Robin died. First in Dean's arms and then again when she vanished. Dean is hurt and angry and devastated and so goddamn committed to getting her back.

Sequel to 'To the Hilt' and Part Two of the 'The End's Not Near' Series, that follows the encounter (and all that ensues) between a huntress named Robin and the Winchester brothers we all love so much.
The first thing Dean does once he opens his eyes, once it finally registers that Robin is gone, is wonder. He wonders if she’s done it yet. If she’s gone back in time and taken her own life. He knows it happened, he saw it. Felt it inside of him when the life left the eyes of the Robin who’d appeared out of nowhere. So he thinks he might feel it again with his Robin. He doesn’t and he’s left to wonder.

He tears his eyes away from where his Robin would have been standing before him, had she not vanished off with Castiel, to look at where he’d seen a version of her crumpled on the floor lying in a pool of her own blood. He looks at where he’d held her, where he’d begged her to undo the damage fruitlessly.

Nothing is there, though. The floor is clear of corpses and there isn’t a drop of blood in sight. He looks down to his own hands. Hands that had also been drenched in blood but are now clean. His shirt, stainless as well. It doesn’t make sense to Dean. He’d felt his fingers slick with the substance. Had felt his palms stick to the fabric of Robin’s dumb ‘I am not amoosed’ shirt when he’d grabbed her by the shoulders. Nothing is left, though, like she’s been erased.

Dean stares and stares and stares at his hands, his clothing, that spot, and tries to will things to make sense. For anything to make sense.

Sam, with his stupefied mother clutched in his arms, watches his brother unravel. Watches as the stillness in the room erupts. Because the second thing Dean does, once he’s done wondering, is yell.

He yells for Cas, at Cas. Begs and threatens him in the same breath. He screams at the angel to bring her back. His voice starts out deep, a commanding growl, but quickly turns into a desperate screeching. Within minutes he sounds raw and hoarse.

Sam doesn’t know what to do. Or maybe he knows there’s nothing he can do. He definitely knows that he can’t watch as his brother falls apart, though. The whimper he hears from Mary lets him know that neither can she. So he turns them around to head down the hall where the bedrooms are and leaves his brother to deal with things the way he knows how.

Mary is full out sobbing when they reach her bedroom. Sam lays her down on the bed and sits on the edge of it keeping a hand on her calf, too afraid to let go of her completely. He watches her tire herself out, crying, and it’s just as painful as watching Dean scream at the heavens. His mom chants apologies, regret and disgrace plaguing her features, until she finally falls asleep.

When Sam is sure that she’s out, which takes some verifying because she doesn’t look at peace even in slumber, he takes out his phone from his pocket to make a call. He might not be able to
protect Dean from the pain he’s going through but he can sure as hell protect him from himself.

Sam doesn’t leave the room while on the phone. Doesn’t dare leave his mother alone afraid of what she might do. He speaks in hushed tones though, through clenched teeth. When he’s sure he’s made himself clear he hangs up and crawls into the bed behind his mom. He holds her close trying not to think of what almost happened. What *did* happen, but was rectified. By Robin.

Beautiful, bright, easy Robin. Who’d somehow given him someone to open up to. Who’d made it easy. Who’d helped him and his brother talk. Helped them feel. Robin who’s traded her life in for his mother’s. For him and Dean. And he had let her. Guilt wells up in his chest because he had quickly understood what she was going to do and he’d accepted it. Hadn’t tried to stop her. He’d offered up her life like it was his to do so with. He doesn’t think he’s ever been more selfish. Shame emerges inside of him to coil around his already growing guilt as he faces a hard truth about himself: He’d let it happen again.

He really would because Sam can’t imagine a world where his mother is ripped away from him for a second time. Or maybe he can imagine that world but can’t imagine surviving it. The disgust he has for himself keeps him up and awake, a sleeping mother with shaky breathing in his arms and the echoes of a howling brother in another room.

- Dean keeps it up for hours. Long enough so that when he tries to yell now it’s almost entirely inaudible. He’d broken a chair, a knuckle and a shelf lining the library wall in that time. He was seeing red when he was seeing anything at all through his tears. He laughs a wet snarky laugh when he finds himself huddled against the same wall where Robin had died. *The first time*, he thinks to himself and laughs again. Because as far as he’s concerned he’s seen her die twice. Her disappearing act was no different from a man heading to his execution. He’s seen her die thrice if you count the hospital. He looks up to the ceiling and sends out one last prayer to Cas. He thinks it as hard as he can and when there is no response, no fluttering of feathers, not a goddamn sign, Dean finally lets himself cry. Really cry. It’s a wailing that breaks hearts.

He gives himself a few minutes to feel whatever it is he’s feeling. Pain, hurt, anger. Briefly he thinks that Robin would be proud of that. She be happy that he isn’t repressing his emotions. He only allows himself a few minutes though, because then he’s standing up and heading for the exit. He wasn’t planning on leaving Robin dead.

- Dean is pissed at being made to wait. He promises to give Crowley hell when he gets ahold of him. A new brand of hell the King has never tasted before. What’s the point of having the demon’s phone number if the bastard doesn’t pick up. It doesn’t matter, Dean has ways of drawing the man out and if it means he gets to gank a few crossroads demons then he isn’t complaining.

“Shit.” He hears a woman’s voice say suddenly from inside the devil’s trap.

He turns to her. “Took you long enough.” He growls.

“Winchester.” Her eyes narrow. “Ah hell no.” She looks around knowing that men with that name travel in pairs.

Dean wants to make a deal but just looking at her has set him off, which sheds light on just how angry he is. The demon barely has time to blink before an angel blade is thrust between two of her ribs. She lights up and dies. Dean grunts as the act, impulsive as it was, doesn’t even take the
edge off. He drags her leather clad body out of the devil’s trap and repeats the steps to summon another demon.

The sound of the heavy bunker door makes Sam jump. He quickly stills to make sure he hasn’t roused his mom, pressed to his chest, out of sleep. He figures Dean has left. He isn’t even sure when his brother stopped yelling. Must have happened, though, because now the quiet of the bunker is eerie.

Dean goes through about a dozen demons, all claim they can’t do anything for him. He’s at black eyed freak number fourteen when he finally gets something he can work with.

“I’m offering you Dean Winchester’s soul. No fuss, no escape attempts. Make the goddamn deal.” Dean barks.

“I can’t.” The tall Asian man snaps, irritated. He drags his eyes away from the night verging on early morning sky to glare at the hunter. He’s been having the same conversation for a full ten minutes and at this point he’d rather just be killed and have it over with. The stack of corpses to his right let him know early on that he isn’t getting out of this one alive. Shame too, he had plans to terrorize a rave in Ibiza, later.

“Why the hell not? Your lot have been after my ass for the past decade. What? Now you ain’t interested anymore?”

The demon rolls his eyes. “Look, I’m under strict orders not to deal with the older Winchester, alright?”

“You’re also under strict orders not to let that slip.” A voice that could only belong to Crowley speaks from behind Dean.

“Finally.” Dean mutters then throws his already bloodied angel blade into the crossroad’s demon’s face. He doesn’t even wait for the body to drop to the ground before he turns towards Crowley.

“You avoid my calls and you have your lackeys blacklist me?” Dean bellows.

“Don’t be mad, Dean-o.” Crowley placates. “Your brother called and threatened me and mine, quite menacingly might I add. You know how fond I am of me, so I agreed not to do business with you. And well,” The king looks pointedly at the bodies discarded on the side of the road. “Mine do hold some value so Moose will just have to understand that our arrangement had to come to an end, in light of your behaviour.”

“Sam told you to steer clear from me.” Dean says angrily, more so than asks.

It’s true that Sam had struck a deal of sorts with Crowley. Well more than anything else Sam had threatened to leave Crowley to deal with Lucifer on his own if he so much as thinks about collecting his brother’s soul. Crowley’s no fool and is fully aware that he’ll need the Winchesters to take down the dark prince. Dark Prince, my British tush. He thinks Moose was bluffing, like that do-gooder could actually just let satan walk free, but figures there’s no point in testing his theory. Besides, Dean is more useful to him topside.

“Yes, but you’ve got my undivided attention now, if it means you’ll stop killing some of my best business men.”
“Did Sam tell you anything else?” Dean demands.

“You mean what happened to your friend, there? Ro-”

“Don’t say her name.” The hunter snaps.

“Right, well, he did loop me in on the tragedy. Shame, she knew how to compliment a fella.”

“So bring her back.”

Crowley laughs. “That’s what this is about?” He laughs again, this time at himself. He supposes he should have known. “I can’t.”

“Do it, Crowley.” Dean orders. “I’ll sign up for any deal you want, alright? Just bring her back.” Dean’s voice is hard as he makes sure to keep the desperation he certainly feels out of it.

“I would, Squirrel. Free of charge, even. Especially if it means you’ll focus on getting the devil back in his cage. I quite liked her, too. But I can’t.”

“What do you mean you can’t? People trade their souls for miracles every hour, Crowley. Do this.” The sharpness in his voice frays. “Please.”

Crowley knows he’s gone a bit soft since meeting the Winchesters. He’s grown to accept it, honestly. However, the way the man before him, one of the strongest willed men he’s ever encountered, sounds like he’s on the edge of an implosion, raw voiced and all, tugs at his rusty heart strings in a way that takes him aback. “Dean, I don’t know what you’re expecting me to do. I can’t bring people back to life.”

“Bull. I’ve seen you do it.”

“No, I’ve released souls from hell. Her soul isn’t in hell. Why would it be? That’s not where hunters usually end up.”

It’s valid. Everything Crowley is saying adds up, Dean knows. He isn’t even sure why he thought the demon was going to be able to deliver. He isn’t exactly in the business of saving lives. But Dean is an angel short and he needs someone with power to bring her back to him. Crowley might not have the power he needs but he knows someone who does. “Get me Billie.”

Crowley chuckles. “You know she’s not exactly fond of you right?”

“Crowley.” Dean growls.

Crowley rolls his eyes. “I’ll see what I can do. Go home. Get yourself cleaned up.” He looks back at the bodies. “Bloody Winchesters.” He mutters as he disappears taking the corpses with him. The angel blade that had been lodged inside Dean’s latest demon’s eye socket clinks to the floor.

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The first thing Robin does is wonder if she’s in heaven. It’s not what she’d imagined. As a little girl, before she stopped believing in God, she’d thought it’d be warm and comforting, but here she doesn’t feel a sense of tranquility. It’s also not the picture the brothers had painted her. This place wasn’t clinical and halls of white with ‘uptight feathery fucks milling about’. She looks around and all she sees is a thick dense smog. She can barely see beyond two feet in front of her. In fact, when she looks down her knees disappear into the fog.
She looks at her outstretched hand and sees fingers laced with hers. *Cas.* She lets her gaze travel up his arm but only makes it to his shoulder. The rest of him is concealed in the opaque smoke.

“Cas.” She breathes.

He turns and steps closer to her, emerging, allowing her to see most of him. She smiles, grateful. Her angel in a trench coat. How blessed is she to be escorted into her afterlife by him.

“Is this heaven?” She asks, beaming.

“No.” Castiel answers almost regretfully. The word hangs heavily in the air.

Robin falters. “Hell?” She chokes. It’d make sense. She definitely had sins to atone for. The events leading to her parent’s death being top of the list.

Castiel shakes his head slightly and for the first time Robin looks at him. Really looks at him and she sees uncertainty and fear in his eyes. “I don’t know where we are.”

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**Chapter End Notes**

Hi!
I hope you enjoyed the chapter.
Any and all comments/feedback is very highly much a lot enormously appreciated :)
PS: HAPPY NEW YEAR
Chapter Notes

Thank you for returning to this fic, I hope you enjoy the chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s a few hours after Dean has left that Sam gets up. Suddenly being in close proximity to his mother feels like too much. He stands in the middle of the room, unsure of what to do with himself. He knows he wants to give Dean more time before going after him. He also knows he doesn’t want to leave his mother unattended.

Finally he decides to sweep the room for anything his mom can use to hurt herself with. A few minutes later he’s adding the last of her weapons, a small switch knife, to the pile he’s already amassed. He hesitates for a moment before going through her things again. This time he collects everyday objects he thinks could be turned into weapons. Small nail scissors, a compact mirror, a goddamn paperclip, a-

“I... I won’t try to do anything.” A beat passes before she adds, “Again.”

His mother’s words startle him more than anything should startle a trained hunter. He strengthens his resolve then straightens his back and turns slowly to face her. He opens his mouth to speak only to close it again. He finds he has nothing to say.

“I wouldn’t... I never should have. I- I wasn’t in my right mind, Sam. I shouldn’t have wanted to-” But she had wanted to.

“Mom.” He interrupts, pained. “Maybe just rest for now, okay?”

His mother nods shamefully and sinks deeper into the mattress. Now, Sam needs to put some distance between them. The sound of her speaking... All he can hear is what she’d responded earlier in the night when he said that he and Dean are her boys.

No, you’re not. Not really. I don’t know you.

He’s not so sure she’s wrong, anymore. He turns back around and gathers all the objects into his arms. There’s a few too many for him to carry but he definitely doesn’t want to do two trips so he makes do. He walks out of the room and Mary watches him.

She isn’t surprised when more tears roll down her cheeks. She does her best to keep the audible sobs at bay until Sam is out of earshot. Why was she crying all the time? Why was she such a mess? Why couldn’t she seize this second chance to be a mother to her sons? And they are her sons. She thinks maybe she was not brought back whole when Amara did whatever she did, because she is not the same Mary Winchester who died thirty years ago.

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When Sam walks into the library, the items in his arms all but burn his skin. He scans the room for a place to stash them and decides on one of the file boxes he’d pulled from the Men of Letters archives when they were researching for... He dumps them into the box and searches for a lid. He
wants the stuff out of sight. The lid he finds first is a bit too large but he can’t be bothered to locate the correct one.

He finally takes his time looking around the room. The table is mostly covered with books and scrolls, note pads and papers and a laptop. Most of the research they’d been working on. The rest of it is strewn across the floor along with Robin’s, now shattered, computer. She wasn’t going to be happy about that. Oh. Right. There’s splintered wood on the ground as well. It’s so beyond repair that Sam barely recognises the former chair. Sam sighs deeply and begins to clean up.

A few hours later, he’s done with the bulk of it. The half dozen file boxes are stacked in a corner of the room to be returned to the archives. Sam hopes the objects he’s hidden inside one of them get lost in the bunker, never to be seen again. It’s irrational of him but he doesn’t care. The table is cleared with all the books they’d been using returned to their appropriate shelves. There is a tower of books still on the floor along one of the walls; he’d have to fix the shelf they belong on before putting them away. He’s even bagged all the garbage and chunks of wood to be disposed of. He tries not to think about how Robin’s laptop is in one of those bags. At first, he’d thought it could be salvaged and had decided to tuck it between some of the books. He changed his mind, though, figuring it’d do more harm than good to have it laying around.

He’s wiping down the table, now, and is startled to find a few drops and a smudge of blood. It isn’t Robin’s, he knows. Robin hadn’t left a trace. The wall against which she had died was the cleanest spot in the room and Sam hadn’t even touched it. He’d barely looked at it. No, this blood is Dean’s. Sam could imagine it. The wood biting as his brother brought his fist down to the table repeatedly until his skin split. He’d probably kept at it a bit longer after that. Sam lets his fingers trail over the dry crimson splotches for a moment before vigorously scrubbing them away.

He’s making his way towards the kitchen to get rid of the rag he’d been using and to wash up when he hears glass crush under his boot. His heart sinks because without looking he knows what he has stepped on. He lifts his foot and stares down at the syringe his mom had tried to use to end her life. It’s cracked open now and the drug it once enclosed bleeds out onto the floor.

Sam presses his lips tightly together and tries to hold off on breaking down. His emotions pulse inside of him, thrumming just below his surface. The hurt, the sadness, the anger, the guilt, the shame, all ready to burst. He can’t afford to, however. It’s how he and Dean work, only one of them can fall apart at a time and it’s the other’s job to keep it together. It’s how they’ve gotten by. And it’s Dean who’s allowed to crack right now.

So Sam bends down, wipes up the liquid and tries to pick up all the glass with his rag. He keeps himself from getting sick and goes into the kitchen to throw the entire bundled up cloth away. That’s where he is when Dean comes back. He returns to the library to see Dean survey the room with wide eyes.

“Where is everything?” Dean asks.

Sam winces as the words sound like they’ve scrapped their way up Dean’s throat. That’s what a couple hours of yelling will do, he supposes. “I cleaned up.”

“Why?” Dean demands, his eyes snapping to meet Sam’s. Sam isn’t sure what to say and flounders for an answer. “We might still need it all.”

Sam is confused. “Dean, Rob-”

“Don’t say her name.” Dean snaps, frightening his brother.
She’s gone.

She’s dead.

There’s no one to research for.

She’s not here to save anymore.

We failed her.

“The research is over.” Sam finally says after agonizing over how to phrase it.

“It’s not. The cosmos might still want to go after her once we bring Ro- Once we bring her back.”

Of course Dean wants to bring her back. Sam isn’t sure why it surprises him. He had seen it coming, he’d called Crowley preemptively as a protective measure to keep his brother from selling his soul to the first bidder, after all. Maybe Sam isn’t surprised, maybe he’s just all too aware of all the additional pain Dean is going to put himself through holding out hope that they’ll get Robin back. They won’t. Robin isn’t trapped in hell, or in purgatory or in the veil. She isn’t locked up in a cage, in a cell or in some unknown realm. She’s tucked away in her own corner of heaven. Safe and sound. Dead and at peace.

“Don’t look at me like that.” Dean barks.

Like what? Robin had spat those words at him, livid beyond anything he had seen from her, just before the first time they had sex.

“We’re getting her back.” Dean says not waiting for his brother to answer. Just like that the discussion was over. Dean looks around the room again, so different from how he had left it. “It’s like she was never even here.” He murmurs. ‘Like she’s been erased.’ He thinks.

Suddenly Dean is overwhelmed with the need to confirm that she had, in fact, existed. That she isn’t a figment of his imagination. That he hasn’t dreamt up this girl who, now that he thinks about it, truly was- is too good to be true.

He stalks down the hallway abruptly. Alarmed, Sam follows. He rushes to keep up even with his long legs. “Dean wha-” Sam stops when Dean does right in front of Robin’s room. Or what had been Robin’s room. Maybe it’ll always be Robin’s room. Just like Charlie's room was still her room. And Kevin's room was still his room. No, this has to be different.

Slowly, almost fearfully, Dean turns the knob and pushes the door open. The room is mostly bare, though that’s partly because Robin had few possessions. The space is lived in though. Notepads and a pencil on the desk. Her camera on the side table and her camera bag on the floor beside it. The rumpled sheets. Robin wasn’t in the habit of making her bed but Dean knows this particular state of dishevelment is due to the rough and tumble they’d had after doing the laundry. On the ground, by the foot of the bed he can see the basket of folded clothing and beside that the original t-shirt he had wanted to dress her in after their shower. She had insisted on the ugly one with the moose pun, though. She’d said it was an homage to the nickname giving skills she could only ever aspire to achieve.

A moment ago all Dean had wanted was to see her things. He’d needed a sign that she had been real. Yet, now looking at her space, the place where she should be presently, seems to be making him painfully aware of a gap in his chest. He shuts his eyes and turns away unable to see any more of it. He consciously turns his pain into anger in an attempt to fuel himself instead of breaking down . He’ll put her in that room again if it’s the last goddamn thing he does.
Sam’s hand on his shoulder, an attempt at comforting him, makes him jump. When he opens his eyes though, it’s his mom he sees. She’s down the hall, half of her hidden away by the door frame to her own bedroom. Dean can’t look at her either.

Sam isn’t particularly fond of his mother at the moment, but the hurt that crosses her features when Dean simply walks past her makes it so that Sam can’t bear to turn away. He walks up to her and gathers all her bits and pieces into his arms. He presses her tightly as if willing the fragments she’s made up of to stick together again. She’s broken, he realises.

Mary cries in the arms of her youngest son. A comfort she doesn’t deserve. She did this. She caused them all this heartache. She killed her. She never should have been brought back. Ironically this is exactly the train of thought that made her start this mess, in the first place. Doesn’t make it untrue. That’s when Sam speaks and Mary wonders if he read her mind.

“You just need help, mom. I’m going to get you help.” His voice is small as he makes the promise. He’s in way over his head and doesn’t know how to make things better. Maybe he can start by getting her to lay back down. He doesn’t think she’d be standing on her feet if he wasn’t holding her up.

Dean heads for the bathroom. He rounds the corner at the end of the hall and-

Is there a problem?

Oh come on, Dean, I’m covered in blood.

He can hear her, from all those weeks ago after their run in with a shifter at the gas station. Had that really been a day after he’d met her? He barrels past the echoes of her and gets as far as opening the bathroom door.

Just like that?

I promise.

He looks to his left, a death grip on both the door frame and the door knob, and sees Robin. She’s leaning against the wall, looking up at nothing with lustful eyes.

I promise.

She blushes, fumbles and stumbles her way into the bathroom stepping through Dean.

He just barely makes it to the bowl before throwing up. He dry heaves a few times, thinks he’s collected himself, then retches again.

“That’s not a sight I’m interested in seeing, Winchester."

Dean would think she’s haunting him but that doesn’t sound like Robin. The voice doesn’t belong to her either. He lifts his head from the toilet, wills his eyes to focus and sees the grim reaper in the flesh.

Billie almost feels for him. His eyes are bloodshot and it looks like he hasn’t slept a wink all night, there’s vomit on the corner of his mouth and she isn’t sure that he isn’t going to start balling right then and there. It’s hard enough for a man to maintain his dignity when he’s hanging off of a toilet bowl but this... Billie almost feels for him. Almost.
Crowley had asked her to go easy on him. He’d explained that he is undoubtedly going to need the Winchesters in his takedown of Lucifer. She responded that her job isn’t to ensure he has pawns for his plans. Yet, it’s Crowley and Billie always feels like she owes him for some reason. Or at least that’s how she explains her desire to please him to herself. Still, she’s dealing with a Winchester and if she wants to keep rapport between her and Crowley a lot, she wants this family to get what’s coming to them a lot more.

“Billie.” Dean says and Death, he sounds worse than he looks.

Dean wipes his mouth on his sleeve with the back of his hand and lifts himself into a standing position. He had a game plan. He was going to threaten and yell and coerce the reaper into bringing her back and when that didn’t work he was going to plead and beg and offer his life. He’s still shaken from hearing her and seeing her, though, so all he does is stand there and stare.

“I don’t have all day, Winchester. In fact, you get two minutes.”

The time crunch pushes Dean to say something, anything. “Please.” He chokes out the word. He cringes as he hears it because there’s desperate and then there’s being at the mercy of Death’s fucking substitute. Billie hates him, she hasn’t kept that a secret, there’s no reason she wouldn’t get a sick pleasure of denying him his request. He’s making it all the more fun for her by laying all his cards on the table and stripping himself of all his pride. He doesn’t care. “Please.” He repeats. “I’ll do it, whatever it is. Whatever you want. Please, bring her back.”

Billie sizes him up, looks him up and down, makes him feel small, contemplates. “No.” She decides.

Dean gags. “No?”

“No.” She confirms.

He feels dizzy sort of like that time they opened Lucifer’s cage and then were suddenly teleported onto a plane. “Why?” He means for it to sound menacing but it’s still mostly a plea. “You never wanted her. It’s always been us. You want me.”

Billie leans against the frame of the door left ajar. “I’ve told you before, that time you’d drugged yourself up in the hospital, there are no more free passes. No more trades.”

“This isn’t that.” He says more forcefully. “This is different, she got wrapped up in this but she doesn’t belong to this bullshit. She never should have been a part of it. This is different.” He repeats.

Billie cracks a little. He seems so earnest. Like he truly believes it was some sort of clerical error that had gotten Robin killed. Wrong place, wrong time. She could return the Fera child, and take Dean Winchester. That’d be satisfying. She could return the Fera child and leave it at that. Crowley would be nothing short of giddy. However, what kind of reputation would she be building for herself if she keeps going back on her word like this. The man before her does look quite pitiful, though. She really could just bring her back and be done with it.

Billie looks at the dead in her mind’s eye, searches for the location of Robin Fera’s soul. All she finds are the souls of the girl’s parents, not where she’d thought they’d be, either. She checks again and when she doesn’t find Robin in any of the usual haunts, she puts two and two together. Leave it to the First Family of hunting to be scattered in death. She almost regrets not reaping the Feras herself. She laughs at the irony.
“There is no difference between then and now.” She tells Dean and laughs again. “None. You’d do well to figure that out.”

Dean blinks and she’s gone.

-  

“You don’t know?”

Castiel shakes his head regretfully.

“Am I... Am I dead?” Robin asks.

Castiel’s brows furrow in confusion. Like he hadn’t questioned it, since he’d seen her die once, but is now finding the answer less than obvious. He steps closer to Robin and cups her jaw with the hand that isn’t holding hers. He feels her warmth and the thrum of her heartbeat beneath the surface. “No, Robin. You’re alive. Body and soul.”

The words hang between them. The question of How? is at the tip of Robin’s tongue but she leaves it there. It’s evident that Castiel does not have an explanation.

“I don’t know where we are but I assure you I will find out.” He promises.

Castiel turns around his hand falling away from her face. When he takes a step he feels her grip tighten on his other hand, now sandwiched between both of hers. He turns back around and tilts his head side ways.

“Don’t leave me.” She requests her eyes wide and shiny.

“You’re afraid?” He wonders aloud more than anything else. It might as well have been a conclusion since it’s quite apparent that he’s correct.

Robin nods and admits, “Yes.”

It’s so earnest and open and exposed that it takes Cas aback. The Winchesters are the humans he’s spent the most time with and it is a rarity for them to allow themselves to show such vulnerability. But there she is, Robin Fera, admitting to fear dauntlessly and unashamed. He wonders if it’s a little known fact that there is strength in such an act.

“Okay.” He finally says. “We’ll go together.”

So they do. Hand in hand, they walk into the fog that has yet to let up in search of answers and a way home.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it folks! All criticism is welcome in the comments sections ;)
Another day another dollar, and by that I mean chapter!
I hope you enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dean doesn’t linger in the bathroom after Billie’s departure. He stays long enough to splash his face with cold water and swish some inside of his mouth. He doesn’t even bother brushing his teeth despite having thrown up. Once he’s done doing the bare minimum he heads to the library.

As he makes his way there, he can’t shake the feeling that Billie had given him a riddle of sorts, like there was more to what she had said than the meaning at face value. He supposes that she wasn’t wrong. It was no different than what had happened with Sammy. Someone he...cared about had died and Dean was trying to trade his life for theirs. Just like last time Dean wasn’t planning on taking no for an answer. That worked out.

Dean shakes his head in an attempt to dismiss his thoughts. She was probably just messing with him, trying to throw him off. She obviously enjoys seeing him squirm and agonise like this. Fuck her. Fuck Crowley. In fact, fuck Cas. Because where the fuck was he even? Taking Robin to her death is one thing but going AWOL afterwards is another. Is Cas afraid? Of coming home? Of Dean? Of his reaction? Is he ashamed? Good. Dean thinks spitefully.

Dean doesn’t need him, anyway. It was becoming apparent however that he would need an angel. Robin is no doubt in heaven, and to get to her he’d need a pair of wings and a halo. If he’s honest with himself, that should have been his first recourse. He didn’t believe she’d be in hell, he definitely didn’t believe Billie would do him a favour out of the kindness of her heart. If he’s being extra honest with himself, though, he’d held out on getting his hands on another angel in hopes that Castiel would be back by the time he’d absolutely need to. Because, yeah, he was furious with Cas, he kind of hated him, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t want him around. He wants both his brothers, here, with him, working on getting Robin back together. Then again, it’s that kind of thing that kept getting Dean in trouble. Him wanting never leads to anything good.

Point is, no Cas. When he gets to the library he considers praying to the angels, to get one of them to come to him. He quickly decides against it, however. He wants to come from a position of power and not like how he’d been with the reaper. He starts researching how to summon an angel, knowing that they have holy oil in the bunker somewhere.

He does his best not to look at the chair to the right of the one across from his. It’s the seat next to where Sam usually sits. It’s the seat Robin had opted for more often than not. Every time he fails at not staring at the chair, he suppresses the urge to throw up again. He was learning, for the hundredth time, that his best rarely seemed to cut it.

It’s mid morning, roughly twelve hours since Robin died, when Sam leaves his mom’s side again in search of Dean. His brother had been mostly quiet, which was alarming in and of itself, but now Sam can distinctly hear Dean let out a few choice curse words. So he leaves his resting mother and
ventures out to the library.

He finds Dean amidst a few books and scrolls, no more than half a dozen of each. Poised on the table, his fists support most of his weight as he leans forward. His eyes are shut tightly as he rambles.


“Dean?” Sam is afraid to ask.

Dean’s entire person shifts towards Sam. “You’d know.” He almost accuses.

“Know what? What are you doing?”

“I want to summon an angel. To get her back, Sammy. I just need-”

“Dean.” Sam interrupts regretfully, his expression soft. “She’s gone. You need to start accepting that.”

“I don’t gotta start doing anything.” Dean snaps, suddenly furious. How was Sam not doing everything he could to help her. She saved their mom for the both of them.

“You saw the same thing I did. I’m not- I don’t want to be hurtful, but, Dean, she’s dea- she’s gone.”

“That’s why I’m getting her back.” Dean explains like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“Getting her back how?” It’s Sam’s turn to snap. “She’s in her version of heaven, now. You’d need an angel and Cas hasn’t been picking up. How do you plan to break into heaven without him?” He challenges angrily. “Even if you could. She’s in her version of heaven, now.” He repeats his earlier words. “Why bring her back? Why tear her away from that? So she can end up like our mom? So she can want to die all over again?” The bitterness in his voice surprises even him. It’s potent enough to make Dean visibly flinch.

“I’m going to get another angel. Castiel isn’t the only one out there, y’know. There’s a whole army of ’em. I think our best bet is the one that had met with Cas even after he’d been locked out of heaven. The one who’d translated the cosmos’ message into the CD player. I need his name for any of the rituals to work, but I can’t remember it.” Dean replies as matter-of-factly as he can. Then, grimly, adds, “She’s not mom.”

Sam laughs, actually laughs, at that. “The cosmos said she was the closest thing to-”

“She’s not mom.” Dean barks.

“Fuck Dean, don’t you see where this is headed? It’s a pointless cause and it’s going to consume you and you need to let it go now before you’re too far down the path.”

“I’m getting her back.” Dean replies simply.

Sam shakes his head, completely sobered up. He hates himself a bit for his outburst. Dean doesn’t need this from him right now. He hates himself for laughing, too. Hates that it reminds him of that lilt of hysteria in his mom’s voice, the night before.

*No, you’re not. Not really. I don’t know you.*

He just feels so inadequate. He knows that there’s very little he can do to help Dean through this
and he’d hoped he’d be able to protect him from himself. That’s obviously appearing to not be the case. “His name is Ayil.” He volunteers the information and tries not to regret it before heading towards the kitchen to get something for his mom to eat.

It doesn’t take long for Dean to set up for the summoning. He retrieves the holy oil from the kitchen, where Cas had snickered in amusement and placed it (go figure). He draws a circle with it in the dungeon and recites the spell saying the name “Ayil” whenever appropriate. When the angel appears he throws a lit match onto the barrier and watches the fire spread.

“Dean Winchester.” The man greets softly.

He isn’t what Dean expects. The brown man looks small despite standing at a respectable 6’1”. He’s slouched and his shoulders are hunched doing his vessel a disservice.

“I thought you might call.” He looks around at the flames. “This is unnecessary, I’d have answered your prayers. Castiel is a dear friend of mine, I’ve often been partial to his cause over the years. I’d gladly look over his charge.”

“You’ll have to forgive me if I don’t just take your word for it.” Dean bites with an eyeroll. “Your kind haven’t been the most ethical or even remotely trustworthy.”

The seraph, Ayil, nods. It takes Dean aback. He’d thought the angel would rebuttal not concede. “I’m sorry for your loss.” The angel finally says, startling Dean for a second time. At the human’s reaction, Ayil continues. “We saw the events unfold, from up there.”

“And you all just let it happen?” Dean snarls accusatorially. “Tell me, did you enjoy the show too? Do they have popcorn and root beer fucking floats up in heaven?”

Ayil winces and shrinks back. “Not all of us were in agreement with the will of the cosmos.” He offers, knowing that it doesn’t make up for anything. “We are all bound to it, however. Interfering is unheard of.”

“Until, Cas, did his little time jump, you mean.” Dean says heatedly.

The angel shakes his head lightly. “We can not tell if Castiel’s actions are a deviation or what was always intended to occur.”

“Bullshit. There’s no way she’s meant to die. Not like that.” Dean is fierce in his words because he believes them.

“Perhaps, however what is done is done.” Ayil replies tentatively.

“It’s time to undo it. I want you to bring her back.”

The confusion is clear on the angel’s mostly stoic features. “Bring her back?” He asks.

He knows he hasn’t misheard but surely the Winchester means something else. Castiel had explained to him that sometimes humans say one thing but they intend for something else to be understood. He’d found it fascinating if not inefficient.

He himself had spent very little time on earth. It was when the angels fell from heaven and the only humans he’d interacted with were a large indian family, the one his vessel belonged to. He hadn’t had the chance to learn much at all about them as being expelled from the only home he’d known
had been difficult and he’d wanted nothing more than to return to it.

“Yes. I want you to snatch her soul out of heaven and bring her back to earth.” Dean orders, annoyed. He isn’t sure how that was unclear. When the angel opens his mouth to say something that doesn’t seem to be a ‘yes’ Dean speaks again. “I don’t care how you have to do it. I don’t care what rules you have to break. I don’t care if the only way is to take me up there and have me do the rest. Do this, either for Castiel. Or for that girl that, on some level, I know you shouldn’t have died.”

His voice lowers, then, into a deep threatening rumble. “Or I swear to God your last sight will be of me slicing away at you. I will end your life right here in this room, but only after I go after every last one of your kind. There won’t be a feather left in the sky, when I’m done. Let’s see how virtuous your Righteous Man is then.”

Ayil believes him. He believes that Dean Winchester would keep his promise or die trying. From his conversations with Castiel, he knows that Dean is a very goal oriented man and he’d make it his life’s mission to bring an end to God’s first creation, angelkind. He even thinks that Dean could succeed and that angels would be no more, if the look in his eyes is anything to go by. Still, Ayil says, “I can’t.” Before Dean’s fury can boil over he continues. “I am sincerely as empathetic about your bereavement as my anatomy allows me to be. I too have lost a brother in the tragic events.”

There is the distinct sound of grief in his voice; Dean recognises it easily. It does nothing to assuage his wrath, however. “I don’t want your goddamn empathy and I for sure don’t give a fuck about your dead angel buddy.” Even as Dean says the words he realises they don’t make sense. What angel would have died that night? How are any of them related to the...incident? “You’re going to do this or I’m going to make sure you regret it.”

Ayil shakes his head gently, as if trying to let a child down easy. Of course, he doesn’t realise that he does it like a human would when letting a child down easy, having never had to let a child down easy himself. “You misunderstand me.” The angel clarifies. “It’s not that I won’t, but that I can’t. Robin Fera is not in heaven. No Fera hunter is. And it is Castiel who has gone missing. He hasn’t been seen or heard of since the passing of your friend.”

The words suck all the air out of the room. There’s no oxygen left to inhale, Dean thinks, as he gasps. She can’t not be in heaven.

Boohoo, Princess. Robin mocks him from the back of the room. She’s cuffed to a metal chair just like she had been the day they brought her to the bunker.

Hearing her, seeing her, it makes breathing all the more challenging.

“Dean?” Ayil speaks, concerned. “I don’t think you’re inhaling as humans should.”

Dean tries to concentrate on expanding his lungs, on letting air in, but all he can manage is a strangled cry as he fixates on Robin’s form.

Is this some kind of new age torture tactic? He’d been so convinced, that day, that she was something evil. He thought there had to be something sinister lurking inside of her. I resent that. I’m literally adorable. Dean shakes his head trying to rid himself of her image. Logically he knows she isn’t there. Knows he should focus on the tasks at hand (breathing and getting her back- they don’t even need to be in that order) instead of this twisted illusion. And he will get her back. I’m sure you will, Deanoold. She throws more of the words she’d spoken so long ago back at him. It’s like she’s inside his head. Like she’s sentient. She’s not. Dean knows. He’s the one conjuring her up. Any excuse to touch me, I guess. She teases with a shimmy of her hips.
“Stop!” He chokes at the empty chair.

Ayil looks behind himself and feels even more unsettled when he sees nothing.


Dean does no such thing. Instead, he loses consciousness and collapses to the ground. For a moment, he feels something hot lick at his face before he feels nothing at all.

- When Sam busts into the dungeon he finds a tall lanky man crouched by his knocked out brother, holy flames receding behind them sputtering out of life. The man, no- the angel quickly raises his hands in surrender and shuffles back.

“He fainted on his own.” He explains quickly. “I wish only to heal him.”

Sam doesn’t stop pointing the gun he’s holding at the intruder. It’s the weapon Crowley had given him and Dean, after they saved the sun. Its bullets are made of melted angel blades. Crowley had said he was investing in the hunters. He wants Lucifer taken down and he knows who will be at the frontline of that battle. The angel doesn’t know what the gun can do to him, though, and that makes Sam trust his yielding a little.

“He fell onto the ring of holy flames, though he does not seem to be burnt. He wasn’t getting sufficient amount of O2 and I believe that caused him to pass out.” Ayil supplies, hoping to fall into the good graces of at least one of the Winchesters. He feels like he owes it to Castiel to look after the brothers, at least a little, at least until his return. If he returns. “I can heal whatever damage was done.” He offers.

Sam nods slowly, the barrel still trained on the vessel, of who he assumes is the angel Ayil, as it moves closer to Dean. “Wait.” Sam finally says. “Can you have him sleep after?”

Wordlessly, Ayil nods and does as he’s told.

- The sun sets again, making it nearly twenty four hours since Robin died, though no one can tell inside the windowless bunker. A day has come and gone and rolled by like nothing. Because that’s what days do. Robin’s passing hasn’t stopped the earth from rotating on its axis.

In any case, it’s around that time that Dean regains consciousness slowly. He keeps his eyes closed, relishing in the rest but he’s aware of his surroundings enough that he can tell that he’s in his bed. God he loves his bed. He loves this bunker. He burrows further into the mattress thinking he can manage to get another hour of sleep if he acts quick and chases after the metaphorical sandman.

*You’re awake.* Robin whispers.

Dean’s eyes snap open and he sees her lying beside him and she’s definitely a sight for sore eyes. She looks beautiful, her is hair is mussed up, her eyes are crusty and her lips are chapped. She looks just like she did the previous morning and Dean can’t.

“No. No no no nononono.” He chants jumping out of the bed looking anywhere but at her. He escapes the room, distressed, and subconsciously heads to where he hears voices. Voices that aren’t hers.
“Hannah spoke so highly of him and once I started peering down on earth I could understand why.” Ayil says to Sam, sitting across from him at the library table.

“Castiel always has good intentions.” Sam responds nodding.

“We’re letting random angels roam free in the bunker now?” Dean asks as he enters the room, once he’s regained some of his composure. He’s surprised to find that he isn’t particularly upset about it. Maybe it has to do with having bigger fish to fry. Maybe it has to do with how meek and small Ayil looks in the chair. Then again, looks can be deceiving especially when it came to angels. Their strength is expertly cloaked.

“I can leave if you prefer.” Ayil suggests, not wanting to cause discomfort to either Winchester. “I will answer your prayers if ever you require my assistance. It’s what Castiel would have wanted.”

“No, stay. I have questions.” Dean takes the seat at the head of the table. “How is she not in heaven? How has Cas disappeared?” Dean doesn’t beat around the bush. Cas missing is so much worse than Cas avoiding his calls.

Sam nods encouragingly at Ayil when the angel hesitates to answer. “We’re not sure. When Castiel went back in time the first time, half the angels were livid. They yanked him up to heaven to punish him. They insisted that his interference would have colossal repercussions.”

Dean clenched his jaw at this point. Of course they’re always looking out for themselves and never fighting for what is right.

Ayil reads the emotion off of Dean as easily as one of his scrolls up in heaven. He knows that he agrees with the man, at least a little, but still feels the need to defend his brothers and sisters. “Angels are mostly afraid of the cosmos since it’s an entity outside of Father’s creation. Once they had Castiel, half of us were livid, yes, but the other half of the angels stood by him. Many of us were against the cosmos’ decision, despite the fear. We believed the young huntress to be destined for great things and not such an untimely death. At the very least one would hope so with the parents she had. The Feras and their lineage are referred to as the First Family of hunting, in Enochian literature, after all.

“The confrontation in heaven was brief, all opting to avoid bloodshed. Ultimately it was decided that Castiel would be sent back down to earth to take the new version of the girl, the version that had witnessed herself die as opposed to Mary Winchester.” Here, both brothers recoiled at the blunt words. “back in time to complete the time loop and avoid a paradox from unfurling. We expected him to bring her soul up to heaven afterwards, but he never came. Neither of them did.”

A long silence stretches as Dean absorbs the information and Sam mulls it over after hearing it for the second time.

Everybody shut up. Robin says from beside Sam.

“The angels don’t know where they went.” Sam says. “They don’t even know how to find out.” He relays more of what Ayil had told him while his brother slept.

Vampire. She whispers. This was after Cas had healed her from her illness.

Dean stares at the table and tries to focus, pointedly ignoring the Robin that’s spinning around the room raving about her distinct lack of synesthesia.

She’s right beside Ayil when she says, Now you say something.
That’s when something clicks for Dean. Something about what Billie had said. About how this was no different than that time with Sam on that damn werewolf hunt. Sam was never dead and if this was no different...

“Could she still be alive?” Dean asks his eyes boring into Ayil’s.

Thank you thank you thank you. Robin chants by Sam’s side again, looking up at where Cas had once stood.

“Everything points to her being dead...” The angel answers whilst in thought. “I suppose it’s possible, however. But...”

“But what?” Sam prompts.

“We are unable to locate either of them. Not her soul, not his grace. Castiel can’t even be reached on the, um, angel radio, as he once called it. I’m afraid that if she has not passed her fate might be much worse.”

Dean inhales sharply and attempts to control his emotions. “What about Cas? Why only her fate?”

“He could also be in jeopardy, but he is an angel and can weather storms beyond what her human soul can handle. Additionally, he is not dead, of that I am certain. His grace is bright and powerful since being fully restored along with his wings. If he were to cease to exist, we’d be made aware of it.”

Dean nods.

“Do you have any idea how we can find out more?” Sam requests, hoping against all hope that the angel can offer them something to work with. “Where we can start to look?”

Ayil shakes his head regretfully. “I apologise.” Sensing that his presence is no longer of use he rises to his feet. “I know that you are not fond of me or mine but please remember, I will answer your prayers.” He promises. “Samuel.” He nods to Sam. He hesitates for a moment before turning towards Dean. “It is said the righteous man may fall seven times, but he rises again. You will not find peace in bloodshed, Dean. No matter what my brothers have said in the past. You were always more than Michael’s true vessel. You were always meant to do more than bleed in hell. I think you have proven that many times over.”

Ayil bats his wings and returns to heaven. He goes back to the desk he has there. Goes back to filing. In the early times, he had assisted Metatron in his role as scribe of God. He was a glorified librarian, if he’s being honest. Time has continued to press forward and here he is, still putting order in all of Metatron’s writings and notes.

-“You had him put me to sleep, didn’t you?” Dean asks pointlessly after the angel’s departure. He already knows.

“Yes.” Sam answers unapologetically. “And now I’m having you eat something.” He doesn’t wait for Dean to argue, gets up and heads for the kitchen only to return moments later with a sandwich and a cold one. He sits back down and watches his brother eat slowly, without protest. It reminds Sam of how his mother had eaten her own food a few hours earlier.

“I’m going to find her. Them.” Dean says after swallowing a mouthful.
“I know you’re going to try.” Sam concedes.

“You don’t think I can?” There’s no fight in Dean’s words. Despite having slept for the better part of the day, he finds he’s too tired to argue with his brother. Especially when he has the rest of the world to battle on most days. Not to mention the cosmos.

“I don’t think they’re anywhere to be found.” Sam sighs. He wishes he felt differently but everything seems to indicate that to him.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that time travel is risky business. They didn’t just go back and observe, they changed an event. She did that. She saved our mom. All I’m saying is that if the angels can’t find them then maybe ‘time’ did something to them. Maybe it...erased them. To cancel some kind of paradox or something. I don’t know, she’s the physicist. Not me. Or at least she was.”

“Don’t do that. Don’t speak in the past tense about her. She isn’t in heaven and she isn’t in hell but she’s somewhere and I’m going to find her.”

“Dean, I know you’re hurting.” Sam looks at his brother, meaningfully. Begs him with his eyes to understand. “But we saw her die. The only thing is that we saw it before she went and did it. That doesn’t mean it didn’t happen.”

“Shut up.” The man tenses. He doesn’t see Robin prancing about the room anymore, thank fuck for small miracles, but hearing Sam say these things almost makes him wish he was a hallucinating.

“Dean you need to face—”

“I said shut up.” Dean roars as he jumps to his feet.

Sam shrinks back in his seat. It isn’t rare for his brother’s anger to be directed at him but Sam isn’t trying to anger him. Quite the opposite he wants Dean to slip into acceptance.

“I’m not having this argument with you again.” Dean says as diplomatically as he can. Robin might not be around be he can still try to apply the things she taught him. He and Sam don’t have to regress. Diplomatic is the best he can do right now. He can’t really talk about this.

He exits the library, leaving behind his mostly eaten sandwich, a mostly full beer and a mostly worn brother. In his defense, the life they’ve lived so far is equally responsible for Sam’s state and Dean refuses to bear full responsibility. Something else Robin had taught him.

‘Forgiveness towards thyself, righteous man, Deanold.’ He can imagine her saying something along those lines, flippantly as though it were that simple. Because it was that simple in her eyes. It is that simple in her eyes. Always simple with her.

They walk for so long. They walk and walk and Robin isn’t sure how she isn’t tired. She’s sick of walking but she isn’t physically tired from it. It’s mildly alarming because she’s sure they’ve been doing it for hours. She doesn’t think it’s been days only because she hasn’t needed to pee, or eat or drink.

Cas had tried to use his wings, but they got him nowhere, so walk they did. He wasn’t able to tap into his angel radio either. Robin had asked him what that meant when he said it. So he explained what it is to her, first in a generic sort of way. When she asked questions that prodded him to
elaborate, and he realised they had nothing better to do, he’d gone into greater detail.

The good news was that he couldn’t hear the cosmos message in his head anymore. The screaming had been ringing in his head, in the heads of all the angels, ever since all of this started. It was gone now, though. The cosmos weren’t after her anymore.

“Time is weird here isn’t it?” Robin asks the back of Cas’ head after she’s sure they’ve hit the twenty four hour mark. Though it feels like a week. Some moments, it feels like a month has past. She misses Dean.

Castiel freezes, then nods as he continues to walk. “Yes.” He answers when he isn’t positive that she’s close enough to see the movement, the smog still dense. “I was wondering when you were going to ask.”

“How long have we even been here?” She doesn’t think she wants to hear the answer.

“I can’t tell. I’m not sure time exists here.”

Robin drops the topic. It scares her more than anything else. “I think it’s safe to assume nothing exists here. Other than this goddamn fog and the floor beneath us. I don’t think there’s anything for us to find, Cas.” It had been their goal to search for something that could provide answers or a way home. That hope seems more and more bleak as they find that whatever this place is, they’re the only things there. Other than fog and floor.

“I think you’re right.”

They don’t stop walking though, because there’s nothing else to do.

Their hands still locked together, Robin shuffles forward a little faster to fall into stride at Cas’ side. She’d accepted his long legs and gotten used to often being a pace or two behind him. “Talk to me about something.”

“You wish for me to discuss an arbitrary topic?” Cas verifies.

“Something arbitrary. Something that matters. Whatever floats your boat.” She laughs.

“Something that matters.” He muses.

Robin nods. “Tell me about what you’ve been up to for the past couple thousand years. What did angels do up in heaven before you all stormed earth after the first seal was broken?”

Again, Cas starts with generic broad strokes, but without much else to do he finds himself launching into depth explaining the workings of heaven and telling anecdotes. After some time he even explains life before and after God had left them.

Robin in return offers a never ending string of questions and commentary. She even explains the references she makes that he doesn’t understand. At some point, after what feels like years of discourse, she says he’s going to impress the brothers with just how much he knows about pop culture, now. It sobers them both up. Something like a decade has come and gone and they are no closer to getting home.

Cas squeezes Robin’s hand in an attempt at comfort. It’s something she did whenever he spoke about something particularly difficult, like Naomi, so it seemed right to mimic the movement, now. They were always touching one way or another. Sometimes it was because Robin was afraid that they’d lose each other in the smoke. Sometimes it was just because.
He cuts the silence stretching between them short and makes a point of sharing one of the funnier tales he has, one about Gabriel back when he was much younger. Robin doesn’t mention that it’s the third time Cas tells her this particular story and just listens attentively.

Another decade rolls by. More stories are shared. Robin tells him all about growing up as a hunter. She tells him about the first time she killed something. Tells him about the first time she saw someone die. The first time it had been her fault. She tells him how the long weekends she spent at Bobby’s were the closest thing to normal she’d done but it had always felt weirder than being on the road. Castiel tells her that in heaven the Feras are known as the First Family of hunting. Robin laughs at that and says she isn’t surprised her parents had earned a reputation.

Sometimes they’re just quiet for full years at a time, or maybe they’re just months. That’s nice too.

Robin feels guilty for getting Cas stuck in this strange place, but is selfishly glad she isn’t alone. Cas feels responsible for Robin’s circumstances and therefore thinks he’s wrong to be grateful that she is here with him.

At some point, Robin thinks she has spent more time in, what she has started calling the fog room, than she had spent on earth. She doesn’t feel like she’s over fifty, though. She misses Dean. She’s about to tell Cas all of this, she’s gotten in the habit of sharing just about all of her thoughts with the angel, when she feels something behind her. That’s strange because there’s nothing here to feel. She tries not to get her hopes up but she can’t help but think it might be a way home.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for choosing to read this fic! Feedback and comments are always welcome and highly highly appreciated :)

Grace

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dean doesn’t know what his next move is going to be, but he knows he won’t figure it out here. So he packs a bag, finally brushes his teeth, and heads out. He makes himself believe that he isn’t running away from the fragments of memories of Robin he keeps witnessing in the bunker.

When Sam asks him where he’s going Dean yells ‘Out.’ and shuts the heavy door behind him. Once he’s outside he regrets it and backtracks. He sees Sam, elbows on knees, lift his head from his hands to look up at him reentering the bunker.

“I don’t know where I’m going.” Dean admits. “I just need to figure things out. I need air.”

Sam nods in understanding.

Dean tinkers with the idea of letting Sam in on his hallucinations but decides to hold off for now. Robin would be proud of the olive branch he’s already extended, anyway.

It’s not long after that Dean finds himself in the impala, on the road, heading north. Baby offers a little comfort and Dean tries to focus on that as much as possible. He puts the music on way too loud, even by his standard, and only stops for gas once, driving through the night.

The heavy sound of classic rock isn’t sufficiently distracting, though, and Dean can’t help his thoughts from drifting back to her and how to get her back. Robin could be anywhere doing anything. He doesn’t even know if she’s alive or not. Where is he supposed to start? His mind moves in circles getting him nowhere fast.

Sunlight breaks over the horizon when Dean is finally pulled out of his own head. He finds himself stopping the impala in the parking lot of a hospital: Mercy North Urgent Care. He’s in Iowa.

Why would he come here? He definitely doesn’t want to see Robin’s doctor friend. Doesn’t want to tell her that he failed at keeping the huntress safe. That she had been right about what happens to those who stick around the Winchesters. Dean is determined to put the car in reverse and head back on the road. What he ends up doing is pulling his key out of the ignition.

He just sits there and stares at the building, it’s small but considerably big for a town like this. He stares at the sunrise too. Briefly he sees a flash of Robin leaning again her ugly jeep with the sun beating down on her, the gas station’s attendant’s blood still splattered across her face.

Dean sighs and softly bangs his head against the wheel, gripping it knuckle-white tight.

From the back seat of the impala, Robin sighs. Dean’s eyes snap open and he nearly snaps his neck to look up at the rear view mirror. I know. She says. There’s a beat of silence and then she’s laughing. It’s light and carefree and Dean knows it isn’t real but he can’t tear his eyes away.

She nearly kneels him in the head when she climbs over the back of the front seat. He remembers this, it’s right after they’d dropped Sam off at the grocery store in Lebanon. They were headed to the gas station next. They had driven in comfortable silence until Dean put on some music.

Robin starts to hum then and Dean can’t get out of the car fast enough. As he shuts the door he sees her over the hood of the car. Her hair is whipping around in a breeze that isn’t there. There’s a
glimpse in her eyes, she’d probably just said something witty and was feeling pleased with herself.

Dean digs his hands into the pockets of his jacket and ducks his head behind the collar. Looking down he makes a beeline for the hospital entrance.

He doesn’t know what to do with himself once he’s inside so he ambles pointlessly up and down the halls, up and down stairs. It’s still early so there’s a calm in the hospital that he isn’t sure he’s grateful for. He wishes there was something to distract him.

The hunter is leaning against a wall of a deserted hallway when he hears someone speak his name.

“Dean Winchester. I thought I had made myself clear.”

Dean looks up and sees Billie leaning against the wall opposite him. She’s mirroring his body, her hands in the pockets of her red leather jacket, one knee bent with the sole of her boot pressed against the wall behind her.

“I’m not changing my mind.” She assures cruelly, a sneer tugging at her lips.

Dean rolls his eyes annoyed. “I didn’t seek you out, reaper. Do you not have anything better to do with your time than stalk me? What are people not dying fast enough for your taste?”

Billie laughs. “Don’t flatter yourself. I’m not here for you, we’re in a hospital, lots of souls to reap ‘round these parks.”

“Right. Hop to, then.” He instructs insolently.

Billie grinds her teeth together. “Moved on to another piece of ass then? Done with the Fera child are you?”

“What I’m done with is you.” Dean throws back easily, looking away from her as though he were bored.

“Big talk coming from someone who doesn’t know the first thing about resurrection.” Billie counters. She wants to rile him up now, because she’s petty.

Dean looks back at her then, dead in the eyes. He’s looking for a tell, anything that’ll confirm what he believes in both his mind and heart. “No sense in resurrecting someone who’s alive.”

Billie doesn’t reveal anything at first, she just laughs. It’s short lived and downright malicious before her features darken. “You better pray she stays that way long enough for you to get to her, Winchester.”

Dean doesn’t say anything, he keeps his face stoic, the way he’s trained it to be since he was a preteen. Billie gave him what he wants, he has confirmation now. He refuses to give her what she wants, though, which is obviously a rise out of him.

“You know, the more you want her, the more I do too.” She’s playing to wound. When Dean remains unfazed, at least to her eyes, she continues. “I think I’ll move her up my list. Decisions, decisions, should I put her before or after your mommy dearest.”

Reapers are supposed to be neutral, but Dean is convinced there’s something maleficent and vicious inside of her. Which is good enough a reason for Dean to kill her. He lowers his foot back to the ground in preparation. He’s uncertain if the angel blade tucked up his sleeve will do the job, but he’s willing to find out. “Wanna know who’s at the top of my list?” Dean threatens.
“Dean?” He looks to his right and sees Dr. Grace Przekop. She’s looking back at him curiously. “Who are you talking to?”

Dean looks forward again and Billie winks before all he sees is the ugly green of the wall she’d been leaning against. “The grim reaper.” He deadpans.

Grace laughs. “Hunter humour, you lot are a hoot.” She mocks giddily. If the Winchester is here that means Robin has stopped by for a visit. “Where’s Robin?” She inquires stepping closer and smiling brightly.

Dean flinches at the name. Grace doesn’t miss the reaction and hardens instantly.

“Where is she?” She demands. When Dean’s only response is large guilt-ridden eyes Grace feels her heart drop to her stomach then both organs drop to her feet. She looks around to see if they have an audience. “Not here.” She spits and walks past him.

Dean follows her down the hall and then into her office. His mindless roaming had gotten him where he needed to go, he guesses.

This is Grace’s biggest fear and it always felt like it was only a matter of time. She’d always known that one of these days Robin, George, Amy or Rodney was going to show up at her door and break the news that any combination of the others hadn’t made it. That a demon was just a little too fast. Or a werewolf a little too feral.

“Is she dead?” Grace asks cutting to the chase after Dean shuts the door. She holds her breath, waiting for an answer.

Dean doesn’t know how to respond. He’s mostly mesmerized by the door that leads to the small hospital room adjacent to the office. It’s where Grace had done the procedure to stop Robin’s heart and then bring her back. If only their plan had worked.

“Hey.” Grace snaps. “Fucking answer me. Is she dead?”

He shakes his head. “She died, but she’s alive.” He explains unhelpfully.

Grace laughs mirthlessly. “Your brother had called it the Winchester way I think. What does that even mean? If she’s alive, where is she?”

Dean is painfully aware now of just how much he shouldn’t have come here. Nothing he has to say will do. He has no comfort to offer. No answers. How is he supposed to look at this woman who, for all intents and purposes is a member of Robin’s family, and tell her that he got her killed. Sure it was at her own hand but it was because of him. It was for him. Dean swallows down the need to gag and choke simultaneously. He feels so guilty because he is. This is on him.

Grace unwittingly agrees. “What the fuck did you do?” She yells stepping up to him.

“I-”

Robin casually strolls further into the room and hops up on the massive wood desk. You make it sound like I disappeared off the face of the earth.

“I’m sorry.” Dean rasps.

“I don’t give a damn what you are, Winchester. I want to know what happened to Robin.” The doctor gets in his face, she’s tall as it is and with the heels she’s wearing she’s just about his height.
so it isn’t difficult to do. Dean feels so small she might as well be towering over him. “I wanna know where she is.”

Yeah? I’m pretty great so that makes a lot of sense.

“What happened?” Grace roars when Dean still doesn’t answer. Her anger doubles when he won’t even meet her eyes, instead he stares past her over her shoulder.

His eyes are trained on the Robin that’s now leaning against the desk as opposed to sitting on it. Do you want the short or the long version?

Grace takes a large step back to keep herself from putting her clenched fists to use. It doesn’t matter, her eyes and words can do more damage. “You did this, didn’t you? It’s because of you and that brother of yours.”

Grace be quiet. Robin says calmly. You have no idea what you’re going on about and I get that you’re worried about me but this pair of heroes have been keeping me alive and well all the while trying to find a solution for me.

Dean shuts his eyes tightly because Robin had been so wrong about them. He wishes just this once that there was someone he hadn’t let down. That he hadn’t let her down. “Yes.” He finally answers Grace. He opens his eyes to look at her when he speaks. He owes her at least that. “I’m not sure where she is, but I’m going to find her.” He says resolutely.

Grace sighs the fight leaving her. She never should have let Robin walk out of her office. She should have called Rodney and the others, had them come so the four of them could be reunited. They were always safer together. Inevitably facing death in their line of work but safer together. She walks to one of the two chairs this side of her desk and sits in it. She waves at the other for Dean, not looking at him.

Dean obeys the silent order.

“Tell me what happened.” She says softer than Dean expects.

For the first time, since meeting her, the woman looks her age. He isn’t sure how old she is exactly but he knows she’s the older sister of Robin’s older cousin’s friend. The doctor had been so lively and the very image of spitfire with her short ginger hair that it had been easy for Dean to forget that she hadn’t been in school with Robin. The sailor mouth on her probably helped. Now though, she looks tired and so so sad and Dean did that.

Dean skips over the specifics, but explains that Robin had sacrificed herself for his family before disappearing with their angel friend. They’d presumed her dead but he’s found out that she’s alive somewhere, he just doesn’t know where.

“Yet.” He finishes.

“That sounds like Robin. She’s a fucking idiot.” Grace mutters while pulling out her phone.

“Who are you calling?” Dean asks alarmed.

“Her family.” She bites with some heat. “Who do you think?”

“I- I don’t want to get anyone else involved, I-”

“Well tough. If you think I’m going to not tell the people who care about her, who know her,
what’s going on, you’re way off your rockers.”

Dean hears everything Grace implies. Hears that he isn’t family. That he doesn’t know her. “I get it, but I don’t think getting more people involved is the way to go. I don’t want to be responsible for...” He drifts off not wanting to finish the sentence.

Grace sighs. The man looks destroyed and desperate and that’s never a safe combination, but she does believe he’ll do what it takes to get Robin back. Who’s more up to the task than a Winchester. Grace suspects letting Rodney, George and Amy know wouldn’t do much good anyway. They’ve never dealt with anything like this before, it’ll only cause them heart ache. Put them in harm’s way even. But that doesn’t matter. It’s not her choice to keep them in the dark, they deserve to know what’s happening. Maybe they can actually help. They’re the people who know Robin best. They can think like her. If she’s hiding out somewhere, they could possibly track her.

“Please, Grace. Robin wouldn’t forgive herself if her actions led to her friends getting hurt.”

“They can help. They know her better than you do.” She says harshly but then amends, “Better than I do too.”

“I’m sure they do.” Dean says. “But she... She isn’t... It’s not like I don’t know which state she’s in. She’s not on earth. Not the way you and I are anyway. I know she isn’t in hell or in heaven either. The veil is out too.”

Grace reels back with this new information. She didn’t fully understand until now the situation Robin had gotten herself into. She probably still doesn’t. She definitely doesn’t want the hunters Robin used to run with, her baby brother, anywhere near this, but it still isn’t her call to make.

Dean stares at her expectantly, hoping. Grace recalls how highly Robin had spoken of him and his brother. Grace doesn’t see it, but she’s jaded. Robin never was.

“I’ll give you a week.” She caves pulling out her prescription pad and a pen from the breast pocket of her lab coat. “If you don’t come back to me with answers by then,” She explains as she scribbles something down. “Or if I don’t hear from you, I’m calling them.” She pulls the first sheet free of its binding to the pad and holds it out for Dean. “My office number is on the header but I wrote my cell down too. You’ll get through to me faster on there.” When Dean reaches for the paper Grace pulls it back. “Don’t make me regret this.”

“I won’t.” Dean promises as he pockets the digits.

There’s a long silence after that during which both adults get lost in their own thoughts.

Grace is the one who breaks it. “What are you going to do?”

“Get her back.” Dean leaves it at that.

On the drive back to the bunker Dean does his best to ignore the Robin crying in the backseat. *It didn’t work.* She keeps repeating like a mantra. This was after they tested if the procedure Grace did had succeeded in getting the cosmos off Robin’s back. It hadn’t. Dean tries to drown out Robin’s sobs with music but they fill the space like an ugly promise of departure, just like they had that night. A promise she ended up keeping.

It only solidifies his resolve even more. He’d told Grace that he’d get Robin back and that’s exactly what he is going to do. Maybe he doesn’t even need to know where she is. He summoned
Ayil, didn’t he? What was stopping him from doing the same with Cas. With her.

- The sensation is oddly familiar to Robin. Foreign only because she hasn’t felt it in so long but familiar like it had been usual in another life. She stops in her tracks which forces Cas to still as well.

“You are alright?” He asks searching her face for signs of pain or distress.

“I felt something.” She answers simply. She then does something she’s done a hundred times over but not in what feels like three decades. She reaches into her back pocket and pulls out her cellphone. “It vibrated.” She states looking up at Cas.

She’s afraid to hope. She knows they have no reception here, it’s one of the first things she had tried. She had seen the logo in the upper right hand corner of the phone that meant she had no bars but had pulled up her text conversation with Dean anyway. She had let her thumb hover over the icon of a telephone for a long time, long enough for Castiel to worry, before pressing it. The line never connected. She knew it wouldn’t.

Here she is again, holding her phone, only this time she felt it vibrate. *It vibrated.*

“I don’t fully understand technology, you know that. Does it mean, you have a connection to earth?” Cas is hopeful too.

“I don’t know.” She admits. “Let’s find out.”

She places her thumb on the home button and hesitates for a long while before finally pressing it. Her heart sinks when she sees the notification. Her phone had vibrated to alert her that her battery was down to ten percent. The sob that knocks out of her is all Cas needs to understand that this is not the way home they both wanted it to be. He pulls her into his arms and offers her a safe space to cry. They stand there, with Robin bawling and Cas pressing kisses to the top of her head for half a decade, give or take a year.

- “We’re not getting anywhere, Cas, why do we keep walking?” Robin half asks to know half asks to complain.

It’s been a few years since the incident with the phone. She shut it off completely after she collected herself. She didn’t want a repeat when her battery hit five percent. They had discussed how her phone battery had even stayed alive for so long, but couldn’t confirm any of their theories, so they let it go.

“I’m sure there’s something better we could be doing with our time.” She continues.

“I’m open to suggestions.” Castiel counters, looking over his shoulder and raising an eyebrow at her.

Back on earth Robin might have been startled by the angel’s behavior. It would have been out of character then, for him to be so expressive, it isn’t now. They’ve found a new normal. A new sense of familiarity with each other, often communicating without saying a thing. The eyebrow raise translates to: What is there to do in a place with nothing but fog and floor? Those words, nothing but fog and floor, had become a running gag for them.
She laughs and shoves him playfully making him stumble a few feet forward, dramatically. He remains in her sights despite the distance. They’d found that the white smog would sometimes dissipate only to thicken again. Cas was keeping track of the changes in that big brain of his but there didn’t seem to be pattern. In any case, it allowed them a bit of room to move sometimes without the worry of losing each other. If they ever did, neither thinks they’d be able to find one another again.

When the smog does lessen it doesn’t make finding anything in the fog room to explain where they are any easier, so they gave up on that after the first hundred times. Cas had been counting.

“We could spar.” She proposes.

“You mean fight each other?”

“Yeah. You can teach me all the fighting styles you know. I’m sure I have a couple tricks I could show you too.”

Cas grins, mischief lighting his eyes. “Nothing better to do, I suppose. Definitely beats walking.”

Robin barely registers the angel’s movement and in a beat finds her back pressed to Cas’ chest her arms pinned by her side. She rolls his eyes, he’d have to do better than that. This is one of the first holds her mom taught her to get out of. So she does, easily despite Cas’ angel strength, the way she had learned when she was six. That’s around when her parents had started training her in hand-to-hand stuff, though they didn’t allow her to start fighting close range with monsters until she was eleven. Before six she’d only been taught to shoot with none lethal weapons and about the lore.

As she twists out of Cas’ grasp, applying pressure in all the right places to make his grip give, she lands a blow on his shoulder with a roundhouse kick. She figures they could avoid the face. This time, when Cas stumbles, it’s genuine. She winks at him over the fists she has poised in front of her. Cas admires her stance, it’s damn near perfect.

“I thought you were rusty after your hunting hiatus.” Cas questions, ego not the least bit bruised. If anything he feels a strange sort of pride swell up in chest.

“I had been. Then I trained with Dean. Then I kept training on my own. It’s the only way I could get through all that goddamn research every day.” Robin explains. “I was good y’know.” She adds almost mournfully. “I was a fucking fantastic hunter. A goddamn force to be reckoned with.” She boasts, now. “Bet I could take you, Cas.”

“You’re not dead Robin, you’re still a hunter.” He says first, tone serious. “But you don’t have a snowballs chance in a fog filled realm.” He challenges, lightly.

Robin laughs at that. “I don’t know dude, gets kind of chilly here sometimes.” That wasn’t true, the temperature never changed. “Come on, come at me, then.”

He does and fight they do. Robin loses. She might have begun training to be a hunter nearly as soon as she could talk, walk and run but Cas was trained to be a soldier as soon as he was created. After each match he explains to her where she went wrong.

After a couple dozen rounds, Robin manages to pin him long enough for it to be considered a win. The smog thickens then so they start walking again. She raves about her victory for the whole year they spend wandering. When the smoke clears up enough for them to fight again another year later, Cas teaches her more purposefully. He educates her about fighting styles that were too obscure for her or her parents to even know about. Her favourite ends up being an early biblical angel genre. It
feels a lot more like dancing to her, it’s elegant and fluid. Cas points out how odd it is that she likes it so much considering all the horror stories she’d shared about her lack of dancing capabilities. She kicks his legs out from underneath him.

They fall into the routine easily. They walk and talk when the smoke is dense and fight when it is clear. Well, it’s never clear, just clearer than usual.

“Why do you call it the fog room?” Castiel asks one day as they’re strolling, fingers laced with hers. “It’s obviously not a room.” He bumps his shoulder with hers playfully. “No walls.” Only fog and floor.

“Do you have a better name for it?” Robin inquires curious. “Realm of Fog? Smog of Eternity. We-get-it-you-vape town?”

Castiel laughs at the last one then shakes his head. Odd how back on earth he wouldn’t even have known what she was talking about. Maybe that can make being stuck here worth it. “I suppose I don’t have anything better to offer, and ‘Fog Room’ is the best that you can do.”

“I feel mildly insulted, Cas.”

“Ah good, my intentions exactly.”

She laughs a big booming laugh. “Sarcasm becomes you.”

Cas is glad that she thinks so, he quite likes it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you're enjoying the story so far. Please let me know your thoughts!

I want to take a moment to thank everyone who's been commenting and all that jazz, I really appreciate it and look forward to hearing more as well as sharing more of this story myself :)


The summoning rituals don’t work. Dean performs the one he used on Ayil substituting Cas’ name when appropriate. After that he tries the other ones he’d found for angels. When those also don’t work, he does more research and finds spells specifically for humans. The one he banks on the most is ‘To Call a Lost Soul’. When that doesn’t work he tries the one on the following page ‘To Call a Lost Love’. It’s a bitter pill to swallow when that one doesn’t work either.

He’s mixing dry herbs together, when Sam walks into the library carrying a half empty plate of food. He’d been trying to get his mom to eat more.

“I didn’t think you’d be back so soon, when you left last night.” Sam says. “You had a bag packed.”

“Yeah me neither.”

“I’ve been hearing you chant for hours, I think it’s safe to assume none of those spells will work for a non practitioner. That might be for the best, magic isn’t something you should dabble in lightly. You know that.”

Dean slams his fist onto the table, making the plant in his hand crumble. “I don’t see you coming up with any bright ideas.”

Because I think they’re gone Dean. Because I think you’re gone. Mom’s gone. None of you are here. Sam wants to shout. He wants to yell at Dean that he needs him here, present. That their mom needs them. That it’s sick that Dean hasn’t so much as spoken to her since what happened. That he’s afraid of losing his brother to an impossible task. That he’s afraid he’s going to get stuck in a denial-anger-bargaining cycle and not ever get to the acceptance part of grief. Just like their father. Sam wants that doesn’t want Dean spending the rest of his life chasing after something he isn’t going to get. That Robin wouldn’t want him to either. Sam doesn’t say anything though. What Dean needs now if his supper, so he thinks he’ll give Dean a bit more time, despite knowing that too much time will lock Dean in the path he’s on.

“They’re alive.” Dean says, finally breaking the silence and falling back into the chair behind him.

“I know you think that, Dean, but-”

“No, I know it. I spoke to Billie. They’re alive, I just don’t know where they are. I don’t even know how to find out. I thought it didn’t have to matter where they are if I could transport them here through some kind of summoning or conjuring or whatever.” He explains rubbing tired hands on a tired face.

Sam lets the words sink in. This changes everything. If they’re out there, if they’re living and breathing, that means they weren’t erased by time like he’d concluded. It means they’re waiting to be saved. He’s gladder than ever about the decision he made when he first started hearing Dean clumsily casting spells.

“It’ll be forty-eight hours since it happened, soon. The more time that goes by the harder it’ll be to...” He doesn’t know how to finish his sentence but he doesn’t have to when they hear a knock at the bunker door.
Dean is up and alert instantly. He eyes Sam curiously when the younger Winchester seems unfazed.

“I called back up.” He explains.

“Back up?” Dean asks already making his way up the metal stairs.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but your spell casting game is weak.” Sam gibes.

Dean opens the heavy door, one hand curled around the gun handle behind his back.

“Short and stout,” Rowena greets. “Big and tall rang.”

Dean looks down at his form as if verifying that he hadn’t let himself go. Plump looks fucking great on Robin, but he doesn’t think he can pull it off. The thought makes him notice that he hasn’t seen Robin since getting out of the impala after his trip to Iowa.

