Candy

by natashawitch

Summary

The Fall from Heaven changed everything. The supernatural no longer hidden. Angels roaming the planet.
Sam and Dean's immediate concerns were on a smaller scale. What do you do with the former King of Hell? Where is Castiel?

A text on Dean's other other cell:
Dean. The man in the gas station permits me to use his telephone. I am behind the carwash machine in Casper. Dean

Notes

Inspired by Paolo Nutini's song Candy.

Disclaimer: Not my characters, they belong to the CW, Supernatural and The Holy Kripke. Just playing in the sandbox.
All the angels and their halos, All they do is keep me waiting

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This is Dean’s other other cell. Leave a message.

“Hey man, sorry, when you passed me the number, I automatically dialed it. Here give me the cell back and I’ll set it up for text.”

Dean. The man in the gas station permits me to use his telephone. I am behind the carwash machine in Casper. Dean

“You’re welcome dude. Hey are you one of those ex-heaven weirdoes? Nope? Well take care man. Hey have you somewhere to go? Are you alright? Hey come back. Well craptastic.”

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The night the sky burned was a turning point in history. The silent majority, who went about their daily business oblivious to the supernatural, had the veil removed from their eyes. The reality of the universe was smacked in their faces. Angels landed in back yards, swimming pools, on mountains, in deserts, on ice caps and cruise liners. Everywhere across the globe the host was expelled to earth. By and large the host was pissed. Locked out of heaven, there was only humanity on which to inflict their rage. There were some angels who hid themselves, retreated to monasteries or forest glades, but their vast majority was anything but silent. The twelve angels who had landed on and around The Fiji Islands had banded together and staged a coup, making a seraph called Feyriel the first angelic head of state. Some governments curried favor with their new super powered citizens, while others declared war on the alien creatures. The United States took a middle road. Homeland security was on high alert. FBI files on known hunters were dug out of storage and shady lone men were approached by shady fed partners in roadhouses and cheap motels across the continent. At the same time Washington met with the self-assured angels who had appointed themselves as spokespeople for their brethren. There was a housing crisis as the angels demanded roofs over their heads. Some wanted the communities where they had landed to give them tribute, others wanted to help humanity and set up healing circles. Two countries in the far east had changed their calendars to Year One.

In an underground bunker outside Lebanon, Kansas, two brothers and a (former) king of hell, sat out the chaos. There had been a Prophet of the Lord too, but he objected to the demon being kept in the dungeon, and moved out. Kevin had only gone as far as Topeka, complete with three groupie angels who insisted on guarding him from other less groupie inclined angels.

Everyday Sam felt better. He gained strength with every sleep. He still coughed up a little blood. Some days he was dizzier than others. Overall he could be said to be on the mend. He had spent the first couple of weeks after the Fall from Heaven reading everything the Men of Letters had on penitence and purifying demonic influence. Then he progressed to some online research and had ordered a couple of giant psychology tomes from Amazon. Finally he felt ready. He began what Dean dubbed ‘psychobabble crap’ sessions with Crowley. First in the dungeon and then in the library. The dungeon was too damp and cold, presumably deliberately. Sam wasn’t well enough to continue there, he told Dean. So Crowley, in his anti-demon handcuffs, was subjected to Sam-talk in more comfortable surroundings. Dean did not know what went on between them, but he trusted Sam.
When Sam wasn’t watching, or psychoanalyzing, Crowley he was attempting the most profound role reversal of his life. He was trying to take care of Dean. There was no admittance of this situation on Dean’s side, because there was little reaction to anything from Dean. Sam would have ganked something for one of Dean’s meat patties but his brother hadn’t cooked from scratch since that night. Dean could still get angry. Two angel reports segued into each other on one news bulletin. One on a lawyer who was smited in Chicago, followed by three female angels who had been living like feral children in Kentucky until the local pastor had led a group of parishioners to ‘rescue’ and take them in. Dean had spat with bile about the unremitting dickness of angels and the inability of ancient beings to take care of basic human functions.

Twenty one days after the Fall from Heaven, Aaron Bass called Dean. Hunters coming out into the open had led Aaron to check on the Winchester brothers. Dean politely enquired about the golem. Aaron said that he was an effective weapon against ex-garrison angels. After an awkward silence Dean enquired about Aaron’s love life and was told that the golem just effective at stopping that. Dean had laughed and felt less weighed down. When he pressed End Call, Dean had a voicemail. He checked it but it was only a heavy breather. He tossed the cell in disgust and went to check that Crowley hadn’t tried to get Sam to make a deal.

A text message arrived after Dean left his room. Although Dean had been retiring earlier and earlier, that night Charlie had called looking for help with her local angel interactions. They were on the friendly but autistic spectrum style of cherub, with a female cupid called Mariel who had taken a shine to Charlie. Dean scrubbed his mind of other thoughts and reflected on the people that he had in his life as he brushed his teeth and shaved for the first time since Sunday. The blinking light on his cell phone made him presume that Aaron had added a postscript. It was an unknown number....

*Dean. The man in the gas station permits me to use his telephone. I am behind the carwash machine in Casper. Dean.*

Muttering about angels not knowing how to sign messages. Dean moved faster than he had in three weeks. He tripped over his half-mast re-donned jeans as he ran to the conference room. The noise of his face plant alerted Sam. Dean was up, had snagged Baby’s keys and his navy canvas jacket, and was headed for the door, when his brother caught him by the shoulder swinging him round.

“What Dean?”

“Huh?” Dean managed as he checked his pockets for his wallet and phones.

“You don’t leave your freaking room except to eat and shower for three weeks, and now you are running out the door? Where the frigging hell are you going?”

“Casper.”

“I believe there was a friendly ghost of that name.” A very unwelcome snarky demon with a glass of Dean’s Hunters Helper commented from the hall way.

“You’re giving him alcohol now.” Dean rolled his eyes.

“It helps him to talk.” Sam shrugged.

“You are being played.” Dean pursed his lips and decided to deal with that later. “I’ve got to go.”

“You have got to be kidding me? It’s nearly midnight. What is in Casper that is so important?”

Dean made it to the door before he turned his head back and gulped, “Cas.”
It would take a normal road car eight and a half hours to get to Casper, Wyoming. Dean was sure the Impala could break seven. She did.
I was perched outside in the pouring rain

Chapter Summary

Dean’s search for Castiel

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The sign said Welcome To Casper. Dean fervently hoped that he’d be welcomed. Castiel had reached out and made contact. What if he was in trouble? Dean checked his pearl handled colt. He pulled over for a moment, allowing his eyes to close. He had driven straight from Lebanon. He whipped out his phone and googled carwash in Casper. The town boasted nine carwashes. None which was going to have a neon sign saying ‘Castiel woz here’. Cruising the sleepy town at 6.30am Dean assessed them for likely Castiel hiding spots. He had purchased a gas station coffee at the first location and after hitting the head he looked around. The back lot had failed to reveal anyone behind the carwash. The rain began to fall as he pulled out onto East 2nd Street. It was pelting down. Dean hoped Cas had shelter and wasn’t standing by the side of the road for hours, like he had on the night all those years ago when Zachariah had sent Dean to the nightmare future.

Driving through a community starting its day Dean felt out of place and wondered if he was on a wild goose chase. The text had come the previous afternoon, Castiel could have spread his wings and be in Nepal or Naples by now. Angels were causing mayhem and havoc across the globe. Maybe Castiel was trying to deal with their messes. Dean was still left with the question; why hadn’t Castiel shown up at the bunker by now? Even if only to show his face and let Dean and Sam know he had survived. Dean raised his hand to find his cheek wet from a single stray unwanted tear. He had considered, very seriously the possibility that Castiel was dead. He’d imagined the imprint of blackened wings at Metatron’s feet. Castiel was a small stupid child who never listened. Except that he wasn’t. He was so much more than the baby in a trench coat. He was loyal and honorable to a fault. He was principled and righteous. His mistakes had never been due to selfish motives. Dean stiffened his jaw and his resolve. He was not slipping back into a state of mourning.

The notice outside one of the churches called on Angels to come to God. Dean would have laughed if he thought it was funny. His thoughts drifted back to three weeks earlier. He had been in battle mode when the angels had been cast out of heaven. It hadn’t stopped him screaming his voice hoarse for Cas, but his mission was to get Sam home and Crowley secured. Back in Kansas he’d focused on locking Crowley down, putting Sam to bed, and dealing with Kevin’s protests about not ganking Crowley. Finally late the next day, Dean had stood down and collapse on the sofa with a beer. The TV was all channel angel reports. Dean searched the blank faces for Castiel, but there was no sign of him. He listened to Kevin’s logical objections to living in the same space as the demon who killed his mother. He could sympathize. He doubted if he would have put up with Azazel under his roof. Once Kevin had talked his heart out, Dean went to check on Sam. He listened to his wheezing sleeping breaths and then ventured to the corridor with the dungeon. Crowley’s sobbing was deeply disturbing. Not figuring things would improve any, Dean had hit the memory foam. He didn’t sleep.

The amount of sleep he had achieved over the last twenty one nights was less than recommended for even a junior doctor. Each day without news chiseled a shard of flint from Dean’s faith that Castiel could be alright. New nightmares woke him. Sometimes he saw them during the day when his lids
drooped. He could see the concern on Sam’s knitted brow and his brother’s hesitant dance around him as if Dean was fragile and about to snap like a twig. Sam speculated that Castiel would be making his way to them from a distant land and be helping his brethren along the way. Dean had shrugged and reminded Sam that angels could appear in a flutter of wings.

Inertia crept into Dean’s limbs and he found it an effort to move around the batcave. His mind replayed Castiel’s sacrifices over and over on a loop like the film reels the Men of Letters had stored so preciously.

A disembodied voice taunted in his ear, “Always ready to bleed for the Winchesters.”

Outside the second gas station carwash Dean took a breath and closed his eyes. This time the vision was of the steely look in Castiel’s eye when he stayed behind, sending Dean from Chuck’s house to Ilchester.

The only thing behind that carwash was a pile of used condoms.

Cy Avenue had four venues to search. Dean pulled the Impala onto the street and made the turn.

Sometimes the nightmares started innocently. Castiel would tell the girl in the brothel about her father. Dean would laugh. Then Castiel would laugh but the timbre would change to that broken noise of Future Castiel. Dean would look sideways and Castiel would be carving the angel banishment symbol into his own flesh. Dean might blink only to see Castiel letting go of his hand at the Purgatory portal, or Lucifer snapping his fingers in Stull, the jerky movements of Leviathan ridden Cas sinking into the reservoir, the lost look in Castiel’s eye after he had smited Alfie, or the Leviathan in Purgatory opening his jaws to consume the angel until Benny beheaded it. Every vision, hallucination, vivid memory drove a hot poker through Dean’s heart until he admitted he did more than need Castiel. He loved the sonovabitch. He was family. He was important. Dean needed him to come back. He’d promised Sam that no vampires or angels would ever take priority over his little brother. The thing about Cas was that he understood that. Dean didn’t know what he was meant to do with this searing painful love in his chest. He wanted to beat the angel’s face in for leaving again, but he’d tried destructive anger when Cas had landed on the road in front of them after losing the angel tablet. He didn’t know what he would do if Cas was hurt now. The one or ones who had hurt him would have to deal with a very angry, hulk-angry, Dean Winchester. He would finish them and take Castiel home and never let him go again. Not that he would tie Castiel down to a bed, although that image had produced a stirring in Dean’s nether regions, but he vowed that he would make Castiel understand that he needed the angel to stay.

With determination Dean marched through the rain of his first Cy Avenue stop. The carwash was a service offered by a thin elderly employee who literally ran into the store under the piercing glare of Dean’s eyes.

The next carwash machine was shielded from the road by the auto-shop. Dean parked the Impala and ventured on foot. He pulled his collar up as a placebo against the deluge. The smell of newly soaked hot asphalt filled his senses. It was pelting down and Dean squinted through the heavy rain.

Folded like a stray dog against the galvanized wall of the garage was a black haired figure under a filthy trench coat. Dean’s mouth went dry as the Gobi Desert. He licked his lips and then gritted his teeth. He attempted to call out, but his voice failed. Instead he crouched on his toes and laid a hand softly on Castiel’s shoulder. Cas stirred. His lack of attack response to an unknown assailant took Dean aback. In a naïve uncurling Castiel’s face turned upwards, like a sunflower finding the light. He smiled at Dean. Dean leaned further over, unbalancing his centre of gravity so that his weight collapsed onto Castiel and crushed him in a fiercely tight hug.
“I missed you man,” Dean clapped Castiel on the back and felt the grin splitting his face.

Castiel pressed the rain soaked skin of his face into Dean’s neck.

“Sonovabitch man, I thought you were gone this time.” Dean squeezed tighter until Castiel gasped for breath.

Dean jerked back. “Cas?”

Castiel hung his head and picked at grimy bitten nails. Dean took in the dirt, the ragged clothes, the scraped knees and ring of insect bites on his neck. Castiel’s soles were parting from his shoes. He had a patina of dirt on his face and a scruff that would give his purgatory beard a run for its money.

“You’re not an angel are you?” Dean asked.

Castiel shook his head and managed to lower it further so that his chin was pressed against his chest.

Dean grabbed hold of that part of his essential self that took care of those chosen few who made the grade as family. He reached out and raised Castiel’s face with a hand on his jaw. “I don’t care, Cas. I need you.”

Castiel tried to twist out of the hunter’s hold but Dean kept him there, green eyes meeting blue. “I need you Cas. You. Not some hammer of heaven. You are gonna get your butt into Baby and we are pit stopping at the closest motel. You reek man.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.

:)
Dean discovers there is more wrong with Castiel than grime, cuts and scrapes.

Dean was afraid he had hurt Castiel’s shiny new human feelings when the ex-angel silently turned his back following the comment on his lack of personal hygiene.

“Hey Cas. Sorry man.” Dean sighed, “We’re getting soaked here. Ignore my runaway mouth. Here.” He extended a hand.

Castiel did his best eye roll but allowed Dean to assist him to his feet. Dean had a spring in his step as they made for the Impala. Sure, he thought, Castiel wasn’t quite right. He was human now and that would take some adjusting. Dean was almost used to Castiel returning damaged in some way; either confused, mind-controlled, penitent or amnesiac. The most crucial point was that Castiel was there, trailing in Dean’s wake. Everything else, Dean could work on fixing.

Dean had his hand on the chrome door handle. Castiel looked at the Impala as if he had never used the door to climb in. “Shotgun, Cas. Get in.”

Castiel’s lips twitched in a tentative smile and he carefully lowered himself into the passenger seat. Dean leaned back to retrieve an old hard grey towel from a duffel behind Cas’s seat. He gave his own head and face a quick scrub and passed it over. As he texted Sam to say he had found Castiel, Dean thought he saw the former angel pushing his nose into the material and smelling it. He decided to ignore the strange behavior.

He popped the glove compartment and pulled out two small plastic bottles. “Water Cas?”

The former angel obligingly uncapped the holy water and took a swig. Dean gave his already reeking clothes the extra aroma of borax. Castiel pushed up his left sleeves and held out his palm for Dean. The silver knife slid across his inner forearm.

“Gotta, you know, can’t be too careful.” Dean’s lip curled at his own lack of eloquence.

Castiel nodded and cupped the bleeding arm with his other hand.

Dean replaced the knife into his boot and used his two hands to lift up Castiel’s right hand. “Germs dude.”

Castiel said nothing but did that head tilt that made Dean realize how much he missed the guy when he was MIA. Dean twisted around, stuffing the grey towel into the duffel and poking for a first aid wipe. He would deal with the other cuts and scrapes later but there was no point in adding to the list. When he straightened up, Castiel’s gaze was transfixed on the seeping cut. Dean wondered what was in the handbook for dealing with the newly human. He planted the unfolded wipe down on the wound, bent Castiel’s arm at the elbow raising it up and told him to hold it there.

Dean slid the key into the ignition and grinned. He had known but now it was 100% proven. This was his Cas. He dropped his voice in an imitation graveled tone, “You haven’t said ‘Hello Dean’ yet.”
Castiel stared at him.

“Come to think of it, you haven’t said much of anything.”

Removing his hand from the makeshift wound dressing, Castiel dug into his suit jacket pocket. A tiny spiral bound notepad and a well bitten stub of pencil fell to the floor. Dean was the faster one and picked them up. The note pad was filled with simple words in Castiel’s precise script.

*hello, thank you, no thank you, please, I am fine….* Ending with *Would you let me use your telephone for this number?*

“Castiel. Can you speak?” Dean said still focused on the pad.

Castiel touched his hand. Dean looked up. Castiel’s Adam’s apple made a leap as he swallowed hard then gripped his neck with two wide open hands.

“Something happened to your neck? Your voice? Did someone hurt you?” Dean growled. He scanned through the windshield for potential attackers.

Castiel’s eyes welled up and he physically crumpled, bent double in the seat. Dean stopped him from adopting the airplane brace position with a supporting arm. Castiel took a deep inhale and made a grabbing motion for the notebook, which Dean hadn’t registered was still in his free hand. Dean passed over the pad and pencil. The damp white bleached paper was gouged by the pencil.

*METATRON*

*MY GRACE*

*RIPPED*

Castiel pointed upwards and mouthed with exaggerated movements the word SPELL.

“So.” Dean began, “Kevin made some progress on the angel tablet. We figured Dick-a-tron had apparated the heavenly host out of dodge.”

He’d lost Cas.

“We worked out that Meta-douche had cast out the angels. The last ingredient was grace.” Dean didn’t say that he’d thought Castiel was an imprint of black wings after the first couple of days of unanswered prayers and absence from landing in his personal space. “So, you’re human now?” Dean checked.

Castiel gulped and nodded.

“You think the silence is physical or you know?” Dean wished Sam was there. He was better at this sort of thing.

Castiel found an earlier page, *I DON’T KNOW*

Dean scratched the back of his neck, “Yeah, right, well. Let’s get a motel room and get you cleaned up.”

He had passed a Super 8 on the same street. He put baby into gear and drove the short distance. Castiel was focused on the passing buildings. Dean didn’t know what to say. He leapt from the
Impala and made for reception. There was a family checking out. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other while the father argued about some movie charges. One look at the teenage daughters’ faces would have resolved the dispute in the hotel’s favor.

If he heard on the news that some of the angels had been struck mute by their falls, he would have been less than sympathetic or perhaps shrugged it off as hard luck. Castiel had made errors but he didn’t deserve this. Maybe it was a PTSD thing. He’d read some of the web pages in Sam’s browser history, that the sneaky sasquatch had been using last year to deal with a Dean fresh from God’s Armpit.

Thing was, Dean understood. He understood better than anyone. Down in the marrow of his bones, he knew what it was like for your words to fail you, to see your world go up in flames and not be able to find the words to interact in a new and terrifying reality.

“Sir?”

Dean shrugged his shoulders and licked his lips. In a smooth charming voice he negotiated a day rate for a room with a queen and twin bed with bath and shower.

Instead of opening the passenger side, he climbed back in next to Castiel. “So I got us a room. A steal.” He noticed the narrowing eyes. “Not a literal theft. A bargain so long as we check out by 6pm so they can try and re-sell to late arrivals.”

Castiel passed him the notepad. A sheet was filled with tiny writing. Cas had been busy.

Dean. I don’t want to be a burden to you. and Sam. I needed wanted to know you both made it. I appreciate your help and will not overstay my welcome. My usefulness is greatly depleted and I will understand if you do not want to bring me back to Samuel.

“No!” Dean shouted and threw the notebook over his shoulder onto the rear seat. “You listen to me Castiel. There is no overstaying welcomes, or burdens, or usefulness. I freaking told you. I need you. I need you with me. Do you understand?”

Castiel looked aghast at the freak out. He pushed his body back against the door as if Dean was about to flip out and physically attack him.

Dean took two deep breaths and splayed his fingers on his jeans in an effort to calm the sudden over-reaction to the offer from Castiel to disappear again. “Cas? Please Cas, look at me.”

Castiel grimaced. Dean wondered if he was in pain anywhere but he did sit up straight in the seat and turn his head to Dean. His face was blank waiting for Dean to be the proactive one.

Dean leaned over and gripped Castiel’s thigh hard, “I’ve got you man.”

Did this feel different to Castiel now? The pressure Dean exerted on his leg, the way Cas’s eyes focused on Dean’s hand and his lips parted in a soft O, told Dean that it must. Whenever Dean had taken a swing at The Angel Castiel, it was Dean’s knuckles that came off the worse. If he punched him now, his fist would sink into the flesh. Castiel’s cheekbone would crack. There would be blood, pain and regret. Dean twitched his head to clear the unwelcome thought of hitting Castiel. Maybe he did have residual anger about the last three weeks and all the other times Castiel had left him behind. He gave a mental shrug. His normal mental state vacillated between a low grade rage, moments of pie-standard pleasure, and a state of panic when a loved one (Sammy) was in need. Castiel needed him now. Dean raised his eyes and met Castiel’s liquid gaze.

“I’ve got you.” Dean repeated.
Castiel placed his mud streaked hand over Dean’s and squeezed his gratitude.
Although I'm left defeated

Chapter Summary

Castiel needs to shower.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Getting Castiel out of the Impala and into the motel room was easy. He followed a step behind Dean who squared his shoulders against the final flurry of rain and made a bee line for Room 7. Castiel’s ruined shoes squelched and flapped on the concrete. The room was spacious, well kept and decorated in neutral tones. Dean surveyed the exit routes and places needing salt lines. He realized he could no longer sense Castiel at his shoulder. He swung round. Cas was standing on the threshold like a B-movie vampire waiting for his invitation.

“Come on in.” Dean encouraged, trying to keep the spark of annoyance out of his tone. “Take a seat Cas.”

Dean’s gesture towards the dark wood round table and chairs in the far corner went unseen. Castiel passed him and sank onto the edge of the queen bed’s soft mattress.

“Right. Good.” Dean was at a loss. He had intended to deal with Cas’s cuts and scrapes at the table. An audible rumble from Castiel’s stomach focused Dean’s attention.

“Have you eaten yet today?”

Dean berated himself for not thinking that Castiel might be hungry. There was a headshake in response.

“Yesterday?” Dean wasn’t sure he wanted to play this game if every answer was negative.

“The day before?”

A slight nod without any conviction made Dean narrow his eyes. “A meal?”

Castiel patted his pockets for the notepad. It was still somewhere on the backseat of the car. He looked up and gave a Sammy trademark bitchface.

“Ok calm down Colombo, I’ll get your book. I need to bring in the emergency duffel.”

Stalking with loud pounding steps across the drying parking lot, Dean’s nostrils flared. He wasn’t sure what he was angry at; himself for forgetting to pick up the little book, or Cas for needing to use it. He slapped a hand down on Baby’s roof. Why did Castiel have to go through this? Couldn’t they catch a break for just once?

He had raced out of the bunker the previous night without packing a bag, so there was only the reserve duffel that lived behind the passenger seat. Castiel’s notepad was wedged between it and the seat. He flipped it over. A small sticker for $2 had WALLACE OF SHERIDAN type printed above the price. He deduced that Castiel must have journeyed southwards. Where had he landed? What had
he been doing?

Dean passed the notebook into Castiel’s outstretched hand when he returned to the room. He got a small close lipped smile of thanks and then Castiel turned over the page with Thank you on it.

“Yeah man, got it.” Dean hefted the bag onto the table and proceeded to unpack. Castiel watched impassive from the bed.

Salt, holy water, rosary beads to make more, borax, the grey towel, spare silver knife, first aid kit, bottle iodine, bottle peroxide, hex bag, goober dust, a stash of granola bars, the John and John Smith IDs and $200, were followed by a change of clothes for Sam and for Dean. Dean curled his lip in disgust at the blood stain on Sam’s jeans. He wasn’t letting his little brother do the packing again. Sam’s moose sized plain white tee was clean and he laid it over the back of a chair. No way could Castiel put back on the clothes he was currently wearing after he showered. Dean replaced the unnecessary items and then salted the door and windows.

“Cas?”

The former angel looked up.

“Why don’t you help yourself to a few granola bars and make a coffee?” Dean waved vaguely at the hotel supplied tea/coffee maker. “Have a shower and put on Sam’s old tee as bed wear and have a rest?”

Castiel pointed at Dean, then the door and raised his brow in query.

“Me? I’m going shopping.” Dean gave him the full pearly whites, a pat on the shoulder and the TV remote.

As he closed the door behind him, a little voice told Dean that he should stay and keep Cas company. Dean ignored the ridiculous thought that Castiel needed Dean with him more than new shoes and fresh bagels.

There was a goodwill store back the way Dean had come. The sign on the door said it opened at 9am but there was a middle aged stout lady with jet black curls setting up their cashier point. Dean tapped on the glass and pressed his FBI badge against the pane. She hurried to open the door, fumbling with the keys.

“How can I help you officer?” Her Wyoming accent was strong and her voice earnest.

“I have a young male in custody, ma’am, and I need a change of clothes for him. Can you assist me?”

Mindy Perkins, mother of two tear-away teenage boys, quilting circle coordinator and three day a week volunteer, set Dean up with a pair of khaki combats and a plain rust brown v-neck Henley. He snagged a deep-red over shirt and a packet of unopened donated briefs. He left a twenty dollar donation to cover the items. Mindy told him she was glad to assist the law and offered to pray for the young man who had lost his way.

Outside he realized he owned the same shirt and that he hadn’t gotten shoes. There was a discount shoe store next door. He had a few minutes to kill before the shutter went up, so crossed the street to the bakery. He was tempted by the freshly baked pies and picked up two slices of apple cinnamon for lunch. Cream cheese bagels with crisp bacon would be breakfast. He didn’t know what Cas would like. He got him the same.
His cell rang as he jaywalked back to the shoe store.

“Hello,” he barked, keeping the cell wedged between his hunched shoulder and jaw.

“Dean? I got your message. Is Cas there with you?”

“Took a motel room for a few hours. We’ll head back later. All good there Sam?”

“Yeah yeah, good.” Sam answered impatiently, “Why’d you need a motel room? What kind of motel? One that does hourly rentals?”

Dean could hear the conclusions being jumped to, “We are in Casper not Vegas.” He hoped Sam could hear his eye roll.

He put down his bakery bag to feel the quality of some lace up hiking boots. He thought Cas was one size smaller than his own feet.

“Can I speak with him?”

“Huh?” Dean was wondering if Cas was two sizes smaller.

“With Cas-Tee-El, Dean, hello?”

“Sorry, just buying some boots.” Dean bought the larger size and picked up a couple of pairs of thick socks from a display stand. Cas could double up on the socks if the boots were too big.

“Dean.” Sam’s exasperated tone got his brother’s attention.

“One minute.” He paid for the boots with his latest credit card and waited until he was outside to resume the conversation, “Word is…. Cas is not doing so good. I need to see to him before we drive back.”

“What does that mean? What are you not telling me?”

Dean licked his lips, “Cas is mute, OK? And human alright? And filthy and covered in small wounds, and I don’t think he has had a meal in the last three weeks and I’m going to take care of him before we come home.”

There was silence, except for the sound of Sam’s nasal huff.

Dean waited for an explosive reaction but Sam didn’t combust instead he got a “Take care of yourself too Dean and tell him I’m happy he is back.”

“OK.” Dean blinked. Maybe Sam didn’t pick up on the mute bit or the human part.

“Can you pick up some milk, spinach, bread rolls and wiener on the way back? Crowley never tried them.”

“Huh?” Sam was cooking for Crowley now?

“We good? Good.” The line went dead.

Dean made a mental note to let Castiel know that Crowley was their prisoner/ Sam’s guest.

With the bagels and couple of slices of boxed pie in one hand and the clothes bag braced between his hip and the wall, Dean knocked on the motel room door, before he poked his head in. Castiel hadn’t
moved. Dean’s jaw dropped. He was still sitting bedraggled at the end of the bed. The TV remote held loosely in his hand.

“Cas?” Dean spoke with a querying but not interrogating tone.

His head looked up. Dean almost heard the ‘Hello Dean’ or the ‘Yes Dean?’ but there was silence. The TV was off.

“How you….”? Dean took a deep breath. He placed the pie and bagels next to the untouched energy bars. “Would you like me to help you?”

Dean came over and put a hand on the former angel’s forearm. Castiel shrugged it off, not violently but as if it pained him. Dean could almost hear the unuttered falsehoods of ‘I am fine Dean’ or ‘You can’t save everyone Dean’.

“Let me help you Cas.” Dean pleaded with his eyes for Castiel to accept this small thing that he could offer a former Angel of the Lord, who had been cast out of what his nightmare future self called a ‘much better club’.

Castiel permitted Dean to help him to his feet. His movements were slow and jerking, reminiscent of someone who had stood up after a trip and fall. He painfully pulled his right arm out of the trench coat. Dean saw the ripped hole in the coat elbow was matched by ones in the suit jacket and white shirt. Castiel’s arm was black and blue with old blood pooled under the skin. His other arm came out easier, sleeve still ruched up, and the only injury the latest one from Dean’s silver knife. Castiel handed Dean the ragged coat. He resisted the forceful urge to bring it to his face and inhale Castiel. It was too close to all those days when all he had was a trench coat to transfer from the trunk of one stolen vehicle to the next. He reverently folded the cloth and placed it on the twin bed.

By the time he turned round Castiel had his jacket, tie and shirt off. His back was a mess. No wonder he had winced when moving at times. It was all shades of bruising from black to green and yellow.

“Geez Cas. What the fuck happened to you?” Dean reached out a hand and lightly, tenderly, stroked the damaged skin with his finger tips. It must have been tortuous when Dean clapped his back behind the carwash.

Castiel turned to face him. His eyes were full. Dean couldn’t cope with seeing his strong ally so broken and he pulled him in close, holding him by the upper arms. Castiel was rigid for the first few moments but Dean didn’t let go. Castiel’s posture relaxed.

Dean moved his right arm to cradle the back of Castiel’s head. He didn’t care about the greasy matted hair under his hand. Castiel ducked his face into Dean’s shoulder. “Shush,” Dean whispered to the man who wasn’t saying anything. For the length of five breaths they stayed there. Cas made a tiny movement and Dean released him.

“You good for the shower? Ya know.”

He got another bitchface in response. Castiel must have been taking notes from Sam all these years.

“Yeah, yeah, I guess you had to shower before the apocalypse when we holed up at Bobby’s,” Dean wondered what the old man would say about them now. Idjits most likely, “And then when you were Emmanuel, I suppose you needed to shower and shave.”

Castiel had his shoes, socks and pants off while Dean rambled. Scraped knees and another bruise on his hip. He put his fingers in the waistband of the boring grey briefs.
“Whoa, take it to the bathroom.” Dean laughed and steered Castiel to the tiled room, “towels there on the rail. Take your time. I’ll have the first aid kit ready for you.”

Castiel raised his hand and ran a finger down Dean’s cheek. He traced the line of his jaw and then closed the door, putting wood panels between him and a totally frozen hunter.

Finally Dean swallowed. He raised his own hand and pressed the skin along the route Castiel’s finger had taken. What was that? Why did it feel so good?

Dean heard the shower power up. He retreated to the middle of the room. There was no saving the suit, shoes or shirt and he stuffed them in the garbage. Then he took a seat at the table. He lined up the iodine, peroxide, gauze and medical tape. He found two oxycotin in the box of surgical thread. Then he made coffee, put the bagels out on two napkins and waited for Castiel to emerge.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and for the great comments and the kudos.

:)
I'll bathe your skin

Chapter Summary

Dean cleans Castiel's wounds and finds out a little about what happened to him.

Dean tapped his fingers in a random rhythm on his denim clad knee.

*You need to step up to the plate here Winchester* he advised himself.

It was all fine and dandy when Dean was in Lebanon sitting on his memory foam, to have eruptions of anger, followed by confusion with a heady mix of worry about Castiel and arousal due to Castiel. Here and now these uncontrolled reactions weren’t going to help his ex-angel any.

Dean was about to re-make the coffees when the bathroom door opened. Castiel emerged wet and bruised with the smaller hotel towel wrapped low around his hips. Dean thought about doing the respectful thing and averting his eyes but he drank in the pale skin of Castiel’s legs, the hand that bunched the top of the towel, a hint of a dark happy trail above the towel line, the dip at Castiel’s collar bones and his eyelashes and brows beaded with water, as if he had patted his newly shaved face and neck but forgot to dry his forehead. Castiel looked at him seeking approval.

Dean cleared his throat, “You look good.”

There was no reaction.

Dean cleared his throat again, “Better than good. Now move your pretty butt and get over here.”

Castiel’s eyes widened. Dean twisted one side of his lips. Did he just call Castiel’s butt pretty? He did have a cute ass, but Dean was meant to be controlling his impulsive reactions.

Castiel took the other straight backed wooden chair. He sipped at the cooling coffee. Dean moved the bagel closer. Castiel picked it up, examined and smelled it.

“Awh Cas, bacon, it’s good, swear. Look.” Dean took a monster bite out of his one and let his face muscles slacken in pleasure and his eyelids half close as the juicy creamy filling with the well made bagel sent him to food nirvana. He chewed and savored the breakfast, congratulating himself on his restraint at not indulging before Castiel was ready. When he came back to his senses Dean saw Castiel had the bagel wrapped in the napkin and raised with both hands. It was as if he had paused in the action of bringing it to his mouth to watch Dean eat. Castiel licked his lips and bit daintily at the edge, tugging a piece of bread and a little cheese with his teeth.

“No man, you gotta eat it, not play with it. Take a bigger bite.” Dean encouraged, “And some bacon.”

Castiel put it down on the table, broke off a wedge with filling and stuffed it in his mouth. He followed Dean’s example and chewed with his eyes closed.

“Good yeah?” Dean checked.

Castiel nodded and took a long drink of coffee before breaking off a smaller piece of bagel. Dean
inhaled the rest of his and to avoid the temptation of stealing the shard of meat that had fallen on the table without Castiel noticing, he ducked to the bathroom. There was a very convenient small plastic boat shaped bowl container holding the hotel facecloths. Dean rinsed it out and then filled it with tepid water for his iodine solution.

Back at the table Castiel had cleared away the bakery wrappings and moved the coffee cups back to their place on top of the fitted drawer unit.

Dean decided to work on the most obvious first. He was surprised by the vice-like grip on his shoulder as he bent from the waist to pour peroxide over the wounded knees. When he pushed upwards against the pressure, Castiel released him.

“Peroxide is a bitch.” Dean answered the offended glare, “but I don’t want you going septic.”

There were a few scrapes on Castiel’s hands that got the same treatment. A scattering of long partially healed shallow wounds reminded Dean of racing through Purgatory’s thorn bushes. The scabbed over cuts were damp from the shower and clean to the naked eye, but the resulting fizz and Castiel’s winces told Dean he had made the right decision to clean them out.

“Turn round.” Dean ordered.

Castiel gave him a confused head lean.

“Flip round on the chair so your front is against the chair support. You might rest your elbows on it so I can look at your sides.”

Castiel made an O with his lips and complied.

Peroxide was too harsh for the mess that was Castiel’s back. Dean tugged his diluted iodine bowl closer and dipped in a cotton pad. Careful not to press too much, Dean began at the left shoulder. The bruising was light green as if there were two layers; one here almost healed, and the other blackened skin a sign of more recent violence. He swept the antiseptic leaving the excess to travel down the muscles, falling in drops to stain the edge of the towel. Random beads of blood pearled on Castiel’s skin, revealing tiny lesions hidden in the mass of wounded flesh. Dean swallowed his sympathetic pain and dipped a new pad into the tepid solution. Castiel panted as Dean tenderly bathed the long curve of Castiel’s spine. Dean clued in to the shortened breaths. Castiel’s body was reacting to his touch in an aroused way. He bit his lip uncertain if he should continue. Maybe he could splash the remaining liquid along Castiel’s shoulders and allow it to flow down his back? Then he could move as far away as remaining in the motel room would allow, and let the fluttering sensation in his own lower body die away.

Castiel’s head tipped down to rest on his folded arms and he expelled a long sigh. Dean could see the tension leaving his shoulders. He ignored that doubting voice in his head. He was doing the right thing here. If Cas could cope with his, presumably new, sensations of arousal then Dean could man up and treat his injuries properly.

Dean marveled that the ex-angel did not have any broken bones, but then Dean worried that maybe he had missed fractures. He tossed the pad into the plastic bowl and shunted his chair closer. He brought his fingers to Castiel’s sides, exploring by touch between the ribs and along the intercostal muscles.

There was an audible hiss of more than air. A distinct ‘Agh’ came from Castiel. Dean twitched a smile behind his back. The muteness was not physical. Metatron had not vaporized his vocal cords. Pressure applied under Castiel’s right arm had caused the gasp of pain. Dean guessed it was a
fractured rib. When he pulled back there was a sheen of perspiration on Castiel’s skin. He hoped he had not pushed against his pain threshold. He admired Castiel’s stoicism and was humbled by the trust placed in him not to unnecessarily inflict pain.

Taking up the last cotton pad from the first aid kit, Dean moved along the right side of the bruising. He was more circumspect, making feather light wipes. Castiel was digging his clean torn nails into his biceps.

“Dammit Cas, am I hurting you?” Dean noticed the white pressure circles under Castiel’s nails, “I mean I know the peroxide stings but is this hurting?”

Castiel twisted round to face him. His cheeks were flushed but his smile told Dean that he was not experiencing any additional suffering.

“We are done.” Dean threw the cotton pad across to the garbage bin and scored a direct hit.

Castiel looked concerned and Dean realized he had used those words before with another more cruel meaning.

“No, I…. I didn’t mean we are done. I’m not leaving you. I meant I’d finished with the antiseptic.” Dean rubbed the back of his neck, “Having a one-way conversation is hard, dude. Makes me appreciate Dad more, y’know.”

Castiel narrowed his eyes. He stood slowly and retook the seat facing Dean. He offered Dean both his hands. Dean nodded and picked up a small metal scissors. He found he enjoyed holding Castiel’s hands as he trimmed his nails down. It was pleasurable. Maybe because it reminded him of all the times he cut little Sammy’s nails, or maybe because this part of taking care of Castiel didn’t inflict any pain. He kept up a one-sided chat while he worked.

“I think it might help if I don’t go silent too. I mean not that I’m an expert or anything. Hell, Sammy would probably have researched the crap out of this already. But you know my Dad never gave up talking with me. He held these long rambling conversations, probably unsuitable for a four, five, six year old and revealing The Life to me, but he never stopped Cas. He always believed I’d speak again.”

There was Castiel’s newly manicured left hand raised to Dean’s right cheek. His stubble tingled under the tender movement, down to the cleft in his chin. He reached up and wrapped his hand around Castiel’s wrist stopping the arm movement but still permitting Castiel’s fingertips to trace a line under his lower lip.

“What are you doing?” Dean panted, “Do you know what you are doing?”

Castiel withdrew his hand. Dean released his wrist. Castiel brought his hands up to examine his nails. The moment passed.

Dean made a quick field dressing to cover the silver knife wound. While he taped it up he thought about what he had said about John and the way it might have sounded. “Ahem, Cas? You know, I wasn’t saying that you won’t talk again for years. We don’t know how long. Maybe you just need a little time?”

Dean’s inner voice kicked up again reminding him that it had been three weeks already.

There was another wounded area that needed more attention than Dean was expert to give. “Your elbow, Cas.” Dean worried at his lower lip, “It looks crap. Maybe we should get an X-ray? Get you a sling?”
Castiel gave a very certain head shake.

“What happened to you, man? Did you sleep in the woods or something? Where were you Cas?” Dean pleaded for answers but didn’t expect any.

He was surprised when Castiel walked over to the guest information leaflets on the same unit as the tea/coffee maker. He picked up ‘Wyoming: Cowboy State Visitor Attractions’. He found a mini-map. Standing beside Dean he pointed to a dark green spot west of Sheridan.

“Bighorn Forest, huh?” Dean wracked his brain for his Wyoming geography, “You landed there?” Castiel smiled.

“But Cas, that was three weeks ago. What happened?”

Castiel drew a circle with his finger that Dean could not interpret. Hit by sudden inspiration he dashed out to the Impala, leaving a stunned Castiel in his wake.

Underneath the weapons store in the trunk Dean located their old A3 size books of maps. Grinning in triumph, he returned with the North-West edition. Castiel was doing the concerned head tilt again. Dean beckoned him to the twin bed and opened the double page map of Wyoming and the south fringes of Montana.

“We don’t use these anymore. Sam used to be navigator. We lost the originals with Sammy’s backseat annotations when the Impala got totaled. Don’t need them so much now with internet phones and Sam’s fiendish ability to locate Wi-Fi.”

Castiel sat next to him. They were right next to each other. Castiel’s bare leg pressed against Dean’s denim. The warning about personal space was on the tip of Dean’s tongue but he didn’t utter a word. Instead he pointed at the detailed map of Bighorn National Forest.

“Where’d you land Cas?”

Castiel’s brow furled as he peered at the landmarks. They were so close Dean could have bent his head an inch and the static electricity between them would have lifted individual hairs off their heads to make contact with a spark.

Eventually Castiel pointed at Cloud Peak and the surrounding lakes.

“And then?”

Castiel moved his finger in a winding path, north towards Montana, before meandering in a south-eastern direction.

“Were you lost?” Dean gaped.

Castiel looked embarrassed, but a curt nod confirmed it. Dean had not considered that a Cas without his angel juice meant no celestial GPS.

“But what did that to your back and elbow? They are fresher than three weeks.”

Hovering his hand over the I-90 between Sheridan and Gillette, Castiel made a fist and burst his fingers open in a splayed position.

“OK.” Dean figured whatever did this to Castiel, it happened after he had broken out of the trees.
Castiel made stabbing pokes at the map then raced his finger down highway 59 to Thunder Basin National Grassland. He paused there again. He trailed down to Douglas but instead of moving toward Cheyenne which was a step towards Kansas, Castiel frowned at Douglas and hovered his finger back to Casper.

Dean thought the movements along I-90 and Highway 59 must have been rides Castiel picked up. He figured one of the kind souls had given Cas the notepad and pencil.

“Something bad went down north of Gillette. Some other dick move happened in Douglas?” He asked.

Cas looked frustrated and tried to speak but only a choking gasp came out. He dropped his head. Dean was not having this.

“I’m sorry Cas. I didn’t mean to push you.” He put a hand on the other man’s shoulder, “Come ‘ere.”

He pulled Castiel into a hug. “You’re beat. You wanna lose yourself in Sam’s giant tee, and have a lie down? Imma going to take my own shower.”

Castiel grabbed his arm as he moved to stand and mouthed ‘Thank you’.

“Hey, now, no need for repeated thank yous. Family remember.”

There was something melancholy in Castiel’s gaze when Dean said he was family. Dean surmised that Castiel must be feeling his exile from his divine brethren, douchebags the lot of them, but they still had been Cas’s siblings.
Then I'll float to you

Chapter Summary

Castiel sleeps and Dean muddles on.

Chapter Notes

A couple of little warnings due to my Teen and Up rating for this fic.

This chapter has dreaming, masturbation (I figure most teens are familiar {wink}), normal bodily functions, and Dean Winchester's potty mouth.

Quote from The Rapture checked on Supernatural Wiki.

The hot water rinsed away any fatigue Dean felt. He turned the dial up a notch and let the room fill with steam. He turned so that the spray rinsed that last of the shampoo from his hair and the water flowed down his back. His hand travelled south and he cupped and rolled with his fingers. He closed his eyes and being a normal healthy male jerked off at a rapid pace. His head hit the tiles as his breath shortened. Panting, the images in his mind coalesced; blue eyes, dark hair, Dean’s hand tugging that person along by their blue backwards tie.

“Casssss,” Dean hissed and came in his fist.

He leaned his shoulders against the shower wall while he took a moment for recovery. His heart rate slowed and he wondered if Castiel had beaten off in this shower too. He had shaved the night before and Castiel had used their only disposable razor, so Dean was rocking the stubble thing. He slipped into the clean spare boxers and his old soft used-to-be-black-many-years-ago Metallica Tee. A mist of steam shrouded him as he came back into the bedroom.

Castiel was asleep. He was curled in a gentle fetal position on top of the comforter, wearing only Sam’s white tee and Dean’s other pairs of clean boxers and black socks. He was freaking adorable. At moments like this Dean could imagine a different world where Dean was not a hunter, Castiel was not an angel, and they’d met in different circumstances.

Something changed. Castiel’s legs straightened, stiff with pointed toes. His fists grasped the cream comforter. He seemed suddenly younger and shrunken in the giant tee. Dean took a step closer, driven to protect.

Castiel made a moaning high pitched cry from the back of his throat and raised the arm with the bruised elbow as if fending off a blow.

Dean raced to the gap between the beds. He leaned over the sleeping man, planting his fists into the mattress. He didn’t want to shock him, so spoke softly but firmly, “Cas, Cas, please wake, you are having a nightmare.”
Castiel turned, muscles eased, but didn’t fully wake. Instead his posture and breathing indicated he was in a stage of dreamless rest. That injured arm unbent and Castiel’s fingers wrapped around Dean’s right wrist. Dean let the tension drain from his own body. He lifted his hand gently to pull out of Castiel’s hold but the fingers tightened.

Huffing at his situation, Dean went with it. He clambered awkwardly onto the bed and lay down beside Cas, who appeared to reach another level of peace with Dean’s presence beside him. Dean figured he could take a nap. He’d driven all night. It was mid-morning now, plenty of time for forty winks.

Reaching that half-sleep still aware stage of drooping eyes and heavy gravity, Dean went to flip onto his preferred sleeping position on his stomach. He turned to the right and met Castiel’s back. Too mentally lethargic and physically too close to falling asleep, to deal with the complicated maneuvering required to separate their bodies, he simply curved an arm over Castiel’s hip and nodded off.

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

The malicious glint of long curved filleting knives and the permanent reek of sulphur

Dean’s in-dreams consciousness told him he was caught in one of his hell nightmares. He repeated the mantra; not in hell, not in hell, not in hell.

Darkness

*Claire Novak is crouched on the ground in front of him. Her eyes are no longer those of an innocent. The naivety of childhood has passed and her pupils bore holes into Dean’s armor. He should have done better here, protected her. She was the innocent, the person to be saved.*

His mind tells him this is a dream too. He can’t see Castiel but he can hear him, “Dean. I serve heaven, I don’t serve man, and I certainly don’t serve you.”

A great storm shakes the ground and that reverie dies away.

“I am an Angel of the Lord.” *Great black wings fill the barn.*

Dean mentally kicked his dream centre. Were the game controls fried? Why was he being reminded of Castiel’s remarkable wings? Of what he had lost.

*Curling in a sharp edged cave barely large enough for one creature. Fingers curled into the hem of the trench coat under his nose. Benny is on watch so Dean can let his guard drop from default code red to orange alert. A graveled voice with unwelcome words, “Dean about the portal….” “Shuddup Cas.” “What makes you think you can decide…” “Shut the fuck up and let me have some motherfucking rest here. Turn the fuck round and face me if you want. Do your frigging creepy sleep-watching if you like. But shut your piehole about the portal. Decision made. We are getting out of here.” It’s the longest speech that any of them have given in days. Dean squeezes his lids tight and pretends not to notice when Castiel’s elbow pokes him and Castiel’s knee winds him, taking Dean up on his offer to turn round in the confined space. He keeps his peepers closed while Castiel tucks his arms in, folding them in thoughtful finger entwined prayer so that his pinky knuckle digs into the skin over Dean’s heart. He doesn’t look when Castiel speaks again, “Rest, Dean, I am watching over you.” He doesn’t twitch when he hallucinates Castiel’s lips brushing against his forehead.*
He thinks he might wake up now. He hadn’t thought about the kiss, that may or may not have happened, since their arms had pulled apart at the portal.

_It is night. He is leaning against the Impala’s front, parked at a lookout point over a wooded canyon. The color of the trees below is more green than black. The full moon is powerful without modern light pollution. He looks at his hands. There are new nicks and scars. His hands are older._

Wow, this is a dream, not a memory. The part of Dean that has awareness settles to enjoy it, like a good movie.

_He has a beer with one final mouthful swilling in the bottom of the bottle. He hears the shotgun door close and turns his head seeking Sam. It is Castiel who comes to join him. He is older too, not much, but fine grey hairs dust his temples. His hair is a little longer, more bedhead than ever. He is in casual clothes: jeans and a zipped up black waterproof jacket with a turned up collar. He walks differently; less garrison, more guy with a beer. He has two cold bottles and offers Dean one._

_“Thanks Cas,” Dean smiles._

_Castiel leans in and pecks the corner of Dean’s lips, “You’re most welcome, darlin’.”_

Dean’s eyes shot open and he swallowed his sleep soured spit. He had dreamed of a world where Castiel called Dean his darlin’ and Dean had liked it. He moved to take care of the resulting boner. A warm puff of air at the nape of his neck halted his motion. Castiel was behind him. His body heat coiled through Dean’s veins. He chewed down on his lip and decided to take his problem to the bathroom for private resolution. He shuffled a little towards the edge. Castiel gripped his thigh. His naked thigh with a warm firm hand. Dean’s breath hitched. A sound broke from Castiel’s throat. It sounded like a garbled but recognizable, “Dean.” The ex-angel plastered his body against Dean’s back. How did they get flipped so that he was now the little spoon?

Trapped, Dean thought of pus and vomit. He pictured Garth eating with his mouth open. He conjured the stink of burning wendigos, and the smell of wet dog. Finally his problem eased. Dean leaned back. He sagged in relief only to be presented with a new problem of Castiel’s hand length pressing into his lower back. Sleeping with chicks was a lot simpler.

Dean took his mind elsewhere. He planned their return route. He estimated gas stops, rest breaks and where would he meet an open grocery store for Sam’s requests. He needed to make a couple of stops on the way and he wanted to find out why Castiel had turned west from Douglas.

Distraction by planning didn’t really work. The tiny movements of a sleeping Castiel kept him in the present. He knew he would be taking to the bathroom for some private time, as soon as Castiel woke up.
Give me some candy

Chapter Summary

They have pie. Castiel writes a couple of pages to Dean. Dean reacts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Dean woke the next time Castiel was already up. Covering a fake yawn with his hand, Dean wiped away his unattractive drool. He swung his legs off the bed and sat up to attention.

The partially packed duffel and the neatly laid out clothes from the goodwill store over the maps on the other bed, showed Castiel had been busy. The slices of pie sat on napkins copying the way Dean had laid out the bagels earlier. There was a scattering of pencil shavings on the floor and Dean’s shorter knife lay on the table next to Castiel. It must have been employed to pare down the nub of pencil. Castiel was still in the white tee and he was scribbling furiously.

Channeling his best Joey Tribbiani, Dean chanted, “Hey Cas. How you doin’?”

While the Friends reference may passed over his head, the words resulted in a wide toothy smile from Castiel. Dean found his own face responding in kind.

“Yeah, me too. Whatcha writing?”

Castiel put up a finger to let Dean know he needed a minute. Dean took the opportunity to hit the head, shuck on his jeans and boots and crank up the coffee maker. He glanced in the mirror over the unit of drawers. A strained grimace at his fluffy hair led to snort of self-loathing and blind rooting in the newly packed bag. He pulled out the pot of petroleum jelly and slathered it on his palms. Back at the mirror he ran it through his hair, spiking it up. It made good emergency hair gel. He didn’t realize he had an audience until he saw Castiel biting hard on his pencil stub. Dean shrugged, feeling like a tween-boy caught being vain.

“So wassup Cas?” Dean smirked away his embarrassment.

Castiel gave him a knowing close lipped smile. He pushed the pie towards him. That was enough invitation for any pie-loving soul. Dean bit into the sweet spiced apple and pastry. He moaned his appreciation for well made baked goods. Castiel had broken off a corner of his slice and was licking his fingertips. Dean wondered if Cas was going to eat every meal by breaking off pieces. He didn’t know if he was going to able to control his urge to lick the fleck of apple off Castiel’s lips if he kept up the finger sucking.

Coffees ready, Dean added creamer and sugar. He noticed as he took the couple of steps back to the table, that there was a pattern of pink dots on the back of Sam’s tee from Castiel’s re-opened wounds.

“Cas, man? Would you lift up the t-shirt? I want to look at your back.”

Castiel pulled the clothing off completely, balling it up and placing it on the other side of the table. Dean assessed the expanse of flesh with a critical eye. Things were not any worse. In fact, it looked
markedly better than earlier. The blood spotting had resulted from where the cotton pressed against the cleaned small cuts.

“Looking better.” Dean let his satisfaction with the improvement leak into his pronouncement. He retook his seat and passed over the other coffee. They ate in comfortable near-silence. Dean made the occasional click of his tongue in food appreciation. Castiel’s pencil made a few final scratches against the paper.

“You writing a novel? Am I in it?” Dean was curious about all the tightly filled lines of text.

Rolling his eyes, Castiel crossed out one word and substituted another. Then he handed the book to Dean. It weighed heavier than a little notepad should. Castiel immediately busied around, clearing the napkins, rinsing the coffee cups, and disappearing to the bathroom.

Dean tilted his chair onto its back legs and propped his boots on the table. He licked a sweet speck from the angle of his lips and prepared to read.

Dean.
You have asked what occurred.
There are not enough pages or words to explain....
I fell...
Then I fell again and again.
I see many things from my long existence when I close my eyes. Repeatedly Metatron slashes though my vessel’s throat and rips my Grace. Other times I see the first time we met and I cover your soul with my wings.

Dean put down the book. He lifted his hands to his face, covered his nose and mouth and pressed into the corners of his eyes with his pointer fingers. He dragged his fingers down his skin and took a deep breath. “Fuck it, Cas.” This was difficult to read.

You asked what happened. At the first dawn in the forest I walked north believing Kansas lay that way. In folly, I continued at night. Human eyes and pre-sentience failed me and I fell from a precipice. A juniper tree broke my fall but dislocated my shoulder and damaged my ankle in a temporary but painful manner.

Dean looked up to tell Castiel it had been a sprain and that he was safe now, but the bathroom door was still shut.

I spent several days by a stream recovering until hunger drove me on. A trail sign informed me that I was in Wyoming. I turned south. Some hikers shared food with me. They offered company but I moved on. When I emerged to roads and civilization, I was weakened by the necessity for food. My feet pained me and in the sun my vision swam. I was hit by a vehicle. My body rose up the bonnet and the windshield impacted my back and elbow. I rolled off. The vehicle did not stop, rather increased speed. I believed I was dying and regretted most profoundly that I had not found you.

Dean ran a hand over his mouth. “Fuck it Cas. Why didn’t you get the first hikers to phone me? I would have come for you, you idiot.”

A kind lady found me. She took me home to Gillette, fed me and let me rest. She gave me the pencil and this book. She arranged for a neighbor to give me a ride to Douglas. He works for the Forest Service and had to call to Thunder Basin and deliver a package to the district office in Douglas. The roadblock at the city limits spooked me. The next car that responded to my outstretched thumb was skirting the north of the city and heading here to Casper.
There was so much missing from this account. What roadblock at Douglas? Dean had driven along I-25 and there had been no obstructions. Granted it was before 6am. Why hadn’t the ‘kind lady’ taken Cas to the ER? What had happened in Casper that he had felt safest behind a carwash?

It was two tightly written pages of loss, pain and fear. Dean gulped. He couldn’t imagine it. Back from Hell, in control of his own physical body after forty years, Dean had found it jarring, weird, and fucking liberating. He’d been determined and focused on finding Sam, amid his confusion and the piercing audio of Castiel’s real voice, former real voice now. For Cas, though, it must be confusing to vastly understate it. He had a body now. He was rooted in flesh, not able to shift into a celestial wavelength and then slip back into his vessel. His wanderings had been disorientated and downright dangerous. He fell from a cliff, was hit by a car, took rides from strangers who could have been evil sonsabitches.

When Castiel tentatively stepped from the bathroom Dean grabbed him in a fierce hug.

“You coulda been fucking killed, you…” The words were lost when Castiel’s arms slotted around Dean’s waist, “You nearly died on me, twice, three times if you count Meta-dick.”

Dean choked up. His hand rubbed softly on Castiel’s windshield injured bare skin. He needed to keep touching Cas. He needed to know that Cas was there, not dead in a forest or in some serial hitchhiker killer’s basement.

“I don’t know what I’d have done. Every time you leave me I shut down a little more. If you hadn’t have come back this time…” Dean’s voice trailed away.

Castiel withdrew his upper body a few inches. Their hips and legs still met. He narrowed his eyes, like he had when he asked Dean why he didn’t believe he deserved to be saved, like he had before he had showed the hunter what really went down at the Purgatory portal. Then Castiel’s face softened, as if he had found the answer he was seeking in Dean’s eyes. He tilted his head forward. Dean moved on autopilot to meet him, drawn in by the motion. He mirrored Castiel. Their foreheads leaned against each other.

Time froze around them. Castiel inclined his head so that their noses tipped. Dean grinned and wiggled his face.

An Eskimo kiss.

A breathy hushed laugh left Castiel, whose hand came away from Dean’s lower back and snaked up his Metallica tee to press fingers into his cheekbone by his ear. This time Dean didn’t grab his wrist. He didn’t pull away. He didn’t allow that inner voice of doubt airtime. He leaned in a little more and pressed their lips together, then nipped and sucked tiny almost innocent kisses along Castiel’s lower lip. Cas met him with his own caress, a more lingering one that moved to open tastes of pie and coffee, a hint of mint, and the soft warm inside of Castiel’s cheek. Tangling slowly, a trace on the sloppy side, but not lacking in depth of feeling. Castiel’s other hand moved languidly down to cup Dean’s butt cheek. The phrase ‘cheek-to-cheek’ popped into his head. He didn’t think it meant when a guy held your butt and face cheeks in each hand. Then Castiel hummed around his tongue and any random thoughts vanished. He was back in the present tense, holding Castiel, kissing Castiel, being kissed back by Castiel, breathing, tasting, feeling Castiel. There was no wrong here, only right, only as it should be, as Dean wanted to hold on to. He wanted this to last. He wanted this moment to stretch infinite and unending. They were in a bubble. The All Singing All Dancing Crap of The World could take a ticket and get in line. This was real. This was now. Dean was keeping this.

Chapter End Notes
I'm crying.
I'll be there

Chapter Summary

They leave Casper.

Every neuron fired in Dean Winchester’s brain telling him that he should be freaking out. Ever time his father sneered at a prissy boy or told him to man up was bubbling under the surface. He wanted to pinch his arm deep enough to make sure he wasn’t in a dream world. A djinn world. A strange other dimension where he was allowed this bliss. It was real, though. It was happening. They were both allowing this to happen.

Castiel’s eyes were closed when Dean opened his. He could see the individual eyelashes, every one of them perfect. He saw the pores on Castiel’s skin and the fine hairs between his eyes and hairline. Dean changed the position of his head so he could leave tender button kisses on Castiel’s right cheek. There was a graze on his cheekbone, a light one, near faded, inflicted early in Bighorn Forest. Dean kissed it. Castiel’s eyes opened when Dean removed his arms from around his neck and cupped his face. They closed again when Dean laid a butterfly kiss to his right eye and then his left.

Castiel finally pulled away, he looked at Dean as if he was afraid of the hunter’s reaction. Scared that a violent freak out was about to commence.

Dean grabbed his wrist and wouldn’t let him pace away, “No Castiel, You don’t get to do that. You don’t get to withdraw from me now.” Dean reigned back his ire, “Do you regret it? Our kiss?”

Castiel hung his head low and shook it.

“Good.” Dean said simply. He smirked his satisfaction and when Castiel raised his head, lips swollen, eyes wet and hopeful, Dean surged forward again and pressed a hard dominant kiss against his mouth.

“You have the wrong Winchester if you want to talk about ‘us’, but I’m saying this once. I need you Cas, in my life, in my heart, and if you want it, in my bed.”

Dean knew he had said the right thing when Castiel rubbed his arm under the tee-sleeve and turned away more gently moving over to the spare bed. Dean took a moment to get his breath back and to calm his racing heart. Castiel was looking under the bed and lifted the carefully folded trench coat. He caught Dean’s eye with a querying look.

