Nobody In Particular

by Lasarina

Summary

After Dean dies and ends up in Hell, Tabitha takes a break from the FBI in an effort to help out her only remaining brother. But when Dean mysteriously returns from the grave, she begins to find herself getting pulled back into the world she thought she'd left behind a long time ago. A world that now includes angels. And one in particular.
Supernatural is one of my absolute favorite TV shows, and I recently tried to read some of the fics for this fandom, but was amazed by the absolute volume of slash fics out there. But since they’re really not my thing, I dug harder looking for something more to my taste. And I was really surprised at how few good Castiel/OC fics there are. At least ones that I personally cared to read. And I really couldn't find much with a Winchester sister in it that appealed to me, either.

And I am one of those women that loves to stick a female OC into stories like this with a heavy male cast. There's a lot only a female character can bring to the story in my opinion. And as a sister myself, I just felt that those boys could definitely use one of their own.

So crazy fool that I am, I got an idea for my own story, and couldn't help but launch my own try in this fandom. Hopefully I can come up with something fresh and new. But I have to admit, I'm already kind of excited about this one. I think it'll be a blast to write.

Now, I'm not sure exactly how chapters are going to lay out from here. Mostly likely, I will kind of follow episodes, but I'm guessing some episodes will be split up into different chapters, while other chapters might have a few episodes spliced into them. And I know right now, that some episodes might be glossed over altogether if I don't feel the OC of my storyline really changes or adds anything to it. I'm not a huge believer in treading over the same old ground if it's not needed for a scene that I'm trying to write.

Warnings: Of course, by the nature of this storyline, it's going to be AU, but along with the nature of the guys, there will be adult language and content in this story. So that's my warning.

Oh, and I only give this warning once in a story: Anything you recognize isn't mine, I'm just playing with it, but promise to be gentle, and everything else is from my own warped mind.

Oh, and it's been a while since I've written third person, my last several were all first-person narrative, so forgive me if I'm a little rusty here at first with it. Hopefully I'll find my groove again.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 1: Lazarus Rising
"Bobby! We're out of bread again!" the woman yelled as she straightened from scouring the fridge. Several cabinet doors in the kitchen hung open, bearing testament to her fruitless pursuit. "Damn man never has anything but canned goods and beer in his kitchen," the woman muttered under her breath as she closed the dingy fridge door. "This whole place could use a truckload of Lysol, too. Or a match," she continued to herself.

"I heard that," the older man groused as he entered the kitchen, shutting the open cabinet doors after grabbing a can and tossing it through the air.

The woman snatched it neatly from its arcing path and read the label. "Pork and beans, Bobby? Is that all you ever eat?"

He shrugged and set a pan on the stove, taking the can back and emptying it into the pan. "Never know when I'm gonna have to skid-addle somewhere on a hunt. Fresh stuff doesn't last long when there's no one around to eat it." He walked over to the fridge and shoved several bottles of beer aside. "I think I've got some hot dogs we can have with this."

"Pork and beans and hot dogs," the woman sighed, "you really know how to show a girl a good
Bobby straightened with the package of hot dogs in his hands, a scowl on his face that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Now listen here, girlie, no one's forcing you to hang around enjoying my company. If you don't like my cooking, you can just skidaddle yourself. Not like I need you looking after me."

The woman's good mood instantly soured, the smile falling from her face. "No, you don't need me looking after you, Bobby. But I should have been here a lot sooner to look after my brothers."

Bobby's face softened. "I'm sorry, Tabitha, I didn't mean to bring up a touchy subject. You know how those boys are—" he paused, his own face darkening a bit, "—were, I suppose. But Sam's still the same. Can't tell that idgit anything. We've both tried, but he don't listen. And you can't blame yourself for that."

Tabitha paused, pushing her dirty blond hair over her shoulder. "But I do blame myself. I should have been there for them." Bobby stepped closer and placed his worn hand lovingly on the woman's arm, bared by the plain white tank top she wore.

"Those boys wanted you to have as normal of a life as you could. They were always so proud of you. A Winchester, walking the straight path of the law. Hell, a damn FBI agent. A real one, too. They didn't want to suck you into the mess we live in."

Tabitha sadly shook her head, tears gathering in her eyes though she refused to let them fall. "I should have said yes to Dean," she whispered so lowly that Bobby had to strain to hear it. "Yes about what?" he pressed.

Tabitha let out a soft sniffle, but still refused to give in to the tears threatening to fall, wiping angrily at her eyes to dispel them. "When Dad died and I came back for the funeral, he asked me to go with him and Sam. He asked me to start hunting with them again. But I was so upset about what Dad had done, and that none of them had told me what was going on with the demons and with Sam that I just shot him down. Told him I didn't want anything to do with this life and went back to Virginia. Dean and I never even got to talk again, and I only talked to Sam when they were really in a fix and needed me to cover their tracks using my connections."

Tabitha pulled away as more tears welled in her eyes, stabbing angrily at them as well as she gave Bobby her back and tried to compose herself. "I wasn't around when they needed me. When Sam died and Dean made that foolish deal with a demon. And now Dean's dead and in Hell." Her back shook with the effort to control herself, but she finally spun back to face Bobby and added, "And I'm trying to look after Sammy now, but how am I supposed to do that when he's running around, God knows where, on his own?"

Bobby stepped closer and pressed the package of hot dogs into Tabitha's hand. "First off, Tab, let's have some lunch, and then get back to researching for that fool Garth. Food always helps to settle emotions. And he needs to know what he's hunting up in Oregon." Tabitha nodded, but in a rare display, Bobby pulled the woman into his arms and held her tightly. "As for the boys," he whispered into her ear, fondly remembering when he'd once had to bend down to hug her, "they were both fully grown idgets, and capable of taking care of themselves—most of the time, anyway. But lord knows I've done my best and failed them, too. Best we can do for Sam is keep looking for him, hope he decides to come back to us, and try to be there for when he needs us."

Tabitha nodded her head and stepped out of Bobby's embrace. "I'll go out and put these on the grill," she told him, not looking up to meet his eyes.
She moved to step past the man who had been as much or more of a father to her and her brothers than their real father had been, but stopped when Bobby gently caught her chin with his hand, pulling her gaze back to his.

Tabitha had once had to look up into Bobby's eyes, but now looked across at him, their height nearly even. She wasn't especially tall for a woman, nowhere near her younger brother's height, but closer to that of her older brother's, meaning she wasn't short for a woman either.

"You don't have to keep hanging around here trying to keep an eye on Sam. You've got that job back east. It won't wait forever, I'm betting. You could get back to your life. I'll keep an eye on Sam. Best I can anyways," Bobby assured her.

But Tabitha smiled with grim determination. "No. I'm sticking around. At least until I feel better about Sam being out there on his own. I just can't help but feel that there's something wrong with him, Bobby. Something just didn't sit right with me the last time we saw him."

Tabitha smile and stepped closer to Bobby. "Besides, I know everything with Dean was hard on you, too. You shouldn't have to be alone, either. I still remember how to do research and answer phones, so I might as well hang around awhile and help you out. And I can keep helping you when you go out and hunt, too." As she stepped past, she paused to press a kiss to Bobby's whiskered cheek, and then quickly stepped outside onto the deck where Bobby kept his grill.

Bobby stood for several moments watching the empty doorway Tabitha had passed through, contemplating the middle Winchester sibling. His hand gently reached up to touch the spot she'd kissed. It had been as uncharacteristic as his hug had been. The girl wasn't normally any more given to displays of emotion than he was.

And while Bobby had always loved the three Winchester children as if they were his own, with Tabitha it had been different. John had left her with Bobby far more frequently than he'd left the boys, fearing more for the safety of his only daughter than either of the boys on dangerous hunts. And while Tabitha had always been spitting mad at being separated from her brothers, she'd also loved the chance to stay in one place for a while.

The girl had always had a thirst for knowledge, not unlike her younger brother in that regard, but she had been the one John most frequently singled out to leave behind with Bobby. Though in Bobby's opinion, he should have kept those boys further from all the hunting that he dragged them into, as well. It was no place for any children, boys or girls.

Grabbing another beer from the fridge, Bobby smiled at the thought of how nice it was to have Tabitha's presence in his home again. Even if she was always griping about his food choices and his cluttered house. The old place just didn't feel so big and empty with her around.

Still, he knew he'd give anything to figure out a way to get her to leave again and go back to the life she'd made back east. It had been one thing he thought him and both the boys had agreed on. That Tabitha was better off out of the hunting life and living the law and order one. It had been a shock to him that Dean had actually tried to talk her into joining them again.

Bobby shook his head as he drained the last of the bottle. Maybe it had been a moment of family nostalgia that had had Dean asking her to join them again. Because Dean had been the most adamant that Tabitha wasn't to know anything about what was going on with his demon deal. Even Sam had seemed reluctant to call his sister after they had failed to find an out for Dean and he'd been drug to Hell. It had been Bobby who had been forced to call Tabitha home for Dean's burial.

He pushed the memory away, listening to Tabitha sing off-pitch to some song on the radio as she
grilled. Bobby would do everything in his power to find a way to convince her to get back to her "normal" life, but that didn't mean he couldn't enjoy having her around again in the meantime.

Tabitha stood over the charcoal grill, occasionally lifting the lid to turn the hot dogs so they wouldn't burn, and singing along to the radio. She didn't listen to much classic rock anymore, but singing along to AC/DC's *You Shook Me All Night Long*, made her think of her brother. And for once, they were good memories that made her smile. So she pushed everything else away and belted out to AC/DC, forgetting for the moment about all of her regrets and wishes, and thinking of all the good times she'd shared with both of her brothers instead.

She was still humming the AC/DC song as she entered the side door from the deck. "Hot dogs are ready, Bobby!" she yelled out.

But as she closed the side door, she heard a knock at the front door. Balancing the plate of hot dogs she called out again, "I'll get it, Bobby!"

Still humming, she pulled open the door. "Can I help—"

The words died in her throat as the plate fell from her fingers, landing on the floor amidst a loud shattering of the Corel plate.

"What the hell are you doing here, at Bobby's, Tab?"

Tabitha stood in shocked silence, staring at the figure of the brother they'd planted in the ground four months before.

"What's going on?" Bobby started to ask as he rounded the corner to investigate the commotion. He instantly grabbed Tabitha by the shoulder and shoved the woman behind him before lunging forward with a knife.

"Jesus, Bobby! What are you doing? That's Dean!" Tabitha yelled as her brother fought with Bobby, trying to disarm him.

But despite his age, Bobby was still wily, and turned into Dean as her brother tried to take the knife from his hand, punching Dean in the face. "My ass, Tab. That's not your brother."

He advanced on Dean even as Tabitha tried to grab at Bobby's arm and slow him down.

Dean quickly took advantage and pushed a chair between him and the still advancing Bobby. "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Wait!" Dean insisted. Holding up a placating hand, he said, "Your name is Robert Steven Singer. You became a hunter after your wife got possessed. You're about the closest thing I have to a father."

Dean cautiously stood up straighter and softly added, "Bobby… it's me."

Bobby seemed to relax, and Tabitha relinquished her grip on the man, moving to step past him, her path aiming for her long-lost brother. But Bobby suddenly pushed her back once more and made another lunge at Dean.

"Dammit, Bobby! It's Dean, can't you see that?" Tabitha growled. Part of her knew Bobby's fears, but her heart told her this was her brother. Only Dean could inflect such love and disapproval all together into the single word of her nickname, Tab.

But Dean easily slipped by Bobby once more. "Listen to her! I'm not a shapeshifter!"
"Then you're a revenant!"

Dean slipped behind Bobby, twisting his arm and taking the knife from him.

He pushed Bobby away and held his hands and the knife out. "All right," he calmly told them. "If I was either, would I do this with a silver knife?" And then he drew the blade across his arm, a thin trickle of blood welling along its path.

"Dean?" Bobby whispered.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you."

Tabitha finally pushed past Bobby and threw her arms around her brother. The tears that she had held at bay for four long months now spilling over as her brother easily returned her hug.

"Ouch, Tab. Ease up," he chuckled in her ear. And though he tried to laugh it off, she heard the thread of pain underneath.

"You're hurt?" she asked pulling back, and then just as quickly followed with, "How are you even alive? What happened? Where have you been? How'd you get out?"

"One question at a time, Tab. I'm just a little sore." Dean paused and looked down at her. "Are you crying, Tab? I don't think I've ever seen you cry before."

She wiped away at the moisture with embarrassment. "Well, my brother just got back from Hell. I think I'm allowed a few tears."

But as she spoke, Bobby pushed by her and pulled Dean into his own bear hug, ignoring the soft "uff" of pain from Dean.

Tabitha took the opportunity to look her brother over. His skin and clothes were streaked with dirt, and she realized now that his voice had seemed deeper and more gravelled than usual.

"What happened, Dean?" she asked again.

Her brother pulled away from Bobby.

"I don't know, I just woke up in this pine bo—" His words were cut off as water splashed in his face.

"Bobby, enough!" Tabitha growled.

Dean turned his head and casually spit out some of the holy water. "I'm not a demon, either, you know."

Bobby shrugged. "Sorry. Can't be too careful."

"Dean," Tabitha repeated, trying to return his attention to the previous question. "What happened?"

"It's a long story," Dean admitted with a tired sigh, running his dirty hand through his hair.

But the action caught Tabitha's attention, and she reached out to pull Dean's hand down between her own.

"What happened to your hands, Dean?" she gasped, staring at the bloody, cut up mess in her grip. "You look like you went ten rounds with a blender."
Her brother laughed bitterly as he stared at his hands. "Guess that's what happens when you have to claw your way out of your own coffin."

As he spoke, he raised one hand to his lips, and then closed his teeth around the side of his hand as he tried to pull a splinter out.

Tabitha yanked the hand away from his mouth. "Dammit, Dean. Don't use your teeth. I'll clean them up. Go sit at the table," she commanded, needing the opportunity to gather her thoughts and consider her brother's words.

When she'd returned to the table with all her supplies: Bobby's first aid kit, two bowls—one empty, and one with water—rags, and a bottle of whiskey. She set them down and then sat in the chair across the corner of the table from her brother.

He looked at all the supplies on the table and grinned, finally reminding Tabitha of the carefree brother she'd once known. "Gonna play doctor, Tab? Wrong profession, I thought you played cops and robbers now."

"I've played doctor enough times with you guys," she retorted. "Besides, they even teach ya a little something about first aid and wound treatment when you become an FBI agent."

"Glad to hear ya learned something useful then, besides getting in the way of guys like me doing the real work."

Tabitha ignored the jab and yanked her brother's hands over the empty bowl, unceremoniously pouring some of the whiskey over his bloody fingers and knuckles.

"Jesus, Tabby! Could ya be at least a little gentle with your big brother?" he exclaimed, trying to jerk his hands away.

But his sister held tight and began to carefully dab at his hands with a wet rag, trying to wipe some of the grime away, even as she smiled at her childhood nickname. One she never thought to hear again.

"Waste of perfectly good whiskey anyway," he complained.

"Stop being a baby, Dean," his sister replied as she focused on her work. "These cuts are filthy, they need to be disinfected."

Dean grunted in return. "Yeah, wouldn't want something like a little infection to kill me."

Tabitha's hands froze in her work, her eyes squeezing shut at the painful reminder that her brother had indeed already been dead. And killed by something far worse than a simple infection.

Her brother sighed and replied in an apologetic tone, "I'm sorry, Tabby. I shouldn't have said that."

She merely nodded in return as Bobby sat next to Dean. With careful hands, she picked up her tweezers and began pulling the bits of splinters out of his fingers and knuckles.

"So, tell us what happened," Bobby encouraged.

Over the next hour, Dean carefully explained what had happened since he'd awoken in his coffin, stopped many times with questions from Bobby, who was now pacing in the kitchen as he and Dean tried to figure out what could have pulled Dean out of Hell.

"What do you remember?" Bobby was asking.
"Not much," Dean answered as Tabitha smeared some ointment on his knuckles. "I remember I was a hellhound's chew toy, and then, lights-out. Then I come to six feet under. That was it."

Tabitha released her brother's hands and watched as he examined them. He nodded to her in thanks. Dean turned back to Bobby as he changed gears. "Sam's number's not working. He's uh—he's not…" he trailed off.

"Oh, he's alive, as far as we know," Bobby hastened to assure Dean.

"Good," Dean nodded, standing and pacing. "Wait. What do you mean, 'As far as you know?'"

"We haven't talked to him for months," Bobby started.

"You're kidding? You just let him go off by himself?" Dean asked. He turned and rounded on his sister. "Why didn't you stop him? Why didn't you watch out for him?"

Bobby stood to defend himself and Tabitha. "He was dead set on it. There was nothing either of us could do to stop him. Lord knows, we both tried."

"Bobby, you should have been looking after him. You both should have."

"We tried," Bobby crossly answered.

Tabitha stood and stepped between the two men, angry with her brother for rounding on her when she'd been doing her best. "These last few months haven't exactly been easy for us, Dean. I didn't even know anything was wrong until Bobby called me out of the clear blue and told me you had sold your soul to a demon and had ended up in Hell. You know, something like that would have been nice to have a heads-up on. Maybe a call to say, 'Hey, how's your day? Mine's good, ya know, just sold my soul for a one-way ticket to the big show in Hell.'"

She pushed on her brother's chest to punctuate her words, but Dean stepped around her to stand in front of Bobby.

"Yeah, about that, I left clear instruction to keep Tabitha out of this whole mess."

"What? Did you expect me to just never tell her that her brother was dead?" Bobby growled back, stepping closer to Dean.

"Yeah, that's what I expected."

"Oh, bullshit, Dean," Tabitha exploded. "I had a right to know. I had a right to know what was going on a helluva lot sooner than I did, too."

Dean swung back to face his sister. "I was trying to give you what you wanted. You wanted out, and I was trying to make sure you could stay out."

Tabitha stalked closer to her brother, jabbing a finger in his chest as she spoke. "Don't you dare use against me something I said the day we burned Dad. I was mad and upset. But I had a right to know what was going on with you, Dean." She stepped away and paced in front of her brother, ignoring his glower. "As a matter of fact, there's going to be a new Winchester family rule: anytime one of you fool men do something so idiotic, like, I don't know, say, sell your soul to a demon, the first call you better make is to inform your sister of what you've done. And I don't care if you have to use a carrier pigeon, find a friendly ghost, or use a damn Ouija board to get the message to me, but somehow, someone better be getting the message to Tabitha."
Dean visibly forced himself to calm. "Tab, I'm sorry, but truth is, I felt bad for ever asking you to come with us after Dad's funeral. It was wrong. Dad and me, hell, even Bobby, we were all just so glad when you and Sam left and went to college. And when you became an FBI agent, you should have seen Dad in the crowd, grinning his fool head off. We were all so proud of you, and all we wanted was for you to stay out of this world. Stay safe."

"Dean, I work as an FBI field agent," Dean's face twisted in surprise, but Tabitha fired on before he could say anything. "Not for the Girl Scouts. And I can take care of myself and make my own decisions. Besides even though I turned you down at the time, I saw how desperately you wanted me to come with you guys, so don't tell me you don't want me around now."

"Of course I want you around, Tab. You're family. But that doesn't change the fact that you're packing your bags and going back to your life in Virginia," Dean insisted, pointing a scolding finger at his younger sister.

But Tabitha stayed planted in her position, arms folded across her chest in defiance. "That may have worked when we were kids, Dean, but I'm twenty-seven years old, a grown woman, and I'm not going anywhere until I'm ready."

Dean quickly turned to Bobby for help. "Can you believe this, Bobby? Help me out."

Instead of leaping to the eldest Winchester's aid, Bobby grabbed two more beers from the fridge and handed one to Dean. "'Fraid I'm not much help. I've been trying to get her to get outta my hair for weeks. She just won't take a hint." He grinned as he spoke, trying to diffuse the situation with some humor.