“Well!” The witch brays dramatically. “Are you going to invite me in, or am I supposed to stand out here for another millennia. I’ll remind you that I’m your,” She rolls her ‘r’ there. “guest.”

“- “

“So you help us get her back and we help Crowley get rid of Lucifer? That’s the deal?” Dean asks as the three of them stand around the library table.

“Yes! Just like your brother and I agreed to on the phone. Is your brain like your wardrobe and only full of plaid? Do I need to repeat myself again?” Rowena clamors.

“Oh, I’m sorry Rowena, do my questions bother you?” Dean placates sarcastically with an eyeroll.

“Why, yes, a wee bit more than a tremendous amount.” The redhead throws back. “Now can we get down to business? The faster I can put the most distance between my person and you strapping lads, the better.”

“I don’t buy it.” Dean argues. “Why would you want anything that helps Crowley? Why would you go after Lucifer even if it’s in this round about way? You’re all about preservation, Rowena.”

“Right you are, Dean-o. I may or may not have sent Lucifer to the bottom of the ocean with a decaying vessel and so it’ll be a while before he resurfaces but when he does I know who’ll be at the top of his hit list. This is me making sure he’s at the top of yours.”

“Never much of a frontliner, huh?” Sam mocks.

“It’s called survival, Moose.”

“We have another word for it, cowardice.” He insults.

“Why, I never! Think what you may, but I’ve been alive for over three hundred years.” She brags. “You, on the other hand are just over thirty and have managed to die a handful of times.” She has a point.

“Do we have a deal or not?” Dean interjects before things can escalate.

“Aye. Now, where’s the body?” Rowena asks looking around.

“The body?”
She looks between the brothers, craning her neck up some, and with exasperation says, “Yesss. The body. You want me to return this girl’s soul to what exactly? A can of tuna?”

“We don’t have the body.” Sam admits when his brother seems thrown by the line of questioning.

“Who does?”

“Erm... No one maybe?”

“Excuse me?”

“Look, when she died, the body vanished and then she went back in time to go die again and nothing happened after that.”

“You want me to bring her back from the dead and also back from time? You didn’t mention a lack of corpses and a presence of time travel.” She says directing that last part at Sam.

“She’s not dead.” Dean says softly.

“That’s not what your boy-o of a brother said on the phone.”

“We have new information now. She’s alive and so is Castiel. Would that mean she still has her body?”

“It could. If you’re correct that makes this a piece of cake. Almost a parlor trick.” She exclaims. “I’m not one to gloat, but turns out I’m the one with the better end of this deal.” She gloats. “Give me some space.” She orders shooing them further back, away from the table, before speaking a spell.

When nothing happens she clears her throat theatrically and tries again, this time closing her eyes. After she’s done, she lifts one lid and notices the distinct lack of angel and huntress on the table. She huffs out a breath and chants a new spell, this time in a language even Sam can’t recognise. She moves her arms and her fingers flex in a way that the brothers are sure it’s what’s causing the sudden breeze in the room. The spell ends on a high note and Rowena stares expectantly at the table.

“Why is nothing happening?” Dean asks getting agitated. This is supposed to work.

“Get me five candles and an obsidian crystal.” Rowena orders. “I know you have some of the latter somewhere in this place, I snooped around during your end of the world party.”

Sam decides to ignore her confession and rushes off to get what she needs.

“Why didn’t those spells work?” Dean demands. “You didn’t even say their names. Maybe you need a spell with their names.”

“Do I tell you how to put down a dogman?” Rowena questions referring to werewolves. “Or whatever else you lot do? No. I don’t. Don’t tell me how to do what I do best, and better than everyone else.” She directs. “Besides, unless you’re a beginner, a lot of magic is about intent with summonings. When I say the words I have the angel and the daughter of the First Family in mind.”

“That doesn’t explain why it didn’t work.” He insists. Then, the rest of what Rowena said registers. First Family? “Wait, Ro-” Dean stops himself unable to say her name.

“Woah, you’re sprung on this girl aren’t ya?” Rowena cackles. “In that case, I look forward to
meeting her. I don’t know what’s more fascinating, that she’s made you capable of love outside of that codependency you share with your brother, or that she’s capable of loving a scoundrel like you. Unless, of course, it’s unrequited. Oh please tell me it’s unrequited!”

“She isn’t the president’s daughter.” Dean grinds the words out through clenched teeth, ignoring the witch’s spiel entirely.

Rowena looks confused for a second, unsure what he’s referring to until it clicks. “The president?” She laughs. “You really are brainless goons. You don’t even know who you’re saving.”

“I got everything.” Sam says, returning.

“Place the candles in a pentagram and give me the crystal.”

Sam hands over the glorified black rock and places the candles as she’s requested. Dean helps, on the other side of the table. When they’re done, Rowena lights the wicks on fire with a word.

Clutching the crystal, meant to help concentrate energy, she begins a new incantation. She tries three more before she starts looking worried.

“What’s going on Rowena?” Dean questions angrily.

“It seems...that perhaps, a summoning won’t be happening on this day.” She offers meekly.

“Why not?” He roars back.

“Wherever they are, they can’t be pulled out. There’s some kind of supernatural block.”

“Can’t you bypass it?” Dean snaps.

“What do you think I’ve been trying to do here?” She shouts back. “I haven’t been singing the top ten pop hits of the week, you know!”

“Try it again.” Dean mandates leaving no room for discussion.

“It’s not going to work if it hasn’t worked so far.” She counters with mostly false bravado. “The block feels pre-Creation.”

“Try. It. Again.”

“Dean, I-”

“Shut up, Sam.” His eyes remain fixed on the redhead.

“Dean, Rowena’s the most powerful witch we know if she says-”

“I mean it, Sammy.” He barks turning to his brother.

“Dean-”

“No! You’re selfish you know that, Sam. She and Cas have been missing for two days, two goddamn days, and you’ve barely tried to get them back. More than that you’ve been trying to get me to stop.”

“What do you call me getting Rowena here?” Sam bites back.
“The bare minimum, that’s what I call that, Sam.”

“Yeah? Well, I’ve been busy taking care of our, mom. Or have you forgotten about her? You know, she’s the woman Robin died to protect.”

“Don’t you fucking say her name.”

“Oh boohoo! Dean doesn’t know how to deal with his emotions. What else is new. It’s like you didn’t learn anything from having her around. She was wasted on you, Dean. She’s better than the both of us and she’s gone now and we couldn’t save her but you don’t get to take that out on me.”

The way Dean is staring at his brother, fire in his eyes, has even Rowena recoiling, but Sam holds his own. When he speaks next however, it’s soft.

“You were going to sell your soul to get her back but she didn’t do what she did for you alone Dean. She wanted you, mom and me to be together and she’d burn and cuss the earth down to get back to you just to kill you herself if she found out you’d given up her sacrifice so easily. You’re irrational and you have horrible tunnel vision. You’re coming down on Rowena for her to try the same thing again when we should be trying something different.

“I’m not trying to stand in your way. I want them back too, Dean. We’ll find a solution. We always do. I’m with you on this. All the way. Maybe I should have been clearer from the beginning, but I’m with you.”

The more Sam spoke the more Dean was able to release the tension coiling around his bones. Slowly he extinguishes the heat inside of him to replace it with resolve. “Okay.” The older Winchester concedes.

Just like that their differences are set aside to be dealt with at another time. All the nasty things that had been said by both brothers aren’t quite forgotten just yet though.

_Not just like that._ In that moment Dean wishes he would see Robin. Even if it’s just an illusion. He wishes he could see a specter of her, even if it’s to taunt him.

“There is something else I could try.” Rowena says bringing him back to the present. “It’s for bonded souls. It’s less about location more about the person. Instead of bringing her _here_, we’d be bringing her to _you._” She explains, looking at Dean.

“I... We never did.” For some reason Dean feels shy. “We’re not Wiccan, obviously, we didn’t bond our souls.” He doesn’t even know where to start explaining that to Rowena. There’s the hunter thing so obviously not into wicca. The ‘they met only a few months ago’ thing. The fact that they’d been together, really together, for only a day before...before.

“Did you sleep with her?” She asks bluntly.

“What? How is that any-”

“That’s all the ritual requires. Sex and intent. It’s not a Wiccan thing, it’s a human thing. It won’t work for the angel, unless of course...”

“I slept with her. Only her.” Dean interjects blushing while Sam chuckles.

“Alright then. Cards on the table, it wouldn’t have worked with an angel anyway since they’re soulless.” She grins. “I’ll need some of your blood.” Back to business.
Rowena has Dean drip some of his blood in the middle of the pentagram. He accidentally singes his shirt on one of the candles which Sam also finds funny. When Rowena intones a spell this time, the blood on the table boils and the five flames that surround it reach new heights, but that’s all that happens.

When she finishes she’s almost sorry.

Dean doesn’t wait for Sam to round the table to get to him. He makes it to the hall that leads to the bedrooms despite his blurry eyesight in record time. Next thing he knows he’s stumbling into Robin’s room. He shuts the door behind him and stands in the center.

He swirls around, or maybe that’s the room spinning, trying to catch a glimpse of her through his unshed tears. He wishes he could see her. He tries to will his mind to conjure her up. They’d had so many memories here. There are too many to choose from so why doesn’t his brain just pick one. Why isn’t he allowing himself this twisted comfort. He could imagine her, standing by the desk fumbling to pick up her tooth brush. That had been her first night at the bunker. He could imagine her on the bed. They’d had talks that lasted hours on there. Any one minute of those would do. He’d take anything his mind has to offer at this point.

Maybe not the sex. No, he doesn’t want to revisit the sex that apparently hadn’t been enough. It had been a long shot, he knows. They’d barely been together, it wouldn’t make sense if they had bonded themselves to each other. What even was that? It doesn’t matter though, it’s just another way he’s managed to fail her.

He can’t bare the sight of the bed anymore. He moves back until he hits the wall and crumples onto it, sliding onto the ground. He shuts his eyes and presses balled fists against them. He misses her so goddamn much.

Folded in three, collapsed against the wall and finally crying. That’s how Dean is when he says Robin’s name for the first time since this nightmare began.

“Robin.” He wails.

If Rowena had residency in his head, she’d be saying something about intent right about then.

“Robin.” He sobs.

“Dean?” He hears her answer but it barely registers. He doesn’t want Robin’s ghost anymore, anyway. It may be fickle of him but he doesn’t think he deserves it. “Dean.”

-“Then he says ‘somebody, anybody’ and it’s the most heart breaking thing.”

“He is unaware that his uncle is responsible?”

“No! He’s a lil’ lion cub, he doesn’t realise how evil works. He thinks it’s his fault and runs away. Then, Timon and Pumba find him passed out and they take him in as their own.”

“A meerkat and a warthog raising a lion. Sounds outside of-”

“There is no room for your close-mindedness, here.” Robin interrupts and continues recounting the story in detail.

“What happens next?” Cas asks at a critical moment in the tale.
“When Scar says ‘long live the king’ it kind of triggers memories for Simba and he realises the truth, convenient timing, I know. So he jumps back up.” She tells him how the lions fight some more, how the hyenas turn on Scar after he bad mouths them, how the movie ends with Rafiki lifting Simba and Nala’s daughter, Kiara, in the air before the entire animal kingdom.

“It truly comes full circle.”

Robin nods vigorously. “Plot twist, Scar has an illegitimate son, or maybe he was adopted, and in the second movie he and Kiara get together.”

Cas looks at her, keeping up with her strides, with amazement in his eyes. “No.” God’s creation is magnificent but these same creations were able of making some damn good cinema that rivaled even his Father’s ingenuity.

“Yes!”

- 

“It feels like it’s been seventy years.”

“I know.”

“I don’t think I even remember what it’s like to want to pee.”

“Now, say that to me in French. You’ve been slacking.”

- 

Cas finishes telling Robin a story from when he was human.

“Why Clarence?”

“It’s what Meg called me. Amongst other things.”

Cas tells Robin about Meg then. About how she somehow ended up being the one to save them all. About how she made Cas feel. About how she died.

“You loved a demon?” She asks, but there’s no judgement.

“I don’t know if love is the correct term.”

Robin nods and leaves it at that, an oddity for her since she’d taken to asking a thousand and one questions.

“What about your past mates?” Cas absentmindedly squeezes Robin’s hand in his. “I’ve told you all about my failed attempts at romance.”

“Very little time for relationships while on the road, I’m afraid. The only person I’ve been with for more than a string of days is Rodney.”

“The one you hunted with?”

“Yeah. Though he’d been hunting with George for a while before I came along. I met him a few times growing up when my parents would visit Uncle Rich. Rodney and Grace had a habit of hanging out there. But it’s in college that I really got to know him.”
“Your uncle was a hunter too, but he wasn’t on the road?”

“Nah, he and George mostly stayed put. Only worked the cases in their area, sometimes they’d spread further out but not usually. George only came on the road once his dad died. He’d follow my parents and I with Rodney in his dad’s pickup. Got his GED and then he went off to college.”

“And you followed.”

“We all did. Rodney moved out to that college town. His sister continued her residency in a hospital in the area. I’d already gotten accepted so when my parents died it only made sense to go be with George, he was the only family I had left.”

“Why did the relationship end? With Rodney.”

“I’m not too sure, to be honest. I was getting sicker and couldn’t manage the synesthesia much at all anymore. We’d argue about me not hunting anymore. We’d argue about what happened with my parents. We’d argue about how to organise the weapons in the trunk. We just argued a lot. He kept telling me I was better than the way I was treating myself. I kept telling him that didn’t mean anything. We ended up agreeing to just be friends. Which worked.

“Then I realised he was right all along and hunting just wasn’t an option for me anymore. I was a nuisance more than anything else. And being around them, while they hunted made me feel so inadequate. So I left. It’s less dramatic than I’ve made it sound. Before getting stuck here, I used to check in with him and George and Amy every couple of weeks. With Grace, more regularly, at least once a month.”

“That’s when you started speaking your opinion on food on the line?”

Robin laughs. “Online. No I started that when I was, like, twelve. I’d go to the libraries to use the computers to update it. We didn’t carry a laptop, then. I’d write the posts on paper in the car first and then type it up as fast as I could at the library. I totally revamped it into something that isn’t garbage in college though.”

“That’s when my mom burst through the glass. She used a goddamn grappling hook like some kind of batwoman. My dad and I were still tied up so we just watched her kick some serious supernatural ass.”

“You’re a very skilled fighter, Robin.”

“Flattery won’t get you out of this chokehold, Cas.”

“I should have put two and two together sooner.” Robin sighs abruptly.

They’ve been quiet for a few years. Cas estimates that they’ve been in the fog room for about a century now. He doesn’t speak waiting for her to continue but he does pull her a little closer.

“When more and more monsters were coming after me, it happened almost over night.”

“Yes, you’ve shared this information before. Back at the bunker.”
“It happened after the sun was dying. It should have clicked.” Robin sighs again. “I never should have left Mary with the CD player. Sam and Dean never should have seen her like that, that night.” She looks up at Cas, eyes shiny with unshed tears. God, she hopes they’re okay.

“You saved them, Robin, but you can’t expect to save them from everything.”

“How do you figure that?” She says now looking down. “I don’t think I was doing the saving.”

“You went back in time and kept Mary Winchester from dying. Kept Sam and Dean from having to live through that, again. How is that not saving?”

“Think about it, Cas. I had been on borrowed time, from the start. The only reason I wasn’t dead yet was because I was sheltered in that bunker. Because Sam and Dean kept me safe. Mary was half right. Only one of us could stick around but it was always supposed to be her. Amara brought her back. I think maybe, my purpose was always to die for her to live.”

Cas doesn’t say anything, because Robin isn’t being completely illogical.

“It’d make sense. Why be raised into a hunting machine only to be incapacitated in all things hunting. I couldn’t think of a ghost without hearing bells in my ears. Without my vision going black. I was meant to be a counterpart of sorts for Mary.”

“Stop.” Cas says suddenly angry. He squeezes Robin’s hand harder than strictly necessary. “You were not born to die. You were not groomed for another to take your place on earth. Your life wasn’t a stand in to be traded in for another.”

“I’m not saying this so you can comfort me, Cas.”

“I know.” He stops walking and turns her to face him. His blue eyes bore into hers, imploring her to trust his words. “I truly don’t believe it to be the case, Robin. The last daughter of the First Family is not predestined to be someone’s keeper. You are not dead, after all.”

She decides maybe he’s right. Mostly, she decides that it doesn’t matter. Very little does in the fog room.

- 

A few more years of silence go by. Then, a few years of talking about themselves, their pasts, about the brothers, about lore and about pop culture. Years of stories and laughter and debates on whether changing the job title of the pizza man would have impacted his relationship with the babysitter. Castiel tells her about this long list of regrets he has. His voice sounds broken when he does and Robin listens to all of it, her hand in his. When he finished the list doesn’t feel as heavy, doesn’t weigh down his wings quite as much. They still fight when the smoke clears, Cas doesn’t even hold back at all anymore. It’s a true challenge to win against Robin, which he does only fifty percent of the time.

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“Why do you call us the First Family of hunting?” Robin asks around Year 115. The fog is exceptionally dense at this time so she needs to squints to see Cas’ face,

“Your ancestry is the longest uninterrupted line of hunters. I don’t know that you were the actual first to hunt, but the longest standing record. You are the last daughter, your cousin the last son.”

“Oh.”
“Also, you almost single handedly took down the largest vampire nest in modern times. That helped build, euh, street cred.” Cas grins.

Robin shakes her head sadly. “That was my parents.”

“You’re the one who pulled the trigger, Robin.”

The words make Robin physically recoil and as though Castiel were consumed by holy fire, Robin drops his hand and steps away from him. She hadn’t meant to, not really, and she regretted immediately. The smog engulfs her completely. It happens so fast Cas barely has time to register the events before an all encompassing fear flares up inside of him. Robin is out of sight and his eyes can’t find her. She’s out of reach and his hands aren’t on her.

“Robin!” He screeches, his voice cracking. He looks around wildly, stumbling in the direction he thinks she went in. He spots a wisp of hair and sticks his hands into the fog. He grabs hold of two shoulders and pulls them to him.

Robin follows and crashes into his chest where his heart beats rapidly. She clutches at the lapels of his trench coat. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” Robin blubbers.

Cas wraps his arms around her, his forearms against her shoulder blades, and holds her tightly enough to cause damage. “Don’t ever do that again please.” He tries to demand calmly, but it comes out wrecked.

“I’m sorry, I won’t, I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking, I’m sorry.”

They’re both petrified of the thought of losing each other here. So they stand there, clenching onto one another for a few years until the smog dissipates enough for them to be able to see two yards in front of them. They both cry, but by the time they pull apart there’s only dry tear tracks left.

“Her name was Chastity?”

“I believe it was a pseudonym.”

Robin laughs. “Yeah, I agree. Most probably a pseudonym. So Dean drags you to a brothel, sets you up with,” Snicker. “Chastity. Then what happened? Did you swipe your V card? Did you pop your cherry? Did you send the boys to sleep-away camp? Did you put the key in the lock for the very first time? Did you-”


Robin chortles. “You already told me you lost your virginity to April, so how did this go south?”

“During Chastity’s, eh, ministrations, her subconscious was firmly fixed on Gene, her father.”

“Oh no.”

“I looked her in the eyes and told her it was not her fault he left. It was because he hated his job at the post office.”

Robin busts out laughing. She stops walking and doubles over, finding it difficult to breathe. She places her hands on her knees for support. Between panting snorts she gets out, “Cas you’re too much.”
Cas keeps a hand on her shoulder, not quite comfortable without a point of contact, as her airy laugh explodes out of her. He grins, loving seeing her this way.

“Gosh, Cas, I haven’t laughed this hard in so long.” She straightens back up, her laugh dwindling into a light chuckle. “So long. Years.”

There’s a sadness now on Robin’s features that Cas doesn’t like at all. He’s also startled by her word choice, almost identical to Dean’s on that night over a century ago.

Robin snorts out another laugh. “Not since you told me about your first day at the Garrison.” She teases and begins to walk again, slipping her hand in Cas’.

The angel rolls his eyes but continues with the story, nevertheless. “She didn’t quite like what I said and left after making a fuss. Dean found me and then the bouncers came so we ran out the back.”

“You miss him.” Robin says, startling Cas again.

He didn’t think he was being so transparent with his emotions. “You miss him.” He counters.

“Yeah.” Robin admits easily. This, however, doesn’t startle Cas, not anymore, anyway. He’s gotten used to her unashamed honesty. “I miss everyone.”

“Why would you and Rodney argue about your parents?” Castiel asks out of the blue one day.

“What?” Robin is taken aback slightly.

“You told me a while back that towards the end of your relationship you would fight about what had happened with your parents. It’s an odd thing to fight about considering he wasn’t even there when they died.”

“How do you know he wasn’t there?” Robin feels tension seep into her muscles. This isn’t her favorite topic.

“The heavens were watching.”

“The heavens were what?” Robin clarifies, thrown.

“A large portion of the angels were watching.”

“What you guys... You just gathered around a TV or something?”

“That’s not really how it works, but essentially. Angels were mostly disinterested in humanity and their doings, but there are moments throughout time that are pivotal points and the making of history. The annihilation of that vampire nest is one of them.”

“Oh.” Is Robin’s only reply. It makes her sick to her stomach to think she had an audience that night. An audience that could have easily interfered and saved her mom and dad.

Castiel knows Robin so well by now, he can tell, from the tension in her back alone, that she doesn’t want to discuss that day. She never does. His curiosity has been building, however, for over a century and he’d just like to understand a bit better. He’d like to understand her. “So why did you and Rodney fight about it?”
Robin sighs deeply. She considers deflecting. Then decides that Cas deserves better. She considers flat out telling him that it’s not something she wants to talk about, but decides he deserves more than that too. It’s not that she owes him this, but she thinks that their relationship is so beyond holding back at this point. You can’t spend a hundred and thirty years with someone, nearly bound at the hip, and still hold on to your secrets.

“He used to say that my guilt was holding me back as a hunter and as a person. He said that’s what was aggravating my illness and that I should know better than to feed the emotion. That I was validating it in my mind and that it was below me to do that.” Robin says doing her best to keep her emotions in check.

That made some sense to Cas. The way Robin has spoken about Rodney over the years, he suspects Dean would qualify him as ‘Hippie Dippie’. He’s very into self growth and self betterment and talking about feelings, which Cas thinks must have rubbed off at least a little on Robin. It didn’t all make sense to Cas, though. “You don’t strike me as the type to have survivor’s guilt, Robin. Your parents wouldn’t hold it against you that you lived.”

Robin tilts her head sideways and up to get a look at the angel and Cas sees a dark seriousness there he isn’t used to. “Is that supposed to be a joke, Cas, because I don’t find it funny.”

“What? No. Why would my words be a farce?” He wonders slowing his pace to match Robin’s.

“I thought you said you saw what happened.”

Cas shakes his head. “No, a lot of the angels were observers, but I didn’t have a curiosity for human activity then. I just found out afterwards from chatter that everyone died, the vampires, the Feras, everyone save for the last child. That’s you. Also that the death count for the vampires was added to your tally because it was you who pulled the trigger that made it happen.”

“Oh.” Robin swallows thickly. “Well, in that case, you didn’t see. It isn’t survivor’s guilt. I killed everyone and everything there that night, Cas. That includes my parents.”

More time passes. Years creep by and some days feel like a decade. Things haven’t changed much. Robin is still wearing her ‘I am not amoosed’ t-shirt, Cas is still wearing his trench coat and they’re both still surrounded by a thick fog.

They still talk and walk hand-in-hand. They still engage in combat. Robin has always been good, great even, but training with Cas has brought her to a whole new level. She feels unstoppable, almost almighty at times. Cas always makes sure to knock her back down a peg, though, when she gets like that, by winning the next round.

Whenever he tries to convince her that her parents’ passing wasn’t her fault, Robin rolls her eyes and laughs and dismisses him with something along the lines of ‘We’ve spent a century and a half here, save some of your arguments for the next century together.’ At first it was a little off putting to Cas but he quickly understood that it’s Robin’s way of dealing with it. That doesn’t stop him from trying every couple of years.

One particularly smokeless day, though there aren’t really days in the fog room just endless time and also non-time, they’re talking about facial features.

“Freckles are cute.” Robin asserts. “Does Jimmy have freckles?”

“I haven’t made a note of it.” Cas admits. He finds that he barely remembers his vessel’s
appearance having not seen himself in a mirror since coming here.

“Let me see.” Robin says stopping them and standing in front of him. She grabs his face in both hands and observes him critically.

She takes her time to make Cas uncomfortable but it’s a testimony to their relationship when he doesn’t even squirm, completely unperturbed.

“No freckles. Don’t worry though you still got them baby blu-”

“Robin.”

Robin’s hands fall away from Cas’ face. She heard her name but the angel in front of her did not speak it.

“Robin.” The voice says again and Cas’ lips remain unmoving. That is until he presses them into a hard line.

“Robin, are you alright?” Cas asks confirming even more so that it hadn’t been him. The way her name had been said it was almost a wail. It was heart-wrenching. It was-

“Dean?” Robin asks the air around them.

“Robin, what’s going on? Are you alright?” Cas inquires again, worried. He grabs hold of Robin’s shoulders keeping her steady and near, afraid of a repeat of the horror that was losing her in fog, despite how clear it was at the moment.

“Cas, it’s Dean. I can hear him. He said my name, Cas, it’s...” She grins up at him gripping his shoulders in turn. “Cas, if I can hear him then there might be a way back.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you for reading :) I hope you enjoyed! If you'd like to share your thoughts with me, you know the drill ;) At this point Cas and Robin have been in the Fog for nearly two centuries. Yikes.
“Dean.” The voice -Robin’s voice- says again.

Dean grunts because of course now that he doesn’t want it anymore his brain is supplying him with an illusion of Robin. Maybe it’s a well earned punishment. He won’t argue that he doesn’t deserve it, but it’s a sick sort of torment even for him.

The voice doesn’t stop. Sometimes it sounds desperate. Sometimes it sounds hopeful. Sometimes it sounds like... it’s plucked out of a sentence?

God, how had it come to this. How had he failed her so completely? How had she ended up sacrificing her life for him when his job was to keep her safe? Maybe the real question is how had he allowed himself to believe he could keep her around, at all.

He feels her words, his name, always his name, reverberate inside his chest. He hears Robin inside of his head more so than from somewhere in the room, which is different than all the previous times he’s had these hallucinations. She barely sounds real.

Dean’s eyes shoot open, then, because despite rationally knowing that the times he’s seen and heard Robin were some sort of mirage, they’d felt anything but. He had to give his brain credit. They’d always felt real. And this wasn’t that.

He scans his surroundings, looking for the Robin that’s mocking him but finds nothing. He rises to his feet, idly wipes the wetness of tears and snot from his face, and moves towards the center of the room. He stands perfectly still, observes the room, waits.

“Dean.” It’s in his head but also from far away.

“Robin?” He whispers but it’s more of a prayer than anything else.

“Dean.”

When he hears her saying his name again, when he hears her answer him, and nothing shifts in the room, he knows. He knows. Somehow, both at his core and with every inch of his skin, with his entire person, mind and body and goddamn soul, he knows. What he’s hearing isn’t a phantasm of his mind. He isn’t the one manifesting the voice. It’s all her. It’s Robin. Wherever she is, she’s the one saying his name.

And God damn it he is going to find her.

With absolute determination he marches back to the library. He finds Sam and Rowena discussing, astonishingly enough, in a calm manner.

“Dean,” Sam starts softly when he spots his brother approaching. He doesn’t miss the look of resolve on Dean’s face. Sam doesn’t get another word out, though, before his brother cuts him off.

“Rowena find her.” Dean demands with authority.

She sighs heavily. “We’ve been over this-”
“No.” He interrupts as he approaches them enough to take his previous post at the table. “I want you to physically find her. If we can’t bring her here, we’ll go get her, wherever she is. And I’m guessing, hoping, that Cas will be with her.”

“How ex-act-ly do you plan on traveling to and from somewhere the angel can’t fly away from?” Rowena jabs. “If he’s with her and he hasn’t returned must be a wing limitation, no?”

“Gee, Row, almost sounds like you care.” Sam snarks.

Rowena scowls at the nickname. “I care,” She rolls her ‘r’. “About having you two around to put Lucifer back in his cage.”

“Look,” Dean snaps, getting the others back on task. “Someone might be holding them hostage or something. They could have incapacitated Cas with enochian crap. Maybe he’s hurt. I don’t know. We’ll cross that bridge when we get there. But first we have to get there. So find them. You can scry, right? That’s what witches do to find something.”

Rowena shakes her head slowly and Dean is about to go off on her but then she says, “A locator spell will be stronger. Besides, where they are might not be on a map.”

Dean nods curtly.

Rowena ruminates through her mind for the most powerful locator spell she knows. She asks for a few herbs that she mixes in the bowl they supply and places it at the center of the pentagram, on top of Dean’s now dry blood.

She clasps the obsidian crystal tightly in her hand and to her chest then begins to chant. She goes on for many minutes, long enough for the brothers to exchange nervous looks of unease.

At some point her eyes had fluttered shut. She only opens them again as she sputters the last of the spell. When her eyelids peel back it’s to reveal completely blank and whitened eyes. No iris. No pupil. No nothing.

Dean takes an instinctive step back, reeling from the sight. Sam, however, moves closer and peers into the woman’s eyes. Despite the absence of pupils, Sam thinks there’s movement there. Almost like she’s looking around for his lost friends, wherever Rowena is herself. She might be physically present but the witch is definitely no longer with them.

“Sam look.” Dean says, once he’s gotten over the initial shock, and nods to Rowena’s hands.

The once black smooth stone she’s holding is now completely clear. It looks like glass and the men can see Rowena’s purple blouse through it. It reminds Dean of a drop of water you would find on a leaf, rounded on all sides, unlike a tear in shape.

The crystal doesn’t remain transparent for long though. In it’s center a small wisp of what can only be described as white smoke appears. It slowly morphs and expands into a sort of cloud occupying more and more of the space inside the stone. Seconds tick by and the brothers watch as the smog flattens against the inner surface of the crystal making it opaque again, only white instead of black.

That’s when Rowena blinks, her eyes returning to normal, and gasps her way back into being present.

Dean, to his credit, gives her a solid ten seconds to recuperate before pouncing.

“You know where they are?”
Rowena takes more time than he’d like to answer but she’s goddamn tired so she decides he can wait another minute. She feels drained from the spell, more than a locator spell should drain a witch of her stature. It hadn’t even worked. Not really, anyway. That strange supernatural block was still there and try as she might Rowena just couldn’t get past it. Or around it. Over or under it. It wasn’t completely pointless, though. She might not have been able to find where Robin and Castiel are but she was able to find out where they aren’t. She tells the brothers exactly that.

“That’s not how locator spells usually work.” Sam quips.

“Do you want to know or not?” She threatens, her accent thickening in her irritation.

“Tell us what you found out.” Dean insists with a sigh that’s both tired and irate.

“They aren’t between Heaven and Hell.” She says simply.

“What does that mean?” Dean asks an edge returning to his tone. His entire body more alert than it had been a moment ago.

“Exactly that.”

“All of creation is beneath heaven and above hell. How can they not be between the two?” Sam questions, more confused than agitated, unlike his brother.

“I don’t know. All I know is that I scoured all the realms and all of time within the reach of the spell which is everything from the pits of hell to the highest wretched cloud of heaven and they were nowhere to be found. When I followed the tug towards her, the Fera child, I got blocked by something...something beyond my magic. Something beyond magic itself. It doesn’t belong to reality.”

Dean laughs. “This is great. Something that doesn’t belong to reality, that’s greater than goddamn magic is blocking us from finding them, wherever they are, which by the way is outside of time and space and beyond heaven and hell.” He laughs again before dropping in the seat nearest him. He doesn’t allow himself to get discouraged though. “Rowena, did you check purgatory, did you check bizarro earth, did-”

“Dean,” Rowena interrupts looking as apologetic as she can muster. “The spell reaches all of God’s creation, alternate realities included, right down to its outskirts; they aren’t even in the Empty.”

“Alright.” Dean accepts, sagging further into the seat.

“Dean-”

“I know, Sam. We’ll find a way, we always do. Tell me how are we supposed to fight this?” The way Dean asks the question is genuine. Like he wants an honest answer. He hasn’t given in, he just needs something to work with. Dean lifts his head then to look at Sam and the younger Winchester does not like what he sees. Dean looks at such a loss, submerged in so much guilt and pain.

“Fists high, knees bent, feet apart.” Sam replies.

Dean laughs again only this time it’s an authentic rambunctious sound and not the ugly chuckle of a man in despair. “Dad used to say that about brawls, Sammy. Doubt it applies to this.” He answers after his chuckling dies down.

“One way to find out.”
Dean appraises Sam for a moment and sees so much of what he himself is not. He’s not a hopeful man. In fact, he barely ever dares to hope. He thinks maybe Sam has been doing it on his behalf all these year, maybe Sam trusts that things will work out enough for the both of them. Then Dean thinks that maybe more hope and more trust couldn’t do more harm. Maybe he should contribute his fare share.

It’s almost an act of defiance when Dean determinedly believes that they’ll find a solution. Like he’s challenging the universe to stand in his way. He finds comfort in knowing that Sam is right by his side, all in with him, for him.

“Alright,” Dean starts, visibly more alert. “Rowena, you said something outside of Creation, outside of time and space. What could that be?”

Rowena shrugs. She already feels like it’s high time she got the hell out of dodge.

“Dean, I think we might have dealt with something like this before.” Sam says after thinking it over. “I don’t think it makes sense, though.”

“Robin, what you’re saying isn’t making very much sense to me.” Castiel speaks cautiously reaching to place a hand on her arm.

“You don’t hear that? You don’t hear Dean?”

Cas shakes his head. “Are you sure this is real Robin?” He hate that he has to ask the question, hates to doubt her sanity.

Robin nods furiously. “Yes, Cas. It’s him, I know it, I can feel it. It’s Dean.” Robin tears. “Jesus, I was starting to think...to think they were gone. We’ve been here for so long, Cas. I was so afraid that they were dead, salted and burned decades ago. But it’s Dean.”

“Robin?” Dean’s voice rings out and it’s an inquiry if she’s ever heard one.

So she does the only thing she can and answers. “Dean.” She tries her best to infuse the word with as much confirmation as possible because she thinks Dean might be hearing her too.

Robin grasps fistfuls of Cas’ trench coat just above his elbows and shakes him. “Cas they’re coming for us.”

Cas smiles a small smile. He isn’t too committed to hoping, but Robin seems to believe it and he thinks he can let her. Thinks he should. “So you’re hearing him? From inside the fog room?”

Robin shakes her head. “More like inside my head. Inside my body. I know what you’re thinking.” She barrels on before he can get a word in. “But I’m not hearing things that aren’t there Cas, I swear, I feel it.”

“Alright.” He accepts and it makes Robin’s face light up.

She loves that he believes in her. They stare at each other basking in the possibility of rescue when Robin’s features darken.

Castiel watches it happen in real time. Her brows furrow and a scowl sets on her lips. “What is it?”

“I don’t hear him anymore.” She answers immediately, somber eyes searching his fearfully for
some sort of an explanation. Or comfort maybe. “The voice is gone, Cas.” Then Robin is yelling. “Dean! Dean! Dean. Please, Dean, please, just... just say my name, please.”

She’s choking back sobs and tears are flowing free and it hurts Cas to see her like this. It’s sick and twisted for hope to be offered to her only to be yanked away. He draws her closer wrapping his arms around her. Instead of the press of her body against his that he expects, Robin fights to get out of his embrace.

“NO!” She bellows. “No.” She repeats. “Enough. Enough of this goddamn fog. There’s a way home and I’m going to find it. I know I heard him, I know it. Which means that wherever we are, what ever this goddamn place is, it’s still connected to our world. To our home.”

She stares at Cas expectantly but all he does is stare back. He doesn’t know what to say so he doesn’t say anything. Robin breaks into a grin.

“We’re going home, Cas. We have to. There’s no way we’re staying stuck here for all of time, non-existent time. I’m a hunter, a great one, and you’re a goddamn angel of the goddamn lord and-”

Her eyes widen in realisation then.

“What is it, Robin?”

“You’re an angel, Cas.”

“Yes. We’ve known this for a long time.” He points out confused. He thinks Robin has ‘snapped’. It was bound to happen, humans aren’t meant to live in near solitude for extend periods of time. Humans aren’t supposed to live for nearly two centuries, either. If anything, Robin has held out remarkably.

“An angel, Cas. With wings and a halo and grace.”

“Robin, my wings don’t work here.” He sighs guiltily. “You know this, too.”

“Yeah but I don’t need your wings to move you, Cas.” She grins and the look in her eyes is equal parts wild and madness.

“Robin you aren’t making sense.” Cas says as his worry grows. “I think we should-”

Robin interrupts him by pulling her cellphone out and dropping to her knees. The fog hadn’t thickened again yet so he could still see all of her, only a light mist hovering over the ground. Without missing a beat Robin smashes her phone onto the floor busting the screen into shards. Now Cas knows Robin’s lost it.

“Robin what-”

“We should have thought of this sooner, Cas.” She says a wide smile on her face as she looks up at him from her position.

He’s so focused on her face, on trying to decipher just what is running through her mind, he misses how she slices a palm open with some of the glass. Their eyes remained locked so it’s the pained wince that makes Cas notice what she’s done.

“Robin, stop!” He drops to his knees as well, trying to grasp her hand and discard the glass all at once. Robin pushes at his chest to keep him off her.

“Trust me.” She implores. She doesn’t give him time to answer and starts drawing on the white
She’s more than halfway done when Cas recognises the sigil. He’s the one who’d taught it to her during one of their talks on lore. It’s the one to expel an angel. “No, Robin no.” He yells clutching the wrist of her bloodied hand just as she finishes.

Robin smiles at Cas, and it’s no longer tinged with lunacy. It’s a soft smile. “This will get you out of here Cas.” She speaks as softly as her smile.

They’re both kneeling in front of each other, the marking the only thing between them, Robin’s now shattered phone just off to the side of her amidst the broken glass. Cas is still holding her wrist and his other hand lifts to rest on her shoulder. “Only me, Robin. This won’t affect you.” Maybe she didn’t know. Maybe she had misunderstood when he’d been teaching her about sigils.

“I know.” There’s sadness in the way she says it but mostly there’s love. Cas is taken aback by it, slightly. It reminds him of that moment they shared in the kitchen of the bunker before she went to the library so save Mary Winchester.

“No.” He says sternly. “I’m not leaving you here.”

Robin shakes her head. “I know. You and Dean and Sam, you’ll figure something out, you’ll come for me, I know.”

“Robin, you can’t know that, we might not be able to save you. Sam and Dean haven’t been able to find us yet.”

“Maybe.” She admits. “But you don’t have to be stuck here too and they’ll have you to help.”

Cas is ready to do whatever it takes to stop her. He’ll knock her out, tie her hands behind her back with his tie for the rest of time if he has to. There’s no way he’s leaving her alone here. Here where there’s nothing. Castiel is an angel who has been alive for millennia and he’d still found it difficult to be in a place with nothing be fog and floor. A human soul, here, without any other living thing around...it’s unthinkable. Humans aren’t built to survive these conditions. “No.”

Robin smiles at him again, like she thinks it’s cute that he’s going to try and stop her. “Tell them...just say that... Not a day goes by that I don’t...and...” For the first time since she’d first dropped to her knees Robin falters in her resolve. “You know what I mean.” She finally says giving the hand on her shoulder a squeeze. “Even if you can’t return for me, just... Take care of them, Cas.”

Castiel tightens his grip on her wrist and is about to tell her that she’s lost her mental faculties if she thinks he’s going to let her do this, but quick as whip Robin’s free hand grabs a handful of the glass beside her, squeezes until she bleeds and smacks her hand down onto the sigil.

A bright white light explodes before her, piercing through the fog, expelling, or more accurately releasing, her favourite angel from this God forsaken place.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading :)
“A soul eater?” Dean asks.

“Yeah.” Sam answers not as reassuringly as he’d like. “Their nests are outside of time and space right?”

“Yeah but how would they end up there? There aren’t any soul eaters in the bunker.”

“Maybe they went somewhere where there was one before going back in time and it got them?”

“One problem with your line of thinking there, Samuel.” Rowena interjects. “Well, actually, more than one. A long list of problems, really. I said it was Pre-creation. Also, soul eaters can’t block my magic and that block...it was very powerful. Not to mention your pal Castiel doesn’t have a soul to eat.”

Sam is crestfallen as he listens to the witch poke holes in his theory.

“Okay, what else we got?” Dean questions, barreling on.

Dean is met with silence. He places his elbows on the table and leans forward. His hands ball together and he presses them to his lips as he tries to clear his head enough to think properly.

“What about the crystal?” He exclaims suddenly. “Rowena, did you get a look at it? Is it supposed to do that or is-”

He’s cut off by a body dropping, not for the first time, from their ceiling and onto the library table with a piercing smack.

Rowena backs up a good two yards whereas the hunters move towards the trench coat clad being. They hear the rapid beating of wings and see Cas blink in and out of presence.

Castiel’s sudden grunt when he finally slumps fully onto the table make the brothers rush forwards to help him up.

“Cas!” Dean shouts a grin splitting his face as he pulls the angel into a hug. “You’re here. Are you alright? Are you hurt?” Dean looks around. “Where’s Robin? Were you not with her?”

The guilty look Cas gives him makes Dean drop his hands from the angel and take a step back. The hunter is reminded of the fact that Castiel is the one who took Robin away in the first place.

“Cas tell us what happened.” Sam instructs walking around the table to stand in front of Castiel and to check him over for injuries.

“That night,” Cas starts and the collective breaths in the room are held, even Rowena’s. “I was going to take her back in time...again. Again for me, for the first time for that version of her.” He tries to make sense and is pleased to find the boys nodding in understanding.

“Then what happened?” Sam prompts.

“We did not end up where I intended.”
“We? So you’ve been with her?” Dean asks.

“Yes, Robin and I have been together all this time.”

“Where?” Dean demands about to burst. This is it. He’s getting her back. “She’s alright, right?”

Cas hesitates. “She is...unharmed and in no immediate danger.” He tries to assure.

“Ok so where is she?” Sam asks this time. “Where have you two been for the past two days?”

“Two days?” Cas’ brows knit. He knew that if time existed in the fog room it was a warped thing but to have lived through centuries in two days...

“Yeah, you disappeared two da-”

“Will you all zip it and stop digressing.” Rowena scolds, itching to find out what this place, that’s just outside the reach of her magic, is. “Spill the beans, angel, where have you two been holed up.”

Cas casts Dean another guilty look. “I don’t know.”

Silence fills the room.

Rowena has the grace to break it. “You don’t knooooow?” She asks shrilly.

“Rowena.” Dean snaps shutting her up. “You don’t know?” He roars to Cas, now. “How do you not know? Is she still there? Go get her, Cas, get her right fucking now.”

“I can’t.” Cas’ voice wavers and cracks and he surprises the Winchesters when his big blue eyes brim with tears.

“Cas what happened?” Sam asks again, softly.

“We went to this place, there was nothing, nothing but fog and floor.” He laughs a wet and dark laugh, mystifying the brothers. He pulls himself together before they can question him and continues speaking. “It was a space, an eternal stretch of a room and there was nothing there, just a fog. A white, thick smog that cleared sometimes but we mostly couldn’t see more than a few feet in front of us. Not that there was anything to see. There was nothing there but that goddamn fog.” He surprises them again with the blasphemy. Goddamn. It was a very Robin thing to say. “And us. The fog and the two of us.” He whispers as his agitation leaves him.

“Okay, okay, hold up.” Dean works on wrapping his mind around the new information. “I’m guessing you didn’t just zap out?”

Castiel shakes his head.

“So how did you two get out?” Dean asks.

“We didn’t.” Cas says and after a beat adds, “Just me.”

“Excuse me? She’s still there?” Dean says so quietly it scares them all. “Go back. Go back, now.”

“I can’t. I tried. When I first landed here. My wings won’t take me there.”

“So why’d you LEAVE HER?” Dean yells scaring them all even more so.

Rowena jumps and makes sure to put more distance between them.
“I didn’t.” Cas snaps back. Dean couldn’t truly believe that he’d abandon Robin?

“Yeah?” Dean bites back. “Just like you didn’t zap her there in the first place?”

“That wasn’t on purpo-”

“Just like you didn’t take her back in time so she could kill herself?”

“That was for you.”

“Shut up.” Dean flares.

“Dean.” Sam tries to soothe and warn simultaneously.

“How’d you get out, Cas?” Dean demands.

Castiel hunches forward as shame sweeps over him. “She did it. She casted me out with the sigil.”

Dean laughs at that. “Of course, she did. Of course she goddamn did.”

“I will go speak to my brothers. See if they might have some informa-”

“They don’t know anything, Cas.” Dean interrupts curtly. “The angels don’t know jackshit. The king of hell doesn’t know. Witches,” He waves a hand at Rowena. “Don’t know. Death, doesn’t even know. You know what else? Not only do they not know where you two have been but they don’t even know how to find out. No one has a damn clue.”

Castiel slumps further, his fingers flex looking to reach for something- Robin’s hand he realises. Then, tears slip down his cheeks. Dean, standing stiffly still and pushing his guilt down, looks away from Castiel, whereas Sam places a hand on the angel’s shoulder, to comfort him, Cas guesses.

“Someone knows something and we’re going to find out who and what and figure this out.” Sam states plainly, like there are no other options. Like that’s exactly what’s going to happen and there’s no need to even worry because they’re getting Robin back and that’s that.

“Only God knows how.” Rowena says.

“Rowena, you’re not helping.” Sam glares.

She rolls her eyes exaggeratedly. “I mean that, li-te-ral-ly, Samuel. Blue Eyes got me thinking. What was there before creation? Angels. If angels don’t know. What’s above them on the pay grade?”

“God.” Sam whispers in realisation.

“God won’t help us.” Dean asserts.

“How do you know that?” Sam asks.

“I’ve been praying to him since I stopped praying to Cas.”

Cas has never felt so small.

“Okay.” Sam accepts. “What’s above an angel and below God.”
“An archangel.” Cas supplies information Sam already knows.

“No, not an archangel.” Dean rectifies, looking Sam in the eyes. “Lucifer.”

A weight settles over the room and its occupants as Sam’s suggestion becomes clear. Dean’s eyes don’t leave Sam’s. The brothers do that thing they do, where they have a conversation without saying a word. It’s mostly Sam saying one thing and in different ways.

*It’s okay with me.*

*I’ll work with him.*

*Whatever it takes.*

*Anything for Robin.*

Then it’s Dean saying one thing back.

*Thank you.*

And then Rowena is shouting.

“ARE YOU ALL MAD? You want to ask Lucifer for help? Lucifer? LUCIFER! You’ve lost it, all of you!”

“It’s happening Rowena, get over it.” Sam says rolling his eyes as he tries to box up his own fears.

“He’s going to kill you all. Kill ME ALL.” She shrieks. “I won’t help you. I won’t tell you where he is.”

“You already said you put him at the bottom of the ocean.” Dean deadpans.

“I won’t fix his vessel!” She argues.

“I’ll lend him mine.” Castiel offers.

“We had a deal.”

“And we plan on keeping it, Rowena. First we just need to ask him a few questions.”

“I’m leaving.” She announces. “And I won’t be seeing any of you again.” She starts heading towards the metal stairs. “Not only because I’ll be so well hidden no one will ever find me but because,” Stomp. “You’ll.” Stomp. “Be.” Stomp. “Dead.” Slam.

“I thought she’d never leave.” Dean tries to joke. Then more seriously, “Sam this is asking a lot.” Then, more coldly. “From you too, Cas.”

“I will begin my search. The ocean is vast.” Castiel says.

“We’ll have a ring of holy oil ready. You bring him, we ask him questions, then you expel him. We’ll have a bit of time before he can find another vessel, after that.”

Cas nods and leaves.

Dean turns to Sam. “Sam, you-”

Sam raises a hand to interrupt his brother. “We owe her.” He says simply. “And even if we didn’t,
even if I didn’t, it’s Robin.” He finishes like that should explain it all for Dean and it does.

So the older Winchester nods. Thank you. “About before, what I said...” He trails off. He’d been nasty, he’d been cruel.

“You weren’t totally wrong, Dean. I shouldn’t have...given up so easily on her. I was really ashamed, you know? That I let that night happen, that I let her do that. It’s really fucked up because I’m grateful too.”

Dean nods swallowing down the lump in his throat. This is hitting too close to home. He does know. He does know so much.

“You were right, but so was I.” Sam continues. “You need to talk to mom. Robin would have a shit fit if she finds- Robin will have a shit fit when she finds out that you haven’t even tried to...spend time with her. Not that you should do it for Robin, but you... You know what I mean right?”

“Yeah I hear you.”

“That shit with Cas too, you-”

“Don’t push it.” Dean warns.

“It’s not his fault, Dean.”

“He took her back in time, he- I’m not having this argument with you.”

“Fine, okay.” Sam consents. “There’s something else. Earlier, what I said, I was wrong too. Robin... She isn’t wasted on you. She’s great for you, sure, but you’re great for her too. You two, it works.”

“Let’s just focus on getting her back.”

Once they prep the holy oil and a banishing sigil, just in case, in the dungeon, it becomes a waiting game. One that Dean’s nerves barely handle. It’s by day’s end, three days since Robin didn’t die, that Cas returns.

“Now!” The angel thunders, barely able to keep a lid on Lucifer as he walks into the painted circle

Sam hurriedly drops a match onto the oil and watches Holy flames erupt just as Lucifer takes over Castiel’s vessel. Sam sees the exact moment it happens. The second Castiel’s contorted features smooth out into a corrupt smile.

“Sam!” Lucifer claps his hands together loudly. “So good to see you again. Missed me?” He smirks.

Sam hates that he does it, but he takes large steps back and tries to conceal the shiver of fear that runs down his spine.

“Dean.” Lucifer acknowledges in a bored manner.

“Look, we’re not trying to start something here, we’re not planning on hurting you, we just-”

Lucifer laughs clamorously. “That’s your opening line? Really? Are you under the impression that you can hurt me?” He waits a beat for Dean to respond but then barrels on. “It’s cute, really. I mean not as cute as say.” He tilts his head to peer over Dean’s shoulder and at Sam who pointedly avoids his gaze. “Sammy here begging for mercy, but cute nonetheless.”
Dean grits his teeth together.

Lucifer takes a look around and eyes the flames. “This again? Did we not establish that your little bonfire can’t hold me?”

Lucifer does something with his grace then, makes the ground shake, makes a wind pick up, makes the holy fire flicker.

“Okay, Cas, anytime you want to take over, s’fine by me.” Dean says signaling Sam to be at the ready by the banishing sigil.

“Oh yeah, he’s been trying to do that for a little while now.” Lucifer shrugs. “Since he got a glimpse at what I’m planning to do to you.”

With one last shudder to the room, the fire dies out.

“There.” Lucifer exhales gleefully. “It was getting really warm in here and not just because I’m a handsome fellow.”

“Sam!” Dean roars standing between his brother and the Devil.

Lucifer rolls his eyes as Sam slams his cut hand onto the sigil.

“Oops.” Lucifer says. “Did I do that?”

That’s when Sam notices the crack in the wall that splits one of the sigil’s lines.

“Dean.” Sam intones fearfully.

The brothers watch as Lucifer smirks wickedly and then as his features twist into something pained.

“Run!” Castiel bellows.

The brothers barely have the time to flinch before Lucifer seals the doors to the room.

“Now, now, Castiel.” Lucifer chimes, back in control. “Don’t be rude to our guests.”

At the last word, Lucifer flicks his wrist to send Dean flying in the general vicinity of a metal chair. Maybe he’d have him hit a wall first. Nothing happens though. Dean stays stood where he is.

Lucifer tilts his head and tries again, this time he puts his back into it. Dean remains unmoved. He tries it with Sam next. Nothing.

“I really wanted to torture you both, first, I swear, but I think I’ll just get this over with. Honestly, it’s ridiculous the two of you have lived for so long.” He touches each of his thumbs to his middle fingers and grunts. “Stop resisting me Castiel.” He breathes deeply, gaining back full control and-

“Sammy, I love you.”

“I love-”

-and snaps his fingers.

“-you too, Dean.”
Lucifer snaps his fingers again, starts snapping away to a dope beat, really, but nothing happens. “Huh.” He says. “That’s new.”

Dean runs his hands along his body, as if verifying he’s in one piece and when Sam steps up next to him he runs his hands along his brother’s body too.

Sam smacks Dean away. “Dude.”

“Dude.”

“Dudes.” Lucifer beckons their attention. “I’m impressed. How did you pull this off?”

“We...err...”

“God.” Sam supplies. “When he was here, he said you wouldn’t be able to hurt us. I think it hasn’t worn off.”


“Wait!” Dean stops him. All or nothing. Go big or go home. Go big and get Robin home. “We want your help. We need it.” Dean admits. “We think you can tell-”

“I know exactly what you want, what you need and what you think.” Lucifer cuts him off. “I see it all in Castiel’s mind. I see what he’s seen too, so I know where he’s been. And I know where...the girl...” Lucifer’s face pinches in concentration then, searching for information Castiel tries to hide. “Robin Fera.” He laughs then. “The last daughter of the First Family, really?” He asks of his brother before focusing back on the Winchesters. “I know where she is too.”

“How do you know? How do you know what that place is? Nobody else has any idea.” Sam takes a defiant step forward.

“Because I’ve been there before.”

For a long minute the brothers only stare at the Devil.

“You’ve been there before?” Dean verifies eventually

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I have. Plenty of times. But you’re asking the wrong questions. The question that needs to be asked is why would I help you?”

Dean sighs. “Name it.”

“I’m sorry what?” Lucifer questions.

“Your price, Lucifer. Every person’s got one, so name yours.”

Lucifer laughs at that. “I’m not a person, Dean-o.” He says playfully. “I am an archangel.” His voice thunders suddenly as the shadow of his wings spread behind him.

“Fine.” Dean accepts, unimpressed by the theatrics. “Every douchebag has a price. You gonna tell me you’re not one of those either?” Dean throws dauntlessly.

Theres a brief moment of crackling tension before Lucifer is laughing again.

“Y’know, I’m not so sure why Sam’s my favourite.” Lucifer says walking further into the room
and straddling a metal chair. “You, Dean, are a hoot.” He winks at Dean and then puts his finger up. “What’s that Castiel? Speak up, buddy I can’t hear you. Now, now, Cas, don’t hide your thoughts from me- Oh! There it is.”

He grins then leans forward conspiratorially.

“Castiel seems to think,” Lucifer whispers as though he were sharing a secret. “That this Robin girl thinks you’re a hoot too, Dean. Imagine that, something she and I have in common. Oh wait! There’s more. And it’s rich. You wanna know what Castiel thinks? I’ll tell you anyway. He thinks Robin is a hoot too. He thinks she might think he’s a hoot back. Oh, how sweet, he misses her. Misses her voice and holding her hand. Oh, Castiel! How PG-13, of you.

“Y’know it’s really private in Epsolguidé lately, tell me Dean, do you think they knocked hoots? A rough thought, huh? I hear ya, your best angel, your best girl, can’t be easy. But, hey, at least your dad didn’t exile you for having an opinion, y’know?”

“Enough.” Sam says. “You wouldn’t still be here, if you weren’t considering helping us. So what’s it going to be.”

“Sam, gosh, you never just wanna play, huh? Always work work work. You’re a smart cookie though. I am mildly invested in seeing Dean’s attempt at a relationship blow up in his face. Plus, Castiel just fished me out of the bottom of the ocean and he’s very fond of the girl. He’s my little brother and as his big bro I gotta look out for him at least a little. So I’ll help.”

“Oh.” Sam says tentatively.

“But I want something in return.”

“There it is.” Sam flings an arm up.

“What is it?” Dean asks still recovering from what Lucifer has unloaded so far.

“I don’t know yet.”

“You don’t know yet?” Dean repeats.

“Let’s just say, you’ll owe me a favour.” Lucifer grins as the brothers share an uncertain look. “Scary, isn’t it? Owning one to the Devil.” He rises to his feet and walks unbearably close to the hunters.

“Fine.” Dean accepts because right this second there isn’t anything he can think of that he wouldn’t do to get Robin back. “If once you do this you leave Cas’ vessel.” Despite his anger, Dean wouldn’t leave Cas at Satan’s mercy.

“Deal, but only because I hate having a roommate.” Lucifer points to his head. “Especially one this loud. You know, he’s been trying to figure out what I meant by knocking hoots. So sweet.” He sticks his hand out for Dean to shake.

Dean looks at Sam, for reassurance, or approval maybe, he doesn’t know. Whatever it is he’s looking for he gets though when Sam nods firmly.

Dean slips his hand into Lucifer’s and gets pulled forward. Their lips crash together for the briefest of seconds.

“You should know,” Lucifer whispers near Dean’s ear. His breath raises goosebumps on the man’s
skin which happens to be doing its darnedest to crawl away. “That was totally unnecessary and I just wanted to make you uncomfortable.” Lucifer cackles as he exit the dungeon. “Let’s get this show on the road shall we!”

-

As soon as Robin smacks her hand down, she shuts her eyes and tucks her head between her knees in anticipation of the blinding white light Cas had explained would occur.

It’s only when she doesn’t feel the hand once gripping her wrist that she raises her head and the weight of what she’s done hits her. Cas was right there, kneeling in front of her, and now he’s gone. And now she’s alone.

She looks around and watches as the smoke seems to close in on her, getting dense again. She lets out a shuddering breath and falls to her side in a fetus position right by the sigil. She stares at the cuts on her hands and watches as the skin knits back together.

She holds back the tears as best she can, and for a while she does pretty well. Castiel is out, he’s free from this place. This eternal nothing. He’ll get to Sam and Dean and then it’ll only be a matter of time before they find a way to break her out of here. She thinks this as hard as she can, believes in it as fiercely as she can.

She stays like that, curled in on herself, beside a drawing made in her own blood, hoping, for a full year.

Long days and longer minutes.

Then she cries.

It’s another year before the tears finally stop their incessant streaming. She figures dehydration isn’t a thing, in the fog. She sits up, arms draped over her bent knees, and stares at the sigil for a few decades.

She decides she doesn’t want to walk anymore. That was a her and Cas thing and it’s just her now. She also, decides that the sigil and the shattered phone mark her new home. This one patch in this vast nowhere, is where she’ll stay.

She’s so lonely.

That’s not to say she isn’t glad she got Cas out of here. The more time passes, the more grateful she is that she managed to. That it had even worked. It was a long shot, since his wings weren’t even working. Cas may or may not come back for her, it doesn’t really matter. He’s out; he’s with the brothers. That’s what matter.

She’s so lonely.

At least half a century has gone by and Robin hasn’t moved. She spends most of her time thinking about people she loves. She thinks about bantering with George as kids. She thinks about when she first met Rodney and how she never in a million years thought they’d end up dating. She thinks about their first kiss. She thinks about when Amy, who hadn’t known a thing about hunters, showed up at George and Rodney’s apartment off of campus the day after they saved her from her ghoul roommate and how she demanded to be let into their ‘secret club of badassery’.

She thinks about the time she and her dad surprised their mom with a wendigo hunt. Her mom loved hunting wendigos, but they were a rare breed. She thinks about the easy back and forth she
had with Sam during long days of research. She thinks about Dean. She thinks about Dean. She thinks about Dean.

*She’s so lonely.*

More than once, more than a hundred of times, she finds herself blurting something out excitedly only to remember that Cas isn’t there. She’d grown used to him *being there*, always within reach. It was a habit for her to share with him what’s on her mind and to have it met with understanding and curiosity or laughter and sarcasm. No one is around to respond anymore, though.

When her first century alone, her third in the fog, comes to an end, Robin can’t stand her thoughts anymore. So she stands and practices fighting moves Cas taught her, making sure not to stray too far from the sigil. When the fog makes it impossible she huddles back close to the red print and works on her languages. Then she recites lore, more of what Cas has taught her. Then she cries again for a few years.

*She’s so lonely.* Like she’s in a void, but there’s also a void inside of her. Like she’s nowhere and there’s nothing inside of her. Like all there is and all there ever will be in this fog is emptiness. Like all she’ll ever feel again is empty. A gaping hole in her chest. She’s hollowed out and she feels like the fog has taken up residency inside the shell of her body. As if she’s been here so long, she’s mirroring the place from within.

She’s so lonely and she thinks that loneliness is *alive* inside of her. Living and breathing and robbing her of her air. Snatching away pieces of her, leaving her desolate and painfully aware that she has an eternity of this. Of solitude. Of nothing.

She cries some more, her sobs echoing off of what, she doesn’t know. There are no walls here. Only fog and floor. And her. From now on, only ever her.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. I'd love it if you shared your thoughts :) you know the drill
Sam and Dean follow Lucifer out to the library where he hops onto the table and plants his feet on a nearby chair.

“So?” Dean asks impatiently.

“So...” Lucifer taunts.

“So where is she dammit?”

“In Epsolguinté.”

“Epsum-what?” Sam tries to reiterate.

“How do we go there and get her?” Dean asks skipping straight to what matters.

“You can’t.”

“Is there a way out on her end?”

“No.”

Dean sighs deeply trying to keep a lid on his anger. The Devil was playing with them. Or playing them.

Sam takes over. “What does it mean? That word, Epsogun-something.”

“Epsolguinté. It’s Enochian.”

“For...” Sam prompts.

“There’s no word for it in English. Or any man language for that matter.” Lucifer says unhelpfully. When both Sam and Dean glare in perfect sync he laughs. “I guess the closest thing to it would be...storage.” He grins.

“Storage?” Dean deadpans confused.

“Yes.” Lucifer confirms.

“Like an Ikea unit?” Dean is positive that the Devil is yanking their chain now.

“More like a locker unit. God’s.”

“I’m sorry what? Did you just say God has a supernatural storage locker?”
Lucifer nods.

Sam and Dean share a look.

“Like a warehouse,” Lucifer says clasping his hands together closely. Then he extends his arms as far as they’ll go spreading his fingers. “Only massive.”

“What does God need a locker for?” Dean questions. He’s a lot angry and a lot confused and a lot desperate and he doesn’t know which emotion to pursue.

Lucifer rolls his eyes. “He doesn’t so much anymore, but he used to. How do you think the world was created exactly? You think Dear Old Dad just willed it all into existence without having to do any planning? Without having to do revisions?”

“Well...Yeah.” Sam volunteers sheepishly.

“Well... No.” Lucifer mocks. “Before Daddy could put ants on Earth, he had to make the anteater. Once he’d made man, he had to put it somewhere while he created woman. After salt, he needed a hot minute to think up pepper.”

Sam and Dean stare.

Stare.

And stare.

“So what... God stored... He just...” Sam tries to make sense of the new information.

“He put things on...on a goddamn cookie cooling rack?” Dean exclaims.

Lucifer laughs again. “Makes him seem less all-powerful, huh? Less like some creative genius. Feels more believable that’d he’d make an abomination like your kind.” His words end up bitter.

“Didn’t you get over that?” Dean asks. “Don’t answer. Don’t care. Therapy is not part of the deal.”

“So what’s our way in and out?” Sam quizzes.

“You don’t have one. God has full control over what enters and what leaves. He was a bit paranoid some of his creations would be accidentally released or that Amara would get in and destroy them. So you need his power to cross the metaphorical border. Think less locker garage door and more pimped out bank vault with DNA detection.”

“That explains why Rowena couldn’t get a read on the place.” Sam says to Dean. “If God was keeping it from Amara then-”

“You’ve got Rowena here?” Lucifer shouts. His body tenses, ready to jump up and take action. “Do you know what that heathen did to me?”

“Yeah she mentioned it.” Dean replies flippantly. “She’s gone now. You two can squabble after you hold up your end of the deal.”

“Yeah, you wouldn’t have agreed to it and stuck around if the place was unaccessible.” Sam says.

“I never said no one could go there. I said not you.”

“Then who?” Dean demands.
Lucifer smirks. “An archangel.”

“You mean you.” Sam spits.

“I mean me.” Lucifer agrees. “See, Dad has a long list of faults and one of them is that he’s a disorganised mess. So he enlisted the archangels, myself included, to keep things orderly in Epsolguinté, granting us complete access.”

Dean holds his breath. This was really it. It might not be ideal. It might be risky as fuck. But he was getting Robin out. Fear struck him suddenly. Hadn’t he had this exact thought before? Hadn’t he felt so close and still remained much too far away?

“So you’re saying you can go there and bring her back.” Sam states.

“No, I’m saying I can go there.”

“And bring her back.” Dean finishes the sentence.

“No. I’m saying I can go there.” Lucifer repeats annoyed. “I don’t have clearance to bring creatures in or out with me. Even back then. The archangels, we only kept the place in check.”

“So what the fuck do we do? It’s not like Father of the Year is answering any of our calls.” Dean flares.

“Sounds like Dad.” Lucifer mutters sourly.

“Wait, wait.” Sam says, wheels churning. “You said God’s power was required to get her through the door right? What about a Hand of God?”

“Could that work?” Dean asks Satan hopefully. *Dean asks Satan hopefully.* What even is his life.

“Oh Sammy, such a bright kid. Not bright enough to consider how a Hand of God would obliterate little Robin. Not bright enough to finish college either.”

“You’re a dick, you know?” Sam throws along with a withering glare. “You’re already the damn devil you think maybe you’d pull back a bit. Don’t worry Lucifer, no one is going to get confused and think you’re a nice guy if you’re not constantly being an asshole.”

Lucifer laughs. “Samantha, please, don’t get your panties twisted, you know I like them on right if they have to be on at all. You’re not not onto something, though.”

“Stop with the double negatives and cut to the chase.” Dean snaps.

“My oh my, like brother like...brother. Okay, I admit, I can do better than that last one.”

The brothers shoot him with another United Glare, patent pending.

“So there’s an object.” Lucifer starts. “The Staff of Eden.”

“Eden as in the garden?”

“Yes, good, you’ve been going to bible study. The garden was big, too big for two people if you ask me especially dirt people like Adam and Eve. It took me a while to track them down once Gadreel let me in.”

“Sorry that you were inconvenienced in your corruption of humanity.”
Lucifer rolls his eyes. “Point is the happy couple would explore, wander, get lost. Not always as a unit; for any marriage to be successful you need to spend some time apart from your partner.”

“Thanks for the advice.” Sam says sarcastically.

“You’re very welcome. Your brother could need it if he plans on holding on to the Last Child.”

“Can you get on with it? What does any of this have to do with EpsolLand?”

“Despite their time apart Adam and Eve spent their nights together. Sometimes they strayed too far from each other, though. So God gifted them with the Staff of Eden. It splits into two pieces. Each ape would take one and when the time came, God’s power embedded into the staff would draw the two parts together and, as long as Adam and Eve were touching the objects, it’d reunite them as well.”

“And this thing, the staff, it’s still around?” Sam asks.

“Last I heard, it’s in Heaven where God left it after confiscating it from Adam and Eve. Y’know, ’cause they sinned.” Lucifer smirks.

“Even if we can get our hands on it, what, we’re supposed to trust that you’ll bring Robin her half without hurting her.”

Lucifer has the decency to look offended. “A deal’s a deal, Dean-o.”

“Right, because the Devil’s word is worth anything.”

“Touché. If it makes you feel better that which God creates can not be harmed in Epsolguinté.”

“Again, your word, not really gonna cut it for us.”

“The whole purpose of the place was to keep his toys safe and just like he left them. Not only can’t they get injured, they can’t change. The very air there maintains the status quo. But if you won’t believe me, fine.” Lucifer rolls his eyes and then suddenly he is no longer Lucifer at all. When the man before them speaks next it’s Castiel’s low voice that the Winchesters hear.

“He speaks the truth.” Castiel assures. “Robin and I sparred in the Fog Roo- in Epsolguinté. All bruising and abrasions healed on their own. She did not age, or go hungry, or increase in muscle mass despite the extensive training.”

“Age? Extensive training? Cas you were there for two days.” Dean questions confusedly, forgetting for a moment his anger towards the angel. He’s more comforted by his presence than anything else.

“We were-” Cas begins before Lucifer takes over again.

“Time works differently there, yada yada, life is hard, yada yada. Get me the Staff of Eden and I’ll get you your girl back. Then we can discuss payment.” Lucifer’s smirk makes Dean’s skin crawl and Sam’s soul quiver.

“...”

“You prayed.” Ayil says appearing in front of Dean.

They’re in his bedroom, Dean sitting at the edge of his mattress.
“Got Castiel back.” Dean starts as some kind of olive branch.

Ayil nods. “We sensed his return.”

“Didn’t feel like throwin’ him a welcome back party huh? A Glad-you’re-alive-and-well-and-not-dead-or-lost Celebration?” He means it as a joke but somehow the words come out more bitterly than he’d intended.

Ayil remains unperturbed. “We were still unable to track him. He was on the move constantly in a large body of water and then he was...with Lucifer.”

“Smart to keep your distance then.”

“Is Lucifer why you’ve called for me?”

Dean shakes his head no. “He was in Epsolguinté. Cas, I mean.”

“How do you know of that place?” Ayil questions with slight defense.

“Your Morning Star filled me in. Castiel didn’t know about it, so I’m guessing it isn’t public knowledge for angels. We couldn’t find anything in the Men of Letters archives either.”

It’s Ayil’s turn to shake his head. “Very few are privy to this information. I only know of it from assisting Metratron in his scribings for God.”

“Robin made it happen, you know. She’s the one who got Cas out of there.”

“I guess I shouldn’t be surprised the Last Daughter could manage such a feat.”

“Why do you call her that?” Dean asks, straying from his intended goal of the conversation to satiate his curiosity.

Ayil gives him an odd look, as if unlike Epsolguinté’s existence this is public knowledge. “Because she is the last born of the First Family. It makes her the Last Child and the Last Daughter.”

“People keep saying that, but she isn’t related to the president.” Dean says exasperatedly, though he realises he’s missing a big part of the puzzle. He isn’t dumb enough to think this has anything to do with politics.

“Not the First Family of the United States of America. The First Family of Hunting.”

When all Dean does is stare Ayil continues.

“You’ve heard of, met even if I’m not mistaken, the Alpha Vampire.”

Dean nods.

“He is said to be the first of the monsters, the first of that which goes bump in the night. When your kind were huddled around the first fires he was the thing in the dark. And Robin Fera’s ancestors were what hunted him and his, even then. Each ensuing generation since has taken to the life of hunting, making it the longest lineage of hunters in recorded and unrecorded history.

“The name of the First Family has changed over the years, the millennia. In fact, at the very beginning, there weren’t names to be had. Now they are the Feras because as the Last Child Robin carries the name, but throughout time they have mostly been referred to as the First Family. They built a reputation that spread widely throughout the supernatural world. Each community has
learned of them one way or another. I am surprised you have not heard of this.”

Dean is unsure of how to react to this information. He and Sam are direct descendants of Cain and Abel and still this was hard to wrap his mind around.

Sensing his unease Ayil shifts the topic. “So that is where Castiel has been?”

“No.” Dean corrects after regrouping. “It’s where they’ve been and Robin is still there.”

“You want my help.” Ayil states. “Believe that it pains me to admit that I do not have access to such a place.”

“I know. That’s not what I want from you.” Dean clarifies. “The Staff of Eden. My sources say the angels have it in Heaven.”

“Your sources are Lucifer.” Ayil accuses, sounding harsh for the first time.

Dean takes a deep breath. “Yes. This is a chance to bring her home. To safety. Most of your siblings are assholes, no offense, but it’s obvious that you believe in good. In what is right. What’s more right than saving a life? Robin... She doesn’t deserve to be trapped there.” Dean isn’t sure that he has convinced the angel to help him so he keeps going. “Besides, if she’s the last of this Super Family wouldn’t you want her out here in the world, hunting like, apparently, literally everyone before her in her bloodline. Isn’t she part of some prophesy? You guys like those, you don’t have some destiny planned for her?” The idea that they do makes Dean sick to his stomach but he figures they can cross that bridge when they get there, but they gotta get there first.

Ayil softens and quirks a small smile at Dean. “The Feras aren’t magic, Dean. They are very human, very normal. Very heroic, yes, but there is nothing more to them than what they have made of themselves. In any case, have you considered why Robin ended up in Epsolguinté, in the first place? How she was put there?”