“The other clothes?”

Castiel nodded.

“In the trash, dude. No salvaging them.”

Castiel made a gasp of shock and looked like someone had killed his puppy.

“Shucks, you wanted to keep ‘em. They were ruined Cas. You’re gonna need a fed suit and some white shirts. We’ll replace them,” Dean promised. “The tie is folded in the trench pocket.”
Castiel grinned as he pulled out the blue length of material. It had escaped the worst and only needed some stain remover treatment. It was a tattered mess with the elbow rip flapping from the sleeve. The small incisions in the back let light through. Dean was able to attribute those now to windshield fragments.

“I don’t know if we can return the coat to a fit state, but I’d like to keep it if you don’t.” Dean felt his cheeks heat up and he twisted his lips waiting for Castiel’s decision. The other man hugged it to his chest and nodded. He moved to the open duffel on the floor and pushed it in.

“Do you like the new pre-used clothes? Casper’s goodwill store supplied the best.” Dean joked but he was nervous that Castiel wouldn’t be comfortable in such casual items. He was answered by Castiel slipping into the khakis and pulling the Henley over his head. That did sinful things to Castiel’s hair and Dean had to restrain from going over there and smoothing or maybe fixing his hair for him.

The way Castiel smoothed down the rust brown cotton and then twisted his hips to seat the combats more comfortably, told Dean he had chosen well enough. Castiel turned the boots upside-down and squinted at the size mark. He shook his head at Dean.

“Too small, too big?”

Castiel made a gesture with his hands like a fisherman exaggerating his catch.

“Ah ha!” Dean was happy to produce the thick hiker’s socks. “Put both pairs on. We will get you fitted out with new boots in Kansas.”

Castiel did not remove Dean’s spare socks but made three layers then put on and laced up the boots. He stood up.

Dean motioned with his finger in the air for Cas to turn round.

It was an awkward fashion model move but Holy Moly Cas’s ass looked bitable in the pants. Dean felt a surge of possessiveness. “Huh, you wanna put on the long over shirt?”

He looked mighty fine. Dean nodded slowly in appreciation and importantly it made that butt for his eyes only.

“You ready to head?” He asked. It was almost five o’clock.

Castiel looked worried and pointed at the open map book, one of their last things not packed away. Dean came over and saw Castiel was pointing at Douglas.

“Yeah, right. The roadblock. Well we are taking a detour. We have business in Loveland, Colorado. But I want to know about that, and if we should expect similar on our route south.” Dean dug in his pocket for the keys, “You load Baby up and I’ll get Sam to geek out online.”

Castiel followed Dean’s instruction while he made the call. It took six rings for his brother to answer.

“Sam. What kept you? Washing your hair, princess?”

“Someone sounds happy.” Sam coughed and cleared his throat.

“How is the cough?”

“I just coughed, genius.” Sam jibed.
“Who got your panties in a tangle?” Dean rolled his eyes at the empty motel room.

“No-one. How is Castiel?”

“Complicated.” Dean wasn’t deliberately keeping information from his brother. He just didn’t think this call was the time to go into everything that was wrong with Castiel, and certainly not everything that was right about Castiel and Dean.

“Uh huh? So you just checking in? You on your way back?”

“No.” Dean got down to business. “There was a roadblock at Douglas, Wyoming, when Cas came through there. Can you check it out?”

“You coming back that way? Want to know if you’ll hit it?”

“Naw, we are taking the scenic route. I’m going to call in to Slugger.”

“Who? Who the fuck is Slugger?”

Dean let out a puff of air. He had forgotten that Sam had never met Slugger. “Oh, yeah. You were in Stanford. Met him on a hunt. I got banged up. Slugger put me up for a month while my knee healed.”

“He’s a hunter?”

“Naw. He was the prey. But some prey. Ex-Hells Angel.”

“And where was Dad?”

Dean could hear the age old accusation in Sam’s question. He shouldn’t rise to it but it was a valid question. “Dad was in New England chasing his own hunt. I wasn’t dragging him to Colorado because I couldn’t deal with the ghost of a murdered biker.”

He heard the patience evoking sigh and could almost see Sam running a hand through his hair. “So you are calling to see this Slugger and you want me to what again?”

“Check out any roadblocks on the road south from Casper, through Laramie. Research the crap out of one that was in Douglas.”

“Yes’sir.” Sam laughed and hung up, the bitch, without saying goodbye.

Dean made a final sweep of the room. He’d left too much of his stuff in random rooms across the continent not to check.

Castiel had his face turned up to the sun, leaning against the passenger door. Dean checked them out at reception and joined him.

They swung out onto Cy Avenue and headed south. Dean found a classic rock station and turned the volume up a notch. He noticed Castiel tapping his foot to Blue Oyster Cult and curled his lip in pleasure.

They were almost at Laramie before Sam called. No other roadblocks as far as Sam could tell. Douglas was now called Free Douglas.

“Huh Sam?” Dean looked over at Castiel who was listening intensely.
“Get this, Dean. If you look at the cached versions of the city websites on the search engine, the mayor is a stick thin guy called Webster. If you look at the current editions of the sites, the mayor is a brown haired guy in a goon suit called Horseal.”

“Whore-seal?” Dean nearly crashed into the barrier.

Castiel was glaring at him.

“Ho-er-ze-el.” Sam was pronouncing with exaggeration.

“I prefer whore-seal.” Dean insisted.

“Ok, Kindergarten Cop.”

This time Dean was sure he saw the eye roll. Who needed Skype with Sammy on the phone?

“Website welcome page is now full of how the city will protect its citizenry from the denizens of the supernatural. It reads like someone lifted it from Gotham City or Star City.”

Dean laughed. Castiel looked freshly flummoxed. Dean was going to have to put Batman and Green Arrow on the agenda for the ex-angel’s cultural education. He’d start with Star Wars and Indiana Jones.

“Hello Dean? Are you there?” Sam’s voice pulled him away from his plans.

“Yeah, yeah. Great work. We’ll steer clear of Douglas. Thanks, man.”

“When will you get back?”

“Hum, We should make Loveland by nine. Slugger might give us a bed for the night. If not we’ll be with you by dawn. If he does then afternoon.”

“Should I ask why you are calling on this dude?” Sam projected his brotherly concern but wasn’t pushing.

“Nay. Nothing big. We had to skip Douglas. It’s a convenient rest stop and about time I swung by, and I think he might be able to help out.”

“OK, Dean keep your secrets.”

“I’ll fill you in when we get home.”

“I guess that’s all I’m gonna get out of you.”

“That’s about right.”

“Take care Dean. Say hi to Cas.”

“He hears you.”

“Hi Cas. Glad you’re back. See you tomorrow.”

“He is waving.” Dean grinned. “See ya later bro.”

When he stowed the phone back in the glove box, Dean patted Castiel’s leg.

He didn’t have a cell number for Slugger. He really should have warned him they were coming. He
contemplated calling Sam back and asking him to dig out up to date contact details. They were on the road to Loveland already. He figured either Slugger was home or he wasn’t. He would make other arrangements if the old grouch was absent or had taken a turn against him in the intervening decade.
The Evening on My Tail

Chapter Summary

The journey to Loveland. Dean explains how he met Slugger.

The evening sun warmed the air. Dean had the window down and his elbow on the edge. His other hand rested on the top of the steering wheel. They had lost the last Classic Rock station but had come into range of a Colorado based radio frequency offering a decent selection of ‘golden oldies’.

Karen Carpenter was singing that they had only just begun. Dean felt the words settle in his chest. The evening and the future stretched out for them too. He felt Castiel’s hand rest on his knee and smiled across. Cas seemed quite moved by the words. Before things could get too chick flick, Mick Jagger was painting it black. Dean twisted the volume up to max and sung along, ignoring both Castiel’s winces when he sang out about his heart being black, and Castiel’s alarm when he took his hands off the wheel to do pointer finger conductor moves for the humming section.

“Awh, Cas!” Dean whined playfully, “Road is straight and Baby can almost drive herself.”

Cas was in a snit. He curved away from Dean. Dean rolled his eyes. He wasn’t sure if the mood change was due to dangerous driving or singing about having inner darkness. Well hello world, inner-Dean was one snarling mess of regrets, failures, Hell, not measuring up, losing people and a smattering of good memories to hold on to. There was a place carved for Cas too. A Castiel shaped niche in Dean’s psyche where the former angel slotted in. When Cas left, he left behind a gaping maw. The advertisement break ended on the radio. It was back to happy-la-la land and Simon and Garfunkel’s Cecilia. Dean flipped the music off.

“Hey Cas, are you hungry?”

They were approaching a drag of drive-thru restaurants on the outskirts of Fort Collins. Dean wasn’t sure whether Slugger was going to kick them to touch, or bake him a cake, so it was better to fuel up now.

Castiel shrugged but he straightened up in the seat, so Dean guessed he was forgiven for whatever slight he had inflicted unintentionally.

Dean hummed. He wondered if Castiel’s stomach had shrunk from lack of food.


Castiel pointed to the red and white Bigginsons-2-Go billboard.

They parked in the Bigginsons lot, eating double cheeseburgers, onion rings, fries, and a shared portion of nuggets off their laps. Castiel had curly fries. Dean wanted to know what the deal was with that, and he snaked a hand across to steal one.

Castiel smacked him, hard.

“Ouch.” Dean shook out his wrist. He opened his mouth to say that had smarted, but Castiel blinned
him with a full on smirk and popped a small curly fry into Dean’s mouth. It didn’t taste any different to a regular fry. He supposed it was a texture thing. He looked across to thank Castiel, but he was tearing a nugget in two. More pulling food apart with his hands, which led to… Yep… finger licking. Dean squeezed his legs tightly together praying to his thighs to work a miracle of reverse arousal. Luckily the food wrappers hid his hard on.

Dean ate his burger as distraction and took a long pull of his milkshake.

Castiel tapped him on the arm and held up his notepad.

**Who is Slug Gur?**

“Slugger, like a guy who slugs,” Dean made a boxer’s punch in the air.

Castiel nodded then tilted his head expectantly for more information.

Dean balled up his empties and accepted Castiel’s wrappers. He ducked out to toss them in the dumpster. On the few steps back he considered what he could tell Castiel without ruining the reveal. Huffing as he came to his decision, Dean climbed back in and rejoined the highway. He left the radio off, to ensure he had Castiel’s full attention.

“Back in two thousand three. Dad’s in Vermont or New Hampshire or the like. I’m drifting East from a covert spying mission in Palo Alto. He sends me co-ordinates with the message Ghost: Take out target and proceed to rendezvous.”

Castiel raised his eyebrows.

“Yeah I know, once a jarhead, always a…” Dean sighed deeply, “I was only able to follow through on Part A.”

Dean focused intensely on the road for a moment. He could still taste his Dad’s displeasure and downright disappointment at how things had gone down. He shook it off and got back to the story.

“It’s going down now. It would be almost dark by the time they got to Loveland.

“So he says to me, ‘You need a Harley, son, not a Chevy. The brown leather jacket won’t cut it and unless you’re a fag, don’t take another drink from Harold.’ I was speechless. Harold looked pissed but there was no fight. He grabbed the sinewy Billy Idol wannabe who had been nursing his drink next to us and they moved to a corner. Slugger introduced himself and demanded my reasons for coming into their clubhouse. I’d planned a journalist cover story but I knew I’d be out the door faster than jackshit. Throwing caution to the wind, I told him I’d heard they had a ghost problem and I was there to offer help. The bikers shouted derogatory comments about the old lady in Poltergeist…. It’s
a movie Cas… Slugger didn’t pull a knife on me. He’d lost three chapter members in unexplainable accidents and he was ready to hear me out.”

Dean saw the welcome sign for America’s Sweetheart City and raced through the end of the tale. Castiel didn’t need the specifics of the hunt and the burning of the separately buried head.

“The fugly was the ghost of a murdered biker. Most of him was buried in his grave but on the way back from the second salt and burn in the hills, Harold’s bike jack-knifed. My knee and the highway connected. My knee cap came out the worse. The chapter took care of me. They had a doctor in their pocket and some serious painkilling dope. I was a month in Loveland before I could drive the Impala.”

Castiel was listening, absolutely still and focused on Dean.

“I stayed with Slugger’s Momma. I put up ten pounds in that house. She was a feeder.” Dean’s voice was thick with affection for the wiry grey haired mother. Hunched by life, in her seventies but cooking up a storm for all callers. “That’s where we are headed. The chapter disbanded while I was recovering. Slugger said he knew they were at the end. There had been the deaths. There was discontent. Slugger was dealing pot, but he wasn’t up for anything darker. Some of the older members who had voted Harold as a member didn’t like that his old ladies were not ladies. There was dissent and arguments. I swung back this way the following spring on my way to California. Slugger’s Momma had passed during the winter. He had set up his business in the old den, where I had camped out on a futon. As far as I know, I mean I hope that, Slugger is still operating out of… Here.”

They had pulled into the carport of a small ranch style family home, with vinyl blue siding. There was a fenced yard and hanging from a stake at the sidewalk was a wooden sign for ‘Tattooles.’

“You are getting inked, Cas.” Dean clicked his tongue and gave a full wattage smile in the darkened car.

Castiel undid his seat belt and almost climbed on top of Dean to tug down the neck of his tee and nuzzle into his anti-possession tattoo. There was something feline or animalistic about Castiel like this. Dean pressed his fingers into the back of Castiel’s skull, holding his head there. The back collar of the band-tee dug into Dean’s neck but he didn’t care. It occurred to Dean that he should stop Cas, or he was going to have a hickey in a place that he was going to have to put on display very soon. He maneuvered Cas's upper body so that his face tilted up for Dean to bend his neck and join their lips. This time Castiel’s mouth was hot with added salt from oily fries and sweet vanilla from the shake. Dean could have eaten him up. He made a good attempt.

Castiel’s back cracked when he moved his legs over to span Dean’s lap. It was awkward in the small space, and the steering wheel must have been pressing on his injuries. His head was grazing the roof. Dean looked up at him, searching for signs of pain on his face. There was only Castiel's blue eyes; deep and expressive. Dean pulled him in tight, trying to take care of him, not to let him hurt his back, keeping them flush against each other.

The porch light came on.

Dean broke out of the kiss like a schoolboy caught behind the bleachers.

“Cas… Cas… we gotta raincheck this.”

Castiel tipped his head down to steal a bonus caress and clambered back to the shotgun side.
“You good to go?”

Castiel put his hand on the door release.

Dean did the same on his side, “Let’s meet Slugger.”
The porch light illuminated the cracked concrete path from the carport to Slugger’s front door. Dean knew Castiel was a hair’s breadth behind him. He could see his red shirt in the peripheral vision of his right eye.

With his foot on the bottom step of the stoop Dean froze. The door burst back on its hinges and there was a manifestation of angry redneck orc. Slugger was in a gravy stained white wife beater and shorts, with his black leather vest hanging open around his substantial beer gut. He was bare footed and bare headed. Sometime in the last decade the receding hairline must have got on his wick and he’d done the full head shave. His beard was a mottled mess of brown and grey tapering down to an eight inch braid that ended with a cherry red bead.

He also had a gun pointed in Dean’s face. The inky blackness of the barrel was causing Dean’s eyes to cross.

“Parlor’s closed.” Authoritative menace was still in Slugger’s projection range.

Dean cleared his throat to say something to jog the old coot’s memory, when a whole other world of stupid happened.

Castiel jumped in between the loaded gun and Dean.

Slugger clicked off the safety.

Time slowed down like ‘life flashing before your eyes’ pace.

Dean’s only thought was that he wasn’t letting Castiel sacrifice himself. He didn’t think Slugger would shoot, but accidents happened. No way in hell would Dean let Castiel take a bullet for him.

He grabbed him by the arms and, with as much force as he could muster, flung him to the left. Castiel stumbled but didn’t go down. He flinched and cupped his injured elbow. Dean winced at the pain he had just caused.

“That was a shit move.” Dean raged. “You coulda fucking been killed!”

Castiel glared back.

“Dean?” Slugger’s pitch rose at the end of Dean’s name. He lowered the gun.

Dean looked up and saw the twinkle in Slugger’s chestnut eyes.

“Slugger.” Dean responded with his back straight. He wasn’t relaxing until the biker had stowed his piece.

“Well if it isn’t my friend the twice dead serial killer.” Slugger gave a dry chuckle but the gun stayed
loose in his hand.

Dean smirked, “Don’t believe the hype.”

“I didn’t.” Slugger grunted. Finally the gun was pointed at the ground, “Come here you young fool.” Dean stepped up and was caught in a serious back slapping man-hug.

“I fucking had a wake for you after that cop station blew up.” Slugger said with accusation.

“Sorry?” Dean tried to pull back.

“And another fucking one after that you and that brother of yours made headline news on your Pulp Fiction road trip.”

“Would it make any difference if I told you that it wasn’t us?” Dean gave a sheepish smile.

“Naw, boy. I don’t give a damn. Who here hasn’t killed a few men?” Slugger looked at Castiel, who was reading the situation better than Dean hoped. The former angel curled his lip and shrugged nonchalantly.

“Tattooles? That is a terrible business name, Slugger.” Dean drew attention back on him.

It was Slugger’s turn for the carefree shrug. “Gets the customers, Dean. Tattoos by O’Toole was too long for the signpost.” The way that rolled off his tongue told Dean it was a well used answer.

"You still in the same family business?” Slugger asked and when Dean nodded he added, "With that enormous brother?"

"Yeah. Sam too." Dean didn't want to be asked how Sam was, when he was still raw about Sam's trial wrecked body. “So? We allowed in, or are we giving the neighborhood a show?” Dean jerked his head towards the house.

“Who’s this?” Slugger pointed to Castiel with the gun but kept it lowered.


“Your Old Lady?” Slugger drawled.

Dean’s mouth went dry. He nodded and repeated, “My old lady? Yeah. He is. You’re not shocked and appalled?”

Slugger threw back his head and laughed with that infectious chortle interspersed with snorts that Dean remembered made his belly wobble and a room of bikers spray beer through their nostrils. Castiel grinned at the spreading joyful sound. Dean wasn’t sure if he was being laughed at, but he chuckled along. When Slugger finally came back to his senses he was gripping his side as if he had a stitch, “Dean, Dean, Dean, You liked riding behind Harold too much for you to be gold standard straight.”

“Maybe I was proving to Mob and Danny that you could be a man and share a bike with Harold.” Dean pointed out.

“You keep telling yourself that if it makes you feel better. Dude I didn’t say you were any less of a
man, or a boy. Harold was only waiting for your ‘light bulb moment’. He’ll be pissed when I tell him you showed up here with your own guy.”

“Is Harold still around?” Dean liked tall biker, who was a mechanic when he wasn’t on the road with the Hell’s Angels, and Harold had fallen hard for the Impala.

“Out West now. With a different chapter and shacked up with a housepainter called Shaggy.” Slugger moved back from the doorway, “Come on in.”

The door opened directly into the house-long main living space. Kitchen was to the rear. A door to the right opened into a narrow corridor off which were the two bedrooms, bath and the den which had been transformed into the tattoo parlor.

Castiel followed Dean in. All of a sudden Dean missed Castiel’s overly loud whispered comments in these situations. He imagined Angel Cas would have informed him in low deep tones that Slugger had in fact not murdered anyone, or had three nipples, or asked if there was a pet cat he could converse with.

“Slugger O’Toole.” The biker’s outstretched hand was taken by Castiel and firmly shaken.

“Quiet one? Huh Dean?” Slugger looked over to Dean for confirmation.

Dean had stepped further into the room and was peering at two photos on the over mantle; one of Slugger with his Momma, and the other of Slugger, Harold, Mob and Dock in full regalia with their Harleys. It must have been taken before Dean knew Slugger, because Dock had been the ghost’s second victim.

Castiel joined him and stood so far into his personal space that they almost touched sleeves.

Slugger reached over a low paper strewn coffee table in front of his faux-leather sofa and switched off the sports channel.

“Cas had an accident. Pedestrian hit and run.” Dean pinched his nose and then sighed into his lowering hand, “He hasn’t spoken since.”

“Shit.” Slugger nodded sagely, “That’s rough. How long you been together?”

“We know each other for years.” Dean replied. It must have been the right answer because Castiel wrapped his fingers around Dean’s wrist and stroked his pulse point.

Slugger huffed, “And here I’d put two and two together and come up with honeymooners. You got that new love vibe.”

“We do?” Dean gaped. Were they that obvious?

“No-one who knew me for more than a week woulda leapt in front of a loaded gun, but Momma always said you were a keeper Dean Winchester.”

Dean flushed. “Your Momma was a good woman.”

“That she was, Dean, that she was. Didn’t approve of my lifestyle but accepted my boys as her own. Turned a blind eye where it mighta caused her pain but was there to bandage my wounds and your knee.” Slugger moved to the kitchen area, “You wanna cold one to toast Momma McGee?”

“Wouldn’t say no.” Dean passed the first Bud to Castiel and took a long welcome swallow from his
own bottle.

Slugger’s cell phone rang with a Sandman ringtone. The biker cocked his head with a smile at
Dean’s matching Metallica tee and answered the call. It was a work call. Slugger rooted his diary out
from under the coffee table mountain of newspapers and bike mags. While Slugger penciled in an
appointment, Castiel made a note in his book. He lifted it up so Dean could see.

*Dean I do not believe Slugger O'Toole is his real name.*

Dean felt a glow inside. There was the not so subtle comment. Human Castiel wasn’t all that
different to Angel Castiel.

Slugger saw the clearly printed letters and punched Castiel in the shoulder with a grin. “Caught me
quick. My name is Barney McGee. My Harley was The Irish Rover and I was drunk as a rule.
Slugger stuck.”

Castiel did his, ‘what Dean?’ face.

“There is a drinking song, Cas. Called The Irish Rover.” Dean started.

“Couldn’t go by Barney. Dumped it while I was still a prospect. This was back in the days before the
purple dinosaur. The Flintstones hadn’t done my moniker any favors, y’know?”

Dean nodded. Castiel copied him, but Dean knew that knowledge of children’s television shows was
not in Cas’s repertoire.

“Let’s get down to business.” Slugger planted his bottle on the worktop. “Nine years and not a peep
out of you. This is no social call. Loveland got a spook? Or you got an Angel problem?”

Castiel laughed. A wheezy breathy sound. Dean rolled his eyes at Slugger, “No beef with any
members. The other sort of angels, hell yeah, but what we need is an emergency tattoo.”

“I’ve had a beer, Dean. Only one, but if you need ink, we’d better do it now before my steady hand
is compromised.”

“Not me, it’s for Cas.” Dean pulled his t-shirt off and let Slugger examine his anti-possession tattoo.

“It’s good craftsmanship. I can tell it is a few years old but evenly faded and well drawn.” Slugger
leaned forward from the waist narrowing his eyes to take in every detail. “You wanna copy?”

“Yeah. An exact copy.”

“Tat like that, for you… you’re talking a hundred greenbacks.”

“I have money.”

Slugger raised an eyebrow. “No plastic. Reece got arrested for pulling the crap you taught him.”

“Sonvabitch. They charge him?”

“Yes,” Slugger laughed, “First offence that he was nabbed for. He had a good lawyer and got
community service on the city gardening team. You shoulda seen him. Seven years ago and they are
still calling him Rosebush Reece if he needs taking down a peg or two.”

“I’ve got cash.” Dean thanked their foresight for keeping $200 in the emergency duffel.
“I have a package that needs dropping off in Denver, if you want to barter?”

“You still dealing?”

“Only on the side. Man’s gotta make a living.”

Dean shook his head. The Winchesters had never lived on the right side of the law but he drew the line at drugs, even if it was only dope. “Sorry, Slugger, we gotta head through Greeley, I’ll pay up.”

“I’ll take a trace of your tat. Where do you want it Castiel?”

“You need clean unbroken skin, right?” Dean checked.

“Yeah, don’t want it to heal wrong.”

“Cas take off your shirts, and show the man.” Dean said gently and tried to give an encouraging smile.

Castiel was slow removing his over shirt. Dean hoped he hadn’t made the elbow worse when he grabbed him. He passed the red shirt to Dean. Then painstakingly removed the Henley. He made an awkward turn round, displaying his back and chest for the tattoo artist.

“Change ‘where do you want it?’ for Where can I put it?” Slugger’s winced at Castiel’s injuries.

“You taken him to a doctor?”

Dean scrubbed the back of his neck. Maybe a doctor was more urgent than the tattoo?

Slugger didn’t wait for the answer, “No medics. Huh. Wanna spliff for his pain?”

“No,” Dean shot out, “No drugs for Cas.” The last thing in the world Dean wanted was happy-high Castiel from Camp Chitaqua.

“You weren’t such a prissy bitch when it was your leg swollen like a balloon.”

Dean spread his hands in consolation, “Castiel doesn’t use.”

Cas had watched this exchange impassive. He patted Dean’s shoulder and gave a slight smile. Dean knew it was alright. Castiel wasn’t offended by Dean jumping in on his behalf.

“This arm is almost unmarked.” Slugger pointed above the field dressing.

“Not the arms.” Dean knew a demon with a hot poker could brand through an exposed mark too easily.

Castiel lifted his right hand and rubbed the skin between his left collar bone and armpit.

“Yeah. That’s enough room.” Slugger said with approval.

“There okay with you Cas?” Dean checked.

Castiel licked his lips and gave a quick single nod.

“I’ll get set up then boys.” Slugger headed for the parlor. He stopped on the way and put a CD on his sound system, “I’ll give a holler in a few minutes. You might want to educate your man on real song lyrics.”
The strains of The Dubliners singing Irish Rover brought Dean back a decade. He’d forgotten the words but the comical lines came back to him. He sang along for Slugger O’Toole who was drunk as a rule and even drained his drink as was the chapter’s tradition when ‘the ship struck a rock’. To his delight he realized Castiel was laughing too. He had his head turned to hear every word sung and he clapped his knee in mirth. Their eyes met at the end of the track. There was so much history between them, so much crap surrounding them, but if they could snatch moments like this, the struggle was worth it.
Dean ground his teeth together. He took three paces forward, swiveled and took three paces back. Castiel was being a champ but Dean knew the needles on the tattoo machine were sure to be inflicting continuous pain.

Slugger had popped his head back in after the song ended and asked Dean to swap out Castiel’s barely drunk beer for a bottle of chilled water and two ibuprofen. He muttered something about not wanting a bleeder. Two minutes later he was calling Dean in to trace his tattoo and pointing Castiel to the bathroom before they began.

The studio had been remodeled since Dean was there last. The walls were stark white with black framed drawings of tattoo designs, photographs of arm sleeves and a few certificates and awards. The room was clinical and professional with a black tattooist’s chair and stool, a newly plumbed sink, and a long metal table with all Slugger’s supplies neatly lined up. At the side of the house a former window had been replaced by a narrow glass door with a screen.

Dean focused on the red ‘81’ tattoo on Slugger’s arm while he did the trace. It made him realize that there were no badges on the biker’s plain black vest.

“Slugger, what happened to your patches?”

“Had to hand them back, Dean. When I left the club. Still got the permanent ones on my skin.” Slugger said matter-of-fact.

“Huh,” Dean acknowledged. “You’re still biking though, yeah?”

“Hell yeah. I have a few good guys that I run with.” Slugger lifted the paper from Dean’s skin, “Done. Let’s get the novice in.”

Castiel had been nervous. Dean could tell from the set of his shoulders and the clasped hand on his combats waistband. He followed Slugger’s instructions, getting on the chair, taking deep breaths and not moving. In fact Castiel went rigid to begin with.

The sound of buzzing needles masked Castiel’s hissed breaths. Slugger leaned on Castiel’s left shoulder with one black gloved hand while he worked with the other. The tattooist exhibited efficient concentration, all the fun slob side of Slugger had been put aside for business.

Dean sneaked a look at the developing design. The outline was done and Slugger was filling in the flames. Dean had put back on his tee. He tugged down the collar and checked. Castiel’s tattoo would actually be at the same level and only a couple of inches further from the chest bone, closer to the armpit than Dean’s own.

On his next pace back Dean noticed Castiel was gripping the arm of the chair with such force that the tendons on the back of his hand were pronounced. Although Cas had been walking around wounded and in pain, he couldn’t be used to the small agonies of being human yet. Dean worried
that doing this might be too much to inflict on an already hurting new human.

 Slugger came out of his hunch and pursed his lips at both of them, “Dean Winchester you are wearing a trough in my floor. Pull out that wooden stool from under the table and take his hand before he breaks my chair!”

 Dean looked in disbelief at the two foot high three legged stool. That was meant to take his weight? “Are you serious?”

 “Old Lady Stool. Specially purchased for those who insist on staying to support their man.” Slugger kept his eyes on Castiel’s shoulder but Dean could hear the tease.

 Dean was tempted to tell him to stuff it, and that he would stop the pacing, but he took his place on Castiel’s right side, lifted his hand from the chair arm and wrapped both of his around it. Castiel favored him with a thankful gaze.

 He stayed in position with his knees uncomfortably higher than his hips, until Slugger was done. He had to do his own private Harlem Shake to bring the blood back to his numb ass and dead leg. When he smirked and shrugged at the other men, Slugger and Castiel did synchronized eye rolls.

 “What asshats?” Dean accused, “I was numb.”

 Castiel snorted and made to get up, but Slugger put a hand on the top of his shoulder above the tattoo. It looked great, all shiny and new, although the reddened skin made Dean’s tattoo itchy with sense memory.

 Slugger laid a piece of cling wrap over the design and taped it up. “Leave this on,” He instructed in response to Castiel’s surprise, “for a couple of hours until we retire. Then you can wash it carefully using your hand not a flannel, with lukewarm water and blot it dry. You will wash your grubby paws first, you hear me son?”

 Castiel looked askance towards Dean. Whether he was checking if he should do as he was told, was offended at being called son, or confused by being told he had paws, Dean didn’t know. He chose the safe route and said, “You listen to Slugger, Cas.”

 “That’s right. Listen to the artist. Thank you.” Slugger peeled off his gloves and began to tidy away his materials, “I’m giving you a pot of Tattoo Aftercare. Apply a thin thin layer, think oil on water. And tonight, sleep on your back.”

 Castiel nodded gravely.

 “Finally. I didn’t spend my out of hours time or Dean’s dollars for you to mess up my work. No Scratching! No Swimming! No sun worshipping! And keep it fucking clean. You got it?”

 Castiel nodded quickly. Dean admired Slugger’s tirade. It took him back to times that Slugger had given a prospect or a wayward member a dressing down back at their roadhouse.

 “In that case, let’s resume beer. Dean have a look for some music will you, or do you want a movie? I’ll follow on in once I’m done here.”

 Castiel got up. He left off the close fitting Henley but draped his shirt on loosely.

 A movie might be better. They weren’t tired having napped during the day, and Castiel needed a couple of hours before he endangered rubbing his new tattoo off bed sheets. Slugger had a reasonable collection of classic thrillers and war movies in his DVD collection. Dean was tossing up
Vertigo and Born on the 4th of July, when he spotted The Great Escape.

Beer and Steve McQueen, with Castiel’s leg pressed into his.

Slugger didn’t care, so Dean slid his arm around Castiel’s shoulder in a move he’d perfected as a teenager in movie theatres across the nation. He wasn’t certain that Castiel was enjoying the film because each time Dean sneaked a look to the right Castiel was doing his sitting-there-watching-Dean thing. However at the end as the movie reached its crescendo Castiel’s lips parted and he dug his fingers into Dean’s thigh. Dean patted him on the arm and directed his attention to the screen in time for McQueen’s famous cross county bike chase. Slugger sighed in approval at that part. Castiel turned his head into Dean’s neck when everything went belly up. Dean was worried for a minute that he had chosen the wrong movie, but Cas scribbled a hasty few words asking to watch it again when they got home.

Dean tried not to be too obvious with his shit-splitting grin, but when he bit into his bottom lip and tracked along the penciled letters H O M E, he knew Castiel saw him and the resulting kiss was precious for all its brevity, as Slugger returned with a bowl of cheesy tortilla chips and another movie.

“Caddyshack? Really Slugger? We didn’t watch it enough in O3?”

“I just love that sly gopher.” Slugger said and ignored Dean’s protest.

Castiel looked concerned at Dean’s objections but in fact they did laugh and drink a couple more beers. When midnight rolled round Dean was experiencing a mellow buzz, from Budweiser and passive smoking Slugger’s bedtime joint.

They were taken to the spare room. Formerly Mrs. McGee’s room, now a plain undecorated guest bedroom. There was only one bed.

Slugger went to a cupboard in the corner from where he threw sheets, pillowcases and a blanket to the bare mattress.

“Listen up. I have a don’t ask don’t tell policy, just shove the sheets into the washer in the morning.”

Dean met Slugger’s knowing eye with a wink.

“Cheeky.” Slugger wagged a finger at him.

“Your policy worked good with Harold and Matthew?” Dean kept up the cheek.

“What did I just say?” Slugger called as he went to the door.

“Don’t tell.” Dean rolled his eyes for Castiel’s benefit.

The grizzled biker muttered under his breath as he closed the door.

Dean turned to Castiel who was looking slightly lost in the centre of the room, “Hey Cas, we got Slugger’s blessing,” He joshed with wiggling eyebrows. “We slept enough today, y’know, we could? Make out?”
Chapter Summary

A mini chapter but this scene stands on its own IMHO.

Hurt/Comfort as Dean reflects.

It was the hissing of Castiel’s pain, the seeping red across the black ink and the feeling of stepping into the past that did it. Dean’s eyelids hopped with REM sleep, his body broke out in a lake of perspiration, his jaw clenched, and his mind…. It was too deeply gripped by the night terror to use his ‘not-in-hell’ mantra.

He’d started at her left collarbone, tracing with only the broken tip of the blade. She had hissed and spat but, unbroken, would not scream. Hell narrowed down to the pattern Dean crafted on her skin. He moved in long languorous sweeps, curving and weaving a web of his own design on the unwilling canvas. She would scream for him, if not today then soon, perhaps before he took her tongue. Intent on circling her navel he missed his master’s approach. Alastair wrapped his true form around Dean’s back, invading him and making him pause in his creation. “Such a good boy, Dean-O, I admire your attention to detail.” The sibilant whispered words of praise brought a welcome chill to Dean’s burning veins. It was always too hot, too sulphurous, too oppressive, too lost...

Castiel slapped his cheek. Dean started, fully awake with only a whiff of rotten eggs lingering. One of the pounding headaches that oft accompanied a Hell dream was threatening to break across the surface of his brain. He was flat on his back and Castiel was crouched over him, eyebrows scrunched and tears in his blue eyes. He extended two fingers and touched Dean’s temple just like he had done many many times. The touch soothed but with no juice there was no quickie healing. Dean knew Cas was equally troubled by Dean’s nightmare and that he couldn’t zap its effects away. He took Castiel’s hand and kissed the tips of those fingers.

“It’s OK, Cas. I’m good.” Dean lied. He wondered where Slugger kept his ibuprofen.

Had he cried out in his sleep? What did Slugger hear through the partition walls?

Castiel lay back down on his right side, so the new tattoo wasn’t rubbing off the sheets. He curled an arm over Dean’s torso and held on.

Castiel understood. He had seen that Dean. The one after forty, no strike that, the one after ten years as Alastair’s apprentice. He’d used that Dean, encouraged him to take up his tools and practice on his old master. Dean held no animosity over those times fighting to stop the apocalypse. Because Castiel was also the one who had raised him, bonded them together with a handprint that Dean still regretted the loss of, and had proved his loyal devotion, even in his twisted reasons for opening purgatory. Here in Slugger’s spare bed with the weight of an arm holding him together, Dean stared at the wood-slatted ceiling and thought of the other Dean who had lain in this house.

2003 Dean was a sore young buck. He carried the agony of a missing limb, named Sam. He thought he was hard as nails, hunting on his own, and fantasizing about being a prospect in Slugger’s chapter. Now Dean could see that boy more clearly. He wasn’t hard. He had a toughened layer of Plexiglas sheltering him from the loss of Sam, his father’s impossibly high standards, and his own
insecurities. But he knew nothing of Angels, vessels, purgatory, or his so-called destiny. He was more innocent but he was not happier. In the present, Dean was better than he had been for a long time. The losses of his ‘family’, of Bobby, Dad, Jo, Ellen, Benny, pressed down on him at times. But he had a home for the first time in thirty years. He had Sam. He had the Impala. Here in a dawn lit room between cotton sheets in a side street in Colorado he had his angel.
Before I Go

Chapter Summary

Dean has his overdue freak out. They leave Loveland.

The sounds of a street coming to life woke Dean. Some bratty kids, who obviously didn’t want to go to school, were being bellowed at by an irate Mom. In the other direction car doors slammed. Normal civilian mornings were frikking noisy.

Castiel slept on. He had rolled onto his back but his fingers still reached for Dean’s side. Dean chewed on his lip, afraid that he had left Cas sleep deprived by all his raving and ranting. Perhaps Cas had tried to stay awake and watch over him.

Doing his own half roll, Dean lifted his watch from the low table at the bedside. It was almost exactly twenty four hours since he had found Castiel.

Twenty four hours.

A day.

One day and everything was different…..

Dean licked his lips. His mouth was parched. His palms turned damp under the fingers that folded into them. His guts twisted and his temper worsened.

What the fuck was he doing?

Twenty four MOFO hours and he was lying in bed with Castiel like an old married couple. With Castiel who was an eons old former celestial being, male, and so far above Dean’s pay grade.

Dean lifted his hand and fist ed into his hair above his ear. He felt that there was a scream of frustration forcing its way out in a clichéd big gay freak out. But it was more than that, that needling inner voice took over reminding him that Dean Winchester didn’t get to keep happy.

Castiel was human now. He would die like everyone else Dean let the down the drawbridge of his heart for.

Or Castiel would leave him again. He’d realize how broken Dean was and up sticks for better greener pastures. A new man would want to travel and see the world with new eyes, alone without Dean.

Maybe Cas would get sick. Did he have Jimmy Novak’s immune system and disease resistance or should Dean have gotten him his shots? Did Castiel need a doctor, for his back, his ribs, his elbow, his voice? Dean could have made things worse by presuming Cas could heal on his own.

Dean bit down hard on the inside of his cheek.
What was Sam going to say? Frikking Hell what were they going to tell Sam?

He and Sam were in a good place now. Sure Sam was still fighting the effects of the trials but their brother-ship, was that even a word?... it hadn’t been this good since… fuck it, since the year of Dean’s deal.

His brother was so straight they could use his stance on solid ground as the measure for right angles. But Sam had also lived in California for four years and had been as cool as Dean was about Charlie’s sexual orientation. Maybe Sam would be accepting of him and Cas? But it was different when it was your own brother.

Could he ask Castiel to act all buddy-buddy and hide what they had from Sam?

If he kissed Castiel in front of Sam would it sicken and disgust his brother? Would Sam’s face change like John’s did that morning after Dean and Caleb had fumbled round when they were meant to be staking out a kitsune, and his father had seen the hickey on Dean’s neck?

What if Sam tolerated them but it made him uncomfortable? Or Sammy thought Dean was choosing between them? Maybe he should have more faith in his overgrown little brother? They’d never had a talk about ‘liking guys’ and Dean had spent the past year accusing Sam of choosing Amelia over looking for him and Castiel in Purgatory.

Maybe Sam would turn a blind eye, but then he and Cas would have to be circumspect in their own home, and Dean was a grown freaking man in his thirties. He had no intention of playing teenage games.

What if Sam lost his temper? What if that deeply buried vicious side of Sam came out and he called Dean a faggot and told him he never wanted to see him again?

That wasn’t going to happen. It wouldn’t. His fears were playing with him. Sam was the most important thing in Dean’s life. He wanted so much for him to be happy about this. He wanted to bring Castiel home and have Sam at the very least be non-judgmental. He wouldn’t be able to stop Sam from worrying. Hell, worrying about each other was their presets. He wanted to be able to have Castiel beside him, living in the bunker.

The bunker, where they were keeping Crowley… Sonvabitch… he still had to tell Castiel about Crowley. What would happen then? Would Castiel refuse to come home with him? Or move out as soon as, like Kevin? Maybe Cas would prefer to live with Kevin and the friendly bookish angels? They could all talk Enochian together and toast smores in their jammies.

Dean felt a lump stick in his craw. He pictured arriving home. Crowley traumatizing Castiel. Then Castiel would leave. He knew they couldn’t spit Crowley out onto the street. There was nowhere safer to keep Crowley than the Men of Letters bunker. That’s what Dean had told Kevin. It wasn’t like they had Crowley trussed up special rendition style in the dungeon anymore. He was strolling around drinking Dean’s whiskey and following Sam like a lost dog.

The last twenty four hours had been like an oasis in the FURBAR that blew a desert storm around Dean.

He laughed hysterically imagining Castiel and himself running away from it all, leaving on a bus, taking off like Dustin Hoffman and Katharine Ross at the end of The Graduate. That would never happen. Hunting was all Dean knew. Saving people was his life. It ran in his blood. Between angel-dicks and demon-crap there was too much going down for Dean to have any longer of a vacation than twenty four hours. It was time to put on a sou’wester and re-enter the shitstorm. Face the
consequences of….

Dean held his breath…..

…..Coming out to his brother as bi or whatever…..

…face the music when he told Cas about Crowley and face up to his responsibilities.

He looked sideways. Castiel was awake. How long had the bastard been watching Dean freak out?

“I’m good.” Dean tried, instead of Good Morning, but his voice shook with all the doubts in his stupid brain.

Castiel nodded and reached over to the low table on his side of the bed. Dean swung his legs out and was going to make for the shower. Unless Slugger had replumbed the whole house, Dean knew there would be a limited supply of hot water. Dean wanted to scald the skin off his back right about now.

Castiel coughed.

Dean turned. A page was held up before his face. Central in large print was

Good Day

Under that along the bottom edge Castiel had written

Good things do happen.

Dean smiled, tired but indulgent in memories, “Not in my experience.”

Castiel surged up and grabbed Dean’s wrist. He opened his mouth. Dean could almost feel Castiel’s vocal cords disobeying his desire to speak. Cas smacked his other hand down on the mattress in frustration. He mouthed a very distinct ‘Fuck you.’ Then stabbed at his own chest, flicked his hand out and dug a finger into Dean’s tattoo. Dean knew what he was saying - this, us, I, good…

The weight on Dean’s chest eased. His voice broke again, “I know Cas. I know. It’s good. I think it too. I want this. Want you, but can we keep it?”

Castiel’s kiss mashed Dean’s lip into his teeth. Keeping the hold on Dean’s wrist, Castiel drove him back against the closet. Empty hangers rattled. Cas dug his nails into Dean’s back. Valiantly Dean attempted to keep up but Castiel was determined to communicate all his desire and possessiveness in long breath stealing moves. By the time Cas pulled away Dean was light headed. He was also more certain, that at least with the information Castiel possessed, the fallen angel was not planning on going anywhere.

Dean refrained from scalding a layer of skin off and courteously left enough hot water for Castiel and their host. Under the spray he wondered how he should introduce Castiel. Old Lady wouldn’t cut it outside Slugger’s house. He thought he might use partner. It was ambiguous in an FBI sense but might please Castiel with its hunting connotations.

When Castiel headed for the bathroom, Dean stripped the sheets and carried them to the kitchen, loading them into the washer as promised. Slugger was at the stove. Dean helped him to cook up sausages and hash browns. The biker was dressed in leather pants and an Aerosmith concert tee.

“I’ve a client at ten and one for a larger tattoo at twelve, but you and your silent boy are welcome to hang around. I could call Reece and Cody over for a few beers later, maybe take you and Castiel out on the road for a jaunt?”
Dean scrubbed the back of his neck, “Thanks man, but we gotta head back to Sam.”

“Always on the move, huh Dean?” Slugger chased the sausages around the skillet. “I’d bet you’ve more road miles on that Chevy than the oldest Hells Angel.”

Dean chuckled, “You know what, you could be right.”

Castiel came in with towel dried hair that made Dean want to bend over and kiss the damp strands.

Slugger served up and pulled a quart of apple juice out of the refrigerator.

After breakfast, under threat of violence, Dean promised not to wait nine years to call again. Slugger walked them out into a sun drenched morning. He ran his hand over the frame of the impala. Dean smiled a cheek splitter, walking around to the driver’s door.

“She’s looking good Dean. I wish some prospects took as much care of their machines.” Slugger praised.

“She’s my baby.” Dean bent and kissed the hood. He caught Castiel’s eye roll as he opened the door.

“Hey you, don’t dis the Impala lovin’”

Castiel grinned. Then he held his hand out to shake Slugger’s. The old coot took it and then crushed Castiel in a hug. He re-issued his tattoo care orders, but stopped when handed a page from Castiel’s notepad. Slugger scanned the sheet and then met Dean’s eyes across the car, “You got a good man there Dean. I wish you the best. May the road rise up to meet you and the wind ever be at your back.”

“You too Slugger.” Dean raised a hand in farewell. “Thanks, ya know, for everything.”

“Welcome. Now scoot.” Slugger’s gruff demeanor was back. He stood at the carport watching until the Impala made the turn into the next street.

++++++++++++++++++++++SPNSPNSPNSPNSPNSPNSPN++++++++++

Castiel’s note to Slugger:

Thank you for your talented work and for opening your home to us.
I promise to take care of him, Mr. O’Toole.
Chapter Summary

They pick up supplies and Dean talks to Castiel.

Dean knew he should talk to Cas as soon as they left Loveland city limits. But he didn’t. Out on Highway 34 heading to skirt Greeley, it was the perfect opportunity. Scientists say that you can handle pain better in the morning, more endorphins or some mumbo jumbo. Dean exhaled through his nostrils and prepared to rip off the band-aid and tell Castiel about their unwelcome lodger. Instead he veered the Impala sharply, crossing lanes to take the exit onto 47th avenue. He gripped the steering wheel tightly and focused on his turns, ignoring the glances from his right.

“Sonvabitch,” Dean said his first word in miles having to crawl the Impala over the speed bump in the Target parking lot. He knew this was a distraction but Castiel needed some damned clothes.

“I know, Cas, we only just got on the road, but you need clothes, man. Target won’t break Mr. Hanson’s plastic.”

Castiel looked pleased and was already opening the door. Dean stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“Three or four tops, a couple of bottoms, shoes, and stuff. Don’t go wild, we can buy more, just nowhere near Lebanon at these prices. And not white frigging work shirts and accountant’s trousers!” He called after Castiel who was already heading for the entrance. Dean jumped out to catch up with him, “Crap. Hold up man!”

Dean trailed behind Castiel, who marched through the racks of clothing as if he was on a mission for the garrison, grimly determined on completing his task. Dean carried a wire basket and attempted to edit Castiel’s tragic fashion selections. Although Dean was tempted to drop them and kick them under some shelves, the white long sleeve chambray button down and the black tailored ivy pants stayed. The long sleeve grey Henley, short sleeve olive polo, a barely tolerable stripped crew neck pullover, a long sleeve faded denim over shirt, socks, briefs, leather belt, Converse sneakers on clearance, brown lace up utility boots, a navy v-neck sleep tee and pants, light grey windbreaker, sky blue hoodie, tailored washed beige chinos and a grey white plaid poplin shirt, kept their places in the basket. However the yellow and freaking pink tank top got surreptitiously put back on a rail, and a passing customer had a pair of purple cargo shorts added to her shopping. Dean couldn’t resist ducking into a security camera blind corner, breaking the tags off a soft brushed flannel outerwear shirt in grey, blue and white and slipping it on over his Metallica tee.

At the pharmacy Dean stocked up on ibuprofen and iodine. He got a shaving kit for Castiel and two bottles of Sam’s preferred vitamin shakes. He slipped a bottle of lube into the pocket of his newly pilfered shirt.

Hot brewed Grande coffees from Starbucks was the plan but Castiel pointed an extended arm and finger at the menu until Dean huffed and took a blow to his manly pride. Castiel got the Vanilla Bean Frappucino he wanted.

They loaded the bags into the back seat. Castiel pulled out the book of maps to bring with him to the shotgun seat. Dean popped two painkillers from the blister pack and shoved them into Castiel’s hand.
While they sipped their hot coffees Castiel examined the map for their route. Dean leaned over and pointed out where they would leave Highway 34, skirt Nebraska, take the single lane road 27, until they joined up with Highway 36. Dean was reminded that after the night of falling angels, Castiel had been lost in Bighorn Forest. He thought that it must be totally weird for Castiel not to instantly know where he was in relation to all space and time. Thinking of timings, he volunteered, “Should take us in the region of six hours to get back to Lebanon. Y’know if we don’t stop too long for lunch and all.”

Dean took a long swallow of his still too hot takeout Grande. He considered getting back on the road and spilling the beans to Castiel in the middle of plains country, so that ‘getting away from Dean’ options would be limited. At the same time he didn’t want any harm to come to Cas. At least in Greeley Castiel could find a new life if he wouldn’t come home.

A hand patted his thigh and Castiel looked at him with his head tilted.

Dean returned a dry humorless laugh. He bit the bullet.

“You’ve probably put two and two together and gathered Sam didn’t complete trials. Hell’s still open for business.” He thought he was at peace with their joint decision to save Sam’s life but a tendril of guilt and shame stirred inside. “Sam and me…. We had a moment…. To borrow a word… a profound moment.” Dean licked his lower lip, “From on the ropes, we knocked our crap outta the park, boxed clever and got the fuck outta there.”

If his understanding was blurred by Dean’s metaphor soup, it didn’t show. Castiel was hanging on every word.

“We stumbled outta that chapel. Made it to the car. The motherfucking sky was falling. I called for you, Cas.” Dean shook his head at the memory. Sam on the brink of death. Castiel’s whereabouts unknown. Mega-dicks crash landing. “I called and called until my voice was hoarse and my throat raw. Sam was…. Shit… I didn’t know if he’d make the journey home…. And then there was Crowley.”

He saw Castiel tense up.

“So that left us with a damaged Broken Arrow in our care, and I mean in the Slater and Travolta sense not the fifties western.” Dean popped his awareness back from his personal memories, “Right, you haven’t seen either of those movies… As a consequence of choosing each other, we got lumbered with the damaged nuclear warhead that is the king of hell. We couldn’t leave him there to heal up and wreak havoc. We had him. We could make him spill as much hell and demon related intel as possible. I trussed him up and got him into the trunk. I frigging had to virtually carry Sammy into the bunker before retrieving the half-healed demon. Kevin freaked the fuck out, as you can possibly relate to.”

Castiel had been writing while Dean filled him in on the last part.

Now? Is he there NOW?

“Uh-huh, Cas,” Dean confirmed with downcast eyes. Apologetically he explained, “Sam’s been working on him, some kind of head shrinking crap. We’ve got him in demon trap cuffs but yeah he’s still there.”
Dean held his breath. Castiel nodded his understanding with exaggerated slowness. He seemed to be considering the new information. Dean hoped he wasn’t scheduling his getaway.

“I’ll understand if you don’t want to come home. I mean it would hurt like a bitch after all we’ve finally…. If you are willing to come then I’ll tell Sam to keep Crowley away from you. We’ll make sure you don’t have to see him and I’ll protect you.”

The lead in Castiel’s pencil nub snapped under furious pressure.

_I am not a child Dea_

“I know. I know you’re not. Geez, I can’t even get this right. Fuck this shit, I want you to come home. I’m saying I won’t let him hurt you, and I’m freaking sorry that the red eyed douche nozzle is stuck in our dungeon.”

Castiel laughed.

He bent double and laughed so much his eyes watered. Dean stared at him, unable to react at first. What was so funny? The guy was cracking up.

Dean had nearly fucking wet his panties obsessing about telling Cas. Then the mirth bubbled up and he saw the funny side. Cas was a (former) angel. Crowley had never intimidated him before. Why would he start now?

Castiel tried to recover from his hysterical laughing fit by punching a bruise into Dean’s bicep.

“We good then Cas?”

A snort and blown raspberry accompanied the nod.

Rolling his eyes at the unforeseen reaction that far exceeded his hopes and expectations, Dean put the car in gear and headed out east.
Trying to Make Myself a Sail

Chapter Summary

Road trip.

Dean rewound and replayed Back in Black. This time he took great pleasure in treating Castiel to an ear splitting rendition.

“Cos I’m back, Back In Black!” Dean thumped the steering wheel. At the final cord he turned to Castiel, “You wanna pick a song?”

Castiel pointed at his seat.

“Huh, yeah, cool, you remembered. Shotgun shuts his cakehole but take advantage of my peachy mood, darlin’”

Castiel was rummaging through the cassette box before Dean clicked that he had called him Darling, in a non-sarcastic manner. He huffed but kept grinning. He sneaked a peek at Castiel’s still face and barely parted lips. Crap, he had the Zep’s IV in his hand, the one with Stairway to Heaven on the track list. Dean waited a moment for the glazed over stony expression to thaw. It did. Castiel carried on as if nothing had happened and slipped the album back into the box. Dean caught on that each cassette was being alphabetized by title as Castiel methodically worked through them.

A rose-tinted memory floated across Dean’s mind. It must have been 1990 or 1991. Sam’s mop of sun lightened hair hunched over in the back seat of the Impala, while he and Dad gave the weapons a deep clean in the motel room. The AC was broken and sweat tricked down the back of his neck. After a while Dean got worried about Sam and heatstroke. He’d heard of dogs that died when left in parked cars. He found Sam messing with Dad’s cardboard box of tapes. He flung the door open and demanded to know why Sam was touching them. Sam’s eyes began to leak water and he shoved the box at Dean’s chest with a loud, “Look see, Deeeaaaan.”

His little brother had put them all in alphabetical order by artist, even putting the Mix tapes Dean had made in between Metallica and Mountain. Dean ruffled Sammy’s hair, which he hated because he claimed to be a big boy, and told him that he was a genius. He didn’t get why a kid would prefer to spend hours of his summer break on something too like a school project, but Sammy glowed under his praise. About two years later they swung back through the Florida panhandle. Dean found the black felt tip marker circle around Valparaiso and on the margin, a note in Sammy’s seven year old secret ‘uncrackable’ backwards writing code.

suineg a em dellac neaD ereH

Dean hoped with ever fiber that Sam was not going to go all Freaky McFreakerson when he brought Castiel home. While Dean had been reliving the summer of ’91, Castiel had replaced AC/DC with the mellow tones of Fleetwood Mac. How did those hippy bastards get into his collection? Sam again.

He noticed Castiel was kind of squirming. “You OK man?”
Castiel turned up the corners of his mouth, then went back to looking like someone put itching powder in his khakis.

“You need a rest stop Cas? That caffeinated dessert in a Grande cup hittin’ the bladder?” Dean swept a hand in a downwards motion.

Gratitude made its way into Castiel’s face. Dean supposed Castiel was still learning his body’s limits. In the wilderness he’d probably taken a leak whenever and they’d left Greeley over two hours ago. He’d thought of topping Baby’s gas tank up in Yuma but there was a 7-Eleven station in Wray.

“I need to pull over ASAP, or can you hold on for ten minutes?”

Castiel flushed with embarrassment at being a slave to his bodily functions, but raised two fingers for the second option. Dean figured at least the fingers were joined together in a half Vulcan salute rather than open and telling Dean what Castiel thought of having his need for a whizz discussed.

Stepping on the pedal in deference to his man’s needs, Dean pulled up directly outside the mensroom door. When Castiel disappeared inside Dean brought Baby round to fill her up. Feeling good, he decided to treat her like the lady she was. He checked her oil and water, then took up the air pressure gauge and checked her tires. She was tip top so he bought her a gift of a tub of premium paste wax and a new chamois. At the paypoint he spotted the candy display and snagged a Kit Kat. Castiel had returned to the car and then gone back to the restroom while Dean busied about.

Taking the chance for a leg stretch, Dean ambled outside the store window. Castiel came round the corner. He’d changed out of the red shirt and had his new olive green polo on. The brown lace up boots had replaced the too big ones. Dean felt a tight burn of desire.

“Looking mighty fine, there.”

Castiel looked at him from under his lashes but didn’t rise to the bait. He had the shirt and little pot of Tattoo Aftercare in one hand. In the other he carried the goodwill boots. The metal sides of the trash can vibrated when Castiel threw the offending footwear in with force. Dean followed him back to the Impala. Inside he pulled Cas towards him by the collar of the polo.

“I saw you giving me sultry come hither eyes.” Dean breathed into Castiel’s parted lips. He took the bottom lip between his teeth for a gentle nip. Castiel’s hand cupped the side of Dean’s neck. Dean moved his hand to feel the clean new weaved cotton on Castiel’s chest. The kiss was short but immensely satisfying.

Dean swapped Albatross for Boston. Castiel lined up Slippery When Wet and Born in The USA for next play like a kid putting claiming quarters on a pool table. They ate two sticks of Kit Kat each to the strains of More Than A Feeling.

The highway stretched out in front of them, long and inviting. Dean brought them out of Colorado and booted down south along the Kansas road. They met little traffic. Flat plains made for big skies. Scattered white clouds moved in a westerly air stream. The sun was passed high noon. Dean belted out, “Tommy used to work on the docks.”

Castiel had taken a pen from the glove box to replace his broken pencil. He was writing a letter in magnifying-glass-required tiny script on the pad’s back page.

“I could never write while we were moving.” Dean broke off his Jon Bon Jovi impression to comment. “Sam could do a whole school project in the back. Then geek boy would rewrite every word in a steadier hand when we got to a motel.”
Good times. Dean guessed why all these childhood memories were surfacing. He was trying to see the brotherly bond that he and Sam held. The one he trusted would not get turned into bungee cord in a few hours time.

Between fast forwarding over the crap Bon Jovi tracks, trying and failing to read Castiel’s letter sideways, and deciding if they could indulge in a slap up lunch at that Mom and Pop diner in St Francis. His mouth watered at the prospect of their meat loaf and creamed corn. Dean’s full attention was not on the road as he took the turn onto Highway 36. He saw the line of trees facing the junction and staying on his right as he turned east.

The roadblock slammed into his consciousness as he slammed on the breaks.

“Sonvabitch!”
Dean took in the heavy road barriers, the local cop car, the large tractor that cut off the westbound lane, the severed vampire heads on three stakes complete with exposed teeth and buzzing flies. There was no hope that this was an ordinary crime stopping roadblock.

He cursed his own thoughtless stupidity for not calling Sam to check if there were any blips showing up along Highway 36. One frikking phone call and he could have stayed on Highway 34 in Nebraska and cut south from Franklin.

Castiel’s eyes were focused on the hand painted wooden sign attached to the tractor as if he found it personally offensive. It was badly painted and misspelled, “Humans Only Permitted Beyond this point.”

Perhaps the citizens of the small tranquil community had banded together and decided to monitor who got to travel through their hometown, and to deal with the fuglies themselves.

A dark skinned cop with a sheen of perspiration under his hat and a baton held with casual threat, approached the car. He could do with losing a pound or twenty but Dean couldn’t blame him if he was one of the law enforcement officers who frequented the local diner. Dean wasn’t crazy on the swinging baton but it could have been worse. The cop could have been holding his piece. Dean figured they hadn’t pinged the not welcome radar, yet. He kept his eyes on the dude’s progress but ran his hand slowly with steady pressure along the side of Castiel’s thigh. It was intended to reassure Cas, to attempt to communicate the need to stay chilled, and to give him the heads up that he needed to follow Dean’s lead.

Donning his charming but oblivious persona, Dean rolled down the window. The parched heat of a ninety eight degree day made Dean blink. The heat was followed by the reek of rotting vampire, and Dean made to breathe only through his mouth. The cop leaned over. He rested his, part muscle part cholesterol, large arm on the frame.

His voice portrayed every ounce of boredom and pointlessness of manning a roadblock against things that go bump in the night, during a sweltering summer day, “License and registration.”

Dean took the monotonous tone as a good sign. He fumbled in the glove box for the clean Dean Smith papers that Paranoid Frank Devereux had supplied. His brother’s Sam Smith ID had long ago been burned. It wasn’t a brilliant idea to be flagged up as a missing psychiatric patient at a checkpoint.