Tabitha smiled scornfully. "At least I cleaned the bathrooms in this place and washed the sheets on the beds in the bedrooms. I think there was mildew starting to grow on your mildew in the bathroom."

"Enough of this. You and I will discuss this later," Dean sighed as he walked out of the room. "I'm gonna track down Sam. You know anything about where Sam went, Bobby?"

Dean and Bobby trailed into the other room, talking about how Sam had taken off and Dean's suspicion that Sam had had something to do with bringing him back.

Tabitha listened carefully from the kitchen as she gathered up bloody rags to throw away and cleaned the table off. But when Dean admitted he was certain that Sam had done something or made a deal to bring him back, she sat down hard in one of the chairs, shocked by the realization that Dean might be right. Bringing their brother back and "fixing" things, had been all her younger brother had talked about.

With a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, Tabitha removed the forgotten pork and beans from the stove and set them aside, reaching instead for a glass and snagging the open bottle of whiskey off the table as she followed her brother's and Bobby's voices into the other room.

Dean was pacing back and forth with the phone receiver pressed to his ear. "What do you mean, 'you can't trace the cell phone?"' Dean angrily asked into the phone. He paused and then continued, "Well, why can't you just turn on the GPS?" Upon hearing the answer, Dean slammed the receiver back onto the holder of the old telephone in his hand.

He looked up at Bobby and angrily explained, "They said the GPS was disabled on that number. Why the hell would he do that?"
Tabitha glanced at the glass in one hand and the bottle in her other. She finally set the glass down on a stack of books and took a long swig from the bottle as she leaned against the doorway. The whiskey burned in an old familiar ache down her throat, but she paused long enough to say, "He disabled the GPS in his cell after the last time I used it to track him down and talk to him."

The two men turned to face her.

"You've seen Sam since he took off?" Bobby incredulously asked. When Tabitha nodded, he thundered on. "Well why in tarnation didn't you say anything to me? I knew you went out looking for him several times, but you never said nothing 'bout finding the idget!"

Dean stepped closer, the old landline phone forgotten in his hand. "You know where Sam is?"

Tabitha took a sip and carefully explained, "No. I don't know where he is at the moment. I went after him about six weeks after he first took off. Found him in some little town not far from where you were buried, and I confronted him. Begged him to come back and stay with Bobby and me for a while. But he was so mad that I came after him and tracked him down." Tabitha paused and took a longer swig before she continued in a softer voice. "He scared me, Dean. Didn't seem like he was in the right frame of mind. Said he'd been hunting demons and was looking for Lilith. I told him how worried I was about him, but the best I could get out of him was a promise to call every couple of weeks. And he has. He's called me every two weeks or so. It's the best I could do for now."

Dean slammed the telephone in his hand down on Bobby's desk. Tabitha jumped at the noise, but couldn't blame her brother for his anger.

"So he got pissed at you for following him and disabled the GPS in his phone, and all you got out of him was a promise to check in every couple of weeks. Great," Dean growled.

Bobby crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes on Tabitha. "You've been in contact with him this whole time and didn't say a thing to me?" he asked in low, harsh tones.

Tabitha took another long swallow, finally starting to feel some delicious numbness from the whole situation of the afternoon. "He made me promise not to, Bobby. I think he was afraid you'd drag him back if you could find him. I was trying baby-steps to get through to him, guys. If I could get him to trust me enough to call every couple of weeks, I was hoping in time I'd be able to talk him into coming back on his own."

"So your idea was to wish and hope that he might someday come back. That is if he didn't get himself killed or do something stupid like make another deal to bring me back," Dean bit out.

Tabitha's eyes shut painfully as she automatically brought the bottle to her lips again. But before she felt the wetness of the whiskey touch her lips, the bottle was ripped from her hand.

"And since when are you drinking like a fish?" he demanded as he held the bottle and the remaining whiskey in front of Tabitha's face.

"You're going to lecture me about drinking?" she asked, but didn't try to take the bottle back.

Dean grumbled under his breath and drained the last of the bottle in one long gulp.

"Look, I can still find Sam as long as he's using that number, and he was the last time he called," Tabitha explained.

"How? And when was the last time he called?" Dean asked.
"Few days ago."

"Well, can you call him back?" Dean pressed.

"He never answers when I call and he doesn't have voicemail on that number," Tabitha admitted.

"Great! Just fantastic, Tab. So, what? We have to wait around for a few weeks for him to call again? Great plan," he growled as he returned to pacing.

Tabitha pushed away from the doorway, slipping her own cellphone from her pocket. "You seem to forget that I'm an FBI agent, Dean. That is, you forget unless you need me to help clean up your trail or find someone that can sneak you out of a damned prison in some foolish scheme of yours, but I do have a few other tricks up my sleeve."

"Like what?"

But Tabitha was already dialing a number from the contacts in her cellphone, ignoring her brother's angry question.

"Hey, Chip," she cheerfully spoke into the phone. "Did I catch you at a bad time?"

"Naw, Tabitha. It's never a bad time for you to call me. How's your leave going? You clearing up whatever this emergency family problem was? When you coming back to grace us with your beautiful presence?"

Tabitha smiled fondly into the phone at his dramatics. "That's actually what I was calling you about. I'm still helping to clean up some family problems, so I'm not sure when my leave will be done. But my aunt has had her hands full with my cousin, and I've been trying to help her with him and get him cleaned up, but he took off again, and I promised her I'd find him and get him back into rehab. But he's not answering his phone and he already disabled his GPS chip trying to keep me from tracking him down."

There was a long silence on the end of the line.

"What is it you want me to do, Tabitha? You know using government resources for family trouble like this is illegal, not to mention I could get my ass in a lot of trouble or fired."

"Come on, Chip. We both know this kind of thing goes on all the time. I just need you to trace the number and see what cellphone towers his last call pinged. I'll track him from there. If anyone finds out, I'll say I forged paperwork for you to do it."

Another silence followed. "You're gonna owe me for this, Tabitha. I'm talking big time, like finally let me take you out on a date sometime, gorgeous."

Dean had been standing close to listen in and frowned at the last part. "What the hell—"

But Tabitha pushed him away and silently shushed him.

"Someone there with you, Tabitha?"

"Nope. Just the TV," Tabitha quickly assured him. Couldn't have one of the tech guys getting suspicious or think they were hearing one of her famous duo outlaw—and dead—brothers on the line with her. "Tell you what, Chip. Next time I've got some free time in the office, you can take me out to lunch."
Dean glared daggers at his younger sister, but stayed silent as she relayed the number and waited for the location.

When she’d hung up and given her brother the slip of paper with the approximate location on it, he took it and gave a strict order. "I don't care how grown up you are, no sister of mine is trading sexual favors for getting information for me."

"Good God, Dean!" she exclaimed. "I told the guy I 'might' have lunch with him sometime. He wasn't asking for sex."

"Yeah, it starts with asking for lunch or dinner or drinks or something, and always ends up in the bedroom. That's what he's really looking for," Dean crossly insisted.

"You don't know that's what he wants," Tabitha replied, rolling her eyes at her brother's absolute sureness. "You don't even know the man."

"Of course it is. It's what I'd want. And I'm a guy. I know how we think when there's a hot chick involved," he maintained.

She shook her head but couldn't help the smile that finally creeped up on her. She looked down at her plain white tank and old worn jeans. Not exactly hot, but like her brothers, she was trim and athletic, and she knew she wasn't hard on the eyes, either. "Thanks for the lesson on men, Dean. I'm sure you're a real expert on the crap men pull," she teased. It had been a long time since she'd felt the protective wrath of her older brother. Confining though it was, she found she had strangely missed it.

"Let's go find Sam," she finally told the two men.

The three walked into the motel in Pontiac, Illinois together. It was a classic run-down no-tell-motel. Just the kind her brothers favored for staying below the radar.

The fact that Sam was so close to where Dean had been buried did nothing to settle Tabitha's nerves and the uneasy feeling that Sam actually might have had something to do with bringing Dean back.

"He can't be that stupid," Tabitha whispered to herself.

"'Course he can," Dean answered back, knowing what his sister had meant. He raised his hand to knock on the motel room door as he continued, "He's Sammy."

The door swung open and a brunette in a tank top and her underwear stood in the doorway. "So, where is it?" the woman asked.

Dean looked around as Tabitha hung back nervously in the hallway. "Where's what?" Dean asked the woman.

"The pizza that takes three people to deliver."

"I think we've got the wrong room," Dean answered.

As the woman began shutting the door, they saw Sam stride out of the bathroom.

But he stopped dead at the sight in the hallway.

"Hey, ya, Sammy," Dean called in an almost fond tone.

The brothers stepped closer to each other, but then Sam suddenly pulled a knife from his pocket and
lunged at his older brother. All while shouting, "Who are you?"

Bobby and Tabitha jumped forward as well, each grabbing one of Sam's arms as they tried to push him back.

"Like you didn't do this?" Dean accused.

"Do what?"

"Sam, please stop," Tabitha pleaded. "It's him. It's really him."

Bobby jumped to back Tabitha up. "I've been through this already. It's really him."

"But…"

"I know," Dean said, walking forward. "I look fantastic, huh?" he laughed.

Sam stepped forward again and wrapped his brother in his arms, holding him close for several moments.

When they stepped apart, the forgotten woman tentatively asked, "So, are you two, like… together?"

"What? No," Sam laughed, and then Tabitha noted a strange look pass across his face as he looked at the woman. "No," he repeated. "He's my brother."

"O-oh," she stammered. "And them?" she gestured towards Tabitha and Bobby standing nearby.

Sam laughed more. "That's my sister, and the closest thing I've got to a father."

"Got it… I-I guess," the woman continued stammering. "Look, I should probably go."

"Yeah, yeah. That's probably a good idea. Sorry," he apologized and then helped gather her clothes and walk her to the door.

Tabitha elbowed her older brother as he they watched Sam from across the room. "Stop looking so damn proud and impressed with him. If that had been me, you'd be livid."

Dean's face darkened as he narrowed his eyes on his sister as they leaned side-by-side against the wall. "If that was you, I'd kill the guy and lock you in Bobby's basement."

Tabitha leaned her head back against the wall and grimly laughed, "Glad to know the gender-bias is still alive and well in the Winchester family."

Tabitha continued to keep her eyes closed as she grimly listened to Bobby and Dean demand from Sam what he'd done. Her stomach dropping as Sam admitted all the things he'd tried to do to bring Dean back, but apparently to no avail.

Eventually the four were sitting around the motel room as Sam passed out bottles of beer, discussing what Sam had been doing in Pontiac. When it finally came out that the demons Sam had been hunting in Tennessee had taken a hard turn and ended up in Pontiac, they couldn't help but wonder if it was related.

"Why?" Bobby wondered.

"Well, I don't know," Dean answered. "Some badass demon drags me out, and now this? It's got to be connected somehow."
Tabitha leaned forward and rolled the empty beer bottle between her hands. "I'm not much of a believer in coincidence myself," she agreed.

"How you feeling, anyway?" Bobby curiously asked Dean.

"I'm a little hungry."

"No, I mean, do you feel like yourself? Anything strange or different?" Bobby asked.

"Or demonic?" Dean added. "Bobby, how many times do I have to prove I'm me?"

"Yeah, well, listen—no demon's letting you loose out of the goodness of their hearts. They gotta have something nasty planned," Bobby replied.

Tabitha abruptly stood, unintentionally drawing the attention of the men around her. "Look, I'm gonna go downstairs and go get some fresh air," she told them, and quickly walked away before they could stop her. She knew everything they were discussing was valid and reasonable, but she couldn't help the silent prayer that everything could just be okay for a few moments in their lives. That neither of her brothers were wrapped up in demon troubles or deals that led to Hell or something even nastier. The threat of that other shoe waiting to drop was enough to eat through her last nerve.

But she wouldn't let herself fall apart. So instead, she paced around Bobby's car in the parking lot. Dean's, or rather, most recently, Sam's Impala, was parked nearby, but looked no different than when it had been Dean's. Or even their father's. It helped bring a smile to her face to see the familiar family car, but it didn't completely settle her nerves as she continued pacing. Trying her best to convince herself that enough bad had been thrown in the direction of her family. Surely they'd reached their quota of bad.

Hadn't they?

Sometime later, the three men came out of the motel and walked into the parking lot. Tabitha was still leaning against Bobby's Chevelle, her hands shoved into the pockets of her worn leather coat.

The boys stopped by the Impala, looking questioningly at Tabitha.

"What's up, guys?" she asked instead of answering their questioning looks.

"Got a psychic friend up the interstate about four hours," Bobby answered. "Figured we'd go see if she could give us any answers."

The boys continued to wait by the Impala.

"You ridin' with us, Tab?" Dean finally asked.

She shook her head. "Naw. You and Sammy need time to catch up. I'll ride with Bobby."

Dean merely nodded, but Sam seemed grateful to have the time alone with his older brother.

Tabitha and Bobby had driven in silence for some time before the silence in the car was broken.

"Surprised you didn't want to ride with your brothers," Bobby casually commented.

"They needed the time together," Tabitha answered. "They've always been close."

"But so were you," Bobby reminded. "Close with both of them. I figured after everything that
happened, you wouldn't want to let either one of them out of your sight."

Tabitha's eyes cut across the car to look at Bobby. "That was a long time ago, Bobby. It's been just the boys now for so long. And yeah, I don't want to let them out of my sight, but they needed time with just each other. It's only fair."

"Have something to do with why you bolted from that motel room when we were talking?"

Tabitha turned away to watch out the window at the darkened landscape passing. Only scattered lights marked where farmsteads sat back from the interstate. Lonely beacons to a shrinking population of rural people.

"I just needed some air, Bobby."

"It's not too late for you to head back to that job of yours in Virginia," Bobby told her, watching as her head snapped back to face him. "The boys are back together and as safe as they ever are. You don't have to drag yourself into this."

"Something drug Dean out of Hell, Bobby. And we don't have a clue what, or why." She turned away again. "I'm staying," she spoke to the window.

Bobby sighed heavily as the silence continued for nearly an hour. He'd almost thought Tabitha was asleep, but the slightest movements from time to time told him she was awake.

"You never told me before that you were a field agent," he commented.

She jerked back towards him in surprise, seeming startled by the sudden topic.

"Back at my place," Bobby clarified. "You told Dean that you were a field agent with the FBI. You've never told any of us that. To be honest, after all the times I called you to help me out with covering the tracks of the boys or some other hunter, I just kept picturing you working a desk."

She stared at him for several moments before she responded. "I've always worked in the field," she simply answered.

"Why didn't you ever tell us that? I know Dean was as surprised as I was," Bobby tried pressing again.

"None of you ever asked," Tabitha responded, and turned back towards the window again.

"Come on, Tabitha," Bobby sighed in exasperation. "I'm asking now. We may not have asked before, but you weren't exactly volunteering it, either."

She turned back with a self-deprecating sigh. "I know, Bobby. I know. I guess, I just didn't see the point in talking about it. I grew up in a hunter family. I know just what hunters think about law enforcement. So I never saw much point in talking about it to you guys. I was happy to help you and the other hunters out when I could, but I swear, sometimes I spent more time at a desk covering tracks for some hunter than I did at a desk doing my own casework."

Bobby gave her a guilty smile. "I guess I never considered how often me or the boys might have been calling you to clean something up. You never said anything." He drove silently for a while. "Guess we weren't exactly doing our best to keep you out of this world after all."

Tabitha turned and placed a gentle hand on Bobby's arm, smiling when his rough hand reached over to cover hers. "I was glad to do it, Bobby. I guess, a part of me always felt guilty for leaving and
trying to have a normal life while I knew what was really out there and what you guys were hunting. I was happy to help. Even if at the same time, I could lie to myself and tell myself that I was really out of this world and had nothing to do with it. That just because I was helping cover your tracks and not actually seeing and touching this world, that I wasn't a part of it. But I still was, and I was lying to myself to say that I wasn't. I've always been a part of this world. I can't escape it. And when I think about all the stuff you and Sam said you guys have been through since he left school…"

Tabitha trailed off as her voice grew thick. "Dean and I both promised Dad we'd watch after Sammy. Dean and I did it together for so long, and when Sam left and wanted to go to school, I promised Dean I'd go with him and look after him."

Tabitha paused as she pulled her hand away from Bobby's, turning in her seat to more fully face the man that would always be her father in her heart.

"But then I got caught up in my own college dreams, and then career. And when I heard that Sammy had left to go hunting with Dean again, I just shrugged it off and continued on with my own life. But I should have been there for them, Bobby. They're my brothers. Sam died, Bobby, and then Dean did, and now he just got back from Hell. And where was I?"

"Living your life ain't something to feel regret over," Bobby softly insisted.

"It is if you were just hiding from where you knew in your heart you should have been all along."

Bobby had nothing more he could argue at the moment, and Tabitha turned back to staring out at the dark landscape.

It was morning when the two cars pulled into the yard of Bobby's psychic friend. All four of them slowly stretching as they exited their cars.

Bobby was the first to walk up to the door of the small white farmhouse. Shortly after the knock on the door, an attractive woman yanked it open, excitedly laughing as she greeted Bobby with a bear hug, somehow managing to lift the man completely off his feet.

The boys stood back looking both surprised, and interested in the woman. But Tabitha laughed, finding that she was already impressed with the jovial woman and had an instant liking for her.

"You're a sight for sore eyes," Bobby told the woman after she'd set him down.

The woman immediately turned her bright gaze on the three siblings. "So, is this them?" she asked Bobby.

Bobby turned to make introductions, nodding to each of them as he went. "Sam, Dean, Tabitha—Pamela Barnes. Best damn psychic in the state."

The three siblings offered their hellos as Pamela looked the brothers up and down. Tabitha found she didn't mind—she was used to it after all—but Pamela didn't look them up and down with a predatory look like most women did. As with everything else Tabitha could sense about the woman, she seemed to look them over with more of humorous eye. As though finding some great cosmic joke in the sight of the boys, but reveling in the sheer pleasure of some irony only she could see.

"Mmm, mmm, mmm." She turned her laughing eyes on Bobby. But he only smiled back, as though he took humor in the same joke only the two seemed to share.

Pamela turned back to the oldest brother. "Dean Winchester. Out of the fire and back in the frying pan, huh? Makes you a rare individual."
"If you say so."

"Come on in," she welcomed them all.

Soon Pamela was setting up her supplies for a séance. Something Tabitha had to admit was a new one to her. But she'd never spent time around any psychics, and wouldn't have put much stock in them if not for Bobby's insistence that she was the real deal.

As Pamela gathered the things she needed, and the boys stood around gawking at the poor woman, Tabitha wandered around the now darkened room. Taking note of the strange paintings on the wall and the stacks of occult books scattered about.

Tabitha smiled to herself as Pamela flirted not just with Dean, but Sam as well, throwing them both for a loop.

"It's all in good fun," Pamela suddenly said from beside her.

Tabitha looked over from the book she'd picked up and was perusing. "I'm sure it is," she answered with a laugh. "I can see that sparkle in your eye that says you enjoy tweaking them. But I can also tell that you wouldn't say no if one of them took you up on your offer."

Pamela's cheeks brightened just a bit, but she still laughed good-naturedly. "No, I guess I wouldn't."

The laughing brunette grabbed one of the books from the pile in front of them, asking, "So, what's your deal? I've heard about Sam and Dean over the years, of course. But didn't know they had a sister. You been hiding in a closet somewhere?"

Tabitha chuckled at the thought. "Naw, not unless you call the FBI a closet."

Pamela stopped and stared at the lighter haired woman, looking her over with new eyes. "You're a Fed?"

Tabitha looked down at herself. She wasn't dressed all that differently than the other woman. She wore a light tan tank top, worn jeans with frayed hems, and heavy biker boots.

"They don't make us wear the FBI suit all the time," she laughed.

"Yeah, but, how's it work being a Fed with those two for brothers?" she asked, jerking a thumb over her shoulder. "Or does it help them that you can pull strings and hide messes?"