Ayil allows a beat to pass, but continues before Dean can get a word in, though he seems too stunned by the question to even try. “I will provide you the Staff, Dean Winchester, but I will also offer you a piece of advice. When Gadreel let Lucifer into the Garden, it exposed man to corruption, it incited the birth of demons, it pushed God to leave us and it created Hell. It’s a single moment, a lone decision that ended up being a catalyst for the rupture of Eden, of peace and of paradise. Gadreel’s mistake was listening to the Morning Star. You would be wise not to repeat it.”

Ayil disappears leaving in his wake a...tree branch.

The Staff of Eden is on the library table where Sam and Dean observe it with slight suspicion.

“It doesn’t look like much.” Sam points out tentatively.

“Doesn’t look like- Doesn’t look like much? It looks like an oversized twig with a ball of yarn hot glued to it, Sammy. Not much doesn’t begin to cover it.” Dean quips back.

“You don’t think Ayil gave you something that isn’t the real deal do you?”

“Nah, I mean, I can’t know for sure, I guess, but he doesn’t strike me as much of a douchebag angel as the rest.”

“I agree with you, but we’ve been fooled before.”
“You made quick time.” Lucifer says appearing beside them and nodding at the branch.

Dean jumps, in his defense, only a little. “Where’ve you been?”

“See, if only my dad was as invested in my whereabouts as you, Dean-o. You got the Staff faster than I thought you would.”

“Can you tell if it’s authentic?” Sam asks.

“That’s it alright.” Lucifer picks it up making both Winchesters tense.

The object is a long and narrow branch, maybe the size of a wrist in thickness. It looked like it would snap easily but it was sturdier than it appeared to be. The bark was smooth to the touch making it obvious that it was well worn. One end split into three, each section curling around a woven ball. Lucifer tightened his grip on the stick with one hand and grasped the globe with the other before tearing the two apart.

“He’s gone.” Dean points out unnecessarily as he easily catches the ball.

“How worried are we?” Sam asks.

“Very but we’re trying not to think about it too much.”

- 

Sam and Dean sit and stand and pace and sit back down for a solid hour. Well, Dean does anyway. Sam mostly watches him do it.

“Shouldn’t he be back yet?” Dean exclaims.

“He did say time works differently there.” Sam reminds his brother.

“Yeah, well time here is making me want to rip my hair out.”

“Hey,” Sam says reassuringly. “This is going to work out.”

“Yeah.” Dean replies to just say something. “I think I’ll go check in on mom.” Dean says suddenly, rising to his feet slowly.

“Yeah?” Sam smiles hopefully.

“Yeah. S’pretty late. I’m just gonna make sure she’s okay for the night.”

“Alright.”

- 

Dean had been putting it off because he didn’t think he wanted to hear what his mom had to say.
He doesn’t want to hear her try to explain what she did, or hear her defend it, or god forbid, hear her say she would do it again. The few glimpses he’d caught of her over the past few days pointed more likely to her feeling guilty. He doesn’t want to see that either. He doesn’t want to hear her apologise. The reason why is selfish of him, too. The reason makes him a bad person. Dean doesn’t want to see his mom’s remorse because he doesn’t want to forgive her.

He’s so angry, the sight of his mother boils his blood. He’s not so emotionally inept that he doesn’t know what’s underneath all that rage though. Dean knows once he forgives her, his fury will dissipate and then all he will be left with is hurt. So much of it. Because how could she have done that? How could she choose death over life with her sons? He’d felt alone before, but that night his mother made him feel abandoned. That night, the most important woman in his life decided he wasn’t worth sticking around for and Robin died because she believed the opposite. She believed it so completely she’d been willing to give up her life.

He can’t fully grasp how much of a disappointment he must be to his mother for her to be pushed to commit that act. He can’t even bring himself to think of it in words that aren’t euphemisms. Dean is no stranger to self-loathing and it wasn’t totally undeserved. He had done more than his fair share of shitty shit. He’d injured, sacrificed, tortured, tormented, killed. He had even enjoyed it some times. Sam never thought less of him though. Dean thought that was because they’re family and family stands by you no matter what. He doesn’t think that’s the case anymore, because Mary is his mom and she didn’t think he had sufficient redeemable qualities to want to be around him. Mothers know best, right?

Dean doesn’t want to open that can of worms because he thinks they’ll eat him alive. So that’s why he’d been putting off talking to Mary, that’s why he holds onto the anger. Tonight though, he’ll try dialing it back if only to ease some of the burden on his brother’s shoulders. Sammy is always there for him, he’s working with Lucifer for him, Dean needs to start thanking him for it. Yeah, words and talking that’s important, but actions, that’s the best way Dean knows how to communicate. So he can do this for Sam.

“Hey.” He says simply leaning against the doorframe of his mother’s room.

“Dean.” Her voice cracks as she sits up in the bed obviously surprised to see him standing there.

“I thought you’d be asleep. It’s really late.” Dean knows how late it is but he only just realises how tired he is. Had it really been that morning that he’d spoken to Grace?

“Sometimes it feels like I’ve slept enough for a lifetime.” Mary answers.

Dean nods because he doesn’t know what else to say. Bitterly he thinks that her words are accurate. She’d been ghost in the bunker more than anything else. Dean had thought it was part of her adjusting but he sees now that she just didn’t want to be around him. That makes sense to him because Dean isn’t that great of a person but Sam… How could his mom meet Sam and not adore him? The kid was a goddamn beacon of good and hope. Just like that, Dean’s anger flared up again.

He wonders if that moment he and his mom shared in the kitchen had been genuine at all. She’d said she understood that he and Sam couldn’t quit the hunting life and then she said something that made him believe he and Robin could work out. Makes sense to do it together. His mom had made it seem just as simple as Robin did. Like the two of them could do that, could just be hunters and be in lov- Could be hunters and be together and that could be a thing they did.

His mom had been what pushed him to not shut down the idea completely. She’s what had pushed him to consider it. Sam coaxed him along the road and Robin convinced him with her easy smile
and her way of giving, but his mom... She’s the one who’d even made it a feasible possibility in his mind. What if that wasn’t even her, what if it was bullshit she was forcing out in an attempt to play the role of mother she didn’t want.

“Dean, about what I did-” Mary starts tentatively.

Her voice is small and she seems so fragile to Dean which almost makes him feel guilty for his thoughts and for interrupting her to say, “Mom, I really don’t want to talk about that night.”

“That’s what Sammy said.” She sighs.

“Can you blame him?” Dean snaps and he can’t even bring himself to regret it. His jaw ticks and his hands grip his arms more tightly in their crossed position.

“No.” Mary breathes. She’d been expecting Dean to lash out and she thinks she deserves it so she doesn’t hold it against him. “Can’t blame you either.”

Dean exhales at Mary’s easy acceptance thinking she might have pushed the topic. It reminds him of Robin and Dean is suddenly reminded of the Cosmos’ words. They’d said Robin was - is - the most similar thing to Mary in existence. He’d resisted the idea but hadn’t Robin chosen death over him too? Hadn’t she chosen to leave instead of staying with him? The circumstances were different, he’d give her that but did it matter that they were? In any case, Cas is the one who whisked her away. He’s angry with Cas, he tells himself.

“Is there something you do want to talk about?” Mary asks and it’s so hopeful. She’ll take anything her son will give her.

Dean sighs as a tinge of guilt finally does creep up on him. His mom is going through something, something happened to her when Amara brought him back, he needs to be cutting her some slack not making things more difficult on her. He’s been so swept up in getting Robin back, and before that in getting the Cosmos off her back, that he hasn’t even begun researching a way to help his mom. Not that he’d know where to start.

He’s just so goddamn angry. He’s about to tell her to get some rest. He’s about to turn his back and return to the library. He doesn’t because there’s a plea in his mom’s eyes and there might be rot in his soul but Dean can’t bring himself to walk away from her.

He doesn’t answer but what he does do is walk further into the room and climb onto the bed. He leans his back against the headboard just like Mary and the two sit there. They stare forward and they listen to each other’s breathing. Things aren’t alright, because Dean is still angry and hurt and Mary is still sorry and lost but there’s a mutual understanding that in that moment things could be just okay. Alright is for families that are less fucked up than theirs and okay will just have to do.

- “How do you do it?” Sam had asked her.

It was a late night of researching, those that inevitably turned into long talks about hunts and interests and loves and feelings.

“Being marvelously fantastic just comes naturally to me.” She laughed like bells in the quiet of the bunker. “It’s a bit of a curse if we’re being honest.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “I swear you have an ego that would rival God’s.”
Robin pondered that for a moment. “Figures that He would be into himself.”

“I meant how do you love it so much? Hunting.”

Robin sighed. Sam wasn’t the first hunter to ask her just that. More often than not hunters found themselves in the life due to circumstances, due to duty, due to obligation. Which was partly the case for her too, she guessed. She was raised in it. Circumstances. She knew what was out there and couldn’t not fight for the safety of others. Duty. She had to honor her parents, make them proud. Obligation. Though that last one was tacked on after they died, and she’d been hunting long before that.

“Sometimes it seems like you don’t...like you don’t see the bad. There’s so much bad I don’t know how you do it.”

Robin shrugged leveling Sam with a gaze that casted out any doubt he’d had about her maybe not grasping fully the reality of this life. She was young and she was cheerful but Robin Fera was not naive. “I love it and I understand that nothing else will do for me. No other job, no other lifestyle will give my life as much meaning. That allows me to love it more. Hunters have a nasty habit of either resisting or accepting and resenting. But y’know, the...problems let’s call them, that plague this life, they’re everywhere. Soldiers in the army face horrors, face death, face the loss of comrades. People who grow up in some neighbourhoods, in some parts of the world, face horrors, face death, face the loss of comrades. The difference is being hunter means you chase some of those things down instead of running from them and a lot of good comes out of that.”

Sam let her words sink, it had given him a lot to think about. “So you never wish for an out, never imagine a different life for yourself? Doesn’t living like this take its toll on you?”

She shook her head. “I got an out and I still chose to live on the road. I got an out and I was miserable not doing what I think I was born to do.”

“Killing. It doesn’t bother you that you think you were born to kill?” Sam asked. Despite the words being a bit accusatory and harsh his tone was full of genuine wonder, like he really just wants to understand.

Robin shook her head again, an easy smile playing at her lips. “Not killing. Protecting.”

Sam was a bit baffled because she really believed it. Really believed that it didn’t boil down to the actual hunt but to the lives they saved. He believed it too, but, unlike his, her faith seemed so unwavering. It was nice to see. “There are other ways of protecting people.” He said anyway. “I could have done a lot of good as a lawyer.”

Robin didn’t even bat an eye when she said, “So do that.”

Like it was that simple. Like it was easy. She almost had Sam believing that it was. She had a way of making everything seem so uncomplicated and accessible.

Robin smiles softly at the memory. She and Sam, and sometimes Dean, had had a lot of great talks in the library. At least Robin thinks it was in the library. Definitely in that... hatch? Bunker. Definitely in that bunker of theirs. Details of her memories seem to be falling away. A consequence of time, she supposes. So much time and yet none at all and yet on it went stretching before her in a threatening eternity of solitude.

- 

“Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends. Mm, I get high with a little help from my friends.
Mm, gonna try with a little help from my friends.” Robin sings. “What do I do when my love is away? Does it worry you to be alone? How do I feel by the end of the day? Are you sad because you’re on your own?” She continues, off key and a little off beat, she thinks.

“No, I get by with a little help from my friends. Mm, I get high with a little help from my friends. Mm, gonna try with a little help from my friends...” She frowns when she doesn’t recall the next verse.

She’s been alone in the fog for just over a hundred and twenty years and she’s been trying to finish this damn song for the last five. She’d given up hundreds of times but it kept nagging her in the back of her mind so she always ended up picking it right back up.

Robin is sitting cross legged by the sigil with a silly little grin on her face as she recalls a memory she’s fond of.

“This one time my parents B&Eed a bunch of places just to steal their security systems so I could practice cracking them. The sheriff’s department was so confused it was hilarious. It took me a while to get the hang of it too so they had to keep-” She tilts her head to look up and stops short. Cas isn’t there.

She’s alone, she reminds herself. How odd that she’d forget when the feeling is constantly weighing her down. Sometimes she thinks her ribs will snap and her chest will cave in from the pressure of it.

It’s a little blurred but Robin remembers it. She remembers Mary pushing the plunger and collapsing into her sons’ arms. She isn’t too sure how she remembers because it hadn’t really happened. Well it had but then she changed it so this version of her shouldn’t be able to recall the memory. But she is able to recall it and it isn’t the only thing. She remembers dying. She remembers being in Dean’s arms. She remembers thinking she should close her eyes because she didn’t want him to have to do that thing they do in moves where they close the person’s lids. She remembers shaking and realising it was from the sobs wracking through Dean’s body. She remembers her last breath.

-  

Left Jab

Left Jab

Roundhouse kick

Right Cross

Uppercut

Flying knee

Tornado kick

-
Dean and Robin were in the car, the black one. Dean loves it. Loves her? Anyway, they were driving, Robin remembers that much.

It was the morning after Mary returned to the bunker. Cas had warded Robin’s ribs and soul and whatever else he could get his hands on. She and Dean were driving a few towns west to test out Cas’ work.

They were both relieved to find that sleeping together and agreeing not to pursue anything further hadn’t ruined their dynamic.

“You need to dial back the pretentiousness because this song is catchy whether you’re willing to admit it or not.” Robin can’t recall the song but it was pop and happy and had made her foot bounce a tad off beat.

“Catchy is not the same as good, Robin, I can’t believing you’re arguing this with me.” Dean scolded her, feeling offended at her gall.

“Dean not everything that isn’t classic rock is bad.” She countered.

“Remove the second word from that sentence and you’ve got yourself a true statement.” He argued as he simultaneously switched lanes and reached for the radio.

She slapped his hand away. “I want to hear it.” She complained. “The best part is coming.”

“There are no good parts.” He muttered but let the radio be. He told himself it was because he had to focus on driving and not because of the way Robin smiled as she murmured along to lyrics she didn’t quite know.

So maybe their relationship hadn’t been ruined but damn if it wasn’t hard to keep himself from wanting more. He wanted everything but he couldn’t ask for that when he couldn’t offer much in return.

Despite his understanding of this, his hand reached out to land on her knee and steady her bouncing leg. His hand froze as he realised what he’d done, he’d broken an unspoken rule. Or at least he thought he had before Robin, without missing a hum to the song, mindlessly placed her hand atop of his.

He was struggling with the need to keep his hand right where it was, trapped between hers and her thigh and the sense of obligation to retrieve it when Robin screeched beside him as she tried to hit a high note.

Dean laughed and he’d just as easily forgotten the dilemma. Unconsciously, he turned his hand so his palm faced up and he could clasp Robin’s. He gave it a rough squeeze in silent encouragement of her performance.

“Three stars.” He scored her when the song came to and end.

“Out of five?” She exclaimed. “That’s not so bad.”

“Not out of five.” He corrected with his eyes crinkling into a smile.

“You’re mean.” She insulted lamely.

Her hand left his then to turn off the FM and press play for whichever one of Dean’s cassettes was in at the time. Dean had turned his hand back around and given her thigh a squeeze to assuage her
bruised ego. That’s when they both realised what they’d been doing. Robin didn’t return her hand to his and after a moment he withdrew his entirely.

Robin, star-fished on the floor of the Fog Room, wonders how she hadn’t picked up on the irony until now. She hadn’t wanted to have anything more than a platonic friendship with Dean if it wasn’t a full blown relationship because she knew she’d end up needing more. Yet, she has ended up with nothing at all because her days were numbered even then. Double irony, her days aren’t numbered here. Here, the days keep coming endlessly.

Maybe she should have given in sooner with Dean. Enjoyed whatever time they could have had together. However much he was willing to give. Or maybe that would have made parting from him even harder.

Either way, Robin is bitter. They’d officially gotten together and not twenty for hours later she had to go and die. Sort of. She’s dead in all the ways that matter, anyway. She’s been in the fog for three hundred and sixty years, that’s a hundred and sixty without Cas, if someone was coming to save her, they would have by now. She’s under no illusion that she’s ever going to leave this place.

Right Jab

Right Jab

Roundhouse kick

Left Cross

Uppercut

Flying knee

Tornado kick

Robin tries not to think of it, but her mind keeps wandering back to how she even got here in the first place. How could she have gone back in time, altered its course and then disappeared without creating some sort of paradox? Maybe she did create a paradox. Maybe the world has ended and she’s all that’s left. Maybe she’d been alone all this time and Cas was never even here. The thought chokes her every time she has it which is why she tries not to think about it.

Her science brain thinks that she split the timeline. That thought is sickening too because it means there’s a reality where Mary killed herself and then Robin disappeared reappearing in the new timeline. It meant she never saved Mary. It meant she’d abandoned not one but two sets of brothers.

Dean and Robin watched the vase burn. They were quiet but the fire crackled noisily. They’d driven a few hours to where they thought they’d find a salt ‘n burn. The case was easy enough, the moment of truth was when they waited to see if the ghost would zero in on Robin. It did. Only moments passed before the hated words were spoken. Fera, we want you dead.

Dean lit the vase the spirit was tethered to; they had already doused it in salt and gasoline. Which
brings them to now. They stood, with their arms pressed together, in the backyard of an impressive mansion. It wasn’t so much a yard as it was it’s own national park.

Dean tried to put his own emotions aside to console Robin. Whatever it is he’s feeling, the anger, the fear, it must be tenfold for her. He remembered what it was like when he’d been waiting for hellhounds to come for his soul. That had been such a long time ago.

“Robin, what can I do? I don’t know what to say…” He trailed off.

Robin gave him a cheery smile and it hurt Dean that she’d fake it for him. “It’s alright, Dean. I’m-”

“Don’t do that please. Don’t lie to me, don’t lie to yourself.” Dean blurted out without much thought then resigned himself to continue. “You’re startlingly honest, usually, don’t lose that because of this and don’t lose that for my sake.”

Robin shrugged. “I don’t know what to say either. Me telling you that the situation seems more and more bleak to me doesn’t really help anything.”

“Does it help you to say?”

“A bit.” She laughed then and Dean’s heart all but burst. Her laugh was the best thing. “Who would have thought you’d be inciting me to open up.”

“Returning the favour.” He explained.

She rolled her eyes. “You make it sound like I’ve been counseling you or something.”

Dean shook his head with his own eye roll and laugh. “You lead by example. Sammy and me, we’ve never really met a hunter as unjaded as you. It’s refreshing. You make it seem so easy too. It’s been helping us.”

Robin nodded unsure with what to do with this information. “I’m literally the greatest.”

“Oh God.”

“I wouldn’t go that far, but yeah I think I could swing it.”

Dean shoved her playfully and they started the trek back to the impala, Robin going on and on about all her positive attributes all the while. Dean couldn’t rid the smile off his face even if he didn’t, of course.

Robin smiles at the memory.

Robin is sitting with her legs spread out in front of her leaning back on the palms of her hands. Her lids are closed as she hums the chorus and then slips into the verse.

“Would you believe in love at first sight? Yes, I’m certain that it happens all the time. What do you see when you turn out the light? I can’t tell you but I know it’s mine.”

“That’s not entirely right. What’s in the dark belongs to me.”

Robin hears a voice interrupt her singing. It’s familiar but strange nonetheless. She takes a second to brace herself. She figured she’d lose her mind eventually and start hearing things, maybe seeing
things too, so it’s necessary for her to collect her wits. Eventually though, she does open her eyes.

Standing no more than a yard away is Castiel in all his trench coat glory. He’s doing jazz hands with a big grin and it’s so surreal Robin thinks she really is hallucinating.

She stares up at him almost void of emotion. Isn’t this what she’d been waiting for? For him to return for her? To rescue her? But she’d long since given up hope. It’s been, what, nearly two hundred years since he left.

“Well that’s not the reaction I was hoping for.” The angel says dropping his hands to his sides and sporting a mildly disappointed if not bored expression.

It’s wrong, Robin thinks. Every thing about him is wrong. The way he speaks, the way he carries himself. Where’s the gravel? Where’s the hunch? Even the way the man before her rolls his eyes isn’t the way Cas rolls his eyes. That, more than anything else, convinces her that this Castiel is an illusion. Robin’s brain must be bad at playing tricks on her, maybe because the real Cas healed her of her synesthesia. She isn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth, though. Real or not, Robin is glad to have someone to talk to.

She springs up to her feet with a wide smile plastered on her face. It startles the vision. “Hi.” She exclaims. She wants to approach him and hug him but she’s worried about what will happen to her psyche when her arms find nothing there. She’s worried the phantom will be gone forever and that her mind will follow suit. So she just stands there and smiles. “Y’know, I gotta hand it to my brain, you don’t talk or act like Cas but you look just like him. The images must have been buried somewhere in my mind, because, and don’t be angry, I kind of started to forget what you look like.” She laughs and it’s a little maniacal.

Lucifer observes her for a moment. There’s madness in the girl’s eyes and her smile is crooked enough that he can tell she’s not all there. He can’t say he’s all too surprised, this place isn’t meant to be inhabited. When God put his creations here they weren’t sentient, just mindless vessels waiting to be put on Earth and brought to life. Even those were only kept here at most seven days, the time it took for the big man to make the world.

The mirage of Cas stands there and watches Robin long enough that she thinks she really has offended him. A gripping fear twists inside of her at the thought that she might lose him. That her own mind might take him away from her. For a moment, she has a flash of feeling the same way that one time she and Cas lost each other in the fog. Did that even happen? If it did, it was so long ago. Too long ago. In the here and now Robin has a chance to get Cas back, even if he is a figment of her imagination.

“I remember some things!” She assures fearfully. “Your eyes. Your hair. Mostly how they contrast. I got that right.” She rushes the rest of her apology-explanation hybrid. The words, they’re a prayer for him to stay.

Lucifer tilts his head and evaluates her further. “You don’t think I’m real.” He concludes.

“No, but that’s okay.” Robin says. “You don’t have to be real to stick around.”

Lucifer wants to toy with her, he does. He wants to fuck her up so badly he returns her to the Winchesters tarnished beyond repair. He might not be able to physically harm her in Epsolguinté but her mind is fair game.

Lucifer, no. Castiel’s voice growls out in the ol’ noggin’.
Lucifer sighs. He wants to but he knows that he can’t. Well, he could, but he won’t. He needs the girl lucid enough to understand what to do with the staff. Or else she won’t be brought back and Lucifer is really keen on the oldest Winchester owing him one.

“You’re not imagining me, Robin Fera.” He says and puts a hand out for her.

Robin shakes her head erratically at him. “If I touch you, you’ll disappear.”

“I won’t.” Lucifer coos. He might be evil incarnate but he knows how to play a role. How else would he have persuaded humans to accept him into their bodies?

Robin’s eyes fill with tears. “But what if you do? I’ll be alone again.”

Lucifer’s heart clenches at the girl’s distress and it’s all he can do not to roll his eyes at Castiel’s visceral reaction.

“You won’t. I’m going to take you home, Robin.” Lucifer says, his voice soft. “But you need to know that I’m real.” He shakes the hand that’s still held out to her a bit drawing her attention back to it.

Robin laughs wetly. “All or nothing I guess.”

She eyes the hand and reaches for it slowly. Just as she’s about to touch it she shuts her eyes tightly as though if she doesn’t see him disappear she’ll be able to pretend he’s still there just as long as she keeps her eyes closed.

Her fingertips touch his. It’s a real human hand, with callouses and knuckles and creases in the palm. With whatever bravery she has left, Robin opens her eyes and sees the hand still there. She feels grounded for the first in at least a decade, her delirium ebbs away and makes way for her sanity. As much as she can muster anyway.

She looks up at his face and the smile she gives him is small but it’s sober. “Cas.” She breathes the word and is transported back to when she first came to the fog. To when she’d noticed their hands interlocked and had followed his arm with her eyes until they landed on the back of his head. She’d felt good having him there even though she barely knew him then. Now, she doesn’t think there’s any one person she knows better in the world.

That’s how she knows that the man isn’t Cas. The smile he gives her isn’t Cas. Her hand drops from his and she frowns slightly. “You’re real, but you’re not Cas.”

Lucifer grins wickedly at her. “Not Cas.” He confirms. “Lucifer, pleased to make your acquaintance.” He jiggles his hand at her again for a hand shake.

Robin should probably be afraid. She should at the very least take a step back. Instead, she shakes the Devil’s hand. She knows exactly why she does it too. It’s because she’s starved for human contact. There are no humans in the fog so fallen archangel will just have to do.

Lucifer raises a brow at her, surprised by her actions. He’s even more surprised when her hand lingers in his long after the shaking comes to an end.

“Are you not afraid?” He asks.

She retrieves her hand and cups it with the other taking a moment to relish in the feeling of having it held. If she squints her metaphorical eyes and tilts her metaphorical head she can pretend it’s just like when she and Cas used to hold hands. Finally she shrugs when she sees Lucifer’s expectant
look. “Would it change anything if I was?”

“I could kill you.” He deadpans.

Robin steps back and Lucifer thinks he got to her, but before he can smirk she drops to the ground and sits crisscross applesauce. She waves a hand for him to take a seat too, as if she were offering him a chair in her home. “Could you?” She asks in legitimate curiosity. She doesn’t think she can die in the fog, which made her feel even more trapped. Sometimes she looked at the shards of her shattered phone and wondered if an out was even possible if it came down to it. She thinks eventually it’ll come down to it.

Lucifer doesn’t want to admit that he in fact can’t murder her here and is annoyed that he’s cornered himself. “What matters is that I won’t.” He finally says as he sits.

Robin nods as though his word is all she needs. “What brings you ‘round these parks? Sight seeing?”

“Ha. No, all business I’m afraid.”

Robin glances around. “Don’t think there’s too much to do here.” She informs him sarcastically.

“There’s you.” He counters.

“Yeah but you-” Her eyes widen in realisation then. “They made a deal with you.”

“Ding ding ding. Took you a minute but you got there in the end.”

“This doesn’t make sense. Sam he wouldn’t…he couldn’t…” Sam hadn’t told her what had gone on in the cage but he’d told her enough about his interactions with Lucifer before and after for her to know that the hunter was afraid when it came to the last standing archangel. Even if he hadn’t used his words, his body language said it all.

“You really don’t think they’d go this far? Which, by the way I’m mildly offended you lot think consorting with me is stooping low. But you gave up your life for their mother and you didn’t think they’d make sacrifices for you?” Humans could be dumb as shit.

“Not this…” Robin trails off again not even questioning how Lucifer knew about that night. “I’d never want this for them, they’d know that.”

“Desperate times, yada yada.”

“They’d find another way before turning to you, they’d-”

“There is no other way.” Lucifer barks. He’s a fickle archangel and what was a pleasant enough chat is now annoying him. “I’m the only ticket in or out. So here’s how it’s going to work. I’m-”

“No.” Robin says forcefully.

“I’m sorry what?”

“I won’t go along with it.”

“This is your rescue, Chuckles, the only one you’re going to get. Time to spit out the cool-aid because there is no ‘not going along with it’.”

“What’d they offer you, huh? What’d they agree to? To not try to stop you in the future?” Robin
forces the words out in agitation but then she whispers, “Their souls?” She wasn’t worth whatever hell Lucifer would unleash on the world and she definitely wasn’t worth a Winchester soul. She’s not even being self-deprecating, it’s just...fact. The world it matters more than her and the world, it needs the brothers.

“Maybe.”

“Maybe?” She asks horrified and confused.

“They’re good suggestions but the deal is he’ll owe me a favour. Eventually I’ll collect but I think they think that’s tomorrow’s problem.”

Robin’s eyes expand even more and Lucifer sighs. Humans are so aggravating.

“It’s a done deal, whether you come through or not Dean Winchester is indebted towards me.” He lies. She doesn’t need to know that he needs to actually deliver the goods if he wants his payday to come.

Robin slumps further. How had she let this happen? That night all those years ago she wanted to protect them, not doom them.

“This,” He holds up a branch horizontally in his flattened palms before tossing it over the sigil and to Robin. “Is the staff of Eden.” She hadn’t even noticed it before.

Robin catches it easily enough and inspects it without saying a word.

“You keep a tight grip on it and soon you’ll be back with your main squeeze. Well, not soon, necessarily. You’ve noticed, I’m sure, that time is unusual here.”

Robin nods slowly her eyes still trained on the underwhelming wood.

“I mean that. You don’t let go of it or you won’t make it out. I meant it earlier too when I said you won’t get a second chance.”

Robin nods again and looks up at him. “How’d you get here?” Her eyes bore into his.

“I flew.”

“Cas, he couldn’t-”

“I’m not my brother.” He interrupts sternly, repressing the urge to shift under her scrutinizing gaze. He’s the goddamn devil, he doesn’t get made to feel uncomfortable by a chimp whether it’s the descendant of the First Family or not.

She nods for the third time. “You can’t just fly me out?”

“Not how this works.”

“Okay.” She accepts. “You know, I remembered that Cas’ eyes are blue. That blue’s a primary colour. That the sky’s blue. But before you came, I’d forgotten what blue looked like. I tried to remember, but it felt like trying to invent a new colour. There’s nothing blue here.”

She glances around at the white fog, at her black sneakers and jeans, at her beige t-shirt with red lettering and red pipping around the arm and neck holes. She looks at the red blood staining the ground and the broken black screen of her phone encased in a grey cover. No blue.
“Then you showed up, inside of Cas’ vessel and I don’t understand how I could have forgotten. I remembered his eyes being bright, startling blue and deeply contrasting with his hair but I couldn’t picture it anymore. That’s what this place does. It robs you of everything you have, things you can’t imagine could be taken away from you.”

While she spoke Robin stared at Lucifer, tried to see as much of Cas as she could. Tried to absorb as much as she could even though it was all tainted with Lucifer’s demeanor. If this doesn’t work, if Lucifer wasn’t here to save her, which really shouldn’t surprise her, she doesn’t think it’ll take too long for her to forget the colour blue all over again.

“Am I supposed to sympathise?” Lucifer throws insensitively.

She quirks a smile at him then and shakes her head lightly. “No, but I haven’t had anyone to talk to in nearly two centuries and you’re here. Still.”

“The fog’s dense. It’ll be easier to navigate once it clears a bit.” He explains as if he wants her to know that he isn’t sticking around for her company.

She nods like she understands the struggles of wings and the associated flight risks. “Works for me.”

“You’re so lonely you’d chat with the Devil, huh?” He needles spitefully.

“Yeah.” Robin admits candidly without missing a beat, startling the archangel not for the first time. She doesn’t even seem put off by his tone.

Then again, it’s not like Lucifer doesn’t know what isolation does to a person. He was locked up for a very long time. Hell, it even drove Michael mad but it’s something detrimental to a human. They’re a breed that travels in packs, they need each other. To quarantine a human, to sever its ties to any other living thing is the cruelest torture Lucifer knows of. The only reason he doesn’t employ it himself is because he likes to be more hands on. It’s more entertaining that way. For him, of course. This weakness of humans is just another thing that makes them less than angels. How his father prefers them, Lucifer will never understand.

“Don’t get me wrong, you’re not my first choice.” She clarifies then adds, “No offense.”

“Don’t think your kind can offend me any more than you already do by existing.”

Robin laughs lightly. “Oh true, you hate humanity.” She says casually like she’s remembering an arbitrary fact about an old friend.

“You want to try to convince me that you’re a beautiful species? That you’re amazing because you try to do better, because you dare to hope.” Lucifer retorts.

Robin shrugs. “I like us, mostly. I hate us sometimes. I’m biased, though, because I am us.”

“Well, here’s an objective opinion, you’re made of dirt and I’m made of light. Tell me which seems of more value to you?” The archangel spells out bitterly.

“A blessing is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect, heal and strengthen.” John O’Donohue.” She laughs a little, almost sadly but not quite. “Can’t believe I remember that. Read his book when I was a kid.”

“Cute quote, cute story. My kind doesn’t exist to serve yours. If you need us to make you better than you aren’t that great to begin with.” Lucifer responds a hair’s breadth from aggressive.
“Guess you’re right.” Robin concedes calmly. “Should it matter, though? I don’t know man, why can’t we all just live and let live.”

The logic is rational and that irks Lucifer. “I want to eradicate you.” Is all that he says. He’s sick of people trying to reason with him, to try to sell him on humanity.

“Okay.” Robin acknowledges. “For the record, most humans, at least the religious ones, think more highly of angels than themselves. Hell, a chunk of the population praises you, fallen glory and all. Your dad’s the one who decided to rank us. Seems to me your issues are with Him, not humanity. and from what Dean’s told me, He’s not even paying attention.”

“I expected stronger self preservation instinct from a Fera.” Lucifer threatens thinly.

Robin throws her hands up in defeat. “Touchy subject, I get it.”

Lucifer rolls his eyes. “Yeah everyone gets it.” He mumbles. If Robin knew him better she might have picked up on the sadness there.

Robin continues to stare at him as she desperately tries to fill the silence. She doesn’t want it. She’s had enough of the quiet. She wants him to talk- wants to hear Cas’ voice even if it isn’t really Cas’ voice.

“Do you realise you’re praying to me?” He asks.

“What?” She chokes out.

“You’re praying for this conversation to continue. You’re really that desperate.” Lucifer elaborates showcasing his amusement.

Robin almost wants to look down shamefully but she doesn’t want to miss a moment of Cas’ face before her. She wants to commit it to memory as much as she can. “Oh.”

Lucifer laughs loudly then. It isn’t gentle but it’s not as mean as she’d expected. “Oh, Castiel, you really know how to pick your humans, huh? You always go for the ones that are damned. First the righteous man and now the Last Child.”

Robin’s gaze narrows, then. “Cas is in there with you?”

Lucifer sneers slyly. “Yes. He’s been trying to get out, but he’s more of a power bottom than a top.”

“C-can I talk to him? Will... Will you let him out so I can talk to him?” Robin pleas not bothering to save face. She must look pitiful as she makes her request. She doesn’t care.

“I’d rather not.”

Robin’s hope falls flat. “Okay.” She says because what is there to say? She hesitates for a moment. “Can I touch you?”

Lucifer is taken aback by the request but he can’t help the mirth that sweeps over him. She really was just a damned human girl and Castiel really did know how to pick ‘em. *Lucifer,* Castiel warns.

“Have at it.” He winks at her as he swipes his arm down the length of his body.

Her haste astounds him as she sets the staff down and scrambles to her knees to crawl around the sigil on the side without the broken electronic. When she’s kneeling beside him she surprises him
for the umpteenth time by slowly taking one of his hands in both of hers and letting out a sigh of
relief. The contact seems to appease Castiel as well.

Lucifer barely remembers a time when someone drew comfort from his proximity. He might have
had that with Lilith, but they were not meant to coexist. One would die for the other to live. He
liked to think she was the moon to his morning star.

He watches as she laces her fingers with his and gives his hand a pointed squeeze. She tears her
eyes away from where they’re joined to meet his. Her free hand follows and cups his jaw.

“Y’know,” She whispers so low he wouldn’t hear her if they weren’t as close as they are. “Not a
day goes by that I don’t...” She trails off.

The way Castiel surges inside of the vessel, the way he aches to surface makes it obvious to
Lucifer that the words were not mean for him but for his brother. He’d be right because these are
the words Robin uttered before she’d sent Cas away, they were her way of saying all the things
that couldn’t be said.

*Lucifer please.*

“Castiel says hi.” The archangel offers. He doesn’t whisper but he keeps his tone quiet.

Robin’s lips morph into a half smile. “So blue.” She says distractedly. “I don’t want to forget.”

They stay like that longer than Robin thought Lucifer would allow her. Eventually, though she sits
back crosslegged in front of him, their knees grazing each other. She keeps the hold she has on his
hand and continues to hold his gaze with her own. It’s a while before either of them speaks again.
Robin is climbing the walls trying to find something to say. But what is there to talk about with
Satan himself?

Robin laughs quietly, then clumsily tells Lucifer a joke in Enochian.

“You speak angel?” He questions, surprised once more by the human. The way Castiel’s grace
flutters against his own pridefully, Lucifer doesn’t need the explanation she supplies.

“Cas taught me a while after we got here. Gotta do something when you have nothing but time,
y’know... Haven’t had someone to practice with since he left, so I’m rusty on top of never really
quite reaching fluency.”

He nods and corrects her pronunciation of one of the words she’d used. She repeats after him and
he nods again.

“Did you find it funny?” She wonders.

Lucifer laughs. “It an old joke. Kind of like ‘Who’s got two thumbs and... This guy.’ No one finds
it funny. Castiel gave you better material?”

Robin shakes her head with a laugh.

They talk for a few more minutes. Lucifer lets her know that Castiel disapproves of him teaching
her Enochian curse words. She laughs at that. She laughs a lot for someone who’s conversing with
the Devil. Then again, no one could find him guilty of being humourless.

When the fog clears enough Lucifer picks up the discarded staff and frees his hand from hers. She
clutches it tightly before relenting and letting go. The archangel needs to remind himself that it’s
his brother’s vessel she’s holding onto. He replaces his hand with the Staff of Eden, tells her not to let go and rises to his feet.

She’s up a second later. “This will really take me home?”

“It’ll join itself with its second half. As long as you’re touching it it’ll take you with it.”

Robin’s brows furrow. “Wait how do you know that it’ll bring me home and not bring the boys here?”

“Because I’ll activate it there. All you have to do is hold tight and wait.”

She wants to ask for how long but doesn’t. The answer scares her.

Lucifer watches her, sees how desolate she looks. Castiel’s feelings blur with his own and for a moment he considers leaving his tie behind. It’s blue. He squashes the thought and represses Castiel who’s trying to escape the vessel. His brother wants to remain in Epsolguinté in his true form to watch over her, but if he does that there will be no coming back for him. His deal with the Winchesters was that he’d leave the angel intact and lost in God’s cupboard does not fall under that umbrella.

“I’ll see you.” He says in Enochian. He means for it sound vaguely threatening, a reminder that someone still has to pay for his services. He isn’t sure that he achieves that but he finds that he doesn’t care.

Robin’s reply doesn’t get past her lips as the archangel vanishes before her eyes.

The sudden solitude hits Robin full force. Lucifer hadn’t been there more than a few hours but she misses him. Misses warmth that isn’t her own. Misses hearing a sound that she isn’t making herself. She’d settle for a leaky faucet at this point. She does her best to ignore the guilt. She feels like she has betrayed Sam somehow.

She thought the visit would recharge her, help her to get through this next bout of isolation before she can return home. It doesn’t. The effect it has is the opposite, in fact. It’s like being given a taste and having it ripped away. It’s like a mirage of an oasis in a desert and it’s reminding her more than ever just how alone she is. She doesn’t want to be alone anymore. She wants to go home. She wants this to end. Whichever comes first.

Robin falls to her knees and then to her side. She clutches the staff tightly against her chest and braces herself for the tears that she’s sure are about to come. She doesn’t cry though. Instead she hears a shrill sound and it takes her a moment to realise it’s coming from her. She’s laughing. She’s laughing and she’s losing her mind.

Chapter End Notes

A lot is revealed in this chapter, a lot happens. I’m really excited to see what you guys think. Comments are always appreciated :)

Epsolguinté is a word I made up. It’s heavily inspired by Dutch and French. It's pronounced Ep-Sol-Gween-Tay. The "Gween" is like "Queen" but with a G.

There are three flashback in this chapter. The first, with Sam, is from one of those
times they stayed up late researching. There is no specific time line.

The second and third, with Dean, are from the same trip. It's set in chapter 10 of To the Hilt (part one of this series). It's alluded it to in that chapter but it's here that I decided to reveal their interactions.
Dean hadn’t meant to fall asleep so when he wakes up it’s with a start and with one thing on his mind. Robin.

He lifts his head from his mother’s shoulder and exits the room as stealthily as he can so as not to disturb her. He doesn’t say so himself, but it’s pretty damn stealthy. He sends a regretful look towards his mom before leaving.

The brightness of the lights in the bunker reveal that it’s morning and Dean all but flies to the library. He hadn’t meant to fall asleep and he definitely hadn’t meant to stay asleep for so long. Was Lucifer back? Was Robin back?

In the library, he finds Sam right where he left him. No Robin.

The younger Winchester is sitting in a chair, balancing it on its hind legs, one foot propped on the table. He’s tossing the half of the staff that Lucifer left them in the air like a baseball. He bounces it between his two large and capable hands as he stifles a yawn.

Dean imagines a younger Sam, in the same position but at the desk of a college dorm, throwing an actual baseball instead of a biblical bundle of twine. Because of that portrait, Dean can’t bring himself to be upset with his brother.

Still, he stalks over and plucks the orb out of the air sending Sam a light hearted chastising look.

“S’not a toy, Sammy.”

“I don’t know about that. Might as well be to God. Don’t you feel kind of cheap since we found out about Epsolguinte? Like the making of... everything... is- I don’t know...”

“Less divine, more arts-and-crafts?”


Dean shrugs. “Never really banked too much on the Lord, you know that.”

“Yeah, well, seeing him almost die and now this... It’s ironic, I have hard proof now and it’s harder to have faith than it was before any of this. Before the apocalypse, before you went to hell. When it was just about spirits and the stuff that stuck to the shadows.” Sam looks directly at Dean then. “How did we even get mixed up in all of this, Dean?”

Dean sighs deeply and falls into the seat at the head of the table besides Sam. “I stopped asking myself that a long time ago. But I think once we pop Lucifer back in his cage, we’ll be able to wipe our hands clean of heaven and its fuckery.”

“How do we do that when we have a debt with him?” Sam asks out loud the question they’ve both been asking themselves in the privacy of their own minds since they made the deal with the Devil.

“None of that, Sammy. I made the deal, you don’t owe that sadistic abomination a damn thing, you hear me?”
Sam rolls his eyes. “Whatever it is, I’m not letting you face it alone.”

“Not your choice. Look, we’ll figure out a way to box him up. We have before.”

“We will again.” Sam nods dropping the rest of their discussion for the moment. There is no point in arguing about it now.

Dean allows Sam’s conviction to wash over him and draws strength from it. How did his baby brother grow up to be so resilient? Well, he knows how. He’s just grateful for it, he supposes. What he isn’t grateful for is how much Sam has needed to put that trait to use. The both of them.

Living this life, it’s robbed them of so much. It hasn’t just stolen loved ones, it hasn’t just denied them any normalcy, it’s taken chunks of them too. Of who they could have been at least. Parts of their person they can never hope to reclaim, to get to explore even. They don’t know the extent what they’ve lost. Maybe that’s a blessing.

The time Dean has spent with Robin... She somehow deluded him into thinking that this life wasn’t as harmful and ruinous. She had him believing that the alternatives weren’t all they were cracked up to be. That there was joy in living the way they do. Not just moments of reprieve where everything wasn’t quite as difficult, but actual happiness.

For a second, Dean wonders if Robin might have been a witch this whole time. Maybe she had spelled him into accepting all that bullshit because Dean doesn’t understand how he could have bought into it. The thought only lasts a second, though, because Robin is no witch.

Truth is, Robin had convinced him because she believed it. Wholeheartedly and without cynicism. She just genuinely thought those things and it had rubbed off on him because she’d made it seem easy. She always made everything seem easy.

Maybe she just hadn’t had the time to get jaded. She’s only a little older than Dean had been when he went to get Sam from college so they could go looking for their dad. Dean had loved the life, then too. It’s not like Robin was naive either. He knows that. She’d started hunting younger than him and he’d started pretty damn young himself. She’d started hunting alone younger than him too. Dean had stuck by his dad well into his twenties. Robin was on her own by seventeen and until she found her surrogate family in those friends of hers.

No, Robin wasn’t under any illusions. Dean could tell. The way she’d spoken about hunts she’d been on, about seeing her friends injured, about the lives she didn’t manage to save either because she just couldn’t or because she’d fucked up. She’d told him that sometimes she liked to stick around after a hunt if she could just to watch over the survivors. They’d made it out alive but not unscathed and so even they, the results of a job well done, could be haunting.

Dean knew a lot about being haunted within his own mind by the things they see and do in this life. He knew that Robin did too, especially when she spoke of her parents and that dark look would wash over her. Mostly, when she talked about them it was fondly and with a smile that seemed larger than life to Dean. He was almost jealous that he hadn’t managed to elicit one as wide. Other times, on rarer occasions, her tone had been morose and her eyes filled with a deep sadness and something that, if Dean didn’t know any better, he’d have called shame.

Death is what drives most hunters into the life, it’s what hardens them, which isn’t all bad because they need that. They need to be tough, solid... resilient... not just to survive but to want to survive. In comes Robin, this girl who’s almost otherworldly in the way she’s managed to walk the line, without tipping one way or the other, between the darkness that is hunting and the sort of blitheness usually only afforded by civilians.
The hunters he knows, he himself, have succumbed to the shadows in some form, traded in parts of themselves. That’s because the hunters who don’t, usually don’t survive very long. You can’t be happy-go-lucky and live this life. You can’t be happy and live this life. You can’t do both.

*Robin does.* A voice that Dean doesn’t need to strain to recognise says.

It’s not wrong, the voice. Robin does. Dean wanted to learn that from her, had started to, but now he can’t see beyond returning her to this world, because it’s a crime to have her not be a part of it.

“Have you been up all night?” Dean finally says shaking himself from his thoughts.

“Yeah.” Sam responds. As if on cue, he yawns again. “Nothing new. Lucifer hasn’t shown up yet. Our half of the staff hasn’t done anything either.” Sam nods towards the sphere shaped item.

Dean swallows down the lump in his throat. He knew nothing had come up since he’d walked into the library but hearing Sam confirm it chisels away at his hope just a tiny bit. “You wanna hit the hay?”

“Nah, I want to be here when Lucifer comes back.”

Dean considers fighting his brother on it but ultimately doesn’t.

The brothers sit quietly together for a short while just waiting until Sam lets his chair fall on all four legs.

“So, mom?” The way Sam says it has Dean believing that he’s been struggling with the idea of bringing it up.

“Don’t mean to disappoint ya, Sam, but we didn’t hold hands and cry tears and—”

“I know that, Dean.” Sam interrupts. “I wasn’t expecting you to. I don’t know when I’m expecting *me* to. I just think it’s really good that you even saw her.”

“Yeah... Yeah me too. It was good, I mean it went okay.”

“Alright.” Sam responds. “We’re going to need to address it eventually, you know that right?”

“First we have to fix her, Sam. Somethin’... Something’s broken. It’s like she didn’t come back completely.”

“I know but I don’t even know where to start looking for answers. Bringing people back to life like that, a real resurrection not necromancy or dark hoodoo, or even soul-musical-chair like we’ve been playing, a real honest to god resurrection, there isn’t a lot of lore on that.”

Dean slumps further into his seat, holding the ball in his hand just a little tighter. “You’d think if God’s sister was going to do it, it’d be done right.”

“That’s another thing. Amara wanted to do this to thank you. Why would she return mom... damaged? What you said is right, hard to believe Amara couldn’t pull it off.”

“Well, she wasn’t exactly the artist of the family. Creating was more her brother’s gig. She was more into consuming things and leaving nothing behind. Maybe that fucked with it?”

“Maybe...” Sam trails off, leaving that particular point of the conversation to be mulled over and pursued at another time. “Y’know what gets me?”
Dean’s about to ask what but Sam doesn’t give him the chance and barrels on.

“And I hate that it does, I hate that I let it get to me and that I’m angry with her but I am. It’s just... She chose them over us. They’re not even real.” Sam forces the words as he strains not to spit them. “And she chose them over us.”

“Them who, Sammy?”

“The us up in heaven. Dad in her heaven. And I know, dude, I get it. It’d be pretty damn hard to turn down paradise, but it isn’t even real. That version of dad? That’s not the same dad who died. The kids mom knew up there, they’re not us. She never even got a chance to know me, that kid probably doesn’t even look like I did, doesn’t even act like I did. He was just some fabricated perfection and mom’s smart enough to know that and she still chose him-them.”

“Sammy...” Dean watches his brother struggle with his feelings and he doesn’t know what to offer him.

He gets it, Dean really gets it. He’s angry and he’s hurt and he’s scared and he’s ashamed for feeling that way too. So how’s he supposed to tell his brother that it’s okay when he doesn’t believe it?

He wishes Robin were here. Not because she could fix this, he doesn’t even think she’d know what to say. He still wishes she was here.

“I love you.” Is what Dean ends up answering.

“Twice in two days, Dean?” Sam smirks playfully after a beat of silence.

“Shut up.” Dean throws, kicking him under the table. “Bitch.”

Mary didn’t expect to wake up beside her son, but she hoped she would. When she does wake up, Dean’s long gone but she’s not alone.

“Mary Winchester, in the flesh. Or sorry, did you hyphenate? Mary Winchester-Campbell?”

“Castiel?” Mary says uncertainly sitting up in the bed. Her hunter instinct would usually be screaming at her right now, but she’s groggy from sleep and still so tired. She’s always tired.

“Not as quick on the uptake as you used to be, huh?” Lucifer taunts.

Mary collects her bearings enough to stand. She eyes the door and watches as it swings until it’s ajar and then as it shuts quietly.

“I’ve got to admit, you don’t live up to the hype.”

“Who are you?” Mary glares.

“Mary, I’m offended. We did business together, a while back. 1973, I think it was.”

The colour drains from Mary’s face. Thinking of the decision she’d made that night makes it a little harder to breathe at the moment.

“In your defense, I had an associate conduct things on my end. I was otherwise withheld at the time. I’m sure you can understand.”
“Lucifer.” Mary breathes the word like its escape from her lips could rid her of him entirely.

“Also in the flesh. We have so much in common, already.” He grins evilly at her.

“You. You did this. You started all of this!” She screeches.

“Now, now, Mary. Don’t get agitated. You agreed to the terms. Our arrangement was fair and square. You can’t blame others for your actions.”

“You tore my family apart.”

“Guilty.”

“How are you even here? The bunker is warded. Why are you inside Castiel?” She keeps her voice sharp and part of her knows it’s because her words are all she has. She can’t very well fend off Satan himself. Especially without any weapons at her disposal.

Lucifer rolls his eyes as he settles onto the desk chair. “You Winchesters. You have the bad habit of asking the wrong questions. I was invited, believe it or not. Into this vessel, into this home of yours. But it doesn’t feel like home does it, Mary?”

“What do you want?” She spits.

"Now, there's a question.” Lucifer seems to ponder it for a moment. He even goes so far as to tap his chin with a finger before pinning her with a frightening stare. “Everything.” He finally says cheerfully. “I’m going to scoop out all that’s left inside of you, Mary, which isn’t much.”

Mary takes and instinctive step back, wonders if shouting for help is the right call.

“You already know that, though don’t you? You know that you’re broken.” He laughs. “You want to know a secret? Amara has nothing to do with it. In fact, Amara returned you better than what you were before. Stronger, healthier, sharper. Ironic isn’t it? That you aren’t able to make it work despite that? Tell me, what does that say about you?”

“What are you talking about?” Mary snaps ignoring his last question. “You think you can spew some bull and I’ll let you get inside my head? You’re not getting anything from me.”

Lucifer laughs again. “I don’t need to get inside your head. You’re already in there tearing yourself apart. You’re diseased in a way God himself couldn’t will away.” His tone darkens then. “And just to be clear, you’re going to be begging me to take you apart and I promise to wait until you do. What I do to you, you’ll want it, you’ll ask for it. Only then will I give it to you.”

Mary doesn’t say anything, she just tries to keep a hard look on her face.


Mary freezes at that.

“Funny thing, another nasty Winchester habit. Making deals with the Devil. You’d think the lot of you would learn.” His smirk is that of the cheshire cat.

Then, Mary is alone again. With a soft click the door to her room opens a few inches. She thinks she ought to seek out Sam and Dean. She should go to them, tell them about what’s happened, be with them to keep them safe but Mary is so tired. They don’t want her around anymore anyway and
she wouldn’t know how to protect them from Lucifer. *And she’s so tired.* She’s exhausted.

So she crawls back into bed and curls in on herself. She catches herself praying but cuts herself off. No one would help her if only because she doesn’t deserve it.

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Sam watches as his brother’s eyes focus on something above his head. He doesn’t need to look to know what it is.


“Sammy,” The devil clamps his hands down on the hunter’s shoulders. “How sweet, you waited up for me.” He moves then to stand at the corner of the table between the brother’s seats.

Sam cringes at the way Lucifer trails his hands across his shoulders.

“I didn’t think you cared so much. I’m touched.”

“Did you get it to her?” Dean demands.

“I did.” Lucifer confirms then extends his hand towards the older Winchester.

Dean hesitates for a moment before handing over the twine-like orb.

Lucifer clasps it in one large hand and lets his body slacken. His eyes flutter shut but it’s only for a moment.

In that moment, you could almost convince Dean that it’s Castiel standing before him. The devil looks as non-threatening as the devil could look. It’s only for a moment, though.

When Lucifer opens his eyes again the globe in his hand is glowing. A faint yet undeniable light peaks through from beneath its surface. Not unlike the Staff of Eden itself, it’s underwhelming.

“What that’s it?” Sam questions. “That’ll bring her here?”

“It’ll bring her to wherever this,” Lucifer tosses the ball in the air and catches it easily. “is. As long as she holds on to her end like I told her to.”

“How long will it take?” It’s Sam who asks the question he knows is on his brother’s mind. Dean seems too stunned to speak for himself.

Lucifer shrugs tossing Sam the orb. “Could take a while.”

Sam narrows his eyes and rises to his feet stretching to his full height. “How much is a while?”

Lucifer rolls his eyes. “Easy tiger, I don’t know. We’re asking an awful lot out of a stick. It has to find a path through realms and worlds, through time and space, all the way from Epsolguinté to your sad reality. Honestly, I’m not sure you’re doing her any favours bringing her back here.”

“So, what, we just wait?”

“Now you get it, Sammy.” Lucifer responds. “I’ll be in touch for payment.”

“Lucifer wait.” Dean’s voice rings out before Lucifer can take off. He hadn’t spoken throughout most of the conversation. “H-how... How was she?”
Lucifer rolls his eyes again only this time it almost hurts with how intensely he does it. “Painfully human. I wanted to gag the whole time. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a vessel to go occupy.”

“A vessel?” Sam presses erratically. “You already have one lined up?”

“You went and got the Staff of Eden, I went shopping for a meat suit. Put in a down payment and everything. It wasn’t hard either, not with a sweet face like this one.” He pinches his own cheek then winks.

Lucifer opens his mouth wide and lets his grace escape Jimmy Novak’s body before it disappears all together, off to God knows where, leaving behind Castiel.

Sam catches Cas’ body and Dean is immediately on his feet helping him lay the angel down on the table.

“Cas, Cas, you with us?” Dean taps his cheek lightly. “Cas, c’mon, Cas.”

Dean knows Cas can survive this. He survived sharing a body with Lucifer for longer before. He hadn’t interfered with any of Lucifer’s doing, then, though. This time... He resisted Lucifer in the dungeon and who knows what else was going on inside their head.

Dean’s thoughts don’t continue down that path as Castiel’s lids peel back to reveal his eyes. Eyes that are all him. They belong to the brother Cas has become to Dean and the hunter can’t help but sigh in relief. He drops his head so his forehead is pressed against Cas’ chest.

“Thank you.” Dean breathes. It’s for waking up. It’s for taking in Lucifer. It’s for going back for Robin.

“Of course.” Castiel replies, resting a hand on Dean’s head in a sort of comforting pat.

It’s not something he’d ever done before, not something he’d ever have done, but spending nearly two centuries with Robin has made touching a much more natural thing for him. He thinks that Dean isn’t too bothered by it if the way he remains unmoving other than to sag further onto Cas is anything to go by. That doesn’t last long as Dean remembers suddenly why Cas had to go back for Robin at all. He got her in this mess in the first place.

Dean tears himself away abruptly and it startles everyone in the room. The look he sends Cas lets the angel know that they are nowhere near okay.

Sam sends his own glare Dean’s way as he brushes him to the side to get to Cas. “Cas, you alright?” He helps him sit up.

“I’m well.” The angel responds. His face pinches for a moment before looking up at the brothers anxiously. “There’s something you should know about Mary.”

“Depression?” Dean verifies for the third time.

“Yes.” Castiel attests. “Lucifer peered into her mind and that’s what he saw.”

“That doesn’t make too much sense, Cas, you checked her over when she got back to the bunker.” Sam explains gently.

“I was not able to see it then.” Dean scoffs. “But,” Castiel continues. “I see it clearly now that I’ve
“No.” Dean denies. “No way. There’s gotta be something supernatural going on. What’s she got to be depressed about? She was brought back to life for God’s sake.”

“Think about it, Dean.” Sam says as things become clearer. “She was in paradise, she was living in bliss and then she’s suddenly thrust back into reality. Our reality. Where there’s a lot of death and danger-”

“Alright, alright, I get it.” Dean interrupts. “This is a good thing then, right? Cas can heal her.”

Both brothers turn to the angel expectantly.

“I can’t.”

“Why not?” Dean snaps.

“Dean, chill.” Sam warns.

“Because she doesn’t have a physical ailment.” Cas tries to explain.

“You healed Robin of her synesthesia.” Dean counters.

“Robin’s brain had visible damage that altered the organ’s chemistry. That’s what I healed.”

“Great.” Dean spits.

“Dean, cool it.” Sam orders.

“It’s alright, Sam.” Castiel says. He understands where Dean is coming from. He understand why Dean needs to be angry at him even though he doesn't think the man does. Not fully, anyway. It doesn't matter in any case, if Dean needs this, needs for Cas to be the bad guy, Cas will allow it.

“It’s not, Cas. Dean, you-”

“Stay out of it, Sammy.” Dean cautions. “We’re going to go see mom. Going to go get her some help.” Dean is talking to the room but his eyes eventually land on Castiel. “I don’t think you should be here when we get back.”

“Dean.” Sam argues but Dean has already grabbed their half of the Staff and made his way across the room. “Cas...” Sam whispers.

“I told you, it’s alright, Sam.”

“It’s not.”

Cas smiles softly at him. “Focus on taking care of your mother and on getting Robin home for now, okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

“There’s something else. I think Lucifer wants something from Mary. He visited her before coming here after returning from Epsolguinté.”

“That’s when he figured out she’s depressed.” Sam reasons. “He went to see her.” His blood begins to boil. He’ll be damned if lets that monster take anything else from him. “What does he want?
You don’t think he wants to use her as a vessel, do you Cas?” Sam swallows the lump in his throat.

Cas shakes his head. “I don’t think so. What would be the point? She’s not a Winchester by blood, she isn’t even close to a true vessel for him. Why go after her and invoke your wrath if it’d be the same as any other? Whatever it is he kept it well hidden from me, but I will try to find out when I leave here.”

“Thanks Cas.”

The angel surprises Sam when he draws him into a hug.

“He’ll get over it, y’know. When Robin’s back, he’ll figure out he doesn’t have a reason, or the right, to be angry with you.”

Castiel pulls away, that soft smile back on his lips. “Maybe.”

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The conversation the brothers have with Mary is a hard one. There are a lot of tears, mostly hers but not strictly hers. She says she can’t believe that after everything that’s happened, what she’s going through is as pedestrian as depression. Sam soothes her into at least considering it. He explains to her that there's no shame to be had. Then they cry some more.

Dean tells her about a nice doctor lady he thinks can help. She’s a neurosurgeon so he thinks she must know her way around the human psyche and she knows all about the supernatural so Mary will be able to talk freely.

Mary behind him, Sam napping to his right and the orb wrapped in a cloth resting on his lap is how Dean ends up behind the wheel of the impala, Iowa bound. It’s a six hour drive and Dean does it in under five.

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Sam and Dean have been waiting outside of Grace Przekop’s office for over an hour. During that time Sam fills Dean in on what Cas told him about Lucifer and their mom. Sam hesitates on doing it. He thinks that Dean doesn’t need more on his plate but he has a flash of them fighting about this in the future. About how keeping secrets never leads to anything good. He even sees Robin there, rolling her eyes at how avoidable the whole debacle is had they just talked about it.

It’s not as easy for him as it is for her. Robin doesn’t feel vulnerable in honesty. She can and has admitted to fear shameless and Sam thinks she might be stronger than him and his brother for it. It’s that thought and his odd peak into the future that convinces him to keep Dean in the loop. It goes pretty well probably proving a cosmic point.

They’re discussing theories when Mary steps out of the office.

“Hey boys.” She says with a smile neither of them have seen in a while.

Sam moves over one seat so there’s one available between him and Dean. “How’d it go?” He inquires hopefully.

“Well.” She responds settling into the chair.

“So that’s it? You’re all healed up?” Dean asks. He means it as a joke mostly, but part of him wishes it could be that simple.
Sam twists his features into his trademark bitch face and glares at Dean who just mouths ‘what’ back at him, affronted.

Mary laughs. It’s small but it’s there which is more than they’ve gotten in a long time. “I think I’m going to stay.”

Dean’s heart goddamn soars. It rips out of his chests, spreads wings and does laps around the hospital. “With us. You’re staying home with us.” It isn’t a question but Mary answers anyway.

“Um, no.” She says. “Here. I’m going to stay here. Grace says the most effective treatment for me is daily therapy. She’s going to set me up here at the hospital.”

“Wait, what?” Sam’s face falls. “You’re not returning to the bunker with us?” His voice wavers.

“I will. When I’m better. Boys what I did—”

“Mom, you don’t- You don’t need to say anything. It’s not your fault. You’re sick. Even if you weren’t, we never should have- We should have realised that you- We...” Dean tries. He really tries, but he’s no good at this. He’d been angry with her but now that he’s facing losing her all over again he can’t bring himself to maintain the emotion. Now he’s just desperate to keep her with him.

Mary smiles at him softly. “I’m sorry.” Mary says ignoring most of her son’s half sentences. “I know that doesn’t do much, but I am sorry. I can’t fix it. I can’t go back. What I can do is save myself, now. Take this help that you’ve offered me and get better so I can eventually have a relationship with my two boys.”

“Mom...” Sam whispers. “You don’t have to stay here. We can-”

“I like Grace. She knows about my situation, I don’t have to talk in code to a therapist if I stay here. And...” Mary hesitate for a moment. “I think space is part of my recovery. I think I need it to do get through this.” Even as Mary says the words with conviction she feels guilty for them. They’re the truth, but what kind of mother chooses herself this way over her sons?

“How long?” Dean chokes out.

“As long as it takes.”

Dean wants to lash out. Wants to cry. Wants to beg her to stop leaving them. Why does everyone leave him?

“Okay.” He says.

Their goodbyes are both earnest and strained. The brothers cling to their mom in a way that’s purely child-like but eventually a nurse comes and takes Mary away leaving the two men to stand there dumbly until Grace approaches them.

“She’s going to be alright.” The doctor assures them. “I’ve seen this before.”

“Yeah?” Dean snaps. “You’ve had patients try to kill themselves after being dead for thirty years?”

Grace smiles gently. “No, but what Mary is going through isn’t all that uncommon. She’s coming down from the high of heaven. Only it’s more like a crash. It’s something a lot of artist types experience. Famous musicians, actors, athletes even who live a charmed, stimulating life and whose careers end abruptly fall into this deep depression.”
The brothers only stare at her and Grace pities them a little. Rodney would scold her for that, he doesn’t believe people should ever be pitied, but they look both lost and like puppies and that’s a heartbreaking combination.

“She’s going to get through this and I’m going to help her, you have my word.”

“Psych wards aren’t... our favourite things,” Sam explains.

Grace nods. “I’ll put her in a regular room, in the neuro-wing. I’ll be the only one to treat her but I’ll consult psychiatry specialists. If she decides that medication is something she’d like, I’ll monitor her closely. Your mom told me what happened with Robin. How she was trying to save her. I’ll do what it takes to finish the job for Robin.”

“We’ve almost got her back, Grace.” Dean says as confidently as he can while gripping the ball a little more tightly.

Grace is features harden for the first time. “I gave you a week, Dean. After that I’m not trusting you to bring her back. I’ll take care of your family, you better take care of mine.”

“I will.” He assures.

“Grace.” Sam calls softly. “Could we see the room our mom’s going to be in? We want to ward it.”

Grace accepts and they do just that with invisible markers from the gift shop. They teach Grace the angel banishing sigil in case of anything. When she insists they tell her what “anything” is, they reluctantly let her in on some of the details. Grace’s sailor mouth makes an appearance.

Then, the boys head back towards the car. It’s a short and quiet trek out of the hospital and across the parking lot. Climbing into the impala is when Sam’s phone rings. It’s Marcus and James, the elderly hunter couple who’d kept the boys on Robin’s trail so long ago. Back, before. Before Dean knew the cosmos were a sentient entity. Before he’d agreed to have Robin stay at the bunker with them. Before he kissed her in that sorority house. Before he decided his life was better with her around. He was better with her around.

“They have a case for us.” Sam announces. “You want me to call them back? Say we can’t take it.”

Dean looks down at his lap and peels back the cloth just enough to peak at the orb. The glow beneath the twine is just as faint as when Lucifer activated it. “No, let’s do it.”

“Really?” Sam asks, surprised.

“Yeah. I don’t think I can sit around and just wait.”

Sam nods. “Just how long are we going to hold out on the Staff working before we move on to something else?”

“Let’s give it twenty four hours.”

“Okay. So the case is in Nelson and get this...”

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It’s been about five hundred years. Robin would bet her last dollar that it’s accurate to the day. Then again, Robin doesn’t really have her wits about her anymore. She’d probably bet her last
dollar on the existence of unicorns too. Robin doesn’t even have a dollar to bet. There’s no currency in the Fog, anyway. There’s no nothing.

It’s odd how warped time is here. She distinctly remembers how in the real world a day could feel long but a month would feel like it had flown by. She doesn’t get that here. Every hour drags on slowly and she’s constantly hyper-aware of each minute and she remembers it all. The past decade feels like a decade. The last three hundred years alone feel like three hundred years alone.

So much time has passed since Lucifer visited. Robin wishes he’d never left. She just wants to not be alone. She just wants someone around. She just wants this to end. Wants it all to be over because she can’t anymore. Being alone with her thoughts became hard a century ago. Now it’s downright torturous.

She knows that no one is coming to save her. Too much time has gone by. Their plan had to have failed. There’s no way the Winchesters are even alive anymore. Best case scenario they’ve grown old and grey and they croaked peacefully in their sleep. Immortal Castiel salted and burned their bodies. He probably spent a few years processing the loss of his surrogate family but he’d have learned to deal with it by now. He’s moved on to something new.

Robin smiles at that thought. The idea that Castiel is out in the world doing good, being alive, warms her heart.

Still, no one would come for her, she knows. Yet, she doesn’t let go of the Staff, not even for a minute.

Robin lays on her side by the sigil drawn in her blood. She picks at it as it chips like cheap paint.

“Y’know which movie I should have told you the story to, Cas?” She says to no one, hoping from one foot to another. “Porky’s Two. I think you’d have liked that one.”

Robin spends the year switching between hysterical crying and an odd eerie sort of laugh. Each bout is triggered by different memories of Dean Winchester. She feels like a pendulum and each time she swings one way her screw gets a little looser.

She swivels and swings the staff around like a sword. She makes a noise that is intended to sound like that of lightsaber but doesn’t.
Robin is laying on her side by the sigil again, only this time she’s dragging her finger through the shards and crumbles of glass from her phone screen. The pieces prick her skin enough to draw dots of blood. They get smeared on the white floor before her finger heals. She drags her finger through it again, drawing a pattern into the cluster of fragments with negative space.

When she finishes with the little sail boat she’d been working on (a half circle, a verticle line with a triangle hanging off of it), she smoothes out the glass. Patting it into a bed of shards again. A blank canvas for her to draw in some more.

- 682

Robin bench presses the Staff of Eden.

- 

709

She thumbs at the hole in the bottom hem of her t-shirt. “He really was moose-like.” She mutters to herself seriously.

- 735

Robin thinks that maybe she’s here as punishment for what she did to her parents. Hell wouldn’t have been enough for her because there’s a way to escape hell. Giving in, becoming a demon, it stops the agony. Here... There’s always more time. More loneliness.

She wipes away a stray tear. She wonders if maybe giving into the madness is the equivalent to giving in to the darkness. Maybe if she stops trying remain who she is, if she stops trying to remember the people she loved, the things she’s done, the good and the bad. If she just lets go of the life she used to lead she can be at peace.

- 754

Robin sits in a lotus position and meditates.

- 775

Robin is on her back, spread-eagle with a loopy smile on her face.

- 796

Robin cries the kind of crying that’s sloppy and snotty. It’s sobs that wrack through her entire body, that make her shake almost to the point of convulsions.
Robin is on her side, clutching her knees to her chest, the staff tucked between her thighs. Her tears have stopped though her cheeks are still wet. She rocks back and forth and hums a song she doesn’t remember the lyrics to.

- 

Robin hugs herself tightly and tries to pretend they aren’t her arms. Tries to conjure the phantom feeling of another’s touch.

- 

Robin cards her fingers through the glass again. She’s sick of drawing in them but she’s tempted to pick up a piece and draw on her own skin. Distantly she recognises it as self harm. But that’s out in the real world. She considers it just to have something to do, really. It isn’t for any other reason than she’s bored. She’s so bored and so lonely. She knows that she’d heal, anyway. Robin doesn’t do it though, because she’s a Fera and Feras don’t give in unless it’s for a greater cause.

- 

What if she cuts deep enough so that she doesn’t heal?

Robin’s thoughts scare her. It’s kind of nice, she hasn’t felt fear in a while.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a rough one to put out so any and all feedback is highly appreciated
Robin & Dean

Chapter Notes

The song in this chapter is Everything Will be Alright by the Killers

A longer chapter! Lots happens. I hope you enjoy :)

PS: Happy Valentine's Day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Robin is on her back. She has been for God knows how long. Hell, maybe even God doesn’t have a clue. Her hair is splayed beneath her, like a fan or maybe like a halo. She knows her ends are tangled in with the shards of glass from her phone. She knows the sigil is right beside her head too. She knows the useless stick Lucifer gave her is balanced on her stomach. However, she knows these things in an abstract distant sort of way as she stares up into nothing. Into fog.

Her gaze is blank and unfocused. Her body unmoving as even her breathing is too shallow to be visible. The only clue that Robin is even alive is the haunting melody escaping her parted lips. She hums an eerie tune, disjointedly. She seems unaware to be doing it until her lips come together and part again this time in an attempt to form words. They come out hoarse, an indication that she hasn’t spoken in a long time. Then again, Robin hasn’t done anything in a long time.

“Toodoo, toodoo doo, I believe”

in you and me

The brothers are an hour out of Nelson town where their next case is, driving along highway eighty.

“So what are we thinking?” Dean asks.

“What do we know that can rot a living human body to death?” Sam counters.

“Yeah, you say that dude, but what does it even mean?”

“Marcus described it like the whole shebang. Moldy skin, decaying teeth, withered organs. Definitely...euh... unnatural.”

“We’re sure our vic wasn’t just sick?” Dean questions.

“Do you know of a disease that can do that to someone let alone within an hour?”

“No, but I do know of a few monsters that can. Wait, it only took one hour? That’s some nasty mojo.”

“Probably took less than that.” Sam nods and scrolls up on his phone to read the information
Marcus had sent. “Erica Donaldson, neighbour, saw Ginger Scott enter her apartment looking well. An hour later, a, and I quote, putrid smell urged her to go check on Scott, finding the corpse instead.”

“Yikes. Well, decomposing will do that to your olfactory senses. Everybody *nose* that.” Dean chuckles, amused by himself.

“Olfactory.” Sam corrects.

“What?”

“It’s olfactory.”

“What?”

“Never mind.” Sam sighs. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“Sometimes the most obvious answer is the right answer.” Dean nods, glancing at the time. Three o’clock.

“Witches.”

“Goddamn witches.” The older Winchester agrees, speeding up.

_I’m coming to find you_  
_If it takes me all night_  
_Wrong until, you make it right_

Agents Edison and Kepler, unofficially known as Dean and Sam Winchester, respectively, step inside the exam room as the assistant pathologist rattles off information about the odd corpse he’d been assigned.

“Ginger Scott, 35, found with twelve different kinds of fungi growing on her organs and the inside of her skin, the most prevalent being *Penicillium digitatum*.” He puts his clipboard down and leads the agents to the correct table. “That’s usually found on citrus fruit, not so much the insides of a human. I’d hold your breaths.” He says without pause.

He peels back the tarp covering the corpse and when Sam reels back and pinches his nose Dean flat out gags.

“What can cause this?” Sam asks when the AP takes pity on them and covers the body back up.

“Officially? We’re thinking some kind of bacteria.”

“Unofficially?” Dean prompts.