“Have you business in Sainty, St Francis, Sir? Where is your final destination?”

Dean cleared his throat, “We are headed home Officer, to East Kansas.”
His brain went on mantra repeat ‘please don’t ask Cas for ID, please don’t ask Cas for ID.’

“Can you step out of the vehicle please Sir? Your companion too.” The cop took three paces back to allow Dean room to emerge.

Okay, that was not good. In fact this could be very very bad. Dean briefly considered sticking Baby into reverse and smoking her tires to get the fluck out of there. In a well seasoned move, Dean scratched his lower back, and moved the pearl handled colt from his concealed holder to the floor. Then he nodded over at Castiel, hoping his telepathic transmission of ‘follow my lead’ was received and understood. Risking making Mr. Community Cop impatient, Dean bent down as if adjusting his boot and covertly passed his knife over to Castiel’s foot well. He grinned inside when he saw Castiel scratch his ankle as they both got out.

The heat rose in a haze on the road. An observant bastard made a U-turn about a half mile back west. Any hopes that they had been caught in a civilian exercise died when a pick-up was allowed through from behind the tractor. The red rust bucket passed the Impala. Mr. Cop’s back up had no vehicles to amuse them. They came round to join their party. Two tall white-blond Angel mouks in standard issue garrison suits appeared. They looked like they had taken twins as their vessels. They moved like Agents from The Matrix.

“Report.” Dick-ass Number One snapped at the cop.

“Routine stop, your worship.” The guy bent one knee in supplication.

Dean raised an eyebrow. He could only see Castiel’s upper body but he could tell he was shuffling his feet. He wished he could whisper to ‘stay cool’, but the Impala was between them.

The cop continued his report, “Two normal humans heading east.”

“Normal men? Did you hear that Aileciel? How did you assess them?”

The cop stuttered, “Mr. Smith was dr-driving the vehicle.”

Dick-ass One and Dick-ass Two, aka I-Lick-Hell in Dean’s mind, turned their freaky synchronized attention on them both.

“Names?” I-Lick-Hell sounded as amused as an angel with a stick up his butt could manage.

“Howdy,” Dean tried for cheery ignorance, “I’m Dean Smith, and this here is my friend.”

They knew. He knew it. It was something about the way their gaze kept creeping back to Castiel who, in turn, was focused on the side panel of the Impala.

“You do not have a name?” Dick One asked Castiel with a definite sneer.

“Neo Anderson.” Dean answered. He ignored the gaping mouth on the cop and leaned idly against the car.

“Winchester thinks he is a comedian. We had heard reports of his back talking insolence, had we not Goriel?”

Gory-Hell nodded. He took a long stride to stand in front of the Impala. “And poor broken Castiel. What a pleasant side effect to our banishment that we get to be the ones who finally end your miserable unruly existence.”
Castiel took a step sideways. Dean wanted to shout out not to run, not to tempt them to smite before thinking.

“You stink like all the other mudmonkeys Castiel.” Goriel drew out Cas’s name in a mocking hiss.

Castiel stood tall and magnificent. He met the stares of the douchebags. Dean was proud of him.

“Carminéal will be envious that he missed your demise.” Aileciel snarled and passed the other dick-ass to get into Castiel’s face, “OM, PHA-MA ORS-BA TOL-TORN DO-ALIM TEL-OSH, OP NONCP AG-AGNA HAMI OL MIR O UL.”

Castiel wilted only a fraction under the verbal assault.

“You know,” Dean called with his head tilted back and eyebrows up, “It’s rude to speak Enochian when others don’t understand.”

“I told our graceless former brother, that he should understand that I will kill his drunkard sodomite, and make his own end one of torment for his disobedience.” I-Lick-Hell spat out.

“I prefer well-oiled bisexual, or sometimes loaded pansexual.” Dean licked his lips and blew an air kiss at Gory-hell. Anything to make their focus shift.

Goriel didn’t hold back with his stomach punch for Dean’s impertinence. Bending double in agony, Dean spat blood and hoped his gut wasn’t perforated. When he made the effort to straighten up while still clutching a hand to his belly, Goriel threw him across the divide with his angel powers and pinned him to the side of the cop car. The impact winded him. He hadn’t been thrown as hard since Aaron’s Golem didn’t like the way he said hello. Dean hated being pinned. He hated straining his muscles until they threatened to spasm. Whether it was demon or angel doing the restraining it was still a motherfucking bitch.

Aileciel spun back to Castiel and swung his fist with all his celestial force. The spray of blood from Castiel’s nose splattered droplets all over the douchebag’s white shirt. The angel followed up with a kick to Castiel’s leg which brought him to his knees.

Dean yelled an invective stream of curses and foul language as boots rained down on Castiel’s already bruised body. He couldn’t stop a tear from falling when he saw Castiel lift his head out of his protective curl, to check if Dean was alright. Blood covered the lower part of Castiel’s face and stained the teeth that grimaced a smile towards him.

“No Cas, protect your head. Hey motherfuckers, why don’t you pick on someone your own size, shitheads, Yo, bitchfaces, over here piss-asses.” Dean continued to try and get their attention away from Castiel.

“You will be silent.” Goriel barked.

“Finish the Winchester.” Aileciel ordered, pausing from tormenting the fetal form below him.

“I say we smite Castiel first.” Goriel gave a cold grin and pulled his angel blade from his suit.

Dean’s scream of “No. You fucking can’t. You bastards,” did not deter them from preparing to strike.

“I wonder,” Aileciel paused, “will his wing ash darken the highway, or will a measly human soul fly up from his remains?”
“You want to check, brother?” Goriel gave another cold malicious smile.

“Now that we are not on the clock, no superior waiting for our return, we should take the chance to be thorough.” The other assbutt replied.

Goriel re-sheathed his angel blade and rolled up his sleeve.

“No stop, you are doing this to make him suffer,” Dean pleaded.

Aileciel tore Castiel’s polo shirt into rags. He sat over his legs and held Castiel’s arms down by his wrists. Goriel’s back was to Dean but he saw the bare lower arm descend.

Castiel’s high-pitched wordless scream, when Goriel’s soul-checking arm entered his body, penetrated Dean’s ears. It tore at Dean’s heart and ripped him open as if the hand was burning through his own body. Dean would have prayed if there was anyone to listen. He would have prayed for Castiel to survive this. He would have admitted his love, called for a Hail Mary Pass, asked for inspiration on a way out of here that didn’t include bringing Castiel’s cold dead body home. But there was only that sniveling sneak Meta-dick in heaven, and the only one who ever heard and answered his prayers was being tortured in front of his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I know... poor Cas., I am a meanie writer.

The Enochian was googled, apologies for any mistakes to anyone out there who is fluent and reading fanfic.
Chapter Summary

Dean looks for any opportunity to escape Goriel and Aileciel

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Withdraw your hand Goriel.” Aileciel ordered, “It is my turn to play with the shiny new soul.”

“They are all so unpleasant inside and full of fluids,” Goriel said with disgust.

Dean could see the blood pooling from Castiel’s abdomen. The angel had deliberately wounded. When Castiel had soul-checked the little boy Aaron Birch and later Sam, there had been no blood, plenty of agony but no major injury. They were killing Castiel. The angel blade would not be necessary. No-one could survive what they were inflicting on Cas. Dean felt a part of himself begin to die. He would never get to take Cas home. He wouldn’t get the chance to show Cas just how very much he meant to him.

Dean closed his eyes and welcomed the darkness. Castiel continued to scream as the two angels argued over when Aileciel got to shove his arm into the torn stomach. The powerful sun meant it wasn’t dark behind Dean’s eyelids. He got the germ of an idea. If he could distract the assbutts for long enough, maybe he could get to Castiel, then he would need to come up with an instant Plan B to get them into the Impala and away. He only needed the perfect opportunity, maybe not perfect because Castiel might not make it if he waited for perfect.

Opening his eyes and tuning back into what the douche bags were saying and doing, Dean knew he had to watch. No matter how difficult it was to see the man he loved being subjected to torture, Dean needed to monitor every move and word for a chink in the angels’ armor. His mind shied away from it, but Castiel deserved to have a witness to the end of his too brief humanity and to know that Dean never left his side.

“I am not putting my vessel’s appendage into that mess,” Aileciel curled his lip.

“So squeamish brother,” Goriel laughed derisively, “I’ll fix him up good as new.” He extended two fingers and touched Castiel’s temple. There was a brief glow of light.

Goriel and Aileciel stood up. The sun in their white blond hair gave them halos in Dean’s view. He had never seen anything as inappropriate.

Castiel moaned plaintively and turned onto his side at the angels’ feet. He curled around, so that his back was facing them all.

Dean didn’t like that. He needed to see his face, to know he still lived.

“Cas! Cas! Castiel.” Dean bellowed, “Cas, my heart can’t take this, please. Cas, you have no idea of what you mean to me. You have to fight. Fight Castiel!”

Castiel’s arm twitched but he stayed down.
“Fight?” Goriel’s head tilted as if Dean had suggested an amoeba take on Mike Tyson. “He is human. What point is there in fighting against God’s army?”

“He’s human?” The by-standing cop gasped.

“Is there a problem?” the other angel asked with menace.

“You…you came to offer us protection against paranormal evil…we…we did not sign on for torturing people.”

“Shut your insolent mouth,” Goriel spat towards the shocked man.

The officer turned to Dean with his palms spread open and the pain of betrayal, and perhaps of the loss of a strong faith. “I am truly sorry, Mr. Smith.”

“So am I.” Dean said sincerely for the danger he was about to put the guy in, “Exorcizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus omnis satanica potestas…”

The angels had taken their reversed places over Castiel. I-Lick-Hell’s head shot up when he heard the Latin. He uttered one aggravated word, “Demon?”

Dean could only move his head. With the justification of the risks in combat of collateral damage he nodded towards the officer. He intended to do his best to prevent the cop from losing his life, but just now the man was the only distraction he could use.

Unbelievably their luck held. The cop remained facing Dean, his features confused by the sudden spouting of Latin. If he had turned towards the angels then they would have known there was no possession, no demon visage hiding beneath the round honest face. The angels were sufficiently wary to move closer checking if something Hell natured was present or if Dean was playing them.

Both angels drew their blades. With eons of battle stealth, they advanced on the innocent man. The fraction of focus Goriel was using to pin Dean weakened. He was able to move his aching limbs. He fell to his knees and gasped as his blood flow returned to normal.

He saw Castiel move.

Luck was still with them. If they could get to Baby while the goons reassured themselves of the police officer’s humanity?

Castiel’s hand reached for the sky. Dean quickened his pace.

Castiel’s hand slammed down on the road surface.

The white out from the angel banishment hit without warning, leaving spots floating in Dean’s eyes. He had blinked but had enough time in that split second to see Gory-Hell and I-Lick-Buttholes get blasted out of Kansas.

The cop was down. Whether he had fainted or had eye damage Dean couldn’t tell.

The most important thing in the universe was that Castiel was getting to his knees, partially revealing the angel banishing sigil drawn in his own blood.

“You magnificent bad-ass motherfucker!” Dean crowed. He stumbled on his numb legs to reach for Cas and help him to his feet. “That was awesome. I mean freaking, out of the ballpark, awesome.”

Castiel clung onto Dean. His breath was ragged. Through the tatters of the polo shirt Dean could feel
his heart leaping erratically in his chest. He could see that the original bruising and grazes remained but all trace of the angel beating had been erased when Goriel prepped him for round two.

“You’re alright,” Dean let his chest sag in relief, “Geez, Cas, you had me going there. I thought I’d lost ya.” Dean choked up. Castiel held onto him more fiercely communicating that he felt the same.

“I dunno… I don’t know what I would have done… Jumped on the asshats and gone out fighting….”

Castiel pulled away and gave Dean a severe and irritated stare.

“I know. I know you think I sacrifice myself too readily, but if those sonsabitches had…” Dean couldn’t speak. He planted a kiss, terrifying in its intensity on Castiel’s parted lips. He tried to press their souls together through their embrace. Castiel lifted his arms and placed them gently and reverently around Dean’s neck. That made Dean feel mortified that he was the one being comforted when Cas was the one who had almost died.

“I can’t… Can’t lose you Cas. I need you.” Dean said when he reluctantly released the injured man to let him breathe.

Castiel wiped Dean’s tears away with his bloodstained finger, then kissed the smears he left on Dean’s cheeks.

The sound of a throat being cleared, made them aware they had an audience. Only their heads turned. Their bodies stayed flush and pressed into each other as if magnetized.

“Mr. Smith,” The police officer nodded and then made the same deferential gesture to Cas, “Sir, Can Saint Francis offer you medical assistance and a chance to rest up?” A single trail of blood seeped from the officer’s right eye.

Dean, who was still having the looked-into-the-sun-too-long spots, responded, “No Officer, we are good now. You might want to get your eye checked out.”

The man raised his hand and looked horrified at the blood that coated his finger. “Yes… yep… I’ll do that.” His voice was robotic with shock.

Castiel coughed and peeled his hand off Dean’s shoulder to point at the road block. Two truckers in baseball caps stood agog at the scene playing out before them. Dean had no idea how long they had been there. They would have been out of his line of vision when against the cop car. The cab of a big-rig was visible behind the sideways parked tractor.

“Yes. I’ll take care of the obstruction.” The cop moved woodenly, giving random headshakes as if trying to realign his memories with the laws of nature and logic. He shouted at the truckers to help him drag the Jersey barrier off the road.

Dean stroked Castiel’s side and eased away to open the shotgun door. Castiel paused to remove the shredded polo shirt and fling it towards the stinking vampire heads. Dean ducked into the back to root into their bags. Pleased with his search, he pulled out Castiel’s new sky blue hoodie with the white zip and drawstrings. He moistened his bottom lip to reboot his saliva glands. They’d gone on vacation when faced with Castiel’s bare chest and shining new tattoo. He wanted to suck and lick at that mark. Instead he blinked and said, “We had better make tracks, Hun, no time for a full wardrobe change. Dicks one and two could return if they can boost back up their juice or send some of their equally douchy siblings. This is soft and loose for the tat. A hoodie’s a good choice if you are below par.”

Castiel beamed at him. Dean clicked into his use of the term ‘Hun’ but besides breaking out his
responding grin, he glazed over the happy verbal slip. Dean helped Castiel with his sleeve over the painful elbow. Castiel’s smile took on an indulgent lilt when Dean zipped up the hoodie for him.

“Get used to it, sweetheart,” Dean cocked his head and laughed as he walked around to the driver’s side, “You can expect Tomato Rice Soup, soft pillows, and Star Wars on marathon until Dr Dean says you are one hundred percent.”

Castiel raised an eyebrow and made best John McEnroe ‘You cannot be serious’ face.

“I am serious as a heart attack here Cas. Ask Sammy. You are getting the deluxe Dean Winchester Care Package and I will not take no for an answer.”

Chapter End Notes

No cliffhanger. I'm not always an evil writer, LOL.

Exorcism from canon, found on Supernatural Wiki.
Got me

Chapter Summary

Essentially fluff to balance out the angst.

They head for home and there are more songs played on the Impala tapedeck.

Speech was beyond Dean. Part of him wanted to fill the silence, another part of him wanted to revel in it. Just the sound of the Impala eating up the miles leaving what had happened behind them.

Occasional touches from Castiel grounded him. The pressure of the flat of Castiel’s fingers on his thigh, or the few moments Cas leaned over to rest his head on Dean’s shoulder, kept Dean from reliving the traumatic attack. He’d relive it later, telling Sam, running over and over what he could have done differently, almost certainly the screams and blood would add a new unwelcome vignette to his nightmares. Dean kept both hands on the wheel and grimly drove as though if he concentrated on the Highway enough, then they would get home sooner.

After a half hour of solidly hitting the speed limit, they were within range of Atwood, Dean slowed and pulled off the highway where a country road branched off. He killed the engine and dug out his main cell phone.

“I need to call Sam.” Dean gulped.

To steady his nerve, he reached over to cup and apply tender pressure to Castiel’s cheek. “You good, Cas?”

Dean went to step out for the call, worried that speaking about what had happened in front of Castiel would be too much too soon. The irritated tug on his shirt and the firm headshake, made him revise his decision. He remembered that it was BAMF Cas who had saved their asses.

This time Sam answered so quickly Dean wondered if he was wandering around the batcave with the cell in his hand.

“It was wieners, milk, spinach and bread rolls, jerk.” Was the hello from his brother, “And if you are in Smith Center go into the bakery and buy me cake, not pie, Dean, cake.”

“Cake is for losers, bitch,”

The attempt at a teasing tone didn’t fool Sam.

“What happened?”

“Let’s just say we hit trouble back in Sainty.”

“What sort of trouble Dean? Our sort? You both OK?”

“Yeah, yeah man, we’re good… now.” Dean rubbed him mouth and jaw, “Cas…. They took their revenge on Cas.”
“Who did? Dean. Talk to me.” Sam’s voice was getting more urgent and Dean could almost see him pacing. He knew things sounded worse over the phone. If he didn’t need Sam to check the rest of their route, he would have waited until they were face to face.

“St. Francis hired, or got co-opted, or some crap like that, by two dick angels called Gory-Hell and I-Lickiel.” Dean started.

“Fanatical arseholes.” A British accent grumbled.

“Was that Crowley? Am I on speaker?” Dean accused and huffed air through his nose, “Sammy take me off speaker.”

“Take a chill pill, Dean, geez, I’m moving to the library.” Sam said. “What went down?”

“I fucked up.” Dean gulped.

Castiel made a grab for Dean’s other cell. He seemed to have his usual technological difficulties but half turned his back in a way that smarted. Dean wasn’t sure if Cas was angry because Dean thought it had all been his fault, or if a part of Castiel blamed Dean for smacking straight into the road block.

“Could you expand?” Sam’s impatience with Dean’s self-hatred was thinly veiled.

“I shoulda got you to check our journey. I was distracted. We were at the roadblock before I knew it. The two angels were killing Cas, slowly.”

“Geez, Dean.”

“They had me stuck in place, but I…. too late to stop them from hurting him… I provided a distraction, and Cas… Sam he was awesome. He kicked ass and blasted them out of there using the blood they tortured out of him.”

“Humph”.

“Humph? Humph? What the hell? That’s your reaction.” Dean’s voice rose. He was expecting some concern or praise for Castiel.

“I got a text on the other phone. Cas says you didn’t fuck up. He says he couldn’t have painted the sigil without your strength. He says he is sorry he put you in danger.” Sam read out, “Are you guys starting a mutual apology society?”

“Cas has nothing to apologize for.” Dean said. He gave a forlorn smile to his passenger.

“OK Ok, he’s sorry, you’re sorry, neither one fucked up. Are you safe now?”

“We’re headed back ASAP. That’s what I need. Can you look for any other problems for us?”

“I’m online now. Nothing on highway patrol, ‘cept incident West of St Francis. I’ll have a look at some traffic cameras. Hang on.”

Dean tapped his fingers on his jeans while he waited. His knees were blood stained. That was Cas’s blood. A buzzing in his brain told him they needed food if they were to ward off delayed shock.

“All clear Dean.” Sam’s welcome voice told him, “Be careful, hey? Not everything is gonna flag up online.”

“Yeah, thanks Sammy.”
“And Dean?”

“Yep?”

“Get some zucchini and beans, long beans, and if they have those purple carrots in Smith Center, and some beets.”

“Fuck it Bitch. Why don’t you just harvest a farm?”

“Dean that doesn’t even make sense.”

“Fine. I’ll get your rabbit food, but I’m buying man food for me and Cas.”

“Cas might be a healthy eater, ya’know, he might love a good organic salad.”

“You shut your mouth Sam Winchester.” Dean snapped back with a laugh, “We’ll be home before dark.”

“Stay safe Dean. Tell Cas I’ve made up a room for him.”

Dean pressed end call. No freaking way was Castiel staying in some cold dead man of letters’ room on the other side of the bunker, when Dean had plenty of warm supportive memory foam and a new bottle of stolen lube.

They sped on through Atwood. Dean just didn’t feel they had put enough distance in yet. By the time Norton’s welcome sign came into view, Dean was almost hallucinating pie and burgers. Starbucks and two sticks of Kit Kat did not count. As far as Dean could reckon it had been seven hours since he had eaten.

Due to Dean acquiescing to Castiel’s pointed choices without processing them and allowing his stomach to bypass his brain, they got their five buck Dairy Queen lunch orders in before the 4pm cut off point with seconds to spare on the computerized register. Dean fist pumped as if he’d won the lottery. Then added his second order of additional choices.

Dean got a quarter pounder with cheese, crispy fries and an Oreo blizzard. Castiel had the same but with a chili cheese dog instead of the burger. They both had a bacon cheeseburger on the side.

Dean carried his tray to an empty booth. Castiel slipped into the opposite side. He looked better now. The hoodie covered the evidence of his old wounds. The color really suited him too. The blue made his eyes seem brighter. Eyes that Castiel opened wide and bent his head towards Dean’s cooling food. Damn, but Dean wasn’t letting his libido get between him and two waiting burgers.

He loved his brother, but to enjoy his meat patties without the sound of salad being munched or a raised eyebrow at his ‘disgusting’ eating habits, was bliss. Castiel put away every item. Getting your stomach ripped to pieces must be hunger inducing. When Dean smacked his lips at the creamy blizzard, Cas licked his slowly and provocatively, making Dean wish they were headed for a nameless motel.

Castiel finished with a strawberry banana smoothie. Dean took their tray to the garbage point and returned. He slipped into Castiel’s side of the booth and licked the strawberry banana flavor out of his mouth.

Back on the road, Dean’s food high bounced his mood up. Or maybe it was the post hunt adrenalin spike, the we survived boost, the one that used to have younger Sam and Dean high fiving.
Cas held up the cassette box. “Huh, yeah, guess I was a moody SOB after the mountain of dicks twins. Time for some tunes?”

There was the mix tape Dean had found in his Dad’s old storage locker in New York. It was mostly eighties songs. It had been popped out midway and hadn’t been rewound. He slipped it in.

“Gosh, Babe, I haven’t heard this in years,” Dean grinned over to Cas who had his head tilted to hear the less guitar driven intro than he was accustomed to in the Impala. He watched the former angel listen to every word.

Dean belted out, “It's gonna take a lot to drag me away from you
There's nothing that a hundred men or more could ever do
I bless the rains down in Africa
Gonna take some time to do the things we never had.”

He laid on hand on Castiel’s leg. The road was straight. Baby could probably stay in a straight line if Dean took both hands off the wheel. Castiel placed his freshly washed hand over his. On the last chorus Cas mouthed the words along with Dean’s attempt to drown out Toto.

“He! I’ll make a singer out of you yet.” Dean joshed, then paled, “Sorry, Cas. I didn’t mean that about you not speaking and I know in heaven you all probably spent eternity singing in wavelengths or something equally weird.”

Castiel tapped his hand and when Dean looked over he was laughing, “You little shit. You let me spout off a whole apology there.”

Castiel literally put his tongue in his cheek and gave a little over-proud head and shoulders shake.

“Back to rock, man.” Dean swapped over to the other side which he knew was pure mullet. Def Leppard’s Joe Elliot banging out ‘Animal’ made him thump the wheel and shortened the time to Smith Center.

They stopped at the bakery first before it would close for the day. After a confusing hug/mugging that ended with Castiel slipping Dean’s wallet into his hoodie pocket and stopping the hunter outside the bakery door with a hand on his chest. Dean gave in and let Cas choose the pie.

“Don’t just get cake! No matter what Sam said,” Dean shouted from outside.

Dean took the few minutes to text Aaron, Garth, Kevin and Charlie about finding Cas. The last three sent back quick responses saying Sam had already taken the trouble to tell him. “Fuck you bitches, I was busy.” Dean said aloud to the cell. He got a Mazel Tov from Aaron with some text symbols **//. He thought it meant something suggestive and tried to huff, smile and headshake all at once.

Castiel had two cardboard boxes and a bag of bread rolls when he emerged. He sauntered back to the car and added them to their earlier shopping in the back. Dean could barely believe that he was still in the same day.

Dean had to put up with eye rolling as he added completely random green items to Castiel’s shopping cart. If Sam wanted stuff from Whole Foods he could freaking go on a vegetable hunt himself. Dillon’s had a perfectly fine produce section. He bought wieners, more bread, milk, his own favorite coffee brand, bacon, and some cherry pie filling and a box of readymade pie cases. He ignored and paid for the bag of oranges, box of English breakfast tea, and the canned olives that Castiel placed into the grocery cart.

“That tea had better not be for Crowley.” Dean grouched as they carried the bags to the car.
Castiel looked stung and turned his head away from Dean, who wasn’t sure if that had been a ‘how-dare-you-even-think-it’ or a ‘you-are-not-the-boss-of-me’ snit.

Making the turn off Highway 36 previous to the one for Lebanon was possibly over doing the cautiousness. The Lebanon road was a better one. After the small town he would normally drive on a mile and turn west for home. The straight dirt road through flat fields made the Impala kick up clouds of dust.

Putting the Impala in park outside his own, sunken and made of iron, front door, lifted a weight from Dean’s shoulders. The impala’s engine ticked to cool, while Dean took a moment to lean across and promise Castiel everything would be fine. He wished he could be truly confident that that pledge would come true.
Although

Chapter Summary

At the bunker, Sam is worried.

The original key to the Men of Letter’s HQ was in its special box displayed on a shelf in Sam’s barely decorated bedroom. Dean’s copy weighed heavier than its mass as the returning hunter inserted it into the lock. He wished he could banish the bilious anxiety rising in his throat. Castiel took a wide legged step closer. The sleeve of the blue hoodie brushed the cotton of Dean’s plaid shirt. With his eyes shut, Dean shouldered the door open. He half expected Sam to be on the balcony waiting for them. The entry way was deserted.

“Come on, Cas, Home sweet home.” Dean encouraged. He hefted the reserve duffel onto his shoulder. Castiel carried the bakery boxes. Sam was going to find himself enlisted for the grunt work of carrying all the bags from the Impala. If he wanted vegetables, then in Dean’s humble opinion he could carry the damned vegetables.

“We’re back!” Dean yelled allowing the cavernous room to echo his words. He figured he should give Sam fair warning to hide Crowley.

Castiel was on the last step of the stairs and Dean was dropping the duffel on the conference table when Sam came loping in from the library, wearing that ridiculous academia v-neck sweater. His face was lit up with dimples and pearly whites. Dean noted that his skin pallor was less grey, much improved.

“Cas Dude, you made it.” Sam caught the bemused former angel around his waist and lifted him off his feet, “Ha! You don’t get to escape a Winchester reunion hug! I hope grumpy pants broke out a Dean hug.”

Dean thought, if only Sam knew. He thought Castiel might be blushing.

Castiel was blushing. There was a distinct pink tinge to his cheeks. Could he be any more cute? Dean wanted to eat him up, to lick those cheeks that tasted as sweet as they looked. Dean wondered if his mind had turned to mush or he had some kind of teenage girl brain. Thankfully that train of thought was derailed when Sam put Castiel down and closed the distance between them. He patted Dean on the shoulder as a welcome home.

“I gotta say Cas,” Sam raked his eyes down and back up, “Casual suits ya. Did Dean only get you pants and a hoodie?”

Sam moved forward and plucked at the top of the zip.

Dean was not jealous of his own brother. He wasn’t. But his little brother should keep his giant paws to himself.

“Huh, Sam?” Dean raised his pitch, “Cas gets to have his own personal space now Bitch.”

Sam furrowed his eyebrows and gave Dean a piercing look. “So did you?”
“Did I what, enormo-puss?”

“Buy him clothes? Or do we need to get over to Junction City to the Army and Navy and the goodwill store?”

“Of course I freaking bought him clothes. Sheesh.” Dean hoped Sam wasn’t in an ornery mood.

Castiel began to unzip his hoodie. Sam put out a hand to stop him, but Castiel smiled and pulled back the cloth to reveal his new tattoo.

“You got inked up! Congrats man,” Sam grinned, “Hey Dean, is that what you were doing in Colorado?”

“Yep Sammy, us humans gotta protect ourselves.” Dean locked eyes with Cas. He presumed they were both remembering last night in Slugger’s house.

“Where are my vegetables?” Sam looked behind the duffel.

“Bags in car. You gonna help us bring them in?”

“Sure.” Sam headed for the door. “Come on Cas. You can show me your haul.”

Castiel looked at Dean who nodded. He noticed how relaxed Castiel’s posture was as he followed Sam out.

Alone Dean took a minute to scope out the library, kitchen, small side room, and the room they used as a den. There was no sign of Crowley. He didn’t have time to trek down to the dungeon to make sure the asshole was on lockdown. Satisfied that Castiel was not going to be imminently faced with the demon, he jogged to meet up with the other two.

“Thanks Dean,” Sam said tongue in cheek, as he carried all the grocery bags. Behind him Castiel had the Target ones. “Too slow, we have everything.”

“Did you lock the Impala?”

“Honestly?” Sam rolled his eyes.

Dean presumed that was a positive. Castiel put his clothes down next to the duffel and retrieved the bakery items.

“Dean!”

The caustic shout of his name made the hunter grimace. They entered the kitchen to the sight of Sam holding up a stick of celery in each hand.

“What is this Dean?”

“That, I believe, is celery.” Dean tried putting on his sheepish face.

“And these?” Sam planted two objects on the worktop.

“Eggplant?”

“And where are the beets and the zucchini?”

“Not there.” Dean tried his damndest at puppy dog eyes, even though he knew it wouldn’t work.
“I had a recipe!” Sam fumed.

“A what now?”

“From the internet.” Sam elaborated with a glare.

“Ha! Since when do you cook?”

“FYI, Dean, since you frikken stopped. Since you shut up like a clam and wanted to wallow in your room.”

Dean licked his lips and set his mouth in a thin line. That was low.

Sam looked sorry.

Castiel linked his left arm into Dean’s right elbow and tugged him close. Dean took a half step to join their sides together. Castiel moved his arm and slotted it around his lower back.

Sam’s eyes popped out of his head. “Personal space Dean?” It was said softly with a measure of worried confusion.

“Yeah… ah… ahem. That is… Sammy…. Cas and I….”

Sam remained in position staring and waiting.

Talking about his frigging feelings, explaining his emotional attraction like a 1D fan, was not Dean’s forte. Why hadn’t he planned out what to say to Sam? His mouth was full of cotton wool. His teeth hurt. He blinked. Sam didn’t.

“Cas is my partner now. Like not for hunting. You are still my hunting partner, Sam. Shit… Not what I meant… Cas, I didn’t mean you couldn’t hunt with me. Man, we can be hunting partners too, but Sam and I, we hunt, but you know that… Castiel is my…. Slugger said he was my Old Lady, and if I had a Harley he’d ride behind me, but if Cas had a bike I’d ride him too… that is… because y’know we are y’know together and not old or ladies but… I can’t do this… Geez would one of you stop me!”

Castiel covered Dean’s mouth with his hand. Dean laughed nervously into his palm, closed his eyes and kissed his skin. He wrapped a hand around Cas’s wrist and pulled it down, moving his body from the waist to turn towards him. Castiel met his lips midway. Dean drew him in, stealing his breath. He sagged, suddenly drained from his out of control speech. He was all over the place. Sam still hadn’t reacted.

“Cas, babe.” Dean whispered and planted a rapid fire kiss to each corner of his mouth. As he pulled back he could lip read the clear ‘Dean’ from Castiel.

“Excuse us, Castiel. I need to talk to my brother privately.” Sam said pointedly with his jaw doing that jutting out thing. “Dean. Library.”

Dean’s boots clomped behind his brother. A brief glance back showed Castiel unpacking the food and laying it out.

“What are you doing?” Sam was clearing enunciating his words. That wasn’t good. “I understand you are relieved he is back. But you are not even gay, Dean.”

“I might be a bit gay.” Dean kicked himself. He should have told Sam he was bi.
“A bit gay? Really?”

“Like, ya know, gay for Cas.”

“Excuse me Dean. I need to get my ears cleaned out. You haven’t a clue what you are doing. Have you? I bet you haven’t even asked Castiel if he wants to ‘share a room’, you were just gonna move him right in?”

Technically Sam was right. But his brother didn’t get it. Castiel wanted this.

“And.” Sam paused. “That is plain unfair on Cas.”

“What?”

“He looks at you like you are the sun and moon, Dean. He has for years. You can’t play with him like this.”

“Who is playing?” Dean snapped. That was uncalled-for. Sam had no right to presume this was something frivolous or cavalier for him. “I’m not fucking playing.”

“You pick ‘em up and spit ‘em out.” Sam accused.

“You have got to be kidding me.” Dean tried to calm down. Sam had been in Stanford when he was with Cassie Robinson. His soul had been in the Cage when Dean lived with Lisa. He sighed. “Not always, Sam, and not this time.”

“I know. I do, but Dean. This is the guy who dealt with Crowley and opened Purgatory, so that he wouldn’t have to trouble you in your apple pie suburban dream life.”

“Dammit, Sammy. I know that.” Dean took one of the seats at the reading tables. Sam was sounding more reasonable. Maybe he could explain this better and Sam would understand.

“Dean you don’t know what Castiel is feeling now. What he is dealing with. He can’t tell you.”

“He told me just fine.”

“How?”

“Do you want the intimate details?”

“Dean! Castiel is trying to understand and adjust to being human. We should be trying to help him. You should be showing him normal stuff not trying to force your way into his boxers.”

“Force?” Dean could not have heard that correctly.

“You know what I mean.”

“No Sam, I fricking don’t.” Dean clenched his fists but kept his hands down. He wanted to take a swing but he also didn’t want this to end badly, “I am not forcing Cas. I am not and I wouldn’t.”

“I didn’t mean it like that, Dean. I meant that you can’t know what Cas wants out of this. I mean the guy has mooned over you forever but is this him taking comfort in a storm? Does he want to stay here? What happens when he leaves?”

“He’s not leaving.”
“Dean.” Sam closed his eyes in exasperation.

“He is not. He is staying Sammy.” Dean added when his brother looked back at him, “With me.”

“You know we are working on the angel-tastrophe. As soon as I was well enough I started looking through the lore. Crowley has been helping with translations. Kevin is code breaking the rest of the angel tablet. He will crack it. We will get Cas’s grace back. And you know, Dean, that he will have to go.”

Dean shook his head.

“I don’t want to see you or him hurt.” Sam pleaded. “You need to think about this. Yesterday, Dean. You found him yesterday.”

Sam’s view of the future hurt. It was too real. He could see it, except for the bit about Crowley and Sam translating documents. Kevin would find the reverse spell. Castiel would get his wings, and he’d leave again.

“I’m taking Castiel to show him his bedroom.” Sam announced.

“What are you doing, Sam? Frog-marching him to the opposite end of the bunker to keep him away from my bad influence?” Dean growled.

“No Dean,” Sam responded with sympathy, “He’s in the room across the hall from yours.”

Dean heard Sam’s retreating footsteps. He lowered his head to between his knees. Why did everything Dean wanted have to turn into a god damned clusterfuck?
I'm a Heartless Man at Worst

Chapter Summary

Dean thinks about what Sam said.

Dean couldn’t be sure how long he sat in the library. Sam’s words reverberated in his mind. They strengthened his seeds of doubt until they grew like vines.

Castiel would leave.

The needle on the vinyl record was stuck on a repeating groove. It was an old and grating song. *Why would an angel stick around for someone like you? Why would you offer a being with the universe at his feet? Heaven had the greater call on Castiel. He could never choose you, Dean. Your touch corrupted Castiel as soon as he laid a hand on your blackened twisted soul in the pit.*

Dean felt like his insides were crumbling.

He needed Cas, so much. It had taken a long time for him to realize it. Longer to admit that need to Castiel in Purgatory. Longer still to repeat it while remote-controlled Castiel had him on his knees beating into his face. Now finally, they had a window, an opportunity, to grab something for themselves.

Sam was right. If…when Castiel got his grace back, then he would return upstairs. He would be in the vanguard of the rebuilding effort. And Dean? Dean would wait. He would sit in the bunker and wait for his love to return, because Castiel always came back. It would be painful to endure, goddamn but it would hurt. But frikken Hell… what they had begun… it was worth it. If Sam didn’t want to have to pick up the pieces, then Dean could stay out of his way when Cas was in Heaven. Dean had made his choice back in Wyoming. He would fight for Cas this time. Sometimes you had to lay your heart on the line for family, for those you loved, and this was one of those times.

The other argument Sam put forward troubled Dean. How did Castiel feel? Dean believed Castiel wanted them together as badly if not more than he did. Cas spoke with his body, affection, touches, eyes… Just because Cas couldn’t speak aloud (for now), that did not mean that he was unable to give his consent. One turning of his back, one step out of an embrace, one raised palm in his face, and Dean would have stopped. If Castiel had wanted to remain in Greeley, after Dean broke the news about Crowley, then Dean would have done his utmost to set him up in a new life. He knew Cas wanted to come home with him. Perhaps he did need to communicate with Cas. Maybe he should ask him why he had come? Was this a pit stop with his friends, the Winchesters, before he made his way in the world? Or did he hope that it could be Dean’n’Cas from now on? What if Cas indicated that he wanted a supportive hug and some TLC and then he was planning on moving on? Dean’s chest tightened. After everything over the last two days, and all the crap that came before, Dean thought that they had established that Castiel was his partner and he was Castiel’s. He belonged to and with Castiel, and vice versa.

It might all seem ultra-rapid to Sam but this had built slowly and gradually over the years, like a sandbar across a river mouth that finally meets the other bank and forms a tropical lagoon. Sam never saw the blood, plasma and filth encrusted Dean who drove a path of terror through Purgatory to find
his angel. That pure fighting Dean was not going to allow his logical worry-wart of a brother come between him and his man...the man he wanted. Dean was not afraid to say that anymore. He had said to the most important person in his life, everyone else could like it or lump it.

He needed a drink.

The kitchen was empty but Sam, well he presumed it was Sam, had been making sandwiches. There was a chopping board smeared with tomato seeds and breadcrumbs. The bakery boxes were pulled apart and folded down for recycling. Dean licked his lips and opened the refrigerator to see. There was an apple pie with a lightly scattered crumble crust on the middle shelf. Below it there was some sort of berry pie with a pastry lattice topping. Dean tickled the filling with his pinkie finger and sucked it like a kiss. Holy divine Mother of Pie, it was a mix of strawberry, blueberry, and raspberry with a hint of a warm spice. Castiel had chosen well. They were good pies.

Dean crouched down and opened the stiff door of the slim cupboard near the sink. The men of letters kitchen functioned without flaws. Dean had tightened the hinges on that one. Behind the surplus boxes of Boraxo, was Dean's secret hoard of Jameson Reserve and Johnny Walker Blue. He found a short glass with room for ice, half filled it with Jameson and downed it in one go. It burned a path in the best way. Taking a second glass from the shelf and finding some ice, Dean poured two fingers of whiskey into each.

As he left the kitchen he remembered his phones were still sitting beside the duffel on the conference table. He detoured to retrieve them. He’d dropped the cells behind the duffel, which sat unzipped on the table. Something tan poked out of the bag. Castiel’s trench coat, smeared with dirt and blood. Dean carefully put down the whiskeys. He eased the ruined coat out of the duffel. Reverently, he raised it to his face and inhaled. It held the scents of the forest, sweat, dirt, and gasoline, but under them all something of ozone and caramel that was essentially Castiel. He tucked it under his arm to carry.

When Dean turned to pick up the whiskeys with two fingers, something about that motion and the way he had thoughtless put them down pinged a memory. Another two glasses of liquor on another table, poured by an older more brutal nightmare version of himself. His heart seized with the visceral flashback. He figured the connection off the bat, the link between that Croat-slaying end of the world version of reality was Castiel. Cas, broken, human, fragile and high, but loyal and willing to stand by the side of a cruel and hardened version of Dean. Nothing kept Cas at Camp Chitaqua. He could have thrown his lot in with another post apocalyptic refuge. No-one had a gun to his head. But he stayed and survived alongside his Dean. That Dean was one who remained blind to their bond, and was willing to sacrifice his best friend without remorse in his quest to end Lucifer. And still that Castiel had stayed. If that shattered human Castiel would not abandon Dean, why would his wonderful, whole, albeit injured, Castiel, who was taking all Dean could give him and returning it in spades?

There was a miniscule bounce to Dean’s step. He tinkled the glasses together and leaned against the door jamb. He watched Castiel pause from carefully folding his new clothes. He was placing them neatly on the open shelves of the brick wall. His boots and sneakers lined up on the floor below. His shaving kit was the only item on the lowest shelf. Castiel had showered and found his own dead-guy-robe.

“Drink?” Dean used as a greeting. Castiel’s smile was tight as was his short nod but he took the liquor.

While Castiel took a first tentative lip wetting, Dean saw the mattress was still bare and dusty. He was glad his brother had not dressed the bed. Sam had piled the sheets, comforter and pillows on the
low bedside table. It was possible that Castiel didn’t know how to make up a bed. Motels made them up for you. Dean was pretty sure the psychiatric hospital had staff for that, and Daphne probably tucked Emmanuel in at night.

Dean walked behind Cas and spread the trench coat, lining side up, on the mattress like a picnic blanket. He perched on the edge of the bed.

“Sit with me Cas?”

Castiel took the place beside him but kept his hands clasped loosely on his lap.

“Ya’know you are welcome across the hall.” Dean scrubbed the back of his neck.

Castiel shrugged.

“I didn’t mean that you had to come right now. I mean, if you prefer to rest or finishing unpacking or stuff.”

It was like trying to push jello up a hill. Castiel wasn’t giving him anything. Just when Dean was ready to stand up and either start shouting or grab him, Castiel took hold of Dean’s hand and wrapped it up in both of his. He brought Dean’s exposed fingertips to push back the wrapped over robe and rest on the skin above his heart.

“You heard Sam?” Dean whispered.

Castiel nodded.

Dean took a deep breath and rubbed his forehead with his free hand, “Whadid you think? I mean he asked me a lot of hard questions. Am I coming on too strong? Is this all too soon?”

Castiel tilted his head and rested it on Dean’s shoulder.

“Did he talk to you too?”

Castiel’s ear rubbed against him as he nodded.

“Did he upset you?”

Castiel squeezed his hand tighter and gave a negative head movement.

“Good. I meant that you know about the bedroom. It’s good you have your own space but I have an awesome mattress.”

Castiel gave a laughter huff.

“Awesome, Cas.” Dean repeated, “You want to go see what Sam’s up to? Have some pie?”

Castiel didn’t move. He seemed content to stay resting against Dean. He wanted to stay with Dean. It made a smile pull at the corners of Dean’s mouth and his eyes closed in relaxation. Dean rested his head against Castiel’s hair and hummed a few bars of Led Zeppelin’s The Rain Song.

Outside Sam’s footsteps and the clink of a sandwich plate against a mug retreated towards the communal areas.
Castiel’s hair smelled of coconuts and lime. Sam must have given him his shampoo. A quip about smelling like a freaking girlie cocktail with a parasol was on the tip of Dean’s tongue, but he noticed Castiel’s breathing deepen and even out. Cas was asleep. There still was a sense of the unreal about Castiel needing to sleep. Perhaps a soul was necessary before a being was called to sleep. Dean would not wake him. He obviously needed to recharge the batteries after all they had gone through that day.

Dean eased Castiel back onto the trench coat covered mattress. He grinned when he saw socks on Castiel’s feet. He would see about getting some slippers or house shoes the next time they ventured out. Dean lifted his legs under the calves and swung them up. Castiel’s fine leg hairs were soft under Dean’s hand. From the pile of linens Dean dressed a pillow. He slipped it carefully under Cas’s head. The bunker was not cold, so he didn’t cover Cas with the comforter or blankets. He fixed the robe over his thighs. At the door he looked back and smiled affectionately at the sight of Castiel’s relaxed features.

Dean ducked across the hall. A lightness of being settled on him when he entered his own room. He tipped the corner of his most treasured photo.

“Hi Mom. I found him, Mom, and I’ve brought him home.”

It felt good to get out of his dirty jeans and the Metallica tee he had been wearing since Casper. He threw his soiled clothes into the hamper. Tomorrow he’d check what Castiel had to be cleaned and give him a tour of the bunker’s domestic facilities. Dean planned a long hot shower before bed. He needed to have a word with Sam first. Throwing on his oldest denims and his round neck grey green tee, he went searching for his brother, via the kitchen. At the refrigerator, Dean pointedly ignored the temptation to break off a chunk of pie and eat it standing up. Instead he pulled two bottles from the six pack of beer. He uncapped them and headed for Sam’s favorite haunt.

As expected Sam was in the library. Dean pushed his shoulders back. He raised a wall around his feelings. He was going to talk with Sam in a reasonable manner and a logical detached voice. He would not lose his cool and he could reign in his temper.

Two huge tomes covered in cracked brown leather took up most of the final table. Sam was making notes with a pencil on a yellow legal pad. He ran a hand through his hair and then tapped his teeth with the pencil.

“So.” Dean handed over a beer, and pulled out a chair on the opposite side of the table. “Sam…”

Sam saluted Dean with the beer and took a swig. Dean copied him.

“So Sam, Cas says you talked to him.”

Sam raised his eyebrows.
“Y’know what I mean, Doofus.” Dean leaned back, plunked his feet on the table and crossed his ankles.

Sam glared at his feet, “Those are 17th century Grimoires.”

“I’m not touching ‘em, geez, give the guy who was nearly angel filleted a break.” Dean moved his feet approximately two inches.

“It’s fine.” Sam put his head back down and ran a finger along the margin of the nearer book.

“I’m not asking what you said to him,” Dean continued his original point. He was hoping Sam might say just that. “But, are you trying to drive a wedge between me and Cas?”

Sam straightened up in his seat and gave a frustrated huff, “No. Dean.”

“Well what are you doing?”

“I am trying to look out for you, for both of you.” Sam’s eyes pleaded his case.

“Sammy,” Dean’s irritation with his brother faded, “We are grown men, man and ex-angel-man. You don’t need to look out for us. We can take care of ourselves.”

Sam laughed. “Dean imagine if I said that to you.”

“’s different.” Dean protested.

“How so?”

“Taking care of you is my job.” Dean rolled his eyes at Sammy’s forgetfulness.

Sam opened his mouth.

Dean held up a hand, “Naw-ha, Big brother’s prerogative. Listen Sammy, I get it. But Cas and I are happy. I want you to be happy for us.”

Sam put on his serious face. “Dean if he makes you happy I will be crapping giant unicorn rainbows of joy. But will he? How will you cope when he…”

Dean jumped in, “Stop. I know it. Don’t you think I don’t know it? Our lives Sam, how many times have we died, been shoved in the pit, Purgatory, the past, the fucked up future? I know he might, could, will go, if we clean up Mega-douche’s mess, but I also know right in here…” Dean beat against his chest, “that he will come back to me.”

“OK Dean.” Sam replied and nodded. However Dean wasn’t sure he had convinced him.

Dean took a long drink of his cold beer. He licked the taste from his lips, “What about Crowley?”

“What about him?” Sam stopped his bottle on his way to his mouth.

“What’s the word?”

“He’s progressing.”

“Progressing?” Dean inclined his head in questioning disbelief.

“Yeah.”
“Like how? Towards learning how to cook wieners or drink his way through my liquor supply?”
Sam dropped his shoulders and sighed, “The first week I talked to him. He was incoherent.”

“Yeah Kevin and I gathered from the noises.”

“So after Kevin moved out… you know the damp conditions downstairs played havoc with my chest… We moved to the old interview office on level three.”

“There is an interview office?” Dean marveled at everything there still was to find in the bunker.

“Yeah. It has personnel files and all.” Sam leaned forward and rested an elbow on the table, “I’ve been encouraging him to seek penitence.”

Dean stuck out this bottom lip and nodded, “The penitent man shall pass.”

“Indiana Jones, Dean? Really?”

Dean shrugged, “So how is that working for you?”

“Look Dean. I’m not the naïve twenty four year old dazzled by Ruby. This is not my first rodeo. I know he is a demon. He’s freaking Crowley and I don’t forget it for one moment. But he is trying to atone.”

“You trust him? With the translations?”

“Hell no.” Sam scoffed. “Everything Crowley’s worked on or ‘helped’ me with is on top of the card index drawers. Put aside for re-check. However in his favor, a lot of his single word suggestions, when I got stumped, make logical sense.”

Dean harrumphed. “Any news from Kevin since the last day?”

“You mean when he rang speaking at a million miles a minute and then called back an hour later saying he hadn’t had a breakthrough?”

“No breaking news on the Angel Tablet then. And the lore?” Dean glanced at the bookshelves.

“Bupkiss.” Sam summarized.

“Figures.” Dean drained his beer.

Sam had finished his. He stretched his arms and yawned.

“You getting enough sleep, Sammy?” Dean checked.

“Yes, Mr. We Can Take Care of Ourselves.” Sam joshed.

There was a loud low pitched bang from the kitchen. Both Winchesters knocked over their chairs and raced there in battle mode.

Castiel was standing in the middle of the room in his sleepwear, pointing at the microwave which was filled with yellow goo.

“What the fuck?” Sam skidded to a stop.

Dean took in the tray with side plates, the sliced apple pie, apple smudged knife, three forks, folded
napkins, and Castiel’s crestfallen face. He realized Cas must have found the carton of pre-mixed Bird’s Custard he had picked up months ago at World Market in Atlanta, with the view of attempting a Boston Cream Pie. “You didn’t cut open the top of the custard carton did you?”

Castiel ripped open the microwave and poked the remains of the box out of the custard bombsite. He jabbed at the ‘Microwaveable’ on the label.

“Ah, yes, but it is explodable if unopened.” Dean tried not to laugh. He made an honest effort but when Sam began hooting beside him, Dean bent double and gave in to the urge.

“We shoulda used custard as a weapon before now.” Sam snorted.

“We could keep a carton in the trunk.” Dean added.

Castiel coated his hands in the dessert and clapped both brothers on the shoulder.

“Hey, dude, that’s my research sweater,” Sam yelped and dashed to the sink for a wet cloth.

“He gotcha gooood,” Dean crowed, “Well done Cas.”

Castiel beamed back at him and rocked on his heels.

“Sam you’re it.”

“Awh Deeeeean.”

“No good protesting Sammy. Cas got you. You get to clean up the custard bomb. I’ll get the squirty cream and Cas can carry the tray to the library.”

“Not on top of the grimoires!” Sam shouted after their retreating backs.
Dean brushed his teeth by muscle memory. He flossed and finished drying off after his shower.

Where was Cas going to sleep?

Dean had helped Cas dress his bed. He had showed him how to do marine-standard corners with the bottom sheet and his Dean-patent trick using the corners of the comforter cover to put it on with a grand shake. He made it clear that if Castiel’s bed was dressed then that made his room looked more lived in. He pointed out that if Castiel wanted to nap during the day that the bed would be prepared. He extolled the virtues of memory foam.

He stopped short of asking Castiel to sleep with him. Now chewing on his bottom lip and looking at his reflection in the mirror he called himself an idjit. Dean Winchester didn’t beg. But it was hardly begging to ask your partner to share your bed? Also he didn’t want Castiel to refuse, so he hadn’t asked the question. Instead he was idling in the bathroom, delaying the disappointment of discovering that Castiel wanted to sleep in the bedroom Sam gave him, or the gratification of having his lover waiting for him.

The sight of Castiel with his eyes narrowed writing in his notebook with one of Sam’s pencils, and sitting up using all of Dean’s pillows, gave the hunter a surge of joy.

“Hey Sweetheart, bring in your own pillows.” Dean called.

Castiel didn’t budge. He smiled serenely.

Dean mumbled something about not being the bitch in their relationship but retrieved Castiel’s pillows from the other bedroom.

When Dean had settled their combined pillows to his satisfaction, and Castiel had put down his book, they lay facing one another.

“We’re home,” Dean smiled.

Castiel nodded. He raised his body up on his uninjured elbow, traced Dean’s cheekbones with his fingers and then moved forward to kiss his temple. Dean ran his hand under Castiel’s top, rubbing circles on his warm skin. When Castiel was done exploring Dean’s face with kisses, he laid his hand on Dean’s shoulder. No more passed between them but secure in each other’s presence slumber took them.

Dean woke. A terrible spectral moaning hit his hunter’s radar. He grabbed for his knife on instinct.

Castiel was keening in his sleep. It was increasing in volume.
Castiel’s gravelled voice tore in agony from his throat, “No you cannot make me do this. I will not. I refuse to kill him. No Naomi.”

If this got any louder Sam would be over to investigate. Dean shook Cas by the shoulders.

“Wake up!” Dean tried to pull Castiel from his nightmare. “Wake up Cas.”

“I didn’t do this. I didn’t kill Dean.”

“No. No Cas. I’m here. Right here. Wake up.” Dean pressed their lips together. He ran his hand through the unconscious man’s hair. “Wake up Hun. Come back to me. Come on Cas. Come back.”

Castiel’s eyes fluttered open. He opened his mouth and tried to say something. Then clearly distressed from his dream and his inability to tell Dean, his eyes filled with tears. He clawed at his throat until Dean tenderly removed his hands. “Stop babe, stop. It’s OK. You’re not there anymore. Naomi’s dead. You’re here with me. In our bed. I’m alive. It’s all in the past.”

Castiel tucked his head against Dean’s shoulder and let Dean pull him close. Dean kneaded the back of Castiel’s neck and whispered in his ear that he was safe and home. It took a long time for the shuddering to cease. Dean didn’t get another wink. He figured that he’d passed the four hours mark. Content to watch over Castiel and for signs of another nightmare, he bolstered his shoulders with pillows and got comfortable.

One of the few things Dean missed about the bunker was windows. There was nothing more refreshing than waking after a hunt with the sun streaming in a motel window. On the other hand waking in a blazing sunshine with a hangover was a bitch. Swings and roundabouts. Dean remained awake. He felt it was morning but Castiel was wrapped in his arms, one of which had gone numb. There had been no more evidence of night terrors. Dean didn’t want to wake him too early. Finally driven by his full bladder, Dean eased his dead arm out from under Cas and made for the bathroom. It was before eight. Dean was in a good mood and he wanted to give Cas something tasty for breakfast. He snagged his robe from the hook on the back of his bedroom door and headed for the kitchen.

He kept the music down low and didn’t clatter the pots and plates. He’d let the others rest on. There were four pancakes on the first stack, another turning gold on the skillet, six slices of bacon crisping under the grill, and a fresh pot of coffee when Sam made his way bleary eyed and yawning to the worktop.

“Don’t know why they call it beauty sleep, you look like a freakishly tall wendigo.” Dean flipped the pancake.

“Thanks, Dean.” Sam poured a cup of coffee and went poking in the refrigerator for the milk. “Milk?”

“Used it in the batter.” Dean pointed at the cupboard, “There’s creamer.”

Sam huffed and shambled over, “I guess Cas slept in your room.”

“Because I’m so perky and bright?” Dean laughed.

“No Jerk. Because his yells brought me out from my room and his was empty. Your door was closed.” Sam took a sip of coffee. Hopefully that would help lift his morning grouchiness. At least Dean hoped it was morning blues and not some repressed disapproval of his relationship with Cas.

Dean rubbed a hand over his lower face, “He has nightmares.”
“And he can speak during them?” Sam asked with interest.

“Yes, Dr. Shrink-Chester.”

“Don’t you find that curious?”

“No.” Dean slid the pancake off the pan. He dropped a knob of butter onto the hot pan, moved it round to spread out and laid on a fresh ladle of batter. “Why weren’t you asleep?

“I stayed up late with the grimoires.”

“If that meant two busty hot German twins, it would make a much better story.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “I couldn’t clear my chest. I think I might try an asthma inhaler. I need to get to Smith Center for the vegetables someone forgot, and I’ll go to the pharmacy.”

“You know maybe you should see a doctor?” Dean paused and looked at his brother. He looked a gazillion times better than after the incomplete third trial, but compared to Sam operating at maximum throttle… it was clear that he wasn’t at full health.

“What do I tell a doctor? Hey I was purifying my demonic blood and well hey, it sorta melted my insides at a molecular level, you got any antibiotics for that?”

“Huh, “ Dean moved to take the bacon out before it changed from crispy to charred, “Yeah, I know, we’ve been over this. You want a pancake? Maple syrup’s on the table.”

“I’ll take two.” Sam got a clean plate and drizzled the pancakes with syrup. He sliced a banana and scattered it over, then got some cutlery and a bottle of water. “I’ll have mine a bit more golden and four pieces of bacon.”

Dean watched as his brother took the breakfast out of the room. That was for Crowley then. The first pancakes went to the demon… whoop-di-do.

Dean had to throw the next pancake in the garbage. He’d inflicted his rage on it with the spatula and it was unsuitable for human consumption.

“Sam if he wants seconds he can frigging manifest his own breakfast.” Dean said when he heard the sound of footsteps.

It was Cas.

“Hey babe.” Dean’s ire drained away.

He was wearing his beige chinos, boots, and grey Henley with the top buttons open. His hair was a mess but not tangled, like he had run the brush through it ever which way. He’d shaved too.

“Look at you.” Dean grinned. “You make me want to take all those clothes back off you and show you what my bed is capable of.”

Castiel had his notepad in his hand. He held it out. Dean wiped his sticky hand on the kitchen cloth and took it. He expected the letter Cas had been composing but it was a short note on a middle page.

*I am sorry I disturbed your rest. If you prefer I will repose in my room. You should not have to tend to my nightmare reactions.*

Castiel had his head down and his thumbs in his chino pockets.
“Shuddup.” Dean handed back the book, “You’ve been in here.”

He pointed at his forehead and made sure he had eye contact with Cas. “You’ve seen my memories of y’know.”

Dean paused a second with his lips parted deciding on his words, “There’ll be some nights I’ll startle awake with my heart jack-hammering and if you are willing to be there, then why wouldn’t I return the favor?”

He pulled Castiel’s hand up and squeezed. “Now come here and I’ll demonstrate producing the perfect pancake stack.”

Castiel was dragged over to the stove. Dean was explaining the consequences of ladling the batter in too heavy, when Sam cleared his throat.

“Can we come in?”

Dean stood rigid, holding the silicone spatula like it was the demon slaying knife, “I dunno. Cas, what do you say?”

Castiel straightened up, tightened his jaw and nodded.

Crowley followed a step behind Sam. He looked as he always did. No evidence of the beaten down mess Dean had to carry into the bunker. Either Sam had let him shave or his demon mojo had rebooted enough for him to look presentable. His skin did look raw around the handcuffs and the symbol etched collar. Dean guessed the anti-demon markings were an irritant and he couldn’t give a damn.

“Kitten, nice to see Squirrel resisted the urge to swaddle you in layers of plaid,” Crowley inclined his head towards Castiel and raised his bottle of water as if it was a fine scotch.

“Crowley,” Sam said in a low warning tone.

“And Squirrel….”

Dean huffed and made eye contact with Sam, telepathically imparting his ‘seriously you expect us to put up with this’.

Crowley continued, “Brought home your very own blue-eyed kitty-Cas, got yourself some man-pussy? Or maybe you’re the delicate flower…”

Dean blinked at the sound of Castiel’s hand smacking against Crowley’s cheek.

“Still swinging for Dean I see,” Crowley lifted his joined hands and dabbed the blood from the corner of his mouth, “Kitty packs a smokin’ punch.”

“Crowley,” Sam’s nostrils flared, “You made a commitment not to taunt or act on your grudge against Cas.”

“Who’s taunting? He’s not the one locked in kinky handcuffs against his will. I’m saying hello to my old business chum. Look at us both brought low and at the mercy of Winchesters. When you and I kissed to seal our deal the lights blew, just saying…”

“That’s it.” Dean slammed down a plate, “Sam take him out of here before I close that filthy mouth of his permanently.”
“Huh, you like the silent type, hey Squirrel?”

Castiel restrained Dean while Sam hustled Crowley out.

Dean calmed down. Castiel’s hand on his lower spine, while he served up helped with that.

Sam came back. “I’ve left him in the library with a book on Byzantine herb lore.”

Dean lifted his eyebrows.

