Summary

Life had always been rough for long-time New Yorker, Castiel Haven. And when he ratted out his mob boss father, the rest of his horrific family, and about a half-dozen cops, he knew life wasn’t about to get better. Especially not when the FBI carted him off to the middle of nowhere, North Carolina. But he sure as hell didn’t expect the biggest complication to be a small-town brazen mechanic with a tenacious sex drive named Dean Winchester.

One of them never lies. One of them never tells the truth. And both of them have no fucking clue what it means to love someone.

Notes

Hello there, and thanks for coming to read my fic. I have to say, this fic was a struggle for me, for a lot of reasons. I’ve been really busy this year and haven’t written as much stuff as I
normally do and then DCBB came around and I decided to actually challenge myself by writing an entire fic from Cas' POV - not something I've ever done before. Also, as with nearly everything I write, it turned out way longer than I first anticipated. The idea stemmed from the movie Safe Haven but severely morphed into something else.

I could not have done this without the amazing help of my beta's, Tennyo and Izzy. Seriously, you guys were my lifesavers and this whole thing would've sucked balls without you.

And after a few hiccups with schedules, I was set up with Journeysmilesmiles who created some wonderful images for the fic, including some NSFW ones *yay*: link here

If there are tags that need to be added, let me know. Or, if there any mistakes you pick up on as I was editing until the last minute, feel free to message me.

As always, I would greatly appreciate kudos and comments. They're a life-giving source for writers!

See the end of the work for more notes
“And there it is,” mutters Castiel Haven, his full lips pulled into a tight grimace. Calculating blue eyes take in the small humble abode—a single storey of flagrant neglect courtesy of the United States Witness Protection Program. With a deep sigh, the former NYC criminal scrutinizes the decrepit bungalow with disdain.

His cousin, Gabriel, would’ve said he was being dramatic. In this case, Castiel reasons, it’s warranted.

It’s apt that a crow, perched on the overhead wire, caws abrasively into the late afternoon sun. Christ, even the animals sense the sorry state of this place. Habitually, Castiel pulls his bottom lip in by his teeth and chews at the chapped bits, a raised single brow openly judging the presented ambiance of his new living situation.

It’s a remarkably accurate depiction of how fucked his life is. Not that he expected much different... after what he did.

Unmoving, save for the chewing of his lip, he takes it all in.

Encased in growing shadows, the drab dwelling on the verge of being called a shack could be the opening scene to a slasher movie. He huffs at the thought, realizing he’d undoubtedly be the villain.
Tucked behind a thirty-foot tall, leaning conifer sits the meager home with weathered chocolate-brown siding and two box-frame windows that loom over the pine-needle ridden lawn. The windowless flat-panel door completes the dreary presentation.

Someone’s attempted to “liven up” the homely structure by painting the wood door a faded dandelion yellow. Unfortunately, it has the effect of making the entire house resemble a public toilet.

God. Who in their right mind pairs yellow and brown? Not that Cas Haven is the quintessential gay man from Manhattan and goes around making design recommendations—his former vocation was alarmingly, and violently different.

However, he is from NYC… and for that matter, happens to prefer men. But that’s neither here nor there. Castiel’s positive no decent human with functioning retinas could’ve proposed such a wretched colour scheme; gay or not.

“Roya’s a fucking dead man,” Castiel drones out loud, eyeing the place from its block foundation to curled shingles. Knowing the U.S. Marshal harbors an intense dislike of him—along with the entire Haven family—it’s no wonder Cas ended up in the smallest buttf*ck town in North Carolina with a population less than two-hundred, in the ugliest rundown home he’s ever seen.

This is basically the U.S. Government’s version of flipping him the bird.

Well, the feeling is mutual.

Walking across the yard covered in a blanket of pine needles and patchy grass with his single suitcase, Cas pulls out a single, worn brass key to the ill-painted house. And that’s it, isn’t it? One key, a suitcase, and one toilet house.

How fantastic.

That being said, he did manage to escape New York with his life. Which has got to count for something, right? Otherwise, what would’ve been the purpose of ratting out his entire family and a half dozen cops to the FBI?

Yes, that was the horrific thing he had done. The decision that led him to this town, and to this walkway.

Walking slowly, as if he weighed 280 instead of 180, Castiel makes a point of stepping on each flagstone paver on the way to the porch steps; it delays the inevitable. When he finds himself face-to-face with the faded yellow door, he resumes his lip-chewing.

It’s been a long few days of debriefing and seemingly endless travel. Castiel does not like change. But, he considerably disliked being a mob boss’s son more. And that’s putting it mildly. So here he stands, on the precipice of a future that scares the crap out of him. Arguably, a different kind of fear than before of course.

“This is it.”

Sliding the key in the lock, Castiel twists the handle and nudges the dandelion-door inward. It creaks as if it were a living thing pushed unwillingly into action. Huh. He feels about the same most days.

A musty smell floods his nostrils—the essence of stale air and damp wood—and he drops his black suitcase in the undefined entranceway. Glancing to the right, he’s greeted by a small kitchen with warm oak cabinets. In the centre, a rolling cart sits like an afterthought. Towards one of the front windows is an open space meant for a kitchen table. It will stay empty.
To his left is a square living room with plain white walls and unremarkable wood trim. The battered wide-plank pine boards that cover the floor and extend down the hall to two open doors is about the only thing he doesn’t hate about the place.

It could’ve been worse, he tells himself. His brown leather Dockers could be standing on a shady orange carpet. Or... there could’ve been wood paneling. He shudders.

As Castiel continues through the house, the floor creaks beneath his rubber soles. He smiles with a pejorative edge; no one will rob him quietly that’s for damn sure. Not that the presence or lack of noise would have any bearing on the intruder’s success.

The thief would be face down on the rough pine before he knew what hit him.

Shaking the violence from his mind, Castiel stops beside the washroom and peeks in. “Oh Jesus,” he groans, knocking his head against the wood trim. Hello 1979.

The vanity offers the same honeyed oak as the cabinets in the kitchen and the counter is a beige and gold speckled design made of cheap laminate. And finally, the tub, toilet, and sink are all a lovely shade of mustard.

Clenching his jaw, he pivots around and takes a step into the sole bedroom.

It’s simple; the same as the living room and he doesn’t completely hate it. The closet doors are rather unfortunate; flat wood sliders with brass inset handles. Yet another seventies gem. Super.

It’s taken him all of thirty seconds to know every inch of the place. Not that he has a right to complain. Still, a four-room house after spending his entire life in a mansion is a hard pill to swallow. Castiel has not once considered himself a materialistic man, but he laments the loss of space. Because for so long, space equated to a delusion of solace.

For a long while, Castiel stands in the hallway staring into nothing, no single thought running through his mind. But he feels off, like he’s buzzing from the inside. The anxiety he experienced as a young boy hums like an old memory beneath his skin.

Castiel fixes his stare on a scratch in the paint and drags out each breath. It took practice to learn how to control the torment of anxiety, but he’s damn good at it now. Long, slow breaths, pulling his spine as straight as he can. His features harden, and he reverts to a man he’s trying to escape from.

Only for a moment, he tells himself. Only for control.

Brushing aside his needling emotions, he walks stiffly into the open living space and scans the blank walls for previous signs of life.

There are none.

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That evening, he gets to know himself.

Not in a carnal manner—it’s been an embarrassingly long time on that front—but in a repetitive run-through of his new identity.

“Jimmy,” he says to himself, nodding his head as if it’ll help. “Jimmy. Richard. Novak.” Each syllable he enunciates, but the clarity doesn’t make it any less of a lie. “James?” he tests the alternative version of the name on his tongue, but detests it. No. He’s definitely not a James.
The whole of it—from the name to the situation—feels so intrinsically wrong he can’t help but scrunch his nose in protest. Unfortunately, if he has any hope of making this new life work, he’s going to need to become this... *Jimmy Novak* character. A man born in Pontiac, Illinois to a *normal* family.

He snorts. “Normal. There’s a concept...”

Unpacking his suitcase in the bedroom, Castiel pulls out each piece of clothing (which isn’t much) and folds them precisely. The pants he stacks on one side of the closet (an arguably shitty closet, the doors of which popped right off their tracks the first time he opened it) and his shirts on the other. In the very middle, he leaves his suitcase open and lines it with his socks and boxers. Two wire-frame hangers have been left behind and he uses one to hang his only suit. It’s full of wrinkles from having been stuffed in a suitcase for the last twenty-four hours and he hopes hanging it up will be enough to loosen the creases.

Standing up off the floor, knees cracking, Cas moves towards the door. On his way out, he glances back into the small bedroom and frowns at the empty sight and the crooked closet doors barely hanging onto their tracks.

On the wall opposite from the mangled closet situation is a long, rectangular window overlooking the overgrown back yard. What a goddamn jungle. The grass hasn’t been weeded or mowed in weeks, maybe months. Two willow trees droop over the unkempt lawn, almost appearing sad by their surroundings. In the far back of the lot, there’s a lopsided brown shed. Castiel shudders to consider what it might hold.

Curling his lip with disfavor, he groans at the lack of bed—and the lack of *everything*. Yes, he was offered the decision of accepting a place fully furnished but he cringed at the thought of what he’d get, so he opted for the option of a little extra cash.

Clearly, a bad move on his part. Might as well add that one to his plentiful list of regrets.

All of his destructive decisions are catching up to him, and his exhausted body isn’t looking forward to a night on the floor. Especially after a *long* bus ride, a *long* flight, a *long* string of shitty safe houses and unfriendly FBI agents.

*Tomorrow*, he reminds himself. Tomorrow he’ll make use of the new checking account and low-limit VISA card WitSec set up with his new fake name and purchase some furniture. A mattress, comfortable couch, and a TV.

Everything a man in hiding needs.

Moving out into the living space, the last of the sun blinking behind the vast tree, Castiel sinks down to the hard pine and eases back against the wall. From this angle, the front door—in all its horrific dandelion yellow—stares back at him.

Castiel fights the temptation to tell the door to fuck off. He’s always had a bad habit of talking to himself. Yet another facet of his personality that set him apart from his peccant, criminally-inclined family. Stony-faced mobsters *do not* talk to themselves, or so his father would often remind him.

The man had always thought adding a solid right hook to the conversation was a fine way to prove a point. Castiel wouldn’t say this argument style was well-rounded, but it sure as hell exacted the desired result.

Fighting the need for rest, Castiel runs a hand over his uncharacteristically stubbled jaw. Judging by
the tickle of hair by his ears and dangling over his forehead, his beard is not the only thing out of control. His normally short, wispy dark hair has grown out over the last few weeks of inconsistent living conditions and he pushes it annoyingly off his forehead. Growing up, his tyrant of a father had always reprimanded him for not presenting a clean and put-together image. They were not heathens.

Pulling at a few errant tufts, Castiel says, “But now you’re in jail,”—he fluffs his hair further—“so fuck you, Father.”

Reaching for the ragged drugstore paperback from his pocket, he flips to his dog-eared spot about halfway through and resumes reading from where he left off on the bus, forcing his mind to focus on the mystery of the story. The plot is about to thicken, and he hopes it’s enough to hold his interest so he can avoid falling asleep alone in this sad ugly house stewing over what he’s done.

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Mornings are the devil. And this one in particular is no different.

Castiel Haven masquerading as Jimmy Novak wakes up in a cramped fetal position on the dusty floor, the flayed paperback an inch from his face. The soft early morning light seeps through sporadic gaps in the overgrown prickly tree, the dim white glow stretching towards him in patches along the floor.

Groaning, he pushes himself up and lets his thoughts drift, falling into a stare at the floating metropolis of dust motes. “Enjoy the freedom now,” he murmurs, shaking a long finger at them. “I’ll be returning with a Swiffer this afternoon.”

From threatening dealers to dust-motes: The great saga of the Haven son. Castiel smirks with a wry twist of his lip.

Standing up and brushing off his clothes, he winces at the ache of his angry joints. Christ, not only did his family screw him up on a few mental levels, they also managed to give him early onset arthritis. Too many long days and nights standing guard, too many fights. The occasional drug-use probably didn’t benefit him any either.

Too bad criminal organizations didn’t offer health insurance.

Moving sluggishly, Castiel goes to the back room where the full force of the rising sun blasts into the empty space. He retrieves his new toothbrush and small tube of toothpaste and backtracks to the mustard-colored ceramic hell of a bathroom. A medicine cabinet hangs over the gold-speckled counter and he stares back at his reflection as he scrubs his teeth.

There are heavy bags under his blue eyes, and his hair is a wild mess of soft, dark brown—every strand in disarray. He’d always envied his dad’s straight black hair, thick locks always perfectly in place, never a kink or curl. Not for the first time, Castiel wonders what his mother had looked like, but discards the thought.

He spits, lays his toothbrush on the counter and raises his face once more to the crisp reflection. He has no idea who the man is staring back at him. A distance voice calls out one sure identifier: Rat.

Rat. Rat. Rat...

Chewing the inside of his lip, Castiel needs a few moments to prepare himself.

Today is the first day of his new life and he can’t comprehend it—can’t wrap his intelligent mind around what’s before him. There’s something crippling about such an endeavour. A strange sense of
powerlessness momentarily locks his frame and he can’t take another step.

Why did he do this?

“Fuck…” The curse escapes him in a slow breath and his mind starts to spin.

He’s so goddamn lost; a marred soul floundering in unknown territory. Memories and regrets and buried emotions swell to the surface the same as blood creates a bruise. Castiel grinds his teeth to stem the bleed.

Though the motion is shaky, his chest far too tight, he breathes deep and long in a familiar exercise, the exhale just as slow and deliberate. He opens his eyes; not having been aware of closing them.

Anxiety and panic are pointless. The past is an unchangeable fact, and he has no choice but to follow through the consequences of his actions.

Guns and violence aren’t the answer. Not anymore.

A switch flipped, Castiel shuts down the inner turmoil in order to force his body to function. He treads down the hall towards the hideous yellow door, each step easier than the last.

The stupid door helps, something for his mind to be angry at instead of himself.

Apparently, he muses, painting it piss-yellow on the outside wasn’t sufficient. How wonderful.

In the world beyond his shack, he absorbs his first full day in Hobucken, lungs expanding with sea-moist oxygen. The essence of morning is tangible around him, from the subtle haze of a morning sun, to the twitter of birds above. Somewhere nearby, there are chipmunks adding to the soundtrack of a new day, short squeaky bursts that are substantially annoying. The cheery chorus of nature mocks him, surely.

Castiel squints at the sky, measuring the movement of the thin white clouds. It’s not sweltering yet, but it will be. The air is thick and still, the sky an expanding swath of blue.

Sporting the same worn jeans and wrinkled soft blue button-up as the day before, the former Haven walks down the street, past the few houses beyond his towards the denser part of the small town.

Alone, nearly penniless, and trapped in a new identity, Castiel snaps back into a prison of regret. Same as ten minutes ago, he knows it won’t last—he made the right choice. That’s irrefutable. But trying to forge a new life at over thirty years old is not his idea of good time.

God, he would give anything to call it quits this very second. One step back, a turn on his heel and a short jog back to the house. Three minutes to pack. He could be on a bus back to NYC in an hour. It’s all he’s ever known.

The notion is so tempting that he slows his pace as he’s passing a picturesque two-storey home; the front lawn littered with children’s toys—a world of upturned plastic bursting with primary colours.

God, he’d almost forgotten there are people living normal lives. People with loved ones, children that play in the yard, BBQ’s, the nine-to-five norm of America. It’s almost impossible to imagine, given how he was raised, but there are people, thousands probably, that have never known the cool metal of a handgun turned warm with touch.

He stops. You’ve made your decision. He breathes. You made the right choose… now keep walking.
After resuming his pace, he then reminds himself that even if he had the balls to return to New York, he’d be shot on sight. And that, more than anything, keeps him walking steady.

Death has a way of setting one’s priorities.

With renewed determination, he runs through his new identity one more time. Trying to compel that unfamiliar man into reality.

*Who is Jimmy Novak?*

Having rehearsed all this several times in D.C. over the last two weeks while he waited to be placed, he’s able to rhyme off the content of a medical admissions form.

Name: Jimmy (James) Richard Novak.

Age: Thirty-one.

Date of Birth: February 6th, 1985.

Parents: Martin Novak, Ellie Parkers. Divorced when he was seven.

Useless details without substance. The only material content was the fabricated story that he moved out of Illinois after his wife left him. Castiel didn’t find it necessary to remind the U.S. Marshals that women weren’t exactly his taste. In the end, the story was just that: A *story*.

Rolling up his sleeves to counter the building heat, Castiel finds his way into the small blip of a downtown—if it can even be called that. From the edge of a cross-street he scans everything that Hobucken center has to offer. It isn’t much. Two restaurants (one that appears to double as a bar), a convenience store, small food market, a quaint furniture store and a... clothing shop? The last one’s hard to identify.

This is definitely the sort of town people leave, not move to. A place to come for weekends and leave by Sunday afternoon. In essence, it’s no more than a crossroads of slightly denser than buildings than the hodgepodge of residential sprinkled around the outskirts.

Heading towards the furniture store, he glances across the street and sees a fair number of people enjoying breakfast on the restaurant patio of Pamela’s Grill. While it’s the middle of the week, things move slower here and there’s no clear distinction between weekdays and weekends in a place like this.

Castiel yanks on the iron handle of the store. Overhead, a bell jingles as he steps over the threshold into the furniture store and he tips his head back to glare at the inane trinket. Yet another sign his life’s been flipped ass over teakettle. And the worst part is, it’s not his fault! Not *really*, he tells himself again and again. Because, surely, if he says it ten thousand times, it’ll change from fiction to fact.

Blame must be reserved for that ludicrous family of his that drove him to such extremes, to be forced to take matters into his own sin-tainted hands. It’s why he has about five goddamn items to call his own, it’s why he’s no longer Castiel Haven from New York, but Jimmy Novak from fucking Pontiac. One man being the known son of a major mob boss, the other? A goddamn nobody. An awkward, ill-fitting nobody who doesn’t come close to blending with the context of a small town.

“Hello there!” a perky mid-forties woman calls from behind the counter down the aisle, wrenching him from his self-loathing. “How can I help you?”
Castiel heads down the carpeted path between a sand-coloured futon and a couple of ugly recliners to reach the behemoth wood desk. The woman behind it is stout—suiting the furniture at which she sits, a precise and practiced smile plastered to her face with the tightest head of curls he’s ever seen. Corkscrews of boxed-blonde sprouting from her scalp.

“Yes,” Castiel coughs to clear his throat. “Um, hello. I’m new in town and, unfortunately, I had to sell my last place furnished... therefore I will need to restock.” His formality is a side effect of his discomfort, another peculiar facet of his personality he wishes he could shed.

Briefly, her gaze flicks down to the partially visible tattoo on his forearm and a shadow of a question passes through her pleasant features, but an instant later, she beams. It seems a shade forced. “Fantastic! We can certainly help you out with that. Why don’t you take a look around, pick out whatever you like and I’ll have our regular guy bring it over for ya. Did you take the place for sale on Greenborough?”

Cas dips his chin, offering a hollow smile.

“Well then, welcome to Hobucken!” she cheers.

No doubt, part of her vivid animation stems from the fact he’s planning to drop a grand or so in this place in all of ten minutes. If nothing else, at least he’s sure to stimulate the economy of this podunk town.

“Thank you,” he replies as kindly as possible and turns away, eager to get this over with.

He momentarily debates rolling his sleeves back down, but what’s the point? Even if he’s not going to be in this town for long, it’s still long enough (not to mention hot enough) that he won’t get away with hiding his ink.

At least he managed to avoid getting branded with the “Haven” moniker years ago.

Not that his father was pleased, a drunken fist very much emphasizing the fact. Evidently, the angel’s wings splayed across his upper back, the simple black cross down the inside of his right forearm, and the family protection prayer etched over his ribs in the language of angels (or so he was told) were enough to appease the infamous modern-day gangster that is his Father.

Uneasy, and too aware of the markings he bears, Castiel does a circuit through the store and makes quick work of the options. In the end, he chooses a modest bed frame. Though it’s cheap, unfinished pine, it’ll suffice. With that, he adds a mattress, the futon he walked by, and he’s told he’ll need to order a television online or take a drive out of town as they don’t carry electronics. It reminds him he needs a computer and some type of transportation eventually.

Normally he wouldn’t care for a TV, but seeing as his entire family has been a hot news topic the last few weeks it seems smart to keep tabs.

After he places the order and pays with his shiny new Visa, he asks when the items should arrive. The clerk, Mandy with the curls, assures him he’ll get everything that evening. The next stop he makes is the grocery store or “Market” as it’s identified on the wood-carved sign and grabs whatever catches his eye and isn’t so much he’ll regret carting back.

Frowning heavily, he realizes on the trek back that he’s going to need pots and pans. And cutlery. And plates. Glasses. Cleaning products—

“Damn.” He stops in his tracks. He forgot to see if they had a Swiffer.
Starting a new life happens to be a massively annoying endeavour, or so he’s learning.

Continuing his walk down Smith Creek Road—albeit a surlier walk now—heading towards his stretch of asphalt on Greenborough, he lets the grocery bags lazily hang from his fists. A gentle, tepid breeze from the Bay wafts against his exposed skin, ruffling his unruly hair. It carries the aroma of salt and fish, and he surprises himself by not immediately detesting the scent. It’s far better than the smell of garbage and homeless people. Or, *Eau de New York* as he’d often called it.

Just as he’s coming up to his turn, the hum of tires over asphalt snags his attention and he glances back to see a sleek, black BMW arc towards him.

His entire body tenses for the unexpected. The groceries are discarded on the ground to free his hands. Half of him is primed to see the barrel of a .45 angling through the passenger window. Fighting the potent sense of being weaponless and vulnerable, he flexes his jaw and wipes his expression clear of emotions.

The car stops.

Slowly, Castiel bends low to peer in through the open passenger window and is surprised by the giant smile that greets him. Confused, he narrows his eyes into confused slits and tilts his head. *Who is this?*

“Hey!” the oversized man calls out from the driver’s seat, waving a large hand in greeting. He’s not heavy-set, but large the way athletes are—dwarfing the expensive sedan with his lean muscle and obvious height, even seated. The BMW-driver is wearing a pressed, lilac dress shirt and perfectly knotted grey tie. Framing his face is a mane of chin-length brown hair worthy of a Pantene commercial. “You the new guy?” asks the driver, his hazel eyes innocent and welcoming.

Jesus. This is definitely a small town. Castiel smiles politely. “I suppose I am. You are?”

“Sam Winchester,” the hair-model answers, bursting with cheerful attitude. “Hey, so, you—uh—you want a ride home? I mean,” Sam smiles and frowns in a peculiarly balanced expression, “I know in a lot of places people don’t take rides from strangers but everybody knows everybody here and you’ve got a couple blocks to go with those bags. Honestly, I swear I’m not evil.” Sam Winchester laughs heartily. “Well, okay, I am a lawyer, I should mention. I guess some people might tell ya the two go hand in hand but seriously, I’m nice, I swear… I just wanted to say ‘hi’ to the new guy and give you a friendly welcome to our little town here. Which I now realize is probably coming across as super creepy.” Cutting off his words, Sam ekes out a smile.

An amused expression softly pulls at Castiel’s mouth. What a strange lawyer to ramble on that way, but Castiel guesses that’s part and parcel with the counselor’s profession.

Debating the invitation, he reckons he’s been in a car with far worse. The former mobster agrees. “Um, alright. Thank you.” Castiel opens the rear door and carefully places his groceries on the creamy leather seat. Climbing into the front, he extends his steady palm. Sam shakes it quick and hard, a big honest smile taking up his whole face, shining bright and true like a puppy. If the lawyer notices the scars on Cas’ knuckles, he doesn’t show it.

“No problem at all!” Sam steers off from the side of the road and gets chatting again. “So, how are you settling in?” he asks.

“Good.” Castiel runs his eyes over the lawyer’s physique and scans his profile. Sam is transparently handsome, and married, he notices. He’s confident, intelligent, and though his profession doesn’t
lend itself to brawls, Castiel has a keen sense that Sam can handle himself. All of this Castiel absorbs in mere seconds. It’s an ingrained habit for him to assess everyone he meets. “I didn’t have much in the way of furniture,” he elaborates to fill the silence, “so I ordered some items from the store in town.”

Sam’s hyper personality hikes up a notch. “Oh!” he looks over with a wider smile. “Guess that means you’ll be meeting my older brother later. His name’s Dean, and don’t even try to help carrying stuff in, he won’t hear of it—he loves being the workhorse in this town. Pretty sure he thinks Hobucken would fall apart if he ever left.”

Once again, Sam draws a genuine smile to Cas’ expression. Each sentence out of the lawyer’s mouth is like a text message with an overabundance of exclamation points. Castiel’s rather amused by it. He likes Sam. Sam, the jubilant lawyer.

“Thanks for the tip,” Castiel replies as Sam steers the car into the narrow driveway of the brown and yellow bungalow.

“Anytime. Sorry, I didn’t catch your name?” Sam faces him, eyebrows raised with an edgy sort of curiosity. No one else would notice save for Cas.

“Novak,” he lies, “Jimmy Novak.”

“Good to meet ya Jimmy. Take it easy! And I hope you like it here!”

_Unlikely._

Cas nods and waves after he’s taken his groceries from the car and starts marching along the flagstone path to his crusty yellow door. Dropping his bags on the porch, he pulls out his brass key and opens it up.

Thing is, in a town like this, locking the door is probably unnecessary. In fact, he’d bet he could leave the door gaping open for ten hours and not a single Hobucken resident would even be tempted to rob him.

You’re not in Kansas anymore, Novak.
Castiel passes the time until his furniture arrives putting away his groceries and making mac and cheese in the microwave. Being accustomed to a high-brow culinary palate and overpriced restaurants, it’s oddly surprising how much he enjoys the meal.

What he does not enjoy is the fact that he doesn’t own a garbage can, and therefore has nowhere to throw out the empty container after he’s scraped the last remnants of milky cheese from the inside walls of the container.

Standing at the island, brooding, he leans over and clasps his hands together, his mind routinely analyzing the last year of his life in the “family business” as it were. He bows his head and sees the thick black extension of the cross. A derisive snort rises out of him.

Minutes after the sun has started to set, he hears the roll of tires draw close and the unmistakable creaks of a suspension under stress. A truck door opens and shuts, and he knows it’s a truck by sound alone. Shortly after some heavy steps tromping up the porch, there’s a loud knock on the door, then two more quick raps. Pursing his lips, Castiel tosses his trash in the sink and out of sight, then walks to the entrance.

“Fucking yellow door,” he mutters under his breath as he reaches for the handle.

Castiel has experienced a lifetime of being prepared for the unexpected. Fights, drug deals gone wrong, a cocked gun leveled between his eyes. And yes, even in this moment—not knowing the man on the other side of that godawful door—he’s a hair tenser than normal. It’s just good sense, really.

But none of that matters in the end. Nothing could’ve prepared him for Dean Winchester. Not a damn thing.

Castiel opens the door in a quick motion, falling inexplicably still as he absorbs his first glimpse of the delivery man. It’s not easy to stun someone like Castiel, but this man manages it with his simple presence. He’s breathtaking, radiating an electric vibe.

Sam Winchester’s older brother, finishing a quick scan of a thin yellow sheet tucked into a clipboard, raises his head. A wide, engaging smile spreads across his handsome face. It’s the most captivating smile Castiel’s ever witnessed. And judging by the hint of arrogance in the gentle curve of his lips, it’s clear this man knows very well the power he holds in a smile of that calibre.

Before any words breach the delivery man’s defined lips, Castiel knows this Dean Winchester has a level of charm that could knock anyone off their feet. Even, as it seems, a hardened cynic such as himself who’s been raised by one of the biggest crime bosses in New York City.

Fuck. Castiel’s never been rendered speechless before now—not by violence nor beauty.

“Jimmy, is it?”

All he does is nod in response. And then stare. It’s a wonder he manages to breathe.

Dean, in the epitome of all-American-gorgeous, has a head of thick, dirty blonde hair spiked up in a way that’s both effortless and exact, a couple days scruff shadowing his jaw, all of it set off by prismatic green eyes framed by thick lashes that remind Castiel of an abstract painting from the second-floor office where he used to live. Something his dad had stolen eight years prior.
Overall, Dean isn’t just attractive, he’s mesmerizing. Somehow managing to be beautiful and rugged at the same time. The worn blue jeans and plain navy t-shirt emphasize a working man’s physique. Castiel wonders about his strength...

A forced cough. Time snaps out of suspension as Dean taps his pen jarringly on the clipboard—the noise loud to Cas’ ears—dragging his attention back into the present.

“Awesome.” Dean smirks, something flitting through his gaze. “Alright,” his voice rises with purpose, “so, I’ve got all your stuff. Just, uh, need you to take this”—Dean hands him the clipboard—“and take a look to make sure I didn’t forget nothin’. Not that I would normally, ya know, but I sort of got about three different jobs in this town, so mistakes happen once in a blue moon. Name’s Dean, by the way.”

Cas comes back to himself in time to form a response. “I’m sure it’s all there... Dean.” Feeling the man’s name on his lips, his body tenses from his abs to his thighs. He can feel his fingers pressing into the clipboard, his eyes locked on the alluring shade of green set on him.

All his former training needles at him to get a bead on this guy, to analyze whatever potential threat he could pose. Instead, Castiel’s mind blanks... his jaw hangs slightly open, and oxygen becomes scarce.

Their eyes stuck on each other, Dean grins—the expression edging on a smirk. Dean claps him on the arm and says, “Now, just hang back a bit and I’ll bring it all inside and get things set up for ya.”

“I-I can give you a hand,” he suggests, dumbly, despite the lawyer’s earlier comment.

Dean quirks his head with an offended chuff, his hand slapping against his broad chest. “No way, man. It’ll hurt my pride.” Following a wink, Dean dashes down the three porch steps and opens up the back of a large white trailer hitched to an even bigger truck. One of those pickups that isn’t a simple showpiece the way some men have them, but a well-used F350 with scrapes and dirt marring its glossy black surface.

Castiel doesn’t normally play into stereotypes, considering his past. But by his estimation—now that he’s put it to use—Dean’s as straight as they come.

Not that Castiel is interested, of course. Not that Castiel is in any place in his life to be looking for anyone to share his WitSec-funded pine bed with.

Especially someone that has the evident capacity to make him an blundering idiot.

Exhibiting nominal effort, Dean hauls out the bedframe in pieces. With the headboard and footboard tucked under one arm, and the side rails under his other, Dean casually treks over the path and up the stairs.

Castiel dodges out of the way when the long ends of the frame turn into the open door. Dean puffs a harsh noise as he readjusts the load and looks Cas straight in the face as he’s walking past, “Bedroom down the hall?”

Eyes distracted by Dean’s freckles, he monotonously replies, “Yes, thank you.”

Dean marches off down the hall and unloads with clunks and clangs. The rest of the furniture goes about the same. Castiel hovers inside the kitchen and watches each trip from the trailer to the house in a kind of trance. A couple times Dean raises something over his head and the navy t-shirt hikes up enough for Cas to see his bare stomach and hips. What was clearly at one point a six-pack, probably in the man’s teenage years, has been softened over the last decade or so in a way that makes Castiel’s
hands twitch with a subconscious desire to touch… maybe grab… maybe scratch.

He can’t remember another time, in all his life, he’s wanted someone this bad. Does mac and cheese come with a side of ecstasy he wasn’t aware of?

To be fair, having recently evaded a prison sentence, and in all likelihood, imminent death, it’s possible the appreciation of life and freedom are playing into his abrupt desires. But, he reasons, if this were true, he probably would’ve found Sam appealing as well. And he absolutely did not. Sam was more of a friendly puppy personified.

Dean however… is another story. Castiel hardly ever thinks of sex, but now his mouth waters imagining the taste of Dean’s skin. Probably salty.

He swallows loudly. Curses internally.

“Okay,” Dean announces, wiping his hands on his jeans, standing just inside the doorway. “That’s everything. I’m just gonna run out and grab some tools and then I’ll get everything to a state where it’s actually useable for ya.”

“Um, sounds great.” Closing his eyes, Castiel clears his throat. “Thank you again. I imagine you’re a very busy man with three jobs.”

Dean laughs, throwing his head back, then making a face. “Dude, you have no idea!”

Returning a moment later, Dean carries in a red and black, sturdy canvas tool bag in one hand and drops it in the middle of the living room with a hard thud.

As Dean starts working on the futon, Cas finds his wits and is able to carry on with a conversation. Not something he ever expected to encounter difficulty with. Over the course of twenty minutes, they skim over the weather, Castiel mentions having met Dean’s younger brother earlier that day, and a few other bits of nonsense while Dean screws together nuts and bolts, piecing frames into furniture and doing his small part to form this new life Castiel has been—more or less—shoved into.

After cursing about poorly made screw heads, Dean poses a question that would otherwise have been a normal inquiry, but Castiel’s posture straightens awkwardly.

“So, where you from?” Dean wonders as he’s tightening the last bolt on the futon frame, his cheeks warmed pink from the effort and heat. Cranking the tool in his thick fist, every muscle in Dean’s right arm hardens, every line and curve becoming defined and… goddamn distracting.

Cas drops his eyes to the floor. “Pontiac, Illinois.” Christ, it sounds so rehearsed. So fake. How can this man not notice?

“Huh.” There’s a pause, and Dean continues, “Never been. Then again, I haven’t been much of anywhere. Sammy and me grew up here. Guess we kinda never left. Maybe that’s lame, I don’t know.” The gorgeous delivery man shrugs.

Castiel jumps in to reassure him, pathetically desperate for Dean to like him. “Not lame at all. You seem to like it here, I gather. Of course, not that I’m looking to you to sell me on Hobucken, but it certainly wouldn’t hurt to hear more about it.” Not that Cas cares about the town at all, but he definitely has an interest in hearing the rough inflection of Dean’s voice some more.

The green-eyed man glances over with a curious expression, the torque wrench held loosely in his fist. “Didn’t you do any research before you moved here?”
“Um, truthfully—no, not really. I needed a fresh start. I suppose I didn’t pay too much attention to where I ended up, more concerned with leaving where I was.”

After a quick second, Dean seems to accept that. “That’s cool. Real tumbleweed in the wind sort of deal, huh?”

“Um, sure.” An abrupt laugh escapes him at the absurdity of it.

Never, in a thousand millennia, would his family have called him a tumbleweed. It doesn’t even come close to fitting his personality. Truth is, even if he’d ever wanted to leave the great city of New York of his own free will, he most certainly would have done extensive research on wherever he’d planned to go. Castiel isn’t, and has never been, the fly by the seat of his pants type of man.

Besides, going off the rails in the Haven family? You were basically signing your own death warrant.

Dean smiles at him. “What’s so funny?”

“Ahh, nothing. Just that my, um, my family would disagree,” he explains with a rueful smile.

“Parents aren’t always the best judge of their kids and that’s all I’m gonna say on that subject.” There’s a bitter edge to Dean’s statement, but Cas doesn’t feel he has any right to ask.

A few seconds later, Dean rises from a crouch and pats his thighs absently. “Okay, now that you have a place to sit so you can watch your non-existent TV, how about we get onto your bed?”

Dean’s eyes flash with a thought and a subtle smirk plays at the corner of his mouth. “Okaaay, that came out wrong. My bad. How about I just go put the bed frame together and you go grab my iPad from the truck and feel free to use it to search the internet for whatever you need. Mandy mentioned you might need to order some shit online.”

Focusing hard, Castiel steers his brain away from images of Dean Winchester splayed naked on his bed and forces his head to effect a curt nod. “Thank you. You’re very generous.”

Dean scoffs. “If I didn’t offer my mom would rise from the grave and kick my ass.”

Castiel catches himself at the door, cocks his head and swivels back to see Dean walking down the hall, his broad back making the space seem narrower than before. “Oh,” Castiel says awkwardly. “I’m sorry… about your mom.”

Dean waves his hand casually in the air to dismiss it. “Long time now. Don’t sweat it.”

Okay. Rushing down the porch steps and cutting across the lawn, Castiel opens the unlocked Ford F350 and peers across the leather seats. It’s an impressive vehicle; all leather and smooth lines. Sitting over on the passenger seat is the mentioned iPad, but Castiel can’t restrain himself from perusing the rest of the cab. A plain cardboard coffee cup sits in one of the drink holders and written in curly-cue purple pen are the words, ‘Seeya tonight, hotstuff!’ followed by a winky face.

Very straight, Castiel decides and tacks on: Taken.

In other words, disregarding the fact that Cas’ life is both in the fucking toilet and on a goddamn hitlist, and as a result of those things he should have zero interest in pursuing any kind of sex life, the only intriguing option is clearly off limits in every way conceivable.

That’s a whole lot of strikes against Dean Winchester winding up on all fours in his bed. Besides, a small town man who works hard and seems genuinely nice deserves far better than a criminal
between his legs.

By the time Dean finishes with the bedframe, Cas is leaning over the island scrolling through ads for laptops, his mind half-tuned to his past in an abstract sort of way. As a result, he’s chewing his lip the way he often does.

“Hey, uh, I noticed you don’t have a car or anything,” mentions Dean. “And by the looks of things around here it seems you’ll be needing a bunch more necessities. I have an old rundown Honda CR-V in the garage I run just north-east of the marina—Winchester Auto—that you can bomb around in if you need.”

Did Dean just offer to lend him a car? For free? Castiel looks up and squints at the man. “I sincerely hope you’re not often taken advantage of. You seem kind to a fault.”

Dean flashes him a lopsided grin. “Man, the only time I get taken advantage of is when I’m beggin’ for it... if you catch my drift.” And then he winks, making Castiel forget why he’s even in this town in the first place.

A weird, tense laugh bubbles out of Castiel and he wishes he could clock himself for the inanity. “Noted,” he replies tightly, directing his eyes elsewhere. His thoughts, however, are less suggestable to a new direction and are on route to a multitude of sinful images.

It’s exasperating that Dean seems to ruffle his feathers so easily. Castiel was not raised to be easily ruffled. He was raised as a soldier foremost. Not that he was ever one to fall in line without some resistance, the fact remains, he’s never been rendered stupid so many times in such a short span.

What the fuck is wrong with me? Did I leave my brain in New York?

Whistling a tune and meandering over to the futon, Dean plunks down with a huff—as if he’s grateful for the moment of rest. “Take your time with the iPad, I don’t have anywhere to be until later.”

Remembering the cup in the truck, Castiel can’t help but ask, “Hot date?”

As Dean considers a reply, Castiel quickly decides on an HP and runs through every blank to be filled in, carefully typing out his new identity.

“Might be,” Dean answers, his focus drawn towards the grimy window in the living room, trying to see beyond the crooked pine that dominates the front of the lot.

Cas studies Dean’s profile, from his defined brow ridge, to the shape of his nose. “Doesn’t sound very promising,” he comments.

Dean makes a strange noise. Somewhere between a sigh and a groan. “Dating in a small town is like bobbing for apples, man. There’s a lot that you bob, some of ‘em more than once even, but not many you bite to keep—know what I mean?”

Interesting perspective. “All done with the iPad.” Castiel walks it over. “So basically you just keep dating all available women over and over again,” he surmises with a sociable smile, doing his best not to let this man affect him more than he already has.

Besides, Dean is obviously straight. Maybe they could be friends? It would be nice, he thinks, not having to be subjected to unending loneliness. Sordid past notwithstanding, Castiel is as affected by a solitary existence as the next person. Truth is, he’s never had any real friends.
Dean’s shooting him a peculiar look as he stands from the futon and accepts the extended iPad.

“Who says it’s all women?” Dean slips out.

And with that bombshell of information, Dean winks for the third time that day, sports a sly grin, and saunters towards the door. At the last second, he throws out a wave without turning back, “See ya around town, Jimmy!”
Over the following two days, Castiel makes it his mission to set himself up better as he’s determined to live up to his cousin Gabriel’s adage of making the best of a bad situation. This requires multiple trips into “downtown”.

It’s very tedious. And leaves him with nothing but time to think.

Castiel’s used to having everything he needs or could ever want. Granted, he would have traded a privileged lifestyle for a different family any day of the week growing up. It’s a shock nevertheless to spend his entire weekend marching back and forth through this blip of a town to acquire mundane items such as: shower curtains, bed linens, utensils, plates, etc…

And the sad thing is, it’s Sunday evening and he’s got nowhere near everything he needs. Access to his family’s ill-acquired funds at this point would be highly welcome. Castiel doesn’t care that it’s money made off drugs, gambling, racketeering, and other fraudulent schemes. Unfortunately, the meagre funds he’d siphoned off for himself in the last year isn’t accessible yet. He needs the heat to die down before he finds a way to get his hands on it. Obviously the US government is none the wiser about this cash stash. And he’d like to keep it that way.

The piddley green WitSec gave him with won’t stretch a whole lot further. Tomorrow, Jimmy Novak will need to find a job—a requirement of his agreement with the FBI. But in a town this size, what could he even do? His past experiences are all but useless. It’s not as if he’s going to tout his excellent body burying skills, or his adeptness with money laundering. Sure, he’s intelligent, but his legitimate job experience racks up to nil.

Sitting on his futon with a new but unappealing paperback in his hands, Castiel categorically ruminates over his upbringing, to the rarity and sheer improbability of being born into the Haven family in the first place. From the time of his first memory, he recalls a profound sense of not fitting in. There’s a sadness to it that lingers, that weighs his chest down.

His own father, Michael Haven, and two brothers and sister, a handful of uncles and cousins, are all devious, manipulative psychopaths. Never an honest conversation was had. Never. And yet, he thinks bitterly, loyalty was first and foremost within the Haven family. Next of course would be order and discipline, and following that, strangely enough, came religion. The Haven family, along with the four other prominent families in New York are extremely pious.

Hence the angelic names. Then again, part of Castiel always believed his namesake and the others in the family were chosen from a place of religious belief on one hand, and sheer intimidation tactics on the other.

For Chrissakes, his uncle’s name is Lucifer!

It’s one thing to be roughed-up by a man named Greg or Joe or Bob, but it adds an extra sadistic twist if your abuser’s named after the fucking Devil. Michael Haven enjoyed that type of thing; a fifth-generation man in a long line of mob bosses. He was cruel to his marrow.

All of the years Castiel spent as a Haven, he tried in vain to limit his interactions with the businesses his family ran. This never sat well with his kingpin father, and it sure as hell wasn’t accepted. It reached a tipping point two years ago when a lackey put his hands on Castiel’s sister, Anna.

Having been the one to stumble into the scuffle unfolding between them, Castiel hadn’t wasted a
thought for his actions and simply grabbed the gun from his father’s desk and fired hot lead into the meat of the man’s thigh.

Shortly after, Michael Haven sent his daughter away. No one, not even Castiel, knows where she is now.

And the lackey that crossed the line with the Haven family?

Well, his screams were heard for days from their well-equipped basement. At the end of the week, Castiel and his uncle Raphael were forced to lug the body (in manageable pieces) to a marsh well outside the city to dispose of the man whose name Castiel never cared to learn.

What happened with Anna had been the last straw, but the truth of it was that he couldn’t bear to remain in that house without his sister. Perhaps, he’d always stayed for her. And without her presence, the breadth of monstrosity his family was had become painfully clear. And knowing he’d been a part of it all since he was a child? He couldn’t stomach it. Unfortunately, the grating politics of criminal families was complex and wildly intricate and it took months to work out his best course of action.

Leaving with a hundred grand in a briefcase wasn’t an option. If he’d been someone low in the ranks, sure, he could’ve ducked out and maybe gotten away with it. But being Michael Haven’s son came with a world of privileges, but more importantly, a wealth of damaging information.

Lacking options, Castiel decided to take all the information he had and bring it to the FBI agent that had been long assigned to their specific family.

It took a little over a year to put a case together, one the FBI was sure they could win. A lot of secret meetings passed off as an affair over that year, and no one was any the wiser.

They’d underestimated him.

From the time he was about nine, maybe younger, he’d been the reluctant mobster son. For the rest of their family, if Michael Haven demanded a thing be done—you damn well did the thing. Castiel was the only one to ever hesitate. It earned him a few broken bones over the years, not to mention the reputation of being a weak-ass motherfucker in everyone else’s eyes.

This backlash didn’t last; it couldn’t. Bruises and broken bones had a way of stifling those defiant tendencies.

A week past his sixteenth birthday, he’d walked in on his dad’s second—Uncle Raphael—beating a woman to the brink of death. Evidently she’d owed them a good chunk of change and couldn’t pony up the cash. When Raphael saw the young, thin teen standing at the edge of the dark office, he smiled without emotion and said, “Would you like to get your knuckles bloody, boy?”

Slim shoulders squared off, he was primed to say no... but his father stepped in behind him, shoving him into the room. Castiel stumbled forward, his heartbeat ramping into the hundreds.

Michael’s emotionless voice turned his blood to ice. “She made a fool of us, Castiel. Stole from us—you will show her the consequences. Or the punishment is yours.”

Castiel had been young, terrified of his father with good reason. So he did it, without a single word of protest. Racing to his room after—knuckles bloody—he barely made it to the bathroom before he was hurling his dinner into the well of the toilet, bits of pasta splattering the clean porcelain.

He remembers the night with a clarity that haunts him, because it was the night he lost whatever
shred of innocence he may have still possessed. He remembers the dead weight in his chest, the throb of his fist, and the leer on his father’s face floating in his mind as he’d tried in vain to sleep.

It was because of events like those that Michael Haven, and the entire family, wrongly assumed Cas would never rat them out. Because he was weak, because he never got his hands as dirty as the rest of them. Or more accurately, he never relished it the way they did. They should’ve realized it would be that very weakness that would lead him to the FBI’s front door.

To their credit, pegging Castiel as weak was never once a reflection of his sexual preferences. Which he’d always found odd, given their religious affiliations. The day he’d informed his dad he favoured men in bed over women (all the while bracing for a doozy of a beating) all his father had to say was this: “Son, I don’t care who you fuck so long as you don’t let anyone take advantage of you. No one crosses us. And if they do… you put them down hard and you make a fucking spectacle of it. You hear me?”

In that way, the criminal organization that ran under the radar within New York City was more advanced than a major portion of the United States as a whole. Go figure.

Silver linings aside, acceptance didn’t preclude the evil.

Everything unraveled rather quickly after that year of meeting with his handler from the FBI under the guise of a relationship. And really? A relationship? He scoffs. What a crock of a cover story. Anyone who would’ve cared enough about him to look closely would have seen the farce. The only “real” relationships Castiel’s been in were ill-conceived, emotionless ones. Frantic blowjobs from the few men who worked for his father that knew what they were but god forbid they admit they liked cock.

And when he was twenty-three, there’d been a man named Tyler; a cop under their payroll. It had been Castiel’s job to bring him his cut on Thursday mornings at eleven. Their chosen meeting spot was a truck depot with endless rows of transport trailers lined up, the rectangular boxes of metal surrounded by tall sharp grass.

How it started, he can’t entirely recall—it began during a time when he’d been seeking the opulent high of expensive drugs. He had no doubt though, that it was the partial wrongness of it that appealed to him. Cas’ inner need to act out. It didn’t help that he’s always had a penchant for a certain type of man. Someone a bit rough on the outside—that all-American man BS—masking a soft and vulnerable inside. Cas wasn’t sure what that said about him, and he didn’t care.

Soon, those weekly meetings had become twisted and rough, with a few hasty handjobs. There was light rain the first time they had sex, and Castiel remembers undoing the officer’s utility buckle and yanking his pants down, gun still clipped in the holster. The tryst ended no more than two weeks later when the cop started being investigated by IA. Nothing ever came of it in the end, but Tyler was effectively cut off from the Haven family.

No further interactions, no pay-offs. There was no need to offer money to keep him quiet. The officer knew he’d be murdered if he opened his mouth. That was enough.

Of course, when Castiel worked through the case against his family, he went all the way into naming cops that were dirty, greedy for an extra paycheck. He felt nothing when Tyler’s name crossed his lips.

After the wheels were set in motion, four U.S. Marshals showed up at the diner where he often had lunch and whisked him off to D.C. From there he spent two weeks getting to know Jimmy Novak while his entire family and several members of the NYPD were hauled off to jail.
Castiel should’ve been relieved, triumphant, but all he felt was a gaping disconnect to whoever he was, or was supposed to be.

Well... at the moment, he’s Jimmy Novak, a guy who apparently sits on his cream-coloured futon and broods over his egregious upbringing. There’ll be no reading of the book in his hand and he tosses it beside him, turning his hand over and glancing over the condition of his knuckles.

A smattering of miniscule white scars break up the tanned surface of his skin.

Despite his attempts to distance himself from the daily grind of life in the fucking mob, he carries the evidence of his failures. It leaves an ache in his chest, and he tries not to hate himself outright. He’s intelligent, as clever as his father if not more. So he knows, objectively, he was never given a choice as a boy.

But why did he wait so long? Because of Anna? Why, after what happened when he was sixteen, did he not cut and run? Grab some cash and get on a bus and find his way into Mexico or northern Canada. Sure, worse things might’ve happened to him, but at least his conscience would’ve escaped only minimally tarnished.

Resting his elbows on his knees, Castiel leans forward—burying his face into his hands and tries to wipe the stress lines from his brow.

“Fuck.”

Of all the families to be born into… what are the chances? But his choices now, the ones that’ve led him to this place, to this insignificant town and decrepit bungalow—what do they amount to?

Yes, his family will hopefully rot behind bars and there’s one thing to be grateful for. But what about him? What about his life? Is this a second chance? Does he even deserve one?

Probably not.

The mansion in New York never once felt like home. Not once had he felt for his father the feelings a son should. Come to think of it… Castiel can’t be sure he’s ever held an affection in his heart strong enough to be considered love. It’s a concerning thought, and no doubt there’s something inherently wrong with him.

Even here, in this small, friendly town, he doesn’t belong. The tattoos are only the first of many traits that distance him from Hobucken’s homegrown-organic residents. Castiel looks around his four-room house with its rough-pine floors, white walls, wooden trim, and that fucking hideous yellow door and feels as out of sorts as he’s always felt.

Deep down, he doesn’t consider himself evil. But he’s well aware he is not, nor ever will be, good.

In a rough, uncertain voice, he asks the quiet room like an insane person: “Who am I?” The walls don’t have any answers. It would be worrisome if they did. Hmm, it seems he’s gotten nowhere today but make himself feel miserable. And apparently crazy.

Fuck it.

Castiel stands, muttering on his way to the bathroom... throwing up a sarcastic prayer, a peculiar thing he’s done since his father used to tell him to pray at night and he’d thought it was absurd.

“Lord in Heaven, proffer to me your revelations.” Shucking his clothes in a pile on the floor, Castiel leans over the edge of the tub and cranks the taps. “Nothing?” he eyes the ceiling expectantly. “I
didn’t think so.”

After all he’s seen, he can’t believe there is a God. How could there be?

Stepping into the old iron tub, he pulls the knob over the spout and water spits and spurts out of the overhead shower nozzle. Half of the jets of water feel like he’s being beaten with a pressure washer, and the rest are nothing more than spittle.

“Mnh. Would it kill you to give me some balanced water pressure?!” he groans out loud to the mythical ‘God’ above.

After he showers and dries off with his new towel, he throws on some boxers, grabs his paperback novel from the futon and takes it into bed with him. He will read the damn novel and forget his own bullshit if he has to glue his eyes to the fucking page.

Sitting back against the pillow with a huff, he doggedly immerses himself in the crime-thriller. By the third chapter, his eyes start to droop. As he’s drifting off, the majority of his thoughts wind up stuck on Dean Winchester, the furniture delivery man, of all things.

Throughout Castiel’s boring expeditions over the last couple days, he hasn’t seen Dean once.

Which is for the best, really. Castiel has no business thinking about men at this point in his life. No business at all.

His hedonistic dreams, however, have other plans.
“Where’s the shipment?” Castiel demands.

The crony on the ground, blood stained around his mouth, stutters a response, “I-I don’t know!”

“What do you mean you don’t know?!” Outraged, Castiel swings his arm up and swiftly backhands the man. The solid hit further bloodies his knuckles.

More blubbering. “We didn’t see who took it! We didn’t see—”

“—So you admit then that someone did in fact steal the truck out from under you?”

“Yeah, but there were six fucking guys, man! And we couldn’t—”

From the side, where Castiel’s father has stood by unmoving and silent, a deafening pop cuts through the vast warehouse. The crack of sound echoes, carrying the significance of death.

Slowly averting his eyes from the end of the Glock, Castiel turns back to the man he’d been interrogating. In his place, lays a dead body.

Castiel’s father steps in beside his son. “He was a waste of time.”

“He knew nothing,” argues Castiel. “Killing him was a waste.”

“Son, he failed. Failure is not tolerated.” Turning to face Castiel, Michael frowns and gestures with the gun to emphasize his next words. “Something you should do well to remember, Castiel.”

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Muscles taut and lungs out of breath, Castiel rushes awake.

He doesn’t move, but absorbs the last remnants of the old memory into his conscious mind. He slows his breathing and steadies his heart. It doesn’t take long, but the room carries an abnormal red tinge minutes after his vital signs have returned to a normal rhythm.

Another death he could’ve stopped if he’d been brave. Does it matter that he wasn’t the one to pull the trigger? No.

Castiel raises his wrist over his face and blinks at his watch. It’s quarter to six in the morning.

“Ugghh!” he growls, turning over inside the sheets. Castiel buries his face into the pillow and gripes uselessly into the softness.

Thanks to the lovely trip down memory lane, it’s only seven o’clock when he leaves the house to make his way into town. Stomach full of black coffee, he cuts across the lawn sporting dark blue dress pants and a crisp white button-up. And to top it off, a deep blue tie. It’s the only formal clothing he has, courtesy of the FBI since he wasn’t allowed to go home and pack after the Marshals picked him up. There’s a jacket to go with it, but it’ll be too warm for that in a few short hours.

In a town of this size and character, it’s unlikely that whatever job he procures will require a suit, but to attain employment he does feel the need to present himself accordingly. Besides, Jimmy Novak looks decent in formal wear.
Having skipped breakfast, he crosses the street to the sounds of utensils scraping plates and low chatter. The restaurant patio is in full swing, despite the morning hour. Swift waitresses with sloshing coffee pots are making the rounds as Cas enters in through the low black-iron gate and waits to be seated.

An edgy, dark-haired woman with a body like something out of a straight man’s wet dream strides over, change jangling in her apron. “For one, sweetheart?” She winks at him, a keen spark in her dark hazel eyes.

“Yes, please.” He smiles when her back is turned. She’s the type of woman he’d enjoy having a conversation with. And he’d bet she’s the Pamela of Pamela’s Grill. She has that distinct air of accomplishment and the confidence to go along with it.

“Follow me,” she says, her finger beckoning him. A plastic menu that doubles as a placemat is tucked under her arm as she guides him through the tables to one near the back corner of the patio, gratefully shaded by the building’s overhang. He takes a seat at the round bistro table nestled against the iron fence.

She lays a hand on his shoulder. “I’ll be right back with the coffee.”

Castiel nods and scans the menu she placed in front of him. He notes there isn’t much on the menu that doesn’t come with a side of heart attack. The one heart-healthy option is poached eggs on rye with a side of cottage cheese. Castiel might be a boring eater at times but that option is definitely too dry for his tastes.

“I’ll have the Hobucken Special,” he tells her when she returns, filling his mug with black coffee (as if needs more after the pot he drank this morning, but his sluggish brain screams for it). After he specifies over-easy eggs, brown bread, and no side of tomato, she’s off again, weaving through the tables like a vehicle dodging pylons.

Twenty minutes later, and halfway through his meal, Castiel is interrupted.

With a chipper sigh and familiar smirk, Dean Winchester plunks into the seat across from him, sporting dark jeans and a green button up left open to reveal a white t-shirt. “Mind if I join you?” asks Dean, his smile easy-going but slightly teasing. It reminds Castiel of a likeable villain.

“Seems you already have.”

“I guess so!” replies Dean. “Tell me then, Jimmy, how’re ya settling in?”

Cas wipes his mouth with his napkin in case there are crumbs from his toast, and resists the urge to tell Dean that Jimmy is not his name. “Fairly well I suppose.”

“Good, good. How’d you spend your weekend? Did your futon and bed hold up?”

Cas smiles across the table. “Your assembly skills seem to be satisfactory. And I spent the weekend coming into town to acquire a few more things.”

“Sounds boring.” Dean stretches out, one arm bent and resting on the chair-back, his legs pushed under the table far enough their shoes bump together. Christ, this man is akin to a living porno.

“Yes, it was boring,” he concedes. “How did your date go last week? Was it a success?” Castiel is relieved to have some tidbit of information to continue the conversation.

“Meh, guess that depends on what you’d consider a success,” Dean shrugs.
Before Cas has a chance to ask what he means, the other Winchester drags out the chair on his left and sits down. Both brothers don’t seem bothered or mindful that he’s in the middle of breakfast.

“And by that,” Sam throws a look his way, “my brother means that he is a colossal slut and got laid but is still helplessly single.”

Dean snorts and angles his body towards his kin. “Hey man, I don’t think mom would be too pleased to hear you calling her first born a whore.”

Gripping back, the hair-model lawyer clarifies, “Oh no, I didn’t say you were a whore, Dean—that would imply you were being paid for your infamous services. I said you were a slut and I think even in the afterlife, mom’s well aware of your extracurriculars.”

Nodding in agreement, Dean scrunches his nose. “Fair enough, little brother. Fair enough.”

Castiel’s dumbfounded by how blunt they are with each other. He’s not used to blatant honesty. Even light-hearted and teasing they way they are. It’s refreshing.

After checking his phone for the time, Sam faces Castiel straight on. “I hope my brother isn’t bothering you. He tends to hit on anything that moves, and trust me, it doesn’t even matter if you’re straight. That won’t stop him. And… he’s actually been known to convert a few men, or so I hear.”

Dean sits up and waves his hand to dismiss the accusation. “I didn’t convert anyone, dumbass, I simply enlightened them to a few new experiences.”

“As in anal sex,” Sam deadpans.

Dean smiles wide and villainous, then makes a hook in the air with his finger. “And rim jobs, Sammy. Ya can’t live your life without a good rim job.”

A groan drags out of the larger brother and he runs his long fingers through his tresses. “Are you ever planning to settle down with someone? You’re not getting any younger, Dean.”

This sounds like a conversation the brothers have had more than once. And truly, by his guess, Dean can’t be a day over thirty.

“What can I do,” Dean raises his shoulders, “you snagged the best catch in town.”

“I won’t argue with ya there. Anyway,” Sam checks his phone for the third time, “I need to get to a deposition in the next county. Watch out for my brother, Jimmy.” The warning is lighthearted, but Castiel knows to heed it anyway.

In a casual gesture, as if they’ve been long-time friends, Sam pats Castiel’s back and fist-bumps his brother before he heads out. Castiel watches the taller Winchester navigate through the patio in his crisp black suit, cut and molded to his frame.

When he looks back across the table he catches Dean’s intrusive stare. It’s the way a starved man glares at food. Castiel swallows.

“So, what exactly do you do when you’re not delivering furniture to newcomers such as myself?” asks Castiel.

Reaching over, Dean snags a couple homefries off Cas’ plate. While he’s chewing, he talks, “What don’t I do, man. I’m like the jack of all trades in this damn place, the resident work-horse. But my main gig is at the shop as I told ya. And actually, the reason I stopped over”—Dean’s greedy fingers
return to his plate and the man picks up Cas’ fork and stabs a section of the runny yolk, hastily shoveling it into his mouth—“I’m heading out to the next big town,” he mumbles through half-chewed egg, “half hour away to pick up some parts and I figured since you might need a few more things,” Dean pauses to swallow, “that you can’t get in this tiny ass town you might, uh, want a ride?” On the last word, Dean’s mouth curves up on one side.

Dean, Cas has quickly discovered, is the kind of man that makes a person want to tear their clothes off. In public. And in the span of a minute, Castiel’s also learned that Dean has no qualms stealing food off of a stranger’s plate. He’s also learned that Dean is an unabashed flirt.

Emboldened by Dean’s brazen personality and considering what Sam had warned him of, Castiel has to ask, “And is this offer part of your ‘conversion’ plan for Hobucken?”

Dean smirks, leans over the table, looks him right in the eye and says, “Oh, you’re already converted but nice try.”

It surprises him Dean noticed. Most people assume Castiel’s straight. He’s been told on many occasions he doesn’t give off the “gay” vibe—whatever the hell that is. Perhaps that’s a byproduct of his former vocation. For whatever ridiculous reason people assume being able to rough someone up negates the possibility of them being gay. He’s been pleased to prove certain people wrong.

“Hey,” Dean defends his deduction, “I might be bi as fuck but my gaydar is exceptional. Then again, in a town as small as this you get a keen eye for any opening.” And just the way Dean’s mouth shapes that last words, Castiel can’t help but hide his smile by looking down at his own lap.

“You’re perceptive,” he says quietly.

“Don’t sweat it. My good looks and overall charm tends to bring out the gay in people.”

“Evidently.” Castiel is obviously not the first person to react to Dean. There’s a good chance the delivery man noticed him trip over his words and outright ogle a time or two last Thursday. “I guess I should inform you that I’m not looking for a relationship of any kind. Be it sexual, romantic, temporary, or limited to a quick fuck in a bathroom stall.”

Across the table, Dean studies him for a few seconds. Conclusively, he places his hands on the table in a submissive gesture that sends a spark between Cas’ legs. “If I promise to be on good behaviour, would you still like a ride?”

Jaw tight, Castiel asks, “Why does everything you say sound like a double entendre?”

“Because I’m just that good.” Dean smiles and then frowns with impatience. “Look, are you coming or not?”

“Fine,” he agrees reluctantly. “I need pots and pans and don’t care to wait three weeks for delivery.” As good as microwavable food has turned out to be, the novelty has worn off. Mostly.

Cas takes a quick scan of the street, the activity in the town gaining momentum as the hour creeps closer to eight. A few passersby glance their way and linger long enough that he wonders how the people in this town view Dean—the admitted town slut.

“I’m surprised with your… alluded promiscuous habits that there aren’t people in the streets regularly throwing things at you.”

Dean sniggers. “Man, no one regrets a night with Dean Winchester. But nah, only person to ever throw shit at me was my dad. But anyway, I’m what you’d call the town fuck up. The black sheep, if
you will. Fortunately for me, I’m also the only decent mechanic and these dummies know it.” Dean flicks his hand in the air, gesturing to those around them.

The nonchalant way Dean slides in the comment about parental abuse takes Castiel off guard. No doubt, someone else might’ve interrupted and given apologies. Castiel on the other hand has seen enough violence in his life that the concept of a father being an abusive asshole isn’t a foreign concept by any stretch of the imagination.

When the bill comes, a measly six-ninety-five, Dean insists on paying. “I did eat your food,” he reasons.

“Yes, you did actually. Do you always eat food off of strangers’ plates?”

They’re on the street at this point and Dean turns and walks backwards to face him. “You’re not a stranger,” insists Dean. “But you are fresh meat.”

“Oh, is that what I am?” he asks, feeling a smile in his cheeks. “I thought this was the beginning of a friendship perhaps and that you were to be on your best behaviour?”

With an undignified scoff, Dean waggles his finger. “Get your mind out of the gutter, dude. I meant fresh meat, like, being the new guy in town and everything. Come on now!”

“Where are we going?” Castiel wonders. The block has begun to slope in grade towards the Bay and the buildings here are less vibrant, the leftovers from an industrial era that’s died out. Whatever their purpose is now, isn’t clear. It strikes him as a bit sketchy for such a small place.

Dean notices his skirting glances towards the blank walls. “Yeah, she’s not pretty, is she? Sorry ‘bout that. Hobucken’s a mismatched town—if you can even really call it that. It’s definitely along the lines of a ‘blink-and-you-miss-it’ kinda place. Anyway, I need my truck to pick up the parts—shop’s just around the corner.”

Castiel chuckles. “This is how all murder stories start off, you know.” Just around the corner... Dishearteningly, Castiel knows it bears a modicum of truth. He doesn’t say this.

“Do I make you nervous?” teases Dean, steady in his backward steps, not having tripped once. He knows the cracked sidewalks well.

Cas meets his gaze head on. “Not at all. I’ve been around much worse than you.”

“Is that so?” Dean digs his keys from his front pocket and finally faces ahead as they turn the corner.

Avoiding an answer, Cas takes in the shop as they come up to it. It’s a bare bones place. A box building with three bay garages, a door to the small office on the far left side and a second story that sits on top. In an old decaying sign below the second story windows, it reads, “Winchester Auto.”

“Might not be much,” assures Dean, “but it suits me and it pays the bills.”

“I like it. Not many people enjoy what they do for a living.” Myself included, he wants to add. Hence the whole contacting the FBI business and ending up in witness protection of course.

“Ain’t that the truth, man. So many drones walking around shackled in corporate America. Fuck. Don’t even get me started.”

Dean hits the key fob for his truck and they climb in. The leather seat is still cool from the night. Turning over the ignition, the truck rumbles to life and the blaring sound of rock blasts out through
the speakers. Dean fumbles to crank it down.

“Ah, sorry.” Dean flashes him a sheepish smile. “Don’t usually have anyone else in the truck with me.”

“No worries. I’m sure I’ll regain my hearing soon enough,” he jokes.

Dean gives him a strange look and shakes his head. “Funny guy, this one.”

Steering them out of town and onto the county two-lane road, it’s quiet save for the music on low. Though a few minutes into the drive, Castiel finds he has to break the conversational silence when Dean is belting along to The Odds’ tune *Heterosexual Man.*

“Really?” he asks, his meaning blatant.

The gorgeous man cracks a laugh, his whole body shaking enough to have Cas’ eyes wandering. “What?!” Dean blasts back. “It’s a catchy tune. *I’m a hetero—hetero—heterosexual maaaan...*”

When the song is over, and Dean’s excited singing dies off, Castiel asks, “As a long-time resident of Hobucken, do you have any words of advice for me?”

Dean drums his fingers on the wheel. “Everyone else in this town tends to warn people against me, so there’s that.” Sporting a crooked, teasing grin, Dean faces him. The picture of Dean—with his flirtatious smile and the early sun highlighting his features—blindsides Cas into a daze.

It takes him a minute to organize his thoughts from the scramble. “Since I’m not looking for a ‘good-time’,” he says steadily, “I think I’m safe.” Though, for the first time in a year Castiel realizes he might’ve been safer staying in New York than winding up in this truck with a man such as Dean.

Beside him, Dean shrugs. “The more you say that you’re off limits, the more I get ideas in my head.”

“You’re the insistent type I take it.”

“I like to think of it as persuasive and goal-oriented. Sounds awesome on a resume.”

*Speaking of...* “That reminds me, I’m kind of... in need of a job, actually. Do you know of anyone in town who might need some extra help?”

They’re stopped at a train crossing and the freight line is blurring past in front of them, loud and obtrusive to their conversation.

Dean raises his voice, “Actually, yeah. I hope you know how to pour a drink.”