“Nothing. I’ve never seen this before. I’ve never even heard of anyone seeing anything remotely like this before. Her epidermis is more mold than actual skin now, her teeth have been totally stripped of enamel so much so that they’re actually crumbling. If all of that wasn’t bad enough, it doesn’t even explain how she died.”
“All of this,” Sam gestures at the table. “that’s not what killed her?”

The PA shakes his head. “Cause of death is heart failure. Look, I’m a man of science which is why I hate myself for saying this,” He sighs. “But if I didn’t know better I’d think there was some kind of supernatural foul play going on.”

Dean’s eyes widen and Sam shifts uncomfortably. The AP tosses his hands up in defeat.

“I know, I’m insane, whatever. You can’t arrest me for that. I’m going to be in the office if you agents needs anything else.”

When the doors swing shut behind the AP, Dean says, “Is he a suspect? Are we suspecting him?”

Sam takes his time answering. “I don’t think so?” He hesitates. “I mean why would he...”

“Okay.” Dean agrees, knowing the end of his brother’s sentence without having to hear it. “Let’s just say he’s too woke for his own good.”

“Too woke?”

“Yeah, Robin says it. It means-”

Sam laughs. “I know what it means. Just- Come on, let’s look at the body again.”

“Eh... You do that.”

“Seriously?” Sam questions pointlessly with Dean already half way to the door, their half of the staff tucked under his arm.

The youngest Winchester pulls a bitch face that contorts into Bitch Face Squared when he pulls the tarp back and the stench hits him again.

*And I won’t forget you*  
*At least I’ll try*

The knob to Ginger Scott’s apartment wiggles before turning and opening letting inside a pair of hunters.

“We’re looking for a hex bag and any reason a witch would have to go after our small town waitress.” Dean reminds as he heads for the kitchen of the tiny apartment.

“Oh god, I can still smell it.” Sam heaves, checking the opened sofa bed for deadly velvet.

“Quit being such a baby.” Dean needles. “You can wash your hair with rose water later and it’ll be-”

“Shut up.” Sam advises. “Come take a look at this.”

Dean finds Sam at a mostly bare built in bookshelf. “She has a kid.” He says when his eyes land on a picture of the vic and an eight year old boy with striking family resemblance.
“Yeah,” Sam confirms. “but there wasn’t mention of one in the police report Marcus sent. When there’s a minor-”

“It’d be mentioned.” Dean nods. “C’mon, keep looking. Maybe something will explain it.”

It takes under a minute for something to explain it.

“Sam.” Dean calls from the one bedroom in the apartment. “Our eight year old is eighteen. I’ve heard that they grow up so fast, but I’ve just gotten whiplash.”

Sam joins Dean in what is very obviously the bedroom of a teenage boy. “I found the hex bag in the coffee table. New age stuff.” He informs looking around the room. “They grow up fast, and big and strong apparently. Did you see this? Soccer trophies, wrestling matches, football championships, you name it. This kid’s a killer athlete.”

“Yeah, the question is, is he our killer.” Dean replies sweeping the room for anything that stands out. A letter in the waste basket catches his eye. “Full ride at UCLA. Football scholarship. You don’t turn something like that down, but Colton Scott throws it in the garbage.”

“You don’t turn something like that down, huh? S’not what you and Dad said when-”

Dean rolls his eyes. “So Scottie gets a one way ticket out of Nelson-Nowhere-Town. Minimum wage earning mom, who had him at, what, fifteen, wont allow it. Holds him back, has him living in a dump. Colton throws a fit, rots the old gal, then makes a run for it?”

Sam shrugs. “Looks like it.”

“And I thought you were insufferable your senior year of high school.”

It’s Sam’s turn to roll his eyes.

The hunters search the room for a while but don’t find proof that Colton Scott is a witch.

“What’s that?” Sam asks.

“Yearbook.” Dean mumbles, flipping through the pages. “This guy really had everyone going. Listen to this. I’ve never known anyone better than you and my only regret is that I didn’t meet you earlier in life. I want us to spend more time together, I want us to nurture the bond we have. We’re like family. Patti.”

“That’s...intense.” Sam responds.

“Ya think? The others aren’t as bad but this dude is loved.” Dean snaps the book shut. “Let’s gank him.”

And run, and run

Tonight

“S’a real shame what happened to Scott’s mother.” The coach at the school Colton attends says. “How is he holdin’ up? I’ve been meaning to call ‘im, but I’m not good with all the talking. He’s a tough kid, but... How’s he holdin’ up?” He repeats rubbing the back of his neck.
“We’d like to know that just as much as you do, sir.” Sam says.

“Colton hasn’t been seen since the incident.” Dean continues.

“Dammit, kid’s prolly losin’ his mind.”

Dean raises and eyebrow.

“You don’t... Ya’ll don’t think he’s responsible for it do you?” When neither agents respond, Coach continues. “You listen here, that boy loves his momma. He’s good people. Everyone will tell ya so. He even had himself a super fan. Kind of jock you root for in and outta the game, y’know?”

“Sir, we understand that you were very involved in Colton’s athletic career.” Sam asks.

“What’s that got’a do with anything?”

“Please just answer the question.” Dean enforces.

Coach sighs. “Yes, alright. Scott had a lot of talent and he knew it and he thought he could go places with it. Thought he could make something outta himself for him and his mom. But he knew talent wasn’t gonna cut it. Asked me to train him back in sophomore year. Don’t see what the point was anymore, he don’t even wanna go to any of the colleges he got scouted for.”

“Wait he doesn’t want to go anymore?” Dean clarifies.

“Yeah, me and his mother have been beggin’ him to reconsider.”

“Begging him?” Dean checks again.

*Everything will be alright*

*Everything will be alright*

They both close the doors to the impala in unison and begin driving away from the Coach’s home.

“Are we buying this?”

“I don’t know, Dean. I mean... Maybe? It makes some sense, but also doesn’t.”

Dean sighs. “This case just got more complicated, but the way to un-complicate it is to find the kid.”

“I’ll try tracking his phone.” Sam suggests pulling his laptop out of the bag on the floor of the impala.

“You do that.” Dean says, petting the orb in his lap.

“D’you wanna talk about it?” Sam asks quietly.

“About what?” Dean plays dumb, but his one handed grip tightens on the steering wheel giving him away to his brother’s keen eye.
“Do you want to talk about her. About,” Sam hesitates for a beat, recalling Dean’s aversion to hearing her name. “Robin.” He breathes.

“What I want is to talk to Robin. I also want to kill a witch. I can do one of those so let’s focus on that.”

“I’m just saying Dean, if you want to talk-”

Sam is interrupted by a phone ringing.

“Thank god.” Dean mutters earning him a mild glare from his brother.

A few minutes later Dean hangs up.

“We’ve got another victim. Same deal. Tobias Clay. He was a talent manager.”

“Alright, no go on Scott’s phone. I’m going to see what relationship Mr. Clay has with the Scotts.”

Everything will be alright

Everything will be alright

“I’ve got nothing.” Sam says, leaning back in the motel chair, popping his back. “He has no relation to Ginger or Colton Scott. He’s not even from here, just passing through.”

“I might have something.” Dean replies, hunched over the screen of his laptop from his bed. “He was a talent manager, right? But not for wanna be Biebers or the Hemsworths.”

“You know who the Hemsworth brother are?” Sam snickers.

“Shut up.”

“Okay.” Sam agrees but doesn’t. “I read about his work. He works with classical musicians mostly. Young prodigy types.”

“Yeah. The client he’s in town with now is like this 12 year old painter. They’re calling her the next Picasso.” Dean’s eyes flicker to the orb, still wrapped in a cloth with only a sliver peeking out, for a brief second. “He’s basically her legal guardian while they’re on the road. Give you three chances to guess where she is.” Dean quizzes.

“Gone?”

“With the wind, baby.” Dean smirks.

“So,” Sam thinks aloud. “Colton and pre-teen Picasso are working together? Taking out their care takers? I don’t know, Dean, it’s pretty thin. What do the two have in common? How would they even know each other? They don’t exactly run in the same circles.”

“I’m with you on the age difference but they do have their talent in common. Plus, the pièce de résistance,” Dean says in a bad French accent. “Picassa was invited to give a speech at a local high school. Three chances to guess-”
“Colton’s.”

“That college degree really did pay off.” Dean teases, a hand moving to rest on top of the ball.

Sam rolls his eyes. “So witchy duo? But why kill-”

Sam is interrupted by a loud piercing scream. Sam gets interrupted a lot.

_I wasn’t shopping for a doll_

_To say the least, I thought I’ve seen them all_

Sam and Dean rush to the business next door to the motel, a small family run pet shop. When they burst through the door, the rancid smell is so potent it makes their eyes water. Dean even tucks the orb in his plaid shirt to protect it.

“What happened?” Sam asks the woman who has plastered her back to the glass window by the door.

He didn’t need to, though. One the look around and he knows why the girl screamed, what is causing the smell. Every single animal in the store has decayed, shriveled up and spoiled like bad fruit. He forces himself to look away, the sight too unbearable.

“Sweetheart, I’m going to need you to calm down. We’re FBI agents, we’re here to help.” Dean places a calming hand on her shoulder.

The girl, whose eyes were still fixed on the scene before her, tries to steady her breathing. Her brows furrow and she pinches the material of the sleeve of Dean’s open button down.

“An FBI agent who wears flannel?” She questions, raising a brow at the space in front of her.

“Yes.” Dean dismisses, pulling out his badge even though she doesn’t bother to look at it. “Can you tell us what you saw?”

“Alright pal, not cool. Did you do this?” She snaps.

“What?” Dean takes a step back from her, affronted.

The girl ambles towards the counter. “I’m calling the cops. What the hell did you do, huh? Put road kill in here? Derby with me.”

“What?” Dean asks again.

Sam moves closer to the girl. “Ophelia,” He reads off of her name tag. “I’m going to take your hand okay? Show you my badge.”

When she doesn’t say anything but pauses by the counter without making a move for the phone he does just that. He flips his badge open and glides her fingers over the metal piece inside of it.

“She’s blind.” Dean states dumbly, finally catching up.

“Keen eye there, _detective_.” She snaps then sighs. “Okay, so it wasn’t you who, I’m guessing,
threw a stink bomb of some sort in here.” She accepts taking her hand back.

Sam gets a sad puppy-eyed look that Ophelia doesn’t get to witness. “Come on,” He says softly. “Let’s get you outside away from this smell.”

Ophelia shakes her head. “Wait. Derby, with me, boy.” She waits a beat. “Derby,” She call more forcefully. “Do you see him? My guide dog. He’s the one with the red bandana around his neck.” She questions looking just to the side of Sam’s shoulder. “Why is it so quiet?” She adds offhandedly, confused.

Sam and Dean share sad looks.

“Let’s get you outside.” Sam replies, leading her out.

Ophelia throws up when the brothers explain to her what happened. Well, not what really happened, not the part about the witch, but y’know. Dean stays with her while Sam goes back inside to look around. He asks her questions but she doesn’t have too much information to share.

She says that Derby ran to the back of the store, which wasn’t odd for him to dispense energy when she was working. Then the animals got very noisy and she thought they thought there was a danger and it scared her so she screamed. Then the stench hit her.

“My sister just left to pick something up for dinner... I- I don’t understand how could this happen?” She asks not really expecting a reply. She straightens from her hands-on-knees position, optimal for dry heaving, to card her fingers through her hair. “At least this didn’t happen when the students were here.” It’s not much as far as consolations go.

“Wait, what students?” Dean digs just as Sam comes out waving a hex bag around.

Ophelia shakes her head to show that it’s irrelevant but she answers him anyway. “The store doubles as an animal shelter.” She explains. “An art teacher from the high school brought his class for inspiration. They’re doing a project for Animal Cruelty Prevention Day.”

Ophelia’s sister returns, the local authorities arrive and Sam and Dean take a minute to confer.

“Dude, I think we’ve got this all wrong.” Sam says.

“Ya think? This case makes less sense the more we work it.”

“No, listen. I didn’t see a red bandana inside.”

“Okay?” Dean shimmies his head in a ‘so what’ kind of way.

“So what if all those animals, Ginger and Tobias, what if they aren’t the victims?” Sam wonders, working out a theory in his mind.

“I don’t know, man, they look pretty victim-like to me.” Dean raises a brow, questioning Sam’s faculties.

“What if they’re collateral damage?” Sam tries again.

Dean’s eyes widen infinitesimally. “The kids were the targets. The athlete, the painter and... The dog? Why would a witch take a dog? Aren’t they supposed to be cat people?”

“It’s not just a dog, it’s a seeing eye a dog. Arguably one of the better dogs to have.” Sam hints.
“Our witch is collecting talents and skills?” Dean says not even bothering with disbelief. Witches, man.

“I don’t know, but I’m willing to bet that the art teacher who put together this little field trip is the same teacher who invited the twelve year old painter to speak at the school.” Sam fleshes out.

“It’s ten o’clock. Time to pay the professor a visit, don’t you think?”

But then you took me by surprise

I’m dreaming bout those dreamy eyes

Roy Hankins sets the two mugs of tea on the coffee table in front of the agents who’d knocked on his door.

“I had permission slips from all the parents.” He explains nervously. “Not sure what the problem is.”

“No problem at all, Mr. Hankins.” Sam replies. “How would you say the field trip went?”

The teacher’s entire face lights up then. “Better than I could have hoped. It really got the students to want to be involved. To want to invest and apply themselves. That’s the whole point. Getting them to become more proactive.”

“Was inviting Darcy Stewart to speak at the school part of that?” Dean questions.

“Yes. How do you- I mean, yes. That one backfired a bit, though” He laughs then. “Some of my kids ended up feeling more discouraged by the idea that a twelve year old has accomplished more than them.” He laughs again. “Not all, some found it inspiring. One of my students even came to me afterwards asking about the best painting materials. She’s a bit excitable so I try not to think too much of it, but it’s important to invite that sort of enthusiasm especially in a teenager like her.”

“A teenager like her?”

“Yes, well Trish hasn’t had it the easiest. Spent her life bouncing from one foster home to another.” Roy admits sadly. “It’s so important to guide the youths and-”

“Mr. Hankins, will you stand up please.” Sam says abruptly.

“I’m sorry?” The teacher replies doing as he’s told anyway.

Sam doesn’t wait and crouches by the armchair Roy is sitting in.

“What is-” Roy begins to question.

“Son of a bitch.” Dean exclaims at the sight of the hex bag Sam wedges out from between the cushion and the arm of the seat where he’d seen it peaking out. “He’s not the witch, he’s the next target.”

“Witch? Excuse me?” The teacher demands with a shrill in his voice.

“Sir,” Dean starts, standing up. “You’re in a lot of danger. Is there anyone else living with you?”
“My wife is asleep but-”

“Dean, you got a light?” Sam asks patting his jacket down. “I can’t-”

The teacher snatches the velvet bag from the agent’s hand. “No one is setting anything on fire inside my home. What kind of FBI are you?”

“The kind that want to save your life.” Dean snaps. “You need to give that back to us and get your wife before one of you ends up dead and the other missing.”

“This is ridiculous. I’m going to get my wife and show you that we’re fine.”

Roy stomps off towards the stairs, taking the hex bag with him, and the brothers knock into each other when they move to follow. They right themselves but manage to stumble as they make their way around the coffee table.

They’re half way up the stairs when they see Roy disappear into what, they presume, must be the bedroom. When they make it there themselves, all they find is the decomposed body of Mrs. Hankins, no Roy in sight.

_I never knew, I never knew_

“Now what?” Dean asks from the driver’s seat of the parked impala.

His thumb brushes idly against the twine-like material of the globe in his lap as Sam’s fingers fly over the keyboard of his laptop.

“Sam?”

“I’m following a hunch and guess how many kids attend that school and are in the foster care system? Four.” Sam asks and answers. “Guess how many of them are in Roy’s art class? One. Patricia.” Sam shoots his brother a look.

“Patricia... Patti. I want us to nurture the bond we have, Patti?” Dean replies. “From Scott’s yearbook?”

“I want to know all about art supplies, Trish.” Sam confirms.

“Alright, I’m on board.”

“I have an idea where she might be too. Says here her parents died in a building fire when she was a kid.” Sam tells him.


“Linda Dar-? Nevermind. The building has been abandoned since. Damaged beyond what anyone was willing to spend to repair.”

“Let’s go.” Dean turns the key in the ignition.

“Linda Darnell, really?” Sam circles back to the topic.
“Shut up.”

*So take your suitcase, cause I don’t mind*

*And baby doll, I meant it every time*

With witch killing bullets in his gun and his half of the Staff of Eden in his duffle, Dean enters the abandoned building from the front while Sam goes around back. They sweep through each floor, efficiently making it all the way to the fourth one where they finally hear something.

The brothers crowd around a door behind which the sound emanating. Perfectly in tune with each other, without needing to vocalise the countdown they both hear in their own heads, Sam swings the door open and they rush inside, guns steady, scanning for threats.

Dean doesn’t know what he was expecting but this wasn’t it. What they walk into is a sick scene taken from a twisted play. Not unlike props, the kidnapped victims are positioned in the room. Like dolls in a toy home.

Little twelve year old Darcy is kneeling at the soot stained coffee table, painting with material that is so new they clash with the burnt down environment. The picture gets less innocent as Dean notices her calves pinned together and to the ground by a bolted down metal loop. Her shaking hands that nervously sweep brushes onto thick paper are shackled and chained to the table. Tears stream down her face that’s become wet and blotchy.

Colton is sat on the grimy singed sofa. A collar around his thick neck with a short leash tied to wall behind the back of the couch holds his head in place so that it’s angled towards a television. Or at least what used to be a television. On the screen, there’s a sheet of lined paper taped with the word ‘Sports’ written in big letters. Colton’s eyelids are also taped open, so that he doesn’t miss a second of the riveting programming of course. His arms are folded behind his back and though Dean can’t see, he’s willing to bet they’re restrained as well.

At the other end of the couch, Roy sits, reading a newspaper. His hands tremble as he brings the edges of the newspaper together, closing it and revealing a bomb duct tapped to his chest. He transfers a page from the right to the left and then opens the newspaper back up like a book, successfully turning the page.

Derby, the seeing eye dog, with the red bandana around his neck, seems to be doing the best. A leash, identical to Colton’s, keeps him tethered to the corner of the room, beside the TV. He’s laying on his stomach, looking miserable, but well.

“Son of a bitch.” Dean mutters.

Roy stares at his newspaper more intently, out of understandable fear.

Colton’s eyeballs go as far right as they can to catch a glimpse of the newcomers.

Even Derby lifts one ear.

It’s little Darcy who gives the most powerful response. Her head snaps up, her eyes shed a new and impossible amount of tears and she wails, “Please help us.” The sobs that wrack through her body seem like they might be powerful enough to physically knock her out.
Dean’s heart splits. She’s just a kid. Just a child.

You don’t need to compromise
I’m dreaming bout those dreamy eyes

“Please,” She begs. “She’s going to come back.”

Dean is immediately by her side after that, dropping his gun to the ground and pulling out his lock picking kit.

“Who’s coming back?” Sam asks getting to Colton. He removes the tape off the poor boy’s lids first before working the leather collar off.

Colton blinks rapidly and tilts his head to the side giving Sam better access. He manages an answer too. “Patricia. She’s a girl I go to school with. She just went nuts, kept saying she’d have a perfect family even if she had to make it herself.”

The jock turns to his knees when Sam gets the collar off so that his saviour can get his cuffs off next.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart,” Dean soothes. “We’re going to get you out of here.”

Even as he says the words he doesn’t know how get her legs out of their confinement. The girl nods, sobbing still but a tad quieter, as she wipes her tears with her newly freed hands. Dean spots a discarded crow bar and figures it’ll have to do.

“Mr. Hankins has a bomb.” Colton exclaims as if suddenly remembering.

All eyes go to the high school art teacher who doesn’t dare look away from the newspaper. Patricia had said she’d know if he did. She said that good daddies read the newspaper just like good little sisters paint pretty pictures and good big brothers watch sports.

“We saw.” Sam and Dean say in unison as the former finally gets the cuffs off the teenager and the latter snaps the metal keeping the little girl in place.

“Come here, kid.” Dean calls Colton over as he helps the little girl to her feet. “Get the dog.”

Colton does as he’s told, untying the dog’s leash from the hook on the wall.

“Sammy.” Dean barks.

“I got them.” Sam assures, scooping the girl up in his arms and signaling for Colton to follow him.

Dean makes it to the teacher’s side, the urgency thrumming in his veins. Suddenly, he’s painfully aware of the duffle bag hanging from a cross body strap. He wonders how Robin would be handling this situation. He hasn’t gotten to see her in action much and without really noticing he sends out a prayer to God that he gets the opportunity to. That he gets to get her back. Castiel hears.

The moment ends as suddenly as it came to him and Dean pries the newspaper from Roy’s clenching hands.
Dean doesn’t have time to argue with him to let go. Sam doesn’t have time to take a step, his gun cocked, a twelve year old prodigy on his hip, a jock at his heels and a seeing eye dog at the heels of the athlete. They don’t have time to do anything because just then Patricia enters the room.

_I never knew, I never knew_

_But it’s alright_

Patricia does not look happy. In fact, she’s devastated. If she didn’t know better she wouldn’t have thought that her makeshift family was leaving her. But she does and they are and that makes her sad but mostly it makes her mad. She worked so hard to save these people from their mediocre families, to bring them together, to bring them to her, so they could all be better. She’d been out looking for a mommy for them all to make them picture perfect and this is how they repay her.

Sam’s gun is flung out of his hands before he can pull the trigger and he gives himself a microsecond to cuss out at the universe because _of course his gun get flung out of his hands_. Things could never be easy.

“Back up, back up.” He instructs Colton, handing him Darcy.

The teenager back pedals, dragging the dog with him and pressing his back to the wall. He pets the hair of the girl sobbing in his arms even as he watches the scene unfold before him.

“Alright, Patricia.” Sam starts, trying to buy them some time maybe? Maybe he thinks he could actually talk her out of all this? He doubts it, but he speaks anyway. “I know you’re hurting. I—”

“You don’t know _shit._” She screeches, sending him flying into the television. “You.” She snaps at Dean. “Step away from my daddy.”

Dean doesn’t budge. In true Dean Winchester fashion, he goes a step further and taunts her. “You’re a big ol’ bag of crazy, you know that?”

“Away. From. My daddy.” She shrieks.

Dean stumbles back and off the sofa and throws his hands up in surrender when he sees a countdown appear on the bomb still taped to Roy’s body. “Alright, let’s just take a breather, okay?” Dean tries a new tactic. He eyes Sam long enough to see the reassuring rise and fall of his chest. Then he eyes his own gun, dropped a few feet behind and to the left of him.

“Your bag.” She demands.

Dean drops all the niceties. That didn’t last long. His features harden into something determined and terrifying to anyone within their right mind. Of course, Patricia is anything but. As it happens, she thinks he looks pretty.

“Not gonna happen.” Dean says, glaring her down.

“Your bag.” She repeats sternly. She’s smart enough to know that disarming these people is step one.

“Not gonna happen.” He stands firm. The orb is the only thing in the bag and the only thing that
can bring Robin back as far as they know. He’d give it up over his cold, dead and quite possible rotting body.

Patricia smiles sweetly then. Dean hates it when they do that. Damn witches.

She raises her hand and Sam’s body rises from the wreckage along with it.

“The bag, or your friend.”

She makes a fist with her hand and Sam gasps into consciousness. He scratches at his chest where he feels a phantom hand wringing his heart.

“Sammy.” Dean shouts.

“The bag!” Patricia roars.

Dean glances at his gun again. He wonders if he can get to it, pull back the safety and shoot before the witch can kill his brother. He knows what he has to do, because this is Sam. “Alright.” He concedes. He slips the strap over his head and tosses the duffle to a corner of the room, away from the both of them.

It feels a little bit like tearing his own heart out. It feels like he’s just tossed Robin away. Like he’s traded her life in for a member of his family, again. It makes him sick to his stomach, but then Sam is gulping down air and he’s okay enough and Dean knows there was no other choice. Knows that faced with the same options again he’d make the same decision because it’s Sam. He doesn’t even think Robin would hold it against him and that makes it so much worse.

“Good.” Patricia says, slamming Sam into the wall behind him and holding him there. “You’re pretty.” She says to Dean. “Pretty enough to complete my family. Daddy needs a spouse.”

“Shouldn’t you go find a woman?” Dean asks.

“Don’t be a homophobe. Couples shouldn’t be straight by default.” She admonishes him like he’s the worst out of the two of them.

Dean loses it a little at that. She wasn’t wrong, but she’d pissed him off anyway. “Listen here, witch bitch. You can take your alternative nuclear family and shove it where your morning star worshiping ass don’t shine, y’got me? You’re going to let these people go and you’re going to do it right now, because you have no idea who the hell you’re dealing with. You think your punk ass Patricia the Teenage Witch act is going to keep me from ganking you? I’ve had people who’d have you for breakfast as a goddamn snack.”

Patricia levels him with a steady gaze and then...she laughs. “Oh yeah, you’d definitely make good mommy speeches. Y’know, that’s a lot of talk to throw at the person holding all the cards.” She slams Sam back into the wall. “And then some.”

Dean’s blood begins to boil. With anger, but also with desperation and he knows it. Knows it the same way he knows she’s right.

“Patti.” A voice cracks from behind him.

Dean turns his head to see Colton swivel Darcy so she’s on his back, placing himself between her and the witch. The teenager takes a small step closer.

“C’mon, Pat. Enough of this, yeah?” He says softly, scared out of his mind.
Darcy clutches his neck tightly enough that Colton blames her for how weak his voice sounds. They all know better.

“Enough, okay?” He repeats. “I don’t get it. All the shit you’ve had to go through, I won’t pretend that I do. I get that there’s something to get though. I get that no one ever has. That you feel lonely. But you’re not alone, Pat. We were friends. You were ‘spose to follow me to UCLA when you graduate in a year, remember?”

“But you’re not going anymore, Colton. Because of your mom. All she’s done is hold you back. You say we’re friends, but we should be family. All of us. Why don’t you guys see this? I’m doing it for us!

“Mr. Hankins, your the best teacher I’ve ever had. You’re so good with your students and you care about us so much. Is it wrong of me to want more of that? And Darcy! You mean to tell me you’re happy with how your parents pimp you out, not even bothering to travel with you? Leaving you with that sleazy manager. You don’t think you’ll be happier with a big sis and a big bro and a dad that care? I even got you a dog, Darce. The best dog!”

Darcy whimpers at the nickname and hides her face behind Colton’s shoulder. Roy doesn’t dare react, keeps his eyes on the quivering newspaper.

“That’s not how it works, Patti. Come on, I have to believe that you understand that.” Colton tries to reason. He considers explaining that staying back from college is his idea but then Patricia is speaking in a cold tone.

“Maybe I was wrong, Colt. Maybe you’re not big brother material after all.”

“Lady, I seriously think you’re the only bad apple in this family tree.”

Dean pulls the trigger of the gun Sam had been carrying. He’d spotted it, closer than his own weapon while Colton and Patty were having words. The bullet whistles through the air and lodges itself in the witches forehead. Sam drops to the ground as she does and Dean empties the rest of the clip into her chest. Partly for the sake of being thorough, but mostly because he’s still pissed.

“Euh...guys.”

Dean looks over to the teacher, the countdown on his chest still going strong. It’s down to two minutes.

“Dammit.” Dean curses. “Sammy.”

“Yeah.” Is Sam’s assuring response.

He beelines it to the duffle then ushers the kids out of the apartment and out of the building, Derby following closely.

Dean looks the bomb over, tries to figure out the model.

“Oh my god, Gods, whatever deities are out there, please-”

“Teach, I get that this is kind of stressful, but I’m going to need you to shut up.”

“Sweet Jesus.” Is the last thing Roy mutters before pressing his lips together tightly.

Dean wonders, for the briefest of seconds, if Jesus was real.
It doesn’t take long for him to figure out that the bomb isn’t man made. Well, it is, but it’s been enhanced by witchcraft and there’s no way for him to know how to disable it. He pulls a switch knife out of his jeans and looks at the screen of the bomb.

Fifty seconds on the clock.

“What are you gonna do?” The teacher asks. “Which wire do you have to cut?”

“I don’t know.” Dean admits.

The man’s eyes bulge out and Dean would find it funny if he didn’t think there is a ninety percent chance he is about to die.

Forty seconds.

“So what are you gonna do?” The man squeals again.

Dean thinks about Sam, outside the building, by now. Probably, looking at the door, waiting expectantly for his brother to come out. He thinks about Sam seeing the building go off and wonders just how many nightmares he’ll have about it. He thinks about Sam getting in the impala, getting the kids to the police station, getting Derby back to Ophelia and then Dean thinks of Sam alone in Baby. It makes his heart physically hurt and when he thinks about Sam alone in the bunker, the ache doubles.

Thirty seconds.

He thinks about Robin, next. He prays that the dumb ass ball and stick do what they’re supposed to do. The world shouldn’t be without Robin, that much he knows. He thinks back to their last day together, their first day together. It hadn’t really even been a full day, but he doesn’t recall very many almost-days in his life when he had been that happy. He chokes on the thought that he might never see her again. A thought that had been haunting him for a long time. He’d been afraid that they wouldn’t be able to bring her back but now he thinks he might not be there when they do.

Twenty seconds.

He thinks about his mom. Not in the way he has most of his life. Not like she’s otherworldly and saint-like. Not the way his father had depicted her as perfect. Not the way he’d perceived her as a child. But the way he’d gotten to know in the little time he’d been afforded as an adult. He thinks of her as the flawed human that she is, just doing her best, trying to figure out where she fits in the world. He finds it oddly comforting that he doesn’t have to live up to these crazy expectations he’d set for himself on her behalf his entire life. He thinks she’ll be alright. She’s a Winchester and she’ll have Sam. So she’ll be alright.

Dean thinks that maybe everything he’s been through, from Hell to the Sun dying, is worth it if it means his little brother gets to get to know their mom.

Ten seconds.

He thinks about Cas last. Thinks about both the love and rage he harbours towards the angel. Cas has given up so much for him, everything really, Dean knows that, but Cas has also taken. He took her and Dean... Dean knows he should forgive him now, a rational part of him recognises that Castiel isn’t even to blame, but Dean doesn’t think he can. Because he doesn’t like where his anger will go if it isn’t directed at Cas and he doesn’t want his possibly last moments to tarnish anything else he hold dear... Anyone he loves.
Five seconds.

“I’m going to cut them all.” He finally answers the teacher and then he does.

There are no seconds left on the clock. There’s a white light so bright Dean shuts his eyes tightly. He feels himself dematerialise in a way that’s almost familiar. He wonders if he’s died enough times that his body recognises it now.

*Everything will be alright*

*Everything will be alright*

There’s stillness after that. Dean thinks he’s done it right, for once. Died and gone to heaven instead of... Then he hears a sob and that’s not right because there shouldn’t be crying in heaven. He feels a mist surround him, like rain that’s so light it just barely brushes his skin. The hand, that he just notices but somehow he knows has been on his shoulder this whole time, squeezes.

Dean opens his eyes and Cas is there. Dean must really be out of it, because he still thinks that he’s dead. That Cas is escorting him to the after life. It isn’t until he hears a fresh sob that he looks around. To his left he sees Colton cradling Darcy in his arms, tears streaming down his own face, as Derby rubs his head against his legs. To his right, there’s a Mr. Hankins doubled over and dry heaving. Over Cas’ shoulder, there’s Sam and the relief etched into his face only chases away some of the lingering fear.

“Remind you of anything?” Cas grins nodding to his hand on Dean’s shoulder.

Dean looks at it in confusion before a smile spreads across his face and a boisterous laugh escapes his lips at the joke. “Yeah, Cas, I feel gripped tight and raised from perdition.”

Cas’ grin widens but his expression sobers when he sees Dean’s harden.

“The bomb?” Dean asks, back to business.

Dean is still upset, still needs time, Cas can tell. “In space.” He answers before zapping away.

It leaves the brothers staring at each other.

They take care of the victims as best they can, but some if not all will probably need a lifetime of therapy. Derby is resting, to Dean’s chagrin, in the backseat of the impala as he’s the last to be dropped off last, at the pet store.

It’s late and they’re tired so they decided to spend the night at the motel even though the bunker is only an hour’s drive away. Sam is in the passenger seat, exactly where he should be. The staff is in Dean’s lap, its faint glow constant. There’s a song Dean likes playing on the radio and Dean doesn’t think about it when his hand reaches out to lower the volume. It wasn’t even loud before. Then, Dean is saying something he doesn’t recall deciding to say but as soon as the words are out they feel too right to take back.

“Want to have a chick flick moment?” He asks his brother.

As if they’d had time to bond amidst the chaos, Derby and Sam both peer at Dean in sync. Derby
rests his head back down and goes back to half-dozing. Sam doesn’t.

“Just till the song ends.” Dean suggests. He figures he should put a cap on the situation.

“I don’t know, man, it’s a pretty long song. Think we can get through it without sprouting lady parts?” Sam jokes despite the pride welling up in his chest.

“Shut up, bitch.” Dean counters with an eye roll.

The car quiets back down as the singer croons over the speakers and light rain pelts down on the metal and glass.

“I miss her.” Dean finally says.

It doesn’t do much for him. Doesn’t alleviate anything, doesn’t reduce the weight that’s been pressing down on his lungs since he saw Robin plunge a kitchen knife into her chest until she reached the hilt. Since she zapped off with Cas, right out of his hands.

“She’s hard not to miss.” Sam answers him.

Dean considers the words then laughs. “Yeah, that’s cause she’s so damn loud.” She was. She filled the vast bunker with her booming voice, loud grunts and endless laughter.

Sam joins him in laughing and nods his head in firm agreement. “And what’s with those nicknames? She really thinks they’re good.”

Dean looks offended on Robin’s behalf. “You said you like Samurai.”

“Relatively speaking.” Sam admits. “I figured it wouldn’t get any better than that. What the heck is a Deanold anyway?”

“Don’t ask me. I don’t question it so that she doesn’t think of something worse.”

Their laughter dies down slowly and petters to a stop, both boys sobering up.

The impala’s engine rumbles the way that’s unique to it. Derby snores softly in the back.

“She-” Dean chokes on the word. “She made everything so easy, and now...” His whisper trails off. Frustratedly he continues, “I don’t know, alright. I don’t know how to put any of this into words. I know she’d want me to, but she’s not here.”

Sam wants to say that she’d only want that for his own benefit, so that Dean doesn’t feel alone because he isn’t. Sam’s here. His lips barely part before Dean’s voice cracks in the air. Sam doesn’t need to look to know that his brother is tearing up.

“She’s not, but she needs to be. Someone like her...she belongs to the world, you know? She makes it better just by being in it and we need all the better we can get our hands on.” Dean speaks and it’s somehow both angry and desperate.

Sam almost wishes they weren’t having this conversation because it hurts to see and hear Dean this way. Almost.

“That’s not even the part that matters, to me.” Dean admits. “Y’know, she brings out the selfish side of me.” He laughs wetly like he finds it endearing but also like he holds it against her. “I just want her around me. Christ, Sam, I need-”
The song ends and so does the conversation. The tears in Dean’s eyes spill over his bottom lids and he wonders if they’re for Robin or himself. He hates that he knows the answer. He really is selfish.

Sam tries to comfort him with soft looks and Dean doesn’t bother being annoyed, or ashamed. He doesn’t even consider telling Sam to cut it out.

So he’s selfish but at least he’s having character development.

*Everything will be alright*

“*Everything will be alright.*” Robin finishes the song and hums the tail end of the tune.

She picks up the staff and twirls it like a baton over her head, before stretching and popping some joints. She gets to her feet and holds the stick in front of her. She wants to toss it away. Wants to snap it in half. Instead she cradles the part that splits off into three thinner branches like it’s the head of a body.

She paces sideways, then spins then does it again and pretty soon she’s whirling around the fog in mock ballroom dancing. She ventures further from the sigil than she would usually dare because the fog is particularly clear on this day. She continues to hum, her eyes fluttering shut as she loses herself to the feeling of her shuffling feet and to the light breeze in her hair when she twists.

*Toodoo toodoo doo*

The next morning, the brothers are in the diner in Nelson that serves the Elvis. The plan is to eat and then return to the bunker. They had a few hours still before their self imposed twenty four hour deadline, before they’d start searching for another solution than the staff of Eden.

“We can go somewhere else.” Sam assures Dean who only shakes his head in response.

His food is untouched. The orb, still wrapped in a cloth, sits beside his plate. Dean’s eyes are stuck on the stool where Robin had been sitting all those months ago.

*When Dean first spotted her, her presence didn’t really register. He ended up doing a double take and then a third one.*

*“Sam, look.” He said, elbowing his brother.*

This is the diner where they’d confronted her. They thought she’d been following them.

*“Are you stalking us?” Dean questioned in a gruff voice getting intimidatingly close to the 20 something girl.*
She slowly turned in her stool eyes wide. “No?” Her brows furrowed. “Are you stalking me?”

Dean scoffed and looked at Sam. Can you believe this girl? Stalking her? He scoffed again for added measure before cutting the crap.

“Cut the crap.” His voice was as gruff as ever. No one saw the girl scissoring her fingers under the counter top. Fleetingly, she thought she’d make a good lesbian.

Dean remembers being very tired back then. He and Sam had worked case after case and hadn’t been back to the bunker in weeks. They found out eventually that it had to do with the girl- Robin - being hunted by the supernatural at the Cosmos’ command.

She looked over her shoulder suspiciously. “Are the feds having me followed?” Her eyes were wide as she stared at the boys. “Is it because I illegally stream TV shows? Because I illegally download music?” Her eyes got even wider. “Did you guys check my internet history. Look I know it’s wrong but-”

“It has nothing to do with your internet habits.” Sam interrupted.

Dean smirked.

She had been so spastic, she’d managed to be both suspicious and disarmingly harmless. It contrasted starkly with when she attacked him on the side of the gas station and with her behaviour in the bunker’s dungeon.

Dean cleared his throat and begrudgingly tore his eyes away from the Elvis she’d ordered. “Ain’t no sense in lying to us sweetheart.”

“What are you?” Sam inquisitioned, seeming threatening for the first time.

The girl hesitated for a moment before finally replying, uncertain. “A blogger?”

“A blogger? What’s that? Like a mutant?” Dean asked.

Over the following weeks he’d learned that she was a combination of the things he’d noticed that first day. Dorky enough to rival Sam and badass in her own right. Most importantly though, she showed Dean how it was possible to live happily even in this life of theirs. Not just accepting and resigned but happy. She proved it to him not by saying words but by doing it herself. By being disarmingly happy. Smiling and laughing and enjoying little moments that usually flew over Dean’s head. It had jarred him so much so that he didn’t notice at first that he was falling in love with it.

A glint brings Dean’s gaze back to the orb. It takes him a beat to put a finger on what’s changed.

“Does it look like it’s glowing a little brighter to you?” He asks Sam. He isn’t sure if he sounds hopeful or desperate.
Toodoo toodoo doo

After a few years, Robin stops her clumsy dance when she begins to feel dizzy.

She opens her eyes and looks around, intending to plop back down next to the sigil. She doesn’t see it.

It shouldn’t matter. She knows that. The sigil is nothing more than her blood smeared on the ground next to broken pieces of glass and a phone far beyond repair. It does matter, though. That sigil keeps her tethered to a semblance of reality. It slows her descent into madness. It reminds her that even though she is alone, here, she wasn’t always. That, in turn, reminds her not to give up. Which, she figured, is her only job. Not giving up. It’s pretty touch-and-go most of the time but she doesn’t hold it against herself.

The sigil is gone, now. Robin feels the realisation physically crush her inside. This loss feels like too much bare. After everything, it’s too much.

She pivots, searching the floor wildly with her eyes. Her heart races a mile a minute, threatening to beat right out of her chest. She keeps it up for at least a week. All the while in a state of panic and frenzy that’s beginning to border on hysteria. She knows that in the real world she’d never be able to maintain such high emotions for such a long time. She wouldn’t be able to handle it. Her body would have to come down, either slowly or with a crash but it’d happen, eventually.

She knows from experience that’s not the case in the fog. It’s why she isn’t surprised when another week rolls by and the overwhelming sense of alarm, the adrenaline coursing through her, doesn’t even diminish let alone ebb away.

When her eyes land on something red-ish, in the distance she barely believes it to be real. She stumbles in its direction then halts. The would-be sigil is yards away. *Yards.* She’s seeing further than she ever has in the fog, dating back to when she and Cas first landed here. She looks around again, slower this time. She observes the fog, instead of the floor, and notices how it seems to have cleared more than ever before.

More than that, *it continues to clear.*

It dissipates more and more, thins out right before her eyes.

A glint draws her attention to the staff she has in a white-knuckle grip. From the cracks in the bark, a low light emanates.

She looks back up and through the fog she sees a silhouette. Her eyes must be playing tricks on her, she knows. That doesn’t stop the breath she releases.

“*Dean.***"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading
I'd appreciate your thoughts on the progression of the story (unsurprisingly :p)
When Robin thinks of the first time she met Dean, her mind goes to the Greyson Case in Saint-Cloud, Minnesota.

It was a short while before their confrontation in the diner where Sam and Dean had marched up to her and accused her of stalking them. Which was preposterous. Of course, she understood how it might have seemed that way because before spotting her in that diner in Nelson town, they saw her in Sioux Falls and before that there was the Greyson case. They say three makes a pattern so maybe preposterous is a bit too strong of a word. Inaccurate, though, definitely inaccurate.

The Greyson case wasn’t supposed to be a case at all. Robin had been zigzagging her way through the country, hitting up the more popular food joints and some that could only be called holes in walls. Her blog was doing really well and she was heading south from Duluth towards Houston to check out a steakhouse her readers kept asking about. On a whim, she decided to stop in Saint-Cloud for the night for no reason other than she liked the name of the town when she’d seen the sign for the highway exit.

Well, because she liked the name of the town and because she’d been having more frequent brushes with the supernatural lately which made her synesthesia hard to bear which, in turn, made her more tired than usual. So a pit stop in Saint-Cloud for a night’s rest it was.

She liked the ‘ou’ sound anyway. It made her synesthesia flare up in a way that wasn’t detrimental. Hues of blue would tinge her vision when she heard words like ‘cloud’ or ‘mountain’ or ‘mouse’. There was a time when her disease was as inoffensive as a bad taste in her mouth when her parents told her to study. Now it was the thing stopping her from being who she is. Who she was raised to be.

Sometimes Robin treated herself to a fancy hotel room but somehow that made her feel even more alone. It’s not that motels were like a home, but motels were kind of like a home. So no hotel. The place she ended up picking in Saint-Cloud was as nondescript as all the ones she’d been in since she was a child.

She wondered how she wasn’t more fucked up after sharing a room with her parents well into her teenage years. She figured that’d be horrifying for most people but she hadn’t minded so much. Or at all, really. In fact, when she stepped into the room she’d rented out for the night, she felt an odd sense of déjà vu and she thought that maybe she had stayed in the very same motel before. It wasn’t inconceivable, she’d been on more than a few hunts in Minnesota. Enough for it to be near impossible to keep track of all the places she’d slept, in this one state.

This motel really did feel familiar, though. She could picture her dad laying a line of salt as he told Robin to clean her weapons, something she did every night. She knew even then that it was only half about keeping her guns at the ready. The other half was about discipline and familiarity. She could imagine her mom scribbling away in her journal, freshly showered. She could envision her
parents arguing over the current hunt, whatever it was, by the small table before grinning like mad people and kissing deeply. That was Robin’s cue to groan and let them know just how gross they were. Even she had limits.

Robin turned right back around and left the motel, feeling overwhelmed by the onslaught of images. Though it was not the case tonight, more often than not she enjoyed these strolls down memory lane, recalling who her parents had been. To her, thinking of them was a way of honoring them, that and hunting in their name. Of course, Robin couldn’t do the latter anymore.

She sighed deeply and crossed the street. There was a large park on the other side of the road from the motel, the kind that didn’t have a playground and was all grass and benches and shrubbery, skirted with a thin belt of trees. She figured it was a good place as any to unwind.

It wasn’t, of course, a good place as any. She’d been strolling for maybe fifteen minutes and had gotten far enough from the motel that it was out of sight, when she first heard the grunting. It took her another minute and twice as many eye rolls to realise it wasn’t a pair of teenagers with a penchant for exhibitionism. After that it was a matter of seconds before she tracked down the scene and found what had to be a werewolf -she flinched even as she thought the word- straddling a young man, clawing at his chest.

Robin reached for the gun tucked into the waistband of her jeans and flipped off the safety. She wasn’t hunting anymore but old habits die hard. You can’t spend the entirety of your life packing and then be expected to just go without. There was that, and the fact that Robin wasn’t stupid. She might not have been hunting anymore but things were still out there going bump in the night preying on the unsuspecting. Going bump in this park in Saint-Cloud about to feed on this poor schmuck. Jesus, Robin thought he was younger than her, probably home from college for the summer.

She raised her gun and aimed as steadily as she could. The bullets weren’t silver but it would have to do. She inhaled and tried to get a clear shot. It shouldn’t have been hard, the monster’s back was to her, it was one of the easiest shots to be had in all of human history. It was the kind of shot her parents would have given her the chance to take at seven years old. The kind of shot they had let her take. The kind of shot that she’d made even at such a young age.

There was nothing easy about it this time around though. Robin’s skin was crawling, her ears were ringing and she could taste rotten eggs on her tongue. It didn’t matter that she wasn’t dealing with a demon, when her synesthesia took a turn for the worst it was always rotten eggs. Except with vampires, then it was always blood that she tasted, coppery and slick, she’d have a phantom sensation of it swishing around in her mouth.

The worst part, though, was her sight. It darkened making it hard to see anything in the almost-full-moon lit park. Robin aimed, aimed, aimed, tried to aim before cursing under her breath. She couldn’t risk shooting the human trapped under the shifter. She put the safety back on and tucked her gun away. Then, she ran towards the figures in the not so far off distance.

She tackled the monster off of the man and choked out a ‘run’, the taste of rot in her mouth doubling. The man did just that, making it a solid four yards before collapsing. Blood loss will do that to ya’.

Robin and the werewolf wrestled, to put it lightly. She narrowly avoided a claw to her jugular and she knew it was more dumb luck than anything else, in her current state. Eventually, she managed to unsheathe the small iron handled silver knife from her horizontal belt holster and thrust it into the beast.
She’d gotten it in the hip and he’d let out a loud agonized howl. Robin pulled the knife out to go again for the heart but the half animal had gotten up off of her. He hesitated for a long moment, like his body wanted to lurch back on top of her against his will but in the end, he ran off into the patchy woods.

On instinct, Robin began to run after him before she physically stopped herself. She couldn’t hunt anymore.

She jogged back to the fallen man and turned him over on his back. The damage was bad, his torn shirt revealing the deep claw marks and shredded flesh beneath, but he’d live. She removed her hoodie, her softest hoodie dammit, and pressed it into his torso to minimize the copious amount of blood he’d already lost.

She made two calls next. The first was 911. The second was to Marcus and James.

They’re a hunting couple she and her parents had worked with dozens of times. When she left Amy, George and Rodney she had met up with them. They were older now and mostly tried to assist other hunters with the lore and clearing them as FBI and such like Bobby had been doing. They still took on cases, though, but they were simpler ones. ‘Easier on the knees’ They’d joke.

After she realised she couldn’t hunt anymore, Robin thought she could join them, do what they did, contribute as a hunter in that way. It hadn’t really worked out. Even research sent her senses in a frenzy. They insisted she’d always have a place to stay with them, said things like ‘it’s the least they could do for her parents’, things like ‘it had been a joy watching her grow up and they’d love to have her around’, but it hadn’t worked. Robin could barely talk about a case without near blacking out and she had put the men in unnecessary danger on the occasional hunts they went on.

She still kept in touch. Had been calling them more and more lately, since she kept coming across creatures that needed to be put down. By someone, but not by her.

Marcus’ sleepy drawl, of course he’d been sleeping it was three in the morning here which meant it was midnight for him, told her there was a pair of hunters in Milwaukee and that they’d start heading to Saint-Cloud immediately. She thanked Marcus, exchanged heartfelt pleasantries and wished him a good night.

Milwaukee was a six hour drive away. Robin figured she’d stay with the victim until eight in the morning giving her an hour to skip town before the hunters could arrive.

Robin mostly tried to avoid meeting new people in her line of work. Or her previous line of work. The more smug ones who enjoyed being condescending tended to think she was a child playing at being a hunter. Robin could never prove them wrong, because she didn’t hunt anymore.

Ones that were more in the know would recognise her as the daughter of the famous Feras. She suspected sometimes that James or Marcus had let it slip. It was just as hard to stomach being around those hunters. They’d rave about her parents, ask questions that were none of their business and Robin couldn’t even really fault them for it. Her parents had been badass and had a reputation that said just that.

She couldn’t handle being asked about that day, though. Were you there? All those vamps up in flames! What did it smell like? Was it really just the two of them or was it a team of hunters?

The worst wasn’t even that. The worst was that Robin would get jealous. The hunters Marcus and James sent her way were going to work the case and gank the fucker and Robin had to hand over the reins and walk away. That never got easier.
So Robin generally avoided meeting her successors. As it happened, Robin had no idea who was coming to relieve her of her duties this time. She didn’t know that it was the Brothers Winchester and that the oldest of the two drove like a mad man. She didn’t know that they’d make it to the hospital where she was waiting on news from the victim in four hours instead of six.

She didn’t know that it was them that tapped her shoulder at seven in the morning, fed suit-clad and weary eyed. Though, she thinks she should have. They had a look that only hunters have. A look only people who’ve seen what lurks in the dark and choose to turn off the lights anyway have, and Robin should have known.

Later both Sam and Dean would kick themselves because they probably should have known too that the tired looking girl with a wild glint in her eyes, sitting in the plastic chair in front of the victim’s room, couldn’t have been anything but a hunter.

In their defense, Marcus had told them there wasn’t another hunter in the area that could take the case when the brothers had asked. They’d asked because they were exhausted and had barely gotten the chance to recover after dealing with God and the Darkness before Marcus and James sent them on this string of hunts. They hadn’t seen the inside of the bunker in over a month.

“Hi,” Sam said when the girl looked up from the touch on her shoulder. “I’m Agent Murphy and this is my partner Agent Law.” He smiled at her softly as they flashed her their badges. “You’re the one who called the ambulance, right?”

Robin nodded and did her best to look like a scared girl who’d been at the wrong place at the wrong time. “Yeah.” She breathed the word, making sure to crack her voice. She didn’t want to get wrapped up in an investigation. “Hi.”

“Do you mind if we ask you a couple questions?” Dean asked her not gruffly but not as softly as his brother.

Robin shook her head agreeably. “Not at all. I already spoke to the sheriff’s department, though. Told ‘em everything that happened.”

“What was that exactly?” Sam questioned taking the only other seat beside her. She recognised it as the tactic that it was. He was trying to make her feel more comfortable by not towering over her. Robin managed not to roll her eyes.

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“I was on a walk.”

“In the middle of the night?” Dean interrupted, the suspicion in his tone thinly veiled.

Robin smiled sheepishly, trying to look younger than her age, like a dumb kid that didn’t know better. Then her smile turned sad, like she was full of regret, like she should have known better. She played him like a fiddle. “I had a lot on my mind, I know it was stupid, but I just got dumped and I needed air and...” She trailed off knowing the FBI agents would change the topic not wanting to hear more of her imaginary love life.

“Hey, it’s alright. You’ll be more cautious from now on.” Sam said soothingly. “So you went out on a walk and then?”

“I heard the man groaning, at first I thought,” She blushed purposefully on command, a skill Amy had taught her. “It was someone fooling around.” All the best lies had some truth to them. “But when I saw him he was just laying there, his chest all ripped up.” She spoke, frazzled, eyes wide like she was reliving the moment. Like it was the most horrific thing she’d ever seen. It wasn’t.
Robin thought if blogging ever died out she had a career in acting. Maybe she could be a stunt double. She knew enough martial arts and she knew how to fall and not get hurt.

“I called nine-one-one and tried to stop the bleeding, like in the movies, you know?”

At this point, the brothers were pretty much convinced there was no foul play on her end. That is until she answered Dean’s next question.

“Did you see anyone there?”

Robin hesitated. It was only for a second. A fraction of a second, really. She was considering making something up, saying she saw a woman to throw the agents off the track of the actual werewolf who’d been a man. To keep them safe.

However, she worried that the hunters Marcus had sent would hear of the witness’ testimony and that she’d be feeding them a false lead. She could always call Marcus back and have him call the hunters and clarify, but she didn’t want to wake him again.

Nevertheless, she hesitated and Dean saw it and Robin saw that he saw it. “I didn’t see anyone where he was, when I found him, but further away, earlier on my walk, I saw a couple.” She tried to cover with something that could explain why she would falter. Like the reason she hesitated was because she wasn’t sure if it was relevant information.

Dean didn’t buy it, not one bit. Robin saw that too. Which is why it surprised her when he nodded. “Alright. I think that will be all.”

To her right and out of her sight, Sam raised an eyebrow at his brother. Sure it didn’t really add up, if she was the werewolf than why would she call the ambulance but they’d been dealing with a lot of creatures lately that weren’t sticking to their MO, and Sam knew Dean had his doubts about the girl. So why was his brother letting up?

“Do you think we could get a number?” Dean asked pleasantly, like she’d be doing them a huge favour. He pulled a business card from seemingly nowhere and fished out a pen from his breast pocket handing them over to her. “So we can reach you if we have any more questions.”

“Sure.” Robin smiled having no intention of ever speaking to these agents again. She reached out, took the business card, flipped it so the back was facing up, and then grabbed the, unbeknown to her, silver pen. Agent Murphy excused himself and moved down the hall as she jotted down a phone number that wasn’t hers and returned both items to the man still standing in front of her. She smiled artificially again.

When she didn’t react to the metal the brothers had exchanged a look and Sam had left to find a paper cup. They both felt like they’d rather be safe than sorry.

When Sam returned, he offered her the holy water.

“Thank you.” She accepted gratefully swallowing some of it down.

That’s when the doctor stepped out of the victim’s room. “Agents?” She said. “Mr. Greyson is awake now if you’d like to speak with him.” She continued once they turned towards her. “I have to warn you though he’s experiencing severe shock. He thinks a person assaulted him but everything points to an animal attack.”

“Thank you for your time, Miss...” Dean turned back towards Robin while Sam continued to speak with the doctor.

The FBI agents stepped inside the room where one Darin Greyson described to them what was obviously a werewolf. Then he told them how ‘A wild girl flew out of nowhere and took the thing down. She fucking stabbed it, man. Saved my life.’

When the brothers stepped back outside intent on interrogating Miss Hood again she was gone. In fact, she was almost back to the motel and was planning on taking the bag she left just inside of the door, getting in her jeep, and driving straight out of town. The room had been a waste. What kind of place was called Saint-Cloud anyway? Dumb name.

Much like Robin, Dean thinks of the Greyson case when recalling his first time meeting her.

They’re both wrong.

Dean and Robin had met long before that.

“Sam, quit arguin’. This hunt’s too dangerous, you’ll be safer here.” A sixteen-year-old Dean says, standing out front of Singer’s Salvage Yard, Sam to his right and his father to his left.

Bobby, lining empty beer cans and empty beer bottles on a car he’d been working on, a few yards away, rolls his eyes exasperatedly at the Winchester men. Every time John brought the boys over they had the same argument, you’d think they’d learn. Idjits.

“Listen to your brother, Sam.”

“But Dad!” The kid complains his squeaky voice making Bobby roll his eyes again, this time affectionately. “I’ve been going on hunts with you guys for a whole year now.” He says, like it’s a long time.

“The answer is no, Sam. This one’s too risky.”

Bobby steps away from his cans and his bottles and walks towards the road; he’s expecting visitors. Well, more visitors. He makes sure to keep a fair physical distance between him and the trio, not wanting to get in the middle of that mess.

John softens a bit at Sam’s look of disgruntlement. Moments like these he wonders if it was right of him to allow his sons to do any of this. Moments like these are brief though. He knows he can’t keep them in the dark. They have to know how to protect themselves. Have to learn to fight. John’s look hardens again as he and Sam engage in a stare off, while Dean flails trying to ease the tension.

“If it makes you feel better, Sam,” John continues. “Dean isn’t coming either.”

It doesn’t make Sam feel better but he can’t help the shit eating grin that splits his face.

“WAIT WHAT?” Dean shouts, swiveling on his father. “Dad, come on. I’m not a kid, you need back up out there.”

“Hey! I’m not a kid either.” Sam argues not unlike a kid.

“Enough.” John says quietly but in a tone that scares both brothers enough for them to shut the hell up. “You’re both staying at Bobby’s and that’s the end of it. I’ll only be gone a few days, a week tops.”
Sam huffs and Dean rolls his eyes. It’s always ‘a week tops’ and it’s also never ‘a week tops’.

“Don’t you roll your eyes at me, boy.” John seethes and Dean forces the scowl off his face.

“Yes sir.” No good would come from angering his dad more, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t pissed as fuck. He only half listens as his dad continues to lecture Sam.

Bobby keeps his eyes pointedly on the road and it’s seconds later that the car he is waiting on drives up. It’s atrocious. It’s mustard coloured.

Dean is working on unclenching his fist when he sees the automobile approach. He watches as before the vehicle even stops a tiny creature, quick and spry, springs out of the backseat yelling a gleeful ‘Mr. Singer’. He needs to force himself to recognise it as human, a little human girl no less, and not as some kind of miniature monster that seemed to be more hair than anything else. Dean watches over his father’s shoulder, still giving Sam a talking to, as the young girl, nine, maybe ten, stands at attention in front of Bobby, her mane whipping in the air.

Her stance is wide and her posture is ramrod straight. Her head is tilted up looking Bobby fiercely in the eyes as she raises a hand to her forehead in an army salute.

What the fuck? Dean thinks.

Her lips are in a tight line but even from his spot many feet away Dean can see them twitching, fighting to form a smile.

“Little bird, two o’clock.” Bobby says like that makes any sense.

Dean, Sam and their father were between her four and five. Dean quickly looks to her two and sees the empty beer containers Bobby had been setting up for seemingly no reason on the red truck he’d told them he’d finally gotten to work the night before.

Dean had barely glanced at the location and then back at the girl, Little Bird apparently, but it’d been enough time for the child to pull a glock, that looks way too big in her tiny hands, out of goddamn nowhere. There’s just no way, no way Bobby would let her fire off at the truck he’d just fixed. He’d been working on that damn thing months ago, the last time they’d stopped by. Dean doesn’t get much more time to doubt or to assess the situation because then she’s shooting.

That gets John, who draws his own weapon, and Sam’s attention. The three Winchesters watch as nine (and a half!) year old Robin Fera aims, shoots and hits every last one of the targets Bobby had set out for her, without damaging the car in the least. Her feet dig into the dirt beneath her to fend off the recoil. She staggers back, less than one would assume for someone her size, in a controlled way.

When she’s done she puts the safety back on holsters the gun that still looks huge against her back and returns at attention.

Bobby grins and laughs loudly ruffling the girl’s hair and she preens. Who preens at that? Normal people hate that. Nobody likes to have their hair messed up like that by adults. Sam doesn’t. Dean never did.

“She’s gotten faster.” Bobby says to the couple Dean hadn’t noticed get out of the car they’re now leaning against.

“I practice all the time!” She exclaims proudly before her parents, Dean assumes, can get a word in.
“She does, but she knows that before she can practice anything else this weekend,” Her dad starts pointedly, moving closer to her. “She has to study for her history exam.”

The girl groans and nods taking the backpack her dad holds out to her and hoists it onto a shoulder. Hunters prioritising school work over training? That doesn’t sound right to Dean.

Bobby takes the small duffle her dad was also holding. “Ain’t it summer?” He asks.

“She has one last final, next week. We gotta be in Washington for her to take it.” Her mom speaks still leaning against the car.

“So homeschooling in the backseat of a car, that’s really been working out?”

It’s her father’s turn to exclaim proudly. “She’s in the top ten percentile in the country.”

Bobby laughs again. “Of course she is.”

“Hello, sir.” Robin greets an approaching John.

Dean and Sam hang back as they’ve been told. Their dad doesn’t like them being around other hunters. Bobby has been the only exception but things seem to be rocky between him and their dad for a short while now too.

Bobby introduces them and mentions as subtly as he can that the girl was going to be staying for a few days but her parents were heading out for a hunt. John relaxes with the knowledge that he didn’t need to stash his boys elsewhere, after all.

The adults exchange strained pleasantries, both parties mentioning that they’ve heard much of the other, before John calls out a ‘Boys’ over his shoulder in goodbye and walks off towards the impala.

Sam and Dean stay put, Sam kicking at dust with his shoe and Dean watching almost perversely as the girl’s parents assault her with hugs, tell her to ‘be good’ as though this were cliché-central and ask her if she really is okay staying here.

Dean wonders what that must be like and finds himself feeling...jealous. If she answered ‘no’, would her parents take her with them?

The little girl grins up at them and even from his location he can see a glint of something wild and wicked in her eyes. “Just go kick some ass, yeah?” She says and it startles Dean a little. It wasn’t particularly vulgar, he’d said worse at a younger age, but the words startle him coming out of her mouth anyway.

“Watch your tongue.” Her mother scolds halfheartedly grabbing her daughters head with both hands and planting a loud kiss at her crown before slipping into the driver’s seat of the car.

Her dad shakes hands with Bobby and reminds her to study one last time before getting into the car himself. Loud chaotic music Dean thinks he likes comes on and dwindles as they drive away. Dean sort of misses them on the girl’s behalf.

He finds out her name is Robin. Dumb name for a girl. Sam takes a liking to her though so Dean finds it harder to hold a grudge against her for having something that he wants. Something he wishes Sam could have too.

Sam helps her with mnemonic devices when she studies so she can remember dates better. She
surprises them both when she helps Sam with some fighting moves. She insists on the technical in a way that makes Dean think she studied fighting theoretically long before she started fighting physically. She argues with him when he tells Sammy it’s just about hitting hard, hitting fast and hitting repeatedly.

Any doubt he has that she both knows what she’s talking about and can hold her own is cast out, when she puts Sam down multiple times to Bobby’s delight. Sam hasn’t hit the bulk of his growth spurt yet, but he’s still taller and bigger than Robin.

Dean spends the few days she’s there being an annoying jerk but when her parents pull up to the salvage yard to pick her up he goes outside to send her off with Sam and Bobby anyway. He isn’t sure why he does it because she’s just an overachieving little brat that smiles too much and laughs too hard. Dean shouldn’t be sad to see her go but he kind of is.

Sam definitely is. He tells her, “You’re a cool chick for someone who hasn’t hit double digits yet.”

In mock-conceit that Dean scoffs at, she replies “Imagine what I’ll be like when I do turn ten.” Then she pulls Sam into a hug murmuring something about what’s cooler than cool.

Bobby ruffles her hair when he comes back from speaking to her parents waiting in the car. “Next time, we’re doing drills.” He tells her. “I saw you stumblin’ chasing after stray cats and dogs one too many times.”

“I never fell, though.” She counters with a raised brow and somehow she doesn’t seem like a nine-year-old, to Dean.

“Don’t be a little shit, little bird.” Bobby deadpans and then she’s cackling. Bobby walks off when he hears a phone ringing inside, chuckling all the while.

She steps up to Dean next, which surprises him. He’d thought she’d head to the car now, to both her parents waiting on her. Instead, she stands in front of him, looks him up and down appraisingly, making Dean shift in discomfort, and smiles. “You’ve been very rude but that’s okay, I forgive you.”

Dean frowns his brows at both her bluntness and her clemency. Sam snorts out a laugh but shuffles off when Dean shoots him a glare. “Just like that?” Dean questions.

“Yeah,” She replies easily. “I’m over it.” She smiles again, just as easily, and turns to head home, where her family is, only a few yards away. She’s already itching to get back on the road.

“Hey,” Dean calls after her. He doesn’t know why but he does. It seems he often doesn’t know why he does the things he does when he’s around her. She’s off-putting.

She half turns towards him. The sun, golden at the horizon, shines brightly making her hair look much lighter in colour than he knows it is as it whips wildly in the breeze, matching the wild look in her squinting eyes. Something about her had him on edge all weekend and he thinks it has something to do with that very look. There’s something turbulent and tempestuous and boisterous in this little girl and God help them all when she does turn ten.

“Bye, kid.” He finishes. He’d taken to calling her that to annoy her, but she seemed to like it and then he couldn’t bring himself to stop.

She answers with a wicked grin, which Dean thinks proves his point, before walking off and climbing into the car. Echoes of the family’s bustling conversation escape the vehicle as Dean watches them drive off. He stands there a few more minutes as the little girl’s laugh echoes inside
his head.

The next time he thinks about her, he’s standing in that very same spot, a month later, waiting on his dad to pull up. One week tops my ass, Dean mumbles.

He doesn’t think of her much at all after that. Once in a while, well into adulthood, he’ll recall in an abstract kind of way how one of the other hunter kids he’d met at Bobby’s when he was younger was, for all intents and purposes, a badass.

When Sam, posing as Agent Murphy on a werewolf case, taps the shoulder of a scared looking girl, Dean doesn’t connect the dots.

When he spots her, does a triple take, in the diner that serves The Elvis in Nelson town and confronts her about stalking them, he doesn’t connect the dots.

When she presses a pair of warded handcuffs into his hand and struts out of the bunker’s dungeon and Sam tells him her full name is Robin Fera, he still doesn’t connect the dots.

It isn’t until one day, when Dean is flipping through one of Bobby’s journals and he finds an entry, one of many, that mentions the Feras, that he notices a scratchy drawing in the margin. It’s a winged creature with the words ‘Little bird’ scrawled on top of it. Dean connects the dots.

“Dean.” The eldest Winchester thinks he hears.

It sounds like Robin. It sounds just like Robin. Like she’s in the room. Like she’s right there. He tears his eyes away from the orb and scans the diner intently, finding nothing. Maybe he’s hallucinating again? It hasn’t happened since he’d heard her in her bedroom, but maybe it’s starting back up. He doesn’t know if it’s a good thing.

They still have a few hours, he reminds himself. Which is arbitrary because even when time runs out it’s not like he’ll stop trying. He’ll find a way to get her back. If it means he has to sprout wings and drag Chuck out of his siblings’ retreat to do so then so be it.

Robin watches Dean’s silhouette. Watches as his ears seem to pick up on her presence and as his eyes fail to register her. She feels crestfallen but the feeling doesn’t linger as she focuses on what’s in front of her. Dean.

All she sees is him, just past the dwindling fog, just out of reach. Faintly, she smells frying oil and it almost assaults her senses. She hasn’t smelled anything other than herself in too long. She hears a ding, like a doorbell? No, not a doorbell.

The fog clears, more and more, more than it ever has in the past thousand years, until all that’s left is a mist and even that continues to clear.

Her eyes settle on Dean, when she first sees him fully, when he’s no longer an obscure figure, and it’s like coming home. The Staff in her hands, gripped so tight it might actually snap, gleams even brighter. Bright enough to catch the hunter’s attention again.

He looks up. He looks up. He looks up and Robin can’t breathe.

His eyes land on her and his gaze glances over before returning to the ball in front of him. He does a double take and then a third until he finally sees her. She’s appeared out of nowhere but she’s appeared.
The image of her sharpens like it’d somehow been blurry before, shrouded by something. Dean doesn’t doubt for a second that it’s the real deal. *It’s Robin.* Not something his mind has conjured up. He knows because as good as his brain is at making hallucinations seem real, he can feel Robin’s presence. The ease that she carries with her wherever she goes reaches across the diner and encompasses Dean.

Robin can’t help grinning madly at the look on Dean’s face. “Dean.” She breathes again like she’s afraid that if she’s too loud the fog will pull her right back in, to muffle her.

Saying his name does something, though. To the entire universe, maybe, because Dean swears he feels it shift into rightness. It definitely does something to him because then he’s standing. The ball, the food, the brother, the world, it all gets forgotten, gets left behind and Dean is shortening the distance between them in strides that are long, *long*, overdue.

Robin can barely believe her eyes. She almost wants to stumble back, almost wants to get away, because it seems too good to be true, suddenly. She thinks that maybe if Dean touches her, it’ll prove that none of this is real, just like when Lucifer had come for her.

She doesn’t move away, of course, mostly because she doesn’t know how to just then. She’s grateful for her loss of motor skill because as Dean gets closer, he unknowingly disperses the lingering smoke, making it fade away more. If she could manage a thought that wasn’t about Dean, she’d notice the room she’s in. She’d realise diners can’t be found in the fog. She’d understand that neither can she. Not anymore. She’s home.

Dean reaches her and then his arms are around her and his hand is in her hair pressing her face to his chest. He’s holding her so tightly, it’d hurt if Robin wasn’t as blissed out as she is. Dean’s eyes are wide and disbelieving, but she’s here, she’s back.

“*Robin.*” He murmurs against the top of her head, blinking away the wetness in his eyes.

Robin slides her hands around his back and pulls him even closer. The feel of his muscles under the palm that isn’t still holding the staff is strange to her. The feel of his body against hers is both foreign and familiar. It’s all undoubtedly real, though.

They stand there clutching each other and for the first time in a long time the minutes that drag by aren’t agonising for either of them. Robin thinks she can stay here, just like this, for another thousand years, easy.

Dean’s hand slips from the small of her back to her hip - *oh how he’s missed those hips* - to pull her away but Robin only holds on tighter.

“Let me look at you.” Dean whispers.

Robin doesn’t want to, doesn’t ever want distance between them ever again, but she knows she can’t deny him a damn thing. So she leans back just enough to make it possible to see each other’s faces, keeping their hips close and her arms wrapped around him.

He’s so beautiful. Robin had never forgotten that even after hundreds of years, but she’d forgotten details. The way one of the creases by his eyes is that much deeper than the rest. The way his hair sticks out. The way his freckles are scattered. She promises herself, then, that she’d commit the constellation to memory.

Dean knows he’d missed her, it had hurt how much he’d missed her, but he didn’t think it could hurt to have her back. That it would be almost too much to bear to have her in his arm. That the
relief would be this overwhelming.

He wants to crash his lips to hers, wants to lose himself in her and maybe find solace there like he used to. Instead, he tugs her back to him and holds on like she’ll vanish again. For all he knows she just might.

There’s a light to her left that begs for her attention, but Robin ignores it for as long as she can. She wants to just be here with Dean. Then the staff in her hands is vibrating and it threatens to shake right out of her hand, so she reluctantly pulls back from the hunter. She releases him from her grip and holds the staff between their chests.

Dean’s arms remain in a loose circle around her, both hands on her hips now. The way his thumbs rub back and forth soothingly is distracting. Robin hasn’t been touched in what feels like forever. Every brush, every sensation, it’s all heightened.

She manages to focus enough to turn her head to the left. She barely takes note of the glow peeking out of a cloth focusing instead on the man holding the ball shaped item.

She’s smiling again and Robin recognises the emotion as happiness. She hooks an arm around the necks of each brother forcing them to bend down as she hugs them both. They return the affection and Robin could cry. She doesn’t, but she could.

Dean drags her back into his arms shortly after and it earns him a chuckle and an eye roll from his brother. Dean doesn’t miss the contented sigh it gets him from Robin, though.

Gently, meaning not to disturb the couple, Sam coaxes the staff out of Robin’s hand. He thinks it’s time to reunite the two halves. Robin flinches, tightens her grip on the stick and rips it away from Sam, making her and Dean stumble a pace away. The act is violent and possessive and it takes Robin a beat to realise that she’s even done it.

Sam looks at her with confused puppy eyes and Dean looks at her with concern, rubbing comforting circles on her back.


She offers Sam the staff, instead of finishing her sentence.

Sam nods knowingly. He doesn’t know, not really, but he’d seen his brother with the orb so he isn’t all that surprised by Robin’s response. He takes the branch from Robin’s hand and extends his best reassuring smile.

Unwrapped, Sam places the twine textured ball in the cradle created by the splits in the stick part of the staff. As soon as the pieces settle into each other, the ends of the branch curling around the ball, the glow emanating from the Staff of Eden ebbs away.

Robin, Sam and Dean stand in a triangle, the unimpressive looking staff, that brought them together, held between the three of them. For a moment, all is right in the world. For a moment, they allow themselves a reprieve from hurting.

Then, Robin’s stomach rumbles, loud and obnoxious, and she gives them a sheepish smile.