“I don’t do Old Slavonic. You never know it might hold the secrets of the universe. Look, guys, I know he is impossible, but that was…”

“Insulting to Cas.” Dean finished.

“I was going to say it was an improvement. He was snarky and defensive, but he wasn’t flying between cringing apologies and threatening to have Castiel dismembered.”

“Whatever.” Dean couldn’t listen.

Castiel passed Sam a coffee. Breakfast began under a frosty atmosphere. Sam’s moans when he consumed his pancakes (with sliced apple, the freak), thawed out Dean’s smile. When Cas used his finger to get the last of the syrup off his plate, Dean was unreasonably pleased.

Those mysterious final pages of the notepad made their appearance when Castiel tore them with painstaking precision from the spine of the book. He handed them to Sam who read them, while finishing his final pancake one-handed using the side of his fork to cut.

Dean snagged the last two pieces of bacon from the centre plate for himself and Cas. Sammy didn’t deserve it after Crowley’s performance. When Dean looked up Sam had gotten his chick flick ugly crying face on. He remained dry eyed but it was clearly an effort.

“Sonvabitch,” Dean said but in a resigned gentle tone, “What has gotten into your panties now?”

Sam waved the sheets of paper at him and gulped, “I’m sorry Cas. And I believe you.”

Castiel found the Thank You page.

Dean looked on as Sam slowly rose from the table. He seemed stiff, but maybe it was the situation. “I’ll clean up here. You cooked Dean. Uh-hem, I’d avoid the library if you want…”

“‘S Okay, Sam. We’ve got laundry duty.” Dean said but his eyes remained narrowed. He wondered if he could pocket the small pages but Sam caught them, folded them and stuffed them in his back pocket.

“I have a few things if you are doing a wash. Don’t put the sweater into the behemoth machines.”

“No sweat, dude. We have Cas’s coat and my vintage Metallica tee. I’m using the new machine.” Dean watched Cas carry plates and mugs over to the sink for Sam.

“I’m sorry about Crowley.” Sam repeated.

“Look. Sam I don’t know what you are doing with him. I thought the plan was to get intel from him about hell, demons walking the earth, locations of Lucifer’s other crypts, Hell portals, etc. etc.”

“Dean he couldn’t string a sentence together when I finally made my way downstairs.” Sam ran a
hand through his hair. “I know it’s not our normal method of procuring information from demons, but I’m satisfied that this is working.”

“Right. So if I ask him something he’ll tell me?” Dean challenged.

“Like what?”

“Like everything he managed to get off the tablets?”

“I dunno. He has memory gaps.”

“Convenient.” Dean twisted his lip.

“Look. Give me some time. If it doesn’t work… then you can move on to your more proven methods.” Sam looked disgusted.

“So if your fluffy bunny hugging doesn’t work, you want me to torture him?” Dean spat, “Really, really Sam?”

“Dean, I did not say that.”

“Are we done here?” Dean glared. “Cas?”

"Fine, Dean, we're done, but you know that is not what I meant." Sam raised his voice over the sound of the filling sink.

Castiel walked out into the hall in front of Dean. He looked left and right, as if on a hunt and expecting Crowley to appear.

“Sam is an ass.” Dean grumbled.

Castiel looked worried.

“Don’t sweat it, Cas. We’ll be fine. I’ll wash his dumb sweater for him and he’ll bring me a beer later. Par for the course. We just rub each other wrong some days.” Dean sighed and shook his head at the curse of stubborn younger brothers. He jerked his head towards their bedrooms, “Hey, man, let’s get some chores done.”

Chapter End Notes

Long shift at real life work today. Most of this was written on my phone. Apologies if it is not up to scratch and for any errors. I will endeavour to correct them.
Simmering irritation from Sam’s offhand comment crawled under Dean’s skin. If they were on the road, he’d have taken off and driven the residual anger away. In times past, he might have found a bar brawl and expelled the rage in the crunch of another man’s nose and a set of bruised knuckles.

He made an effort not to transfer his annoyance to the way he was interacting with Cas. He felt guilty at the uncharitable thought of wishing Castiel could talk back to him so he could blow off steam by dropping a few infantile insults or trying to get Cas to argue with him. Saying anything mean to Cas while he couldn’t give as good as he got would be cruel and unfair. He didn’t really want to be mean to Cas, but he was itchy and tense. Later if it didn’t dissipate he’d go to the shooting range and mentally replace Meta-dick with Crowley’s smarmy face on each target.

Castiel was watching him out of the corner of his eye. Dean knew the pretend patience routine wasn’t cutting it.

“Sonvabitch.”

He had no fucking clean clothes. He hadn’t done laundry or given Sam any since before they raced off for the last trial. He had a couple of Fed suits and his mechanic overalls. He could only imagine the YMCA cracks from Crowley if he wore the overalls. By sniffing he found a pair of jeans with only a beer splash and an old used-to-be-black tee.

He huffed and sighed his way to the laundry room, stopping to load Castiel’s arms up with the former angel’s few items and Sam’s hamper contents. He took the damp towels from the bathroom across his own haul.

Castiel walked from one huge 1950s industrial laundry machine to the next. He seemed amused by the shiny white whirlpool front loader. Dean rubbed the side of the incongruous appliance.

“Plumped and wired her up myself.” He preened. “The big ole clunkers are for towels, sheets, old clothes and crap. Anything you don’t want mangled or pee-wee sized goes in the 2013 edition.”

Castiel snatched the trench coat out of the mountain of clothes.

Dean snorted a laugh, “As if I was gonna risk that.”

They exchanged a knowing smile.

“OK, will you fill a bucket with water and put in two scoops of the stain remover? We’ll soak your tie and khakis and my jeans from yesterday.”

Dean left him to it and separated the clothes into darks, lights and delicates. Castiel was leveling off
the scoop of powder with his finger when Dean looked up. He was about to tell him not to be so precise but decided not to be petty when Castiel was learning stuff.

“Cas!” He called. “See here. There is a whole crap load of different options on the machine. So normally with my screen printed band tees and our ties and stuff I use delicates, but we’re putting in the coat and Sam’s hideous sweater, so we’ll go so gentle it’ll be like the machine is bathing ‘em.” Dean selected the Handwash option. “The rest of our stuff is in those two behemoths. They wash like wham bam thank you ma’am.”

Castiel leaned against the clothes press and watched while Dean showed him the difference between various detergents and stressed the wonders of soft towels that Downy gave you.

Dean washed his hands at the huge sink. When he turned round Castiel was sitting yoga style on the floor watching his trench coat spinning.

“You want to come see what Sam is doing?”

Castiel shook his head.

“Any chance you’d tell me what you wrote to him? He seemed pretty cut up?”

That met with a bit lip and head shake.

“You OK, Man?”

Castiel looked up and produced a small smile. Dean wondered if everything was getting on top of him, or maybe it was too human to have to wash that coat. It made a change from being able to abracadabra your clothes clean.

“You wanna stay here. The handwash cycle will finish first. Through the far door is an airing room. The rods under the ceiling are suspended by pulleys. Let down the ropes and you can hang the wet clothes and raise them up to dry.” Dean thought of something else, “You can’t open the door while the clothes are cycling. When the spinning stops, there is a delay before the Open Door light comes on.”

Castiel nodded.

“Don’t worry about the other machines. They take all day. Are you sure you don’t want company?” Dean squeezed Cas’s shoulder. Castiel patted his hand, signaling he’d be fine.

Dean stopped in the kitchen and checked he had everything to make his best meat patties. They did but he would use the last eggs and he preferred larger tomatoes for the slices in the buns, and if Sam was going to Smith Center he could get those tasty smaller buns.

Sam was in the library, alone. Dean looked over Sam’s shoulder. He had those psychology books he ordered online. The DSM was under his elbow and he was reading a chapter in the other one called, “A Case Study in Conversion Disorder.”

Dean sniggered, “You want Crowley to have a road to Damascus moment?”

Bitch face Number 17 – Don’t sneak up on me while I’m studying.

“Actually, jerk, this is for Castiel.”

“What?”
“I entered all Castiel’s symptoms online.”

“What did having your grace ripped out produce on ‘I’m feeling lucky’?” Dean smart alec’ed back.

Sam paused to show his bountiful patience with his brother, “Conversion Mutism. Used to be called Hysterical Mutism.”

“Alright?” Dean asked warily.

“Get this. Patients have no physical disability. They stop speaking after a traumatic event. It is different from selective mutism which is more common in children and then the person often talks to a select group. It is also different from when a psychiatric patient refuses to speak. With conversion disorder they cannot form words.” Sam half read, half summarized. “Back in the early days they thought it was cos the person couldn’t do something during the trauma, like the woman who couldn’t walk cos she really wanted to kick out at her attackers.”

“Is there a cure?” Dean leaned forward.

“Not really. There are no timelines. Most recover in the first month. Says in this study that after four months the woman woke up one day and she could speak. She whispered for a few weeks and then returned to normal. Some don’t speak for years, others have remissions. Most patients are being treated for PSTD or depression. They recommended anti-anxiety meds and avoiding stress on one website.”

“So Cas could start talking again any time soon or not for freaking years? He’s in the wrong frigging place if he wants a stress-free existence.” Dean gulped. Maybe he should have set Castiel up somewhere in his own home.

“Dean shut up.” Sam glared at him, “He wants to be here. You are good for him.”

“Yeah, yeah, right,” Dean was uncomfortable with that, thinking of other times when he hadn’t been so supportive. He tried for a casual air, “What did he write you in that letter?”

“None of your beeswax and you can keep your light fingers away from my pockets, because I moved it.”

Dean curled his lip and gave in, “You still doing a grocery top up? Can you get some of those small burger buns in the bakery and some large tomatoes? I’m gonna do my homemade burgers.”

“Sure, Dean.” Sam looked up, “I’m gonna use up the stash from St Louis.”

“Huh?” Dean had swiped the few hundred dollars of bar takings as payment for having to deal with freaking witches and human-cats.

“When you called saying Castiel was human, I repaired all the angel proofing you’d scratched out. Don’t look at me like that Dean. I know you did it after Cas killed Samandriel so he could find you if he needed you.” Sam ignored Dean’s faint blush, “So Crowley was watching me and he suggested we fit a security camera on the bunker door, so at least we can see anyone who calls, an extra layer of preparation before we water, borax, silver them.”

“The douche is covering his own ass. He doesn’t want any angels flying in to smite him.”

“Well neither do we Dean.” Sam pointed out.

“OK.” Dean grudgingly agreed, “It’s a good idea.”
“Good.” Sam closed the books. “Crowley’s downstairs. He’s not locked down. I gave him a few documents to work on. I might go to the library for an hour to check their psychology section.”

“Sure. Have a geek out.” Dean bit his lip, “I mean I… we appreciate you looking for something to help Cas. Don’t be late, though, OK? My meat patties need those little buns.”

“You’ll toast ‘em?” Sam asked hopefully.

“Specially for you Francis.”

Sam held out his hand, “Keys, jerk?”

Dean dug in his pocket and threw the car keys over, “Drive careful, bitch, and freaking keep your eyes peeled for celestial dicks.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you are all still with me. Less domestic fluff and more plot coming up when they get some news from Kevin....
Dean checked in on Cas when Sam left. He had followed Dean’s laundry instructions and was resting against the airing room door.

“Watchin ‘em won’t make ‘em dry any faster,” Dean chuckled.

He slung his arm around Cas’s shoulder and brought him back to the kitchen. They brought their coffees and the last pieces of the apple pie to the sofa in the den. Dean left Cas watching some daytime chat show, while he burned off steam at the shooting range. After hitting some targets, he felt better, as if his muscles had been loosened by a long run.

For a while Dean cleaned his guns at the table behind the sofa while he tried to ignore Castiel’s channel hopping. When Castiel watched five minutes of the classic episode where Dr Sexy got shot in the ER, before switching over to Cupcake Wars, Dean had to decide whether to assume control over the television. He thought Castiel’s mood had been down earlier, so didn’t interrupt his enjoyment, but motioned that he was popping over to the library.

Sam’s browser history was a reference library on Conversion Mutism. There was a heap of psychobabble Freudian crap from older studies. However there were some university papers of interest, including a woman with temporary hysterical blindness, and a teenager who was mute for four days after the car accident that killed his family. Dean got lost in a case study that he hadn’t meant to click on. It was an archived study about a pre-school boy who presented with mutism after the traumatic loss of a parent. The boy had withdrawn from life and had finally been admitted to an institution. Dean felt cold and shaky after reading that one. He wished he could remember how and why he had begun to speak again. Dad would have known. Bobby might have too. He had only been six years old. He remembered talking to toddler Sammy, but not when he got his words back. It was frustrating. If he could recall the trigger, or event, then maybe he could help Cas.

The next website assessed the effectiveness of hypnosis. It seemed patchy at best.

The laptop lid was banged down by Castiel’s hand leaning over Dean’s shoulder.

Dean swung round. Castiel stood with his hands on his hips and he was frigging pissed.

“Sam’s been doing research to find a cure or a treatment for your voice,” Dean began to explain.

Castiel remained stony-faced.

“We should’ve involved you.” Dean admitted as he realized their error.

Castiel nodded and let his arms relax by his sides.

“He showed me his findings before he left. He’s going to the library in town to check out their psych section too.” Dean rebooted the laptop, “Look, Cas, do you want to read through this stuff? It’s kinda positive. Seems mutism from Conversion Disorder, which is Dr. Sam’s diagnosis, rarely is
permanent and often resolves without much intervention.”

Cas pulled up a chair and let Dean show him the first sites which explained symptoms, causes and diagnosis. Then Dean opened a cascade of windows for him to click between.

“I’ll leave you read in private. I’m gonna make a start on some decent grub.”

When he rose to go, Cas pulled him back down, so that he fell onto his lap. Castiel gripped him and held him there. The kisses seemed to impart gratitude for their research efforts. Dean’s returned caresses told of his relief that Castiel was not angry with him. For comfort Dean shifted one leg to either side of Cas’s lap. He was held in place by Cas’s hand on his spine and the other one round the back of his neck. Castiel latched onto his neck like a limpet. He sucked and worried at the skin near the hollow of his throat until Dean was moaning and marked.

“We could take this to the bedroom,” Dean gasped. His hips were moving and Castiel was grinding upwards to meet him.

His phone rang and rang with the ringtone set on ascending volume.

“Dammit,” Dean reluctantly pulled out of Cas’s embrace. “If this is Sam cockblocking us…”

It was Sam. Dean sighed and answered, “Y’allo.”

“Dean?”

“Yeah. What’s the story?”

“You got a sore throat Dean? You sound hoarse. You want me to pick up some lozenges?”

“Huh-uh, No. I’m good.” Dean cleared his throat.

“Should I buy Castiel a phone?” Sam asked, “They’ve a special on a pre-paid android.”

“Cas, you want a new phone?” Dean could hardly believe Sam called him for that, but then thought it was actually rather considerate of his brother. Presuming someone who couldn’t speak wanted a phone might be taken as offensive. Cas could use it to text and surf the net.

Castiel gave a firm nod.

“Cas says yes.”

“Cool. What have you been doing?”

“Oh, nothing,” Dean replied quickly, “Cleaning guns, laundry, TV. I showed Cas your research.”

“Good. Any sign of Crowley?”

“No he’s stayed out of our hair. You want to pick up some Monterey Jack for the burgers?”

“Sure, Dean. I got a bang up deal on a wireless connection security camera. I’m on my way back. You got the burger mix ready?”

“Just getting to it.”

“Catch you later.” Sam said as goodbye.
Dean stood up, “Sam’s right, babe, I need to get the burgers started.”

Castiel patted him on the butt and smirked when Dean glared at him.

“That sexy smack better have been an appreciation of my fine buns, and not an order to cook your meals and bring you your pipe and slippers.”

Castiel’s brow furrowed.

“Just so we are clear.” Dean called as he left the library. He thought that his comment had gone over Cas’s head.

Dean had two secrets to his burgers. One was the addition of a pinch of garlic powder to the patty mix and the other was that he simmered his chopped onion to remove any bitterness before he mixed them through. He would only add the hot onion to the raw meat if he was cooking the burgers immediately. He’d made that mistake once and Sammy had missed a sixth grade field trip due to vomiting from both ends.

While he waited for the onions to cool, Dean took a trip downstairs.

“You wanna bottle of water or something?” Dean asked Crowley.

The demon looked up from his book.

“Not particularly. You got any scotch?”

“Not for you.”

“Not even after I left you and your pet-kitty to have some sexy alone time.” Crowley smirked, “I heard you ‘Cas babe ooooh give it to me good, you’re so big and manly Cas’.”

“Fuck you Crowley. Keep your fantasies to yourself.”

“I bet I’m not far off.” Crowley blew Dean a kiss, “Bet you love it that he can’t talk while you are plundering his chapped lipped mouth with your tongue.”

“Sam will be back soon. I’ll send him down with some food.” Dean kept his anger pressed down and made to leave.

“How is Moose coping?”

“Huh?”

“With the shock. You know,” Crowley raised his eyebrows, “of finding out his big brother is a pansy.”

Dean turned on his heel.

Crowley called out after him, “Cos you know his calm façade is bollocks.”

Dean couldn’t remember his walk to the laundry. While Sam hadn’t popped open the champagne at their news, he had only been concerned, not disapproving or homophobic, at least Dean hoped he hadn’t. However he didn’t know what Sam had said to Cas last night. Shaking himself, Dean took a second to tell his racing mind that Crowley was trying to stir up trouble. He put the insidious words to the back of his mind. The washer/dryer cycle was finished. It took only minutes to fold anything that didn’t need ironing. He dropped the towels off first, before heading to their bedrooms.
Dean noticed the grimoires beside Sam’s bed, which he had missed earlier.

“Geez, Sammy, if I’d known you’d slept with them, I’d have come up with a better one-liner.” Dean put Sam’s folded clothes on the bed and made a random move to pick up the top grimoire testing its weight.

Between the two books, pressed flat, was the letter Castiel had written to Sam. To his credit Dean paused. He let thoughts of privacy, mutual respect, and honesty flit across his brain, but godammit he knew the letter was at least partially about him, or what he and Cas had going.

With only the minutest hesitancy, Dean sat on Sam’s bed and began to read.
Waiting for you

Chapter Summary

The Letter.

Sam

Please excuse my shaking hand. We are travelling now.

I wandered lost after my Fall. It was difficult to adjust to the limited scale and confining range of my existence. Do you understand? From when you were filled with Grace?

I could smell the forest and feel the ground under my feet. But I could not tell where I was in space-time. I had heard your metaphor ‘the silence was deafening’. It is true. The wind, the river, the birdsong were drowned out by the absence of the celestial choir. I was - I am human. I was and am Silence. The voices of my brethren are lost to me. I wished I knew if you had survived. If Dean had saved you. I worried endlessly that one or both of you may have died.

When Dean came for me, I wanted to be able to speak to ask about you. When I knew you lived a joy blossomed in my chest. You are my true friend. Sometimes I believe you have a greater understanding of me than Dean. I think of how you forgave and accepted me after I broke your wall and how kind you have been to me, oft when I did not deserve it. I am shamed when I think back on our first meeting, your honest Faith meeting my indoctrinated blinkered vision, seeing you as an abomination. Much has changed. You have grown into a mature heroic and honorable man, despite my desecration of your mind. Those months, Sam, when I took on your Hell scars – they purified me. I realize that they interfered in some way with the control Naomi held over my will. When they took me from Purgatory she had to resort to extreme measures in her efforts to prevent my disobedience and freedom to choose.

But I digress. Maybe not. What I have written leads me to when I finally broke free. She commanded me to kill Dean. I could not. The sight of his eyes pleading with me as I drove my fist into his face... You will understand, I know, that he pleaded not for his own life. He begged me to come back to him.

Sam. I love your brother in a way I have never loved another. More than life, more than my life, more than Heaven. I will always choose him. I have duties, as you both have your responsibilities, but before we reunite, I wish to reassure you that Dean is my first priority, just as you will always be his.

~0~

I apologize for the smear of blood on the reverse of this sheet. It is from the attack which Dean has now told you about on the cell phone. We will see you soon and I will allow Dean time to take you aside and tell you how we have acknowledged and commenced a mutual physical expression of our bond. I have watched him during our journey and know he has fretted and tormented his soul in contemplation of doing what I believe is termed ‘coming out’ to you. Although I now too am fixed as a male homo sapiens sapiens, I continue to think in terms of souls. I hope your reception of us will not be constrained by our shared gender.
Dean was here. He brought me my coat.  
I am heavy with disappointment. When you showed me to my room I was cold from overhearing your attack on Dean. I put my hand in my pocket to give you the pages that I had written but you were so intent on laying down your law and criticizing me that I stayed my hand.

I am not using Dean as a ‘sop to my neediness’. He is not using me to ‘get off his blue balls’. I will not ‘drop him like a hot potato’. Fueled by your anger you denied me the right to reply. I understand you are concerned. You are entitled to be. Dean is your family. I am the interloper. You have genuine suspicions. I vow to you that I do not intend to hurt your brother. I will do everything in my power to ensure we spend the rest of our lives together, if he wants me. If by some unforeseen hand I regain my Grace, and the host regains access to Heaven, then duty will call me, but I will not abandon Dean. I will always return to him, and I will not take off for ‘freaking months without a word’. Dean will remain the centre of my life.

Dean is in the shower now. You acted in a more reasonable manner while we had our pie. Dean’s hand hovered over my leg but he took it back when you came in from cleaning the kitchen. I understand you have been stunned and perhaps disturbed by our relationship. I plead with you to be careful with Dean. He takes to heart every word you utter. Please consider how any rejection of us, and by association his sexual identity, will cut him to the core. I can no longer attempt to divine your thoughts. Do you think I fundamentally altered your brother to have feelings for the male form? I will not breach Dean’s privacy with details but when I rebuilt him, his life was revealed to me. I am not the first man Dean has cared for or enjoyed. Although he seldom allowed expression of these desires due to your father’s disapproval and the hunter world. Dean is one who takes pleasure in flesh that attracts him regardless of gender. I ask you to disregard our chromosomes. I do not believe you hold such prejudices but it is difficult to process any profound change in a loved one’s life.

I must finish. He is before me now, glorious and warm.

I hope you can believe every word was written in honesty and with vast regard for you Sam. You have accepted me before into your family. Please accept me as your brother’s partner.

Castiel

The pages fluttered to the floor.

Dean crouched to retrieve them. He understood Sam’s ugly crying face, apology and vow that he believed Cas.

His hands shook. He abandoned the effort and retook his place on Sam’s bed.

He looked at his boots and the blue lined pages filled with Castiel’s tight neat script.

Some awareness made him look to the door.

Castiel appeared smiling and holding up a Samsung Galaxy box. Then his face switched to one of concern when he saw Dean’s distress.

Dean recognized the flash of crushing disappointment, when Castiel’s eyes fell on the pages
scattered on the floor.

Then any evidence of Castiel’s emotions vanished. With a blank face he turned away.
A helpless one at best

Chapter Summary

Warning for minor self-harm.
It is not the focus of the chapter and not extreme but if you are likely to be triggered read
with caution.

Additional warning for Dean’s self-hatred.

Dean tried to remember to breathe as he read Castiel’s words, addressed to Sam, but full of devotion.
The letter was overwhelming. He felt his grasp loosen on the pages and they slipped from between
his fingers. He was unable to co-ordinate his body to retrieve them. Dean Winchester, who had
defeated Dick Roman and shot Lucifer in the head, was undone by an outpouring of love and
concern.

He tried to process each word, tried to assemble them into a meaning almost too big to comprehend.
Castiel loved him.

Deep down Dean knew Castiel loved him. He had fooled himself that Castiel held him in high
regard, or was attracted to his body, or felt he was one of the family. The type of adoration that
Castiel had been unafraid to proclaim to Sam, that he had been proud to write about, Dean had never
received that from anyone before and he had never returned such depth of sentiment. His hands
trembled matching the quivering in his breast. He tried to imagine using those words. ‘You are
family’ meant you are loved. ‘I need you’ meant I love you. But to say it, to write it…

When he looked up and saw joy turn to betrayal and disappointment on Castiel’s face, it was like an
oncoming train slammed into him. He dropped his gaze as Cas turned away.

The beautiful sacred pages were on the floor like garbage, not held close and tight in Dean’s hand.
Maybe if Dean had been holding them like the treasure they were, then the sting of deceit would
have been moderated.

He had to fix this.

Urgently Dean sprang from the bed and took off down the hall after Cas, but the guy had the lean
wiry body of a runner and too great a lead. He slammed his bedroom door as Dean reached for it.

“Cas! Cas! Please, please, I’m sorry.”

Dean pressed his forehead against the wood. It was cold against his skin. An icy fear spread through
his veins like a virus. He had fucked up. Major League, Hall of Fame, fucked up. He knew it.

No matter who, they always found out what a disappointment Dean was in the end. They all got that
look. Their Dean-balloon deflated and they saw how pathetic he really was. Sometimes Dean didn’t
shoulder the whole blame, like with Lisa, or when Cassie wanted to call in mental health services
unable to accept the truth. Other times, most frikken times, Dean knew it was due to dumb stupid shit
that he did himself; playing arcade games when he should have watched over Sammy, letting a guy
touch him in front of Dad, making his deal, trying to say yes to Michael, getting shit-faced, the look
in Benny’s eyes before he swung the machete, Ellen’s face when he led Jo into hunting, Castiel’s hurt…

Dean slid down the door and sat with his knees up and back braced against it.

“Is nothing freaking sacred to you?” Sam roared as he marched up the corridor.

Dean managed to move his head, agreeing with Sam’s unspoken assessment of what a useless pile of crap he was.

“Don’t you dare!” Sam shouted.

“Whaa?” Dean blinked and craned his neck to look at his brother.

“You do not get to make all this about how bad you are feeling because you got caught, Dean.”

Sam’s eyes were burning holes into him, “You need to fix this. You broke Castiel’s trust. Not to mention why you were poking around in my private things?”

“I…” Dean gulped, “I brought your clean stuff and I saw the spell books and looked at ‘em, and the letter was there…”

“So?” Sam spat.

“Yeah.”

“No Dean. So what? You leave the friggin letter there. Geez Dean you are like a freaking child. The candy was there so I ate it. Do you have any impulse control? Fuck it Dean. Fix this.”

Sam turned on his heel and pounded down the hall.

Dean stayed where he was.

“I fucked up, Cas.” He called brokenly through the door, “Fucked up again, story of…”

There was no response. He drew his knees closer and rested his head on his arms. He mumbled apologies too low for Castiel to hear. He didn’t have to see Castiel to imagine the look of pain and betrayal he had caused. Sam probably looked like that when he told him to pick a hemisphere. He had a new entry in the billboard chart of worst Dean Winchester FUBARs. This one was more raw because of the heartfelt love Castiel had written.

He wanted a fucking drink. He wanted to drown in hard liquor.

Before Dean had broken everything Castiel had loved him enough to promise to Sam that he wouldn’t leave. He would not abandon Dean. A child’s voice in his head told him that people you love go away forever. A broken sob caught in Dean’s throat. He began to bang his head back against the door. Not to seek admittance but trying to inflict physical pain to take away the self inflicted heartache.

“I’m so fucking dumb.” He cried out loud enough for Cas to hear and smacked his head with each emphasized word, “So so stupid. I’m sorry, Cas. I am. I’m not made for thinking Cas. I’m a grunt. I don’t know what you see in me. I’m rotten inside…”

His head met air. Castiel’s body wrapped behind his and lifted him up under his arms. Cas didn’t hug him like the tiny four year old part of Dean wanted. He sat Dean on the hard backed armchair behind the door and commenced a silent rant.
Dean wiped his eyes and tried to lip-read as Castiel paced and pointed his finger and mouthed, ‘Hurt’ and ‘Private’ and ‘Devious’. Dean was transfixed by Castiel’s mute tirade. In his anger Castiel even licked his lips to moisten and continue like he was screaming the words. Then he slowly mouthed ‘Dean.’ He dropped to his knees in front of the chair. His eyes were red rimmed. Dean had made him cry. It made Dean feel like an insect.

Castiel placed his palms on Dean’s thighs and locked their eyes together, ‘I’…’Am’…’Not’… Castiel paused in his exaggerated speech movements.

Dean waited. He swallowed and tried to prepare to see ‘able to stay here’ or ‘able to trust you.’

‘Not’… ‘Leaving.’

He jabbed Dean in the sternum. The finger poke was hard and painful.

‘You’… ‘Will’… ‘Never’… ‘Speak’… ‘About’…”Yourself”… ‘Like’ … ‘That’… ‘Again’.

Dean wasn’t sure what had happened. He wasn’t sure he had been forgiven. However from dying out there on the floor, he had gone to having Castiel’s head on his lap. He carded his hand through Castiel’s unruly hair and let him get comfortable, nuzzling in, and making a damp spot from his warm breath. He could stay here in this moment, postpone the future and take the respite, and let it sink in that whatever the consequences to come, Castiel leaving was not one of them.
Kiss

Chapter Summary

The morning after - the evening before

They slept in Castiel’s bed.

Sam turned up with a tray of tomato rice soup and buttered bread. He spoke only to Castiel. Clearly Dean was in Sam’s bitch book. Sam did take the trouble to tell Cas that he had salvaged the patty mix ingredients and stored them in the refrigerator.

Dean was sitting on the bed with Castiel curled into his side when Sam came back to take away the tray. Sam had an old laptop, which was only good for playing music and watching DVDs. He handed over Star Wars: A New Hope. Dean thanked him. Sam told Castiel that he hoped he’d like it. Dean might have seen out of the corner of his eye, an indulgent smile aimed at him.

They reclined fully dressed against their combined pillow hoard. Dean had fetched them from his room. It was kinda awkward except it wasn’t. Dean pointed out the best bits with increasing enthusiasm. Castiel indulged him by nodding at Dean’s gestures. He wasn’t sure if he should put an arm around Castiel so kept his hands to himself. But as the movie went on, they shifted closer together, so that by the end Dean had his head on Castiel’s shoulder and Cas had his hand on top of Dean’s.

They didn’t snuggle that night. Dean was apprehensive to try anything more than light affectionate touches. He didn’t want to be rejected, nor put Castiel into a situation where he was uncomfortable enough to push Dean away. The tension still lingered and Castiel was obviously not in the mood. Dean was obscenely grateful to his forgiving partner, that he had not been kicked across the hall.

In the morning Castiel rose before Dean, who slept longer and deeper than he had in months. The morning after effect made him jittery. His clothes felt itchy and heavy. Even after he shaved, his hairs prickled his jaw. He thought his eyes were too bright, too green, in the mirror. He used nearly a tub of hair gel trying to get the style reasonably right. He was chilled and dressed in multiple layers, wifebeater, tee, Henley, plaid shirt, denim shirt…

There were two blueberry muffins on a plate in the kitchen, a half pot of still warm coffee, evidence of three breakfasts, and two notes. Sam’s scrawl of his name was propped against the coffee. The muffin plate was the paperweight for Castiel’s neat Dean on a folded over page.

Dean poured a mug of black coffee and added a sugar. He took a sip before he opened Castiel’s note.

Dean.
I have left you to sleep. I suspect the turmoil of last evening has taken its toll. I need us to return to where we were yesterday before you breached trust. I hate that I feel I must keep my notebook in my pocket for fear you will sneak a peek at my thoughts. I don’t like this.
Perhaps it is taste of my own medicine from when I would look in on you but not declare my presence. It is a bitter pill.
If you had an intense desire to read the letter, if you had approached me I would have summarized.
If you wanted the original we could have discussed it with Sam. I am saddened by your act. But it has not lessened my devotion.

Perhaps later we can watch the second rather strange space epic.

X

Dean barked at laugh at Castiel’s description of Star Wars. He wanted so much to wind back the clock and never see the beastly (yet glorious) letter.

Sam’s note said OUTSIDE.

He ate a muffin as he walked. Crowley was at the conference table on Sam’s laptop. Dean grunted at him.

“Cheery-day to you too, my denim wrapped jailor,” the demon sighed then gave a business like shout, “Sam! I’ve got a signal.”

Sam’s tousled head appeared over the balcony. He removed a screwdriver from his mouth. “Yeah? Can you see Cas or is it all pixels?”

Despite his revulsion at getting any closer to Crowley, Dean stood behind him and saw Castiel standing in the sunshine, waving up at the camera. His hoodie sleeve rolled up above the cuff of the grey and white plaid shirt.

“Target acquired, Captain, where is the deploy switch?” Crowley joked.

“Very funny,” Sam replied with sarcasm. “You can be the test subject for that phase of security enhancement.”

“Hey guys.” Dean interrupted, “You could tell Cas that he can stop waving.”

“But he is sooo cuuuute,” Crowley raised his cuffed hands and jiggled his finger at the screen as if he was rubbing Castiel’s belly.

Dean slapped his hands down.

“Possessive bitch are we?” Crowley snarked, “You know squirrel, you’d have made an excellent demonic double agent, if you’d stayed black-eyed, and had broken free of Alastair. You’re sneaky enough.”

“Shuddup.” Dean congratulated himself for not ganking the asswipe. He took the steps two at a time, heading out to greet Cas and see the camera.

The camera was small and hidden under a metal hood. It was a good buy and Sam had done a professional job installing it. “Nice work, Sammy.”

Sam nodded and packed up the tool box. Crap, Dean had forgotten Sam wasn’t talking to him.

“Hey, babe.” Dean spoke softly to Cas, “My jeans suit you.”

Castiel ran a hand over the pants that Dean had worn the previous day. They were a size too big. Castiel’s leather belt held them up. There was something very appealing about seeing those jeans on Cas. He loved the way Cas had taken them from the floor of his bedroom and wore them like they shared their possessions. He could have continued with his compliments on Castiel’s appearance. The way the hoodie brought out his eyes. The light stubble that showed Castiel had not shaved yet that day. The way the scrapes on his hands were healing. The red mark on his jaw that Dean had
sucked yesterday morning, matching the one on his own throat.

“I got your note.” Dean said instead. He used the tip of his tongue to wet his lips, “I am sorry, babe. I know saying it won’t regain your trust. It was a crap move and I regret it.”

Castiel put a finger to Dean’s lips. He made a narrow-eyed assessment of Dean’s layered clothing. Then he rubbed Dean’s upper arms as if he was frozen by snow and ice, not standing under a blue Kansas sky chilled by emotional aftermath. Cas wrapped his arms around Dean’s neck. In response Dean’s arms glided around Castiel’s waist. He inhaled Cas and held on.

A car passed by in the distance. Castiel moved first tilting his head so he could access the hickey on Dean’s neck and sucked rhythmically to deepen the mark. The intensity of Castiel’s desire pushed Dean back, so the metal hand rail dug into his side. He ground his hips forward, meeting Castiel’s body.

“You do realize that Crowley and I have front row seats for your performance.” Sam had come back out and slouched against the brickwork.

Cas looked sheepish. Dean grinned, “People would pay good money for that.”

“Well I wouldn’t. Come on.” Sam beckoned with his head for them to follow him indoors.

Dean trailed behind Cas. He worried at his lip. Had that been a normal tease from Sam? Like when Sam shrieked T.M.I. if Dean wanted to tell him about some barfly chick? Or did Sam’s stomach turn when he saw Dean and Cas entwined? When did everything get this complicated?

He was going to have to grow a pair and ask. He couldn’t keep up this draining urge to analyze every look of Sam’s towards them, every word Sam said.

On a positive note, Sam had spoken to him.

Crowley and Sam headed for the library. Dean cleaned the kitchen. Castiel sat at the laptop. He was fascinated by the camera feed. He spent the rest of the morning watching the screen while studying the manual for his new phone, which was charging via the USB cable. Finally Sam had to tell Castiel that the camera’s functionality would be compromised if the former angel kept using it to zoom in on insects and birds that passed by or paused in the region of the bunker entrance.

“Berry pie lunch.” Dean yelled from outside the kitchen, “Red-eyed assbutts get a slice too. It needs to be eaten today.”

Sam’s phone rang. He wandered to the den to speak to whoever.

Dean was serving up with the last of their Ben and Jerry’s vanilla caramel fudge, when Sam came in. Dean held up the empty tub, “There is only the Chubby Hubby and a half tub of Karamel Sutra left.”

“You like Chubby Hubby.” Sam whipped the plate with the smallest slice of pie and the biggest scoop of ice-cream.

Dean rolled his eyes. As if he hadn’t planned on giving that one to Sam anyway.

“Call was Kevin.” Sam mumbled through a spoon of ice-cream.

“Oh yeah? What’s the word?” Dean passed Castiel his slice. Crowley appeared and when he sat at the table Dean slid over a plate.
“They are coming over tomorrow.”

“Kevin does know Crowley is still here.” Dean checked.

“Hello! I am right here.” Crowley groused.

“You’ll be on lockdown.” Sam said to him.

“Bollocks.”

Dean ignored him. “What about the angel proofing then?”

“Appliel, Koneal, and Delifer will wait in the car.”

“OK.” Dean said slowly, “Why can’t we Skype this?”

“He says he’s made progress but he wants Castiel to check his findings before he is willing to share.”

Dean humphed and ate his pie, trying to use the sweet fruity perfection to block out warring thoughts of hope that Kevin and his angels might help Castiel, and fear that they could restore his wings, meaning duty would call Castiel away.
After lunch Sam set Crowley up with a battery of psychological tests to complete. The demon took off to the interview room saying he’d only play Sam’s game because he was bored. Sam gave Dean a knowing smile behind Crowley’s back. Problem was Dean wasn’t convinced Sam did know what he was doing.

While the demon was busy, Sam showed Castiel the work Crowley had done. Without being asked Cas took possession of one of the winged black armchairs in the corner of the library. He laid the pile of documents on the table and methodically worked through the translations with one of Sam’s pencils stuck behind his ear.

Dean sat in the other chair. He intended to read a book on Enochian magic that Sam wanted checked for anything that could help them with Kevin’s unrevealed findings. The book was in what claimed to be English but was full of thou, thee, ye, and seemed to have been written by a crazy person on magic mushrooms. Dean’s knees hopped. The incomprehensible words swam and re-arranged themselves. He couldn’t sit still. He was antsy. Cas glared at him. He tried not to distract him from his work. A minute later Dean’s fingers played out Smoke on The Water on the arm of the chair.

Cas slammed down the book he was cross-referencing.

“Huh?” Dean stuttered, “Sorry. I know. You are working. Right. I’ll just… get a beer. Yeah. You wanna beer Cas?”

Castiel wrinkled his nose and shook his head.

“Good. I’ll be back in a flash.”

Dean bolted for the kitchen. He wasn’t avoiding Cas. It was the research. Why were they researching ways to make Cas leave him?

He knew, of course, that he was being unreasonable. They weren’t researching ways for him to lose Cas. They were trying to find a way to lock all the angel-assbutts back into Heaven.

Earlier, the news showed storms over the Mediterranean that had caused giant freak waves to batter Crete. An angelic spokesperson had issued an apology. Thirty people were dead, more missing. It was not acceptable. Between angels setting up their own governments, smiting when they were in a bad mood, and now stirring up the weather, Dean knew what they had to do.

Sam had beaten him to the refrigerator.

“Cas want a beer?” Sam asked as he handed one to Dean.

“Naw, you’d think I’d offered him goat piss.”

“Maybe it tastes like urine to him now.” Sam shrugged, “He might prefer a whiskey from the borax
“You sneaky little…” Dean sucked back the words feeling he wasn’t entitled to throw stones. He grinned, “Ooops.”

“I was looking for cleaning supplies, and I have not taken any of your precious liquor.” Sam’s eyes got all foxy and sharp.

“Geez, give it a rest. I’m freaking sorry I read your letter.” Dean was heartily sick of feeling bad about the whole thing.

“It is a federal offence, you know, tampering with the mail.” Sam said in his authoritative voice.

“You what now?”

“It’s a felony.” Sam pointed out.

Dean laughed. He slapped his hand on the worktop and replied, “Seriously? That’s rich. I guess I’ll just go and hand myself in at the closest Fed office.”

“As soon as…” Sam laughed in unison with him, “Hey? Pretzels?” Sam produced a fresh bag.

“Thanks man.” Dean took a pretzel, “Sammy?”

“Yeah Dean.” Sam took a deep drink and waited patiently.

“You’re good, right?”

Sam’s brow furrowed, “I’m feeling stronger.”

“Not about your recovery, but geez, Sammy that’s awesome. I mean…” Dean took a breath, “…About me and Cas. Y’know and the sex?”

Sam spluttered his beer.

“Cos, y’know, we are, y’know, together but we haven’t worked up to…”

“Oh My God. Awkward! It is like you are freaking sixteen again and I’m twelve trying to block my ears. How many friggin times, I don’t want to know anything about my brother’s cock or his a-hole!”

“Geez, Sammy. Don’t have a conniption,” Dean took a quick gulp, “So it’s not because Cas is a dude?”

“Dean?” Sam managed to fill his lengthened name with sadness, sympathy and compassion.

“You know, our relationship, it’s OK with you?” Dean closed his eyes and ploughed ahead. He had to know.

“Besides the way you treat him like crap, and you never ever told me you were bi. I’m good.”

“I don’t treat Cas like crap.” Dean’s mouth dropped.

“Dean! You verbally assaulted him every time you opened your mouth before the last trial. You broke his confidence last night. But I know you freaking love him, you damned idiot. It took you long enough to see it.”
Dean was speechless. He got two more beers out.

Sam took the offered bottle with a smile. He flicked his hair back and laughed, “And at least he’s not a vampire.”

“Well,” Dean grinned. He slouched back against the worktop, “I might’ve had a kiss off Benny.”

“What?” Sam shouted and the beer almost slipped from his grasp.

“Just once,” Dean winked, “in Purgatory.” He saw the moment. The survival rush of beating a whole pack of werewolves, and the squeezing man-hug that ended in an embrace. They found Castiel soon after.

Sam grabbed a dishcloth and ran after Dean, trying to whack his backside.

“You wanted to know shit, Sammy!” Dean laughed as he raced ahead and escaped down the hall.

Castiel allowed them to pull him away from the translations. He had made some minor corrections. Dean was quick to point out the supposed errors. Sam was equally rapid to reply that they were minor. They had the juicy homemade burgers with melted Jack cheese and the toasted bakery buns. Dean made Castiel spit out a bite from laughter when he checked that beer did not taste like goat piss to him now.

When they had cleared up, the three of them watched The Empire Strikes Back in the den. Sam took an armchair. Dean sat sideways with his legs across Castiel’s lap. Cas gave a mean foot massage.

Dean thought that Castiel wasn’t giving the masterpiece of cinema the serious attention it deserved, especially because he snorted every time Yoda spoke. However when Han was tortured and frozen, Cas grabbed Dean’s hand and his eyes were riveted to the screen.

Sam disappeared when Luke arrived at Cloud City, to check on Crowley he said. Dean knew that the Vader and Luke chat followed by Luke’s skydive pinged too many Lucifer buttons for his brother. He said nothing. Castiel looked concerned at Sam’s departure but when Dean whispered “Darkside demonblood,” Cas nodded.

Dean popped the disc out and asked if Cas wanted to watch The Return of the Jedi. He waited while Cas flipped through his notepad looking for a clean page.

Not tonight. I can see why you like the stories. They are a parable on family and the dangers of power. Is the next movie the last one?

“It’s the last classic. There are three other prequels,” Dean replied. Castiel looked confused and did a fast scribble.

You showed them to me in the wrong order?

“No. No, Cas. This is the right way. The only freaking way to watch ‘em. The other movies are newer and not in the same league. We’ll watch those some other time.” Dean grinned, “So what would you like to do?”

Castiel shrugged.

“Hey, can I ask you something?” Dean was suddenly nervous. He thought of what Sam had said about the way he treated Castiel. Castiel nodded gravely, picking up on Dean’s shifting mood. “Are
you good Cas?"

Cas tilted his head.

“Y’know, I mean, you’re not in pain, miserable or crap?” Dean sighed. He didn’t know what to ask, “You’re not shitting it about Kevin tomorrow, or feeling blue about being human?”

He knew that had been too many questions. Sam was so much better at dealing with this stuff, but he was determined to try. “So you’re not struggling?”

Castiel put his hands around his throat and made a gagging cough.

Dean jumped to retake the seat beside him, “I know. I know, it must be fucking the worst to want to speak, but Sam says you mustn’t get stressed over it.”

Castiel rolled his eyes.

“I know, easier said than done. All that stuff we read said that you need a stress-free environment and don’t try to force it.” Dean chewed his bottom lip, “You know I didn’t speak for a long time.”

Castiel nodded.

“In the letter to Sam you said you’d seen my life journey. I’ve been trying to remember what happened but I can’t. If I could, then I’d be able to tell you, maybe help you. I friggin can’t think of anything. I remember when I only talked in my head and then teachin Sammy stuff out loud and later learning to read stories to him. Do you know?” Dean asked.

Smiling and curling up to Dean with his back leaning on Dean’s chest, Castiel raised the pad so he could see the words forming, Sam started to sing and so did you

Dean huffed a laugh, “I still don’t remember but I can imagine. Sam was such a giggly baby, and I’d’ve tried to teach him the right words. So I’ve got to start singing to you… serenading you? Is that it?”

Castiel grinned and turned his head to look up at Dean.

“Would you like that? A little bit of Skynard or the Zep? Or maybe there’s something in the bunker collection?” Dean ran through the classic vinyl in his room and the Men of Letters’ collection. “I know. I’ll play you the Ella Fitzgerald later.”

Dean began to sing softly in Castiel’s ear, “When you're near, There's such an air of spring about it, I can hear a lark somewhere begin to sing about it,” He moved his hand to gently stroke Castiel's bruised elbow, "There's no love song finer but how strange the change, From major to minor, Every time we say goodbye.”

Castiel didn’t miraculously speak but he did stand up and hold out his hand to Dean. He led them down the hall and into Dean’s bedroom. He kissed him tenderly and pulled layer after layer of clothing from Dean’s body. When Dean was lax and chilled on the bed, Castiel took pillow retrieval duty.

Dean felt like he’d had a win on the lottery. His memory foam missed him. He chuckled, imagined Castiel telling him he was anthropomorphizing an inanimate object. Castiel caught him laughing out loud in a room on his own, when he came back with the pillows.

“You need spare PJs Cas.” Dean thought out loud while Cas turned off the main light, “There are
some old grandpa style stripy ones in the Men of Letters storerooms, but we’ll head over to Junction City one day for a bargain hunt.”

Castiel proceeded to do a strip tease with the offending pajamas that made Dean’s mouth water and all rational thought depart his mind.
Kevin comes bearing news

Castiel pulled apart his Oreos. He would hold one half in each hand and eat them in turn. Dean was fascinated and sat opposite him with his elbow on the table and his chin on his fist. Dean had gobbled his mid-morning snack in seconds.

“Do they taste better when you take them apart?” Dean asked.

Castiel grinned.

Sam flipped open his phone. Kevin had texted to say he was outside. Instead of opening the door, Sam insisted on testing his camera.

Dean and Castiel followed the taller hunter to the laptop. Kevin was smiling up at the lens. His crew stood round him. Appliel’s back was to them, but they could see his white tight curls above the collar of his standard angel suit. Appliel’s vessel was of the same bloodline Raphael preferred but he had remained neutral during the heavenly civil war. Koneal and Delifer flanked Kevin. They had the appearance of career women in their forties, with perfectly coiffed hair and spray bottle tans. They fussed over Kevin like spinster aunts, but they gave Dean the vibes of stern disapproving nuns.

“Stick behind me Cas.” Dean instructed as they went to the door.

Kevin ran in as soon as Sam opened it, dodging Koneal’s attempt to restrain him.

“Sam!” He pealed and hung off the hunter’s arm. Then he grinned at Dean and said hello.

“Hey Kev.” Dean couldn’t help smiling back even if he was dreading the contents of Kevin’s backpack, “How’re you doing?”

“Good. Great. The guys are amazing. They take care of everything so I can work. They create this atmosphere…”

Castiel scribbled and passed over the oasis in the desert

“Exactly, Castiel.” Kevin looked at the Winchesters who were stumped. “Delifer said that if the Leviathan had not intercepted the Garrison, I would have been able to work and learn in a serene and safe place. Of course, as Appliel pointed out, the top brass would never have let me go. They are making their best effort to reproduce the conditions for prophethood.”

“Is that a word?” Sam asked.

“Possibly not.” Kevin conceded. He moved to the table. “They get anxious if I’m away for long.”

“Smity anxious or harsh words anxious?” Dean jumped in.

“Minor damage. Koneal burned a bush when I was too long with the dentist.”
Castiel nearly got sick laughing. Obviously that was hilarious to angels.

“Baby is out there.” Dean made to go but Sam put a hand on his shoulder.

“Oh they won’t touch the Impala.” Kevin said, “It is a holy object.”

It was Dean’s turn to get a stitch in his side from laughter. “Oh. Oh Kevin, stop… Sam and I… we lost our cherries in there. I bumped uglies with many a high school chick and of course I popped Anna’s…”

Castiel smacked his butt.

“Ouch!” Dean rubbed his butt cheek, “Fucker! That hurt.”

Castiel looked inordinately pleased.

“Seriously, guys, I’ve got to get back out… wait…” Kevin looked at Castiel and then at Dean, and then at Dean’s dark bruised hickey on his throat, “Have you guys moved on from the eye-fucking?”

Dean cleared his throat and in a very dignified tone said, “Castiel is my partner.”

“Good for you. For you both,” Kevin nodded, took the news in his stride, and continued, “So. I haven’t gotten everything off the tablet. I think, but I want Castiel to read over the gleanings I have here, that there is a reverse spell.”

He opened the back pack and pulled out a thick sketch pad and a giant bottle of water. “Koneal says I have to hydrate.”

From their resting place in the pad Kevin laid out three sheets of paper that had been wrinkled and then smoothed over.

“You didn’t have time to re-write them?” Dean asked.

Kevin didn’t dignify the question with a response. Castiel picked up the closest one to him. In Dean’s eyes it seemed to be a pattern of scattered symbols from the tablet surrounded by Enochian. He knew Castiel and the angels didn’t read Tablet-babble but Cas was running his finger down the Enochian and looking perturbed.

“I know,” Kevin said then turned his attention to Sam and Dean, “It’s like there was another layer of meaning to the spell. When I cracked the original, it niggled at me, made the symbols dance. There is more on the reverse side that I have yet to break.”

“Where is the tablet?” Sam asked looking at the suspiciously flat backpack.

“I didn’t want it anywhere near Crowley.”

“Fair enough,” Sam responded and pulled a chair out far from the table. He stretched his legs. “So Man, what have you got from it?”

“Well, there is a reversal.”

Dean nodded. He’d gathered that bit.

“You need to reverse each part of the spell Metatron used and then add a final element.” Kevin beamed at them.
“How Kevin?” Dean tried not to let his frustration into his voice. The poor boy looked so satisfied to be bringing them ‘good’ news.

“Well. I haven’t cracked that yet.”

Sam groaned.

Kevin was quick to add, “But I know where you start and what the key is.”

“There’s a key?” Dean imagined a larger version of the bunker door key and them kicking the angels’ asses through the pearly gates and locking them behind them, maybe adding a Castiel inspired ‘take that asshats’. He noticed the others’ concerned looks at his manic grinning.

“I’m good,” Dean licked his lips, “Continue.”

“Not a physical key.” Kevin sounded like he was teaching the dunce class.

“Yeah. Right. Why would it be?” Dean laughed to cover up that he thought it might have been and they’d have to dig around in another of Lucifer’s crypts to find it. He told himself to shut up and stop letting his anxiety make him look like a grinning idiot.

“This part says you must reverse each step in the original order.” Kevin pointed at the middle page, “That one is about the futility of attempting these trials and how Metatron only wrote the reversal because there must be balance. The page Castiel is holding says the Seeker must hold the measure.”

Castiel had been tapping his pencil against the Enochian. He wrote down the side of the page The Seeker must Keep the Log

“Huh?” Dean read it upside-down. “What does that even mean? Keep a log like a Starfleet Captain? Or walk around with a freaking piece of wood in a Twin Peaks tribute?”

“Are you sure Castiel?” Kevin asked, “My first instinct was Keep too rather than Hold but hold fitted better with measure.”

Castiel gave a sharp nod.

“Do you mind if I ask the guys their thoughts?”

Castiel stood up and headed for the door. The others followed.

“What?” Dean asked, “Hello. What the fuck kind of log?”

Sam jostled his shoulder, “A log is a biblical unit of measurement. I think it’s a small volume of liquid.”

“Freaking encyclopedia brain,” Dean grumbled but kindly because he was glad Sam had at least answered that part of the puzzle.

Outside Delifer was waiting in Kevin’s beat up Mazda. Koneal and Appliel were missing, until Dean followed Castiel’s gaze and found them sitting in the treetops. Delifer got out when Kevin used the bonnet of his car to spread out the sheet.

“Del what do you think? Castiel has suggested that the Seeker keeps the measure during the quest and that it is a log.” Kevin asked.

Dean blinked and he was being crowded by the other two stick-up-the-butt Kevin groupies. He
moved out of their way and plastered his side up against Cas.

“Castiel.” Appliel inclined his head in greeting.

Castiel mirrored his gesture in response.

“We are glad to see that you have survived.” Koneal stared unblinking at him. It made Dean feel like they were inspecting Cas.

“The Prophet asked us to help you,” Delifer didn’t sound very friendly. She took a step so she was directly in front of Cas. Dean put his hand on his arm. “You are still our brother Castiel.”

Delifer raised her hand. Castiel watched the glow of Grace from her fingers. His sadness and loss was tangible to Dean, who tightened his grip. The angel touched Castiel’s temple and closed her eyes.

“I am sorry,” Delifer dropped her inhuman gaze, “I cannot cure your mutism. There is nothing physically wrong with you.”

“Tell us something we don’t know.” Dean was all at once angry with her for disappointing Cas and with the world for the bum hand they always seemed to be dealt.

Delifer took his comment literally, “I can score his ribs to match yours. Perhaps not quite the same as yours.” She gave a weird smile, as if her mouth was unaccustomed to the movement.

Castiel laughed.

Dean raised an eyebrow.

Koneal came forward, “I will do it sister. You expelled a great deal of Grace in your attempt to heal our brother.”

Dean felt a twinge of guilt at his previous anger. He hadn’t known Delifer had made such a monumental effort.

“Why do Cas’s rib marking need to be different to ours? He is human now too.” Sam asked.

“Not different to yours Samuel,” Appliel answered as Koneal moved closer to Cas. “Your brother has an extra symbol that allowed Castiel to maintain the connection he forged at their first meeting. In times of need it helped guide Castiel to Dean.”

Dean knew Castiel had some kind of way around their rib wardings but had thought it was because Castiel had written them, and it didn’t always work, sometimes he needed to tell Castiel where they were for him to find them. Then he thought of how Castiel had shown up and found him a number of times before he popped open Purgatory, how Cas had found them when the guy got out of God’s armpit, and of the night they had found Castiel’s battered body on the highway in front of the Impala. He wasn’t annoyed that Castiel had presumed so much way back then when he did the rib inscribing. It made practical sense, and who knew what would have happened if Castiel couldn’t have reached him those times. When Dean looked up again, Cas was clenching his hoodie around his mid-section. Smarmy pride was a bad look on Koneal.

“Hurts like a bitch doesn’t it?” Dean sniffed, “It’ll fade Cas, and at least you are for our eyes only now.”

Castiel managed a smile through the pain and mouthed ‘yours’.
“Sure, my eyes.” Dean laughed.

Kevin and Sam cleared their throats in unison.

“We’re good?” Sam looked at Dean and Cas who both nodded, “Kev? If Cas is right about the liquid measure, what does that mean?”

Appliel answered, “Kevin have you told them what you have garnered about the blood?”

“I knew there’d be blood. There is always friggin blood,” Dean muttered.

“Summary of findings?” Kevin asked.

“Please,” Sam encouraged.

“A Seeker takes up the quest to reverse the spell. A measure of something from each part, blood in the first instance, must be protected and kept by them until they have the full log, then they can presumably do a new spell.”

“Presumably?” Sam queried.

“I haven’t translated that far.” Kevin looked apologetic.

“What do I have to do?” Dean demanded.

“You’ve nominated yourself as The Seeker then?” Sam asked.

“Damn Straight Sammy.” Dean stood up to his full height, “This is my quest. You are not jumping in to bathe in blood. Castiel is not going chasing after cupids without me. I’m shouldering this one. My family, my partner, my freaking planet, and excuse me guys, the angels can go directly back to Heaven do not pass go, do not collect $200.”

“Dean, you do not get to self-nominate or to self-sacrifice, or to run headlong under a coming bus.” Sam glared at him.

“I’m not. Not this time Sammy.” Dean wondered if Sam had listened to what he had just said. Castiel didn’t look too pleased with him either. “Look, guys, I’m not volunteering for a fast end here. I want to do this so Cas can live a life without fear of being smited, so we can go about our business without worrying about angels holding apocalyptic grudges and so Meta-dick gets his.”

“You are not doing this on your own Dean.” Sam insisted.

Castiel caught him by the shoulders. Dean bent his head so their foreheads touched. He spoke to Cas but loud enough for the others, “Cas, Hun, I know you might think this is your task to rectify but I can’t risk you, I just can’t. I won’t do it alone. I’ll need all the freaking help I can get if previous events are anything to go by.”

He turned his head to Kevin, “What do I need first?”

“The blood of the blood of the Nephilim.”

Castiel stepped back and threw his hands up. Dean watched as he marched back into the bunker.

“Metatron and Castiel killed the only living Nephilim when they took her heart for the spell.” Koneal supplied.
“Oh.” Dean responded. He supposed he should think that was it. There was no way to begin the quest. His quest. But he didn’t believe that. He felt there was a way around it. There had to be. “We’ll work on it, hit the lore, and you Kevin, you need to get working on the next part, OK man?”

Kevin agreed, “OK Dean. We’ll head out. I’ll stay in touch.”

“You don’t want to stay for lunch?” Sam asked.

“No. Thanks Sam,” Kevin smiled, “There is a noodle bar on the way home.”

Sam gave Kevin a hug.

Dean shook his hand. “You take care Kev. Don’t let Apples, Cones and Deli push you around.”

“I don’t see why he can’t use our proper names.” Dean heard as he walked back in to find Cas. Sam remained outside to wave them off. Dean huffed at the nature of angels. He needed to find his own and reassure him that not having a living breathing Nephilim available didn’t end things before they had even begun.
Dean found Castiel in the library. He was sitting in the black armchair staring at the wall.

“Hey, Man?” Dean called as he walked towards him, “You good?”

Cas shook his head and turned to look at Dean. His eyes were too blue, too moist.

“Hey,” Dean breathed and dropped to a crouch beside him, “What’s up doc?”

Castiel gave another head shake.

“Wanna do twenty questions?” Dean asked trying to keep the mood light.

Cas looked confused but kept his gaze on Dean. At least he hadn’t begun to cry.

“Are you angry?” Dean tried. He thought Castiel was attempting a ‘so-so’ movement with his hand. Dean froze an instant, then swallowed, “With me?”

Cas slowly hung his head with a negative move. He was so sad. Dean gripped his hand and squeezed. He counted it as a small victory when Cas squeezed back.

“The whole freaking song and dance is downright crap. It’s more blood and hurt and pain but you know what Cas? We are here. I’m not running off to be some Almighty Seeker, and you’re not fluttering away anymore. We’ll figure it out together.”

“All of us.” Sam’s firm voice sounded behind them. Castiel looked up and gave a soft smile to the other hunter.

Dean leaned over as he stood up and planted a kiss to Castiel’s forehead. He patted his shoulder as he stepped aside. “I think we all could do with a drink after Kevin’s news bulletin.”

“Bring a bottle Dean.” Sam called, “I’m calling a Council of War.”

Dean rooted out the two thirds full bottle of Jameson and four glasses. He twisted his lip putting the fourth glass on the tray but he had guessed correctly. Crowley was up from the bunker dungeon and seated opposite Castiel at the middle library table. Sam was poking around in the card index drawers.

“And where have you been hiding that beauty?” Crowley asked when he saw the bottle.