Since he was five years old. “Yes, I’m quite familiar with that.”

“Allright then. I’ll hook you up with Rufus when we get back in town.” The train caboose flies past and Dean puts the truck back in drive. “Since we got about another twenty minutes in this drive, how about you tell me a little more about yourself, Jimmy.”

Castiel struggles with his thoughts. Turning out to face the window, he decides to keep things light. “Not much to tell. Had a bad breakup, was sick of my family and left.”

“Ooh, bad breakup?! Spill the beans!” Reaching forward, Dean lowers the music.

Already, Cas has decided that the whole wife-leaving-him story wouldn’t fly with Dean. He’s forced to make something up on the spot. “Nothing too dramatic. The guy I was with, um, I suppose you
could say we were from two different worlds.”

“Huh. Rich guy from Pontiac, Illinois meets bad boy from, what, Chicago or something?”

Cas feels an honest laugh leave his chest. “Something like that…” Deciding to redirect this conversation he opts to turn things around. “What about you? Your life story seems interesting.” Somehow, vastly more interesting than Castiel’s. Despite the fact that countless books, movies, and documentaries have been written about Castiel’s previous vocation.

“Interesting? Not so much. Tragic and pathetic maybe. When I was a kid, my mom died in a house fire.” Castiel can’t help but cringe. “Yeah, that sucked. But I was young and it was an accident, something about shitty knob and tube wiring in our old ass house. They said she died of smoke inhalation before anything else, so that’s something to be thankful for, I guess.” Dean reaches over to turn the music even lower than before; it’s nearly inaudible. “After that, my dad became an alcoholic.” Dean makes a face at him, chuffing in vague disbelief. “Real original, right? Ex-military guy loses his wife and drowns himself in Jim Beam every night. What a fucking loser. Anyway, guy got rough with me a couple times and landed his ass in jail over it.”

“Is that where he is now?”

“Yeah. I mean, his sentence for child abuse was only ten years, but the dumbass went and beat some guy to near death in fucked up prison politics and got himself another eight for attempted manslaughter.”

Castiel’s quiet, not sure what to say. Though he’s never ended up in jail himself, he’s had many family members that’ve done time. Prison politics can be unavoidable.

“Sorry to crush on this nice drive and everything with my crappy family history.”

The irony is laughable. Castiel smiles ruefully to himself. If you only knew… “No worries at all. Every family has skeletons in the closet.” Or buried at select locations across the great state of New York.

“Ain’t that the truth.”
Meeting Bobby Singer

Walking through a vast, seemingly never-ending parking lot an hour and a bit later, overloaded with giant plastic bags from Wal-Mart, Castiel spots the large black Ford and heads towards it. Dean notices him and rushes out of the cab to grab his purchases.

“Such a gentleman,” Castiel compliments in a low voice when he catches the way Dean beams at him as he takes the bags off his hands, throwing them into the back of the truck next to a few monstrous clumps of metal that Castiel assumes are engine parts. Or perhaps, paperweights for giants.

The corner of Dean’s sinful lips turns up. “You just looked like you could use a hand with that. It was a big load.”

Castiel shakes his head at the clear innuendo and climbs into the passenger seat. Dean puts the key in the ignition but pauses before he turns the engine over to throw Cas a look, a quizzical assessment of some kind.

“What?”

A smile builds on Dean’s face. “You’re really hot, ya know that?”

Damn, this guy is good. “Thank you. Are we heading back now?”

With a snort, Dean starts the engine. “Well, you’re welcome. And yes. You’ll only have to put up with me for another thirty-five minutes or so. More if we get stuck by another passing train… which I’m hoping for.”

“I’m not interested,” he lies.

“Yes you are. You’re just not acting on it for whatever reason. I’ll figure it out. I always get what I want.”

Castiel shifts in his seat, resting his back against the door so that he can watch Dean drive. “Do you?”

“Yup!” Dean smirks at him, a devilish grin that makes Cas want to crawl into the man’s lap and grind until he loses his mind.

Castiel takes a breath and remembers he’s in WitSec and that he’ll eventually need to go to trial and condemn nearly his entire family and about six police officers to a life sentence. Now is really not the time to get the breath knocked out of him for the first time in his life.

“Fair warning, Dean… I’m not an easy catch,” he says, trying to be funny.

For a long minute, Dean chews his lip. They’re getting closer to the train tracks. “Maybe not. But I’m a damn good fisherman. Lived on the Bay my whole life, ya know.”

There’s no train passing, or nearby, but Dean slows anyway. “Keep driving Dean,” Castiel dictates in a dry tone.

“I’m just being extra cautious, man. Gotta stop and make sure to check both ways.”

“They only do that with school buses.”
“Any vehicle that has precious cargo,” Dean argues, waving his finger in the air to emphasize his point.

“So I’m precious cargo in this scenario, or you are?”

Dean laughs and hits the gas, giving up on the wait for a train to pass. “Both of us, I guess.”

The rest of the ride back, Dean asks him easier questions; what he likes to read and watch on TV. In the last ten minutes of their drive Castiel discovers that Dean is incredibly smart and took over the mechanic shop when he was only fifteen. A good friend of the family had held the ownership in his name until Dean turned eighteen. Every day after school, Dean would go to the shop and work on the cars that came in.

With his dad gone to prison, there wasn’t anyone else in town who knew what they were doing. Dean’s twenty-seven now and considered the best mechanic in the county, the one truth he says with moderate humility. Everything else that comes out of Dean’s mouth is comparably honest but unapologetically so. It’s amazing to find someone like that. Cas doesn’t believe anyone else could possibly understand how rare and underappreciated that is.

Dean drives straight into town and parks in the small lot behind the furniture store. “C’mon, I’ll get you set up with Rufus for a job.”

They hop out and go in through the back door of a building a ways over from where he bought his futon and bed.

“Hey! It’s me. You in here?” Dean calls out.

The back hallway they’re in is dark and the smell of beer seems to have latched onto every surface. Gesturing for Cas to follow, Dean steers them down the corridor, and he pulls to a stop at an open door on the right. Further down, Castiel can see the wooden tables and chairs and dark atmosphere of the small town dive.

“There you are. Got someone for ya,” says Dean leaning against the jamb. Castiel’s not close enough yet to see who this Rufus man is.

A gruff reply rumbles out from the room. “Better not be any more of them dumb-blonde types. For the last time, this ain’t Hooters, Dean.”

“Do you have no faith in me at all!?” Dean reaches over and grabs Cas, yanking him close and throwing an arm around his shoulders. “This is Jimmy and he can pour drinks.”

Sidled under Dean’s arm, Castiel struggles to breathe. It’s utterly, preposterously ridiculous. He’s buried bodies for chrissakes.

Avoiding Dean’s presence as studiously as possible, Castiel focuses on the other man. Rufus is a medium-built black man with a crew cut and seems the type that doesn’t smile all that often. Shrewd eyes scan over Cas from top to bottom. “You know how to pour drinks?” he asks dubiously, as if Cas’ clean-cut attire implies otherwise.

“Yes, sir.”

“You know how to handle money?”

Castiel nods. “Very well.”
“Good enough for me. You’re hired. Dean will show you the ropes and you’re starting now.”

Eyes widening, he looks towards Dean only to find his eyesight land on a scruffy jaw an inch away. Dean turns to him, chin tipped down, close enough to kiss.

_Fuck._

Rufus groans. “None of that, Winchester. I’ve told you how many times now! I catch you fucking people on the job and I swear I’ll stop paying you.”

Dean laughs, his entire body joggling against Cas’ side. “You barely pay me as it is, Rufus. Besides, Jimmy here, has assured me more than once that he’s not interested.”

“Good!” Rufus barks at them. Suddenly he leans over to Cas and lands a heavy hand on his shoulder. “Watch out for this boy, he’s the horniest damn kid I’ve ever met.”

Cas struggles to retain his laughter and still seem professional. “You have nothing to worry about.” _Except my crumbling willpower._

Which is currently being tested. This close to the mechanic-slash-delivery-man, every breath Castiel takes is filled with the clean, soft redolence of the man beside him. A hypnotizing mix of deodorant, cheap cologne, and all-American hard-working man. The combination screams sex stronger than Amouage on a bonafide model.

With introductions and scant paperwork settled, Dean leads him across the hall and into another small room. Not an office this time, but a sparse square space with a rickety metal shelf, too-bright lights, and some timesheet papers pinned haphazardly to the wall. “Okay, not much to know,” Dean starts off. “First of all, ignore that old fucker in there. He’s just jealous he’s not on my hit list—the cutoff is forty in case you were wondering. Uh, except for this one old broad… fuck man… you don’t even… I’ll shut up.” Taking a breath, Dean continues, “Anyway, you’re clearly not a day over thirty. Take a Budweiser apron and throw it on. This paper is where you write down when you work. Rufus might be a grumpy bastard, but he pays, I promise.”

“So, mechanic, delivery man, and... bartender?” interrupts Castiel.

“Yeah, once in awhile. It’s fun to watch the town drunkards do their thing.”

Castiel takes the apron from Dean and goes to put it on when Dean spins him around and snatches the straps. His mind hurtles forward with a seconds’ long fantasy of him and Dean doing something athletic up against the unsturdy shelf.

“I’ll help,” says Dean, voice lowering towards intimacy. “Tying something behind your back can be tricky. Trust me, I know.”

“Not giving up, are you?”

Dean leans over his shoulder, their bodies close as he ties off the apron. Wrenching the knot a little too tight around his hips, the abrupt motion rocks him on his feet. “Not my style,” promises Dean. The words are whispered close enough that Dean’s breath tickles the back of his ear.

Yes, it’s confirmed. It was _far_ safer in New York.

“I’ll give you this much,” Cas allows, “at least you’re not a quitter. I’ve never been a fan of people who don’t follow through with things.”
Dean cocks his head in agreement. “I completely agree.”

They head out into the bar and Dean goes over how to use the cash register and where everything is, the menu, some commentary on the regulars. One of those Dean speaks of with a sort of fondness. Bobby Singer. Castiel remembers that for later, wanting to know why Dean seems to have a soft spot for one particular town drunk. They wind up off topic for several minutes, and Dean finally mentions he needs to head out and that he’ll swing by Cas’ place and drop his bags off from the truck. And of course, there’s no concern over potential theft, but to assuage Cas, Dean promises to leave the goods around back.

“I guess you’re all set,” concludes Dean. “I hate to leave for your first night here—God knows I love a man in any kind of uniform—but Rufus will hang around, and the dinner crew will be in a couple hours to help out.”

Castiel kicks himself for asking his next question. “Is there a date tonight?”

Standing in the middle of the hallway, hands braced on both walls, Dean smirks. “Damn right. Wish me luck!”

Licking his lips to stifle his own stupid grin, he wishes Dean luck on his date and takes a deep breath after he’s gone. “Fuck,” he says a few minutes later. “Fuck,” he says again, softer this time. Taking a minute, he squeezes his eyes shut and forces the image, scent, and overall charm of Dean from his mind.

With fastidious execution, he busies himself however he can.

Soon enough, after he’s perused all the booze offered, the menu in greater detail, and gotten a thorough lay of the land, the dinner crew staggers in. A couple waitresses, one ragley cook, and a hostess. After that, the place starts to pick up pace. It takes Castiel about an hour to get used to the cash register and another to memorize the cost of nearly every drink.

For the most part, his first shift is going well. Not that it’s very hard, to be fair, but he’s proud of himself for starting a legit form of employment. Even finds himself smiling here and there.

It’s coming up to nine when things detour south. A man walks in, eyes skirting about the place. From the way his hands are stuffed in his pockets, to the shady dance of his gaze, Castiel’s senses go on alert. He knows this behaviour… has spent his life working alongside these kind of idiots. Not to mention the times he’s found them on the receiving end of his right hook.

After the tenth cursory scope of the place, the man—really more of a boy, with baggy dark jeans and a too-long shirt—makes a beeline for the hallway. Sure that this is only headed in one direction, Castiel reacts instinctively.

Twisting the damp bar-rag around his fist, he marches out to cut off the kid’s progress. Over the low chatter and music, no one notices Castiel stride in alongside the boy. One arm slides up over slim shoulders while his covered fist makes a shallow jab into the space between the kid’s ribs.

Having the wind knocked out of him means he can’t speak, or yell. It makes Castiel’s job easier. “Maybe getting wasted before coming to the bar was a bad choice,” Cas announces at normal volume, easily manhandling the suspicious teen out the back door.

On the other side of the steel, with no one around, Castiel grips the kids shirt with the hand wrapped around his shoulders and flings him around so his back smacks into the wall.

“Wha…” the kid wheezes, “What the f-uuh-king hell? Who-who are you?”
“The new bartender,” he answers easily, a thread of pride marking his tone.

“What the hell d’ya punch me for?!” The boy waves his arm up. “I didn’t do shit.”

“No, but you were about to.”

The kid has the gall to laugh. “Listen newbie, okay, you clearly don’t know shit about this town so why don’t you stay the fuck out of it.”

Annoyed, Castiel steps forward and pins the boy against the brick. “And you clearly don’t know shit about me.”

Castiel’s not sure what might’ve happened next, but he’s interrupted as the back door flies open. Immediately, Castiel takes a few, less incriminating, steps back.

Standing under the safety light is the cook, confused but completely unbothered. “Everything alright back here?”

Cas decides not to answer, but the boy does, “Ash, man… your new bartender is a psycho!” More arm flailing. “I was just comin’ in to see you, buddy. And this crazy fucker fuckin’ attacked me!”

Ash frowns, but doesn’t seem all that concerned about anything. “AJ, what did I tell you?”

Glumly, AJ mumbles, “Never at work.”

“Right on. Why don’t you head home and I’ll swing by after work. We can chill then, alright?”

Darting a nervous glance between Ash and Castiel, AJ finally huffs and jogs off towards the intermittent shadows of the main road. When he’s gone, Castiel meets the cook’s eyes. His only interactions so far have been to relay orders throughout the night for those eating at the bar.

“Drugs?” Castiel assumes.

Ash smiles with utter nonchalance. “Just some dope. That a problem for you, newbie?”

“No.” Straightening his stance, Castiel forces himself to sound more… normal. “It was just that, well… your friend AJ came in looking very shady… I wasn’t sure what to do. I’ve never tended bar before,” he shrugs with a forced demeanour of innocence.

“No harm no foul, man.”

When Castiel returns behind the bar, there are a number of people looking for refreshments and he doesn’t have the time to chastise himself for acting instinctively. Besides, the kid could’ve been a real threat. Seeing the tenor of guilt is one thing, knowing the reason for it is another beast entirely.

Hours later, his feet are throbbing in pain. His back is in tight, painful knots and he curses his damn caseworker for sending him to this godforsaken town. Fucking Hobucken and it’s damn drunks hanging around into all hours of the night. Annoying dope-addicted kids mucking with his new life.

Bobby—the one Dean mentioned earlier, is a surly older man with a thick gray beard and straw-stiff hair that pokes out under a trucker hat. He’s got a beer belly to suit his pastime. Bobby strolled in just after the AJ incident and took a seat at the end of the bar near the hallway to the washrooms. Rufus drifted out front and chatted with the older man for a while, but now Bobby is alone again with his beer. A beer he holds the way a child might a safety blanket.

The bar closes at two in the morning and by one-thirty, Bobby’s the sole patron left. Castiel heads
over to him and lets him know the damage for the night, passing him off his bill.

“Rufus never charges me,” grumbles the man. Dean had prepared him for this.

“I’m sorry to tell you that Dean warned me you might say that. He told me to make sure you paid.”

“Fuckin’ kid,” Bobby smiles and shakes his head and hands Cas a credit card. “Here, take my money. Goddamn cost of booze is shootin’ up every damn year.”

“Yes it is,” he replies.

“So you’re the new guy, huh?”

Cas runs the card and passes him the receipt for signing. “I guess so.” Bobby scrawls his name on the paper and shoves it across the bartop. Then he stands, and nearly falls off the stool.

“New guy.” Bobby grunts. “You know they say I’m the town drunk.”

Quite on point, Castiel agrees silently as he watches the man stumble between the tables to the front door. “They do. One second.” Castiel dashes back and tells Rufus that Bobby’s the last of them and he’s going to see that the man gets home okay. Rufus dismisses him with a wave that manages to be surly. After that, Castiel quickly bundles up his apron with the tips still in it and locks it into the safe under the bar where Dean showed him. He should’ve gone over his receipts for the night and made sure everything was balanced but he can do that tomorrow, promising Rufus he would come in again.

Bobby’s already out in the street when Cas catches up to him.

“Care for some company?”

“Don’t matter one way or ‘nother.”

Castiel nods. “Dean Winchester speaks fondly of you,” he says by way of conversation.

The comment makes Bobby smile indulgently, the years in his face lessening some. “Good kid, that one. Causin’ trouble left, right, and center, mind you, but damn good kid. Him and his brother, like my own, them boys.”

“It’s good to hear. Their father doesn’t seem to have been the best role model.”

“Aghh!” Bobby waves his hand around. “John had a rough go of it. It don’t excuse what he did, it don’t, but in ‘other life he could’a been more n’ what he was. Too bad, though. Ya know, I took them boys in when they carted him off to prison.”

“Really?”

“Sam was only nine or ten when the whole of it went down. Dean showed up at my door that night with a black eye, broken rib, and a broken arm. Kid brother in tow. Saddest damn thing I’d ever saw. And to call the cops on one of yer best friends? Not easy, that. Not easy.”

Castiel follows Bobby down the road that follows the water. The houses here are in rougher shape, the siding weathered. The roofs are in need of repair—nowhere near as bad as the best parts of East New York, but it’s clearly the rough part of town. At least the earlier summer heat is chased away by the cool night air and the crisp gusts from the Bay. He nods along as Bobby unloads the backstory in his intoxicated rambling.
They bounced back quick. Good, solid heads on their shoulders. Strong, both of ‘em. Got into lots of trouble though. Dean especially. One time when they were in high school,” he starts off, a look of pride taking him over, “they found this abandoned old place at the edge of town. Real creepy joint, used money from the shop to buy the thing and started selling haunted house tickets. Made a damn killing those boys. Got all into it and set up noises and props and everything you could imagine. People were coming from the next counties over to check out the place. The place even got a mention on one of them crazy ghost-hunting shows a while back, GhostFacing or Facers? Or some crap or other.”

“Impressive. Is it still open?” he wonders. Bobby leads them down a smaller lane and Cas is fairly certain he knows which house is Bobby’s. The large front lawn is littered with random junk. Old tractors, a couple old cars, and even an old Indian motorcycle that’s been left out to rust within an inch of its life.

“Nah. Place got condemned by the County years back. But, Dean still managed to rack up enough cash to send his brother off to college.”

Castiel smiles. Dean might be shameless but he’s got more values than anyone else Cas has ever known.

“Sounds like Dean’s a good man.” And I am not, he reminds himself.

Bobby snorts, fumbling to get through the gate towards his front walkway. “That he is. And I love the kid. I do, but I’d watch yourself new guy. He’s a goddamn heartbreaker that one.”

“That’s what everyone keeps telling me.”

“And yet, here you are,” Bobby grumbles, “walking my old ass home, letting me blab on about the kid like you can’t wait to hear more about him. Fair warning, he ain’t the long-term type, son.”

Closing the gate behind Bobby, Castiel waves good night. “Dean’s just a friend.” And maybe if he repeats it enough, his brain will get on board with the idea.

With a choking laugh, Bobby clamours up his front porch and shakes his head. “Uh-huh.” And then he disappears inside his shabby, rundown home and leaves Castiel on the sidewalk. Wiping his hand across his jaw, Castiel tries to push aside the more inappropriate thoughts—all of which feature someone he barely knows.

Turning away from the direction of the water, Castiel hikes up the street. As he’s about to cross the main road and head home, a sleek black car nearly runs him over. It stops on a dime and the driver-side window cranks down with manual speed.

It doesn’t surprise him in the least to see Dean smiling behind the wheel. It worries him how much Dean’s presence satisfies some buried need in him.

“Care for a ride? It’s late. Something bad might happen to you.”

Like you? he’s tempted to say. He tries to tell himself that if his feet weren’t so sore and tired he wouldn’t be saying yes. Also… his back hurts something awful and it’s only normal to say yes when a friend asks if you want a ride.

Castiel accepts the offer with a silent nod.

But the truth hits him as he climbs into the car. Dean’s masculine scent fills his nose, and he knows the reason his ass is parked on the leather seat is because the mechanic makes his stomach curl into
knots, not because working the entire evening mildly irritated his heels and spine.

“No truck tonight?” he wonders, trying to be casual even though all his nerves are on edge.

“Nah, the truck is for work. Baby is for dates.”

“Ah. And baby is?”

Dean smiles wider than he’s ever seen. “Oh, Baby’s this beautiful girl,” Dean pets across the dash and makes a low moan in his throat that should be illegal. Fuck money laundering and five years in prison. Dean’s low moan is far more detrimental than ill-acquired green.

“She’s very nice,” he agrees, making sure to look around appreciatively at the leather seats and well-maintained interior.

“Very nice?” echoes Dean in faint outrage. “She’s fucking badass sexy and you know it.”

“Definitely sexy,” Cas agrees, his eyes directed at Dean. “So how was the date?”

“Oh man,” groans Dean, “a fucking disaster. I ran into a guy from high school a few weeks back, he was down visiting family from where he lives now… I can’t remember where. Anyway, this guy—Aaron, and me go out and have a couple beers. I take him back to my place and we start fooling around and he’s kind of inexperienced, which wouldn’t normally bother me at all, but he wanted to go without! And he’s taken the bottom-bunk, and I’m like, dude?! What the hell man? Apparently ‘It feels better’. So I said, you’re getting my dick in a condom or no dick at all.”

Castiel thoroughly enjoys Dean’s barefaced tell-all. Blunt honesty is suddenly the most attractive thing he’s ever witnessed on a man. “And what happened?”

An irritated growl blows out of Dean’s mouth. “Well, my balls feel like a bruise, what does that tell you.”

“I’m sorry you had a bad night.”

“Eeh, whatever. I’ll make do in the shower later.” Dean flashes him a teasing smile. “Unless you’re willing to help out?”

Jesus Christ, he’s tempted. “Going to have to decline.”

Out of nowhere, Dean flips to serious. More serious than he’s seen thus far. “Why? I mean, I don’t want to annoy you too severely or anything. I know I have a habit of being obnoxious, but I’m genuinely curious why. I know you’re attracted to me, so it’s not that.”

Only because Dean is being sincere does Castiel decide to give him some portion of the truth. “My life is a mess, Dean. You’re probably one of the most captivating men I’ve ever had the pleasure to meet, but I’m not in any place in my life to get involved in something. I’ve had physical based relationships in the past and they’re not my style.”

Dean’s also far too good for him, but he doesn’t say that. Those kind of statements tend to raise questions.

“Fair enough. Still want to be my friend if I promise to hit on you as little as possible?”

Castiel laughs and reaches for the handle as they pull into his driveway. “What classifies ‘as little as possible’?”
Putting the car in park, Dean muses for a moment. Finally, he turns to face Cas, the deep shadows from the tree in the front yard block out the moonlight and it makes the air between them thicker, as if the shadows have substance.

“How about this? I’ll do my best. I don’t know what it is about you,” Dean admits, appearing surprised by it, “you’re a mystery I want to figure out.”

Whatever mysteries he holds, Cas is sure Dean wouldn’t like. “There’s nothing special about me, I promise you.” Nothing good anyway.

Dean reaches towards his hip and pops the seat-belt buckle. “Ah, c’mon, everyone is special. Just takes the right person to see it.” Another taunting smile is flashed his way.

Castiel climbs out of the car and turns back to lean in through the window. “That was exceedingly cheesy.”

“Guilty!” Dean throws his hands up. “I had to give it a shot. Anyway, have a good night.”

“You too. Enjoy your shower,” he grins back at Dean, turning to the fragmented pathway up the lawn.

“Oh I will. And hey—“ Dean calls out. At his front steps, Castiel peers back through the darkness, and his chauffeur continues, “Thanks for walking Bobby home. I appreciate it, man. Seriously.”

“Of course.”

With a final wave, Dean reverses out of the driveway and drives off. By now, it’s sometime past two and all Castiel wants to do is crash in bed, and not move a muscle for at least ten hours.

Unfortunately, the stale beer stench from the bar lingers on him and a shower is definitely in order. He loiters in the living room for a solid ten minutes before moving to the bathroom. Some part of him gets off on the idea that he and Dean will be showering at the same time.

Yes, there is definitely something wrong with him.

Under the uneven spray, the hot water drenches him and he closes his eyes to feel the planes of wetness rush over his skin, his dark brown hair matted to his scalp.

“How dare you create a man like that,” Castiel relays to the fictitious God. “I need to keep my fucking head together.” A profound tiredness sinks into him and in glaring contrast, he feels his body respond in subtle sparks to thoughts of Dean.

God, he should fight it. He should. But he doesn't.

Too exhausted to overthink it, he accepts the impetus to his growing erection and reaches down to palm himself. The touch is such a relief, and inexplicably comforting. Masturbating is the sort of activity that can serve a variety of purposes. It can wake you, de-stress you, or send you off to sleep better than a good hit from a bong.

This time, Castiel’s reasons are centered on wanting that blissful, mind-numbing release before he conks out. And sure, maybe a little about wanting to let his mind imagine Dean getting naked and into his bed.

Bracing against the shower wall, which is disgustingly covered in soap grime, Castiel forces the world from his thoughts and strokes his length from tip to base, closing his eyes to feel.
He pictures Dean on his cheap bed, dark green eyes begging Cas to join him. In the fantasy he does, gladly, yanking off Dean’s trademark worn jeans and peeling his t-shirt over his head. They would kiss, and grope… maybe bite. Naked limbs would get twisted as they shift around in aimless urgency.

“Mmh… fuck.”

Slowing the pace of his impatient hand, he takes point in his fantasy, moving Dean onto all fours and fingering him without reservation. Reveling in Dean’s low moans and whimpers as things grow heated. Cas imagines the way Dean would maybe bite his lip or beg for more.

Arousal blossoms in a stiff peak, and he reacts by squeezing around his cock and exhaling a hard breath into the steam of the shower. God, it’s wrecking him to give into this potent daydream.

The imagined sounds of Dean’s blatant desire, the imagined feel of his skin… the smell of it—Castiel isn’t going to last.

When the fantasy-version of Dean twists to look back at him, eyes shadowed with want, he’s done. Choking through an elated moan, Cas watches distantly as spurts of semen splatter against the mustard-coloured tiles.

“Fucking christ…” he drones, blindsided by the force of the orgasm.

Sighing, he rinses off and lazily splashes water at the tiles in a vain attempt to clean his mess.

Towel-dried and naked minutes later, Castiel stumbles across the hall to his room, shoves the blankets over and climbs into bed, almost asleep before his head hits the pillow.
Near the end of the week, Castiel receives a package in the mail—his first addressed to Jimmy Novak.

Inside the FedEx box is a cellphone. There’s no markings on it, or instructions of any kind. Curious, Castiel hits the ‘on’ button and waits for the phone to boot-up.

“Present from U.S. Marshal Asshole?” he wonders out loud.

When the phone has flared to life, Cas taps the contacts button and sees only one number. Not much mystery there. Choosing it, he hits call. After two rings, the familiar gruff tone answers, the result of a decades long chain-smoker.

“Haven.”

“What do you want?”

A faint creak on the other end has Cas picturing Mr. Asshole leaning back in his hideous tan leather monstrosity of a desk chair. “Check-in time. How are you settling in?”

“I got a job. I take it that’s what you want to know.”

“Good. Means we can start tapering off funds. We’ll give you next month’s allotment, half of the next after that, but you’ll be more or less on your own by September.”

“The U.S. Government is so wonderfully generous.”

“Fuck you, Haven. You’re a criminal, remember? It’s the best you’re gonna get.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. Thanks for the reminder, dick. “When’s the trial going to be, Zach?” he wonders.

“How many times have I told you to call me Marshal Roya, Haven?”

“Not nearly enough, Zach. When’s the trial?”

“No date set. You know how it is. Our system is backlogged and your father’s attorney keeps throwing out bullshit motions. My guess: your family won’t see trial for months, if not years. Their second arraignment is in three weeks though.”

In the kitchen, Castiel opens the fridge door and takes out a jar of jam for some toast. “Hear anything else going on?”

There’s a long silence before Marshal Roya answers. “They upped your price, or so I’ve been told.”

Popping the bread into the cheap plastic toaster, he finds himself smiling with bitter interest. “That doesn’t surprise me. How much is my head worth now?”

A curt laugh crosses the line. “One and a half mil’.

Peanuts for Michael Haven, but still enough to attract a number of interested parties. “Then I hope you’re good at what you do.”
His toast pops and he starts slathering some butter and then jam on it.

“Call me if your life's in danger, Haven. The phone in your hand is GPS-chipped so don’t lose it.”

“Sure thing, Zach.” Cas is already moving to hit end, even though the US Marshal is yammering something else.

After pouring himself a cup of coffee, Castiel heads out onto his meagre front porch and takes a seat on the concrete step with his toast and his plain white mug. The phone sits beside him in an ominous way.

“One and a half million, Father?” Shaking his head, Castiel wonders how enterprising his potential hitmen will be. It’s a long known fact that there are FBI agents assigned to each of the five families that run New York City. It only takes one very skilled man or woman to follow the trail through the federal line.

It’s not that he has no faith in WitSec. It’s more that he’s seen impossible hits done and dusted with expediency. It’s moments like this that remind him he has a very real desire to live… to maybe do something with his life.

There’s a shift for him tonight at Rufus’ Cabin, his fifth now, but he’s been wanting to get a TV ordered and his computer hasn’t been delivered yet, so he’s planning to use the ancient desktop at the bar.

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Crossing onto Elmsley, the main road into downtown an hour later, Castiel passes Bobby’s street. It’s sad that the older man has hit the bottle the way he has. Part of him wonders what about Bobby’s past drove him to it. It’s always something.

The bustling of the little town greets him a few blocks later and already he’s finding that he enjoys the small-town hustle that doesn’t even compare to New York’s rat-race and chaos. It’s a different kind of energy. An honest energy.

Heading down the sidewalk on the north side of the street, he walks past the furniture store, and comes up to the front door of the bar. It’s closed this early, but he’s already been deemed trustworthy enough to have a key of his own.

Staring down at his key ring as it hangs from the lock, he realizes he now has two keys: The brass one for his hideous bungalow, and the giant silver one that opens up the bar. For only being in Hobucken a week and a half, it’s not a half bad development.

“Rufus?” he calls into the shadowed space.

Checking around to make sure everything’s clean and in order, he ducks back into the office and finds it empty. Taking a seat in the stiff-back dining chair taken from out front, he powers on the dusty PC.

There’s a login password, but in true small-town fashion there’s a bright post-it on the monitor that says ‘PSSD – Johnny Walker’

“Very original,” mutters Castiel as he types it out.

When the desktop appears, he can’t help but groan. “Mmnh. This will be annoying.” All across the desktop is a scattering of random icons, files, folders. It’s an absolute mess. And diving into the files
“Organized Accounting Crap” makes him cringe more. It’s immediately decided that he’s going to have to ask Rufus to let him fix things up.

Trying to ignore the technical nightmare, Cas clicks open up the internet browser (Explorer, naturally) and navigates straight to Amazon. He’s not picky, and chooses a modest 32” television for his purposes and moves through the checkout.

Castiel hits pay. “And there’s the last of the credit card room.” Maybe he’ll ask Dean if anyone else in town needs help. Rufus’ Cabin is a fine job, and he’s been loosely promised four nights a week, and a short shift on the weekends. It still isn’t much.

After leaving a note for Rufus on the desk about the computer, Castiel takes his keys, locks up and walks across the street to the patio at Pamela’s Grill for brunch. Already sitting in the middle under an umbrella is Sam and Dean.

Not having ever been one to seek out social interaction, he doesn’t feel the need to wave them down. Instead, he requests a table for one.

The same brunette waitress he had before steers him through the tables to a small two-person bistro set up directly beside the brothers. And if he’s seeing things right, he’s sure he catches a smirk in the lift of her cheek.

“Jimmy!” Sam’s boisterous voice seems to stretch out and fill the morning dining atmosphere. “Come on, take a seat!” The tall brother pulls out the available chair between him and Dean.

Casting a quick glance in Dean’s direction, he’s not surprised to see that trademark smile beam up at him. Always something in that smile, he thinks. This sexy undercurrent of mischief that makes Castiel feel nothing like a mob boss’s son.

Knowing he can’t say no to either of them without causing a ruckus, he takes the offered seat and places his order quickly.

“How are you both?”

With paramount energy, Sam dives into the tale of his most recent case. It’s then Castiel learns Sam Winchester is the fucking DA for Pamlico County. Could this get any better?

“You sound very busy,” he comments, a rainbow of curses flashing through his mind.

“Wish I weren’t. Unfortunately, there’s no shortage of criminals, not even on the calm east coast of NC.”

Dean nods agreeably. “All those petty thieves and joy-riders, huh, Sam?”

“We get murderers, too.”

A bright laugh escapes Dean. “Seriously? When was the last murder in Pamlico?”

Sam’s face firms up as his retort is loaded. “There was that guy who killed both his parents like four months ago.”

“Man, you told me last week he was found to be mentally incompetent to stand trial.”

“Damn. I forgot I mentioned that.”

A different waitress swings by to drop off his food and Castiel dives in, finding he’s ravenous despite
the toast he had earlier.

Both brothers continue to chat while he eats. He’s barely eaten half when Dean pushes aside his own mostly cleaned plate and reaches across the table to snag one of Cas’ homefries.

“I don’t think so,” says Cas, smacking away Dean’s hand. “If you want more food, order more food.”

Sam chortles at them. “You’re already stealing food off his plate? My God, Dean.”

“What?!” Dean feigns innocence. “I like food. Sue me!”

“Don’t tempt me. Anyway, I need to get to work. Hey Jimmy, Dean and I were going to meet here for dinner tonight, you in?”

Cas swallows the bite in his mouth and looks between them. They’re both smiling warmly at him, waiting on an answer.

“Um, sure. Thank you for the invitation.” His joy at being included is marginally dampened by his guilt. If they knew who he was...

“Of course. The more the merrier,” says Sam. “And kudos for dodging my brother’s unrelenting attempts to get you to date him.”

A low chuckle rises from Dean and he glances down at his lap. Castiel smiles at Sam and replies, “Thankfully, he remains tolerable.”

Sam and Cas share a quick laugh at Dean’s expense, who then retaliates by stealing Cas’ plate.

An immediate frown changes Cas’ expression, the corner of his eye catching the glint of mischief in the quirk of Dean’s lips.

Immature flirtation should not be so arousing.

“Alright, well… I’ll catch you guys later,” Sam says, tucking a twenty under the salt shaker—more than enough to cover all three of their meals plus tip.

In his absence, Castiel is left alone with Dean. It occurs to him he should probably try to avoid this sort of thing.

“Give me back my plate, Dean,” Castiel commands in a steely voice.

Dean replies, “You’re laughing at my strikeouts, man. Not cool! I demand payment in homefries.”

Pooling from his skills developed growing up, Castiel fixes his expression into one of perfected dominance and leans close to Dean, close enough that if Dean knew who his family was, he’d be tripping over himself to get away.

“Give me my food. Now.”

Dean swallows and quietly pushes the plate back over. “Geez. Guess I won’t be coming between Jimmy and his meat anytime soon.”

“Wise choice.”

After a few minutes of silence, Dean shifts uncomfortably. “You know, you really shouldn’t look at
a man like that.”

Stifling a grin, Cas turns to Dean, taking the last bite into his mouth. “And why not?”

“Because it means I can’t get up from the table without causing a scene.”

He does his best, he truly does, but Dean’s words send blood rerouting south and Castiel has difficulty swallowing his food. “Don’t forget that we’re friends and nothing more,” he reminds Dean. “Whatever you’ve got going on under the table is your own fault.”

Dean chews his lip and leans back, subtly checking his crotch to make sure everything’s normal again, or at the very least, acceptable. “So what are your plans for today?”

“I’m not sure,” answers Cas. Other than working at the bar later, and now dinner plans, he has no idea. Unless Rufus calls and gives him the okay to rework the entire computer and inherent accounting system.

“If you want some more cash, I might have a job for you.”

More cash is definitely something he wants. “What’s the job?”

“Helping me.”

“This sounds like a trick.” And a bonafide bad idea.

The waitress who delivered his food rushes over, rips the bill off a pad and slaps it on the table upside down. Dean snags it and the twenty that’s half under the salt shaker. “Sam’s treat.”

“You’re both far too generous for your own good.”

Dean grins. “It’s what makes small towns awesome. All of us nice, decent people. Smart, too. Great in bed…”

“I sincerely hope you’re no longer referring to both you and your brother.”

Mock gagging, Dean shoots up from the table. “Gross, dude!”

Laughing at his newfound friend, they walk out of the patio together and Cas stops when they’re on the sidewalk, not sure where he’s going. Dean saves him an awkward moment. “Anyway, if you want some extra cash, I could use a bit of help for an hour or so. Basically, you’d be my wrench monkey. And I can absolutely promise you I will be well-behaved because I’ve got a rush job for a good friend.”

“I don’t know much about cars,” he admits.

“No problem. Consider it a shit job and learning experience. Come on.”

Castiel follows Dean back to the shop, stewing over his reservations about spending more time with the man. But he’s amazed to see the way Dean’s demeanour switches gears when they get to Winchester Auto. Gone is the flirtatious, honest man that intrigues him and what’s taken his place is a calculating, incredibly talented worker.

Unfortunately for Cas, this version of Dean is just as appealing as the other.

In a few moments, Dean explains in simple terms what the problem is with the Chevy El Camino.
“Not many people have this car anymore,” he remarks as Dean parks his perfect ass on a stool and swivels underneath the engine—the whole car raised on a hydraulic lift.

“Yeah, my man Garth’s a bit of a weirdo. Nice fuckin’ dude though. Works at the Sheriff’s office and I like to keep the law enforcement around here happy as can be. Not that I plan on doing anything illegal… but it’s not out of the realm of possibility.”

Getting his hands up under the vehicle, Dean starts wrenching on something hard enough the whole car moves, rocking back and forth and side-to-side. The header for the exhaust is in need of replacement, and apparently this requires a lot of shaking and noise.

“Normally I’d weld if the issue was minor,” explains Dean in huffs, “but both connections are rusted to hell. The second I start fucking around here, the whole part’s garbage. Uh, can you pass me the grinder on the table back there? It’s yellow and black, says Dewalt on the side.”

Castiel sees the tool and picks it up, making sure the plug is secure into the outlet before he passes it under the car to Dean’s waiting hand. “Thanks. Gonna get loud in a sec.”

For a good fifteen to twenty minutes, Dean works at grinding off some of the bolts that hold the part in place and Castiel busies himself by organizing some of Dean’s tools by size and colour.

Dean eventually swivels out from the under the car, his skin coated in a sheen of sweat and flecks of metal dusted over his skin. “Christ, it’s hot. Here—“

Taking the grinder from Dean, he places it back on the table, precisely in line with the rest of the newly organized set up.

Wiping his forehead, Dean then asks for a pry bar and a sledge hammer.

“Is there no specific tool then for this next part?” wonders Cas.

Dean smiles wide. “Nope! Just brute force, man. Even with the bolts out of the way, the rust acts like a weld, sealing the two ends to the rest of everything else.” Rolling back under the car, Dean starts bashing on the metal pipe as if it had caused him some great injustice.

The whole car’s shaking and it makes Castiel nervous the lift will collapse and crush the man underneath. Dean somehow senses his apprehension and an amused laugh eases out from under the car. “Don’t worry about me over there. Never had a lift fail me before, it won’t now.”

With a few more attacks on the car’s undercarriage, the part detaches and clangs onto the concrete at their feet.

“Ah! Success. Now, next part’s easy-peasy. Pass me the shiny new part on the shelf just behind you.”

Cas does as he’s told and is pleased that Dean didn’t lie when he said that Cas would be playing the role of a wrench-monkey. It’s not the first time he’s taken orders from someone by a long shot, but it’s the first time he feels good about it.

“This is honest work,” he notes while Dean is securing the new part. “There’s a methodical aspect to it and it’s basic, but good, solid work. Bestowing pride at the end of a day. I admire this type of work.” Nothing at all like trying to infer whether the bookie is diverting funds away from the family’s earnings. Definitely nothing like assisting his father interrogate a suspected undercover cop. That had been messy in a completely different manner.
“You’re gettin’ kinda philosophical over there. I am literally messing around with metal down here. That’s it. Nottin’ special about it.”

All in, the whole switch out takes about an hour. And since Dean has some appointment after that, he drops Cas off at home with a crisp couple of twenties and promises to see him at dinner later.

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Castiel arrives at Pamela’s minutes before six o’clock and sees Sam alone, skimming through emails on his phone. He takes a seat quietly and smiles as Sam raises his head.

“You seem to be fitting right in here.”

Castiel shrugs, knowing he doesn’t. “I’m trying anyway. You and your brother, and Rufus, have all been kind and generous.” Undeservingly so.

For a fairly distracted man with an abundant workload, Sam’s hazel eyes settle on Cas with all his attention. “I gotta say, I haven’t seen my brother as worked up over someone as you in a long time. Maybe never.”

“People always want what they can’t get.” And Cas is definitely not someone that anyone should be getting worked up over.

Sam considers his words but pulls a face. “Maybe. I dunno. I think it’s more than that.”

For what feels like the hundredth time, he assures Sam that he and Dean are just friends. Because that truly is all they are. And all they will ever be. Dean is a good, hard-working, honest man, and Castiel is… someone who should’ve wound up behind bars, but secured a deal to keep his ass off of a single cot.

As they wait for Dean, Sam questions Castiel about his past and while he does his best to lie to the fucking District Attorney, a couple of his responses obviously rub Sam the wrong way. Castiel curses himself, knowing that lawyer is no doubt going to do a background check on the new mystery guy in town that his brother’s hell bent on taking to bed. Wonderful.

It also doesn’t escape his notice that Sam’s eyes flicker down to the tattoo on his arm. And with the shirt he’s wearing, the top extension of the wings on his back are probably visible.

He’s grateful for the interruption of the waitress.

Once they’ve settled on their orders and Sam is about to message Dean, the man in question strolls onto the patio and slaps a piece of paper down as he’s taking a seat.

“Ta-da!”

“What’s this?” asks Sam, grabbing the folded white sheet. Opening it up, he takes one look at the paper and then shoots Dean an intolerable glare. “These are your STD results, Dean.”

Dean makes a show of looking shocked. “Gosh, how did that get there? And by STD results, you mean negatives across the board. Hallelujah! May the fucking continue.” Dean switches the paper for one from his other pocket. “Joking aside, I really wanted to show you this.” Anxiously impatient, Dean waits on his brother to say something.

Sam takes the next sheet and this time, his eyes roam over the page for longer.
“For real?” Sam faces Dean, eyebrows raised.

“Approved this afternoon.”

They share immediate joy between them, rising from their chairs to hug it out and Castiel feels solemn. Not that he expects either of them to hug him about something that obviously has nothing to do with him but…

Am I really sitting here sulking about not being hugged? Castiel nearly snorts out loud. Instead, he clenches his jaw and remembers who he is. And more precisely, who he is not.

When both men take a seat, Dean’s vivid green eyes flash over to him and explains he’s been wanting to expand the garage, take on cooler projects from around the county. Work on choppers, sick wheels, ATVs, boats, everything.

“That sounds incredible. Congratulations.”

The pride that perks Dean’s shoulders is endearing. “Thanks, man.”

Sam nudges his brother. “You gonna hire Ash to help out during the day?”

“Maybe. If the guy lets up on the dope.”

***

After dinner, Sam heads home to a wife Cas has yet to meet, and Dean takes off to deliver some items for the furniture store. Castiel treads across the street to begin his shift at the bar and wonders if Dean will drop in later.

He doesn’t.

And much to Castiel’s disappointment, after walking Bobby home again that night, he’s sadly not picked up by Dean on the way home either.

It’s only as he gets into bed late that night that he realizes he can’t stop thinking about Dean. No matter how hard he tries not to, or how unwise it is. This hot-blooded American man who's all about a down to earth living and an unapologetic sex-drive is apparently burrowing into Castiel’s synapses and staying there.

It’s not smart. Not at all. Castiel has no right to be distracted by thoughts of this nature. For fuck’s sake, he has a goddamn price on his head. One and a half million dollars ready to be paid to the person who manages to track him down and put a bullet through his skull. He should not be thinking about sex, or flirtatious green-eyed men that are built to tease images of riotous fucking into one’s subconscious.

Maybe, if Dean was no more than the promise of sex it would be one thing and maybe he could entertain a quickie with the man and get it out of his goddamn system.

But Dean is so vibrant! Sporting a smile that’s as contagious as it is detrimental to a person’s higher brain-functioning. He’s confident but vulnerable, strong and somehow tender. The sort of man always ready to lend a hand, but bears the capacity to be incredibly mischievous.

Castiel finds himself wanting to delve into everything that is Dean Winchester. He wants to crack past that arrogant exterior and discover what he’s like when there’s no trace of his social guise, no posturing, no walls.
Dean is a beautiful paradox.

And as it happens, the most exquisite, most perfect construction of everything Cas has ever deemed attractive or desirable about a man. Every trait, every perceived flaw… everything. So why—for Gods sakes, why!—of all moments in his life, does he have to meet Dean now? When not only is it unwise, it’s very much unsafe for him to be with anyone.

And besides, after the things he’s done, Castiel doesn’t deserve someone like that and he damn well knows it. But you know, he also didn’t deserve freedom. But here he is, not behind bars.

One of these days, all that bad karma’s gonna come roaring back to him. Probably in the form of a thirty-oh-six embedded in his cerebral cortex.
Walking Along at Night

Around mid-June, Castiel’s previously infrequent nightmares ramp up to the point where his late shift at Rufus’ starts to suffer. It probably has something to do with the arrival of the TV.

It’s Wednesday night during his third week in Hobucken and Castiel’s relieved to have a night off. But, the freedom means he can’t help switching on the news and glaring at the perfectly primped reporter on screen.

“We’ve just learned that yet another New York police officer is among those charged in the massive crackdown on organized crime last month that saw the arrest of nearly four dozen suspects, all members of the Haven organized crime family in New York. This makes a total four NYPD cops accused of corruption…”

When the cop’s badge ID picture flashes on the screen, Castiel grinds his teeth. His brain recalls a few choice memories involving that face. Why the media doesn’t know all the names of the cops he’s ratted out yet is beyond him, but the FBI can do whatever the fuck they want with his information. Maybe they plan to keep some badges onboard as undercover cops… maybe some of them were to begin with. But it’s doubtful, every one of the cops Castiel personally dealt with were spineless weasels. They only wanted the extra cash, with a way to live on the wild side—nothing more than the dreams of an adolescent.

“And in related news, the prosecution’s key witness is rumoured to be someone well embedded within the Haven family, and not an undercover cop as originally suspected. Many New Yorkers are asking the question—Who could it be? And what could’ve happened to spell the entire dismantling of one of New York’s longest running criminal families?”

The professionally dull tone of the reporter ends, and the news switches to an overview of the latest baseball game. While he leaves it on in the background, he doesn’t pay attention to the commentary. Sports never interested him, another facet of his personality that often warranted a snide eye from some family members.

The FBI are under strict orders to keep his name off any witness lists, and the press will be barred from the courtroom when he relays his testimony so the possibility of his name winding up in the news is slim. It would mean someone’s fucked up big time.

But just the fact that the reporter touched on the “key witness” is unnerving. They’re talking about him even if they aren’t aware of it.

Castiel cleans the kitchen with the low murmur of the television in the background. It’s getting late, but he’s putting off climbing into bed, not all that keen on suffering another night of memories.

As the stove clock ticks past eleven, he huffs and decides to go for a late-night walk. Feet hitting the sidewalk in a monotonous rhythm, he brainlessly follows the same routes as every other day. Right from the house on Greenborough, left at the house with the toys and straight on till downtown. It only takes him eight minutes, give or take.

Wednesday is a slow night in this town, and even the Cabin looks dreary and inanimate. He passes it by, moving now towards the Bay and knowing in a distant corner of his mind that the trek happens to take him towards Winchester Auto. Dean’s apartment is on the second storey.

It’s a stupid thing, to pretend he’s out for an innocent walk. Or maybe it started that way, but the
distraction led him here and that was no mistake. The moment he walks past the last jutting empty building to wind up at the edge of the parking lot, he forces himself not to turn his head to the right.

*Keep moving…*

Moving, and *not* looking, he coaches himself. By same grace of willpower, he marches past the shop without seeing it save for the glimpses out of the corner of his eye. Another two blocks, and the road ends at the water. Beyond him is the cracked edge of the asphalt, after that there’s a wide stretch of concrete. The occasional t-shaped boat anchors are spaced along the edge and Castiel moves out onto the solid concrete dock and settles his sight on the dark waves.

Between the nighttime air, the recurrent dull slaps of the bay, he feels soothed. It’s not a common feeling for him, so he appreciates the moment. Perhaps a little too much… as he doesn’t hear the approach.

Out of the shadows, a masculine hand latches onto his shoulder and Castiel reacts—

Grabbing the offending hand with both of his, Castiel wrenches it forward and expertly drives into the person with his shoulder, shifting his weight and throwing the man down—the person’s back slamming hard onto the concrete.

“Ahh—fuck!” a deep, familiar voice groused, discomfort marking the tone.

Castiel stares down, bewildered. “Dean?”

“Oh! ‘The fuck else were you expecting, man?’”

“Um… no one.”

Grabbing onto Cas’ arm, Dean hauls himself onto his feet. “Jesus. Do you always attack people like that?”

“No,” Cas answers quickly. “You startled me.”

Dean mumbles, “Won’t be doin’ that again. Trust me.” Reaching around, the mechanic rubs his lower back and winces. When he turns to search Castiel’s eyes, there’s a clear note of curiosity in his stare. Too much for Castiel’s liking.

“I’m sorry.” Intent to move past the moment, Castiel turns back at the water. “What are you doing here?”

Dean sidesteps the question. “What are you doing here?”

“Couldn’t sleep, decided to go for a walk.” Which is a normal thing to do, nothing out of the ordinary for a person.

Dean hums in agreement, but it’s obvious his mind is overworking itself on the matter of the newest resident in town, someone he’s deemed a friend despite barely knowing him. “If that’s the case, you coulda hung out with me or something?”

“No dating, remember?”

Dean scoffs. “Yeah, yeah, I know. I mean as friends. We’re friends, remember?”

Shrugging, Castiel looks at Dean. “I suppose.”
“Well alright then. Friends hang out every once in awhile. So how about next time you’re feeling funky or whatever and can’t sleep you call up your buddy-old-pal Dean and we can chill.”

He stops the chewing of his lip to reply, “Um, okay…” Going back to his initial question, he asks what brings Dean out close to midnight.

Dean grins. “I was doing the dishes and happened to see some really hot dude takin’ a late-night stroll—thought I’d see what that was all about.”

Despite himself, Castiel chuckles and has no idea how to handle someone like Dean. “Sadly, nothing too interesting… or promising for that matter,” he adds with a chastising glance in Dean’s direction.

With a shrug, Dean drops the flirtations. “Yeah I hear ya. Anyway, how are you liking the bartender life? Suitin’ ya alright?”

Only one incident so far, and Dean doesn’t seem to know about it. Castiel isn’t about to remedy that. “Yes, very much. Though, I’m thinking I might like to take on a few other forms of employment if I can. Not sure what else there might be.” Brows pinching in thought, he goes on, “Not sure if you’re aware… but Rufus has no concept of proper bookkeeping. I’m surprised the bar is still functioning as a business, to be honest…”

Dean cuts in with a laugh. “Oh trust me… I know.”

“Has no one ever tried to fix it for him?”

“You kidding me?! No one wants to go near that pile of crap with a ten-foot pole. Fact is, people in this town… they run their businesses with the main goal to do as little as possible and still stay afloat.”

“You’re doing alright,” Castiel points out.

“Meh. I’m getting by… truth is, there isn’t always enough time in a day to deal with paperwork. Charlie used to give me a hand back in the day—”

“—Who’s Charlie?” Cas wonders.


Castiel nods and tries not to corner himself into agreeing to work on Dean’s books. He has a bad feeling it would lead to him working on Dean.

“Do you think Rufus would pay me to fix things up?” he asks, avoiding the subtle invitation to help Dean out. At least for now.

Dean snorts. “Pay’ll be crap, but yeah, he’d pay.” Features twisting into a thoughtful countenance, Dean opens his mouth and adds, “Ya know, if accounting and bookkeeping shit is your forte, Rufus might not be the only person interested in that kind of thing. Pamela runs a great business, but she does a side gig too and doesn’t always have the time for it, plus there’s George who operates the marina. And well… ya know… me.”

So much for the subtle invitation he hoped to have bypassed. Much harder to ignore blatancy.

Chewing at the dry bits of his bottom lip, Castiel thinks. There’s nothing inherently wrong with having a crush really. So long as he doesn’t act on it, where’s the harm? It’s not like he’s often thrown himself at men, he can probably handle the slight attraction, even with added proximity and
greater interactions that would come with working alongside Dean.

Besides, having friends is a nice comfort—one he didn’t realize he needed in life. Probably more so now than ever before.

Shoving his hands in his pockets, Castiel faces Dean and smiles softly. “Okay, sounds like a plan. I charge ten thousand dollars per hour,” he jokes.

Dean cracks a laugh. “Ha! A little steep there, buddy…but I can always pay you in other ways.” There’s an added wink and a slight twist of his lips. Castiel sighs and shakes his head. “Am I annoying yet? I don’t think I’ve reached my quota for the day.”

Amused with the man on his left, Castiel shakes his finger at Dean, “You’re lucky we’re friends, or I’d—”

“—Throw me on my back?” Dean smirks. “Cause you already did that… not exactly the way I would’ve liked, mind you…but I’m sure I can modify the reality to make for a nice little dream tonight.”

“You’re relentless.”

“You love it.”

Pathetically, he does. But there’s no way he’d own up to that. “Hmm, whatever you must tell yourself, Dean.”

The mechanic laughs, knowing their banter is nothing serious. “I’m gonna start heading back, you gonna stick around for a bit or you want to come along?”

In a flash of thought, he pictures the walk back and knows he’d think about wanting to hold Dean’s hand, think about kissing him when they part ways. Late night walks with Dean are a bad idea.

“I think I’ll stay for a while longer, but thank you.”

“Suit yourself.” Dean reaches out and gives a gentle squeeze of Castiel’s forearm, lingering a breath longer than normal between two men feigning friendship. “Night… Jimmy.”

Teeth clamped together, Castiel smiles forcefully. The expression probably too bright to seem normal. The mention of his fake name angers him so much he can’t even force out a returned farewell.

Dean’s shadowed stare clings to his for a few beats, the return of his earlier curiosity a faint presence in the stiffness of his features.

When Dean finally turns his back and hikes up the sidewalk back to his apartment, Castiel exhales in a mixture of relief and dread. He pulls his lip back in by his teeth, works at the dry skin and watches the movement of the water. This time, he makes sure to listen over the rush of the Bay. Just in case.

No one comes, and he relaxes into the night for a good half an hour before making the decision to go home. By the time he crosses the yellow threshold, it’s a quarter to one. The walk tired him the way he hoped it would, and he’s hoping it’ll be enough to curb his dreams for one night.

Just to be on the safe side, he might as well shower. A good dose of hot water can’t hurt. Facing the mirror, he unbuttons the pale blue shirt and watches distantly as he reveals a truer version of himself. He can’t help but be distracted by the cross, and the enochian protection prayer across his left
If you’re not a savior, you’re the enemy.

But now? Now when he sees the wings, a mix of black lines, shading, and vibrant royal blue, he tries to see nothing more than art. Maybe even a token of his tenuous and infrequent rebellion. Because instead of wings, he could be staring at the Haven family emblem. A grotesque depiction of violence formed to make a crest. While the detail of it was, in fact, remarkable, it wasn’t something he ever wanted to be associated with. It would’ve forever labelled him as one of them. Besides, it would’ve been rather difficult to make a go of this WitSec business if a third of his back spelled out “HAVEN” in giant block letters under a badge of cruelty.

By now, the room is filled to the ceiling with steam. And he can’t begin to guess the time, but he needs to shower and sleep if he’s aiming to have a productive day tomorrow. More so if he intends to add to his shallow resume of barkeep.
Castiel steps into the tub and washes methodically. Fifteen minutes later, he’s warm and under the covers, eyes drooping with a pleasant sense of exhaustion.

***

It’s been raining for a week, the streets of Manhattan shiny and colourful with reflections of streetlights, cars, and storefronts. The wet asphalt magnifying every sound, rushing tires and disrupted puddles.

There’s been a rise in territorial disputes, Castiel’s father trying to push the limits of his drug operations. Certain organizations aren’t about to roll over for the change either. It’s why Castiel is stuck hovering inside the vestibule of the too-loud club, one of their new acquisitions. Which just so happens to be on the wrong side of an imaginary line.

Standing six feet to his right is one of his father’s enforcers—all brawn, no brains. Which is fine for Castiel, it’s too noisy for conversation anyhow. Chase is younger than Castiel by a year or two, taller and leaner. But damn, the man can fight. Long arms and quick reflexes.

It’s after midnight when he catches Chase flicking glances his way.

In a dull voice, not even bothering to face the man, Castiel asks, “What?”

“Nothin’.”

Whatever. Castiel ignores the interruption, looking forward to closing time when they’re good to leave and only a couple guys from upstairs will stick around overnight. Chase’s cursory peeks continue and when three o’clock rolls around, and they’re heading out to the side alley where Cas’ Beamer is parked, he’s irritated.

He waits until they’re standing in front of the open trunk, dropping in bags of packaged cocaine. Despite knowing he’s most vulnerable in transit, his annoyance with Chase takes over.

Knowing the other man is bigger than he is, Castiel extracts his gun—not something he does lightly. It gets pressed lightly against Chase’s hard stomach.

“What is your problem?” Castiel asks gratingly.

The corner of Chase’s lip quirks, his eyes flicking down to the gun. “I’m thinking the same as you… ‘Course I wouldn’t go telling Michael that shit. Thought it was a rumour at first, you tryin’ to piss him off ya know… but nah, I see it now.”

Castiel barely restrains a growl. “See what?”

The man smiles back, but it’s no longer Chase. It’s Dean. Dean, who pushes the gun casually away from his torso and steps into Cas’ personal space. And Dean who puts his hands on Cas’ body, sliding them gradually down his frame until he’s on his knees.

Castiel looks down, frightened by the open advance. But he doesn’t stop the motions of Dean’s hands as they unhook Castiel’s pants, drag the zipper down, and pull his cock out into the damp alleyway. The rain is light, but it trickles against Dean’s face beautifully.

He’s fixated; Dean opens his mouth…

The dream merges into another scene. The basement. Castiel’s eyes staring at a mangled human, body beaten to deformity.
Dean.

In the recess of his mind, he can hear is Father’s voice, “What? You thought I wouldn’t retaliate? You thought prison would stop me?”

***

Not unexpectedly, Castiel sleeps in. Dawdles in bed until the last possible moment where he can’t put off the day any longer. Not only did the nightmares make a showing, his subconscious decided to really top things off by throwing Dean into the mix.

It rattles him more than he’d like. He wishes there was a way to just forget everything, sign up for amnesia like a flu shot.

Sadly, no such thing exists. Castiel doggedly throws off the blankets and swings his feet to the floor.

“Get up. Be productive,” he coaches himself out loud.
On Dean’s advice, Castiel negotiates with Rufus, Pamela, and George and works out a loose schedule to tackle some of the neglected parts of their respective businesses. They don’t ask where his skills come from, they don’t even ask for proof that he knows what he’s doing; they simply take him at his word. It’s a good thing he’s no longer a criminal, cause they’re making it far too easy to rob them blind.

It’s a sunny Thursday morning, just past ten, and he’s setting up Quickbooks on Rufus’ computer. It would’ve happened sooner, if he wasn’t stuck deleting useless and often redundant files, not to mention the necessary download of a virus program to tackle the rampant spyware on the computer.

Castiel hasn’t once thought of himself as technologically inclined, but compared to the people who live in Hobucken, he feels like a computer genius. He catches himself smiling, wishing he’d grown up a nerd in a funny little home with two parents.

It’s early afternoon before he calls it quits for the day and reluctantly takes the turn left that’ll bring him to Dean’s place. He’s already done initial assessments for everyone else, and he can’t put off this one anymore.

Working for Dean is selfish. And yet, here he is, still walking towards the shop. Castiel tells himself it’s only for the money, but he’s well aware of the blatant lie.

Plastering a very fake smile to his face, he marches up and walks in. There’s no one sitting around in the reception area but that doesn’t surprise him. The only customers that would ever make use of the standard-issue black seats bordering the room would be travellers passing near town with car trouble, or people coming in from another county. Even then, why would anyone wait around in a fairly unwelcoming auto shop when they could walk a few blocks to the restaurant to pass the time.

Hmm, maybe Dean should think of adding a coffee machine or something of the sort. Extra money can be made in very rudimentary ways. Often, it’s not the main product or service that moves a business from merely getting by to making bank, it’s the extras. Sprinkle a little cocaine in your ready-to-smoke joints, and you can charge an exorbitant price, seventy-percent more than what it’s worth.

Castiel finds Dean under a car, covered in smears of liquid black. “Hello Dean.”

Rolling out smoothly on a red stool, Dean stops in front of him and smiles. “Hiya.”

“Black is a nice colour on you,” he teases.

Dean grins, exhaling a laugh. “This is nothin’, you should see me in nude.”

They share a moment of clear awkwardness before Dean stands up and guides him towards the back office, the one where a surprisingly new-ish laptop sits amongst piles of paper in no discernable order.
“Oh Dean…” he chides, frowning at the haphazard form of business management. Castiel turns to his right to find Dean guiltily staring at the floor.

“Yeah… so here’s the thing, I kinda hate paperwork. Computers always seem to malfunction near me….” Dean perks up to radiate a poor, helpless set of eyes. “Help a guy out?”

Holding Dean’s gaze, he agrees of course. Probably with some string of words but for the life of him he can’t remember saying a thing. As he sits in the desk chair, Dean gives him a high-level overview of some basics about how he runs the business and it’s clear that the mechanic focuses on the service-side to the probable suffering of the bottom line.

With Dean having returned to the service bay areas, Castiel begins his review of the business by printing off the basic set of reports to skim over. From there, he tries to organize the desk, because it’s driving him insane to be surrounded by flagrant disorganization.

By late afternoon, Castiel has a fairly good idea of the business and how it runs. He still has lots to do in order to maximize its potential, but he’ll get there.

Taking a momentary step away from the finances of Winchester Auto, Castiel does a bit of googling… tracking down all the articles he can find about his family. Splitting his attention, he listens to be sure Dean is still working and won’t catch him in the middle of reading about himself.

One article blends into the next, and in ten easy minutes he’s perched right up close to the screen with his cheek resting on his fist as he scans the words of an article about four execution style hits, that by the sounds of it, seems to Castiel as if the hounds of other families are picking off the pieces of what Castiel left behind.

“Catching up on the news?”

Jerking away from the computer, Castiel spins around to find Dean in the doorway of the office. Beyond him, the sound of a machine still blares, having left the false impression that he was working when he wasn’t.

Was it on purpose?

Putting aside his suspicion, Castiel weakly replies, “You startled me.”

“Had to. You were slackin’ on the job.” Dean steps inside the small room and leans against the wall with a tethered grin. A poster of an old roadster adds a splash of colour behind his head.

“Sorry.”

“You can always make it up to me with a date.”

“I suppose I could,” says Castiel, “but I won’t.” He smiles up at Dean and tries not to think about the apparent side effects of dismantling one family and leaving room for a breakout of turf wars.

“It’s probably smart anyway… now that you’re my employee and all.”

Castiel smirks. “Hired consultant, I would say.”

“Sure, let’s go with that. Uh, listen… I was thinking of having some guys over for a poker night tomorrow. You down for something like that?”

He thinks it over quickly, measures the pros and cons. Ultimately, he latches on to the opportunity
for friendship, however dishonest on his part it may be. “Sure. I’d like that… thank you.”

“Anytime. Uh, also… you might want to be careful poking around on that computer. I may or may not be really bad at hiding my porn.”

He smiles. “Thanks for the tip.”

“If you only asked… I’d give you a lot more than the tip.”

Castiel chokes out a laugh, every muscle flexing in unison. “Go back to work Dean.”

The mechanic groans, a fabricated exasperation. “Fine. But I made you laugh though, didn’t I,” he winks, “when about ten minutes ago you were all pissed-off lookin’ and broody, so you are welcome.”

“Your vulgarity, as always, is appreciated.” Probably more so than Dean would imagine.

Dean takes a bow, his hand making circles in the air on the bend. “At your service…” From his formally bent position, Dean peers up through his lashes and very discreetly parts his lips.

Castiel swallows the sudden urge to touch himself. “I already regret this arrangement.”

“No. You don’t…” With that, Dean smiles with complete genuine affection and returns to work. It doesn’t escape Castiel’s notice that Dean shuts off the large air compressor without making use of it.

Though he returns to the books for another hour, he wonders just how long Dean had been standing in the doorway. Whatever nagging worries he has though, are swept aside when he does accidentally stumble upon Dean’s folder of stashed porn.

Dean’s tastes are… something else. It highlights just how inexperienced Cas is in comparison. He’s tempted to snoop more, but it daunts him, so he closes every open window and ends his day.

When he sleeps that night, his brain decides to work Dean into his nightmares again. This has been a recurring theme, and one that he’s not too thrilled about.
A Mistake

Over the following weeks, Castiel gradually becomes a regular companion of Dean and Sam’s. They consider him a friend, and seeing as he’s never had friends, it’s an impossible thing to deny himself.

Taking his five allotted shifts at Rufus’ has been supplemented by a couple days during the week where he tackles the mess that Rufus has made of the bookkeeping system on his computer, or puts in a few hours at Winchester Auto, and sometimes taking a half hour to balance out month end reports for Pamela.

He’s even convinced Dean to let him really break down the shop’s finances before the man barrels full steam ahead with the expansion loan. Pushing it all too fast could easily run Dean dry, or burn him out.

Throughout all this, Dean’s persistence to date Castiel hasn’t waned even a little.

Every other thing out of Dean’s kissable mouth is a blatant innuendo and it’s become a running joke between them. Castiel has taken it upon himself to give ratings to each of Dean’s double-entendres. Their constant banter and building friendship has managed to moderately stem Cas’ building attraction to Dean and he does his best to control the novel, errant emotions that plague him.

True to form, Dean doesn’t stop dating despite his pursuit of Castiel. Nor does he sugarcoat his exploits. He’s never unnecessarily vulgar, and leaves out the names of his conquests unless he slips-up. Castiel hangs on his every word, almost pathetically, and he’s completely captivated—despite the subject matter.