Robin and Dean walk out of the diner, into the cool late fall air, and back to the impala, hand in hand. Robin relishes in the cold, something she couldn’t feel in the fog. She wouldn’t be able to get
rid of the grin on her face if the world was goddamn ending because she’s touching someone. Another human whose hand is warm and calloused and perfect. Another human who’s Dean. Sam’s promise to get food to go helps too.

They’d caused a bit of a scene so Sam said it was best to head home. She wanted to tell them she that she already was home but decided it was too repulsively corny even for her.

“Baby’s still kickin’, huh?” She beams at Dean when they stop beside the car.

Dean’s too happy to think that the statement is odd. He doesn’t question why Robin would think his Baby wouldn’t be in good shape. “Yeah.” He says, tapping the top of the car affectionately, though his eyes don’t leave Robin.

Her eyes don’t leave him either, as it happens. She studies his face intently, falling in love with his goofy smile all over. “You haven’t aged a bit, Dean.” She breathes out the words, awed. She’s thinking out loud more than anything else, she doesn’t mean anything by it, but she thinks she might have done something wrong when confusion mixes with the amusement in Dean’s features. He picks up on the oddity this time.

Dean chuckles a little uneasily. “What do you mean?”

Robin doesn’t understand the sudden underlying tension. “Just that time has done you well.” It had. He just looks a little more tired than Robin is used to.

Sam and Dean are alive and well. There aren’t any flying cars. Robots aren’t everywhere. Robin isn’t dumb enough to think that a thousand years in the fog, give or take, equates to a thousand years in the real world. Time is warped there, but time has passed. She figures a few years at least, maybe a decade.

Dean’s confusion deepens and the smile he’d been sporting is wiped clear off his face. Dread settles in the pit of Robin’s stomach and she doesn’t want to think about any of this anymore. “Think Sam will forget the extra fries?” She asks casually, forcing her grin to widen.

“Robin,” Dean calls softly. He removes his hand from the impala and cups Robin’s face. The touch is so tender it makes Robin want to cry. “Robin,” He repeats and Robin wants him to stop there. Wants him to do anything but finish his thought. “How long do you think you were gone?”

Robin’s lips twitch and try as she might she can’t keep her fake smile from falling away. “Dean, I—” Dean don’t. “I don’t know, I—” Don’t want to think about it. “It was different there.” She finally gets out. “Time, it wasn’t normal. So I know, okay I know it wasn’t really as long as it felt.” Her voice wavers, a shrillness tinging it at the fringes. “I know it hasn’t really been nearly a—” She laughs and it’s not the laugh Dean likes. “A millennium. I know.”

Dean flinches, his eyes widen and fill with an anguish that Robin doesn’t ever want to see there. She hates that she’s caused it.

“I know.” She continues just so that she has something to focus on other than Dean’s sad eyes. “I get it, I’m guessing it’s no more than a decade. A few years maybe.”

Dean tries to rid his face of emotions, tries not to be as transparent as he knows he’s being, for Robin’s sake, but she reads him easily enough that her next words tremble out past her lips.

“One year?” She asks. When Dean doesn’t dare answer Robin feels her eyes tear up. “A few months?” It couldn’t possibly be less than that but Dean’s eyes tell her otherwise. “Less than a few months?” She whispers.
There’s a lingering minute where the two only stare at each other. She feels like they’re so fragile and that seems wrong to her. She’s strong and Dean is stronger. They shouldn’t be this vulnerable in this moment. Robin hardens her resolve, blinks away the tears and presses her lips in a thin line.

“How long has it been, Dean?” Her words aren’t harsh, but resolute. When Dean doesn’t answer, she tries again with more force, determined to get the information and move on. “How long, Dean?” He’ll tell, she’ll know and that’ll be that.

Dean regrets it before he even opens his mouth. “Just under a week.”

The words are like a punch to the gut. Robin can’t wrap her mind around them. She’s lived lifetimes and only a handful of days have gone by here. It couldn’t be possible. She couldn’t have just felt like there was more time in the fog. This thing couldn’t just have been in her mind. There’s no way her brain would have been able to torture her like that. Absolutely not. She’s certain because the thousands of conversations she’d had with Cas couldn’t possibly have occurred within a week.

The certitude that it wasn’t her own doing at least does nothing to comfort her and then she’s crying. Wailing, really. Coming undone. Guttural and pained sobs that break Dean’s heart escape her. He’s there, though, and he’ll stay there to catch all of her as she falls apart.

Chapter End Notes

Quick note, before I started writing this fic I thought Sam was very early 30s (30, 31) and Dean was 33, 34 MAYBE 35. It was a shock to my system when I realised they are older than that. I had already built Robin in my head, though, as 26 going on 27 and I didn’t want a larger age gap than that between her and Dean so in this fic, much like in the fog, time is warped :P

Our babies are reunited! Please let me know what you think about the chapter and how the story is progressing. I feel like the pace has been very slow so far but things are about to pick up for sure.

Any and all feedback is welcome and very much appreciated.

I'm on Tumblr: @fanforfanatic
“I almost forgot about this place.” Robin says as Dean waves her into the bunker.

He and Sam hover closely behind her, unwilling to stray too far after Robin’s meltdown earlier. They had ushered her into the backseat of the impala where Dean had held her, shushing and patting and promising that everything would be alright, that she was home now, sweetheart. Sam drove them back to the bunker and, save for Mary in the passenger seat, it was just like when Robin freaked out after the plan for Grace to kill her and bring her back hadn’t worked.

Robin places her hands on the railing and gazes down at the library. It feels just like the first time she saw it, all wood and warm hues. The Men of Letter library was definitely impressive.

Robin feels her memories adjust in her mind. Moments she’d shared with the boys, here, return to her, just like ones from the impala.

“Forgot?” Sam asks tentatively, following her down the steps when she begins making her way to the main floor.

“Yeah,” She confirms. “A lot of details faded away over time.” She explains more calmly than any of the three expect her to manage. “I still remembered it existing, I just couldn’t really recall what it looked like and...stuff.”

Sam nods despite the fact that Robin can’t see him behind her. Dean breathes purposefully, trying not to think too much about what Robin’s been through.

“It’s really good to have you back, Robin.” Sam says, placing the Staff and the take out on the table of the war room. He can’t help feeling a little guilty as he does so. Robin went away for them in the first place and then it took days for him to actively try and get her back. A few days that ended up feeling like centuries to her.

“It’s good to be back.” Robin replies, inching closer to him. “God, I wish I had a less cliche response.”

Sam chuckles and Dean rolls his eyes at Robin worrying about such a dumb thing.

“Yeah, work on it for next time.” Sam mock-agrees, pulling her in for the hug he thinks she wants. A hug, he realises, he really wants too.

“Aye aye, Samurai.”

Sam groans.

“You smell like ash.” She throws back.

The boys hadn’t trusted the motel bathroom to shower in it the night before, so they still smelled like the burnt down building. Sam more-so since he’d been made to roll on the ground and rub against the wall by the witch.

“I do.” He accepts. “I’m going to put the Staff away and take a shower. Unless you wanna go
“first?” He offers her, not letting her out of the hug just yet, smothering her with his stench evilly.

Robin could take him up on his offer. She hadn’t showered in nearly a thousand years, but she’d showered the day she left. She blushes recalling how said shower had been shared with Dean. She hadn’t gotten dirty, in the fog, hadn’t even sweat. Nothing physically changed about her. Which means those Kegels had been pointless, she realises. All that being the case, a shower sounds heavenly just about now. What she isn’t too keen on is being alone in the shower room. She doesn’t want to be alone ever again.

“No, you go ahead.” She assures the tallest Winchester, pulling herself out of his embrace. “Thanks.” She smiles at him.

Sam eyes her briefly, trying to judge if she means it or if the time apart has made her feel like a guest. He decides that Robin isn’t afraid of imposing. He gives her another quick squeeze and disappears down the hall, the Staff of Eden in hand.

That leaves Robin and Dean alone. From behind, Robin can feel his gaze on her. She feels him stride over more than she can actually hear him. When he’s close enough, she feels his front press into her back. She feels his chest expand against her as he inhales and her own breathing begins to match his.

Dean reaches around her, his strong fingers wrap around the rolled top of the paper bag. He gives it a shake, then says, “Food?”

Robin nods, suppressing the shiver his breath against her skin elicits.

Dean laces his fingers in hers, maybe so that Robin feel less jealous of the takeout. It’s an act Robin recognise as slightly out of character for him. He quietly leads her to the library.

Pretty soon they’re both digging into their food. Well, Robin digs into her food and Dean watches her. She’s not exactly eating as she’s devouring the meal in front of her. Totally engrossed in the task except for when her eyes move to him every few seconds. There’s a pang in Dean’s chest when he realises that she’s checking that he’s still there.

“What?” Why are you staring? She asks around a mouthful. It’s all very lady like.

“Nothing.” Dean smirks. “You just have a lot of, euh, gusto.”

Robin force swallows the food she hasn’t chewed enough. “We hadn’t had dinner.”

“What?”

“The night I... When I left, we hadn’t had dinner, yet. I was hungry then and I still am.” She sticks some fries in her mouth. “I was hungry the whole time I was there, but it was kind of underlying. Never got hungrier. Jesus, this is amazing.”

She sinks her teeth into her burger again and grins at Dean simultaneously. He’d be impressed by the dual action if he wasn’t a little grossed out. Who’s he kidding? He’s very impressed.

“I forgot what it’s like to bite into something. To chew. Oh god, yes.” She all but moans. The way the food occupies her mouth and the way it travels down her throat feels strange to Robin but she’s into it.

Dean laughs and finally picks up his own burger. “You’re... Something else, Fera.”
She mumbles something in between chews and Dean assumes it’s ‘Thanks’, maybe ‘Thanks, Deanold’.

He takes a bite out of his own food. “Robin, it’s gotten cold.” He says like he’s offended by the burger. “Why didn’t you say something? Give, I’ll heat it up.”

Robin’s eyes widen. “No.” She half splutters half shouts.

Dean would think she doesn’t want to delay her feasting, but the way she grips his forearm to keep him from getting up all the way tells another story. The fear in her widened eyes corroborates it.

“Okay, okay.” Dean soothes, sitting back down. “We’ll sit right here and eat cold burgers. No problem.”

Robin’s grip lingers for a few more moments as she distractedly shoves more fries in her mouth. Eventually, she lets go to regain the use of both her hands, leaving behind a smudge of ketchup on Dean’s skin. “So,” She starts, a little awkwardly. “How’ve you been?”

Dean laughs. “Really?”

“Yes?”

Dean laughs again.

Robin rolls her eyes.

Dean looks at her seriously, then. “We need to talk, Robin. About that night.”

“Do we?” Robin doesn’t think it’s a conversation she wants to have.

“Yes.” Dean insists in a way that lets her know he won’t budge on the matter.

“Do we have to do it now?” Robin asks sadly and tiredly. She’ll do it, if it’s what Dean needs, but just the thought of going through the events that lead to her landing in the fog is draining enough. She can’t imagine picking words and forming sentences. She doesn’t want to deal with the fallout just yet. Doesn’t want Dean to tell her what was going on in his mind when his eyes were squeezed shut, when her hand was pressed to his sternum, right before she vanished off with Cas.

Dean knows it’s something he needs to talk about with her but he decides it can wait. “No we don’t.” He accepts and Robin nods gratefully. “Who would have thunk you’d be turning me down for a chance to talk about feelings?” He grins at her, raising a brow.

“Right? The world has gone topsy turvy, my friend.”

There’s a moment of silence as they each return to their meals.

“How’s your mom?” Robin eventually asks.

“Sick, as it happens.” Dean deadpans.

Robin slows down her eating and waits for him to elaborate. There was a time when Dean wouldn’t have. When he’d crack a joke and change the topic then glare if anyone insisted on getting more out of him.

“It isn’t Amara who screwed up, it isn’t anything supernatural. She has a run of the mill case of depression.” Dean continues. He tries to be nonchalant but Robin picks up on the feeling of
inadequacy that he poorly conceals. He doesn’t say it but Robin hears, \textit{and there’s nothing I can do about it.}

“That makes a lot of sense.” Robin muses, thinking back to Mary’s behaviour.

“We’ve gotten her help. Grace is treating her.”

“Grace? My Grace?”

Dean nods.

“That’s...good. Grace is great. No, really. Your mom is in great hands.”

“We’re not exactly overflowing with options.” Dean says then winces at the sharpness in his tone and at the downwards twitch of Robin’s lips. “Sorry, I’m sure Grace is good at her job it’s just...” He trails off.

He often does that, Robin remembers. When he can’t find the words he opts to try and convey things with silence. Sometimes Robin waits him out, refusing to let him off the hook because she isn’t a mind reader. If he wants her to know something he can use his words and if he doesn’t he can use his words to tell her just that too. Other times Robin gets everything from the silence.

“I know.” She tells him. “You don’t have to explain any of it to me, Dean.”

He nods, again, gratefully and resumes eating.

Sam shows up a few minutes later and after Robin insists she doesn’t mind Dean getting the next shower she’s left with the youngest Winchester. Dean had parted with a kiss on her forehead and Robin is acutely aware that it wasn’t on her lips.

“You two okay?” Sam asks, settling into Dean’s abandoned seat and shoving the wrappers from his brother’s meal into the paper bag.

Robin puts another fry in her mouth, looking mournfully at her dwindling pile. “Sure hope so.” She answers. “He wants to talk.” She fake whispers like it’s taboo.

Sam laughs. “That’s unheard of.” He thinks back to when Dean requested a chick flick moment, brief as it was. He decides to keep it to himself, to treasure the memory as his and his brother’s and no one else’s. Except maybe Derby.

“What do you think? It’s gotta be an omen, right?” She says with a straight face.

“Another apocalypse is looming. Only explanation.” Sam mock-agrees, using what Robin assumes is his serious FBI voice.

“Fun, I get to be in on the action this time around.” She replies in a flat tone that rings true nonetheless.

“Only you would be excited by the prospect.” He rolls his eyes but it isn’t enough to hide his genuine sentiment of disbelief.

“Doubt that. Lots of hunters wanted to help out with more than the symptoms when armageddon was a’loomin’. Had to be you two, though, huh? The guys who save the world.” She grins at him.

The look she gives him... Sam would say it’s awe, he’d think it’s pride. Sam doesn’t answer her.
“Sam... What you did to get me out of the fo- out of there. Working with Lucifer-”

“He didn’t hurt you did he?” Sam interrupts. He’d almost forgotten that Lucifer had paid a visit to more than just his mom.

Robin shakes her head. “No, no, I don’t think he could have.” She assures him then very meaningfully says, “Thank you.”

Sam’s eyes land on hers. “You’re kidding, right?”

Robin frowns her brows, allowing her confusion to be apparent. “No? Sam I don’t- I can’t get what happened in the cage, even out of the cage with Lucifer. The little you’ve told me during our late night chats... I mean you only ever spoke about it when you were too hammered not to. Didn’t even feel like I had the right to hear it. Still, I can’t get it, can’t really understand, so I won’t pretend to. What I do get is that it was nothing good. I get that working with him wasn’t easy and I want you to know that I’m grateful that you did it anyway. To get me out.”

Sam laughs and Robin only gets more confused. “You saved my mom, Robin. I’m going to need a lifetime to thank you for that.”

They stare each other down for a moment. They both see the pointlessness of the ensuing conversation and decide to just drop it. Sam is reminded, then, of just how easy things are with Robin. How he spent day after day with her in this exact room researching endlessly. How he spent night after night talking about the good times and the bad times and the times that were both.

“What was it like there? Epsolguinté is what it’s called.”

A distant look overcomes Robin’s features and Sam regrets asking. “It was alright at first.” The dependence in her voice doesn’t make him regret it any less. “Cas was there for the first two hundred years and that was good. Got to know him really well. Got to learn a buttload about...everything. Man, Angels, History, everything else. Man, Angels, History, everything else. Then...”

She chokes up a bit and forces herself to blink away the tears that threaten to emerge. Sam wants to tell her it’s alright, that she’s home, that she doesn’t need to talk about it if she doesn’t want to but then Robin laughs. It’s a startling sound but it’s how she looks broken that really rattles Sam.

“Epsolguinté. That’s Enochian.” She laughs again.

“Yeah, it means-”

“I know what it means.” She presses her lips together and maybe it’s to keep herself from laughing again, maybe it’s to keep herself from crying, maybe it’s to keep herself together. “That place kicked my ass, Sam. I mean... I was losing my mind a little. There was, there was nothing. Y’know, I got sad when Lucifer left? I missed him. Isn’t that sick? I thanked you but maybe I should have been apologising for fraternising with the Devil. For being so weak. I-”

She breathes unsteadily.

“I was on God’s goddamn bookshelf and I’ve managed to come out a mess. You and Dean have been to Hell and back, then purgatory and- and I was in storage. No one was torturing me. No one was hunting me. Still, I’m- God, if my parents could see me now.” She shakes her head as though she can shake loose the thought of her parents’ disappointment.

“Hey, hey, stop. Just stop.” Sam moves and crouches in front of her seat, squeezing her knees in his hands. “You were alone for the better part of a millennium, Robin. Solitary is what they use on
hardened criminals. Don’t start comparing apples and oranges and don’t go apologising for anything. You’re far from weak.”

Robin tilts her head and Sam is distinctly reminded of Cas. They clearly managed to rub off on each other in the time they spent together. “You really think that don’t you?”

“Yes.”

Robin doesn’t particularly agree, but she knows when not to argue with a Winchester. “I should contact my friends. It had been a while since I had spoken to them before I...went away and I think this is the longest I’ve ever gone without giving them a sign of life.”

“Grace is a little in the loop.” Sam tells her, moving back to his seat. He explains the deal she had with Dean.

“Oh god, she’s going to mother hen me for a decade now.”

“Well, you did die, Robin.” He raises a brow.

Robin rolls her eyes. “Like that means anything when you run with the Winchesters.”

Sam laughs.

“Can I have my laptop please?”

“Eh about that... I might have thrown it out.” He says sheepishly.

“Why would you do that?” She exclaims.

“A series of unfortunate events lead to that inevitable outcome.”

Robin grumbles something about never dying again before asking to borrow Sam’s computer.

It turns out she backs up her cell phone on her computer and her computer on a hidden online server which is what she accesses on Sam’s PC. She video calls a trio, two men and a woman. They’re loud and chaotic, talking over each other. The commotion almost gives Sam a headache. When he stands to give her privacy, Robin gives him a look that lets him know she’d rather he not. So he stays. Somewhere during the call, Robin agrees to meet up with the trio soon.

Then she video calls Grace who cries. It was mostly that. The two girls blubbering at each other, saying how much they love each other, how they’re family, how one of them needs to stop being reckless and how the other needs to stop being dramatic. They insult each other a lot too. Calling the other names but it’s all love. Sam can tell.

When Robin hangs up, Dean returns from his shower. For a quick second, Robin is transported back to her first night in the bunker. To a freshly showered Dean leaning against the doorframe to her bedroom. She shakes the thought away, because she doesn’t think Dean is with her on that front anymore. She doesn’t think they’ll be picking up where they left off.

That doesn’t stop the three hunters from spending hours together. Seated in that library, just like old times- and they are old times to Robin -talking, laughing, drinking. Some of her favourite things. They talk about the dumbest shit, because none of them are in the mood to talk about the shit that isn’t dumb. They rag on each other, tease and mock and it’s all love too, Sam thinks.

Eventually, Sam gets up, stretches, and bids them a goodnight. He gives Robin’s shoulder a
squeeze on his way out and it does more to comfort her than he’ll ever really understand.

Dean and Robin talk for another short hour. They’re quieter now. Sharing old tales they hadn’t gotten around to before- before. Robin surprises Dean a few times by knowing the end of his stories. She explains that Cas talked about them a lot in the fog.

“The Fog.” Dean repeats. “That’s what you called it?”

“The fog room for a while. Didn’t stick as much.”

Dean nods and doesn’t push for more information. “You ready to get some sleep?”

“Um, yeah. A thousand years overdue for a nap.” She tries to joke, but it falls a little flat. “Tough crowd.” She mumbles.

Dean does laughs at that before standing up and nudging her with his foot. “Still, flippant as ever, Robin. C’mon.”

He takes her hand in his and leads her to the hall where the bedrooms are. Robin doesn’t know if he does it in case he thinks she’s forgotten where it is- she hasn’t for the record, well she had but the memories are back now -or if he does it just for the sake of doing it.

She doubts it’s the latter though, when he stops in front of her door.

“Everything is right where you left it.” He tells her. He leans down to press his lips to her forehead then turns to continue down the hall to his own room.

Robin stops him with a hand on his bicep. “You’re- We’re...” She doesn’t need to finish for Dean to understand the question she’s asking.

He moves in closer to her again, holds her face in his hands and stares into her eyes. “I need some time. Us... With what happened I just...”

“Need some time.” She finishes.

“Yeah.” He breathes.

Robin nods. “I can give you time.” She tries not to think about the irony.

She opens the door to her room and slips in, slipping out of his grasp.

Dean tries not think about how she slid out of his hand just like that night. That’s the whole problem, isn’t it? It won’t take much at all to lose her all over again and Dean doesn’t think he can handle that.

Robin checks the time again. It’s only been a minute since she did so last. A total of forty since Dean dropped her off. She paces the floor of her room, her breathing ragged. Her hands shake as she wipes the perspiration off of them and onto the sweatpants she put on after discarding her jeans.

She does her best to calm herself she really does. She wishes she wasn’t this debilitated. She wishes she hadn’t broken down when she found out how much time had passed outside of the fog. It shouldn’t have mattered, but it did. It shook Robin for whatever reason.

Now she wishes that she didn’t feel just about ready to climb the walls, lucky as she is to have
walls to climb. She wishes that breathing wasn’t as difficult as it has proven to be. She wishes she wasn’t so scared of being alone.

She makes her way to Dean’s door. Twice. Both times she backtracks. He’d set reasonable boundaries and she’d respect them, damn it. The third time she ends up pacing outside of the hunter’s door.

She tries to calm herself. Tries not to feel so alone even though she does. She feels so alone. She feels afloat and lost and unbearably alone. Like if someone doesn’t lay eyes on her quick she might blink out of existence and the world would be none the wiser.

She tries to picture herself in the backseat of her parent’s car, driving down some highway, with them bickering up front. She imagines herself sprawled on the floor of George and Rodney’s apartment, cramming for a final while George did the same from the couch and Rodney searched for a case.

Try as she might, the visions of her alone in the fog, the feeling of her lonely in the fog persist. They take over, even. So she stops trying to beat them down and instead tries to play off of them. She envisions herself in the fog, yes, but not alone. With Cas. Those had been good times. Cas near and a constant safety. A best friend, really. She never regretted expelling him, but she hadn’t thought it through. Hadn’t realised how much she’d come to rely on him. How much she’d needed him. Needs him.

“Robin.” Castiel says in the low and rumbly voice that could only ever belong to him. “You are alright?” He asks when she turns to face him.

“Cas.” She breathes. The thought that Lucifer might still be the one at the wheel doesn’t even cross her mind. This is Cas. All Cas. Robin feels a wave of pure comfort wash over her.

He smiles at her. It’s gentle and soothing and she thinks that maybe he feels comforted by her presence too. In that moment, in the stillness that they share, the silence they don’t sense the need to fill, Robin doesn’t feel so alone anymore. Subconsciously, her hand itches to reach for his. Hand in hand, that’s the norm for them.

The door beside her opens and Dean steps into the frame, rubbing a hand against a bleary eye.

“What’s going on?” He assesses the scene in front of him. “Cas? I thought I had made myself clear.” Dean says, his tone going from confused to cold fast enough to stun Robin.

“I heard Robin’s prayers.” Castiel explains not defensive in the slightest, which doesn’t really add up to the way Dean has spoken to him.

“I didn’t pray to you, Cas.” Robin replies knowing that the angel will hear the underlying question.

“Not out loud.” He continues to explain. “Not in so many words.”

“So you decided to just pop in?” Dean says in a chipper voice that isn’t cheery at all. It’s almost a challenge.

Robin looks from the hunter to the angel. It’s the strangest stand-off she’s ever witnessed. Dean is all heat and glaring daggers whereas Cas is unperturbed and at ease.

“I will always come when she calls. I will always come when any of you call.” Cas states like it should be a known fact. It is, to Robin. She suspects it must be to Dean too. “Robin shouldn’t be left alone.” Cas barrels on, dismissing Dean’s topic of choice. “You’re a mess.” He tells her.
Dean thinks that Cas has lost any tact he’s learned over the years but Castiel knows Robin wouldn’t take offense at his words. They’ve spent enough time together to have reached a level of friendship where bluntness is acceptable.

“Why shouldn’t she be left alone?” Dean demands, finding that he needs to put effort into being angry with Cas. He wants to be angry with him, needs it, but the angel doesn’t make it very easy.

“Because that’s all she’s been for the last eight hundred years, Dean.” Castiel tells him and if Dean didn’t know any better he’d think that Cas is sassing him. “Do the very easy fifth-grade math. Your GED is proof that you’re smarter than-”

Robin chuckles. “Cas.” She admonishes.

Castiel grins at her and then Dean sees him wink-wink!- before he schools his expression. “I’ll respect your wishes, Dean.” Cas assures and then he’s gone.

“What wishes?” Robin asks, turning her body fully towards Dean.

“What was that?” Dean ignores her question.

“Cas handed your ass back to you for being rude. You going to tell me what that was about?” There’s no judgement in her voice. Like Robin trusts Dean to be angry if he thinks he should be angry. She isn’t jumping to anyone’s defense, just searching to understand.

“No.” There’s no room for negotiation in his answer. “You’re having a hard time being alone for the night?” She seemed to be doing really well as the night progressed, but then again she’d been with him and Sam.

Robin looks down, embarrassed. She’s a grown ass adult. “I shouldn’t ask this of you, Dean. You made it clear that-”

“Answer the question I asked, Robin.”

She sighs. “Yes.”

“Okay. Come on.” He grabs her hand not for the first time that day to tug her into his bedroom.

“Dean-”

“Don’t argue with me.” He cuts off sternly but continues in a gentler tone. “If I had a problem with this, I’d tell you. Comforting you, being there for you, that’s not what I need time from Robin. So, come on.”

He leaves her in the middle of the room to retrieve something from his wardrobe.

“Here.” He throws her a t-shirt. “If I have to look at that shirt any longer I’m going to have to burn it.”

“It’s funny!” She argues, slipping out of her ‘I am not amused’ top to don the navy one Dean offered her.

He rolls his eyes in response, deciding the topic didn’t require any more of his attention, and lifts the corner of his covers. With a wave of his hand he signals for Robin to get in. She scurries to him and then climbs onto the mattress, scooting to the other side. The softness she finds herself surround in, between the plump blanket and the cushy bed, feels wonderful after years of laying on
the hard floor of the fog.

When Dean slips in beside her, when he wraps an around her waist and drags her body to his, when tucks her into him in the perfect way they fit before everything, well that, that feels downright divine.

The sleep that follows is restful for the both of them. Just like they suspected all sleep would be in each other’s arms, the first time they shared a bed.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Comment! :)

Also, find me on tumblr

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The next morning, Sam and Dean have breakfast at the kitchen table. They discuss where to start with the whole Lucifer wanting something from their mom thing. They also discuss their mom, what they can do to help her. It’s a tough topic because the boys feel particularly inadequate. Give them a monster, hell, a monster army to gank and they’ll do it. But this? How do they help their mom with these demons?

It’s a quiet and calm morning, they’re unperturbed except for when Robin enters the room every twenty minutes or so, drenched in sweat.

She mostly just stands by the entrance and drinks water. She offers her two cents, once in a while. Points out this thing or that, makes suggestions, acts as a tie breaker when the brothers butt heads on one issue or an another.

Then, she slips right back out the room. Sometimes Sam and Dean don’t notice until one, or both, looks up to get her opinion only to find the spot, where she once stood, vacant. It’s never long until she pops back in, more disheveled than her last appearance.

Neither men say anything about it. They don’t question her odd behaviour because they both have an inkling about what’s going on. Robin hasn’t tried to explain it, but they’ve connected the dots and they know that each time Robin leaves the kitchen it’s to go to the bunker’s training room. They know Robin is making sure her skills are still sharp. They also know that she isn’t able to last much more than fifteen minutes alone and that’s what keeps bringing her back to them.

When they move to the library to do some research on the Lucifer situation, that’s where Robin rears her head periodically. Until, she returns one time and announces that she’s going to shower and then come help.

She doesn’t. What she does do is stand in front of the shower room, her ears straining to hear the shuffling of papers from the library and the occasional murmur from one of the boys. She stands there and she’s scared. Afraid of showering. Isn’t that just adulting at its finest?

Robin hasn’t felt shame very often in her life. When she screwed up in a case. When she killed her parents. When she realised she couldn’t hunt anymore because of her illness. And now. She feels so inadequate. So pathetic. A grown ass woman who can’t bring herself to be alone for half an hour. It’s not like there’s anything to validate her fear. Rationally she knows that she’s out of the fog, that it won’t be taking her back. She understands that if she enters the shower room, even if she takes a whole hour, when she comes out, Sam and Dean will still be in the library working away.

She knows.

She’s still frightened.
When there isn’t a human presence around to ground her, she feels the almost-tangible loneliness creep up inside her. She feels the fog lick at her skin and she’s half convinced that if she lets out a sigh a puff of smog will escape her lips if she doesn’t choke on it first. Because she wasn’t just in the fog, the fog had been in her. She’d become a part of it, it had owned her and consumed her and she’d been so alone. Robin can’t, can’t return to that. She wouldn’t be able to bear it. Wouldn’t ask that of herself again.

“Robin.” Dean says gently, a few feet away.

She swivels, startled by his sudden presence. How’d he even manage to sneak up on her? She’d been tuned in to the brothers. When did her breathing get so ragged? His beautiful green eyes meet her wet ones, when did that happen? He smiles softly at her and Robin is relieved that she doesn’t find any pity coming off of him.

“Mind if I brush my teeth while you’re in there?” He asks.

Robin looks up to the ceiling to keep tears from falling as she’s flooded with contrasting emotions. Mostly she’s grateful. Dean isn’t here to brush his teeth, he’s here to offer her support. That leads to more shame. What kind of adult needs to be babysat in the shower? What does it say about her that she can’t get through the simple task without a chaperone?

What’s more is that she can’t afford to turn him down for the sake of her pride. Not if she wants to stop smelling like sweat.

When she thinks she’s got her tear ducts under control, Robin looks at Dean again. She gives him a small nod and he follows her into their bathroom. He does so without judgement and on some level Robin knows that. It doesn’t really matter, though, because she’s judging her enough for the both of them.

The water, which has better pressure than she remembered, hits her all over and the sensation is unfamiliar only for a short amount of time. She gets used to it quickly enough and in not long at all she stops being aware of each drop of water trickling down her body and along the surface of her skin. Instead, she becomes all too aware of Dean audibly brushing his teeth for as long as he can extend the activity. Then she’s aware of him leaning against the wall, tapping a beat against it. She knows it’s so that she can hear him. The fact that he usually brushes his teeth at the sink in his bedroom doesn’t escape Robin, either.

When she finishes, she pads her way back to her bedroom wrapped in a bathrobe and her hair twisted into a towel, Dean by her side.

“Do you need me to stay?” Dean hesitates to ask when they get to her door.

Robin shakes her head, unable to bring herself to speak words.

Dean nods and pivots on his heels to walk back to the library, deliberately slow.

“Thanks.” Robin manages to whisper, ignoring both her humiliation and its manifestation in the shape of her reddening cheeks.

Nothing Dean does indicates that he heard her. In fact, she’d spoken low enough and he’d gotten far enough by the time she got the word out that it’s entirely plausible that he didn’t catch what she said at all. Robin knows he did, though. Somehow.

They spend the rest of the day researching and working out theories. It’s so much like when they’d
been trying to figure out the cosmos, it’s unsettling. The only visible difference is that Robin opts for the seat beside Dean instead of the one beside Sam.

The following week is more of the same. What changes is the amount of time Robin lasts in the training room before checking in with the boys. It goes from roughly twenty minutes to a solid hour. By the end of the week, Dean doesn’t even stay with her in the shower anymore. He does however train with Cas in the fog. He’s thoroughly impressed. Robin explains how she sparred with Cas in the fog. She doesn’t miss the way Dean scowls at the mention of the angel’s name.

It takes another week after that for Robin to sleep in her own bed. She’s been doing better and Robin can’t help but feel triumphant. The feeling of loneliness doesn’t ever really go away but she isn’t so much afraid anymore. Her instincts don’t scream at her to hold onto the people around her, lest she be whisked away by the fog again. She’s able to rationally accept that even though she feels an underlying loneliness, she isn’t, in fact, alone.

Some days are still hard. Some days she makes fewer trips from the library to the kitchen to stock up on snacks. Some days she holds in her pee just a little longer than she normally would have. But some days Robin forgets to be hyperaware when she’s leaving the library and the comfort that the boys provide all together so she thinks she’s doing pretty well.

The first night Robin doesn’t meet Dean in his room, he meets her in hers. She doesn’t have a single complaint. After that, they switch rooms sporadically, following the lead of whoever goes to bed first. It doesn’t mean as much as Robin would like it to, because it’s clear to her that Dean still needs time. She isn’t sure time for what exactly, but she’ll give it to him if it’s what he wants.

One night, Dean decides to call it quits and hit the hay maybe an hour or so after Robin. When he gets to her room, he finds her sitting crosslegged on the bed, methodically cleaning her guns. It’s precise and practiced, there isn’t a wasted motion on her part. Robin looks like she’s only half paying attention and Dean is extremely aware then that Robin has been doing this since she was a child.

Pick someone who can handle a target on their back.

He leans against the doorframe and watches her work, the sound of clanking metal oddly comforting as she expertly takes the guns apart and puts them back together. When Robin registers that he’s there she moves like she’s going to stop what she’s doing and clear the bed. Dean doesn’t know how he communicates it, but somehow Robin figures out that he’d rather she didn’t. She goes back to the task, deftly handling the dozen or so deadly objects splayed in front of her. Dean watches.

They visit Mary every other day too. Well, the boys do. Robin goes along for the ride but her first time there, after Grace gives her a beatdown, she gets told that it wouldn’t be in Mary’s best interests to come face to face with the woman who sort of died for her. Robin accepts Grace’s reasoning easily enough, she figures the neurosurgeon moonlighting as a psychiatrist knows better than she does. She hopes, however, that they make it clear to Mary that Robin takes full ownership of her actions from that night.

It’s another week before Robin is climbing the walls again only this time it has nothing to do with the fog. They spend the majority of their time researching, Sam most of all. Robin trains in the mornings and some evenings Dean can be found in the garage working on Robin’s jeep or maintaining Baby. Sam’s the one who doesn’t afford himself any distractions. Still, Robin doesn’t have his level of focus or patience.

Robin is a hunter. It’s what she was raised to be. When she retired from the life because of her synesthesia, it was one of the hardest things she’d ever done. Then, Cas healed her and still, save for one tiny vamp case, she hadn’t been able to hunt because the entire supernatural community
was hounding her ass. She wasn’t able to hunt after that either because she was trapped in a place where there was nothing but fog and floor and all of eternity. She hadn’t felt apt since her return on the account that she wasn’t able to be alone for extend periods of time.

She feels prepared now, though. Her combat skills are better than ever and would only sharpen with some in field practice. The time she’s spent in the shooting rage has reassured her that she hasn’t lost that skill either. She makes a note to do some long range shooting soon, however. She thinks she might still be rusty in other areas, there’s more to hunting than fighting the monsters, but there’s no better way to learn, or in her case relearn, than by doing. And Robin is itching to do. She needs a break from the research and she needs out of the bunker.

So when she enters the library after her shower, today, it’s with a duffle hanging off her shoulder. Sam and Dean don’t even glance up. The only sign that they’re aware of her being there is Sam pushing a plate of food closer to the seat beside Dean.

Robin planned on hitting the road immediately, but the sandwich is too appetising to pass up. She walks over to the table, dumps her bag on her intended chair and lifts the plate under her chin with one hand while the other brings the sandwich to her mouth.

“What’s this?” Dean questions, eyeing her bag.

It’s around a mouthful of bread, cold cuts and tomato, that Robin can tell Dean put together by the lack of lettuce, that she splutters, “S’yur wig collection, wassit look like?” She lays the sarcasm on thick just to be a little shit.

Dean rolls his eyes and Sam quirks a smile but they both wait for a straight answer.

“It’s my bag, I’m going on a hunt.” She says after swallowing.

“You’re what?” Dean replies unintelligently as Sam simultaneously asks, “You’ve been looking for a case?”

She shakes her head at Sam. “George called. I promised them when I got back that I’d see them soon. They don’t know about the fog or anything but still. The only reason I ever even left them was because it was hard to see them hunt when I couldn’t so it makes sense to finally have a family reunion. Besides, he says the case is a doozy.” She takes another bite of the sandwich. “They can use the help.”

Dean shuts his laptop and stands. “So we’ll help, then.” He announces.

Robin looks at him wide eyed and slack-jawed, giving him a peek at the inside of her mouth. Dean scrunches his face in disgust before tapping her chin a few times until she gets the hint. She swallows down the lump and sends out a quick thank you prayer to the heavens that she didn’t choke on it.

“You want to come?” She asks. She doesn’t sound as surprised as she appeared to be and the question is more like fact checking.

“Do you not have a pair of plus ones to hand out?”

“I’ve got exactly two as it happens.”

“I’m in.” Sam chimes. He really is, very much in. Sam likes research but the amount of hours they’ve been putting in, without doing much else, it’s more than even he can tolerate.
Robin nods. “Pack your stuff, I’ll be at my car.”

“Nuh-uh.” Dean says very seriously. “We’re taking my car.”

Robin rolls her eyes. She really doesn’t mind either way, but just to rile him up she says, “My hunt, my car.”

“And put Baby in the corner? I don’t think so.” There’s finality to the way Dean says it and that’s that.

Robin chuckles to herself as the brothers disappear down the hall where the bedrooms are. She hops onto the library table and continues to chow down on her late breakfast.

She’s leaning against the impala when Dean walks into the bunker garage with a duffle of his own in tow.

“How’d you get your bag in here?” He asks, throwing his bag in the already popped open trunk.

“Picked it.”

Deans eyes nearly bulge out of his head. “You wha-” He runs a soothing hand along the impala’s bumper. “Oh Baby, what did she do to you?” He turns to Robin. “You violated her.” He accuses.

“Why?” Robin asks.

“Why?” He repeats bewildered. “Because you shoved something foreign up her-”

“No.” Robin interrupts. “Why do you want to come?”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a simple question.” Robin steps closer to him.

“Is there a wrong answer?”

Robin considers it for a moment. “Yes.”

Dean levels her with an appraising look, trying to read her and the situation. It isn’t like Robin to set up some sort of test. “Okay. Not that answer then.”

“I’m not testing you.” Robin says and Dean wonders if she read his mind. “I just need to understand.”

“Understand what?” He’s the one who moves closer this time. He’s only a little aware that he does.

“I’m the one asking the questions here, bud.” She pokes his chest, barely having to extend her arm to reach him. The look in his eyes is a challenge and Robin knows she won’t win this with a battle of the wills. “C’mon, Dean.” She sighs, looking up at him past the hair that’s fallen in her face. It’s very clearly a concession. She’s not demanding answers anymore, she’s requesting he offer them up.

“Yeah, okay.” He agrees, sweeping the strands out of her eyes.

He does it with his whole hand. It’s not a delicate brush of fingers but a deliberate and undeniable action. Robin feels his entire hand card her hair back and then she feels it rest there, cradling the
side of her head. They’re close enough now that if they were both to inhale deeply at the same time their chests would touch. That’s closer than they’ve been since after she got back, excluding their nights together.

“There’s lots of reasons. I want you close, for one. Just cause that’s how I like things.” There’s no teasing in his tone, no sarcasm, just honesty. The admittance makes Robin’s chest constrict pleasantly. “I want to meet the Scooby gang too. You talk about them enough. I think it’s about time I got to see if they can live up to the hype.”

Robin nods in his hand as best she can with the way her head is tilted back to look at him. “Is that it?”

Dean hums a yes. “Your turn. What’s this about, Robin?”

Robin looks away from Dean and opens her mouth to speak. Then, she turns back to look him in the face, he deserves that much, as she says, “I needed to know you aren’t coming from a place of distrust.”

“Distrust?” That’s definitely not where he thought this was going. “Robin, what? You think I think you’re going to sell us out or something?” Dean lets the confusion lace his tone.

Robin shakes her head and lets out a laugh. “That you trust me in my capabilities as a hunter. That you didn’t want to come just to keep me safe or some dumb bull. I need to know that you trust that I can take care of myself.”

“Oh no, that’s definitely reason number one. I don’t think you can hold your own at all.”

Robin punches him in the shoulder as a grin spreads across his face. “Ass.” She insults, making her way to her door. “Unlock the car, would ya’?”

“What, you don’t want to defile Baby some more?”

Dean pulls up into the parking lot in front of the motel Robin’s friends had said they were staying at, in Bloomington, Illinois.

It’s late in the afternoon, and the plan is for them to meet outside and walk to the diner down the street to discuss the case. And familiarise themselves with each other. Dean won’t lie, he’s a bit nervous. He’s essentially meeting Robin’s family.

The concept is even more odd to him now that the time has come. Now that it’s no longer hypothetical. It’s not like he doesn’t know that Robin had a life before she nicked him with a knife against the wall of a gas station. He’s met Grace, he knows, but Grace had felt like a visitor in their world. Now, the cocoon he shares with Sam and Robin is being blown wide open due to a collision with Robin’s past. He’s about to meet the three people Robin has claimed as family.

They’re not what he’s expecting. At all. Dean doesn’t know what he was expecting, but this isn’t it. This most definitely isn’t it. This is very far from it.

The taller of the two, wiry frame that’s more lean muscle than bulk, has hair longer than Sammy’s. He’s wearing suede moccasins, patterned sweatpants and what can only be described as a blouse. If Dean ran into him in the street, hippie dippie are the words he’d use to describe him.

The shorter one, though neither are particularly short, is wearing pastel trousers with the hems
rolled and a white short-sleeved button down. His hair is a curly mop of a mess, his eyes are too wide and his smile is too toothy and Dean knows that this must be George, the cousin. The family resemblance is there, in a very odd strange sort of way that he decides he doesn’t want to think about too much.

Robin’s out of the car, before the impala has fully stopped. She bounds down the short distance and all but flings herself at the men. George catches her with more ease than his preppy attire suggests he’s capable of and swings her around.

The way Robin squeals is the most childlike thing Dean’s ever seen from her. More than the dumb nicknames. More than that time she realised there was the word ‘win’ in Winchester. Dean likes it.

The brothers make their way out of the car and one shared look lets the other know they’re both equally surprised. George and Rodney, don’t look like hunters. They look like a trust fund baby and a baked college kid.

Robin is only back on her feet for a brief second before Rodney wraps his arms around her, pulling her into a tight hug that looks more vice-like than loving. Then the men are yelling.

Sam and Dean only catch half phrases here, sentence fragments there, but they get the gist of it.

“Almost two years, Robin, what-”

“Do you have any idea how-”

“-once in a while isn’t enough and you should know better than-”

“- spoke to Grace? Grace! More than me?”

“-your blood, only living relative, you don’t think I deserve more than-”

After a few minutes of that the topic shifts but the yelling persists.

“I missed you so goddamn much-”

“-left me with these nutjobs.”

“You have no idea how happy I am to see you-”

“-glad you’re not dead.”

After a few minutes of that, the yelling stops all together. All that remains is the two men and Robin buried somewhere in between them, as the trio clutch at each other. Dean can’t help but think that Robin looks like she belongs there. Her regular clothes clash terribly with theirs, but it’s almost like a complete picture. Dean sort of feels like Robin has been on loan to him and Sam. Like the seven hour drive here was just so that they could return her to her rightful owners. Not that Robin is a thing to be possessed.

When the encounter is over Robin turns to the brothers and waves a hand at everyone, naming each person. Dean feels a little awkward and wipes his hand on his pant leg (denim clad, thank you very much) before extending it towards George.

“Robin told us all about you guys,” Dean starts, shaking Rodney’s hand next. “Pleasure to finally meet you.”

“Robin hasn’t talked to us at all about you but that’s just because Robin doesn’t talk to us at all.”
“Bite me, George.” Robin retaliates and Sam can’t help but laugh quietly at all the exchanges and antics happening before him.

“The Winchesters, huh?” Rodney says and said Winchesters stiffen. Not all hunters think good things of them. “Pleasure is ours. Thank you,” He intones meaningfully, before continuing with a grin. “Grace told us you’ve been taking care of our lil Robin, here.” He reaches out to pinch her cheek mockingly.

Robin twists his arm back so that he feels the tension in his elbow. “I dare you, Przekop.”

“Alright, alright, Christ, babe, forgot about your mean streak.”

Dean doesn’t miss the pet name. Robin had mentioned the two had dated and she’d also said that it was a thing of the past. So Dean refuses to be jealous. He won’t do it, he isn’t barbaric. The thing is, he really isn’t jealous. Not of Rodney and Robin as a pair, but of this whole reunion. All Dean wants is to pack Robin back in the car and drive away so that he doesn’t feel like he’s losing her all over.

“’S’good, I’m here to remind you then.” Robin playfully threatens as she releases him from her grip.

“Shit, I’ve missed you.” George says, pulling her into another hug.

“Stop, you’re embarrassing me in front of my cooler friends.” She mock-complains.

George and Rodney shove her lightly in retaliation to the jab, causing Sam and Dean to chuckle.

“This is violence towards women. Speaking of. Where’s Amy?” Robin asks, looking around. “The most violent of all the women.”

“She’s changing out of her Fed getup. She should come out in a- now.” Rodney says when he spots the woman in question exiting their shared motel room and striding, confidently and with purpose, over to the group.

Amy Heung doesn’t just ‘come out’, she *arrives*, and Sam... Well, Sam notices.

Amy looks like what hunters should look like. She embodies the profession more than George and Rodney, hell, probably more than Robin. She’s decked out in all black, from her boots and skin tight jeans, all the way to her t-shirt and leather jacket. Even her hair, cropped short, though Sam suspects it’s still long enough to gather in an elastic, is jet black. It’s sleek and pin straight and it seems to swallow all the sunlight that hits it.

Her expression is impassive, her lips set in a non-smile-non-frown, but her features are sharp.

When she’s close enough, Amy uncaps the bottle in her hand and, without a word, splashes some of its content onto Robin’s face. Then, she does it again for what, Sam assumes, must be safety’s sake.

Robin splutters, spitting out some of the water, and wipes her eyes with the sleeve of her grey hoodie. “I’m not a demon, Amy.”

Amy raises a brow, the rest of her face remaining unchanged, and Sam wonders if she isn’t convinced despite the test. “That’s not holy water.” She says in a flat tone.

Reactions all around. Rodney sighs deeply as though he’s too old for this crap, but there’s a
fondness to it. George grins, unsurprised by the happenings but pleased nonetheless. He offers Amy a fist to bump which she smacks away. Sam suppresses a laugh and Dean does not. Dean cackles, loud and proud, and doesn’t stop when Robin sends him a playful glare.

“Alright,” Robin accepts. “I deserve that.”

“You deserve more than that.” Amy counters. There’s no bite but her tone is unyielding. “The only reason you’re not getting more is because you’re my favourite.” The words are sweet but the sugar doesn’t go beyond that, her demeanor remaining stoic.

“Hey!” George protests.

No one pays him any mind though as Robin and Amy hug for a quick second. It can’t really be called a hug. As soon as their arms wrap around each other, they’re pulling apart.

Sam and Dean exchange another look. This is Robin’s rag tag team. It explains a lot, Dean thinks, but mostly he has more questions.

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The walk to the diner is rambunctious, to say the least. Robin and George lead the pack, shoving and cussing each other out. Their laughs are loud and they cause a raucous just between the two of them. At one point, Dean sees George try to climb Robin and at another they point finger guns at each other like they aren’t adults in their mid-to-late twenties.

The thing is, maybe they’re not. Not when they’re together anyway. The two grew with each other, in the impossible world of hunting maybe, but like children still. Not the way Sam and Dean were raised. So maybe adults in their mid-to-late twenties acting like children is the norm when they’re with life long friends. Dean wouldn’t know.

Robin’s hair is wild in the wind and her smile is so big, Dean feels overcome with a warm and happy feeling. Then it’s chased away by the green monster inside of him. It’s not one he can gank with a machete or a sawed-off.

It’s not that he doesn’t want Robin to be happy, it’s not like he doesn’t want this for her. He just wants it for her with him.

Behind the cousins, there’s Rodney and Amy, the latter of which does not look amused.

“You missed her.” Rodney sing-song taunts. “Cause you love her.” He holds the ‘o’ in ‘love’ for an annoying, if not impressive, amount of time.

“Shut up, Rod.” Amy snaps. It’s harsh enough to make Sam and Dean wonder if things could escalate.

“Cause she’s your best friend.” Rodney, with what seems to be not a single ounce of self preservation, doesn’t shut up.

Amy’s hand juts out suddenly, making Sam and Dean twitch for their guns, to pinch the taller man’s ear between two fingers. Even as she continues to walk, Amy pulls Rodney’s head to her own and whispers something that the brothers don’t catch. It makes Rodney tense up and visibly blanch though, before shuffling off towards the front of the line. By the time he reaches Robin, he’s relaxed again which he proves by hoping onto George’s back in a single bound.

Sam and Dean bring up the rear as they watch the chaotic foursome interact. That’s the case until Amy slows down enough to fall into pace with the brothers, walking between them.
“Hey,” she says.

Dean’s about to greet her back, but he hears Sam stutter out a nervous “H-hey.”

Dean smirks at his brother and gives him an exaggerated wink over Amy’s head.

“Did you know Bloomington used to be called Blooming Grove?” Sam announces cheerfully as if this fact is a fun one, his nerves getting the better of him.

It’s all Dean can do not to smack his face with his palm. Sam hasn’t shown active interest in a someone in a very long time, so it makes sense that he’s rusty but come on. Dean is about to do some damage control but Amy speaks before him.

“Yes, of course. It was called Keg Grove before that.” She says matter-of-fact, like this is information everyone knows.

When Dean is done feeling shocked at the turn of events he wonders if this really is something he should know. He decides he might be surrounded by freaks. He confirms it a second later when he hears George cackle and gasp out, “Deanold, that’s so good.”

So now he knows who got Robin to think she’s any good at nicknames.

- “So, Robin said you’re having trouble working out the case?” Sam says once their food arrives, drawing everyone’s attention back to work.

Robin gives him a grateful smile.

“Aw, Sammy, come on, George was just about to tell us about the time Robin got arrested for public indecency.” Dean fake-complains just to tease Robin.

“I wasn’t arrested.”

“That’s not even the best part of the story.”

“Shut up, George.” She leans over Rodney, at the round table booth, to smack her cousin.

“Settle down.” Rodney forces her back into her seat and keeps an arm around her shoulders to keep her put.

Dean doesn’t seethe. He doesn’t hate the fact that Robin is completely unfazed by the contact. Dean doesn’t have half a mind to snap the boy’s fingers as they hang off of Robin’s shoulder beside him. So maybe he’s a little jealous, but Dean’s not a neanderthal, he knows he doesn’t have a leg to stand on. Besides, he’s the one who said he needed time. Because he does. Because he doesn’t know how to be with Robin with the prospect of her vanishing looming over him. Yet, here he is, not with Robin and still, he feels like he’s losing her.

He looks over at Sam, maybe he’s hoping for some support, but Sam is busy happily staring ahead at Amy.

“It’s a weird one.” Amy finally answers Sam.

Everyone sobers up, then, to focus.

Rodney starts, “Daren Reece, team captain of the Illinois Lions—”
“Football team at Illinois State University.” George adds.

Rodney doesn’t miss a beat. “-twenty-one years old, died of heart failure.”

“Odd right? Athletic, young, healthy kid.” George continues.

“So we looked into it and witnesses say he’d been acting weird.” Rodney tells Robin and the famous Winchesters.

“‘Feared his own shadow,’ someone had said.” George mentions.

“Hallucinations.” Rodney recalls.

“The whole shebang.” George finishes.

“Yellow fever.” Sam and Robin say in unison as Dean shivers through his recollection of his own episode with the ghostly disease.

“That’s what we thought.” Amy says and though her tone isn’t particularly lively, there’s a fire in her eyes.

“But?” Sam prompts.

“No one else has been infected. Yellow fever spreads and this seems to be an isolated case.” She responds.

“So there haven’t been any other deaths? Maybe it’s a fluke.” Dean suggests.

Rodney shakes his head. “Others have died. Timon Perkins, financial advisor. His heart’s missing.”

“So werewolf?” Sam deduces.

“No, you don’t understand,” Amy blurts before George and Rodney get a chance to speak up. Her excitement is more noticeable now but only if you’re looking for it. In fact, Robin, Dean and Sam can clearly see a thrill course through George, Rodney and Amy. “The heart’s just gone. No claw marks, no injuries, not a scratch. No incision. Tim dropped dead without any warning and when they did the autopsy, his heart wasn’t there.”

Robin and the brothers stare, dumbfounded, for a solid moment.

“George,” Robin says seriously. “Thank you so much for calling me.” Then her grin matches his and the family resemblance is there again.

Robin is giddy at the prospect of such an interesting case and Dean can feel it vibrate out of her, into the bench they’re all sharing and into him.

“Wait, wait,” Dean says mostly to distract himself. “What do you mean his heart was gone?”

“As in one second it’s there and then poof.” George supplies.

“What do the two vics have in common?” Sam asks.

“Nothing other than they’re two white males.” Rodney informs.

“And we think it’s the same thing that caused both deaths?” Robin checks.
“What are the odds that we have both the rare yellow fever and some mysterious heart snatcher hitting up the same town?” Amy reasons.

“Alright, so common culprit. Any leads?” Dean agrees and then questions.

George and Rodney offer sheepish smiles and Amy shrugs.

“Told you,” Robin reminds, putting a forkful of her breakfast-for-dinner pancakes in her mouth. “It’s a doozy.”

Later as they leave the diner, despite their numbers, skills and the lifetimes of experience they have between them, none of the hunters notice the robot-shaped vending machine for small gashapon capsule toys by the door and none of them notice what looks the drop of chocolate syrup trickle out of the robot’s eye and down its cheek, much like a tear.

They head back to the motel to collect their cars and then make their way to the heart of town to talk to the locals and dig up leads. Dean isn’t hurt that Robin climbs into George’s truck without giving it much thought. That has nothing to do with why the ride in the impala is tense. Sam doesn’t mention it.

The ‘heart’ of the town is no more than a three block radius so between the six of them, split off into pairs, they hit up pretty much every dive, bar and joint there is. They reconvene at a place called The Emerald near where they parked their cars, a little over an hour later.

Sam and Dean are already there when Amy and George walk in.

George hands over the case files he had the forethought of bringing this time as sits across from Dean. “Any luck?” George asks.

“Maybe.” Dean answers, flipping the dossier open to look over what’s there. It’s mostly what they discussed at the diner but now there’s visual aid, pictures from the scenes and from the morgue.

“What do you got?” Amy prods taking the seat beside George and in front of Sam. “Cause we got zilch.”

“We’re thinking it might be a trickster.” Sam shares with a smile.

“You think?” She questions, her brows gathering just a bit. “I mean it definitely has the mojo for it, but the ones we’ve encountered usually like to cause mayhem. This is pretty tame.”

“Wait, you’ve met one before?” Dean looks up from the file to ask.

It’s George who answers this time, with a nod. “Twice. One was in college and the other we hunted down the coast of Florida, from Jacksonville to Orlando. I take it you haven’t?”

“We thought we did but it turned out to be the archangel Gabriel.” Dean explains then returns to the file.

“The archangel Gabriel, of course.” Amy nods, her lips pressing in a thin line, as if she doesn’t want to be seen smiling.

Sam laughs and George nudges her and gives her a brow wiggle.

“So mayhem, definitely a trickster’s MO.” Sam says, getting back on task. “But they also like to serve their murders with a dose of irony, according to the lore, and that’s definitely the case here.”
“How do you figure that?” George wonders.

“Word around town is that our fearless leader of the Lions has been freaking out about the last few games of the football season. This year is either going to jumpstart his career as a pro-baller or end it before it begins. People are convinced the anxiety from the fear got to him. Then there’s Timon. Described as a ruthless, money hungry, corporate. Some went as far as calling him—”

“Let me guess,” Amy interrupts. “Heartless.”

“Okay, so a trickster. Awesome work guys,” George applauds and that gets both brother’s attention.

Dean’s head snaps up and Sam drags his eyes away from Amy to look at George. They don’t really get praised a lot, barely ever get thanked for their work and it had been so unexpected the way George said it. Like it was nothing. It sort of was. George is already busy flagging down a waitress. Sam and Dean don’t say anything, they just return to what they’d been doing previously, which in Sam’s case is looking at Amy.

Who happens to be looking back.

“Did you know Pepsi is the official drink of Bloomington.” Sam blurts.

“Oh brother.” Dean rolls his eyes.

“I didn’t but I’ll store the information away for later use. I’m sure it’ll come in handy.” She deadpans.

Sam isn’t sure if she’s mocking him or teasing him because her expression and tone give nothing away. He decides he’d rather not know. He doesn’t have to deal with the embarrassment, and Dean doesn’t have to deal with the secondhand embarrassment, for too long because that’s when Robin and Rodney enter the bar, giggling.

The newcomers get filled in and they all discuss how they can track the thing. Dean keeps going back to the pictures in the files, thinking that there might be something there but he can’t quite put his finger on it.

When he puts the file back down this time, he asks, “Our poor bastards have to have something in common. You guys spoke to the families before we got here, right? Is there a Pumba to our Timon? He was a pretty hated guy, what did the misses have to say?”

Rodney shakes his head. “Wife died a couple years back, natural causes.”

“I ran every relevant algorithm I could think of on the town’s database and their personal drives.” George explains. “They both grew up here but they’re a decade and a half apart. Went to different school, had different hobbies. The only thing they have in common, and I mean that literally, the only thing, is that they both have loved ones buried in the town cemetery.”

“You didn’t tell me that.” Amy frowns.

“That’s something.” Dean, also, frowns.

“Not really.” George assures. “Everyone who dies here gets buried there.”

“So what you’re saying is,” Robin clarifies. “the only thing they have in common, they have in common with every person in a fifty square mile area.”
“If those people know someone who’s dead, yes.” George confirms.

“Everyone knows someone who’s dead.” Rodney deadpans.

“Actually, Bloomington is just under thirty square miles.”

“Dude,” Dean groans at his brother. “Out of whose ass are you pulling these facts?”

Sam bristles and ignores the question.

“Okay, wait,” Robin starts but doesn’t finish.

George knows exactly where she’s going with it, because George knows her. “No I checked.” He tells her. “Timothy’s wife died around this time of year but Daren’s only dead family is his father. It was a few years ago in the spring, not the second week of November.”

The quirk of Robin’s brow poses the question in her mind without having to utter a word to George. “Car accident. Legit as far as I can tell.”

Dean watches their interactions and wonders if this is how people feel when he and Sam do something similar, because the way Dean feels is creeped out. He shakes his head and returns to the files. He keeps an ear out for the conversation as the other hunters bounce ideas off of each other. He’s got hand it to Robin, they’re clever people. Dean kind of hates that he likes them.

“What are you looking for?” Robin asks him quietly from the seat to his left. Suddenly, she seems much closer than before, even if the distance between them hasn’t changed.

Dean tilts the folder towards her, revealing two side by side images of when the bodies were found. “Something seem not right to you?”

“Yeah, actually.” Robin pulls out her phone and opens a magnifying glass app. She moves her phone over the images slowly. She and Dean lean in closer to the file, lean into each other a little too, and examine carefully.

“Wait, go back.” Dean instructs.

Robin moves the phone back to Timothy’s bare chest.

“Is that...?”

“Glitter.” She confirms.

They turn their heads to grin at each other in victory and confusion. Robin thinks that Dean decides they’re too close just then, if the way he scoots his chair away a few inches and the way he focuses his eyes back on the screen of her phone are anything to go by.

She swallows down the lump that’s formed in her throat and tries not think that maybe Dean won’t ever come around to the idea of them, again. She scans the other picture a second time and lo and behold, in the mud beside Quarterback Daren’s fallen corpse there’s more glitter. “It’s in a shoeprint.” Robin points out.

Dean looks at her quizzically from his safe distance away. “That’s not a shoeprint. It’s barely the size of my thumb.”

“It’s the heel part of a woman’s shoe.”
Dean looks again and finds that Robin is right, the rest of the footprint, out of frame.

They’re walking out of the bar and to their cars when George says, “Failing hearts, missing hearts and now glitter? This case is weirder than the one we worked in-”

“Emery, Utah!” Robin and Rodney exclaim. Amy even cracks a smile. Robin loves how easily she’s managed to slip back into their shared dynamic.

Dean hears them from behind him as he’s a few paces ahead and he’s grateful he doesn’t see their grinning faces. “Yeah, glitter and gore, we’re about to have some fun.” Dean states bitterly before slamming his car door shut, behind him.

Both Sam and Robin give apologetic looks to the trio, though none of them seem unfazed as they chat away. Sam strides quickly to get to the impala and Robin is hot on his trail, backtracking towards it. She’s about to call out to her oldest friends, about to tell them she’ll meet them at the motel, when she hears Baby’s engine. Then she hears Baby’s tires and then she’s left feeling like a damn fool.

Again, the others barely seem to pick up on the happenings, continuing past Robin to George’s truck.

Robin steels herself. Tells herself that Dean must have thought she’d been planning on riding with the others. She tells herself other reassuring things, she even gets herself to believe most of them, as she turns to walk towards the truck.

She doesn’t know it, but just as she turns her back, a horse pulling a carriage trots across the intersection. It’s a tourist attraction that isn’t that odd in and of itself. The thing is, the horse is red. Which is strange, sure, but here’s the kicker, it becomes purple. Then it’s far enough down the perpendicular street that even if Robin turned around, she’d be none the wiser.

“Do you want to talk ab-”

“Shut up, Sam.”

Sam sends her a text. That’s how Robin knows the room number the boys booked. Dean’s tucking his gun back into the waistband of his pants when he opens the door for her and Rodney, obviously having looked through the peephole.

Dean doesn’t look at her, just makes his way back to the bed and asks, “Where are Velma and Daphne?”

Rodney laughs and sits in the chair Sam isn’t occupying. He tosses Robin two prism-shaped wooden stakes. She catches them and walks over to where Sam or Dean has put her duffle bag on the same bed Dean is on.

“George is Velma, huh?” She says unzipping her bag to retrieve one of her sharper knives before settling on the edge of the mattress to start carving the wood into points.

Dean doesn’t miss how Rodney, without Robin having to ask, kicks the garbage can towards her so
she can work over it. Robin doesn’t miss how Dean moves to the other bed. He does it in a way that’s inconspicuous, but Robin picks up on it and her heart drops.

“He’s your hacker, right?” Sam recalls Robin mentioning George’s major in school and all of his less-than-legal extracurriculars. It had kind of reminded him of Ash. A good fit for the nerdy Velma.

“Something like that.” Rodney chuckles.

“He’s a cross between Velma and Scooby.” Dean corrects, answering Robin’s earlier question without actually answering her.

Robin laughs and, despite the tension between Dean and her, it’s carefree. It’s Dean’s favourite laugh of hers. The one he used to hear in his dreams when his dreams were about the two of them driving down some highway in Baby. When his dreams weren’t every reiteration of her leaving him. Of her dying. Of her vanishing.

“Accurate.” Robin laughs out and it takes Dean a second to realise she’s talking about George’s Scooby Doo persona and not her plans to disappear on him. Again.

Rodney’s laughing too, as he sets up for his own wood whittling. “George can be excitable.” He agrees, then sighs suddenly. “I’m Shaggy, aren’t I?”

Robin’s laughing again, pausing her work to throw her head back. “Brown corduroy pants.”

“I donated those ages ago, will you let it go? Besides, you can’t actually tell the pants are corduroy in the cartoon.”

“I know in my heart.” Robin insists.

“So where are they?” Dean all but snaps.

Robin glares at him out of the corner of her eye. Whatever his deal is, he doesn’t need to be rude. “Getting blood from the trickster’s victims to dip the stakes in.”

“Right.” Dean accepts.

“So you two go way back, huh?” Sam questions Rodney and Robin.

“You can say that again. Put it on a loop. I met Robin back when she still had some of her baby teeth.” Rodney replies.

“Yet, it’s your tooth that got knocked out.” She reminds him.

“Because you were nuts.”

“You were following George and me all over Lawrence.” She argues.

“I was following George.”

“You’re not really making a case for yourself, stalker.”

“You know that I was working up the courage to thank him and his dad for, hmm I don’t know, saving me and Grace.”

Robin sends him a wink. “I know.”
Rodney rolls his eyes and Sam laughs. “The four of you, you’re like cats and dogs. It’s better than stand up.”

“Okay enough of memory lane and enough of the strolling. We still need to figure out who our next victim is. Back to work, Sammy.”

Sam rolls his eyes but does as Dean asks, focusing on the screen of his laptop just like Dean’s doing with his own, just like they had been doing before the new arrivals.

“God forbid we spend time together.” Robin mutters and it’s the worst thing she could have said. She regrets it before she’s done getting the words out. She’d take it back, she would, but Dean’s eyes snap to hers and there’s hurt and shock and anger there and it’s too late.

Sam and Rodney don’t even notice so they don’t think twice of Dean saying, “Too much of a good thing, you know?”

Of course, that’s the worst thing Dean could have said because all Robin hears is *It was fun while it lasted and I’ve had enough and I don’t want you around anymore.* Part of Robin knows Dean doesn’t mean it, just like she didn’t mean what she said, but part of Robin thinks maybe it’s a truth she can’t bring herself to believe. She’s been back for weeks and Dean hasn’t given her a sign that they’ll ever be able to go back to what they were for the briefest day before she went away.

A third part of Robin is pissed. “Not that you’d know a good thing if it bit you in the ass.”

“Right, I’m the poor bastard who can’t keep it together.”

“If the dysfunction fits.”

That’s when Sam realises there’s something going on. He has time to look up, but not to think of what to say because next thing he hears is Rodney, from across the table, bark out in a low and dangerous voice, “Robin.” It startles Sam and his brother and it definitely startles Robin who visibly shrinks. “You’re better than that.” Rodney continues.

“Yeah.” Robin breathes out after a tense moment.

Dean tears his stunned eyes away from Rodney to do a double take on Robin who looks properly chastened. He stands to loom over her. “I’m sorry what? Did you just say, ‘yeah’? You’re gonna let that douchebag talk to you like that?”

Robin looks up at Dean with surprised eyes because the last thing she expected was for him to defend her.

“You don’t talk to her like that.” He yells at the man. Dean can’t believe he was warming up to this bastard. Can’t believe he was going to accept losing Robin to him, to them.

Rodney remains calm and it grates on Dean’s nerves. “It doesn’t really concern you how she and I speak to each other.”

“Wanna try that again, buddy? You’re the one who butted into my conversation with her.”

Both Sam and Rodney open their mouths. Rodney to clarify his point, Sam to diffuse the situation, though he doesn’t know how he’s going to manage that, but Dean’s talking again. Bellowing, really.

“You think you can waltz in here, in your- your *blouse* and treat people-”
“Okay, okay.” Robin cuts him off, jumping to her feet and rubbing soothing circles between Dean’s shoulder blades with one hand while the other tugs his flexed forearm towards the door, her stake and knife forgotten on the bed. “Come on, just come with me.”

Robin trails behind Dean once they’re out the door as he stalks across the parking lot angrily. Robin would think it comical, the way his shoulders are hunched, the way he exhales through his nose and the way he grumbles if the situation wasn’t such a damn mess.

Robin isn’t sure if Dean’s heated because of Rodney or because of her. When he’s calmed down enough that he’s leaning against the waist-high concrete parking block, looking at the night sky instead of pacing furiously, Robin says, “He’s right, you know.”

“What?”

“I shouldn’t have said what I said.”

“He shouldn’t have talked to you like that.” Dean avoids her admittance. He doesn’t want to be angry with Robin. “You shouldn’t have let him.”

Robin laughs a little, a quiet little sound. “He means it. When he says ‘You’re better than that.’ When he says ‘I’m better than that.’ He’s really just holding me accountable, holding up a standard and expecting me to reach it because he believes I can.”

“So he snaps at you for your improvement.” Dean scoffs.

“No,” Robin shakes her, a small smile on her lips. “He was getting me to listen. Because he knows me so well, he knew I was wrapped up in our...talk. He knew I was going to say something I would regret. Regret more.”

“So he snaps at you for your improvement.” It’s acceptance this time. “Still kind of fucked up, Robin. I don’t like it.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Can’t really make you like it.” She shrugs. “Just know that I don’t mind it. That I’m grateful, really.”

Dean shakes his head in slight disbelief. “You... You and your... How’d you grow up so well adjusted?”

Robin laughs. “You just said how fucked up-”

“You know what I mean. You talk about self-improvement, you talk about your feelings, you fucking meditate.” Dean asks her, like he’s asking the secrets to the universe, like she can offer him the key that frees him of all of his damage. Of all of his fears.

Robin moves to lean again the concrete beside him. “I think you just answered your own question.”

Dean laughs. “You’re lame.” Then, seriously. “I regret what I said too. Didn’t mean any of it, Robin. I just need time.” His voice wavers. He’s afraid she’s about to tell him that time’s run out.

“Do you?” She wonders. She moves again, to stand in front of him, now. She places her hands on his folded arms and looks him in the eyes. “Do you just need time? Or is there something else?”
It’s a long moment before Dean answers and he wants to mean it but he knows it’s a lie. “Just some time.”

Robin hears the lie too.

There was a time when she would have walked away. Hell, there was time when she had walked away. In the bunker kitchen, she’d told him she wanted a relationship with him whether it be romantic or platonic was up to him but that she wouldn’t stand for the in between. Wouldn’t put herself through the looks and the touches and the short lived make outs only to have him stumble away from her time and time again like they’d sinned, like they were something to be ashamed of, to be feared.

That Robin would tell Dean, right here and now, that she won’t allow herself to be strung along. Time has passed, though, so much time, and things have changed and walking away doesn’t really feel like an option to Robin anymore so she tells him, “Okay.”

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Later, George and Amy return with three jars of blood to find the room and its occupants particularly quiet.

“Anything on how to find our trickster?” Amy asks the room, though her eyes are on Sam. He shakes his head.

“Alright,” George announces. “It’s just about my curfew. Evil can wait till morning to die.” He gathers some of the stakes Robin and Rodney have carved in his arms, making sure to leave some for the Winchesters along with a jar of blood and waits for someone to open the door for him.

It’s Rodney who does and the two men head down the walkway to their motel room, bidding everyone goodnight.

“You coming?” Amy tosses the jar of blood from her right hand to her left and then back as she directs the question at Robin. “I’ve got a bed I’ve just been dying to share.”

Robin rolls her eyes. “Yeah, like you’ve been sleeping alone.”

“Whatever, come on.” Amy disappears out of the room, leaving the door open.

Robin stands slowly and Dean’s eyes are on her while Sam’s are pointedly not.

“You’re gonna go?” Dean asks her and to his credit, he does his best to keep his voice neutral.

Robin hesitates for a few seconds. This would be their first night apart since she returned from the Fog. “Just for the night. Not because of- because of anything.” She does her best to convey sincerity because that is the truth. “Just ‘cause I miss them.”

“Right, no, yeah, of course, go.”

Robin tries to think of something else to say, but eventually, she just nods, grabs her bag and heads out, closing the door softly behind her with a small ‘g’night.’

Sam moves to turn the lock and waits a minutes before he asks, “Do you wanna tal-”

“No, Sam.”
It’s embarrassing. They’re six respectable hunters working the job and they still have no leads. No idea how to track the trickster and no idea who the next victim might be.

Huddled at the small motel table, George shows Sam all the codes he ran through the town’s database on his reconstructed computer and Sam is reminded of Ash all over again. The Winchester learns a few things and makes suggestions of his own, making George put his tools to use in a new way he hadn’t thought of before. Though the two have personal breakthroughs, it doesn’t yield any tangible results.

Amy, sitting on a bed, and Rodney, sitting on the floor with his back against said bed, comb through the town’s newspapers and news channels for possible victims. They figured that Timon and Daren were semi-public figures so maybe the trickster was picking that way. They don’t really know what they’re looking for exactly, so they come up with potential marks but the list is long with no way to narrow it down.