"Yeah, that's part of it," she admitted.

"Must get complicated, what with their past with the Feds and supposedly being dead now. How'd you avoid scrutiny after that?" Pamela continued, as she bent down to gather what looked like herbs from a lower shelf.

Tabitha felt her brothers straining harder to listen to their conversation now, but ignored it and continued her companionable conversation with the psychic.

"Oh, I was under a lot of scrutiny there for a while. Only time I've been forced to play desk-jockey, but they couldn't find any trace of me having been in contact with my brothers in years—luckily I'd managed to hide that trail well enough—and then after I had been carefully watched, well, they 'died,'" she said, using air-quotes, "and they had no reason to suspect me of anything or keep me out of the field. So I went back out on field duty."
Pamela laughed in that carefree manner again. "And little do they know, your brothers are alive and kickin'." She nodded her head appreciatively at the other woman. "Crafty. So what exactly do you do for the Feds? Law and order types aren't something I know a lot about. Least not from that side of things," she grinned.

Tabitha set the book she'd been glancing through down and leaned back against the bookshelf, shoving her hands in her pockets as she spoke. "I work in the CID, the Criminal Investigation Division, specifically in the Violent Crimes Section."

"Damn. Sounds important. So you like hunt down serial killers and stuff like that?" the dark-haired woman asked.

"Stuff like that," Tabitha noncommittally agreed.

"I can respect that," Pamela agreed. "Have to admit, FBI and all law enforcement types are normally a bunch of those guys we hate, but don't really know anything about. At least you don't seem so bad for a Fed."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Tabitha laughed.

Pamela moved away to place her supplies on the round table in the center of the room, but like a shark, Dean circled closer to round on Tabitha.

"You work violent crimes? Like what, murders and stuff?" he demanded.

"Yeah, Dean. Murders, manslaughter, rape, robbery. Anything that involves a violent crime," she agreed, tensing for the fight she could feel coming.

"So it's dangerous?"

"Well, it's not 'drag me to Hell' dangerous, but there is some danger involved, yeah."

"Soon as you get back to Virginia, you're taking a desk position or getting a different job altogether," her older brother ordered.

Tabitha looked towards her younger brother, hoping for some solidarity. "Back me up, Sam. This is ridiculous. I've been doing this job for a while, now. I'm fine." She turned back to Dean. "And you can't tell me what to do. We're not kids anymore."

Sam broke in before Dean could speak. "Well, it does sound pretty dangerous what you're doing, Tab. You never even told us what you did at the FBI."

Tabitha threw her hands up in exasperation, also casting a glare at Bobby, who merely shrugged. "I can't believe you men. None of you have ever cared to ask before. Did you guys really think that just because Dad was so dead-set on being sexist and trying to always keep me out of the worst hunts, that the rest of the world operates that way, too? I work for the FBI. You guys should know better. You impersonate Feds on a weekly basis."

"She's got a point, Dean," Sam agreed. "We have just kind of gone along with Dad's belief and never questioned it. Besides, you know Tab's tough. Dad did train her beside both of us."

"Thank you!" Tabitha exclaimed.

"We'll talk about this later," Dean muttered, turning back to watch Pamela.
"Yeah, after more important stuff, like finding out who has got an interest in your ass and just why," Tabitha called after him.

"Well, it's a nice ass," Pamela commented, setting another bowl on the table and gesturing them all to sit in the seats gathered around it.

Tabitha shot the other woman a smile for trying to diffuse the situation, to which the psychic discreetly winked.

As they sat at the table, Pamela directed them to join hands, but Dean wasn't done muttering at the sister plunked between her two brothers.

"When the hell did you get so difficult?" he muttered as he took her hand.

"When the hell did you get so bossy?" she fired back as she grabbed his and squeezed hard.

"Come one guys," Sam laughed as he took her other hand. "This feels weird for me to be the peace-keeper. That's supposed to be your job, Tab."

Tabitha took his hand as well, but didn't respond to his statement.

"Idgets," Bobby complained under his breath, and the three Winchesters did finally smile.

Tabitha took a deep breath as she closed her eyes, not really paying attention to Pamela's words as the psychic talked to Dean and then began her séance. To Tabitha's way of thinking, it was likely to be a waste of time, but at least the quiet of the room was enough for her to calm her thoughts. She laughingly wondered to herself if this was more like yoga with all the quiet and mental centering.

At least until the room and everything in it started shaking. Tabitha sat up straighter as it felt like a jolt of electricity went through her. As the room and all of the objects around them shook and shuttered, Tabitha could feel that vibration of power pulsing through her every nerve ending.

She knew Pamela was still talking, but a high-pitched whine began to fill her ears. Tabitha tried to wrench her hands away to cover her ears, but her brothers held them tight.

Finally, the high pitch gave way and Tabitha could hear normal words again.

"I am Castiel."

The power in the room still vibrated with such intensity that Tabitha felt like she was holding a live wire. Or perhaps that one was running all the way through her body.

"I warn you, do not look at my form."

The vibration of power seemed to increase ten-fold.

"You have been warned."

And suddenly the power flared amidst the shrill screams of a woman and a bright flash of light. For just a moment, Tabitha thought she saw an image of a face, but then the light and the power were gone, and left in its wake were only the shrill screams filling the air.

Tabitha shook her head and realized that she had broken away from her brothers' grip and was standing back from the table several feet. Pamela's chair was tipped over backwards and Bobby and Sam were running around the table to check on the crying woman. But Dean paused to glance at his sister. "You alright?" he asked.
But Tabitha forced herself out of her stupor and into her training. She took one look at the bloody face of Pamela on the ground, and ran into the kitchen to wet several dishrags with water.

As she came back into the room, she marveled again at the gruesome sight of the poor woman's face. And the two sockets where her eyes had been burned away.

Tabitha gently pushed the other woman's hands from her face and covered the burned eye sockets with the cool rags. Bobby was supporting the woman's head and upper body in his arms, but Tabitha grabbed at her flailing hands and held them in hers, trying to calm her.

"I can't see! Oh God, I can't see," Pamela cried.

"Shh, Pamela. I know it hurts and it's scary, but you gotta stay still," she told the injured woman.

"Call 911!" Bobby yelled to Sam.

Tabitha glanced over her shoulder at Dean crouched there. "Go find a blanket to cover her in. We don't want her going into shock."

He nodded and disappeared, returning shortly with a thick quilt that the two carefully helped Bobby wrap her in.

"You three should get out of here," Bobby told them. "I'll stay with her and get her to the hospital."

"You sure, Bobby?" Sam asked as he returned to the room.

"Go."

The brothers stood, but Pamela's hands tightened around Tabitha's and she found she didn't have the heart to leave the woman yet anyway.

"Go," she threw over her shoulder to her brothers. "I'll stay with Bobby and make sure Pamela's alright."

"You sure, Tab?"

"Go!" both Bobby and Tabitha shouted at once.

"But you two be careful," Tabitha warned, her eyes turning meaningfully back to the whimpering psychic.

Her brothers nodded once, and quickly slipped away.

"Here. Look like you could use some," Bobby said as he offered Tabitha a cup of coffee.

She sat up straight in the uncomfortable hospital chair, and gratefully took the cup, eagerly drinking the liquid as though it were the finest of beverages instead of cheap swill.

"Thanks."

Bobby settled in the chair beside her and nodded towards the hospital bed. "Any change?"

"No," she replied with a shake of her head. "Other than I think she's sleeping a bit more comfortably. Drugs must be kicking in better. At least she's out of ICU."
"Good," Bobby simply replied.

"The cops and paramedics actually buy the story that it was an arc welder explosion?"

Bobby grunted. "Doubt it. But they can't come up with anything else that could explain the burns. 'Course, it doesn't help that Pamela doesn't have any welding equipment."

Tabitha grunted as well, and leaned her head back against the wall, closing her eyes. 

"There a reason you been making yourself scarce ever since the paramedics arrived?" Bobby asked in a gruff voice.

Tabitha answered without opening her eyes, wrapping her arms around herself, and wondering why hospitals were always so cold. "You know how strange this all looks, Bobby. I don't want to hang around and have some cop find out I'm a Fed and then start asking around about why some special agent is involved in something so weird. I've had enough scrutiny with my bosses. I'm not looking to invite anymore."

A heavy weight suddenly descended over her shoulders, and Tabitha looked down to see Bobby tucking his outer coat over her shoulders.

"Looked cold. And tired," he told her. "Why don't you get some rest?"

Tabitha smiled at his gruff but protective demeanor, pulling the coat tighter into her grip. "Thanks," she smiled. "I left my coat out in your car, and it's always so cold in hospitals."

Bobby immediately stood. "Well, I'll go get it," he offered.

Tabitha grinned. "You just don't want to sit around a hospital room," she accused.

"Nope." And with that, he strode out of the room.

"Can't blame him," Pamela suddenly rasped. "If I could, I'd walk out of this room, too."

Tabitha immediately sprang to her feet and grabbed the cup of water from the nearby table.

"Here, drink this," she directed and she gently guided the straw into Pamela's open mouth.

When she'd had her fill, Pamela leaned back against her pillow. "Sure as hell never saw the day ending this way." She laughed bitterly. "'Course, I'm not going to see much coming from now on."

"Guess you're going to have to be more hands-on from now on," Tabitha tried joking.

Pamela did smile faintly. "I always did like the hands-on approach. Guess this gives me a good excuse, now."

The silence lapsed again, but then Pamela suddenly reached out and grabbed Tabitha's hand on the bed, startling the other woman.

The brunette smiled a little wider. "Yes, I really am psychic. At least it means I can still see in other ways now."

Tabitha held on to the other woman's hand, but reached out behind her to pull her chair closer to the bed so she could sit.

"Pamela, I know it's probably that last thing you want to talk about, but what was that thing?"
Pamela squeezed her hand, as though in momentary fear at the reminder, and Tabitha almost wished she hadn't spoken.

Taking a deep breath, Pamela slowly answered, "I truly haven't the foggiest. But after that encounter, I'm not sure I want to ever find out. I don't get scared easily, but whatever that was, it scared the shit out of me."

Sitting back in her chair, Tabitha wondered about Pamela's words and the warning that thing had given during the séance. The words hadn't seemed all that threatening, but, then again, whatever it was had also burned the poor woman's eyes out.

"Tab," Bobby whispered from the doorway, tearing Tabitha's attention away from her thoughts.

She turned in her chair to look at Bobby, Pamela releasing the grip on her hand as she did so.

"I'll just be a minute," Tabitha assured the woman before she met Bobby in the doorway. "What?" she whispered back to him.

"Dean just called. They had a strange showdown back in Pontiac with those demons Sam followed there."

Tabitha bit her lip, knowing that Bobby was trying to say they needed to head in that direction, and rightfully so, but still feeling guilty at the thought of leaving the poor woman behind.

"Just go," Pamela called from behind her. "Catch up to those brothers of yours and keep an eye on them."

Tabitha and Bobby moved back to her bedside.

"Are you sure you're going to be alright here?" Tabitha asked, taking the woman's hand again.

"I hate running out on you," Bobby added. "It's our fault; we brought this mess to you."

"Damn right," Pamela laughed. "But that's the nature of our world, Bobby. And it's the nature of our world that you've got run out." She briefly grabbed Bobby's hand, somehow knowing where it was, just as she had with Tabitha. "I may be down, but I'm not out, you know that Bobby. I'll figure things out. So go find those boys, and then figure out what the hell did this to me and give it a little something with my name on it."

One of the rare affectionate smiles that Tabitha only occasionally saw stole across Bobby's face. "You always were one tough girl," he told her. "You take care of yourself, and let me know if there's ever anything I can do."

With that, he released her hand and strode quickly from the room, not looking back.

"You gonna get all misty-eyed on me now? We barely know each other," Pamela drawled.

Tabitha laughed and squeezed the injured woman's hand. "No. I'm not gonna get all misty-eyed. And I may not know you that well, but I can honestly say I do like you Pamela Barnes. You're my kind of woman. And tough as nails."

"I got a feeling you're no slouch either," Pamela answered, releasing the other woman's hand. "See ya around, Tabitha."

Tabitha walked to the door, but paused to look back at the other woman. The two were so close in
age, and had things been different, Tabitha could have easily seen finding a lifelong friend in a
woman like this. But even in her so-called "normal" life, Tabitha hadn't been one to form lasting
friendships. Being on the road with work was hard on those kinds of relationships, too.

"You can still form lifelong friendships with someone you know you'll probably never see again,"
Pamela called out. And Tabitha's breath caught in her throat. "And I plan to be around for at least a
while longer." The woman sat up a bit straighter in bed, turning her bandaged face towards the
doorway Tabitha lingered in. "And I'd definitely call you a friend."

Tabitha nodded once, and turned away to leave, but stopping when Pamela called out again.

"Tabitha." She paused and her voice came out softly as she continued. "Thank you for staying with
me like you did. And for keeping me calm when I was scared. Fear isn't something I'm used to."

Tapping the doorway with her fingers, Tabitha smiled and answered, "What are friends for?"

She left, walking down the hospital hallway to the sounds of Pamela's soft laughter.

Tabitha climbed the steps of the old motel with duffel bags of clean clothes on each shoulder.
Exhausted, but finally finished going through her brothers' bags of clothes and cleaning the filthy
things they kept in their bags, Tabitha wanted nothing more than to fall into one of the beds in Sam's
room. Even a couch would do at this hour.

But she looked up the stairs at the sound of someone jogging down them.

"Sam? What are you doing up? I figured you and Dean would either still be researching or conked
out by now," Tabitha said as she came closer up the stairs.

An almost guilty look flashed across Sam's face, but then he shrugged and answered, "Dean's down
for the count, but I couldn't sleep, so I thought I'd take a drive."

"At this hour? Come on, Sam, let's go back up to the room and talk if you can't sleep. You shouldn't
be out there alone," Tabitha told her younger brother, grabbing his arm as he tried to pass her on the
stairs.

But Sam shook it off and continued down the stairs, stopping a few steps down so that the siblings
were able to face each other eye-to-eye.

"Where's Bobby?" she tried instead.

"Went to make some phone calls to some of his contacts," Sam quickly answered.

"Sam—"

"Come on, Tab," he lightheartedly tried. "I can look after myself. I don't need you and Dean
watching my every move."

His sister grabbed his shoulder before he could turn away. "I don't like this Sam. There's something
you're not saying or not telling me. I saw what kind of shape you were in after you took off all those
months ago. What's been going on?"

Sam scoffed. "And you're one to talk about not telling each other things. How much you been
keeping from Dean and me? You've got your own life, and I've got mine. Just leave it at that, Tab.
I'm just going for a drive."
He jogged down the stairs before she could stop him. Tabitha knew her brother was right, but couldn't help wondering when the huge gulf had developed between the two of them. Sam had once been able to tell her anything. Even when they'd both left to go to college. But somehow, they'd drifted apart.

She glanced up the stairs at where her other brother still was. If she was honest with herself, it wasn't just the relationship with her younger brother that was strained and difficult. She'd once been just as close with Dean as she'd been with Sam, helping to bridge the gap between both of the boys, and even with their father when he was upset.

*When did it all change?* she wondered. *When did my brothers grow so far away from me?*

But she knew in the pit of her stomach, that she shouldered the most blame in the chasm that separated her from the brothers she'd have once given anything for. She'd once been the one that bridged the gap between the others, but now she wondered if she could possibly bridge the gap that now existed between her, and them.

As she continued up the stairs, Tabitha suddenly felt the same corkscrew sensation of power crawling through her body, and heard the eerily familiar high-pitched whine ring out from the floor of their room. Grasping the bags on her shoulder, she bolted up the stairs towards their room, fumbling to pull the key from her pocket.

But just as the key slid into her hand, the whine gave way to the familiar sound of words. A voice softly calling, "Dean. Dean, you must listen to me. Dean, you must hear what I have to say."

The key slid into the lock, but Tabitha paused at the door, softly whispering, "What are you?"

Like a switch being flicked off, the sound suddenly stopped. Tabitha shook herself, and threw the door open, dropping the duffel bags on the ground and frantically looking for her brother and fearing the sight she might find.

Her brother was curled up on the floor, every pane and every inch of glass in the room was shattered and covering him. Dropping to her knees, Tabitha reached for her brother, rolling him onto his back as he slowly pulled his hands away from his ears.

"Dean! Tabitha!" Bobby yelled as he exploded into the room. "Are you two alright?"

Tabitha quickly examined her brother, thrilled at the sight of him staring back into her eyes.

"I think he's okay," Tabitha replied. "Looks like some cuts on his hands and arms from all the broken glass." She shook her head and let out the breath she'd been holding. "Jesus, you scared the holy hell outta me, Dean."

"Yeah," he agreed, rolling carefully on the glass to sit up. "I'm getting damn tired of that supersonic bat screech, too."

"Why didn't you just answer it?" Tabitha asked as she jumped to her feet, digging through one of the duffel bags to find a clean t-shirt to wipe Dean's hands with.

"Answer it?" Dean repeated, taking the t-shirt and grinning when he saw it was one of Sam's. "If that high-pitched screeching was something trying to talk, I don't know how to answer it back. Screech in return?" he laughed.

Tabitha stopped in the middle of the room, her heart falling into the pit of her stomach at Dean's words. Slowly and carefully, she turned to Bobby and asked, "What did you hear, Bobby? You
came busting in awful fast."

"Saw you from down the hall, running for the room, then heard that god-awful screeching just like we heard at Pamela's. I'm with Dean, if you think that was something trying to communicate, I'm at a loss for how to talk back to it."

"That's all either of you heard?" she carefully asked them.

Dean chuckled a dark laugh. "Well, that and a shitload of glass shattering all around me."

The blood seemed to run cold in Tabitha's veins, but she held her ground and forced herself not to shake. *It had to be a trick of my mind*, she told herself as she counted slowly to ten.

"Damn, Tabby, you must'a cut your knees. You're bleeding, too," Dean told her from where he still sat on the ground.

He came closer and crouched down to pick at the torn and now bloody knees of her jeans, carefully inspecting her knees as she passively let him. "I don't think it's too bad though. Not a lot of blood. But you should wash them off and make sure you get all the pieces of glass out."

Tabitha nodded in a detached manner. Slowly grabbing her own bag and taking it into the bathroom, grateful for the chance to close a door between her and the men while she gathered her thoughts.

Surely she was imagining things. Neither of the men had heard a voice, so it couldn't be possible that she had.

Right?

Chapter End Notes

Well, that's the beginning of this story. Let me know what you think so far. Any interest in reading the rest?
Tabitha studied the symbol from the book in her hand again, looking back up at the worn wood of the barn. It barely bore a resemblance, even to her eye.

"You're getting the paint too thick; it's dripping," Dean gruffly complained as he passed behind her. "Haven't you ever used spray paint before?"

She studied the drips of paint, and then tried to wipe them away with her fingers, only succeeding in covering them with black paint and smearing the drips. "No. Can't say I ever got much into graffiti," she answered, pushing the end of her ponytail back over her shoulder so it was away from the spray of black paint as she leaned closer to look at the wall.

"See," Dean argued, "you should have hung out with me and Sammy more instead of reading books all the time." He shook his head as he took the book from her and studied the design. "Who am I kidding," he muttered under his breath. "I was lucky just to get Sammy away from his books occasionally."

Tabitha smiled at her brother, glad to see him easing some on his hardass routine. It was the first words he'd exchanged with her that hadn't bordered on shouting since he'd come up with his plan to summon the thing that brought him out of Hell and she'd insisted on coming with. She had agreed with leaving Sam out of it, though. Something about her younger brother still didn't seem right to her, so she agreed it was best to leave him out of it.

Dean held his spray can up and gestured for Tabitha to watch. "See, you gotta move faster. You're going too slow and getting the paint so heavy it's running. That'll ruin the symbols and then they won't work."