Dean is the opposite of everyone he’s ever known. Sure, some of his father’s men were arrogant beyond belief, but Dean’s occasional ego is different. And he can’t explain the difference. Aside from the whole good versus evil thing.

In getting to know Dean over the last few weeks, Castiel’s noticed that the charming man has rare moments of uncertainty, times when he sheds that outer layer of brazen energy and looks as if he desperately needs someone to tell him he’s doing okay in life. It comes and goes in a flash. This has only endeared Dean to him further.

It’s become harder the last few days, to disregard the rising, potent feelings inside him. Emotions that keep him up at night, that infect his dreams, and make him physically ache at times. He doesn’t dare consider the implications of what all this amounts to. Besides, how would he know? What comparisons would he have?

When the calendar changes to July, and the streets are littered with patriotic confetti, Castiel catalogues Dean Winchester strictly as a friend (resolutely ignoring whatever other feelings he has on the matter). It also happens that Dean is the only person who has ever made Castiel feel normal, almost human—as opposed to the violent, crude criminal he used to be.

It occurs to him on the night of the 4th, long after the small-town firework show and the over-eighteen residents have filled up the only bar, that Castiel hasn’t smiled in his whole life as much as he’s smiled in the past four weeks. In some ways, it angers him and he can’t begin to fathom why that might be.

All in all, confusion has been Cas’ default the last few weeks, his normal confidence taking a serious hit.
“Another beer?” Cas asks Bobby.

The grumpy old man is hunched over the bar in his usual spot. “Ya’even have to ask, kid?”

Castiel smiles at the man and moves over to the taps to fill up his glass. Dean leans over his shoulder to whisper in his ear. “You should fill half with water—he probably wouldn’t even notice at this point.”

Feeling Dean’s cheek graze his, Castiel adjusts his weight from one foot to the other, leaning ever so slightly towards Dean and simultaneously cursing himself. “A seasoned alcoholic the likes of Bobby would most definitely notice if his beer were watered down.”

Dean snatches the filled glass from his hands. “You’re probably right. I’ll tend to Bobby, you go see to those two foxes at the end over there.” With a small gesture, Dean nods in the direction towards the section of bar closest to the front door.

There, sitting around the curved corner that leads to the hallway are two older women all done up for Independence Day. Castiel almost laughs as he makes his way over. Who knew that even small-town Hobucken had its share of cougars.

“Hello handsome,” the red-head croons at him, her voice lilted with a Scottish accent.

“Ladies.” Castiel offers up his best smile. “What can I get you?”

“I’ll be havin’ yer best Scotch, dear, and my friend will have the house red.” The friend of the redhead is a woman of similar age sporting a blond bob-cut. The epitome of a soccer mom. Or at least, that’s Cas’ assumption. He’s never known a single soccer mom in his life. He never knew his own mother for that matter.

Bringing the women back their drinks, he’s ready to turn off and see what else needs doing when the Scottish woman hooks her finger at him.

“Can I get you anything else?” he asks.

“Oh yesss, I think I’ll need a glass of ice cold water, dear—with the way our beloved mechanic is watching that fine arse of yers I’m liable to burst into flames!” Her voice ascends at the end, and the entire bar seems to turn towards the sound of it.

The blonde beside her snorts, and focuses on her wine. Castiel laughs tightly and looks back to see Dean winking at him from the other end of the bar.

This isn’t going anywhere good.

“That would be unfortunate,” he deadpans. “I’m not sure Rufus has insurance to cover the spontaneous combustion of its patrons.”

“Pity.” She takes a healthy swig of her Scotch. “You shouldn’t leave our boy floundering over there. Give him a little taste, dear! The poor lad’s smitten, ya know.”

He opens his mouth to brush her off, when a bold blonde named Jo (seemingly the only woman in town Dean doesn’t seem to sleep with) pops up out of her chair and comes up to the bar. She works occasionally at the Cabin, but not often. “I’m with her”—Jo thumbs in the direction of the redhead—“You keep telling our boy no, and I do not blame you, trust me—but we all see what he does to you.” Her smile is teasing. And it’s not the first time the blonde has bugged Castiel on the matter of Dean. She has a way of taking on the demeanour of an annoying little sister.
It’s also no secret that the resident mechanic has been trying his damndest to fuck the newest member of Hobuckken.

As it happens, the entire bar is suddenly attuned to the development of the night and Cas is on the verge of telling them all to fuck off. Instead, he lets it sway him, lets their nagging, small-town meddling pressure him into doing something irrational.

A few more patrons and drunk idiots call out with, “Come on!” and “Poor Dean!”

Shaking his head, he turns around, his gaze settling on the town trouble-maker. Dean is more tempting in that moment than ever before. Leaning back on the bar, hands gripping the ledge at either side, he’s wearing a soft smile—almost coy. Dean doesn’t say anything, not wanting to influence Cas one way or the other. Everyone is watching them stare at each other.

Fuck. Fucking small ass towns. This would never happen in New York.

Crossing the length of the bar to the rising cheers of the room, Cas knows very well he’s screwing his self-restraint. Watching Dean’s eyes widen in disbelief, Cas reaches up and grabs the other man’s jaw and drags him forward. Their lips crash together in a hard, direct kiss.

Castiel’s first kiss… actually. First ever.

It lingers, one breath, and then two… and he seizes every thread of willpower and steps back. Throws himself back… whatever. His eyes flash open and he knows his stare is dark.

There’s a fire in his veins, and Dean is awash in surprise; the man’s mouth hanging loose, eyes wide and blinking, and cheeks that are more pink than tan.

Castiel tries to think around the lingering feel of Dean’s soft lips, the smell of him so close… he laments it immediately. Because it will haunt him. Are all kisses so disorienting? Or is that just Dean?

“Damn. I didn’t think you’d do it,” breathes Dean.

Behind them, Bobby rolls his eyes and mumbles to himself as he brings the beer up to his lips. The redhead whistles from the other end of the bar and Castiel rounds back to throw her a glare. He must look menacing, because she straightens and wipes the glee from her sharp features.

Turning back to Dean’s slack-jawed expression, he says, “I’m still not going on a date with you.”

“Hey—I ain’t complainin’. In fact, I’ve got some lovely ladies I need to thank!” Dean practically jogs the short distance to the other side and leans over to conspire with the small horde of women. It happens to give Cas an unhindered view of Dean’s tight jean-clad ass.


Bobby raps on the bar with a knuckle to garner his attention. Cas gives the man his focus.

“You done screwed yourself, son.”

Castiel sighs and takes the man’s beer and upends it in greedy swallows. He looks down at Bobby. “Yes… I know.”

***

At the end of the night, worry and something along the lines of fear have settled into his gut and Castiel avoids Dean as best he can. Which isn’t easy when you’re trapped behind a bar in a ten-by-
three space. They’re always unconsciously brushing past each other, handing off drinks where their fingers graze together. It’s maddening. He should never have kissed Dean.

This whole life is a lie. These friends that he’s made… none of it is real.

As usual, Bobby is the only one left. Dean’s wiping the counter and Castiel is cleaning the glasses and organizing the garnishes.

“Regret kissing me already?” Dean flicks the bar cloth at him.

On the next snap of the damp checkered rag, Castiel snatches and tucks it into his apron. “No.” Yes.

“Don’t lie to me.”

When Castiel looks up, Dean is standing not six inches from his face and he’s serious. It’s restrained distress that Cas sees buried in those green eyes. Some hidden worry or vulnerability. In that moment, he never wants to lie to Dean. Ever. And yet, it’s all he’s ever done since they’ve been friends.

“I regret it for some reasons, but I don’t for others… Does that make sense?”

Dean licks across his bottom lip and looks out over the tables, chairs already turned up on top. “I guess. You’re still on the no side of the fence then?”

“I’m sorry.”

For the first time since they met, Dean seems genuinely upset by his refusal. It nearly makes him cave, wanting to kiss the hurt look off of Dean’s face. But that’s not his place. It can’t be.

“No worries.” Dean shoves his disappointment under the proverbial rug and flashes him a bright smile. “I got a kiss tonight at least. I’m slowly wearing you down. Pretty soon it’ll be too hard for you to say no.”

A faint laugh leaves his mouth. “Too hard for me?”

Dean responds with nothing more than a smile. An honest, friendly one, waiting for the rating on his most recent line.

“Six.”

Dean throws napkins onto the floor in overdramatic outrage. “A six!? Oh c’mon. An ‘it’s too hard’ joke is classic. Give it a seven at the very least.”

“I’ll up the rating to six and a half if you walk Bobby home tonight. I’ll clean up.” Part of Castiel’s motive is that there seems to be a rift between Dean and Bobby. As often as he can, he tries to get them to spend time together. It’s obvious that Bobby means a lot to Dean. But it’s likewise obvious that Bobby’s alcoholism genuinely pisses Dean off.

“Deal.”

The two make their way out the door and Castiel is left by himself in the bar. He’s slow in going through every chore, and even slower counting out the till for the night. Some money ends up in the deposit bag for the bank, and the rest goes in the safe for the next day.

Locking the door, and turning out onto the street at two-thirty in the morning, he’s met by a southern wind that’s cold enough to tighten his skin. Halfway home, he receives a call on his phone. Even
though a few people in town now have his number, the display shows ‘Unknown Name, Unknown Number.’

“And to what do I owe the pleasure of this late night call?” he asks with a resolute sigh.

“One of your Father’s men was released.”

He pauses on the street. “Who?”

“Raphael.”

Shit. Castiel’s heart rate accelerates. “How the hell did he get off? Raph’s list of crimes is endless.”

Not to mention the fact that out of every one of his father’s men, Raph is the most terrifying, the most disturbing, and the most likely to track Cas down and not only kill him, but take a long and torturous route getting there.

“No shit.”

Rage and fear blend together and he spits out, “You fucking incompetent—”

“—Fuck you, Haven.”

“Likewise,” he growls back. “The price is up again, isn’t it?” The silence is all he needs to know the answer, but he presses anyway. “Tell me, Zach.”

“Five mil.”

That’s a massive hike, more than he’s ever seen before. Something tells him it’s no longer about killing the rat but seeking revenge on the Haven son that screwed them all. “Please tell me how he managed to get off?”

Castiel can hear the creaking of the Marshal’s chair again. Creak, creak, creak. Rocking back on the thing, revealing his frustration. “It’s a damn fuck up by the prosecutor. One of the staff let a chick in to suck his dick and she must’ve been working for the family somehow. Found out the name of our witness that you hooked us up with.”

The witness, Castiel remembers, is a lovely woman who lives above Corey’s Dry Cleaning. She’d always been sweet on Castiel, and having been around as long as she was, she’d seen some stuff go down. The family never expected she’d go against them either. But Castiel had persuaded her. It wasn’t very hard—considering Cas’ eldest brother, Bartholomew, had roughed up the woman’s daughter years ago.

“You better not tell me she’s dead.”

As thick silence eases across the phone line, Castiel bites off a curse at his sudden grief and says, “What about the bodies? I gave you two locations where I know he buried people he personally murdered! How is that not enough?!” Glancing around the dark streets, Castiel regrets the rise in his voice but he can’t help his outrage. Too many good people have died because of his father, because of Raph… because of Cas...

Zach blows out a breath. “Our MEs did autopsies, there’s no DNA to tie him to the bodies, and we got rough time of death and he’s got alibis for both.”

“Whoever’s vouching for him is lying and you fucking know it.”
“Doesn’t matter. There’s no evidence to tie him to the deaths. Not with the other witness dead.”

The ineptness of the US government really pisses him off. “You better tighten down the hatches on your end, Zach. Raphael is an industrious, highly skilled man. It’s no wonder he managed to get himself off.”

“You tellin’ me how to do my job?”

“Someone ought to,” he replies tightly.

After a few choice fuck yous volleyed between them, Castiel shoves the phone into his jeans’ pocket and walks the rest of the way home chewing the inside of his lip.

He's faced death a number of times. But he's never feared it till now.

By the time he gets home, he’s irate. Anger laced with dread, making for a toxic whirlwind of emotions.

It’s no surprise Raphael would’ve found a way to wheedle his way out of prison time. The man is a master of deception and control. And, unfortunately for Castiel, he’s also got a plethora of weapons in which he is also highly skilled.

If Raph is the one he eventually faces, he doesn’t like his chances.
It’s four a.m. and Castiel’s still awake when a new message on his phone dings. Without a nightstand, he usually tucks his cell under the other pillow. This time, when he pulls it out, the screen shows the only name that could draw a reluctant smile from him.

“I can’t sleep.”

Castiel swipes across the message from Dean to open it up. He types back, “Same.”

“Wanna come over and suck on something?”

In the silence of his room, Castiel snorts out a laugh and quickly writes back. “Not sure what you’re referring to, but I’m giving it a preemptive eight.”

“I did an oil change on Ash’s shitbox and he paid me in pot.”

Shoving the blankets off, Castiel’s already getting out of the bed. Dean’s offer is exactly what he needs after the night he’s had. He’s in the middle of pushing his arms through a t-shirt when he freezes with reservations about going to Dean’s in the middle of the night.

Snatching his phone off the bed, he taps the keys and sends Dean another message. “Can I request my friend Dean tonight, not…” Unsure how to frame it, he hits send anyway and hopes his new friend will understand.

“No problem. I’ll come pick you up.”

Not even ten minutes later, the smooth rumble of the Chevy Impala Dean loves is sitting out front under the massive evergreen. Castiel zips up a royal blue sweater this time, remembering the earlier night chill and heads out.

It’s different hanging out with Dean this late at night. With everything quiet the way it is, there’s less pressure between them. Or maybe that’s a facet of the mood he’s in, his mind preoccupied enough that it isn’t rendered stupid every time Dean smiles at him.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” Castiel asks as they drive through the sleeping town of Hobucken on the way to Dean’s small apartment on top of Winchester Auto.

“I don’t know. Just kept tossing and turning, and then it pissed me off and I got up and decided to see if you wanted to get a little high with me.”

Castiel nods. “Thanks for the offer. It’s been awhile since I’ve smoked but tonight would be really nice to just… unwind,” he breathes the last word and relaxes against the leather.

“I hear ya.”
Back at Dean’s apartment, they settle at either end of the couch and Castiel sips on a beer, not really in the mood for it, as he watches Dean roll a joint. It’s obvious Dean’s done it before, but Castiel has to press his lips together to stop his suggestions. Drugs were as common in the Haven household as sliced bread. If not more so… Castiel knew how to roll a perfect joint before he knew how to swim.

There’s an alarming amount wrong with that truth.

“Want to go up on the roof?” asks Dean. “I don’t usually care to smoke here.”

Cas nods and follows the man down the short hallway to his bedroom. He’s been in the apartment before, playing a game of poker a couple times with Dean, his brother, and Ash—the cook at Rufus’ Cabin. But never got the chance to peek into the private space where Dean takes his dates.

It’s both what he expects and not what he expects. The room is nothing special. Sitting in the center of the back wall is a queen-sized bed with a grey plaid comforter, a night stand on one side. A tall plain wood dresser is pushed into the far corner; some of the drawers are half-out with a shirt or a sock hanging over the edge. The paint colour is a sort of dark, mossy sage and he wonders what it would look like in the daylight.

Castiel hasn’t realized he’s stopped at the end of the bed until he hears Dean pushing up the window a few feet away. The old, over-painted wooden frame creaks into the silence of the room. Everything pauses for the span of a breath, and Castiel feels so overloaded with his past and an unfamiliar fear that’s settled in him that all he wants in those short couple of seconds is for Dean to leave the window and come over to him and take his clothes off and give him a night that makes him forget who he is.

It’s the first time he’s truly wanted to be Jimmy Novak, or at the very least, a normal man without a dark past. A wave of nausea courses through him and he flexes his jaw to try and quell it.

“Are you coming?” asks Dean. It’s abundantly clear it takes everything in Dean’s power not to cross the space and follow through with all the ‘ideas’ he always claims to have. For whatever reason, Dean must know that even though Cas wants it tonight on some level, he’d regret it the same as he did that kiss.

Taking a few more steps, he clears the rest of the room and the odd moment is brushed off, though his ribs feel tighter than they did before. “Yes. Lead the way.”

Dean steps out of the window, the joint held in his mouth, and latches onto the ladder that creeps up the brick. Cas follows, his mind stewing aimlessly.

Even though the building is a mere two storeys, it sits near the north edge of the bay and they can see a lighthouse far off in the distance. Despite the decrepit buildings behind them, the view out this way is serene and breathtaking in its own way. The company helps with that.

The scritch of Dean thumbing the wheel on the lighter draws his attention. They’re sitting on the edge of the parapet, feet dangling towards the Winchester Auto sign. The cherry lights up as Dean pulls in the smoke. It takes a few tokes before the joint gets going and he passes it off to Cas.

“Thanks.” Taking the lit smoke, he brings the edge to his lips—habits keep him from actually wrapping his mouth around the thing—and inhales. It’s been nearly two months since he’s smoked and it feels good to know his brain will settle down for a while.

“Wanna talk about what’s on your mind?” Dean asks, taking the rolled joint from his fingers.

Turning to the side, he zeroes in on the way Dean’s well-formed lips close around the paper-
wrapped filter. “No.”

“It’s gotta to be something, man. You always have this, I dunno, low-key confidence about you, and you look at people, at me, like you’re really reading us, like your thoughts are analyzing every encounter.” Dean pauses and laughs, “it’s almost like you’re fucking Jason Bourne or something. But just there, downstairs… you looked at me like… like your whole world didn’t make sense for a second. It fuckin’ threw me.”

Taking back the offered smoke, Castiel takes a few drags before he builds up any kind of reply. Dean’s playing the friend tonight, and he’s grateful, but his attempt at ‘talking it out’ is a bit too on point.

“I, um, got a call earlier tonight. Family stuff… it wasn’t a good call. Let’s leave it at that.”

Dean nods, understanding. “Bunch of dicks, are they?”

He chuckles softly and takes the joint straight from Dean’s mouth. “You have no idea.”

“I don’t know what’s going on, and it’s cool if you don’t want to tell me. I’m not Sam, I won’t try and Oprah it out of you or anything. But despite my general awesomeness, good looks, and sexual prowess, I am an excellent listener.”

“Yes, you are.”

They smoke the rest of the joint in silence, watching the distant lighthouse flash across the black waters of the mouth to the Pamlico Sound.

Buzzed and ready to sink into the depths of a couch and not move for a while seems like a fucking great plan. Dean flicks the butt off the roof and they make their way back into the apartment.

Being high makes it easy this time to bypass Dean’s bed without wanting to strip down and climb onto it. Back in the living room, Dean turns on the TV, selects the Action channel and they both slump down at either end of the old, hefty piece of furniture and stare in a daze at Die Hard blasting through the speakers.

Cas says, “If I spend the night here, the town will talk.”

Dean looks over at him, his eyes pink, lids hanging low. “I’m not one for lies in case you didn’t know… I’d set them all straight.”

A tired laugh leaves his mouth. “You’d set all of them straight?”

“Shut up.” Dean shoves against the outside of his hip with his foot. “Does this mean you’re crashing here?”

Castiel loathes the idea of walking home. It’s already close to five in the morning. “If you don’t mind…”

“Not at all. One sec,” Dean gets up and takes off down the hall. He comes pack with a couple folded blankets and a pillow. “Here. And sorry about the pink blanket. It was my mom’s, um yeah…” The “…and I can’t bear to toss it out,” goes unsaid. Castiel takes it all and puts it between them carefully.

“Don’t feel the need to stay up for me. I’ll shut the TV off if you want to go to bed.”

Running a hand over his face, Dean stares down at him. “Yeah? You’re good?”
Castiel nods, equally hating and loving how close he and Dean have become.

“Cool. I’m definitely good to hit the sack now. I gotta be downstairs at ten and if you’re still asleep I’ll try not to wake you.”

“Thanks.”

“And Jimmy?”

The use of his fake name hits him like a blow to the stomach. Castiel looks at Dean with his eyebrows up, trying to poker-face past his sudden discomfort.

“Try not to dwell on whatever it is that’s bugging you. I learned long ago you just gotta keep moving when things get shitty. Worrying ain’t gonna change a damn thing.”

It’s sound advice, but much easier said than done. Castiel has a tendency to overanalyze everything to death.

“Thank you. Sleep well.”

Dean’s sleepy stare lingers on him for a moment longer before he heads towards the short hallway to his bedroom. Listening over the TV, he’s sure that Dean doesn’t close his door and the thought of going to him in the middle of the night… just to feel the welcome heat of another body is a dominant thought in his mind. He wants it so bad his entire chest aches.
On the Way to Jaded

The following day, Castiel wakes to the sound of a high-impact air drill rising up from the shop below.

Cracking his eyes open, everything’s a bit fuzzy—including his brain. Tucked around him is the rose-pink blanket and he’s sure he didn’t fall asleep with it wrapped around him that way. It smells the way linen closets always smell. That stale aroma of laundry detergent left to linger between the folds of knitted cotton. It’s comforting to Cas, a universal home-like scent.

Grasping his phone off the coffee table, he notices it’s already noon. He should definitely get up and go home.

Moving into the kitchen, he sees the half-empty coffee pot and a note scribbled on the back of an envelope:

*If the coffee is cold, feel free to make more. Hope you’re feeling better today… if it helps any... you have the best bed-head I’ve ever seen. – Dean (your blatant admirer).*

Smiling at the note, Castiel goes about making more coffee. As the machine is doing its thing and he’s sitting at the eat-in kitchen table, he hears the distinct thuds on the steps coming up to the apartment.

Dean walks in wearing a blue and green plaid button-up with the sleeves rolled up and old jeans stained with black grease. There’s a smear of it on his cheek and his fingers are mostly black at the tips, darker lines bordering his fingernails.

“Good morning!” A broad smile spreads across Dean’s face, and he practically saunters his way into the kitchen, heading straight towards the sink.

“Don’t mechanics normally wear those blue coverall things?”

Scrubbing his hands with some industrial-looking soap, Dean shrugs. “Hate those things. Feels like I’m wearing a onesie sleep getup with butt-flaps. I may go through my share of jeans, but at least I’m damn comfortable.”

Comfortable, yes, and unquestionably the hottest human man Castiel has ever laid his eyes on.

He sighs quietly. It’s time to go home.

“I’m just waiting for some coffee,” he explains, “and then I’ll be heading out. Sorry I stuck around so long.”

Twisting at his hips, Dean looks back and snorts. “Don’t be. I’m glad you stayed. Seems like you needed the sleep pretty bad… not to mention the weed.”

Very true.

The old coffee pot gurgles and spits at the end of its process and Castiel rises from the chair to pour himself a cup. “Would you like one?” he asks Dean.

“Won’t say no to that. I didn’t get much sleep last night and I’ll probably need an IV of caffeine to get through my date tonight. This woman is particularly feisty,” Dean enunciates, eyebrows up high.
Castiel pours two mugs full and takes the first hot sip of his own. “Feisty? Are you going to end up in a precarious situation later?”

Grinning, Dean enthusiastically replies, “I sure as hell hope so!”

Losing willpower over his reactions, Castiel bites his lower lip, imagining all the interesting things some lucky woman might get to do to Dean tonight. Clearing his throat, he tries to push aside the teasing images tying up his thoughts.

“You have one of the hottest looks of jealousy I think I’ve ever seen in my life.”

Castiel scoffs. “I’m not jealous. I’m worried for your safety.”

“Sure, man. Whatever you say.” Moving in to stand close to him, Dean peers into his eyes, a blatant examination.

“What?”

“Just trying to figure you out.”

“And how’s that going?”

Dean’s stare intensifies. “It’s a long process, but I’ll get there.”

Avoiding the heat in Dean’s multi-faceted, jade-coloured eyes, he looks down at his cup and slowly raises it to his lips, taking an excessively long, burning gulp of his coffee. Swallowing down the bitter liquid, he bolsters his courage to lift his chin, finding that he’s gone and trapped himself in another moment with this man.

“D’you feel better today?” asks Dean, still standing much too close.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Good.”

“And you?”

“Mm, tired,” admits Dean, “but not a total shocker there. Uh, you want a ride back to your place?”

Glancing through the grimy square window over the sink, Castiel sees the white caps turn over in the bay, the wind gusting below dense, unyielding grey clouds.

“I think I’ll walk.”

“You might get rained on,” says Dean.

“I’m fairly certain I’ll survive.”

Dean laughs and the tension breaks. Shifting back and drinking down some of his own coffee, Dean seems to relax back to the friendship setting. “Suit yourself. I need to head back downstairs anyway, so, uh, see ya tonight?”

Castiel scratches at his unshaven cheek and shoots Dean a curious look. “I thought you had a date.”

“I do, but we’re heading to Rufus’ for beers first. You’re working, right?”
Yes. Though now he wishes he weren’t. “I’ll be there.”

Grinning, Dean takes the mostly empty coffee cup from his hands. “Try not to scowl at my date tonight or she might just tie us both to the bed! Which… I’d totally be up for. Just sayin’. In case you were interested…”

Laughing, Castiel bows his head and good naturedly gives Dean a playful shove (or a pathetic attempt to put distance between them). “Sorry, Dean, you’ll be getting strapped down solo.” He pauses, fighting his imagination, and adds, “I should go.”

“Enjoy your day.” Dean smiles in a secretive way and waves him off.

Tearing his eyes reluctantly away from the mechanic, Castiel grabs his keys from the table and makes his way downstairs and into the thick early afternoon haze, dreading his trek home.

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After spending the day cleaning his home and drowning himself in James Patterson, Cas finds his way into the bar around five, getting in a bit earlier than he needed to for his shift but finding he’s in the mood to distract himself.

After a few hours, he manages to busy himself enough that he forgets Dean is stopping by with a date. It’s sometime after nine when the door opens and Castiel’s head snaps up on impulse, in the middle of pouring a beer, to find a smiling Dean stride in with his arm around an athletic brunette. She’s stunning, and he can tell by the way she leans in towards Dean, brushing her hand across his stomach, that she’s comfortable with him. Castiel’s reminded that this is the feisty woman Dean had been talking about.

Castiel hates her.

Naturally, the two come straight to the bar and find a seat. Cas looks at Dean and for a moment, Dean appears guilty, as if he knows exactly what he’s doing.

“How can’t believe we haven’t met yet!” says the brunette. She extends her small but sure hand, “I’m Lisa.”

“Um, Jimmy. Nice to meet you.” Holding her palm in his, he’s tempted to yank her close and tell her to back to the fuck off.

Not exactly his place, though. And he won’t be that kind of man again.

“So I hear you and Dean are good friends,” she says conversationally. Good friends? Is that what they’ve become? Is that what Dean’s told her? What else has he told her?

“I suppose,” he replies.

Dean doesn’t hold back. “I’ve been begging him to go on a date with me, but he won’t give in!”

Lisa laughs. “Oh, Jimmy! Why not?”

Scowling at the man wearing the smirk across the bar, Castiel ultimately turns his gaze to Lisa’s dark brown eyes. “Because,” he speaks with a tight jaw, “Dean and I are just friends and he knows that. May I get you something to drink?”

Lisa narrows her eyes at him, reading the blatant lie in his words but offers nothing on the subject.
and politely asks for a Corona.

Over the course of the next two hours Dean and Lisa spend sitting at the bar, Castiel resists the urge to grimace at them. But each time he replenishes their alcoholic fuel for late night extracurriculars, his polite smile twitches towards a shoddy imitation of the expression. He can feel the sharper lines in his cheeks and the tightness down the column of his neck.

One thing’s clear—Castiel has never before experienced the potency of jealousy before this night. It’s a surprisingly violent emotion. Not one he expected considering Dean’s detailed exploits have never bothered him before.

And apparently, his ability to hide his identity is far better than hiding his jealousy. He’s in the washroom later relieving himself when Dean bursts in, more than a bit tipsy, to call him out on it.

Dean snaps, “Got a problem, buddy?” In this case, ‘buddy’, is not as jovial as the definition would imply.

Staring at the tiles above the urinal, Castiel doesn’t bother to turn around as he answers, “No.” “Liar. Just go on a fucking date with me already!”

Castiel finishes his business, flushes and does up his jeans before turning around to face his friend. “I can’t.” One of these days he won’t be able to deny Dean. It’s a fact he feels etched in his bones.

“Why the fuck not?!” yells Dean. “You keep yammering about this messed up life but, man, I don’t see you swimming in drama or any of that shit, so what’s the deal? I mean—fuck—you can’t just keep brushing me off but then go ahead and unload your death stares of jealousy onto Lisa—it ain’t her fault you’re not rousing up for a night with me.”

Moving to the single sink, Castiel washes his hands and ignores Dean. There’s nothing he can say, no explanation to provide. He knows he’s not good enough, but if he says that, Dean will want an explanation. Yes, he’s not handling Dean’s current date very well. But sometimes a man is weak. Sometimes he wants what he shouldn’t. Even if he doesn’t deserve it.

Dean bristles behind him. “So you’re just gonna ignore me now? Really?!”

Sighing, Castiel finally approaches Dean, his hands dripping by his sides. “Dean. There’s nothing I can say.” He frowns with the weight of his thoughts. “I’m sorry I’m being rude to your date. Can we please return to being friends?”

Dean studies him with glazed eyes and finally dips his head. “Sure…” Biting his lip a moment, Dean’s eyes dart away from Cas. “Whatever.”

After Dean exits and he’s alone, Castiel shakes off his hands and snatches the brown napkins from the dispenser. God, he shouldn’t even be here. And who knows how much longer he will be. He shouldn’t have become friends with anyone in the first place. He should have avoided Dean as best as he could.

But his family was right, he’s weak. And he’s selfish.

Balling up the damp crumpled paper, he slams it into the garbage through the swivel cover, then reaches up to rub the back of his neck.
After a rather restless sleep, Castiel goes into work early to take care of the books and stays through the dinner shift.

He hasn’t spoken to Dean since the night before in the men’s washroom. By the time he’d gotten back out to the bar, Dean had left with Lisa and he was equally relieved and disappointed. Later in bed, despite all his best efforts, his mind pictured what Dean might’ve been doing.

Now, a day later, he’s walking home at seven in the evening when a familiar rumble pulls up beside him. Castiel is nervous to look over, wondering how their friendship is holding up after the previous night’s interaction.

“Hey, want a ride?” It’s the first time Dean’s said it without the undertone of a joke.

Castiel looks to his left. He should say no. “Um…” Closing his eyes for a second, he gives in. “Sure.” Easing the door open and slumping into the passenger seat, he assesses Dean’s day-after condition. Baggy eyes, settled mood, and clearly tired.

“Look, I feel like an ass for yesterday,” Dean apologizes. “It was a dick move bringing Lisa into the bar and goading you. I know you got your own shit goin’ on even if you won’t talk about it.” There’s a beat of silence, and Dean continues, “Can we please go back to me hitting on you and you adorably telling me to fuck off?”

Castiel laughs. “Yes, I’d like that. And can I also say that you seem terribly exhausted.”

“Well, yeah. Long night.” Dean sheepishly looks away and pulls the car off from the side of the road.

“Don’t hold back now.”

Dean chuckles, but it's sluggish and Castiel wonders if he should even be driving with how tired he seems to be.

“You sure you want to know?”

“Always.”

“Have you ever been edged?”

Certainly, Dean does not mean being held atop a building and dangled off in a threat. Not that Castiel’s done that of course. “No, I don’t think so.”

“God, it’s the worst. But also awesome. Anyway, she pushed me to the limits last night—probably ‘cause I was in a mood after our little chat. Anyway, I’m fuckin’ beat now. Can’t wait to crash.”

They pull into the driveway and Cas invites him in for coffee. “I don’t want you falling asleep at the wheel on your way home.”

“Man, I live like six minutes away.”

“And you swerved twice on the way here. Inside. Now.” Yes, Cas is very, very weak.

Grumbling his irritation, Dean shuts off the engine and ambles behind him towards the hideous beacon of a front door.
Once inside, Cas shoves Dean towards the futon and heads into the kitchen. “About last night, I should apologize as well,” Cas begins, pulling out the coffee pot from under the counter and getting it set up. “I didn’t mean to be that hostile. I think I’m just a little... frustrated with my own situation. I wish things were different… I wish things were very different,” he emphasizes. “We’ve become good friends Dean, I think, and despite the underlying attraction, I’d very much like to preserve this friendship as best we can, because frankly, I haven’t had a lot of friends before…” Try none.

Cas continues to ramble, fighting the urge to tell Dean more than he should. When the coffee is almost done, he turns around—his features lifting into a warm smile.

On the futon that Dean put together lies the man himself, completely and totally passed out. Castiel strides over and crouches in front of Dean’s face. “Is this your clever way of spending the night?”

In a low rumble, Dean murmurs, “Hmm…”

Castiel's eyes linger on the picture Dean makes in his sleep. How his features soften out, how vulnerable he looks without his brazen facade and charming grin. Freckles are scattered across Dean’s face, prominent on the rise of his cheeks and the bridge of his nose. It's not the first time Cas has seen them so close but the first time he's not being smirked at simultaneously.

Unable to stop himself, he reaches over to brush his finger across the ridge of Dean’s eyebrows and down his temple, following the line of his hair where it disappears behind his ear. The shell of Dean’s ear is warm and soft and he traces the shape of it, his fingers gently pinching the fleshy part at the bottom.

A low moan rises from Dean and he swallows but doesn't wake. Hmm, Dean likes having his ears rubbed. How… cute.

Castiel could easily stay here for hours and inappropriately trace this beautiful man’s features but that would be wrong (not nearly as wrong as other things he's done) but immoral nonetheless.

Withdrawing his hand, he frowns. “Goodnight Dean.”

***

Castiel Haven is not a morning person. Nor has he ever been, and nor will he ever be.

But apparently Dean is, and likes to make a fucking racket too. Yelling from the comfort of his bed, Castiel calls out with a sleep-roughened voice, “What are you doing!?”

Abrupt silence greets his annoyed shout, then steps down the hall, and then Dean swings his bedroom door open—all smiles and good morning cheer—and blasts, “It’s gorgeous out! I'm making you breakfast.”

Castiel groans, fighting the deep-seated urge to smile back at the man. “What time is it?” he asks instead.

Dean grins wide. “Seven.”

“I hate you. Get out of my house. And let the horrible yellow door hit you on the way out.”

“Oh don't be grouchy. Or... if you want I could, uh, give you something to help wake you up?” Dean mimes a blow job with a smirk in his eyes.

“Coffee would taste better,” Castiel jibes. And to be fair, it’s a doubtful assumption. His mouth
waters, fueled by imagination.

Dean’s eyebrows pop up in a flirty gesture. “Oh, I think you’d taste damn better than coffee.”

Resisting the urge to grunt in nonsensical sounds at his sudden sexual frustration, Castiel sits stiffly on the bed. “Dean,” he utters in a hard voice.

“Yeah, yeah,” the Hobucken mechanic drones back.

When Dean disappears from the room and heads back to the kitchen (the racket starting back up) Castiel slumps back to the bed and deludes himself into imagining a normal life. How wonderful it would have been to grow up in a regular home, meet someone like Dean in College, settle down together. Of course, the dream still doesn’t fit, does it? Dean is not the settling down type.

*Jesus, why am I even thinking about this nonsense?*

Castiel throws off the blankets and goes about getting dressed. Wearing jeans and a plain white t-shirt, he makes his way into the kitchen. There, Dean is humming a tune and serving two over-easy eggs each onto his new white dishes. Buttered toast and bacon are already on the plates. It’s the most wholesome breakfast Cas has had in a long time.

Even though Dean’s wearing the same clothes as before, he looks refreshed and breathtaking. The soft morning light from the kitchen window highlights his freckles and the growing tan from the early days of summer.

“You gonna come eat or just stand there?” Dean looks up, green eyes bright and inviting.

For the first time, Castiel regrets not having purchased a kitchen table, or stools for the island. He walks over and they eat standing up. After the first bite of his toast dipped in egg yolk, Castiel swallows and fixes his stare on Dean. His mind turns over everything he’s learned since he’s moved here, precisely cataloguing the people in town, Dean’s traits, the undercurrent of drama in such a small town.

After a while, he decides there’s something he’s been wanting to know. “May I ask you something?”

Dean bites a piece of bacon. “Shoot.”

“How come Bobby’s an alcoholic—what happened?”

All of Dean’s morning cheer is suddenly wiped away and his shoulders stiffen, his fork gets placed on the butcher block surface. He inhales deep and starts off slow, the words coming out rough. “Uh, Bobby’s wife… she-she drowned when I was eighteen. And, uh, she—Karen—had always been a good swimmer, used to go out every morning. Every goddamn morning. And one day she just… she just didn’t come back.” Pausing, Dean swallows and looks down at his breakfast, seeing his past. “They had to drag the bottom to find her. Autopsy couldn’t even tell us how she… just… drowned, just like that. The water’d been calm. We still don’t know, actually—it’s hard, was hard, she was like a mom to me for a really long time and Bobby, he just… he fell apart from that shit. Couldn’t understand why it had happened, couldn’t get over it. I think if it hadn’t been for Sammy and me, I honestly think he would’a shot himself or somethin’. I mean, shit, it took me a long time to get past it—the uncertainty, disappointment, and anger about it all. But what good does it do, ya know?”

Forearms resting on the island, Castiel’s breakfast is forgotten—the entirety of his focus on Dean. He doesn’t second guess, or overthink, he simply reaches across the small table and takes Dean’s hand—a wide-palmed, strong hand that’s currently shaking. The man in question looks up, a haunted distance in his eyes. “I’m so sorry, Dean,” Castiel says.
Flexing his jaw, Dean forces a small smile. “Thanks.” Then clearing his throat, Dean pulls back his hand and rubs it against his thigh. “So, uh, tell me something, Jimmy, why’d you really move here? Ya know, since we’re doing the sharing thing and all.”

He goes still, his hand reflexively curling into a fist. He’d not been expecting a question like that—though he should’ve after prying the way he did. It throws him off-balance and his words come out sharp, “I told you.”

“Right… a bad breakup.” Dean’s not convinced. “Thing is, you don’t look heartbroken, you’re never checking your phone or texts or emails, you never say anything about this guy at all, not even an offhand comment, and to me that doesn’t add up. Plus, I know when you’re lying.”

It’s true, Dean has an uncanny ability to discern his untruths. Maybe it’s a facet of Dean’s honest persona, being so good at knowing when others aren’t being upfront, or maybe Castiel has always been a bad liar. But he doubts that, given his past. Maybe, he considers, it’s more that he can’t stand the idea of lying to Dean. He hates it.

“My past is complicated,” he answers succinctly, knowing it’s nowhere near enough. There’s really nothing more he can say. If he does, he’s either putting Dean in danger, or being dishonest, and he’d rather not do either.

Dean huffs. “You’ve said that. But, what’s so complicated you can’t talk about? You trust me, don’t you?”

_God yes_, more than he’s trusted anyone else in his life. “I do trust you.”

Standing up straight, his chest puffing out with a breath, Dean searches his eyes. “But you won’t tell me anything.”

It’s not a question, but Cas answers anyway. “I can’t. Not about my past.”

“And what about your future? Is Hobucken the last stop or do you think you’ll be moving on?”

“I don’t know.” Castiel shrugs and meets Dean’s challenging stare, everything has taken a very serious turn and he wishes there was a way to redirect.

“Well,” Dean begins, smiling sardonically, “_Mystery-man_, despite your elusiveness and constant rejection, I would like it if you stayed.”

Relieved, Castiel smiles back. It’s unlikely he’ll stay here in the long run, but he doesn’t want to broach another complicated topic. He says what he wishes were true, “I hope I do stay.” From the corner of his eye, he notices the door and decides to comment on it as a way to shift their conversation. “Of course, if I did—the first thing I would do is paint that hideous door.”

Dean bursts into a laugh, his eyes taking a gander at the dandelion yellow. “Yeah, that brown and yellow color scheme is damn atrocious, isn’t it?”

“Ugh,” Cas groans, “I think this is the first time I feel very typically gay in my detest for the décor of this house.”

Sporting a grin, Dean replies, “I happen to feel very typically gay when I’m having sex with a guy, but maybe that’s just me.”

Cas shakes his head and grabs his forgotten fork. “Eat your breakfast Dean.”
Smirking down at his plate, Dean resumes chowing down, and not long after they’re done, Dean leaves to go into work. Castiel, overrun with conflicting emotions, sits on the porch with a mug of coffee and dwells.

Every interaction with Dean brings them closer, and he wants to fight it. He knows he’s not good enough for Dean. He knows he won’t stay here, and that it’s not safe for him—not really. Sure, he’s in WitSec… but mistakes happen. People are greedy, and if the wrong person is swayed… who knows what could happen.

Castiel wipes a hand over his face; the things he’s feeling for Dean… he’s never felt before. He’s out of his depth and finding it harder and harder not to give in.

The appeal of Dean is no longer about what’s on the surface, but what he promises: Comfort, pleasure, and distraction.

Castiel yearns for all of it.
A Drunk Man is Very Weak

Cigar smoke curls up into the air surrounding the five men, all their focus on the cards on the table. The entire night has been a mixture of laughter, good-natured jeering, and pounding music that fills Dean’s kitchen. It’s a Friday night, and since they’re all off from work and other obligations, Dean decided to have everyone over for a guys night.

Taking a glance around the small eat-in kitchen table, Cas finds Dean to his right—a ridiculous Casino dealer’s visor on, and beside him is Ash, then Sam, and finally, Sam’s good friend Matt from the office.

The collection of men is quite funny to him; an ex-mobster, an admitted slut and jack of all trades, two lawyers, and a drug-dealing barcook.

Castiel leans back in his chair, his eyes steady, peering across the table at Sam, sizing him up. They’re the only two left in this current round. Face-down on the table are Cas’ cards: An ace and a nine. Luckily for him, the flop had another nine and ace. Two pair isn’t a fantastic hand, and it’s possible Sam’s holding a low straight. But doubtful; Sam would’ve bet higher with the nine up, and definitely higher when the six and the five turned over.

When they eventually cease their bets and turn over their cards, the other guys holler and cheer. It’s clear Sam had been hoping for a flush over a straight, but Castiel still wins the hand.

“Damn you’re good,” grumbles Sam, reaching for his nearly wasted beer.

Dean smirks to the side. “It’s cause he’s such a deceiver.”

Ever since their talk when Dean had crashed at his place, Dean’s being making snide remarks about his hidden past. It’s been getting on Castiel’s nerves, especially when it’s done in Sam’s presence. Still, Dean continues to hit on him nonstop and that lessens the blow of each backhanded comment. Castiel can see through Dean, can see that Cas’ unwillingness to confide in Dean bothers him, and he so he makes his remarks, and so Castiel ignores them.

It’s Ash’s turn to deal next, and they all take a quick break—some to empty their bladder, some to grab a new drink. Dean leans over. “Want to smoke?”

Without having to ask, Cas knows he means pot, and so he dips his chin. “Sure.”

“Come give me a hand,” Dean requests, and Castiel has long gotten past the deep insinuating tone of his voice, and isn’t bothered in the knowledge that it does not take two people to roll a joint.

Personal torture has become Cas’ favourite game. Whatever moments he gets with Dean, he takes. They’re still friends, not once crossing the line since the kiss at the bar a couple weeks back, but the tension hovers between them. A consistent, unrelenting presence.

Following Dean into his bedroom, Castiel is aware he’s tipsy and can’t remember how many beers he’s had. Old rock music roars through the apartment, the volume level way higher than necessary. Dean grabs an old record for a steady surface and sets up a little rolling station on his bed. Cas does in fact help, cutting up one of Dean’s business cards and rolling the strip of cardboard into a makeshift filter.

They’re quiet, listening to the sounds around them, when Dean throws him a teasing eye and quietly says, “Got you on my bed after all.”
“And I’m a little drunk,” Cas tacks on.

Dean uses the edge of the leftover card to pack the weed into the paper. “Hmm, easy target,” he purrs.

Castiel’s mind flips to his past, and he almost blurs out: God, I hope not. But he manages to catch himself. “How would you want it?” he asks stupidly instead, ‘cause he’s definitely a little drunk, and apparently can’t help himself.

Pausing as he’s licking the edge of the paper, Dean pulls his tongue back, swallows, and faces Castiel. “You trying to kill me right now?”

“Answer the question.”

The look Dean settles on him his hard, impassive, and yet radiating promise of a night he wouldn’t forget. “I’d want you to be rough with me, I’d want you to let loose… get rid of all that banked power you’ve got and fuck me like you goddamn mean it.”

All the air has left the room and Castiel stares back in a stupor, his mind picturing it. Garnering the faint remnants of his willpower, he chokes out, “Finish the joint Dean.”

Knowing exactly how tempting he must look right then, Dean finishes licking across the paper, dark eyes on Cas. His focus deviates to roll up the joint, and when he baptizes it—the entire joint sliding into his mouth—Dean pulls it out slow, lips gently puckered around it.

Their eyes don’t shift away from each other the entire time.

In the background, *Gimme Shelter* exudes the essence of the late sixties into the relatively dark room with only the bedside lamp on. They stand to leave, but as Cas is walking to the door, Dean grabs his shoulder and slams him against the closet door. Dean’s body comes in hard, his mouth hovering an inch away from a kiss.

“Dean,” Cas warns, unable to push his friend away. Not that he’s trying.

“What the fuck is holding you back, huh? God, you can’t just look at me like that, fucking tease me about how I want it, and then just…” Dean shuts up, his eyes glancing down at Cas’ parted mouth. “Fuck.”

The summer heat, the proximity of Dean’s body has Cas sweltering in his clothes from an instant flush. His cock is harder than it’s been in recent memory, pushing and swelling behind his zipper and if Dean leaned closer, he’d feel it.

As it is, their breath mixes in the air between them—potently moist and tempting, scented with the faint reminder of the beers they’ve consumed.

Cas is too drunk to step away, too aroused and confused to remember the reasons he shouldn’t be with Dean. His clear lack of protest flips a switch for Dean.

The man whispers between them, “Tell me and I’ll step back… just say the words.”

He can’t; his mouth won’t cooperate. His brain is sidetracked from all the blood rushing to fill his erection. Instead of a uttering a refusal, his mouth falls open more and for the first time in his life he feels… vulnerable, something along the lines of innocence. Two traits that have next to no meaning for him. All of his hard-edged predispositions wither away. He wants to be touched by this one man so badly, he wants it so much it aches everywhere. His mind *screams* for it, repeating the desire
louder and louder in the hopes that some greater power can hear him.

Castiel breathes in the scent of Dean in a wavering breath. *I want you,* he thinks loudly.

There’s no way to relieve the pain ripping through him—the tiresless ache circling his chest and coursing down to his groin. If Dean takes him here and now, his body would get what it needs. Dean can make it go away. Just this once, just one time.

One small moment of relent.

As if in agreement, the music swirls around them, the rising tempo urging them together.

A soft noise escapes from Dean’s throat, something desperate, his broad chest expanding in hard breaths as he lessens the already slim gap between them—bringing their hips flush together.

“*Dean…*” Castiel exhales, mouth suddenly dry as sand.

The gentle friction of Dean’s body pressing against Cas’ clothed dick is a lightning rod of pleasure flashing across his senses. In a blink, his cock is stiff as iron and flexing against the confinement of his jeans. In a harsh growl, Dean’s breath is all over him—a sensation on his lips, on his tongue.

They’re on the verge of a kiss and he knows he’ll break in two if it never comes.

There’s a pinch at Cas’ hips—Dean’s fingers holding him steady as he brings their foreheads together in a false expression of calm. With an expert roll of his lower half, Dean grinds against him. Absorbing the thick line of Dean’s sex, Castiel’s arousal spikes, forcing his head to slam back against the door.

Between Dean and the closet, he pants for air and whines at the sensation of his cock throbbing as Dean rounds out against him.

A soft groan rumbles from Dean’s throat and Cas can’t help himself. As he registers the break of his willpower, he dimly considers how easily Dean could torture him, could whittle him down and extract the truth of his past if he tried hard enough.

“Fuck…” Castiel curses his failures.

Uncurling his fist, not realizing how much of a strain he’d been putting on his knuckles, he wraps his arm around Dean and reaches down, getting a solid grip on the man’s ass.

“Dean,” he sighs, dragging the gorgeous mechanic against him, deft fingers plying at the seam of Dean’s jeans. In his arms, Dean shudders and whimpers softly.

For the next two quick minutes, Cas encourages Dean’s rutting hips… holds him hard in place and relishes in the rough friction being worked out on his cock. They’re like drunken teens exploring lust for the first time in their lives, and in many ways, for Cas… this feels very much like a first time. Arousal pounds through his veins, and every time he feels Dean’s ass harden as the man thrusts against him, he can only think of stripping him bare and laying him on the bed.

The feel of Dean’s body, rolling and riding against him is intoxicating on it’s own, but the proximity of his lips and the taste of his breath are driving Cas mad. He’s never experienced a more powerful mix of sensations and emotions in his life, how they all coalesce together and dull his vision, the droning hum in his ears, the disorientating staccato beat of his heart.

“Please,” Dean begs, his voice weak with need. Cas hushes him but doesn’t stop what they’re
doing… he won’t take it further. He can’t.

It’s tempting enough when they fumble too close and for the briefest of seconds, their lips graze in passing. He never imagined himself a screamer, but God, he could scream with the frustration of his desire for Dean.

The stolen moment crescendos to an inevitable end faster than Cas would like.

Dean’s mouth opens wide, his fingers digging almost painfully at Cas’ hip bones. The hard friction of his movements become erratic and purposeful. And with a few sharp thrusts and a ragged moan, Dean is coming—his entire body curling into Cas and the once stiff lines of his body are shuddering with release.

Magnificently, through the thick fabric of their jeans, Cas can feel the pulse of Dean’s thick sex as it pumps out each shot of come into his jeans. After a few lingering twitches, Dean collapses onto his shoulder, breathing like a freight train and Castiel is overcome with guilt and fear.

Fear for Dean getting involved with him, fear over his own attachment to the man. Fear of forgetting who he was.

It terrifies him how suddenly and monumentally important Dean has become to him. How fiercely protective he is now.

But he has no time to think about it. Before he realizes, Dean’s hand is covering his rock-hard erection, still full, still throbbing for release.

No, no, no, he shouldn’t let this happen. God, I should stop him. But Dean fixes a hard, dominating gaze on him and starts rubbing the heel of his palm over Castiel’s shaft, his fingers feeling out the shape of his cockhead through his jeans. Because he’s so fucking swollen, every detail of his cock stands out through the stiff fabric. Dean explores every inch, tracing the shape of him.

Castiel can hardly think, or breathe… his heart is racing. Pleasure’s never felt this way before.

“You’re gonna fuckin’ come for me…” commands Dean in a heady whisper. “We can go back to the status quo after this, but right now, right here in this room you’re gonna show me how bad you want me—that you lie in bed at night and stroke this fine cock with images of me all laid out for you, that you think of bending me over the bartop and eating me out, that you want to hear me cry out your name in a fucking delirium as I come all over myself with your cock pounding my ass—Show me all that.”—Cas bites down, utterly wrecked and trapped in a wild torrent of bliss and fear—“Come on…” Dean works him faster, shadowed green eyes boring into his soul, the music hammering around the blood rushing in his ears.

The distant words of the song flooding the apartment rise in and out of his conscious mind, “Love… it’s just a kiss away, kiss away, kiss away…”

The peak rises and his mouth falls open as he struggles for air. Dean encourages him towards climax, but he doesn’t immediately fall over the edge. Coming on command is not something Cas is able to do.

Dean tries to kiss him, but Castiel knows he can’t handle the intimacy, so he reaches up to grab a fistful of Dean’s short hair, forcing distance between them.

“Fuck, yeah,” praises Dean, hissing at the yank on his scalp—liking it. “Oh god…” Crowding over, Dean tucks into Castiel’s neck and bites him hard, sending sparks racing down his spine.
Castiel opens his mouth to shout, but no sounds erupt from him. Everything flashes white, and the first gratifying throbs rock through Cas’ body, each pulse soaking his boxers, the dampness immediate and spreading. He’s panting hard, curled over Dean’s shoulders—angry at himself.

Angry at everything.

Dean works him through every last shudder, his fingers lingering on the obvious wet spot in his jeans. “Do you hate me now?” Dean whispers against him, their bodies twisted into the semblance of a hug.

Not even close, he wants to say. Truth be told, what he’s feeling for Dean may be dangerously quite the opposite. But what is there to say? “No.”

“Man, I know you’re drunk ...and I know where you stand.” Dean steps back, still breathing through his mouth, looking ashamed of himself. “Back to normal now, yeah?”

Eyelids fluttering in the aftermath, Cas manages to nod. His disappointment is expressed through the subtle chewing of his lower lip. “May I”—he swallows—“May I borrow a pair of boxers and a pair of jeans?”

Dean smiles, having switched back to his friendly deportment, no hidden trace of who he was two minutes ago—expressing things Cas will never in all his life forget. They change quickly, not daring to look at each other after the obvious infraction to their friendship. Hoping they look presentable, Dean snags the joint, and they exit the room and return to the game as if nothing happened.

Dean’s excuse over their delay is simple, “You know it takes me forever to roll a joint, man.” And fair enough, Dean does, and the jeans they’ve put on look pretty damn similar to the ones they had on.

But Sam’s calculating stare falls narrowly on Castiel, a shrewd gaze. It’s barely more than a second, but he worries about it. Dean might be willing to look past his secrets, but Sam... is not. Not now that he suspects something went down between them.

Great. Now the DA has really got it in for him. Why the hell did Castiel have to attract the affections of a man whose brother happens to be the County DA? What are the chances?
As Dean promised, that status quo does in fact resume and their friendship is gladly not hindered by what happened in Dean’s bedroom. (At least, not hindered in regards to outward appearances—Castiel has had other challenges on the matter). The unapologetic man still hits on him, still raves about his exploits in detail, and yet still manages to be whatever kind of friend that Castiel needs in the moment.

It’s definitely a strange kind of friendship.

But not once before, in Castiel’s whole twisted life, has anyone ever been everything he needs (hell, not even close to a little of what he needs) while at the same time being everything he could ever want. The knowledge of this angers and frustrates him. Why now? Why in this life is he given something he can’t have, nor hope to keep.

In a few months, probably more, he’ll need to stand trial. The fallout from that could be disastrous, and there’s a chance he’ll need to move when the dust settles. Not to mention the fact that Raphael is free and a definite threat.

The idea of leaving this town, having to tuck away memories of Dean is unpleasant. All of these enraging and depressing thoughts pass through his mind as he files through the books for Pamela’s diner at one of the tables.

It’s Tuesday afternoon and there are still a few patrons hanging around for a late lunch. Castiel is organizing the vendor invoices when Sam strides in, gives the owner Pamela—a fit brunette with quick wit—a tight hug and makes his way over.

When the oversized brother takes a seat on the opposite side of the booth, it’s clear he’s not making a friendly visit. Castiel straightens the stack of invoices and places them neatly on the table.

“Sam.”

At first Sam says nothing, but his jaw is flexed—a habit Dean shares.

“Who are you?”

At least Castiel had been expecting something like this after what happened a little over a week ago. “Jimmy Novak,” he recites. Though he doesn’t offend Sam’s intelligence by trying too hard with the lie. No doubt, the DA has already done a background check on him. Hmm, he wonders what that would’ve looked like.

“Yeah, I think we both know that’s bullshit and I need to know who the hell you are before anything else happens with my brother.”

“What do you think happened with your brother?”
“Don’t treat me like them,” Sam waves to the crowd of hometown simpletons. “I know something happened with Dean, and I know you are not Jimmy Novak. You think I haven’t seen my share of WitSec deets? The barebones background info? I have two degrees and a stellar IQ so spare me.”

Cas takes a long inhale, holding Sam’s unwavering stare. “If you know all that, you know I can’t say a word.”

With a huff, Sam blurts, “It tells me enough. Enough to know I don’t want you around my brother.”

“You’re right,” Cas shrugs, agreeing wholeheartedly. “I shouldn’t be around him… I don’t want him involved with me, Sam. He deserves better.” Raising his chin, Castiel pegs Sam with a hostile glare, “But if you truly believe I’d willingly put him in danger or allow any harm to come to him, you may want to reevaluate that fancy IQ of yours, boy.”

Sam bristles, teeth grinding. “Request a fucking transfer.”

“No.”

“Why not?” Sam snaps.

Yes, he asks himself, why fucking not. It’s what he should do. But he’s weak, he’s so weak. “Because despite your dispositions, I’m not everything you believe me to be, and I’m… I’m happy here, Sam. Why can’t I have that?” An unexpected sadness tightens his throat, but he powers through. “Why can’t I be allowed a normal life? For once!” he stresses, his voice rising. “You have no idea—“ he cuts himself off, all his buried anger at the Haven family boiling to the surface. “You have no idea,” he concludes quietly.

Out of sorts, losing a grip on his control, Castiel rubs the back of his neck and tries to reorganize his emotions. To control them the way he used to control his father’s various henchmen.

The younger Winchester’s stare narrows, and he searches Castiel’s features for a very long minute. “You care about Dean?”

Wearing a harsh smile, his answer is bitter. “I’d kill for him.” Nothing says the truth more than that.

With a gruff noise, Sam leans back against the booth. “That doesn’t exactly placate me.”

“I wasn’t trying to placate you; I was being truthful—is that not what you’d prefer, Sam?”

Sam considers his statement, nods once slowly and meets his eyes again. “There won’t be any trouble here, you hear me?”

It’s a law for Cas to abide by and while he’d give anything to hold that promise, there’s a hefty price on his head and a very skilled murderer reaping in freedom at the moment. Trouble could very well find him, and the notion fills him with dread. If something ever happened to Dean… Quickly, he shakes the thought off. It’s unbearable to think of.

Castiel, regretfully, cannot give Sam what he wants. “Whatever trouble arises will not be caused by me.” Perhaps, because of me, he thinks, but decides it’s better not to be said.

“Fair enough. Don’t get too close to Dean… he’s not as strong as he seems. He gets hurt easy and I won’t have that.”

“Your brother is the kindest, most honest man I’ve ever met. I have no intentions of hurting him—and trust me, I have tried to keep my distance, I do try… but he makes it very difficult.” At this,
Castiel can’t help the face he makes, a tired resignation from having to withstand Dean’s constant attempts to date him.

For the first time since he sat down, Sam laughs, becoming the Winchester Castiel first met on the street a while ago now. “Yes, he definitely does. And I am sorry for that. Look, you were right—I don’t know shit about your past, Jimmy… or whatever the hell your real name is... so I won’t presume the worst and that’s my promise to you. But you can’t blame me for being cautious, for being worried, okay? Dean’s pretty much the only family I’ve got.”

There’s never been an opportunity before now to speak to Sam about the Winchester’s past. “Dean told me some of what happened—I am very sorry Sam. I am.”

“Thanks. Appreciate it.” Sam heaves a big sigh, and smacks his hand on the table. “Alright, look, I need to get home and grab a bite and see the wife before I have to be in court but just… keep your head down here and know that if you hurt Dean… I won’t just throw your ass in jail, I’ll put you six feet under myself.”

Castiel smiles, hoping it never comes to that. “Duly noted.”

All in all, the conversation wasn’t nearly as bad as Cas had expected. Sure, Sam’s not his biggest fan, but he had no illusions about that before.
Past and Present Violence

Sam’s warning should’ve quelled the rise of his feelings for Dean, it should have brought to light how serious his situation is—how precarious it could become.

But time is a funny thing. How it can so easily drape over his worries like a white sheet on a dead body, masking the obvious.

Normalcy, it seems, can fool even the most cynical and cautious. When a few more weeks go by and Castiel’s day-to-day life as Jimmy Novak further cements itself, he manages to forget about the upcoming trial. Not in a complete and total way, obviously. But he goes hours, sometimes whole days without his mind being drawn to his past, or to the trial (whenever it’s even supposed to be). There are no “Unknown Name, Unknown Numbers” that show up on his cell. There’s been nothing on the news about the major New York mobster roundup.

And so he forgets, his mind preoccupied by more recent distractions. To finally unravelling the mess Rufus has made of the accounting system. To his occasional conversations with Pamela—who he immensely respects and gets along with. He has a feeling she’s dealt with some shit in her life and they bond comfortably, conversations carrying the tone and feel of two people who have been long friends instead of new ones.

Everyone in the town has their own unique appeal to him. Jo, a fierce blonde who frequents the bar as a waitress and is always brazen and amusing, ribs Dean constantly. Cas loves it. The mayor of Hobucken he’s met twice now, and her name is Ellen and he’s positive she’s Jo’s mom—based on looks and personality alone. When Ellen comes to the bar, she always makes a point of sitting with Bobby for a while. Though he doesn’t know anything of their relationship, he can tell they care for each other, but he sees the disappointment and sadness in her eyes when she spares one last glance at him as she’s going out the door.

All of these people, and their intricate lives he’s only managed to scratch the surface of, are so completely normal and he wishes nothing but the best of them.

And so he forgets.

As if everything horrible that happened becomes some foggy distant memory (like a bad storm you watched from a window weeks prior), a memory that’s no longer important. It’s, frankly, impressive—what the mind can do. He forgets about Michael forcing him to watch torture and interrogation when he was only a child, he passes the nights without darker dreams, he forgets how wrought with tension he was for the first thirty years of life, forgets how he worried about a lackey trying to usurp his father on a weekly basis.

He forgets. It seems… impossible.

By this point, Castiel has done the books for nearly half the businesses in town, which is like... four. Every time he runs the numbers, analyzes how they order their supplies and determine their pricing, he calculates how they could be doing better. Whenever he finishes up, he always makes sure to leave a detailed explanation of what he found, what he fixed, and what they should be doing differently in the day-to-day. Every single time he helps one of them, he feels… redeemed.

Working steady for three nights last week alone, he helped Dean map out a business plan for expanding the operation of the garage—when his operating revenue would indicate the right time to hire someone, how best to advertise and when. It was difficult to strike a balance because Dean
never wanted to operate the way bigger shops did (with set hourly pricing for set jobs—regardless of how long a job actually took).

Even Sam, despite his continuing reservations, has grown lax. The lawyer no longer frowns when he hears that his brother and “Jimmy” have spent time alone together.

None of this “alone time”, Castiel reflects, has been spent precariously though. No drunken hump-sessions, no stolen kisses during late nights at the bar. His relationship with Dean remains genial, if not for the daily insinuations on Dean’s part and blatant requests to: ‘Go on one date,’ or ‘Go fuck in the bathroom,’ or ‘Go give each other head behind the shop.’

He denies every single one with a grin. Dean smirks back and starts thinking of his next line. It’s a running joke, but they both feel—are both aware—of the intensity beneath it all.

More and more, Castiel craves Dean’s presence, thinks of his smell late at night, remembers in vivid detail how Dean felt pressed against him that one night. How the incredible man shuddered helplessly in Cas’ arms, the erotic pictures he painted with husky words.

But the days continue, the status quo continues, and everything is okay.

It’s around six on a Thursday night towards the end of July, and Castiel is leaving the grocery store with a few necessities, when the imprinted sound of Dean’s car draws his attention. He turns to the road just as Dean makes a sharp swerve and stops on a dime.

The window is already open. “Get in.”

Cas walks over to the car and leans down, squinting at his friend. “What’s wrong?” he demands, his voice level, a forgotten persona briefly slipping back into place.

“Please get in.” Dean repeats in a dry tone, but not friendly.

Wondering what he’s about to get into, Castiel opens the door, puts his bags in the back and takes a seat. He’s barely buckled his belt before Dean’s ripping through the streets, taking an immediate right on the first northern street towards the highway.

“What are we going?”

“To get out of this fucking place and get shitfaced for a night.” Dean’s words are sharp, and his entire body is rigid in the seat, hands white-knuckling the steering wheel.

“What happened?”

Dean sneers at the road and closes his eyes. “Doesn’t matter.”

It definitely does and since Cas has never seen Dean so unraveled, he won’t stop the questions until he gets an answer. “Dean, tell me.” Worry deepens his voice.

Dean grinds his back teeth, his fingers regripping the wheel over and over. “I saw my dad today.”

Oh. That explains it. Though Castiel can’t be sure whether this is always Dean’s reaction after seeing his dad or if something particular happened. “Why did you go?”

Dean blows out a hard exhale, his one hand flies up in consternation. “I don’t fucking know. ‘Cause I thought maybe, after all this time, I’d show up and he’d be a different person. But that place has just made him… a fucking bastard. A fucking right bastard.”
“What did he say to you?” Watching Dean in pain is by far the worst thing he’s ever seen, and he’s seen more than enough hurt to last a lifetime. But this? This is worse.

For a moment, Dean’s eyes glaze over with unshed tears but neither of them acknowledge it. Dean finally cuts out, “The fucker called me some shit and uh, made some bullshit offhand comment about how much I would fucking loooove it in prison…” Dean’s lip curls back, “Man, it was fucking disturbing, actually… I mean he hit me before, yeah, and he got real messed in the head from the boozin’ and mom dying like that, but—“ Dean slams his mouth shut, a look of sheer revulsion marking his detailed features.

Jesus. For the first time, Castiel wonders if he could contact his cousin Gabe—one of the only family members he has any sliver of trust in—and request that John Winchester be removed in a delicate fashion from the North Carolina correctional system.

“Pull over.”

They’re on the two-lane County road, and there’s no other cars around. Dean needs to take a breath, or he’ll crash them into the ditch. And even if he doesn’t, Castiel can’t stand seeing Dean this way.

“I’m fine,” replies Dean, voice like steel.

Castiel’s thankful for the bench seat, and his skills acquired during two car chases outside of Jersey. In a quick, deft move, he slides over—wrestles the wheel from Dean, shoves his leg between Dean’s, kicks the man’s foot off the pedal and expertly veers the car to the shoulder, brakes hard and rams the lever into park.

“I was not asking,” he clarifies, breathless and practically sitting in Dean’s lap.

When he peeks down over his shoulder to see his friend, the sight crushes him. Dean is wide-eyed, borderline scared. Every expansion of Dean’s chest against Castiel’s side feels choppy and uneven.

“You shoulda seen the way he looked at me…”

“Dean.” The name trips out as a whisper and Castiel cradles Dean’s face, desperate to kiss him, wanting to do whatever he can to erase the memory from Dean’s mind… but he can’t. Instead, he tries to be funny, “I could have him killed for you.”

Dean breaks into a hesitant smile, the first signs of relief. “Ha. Ha. Is that your great, big secret? Huh? You’re a hitman?”

He indulges a little, brushing his thumb on the edge of Dean’s poutish bottom lip. “Hmm, yes, Dean, you’ve figured me out. I’m incredibly dangerous.”

All at once, Dean is the picture of innocence. “Are you, sir? Should I be worried?”

Fear lances through Castiel’s gut. Yes, he thinks, but plays along. “Of course not, you’re under my explicit protection, Dean. I’d destroy anyone who tried to hurt you.”

For a long minute, Dean curiously stares up at him, as if he’s trying figure out what’s truth and what’s not. Voice carrying a hint of incredulity, Dean speculates, “My god, you would, wouldn’t you?”

Castiel’s only response is to nod in absolute sincerity.