“You only get a glass if you are helpful.” Dean said as he banged the tray down.

“That is bloody bribery.” Crowley accused.
“Got it in one.” Dean confirmed.

Sam carried a small stack of index cards in his hand. He took a spot at the top of the table. Dean poured the drinks and then pulled his chair so his arm rest touched the arm rest of Castiel’s chair.

Sam raised his glass, “To Seeking A Way to get our World back.”

“And to ganking Meta-douche’s ass.” Dean followed suit.

“And to letting me go on my merry way,” Crowley added.

“You wish.” Dean huffed before taking his first sip.

Sam got obsessively organized. Giving each of them one of his store of yellow legal pads, three pencils, and a selection of index cards. At his place he set the laptop and the copy of Kevin’s notes.

“Is this Professor Winchester’s class? Cos old GED me thinks we should hit the books already.” Dean rolled his eyes and topped up his glass. If Sam was seriously going running this like a schoolroom, then once he got itchy under his skin, he was going to sit at the back and neck his boyfriend.

“Dean,” Sam produced bitch face number 44 – My brother is an impatient ass.

“As amusing as your brotherly banter is NOT, can we tell the King Of Hell what the skinny prophet had to say, and why I have to read a 1903 dictionary in Aramaic?” Crowley asked.

“Can you read Aramaic?” Sam asked pointedly.

“Why yes teacher, but…” Crowley started.

“Order.” Sam banged his glass on the table, “OK. Let’s do this.”

Dean knew Sam was about to deliver a little speech that he probably had practiced and edited in his head, but Castiel interrupted him by holding up a sheet of paper. Sam retrieved it.

“Share with the class.” Crowley said with amusement and leaned into his chair, swilling his whiskey around the glass.

“Cas thinks he won’t be much use. He is apologizing that his lost powers are unavailable and he wants to know if he could make us sandwiches while we work.” Sam delivered in monotone.

Dean swiveled to face Cas, “Listen Man. We need you here. We have to research the crap out of this and we need your input. You are not freaking useless, you are going to be ten times more useful than I am. You can weed out all the freaks and nutters’ writings. And yeah sure, if we find a lead, then you could have angel transported us there, but that’s why I have my Baby, and we’ll go the classic way, OK? And if I have to I’ll sit on your lap to keep you here…”

“Please don’t,” Crowley requested wearily.

Castiel nodded and tilted his head so Dean could do their touching foreheads thing. Dean wondered if it was becoming their signature ‘thing’.

“Fine?” Sam announced, “We are all good?”

Receiving no complaints, Sam continued, “Kevin has been able to translate enough to find that there is a hidden reversal spell on the Angel Tablet. There were three elements to the original spell; the
heart of a nephilim, the bow of a cupid and the grace of a seraphim. Right Cas?"

Castiel bit his lip and nodded.

“The roll back ritual requires something to reverse each part and a fourth element.”

“You need to gather all three again?” Crowley asked.

“As if anything we do would be so simple.” Dean chuffed.

Sam explained, “As far as Kevin can tell. We need to gather something, probably a liquid something, for each element. The Seeker is what the tablet calls the person attempting the reverse. They must hold, protect, keep, these gathered things until they have all four. The volume the mix must add up to is called a log.”

“A third of a quart.” Crowley shrugged, “Not so much for four components.”

“Why couldn’t they just say that then?” Dean grumbled. “Not on the tablet, but Kevin’s angelic triad?”

“I suppose they thought we’d figure it out.”

Castiel held up his pad, 0.348 of a quart is more precise

“But like, do we mix each thing together as we go? Or add them all at the end? Is it all blood? Altogether one third of a quart? Or a log of each thing?” Dean sing-songed a list of all they didn’t know yet.

“Kevin is still working on it.” Sam answered. “I have divided the Men Of Letter’s holdings on Nephilim between us. I’ll look online too. Unfortunately the original spell killed the only known one. So we hit the books, look for any reference to finding hidden angelic offspring, how to summon one, anything helpful.”

Following Sam’s direction they set to work. They worked diligently. Cas wrapped his foot around Dean’s ankle. Sam gave an occasional dry cough and Crowley took it upon himself to top up their whiskeys. Dean lucked out for once and he got the journal of an Ephraim Nobel, who met with a supposed Nephilim in 18th Century Boston. Ephraim had a sense of humor and Dean snorted a few times as he described the male half-angel’s attempts to hide in plain sight.

After couple of hours Sam cleared his throat. “Any progress?”

“I’ve got a definite Nephilim living in Boston posing as a socialite,” Dean delivered his punch line, “…In 1794.”

“We’ve traveled back in time before.” Sam pointed out.

“We had assistance.” Dean hissed at Sam for raising something Castiel couldn’t do for them anymore.

“I might have something.” Sam’s eyes glazed over and he pulled out the second book he had leafed through.

“Well I can now call you a giraffe in Aramaic and I know that some Nephilim leak Grace when angered.” Crowley supplied, “And nothing freaking else. What is the point of this?”

“Ah-ha.” Sam lifted the book and displayed a drawing of a ritual table with dishes of ingredients.
“This is one of the Men of Letters’ own spell books.”

“Is there a spell for conjuring a Nephilim?” Dean asked and Castiel nodded to support the question. “Or the one our grandfather did to travel forward to our time?”

“No, but get this, the spell is to summon the being you need to complete a vital task.” Sam grinned triumphantly, “And it is a breeze, no tapping into your own soul like Henry had to.”

“And it will work through time? Do we have to go to Boston?” Dean stood up as if to leave immediately.

Castiel put a hand up to grab his arm and stop him.

“You know,” Sam said, “It might summon a different nephilim or there could be an unknown one alive now. This way the spell pulls the target to us.”

“What do we need?” Dean wanted to do this now. The sooner they got started the better.

“Mostly herbs and stuff. Some of the blood of the man of letters whose task this is.”

“That is me. I mean it should work, we are legacies and I am going to be the Seeker.” Dean almost rolled up his sleeve. He had that rush to action that he got on a hunt. He knew they were still in the research phase but that drive was building.

“Squirrel is right. It pains me to say.” Crowley was leaning sideways to read the spell, “You seriously have ground up whalebone, an ounce of silver, a pound of earth from consecrated ground and freshly cut sage?”

Sam had answered yes to each one, pointing out that the whalebone was in the men of letters’ storeroom. “Fresh sage?”

“Yes Moose.” Crowley pointed at the page, “Sage leaves plucked from the plant.”

“Crap.” Dean huffed.

“We need a trip to the grocery store or, wait, there must be a garden center close by.” Sam said, “Hang on guys…”

They waited while Sam googled.

“Cawker City. And they have a herb section.” Sam practically fist pumped.

“Cas and I will go.” Dean volunteered, “That’s only a short run. He’s all rib warded now, and we’ll bring back take out for dinner.”

“OK.” Sam agreed. “Get a few plants and see if they alfalfa?”

“For the spell?” Dean asked as he headed to his room for his dark blue jacket.

Sam laughed, “No jerk, I want to try sprouting them for salads, I saw it online.”

“Yes Princess, I’ll get your precious green things.” Dean jiggled Baby’s keys, “Come on, Cas, let’s be gay stereotypes and hit the garden center at the weekend.”
As a result of the spell, they summon someone from Canon, but I am not tagging the character because I don't want to ruin my reveal. I hope you all don't mind this. I usually tag my characters in advance, but I don't want to give out a spoiler. The dilemma (wrings hands) has had me thinking all day!
While I am tapping out an author's note, let me say big huge moose-sized thanks to everyone who is reading, commenting, bookmarking and leaving kudos. You all keep me going!
<333
Dean didn’t turn directly south for Cawker City. Instead he took Castiel into Lebanon and called to Mrs. Edmondson’s condo. The grey haired but smooth cheeked lady took care of her grandkids while their parents worked, and for a few extra bucks, she took in small dressmaking jobs. She had already rescued a couple of Dean and Sam’s favorite clothes from knife holes and claw tears. After Dean dropped off Castiel’s trench coat with a request that she do her best with the tattered cloth, Castiel showed his gratitude and feelings about Dean’s thoughtfulness. Dean felt almost guilty for thinking that he really needed to suggest moving to the back seat for making out, but the gear stick was poking at him and he was going to have to crack his neck when Castiel finally let him go. However despite the mini-hardships and how sore his nipple was going to be after Castiel sneakily opened a button and slid his hand under Dean’s shirt, it was still magically and almost Djinn-like to share this intimacy with Cas. Dean wasn’t used to having all these touches in his life. Hell, Cas was probably making up for being touch starved for Millennia. Dean had a reputation to uphold, as an anti-chick flick guru, but Castiel was very difficult to resist, and really Dean didn’t want to try.

“Well, at least I don’t have to pinch myself to know I am not dreaming,” Dean grinned as they fixed their clothing.

Castiel gave a questioning head tilt.

“Nipple, Cas, your thumb and finger could break iron.” Dean wasn’t complaining and he smiled to show it. “You can always kiss it better later,” he joked.

Cas took him at his word and dived across to kiss through his shirt, leaving a damp mark on Dean’s chest. He hoped it would dry without a stain before they got to Cawker City. He shrugged as he turned the key. He could always button up his over shirt.

Dean put on The Zep for the thirty minute drive. Castiel was still and calm, looking out the window. Dean didn’t chat. It was comfortable. Dean realized he enjoyed sitting in silence with Cas, here in the Impala, or at home with his partner pressed up against him.

They had no alfalfa at the garden center but plenty of sage. They bought six sage plants. Dean got Sammy a pot of parsley and one of garlic chives. He didn’t tell Cas that the cilantro he picked up was for his own Tex Mex dishes. The dude at the payment counter asked them if they were starting a herb garden and told them about some free classes the center held for new gardeners. Castiel linked Dean’s arm and beamed at the young man. He took the loyalty card the guy offered. Dean didn’t bother protesting. Who knew, they might be regulars yet, the place had a great herb section. Castiel lingered over the indoor ‘office plant’ section. Dean read a couple of labels that claimed the plants could survive in windowless cubicles.

“Do you want one?” He asked.

Castiel picked out a lucky bamboo in a glass pot. Back at the counter Dean saw the cashier wink at Castiel and he was sure he heard the man tell Castiel he was lucky to have such a hot and generous boyfriend. Castiel held the bamboo close and Dean didn’t mind that he ended up pushing the cart of herbs to the car.

With the back seat full of plants, Dean rang in their order to the Chinese restaurant which was in the next town over. Their food was ready when they arrived. Dean gave in to Castiel’s mouthwatering
repetitive neck craning towards the take out bag and they shared the egg rolls on the way home. Of course, Sam demanded to know why Dean had forgotten the egg rolls. Dean didn’t bother answering and let Sherlock Winchester use his grey cells and link the empty white paper bag with the flakes of roll wrapper on their clothes.

“I’ve cross-referenced the spell,” Sam said around a mouth of Lo Mein.

“I fully intend to add learning to use a card index to Hell’s torture options,” Crowley said as he picked rice from his teeth.

“We can’t specify that we want a nephilim.” Sam informed them.

“But that’s what Kevin said we need and you said the Men of Letters’ spell draws who you need for a vital task towards you.” Dean checked.

“Yes, Dean, but there are four elements to the angel reversal. We might get what’s vital for one of the other parts.” Sam tapped his finger on the table.

“I dunno Sammy. I mean, we can get a cupid, I bet we could summon a seraph, but the nephilim is vital and we can’t find one.” Dean said, “It’s what the spell is intended for.”

“Magic is all about intent.” Crowley offered.

“Thank you, David Copperfield.” Dean snorted and then bagged the last chicken wing.

“You know Dean, if you use your blood for this you’re confirming your role as Seeker.” Sam’s face was doing his intense protective brother stare.

“I know Sammy. I’m ready.” Dean knew as he said it that he was ready. This was his gig. He couldn’t wait to get vengeance on Metatron for what he had done to Cas, and for expelling all the super powered dickwads to Earth.

Sam and Crowley had been busy while Cas and Dean had gone on their trip. The bunker had a ‘magic ritual’ room. Dean pulled a hooded robe from a hook on the door.

“Seriously?” Sam raised his eyebrows.

“Don’t we get to play the part?” Dean whined.

“I’m beginning to think you have a fetish for dead men’s robes.” Sam stared until Dean reluctantly hung the magician’s robe back up.

There was no requirement in the book for anyone other than Dean to perform the ritual. However Sam was determined to supervise. Castiel was busy plucking the sage leaves. Crowley had pulled in a stool and was taking the part of audience member.

Everything was laid out. All Dean had to do was allow drops of his blood to land on each ingredient, burn the sage leaves, and recite a plea in Latin for assistance from the universe to supply the presence who could assist him with the crucial part of his quest.

It was done in minutes. They waited. Crowley cocked his ear as if listening for an approaching rumble of thunder. Sam kept looking around. Dean looked at his sneakers. “Didn’t work, Sammy,” He mumbled.

Cas came over and wrapped a cloth around his bleeding arm.
“Didn’t work, Cas.” Dean repeated downheartedly.

They waited some more to be sure.

“Fuck this.” Dean grabbed Castiel’s arm and they headed to the den. He knew he really should help Sam clean up the table, altar, whatever, but he had hoped they were going to catch a break with the spell.

Castiel put on the TV. Dean decided he hated talent shows, but he didn’t change channels.

“You know Dean,” Sam said from the door, “We can call Kevin and ask if he got any more off the tablet. Maybe when we have more detail…”

“It’s cool, Sam.” Dean lied, “We’ll go back to the drawing board tomorrow.”

“You know sulky monkey, the spell may have worked,” Crowley said from behind Sam.

Dean rolled his eyes. He thought Sam would have gotten rid of him for the night, “Wait, did you call me a monkey?”

Cas growled and glared at Crowley from his place at Dean’s side.

“There are many reasons for a delayed answer to a summons; your target may be powerful enough to put up magical resistance, there may be barriers for example maybe you are getting a dragon from Purgatory, they could be coming a vast distance or be traveling through time, or they could be trapped by another summons.” Crowley supplied.

“Like when Dick had your ass in a demon trap.” Dean reminded him.

“Exactly,” Crowley sounded pleased rather than the insulted Dean had been aiming for.

“Have a good night’s rest, Dean, Cas,” Sam turned to leave, “We will hit the books tomorrow for the Blood of the Blood of the Nephil.”

“Pardon?” Crowley said pointedly.

“What?” Sam startled.

“You said you were looking for a nephilim before, not the blood of the blood. Are you all in remedial class?”

Crowley looked at three blank faces. Dean opened his palms as a so-what gesture.

“Jolly Green? Anything?” Crowley sounded disappointed in Sam. Then he began very bad impressions of Dean and Sam’s accents, “Oh Sammy you are my blood. Oh Dean, my brother, my blood.”

As comprehension dawned Crowley roared, “Hello! Family! The raison d’être of a Winchester!”

“Nephilim are extremely rare,” Sam told them absently going back to what they had already quite definitely established.

Crowley leaned against the door, “Do I have to spell out every bloody word for you cretins? There is a Mommy and a Daddy. And one of those was a human being with relatives. Check the dead chick’s family tree.”
Sam couldn’t wait until morning. He got the deceased nephilim’s location from Castiel, who only knew her first name had been Jane. Sam rang Garth who said he’d send a local hunter to get her birth and death records. He rang Charlie and asked if she could hack into any records that might lead them to Jane’s family members.

Dean could hardly believe they’d gotten a break, and from Crowley. He felt slightly dumb that they hadn’t thought of interpreting the quest in that way, but they had been so focused on the celestial side of the problem, they had missed the simplicity of the requirement.

Sam was beaming when he came back to the den. “Charlie says as soon as Garth gets us the data, she will be able to trace Jane’s nearest relatives.”

“She is the bomb.” Dean quirked a quick grin thinking of the feisty Queen of Moondor.

“She asked if we are still on for the cosplay event next month. I say yes, end of the world permitting.”

“Isn’t that always the way?” Dean laughed. There was hope. Maybe by next month everything would be resolved. Dean would have gone from Seeker to Angel Ass Kicker, and they could go back to their regular dangerous lives. He was deliberately avoiding what would happen with Castiel, if he got his flight feathers back, but in this visualization Cas was there in the shotgun seat on the way home after a successful good old salt and burn.

The next morning, Dean was tempted to call Garth for a progress update. He figured Monday morning at 8am wouldn’t yield anymore than an admonishment from the perennial optimistic hunter. If he didn’t call by noon, Dean decided he’d check in with him all the same.

He whistled to himself in the shower, hummed as he dressed, and sang a little Queen as he whipped up the last of the eggs for a giant omelet. Sam and Cas arrived at the kitchen together. Dean liked to think that the smell of his cooking drew them. Sam had that hideous bright orange plaid shirt on, and Cas was wearing the objectionable stripy crew neck sweater. There was a fashion police joke on the tip of Dean’s tongue, when there was a resounding knock on the bunker door.

It sounded like someone was using a battering ram to announce their presence.

All three ran to the laptop to see who was there.

Dean’s pulse rate leapt. His mouth dried up. The person outside had their back to the camera but Dean knew the shade of that hair, the slope of those shoulders….

He took off as fast as his body could move, tearing up the stairs to the door.

At the edge of his consciousness he could see Castiel trying to grab him, to hold him back. From the corner of his eye he could tell that all the color had drained from Sam’s face and his brother was gripping on to the back of a chair as if the furniture was the only thing keeping him upright as he continued to stare at the laptop screen.

“It’s Dad,” Dean croaked back to the other two. The spell worked. It worked. His Dad was a Legacy too and the spell was a Men of Letters rite. So many times over the years, Dean had wished his Dad had been there. He had relied on the wisdom that his father had taught him. He had poured over the man’s journal until he could recite it word for word. Of course Dean thought, his Dad could assist them, if anyone could, then it would be the best hunter who ever lived.

“Dean!” Sam yelled finding his bearings, “Don’t open the door!”
Dean was fumbling with the locks, “Don’t worry, Sammy,” He called back, “Bring up the water and silver, we’ll test him.”

“But Dean,” Sam roared, “That’s not Dad.”
Chapter Summary

Dean has a private conversation.

For the briefest of moments before the scales were removed from his eyes, Dean prepared to open his arms and feel the bone-crushing hug only his father could give.

Sam’s yells faded. Castiel pounding up the stairs to catch up with him barely registered.

He saw a hand extended towards his forehead, then there was a blinding all encompassing white light.

“I am sorry Dean. We’re not in Kansas anymore”.

Dean opened his eyes. He was in the red leather booth seat of what he thought was Kathie’s Diner in Jersey City. Opposite him was the apologetic face that belonged to his father from 1978, when Anna and Uriel had tried to kill them all.

“You called?” Michael asked, slouching his arm over the back of the seat.

“Get out of my Father.” Dean spat. “How the hell are you here? Where the fuck is Adam?”

Michael sighed wearily, “I was busy. It is more difficult than your mind can conceive of to marshal the angelic host without access to Heaven, while at the same time trying to stop your brother from wreaking havoc with the planetary weather system.”

Rage was building, boiling in Dean’s blood, “Where the hell do you get off? Taking me half way across the freaking country. Why aren’t you rotting in the cage? Is my Dad in there?” Dean’s voice broke. Maybe this was his Dad from before he knew Sam and Dean were his sons, “John? John you hang on, I’ll get him to leave you the fuck alone.”

Michael clapped his hands in a slow beat, “Very touching but Daddy’s not home.”

“I am going to kill you.” Dean vowed. His hands made fists under the table.

“Even if I am the only solution to whatever problem your Men of Letters spell was cast for?”

Dean gritted his teeth. The asswipe had a point. “In that case, answer my motherfucking questions.”

A brave waitress with bouncing blonde Shirley Temple style curls came to take their order. “Hi, My name is Hilda. I’ll be your server today. I didn’t see you guys come in. Would you like a menu?”

“We will have eggs over easy and with toast and butter. Dean will take coffee. I will have the orange juice, please.” Michael ordered politely.

The young woman’s eyes lingered on the two handsome diners. Dean wondered if she thought it was odd that Michael ordered for them both. He couldn’t care less. He wasn’t planning on hanging around to eat the food. He did allow a moment to admire her curves as she deliberately swung her
hips on her way to put in their order.

“Your questions, yes?” Michael picked up the salt seller and spilled a little on the table, then blew it away across the surface and onto the floor.

Dean wondered if being locked up with Lucifer for hundreds of Hell years had scrambled the archangel’s wiring.

Michael rested his right hand on the table and tilted his head as if thinking, or maybe he was listening to angel radio.

Dean was trying his damnedest not to pull out his knife and stab through Michael’s hand, just to inflict some pain on the dickhead, and to get his attention focused, but that hand belonged to his twenty four year old Dad.

“You have the Angel Tablet?” Michael asked.

“I’m the freaking one asking the questions. You are the one doing the talking. Capisce?” Dean blustered. He figured Michael wasn’t going to kill him. The Men of Letters spell surely didn’t allow whatever it summoned to go psycho-killer on your ass.

“The heart of an unsanctioned angel-human abomination, the bow of a dedicated cupid, the grace of a disobedient seraph, all in the hands of the lowly scribe of our Father.” Michael recited, “We know the spell. We read our Father’s writings. Why do you think Lucifer hid the tablet?”

“I dunno, maybe because he’s Satan and it got his rocks off.” Dean sneered.

“Raphael would never have allowed this.”

“Well boo-hoo, Rafe is dead, and so are a lot of other people, so cough up assbutt.” Dean wondered how far he could push it before he got his face rearranged by Michael’s fist. He hoped Sam and Cas were alright. That there weren’t any of Michael’s lackeys back at the bunker.

“Your brother and lover are fine.” Michael said drily.

“Stay out of my frikken head.” Dean shouted. Too loud, the other diners looked over.

“As you wish,” Michael gave a slight nod. “Where were we? The expulsion of all angels to Earth, very convenient for Luci and me. It was quite a surprise. Adam remains alone in the cage. I would have carried him out, but hello, stuck on Earth. I needed a vessel, and as you know Lucifer’s was stolen from him. John said yes. I re-inhabited him.”

“What do you mean re-inhabited?” Dean growled. He could do this. He could stay his rage and use the bastard to help them out.

“Oh, Dean. You only have to say yes once. The door is always open.”

“Sa-Sam.” Dean stood up. He had to get back to the bunker. Now.

“Sit down.” Michael barked, “Lucifer is busy. Last time I saw him he was mumbling something about his crypts. He reassembled Nick, and I have borrowed John’s form. As soon as I take back control of Heaven, I will return it to him. He will be back before Mary wakes up and I will ensure once again, as I promised, that their minds are scrubbed clean of that night.”

Their coffee and juice arrived. Dean watched Hilda pour his cup. Reality seemed disjointed. She was
having a regular day in her normal job while he sat here looking at the prime dickwad wearing his father’s face.

Michael drained his juice, “Why did you summon me?”

Dean cleared his throat. He didn’t trust Michael. But if the archangel planned to take on Metatron then maybe they were fighting the same battle.

“If you know the tablet’s spell, then you know there is a reversal.” Dean licked his lips.

Michael nodded at him to continue.

“We, huh, I mean, Kevin has the tablet.” Dean wrinkled his brow, “How come you can read the tablet? Cas couldn’t. Kevin is working as hard as Lady Gaga’s costume designer to translate it.”

“Kevin Tran, Prophet of The Lord,” Michael smiled. It was creepy. “Excuse me, a moment.”

Dean rolled his eyes. Michael closed his.


“You sonvabitch, leave Kevin alone.” Dean spat.

“I have no intention of harming the prophet. I approve of his guardians.” Michael raised his eyebrows and frowned as if shocked that Dean would think he would hurt Kevin, “As for my ability to read our Father’s word… “ He spread his hands palm up and did a little head bow, “…Archangel.”

“So you know how to reverse the spell? This is why you landed on my doorstep?” Dean took a deep breath to steady his nerve, “What do I do?”

“From that I presume my little swordling, that you have appointed yourself as The Seeker. As to why you got me, I don’t know. Lucifer or Gabriel could have answered your question. Perhaps you need my particular assistance?” Michael’s voice dropped to a whisper as their eggs arrived.


“You understand it is many centuries since I set eyes on any of the tablets. I believe you will need blood, tears and grace linked to the original three and then a corruption to curdle the mix.” Michael said, “But I would advise you to read the original text.”

“Could you be more specific?” Dean asked pointedly. He used his butter smeared knife to gesture, “We are on the case of the nephilim’s family blood. What tears? What grace? What corruption? Do I need a log of each?”

“You need to get a terracotta amphora to take a log. Rinse it with holy oil. Stopper it up with a cork and wax while you gather the next ingredient and when you have them all, you will be able to open Heaven and I will march my army through the gates.” Michael made a toothy grim smile.

“Right, yeah,” Dean agreed, “And you’ll stay there?”

“Excuse me?” Michael stared at him.

“No more smiting vacations to Planet Earth? No more Angelic interference?”

“I think you have me confused, Dean. I am an archangel. Not a demon. I don’t make deals.
However, yes, Heaven, or what is left of it, needs my attention. Your species’ petty squabbles and blink-of-an-eye lives are not my concern.”

“And Metatron?”

“He will be dealt with accordingly.”

“No.” Dean shook his head. He inhaled and exhaled deeply through his nose and swallowed hard.

“No?” Micheal repeated with amused surprise at Dean’s temerity.

“Metatron is mine. He hurt…”

“Castiel.” Michael finished, pronouncing each syllable of Cas’s name. “Interesting. How will you kill him?”

“I don’t know yet. But I will gank that sonvabitch, with an angel blade, or a spell, or the bone of a saint dipped in the blood of an angel demon alpha combo.”

Michael laughed. It was a strange noise. Not his father’s laugh, but a trembling hitching snort. “Leviathan joke. Excellent. You are learning Enochian humor from your bondmate.”

“My what now?”

“Castiel.” Michael clarified. “You may pray to me when you need my ‘vital assistance’. I will answer. We both want the same thing here.”

“Awesome,” Dean said with distinct sarcasm.

Michael’s attention seemed to be divided again. Dean considered if he trusted the archangel enough to ask him to read the Angel Tablet for them. Michael would probably agree, but would he tell them all the relevant details, or keep things back so that his team had the advantage? The edge needed to gank Metatron, the key to shut the gates of Heaven, anything detrimental to Michael, would not be revealed. Dean kept his mouth shut.

“I am called elsewhere,” Michael said and reached across the table, touching Dean’s forehead with two fingers.

Dean could hear Castiel’s wordless sobs of grief before he knew he was back in Kansas. Castiel was crumpled on the ground at the top of the concrete steps. Dean dived down onto his knees to scoop him up, “Cas, Cas, what is wrong? Are you alright? Godammit, is it Sammy? That assbutt swore you were both fine. What happened?”

“Dean?”

Dean looked up into the double barrels of Sam’s shotgun.

“Dean is that you? Because Michael you have a hundred and eighty years of payback coming to you.” Sam glared down.

Castiel had stopped crying and wrapped his fingers around Dean’s wrist.

“Sammy, it's me. I didn’t. I wouldn’t say yes. He didn’t ask.” Dean pleaded.

Sam lowered the gun, “We thought you were gone. What did he do to you?”
Dean shrugged. “He offered to help.”
Just Give Me Some

Chapter Summary

Dean fills the others in on his trip to Jersey

Turned out telling Sam, Cas and why-again-does-he-have-to-be-here Crowley about his breakfast meeting with Michael was more excruciating than Dean could have imagined. Dean sat at the conference table and spewed out a summary of events at NASCAR speed. Of course that didn’t satisfy any of them. Sam claimed Dean had swallowed half his words and had jumped around in a way that made no sense. Dean took a deep steadying breath.

“Look, the conversation jumped around like a friggin flea on acid. Buttercup wouldn’t answer a straight question,” Dean huffed, “Then he’d get all phased out as if he was Mork calling Orson.”

“Dean,” Sam chided, “could you just tell us what happened? I know it was high on the Winchester Weird-out Scale, but slow down and start again.”

Where did Sam get off talking to him as if he was a frigging witness in a case? Dean looked down. His hands were freaking trembling. He didn’t know if it was from temper or shock. He took another look at Sam. He didn’t look so hot either. Castiel had been standing at the bottom of the stairs playing with the hem of his stripy jumper. He moved over and took the chair to Dean’s right. He pulled Dean’s hands down onto his lap and laid his left one over Dean’s right, just holding it there until the shaking stopped.

Dean gulped. “Any chance of a stiffener?”

“I love you Winchesters, you’re my favorites.” Crowley commented as he went for the Hunter’s Helper. “Not yet noon and we are cracking open the liquor.”

Once Dean had a tumbler in his hand, Sam asked him to start again from the beginning. He did, taking it slowly and trying not to miss anything out. Castiel flinched at every mention of Heaven, Grace, Angels and shit. Sam’s eyes narrowed and he asked probing questions, wanting the exact words Michael used, facial expressions and tonal inflections. At the same time Sam’s skin got greyer and paler at every mention of The Cage, Adam, Hell and Lucifer.

Dean paused. Castiel squeezed his hand. Crowley’s ice tinkled in his glass.

“What Dean?” Sam huffed, “No holding out on me. There is more.”

How do you tell your little brother that he is an open meatsuit for the Devil?

“Michael didn’t go back in time and ask Dad to say yes again,” Dean couldn’t look at Sam. He picked a spot, which was the back of Castiel’s hand. “He simply went back and as he put it, re-inhabited his vessel.”

“But…” Sam started, his mind adding two and two together.

“Yeah,” Dean blew out a stream of air, “Lucifer doesn’t need…”
“Oh… Oh Right. I can’t go outside.” Sam swallowed hard.

Dean bit his bottom lip, “It would be safer if you stayed in the bunker.” He was about to add a bit about how Lucifer was using a rebuilt Nick but Sam turned and vomited pieces of omelet with coffee all over the floor.

No one commented as Sam righted his body and wiped his mouth with the edge of his shirt. Dean moved over and laid a hand on his back. He was watching for a full on rolling back of the eyes fit. Sam allowed Dean help him to a seat. Castiel got the mop and a bucket. Surprisingly Crowley patted Sam’s shoulder and made a joke about them both being prisoners in the angel proofed bunker. Sam smiled wanly at their efforts. He poured a large glass and knocked it back.

“I’m good.” He claimed.

“You sure?” Dean asked as he retook his place.

“It’s not like I had gotten out much since the last trial.” He shrugged. “Can I do some fact checking?”

“Fire away,” Dean sat back and prepared to take it. Any reticence he felt before had been washed away by his concern for Sam. He vowed to himself that he was willing to lay it all out. Whatever Sam wanted.

It turned out Sam wanted quite a lot of detail. This time he made notes. Dean felt like he was up before a Senate select committee. He tried his best but it was the third freaking time telling his story. He had the headache from two-way angel transport building under his skull. Castiel was not helping. He was alternating between two sheets of paper, held up like cue cards, But Why? and You cannot trust Michael.

Dean was freaking exhausted and close to breaking point. When Sam suggested he get down on paper precisely what Michael had said about the Angel Tablet and then source a suitable amphora online, Dean had enough.

“That’s it.” He slapped his palms on the table, “I’m done. I am sorry Sammy. I know it is important, freaking crucial, but I can’t sit here any longer and be interrogated about what the assbutt’s intentions are and then play frikken Antiques Roadshow on the web.”

He marched to the den, ignoring the three dropped jaws he left behind. He didn’t turn on the overhead light. He pulled the string on the green glass shaded reading light and fished around in the box of DVDs. He found his boxset of Season One Dr Sexy M.D. and stuck on the first disc.

He knew he shouldn’t have stomped off. He should have stayed and tried to help. He should have played up for Sam how Michael promised their Dad would not be harmed. He should have checked again that Sam was good after the bombshell of Lucifer being sprung free and able to take up residence whenever.

Dean kicked off his shoes and curled up on the sofa with a fist in his hair. He tried to focus on when Dr Sexy was still a young naïve surgeon who knew nothing of the deviousness of his colleagues and the intrigues of the hospital administration.

“I wasn’t interrogating you.” His brother’s hurt little boy voice jolted Dean’s heart.

“I know Sammy.” Dean stayed where he was. He couldn’t face Sam after running off. He’d screwed up again. The spell had drawn Michael to their previously rock solid hidden location. Now the asshat knew where the Angel Tablet was, and their plans to reverse it all. Dean wondered where he thought he’d gotten off giving all that intel to Michael. He was surprised the others had not called him out on
it. He’d seen Crowley’s judgmental sneers each time Dean repeated his own side of the conversation. Maybe Sam was going to admonish him now.

As if Sam could read his mind he said softly, “It’s not your fault Dean.”

“What?” Dean wondered what part of the fuck up Sam wasn’t attributing to him.

“Everything, whatever thing you are shouldering the blame for.” Sam came and sat on the arm of the sofa, “Dean, I was the one who found the spell. We all worked on setting it up. You didn’t ask for Michael to show.”

“I opened the door,” Dean whispered.

“You thought it was Dad. Freaking Hell, if I thought it was Dad, I’d have raced passed you.”

“You wish,” Dean snorted, “I’m faster.”

“I have longer legs, jerk.”

“But slower ones, bitch.”

“You tell yourself that Dean. Hey Man,” Sam sighed, “We’ll cope. We will do what you said, ‘use the bastard’, OK?”

“I shoulda kept my mouth shut. I shoulda… but it was Dad’s face, y’know. I thought it was Dad. How did you know?”

“From the security camera feed?”

Dean nodded.

“He liked to look like that, down there,” Sam gulped hard, “You know my memories are sketchy, like glass shards of a mirror mixed up with hallucinations…” Sam paused to inhale deeply, “He… Michael… He is not a good guy, Dean. Castiel is right with his note. We can’t trust him.”

“Fuck it, Sam. He was possessing Dad. I never thought he was ‘good’ for a freaking second.” Dean kept his voice steady and lifted his upper body so he was sitting on the seat.

“Right. Yeah. Just so we are clear. If we work with him, and the Men of Letters spell suggest we are going to hit a roadblock that only he can clear for us, then we frigging check and re-check everything he advises? Yeah?”

“Preaching to the converted,” Dean added, “and we are not letting him near the Angel Tablet.”

“I called Kevin while you were loading your gay medical crush. They are warned. The angelic trio think Michael will leave them alone, something about the sanctity of the prophet.”

“So what do we do now, Sam? Y’know about Satan?” Dean licked his lips. He waited. This ball was firmly in Sam’s court.

“I dunno,” Sam ran a hand through his hair, “He’s been out for almost a month. He hasn’t come looking for me. But Crowley is right, I’ll stay here as much as possible. Collecting the amphora and the nephilim family blood is going to be your and Cas’s gig.”

Dean sat up straighter, “The blood! Did Garth call?”
“No. Not yet. Cut him a break. These things take time.” Sam stood up, “You want to come out of your darkened sulky room?”

“Naw, I’ve started the pilot. I have to see the end.”

“I don’t know” Sam rolled his eyes, “you can recite the script.”

“Ah but Sammy, it might have changed since the last time I watched it.”

“That makes absolutely no sense. And they say you’re the older and wiser brother.”

Dean was about to retort with how his rep wasn’t as the wiser but as the adorable one. There was a soft knock on the partially open door before Castiel pushed it open with his hip. He was carrying a tray of sandwiches. Dean moved the open DVD case and the vintage magazines from the low coffee table. There were two plates with thick cut sandwiches and two cokes. Castiel had arranged the chips in a circle around the bread, and he had folded two linen napkins on the side. Dean was touched by the care Cas had taken with the simple meal.

“Obviously, I don’t merit a lunch,” Sam teased and winked at Castiel before the former angel got too apologetic looking. From the doorway he added, “Enjoy guys. I’ll be back if Garth calls.”

Dean shifted over, making room for Cas on the couch. “I hope you can deal, Cas, because Dr Sexy is in the house.”

Cas slid his body close as Dean pressed the play button. Dean was amused to see Castiel take apart a sandwich he had put together and eat the component parts in a random order. He wondered if he should take him out for lobster or crab claws. He might like food you needed to work on at the table. When lunch was done, Cas moved the tray to a side table and took the crocheted throw from the back of the sofa. He wrapped it around them and snuggled in for the afternoon. Dean didn’t object, even when Castiel’s sleep grunts distracted him from the TV screen. He found he was content to stay where he was bound by Castiel’s octopus impression, when disc one ended. He hadn’t the heart to disturb him just put on the second disc. He spooned Cas closer and had his own nap, cocooned in his partner’s body heat.
“I think you both have sleeping sickness.” Sam announced, his voice drifting into Dean’s brain, “Are you sure you weren’t both bitten by a Tse Tse fly over in Wyoming?”

Dean peeled his face off the sofa. He knew he probably had a pressure pattern on his skin from the blanket and cushions. He noticed he was alone in the den and the TV was off.

“Huh Sam? Where’s Cas?”

“I dunno. I’ve done the vegetable lasagna if you want some.”

“You mean vegetables I can poke out of a chunk of ground beef?” Dean asked in vain hope as he stretched his back.

“Not.” Sam grinned with dimples, “The recipe I found online. Vegetarian.”

“Rabbit food.” Dean rolled his eyes, but saw in Sam’s open expression a touch of the vulnerable boy who showed his brother his school projects, “I guess I could taste a portion.”

“Great. Find Cas. I’m serving up.” Sam spun on his heel.

Dean guessed it wouldn’t kill him to eat something healthier for once. He chuffed to himself as he went to the bedrooms imagining Sam’s face when Cas took apart every element of Sam’s creation. His gait got cockier recalling that Cas hadn’t pulled apart his homemade burgers.

Castiel wasn’t in Dean’s room or his own. He tried the bathrooms and went down to the level of the shooting range and to the medical bay. The bunker was like a freaking maze. There were rooms and storage halls that the Winchesters had yet to catalogue. Finally Dean pulled out his phone and sent a text to ask Castiel where he was. He headed back towards the kitchen via the laundry room. In the corridor his phone beeped.

I am in the dark room

“The what now?” Dean said out loud. Which level Cas?

“Freaking having to ask for directions in your own home,” Dean grouched happily and waited.

I am opposite the armory, Dean.

Dean knew where that was. The crates of scimitars and World War 2 Carbine assault rifles had made Dean’s eyes pop. There had been a whole box of trench knives engraved with as yet unidentified symbols. In the corner a three shot bazooka had stood next to an armored flamethrower that could
have taken out a whole forest of wendigo. Dean was almost tempted to go in and have a look through some more of the weapon crates, but he knocked on the door opposite.

Castiel stuck his tousled head out and grabbed onto Dean’s shirt pulling him into the red lit space. Dean took in the wires for hanging prints, liquid baths, strips of decaying negatives, film cannisters and jumble of boxes on the floor.

“Wow, it’s like a time warp.” Dean picked up a Bakelite 35mm Kodak and examined it. Castiel sat back down in the central space he had created. There was a flash in the dark and Castiel laughed.

Dean saw stars. He dropped to his knees next to Cas. “What have you got?”

From his childhood Dean recognized the noise of the Polaroid paper before he saw the square photograph come out of the camera. It wasn’t a bad shot. Dean was in profile holding up the Kodak with his eyes focused on the lens part. The background was black as if the shot had been taken at night or against a movie green screen before being filled in.

“Not bad. My turn,” Dean had to sneakily tickle Castiel’s side to get hold of the early edition Polaroid camera. He twisted and caught Castiel with his head tilted back in that unwilling laughter of the tickled.

“Come on, Jimmy Olsen,” Dean extended a hand to help Castiel up. “Sam’s got some sort of green perversion of lasagna for our dinner.”

Cas accepted his help. He took the Polaroid with him and the two pictures. He seemed to be scanning for other things he wanted. There was a box camera with glass plates that Dean wouldn’t mind trying for the hell of it.

“We can come back, babe.” Dean promised. Castiel turned and took another instant photograph of the mess he had made of the dark room.

“You know, I don’t think they make them anymore. You may not be able to get replacement paper, film, or whatever it’s called. Just saying you might want to be sparing with it.” Dean recommended.

Cas put the three photos in his pocket. Dean winced, “And you have to wait for them to dry, so I guess the last one’s gone to crap.”

The lasagna was edible. Sam had provided garlic bread for the hungry. Cas showed off his new toy. After dinner Sam geeked out on Kodak Brownies and Twin Lens Reflex hand helds, while Dean tried and failed to repair the early glass plate one. Cas took a vintage six-20 folding Brownie back to his room.

By the following afternoon Dean was worried they had spawned a monster. Cas was taking photographs of everything; walls, tiles, brickwork, Dean’s bedroom from ten angles, Sam shaving, Dean cooking, the ceiling of the observatory from a position prone on the floor. He was sparing with the Polaroid but the Brownie and a Canon 35mm never left his hand. After lunch Cas disappeared into the dark room with a book on the developing process. Dean hoped he wouldn’t be disappointed by the extras. Dean had taken the Canon while Cas showered, and had lifted his dead guy robe, bent over and took some ‘office Christmas party’ standard shots of his ass crack.

“Who the hell programmed The Ace of Spades as their ringtone on my phone? Sam!” Dean yelled and answered Garth’s call.

“Hey man.” Garth’s chilled out voice greeted him.
“Hey Garth. What’s the word?” Dean gripped the cell tight waiting for the answer.

“Hey, Dean. Missed you, you idjit.”

“No Garth, Stop. Just no Bobbyisms, OK?” Dean pleaded and sighed.

“Sure man.” Garth replied cheerfully, “I put my best guy, Lamar, on the case. You should have heard him moaning about his gas bills to get over to Frankfort and having to drop the pooka case he’d been working on, but I told him; Lamar this is more important, squeezing all those interfering smitey dudes back through the eye of a needle…”

“Garth, Garth,” Dean shouted down the phone. “The nephilim’s family?”

“Yes, good. I have them here. Jane Galton, born 1953, Paris Kentucky. Very well preserved. I’m e-mailing you the jpegs. Daughter of Misette Galton and unnamed father. Lamar had to bribe the clerk to get overnight service…”

“Yeah. Did it work?” Dean waved Sam into the room.

“Misette Galton died in 1985 but she had a brother, Marcel born 1935. No record of a death for him. Looks like a lead.”

“We’ll get Charlie on to it. Thanks man.”

“I know,” Garth’s grin was audible, “I’m a lifesaver.”

“You take care Garth. No angel issues?” Dean asked.

“Plenty to keep us busy. You look at the news today?”

“No. Why?” Dean closed his eyes. “What have the douchebags done now?”

“It’s funny actually. You know that oil slick from the tanker that went down near the Great Barrier Reef?”

Dean said yes but he didn’t really.

“There was a freak storm. Gathered up all the oil into a sort of waterspout, or oil spout, and it dumped its contents over a huge chemical factory in Laos.” Garth laughed, “I know there are casualties but some angel has a sense of humor.”

“Or an anti-human ultra environmentalist bent.” Dean gritted his teeth and wondered if Lucifer was going to sink Texas, ice over the North West Passage, or raise Atlantis next.

“Yeah, suppose, it must have been balls for the guys in the factory.”

“No, dude, wrong use of Balls.” Dean snorted, “But points for effort.”

“Take care Dean. You and Sam. Let me know if you need Team Garth’s assistance.”

“Will do. Sam’s booting up the laptop now. Thanks again.”

Dean shook his head at the younger hunter’s personality and laid back attitude. He wondered how long it would take Charlie to trace Marcel Galton or his children. He worried that cousins might be too far for the blood to have the potency needed. He didn’t want to have to pray to Michael to find out. Maybe after they Skyped with Charlie they could call Kevin for an Angel Tablet update.
Thanks once more for all your encouraging kudos, comments and bookmarks.

I'm running out of song lyrics from Candy for my chapter titles, so I may need to get inventive soon.... let's just say the fic is longer than I had thought it would be....
Quite Enough

Chapter Summary

The Second Sam Winchester Council.

Sam Winchester’s Council of War, Part Two, or as Dean was renaming it Hot Shots Part Deux, consisted of the brothers, Crowley who was in some sort of snit because Sam had left him downstairs for twenty four hours, Castiel who was reading a book on making your own pin-hole camera, and Charlie via Skype who spent the first five minutes trying to convince them it would be a good idea for Cas to shave a tonsure on his head to fit in with the vow-of-silence monk’s robes she had obtained for their cosplay outing.

“You know Frodo sacrificed his finger on Mount Doom to end a world of tyranny.” Charlie pointed out.

Castiel looked up as if there was another battle going on that he wasn’t privy to.

“Number one, an afternoon of Merry Men and Medieval Knights does not compare to the battle against Sauron. Number Two Castiel’s hair is not up for discussion.” Dean insisted, “Can we talk about normal things like half-angel blood collection?”

“Spoil sport.” Charlie curled her lip, “I am revising your station down from handmaiden to insolent cur.”

Dean laughed. “It’s more manly.”

“Don’t laugh too soon, your new costume has tights.”

Sam guffawed.

“I am sure you look splendid in pantyhose, Squirrel.” Crowley deadpanned.

“Yours too Sam.” Charlie added.

“If I go, if it is safe to go, then I will insist on at least chainmail and a shield,” Sam moved his head so he was caught on webcam and raised an eyebrow.

“But that will put you on the Sherriff of Nottingham’s crew.” Charlie protested.

“More appropriate.” Crowley added.

“Who asked you?” Sam turned on him.

“Nobody. Just offering it up to the group, your majesty.” Crowley’s veiled boy king reference needled Dean but he didn’t rise to the bait.

“Can we get back on point, please?” Dean pleaded.

Castiel closed his book and crossed his hands over the cover.
“See Cas and me, we’re ready, come on Charlie, talk to me.”

“You have seen the ID photos of our deceased nephilim?” Charlie asked first.

Dean nodded, “She was smoking for a sixty year old. Garth said well preserved. She must have been brined.”

Castiel scribbled out and held up for the camera, *She had Grace*

“And style,” Charlie added. “Born Kentucky, but her records and employment history shows she moved around. Never stayed more than ten years in one city. You know the Twilight effect.”

“The what now?” Sam asked.

“The freaky non-aging confuses the muggles.” Charlie explained. Castiel’s brow was getting more furrowed as Charlie spoke.

“Muggles are like civilians, Cas.” Dean explained, “and the Twilight thing compares the fountain of youth gig to living like a sparkly emo vampire.”

*Neither Vampires nor Nephilim sparkle*

“No, you’re right they don’t” Dean agreed.

“Vampires however will light up, if you apply enough electric current.” Crowley offered. He was met with stern faces, “What? I was being helpful.”

Charlie waved manically on the screen to get their attention, “Hello? Jane, what a boring name, had no children, or siblings. Her uncle Marcel, is still alive. Lives alone in a condo in Minnesota. Retired school teacher. Holds a gun permit and is a registered Doberman Pincher owner.”

“Awesome, a gun toting school master with a drooling blood fiend.” Dean sighed and ran his hand over his face.

“That’s not the best bit.” Charlie leaned closer to the camera.

“Don’t tell me. He is a member of the Westboro Baptist Church, he’s living beside the sheriff’s office, he’s a freaking witch?” Dean didn’t know which one would be worse.

“No,” Charlie started to giggle. She took a drink of something bright purple. “He’s living in… wait for it… Moose Lake.”

There was a crash. Crowley had laughed with such force his chair toppled backwards. Dean snorted his own glee at the sight of the smug bastard’s feet in the air.

“Hallo! A little help here for the handcuffed demon.” Crowley croaked.

Sam, big wuzz that he is for anyone in need, went and helped Crowley upright. Dean was robbed of the sight of Crowley rolling around like a worm to get up.

“Guys!” Charlie called, “Marcel Galton, lives on Birch Avenue down the street from the elementary school. I’m uploading an image from Google Earth, so you can see the house.”

“Thanks Charlie.” Dean said.

“Yeah, we appreciate it.” Sam said as a way of finishing the call.
“Wait, this is going to work right? Cos Mariel and her posse, all they want to do is go home.”

“Yeah, it should work.” Dean said in hope, “Charlie, you know Mariel and the chicks, they are still on Angel Radio right?”

“Yep still linked into their very own Archangel Network,” Charlie laughed.

Dean suspected there was a cult reference there but he wasn’t going to admit he didn’t get it. That was Cas’s line. Instead he asked, “They talk about any disruptions in the force?”

“Oh yes revered Obi-Wan. You mean the new sheriff in town? Yeah. Mariel said they have been told to get ready to head home, but I thought maybe there had been stirrings about your attempt at a reversal.”

“OK, if this guy shows up, my height, good looking, mid-twenties, dark hair, denim jacket, Midwest accent, you tell us, OK?”

“Or,” Crowley volunteered, “A scruffy blond in his forties with an olive green tee and a mournful expression.”

“You know guys,” Sam said wearily, “Archangels can change their clothes.”

“You expect Michael and Lucifer to turn up here?” Charlie squealed. “You guys get me in so much shit. It is not funny.”

“No, Charlie,” Dean tried for calm, “I was being cautious, ok?”

“Sure. I’m going to call on Mariel, make sure that everything is kosher.” Charlie waved her goodbye.

Once Charlie was gone. Sam texted Kevin seeking any update. Cas and Dean cleared off the table to check the map for Moose Lake. They’d need the internet or the books of maps in the Impala for highway development in the last half century.

Sam came back a few minutes later. “Kevin says what Michael told you about the amphora container checks out. He almost had that layer of text translated. Hearing of the amphora and the rinsing with holy oil triggered it to give up the meaning.”

“How does that work?” Dean lifted his head from staring at Minnesota.

“I dunno, that’s the way Kev explained it.” Sam turned the laptop so he could tap at the keys. “I’d already sourced a suitable container. The local museum up in Grand Island, Nebraska, has a display of Roman Vessels.”

Crowley blew whiskey out of his mouth, “That’s it. Vessels? I’m renaming Tuesday as Puns-day. Next thing you’ll need to go meet a guy who speaks Castilian to buy a squirrel.”

“Sammy? Museums don’t normally sell shit.” Dean said pointedly coming back to his chair with Castiel trailing behind.

“But they do Dean. In the little shop.” Sam smiled patiently. “Replicas of Amphora 5B. Will hold up to a half quart of the finest olive oil, and comes with its own cork. Only $79.95”

It was Dean’s turn to spew rot gut. “You what? Chances are it’s one of those little mom and pop museums that don’t take plastic. We spent the emergency stash on the security camera. I’ve got twenty bucks, what do you have Sammy?”
“Zilch.” Sam grinned, “You’ll have to steal the jug or go hustle. I’d advise hustling, we’ll need more greenbacks, and the last time we broke into a museum, not the House of Wax, if you remember we ended up in Folsom County.”

“Shit Sam, Cas is too pretty for the lock up.” Dean laughed and caught the hand of a bemused Castiel. “Come on jailbait, we gotta pack.”
I'll kiss your eyes and lay you down

Chapter Summary

Dean and Castiel get on the road.
And get it on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dean did a supply run of fresh food for Sam, including a bottle of the cheapest rotgut he could source for Crowley. Amazingly nothing untoward happened. Sam could have risked the journey after all. Dean’s last twenty dollar bill was burning a hole in his jeans pocket. Sam was right. He had to come up with some readies. The thought of trying their well oiled pool hustle with Castiel in Sam’s role didn’t really fly. Sometimes the right location for card sharking could be hard to find, but Dean thought Castiel’s poker face could work in his favor. Maybe he could convince Cas to work a quick con with him. Dean decided to think about it on their journey.

When he got back Castiel was dressed in his grey Henley and chinos, scuffing his Converse on the tiles as he sat waiting with their duffels at the bottom of the stairs. Their bags included a plain black suit Cas had found in the bunker. It wasn’t too identifiably 1950s, with straight lines and classic cut. It made the grade as a Fed suit. Castiel had packed his new white shirt and the stain removed blue tie. He had a 35mm Pentax on his lap.

The hunter dropped his voice and imitated Cas’s much missed graveled tone. “Guess we are leaving forthwith Dean.”

Cas slapped him on the arm but changed it into a full body hug complete with a firm squeeze of Dean’s butt.

“Geez Hun, mind the buns. I have to drive us cross country!”

Castiel gave him a mega watt grin, robbed the keys out of Dean’s hand and set off to load up the Impala.

Sam gave Dean a freaking cardboard folder, tied with string, of information. Dean was sure his brother was nerding out after discovering the Men of Letters’ stationery supplies. He leafed through. There were maps of Moose Lake, Jane and Marcel’s data, blueprints of the Grand Island museum and pictures of Amphora 5B.

“Thanks Man.” Dean clapped him on the shoulder.

“Take Care, Jerk.” Sam stood back and let Dean mount the stairs. He called up, “Oh, and I checked the route, as long as you don’t go off piste, no angel enclaves or bunches of omens.”

That was a relief. Dean was planning on sticking to the highways. They headed north to Grand Island, arriving at lunch hour. The museum was closed from 1pm to 2pm. Dean did a surveillance walk around the old style building that looked like a large family home set in gardens. He had briefly considered a quick B&E or shoplifting a jug, but he changed his mind. There were freaking alarms
and CCTV everywhere. Through the window he could see a security guard’s lectern. It might be a
local set up, but it had its security up to date.

“Plan B, we need to come up with the readies,” he called to Cas who was leaning against the Impala
taking photos of the museum, or maybe of Dean looking at the museum.

They stopped at a Biggersons to fill up for the journey. The day moved into afternoon and evening.
They listened to the radio more than Dean’s tapes but using driver’s prerogative he flicked passed
any sounds that were too offensive. By the time they had skirted Omaha and Des Moines, Dean had
developed a secret admiration for Imagine Dragons and a grudging understanding of Some Nights by
Fun.

Ten minutes past Ames Iowa, Castiel passed him a note asking when and where they were stopping
for the night.

“If we push on we can get to Moose Lake before eight.” Dean said but he noticed Cas’s shoulders
slump. Cas had needed a lot of sleep since Dean got him back. Dean figured it must be exhausting
being newly human. He chewed on his lip and thought about their route. There was that cute country
hotel in Iowa, but could he remember where it was?

“Cas? You want to stay somewhere a bit classier than our norm?” Dean rubbed Cas’s thigh
suggestively.

In response Cas grinned with a rapid eyebrow raise.

“We could chill out and be tourists. Dad and I came through here in spring ‘05. Garden gnome
dressed as a Harlequin making folks bury themselves alive.” Dean gave a chuff at the freaky crap he
had to deal with on hunts, “Dad took it with him for disposal when we parted ways. Now I know it
must have been a cursed object. At the time the grotesque pottery clown face just made me miss
Sammy like a hole in the heart.”

Castiel patted his shoulder.

“So we were holed up in the moldiest mustiest flea-hole in the state. And the place flooded. All the
guests got kicked out. Dad was headed to a bar. I was set to sleep in the Impala, when the owner of
the Forest Glen Lodge offered the evicted guests beds for the night. Let’s go see if it’s still there?”
Dean suggested.

The Lodge was fifteen miles off I-35. Dean thought Sam might rip him a new one if Forest City was
an angel stronghold, but the residents of the town seemed oblivious to the global change-about. The
hotel was still there, and if possible the landscaped grounds looked even prettier than in 2005. When
they entered the bright open reception of the country style lodge, Dean caught on. There were
posters and leaflets for Iowa’s favorite wedding venue. The receptionist apologized that they only
had vacancies for that night as they were block booked for a wedding party from Thursday. She
handed over the key card to a queen suite without blinking and asked if they would like the
continental breakfast in the morning or room service.

Cas took the camera with them when they stretched their legs on a nature trail along the riverbank.
He took a few shots of Dean, who believed he was becoming inured to his partner’s paparazzi
tendencies. When they got back to the hotel, they ate dinner on the veranda. Their discreet and polite
server took Castiel’s mutism in his stride when Cas used finger pointing to order their steaks, and he
took their picture for Cas. The waiter got Dean’s last twenty dollar bill as a tip. Everything else was
going to be plastic.
Back in their room Dean explained his plan for using the open investigation into Jane’s murder to get them entry into Marcel’s house. “You can’t get that look Cas.”

WHAT, Castiel mouthed.

“You know the ‘I’m the guilty party, I killed her, big pointy Styrofoam finger it was me’ Look.” Dean sighed, “We are the investigators. At least until we are inside. Then we make a plea for the old dude’s blood. I have the syringes, tubing and a blood bag. I’ve done it before with field injuries.”

Castiel didn’t look convinced.

“I promise we will do everything to avoid taking it by force Cas, but worst case scenario, I’m prepared to knock him out, if you can distract his hell hound.”

Castiel huffed. He pulled out his new notepad and wrote quickly, Can we make out now, Dean?

Dean smirked when he saw it. “Sure thing Cas.”

He made for Cas’s belt buckle. For a second he thought he was going to get his hands batted away but Cas started on Dean’s shirt buttons. By the time Dean had his hands on the fleshy globes of Cas’s butt, Cas had pulled off his own Henley and worked his way through Dean’s layers. Dean crowded him back to the corner pillar of the four poster bed and leaned forward so their foreheads pressed into each other.

“You wanna…?" Dean stopped to kiss Cas’s cheek and temple. “If you’re ready… I brought the lube.”

He was answered by Castiel pulling off his chinos. Only in his boxer briefs, Castiel wrapped his arms under Dean’s drawing their bare chests tightly together. Dean noticed the tattoo was almost healed. Soon he would be able to suck and mark all around it. Maybe Cas would gift him with a corresponding hickey. Castiel nipped at his neck. Dean breathed in the salty scent of Castiel’s warm skin. He ran his fingernails down Cas’s spine, eliciting a moan.

“You like that huh?” Dean grinned.

Cas made a breathy sound and lifted a hand to rub his fingers through Dean’s reddish brown evening stubble. He ran his hand back along Dean’s jaw and pressed in with his fingertips on the hollow near Dean’s skull. Dean leaned into the touch and closed his eyes. He felt the soft moistness of Castiel’s lips at the corner of his right eye and then on the lid of his left. He opened his peepers and saw the desire in Castiel’s gaze. Knowing how much his lover wanted this made Dean even more aroused.

“You are one hot sonvabitch, Castiel.” Dean complimented.

Cas caught his hand and dragged him down onto the covers.

Chapter End Notes

Just a short note about my posting schedule.

I’m away this Saturday and Sunday.... so I am going to post tomorrow evening (Friday) as normal. I have the draft of a short chapter which real life permitting I will post either early Saturday morning or late Sunday when I am home.... and if I can catch up there
will be a chapter on Monday, resuming normal service.... So long and short of it... I may miss one or two days this weekend but will be back to daily posts by Tuesday.

Thanks again for all your support.
Chapter Summary

Dean and Castiel get to Moose Lake

At breakfast Dean could feel eyes on them. Between Castiel’s extreme level smirk and Dean’s inability to walk straight, he thought every other guest could tell how very much they had enjoyed their four poster duck down. Dean finally dug all those innuendos about spending a night away from the kids. Without the risk of Sam, or Lord forbid Crowley, sticking their noses in, the sex had been awesome. Who knew the nerdy little dude was so flexible?

When Dean lowered his butt gingerly onto his restaurant seat, Castiel preened like a cat. “Now I can see why Crowley calls you a kitten.” Dean grumbled and ate his bacon and eggs.

He wasn’t on the outs with Cas. Last night had been… well, awesome. The sounds and moans Castiel made had driven Dean wild. Dean chuffed thinking if they had been back in the Whitefish cabin, the bed there never would have survived it.

And this morning… Dean smiled around a mouthful of toast…Castiel in his black suit with his chambray button down and the freaking tie. Dean had staggered to the shower and taken his time getting a close clean shave for his Fed persona. When he came out Cas was tying the blue tie on backwards. Everything seemed to slot into place. Like the final turn of a Rubik cube or the final roll of the dial when cracking a safe. If Dean believed in destiny, which he didn’t, being the poster boy for Free Will, then he would have had a sense of déjà vu rightness about that moment. And it was a Thursday.