She studied his example, and then tried again herself, having to start again several times as he gave her more direction.

Finally, they'd finished tagging the entire interior structure of the barn with various symbols and every trap they knew to possibly use. But after Bobby had performed the ritual to summon the thing, they waited.

And waited.

"Does it usually take this long?" Tabitha asked as she sat next to her brother on a high table, a shotgun across her lap and her handguns in her shoulder harness as she swung her heavy boots back and forth through the air. There were also weapons of every various kind to use on monsters around her and within reach of Dean and Bobby.

Bobby only graced her with a droll look.

"What?" she defended, pulling at the tail of her black long-sleeve t-shirt instead of looking up. "It's been a while since I've done this, I guess. I just don't remember a lot of sit and wait time when we were hunting monsters before."

And then Tabitha felt a faint vibration of power, followed by the shingles of the barn rattling over their heads.
"Ya just had to say something like that," Bobby muttered as they all slid to their feet, staring at the rattling shingles.

"Wishful thinking, but maybe it's just the wind," Dean tried as he nervously looked around.

"Cause that's the kinda luck we usually get," Tabitha muttered as she held her shotgun loosely to her shoulder, barrel pointed down at the ground until she had a target to aim at.

Every light bulb in the old fixtures suddenly began busting in the rafters, sparks raining down on them as they ducked their heads.

A loud crack resounded through the barn then, the heavy beam across the door snapping as the doors swung open, a lone figure casually walking through them.

The three stood almost dumbfounded by the sight of a plain looking man in a trench coat casually strolling through the open doors.

Tabitha wasn't certain what she'd been expecting, but she'd partly been ready to see the face she'd seen a flash of during Pamela's séance. Though it did give her hope that she had been imaging the face and the voice altogether. Because this normal looking man certainly wasn't the image she thought she'd seen.

As the sparks stopped falling down on them, they realized that this ordinary looking creature was walking through and by every trap, talisman, and design they'd painted on the walls, floor, and ceiling. Dean raised his shotgun first and fired at the trench coat wearing creature, but Bobby and Tabitha quickly followed suit.

Still, not even the salt rounds slowed his easy stroll through the barn.

Dean grabbed the demon-killing knife from the table, and Tabitha grabbed a silver knife in one hand, sliding her handgun into her right hand. It was awkward holding both in her grip, and the regular rounds from her service weapon might not do anything on a monster like this, but Tabitha was willing to shoot it in the head to find out.

"Who are you?" Dean asked as the creature partially circled him.

"I'm the one who gripped you tight and raised you from perdition," the creature matter-of-factly responded.

"Yeah, thanks for that," Dean sarcastically answered, and then lunged forward, swinging the demon blade down in an overhand motion into what should have been the creature's heart.

But it merely stood there, glancing down at the knife as though it were an interesting toy, and then easily sliding it from its chest, dropping the knife to the ground with a clatter.

Bobby moved next, swinging a tire iron down at its head, only to have the thing catch it in its hand without even looking, wrenching it from Bobby's grip and then pressing two fingers to Bobby's head.

Tabitha gasped as Bobby crumpled to the ground, her training taking over as she fired three shots in quick succession into the creature's heart from behind. He turned and glanced at her, his head canting strangely to the side as he stared at her. Tabitha almost swore there was surprise in his eyes, but then she realized she'd followed her training and aimed only for the heart, so she raised her Glock to aim for his head.
Only to have her gun burn like a stovetop in her hand. It fell to the cement floor as she shook her hands, the creature continuing to stare at her. "What are you doing here? You should not be here," it said to her. But when it stepped forward, Dean sidestepped into its path, placing his sister to his back as the creature looked at them in a curious but detached manner.

"We need to talk, Dean," it finally told him, glancing at Bobby's crumpled form and then over Dean's shoulder.

The hint was less than subtle. Dean maneuvered closer to Bobby, one hand behind him, moving his sister along with him. "You're not touching my sister," he growled, crouching down near Bobby.

Tabitha immediately felt for the older man's pulse, finding it steady and strong. "He's okay, Dean. Just out," she whispered to her brother so he could keep his focus on this seemingly unbeatable creature.

"Your friend's alive," it off-handedly supplied as it flipped through one of Bobby's books.

Her brother didn't seem impressed as he growled, "Who are you?"

"Castiel," it said, still not looking up.

She knew it had to be so. But she couldn't help the jolt of surprise that ran through her. Even though she had convinced herself that she hadn't actually heard or seen anything, she'd still half expected to hear the same voice, or see that face she's witnessed a brief flash of.

"Yeah, I figured that much," Dean was saying, his back tense as he stayed crouched in front of Tabitha next to Bobby's body. "I mean, what are you?"

The creature finally looked up and flatly said, "I'm an angel of The Lord."

Dean stood uneasily, grabbing his sister's hand and pulling her up behind him, even as she gapped at the creature.

"Get the hell out of here," Dean replied. "There's no such thing."

"An angel," Tabitha whispered to herself.

The creature—angel—or Castiel, as Tabitha was more comfortable thinking, turned towards them fully.

"This is your problem, Dean. You have no faith," Castiel said, his head tipped down in such a way that he looked up at them through his eyelashes, seeming somehow more predatory in his gaze than angelic.

Lightening flashed, and Tabitha jumped behind her brother, his hand squeezing painfully on hers as dark wings seemed to unfold and spread in the shadows behind Castiel.

"Some angel you are," Dean snidely replied. "You burned out the poor woman's eyes."

Tabitha stepped slightly to the side, gazing more fully at the angel. "Why would an angel have done that?" she asked.

Castiel looked down, and seemed plainly regretful. "I warned her not to spy on my true form. It can be," he paused and looked up, meeting Tabitha's eyes as he continued, "overwhelming to some humans. So can my real voice." His gaze finally tore from Tabitha's, switching to her brother's. "But
you already knew that."

"You mean the gas station and the motel? That was you talking?" As Dean spoke, he stole a glance at his sister, pulling her closer and slightly behind him again.

Castiel only nodded serenely to Dean.

"Buddy, next time, lower the volume."

"It was my mistake," Castiel told him. "Certain people, special people," he continued, his eyes trailing back to Tabitha, "can perceive my true visage. I thought you would be one of them. I was wrong."

Tabitha's brows drew together at his words, and she almost swore he nodded at her. But she shook her head, unable to believe that she could be one of those people.

"And what visage are you in now?" Dean demanded. "What, holy tax accountant?"

"This," Castiel said, looking down and fingering the trench coat, "this, is a vessel."

"You're possessing someone?" Tabitha choked out.

"He's a devout man," Castiel nodded. "He actually prayed for this."

"Look pal, I'm not buying what you're selling. So who are you really?"

Castiel looked genuinely confused, his face drawing together in a mask of bewilderment. "I told you."

"Right. And why would an angel, rescue me from Hell?" Dean demanded.

Castiel stepped closer, only a scant distance separating them as he answered, "Good things do happen, Dean."

"Not in my experience," Dean replied, his voice thick with emotion.

"Not in our family," Tabitha added, thinking of all the trouble both the boys had had, along with their father.

Castiel squinted, looking at them both, his head canted to the side again as he gazed back and forth between them. "Have you not escaped almost certain death, only to wonder at your fortune?" His eyes turned and locked on Tabitha's again. "Have you not worshipped, and prayed, and given your thanks to God for His blessings when you have been saved?"

"How could you know that?" Tabitha gasped, her free hand covering her mouth.

Dean glanced dubiously over his shoulder at her, but Castiel focused on him again.

"You don't think you deserve to be saved," he stated, staring at Dean as though he were perplexed by him.

"Why'd you do it?" Dean finally asked.

"Because God commanded it," Castiel said. "Because we have work for you."

"You're really an angel?" Tabitha whispered.
"Yes," he answered. And then from one blink to the next, he was gone.

"This can't be happening," Dean muttered.

Bobby was seated at his desk going through books as Dean and Sam argued over the possibilities of angels.

Tabitha sat nearby on the couch, trying to ignore their voices as she poured over the book in her own lap. It was hard trying to read over the boys’ arguing, but she was finding that she was quickly remembering the skill from her childhood.

"Tabitha!"

She looked up at Bobby shouting her name.

"Huh?"

He held up a thick book in his hand, it was worn, but she could see "Bible" emblazoned on the cover. "Researching angels. You wanna help?" he sarcastically asked.

She held up the book in her lap. "Already am."

He stood and came closer, looking at the old text she held. "What's that?"

"Mom's old bible. She said it came from her side of the family, I think," Tabitha answered.

Bobby glanced at the cover, and then thumbed through the first few pages. "Looks old. Obscure. Definitely not your run-of-the-mill Gideon bible. Might be useful," he agreed, walking back to his desk.

"I didn't even know Mom had a bible from her side of the family," Dean commented from the chair he'd laid himself out in, sullenly looking at the old bible on his own lap. "Why'd you keep something like that all these years anyway?"

Tabitha shrugged. "It was from her folks. Seemed like something that should be kept."

Several minutes passed, but Tabitha could feel her brother staring at her from across the way.

"What?" she finally demanded.

"You really believe that thing was an angel, just like Sam does?"

"Who's to say it wasn't? We know there's demons, so why can't there be angels. I guess it makes a certain amount of sense." She braced for the arguments he'd had with Sam, but he seemed to be turning something else over in his mind.

"What did he mean about you worshiping and praying to God?" he finally asked, his eyes fixed on the floor.

"I go to church," she finally answered. "At least, there's a church I go to when I'm actually at my place in Virginia.

"Why?" He still wouldn't meet her eye.

She shrugged, not knowing how to frame her answer for the brother she knew wasn't a believer in
"I believe," she finally simply settled on.

Whatever Dean had wanted, her answer didn't seem to be it. But he only grunted and opened the book in his lap.

"Where's Sam?" Tabitha asked.

"Went to get pie," Dean answered shortly.

Tabitha sighed and returned to her attention to the Campbell family bible.

Sam and Dean followed behind Tabitha and Bobby to go check on his hunter friend after she'd left him a message frantically asking for help. Tabitha had tried talking to him several times as they drove, trying to ease his fears, but he'd never said a word back to her, so she'd eventually given up, instead riding in silence.

When they'd pulled up at the woman's house, Tabitha automatically followed Bobby to his trunk, grabbing one of his shotguns out of the back.

"You're staying here," Dean told her, trying to take the shotgun from her hands.

"I don't think so."

"He's right, Tab," Sam added, stepping closer as he glanced at the old house. "This could be dangerous."

"Darn. And I was hoping for a bake sale," Tabitha answered in a droll voice. She stepped around her brothers and onto the front steps, turning when she heard her older brother's voice.

"We're just trying to look out for you. You're getting drug back into something you might not be able to get out of," he warned.

"I know," she told them. "But I make my own choices. And I'm not turning my back now."

Her brothers were fast on her heels as they fanned out through the house, calling out for Olivia.

Tabitha rounded into the dining room to see her brothers crouched over a woman's badly torn up body. Sam stood and tried to block the sight, but Tabitha moved around him and crouched over the body.

"What could have done this?" she asked Dean.

He held up an EMF meter. "We're thinking ghost."

She glanced back at the body. "Hell of a lot of rage," she commented.

"Yeah."

Bobby stepped back in the room saying, "Called some hunters nearby."

"Good, we could use the help," Tabitha answered.

"Except, they ain't answering their phone neither," Bobby finished.
"Something's up, huh?" Sam quietly stated.

"You think?" Bobby quietly answered.

For the next several minutes, they all took pages from Bobby's address book and started calling hunters who were in the area, but to no avail.

They finally decided to split up again and start making house calls.

"You shouldn't do this," Dean warned as Tabitha moved to get in the passenger seat of Bobby's car. "I've got a bad feeling that it's just going to be more gruesome sights like that one. You don't need this kind of thing haunting you."

Tabitha stopped and sadly looked into her brother's eyes. "Do you know how I ended up in the Violent Crime Section? It's because I could handle sights like that," she told him with a jerk of her head towards the old house. "I ended up on a team that specifically works on some of the worst, and most gruesome of cases that the Violent Crime Section deals with, because they needed a woman on the team, and I was the only one they could find who could handle sights like that and didn't burn out from it." She sighed and laid a placating hand on her brother's arm. "I've seen a lot of crime scenes that haunt me more than that will, Dean."

"It's still taking a step further into this world," he argued.

"I know," she told him as she turned and stepped into Bobby's Chevelle.

Several houses later, Bobby found Tabitha crouched over yet another torn up body.

"You alright, Tab?" he asked her.

"Yeah," she answered faintly.

He stepped closer, squatting down next to her. "Little harder than you let Dean believe, huh?" he asked in a low voice.

She shook herself from her trance and looked at Bobby. "Yes. And no."

"How so?"

She glanced back at the body. "I learned a long time ago, that if you want to get ahead as a woman in a man's world, you've got to prove that you're as tough as they are and can take anything they can. It was the only way I got ahead in the FBI with all my male bosses. I can't let Dean think I'm bothered by sights like that any more than I could let my bosses think it." She paused and turned back to the body in front of them. "And yes, I've seen more gruesome sights than this."

Bobby waited for her to continue, but finally prompted, "So what is it about this one is making you pause."

Tabitha reached out as though she was going to touch the man's body, but then stopped inches away from touching his cheek, pulling her hand back, and pushing to stand up straight. "Just never thought I'd see Collin torn to pieces like this, that's all."

"You knew Collin?" Bobby asked, standing to face her in shock. "Since when?"

"Few years back," Tabitha replied, moving through the house and back to Bobby's car. He followed,
but waited at the driver's door for her to continue.

She paused and set her shotgun down on the roof, leaning down over the car to finish explaining. "I was still fairly new to the team in Violent Crimes, and it was one of my first cases. Ended up in Nebraska looking into some gruesome killings. Locals had thought it was a mountain lion that had traveled from the Rockies or South Dakota at first, but the kills didn't seem right, so they called us in. The team was thinking some kind of out of control serial killer or cannibal with how torn up the bodies were, but something didn't sit right with me. So I went out to one of the crime scenes late at night to take another look. I caught Collin out there, but when I saw the weapons he had with him, I realized he was a hunter. After I proved to him that I understood what he was and came from a family of hunters, he told me he was hunting a rugaru. We stayed in touch afterwards."

Tabitha shrugged and then climbed into the car.

Bobby followed her. "'Stayed in touch?'" he repeated.

"Yeah," Tabitha replied, a defensive tone creeping in. "I got to know a few of the hunters you sent my way to have me clean up their trails. Collin was just another hunter I knew. I'd occasionally throw cases his way when I saw something come through the FBI that I knew wasn't a human culprit."

"But you stayed in touch with Collin?" Bobby repeated, his tone making the unvoiced accusation clear.

Tabitha glared across at Bobby. "A time or two, all right? And if you breathe a word of that to Dean, I'll deny it and tell him you're getting senile."

Bobby chuckled humorlessly as he finally started the engine. "Like I wanna start that fight. Still, I can see why this one would be hard for you."

Tabitha glanced back at the house. "I'm just tired of seeing men I've cared for, dead," she whispered.

Her words rang a chord with Bobby, but he couldn't put a finger on what seemed strange about her wording or voice.

"Drive," Tabitha finally told Bobby, breaking his thoughts. "Where we going next?"

"We're not making any headway," Bobby answered. "Might as well head home and see if we can't figure out what's doing this."

"You find anything yet?" Bobby called out from behind his desk.

"Not really!" Tabitha called back. She was starting to get frustrated with the lack of progress, and dug another handful of M&Ms out of the bag on the kitchen table as she got up and wandered back into the living room, looking for another book to pour through.

"You just going to binge on candy, or are you actually working?" Bobby grumbled.

Tabitha grabbed a book and wandered back to her own little workstation in the kitchen. "I eat when I'm frustrated!" she threw back over her shoulder, rubbing her arms at the cold air in the house, and considering whether to get up again to go get a sweatshirt.

"And it was always chocolate that was your fix, wasn't it?" a familiar voice said behind her.
Tabitha gasped, nearly inhaling an M&M as she scrambled out of her seat, the chair skidding backwards away from her as she spun around. The lights in the kitchen began flickering around them.

"It can't be. You're dead," she rasped, her throat hoarse as she spit out the M&M she'd nearly choked on.

He stepped closer, and then moved around her as he trailed a finger along the table near the open bag of candy. "Yes. You were always fond of your M&Ms. But any chocolate really. Anytime you were frustrated, or exhausted," he looked up and gave her a wicked grin. A look that was so painfully familiar on that square face. "Or satisfied. Any of those times, and you'd grab for a bag of chocolate." His grin suddenly turned snide, the normal laugh lines around his mouth drawing into harsh and cruel lines. "Quite the stereotypical woman, weren't you?"

"Tabitha?" Bobby shouted from the other room. She could hear him coming closer, but the sliding pocket doors suddenly slammed shut between them.

She reached for the saltshaker behind her, but before she could break it open or get the lid off, she was thrown backwards on the table, her back bending over at a painful angle.

"Tsk, tsk," he said as he held her down by her throat, grabbing the saltshaker from her hand and throwing it across the room. "Can't have that now. We were just starting to catch up."

"Casey, please," she rasped, struggling for air as she pushed at him, trying to pry his hand away from her throat.

Suddenly, he picked her up by her throat and threw her across the room. She hit the kitchen counter near the sink, and fell to the floor in a heap.

"You should beg!" he shouted.

Tabitha pulled herself up from the floor, fighting to her feet as she stared at Casey's once familiar and handsome face, now distorted with rage as he flashed in front of her, grabbing her by the throat again as he pushed her against the sink, bending her backwards once more.

"You should beg for your life," he continued screaming. "I'm dead because of you!"

"Didn't know about the bomb," she wheezed out, her eyes watering as she struggled against his hold. She tried kicking and hitting at him, and although she met something solid with each strike, it did nothing. She tried twisting away from his grasp, but it was like fighting a brick wall, nothing seemed to budge him.

Casey bent her head to the side, pressing his face into the crease of her neck and shoulder, almost seeming to inhale at that spot before bringing his lips up to her ear. "You should have been at my side when I walked into that building. I was your partner; you should have been beside me. Where were you? Where were you when I was blown to hell?" he whispered in a caress to her ear.

A tear escaped to run down her cheek. "I'm sorry."

Tabitha felt Casey's other hand run ever so gently up her arm, cupping her jaw and pushing her head back, even as his other hand tightened around her throat. "You should beg me," he repeated. "You know how much I like to hear you beg me."

"I'm sorry," she repeated in a croak, her vision darkening.
And then, the sound of a shotgun echoed in her ears as something tore through Casey's body, his image disappearing, and leaving Tabitha to crumple to the floor as she began wheezing in deep breaths.

Something grabbed her by the arm, yanking her to her feet and propping her up with an arm under her shoulders when her legs couldn't support her weight.

"Tabitha!"

She shook her head and finally realized Dean was shouting her name.

"Dammit, Tabitha! You gotta pull yourself together!" Dean yelled, his eyes frantically darting about. "They're ghosts, Tab. Just ghosts."

She pulled away and nodded. "Stronger than any I've seen before," she rasped.

He glanced back at her and handed her the fire poker he was holding, a shotgun in his other hand. "But still ghosts. Same rules apply."

She nodded again, holding the iron fire poker like a lifeline.

"Where's Bobby?" Dean asked.

"I haven't seen him since Case—since that ghost showed up."

Dean glanced over at her verbal slip, but they continued moving out of the kitchen towards Bobby's desk.

"Where's Sam?" Tabitha asked.

"Outside. We split up looking for you two."

"You've seen them, too?" But she didn't need to ask. Something in her brother's spooked look gave her her answer.

"Yeah."

"Let's split up," she told her brother. "You go upstairs; I'll get the rest of the main floor and the basement looking for Bobby."

Dean grabbed her arm. "I don't think so. That thing nearly killed you. You're not getting out of my sight."