That’s more than enough truth for one day, he decides. Awkwardly, he slides off of Dean’s lap and
changes the subject. “Um, are you we going to a bar then? Maybe to a place that has pool tables? I’m an excellent pool-player.”

It’s Dean’s responding smile that makes him glad he pulled the maneuver he did. “Are you? I’m not so bad myself. Very good with a stick and balls.”

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Two hours later, after a few beers and a few good-natured games, they reach the conclusion that neither of them are in any condition to drive.

“You know,” Dean mentions, “I’d call Sam to ask for a lift, but I gotta say he really doesn’t want me around you.”

Castiel rests his elbows on the pool cue rack at his back. “He worries about you, and I don’t blame him. I’m no good for you… You know, Dean, you really should let it go. All this—” Castiel gestures between them as they stand close. “Maybe in another life, but in this one… it can’t work.”

Breath smelling of beer, Dean sidles up to his chest, chin tipped back and an arrogant smirk plastered across his face. “Dude, you’re talkin’ like I want a ring and babies… I just want one date. One measly little date… and, well… a whole night of raunchy, uninhibited fucking of course. You know, the kind that leaves you sore and exhausted for days.” Dean bats his eyelashes. “C’mon, is that so terrible? Is that really too much to ask for? Huh…”

Why does this man have to be such a fucking tease? Castiel reaches for Dean’s collar and grabs a fistful of plaid cotton, jerking him close. “Don’t kid yourself Dean… if that’s all you wanted you would’ve given up on me.”

“You’re wrong,” argues Dean. “I don’t believe in love or any of that happily ever after BS. Not for me anyway.”

“Oh no?” he challenges.

“S’just not my style.” No matter how much conviction Dean puts on his words, Castiel catches the shift in his throat as he swallows and senses the lie.

Dean’s subtle vulnerability rises steadily in his gaze, wide trusting green eyes at odds with the statements leaving his mouth. In that moment, Castiel hates himself, hates the fact of his past. He’s on the verge of saying something else, doing what he can to lighten the odd mood, to go back to forgetting... when a rousing commotion disrupts their erotic bubble.

Shouting and a chaos of action busts out through the bar, and they both step apart to take a look around. Over near the restrooms, there’s a clear scuffle unfolding and a woman’s muffled accusations.

Annoyed at the interruption, Castiel abandons Dean by the pool tables and walks steadily through the throng of drunken bodies. The one bartender, a wily but ineffective man, is trying to manhandle some guy, likely the cause of all the trouble. Once Castiel’s close, he can decipher the woman’s angry words. Apparently the snarling man fighting the bartender had attacked her in the washroom.

Fucking idiots. Castiel steps in, wrenches the bartender off the podunk moron and in a quick maneuver—one hand on his wrist, the other on the back of his neck—has the pest slammed down on the nearest table face down, his arm twisted back towards his shoulder blades.

The room goes silent as a tomb, save for the dripping of the beers knocked over on the table. Castiel
leans down to the miscreant. “Apologize to this lovely young woman or you’ll be masturbating with your left hand for weeks.” To emphasis his meaning, Cas adds pressure on the twist of his wrist.

“Oh! Motherfucker!”—The guy spits—“I’m sorry, alright, I’m fucking sorry—now get the fuck off me before I fucking kill you!”

Castiel laughs, a dark confidence blooming back into him. “I would love to see you try,” he breaths into the man’s ear. “Now get the fuck out of here.” Releasing his trained hold, Cas shoves the guy to his feet and meets his eyes, staring him down with every ounce of reticent confidence he possesses. It doesn’t matter that Castiel is shorter by an inch or two, his skillset more than makes up for it. It’s a truth that doesn’t need saying. Castiel has long mastered the ability to quietly illustrate his strength.

The man’s light blue eyes are split wide with curious fear, and he gets the message loud and clear. Tripping backwards, the offender stumbles his way out of the bar. Little by little, the bar resumes its pre-commotion atmosphere and Castiel tries to shake off the resurgence of who he used to be, but when he turns around to walk back, Dean is standing there.

This is who I am, he thinks.

Dean’s expression is unreadable. Castiel breaks the heavy silence. “We can’t drive home, but after
that it’s probably best we leave.” And given the way the bartender is eyeing him—as if he doesn’t belong—they should definitely vacate the premises.

Without saying another word, they make their way to the front, dropping a few twenties on the bar, and head out into the humid night. Dean’s car is parked at the far end of the plaza, but knowing they won’t be driving anywhere, Castiel cuts across the asphalt towards the road.

On the far side of the two-lane stretch is a large grass field, and he beelines towards the lone tree at the centre, not sure why, his thoughts swirling about his past. He’d been too complacent lately, believing his former life wouldn’t haunt him, that he wouldn’t have these striking moments of utter self-hatred.

Fuck, he hopes his family rots in jail until they die. He hopes they get shanked within the year. He hopes all the horror they reaped on others comes back to them tenfold. And yes, Cas deserves some of that karma. And he’ll take it when it comes.

He knows Dean is following him and he’s not sure what’ll happen when he stops moving. Either an interrogation or a come on. Cas hopes it’s the former, because he’s not sure of his willpower at the moment. There’s a brewing unrest in him, something he isn’t sure how to manage.

Beneath his shoes, the grass is dry as bone and Castiel drops down onto his ass and promptly lays back. The night is clear, and faint specks of white stars dot the sky overhead. Dean follows suit, and continues the peculiar silence.

Where are his thoughts taking him? Cas wonders. His gaze tracks Dean from the corner of his eye.

A good stretch of minutes slip by, and still, Dean says nothing. Castiel has calmed down, and he feels guilty. There was no need for him to intervene at the bar. But in his past life, he’d often broken up fights and put people in their place as needed. It was a default reaction, and he regrets it.

“I’m sorry, Dean.”

“About?”

“The fact that you know nothing about me, the fact that you saw a part of me I don’t ever want you to see… that I should move… but I can’t.”

Dean props up on his elbow and leans over Cas. “You don’t have to tell me anything.”

“Why do you even trust me?” God, he doesn’t understand. “Especially after that—” Cas gestures to the bar across the street. “Your brother doesn’t trust me, and with very good reason. You know nothing about me, Dean.”

A kind smile softens Dean’s handsome features. “Because you’re smart, and you always do the right thing. You walked Bobby home the very first night you met him. You didn’t have to do that, but you did… and that said more to me about who you are than all the shit you won’t tell me.”

What if you knew I shot someone? he wonders. What if you knew I’ve helped bury someone? How could Dean possibly feel the same if he knew those things.

Bitterly, Cas says, “I said it when we first met… but you’re far too kind for your own good.”

Dean smirks. “Yeah? Does that mean you plan to take advantage of me?”

Not in the mood for innuendos or games, he looks up at Dean and replies with conviction. “No. I
don’t.”
Scraping the Surface

Castiel didn’t notice it at first.

The days passed without event, a continuance of mundane Hobucken life. Evenings at Rufus’ cabin, days running the books for the town businesses as needed. How could he not have seen the difference?

Nearly a week’s gone by since the night he and Dean played pool in the next town over. After their bizarre conversation in the open field, they simply laid in silence until Dean suggested they try and get a few decent hours of sleep in the car before driving back. To Castiel’s vague surprise, Dean didn’t tease the notion of getting it on in the Impala—one of Dean’s favourite places to fool around (as he’s mentioned countless times). But, Cas figured, they were both tired and it had been a strange night. Plus, their friendship was under strain.

It’s early morning the following Saturday, and Castiel’s sitting on his porch under a flat grey sky enjoying his coffee when he realizes Dean hasn’t hit on him since they got back.

Not once. At all… “Huh.”

Glancing up from his mug, he squints out over the meagre lawn and can’t believe he didn’t immediately notice the change. Not one innuendo all week. Not one mischievous smirk or salacious leer.

Castiel frowns into his half-empty mug.

Maybe Dean’s finally given up? Maybe after what happened he saw a taste of who Cas really was and it was enough to steer him away. The thought makes his chest feel heavy, and Castiel presses his lips together and steadies his next inhale.

“It’s for the best,” he tells himself, gripping the ceramic handle.

It takes him twenty minutes to finish the remnants of the morning brew. Nowhere near as enjoyable as when he started. Left with an empty mug and no other excuse to continue sitting on his ass ruminating over the potential reasons Dean has backed off, he figures he better get on with his day.

He’s not scheduled to work, but some cleaning is long overdue. Castiel isn’t the tidiest of people and he has a habit of ignoring the errant shirt, sock, or dish throughout the house. Item one on the agenda is organizing his laundry to bring to the Suds Shop north of Emsley.

Simple, everyday chores—as though today is nothing out of the ordinary. There’s no reason to sit around mourning something he never would have acted on anyhow. Dean’s change in behaviour makes absolutely no difference to him. None.

And if he looks grumpy and pissed off as he stands and forces himself to go inside, who’s to say it isn’t because he hates laundry.

A half hour later, Cas is drying off from his shower on his way back into the bedroom. He tosses the damp towel on the bed and turns to the closet when his phone goes off. The sound is muffled, and he remembers that his government-issued Blackberry is still in his jeans pocket from the day before.

Finding it buried in a heap with the rest of yesterday’s clothes he raises it and sees the ID splash on the screen.
“Fuck.” Pausing only briefly, Castiel answers. “What.”

“Well hello to you too.”

“What do you want?” Hearing Roya’s voice kicks off an instant headache behind his eyes, and he rubs his forehead with his fingers.

“Thought you might like an update, Haven.”

Not really, he thinks. “Tell me.”

There’s a pause, some shuffling of papers. “The DA is getting slammed with injunctions and bullshit motions. I don’t think we’ll be getting you in to testify until… Shit—maybe next May? God, maybe longer. This is a monster fucking case, you know that, there’s bound to be—”

“—Shut up.”

Roya blows out an exhale. “Anyway, you’d better get comfy ‘cause you’re goin’ nowhere fast.”

“How long?”

“I told you—”

“No, you incompetent fuck, how long will I be in this town, whether or not the case is heard in six months from now or in two goddamn years from now. How fucking long?”

There’s a dead pause on the line and Castiel waits in suspense. He realizes this should’ve been something he’d asked at the outset. Maybe they skimmed over this detail, maybe he wasn’t paying attention.

“Listen, unless there’s reason to move you, you’re at your final destination in the eyes of the FBI. Should you wish to move after the case is done, it can be discussed, but we’ll need to know why, we need to verify the location to make sure wherever you wind up doesn’t conflict with any other known felons or others in our program that may be in the area. And, of course, we’ll need to make regular check-ins for a while to make sure you’re still abiding the law. You do remember the terms of your agreement?”

Grimacing at the edge of his bed, wet hair dripping down over his shoulders and chest, Castiel replies, “Yes.”

He couldn’t so much as swipe a pack of gum without the FBI finding out. If they’d wanted to be dicks, they could tear up his agreement for immunity and cart his ass to jail. Sure as hell wouldn’t last long in there. As soon as he gives his testimony, he’s no longer useful to them.

“Why? Not loving the small-town flair in North Carolina?”

Castiel can’t even put together a response. He ends the call and tosses the Blackberry onto the bed. So.

Hobucken isn’t temporary… was never meant to be. Truth is, he hadn’t known what would happen after the trial, whether they’d move him, make him stay, or simply keep tabs on him and he was—more or less—free to go wherever he pleased.

Castiel never really considered the possibility that this place would be home.
But if it is, does that mean…

Castiel turns and sits back on the bed. This is definitely a sitting down thing, and slower breathing would probably be smart too. There’s no need to panic yet. Okay, he coaches himself, you are smart… Think it through.

Carefully, with his mind drifting past unimportant details, Castiel tries to imagine living here for the indefinite future. He pictures himself cleaning up the house, painting it, making it worthy of being called a home instead of a shack. What would it look like? What would he want it to look like?

Would he be alone in it? ...Forever?

Does he dare imagine the idea of settling down? Of rooting himself into this community more than he already has.

For some reason, the case had always seemed more of an imminent thing he’d have to deal with. Realistically, it was a stupid assumption. He should’ve known better. Now, the thought of trying to live a life, alone, with this impending court case looming over him... he’s not sure his mind can retain any semblance of sanity. God, he’s so sick of being alone.

As every thought takes a turn through his mind, there’s one that lingers in the recesses. A blurry image of Dean, and how his smile—teasing or otherwise—lights up his entire face. Could Castiel live in Hobucken, for months, for years, and never give in to one night with Dean?

What’s one night? Or one date, even. What’s so damaging about it?

If he’s going to be here for so long, maybe forever, it’s only one single date. A few hours. A selfish indulgence. Nothing has to come of it, and nothing will. Because Dean, regardless of his infatuation with Castiel, loves his bachelor lifestyle and has no plans to settle down.

The dimmest of smiles, building and teasing twitches in his expression, but his memory decides to show up for the internal discussion and remind him of the newest development on the subject of Dean. After weeks, Dean has finally affected Cas’ flippant cease and desist order.

This realization takes every snippet of building hope and squashes it into dust. Surely, after all those denials and refusals—he can’t very well reneg on his position, can he?

“Ugh,” he groans, slipping his fingers into his wet hair and scratching out of frustration. Droplets of water are shaken loose, landing silently around him.

Unless, he considers, Dean asks me out again. Then, he could say yes.

But only if Dean asks.

Thoughts in a hurricane, Castiel methodically dresses in a pair of jeans and loose white button-up.

“Right, what was I doing?” he asks out loud. Squinting around the room, his brain highlighting memories of Dean in the background, he finally glances down at his clothes. “Yes, laundry. Chores…”

He flattens his lips, eyeing the still-broken closet.

Thing is, he actually does hate laundry. After a thoughtful chew at his lip, Castiel treks purposefully down the hall to head outside. Maybe he’ll check out the crumbling shed in the back of the property, or maybe pick up the dozens of pinecones off the front lawn.
He stops in the bathroom on his way out to brush his teeth, and focuses on his reflection. He’s kept his facial hair trimmed, and recently had a haircut, but he doesn’t look the same as he did in NYC.

Even with a toothbrush hanging from his mouth, Castiel somehow manages to grimace at his reflection. His life suddenly feels out of whack. Though nothing has exactly changed since he woke up. He’s angry, confused, and thoroughly vexed when he finally spits into the sink and marches down the hall and out the door, slamming it behind him.

Utter quiet strikes him and he stops cold before he hits the steps and looks around. It’s the way weather feels before a storm, but there are no thick clouds overhead, only a thin sheet of grey. Somewhere far to the right, he can just barely make out the sound of the water hitting the shoreline. The oceanic breeze brushes softly against his skin.

Glancing down the street over to the next corner, to the street perpendicular with his, he stares at the two-story home he walked by on his first day—the one with all the toys.

Nothing bad ever happens here; people live each and every day without worry or fear. For the most part, everything appears to be under control.

Raphael has been out for over a month, and yet, Cas hasn’t heard a single whisper. Perhaps he’d been too quick to judge the FBI’s skillset. They do have an abundance of resources, not to mention layers of security.

Castiel’s been here since the beginning of June. It’s now the end of summer and he’s been safe. No one knows who he is, and though Sam knows he’s not “Jimmy Novak” the Pamlico DA hasn’t guessed who he could be.

No one here has been affected by his cruel, dark past.

Well... that’s not entirely true, is it? Both Winchesters have been impacted in some form by his lies. But for whatever ridiculous reason, they’re still his friends. Jesus… he has friends. And a house… A legitimate job! Plus, he hasn’t been in a fight in months (the incident at the bar resolutely not considered a fight by his definition).

The glaring contrast of his former life and his fabricated one comes to a head. This is the tease of normalcy in all its glory. And it’s looking as if it will last, that nothing will intervene to tamper with whatever sort of life he might want to build here.

Jesus Christ… is he actually facing an honest-to-God, miraculously-given second chance? Not that he deserves it, but he’s selfish enough to want it.

Am I free?

The concept hits him like a breath of oxygen he’s been starved of. A weird unexplainable, ragged panic rips through him. Castiel starts to heave for air in rapid succession. The soft flowing breeze around him slows in contrast, and he feels lightheaded, lungs continuing to expand and contract with no discernible pace.

Am I really out for good?

He raises a shaky hand to his chest and clutches it. The thought of letting his guard down is wholly terrifying…

Because that would be the cruel joke of the universe, wouldn’t it. All those years of suffering, he manages to find solace and the goddamn moment he decides to take a real step towards a new life—
the tainted past would rise up, like some beast from the depths of Hell, all fingers and talons clawing
to drag him back into the underworld.

It would be no less than he deserves.

For the first time in… years, the sting of tears well in his eyes. An accompanying tightness grips his
throat. In a flood of horror, his previous life roars back in protest. As if in trying to suppress it, trying
to bury the beast, he created the ultimate backlash.

The vacant street, pine-needle covered lawn, and lopsided tree all fade out to make way for the
aggravated memories.

Jolted back in time, he sees the sharp cut of his father’s knuckles rushing towards his face. Then a
crunch, and pain. Castiel hears the distant replay of his own voice—a gravelly, weak plea.

In the next flash, another fist sails through air, but this time it’s his own… and it lands squarely on the
target of a too-square jaw. Castiel doesn’t even remember why or who.

Doesn’t matter, he supposes. The floodgates have opened, carrying along the trail of debris he left
throughout his life. There’s no way to sift between atrocities. He watches in his mind’s eye the shift
between the crippling fear of his father, the remembered sensation of blood running down his chin
and a stinging lip, and then anger. The kind of anger that hardens a soul, and manipulates fear into
aggression.

With bitter distaste, he remembers how effective he was at trading fear for violence.

Making sure everyone’s toes stayed in line, all so he could keep the heat off him. Because that’s how
it was—you either did what you were told or you were taught a lesson. Reminded of the mission and
what happened if you deviated.

Swaying on his feet, Castiel remembers the habitual throb of a used fist the way a normal person
recalls locking their door. It happened so often; one hit bleeding to the next.

Fighting wasn’t even the worst of it. Hell, that was lunch hour.

Once, the first time he was asked, he’d refused to assist his uncle with a former “employee” who was
abruptly “fired”. There’d been pools of blood coursing along tile-grout lines to a convenient floor
drain, a hacksaw nearby, and the former employee laid out on stainless steel.

“Alright, Castiel,” said Raphael, “cut him up and bag ’im.”

When Castiel softly refused, his uncle effected a cold, calculating expression and left the room in
silence… only to return minutes later with one of the maids. The poor woman knew who they were,
there was no doubt about that. But it was painfully clear the job had never been a choice for her.

As if he were about to slice off cold-cuts for a sandwich, Castiel’s uncle raised the serrated hacksaw
to her throat and gripped the bun on her head with meaty, bloody fingers. He yanked, forcing the
woman to her toes. The maid struggled in silence, like even with death on the horizon, she didn’t
dare act out more than innate fear let her.

“You help me with this little problem, Castiel, or you’ll be dealing with two by yourself. And don’t
think Michael won’t hear about it.”

Swallowing, his jaw tight, Castiel nodded in reluctant acquiescence. If he didn’t, the kind woman
would be killed, and Castiel would suffer at the hands of his father and in the end… the man ripped
to shreds on the table would still be dead. What did it truly matter if Castiel did or did not dispose of him? Whoever this man was, it didn’t matter; he was already dead.

The tide of memories slide out of focus and Castiel faces a renewed sense of horror about who he was. God, how could he ever expect to escape such a past? How could he even think of touching Dean with hands that have…

“I should leave,” he announces to his front yard. Right now. Pull out the tracker on his phone, let Roya know he’ll be in court whenever he’s needed, but otherwise be completely inaccessible. He could pay Dean a fair price for one of the cars in the shop that are simply sitting around and take off. Drive towards nothing, letting the road lead him away. Shack up in an abandoned cabin in the woods and live out his remaining days. In the absolute isolation he deserves.

Sure, Dean will miss him at first. Castiel is well-versed in reading people—it aided his former job—and he knows deep down Dean likes him more than he lets on. Though who the hell knows why.

But time lessens everything (or so he hopes). Dean would be far better off, and Sam would be relieved. The notion of abandoning the town gains such traction that Castiel turns back towards the house, all his intentions of walking down the hall, dragging his sorry suitcase out from the back of the closet and ramming as much of his possessions into it as he can.

Instead he stops… face-to-face with the chipped, dandelion-yellow door. Absently, mind askew, he raises his hand to it. With a short nail, he flicks at an annoying curl of paint.

A large section flakes off and lands on the porch.

Beneath the yellow, hilariously enough, is a brighter shade of yellow. More lemony yellow, with slightly less of an orange hue.

Momentarily deranged, Castiel scrapes at the flakes of paint a little more. He scratches and scratches, his body shifting closer. Fixated on the ever growing patch of lemon yellow, he digs and claws at it. Paint chips get stuck under his nails, but he keeps going.

God, he can’t stand this fucking door. He can’t fucking take it...
Fun and Games

“What are you doing?”

Startled, Cas spins around—fists tight and ready—to find Dean quizzically staring up at him, freckled features marked with worry. The oddest part of the picture is the toddler in Dean’s arm, bolstered on the side of his hip.

Castiel ignores Dean’s first question. Saying ‘I don’t know, I’m insane’ isn’t the kind of thing he’s willing to admit out loud. “Who’s the child?”

Smiling at the kid, Dean replies casually, “Oh this little nugget is Cara and she lives right up the road. Don’t’ya sweetie?” The girl burrows shyly into Dean’s chest, and Dean continues, “I was visiting Cara’s mom who happens to be a very good friend of mine, Charlie—pretty sure I’ve mentioned her before. Anyway, me and Cara were outside playing and I look over and there you are, scratching at that—” Dean spares a glance at the kid, skips over a curse and finishes his sentence, “—door.”

“I don’t like the door,” Castiel states rationally.

“Yeah, but there’s this awesome invention called paint-stripper. Or a power washer for that matter. A scraper, even, would’ve been a mighty better choice than your nail.” Watching Cas closely, Dean’s features gradually stiffen and the wheels turning in his mind show in the crease between his brows. “Come for a walk with us.”

Castiel feels unnerved. He looks at Dean, staring into his unique green eyes—realizing how much he relies on the undeserved kindness in them to get him through the day.

His breath hitches, and he fights back a tidal wave of sudden emotion. “Okay,” he squeaks out, his voice sounding nothing like a man who once piecemealed a body.

Moving stiffly, Castiel steps down off the porch on weak legs and tags along beside Dean as the mechanic leads them down the street. Cas says nothing, but Dean shares something of a conversation with the young girl. She’s a beautiful child, red hair with blonde highlights and hazel eyes. Like Dean, she has freckles dusted across the bridge of her nose and her cheeks.

It makes Cas wonder.

They approach the house with the toys. “That’s little Miss Cara’s home,” mentions Dean. And sure enough, Dean’s sleek car is parked in the driveway. But instead of stopping, they continue walking down Greenborough. The road slopes for a block, the houses becoming more cottagey with their shutters and soft colours, spaced tighter together.

Dean spares a glance his way, clearly wondering what the hell is wrong with him. “Hey Cara, this is my friend Jimmy.”

She waves a little, eyeing him with an inquisitive gleam in her eye. “Hi Cara,” he says, finding his voice.

“Uncle Dean likes you.”

Dean smirks a little but doesn’t say a word to that. Cas smiles at the girl. “Does he? Did he tell you that?”
“Yeah, he talks lots,” she sighs as if exhausted, “and lots!”

Both Dean and Cas snort a chuckle at her tone.

At the end of the road, they go to the right where there’s a small park facing out over the water. Cas never knew it existed. It’s beautiful and welcoming. Reaching the plastic playground, Dean sets her down and she starts to play without guidance.

Keeping his eyes on Cara, Dean asks, “What’s going on, man?”

“Oh,” he lies. His heart has resumed its normal rhythm, but he’s thought process is muddy and disjointed.

“Liar.” Dean flashes him a grin. “It’s fine… I won’t bug ya. I just hate—Cara!” Dean jogs around the playground to the girl’s shrieks. Dean jogs around the playground to the girl’s shrieks… only to find the perpetrator is a spider. A minute later, Dean returns to his side.

Before Dean says anything else, Cas wonders about his earlier thought and blurts out his question without thinking. “Is she yours?”

Jaw clenched, Dean throws him a look from the corner of his eye and dips his head to the side. “Not really.”

“Biologically?”

Dean makes a face, and though it’s noncommittal, Cas knows it for a yes. He wonders if Dean will elaborate. They stand side-by-side in silence for several minutes, listening to the sound of the water, and birds, and Cara as she races to each new contraption.

Exhaling in a long sigh, Dean starts to speak, “I’m pretty well best friends with Charlie. You probably haven’t seen her yet; she’s a bit of a homebody, always writing these crazy sci-fi novels. You already know her wife, Jo. The two of them have been together pretty well since high school. Anyway, after a long bunch of years they decided they wanted kids, or at least a kid, but thing is, Charlie doesn’t make a whole ton of money and Jo’s a supply teacher over at the school when she’s not at the Cabin. Both jobs pay shit…”

Dropping his head back, Dean closes his eyes to the sunless sky and seems lost in his own history. Castiel feels guilty listening, knowing he hasn’t shared any of his.

Even so, Dean continues, “We were at their place, drinking, talking shit like we always do and… God, I don’t even know how it came up. But one of them, Jo I think, got all sad about the kids thing, and I kind of joked—you know the way I am—and offered up my stellar services. They laughed, I laughed. But then Charlie went all serious and said, ‘You and Jo do kind of look alike’. Fuck, I don’t even know how we went from that conversation to…” Dean goes quiet, watches Cara for a moment and then resumes, “Anyway, after some extremely awkward situations, and some nine months later, Cara was born. Seven pounds, three ounces.”

He has no idea what to say after all that. “She doesn’t know?” Cas wonders, gesturing to the girl currently sliding down the yellow plastic slide.

Dean shakes his head. “Why should she? She has two great moms and that’s all she needs. If they decide to tell her when she’s old enough, I’m cool with that, but it’s their call not mine.”

The conversation seems to make Dean uncomfortable, given the way he’s shifting his weight from side to side, his gaze restless. Cas wonders how many people he’s told about Cara’s paternity.
“Do you want kids of your own?”

Dean snorts and pulls a face. “Me? A father figure? *Please.*”

“I think you’d make a great father.”

Pursing his lips in disbelief, Dean says nothing and walks over to Cara and picks her up in one easy motion. “C’mon nugget, let’s get you home.”

On the walk back, Cara breathlessly relays the story about the spider that landed on her leg and Dean listens in rapture, his face animated. When they reach the low gate of the house with the toys, Dean walks through and drops Cara to her feet, letting her race up the walkway to the white-painted porch that stretches the length of the house. A redhead Cas hasn’t seen before, but can only be Charlie, opens up the door and smiles at them. Cara wraps herself around her mother’s leg and they can hear her retelling the story of the spider once more. Dean laughs low to himself and Cas can’t stop stealing glances at him.

They reach the bottom stair where Dean introduces him.

“Hi Jimmy, I’m Charlie—Dean’s spectacular bestest best friend. Sorry I haven’t met you yet but I pretty much never leave the house—what with writing, and the kid, and my god—*sleep!*” She laughs, and ushers Cara inside. “I hear Dean’s been annoying… as he usually is.”

Dean cuts in, “Shows how out of the loop you are, *Nerd,* I’ve stepped back… taken the high road, become the perfectly controlled gentleman you never thought I could.”

“Uh-huh,” she mutters in suspicion.

“Hey now, when do I ever lie? Tell her, man—I’ve been a fucking saint.”

Cas backs him up. “He’s right. All week… he’s-he hasn’t hit on me once.” And it hurts so much more than he expected.

“Holy Bananas Dean, what are you in love with him?”

Dean growls and bows his head. “Charlie!”

“Well Jesus Dean, anyone who gets you to rein yourself in has got to be someone special. Which means—Jimmy, you’re totally coming for dinner tonight.”

“Um,” he starts to protest, “actually, I don’t think I should—I mean I have a lot—“

“—You have nothing to do. Be here at five,” she cuts out.

Glancing to his right, he sees Dean with his lips pressed tight together, trying to hold back a smile, but his cheeks and neck are red. “Just say yes or she’ll run you down and wrestle you into submission, and no I’m not joking. It’s always best just to agree with her.”

“Ha! I’d love it if you told Jo that.”

“Are you kidding me?” Dean stares back at his friend. “I’m more afraid of her than I am of you.”

“Man, for being so short she is pretty damn terrifying,” Charlie agrees. “Anyway, I’ll see you both at five, be here and be queer.”

Cas laughs despite himself. Dean throws him a funny look, as if Cas laughing is something unheard
of. Charlie disappears back into the house and Dean says, “I’ll walk you home.”

He should say no, he vaguely remembers his earlier freak out. But with Dean… he fails. “Okay.”

They walk back in silence, and it doesn’t take long. It’s almost noon and the winds have picked up again. There’s just enough cool air on the breeze that outside work might be tolerable.

When they reach the path that crosses over his lawn, he stops. Dean faces him and searches his features for clues of what’s going on with him. Cas isn’t sure what he’s keeping hidden, and what he isn’t.

“Please talk to me,” Dean’s tone is rough, and he leans in—stops just as he’s about to lay his hands on Cas’ shoulders.

_I’m a criminal, I’m evil, I deserve to suffer penance for my sins._ “I’m confused.”

In a quick reaction, Dean’s eyes widen—not having expected him to answer with any sort of honesty. Dean clears his expression and treads carefully. “Okay, explain why you’re confused in whatever vague way you can. I’m here… I’m listening.”

He huffs, and wishes Dean were touching him. “I don’t know who I am,” he admits, the emotions rolling in him. The words fall out, “I don’t know what I should fear and what’s irrational. What is it that I deserve, Dean? Do you know? I don’t. Am I-am I worthy of a second chance? What do I do? Tell me, please… because I can’t make sense of things anymore. I used to be so clear-headed, so focused. And now, with you, and this place… I’m—”

Castiel takes a long, uneven breath and looks Dean in the eyes. Staring back, Dean seems unsure of how to handle the sudden onslaught of Cas’ burst of truth. And it probably sounds crazy, he feels a little crazy.

Without uttering a word, Dean steps forward and pulls him into a hug, strong arms wrapping tight around his shoulders. “Hey,” Dean says soothingly, rubbing Cas’ back, “it’s fine, everything’s fine… we’ll figure it out.”

Feeling his chest hitch with each inhale, Cas clamps his teeth together and hugs Dean back—circling Dean’s middle and squeezing hard. He sags into the cushion of Dean’s chest, and lowers his face on Dean’s shoulder. Taking deep breaths, he tries to comfort himself with Dean’s unique scent, filling his lungs with it.

Not once in his entire life has anyone hugged him this way, perhaps at all, and he wants to cry. In a low, calm voice, Dean starts to talk to him and he never imagined a voice could be so soothing. “You gotta stop thinking for a bit, okay, you gotta stop worrying. All this fear, no matter what it’s about, you can’t keep it up, man… it does nothing. Trust me. Whether or not you fear something, it ain’t gonna change whether or not something bad’s gonna happen—it will or it won’t and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it.”

Dean continues to hold him tight, stroking the length of his spine and occasionally threading his fingers into Cas’ hair. “Look, I don’t know where you were before you came here, or who you were, and I don’t care. Since I’ve known you, all I see are good things. And sure, you seem kind of lost but that’ll figure itself out if you let it. You need to stop worrying, okay, stop wondering what’s right and wrong, or what you deserve or whatever that bullshit is and just be whoever you want to be and forget everything else—it doesn’t matter. Take it all one day at a time.”

Fuck, Dean is far too nice, too forgiving. He doesn’t understand. Maybe Cas should enlighten him a little. “If you knew who I was, or what I’ve done, you’d leave and never speak to me again.”
“Try me.”

He fights the ongoing battle of wanting Dean to hear the truth, but knowing that if he told it... he would lose him. “I can’t,” he says, his voice breaking. The tears are wavering on the sidelines, ready to fall.

“Hey, okay, it’s fine. You don’t—I wasn’t trying to pressure you.” Dean steps back and presses his hands against either side of Cas’ face. “Don’t leave. Promise me you’re not going anywhere.”

He stands still, a bit numb. Finally, he replies, “I don’t know what to do, but I won’t leave.”

Not yet.

“Promise?” Dean’s eyes sparkle a little, his thumbs rub gently across Cas’ cheeks.

Castiel manages to nod, and decides he needs to go back inside and be alone for a while. “I’ll come to dinner.”

“Good. Don’t make me have to come and find you—’cause I will.”

A gentle smile curves his mouth, but Cas knows it must seem forced. “Okay.”

After Dean leaves, Cas forgets all about the chores he was going to do, he can’t think clearly anymore. He walks back into the house, into the bathroom, strips, and drops into the tub with the shower cranked as hot as he can tolerate.

He lies in the swell of mustard-colored ceramic and lets the piping hot water pelt down on him. At some point, he starts to cry in earnest. He doesn’t really know why—probably over a lot of things—but the force of it seems to represent all the times he hasn’t cried over the last fifteen years.

The sobs wrench through his chest as if they’re being torn unwillingly from a cage. He cries so hard it hurts, and the pain streaks across his ribcage and he winds up curling in to brace himself.

Not much helps, and after a very long while, after the water has gone cool, he sluggishly rises out of the tub, legs shaking, breaths wildly ragged and finds his way across the hall.

He buries himself under the covers and passes out.

***

“… Said I would come find you.”

The low voice is familiar, gruff and commanding. Castiel’s eyes flutter open and he sees Raphael leaning over him.

No!

He tries to leap up in a panic but his tall, strong uncle bears down on him, both of them grunting in a sudden struggle. Raphael’s sharp features are twisted into a cruel sneer as he straddles Cas, trapping his legs and arms beneath the blankets.

The family enforcer starts to hammer Castiel in the face with a steady, practiced fist.

Each blow stuns him, and he feels as if his head is about to explode. His vision swims and fades.

“You fucking rat! You goddamn fucking rat!” The chant rings around his ears. Another punch crunches against his nose and blood rushes out over his lip and cheeks. He coughs, but that only
makes it worse and spikes the pain.

Trying hard to fight back, Castiel works his legs around, ramming his feet into the mattress.

“Oh, don’t bother.” The beating comes to a halt and Cas opens up his swollen eyes to see a small silver revolver—Raphael’s favourite piece—trained on him.

“I’m your nephew,” he croaks. And who would’ve thought he would beg. But he does, because he can’t bear the idea of never seeing Dean again. It hurts worse than every fight he’s ever been in. The circular barrel is rammed against his already swollen cheek and he hisses from the sharp flash of agony. “You’re nothing… Rat.”

Raphael pulls the trigger.

***

Heart-racing, Castiel bolts up in bed gasping for air. “Fuck!” In a mild panic, he throws the blankets off. He can’t stand the suffocation of them, and he draws his knees up and hangs his head between his thighs.

God, he’s fucking losing it. He’s really losing it.

And the worst part of that horrific nightmare? Thinking he would never see Dean again. Fucking Christ, he’s—No. Cas stops the thought in it’s tracks. It’s a stupid thing to think. He’s never felt that way about anyone. He’s never even really cared for anyone so that’s all this is. He just cares for Dean a lot. He can admit that, he can admit that it hasn’t been about simple attraction for weeks.

He really, really cares about Dean.

A quiet knock kicks off his adrenaline again and his head darts up… but it’s only Dean. Standing inside his bedroom doorway. With staid awareness, he realizes he’s naked and drenched with sweat, or perhaps still wet from the shower. What time is it?

“Are you—“

Cas cuts him off, “Please, just be the Dean I first met. Say something crude or leading about my being naked and then get out and let me get dressed... and we’ll go for dinner.” He pauses, tilting his head in thought. “Unless it’s too late? Did I miss dinner?”

Dean shakes his head in confusion and stumbles to reply. “Uh, no, not really. It’s only a little after five now… and I figured I’d come check on you, and you were…” Slamming his mouth shut, Dean resets his stance and abruptly plasters a fake smile to his mug. “Since you’re naked then… should I just climb on and we’ll go at it?” The words are there, but Dean’s trademark gleam and mischief are not.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Castiel doesn’t reply but stares into space. Dean gives a curt nod and retreats back to the living room.

Slowly, his entire body sore and hands shaky, Castiel gets ready. He doesn’t bother to look at himself in the bathroom mirror. After a nightmare like that and a fucking sobfest in the tub like some psychopath, he knows he doesn’t look good.

***
By the time dinner is underway, he’s managed to recover, marginally. Everything he didn’t think he could handle hours ago, seems easier all of a sudden. His soul feels a little more at ease. He doesn’t want to admit that the crying may have helped, but he doesn’t see what else it could’ve been. Definitely not the nightmare, that’s for damn sure.

Staring at his plate, he smiles at the generous portions of roast ham, scalloped potatoes and steamed carrots. Breathing in the flavours of butter and garlic, he offers an earnest thanks to the two cooks.

Jo snorts, whereas Charlie hangs her head. It’s the blonde who explains, “The day Charlie puts together a homemade meal like this, I’ll sprout a cucumber from my head.”

“Hey!” the redhead retorts, “I can cook!”

The writer’s wife rolls her eyes. “You can pour cereal, and heat up frozen ready-made meals, Babe, but that’s about it. Don’t worry… I still love you. But just remember who feeds you the good stuff next time I come home smelling like ‘gross disgusting beer’,” the blonde air-quotes, indicating a past argument of some kind.

Charlie pointedly avoids the topic and turns to Castiel, to her known as Jimmy. “So,” she says ominously, “you’re the one.”

Dean bursts into a laugh, immediately admonishing her, “Don’t start that again.”

“Start what?” Cas wonders, staring between all three of them as they trade knowledgeable looks. Cara, meanwhile, is pushing her food around on her plate with a baby-blue coloured plastic spoon. There’s a face on the very top of the spoon, some cartoon character Cas has no idea about.

It’s Jo who offers an explanation. “These two—”

“—Oh,” Dean interrupts, his tone snarky, “‘Cause you never join in!”

She smiles the way Dean often smiles, with the hint of a smirk. “Okay, fine! As I was saying…” she turns back to Castiel, “We, sometimes, do this thing where we try to have entire conversations using only lines from movies or shows. That hot redhead over there”—she thumbs at her wife—“was quoting Top Gun.”

Cas never had time for, nor cared to make time for, watching movies. But he’s pretty certain Tom Cruise was in it, he’s caught glimpses of posters and snippets on TV over the year’s. “I’m afraid I’d be very bad at this game.”

Dean snickers beside him and smiles alongside a gesture that implies he, too, agrees Cas would be bad at this.

But that doesn’t stop the rest of them. When Charlie repeats her quote, Dean looks back at her with a cocky shit-eating grin, and in an accented voice says, “I’m going to make him an offer he can’t refuse.”

Jo laughs in a bark. “And the response: Get your stinking paws off me, you damned dirty ape!”

More laughter ensues, and Castiel is quite sure much of their antics are at the expense of his and Dean’s offbeat relationship, err… friendship.

But it’s extremely enjoyable, and he’s having a wonderful time, even if he feels slightly outside of it all. Watching them move through life from behind two-way glass, if you will.
When their game stutters to an inevitable end, the two women ask him questions, but each one seems cautious and safe, and he realizes Dean must’ve coached them about what they shouldn’t ask. The former criminal doesn’t know whether to be thankful or feel profoundly guilty, bordering on traitorous. Some strange man enters their house, hangs around their daughter and all the know about him is that their friend likes him and he has an incredibly shady background.

How could anyone be so welcoming? So trusting! Do they not have any regard for the inherent dangers of the world they live in?

They continue to play games after everything is cleaned up, but board games that Cas actually understands. One particular game—Settlers of Catan—he wins with a stunning victory. Around seven-thirty Dean puts Cara to bed by singing to her, the smoky reverberations of a well-practiced song reaching down the staircase to where Cas waits in the living room. After a few more games and a couple drinks, Dean says his goodbyes and Cas thanks them profusely for an incredibly wonderful meal and evening, and thanks them for being kind and generous. He must be overdoing it, because Dean is trying to hide a teasing smile as he drags Castiel out the door.

It’s dark when they leave the house to quietly meander back to Cas’ place, even though Dean’s car remains in Charlie’s driveway. At the porch steps, Cas peers down at Dean from the first step—for once being taller. “You’re the first real friend I’ve ever had,” he says in awe.

Dean licks his lips, shrugging. “That’s okay.” The man knows Cas regards the admission as some internal flaw, like there’s something categorically wrong with him for never having had any real relationships in his life.

“It’s pathetic.”

“Man, I’ve never had a relationship last longer than a week.” Dean admits, trying to cheer him up.

Castiel snorts softly. “Neither have I.”

They smile simultaneously, and suddenly his chaotic life seems less daunting. Whatever palpable weight has been on his shoulders feels buoyed. But Dean has often had that effect on him. Still, it’s been a long, strange day teeming with mixed emotions and Castiel is ready to let Dean go for the night.

“I’ll see you sometime this week?”

Dean nods, his mouth curved in a soft smile. “Definitely.”

“Good night, Dean.”

“Night.”
Whatever reckless idiocy Castiel managed to avoid as a teenager in New York has apparently tracked him down in his thirties.

He’s a mess; ripe with drama and yearning for something he shouldn’t. It’s annoyingly childish, and yet he can’t control it. With Dean changing gears and withdrawing his flirtatious schemes, Cas is left irritable and feeling as if his more violent emotions are on a hair-trigger. The smallest things set him off and he’s got half a mind to scream at the next person he sees for no logical reason.

Boiling it down to the truth, he’s acutely pained by the retreat of Dean’s advances—not that he has any right to be. Christ, he never realized how the daily offer of affection—however brash—uplifted his spirits. All of the blackness in him, the sidelined anger, is swarming back in.

Moving to the stove, Castiel glances down into the steaming pot to find his soup furiously boiling, no doubt some of it stuck to the bottom now. Picking up a wooden spoon he stirs while flipping off the burner, scraping at the crud of congealed soup.

Pouring half into a bowl, he then walks to the living room and sits on the futon and begins to eat the burning, unsatisfying meal of Campbell's minestrone soup.

“Yum,” he mumbles sarcastically, staring unhappily at his lunch.

He works later tonight, but wishes he didn’t. His current mood reminds him of an overloaded truck with ratty straps holding everything together, primed to fray apart and send a slew of debris flying out onto the highway. Probably not ideal before bartending.

As he’s washing the bowl several minutes later, then filling the used pot with soapy water to sit, a knock takes him by surprise. He didn’t hear a car pull up…

Whatever childish temper he’d been harbouring moments ago vanishes to make room for his lethal proclivities. Castiel quietly pulls out the top drawer next to the stove and removes the biggest knife he owns, flipping it into his fist, his thumb pressed along the top of the handle for stability.

He’s cautiously slow as he opens the door. Though all his banked energy deflates when he catches sight of Dean lounging against the far side of the porch railing—black-painted metal barely secured to the wall.

“What are you doing here?” Castiel does not appreciate unexpected visits, and it carries in his voice.

“Nice to see you too,” replies Dean, smiling.

Cas glowers at him. “**Dean.**”

The mechanic rolls his eyes but rambles away, “Had a bit of free time, thought I’d swing by and fix those closet doors you were ranting about a few days ago.” To support his excuse, Dean kicks the bag of tools with his heel sitting on the concrete behind him. He’s wearing his usual boots, a pair of ratty jeans, and a plaid shirt that showcases a mix of blues and purples.

“Oh.” Cas is very aware of the knife gripped in his fist, though it’s been out of sight—held just inside the front wall of the house. “Thank you… you don’t have to do that.”

“S’all good. I was bored anyway thought I’d come check on ya.”
Right. Because last time they saw each other, Castiel had been flashing his fears and insecurities in a decidedly psychotic episode. “I’m better, thank you.”

“Good.” A grin flashes across Dean’s face, forming his own conclusion that Castiel is not better, and he reaches down and picks up the same sturdy canvas bag he had with him on the first day. “Anything else need fixin’ around here?” asks Dean, brushing Cas’ chest as he steps inside.

My mind. Cas forces a smile for his friend. “Everything. But I suppose you can’t fix ugly with a screwdriver?”

Dean chuckles, rounding to face him. The twitch of something familiar teases his mouth, but whatever line Dean might’ve said without reserve before, is now an awkward and tense silence. Dean swallows in place of it. “Nah, you’re stuck with the lovely shack-chic of the seventies. Sorry ‘bout that.”

“It’s fine.” It’s not. However, his dejection is not solely in reference to his opinions of the house.

Breaching the gap of their insecure exchange, Dean plants a solid hand on his shoulder and meets his eyes. “I’ll get working on the doors in your room and uh…” Dean’s fixed stare falls low and he tentatively adds, “and maybe you wouldn’t mind putting the knife away?”

Fear of exposure widens Castiel’s eyes, and his teeth press together uncomfortably. He nods and steps out of Dean’s grasp, deciding not to offer any lame excuse for silently gripping onto a giant knife for no apparent reason. It’s clear to Dean he’s not cooking, so that excuse is out. In fact, since he’s been relocated from New York, Castiel has fallen into the ease and simplicity of canned, frozen, microwavable foods. Of all the time he’s been here, he’s not actually positive he’s used the knife once.

While he’s robotically lowering the knife back into the drawer, he listens to the sounds of Dean working in his bedroom. It makes his blood hot, thinking of Dean in his room. And not out of arousal, as might be expected, but unjustified indignation.

Castiel doesn’t want to revert back to the violent person he used to be, he truly doesn't. He’d always assumed he became that way out of necessity, but now he wonders whether it’s interwoven itself into the underpinnings of his personality. They say your past defines you, and in this case, it proves to be true.

The injustice he feels, however undeserved, makes him want to throttle Dean and scream, Why can’t I have you?! Why have you given up on me?!

In an attempt to distract himself from the tightness of his shoulders, the howls of bias in his mind, he moves down the hall to his room and silently watches Dean remove the tracks—the sliding doors already taken off and propped against the far wall.

Over the clicks, subtle pops, and occasional whir of a drill, there are no other sounds. Castiel would kill for the ambiance of a busy metropolis right that moment. Because without it, he can only focus on how badly he wants Dean to hit on him, and for that matter, wants Dean to be under him.

For whatever absurd reason, the provocative teasing had become the stone against which he’d grinded his surlier half. Without it, he’s feels too rough, perpetually on the brink of violence.

“Ah!” Dean praises, “There we go.” The top track comes loose from the wood trim and Dean stands it up outside the closet and finally turns around. “So, some bad news… I couldn’t adjust it because the track is so damn old the plastic guides that slip inside are busted to shit. Meaning… no closet
doors until I can take a drive out of town to Lowe’s.”

Castiel makes a snap decision to test Dean’s “gentlemanly” decision. “Hmm, you can’t just… screw it in harder?”

If Dean notices the beguiling tone in his voice, the man doesn’t react. “No, it’s not the screws holding the track to the frame that are causing the issue, it’s these pieces of shit little plastic assholes. Man, nothing is made to last anymore,” rants Dean, his fingers pinching one said plastic piece and glaring at it.

Huffing from his failed attempt, Castiel searches for another angle. There isn’t one, but it’s highly possible he sucks at this. “That’s not a problem. I don’t need a closet door.”

This evokes an amused huff from Dean. “I suppose you don’t.”

It’s a lame joke, and they laugh awkwardly, mindful of the glaring intimacy of their last interaction. Selfishly wanting Dean to stay—as he craves the return of that closeness, Castiel racks his brain for anything in the house the mechanic could possibly tweak with. And then, he remembers his displeasing experiences in the shower. Also, having Dean work on the shower might offer some other opportunities for being flirtatious. Showers, nakedness, being wet—there has to be something there.

“Um, if you do have some extra time,” Cas begins, “would you mind taking a look at the shower head? The pressure is very inconsistent… It makes it hard to enjoy myself while I’m in there… showering, of course.” Castiel tilts his head, raising his brows as indication. Is that over the top? He’s not sure. Should he say anything else? Cease, you idiot!

Dean scratches his ear. “Sure, uh, yeah definitely… I can, uh, take a look at that.” Clearing his throat, Dean beelines down the hall and cuts into the small room.

Inside the cramped mustardy bathroom, Dean steps inside the shower in barefeet and inspects the hardware. The mechanic sighs. “Jesus… this thing looks broken in about eight different ways.”

Cas doesn’t hesitate. “Do you think it’s because the water is hard?”

Turning his head, Dean blinks at him. “No.” Unfortunately, Dean’s tone implies he’s questioning Cas’ sanity. Christ, how is Castiel this terrible at flirting?

“Maybe it’s just… dirty?” he tries again.

This time, Dean doesn’t miss the insinuation, but doesn’t seem inclined to pander to it either. “Maybe you should clean it then.”

“I tried,” he answers through a tight smile. “It’s very hard to clean…”

The gorgeous handyman standing in his tub meets his heated gaze and throws back a hard stare. “Yeah… uh, I should take off.”

Castiel stands mute and irritated as Dean steps out of the tub, brushes by him, and makes his way to the front door. Before Dean has a chance to run off, Castiel leaves the bathroom with purpose.

“Are you working at the bar tonight?” he asks, aware of the higher pitch in his voice. Why is he so eager all of a sudden? Christ, he’s growing desperate.

Dean doesn’t turn back but offers a simple, “Yup, see ya later,” before he disappears beyond the
yellow and into the afternoon.

***

That evening, Castiel tries to taunt Dean however he can, knowing he’s only doing it because he’s angry for no good reason. But he’s beyond chastising himself for acting this way. When he moves inside the narrow space behind the bar throughout the night, he’s sure to make as much contact with Dean as he can. If there’s something he needs on the lower bar in front of the other man, he doesn’t wait for him to move, but reaches around. Castiel’s forearm slides against Dean’s jean-clad hips, his chest pushing against Dean’s back.

Capitalizing on the proximity, he satisfies previously off-limit urges, such as breathing in Dean’s unique masculine scent. Musky deodorant, mixed with booze and the soft undertone of a mechanic’s scent that never seems to go away.

It’s also clear, by the tight set of Dean’s mouth, he knows exactly what Cas is doing. But still, still, he’s maintaining this reserved, stoic gentleman BS.

Why?!

Castiel can’t understand Dean. One moment he wants Cas, is relentless in his pursuit. But then… after weeks of Cas’ steady rejection Dean decides to call it quits. That part Castiel understands, it makes sense. But now, seeing as he’s being pretty damn obvious in what he wants, why hasn’t Dean started back up again?

In his distraction, Castiel accidentally over-pours a beer. The malt liquid floods the rubber mat below the tap and trickles over the lacquered wooden edge. Dean appears at his side, pushing his hand off the lever and stopping the fountain of PBR.

In a quiet whisper, Dean demands, “Seriously, what’s with you today? You’re all over the fucking chart!”

Picking up a foam knife, Castiel slices off the white dome on the beer and places it on the counter to the strange look of his customer. Castiel shrinks his posture towards Dean, a gesture of need he can’t deny. “Nothing,” he replies on a sigh, giving up whatever game he’d been playing.

It’s not fair, he knows that. And it wouldn’t do their friendship any favours for him to act like a petulant teenager. Besides, if he legitimately wants something more from Dean, he needs to be clear about it. Christ, one of these days, Castiel is going to need to get his shit together.

“Not today,” he murmurs.

Dean leans in. “Sorry, what was that?”

Shaking his head, Cas returns to work feeling inanimate.

Dean doesn’t pester him further, but instead offers a quick rub on his back here and there, throughout the night. Silent looks are exchanged between orders.

***

Two more days of forced platonic interaction needles at Cas. He’s getting closer to a decision with each hour gone by. Probably a stupid decision based on the direction of his thoughts but he’s irritable enough to ignore the fog-horn warning signs in his mind. It amounts to a very quiet work shift that night, both of them withdrawn—their minds too busy to make room for a conversation.
Dean still doesn’t comment on it, but occasionally drops a hand on Castiel’s shoulder in the midst of him conversing with a regular and the touch grounds him. It may not be a line, or a come on, but it does something to lessen the pointless fury that’s been loitering in him.

He has a sense now, that Dean’s been keeping at bay for his own reasons. Cas doesn’t ask about it. Though he has a feeling whatever wall they’re trying to build between them is thin and poorly constructed.

Near one in the morning, he’s tired and Dean appears the same. There’s a few groups lingering around, not yet ready to call it a night. He looks forward to being at home in no more than an hour and a half, wondering if he should take up Dean’s probable offer for a ride or take the safer option and walk.

Fifteen minutes slip by and the second to last group settles their bill and stumbles loudly one after the other into the night; born and raised Hobucken kids home from College for the summer. In the back, Ash is cleaning the remainder of dishes and prepping whatever he needs for the following day.

Dean lowers the music, and Castiel starts putting the chairs up. A routine of closing time has begun, and they follow monotonously through their respective chores. When Castiel has made it to the back side of the room, Dean is standing by the table of late-night boozers, dishing out each of their bills. As the mechanic-by-day and bartender-by-night waits on their signatures and cash, his eyes slide up to meet Cas’ rooted gaze.

For a moment, they trade a thousand thoughts between them. How is it possible he can search Dean’s green eyes and find solace? And what’s even more unnerving… is that Dean seems as comfortable in the moment as he does.

How much of their connection is real through the forest of lies? How can any of it—

A hard crash jerks their heads around, finding the front door smashed open. Castiel barely catches a glimpse of what looks like AJ in an oversized sweater and boxers storming towards the kitchen.

Castiel jogs towards the back, Dean on his heels… the remaining patrons stand up at the flurry of commotion. He hears a scuffle before he makes it to the kitchen. Turning into the open door, he finds AJ thrashing at Ash, mumbling barely audible nonsense.

“Jesus, Ash—what the hell,” shouts Dean over the noise of bodies slamming into metal. The two young men wrestle without paying them any attention.

As he and Dean try to intervene, they got shoved back towards the fridge. Ash ducks to avoid a hit, sliding across the floor towards long metal shelving where a slew of mixing bowls rattle from the impact.

It’s when AJ spins around to find his opponent that Castiel is able to scrutinize his frantic expression. His face is white and sickly, dark half-circles in a pillow beneath his eyes. A breakout of zits have formed around his mouth, which weren’t there two weeks ago when Castiel saw him at the market.

Dean’s standing beside him, out of breath and wondering what to do. AJ is already making his way over to Ash again, angry intentions splayed across his drug-mottled face.

There’s no better opportunity to outlet his own anger. Castiel stomps across the room and doesn’t even hesitate as his arm rears back and quickly snaps forward. His fist crunches into bone in a decisive hit.

AJ is instantly knocked out; a boneless heap of drug addiction on the floor.
Castiel’s insufferable gaze slides to Ash, who’s still curled up beside the metal shelving. “Just some dope, right?”

The cook’s hands fly up, palms out. “Yo, if AJ’s rockin’ heroin man, it ain’t from me!”

Dean pipes up from the edge of the kitchen. “Ash, you’re the only dealer in town.”

Ash throws Dean an ‘are-you-stupid’ look. “Obviously not anymore, bro!”

After a long beat of silence where none of them are quite sure what else to say, Dean finally tells Ash to get the hell home and to try and find out where the stuff is coming from. The ragley young man’s departure leaves Castiel and Dean alone with a drugged-out kid on the floor. Castiel tries not to focus on the knowledge that Dean watched him knock someone out.

“We should get him to the hospital,” says Dean.

“It’s not necessary. Trust me… I’ve seen worse. He’ll be fine so long as he sleeps it off and starts detox tomorrow before he goes down a road he won’t come back from.” Castiel looks down as AJ starts to come to. “Does he live with anyone?”

Dean nods, but his face is anything but positive. “His mom’s not gonna be any help, trust me. We should just take him back to my place. I’ll keep an eye on him.”

“Short of locking him up, there’s no guarantee he won’t shoot up again.”

“Yeah well, I’ll do what I can for now. Fuck… I don’t think this town’s ever had any real drug problems before.”

Castiel snorts. “Too many where I’m from.”

Not paying attention to his words, he only realizes what he said seems off when Dean catches his eye. “Pontiac?” Dean throws out dubiously.

There are lies Castiel could give, some narrative about unheard-of gangs in the Illinois town. He doesn’t. Instead, he settles his expression. “No…”

AJ is starting to moan, and twist his body around uncomfortably. His brain no doubt screaming for another hit.

It’s obvious Dean has questions, but he sidelines his curiosity to get back to the problem at hand.

Together, they bend down to pick up the barely cognizant twenty-something. Cas takes his legs, Dean grabs for his arms. They’re carrying him down the hall to the back door where Dean’s car is parked, moving awkwardly with each unexpected spasm from their load.

When the steel door smacks open, hitting the outer brick, Castiel’s focus on reality warps, a total reorganization of circumstance.

No longer is he in Hobucken, North Carolina.

New York surrounds him now, with its smell and cacophony of noise. A low beat radiates from the stripclub down the block.

Looking down, he sees his hands wrapped around a naked set of ankles. The rest of the body is covered in a plastic sheet. A wave of cold goes through him, his breathing starts to short out… the moderate domes of light from above narrow into points. Castiel feels the ankles in his hands slide
away from him.

“I can’t—” he says. “Not anymore. I just can’t, okay? I can’t.”

A familiar whiskey-smooth voice, full of sass, reaches his ears. “Cassie, you got this.”

“No, no… Gabe. It’s insane. They’re all insane!”

His cousin, pushing his honey-coloured wavy hair off his forehead, lets out an irritated huff. “You’re damn lucky you’re with me tonight, you know that! You pull this shit around Michael or Lucy… or god forbid Raph, you know what they’d do. Geez, Cassie—why do you have such a problem with this? This guy was nothing. A low-life, womanizing drug-peddler who tried to deal shit from the wrong person in the wrong place, cous’. He’s nothing,” Gabe ends with a side of scorn. Not able to comprehend Cas’ frequent stroke of a conscience.

“I need to get out,” Castiel confesses to his cousin.

Gabriel frowns and huffs with tempered anger. “Watch who you say that to, kid.”

To a point,

he adds silently.

“Never trust anyone, Cassie. Promise me that? No one…”

Averting his focus from Gabe’s amber-coloured imploring set of eyes, Castiel looks at the snuffed drug dealer half-lain on the dirty asphalt, his upper body still propped by Gabe’s loose hold.

“No one,” Castiel repeats his cousin’s words with grim inflection.

Once more, his attention falls on the body. And then skips along the texture of the asphalt. His vision fades and blackens, as if he’s surfacing from deep water.

***

Something’s coming back, a reality he temporarily drifted away from. Castiel’s vision starts to clear, but not to the familiar streets of New York. And worse, the back of his head feels painfully tender. With a wince, he fully opens his eyes to find Dean’s face peering into his.

Also, he’s no longer standing but ass-down on the pavement.

The mechanic’s expression set on his is taxed with worry, questions, and below everything: Fear.

Castiel asks, “What did I say?” Knowing he doesn’t want the answer.

Distracted, Dean shakes his head and refuses to say anything on the matter. “Let’s get AJ back to my place, okay?”

He nods, but as he attempts to stand, Castiel wavers in a dizzy spell. It could be from whacking his head on the wall when he’d crumpled, or from the corrosive trip down memory lane. Either is a good bet. But both are probably the cause.

Dean steadies him with both hands. Their eyes lock for a fleeting moment and Castiel wonders how much Dean has garnered over the course of their friendship. It should tell him something that Dean has stuck around regardless, but he’s far too self-deprecating for that level of insight.

With his feet firmly beneath him, they resume the unhappy task of transferring AJ to the car. The entire ten feet remaining, Castiel is aware of the hard, calculating stare on every micro-expression he
must be displaying.

No one speaks during the ride to Dean’s, which is brief. AJ has resumed a state of unconsciousness, and Castiel—unlike before—would prefer he were awake to offer a distraction.

The kid is roughly carried up the narrow stairwell to Dean’s apartment and placed on the couch. Without saying a word, Castiel turns to leave, not daring to meet Dean’s gaze which has been tracking his every move for the last ten minutes.

*What could I have possibly said?* The worry eats at him.

Castiel’s passing the kitchen table, mind elsewhere, when Dean’s thick voice cuts the silence.

“You’re not walking home.”

“I’m fine.”

Dean races to cut him off at the door. “Like fuck you are. Besides, you obviously know something about this”—he gestures to AJ—”so I’d appreciate it if you stuck around to make sure the damn idiot lives.”

Castiel rolls his eyes and stomps back to the couch. Holding Dean’s attention, he reaches to AJ’s neck and checks his pulse. It’s fast, which is normal, but steady and he’s sleeping more or less soundly. The “idiot” will be fine. He relays this to Dean.

“Fair enough,” Dean concedes. “He may be fine… You, are not.”

“Dean, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Again, Castiel marches towards the door, needing to put distance between the teetering darkness in himself and Dean’s curiosity.

But like before, Dean blocks his escape. “Let me drive you home.”

“You should stay here.”

“And you just said he’d be fine,” argues Dean.

The unfolding gaze is nothing more than a sizing up of each other’s apparent will. Knowing Dean well enough by now, Castiel shrugs and says, “Alright. Let’s go.”

The trip downstairs and across town is thick with secrets and animosity. Castiel wishes he never came here. And yet, sitting in the passenger seat of Dean’s car, a growing part of him longs to be able to tell Dean everything. For better or worse.

But he doesn’t, because he’s a coward. Has been and always will be.

As they pull into the dark driveway, it’s later than he expected. He doesn’t say a word of protest when Dean follows him inside. Past the yellow door and stopping next to the island, Castiel readies himself for an argument. Something along the lines of “*Who the fuck are you?!*” and “*What are you—some kind of psycho?!*” But also the sad addition of: “*We’re not friends. Friends don’t lie to each other…*”

But when he turns his back to the cupboards in order to face Dean, he’s blindsided by the mechanic’s hands rushing up to capture his face, bracing him as he moves in for a kiss. Cas doesn’t have a second to react, only to register the scent of old grease and stale beer that radiates in the proximity.
Cas feels the generous heat from Dean’s palms, a pair of insistent lips plying at his. The unexpected intimacy propels the air from his lungs. He stands there in shock while Dean crushes his mouth in a passionate kiss, a warmth that’s inexplicably grounding.

Slowly, Dean’s hands drift from Cas’ face; his muscular arms curl around Cas’ neck and back, wrapping him in a possessive embrace. Castiel balls his fists, wanting nothing more than to collapse into it, to yield to Dean’s naive acceptance.

Castiel moans low in his throat with blatant yearning, but refuses to open his mouth to the kiss. Denying it aches in every fibre of his being. After a torturously long moment, Dean unfurls himself from the sudden attack. There’s clear disappointment in his face that Cas hates to see. The mechanic’s hands slide over Cas’ shoulders and down his chest, lingering until the last moment before he steps back.

The kitchen feels drafty in the absence of Dean’s touch.

“I’m sorry,” Dean whispers, facing the hallway. He wets his lips, maybe trying to taste Castiel or perhaps trying to forget the sensation altogether.

Confused, Castiel shakes his head. “Why?”

“You need me,” argues Dean. “You know that, right?”

“I don’t need anyone.” Lie.

Dean faces him, vexation written in the crease of his brows. “Fuck, man! I don’t know what happened to you… maybe I don’t want to know. But you need a friend alright. A real fucking friend… and I can be that if you want, if you’ll let me. Putting aside the kiss... obviously.” Dean frowns at the hardwood, looking ripe with guilt. “That wasn’t planned and I’m sorry.”

Instead of letting this conversation lead into a futile debate, Cas doesn’t say anything else—what’s the fucking point. He locks up his expression and employs a facade of impenetrability.

Dean isn’t ready to be swayed. “Oh, we’re staring each other down now, is that it?” A minute passes, and Dean pipes up again, “Talk to me,” he pleads, his voice softer.

It’s harder to blatantly ignore Dean when his rough tone is dropped into something more tender. But, he manages.

Dean steps closer, in no way balked by Cas’ silence. “Goddammit... let me in?”

Chewing his lip is all Cas permits in his stiff expression. He stares back into Dean’s patient eyes, secretly praying the mechanic will go home and leave him to his own pathetic detriment. It’s the only time Castiel’s ever wished he had a secret stash of booze. In the past, when he went through rough times with his family, he turned to drugs as a necessary escape. His dabbles in substance abuse never progressed towards an addiction, thankfully, but he does crave the hypnotic detachment only quality drugs can provide.

Dean raises his hand to his own face, wipes at it in frustration and pegs Cas with a look, a streak of resignation showing through. “Okay… I’ll go.” But instead of moving towards the door, he walks forward, bringing his palm to Cas’ cheek.

A flicker of emotion twitches in Castiel’s blue eyes, he knows it, grinds his teeth to hold himself back. Dean says nothing; only brushes his rough-textured thumb gently over Cas’ skin, tracing down the faint wrinkle beside his mouth. There’s kindness and patience in the contact, in those familiar
green eyes.

Cas can hardly stand it.

“Whenever you’re ready,” is the last thing Dean says before he lets the touch fall, and walks out the door without looking back.
Ready, or Something

Whenever I’m ready…

The comment stays with Castiel for days. It echos in his nightmares and dreams, threading into fantasies too. Such as the one the night before, where Cas had Dean on top of the island in his kitchen, naked. His thick bowed legs spread wide… a grin rising on his mouth, “Whenever you’re ready,” Dean taunted, this time with a welcoming leer.

Cas can’t help comparing Dean to a termite, eating away steadily at his edifice of self-preservation. Inevitably, Castiel will cave. Just as he did as a result of his fermenting hatred towards his family. This time, however, hatred is not the impetus for change but something he has only a flat understanding of.

Since the kiss, he’s only seen Dean a couple of times. There’s the requisite awkwardness, but not much. Dean has a way of brushing aside the drama to make life easier. Whether he does it for Cas, or that’s simply who he is, Castiel isn’t sure. But probably more the latter.

Castiel finds out through a phone call from Dean that AJ swiped the heroin from his own mother, who’d pilfered it from a dealer in Aurora. It seems their family has a whole set of problems that makes Castiel’s drama with Dean come off as unimportant.

They’re adults, goddammit, and even though Castiel is adamant in thwarting Dean’s curiosity, they can work around it. Not like there’s a whole lot of choice. The only comment on what happened is a brief whispered conversation in the break room at Rufus’ during a lunch shift. To Cas’ shock, Dean doesn’t bring up the whole passing out flashback incident, but instead focuses on their relationship, of sorts. Dean explained in a soft voice that he never meant to seem dismissive in his change of behaviour, but after paying attention to Cas’ inner turmoil, he decided to focus on being a better friend. For Dean, this meant dropping his self-identified salacious actions in favour of being someone “Jimmy” could turn to.

“If you decide to let me in… whatever that means,” Dean concluded, “I’ll be here.”

In turn, Castiel couldn’t bring himself to say anything in response. He was worried that if he opened his mouth, he’d do something stupid—like resume the kiss. Dean’s transition to a caring, unadulterated friend has had a relaxing effect on Castiel’s resolve.