Robin does more research, specifically trying to figure out which trickster they’re dealing with and if there’s some sort of summoning ritual. If they can’t find it, maybe they can bring it to them. She’s sitting against the headboard of the bed she shared with Amy the night before. Dean is sitting on the edge of it, his back leaning against the thigh of her bent leg, purposefully. Like they’re making a point of touching just to prove that they’re okay.

They are maybe. Mostly. There’s still a tension that comes and goes. They slip into the ease that’s always been their relationship and then someone does something that reminds them that they’re not them. Not yet anyway. Dean will shuffle off only to return and put his hand on her shoulder like that’s supposed to mean something. It’s just very awkward. Robin will lean in close to his ear to whisper a cunning jab about...someone... Dean can never focus enough on her words when she’s that close. Then Robin will realise what she’s doing and she’ll jump so far away, it’s a wonder no one in the room picks up on it.

Dean is whittling a few more stakes, he says they can never have too many, but really he just needs to keep his hands busy with manual work, to keep his head clear.

It’s a little past noon, when Robin decides she needs a break. She’s singled out two demi-gods who might be their trickster but she’s not too convinced it’s either of them which is what she tells everyone while she emails them the information so they can have it on hand. Then, she’s standing and saying she’s going to pick up some lunch. George doesn’t need to look up from his computer to know that Robin is holding her hand out to him from her spot at the door.

He’s half way through digging the keys to his truck out of his pocket, when Dean says, “I’ll drive.” He stands up and brushes the splinters off of him and into the trash can as best he can.

Robin is surprised but she doesn’t let on.

“They’re good at their jobs.” Dean tells her when they’ve pulled out of the parking lot.

“You thought they wouldn’t be?” Robin challenges with a playful, un-offended smile.

“Not exactly.” Dean explains without feeling defensive. “Whenever I thought of you hunting with them, I pictured a bunch of college kids running around. I know you’ve been hunting before that, I know you hunted with them long after you graduated too, it’s just the image I had. Didn’t expect them to be so capable, so professional.”
Robin laughs. “I wouldn’t go so far as to call them professional. Definitely don’t to their faces.”

Dean chuckles. The conversation turns to the case after that and it’s easy. Well, not the case, that’s a doozy still, but the conversation is easy and flowing and neither of them messes it up this time. It’s mostly shop talk but there’s the fun banter they’ve always had too and Robin tries to delude herself into thinking that it can be enough for her.

When they get to the pizza parlour, they bump shoulders from the car all the way to the restaurant. It’s not to demonstrate how okay they are, they aren’t trying to convince themselves of anything. They do it without much thought, like it’s a little inevitable. Didn’t Robin have that epiphany once before? Didn’t she realise the night before she sort-of died that she and Dean are inevitable?

They put in their order with an overwhelmed looking waitress, Robin recalling the preferences of ‘three-quarters of the fantastic four’, as Dean put it.

“Please tell me I’m not It.” Robin pleads.

“It is the clown in the Stephen King book. I think you mean The Thing.”

“I don’t want to be The Thing.”

“You’re the Human Torch.”

Robin accepts that. Her last name is kind of like ‘fire’, she figures. “You and Sam can be the combined forced of Superman and Batman.”

“I’m Batman.” Dean says quickly like he’s calling dibs.

Robin laughs and leans against the back of her seat, looking around. It’s as crowded as you’d expect considering the time of day. Apparently, Dean’s been looking around too, because he nudges Robin’s foot under the table and nods his head towards a little girl.

She’s sitting alone on one of the high stools at the counter staring intently at the kitchen. Wearing a pink dress with thick straps over a blue shirt with puffy sleeves and sporting two pigtails, she looks too sweet and too young to be on her own.

Robin glances back at Dean who mouths the word ‘shoes’. When they look to the girl again, they find the seat vacant.

“What was it?” Robin asks him, on edge in the way that made her a good hunter, hyper aware of her surroundings and at the ready.

“Here you go guys.” The waitress, Scarlett her name tag reads, says placing two plates on the counter. “Sorry for the wait.” She runs a shaky hand through her hair and the smile she offers them is tired.

“Hey, no problem.” Dean assures her. “This isn’t what we ordered, but-”

“Oh crap.” She exclaims. “You guys are the pizzas to go, right? I’m sorry.” She starts, scooping the plates back up. “I don’t know where my mind’s at, today.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Robin says, trying to infuse her voice with understanding.

“Take your time, sweetheart.” Dean tells her.

Scarlett nods distractedly as she walks away, mumbling something about being an airhead.

“You would know?” Dean raises a brow at her.

Robin nods.

“You’ve waitressed before?” Dean leans forward on his forearms, very interested.

“For a whole day.” Robin nods. “It was a little after I turned sixteen and my parents thought it’d be humbling or something. There were days when I was held hostage that were easier than working that job, let me tell you. Our line of business, it’s got nothing on the service industry.”

Dean smirks suggestively and forces himself to hold back a wink. “I have a thing for waitresses, you know.”

“Are you trying to make me jealous?” Robin leans further back, a smirk of her own toying with her lips.

“Absolutely not.” Dean answers in a way that means ‘Yes.’

Robin shakes her head fondly and laughs and this. This is always easy for them. So what’s been making it so hard? She remembers then, why they’re here. “Wait, so what’d you want me to see before?”

Dean takes a second to scold himself for getting distracted on the job. “The girl was wearing sparkly silver shoes.”

“Heels?” Robin asks, confused. She was just a child.

“Euh, yeah,” Dean searches for a descriptor. “Like what would be part of a school uniform.”

They’ve scoped out the place, without any luck, by the time the waitress brings them their boxes, looking more frazzled than before. They leave her a generous tip and head back to the motel to regroup.

“One of the demi-gods I emailed earlier tends to take on the form of children.” She tells Dean on the drive back, shivering still from the drop in temperature. She’ll add another layer next time they head out, she decides. “Maybe he’s our sparkly-shoes-wearing little girl.”

“Yeah, I don’t know…” He trails off.

“What is it?” She asks.

“Nothing specific. Something just doesn’t add up.”

“Everything points to a trickster.” Robin prods him to continue, so she can see where he’s coming from.

“Yeah, I know.” Dean admits. “Just call it a gut feeling.”

Robin nods and makes a note to keep her eyes peeled for anything strange. Well, extra strange.

They see Sam, who’s nervously rubbing the back of his neck, and Amy outside as they pull into the parking spot right in front of their room. It’s kind of funny because the hair of both hunters is being whipped every which way by the wind that’s picked up.
“Does Sam have the hots for Amy or something?” Robin half whispers since Dean’s door is already open.

“He sure does.” Dean grins as he grabs the pizza boxes from the bench between them.

“You know she...” The words are drowned by the creaking of Dean’s door. Robin sighs and hurries out the car.

“Fuck yeah, food.” Amy says and it’s maybe the most expressive she’s been since Dean’s met her.

The older Winchester shoves the boxes into Sam’s chest. “Give the lady what she wants, Sammy.”

Sam flushes a deep red and Robin can’t help but laugh as she waits for Dean to unlock the door, holding her hoodie close to stave off the cold. She’s one step in when she hears Sam stammer out, “You know, Bloomington is where the namesake for Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz is buried.”

Robin is laughing again until she’s not. Until she gets it.

“You don’t say.” Amy replies, marvelling at all the information Robin’s giant friend keeps in his head and closing the door behind her.

“It’s the Wizard of Oz.” Robin says before Dean can share what they saw at the pizza place.

“Actually, it’s just the Dorothy character, not the name of the story. She was the author’s niece. Well, Dorothy Gage, but he changed the last name to Gale.”

“No, I mean yes, I mean-” Robin stops herself from being too incoherent as she works things out in her mind. When she speaks again, all eyes are on her, the pizza boxes long forgotten on the table. “What’s happening in this town, it’s the Wizard of Oz.”

“How do you figure that?” George asks mockingly just as Sam says, “But we already killed the wicked witch.”

The fantastic four, the scooby gang, whatever name they’re going with, stare at Sam. Then, as though in perfect sync their gaze slowly move to Dean, checking if his brother is being serious, before shifting quickly back to Sam.

“I’m sorry, what?” Amy is the one who breaks the silence.

“Did he just-” George starts then looks at Robin for reassurance. “Did he just say they killed the wicked witch?” He turns back to Sam. “As in the Wicked Witch of the West. The fictional character. From a fictional movie. Based on a fictional book. Of fiction.”

“Say fiction one more time.” Amy threatens.

“Euh, right.” Dean start. “Oz. It’s real. There’s a door that takes you there. Wicked Witch. East, West, they’re all real. We killed the second. Well, we watched her die, anyway. None of that matter, Robin what do you mean this is Oz? That’s crazy.”

“Right, that’s crazy.” George mumbles and Rodney smacks him upside the head.

All eyes are on Robin again. “Ok, hear me out. Daren, team captain of the Illinois Lions, was afraid of the coming football games. Some would say he needed a little bit of courage. What’d he get instead? Something that looks like yellow fever. A buttload of fear, enough to have his heart give out.
“Timon, described as heartless. Found dead, actually heartless.”

“The Tin-man.” Sam finishes for her.

“I’m not saying the actual world of Oz is here, but maybe someone or something is, I don’t know, drawing inspiration.”

Amy frowns her brows. “I don’t know, Robin. That’s pretty far-fetched.”

“Okay, maybe it’s a little thin. Odd coincidences. But Dean and I saw a little girl and she was wearing the slippers that would have made the shoeprint and left the glitter in the pictures. That’s not a coincidence.”

“The glitter, the shoes, they were silver, Robin. Not ruby red.” Dean objects, despite his gut being on board with the new theory. This makes less sense than the trickster, but somehow it’s adding up more. “Besides, Dorothy wore white and blue gingham.”

Robin opens her mouth to speak but George beats her to it. “Not while they were filming. The movie was shot in technicolour so the actress’ actually costume was pink and blue so it could come off better on camera. Even the slippers, they were originally silver in the book, but they decided to make them red for the movie so the contrast with the yellow brick road would be more aesthetically pleasing.”

Robin nods enthusiastically.

Dean looks to Sam, “You said the girl Dorothy was named after is buried here?”

Sam nods.

“Who’s in the mood to burn some remains?” Dean says like it’s a fun party he’s suggesting.

“We need to wait till it’s dark out.” Amy points out, peeking out the window. “Just a few hours away.”

“I don’t know if we have that luxury.” Rodney says, getting everyone’s attention, though his is on his phone. “Dorothy Gage died November eleventh, two hundred years ago this year.”

“November eleventh, that’s tomorrow.” Sam realises.

“Yeah,” Rodney confirms. “Tin-man died yesterday, the cowardly lion the day before.”

“The scarecrow is up.” Amy finishes. “What she’s going to do, take its brain away?”

“Today, probably.” Dean’s tone is sombre as he thinks. “You guys piled together a list of potential victims, right?”

“Yeah,” Rodney ratifies. “We sent the list in a reply to Robin’s email about the tricksters.”

Everyone is on their phones, then, scrolling through two pages of names with notes on what got the person in the news.

“Robin you seeing this?” Dean asks.

Robin’s already opening the door so she thinks it’s clear that she’s caught on. She still throws a ‘yeah’ over her shoulder as she exits the room, forgetting to grab an extra jacket all together.
Somewhere in the list, towards the bottom, there’s the description ‘Beauty pageant contestant’ next to the full name of Scarlett the scatterbrained waitress.

It’s too late when they get there. The pizza parlour has been sectioned off by the Sheriff’s department with caution tape which hasn’t stopped at least a third of the town from gathering around.

Robin, Sam, Dean and Rodney are waiting between the impala and the truck as George and Amy go in to investigate, the duo having done the Fed thing the previous morning.

“We could have saved her.” Dean mutters low enough that only Robin, who’s boldly permitted herself to stand close to him, hears.

“I know.” She murmurs back. She doesn’t have any placations to offer.

“We should have stayed back when we saw the girl.”

“I know.”

Their arms press together all the way down to the back of their hands as they stand side by side. It’s a small comfort neither think they deserve, but one they’re allowing themselves anyway.

They’ve both been hunting long enough to know that you can’t save anyone. They’ve both been hunting long enough to know that they’re bound to screw up. They both know the only response to that is to keep working. There’s no point in trying to convince themselves that it’s not their fault, because even though it’s true, it doesn’t feel like it. Maybe it shouldn’t feel like it. Maybe that’s the point.

“Good news and bad news.” Amy says flatly as she and George approach the other hunters.

“The good news is we were right about Scarlett being the vic and she still has her brain.” George says in a way that contrasts Amy’s monotone and the morose heaviness weighing down on Dean and Robin.

“So how’d she die?” Robin asks.

“Therein lies the bad news.” George quips.

“She got a second one.” Amy informs.

“A second one what?” Dean asks this time.

For a flicker of a second Amy looks at him like he’s a little dense. Dean doesn’t see it because he isn’t used to reading her micro-expressions. “A second brain.”

Sam opens the file that George handed over to reveal the busted open skull of the pretty ginger with not one but two brains half spilling out.

The back of Dean’s hand isn’t against Robin’s anymore after that. He presses his palm into hers instead.

- 

It’s Rodney, Sam and Amy who dig out the grave. The others are supposed to stand watch, but
really it’s just Dean and his sawed-off.

Instead, George is on his back a yard away from the hole, laying in the grass with Robin’s head on his stomach. He plays with the end of Robin’s ponytail, she’d tied it when the wind had picked up, as they both stare up at the sky and watch the stars.

“Do you remember when-”

“Yes.” Robin interrupts him. She knows exactly which memories he’s referring to.

George had grown up in Lawrence in the same house her mom and uncle had. His dad had decided to raise him in the family home whereas her parents had wanted the open road. They stopped by all the time, which was nice, but Robin had always preferred when her cousin and uncle hit the pavement with them.

George went to regular school so it wasn’t often and when it did happen it was always summer. Uncle Rich, trusted local handyman, would tell his clients he’d be out of town for a few weeks, pack up the truck, pack up his boy and drive to whatever case her parents had found.

When they worked cases so far out of any city that at night the clear sky was unperturbed by the light pollution. Robin and George would sneak off in either of their parents’ cars, not that they had a license, not that they were old enough to have a license, not that it mattered enough to stop them, and they’d drive out to a field, or a cliff, or right to the edge of the Grand Canyon, once.

Then they’d lie down, just like this, and watch the sky. If their parents had knocked out before the sunset, George and Robin would get to watch as the day turned to night and then as the dark infinite thing above freckled and presented them with some of the most beautiful sights the pair would ever see. Just when they thought it was impossible for more stars to appear, more stars pierced through the dark veil and appeared. The first time they did this they were young and dumb enough to think they could manage to count every last one.

It was so beautiful that Robin remembers thinking that maybe it’s worth having things that go bump in the night if the night could take her breath away like this.

Sometimes all they did was stare quietly. Sometimes they’d ramble and prattle on inventing tall tales and entire worlds to match the constellations. Other times, when hunts had gone wrong, when they’d lost a civilian, when one of their parents had almost bit the bullet, when they had almost died, too young still to even have lived, they wouldn’t bother lying down. They’d stand and they’d shout at the stars and relish in how the sky would swallow their screams.

It’s what they did after uncle Rich did die. It’s what they did after Alice and Oliver Fera died.

It never fixed anything, but then again that’s not what it was for.

“Dean,” Amy says, sticking her arm up. “Mind giving me a hand?”

Dean helps lift her out, leaving Rodney and Sam to finish up. The grave had been a bitch to dig, the wind making dirt fly everywhere, namely back in the hole and into their eyes and what Amy wants is her water. She doesn’t get it.

“Dean.” Amy says again. Amy always sounds serious, but her voice just then means business.

Dean sees Amy’s eyes trained on something over his shoulder. “There’s a little girl in a pink dress and silver slippers behind me, isn’t there?”
“Smarter than you look, Winchester.”

“Oh goody, Daphne’s doling out compliments.”

Before he can see Amy’s scowl, Dean spins around sends a shot straight into the girl- Dorothy’s chest. Only she doesn’t disappear like a ghost would. The packed salt makes her stumble back a step but that’s the extent of the damage.

“That can’t be good.” Dean mutters.

Then Robin heads straight for Dorothy, an iron bar in hand. The girl bleeds when Robin gets a good swing in, before she sends Robin flying into a headstone. Or, more accurately, the wind does. The wind that is now, decidedly, not natural.

Dean wants to go to her, wants to rush to Robin’s side, wants to double, no triple, check that she’s breathing and her heart is beating. He settles for aiming and firing at Dorothy again and again, reloading efficiently between each shot. It’s enough to send Dorothy landing on her back a solid yard away.

“Sammy!” Dean calls, reloading his shotgun, as he hears the breaking of a wooden coffin.

“What’s George who answers as he hands over the lighter fluid to someone and starts dumping salt on the bones.

Someone else is shooting then. It’s Robin, kneeling where she landed before. She’s using regular bullets and her regular firearm and Dean likes the way she thinks until they both notice, almost simultaneously, that it does just as much damage as the rock salt. Which isn’t much, at all. She empties her clip anyway.

“Guys.” Dean calls again as he watched Amy move in this time.

She throws punches that Dean knows should make bones crack.

“Fucking Christ.” He hears her cuss, shaking her hand even as she ducks to dodge the swing Dorothy takes at her.

Both he and Robin move in after that. They’re side by side, heads ducked as they walk against the wind. For each two steps they manage, they slide back a foot, their shoes digging into the ground.

“This is going very well.” Robin shouts over the noise he hadn’t even noticed, winking at him. Dean almost gets distracted by the wild glint he finds when both her eyes are open again.

“You guys maybe want to barbecue the bitch?” Amy questions and it sounds casual even as she struggles to hold her own.

“We did!” Rodney screams.

The hunters take a second to let that sink in. Except for George who’s army crawling his way to Amy as he shouts her name.

The shot Sam fires next makes it a few inches out of the barrel before it’s swept into the wind. He watches it go, stunned for a moment. “I don’t think it’s a ghost.” Sam says dumbly, though he doesn’t think anyone hears him over the chaos.

The wind is powerful and loud. The trees rustle so much they look like their about to unroot. The
dirt flies through the air making it harder for the hunters to see.

Despite all the commotion, when Dorothy speaks for the first time her voice rings out clear as a bell. “It’s time to go home.”

“Try clicking your heels.” Dean suggests loudly so she can hear him. “Hear it’s the fastest way back to Kansas.”

With a hand shielding his eyes as best he can, he sees Dorothy tilt her head to look at him.

“It’s time to go to Oz.” She corrects.

“I’m no expert,” Robin tells Dean. “Isn’t the fastest way to Oz, a tornado?”

They share a look then as realisation dawns on them.

“Son of a bitch.”

The wind picks up and the pair are sent flying. Something cracks where Robin lands and Dean’s terrified hands are roaming over her before she’s even collected her bearings.

She tugs something free from under her body, showing Dean that it’s what she landed on that cracked. It’s quieter where they landed, just outside the pandemonium, so Robin doesn’t have to shout when, with a raised brow, she asks, “You don’t think?”

For a brief moment, the wild look in Dean’s eyes matches hers. For a brief moment, as she watches his freckled face, Robin feels like she’s looking at the sky.

Getting close enough to Dorothy is the real challenge, but they follow George’s lead. He’d made it at some point and between him and Amy, the girl was distracted.

When Dean and Robin are within a yard of Dorothy, the wind is calm. In fact, it’s completely gone. Eye of the hurricane, Dean figures. Later, when Robin tries to explain to him the Coriolis force, he tells her to not.

The calm makes it so that when they open the water bottle Robin landed on and the other two they retrieved from the duffle bag, it’s easy. It’s even easy when they empty them onto the girl’s head.

What isn’t easy is hearing Dorothy Gage shriek that she melts. Mostly because her voice is grating. Robin and Dean high five anyway.

-

An hour later, they’re packing up the cars and having a few beers while they’re at it.

Sam and George are leaning against the truck, trading a few more research tips and tricks as well as phone numbers.

“I’m glad we got to meet you two.” George says, eventually. “I gotta be honest, when Grace said Robin was hanging out with the Winchester, that Robin had asked her to kill her and bring her back to life, I just...”

Sam laughs. “Yeah well, I don’t blame you. We have a bad habit of getting into really bad trouble.” More solemnly he adds, “Seems to follow us around, if I’m being honest.”

“You and your brother have a bad habit of saving the world too, so at least some good comes with
“You ever get tired of it?” Sam takes a long pull of his beer.

“Yeah.” George agrees far more easily than Sam expects and without needing clarification on what it is. “Never enough to call it quits, though. We saved a whole town today and I had fun doing it. That’s never going to not be worth it.” George speaks more seriously than he has in the past two days.

Sam looks over to where Robin and Amy are chatting at the trunk of the impala, across the lot.

“You have a very good attitude towards hunting. Get that from your cousin?”

George chuckles. “You think we’re bad? You should have seen our parents. Robin’s mom, Jesus, I’ll never really know how her dad kept up.”

“They made it work, though.” Sam points out, watching Amy. He toys with the idea of the possibility of trying something like Robin and Dean. Things are rocky for them right now, sure, but not impossible. “Do you know where Amy stands on that? Dating a hunter, I mean.”

George is laughing again and it’s loud enough that Sam looks over at him. “I think so.” Sam recognises the look of mischief in his eyes.

“George!” Sam hears.

Glancing towards the voice he sees Amy running towards them, baring her teeth in an actual smile. It’s the most lively Sam has seen her and it looks good.

“They have a grenade launcher.” She squeals, actually squeals, when she reaches them. “You have a grenade launcher.” She tells Sam excitedly like maybe he didn’t know and hadn’t heard her the first time. Then she’s pressing her lips to George’s and pulling him towards the impala. Sam hears a muffled “Come see the grenade launcher.”

George winks at him over his shoulder as he’s being dragged off. “No hard feelings, man.”

Sam’s left alone, stumped and a little embarrassed.

Robin laughs as Amy bounds off towards George. Nothing gets Amy excited quite like explosives. Robin heads back to the motel room, to retrieve her bag, and sees Dean and Rodney talking. As she closes in on them, she catches the tail end of their conversation.


Rodney laughs. “No hard feelings, dude.” He spots Robin approaching and holding back her own fits of giggles. “Hey, I’ve been meaning to ask you,” He starts. “Where’s the jeep?”

“Home base.” She answers not really giving him the information he’s asking for.

“Which direction? That’s our next stop, right?”

Robin’s brow furrows. “Our next stop?”

“Yeah,” Rodney states like it’s obvious. “The last time the four of us spent extended periods of time in George’s truck, we ended up in the ER.”
Even though that’s a story Dean would like to hear, he really would, because he sort of likes these people, this conversation is one he isn’t interested in hearing the end of. “I’m gonna go help Sam out.” He raises his beer at Rodney, who raises his back, and makes a quick escape.

When he gets to the impala, Sam’s already there, slouched and pensive and…a little pouty? Dean is too busy watching Robin in his rearview mirror to deal with that mess just yet. He turns the reflective glass to follow Robin as she makes her way across the lot. He only feels a little creepy. When he sees her head in the direction of the truck what he feels isn’t a little anything. What he feels is a lot of everything.

It’s overwhelming, too overwhelming to keep looking. He won’t be made to watch as she…as she walks away from him. As she chooses other people over him. Not that they’re just people. They’re her family. How did Dean expect to fare in that showdown?Dean who’s unable to be honest with her about what he’s feeling. Barely able to be honest with himself. Why would Robin stick around for that?

Dean doesn’t know. He gets the chance to ask, though, because Robin climbs into the backseat of the impala with her duffle.

"Is Sam- Is he pouting?" That’s the first thing Robin says, like she wasn't just about to break Dean’s heart. She leans over the backrest of the front seat, her forearms splayed across the top of it, to get a better look. "He is! Aw Sam, what's got you down buddy?" She teases.

Dean settles and then he settles into his sitting. Robin’s not going anywhere tonight anyway. Turning the key in the ignition, he says, "I'm betting he got turned down by pretty Amy."

"Oh no! Oh man, I meant to give you a heads up about her and George, i swear, but i got distracted by the case."

Sam glares, letting her know just how unimpressed he is by her excuse.

"S'alright, Sammy.” Dean reassures. “We'll find you a perfect match. A librarian maybe.” He muses.

Robin laughs and falls back into the backseat. "Besides, it's pretty obvious they're together." Two pairs of Winchester eyes stare back at her. "What? Did you not see how she dotes on him? She’s whipped."

Sam goes back to pouting and Dean goes back to looking at the road, feeling for all the world like he stumbled on something far greater than he’d realised up until then when he met Robin.

"I think we should all just count our lucky stars that Dorothy the Wicked Kid didn’t drop a house on us."

They drive through the night, even though they’re tired, because it's worth it. Because home is where they’re going. It might not be perfect, Dean and Robin might still have ways to go, beyond the six-hour ride back to the bunker, but things don’t have to be perfect to be right. Besides, six hours later, when Dean and Robin fall into bed together for no reason other than to sleep, it’s both. It’s perfect and it's right. Maybe, it's a little inevitable too.

Chapter End Notes
I hope the case was interesting and not too obvious to guess!

Things that I don't explicitly explain and that you might not get if you don't know details of the Wizard of Oz: 1. the horse changing colours is something that is in the movie/book 2. the tinman cries machine oil at one point, but for the visual quality, while filming the movie they used chocolate syrup.

Some things I think are funny as shit: 1. our cowardly lion is Daren like daring (ha!) 2. Timon -> Timan -> Tinman (I think I'm hilarious) 3. SCARElett is the scarecrow.

Please let me know what you think (of the chapter and the story so far) in a comment, I'd really appreciate the feedback.
Robin picks the lock to Grace’s office easily and guiltlessly. Grace had technically given her permission to be in here, she just hadn’t given her a key.

Robin spent the last hour or so scoping out the grounds of the hospital, reinforcing the wards they had already set up and laying down some new ones. It was her routine each time they came to visit Mary, while the brothers spent time with their mom.

Grace always kept her schedule clear when they came so she usually did the rounds with Robin and they’d hang out in her office afterwards. It’s different this time because Sam and Dean aren’t just visiting their mom, they’re doing family therapy. Which is where Grace is. Which is why Robin has to commit a tiny little B&E. No sweat off her back.

Settling into Grace’s luxurious chair, Robin snoops around her friend’s things for only a few minutes before getting down to business. Finding a case. They’d worked a string of them, stopping by to check on Mary intermittently, and the plan was to head for the bunker after this, since nothing else was coming up. Robin thinks she can change that.

- “How’d it go?” She asks Sam and Dean as soon as they’re in the parking lot. “How is she?”

The boys shift uncomfortably again, they’d been doing it since their session ended.

“How. Things are working out.” Sam finally says.

“Grace is a monster.” Dean blurs out. “I feel emotionally probed and I’ve been physically probed so I know what I’m talking about.”

Robin’s brows knit together. That’s one way of calling butt stuff. “Anyway! I found us a case.”

The brothers grunt. “Another?” Sam complains.

“You’re worse than when Sam was soulless.”

“Hey!” Robin and Sam exclaim in unison just as Dean slams the car door behind him.

“What do you got to be upset about? He didn’t call you soulless.” Robin all but interrogates Sam as he rounds the car to get to the passenger door.

“No, he compared a version of me to you. Much worse, trust me.”

Robin scoffs as she’s left standing outside the car on her own. She starts to get in, grumbling all the while about ungrateful little-

- Meanwhile, Mary sits in her room, flipping through the pages of a novel to land on the one she dogeared.
“Knock knock.” Someone says from the doorway.

“Sam.” Mary smiles. She’s been doing more of that lately. “I thought you and Dean had left?”

“Yeah,” He returns the smile and takes a seat at the edge of the bed. “I doubled back. Just wanted a
minute with you.” He smiles again.

Mary frowns. “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah sure, mom. I mean... it’s just Dean. I think it’s taking a toll on him, the whole...”

“The whole what?” Dean seemed well when she saw him earlier. A little angry maybe, sure, but he
was entitled to that.

“Oh nothing, forget I said anything.” He stands and moves closer to where she’s sitting up in the
bed. “I should hurry back, my brother is waiting.” He leans down and presses a kiss to Mary’s
forehead. “See you soon.”

- 

“Alright, what’s this case you’ve got us on?” Sam sighs, once they’re on the road.

Robin is nestled in the middle of the backseat of the impala with her laptop balanced on her knees.
“Four girls, seventeen and eighteen, disappeared within the last two weeks in Winner, South
Dakota. I’ve already looked up the town’s history and nothing’s come up except an older woman,
she’s a seamstress and a formalwear shop owner, disappeared two weeks before the rest. I can’t tell
if it’s related, though.”

“What makes you think this is even our thing?” Dean asks.

“A couple omens and an increase in violent behaviour in the town. Reckless endangerment arrest
rates shot up in the last two months.” Robin answers tapping away on her keyboard.

At Dean’s nod, she continues, “I’ve already hacked the sheriff’s department’s database and they
don’t have any leads or any viable clues. So far the only connection I’ve found between the four
girls is that they all go to the same high school, but there’s only one high school, so I’m thinking it
has more to do with their age. I’m trying to get into their school system to compare their records but
I can’t get past- Actually, Sam, maybe you can help me out.”

Robin hands him her computer over the backrest of the front seat, scooting forward to look over his
shoulder.

“You can’t get through a high school’s security?” Dean teases her.

“It’s surprisingly sophisticated. Also, shut up.” Robin pushes his head lightly, keeping her attention
on the laptop screen. “Hey, wait. Why’d you do that?” She asks Sam who concisely explains to her
his hacking strategy.

“They don’t seem to have much else in common, they’re seniors. Some shared classes and two are
on the same basketball team.” Sam informs.

“Alright so what do we think is snatching up our youngins?” Dean questions.

Sam hums and suggests, “Dragons?”

Robin laughs but when no one joins her she levels Sam with a stare. “You’re kidding, right?”
He gives her a sheepish smile and a light shrug.

Their first stop is checking into a motel so that Dean and Robin can change into fed suits and Sam can wear something a counselor for teenagers might. Sam also takes the time to run the missing girl’s IDs in through the algorithm George built. It essentially detects anything the vics might have in common. It cross references education, previous employments, cell providers, credit card bills, and so on. Name it, it checks it. It’s very thorough and George is very proud.

Next, they drop Sam off at the high school so he can do some undercover investigative work. (He’s going to ask a bunch of teenagers some questions.)

The plan for Dean and Robin is to hit up the families of the missing girls. The drive to the most recent victim’s home is quiet, made a little awkward by Dean’s uneasy shifting.

When Robin can’t take much more of it she raises a brow at him and says, “Dean, what-

“Grace wouldn’t say anything right?” He interrupts her. “The whole patient-doctor confidentiality thing, she wouldn’t tell you what we talk about in the sessions right?”

Robin chuckles. Dean makes an effort to be open with her but she understands that he’d want some things to remain private. Robin isn’t entitled to anything Dean doesn’t want to give her. “Not unless I get her nice and liquored up. She has loose lips when she’s drunk.”

Dean blanches in apprehension.

“I’m messing with you, Dean.” Robin assures, feeling a little guilty even though she’d meant nothing by it. “Grace is a professional and a damn good doctor. Therapy and psychiatry aren’t her usual gig, but she has some experience from when she was a resident and knowing her she’s probably been researching the crap out of everything remotely relevant to your mother’s situation. You don’t have to worry. She’s going to take care of you and she won’t go around spilling any classified Winchester secrets.”

Dean relaxes at her words. “It’s not that I want to keep things from you, I think we’re past that, I just don’t want you learning things about me anywhere but from me.”

“So you can put a positive spin on them and try to sell yourself to me?” She jokes.

Dean laughs. “Pretty sure I already have you right where I want you.”

A quiet settles over them, then, because that strikes a nerve.

“Shit, Robin, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“No, I know. It’s fine, Dean. Don’t worry about it.”

Dean runs a distressed hand through his hair. “I don’t want you to think-

“I don’t.”

“You don’t even know what I was going to say.”

“It doesn’t matter. You want time to figure out how you feel...about me, about this.” She waves a hand between them. “I’m willing to give it to you. Meanwhile, I’m not going to hide how I feel about you. I’m not going to pretend that I don’t want what I want. For, what, the sake of saving
face? This face is unsalvageable anyway.” She swivels a finger around her head, grinning.

Dean rolls his eyes. “That’s true.”

Robin smacks his shoulder with the back of a hand. “I can say self-deprecating shit like that but you have to compliment me profusely. ‘Round the clock, really. I have a very delicate ego.”

“I’m not trying to figure out how I feel about you.” He tells her, returning to their original topic, tone forcedly light. “I think you know. I think I made it clear before...you left. It’s... other stuff. It’s something else. It’s-” The words are right there. Right at the tip of his tongue because Dean knows exactly what’s been bothering him since Robin’s been back. Knows why he’s been angry with Cas. Knows that bringing it up could take away any potential this thing between Robin and him has. There are some buttons you don’t push. He can’t bring this up, not with her. Can’t put the idea in her head.

“Hey, it’s alright, Dean. You don’t need to explain anything to me now. That’s why you asked for time, right?”

“Right.” Dean mutters, unclenching his fists from the steering wheel. When had that happened?

“About those compliments,” She continues cheerfully. “I like diversity. So tell me I’m pretty but also praise my mind, you know?”

“You’re ridiculous.” Dean laughs.

“You’re not very good at it. Do you want me to make you a list of pre-approved flattery?” She keeps a straight face as she makes her seemingly earnest offer and there’s another burst of laughter bubbling up Dean’s chest.

When they pull up to the first house on their to do list, Dean maybe can’t help watching Robin’s ass in her pencil skirt as she lifts herself out of the car. He doesn’t compliment her on it for fear that her head might get even bigger. The girl has enough of a narcissism problem as is. Delicate ego his pert ass.

“Miss. Kaur, is there anyone who you think might want to hurt Meena?” Dean asks.

“Of course not! Casey was a great girl. The best.” Mrs. Finley answers, her light Irish accent thickening in her agitation.

“Of course.” Robin agrees, placating the woman.

“Is it bad if I want to say yes?” Mr. Villaverde sighs, earning him the hunters’ undivided attention. “The answer is no, of course, but I know that if it’s some random stranger that took my Anabel, it’ll be harder to track her down.”

Dean waits a beat. This is when his brother would say something to appease the family member. Sam is the one who is good at consoling the distraught. That’s how their dynamic works. As it happens, this is also right about when George or Rodney would step in and reassure whoever they were interviewing. So Robin waited the same beat.
They glance at each other, and in silent communication agree that someone should say something right about now.

“We’re doing everything we can, Sir.” Dean articulates just as Robin says, “I know this is tough, but anything you can tell us will help.”

“I’m just glad the cops don’t think she ran away,” Jasper Kaur, Meena’s sister, says rubbing soothing circles on her mom’s back.

“It’s not uncommon. Any reason she might have?” Robin questions, fishing for friction somewhere in the victim’s life.

Jasper shakes her head vehemently. "Look, she’s a teenager, who’s going to graduate in a few months. Which means she’s ungrateful and annoying and thinks she has the world figured out, but Meena loves her life. Loves her school. Loves that she’s heading off to college soon. This guy, childhood friend, finally asked her out, to winter prom no less, after years of dancing around each other. Nothing could drag her away from that.” She pauses. “Except that someone did, of course, but...”

“Do you have any leads? Any idea where my baby is?” The mother cuts in when her eldest daughter trails off.

“If the FBI are involved that means you think she’s been taken out of the state right?” Mrs. Finley asks.

Dean’s eyes flick over in a way that purposefully draws Robin’s attention to the woman’s hands. Specifically the band-aids adorning a few of the woman’s finger tips.

“We don’t know that yet.” Robin assures her. “I know this is very hard and stressful for you, Mrs. Finley. We’re going to put everything we’ve got in getting your daughter back.”

“Meanwhile,” Dean tag teams in. “You need to take care of yourself.”

The woman nods though she doesn’t know how any mother is expected to do that when their child could be God knows where.

“You need to stay well and alert, because your contributions matter and move the investigation along.” Dean continues.

Robin nods like Dean is full of wisdom. “I know it’s hard, it’s in difficult times like these that our worst habits flare up. I’ve been known to bite my nails down to the nub.” She smiles softly at Mrs. Finley, concealing her suspicions.

It definitely looks like the woman has been pricking her fingers to draw blood. Just like a witch might.

“Euh... Right.” Mrs. Finley awkwardly acquiesces. “That’s not a thing for me.” She looks down at her hands self-consciously and notices her bandages. “I have been pretty careless, I guess.” She sighs. “Working double time tailoring Casey’s dress... Just... My way of reinforcing the belief that I’ll be getting her back before prom.”
“They say the first forty-eight hours are the most critical. It’s been over a week. My Anabel has been gone for over a week.”

“My partner is going to ask you more questions so we can do our very best to get your daughter back, Mr. Villaverde. Do you think I could use your restroom in the meantime?”

On her way to the bathroom, through the kitchen, Robin takes the time to look at what’s stuck up on the refrigerator door. Pictures of the pretty Latina with her dad, with her friends, with a soccer team. A spelling bee participation certificate from a decade back, Robin thinks they’ve kept up more as joke than anything else. Business cards for local shops. Menus for the nearest places that deliver.

Robin didn’t really have that as a kid. A refrigerator and the things that go on it. She gets it though, gets why Dean can’t shake the desire for the picket fence in suburbia. She understands it, but Robin doesn’t want it. She doesn’t feel like she missed out either, as a kid.

Her parents didn’t have anywhere to put up awards for competitions she never participated in, but they let her lead a hunt for getting straight As when she was sixteen. When it went off mostly without a hitch, they took her out to an abandoned building, way out of the town they’d been in, and they spent an afternoon goofing off and spray painting the East facing wall.

So that each morning the sun rises, it is reminded that the Feras were here. Her dad had said. Her mom had replied saying it was a good thing he’d met her when he did or he might have tried to become a bad poet.

So Robin didn’t get refrigerator doors but she got more. She got entire walls to remind her of the work she and her parents did. Of the lives she saved on that hunt. She got everything she needed as a child and it’s because her parents gave it to her. She knows she drew the longest of straws as far as hunter parents go.

“Alright, what did you find in the vic’s room?” Dean asks as soon as Mr. Villaverde closes the door behind them. They only had the family of the first vic left to visit, the parents of Lorelei Spooner.

“What? When was I in the vic’s room?” Robin questions, confused, making her way back to the impala alongside Dean.

“You went to the bathroom” Dean says as way of explaining.

“Yeah?”

“Wait, you went to the bathroom?” Dean stops her from getting into the car to question her.

“Yeah? That’s what ‘May I use your restroom?’ usually means I’m going to do.”

“No, it usually means I’m going to go snoop around your house without your consent because you’re an unknowing civilian and I want to stop whatever creature is hurting people in your town and need clues to do so.’ That’s what a bathroom break means. The whole time I was stalling so you could tinkle?”

“First, don’t say tinkle. It sounds really weird. You’re a grown ass hunter-man. Wait no, I shouldn’t
impose some kind of preconceived notion of what it means to be manly on you. Say tinkle if you want to say tinkle.”

“Robin.” Dean warns.

“Second, during this stalling of yours, you didn’t think of asking relevant questions?”

Dean rolled his eyes. “I know how to do my damn job. I asked questions, he didn’t have anything for us. Get in the car.” He orders, opening her door and rounding the hood without waiting for her to enter. “One family to go.” He says getting in on the driver’s side.

“No need. I know where our next stop should be. I may have needed to go do my business but I still know how to take care of business.” She said just as Dean’s cell dinged with a message. “I thought that would sound better than it actually did.”

Dean rolls his eyes again, he does that a lot around Robin, but there’s fondness peppering his exasperation. “Where we headed, Robin, what’d you find?” He asks, unlocking his phone and pulling up the text he received from Sam.

**Little info from students and staff. Vics were all planning on attending the annual Winter Prom. Not a dragon.**


“Beatrice... That’s the older lady you said disappeared a month back.” He puts the key in the ignition and listens to the beautiful sound of his Baby purring.

“Yeah, I think that’s where the missing girls might have bought their dresses for that prom that got mentioned. Found this on the Villaverde’s fridge.” She pulls out the store’s business card from the pocket of her blazer.

“Glad your pee run turned out to be useful.” Dean mocks, pulling into the street.

Robin rattles off the address in lieu of responding to his jab.

“We would have seen that they shopped at the same place, though, with the computer thingy Sam did.”

“Computer thingy, a true professional.”

“Whatever.”

“Maybe they didn’t purchase anything there, just browsed the dresses.” She argues, getting back to the matter at hand. “Or,” She exclaims suddenly, getting a thought. “They’re in high school. Maybe their parents payed. Could have used cash too, that wouldn’t have shown up.”

“Alright, text Sam to meet us there.”

Robin nods and does just that, making sure to include the address, then grins at Dean. “You should tell me I did good.”

“Fishing for compliments, Robin? Really?”

Robin’s smile widens.

“You don’t congratulate a fish for swimming. Just keep doing your job.” Dean deadpans, not
giving her an inch just to mess with her. Just to rile her up a bit.

“What’s with the sea vernacular?”

Dean doesn’t answer her.

“Alright, fine. Are you at least going to tell me how much you like my ass because you’ve only checked it out half a dozen times and the night is young.”

Dean still doesn’t answer but when he flushes red, Robin laughs, loud and a little maniacal.

- 

When they arrive it’s late enough that the store is closing but a flash of badges gets Robin, Dean and the Sam who’d been waiting for them, in.

Sam ignores Robin’s chortle at his attire, sweater vest over a collared shirt, and lets them know that he’s checked the place over before they arrived and it’s clean. No EMF, no sulfur, nothing odd.

Dean tells them he’s going to sweep the place again anyway and nods towards the woman who let them in.

Sam and Robin make their way over to the counter where she’s standing, busying herself. She looks to be about Robin’s age, maybe Sam’s.

“Hi again,” Robin starts kindly when they’re close enough. “Sorry about this, it shouldn’t take us too long. We just want to take a look around and ask you a few questions.”

“I’m guessing this is about my aunt?” The woman says, looking up from her notepad and going as far as putting it down, giving the hunters her undivided attention.

She’s really pretty, Robin thinks. She really is with her sharp jaw, high cheekbones and feline-like eyes. Her hair is rich brown cascading waves adorned with a headband that sits on her forehead and circles around. She wears a floor length velvet dress that would look out of place if they weren’t in a dress shop.

“You’re Beatrice’s niece?” Sam inquires.

The woman eyes him for a moment then raises a brow at Robin. “He’s one of our experts,” Robin assures her. “Please, treat him just like he’s with the bureau, too.”

The woman nods acceptingly. “Great-niece, actually.” She says with a sigh. “Look, I appreciate the effort, but I’m afraid you’re just wasting your time. Aunt Bee isn’t missing.” She rolls her eyes. “The locals just got antsy when my aunt wasn’t around to open the shop for a few days and filed a report. It’s my fault really, I was supposed to arrive to town to take over while she went on her well earned vacation, but I got car trouble and was stalled on the drive down.”

“I see, one big misunderstanding, then.” Sam says sensing that it might not be the whole truth.

“I really like that stone.” Robin compliments pointing to her own forehead and referring to the carnelian gem in the center front of the woman’s head piece. Though Robin would only recognise it as ‘orange’ not being much of a rock connoisseur.

The woman offers her first genuine smile. “Thank you. We sell some very similar ones in the shop, if you’d like me to show you.”
Robin is about to agree, enthusiastically at that, while the woman gestures to a small stand on the countertop, when Sam clears his throat abruptly.

“Perhaps, we could ask about the victims, agent?”

Robin sends Sam a sheepish look. “Right.” She says seriously, reaching into the breast pocket of her blazer for four photographs. “Have you seen any of these girls? We believe they may have been customers here.” Robin asks as she lays down the pictures on the counter for the woman to see.

She furrows her brows as she observes the photos in front of her. “I get a lot of customers, young girls just like these, especially with the high school prom being tomorrow.” Her pretty face twists in deeper concentration. “I remember this one, I think.” She points out Casey Finley. “Yes, I’m sure, difficult to forget that ginger hair. I can even show you guys which gown she got, if that helps at all.” She looks up and offers.

“That’d be great, thank you.” Sam accepts and waits for the woman to round the counter.

Robin means to follow them, she really does, but she sees a necklace hanging on one of the hooks of the stand the woman had gestured to. It has the same stone as the woman’s headpiece. Well, it isn’t identical, but it’s a similar dark burnt orange. It’s no bigger than a large pebble as it hangs on a delicate copper, almost rusty, chain. It looks smooth to the touch, like it’d feel good against the pads of her fingertips and Robin wants to test that theory. She-

“Well that was a bust.” Dean carps, coming up behind her.

Robin hears him but all Robin wants is to feel the silky sensation of the stone.

“Robin,” Dean snaps, gripping one of her shoulders.

She tears her eyes away from the rock to look at Dean.

“Hey, you okay?” Dean asks worriedly. “What are you doing?” He glances at the spinning rack of necklaces and bracelets and then back at Robin.

Where was she doing? She turns back to the stand and doesn’t find anything she particularly likes. Not that she is much of an accessorizer. “Nothing. We heading out?”

“Yeah, Sam’s just about done.”

The woman waves them goodbye with a kind smile and the trio walk down the sidewalk to where they parked the impala, a few stores away.

Robin snorts suddenly at the image of a cherub in large storefront window. It’s part of the Christmas decor that’s been put up. “Look,” She nudges Dean with an elbow. “Baby Cas.” She laughs again.

She sees the twinkle of a beginning of a laugh in the man’s eyes before it’s chased away by a scowl.

“Tough crowd.” Robin mumbles as she climbs into the backseat of the car.

Robin can’t see past her nose. She’s never wished so hard to be submerged in darkness, but that’s
not the case. Robin is in the fog. Robin is trapped. Robin is alone. Always. An eternity of this.

The smog pries her mouth open, shoves its way down her throat, makes her choke. Occupies her lungs. Replaces her soul.

- 

Robin wakes up with enough of a start to make Dean’s grip on her tighten but not enough to rouse him from his own sleep.

She takes deep breaths and reminds herself that she’s out and she’s safe, well as safe as she can be. She isn’t in the fog, she’s in Dean’s arms in a bad motel in Winner, South Dakota. He’s drooling onto her pillow and his body is warm and firm and, most importantly, there.

She’s startled again, by a voice this time.

“You alright?” Sam asks her.

He’s sitting at the small table that can always be found in the motels they stay in. He looks tired and worried, his face illuminated by the blue light of his computer screen.

“Bad dream?” He tries again.

Robin slips out of Dean’s grasp to stand. She buttons her jeans- she doesn’t actually own sleepwear- making her way over to the vacant chair, and nods.

“About Epsolguinté? You dreamt you were back there?” He questions, knowingly, voice quiet.

Robin gives him the smallest of headshakes and then speaks for the first time. “Dreamt I had never left.” Her voice is groggy with sleep and that’s why it cracks a bit. She clears her throat, quietly so as not to wake Dean.

“Do you dream about that often?”

“Just once in a while. Have you even slept?” Robin wonders, as she lights up his phone to check the time. Very early morning, but with the curtains drawn it feels like night still.

“Got a few hours in.”

“You’re that eager to work the case?” She raises a suspicious brow.

They’d all agreed to get some shut eye when they got to the motel and continue researching in the morning. It had been a long day, they’d woken up early to make their appointment in Iowa, then they drove all the way to South Dakota, and spent the rest of their time investigating. Not to mention that Robin had been lining up case after case for them to work since the one with the wicked ghost of Oz.

Sam answers by silently turning his computer screen towards her. She sees a web page on objects that might weaken angels. At the top of the browser, she sees at least a half dozen other tabs, the titles of which have the words ‘Devil’ and ‘Archangel’ and ‘Vessel’.

Robin nods in understanding. “Okay, come on.” She stands and tugs at his arm for him to get to his feet too. “I’ll take over for now. You get some more sleep. Need you sharp, big guy.”

She guides him the few steps to his bed and is a little surprised that he lets her. He must have been more tired than she’d thought.
“It doesn’t make sense Robin,” He mumbles. “What does he want with her? How are we going to lock him up if Rowena’s gone AWOL.”

Robin swallows down the guilt. That last part’s on her. It’s the deal they made with Lucifer to save her that had the witch Rowena high tailing it. Robin hasn’t met her, but from what she’s heard from the brothers, she was their best bet at cramming satan back in his box. She knows it’s not really her fault, but it’s hard not to feel like it is sometimes.

“What’s he going to make Dean do -”

“Sam,” Robin interrupts him as she tugs to free the blanket from under his massive body. “Sleep. We’ll figure it out.” She covers him up and thinks that he knocks out before she’s even done tucking him in.

Robin returns to his computer to pick up where Sam left off. It’s not like he was wrong. They had a lot of unanswered questions when it came to Lucifer and his plans for the two older Winchesters. They know that he wants something from Mary and Dean owes him something as per their deal. They need to start figuring out what.

When Dean wakes up, showers, goes out and comes back with breakfast, Robin shifts gears and starts researching the case. Which is just as frustrating as researching the Devil. They’ve run out of leads. Or, more accurately, haven’t caught whiff of one at all. Still, she and Dean dutifully sit across from each other at the small table, Dean on his own laptop, Robin on Sam’s, and try to connect the dots despite not having any of the right ones.

“Maybe we need to go undercover at the school, again.” Dean suggests, plucking the pen cap from between his lips.

“I guess. We could pose as custodians or substitute teachers or something.” Robin muses, already thinking of which stores in town would sell plain overalls.

Dean shakes his head. “Sam’s done the whole counselor thing. If we’re going to get anything out of the students you’d have to infiltrate them.”

Robin lets out a single laugh before quickly quieting herself down, so Sam can keep getting as much sleep as he can. “I can’t pass for an eighteen-year-old, Dean. You’re just under a decade too late.”

“Sure ya can.” Dean assures. “We’ll put you in a plaid skirt and you’ll be golden.”

“It’s a small town high school. Not porn.”

Dean shrugs in concession even as his mind fills with images of Robin looking the part of a school girl in a porno.

Robin shoots him a simultaneously incredulous and chastising look.

“Quit reading my mind, woman.”

Robin rolls her eyes.

It’s midday by the time Sam wakes up and he doesn’t waste time getting on the job. Robin moves to the bed to work at her own computer, leaving Sam his to return to.
It’s hours before any of them get a breakthrough.

“Guys,” Sam calls. “I think I know what we’re dealing with. And who.”

When two pairs of eyes are on him, attention undivided, he continues.

“Turns out Beatrice, the shop owner, doesn’t have any siblings.”

Dean and Robin share a look.

“Gotta tell you,” Dean starts. “Your discovery is a bit of a let down.”

Robin nods in agreement with an apologetic look.

“Who?” Sam asks.

“Which means she doesn’t have any nieces or nephews which means she doesn’t have a great-niece.” He waits for the chorus of ‘ah’s and ‘oh’s to end before continuing. “I thought the lady at the store was pretty shifty so I looked into it. Then I looked into that stone on her forehead and-”

“So pretty, right?” Robin interrupts. “Sorry.” She apologises to the twin set of glares she gets.

“It’s a carnelian stone. It’s supposed to aid in courage and have protective properties. At first that wasn’t enough to go off but then I found out it also preserves memories, particularly of past lives.”

“Past lives?”

“And you had enough to go off with that?” Dean questions, shutting his own laptop and rubbing his eyes. Staring at a screen all day isn’t as easy as it once was.

“Well yeah, put it all into google and what came out the other side is Valkyries.”

“Valkyries?” Robin echoes. “Like warrior princesses from the woman island of Valhalla?”

“You’ve faced one before?” Dean asks her, turning in his seat so that he isn’t solely facing his brother anymore.

Robin shakes her head. “Wasn’t even sure they were real.”

“You’re off about a couple of things.” Sam corrects. “They’re demi-goddesses -”

“Oh goodie.” Dean groans.

“-and Valhalla isn’t an island but another realm. Also, they’re warriors but they don’t actually go into battle, instead they abduct men and train them to do the fighting.”

“Wait, so if it’s men they’re after how does that fit the MO of whatever is terrorising this town?” Dean asks.

“I don’t know, but everything points to Valkyries. Maybe one has gone rogue or something?”

“Works for me.” Robin shrugs. “Did you read anything on how to kill it?”

Sam shakes his head. “Only that the usual blood coated wooden stake won’t do the job.”

“Double goodie.” Dean pops his laptop open again, to continue researching. “If we find out how to gank the bitch quickly we might make it back to the bunker by tonight. Where we won’t look for
another case for at least twenty-four hours, Robin. ” He warns her.

She gives him a sheepish smile. “Let’s just ask Cas.”

“No don’t-” Dean stops himself as he sees Castiel appear, trench coat flapping in the brief breeze.

“Hello.”

“Hello?” Robin repeats in mock anger. “Hello.” She mimics again in a gruff voice. “You don’t call, you don’t write, what’s a girl gotta do to get a lil’ lovin’?” She pushes herself off the mattress and takes one large step right into his waiting arms.

It’s a regular length hug, but it feels longer for the both of them. There will always be comfort in each other’s arms. It’s to be expected, after what they’ve been through. Robin teased but she does wish he was around more. She understands that he’s still mending bridges in heaven, trying to help establish order and that’s on top of chasing down leads on the Lucifer front. Still, she misses him and she tells him just that, in their own way.

“S’been weeks, Cas.” She murmurs against the lapels of his coat before stepping back, getting a good look at him. “Not a day goes by, you know.”

“That’s because I’m a delight.” He quotes something she said often in the fog. He doesn’t deliver the line with quite as much sarcasm as she did, though, and Robin hears what he’s leaving unsaid. Me too.

“It’s good to see you, Cas.” Sam says with an apology in his eyes. Sam knows that Castiel is staying away for Dean’s benefit. Sam also knows that they’re the angel’s true home, which makes his brother’s request all the more heartbreaking.

“And you.” Cas grins at Sam, clamping a hand down on his shoulder. His features smooth out into something stoic, however, when he addresses Dean with a nod. “Dean.” He intones, voice gravelly.

“Cas.” Dean responds, though he might as well have chucked a fistfull of actual gravel at the angel with the way he spits the word.

Robin eyes the two and recalls their tense encounter her first night back from the fog. Cas had returned a few days before, what could possibly have happened in such a short amount of time that would justify Dean’s anger?

“I assume you called for assistance?”

Robin plops back onto the bed and skips to a blank page on the word processor she’d been using throughout her research. “Valkyries. What’s the 411?” She asks, fingers poised over the keyboard to take notes.

“Namely, how to kill them and why they might be going after girls instead of men.” Sam chimes.

“You have a Valkyrie on your hands? What a rare occurrence. You’re sure?” Cas questions, taking a seat on the edge of Sam’s bed.

“Is there a way to confirm it?” Robin wonders.

“They each carry a special charm. It links to and acts as a key to Valhalla. There, it is forged in the springs that give them their immortality. It’d look like an orange crystal.”
“Carnelian stone?” Sam supplies.

“Exactly.” Castiel confirms.

“Then, yes, we’re sure.” There’s only a little bite in Dean’s words but it’s still more than is warranted.

Castiel nods stiffly. “A valkyrie’s life may be ended by one who wields a sword in their fashion.”

“Mhmm, mhmm, what does that mean?” Robin asks.

“They can be killed by one of their own, or if one of their soldiers turns on them. It’s very unlikely because there is fierce loyalty there.”

“Well we definitely don’t have volunteers for treason coming out the wazoo. Is there anything else?” Dean huffs, itching to put distance between him and Castiel. Being near him is too much of a reminder of what she- of what happened. It’s also harder for him to be angry with Cas when he’s right there. Dean needs to be angry with Cas because if he isn’t he’s-

“Yes.” Cas replies without missing a beat, unperturbed by Dean’s curtness. “It is said where a woman is made into a goddess, in the deepest springs of Valhalla, the current that gives eternal life can take it away. Essentially, you can drown a Valkyrie in that body of water.”

“I’m not too crazy about fighting them on their turf.” Sam admits.

“Our options are pretty bleak.” Robin concurs.

“May I ask…” Cas starts. “Valkyries aren’t innately evil. They are fierce and regal women that thrive on structure and order. What is their infraction?”

“She’s snatching teenagers.” Dean snaps.

“And they usually kidnap men. Sounds pretty not good to me, Cas.” Robin adds gently, to make up for Dean’s harsh tone.

Cas shakes his head a little. “They do not abduct men. Valkyrie’s intercept the souls of fallen soldiers and offer them the chance to be warriors in the Final Battle. If the men consent, their spirits are taken to Valhalla, instead of being reaped, where they train in preparation.”

“Wait, what Final Battle?” Robin is quick to ask.

“As in the apocalypse?”

“Didn’t we stop that?” Sam demands, a little on edge. “Like more than once.”

“You did derail the End for Judeo-Christianism, but Valkyries subscribe to different beliefs.”

“Just how many armageddons should we expect exactly?” Sam sighs out the rhetorical question.

“I believe no more than a baker’s dozen in your lifetime.” Cas deadpans.

Robin stifles a laugh. “Alright, so if they’re into consent why are they plucking teenage girls out of this town?”

Cas thinks it over for a moment. “Perhaps they are replenishing their ranks. I have heard of struggles in the Middle East, where rogue reapers interfered with their work. They lost six of their
recruiters in the battle.”

“Six.” Dean repeats. “We’ve got four missing girls. Plus Beatrice. So our fake shop owner is going to go after one more. Is there a way to get back the girls that have already been taken, Cas?” Dean is immersed enough in the case that he doesn’t bother lacing his tone with snark.

Castiel offers him an apologetic look. “If they were chosen by the stone and if they succumbed to it, they would have been taken to Valhalla. Even if you were to go there for them, they would have been brought to the spring to complete their transition, first thing. It is an irreversible process.”

“Okay,” Robin barrels on, not missing a beat. Saving the girls that were already lost had been a long shot, there was no point in wasting precious time on the matter, not when there’s another victim out there. “But why bother with the ruse? Why take over running a shop?”

“I read about them being elegant women,” Sam starts. “I figured that was something the lore got wrong since they’re mostly described as warriors, but you called them regal, Cas.”

“Yes.” The angel nods. “They believe in nobility. Throughout history, princesses and queens have been known to become Valkyrie.”

“Alright, well, it’d make sense then. If they’re not entirely familiar with human culture, they might think girls who buy prom dresses are…” Sam waves a hand around, searching for the right word.

“The shit.” Robin offers.

“Yes, Robin, that.” Sam accepts with a roll of his eyes.

“Alright, so I say, we go over to the store and gank ourselves our very own Xena.”

“Yeah, Dean. How do you propose we do that exactly?” Sam sasses sarcastically in that shitty little brother way of his.

“I’m thinking angel blades should work.” Dean proposes. “Angel of the lord trumps demi-god right? Especially a human-turned-demi-god. It’s not even pure lineage.”

“We gonna bank on that?” Robin asks, looking at Sam for approval. She’s game either way, but she wants to make sure everyone’s on board.

Sam shrugs. “It’s our best bet.”

The sun is setting when they make it back to the store, an angel blade tucked up each of their respective sleeves. It’s closed for the night, much earlier than the previous day, they note.

Robin’s the one who picks the lock. She’s proven to being the best at it out of the three. Every time she steps up to the task it reminds Dean of when she’d gotten herself out of their warded cuffs when they’d kept her in their dungeon. He never did figure out how she managed that.

They enter the darkened store and sweep it twice, without any luck finding their Valkyrie.

“Any clue how we’re going to track it?” Robin asks, ready to spitball ideas.

“I think I have an idea where she might be in half an hour.” Dean announces from behind the counter. He lifts a pale blue flyer for the other two hunters to see. The words ‘Winner High School Winter Ball’ are written, in a font that mimics icicles.
Sam sighs. “I’ll talk to the school vice-principal I spoke with yesterday, tell her we’ll be chaperoning for FBI business. It’s going to blow my counselor cover though.” He murmurs the last part as he walks into the aisles to make the call.

Robin nods at him, though it’s pointless since his back is turned. When she turns back to Dean she notices him grinning at her, however.

“Robin?” His lips pull, turning his smile into something mischievous.

“Yes, Dean?” Robin hesitates.

“Wanna go to the dance with me?” He asks, mirth dancing in his eyes.

Robin’s answer is a big boastful laugh. One of Dean’s favourite things.

They agree that there’s no time to return to the motel to change into more appropriate attire. Even if there was time, where the boys’ fed suits would do the trick, Robin didn’t actually have anything that fit the occasion. If she did own a dress that would do the job, she wouldn’t have it with her, anyway.

They end up pillaging from Beatrice’s shop where the options are abundant.

Robin is digging through the available purses, having been the first to finish changing considering she didn’t have quite as many layers and just had to slip on a dress and heels, when Dean steps out of the changing room and takes her breath away.

There’s gotta be something supernatural at play here, because the three piece suit fits him like the sexiest of gloves.

“You look really good, Dean.” She breathes in, finally getting some oxygen. She drags her eyes to his, in an attempt at not being an ogling sleazebag, but finds his lingering on her body.

“You don’t think it’s a bit much?” He asks her.

She shakes her head making her lumpy hair swish around her. “No, Dean, you… You’re good.” She starts gathering her hair up in as neat a bun she can manage. She can’t wear it down with how messy and frizzy it is at the moment.

“I meant you, Robin.” He waves a hand up and down, towards her. “You’re going to make teenage boys’ noses bleed.”

“Donations. I wanna pull a Carrie.” She jokes and watches as Dean’s face scrunches in disgust. “It’s one of the only dresses that’s short enough for me to run in and that doesn’t make me look like a cupcake.” She explains of the black dress that could only be described as slinky. It’s modest enough, hitting a few inches above the knees with a high neckline and wide straps.

Dean nods, his eyes following the curve of where her waist becomes her hips before spinning on his heels. “How we coming along, there, Sammy.” Dean calls for his brother, his voice rougher than it had been a moment ago.

Robin busies herself with shoving most of her weapons in the large, envelop-style clutch she ends up finding. If placed at an angle, the angel blade just about fits.
She does her best to shake the tingling that Dean’s eyes on her elicited.

“Give me a minute.” Sam’s muffled voice gruffs out.

“Does it sound like he’s having technical difficulties to you?” Dean asks Robin, who’s moved to behind the counter. “You lookin’ for something?”

Robin lifts her head from the drawer she’s rummaging through to wave a roll of duct-tape at Dean. “Got it.”

Dean doesn’t see below her waist, with the counter between them, but by the way she moves her arms he can tell she’s hiking the skirt of the dress up. Then she’s tearing a strip of tape with her teeth and picking up her small hiltless blade he’d failed to spot beside the register.

“They sell garters here, you know.” Dean informs, jutting his thumb behind him.

Robin shakes her head and picks a piece of tape from her tongue before saying, “Don’t trust them. Don’t wanna risk it falling.”

“Shame.” Dean winks.

Robin has a witty retort at the ready to distract from her blush, but Sam steps out of the dressing room and does the distracting for her. She and Dean can’t help the guffaw that escapes them even if they wanted to.

“Shut up.” Sam scowls, tugging at the sleeve of his jacket, desperately trying to make it reach his wrists. The action makes the fabric of the blazer pull across his the back of his shoulders, threads threatening to give.

“You look like-”

“Shut up, Dean.” Sam snaps, shrugging off the jacket and mumbling, “Screw it. The vest will have to do. Everybody ready?”

Everybody is, in fact, ready.

They split up as soon as they get there, keeping their eyes peeled for the Valkyrie who had posed as the shop owner’s great-niece and anyone who might be a potential victim, which could literally be anyone in a gym full of gown clad girls. Sam goes to find the vice-principal, something about her sounding a little panicked on the phone at the idea of the FBI needing to attend the ball.

Forty minutes in, Dean and Robin meet up at the refreshments table.

“Think anyone spiked the punch?” Robin jokes, using a ladle to pour the orange drink into cups for her and Dean, her clutch held against her side awkwardly.

“You rebel, you.” Dean jokes, only half paying attention as his eyes continuously scan the room. “It’s pretty impressive, what the high school was able to pull together.” Dean compliments the successful winter-wonderland decor. He was just counting his lucky stars that the snowfall outside had been minimal despite it being early december.

“It is?” Robin asks curiously, handing him his plastic cup.

“Well, yeah. It’s nicer than any dance- or prom- I’ve ever been to, few as they were.” He takes the
cup and licks the lone drop that lands on his thumb.

“It looks like in the movies and tv shows. I figured that was the norm.” She explains.

“Wait, you’ve never been to a dance?” Dean doesn’t bother masking his incredulity.

Robin’s brows furrow. “I was home schooled. How have I never told you this?”

“You were what?”

“Home schooled. Sort of. I mean, we lived in car so the home part…” She trails off. “Nah, still pretty accurate.”

“This explains so much.” Dean has a far-off look in his eyes, like he’s doing some hard math in his head.

“Should I be offended? I feel a little offended.” She wonders with an eye roll.

“I’m counting my blessings that you didn’t grow up to be Norman Bates or something.” He says, ignoring her comment entirely.

“Well, we do kill things for a living.” Robin counters. Then, in a bit of a daze adds, “You’re a warrior that would die in the line duty.”

“What?” Dean tunes back in.

“What? I’m a little Bates-y considering what we do.”

Dean looks at her oddly then raises hi glass.

“To my first dance.” She raises her own and clinks it against his, capturing his eyes as she does so.

“To my beautiful date.”

Their eyes stay locked as they each take a regrettable sip- the punch is pretty gross- of their drinks. Forgetting the case for a moment, forgetting that they’re in a gymnasium full of sweaty teenagers, forgetting they are officially not together, Dean and Robin move towards each other. It’s infinitesimal, at first. They’re just a hair closer than before, but they can both feel the change, the shift in the air.

They continue to close the gap, slowly, eliminating an inch at a time, until they’re just a hair apart, their chests close. Their cups forgotten on the table, Robin’s clutch beside them. Her head is tilted all the way back so she can look at Dean, a look he’d describe as intoxicating.

Dean finds himself wishing he’d opted out of a jacket like Sam did, if only to have one less layer between him and Robin. He wants to touch her, wants to hold her, wants to feel her warm against him. Maybe he’s still not ready to go there, maybe he doesn’t know how to cross the line back into together, maybe he never will, but right here and now, what he does know is that Robin has always fit in his arms just right. That much he can handle.

He lifts a hand and pinches a fallen strand of her hair between his thumb and forefinger, tugging on it lightly once just to tease, before placing it where it isn’t in her face. There’s a mirthful glare in her eyes but it dissipates into a heady look when Dean’s hand falls on her shoulder. Skin touching skin.

They move for each other then, into each other maybe, or at least they would have if an obnoxious
kid hadn’t just marched up to them asking if they were planning on keeping the punch for themselves. Dean doesn’t tell him he’d like to serve him a punch, as he steps away from Robin, only because they’re still on the job.

When the kid leaves, Robin hesitates for a moment then steps closer to Dean again, not as close as before but closer. She hesitates once more, but seems to suss out that the moment is gone and doesn’t take another step. She feels her skin actually ache with the desire to be against Dean’s. She thinks it’s for the best that things were cut short because she doesn’t think she could be held responsible for how they would have progressed.

It’s better to keep things as uncomplicated as they can be, while Dean figures out…what he has to figure out. flirting and teasing here and there is fair game because that had been their relationship from day one, before emotions, before commitment, before.

 Robin knows there’s something still bothering Dean about her return. Or about her… initial departure. Part of her thinks it has something to do with why Dean is angry with Castiel. She knows how conceited that is, obviously the world doesn’t revolve around her, but she has this nagging feeling, pecking away at her, that she should be doing something about their strange fighting.

“Hey Dean,” Robin starts, after having stood there dumbly for a long moment. At least Dean was back to surveilling the room. When she knows she has his attention, she continues. “This thing with you and Cas—”

Dean’s neck almost snaps with how quickly he whips his head to look at her. For the briefest of seconds Dean looks scared, but then he looks angry. Not full out furious, but a simmering sort of rage that’s controlled and below the surface. “Don’t.” Dean’s tone leaves no room for argument. It’s all Robin can do not to physically throw her hands up in surrender. She should know better than to ignore his fair warning, she does know better, but Robin pushes despite the red flags. “I know that it isn’t any of my business—”

“Then stay out of it.” He snaps.

“Dean,” She breathes out the word in a silent plea. “I just want to tell you, that whatever this is, I’m here for you. The both of you. And that I hope you don’t doubt, even for a second, despite whatever is going on, that Cas loves you. Like a shit ton. You’re his favourite person in the world.”

What Robin says softens Dean because they don’t throw the word ‘love’ around often. Robin said it to him before she… left. He’d almost said it back, would have if she hadn’t… left. They haven’t talked about it. It’s just not something he and Cas say. They know it’s love that they’ve got between them though, that they’re family.

“Look, Cas did something.” Dean grinds out, wanting to give Robin something. “I’m not okay with it and I’m angry. That’s all there is to it.”

“Okay.” Robin accepts, not wanting to push her luck any further.

“Okay.” Dean repeats. “Don’t… Don’t ask me about this again, Robin.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

A buzzing sound comes from Robin’s purse and she pulls her phone out to accept the call.
“Whatchu got, Sam?” She asks.

She listens to his answer and absentmindedly takes another sip of the punch, scowling at the taste again, to Dean’s glee.

“I don’t know why he didn’t pick up,” She glowers at Dean. “But I’m with him now.”

She nods along to what Sam is saying before agreeing to meet him somewhere and hangs up.

“What’d he find?” Dean asks, dusting his fingers clean of chip crumbs.

“He saw a carnelian stone in the Winter Ball Queen crown. He told me the room it’s being kept in, where the votes are going to be counted, wants us to meet him there.”

“Makes sense that they’d go after the queen. Fits the profile they’re after the most.” Dean nods and watches as Robin opens her purse to dump her phone in. “Alright, let’s g-”

He almost misses it. The gleam from inside could have easily been chalked up to light shining off of the angel blade there, or even Robin’s extra clip of bullets. It’s neither of those things. Nestled in one corner of the bag is another carnelian stone.

“Don’t.” Dean snaps, snatching the clutch out of Robin’s hand. “Don’t touch it, what’s wrong with you?”

Robin is startled to realise that she had indeed been reaching for the pretty rock. A mistake she’s no rookie to make.

“We don’t know how that thing works, we could open a portal accidentally, or- Robin are you listening to me?” Dean searches her face for an acknowledgement but her eyes remain fixed on the bag in his hands.

“Yeah, yeah, course. Come on, hand me my purse and we can go find Sam.” She says, reaching for the object.

Dean rolls his eyes at her- no one ever listens to his lectures- and moves to return her bag to her. It’s the scary intent in her eyes and the twitch in her fingers that makes him stop, tucking the purse close to his chest. “No.”

“No?” Robin’s tone is harsh before she collects herself and sweetly says, “Funny, Dean. C’mon, give. Sam is waiting.”

Dean eyes her suspiciously and repeats, “No.”

He places a hand on her shoulder and turns her around. His hand glides to the back of her neck, which he grips warningly, and he walks her out of the gymnasium.

In the hallway, he asks, “Which room number did Sam tell you he was in?.”

Robin answers him as she shakes her mind out of the odd state it’s in.

“Okay.” Dean opens a door to a classroom that is not the one Sam’s in, which makes Robin frown in confusion. “You’re going to stay here.” Dean says, ushering her in.

“What?” Robin pivots on the heels to look at Dean.

He glares down at her. “I think the Valkyrie are having an effect on you. You need to sit this one
“That doesn’t make sense, she’s only missing one and she’s going after the prom queen.”

“Maybe, she didn’t take Beatrice, just killed her to used her shop as a cover. Which means she’s missing two.”

“Dean-”

“Or maybe she doesn’t mind overstock. Either way, you’re a good fit for them, warrior and all. So I get that they’d come after you or that you’d be compelled by them.”

“I’m not.”

“Then explain your behaviour earlier. Or why you took that necklace.”

“I didn’t.”

Dean raises a brow.

“Okay, maybe I did without realising it. Or remembering. I definitely see your point, now that I’m saying that out loud.”

“So you’ll stay here? Last thing we need is you going dark warrior princess side.” There’s a nervousness in his voice and a bit of humour. Then, softly, “Need you away from the action for this one, Robin.”

Robin sighs, shakes her head and grunts. “Fine, yes, okay. I’ll probably end up doing more harm than good.”