Tabitha held up her new weapon. "I'm fine now. I've got this, and I'll grab one of the shotguns that Bobby's got stashed around the house. It won't catch me off guard again. I just didn't see it coming."

Her brother paused, torn between the common sense of splitting up to search, and the need to watch his sister and protect her.

"We have to make sure Bobby's okay. I haven't seen him since that thing grabbed me," she insisted. Better to call it a thing than to think of that as any part of the man she'd once known and cared for.

"Fine. But you be careful. And if you get killed by that thing, I'm bringing you back and killing you again," Dean warned.

"Back at ya," she answered as they separated. She soon grabbed one of Bobby's salt loaded shotguns
from the linen closet, continuing her search for Bobby.

It was hard to tell in Bobby's house if anything was out of place, it had that lived-in look of chaos. But from what Tabitha saw as she went through the main floor, there was nothing to indicate any kind of real struggle anywhere. Other than where she'd been in the kitchen anyway. Only one thing might have been out of place. An iron bar on the floor at the base of the steps. But still no sign of Bobby.

She was just reaching the top of the basement stairs when she heard a loud crash from upstairs and heard Dean's pained voice.

Pulling the shotgun into the crook of her shoulder, she ran for the stairs to the upper level, taking them two at a time as she raced towards her brother.

As she came around into a hallway upstairs, she saw Dean on the floor, a woman with shoulder length blond hair and a filthy white shirt advancing on him.

"You know how little siblings are, right? How they'll do anything for you?" the woman was asking Dean.

She started to draw back to kick him, but Tabitha raised the shotgun and fired a shot through her before she could. "Yeah, little siblings will do anything, won't they?" she told the now empty space.

Coming forward, she helped pull her brother to his feet.

"They will, huh?" he asked, a small smile coming to his lips as he bent to pick up his shotgun from the floor.

"Thanks Tab."

"We're even," she told him. Glancing back where the woman had stood, she asked, "Who was that?"

"Meg." At her blank stare, he continued. "Girl possessed by a demon. Story for another time," he waved off. "Guy downstairs?"

"Casey," she answered shortly. When Dean gave her a pointed look, she continued, "Dead FBI partner. Story for another time."

"Fine. Let's find Bobby and Sam," Dean told her, pulling her towards the stairs. "And we're sticking together this time."

They jogged down the stairs together. Just as Bobby and Sam came into the house, calling their names.

"Are you guys alright?" Sam asked, meeting them in Bobby's living room. He grabbed his sister's shoulders, staring down at her throat. "What the hell happened?" he demanded.

She pushed away to collapse on the couch, the adrenaline rush starting to wear off now and the pain in her throat making its presence known. Along with all the other aches in her body.

"Ghost," she answered, not wanting to say more and not feeling like she was able.

Dean left the living room, coming back with a glass of water and a bag of frozen peas he'd managed to find somewhere, silently handing both to her. He paused long enough to gently turn her head to the side, no doubt gauging the bruises she could feel forming.
"I'm gonna kill that guy," he growled in a low tone.

"Who?" Sam demanded, hearing her older brother's vow.

Tabitha shook her head. "He's already dead," she reminded them.

But as she took the offered items, she saw her older brother looking over her head and subtly shaking his head at their younger brother. She knew her brothers were likely having some silent conversation, but didn't have the energy to deal with it. Instead, she sipped her water and held the peas to her throat.

The men started discussing the ghosts they'd seen while Tabitha silently drank her water.

"So, they're all people we know?" Sam asked.

"No just people we know, people we couldn't save," Dean responded, reloading shotguns, and handing one to his sister.

She took it, setting it beside her as she listened to them.

"Hey, I saw something on Meg," Dean said, seeming to remember something. "Did she have a tattoo when she was alive?"

"I don't think so," Sam answered, shaking his head.

"It was like a mark on her hand. Almost like a brand."

"I saw a mark, too. On Henriksen," Sam responded.

They glanced at Tabitha and she nodded, pointing to the spot where she'd seen something on the back of its hand between the thumb and forefinger. "There. And I know he never had any sort of mark or brand or tattoo when he was alive," she told them.

"What'd it look like?" Bobby wearily asked.

"Paper?" Sam asked, grabbing the proffered paper and pencil from Bobby and drawing the mark.

But as he drew, the Campbell family bible still on the couch caught Tabitha's eye, and she grabbed it, flipping through its pages.

Sam held his drawing up for them to look at.

"That's it," Dean agreed.

And Tabitha held the bible up, pointing to the symbol on the page. "The Mark of the Witness," she rasped.

Bobby looked at the page and agreed, a worried look sliding across his face.

"I think I've seen this before," he agreed. But before he could continue, the lights began flickering once more in the room. "We've gotta move," he told them.

"Where?" Tabitha croaked, but jumping up and taking the bible in her hands, along with the shotgun and fire poker at her feet with her as she followed Bobby.

"Somewhere safe," he told them, leading the way down the stairs to the basement.
At one end of the musty basement was a small round room the opened with a heavy iron door, and was completely lined with iron.

"Bobby, is this—" Sam started asking.


They all looked up at the huge ceiling fan, around it and in the cage around it, Bobby had also managed to design a devil's trap.

"You built a panic-room," Sam marveled.

Bobby shrugged. "I had a weekend off."

Tabitha leaned back against outer wall, feeling exhausted already. "I wonder what my bosses and colleagues would say about a panic-room like this?" she offered with a small smile.

Dean turned around with an assault-rifle in his hands. "Bobby. You're awesome," he told the man in awe.

"So what's that thing say about the mark?" Bobby asked, gesturing to the heavy bible in Tabitha's hands.

"Dunno," she answered. "Just remembered seeing it. I haven't read this thing cover to cover. It's so darn long and has tiny print."

"My problem with all books," Dean pointed out.

"Well, get to reading," Bobby told her, then pointed to the stack of books he'd brought down with them. "I'll start on these." He turned to the boys, pointing at a table with munitions supplies. "Why don't you two make more salt rounds? I have a feeling we're gonna need them."

Tabitha sat cross-legged on the cot while Bobby took his usual position at the desk.

Sam and Dean had begun arguing about whether or not God existed, but mostly Bobby and Tabitha tried to ignore the conversation as they researched a solution.

"But if he is out there, what the hell is wrong with him? Where is he while all these decent people are getting torn to shreds? How does he live with himself? Why doesn't he help?" Dean demanded as he faced off with Sam as they sat side by side at the table, shotgun shells with packed salt.

Sam stared at him blankly, and then two boys turned their stare on Bobby.

"I ain't touching this one with a ten-foot pole," he nervously laughed, holding his place in the book on the desk.

"What about you?" Dean asked then, nodding over at his sister. "You said you go to church. You pray. You believe. Is that what you believe in?"

She ignored the hostility in his voice. "Yes," she answered, not looking up.

"Yes?" he repeated incredulously. "That's what you believe in? A god who doesn't do jack-squat?"

"Yeah," she repeated, sitting up straighter and finally looking up at his angry tone. "He gave us freewill to make our own choices and be our own people. He gave us the freedom to fight for the
things we wanted. Should he take over and do our fighting for us and make all of our decisions for
us?" she asked in clipped tones.

"That's not what I'm saying. I get what you're saying about freewill, and I'm all for it. But does he
have to sit on his ass while demons and monsters tear this world apart? Doesn't he give a damn? If he
does, why'd he even allow monsters and demons to exist in the first place?" Dean angrily demanded.

"Because the bad has to exist for the good to exist," she answered, trying to keep calm and be
logical.

"Oh, are you all Zen now? Gotta have yin and yang, is that it?" he scoffed.

"Don't be an ass," she growled turning back to the bible in her hands.

Bobby cleared his throat. "Found it," he told them, pointing at the page of the book in front of him
with the pencil in his hands and effectively stopping their argument.

"What?" Sam asked.

"The symbol you saw, the brand on the ghosts, the Mark of the Witness," he said.

Sam sat back in his chair. "We knew that much. Tab found the name, but she can't find what it's
witness to."

"The unnatural," Bobby answered, causing the three Winchesters to sit up straighter as they listened.

"None of them died what you'd call, ordinary deaths. See, these ghosts, they were forced to rise.
They woke up in agony. They're like rabid dogs. It ain't their fault. Someone, rose 'em. On purpose."

"Who?" Sam asked.

"Do I look like I know," Bobby answered. "But whoever it was, used a spell so powerful, it left a
mark, a brand on their souls. Whoever did this, had big plans. It's called the Rising of the Witnesses.
I just ain't figured out what it does."

Tabitha frantically flipped back through the pages in her bible, looking for the text she remembered
seeing. "It's a prophecy," she told them. "From Revelations, according to this. It's a sign—" she
gulped hard before continuing. "—a sign of the Apocalypse."

"Apocalypse?" Dean asked. At his sister's nod, he continued. "As in Apocalypse, Apocalypse? The
four horsemen, pestilence, five-dollar-a-gallon-gas-Apocalypse?"

"That's the one," Bobby sighed.

Bobby grabbed another book and looked through it, adding to Tabitha's explanation, "It says here,
the Rise of the Witnesses is a mile-marker."

Tabitha leaned back against the wall again as the boys asked what to do next. She briefly thought to
herself that she had perfect timing in coming back into the supernatural world just in time for the
Apocalypse, but immediately chastised her snide thought. At least if it was going to come, she wasn't
going to sit around ignorantly.

"There's one thing I don't get," she told the boys after she'd thought it over for a while.

"What's that, Tab?" Sam asked.
She opened her eyes to look at Bobby. "According to what you and I have read, these ghosts are all people who didn't die ordinary deaths, right?" Bobby nodded. "But well—Casey—he very much died an ordinary death. I mean, he walked into an office building to question a suspect, and the guy had the place rigged to blow with explosives, but it was still a human death. Not supernatural. So why was he here trying to choke the life outta me. And he was marked just like the others were."

Bobby shrugged. "I don't have any answers for you. Maybe whatever it was that set off the explosion wasn't really human. You said you've run across monsters that you've tossed to other hunters. Maybe that was one of them and you didn't realize it."

"Maybe," she shrugged. "But I don't think so."

"I just don't know, Tab."

"How'd you avoid the blast?" Sam asked in a quiet voice.

Tabitha looked down, the guilt creeping in just as it always did when she remembered that day. "Random stupid luck," she admitted. "I somehow forgot my badge in the car and went back for it. We were just going to question a witness we thought, so Casey went ahead. We didn't think there was any danger."

She shifted uncomfortably on the stiff cot, the springs groaning audibly in the silence of the room.

"I just got lucky that I remembered my badge and went back for it," she whispered.

The silence stretched on. Tabitha pointedly turned back to the bible in her lap, and the boys soon turned back to filling their shells.

After some digging, Bobby finally found a spell in one of his books that would put the witnesses to rest. As luck would have it, he said he had everything that was needed.

Unfortunately, it was all upstairs.

"Maybe you should sit this one out," Dean told his sister as they prepared to leave the panic-room. "I don't want you getting hurt any worse."

"I'll be fine," she insisted.

"That guy nearly killed you. And would have if I hadn't come along."

"And you got your ass kicked by some little nothing of a girl," Tabitha reminded him. "You're lucky I came along, too."

"Wow," Sam laughed. "You got your ass kicked by a girl?"

"Shut up," Dean told him. "And that was no girl. That was a ghost."

"Exactly. And you were susceptible to it even though you were on guard. So I'm going to help watch your guys' backs."

"And who's gonna watch yours?" Dean insisted.

Bobby broke in, stepping between the siblings and shoving a shotgun at each of them. "That's enough. We're gonna need every shotgun up there we can get. So you all watch each other's backs. And watch where you're shooting," he told them, going to the heavy iron door.
They all took as many salt rounds as they could carry, shoving them in pockets before Bobby opened the door.

As they started climbing the stairs, a voice called out above them.

"Howdy boys." They all stopped to see Agent Henriksen at the top of the stairs. "And Special Agent Tabitha Winchester," he almost pleasantly drawled. "Bet you never thought you'd see me again."

"I'm sorry for what happened, Victor," she apologized, her voice tight and strained with regret.

"Oh, you're sorry, are you? Sorry that I'm dead, or sorry that you didn't tell me what was really going on when I went after your brothers?" he continued.

"I couldn't tell you everything. I told you there was more to them than you realized," she defended, her brothers stepping closer to either side of her.

"What did you expect her to tell you?" Sam asked.

But a shot rang out next to them, and Henriksen's image dissolved as the salt round from Bobby's shotgun tore through him.

"If you're gonna shoot, shoot. Don't talk," he told the siblings.

As they entered the living room, the four split up, Bobby grabbing supplies for the spell, and the Winchesters spreading salt lines to ward off the ghosts.

Bobby lit the fire in the fireplace, and then started giving orders to the others for the supplies throughout the house that he needed, sending Sam upstairs for a hex box.

"Bobby."

Dean and Tabitha looked up at the childish voices to see the two small girls staring at Bobby. Without hesitation, Dean fired a shot through them, nodding to his sister and saying, "Keep salting."


Dean nodded and left to gather it, telling his sister, "You stay with him."

But Bobby was already calling out for the other items he needed. "Kitchen cutlery drawer. It's got a false bottom. Hemlock, opium, wormwood."

"Opium?" Tabitha repeated as she made her way to the kitchen. "I'm not sure I should legally know that you have that, Bobby."

"Go!"

She entered the kitchen and yanked open the cutlery drawer, dumping its contents on the counter and pulling at the false bottom to get to Bobby's stash.

Suddenly, she heard the sliding doors to the kitchen slam shut again.

"Tabitha?" Bobby called from the living room.

"It's fine, Bobby!" she called back, pulling the shotgun to her shoulder again. "Keep working!"
As the lights began flickering again, she used one hand to loosely hold the shotgun, and the other to grab the bundles from the hidden compartment of the drawer. But as she reached for the last one, a hand clamped down on her arm in a crushing grip. Swiveling, she tried turning into the grip and raising her sawed-off, but the crushing hand lifted her from her feet and threw her backwards.

Crumpling against the kitchen cabinets as the doors cracked and bounced open, she pushed to her knees and tried bringing the shotgun up again, but it was knocked from her grip.

Kneeling in front of her, Casey grabbed at her throat again and pushed her against the base cabinets. "There was nothing I could have done," she gasped to her former partner. "I didn't know it would blow."

"No," he agreed, leaning close to her face again. All pretense of his familiar smile and the kindness that had once been burned into her memory, had fled from his face, replaced by a twisted hatred she didn't recognize.

He continued in low tones, his face close to hers as his breath caressed her cheek, now harsh and cruel instead of familiar and comforting. "But you should have known more. You should have realized I wasn't me," he growled in her face, squeezing painfully as he stood, lifting her in his grasp until she dangled from his hand, trying in vain to reach the ground with her toes.

"I don't understand," she wheezed, tears burning painfully in her eyes at the lack of air. She tried striking and kicking his torso. She even tried clawing at him, but he didn't seem to notice.

"You come from a family of hunters, and you didn't even realize that man you were fucking wasn't really me!" he shouted.

"What?" she gasped, her face drawing together in confusion as her hands flailed behind her for something to use against him.

"That's right," he growled, shaking her to emphasize his point. "I was being ridden by a demon. Your own partner was a demon and you didn't even know it. Didn't see it. You were screwing a demon, and you didn't even realize it! Some hunter you are. But then, I guess that's why you ran away, wasn't it? Because you were no good at it. Just like you were a no good partner!" His other hand suddenly plunged through her chest, his hand grasping her heart and squeezing, even as he squeezed in time at her throat.

She gasped in pain, but couldn't so much as yell out as he tightened his grip on her throat. But finally, she yanked her hand from behind her and swung it through her former partner, his image disappearing as she fell hard to her feet. She stood holding the old cast-iron frying pan for a moment, hardly believing her luck in being able to reach it as her other hand clung to the counter, trying to keep on her feet.

But she didn't have time to dwell on the pain or her lack of breath; she knew he would be back, so wheezing for air, she grabbed her shotgun and Bobby's stash, running into the living room to get it to him.

"Here," she told Bobby as she set the herbs and drugs on his desk.

Her brothers entered just behind her, looking no better off than she felt.

The three went back to laying more salt lines down as the windows shattered and gusts of wind scattered their salt lines, ghosts appearing in the room and disappearing as the siblings began firing at them. They danced around each other as they fired, falling into the easy routine of watching each
other's backs just like when they'd been younger.

The small girls suddenly appeared, pinning Sam against the wall with the heavy roll-top desk.

"Sam!" Tabitha called, stepping towards him. She couldn't fire a shot from her angle though, not without hitting her younger brother.

"Cover Bobby!" Sam ordered, and Tabitha and Dean turned back again to face the continued onslaught.

A fist suddenly sailed into Tabitha's peripheral vision, connecting with her temple as she staggered sideways, getting knocked down as something heavy came down after her.

She instinctively blocked with the shotgun, stopping Victor's hands from grabbing at her. Instead, his grip tightened on the gun as he tried to push it down at her head.

"Tabitha!" Dean shouted.

"I'm alright!" she called back as she grunted and fought to push up on the shotgun.

Victor snarled down at her over the gun. "I wasn't alright," he growled. "You should have told me about them. You should have warned me to stay away from them before they got me killed!" he yelled.

And then he let one hand slip from the shotgun, plunging it through her chest just as her former partner had done. She threw her head back, biting off a scream of agony as the pain tore through her chest again.

"You should have told me that they'd get me killed. That's why you ran away from them after all, isn't it? You knew it was only a matter of time until they got everyone around them killed," he told her.

And then silence.

"Bobby?" Dean asked. "Tabitha, Sam? You guys okay?"

"I'll live. I think," Bobby answered in a tired voice.

"Yeah, I'm okay," Sam added.

"Tabitha?" Dean called.

"Tab, you okay?" Sam added, as she heard her brothers rush around looking for her.

She tried holding up a hand to signal she was okay, but realized she was behind the couch and they couldn't see her gesture, so she pushed painfully to her feet, one hand trailing the shotgun with her as she leaned hard over the couch.

"I'm here," she told them. "Please tell me you iced their asses. I think I could use a little sleep before battling another ghost."
Her brothers reached her and pulled her into their arms. Dropping the shotgun, she gratefully wrapped her own arms around each of them in return.

"Yeah, Tab. We iced them," Dean whispered, his hand reaching up to pat her head.

"Ouch," she whispered, pulling away from her brothers.

Dean looked down at his hand, the fingertips dotted with blood where he'd touched her head.

"Turn around," he ordered.

"It's just a bump," she told them, but studiously turned around. She knew it was only one of many bumps. "You guys don't look much of any better," she reminded them. Like her, they were covered in small cuts, and lumps and bruises that were beginning to form.

"It's a pretty big one," Sam told her. "And split open. But I don't think it really needs stitches."

She jerked away from them, gingerly touching the lump to the back of her head with her own fingers. There was only a small amount of wetness that she could feel. "Good, 'cause I'm not letting the two of you try to shave my head again under the guise of giving me stitches this time."

The boys grinned and then fell into laughter as they remembered the childhood incident. "I thought dad was going to tan our hides," Sam laughed.

Dean grinned at the memory as well. "You kept complaining you needed a haircut. Dad didn't want to take you somewhere and have to wait forever at some salon. So he said to cut Tabby's hair. I thought you looked good."

She pointed an accusing finger at them. "You made me look like a boy. Do you know how long that hair took to grow out again? Years."

The brothers laughed at the memory, and even Bobby chuckled from his seat at his desk, remembering the irate little girl who had hitchhiked for four days to reach his house, and then refused to leave for almost four months to rejoin her brothers.

And for once, as the men laughed at the memory of a nearly bald little girl, Tabitha actually felt like things might be okay again between her and the three men she cared most about.

It had only taken a few ghosts trying to rip their hearts out.