From then on, their relationship has consisted of far less comedic, lewd banter and more casual gestures of affection. Dean often stops by his ramshackle home to drop off a couple of books, or cassette tapes… and then yesterday, a stereo through which he could play the tapes.

It’s after nine in the evening on a Friday, and Castiel’s listening to a mix of what he believes is rock music from the 80’s; not one tune more recent than that. He doesn’t not like it, but classic rock has never been his ultimate preference for music.

His tastes mutated from classical when he was young, to punk in his teens, and now leans towards a mix of indie alternative and folk rock.

But notwithstanding his penchant for hippie harmonies, he sings along to one of the songs on the tape, “A singer in a smokey room…” he mumbles through the lines he doesn’t know, and picks up at the end of the verse, “It goes on… and on… and on… and oooomnnn…”

His tuneless rendition of Don’t Stop Believin’ brings a smiles to his lips and he hasn’t felt so carefree
in a while. Wearing a pair of jogging pants he bought on sale at the “random everything store” in town, he moves around the house to the sounds of the 80’s and picks up the errant shirt or dish lying around.

Though he’s not scheduled to work, he decides he wants to head over to Rufus’ for the sole purpose of having a drink. It’s Friday, this is what people do. The desire to be like everyone else comes in alongside his newfound carefree attitude.

After putting away the last of his clean dishes, he changes in his bedroom, and is walking through the door of the bar in less than forty minutes. It’s past ten now, and there’s a fair crowd—singles at the bar and groups at the tables, as per the norm.

Dean is manning bar that night, with Jo as the sole server. The blonde, however, is notably distracted by a familiar red-head sitting with Bobby and Ellen.

Standing next to Charlie, Jo leans on her wife, her fingers twining through the long red locks. Charlie is having an animated conversation with Bobby, to which Ellen seems displeased by the whole ordeal. Cas wonders what their going on about, and has an idea it could very well be a disguised intervention. Bobby needs it.

Castiel’s gaze turns from their group to face the bar and catches Dean’s eye. Then mechanic smiles and gestures him over.

“Hello Dean,” he greets his friend, taking a seat on the nearest stool.

“You know you’re not scheduled tonight, right?”

“I know.” Cas clasps his hands together, noting the faded coffee stain on the cuff of his white button-up. Damn, he wished he would’ve noticed that before he left the house. “I decided to come in for a drink.”

Mouth in an amused line, Dean raises his eyebrows and shrugs. “Alright then, what'll ya have?”

“Keith’s white.” He holds his finger up and adds, “with a slice of orange.”

Dean grins and grabs a class, readying the drink with the automation of a seasoned bartender.

An hour later, two beers down, Castiel turns to his right when a huff distracts him from watching Dean flirt with the older Scottish woman at the end of the bar, Ruth, the one from the first night they kissed. Pathetically, also the night of Cas’ first kiss.

Bobby’s seated beside him, more cantankerous than usual. “How are you, Bobby?”

The older man grumbles and mutters, “Meddling women, I tell ya.”

“What did they want?”

He snorts. “Damn usual. Telling me I’m throwing my life away.”

“Aren’t you?”

Bobby whips sideways to throw him a glare. “‘Scuse me?”

Sighing, Castiel asks, “Do you want to know the average lifespan of an alcoholic?”

“No,” he rudely answers. “I don’t. And you know what else, son, you got no business criticising
“And you have no business subjecting your loved ones to the grief of your premature, wasted death,” Castiel argues drily. “Those women love you… Ellen loves you. And the only thing holding you back from complete and total bliss, is yourself. And if I were in your shoes I would be goddamn grateful for such an opportunity. So pardon me for not having any sympathy for your disentitled hardship.”

Following his rant, he’s met by a set of thought-muddled dark blue eyes. Around Bobby’s iris’, the whites are tinged with a yellow hue—the results of a decades-long drinking habit. “Who pissed in your cornflakes?” Bobby asks with a curl of his lip.

Castiel closes his eyes, feeling ineffectual. “No one. I only want the best for you.” And because you’re the only decent parent Dean has.

Bobby purses his lips and reaches for the beer resting on the coaster in front of him. He stops and swallows, sneaking a peek at Cas. “Yeah, what about you and that one—” The alcoholic points an elbow at Dean.

Despite himself, he smiles. “We’re friends for now.”

Bobby snorts loudly. “For now?!”

“Unlike you,” he says clearly, “I have legitimate reasons for pushing people away. You don’t.” Castiel makes a face and reaches over for Bobby’s so-far untouched glass of PBR. “Go home Bobby, drink some tea and make a change in your life.”

Throwing Cas a scrunched expression of confusion, Bobby leans back. “When in the hell d’you turn inta Oprah?”

Shaking his head, Castiel offers a shit-eating grin. “About the time you decided to go to AA.”

With a grumble of nonsense, Bobby offers up a final look of stupefaction and amazingly slides off the stool and walks towards the exit.

It only takes three minutes for Dean to abandon Ruth and head over. “It’s not even midnight and Bobby left already?” Dean notices the beer Cas is drinking isn’t the Keith’s he had before. “And he didn’t even finish his beer?! My god… has Hell frozen over?”

Cas shrugs. “Maybe.”

“What did you say to him?”

“Nothing really. Ellen, Jo, and Charlie were speaking with him earlier.”

Dean waves off the information. “Oh that’s nothing, man. They intervention his ass every couple of months. Seriously… what did you say?”

Staring into the malt liquid, Cas replies, “I simply told him he was wasting his life and he’d die and it was selfish to make his family grieve for him.”

“Christ.”

“It’s the truth,” argues Cas.

“Yeah but… damn.” Dean purses his lips and sneaks a glimpse at Ruth over his shoulder. He seems
uncertain. “So, uh, you think I should bang the cougar over there?”

Castiel chuckles, forcing a smile but feeling ill. “If you want. I bet her vigor would surprise you.”

“Probably.” Reaching across the bar, Dean rests his hand over Cas’ wrist. “I think I’ll pass though.”

He sighs, meeting Dean’s deliberate watchfulness. “You don’t have to.”

“I know.” Turning to the call of a customer from one of the back tables, Dean squeezes his hand and returns to work.

The simple touch makes Castiel’s heart feel as if it’s filled with lead. Somehow, his craving for Dean is amplified into a hundred-pound weight every time he’s teased with the thought of something more.

Every touch weakens him. Dean’s persistence in not just wanting him, but now wanting to be there for him, despite all of his lies, is taxing on his resolve. To keep temptation at bay, he leaves before the night ends and loses his breath when they say goodnight and Dean squeezes the back of his neck affectionately when he turns to leave.

On the way home, Castiel takes a left down Bobby’s sloped road. He lets himself inside the gate and climbs the steps, listening for any sound. He knocks and waits for Bobby to open up. When the man finally does, appearing to have just roused from a heavy sleep, Castiel says what he came to say quickly, “Listen, I don’t know what you used to do… but I’ve been working with some of the businesses in town to maintain their books. I could use some help… if you’re interested.” It’s a lie, Castiel isn’t the one who needs help.

“I’m old,” Bobby argues, as if that’s all of a response that matters.

Castiel smiles. “Not that old.”

“You gonna make me use a computer?”

“No. Not at first, anyway.”

The older man deliberates, his eyes still carrying the haze of booze and sleep. But then in a curt response, he says, “Yeah, alright. Whatever,” and promptly shuts the door in Cas’ face.

Chuckling as he thumps down the steps, Castiel feels better on his walk home. If he can’t make sense of his own life, at least he can do something to fix someone else’s.

The concept of seeking penance resounds in his mind all throughout the night and into the next day. But along with it, he feels fragments of peace strike him in rare moments. There’s a lightness in his soul that didn’t exist before now.

With a measure of caution, he welcomes it.
Castiel curses at the sound of breaking glass. Closing his eyes for a second, he takes a breath and throws a look over his shoulder.

Standing frozen in place is Dean, eyes are wide and amused, lips stretched into a comical grin. Both hands are held up to feign innocence. “I did nothing.”

There’s glass everywhere. Clear shards littering the brown tiles at their feet.

“You see,” Castiel admonishes, “this is why Rufus is always mad at you.” Dean hasn’t quite accepted the fact that he can’t juggle like bartenders on TV, but he keeps trying.

“Oh, pfft, Rufus’ just mad at me ‘cause he wants a piece of this fine body.” Biting his lip, Dean strokes a path from his chest to his abs.

Shaking his head, Cas goes back to pouring a gin and tonic and tries not to feel Dean’s presence the way he does. It’s been worse since the egression of Dean’s flirtations and the introduction of casual, but tender contact. A hand on his back, gentle graze on the side of his neck, sometimes a long hug meant to comfort him—though all it does is make him grieve for something he’s never had.

Whatever longing has grown in him for the mechanic has become untamable. A need he’s ill-equipped to handle. Without any relationship experience to fall back on, he’s so vulnerable to the warmth.

Fuck! If only Dean tried one more fucking time… Just once! Because Cas has spent the last few days reaching the conclusion that all things aside, one little date isn’t going to kill anybody. Hopefully.

Forty-five minutes later, as a football game blares from the speakers, distracting most of the regulars, Cas stands beside Dean and bumps his shoulder. Just to feel a seconds’ touch, to feel the solid heat of Dean’s muscled physique.

From the corner of his eye, he catches Dean smile without teeth, the expression shining in his eyes. They work side-by-side, readying drinks, sending orders back to Ash and trying to ignore the electricity between them.

After watching Dean blatantly hit on Pamela’s cousin visiting from out of town—a dark-haired college guy who fucking blushes under Dean’s flirtatious gleam—Cas’ newfound jealousy and annoyance overrides the last remnants of his self-control.

He slaps the perpetually damp bar rag onto his shoulder and marches the five feet towards Dean, who’s half bent over the bar towards the college senior.

Ignoring the boy on the far side of the bar, Cas moves in beside Dean and casually says, “Hypothetically Dean,”—green eyes shift and find him—“if I said yes to a date with you, what would you do?”
Dean gapes, eyes darting back to the young man and then back to Cas. “Huh?”

Repeating himself, Castiel slides his hand across the bar, long fingers grazing the tanned inside of Dean’s forearm.

“What—what would I do?” Dean blinks at him in utter confusion, thrown for a loop at Cas’ sudden change of pace. “Like, on the date or right now?”

_Umm..._ He grins at Dean. “Both.”

Straightening his stance—forgetting about who he’d been flirting with two seconds ago, Dean replies, “Right now? Christ, I think I’d do a fucking happy dance, and as for the date... well I have plans. I have _so_ many plans.”

“How can you already have plans?” Cas wonders, faintly shaking his head. _I only just asked and it was hypothetical!_

“Because I’ve had all fucking summer to plot, dreaming about the moment when you’d finally give in.”

“Plot?” Castiel stares at Dean, sporting a sly smile. “Are you planning to _off_ me on this date?”

Dean smirks, and _God_ did Cas ever miss that look. “Oh, I’ll get you off alright.”

Unfettered joy blooms in his heart. This is the Dean he lo—“Um, I give it a fair seven-point-four.”

“Oh, c’mon,” Dean grins, delighted by the return of their particular form of banter, “it was a fucking ten. But wait—are we still talking hypothetical here or should I be jumping up on the bartop and
“giving these losers a show?”

Castiel squints. “When you said, ‘do a little happy dance,’ what exactly did you mean?”

“I meant grossly disturbing the peace by twerking my fine ass and tearing off my clothes in joy.” Dean’s youthful elation strikes such paramount happiness in Castiel, it’s floors him and leaves him speechless.

Regaining his faculties, he utters, “You are the most brazen, honest, suggestive, and unapologetic man I’ve ever met.”

Dean beams. “You are welcome.”

They both stare intensely at one another, the tease hanging in wait, a potential change of course in their relationship hovering in the electrified air.

It’s Dean’s delighted expression, the warm-hearted trust in his eyes, that breaks the last vestiges of Cas’ will. “Okay.”

Vibrant green eyes flare wide with incredulity, and Dean’s mouth drops. As if he never actually expected Cas to really go through with it. “For real?”

Reserved, Cas nods. There’s a forty percent chance all he is to Dean is a conquest, that a bout of fucking will satiate the mechanic’s desires and it’ll be the end of it. Cas will learn that all of Dean’s softer affections have stemmed from a blend of friendship, sexual desire, and nothing deeper.

But Cas has embraced his selfish hunger for this man. He loves the way Dean wants him. And so he’s satisfied with the idea of being conquered, if that’s all it turns out to be. If nothing else, it will free him from his own thoughts for an hour or two.

True to his word, Dean reaches behind himself and unties the Budweiser apron and slams it on the lower bar. Watching in rapture, Cas tracks Dean’s bout of immaturity as he clamours up onto the bar and towers over the crowd.

“Mark this date in your calendars all you no-good, booze-chugging drains on society”—several boo’s rise up and a few good-natured cheers—“because today is the day that... the newest resident of Hobotown has agreed to go on a date with me!”—more hoots and cheers, beers clinking—“As this has been a long, invested goal of mine, I’d like to celebrate this momentous achievement by scaring your retinas with my incredible dance moves that will remind all of you turds who is the sex god in this town and who’ll need new livers by 2018—Can I get a hell yeah?!?” he shouts exuberantly, arms thrown high in the air.

The entire bar screams back a chorus of “Hell Yeah!” and Cas stares at everything in shock and awe. Hands on his hips, Dean turns and looks down with a villainous, triumphant grin. “Hit the music!”

The music, Cas learned in the beginning, is nothing more than an old radio hooked up to the scratchy sound system and he shakes his head but goes over and gets everything switched over from the football game. Come Together by Aerosmith rolls out in waves through the small-town pub.

Dean immediately starts belting out the tune, loud and animated, his rough voice rising up with remarkably perfect inflection and harmony. He dances too, and while it’s not all that coordinated or all that good—truth be told—it’s sexier than anything Castiel’s ever seen.

“One thing I can tell you is you got to be freeeeeee...” Dean rips his t-shirt over his head and throws it to Jo, who looks mildly disgusted. “Come together!!! Ovvvver me.”
By the time the song is done, Dean is breathless, shirtless, and the crowd is in a mixed state of cheering wildly and booing heavily. Sporting a sheen of sweat, the mechanic hops down and saunters right up to Cas who’s been standing in a state of shock (perhaps some slight panic as well) for the last three minutes, leaning against the back bar for needed support.

When Dean’s close, and Cas can smell his exertion and the subtle note of his deodorant, he blurts out the only thing on his mind. “Who are you?” Which is incredibly ironic. But to be fair, there is no one on this earth quite like Dean Winchester.

“Your next hot date, that’s who. Pick you up at seven tomorrow. Bright and early.”
“Oh fuck, what have I done?” Castiel grous to the empty kitchen.

Agreeing to go on a date with Dean happened in a moment of weakness. Castiel’s in too deep as it is. This looming date is the equivalent of shooting himself in the knee, crippling his ability to run if necessary.

What the fuck is he thinking!

Last night, he hardly slept. Tossing and turning, worrying his lip into the chapped situation he’s got going on now. But in the end, he won’t back out. He can’t.

Besides, it’s only one goddamn date. Is he so fucking out of control with his emotions and fears he can’t handle a few hours alone with Dean? Christ, he’s already done that numerous times. So no. Absolutely not, he has things handled.

I’m doing this. “But not doing Dean, though,” he forbids himself.

Pacing around his kitchen island, Cas wonders what Dean’s “plans” are, knowing without a doubt, Dean’s going to want sex. He’d concluded late last night that sex is unequivocally off the table. It’s too intimate, and he’s far too weak.

Whatever happens with Dean needs to start off with the pace of a toddler’s first steps. And it should be purposefully categorized as a casual hookup between friends until his life is sorted. This farce is the last of several slim barriers he’s put up to keep a safe distance between everything good that Dean is and everything horrible that Cas is.

So far everything that’s happened between them has been spontaneous, caught up in the heat of the moment. He could find excuses for his stupid behavior, but this? This is intentional, planned.

Long before the Impala pulls into the driveway, Castiel can make out the rumble of its familiar engine. It’s tied to his understanding of Dean, a part of more than a dozen clear memories he’s glad to possess.

Castiel doesn’t wait for Dean to come to the door. Not to be considerate for time or any of that garbage, but because he’s antsy and has never experienced this strange, hyper-thrill coursing through his limbs and making his stomach tighten. Hmm, probably should’ve eaten something.

As he steps onto the concrete porch, pulling the door shut behind him, Castiel takes in the sight of Dean parked in his driveway. Sunglasses pushed up onto his head and a daring smile stretched across his face; Dean is the picture of a summer fling.

Here we go... At least this isn’t a bad way to earn a one-way ticket to Hell. Granted, Castiel’s deck might already be stacked with a bunch of those. Cutting people up is obviously worse than being indulgent.

Putting all that aside, Castiel crosses the lawn and climbs into the old car, the aroma of conditioned leather filling his nose. Across the seat, he notices Dean is dressed for whatever occasion awaits them: a thin light blue t-shirt with a broad diagonal white stripe across the front, and most uncharacteristically, thin colourful board shorts.

“Are we going to a beach?”
Dean hums evasively. “Who knows. Guess you’ll just have to find out.”

They’re reversing out onto the road when Dean abruptly brakes and says, “Oh wait, got something for ya”—Dean reaches around into the backseat, grabs a plastic bag and drops it into Cas’ lap—“a few things you might appreciate today.”

Inside, Cas finds a similar pair of shorts—and on closer inspection he’s pretty sure they’re for swimming—and a pair of sunglasses. Both the shorts and the sunglasses are a vibrant, canary yellow.

“I… I don’t know what to say.”

Dean laughs. “I know yellow is your absolute favourite colour.”

“Yes. I love it.” Actually, he doesn’t mind the sunglasses, though they seem more fitting of a California douche than an ex-criminal. The shorts he hates. He’s going to look like a banana.

They drive towards the other end of town, back towards Dean’s apartment, but when they get to the last block before the old factories that have long been closed, Dean takes a right and progresses down a shadier stretch of town. This section of Hobucken could be something far better, especially with its proximity to the water but for whatever reason, it’s been left to wither and crumble.

“How come no one’s redeveloping any of this?”

Dean shrugs. “Ellen tried to buy some of the lots years ago but they’re all owned by some old industrial goon named Crowley from overseas. After a while we all sorta gave up and took it for what it is. Which is”—Dean snorts—“ugly as fuck, but what can you do.”

At the end of the road, the marina spreads out on the right and Dean pulls onto the uneven grass that serves as a makeshift parking lot. They exit the car, Dean grabs a few things from the trunk and Castiel follows him down towards the water. The flap of Dean’s flip-flops is an oddly hilarious sound.

Castiel has never worn flip-flops. Ever.

“Are you laughing back there?” Dean accuses from a couple steps ahead.

Fighting a grin, Castiel replies, “Only a little.”

“Hey, flip flops are comfortable, man.” Dean rounds back and points a stern finger at him and for the millionth time Castiel is struck by Dean and everything he is that appeals to Cas on every level.

Forcing back such revelations because this is a casual hookup and nothing more, he continues to follow Dean down the grassy hill, onto a gravel path and towards a set of docks. There are a fair variety of boats; everything from hollow fishing boats with small engines, to larger vessels that clearly have space below deck for a bed or bathroom, maybe both.

Dean climbs onto one that fits comfortably between those types. After dropping off the stuff he carried onboard, Dean steps back up onto the dock and unravels the knots securing the boat to the posts. Castiel moves to help him.

“How long have you had a boat?”

Voice under a little strain as he drags the drifting boat closer, Dean replies, “Oh man. Forever I guess? Used to be Bobby’s but I confiscated it years ago.”
“A wise move.”

Dean nods agreeably and he holds the boat steady as Cas climbs on. Stepping widely off the dock, Dean hops back onto the boat and gets settled in the driver’s seat. Within a few minutes, the engine is rumbling and Dean is steering them out of the bay into open waters.

There were a lot of different things Castiel had imagined for their date. But this didn’t factor in. Of course Dean, for whatever reason, never told him he even had a boat. It’s serene—the wind rushing past him, the gentle bob of the machine over moving water.

It’s still early enough that the sun isn’t burning his skin, but if it gets as hot today as it has been, he’s going to want to remove his t-shirt. But Dean’s never seen the vast tattoo on his back, nor the one on his ribs, and he’s not sure he wants Dean to see either of them.

As they ride out, facing away from the rising sun, twinkles of light flicker across the sea. Castiel sits on the left side of the boat and watches Dean without reservation. Since he’s going through with this date, he plans to enjoy every goddamn minute of it.

After a solid half hour, he estimates, Dean slows abruptly and kills the engine. The Pamlico Bay sits behind them as a strip of faded greenish brown.

Turning to face him, Dean notices the way Cas is staring and settles into a matching gaze for a few breaths before breaking the relative silence.

“Wanna go for a swim?”

“Okay.”

Is it a premeditated move on Dean’s part that a portion of their date involves getting nearly naked? Probably. Does Castiel care? Not in that moment.

Dean stands, nearly bumping Cas’ knees, and peels his blue-and-white t-shirt over his head. “If you want to change into your shorts without me blatantly ogling you, I can jump in the water now.”

Leaning back against the low side of the boat, Castiel starts to undo his jeans. God, he’s going to hell at an alarming rate, isn’t he?

Standing between Cas’ knees, Dean’s heated stare is fixated low, rough hands curled into fists. “Do you, uh, need a hand?”

Jeans undone and opened in a vee, Castiel gives Dean the smallest of nods. Tension, ripe and teeming, roars between them as Dean crowds over him. Warm, bare arms reach behind Cas’ lower back, their faces inching closer, Dean scoots him to the edge of the seat.

“Funny thing is” Dean remarks, “I don’t think you have any fucking clue how wildly hot you are right now.”

Cas says nothing, feeling like a bug caught inside the depths of carnivorous plant. Putting aside the effort of removing Cas’ clothes, Dean glides his hand over Cas’ skin, nails scratching over his spine. A finger slyly dips into the loosened waistband and into his crease. Castiel’s breath catches in his throat and he tries to suppress his growing erection. An impossible task.

Seconds lazily tick by, Dean skims his lips along the edge of Cas’ jaw, hands dragging up Cas’ shirt from the back. When it reaches his arms, Dean whispers, “Up,” and Cas immediately complies.
Once his shirt is discarded on the coarse grey carpet of the swaying craft, Castiel notices Dean’s gaze flick to the scripture inked on his ribcage. But his friend says nothing. Dean smirks as he shifts away, rough hands dragging down Cas’ naked chest… palms ghosting over his twitching abdomen and then finally, gripping the fabric of his jeans and boxers.

Pausing, Dean peeks up at him with a silent question.

God, I’m fucked. Castiel lets his chin drop for a second time. If they have sex, he’ll probably regret it, but he can’t deny this man… can’t even fathom how he could put an end to this beautiful mistake.

Dean starts pulling down, jerking and wriggling his remaining clothes past his hips while Cas grabs the seat so he doesn’t get dragged to the floor. With a final yank, his jeans and boxers are brought to his thighs. Naked from there up, his swollen cock lays against his pelvis. The ocean breeze ghosts over his shaft and he slams his eyes shut. Dean’s muted laugh reaches his ears.

“Fuck,” Dean whispers, “has no one ever seduced you before?”

Giving an honest reaction, Castiel opens his eyes just to roll them with an undignified huff. “Do I seem like the type of person that’s been seduced on a regular basis?” Or ever.

Dean shrugs but is pleased, and continues peeling his clothes off his legs—eyes occasionally darting up to watch Cas’ shamelessly twitching erection. “I guess not. Doesn’t matter anyway… cause you have me now.”

How did Cas ever think he could deny Dean? This man is a master of seduction. It’s one of his best, most honed skills. In comparison, Cas is more or less a virgin.

When he’s finally naked, stretched out on the seat with his upper back resting on the ledge of the boat and his bare feet spread on either side of the driver’s chair, he can’t remember a time he’s ever felt so exposed.

It’s not even so much a facet of being nude, but in how the man standing in front him rakes his eyes all over Cas’ body. They linger on his right forearm, where his black cross stands out against the paler tone of his skin, and then once more on his the spot below his heart.

“Were you religious?” Dean asks, continuing to ogle without apology.

Cas gives a sarcastic laugh. “No.”

“Ah, so that one’s just a crappily drawn plus sign then.”

A carefree chuckle rises from his chest, clearing his lungs in an indefinable way. His next breath feels fresher and somehow free of past cobwebs.

Looking down at his feet, Dean heaves a big sigh and grabs the bag on the back bench seat of the boat, digging out the yellow and orange swim shorts.

At Cas’ surprised stare, Dean defensively throws out, “What? Did you think I was gonna skip right to the good part? Legs up.”

Confused, and completely charmed, Cas says, “Not only are we not going to fuck, but you’re putting clothes on me?”

Smirking, and very aware of how much more of himself he’s showing by lifting his legs, he does it easily, realizing he enjoys the feel of Dean’s eyes on him. Drawing his knees back, he dangles his feet in the air, making room for Dean to slip in between the two seats.

Even under the sharp sun, and over the sound of the water slapping at the side of the boat, he notices Dean swallow thickly as he positions himself precariously for the sole purpose of putting swim shorts onto Cas’ legs.

But Dean manages, as professionally as possible. They’re smiling moronically, short laughs breaking the silence as Dean struggles to get the shorts up over Castiel’s thick thighs and past his hips. When his completely erect cock makes the process difficult, Dean presses his lips into a flat line and gets the garment as close to “on” as he dares without touching anything.

“Oh god, you need to do the rest. My control is fading rapidly. I’m a cock-twitch away from riding you into a boneless heap of satisfaction.”

“Ah, so when you said you had control… you didn’t mean very good control,” teases Cas.

Dean tells him to shut up and promptly rushes towards the back of the boat and dives off into the crisp water, creating a wild splash of water to float up into the air and sail back down.

It looks like so much fun, and Cas can’t wait. Fun is sort of a new concept for him.

Standing up, he adjusts his dick, tightens the strings on the shorts and moves to the back of the boat. It rocks under his weight as he moves. He can’t help the giant smile that splits his face as he looks out onto the water, seeing Dean waiting for him with a grin of his own. God, he’s soaring in that moment, happier than he’s been in his whole life. Riding a carefree wave, and hoping for the best.

It’s as if he can breathe for the first time, each inhale filling out his lungs like never before. Castiel forgets all of his worries, for better or worse, and allows himself this one day.

One perfect day to carry with him into whatever future he may face.

Bending his knees, Castiel pushes off into a cannonball; his body slams into the cold water. It rushes over, enveloping him, closing around his head and clearing his mind of every horrible memory.

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A while later, drenched and out of breath from wrestling in the water and acting completely immature, they climb back onto the boat. Water runs down Cas’ legs, flooding around his feet and he hopes Dean has towels stashed somewhere.

“Brrr!” Dean shivers dramatically behind him, crowding against his back. Dean’s arms wrap around Cas’ waist and the man lays a kiss onto his wet shoulder. Then another into the sensitive curve of his neck. It drags a smile out of Castiel and he relaxes against Dean’s damp chest, enjoying every dab of the man’s lips on his skin.

The lighthearted spirit of the moment morphs when Dean’s lips pause at the top of his spine. Slow progression of kisses continue, as Dean indubitably traces the dark wings on Castiel’s back. All of his momentarily forgotten worries dance back into his mind, but he bites his tongue to avoid ruining things.

“I saw parts of this one before,” whispers Dean, kissing along the arch of the left wing. “Didn’t know what it was.” Castiel’s jaw turns slack as he feels Dean’s fingers tuck into the wet edges of the ugly swim shorts.
Without warning, Dean spins him around so they're facing each other. The sun is over their heads now, beating down on them. “Have any other tats I haven’t seen yet,” Dean wonders, eyebrows perched high as he snaps the back of Cas’ waistband, indicative of where he imagines another tattoo might be hiding. That is to say, on his ass apparently.

“Yes, Dean,” he teases, “I have a heart on my ass.”

Dean laughs. “Says ‘Mom’ doesn’t it?”

“Well that would be awkward, seeing as I’ve never met my mother.”

Green eyes flare wide with the drop of unexpected honesty. “Shit. Sorry?”

Cas shrugs. “It’s okay.”

He reaches up to push Dean’s short, dripping-wet locks off his confused forehead. Dean’s eyes blink shut, and he leans into the touch like a cat. Indulging a little longer, Castiel traces the edges of Dean’s handsome features, enjoying the gentle expression of happiness the touch seems to rouse. Finally, he asks, “Do you have any towels?”

Smiling lazily, as if tired, Dean opens his eyes. After a brief uninhibited stare, Dean boyishly dives forward to peck Cas’ cheek before turning to the bench. The mechanic clears his throat and lifts the seat to reveal an open storage space full of the type of things one might expect on a boat. A cooler, towels, life jackets, paddles, and ropes.

Both towels that Dean pulls out are old; one is Lion King themed, the other Aladdin.

When Cas makes an odd face, Dean explains, “Yeah, Sammy and me had ‘em when we were kids and we’re sort of weirdly attached to our beach towels. I don’t know.”

He smiles softly at Dean and takes the offered Aladdin towel to dry off. “What’s in the cooler?” Castiel asks, wrapping the towel tightly around his waist.

Dean heaves it out, shuts the seat and plunks down on the vinyl, patting the space beside him with a welcome grin. “Come have a seat and I’ll flash ya the goods.”

Shaking his head, Castiel mutters, “Six,” and lowers to the seat, shoulder-to-shoulder with Dean; the man’s skin already dry and warm.

Leaning over, Dean opens the red and white cooler and lists off all the food he brought for their day out on the water. “We got some sandwiches made by yours truly, crackers and cheese cause you gotta have crackers and cheese on a picnic, and two pieces of Pamela’s apple pie, and…” Dean digs lower, loose ice clacking together, “… champagne!” Pulling out a nondescript water bottle, clearly not filled with water, Dean smiles and gives it a little shake.

“I believe drinking while boating is illegal,” he chides Dean.

Dean pffts at him and looks him over. “For this long-overdue date? Champagne is a damn necessity, man. Besides, there’s barely a glassful in here and I’ve never seen the coast guard out here ever.”

Having unscrewed the white plastic cap, Dean hands over the drink and says, “To you.”

Holding Dean’s eyes a second longer, he takes the bottle—his fingers brushing over Dean’s. Tipping it back, the light and bubbly texture of the drink dances over his tongue. It’s refreshing and delicious. All of this is so much more than he expected, or deserves.
As they begin to eat what Dean brought and a conversation naturally unfolds, Castiel leans back and listens to the smooth gravel of Dean’s voice combined with the dull slaps of water hitting the side of the boat.

“I gotta give it to ‘em,” Dean’s saying, “For a small town, they’re surprisingly tolerant. I mean—I shit you not but I once made out with a guy in senior year, on a bench, on the main street… like… lying down. Completely inappropriate public behaviour. You wanna know what happened?”

“What?”

“Bobby showed up, gave me a smack upside the head and told me let the poor boy breathe and get the fuck to work.” Dean laughs as he remembers, his head thrown back, shaking it in disbelief. “No one else even gave a shit, they’re all just like, ah yeah, Dean’s makin’ on some other random—surprise, surprise. I mean it’s no wonder I’ve been dubbed the town slut—course no one ever says that shit to my face, but I’m not an idiot.”

“Does it bother you?” he wonders, concern for Dean’s well-being weeding into his tone.

“Sure, for a while. But one day I decided not to care. Because in the end, it didn’t fucking matter. And so I just kept on bein’ my awesome self.” With a wink, Dean pointedly lifts and extends his arm to rest on the back of the seat behind Cas’ shoulders.

A classic move. A short laugh rises from Cas’ chest. “You are awesome,” he concedes, thinking he’s positive he’s never said ‘awesome’ in his life, “...even if everything that comes out of your mouth makes me feel like I’m in the first five minutes of every porno I’ve ever seen.”

Smiling mischievously, Dean adds, “Well, I do have a lot in common with good porn; I’m full of cheesy innuendos and I’ve got a nearly one-hundred-percent success rate of orgasm delivery.”

Quirking his head with interest, Castiel vocalizes his thought, “Nearly one-hundred percent?” As in, the great Dean Winchester—the master seducer—failed to deliver? This he needs to hear about.

Pursing his lips, Dean lounges against the creaky vinyl. “Yeah, uh, so once me and this girl were doing something”—Cutting off with a laugh, Dean wipes across his forehead and continues—“uh, let’s say wildly acrobatic, and I broke my arm.” Quickly, he rounds on Cas, “But listen, if she’d have let me, I would’ve gone down on her and gotten the job done, but women get all skeevy when your arm’s bent the wrong way, apparently.”

Castiel realizes how inexperienced he is when he can’t even begin to imagine how that could’ve happened. “I’m tempted to ask…”

“Let’s just say it involved a hula-hoop and leave it at that.”

How would that work? Why on earth would someone even suggest such a thing? “I can’t even begin to picture what that would look like.” Castiel brushes off the curious question about Dean’s sex life and lays back, turning his face to the sun and closing his eyes.

He can feel Dean’s stare, and wonders about who and what they are, and how so many various decisions and random moments have brought him to this one. To this single moment, shared with a man with whom he has very little in common with, but a man who’s made him question so much. Has made him appreciate so much.

“What are you thinking about?” Dean asks.

Letting his head fall to the side, Castiel opens his eyes. “You.”
“Hmm, funny… I was thinking about you.” Dean looks away suddenly, his features stiffening. “Actually… I was hoping, maybe, you might talk to me about you a bit more, about your family… or something.” Dean pauses and clasps his hands together. “Anything.”

It goes against his efforts of self-preservation, and for that matter, his sanity, but he tries to offer Dean what he can. Someone who lives their life in an ode to honesty deserves a little of that from him. So he tries, even though the words that rise to his tongue make his chest sting.

“Dean,” he begins, his voice already unsteady. “I trust you, you know that?” Beside him, looking down between his knees, Dean nods. “I’m not who or what you think I am. My past…” he takes a breath and continues, “my past is full of distrust, dishonesty, hatred, and… violence.

“You don’t need the specifics, and I’m in not in any place to give them to you. You just need to know that I haven’t lived an honest life, I’m everything you hate… and that’s the truth. I’ve done things that would sicken you, I’ve done things that—if I believed in Hell—that’s where I’d be going. And who knows, maybe it does exist, maybe I’ll make my way there sooner than I expect. But for all the horror that was my life before I came here, nothing has shaken me—nothing—the way you have.”

Jesus Christ. What started as a confession of his past rather became something else, didn’t it? Shit. This isn’t what he’d planned when he started speaking. At least it wasn’t another lie.

Dean is curiously silent. But Cas hears him swallow, and then, “So, uh, your family kinda sucks balls then, huh?”

It amazes him every time, that despite Dean’s main personality traits, he knows exactly when to push and when to let something slide. He gives Cas whatever he needs in the moment, and Cas has never appreciated anyone more in his life.

“You could say that.”

Dean snorts. “Yeah well, you’re not alone there.”

Surely, Dean is thinking of his father. But the relationship he shares with his brother more than makes up for what he lacks, family-wise. “You and your brother, at least, have an incredible relationship—better than any siblings I’ve ever seen—not that my opinion should hold much weight.”

Leaning back, his gaze falling to Cas, Dean says, “Yeah, Sammy’s good people. A little too uptight if you ask me, but I guess I’m more than wild enough for the both of us.” With that line, he smirks a little… a tease of it.

Cas smiles automatically, his blue eyes taking in the colour of Dean’s skin and freckles as the sunglow hits him. The moment gets lost in a stare, and he searches Dean’s winsome mossy-green eyes. Dean watches him right back, a dim smile showing more in the softness of his expression than in the upward curve of his lips.

Leaning close, Castiel breaks the taut silence. “What’s the craziest thing you’ve ever done?”

Blinking his eyes away, Dean bites his lower lip. “Uh, sexually... or generally?”

“Both.”

“Oh man.” Dean draws back a long inhale through his nose. “That’s a good one. To be honest, I don’t normally talk about past exploits on dates. Doesn’t usually go over too well, ya know.”
Yes, on most dates, that would be true. But Cas does not consider himself part of the norm. “I know who you are,” he says sincerely, “Dean, you enjoy sex—there’s nothing wrong with that.”

Dean throws his arms up. “Thank you!” A look of shocked relief animates his features. “Man, most people look at me like I’m satan. Like fuck you very much, ya know.”

“Satan?” Cas repeats. “I suppose you are devious.”

“And tempting…” Dean tacks on.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

Huffing a laugh, Dean puts out his hand in surrender. “No worries, I’m the perfect gentleman.” Their eyes meet and they share a soft chuckle. Dean settles and says, “Okay, okay… craziest sex story? Ah! I’ve got a good one. I was a sophomore—a really adorable one by the way—and I freaking loathed history class. And not because I’m some willful ignorant but because the school system is fucking stunted and biased, but I’ll save that rant for another time. Anyway, at the time I had high hopes of being a ladies man.” Dean winks at him. “Because of my dad, obviously, my non-super-straight preferences were limited to midnight porn… and God, it was good actually. But during school hours, I was all about the ladies. ‘Course at the time, I had fuck all of experience. Anywho, one day, in the back of class, sitting at one of those long double tables watching BenHur, Cassie Beckwith—”

Jesus, her name was Cassie? What are the odds. Castiel tries not to flinch at the close approximation of his true name.

—flirting with all year, reached over and stroked my thigh.”

Dean looks over, reminiscent, and expressive of ‘My Thigh, Man. My Thigh!’ Which, for a sixteen-year-old boy is the equivalent of shooting up with Viagra.

“I assume it didn’t end there,” guesses Cas.

“No it did not.” Dean smacks the vinyl to his right and continues, “So here I am, sportin’ wood in history class, and Cassie must’ve noticed because her delicate little hand slid up between my legs and just started goin’ to town! Just fucking rubbin’ the thing, you’d think she was scrubbing floors, man. I was done. I was so done. No sixteen-year-old has the power to stop that, none. So I just kinda put my head down on the desk and forgot about everyone else in the room… and let’er happen.”

With his hands, and myriad of expressions, Dean is a very animated storyteller, and though the subject is amusing on it’s own, Castiel enjoys the way he gestures in the air, the way his eyes light up, or flare wide, or how his cheeks turn pink-red with embarrassment.

“You came in your pants,” Castiel concludes.

“One hundred percent.”

“And then you got up and walked out of the room?”

Breaking into a hard laugh, his features embellished with humour, Dean corrects him. “Nope.”

“What did you do?”

“Oh, I left the room alright,” Dean tells him. “I just didn’t use the door.”
Cas starts chuckling. “Out the window?”

In a fluster, Dean throws up his arms. “Dude, it was right behind me! I shoved my chair back, spun out of it like I was in some boy-band video—but mostly so no one could catch a glimpse of my crotch—hiked a leg up and tossed my ass out the first-storey window. I landed in a goddamn rosebush! That shit hurt.”

“And then what?”

“I ran across the street where there were a whole row of houses, saw one running a sprinkler and beelined for it… ran through the water until I was soaked. Walked dripping wet all the way back to school, down the hall, right back into class and said, ‘Beautiful day to get wet, isn’t it?’ and I winked at Cassie.”

Laughing in a burst, Castiel manages to say, “You are awful.” But the comment is playful.

“Guess my reputation started early.” Pride infuses Dean’s words.

“I would have liked to see you in high school.”

“Yeah? And what were you like in high school?” asks Dean, compressing his lips immediately after, caught between wanting to know and wondering if he should withdraw the question.

Castiel feels guilty for causing such uncertainty in Dean. He decides to answer. “I wasn’t—I didn’t actually go to high school,” he admits. “I guess you could say I was homeschooled.” Right. In the subjects of racketeering, gambling, blackmailing, torture, and running a behemoth of a criminal organization. And not only that, but he’d fucking excelled for nearly twenty-nine years in nearly every subject.

“No back of the class handies for you, huh?”

He laughs. “No. Definitely not.”
They talk for a while longer, and Cas reveals as much as he can. He tries to dissociate his stories from the context of them, tries to reframe them in a way that doesn’t dampen the moments they share.

And while his sentences are laced with uncertain pauses, blatant lies, Dean doesn’t interrupt or say anything one way or the other. But he’s clever, and he knows. Castiel can see him putting it all together, taking every snippet of things he’s said over the last few months and forming a picture in his mind, a story of his own construction. Cas wonders what truth there is to it. He wonders what Dean thinks, and why—especially now—he hasn’t shifted away. If anything, Dean has gradually moved closer.

The sun is much lower than he expects when he realizes they’re talking softly with a sparse couple inches between them. Trading words and reflections about life and a variety of safe topics, Castiel traces the delicate lines of Dean’s features with his eyes.

Freckles characterize the mechanic; highlighting his playful nature. The dichotomy between Dean’s masculine jawline and unshaven scruff, with the perfected shape of his mouth and alluring stare, is captivating.

Dean is currently in the midst of a breakdown of the pros and cons of Marvel movies, when Cas cuts him off, “We don’t make sense.”
This is all an exercise in entertaining a notion that has zero staying power. Why did he ever agree to this? It’ll only hurt them in the end.

Stumped, Dean searches his face, green eyes clouded with thoughts. “Why not?” he argues.

In a stiff voice, Cas argues, “Because you’re good, Dean… to your core. And I’m damaged, and jaded and cynical and…” he falls silent. In a quiet whisper, he finishes, “I don’t know how to be… whatever it is you seem to want with me.”

With unparalleled patience, Dean levels him with a look. He doesn’t answer with words, instead he raises his hand to Castiel’s face and rests his palm over his cheek. His green eyes turn soft, and he brushes Castiel’s skin with his thumb… over his cheek, and then down near his mouth. Across his lips. Cas’ breath stalls in his lungs.

In a rare glimpse into Dean’s true thoughts, Castiel suddenly sees confusion and worry play across Dean’s features, in the crease between his brows and the shadow in his stare and the tight set of his mouth. Maybe they’re both treading in uncharted waters.

But even if that’s the case, even if they’re both feeling things they’ve never felt before, Dean still deserves better.

“It’s getting late,” Dean eventually says, his voice cracking a little.

“Yes. We should get back.”

Biting his lip, dimly vexed but trying to hide it, Dean scrutinizes Cas for a lengthy bunch of seconds and then quietly gets up and goes to start the boat.

The drive back is awkward, and long. Castiel changes back into his clothes silently. Dean doesn’t try to steal a peek even once. It feels as though years have passed before they wind up on Cas’ front porch.

“T’ll take it you’re not inviting me in,” says Dean.

Castiel tries to lighten the moment. “I guess you’re down to 98%” he teases, referring to Dean’s admitted correlation to pornos and orgasm delivery.

“Tell me why,” Dean demands. “Is it-is it because of what I’m like? I mean is that a factor here?”

Cas’ face softens, and he leans towards Dean. “No, God Dean, not at all. The things is, I have never had a relationship in my entire life. Not a real one. No friends, no loving family, no past lovers… that’s the truth. My entire world was centred around violence and lies. And it’s probably going to catch up to me, and I won’t endanger you. Above all else, you are the only thing I have of value in this life. You are my friend.”

“But nothing else?”

“I’m not ready for anything else.”

“Because of your past and all that,” wonders Dean, “or because what we’ve got is really awesome, and maybe on the far side of intense.”

“Both.” Cas watches Dean falter, his confidence taking a hit and confusion running high. “And sure, we could satiate ourselves and have a night together… but then I’d be nothing more than a conquest.”
Dean’s entire frame sags, and he flashes Cas a pained look. “I don’t fucking think of you as a goddamn conquest. Please tell me you don’t actually think that.”

In his more rational musings, Castiel hasn’t believed he’d be just a conquest for some time now. But considering his absolute lack of experience, he’s wondered about it. Even dwelled on it at times.

“I don’t,” he replies, lacking conviction. “But I don’t know much of anything when it comes to this sort of thing. Dean, I’m lost here. I don’t know who I am. How can I know what we may or may not be without knowing who I am. All I know is that my life is a mess, and...” Fuck it. Castiel shuts up and abandons wherever he’d been going with his rant. He doesn’t know what he’s doing.

“Why’d you agree to go on a date with me if you never planned to go on a second one?”

It’s a fair question. His reply is not. “Because I couldn’t stand that you’d given up. And I do want you. I know... it’s selfish, but there it is.”

Dean smiles a little. “You should be selfish more often.”

“I was selfish enough for one day.”

“What a tease,” Dean smirks playfully. “I can tell you one thing, you’ve certainly gotten me back for months of relentless propositions. One date and I’m hooked! Does it feel good to know you’ve taunted me?”

Watching Dean lean back against the door jamb, his expression coy, Castiel lowers his voice and replies, “I hate myself but yes, it does. Know you’re not the only one who’ll have a hard time sleeping tonight.”

“Oh, it’ll be damn hard alright.”

Cas laughs breathlessly. “I give it a nine.”

“C’mon, solid ten.” Dean licks across his bottom lip and adds, “inches, that is. In case you were wondering.”

“Now you’re just lying.”

Gasping in false shock, Dean replies, “I would never.” Flipping back to serious, Dean draws close. “Here’s the deal... I’ll leave if you kiss me.”

Castiel’s heart flutters in his chest. “And if I don’t kiss you, will you live on my porch for eternity?”

“Yes.”

“You’d have to stare at this hideous yellow door all the time. It’s very ugly.”

“True, but you’re worth it.” Dean smiles in the sweetest way, the kind that’s innocent on the surface, but ensnaring just below. It’s unabashed Dean, and Castiel loves it. He doesn’t want to deny it.

“I’m going to regret this, aren’t I?”

“Won’t know till you do it.” Dean shifts a few inches, his face close enough that Castiel can smell the flavour of his mouth.

“Fuck, I want you...”
Triumph flashes in Dean’s intense stare. “I’m right here.”

A rush of banked energy erupts from Castiel, and he grabs Dean by the back of the head and reels him in, their mouths crashing together in a mess. A groan rumbles from his chest the moment Dean’s tongue slides in. It’s wet and skilled, scouring the inside of his mouth in a way he’s never experienced.

Castiel never imagined kissing would feel so illicit. So deliciously wet.

In an awkward scuffle against the door frame, he traps Dean at the threshold and deepens the kiss, pressing into him, giving into the craving to feel the hard lines of his body. Dean’s mouth tastes sweet and warm, and he could spend an hour relishing such a glorious sensation.

And, *God in Heaven*, the way Dean moans; a low, needy whimper almost buckles him. Castiel captures Dean’s face to ground himself, guides Dean’s head to a slight angle and drives his tongue between the man’s parted lips.

His jeans grow damp as his hips thrust against Dean’s groin, who’s still wearing swim trunks, wet from jumping into the water when they’d docked to remove weeds from the prop. They’re both hard and Castiel could work himself all the way to climax if he kept it up.

Or, he could drag Dean inside and take off his clothes, lay him on the bed and—

Inhaling past the ache in his chest, Castiel rears back. Breaking the kiss is the hardest thing he’s ever done. He swallows away his disappointment, and opens his eyes.

In front of him, Dean is the picture of teetering restraint. They both take a minute to stare at each other and settle their rampant heartbeats, slowing their heaving chests.

For the first time, he notices Dean’s hands are locked behind his back.

“What?” Castiel asks breathlessly. “Didn’t want to touch me?”

Dean mutters through his teeth, “If I get my hands on you, I ain’t lettin’ go.”

Castiel’s smile stretches his face in languid content. “Fair enough.”

“One last request?”

Hesitantly, Castiel dips his chin.

“Touch yourself tonight, and think about me, and shove all your worries and fears somewhere where it won’t ruin things. If you won’t let yourself have me... you damn well better fantasize about me.”

He definitely has no problems on that front. “I’ll do my best.”

Dean narrows his eyes. “Goodnight... Jimmy.”

The name hits like a blow to the stomach, and he barely holds back a wince. Castiel might hate his past, and loathe the man he became... but he isn’t Jimmy, and hearing Dean say another’s name—no matter the circumstances—torments him.

When he replies, his voice is off. “Sleep well, Dean.”

Expression unreadable, Dean stares at him a second longer before turning around and hopping down the front steps. Standing on the walkway, he rounds back and says, “I will once I get rid of this,” and
reaches down to stroke the tented bulge in the front of his beach shorts.

With a wink, Dean treks back to the car.

Castiel shakes his head as he closes the front door. With his back settled against it, he slides to the floor and buries his face in his hands.

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In bed later that night, Castiel makes good on his promise. Frankly, he’s not sure he would’ve been able not to, even if Dean’s request had been the complete opposite. But, as he’s been given permission—downright encouragement—Castiel clears his mind of nothing but Dean.

He lays there stripped bare, physically and emotionally, his skin still damp from the shower. It hadn’t been easy, but he managed not to give in to a quick jerk-off session while he was in there. He wants to enjoy this.

Closing his eyes, pretending to be elsewhere, Castiel rests his hand on his stomach. He pays attention to the rise and fall of each breath, to the warmth of his own skin. His mind starts to show him certain fantasies, the building of a detailed picture amidst imagined sensations of tight spaces and slick warmth.

A sound catches in his throat as he starts to feel his way over to the protrusion of his hip bones; first the left, then ghosting over to the right. Another sound rises, but breaks through. The lowest of moans, painfully wanton.

Moving higher on his torso, Castiel traces the outline of bone and muscle to the hardened nub of a nipple. He pinches it, hips jerking with a rush of pleasure. He moves to the other, twists around it with his forefinger and thumb, lightly brushes over the tip.

“Mmngh,” he murmurs, biting his lip. He continues with it, until his nipple feels strangely numb and yet hypersensitive.

Since he began, the weight at his hips has swelled significantly, his cock now rigid with need. It no longer rests against his thigh, but hovers thickly over his pelvis. Touching it would feel fucking good, but not yet.

Castiel denies himself, focusing instead on the feel of his skin elsewhere. How his lips feel, and the wetness of his tongue on the tip of his finger, how it feels to wrap his smooth hand around his own neck, tracing with his fingers the places Dean has touched.

Castiel licks his lips, opening his mind to an image of Dean under him.

He wishes he knew Dean’s body. Unfortunately, he has to imagine freckles in places where there may not be any. Castiel rubs his hands all over his body, grasping his thighs as the tightness grows in his hips, his cock twitching with urgency. He spreads his own legs, picturing Dean do the same.

Loose breaths fall from his mouth, his body undulates over the covers, and before he has a thought to stop himself he reaches over for his phone and takes a picture. His thumb hovers over the send button—

“Fuck it…” Castiel hits send, and chuckles darkly at the thought of the FBI regularly doing scans on the device.

It’s not long before he gets a reply. And he’s not disappointed. There are two images. One of Dean
grinning for the camera, the other of his hand locked around his cock in an incredible close up. There’s a message too, “I like my hair pulled… By the way.”

Castiel stares at the picture, and a fantasy explodes in his mind. Of Dean, bowed legs parted wide on Cas’ bed… the man’s rough hand working himself over at Cas’ direction, and of course, a handful of Dean’s short, thick hair gripped hard in Castiel’s fist.

But all of this is not the best part of what he pictures, no. It’s what’s transpiring below, his other hand around his erection, guiding himself to Dean. In the present moment, Castiel finally gives in and touches himself. Arousal spikes with the sudden heat and tight grip around his dick, his hips canting upward towards nothing.

“Fuck, Dean…” As he inches forward in the daydream, he softly traces the head of his cock—pretending the touch of his fingers is somewhere very specific on Dean. But it’s not vivid enough.

Swearing out loud, Castiel pauses to bring his hand to his mouth, sucking every digit until each one is wet.

He lowers his arm again, building back up to the fantasy. He hears Dean’s voice trail across his mind—all deep groans and murmurs of desperation. Castiel pictures where he left off, and as he sees himself pushing inside Dean, he squeezes his wet fingers tightly around the head of his cock.

Breathing hard through his nose, he forces the action to be slow. And Christ, he goes and makes use of both hands, enveloping his cock in slick heat that he can pretend is the man he’s been thinking of for weeks, and months.

Short on oxygen, his mouth drops open to heave for air. Castiel slides both hands down his cock, all the way to the base where he’s kept things trimmed. He squeezes hard, groaning into the feel of it. Everything is tight, coiled with anticipation. His every muscle, his jaw… his grip.

God, what would Dean’s face look like? How would he sound?

“Uhn, fuck… I want you,” he whines to the empty room. There’s an ache that comes with the delusion, his mind pissed off that he’s trying to pass this off as real. It knows better; his dick knows better.

But despite all that, he feels disorientingly good. Touching himself in the past was never more than a sad exercise for relief. This is nothing like that. Christ, to really take control of it, to revel in exacted pleasure, he’s become fully disengaged from his troubles.

In this moment, with Dean capitalizing his thoughts, nothing can harm him.

Moving faster now, Castiel stacks his fists tight and jerks his throbbing erection in a blind reach for climax. When his arms tire, his hips take over, rising and falling to mimic what he wants so fucking bad.

The fantasy fades and returns through the fog of ecstasy in his mind, and part of the disconnect is because he’s lying down. An easy remedy, he realizes, quickly changing positions so that he’s on his knees and facing the pillows.

“Yes…” he sighs, the images turning sharp in his thoughts.

Castiel cradles his balls in one hand, roughly and tightly strokes his cock with the other. There’s no longer a steady rhythm, only blatant need. He works himself to the brink, crying out when he denies it with the tight squeeze. And then a second time, and a third.
The fourth time, he’s almost wincing from the sharp peak of pleasure. It’s grown uncomfortable now and he won’t stop. Not sure he could anymore.

Climbing higher towards release, his head thrown back on his shoulders, Castiel doesn’t picture himself inside Dean. Too reverent of the reality to risk a poor substitution in his mind.

Instead, he fucks into his fist, and aims his cock lower… imagining Dean’s open thighs. And everything between them.

“Fuck!” he shouts when the tension breaks, the orgasm crashing through him in waves. He’s shaking. “Fuuuuuck,” he groans with each surge, fisting his cock through a mess of come. There’s more of it on the bed, but all he sees are white, creamy streaks painted across Dean’s tight entrance.

If it were real, he would use the available slickness to finger the glorious mechanic into a sated mess. Two fingers buried deep, scissoring him, stroking at his prostate until he can’t stand it. Bringing Dean over the edge is a desire unlike any other.

But it’s not real.

None of it is, and he’s left in his room naked and badly needing another shower, not to mention another set of sheets he doesn’t have.

He’s about to tiredly crawl off the bed and go take a shower when his phone pings.

“I don’t know about you… but I’m a goddamn mess. As is the bed… and um the wall.”
Cold Slap, Illinois

It’s been two days since Castiel’s date with Dean. Two days of overanalyzing every minute, of reliving the silky texture of Dean’s tongue, of remembering the scent of his skin as the sun dried him after their swim.

Plus, there’s the dick-pic on his phone that he should probably delete but is self-aware enough to know that’s simply not something he has the capacity to do. He’s already jerked off three more times to the image.

The wanting makes it very hard to make sense of the right thing to do. Something like not being able to see the reality-forest through the sexually-frustrated trees. Essentially, the confusion of it all has returned. And he’s just so fucking thrilled about it.

Castiel has wearily flopped back and forth between giving in to his rampant desires, and running out of town. But he always finds a reason to stop himself from doing either. It leaves him in a strange, irritated state of existence.

Everything infuriates him, from the decor of his home to the wind flapping at the window panes, rattling the glass inside the wood, to that damn, ugly-ass yellow door.

Not that he’s purposely avoided Dean the last forty-eight hours, but he conveniently hasn’t had a shift at the bar, and none of the businesses in town have needed their books done. It’ll be a couple weeks before he needs to deal with them, and by then he’s hoping to have shown Bobby a few simple things.

The distance from Dean is necessary. Although, it would’ve been far more efficient had the distance thus far and excessive overthinking resulted in some sort of decision.

But no!

Cas “The Rat” Haven is right back where he started. Except now, he’s drowning in thoughts of Dean. Inundated with concupiscent sensations crawling beneath his skin, driving him fucking mad. He’s a livewire, half ready to fight, half ready to explode.

Either way, he better damn well get his head in the right place, because tonight… he has to work. At six, or Rufus will be pissed. Not someone Castiel’s inclined to anger. There are rumours that Rufus used to be in the military. Based on what Cas has already seen of him, the personality fits, the way he moves too—as if sheer purpose constantly motivates every step. Castiel wishes Rufus would apply that attitude to his books, but computers are certainly not the man’s forte. As this benefits Cas, he shouldn’t really complain.

Dean will be there, of course. On the face of things, they’re moving forward as friends (despite the other night’s naughty exchange of messages). And though Castiel may not be versed in the ins and outs of relationships, he’s not a total idiot.

They are friends, yes. But there’s so much else going on, he can’t begin to make sense of it. Several times over the last hour alone, he’s thought over the concept of being in love.

Is that what this is? After thirty-one years, has he managed to fall in love with someone? And, god help him, but with an innocent small-town man? How the goddamn hell had he gotten himself into this fiasco? He’s never considered himself an overly emotional person before, but recent experiences prove otherwise.
Getting ready for work, shoving his legs into his favourite jeans (mostly because they’re Dean’s), Castiel comes to the decision that he’s not willing to leave; it would complicate things with the FBI for one, and secondly, he fucking doesn’t want to. He won’t take things further with Dean, at least not yet. He needs to tread very lightly because Dean is, in many ways, far more dangerous to Cas’ life than a potential hitman.

No one affects him the way Dean does. No one has weakened him to such a degree before. Castiel would take his own life to save Dean any amount of suffering. And that, clear as glass, is a dangerous development.

Worst of all, he doesn’t even care. He would gladly take a bullet in Dean’s place. Fuck, he would smile into the barrel of a shotgun, take six rounds in the gut, all for Dean.

Hours later, as he’s walking to work through a sunlit sprinkle of rain, his stomach grumbles and he realizes all he’s had to eat since he woke up is a bagel and two glasses of orange juice. Apparently emotional turmoil dampens his appetite.

Dinner is well underway when he walks through the front doors to Rufus’ Cabin. The waitresses are bustling around, and Rufus is tending bar—a rare sight. At the back side of the room, he notices Ellen sitting with Bobby, her two hands wrapped around one of his and their exchange is absent of words, but filled instead with soul-deep stares.

Interesting. Hopefully their relationship is mending itself towards something great.

Christ, this business of love and its unclear missives is damn frustrating. Castiel walks down the main hall, waves into the kitchen at Ash—whose trademark mullet is pulled into a low bun with a pink and yellow scrunchie of all things—and progresses into the staff room.

Dean is there, tying on a Budweiser apron. Castiel is instantly drawn back to the first week he was in town. How things have changed.

“How are you?” asks Dean, his expression calm.

Reaching past his friend to the rack, Cas grabs a spare apron for himself. “I’m good.” His blue eyes find their way to Dean, and he lingers. “And you?”

Blowing out an exhale, Dean leans against the metal shelves. “Honestly? Man, you’ve gone and messed me up. Pamela and me sometimes have these, uh, experimental evenings you could call it. Anyway, yesterday she invited me over and I mean I went, not sure if I would follow through but we didn’t even get down to business before she knew right off the bat somethin’ was up with me and refused to fool around. And then she wanted to talk. Ugh.”

The picture of Dean with Pamela is… intriguing. Castiel apologizes, “I’m sorry, Dean. If I could change things I would.”

“I know,” Dean smiles kindly, but there’s a quiet exhaustion in him. One day, Cas knows Dean will give up on him.

The bar shift is less uncomfortable than he thought it would be. He manages not to worry about Dean, and his past only bubbles to the surface once or twice. That is, until around ten-thirty when he’s bringing out the trash and Ash is standing there smoking a joint.

Castiel offers a friendly hello. They haven’t spoken much since the incident with AJ.

The immediate reaction is ingrained. Castiel drops the lid of the garbage bin and powers over to Ash. Within a second, his long fingers are tight around Ash’s throat and the young man is pressed up against the back wall.


Following a gurgled attempt at a reply from the man under his scope, Castiel loosens his grip.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Ash mumbles roughly, “back up the intensity, just tryin’ to help out my man. I ain’t got no beef with you.”

“And exactly who do you think I am?”

Ash hesitates, and then stammers, “No one, my man. Absolutely no one.”

“No, really. I would love the insight. Tell me.” Cas squeezes a little harder and then releases.

Licking his lips, Ash finally spills, “Well, uhh, ya know, guy shows up outta nowhere, low key Yankees accent… the tats… and all that after the Haven case going down… rumours about a rat… but hey, I don’t know nothin’. Just watched one too many gangster movies.”

Instead of panic, Castiel becomes exactly who he’s been running from. “You’re right,” he says in a measured tone. “You don’t know anything. And you will say nothing about whatever it is you know nothing about, you hear me?”

“Aye aye Captain.”

In a swift move, Castiel pulls back and Ash slumps back to a flat-footed stance on the asphalt. They linger a moment, breathing heavy and tensions running high.

Regret for his actions curdles Cas’ stomach. “I’m sorry,” he offers quietly. “I wouldn’t have hurt you.”

Surprisingly confident, Ash replies, “I know. Hey, no hard feelings man. I swear.” Ash extends his slim hand and smiles as if he knows more about hidden pasts than he’s let on.

Intrigued, but doesn’t ask, Cas shakes his hand. “Thank you.”

“Anytime.”

After that, Ash ducks back inside and Cas looks up at the night sky. It’s clear, as it often is here. A long time goes by before the sound of the creaky back door opens and he smells Dean’s presence before he sees him.

“You’ve been out here a while.”

Cas smiles falsely. “It’s nice out.” Cold actually, very much like the slap of reality he just received.

“Yeah. It is.”
This time, Castiel does avoid Dean. Purposefully. And it’s killing him. But after what happened with Ash, he gets a clear slap in the face about who he is. Sure, maybe he might be in love with Dean. Maybe Dean could’ve been that man for him.

But it’d be in some other life.

He manages to go a week and a half without seeing his friend. Which is downright remarkable for a town this size. And when he’s finally faced with an encounter, it’s the younger Winchester pounding on his door.

Castiel puts down his mac and cheese (his new favourite meal he can’t get enough of) and treads to the ugly door. He hears a distinct annoyed huff and knows it’s Sam.

“Sam?”

“Heading up the fucking door!”

Heaving a long sigh, preparing himself for the wrath of the younger brother, Castiel unlocks the door and swings it open. Sam storms in like an angry bull.

“What the fuck happened with my brother?”

Castiel sees no point in skirting the truth. “We went on a date, realized things were more complicated or more serious than we thought… and it won’t work. I’ve kept my distance since then, you should be happy. It’s what you wanted, isn’t it?”

Growling, Sam paces in a circle. “Not anymore!” he shouts.

Confused, Castiel walks towards the brother. “What are you talking about?”

“Goddammit—Can’t you see it?” Sam throws his arms out wildly. “My brother is in love with you! He’s never been in love with anyone! And you pushing him away is really fucking with his head okay. I told you he wasn’t as strong or cocky as he comes off—I told you not to hurt him! Well,” he bristles, “he’s hurting!”

The accusation hits Cas hard. Dean is hurting? Because of him? Because he loves him? “No,” Cas shakes his head in stunned disbelief, “No, I’m sorry, that’s not possible. Dean knows better. He knows I’m no good for him.”

Sam laughs bitterly. “People can’t control who they love. You know that right?”

“Um.”

Out of nowhere, Sam dominates his vision—two big hands bearing down on his shoulders. “Listen man, I don’t know if I trust you, all I know is that I can’t stand seeing my brother’s heart broken, so you need to fix it okay?”

“He loves me?” asks Castiel stupidly, eyes looking innocently into Sam’s.

The tall Winchester huffs hard. “Yes, jesus, it’s not that hard of a concept.”

But it is, Cas argues in his mind. Has anyone ever loved him? Did Anna? “I’m no good for him,”
“How do you know that?” challenges Sam. “Come on, tell me. Let me be the judge. I won’t say a damn word I promise.”

There it is, the invitation for truth. It would be easy to tell Sam, much easier than telling Dean and once the truth is free—he knows Sam would find a way to get him out of town. And maybe that’s for the best.

Minutes of the hour dwindle down, there are birds outside in the trees on Cas’ property and it’s all the sound that hangs around in the stilted silence of their conversation.

How would he start, he wonders? My name. Castiel thinks clearly for the first time in days, he should start with his name.

So much for the anonymity of WitSec.

Squaring his shoulders, Cas looks up at Sam firmly. “Haven,” he says steadily, “my name is Castiel Haven.”

***

It went better than he expected, telling Sam that is. The brother in question has been gone for a few hours now and Castiel heats up his leftover mac and cheese, ruminating over the things Sam had said.

There wasn’t as much shock as he’d expected telling his tragic backstory, but when Sam had asked for details of his wrongdoings, he’d never felt such paramount shame before then. Of course, there’d been times he’d hated himself, but feeling the weight of Sam’s judgement—it truly crippled him, because for the first time he cared about another’s opinion of him, he worried about how his morals stacked up against someone righteous and true.

He thinks there should be a bruise on his cheek from the encounter—it’s what he deserves. And he had been ready to take Sam’s fist square in the face, but it never came. He sure as fuck hadn’t expected that hug. To be frank, the comforting touch had been rather weird. Whether that was because Castiel had so rarely been hugged in his life, or because Sam dwarfed him, or because the younger brother should really be kicking his ass out of town—it probably didn’t matter.

Either way, Castiel stood completely still inside the closure of Sam’s muscular embrace, his features twisted with confusion.

“Hug me back, Castiel,” Sam had said, irritated.

And he did, looping his spaghetti-weak arms around the Winchester’s large frame. “Um, why are you hugging me?” he’d asked.

Sam’s responding words linger in the recess of his mind now. “Because you didn’t deserve what happened to you. Man, it wasn’t your fault—you hear me? And you got out, you did the right thing. You’re not a bad person, okay? You’re not.”

On that, they do not agree.

Sam promised not to say a word to Dean, that he’d keep Cas’ secret because it wasn’t his to tell. But he pleaded with Cas, tried to persuade him that Dean would accept him for who he’d been. Castiel had calmly reminded the lawyer that all of that didn’t matter. Regardless of everything, Dean isn’t...
safe with him. Until Raphael’s behind bars or dead, Castiel knows better now than to fall into the pretense of a normal life.

The fear is too great. Sure, Dean’s advice that Cas can’t control what might happen is absolutely true; he can’t control anything in fact. But he figures, if he’s never around Dean there’s less of a chance Dean will get hurt because of him.

At the end of their conversation, Cas promised Sam he’d be strong, that he would steer clear of Dean. But the brother didn’t leave happy… because that wasn’t what he wanted anymore. He’d all but given Castiel a green light where Dean was concerned.

Castiel snorts. As if he needs more corrosion of his will power.

Shaking his head, he forks the mac and cheese into his mouth in hefty bites, chews quick and swallows without being satisfied by the meal.

He wonders idly if where things will go from here.

***

Weaving through the patio tables the next evening, Castiel makes his way through the front doors of Pamela’s Grill—the woman in question is bent over the ledge where there’s a wide opening to the kitchen.

Even before Cas makes his way to her, she spins around with a spark of a grin. “Well hello there, my sexy accountant—it’s been a while.”