Back on the road, Dean beat out the rhythm of eighties Metallica on the wheel. The sun shone and warmed the dark metal of the Impala. Dean shucked his jacket at their rest stop. He rolled down his window and rolled up his starched white shirt sleeve, letting his left elbow get a freckled tan. Castiel had his phone out for the early part, zooming and clicking with the camera ap. Then he took out his new (but very old Men of Letters) journalist jotter pad. Dean didn’t disturb him as he made his scribbles.

They were at Moose Lake by noon. They found the school with no problems and headed up the street to Mr. Galton’s condo. Dean double checked Cas was holding up his FBI badge the right way before he rapped on the door.

Mr. Galton was a wily fox. He made them press their identification against the glass and rang the division number on the card Dean passed over to him. While they waited Dean peered at what he could see of the neat simple home. Its owner was a bald elderly man, dressed for the golf course in tartan trousers and a beige long sleeved polo shirt.

Satisfied by speaking with their superior (Garth), Mr. Galton let them into his home, with a direction to take off their shoes. Dean didn’t particularly care for homeowners who insisted on shoe removal. The number of times he had to chase a demon or flee a phantom in his socks didn’t recommend it. However they needed Mr. Galton’s help and pint of blood, so Dean compiled.

“This about Janey?” He asked as he took his seat on a straight backed armchair and gestured for
Dean and Castiel to take the couch. Dean settled his briefcase of blood collection items by his leg.

The sound of Doberman claws on the other side of the kitchen door made Dean wet his lips to speak. “Yes Sir.”

“No progress on finding her killer, agent? You know they took my niece’s heart?” Marcel leaned forward and peered at them.

“Yes Mr. Galton. We are following a lead that Jane’s blood may have been the killer’s target. The profile fits other unsolved cases. We would like to take a sample of your blood as her closest living relative.” Dean pitched.

The Doberman whined making Dean clench his fists. Castiel shifted ever so slightly closer, offering support in a distinctly unprofessional manner.

“What does your partner have to say?” Mr. Galton’s narrowed eyes told Dean he wasn’t buying it. He didn’t know yet, if it was just their pitch that had fallen flat or the whole FBI gig.

“Ahem, Agent Jones has laryngitis.” Dean swallowed, “He is very dedicated to his casework.”

Marcel Galton began to laugh, a wheezing, thigh slapping process that had Dean running through his CPR bullet points.

“Janey wasn’t normal, Agent Page.” Marcel said when he got his breath back. “Now I don’t know if you are from Area 51, or that new Homeland Security division dealing with the angels, but I’d ask you not to insult my intelligence.”

“Yes, sir.” Dean agreed making a hasty change of plan. “Name’s Dean. This is my partner Castiel. We are here looking for assistance relating to Jane’s death. Anything you can tell us would help.”

“Therefore you young men do not need my blood?” Marcel checked.

Dean shifted awkwardly in his seat. “About that.”

“Let me lay it out for you, Dean. Jane was a super girl. She excelled in school. It was difficult for Misette raising that kid on her own back in Kentucky. The child’s father would breeze in every few years and woo Misette all over again before disappearing. Funny thing was he never aged a day. He was a sly rooster. Then Jane grows up, sassy and bright. But she doesn’t get a grey hair, doesn’t get wrinkles on her face. I’d met my good wife Christine and moved up here, before Jane had to leave her hometown. She spent eight very happy years here with us and then moved on again.”

Castiel had poked Dean with an elbow when the elderly gentleman spoke of Jane’s father.

“You knew her father? His name?” It didn’t really matter but Dean supposed Castiel wanted to know which of his brothers had been doing the rumpy pumpy.

Marcel laughed, “Called himself Tommy Atkins.”

Dean huffed and nodded in unison with Jane’s uncle. Castiel gave him the confused face. For Cas’s benefit Dean said, “It’s like an alias, used for a British soldier, like John Doe.”

“Like Agents Jones and Page?” Marcel said drily, “Now why do you want my blood, boys?”

“Jane’s father was an angel.” Dean waited for an exclamation of shock or denial, but Marcel remained blank-faced. He guessed after recent events that his news wasn’t a bombshell.
He got a note from Cas: \textit{Fornication with the human race was forbidden and the offspring of illicit unions abominations}

“I am not reading that out,” Dean hissed and crumpled the page, “Mr. Galton, Jane was the product of a forbidden love. Her kind, Nephilim, are extremely rare. You know of the night of the falling angels?”

“I’m old Dean, not senile.”

“Right. That whole thing, it didn’t just happen. It was caused, by another angel.” Dean scrubbed over his jaw and leaned forward, “Mr. Galton… Marcel, Jane’s heart was an ingredient in the formula.”

“She was killed by a rogue angel,” Marcel’s voice was filled with regret or grief, “Her father claimed he would always look out for her.”

“Well, in recent times, a lot of angels died, there was a kinda civil war up above. Perhaps he couldn’t anymore.” Dean reasoned.

“I don’t think I want to know how you have that knowledge. I am guessing you require a donation from me, but how will that help? I am Jane’s mother’s brother, not her father’s side.”

“There is a way of reversing the process. Jane’s heart was one of three components. We are seeking the elements corresponding to each. I can’t explain the metaphysics of it, maybe Castiel could…”

“If he didn’t have laryngitis,” Marcel said with disbelieving sarcasm.

“Yeah,” Dean agreed. “Your blood is close enough to Jane’s.”

“Should I have dialed 911 when you came to the door? Are you my grim reaper?” Marcel met Dean’s eyes.

Dean gave the senior citizen the respect of keeping eye contact. “No sir. We need more blood than your physician would take for a blood test. I have a donor bag. We need it about three quarters full.”

“And if I had said no to you son?”

“With respect, sir, I would have taken it.”

“Thank you. I like a straight talker.” Marcel rolled up his polo shirt sleeve. “I used to donate at the Red Cross. Would one of you bring me a glass of water?”

Castiel, who had no canine issues, braved the kitchen, while Dean swabbed the man’s arm and found a vein.

The blood was slow to flow. Dean wasn’t sure if it was an age thing. Marcel pointed Castiel to large frame containing a mount with apertures for six photographs. “Jane and Misette are in the bottom left photo. 1958. She was such a cutie. The top right is my Christine with Jane in 1999. Chris was not well there, but it was the last picture of the three of us.”

“They were good looking women,” Dean complemented.

“That they were. That they were.” Marcel nodded. He sipped at his water until Dean had almost a pint.

“Thank you Mr. Galton.” Dean pulled out the needle and put a band aid over the mark on his arm.
“It is a small sacrifice in a good cause.”

Castiel appeared with a plate of cookies and a glass of iced tea.

“Thank you Castiel.” Marcel took a cookie, “That was very thoughtful of you, and brave. Commodious normally frightens off all comers.”

Castiel inclined his head.

“Will you stay and share the cookies, boys, and there is more iced tea?”

“No sir,” Dean stood. “We need to be on our way. But thank you.”

“I suppose I won’t hear from you again.” Marcel was misty eyed for a moment. “But I’ll know if it worked, won’t I? If the world tilts on its axis again.”

“I guess so.” Dean shook his hand. Castiel copied him.

“Then good luck to you. God bless your efforts.”

Dean waited until they were off the porch to grumble about divinities that suck ass.

The briefcase with the blood of the blood of the nephilim was locked securely into the Impala's trunk.

"I guess we are doing this." Dean pronounced as confirmation of the successful collection of the first reversal component.

When he sat into the driver's seat, he got handed a note by Castiel who was wearing a worried frown

You are now The Seeker.

"With all the crap that goes with the title I presume," Dean laughed drily and pulled away from the curb.
I've Taken

Chapter Summary

Dean shows Castiel how to obtain money.

At the pedestrian crosswalk outside the elementary school, the Impala’s engine idled behind an SUV and a crossing train of second graders. Dean caught Castiel by his backwards tie and pulled him in for a lip crushing kiss. “We got it man. First quest. You were awesome. Freaking Doberman.”

Castiel smiled indulgently.

“Slap up lunch, Cas?”

Dean got a firm nod in agreement. He hit I-35 and stayed steadily at the max speed limit for the hour down to North Branch. From long experience he knew it was better to get the hell out of dodge as soon as a job was done, even if the target had been co-operative. Dean parked Baby in shaded spot at Denny’s. Cas pointed at the everyday burger and fries, but Dean wasn’t having it. They were celebrating, so he got to watch Castiel deconstructing a Bacon Slamburger while Dean blissed out eating his own.

*I believe the addition of potato hash was a step too far, Dean. I would prefer to have my potato items accompanying my main in future*

“Duly noted,” Dean gave a smirking nod, “Now how about I order us the apple pie, or do you want to pick an inferior dessert?”

Castiel just rolled his eyes. He let Dean steal pieces of his portion when the hunter shoveled his own piece in record time. Dean figured Cas must love him, giving up your pie was a sure sign.

They hit Des Moines after the rush hour, which was the second best time to drive into a city in Dean’s opinion. The dead of night being the very best. Back to hunter standard levels of comfort, Dean checked them into a paint peeling motel off the highway.

Castiel lay back on the distinctly lumpy queen bed. Dean stuck out his lip and huffed at things being back to normal. “OK Cherry Pie, we need to hit the town.”

Castiel sat up and tilted his head.

“I need you on this one Cas. Two man gig.” Dean rooted in his duffel for his newish black Henley and best denims. “You need to put on the red shirt, no undershirt. You can keep the dress trousers. I’ll give you my dual purpose black Fed overcoat.

Dean found his target location downtown near the Marriot. It was a green canopied wine bar with outdoor seating, pumping music, and socially climbing douches in Armani. His jeans nearly drew a blank with the doorman but Dean leaned into Castiel and rubbed his bicep. The bouncer took a closer look at Castiel’s apparel and nodded them in.
It was perfect. Obviously the place to be seen. Dean kept Castiel’s hand in his. He didn’t want to lose him in the crowd of predatory power suited cougars and tie-loosened bankers.

In a nook by the vast mounted plasma TV, Dean pulled Castiel close. A passing dickass hooted at them, but Dean wasn’t going in for a kiss. “We are going to move thorough the throng, starting at this end of the bar and ending by the restrooms. You stay at my back and whatever I slip you, you put it straight into the pockets in the lining. You got it?”

Castiel narrowed his eyes but he nodded.

That was enough acknowledgement. Dean started with a buzz headed jerk who elbowed a lady to get to the bar. It was like taking candy from a baby. He stayed back where the mob was three deep from the bar and kept a keen eye on his marks’ hands. Castiel played his part like a dream.

At the restroom Dean tugged Castiel into a cubicle. He pulled open the coat and saw six bulges of concealed wallets, “Man, you were class…”

Castiel punched him.

Dean tested his jaw and blinked his eyes.

Castiel winced and shook out his fingers.

“What was that?” The words were blurted out of Dean’s confused mind, part of which was concerned that Cas had hurt his hand.

Castiel poked Dean’s chest firmly with a finger and crowded him up against the partition wall, before taking a brown leather Hilfiger and flipping it open. Dean sighed as the painful pressure of Castiel’s finger was removed from his sternum to point at a photograph of a dark haired Hispanic woman with a baby and a Pekinese.

“No wait, Cas. You’ve this all wrong.” Dean pleaded. “Let me set you straight.”

The replying laugh could only be described as disbelieving.

“Why do you think we are in the mensroom and not booting it back to our piss stinking motel?”

Cas shrugged but he was listening.

“It’s not all card sharking, pool hustling and mail fraud, that puts the ice cream with the pie or gives us trips to the garden center. We do this.” Dean took the brown wallet. He curled his lip at the douches who put everything on credit. It only held two twenties and a dollar. He pocketed the cash. Had a quick look for anything else useful, like a work ID or such that they could change the picture on later, but came up blank. He didn’t touch anything personal, especially the single condom in its wrapper, or the credit cards, which could get him banged up like a hot potato. Once he was done he placed the wallet on the cistern and held his hand out for the next one.

Castiel made a circular ‘O’ with his mouth, passed over a black ladies Radley one complete with the little puppy charm. Dean got $170 in that one and a €50 note. Cas got $105 out of his one. The next two only yielded $80 between them. Last one was a beaut. It had no famous designer label but belonged to a die hard cash carrier. $370 in a money clip, and six loose dollar bills, and wait until Sam got to use this one, a hologrammed employee ID for Drake University Library.

All the wallets lined up on the toilet top. Dean led Castiel back through the bar. There was a bouncer by the emergency exit. Dean shouted in his ear over the loud beat, “There is trouble in the
“See Cas, the guy will find the stash before any opportunist steals it,” Dean said, “And now we run.”

At the Impala, Dean risked a moment to do a mental toot up. “$772 Cas, and a European fifty. All for the trouble of dressing up like yuppies and twenty minutes of our time.”

Castiel didn’t look as thrilled as Dean felt, but he didn’t seem angry anymore. Dean figured he’d put the whole gig down as a win.

He parked the Impala directly outside their motel room door and pulled Cas down the avenue to The Hole In The Wall Bar and Grill. Castiel was still pissy. Dean hissed at him that the douche-bag bankers probably had been reunited with their Pekinese photos and Amex cards by now. Castiel half turned his back to watch the coverage of the unprecedented plant growth in the Amazon basin.

Dean’s crack about idle hands and keeping the Devil busy didn’t provoke any response, so he downed two whiskey chasers and let Cas work through whatever dumb moral objections his newly human brain was throwing up. The bartender was Irish, and more friendly than Dean’s main BFF, who freaking sipped at some sort of rum and mixer. Somewhere around the time Dean’s vision started to blur, the bartender gave him sixty bucks for his €50 note. Dean thought he might have been losing out on the deal but he was too buzzed to care.

There was a vague memory of Castiel half carrying him back to the motel. Dean was forever going to deny he had belted out I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing, under the drunken logic that he was a New Seeker. He woke late morning to a glass of water, two ibuprofen and a note being pressed into his hand.

It took another glass of water, a hot shower and a vicious scrubbing of his teeth for Dean to be even capable of reading Castiel’s note.

With his towel wrapped around his waist, Dean emerged in a cloud of steam to the bedroom. Their duffels were packed and ready by the door. Cas had his chinos and red shirt on and was seated at the table picking at his nails. He had laid out Dean’s jeans, black tee and faded green shirt on the bed. Dean was too hungover to protest that he could choose his own clothes, thank you very much. He slumped over and picked up the note, not feeling so hot.

Good Morning Dean,

I would prefer to be warned before you take me on morally dubious acts of criminality. I am not unaware of your methods of obtaining the money necessary for your and your brother’s survival. I admit I find the pickpocketing more objectionable than the pool and playing cards because those acts have willing if foolish participants. However I will not continue to lecture you when you are no doubt in a state of tenderness.

I will ask you to keep your grizzled after alcohol mood to yourself.

Dean chuckled, making his head pound and stomach flip. Cas had a point. He put on his tee and the legs of his jeans. He stood up to finish dressing, “Tender and grizzled. I sound like a cross cut piece of beef steak.”

Castiel huffed. He came over to stand directly in Dean’s personal space. Dean gulped like the old days, unsure of Castiel’s intentions, but he got a kiss on his forehead before Cas turned to heft the duffels out to the car.

Later Dean told himself he should have known from its beginnings that it was not going to be a good day. They got to Grand Island by late afternoon. Dean waited for his replica amphora to be packaged up. Castiel went to the restroom. The lights flickered. Dean pulled out his colt, but realized his error.

mensroom.”
It was the demon knife he should have reached for. There was the sound of doors slamming shut. The newly black-eyed shop employee and old security guy cracked their necks. Miss Demon-cashier leaned over the glass counter and sneered, “The Queen is wondering what a Winchester wants in this hokum junk house. I am going to enjoy the process of getting that information from you.”
You're my Diamond in the Rough

Chapter Summary

The demons try to get Dean to talk.
Dean whumpage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dean’s first thought when the petite clerk’s eyes turned black was ‘Well isn’t this peachy’. His second thought was ‘Thank whoever that Castiel needed the bathroom’, followed quickly by, ‘I should’ve pulled the knife’.

The equally black-eyed security man edged closer, crowding Dean from behind. The only other customer, a horse faced woman in a powder pink twin set and pearls was sensibly cowering under a display of tourist dream catchers and fridge magnets of Platte River scenes.

Out of the corner of his eye Dean saw the mussed bedhead of his partner, only visible over the top of the poster stuck to the glass of the little shop’s demonically sealed door. He hoped Castiel wasn’t going to draw attention to himself. He had a bad feeling about this dumb museum. He should have trusted his instincts. All he had wanted to do was pick up the damned jug before they closed and get home.

The tiny red-haired clerk placed her hands on the glass display case that separated them. She leaned forward, her breath stinking of sulfur. “The Queen is wondering what a Winchester wants in this hokum junk house. I am going to enjoy the process of getting that information from you.”

“Sure sister,” Dean smirked, “Because I’m gonna fess up to you and hench-demon number five over there.”

“Oh but Dean,” The demon bitch put on a little girl’s voice, because that wasn’t creepy at all, “You will tell me every detail.”

The security guard may have looked like a retired serviceman working part time to supplement his pension, but as a demon he had a grip of iron. He grabbed Dean’s upper arms so tight he knew there would be unwelcome bruises tomorrow, if he survived that long. Miss Ginger Pubes completed the awesomeness by vaulting the counter and spitting on Dean’s favorite boots.

“Hey don’t mark up the merchandise,” Dean snarked at both of them, “How’d Abaddon know I was here? Just curious, y’know, for future reference.”

Dean wasn’t expecting an answer but teensy demon was a talker.

“Lucky break,” She bared her teeth in an approximation of a smile, “The former monarch had a security surveillance program with facial recognition. Seems someone pinged the radar the morning before last. One Dean Winchester lurking around this museum, casing the joint. We were sent to investigate.”

“Crowley and his motherfucking security cameras,” Dean cursed. There was the noise of something
falling over in the store room behind the counter. “You got rats?” Dean asked hoping to distract the hell-bitch.

“Lacey was quite influenced by your ‘hotness’. She failed to take care when extracting your purchase.” Demon-Lacey supplied, “Enough chit-chat Dean, you will tell me why you are here.”

“You’ll die waiting,” Dean would have folded his arms if he wasn’t being held by the other demon.

“I don’t think so,” She sneered and shoved a hex bag into Dean’s hand.

“Freaking witch demon, my favorite.” Dean tried to drop the cloth bag but it was stuck to him like used chewing gum.

The demon in the Lacey meatsuit leaned back against the display case and began, “Question One: What are you doing in Grand Island? Question Two: Why did you return here?”

Dean tried to stop his mouth from forming words and his throat from making sounds. Somewhere the irony of this spell and Castiel’s condition registered on the Winchester Luck Index.

“I want that jug,” Dean choked out.

Demon Lacey cackled. Dean wondered if her true demonic form had green skin and a warty nose, amongst her claws, talons, leather batwings, and horns.

“This piece of made-in-Taiwan crap?” She dangled the small amphora by its handle.

“Yes, that jug.” Dean involuntarily answered.

“What are you planning to do with it?”

Inside Dean did a dance of glee, previously he had been planning to drain Marcel Galton’s blood bag into it, but his plans had changed. “Can I show you?”

“Too many multisyllabic words for your brain to explain, Winchester?”

Dean forced his throat closed, held his breath and nodded.

“Proceed.” She nodded at her hench-demon to let him go.

Arms freed Dean reached for the amphora and broke it over her head. He ripped the demon knife from its concealed holder, twisted his arm back, and stabbed the security guard a death blow.

Unfortunately low grade pottery doesn’t do more that startle a demon and Dean found himself being twisted around by his right leg. His skull cracked against the floor. The knife went flying and his fucking dumb knee dislocated.

“Motherfucking,” He roared, which turned into a scream of pain as she rotated his hip so that his tendons and ligaments stretched and burned at being forced the wrong way.

“Wrong answer.” The demon smiled maliciously down at him. She kept hold of his ankle, pushing his leg sideways. Then she stepped over him so that one foot was beside his leg and the other high heeled shoe pressed down on his groin. Dean writhed in agony. His frikken leg was on fire all the way up to where it met his shoulder. A screamed “Sonvabitch” was forced from his lungs as she cruelly ground down with her shoe.

The demon opened her mouth to taunt him once more but her maw was backlit by her dying glow.
She fell sideways like a skittle toppling, revealing Castiel still holding the bloodied demon knife.

Dean tried to speak to thank him, ask him how he got in, tell him he was in freaking agony, but only a whimper came out. He flung the hex bag away but could only barely manage to grind out from between his clenched jaw, “A little help here?”

Castiel dropped to his knees.

Dean reached for him and clung on. He was in the manly process of using his hunting partner’s assistance to stand on his own two feet. However the spiking blinding pain made him tuck his face into Castiel’s hip. He tried to regulate his breathing, tried to think of the Percocet and Oxycotin back in the bunker, tried to focus on standing up. There was a chance he blacked out because when he came to a few minutes later, the army blanket from the Impala was covering his legs. Mrs. Blue-rinse-and-pearls had vanished. The demon corpses were lain down side by side.

Castiel appeared in the doorway with another amphora in his hand. Dean attempted to focus on the good stuff. Castiel was there and unharmed. They had another jug. The demons were ganked. Dean was doing his best to be thankful for small mercies but he was in a bucket load of torment. His fucking knee was facing New York and his leg was pointed to Texas.

Castiel placed his jug on the counter and knelt beside Dean.

Dean’s eyes dropped to his knee again. He tried to assess how much damage had been inflicted. His pain addled brain heard, “Hello Dean.”

That is all he freaking needed, fricking auditory hallucinations. He wondered if his skull was fractured.

“I am sorry, Dean. I cannot heal you.”

“OK, Cas Babe, just give me a hand up…Wait…What?…You’re speaking dude! What? When?” Dean gaped. He was so freaking happy that he didn’t feel his leg until he tried to move it.

“As I was attempting to extract the amphora from its display case,” Castiel explained while he leaned down, allowing Dean to put his arm around his shoulder. “It was extremely frustrating. Although the demonic power surge disabled the alarm system, the case was securely fastened. I said Phooey.”

“Phooey? Seriously, Phooey?” Dean gaped.

“I am sorry if you wanted something more memorable, but the case was very stiff.”

“Are you telling me that is the original jug?”

“Yes, Dean.”

“Awesome,” Dean smiled through his pain. “Your voice, the Roman original, awesome.”

“Yes I believe so. Can you keep hold of the shelves?” Castiel left Dean one legged, while he took the ancient jug and the replica’s cork from amongst the bloodied pottery shards. With their prize in his right hand and the army blanket draped over his arm, he took Dean’s weight again.

Dean staggered. His leg throbbed. “Ahem, Cas. You need to straighten my leg.”

“What Dean?”

“My leg. The gimp one. Straighten it.”
Cas tilted his head and squinted his eyes at Dean. “Won’t that inflict pain? I find it better to avoid intentionally hurting your body.”

It was on the tip of Dean’s tongue to make a sarcastic comment about Castiel’s not so vast experience of being human but he bit it back, “Knee needs to be popped back in before it swells.”

“Are you certain?” Castiel asked with grave concern.

“Freaking Nora. Just pull my fucking leg already.”

“OK Dean.”

Castiel yanked Dean’s leg straight, allowing the knee cap to jerk back.

Dean passed out again.

Chapter End Notes

Hurray Castiel found his voice, hope it was worth the wait.
I know you Baby

Chapter Summary

Dean has a nightmare and a talk with Castiel

**Sulfur invaded Dean’s nose. It travelled through his throat and pharynx, down his trachea and was absorbed through the alveoli of his lungs. It hitched a ride on his red blood cells and invaded every cell of his body, beginning the process of making him a denizen of Hell. He strained against his bindings, as if he could push the corruption out of his body. The rack tilted until he was upright and the Demon was in front of him, the one that came every day, but had yet to give him a name only a purpose. Take up his blade and the victim can become the torturer. As if Dean ever would. He thought of Sam, living and breathing, maybe Sam would go back to Stanford, maybe he’d meet a nice girl. Dean’s top lip was being pulled. It was being stretched and tugged so viciously that the skin was coming away from the base of his nose and his nostrils. Just when Dean thought he was going to be scalped starting at his mouth, a hook punctured his lip, piercing him clean through. Dean opened his eyes to see if it was as high a gauge as it felt. There was no hook. It was the claw of the grotesque being in front of him. “Feel that Dean-o? This is the first act of today’s exquisite schedule.”**

There was a disconnect. Dean should have piercing pain in his lip with blood flooding his mouth and throat, but he had a pulsating agony in his leg and a pressured hammering at the back of his head. There was a rumbling motion under his body. He could smell leather and oil and home….

Dean woke in the backseat of the Impala. He was wrapped in blankets, with an emergency ice pack on his knee. He blinked away Hell, blaming Demon-Lacey’s sulfur breath for triggering him. He huffed a beat and took in his surroundings. The amphora was on the shotgun seat. The Impala lurched.

“What the fuck!” Dean yelled.

“I am driving us home, Dean.” Castiel called back from the driver’s seat, “How are you feeling?”

“Stop the car! Stop the fricking car!”

Dean nearly tumbled off the seat when the Impala abruptly halted. “Please tell me you pulled over and we are not stopped in the middle of a lane.”

“I have not stopped in the middle of a lane, Dean. We are still in Grand Island,” Castiel twisted around so Dean could see his face, “You are not capable of operating this vehicle.”

“No shit Sherlock.” Dean grumbled, “But why and how are you? You didn’t scratch her or ding her, did you Cas? Are you OK Baby?” Dean ran a hand down the interior of the door.

“I believe you are suffering from delirium.”

“I am not freaking delirious,” Dean insisted, giving the Impala a final soothing rub of his hand.

“But you are concussed.” Castiel insisted in return.
“Get out of the pilot seat.” Dean could feel panic building, rising like bile in his throat. They would be killed, on the road, head into oncoming traffic, killed stone dead.

“And what do you suggest we do Dean?”

Yep, Cas was definitely annoyed now, Dean could recognize his pissed off voice. He undid his seat belt so he contort his body enough to be face to face with Dean, “Do we call Sam to come where there are demons? Should we wait for Abaddon to arrive? No.” Castiel rasped.

“No?” Dean repeated and looked agog at Castiel’s determined face. Perhaps he had segued from a Hell night terror into an Impala damage nightmare. He was about to pinch himself but the ice pack shifted off his knee. He grabbed for it causing a shooting dagger of pain to ride his nerves. He was awake, definitely.

“No, Dean. You will lie back and I will drive us home. I have checked the very informative reference maps and I remember our journey here. I will follow highway 281, through Hastings, all the way to Lebanon and then turn for home. I have observed your driving technique for many years. I will follow your example.”

“Oh Lord.” Dean raised a hand to his brow.

“Dean!”

“Sorry, blasphemy,” Dean rolled his eyes.

“Keep your leg straight,” Castiel instructed as he resettled in his seat, “Take the Tylenol. I left them on the blanket.”

Dean noticed the two pills of Tylenol 3, in a fold of the material and dry swallowed them.

The Impala jerked and shuddered when Castiel started her up.

“Be careful,” Dean shouted.

“Dean, I am capable. Do not lean sideways.”

“When did you get to be so bossy?” Dean grouched.

“I have always been this way.” Castiel said lightly, ignoring Dean’s bad mood, “Now, I believe that the driver picks the music.”

Dean groaned.

After twenty minutes of eighties love songs, Dean coughed. There was only so much Lionel Richie that a dude could take.

“Yes Dean?”

“Cas, can you put on something else please? I’m injured here. I can’t take anymore of the teary eyed legwarmer brigade.”

Castiel chuckled, “For you Dean, anything.” He scanned through various stations until he found a Kansas based classic rock channel that was also picked up in the bunker.

Journey’s Don’t Stop Believing had never sounded so sweet.
“Hey Cas?” Dean called once an advertising break came on.

“Yes, Dean?”

“I… huh… I missed your voice.”

“So did I.” Castiel said with conviction.

“I’m glad you got it back, even if you have only used it to order me about and steal my car.” Dean tried to block out the pain, willing the super powered Tylenol to have some effect. He wondered if the pills would do a job on his muzzy head too.

“There have been many times over the past ten days when I desired more than anything to be able to speak with you, my partner.”

Dean’s response was delayed by having to brace himself as Castiel’s exaggerated turn of the wheel produced a very sharp left turn as they departed Hastings.

“Are you sure you know how to drive Cas?” Dean panted.

“Jimmy could drive Dean. A lot of it is muscle memory and adjustments in spatial perception.”

“You know,” Dean cleared his throat, “Y’know, I am sorry and all about Sam’s letter.”

“Yes. I know you are.” Castiel said with little emotion.

“And for taking you pickpocketing without telling you, and for getting shitfaced last night after you punched me, and for letting Gory-Hell and Lick-Ass get the jump on us…”

“Stop,” Castiel interrupted Dean attempt at seeking forgiveness, “Please, don’t.”

“Huh?” Dean managed to make a noise of querulous surprise.

“We are not doing this. I refuse to spend my first day speaking as a human full of regrets and apologies. Do we go back to seal breaking and purgatory opening? I too am sorry…for being a burden and I want to thank you for saving me.”

“You listen here Cas. If you are going to apologize and thank me repeatedly you can stopper back up your piehole.”

Cas laughed, full throaty with deep tones. “You see, you don’t like it either.”

“I was trying to…” Dean’s words faltered. Castiel was right. They both knew there were regrets and gratitude, there was no need to express them, but Dean was still glad he had got in the apology for reading the letter.

“There is a great amount of acts and non-actions that I regret over my long existence, but let us not dwell on that.”

Dean nodded his assent, but remembered Cas couldn’t see him. “Okay Cas.”

“Let us get home to Sam, with the first quest completed and get your leg tended to.” Castiel said with finality.

Dean was silent for at least one chorus of Black Betty. He had a terrible thought about how now that Castiel had his voice back and could drive, he wouldn’t need Dean so much and he might take off on
his own. He might need a break from Dean or maybe want to leave the bunker altogether. Dean shoved those negative thoughts down, pressing them tight, and switched it up by thinking of other things.

“Cas?”

“Yes Dean,” Castiel had that tone to his voice that Sam got when he was trying to concentrate on the road and Dean was tapping out a tune or otherwise distracting his baby brother.

“Why’d you take the real amphora?”

“I considered it more prudent when the opportunity presented itself. We can be assured that this is an appropriate receptacle.”

“Guess so,” Dean adjusted the ice pack which was cool rather than cold now.

“Dean?” Castiel called back after a few minutes, “Did you mean what you said?”

“When Cas?”

“When you told Sam I am staying with you? When you told Slugger I was your Old Lady?”

Dean was sure Castiel was holding his breath. He was tempted by his impish part to make a Kumbaya hug circle remark, but he sought to be honest with Castiel and show he did have respect for their relationship. He reminded himself that Cas was no longer a mind reader, and kept his voice steady, “Every word, Hun.”

“I did too, every word I wrote in the letter. I have chosen you Dean.”

“Geez, getting all chick flick on me when I am pinned down, Cas.” He was hot under his collar. It was getting too like emotion-talk, and yet his being was lightened by Castiel’s words. Something soared inside him.

“Let me finish,” Castiel huffed.

Dean stayed quiet, not moving a muscle.

“I want to stay. If Kevin translates the tablet further and you need my heart to reverse the spell, then do not mourn me…”

“Whoa! Whoa! Slow down there cowboy. Who said anything about cutting your heart out?” Dean was almost hyperventilating.

“You must have considered it. We took Jane’s heart.”

“I have freaking not fucking bloody considered it. No Cas. That is not under consideration. That is called a fucking deal breaker.” Dean ignored the agony pulling himself upright, “No one dies. Not Sam, and not you. You got it?”

“No you too Dean.” Castiel added.
Dean’s not-so-little brother was an overgrown puppy. This fact had become indisputable. Turned out that Cas has texted Sam after his heroic demon-clerk ganking, sending him a photograph of an unconscious Dean’s knee, meaning Sam had spent their journey time obsessively checking the camera feed for any sign of the Impala. He came rushing out of the bunker, in total disregard of the potential apparation of Satan fresh from the archangels’ break out from Azkaban.

“Dean! Dean! Oh good God Dee, it looks as bad as when that Leviathan Edgar…”

“Stop fussing Sammy,” Dean interrupted as he attempted to extract his body from the car with the least amount of pain.

“Wait,” Sam blinked, “Cas was driving.”

“Hello Sam.” Castiel said as if he had never been mute and proceeded to assist Dean out of the back seat and let the hunter lean on his arm.

“Oh Cas,” was all Sam could manage before he became a blubbering mess of flailing limbed hugs. He kept pausing to pat Castiel on the back as they helped Dean inside.

“You know,” Dean said drily as he gripped the railing of the bunker’s balcony and attempted a hopping motion. “His words were not caught in his lungs. You don’t have to wind him like a baby.”

“Shuddup Dean.” Sam said but without much bite.

Dean muttered under his breath about sympathy for his injuries being short lived.

Sam turned to Castiel, “Are you good? How is your throat Cas?”

“It is good, thank you Sam. It felt dry with my first words, but I rather selfishly drained the bottle of water in the Impala, leaving my partner to dry swallow his pain meds.”

“I didn’t mind,” Dean interjected.

“It was not pleasant being unable to get my thoughts out. Words felt heavy in my mouth and my throat seemed to close around them. My tongue was pressed down by the weight of what I had to say. I would not like to experience it again.” Castiel shuddered and did not seem to realize that he had raised a hand to his throat, like the times he had being trying to force words out.

“We know that feeling, Cas.” Sam said.
“Demons.” Dean nodded.

“And Angels,” Sam added, “sometimes they don’t wanna hear what you gotta say.”

“And you Dean? Did it feel like that for you?” Castiel tilted his head and asked.

Dean knew he was referring to when he was small. He’d opened up about it to the silent version of Cas. The one who didn’t ask probing questions, especially in front of Sammy. “I don’t think so, babe, I wasn’t trying to talk back then.”

If Sammy could get any more mournful looking, he’d get a job as an undertaker. Still Dean felt a tendril of guilt. He should have blown the question off, said he didn’t remember, now he was causing a downer when they should be celebrating a successful quest and Cas’s voice.

Sam knew Dean too well and he jumped in with, “I think Dean needs medical attention. I want to look at your head Dean. Did it bleed? You were unconscious when Cas messaged me. I mean it could be from the pain, or you could be concussed.”

“No blood I think, but looks like Wile E Coyote got me with the anvil.”

“So,” Sam beckoned them to follow, “Welcome to Men of Letters Memorial Hospital. Let’s get you admitted Mr. Winchester.”

“Crap,” Dean muttered. Sam had gone into Dr Sew-em-up Medicine Woman mode.

Three days later with his leg in a splint that Sam had constructed using 1950s medical equipment, Dean was ready to go insane or on a hunt, or maybe relieve his tension by killing Crowley for his continual hop-along and Long-John-Silver comments. The only thing he had been allowed to do was fill the amphora with their collected blood. Cork in his hand, Dean peered into the neck of the jug, which held a half quart according to its blurb, wondering if it was too full when they had other ingredients still to find. Sam had stood rigid as a toy soldier while Dean did his Seeker duty. When Dean didn’t explode, have his veins glow, or start coughing up blood, Sam sighed with relief telling Dean he had been freaking out that these seeker quests would cause similar damage to the Hell Trials.

Castiel was very attentive to Dean’s needs. Sam had administered a lesson on how to nurse Dean in the bunker’s medical bay. Castiel hung on every word, ignoring Dean calling him out for fan-boying Sam. Instead Cas asked pertinent and practical questions about medication dosages, concussion symptoms, leg supporting, and how to help Dean shower, at which point Dean vocalized a protest. Although, it turned out that showering with Cas was an entirely pleasurable experience. Castiel found a waterproofed stool in some dark corner and installed it in the shower cubicle nearest to the bathroom door. The tender considerate way that Cas cleaned Dean, made him felt 95% treasured and only 5% guilty that he was allowing Cas to wash him in places he could easily reach. The water pressure was eased for Dean’s egg shaped lump at the back of his head and Cas used a soft flannel to wipe carefully around Sam’s splint construction.

After the first couple of tries Castiel knew Dean was no longer at risk of brain swelling or other terrifying consequences of concussion. He became more adventurous and amorous. He began to add to their routine, getting down on the base of the shower and settling between Dean’s legs. The first evening he kept checking if Dean was okay with his movements, if Dean liked it, and pulling off to ask if it was acceptable. It was more than acceptable. Dean more than liked it, and he was way beyond good on the spectrum. Castiel’s touch caused electric currents of arousal. His fingers charmed sounds of adoration from Dean, and his mouth made Dean writhe in building ecstasies.
When they had no milk, no eggs, no beer and no salad leaves, Sam threatened to leave the bunker. He reasoned with Dean that Castiel had driven them home safely and Lebanon’s grocery store was only a few minutes away. Crowley promised to stay quiet for a whole evening if Castiel got Sam some green leafy vegetables. Under vast peer pressure Dean handed over Baby’s keys to his partner. When Cas brought home a box of popsicles for future practice, Dean nearly choked on his whiskey and Sam honest to God blushed. Once Castiel had taken his bags of supplies into the kitchen, Sam bumped Dean’s arm saying he now understood why Dean kept saying he was Peachy after his showers with Cas.

On day five of medieval medical device leg torture, Sam and Nurse Cas took off the splint on the strict promise that Dean would use a wooden crutch like something out of Little House on the Fucking Prairie. Said crutch was excellent for smacking Crowley’s shins if he went too far, which led to the added benefit of having Crowley sit as far as possible from Dean and Castiel.

Unfortunately one week after the Grand Island showdown, Dean got caught. He was ostensibly lounging in his dead dude robe with a coffee. In fact he was trawling Sam’s laptop for potential hunts and received a concerned brother lecture and a bitchface. Even worse Castiel overheard his call to Garth pleading for a freaking werewolf, rugaru, wraith, rawhead, anything because he was going stir crazy. Dean virtually hung up on Garth when he saw the crestfallen expression on Castiel’s face.

Castiel cornered him in the kitchen while Dean was trying to pour a much needed secret double of Johnny Walker Blue.

“I’m gonna use some of our $800 to get more of the good stuff. Any preference Cas?”

“I once partook of a Japanese Whiskey that was very pleasant.”

“Heresy Cas.” Dean blurted, “Only American or from the old countries.”

“I do not think you have the correct concept of heresy,” Cas pulled a clean glass out of the mountain of drying ware and plunked it down expecting his own measure of the Johnny Walker. Dean opened his eyes wide and raised his brows, but then complied.

“We need to talk Dean.”

“Uh-oh,” Dean dreaded whatever was coming next.

“This search for a hunt…” Cas paused.

“Yeah, Cas that is what I do.”

“You wish to be away from me.” Castiel’s blue eyes were caught in a mix of hurt and resignation.

“What! No Cas. No babe, the hunt is for both of us,” Dean reached for Cas’s hand, wondering how he could have thought otherwise, “I need you, man. You’re my back up, Hutch to my Starsky.”

“I do not underst… Oh… wait you are saying that I am the Cagney to your Lacey.”

“No freaking way. I am banning daytime re-runs and no way are you Christine Cagney. I’m Cagney. You are Mary Beth.”

Sam’s jaw dropped as he came in with his own empty glass. Was there some sort of alert system for when Dean opened the good stuff? Dean barked out a laugh at the comical expression on Sam’s face.
“Dudes. Seriously? Whatever role-play you get up to, keep it in the bedroom.”

“I don’t see why I can’t be Cagney,” Castiel grumbled, “After all I am obviously Scarecrow to your Mrs. King.”

“That is it. He is banned from the den before evening. Banned do you hear me Sam?”

Sam nearly broke his face laughing. Castiel had a secret smile as if he wasn’t all that oblivious and was pulling Dean’s leg.

“Maybe,” Sam said when he caught his breath, “Cas can be Chandler and you can be Joey?”

“You know that makes you Ross?” Dean sniggered.

“I haven’t seen those detectives.” Castiel narrowed his eyes.

Dean laughed, “Maybe something more mature Sammy.”

“You are Norm and he is Cliff.” Sam snorted.

“Try and be insulting why don’t you? That makes you Woody, you lose again.” Dean pointed at his brother.

“No way.” Sam whined, “I’m Ted Danson’s Sam.”

“I think I need to see this show and draw my own conclusions,” Cas said.

“Ha-ah, Dean, watch out he’ll dub you Carla, you are so grouchy.” Sam teased.

“Kristie Alley at the minimum Sammy,” Dean preened.

“What show is this?” Cas asked, and Dean could just see him searching the listings.

“Cheers.” Dean answered.

“You haven’t poured our whiskeys yet.” Cas looked confused.

Dean and Sam bent double with laughter. Sam had to grab the edge of the counter.

“Oh Cas, please, please don’t,” Dean pleaded as tears of mirth poured down his cheeks.

“But I didn’t do anything.” Castiel protested.

Of course just then Sam’s phone buzzed.

“That’s my phone,” Sam rooted in his jeans pocket, “Kevin… text… he wants to Skype. He’s cracked the Cupid related quest.”
Chapter Summary

Three talks

Dean poured the whiskeys, seeing as he had gone to the trouble of unpacking the boraxo wall to pull out the bottle. They carried their glasses to the library only to be ambushed by Crowley. The demon was seated on the table with his shiny black shoes on the seat of a chair. The laptop was tucked in next to his hip.

“Get off my laptop,” Sam snapped.

“Hold your horses, Sasquatch, I only want to have an amiable discussion.” Crowley’s snake oil smile did nothing to convince Dean of Crowley’s friendly intentions.

“We talked earlier during our session,” Sam’s brow furrowed.

“Blah blah blah, yadda yadda yadda, one on one, but conveniently we are all present and correct. Although I see Castiel has neglected to complete his ensemble.” Crowley did a side nod in Castiel’s direction.

“You what now?” Dean looked Cas up and down: converse, old pair of Dean’s jeans, god-awful stripy pullover, check.

“Going commando Kitten?”

Castiel blushed from his neck to his eyes. “It… ah… it makes it easier to…”

“Weha, not going there,” Sam raised his hand to stop Castiel’s explanation. “Crowley, what is your point?”

“How long are you three ungracious hosts planning to keep me here as your unwilling guest?” Crowley looked from one to the other.

“Huh,” Sam huffed, “Indefinitely?”

“I have healed from your half-arsed purification. All spanking new Crowley, except for where you insist on these tiresome cuffs and collar. I could be of assistance. Distract the usurper calling herself Queen in my absence?”

Dean pulled out a chair at the next table. It was a reluctant move, but he was benched by a standing ache in his knee. He answered the question, “Abaddon is not our priority.”

“After her minion spun you round like a top? She should be. I can stop her, what do you say Moose? We could cut a mutually beneficial deal?”

Dean was sure he could see a faint red glow in Crowley’s eyes.

“No.” Sam remained stony faced. “It is better that you are here.”
“I believe you would be lonely on your own, poor sad moosey,” Crowley pouted his lips, “All locked up safe when big bro and his piece of ass are away. What about when you can venture out into the big bad world again? Do I get a babysitter? Do I molder in the dungeon?”

“We will cross that bridge when we come to it.” Sam said, “And that is the only answer you’ll get. Now unless you want to head downstairs, get off the table and let me use the laptop.”

“Bloody laptop hoarder,” Crowley grumbled as he slid off and took a seat at the further table.

Dean was happy to see that the crutch-time shin whacking had been habit forming. Castiel took the chair next to Dean and placed a steady hand on his thigh. Dean didn’t comment but he raised his glass to his partner and smiled.

Sam turned the laptop towards Dean and Castiel’s table and had Skype up within moments to call Kevin.

Kevin Tran was looking good. His complexion was healthy. He was neatly dressed, even if Dean wanted to reach into the computer and undo the top button of his crisp white shirt.

“So guys,” Kevin said by way of greeting, “Congrats on the blood of the blood.”

“Thank you,” Castiel said.

Kevin yelped and the call went to voice only for a moment. Then the video link was back, “Guys, you never told me. Nice to hear you Castiel. How are you?”

“I am perfectly well. Dean however is healing from his leg injury.”

Delifer’s face appeared behind Kevin giving a look of sympathy. Dean had a feeling that it was not directed at him, rather at Castiel for being human now and no longer able to access healing powers.

“The cupid bow?” Sam prompted.

“Right. No bow.” Kevin scratched his chin, “Weeping remembrance.”

“I got no clue,” Dean threw his eyes up, “Tell me you got more than that.”

“I cracked it yesterday. Almost called you all, but I worked through the night.” Kevin spoke rapidly.

“He refused to sleep,” Koneal grumbled from somewhere off camera.

“I still would like the opportunity to refine my translation. I may glean finer details. However, you need a small measure of the tears of a cupid and a Memento Mori from a cupid match that ended in tragedy.”

Castiel nodded and looked unfazed. Dean thought that at least someone considered the task a straightforward one.

Sam said, “So we have to make an angel cry into a Petri dish and find some widow willing to give up the last memorial of her true love?”

Kevin made a scrunched up face, “Specifics. I don’t think it matters what you collect them in as long as they go into the Seeker’s amphora. You need forty tears.”

“Why? That is completely random.” Dean queried.
“Actually forty is a significant religious number, it occurs many times in the bible.” Castiel answered to a chorus of how right that was from Kevin’s angels.

“Temptations and floods and all that,” Crowley offered from the far table, luckily it seemed he was far enough away from the computer’s microphone for Kevin not to have noticed his presence. Or perhaps Kevin was ignoring him.

“I’d suggest that you should seek the cupid first,” Kevin pointed at notes they couldn’t see, “because there a couple of symbols… Appliel may be able to explain… the translation from the tablet to Enochian is fluid. I can show you my notes…”

“No, Kevin,” Sam called, “A summary will suffice.”

“You need to find a cupid joined couple, where one partner has predeceased the other in tragic circumstances, and left an item, a Memento Mori, which is impregnated with the memories and essence of the lost one.”

“That is fairly specific.” Sam gave an assessing nod.

“It has to be something small,” Kevin expanded, “to fit in the amphora.”

“No treasured cars, portraits or baseball jackets so,” Dean blew a raspberry.

“Perhaps a piece of jewelry,” Castiel mused.

“You know Dean, you still have Mom’s ring.” Sam said.

Dean’s jaw dropped. He must have a buildup of wax in his ears because there was no way he heard that.

However Sam had continued, “Mom and Dad were cupid matched. Dad held onto her ring and then gave to Dean.”

“Listen to me, Sam. This is not up for discussion. I am point blank telling you that Mom’s ring is not going into a spell.” Dean licked his lips and tried to remember that Sam didn’t get it at times, that Sam never knew Mom like he did, “I know it is only some ‘material possession’ but it was Mom’s. There must be thousands of cupid matches, those assmonkeys fluttered around shooting their arrows at innocent people going about their daily business, some of’em must have been hit by buses or fallen off cliffs afterwards.”

“I guess,” Sam accepted.

“We don’t know if it should be a ring.” Kevin volunteered, “Although Castiel had a good point about it being jewelry. Could also be a finger bone, or a tooth, or a lock of hair?”

“What kind of Hannibal Lecter love matches are we looking at here?” Dean leaned forward to give Kevin his best look of disbelief.

“Just saying, Dean, don’t limit your search to necklaces, brooches, etcetera.”

“Mariel.” Castiel said suddenly.

Dean grinned.

“Dean and Sam’s friend Charlie knows a cupid named Mariel.” Castiel explained to Kevin, “I am certain we can convince her to cry for us, and she may know what happened later to some of her
couples. Also Dean is not fully fit, we can wait for your full translation on the Memento Mori.”

“Looks like Castiel has the final word,” Sam smirked.

Dean just huffed. Kevin said his goodbyes and promised to call as soon as he had more news.

Dean pulled out his cell and tried Charlie. However she was immersed in something possibly white collar criminal, and probably requiring a vast amount of computer base code. He called a second time to leave a voicemail as she requested. She returned his call while Dean was making meatballs and tomato sauce with buttery polenta. He put his floured meatballs aside and took the skillet off the heat.

“Hey Dean. How’s the peeps?”

“All good your majesty.” Dean couldn’t help smiling when he heard her chirpy voice.

“So, Mariel will cry on command, all you need to do is bring an onion. We did a dry run.” Charlie tittered at her own pun, “chopped onion works on angelic vessels too.”

“Onion, check.” Dean wasn’t just mentally checking it off. He went to their root vegetable basket and pocketed a large onion.

“She is willing to talk with you about some of her four-ever lurve matches.”

“Obviously they are the same as love matches.” Dean nodded at the cell.

“Now, to vital matters, my devoted handmaiden. What do you suggest I do with the Monk’s robes I bought for your mute boyfriend?”

Dean spluttered something unintelligible, which might have been an apology and a protest.

“Also, Sam’s voicemail includes an apology for his absence.” Dean could hear her pout.

“It’s too risky. Sam’s on lockdown.”

“Think about it Dean. Maybe he could be in Mariel’s posse. They’d look out for him. All other angelic D-bags will be forcibly ejected from the field.”

Dean didn’t think it was feasible but he promised to talk with Sam and with Cas too.

“I am glad you and Castiel are coming.” Charlie said more seriously, “The more Merry Men I have the better. Doctor Hansen has a full quota of Norman Knights. And I do need to rank Castiel on the swoonable hotness scale.”

Dean choked around a spoon of his tomato sauce. “No rating. No making Cas feel uncomfortable.”

“As if I would. I will source him a suitable costume. Now it is almost time for Torchwood on BBC America, Season two, Dean, can’t miss it.”

“Wouldn’t want to get between a lady and her show.” Dean teased.

“Good talk Dean, see you on Sunday, try and get here early before the plebs.”

“You too, babe, we’ll be there.” Dean had that warm family feel after his short chat with the computer genius. He thought that if the old adage about food made with love was true, these were going to be his best tomato meatballs ever.
Interlude

Chapter Summary

A little bit of Comfort/No!Hurt

Chapter Notes

Very short sorry, RL caught up with me. Hope you like it for all of its brevity.

Dean put the meatballs in the refrigerator. He changed his plans from a high heat quick fried tomato salsa type sauce. He turned down the heat on the stove, added a spoon of dark brown sugar, put a lid on the pan and set his tomato sauce on for a long low simmer. When he came back he would brown the meatballs on another skillet and then finish them in the sauce which would be a sweet and sticky unctuous coating. He went to find Sam and Cas.

Sam was still in the library with Crowley. Dean relayed his conversation including the open invite for Sam to be surrounded by pretty cupids and cherubs for the cosplay event. Sam shook his head despondently but Dean knew it was the correct decision for his brother to remain behind.

Castiel had said he was going catch a shower, on his own sadly, before they ate. Dean jogged, albeit with a slight limping motion. He tested his knee, finding only a niggling twinge as he rounded the corner down to their bedrooms. They had lived in Dean’s room since their return from Grand Island. The door was open and Castiel was not there. He knocked on Castiel’s bedroom door. When there was no answer he stuck his head inside.

Castiel’s bedroom was not as neglected as Dean had presumed. While Dean had been laid up, Cas had been busy. Books on photography lay open on top of the comforter. The pin-hole camera Cas had been working on putting together in the evenings was on one of the clothes-free shelves. But it was the brick wall of the seldom used bedroom that grabbed Dean’s attention and pulled him in.

Pinned up at skewed angles were developed sheets and smaller Polaroids. It was hauntingly beautiful in its randomness and simplicity. There were shots of the bunker corridors, the empty shooting gallery and the kitchen in various states from pristine to beer bottle littered. However it was the other pictures that Dean came closer to examine. There was a profile of Dean eating a slice of pizza with his eyes closed that made him grin. Castiel had captured Sam’s concentrating face in a shot at the library tables. The Impala glowed in the sun. Dean reached out a finger and touched that one. A brown spider was almost camouflaged on the rough bark of one of the trees behind the entrance. Cas had taken a shot of Crowley’s bent head from behind. There was an artistic Polaroid of Castiel’s left hand. The shots of Dean stalking around the Grand Island museum were laid in time sequence on the floor below as if waiting Castiel’s decision on placement. There was one of a slobbering Doberman. Dean shook his head in bewilderment that Cas had taken a photograph of Marcel Galton’s dog. By the bed, against the lamp was the one the waiter in Forest City had taken of the two of them. Dean picked it up. His lips curled in pleasure. In the shot, Castiel’s hand curved over his own and the former angel gazed not at the camera but at Dean. Dean smiled into the lens for posterity but his
fingers held on to Castiel’s hand and his shoulder turned in towards Cas. They were clearly together in a simple eating out dating as a couple way. It warmed Dean and made him gulp thinking what could have happened if he hadn’t found Cas, or if he had found him but neither of them had been brave enough to act on their long held feelings for each other.

“Hello Dean.” Cas smiled when Dean turned to face him with the picture still held in his hand.

“I like this,” Dean lifted it up, “and all of your wall montage.”

“I do too,” Castiel said somewhat shyly.

“I’d like a copy of this one, for our other bedroom.” Dean suggested.

“I think we could keep that one in our room,” Castiel grinned and came closer, wrapping the arm that wasn’t holding up his towel around Dean’s neck, leaning in to plant a lighter kiss on Dean’s well maintained neck hickey.

Dean moaned into the touch. Cas had called Dean’s bedroom their room. It was. It was their own room. Maybe Dean would suggest that Cas start another collage on the blank wall there. One with this photo in pride of place. He moved so that he could return his own attentive nips and featherlight kisses to his lover’s freshly smooth face. Castiel smelled of coconut shampoo and shaving foam, but underneath there was still the unique caramel ozone tang that was simply Cas. Dean breathed deeply of his partner. Cas responded to Dean’s gentle pressure on his cheek and moved up for a full on deep and lengthy kiss, each giving praise and accepting thanks, each committed to the embrace but not warring for dominance, each gripping the other tight in their arms, speaking with their actions.

Sometimes words were unnecessary.
There on Your Bedsheet

Chapter Summary

The night before they leave

The next morning Castiel was folding laundry on one of the library tables. Sam was giving him slit fox eyes. Which Castiel was successfully ignoring. Unfortunately Dean hadn’t come up with the laundry excuse and he was engaged reading dry lists of cupid sightings from the early twentieth century. Crowley had struck gold this time and was laughing out loud at whatever book Sam had gifted him.

Kevin rescued them from boring research duty. He called with a progress update. Sam put him on speaker.

“So, guys, I got it.” Kevin had the excitement of a scientist who makes a breakthrough in their research, “Your memento of the dead half of the cupid union; the death must have been from unnatural causes.”

“Rules out all the deaths due to illness and common or garden accidents.” Sam commented.

“Exactly,” Kevin agreed, “So cupid matched couple, deeply in love, one dies by supernatural means, leaves some precious and small item behind.”

Dean narrowed his eyes and dared any of them to mention his mother’s ring.

“Good to know,” Sam said, “We have alternatives.”

“Alter-na-whats?” Dean blinked at him, “There are six billion alternatives all to nothing because Mom’s ring is not an alterna to begin with, there is no alterna here, so shut your piehole.”

“Deeean,” Sam took a deep breath, “that makes no sense, but I get it. I do. Wait and let Kevin finish. Kev? Does the item need to be fresh?”

Kevin made querying Huh-type noise.

Dean said, “What Sam means is do we need to pry this memento from a weeping widow or widower’s hand?”

“No guys. That’s the good part. There is no time limit so you could find something historical.”

“Another suckass museum? Seriously?” Dean was starting to think this seeker gig was the geekiest driven hunt ever.

“It may be the easiest option.” Castiel volunteered.

“You don’t think Her Royal Douchiness hasn’t a corps of demon lackeys watching museum footage?” Dean pointed out.

“I told you I could distract her, fellas.” Crowley contributed.
Castiel seemed to consider this and said “Wait until we speak to the cupid Mariel tomorrow, she may have a simple solution.”

Dean was full of pride at Castiel’s genius comment which had the added benefit of distracting Sam from assigning research documents. He spent the afternoon giving Baby a tune up and making a quick grocery run, glad to get back behind the wheel. He had to admit Castiel hadn’t ruined the engine or let her run out of water or oil.

That evening Dean pulled Castiel away from one of his infernal talent shows. At least Dean was guessing they were infernal. He thought he might ask Crowley if Simon Cowell was on his list of souls to be collected.

“We are leaving at dawn, Cas,” He explained, adding in seductive tones, “thought you might like an early night.”

“Guys wait up,” Sam said loping down the corridor.

Dean glared. If Sam was cockblocking, he was getting salt in the sugar shaker before they left. He rolled his eyes. “Yes, we will be careful. Yes I will buy some funnel cake for Cas if there is a stall. No we won’t miss you, satisfied Princess?”

“Yeah, fine, Dean.” Sam pursed his lips, “But get this, I’ve thought of another memento mori for you.”

“Here Sam?” Castiel asked looking at Sam’s empty hands.

“No, but I was doing a mental run though of all the crap we have picked up or encountered from hunts.” Sam tried to begin.

Dean interrupted, “You mean stuff you picked up Sammy. I salt and burn ‘em.”

“So,” Sam ignored that comment, “Can you guys detour into Topeka?”

“Detour? That is not a freaking detour. I am heading south through Wichita. Topeka is a whole other direction Sam.”

He was ignored again by Sam, “Cas, since we got here Dean and I have been clearing out some of our old storage lockers and lock-ups, and safety deposit boxes and bringing all our shit here.”

“First we took all the stuff from the Whitefish cabin, all the boxsets and books, priorities y’know?” Dean explained for Cas’s benefit.

Castiel nodded, “I would have presumed your weaponry and spell supplies would have also had greater priority.”

Dean clapped an arm around his shoulders, “Oh they were but you gotta make room for Dr Sexy M.D. and…”

“Your Harrison Ford obsession,” Castiel finished.

Dean gaped. Sam outright laughed, “Ha! He called you out. Come on Dean, you made him watch Witness and ancient episodes of Gunsmoke.”

Castiel joined in, “And we watched Raiders of the Lost Ark twice despite my objections to its historical inaccuracies regarding the Ark of the Covenant.”
“The night is moving on here,” Dean knew he could have come up with a better topic change but his brother and partner were ganging up on him, “Talk to me Sam. What is in the box in Topeka?”

“Ava’s ring.”

Dean felt an itch of recognition, “Come again.”

“Ava, you know, special child, died at Cold Oak, slaughtered her fiancé.”

“You kept her engagement ring?” Dean did a double take.

“Well,” Sam scrunched his face and spread his hands, “When we found it we didn’t know what had happened. I kept it for her I suppose. Then with the dying and all, I never got round to getting rid of it.”

“But the bitch dumped the ring on the bedroom floor, how is that gonna work?” Dean objected.

Sam chewed at his bottom lip, “Way I see it, she left it behind because it was too vivid a reminder of their love. It is a relic of that love. It might work.”

“Why do you presume that these people had been fated by a Cupid’s arrow?” Castiel asked, tilting his head just enough to make Dean want to lean in and kiss him.

“I don’t know, but Ava was part of the greater plan for the Apocalypse and they had been devoted. If Mariel held the ring maybe she could tell?”

“Sam has a point,” Castiel said, “And it is something already in your possession.”

“OK,” Dean sighed, “We will leave an hour earlier and swing through Topeka to empty your box of morbid keepsakes.”

“It is in the pencil case,” Sam informed them.

“Your nerdy case of dead people’s crap,” Dean corrected, “Come on Cas we need some shuteye before we meet her highness queen of Moondor and Sherwood Forest.”

“Have fun Dean, if I don’t see you in the morning,” Sam said as he turned, “Don’t let him put you in tights Cas.”

“But I may like tights. I haven’t experienced them as yet,” Castiel said with a too innocent smile.

Sam gave a good night wave and headed down the corridor muttering about his big mouth and getting answers he didn’t want to hear.

Dean got comfortable on the memory foam while Castiel did a recheck of his packed duffel.

“You know we are only going to be away for one night?” Dean asked, impatient and lonely in the bed.

“Yes, Dean, but I have never been to a costume party before.”

“OK. First don’t call it a costume party, that is something else.” Dean huffed in amusement, “Second it is a cosplay, sort of mix of LARPing and Medieval re-enactment.”

Castiel looked confused.
“If it was LARPing we would be role-playing in a fictional world, and if it was a re-enactment it would be based on a historical battle. So it’s kinda like a mix of the two using the Robin Hood legends to put on a show for the locals and get in some quality role-play.”