Tabitha jerked awake in the room where she had slept for the past four months in Bobby's house. The nightmare was fading from her memory, but she knew she wouldn't be able to get back to sleep. So she eased out of bed and dug through her luggage, finally finding one of her boots and holding it upside down, her stash of cigarettes and a lighter sliding onto her palm.

The boys were sleeping on the couches downstairs since they hadn't wanted to take the time to clear out one of Bobby's other spare bedrooms. So she slowly and quietly eased down the stairs, trying not to wake them.

As she reached the middle of the stairs, she realized she could hear Dean's voice, and slowed to a stop, trying to catch his words and whom he was talking to.

She was surprised when she heard the angel's voice.

Remaining perfectly still on the stairs, she listened to the angel and her brother talking about the seals
and what they were. Hardly breathing as the angel explained that Lucifer himself would be set free with the breaking of the seals.

"Well, bang up job so far," Dean was telling the angel in condescending tones. "Stellar work with the witnesses. It's nice."

Tabitha tensed at her brother's disrespectful words, fearing just what affect they would have on an angel, and so she shuffled quietly further down the stairs, trying to get closer to the conversation in case she needed to intervene.

"We tried," Castiel responded in calm tones. "And there are other battles. Other seals. Some we'll win, some we'll lose. This one, we lost."

She heard her brother scoff as she stepped off the last step, waiting at the bottom of the staircase as she held her breath.

Her brother must have done something to anger the angel, because he continued in stilted and harsh tones. "Our numbers are not unlimited. Six of my brothers died in the field this week." Tabitha froze at that, shocked that angels actually could be killed, given their own attempts to kill him, and briefly wondered what actually could kill an angel. "You think the armies of Heaven should just follow you around? There's a bigger picture here. You should show me some respect. I dragged you out of Hell. I can throw you back in."

At his angry words, Tabitha trotted into the kitchen where the voices seemed to come from, determined to defend her brother.

Only, the kitchen was empty.

She walked through and into the living room, only to find Sam asleep on the couch and Dean likewise fast asleep, using his coat for a blanket on the floor.

"What the hell?" she muttered to herself, looking around, but seeing no angel.

With tremulous steps, she quietly slipped out of the house, standing barefoot on the porch. Her breath hung in the air in heavy clouds. The cool air of the fall night licking over her exposed flesh, but after the nightmare she'd had, and the pounding in her heart now, the snap of the cold air felt refreshing. But her hands shook with anxiety so that it took six tries to strike her lighter and light a cigarette, but she finally brought it to her lips, drawing in a long inhale.

Slowly exhaling, she whispered to the soft singing of the crickets, "Am I really going crazy?"

"No. You are not crazy."

She coughed on an inhale of smoke, whipping around to see Castiel, still in his suit and trench coat, leaning casually against the faded siding of the house, his hands braced behind his back.

Still sputtering, and leaning back against the weather-beaten railing behind her, she demanded, "What the hell are you doing here? What's going on?"

He stared at her for so long, she didn't think he was going to answer her.

"I merely wished to assure you that you were not insane," he finally told her.

She took another long, nervous inhale of her cigarette, the smoke burning her sore throat, but helping to calm her shaking hands as she asked, "I really did hear you talking to Dean?"
"Yes."

She waited for him to elaborate, and made a frustrated motion with her hands when he didn't. "How? He was still asleep on the couch. And you were nowhere in sight. What's going on?"

"I spoke to Dean in his dream," Castiel explained, as though it were something as simple as using a telephone.

"In a dream?" she dubiously repeated.

"Yes. Why must I repeat myself so often with you and your brother?" Castiel suddenly asked, exasperation creeping into his own voice.

"Well, sorry. I guess us humans just aren't used to dealing with angels. It's kind of hard to wrap our heads around," she told him, her tension easing somewhat as her irritation set in and replaced her nervousness. She hopped up on the railing behind her, sitting with her bare feet dangling between the bars of the railing beneath her.

"Why would you want to 'wrap you heads around' something?" the angel asked, his head canting to the side again.

Tabitha suddenly threw back her head and laughed, and then clapped a hand over her mouth, not wanting to wake the men in the house.

Castiel pushed away from the house, waving a dismissive hand towards the old structure. "They still sleep," he assured her, still staring at her as he waited almost anxiously for her explanation.

"Castiel," she laughed quietly, "it's just an expression. It means to understand or comprehend something."

"Then why do you not say that?" he asked, clearly still baffled by the idea of human idioms.

"I don't know." She shook her head, finding his bewilderment and interest in her wording humorous. But then, she sobered. "So. I can hear you when you talk to my brother in dreams. How is that possible?"

Castiel moved closer to her, standing almost uncomfortably close and reminding her of children who had been deprived interaction with the outside world and had no understanding of acceptable social manners and boundaries.

"You are one of the humans I spoke of. One who can perceive my true voice and visage," he explained, his body nearly touching her bare knees as he moved even closer to her, his head less than a foot away from hers.

She scooted back on the railing, hanging dangerously over the back of it, her hands nervously rubbing at the cut-off sleep shorts she was wearing. The action would have been an indication for a normal human to back up and give space, but the angel merely waited for her response, not moving an inch as he stared down at her.

"So," she nervously began, trying to ignore her unease. "I can hear your voice, see what you look like. I'm not gonna argue with an angel on that, I guess, but how can I hear you in my brother's dream? It was this voice the one of your 'vessel' or whatever, not your true voice. And how could I hear Dean's voice, too? He's no angel."
He slowly reached out and touched his fingers to her temple. "You perceive my voice with your mind. Not your ears. When I spoke with Dean, you were able to catch the wavelength of our conversation and hear his responses as well. If you had concentrated, you could very well have seen it if you wished."

As he pulled his fingers away from her temple, she slid from the railing and pushed by the angel, moving to stand on the other side of the porch.

"I did not intend you to overhear my conversation with Dean, and I apologize that you were disturbed by it. I have not spent time around humans like you who can perceive us and did not realize you would hear me if I entered your brother's dream. Have I done something wrong?" As he spoke, his words increased in pace so that his last several sentences were spoken so quickly they ran together into one long sentence.

Tabitha turned around from the other side of the porch, deliberately leaning sideways against the railing and trying to appear nonchalant as she gave him a questioning look.

"You suddenly appear agitated," he clarified.

She sighed. "You were too close."

"I do not understand." He looked around the porch. "Too close to what?"

"Me," she sighed. "You were standing too close to me. Look, I get that you're an angel and apparently don't understand human norms, but humans don't like to be crowded. It makes us feel uncomfortable."

"I apologize," he said, his voice sounding like a mixture of regret and frustration.

"It's all right. Like I said, I get that you're not human. That's why I'm telling you how humans are."

"Then, I thank you for explaining your discomfort to me," he slowly answered.

She turned and leaned her forearms on the railing, bringing her forgotten cigarette to her mouth again.

"Why are you doing that out here?" Castiel suddenly asked.

She glanced at him, and he gestured to the cigarette in her hand.

"Because Dean has a weird thing about smoking. Says it's dangerous," she laughed. "As if hunting and all the drinking he does isn't." When the angel stared at her blankly, she continued. "I came outside so he wouldn't know. I just needed something to settle my nerves, I guess."

"Why?"

"You're like a little kid, you know?" But she shook her head and stood up straight, turning until she was leaning back against the railing again, and facing the angel who was keeping a more respectful distance, though he had moved a bit closer to her. "Why did I need to settle my nerves you mean?" At his nod, she continued. "Oh, I don't know, my brother suddenly showing back up from Hell, seeing the dead body or ghost of the last two men I've both slept with, one of whom turns out was actually a demon, finding out that the Apocalypse is coming, or oh, I don't know, hearing you tell Dean that all this really means that some demon bitch is actually trying to raise the damn devil. Guess it's probably one of those things. Not sure which. It's been a long couple'a days." She flicked one hand up in the air as she looked away. "Take your pick, I guess."
Silence followed for so long, that she thought Castiel had either disappeared, or actually been a figment of her imagination all along. But when she opened her eyes, she saw he was still standing there, his head still tilted to the side as he studied her.

Uncomfortable with the silent assessment, she wrapped her arms around herself, suddenly wishing she'd thrown a sweatshirt on over the worn spaghetti-strap tank top she'd worn to bed.

She cleared her throat in the silence, and nervously continued, "And I usually eat chocolate when I need my nerves settled, but I think it's going to be a long time until I touch chocolate again."

Still, the angel stared.

She cleared her throat one more time and turned sideways to the angel, looking out over Bobby's scrap yard. "It's impolite to stare at people like that, too," she told him.

From the corner of her eye, she saw his gaze immediately drop away. "Forgive me," he quietly offered.

But Tabitha silently shrugged it away. It was uncomfortable, but she couldn't really blame an angel for not understanding social norms of humans. But it made her wonder if angels just sat around in heaven staring at each other all day.

"How did you find out your partner was possessed by a demon?" he suddenly asked.

Tabitha turned again to face him, surprise coloring her tone. "He—I guess, his ghost—told me. He was so mad at me for not knowing he had been possessed." She looked away as she leaned heavily back against the railing. "I should have known," she whispered.

"You could not. The demon did not wish you to know," he offered, surprising her with the kindness in his tone.

"But I should have," she whispered in instance. To herself, she continued, "Was it the whole time? Just how long was he possessed?"

"Only a few weeks," the angel assured her.

Her attention snapped back to Castiel. "How would you know that? For that matter, how did you know he was my partner?" she demanded. "I said one of the men I'd slept with had been a demon. Not my partner. How do you know so much about me?" She remembered something else. "And why did you say that I shouldn't be here when you first came to Dean at that old barn?"

The angel looked nervously away. "I ah… I am an angel. I know many things," he told her, not meeting her eyes, but his voice was uneven and nervous.

"Bullshit," she growled. "You may be seemingly unkillable, but you're a horrible liar. How do you know those things about me? How do you know anything about me?"

The angel sighed tiredly, and looked back into her eyes. "I was tasked with watching over you for some time."

"What? When? How long?"

The angel shrugged, the action seeming almost elegant. "For a few years. Since the time you left the protection of your father and brother. I was told to watch over you."
"Why?" she demanded, her hand pressing nervously over the thumping of her heart.

"I do not know," Castiel answered. "I am a soldier. I follow orders."

"Is it because I can hear your real voice?" she whispered. "Because I'm not a normal human and can hear angels?"

"As I said, I do not know, although it was not until you responded to my words when I spoke to Dean that I realized you could hear my voice. I do not know why you were to be watched."

Her head was spinning as she mentally ran through the last several years. With a gasp, she turned back to face the angel.

"I heard your voice then, too, didn't I?" she asked him. "When Casey went into the building and was blown up, I heard your real voice whisper one word to me: badge. And I checked and realized I'd forgotten it and went back to the car. That was you, wasn't it?"

He nodded slowly. "I did not know if you heard my whisper in your ear or not," he told her. "You did not react nor turn away for several moments. I thought you had realized it on your own."

"You knew Casey was possessed, did you have something to do with his death? It had to be a supernatural death for him to rise with the other witnesses. Did you do something to him?"

The angel looked uncomfortable and turned away from her. "I was following my orders. When I relayed that the man you were intimate with had been possessed, heaven ordered that I smite the man so that you would not be in danger of whatever the demon's plans were."

"Why? Why would heaven order an angel to watch me? What could either Dean or I possible mean to anyone in heaven? Why are we important? What do you know?"

He turned back towards her at her barrage of questions, and slowly and angrily repeated, "I. Do. Not. Know. I am a soldier. It is not my place to question orders. Only to follow them."

Tabitha paced on the porch, crushing her forgotten cigarette and flicking it away as she paced.

"If you were sent to watch me, why were you surprised to see me with Dean the other night?" she suddenly asked.

The angel looked reluctant to say more, but sighed and continued. "My orders changed. I was recalled to heaven and then after a time, given new orders to bring your brother out of perdition. Another angel was tasked with watching you. I know not who."

"Some job they're doing," she muttered. "Nearly had my heart ripped out of my chest."

The angel stalked closer, his eyes narrowed as he stared down at her. "You and your brother are most frustrating. You are both alive. Do not complain about that. We do not have the luxury of following your every move. We are not guardians, but soldiers tasked with watching you humans. And neither your brother nor you are helpless. You are both alive. I lost brothers in the field who are not."

The pain was masked from his voice, but plain in the eyes that stared down at her. As was his regret. The angel didn't lie well with his words, but he didn't show much emotion on his face to betray himself either. If he didn't speak, he could have been a hell of a poker player.

Except for the eyes, Tabitha realized to herself. No emotion showed, except for in the subtle softness
of his light blue eyes. She moved closer to the angel, watching as he tracked her movement. When she stood before him, she had to look up into his eyes. He wouldn't have been much taller than her normally, but standing barefoot on the cold wooden floorboards of the porch gave him the advantage.

She exhaled a long breath to calm herself and placed a comforting hand on the angel's shoulder. His head jerked to the side at her action, staring down at her hand, seemingly in shock at her boldness or the gesture.

"I'm sorry," she told him, watching as his head whipped back to face her, his blue eyes staring incredulously down into hers. "I know what it is to lose a brother. And I'm sorry for your loss. And I know you're frustrated with Dean and I, but this is a lot for a human to take in in such a short time. It's hard to imagine what interest Dean or I could hold for anyone in heaven, let alone, God. We're just trying to figure out what's going on. So I'm sorry if we haven't been the easiest to deal with."

He stared at her for so long, that Tabitha started to wonder if she'd done something improper in touching the angel, and began slowly removing her hand, pulling it back to herself.

But his suddenly closed over her hand, pressing it to his shoulder as he continued staring at her. "Thank you for your condolences," he whispered. "These times are difficult for angels. We walk the earth as we have not in thousands of years. And I am not accustomed to losing so many of my brothers in so short a span of time."

"It doesn't matter how long the span of time is," she offered. "I know each one hurts no matter how much time passes."

The angel nodded in reply.

"Thank you," Tabitha quietly whispered to Castiel, feeling the angel jerk beneath her fingers at her words. He looked confused, so she elaborated. "For saving me back then from that demon and whatever it had been planning, and for bringing Dean back from Hell. I know I didn't say that earlier. And I know Dean would sooner swallow his own tongue than give a genuine thank you to a stranger, so, thank you for us both."

"You are welcome," he whispered back, still staring down at her in surprise. "And I appreciate your consideration on your brother's behalf. He is not as... understanding or accommodating to speak with as you have proven to be." As he spoke, he gently squeezed her hand one last time.

And then disappeared beneath her fingertips, leaving only the fluttering sound of feathered wings flapping in the night air.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think!
Sweat was trickling down Tabitha's face by the time she jogged back down Bobby's driveway, despite the still cool fall air. The last several hundred feet, she slowed to a walk, trying to cool down her exerted muscles. When she reached the front porch, she braced her arm on the railing, bending over to stretch her muscles as they continued cooling.

Suddenly she felt the headphones of her iPod ripped out of her ears.

"Where the hell have you been?" Dean demanded. "We woke up and you were gone."

She gestured down at her sweat covered running pants and zip-up sweatshirt. "I went for a run. No big deal. You guys were still sleeping, and I didn't want to wake you."

Dean calmed down by a few degrees as he stood on the steps of the porch, running a hand through his hair. "Just… leave a note next time. Scared the crap out of us when we couldn't find you. Especially after last night."

"All right," she sighed. "I'm sorry. I'm just not used to having to tell anyone what I'm doing or where I'm going."

She paused to give her brother a dramatic and playful hug as she climbed the steps, laughing as he tried to push her away.

"Ugh, gross," he complained, pushing at her shoulders. "You stink. What is with this sick obsession you and Sam have for running when nothing is chasing you? Didn't you get enough exercise last night?"

She jogged up the steps and into the house, taking note of her younger brother at the table eating breakfast and reading the paper.

"I was just out jogging," she called to Sam, "since Dean informs me that the two of you were so worried."

Her little brother didn't even look up. "Huh, yeah. Jogging. I told Dean it would be something like that."

Tabitha pinned her older brother with a smug smile. "See. He wasn't worried about me. I'm going to take a shower," she called over her shoulder as she jogged up the steps.

Tabitha dropped into a chair between her brothers, plunking her laptop on the table along with a plate of scrambled eggs from the stove.

"Thanks for saving me some bacon," she complained as she powered on her computer.

"I don't get it," Dean said. "Why would you eat bacon after doing the whole running for fitness thing?"

Tabitha took a piece of toast from Dean's plate. "I run so I can eat bacon. So save me some next time." Plus, she added to herself, running always helps with the guilt from a rare cigarette or my
chocolate addiction.

They ate in silence for a time as the men read the various papers Bobby usually received and Tabitha checked her email.

But it didn't last for long, and soon Dean was telling them about Castiel invading his dreams and what the angel had told him. Tabitha kept her head down and her attention on her laptop, afraid if she looked up, one of her brothers would see something in her face that gave her away. Guilt ate at her for keeping the whole hearing-the-angel's-voice thing a secret, but she was more worried about telling them the truth than keeping it from them.

"Can you believe this, Tab? What do you think, if you believe in angels and God, do you believe in the Devil, too?" Dean asked her after posing the same question of their brother.

"I guess, I don't know," she answered vaguely, and then tried to quickly change the discussion, hoping to distract from the current topic. "Hey guys," she called to her brothers, gesturing to her computer with her hands. "I think I've got a case here."

"Don't talk with your mouth full, Tab," Sam complained, but leaned over to look at her screen. "These are police and FBI reports." As he spoke, he gave her an appreciative and impressed smile.

She hurriedly chewed her mouthful, washing it down with coffee. "Yeah, some files a friend emailed to me. He wanted a second opinion."

"I thought you said you were on leave?" Dean asked. "Why's the FBI emailing you case files?"

She pointed at her laptop. "The FBI isn't, my friend is. He knows I'm on leave, he just wanted another opinion."

"So? What is it?" Dean asked.

"I think a vamp in Ohio. There's been a string of girls disappearing," she explained.

Dean shook his head, standing to take his dishes to the sink. "Missing girls doesn't necessarily mean vamps, Tab. And why is this guy asking your opinion on abductions. I thought violent crimes was your thing."

Tabitha stood as well, placing her dishes in the sink as she hurriedly explained, "It is. But there was blood found at the scenes where the women were taken. But not just their blood, an unknown male sample as well. So the FBI is thinking signs of a struggle."

Sam turned around at the table to face the two. "Okay, starting to sound a little more interesting, but still not necessarily a vamp just because of a little blood. And those girls are missing, not drained and dead."

Tabitha hurried to the table, picking up her computer and showing them the screen. "Yeah, but I found additional police reports from Cleveland. The girls have been disappearing from suburbs, but there have been deaths in some of the slum areas of Cleveland. Gangbangers with torn up necks and missing a lot of blood. Nobody's connecting them because they're assuming the deaths are simply gang violence."

"That could be vamps, but not necessarily related to the missing girls," Dean agreed. "And if they are, why take girls from suburbs and dudes from the inner city? Some sorta taste preference?" he grinned.
"I think the girls are getting turned in those suburbs, Dean, and then they're hunting in the city for blood."

Dean seemed to give her idea some thought. "You got autopsy photos of the dead guys by chance?"

But his sister shook her head. "No. I haven't told Evans that I think the cases are related, and I can't make an FBI request to see local police reports right now."

"I'm still not sure," Dean started.

"Come on, Dean. I may have been out of the hands-on part of hunting for a while, but I still know what to look for. Hell, I've been tossing you and other hunters cases for years," she insisted, crossing her arms as she held her ground.

"Look, I can buy into the dudes with the torn up necks being vamp food, but why are you so certain those girls are related?" Dean asked mimicking her stance and trying to stare her down.

Tabitha fought the slightest twitch of her lips. Dean was only slightly taller than she was and had never intimidated her. She'd seen his protectiveness for his siblings too many times to be subdued by his harsh stare alone.

"Call it a gut feeling," she told him. "I've learned to trust my instincts."