Offering a timid smile, he takes a seat at the closest table and she joins him. “Yes, it has. I’ve been busy.”

She chuffs knowingly. “Bull shit. You and Dean have been dancing around each other for weeks. And now you’re avoiding him.”

He swears under his breath.

“—Be right next to Dean in a confined space surrounded by alcohol?”

He huffs a laugh at her directness. “Yes, actually. Exactly.”

“—Be right next to Dean in a confined space surrounded by alcohol?”

He huffs a laugh at her directness. “Yes, actually. Exactly.”

“What happened, sweetheart? Get scared off by the big ‘L’?”

Tipping his head in confusion, he stares at her.

“Love,” Pam drones.

Cas nods in understanding. “I’d rather not talk about it.”

She tsks. “I think maybe you need to.”

“I can’t,” he mutters. Pamela’s quiet for a long minute, staring at him as if she’s debating something,
so he fires off: “What?”

“I used to be a psychologist,” she tells him, “for the government.”

Alarm bells go off, but he puts up a poker face. “And?”

“Look,” she checks around them for eavesdroppers and continues, “I’ve worked with ex-special forces, CIA field agents, the FBI... I’m not just a pretty face who makes a mean hamburger. Whatever you’re hiding—and I don’t care what it is—it’s eating away at you. All I’m saying, is that you can talk to me. I’m still licensed and I’m still bound by doctor-patient confidentiality.”

He doesn’t know what to say. Delaying a response, he watches her eyes trace his flitting expressions. He wonders what she makes of him. What she’s seen and hasn’t voiced.

“I’m not allowed to say anything,” he tells her, being clear.

She nods, knowing what he means. “I’ve done a few cases with... people in your predicament.”

With a snide lilt in his voice, he asks, “Do you enjoy talking to people who’ve done terrible things?”

Pamela places a hand on his forearm. “A lot of people do terrible things... good people regret doing them. Which one are you?”

Swallowing, Castiel looks her in the eye. “Most days... I don’t know.”

“How about... I hire you to make a website for my cousin’s business... but in turn you give me one hour a week. If all we do is sit there and stare at each other... so be it.”

Castiel glances at her hand resting on his arm. “Why do you care?”

“Because for some reason, you’re right for Dean. You cause the most genuine smiles on that handsome face of his. You only know what you’ve seen so far, so you don’t know what the rest of us see... how you’ve changed him.”

“It’s not what you think,” he argues, “it’s just complicated. Giving the false impression of something it isn’t.”

She sneers. “I should mention I’m pretty good at picking up lies. You’re full of BS.” Castiel catches himself laughing and sees her smile in return. “Is it a deal?”

Thinking it over, he realizes there’s no way to verify her credentials, but he too is good at seeing lies. She’s not deceiving him. “Okay.”

Not long after, when she’s done at the Grill, they walk to her house to have a “chat”, as she puts it. Castiel is nervous, but also hopeful. If nothing else, at least he’ll have a chance to be himself for an hour.

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Learning who he is and his confusion where Dean is concerned, Pam is sympathetic to his struggles and offers up the details for her cousin’s website needs. While he’s never designed a website, learning how will eat up a lot of his time.

Over the course of two weeks, he works on the computer and doesn’t take a single shift at Rufus’ Cabin. He’s told Dean over the phone it’s best they distance themselves from each other for a little while.
The hint of autumn is in the air now, the breeze cooler in the evening than before. The leaves on the trees are lightening towards various shades of red and orange.

It annoys him that Dean seemed completely unbothered by their conversation. “Yeah, man, it’s fine—honestly. Do your thing and I’ll do my thing and if we’re friends cool, if not, well, I’m sure I’ll live.” Those were Dean’s words. And they hadn’t sounded marked by any profound distress, not to the degrees of which Sam had implied.

*Dean isn’t hurting*, he tells himself, feeling a pang in his chest. God, it’s reprehensible he’s even upset! All because the man he cares about isn’t wallowing unhappily in rejection?

After another few days, he thinks enough time has passed that he can resume the normal course of life he first began here. Meaning, regular shifts at the bar, doing the books in town as needed with Bobby tagging alongside him now, even hanging out with Dean on a friendly basis once in awhile. The separation has him feeling as though he’s on steadier ground; the “chats” with Pamela have helped immensely.

Not once has she judged him, or tried to push him beyond his limits.

When Castiel tells Rufus about coming back for his regular shift schedule, he’s immediately commanded to work that night. It doesn’t surprise him, and he realizes he missed Rufus’ gruff demeanour.

That night, when he arrives at work, he notices the sharp deviation in the tone of the town’s patrons crowded in for drinks the second he walks through the door.

And strangely, Jo is behind the counter. She’s almost never behind the counter. “Where’s Dean?” he asks.

“Shit—you didn’t hear?”

He crowds into her space and demands answers. “What happened?”

“Oh, his dad was offed in jail just yesterday—it was all over the local news.”
The Inevitable Descent

Fuck. Dean must be a mess. Castiel would’ve known about it if he’d turned on the TV but Pamela has asked him to take a step back from it all, which meant, not watching the news.

Goddammit.

Castiel hesitates a few minutes, but realizes he can’t stay at work for hours worrying about his friend. “I’m sorry, I need to go…” he apologizes, knowing she’ll have to man the bar all night if he leaves.

She smiles the way a friend does when they know your secrets. “I know… go on. I got this.”

Dropping his apron on the lower bar, he marches towards the door and when he rushes outside he finds Sam standing on the sidewalk, looking distraught. The lawyer’s always polished and together, his mind running a mile minute and it’s the first time Cas has seen him unhinged.

Wearing jogging pants, hair disheveled, it’s hard to imagine this is the same man he met his first day.

“Are you alright?” asks Castiel.

Sam huffs indifferently and rubs his face. “I don’t know. I don’t know.” Qualifying his urgent words, he adds, “Dean won’t let me in.”

“I’ll head over, and see what I can do,” promises Cas. “But are you okay, is there anything I can do for you?”

“Oh, no it’s fine… I’m okay. I’m fine.” Repetitive assurances prove otherwise, but Castiel offers a supportive nod because he knows it’s what Sam needs. “I’m gonna head home and be with Jess. But thanks, for going to see Dean—I know it’s not easy for you.” Sam reaches out and squeezes his shoulder. “You know?” the tall man laughs a bit, “I kinda think you two might be perfect for each other. Fucked up, huh?”

Cas narrows his gaze and presses his lips together. “Um, thanks… I guess?”

After an awkward goodbye, Cas jogs to Dean’s apartment—it doesn’t take him long. As he steps foot onto the site, he knows it’s a long shot to expect Dean to open the door willingly. Switching gears, he treks across the parking lot towards the sides and near the building base, his eyes scouring the ground for something useful.

Just by the far corner of the bay areas, he reaches down and picks up a long, thin nail and after rounding the back of the property where a lot of scraps and garbage are piled up he picks out a thin strip of metal—maybe an old dipstick but it’s hard to say as it’s been cut short.

It’s been a long time since he’s lock-picked a door, but his hands find a rhythm and he fiddles with the shop entrance for a solid ten minutes until the distinctive click triggers his success. Tools in hand, he climbs the narrow stairs to Dean’s place, his mind wondering how Dean could be taking the news about his father. It’s obvious in past discussions that Dean has a number of issues on that front. Not that Cas is anyone to judge daddy issues. He’s got a truckful of them.

Thankfully, his hands are quicker with the apartment door.

Before he steps inside, he can hear the sounds of Metallica thumping through the space. As he glances around, he notices an empty bottle of liquor beside the kitchen sink.
To be expected, he reasons.

He bites his lip, nervous to offer comfort, and makes his way through the kitchen towards the hallway. The door to Dean’s bedroom is shut, but the continued sound of rock—heavy and abrasive—pours out into the hall.

As he raises his hand, he hesitates. What if he walks in and sees that Dean is getting the comfort he needs? By way of some willing body, their legs wrapped around Dean’s strong hips. It’s not exactly something he’d care to see, but he can’t exactly dither outside in the hall for the rest of time, can he?

Straightening his spine, he creaks open the door; his breath held tight in his lungs.

It’s not the heady scent of sex that greets him, but the stale aroma of old alcohol and sweat radiating out into the hall. Glancing down to the right, he sees the stereo plugged into the wall. He crouches down and lowers the volume before standing again to look over at the bed.

The only evidence of a person in there is the large bump under the covers. He has no idea whether Dean is awake, asleep, or passed out, but he moves to the side of the bed and takes several breaths and waits.

And waits…

After twenty long minutes, and after Cas’ knees have gone stiff, the bump shifts and the top edge of the blanket is nudged down to reveal his friend’s face. It’s tear-streaked, puffy from sleep and booze and dented with lines of the pillow from having been in bed for who knows how long. Yes, Dean is a mess… one that Castiel can’t avoid anymore.

The mechanic’s face, normally lit up with joy and swagger, flinches with teetering emotion as he speaks. “I know—” He swallows, starting again, “—I know you don’t want anything with me, but…” tightening his jaw, Dean pauses and tries to steady himself. “Fuck, I need you,” he throws out quickly, his voice painfully rigid, and clamps his mouth shut, reddened eyes darting up to stare at the ceiling.

Ignoring every former protest, Cas shoves up the blankets and climbs into Dean’s bed. He wraps his body around Dean and cradles his friend as the man immediately starts to sob again, muttering nonsense about how he’s so pissed, and so angry that he’s even upset at all. So stupid, Dean argues in a hitched voice, so fucking stupid. Hearing Dean berate his own emotions gives Castiel the urge to cover his mouth in a kiss for the sole purpose of turning off his rain of nonsense.

“Why the fuck am I blubbering over the death of a cruel sadistic bastard?” asks Dean. “Fucking why?!”

They aren’t questions for Cas to answer really, just things Dean needs to vent, and Castiel understands the need. Instead of offering pointless reassurances or explanations, he pulls Dean tighter against his chest and presses comforting kisses into the mess of his unwashed hair. It’s remarkable how easy the affection happens, considering Castiel’s complete lack of experience with it.

Two hours pass this way and eventually Dean falls asleep, a loose-limbed fully-grown man trusting Cas to be there for him through such a sad, complicated situation. Castiel has never grieved anything before, and he struggles to understand exactly what Dean needs.

Sometime near midnight or one a.m., he can’t be sure, Cas drifts off and doesn’t wake until hours later when Dean stirs within his sleepy embrace.

They wake slowly together, shifting apart only enough to meet each other’s foggy gaze through the
shadows. For a long time, they just stare, searching for any number of things in the other. Not a single sound seems to breach the room, the Metallica tape having reached an end sometime while they slept.

The silence of the late night brings about a false sense of calm between them, where Cas can pretend to ignore his own situation and maybe Dean can manage to do the same.

The longer his eyes roam over the angles of Dean’s face, the way those long eyelashes flutter slow with the lingering weariness of a restless sleep, Castiel becomes aware of the connection between them shifting and twisting into something neither of them have any hope of understanding. Especially not Cas.

“I’m sorry,” Cas eventually whispers. He doesn’t specify why.

“I know.”

“Do you want a drink?”

Dean grins tiredly. “Yeah,” he says, relieved.

Extricating himself from the tangle of Dean’s limbs and the twisted sheet, he climbs out of the bed and crosses the room to the tall dresser where a half empty bottle of Whiskey sits. “Would you like a glass?”

Dean snorts in response.

A minute later, Castiel is back in bed and handing over the bottle as they sit up side-by-side against the headboard. He watches Dean swallow back a few gulps, exhaling shakily.

Placing the bottle on his nightstand, Deans wipes his face and mouth in the same motion and turns to focus on Cas. He chuckles softly. “I bet I’m super hot right now.”

Castiel smiles. “A ten.”

“Liar.”

“For once, no… Not a lie.” Because looking at Dean now, sleep-mussed and bare of his outer personality, Castiel can see the parts of him he’s never seen before and for the first time he realizes the truth he hasn’t wanted to accept.

Through the confusion and inexperience of his past, he wasn’t prepared to put a name to a feeling he couldn’t be sure of.

But now? Searching Dean’s eyes, feeling the warmth of his body beneath the covers, and sharing this quiet night with him—Castiel is certain.

He’s fucking in love. There’s no denying it, and it—damn—it hurts.

To the point where the breadth of the emotion is staggering. And God, why does it ache as if he’s been punched in the ribcage? All of his fears have tripled and compiled, ranging out into complicated irrational paths.

Uncertain green eyes remain fixed on him as he comes to this gripping realization. Is it obvious, he wonders? Curious, Castiel tries to follow the tumble of Dean’s thoughts, and while he doesn’t see the reflection of his own revelations, he does see the culmination of a decision reached; a shaky resolve
building with each passing second.

Castiel reacts before Dean has a chance to reach out. Because he doesn’t want Dean to feel even a moment’s flare of shame-filled need, not if he can help it.

With a minute shake of his head, he shifts his position and reaches over to hook his arm around the far side of Dean’s midsection, pulling the weight of him down to the bed and finally… underneath Castiel.

The sudden proximity satisfies a deep-seated need in him. Something primal that mildly frightens him.

Castiel’s breath stutters at the contrast of Dean’s near nakedness (sporting loose boxers and not a stitch else) compared to his fully-dressed status, but neither of them make a move to modify the situation. Besides, it’s best to keep a few remaining barriers.

“This is complicated,” he tells Dean.

After a beat, Dean throws back in rocky voice, “I don’t care.”

Exhausted from fighting himself, from pushing Dean away, Castiel closes his eyes and registers every nuance of Dean’s body lined up under his, still managing to hold back some of his weight. It’s pure bliss as far as he’s concerned, and—God—he can’t imagine how it would feel if they were free of encumbrances. To experience the silken heat of laying skin-to-skin with Dean, with everything touching? He would implode.

It’s fair to say that Castiel is not ready for that.

Muscles starting to shake, Castiel finally lets the rest of his weight sink on top of Dean, a long sigh flowing past his lips. He buries his face towards the man’s neck to breathe his scent before dragging his nose across Dean’s unshaven cheek. Dazed, Castiel mutters, “… Mm, I love the way you smell.” Like grease, and heat, and… home.

Dean replies with a thick noise in the back of his throat and twists impatiently under him.

They angle quietly into each other after that, teasing the buildup of a kiss in a sort of intentional torture. Each pass and twist of their faces to bring their lips closer pumps up the heat in Castiel’s veins. He feels helpless; ensnared by the hedonistic taunt of pleasure and love.

Dean’s hot breath rushes up over Castiel’s mouth and tingles set off in his groin. He swallows, preparing himself for an intimacy he’s never quite experienced.

Mind temporarily focused on his past, a slip of worry streaks through his mind, and he stutters into a reluctant pause.

“Dean?” Cas hesitates, opening his eyes to showcase his reservations—barely able to see his friend through the darkness and total lack of space between them.

Squirming in frustration, Dean pleads in a static-rough voice. “Fuck, just be with me okay? Please?”

Christ, hearing Dean beg him tugs at the persistent ache in his chest, unwinding him. Castiel’s need to satisfy Dean overrides his better sense. Knowing how fast he’s falling, he can’t hold back a low groan—the sound nothing more than nonverbal acceptance.

Holding onto some level of calm is abandoned when he can’t seem to breathe fast enough. Tasting
the moisture in the air between their parted mouths has him pinned to Dean’s eyes, needing another plea to push him the last inch.

As always, Dean reads him and whispers, “Please,” the word spoken so close Cas can breathe it in.

It’s the last nail on the coffin of his indecision.
Accepting defeat has never felt so good.

Imaginary restraints have come loose, walls he’d built to keep Dean out start to crumble. Fear lingers, but he pushes it out of his mind. Castiel, former mobster and a substantiated weak man, tips his head back slightly.

In a tender, intimate nuzzle, his dry lips brush against Dean’s parted mouth. His nose nudges past Dean’s, his entire being revelling in the closeness. The kiss is nothing more than a graze of skin, warmth and unshaven bristle coming together.

The lack of urgency doesn’t dampen the blaze of heat coiling in the pit of Castiel’s stomach. A sound he doesn’t recognize travels up his windpipe—something raw and wistful.

Dean’s low whimper in response radiates to his core, and his tongue darts out across Dean’s upper lip, tracing it, acclimating himself to the brewing intensity. He licks gradually into Dean’s mouth, wet with a remnant flavour of Whiskey to light up his tastebuds. Wanting more of everything—taste and touch alike—Castiel angles his head to seal and deepen the kiss, sinking his tongue in alongside Dean’s and moaning. Loudly. With a blatant air of relief, Dean throws his arms around Cas’ neck and locks him in. 

As if I’m going anywhere, he thinks with a grin against Dean’s mouth.

While he kisses Dean in a building tempo that gives his heart a workout, his hips find a rhythm too. Not that it’s an ideal rutting situation. Being fully-clothed and all, as well as under a mass of blankets. Truth be told, it’s hot as all hell, and he feels beads of sweat trickling under his clothes but he won’t dare undress.

So he deals with it in a sort of joyous protest. Devouring every timid whine from Dean, loving the silk heat of Dean’s mouth, and now—with a growing note of perspiration in the room—he buries his hips into the cushion of Dean’s welcoming groin. A mixture of soft and hard crashing together, dampened by the bunching of fabric and too-many layers.

The sounds of their efforts are mostly quiet, save for the muted rustling of blankets and drag of clothes, the occasional gasp for air between the smacks of lips-greeting-lips and tongues sloppily sliding together in the space between. Sounds that wouldn’t even carry into the hall, but each one nearly paralyzes Castiel because he’s never once experienced anything with such profound meaning.

Even though he’s giving in, there’s still the damn ache in his chest. Something about Dean makes him feel as if there’s a belt around his ribs being cranked tighter and tighter. He’s bound to break, he just doesn’t know how.

Not to be distracted, Castiel redoubles his efforts. Hips grinding harder, flexing his ass to press further into Dean. The increasing sweat and humidity dazes him, and he feels the moisture as they slide their fingers repeatedly together and apart—an enticing metaphor of the act they’re denying themselves.

Dean’s broken moans are more breath-laden than thick, softer than Cas would’ve expected from such a raucous man. But the more he’s gotten to know Dean, the more he realizes the confidence and audaciousness don’t play into Dean’s preferences sexually. Not the way Cas would expect from other men.
Absorbing each subtle shift from Dean under his heft, the question of submission rises at the forefront of Castiel’s mind. Not that Castiel has a great deal of experience in sex, or in any kind of power dynamics therein, but it’s undeniable in the way Dean opens for him; legs spreading out wide, mouth parting in invitation to allow Cas’ tongue to explore and taste. Even those rough mechanic’s hands are up on the pillows, splayed out as Cas holds them as leverage for his rolling movements.

Mapping out every sign of Dean’s trust and openness takes his breath away. Castiel eases back from Dean’s lips to peg him with a serious look. “Dean…” is all he manages to say.

The man under him stares back, equally distraught and licks across his lips. He then spreads his legs more and rubs his barely covered erection against Cas’ jeans. This time Dean doesn’t say please, but it’s there between them. An undeniable need.

Castiel stubbornly ignores the nuisance of his clothes and the weight of the shifting blankets, and imagines they’re together as he searches Dean’s eyes—imagines that he’s inside Dean with more than his tongue. And as he fantasizes without reservation, Dean whimpers and undulates beneath him, hips pressing up wantonly into each thrust.

“It’s your turn,” Castiel says, his voice thick. To imply his meaning, he grinds his barricaded erection against Dean’s, dragging a ragged hitch from the man. “I want to make you come, Dean…”

Dean curls his fingers tightly in Cas’ hands and groans, rutting up into his groin. Losing his patience, knowing he has to fight his own desire, Castiel fucks against Dean wishing it were real.

Wanting it so bad he’s shaking.

“Would you—” Cas breathes into Dean’s ear mid-thrust “—would you let me inside you if I asked?”

Dean cries out; a mix between aggravation and exultation. “Fu-uck yesss.”

“You don’t know me,” he reminds Dean sternly.

Dean twists his head to the side to meet Castiel’s gaze. “Yes,” he growls. “I do.”

It’s not a lie. Castiel can see Dean truly believes it, and though his tempestuous question wasn’t leading to anything, it does something to Castiel to be wrapped in Dean’s easy acceptance.

He can feel the heat in his own gaze rise, his hips move harder than before but slower… his whole body seeking release from the tight coil of emotion and desire wrenching around him.

Each time his weight presses in between Dean’s legs, they both gasp at the contact, feeling the thick, solid lengths drag and rub together through an annoying crumple of clothes. It’s goddamn maddening, and stunningly erotic.

In a trance, Castiel watches the peaks of his friend’s arousal. Catches every rise and plateau, waiting to see him fall over the edge.

“I want to—” Dean pants and strains. “I want to say your fucking name,” he gasps, “but I know… I know it’s not what you say it is. I fucking know it’s not,” he adds with a side of anger, “because you goddamn cringe every… every time I say it. It’s why”—he pauses to suck back a necessary breath—“it’s why I stopped saying it.”

Shit. Panic braids into the mix of pleasure, and Castiel can’t bring himself to say a single word. Instead, he mind-numbingly works himself on Dean, trying his best to distract them both from his glaring lack of identity. He ducks away from Dean’s stare and sucks a series of hard kisses into the
man’s neck, rousing uninhibited moans from him.

But as they strain into each other, working themselves higher and higher, and he hears the quicker tempo of Dean’s choppy inhales and the occasional ‘Please’, Castiel wants nothing more than to hear his name from Dean’s lips as he comes. He wants Dean to scream it.

Considering he’s relented this much, he might as well make yet another mistake. Hopefully, this doesn’t spell the beginning of his downfall.

“Cas,” he utters quietly amidst heavy breaths. “My name is… Cas.” Of course, not his full name, but everything comes in time. On the heels of his admission, he kisses Dean with every knot of banked fear and stumbles into overdrive to compensate, chasing his own release in a weird panic.

Fuck—what if Dean figures it all out from his name somehow?

“Cas,” Dean cranes his neck in search of a kiss, lingering in the press of their lips before he continues, “stop worrying…”

The kiss deepens, with Dean putting everything he has into it. It takes Castiel apart, makes him desperate to finish what they’ve started.

All at once, they grab for each other with urgency, bodies crowding together in wild repetitions. The kiss turns rough and sloppy. Heady groans rumble between them and Cas pushes Dean towards release.

He ends the kiss only so he can watch Dean fall apart. It happens quick, as if each second trapped in the heated stare compels them.

Dean rips his hands free of Cas’ grip and claws at Cas’ clothes, trying to get him naked before he finishes. But he doesn’t succeed. It seconds, Dean is shaking and grinding erratically through his orgasm—shouting Cas’ name and several curses in tandem.

The echo of Dean crying out his name lingers in the room. A telling wetness dampens Castiel’s shirt, and a feverish heat blankets his skin from head to toe as he soars towards climax. His mouth drops open as his entire body seizes with a sharp rise of pleasure, lasting only a split-second until the delirious rush of an orgasm pounds through him, taking over.

Unhinged, he murmurs thick curses into the sweaty arch of Dean’s neck and ruts his hips into the vee of Dean’s open thighs. Near the end, he can only shudder with ebbing throbs, his boxers warm and wet.

“Oh… god,” he sighs.

Between the sweat and come, there’s nowhere on his body his clothes are not plastered to his skin. He’s exhausted, and overstimulated, breaths labored. With weakened arms, Castiel hoists himself up off of Dean and stares blearily at sated green eyes.

Not that he would admit it aloud, but he just experienced the best orgasm of his life. It’s quite remarkable, seeing as he was fully clothed and wasn’t touched at all. Remarkable, yes, but pathetic is very much part of it.

Dean smirks lazily. “Man, we really gotta quit this comin’ in the pants business.”

They both laugh, and Cas agrees, “Yes, that’s probably wise.”
Biting his lips and being sheepish, Dean says, “So, Cas huh?”

“Yes.”

“Is that your whole name… or?”

Castiel smiles. “No.”

“When do I get the rest of it?”

“I don’t know.” Castiel shrugs and twists his lips to the side nervously.

Grinning, Dean asks, “When do I get the rest of you?”

He shrugs again. “I don’t know…” And then frowns. “Dean, we’re very dirty.”

“Yeah we are,” drawls Dean.

He doesn’t reply, but glares. Making a move to roll off Dean, he notices the smear of come all over Dean’s chest. And then… glancing lower, sees the tip of Dean’s cock sticking past the waistband of his boxers.

He swallows, fighting the desire to taste Dean. Castiel’s never done that… Had it done to him, but never reciprocated.

Dean’s work-roughened hand slides into view, where he drags a finger down the center of his stomach, then raises the come-slicked digit to Cas’ gently parted lips. “Open.”

Denying Dean is impossible. His mouth drops open and he hums as the salty come is wiped over his tongue. His lips close over Dean’s index finger and he sucks it clean.

After that, he hardens his jaw and grates out. “We need to clean up…’”
An hour and two separate showers later, they’re both clean, dressed in pajamas, and back in Dean’s bed. It’s early morning now and the lack of conversation between them glaringly highlights what they did.

Dean breaks the silence, sporting a sly grin. “Sorry I fucked your self-restraint.”

“Seeing as you were not fucked, I think my self-restraint is mostly intact.”

“True.”

They should be tired, but neither of them seem all that interested in closing their eyes. Castiel surveys Dean’s face; the notes of exhaustion and the low-key grief hanging around.

“When was the last time you ate?” he wonders.

Dean rolls his eyes upward in thought, and says, “Does Whiskey count as calories?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Then, yesterday mor—No. Actually, dinner the night before.”

That settles it. Castiel disrupts their post-bliss return to the scene of the crime and drags Dean into the kitchen for breakfast. The meal is nothing special, a quick throw-together of scrambled eggs and bacon. But they chow it down with relief, neither of them realizing they were hungry.

Dean puts the fork on the table and pegs him with a look. “So… you stayin’ or goin’?”

Undecided, Castiel redirects his eyes to the dirty plate in front of him and wishes he didn’t have to constantly battle his conscience. He doesn’t notice Dean rise from the table, but he’s relieved when the man takes his hand and pulls Castiel back towards the bedroom. “Dean…”

“You haven’t cuddled me, Cas… it would be rude to leave without cuddling me,” argues Dean.

“Oh okay,” he concedes lamely.

Returning to the bed, Dean promptly cuddles into him—resting his head on Castiel’s chest and winding his leg around Cas’ thighs.

“Ah yeah... this is nice,” sighs Dean.

Cas chuckles. “Mm, I see. I’m your pillow then?”

“Yup.”

Smiling, listening to the relative silence and soft notes of Dean’s subtle movements, Cas allows his thoughts to run free.

Some moments he worries, worries so greatly it paralyzes him, and other times he daydreams of spending each and every day with Dean, and he also imagines showing up in New York and using a semi-automatic to mow down his entire family.

They drift in and out of wakefulness over the course of the morning, and after god-knows how much
time has passed, Castiel figures he should probably ask Dean about his dad, about what happened, and how he feels. That’s the right thing to do in this situation, isn’t it?

Building up to a question, Cas runs his fingers through Dean’s short hair. He loves the responsive hum from the man against his chest and smiles automatically.

“Dean,” he begins in cautious tone, “what happened? With your father I mean.”

There’s a thick silence for a moment and he wonders if it was too soon to ask.

“I don’t even know,” huffs Dean. “The C.O. wouldn’t tell me. Just that there was a fight and a few people were pretty messed up, and that my dad didn’t make it. That I’d need to come get the”—pausing, Dean tightens his jaw—“get his body. Or make arrangements or whatever. I honestly don’t think I can.”

“I’m sorry you lost your dad.”

With a snort, Dean says, “Nah man, I lost my dad years ago. Don’t even know why this hit me the way it did. Makes no fucking sense.”

“Emotions are complicated, and in my experience irrational and annoying.”

Dean laughs. “Ain’t that the truth.”

They fall into a companionable silence, Castiel continues to card through Dean’s hair and trace his fingers along Dean’s spine. They eventually wind up on their sides under the covers facing each other. It’s weirdly intoxicating to stare in Dean’s eyes for an extended period of time, and even after so long he still can’t catalogue all the various shades of green. He feels funny all over the longer they do this; relaxed and antsy in a strange mash-up of conflicting emotion.

There must be a curious expression on his face, because Dean smiles and says, “What?”

Castiel flattens his lips in thought. “Um, I’ve never stayed in bed all day before… it’s very warm.” And domestic.

Smirking, Dean suggests he get naked.

“I think it’s better I don’t.”

“Right… Considering we’re not…” Dean flicks his hand up, “whatever it is that I want us to be.”

“What do you want us to be, Dean?”

“Friends…” Castiel feels Dean’s fingers tug at the t-shirt he’s wearing. “More than friends. I don’t know. Listen man, I don’t really do the whole relationship thing, okay?”

Castiel chews his lip and then has to ask. “But you want to with me… or you don’t?”

Looking down at Castiel’s chest, Dean shrugs. “I’d give it a go… if you’d let me.”

There are too many uncertainties to say yes. Not that he wants to string Dean along, but he needs to hold back until he’s sure. Until he knows his life is stable, and that imminent danger is no longer a concern. Either way, he won’t lie to Dean about this, he won’t tell him that everything is fine and they can be together. Especially now that he can tell Sam was right. Dean does care for him, more than the man is willing to admit. More than Cas is capable of comprehending.
“Maybe one day,” he finally allows. *If I kill my uncle... If the trial is a success.*

Pursing his lips, Dean doesn’t look as though he’s holding out for the best. “Getting my hopes up is kind of a dick move.”

“I only want to give you the truth, Dean.”

“Then tell me the damn truth,” he fires back.

Playing with a number of different responses, Castiel fiddles beneath the covers, diverting his eyes away from Dean’s imploring stare. He’s just not ready to lay himself out and he knows it’s selfish, but it’s a hurdle his mind won’t let him cross. Besides, it’s too soon. There’s no point in displaying his past if there’s no hope for them anyway.

But there are certain things, he realizes, pieces of his life that he can talk about. Granted, they’re embarrassing and he feels stupid but if it’s part of the truth he can give Dean, he will.

“Some things I can’t share yet, I just… I can’t, Dean. But I will tell you what I can.” Dean nods once, and he continues. “Well, my name is Cas”—he smiles wide when Dean smirks at him—“and I used to live in a big City. I also had very bad anxiety as a child… but that went away. I never knew my mother, though you already know that… I think it’s probably a good thing I don’t know her, but I suppose I’ll never know. I was—I’m not—a good person and my family was incredibly worse. Dean, I’ve done things that would horify you.” He stops there and chances a look at the man laying across from him.

“What else?”

Dean doesn’t even seem fazed. So he adds more truth. “I never went to school.”

“I know that one, keep goin’.”

“My sexual history is,” he huffs in annoyance at himself and continues, “... erratic.”

To his shock, Dean laughs. “How’s that?”

“Well, until you I’d never kissed anyone before.” How’s that for truth, he thinks sarcastically.

Dean’s mouth is agape. Eyes widened in disbelief. “Please tell me you’re fucking kidding me.”

He shakes his head in the negative.

“Are you a virgin?!”

Castiel can feel the corner of his mouth curve into a contrite expression. “No, hence the erratic nature of my sexual history.”

“But how does that—how did you—Huh?”

“My life was governed by a strange set of rules and yes, I had sex, but I’ve never been intimate with anyone… not honestly… not the way you are.”

Dean shakes his head and refocuses. “Ok, tell me everything please… I mean, tell me about this part cause I’m stumped.”

And so he does. Slowly, and with a permanent blush of shame painting his cheeks. He tells Dean that he was never close to anyone, he tells Dean he always had to be… in control of anything sexual.
When he ends his confession, he adds on that maybe… in a possible future… he’d be open to Dean being his first.

Saying this leads to a heated kiss, and then groping.

***

It’s the following morning when Castiel finally leaves, and he’s proud of himself for not completely giving in to Dean’s temptations.

Wearing a different set of clothes than when he arrived, he stands halfway down the stairs looking back at the Hobucken mechanic who’s leaning against the jamb of the doorway to his kitchen.

Dean’s mischievous gleam is back, making his next words less of a surprise. “I gotta say, you really know how to perk a guy up, Cas.” Of course, Dean emphasizes the word ‘perk’ with a thrust of his hips.

Castiel shakes his head and throws him a look. “Eight-point-seven.”

“Easy ten,” argues Dean, his voice reserved compared to their usual repartee. After a beat, Dean straightens his posture. “So, uh… at the risk of sounding like a sixteen-year-old I gotta ask—What are we now?”

Smiling softly, Cas says, “Friends.”

Dean’s immediate grin stretches wide. “…With benefits?”

Raising his hand to his face, Cas tries to wipe off his bare emotions. “I don’t know,” he finally mumbles beneath his hand. It’s clear he’s too transparent now.

“You know you haven’t stopped smiling for about the last twelve hours, right?” Dean points out.

“Shut up.”

“The big bad mystery man Cas turned into mush by the infamous Hobucken manwhore!” laughs Dean, eyes alight with affection.

At a loss, Castiel sighs long and hard. “Goodbye Dean.”

He’s about to turn, to finally get on his way home, but the fleeting frown on Dean’s face stops him cold. It takes him a couple seconds to figure out what Dean wants, and he can’t help but laugh. God, it feels good to laugh.

“You want a goodbye kiss, don’t you?”

Dean pouts but owns up to it. “ Fucking yes. I do.”

“Then come and get it,” he taunts.

Muttering a curse, Dean trumps down the stairs and comes to a stop a foot above him. The gorgeous mechanic leans over and pecks him on the mouth, his eyes closed and a soft, barely-audible moan making the chaste touch blissful.

After a few seconds of unabashed staring, they part ways and Castiel manages not to trip and tumble down the stairs. The last couple days he’s existed in a haze and it’s hard to shake off.
Several blocks later, on the far side of downtown, he still can’t shut down the smile on his face, and normal confidence notwithstanding, he feels rather *invincible*. Ready to take on the world and anything in it. Dean’s presence is like sheer adrenaline pumping through his veins.

All of the worries he harbours are all still there, hanging back waiting for any kind of action for him to take. But it’s not quite as terrifying any more. Whatever is growing between him and Dean is a beast of its own, a fight he knows he can’t win.

He acknowledges this defeat, just as he did his love for Dean, in the quiet privacy of his mind. There’s no sense in saying anything to Dean until Raphael is taken care of. It’s the last vestige of his past, and it will be dealt with.

Maybe not now, but *soon*.

He’ll bide his time and make strategic plans, because going after Raph has to be done under the radar, and no one can know it was him. Two weeks is all he needs, enough time to plan and procure a few things that might be hard to come by.

In the meantime, he and Dean will just be friends. That shouldn’t be too hard.
Guns and Ammunition

Sitting on his bed, Castiel stares at the blank white wall by the door in his room and wonders how it would look if the bare space was decorated with a picture. A painting maybe, or even a collection of candid snapshots of the people he’s come to care for.

A damp towel is still wrapped tight around his hips from the shower, and he’s been contemplating his next moves. Coming to terms with his feelings for Dean, and the blazing force of them, he knows that avoiding the mechanic is out of the question.

Even if he tried at this point, Dean is persistent. And while the man may be unwilling to see what they have for what it is, the truth is there in the quiet moments when all they do is stare at each other.

Love might be a novel human emotion for Castiel, but his skills in reading people are as accurate as they’ve ever been.

All of which means, his options are limited.

Since he can’t stay clear of Dean, he needs to be sure he can protect the man he’s fallen in love with. And he won’t be able to protect fuck all without a piece.

Castiel Haven, son of Michael Haven—the rat with a cross on his forearm, wings inked onto his back, and a prayer etched below his heart, reluctantly embraces the hardened man he’d once been. It’s almost fascinating how his fears and insecurities close out and the strength born of hate blossoms back into being.

Rising off the mattress, he unhooks the towel and throws it on the bed where he’ll forget about it. Naked, he peruses the closet and pulls out his deep navy blue dress pants, the white collared shirt, and the only tie in his possession.

When he’s dressed and stops in the bathroom on his way out, he meets the face in the mirror with his chin raised and his breaths steady. This is not the man he wants to be with Dean, but it’s the man he has to be to protect him.

His jaw is flexed as he turns away from the reflection and moves down the hall to the front door. As always, he saves a dry look for the hideous yellow—as if the old wooden door is a friend that frequently annoys him.

He walks into town with a mind full of purpose, his steps sure. There are few resources in town that might be able to satisfy his needs, but he goes with his instincts. Twelve minutes later, on the second storey above Pamela’s Grill, he’s knocking on a thick steel door.

The resident of the apartment disengages a number of locks, and pulls the door in. “Illinois.”

Castiel greets the Cabin’s regular cook with a wry grin. “Ash.”

Without an explicit invitation, but both of them familiar with the flavour of certain interactions, Ash steps over to let him in and closes the door, locking it once he’s inside.

“So what can I do ya for, my man?”

Before Castiel discusses what he came here for, he makes some inquiries of his own, “Dean mentioned once that you arrived eight years ago, lacking backstory like myself.” His shrewd blue
eyes flick over to the bank of computers and abstract data lit up on the screens. “Let me guess… wound up on the FBI’s hackers most wanted list?”

Ash nods appreciatively at the deduction. “Ah,” he brushes it off, “not the main list… just a recurring interested party. Not my damn fault their firewalls are shit.”

“Strictly computers?” Castiel wonders, though he knows the answer.

The wiry man with the mullet looks back at him with a crooked smile. “I might’ve diversified my portfolio back in the day,” he drawls.

The former mobster begins cautiously, leading with the potential threat. “There’s a possibility my past might catch up to me,” he says significantly. “In that event, I’d like to be… prepared.”

After a beat of weighted silence, Ash’s lips twitch and he shrugs. “Tell me one thing, my man, this for stopping trouble or causing it?”

Cas replies with serious inflection, “It’s so that if any of my family members step foot into this town and threaten anyone within it, I have a means of eliminating them.”

“And by threatens anyone… you mean my buddy-boy Dean, don’t ya?” Ash grins wide and seems pleased.

Castiel doesn’t offer a reply, but waits.

“Alright, I think I can hook you up.”

Nodding, Castiel extends the paper in his hand. “My list.”

After scanning the scrap of lined paper, Ash seems to calculate a few things in his head and then throws out a number. Less than what Castiel expected, but still more than what he has. Which means a resource trip is in order.

“Tomorrow?” he asks.

The Cabin’s cook makes a noise with his lips. “Damn. Don’t know, man. That’s a tight turnaround.”

“I’m sure you can make it happen… for an extra two.” It’s an exorbitant tip, but Cas can’t ignore the urgency in his gut.

Ash flashes him a crooked smile. “I’m sure I can.”

From Ash’s place, Castiel walks over to Winchester Auto. He already knows that after the few days off Dean will be working, and it’s a good thing—he can’t have Dean tagging along for this trip.

The garage bay doors are all open, old rock music filtering out to the sidewalk as he rounds the corner. He can’t quite see Dean yet, but sure enough, the closer he gets, he catches a glimpse of fabric near the side of a raised car hood.

His steps on the concrete give away his presence.

“How’s it goin’, friend?” asks Dean, poking his head over the edge of metal and grinning wide.

Castiel’s answering smile is immediate. “It’s going,” he elusively says. “Actually, I was hoping I could borrow a vehicle, if you don’t mind.”
Since he’s been in Hobucken months now and never once asked to borrow a car, it’s no wonder Dean stands straight, tools in hand, and pegs him with a strange look. “What the hell for?”

“How to run some errands. My decrepit shack is still in need of a few necessities.”

“Gee, ya think!” Dean snorts, satisfied by the lie. “You’ve got about two things and zero personal items. I mean, would it kill ya to buy a hideous lamp or like throw cushions or some shit?”

Castiel grins, tempted to walk over and kiss Dean senseless, but he feels out of place in Dean’s life after having placed an order for four handguns and two semi-automatic rifles, plus abundant ammo for all of it. “I’ll make sure to check out ugly home decorations while I’m out.”

“You do that.” Dean points at him with the tool in his right hand. “Now, as for wheels—if you want to take the CR-V in the back, it’s all yours. Can’t say the gas tank is full, but it won’t be bone dry either.”

“That works.” Castiel strides towards Dean with his hand outstretched for keys.

When Dean smiles coyly and backsteps to lean against the cluttered bench, Castiel echoes the expression, knowing it wouldn’t be that easy.

“And here you were thinkin’ you were gettin’ a free ride,” teases Dean, eyes sparkling with playfulness.

Crossing his arms, Castiel fixes Dean with a hard stare. “And what payment do you require? For this… ride?”

It’s brief, but he catches Dean glance past him to the parking lot—no doubt scopeing for potential customers or other townsfolk. Satisfied the coast is clear, he bites his lower lip and places the socket wrench on the bench at his back. “Nothin’ much,” shrugs Dean.

“Uh-huh,” Castiel thinks sarcastically.

Dean makes an odd face, his clever mind working in naughty ways no doubt. After a few seconds, he makes his request: “I want the naked truth.”

Castiel’s eyebrows rise and a faint smile catches the corner of his mouth. “The naked truth?” he echoes.

The mechanic can barely restrain his glee, but he gives an out nevertheless. “Only if you want. You’ll get the car either way. I’m not a dick.”

“A, you just want to see dick,” jokes Cas.

Dean laughs quietly, his eyes locked and his demeanor all about patience. “To be fair,” he adds, “only yours.”

“What about your promiscuous ways?” he wonders, starting to pace towards the switches for the bay doors, detouring a few steps to the stereo and flicking the volume dial to silence it.

“Tentatively on hold.”

Castiel hums and presses each of the three switches. With a dull grinding of gears and a low mechanical groan, the garage doors slide down their tracks and settle at the ground. The entire garage is suddenly thrown into a heated silence.
Walking back towards Dean, Castiel can’t reconcile the two halves of himself. His born and raised confidence wars with his shame. But both parts seem hellbent on giving Dean whatever the fuck Dean wants.

There’s only three feet or so between the car’s bumper and Dean. But Castiel finds himself standing there, reaching up to loosen his already twisted tie. “How about this?” he begins, wanting to control this—for lack of a better term—dare. “I’ll get naked… and you get one question. Only one.”

Dean finds his eyes and reaches back to grip the edge of the bench. “Deal.”

Slowly, not leaving Dean’s stare more than he has to, he strips, discarded clothes being draped back on the ledge of the upraised hood. When he lowers his slacks and Dean notices there’s nothing underneath, a sharp inhale breaks through the quiet. That right there is why he turned off the radio.

“Mmnh,” grumbles the mechanic, evidently enjoying the show.

By the time Castiel’s bare feet are flat on the blackened concrete, no doubt absorbing some of the grit and grime, he’s embarrassingly hard and feeling far less confident than when he started. In fact, thinking more about it… this is only the second time he’s ever been 100% naked in front of someone. The first time happened to be on the boat with Dean.

The realization is disconcerting. It makes him regret the things he did with the cop, and some others. There’d been nothing meaningful then and he knew it. But it was an escape at the time, a way to use pleasure to grind off the sharp edge of daily life in the Haven household.

Dean doesn’t immediately ask any question, he ogles. Unabashed, immature, goofy-eyed ogling—hands paused in the motion of wiping them off with a rag. Even nervous as he is, Castiel registers the grin building in his expression. How can he not be pleased? With the way Dean is staring, he can’t help the flutter of egotism.

After several minutes of this, Dean seems to come back to himself—not exactly looking ashamed of himself but almost. His handsome features harden in a flash, and it’s not a countenance Cas has ever seen him wear. It’s not cruel, but equally unyielding and steady.

“No lies,” Dean commands, his voice hard and threatening. Castiel nods gravely and waits. The seconds creep by with unnerving inertia. When Dean speaks, there’s a stiffness in his words. Not fear exactly, but reserved hostility. “Have you ever killed someone?”

Whatever air had been in Castiel’s lungs abandons him and while he knows his answer will satisfy Dean… it doesn’t exonerate him. For that reason, he hesitates, adding weight to his reply. “No, I haven’t.” Not yet anyway.

“Come close though, haven’t you?”

“Only one question, Dean. Remember?”

Dean squints. “That’s a yes.”

Castiel makes no response one way or the other. Believing this strange transaction is over, fearing whatever might unfold because of it, he turns to reach for his clothes. Despite being shaken up from the Q and A, he needs to get moving. He has a ways to go if he intends to be back by tomorr—

Behind him, an unexpected touch grazes the low curve of his spine. It stops him cold, a sharp intake of air rushes into his lungs. Desire spreads unchecked, and he’s not sure what to do about it.
Jaw clenched, Castiel swallows thick and tracks the progression of Dean’s calloused finger up each vertebra.
Driven to the Edge

“But Dean—”

“I don’t care,” utters the quiet, deep voice behind him. The air shifts, and the heat of Dean’s body is suddenly closer, causing Castiel to stutter his exhale, straighten his posture.

Dean’s fingers trace the pattern of black and midnight blue feathers inked on his back, changing course a moment later to travel down his side and squeeze his bare hip. Using the hold, Dean guides Castiel’s body flush against him.

Smooth skins greets coarse fabric. Castiel lets his head hang forward, his body alight with sensation.

The rough texture of Dean’s work jeans drags against his rear and he experiences the abrupt nuance of weak-knees, buckling an inch or two before he catches himself. Dean chuckles softly, but doesn’t stop what he’s begun. To counter unsteady legs, Castiel grips the edge of the hood with one hand and something sturdy inside the engine with his other.

“Dean,” he groans, trying to establish some grounds for protest. But he can’t come up with any. For all his intelligence, his mind has decided it would like to be very stupid at the moment. Who is he to argue?

The man pressed to his back answers with only his name, “Cas…”

Any further protests are demolished when Dean places an open-mouthed kiss to the back of his neck, a wet tongue dragging hot over too-sensitive skin. Dean trails towards his shoulder and down. The track of damp flesh prickles in the cool open air of the shop. Dean must notice, because he laughs softly and squeezes Cas’ hips with both hands.

Long after Castiel has begun gasping at each of Dean’s ministrations, the mechanic stretches towards his ear, nibbles, then asks, “Can I touch you?”

The implication of touch is clear, and Castiel hesitates. He searches his memories to the few men who’ve given him pleasure. There aren’t many. Two in his father’s command, and the cop. But one of them, Castiel had learned long after the fact, had been responsible for the death of an opposing family member in New York, and it had not been quick or painless from what he’d heard. Could he stand the idea of letting Dean touch him, knowing a murderer had also? Christ, the thought of it alone is enough to deflate his arousal. But as Castiel chews the inside of his lip, thoughts torn, he curses himself for being irrational.

He’ll be the first to admit his psychological state has areas for improvement, something Pamela has more or less confirmed, but he can recognize the fact that he isn’t tainted by his sexual past. Anyway, there isn’t much of it to begin with.

Ruminating about where his cock has been became a heck of a distraction, and Castiel didn’t realize the kissing and touching had stopped. Instead, Dean’s simply hugging him from behind, breathing softly against the dip of his neck.

“Whole lotta thoughts stirrin’ around up there,” whispers Dean.

“Yes,” he agrees despondently. But the remedy presents itself in the form of a six-foot-one mechanic with a serious case of gutter-mind. “Make it stop.”
Dean strokes up to his chest, rubbing across it, and says, “It would be my pleasure.” His friend’s grease-stained hand slides down, stopping only to let his fingers thread into Cas’ trimmed pubic area. Avoiding Castiel’s rigid sex, Dean reaches into the slim gap between his thighs and fondles his sac.

An unbidden moan escapes Castiel’s throat. Dean praises the sound with a gentle tug and a kiss.

More soft kisses ghost across his back and he smiles down at the engine—absently wondering what it was Dean was working on.

He gasps in broken huffs, “Wh-what?”

“Don’t lie.” Dean licks up the back of his ear and squeezes lightly around the head of his cock. Castiel trembles with a wave of ecstasy.

While Castiel doesn’t wholly agree, he’s long past the point of using his brain. He rocks back and forth on his bare feet, his mind turning hazy with each pump of Dean’s fist. Every time his body crests, his blunt nails scrape the metal and give him away. Dean smiles against his skin and works him faster, technique tried and true.

The momentum rises over and over, but each time he starts to shake, Dean’s quick fist stills and tightens, jerking him so achingly slow his head pounds with the growing pressure in his veins.

Not capable of full sentences, too painfully close, he manages to edge out, “Dean… the car…”

The mechanic shushes him. “It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

Slamming his eyes closed, Castiel pushes on the car to greet Dean’s bracing presence behind him full-force, to feel the stiff length lined up against his crease. Oh fuck, his mind swirls with curiosity about the idea of Dean taking him that way. Imagining it in every detail, he can’t hold back a whimper, and grinds his ass shamelessly against Dean.

The arousal in Dean’s voice is present in the gritty laugh and proceeding comment, “Tryin’ to get me to come in my pants again?”

Castiel smiles and once more arches back. “Never.”

In a sudden vise, Dean’s arm is locked around Cas’ ribs, squeezing him tight—trapping him. “Liar,” Dean accuses, playful but with a detectable edge. The pace of Dean’s strokes increase, his fist sliding over Cas’ erection with chaotic purpose.

This time, when Castiel starts to tremble, Dean only grips him harder, squeezes his body tighter, and unleashes biting kisses into the thin flesh at the base of his throat. Intense pleasure surrounds him, drowning him in sensation that’s nearly too much as it is not enough.
“Dean,” he says in warning, “I’m—” But he never finishes the sentence.

The crest of release hits with a tingle at the base of his spine, and then a glorious swell of pressure. There’s a heartbeat of pause, and then he crashes.

“Uhhh! Uhn... God.”

The rush of release pulses out, come streaking onto the black metal of the old engine. Each throb of arousal makes him dizzy, his entire body twitching inside the brace of Dean’s hold on him.

In the stark aftermath, Castiel struggles to breathe. Standing is a bit tricky too. But he focuses on the press of Dean’s lips by his ear, the grounding presence of the man’s muscular forearm roped around Cas’ midsection.

He isn’t able to open his eyes just yet, so he absorbs the soft endearments from Dean whispered against his ear. Each breath tickles him, causing shivers to ripple out across his skin. All he knows is that the things Dean is saying, about being there for him, wanting to be with him no matter what horrors exist in his past, they’re not the words of someone who’s just a friend. Not even the promises of a casual something or other.

Dean may hate liars, but he’s lying to himself if he doesn’t believe in love, or think this isn’t it.

It’s all the more reason for Castiel to leave and get prepared. Because the moment Dean’s true feelings dawn on him, Castiel will—without a doubt in his mind—drop every last barrier where Dean is concerned. Every grain of truth, every terrible thing about himself, and all of his bare emotions will be there for the taking.

Whatever Dean makes of his past is what it is. Completely out of his control at that point, but at least he will know he wasn’t a coward. Not this time.

Quietly, Dean continues to kiss along the ridge of Cas’ shoulder, both arms snug around his torso. Castiel knows he should be getting on the road, but the comfort Dean provides sinks through him and he never wants it to end.

It doesn’t take long for his mind to spin, slowly at first, showcasing the immediate actions he must take. In less than a minute he’s internally nagging himself too much to continue enjoying the moment.

“I need to go,” he says, sounding depressed.

Dean hums, places another kiss by his ear and reaches up to grab Cas’ clothes for him. “Fine,” Dean pouts, another kiss brushes Cas’ skin. “Leave me unsatisfied.”

Turning to the back of the shop, pulling his pants from Dean’s hands he points out, “You’re the one who didn’t want to come in his pants.”

“I could take them off,” suggests Dean, smirking.

Castiel falls still and pegs Dean with a look.

The mechanic crosses his muscular arms across his chest. “Ya know, instead of smoldering at me you could just say you’re not ready. I’m not a ravaging horndog, dude! I have self-restraint.”

Opening his mouth to tease Dean, his eyes flicker down to Dean’s blatant hard-on testing the strength of his zipper. Dean follows the tract of his stare and they both snicker quietly.
“Most of me has restraint,” Dean corrects, smiling.

Castiel dresses while Dean watches him, and when he’s finally clothed he steps towards Dean and cradles the man’s gorgeous face to bring him close. Though he’s reluctant to voice the importance of what this has become—he can’t forego one last taste of Dean’s lips before he leaves. Hopefully, this says all that he can’t say.

There’s instant relief from Dean, broad shoulders sagging and breath softening, as he returns the relatively chaste kiss.

When they pull apart, Dean’s eyes are closed and his tone is peaceful. “Hmm. Keys?”

“Please,” replies Cas, fingers tracing the stubbled edge of Dean’s jaw, watching the man relish in being touched.

*If only he knew...* Castiel’s intrusive mind cuts in, showcasing a memory of his fist doing something far less gentle to another man’s jaw. Flashes of the former criminal’s past splay across his mind, abruptly reminding him of the man he once was. How he used these exact hands to impart violence on others. Numerous bruises and broken bones.

Dean senses the change and his eyes flick open. “I see you’re back to all that thinking nonsense.” Before Cas can say anything, Dean walks over to the office. “C’mon, keys are in here.”

Seconds later, Dean is walking out with the dangling silver key on a large metal ring sporting a looped white tag that gives the year, make, and model of the vehicle. He places it in Cas’ hand. “If you skip town with my car, I’m coming after you.”

With new-found certainty, he finds Dean’s eyes and replies, “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Good.” Dean’s back straightens and he nods formally. As Cas is walking over to the side door with the keys, he hears Dean call over to him, “Don’t forget—throw-pillows and ugly lamps!”

***

God, how long has it been since he drove? Eight months? More?

Either way, the moment Castiel gets out onto the state highway, the drone of the tires and the neverending sameness of the asphalt sets his anxious mind at ease.

Though perhaps, he considers, some of that has to do with Dean. Something about this salacious green-eyed man, his first true friend, answers a longing in Castiel he didn’t think he possessed. A need to be comforted and seen as something more.

How had he woken to each day in the Haven household without being crippled by this hunger—this tangible sense of hollowness whenever Dean is absent? Is it new? Despite his father’s cruel ministrations time and again, Castiel was *never* fit to be a hammer. But he was *pushed*, molded, and belted into compliance.

And now, he thinks, he is a man split in two. A hardened criminal clashing with an inexperienced soul trying to reform itself. Frustrated by the constant battle, his fingers clench around the wheel and he rubs his lips together, chewing at them from the inside.

*Stop,* he tells himself. *Think about something else!*

Staring at the road ahead, the metaphorical depiction of a path leading forward, he thinks about the
future and what it holds, or could hold for him. Naturally, his mind passes over the concept of Karma, and what he does or does not deserve. He daydreams in passing, and thinks about grandiose ways of eliminating Raphael and protecting Dean like the Superhero he is far from being.

There are peculiar new fears simmering in the background, fears that have nothing to do with his family but something oblique. He’s in love—that’s the root of his fear—and for now, this love seems spectacular and promising. But what if Dean holds true to his predilections?

What if after they’re together, Dean wants to return to being friends?

What if, as Dean’s said, he doesn’t believe in settling down, or putting all his cards in a single basket and hoping nothing horrible ever happens to said basket.

Stewing in his worries, Castiel doesn’t realize he’s speeding well over the speed limit and immediately corrects the weight of his foot. Since he’s not supposed to be leaving Pamlico County, it wouldn’t be smart to get a speeding ticket in another fucking state, now would it?

***

By the time he arrives in York, PA, it’s just past dinner and his stomach grumbles, demands his brain wishes it could ignore. He pulls off of the 83 and navigates to the closest Wendy’s for a needed burger and to use the washroom. When the necessities are taken care of, Cas takes one look at Dean’s car and decides he’d rather not drive it into the shadier sections of York, not with what he’s doing here. He leaves it parked in the modest parking lot of the strip mall and walks down the street towards another, larger shopping centre, backed by a church. It’s still early enough in the year that he’s taking a major risk swiping a car in broad daylight but sometimes things need to be done.

As he follows a path between the theatre and the mall he winds up in a back parking lot. There are no windows, no cameras, and only a scattering of cars in the strip of parking set in front of a berm that blocks the shopping centre from the church in behind.

Perfect.

Castiel checks around himself, but there’s no one around. The inventory of available cars is calculated against ease of theft and nondescript merits. He opts for the Mazda wagon because it satisfies both his criteria. Beyond the rear passenger window there’s a small inoperable glass panel that’s easy to bust, and from there he can unlock the rear door with relative ease.

He’s driving the car back towards the highway ten minutes later and at his destination in another eight. The low, wide building is painted grey brick with three unexceptional entrances. One claims to do iPhone repairs, the other deals in appliance parts, while the third—and one he’s headed towards—is the home of Gorlan and Tenner, LLP. They claim to have expertise in wills and estates law.

Castiel knows better, and it’s one contact he sorted out before his deal with the FBI. He steps inside the over-air-conditioned foyer to find a very bosomy blonde clacking on a keyboard at the front desk. Her eyes dart to his for a moment before she’s again facing the computer. “Do you have an appointment?” she asks without looking.

“No. But I have a 900-series account.”

The change is instant. Her fingers stop mid-clack and she straightens, popping up out of the chair and walking over in ugly yellow heels. God, he hates yellow. “Yes, of course.” She smiles megawatt-wide and megawatt-fake. “Mr. Gorlan will be right with you.”

Mr. Gorlan’s office is white and minimalistic, more fitting of Google headquarters than a 1950’s
dump off of South Queen street in York. Castiel’s name is not given, nor was it once in their prior discussions. And they do not shake hands. There’s a number, and a thumbprint. Nothing more is required.

After he has provided both, he watches the lawyer with the questionable ethics—in his slim dress pants and lined plum shirt with a stark white collar. Skeevy lawyer aside, he’s got impeccable taste.

“Do you require the entirety of your account at this time, sir?”

He doesn’t want to risk another trip, but dislikes the idea of having nearly a million dollars in his possession. After brief consideration, he replies, “Yes.”

Besides, he has an idea what he can do with the cash he won’t need.

***

The following evening, he sits on his futon and stares at the damn yellow door. Under his pine bed that Dean constructed lies a duffle bag of guns and ammo, and another duffle bag bursting at the seams with stacks of cash.

It’s like being eighteen again, he laughs sarcastically. His stress-lined face falls into his waiting hands and he groans.

What makes matters worse? Dean texted minutes ago and is heading over for a “friendly” movie night. Cas stuttered, ready to formulate an excuse. But Dean is… well Dean.

There’s no denying him.
“What’s with you?” asks Dean seconds after stepping through the door.

_Have I always been this transparent?_ Castiel asks himself. Turning away from Dean’s intrusive eyes, he rubs the back of his neck and throws out an answer, “Um, just worried about you being here.” Which, isn’t technically a lie.

“Why’s that?”

Facing the living room and the man standing within it, he throws Dean an impatient look. “Because I highly doubt this ‘friendly’ movie night is going to remain so.” But also because of the illicit guns and money stashed in the other room.

Dean fervently replies, “God, I hope not.”

Chuckling, Castiel turns away from Dean and searches the kitchen cupboards for a suitable snack. After rummaging for a minute, he tracks down a box of popcorn he never got around to eating. Which isn’t much of a surprise, Castiel has never been a movie-watcher and there aren’t really many other occasions to eat popcorn.

He readies the snack while Dean fiddles with the DVD-player, soft curses rising to his ears. Dean and technology do not mix. Castiel hopes nothing is broken after he leaves.

“What movie did you bring?” Castiel asks, hoping to a fictitious God it’s not a gangster movie.

“Porn.”

Castiel rolls his eyes, though Dean can’t see him. “Really?”

There’s a laugh from the living room. “No, I’m not _that_ bad.”

“Debatable,” he voices over the sound of popcorn exploding in the microwave.

“Ha, ha. For your information I brought a very appropriate movie. _Friends with Benefits!”_

Shaking his head, Cas pours the popped popcorn into a bowl and takes it back to the futon. Dean has already got the movie started, paused on the opening scene. And naturally, Dean has taken his place in the absolute centre of the piece of furniture. The only piece of furniture in here, besides the stack of crates on which his TV now sits. Meaning, no matter where Cas sits, he won’t avoid being close to Dean.

At this rate, does it even matter anymore? He’s mostly accepted that Dean has a hold of him, and with that thought, he plunks down right next to the other man. Castiel hands off the bowl of popcorn with a smile, immensely enjoying having Dean next him again.

It feels right. With a side of terrifying because of all the dangers lurking around future corners, at least, as Castiel sees it in his mind. The movie is unpaused, and Castiel doesn’t exactly pay attention.

From the corner of his eye, he watches Dean scarf the snack so gluttonously you’d think he’d been starved. Dean halts with a fistful of greasy popcorn halfway to his mouth, turns to the left to glare at Cas. “Man, you’re not even watching the movie.”

He smiles. “Not exclusively.”
“Not at all,” corrects Dean. “What’s on your mind, Cas?”

“Nothing,” he lies. “Watch the movie, I won’t bother you.”

Narrowing his eyes, but on the cusp of a grin, Dean reaches over and rests his hand on Cas’ thigh. “Maybe I want you to bother me…”

“Do you happen to have an off button I’m not aware of?”

Dean cracks a laugh, his features lit up, and moves his hand off of Castiel’s thigh only to capture his chin and drag him close for a kiss. It’s brief, but it feels as good as all the others. A mixture of relief, joy, and satisfaction all in a second’s touch.

Their attention drifts apart, turning back to the movie unfolding. It’s set in New York and Castiel recognizes nearly every scene. Sometime in the first forty minutes of the film, Dean’s managed to work them both into the uncomfortable corner of the futon, shoved up Cas’ arm and tucked himself into Cas’ chest.

Christ, the fucking domesticity of it is such a terrible tease. Having Dean’s body curled up into his side is a type of heaven he never imagined he’d be lucky enough to experience. Castiel doesn’t shy away, though it’s all very new to him. He scratches his blunt nails down the length of Dean’s arm, sometimes kneading at the back of his neck. Dean’s reactions are nothing short of adorable; humming quietly the way a cat might, snuggling closer, turning his face upward at random moments in search of a kiss.

With every passing minute, he seems to fall more in love with the mechanic. Killing Raphael is not quite as daunting, from a moral perspective, as he’d first thought. There’s no doubt in Castiel’s mind that the task itself will haunt him in the years to come, but for Dean, he’d suffer endless nightmares to ensure his safety.

The only hurdle, besides the obvious, is the treacherous period from now until the deed is done. It’s during this time where Dean isn’t safe, that his unwitting association with a criminal could get him killed.

“You sure you’re okay?” Dean is staring up at him, eyes filled with latent worry.

Castiel searches Dean’s gaze, the various hues of green. Is he seeing love? Does Dean feel the way he does? Sam and Pamela both seem to think so. “Dean, I have to tell you something.”

There’s a beat where Dean doesn’t react, and then licks his lips, promptly pausing the movie. “Should I sit up for this?”

Cas shakes his head. “No, I like you right here.” There’s a responding but patient smile, so Cas continues. “Before anything real can happen between us… before I can fully invest in this… I have to temporarily revert back to who I used to be.” When there’s no interruption here, he expands. “I didn’t want you to come over because I’m getting ready to do something and you won’t agree with it. In fact, the criminal justice system doesn’t agree with it. But it’s necessary Dean. I’ve tried to step back from my life, but it will come after me—there’s no avoiding it. And when it does,” he pauses, an ominous tension sliding between them, “I need to be ready to… to deal with things.”

During his admission, Dean had mostly avoided looking him in the eye. Now he looks thoughtful, choosing his words carefully. Castiel expects him to ask what he plans to do. That would be something a normal, fearful person would do. But instead… “Does that mean you want me to leave?”

Dean seems primed for bad news. Castiel asks, “Do you want to leave?”
Laughing and relieved, Castiel explains further, his tone turned somber, “Good, because I don’t want you to leave. What all of this means, Dean… is that right now… I need you.” He raises his unencumbered arm, pressing his palm to the side of Dean’s face, his thumb dragging along the shadow beneath Dean’s lower lip. “I need you…” in case everything goes very bad.

“I know you do,” replies Dean, nearly a whisper. He picks up the remote, turns off the TV, and extracts himself from under Cas’ arm. Lithely, Dean climbs into Cas’ lap—now towering over him, the man’s knees rammed into the back of the futon at either side of Cas’ hips.

Both of Dean’s hands close softly around Castiel’s neck, pushing his chin up. Their eyes lock, and everything intensifies. When Dean falls forward to steal a kiss, Castiel loses all patience for taking things slow.

There’s a fair chance Raph might triumph and kill him instead, not caring a lick that they share blood. Not that Castiel cares for that either, he supposes.

Dean plys at Cas’ mouth, working him open into a heady kiss. They trade breath and gasps of pleasure, which grow louder when Dean starts to grind on him. Castiel throws his arms around Dean, encouraging every rocking motion. He can’t put a stop to the sudden urgency, not that he wants to anymore.

The green button-up Dean’s wearing is familiar, he’s worn it many times before. But Castiel has never touched it. It’s not as thin as it seemed from a distance. He slides his hand underneath, sweeping across Dean’s lower back, his pinkie dancing along the edge of Dean’s jeans and boxers.

There’s a rumbling moan from Dean, the mechanic rearing back from the kiss. His lips are swollen red, glossy from an unrefined kiss.

“Jesus fuck, Cas. No clothes this time, okay? For the love of God—No. Clothes.”

He laughs, seeing the sheer frustration written across Dean’s face. Dean’s freckles are almost invisible due to the flush of pink. Delaying an answer, he sinks his hand roughly down the back of Dean’s jeans and grabs his bare ass. “No clothes,” he agrees.

Dark heat suddenly shadows Dean’s green eyes, he looks ravenous. Their interim pause snaps towards action as Dean crowds around him. Strong arms circle around Cas’ neck and shoulders, his legs still trapped under Dean. And his mouth, which had been parted on an exhale at the sight of Dean’s blatant desire is now occupied by a salacious kiss.

His chest vibrates with a moan, rising from deep within. Dean, same as himself, seems caught between kissing and the need to rid each other of clothes. They try to break the kiss, laughing each time they return for one more.

Finally, Cas pushes Dean off, forcing the man to his feet. Dean’s grinning wide, already disheveled. They start to undress, slowly, staring at each other with unmistakable intent.

“Well, shall I dance?” teases Dean, winking and jerking his boxer-clad hips side-to-side. “You’ve seen my bartop show, but I promise the private show is better.”

Castiel stops the progress of unbuttoning his shirt to focus fully on Dean. He senses the more dominant parts of personality take over. “No,” he says gently, mindful of Dean’s feelings. “I want you to look at me, and get undressed as slowly as possible so that I can commit this to memory.”
Cheeks flaring red, Dean swallows and greets his stare. Following Cas’ instructions, Dean gradually reveals every inch of himself. Castiel has seen and felt parts of him, but he’s never seen it all. Not quite like this.

It makes Castiel’s mouth go dry. The man in front of him is strong, muscles pronounced but not overly defined. Castiel’s gaze tracks along each curve, makes note of every freckle he can see. But certain things snag his focus over others.