“I’m glad we agree.” Dean doesn’t even try hiding his smug look. “Now, give me your hands.” He reveals a pair of cuffs.

Fuck no.” Robin takes a large step back.

“Robin, you were acting really weird not more than two minutes ago.” Dean insists. “You seem back to yourself, now, but how long will that last?”

“There’s no way I’m putting those on, Dean. I’ll be fucking helpless if the Valkyrie comes for me or passes by here.” She doesn’t bother pointing out that she can get out of the cuffs, because that’s not the point. “I want to keep my weapons too.”

Dean looks hesitant. She makes a valid argument but he’s not comfortable with the situation. If history is anything to go buy, hunters don’t tend to stay on the sidelines. Robin seems to read his mind.

“Hey, if I tell you I’m going to stay here, I’m going to stay here because I told you I would. I don’t go back on my word. Besides, the goal is for me not to be troublesome. If you can’t trust that I’ll respect our agreement, then you’ll be distracted and worried anyway and then what would be the point.”

Dean is faced, not for the first time, with just how unlike other hunters Robin is. How level headed. He wonders, not for the first time, how this life hasn’t fucked her up yet. “Okay,” Dean breathes, tucking the cuffs away as he undoes his tie, slipping it from around his neck. “I’m going to take the stone. Go stand on the other side of the room and don’t look at it.”
Robin nods and, just before she turns away to do as he says, gives him a meaningful look. Dean thinks it might be a thank you for compromising. Maybe it’s a be safe. Maybe it’s the three little words she said the night she- That night.

Dean picks up the stone from her purse with his tie, making sure not to make direct skin contact with it, then places her bag on a student desk and leaves.

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It’s only been fifteen minutes since Dean left, but Robin is bored. She spends a few minutes snooping around, having only ever been in a classroom the few times she went undercover for a case. That turns out to be pretty boring and she spends another few minutes drawing on the chalkboard, then playing in the white powder that’s accumulated on the ledge beneath it.

As she drags her finger through the chalk residue, she’s reminded of doing exactly that in the fog but it was shards of glass that pricked her skin. A pang in her chest, or in the hole she sometimes feels is there, makes her step away from the wall and look for something else to do.

The best thing for her right now would be to work. Time and training and Dean. That’s what’s helped her move forward, move past the fog. It’s helped her cope and deal with the memories and the emotions that still flare up. But hunting… Nothing ever makes her feel like she’s back the way hunting does.

Robin has had many homes. Her parent’s 1973 Allegro, for most of her life. That beat up jeep Bobby gave her, for a while. Dean’s arms, now. But hunting is home too. More than anything else, really. The one constant throughout the entirety of her life. Her earliest memories. Her best memories. Her purpose.

So she’s itching to take her angel blade and do her job, but she told Dean she wouldn’t. She told Dean she’d stay right here. Which is what she’s going to do. It’s not like the brothers can’t handle it. The two of them versus one valkyrie. It’s a cakewalk for the Winchesters.

To distract herself, she decides on retrieving her phone to play a game, or maybe text George, see what he’s up to. Her plans are interrupted when she opens the flap of the envelope style clutch only to find the same stone she saw at the shop hanging on the same thin copper chain. The one Dean had supposedly taken.

“Well, shit.”

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Dean opens the door to the classroom Sam had told them to meet him in with worry on his tongue. He wants to tell Sam about what’s happened with Robin but what he sees stops him.

The crown, plastic and cheap and all too fake except for the all too real carnelian stone embedded in its center, is on a desk. In front of it, wearing a typical prom dress and clutching tightly under an arm the metal box Dean saw students casting their votes for King and Queen in, a teenage girl is mesmerised by the orange rock.

In front of the girl, behind the desk the crown is on, there’s the woman from the shop. She’s leaning forward slightly, an eager look in her eyes, as she watches the teenager. Her attire has changed, save for her headpiece, to mostly brown leather. Scraps of fabric, secured by wrought iron broaches, that leave little to the imagination.

Dean would think it’s hot if it wasn’t for the second Valkyrie, to the right of the teenage girl, who’s
currently got her arm wrapped around Sam’s neck, pressing against his throat in a sleeper hold. 

Sam passes out, his eyes fluttering shut, just as Dean springs into action.

“Ah ah ah,” The second valkyrie intones making Dean halt.

She’s like an amazon but not the kind that get pregnant and then sic their children on you. She’s like an amazon the way Wonder Woman is, bracelets of submission and all- one of which has an orange stone of its own. She’s taller than is totally normal, as tall as Dean’s little brother. She’s probably as strong as her thick muscles suggest, too.

“Sam Winchester is a warrior in the truest sense of the word and he, as well as you, will be taken, when the time comes. It won’t be today, unless you force our hand.” She drops Sam’s body and steps over it towards Dean.

“Let us finish our work.” The first valkyrie, the one from the shop, speaks. “We have not come for you Dean.”

“No, you’re here to prey on innocent high schoolers.” Dean growls back, dropping his angel blade from his sleeve and to his hand in a silent threat.

“Look at her,” She continues. “We are not harming her, we aren’t doing anything to her. She is compelled by the pull of Valhalla. Its holy stream beckons her as it did us and she will join our ranks if she chooses it.”

“Don’t pretend like that girl has free will, in this situation. She’s in some sort of trance.”

“Perhaps.” The first valkyrie speaks again and mulls his words over. “Perhaps it is Valhalla that chooses us and not the other way around.”

“No matter the case,” The second jumps in, sounding gruffer than her smaller counterpart. “You don’t end up in Valhalla unless you belong there. Her life, serving the Great Cause, will be more meaningful than anything she can accomplish in this realm.”

“You don’t get to decide that for her,” Dean barks. He’s fucking sick of all this destiny crap. “Fight your own damn battles. She’s not cannon fodder.”

“No,” The first valkyrie agrees. “She is not. She will lead armies. The fodder is you and those like you. The soldiers of the world. Do not misunderstand me. It is honourable. You will save it. The world, I mean.”

Dean glares at her. He liked his odds better when it was Sam and him against one of these bitches. Now the current has changed, but he is still Dean fucking Winchester. “I already have.” He shrugs nonchalantly as he says it, but his voice is hard. It’s a threat. “Saved the world, I mean.”

Valkyrie One laughs. It isn’t sinister or condescending, just a regular laugh one makes when they hear something funny. “I suppose you have.”

The teenage girl reaches for the crown with both hands, dropping the metal box in the process. The sound it makes as it clatter to the ground startles her out of her hypnotic state. She looks around wildly, taking large steps back and away from the two women within her range of sight. One of which is massive and standing over an equally massive unconscious man. The counselor that had been at the school yesterday.

Then Dean moves forward, towards the teenager, and swivels the blade once in his hand, to adjust
his grip on it. He grabs her arm, making her scream in surprise and struggle to get away. Through gritted teeth, he tells her to run and pushes her towards the door. Turns out she doesn’t need to be told twice and she scrambles out of the room faster than one would think she could, what with the layers of tulle and the high heels she’s wearing.

Valkyrie Two growls and body checks Dean into a wall. He finds himself pressed up- face first-against a poster with the quote ‘One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it is worth watching.’ Dean doesn’t know about that second part, but he does know that today won’t be that day.

“I will hit a lady,” Dean assures, even from his less than advantageous position, considering the angel blade is no longer in his hands.

“And I will crush a bug,” Valkyrie Two promises.

Dean finally wiggles in her grasp enough to be able to thrash his elbow back into the spot just below V-Two’s sternum.

She reels back, coughing, but glares when Dean levels her with a smug sneer. Dean hears a huff and looks over to V-One.

“She got away because of you.” Her tone is low, bone chilling. Dean actually feels the hairs on the back of his head rise. If he wasn’t in a defensive stance at the moment, he might have patted his neck to smooth them down. “She got away because of you.” She repeats and her eyes darken. Dean thinks he’s misjudged the real threat in the situation.

V-Two grabs Dean by the neck and, when he can’t force her off of him, she flings him into a row of desk- a rib might snap against the corner of one- so that he lands at V-One’s feet, with a grunt.

V-One crouches down beside Dean, grips the collar of his shirt and lifts him off the ground enough to bash him back down into it. The back of Dean’s skull smacks against the tile and the flare of pain shoots forward to his eyes. He’s too out of it for a second to make a move, to reach for any weapon he has on his person. He tries to shake his head, as though that could rid him of the injury, but V-One digs her nails into the flesh of his jaw, restraining him.

“We like,” She slams his head back, again. “Efficiency, Dean.” She does it again and Dean tries to convince himself he didn’t hear something crack. “I don’t appreciate you interfering with that.” She drops his head to rise back to her feet. “Clodovea, I will bring the stone to the girl and check in on the Last Daughter. Keep our friend here busy. Only kill him if you have to.” She exits the room but not before sweeping the crown into her arms.

Dean barely hears V-Two- Clodovea, apparently- answer with a ‘Gladly’ due to the alarm bells going off in his ears. It’s partly because of the throbbing pain still echoing against the walls of his cranium, but mostly it’s because Robin is the Last Daughter. If he’s here then he’s not there protecting her.

Even in his addled state, Dean reminds himself that Robin can, and has, taken care of herself. Pick someone who can handle a target on their back. Knowing that Robin can is one of the reasons he was willing to try the whole relationship thing with her. She’s proven herself more than enough times, in their training sessions (where she whoops his ass more often than he’s willing to admit) and during the hunts they’ve been on. Dean needs to trust that she’ll keep herself safe.

Dean knows all of that, but she wasn’t in her right mind earlier.
His vision is still spotty but he manages to scramble to his feet, his palms still flat on the ground. An elbow thrust into his back has him falling down, again, his chin catching on the linoleum. He knows it, before he actually tastes it, that there’s blood in his mouth now.

Robin stands outside of the classroom Dean had left her in.

When she saw the stone she instinctively reached for it, beckoned by its silent call, but somehow she found the willpower to wrap her fingers on the angel blade instead of the orange gem. She left the room after that to stand outside of it, with her weapon clasped behind her back.

She just stands there for a while, alert but bored. It seems that distance, and having the stone out of sight negates the stone’s power. For a few minutes it’s well and dandy, but Robin thinks the magical rock might be sentient, adapting, because it seems to be extending its reach.

The thought of it, the knowledge that if she were just to turn around, turn the knob and take a few steps, then she could touch it, nags at the back of her mind. Until it seeps to the forefront and Robin is trembling with the desire to do just that. It’d be so easy too. She could just do it. If only for a second. Dean would be pissed, but she could put it right back down after that. She’ll just hold the stone for a moment. See what the fuss is about. See why her fingertips tingle at the idea of gliding against the smooth surface. See why her neck aches to feel the weight of the pendant.

Robin doesn’t know why she hears water running in her ears. Why sights of tides crashing against boulders flicker in her eyes. Why bathing in the current is the only thing that seems more appealing than the stone, at the moment.

She also isn’t sure when she turned around, when she started reaching for the knob. What she does know though, is that she doesn’t need to actually enter the room to get to the necklace, because the delicate chain hangs off of the doorknob, the stone swinging tantalizingly beneath it.

“Fuck.” Robin curses, startled by its sudden appearance and back-pedaling until she’s pressed against the opposing wall of the hallway. “Fuck.” She says again, shutting her eyes tightly, trying her best to rid herself of the image of stone. She tries an exercise that used to help her manage her senses back when she had synesthesia. She focuses on the things that she knows are real and repeats a mantra of what she needs to do. But right now, Robin chants to herself not to move.

“Help!” A voice screeches from down the hall, which has Robin’s eyes snapping open.

A girl is running towards her, with the skirt part of her massive pink dress gathered in her arms. “Please help!” She shouts again.

It’s urgent enough, distracting enough, that Robin’s mind is taken off the stone momentarily.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” Robin asks, clamping her hands down on the sobbing girl’s shoulders to steady her.

“Please . These women, a giant woman, and these guys, they’re- I don’t know what they’re doing, but it’s fucked up.” The girl just might hyperventilate.

“What do you mean women ? There’s more than one?”

“There’s like two and half. One is an actual giant and she choked the new school counselor and-and-”
“Robin Fera,” The valkyrie from the shop says, coming from the same direction as the teenage girl. “I’m happy we get to meet again.”

“Go, GO. ” Robin shouts at the girl, who obliges.

Robin’s eyes fall on her angel blade, fallen by the door of the classroom.

“Don’t bother,” The valkyrie says. “I know you’re more interested in this.” She shows Robin the stone in her hand, the chain tangled in her fingers.

Robin looks back at the door and doesn’t see her stone there. No. Not my stone. She tries to tell herself, yet can’t stop from walking to the center of the hallway to stand face to face with the valkyrie, no more than three yards between them.

The valkyrie takes a step forward and Robin finds the strength to take a step back. Distance distance distance.

The valkyrie laughs, jovially enough. “Don’t be like that, Robin.”

“Do you make it a habit of knowing your victims names? How humane.” Robin snides sarcastically.

“Not usually no.” The valkyrie admits.


“Those names don’t matter. They’ll get new ones. I was once Marjorie Wilson. Now I am Ailith and I am at my best.” The valkyrie- Ailith- explains to Robin sincerely. Like she believes every word.

“Those are the people you ripped from their families. From their homes. Their names matter. ” Robin snaps, her fists clenching.

“Their home is Valhalla now.” Ailith shrugs.

“You imposed that on them.” Robin counters.

“What is it with you people and free will. They were chosen because they are fit for the role. As are you. More so than most, in fact.”

“I don’t care. You’re not going to take me- You’re not going to take anyone else.” As Robin spits the words, she realises that she means them. Her anger and disgust at the monster before her overpowers the pull the stone has over her. Her eyes flick to the angel blade, only for a second. A second is all she needs to assess how big of a leap she’d have to make to get to it.

Ailith’s lips twist into a smirk. “Some of yours are among us, you know?” She says conversationally, purposefully elusive.

“Hunters?”

Ailith shakes her head. “No.” She pauses, tilts her head upwards in thought. “Well, yes. But more than that. Your blood. Your whole lineage is generation after generation of warriors. Fighters of the shadows. The First Family. We’ve plucked some from the bunch.”
Robin doesn’t say anything. If this valkyrie thinks she’s going to get inside Robin’s head, she’s got another thing coming. Robin is levelled and sharp and has been doing this her whole life. She doesn’t fall for cheap tricks. More than that, Robin’s favourite thing to hunt is shapeshifters. She finds it therapeutic when they take on her form and dig around her noggin to throw her off her game. This valkyrie’s got nothing on them and she’s got nothing on Robin.

“You know, the name was given in recognition of your bloodline’s work. The way the Carters are called the First Family of Country Music. One hundred thousand years of uninterrupted hunting. You were dubbed for that reason. By some anyway. Other communities named you as a warning for their kin. Fear the First family. It has nothing to do with you being the actual first. Though, you are. The first, I mean. Not a lot of people- or things- know that. But it’s true. You are the child of the child of the child of the child- you get it- of the first homo sapien to kill a creature that didn’t quite belong on earth. The last child, in fact. The last daughter.”

“Thanks for the lesson in history.” Robin remarks dryly, inching towards the blade.

“We wanted your parents. God how we wanted Alice. We were at the ready when they died but we just weren’t fast enough. The reapers must have gotten to them first.”

Robin rolls her eyes. “You’re really clever. No one has ever tried to hurt me with the memory of my parents before. Trust me, I’m crying on the inside.”

The corner of Ailith’s lips quirks upwards. “We don’t usually take women in death, but we knew better than to go after Alice Fera in life. She’d have annihilated us.” She laughs like that was her favourite thing about Alice. “She was the best, you know. No hunter before her was better and she’s only been surpassed by one Dean Winchester. His father came close, John. We wanted him too.” She scowls. “But he had to go and sell his soul to Azazel. Some of Azazel’s special children are among us as well.” She adds just for the sake of sharing.

“Is there a reason you’re telling me all of this, or do they not teach you to shut up in Valhalla?”

Ailith laughs. “I want you to understand that you belong amongst us. Robin Fera, we want you.”

“Cool story, uncle Sam. The only way you’ll have me is dead.”

Robin, quick as a whip, rips the small blade she’d taped to her thigh, and flings it at the valkyrie. Ailith catches it with ease, though the sharp edges cut into the flesh of her empty palm. That’s alright, because Robin only needed the distraction to retrieve her angel blade.

Ailith looks up from her injury, with a frown, only to see Robin coming at her with the point of another weapon. She sidesteps the attack in the nick of time and dodges the one after that. She clocks Robin, sending her reeling back.

“You’re not going to win this fight, Robin. You may be Alice’s daughter but you don’t have…” Ailith trails off when a wild look glints in Robin’s eyes, as the hunter wipes the blood dripping down her face with the back of a hand. Then, she laughs. “Well, maybe you do have her chutzpa. Only makes me want you more.”

“Ask me out to dinner next time.” Robin pushes forward, changing her grasp on the blade so she can slice instead of stab.

She means to distract with that move while her free hand goes for a right hook, but it’s the punch that Ailith blocks with a grip on Robin’s wrist, allowing a clear swipe at her stomach. It’s deep, Robin feels the blade dig into the valkyrie’s flesh, can see the bloodless gaping gash now, but
Ailith barely flinches. Still, she sends Robin’s own fist back into her face, then knocks her back a few steps.

There’s insult in that injury but Robin won’t ever tell a living soul what happened. Her own damn fist. She blinks the drop of blood that drips from her forehead out of her eye.

“Valkyries don’t eat.” Ailith clarifies.

Dean swoops down to dodge a jab and lands a few on Clodovea’s stomach. The valkyrie clobbers her own fist down on Dean’s shoulder and he drops like a sack of potatoes. The valkyrie slams herself on top like she’s some kind of heavy-weight champion and starts pummeling him.

Dean barely gets a gasps in throughout the onslaught. The pain in his face is sharp and he feels like his skin has been peeled back to expose the raw layer beneath. With the amazonian woman above him, he doesn’t have a lot of room for movement but eventually he gets enough purchase that he manages to fling her off with his legs and hips.

He clammers for the closest angel blade, which happens to be Sam’s, because he knows it’s his best bet.

Clodovea roars as she moves to maul him again and Dean brings the blade up just in time that it goes straight through her heart. She stills, her chest against the hilt of the weapon and Dean finally allows himself a deep breath, that he finds hurts with a pinch in his lungs.

Now’s not the time to assess injuries though. He needs to get to Robin, but first Sam.

It turns out, it isn’t the time for either of those things because Clodovea lets out a laugh, stepping back and off the angel blade. Instead of blood oozing out of the hole left in the weapons wake, there’s a steady stream of clear water.

“You thought that toothpick would do any real damage?”

Dean is flung across the room again, this time landing on the teacher’s desk before tumbling to the ground. Burning pain shoots up his back, cutting off his breathing for a quick second the way back pain does. There’s no denying his rib is broken now. He hears Clodovea stomp towards him at a leisurely pace.

Dean rises to shaky arms and rasps, “Sam, I know the bitch stopped your oxygen and blood flow for a hot minute there, but if ever there was a time to tap back in this is it.”

Robin is beat up more than she’s been on any of the hunts she’s worked since she started hunting again. She’s bent over, hands on her knees, her angel blade still clutched tightly in one hand, eyes trained on the valkyrie.

“I think you’ve realised that pigsticker isn’t going to do you much good.” Ailith taunts. “I’ve got to admit, despite your obvious lack of common sense, you’re a very skilled fighter. You know of maneuvers and arts that do not belong to your time.”

“I’ve had very good trainers.”

“Unsurprising, but you should know that we are the best trainers. It’s what we do. Why won’t you
allow yourself to become that. Don’t you want to be part of the fight when The End comes?” Ailith asks earnestly. The men of the First Family that the valkyries have invited to Valhalla while on their death beds did not need much convincing. Even the women they’ve taken in life, they were so wholly compelled by the stone. Robin’s resistance is not only futile but counter intuitive. She belongs in their ranks. The stone, still in Ailith’s palm, hums it so.

“My fight is here and now.” Robin answers simply.

Ailith laughs as she dips a finger in one of her wounds. “Have you ever heard of the saying ‘If it can bleed, it can die’?” She waves her finger, clean of blood but damps with water, at Robin to prove her point.

“Have you ever heard of the saying ‘Shut your whore mouth, bitch’?”

Robin lunges forward aiming for the throat. Immortal or not, decapitation slows most things down. She gets the valkyrie up against the wall and strains to keep her there what with the creatures superior strength.

“Careful, Robin. I wouldn’t recommend getting so close.” Ailith lifts a hand to reveal the stone still firmly seated in her hand. She sneers like she’s won a game.

Robin stares at the stone for the moment but all she feels is angry. She narrows her eyes at the valkyrie and then, to prove a point, stabs the stone with the angel blade, shattering it and piercing through Ailith’s palm.

Robin has every intention of continuing with her plan to behead the valkyrie after that, but Ailith’s scream of agony gives her a new idea. She withdraws the angel blade and grips Ailith’s shoulder so that the monster can’t toss her away. Then, without much ceremony, Robin plants the angel blade in the stone that’s part of the headpiece Ailith has been wearing, burying it deep enough inside her skull that the tip sticks out at the back of her head.

Ailith’s face freezes in a grimace of horror before her entire person liquefies in Robin’s hands. The puddled water disappears in a blue glow and Robin thinks it might have returned to Valhalla.

Dean is a damn good fighter, so he manages to keep up for a while despite his injuries, even pulls a gun on Clodovea. He fires once, the bullet doing no damage other than making the floor more slippery for him, before it gets knocked out of his hand. From behind, she gets him in a headlock, one arm wrapped tightly around his neck, the other securely around his chest, pinning his arms to his sides.

Which is when Robin stumbles into the room, looking worse for wear.

“I killed your bitch friend,” Robin says. “And now I’m going to kill you.” She sways on her feet but the words are self-assured.

Clodovea laughs but it rings uncertain. “Ailith is immortal. Last Daughter or not you’re just a human.”

Robin has already assessed the situation at this point. She’s seen Sam and the rise and fall of his chest. The two scattered angel blades that make her curl her fingers around her own just a little tighter. Dean’s gun on the floor, just a few feet from her. Dean.

His wide eyes communicate for her to get the fuck out since he can barely gasp a breath let alone
form a sentence. Does he know something she doesn’t? Or does she really have the upper hand she thinks she has? It doesn’t matter.

“That’s not how she made it sound. She made it pretty clear that you feared my mother.” Robin counters, strolling further into the room casually and stopping purposefully by Dean’s discarded gun. She should have brought her own, should have gone back into the classroom for her clutch but she raced here instead. She doesn’t even know if there are still bullets in it.

“You are not Alice Fera. Not nearly as great a warrior as she was.” Clodovea bites, tightening her hold on Dean.

It brings Robin’s attention to the cuff on the valkyrie’s arm. To the carnelian stone embedded in it. She smirks. “Maybe,” She concedes. “But I’m a better shot than her.”

It happens quickly. Robin drops her angel blade and drops to a knee. Picks up and pulls back the safety of Dean’s gun in one swift motion. Deep breath. She pulls the trigger.

The sound of Clodovea’s stone cracking from the bullet now logged in it is drowned by the sound of the gunshot.

Dean feels like a bucket of water gets dunked on him, he suit clad back soaking entirely. His clothing sticks to his skin despite the layers. When he regains all his bearings, namely his breath, he sees Robin already attending to Sam, rousing him from his unconscious.

About damn time.

- 

“Hey, where’s Sam?” Robin asks, stepping out of the bathroom and braiding her freshly washed hair.

Dean tips the glass that’s poised at his mouth back so the last of the brown liquor in it can slip past his lips and burn down his throat. Best cure for a headache he’s ever found. “He hit it off with that vice principal apparently,” He answers proudly, rising from the bed with a small wince and making his way over to the table where there’s a sad looking first aid kit, a bucket of ice and a bottle of cheap scotch.

“Our Sammy is out on a date?” Robin coos at the idea while nodding at Dean who lifts a clean glass in question.

Dean pours her a drink, refreshes his own, and in a mock-scolding tone that rings a little sincere says, “Don’t call him that.”

“Right, sorry.” She offers him a sheepish smile and ties off her braid before moving closer and accepting her glass. She clinks it to his in a silent- save for the jingle of ice cubes- thanks and takes a drink.

Dean moves the bottle further away so he doesn’t run the risk of knocking it over when he leans against the table. “I think he’s rebounding off of Amy.”

Dean acts casual like he can’t smell his shampoo on Robin. She ran out three hunts ago. They stopped at a store at least twice since then, but somehow that item kept getting forgotten. Well, Dean remembered just conveniently didn’t point out what was clearly missing from their shopping basket.
“Can you rebound from a relationship that never happened?” Robin ponders, pursing her lips as she reflects.

Dean doesn’t doubt that the question is genuine. He shrugs noncommittally and takes a large swallow. The room is dimly lit, with only the two lamps between the beds on, instead of the overhead light, but Dean can still see Robin’s face emote as she mulls the question over.

“I guess, if you were invested.” She concludes.

“You really scared me tonight, you know.” It’s a complete one-eighty as far as topic changing goes but the only one who’s taken aback by the words is Dean. He didn’t think he would be bringing this up.

Robin doesn’t miss a beat, though. “Yeah some of it is a bit foggy, did I tell you that you’re a warrior that would die in the line duty? That’s creepy.”

“Not that.” Dean breathes out the words like it’s the biggest thing he’s ever confessed to Robin. It’s not. Dean told Robin about liking purgatory. About liking hell. About being petrified that he might outlive Sam. About Rhonda Hurley and her panties. “Not you almost becoming a valkyrie.”

Robin’s brows knit together and she stops swirling her glass. “Then, what?”

“You really gotta ask me that?” There’s an edge of agitation to Dean’s voice that has Robin bracing herself minutely.

“I feel like you want me to say no, but I really don’t know what-.”

“Dean, I was doing my job.” Robin states it simply, because that’s really all there was to it. She wasn’t stone-obsessing when she went to find him which made her think it was okay that she went back on her word. She handled the situation like the trained professional that she is. She runs the events in her mind’s eye just to double check that she didn’t do anything particularly stupid without realising it.

“You were vulnerable to them and should have stayed back. Since when is your job getting yourself killed?” Dean growls out the words, a rumble deep in his chest escaping him. He beats it down because that’s not what he wants to talk about. He won’t touch that with a pole twice Sam’s height.

The words hit a little too close to home and even as Robin opens her mouth to speak, she doesn’t know what she intends to say. “I-”

“You were reckless, Robin.” The accusation is clear.


“Did you? Did you think? Or did you just do without considering...” Dean snaps, finding it harder and harder to keep his anger under wraps.

It’s not coming off as anger to Robin, however. It’s coming off as condescending. “Considering what?” She challenges.
Dean forces himself to relax, outwardly at least. He releases his tightened muscles and goes as far as leaning against the table again. “Nothing.” His voice is tight but the unrest that was there before is tucked away somewhere else. Probably between one of Dean’s good ribs and his broken one.

“Does this have anything to do with the talk you wanted us to have when I first got back?” Robin sighs and asks softly. She keeps her eyes trained on Dean’s face to read him, though instinctively she’d rather be looking anywhere else as she speaks. “You never let me bring it back up and I know you’re holding something back from me, Dean.”

“Let’s just drop it.” Dean finishes off his drink and pours himself another.

“You don’t get to do that.” Robin’s tone remains quiet but it’s less soft. There’s something sharp in it now. A standard she’s asking Dean to meet.

“Do what?” Dean strolls back to the bed and plops himself down on it. His free hand runs through the sheets until it finds his phone. He lights up his screen and starts wasting time.

“End the conversation just because you’re not in the mood for it anymore.”

They both hear what is left unsaid.

Coward.

Talk to me.

“Not in the mood for it anymore?” Dean jumps back to his feet, making pain flare up in his side, slams his glass on the bedside table and levels Robin with a glare he’s never used on her before. “Christ, you really know how to downplay things don’t you? It’s all part of your flippant charm though, right? You can talk about anything like it’s nothing, ’cause you’re Robin Fera. There isn’t a thing you give a damn about.” Not even your own life.

Robin laughs dryly. She knocks back the rest of her drink and says, “That’s what you think?” She expects him to say no. Expects him to take it back. Expects him to admit to what’s really going on. Maybe she expects too much.

“Yeah, that’s what I think.” He looks her right in the eye when he says it and Robin hasn’t ever been heartbroken before, isn’t sure what it’s supposed to feel like, but she thinks this might be it. How can he think that? How can he still doubt Robin’s feelings? “Alright.” She sounds both threatening and tired and if Dean didn’t feel like something horrible was about to happen he might have been impressed. “Let me prove it to you.”

She puts her empty glass down and strides over to him. She’s going to kiss him and Dean wants but Dean is so scared of having. They’ve been down this path before and less than a day after he’d finally allowed himself to be with her, she died. Then she vanished. Then she was isolated in some unknown place for nearly a thousand years.

Robin approaches him and Dean is not ready. He thinks he can get there, he thinks he can go back to being willing to try this thing with Robin again, but he isn’t ready.

Robin doesn’t kiss him, however, so Dean doesn’t have to worry. She does do something much worse. Does the worst thing, really. Robin bends down, once she’s in front of him, and picks up her duffle. It’s only eighty percent packed but she doesn’t seem to care. She slips on her boots even though her feet are sockless but she doesn’t seem to care about that either.
Dean watches her hitch the strap higher on her shoulder. It’s almost in slow motion. He sees her run her index finger between her ankle and the back of her boot, straightening it out. The room is so quiet that he hears the sturdy material pop into place. Dean looks at her as she picks up her jacket. She doesn’t bother shrugging it on despite the december weather but she does check, with a groping hand, that her phone is still in the pocket.

Then she walks out.

It’s ironic, because it’s what Dean fears the most. More than her dying, it’s her leaving. It’s startling, when he realises she might not be coming back. Dean doesn’t think she is and, in that moment, neither does she.

- 

Robin’s mind is racing enough, when she steps out of their motel room and onto the parking lot that she doesn’t notice the impala still parked in front of their door, or the man sitting in the driver’s seat, with the windows down, despite the cold.

“Hey,” Sam calls to her, a nervous smile on his lips.

“Hey, Sam.” Robin answers, approaching his window, without much thought. She doesn’t even consider that maybe she shouldn’t be talking to Dean’s brother. “You’re not on your date?”

Sam lets out a shaky laugh and rubs his hands on his denim clad thighs. He’s wearing his nice jeans, Robin notices. “It isn’t for another hour but I didn’t want Dean to see me like- well like this.”

Robin laughs. “You’re nervous?”

“Okay, apparently you’re going to mock me too.” Sam throws his hands up in defeat, dropping them back on the wheel with a thunk.

“No, no, I mean… Maybe a little.” She offers him a sheepish smile.

“Yeah, yeah whatever. You two really are a good match- Wait. What’s with the bag? Aren’t you freezing? Put your damn coat on.” Sam opens the door between them and slides across the bench to the passenger side, leaving room for Robin to get in.

Once she’s seated and the windows are closed and, at his insistence, her coat is on, Sam asks again. “What’s going on?”

“Dean and I got into an argument.”

Sam would tease, but Robin has her duffle and he knows she’s not on a laundry run.

“It’s weird for you to talk about this. I’m just going to-”

“Leave? You’re going to leave?”

Robin sighs. “I don’t know, Sam. Maybe. I don’t think I’m the best thing for Dean to have around.”

Sam laughs, then. “You’re kidding right? Robin you’ve made him more him than he’s been in years. Less hard. Less angry. He and I haven’t talked the way we talk now since…ever. We have chick flick moments .”

“Maybe, but since I’ve been back… Sam, he thinks I don’t even care. I don’t… I’ve told him, with
words, plain as day, how I feel about him. I’ve showed him, how I feel about him. If he’s still not convinced… What am I supposed to do with that?”

“You tell him again and you show him again. Or you walk away. Guess it depends on just how much you really do care.”

“That’s not fair. You can’t do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. That’s called insanity.”

“You can when it’s for people you love.”

“I.” She interrupts herself to think for a moment. “You can give and give, but eventually there won’t be anything left of you. Who I am is all I’ve got, Sam. It’s been taken away from me before. When I was too sick to hunt. When I was… there. In the fog. I kind of lost my mind a little. And I can see it happening again. I could lose myself in Dean. I could give him everything, which is probably weird and unhealthy because we’ve only just met months ago but everything about it feels right. Feels inevitable. I just… I don’t know if I can gamble myself away like that if Dean won’t even recognise that I’m doing it. I’m not even asking for reciprocation but he thinks- He thinks I don’t care.”

“If he said that, he doesn’t mean it.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do. Because he’s my brother and I know him and I know that he isn’t afraid of much. He definitely isn’t dumb enough to be afraid to lose what he can’t have. What he’s afraid of most right now is losing you. Which means he knows he could have you. Have life with you. He hasn’t dared to hope for anything outside of hunting for a long time, Robin. He knows you care. That’s what he’s afraid of. Of not being worthy of it. That it might not last.”

Robin stays quiet.

“He adores you.”

“You don’t know that.” She repeats.

“Hey.” Dean wouldn’t have been able to keep the surprise from his voice even if he had wanted to.

Robin waits until she’s shut the door completely behind her, until the soft click rings in the room, before answering him. “Hey.”

“I should apologise.” Dean scrambles to sit up on the bed. Robin notices that the bottle of liquor is on the bedside table now, but his words don’t slur so she doesn’t think he’s had more than is appropriate for the conversation that’s about to occur.

“You probably should- and maybe I do too because you’re obviously upset about something-” Robin sits on the bed, tucking one leg beneath her body and leaving one foot planted on the floor. She sits close enough that her knee is against his shin. It’s accidental and she wonders if she should move back and then she hates that she has to ask herself that. “But that’s not what I need from you.”

“What do you need?” Dean sounds so earnest. So ready to give, something that comes so easily to Robin. She’s offered him her smile, her laugh, her affection and acceptance freely, for so long.
Dean had gotten in the habit of receiving. Of taking.

Robin leans forward conspiratorially. “You ready? It’s a really big thing. Huge. Don’t know if you’re up for it—”

Dean laughs at her antics and reprimands her with a, “Robin.”

“An explanation. I need to understand where all of that came from Dean. Because, A, I care about things. I care about you. B. I don’t care about you enough to let myself be spoken to like that on a regular basis.”

“Harsh.” Dean rubs the back of his neck nervously.

Robin stares at him blankly, because maybe it’s true. Maybe it is harsh, but Robin laid down her life for his family. For him. She doesn’t understand how he can doubt what she feels for him and Robin doesn’t have the emotional strength to be with someone who will continuously doubt her.

That’s if that’s what this is about. But Robin doesn’t have the self esteem to be with someone who will always doubt her out on the field, either. Who will guilt her for doing her job. She spent a year and a half feeling guilty for not doing it. She spends every day feeling guilty for what she did to her parents. She refuses to take on more guilt even if it’s in the name of Dean Winchester. Then again, just how capable is she of leaving him? She doesn’t know.

How do you walk away from the best man you’ve ever known?

“I know you were kidding before, about it being huge and not knowing if I can handle it, but I don’t know if I can manage this. The moment’s here and I get that all I have to do is open my mouth and say the things that I mean but all that’s coming out are other words that don’t matter and this is so hard for me, Robin. I’m rambling and I’m not a rambler. I feel like where we are now the floor might crack beneath our feet if I don’t tread carefully.”

“You sell yourself short, Dean. Take your time. I’m here to listen to what you have to say, whatever it may be. What’s beneath our feet is solid ground, not eggshells.” Robin wants to reach out and touch him but her hand stays heavy in her lap.

Dean doesn’t need time, after that, after her reassurance. “I can’t watch you die again, Robin.” There it is. Words that had felt like lead on Dean’s tongue for too long. They’re not the words. Dean can’t bring that up. “I can’t have you and then have you be gone, it’s just, I won’t- I can’t.”

“Dean…” Robin sighs, her eyes soft but crinkled in obvious turmoil. “I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“Say that you’ll stay alive.” It sounds simple enough. It’s the prayer Dean has for everyone he cares about and it’s so rarely answered by anything divine that Dean needs Robin to be the one to fulfil it.

“I can’t really guarantee that, though, can I?” Robin speaks like she might to a child. It isn’t patronising but there’s a softness you wouldn’t usually find in other circumstances.

“You’re going to have to.”

“Or what?” There’s no challenge, only fear of hearing the answer. She might have been ready to leave not too long ago, but Robin doesn’t actually ever want to go. Dean picked her, centuries ago for her, a matter of months ago for him, he picked her. But Robin chose Dean too. She saw a life with Dean, the best life.
"Or, or," There’s an odd sort of momentum in Dean’s words but they fall flat. “Or nothing. This isn’t an ultimatum, Robin. I just don’t know how to be with you if you could die any day."

“Dean you could die any day. Anyone could die at any-"

“Don’t give me that everyone-can-die-at-anytime bull crap. I’m not worried you’re going to get hit by a bus, Robin, I’m worried some thing will tear you to shreds while I’m not looking. Or worse, while I am. I’m worried that you’re going to let it if it means saving someone else’s life.”

“That’s just our reality.” She argues. “I don’t want to be the one to break it to you, but you’re never going to have that issue. Whether you’re with me or with someone else. So what are you going to do Dean? Spend the rest of your life alone? Whether I’m with you or not I’m still going to be hunting too. Still in the same amount of danger.” She sighs, then. A deep tired sigh. “I don’t understand what happened? I thought we’d been over this? Wasn’t this our issue last time around? I thought you came around. I thought you wanted to give it a try. What changed?”

“What changed is that you killed yourself.” There’s a hot flash of anger even as the words are said matter-of-factly.

“That’s not fair. I won’t apologise for what I did that night.”

“Of course not.”

“Dean.”

“You died, Robin. In my arms. I felt you stop living. Because of me.”

“It wasn’t-”

“Because of me.”

There’s a long pause, long enough that the tension leaves them both. Neither wants to fight. Robin moves close, so that her leg touches his more fully. She reaches for one of his hand and holds it in both of her. “I can’t guarantee that I won’t die.” She starts then forces herself to drag her eyes away from the freckle between the knuckles of his pinky and ring finger and look at his face. “But I can promise to do my best to stay alive. I do. I promise you that, Dean. I’ll be cautious and I’ll fight to survive. I won’t give in, won’t give an inch. No-” Suicide missions. “No being reckless. I promise to stay alive for as long as I can.”

There’s a wetness in Dean’s eyes that he’ll never admit to, but it’s there and it’s for more than one reason. Partly, Dean recognises what Robin is offering and it’s everything. She’s telling him that she’s all in, not for the first time, and Dean feels… He feels cherished. He feels worth the effort and Dean rarely ever feels worth anything.

He’s also realising, that this is the best he’s ever going to get. He’s never going to be able to be with someone safe from the supernatural. If they aren’t in the life then he’ll inadvertently end up dragging them into it, or it into them, and if they are in the life then their fates are already sealed.

“Plus, y’know,” Robin continues. “I’ve been doing it, being alive I mean, for almost three decades. I’m a pro. I keep breathing like it’s no sweat off my back. And I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but my job is saving people’s lives so I feel like my resume is pretty decked out. Besides-”

Dean kisses her.

It’s just the press of lips to hers. Well, no. It’s not just anything. But it’s uncomplicated, simple,
soft. It’s meaningful, unhesitant and unrushed. Mostly, it’s long overdue. They take their time, feeling the other against them, near.

Eventually, Dean pulls away and Robin can’t bring herself to open her eyes. She prepares herself for the possibility that when she does, Dean won’t be there. That this is all manufactured in her mind. Or worse, Dean will have regret in his eyes and the words this is a mistake on his lips.

Dean’s eyes are kind, though, when Robin looks at them. Soft and adoring in the way only he can. Or maybe in the only way he can. His lips are a small, almost shy smile.

She looks down to where their legs are still touching, hands holding. “I thought you needed time.”

Dean cups her face and tilts it up gently so she’d look at him. “Turns out I needed a promise.”

Then, he’s kissing her again. It feels good, of course it does. There’s nothing fancy, but he does press his tongue past her lips when she parts them for him. She tastes like the punch from the dance and like something metallic, no doubt from her own blood. Dean kisses her in earnest, holding her face in both his hands, now.

Robin pulls away and, with mischief in her eyes, says, “Not one of chastity, right?” She pushes him back against the mattress and starts working on his belt, moving to straddle him.

“We haven’t been back together for a minute and you’re already trying to get in my pants?”

“You’re pants is a good place to be.” She looks back up at him, her fingers pausing where she’s slipping his belt off, and smiles cheekily. “So we’re together, huh?”

“Well, yeah. What you think you were just going to get some without any commitment? I’m not a whore.”

“Did I not make it clear that I only want you for your body?” Robin frowns like there might be a misunderstanding they need to rectify.

“Oh yes, objectify me, Robin. That really gets me going.”

“You’re nothing but a fine slab of meat.”

He tugs on her arm so she falls onto him. Their bodies lining up, her face hovering over his. He doesn’t care about the pain, just wants her close.

“Just a pretty pair of lips.”

She pecks him then, chastely and he chases her with a crane of his neck.

She reels back, out of his reach, to say, “A face just for me to sit o-”

“Okay, you can shut up now.”

She laughs, loud and wild, the way Dean loves, and rests her head on his chest to enjoy being near him like this. They share a bed every night, but somehow this is different. It’s more. It’s everything.

“I was petrified, Robin.”

Robin wants nothing more than to reassure him. “Dean, I swear I knew what I was doing. I’m a damn good shot. I don’t miss. I mean, obviously sometimes, I miss, statistically speaking, but I
wouldn’t have put you at risk—"

“Not today. When you... When you were gone. I was running out of ways to get you back, I didn’t, I couldn’t. Jesus, I was going out of my mind. I was hallucinating you.” His hand finds the back of her head to hold her against him like that could keep her from vanishing. It hadn’t last time.

“You were?"

“Yeah and I hated it when it happened but missed it when it didn’t. I was a mess. When Ayil said that you weren’t in heaven, that no Fera hunter was, I started thinking you might be alive and I was scared that it was wishful thinking and that I was chasing pointless leads.”

“Well, I was alive and you weren’t. You got me back Dean. I haven’t really thanked you for it, but I am grateful.”

Dean holds her tighter.

Robin finds comfort in his embrace and does her best to ignore the nagging feeling that there’s still something Dean is holding back on. Instead she thinks about what he said.

When she was in the fog, Robin thought of Dean a lot but it was mostly about Dean living his life. Sometimes it was about maybe Dean being dead, she’d been there so long it would have been the year 3000 by the time she got out.

Mostly she thought of him working on Baby, cooking up a feast, hunting things, saving people. She didn’t linger much on the idea of him mourning her. She ran his words through her mind again. Tried to picture him the moment he realised she wasn’t at rest, wasn’t in heaven-

“Wait.” She pushes herself up to look at him, her eyes wide and afraid. “What did Ayil say?”

Dean raises a brow at her and slowly says, “That you weren’t in heaven.”

“No, you said that no Fera hunter was. Were those his exact words?” There’s distress lacing every word as she pulls herself back to her knees.

“I don’t know Robin, it’s been weeks, what’s going on?” Dean props himself on his elbows to see her better.

Her frazzled state causes dread to well up inside of him. For a split second he wishes he could take back the question. Could lay back down, pull her back onto him, and pretend like nothing bad is going to happen at least for a damn day. He just wants to hit pause and live in the moment before this one for a while. Wants to just lay in bed with Robin and talk to her and listen to her and make her laugh.

“Think. Is that what he said?” Her voice is hard. But even hard things crack.

Dean sits up fully, subconsciously rubbing his hands along Robin’s arms comfortably, and really thinks about it. Tries to recall. “Yeah, yeah, I think so. Something to that extent anyway. Robin what—”

“My parents. They’re-” She chokes on the words, clears her throat and tries again. Dean doesn’t look away but he wishes he didn’t have to see the terror in her eyes. “My mom took my dad’s name. They’re Feras. They’re hunters.”

Dean’s hands still. Realisation dawns on him.
“If they aren’t in heaven, then where in the hell are they?”

**Chapter End Notes**

I have never gone so long without updating this story. This chapter took me over a month to get out. It's still not where I'd like it to be but I just can't look at it anymore.

I want to thank the beautiful people who left comments and kudos and all that good stuff, it's literally what kept me from jumping ship

Feedback for this monster-length chapter is really appreciated!

You may find me on [tumblr](http://tumblr) (I'll allow it)
The skin stretched taut over Robin’s knuckles is scraped, bruised and peeling in some places enough so that the raw flesh underneath is exposed. It burns when the air touches it but the air only touches it intermittently, because most of the time her fists smash into the face of the vampire beneath her.

A no good blood sucking scumbag that she’s straddling and gripping his collared shirt to keep him flush with the ground. Her clenched hand beats down onto his face over and over and over. It isn’t really recognisable as a face anymore, even with the creature’s fast healing abilities.

“Where is he?” She screeches, her voice hoarse from posing the same question again and again.

Something snaps in the next punch and Robin isn’t sure if it came from her hand or the thing’s head or both. She really doesn’t care.

“TELL ME!”

Shouting those words, surrounded by at least a dozen headless corpses and with a crazed look in her eyes is how Sam and Dean find her, a week after the Valkyrie case they worked in the town of Winner.

She was easy to track but the brothers didn’t think she was exactly trying to conceal herself. What wasn’t easy was catching up to her. By the time they got to where they knew she was, she had already moved on to another town, another state, another nest. Bigger and more powerful ones.

Sam and Dean have never seen anything like it. She must have taken out seven vampire packs in just as many days. Even Gordon hadn’t racked up such a tally. Then again, Robin was her parents’ daughter and they were stuff of legends.

“Robin, hey!” Dean yells, attempting to catch her attention.

He moves towards her to drag her off the creature he’s actually pitying. Robin stops pummeling the thing long enough to thrust her palm up into Dean’s jaw, sending him reeling back. She goes right back to beating the vampire.

“I know you know,” She says shrilly. “And you’re going to tell me and it’s going to be the last thing you do.”

Robin feels something against her back and for a fraction of a second she thinks, in the way her sleep deprived frantic mind can think, that the brothers have pulled a gun on her. The next fraction of that same second, there’s a current of energy coursing through her.

And then there’s nothing.
“You tased her?” Dean asks incredulously.

Sam shrugs.

Robin comes to suddenly, with a jolt, much like how she went down.

Her body is sore, the muscles in her, now bandaged, hands most of all, but it’s got nothing on the throbbing in her mind. A touch of her fingertips to her hairline confirms that her brain isn't actually pulsing against her skull.

It takes her a minute to recall what has landed her in her bed back at the bunker and what’s given her all these pains and aches. It's a blissful minute during which she isn't tasked with the duty of finding her parents. For sixty seconds Robin doesn't have guilt chewing at her insides, threatening to devour her whole.

Then her minute is up and Robin remembers. Remembers pushing her body past exhaustion, remembers ramming her fist into the faces of vampires until a knuckle popped. Remembers pushing it right back into its socket and continuing on. Robin remembers Dean interfering, remembers the terrified look in his eyes when he called out to her. Remembers knocking him back, remembers not caring. Remembers the blood, the weight of the machete that felt wrong out of her hands, the bodies dropping.

Most of all, Robin remembers being desperate. And angry. She conjures the emotion back up now because that’s what’s going to get her through this. The nagging intermingled voices of her parents whisper in her ear that a good hunter keeps a level head, but Robin can’t. Robin should have been doing this a decade ago. She can’t be calm and if she’s anything but angry she doesn’t think she’ll survive the guilt. Doesn’t think it won’t consume her.

On her feet, primed for another fight, she exits her room and shouts Dean’s name. She hopes it sounds threatening, because he had no right to interfere.

She finds him coming up one of the stairs that lead to the lower levels of the bunker. The sounds of the vampire she was…interrogating and Sam’s voice filter up behind him. Robin glares at Dean and marches past him.

“Don’t bother,” Dean tells her, almost casually. “Sam’s not letting you near him.” He strolls away, knowing that she’ll follow.

Robin is pissed. Dean thinks she can’t get past Sam? Dean doesn’t know shit. The brothers may have brute force on her, but after her time in the fog she’s a technically more skilled fighter than them. She follows him intent on letting him know just that, her agitation barely contained. She stomps after him but doesn’t speak until he stops in the kitchen. What she does say has nothing to do with the Robin vs Sam boxing match she’s got snapshots of in her mind.

Robin smacks her hands down on the stainless steel island countertop. “At least you had the common sense not to kill him,” She snarks at Dean’s back while he busies himself with filling up and turning on the kettle.

She’s fuming and when Dean ignores her to address Sam, who’s appeared out of nowhere, over her shoulder instead of answering her she has the violent image of picking up the retro kettle by the handle and swinging it into Dean’s stupid face.

“You locked him up?” Dean is pointedly calm. Maybe he wants to offset Robin’s turbulence. As if
there’s only so much this bunker can contain.

“Yeah, she… No one is getting to him without the key.” Sam answers.

Robin shoots Sam a glare. “I’ll get to you later, Electro. You’re not keeping me from him, Dean.” She shifts her glower back to the older of the two.

Sam throws his hands up in a non-confrontational manner but waits for Dean to nod at him to leave. Dean takes out a mug and puts sugar and a tea bag in it.

Robin waits expectantly for him to say something, for him to explain himself but when all of a minute goes by and he doesn’t, she leads the conversation. “He’s mine. I’m the one who hunted him down, who captured him-”

“Then I took him from you. He’s currently held hostage by me. Which makes him mine.” Dean is collected as he speaks, straddling the line between firm and gentle, but he makes it clear that there’s no room for argument.

Robin argues anyway. “I mean it, Dean.” Unlike him, her tone is dangerous. “I’m not playing this game with you, I’m serious.”

Dean, for the first time, loses some of his control, slamming down the sugar container onto the island across from Robin. “What you are is out of control. You didn’t see yourself out there.”

“I was doing my job!”

“You were frightening! I’ve been to hell, I’ve been to purgatory and I’ve had the darkness inside of me, Robin, and seeing you like that scared me.”

Robin blocks out all the emotions she’s hearing from him, that he’s eliciting from her, and opts for a solid rational defense. “I took out every vamp in that city and kept the ringleader for questioning. That’s a good day.”

“You were sloppy. Leaving a string of fanged bodies in your wake. It was easier to track you than the nest. You’re lucky Sam and I were there to clean up after you.”

“I don’t want your help and i certainly don’t nee-”

“And! You were reckless, going in half cocked without backup. Did you already forget that promise you made me?”

That gets Robin to cork it. Her jaw hangs open, the retaliation she had at the ready now dead on her tongue. She’s quiet but fuming, nonetheless.

“I’m going to question him, and if he has the information, I’ll get it out of him.”

“This is my business.” Robin snaps.

“You’re one of us now, sweetheart and-” The pet name isn’t sweet as it rolls off his tongue. He’s almost sorry about it. Partly, derisive.

“Shut up! Shut up, just shut up. This has nothing to do with you. I might have gotten wrapped up in your family drama by- by the cosmos or whatever the fuck because but this has nothing to do with you. I’m a Fera. First. Foremost. Always. And I’m letting someone else step into the line of fire over my dead body.”
“Tough.”

That’s all Dean says and Robin thinks it should anger her, thinks it would have if she was in her right mind, but it just makes her feel desperate. Like Dean is this massive boulder and she can keep pushing but she knows it won’t move.

“Do you know what it’s like, Dean? To wish your parents were dead because it beats the alternative. Because it's better than the very real reality that they’ve been holed up somewhere for a decade probably getting tortured within an inch of their lives while I-” She chokes on her words then forces them out. “While I went to college and learned about astrophysics and how to write a good headline and other dumb shit.”

“A little bit yeah,” Dean answers quietly and that gets Robin to calm more.

“Right,” She says, recalling. “Your dad was supposed to be the original righteous man. Sold his soul for your life. Well his soul and the colt. Spent a while in the pit.”

“I never told you about that.” Dean sounds a little harsher, then.

She sighs. “There was nothing but time to talk in the fog and if there’s one thing Cas likes to discuss it's the Winchesters.”

Dean swallows, nods then moves closer, rounding the counter to be near her. “You have to let me help you, Robin. How can we be together if you won’t let me be with you on this?”

“Don’t do that. Don’t use our relationship as a bargaining chip, Dean. It’s cheap.”

“What relationship do we have if you won’t trust me to have your back? You've always been honest and open with me. Made it look easy, too. Don’t stop now.” And then, “Please.”

Robin’s laugh is cynical and darker than Dean’s ever heard it. Dean loves the way she laughs, has since the very beginning, but this sound is ugly.

“Made it look easy, huh?” She questions like it’s amusing. “Well it's fucking not Dean. It's a lot of introspection and meditation and working on being fucking zen. It's hard not to become a hunter stereotype so I’m sorry if I’m letting you down but maybe you should take me off that damn pedestal. I’m not made of steel. Blow hard enough and I’m going to fucking bend. I’m not a cherry blossom growing out of a spring stream of serenity either. Stop expecting so much of me.”

“I’m not expecting more than you can deliver. You're better than who I saw out there. If you gotta lean on me to be that person then lean on me, Robin. I deserve-”

“I don’t owe you a damn thing.” Robin doesn’t know why she’s still lashing out. What she wants is to drown in Dean’s arms. She wants to wrap herself in his words that mean so much to her.

“No, you don’t, but I’ve earned your trust, I think. I’ve put in effort to open up to you, despite it being against my nature. I’m asking for a little bit more of that in return. I don’t think that’s unreasonable.”

Robin shakes her head defeatedly and they both see it as the concession that it is.

Dean pours hot water into the mug, stirs it once and places the tea in front of her. “Tell me why you think he has information on your parents.”

Robin takes a deep breath. “I don’t. I think he’s high enough on the vamp food chain of command
to know where their alpha is.”

Dean’s brows knit in confusion. “How does that help? It’s not like he was there when your parents di- when the New York nest was taken down. Why would he know what happened to your parents?”

“A vamp who was there must have seen what happened to my mom and dad and they’re psychically linked to him.”

“The alpha would have seen it through their eyes.” Dean realises. He’s gotta admit, it’s pretty freakin’ clever of her.

Robin nods, looking up at him. She looks so small right then, to Dean. Like this is the extent of what she’s able to bear. Like this is harder on her than when the entire supernatural world was hounding her ass, courtesy of the Cosmos, courtesy of him getting his mom back. Which he gets. It’s always harder when it’s family.

“I’ll get it out of him, Robin. I know torture.”

“And I know what torture does to you.”

“I wouldn’t offer if I wasn’t okay with this.”

“Yes you would.”

Dean cracks a smile. “Okay maybe I would. But I am okay with it. I’m gonna do it clean and proper. Efficient. I’ll be out of there before you know it.”

He leans down and kisses her forehead. It’s slow and sweet and meaningful and Robin has to suppress the tears that threaten to well up. Dean’s thumb brushes against her cheek while his other fingers curl beneath her jaw line.

He’s looking her in the eyes when he says, “Drink your tea and trust me.”

He thinks about kissing her again. About putting his mouth on hers where he knows it belongs but pulls away instead and starts heading towards their dungeon.

“Dean,” Robin says, stopping him in his tracks.

He looks over his shoulder and waits.

She struggles to get the words out but eventually manages. “I’m sorry I scared you.” She looks anywhere but at the pale bruise that’s formed on his chin. The one she put there.

“Good.” He moves to leave.

“Dean.” Robin stops him again. “I made you a promise and I’m going be better at keeping it.”

He didn’t turn around this time so Robin sees the way some of the tension in his back eases. He nods and he leaves.

Robin stands in the kitchen for a very long while. Her tea has gone cold by the time she starts to drink it but she drinks it anyway. She doesn’t think she deserves him. Dean. She doesn’t deserve anything. Not after it turns out that the worst thing she’s ever done isn’t killing her parents. It’s much worse.
When Dean comes back, his hands particularly clean, he finds Robin and Sam in the library reading up on weapons they can use against alphas and against archangels. Well Robin tries to read, gets a few sentences in at a time. It could be worse. She could be worse. She’s keeping it together well enough.

Dean says, “He doesn’t know where the alpha is—”

Robin is already on her feet. “I’ll get him to talk, Dean.”

“Robin,” He says sternly. “No offence, darlin’ but you won’t get something out of him that I didn’t.”

“Wanna bet?”

“Besides, I killed him. But—” He adds quickly before Robin can have an aneurism. “Not before I got the name and location of a vampire he says does know where the alpha is.”

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In Wray, Colorado, two hours later (though the town is is a solid four away from the bunker), Robin, Sam and Dean take on a medium sized nest in a large barn.

It goes smoothly… for the most part. When there are only a few vamps left, Sam goes after one that decides to brave the sun and flee, and Dean and Robin find themselves on either loft of the barn, two fifty-feet-high platform that line opposing walls and aren’t connected to each other but to the ground level by two ladders.

Dean swings his machete one last time after dodging a blow and puts down the last of the vamps on his side. He looks over to Robin and sees that she is still facing off with the leader of the pack, the one with the intel they want. She’s surrounded by corpses, her hair is wild despite being in a ponytail and even though she moves gracefully, intelligently, like a trained fighter- like a soldier- there is something erratic about her.

She’s more savage than he’s seen her be in the weeks they’ve been actively hunting together. She’s cutthroat, vicious almost. Meaner. It’s new to Dean, seeing her like this, but he gets it. He wonders if it’s new to her, though. Despite how deeply his feelings for her run, they’ve only really known each other just under half a year. He knows her well, he knows he does, but there’s a lot he doesn’t know.

He starts to head towards the ladder to go in for an assist on Robin’s side but stills when he notices that she has the vampire cornered at the ledge of the loft with a syringe in hand. It’s all under control until Dean sees her eyes widen in fear. The vamp must have said something Dean didn’t hear. Dean figures out what it is quickly enough because then the vampire steps back, right off the platform, and Robin lunges after him. The syringe clatters to the ground and the sound reminds Dean so much of that night. Of his mom’s weapon of choice.

“ROBIN!” Dean shouts because it’s all he can do. Robin latches a bandaged hand onto the vampire’s forearm and just barely manages a grip on the railing.

“Robin!” Dean yells again, rushing to the other side of his own platform where the ladder is, weaving through corpses and the blocks of hay splattered with blood.
His heart races just as quickly as his feet do and the only reason he isn’t vaulting right off the loft is because he just might not make it. The barn is big enough that the second floor is a solid four stories up so he isn’t guaranteed to survive the fall. Robin isn’t guaranteed to survive the fall.

“Robin, drop him!”

“Yeah, pretty bird, drop me,” The vampire snickers. “We both know I’ll be alright no matter how I land. Of course, I’m going to hightail it out of here as soon as I do. You on the other hand. Maybe you’ll break a leg, or your spine, or your neck. Who knows really?”

“Shut up,” Robin spits. “Dean get down there, already.”

She’ll let go when Dean is on the floor to keep the creature from escaping.

The vampire digs his human nails in the flesh of her forearm making both her grips slip the tiniest bit.

Dean sees it. “Let go of him, Robin!” Dean orders. Dean begs. He’s halfway to the ladder.

“She’s not going to do that, Dean-o. She’s going to lose her one good lead if she does. However will you find my father then?”

The vampire swings his body around like he’s in a damn jungle gym and Robin strains, grinding her teeth against the tugging of the tendons in her shoulder. The full handed grasp she had on the railing is no more than her finger hooked around the pole. She can hold out though, she knows. If Dean will just hurry up.

Dean is at the ladder when he sees it. Sees her hanging by little more than her finger tips. He won’t make it, he knows. He’s too high up and it’s a long ladder. Then he’d have to cross the barn again. He won’t make it.

“Robin,” He chokes. “You promised.”

He watches her tense and then he watches her let go of the vampire, swinging her newly freed arm up to pull herself back onto the loft. The vampire hoots out a laugh then howls in pain when the arm he lands on snaps. Still, he rolls to his feet and runs towards the exit.

Dean and Robin barely get the chance to make a move before they see Sam appear at the large doors, knocking the vamp out.

“Is this the one we want to keep alive?” Sam asks. When Robin and Dean nod quietly, he says, “Alright, I’ll get the rope.” Sam heads towards where they parked the impala but not before toeing the body with his foot to make sure the vampire was down for the count.

Dean and Robin lock eyes for a moment, on their respective lofts, before the latter slumps back so she’s laying down on the wooden floor. She lets out a loud sigh, squeezing her eyes shut tightly enough that colourful spots appear in the darkness of her closed lids, like that’ll fix things. Like it’ll fix her.

“Are you mad?” She asks. It isn’t loud but Dean hears it clearly on the opposite corner of the massive space.

Dean sits down at the edge of the platform, legs hanging over the ladder. “I know what it meant to let him go. Thank you, Robin. I—” How do Dean’s fears keep finding him so fast? “Thank you.”
“I think I dislocated my shoulder.” She says.

He says, “I’m coming.”

The vampire doesn’t know where the alpha is. What he does know is where he’ll be the first weekend of the New Year.

“He’s gotta know someone who knows where he is now, Dean. I can’t wait a whole month for answers.”

Dean sighs and he looks wired and annoyed. Robin knows what torturing does to him.

“If he knew, I’d have found out by now.” He snaps back.

Robin takes a deep breath to keep herself from escalating things further. Fighting with Dean is not what she wants.

“Fine. So I’ll start scouring the news for another nest.”

“I’ll help.” The words are harsh even though he means well. He’s too amped up. Too much energy is coursing through him from the endorphins he gets from wielding all that power over a creature. Maybe he should go back to the dungeon. Kill the thing himself instead of leaving Sam to do it. It might take the edge off.

“Thanks, Dean, but I get it if you wanna tap out for the night. It’s late and it’s been a long day. I know you got just a tad more sleep than me during the past week.”

Dean exhales a loaded breath. “Come to bed with me.” He pauses. “You said it yourself, you’ve barely slept.” The words are still tense but becoming gentler by the passing syllables.

Robin shakes her head at him. “Your brother tased me, remember?” She cracks a smile. Her first genuine smile in a week. “I got a solid few hours so I’m going to look for a vamp case. Head out in the morning.”

Dean stiffens again. “I’m going with you, wherever. Don’t go on your own ag-”

“I’m not planning to, Dean. Just so we’re clear though, don’t bark orders at me.” Robin crosses her arms.

“I’m not, I’m- Okay, maybe I am a little. I’m just…”

“I know, it’s fine.”

It is fine. She knows that’s not how he meant it. Knows how it feels to want to keep those you care about safe. In her case usually it means putting distance between her and them. God, she’s going to have to tell George about this. About Alice and Oliver Fera being… somewhere. How is she supposed to do that? How is she supposed to tell him that she-

George is going to stand by her. She knows it. That’s the worst part. Just like Amy, Rodney and Grace. Just like Sam and Dean are, though they don’t know the extent of her involvement. The people she loves don’t abandon their own. She is theirs but she doesn’t deserve it. Doesn’t deserve to belong to such an amazing group of people. Kind, brave heroes. Hell, Cas is an actual angel.

She’s lived her adult life thinking she was guilty of matricide and patricide but somehow it turns
out that her actions lead to something much, much worse. Now she’s got the chance to get them back and she can’t even bring herself to be happy about it. How is she supposed to face them?

Maybe that’s why she ended up in the fog. Maybe it’s penance. Maybe she had to be somewhere worse than Hell. Maybe she had to pay.

Cas never should have allowed Lucifer to take him over. Dean shouldn’t have agreed to that deal. She keeps ruining things. Keeps hurting people.

For the first time since her return, Robin wishes she was back there. Wishes she was surrounded by the smog. Wishes the white smoke could consume her again. Without Cas. She doesn’t deserve the comfort he afforded her. Doesn’t deserve to keep her sanity. Cas shouldn’t even have gotten trapped there with her. More collateral damage at her hand.

He never even blamed her for it. Cas should have been pointing fingers instead of holding her hand. He should have been putting as much distance as possible between them while they were in the fog. He didn’t. He is too good for her. Too good for this world. Cas knows what she’s done, unlike the Winchesters. Still, he sticks by her.

Then again, she’s barely seen him since she got back. He and Dean are fighting. What if Cas, now that he isn’t forced by the circumstances of the fog, doesn’t want anything to do with her? What if he’s been trying to warn Dean of Robin’s true and vile nature and that’s what’s got them butting heads? Cas is too honourable to actually divulge her secret so he’s stuck trying to convince Dean abstractly, receiving the brunt of the hunter’s anger and avoiding the bunker, his home, because Robin lives here and seeing her sickens. She sickens her.

She can’t handle that. Not on top of everything else. She can’t lose Cas. Cas is-

“Robin.”

Her name is spoken steadily, in a voice deep enough to be Dean’s. It isn’t Dean’s, though.

“Cas,” She breathes.

There’s a moment of stillness shared between them where the corner of Cas’ mouth lifts and it’s reassurance that Robin needs. She doesn’t deserve it but it’s being handed out to her so she greedily accepts.

The moment is cut short when Dean huffs. “Cas.” What are you doing here?

“I told you I would come when prayed to.” Cas turns his body to face Dean.

“No one prayed-” When Cas raises a brow, Dean huffs again. “What are you tuned in to her head, or something? Back off, Cas, when we need you we’ll call. Cell phones. You’ve got one. We’ve got plenty.”

“Dean!”

“It’s alright, Robin. Dean is still processing difficult emotions at the moment and-”

“That’s real fucking rich, Cas. Coming from you? You realise you don’t even know how to emote, right?”

“That isn’t entirely correct. In any case, I understand why you must be this way.”
“You understand why I must be this way?” Dean shoves Cas back with a hand. “Quit it with the highroad, Cas. You don’t know why I do anything.” He shoves again. “Got it?”

“I won’t fight with you Dean, but I won’t be intimidated either.”

“Is that so?” Dean shoves Cas back with two hands this time and it’s all his pent up energy coming to a head.

“Hey,” Robin starts then shouts when Dean looks like he’s going to keep going. “HEY! Walk it off.” She shoves him back when he takes another step towards the angel. “Go, Dean.”

Dean grunts a ‘whatever’ and stiffly walks away.

Once he’s disappeared, Robin levels Cas with a serious look and asks, “What is going on with you two?”

“Don’t worry about it, Robin.”

“Cas.”

“It is not my place to tell.”

Robin sighs. She can get that. She did just think about how honourable Cas is. “Alright, don’t tell me what but tell how. Tell me how to help fix this.”

“You will.” Cas nods assuredly.

“What?”

“When Dean can come to terms with his feelings as they are inside of him, I believe you will know how to fix it.”

“You’re not making much sense, Cas. We’ve been over this. I don’t like enigmas in conversation. There’s a time and a place.”

Cas laughs a little. They had been over this. At least a hundred times when they first arrived in the fog. Cas had to break his habit of speaking cryptically. “Why did you pray to me, Robin? You were very distressed.”

“I didn’t even know I was doing it. Cas, my parents… What I- When I did what I did…”

“You never want to talk about that.” Cas squints. She’ll talk about her parents, rave about who they were in life but for Robin to bring up their death willingly...

“They’re not in heaven, Cas.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ayil told Dean and I know their afterlife isn’t hell, they did too much good in their lifetime to belong there. So all I’m left with is- I don’t know, Cas. I don’t know anything. I just-”

Cas pulls her into a hug. “I will find out where they are Robin.”

“Cas, you’re dealing with heaven and the devil and-” I don’t deserve your help.

“Let me do this for you. Wait on me. Don’t be reckless. Wait on me to bring you their location,
“Alright?”

She leans back from his grasp. “I’m not going to sit around and do nothing.”

“Just until I find them. Robin, you are very close to this. I sense you’re not operating as you normally would. It’s worrisome.”

Robin frowns. “No, I’ve got a lead and I’m going to keep pursuing it. Not only is this my respon-”

“Robin, it’s-”

“My responsibility. I’d go nuts doing nothing.”

Cas sighs. “Alright. I won’t argue with you in this moment.” He pulls her into another hug.

“I hate that you’re never around.”

“No a day goes by for me either.”

“’What the hell was that?’ Robin barges into Dean’s bedroom.

“Drop it, Robin.” He’s on his bed, cleaning his favourite gun. Hands shaking and motions not quite as fluid as Robin knows they would usually be.

“The hell I will. You don’t think you’ve tortured him enough?”

Dean lets out a snarky laugh and drops the pieces of the weapon on the mattress to walk right up to Robin’s face. “We both know that I know torture, trust me when I tell you, that was not it.”

Robin feels his breath on her face, the energy coming off of him, his warmth, as they stare each other down.

He walks away from her, body tense with ire. His muscles clenched, wound so tight that even his deliberate breathing isn’t calming him. He paces the free floor space, coming towards Robin then moving away again, not unlike angry waves crashing onto a shoreline.

He stops in front of her again and lifts a fist to uncurl his index and point. “Why are you so hellbent on defending him anyway, huh?” He shouts and there’s spit but neither really see where it lands.

“Because you two are miserable like this, that’s why!” Robin shouts back, desperate to make him see that it’s not about taking Cas’ side but about having them be on the same team again.

Dean laughs a second time, leans back and sneers. “You sure that’s all there is to it?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Robin demands.

Dean raises a brow at her.

“You think me and... Cas? That’s what this is about? I can’t believe that’s what this is about.” She throws her hands up and turns from him in her frustration, taking a few steps just to put some distance between them.

“Lucifer said-”
“Lucifer said?!” She spins on her heels to face him again. She can’t believe what she’s hearing. “We’re taking relationship advice from Satan now? Cool, let me call Crowley up see if he can recommend a fucking toy store so we can spice up our sex lives next.” She shakes her head incredulously. “Goddammit, Dean. What the hell? I can’t believe you think I’d do that to you. I can’t believe you think Cas would. I mean that literally. I don’t believe you.”

“You what?”

“I don’t believe you. There’s no way that’s what this is about.”

Robin stares him down fiercely, that wild look in her eyes that’s unique to her cuts through Dean’s layers to get straight to the meat of him. To who he is even if he wasn’t who he is, which doesn’t makes sense, but Dean feels that. Feels her knowing gaze on the parts of him that are innate.

“Look, with or without what Lucifer said, there’s something there. Between the two of you.”

Robin opens her mouth and Dean knows it’s to object because he knows her too, dammit.

“Don’t. Don’t lie to me.” The words rip out of his throat and it sobers Robin.

“It’s not like that, Dean.” She snaps, annoyed at having to defend herself, but not yelling anymore.

“Yeah? Then what’s it like?” It’s an accusation but only because Dean is scrambling to not discuss what he’s been avoiding since he got her back.

“Cas and I...” Robin starts with the tense energy that’s plagued this entire conversation but continues softly, “Cas... He’s my best friend.”

“He’s what now?” Her answer stuns Dean. It stuns Robin a little too. “What happened to that trifecta of yours?”

Robin glares in response to his cavalier reference.

Dean rolls his eyes. “George, Amy, Rodney.” Then adds, “Grace.”

“It’s not the same.” Robin states matter-of-factly because it’s the truth.

Dean waits a few beats and when Robin doesn’t continue, he asks spitefully: “Care to elaborate?”

“It’s just not the fucking same okay!” She yells then sighs frustratedly. “Dean you don’t understand what it was like there.” They both know where ‘there’ is. She doesn’t need to specify. “There was nothing. There was always nothing. Just the floor we stood on and that goddamn fog and each other. It was just Cas and me. All the time. It’s not like we were roommates and we passed each other in the hall. It was Cas and Me. All. The. Time. For decades. Not one decade or two decades but nearly twenty of them. Two hundred years. About eight times my life on earth. Let that length of time sink in for a second.

“Every minute of those two centuries we were by each other’s side. Talking. Always goddamn talking. I don’t think there’s very many things I don’t know about him at this point. And he’s taught me so much. Do you have any idea how smart I am now? I’m really fucking smart, Dean. I speak like six languages! He was always just there. Always within reach. Always within sight. And the few moments he wasn’t, when the fog got so thick I couldn’t see past my nose, I... I missed him. You can’t- You can’t spend that much time with someone and not- and not have that change you.
“So yeah, there’s something there when it comes to me and Cas, and I love him, I love him a lot, but I don’t want to be with him, Dean. You’re who I want to be with. I’ve made that abundantly clear, I think. Time and time again. I’ll keep telling you too, if that’s what it takes.”

“I don’t.” Dean sighs like it hurts him. God, that was just Robin’s first two centuries there. She was alone after that. Dean is grateful she had Cas. That Cas had her. That they care about each other. That she gets along with Sammy, too. That she fits in his life so perfectly. But Robin never should have been there in the first place. “I don’t actually think you two are...” He waves a hand around jerkily to complete his sentence.