Dean continued to stare for a few more moments, but Tabitha met the challenge, refusing to back down.

"Fine," he suddenly agreed. "We've got no idea where to go with this angel business anyway, and I'd rather hunt a vampire than sit around watching you two."

Tabitha grinned as he turned away back into the living room.

Sam returned her grin, seeming genuinely happy that she had found a case for the three of them to hunt together. "I'll go pack," he piped up with a smile.

Suddenly, Dean stuck his head back into the kitchen. "I don't suppose I can talk you into heading back to Virginia and letting Sam and me handle this alone, can I?"

Tabitha's eyes narrowed in a scowl. "I told you, I'm sticking around until we know more about what's going on with you."

Dean huffed an exaggerated sound of frustration, and his sister's expression eased to see his lightened mood. "Fine. Fine," he told her. " Couldn't blame me for trying though. At least a vampire hunt should be simple enough for your first hunt back."

He disappeared back into the living room, but Tabitha yelled after him, "I'm an FBI agent! It's not like I've been playing simple civilian all this time."

Tabitha lounged in the back of the Impala as Dean drove and Sam rode shotgun. She really wasn't all that upset by it; it was nice having the whole backseat to herself so she could stretch out and sleep if she wanted to.

But at the moment, she was relaxing with her feet stretched across and resting behind Sam's head as she looked through files on her computer. She'd finally gotten Evans to email her some of the witness statements from the abduction cases and she didn't want to miss any important details.
"Find anything new?" Dean asked as he turned a Kiss song down.

"Not really," Tabitha admitted as she closed her laptop and shoved it back in her briefcase. "Just that none of the girls were at those bars looking for a guy or anything. Two were separated from their friends on the dance floor, and one disappeared before her friend showed up to meet her. But they all fit the same basic profile. Blonde, mid to late-twenties, pretty and outgoing, and from what their friends say, flirtatious. But according to those friends, much as they flirted, none of them was looking for a guy. Two already had boyfriends, and the other wasn't looking from her friends' statements."

As she finished putting her laptop away, Tabitha pulled out the stack of IDs and badges Bobby had given her before they left. He said he had a feeling she would need the false IDs and had had a friend cobble them for her. She knew as a Fed she shouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole, but she'd been very touched by Bobby's thoughtfulness, and practical enough to know how useful they'd be since she couldn't flash her own real credentials.

"What about the attacks on the guys?" Sam asked as he turned partly in his seat.

"I don't know for sure," Tabitha shrugged, coming back to the conversation. "I've managed to hack into the local police database, but there weren't any eyewitness statements of the attacks, just whoever finds the bodies, and they don't have those statements posted in their database yet."

"But you're still sure those missing girls are connected?" Dean pressed, trying to look at his sister in the review mirror.

"Yeah. Something's hunting those girls, Dean. Someone with enough charm and skill to get three intelligent girls to leave the safety of their friends in the company of a stranger. So it's someone with experience at this, and the skills of a predator."

"Maybe," Dean conceded, but turned the music back up and returned his attention to the road. Sam gave her a small smile, but didn't speak for or against her theory, making Tabitha wonder just whose side he backed. But as she relaxed into the bench seat to take a nap, she knew it didn't make a difference. She felt it in her gut that these cases were related, and her brothers would just have to wait and see.

Tabitha had chosen not to wait in the car as her brothers booked a room in a nondescript, rundown motel. It wasn't the kind the FBI usually sprung for, but it reminded her of the years she had hunted with her brothers and father.

"Yeah, you got two rooms available?" Dean was asking the pimply-faced kid behind the counter. "One single and one double would be great, but I want them next to each other."

At first, Tabitha was pleased with the thought of having her own room, but then a feeling of unease settled in. She'd usually had her own room with the Feds—or shared with another female agent if there was one working on the case—but hunting with her brothers and father, they'd always shared one room, cramming in to make it work. Of course, their father never had been wild about the idea of his daughter being out of his sight, or that of her brothers, even in her teenage years when she'd begged for her own room and own space. He claimed they were able to look out for each other better that way and Tabitha couldn't argue now with his reasoning, suddenly unsure if it was a good idea for them to be separated now, even at night.

But she smiled as she thought of one way to change her brother's mind without him really noticing it was her idea.
Stepping closer to Dean as the kid looked through his list of open rooms, she grinned and drawled, "I get my own room? Aww, thanks dad. Does that mean I can have boys over and everything?"

Both of her brothers turned to shoot dirty looks at her, but Dean immediately turned back to the teenager. "Scratch that. We'll take one room. And a cot if you got it."

Tabitha merely shrugged, fighting back a grin at her brother's predictability.

The rest of the day had been spent in a tattoo parlor and shopping. The latter had been at Tabitha's insistence since she had only packed her civvies for her stay at Bobby's place and didn't have any of her work suits with her.

But the tattoo parlor had been at her brothers' insistence, much to her surprise.

"You want me to get a tattoo?" she asked incredulously.

"Yeah," Dean responded simply, his arms folded over his chest again.

"You want me to get a tattoo?" she repeated, shaking her head as they stood outside the Impala at the first tattoo shop they'd come across in Cleveland near their motel. "What? Maybe a tramp-stamp with butterflies or hearts or something equally as stupid?"

Dean undid the first several buttons on his dark shirt, pulling it to one side to show an emblem with a pentagram in the center of a circle and what looked almost like flames around it, tattooed on his own chest. Tabitha leaned closer to look, and then turned to see that Sam had also opened his shirt and was sporting the same tat.

"It's an anti-possession symbol against demons," he told her, buttoning his shirt again.

"We're hunting vampires," Tabitha reminded, her brows drawing together in confusion. "Besides," she added, pulling a necklace out from under her own shirt, "I still have my anti-possession charm that dad gave me years ago when we were all hunting."

"Nope," Dean shook his head. "Charms can be taken or lost. You're getting a tat before we hunt anything. Just in case," he warned.

Tabitha shrugged, not really against the principle of getting a tattoo, and agreeing with her normally reckless brother, that safe was better than sorry. "Fine," she told them, "but I'm checking this place out to make sure I find a decent tattoo artist who won't botch it and to make sure they're up to health codes."

An hour later, she was reclined more or less comfortably on the tattoo artist's table on her stomach, her jeans pushed down and a towel covering the area the tattoo artist wasn't working on.

Sam and Dean had refused to leave the suddenly cramped room, but neither would they face Tabitha while she was getting inked.

"Do you really have to get it on your ass?" Dean complained as he continued sulkily staring at the wall.

"Yeah," Sam added uncomfortably, "why not on your arm or back or something?"

Tabitha pushed up on her elbows as she spoke to their backs. "I'm not getting a tattoo of a strange emblem on my arm or back for my friends or colleagues to see and ask about, and I'm not gonna get
one where I'm always having to be careful about what I can wear and still cover the tat. If you guys
don't like it, you can wait out in the outer room."

They grumbled, but neither one left.

"They always like this?" Crissy, her tattoo artist asked.

Tabitha looked over her shoulder at the woman. She was short with pixie cut brunette hair. Tab
wondered if the girl was even five-foot tall since she had to stand on a small stool to work. Tabitha
considered her quite pretty, maybe not in the conventional sense—she had too many tattoos and
piercings covering her exposed skin for that—but still, they brought a hard edge to the soft femininity
her small frame gave her, the hard well complementing the soft side of her.

"Yeah," Tabitha confirmed. "They're always like that."

Crissy made a polite noise as Tabitha went back to laying her head on her folded arms.

"So," the shorter woman politely inquired, "what's the deal with you all having the same tat? Some
kind of gang thing? Or something to show you belong to these two hunks?"

"No," Tabitha quickly answered as her brothers made choking noises. She quickly thought on her
feet, so to speak, as she lied, "It's the same tattoo our father had. And we all agreed to get one like his
to remember him."

"Cool," Crissy answered. "But why are your brothers so concerned if you get another tattoo on your
ass? Not like it's their business."

"Another?" Dean repeated, whirling around to face her.

Tabitha felt the blood rush to her face as she stared him in the eyes with her head still reclined on her
arms. "It's none of your business. I got it one drunken night after me and Sammy left for college."
She pushed up on her elbows again, raising a challenging eyebrow. "Why? You wanna see it?"

Dean whipped around again, grumbling under his breath as Tabitha looked over her shoulder once
more.

Crissy grinned wickedly. "Sorry, I assumed they didn't know, and I couldn't resist tweaking them."

"Thanks," Tabitha drawled sarcastically, and then lay back down again. She couldn't wait for this to
be over.

It was late when Tabitha limped into their motel room later that night, carrying several shopping bags
with her purchases from earlier in the day. She dropped them beside the bed nearest the bathroom
and flopped down on her stomach, grumbling, "I'm taking this bed."

As she looked across the room, she saw her brothers staring at the remaining bed, and then they
turned to each other and quickly played a silent game of rock-paper-scissors. Sam won, and Tabitha
began feeling guilty as she saw their older brother's scowl as he spread a blanket out on the floor.
There hadn't been any cots available, and Tabitha suddenly felt like she should take the floor since
she had gotten the guys to have just one room.

"I can take the floor, Dean," she offered, starting to push off the bed she'd commandeered.

Her brother flopped over on his back. "Nope. You can have the bed tonight, especially seeing how
you just got a fresh tat." She opened her mouth to speak, but Dean cut her off without even opening his eyes. "Go to sleep, Tab."

She huffed, and decided to go change in the bathroom since she was already up. While she was in the bathroom she decided to shower, and then she decided to take the time to smooth more Bacitracin on the fresh ink, admiring little Crissy's handiwork in the mirror as she did so. Once she was finished, she began wrapping an ace bandage over some plastic wrap and the tattoo. Tabitha wasn't the kind of woman who necessarily liked to get a lot of tattoos—the first had been a drunken idea—but she figured if she was going to get one more, she wanted it to look good and heal well.

And she was suddenly glad that they were already in Cleveland and didn't have to spend a ton of hours sitting in the car driving anywhere. It probably wasn't going to be much fun sitting for the next several days as it was.

When she finally came out of the bathroom, she saw that both of her brothers had fallen fast asleep. And she was reminded again of how removed she felt from them. All day they had talked about past cases and joked around with each other in shorthand and inside jokes that she was mostly left out of. She didn't begrudge them their closeness, in fact, she was glad to see how well they still got along after Dean had been gone for four months, but she couldn't help the pang of feeling like an outsider. It was a painful reminder of what she'd felt before she finally left to follow Sam.

She'd never been quite one of the guys. She hunted with them, researched alongside Sam, could shoot a pistol, rifle, or shotgun as well as Dean, but their father had always tried to keep her separate. It was one of the reasons she'd started taking online courses the last several years she'd been with them, needing to do something that was all her own. And partly why it had been so easy for her to walk away with Sam when he had.

But things were different now. Their father was dead, and she knew the truth was, she wasn't the same girl she had been back then, anyway.

She just had to figure out where she fit into things now.

Because the truth was, even if she went back to Virginia tomorrow, she knew she would never go back to staying so out of touch with her brothers.

They were back in her life, and she was keeping them there if she could help it.

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Tabitha groaned as she carefully rolled over in bed, trying to slip onto her side without jostling her tender flesh too badly. But as she rolled over and rearranged her pillow, she became aware of a pained moan echoing in the room. Lifting her head, she could see that it wasn't Sam, who was sprawled out in the other bed, his mouth partly open as soft snores escaped.

So it had to be Dean. She rolled to her feet and tiptoed closer to him, seeing that he was tossing slightly as his moans increased, a look of pain or anguish marring his normally jovial face.

Kneeling beside him, she gently nudged his shoulder. "Dean. Wake up, Dean," she whispered.

He jerked up so quickly that Tabitha fell back on her butt to keep from being clocked in the head with his noggin, groaning at the pain as she fell on her tender flesh.

"You alright? What's wrong, Tab?" Dean demanded in a whisper, grabbing her shoulders.

She pushed onto her knees again, rubbing lightly at the tender skin of her tattoo. "I'm fine," she assured him, focusing her attention on him. "It was you I was worried about, Dean. You were
moaning in your sleep like someone was skinning you alive. Are you okay?"

Tabitha didn't miss the way his eyes widened fearfully at her words, darting almost nervously around the room. "I'm fine. Must have been a dream. I don't even remember," he hurriedly told her.

"Bullshit!" she nearly shouted, barely remembering to drop her voice as Sam continued to sleep unaware. "You seem to forget, Dean. I'm a Fed. We're good at body language and reading lies. And I'm especially good at reading your lies. What's going on? What were you dreaming?" she demanded.

Dean jumped to his feet and paced inside the room, looking like a caged animal desperate for escape.

"It's nothing, Tab. I don't remember, really," he insisted. But his lie was no more convincing to her a second time around.

She pushed to her feet as well, stepping in front of her brother to halt his pacing, and grabbing his hand as she pulled him to her bed. As she pulled him down to sit on the edge of her bed, she told him, "You can tell me anything, Dean. I'll always be here for you."

He didn't say anything, just silently sat on the bed as he stared at the floor. But he hadn't released her hand.

"You remember Hell, don't you?" she whispered, almost afraid to say the words and spook him.

Dean tensed, and she knew he was going to spring up again, so she tightened her grip, and turned to face him more, ignoring the pain sitting on the bed caused her new tattoo. "I mean it, Dean. You can tell me anything. And don't you dare try to lie to me again and say you don't know what I'm talking about."

"Fine. I won't lie," Dean said, and then proceeded to say nothing.

Tabitha sighed in frustration. What could she say? It wasn't as though she could say she understood what it was like in Hell, or that she even had an inkling as to what it was that happened there. If he didn't want to talk, she couldn't force him.

"You don't have to tell me," she finally whispered, staring down at their hands. "But I know you've been having trouble sleeping. You don't have to hide that. And if you ever want to talk, I'll listen. You've always tried to look after Sam and me. Let us return the favor."

She felt Dean turn to look at her, so she lifted her head to meet his gaze.

"What about you? You haven't been sleeping that well, either," he pointed out.

She opened her mouth to deny it, but his glare made her shut her mouth abruptly as she remembered waking from a nightmare as she napped in the back of the car just that afternoon.

Tabitha shrugged. "It's no big deal," she told him. "Not anywhere on the scale of having been in Hell."

Dean's gaze darkened slightly, but he didn't turn away. "About that guy from Bobby's? Casey, right?"

She only nodded.

"You said he was your partner," Dean continued, "but he seemed awful up-close-and-personal when
I found you. And I heard some of the stuff he said to you. Want to talk about it?"

Tabitha felt the heat build in her cheeks and her eyebrows climb. "I doubt that's really something you want to talk about," she evaded.

Dean's cheek turned white as he seemed to bite it before continuing calmly. "I told you, I heard some of what he said. So I already know you were sleeping with the guy. Did you love him?"

She immediately shook her head, trying her damnedest not to sound or act like a sixteen-year-old virgin as she discussed her personal life with her brother. She was a grown woman, and if she could chose to do something stupid like sleeping with her partner, she knew she should be grown up enough to discuss it. Still, it felt strange telling Dean.

"No," she quickly responded. "I didn't love him. But we'd been together as partners for a while. We were good friends. He was funny, smart, good-looking, and we were friends. It just sorta happened." She cleared her throat nervously. "And then it just kept happening. It's hard to have a normal dating life when you're an FBI agent and always being sent all over the country. We knew all those little things about each other that normally only couples know about each other." She shrugged again. "It just happened."

Dean was silent for a moment before he asked with obvious discomfort, "And I take it the FBI doesn't condone that sort of thing?"

"No," she answered with a shake. "But after he was killed in the explosion, they did a standard investigation into his death, and it didn't take long for them to discover that he'd been spending a lot of time at my home. Too much time. That's really why I'm on leave. They told me I had to. Either that or I'd be put on suspension and it would go on my record what happened between us. I went on 'leave' only a few days before Bobby called to tell me about you. So I didn't think twice about leaving Virginia and coming back."

"And you had no clue the guy was possessed?" he asked, reaching over with his other hand to cover hers with both of his strong hands.

"No. He was acting strange those last several weeks, but we'd just come off a tough case where several kids had been murdered and more had disappeared, and I just thought it had gotten to him. Her voice dropped as she whispered, "How could I not have known?" As she spoke, she looked away, ashamed at her ignorance of her own partner. A man she'd even been sharing her bed with.

Dean suddenly pulled her into his side, offering her the same familiar comfort he'd always given when they were children. "You can't know everything. Not even you, Super Special Agent Winchester," he chuckled softly.

Tabitha smiled as well. "What about you? Are you even going to be able to get back to sleep?"

She could almost feel the smile melt from his face. "I doubt it, but why don't you get some sleep," he told her, gently pushing her back towards the bed.

Moving across the bed, she also pulled him with her, patting the space beside her on the queen bed as she leaned against the headboard, mostly sitting upright. He looked at her curiously, but allowed her to pull him down until his head was resting on her legs as she ran her fingers through his hair, humming a soft lullaby she remembered singing to her brothers when they'd been little and couldn't sleep.

"Do you remember Mom singing that to us?" Dean asked sleepily.
"No," she whispered. "But sometimes I think I do. Who knows if what I remember is real or not?" In truth, she only had a handful of memories of their mother, and even those, she wasn't sure if they were real, or fabricated in her mind after hearing stories from their father and from Dean.

As Dean's breathing evened out again, she finally felt like she'd fallen back into place with her brothers. At least for the moment.

The sudden sound of flapping wings had Tabitha tensing as she looked up. But she gave a shaky sigh when she saw Castiel in his familiar trench coat standing only a few feet away from her.

"It's kinda terrifying the way you can just show up like that," she whispered to the angel.

"Why are you still here?" Castiel asked her as he wandered around the foot of the bed, looking at the papers with the news reports of the dead gang members they'd collected that day.

Tabitha paused to look down at her brother still sleeping with his head on her lap, and her younger brother still sleeping in his bed unaware of their visitor.

"We just got here today. What do you mean, 'what are you still doing here?'" she asked, completely confused by what the angel meant.

He turned to fully face her, looking down at where she still sat, his arms folded behind his back. "I don't mean them. I mean you. What are you still doing here? It was hoped that you would return to your life and stay out of the dangers your brothers are facing."

Tabitha shifted to get up, but felt Dean slightly tense at the movement. Not wanting to disturb what little sleep he seemed to get, she froze, annoyed that she couldn't stand to face the angel.

"I don't get it. Why do you care if I'm here with my brothers or not," she huffed, careful not to raise her voice and wake Sam or Dean.

"I am only—" the angel started to say.

"Following orders," she cut him off. "Yeah, you've said that. But despite what you've told Dean and I, we still don't know why the hell angels give one whit about us. And honestly, it's a little terrifying not knowing why you're interested in us. I'm starting to think that angels aren't much different from humans in that you don't do something for nothing. So forgive me if I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Castiel stood staring at her in the silence that followed her words. She knew it might not have been prudent, but she couldn't help the need to know what was going on.

"I just don't like being clueless," she finally told the silent angel.

Castiel finally sighed when it appeared Tabitha wasn't going to back down and stepped closer to her as he spoke, his arms still folded behind his back as he leaned down towards her. "I cannot help that you are clueless for I don't know any more than you do. Heaven has something in mind for you and your brother, some purpose, but it hasn't been revealed to me."

"So how do we find out?" Tabitha whispered, looking over at her two sleeping brothers.

"'We?'" he repeated, leaning back from her a little in surprise.

"Well, yeah, I don't know any other angels. Who else is going to help us?" she reasoned.
Castiel still seemed surprised, and more than a little baffled. "You want my help specifically?" he asked.

"Well, yeah. You're the only angel we know," she repeated with a small laugh. Sobering, she continued, "But you've protected me before. And maybe it's crazy, but my gut tells me we can trust you. You saved my brother, and that means something to me."

The angel started to move closer to her again, turning his back to her brothers as he sat on the edge of the bed near her feet, twisting his torso to look Tabitha in the eye. "Do you really wish to know?"