Dean is fully erect, gloriously so. His swollen cock hovering parallel to the floor. Castiel’s never given a blow job, but looking at that... he hasn’t a clue what else he’d rather do with his life.

“You’re beautiful,” he says in awe, wishing there was a word more worthy of the man he’s fallen for.

For all of Dean’s admitted past, promiscuous as it seems to be, Dean looks remarkably shy and it’s endearing beyond comprehension. With Dean’s eyes lingering over him, Castiel acknowledges the silent request.

He tugs off his already open button-up, pulls his undershirt over his head. And then his jeans, and lastly, his boxer-briefs.

The living room is littered with their clothes. Castiel waits, his bare ass seated on the futon as Dean stands a couple feet out of reach.

“Not to sound high school here,” says Dean, “but uh, we goin’ all the way?”

Castiel chuckles, feeling funny from head to toe. A blend of nerves and anticipation. “As much as I would love to, I’d prefer to wait… If that’s okay with you.”

“Whatever you want, Cas. I’m all yours...”

_God, I wish._ “For tonight.”

A wince of pain flickers across Dean’s expression, but he doesn't comment. He does, however, return to a not-so-patient man on the poor excuse of a couch. Their legs graze as Dean steps close, pausing only a moment in anticipation before he climbs back into Cas’ lap.

“Mnn,” Castiel sighs, overcome by the deluge of sensation. Finally, skin-on-skin; everything warm and soft. Dean’s bare thighs straddling his, the subtle weight of certain masculine parts. Castiel’s unable to break it all apart, to feel any one aspect with distinct appreciation.

Dean is just _there_, surrounding him.

“I can’t imagine anyone ever letting you go,” he tells Dean.

“Then don’t.”

Time creeps by, measured by touch and sound.

Castiel has a sense for the number of times he’s made Dean gasp in pleasure, but not for the span of minutes that might’ve broken up each low, heated moan. Who knew that mere contact, the smooth friction of skin-on-skin, could be so thought-dulling.

Dean has a grip on the back of the futon and his free hand in Castiel’s hair, wrenching his head to
one side so he has full access to Castiel’s throat. And though the scrape of Dean’s two-day old scruff tickles and arouses him like nothing else, Castiel manages to focus enough to reach between them— needing to wrap his fingers around Dean, to feel the solid, hot girth of him.

For the last immeasurable span of minutes, they’ve only been rubbing themselves together relentlessly, teasing each other with a handsfree approach. Nothing but mindless rutting. Castiel looks down at the picture of it; Dean’s weeping erection next to his.

It’s exhilarating to be so needy, knowing greater pleasure is there for the taking. Castiel takes them both in his right hand, enclosing them in a tight heat.

“Fuck!” Dean cries out against his skin, nipping him in retaliation. “Warn a guy…”

Where would the fun be in that?

Smiling, Castiel’s eyes drift shut as he starts to stroke them in earnest, sliding upward with a twist and squeezing hard on the way down. Dean huffs against his shoulder, apparently too disoriented to continue his earlier assault on Cas’ throat.

With wanton motivation, Dean abruptly lets loose and starts to fuck into Castiel’s fist. The mechanic’s hips roll up and down on Cas’ thighs, his entire body curling forward over and over. Castiel can hardly believe his eyes, to see Dean so unhinged. It strips him down from the inside, opening him to a possessive twist of pleasure, the kind only experienced when it’s not your own.

“Christ,” breathes Castiel, awash in exultation. “Dean… I want to make you scream.”

Dean laughs the way drunks do, liberated, and collapses over him, two broad hands clamp around Castiel’s head and Dean dives in for an obscene kiss. Husky words interrupt the greeting of tongues and wet lips. It’s in the disjointed ramble of Dean’s sex-talk that Castiel first learns just how kinky the man actually is… especially when he catches things like, ‘restrained’ and ‘plug’ and ‘spank me.’

Castiel is barely moving his hand at this point, too distracted by everything. Dean is working them both anyway, his hard length sliding up and down Cas’. Sitting up, Dean’s hands trail down Cas’ chest, his hips working in shallower thrusts now.

Dean is watching their sex slide together, his eyes wide with arousal. When Dean grins and catches his gaze, Castiel knows he’s about to do something that will probably splinter Castiel into remarkable stupidity.

It’s amusing, because he never understood the saying to fuck someone’s brain out. But Dean is akin to a hurricane of pleasure, showing up and ripping through you.

“You’re not planning to trick me into fucking you, are you?” he asks, grabbing Dean’s wrists to stop the descent of his hands, which seem to be itching to grab things.

Dean smirks. “If only I could.” Leaning forward, he places a chaste kiss to the side of Cas’ mouth, and then on his lips. He opens his eyes without shifting away, they stare at each other for a long moment.

“I want you to…” Dean pauses, trying to find the right word. “I want you to fucking let go for once… to give in to me.”

“How so?”

Without answering, Dean kisses him again and pushes himself to his feet. Standing there, naked with
splotches of red across his skin from where Cas had grabbed him, Dean fixes him with a level gaze.

And then Dean lowers to his knees.

Castiel groans, his hips jerking forward with primitive instinct. “Dean…”

“My ass might be off limits… but my mouth is definitely not.”

There’s a subtle urge to argue with Dean, that somehow this isn’t right but, for the life of him, he can’t remember why. Castiel simply acts… he scoots to the edge of the futon and spreads his legs to give Dean access.

Dean smiles, radiating triumph. “And Cas?” He hums in reply, brain too distracted by Dean’s presentation. “Don’t go easy on me.” Even if, for a second, Castiel might’ve questioned whether Dean truly enjoyed rough sex, the twitch of his stiff cock says the truth of it.

Reaching forward, his hand shaking he’s so eager, Castiel threads his fingers into Dean’s hair, drawing him close. On the way forward, Dean kisses up the inside of Castiel’s thigh.

The progression is slow, torturously so. And Dean’s mouth is incredibly wet and satisfying, even though he has yet to reach his destination. He watches Dean tease him with a dirty look, the man’s green eyes sparkling with that familiar mischief.

This time, Castiel is in a position to taunt him right back. Which is exactly what he does, by taking his sex in hand and dragging Dean’s face just close enough. Holding back a thick moan, Castiel drags the head of his cock across Dean’s mouth, pressing at his lips with it in a decidedly indecent kiss.

He squeezes himself from the base up, working loose a bead of precome to wet Dean’s mouth. The mechanic whimpers in response, his eyes fluttering open and closed.

After another thirty seconds of outright teasing, Dean opens his mouth in invitation and Castiel doesn’t wait. He also heeds Dean’s request and does not go easy. Less mindful of his size as he’s been in the past, Castiel fills Dean’s mouth completely, pushing in deep, all the way to the back of his throat.

Both of them twitch and groan in reaction to such a satisfying union. It’s overwhelming, robbing Castiel of breath… just as he’s momentarily denying Dean the same.

He can’t get enough of the honest expression of ecstasy on Dean’s face. It astounds him how much the man truly loves sex. More than anyone else Castiel has ever met.

Things unfold savagely from that point on. Castiel can’t bear to hold back, and Dean doesn’t want him to. He fucks Dean’s mouth with a need he’s never known, some foreign desire to make a primal connection with another human soul.

He’s lost in the moisture and tight suction that Dean unleashes on him, and the exquisite sight of the bold mechanic on his knees, dark green eyes strained but locked on Castiel’s during each and every thrust.

Lasting much longer is not in the cards. It’s too much.

Dean doesn’t seem to be handling it any better. Reaching up to grab Cas’ wrist, Dean pulls off him to gasp for air. He meets Cas’ eyes, lazily reaches for Cas’ other hand and starts to suck each of his fingers the same way he had for Cas’ sex.
When each digit is wet, Dean flashes him a lopsided smile and guides his hand over Dean and towards his ass. The position is now cramped, but neither of them seem to care.

“Please,” is all Dean says, before he opens his mouth to Castiel’s cock, burying his face all the way down to a degree Cas isn’t sure he’s able to breathe.

He can’t possibly deny the man. His damp fingers slink down the crease of Dean’s asscheeks and from there he traces the puckered rim, delighted when Dean flinches from head to toe. Castiel notices Dean reach for his own cock, his mouth only gently sucking around Cas’ erection. Unhinged is now exactly how Cas feels, he presses into the back of Dean’s head, needing the extra space to curl around his mechanic… and pushes one finger into Dean.

Together, they shudder at the invasion; Dean moaning loudly in vibrations around Castiel’s sex, and Cas loving the feel of Dean tightening around him.

Patience goes right out the window.

Dean hums and moans around him, not so much moving as choking himself and seeming to enjoy it—if the speed of his fist jerking himself is any indication. Castiel has two fingers inside Dean, pumping them and twisting them. He spreads them and curls them, his hips pushing desperately into Dean’s face.

Everywhere their skin touches, it’s now damp with sweat. They’re becoming exerted, barely able to catch a breath. All Castiel can focus on is making Dean come. Every time he senses Dean on the brink, judging by the height of muted groans and the tightening of his muscles, he loses further control of what he’s doing.

“Dean,” he murmurs, his whole body wrapped around Dean. “You’re all I want… you’re everything I want.” He doesn’t mean to say any of this… it simply tumbles out of him. “God, Dean… come for me. Show me how it feels to have you like this.”

It’s his words and the sudden hard thrust of his fingers that take Dean over the edge. His body curls into itself, mouth clamping tight around Cas’ shaft and then Dean cries out, the sound muffled. His ass seizes tight around Castiel’s fingers. When Dean’s body starts to jerk, the orgasm surging through him, Castiel feels the splashes of come hit his legs and feet.

In contrast, Castiel’s release seems to unwind instead of explode. As Dean grows lax inside his arms, Cas finally lets go… his muscles soften and he starts to come, the feeling so dizzying he’s worried he’ll fall off the furniture. He empties himself into the warm moisture of Dean’s mouth, loving the tender hum of acceptance from between his legs.

Sated and exhausted, he brings both hands to Dean’s head, running his long fingers through the sweat-damp hair and scratching drunkenly all over Dean’s scalp. When Dean pulls off, lips puffy and red, he tips his chin up to face Castiel.

They stare at each other, confusion hovering in the recesses of the intense stare. There was nothing casual about that.

Dean swallows, eyelids fluttering lazily. “I’m sleeping over.”

That’s for damn sure. Cas nods. “On two conditions.”

“Anything. Fuck, I would agree to anything right now.”

Castiel laughs, but pulls Dean into his arms and back into his lap, wherein Dean immediately
collapses all around him—a funny position for such a big man but Castiel isn’t complaining.

“One… you sleep on the far side of the bed.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s furthest from the door.”

Blearily, drunk on post-orgasm hormones, Dean pegs him with a stupid look. “If you fucking run out on me in the middle of the night I’mma be so pissed, you don’t even know.”

He huffs a laugh, charmed by Dean’s pouty surliness. “No, I only want you away from the door because… I feel as if… I can protect you easier.”

Dean’s lip curls up. “Protect me from what?”

“Oh… intruders.”

“Liar. But fine, I’ll be your damsel. What’s the other condition.”

“Don’t look under the bed.”

Narrowing his gaze, Dean searches his expression for more details on that one. “Is there a monster under the bed?”

Castiel doesn’t lie. “Yes. A previous version of me.”

There’s a long pause as Dean considers the information. “Okay, you win. Far side of the bed, don’t look under the bed. Gotcha. But first things first, you’re carrying my ass into the hideous fucking bathroom and washing me because I’m tired as balls, and then you’re cuddling me damn good in bed. You got that, mister?”

He smiles, wondering at what point his heart might give out. “Yes, Dean. I got that.”
The Last Supper

It’s Sunday, a couple days later, and Cas is helping Dean set up the new accounting system which incorporates a new set of inventory and service database for all the new types of jobs he wants to do.

Of course, by helping Dean, Castiel actually means he’s doing all the work and Dean is hovering behind the desk chair distracting Cas with his teasing fingers edging up the sides of his neck and dipping into his hairline to scratch across his scalp.

“How’s it going… friend?” teases Dean. “Is it… hard?”

Castiel snorts, they are not friends. That farce has been well and truly demolished after what happened the other night. To emphasize this, he angles his head back and rolls his eyes for Dean to see.

“What do you want me to say?” challenges Dean with a funny face. “I doubt you’re ready to call me your boyfriend.”

“At this point, Dean, terminology is really not important. What is important is me finishing what you’ve asked me to do in a reasonable amount of time.”

Sliding both hands down Cas’ chest, Dean says, “Yeah when I asked you to do up the accounting stuff for the expansion, that was totally an innuendo for you to do me up.”

How is it possible to find someone endearing when they’re being annoying? There’s no logic there.

“There’s not going to be any ‘doing of you’ quite yet. May I get back to work now?”

“How much longer is this gonna take? It’s boring,” nags Dean.

“It’s not boring, Dean, but it definitely won’t be quick or easy with you interrupting me.”

Dean laughs and pinches one of Castiel’s nipples through his shirt. “I never make anything quick or easy… much prefer slow and hard.”

Chuckling and rolling his eyes, trying not to react to Dean’s touch, Cas adds two new service entries with the correct taxation. “Six.”

Behind him, Dean chuffs loudly. “You keep giving my ‘it’s hard’ lines really crappy ratings.”

“Overused,” he succinctly replies, distracted by the task at hand.

Under his breath, Dean mumbles, “I wish.”

“Much better,” praises Castiel, “Nine-point-five.”

Dean laughs and yanks playfully at Cas’ hair, getting restless by the computer work even though he’s not the one doing it. Over the course of the next few minutes, Dean tries twelve times to entice Cas into bending Dean over anything. The temptation is very difficult to ignore.

His hunger helps, his actual hunger. There’s a pot of chili simmering up in Dean’s apartment above their heads, and the smell manages to permeate through the lingering scent of engine grease in Dean’s office on the ground floor. It makes Cas’ stomach gurgle in anticipation.
After Dean attempts to “tickle” him—for which he is having none of that—he begs Dean to go upstairs and check on the food so he can finish up faster. Grumbling about being banished from his own office, Dean heads upstairs to add any additional spices to their contribution to a dinner at Sam’s place.

It’ll be the first time Castiel will meet Sam’s wife. All he’s learned from being in the town this long is that her name is Jess, and Dean has very high respect for her. The unsettled feeling in his stomach returns, this time not from hunger but worry over whether Sam has told his wife who he is.

What if she doesn’t want him in her home?

***

Castiel’s worries are unfounded an hour and a half later when Jess, a glowing blonde, greets him in a hug at the threshold of a two-storey brick home on the edge of town.

“Oh, finally! I meet the man that’s managed to rein in my horndog of a brother-in-law.”

Dean laughs and Castiel offers Jess a frown when he pulls back. “Sadly, I think he’s a lost cause.”

The laughter over his shoulder stops and there’s a playful pinch into his side as they make their way into the foyer and slip off their shoes.

Sam appears from down the hall, emerging from what Cas gathers must be the kitchen. “Babe, go easy on them, they’re technically not even ‘dating’.”

Rolling her eyes, she slaps a hand on her hip and leans in to them. “Ignore Sam. He’s a lawyer and thinks being factual means he’s right all the time. Whether you want to call it dating or not, you’re dating.”

Biting his lip, Castiel spares a glance at Dean—who smiles back wide and shameless.

Throughout dinner, the vibe around the table is clearly that of two couples enjoying a meal together. Sam stares at his wife in silent moments of awe, she smirks back at him—secrets of their life together playing in the light of her eyes.

But beside him, similar looks are being given. Castiel loves the affectionate warmth in Dean’s expression every time he catches his gaze. The atmosphere is like an illusion, a daydream playing out before him. The tease of life in a normal existence.

A home, filled with laughter and positive energy. A man, promising happiness and comfort. A family, without lies or violence.

All there for the taking. For the price of one murder and a lengthy trial where all his wrongdoings and dark secrets will be laid out under a microscope. Immunity is meaningless when the truth silos you in a prison of your own making.

“Everything okay?” whispers Dean, leaning into his shoulder.

“Perfect.” For a fleeting moment in time.

Dean smiles, but his eyes are distant and calculating. The mechanic sees everything, but remains silent.

As the last few bites are put away, and everyone praises the meal and the company, Sam ducks into
the kitchen and returns with a post-dinner beer for everyone.

Dean and Castiel follow the other two into a living room across the hall. It’s not big due to the age of the home, but it’s filled with large, cozy furniture and rough wood tables that give the place character and a softness and sense of welcome he’s never experienced before. It’s the type of room families share together, the type of furniture someone would nap in after a heavy thanksgiving dinner.

Dean plunks into the corner of the beige couch and drags Cas down with him. They collide together, and Dean’s arms are quickly circled around him.

Jess snorts from her perch on the arm of the oversized chair Sam is sitting in. “Oh yeah, that doesn’t look like dating at all.”

“Shut it, blondie,” Dean fires back.

How did he ever imagine he could deny Dean? A: He doesn’t want to; and B: Dean wouldn’t let him.

With the windows open and the occasional breeze snaking through the room, they chat about life in Hobucken and Jess talks about working in the hospital a couple towns over, explaining that work and Sam are her life. The married couple gush about how they met, to Dean’s groaning intermittent responses that he’s heard the story a million times.

His theatrics are only that, and anyone can see how much he loves his brother and sister-in-law.

Because of his job, it’s no surprise to see Sam constantly, but discreetly, checking his phone—always needing to be on top of the news and to see if any of his clients need him. It’s a habit Cas has become quite used to, and he doesn’t bat an eye when it happens.

What does alarm him is when Sam’s eyes flash wide and he takes a closer look at whatever he’s seeing. A moment later, his hazel stare flicks up to Cas. The movement is fast, and unnoticed to Dean who’s waging a mini argument with Jess over the merits of one MMA wrestler over another.

Sam clears his throat. Frozen against Dean’s side, Cas is ready for whatever Sam is about to say. “So, uh… Jimmy, want to help me pull together some kind of dessert? Dean won’t leave until we drug him with sugar.”

Jess laughs. “So true.”

“Of course.” Castiel’s reply is stiff, his heart accelerating with uncertainty.

It’s obvious Dean can tell something is off by the tone of his voice, but he seems to brush it off. Not surprising, seeing as Cas is often strange and distant. Still, Dean catches Castiel’s wrist as he’s getting to his feet.

Nothing is said, and Dean’s hand quickly slips away from his skin and Castiel reluctantly follows the taller brother across the hall and into the kitchen. But Sam doesn’t stop, he turns a corner near the pantry and heads into the basement. Castiel follows, his frame weary with grave possibility.

At the bottom of the staircase, Sam turns and raises his chin.

“What?” Castiel demands.

Sam huffs and looks away as he turns his phone around. The screen, at first glance, shows a news headline. The words assassinated and Marshal standing out clear and destructive to his heart rhythm.
He reaches out and swipes the screen to show more. Cigarette-induced wrinkles and a hard set of eyes stare back at him. Marshal Roya. Dead. No… Assassinated.

There’s no more time to think. “I need to go.” He turns to leave but Sam catches him on the shoulder.

“Is someone coming here?”

He doesn’t lie. “Probably.”

“What are you gonna tell Dean?”

“Nothing, and neither should you. If Raphael is coming here, and he somehow finds out I’ve become attached to your brother—he’s as good as dead.” Castiel feels a dizzying sense of anger and regret. “Fuck, I never should’ve come here, I never should’ve been friends with him, and whatever this is… what I’ve done… it’s put him in danger. I’ve put him in danger.”

Sam shakes him suddenly. “This is not your fault. Leave and I’ll deal with anyone who shows up in our town. I’ll give Sheriff Mills a heads up and everything will be fine.”

It will be, Cas adds silently, because he’s going to lead Raph away from Hobucken. Lead him away and hopefully get rid of him for good. “Yes,” allows Cas, “everything will be fine.”

He ducks out of Sam’s hold and marches up the stairs… only to find Dean standing ominously in the kitchen.

“Dessert in the basement?”

“Yes. But I can’t stay for it,” he talks calmly, features flat and emotionless. “I’m not feeling well so I’m going to head home, but I’ll see you tomorrow.” Another lie to throw on all the others he’s told Dean.

Same as always, Dean knows it’s all a big fat crock. But he’s pissed enough that he says nothing about it. Sporting an equally stiff expression, Dean replies, “Yup. See you tomorrow.”

There’s a very real chance that this is the last time he’ll ever see Dean. Efforts notwithstanding, Castiel may not be successful in killing Raphael. And if he’s not? Well, that’s probably where the Karma comes in.

The deep yearning in the pit of his gut flares in pain and he wants to close the distance between Dean and kiss his mouth and wrap him in a hug that lingers for hours, for days even.

Dean’s restless anger waivers as Cas’ warring emotions must show on his face. “Good night, Dean.”

The mechanic clears his throat and lowers his voice. “Night Cas.”

He can’t help it. His body moves more suddenly that he thought it possible. His mind screams as his mouth crashes against Dean’s surprised lips. The jarring attack pushes Dean against the counter and Castiel frames the man’s cheeks with his hands, kissing him hard and with a painful whimper held tight in the back of his throat.

Castiel slips his tongue inside and strokes the warmth of Dean’s mouth, feeling heartbreak for the first time in his life.

It’s a sensation he could’ve done without.
He doesn’t so much as end the kiss, as he does throw himself back from it—his legs carrying him quickly to the hall and out the front door without looking back. He walks to his home in a quick fourteen minutes, and has his suitcase and two illicit duffle bags on the bed seconds after he’s rushed through the front door.

His breathing is labored even though nothing he’s doing is physically exerting. It disorients him, his hands shaking as he haphazardly stuffs his suitcase with clothes. Each exhale ripples out unsteadily and he wonders how he’ll manage to hold a gun.

Stopping, he stands still and he tries to suck in a deep breath—the same exercise he’s so used to doing. But for the first time, it does nothing. It doesn’t calm his chest, or his mind.

“Fuck!” Castiel yells in frustration and whips the suitcase against the white wall, causing a jagged tear in the paint, his clothes being flung every which direction.

How old was the news article? He wonders out of the blue. How much time does he even have?

Fuck the clothes. He doesn’t need clothes. Reaching across the bed, Cas digs into the furthest black duffel and pulls out an unmarked Glock. Finally, his hands are steadier. Going through the motions, he loads the gun, checks the chamber and tucks it into the waistband of his jeans. He’ll need a car and—

“Holy shit!”

If the heart could suddenly disengage its veins and plummet into one’s gut—Castiel imagines it would feel exactly how he feels now. Nauseated and losing control. Half his mind contemplates using his body to shield the trappings of criminal activity on the bed, and the other half is fearful of the time. Of the moment when Raphael shows up, the possibility of that being a moment where Dean is near him.

Slowly shifting on his feet, bringing himself to face the one person he feels accountable to, his fear takes precedence. “Dean, you need to leave. We’re done.”
The mechanic throws a brief look at the weapon and returns to his face. “No.”

“No?” Castiel retorts in disbelief. The seconds are ticking and he’s near ready to throw Dean over his shoulder and haul his ass back to the other side of town himself.

“You heard me.” Dean shifts from one foot to the other and crosses his arms. Unbelievable. Castiel waves his arm over the contents on the bed, his anger rising. “Do you see all this!” he asks roughly. “Do you see who I am, Dean? I am not someone you need to get involved with. I was irresponsible for allowing this to continue, I was selfish and weak but not anymore! Dean, I will not ask you again—leave.”

“Fucking make me.”

His irritated breaths rip back and forth between his parted lips. If that’s what Dean wants… then Castiel will make him. “Do you watch the news, Dean?” he asks, an air of pointed confidence in his voice.

Dean squints but answers nonetheless. “Enough of it, why?”

“Does the name Michael Haven ring a bell?”

Now, Dean finally looks uncertain. For once, he looks cautious. “You mean the mob boss guy? Didn’t he get ratted out and is rotting in jail or something. What’s he got to do with any of this?”

Castiel is silent for a beat. “A lot.”

“You know him or something?”

Brushing a hand over the back of his neck, Castiel edges out a bitter laugh. “Probably not as well as a son should know a father, but yes I know him.”

Whatever lingering petulant anger resided in Dean is wiped clear with that bomb. The mechanic’s eyes flare with a moment’s fear, disbelief, and probably a thousand questions all at once.

This is the reaction Cas had been waiting for, had been delaying and fearing for so long. Dean’s infatuation with him is sure to be over now. How could it not be? Besides, there’s one last nail in the coffin: “And I’m the rat… in case that wasn’t clear.”

“But.” Dean narrows his gaze on the bag of guns, and the matching bag of cash. “Ohhh,” he intones, as if a thought occurred, “you were thinking that was gonna get me to hightail it outta here, didn’t you? Maybe there’s a lot we still don’t know about each other. Well… here’s a clue, I ain’t goin’ anywhere. And neither are you until you tell me everything.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. “Are you not listening? There is no time to explain to you how awful of a human being I’ve been. The U.S. Marshal who was handling my case—the only person in fact who
knows my location—has been shot in the face and is currently lying dead on a slab right now. His grieving family has my uncle to thank for that, Dean. My uncle… who is likely on his way here to kill me… and anyone who gets in his way. And if he were to find out that I’ve fa—“ Castiel pauses sharply and turns away. “If he finds out about you, you’re dead. Don’t you get that?!?”

There’s a long stretch of quiet and all Cas can focus on is the absence of sound, and he dreads the moment when the soft sound of tires interrupt the calm.

Surprising Castiel, Dean shoves him out of the way and starts picking up the clothes around his room. He watches, confused, as Dean packs his stuff.

*He’s helping?* “What are you doing?”

Dean’s reply is casual. “You need to leave? Fine, we’re leaving.”

Of course. “We’re… leaving?” he throws back.

“Don’t take me for an idiot,” argues Dean. “I get it, okay… you had a big bad craptacular life and it’s not over yet… but one thing you gotta understand is you’re not getting rid of me. Sure, we stumbled into this thing a bit blind and with massively shitty timing, but I don’t get hung up on someone… like ever. So ‘scuse me but if you want me gone, you’re gonna have to kick my ass to do it.”

“I would never hurt you,” replies Cas, sounding defeated.

Dean spins around and smiles. “I know. And look, you think we aren’t safe then fine we’ll duck out of town.” Given the very real danger of the situation, Dean is far too relaxed.

“This isn’t a joke,” he pleads with Dean.

“Didn’t say it was. Life or death situation,” Dean shrugs, “doesn’t matter. You’re not using this as an out for us. We’ll pack your shit and stop off at my place and I’ll grab some stuff, and we go together. Besides, it’s not like I’m dead weight, alright. I know how to shoot a gun and I’m not exactly some delicate flower. I can handle myself.”

Tired of arguing, and hating this constant fight against Dean, Castiel drops onto the bed and stares off into space. “I don’t know what to do,” he admits.

“You’re worried about protecting me?” challenges Dean. “Well, how the fuck do you think you can protect me if you leave?”

It’s a thought Castiel has turned over many times. He’s battled it, the notion of distance from Dean somehow spelling out safety, but the truth is… Dean is probably safer by his side. It’s no secret in the town there’s something between them. Any number of residents could tell an out-of-towner about their relationship.

And Dean would be alone, unprotected.

“I can’t,” he agrees.

“Exactly. So I’m going with you.”

It’s shaky and forced, but Cas throws Dean a resigned smile. “What do you suggest?”

Dean looks confident as he stands, his rough hands taking hold of Cas’ chin and angling it up. “First,
we pack up here and then head to my place so I can grab a few things. Then I’ll take one of the cars without plates and we’ll drive over to New Bern where a buddy of mine lives. A buddy of mine who happens to be in the Army”—Dean winks—“and lets me crash at his place from time to time. He’s on tour now but man, the place is wired to the nines cause he’s kind of psycho so it’s the safest place to be. And no one here knows about Benny—not even Sam.”

There are a million more important questions. Instead, he asks, “How did you meet Benny?”

Smirking, Dean grinds his hips in the air. “I was young… he was burly.” After a pause, the mechanic adds, “Does that bother you?”

It doesn’t. In fact, of all of Dean’s shared exploits, Castiel had rarely felt jealousy. Except when he’s witnessing it in person of course. That, he hates. But imagining Dean with someone, in a disconnected sort of context, doesn’t bother him at all. In place of expected jealousy, he has other sorts of reactions.

“No, it doesn’t.” His cheeks feel hot and red.

“Picturing it?”

“No,” he lies.

Holding his face steady, Dean lowers until they’re nose-to-nose. “You keep lying to me and I might have to think of some kind of punishment.”

The internal ticking clock cuts into Cas’ thoughts, as well as the sudden hedonistic fantasies Dean is arousing. “Perhaps that’s something we can discuss later.” He pauses, blue eyes searching green ones. “Are you sure about all this? There’s things I haven’t told you—about me… about who I was. What I’ve done. You can still leave, I wouldn’t stop you.”

Expecting a gruff reply, Castiel is shocked by the sudden lack of air and Dean’s warm lips squashed against his. Pressure, sure and soft for a breath, and then Castiel feels his jaw loosen and Dean’s tongue slides in with a blinding sense of immediate relief. He sags into Dean’s ministrations, going slack under the mechanic’s touch. After a lingering minute trapped in a hot kiss, the feeling of air when Dean pulls back is dizzying.

“There’s one way to shut you up.”

He laughs. “Yes, that has proven effective.” Shaking his head, Castiel can’t understand how a man as perfect as Dean likes him—it defies the laws of physics. And he tells Dean this.

As he starts to pack, Dean pins him with a stupid look. “Man, don’t you get it? I don’t just like you. I really like you.”

Cas chuckles. “I know. I didn’t say I didn’t believe it, I just don’t understand why.”

The packing continues, and so does the sound of Dean’s voice in the bedroom. “Why do I like you?” he repeats, deciding to answer. “Okay… well, I like the way you never brush your damn hair, I like that flat look you give me every time I throw out an innuendo. I love how friggin’ nice you are to everyone, even though it’s so fucking obvious how much of a badass motherfucker you can be. I fucking love that you somehow gave Bobby the kick in the ass he needed. I love that no matter how strong you seem to be, you need me—even if you have a hard time admitting it. I love that you walk Bobby home every night, that you hung out with some of my bestest friends on the planet and had a good time. I love that you put me in my place when I’m being a pestering horndog, I just—” Hands settled on the edge of the suitcase, Dean abruptly cuts himself off. Something dawns on him, his
eyebrows pulling together, chest expanding in erratic movements. “Huh…”

Still perched at the corner of the bed, Castiel watches Dean reach the conclusion he’s known for some time. “What is it?” Though he knows, his stare fixates on Dean.

Shocked, Dean looks over and down, staring at him as if he hadn’t been there the whole time. “I love you?” The three words are being tested from Dean’s tongue, his mouth confused by the sounds. After another beat, Dean makes an odd face as if he’d just eaten something sour. “I love you?”

“Do you require medical assistance?” teases Castiel.

“Shut up… I’m having a goddamn epiphany here.”

“I see that. I guess it’s good I’m not leaving you behind after a revelation like that. You might wallow in the remnants of your crumbling reputation.”

Dean places his hand on the side of Cas’ neck and leans in to kiss him. “We can’t have that.”

“No, we can’t.”

Twenty minutes later, all their bags are packed and they’re driving a ten-year old Honda Civic down the county highway.

In the growing dark of the evening, Dean looks over at him and takes his hand. “I know you’re scared, and I get how bad this is… but we’re in this together, okay? Thelma and Louise style with a side of Ray Liotta!”

Castiel squints across the seat, his head cocked to the side. “Who?”
Fugitive Bliss

Fear is an odd thing. It has a shelf-life, because the body can’t physically sustain the tension for too long. Though it doesn’t dwindle into calm, it transforms. Sometimes into a low panic, or dread, or hopelessness.

But in very rare moments, as Castiel is learning, it thrums beneath the skin—twisting itself from stomach-tightening anxiety, to stomach-tightening arousal.

It hits him the moment he and Dean close the door to Benny’s apartment and drop their loaded bags on the floor. The rustic-themed loft is quiet and open, promising a safe retreat until whatever threat has passed. Realization creeps in; the leaps and bounds in their relationship that occurred in his bedroom are suddenly demanding attention in his mind. Dean loves you! his brain shouts, the words flying around at top speed.

Despite his vast inexperience, Castiel knows this is a particular kind of moment. The breath of time before profound things happen. In this case, not a fight or a pioneering act, but something that makes his throat dry.

Which is odd, he’s not a virgin. But around Dean, with the thick air of their joint confessions pressing in on them, he feels untouched and so nervous his knees are weak.

Now would be an ideal time for Raphael to kill him, given his sudden immobility.

Dean’s coarse fingers tracing down the length of his arm pull his head around and he finds green eyes set on him, darker than they were before. Though, where Dean had been confident and commanding back in Hobucken, he’s vulnerable now, letting his newfound emotions crawl to the surface. These raw feelings of being in love are highlighted in the soft confusion on Dean’s features, in the way his brows knit together with uncertainty.

Seems they’re both treading in uncharted waters. Hopefully neither of them drown in it.

“What now?” Castiel asks.

“Now?” muses Dean. “Hmm, I think we… should...” Trailing off, Dean leans in to kiss him.

It’s exactly what Cas wants. A gentle reminder he’s not alone, and that someone cares whether he lives or dies. Unfortunately, it’s also a reminder that Dean still doesn’t know everything. However far they’ve come, the balance of truth and lies is still lopsided against him. For that reason, Castiel is unresponsive to the guiding movement of Dean’s lips, diligently trying to tease him towards something.

 Probably a bed, knowing Dean.

Squeezing his eyes to shore up his willpower, Castiel pulls back from the small-town mechanic and sets his shoulders. “You need to know who I am.”

Dean barely holds back a groan of frustration, settling Cas with an impatient eye. “I do know who you are. I know all the things that count.”

Except all the horrible things I’ve done. Oh, and my name, thinks Cas sarcastically. “Dean, you don’t even know my entire name. You don’t even know how old I am!” His hands fly up in dismay.
“You're right,” allows Dean, his voice tight. “Cause if your name isn’t something I think is so super cool, we’re fucking done. And of course, age is a huge factor for me… I mean, Jesus Cas, if you wind up being a day over forty, I’ll have to haul back that ‘I love you’ business and get the hell out of dodge, ya know.” The words aren’t meant as a joke, they’re executed from a place of mounting irritation. And though it’s not Cas’ intention to start another argument with Dean… he can’t help that a discussion needs to be had.

Dean is being careless.

Taking the matter into his own hands, Castiel cuts through the room to the leather sectional and takes a seat. He rests his elbows on his knees and leans over to stare at the floor. Dean may not want the truth, or care for it, but he’s going to get it. Castiel can’t be with him without a clean slate between them. It would eat away at him, the dishonesty of it.

If Dean wants honest sex, he’s getting the most honest sex Cas can give him. Or, Castiel acknowledges with a plummeting weight in his gut, the truth will create an impassable cavern between them.

Fuck.

The former mobster doesn’t speak just yet, he waits until Dean harrumphs and crosses the room to sit down opposite him on the coffee table. It’s a bad seat for a long conversation, but he chooses not to rib Dean over it.

“Alright, spill the beans then. Tell me everything.”

Struggling to start, he raises his face to Dean and catches his gaze. It’s still radiating impatience. It doesn’t seem to matter what he’s about to say, Dean is already set on his feelings.

Might as well get things started.

“My full name is… Castiel Michael Haven.” When no response follows, he spares a glance at Dean and turns away to continue. “I’ve helped my father run his business since I was kid… Drugs, fraud, blackmail, gambling, guns… the list is endless. Anywhere money could be made, it was. If anyone stepped out of line, they were… reschooled in the ways of the Haven family business.” Here, he stops, the memories of breaking bones are as sharp as the sound they’d made. He doesn’t meet Dean’s eyes again. “I’ve beaten people severely, nearly to death. I’ve shot people. I’ve dismembered bodies. I’ve buried them…”

The resounding silence is crushing and the sudden nausea swirling around his gut is almost enough to keep him from talking altogether. If he opens his mouth at the wrong moment, he might be sick. Which is something Dean’s friend would probably not appreciate. Although leather is fairly easy to clean. The Haven household was furnished with lots of leather.

Huh. He doesn’t realize he’s shaking until Dean’s hands appear in front of his eyes, the coarse—nearly perpetually stained skin—locking around his forearms and garnering his attention. “I’m sorry,” is all Dean says, his deep voice softer than Cas has ever heard it.

“I should be with them,” admits Castiel. “Lives have been ruined because of me, lives have ended.” Yes, he belongs with his family sporting a uniform getup of standard-issue coveralls, fearing the other inmates who they’ve crossed in the past. For all he’s done, it’s what he deserves. But he became a rat instead. In their world, this was the worst infraction. The most heinous act to commit in the world of organized crime.
Come to think of it, the fact that he’s even still alive is remarkable. A fucking miracle.

“No,” argues Dean, “no you shouldn’t. They were evil… you’re not. And besides, everyone you’ve ever done wrong to probably deserved it anyway.”

A wince of guilt gives his body a telling twitch. Dean notices and goes curiously quiet, even the regular movement of his breath seems absent. There’s no reason to elaborate, the horrifying truth is plain. Sure, Castiel could blame his actions on the crippling fear he had of his father, or his sense of powerlessness, or his former belief that there was no other choice.

It was all lies, things he told himself to make it through the day. Because the concept of breaking free was petrifying. A coward is what he was. Still is…

“I should be with them.” Or at the bottom of a river, he silently tacks on. “I need to do penance, Dean…”

In going down the road of honesty, Castiel didn’t expected it to hit him so hard. Hearing the words out loud of the man he’d been—he knows he doesn’t belong next to a man like Dean. They don’t fit, they don’t work together. One is light and vivacious, the other is dark and damaged beyond repair.

Movement drags his head up. “What are you—”

Moving lithely and determined, Dean grabs his wrists and pushes his arms apart, giving the mechanic space to climb into Cas’ lap. A position Dean seems to favour. Utterly confused, Cas doesn’t react and finds himself staring up at the man, his first true friend, who’s managed to straddle him and lock his wrists in a grip between their chests.

It feels inexplicably good to be restrained, a condign punishment.

“Don’t you get it?” Dean pins him in a stare, a trance he can’t pull away from. “Being there… with them, with what they made you do… that was punishment. You grew up only knowing that life. God, Cas, you were just a kid…”

No, he corrects, he was never a kid. There were no birthday parties, there were no family vacations. Only rules and deeds to be done. “That doesn’t justify it.”

“Stop beating yourself up about what you do or don’t deserve, or what’s just. I’m pretty fucking sure your dad worked out his fists on you enough—whatever penance you think you deserve—it’s done already. Your sentence is up, alright. You’ve had enough! And damnit—you got out! You did the right thing—and I can’t imagine how terrifying that would’ve been. But you did it… that’s huge man. There’s not a lot people that coulda done that.”

Had he told Dean about his dad? The violence that was as much a part of his father as hugs were to normal dads. The confusion and peculiar cast of shame must be clear in his features.

“Takes one to know one,” adds Dean, the biting edge of his tone contrite.

The corner of his lip quirks up. “I suppose it does.”

Well, Cas thinks with bitter sarcasm, at least we have that in common. Though he wishes this was not the case. He would trade his life in a heartbeat to erase Dean’s experience if he could. But in that, he’s powerless.

The familiar texture of Dean’s working man’s fingers revives his attention, nothing but a thumb absentely stroking the inside of his wrist where it’s locked in a vise—the grip of a man who’s worked
in hard, honest labour his whole life. If only Dean could be his prison, his guard, iron bars in the form of industrious hands. Torture through denial.

*If only…*

“Cas, you’re a smart guy…” pleads Dean, “you know you didn’t have a choice then. Not until you were ready. Denying yourself a life now doesn’t do shit. Who does that help? You? It sure as fuck doesn’t help me! What about everyone else you’ve become friends with, huh?” Dean releases his hold to grab his chin as he’d looked away. “Don’t pull the avoidance crap with me. You’re one of the smartest guys I know next to Ash, and all this BS about penance is drivel spewing from your damn guilt, trying to break you down. Turning your family in was fucking brave as all hell, Cas. And criticising yourself for not doing it sooner doesn’t make you a bad person, it just means you were scared. And that’s okay…”

Out of nowhere, Dean rushes close and plants him with a hard kiss. Castiel’s thick lips crush against his teeth, and his breath punches out from his lungs in a mixture of relief and objection.

When Dean rears back, he’s angry. “And what kind of guilt would you have if you left me? What about that? You really think shutting out a good thing is the answer? Don’t be a goddamn martyr. Acknowledge the shit life you had, the crap you did, and move the fuck on as whatever kind of man you want to be.”

It’s been several long minutes since Cas has said anything, and he can’t seem to make his mouth work, his throat feels abnormally constricted. His mind slides towards a thought of the weapons nearby, and how he’s not sure he could operate one if he had to.

Dean has a way of making him feel lost, unsure of the man he is, or how to become the man he’d rather be. Constantly swinging from swollen guilt to bated hope, an annoying pendulum action that’s been driving him mad.

When the silence is broken, it’s with Dean’s static-rough whisper, “Please, just let me in…” Moving close again, Dean kisses his cheek. “You don’t have to do this alone, Cas.” Another kiss; a featherlight touch by his temple. “Don’t think I won’t kiss you into submission.”

Letting his head fall back wearing faint smile, he meets Dean’s eyes at an angle and voices the only real truth he knows and hopes Dean will take it from there. “I don’t know what to do, Dean… or who I am anymore.”

For the first time in a while, Dean grins. It’s not as broad or as bright as it usually is, but it’s beautiful nevertheless. “You’re a man that’s somehow managed to bring a self-proclaimed slut to his knees—and not in the typical sense.”

“Don’t call yourself that,” he reprimands.

Dean scoffs. “A spade is a spade is a spade. No one is perfect, you just accept the gouges in your soul and deal with it.”

Something along the lines of happiness surges in Castiel’s chest. He places his hands on Dean’s hips and finds his gaze. “There are no gouges in your soul, Dean. It’s perfect… the brightest I’ve ever seen. The truest.”

The crimson blush that sweeps beneath Dean’s freckles is gratifying.

“Don’t leave me to punish yourself, okay?” pleads Dean. “Just don’t.” When the man above him shakes his head in a subtle protest, it brings to light how truly fragile Dean is. And if Cas had no one
to answer to, he would recluse himself from the world. Watch over it but be separate.

But now there’s Dean. And God help him, because he can’t leave this man.

“I won’t,” he answers with conviction. I can’t.

Maybe it’s not the right thing in the end, maybe they’ll both regret it. But maybe, maybe, they won’t. One can only pray.

Castiel laughs suddenly at the thought. Of all the prayers he’s said in satire, the mockery he made of it—he thinks perhaps he understands now what the whole mission is about. To have faith in a wish.

Above him, Dean smiles. “What’s so funny?”

Castiel’s hands, steadier than they’ve been in hours, slide up along Dean’s ribs and angle towards his chest, searching out the feel of his beating heart. “I think you’re turning me into a man of God.”

“Talk about bad timing.” Dean smirks, leaning close. “‘Cause you are so about to sin.”

A soft chuckle escapes his mouth, and he searches Dean’s eyes. “Am I?”

“Oh yeah…” Castiel’s mouth is captured in a gentle kiss, then Dean adds, “Lots of times.”

He smiles into the next kiss, welcoming the invasion of Dean’s tongue with a newfound calm in his soul. This touch proves in a lot of ways that maybe he’s not a lost cause. Maybe he has a future, something real and fulfilling more than he could’ve conceived of six months ago.

As Dean works them into a deeper kiss, firm hands holding him still, Castiel wishes there was a way to show Dean all that he’s done. To take a man who never knew anything but violence, never knew what it felt like to be cared for, and offer him compassion and love… it changes a person in deep-seated ways he can’t begin to understand.

Castiel doesn’t consider himself redeemed; there are certain goals that are simply unreachable. However, because of Dean, he feels renewed. From here, he has a hope to rebuild himself.

Becoming a new man, one worthy of Dean, starts now. And how better to illustrate this than by outright worshipping the man. Giving Dean the kind of pleasure that’s transcendent, taking you apart from the inside only to piece you back together.

Reaching this conclusion, Castiel eagerly wraps his arms around Dean nice and tight. He returns the heat of Dean’s kiss, licking at his tongue, biting and tasting his lips without equivocation. The abrupt surge of Castiel’s efforts evokes a hard moan from Dean.

“There you are,” murmurs Dean against his mouth. Castiel’s chest feels stretched with emotion, and he starts to finally let go.

For now, they are safe; there’s no need to rush. Castiel falls into the ease of the connection, his lips chasing the friction of Dean’s, strong arms holding his mechanic as close as possible. With each breath, he takes in Dean’s particular scent and lets the whole of his senses come together to create a potent memory to relive in the future.

Castiel feels the weight of Dean on him, the guiding movement of his tongue, the intermittent sighs and throaty moans. Beneath them, the leather creaks with their subtle shifts. It grows louder, and squeakier, when Dean gets lost in the moment and starts to rock in Cas’ lap as he’s done before.
Rough fingers find their way over Cas’ skin, tangling into his hair.

Desperation builds steadily, with each kiss harder than the last, each touch a little rougher. Dean dominates the kiss, forcing Cas’ lips apart over and over, the man’s tongue insistent and explorative. Having Dean inside his mouth, when the sensation is still so new, has Cas wondering what other appendages of Dean’s might feel like between his lips and on his tongue. How would Dean taste? Would Castiel be able to take it all the way in, as Dean had for him? Castiel decides he’d rather choke trying to succeed than fail, but he supposes he’ll find out soon enough.

In his past life, every sexual encounter had been with him in the position of power. Whether that was a matter of happenstance, preference, or some innate fear of his father finding out he’d gone to his knees for someone or bent over for them—he can’t say. But true as anything, Castiel would gladly fall to his knees for Dean. Perhaps his penance can be in the form of pleasuring the one man on the face of the earth who can’t seem to get enough of it. Castiel’s job would never cease.

Dean suddenly groans, a hard sound of sheer need, and breaks the kiss. Castiel licks his wet lips, meeting Dean’s heated gaze.

“Cas…”

The unspoken question is clear. Castiel strokes the length of Dean’s spine, stretches up to kiss him once more and pushes Dean off of him and stands.

They look ridiculous. Clothes in disarray, hair showing the evidence of erratic fingers, lips plump and red.

Castiel reaches forward and cups his hand around the back of Dean’s neck, drawing him closer. He can’t deny one more kiss and takes it. Then, with an insinuating glint in his eye, he says, “I assume this place has a bed…”

A beaming smile cracks into Dean’s expression, and he laughs in short huffs. “Definitely has a bed. Uh, so does that mean…” Eyebrows raised, he searches Cas’ face.

“Yes, Dean.” Cas throws both arms around Dean’s neck, their faces nearly touching. “From this point forward, everything you want is yours.”

With a shy smirk, Dean nudges Cas’ nose and says, “You’re totally going to regret giving me a blanket freebie like that. Cause man, I’m gonna have some kinky requests.”

Castiel smiles, quite happily resigned to such a future. “I would expect no different.”

There’s unparalleled warmth shining in Dean’s eyes when he returns the expression, and then he draws Cas into another kiss. But this time, the man’s hands are working at Cas’ clothes—his shirt guided over his head, then his undershirt.

Here, he stops Dean, needing to even the progress some. He’s also very eager to take all of what Dean offers.

Castiel is slow in shedding Dean’s clothes. He unfastens the plaid shirt one button at a time, loving the adorable grin on Dean’s face. Leaving the shirt undone, Castiel reaches for Dean’s jeans. He’s rough as he undoes them, taking note of the deeper shade of red creeping up Dean’s neck.

Abruptly, he pauses, curiously looking at Dean. “Won’t your friend mind that we’re about to…” In place of saying ‘fuck like mad’ he raises his brows.
Dean laughs. “Nah, Benny’s pretty chill. Besides, the guy is gonna be so goddamn shocked to find out I’ve fallen in love with someone, he’ll probably be proud we did the do for the first time in his apartment.”

“Hmm, alright then.” With that, Castiel moves quickly; he drags Dean’s button-up off his shoulders and tugs it free of his arms, the t-shirt underneath is rucked up and torn off too, and then he bends his knees, grabs Dean’s jeans and boxers together and yanks them to the floor.

Nice and efficient.

It also serves the purpose of bringing him to his knees. In front of Dean… a man who’s become his saviour. He smiles up at him, and reaches out to take off the mechanics heavy shoes. They’re tossed elsewhere, landing in two hard thuds behind the couch. Castiel nudges the bunched jeans and boxers off Dean’s feet, and that’s thrown over his head.

When he meets Dean’s stare, there’s a clear hunger residing there. Castiel’s not sure what to expect, but it’s not the kind gesture of Dean reaching for his chin and tilting his head back. Bending over, Dean finds his mouth and lays a kiss on it. Then hooks his arms around Castiel and pulls him to his feet.

“Let’s save that for later,” says Dean, wearing a patient smile.

Not breaking eye contact, Dean reaches for Cas’ pants and undoes them, pushing them down and letting Cas wiggle from them himself. Being so aware of his current nakedness, Castiel remembers other truths he’s kept from Dean.

“This is going to sound odd, but…” Castiel looks at the far wall towards the open-concept kitchen, then back at Dean. “Um, you were actually the first person to ever see me fully naked. Isn’t that strange?”

The likewise-naked mechanic breaks into an odd smile, brows knit together in bewilderment at the conflicted man that’s heavily disrupted his life. Castiel wonders how Dean doesn’t routinely laugh at him. Not a virgin, but never kissed another person until he was thirty-one. An atheist bearing a cross, a prayer, and angel’s wings. A mobster who cowers from their own kin. And a violent man who surrenders at the sight of a smirk.

Granted, a very sexy smirk.

“Sorry, but I can’t exactly say the same on that one.”

“Doesn’t bother me,” assures Cas. “You’re a work of art, Dean. Every line, curve, and freckle. I wish I could look through the eyes of those you’ve been with and see you as they have, see the way you moved, relented.”

Dean turns a warm shade of pink. “Jesus, you and your words.” Hands burying into Cas’ hair, Dean crowds into him and attacks his lips with a kiss. A tongue joins the incursion, slick and devouring. They erase the space between them, sighing into the kiss as the warmth of their skin comes together, all silken and gloriously hard in places.

With a hitch in his breath, Dean pulls back and looks… unsure. “Oh man, how the hell am I nervous?” Judging by Dean’s focus, drawn elsewhere and somewhat distant, it’s clear he’s not firing off the question to the only other person in the room.

Cas answers anyway. “Because you’re in love with me.” God, it feels good to say that. How unbelievable that such a thing could be true? The old scars on his knuckles should’ve assured such
an outcome would never come to pass, but fate has different plans for them.

Castiel likes these plans better than what he thought they were before. Yes, definitely better than jail or death. *Definitely.*

Beaming and mildly abashed, Dean says, “Yeah probably. God, it’s like I’m seventeen!” Clapping his hands, Dean bounds over to the bags by the door and bends over. Which happens to give Castiel an unhindered and spectacular view of the mechanic’s shapely behind.

Deans trots back over with necessary items in his hand. He catches the lingering grin on Cas’ face. “You were totally checking out my ass, weren’t you?”

“Um.” *Yes.*

Dean preens. “Atta boy, we’ll make a sex fiend of you yet.” With his free hand, Dean reaches for Cas’ and starts dragging him away from the couch. “C’mon, it’s about damn time you make love to me.”

As Castiel follows a very naked Dean through the wide open apartment, he can’t fight the unfamiliar smile spreading across his face, too bright and delirious to be his own. It fits tight between his cheeks, like his mug doesn’t know what to make of the expression.

They sweep right towards a wide hallway that leads to a bathroom, and then further to a winding metal staircase. At the base, Dean spins back and reaches out for him—their bodies colliding in a haphazard way.

Castiel loses his breath.

The anticipation of what’s to come has exploded into sharp existence, a hot tension between them. Castiel can’t hold back the sudden twitch of his erection. A movement Dean definitely feels between them. Dean hisses, his body responding in similar ways, and throws his arms around Cas’ neck.

They fall into an urgent impromptu makeout session against the black sharp-edged rails of metal. Cas feels eager in the way only the inexperienced can; his hands moving over Dean without purpose, his kiss less refined.

But Dean doesn’t seem to care, or doesn’t notice. When they reluctantly put space between them, Castiel is short on air… and Dean looks dazed.

“Upstairs?” prompts Castiel.

Dean nods. “Upstairs.”
They scramble up the steps on weak knees and over the last riser, Castiel is struck still by the view. The overhead loft space is simultaneously vast and comforting. A large king size bed is positioned up against a wall of brick to their right, and ahead of them is a wall of glass. Not that the City presented on the other side is remarkable. Nothing like Paris or New York, but it adds to the dream. The dream that has become reality.

A few feet ahead, Dean is watching him. Watching him take in the essence of possibility. Dean cocks his head and stares, waiting for Cas to come to him.

When he starts closing the distance, walking towards a hopeful future, Dean backs up—wearing that damn trademark grin. Castiel continues to advance, stalking Dean until the man hits the end of the bed and has no choice but to fall back on it.

A small bottle of lube and, jesus… five condoms in a strip fall from Dean’s grasp onto the bedspread.

“Five condoms?” Castiel stares at the little packets and then back at Dean.

The man on the bed shrugs. “What? Who knows how long we’re gonna be here! I was ready to bring a box!”

A laugh bursts from Cas’ lungs and he crashes on top of Dean, quickly finding his mouth and dipping a tongue between his lips to savour the warmth. They shuffle up the bed together, hands getting greedy and impatient.

It feels like he’s been waiting his whole life for this moment. Both of them are on edge, ready to bring the ache to a swift satisfying conclusion. But Castiel doesn’t want fast and rough. He plans to revel in the living fantasy, to explore Dean.

Fighting his own desires and shameful triumph, he forces himself to slow his actions. He kisses Dean’s open mouth, loving the wet intimacy of such a simple thing. Gradually, his efforts shift—in a trail of kisses across the rise of Dean’s freckled cheek. His lips press against Dean’s ear and he feels a shiver ripple through the man beneath him.

God, how could he be this lucky?

In that moment, feeling Dean’s nails scrape down his back and absorbing the warmth of his bare skin, he wants to whisper to Dean, to tell this magnificent human being how much he loves him. But the words don’t come, they stay locked somewhere inside him.

It hurts to fight against what his heart wants to say and what his deconstructed mind can’t reconcile.

He ignores the frustration of it by offering kisses down the column of Dean’s neck, enjoying the way Dean squirms when Castiel uses teeth. Since the words are failing him, he does whatever else he can to prove their existence. Castiel sucks marks onto Dean’s skin, breathes his scent to know it without question, and passes his hands over every plane and curve that he’s admired before.

In abstract patterns, Dean whimpers and undulates beneath him. When their eyes shift towards each other, locking in a moment’s stare, the passion of the act hovers in limbo until one of them smiles or looks away.

Before he realizes it, Castiel is finding his way down Dean’s body, his lips currently sucking on a
taut nipple, the velvet texture against his tongue is causing a fire to rage in his pelvis. His mouth works at the nub, feeling it harden with a flick of his tongue.

“Fuuuck,” groans Dean, his hips moving restlessly up and down.

Castiel decides the expletive is a hint to move on, but when he shifts lower and nibles at the flesh over Dean’s ribs, the man’s hands grab around his head and guide him back.

“Oh my god, more… fuck, keep doing what the fuck you were just doing.”

Castiel speaks honestly. “Dean, I really have no idea what I’m doing… but I’ll do my best.”

There’s a broken laugh from Dean, and then a thick moan as Cas resumes sucking and flicking Dean’s nipples for another thirty seconds—long enough for Dean to start pumping his legs and whining loudly in fierce growls.

Precome has smeared from the swollen tip of Dean’s cock onto Cas’ stomach and he’s reminded of his earlier curiosity about having Dean in his mouth. But, of course, he’s never given a blow job. And Dean’s probably had a thousand.

Castiel sits up. He tilts his head in thought, trying to remember what he’s seen in the few porn videos he’s watched.

“Uh, what’chya doin?” asks Dean.

Castiel frowns. “I really want to feel you in my mouth but I’m, um, I need… guidance.”

Popping up onto his hands, Dean sinuously licks his lips. His deep tone resonates when he replies, “Okay… Go slow, and look at me.”

If Castiel thought he was hard before, the feeling of Dean’s watchful stare on him as he lowers his mouth to Dean’s sex has a way of pumping a surge of blood into his already swollen cock. It kicks between his thighs and he wonders if Dean saw his unbidden reaction.

Planting his hands on the bed by Dean’s thighs, Castiel braces his weight and ducks his head down. His tongue slips out to test the waters, a soft flick against the ridge of the crown.

Castiel moans loudly when it jerks away and then back. Yes, he triumphs. And does it again, and again, his tongue skirting lower each time, swiping over the hard, lightly veined shaft. Above him, Dean lets out the faintest noises—sharp breaths, a low whimper, a groan so subtle he’s not sure he heard it.

Because Dean is magnificent to him, and deserving of every form of love, Castiel presses kisses to the heated skin. It’s not the best technique, but he’s decided he doesn’t care. After he’s dished out kisses to the inside of Dean’s thighs, his belly, inner groin, balls, and a quick nibble of his hip, Castiel finds his way back to the tip.

He stares at it, never having looked at a cock this close before. Castiel’s eyes drift shut when he feels Dean’s fingers card gently through his hair. Slowly, he descends over Dean with an open mouth, letting the wide sex close off his airways. With skilled concentration, he doesn’t choke but tightens around Dean to feel every throbbing inch of him. The moans from Dean’s mouth seem to rumble down to greet Cas’ lips, and the wave of arousal is the sudden impetus for him to start bobbing up and down in earnest, finding a rhythm he wasn’t sure he possessed.

For ten minutes or more, he sucks Dean off with fervent dedication. Groaning at each drop of
precome that pours out onto his tongue, or smears across his lips. His hands have left their perch on the bed and wound up running a course over Dean’s chest and grabbing at his hips.

When he stops, it’s not because he doesn’t want Dean to finish, it’s because he wants to be inside Dean, fully and completely.

Dean’s green eyes are blown wide and dark, his mouthing hanging open for air. “I love you.” There’s a distinct awe in the tone of Dean’s voice.

One that cuts through Castiel, and he wishes he could say it back. “I know,” he says stupidly instead. Hating himself right to the marrow.

Instead of being angry, Dean smiles knowingly and reaches for the gratuitous row of condoms. He tears one free and lays it beside them.

Reaching for Dean’s knees, Castiel pushes Dean’s legs apart to bare him to the open room. It’s difficult to look away from Dean’s eyes, but he does… his precise blue stare falling low.

Not exactly sure what his plans had been, he finds himself back on his stomach and his mouth most definitely south of the border. Cas’ right hand fondles Dean’s heavy sac, making room for his face and mouth to press into the cleft of Dean’s ass, his tongue working into the hot crease until he laps across Dean’s nerve-ridden entrance.

Splayed on the bed, Dean bucks at the abrupt change of plans but doesn’t do more than hum nonsense and squirm.

Castiel learns quickly that he loves using his tongue on Dean. How pressing it tight against the ring of muscle gives Dean a jolt, the instant pleasure noticeably rippling through Dean’s body. And also, the flicking—which makes Dean pant, and then of course when Castiel bites the plump asscheek nearby.

They both laugh when he does that. But not a funny laugh, a breath-laden laugh of elation.

When he rises to his knees, Dean is still twitching from his ministrations, his body pulling into itself. So Castiel is quick, he tears open the foil wrapper and rolls the condom down his length. Mostly untouched at this point, the sudden attention makes Castiel’s sex flush thicker than before.

Popping the blue cap of the bottle of lube, Castiel squeezes some onto his fingers and reaches between Dean’s legs. The normally suave mechanic flinches from the cold and curses. But then immediately, his legs drift apart and his body opens for Cas—two fingers gently but ardently pushing into the heat.

“Ahh,” hisses Dean, his head punching back into the pillow. “More.”

Salacious, this man. Castiel smirks and ignores Dean’s demands, using only two fingers to prepare him. But he’s generous in movement, pushing in deep and twisting sideways. Castiel scissors his fingers, pulls back—slides in one and hooks it. Stops.

“Cas!” cries Dean, jaw hardened shut. The name being grated through teeth.

He doesn’t stop, because being able to give Dean pleasure is the gift of a lifetime. Working the lube around, he fingers around Dean’s entrance—feeling the muscle tense and release wantonly. When he ultimately opens Dean again, he quickly ups his pace. Pumping his two fingers in and out, with a fair amount of force, watching Dean rock on the bed and listening to the hoarse gasps of air crawl out of his throat.
“You’re captivating, Dean,” he praises, pushing a third finger in alongside the other two. Dean pauses mid-breath to relax, but Castiel smiles when everything seems to tighten again in response to the curl of his fingers, brushing upward.

“Oh God, fuck…” Dean pants, breathing hard as Cas thrusts into him in rapid bursts. “Uhhn… jesus… okay, okay… I’m-I’m ready, ahh…”

Slowly, Castiel withdraws his fingers one at a time, punctuating each retreat with a twisting motion that makes Dean’s thighs shake.

His need to be with Dean amplifies, making his heart race. It’s a selfish, uncontrollable need.

Reaching out with his dry hand, he captures Dean’s face—framing his beautifully flushed cheeks. “I want you… if you’ll have me.”

“Fuck yes, I’ll have you!” yells Dean. “My god, I’ve only been saying that exact thing for like half a goddamn year!”

Castiel breaks into a laugh and bends over to kiss Dean on the mouth, kisses him hard and with promises he’s not sure he can keep but he’s damn well going to try.

Desperation claims the man beneath him, his legs rising up and locking around Cas’ hips—dragging him down.

“You’re insatiable,” he chastises.

Dean throws his arms around Cas’ neck like a vise. “Yes, I am, so please fucking satiate me.”

This moment too, those three words want to spring out of his throat. But they don’t. Castiel is overjoyed and awash with love, drowning in the green comfort and acceptance below.

But he can’t say it. He doesn’t know why, and he’s afraid he might be irreparably damaged in ways he never considered.

To compensate for his shortages, Castiel takes himself in hand and guides his cock to the welcoming heat of Dean’s body. He waits there, finding Dean’s rooted gaze. Not able to look away, he pushes in. The tight pressure closing around his sex fogs his mind, each inch being worked into Dean erases his lingering worries and fears.

All he can feel is Dean. All that matters is Dean.

“Wow,” Dean chokes out, eyes blinking rapidly.

“Am I hurting you?” Castiel worries, barely understanding anything beyond the subtle throb of his cock inside a lure of heat. But he notices the glossy reflection in Dean’s eyes and wonders what he could’ve done to elicit such a reaction.

“No,” replies Dean, his voice rough with emotion, “God, no… I’m just like… bursting I’m so fucking happy. It’s sort of bubbling over, I guess… don’t worry about it. Fuck, you feel amaz—Ahhh.” Dean’s admission rouses a physical reaction from Castiel, his buried erection swelling just a bit more. “Holy fuck—Pretty sure that alone could get me off.”

“So, you’re crying because you’re happy?”

Embarrassed, Dean blushes. “Yes, and if you tell anyone I cried during sex I’m painting your whole
fucking house the brightest shade of yellow you’ve ever seen.”

Castiel laughs, having the unintended effect of jostling their joined bodies. They both let out a low sound of surprise… and then Cas moves for the first time since he started.

Slowly, drawing himself out inch by inch… watching Dean’s reaction. When his cockhead catches at Dean’s rim, he plunges forward until their heated bodies slap together and Dean groans.

Whatever Cas had expected of his first time with Dean, he didn’t expect it to feel like he was making love to his best friend—for how would he have imagined such a thing to begin with. But this is how it is, and he’d want it no other way.

Castiel rolls his hips forward and back, only somewhat hindered by how tightly Dean is wrapped around him. He’s never been this close, this connected to another person before. It humbles him. Castiel wants more of it, craves the press of his body against Dean.

Slowing his pace for a beat, Castiel sinks his cock deep inside Dean, their lower bodies crushed together. Dean reacts to the invasion with a gasp, breathing hard when Cas doesn’t pull back. “I can’t get enough of you,” he admits, one arm wrapping under Dean’s neck and pulling his face closer, the other hooking around Dean’s thigh.

The position has them both curled into each other, no room for air. He claims Dean’s mouth in a salacious kiss, his hips pulling back for a shallow thrust. And then another, each succession faster and needier.

Castiel’s arm slips from Dean’s leg and tucks under his back, holding him in place as Cas starts to unravel completely. He moves his hips in tandem with his arms pulling Dean closer, working the man onto his thick sex.

From his head to curled toes, Dean clenches every muscle each time Castiel fills him. Muffled moans being traded in the kiss as they relish the connection. A shiver ripples through Castiel when he starts to sweat, when the pleasure starts to creep higher.

The blankets have bunched around his knees, and under Dean. They’re annoying but not so annoying he wants to stop to fix it. Outside of their exertions, the twinkle of lights and deep red remnants of the sun suffuse from the vista beyond the window, giving a soft glow to the room.

Castiel breaks away from Dean’s slick mouth only to meet his eyes, smiling at him. Having Dean with him this way is the best thing he’s ever experienced, the best sight he’s ever laid his eyes on.

Locking into a deep stare with Dean, he loses grasp on his motions, growing stiller with each passing second. Dean sucks in a choppy inhale and whispers between them, “I think I’m realizing it’s kinda fucking terrifying to love someone this much.”

Castiel’s features soften, and he kisses Dean. “What are you afraid of?”

“Losing you…”

“I promise you, Dean, I’m not leaving you.”

Dragging his hand up Cas’ back, Dean rests it around his neck. “Maybe not willingly…”

Ah. Castiel’s fears have found their way to Dean. He wants to deny the possibility. But the truth is, Castiel knows his uncle very well, he knows the odds are stacked against him. Every fibre of him wants to assuage Dean with falsified confidence, but the days of lying are over.
“That’s a possibility that is nowhere near us right now, don’t think about it.”

When Castiel doesn’t deny the fear, instead acknowledges its future potential, Dean’s eyes glaze over a second time and he reaches for Cas, pulling him back into a wanton kiss.

Castiel resumes the motion of his hips, building into a crescendo. He leaves Dean’s mouth to trail a wet kiss down the length of his throat, unleashing low moans of ecstasy against Dean’s skin. He wants to overwhelm Dean, to take control of his senses so he has no room left to worry.

Pushing in deep, encasing his cock in slick heat, Castiel groans at the flare of his arousal, a coil twisting inside him. His skin prickles with a flush of heat, and he works his already buried erection inside Dean, trying to feel as much of him as he can.

Castiel stretches towards Dean’s ear. He bites at the edge of it to drag a shudder from the man beneath him, and whispers, “Focus only on this… on me.”

His words drag a soft whine from Dean, and he feels nails biting at his back, fingers curling into the flesh of his ass as he drives forward, withdraws, and slams back in.

Kissing his way back up Dean’s neck, nipping at the hard, bristled jaw, Castiel claims Dean’s mouth in a kiss. It’s brief, because he prefers to watch Dean, to see the affection so plainly on display.