“I see,” Castiel nodded, “So do you think I can leave the windcheater?”

“Cas?” Dean paused until his partner looked at him, “Do you have all your clothes in there?”

“No… well yes, I wasn’t sure what to bring.” Castiel admitted.

Dean chuckled to himself while Castiel unpacked and refilled the duffel with a more normal amount of clothes for a one night trip. He turned down Castiel’s side of the comforter while he waited for him to return from putting his clothes back into the other bedroom.

A while later lying together in the dark, Castiel whispered, “I like it here.” He traced a pattern, maybe Enochian, on Dean’s chest, “You and me together, don’t you Dean?”

“Sure Cas, but we have to leave the batcave sometimes,” Dean answered softly, stilling Castiel’s fingers with his own.

“I wish we could stay.” Castiel muttered.

“What’s wrong Hun?” Dean shifted to prop himself up on his elbow and leaned down to kiss Castiel’s forehead.

“You are The Seeker.” Castiel paused to gather his thoughts, “You have taken on the quest, but the Demon Tablet would have killed Sam, Leviathan sent us to Purgatory, Metatron’s Angel Tablet spell already ripped my Grace. It is…I can’t lose you…I’m human now…If you…I can’t heal you, Dean, can’t bring you back, can’t search Heaven for your soul. I wonder if it is too dangerous to continue.”

Dean swallowed hard. He hated that Castiel was upset and held such worries. He chuffed and attempted a joke, “Danger is my middle name.”

“No.” Castiel responded, “It isn’t. It is Michael.”

“Ah, Cas,” Dean shook his head in the dark, “I think I might love you.”

“Might huh?” Cas poked him in the ribs, “Darling you know I think you might too.”

Castiel turned and pushed Dean back down into the mattress. He hissed a laugh as he climbed up Dean’s body to nuzzle his jaw and plant a kiss under his ear. Dean wrapped an arm around Castiel’s back.

“I like it when you touch me, Dean”

He could feel shivers in Castiel’s skin, but he was warm and firm under Dean’s touch. He nudged at Castiel until he was in a position that Dean could indulge in his long awaited plan to stuck and mark around Castiel’s anti-possession tattoo.
I'll be for You

Chapter Summary

Dean and Castiel travel to the cosplay fair

It was four AM when Dean got them out of bed, waking Castiel with an enthusiastic “Thunderbirds are go.”

The hour felt like he should be in a cemetery digging up the body of a fugly ghost. He nudged a sleepy Castiel at least four times while he buttered his bleary eyed partner’s toast and spread it with the breakfast marmalade he and Sam liked.

They had not been stealthy enough because Sam in his sleep tee and shorts with his hair looking like it was trying to grow in three different directions, caught them at the base of the staircase to the entrance.

“I called Kevin late last night,” Sam coughed, “about five hours ago, asked him if he thought Ava dropping the ring on the floor precludes it from consideration. Kevin looked at his notes and says not. And when I filled him in on how much it meant to her before, y’know, he agrees it would be a memorial of their love. But you’re going to ask Charlie’s cupid, yeah?”

“Yeah, bro,” Dean said softly, wondering if Sam had only had an hour or two of sleep, “You head back to dreamland, OK?”

“Yeah, right, Dean. You got everything guys? Give Charlie a hug from me.”

Castiel thought of something, “Sam would you please check the water level on my Lucky Bamboo?”

Dean gave an affectionate huff, “You want anything Sammy from Oklahoma or the cosplay fair?”

“I dunno Dean, maybe some ear plugs, cos you know Castiel is a screamer.” Sam laughed.

Dean pulled a protesting Castiel out the door with him. He chuckled all the way to the Impala. Let Sam put up with Castiel’s calls of ecstasy. It was miracle that Cas was finally able to voice his passion.

As they drove into the rising sun, Dean filled Castiel in some more on their encounters with Charlie. He brought it bang up to date with how Charlie had taken Mariel and her angels under her wing. Dean made a mental note not to indulge in Charlie’s Angels Farah Fawcett jokes. Not unless he wanted to end up in the stocks for the afternoon. He got Cas to check the maps and on his android phone, for the best way to head south to Miami Oklahoma from Topeka, which did not involve passing through Lawrence. Castiel wanted to know if they were meeting up with Kevin, but Dean explained they were only passing through and it was very early for the night owl prophet.

The shop with the twenty five types of pie didn’t open until 8AM on a Sunday morning so they called at the 24-hour check cashing place that held the Winchesters’ deposit box. It was one of the ones paid by a dummy account. Dean filled out a form to close it down and emptied the long metal container into a waiting backpack. Outside they walked down the street to get pie for a second well deserved breakfast.
Dean was extra buoyant with a side of bouncy when they left Topeka. He had consumed two slices of maple pecan with a flaky pie crust. Castiel had a cinnamon roll. Cas didn’t know what he had missed out on because Dean ate it all before he thought of offering a taste. Dean’s mood had been raised by the contents of the deposit box. His long misplaced copy of Vonnegut’s story collection Bagombo Snuff Box was now resting in the glove compartment. He had slipped his forgotten spare leather bracelet on his right wrist.

“I’d like one of those,” Castiel said from the shot gun seat, admiring Dean’s wrist.

“I’d bet there’ll be tons of leatherworkers at the fair. We’ll pick you out one.” Dean promised earning him a dazzling smile.

They only stopped at once for gas and a rest break making it to Twin Bridges State Park outside Miami just past noon. A poster at the entrance announced the Merry Men (and Women) and Sherriff’s Knights Fair, gates open at 1pm, entry fee in aid of the families of those in a Persistent Vegetative State. Dean gave a thought of remembrance for Charlie’s mother.

They were barely out of the Impala when Charlie came racing across the car parking area. She had yet to dress for the occasion and was in purple denims and a blue tee with writing on it. She threw her arms around Dean and grinned as she backed out of the hug.

“Good to see you Charlie,” Dean beamed, “looking good as always.”

Charlie punched his arm and laughed, “Flattery will get you nowhere.”

Castiel came round from the other side of the car and held his hand out to shake Charlie’s in greeting. She wasn’t having that and pulled the dazed man in for his own hug. “Finally,” she said holding Castiel out at arm’s length, “I get to meet the dude who stole Dean Winchester’s heart.”

“And I get to meet the superwoman who brought down Roman Industries and installed that hunters’ program on Sam’s computer that he never stops praising.”

Charlie’s grin widened, “You and me, Castiel, we are going to get on just fine. I’ve reserved a room for my favorite bitches at the Homeaway Bed and Breakfast near the Golf Course in Miami.”

“She means us, Cas.” Dean explained.

“Mariel and I are bedding down there too. Now you are both on my team, so no thoughts of donning the Knights’ garb, Dean.”

“Why couldn’t you lead the Normans Charlie?” Dean pouted about the idea of wearing tights.

“Hello,” Charlie waved a hand down her body, “heroes’ side. Anyhow when Doc Hansen and I came up with this idea on the Moondor chat portal, he put dibs on the Knights.”

“This Doc Hansen, he’s alright yes?” Dean checked.

“He’s not a monster, if that’s what you are hinting at,” Charlie said in a bored voice. “He works out of the hospital over in Joplin Missouri, used to come here to Twin Springs as a boy and he did all the leg work to set up the event.”

Dean was satisfied for now. Charlie led them into a wide open space surrounded by lake huts and temporary stalls. In the center there was a circle of tents surrounding a flat area for role-play battles. He was itching to explore the venue. Charlie explained all the cosplayers were giving their time free gratis. The stall holders would give ten percent of their takings for the charity. She pulled back the
opening of a large white tent. A couple of very pretty girls with their hair in nets and with Medieval style velvet dresses ran over to welcome her. She took it in her stride and asked for some privacy for Dean and Castiel to get suited up. The tent had honest-to-God wolf pelts hanging from a central post and strewn around to sit on. A simple wooden bench held a clay jug and a bowl of apples.

With an audible sigh of relief Dean took the leather pants that laced up the side, a Henley type plain linen shirt with more laces instead of buttons, and a set of dark brown leather armlets to cover him from wrist to elbow. There was a light sleeveless chainmail to go over this and a leather belt to hold it, his dagger (the demon knife) and a crossbow. Charlie had done well. Castiel got a similar outfit but he had linen trousers, a green serge tabard rather than chainmail, and a type of cloth hat that fitted his head snugly. He told Dean with blatant pleasure that it was a scholar’s cap and then sneakily put his cell into his belt pouch. Dean narrowed his eyes but he knew it was for the camera ap, not for phonecalls. They had been warned to have cells on silent.

Suited and booted, they headed out to explore.

Castiel pulled Dean aside. “Is Charlie using a code?”

“What now, Hun?”

“On Charlie’s t-shirt, The Angels Have The Phonebox, is it code? I do not understand why angels would need a phone box.”

“No man,” Dean laughed and smacked Castiel on the shoulder, “It’s from a show. It’s a thing.”

“A show about angels? From before the Fall? Would I like it?”

“You might like it. The episodes Charlie sent me, the main character wore a suit with converse.”

Dean thought Castiel was a little too attached to his own converse, “The angels aren’t our kind of angels. They are aliens made of stone who zap people into the past. It was an awesome episode, that spawned the tees, I’ll show it to you.”

“I look forward to it.” Castiel nodded.

Dean pulled out his own vibrating phone, “Charlie’s texted. She’s helping the local grade school teachers set up a tent for kids to paint their own cardboard shields. Come on, let’s see what’s to eat round here.”

There was no funnel cake, but there was an awesome hog roast on a spit. It wouldn’t be ready until gates open. Dean chalked it down for later. He bought two very un-historical crepes and a strange colored hot beverage for Castiel from ‘Totally Authentic Teas’.

They wandered around taking it all in before the crowds. There was a couple in blacksmith’s garb using a bellows to start up a fire pit. They had a few tree stump type stools for kiddies and a wooden slatted table on the side for them to make their own coins. A local pottery had set up a wheel. A very fake, Dean checked for hex bags, witch tended a cauldron and offered herbal face creams and soaps. At the far end there was an absolutely historical canon from a local museum and a dude with his pet falcons on display.

Charlie came looking for them before 1pm. Dean was required at the battle field for the initial face off of Merry Men and Women with the medical students in metal suits. Castiel was required to sit outside the scribe’s tent with ink on his fingers holding a quill and tell any children that he was writing down the heroic deeds of Robin Hood.

They might have had wooden swords and rubber stopper arrows but those medical students were
one determined gang of gamers and LARPers. Round one went to Sherwood Forest but only barely, and Dean suspected it was because Robin Hood, Aka Charlie, took to the field and distracted the Moondor players on the other side with her royal presence. He ran off the field to the applause of the children and parents and made for the scribe’s tent, but Castiel was nowhere to be seen.
Cheap and Sugary Philosophies

Chapter Summary

Dean finds Castiel but not where he expected.

A God-awful group of drummers and whistleblowers had taken to the central area, meaning it was pointless to shout out for Castiel. Dean tried texting and calling but figured Cas couldn’t hear the cell in its pouch with all the noise. He followed a woman dressed in a Harlequin costume. He was sure she was one of the angels from the stiff way she held her body. He wondered if Castiel had headed over to the falcons. He had been fascinated with them earlier. There were a group of cosplayers in cloaks around the bird display but no Castiel.

Back at the scribe’s tent, there was still no sign of Castiel. One of the enemy, who was wearing distinctly modern spectacles, and tights like the rest of the losers, asked if he was looking to have his name written in ancient script. Seemed Castiel had improvised, ripping off strips of parchment and doing kids’ names in calligraphy.

He was about to resort to having the local DJ in charge of the PA system give a shout out for Cas, when out of the corner of his eye Dean caught sight of the green tabard and really douchey scribe’s cap. Castiel was at the limit of the cosplay area outside one of the lake huts which had been enclosed by hanging dark colored tarps. There was a cute chick in a blue dress and blue felt pointy hat complete with floaty tulle. She was hanging off his arm. She looked like a Polly Pocket version of Halle Berry. As Dean approached he could see the mini-Halle was giving his partner doe eyes, while Castiel assisted her to pin a sign to the post by the curtained entrance.

*The Mythos and Spirituality of the Robin Hood Legends*

Castiel had done a curly script but it was still clear and legible. If Dean was not so focused on where Oklahoma’s version of Catwoman had her hand resting on Castiel’s leather armlet, he might have appreciated the artistry.

Castiel did not turn and see Dean. Instead he went into the hut with the chick. Dean quickened his pace reaching out to pull back the curtain. Inside were three picnic benches all occupied by ladies of different ages, some in costume. A very large lady in layers of dresses and cloaks was playing a lute in the center of the room. Dean spotted Castiel perched on the far edge of the closest bench. The touchy feely chick had her hand on his arm again and her head on his shoulder as they listened to the lute playing. On top of that Dean noticed not every girl was focused on the supersized musician.

Some of them only had eyes for his Cas.

There was a prickling sensation under Dean’s skin. He wasn’t accustomed to it. It was strange and unpleasant. It was jealousy. It blew through him like thousands of beads rising as gooseflesh. He wondered if Castiel turned would his eyes seem darker to his lover, a deeper hue of green. This writhing possessiveness was known as the green eyed monster. Only now that Dean found occasion to be jealous did he understand that it was a truly fugly feeling.

Castiel was taken. Fake Halle Berry had no business making a move on him. He wished he had love-marked Castiel somewhere that it could be seen. He knew the bruises he had passionately sucked around the tattoo would be on display just for him when he peeled the dark haired man’s clothes off later. Dean’s fingers fluttered unconsciously towards Castiel’s mark on his throat. The
song, if you could call it that without a guitar riff and drum solo, ended. Amid the polite applause Dean marched up and put his hand on Castiel’s free shoulder. Cas’s head swung round and a wide open smile lit up his features.

“Hello Dean.”

The cool air of those words dimmed the raging jealousy.

“Hey Honey,” Dean knew he was laying it on thick, but he wanted to dispel any misconceptions, “I’ve been looking for you Babe.”

“You have?” Castiel blinked at him, “I was helping Rosa. We came in to hear the music. Do you know that on certain cords the lute resonates at celestial vibrations?”

“That’s awesome Cas,” Dean smiled indulgently, “We had better get you back to your post before Charlie notices. Nice to meet ya, Rosie.”

“Rosa,” She corrected, straight backed and glaring, “Castiel was going to stay for the talk on Woodlands in the Western Mystery Tradition.”

Dean raised an eyebrow, “Cas, you are not into this hippie hokum, are you?”

“There is no hokum, Dean,” Castiel replied in a serious tone, “These people are in tune with the spiritual side of existence and are freely expressing it.”

“Hippies and freaking wiccans,” Dean grumbled.

“Excuse me,” Rosa finally pulled back from Castiel, “That is a blinkered position. I am a third generation psychic and it is not hokum.”

Dean gave that piece of news the withering look it deserved in his opinion. He changed tack, “And you are the only dude in this hut.”

It was Castiel’s turn to raise his eyebrows. Dean figured his possessiveness driven argument hadn’t been very powerful.

“You are here too Dean,” Castiel pointed out the obvious.

“You are insufferable, babe, but I love it.” Dean laughed.

Castiel quirked his lip and stood to leave with Dean, “Rosa, it was nice to make your acquaintance. I hope your talk on moon cycles is well received.”

Dean mentally fist pumped at his victory in extracting Castiel from the hippie commune vibe. However at the exit, Rosa caught Castiel by the arm, “For free. I am not giving readings today. Castiel you face a great challenge, with the fates of countless resting on your word. There is hope and also help from an unexpected quarter. You must allow your love to make his sacrifice when the time is bleak. But remember you have a long road ahead but not alone. Never alone again.”

Castiel looked quite emotional and thanked her.

“Good luck.” She called after them.

“What in tarnation made you go in there?” Dean asked as they headed back. “She wants you to come back. Spinning you a line about being psychic.”
“Don’t snap at me. I believe Rosa has a gift. I cannot see the myriad of possible futures anymore Dean. I am adrift in time.” Castiel hung his head and looked at his toes.

Dean linked his arm sorry for being snappy, “Aren’t we all, Cas, aren’t we all.”

They made a pit stop for slices of wood-fried pizza fresh from a portable flame filled oven which they ate on the way back to Castiel’s scribe’s tent. Dean didn’t apologize for behaving peevishly but he didn’t race off for the next battle either. He was happy to sit with Castiel, drinking a goblet of mead. Who knew honeyed liquor could be so good? The sun was out. Castiel wasn’t in a mood with him. Dean spent a while admiring the script that flowed from a thin paintbrush that Castiel dipped in an inkwell.

Too soon Dean was cornered by Charlie. She needed a hero to represent her side in the archery contests. Dean balked at the long bow, but a crossbow, he knew that weapon well.

With Castiel as his cheerleader, Dean won the crossbow cup for the Merry People. Charlie gave him a high five and the praise that she had known he could do it. Castiel came up to the presentation podium and gave him a winner’s kiss. Dean made a quick survey of spectators’ reactions but no-one batted an eyelid. He felt better inside. There had been no catcalls of homophobic insults. He openly entwined his fingers in Castiel’s as they approached the leatherworkers. Castiel was entranced by the multicolored candles and joss stick packets at the next stall while they queued. Dean took a few moments and picked out a black plaited bracelet which Castiel loved.

To end the day, Dean led the kids with their cardboard shields and wooden swords to assault the walls of the castle, otherwise the main lake hut, and free Robin (Charlie) and Maid Marion (Mariel). When the Knights let down the paper drawbridge in defeat, Dean found himself swamped under a sea of cheering school kids.
Chapter Summary

Dean shows Mariel the ring and there is pizza.

Ava’s ring was burning a hole in Dean’s pocket. He could feel the demon knife strapped to his leg. He huffed as he drove thinking that the ring that was meant to solve their ‘memento mori’ problem was from a time before they had set eyes on Ruby or her knife. Before his deal, before hell and everything that came after...

“Dean?” Castiel motioned to the windshield, where Charlie’s yellow vehicle was pulling into a side street.

“Yeah, I see Babe,” Dean quirked his lip. “There is the sign for the B&B.”

“I hope there is a bath,” Castiel rolled his shoulders, “I am aching.”

“Hey, I was the one in battle,” Dean teased.

“My powerful hero,” Castiel deadpanned, “My fingers are still inked. But some rubbed off on the inside of those workmen’s gloves.”

They had spent a couple of hours helping dismantle the fair. Dean’s muscles ached in good places. He had a sense of satisfaction that came from a job well done by a team of volunteers. He couldn’t wait to see if there was a tub big enough for two, if not he could compromise by joining Castiel under a hot shower.

Dean pulled into a small car lot surrounded by flower beds at the rear of a three story pebble-dashed house. Vines grew on the walls trimmed back around the windows and doors.

Charlie and Mariel waited for the guys to get their duffels. Mariel had obviously learned fashion from a Charlie montage. She had orange skinny jeans and a bottle green v-neck floaty top, red platform sandals and a pink bobble at the end of her long brown braid that came over her left shoulder. Charlie beckoned them in and pointed out reception, saying she’d meet them in the glass conservatory in an hour. She gave Dean a wink and waggled her eyebrows with innuendo.

A skinny buzzed headed young man in a pale cream tank top checked them in. “Mr. and Mr. Winchester?”

Dean’s breath hitched in a mix of surprise and amusement at Charlie’s presumption and this meant there would be no fake credit card use. Meanwhile Castiel looked like he had reeled in the catch of the day, “Yes that is us,” Castiel beamed, “Dean and Castiel Winchester.”

“Cool, I’m Barry. If you need anything dial zero, your room has been pre-paid, second floor, number seven. This is a rainbow friendly establishment, please enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you,” Castiel took their room key on its heavy wooden rainbow key fob.

Their room was spacious and homey with soft linens and a firm mattress on a King bed. The tub not
only was large enough, it also had Jacuzzi jets. An hour was not long enough and Dean promised Castiel they would take another longer soak before they left. As it was they had wet hair and bathroom heat flushed skin when they joined Charlie and Mariel, not overly late for their rendezvous.

They had the conservatory to themselves. It was that time of the evening when other guests were most likely out for dinner. Charlie had ordered pizzas and the smell of garlic, cheese and pepperoni drew Dean into the room. There were sodas and a side of onion rings too. They took a seat on a wicker framed sofa opposite the ladies.

Charlie eyed Castiel’s new hickey under his jaw line. Dean shrugged his shoulder with a cheeky grin. There would be no repeat of catwoman’s assumptions.

“You have brought an onion?” were Mariel’s first words.

“Straight to the point,” Dean snorted around a triangle of pizza.

“I am expected to cry and I am willing to give my tears. It is less than the sacrifice of my sister who freely gave her bow.” Mariel’s words were hard.

Dean swallowed.

Castiel gulped, “Her sacrifice was noble Mariel, and at the time we believed it was for a greater purpose.”

“And now you believe the same, Castiel,” She hissed his name and leaned forward, “You were a bogeyman to the cupids, slaughtering any who had been swayed by Raphael. We lived for love, for love Brother, to unite souls fated to be together, to bring joy and harmony into lonely lives, and now we are cast out, cast out of our home, our happy corner of heaven…”

Dean thought she was about to cry without any aid. Charlie rubbed her arm and said, “It’s not Castiel’s fault.”

“Oh but it is,” Castiel hung his head, “I did those things. I believed Metatron’s story.”

Dean shifted closer to Cas. He didn’t deny that Mariel told the truth but there was no need to make Cas feel any worse.

“Can we move onto business?” Dean asked and pulled out Ava’s ring. He handed it to Mariel.

She looked at him blank faced.

“Well, is it the real deal? Kosher?” Dean asked.

“I am not psychokinetic. I am a Cupid.” She glared at him. “Whose ring is this?”

“Ava’s.” Dean answered and waited.

“Ava who?” Mariel asked. “I can ask on the celestial wavelength. Send out a message for my sibling who joined these souls but without their presence I need their names.”

Dean’s mouth dropped like a fish. He remembered Max Miller and Andy Gallagher. He would never forget Jake Talley for as long as he lived, but Ava’s family name escaped him. Sam would know.

“I’ll call Sam.”

“No need,” Charlie whipped out an I-phone. “I’ll check the Carver Edlund Wiki.”
Dean rolled his eyes. Rather than disturb Sammy, he let her continue.

“You have your own page Castiel.” She informed as she scrolled down the screen. “Gaining on Dean’s for hits.”

“I do?” Castiel craned his neck although he couldn’t see anything from his position, “Will you show me later?”

Dean wasn’t sure that was a good idea. He checked with Charlie “There is no slash on that site?”

Charlie gave a high pitched laugh, “No. Links though if you wanna?”

“And I have the most hits?” Dean hummed. He might hate that his life was serialized and published but he was going to have a peek at Castiel’s page later.

“Oh no, doofus,” Charlie grinned, “Sam’s page is miles ahead. It’s moderated by Rebecca Rosen and she has tumblr links where she runs fanfic contests.”

Dean muttered something unsuitable for ladies’ and angels’ hearing.

“Got’ya,” Charlie tapped once on the screen, “Like grabbing onto the snitch. Ava Wilson of Peoria. Edlund doesn’t give her fiancé’s full name but he was called Brady.”

Mariel stilled and tilted her head.

Castiel put down his pizza. He looked lost. Dean slung an arm around his shoulders and whispered, “What?”

“I can’t hear them,” Castiel murmured.

“I know.” Was all Dean could think to say in comfort.

Then Mariel began to cry in heaving choking sobs. Charlie sprang to her side. The angel was distraught.

Castiel pulled this freaking cotton hankie from somewhere and was up like a shot. He crouched in front of the weeping angel and dabbed her cheeks tenderly. For a moment Dean was awed by his partner’s compassion for the angel who had been downright mean to him minutes earlier. Then Dean saw Castiel’s lips moving silently. The frikken genius was counting the tears that the hankie was soaking up. At forty the inconsolable angel was patted on the shoulder awkwardly by Castiel. Dean handed over one of the paper napkins that came with the pizza and Castiel pressed it into Mariel’s palm.

“Do you have the plastic dish and Ziploc bag?” Castiel asked Dean, who took both out of his large canvas jacket pocket. Castiel discarded the Petri dish and sealed the hankie in the bag.

Charlie continued to rub circles on Mariel’s back. She didn’t comment on Castiel’s opportune collection of tears but looked disapprovingly at both men. “You coulda used the onion,” She accused.

“Hey,” Dean held his hands up, “I didn’t know Ava’s ring was going to lead to Girl Interrupted.”

“She was so…” Mariel choked around the words, “She was so in love. He adored her. Their cupid didn’t know. The larger picture is never revealed to us. Pryidion is in pieces at the knowledge.”

Castiel looked forlorn. “I know Pryidie. He is an innocent. One of those who prefers not to clothe his
vessel. I am sorry he had to find out.”

“Such bright young love, just heartbreak,” Mariel pressed her hand over her own heart. She grew calmer. “This is why we do not return to look over the souls we unite. It is too crushing a blow. Of course we know one soul will be reaped before the other, but details like this are too much. Please Seeker take the ring.”

Dean leaned over and took it back.

They avoided the topic until the pizza was consumed. Charlie got a text from Doctor Hansen about how much they had raised for the charity. They toasted the success with their sodas. Dean had added a splash of from his hip flask to their glasses. He raised another toast in thanks to Charlie for gifting them the B&B stay.

He noticed Castiel staring at Mariel who in turn was focused on the middle distance. “What are you listening to, Sister?”

Mariel blushed, “I did my duty.”

Dean stiffened.

“What duty?” Charlie said taken aback.

Mariel gave a tiny headshake and played with the end of her braid.

“Tell me please, Mar.” Charlie said softly.

“I have updated Lord Michael on your progress.” Mariel answered.

“Sonvabitch.” Dean spat and inhaled deeply to cool his temper.

“Dean,” Castiel’s voice aided his efforts to remain calm, “You will need Michael’s aid, what does it matter if he knows we are at the halfway point?”

“I freaking hate being spied on.” Dean seethed.

“No, no, Dean Winchester, I was not spying,” Mariel was distressed again, “I was helping and Lord Michael is our savior. He will lead us home.”

Dean held in his bile about the head angel-dickass, who was wearing his father as a meatsuit while he gathered his troops.

“Shush, don’t cry,” Charlie pulled Mariel into her arms.

“We are very grateful.” Castiel added, “You are a loyal cherub.”

“Thank you” Mariel sniffled.

Dean glared at Cas, who gave it right back with his patent stink eye glare. “Dean, you cannot blame Mariel for what she is. I think you should apologize.”

“Apolo-what?” Dean wrinkled his nose. He took a moment under Castiel’s stare. Michael had an angelic APB out on him. But then he saw Charlie’s narrowed eyes, Mariel’s face tucked into her shoulder, and Castiel crossed his arms. He remembered the other cupids he had met. They all had been more gentle creatures than the standard asshats.
“I’m sorry, Mariel. I’m not a fan of Michael keeping tabs on me,” He moved over and crouched in front of her, “Oh Lady Marion, forgive your Merry Man his infraction and accept his devoted gratitude for your kind assistance.”

Mariel smiled. Charlie unwrapped her arms allowing the angel to place her hand on Dean’s head. His breath caught when he saw a soft glow of Grace, “May your union be blessed Dean Winchester. A bond forged in Hell but pure and deep in its intensity.”

“Profound,” Castiel’s deep voice said from behind him.

“Yes Brother. You chose well.”

Dean was a little shaky on his legs when he rose but hid it well. Castiel enveloping him a bone crushing hug helped.
Dean and Castiel come home. There is news.

The road trip home was of the ilk Dean preferred. They stayed off the interstates. Not checking out of Homeaway until after eleven had the dual bonus of another Jacuzzi bath and avoiding any Monday rush hours. Charlie made them promise to bring Sam to the Moondor Mid Year Jubilee if everything worked out by then. Dean thought, but didn’t say, that it was dependant on Satan vamoosing with the other angels, which wasn’t guaranteed. Charlie kissed their cheeks and called them both her boys. Dean was sorry to leave her behind and invited her to a vacation underground in Lebanon, to which she joked that they had the largest hobbit hole ever and nodded her acceptance.

Somewhere between their shared nacho plate in Fredonia and Wichita city limits, Castiel asked Dean why they didn’t stay in B&Bs more often, telling him they were much preferable to motels.

Dean smiled over at him and turned down the volume on Pink Floyd, “I dunno. I guess they don’t suit the lifestyle. Not anonymous enough, sometimes too expensive, and back in the day they didn’t take plastic. Y’know, I liked it too, and our stay in Forest City. Maybe we can indulge sometimes.”

“I’d like that Dean.” Castiel chewed his lip, “Remember Rosa?”

Dean jutted his jaw and made a noise of acknowledgement.

“You were jealous.”

Dean gulped. He wasn’t sure if there was a question.

“It made me uncomfortable and you looked like an asshole.” Castiel continued. “You have no need for jealousy. I am not going anywhere. Jealousy is a sign of doubt. Do you doubt me, Dean?”

Dean white-knuckled the wheel. It was either that or let go. How could Castiel think that? His heart dropped painfully to his gut. “Fuck,” Dean gasped, “I’m not. I don’t. It wasn’t you. I never thought you would. Not for an instant. It was her. She was making a move.”

“But I was not going to move to meet her.” Castiel said softly.

“Damn it, Cas. I fucked up again didn’t I?” Dean bit his top lip with his teeth. “I freaking don’t how why you put up with me.”

“Is that it?” Castiel asked as if he had gotten a light bulb moment, “You think you are not worthy? That I will find someone more pleasing, better than you?”

A snake of bitter sour acid uncoiled in the pit of Dean’s stomach.

“Because you know that is impossible. There is no one. No soul so bright, so beautiful as yours, Dean. I am the one who is grateful that you have given me this; a home, a life, a family and your love. I need you as much as you need me. More perhaps.”
“Not more, Cas. Look at us. We are as fucked up as each other,” Dean snorted a laugh.

“I will take that as a compliment because I believe you are perfect, Marmalade.” Castiel said with a pleased smirk.

“I’m perfect marmalade?” Dean raised his pitch and half-laughed.

“I am following your lead. You use Honey as a term of endearment. I believe you taste as sweet and your beard reminds me of the condiment. Also I saw a picture of a kitten.”

“Excuse me,” Dean tried to take in that he tasted like Sam and Castiel’s breakfast toast spread, he had been called red-haired, and he reminded Castiel of a cat.

“On the internet. Sam showed me the cute kitten websites. There was one of a marmalade kitten with bright emerald eyes. It was batting paws with a black kitten with blue eyes. Then they snuggled up together. It reminded me of us.”

“Kittens? Reminded you of us?” Dean nearly sneezed at the thought.

“Yes Dean.”

“I don’t know. I just don’t know.” Dean shook his head.

Despite being dubbed after a ginger allergy inducing feline, Dean reacted to Castiel’s longing look at the Cawker City road sign, turning off for the garden centre. He loaded the Swedish ivy and the Boston Fern into the rear seat without complaint. He didn’t complain about his thank you kiss either.

When they got home, there was a welcoming committee of Sam and Kevin. The angel trio had zapped the prophet over to the bunker. He had cracked the rest of the spell.

Dean postponed the next installment of Angel Tablet News, saying he needed a drink after his day on the road. Sam wanted to know about the cosplay too. He seemed to have endless questions and was seriously deflated when he learned Castiel and Dean did not have to wear tights.

Once Dean had a second double of Hunter’s Helper down his gullet, they headed to the Men of Letters ritual room. The celebratory adding of a damp hankie and the engagement ring to the amphora was done rapidly, toasted with rotgut and a determined shake of the jug by Dean who felt the ingredients needed to be mixed together.

“We have a problem,” Kevin said as they marched back to the conference table.

“Don’t we always,” Dean scratched the back of his neck as he sat his weary body down at the long table. He noticed the exiled King of Hell was absent. “Where’s Crowley?”

“Downstairs. It’s better.” Sam said grimly. “Two problems, really, but one that might be the kicker.”

“Hit me,” Dean said.

“The corruption.” Kevin looked at them to check they were with him. “It is elements of the essence of a demon.”

“What is that exactly?” Dean asked, “You need their blood?”

“No the blood is demonic but at its base level it is the blood of their meatsuit.”

“You mean we have to try and capture some of that black vapor when they smoke out.” Dean
“That’s what I said too. Started thinking of bell jars and how to transfer it into the amphora.” Sam commented.

“But it isn’t.” Kevin leaned over the table, tapping at some symbols on sheets spread in front of him. “They must be taken from the true form of the demon.”

“Which they reveal in Hell.” Dean finished, “Oh Metatron is a clever bastard. If Sammy had closed the gates…”

“Then no demons to reverse it.” Castiel added.

“Or ones trapped here, hiding in meat suits, and only seen as black smoke when jumping bodies.” Sam contributed.

“Exactly,” Kevin said.

“We can trap a demon. Hell we have a trapped demon, but how do we see their true form? How do we know what to take for the spell?” Dean sighed deeply.

“And that is only the first problem.” Sam said with too much resignation for Dean’s liking.

“Kevin, talk to me.”

“The Grace.” Kevin looked at Castiel who raised a hand to his neck, “It has to be Castiel’s.”

“What?” Dean blinked.

“The Grace must be that of the original sacrifice.”

“But Metatron ripped it from Cas’s body.” Dean protested.

“I know,” Kevin gulped, “but there it is. A measure of the original spell’s Grace poured into the amphora at the final moment. The good news, guys, is that it need only be a bare atom of the Grace. So if Metatron has secreted it or did not use all of it, then…”

Castiel stood up. He walked like a marionette with its strings cut. Dean took long strides to catch up with him in the corridor, but Castiel pushed him away with a broken headshake. “I need some space, okay?”

Dean nodded and let him go. It ripped at his heart but he could respect Castiel’s space. He looked at his watch. Cas was getting ten minutes and then Dean was going to find him.
“Holy fire glasses,” Sam roared across the room when Dean re-appeared.

“Knew you were the smart one, Sammy.” Dean clapped his brother on the arm. If the glasses could see the true form of a hell hound then they should work on a demon or at least a smoked out demon.

“We can use Crowley as the trial run.” Sam theorized.

“I take it back,” Dean rolled his eyes, “Firstly if it works, how do we know what to take from Crowley and second how do we let Crowley out of his meatsuit?”

“The demon knife would probably work as a tool and we could ask him.” Sam said.

“He might deal.” Kevin suggested.

“Hey Crowley how about you let us cut off your wings? Won’t hurt a bit. In exchange for access to the good whiskey.”

“No need to be sarcastic.” Sam bitch-faced him.

“Wings would be too big. Do demons have fangs or tentacles?” Kevin asked.

Dean blew a huff. “They have a crap load of fugly.” He closed his eyes and pushed away the sensation of Alastair’s talons peeling off his skin.

“What about a forked tongue?” Sam tried.

“What? No.” Dean dismissed, “at least not in my experience. And even if they did, I can’t see him giving that up easily.”

Kevin grimaced, “If you guys think you can believe him, it might be time to ask Crowley. What are you going to do about the Grace?”

“Summon Metatron and get the douchebag to hand over Cas’s Grace.” Dean ignored the little voice telling him that when Cas had his Grace back, minus the few molecules for the spell, then he’d be all powered up and ready to aid in Heaven’s rebuilding.

“Simple as that?” Kevin gaped.

“Holy oil circle, summoning we used on that feathery louche Balthazar, and no breaking of the circle until he hands it over.” Dean marked each part of his plan by raising one finger after another.

“You know he’s the only one up there,” Sam said, “He has all the souls like when Castiel was y’know God.”

“He’s still an angel and he doesn’t have them all nuclear inside him like Cas did,” Dean winced. He
made a quick note to collect the trench coat.

“We could take precautions. Use the Men of Letters magic ritual room, scrape off the angel warding like you did, Dean.” Sam paused, “Once he has given it up, we can fix the warding again. Also we can have an emergency bailout plan. Angel banishment sigil ready in case of any unwanted guests.”

“I like it.” Dean gave the plan his seal of approval.

“Then you only have to decide which gate to perform the reverse spell near.” Kevin folded over his notes as if he was finished with them.

“I have to what now?” Dean turned to his brother, “I thought we were doing this in the bunker?”

“We can get all your ingredients here, but you have to add Castiel’s grace at the final moment and then… well we aren’t sure what effect it will have on the surrounding area. It might be a bomb or a portal might open or the sky might rip apart and suck all the angels back in.” Sam’s hands were gesturing as he explained, “The spell wants to be done somewhere near a borderline.”

“It does now, does it?” Dean raised his eyebrows.

Sam got his pen and ticked off options he had written on another of his yellow pads, “Stull, Devil’s Gate Wyoming, Ilchester, Jerusalem, Lourdes, Hundred Mile Wilderness Maine, any of the other Devil’s gates…”

“Why would you do a spell to open Heaven at a Hell Gate? Are you sure you translated that correctly Kev?” Dean asked.

Kevin looked offended, “Hey! I’m not just in advanced placement now. I’ve been doing this for fucking years. The spell will be most potent where the border between worlds is thin. Doesn’t specify heaven and earth.”

“OK.” Dean held his hands up, “Double checking. I don’t fancy any of those. You up for some research Sammy? Maybe the dudes who compiled this library have something on places like that?”

Dean left Kevin and Sam to thrash out an extended location list. He had a partner to find. This time he hit a hole in one. Castiel was in his own room. He was staring at the wall of photographs. Dean did not declare his presence. He walked over and wrapped his arms around Castiel’s waist. Cas leaned back into the silent embrace, pressing into Dean from hip to shoulder.

Castiel’s head fell back against Dean’s shoulder and his graveled voice was hoarse, “I will lose this.”

“What Cas?” Dean didn’t want to go there. He wanted to simply hold on to Cas and keep him there in his arms.

“My eye for the lens. I will see every atom in motion simultaneously as the light of their souls, and they will overlay the physical forms. That does not make for a good photographer.”

Dean flattened his palms and pressed into Castiel’s torso, pulling him closer. He kissed the curl of Cas’s ear. “You’ll gain your wings.”

“And everything that comes with them,” Castiel sighed deeply enough that it ran though both their bodies.

“Hey grumpy, we have the other impossible task to complete first. Eau d’Demon, Essence of Corruption.”
“You will succeed.” Castiel stated as if it was a foregone conclusion.

“I like your confidence.” Dean huffed.

Castiel swiveled and faced Dean, cupping the hunter’s face in his hand, “You will. You will do this and I will play my part. Then if I can, I will come home to you.”

Dean closed his eyes because he couldn’t keep them open. It was like a stiletto was piercing his heart. That was the way it was going to be. Back to Castiel leaving him behind, this time with a promise of return. Dean had a sudden appreciation of the stoicism of army spouses. Castiel would ride to war under Michael’s banner, and Dean would wait. It sucked ass.

He gulped and pushed down the pain, “What if Meta-douche dumped your Grace?”

“Remember how the tree grew where Anael’s grace fell. Uriel was able to extract it then Anael could take it back. Perhaps this is why we will need Michael’s help.”

Dean shrugged, “Come on Cas, let’s go yank Crowley’s chain.”

“You have chained him for this?” Castiel asked.

Dean wondered if that was a deliberate misunderstanding but it still worked to lighten his mood, “No, Cas, it is an expression.”

“I understand,” Castiel smiled back at him.

Kevin and all his notes were gone when they got back to the conference table. Sam explained he had gone outside to be picked up by angel transport, before he asked Castiel if he was good.

“I am well, Sam, thank you.” Castiel sat down at the table and looked over Sam’s notes. “I think we should go to Stull. It is close and it is connected to both Heaven and Hell because of being the destined location for the apocalypse showdown.”

“I dunno. It’s not exactly a happy memory.” Dean bit his lip and waited for Sam to comment.

“Lots of the options are a long distance, and we did win there Dean, more than in some of the other locations.” Sam didn’t mention the unmentionable Ilchester last seal debacle.

“Let’s not count chickens.” Dean leaned over and tagged Sam on the shoulder, “You’re It Sam. You get to talk to Crowley about his participation.”

“Well thank you, Jerk, thank you very much.”

“You are very welcome,” Dean grinned brightly.

“He doesn’t sound very thankful.” Castiel said as Sam stomped out of the room.
Chapter Summary

Shopping, Cooking, Dealing.

It was a short run in the Impala into Lebanon. Rain pelted against the windshield reminding Dean of the morning he found Castiel.

The atmosphere in the bunker was weirding Dean out. He needed some air.

Castiel had taken over Dean’s normal retreat, the kitchen. While Dean had slept like a log, unexpectedly after the final quests news, Castiel had been up with the birds and watching a cookery channel. The former angel was attempting to make pizza from scratch, i.e. bread dough base, homemade tomato paste, slicing the salami with a sharp knife. The kitchen looked like a disaster zone. Castiel had found Dean’s jar of cherry pie filling and asked if would like to make a dessert. Mr-I-Am-A-Chef-Now had used up the flour so Dean couldn’t make pastry. Thus Dean was on a welcome run for cheats’ readymade pie cases, confectioners’ sugar, the ever wanted green crap for Sam, and some fresh basil and mozzarella, both for Cas to tear with his own hands over the pizza.

The evening before Sam had spent hours talking with Crowley in their interview room/head shrinking office. He was bone tired when he joined Dean and Castiel in the den for the last half hour of Die Hard 2: Die Harder. Today Crowley has been taciturn and growly. Dean didn’t attempt to ask for a progress update. He heard Sam say something about redemption when he was guiding Crowley away for another chat.

When Mrs. Edmondson put the cleaned, folded and mended trench coat into Dean’s hands, she respectfully glanced away as he lifted it to his face as if examining her handiwork and rubbed it against his cheek.

“I could tell it means a lot to you and your young man. I have tried my best with it. I found a matching gabardine to create the elbow patch and have hand stitched the rips. I doubt it is suitable for public wear, but it is not going to fall apart any day soon.”

“Thank you Ma’am. How much do I owe you?” Dean put the coat down for a moment and pulled out his wallet.

“Today? Nada.” The senior citizen tapped the side of her nose. “Call it a customer loyalty scheme. I might have those cards you stamp printed up: Buy ten get one free.”

Dean gulped. He knew that he and Sam had not sent ten items her way yet. “Thank you. We owe you one.”

“No, Dean. It is my pleasure, please accept it.”

“Thank you again, Ma’am.”

“God Bless.” She said as goodbye.

Dean wasn’t going to make a smart comment this time, “You too.”
He laid the coat on the shot gun seat while doing his other errands. He got everything he needed in the town which was a stroke of luck. The mozzarella was mini balls in a water bag but he figured it was fine. Cas was gonna rip it to pieces. He picked up the basil as a small weedy plant at the florist cum candy cum greeting card store. There were no supermarkets in Lebanon. He didn’t particularly want to drive to Smith Center.

Back at base, Castiel was covered in tomato sauce and flour giving him a pink tinge. Dean didn’t know whether to break his ass laughing or pull Castiel’s very desirable ass into the shower. He plunked his grocery bag on the worktop and beckoned Castiel over.

“I was gonna let you unwrap it yourself but you are covered in food bits,” Dean whipped out his short knife and cut the string he had tied around the brown paper. Then he lifted out Castiel’s coat and shook it from the shoulders. “Nice job huh?”

Castiel made to touch it with his sticky hand but Dean batted it away. “Naw-ha wash the paws first, Babe.”

Castiel snorted a laugh and dutifully went to the sink. “I think I’ll show you those kittens Dean. You might allow me to call you Marmalade after all.”

“You’ll be waiting,” Dean smirked.

Castiel held the coat out from his body turning it round for inspection, then nodded in satisfaction. “I will hang it in the closet in our room.”

He knew that Castiel could have re-folded it along the lines Mrs. Edmondson had, and placed it on the shelves beside his other clothes and cameras. It meant more to put it into Dean’s closet, acknowledgement of what the piece of repaired cloth represented to both of them. A truly ugly thought popped into Dean’s head, that Castiel might be able to zap the coat back to its old state very soon.

He strutted to the refrigerator for a cold one and found the two huge rectangular pizza bases. Cas had covered them in tomato sauce, dried herbs, fried mushrooms and sliced salami. He had grated the end of the Monterey Jack and scattered it finely across one of the pizzas. The other had a can of corn sprinkled over it. Sam could have that one.

Paper rustling got Dean to pull his head out of the refrigerator. Castiel had finished unpacking and was massaging the mozzarella packaging. He stuck his nose into the center of the basil. Dean wondered if he licked the tip of Cas’s nose would he taste the herb.

“You did well.” Castiel said as he caught a knife to slit open the mozzarella.

“You want the oven first or last?” Dean asked as he turned the temperature dial.

“How long will you need?” Castiel asked.

“Everything is cooked really. About twenty minutes in the oven. I’ll pour the cherry filling into the sweet case. I’m topping it with some flaked almonds and I might drizzle a little of the honey Sam has been taking in hot water.” Dean grinned, “then I can tell him it’s healthy food.”

“The pizzas will take a little longer.”

Dean uncapped two beers to assist the cooking process. “We will do the pie first, cos it needs to cool.”
The smells of baking pastry and cherries followed by the baked bread aroma drew Sam into the kitchen. “Holy crap, what have you two been doing in here?”

“I know the place looks like the aftermath of a food fight…” Dean began to explain.

“No, not that,” Sam tilted his head and scented the air, “Have you kidnapped a baker?”

Castiel smirked with pride, “Dean has made pie and I have made pizza with my own hand. I am now the pizza man.”

Dean spluttered his beer all over the floor and Castiel had to slap his back while he tried to breathe and laugh at the same time.

Crowley joined them for their meal. He was polite, for Crowley, making no snide remarks only using his ridiculous nicknames for the other three. It made Dean suspicious.

Dean told Castiel to relax while he cleared the table with Sam. There was one lonely slice of pie left. It was not alone for long because Dean rescued it and allowed it to join the large slice he had already consumed. He had to loosen his belt by one hole when he brought a round of beer to the library.

Crowley refused a beer. “I wish to propose a deal.”

“I knew it.” Dean spat.

“Wait,” Sam held up a hand.

Dean folded his arms but listened.

“I will give you my weenie talon for my freedom.” Crowley licked his lips.

“Bad deal…” Dean began.

Crowley spoke over him, “…patience my flighty Squirrel. In addition I will confine my activities to Hell and the removal of that bitch Abaddon.”

“Isn’t that what you want to do?” Castiel asked.

“Perhaps, but it also benefits your team.” Crowley lounged in the seat, “Don’t you like the poetry? I took the prophet’s finger and now you can take one of mine.”

“It will grow back.” Dean scoffed.

“Actually,” Sam said, “It won’t, if we use the demon knife.”

“Hello? You’ve discussed this already Sam?” Dean accused.

“Of course. What did you think I have been doing since yesterday? Letting Crowley braid my hair?” Sam huffed.

“How would you do this?” Castiel asked.

“Moose lets me out of these.” Crowley raised his handcuffs. “I ‘smoke out’ as you boys call it. You wear those spectacles that allowed you to send poor devoted Growley to his eternal rest. I jump back in the body. When I am gone, I am gone.”

“We could use a demon trap.” Dean said.
“No dice. It will keep him in the meat suit.”

“Squirrel are we not all pals now, housemates and all that?”

“We are not pals.” Dean’s shoulders sagged. He rolled his beer bottle between his hands.

“Look Dean. I’m not gonna force it. We can capture another demon.” Sam said.

Crowley shrugged, “You could. I’d get to keep all my little piggies. Whatever.”

“Oh for Pete’s sake.” Dean stood up. For all Crowley was and had become, he had been King of the Crossroads. He honored his deals. “Let’s do this.”

“What?” Sam and Castiel said together.

“Sam will release you from your demon bindings. You will leave your meat suit and allow me to take your filthy claw.” Dean said eye to eye with Crowley.

“You will then allow me to leave. You will not obstruct me in any way. I will return to Hell and take up the fight against Abaddon.” Crowley made clear.

“Get the holy fire glasses Sam.” Dean said, “Deal.”

Crowley twisted his lips in a smile and then puckered them, “Come now my shy hunter, time to kiss and make up.”

“Can’t I kiss Cas instead?” Dean sighed but then leaned forward and landed the lightest peck on Crowley’s lips. He jumped back and scrubbed his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Deal.” Crowley said and held up his hands.

“I have a bad feeling.” Castiel muttered.

Dean had twisty wrong feeling. He hated that he had done a deal, but keeping Crowley as a ‘housemate’ was never going to be a long term workable situation. Eventually a gank or let go decision was going to have to be made. At least this way they got something out of it.

Sam threw the glasses at Dean who slipped them on. Sam pulled the demon cuff and collar keys out of the card index drawer labeled Ka-Ko.

“Bloody fucking bollocks.” Crowley’s jaw dropped, “Do you mean to tell me that all these weeks I have been in this room and the keys were filed alphabetically?”

Sam smirked and worked at the locks. Both collar and cuffs had sunk into Crowley’s wounds. There was the sickly pull away of skin when Sam peeled them off.

“Sayonara boys.” Crowley crowed. His head fell back. A stream of red tainted smoke poured from the meat suit.

Dean could see it coalesce into a huge leather bat-winged horned mass. It was gross. His human perception, even with the assistance of the glasses, attempted to screw away from the sight. He raised the knife but Crowley lifted his scaled limb to his razor toothed mouth and pulled off a claw with his teeth. Dean dived to retrieve it from the floor. The glasses fell from his nose, making it look like he was holding a wisp of smoke, but he could feel the slimy solid nail between his thumb and finger. Looking up he saw Crowley’s smoke disappearing out through a vent. He was alarmed that the demon had not retaken his meat suit.
“Sammy?” Dean asked urgently.

“I know,” His brother said. “I mean I don’t know. That wasn’t the deal right?”

“I don’t understand why he would leave his favorite vessel.” Castiel tilted his head at Dean.

Sam bent down and began checking the motionless body as if he was expecting sticks of dynamite from the weapon room to be wired onto a timing device.

“There is a note.” Sam said grimly. “He planned this.”

Boys,
If you are reading this, nice kiss Squirrel, pleasure.
Take care of the Big Apple literary agent, will you Moose? Put him on ice for me.
Best of Irish with the heaven lark. I’ll listen out for news from my infernal home. Enjoy my claw, you got your prize as dealt. You know how humans trim their fingernails? I’m afraid there is nothing essential about it. Just a tip for free, when you do find a demon for your spell, take something vital like brains or irreplaceable like the venomous fangs and horn tips.

“Motherfucking Sonovabitch.”

Dean looked at the useless smoke in his grasp. He realized he hadn’t spoken. The cussing was all Cas.
“What the fuck do we do now?” Dean’s growl vibrated through the bunker. He gave the lifeless meat suit a hard kick in the groin, and dropped the useless claw onto the tailored jacket.

“We could call…” Castiel started.

“Do not say Michael,” Dean yelled.

Castiel gaped at him, “I was going to say Kevin… to check out if what Crowley wrote was true.”

“Good, right. Because we don’t need an archangel to find a demon.” Dean protested, but he wasn’t sure. Everything was going to shit. They’d had a freaking demon under their control and now they had bupkis.

“We’ll figure it out Dean.” Sam said from where he had collapsed into a chair.

“I say we salt and burn this thing,” Dean said landing another vicious kick into the flesh of the thigh.

“Crowley may come back for it.” Sam said.

“All the more frikken reason.” Dean glared at his brother. “Sometimes Sam… I just don’t get it.”

“No Dean. Not for Crowley, but we might save another soul from becoming his meatsuit. We could put the body outside in a demon trap.”

“Really, Sam, really?” Dean huffed, “Fucking hell, do what you want with it. I need a fucking real drink.”

With that Dean went and got monumentally drunk.

The following morning Dean woke spread out on his back on the map-topped conference table, reminiscent of Ash on the Roadhouse pool table. His mouth felt like something had died in it. He was in his clothes minus one boot and an arm free of his plaid over shirt. Everything fucking hurt. It was too freaking bright. A military tattoo played in his head. He noticed Crowley’s vacated meat suit had been removed by Sam or Castiel. He felt sick to his stomach with alcohol poisoning and guilt. He had been too hasty, too gung-ho to seize the prize of the corrupting element to his quest. It had fricking corrupted it alright. They were fucked. Royally fucked now. He’d wanted to get a quick slam-dunk, but it was Crowley who slammed him, blindsided Dean using his rash stupidity.

Dean groaned and rolled off the table. A wave of nausea assaulted him but he fixed it by staggering to the cabinet and drinking his fill from a half bottle of rot gut. Not wanting to inflict his sorry self on his brother or partner, Dean banged against walls stumbling to the bathroom. His toothbrush wavered
and cloned itself in front of his eyes. Dean decided he’d have a shower first. In the furthest cubicle the effort of clothing removal was way beyond him. He slid down the wall, braced his soles against the edge of the shower tray, and raised the bottle to his lips.

Three quarters the way through a sobbing rendition of Stairway to Heaven, a hand pushed the bottle down from Dean’s mouth. Castiel with his hair askew and wearing only boxers and his dead guy robe said with sadness, “Dean.”

Dean huffed and made a sort of hissing noise of derision. Of course Castiel was sad. He’d made the foolish mistake of putting Dean on a pedestal. Now he got to witness a patent Dean Winchester collapse into a black hole of alcohol and self pity. Dean waited for sadness to change to disgust.

“Dean, darling, come on please,” Castiel tried to take the bottle of Hunters Helper but Dean held on. “I need it Cas… need it cos I’m fucking useless.”

“Stop it,” Castiel snapped and jabbed at Dean’s muddled mind with emphasized words, “You were not the only one in the room. I was there. Sam feels terrible. Even worse, I’d say, where your boot hit him as he dragged the vacant vessel away.”

Dean didn’t remember that but he had a vague recollection of flicking his Zippo and threatening to burn the body indoors, “No, not, Sammy did nothing. I kissed his pissy demon lips. Dealt again. Dumb-dumb Dean-o.”

He raised the bottle again but this time Castiel succeeded in tugging it from his grasp. Dean threw his head back against the wall and shut his eyes, blocking everything out. His eyelids flew open when he heard and felt Castiel curling around him in the tight space, like the too confined tree hollows they clung to in Purgatory.

“You stink of a sour backstreet bar,” Castiel wrinkled his nose.

Dean chuckled and ducked his head into Castiel’s soft robe, “You smell of Cas.”

“That is good,” Cas put his hand on the nape of Dean’s neck and gently kneaded.

“I’m sorry,” Dean whispered, “You deserve better… I wanna… wanted to be for you… be here for you.”

“You are, Dean. You are here. I am still here.” Castiel breathed the words into Dean’s hair.

“But Crowley is gone.” Dean rubbed his thumb and finger together feeling the ghost of the useless claw.

“I never liked him anyway,” Castiel quipped.

“Come here,” Dean squeezed Castiel tighter.

“I am right here.” Cas responded.

It took a while for Castiel to get Dean looking and feeling human again. Showering, tooth brushing, shaving and a new pot of hair wax helped. He exchanged an apology for assaulting Sam with a shoe for a full pot of strongly brewed coffee. Sam was morose. Dean knew he was blaming himself. He pulled his little brother down to the shooting gallery for a toxicity leeching session where they imagined Crowley’s smarmy face on each target. By evening Dean was much improved and Sam even cracked a grin at some Sheldon centered geek joke on Big Bang Theory.
“Who is up for burgers? Cos I feel the need for a couple of double bacon cheeses? Take out? I’ll ride over to Smith Center?” Dean looked at the other two.

Sam tore his eyes away from Leonard and Penny. “Why don’t you both go out Dean? Have a break from here? I have the makings of a salad that will go in the garbage if I don’t use them today.”

“Hey Sammy? Garbage greens, who are you The Grouch? We’ll bring back a doggie bag. How about a Po Boy?”

Sam brightened up, “If you are ordering a Po Boy for me get some slaw and relish. Why don’t you take Cas to that place in Osborne?”

“Burger Bodega,” Dean practically drooled. They’d stumbled across the newly opened bar back in ’09. There had been a wraith in the county hospital. Dean remembered the food better than the hunt. Since they’d found the bunker he and Sam had only had the opportunity to indulge twice. On one occasion Sam had ordered a fricking Greek Salad. Cas deserved a treat, especially for putting up with his messy freak-out.

An hour later Dean held the Burger Bodega door open for Cas. There was a decent midweek crowd. The owners had painted the décor a forest green since his last visit, themed with table covers and servers uniforms in the same hue. Once they had been seated in a private booth, Dean ordered a pitcher of Free State Copperhead. He pulled Castiel out of his seat to take him over to the large board chalked up with menu options. Their server had given them the printed versions, but Dean preferred to read the board with its specials and daily graffiti of customer comments. While Cas perused the choices, Dean caught a nub of chalk and scrawled Glad to be back in a bottom corner. He eyed the pool table and pinball machine at the end of the room where the Bodega was more bar and less restaurant.

“What’s good Dean?” Castiel asked with his head to one side.

“Everything we’ve had. Sam raves about the salads and the falafel patty, but have something carnivore Babe.”

“Are you ordering the smoked bacon with Vermont cheddar burger?”

“Tempted by something new.” Dean said. He saw the waiter with their beer and took Castiel’s hand to return to their table.

In the end, Dean ordered a Kobe Burger with a side of sweet potato fries cooked in duck fat. Castiel picked a corn dog with all the fixings and a side of fried pickles. They arranged to take a Po Boy home for Sammy, which would be cooked when they called for the check.

Castiel stole Dean’s fries. Dean robbed Castiel’s pickles. Castiel pulled apart his corn dog into its component parts and licked salt from his fingers. Dean moaning was not all due to the gourmet beef. He leaned across and took a touch of Cajun mayo from the edge of Cas’s lower lip with his fingertip. The look of revulsion from a passing buttoned up middle aged douche in a suit went over Dean’s head. There were bigots everywhere. He was just glad Castiel was angled away from the homophobe.

They talked about the movies they’d watched and ones Dean still wanted Cas to see. He avoided telling Cas that Harrison Ford was in K-19 and Clear and Present Danger. Castiel reminded him that he wanted to see The Great Escape again. Dean talked a bit about books and said he’d give Castiel his re-found Vonnegut short story collection. They didn’t talk about the future or the quests. They did relive some of those months when they were Team Free Will and raised a glass to Bobby’s
memory. Cas told him a supposedly hilarious tale, if you were an angel and the story was in Enochian, about Balthazar and a Neanderthal poet. Dean told Castiel about the day his Dad had given him the Impala and how he raced down the highway with Sam in the shotgun seat, AC/DC blaring, feeling invincible.

Castiel reached across and took Dean’s hand. “We had better get your brother his Po Boy before they close the kitchen.”

Dean had not noticed time passing.

Outside Dean pressed Castiel against the Impala. He tasted his partner transmitting everything and all his hopes that they could keep this, that this wasn’t a farewell meal. “You are mine Baby.” He breathed into Castiel’s ear.

“I hope you are not referring to the Chevrolet.” Castiel smiled into Dean’s neck.

Dean’s chest heaved with laughter, “Funny guy now huh?”

Castiel’s shy smile melted Dean. Sam’s Po Boy needed the microwave by the time they got home.

Chapter End Notes

A big Thank You to Kansas native Madi over on Fanfiction.net who gave me tips on burger joints and Kansas Free State beer.
Chapter Summary

If you ain't got no Crowley then...

Going after the Grace next was Castiel’s suggestion. Dean wasn’t exactly rolling out the red carpet on the idea, but he figured they were temporarily stumped on the corruption element. They put aside the problem of how to tackle a smoked out demon without a demon trap. Dean was beginning to wonder if it would take a call to Michael. He was sure the archangel could scoop out demon essence in his sleep. Not that archangels slept any.