“But, you’re still angry.”

“Of course I’m still angry!”

“Why?!” Robin clamors back. She wants to get to the bottom of this.

“Because. Because, Cas, He-” Dean cuts himself off, his temper flaring more than he’s allowed it to so far. He can’t do this with Robin. Not with her. He stalks past Robin so that now he’s the one by the door to his room, subconsciously blocking the exit.

“He what?” She insists relentlessly, turning to keep her eyes on him.

“HE DID THIS.” Dean slams the bedroom door shut just to avoid his fist from going through the drywall.

Robin jumps, startled by Dean’s aggression. When she speaks, it’s quiet. “What?”

“He did this. He moved you through time, not once but twice, so you could... so you could kill yourself. He did that. He might as well have stabbed you himself. Then he left you there, in that place all by yourself.” His hands run through his hair, tugging slightly like the prickle of pain will ground him.

Realisation begins to dawn on Robin. She gets it now, why Cas was as unaffected by Dean’s attitude as he was. Dean isn’t angry with Cas, not really. He’s angry with her.

“But he didn’t, Dean. I did. It was me. I asked him to, not in so many words, but I asked him to take me back. It was me who walked out to the library. And it was me who pushed the knife into my chest. I died in your arms. Me. And I casted Cas out of the fog against his will. So if you’re going to be angry at someone be angry at me.”

“I can’t!” Dean roars like it’s beyond his control, like the current has swept him up and all he can do is brace himself for when he’ll inevitably hit wet rocks. It’s ironic, that he says that while they’re fighting.

“Why not?” Robin’s tone is gentle. She just wants to understand. Just wants to fix this. She can’t be the reason one of the best relationships either of these men have ever had, the one between them, is jeopardised.

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“Because... Cas, he’s my brother, alright? I can yell and shout and hurt him and, hell, I tried to kill him a few times and he still stands by me. It’s not fair to him. It’s not right of me. But it’s mutual and it’s how things are for us because that’s what brotherhood is. But you…” Dean shakes his head at her, like despite the bond they both know they share, he’ll never really have her. “I’m afraid to be angry with you. Especially about this. About how you keep... you keep leaving. You’re not Cas. You’re not Sam. I don’t know what’s going to make you decide to go. I don’t know that you won’t. If I push with you, I’ll push you away.”
“What?” The word quakes out of her throat, barely formed. Robin doesn’t know how to swallow this information. Leave him? She hasn’t wanted anything less since she met him.

“You’ve done it before. On that night. Just went ahead and abandoned me so you could… die. We’d just gotten together and you knew how afraid I was because of the life we live and you just… Not a damn day had gone by, Robin.”

“Dean, I was doing what I thought was right. It wasn’t about you, it wasn’t about- Christ, I didn’t want to leave you behind.”

“Even, before.” He argues, shaking his head at her excuses. “When we were still dealing with the Cosmos, you kept saying you were ready to move on. Willing to walk away and hunt for whatever time you had left. You don’t choose life, Robin, and you don’t choose life with me.”

“We were running out of solutions, Dean! I was trying to make the best out of a shitty life-coming-to-an-end situation. We weren’t even… We weren’t even a we, then! We were sneaky flirts in the library. And brief touches in the halls. We were winks and smirks and dirty jokes but we weren’t a thing. You didn’t want us to be a thing.”

Dean scoffs ignoring her very valid point.

“Dean… We’ve talked about me being more cautious and… That was then. I’m not going anywhere now.”

“Yeah? Is that what you were doing when you talked to Sam in the impala last week? Not going anywhere? Or was that then too?”

She hesitates for a second. “I thought that’s what you wanted. I thought I was helping.”

“Do you also think that’s what I wanted after you realised that your parents weren’t in heaven? When you ran out on me? When you hot wired a car before I could even get my boots on? And left me. Again.”

“Dean come on, cut me some slack here. I thought- My parents they-” She grunts in frustration at how none of the words seem right.

There’s a long moment where neither says anything. Dean calms. He hates how fucking needy he sounds but he’s willing to at least try to deal with a life of hunting screwing him over, with it taking her away from him. What he can’t handle is Robin choosing that for herself. Choosing not-him.

His voice quiets when he says, “I used to think you were perfect, you know? Not in a sappy romantic way and not in every sense of the word. You take too long in the shower, you can’t cook for shit and you think you give good nicknames but they’re really really terrible. None of it is endearing, it’s just ridiculous. But those aren’t things that matter.

“I thought you were perfect when it came to the things that matter. You’ve got your head screwed on straight. Straighter than any hunter I’ve ever known. You’re a damn good hunter too, Robin. Not because of your last name or the whole First Family crap. You’re smart enough to keep up with Sam. Hell, you’re smart enough to have double majored in college while hunting. You’re so giving and calming and accepting. You make me feel like who I am is a little perfect too.

“When you were in the fog, I started thinking that I must have altered you in my mind, y’know. I thought the grief was making you out to be better than what you actually were. Then you came back and it hadn’t. You were just like I had seen you last. Still wearing that damn t-shirt. Still perfect, I thought.”
Dean stops to laugh quietly and Robin blinks at him unable to conjure up a response.

“Took me a while,” Dean continues. “To figure it out. To realise what makes you flawed. What makes you like the rest of us. You’re a coward Robin.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re a coward,” Dean repeats as though she simply hadn't heard him.

“I may be a lot of things, Dean, definitely imperfect, but I am not a coward. I don't back down from a fight and-”

“Oh come on Robin. When you’ve been hunting for as long as we have, dealing with this shit since we've been kids, it doesn't require bravery because we aren't afraid. Not of the things that go bump anyway.”

“Then how am I a coward?”

“Because you run away when you are afraid. When shit hits the fan. You think I haven’t noticed how you haven’t kept a single thing of your parents? They died and you stopped using your last name in the hunting world.”

Robin shoots him a dark look. “Watch yourself, Dean.”

“When you couldn’t hunt anymore you left the scooby gang behind. You left George, your only blood, behind. Why? Because it was hard to be around hunters and not hunt? Grace told me that before your synesthesia was healed you barely ever touched base with them, ignoring calls and messages. You jump ship so goddamn quick, Robin, it causes whiplash.”

“You're out of line, Dean.”

“But I’m right!”

“What do you want me say? Huh?! That I’m flighty? FINE. Bailing is a thing that I do. I’m sorry that how I handled the two worst times of my life isn’t satisfactory to you.”

“I want you to say that you won’t do that with us. To me.”

“Dean, I want to be with you,” Robin says, stressing the words. “I don’t know how else to spell it out for you without actually spelling it out for you. Are we going to be able to make this relationship work? I don’t know. Things happen. Relationships end. For reasons that have nothing to do with us being hunters. I can’t- I don’t- I don’t want to go anywhere but what we want isn’t all that counts. You can’t be angry with me now for the potential end of what we have here.”

“You don’t get it, Robin! The thought that you’d... that you’d choose to walk away from me. That it’s an option for you. I can’t, I can’t handle that. Because it’s not an option to me. There isn’t going to be anyone after you and no one before you matters anymore. You’re it for me.”

It’s too much, Dean gets that. He sees that he’s being over the top, that there’s something irrational at play. That he’s not making complete sense. That he hasn’t known Robin long enough to feel things to such an extent. Even taking into consideration the extreme circumstances of their relationships. People bond faster when dealing with life and death on the daily.

Thing is, Robin’s right there with him. She feels pulled towards Dean, like there’s nowhere else she could ever belong. Like there’s something inevitable about being with him.
“You’re it for me.” Dean repeats, whispering the words this time. He steps closer to her so that, with her head tilted back, they are face to face.

“I am not going to apologise for what I did that night. Not for doing it twice and I want you to know I’d do it again. But I’m sorry for making you feel like I have my foot out the door. I’m so sorry Dean. I fucked up, I’m sorry. I hate that I hurt you. I hate that I made you feel like you couldn’t speak freely with me. That you had to- shit- let out your emotions elsewhere. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. But I’m here and I don’t want to go anywhere. I fucked up before, and I might fuck up again, but that’s what relationships are right? We mess up and we care for each other anyway, right? I’m sorry, I should have caught on sooner. I’m here, okay? For you, with you. I’m all in, Dean. I don’t plan to ever be anything but all in.”

The words wash over Dean and something settles inside of him. He lifts a hand to cup her face with a newfound gentleness. “Okay,” He says simply.

“Yeah?” Robin blinks back tears.

“Yeah.” He nods his head, a small motion in the still room.

“Just like that?” She quirks her lips at the old joke and her heart soars when he smiles back at her, teeth and all.

“Yeah.”

Dean kisses Robin softly. His lips meet hers like they’ve been leading him to her his entire life. He thinks maybe they have been.

His movements remain gentle as he places his free hand at the small of her back, pulling her closer so that their bodies may find each other.

Everything falls into place for Robin, then, and she hums into the kiss. She’s always somehow known, felt it, that she and Dean are inevitable.

As though they are of the same mind, they both start shuffling towards the bed. It only hurts a little when Dean lands on top of her. It’s definitely worth it because Dean makes her feel good all over after that.

He kisses a cheek and her jaw in passing as he makes his way to her neck where he lingers, knowing how much Robin likes that. She lets out breathy little sounds in his ear and Dean loves them but Dean thinks they can do better.

He tugs the collar of her shirt to the side to expose her shoulder and leave a quick hickie there before sliding down her body.

Dean is no longer blanketing her, instead he's between her legs working her pants off. Robin tries to help but she finds her mind drifting, wishing he was close again.

She'd felt safe a moment ago and now she feels like she's floundering, unanchored and alone. Dean is still with her, she tells herself, right here with her. In fact, Dean’s tongue is on her and it feels good. But Robin doesn't really deserve to feel good.

Dean would tease, but it’s been too long. So he circles her clit a few times then starts sucking on it at the same beat as the finger he dips inside her. It’s a tight fit, the wet slide he’d learned to expect from Robin isn't there. He takes a moment to slicken his finger in his mouth before going at it again.
The sound Robin lets out when he breaches her this time is an actual moan that replaces her previous pants. Dean can't help the self-satisfied smirk he makes against her pussy.

Looking up, he sees her head thrown back as she stares intently at the ceiling and he wonders if she ever… took care of things, in the fog. It’s one hell of a celibacy streak if not.

Dean doubles his efforts, intent on making her come once before he fucks her and makes her come again.

The moans become whimpers above him. He presses his finger upwards, rubbing her wall the way he knows she likes and then there's a sob.

He glances up quickly, to see the fruits of his labour and finds Robin wiping at her face. It takes Dean a moment for his ego to realise that it isn't his artfully given oral sex that has her tearing up.

He lifts himself from his forearms to his fists. “Robin?” He asks, unsure.

It ends up being the wrong thing to do, or the right thing depending on how you look at it, because Robin starts crying.

Dean moves up the bed quickly. For a moment he doesn't know what to do, he’s almost afraid to touch her. Then Robin lets out an especially agonised wail and Dean does the only thing he can do. He gathers her close and holds her trembling body to his chest.

“Robin, Robin, what is it?” He pets her hair as best he can with how she’s jerking in his arms.

“It’s on me, Dean. It’s all me. I should have been looking. I never should have pulled that trigger. I wish they hadn’t taken me with them. I wish they hadn’t had me.”

“Who? Have you what?”

“My parents. I wish they hadn’t had me at all.” Robin weeps and Dean’s heart aches.

They spend a while like that, Robin naked from the waist down crying for the first time since the Valkyrie case in Dean’s arms. Dean who coos and murmurs and does his best to comfort her, holding her tight and promising to himself that he’ll never let go. He keeps it up even after Robin’s thrashing has tired her out enough to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

feedback, yes?
my tumblr

Thank you for reading! as always :)
A plan to get them back?” Robin looks up at Cas, eyes fearful but full of hope and Cas isn’t sure which is worse.

“To get them out,” he says.

“Out of where?” Robin chokes out the question.

Robin wakes up alone in Dean’s bed and her memories of the night before hit her immediately and at full force. The weight of the situation with her parents weighs heavily on her heart and chest but it’s her embarrassment that’s at the forefront of her mind.

She dresses slowly, trying to stretch out the time before she has to face Dean. Eventually though she finds him and Sam in the kitchen.

“I think I found us a vamp case,” Sam says.

“About that,” Robin cuts in before he can continue. She takes a seat at the table beside him, across from Dean. “I’m not going to run off like I did before, but you guys have wasted a week chasing after me. I know you want to visit your mom, I know you want to rest, this isn’t your problem and you don’t have to make it yours.”

Dean opens his mouth to protest but Sam beats him to it.

“This is important, Robin. We’re talking about your parents here, we’re not leaving you to deal with this on your own and—”

“I have George and—”

“We’re not leaving you to deal with it without us. You’re family, now. That makes your parents…”

“Family adjacent?” Robin snickers.

“Yeah,” Sam laughs. “That. Besides, there’s something bigger at play here, I think. I already told Dean about this but remember the vampire I went after when we were at the barn.”

“Like it was yesterday.”

“It was yesterday,” Dean reminds. Sam and Robin give him a look. “Oh right that’s.. The joke. Ok carry on.”

“The vampire wasn’t even a little bothered by the sun. I think it’s that mojo sunscreen the sorority vamps we took care of months ago had. Do you remember that?”

“Like it wasn’t a millennium ago.” She jokes even though it really was, for her, something like a
thousand years.

“I had kept my ear to the ground and no other hunters have encountered it since, but I think this is it again.” Sam continues.

“Vampires running around at night is bad enough…” Dean says.

“Vampires running around regardless of the time…” Robin continues in agreement.

“The vamp case I found is in Michigan but we’re gonna do a small detour to Iowa,” Sam explains.

“Of course,” Robin says. They haven’t seen their mother in a week.

They discuss a few more details and agree to meet by the stairs in thirty before Sam stands to leave.

“Euh… Robin,” He says. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but maybe shower before we go. It doesn’t smell like you have since-”

“Alright thank you for your input, Sam. Message received,” Robin says hurriedly. She hadn’t showered since the valkyrie case. Nothing more than a whore’s bath anyway.

Sam offers an apologetic smile and to assuage the situation offers, “You can use my fancy shampoo if you’d like.”

“Please just go.” Robin covers her face with her hands.

Dean calls after his brother, “You never let me use your fancy…! He’s gone.” Dean stands to take Sam’s vacated seat beside Robin. “Aw baby, I don’t mind how you smell.”

“Oh god.” Robin drops her head to the table and covers her head with her arms. “I was busy killing vampires. I didn’t even bother with motel rooms. I-” She freezes when Dean puts a hand on her back.

She can’t tell, with her face buried in her arms, but Dean is snickering. Robin isn’t humoured though. She’s embarrassed about what Sam said, sure, but she is mortified about last night and Dean’s touch isn’t welcome.

She jumps to her feet. “I’m gonna go get ready. I’ll euh… I’ll see you in a bit.”

Grace still hasn’t given the OK for Mary to face Robin so Robin checks the wardings and sigils they’d laid out in and around the hospital like she always does when the boys visit their mom. Grace isn’t at the hospital today, so Robin is left to roam the hospital after triple checking everything.

Meanwhile, in Mary’s room.

“I’m sorry we haven’t been by in a while, Mom,” Dean says. A week is the longest they’ve gone without seeing her since she returned to the bunker.

Mary figures it’s easier for Dean to say we than me, because she just saw Sam two days ago. In any case, she doesn’t hold it against Dean.
They find the warehouse where the vampires were holed up. They’re sure it’s the right one because there’s corpses left behind that happen to coincide with the list of people who’ve gone missing in the small city. The vampires are gone now, though. In fact, they haven’t left a trace the trio of hunters can follow.

“There’s no way they covered their tracks this well,” Sam muses, thinking aloud as he goes over the items left behind again. “Without bothering with the bodies.”

“They might have if they knew we were comin’,” Dean says.

“How?” It’s Robin who asks. “We didn’t make a morning news announcement.”

“Didn’t we?” Dean muses. “Think about it. You took out some of the bigger vamp nests in the country last week. Maybe Daddy Vamp told all his little kiddies to retreat. To lay low. Steer clear of hunters.”

“Please don’t ever say Daddy Vamp again,” Sam pleads.

“I agree with Sam. Never again.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “When did you say the last person disappeared, Sam?”

“Two days ago. The whole article that got me onto them was dated from two days ago too. That gives them enough time to pack up shop. Now that you mention it, it was really hard finding a vampire nest at all this morning, that’s why I started looking at older news.”

“They did a really good job…” Robin says solemnly, eyes trained on the room. “Disappearing, I mean.”

“Yeah, but a monster’s gotta eat. They can’t stay hidden forever. Let’s book a motel for the night and start looking for vamp activity outwards from here. If we’re lucky maybe we can track them back to a…a vamp safe house or something. Maybe other nests will be there and we can take out a whole bunch of the suckers. Get some answers.”

Sam nods. “Depending on how many there are, we might need some other hunters coming in on it. Robin, how did your parent’s take out the New York nest? Were you there?”

_Were you there?

Did you see the magic, little girl?

_Having parents like that, you’ve no idea how legendary they are- err... were.

What was it like? Being raised by them. The freakin’ Feras!

_Were you there?

_Were you there?

_Were you there?

“Yeah,” Robin choke out. “I was there. They used something we can’t get our hands on in time.”

Sam notices Robin’s unease, figures that talking about her parents isn’t the easiest thing for her at the moment. Which is true, but it’s not for the reasons Sam thinks. Not just for those reasons anyway. Sam doesn’t know that it’s all Robin’s fault. “Alright. Let’s get going then.”
Sam leaves the warehouse and notes that neither his brother nor Robin follow.

Robin decides to focus on anything but her actions from that day almost ten years ago. She thinks of their vampire problem instead. She closes her eyes and lets out a long breath. “We’ve lost any sort of element of surprise we had on the Alpha, didn’t we?”

“Howdy?” Dean asks which is dumb. It’s not like Robin would ever want him lying to her. “Probably as soon as more than a few vampires had a Fera on their ass. Or more accurately chopping their heads.”

“Dammit.” Robin runs both hands through her hair. “I should have known better, been smarter about it.”

“If it makes you feel better my interrogations probably didn’t help.”

Robin smiles at him then. “Yeah, a little. Sharing blame, it’s a good time.”

Dean grins back at her and it turns dirty with each step he takes towards her. “I’m thinking maybe,” He hooks his fingers in her belt loops and pulls her to him, winking. “We get two rooms tonight. Have more good times.”

Robin blushes, which Dean finds surprising but absolutely adorable. She shakes her head and shimmies out of his hold. “You’re not… You don’t…? Nevermind. Let’s go.”

Robin leaves the warehouse to meet up with Sam by the impala. Much like Sam had, she notices that Dean doesn’t follow her. Instead, Dean is left confused, until realisation dawns on him. This is the second time she has shied away from his touch, today. Third if you count when he reached back to pat her knee in the impala on the drive here. He finally gets why.

Dean waits patiently. Bides his time until an opportunity presents itself. It’s after they agree that the vamps haven’t struck anywhere in a hundred mile radius since leaving, that Sam offers to go pick up some dinner.

Opportunity presented.

“I know what’s going on Robin,” Dean says, standing from his chair to sit on the bed she’s been working from.

“Yeah? What are you thinking?” Robin looks up at him briefly before focusing back on the notes in her lap.

“That it’s been a long time.”

Robin’s brows knit. “You know... You’re right. The vamps we dealt with in that sorority had their hands on the juju-sunscreen months ago. That means someone’s supplying it. I don’t think vampires can make the crap so are we thinking witches?”

“What? No- I mean that’s actually a really good theory, we follow the witches maybe that’ll lead us to the vamps and then to the alpha but that’s not what I’m- I’m talking about us, Robin.”

“What?”

“Look, we haven’t…you know-”
“Oh god.”

“-since before The Fog. So it’s been a while for both of us.”

Robin blinks at him.

“Some more than others.”

Robin slow blinks at him.

“I mean you. I mean for you it’s been a thousand-”

“I know what you mean, Dean!”

“You haven’t let me touch you at all today, Robin,” Dean says softly like he’s been thinking of holding her this whole time, which he has.

“Dean it’s not…” Robin grunts. Why is everything suddenly so difficult? “It’s not you, alright?”

“Did you really just say that?”

“What?” Robin thinks and realises what he means. \textit{It’s not you, it’s me.} “I didn’t mean it like that. It’s not me either. I mean it is me. But that’s not… Oh man I’m just making a bigger mess of this, aren’t I?”

Dean moves closer to her on the bed. “Robin, it’s okay that you’re nervous.” He pushes her notepad and laptop away and takes one of her hands in his.

It takes all of Robin’s will power not to rip it away.

“Dean, you don’t have to do this,” She says quietly. “If you’re weirded out now. If you don’t want to do this with me.”

Dean’s eyes widen at that. “When have I ever given you the impression I don’t want to have sex with you?”

Robin lets out a dry laugh. “After last night?”

Dean frowns. “Last night? I thought this was about how long it’s been since-”

“I 	extit{cried} during sex, Dean. Do you know how many jokes that’s the butt of? I’m that weird guy. I’m a sex crier.”

Dean… Well, Dean laughs. To his credit, it’s a small and low one. Still, Robin calls him out on it.

“You’re laughing at me. At me and my sex tears.” She pulls her hand out of his but he catches it again just as quickly.

“Robin, please tell me you can tell you’re overreacting. You’d had a rough week, we’d just had a fight, you were going to need to let some of it out eventually.”

“Full on sobbing Dean. \textit{During sex.}”

“I was there.” Dean reminds her. “I’m kind of glad that you did.”

Robin frowns. “Is this a weird kink thing. I’m not judging, just asking.”
Dean would roll his eyes but he’s too earnest in this moment. “I… I think it’s really great that you let me be strong for the both of us, last night. That you don’t pretend with me. I want us- this - to work so much, Robin, and I think that’s how we do it. By leaning on each other.”

Robin lets his words sink in, feels her heart flutter at them, and says, “You’re really not freaked out? You don’t want laugh at me?”

“I don’t want to laugh at you,” Dean confirms with a firm shake of his head. “I want to have loads of sex with you though. Like all the time. For long periods of time. All kinds of sex. So much sex. Tons of sex. Immeasura-”

“Are you just going to talk about the sex you want us to have or are we going to have the sex you want to talk about?”

Dean grins wolfishly at her. “I don’t see why we can’t do both.”

He buries fingers in her hair at the nape of her neck and pulls her closer, his lips meeting hers in what might be the softest kiss they’ve ever shared. He rests his forehead against hers for a moment once he pulls away, panting into the small space between them. She right there with him, struggling to even her breathing despite the like of strenuous activity. Then again, Dean does that to her: takes her breath away.

“We can do whatever you want,” Robin tells Dean.

It turns out that what Dean wants and what Robin wants are exactly the same thing. He lays her back and she pulls him down with her. They shed each other’s clothing, pulling off the too many layers without urgency, reverently.

Then they’re naked and they’re rolling, narrowly avoiding crushing Robin’s laptop, so that she can straddle Dean’s thighs and place a kiss on every freckle Dean has littering his chest. Dean’s eyes close and he hums in appreciation, hands tightening on her hips when her lips linger on his nipples.

“You like that?” Robin says.

Dean laughs. “Which porno did you pull that line from?” His voice hitches at the last word with Robin moving further down his body, hers sliding out of his hands that trail up her hair.

“Every single one,” Robin speaks into the crease of his thigh before leaving a kiss there too, where she finds a wayward freckle.

“Next you’ll be sayin- Shit, Robin. Warn a- a- a guy!”

Robin takes her mouth off him after a sharp suck. “No.” She winks at him when his eyes flutter open then goes right back to wrapping her lips around his dick, licking at the tip.

“You’re a damn menace, Robin Fera.”

She does her best to nod and take more of his length simultaneously which must do something for Dean because he lets out a guttural moan. Robin breathes through her nose when Dean’s cock bumps the back of her throat and then she’s swallowing around Dean and it’s so hot and tight for him and it’s so so so good but all he wants is to be inside her. Which he technically is but not like this. It’s not enough like this.

“Robin,” he starts then loses track of what he was going to say. He chants her name for a minute before his mind sharpens again. “Robin, you need to stop. You need to or I’m going to-”
Robin sits up and smiles down at him. “You gonna fuck me, Dean?”

Dean hands are back on her hips, he’s always loved them. He stares up at her, her lips just a little swollen, her eyes just a little wet and her smile wide and bright, he loves her smile best, and wonders how in the world he gets to have someone like her- no, how he gets to have her in his life, in his bed. “Whatever you want, Robin.”

She laughs cheerfully and proves him wrong, her laugh is what he loves most. “That’s not from any porno I’ve ever seen.”

Dean rolls his eyes and then rolls them over again. This time they do crush Robin’s computer but Robin doesn’t care because Dean’s kissing her neck and Dean doesn’t care because Robin is laughing that laugh. Later, they find that there’s no permanent damage and Robin will tell him he’s lucky because he broke her last laptop and he’ll scoff and then he’ll kiss her.

Right now though, Dean is lining up and pushing in and Robin is moaning and Dean doesn’t think he’ll last at all.


Dean is thinking the exact same thing.

The days that follow are made up of hunts and research. Sam, Dean and Robin continue looking for a way to stop Lucifer, they continue trying to understand what he’d want with Mary, what he might get Dean to do for him. They don’t forget that a debt is owed. The very fact looms over the trio.

They try to track down vampire nests but it’s like they’ve all but disappeared. Witches don’t seem to know anything about the sunscreen the vampires have been using. In fact, apparently witches aren’t fans of the monsters which makes sense since they worship demons.

Still, though the research and the vampire hunt are fruitless, good comes from the days that pass because the hunters still do their jobs. They work cases and they save lives.

Robin looks up from where she’s sharpening a knife to see Dean walk out of the bathroom of another motel decked out in nurse scrubs. She whistles.

“Give us a spin, sweetheart,” she says in the sleaziest tone she can muster.

Dean is almost prideful when he turns and reveals just how great his ass looks in the pants. “I do look good.”

“Well, come here,” Robin tells him, all wanton intent.

Dean grins as he makes his way over, swinging his hips playfully the littlest bit.

Robin pinches the drawstring of his pants and tugs slowly.

“I just put those on,” Dean mock-complains.

“And I’m going to take them off.” She raises a brow at him. “That’s not a problem is it?”
“Definitely no—” Dean is interrupted by Sam walking in.

“Oh come on, you guys! I just went to get- Nevermind.” Sam sighs pinching the bridge of his nose and squeezing his eyes shut, while Dean ties his pants again and rolls his eyes at Robin who’s shamelessly winking at him. They’re both grinning like idiots. “Can we just go? We’ve got a baby to kidnap.”

They do have a baby to kidnap, a newborn that a pair of witches want as an ingredient for a spell. Something magical about him because he’s born at the stroke of midnight or something. That’s why Dean’s in scrubs and Robin’s in maternity clothes and that’s why they’re headed to the hospital.

When the three of them return it’s with a crying baby cradled in Robin’s arms and a diaper bag hanging off of Dean’s shoulder.

“Take it, take it,” Robin orders trying to pawn the kid off on Sam. “I need to change out of all these ruffles anyway.”

“I don’t know,” Dean says. “You look good.”

The look Dean gives her is so soft that Robin isn’t sure if he’s talking about the clothes or the baby in her arms. The pause feels long to them...pregnant if you will... but Sam is unfazed when he takes the boy from Robin.

She scurries to the bathroom to wear something that a hunter (who isn’t Rodney because Rodney does do ruffles on any given day) would wear, escaping the baby’s screams, Sam cooing at it she calls you ‘it’, but you’re not a thing are you? No you’re not, you’re a boy, a real boy, aren’t you Thomas? and Dean’s eyes that burn holes in her back.

When she comes back out Dean’s the one holding the baby who is now calm, while Sam types away at his computer.

“Alright, I’ve got a location on the witches,” Sam says, hearing the bathroom door.

“Awesome lets go.” Robin starts pulling on her coat.

“Wait wait. Aren’t we forgetting something?” Dean asks.

Robin and Sam look at him in question so Dean hikes the baby a little higher to draw their attention.

“Like, I don’t know, just under ten pounds of Thomas here.”

“Oh right,” Sam answers him. “Okay, well, someone has to stay and protect the kid and the other two will go take care of the witches.”

“I want to gank witches,” Dean says, attempting to give Sam the baby.

Sam takes a step back, which, with Sam’s legs, is like five steps back. “You hate dealing with witches,” Sam argues.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t want to kill them. Here Robin, you take Thomas.”

Robin takes five steps back and stands beside Sam. “That’s sexist.”

“What?”
“Because I’m the woman I shouldn’t be made to stay with the baby.”

“That’s sexist,” Dean defends.

“I’ll consider your opinion when you either have a vagina or identify as a woman.”

“You’re hustling me,” Dean whines.

She really really is. Robin shrugs.

“Why am I the one getting stuck here?”

“I mean, Dean, the baby has quieted down since you took him,” Sam points out shuffling backwards towards the door.

“And you’re still in scrubs,” Robin adds in a chipper tone, following Sam’s lead. “Attire not fit for hunting. We’ll be back before you know it.”

“What I want to know is when you two started to team up against me.”

Robin and Sam let out nervous laughs. On some muted cue they both bolt out of there, Sam snatching up the keys to the impala on the way.

When the door shuts behind him, Dean is left alone with a baby boy in his arms.

“Who needs them? You wouldn’t betray me like that, would you Tommy? No I didn’t think so. You know the big one is supposed to be my brother, right? I know! He doesn’t know the meaning of the word loyalty I guess. And the cute one… Well… She has a habit of picking me,” Dean smiles for a moment before scowling. “So this treason cuts deep.”

In the car, Sam and Robin laugh for a solid minute, go over their witch killing plan once and turn on the radio to a station that isn’t rock as a wild rebellious act. They’re quiet for a while and some teenage heartthrob is singing about heartbreak when Sam eventually speaks.

“Can I ask you something?”

“That’s a horrible opener.”

“Can I ask you something anyway?”

Robin sighs dramatically and waves a hand. “If you must.”

“Before you went away it seemed like there was nothing you wouldn’t be able to talk about.”

“Sam that hasn’t changed. Anything you need to get off your chest, I’m here to listen.”

Sam cracks a smile and shakes his head as he makes a left turn. “I know that, thank you but it’s not what I mean. I’m saying that it seemed like there was nothing you wouldn’t be able to talk about. You were open and kind of flippan of about a lot of things but now… You’ll barely talk about the fog and you won’t talk about your parents at all.”

“Oh.”

“I’m not saying you have to, but the reason I’m bringing this up is because I’d hate to see you lose
the part of yourself that makes you so different from any hunter I’ve ever known. It’s like this shit
life hasn’t damaged you but it’s starting to seem like this shit life hadn’t damaged you yet. I don’t
want to watch you get jaded like the rest of us, Robin.”

There’s a pause before Robin says, “I don’t think this life is shit. I love it.”

Sam laughs. “Yeah yeah, I haven’t forgotten how delusional you are.”

Robin rolls her eyes. “I don’t talk about the fog because the more time goes by since I’ve been out
the more my time there feels like a dream. It’s like I have to put effort to remember it even though
the feeling of being there… That loneliness flares up on its own. I’m hoping that feeling will fade
too if I give it time, if I…”

“If you don’t think about it too much.” Sam realises.

Robin nods. “Yeah.” There’s another pause before she speaks. “I don’t talk about my parents
because there’s nothing to say.”

“That can’t be true.”

“I don’t talk about my parents because there’s nothing good for me to say. Before I’d at least tell
you about how great they were in life, but now that they are alive somewhere going through God
knows what… And I’ve been… I’ve been not looking for them for the past decade. There’s nothing
for me to say and that’s not a sign of the hunter life getting to me, that’s just me owning up to my
actions.”

“Robin you didn’t know they were still out there. You didn’t do anything wro-”

“Sam. If I wanted to be comforted I’d have brought it up.”

Sam nods. The songs ends and another starts.

“I meant what I said the other day. You’re family to my family, Robin. Just remember that.”

A few hours later, Sam and Robin get back to the motel after killing not two but a surprising three
witches and find Dean changing the baby’s diaper like a damn pro, cooing at it all the while.

“How’d it go?” Robin grins at him.

Dean smiles brightly. “Lil’ Tommy here is a pretty alright dude. How’d it go with the witc-
Actually check this out.” Dean’s smile widens even more as he nods towards the baby still on the
bed to draw Sam and Robin’s attention to him. “Tommy how do we feel about,” he starts then
slowly enunciates: “Witches.”

The baby’s face scrunches up and Dean’s glows.

“I taught him that, no big deal.”

“Gee, Dean. You sure you want us to return him?” Sam teases.

“Alright alright, take him.” Dean hands the baby to Sam. “You’ve got your cover story straight?”

Sam rolls his eyes. “It’s not my first time returning a kidnapped baby, Dean.” He heads out but
Dean follows.
Dean calls after Sam who is situating the baby in the impala, “Double check his car seat. And drive ten miles under the speed limit. And-”

“I got it, Dean!” Sam huffs.

Dean watches Sam back out of the parking lot, flip Dean the bird and drive off.

Robin watches Dean.

“For all your bitching before Sam and I left, you had a good time didn’t you?” Robin asks.

Dean keeps his eyes on the road. “Yeah.” Then: “I’ve wanted kids for a while but…” He trails off.

The rest is implicit but Robin gets it. The hunter life.

She nods.

Dean turns to look at her. “Do you?”

Robin doesn’t even hesitate to say, “I’d have yours.”

It’s a crazy thing to say, they’ve only known each other for the better part of a year.

“Is it insane that I said that?” Robin asks, suddenly nervous and insecure.

Dean takes a moment to think about it, though he’s grinning, during which Robin shifts her weight from one foot to another. “Maybe but it doesn’t feel like it, huh?”

“No. It really doesn’t.”

Dean can imagine it. Eventually, they’ll be too old to hunt, assuming they live long enough. Their knees will creak and their backs will give and they’ll settle down somewhere. He loves the bunker, he does, but it’d be somewhere with windows and a yard. He and Robin could raise a rugrat or two and Sam wouldn’t be too far away with a family of his own. And a dog probably.

Robin can imagine it too. They’d be older than they are now but still hunting because it’s not like they’d ever stop. She’s in the passenger seat of the impala and Dean has a rock cassette playing but on low volume because their kid is dozing in the back seat. They’re headed to a new town to work a new case to teach their child what, Dean told her once, his dad called The Family Business.

“Hello, Dean.” Dean and Robin break their eye contact to see Castiel standing by the motel door. “Robin,” he nods. “I have news.”

Robin is standing in the small patch of clear floor of the motel with her hands on her hips. Cas is stood in front of her and Dean is sitting on the bed, keeping quiet mostly. Sam has yet to return.

“You’ve known where they are for days?” Robin squeaks threateningly.

“I have.”

“Why did you wait to tell us, Cas!”

“I-”

“You told me you wanted to help. Time is of the essence!”
“Are you done?”
“No. I don’t understand why you would have stalled.”
“You’re the one who’s stalling right now, Robin,” Cas counters knowingly.
That’s true. Robin is stalling. She doesn’t know if she wants to know what Cas found out.
“I wanted to come to you with a plan. That’s why I waited. And I have one,” Cas continues.
“A plan to get them back?” Robin looks up at Cas, eyes fearful but full of hope and Cas isn’t sure which is worse.
“To get them out,” he says.
“Out of where?” Robin chokes out the question and Dean sits up straighter.
“Purgatory.”

Dean is pacing the entire floor of the motel room agitatedly while Robin sits where he once was, staring blankly at the two men. They’re saying words and she understands them but she doesn’t really get it, not really. Everything is taking longer to process which, apparently, is the case for Dean too.
“You’re telling me,” Dean says, not for the first time. “That when they took out the New York nest, they got dragged down to purgatory with all the vampires? Like you and me with exploding Dick?”
“Sounds like a bad porno.”

Dean and Cas glance at Robin briefly.
“That’s exactly what I’m saying,” Cas repeats, not for the first time. “That many souls descending towards purgatory… Alice and Oliver Fera must have gotten caught in the movement.”
“Cas… We were there for a year… We’d have known if there were other humans down there. Benny would have known. You’d have sensed it.”
“I don’t know how to explain that, Dean. Perhaps they were in a corner of Purgatory we weren’t close to, it’s a massive plane of existence. What I do know, with certainty, is that they’re there.”
“Okay,” Robin says, eyes focusing finally. “The time Sam went to Purgatory during the Hell Trials you had a rogue reaper open a portal, right? I’ll do that.”
“Absolutely not,” Dean growls. “You know that story which means you know the reaper wasn’t able to get Sam out.”
“Because he died. I’ll keep him alive.”
“No.”
“You don’t tell me ‘no’, Dean. That’s not how it works.” She stands on wobbly feet which do little to assert her position and crosses her arms.
Robin, we’d be trapped without a way to get your parents out. We’ll find something else. Something safer,” Dean insists and it’s half a command, half a plea.

“I don’t care about safe, Dean,” Robin shouts. “My parents have been trapped there for nearly ten years!”

“That’s the problem! You’re not thinking about your safety,” Dean yells just as fiercely.

“No. The problem is that my parent are somewhere in Monster-Hell and- Wait. Did you say we?”

“You think you’re going there alone?” Dean’s voice is soft and just a little disbelieving. He’s never letting Robin go to some other world without him ever again. The fog was one too many times.

“Dean…” Robin’s tone has lost all its edge and the looks she gives him… Dean doesn’t know what to make of it exactly.

“Are you two done?” Cas pipes up and they turn to look at him. “Good. Dean is right. A rogue reaper won’t do.”

“Cas-”

“I told you that I came to you with a plan, Robin,” Cas interrupts her quickly.

“Okay. Alright, okay. What is it?”

“You’re underestimating how vast of a place Purgatory is,” Cas explains. “It has the same surface area as Earth but with fewer oceans.”

“Fewer oceans?” Dean questions.

“As in none. Once you get there…”

“You’re saying there’s no real way to track them down.” Robin pauses. “It doesn’t matter. I’m not leaving them-”

“No one is asking you to, Robin. Please, you need to be more rational than you’re being right now.”

Robin glares at Cas. Dean makes a grunting sound of agreement. Robin glares at Dean.

“I’ve found a way to open a portal that will land us within a hundred yards of your parents on the other side. I’ve already amassed all the ingredients for the spell except two.”

“What two?” Robin asks.

“We need a soul that belongs to Purgatory.”

“A soul that belongs… You mean the life of a monster? Easy,” Dean grins.

“Not just any soul. It needs to be a powerful one. One that is-”

“An Alpha’s,” Robin finishes for him.

Cas nods. “That will do.”

Robin runs a hand through her hair. “So we keep searching for the Alpha Vamp and we gank the
“fucker. Sounds like a plan to me.”

“What’s the second thing?” Dean asks.

“For the location part of the spell. We need something of theirs. Something that belonged to Alice or Oliver or both.”

There’s a long silence before Dean speaks up. “Robin didn’t keep anything.”

“Not on me,” Robin adds.

“What?” Dean turns to look at her.

Robin smiles, shyly, sadly. “I guess I’m going back home.”

Dean’s brows furrow. Robin doesn’t have a home as far as he knows.

Robin’s finger hovers over George’s name on her phone screen for a solid minute, standing outside the motel room. How is she supposed to fill him in on this? Somehow George never blamed her for her parents’ death even though he knows what happened but she can’t expect him to forgive her this. For leaving them trapped in a Hell designed for the things they spent their entire lives hunting.

She could just not, she muses. She doesn’t have to tell George about this. She could wait until she has her mom and dad back. Until they are safe and alive and well and then tell George. He won’t care then because they’d be back. She should just put her phone away and go back inside. Dean is probably done apologising to Cas for his behaviour and Cas is probably done forgiving Dean.

Robin sighs and hits call.

“Give me five reasons why I put up with Rodney. Go,” George says as soon as the line connects.

“Because you hero worship me, loser,” Robin hears Rodney’s voice in the background and then a smacking sound and an ow, Amy!

“George,” Robin all but whispers.

“Woah, hey, what is it? What’s wrong?”

“George, there’s something you need to know. When I… When my parents took down the New York nest…”

“Robin, what is it?” George’s worry only makes Robin feel guiltier.

“They didn’t die.”

“What are you talking about? Of course they did. Bobby checked the warehouse himself.”

“He never found the bodies.”

“Because the whole place was blasted to pieces, Robin. There was nothing to find. You know this.”

Robin smothers a sob and hears a soft voice say, “George, what’s happening?” Another says, “Is she okay?”
“Look,” Robin continues, after steeling herself. “I don’t have a lot of information. Only that they were somehow dragged down to purgatory and that I’m going to get them back.”

“Where are you? I’m coming to y-”

“George no.”

“Don’t George no me, Robbie. They’re my family. Your mom trained me. They took me in when Dad died.”

“Is this about Alice and Oliver?” Rodney’s muffled voice says.

Robin says, “George, I’ve got this, okay? I can’t have you mixed up in it, I can’t risk you-”

“Hey. We’ve always respected each other’s decisions, just like our parents did. You can’t tell me to sit this one out.”

“I’m not. I’m asking you to. George this started with me. Because of me. I need to end it.”

George is silent for a long while.

“If you want to help, try tracking down the Alpha Vampire. I know where he’ll be one week after New Years but if you can get ahold of him before-”

“What does he have to do with anything?”

“George-”

“You’re going there, aren’t you?”

“It’s the only way to get them out.”

“No, no way. There has to be a spell or something that can summon them out.”

“That’s not how it works.”

“Robin.”

They’re silent again.

“You didn’t cause this, you know?” George says, quietly.

“I know you think that.”

“It’s the truth, Robin.”

“I don’t want to have this argument again.”

George sighs. “We’ll work on tracking the Alpha.”

“Call me when you’ve got him. Don’t engage George, I mean it.”

“It’s not my first Alpha, Robin.”

“I’m not worried that you can’t handle it George. I’m saying that because I don’t know what we need from him exactly yet.”
“Okay.”
“Okay.”

“Robin, I love you.”

“Me too. Keep yourselves safe.”

“Keep yourself safe. Be smart.”

“Oh and there’s only one real reason to put up with Rodney.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“He’s family.”

They hang up and Robin takes a moment to breathe before entering the motel room again just in time to hear Cas say, “Not a day goes by, Dean.” The apologies must be over.

“I’ve heard you and Robin say that like it means something but I’m not getting it.”

Robin shuts the door behind her softly and leans against it. Dean’s eyes lock with hers. “It means I miss you,” she says. Because it does but it means so much more. They’re the filler words for what you can’t exactly describe. The words she offered Cas when he left the fog, for him to pass on, the only words she could come up with. “Means I love you. Means everything else that comes with that.”

Castiel nods and then says it again. “Not a day goes by, Dean.”

Dean nods dumbly. “I’m sorry, Cas. I shouldn’t have-”

“Dean, there’s nothing to forgi-”

Dean pulls Cas into a hug and Robin smiles. At least some things are right in the world.

The door gets forced open and Robin stumbles forward. “Watch it, Moose.”

Sam offers her a sheepish smile. “Sorry. Thomas is back where he belongs and- Hey, Cas!”

“Cas found my parents.”

“Oh.”

“I also found Lucifer’s last vessel but no trace of who he’s possessing now.”

“Oh.”

The four stand in the room quietly, perhaps for much too long. There’s a lot of work to do and maybe they just need a moment of reprieve.

“We’ll divide and conquer,” Dean says finally.

Chapter End Notes
Many struggles writing this chapter. Feedback is appreciated!

Find me on tumblr
Robin shows Dean where she grew up and tells him all about the day her parents didn't die.
late to do anything but—"

“Did you say another seven hours?”

“Yeah?”

“But that’s across the… You’re taking me to— You’re from Canada?!”

Robin is laughing again.

They end up stopping for the night at a motel in North Dakota where Robin explains to Dean that she’s never lived in one place long enough to be from anywhere (where she went to school in college doesn’t count) but her dad was— is from Lawrence and her mom lived there when she was young.

“Dean you know this. Mary said she set my parents up together. In Lawrence. ”

“Then why is your so-called home in Canada?”

“That’s where Bobby stashed it for me.”

Robin ends the conversation after that, kissing Dean until his knees grew weak and he was falling back on the motel bed.

They get an early start the next day, get through customs easily with a flash of a badge (despite the armory in Baby’s trunk) and only bicker a little throughout. By early afternoon the impala rolls into a small town in Saskatchewan where the population tallies up to three hundred and where the median age of said population is fifty years old.

“Rose Valley? What’s so special about this place?” Dean asks Robin, squinting as he peers out the windshield. The sun is bright and the snow on the ground is bright and a perfect reflective surface for the brightness of the sun so all and all it’s very bright. Dean has never needed sunglasses this close to Christmas before.

“Nothing. Well… It’s far off the grid but still easily accessible. Take a, euh, a left here, yeah left —”

“You’re not sure?”

“—and then keep going past the residential area.” Robin adds, “It’s been a while since I’ve been here,” as way of explaining her uncertainty.

A whole song plays before Dean speaks again. “How long’s a while?”

“I think I was sixteen, last time.”

It’s not long before they get to where they’re going. Dean doesn’t know when to stop until he sees it. He pulls into the lot without Robin having to tell him to then follows her directions, weaving between the large shipping containers.

Once they park and step out of the Impala, Robin speaks across the roof of the car. “They changed the standards and these didn’t fit regulation anymore so they were sent here to be used as storage
units instead of actual shipments.”

“That’s… unconventional.”

“And out of most people’s way which is why almost none of these are in use. This place is pretty isolated.”

Dean looks around at the two dozen or so massive grey metal tanks. “That’s… convenient.”

“They’re built to withstand just about anything,” Robin explains, slamming her door shut. “And my parents reinforced that one.” She juts her chin towards the container closest to them.

Dean nods and closes his own door. “You got a key?” he asks, walking closer to what they drove across state and country lines for three days to get to.

“Not exactly.”

“Alright, then.” Dean reaches for the latch too late for Robin’s

No, Dean, wait!

and is sent flying back onto Baby’s hood, his landing only softened by the thick winter coat he’s wearing.

Robin is helping him instantly as he groans his way to his feet.

“Are you, okay?” Robin worries over him, wincing at the dent in the car and what that might mean for Dean’s own state.

“The hell was that?” Dean shouts.

“Um… an alarm system… of sorts.”

“You couldn’t warn a guy?” He sends her an accusing glare and Robin knows Dean’s alright. “My car!” Well, mostly. “What’s in there anyway?” Dean asks when he’s done fussing over Baby. “And don’t tell me ‘home’ again.”

Robin shifts from one foot to another and shrugs. She’d been messing with him by withholding information so far, but now she just didn’t know how to put it. “Everything, I guess.” Robin stares at the container for a long minute and Dean lets her. When her eyes settle on him again, she says, “You can only open it with Fera blood. George keeps a vial of mine just in case he needs to get in and I’m not around.”

“That’s not gross.”

Robin strides over to the doors, reaching behind her for her favourite knife, the one with an iron handle and a silver blade. Dean likes it too. She thinks of pricking her finger but it reminds her too much of how she’d drag her digits through shards of glass in the fog, drawing blood. She wonders briefly if her shattered phone is still there, scattered across the white floor as lifeless as she’d felt at times.

“Robin?” Dean is standing beside her now.

She offers him a small smile as she cuts into the meatier part of her palm—she’d normally do it elsewhere but she’s bundled up and doesn’t want to strip off layers and brave the cold. Then, she grips the latch, smearing her blood onto it. A wave of energy ripples away from that point and across the surface of the container that looks more blue than grey for a flash of a second.

“You ready?” Robin asks him but Dean doesn’t think she’s really asking him so he waits for her to
decide. Robin stalls for a beat then takes a deep breath and pushes the latch down. It’s rusty and it grinds downwards slowly with a screech that has Dean wincing but that Robin seems unsurprised by. She gives the latch a calculated—practiced, Dean would say—shimmy and it glides the rest of the way.

The first thing Dean notices once they open the doors is the stench. It’s bad enough that Dean brings the back of his wrist, clad in four different layers, to his nose to block it. “What *is* that?”

Robin shrugs as she looks around the frame of the entrance, pointedly searching for something.

“You said you haven’t been here in a long time but *has anyone*?” Dean asks, beginning to take a step.

This time Robin stops him in time with a hand on his arm. “Wait,” she says. She walks over to the hinges of one of the doors and unsticks something from the inner wall of the container, careful with her motions.

“A slingshot?” Dean asks, watching Robin dig in her pocket. “That looks like a toy,” he continues, a little incredulous.

“It used to be,” Robin tells him with a sheepish smile. “We replaced the rubber with a stretchy synthetic cord so that it doesn’t become brittle and snap if there’s a long time between visits to this place.” She finally pulls a quarter out of her pocket. “The last time someone was here was about a decade ago. That’s what you asked right?”

Dean keeps his eyes trained on Robin’s schooled face and she keeps hers on the slingshot, testing its weight in her hand, and the elastic.

“It was Bobby,” she says, still not looking at Dean. “When they died. Or I guess… When they got dragged to purgatory. He came to me after it happened, in New York. I hadn’t… I couldn’t bring myself to—to leave. I was still at the site. By the building where the vamps had been nesting. Well, there wasn’t much of a building left anymore.

“Bobby came in my jeep, one from his salvage yard at the time. After he took care of things, took care of me,” Robin laughs out a dark little sound. “I was kind of useless at that point. He gave it to me. The jeep, I mean. Told me to drive West, and that George and Rodney were heading East to meet me as soon as possible. He took our—my parent’s car and everything that was in it and brought it here.” She nods at the tarp that’s clearly covering a vehicle. “This is where we stored… everything.”

*And then what?* Dean wants to ask. *What happened before? How did the Feras take down the largest vampire nest in modern history?*

“What’s the slingshot for?” he finally asks.

Robin points to the back wall of the container. The outside is metal, but inside there’s a foot-thick concrete lining (added by the Feras, Dean realises) that’s almost entirely covered in wardings. It eats away at the space but the tank is so massive that it’s not much of a loss. Past things hanging from the ceiling, behind a metal shelving unit, on a strip of wall visible between two closely placed crates, wedged between two sigils, there’s a grey spot a few shades lighter than the grey of the walls. It’s almost impossible to see.

“Gotta hit that to disable the rest of the… euh security. Walking in right now would leave you torn to shreds and riddled with bullets. Silver bullets, witch killing bullets, all kinds.”
Dean’s eyes widen, not at the threat but at the feat. “Robin, you’re a good shot—”

“I’m a great shot.”

“You’re a great shot,” Dean concedes, because it’s true. In all the hunting they’ve been doing, and they’ve been doing a lot of it, Dean has seen Robin miss no more than a handful of times. She told him once, that first time they went to a bar together when Cas took her synesthesia away, that she was the sniper of her family. Her family is the Feras so that’s definitely saying something. “But there’s no way you can make that.”

Robin winks at him and grins and that wild look is back in her eyes. She places the quarter against the leather ammunition holder and fiddles with the slingshot a bit, testing the tension.

“What happens if you miss?”

“Nothing if it’s by less than an inch.”

“And if it’s not?”

Robin pauses. “I think the whole thing blows up.” A little sadly she adds, “My parents were very into explosives.” Then she’s raising her arms, taking a deep breath, drawing a hand back—

“Robin wait —”

—and letting go. The quarter whizzes past Dean, through the ropes of two different nets hanging on hooks bolted to the ceiling, between the two crates that are maybe four-quarter-widths apart and smacks its edge into the concrete.

Immediately, Dean hears the sound of dozens of blades scrape against something, the clicks of the safety of guns and the sound of quickly coiling string like what you find in the IDs business people keep clipped to their clothing.

“What was that?” Dean swivels on himself, his own firearm drawn.

“That was me being badass. Also, I told you, security. Everything just retracted itself. It’s safe now.” Robin takes a step inside as if to prove her point.

“All those weapons were going to go off on us?” Dean tucks his gun away again, if a little reluctantly.

“Weapons. Darts. Trip wires. Landmines.”

“Where even are they?” Dean peers into the container and sees no threat.

“Cloaked with magic. Same kind that had the doors sealed.”

“You guys dabbled with witchcraft?” Dean asks, taking a tentative step inside.

Robin nods and shrugs simultaneously. “When the situation called for it. My parents had a few witches on their roster. Not the sell-your-soul-to-a-demon-for magic witch. I didn’t keep in touch with any of my parents’ connection except for Bobby, though. Damn I can’t even remember their names. One was a Sasha Bain maybe? I don’t know, but my mom would have documented it. She wrote journals extensively. It’s all in here.” Robin waves a hand.

“When you said you were going home, you meant this car, didn’t you?”
Robin grins at Dean and walks over to the car, gripping the tarp with both hands. “I’m not as anal about it as you, but yeah.” She pulls the fabric off and Dean comes to face with an actual abomination.

It’s a 1973 Austin Allegro but even Dean doesn’t know that off the top of his head. What he does know is that it’s hideous. It’s boxy, oddly shaped and mustard. Or maybe it once was a mustard colour, now it’s darker and worse.

Dean moves around it and bends to look inside. The seats are mustard, too. “It’s so ugly.”

“Hey!”

Dean straightens up again. “The steering wheel is square, Robin. Square!”

“Square-ish,” she corrects. “Be nice. I grew up on that backseat, was conceived in the front and born right where your hand is.”

Dean looks at where he’s placed his hand on the hood and cringes, bringing it back towards him like it’s been burned. “You’re fucking with me?”

“Yes. I mean, my dad really did deliver me on the hood but I’m only telling you because—”

“You want me to have night terrors?”

Robin rolls her eyes. “You’re so dramatic, Dean.”

“It’s called for,” he counters, observing the walls again. He recognises most of the sigils, a few are a mystery, but some feel like they shouldn’t be there at all. “You knew about angels? Ten years ago you knew?”

“What?” Robin turns back to him from where she was browsing a shelf. The periphery of the space is lined with metal shelving units, rusty but solid.

“There are angel wardings on here.” Dean points one out.

“Oh no, well, not really. We met this lady once, Sunders, I remember. She claimed they were real and all that jazz and my parents… they weren’t too into believin’ and it is one of those things you gotta see to believe but she really seemed to know her stuff and my parents are into caution so they put the information she gave them to use anyway. Nothing to lose, you know? Huh, I guess she’d been in the know.”

“But how? Angels weren’t walking the Earth, then. Hadn’t for centuries.”

Robin’s brows gather. “I don’t know. I was a tween at the time. I don’t remember much. Whatever my parents found out about her thought would be somewhere in here. Our whole lives are in here.” Robin breathes for a moment, the sweet nostalgia she doesn’t deserve passing through her. “There’s no real rhyme or reason to where anything is, but it’s all labeled. There’s a file in here on the New York nest and the Alpha. The plan was to go after him after but…y’know.”

“Hey,” Dean tells her, walking over. He tilts her head up so she’d meet his eyes. “We’re going to fix this. We’ll make it right.”

Robin nods in his hand. “I know,” she chokes out, her voice a little wet. “I know we will, but all that means is that there’s a wrong to right in the first place and that’s my fault.”
Dean shakes his head vehemently and Robin closes her eyes. She doesn’t want to see Dean look at her like that, like Robin isn’t guilty because she is. “It’s not. Look at me. Hey, look at me.” Robin does and tries to blink the moisture away as best she can. “Sam didn’t look for me when I went to purgatory.”

“I know that.”

“Is there anything you don’t already know about us? Did Cas tell you everything?” Dean whines.

Robin laughs a little. “Sam told me about it. He still feels guilty sometimes.”

“I forgave him.”

“He knows.”

“They’re your parents. They’ll forgive you too. They won’t hold this against you. There’s nothing to hold. You didn’t know, Robin.”

Robin sighs. “Let’s just start looking around. I need to find something that’s just theirs for Cas’ ritual too. And that file will maybe have something to help with the Alpha. You can look around, get anything you think could be useful for whatever.”

“I think most of this stuff could be useful.” Dean scans the shelves upon shelves of books. The crates and boxes, some filled with journals (there must be hundreds of them) some with objects Dean doesn’t think they should touch without gloves on at least. He shudders recalling the time something in the bunker’s storage shrunk him to six inches tall.

Robin nods, only half listening, rummaging through some documents, “Take whatever you want. If it fits in the Impala, that is. This stuff belongs in a place like the bunker anyway.”

Dean loves the thought of that. Anything Robin related belongs with him.

They mostly work in silence, going through boxes. Dean realises that people can accumulate a lot in a lifetime. It’s weird, he thinks, that this is something he’s realising because most people probably know this. He and Sam haven’t had the experience though. Even now with the bunker, Dean hasn’t really managed to clutter his space. That’s fine. On all the things he’s had to miss out on, this is the least of his worries.

He’s heard a lot about the Feras over the years, rumors mostly but some first hand accounts too, namely from Ellen. No matter the source, it had all made them seem… larger than life. It reminded him a lot of his dad but a happier version. All the hunters who’d worked with them had told Dean how fun they were. Fun. How during those cases the hunters could forget just how hard this life could get. Dean didn’t really understand that, then. By the time he even started socialising with other hunters, that is to say after John’s death, he’d been hardened too much. Now, knowing Robin, he could get how the Feras might have offered that illusion to other hunters, at least for a short while. She exudes so much excitement for this life. Reading their journals in this hideaway of theirs, he gets it even more.

Dean was uncovering hunting strategies he’s never come across before. Truly ingenious approaches interspaced with paragraph about how right their work was, how hunting was the only way for them to live. Then pages and pages about Robin, their love for her mostly but also records of her training that was almost as brutal as what Dean had gone through growing up. When the journals were Oliver’s, they also spoke about Alice. There was so much admiration there, Dean
wondered if the Feras had it right. Maybe if Mary had told John about hunting… They wouldn’t have been normal but they could have been… happier.

Dean spots a box labeled *First*. That could be about the first vampire, as in the alpha. Any alpha, really. Or did Robin’s parents know about them being the First Family? Robin didn’t until recently. Maybe it’s about that.

Dean opens the box and what’s inside is not what he expects.

“Robin.”

“Hmm?”

“Robin.”

Robin grunts and turns to look at Dean who’s holding up a pair of baby booties.

“Are these yours?”

“Oh god.”

Dean’s already digging into the box again and pulling out all sorts of things, each more embarrassing than the next. “Your first math test. You first quizz about lore. Your first— Hey, there are tapes in here! I think we have a VHS at the bunker that we could use— There’s a photo album! You were a flower for your first Halloween!”

“Dean.”

Dean looks up from a baby Robin, head in the center of a circle of large, yellow petals, to an adult, smiling Robin. She walks to him, manila folders in her arms, and presses a kiss into the corner of her mouth.

“We’ve got work to do.” She goes back to her earlier spot and leaves Dean grinning. Until Dean looks down, flips a page in the album and sees what must be Robin’s first kill. He’s not grinning anymore. She’s maybe eight, standing over a hole in the ground. The flames from the grave are the only thing lighting up the shot. Robin’s smile is wide and proud as she clutches a pack of matches, in one hand. No child should feel proud about… As capital-G Great Oliver and Alice Fera seem to be, just how alright were they, if they chose this life for their kid.

Dean flips to another page and Robin’s wearing an apron over a mint green dress standing in front of a diner. She’s mid-eyeroll in the shot and Dean’s eyes crinkle with a smile. This must have been her first job. He puts the album down, not wanting to sour it more and pretends he doesn’t notice the small pistol inside of the box. It must have been Robin’s first.

Dean spots a cooler a few feet away and smirks. How long does it take for beer to expire? He pops the lid and a puff of cool smoke seeps out with a hiss. Inside are rows of what looks like frozen red bullets sitting on a bed of dry ice.

“Robin,” Dean calls. “Come check this out and tell me what the hell.”

Robin circles the car to get to Dean’s side and peers around him. “Oh. Dead man’s blood bullets.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Yeah, it’s not ideal because they melt and just a little bit of that fucks up your guns. You get, ten
minutes, I think it was, to empty your clip. I remember it was a bitch to clean.”

“How does that even work?”

“Dilute the blood in glycerine because it has a high freezing point, just under sixty four degrees. Then it gets poured into the molds to freeze and that’s that. The kit for it should be around here somewhere. It keeps vamps down longer because more Dead Man’s blood gets into their system as the bullet melts.”

“Why do all hunters not know about this? It should be—”

“Don’t touch the ice! We use tweezers.” Robin warns when it looks like Dean’s reaching for one. “It was still in early stages. We mostly used syringes and crossbows with the arrows dipped instead of these. We couldn’t get it to not melt in guns and melt in the vamp’s body.” Robin shrugs.

Dean shakes his head a little. “This is kind of insane. Revolutionary. I really get it now.”

“Get what?”

“Why the Feras are The Feras.”

Robin stiffens and takes a step back.

“I didn’t mean anything by it Robin,” Dean tries to backtrack, putting the cooler away. It’s a positive thing, Robin praises her parents all the time, why doesn’t she like it when others speak of them in high regards? Dean doesn’t understand that Robin knows just how otherworldly her parents were and how she’s the one that ended them. “I just mean, they—you—are great hunters. Makes sense you know, with the whole First Family thing.”

Robin laughs a little. “Yeah, I’m practically monster-killing-Royalty.”

“That makes me monster-researching-Royalty?”

Robin scrunches her nose. “You’re bourgeoisie, at best. New money. I’m nobility, blue blood and all.”

“Oh, is that how it is?” Dean grabs Robin’s hips and pulls her close, molding his body to hers as best he can through their winter get up. “You’re letting it go to your head, I think, Robin.”

“You ought to be more respectful of the Crown, you plebeian.”

Dean bellows out a laugh and keeps smiling through the kiss that follows.

It’s a few hours later that Dean packs Baby’s trunk with boxes and crates he thinks they’d get the most use out of at home. He walks back into the shipping container to see Robin scanning the shelves with her eyes one last time.

“Still haven’t found it?” he asks.

Robin sighs. “No. You can’t really miss it, it’s massive. Maybe Bobby took it with him? I feel like he would have told me, though.”

“Well, hey, we found a bunch of stuff about vampires and alphas. We came for something of your parents’, anyway. For the ritual. We didn’t come for the file.”
Robin continues to look around the room, trying to find a nook where it might have been placed.

“Robin, can you think of somethin’ we can use?”

“Huh? Oh.”

“Did you come across anything that would work? I doubt this hideous thing will do the trick,” Dean says chuckling and rapping his knuckles against the car.

“Oh my fucking god,” Robin moans.

“What?”

“It’s in the car. I’m so fucking dumb. Bobby never took it out of the car.” Robin goes to the trunk as she speaks.

“Here,” Dean says. “I saw the keys on the front seat earlier—” He stops from opening the driver’s door when he hears the trunk pop and sees Robin put away her lock pick. “How do you do that so goddamn fast?”

“I’ll show you sometime,” Robin promises with a soft smile.

Dean moves to stand beside her as Robin opens the trunk all the way, the hinges creaking. “Why do you have a can opener in here?” Dean asks picking up the old device.

“We used to eat canned food a lot on the road. We’d stop by the side of the road to drain them and then keep driving.”

“What, like tuna?” Dean’s face becomes the image of disgust.

“No, like corn and beans.”

“Alright,” Dean tosses the can opener to the side of the trunk and taps the chest that’s occupying most of the space. “The file’s in here?”

Robin laughs a little. “No, Dean. That is the file.”

They eat a few towns over and decide to make it back to the US before stopping for the night. On the drive, the weight of the chest keeps it from moving around in the backseat at every turn which Dean is grateful for. He doesn’t think the upholstery can handle that sort of friction. There’s no music playing because Dean figured Robin would put in the cassette she dug out from the glove compartment of that atrocious car. She told him, with a fond look in her eyes that was quickly chased away by something dark, that her dad had gifted it to her mom when they were in high school but it had always belonged to the both of them in every way that mattered. It would work for what Castiel needs.

Robin doesn’t put the tape in, however. Instead she deftly turns it over and over in her hand, eyes sometimes fixed on it but mostly out the window.

They’re an hour away from the border when Dean asks, “Do you want to play it?”

“What?” Robin looks at him, then at the tape like both are foreign to her. Like she forgot she was even in the car with Dean, holding anything at all. “Oh. No, thanks.”
“Okay,” Dean quietly accepts.

A few highway exits later Robin says, “You should know…” She trails off, clears her throat and tries her best to gather herself. “A lot of hunters thought it was a suicide mission. They thought that my parents knew, going in, that they wouldn’t be coming out. They were supposed to. The plan was good and they were supposed to live.”

It takes a while for Dean to respond but he doesn’t think Robin minds. “Hunts go sideways all the time.”

“They do,” Robin agrees. Dean thinks the conversation might be over because it’s a long time before Robin speaks again. “They hadn’t wanted me there. Normally they let me decide for myself what I felt ready for, vetoing my choices only once in awhile but they didn’t want me near this one. Biggest vampire nest in modern times so I can get why. I got why. But I was the best sniper they knew and they needed the best. They were supposed to live and, yeah, hunts go bad but I’m the one who fucked up. It’s on me, Dean.”

“You missed?”

Robin laughs wetly at the irony and turns to look at him, the tears in her eyes putting a strain on Dean’s heart. “If only. I pulled the trigger too soon and it’s what killed them except that would have been a mercy and the Holy Host doesn’t hand those out, apparently. Instead they’ve been in goddamn purgatory for nearly a decade and it’s my fault. It’s me. I did this. I caused this. They’d still be around, they’d still be doing good if it weren’t for me. They were supposed to live. You should know that they were supposed to live and the reason they didn’t is me. They never should have had me, Dean. I wish they had never had me.”

The conversation ends. Dean pulls Robin into his side and kisses the top of her head. He doesn’t offer words because he doesn’t think any would help and Robin is grateful. What he does do is drive fast enough that Robin feels her chagrin and guilt trailing behind them instead of pressing down on her chest. It’s more of an illusion than anything else, you can’t outrun something that has already caught you, with a firm grip at that.

Not as firm as Dean’s, Robin thinks.

It’s dark when they pull into the same motel in North Dakota they’d stayed in the previous night, though it’s a different room. Maybe not different, but it’s another room.

Together, Dean and Robin bring the chest inside so they can start looking through it. Well, so Robin can look through it. Dean is enraptured in a crate of journals with the odd object thrown in, he went back to the car for. The Feras really were something and reading their words makes Dean almost giddy to have the job he has. From his seat at the small table he keeps looking up at Robin who is going through her findings methodically, making organised stacks on the bed and taking extensive notes.

“Hey,” Robin says. “There’s a journal in here that’s Bobby’s.”

Dean catches when Robin tosses it over and then goes back to taking inventory of the chest. He quickly realises, by the dates, that it was the journal Bobby was using around the time the Feras went for the New York nest. He must have left it behind when he stored that godawful car.

Alice has got that look in her eyes again. Oliver not so much. That’s what’s worrying me. That
wild side of her always finds its way into that boy’s bones. She’s contagious by default but Oliver’s got less chance than the rest of us on the account of how gone he is on her. Maybe he ain’t got no chance at all. So why does he look more scared than eager about heading out East. Maybe it ain’t fear. I don’t know what else they got going on. They’re saying it’s a done deal, and when they stuff like that they mean it.

They stopped by to pick up the Little Bird. Left a package that don’t make sense. She wasn’t supposed to go with them for this. They went looking for another sniper but clearly they ain’t found someone as good. I haven’t met a better shot than her. I’m all about keeping it in the family, but there’s going to be hundreds of vamps there. Feras didn’t ask me for back up. They ain’t ask anyone as far as I know. Just them and their kid.

Dean flips ahead to the last page with anything on it.

They did it. The entire nest is obliterated and by the looks of it, they might have left their kid in a similar state. Maybe I shouldn’t have let her drive off on her own. She looked just about ready to vomit at the sight of the Allegro. Well, hurl some more anyway. Makes sense now, what Alice left me. Besides, George and that Rodney kid are gonna meet her halfway. Three quarter way probably.

“Hey, Robin. Do you know what your mom left behind at Bobby’s?”

Robin looks up from the map she has laid out on top of everything else on the bed. She’d been studying it, brows gathered. They knit more closely now and she says, “What do you mean?”

“Says here she left something at his place when they came and got you right before… Right before.”

Robin sucks a lip in and chews it thoughtfully. A composed reaction that has Dean believing she’s all cried out, at least for a while.

“Lemme see,” she finally says, crossing the room to stand behind Dean. She hooks her chin over his shoulder and skims the lines, then circles Dean and steps over the crate on the floor to seat herself in the second chair. “I don’t know. I don’t think it’s related to the case at all though. My parents didn’t really involve anyone unless they had to. Including Bobby.”

Dean watches her peer into the crate, picking up journals and random pens only to put them back down. “How’d you do it, Robin?” Dean asks quietly. He needs to know how everything went down if it’s what led to her parents being dragged to Purgatory. He also just really wants to know. There’s so much mystery about that day. No one knows what happened. “How’d three hunters take down three hundred vampires?” he says, just as quiet.

Robin sighs and drops a ballpoint back into the crate before sitting straighter. She offers Dean a small, sad smile. “They built a bomb.”

Dean blinks. “Bombs don’t kill vamps.”

“This one did. There was this chemist. A professor and researcher at Stanford, actually. You know they have one of the best chemistry departments in the world?” When Dean doesn’t answer, Robin continues. “We saved her from a student of hers that was a witch. She and my parents kept in touch, I guess. One thing led to another.”

“A bomb that kills vampires?”

“We used a bullet from the Colt. Broke it down to what it was made of—”
“The colt?”
“Yes.”
“No one knew where the colt was, then.”
“Daniel Elkins knew.”
“Yeah ‘cause he had it.”
“And we knew him.”
“So did my dad. He didn’t tell people he had it.”

Robin smiles at him again, a knowing little smile that reminds Dean she has a life and heritage he knows only what she’s told him. “Who do you think gave it to him to keep safe, Dean?”
“No… Your parents? Really?”
“My mom and her dad, actually. This was before my parents left Lawrence. I think before my mom even told my dad about the supernatural.” It makes sense that every generation of the First Family would have kept track of the colt’s whereabouts from the time Samuel had it.

Dean looks rattled for a moment and so Robin wait before getting into the nitty gritty. Well as nitty gritty as she could recall every understanding about the complex chemistry. She knew they’d used a bullet from the colt and an artificially replicated molecule that can be found in a dead person’s blood. Something about the hormones your body releases into the bloodstream post-mortem. She even tells him about the experimenting they had to do on vampires.

Robin leans forward again, one elbow planted on her knee while the other hand hangs between her legs to fiddle with different things in the crate. “The bomb took down the entire building and released a fabricated gas deadly to vamps. The heat generated by the bomb made the toxin spread faster. A matter of seconds fast. I was supposed to gun down any runaways but there were none. It was a good plan.”

“A bomb,” Dean repeats and lets out a low whistle. Innovative is right.
“It was set up for instant-detonation. There was no way around that,” Robin adds morosely. “I’m the best sniper they knew.”

_I pulled the trigger too soon_, is what Robin had said in the car.

“They weren’t out yet,” Dean states because it’s not a question.

“I thought they were. I received my cue.”

Robin won’t look at Dean and he wants her to so bad. He wants to look her in the eye when he tells her… when he tells her… _something_. He doesn’t know what. Doesn’t know how to help. But he wants to.

Robin keeps looking down, keeps poking at what’s in the crate. “What’s this?” Dean hears her ask as she reaches for something. It’s the last thing he hears, before a bright light emanates from Robin’s hand on what looks like a porcelain figurine. “Oh fuck.” The voice is drowned.

The light blinds, consuming the entire room. Dean can’t see. He can’t hear either. Not really. Only a strange sort of swishing sound, like that time when he and Sammys were kids and the motel they
were at had a pool to cannonball into.

The light recedes, almost as quickly as it came, fast enough that Dean doesn’t get the chance to react at all. When he blinks and can see, he doesn’t find Robin in her chair and it’s a lot like that time at the pool, when Sam took too long to resurface. Dean’s heart sinks but movement in his periphery catches his eye.

He turns to find Robin on the floor, back against the bed, gawking at her legs. Or at where her legs should be. There’s a fishtail now instead. She tilts her head down further and groans at the sight.

“Sea shells for a bra?” she exclaims, outraged.

Dean should be alarmed—he really really should be—but mostly he finds this hilarious so he laughs, instead. He keeps laughing when Robin tosses a pen at him… her fishtail flopping wildly.

Chapter End Notes

I am on the tumbz.

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