It’s clear Dean’s not accustomed to this degree of emotional intensity, if the trembling of his lip is any indication. Also, by the way his shaking, sweat-damp legs have started to slip off Castiel’s hips. The force of his invasive thrusts only making matters worse.

Dean is falling apart around him; gruff whimpers turning choppy with punctuated breaths, bowed legs falling open, arms losing hold around him. The movement makes it harder to bring them together as deep as he likes, so Castiel reaches for one of Dean’s legs and hooks his arm under the man’s knee, bending him into himself.

And Christ, when he buries his cock on the next thrust, it feels so complete he can hardly bear it. Dean curses, then starts to mumble softly as he searches for a kiss. It’s hard to make sense of what he’s saying, but Castiel can feel him start to shake all over.

“Do you want my hand?” he asks, smiling at the whine of protest from Dean for breaking the kiss.

Below him, Dean shakes his head. He’s muttering tender words again, taking Cas’ face in his hands and this time yanking him close, devouring his mouth. His gruff moans, needy, rising from somewhere deep, spurs Cas on faster.

His brain starts splintering into a thousand thoughts and yet nothing at all. His entire being absorbs every nuance of the moment; the musky aroma of their exertions, the slickness of the condom as he plunges and retreats, the damp layer of sweat they’re coated in.

Though Dean’s trying, they’re not quite kissing anymore. Their lips rest together, mouths open, fighting a shared struggle for air. It doesn’t occur to them to allow a spare inch to breathe.

Caught up in Dean, Castiel can’t fight the gradual rise of tension between his legs. Everything starts to tighten inward, and he knows he’s close. Castiel hoped he could wait, push Dean to the edge first, but it’s impossible.

“Uhn—Fuck, Dean…” he gasps, his lips moving against Dean’s. “I can’t stop, I can’t—I need to finish.”
It’s the low hitch in Dean’s throat, and the barely audible string of words, “S’okay… want to fe-feel you come…” that drives him closer. Dean nips at Cas’ lip as some form of encouragement. “Mnngh, goddamn… I love you.”

Cas soars, his body taking over without thought, rutting hard into Dean and moaning roughly against the slick mouth at his disposal.

All he feels is the damp skin around him, and the feverish tightness of Dean’s body as his sex surges in and out, blindly finding his way to release.

Castiel’s orgasm shatters through him on one hard thrust—their bodies slamming together. Pulses of ecstasy radiate from his core to his fingers and everywhere between. He’s riding through it, suspended in time—

“Fuck!” Dean shouts, hollering curses to the ceiling. His entire frame starts to tremble inside the barricade of Cas’ hold, his ass clenching in spasms around Cas’ cock, pulling a final groan out of him.

Between their chests, Dean’s come splashes up at their skin in warm, wet streaks. Feeling the evidence of Dean’s pleasure flips some barbaric possessive switch Castiel didn’t know he had and he pulls out, untangling himself from Dean only to push three fingers into Dean’s stretched hole.

Dean cries out and grabs at his own hair, pulling at it. All the while Cas is fixated on dragging another orgasm from Dean… so intent on his purpose that he hasn’t even bothered to remove the condom.

Utterances of please and fuck, don’t stop, spill from Dean’s kiss-swollen mouth. Castiel thumbs the outside of Dean’s perineum and strokes each finger over Dean’s prostate. He’s relentless in his touch, pushing Dean to an edge of pleasure that borders on discomfort. With his free hand, he takes Dean’s cock—still nice and hard—and jerks him slowly, using Dean’s previous release as lube.

It happens faster than he expects, no longer than a couple minutes. Dean starts to whimper again, mumbling nonsense, his body rolling in shudders, legs shaking parted on the bed. When he comes a second time, Dean nearly screams… no doubt aching in oversensitivity.

Castiel feels every throb wave through him, watches every rope of come weep out with less force than before. It’s enthralling to study Dean like this, to watch him unwind into bliss. As Dean lays there sated, Castiel pulls the filled condom off, ties it, and not sure where the garbage is, tosses it on the floor and hopes neither of them step on it later.

When Dean starts to reach for him, eyes bleary, Castiel falls on top of him. The nuzzle their way into a kiss. Something soft and slow, reverent. A shudder or two rocks through them, orgasmic aftershocks creating little pauses in their kiss.

It’s a long while before calm returns to the room, and Castiel’s sense stutters back into his mind. His eyes flutter open, noticing how much darker it’s become beyond the window. God, so many nights he’s spent with Dean. Becoming friends, sharing their personalities, and becoming more.

He tried to hold back, he thinks. It seems resistance is indeed futile, and he remembers when he and Dean drove out to the next town on that first Monday and Dean maintained he would get what he wants.

Seems they both did. Even if Castiel wasn’t aware of how badly he wanted this. Once more, a declaration hovers in the back of his throat. He tries to part his lips and force his tongue to make the
words, but nothing happens.

It hurts so much it brings tears to his eyes. There’s obviously something broken in him.

Somehow, Dean knows. Dean knows him. “It’s okay, babe,” he assures, his voice rough. The surreal man pulls Castiel into a tight hug, rolls them over, and starts kissing his lips. Castiel can feel them trembling under Dean’s touch, his eyes stinging with frustrated tears.

“I’m sorry,” he says in a lame attempt. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

Dean gets it. Though he shouldn’t have to. “Hey, sshh. It’s all good, Cas. You just take your time alright. I’m full enough of love for the both of us.” He grins wide, the expression lopsided from fatigue. “Kinda wish I was full of your come, but I think the love will do for now.”

The words drag a reluctant laugh from Cas and he tries to smile at Dean, but it probably seems a shade forced. “Apparently, I have some… psychological deficiencies.” Not the terms Pamela has used, but his take on it is far more all-encompassing.

Dean snorts. “Yes, Dr. Phil. Most of us do. Now, why don’t you just”—Dean pushes Cas onto his back—“lay like this, and”—Dean burrows into the crux of Castiel’s armpit, head resting comfortably on his chest—“and cuddle me nice and good and we’ll both fall asleep and not think about anything whatsoever.”

With that, Dean wraps a heavy leg around Castiel’s thigh and tightens an arm around his ribs. Ah yes, this is Dean’s favourite position. It would be better if they weren’t sticky in places… but Dean’s warm touch all wrapped around him is really very nice.

As he’s drifting off, he expects them to banter or glory in what just happened, but all of the day’s events compile into a wall of exhaustion. He feels his conscious mind slipping under the depths of dreams, Dean feels heavier against him.

The last thing he remembers is Dean’s rumble of snores vibrating against his chest.
A Picture Says a Thousand Nightmares

The days crawl and zip by in a paradox. Before Cas realizes, it’s the end of the week. He’s lost count of how many times they’ve had sex. All he knows is that they went through the condoms Dean brought a couple days ago and had to take a treacherous trip outside their little hideaway.

Cas debated whether it was necessary, but Dean was adamant that being fucked was a life or death situation. It amazes him how stubborn Dean is. He knew his favourite mechanic was getting a little sore, but he kept insisting he was fine.

Yesterday morning, Castiel caught a poorly hidden wince of pain as he was taking Dean from behind. At that, he pulled out, laid a moist and very tongue-laden kiss against Dean’s entrance and told him they were switching to oral.

Dean didn’t complain. In fact, he shamelessly pushed his ass towards Cas and begged for a “Damn good lickin, good lookin!”

How on earth did he wind up with this man? It’s a wonder of the world surely. After limiting intercourse, they’ve relentlessly used their mouths on each other, being slow and torturous.

It’s early afternoon, he thinks it’s Saturday but isn’t positive. The sun is on the other side of the building but the wall of windows ensures a vibrant glow of light sweeps through the loft. It’s probably better without the direct sun, they’d be baking.

Dean has more or less remained naked the entirety of time they’ve been at Benny’s place. But even still, Cas hasn’t quite acclimatized to the sight of Dean’s sated cock resting between his hips as he struts around the room. This has been the cause of sex a number of times now. Castiel stares, Dean notices.

They don’t make it very far after that.

It’s a whole different world, another life, that he’s found himself in. They don’t talk much beyond their own little world. If Dean has a question, he answers it, but the mechanic’s banked fears have been buried. Sadly, Castiel knows the real world will come raging back into the present well before he’s ready.

The bag of guns has been moved to the closet by the front door, though Cas has since found Benny’s stash. There’s a shotgun in the back cupboard of the pantry, a handgun in each nightstand and knives basically everywhere. Dean’s choice of hideouts is exceptional.

Castiel’s also lost count of the number of times Dean has said I love you. It washes over him like spring rain, giving the illusion of washing away past wrongdoings. He’s no longer surprised by it—Dean is the same in everything he does. Approaching life with honesty and directness. He doesn’t beat around the bushes.

And he’s goddamn kinky!

Something Cas is gradually learning to embrace, even enjoy. Though he was nervous at the outset. How does a person normally react when their lover asks them to ‘choke them a little’? It certainly heightens everything, his senses exploding in ways only drugs can compare to.

Dean has a way of undoing the complexities in him, slowly untying all the knots built over the years he lived as a Haven.
Long after lunch, Castiel finds himself towering over Dean—dazed as he watches his slick, bare erection funnel in and out of Dean’s plump mouth. The mechanic’s green eyes are leaking tears under the strain, but he gets off on the gentle abuse.

Who is Cas to deny him?

So he cradles Dean’s head and rocks his hips back and forth, moaning each time the tingle of nerves at the tip of his cock greet the barrier of Dean’s throat. He has to fight the oncoming release, wanting to ride it out.

Being with Dean is the only heaven he’ll ever see so he better make it last, reaping every lick of pleasure offered to him.

Tracing the lines of Dean’s face, Castiel feels his way from the softness of Dean’s hair, to the smooth touch of his cheek, to the rough unshaven line of his jaw. He cups the underside of Dean’s chin, gripping him the way he knows Dean craves it.

Castiel guides the gentle bobbing of Dean’s head, feels the occasional flutter of a tongue along the underside of his cock. It rouses a surge of pleasure from Castiel when Dean swallows him down and exhales through his nose against Cas’ trimmed pubic area.

When the intensity starts to peak, and he’s pushed too close to the end, Castiel pulls out but replaces his sex with his fingers. He has a fascination with tracing Dean’s reddened, slick lips, then dipping inside to slide along his tongue.

Of course, it’s very possible he loves it so much because Dean moans obscenely as a result, his thighs shaking under him. When Castiel draws Dean back in, he’s greeted by soft kisses into the crease of his thigh, and a gentle suck at his balls. But his patience for being teased is thin, and he takes a hold of Dean, and startles them both by ramming his entire length into Dean’s mouth.

He shudders, watching Dean’s green eyes flare with hunger. Rumbling groans from Dean’s throat vibrate along his shaft, and he’s distracted by Dean’s fingers clawing desperately at the meat of his thighs. He weaves his fingers through Dean’s hair, eliciting a wanton hum.

He pulls out a little, closing his eyes to the wet friction. Dean suckles near the tip, the sensation maddeningly good. Castiel’s cock twitches in response, the pool of heat in him ready to spend itself into a waiting mouth.

After another gruff moan, louder and demanding, Castiel tightens his fingers in Dean’s hair, earning a hitched whine. Holding him in place this way, Castiel lodges every inch of himself deep into Dean’s mouth and stays there.

His gaze locks with Dean’s, watching the gorgeous man struggle to hold still. When he glances down towards Dean’s spread legs, he can see Dean’s hard sex dripping precome, beads of it leaking around the crest of his cock, thighs twitching from being on his knees for so long.

That’s all it takes.

The mesmerizing sight of Dean wrapped in pleasure drives Castiel over the crest. He’s barely able to pull out fast enough, wanting to watch himself finish on Dean. His body jerks forward with each warm jet of come, all of it landing on Dean’s flushed face, his chest, and—

“Oh god… Dean. Deaan…”

Dean is a mess. But he’s smiling in a crooked way, attention half split to his own hand working
himself fast. Right as he comes, words punctuating each stroke, he chokes out, “Fucking... hottest... cumshot... ever!” On the last word, Dean throws his head back, his release spurting out, onto Cas and the floor. God, this man has the most gratuitous loads. For someone who has sex so often, Cas would’ve thought there’d be less. But every time Dean has an orgasm, it’s explosive and everywhere.

“Hmm, Dean,” he sighs, brushing his hand over Dean’s head. “We’re disgusting.”

Dean throws a glare upward. “We? No, pretty sure that’s just me.”

Yes, that’s true. Dean’s handsome face is glistening, as is his chest, thighs, cock, and hands. A total mess. Springing up to his feet, Dean wipes his come-soaked hand down Cas’ chest. It doesn’t surprise him.

“Very mature.”

With a snort, Dean blurts, “Man, I never said I would be mature, I only promised to be honest.”

Following a come-tasting but lovely kiss, Dean heads towards the bathroom for a shower. An hour later, Castiel finds him passed out on the bed with the blanket half pulled over his naked ass.

How in the hell did Castiel ever manage to get this lucky?

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Leaving Dean to sleep, Castiel scours the cupboards dressed in jeans and a black long-sleeve shirt, and thinks of what to make for dinner. He’s comfortable, sated, and imagines himself a true spouse. When he tracks down a box of mac and cheese at the very back of the pantry, he smiles and hopes Dean likes the cheap meal as much as he does.

The water is boiling, and the box has been torn open when the phone dings from the counter. This isn’t too troublesome as Sam has been routinely keeping them informed.

So far, nothing’s been amiss.

Which is why, when Cas rounds the corner of the island he doesn’t worry. His shoulders are relaxed and his features are calm. He picks up the blackberry and unlocks the screen—

Oh, fuck! Nononono...

The phone slips and falls to the floor, the screen splintering into shards.

His heart’s racing, thudding so heavily he feels weak. Castiel reaches up to his chest, digging his fingers against the muscle, trying to pry at the outside in order to slow the damn thing down. Nonono. It’s still pounding hard against his ribcage, drumming in his ears, and he can’t breathe.

Dean will hate him. Oh, God...

Staring up from the floor is a picture. A now shattered picture of Sam Winchester tied to a chair—one eye swollen shut. He isn’t conscious. Could already be dead...

Absolute rage rises like a mythical beast. A tidal wave after an earthquake in the ocean. “You motherfucker! You had to go after the first fucking person that was nice to me!” he growls, fury twisting in him so severely, he’s feverish from it.

Castiel’s blue eyes, suddenly flat and emotionless, dart up to the ceiling, towards the man he’s fallen
in love with. The man he needs to protect, whose brother he needs to save… if it’s the last thing he ever does.

The soldier in him grows back into his veins, dark skills lining up at the forefront of his mind ready for use. Castiel reaches down and snatches the cracked phone off the floor. He pockets it, turns off the stove, and stalks towards the closet by the front door.

He checks the guns, loads them all, and at the last second, grabs Benny’s shotgun and adds it to the pile. Better safe than sorry.

He’s out the door, keys in hand, not even eight minutes after he got the photo. On his way back to Hobucken in the blink of an eye, whatever he built with Dean completely put on hold.

Maybe forever.
The Winchester Auto building means a lot of things to Castiel. A haven from his life, coincidentally. It seems only fitting that a Haven family member has arrived to destroy the symbolism.

On Castiel’s first day in Hobucken, he always expected he’d be taken out assassination style. Long-range; one to the head, two to the chest. But he knows different now. Now it’s personal.

There’s no point in being quiet, Raphael knows he’s here. Castiel has a shotgun in his hands already, a handgun tucked at the back of his jeans, and the heavy duffle thrown over his shoulder.

He kicks the side door open to the shop and quickly scopes the ground floor to find nothing but the obvious signs of a struggle that do nothing more than infuriate him.

Sam, the friendly lawyer, and one of Castiel’s only friends. Fucking Christ… Raphael will suffer for this. Whoever dies today, it won’t be slow or with a grain of pity.

On the second floor, Dean’s apartment, there are less signs of struggle. But also no one to be found. His eyes shoot upward, and he wonders how Raph managed to get Sam on the roof, but he hears the softest of thuds and knows where to go.

It’s not easy climbing a ladder with eighty pounds of metal strapped to you, but he manages. Clever, Raph… great advantage to have Cas come this way. If he fires for cover, he risks shooting Sam.

Fear lodged in his throat, he bets on Raphael not wanting to end things too soon. Castiel steels his nerves and climbs the last two rungs, feeling the wind sweep over the flat roof and rush to greet him. As he breaches the parapet, the scene explodes into his mind. Sam, gagged and trussed, wobbling wearily near the edge of the roof—a gun trained on him.

Kudos to the younger Winchester, he looks far more pissed than he does scared. Clearly, he doesn’t know his attacker all that well. But at least he’s alive.

Arguing is worthless, but Cas tries anyway. “Let him go.”

Raphael turns his head to Cas, but doesn’t redirect his piece. “Not the way it’s going to be, Castiel. You know that.”

For such a frightening man, he’s eerily formal in tone. It’s always given Castiel the creeps. “Don’t waste your efforts on him. It's me you want…”

“Yes. The rat. Michael’s defective rat. You should’ve heard your father seethe over what you did. He said you’re just as much of a bitch as your mother was.”

Another blast of fury roars in his veins, his finger twitches at the trigger of the shotgun. “Let. Him. Go.” The syllables of each word are ground out through his teeth, because if he opens his jaw he’ll fucking scream out of aggravated hatred. Hatred that’s been piling on top of itself for decades.

“Do you think you can fire your gun before I fire mine?”

Probably not. “Even if I don’t, you still die.”

Raphael laughs. But it’s not a laugh; it’s the sound of one, not the authenticity of one. Too dull and lifeless. “You were always so clever, Castiel.”
Yes, he is. He might be a lot of bad things, but stupid isn’t one of them. And he remembers the layout around the two-storey. The car that’s parked a little further back. The decision is that fast. Castiel steps closer, his gun lowering enough to lessen the immediate threat.

He wants to talk, that’s all. “It doesn’t matter if you kill me. Or him. My father and everyone else will still rot behind bars until they die of old age.”

Watching his progress, Raphael steps back and tsks. “Watch yourself, nephew.” On the sideline, Castiel registers Sam moving infinitesimally to match them.

Keep going, Sam.

“It doesn’t matter,” announces Castiel. “I’ve been ready to die for a while. Are you? What could a man like you possibly do now? With the Havens and everyone who’s ever sided with them put away indefinitely—you’re nothing. You’ve burned bridges with all the other families, you’ve killed too many people to have any friends left.” Castiel keeps walking, so does his uncle, so does Sam. “Kill some more, why don’t you,” he taunts. “You’d have it all. The big house, the non-existent organization, no women, no money. All that death… and for what?!"

Raphael narrows his deep brown eyes. He’s well over fifty and the creases in the corners stand pronounced against his skin. “For peace and order,” he replies, his normally deadpan tone twisted with vexation.

“There was never peace. There was never order,” he reminds his uncle.

In the moment of quiet, a strange deliberation between two violent men, Castiel flicks his eyes over to Sam. He doesn’t even need to say it.

The younger Winchester throws himself back over the edge. Castiel fires at his uncle, the boom of the shotgun exploding through town, the force of it resounding through his shoulder. The sound muffles Sam crashing onto the car below.

The pellets of the shotgun give a wide spray, but the gun isn’t sighted for shit and he only manages to swipe Raphael in the arm. His uncle raises his arm to fire—Castiel drops low—the wind of the bullet puffs his hair.

Without waiting for more, Castiel rushes back to the side of the building and throws himself over the ladder, sliding down and more or less falling through the window. He’s racing through Dean’s apartment, already barging through the door to the stairs when he hears Raphael cursing as he smashes the upper glass of Dean’s bedroom window.

Flying down the stairs, his shoes barely hit the carpet. Castiel slides open the chamber and lets spent shells roll over the stairs. He drops the gun and swings a left into the shop, reaching for the handgun at the same time.

Fuck… the bag of guns are somehow still slung over his shoulder. That’s fucking impressive. As he hides behind one of the cars in wait, he hopes to god Sam is okay and that he didn’t even go get help—that he just took off.

The low monotone of Raphael’s dead-sounding voice breaches the space. Somewhere near the office. “Ugh. Castiel, you always had to make everything so difficult.”

Yes, wanting normalcy. How horrific. Holding his position, he says nothing. As long as he listens to make sure Raphael stays inside the building, everything is fine.
“I had an interesting conversation with a woman at the furniture store. I showed her a picture of you. And do you know what she said, Castiel?” No, but I’m about to. “She was overjoyed to tell me how you and a man named Dean Winchester were something of an item. I looked for this Winchester, but wound up with another. I decided it would have to do. You know what amuses me?” Probably not much, Castiel fumes. “Is that you’re clearly not scared enough. Because, nephew, you must realize that once I take care of you, I will kill this Dean of yours, simply to wipe the slate clean. Naturally, I would have some fun first. I enjoy a good carving, you know. Besides, Michael won’t tolerate anyone mourning a rat. It’s blasphemy.”

Fuck that bullshit. “Go to hell!” shouts Castiel, reaching over the car with the gun in his hand and firing off a couple of shots and praying they hit their target.

No pained groans follow, just that dead lifeless laugh again. “Someone is out of practice.”

God, he can’t take it anymore. “Fuck you, you sadistic… cunt!” Screwing his position entirely, Castiel rises to his feet and just starts unloading the clip. He rejoices in the moment’s shock and fear on Raphael’s evil face before his uncle crashes through the door to Dean’s office (absolutely fucking up Castiel’s organized paperwork) and manages to avoid getting hit.

Return fire pops through the shop, but Castiel takes cover behind the large metal column of the lift. He reaches into the bag, grabs for the other handgun and starts walking. With each couple steps, he fires.

And he doesn’t stop.

He’s fueled by anger and fear, and heartbreak. The sharp, deafening pops of the gun resound in his ear canal and he’ll probably be deaf by the time he’s sixty—if he lives that long.

When the clip empties and there’s nothing left but dull hollow clicks, he walks into the destroyed office and sees the far window smashed—the blinds bent and twisted out of shape. But there’s blood all over them so that’s something.

Castiel has reached a frightening sense of calm. He detours back out of the office and walks out the front doors. Sam is nowhere to be seen, which is a plus. But neither is Raphael.

There’s one last gun, but he doesn’t care for it. Guns are too impersonal for his uncle. Castiel lets the black dufflebag drop to the pavement and takes a right around the building to the back. Looking up as he passes the office window he sees the trail of blood and smiles, walking over it like a trail of demented bread crumbs.

In the back, standing near the pile of debris is his uncle, sporting a sneer. “You see? That’s the Castiel we raised.”

His feet carry him steadily over the pavement, and he makes no response. Raphael primes to fight him, but Castiel doesn’t waste a moment posturing—he steps right in and bashes his fist in a straight shot to his uncle’s jaw, the man’s face whipping to the left.

The ensuing fight ruptures; a collision of knees and fists. Low grunts and curses, accusations and name-calling cut into the dull sounds of bone on bone. The sound so familiar it’s like a fucking cradlesong. The harmony of his childhood.

It’s the abrupt return of his hatred that distracts him, and he doesn’t catch the glint of metal before it’s too late. There’s a swipe, the sharpened blade zinging through the air—then only pain. Disorienting pain. It really isn’t supposed to happen this way.
“Cas! Nooo!” The roar of Dean’s voice is wrong in that moment. Very wrong. “Oh, you fucking piece of shit!”

The world swivels irregularly, tilting sideways. Castiel thumps to the ground in a boneless heap, as if every muscle decided to give up. Probably has something to do with the butt of a knife protruding from his gut.

Not to mention the fact he seems to be leaking pretty severely...

He swallows a wave of piercing agony and weird sweat-inducing nausea. Remembering the very wrong aspect of Dean being there, he forces his failing eyes to open.

What they see cannot be right. Nope. He must have lost his mind.

It seems, Castiel is not the only one sliced open and dropping to the ground, Raphael is following along with him. But the gash is not in his side… it’s on the side of his skull. And the item protruding is not the butt of a knife, but that of a shovel.

Yes, a shovel. Still held by the wooden handle with a set of rough mechanic’s hands Castiel is intimately familiar with.

It hurts beyond belief to speak, but he tries anyway, “You killed him?” His vision swims, dark spots springing up in places. “…With a shovel?”

Wide-eyed, Dean flinches as if he just realized what happened. He turns and barfs. Then immediately drops the long handle and rushes over. Dean’s strong hands feel like they slam into Cas’ wound and he screams.

“Sorry babe, but, uh you’re bleeding kinda bad. Like… oh god. Oh this is fucking insane.” Breathing on the verge of hyperventilating, Dean prattles on. “Okie dokie, doing the whole pressure thing—you don’t worry at all. Sam is coming back with the troops. I got ya… You’re a Hobucken now Cas and we watch out for what’s ours, alright. So no fucking dying on me.”

“I’ll… do… m’best,” he manages, blindsided and somewhat flabbergasted by the amount of pain from a stupid knife. But of course, only Raph would know exactly the best place to stab someone in order to exact the most amount of damage.

There’s a fair chance Castiel will die before they make it to the hospital, but he keeps that bit of knowledge to himself. “Dean, I—”

“—Maybe it’s better you don’t talk or nothin’,” interrupts Dean. “Just let me do all the yammerin’. We both know I’m excellent at it. Anyway, uh, so you went and took off on me and if you weren’t bleeding like a damn sieve I’d be so mad right now. Can you believe I just killed a fucking mobster assassinator with a goddamn shovel. Jesus. That’s gonna fuck with my noggin for a little bit. But you’re worth it. Oh my god, Cas, you know they’re probably gonna make a movie out this whole ordeal one day. So you have to live, alright, so that we can go watch it together and make out in the back while two hot ass celebrities play us and we can watch them awkwardly bang on screen and then…”

Dean’s voice rises and drifts below the conscious line. Soon enough, it ducks under and Cas doesn’t hear it again.

There are worse ways to go.
“I don’t know, Dean,” an annoyed man stresses. “Ugh, I will call you!”

Castiel tries to lift his eyelids, but it’s more or less the same as trying to hoist a vehicle over one’s head. He tries to speak instead, and what he hoped would be: “What happened?” comes out as: “Mngngh.”

“Cas?” Sam’s voice, softer now. Less irritated.

Knowing it won’t work, he tries to speak again but everything is muffled and less direct. All his synapses have been stuffed with morphine and so doing anything is next to impossible.

“Hey, it’s Sam. They’ve got you loaded with drugs, so you’re probably massively out of it right now. I know you’re wondering why I’m here and not Dean, and well… it’s complicated. But Dean is okay, and so am I—because of you.” Sam enunciates the last part, and continues. “And your uncle is… out of the picture, in case you happened to miss that. Get some rest, everything is fine… and we’ll talk when you’re less drugged up, okay? Oh and by the way, Dean says he loves you and wants me tell you that if you don’t wake up soon he’s spray-painting your house yellow. Various shades of yellow, he says. I don’t get it, but whatever—my brother’s an idiot.”

Castiel smiles, the smile seems to work because he hears Sam breathe a sigh of relief. Whatever medication they have pumping through his veins wins out over his efforts to stay awake and he falls back under.

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The next time he wakes, he’s actually lucid. Sam sits down and tells him everything. The FBI has stepped in to handle things but Sam somehow has all the information. Castiel wonders what connections he must have as a DA.

Because of the incident, the FBI is expediting the trial. Not an easy task, he’s told. Way faster than Sam’s ever seen before. In fact, the talk going on right now seems to imply that they’ll kick things off as soon as Cas is well. Maybe a month at best.

Facing his father in thirty days? Almost as scary as being stabbed. Well, more scary, probably less painful.

He’s released from the hospital a week after he was admitted. Which is frankly impressive, but he’s always been a fast healer. Again, it’s Sam that greets him when he checks out of the hospital, and it’s Sam that drives him home.

He hasn’t spoken to Dean once since everything happened. But Sam has countlessly assured him there’s nothing wrong.

All assurances notwithstanding, Castiel has grown concerned. He wouldn’t blame Dean after what happened—and God! He can’t imagine the state the garage was in. Castiel unleashes a groan (which sends a lance of pain through his abdomen) as he pictures Dean standing in the mess.

“What’s wrong?” asks Sam.

“I destroyed the garage! Dean’s business!”
Sam has the gall to laugh. “That’s what you’re worried about! Cas, you nearly died. Besides, Dean seemed to think finding the money to repair the damage was “in the bag” and then he winked and I told him I—as the DA of this County—do not need to hear another word.”

Yes, the bag of cash is still at Benny’s (or maybe now with Dean). Both are fine places to be. As long as they’re not near Cas.

It’s a long drive from the hospital, which is an hour outside of town. And it’s around lunch time when they turn onto Cas’ street. He doesn’t notice at first because the tree is so fucking huge on the front lawn. But when Sam parks the BMW onto the cracked asphalt, Cas’ eyes bulge wide.

The front door—formerly hideous piss yellow—has been painted a deep, beautiful shade of red. And matching red shutters now flank each window. And the brown, the flaked, ugly brown has been painted as well—a cottagey soft sage. The combination works somehow, the soft greyish green, and the deep red.

It’s home.

He swallows the creep of raw feelings he’s definitely not psychologically stable enough to handle, and his shaky hand reaches for the chrome lever to open the door. He gingerly stands from the car, his side burning and the skin pulling at his stitches. The fresh moist air from the water blows under his nose and he sucks it in as if it’s a life-giving force.

Maybe it is.

Sam appears beside him, wearing the same innocently wide smile same as that first day. “Welcome home.”

Fuck the knife-wound. He’s doing to die from an exploding heart. How do normal people handle positive emotions. They’re staggering. Castiel can’t speak, he walks instead. He walks the way he always does when he’s low-key freaking out—managing even breaths and moving his feet one at a time.

At the door, his feet on the same porch he enjoys having coffee on, he looks at the fresh paint.

“I’m just gonna leave your bag here,” Sam tells him. “I know you can’t carry it in, but I’m sure you’ll figure that out… I’m gonna take off.”

“Sam?”

The man rounds back, and though it hurts enough to grind his teeth, Castiel throws his arms around Sam’s torso. If he were well enough, he would squeeze the younger brother, but he says he’s sorry instead.

“Don’t apologize anymore. Everything’s fine. We’re a tougher bunch than you think.”

That, Castiel is definitely in agreement with. Though the image of Sam catapulting himself off the roof of Winchester Auto will probably haunt Cas’ dreams. The man is more family to him than any Haven ever was.

Alone on the porch, as he was once before—months and months ago—Castiel reaches out and grabs the handle. As he opens the door, his mind replays the day he met Dean. When he opened the door and saw the most mischievous smile he’s ever seen.

God, he was so done before. He just didn’t know it at the time.
Once more, like clockwork, Dean is there on the other side of the door, grinning in the most enticing welcome anyone’s ever had.

“Welcome home.”

He takes a look around and thinks this is not his home anymore. “Um…” All around him is stuff. Books and knick-knacks, and pictures. A familiar couch, too. Familiar kitchen table, familiar man. “Why is all your furniture in my house?”

Dean saunters towards him. “Oh, didn’t I tell you? We’re moving in together.” The broad cunning smile he’s sporting is the best thing Cas has ever seen. He wants to rush Dean, and throw him on the counter and fuck him until they’re either screaming or crying or both. Because that’s love… apparently. It makes you insane.

“No,” he answers with nonchalance. “You didn’t. Fairly bold of you, Dean. The town will talk. Dean Winchester settles down.”

“And with the former mobster of New York City. Who knew.”

Castiel manages a laugh, but it cuts off in a blink. Fucking reality. “I’m… still damaged, Dean. And now physically… so… this isn’t exactly happily ever after. It’s temporarily okay, a little broken and a lot confused ever after.”

“You and your words. Making no sense again. Tell me this, Castiel, do I make you happy?” asks Dean.

He can’t hope to hide his reaction. The twitch of a smile erupts into a beaming partial laugh. “Yes, yes you do.”

“Then it’s fucking happily ever after!” Dean bounces on his feet and grins a little bit foolishly. “I totally want to jump you.”

Castiel winces in anticipation. “I’d probably collapse.”

“Hmm, maybe.” Stepping closer, Dean looks quite proud of himself. “Guess I’ll have to be gentle.”

On the heel of his words, Dean places his large rough palms on either side of Cas’ face and teases his chapped lips with a slow, inciting kiss. It’s warm and openhearted, the kind of touch meant to pacify and reassure.

Castiel doesn’t fight it, he relinquishes all of his misgivings and sags into the wonderful strength in Dean’s arms. This is the happiest he’s ever been.

Sighing, Castiel says, “It feels good to be home.”
Chapter Notes

Warnings: mention of rape, no details.

One Month Later

As the hotel elevator jerks its way up to the thirtieth floor, Castiel watches Dean from the corner of his eye.

It’s late, sometime after eight and he can’t stop thinking about what his father shouted across the courtroom. The trial is now well underway, and Castiel has been constantly flanked by stoic U.S. Marshals anytime he leaves the hotel room.

Meaning, he and Dean don’t talk during transit. Dean will reach for his hand sometimes, but Cas has withdrawn a lot during the case. When Dean insisted he was coming to New York for the trial, a massive argument had ensued.

There was the shop to consider, Castiel reasoned, not to mention all the other businesses that rely on Dean. But once more, he learned there’s no changing course for Dean. When the man is set on something, that’s it.

Thing is, it isn’t just the business Cas is worried about. It’s exactly this situation, where both of them are running through every horrible detail in their minds. Dean has had a picture of Castiel in his mind, and there’s no way the trial isn’t changing that.

Especially after today.

Exiting the elevator, they trek down the carpeted hall to their room, followed by the Marshals who will stand guard all night. The first night, Dean made a joke about having gratuitously boisterous sex.

But as it happens, they haven’t touched each other intimately since they arrived.

Dean uses the card key on the door, holding it open for Cas to step inside. It’s a sad routine that unfolds between leaving the courthouse and coming back to it. They return to the hotel room in silence, undress, Cas takes two pills prescribed by Pamela and more or less passes out until Dean wakes him up the next day.

Tonight, though… is different.

Because not only did Dean learn something horrible, so did Cas. Something he’d feared any number of times over the course of his life. How could he not? Based on the way his father is, the fact he never knew his mother. The best case was that his dad had an affair and told her to fuck off after she give birth. The second-best case, which is still horrible, would be the same scenario but his mother was murdered after having him.

But he’s always wondered, in the far recesses of his mind—not daring to truly think about it—whether he was the product of a terrible act, something so heinous he shouldn’t exist. Why his mother even decided to have him is a mystery, and worse… why did she stay in New York?
Because sure enough, when Michael Haven learned he had a son, he took what he deemed was his, and got rid of any loose ends.

Anytime Castiel worried about such a possibility before, he always argued his way past it, thinking that, yes, his dad was a psychopath, but would he do that? Had he?

Well. Evidently… he had, or so he said under oath.

Castiel can’t even think the word. In one fucking sentence, his father rearranged Cas’ entire understanding of his existence. Nausea has been rolling in his gut, but he hasn’t eaten anywhere near enough food to be sick.

“Hey?”

Looking up, Cas realizes he’s sitting on the bed. Dean is no more than an inch away, hands stroking his face, his neck, studying him. Cas can’t find his voice, he simply stares back, feeling lifeless.

“Right.” Dean swipes a hand over Cas’ head—it feels nice, but he only blinks in response to the touch. There’s more touching, tender gestures of comfort. Though he is no way comforted, not after what he learned.

He lists sideways when Dean’s steadying hands are gone, but his mechanic returns, palm open with two pills in the center. “Take them,” he’s told.

Why are they pink, he wonders? Who the hell wants bright happy-looking pills when they want to scream? Castiel hears Dean huff a little impatiently and brings his hand up, forcing Cas to take them. He does, robotically, then swallows the water upended into his mouth.

They never take long to filter through him, and it always makes him feel like a cotton ball has exploded inside his brain, lead filling up his limbs. Dean’s undressing him, and then guiding him to the bathroom. He wonders idly if Dean plans to help him pee, he does have to go actually but can’t seem to care enough to actually do it.

Of course, Dean has no idea and starts running water into the tub. Castiel’s quite sure he passes out standing up because when he opens his eyes again, or comes to, whatever… he’s sitting in the tub but has no fucking clue how he got there.

Is Dean nearby? Feeling very fuzzy, he calls out, “Dean?” But the name doesn’t sound right, it must be muffled by the cotton.

A few minutes later, the blurry image of his favourite person steps into the bathroom, cell phone tight to his ear. “... Yeah, I gave them to him, but he’s just… like really out of it…. No before the pills too. I’m telling you Pamela, he’s not reacting to anything. What do I do?”

Dean comes closer, lowering to his knees and presses the phone to Cas’ ear. Wow, he stupendously does not want to talk to anyone right now. “Cas?”

He recognizes the voice. Pamela is a wonderful woman—

Castiel’s mom had probably been wonderful too, until his dad… “I can’t.” He shoves the phone away, but Dean glares at him and puts it right back where it was.

“Try… please. For me.”

For the first time in hours, maybe days, Castiel finds Dean’s eyes and searches them. For what, he
doesn’t know. A lifeboat maybe, a memory erasing device. He’s tempted to take the phone from Dean only to drop it in the water, but Dean has been there for him.

Dean’s been everything.

Pressing his lips together, he replaces Dean’s hand with his and sits there holding the phone. Pamela’s voice comes across again, “You don’t have to talk if you don’t want. Just listen okay?”

He nods, not that she can see him. For a long while, Castiel lays in the tub with the phone attached to his ear and lets all her words wash over him. Not everything she says makes sense, and he doesn’t agree with a lot of it.

At some point, though, he’s come back to himself enough to murmur yeahs and mm-hmms. This gives her a note of relief; he can tell by the sudden change in her tone. Sometime later, he ends the call and lays his head back, closing his eyes.

The water is lukewarm now, not exactly appealing or comforting. He thinks about getting up, but that seems like a hell of a lot of work. He’s grateful when Dean peeks around the corner of the door. A soft spoken, “Hey,” easing into the space.

“Hey.”

Dean smiles. “You’re talking.” With a little hurray of his fist, Dean whispers, “Yay.” And if Cas wasn’t feeling so horrible, he’d find it cute.

“Can you, um, help me get up… those meds are a bit disorienting.”

“Of course.” Dean yanks a thick white towel off of a chrome rack and comes over.

Towel draped over his arm, Dean reaches down and hauls him to his feet. Christ, his knees feel like they’re made of overcooked spaghetti. He’s wrapped in the thick towel, which feels pretty fucking good, and directed by two hands on his shoulders back to the bedroom, and to the bed.

Castiel collapses on it, still wet, mostly burrito’d inside a oversized hotel towel. Lying beside him, Dean starts to play with Cas’ hair, and it feels wonderful. This continues for what feels like hours, and he exists in a strange space; half asleep and half awake.

In a murmur, Castiel asks a question that needs an answer. Though he stutters through it, his mind twisted with the medication. “Be honest Dean… do you—do you want want to leave me? You can… if you want. It’s okay… it’s okay, I understand.”

Though he doesn’t see it, eyes must be closed, he feels the soft warmth of Dean’s lips on his. A reassurance. “No. I love you, and I’m not going anywhere.”

Though he could talk to Dean ad nauseum about all of this, he’d rather save his irrational psychotic rambles for a professional. Instead he forces his eyes open, and tries to throw Dean a sarcastic curl of his lip. “Don’t know about you,” he mumbles, “but my day sucked.”

Dean kisses his forehead, a lingering touch. “Me too. Tell you what… think of something you want—anything—and I’ll get it or give it. You want Cool Ranch Doritos, we’ll get them, or wings, or a massage, or some more hair playing. Right now, I’m ready to put on a skirt and twirl around if it’ll put a smile on your face.”

He snorts, picturing it. “That would be something.”
“I’d look bangin’ in a tight yellow dress, ya know.”

“Black.”

Dean looks intrigued. “Black, huh? Given this some thought, have you?”

Shrugging, Castiel tries to smile but it doesn’t quite get there. “Not a dress… but you mentioned something about panties once, a while back.”

“Mmm, yeah, panties are hot. My ass can pull off boycut like you wouldn’t believe.”

A tired chuckle escapes his throat, and he falls into a daze, aimlessly studying Dean’s face. They watch each other for a few slow minutes. Dean’s fingers find their way back into Cas’ hair. The touch has a way of grounding him, of turning off his mind in a way the drugs can’t.

Finally, he knows what he needs. It’s not Cool Ranch Doritos. It’s Dean, and an experience he’s never had. “Dean?”

“Yeah?”

“I know what I want,” he says, not daring to meet Dean’s eyes in case he looks vulnerable. It’s not his fault he’s cracked, it doesn’t mean he wants this any less.

“Anything…”

Castiel tiredly struggles to unwrap the towel, keeping it close by for cleanup later. He turns onto his stomach, but reaches to drag Dean close by the back of his neck. First, he kisses Dean, hopefully softening him up to the idea. “I want you to fuck me.”

If he was going for shock and awe, he’s got it. Dean’s wide green eyes are on him, scrutinizing every inch of his face. “Uh, I don’t know if that’s—”

Cutting Dean off, he says, “A good idea? Hmm, well, let me see… it’s what I want and you said you’d give me whatever I want, so ergo it’s a good idea.”

Dean blinks at him. “Sassy much? Wow, never knew you could be so demanding.”

Worried Dean won’t give him this, he tries to pout. Though he’s not entirely sure he’s ever done that before. “Please…”

“Ahhh, come on. Don’t give me that look. I’m supposed to be taking care of you… not givin’ it to ya.”

Castiel winks, though the medication makes that feel strange. “You would be ‘taking care of me’.” He does the air quotes with one hand because his other arm’s underneath him.

It has the intended effect of dragging a laugh from Dean, however reluctant. “I see I’ve rubbed off on you.”

“Now who’s insatiable?”
Shoving the banter aside, Castiel grows serious. There’s a deep pit of anguish inside of him, something dark, and he knows he needs to overcome it. Pamela is damn good with her words, and he knows he wants to try, at the very least, not to let the news of today define the rest of his life. He lays his hand on Dean’s cheek beside him, traces his nose, the flat line of his mouth and asks once more. “I need to get out of my own head… being with you is the only way that happens. Please Dean, give me this. You kept saying you wanted me to let you in, well now I’m begging you for it...”

The moment Dean’s expression softens, Castiel knows he’s won. He’s tempted to smirk but the feeling isn’t quite there. He really just wants to be touched, cared for, and loved. All his life, he’s been robbed of that.

Dean is quiet, thoughtful in his resignation, as he presses a tender kiss to Cas’ cheek and then his shoulder. Taking one of the pillows from the bed, Dean moves down and pushes it under Cas’ hips.

Feeling Dean’s hands on his skin immediately calms the storm in his mind, warming him straight through. He feels soft kisses all over his body, from the back of his neck, to his triceps, all the way to the bottom of his feet. Dean takes his time.

When Dean starts to massage Castiel’s legs, he’s quite certain he starts to melt. Every muscle goes slack, but then Dean nudges his legs apart and it sets a fire off in the pit of his stomach. Everything tenses right back up. He isn’t hard, but he can feel a burgeoning erection. Soon enough, his cock will be stiff and trapped against the pillow beneath him.

The massaging action navigates up his backside, to his shoulders, where Dean kneads at the muscle for a few minutes. And then his weight on the bed is gone, but quickly returns. Castiel hopes he returned with necessary items.

Even through the slight fog of the medication, Castiel senses Dean’s sudden apprehension. “What’s wrong?”

“Oh, nothing I guess. Just… have you ever even fingered yourself? Or is this gonna be like… really new for you.”

Castiel throws a dumb look over his shoulder. “Of course I have.”

“Alright,” Dean smirks, “No need to get snippy.” Giving a little smack on his ass, Dean then grabs him roughly, seemingly enjoying the plumpness of his behind. He definitely likes that. But he prefers the sounds of Dean opening the bottle of lube and slicking his fingers.

Before he starts, Dean lies down beside him so they’re face to face. “Hey,” whispers Dean, a soft smile on his lips.

Cas can’t help but return the affection. And when he does, he blinks rapidly at the sudden feel of Dean sliding his fingers down Castiel’s crease, working towards his entrance. It’s been a while, to be fair, so Castiel tries to regulate his breaths, trying not to tense up when he feels Dean nudge at his rim, ever so lightly pushing inward.

But then the first of his slicked fingers slides into Castiel and a long exhale flows past his lips. It feels invasive, but in a way that allows him to let go and just be… a strungout bundle of nerves waiting for the next sensation.

He appreciates that Dean doesn’t draw it out, Castiel isn’t sure he could handle a long bout of foreplay. He just wants to be taken, to be loved in a way that tears you apart so completely you can’t
remember what the hell it was you were worrying about.

As he wantonly grinds into the pillow, Dean watches him... soon enough stretching him with three fingers. Castiel already feels close, his body welcoming the twist of Dean’s fingers, the scissoring of them, making Cas’ vision flash white.

When he tells Dean he’s ready, Dean nods and steals a kiss before lying on top of his back, nudging one knee further apart from the other. Castiel waits as Dean preps himself, sheathing his length and slicking them both a little more.

“Sweetheart, this is gonna feel a lot fuller than three fingers,” he warns, his voice very near to Cas’ ear.

“Good.”

Dean laughs, shaking his head, and positions himself. His cheeks are parted by the blunt, slick head of Dean’s cock… guided by Dean’s hand. As the pressure increases, there’s a faint twinge of discomfort...

“Relax,” instructs Dean, his chest weighing heavy on Cas’ back, his only free hand now brushing through Cas’ hair. “You’re tensing up... it’s okay... happens automatically.”

It’s a bizarre thing to relax when he’s turned on. The patterns don’t fit. Castiel focuses on wanting Dean inside, tries to coax his body to do what he wants, and it works—Dean’s rigid erection, slippery with lube, starts to slide into him.

His body stretches to accommodate, and each inch further causes twitches to roll out throughout his body. Dean is huge. How had he not realized this before? When Dean settles, filling him in a way that robs him of air, he understands why Dean cried before.

Castiel’s never in his life trusted someone like this. It’s overwhelming.

Wrapping around him, Dean starts to move, slowly. His practiced hips pulling back only an inch or two before moving back inside.

Time gradually creeps forward, but Dean’s pace never alters. Cas is surrounded by Dean, the man’s weight draped over his back, arms locked around him. Between his legs, inside of him... all of it... Dean.

The rolling motions of Dean’s hips continue with a predictable assurance. Castiel knows the feel of each thrust, knows exactly how deep Dean will go, how hard his hips will drive against Cas’ ass.

There’s something pacifying about it, and he starts to fall apart. Floating in pieces, not ready to finish exactly, not even sure if he’s going to. But everything feels buoyant, and yet certain.

When Dean does shift, it’s only to lay his arm above Cas’ head on the pillow. All so that his hand is close enough to push Cas’ hair off his forehead, and hold it back. It’s feels fantastic, cooling the blaze of heat in him.

As he’s on his stomach, face turned to the side, it’s not easy for Dean to search out a kiss but he finds what he’s looking for and they kiss sloppily as Dean keeps filling him, taking him slowly apart, one thrust at a time.

Castiel’s never come untouched before. He doesn't expect it, didn’t care if he did or not. And so, it takes him by surprise, seemingly out of nowhere.
His body spasms, a fierce ache blooming from his core. With his cock rammed against the pillow, Castiel can feel each pulse of release soaking the cotton. Unhinged, he fucks his erection through the wetness and moans at the sensational friction of wet cotton.

But none of it feels better than the way his insides clench around Dean with every wave of his orgasm. It’s intoxicating. No matter how tight he feels, Dean’s hard girth is unyielding to it.

Between the drugs, the day he’s had, and the orgasm, Castiel is barely conscious seconds after his body is spent. “Come on me,” he mumbles, nearly half asleep.

He hears a soft chuckle, a heady sound because Dean’s clearly still very turned on. The weight of Dean vanishes, and leaves him empty, but Castiel can still feel him on his knees between Cas’ legs. By the slight vibrations of the bed, it’s obvious Dean is jacking himself off, furiously by the sounds of it.

Castiel smiles, totally sated when he starts to feel warm splashes land all across his back and ass. It’s made all that much better by Dean’s choked off grunts.

Hopefully Dean cleans him up, but he doesn’t know, because he passes right out. And though it didn’t seem possible hours earlier, there’s a faint smile on his mouth when he slips into a dream state.
The newly-painted door still stumps Castiel as he mounts the front step. Deep crimson, the colour of love and passion, greeting him every time he returns home. Of course, he’s wearier today than most days. Grateful to have Dean by his side, their hands entwined—both their skin dried out from the harsh soap supplied in the courthouse bathrooms.

Eight weeks it took. From start to finish, and ran an average of ten hours or more each day. He’s drained—emotionally and physically. Being back in Hobucken after residing in New York for so long is a relief.

He appreciates the quiet, the slow passing of life as people go about their day without urgency or great care.

Dean opens the door, because Cas is stuck staring at it. He tries not to think about the outcome. Granted, it’s a good outcome and he doesn’t truly have anything to fear. But that doesn’t stop him from overanalyzing the testimonies, the defense lawyer’s asinine arguments and deflective tactics, every word he spoke knowing Dean was there in the audience.

And then there was the one really bad day, but he’s been better. Working his way through a truth he can’t stand isn’t easy, but Pamela has helped.

When his senses rouse back to the present, he’s inside the kitchen and Dean is piling their bags next to the hallway. They’ve been living together for just over three months—most of which was spent in a cramped hotel room with neither of them in good spirits.

He wants to laugh and say I told you so. Happily ever after is not what they got. And that’s another thing he tries not to think about, how he’s so severely altered Dean’s life. The business being put on hold for so long doesn’t sit well with him and he’s thankful they kept the money he’d swindled before he pulled the plug on the whole thing.

The similarly exhausted mechanic leans against the wall by the kitchen and stares at him. He’s not glaring or even smirking, he’s just watching. Dean is very perceptive, sometimes annoyingly so.

“Ya never know how to shut that brain off, do you?”

Glancing down at the pine floors, dented and worn to a beautiful rustic finish, he sighs—letting the exhale expel the tension in his shoulders. He finally looks back at Dean and an apology sits on the tip of his tongue, but Dean won’t hear of it. There are other things he could say, things he has yet to say. But that too, sits on the tip of his tongue. Held back for other reasons.

“No,” he laughs softly, wanting to sleep for about six months. Minimum.

And the smirk returns. “Want some help with that?”

Castiel doesn’t expect his body to respond, but it does. It fucking flares to life like it’s been dormant for eons. An immediate craving to feel Dean’s skin against his roars through his mind and through every vein and cell.

“God, yes…” he exults. Whatever exhaustion had been weighing his frame transforms with a surge of adrenaline. Which is required, because Dean has that look. The ‘I-want-to-jump-you-look’
know you want to…”

With an eager bite on his bottom lip, Dean pushes off the wall and rushes for him. His arms fly around Cas’ neck and he jumps up not giving a shit that he weighs a solid one-ninety.

Castiel huffs under the sudden heft, his chin tipped back to look at Dean. The mechanic is beaming down at him. “Guess what?”

“What?”

“Our real life starts now. The mobster and the mechanic! The slut and the angel! God I need this movie so bad.”

“You’re ridiculous,” teases Castiel.

Dean snorts with a cocky smile. “Ridiculous, absolutely. And you know what else?”

“Horny?”

“My god, how d’ya know?! You must be psychic.” That, Castiel thinks, or the fact that Dean is horny about ninety-nine-percent of his waking life.

He doesn’t answer Dean. Instead, he moves them down the hall and into the bedroom. No longer does it have the bed he first purchased that Dean set up for him, but Dean’s bed which is far more comfortable.

As they pass through the threshold, Dean laughs to himself, but Castiel decides not to ask why. He has a feeling he knows what the answer would be. And Castiel is not ready for that conversation, not yet. Collapsing onto the bed, with Dean crunched up under him, Castiel catches the sight of a row of pictures from the corner of his eye.

Lined up on the wall by the door are five pictures. One of Sam and Jess, a very old picture of Sam, Dean, and Bobby, one of Dean smiling on the boat, a family portrait of Jo, Charlie, and their daughter, and then in the middle of the five: Cas and Dean. It’s a picture, taken on the fly by Sam of the two of them sitting on the front porch. They have bags under their eyes and are gripping coffee mugs like life rafts. There’s still a hint of pain on Castiel’s face because it was the morning after they tried to have sex after his injury and the stitches ripped.

Completely healed, save for a twinge if he’s being overworked, Castiel snakes his arm under Dean’s back and wrestles them further up the bed. With Dean splayed out on the comforter, the one that still radiates the smell of a mechanic who overheats in his sleep, Castiel remembers the evening they first arrived at Benny’s.

It was marked with an air of imminence, of something on the verge of happening. It was present then the same as it is now—the first stroke of ink on a new chapter of his life. One that doesn’t involve lawyers, or grave memories, or violence.

Wanting to honor the moment and all it promises, he forces the tangle of his lingering worries aside and looks down.

As always, Dean is softly grinning. Always that hint of mischief simmering beneath the curve of his lips. “You’re frustratingly captivating,” states Castiel. “I don’t think I ever stood a chance.”

Dean chuckles, his hands rubbing absently along Cas’ forearms. “And you were a mystery,” replies Dean. “Man, I see right through everyone and there is not a whole lot below the surface. But you
were different.”

Yes, because he was a liar and criminal. “Not a good different,” he counters, trying to smile through the bitterness.

“Ooh,” groans Dean, “you and your damn good versus evil crap. One more word about that I’m stripping the door back to yellow.”

“You can’t always use that argument, Dean.”

“I can and I will.”

Deciding it’s high time to end the conversation, Castiel grabs Dean’s hands and presses them over his head, then leans down to ravish his mouth in a heated kiss. It starts deep, and continues until they’re lost for air.

By that point, the clothes have got to go.

Castiel strips Dean, cursing the man’s overabundance of layers in the late-autumn season. While Castiel can easily make do with a sweater, or a cardigan on top of a t-shirt, Dean is set on piling on every type of shirt in existence. Tanktops and long-sleeves and button-ups and jackets overtop of an onion of clothes.

He has no patience for it. Grunting in vexation, Castiel is rough with the man under him. But Dean prefers it that way, so if anything, they gain traction towards a successful end. When his naked chest lowers onto Dean’s, the room decorated in their castoffs, he’s breathing heavier than he should already.

There’s a preferred buildup they’ve come to enjoy. Perhaps just like a real couple that has fallen into routine. It makes Castiel smile to think of it that way. But he continues what he’s doing—knowing what Dean likes.

For as promiscuous as Dean has been, he so easily succumbs to the faintest of pleasures. Each time he falls apart, Castiel feels triumphant and continually surprised that Dean loves him so openly.

Less bold with his words, Castiel showers Dean in physical affection. His lips trace the familiar ridges and slopes of Dean’s body. He sucks harder when he travels over Dean’s stomach because it makes his mechanic quiver. And does the same on the inside of his thighs, always trying to precisely lock his lips around a freckle he isn’t sure he’s kissed before.

Not being able to say the words haven’t hindered them really, and Dean is as patient as he is honest. A truly remarkable pairing of traits. Castiel is forever blindsided by the unique composition of the man under him. A paradox. And completely his.

Luck doesn’t begin to explain it. There must be a higher power, and now… when Castiel prays, he’s not sardonic or derisive.

After Castiel has passed his lips and tongue over his favourite spots on Dean, he guides the man onto his front and angles his hips up and back. As much as he loves being able to fall into Dean’s eyes during sex, he can’t deny the way taking Dean from behind destroys them both. Maybe they can buy a giant mirror. Dean would probably love that.

Castiel smiles at the thought as he rakes his fingers down Dean’s back and watches the roll of pleasure ride through Dean’s torso. To him, Dean is perfection and the embodiment of love in his mind. Each graze of his hand or press of his lips is overloaded with his own personal slant on reality.
Pushing his fingers through Dean’s short hair, he grips and pulls. Dean groans and lets Cas do whatever he wants. This is how he loves; exploratively and without boundaries. Before they left New York, Castiel stopped by a clinic for testing—needing to know if he could be with Dean without anything between them. He now has a clean bill of health. And Dean of course, still likes to flaunt his STD results.

Often during dinner with friends, who the hell knows why.

All that amounts to his eyes dropping down to the picture of Dean’s bare ass presented for him, and his own cock pointing out from his body without anything sheathing it. This, they haven’t done before. And Cas wasn’t expecting it so soon. His plans when they arrived back home had been to eat and then crash.

He should’ve known better.

Bending over Dean, he places a soft kiss at the base of his spine. His hands hook around Dean’s hips and draws him close; their skin greeting in places that pull an exhale from his throat.

Castiel foregoes the lube for the moment and sucks his fingers until they’re wet. He rests his face on the heated expanse of Dean’s skin, close enough to watch as he teases the cleft of Dean’s ass. His other hand absently caresses along Dean’s spine, reaching up to knead his neck and shoulder blades as he works him open.

It’s the highlight of the act when Dean gradually starts to tremble. Castiel smiles lazily to himself at the feeling of Dean’s body clenching around his fingers, he twists them to counter the reflex.

“Ahh… jesus fuck,” moans Dean, his spine curving as he drops his head to the comforter.

Castiel hums in a pleasant response and continues stretching Dean—more for the sake of it than the intended purpose. Using his hands in this way is a far better experience than previous routines. When he stops, rising to his knees and looming over Dean’s primed, hands-and-knees position, he feels vindicated.

“I can’t imagine a life without you in it,” he tells Dean. Throat tight with the sense of feelings still very new for him, he catches Dean’s eyes as the mechanic twists around to offer a tender smile.

Dean replies, “I can’t imagine another minute without you in me.”

Mmm. Yes, that too. Castiel palms Dean’s rear and gives it a little slap before he walks on his knees to the side of the bed and digs in the junk-loaded side table drawer for the lone bottle of lube buried somewhere inside.

When Dean moved in, he brought certain paraphernalia with him. Kinky sex toys Cas is a bit daunted by. But of course, Castiel hasn’t been able to let go of having a few guns in the house. Because you never know. People have escaped prison before.

How he found himself living in a postcard town in North Carolina with a mechanic in a dinky, decrepit bungalow filled with guns and sex toys is anyone’s guess. God, it seems, has a very strange idea of fate.

Pushing aside an alarmingly large dildo with a shake of his head, he wraps his fingers around the perpetually sticky, clear bottle of lube.

The motion of spreading the slick substance around his shaft is second nature, and he does it with his eyes locked on Dean’s, whose head is twisted to one shoulder so he can watch.
The anticipation of feeling Dean bare sets of a fiery hum in his veins and it must show on his face, because Dean smirks back at him.

“Are you sure?” Castiel asks for the last time. They’ve talked ad nauseam about it, but his inexperience and humble nature around Dean forces the question out once more.

Exasperated, Dean plunks his forehead onto his crossed arms on the bed. “Juuust. Do. Me!” he shouts and then glares over his shoulder.

Castiel laughs and takes a readying breath. Holding himself in position, he grabs for Dean’s shoulder and pulls Dean towards him instead of moving forward. The instant heat and circle of pressure drowns his thoughts in ecstasy.

A harsh moan grinds up his throat, and he knows being with Dean will leave him hoarse until tomorrow. Under him, Dean is biting his own flesh, a whimper of pleasure squeaking past his lips.

Progressively and with a torturous overload of sensation, Dean sinks back—impaling himself.

“Oh, God,” breathes Castiel. “Dean…”

His voice or his exultation rouses a convulsion from Dean, his body hardening in waves, clenching around Cas’ sex. Dean lets out a grating curse and starts to slide forward.

Castiel watches Dean move back and forth on him in a building cadence of the sinful act. The iron-hard length of his sex thrums at the feel of Dean’s insides working over him, tight and feverishly arousing.

His breaths slip out faster and louder, deep rumbles rising up unbidden from his throat. “Dean,” he says in wonderment, reaching out with both hands to grope at his mechanic’s strong, muscular back, to scratch his nails up over Dean’s scalp.


The direction doesn’t dampen the moment, Castiel loves when Dean is clear about what he wants. Well, he reconsiders, except when it comes to the odd hint about rings and vows. Of all things he expected of Dean, the desire to be proposed to was most definitely not one of them. Maybe it’s a small town thing? He’s not sure.

Castiel appeases Dean’s request. He anchors himself on Dean’s shoulders and fucks Dean as hard as he can without hurting either of them or smashing into the rocking headboard.

After only a few thrusts, Dean is shouting—he’s never quiet. Castiel can’t match it, but he grunts with his efforts, his fingers digging in towards Dean’s collarbone. Their skin slaps together with dull, resounding thuds. Muscle colliding with bone and flesh, a slick shaft penetrating obscenely fast into a constricting heat. The noises are gloriously pornographic, and Castiel catches himself smiling and muttering Dean’s name as if it were a praise, a curse, and a whine all in the same context.

Running out of steam, Castiel falls onto Dean and reaches around his hips to circle his fingers around Dean’s cock. He strokes it in time with Dean’s rising moans, and ruts into him less fast but not at all softer.

Seconds before Dean climaxes, he whimpers a desperate sound and cranes his head back… the look in his eyes tells Cas he’s seeking a kiss. It’s not the easiest of positions, but he manages to reach Dean’s mouth and kisses him deeply, their chests rumbling with gruff sounds of pleasure.
And then Dean is coming, his frame locking up and tightening in a multitude of places. It draws a litany of hoarse cries from Cas’ throat, at the feel of Dean pulsing around his cock, and warm release drenching his fingers and most likely the bed.

He follows in a few final strokes, unable to stand the repetitive pressure of Dean’s orgasm. To the sound of Dean’s exhausted heaves for oxygen, Castiel shudders with the swell of pleasure that erupts from his cock and fills Dean, leaving them both messy and profoundly wet. The euphoria of it is blinding, and he can’t make sense of it. The lingering aftershocks stun him, and he weakly pushes himself off of Dean’s back and glances down at the glistening crease of Dean’s ass.

When he pulls out, slowly, some of his release beads in a white streak down the inside of Dean’s thigh. Castiel sighs thickly and with the weirdest sense of peace he can’t begin to explain.

Wavering on his knees, mute, he’s barely aware of Dean rolling onto his back and reaching over the bed for a towel in the nightstand to wipe the excesses off the bed and himself. When that’s taken care of, Dean goes up to his knees and pulls Cas into a hug, bringing their faces so close their noses touch.

“I love you,” sighs Dean, a sated dopy grin on his face.

Castiel is sure his heart expands behind his ribs. I love you too. He opens his mouth, and feels the words out, imagines how his voice would frame them. It hurts when nothing comes and he still doesn’t know what’s wrong with him.

“Hey,” whispers Dean, shifting his position to cradle Cas’ neck and hold his eyes. “It’s okay.”

“No,” he chokes out. “It’s not.” Of course, Castiel knew he had psychological deficiencies, but this one is the worst of them. What a mockery it makes of him.

They’ve never had a real conversation about it, and he’s embarrassed and ashamed. Self-loathing is also a word he would use.

“Cas, babe…” Dean strokes his thumbs against Cas’ jaw. It feels wonderful. “Don’t you get it? You’ve never said it before… ever.” Intensifying his gaze, Dean waits for that realization to sink in, but he continues. “You never said it to family, to anyone… so it’s okay. Trust me… I’m not the kind of man that tosses those words around and I know how you feel.”

There’s a hazy blanket over the sound of Dean’s voice because Castiel is far too busy running through his myriad of shit memories to recall if what Dean’s saying is really true. He reels back in thought as far as he can go, but nothing stands out. Not from him, not from others. The deeper he goes, the less and less he finds of affection. There were no hugs that he has any memory of, and definitely never the utterance of an I love you. Ever.

He swallows and searches for Dean’s eyes like they can save him from the weird plummeting sensation in his gut. “There’s so much wrong with me,” he announces, strangely struck stupid by it.

Dean laughs, not derisively but affectionately. “Babe, there ain’t a damn thing wrong with you… says the whore.” He chuckles again. “Neither of us know what we’re doing, okay?”

At least they have that in common, he allows. Dean is new at this too. Maybe it’s okay that he takes his time. “We’re just making it up as we go?”

Dipping his chin, Dean agrees with a wide grin. “Exactly!”

“Okay,” he concludes soberly. “I like that plan.”
“Me too.”

Following a lazy cuddle and absent-minded petting, Dean drags Cas into the kitchen to eat. The mechanic cooks up Cas’ favourite meal of mac and cheese. And they eat it sitting at the kitchen table in the nook Cas always assumed would stay empty.

Through forkfuls of cheesy pasta, they trade looks of content and sheer awe.

This wasn’t luck, Castiel reminds himself, there is fate at work here. Because nothing else could explain something so incredible.

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It happens a week and a half later. Pinpointing the cause is impossible. The horrific nightmare locks Cas in a silent hell. The details aren’t precise in the dream, but he’s very aware of the concept of danger, and Dean being taken from him.

He screams in revolt.

The violent reaction being enough to wrench him back to reality—to the dark room and the soft snores beside him.

There’s a viscous panic trying to work its way through his pounding heart, and he can’t hold it back. Reaching out for Dean’s shoulder, he shakes the man awake, his urgent tone no doubt scary.

“Dean, Dean, you have to wake up. Dean, please—“

Grumbling protests, Dean blinks but can’t keep his eyes open. “Hmm, what’s wrong?”

Castiel grasps his face in earnest, peering into his sleepy green eyes. “Dean…”

“What’s wrong?” Dean’s more alert now.

Waiting, Castiel takes several breaths. And one more. “I love you.” Ooh, that feels good. “I love you.” Even better. “I fucking love you!”

Snorting, Dean laughs and tiredly pulls Cas closer, wrapping him in a sweltering hug. “I love you too.”

“No,” he argues back. “I love you.” God, the definition of the word doesn’t justify the swirl of emotion in him.

Another laugh and then a kiss from Dean. “I know… I’ve known, dummy.”

Because the word isn’t enough, he needs the act to accompany it. Castiel speaks with an insinuating lilt to his voice, “I love you,” and he winks. Because winking is not something he does very often, or ever, Dean cracks into a laugh.

“You want to make love to me, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

Dean throws his arms out and spread his legs in a quick impersonation of a starfish. “Have at it, baby.”

“You’re far too easy, you should make me work for it.”
Chuckling, Dean reminds him, “Oh please, you knew I was easy from day one. And now that I’m stupidly in love with you, you basically have full access whenever you want, however you want…” He pauses and smirks. “With whatever you want.”

Castiel lets out a growl of anticipation, his body and heart singing with tangible joy.

“I love you,” he claims once more. Ready to tattoo the words over his chest.

Below him, Dean grins. “I know.”

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End Notes

To everyone who has reached the end of this story, I sincerely hope that you enjoyed yourself and that I did Cas justice in this particular AU format. It's always a great challenge participating in DCBB and I had a lot of fun. I am however, so fucking tired you have no idea. I am going to pass out now, and thank you so much for reading everything and offering kudos or comments. And hey, come say hi on Tumblr if you want as well: cocklesheadboop

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!