It was time to concentrate on getting Metatron to hand over Castiel’s Grace. Dean wished it wasn’t. He wished this could be postponed, but it was Castiel’s life, and if he was ready to take back his wings Dean was going support him. Castiel pointed out that he need not consume the Grace as soon as they retrieved it. The contribution to the reverse spell would be the final addition. The idea of the shining vial hanging like a hippie crystal pendant around Castiel’s neck was not attractive. It would taunt him with future loss. Dean was more a rip off the band-aid type of guy. However he could be meticulous about a hunt and after the Crowley debacle Dean was determined to cross every T and dot every I. There was no panic to race through this quest. Sam was triple checking their research, some of Bobby’s old library and Castiel’s Enochian knowledge. Castiel was appointed the chore of painting numerous circles of holy oil all over the ritual room so that Metatron was sure to appear in one, or close enough to be nudged into one. Kevin was reanalyzing ever symbol regarding the third and fourth quests.

On the third day Sam’s eyes were in danger of rolling out of the back of his mega-brain. Dean had him drawing angel banishing sigils in charcoal on the walls to prevent any slip up when painting it in fresh blood. Dean had discovered a Men of Letters training manual that recommended a light diet and refraining from alcohol, medication, caffeine, meat and fornication for twenty four hours before a ritual. He decided it would not do any harm to follow their instructions, after all he figured a satisfying mutual jerk off didn’t count as sex.

Sam and Castiel took point at either side of the ritual room. Dean made one final run through the summoning. It was almost anti-climatic when Dean scratched through the angel warding and proceeded to read the Enochian words. Metatron appeared smack bang in the center of the main circle. Castiel threw Dean’s Zippo and the flames lit up around Dick-a-tron’s stocking feet. The douchewad was in freaking brown ribbed indoor sock-shoes like people who live on couches wear. He had one of those long wooly granddad cardigans with a diamond pattern. The fricking dickwad was ruling Heaven and he couldn’t put on a suit?

Metatron took a sneering look at his surroundings and asked “Have you called me here to honor me with a story? Castiel, how nice to see you. Tell me of your journey so far.”

“Shuddup Marve.” Dean spat, “You don’t get to speak to him.” He desperately wanted to rip the Voice of God a new one.

“And Dean. Chosen to take on the quest to reverse my spell?” Metatron smiled condescendingly, “My persnickety reversal. Archangel grade magic. Couldn’t make it too easy… so I made it impossible. You are on a pointless quest. Sorry. You may let me out of this inconvenient barrier.”
Dean’s trigger finger twitched. He wished he had one of those angel bullets Castiel told him about.
“You will be released when you hand over Cas’s Grace. Capiche?”

The smarmy smirk didn’t leave the scribe’s face, “Well now, it seems we have a Catch-22 situation. Good book. Heller could tell a tale. You want something I cannot give you, in exchange for releasing me.”

“You can stew here for eternity.” Dean threatened. Metatron’s whiny voice was grating on his very soul. He imagined slitting the dickass’s throat. That made him feel marginally better.

“I do not have Castiel’s Grace.” Metatron stated calmly and shrugged his shoulders.

“Where is it?” Castiel gasped as if his voice was faltering in the angel’s presence.

“Where the hell have you hidden it, you freaking shithead?” Dean took a step closer. No matter which dimension the Grace was in Dean would retrieve it. He would scour the Earth for it. He’d chase Crowley to Hell. Get Doctor Robert to kill him and persuade Tessa to get him into Heaven. He’d open the portal to Purgatory from this end and pull the Grace and Benny right out of the stinkhole.

Metatron’s laughter was not a pleasant sound, “Scattered.”

Castiel gulped.

Dean narrowed his eyes. He wished with force that he had an archangel blade. “You are lying.”

“Why would I?” The asshole stroked his goatee, “The casting out spell consumed it. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed. It is atoms on the wind.”

“It is possible,” Cas choked out.

“Gone?” Sam spoke from his place by the banishing sigil.

“I must get your story Samuel. I expected you to arrive in Heaven as soon as I had assumed control.” Metatron tilted his head at the hunter.

“Good to know I was heading upstairs,” Sam said wryly.

“You were purified, well almost.” Metatron gave a derisive nose wrinkle, “Who knows where you will go now.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Dean snapped.

“It depends on his newly sprung angel. Used vessels follow angels. We promise Heaven to all those who say Yes.” Metatron’s brow furrowed, “You knew this? How else would angels retake their forms after considerable periods of time?”

“Dammit,” Dean kicked the edge of the ritual altar. “You are shitting me. Did you know this Cas?”

“I never considered the implications. I promised Jimmy divine rapture, as I had previous vessels.”

“And now dear Jimmy is in his Heaven and you are on earth. You know as you are in a Novak vessel, you could host another angel, if you agreed. Wouldn’t that be a tale?” Metatron pondered aloud. “Quite a bevy of vessels you have here.”

Dean huffed in disgust. He couldn’t listen to this drivel any longer. “Get rid of the worthless piece of
crap.”

He gave Sam and Castiel the nod.

Castiel threw sand on the holy fire as Sam slammed his hand into the sigil.

Dean saw Castiel’s knees buckle and caught him before he hit the ground. He held him close but looked at Sam. “You good, Sammy?”

Sam shook his shaggy mane and puffed, “I guess I’m going be on Team Let Lucifer Into Heaven now. There’s always a kicker.”

“I don’t know what to say.” Dean bit his lip. Fuck it. If Metatron hadn’t cast out the angels and Sam had completed the demon tablet trials, would he have been sealed in Hell with Lucifer for eternity? Was heaven only open to his brother because Lucifer had lucked out on a jail break? Was that the heavenly ‘reward’ for purifying your soul? Or would the gates of Hell have locked before Sam died as Metatron implied? The possibilities were headache inducing and didn’t bear thinking about.

Sam shrugged. “It’s academic now. How are you Cas?”

“I’m human.” Castiel said simply but he clung to Dean. “When I fell, I knew, I wasn’t expecting to return to the host. But these last few days, I’ve been preparing. Trying to steel myself to leave, but also allowing my imagination to regain my wings and see with celestial eyes.”

“And now it is ripped away again,” Dean said sympathetically.

Castiel nodded, “We won’t be ripped apart, but it still…”

“…sucks.” Dean finished for him.

“Yes. Dean. It sucks.” Castiel gave a broken laugh, “You guys, you are really stuck with me now.”

“Stuck to you,” Dean rubbed Cas’s back.

“I’m buying those earplugs.” Sam muttered as he moved to put a dressing on where he cut his palm for the sigil.

“Sam, the angel warding?” Dean inclined his head toward the sigil he had scratched through. Better to prevent the return of a powered up unrestrained Metatron.

“Dean,” Castiel said grimly raising a hand for Sam to pause, “I think it is time to call Michael. If anyone can find some of those atoms, he has the ability.”

It was an unwelcome suggestion but Dean knew it was the only option if they wanted to gank Metatron’s stupid ass. At that moment there was nothing he wanted more.
Wait

Chapter Summary

Dean's prayer is answered

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Twinkle twinkle little star,
How I wonder What the Fuck,
Up there fluttering about the sky,
Like a dickass kinda guy,

There was the sound of rustling feathers.

“What was that?” Michael curled his lip in disgust, “Didn’t anyone teach you how to pray?”

“My Daddy wasn’t all that religious, y’know. Having your life ripped apart in the name of some deadbeat God’s apocalypse doesn’t make for a pious soul.” Dean shrugged and gave his trademark smirk.

“You have hit your stumbling block.” Michael intoned.

Dean glanced behind the archangel to where Castiel had the edge of the altar in a death grip and Sam… well Sam had a look of complete petrified horror.

Michael noticed Dean’s eye movement and swiveled around in one of those unnatural motions that sucked it to Dean that he was looking at an occupied vessel. Not that Dean was going to forget that for an instant. It hurt bad seeing John’s young handsome features, a reminder of all the pain his Dad still had to face when Michael finished using him as an angel condom and wiped his memory.

“Well, well, if it isn’t the disobedient former seraph who thought he could Molotov me into oblivion, and my brother’s own specially crafted chew toy.” Michael smile was chilled with ice, “Aren’t you going to say Hello, Sam? We spent so long as cellmates.”

“Up yours.” Sam choked out.

“I should roast you.” Michael clicked his fingers. Flames licked at Sam’s legs.

Dean yelled, “How fucking dare you! Leave Sammy alone.”

He couldn’t breathe. This whole crap-fair was going from clusterfuck to utter FURBAR. Sam was frozen in place, letting out extreme nasal huffs, so much Dean was thinking of hyperventilation and paper bags. He looked down. Michael’s boots straddled two holy oil rings. Dean’s Zippo had gotten kicked towards the altar. He eye jerked Castiel to pick it up. He needed to get Michael to take a step to the left or the right.

Within seconds the stench of burning hair and denim signaled that Sam was actually catching fire.
His little brother grimaced in pain but wouldn’t give Michael the satisfaction of hearing him cry out.

As if it was a random gesture Michael flicked his wrist and there were no flames. Sam’s jeans were not even blackened. “… but I won’t BBQ you Sam. Lucifer would not be pleased. I have enough to deal with cleaning up the consequences of his environmental temper tantrums.”

Dean mouthed over to Sam, YOU GOOD?

Sam swallowed hard and put on a brave face. He nodded but Dean didn’t believe him.

Michael turned towards Dean, “So monkey, as distracting as it is to toy with your brother, why have you called at this time?”

Dean glared hate at the douchebag, “Come over here and deal with me.”

“I have told you…” Michael swept a hand over John Winchester’s body, “…Archangel. No deals. Also I am comfortable here between your pathetic circles of sacred oil, thank you.”

Dean cussed internally, licked his lips and began to explain, “We have lost our demon…”

Michael mocked him, “Lost? Misplaced? Where did you last see the abomination?”

“He escaped…” Dean tried again.

“Not a problem. I am sure I can obtain the corruption.” Michael said smugly.

“That is not why I…” The word caught in Dean’s throat, “…prayed to you.” He took a deep inhalation, “The Grace… Cas’s Grace for the spell. We, that is… Metatron said the original spell devoured it. It is gone.”

“Atoms on the wind.” Castiel quoted gravely.

Michael tilted his head, “You wish me to discover if the scribe was speaking a falsehood, and to seek out any traces of the spilled Grace.”

“In a nutshell,” Dean gave a firm nod.

Michael went absolutely still.

Dean gaped open mouthed at Castiel’s confidential whisper that he thought it unlikely that his Grace was secreted in a nutshell.

Dean leaned forward and waved a hand in front of Michael’s face. “He’s zoned out Sammy. You think Elvis has left the building?”

“Naw, Dean. He’s on angel radio.” Sam gave a dry cough to clear his throat and gazed down at his legs as if he could hardly believe he was uninjured. He shot a murderous look at Michael. “Fucking asshole.”

Dean was relieved to see the anger. He considered it a normal healthy response to Michael’s dick move. Sam’s rage face made the pressure on Dean’s heart lighten.

Michael remained mannequin like. His chest did not rise and fall. Dean kept an eye on the lips for signs of cyanosis.

“True.”
Dean startled back at the resounding word from the archangel.

“There is but one deposit of Castiel’s Grace. To procure it I would be required to GIZ IAX AL DON GETA.”

Castiel looked aghast. Dean resisted spitting out a request for the assbutt to speak American.

Michael continued, “This would best be translated from the Enochian as open cast fracking. I can mine for it using my Grace to extract the ore.”

“Peachy,” Dean responded, “Let’s get fracking.”

Dean liked the sound of it. Even the word was like a mish-mash of Fricking and Cracking. He did have a vague memory of some TV news special Sam watched which exposed the environmental damage caused by both pumping millions of gallons of water into the ground, and of open cast mining, but freaking hell, this was to reverse Metatron’s monumental expulsion of angels all over the planet.

“Sign me up,” He clicked his tongue at the archangel, “Gold in them there hills. Panning for Grace nuggets. Tunnels and those funny rail track lever trucks. Where is the seam of Cas’s diamond Grace?”

Michael stared at him, “In you.”

“What now?”

“In you Dean. The righteous man remade. My sword reconstituted. My true vessel knitted back together and purged of Hell’s taint, all with Castiel’s Grace. Also profoundly bonded as an unforeseen consequence. Time to break those ties. I can remove all trace of Castiel from you by fracking your soul with an in-pouring of my Grace. It will wash the other’s Grace from you at a subatomic level, breaking you back down to your molecules and chemical bonds. It will wipe his essence clean from your body, mind and soul.”

Chapter End Notes

The closest Enochian I could get to fracking was a Giziax Aldon Geta (or literally an earthquake to gather it out of him). In real fracking millions of gallons of water are pumped into the earth to force the mining target out of the ground.
Nonetheless

Chapter Summary

Dean takes a moment.

“No.” Castiel said with all the authority of a garrison commander, “It could kill Dean. You cannot GIS-IAX a human.”

“Castiel, I will not allow Dean to die,” Michael looked down his nose at the former angel, “The seeker is required to complete the spell. Without Dean, heaven cannot be re-opened to us.”

“There are worse things than dying,” Sam muttered.

“It could damage him,” Castiel’s glare went up a notch, “It may alter his memory, his mind…”

“It may,” Michael admitted casually, “With every significant ritual there must be sacrifice. You all have spilled your blood enough times to know this.”

“But Dean is…” Castiel started.

“Stop Cas. Just stop a second. It’s OK.” Dean sighed. He needed a moment to get his head around this. “Cas’s Grace… There’s this kinda thread of it still in me from when he sewed me back together, when he… raised me outta Hell?”

Michael and Castiel both nodded.

Sam kept up Dean’s stitching analogy, “But if you unpick the seams won’t Dean come apart?”

“Yes, in essence. I will rip and re-bind as I proceed.” Michael explained slowly.

“Sounds awesome,” Dean scrubbed his hair with his hand.

“It will be painful. I will have to force Castiel’s Grace out with my own.”

“Wait!” Dean held up a hand, “Do you mean you want to wear me like an angel condom?”

“It would be simpler if you consented to be my vessel. I could return John to his pregnant wife. I would be able to simply spit out the foreign Grace. But I know you will not consent,” Michael said wearily, “Therefore I will need to remodel your soul and its connection to your physical form.”

“Damn right I am not saying yes.” Dean spat, “I’ll take your pain and power wash cycle.”

Castiel looked like he wanted to butt in. Dean gave a slight headshake towards him and Sam. He realized Michael had gone still again, not so much that he was not breathing this time, but enough so that Dean felt the dickwad was waiting for the nod to get started using a melon scoop on Dean’s soul from the inside.

Dean figured that if he did not pause to let them have their say, but leapt straight to firing the starting pistol, Michael might not kill him, but Sam and Cas might.
“I need a minute,” Dean said. Michael remained blank faced. Dean repeated, “I need a minute with Cas and Sam, private like.”

Comprehension dawned on the archangel, “Oh, I will be outside then. Call me back when you are ready to proceed.”

“Cas?” Dean stuttered, “I gotta do this. I can’t be selfish… I gotta do it, but Man, I need you.”

He held out his hand. Castiel caught it and tugged Dean towards him. He was squeezed tight, so tight, it was like Castiel was trying to impart some of his new self into Dean’s body.

Sam came and perched his ass on the altar. “You don’t gotta do anything, Dean.”

“I do. This one is on me.” Dean spoke over Castiel’s shoulder. His partner was showing no signs of letting go.

“No. You don’t Dean.” Sam said with emphasis, “This is not some game of one-upmanship where you finish off your quests.”

“What? Come again,” Dean blinked and pulled marginally apart from Castiel, who kept hold of his hand, “No Sammy. It’s not. Didn’t you hear Mikey? He is not going to allow me to die.”

“Dean, that is not at all comforting,” Castiel said, “Remember Donnie Finnerman? Raphael’s vessel. He was in a catatonic state when Raphael vacated him. Michael’s Grace can purge mine out, but it could purge your mind, Dean.”

“Mikey is not gonna Cuckoo’s Nest me. He needs me to commence his glorious march back through the pearly gates.” At least Dean hoped he wouldn’t leave him like a freaking vegetable.

“Head to a gateway location, pour the vial into the amphora, say a few words of rehearsed Enochian. How much of your frontal lobe do you think Michael would assess as needing to remain to achieve that?” Sam clenched his fists, “And it would be nothing to him, nothing. Do you hear me Dean? This isn’t some minor player. Michael will do what he wants with your soul, mind and life.”

“I do hear you, Sammy. I don’t think he is gonna do that. He wants a walking talking living Dean.” Dean shifted so his body was flush with Castiel’s side, “Cas? Will I remember you?”

“I can’t say. Holy Father, I don’t know Dean. If you were an angel it would be excruciating to have your bond-mark removed but only the spiritual connection between the two angels is lost when they wish to break that union. They do not lose memories or their personalities. But this is more than breaking our bond and you are not an angel. He is going to tease apart everything that makes you… you.” Castiel’s eyes filled, “I don’t know if any trace of me will remain. You may retain everything. You may only lose memories that are directly linked to my Grace. You may recover memories of me you have forgotten as Michael triggers them. Or I may become a stranger to you.”

“Fuck.” Sam huffed.

“Ditto.” Dean bit his lip, “Listen Cas. I won’t forget you. I’ll hold on to every minute, every meeting, every dream, prayer, reunion, fight… Hell I’ll even grip onto every time I was mean to you, and called you names…”

Castiel cupped the back of Dean’s head and pulled him down so that their foreheads pressed against each other. “If you do forget me, I’ll still be here. I’ll make you remember. We’ll make new memories.”
“Don’t leave me Cas.” Dean pleaded, “Even if I’m a complete assbutt to you. Don’t listen to me if I don’t believe you’re my partner. Show me our photographs. Get Sam to beat it into me. Let me read Chuck’s later online books and Sam’s letter again. Just don’t give up on me.”

“Never.” Castiel breathed Dean’s air.

“I have to do this. Please.” Dean gulped. “I can’t without your… You’re good, right Cas?”

He froze the running stream of thoughts. He could do it without Castiel’s approval and support, but he didn’t want to. If he was going to let Michael tear through his soul, he needed to know Castiel had his back.

Cas took a moment to answer. “Remember Rosa, the psychic?”

Dean could see Sam’s raised eyebrow, “In Oklahoma. Yes Cas.”

“Remember she said the fates of many rested on my word, that I must let you give your sacrifice but I would not be alone again.” Cas summarized, “She was right so far. I choose to believe she was right about that too. We will not be alone. We will get through this and remain together.”

Dean nodded, touching their brows together again.

“I think I’m ready.” Dean said and steeled his resolve. He pulled back from Castiel, walked over to Sam and gained a hug from the other most important person in his life. “Sammy…”

“No words, Dee.” Sam’s arms were regaining some of their power. Dean was in danger of bruising. “I’ll be right here.”

When Sam released him, Castiel wrapped his arms sinuously around Dean’s waist. “I am going nowhere.”

Dean nodded, gritted his teeth and called, “Showtime Mikey.”

Michael popped back onto the same spot on the floor. He carefully sidestepped the holy oil to reach the altar. When there he snapped his fingers and all the angel summoning paraphernalia vanished.

“Hey douche, myrrh doesn’t grow on trees y’know?” Dean grumbled.

“Actually it does,” Professor Sam corrected as he moved back out of Michael’s way, “It’s a resin.”

“Thank you brainiac bitch.” Dean gave his brother a shitfaced grin.

“Excuse me.” Michael said pointedly. “Dean it would be more convenient if you would lie on the altar.”

“Freaking hell. Like in Sisters of Lesbos IV? Isn’t that taking the sacrifice crap well beyond the end zone?”

“I do not understand your objection.” Michael blinked.

“Sisters of Lesbos… Bella Donna and Pussy Cox in nuns’ wimples and not much else…” Dean began.

“Stop.” Michael bellowed. “What is your objection to lying flat?”

“A man should face death with his boots on.” Dean tried in vain.
“I told you that you will survive the extraction.” Michael’s speech was clipped with annoyance. “I can do it anywhere but if your legs fail you, would it not be easier if you are already prone?”

“I’ll stay with you.” Castiel whispered again. He didn’t let go of Dean’s hand as he used his other arm to help shuffle his denim clad butt onto the altar.

Dean took a deep breath as he lowered his back onto the hard surface and straightened his legs. He looked up. He could see Michael rolling up his sleeve. He guessed they would start with traditional soul checking torture. Super. Peachy. Awesome. He tried to focus on the symbol decorated ceiling instead. Castiel’s face moved to block his vision. His head tilted down and he sucked Dean’s lip into this mouth. Dean opened up for him. Castiel drove his tongue in, pushing with a passionate urgency which Dean met in kind. It would not be their last kiss. It would not. Dean would not allow it to be, no matter what.
Before he was touched, before the pain, Dean’s mind experienced a disconnect. His father’s hand, the young softer hand he remembered from when his Mom was alive, complete with wedding ring, pushed down on his solar plexus. It was wrong at a base level, as if it symbolized everything that was amiss with the world.

Michael kept pressing downward with unrelenting force until the hand entered Dean up to the wrist. It was shocking and excruciating. He had not felt so violated since Hell. He tried to breathe through gritted teeth, tried to focus on Castiel’s grip on his fingers.

A quip about Michael stepping on the accelerator to get on with it, died on Dean’s lips.

“Close your eyes now.” Michael commanded.

Dean obeyed. Eye burn-out was not on his bucket list.

“All of you,” Michael’s voice insisted.

Castiel tightened his hold on Dean’s hand. Dean guessed it coincided with Castiel’s eyelids falling.

The flare of Michael’s Grace still penetrated the layers of skin covering Dean’s pupils causing spikes of pain and sparks in the darkness. That pain invaded him, not from his eyes but from where Michael had connected his Grace to Dean’s soul. It ravaged him, tearing him apart at the speed of light.

Nothing had ever come close; not the heart attack from the rawhead hunt, the implosion of his brain when the Impala was totaled, not being torn apart by hell hounds, nor the slow precision of Alastair’s knives and teeth.

Dean blacked out.

His conscious mind retreated from the breaking down of his soul and body. He was somewhere quiet, white and clean. It was calm and still. Unnatural. He wondered if Michael had created this space for him. He must have, because Dean would surely have retreated onto a long highway at Baby’s wheel with Sam and Cas along for the ride. He focused on Castiel. He remembered his promise. He wouldn’t let his angel go…

A reel of images flitted across the white wall. They moved at hyper-speed, like a live action rewind at pace. Dean clung onto to the images. Were they appearing because Michael was erasing them as they sequenced?

On the virtual screen, Castiel lay spread out on his back, exposed for Dean’s personal view, on their bed, a sheen of post-lovemaking perspiration on his skin, the long expanse of his neck calling to Dean to lick and suck his devotion.
Castiel hunched broken in the rain.

Cas under Naomi’s control punched into Dean’s face. Somehow although the image seemed outside his mind, he could feel his cheekbone shatter under the angelic force. He could taste the mix of blood, bile, loss, and heartbreak at the back of his throat.

Dean thought he was travelling back in time, but then the images mixed and shifted in a confusing mass of memories.

Hippie Cas, who never was, popped pills in a Croatoan world.

In a back alley Castiel used his fists to tell Dean what he thought of saying yes to Michael.

Castiel held his FBI badge upside-down, before they ran down the back stairs of a brothel and Dean was happier than he had been in an age.

They sat on a bench watching children play and then they talked at the end of a fishing pier.

Castiel held vigil by his bed in Cheyenne as Dean fractured into pieces before his eyes and he didn’t leave. Dean picked this point in time as when he started to fall for him. He loved Cas and he could feel those layers of love were being peeled away.

Dark black wings spread across a barn wall. His shoulder burned too hot like a brand was being seared into his flesh. He smelled the sulfur and Alastair’s unique stench.

This couldn’t be what he would be left with? Something pulled him out of perdition but he won’t remember what? It would be like waking up underground in his coffin but this time underground in his home. What if it was not only Castiel? What if everything since he was bonded and reformed by Castiel’s Grace disappeared? He wouldn’t remember Charlie, Kevin, Jodie, Garth. He’d think Bobby was still alive. Sam would have to tell him. Sam would have to tell him about the apocalypse. Dean was suddenly terrified that having to do that could break his brother. He wanted out now. He was giving too much. He couldn’t do that to Sam. He tried to call out, to tell Michael to halt. That he was done. That he just couldn’t give anymore. His screams bounced off the walls in this room made of his mind and echoed back at him in mockery. He tried to force his consciousness to wake up. He pushed back with a supreme effort.

He remembered someone ordering him to close his eyes. It was the most important thing to keep his eyes closed. The pain increased, impossibly, as he had surely been at his limit. There were no more memories to rely on. He was composed only of the agony of his atoms’ chemical bonds being forced apart. Cold fusion happening inside, splitting apart what made him Dean Winchester, his soul? His body? His mind?

The tapping of a silver topped cane and the smell of a deep dish Chicago pizza menaced at the edge of his existence.

Then he was no longer in the white room. He was back in his own deeply aching body with his eyes clenched shut and his breath coming in ragged gasps.

“IT is done.”

He heard the words but could not connect them to a meaning.

A voice that was vaguely familiar spoke, “He is coming round. Sam!”

“Don’t touch him.” Sam barked.
Dean tried to focus. He felt he should know those voices. He latched onto the last one: Sam. Suddenly his mind was filled with all his memories of Sam like an empty glass on a hot day with homemade lemonade to the brim, and he tried to call out for his brother.

He blinked and could see a face peering into his. More of his life was replenished until he was bursting with pain and pressure.

On the opposite side under all the fiery pain, Dean could feel someone holding his hand.

“Get the fuck away from me.” Dean lashed out towards the face with his free arm.

“Not a problem.” The stranger scoffed.

“Dee? Are you OK? You had me going there. Thought you’d screamed yourself to death. Jerk.”

“Having angel juice scraped outta ya is no picnic, Bitch.” Dean took a few stuttering breaths. He tried to move but the nuclear reactor in his middle wasn’t cooked. A flare of agony knocked him back.

Michael urged him to remain still while he finished healing but Dean had already lost the battle with consciousness.

Next time he came close to awareness he could hear someone weeping. Sam’s noisy snot-filled sobs provided a counterpoint. A part of Dean wasn’t waking for a click flick and he gladly sank into the painless dark.

The air had a taint of antiseptic. Something was stuck in Dean’s arm. It was a fucking IV. He knew it was. Why would he be in hospital? What had happened?

It wasn’t a hospital. There were no beeping monitors and bustling nurses. The batcave… he was in the bunker… in the medical bay.

Someone was sitting to his right reading aloud to him. A poem maybe. The voice was deep, graved, and grave. Dean wanted to reach out and touch the owner of that voice.

“….I know nothing else but miracles,  
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,  
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,  
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,  
Or stand under trees in woods,  
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,  
Or…”

Dean opened his eyes, blinking at the brightness of the overhead fixture.

Dean’s head was inclined away from the voice. The poetry reader stopped and his breath shuddered. A broken intonation came instead, “Sam?”

Dean’s vision came into focus. He could see Sammy. He was hunched over in an old metal backed chair too small for his large frame. He held a weird snow globe containing swirling storm clouds in his palms. Sammy’s head lifted taking in Dean’s blinking eyelids and moving past him to the owner of the voice, “He’s awake.”

Dean licked parched lips and tried to clear his dry throat. He moved his head to the other side. Dark hair, bluest eyes, a tattered and mended trench coat and blue backwards tie, a hand reaching for
Dean’s own. His mind opened like a flower turning towards the light. His heart filled complete and the name burst out of him, “Cas?”

Chapter End Notes

What Dean saw and heard in his confusion as he came back from the tortuous extraction will be explained in the next chapter.

The quote is from the poem Miracles by Walt Whitman.
Eyes

Chapter Summary

Sam and Castiel fill Dean in on what happened.

“Cas?”

The room seemed brighter, the air lighter, his lingering aches less important.

Castiel real and solid, not a memory that had to be clung to for dear life lest it be ripped from his grasp forever, not slipping through fingers that strained to hold on. Cas was there next to him in reality to be held and cherished in hedonistic pleasure. He drank in the sight. His newly scourged brain might have been playing tricks with him but he was sure he could smell caramel and ozone, taste Cas’s salty skin, and still feel the other man’s fingers that had remained wrapped around his own.

“I’m here.” Castiel broke out a relieving sob, “Dean. I thought I’d lost you.”

“No, Babe.” Dean croaked, “Still alive and kicking.”

Sam’s worried face appeared above him, “How are you feeling?”

“Like I went five rounds with a steamroller and lost.” Dean gawked, “Water?”

“Of course,” Sam moved to the side to get a cup of water.

“Cas? What’s with the coat and tie?” Dean croaked out and smiled.

“For good luck and I thought it might trigger your memories of me,” Cas shrugged. He rubbed the back of Dean’s hand lightly with his fingers. Sparks tingled along Dean’s nerves rising from his hand all the way to his heart, as if his inner self was seeking out Castiel trying to replace what had been stolen from him.

“I didn’t forget.” Dean said hoarsely, before Sam came with some blessed liquid. His brother helped prop his head up while Castiel cranked the old lever at the side, raising the top third of the Men of Letters portable medical bed.

“How long?” Dean asked in a more normal voice before licking some stray droplets from his bottom lip.

Castiel leaned sideways, producing a cool damp flannel. He dabbed the back of Dean’s neck and then his forehead. It was the balm he didn’t know he needed. He closed his eyes for a moment. “How long?” He repeated.

“Four days.” Sam told him straight. “They moved you down here as a favor.”

“Who? Where is the scraped out Grace? Are you both OK? What the fuck is in that Nightmare at Christmas snow globe?” Dean couldn’t get the questions out fast enough now that he was coming back to himself.
Castiel had his white shirt on under the coat. He loosened the tie and undid a button. With his right hand he lifted out a glass vial at the end of a silver chain. It held the barest trickle of glowy stuff coating the bottom.

“I went through all that crap for a smear of juice.” Dean shook his head, which wasn’t his best move ever. He huffed away a sensation of vertigo.

“It is enough, Dean. You did it. We have all the ingredients.” Castiel grinned at him. His eyes sparkled with pride. Dean gulped knowing Castiel was proud of him. He may have screamed like a little girl while Michael ripped though him, but Cas didn’t care, he gazed at Dean in adoration.

“All of them?” Dean asked when he could tear his eyes away from Castiel.

Sam coughed. “The ‘snow globe’ as you call it. It’s Abaddon.”

“It’s what now?” Dean gave his brother a wide-eyed stare to prompt a better explanation.

“Well,” Sam rubbed the back of his neck in an awkward move, “You were comatose, and Michael said you needed time to recover, that he had healed you but that as a human you would take time to come round…”

“He did not say four days,” Castiel growled. The anger on his behalf warmed Dean.

“He said to call him back when you woke, and that you needed to be kept hydrated.” Sam gestured toward the IV.

“Hence the tube,” Dean acknowledged, “Can you get it out of me? You know I hate those things.”

“In a minute Dean,” Sam sucked in a breath. Not a good sign. “So, Castiel says that Michael could at least bring you to the medical bay, and then the assbutt says he can give us more than that, and then…” Sam paused before increasing his speech to the speed of knots, “Lucifer arrived and gave me the demon essence and they moved you here.”

“Excuse me? Are you saying that Satan popped in for tea and you didn’t angel sigil him the crap outta here?” Dean sat up straight.

“No, Dean. We did.” Sam’s shoulders sagged, “You tell him Cas. He’ll listen to you.”

“Lucifer’s arrival was unexpected. He gave Sam the demon orb. It contains Abaddon’s essence and her talons.”

Sam gave the orb a tinkling shake.

“I prefer demon snow globe.” Orb sounded too Lord of the Rings. Dean craned his neck seeking out any sight of pointy claws in the smoky ball. “She survive that?”

“She sought out Lucifer to offer her eternal allegiance as Queen of Hell.” Castiel continued, “He saw a better use for her as a gesture of apology towards Sam.”

Dean snorted. “What ever happened to saying sorry with flowers? So you told him where to stick his worthless apology, Sam?”

“I accepted it for what it was worth and took the orb. He says he won’t use me as his vessel, that he is marching into Heaven with Michael.” Sam met Dean’s eyes, “Don’t judge me Dean. It was my two centuries of Hell. I’ll deal with it as I see fit.”
“Who’s judging here? I’m just concerned is all.” Dean huffed. Surely Sam didn’t believe a word that came out of the Devil’s mouth, “What happened then?”

“They moved you here. Didn’t show any signs of leaving.” Sam rolled his eyes, “Michael was doing his angel radio trick. Lucifer started poking in all the drawers of medical stuff. Castiel did a new sigil and blasted them out of here.”

“Good on you, Cas. So what do we do next?” Dean asked clasping Castiel’s hand tight.

“You rest up, Dean.” Sam instructed, “There is no hurry. Michael is mustering his troops. We are to let Kevin’s angels know when we are go.”

“I’m good,” Dean said and prepared to stand. Unfortunately his body wasn’t ready for such a leap after lying flat in recovery for days and he fell back clutching his throbbing head, “Fucking hell, did he give me a brain hemorrhage?”

“He promised you would be well.” Castiel asked urgently, “Do you feel as if you are bleeding inside?”

“Not literally.” Dean admitted, “It sucks. And I thought I was losing you. I saw us… times when we were together… I didn’t know if he was deleting them. I tried so hard to hold on.”

“And you did.” Castiel nodded with a smile, “You gripped me tight.”

Castiel laid his hand on Dean’s shoulder. Dean almost expected to feel the old scar on his arm reforming.

“It’s gone now Cas,” Dean said with grief, “Our profound bond, your mark on my soul…”

“I still love you equally as much,” Castiel intoned.

“And I you.” Dean choked out. It was true, as he said it he knew it. The original Grace that drew them together, that raised Dean from perdition, had been pulled from his being, but everything they had forged together, everything they had done for each other since then, that was solid.

“But it is true that my mark has been removed,” Castiel’s voice dropped as he let an element of regret seep into his tone.

“Well I guess, you’re gonna have to mark me up good, Hun.” Dean gave him a shit-eating grin, “Suck me a new one. Paint my insides.”

“No prophylactic?” Castiel asked breathless with evident glee.

“Not this time. No condom, darlin’.” Dean promised with a wink.

“My ears! Dudes! Earplugs, I swear, I gonna wear earplugs,” Sam said as he made tracks and left the couple to have their reunion.
Go

Chapter Summary

The reverse spell is performed.

Three more days of being fussed over confined to the den and his bedroom by Sam and Cas. Two of
those days up on his own damn feet, thank you very much. One mega-argument about the location
for the spell reversal; Dean campaigning for somewhere isolated within Samuel Colt’s railway
pentagram which was less than a day’s ride away, Castiel arguing for Van Nuys as Heaven adjacent,
and Sam putting his giant sized foot down in favor of Stull.

A bright hot noonday sun beat down on the bone-yard outside Lawrence. The Impala rolled through
the rusted gateway containing the three surviving members of Team Free Will. Dean had the
window rolled down. ‘Bad to the Bone’ blasted out.

“You got the Grace, Cas. You got the hellbitch Sam. I’ve got the jug of blood, tears and rattling
jewelry. Let’s do this.” Dean swung his door open and stepped out taking in the sight before him.
God, he really hated this place. Why did he listen to Sammy?

Michael leaned against a cross-shaped grave marker, obviously waiting for them. There were a few
other angels milling around at the far side of the cemetery. At a tombstone, Kevin stood with his
three angels. Koneal patted Kevin on the shoulder. Saying their farewells Dean supposed. He
glanced sideways at Castiel who was coming up to join him, profoundly grateful that he was not in
the same boat as Kevin. He hadn’t asked Castiel outright if he regretted that he was irrevocably
human but Dean thought that the former angel might have conflicted feelings from the way his hand
strayed to the pendant vial of his last remaining smudge of Grace.

“Hey Mikey!” Dean yelled.

“Glad to see you have recovered. You are ready to proceed?” Michael straightened up and smoothed
down John’s denim jacket.

“Once Kevin is over here on our side of the show. No whipping the prophet off to Heaven or some
shitty desert.” Dean insisted.

“And just so we are clear,” Dean took a pace in front of Sam and Cas, “Metatron is mine. Y’all are
vamoosing your feathery asses, taking the original cast out brother with you.” Dean narrowed his
eyes, “I might’ve lost Castiel’s juice-glue but the air is freaking shimmering like bad hospital jello. I
hate being spied on. Tell’em to show themselves.”

Michael raised an eyebrow at Dean’s demands. Dean wondered if he had gone a step too far and
was about to get his own ass handed to him. However Michael made a beckoning motion.

The air shuddered, the sunlight warped, and a thunderous cacaphony of wing beats happened
simultaneously. The fricking angelic host must have been a slip second or a slip in dimensions away.
Thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of angels stacked up from earth to sky out to the horizon,
blanking out the surrounding trees. Dean heard Castiel gasp. He reached his hand back, palm open. Castiel took the offered gesture. Dean scanned the assembled ranks for any familiar faces. The only one he could pick out was Gail, the cupid who had given up her bow, close to Michael, who had commenced a glaring contest with Lucifer. The devil was seated in yoga cross-legged pose on the very spot that Sam had opened the portal to the cage.

“Are we doing this?” Lucifer asked lazily, pulling his archangel blade out from nowhere, and scratching a trident in the dirt with the point of it.

Kevin hustled over to stand beside Sam. Dean raised the amphora and asked “Is there somewhere I am meant to work it?”

Kevin shook his head. “Anywhere will do.”

Dean spotted a flat topped tomb about fifty feet away. He planted his boots firmly into the ground as he walked, keeping tight hold of the jug and Castiel’s hand. He had to disengage their hands to pull the cork out of the amphora. Sam placed the infernal snow globe next to the jug. Castiel half-unzipped his blue hoodie and lifted the silver chain over his head. Dean put his hand out palm up. Cas surprised him by bending over to kiss the hollow of his palm before carefully lowering the vial onto his skin. It looked cold with icy blue light, but it had been warmed under Cas’s clothes. Dean closed his hand around the container, thinking of that this was the final piece of Castiel’s angelic existence which had been passed back and forth between them.

Dean cleared his throat, “Stating the obvious here, dudes, but how do I get that orb-thingy in through the neck of the jug?”

“Use the lip of the jug to crack it open,” Sam said.

“Like an egg,” Lucifer finished.

Sam gave dagger eyes to Lucifer. Satan leered back at his vessel running his tongue, which was freaking forked, across his top teeth. Dean was creeped out by the whole thing. The douchebag was looking at Sam as if he was hot buttered toast. Sam hunched his shoulders and looked uncomfortable in his clothes.

Dean moved on. The sooner this was done the better. He swilled the contents before tapping the snow globe on the edge. It cracked like an egg shell. He had a moment of doubt, imagining Abaddon’s remains streaking off across the sky like a demon leaving its meatsuit. But the spell was nearing completion and when he gave a stronger tap the orb shattered and the smoke was sucked into the jug. The talons made a sickly plopping noise as they fell into the blood, hankie, ring combo.

The Grace barely coated the bottom and lower sides of the vial. Dean hesitated.

“Uncork and invert it,” Michael said, “then put it in whole.”

With a final look at eye level to etch into his memory the image of the Grace that first bonded him and Cas together, Dean popped the mini cork, turned it quickly and fired it into the amphora before any could leak out. He picked up the jug with both hands and gave it a wobble to mix.

“Now, Dean.” Castiel said from his side.

Sam met his eyes and gave a firm nod.

“Offer and ask,” Kevin prompted.
Dean shut his eyes for a brief second. He didn’t offer a prayer, as who would hear it? He concentrated on the job at hand. When his eyes flashed open, he tipped the contents of the amphora over the tomb. A freaking weird glowing red and black cloud of goo was suspended in the air, complete with its own mini-lightning bolts.

“O-DO A-DO-HY PAI-D RA.”

That was it. A simple command for Heaven to open and stay that way. For the length of a long exhaled breath, nothing happened. Every being in Stull remained as still as a fly caught in amber.

Then lightning cracked across the unbroken blue expanse of the sky. The cloud of spell ingredients rose up and swirled around Dean so he was caught in a whipping dust devil. Pearls of blood, grace, tears, demon smoke and liquefied metal flew by his eyes. He felt weightless and realized he was lifted off his feet, levitating to the height of the first flying rank of angels.

A voice in his head reminded him to breathe. He must have hallucinated the unidentified voice that told him the speaker was pleased with him.

A seam was ripped open across the sky and light poured out from it, like a sci-fi rift to another world, or the sun slanting through a gap in storm clouds. In an infinitesimal amount of time, between one blink of Dean’s eyes and the next, Heaven’s host were vacuumed into the gulf. As the tornado around him dispersed he was dazzled by a flare of brightness. Michael in his terrifying and awe-inducing true form, archangel blade raised high, led the charge into Heaven.

Dean dropped like a stone to the dirt. He blinked repeatedly to make sure he still had his eyes. The only explanations he could think of were that some thread of Michael’s Grace still remained in place of Castiel’s ripped out stitches, and maybe that the spell vortex had protected him.

Another breath and he was swamped by Sam and Cas.

“Are you OK? Freaking hell Dee. I thought it was gonna suck you up too.” Sam panted and pawed at his jacket as if checking Dean was really there.

“Hey who knew I could float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.” Dean joked.

“I like bees,” Castiel knelt by his side and offered a hand to help him up. “What about the pet name Marmalade Bee?”

“Give it up Cas.” Dean laughed. He wasn’t answering the quizzical looks from Kevin and Sam. “We need to crack open a new bottle of the good stuff, but for now, I’ll take a cold one from the cooler.”

The four men leaned against the impala, each with a beer, each with a smile of their own. Sam grinned because for once they all came through unscathed. Kevin smiled in memory of his three companion angels who had gotten to go home. Dean and Castiel looked at each other and mirrored their smiles that morphed into softly touching hands and pecked cheeks.

When the sun in the sky and the beer in the cooler were low, Dean conceded that Michael wasn’t popping back with Metatron in chains. He muttered things about archangel dicks and promise breakers before deciding to take the day as the victory it was.

“Home guys?” He asked dangling Baby’s keys between his fingers.

“Home Dean.” Castiel agreed.
When they stopped in Topeka to drop Kevin home, the prophet asked them to come in and eat. Not one to refuse a good meal, especially on a day when circumstances denied him lunch and he had freaking been levitated in a whirlwind, Dean agreed on the others’ behalf. He was happy to trapse up the stairs to the one-bedroom apartment above the dollar store. All Kevin’s research had been piled neatly on a side table. The main table in the kitchen-cum-living area was topped with various containers. A note on the refrigerator from Appiel and Delifer asked them to have a celebratory meal on them. Kevin’s jaw dropped. Castiel discovered various breads and fruits in the Tupperware. Sam snagged a juicy peach and collapsed into a bucket seat. Dean opened the refrigerator discovering cold cuts, relishes and a six pack of Budweiser. They ate heartily and talked long into the night. Kevin told them stories of his departed friends. Dean grinned at their social faux pas. Castiel seemed to be making mental notes for some of the incidents. Sam’s disgusting drooling snores after midnight prompted them to their rest. They pushed back furniture. Dean took a trip to the Impala for their bedrolls and moose-sized sleeping bag. However Kevin spread his spare comforter on the floor of his room for Sam. Paper thin walls put a dampener on any celebratory nookie, but Dean re-familiarized his hands with Castiel’s skin until his lover drifted to sleep with his head tucked into Dean’s chest under the cover of their sleeping bag.

The morning after the day before was the time for catching up. The TV news was full of breaking reports of the vanishing angels, some perceptive journalists made the leap to connect it to the violent gales and lightning storm that broke over East Kansas in calm sunny conditions. Dean called Charlie who knew the score. Mariel had come to say her farewells. She gave Dean some ribbing about how unlucky the Winchesters were for her love life, stealing fairies and cherubs away from her arms. Dean apologized because he felt he should but Charlie’s smile was almost audible as she told him that unlike him and Cas, Mariel had been a fun gal but hardly her OTP, whatever that was.

Sam got Garth who whooped his congratulations, promising to call into the bunker the next time a hunt brought him their way. He had to go and remind them that all those places that the angels had taken under their wing, had been re-exposed to the supernatural, some of those monsters would be inclined to take revenge on the humans who had let the celestial warriors into their territory. He already had calls from some hunters called Pony and Jack who had been working with Homeland Security about some sort of werecreatures up in Washington State.

“Garth.” Sam interrupted the scrawny hunter, “Lay off. Dean was floating in the air yesterday and Cas is now 100% certifiable human. We’re going home. Put us down for a rain check on anything for the next few days, buddy.”

“Sure thing, big guy,” A ringtone could be heard in the background, “Give you a tinkle if I get anything in your neck of the woods, then?”

“A tinkle?” Dean scoffed when Garth had said a quick farewell to take his other call. “I swear…
“Where did we find him?”

“I believe you told me Bobby sent him to you when Sam was with his wife Becky Rosen.” Castiel answered the rhetorical question.

“She is not my wife.” Sam said with full force glare, “It was a spell and it was annulled. Annulled. Like it never happened. At all ever.”

“Cas, we don’t mention Becky.” Dean said in a whisper loud enough for Sam’s ears.

Bitch face #21: Get off my case Dean.

Dean’s cell vibrated in his pocket. “Got a text,” He pulled it out and gaped at the sender’s details – 666

“How did the motherfucker get this number?”

“Who is it?” Castiel peered over from his seat.

“Crowley.” Dean growled. “Check this out. ‘Congrats boys. Knew you could do it. Thanks to Moose, picked up the literary agent.’ What does he mean Sammy?”

“Well. We need the chest freezer for all that ground beef you like to buy.” Sam shrugged but didn’t meet Dean’s eye. “I set the meatsuit outside to defrost before we left for Stull.”

“How would Crowley know it was there?” Castiel said perplexed.

“I posted a picture on his facebook page.” Sam said making a run for Kevin’s bathroom.

“Crowley has a facebook page?” Dean blinked.

“Had to keep him amused somehow.” Sam shot back before he disappeared.

“You know Dean. I think Sam might be right. This way we will not have Crowley attempting to breach our home to steal back the body.”

Castiel made sense, but Dean wished Sam had mentioned it beforehand. He shrugged it off though for the sake of familial harmony.

When they got home Dean thought for a moment that Crowley had failed to pick up his meatsuit, as he tried to figure why Sam would have tied it to a tree. On closer inspection as the Impala reached the bunker entrance, Dean could see a low burning ring of fire around the tree.

“Looks like we got ourselves an archangel parting gift,” Dean clicked his tongue and the safety off his colt. He turned to Castiel who had the shotgun seat, having beaten Sam at rock paper scissors. “Guess a run of the mill angel blade will do the trick now?”

“Metatron no longer can draw on the power of Heaven’s souls. I think this will serve.” Castiel pulled a blade from under the seat.

“I’ll head inside and get more holy oil.” Sam said, “If Michael strung him up there yesterday the ring may need more fuel.”

Dean huffed, “I’m not planning on keeping him round long.”

Sam went for supplies. Castiel brandished the blade. Dean kept a target on Metatron’s melon as they
approached. He had plenty of practice from his Metatron imagined sessions in the shooting gallery.

“Your pathetic human weapon will not kill me.” The smarmy skunk grinned at them.

Dean wiped the smile from his face when he shot him, once in the right thigh and once in the left shoulder, “No? Bet it smarts though.”

“Such useless violence.” Metatron sneered as his body healed with a glow, spitting out the bullets, “I have heard tales of you, Dean Winchester. Your methods, your glory in pain.”

“Glory this.” Dean raised the gun. He thought he could hit him right smack on that tatty moustache. Castiel raised his hand and lowered Dean’s arm. “What Cas?”

“Why did you ask Michael for him?” Castiel’s sincere blue eyes calmed Dean’s ire.

“Because of what he did to you Babe. Because he cut into you and stole your Grace, left you mute and hurt. No one hurts my family.” Dean beseeched Castiel with his eyes, “He deserves to be ended.”

“Ha!” Metatron called derisively, “My story will not end. Two humans with not a drop of Grace and a single blade. Ha!”

“I think you underestimate us.” Castiel said grimly.

“We could always leave you wrapped around that tree indefinitely.” Dean threatened with a casual eyebrow raise. He could see Sam coming with a new jug of oil.

“You wouldn’t dare.” Metatron said, “I am God’s scribe. I hold the stories of creation and all worlds.”

“As smug as ever.” Dean could see Castiel was deep in thought, “Penny for them, Cas?”

“What Dean? Oh. I was thinking.” Castiel licked his lips then whipped out the air quotes, “Are you set on ‘ganking’ him?”

Dean raised his eyebrows, “What do you suggest?”

“Something more appropriate.” Castiel’s smirk was chilling, “Will you follow my lead?”

Dean nodded. He trusted Cas. Metatron’s fate was in Castiel’s hands, appropriately as far as Dean was concerned.

Castiel closed his eyes, “Commander of Heaven’s host, Lord Michael Archangel, I beseech you in prayer…”

There was the rush of wings. Dean shook his head to clear his vision, because this time Michael was wearing Adam to the prom. His half brother’s body looked the same as he had that last apocalyptic day in Stull.

“Nice prayer brother,” Michael inclined his head, then noticed the shocked expressions on all three. He looked down at his vessel’s body, “Oh this. I sent Luce to collect him while I dropped Johnny home. Adam’s soul is being tended to in his mother’s heaven.”

“So Lucifer is in Hell then?” Sam asked. Dean could see his hidden nervousness.

“No idea. Once he’d gone back and brought Nick’s soul up from perdition, he took off.” Michael
responded with disinterest. “Now I am busy. Heaven you know, Castiel, difficult to bring to order.”

“Michael, please, I can be of use to you, record your victorious return.” Metatron pleaded in a whining tone.

The archangel ignored him, turning his blue piercing eyes on Dean and Castiel, “Speak.”

“I presume you have not reformed Heaven’s methods.” Castiel said with a touch of accusation.

“I believe there is a human expression. If it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” Michael replied sharply.

“Perhaps then Metatron could undergo the treatment that Naomi presided over.” Castiel suggested.

Dean was impressed with Castiel’s intelligent vengeance.

“Remove every memory, story, and history from his mind?” Michael gave a malicious smile. “An excellent idea.”

“No. Not that. I beg you. Michael, brother. I can be faithful. I can be your chronicler. Please don’t do this. Don’t take their stories from me.” Metatron sagged in his ropes as his pleas mingled into unintelligible begging.

Michael clicked his fingers. Metatron vanished. Before Michael also disappeared he turned to Castiel, “He is being prepped for the procedure. Goodbye brother. Love your righteous man well. May you be blessed with long human lifespans and find contentment in each other.”

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue tomorrow... Oh Chuck how am going to miss writing this fic...
After My Heart - Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Somewhere In Vermont

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The man in the gas station says there is black ice on I-91” Castiel said through chattering teeth as he slid back into the shotgun seat. He passed Dean his change from the gas and a Snickers.

“What are we gonna do, Cas? I don’t wanna stay here another night. Whole town creeps me out.” Dean grumbled as he unwrapped his candy. “Freaking ghouls.”

“We could find a guesthouse, somewhere nice and cozy maybe Darlin’, wait out the ice storm?” Castiel suggested.

Dean huffed and took a large bite of chocolate. He turned on the wipers but the rain had fricking frozen to the windshield in the few minutes that parka wrapped Castiel had ducked into the gas station store. “Sonvabitch.”

He hunched his shoulders against the cold and gritted his teeth as he used the scrapper on the glass. He wouldn’t have needed to risk scratching Baby’s windshield if they had headed home after clearing out the nest of house imps in Dublin, Ohio.

Sammy, the lucky bastard, had gone to Phoenix to help Krissy and Aiden deal with a poltergeist. When the rogue imp SNAFU had hit the hunter alert grid at the same time as Krissy’s call, they had decided to divide and conquer. After chasing giggling imps who were not adverse to using flour and water bombs as distractions, Dean decided he was too old for kindergarten mentality fuglies and that Sam was not allowed to arbitrarily pick and chose their jobs. Part of Dean was in fact thrilled that his baby brother was back to his best and able to take Dean in a wrestling showdown. Winchester Wrestling was the latest amusement in their newly discovered Men of Letters gymnasium. Who knew that a whole gym lay behind a nondescript closet-like door near the showers?

The Ballantrae Motel in Dublin may have been falling down but it did have fantastic water pressure and a large enough shower for Castiel to assist Dean in removing the flour glue, while Dean massaged the broken eggs out of Cas’s hair. They were on the road to Indiana when Garth had called with a hunt he said they were under the Obligation of Co-incidence to accept. Castiel informed the self appointed hunting coordinator that there was no such thing as Obligation of Co-incidence. However when Dean heard that dead bodies and live people were going missing in Lebanon, New Hampshire, he did accept that they were the first ones he would have called in too.

It was snowing when they reached Erie. By the time they crossed New York State the radio was giving weather warnings. The owner of the Mascoma Inn, Lebanon, New Hampshire had to help them dig a path for the Impala to the customer carport, which was the feature that made Dean pick the establishment. The ancient heating system made Castiel paranoid about dying in their sleep due to carbon monoxide poisoning. In the end they hadn’t caught more than forty winks in the grubby room.
Snow was no good for hunting. OK so it muffled sounds but it also left tracks to alert your fugly that you were coming. Luckily for Dean and Cas, but unluckily for the stolen corpse of a foundry supervisor in Franklin, the ghoul was too absorbed in eating the dead guy’s liver to notice the two hunters stealthy approach. Dean had decapitated the ghoul before it knew what hit him. They had spent the rest of the night checking the ghoul hadn’t any friends or family hiding in the basement, attic or outhouses before burning the bodies and heading back to the wrong Lebanon.

Once Dean had a wide enough opening in the ice to see the highway he hustled back into the Impala. Castiel was surgically attached to his new I-phone. Dean was sure the memory card was full of pictures of snow and icicles. This time Cas was scrolling down his screen.

“Do we have a genuine fake credit card?”

“Sure we do.” Dean flipped open his wallet, “Better not be for porn, unless you’re looking up some kinky loving for later.”

Castiel gave him a stink eye. “I have found us a place for the night.”

“Awh, Cas, can’t we just drive until we can’t anymore?” Dean itched to get outta dodge and away from all this New England winter weather.

“Firstly, the roads are treacherous. Secondly, you have already had too many of those caffeine drinks. Thirdly we did not sleep last night due to the hunt. Fourthly I am not taking the wheel with ice on the roads…”

“OK, OK, I surrender.” Dean laughed, “We’ll do it your way.”

Castiel called ahead and booked them a superior queen. Dean raised his eyebrow but Castiel ignored it turning his head to the side window.

“Take I-91 as planned Dean.” Castiel directed, “signs for Mount Ascutney State Park. Our Bed and Breakfast is beyond the butterfly farm outside Windsor, Vermont.”

Dean tried not to laugh. He shook his head thinking he was going to be dragged round to see butterflies in the morning. He’d bet the takings of his next hustle that ‘The Google’ had told Castiel that the farm had bee hives too. The single lane road to that led them to their guesthouse would need a snow plough soon, but they made it with no trouble. Ascutney Lodge had a football pitched size lawn, now white, and plenty of parking. The windows between the green shutters glowed with welcome, which was only added to by the giant fireplace full of glowing logs in the hall. Their receptionist was a friendly young girl with bouncy red hair and clashing purple eye shadow, which for some strange reason, perhaps a new fashion that escaped Dean, she had applied below her eyes too. Dean nudged Castiel, “Look Hun, they’ve a games room.”

Purple overheard him and outlined their pool table, foosball, playstation and that they could sign for playstation games available for loan from reception. Dean thought it might not be too bad if they got snowed in.

Their room had a view of the State Park and as the sun fell below the trees, Dean stretched out on the comfortable bed with its heritage style quilt. After the shocker of the beds in Lebanon and Dublin and sleeping in the Impala during their cross country road trip, being able to extend his limbs comfortably was bliss. Castiel took to the bathroom to wash up before they headed down for a promised decent meal at the in-house dining room. Dean’s phone jerked him from his warm dozy state.
“Hey Jerk.” Sam said as hello, “Thought I’d forgotten?”

“Huh?” Dean asked.

“Happy Birthday old man. You know 35 is nearly forty.” Sam chuckled.

“Did you call me on my freaking birthday to abuse me, bitch?” Dean scrubbed his hand over his scalp. He’d lost track of the date. His birthday had crossed his mind earlier in the week but between imps, ghouls and snowstorms he’d forgotten about it.

“Ha! Dean.” Sam huffed down his nose, “Gotcha a gift an all.”

“Pie?” Dean asked hopefully.

“Apple and brown sugar. Mrs. Anderson in the bakery says I can freeze it. You on your way back?”

“Yeah Sammy. Ghoul is ganked. Cas and I are holed up in Vermont till morning. Then we’re heading your way.”

“I hear ya. I’ll keep it out of the ice box then. Drive careful, dude.”

“Will do.”

“Say Hi to Cas.”

“Sure thing.” Dean cleared his throat, “and thanks man. You’re a good brother.”

“Geez, if I’d known all it took was some pie. Bye Jerk.”

“Later Bitch.” Dean chuckled.

“Sam?” Castiel asked as he emerged with a fluffy towel slung low around his hips.

Dean nodded. He didn’t relay the conversation, not wanting to make Castiel ill at ease about the birthday thing. He promised to himself that he would indulge in Castiel’s firm abs and dusky nipples later, as his own birthday present. Cas turned his back and dropped the towel. Dean smiled at the sight of their Christmas exchange. He rubbed his lower spine with the back of his hand, feeling for the same spot on his own skin. He could almost smell Slugger’s mulled wine air freshener as he remembered their trip. The bike ride into the hills, the drinking party at Slugger’s local, and their new matching tats, an Impala-black feather halved on its side. Dean had the top half above the shaft, Castiel’s one had the spine on top with the soft black barbs aligned below.

Downstairs the dining room was glowing in low lighting with another huge roaring log fire. Their hostess, who looked like Purple’s sister, gave them a table under a painting of the Connecticut River. There were only two other occupied tables, both by other guests. It was a family operation not a restaurant, but there were still three choices of entrée. Dean picked the steak and blue cheese sauce. Cas went for the Rabbit Cacciatore.

Over freshly brewed coffee and homemade brownies, Castiel pulled an envelope from his pocket.

Dean took it with a questioning look, but Castiel didn’t say a word.

Inside were another envelope and a note.

_I know you and Sam do not celebrate occasions but I wish to acknowledge the day of your birth. Without you Dean I would still be a ‘junkless mindless solider’, I would not have known free will nor_
what it means to love another. I do not regret my fall because I fell for you.

“Quite the poet.” Dean quipped but he leaned across and caught Castiel’s face with his palm, planting a kiss on his wine flavored lips.

The other envelope held three tickets for a Black Sabbath concert in Clarkston Missouri.

“Do you like them?” Castiel asked with a tense hopeful smile.

“Awesome Dude.” Dean’s face split in a wide grin, “You will have to let me thank you later.”

“You can thank me now.” Castiel whispered.

They balled up their napkins and made a break for the bedroom. A trail of clothes littered the carpet. Sheets and blankets were tossed aside. In the race to be first on the bed, they both won. Dean laughed with his head thrown back as Castiel’s stubble tickled his chest. Castiel gripped the sheets so tight that the crinkles remained in the morning. Castiel may have been the screamer, but Dean was hoarse from pleasure and sated from Castiel’s demonstrative lovemaking.

“My Cas.” Dean uttered gently into the other man’s bare shoulder.

“They.” Castiel spoke soft and low into the night.

Intimate words exchanged in whispers, on this night and eternally

Chapter End Notes

Author’s Note:

OMG guys it’s done! I just want to thank you all for your support, attention, comments, reviews, kudos, favourites, bookmarks and follows on AO3 and Fanfiction.net. I cannot believe as I post the epilogue there are 7.5K hits on AO3 and 26.5K on FF. I am humbled and delighted that so many people have read or looked in on Candy. A special thanks to those of you who have typed your supportive comments as I posted, and to those who have given me constructive criticisms, pointing out errors that I have endeavoured to correct.

I am going to miss this so much, you have no idea.

Now that I won’t be posting daily I have a list of Big Bang stories to read, a pile of fics marked for later on AO3, my poor neglected RPF tales to write, and of course my diary cleared for the return of Season 9…

Thank you all again, it has been a fun ride.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!