"Yes," she immediately nodded. "I know we all do. But especially Dean and I."

For a few moments, Castiel seemed to consider something internally. "It could be difficult," he finally told her.

Tabitha nodded. "I'm starting to get that most things are difficult when it comes to angels. Or are you not like other angels?" She smiled as she said it, trying to tease the serious angel.

But her teasing seemed to go over his head, with a serious expression on his face, he shrugged, but carefully answered, "I doubt you'd like to know what it is like to work with most of the other angels. Most other angels are... even less accustomed to dealing with humans than I am."

There was something heavy in his tone that told Tabitha there was more to his words than he was saying, but she didn't press him on it.

Castiel glanced over his shoulder at her brothers again, lowly saying, "It would still be best if you were not in their company. You are not accustomed to the things they face and will continue to face."

She shook her head, her loose and mussed blond hair tossing from side to side as she did so. "Why are you so adamant about me not being here? Why do you keep asking why I'm here?"

He leaned sideways towards her, his eyes staring at her in that manner so that she felt like she was under a microscope. "I do not understand your insistence on placing yourself in danger. Your brothers are in too deep to escape it. But I do not understand why you persist in bringing yourself deeper as well. Why do you do this?"

Tabitha began to feel slightly crowded again, and leaned back against the headboard as she considered her answer, wondering why this angel even cared to know what her reasons were.

"They're my brothers. My family—my blood. And I've already let them down by not being there in the past. And I won't let them down again. So until I know what's going on and why Heaven is interested in my brother, I'm not going anywhere. I stayed away before, and I wasn't there when the boys were in trouble. I have to be there for them now. In whatever way I can," she insisted. "I'm tougher than you think, you know. I can take care of myself."

The angel didn't respond, and suddenly stood, walking away from her to look at the articles scattered on the table.

"What are you hunting?" he asked, his back to her as he sifted through the papers.

The surprise of his question stilled Tabitha's words for several moments, but she finally managed to say, "A vampire. At least I think so. Case came through a colleague of mine, and I'm pretty sure the missing girls and murdered men are all connected to a vampire. Maybe more than one vampire." She glanced down at Dean again, whispering to herself, "Dean's not so sure though."
Castiel glanced over his shoulder at her. "You have good instincts. I saw that in the times I checked in on you when I was tasked with watching you. Trust them. Your brothers will learn to. That is if you still insist on joining them. You'll need your instincts."

Tabitha opened her mouth, still unsure what she was going to say, whether to thank him for believing in her when her brothers didn't, or perhaps to finally ask him why he'd shown up in their motel room in the first place, but before she could speak, the angel disappeared with the soft flutter of wings.

But whether her brothers believed her or not, she wasn't going anywhere. She'd made a promise to herself to do a better job of looking after her brothers, and as long as things with these angels and demons were still up in the air, and the apocalypse hanging on the horizon, she wasn't going anywhere.

After their mother had been killed, she'd always done her best to take care of her brothers. She remembered the vague memory of Sam's birth and how upset she'd been to no longer be the youngest child. Her mother had told her that she had to look after the boys, that it was her responsibility as their only sister to take care of them and keep them out of trouble.

And she realized with a sinking sensation, that she hadn't been around to do that in a long time, and vowed to herself that she would do better. She'd look after them as best as she could.

Chapter End Notes

Be sure to leave some review love! And thanks for reading!
"I don't like this," Dean complained as he knotted the blue tie of his FBI suit.

Tabitha walked out of the bathroom as her hands busily pulled her hair into a French twist, pinning the loose hairs in place. "Well, tough, Dean. I don't have a problem with you playing faux Fed to the local police, but you can't go with me to meet Evans, and I can't go to the morgue to check out the bodies. Evans is a real Fed, and the chance that he'll recognize you guys is just too high. You guys kinda made a name for yourselves with my colleagues. They're going to remember the outlaw duo brothers of another Federal agent. And I can't show up at the local PD because someone might recognize me from the last time I was in Cleveland. So, no dice. You're not going with me. You guys go check out the bodies, I'll meet with Evans," she insisted.

Finished with her hair, she smoothed her dark blue knee-length skirt, and stepped into the plain looking pair of black heels on the floor, instantly kicking her height up a couple of inches. She pulled the matching suit jacket over her white blouse, once more donning her familiar FBI persona like armor.

Her brothers continued to scowl silently as they drove to the Cleveland Police Department, Dean getting out of the Impala as Tabitha slid over into the driver's seat.

"I won't be gone long," she told them. "I just need to meet with Evans and go over the case a bit."

"Why?" Sam asked, coming around to stand with Dean on the sidewalk. "I don't get it, I thought that guy already sent you the files the FBI has on the abductions."

Tabitha nodded as she reached out for the driver's door, not closing it quite yet. "He did. But I still want to talk to him. He's been on the case, and there are always things that don't make it into the reports, theories and gut-feelings that an agent has but can't prove. But a lot of times, those feelings and reactions are important," she explained.

"But I thought you already decided it was this same vamp?" Dean said, his hand not yet releasing the driver's door.

"It never hurts to check everything out," Tabitha reminded. "Just go. Check out the bodies and make sure these really were vampire attacks, and I'll be back in no time."

Dean helped push the door closed, but called through the glass, "Just take care of my baby."

His sister laughed and waved out the back of the window as she drove away.

"I ordered some coffee, wasn't sure what else you'd want," Evans said as she entered the small family diner and sat in the booth across from him.

"That's fine," she told him, hailing down a waitress to place her own breakfast order.

When the waitress had finally left, Tabitha turned back to the agent across from her, noting that Phil Evans was still staring at the cup of coffee in his dark hands, not touching his food, and not looking up into her eyes.
"What's wrong?" she instantly asked, not liking the somber feel in their booth.

Evans continued to roll the half-filled cup between his hands, but his dark lips lightened slightly from the pressure of him clamping them unpleasantly together, an almost sour look filling his face.

"What?" she repeated.

Evans finally looked up, pinning her in a hard stare as his dark eyes looked her over, seeming to search her face for some truth.

"Why'd you come?" he suddenly asked, his deep voice rumbling dangerously.

Tabitha leaned back in surprise at the hostile edge to his tone. "I told you, after reading the case files, I decided to come take a look. Unofficially of course, since I'm still on leave. Just figured I could lend a hand."

"On leave?" he repeated, leaning back in his own booth and slinging one arm across the back as he continued his hard stare. "That's what you told everyone, 'on leave for a family emergency.' But the way I just heard it, you're on an unofficial suspension. You know you can't be here without compromising the case. So why are you?"

Tabitha sighed and crossed her arms on the table as she leaned forward over them. "You've been talking with someone from my office about me."

"Yeah, when you said you were coming to take a look at things, I decided to give your office a call and find out just why you'd taken such a long leave of absence from your own field office. Didn't want you getting into the case if you were burning out or something. But this is worse." He shook his head and whispered low and accusingly, "What the hell did you do?"

Tabitha huffed, trying to decide what to say as their waitress brought her plate of food, mercifully giving her a moment to think.

"I didn't do anything really wrong or illegal," she finally whispered confidentially to him when they were alone. "After Casey died, they found out we'd been intimate with one another, and you know how the Bureau doesn't like that kind of thing, so they put me on leave. Especially since he'd been killed."

Evans looked momentarily surprised, but then seemed to be replaying every time he'd around the pair on the two cases where they had collaborated. He leaned forward again and stabbed at his own omelet. "Damn," was all he said for a moment.

"One of the many reasons my wife is thankful my partner is a man," he said lowly. Then he met her eye. "I'm sorry. They didn't say what you were 'unofficially' suspended for, and I just assumed the worst. I'm sorry about Casey, too. He was a good man. Good agent. We were all sorry to hear about his death."

Tabitha nodded into her coffee, not meeting the other agent's eyes as she sipped the hot liquid.

"But why so long?" Evans pushed. "I get that the Bureau wanted you to take some time off after the man you'd, ugh, been with had been killed. But almost five months? Seems pretty damn long to me."

Tabitha shrugged and stared at her cup in her hands, absentely stirring the stemming liquid with a spoon. "I can come back when I want. As long as I agree to counseling. It's also being mandated that I complete a full evaluation before I can return and I don't agree it's necessary."
Evans reached across and briefly laid his large warm hand on her arm, offering his silent support. "Counseling is mandated anytime you lose a partner, Tabitha. You know that, and this is even more complicated because of, ugh, your close relationship with him. Maybe it's not a bad idea."

"So what can you tell me about the missing girls?" she asked, eager to change the topic.

But Evans hesitated. "You sure you should be working on this. I mean, you are on leave or suspension, whatever you want to call it. Maybe you should be staying away from casework for a while."

"No," she answered with a shake. "I'm fine, and I've been away for almost five months now. I've had plenty of time off. Just let me take a look at the files."

He hesitated, but finally grabbed the files off the bench beside him, handing them across as he explained which file belonged to which girl. Tabitha didn't say anything, but the sheer fact that Evans had brought the files with him anyway meant he'd intended to share them all along. Either he trusted her more than he'd let on, or he was stuck bad and really needed an outside pair of eyes.

For the next hour, Tabitha picked at her food and flipped through the files, looking through the pictures and reading everything Evans had gathered as she asked him to clarify different points and give his impressions.

"So. What's your gut telling you?" Evans finally asked.

Tabitha shook her head slowly. Her gut was even more convinced now that these girls had been lured away by a vampire. The man that had been able to lure three intelligent women from bars and clubs like that was obviously intelligent himself, and a skilled and practiced hunter. Many years of skill, she was sure. But she couldn't tell another FBI agent what she was really thinking.

"My gut tells me that these girls are dead and we won't find their bodies or who did it," she told him, sliding the files back across the table to Evans. "Whoever did this, it isn't his first rodeo, and he left very little evidence behind."

"He left blood," Evans pointed out.

"Yeah, at each scene. Which leads me to believe it was deliberate or he just didn't care. Blood doesn't do us any good if we can't match it to anyone in the system. And this guy knows it, too."

"But his blood is on file now. We could catch him for something else and link him back to these women."

"Do you really think we will?" Tabitha asked, leaning back as she gathered her purse and threw a few bills down on the table to pay for her meal.

Evans sighed in frustration, likewise throwing some bills on the table. "No. We haven't even found any familial DNA in the database to match to the guy. It's like the guy doesn't exist and has no family."

"And that's why I think it'll be a miracle if the FBI does actually find him," she agreed as they walked out of the diner.

Evans reached out to shake her hand. "Well, thanks for coming to look, even if you've only confirmed what I've feared. We'll keep digging of course, but I'm not sure we'll find anything."

"I'm always happy to help," she assured him.
Tabitha pulled up in front of the Cleveland PD where she'd left her brothers, waiting only a few minutes before scooting to the middle of the seat as they piled in on either side of her. At least she hadn't had to wait long for them to be done as well.

Dean was surreptitiously looking his car over, and not so sneakily changing the station on the radio as he threw her a dirty look for changing it.

"Find anything?" Sam asked as they took off.

"Nothing concrete, but I'm even more certain these are related and it was a vampire that took those girls," she told them.

"We'll see," Dean shrugged, still unconvinced.

"How 'bout you guys?" she asked, smoothing her hand over her skirt as she ignored Dean's skepticism.

Sam was pulling his tie loose as he answered, one arm slung behind her on the seat. "Definitely got a vamp here in town. At least one, probably more from the number of bodies in the time frame. You were spot on about that."

Tabitha hummed a sound of agreement, but stared ahead as they drove, ignoring her younger brother's implication that she wasn't right about her other theory.

It was after dark as the siblings argued in their motel room.

"Look, I agree with you one-hundred percent on those guys, Tab. No way were they torn up by an animal. That was definitely the work of a vamp, but I still don't think the missing girls are connected. So let's just go to the area where it's been hunting and see if we can't find it before it kills someone else," Dean argued. He'd changed out of his FBI suit and back into jeans and a heavy button-up shirt, and was currently sitting on the edge of her bed as he pulled a machete out of the bag at his feet.

Tabitha looked up from where she was sitting at the small square table, a map of the city laid out in front of her as she marked off the areas where the girls had been from and where the bars and nightclubs were where they'd been taken.

"And I'm agreeing with you, they've killed more people than one vampire would need for food. But I think this vampire has turned those girls and they're feeding now, too, or he's hunting to feed them. But either way, based on the timeline of when those girls were turned, I think he's going to be hunting for another one to turn tonight or tomorrow night. So I think we should watch these clubs and look for him," she argued, trying to point to the area where the girls had been taken. It wasn't a huge area, but there were a couple of nightclubs left in it he hadn't taken girls from yet.

Sam leaned over her shoulder to look at the map. "Okay, even if there is a vampire hunting and turning these girls, how can you be sure where he'll be?"

Tabitha threw a grateful look at her younger brother, glad he was at least taking her somewhat seriously. "Vampires were once human, too. And they still have enough human instinct in them that they hunt in similar patterns to human predators. And they like a comfort zone. These girls have all been taken from different clubs in the same area. And there's only two clubs similar to those other ones left in that area that haven't been hunted yet. I say we stake them out. Try to figure out which one he's gonna hit next."
"We don't know a vampire has been hunting those girls," Dean maintained. "But we do know a vampire has been killing those men, so we're gonna go hunt where we know it's been killing people. Not where it just might turn up and be hunting chicks to turn. Besides, even if you were right, it's already turned three girls. Why would it turn more?"

"You know vampires tend to like nests with numbers of six or more. It's rare to see ones much smaller. As quickly as this one is turning girls, I'm guessing either his old nest is dead, or he's just establishing his own nest for himself. He's not done yet," she argued, getting to her feet and standing in front of her brother.

"We're hunting the area we know this thing has been," Dean told her, his voice brooking no argument.

As though that had ever stopped Tabitha. "Fine. Maybe that's a good idea. You and Sam head over to the east side of town and check there just in case he is hunting for blood again, and I'll go to the area where the girls have been taken. Maybe I'll get lucky and hit the right club, but this way, we're covering our bases better."

"What?" Dean sputtered. "You want to go hunting a vampire by yourself?"

"I'll be fine," she huffed. "According to you, I'm wrong anyway. But I'm going to go check it out just in case I'm right."

"Come on, Tab," Sam interceded. "You can't go hunting a vampire by yourself. How are you even going to find it?"

Tabitha fluffed the loose hair around her shoulders. "He's got a type. And physically, I fit it well enough. And I know enough about the other girls to fake the personality type."

"You want to be bait?" Sam asked, his mouth dropping open. "Do you know how dangerous that is?"

Tabitha whipped around and began digging through her bag, looking for clothes to wear to fit the part. "I'm a Fed, Sam. I'm familiar with the dangers of playing bait. We use our own agents when we need bait for a sting. I've played bait twice when I've fit the profile. I'll be fine."

Her brothers were silent, and she finally looked up as she found clothes that would work for a girl looking to have a good time at a nightclub.

"I don't like this," Dean told her. "But I still don't think it's a vampire you're looking for that took those girls. It's probably your garden-variety, human sicko."

"In which case, I still can't walk away without looking for him," she replied, heading to the bathroom to change.

When she came back out, she was wearing a brightly colored, shimmery purple halter top, and tight low-cut jeans with strappy heels.

"Taking bait to a whole new level, aren't you?" Dean snorted, sitting on the bed once more, machete still in hand.

Tabitha ignored the jab, carefully looking at her loose, curly hair and makeup in the mirror again.

"I don't like this," Dean repeated.
"Fine. Duly noted. But I'm still doing it. I can take care of myself. Especially if it is a human sicko as you say. I'll be fine," she insisted, slipping flashy silver earrings in place.

Dean stood and held something out to her. She turned and looked down to see a small syringe in his palm, filled with dark red liquid.

"Dead man's blood?" she asked, taking the syringe. Then she looked down at her outfit, unsure how to hide the syringe in her skintight jeans.

"Yeah, it's not a lot, but should be enough to drop a vamp for at least a while," Dean answered. "And I want your cellphone glued to your hand. The second you think you see a man or a vampire that might be your guy, you call me or text me, and Sam and I will make a beeline for your location. That's the only way you're doing this."

"Fine," she easily agreed, and then handed the syringe back to Dean. "Why don't you find some tape, and tape it to my lower back. It's the only place I can think to keep it. And I don't want to put it in my purse. Just in case."

Dean rifled through his bag, coming up with a roll of duct tape. "Good idea," he agreed. "I'll feel better if you have this on you in case something does happen."

Tabitha held the back of her halter-top up out of the way as Dean taped the syringe in place along her spine. "I'll be fine," she insisted over her shoulder. "You guys be careful, too. We don't know for sure where this vampire's gonna be, and you guys will be more exposed out on the streets in gang territory than I will be in a crowded club."

Several hours later, Tabitha was nursing her second daiquiri and wishing it was a beer instead. But the daiquiri fit the profile better.

Tabitha was at least thankful the nightclub she'd chosen didn't seem to have an FBI presence. Evans had told her he was working with a very small team and using mostly local PD to watch the clubs and bars. And given that Evans had only been able to narrow the target area down to five bars and nightclubs, wouldn't have been able to station his own guys at each of them. She could spot the undercover local cops by the way they scanned the crowd too intently, but luckily, she didn't know any of them, and better yet, none of them knew who she really was.

She shifted in her barstool, her fresh tattoo aching dully as she moved. She'd just shooed away another drunken come-on, and was trying to decide just what was the bigger pain in her ass for the evening. The drunks, or the tattoo.

"Why, what's a lovely rose like you doing all alone at the bar?" a smooth, lightly accented voice asked as a man slid up beside her. Another man had been sitting on the barstool to her left, trying to get her attention for the last twenty minutes, but the newcomer easily pushed the protesting drunk away.

Tabitha glanced at the stranger, noting his charming smile and dark exotic skin and hair. He looked middle-eastern, and easily played up the foreign mystique with his dark clothes and only partially buttoned shirt, exposing a good portion of the smooth olive skin of his chest. But she ignored his question, and turned back to her drink.

"Waiting for someone, perhaps?" he tried again, the dark waves of his hair tumbling slightly over his brows as he tipped his head down towards her, his smile undeterred by her silence.

"Yeah," she admitted, careful to seem upset by it. "I'm waiting for a friend to meet me here. We were
going to have a girl's night."

He didn't seem any more putout by her answer than he had been by her silence. "Perhaps you'll permit me to buy you another drink while you wait, neshama," he suavely suggested.

Tabitha paused at the foreign endearment, trying to seem as if she was carefully considering his offer. "Sure, why not. My friend should be here soon anyway."

She glanced at the phone in her hand as the stranger hailed the bartender, ordering two glasses of wine. Tabitha's brow rose at his change in her drink order, but decided to go with it.

He pushed one of the wine glasses across the bar towards her, saying, "I am Calev."

Tabitha took the glass and sipped from it, tasting the rich flavor of the red wine. "I'm Crissy," she answered, feeling inspired to use the name of her little tattoo artist.

"A lovely name," he complimented. "And what is it that fills your days, neshama?"

Tabitha let herself smile as she felt her cheeks flush, trying to sell the flirtatious act. She knew that one of the things all the women had in common was that they were all highly intelligent, but worked fairly mundane jobs. Looking at this exotic man, she could see that if he was her target, he'd easily been able to fan the buried need for adventure in the life of a woman with a mundane job. And though they'd all worked mundane jobs and had simple lives, their friends admitted they did have a wild streak to them. A streak that liked to cut loose and have a good time.

"I work at Cleveland University, and teaching classes and meeting with my slacker students mostly fills my days," she primly answered, the hint of a grin showing through. "And what is it you do, Calev?"

He grinned and reached over, lightly running just the back of a fingernail down the skin of Tabitha's arm. Goose bumps followed in the wake of the light touch, but it hadn't been enough for Tabitha to determine if his temperature ran hot or cold.

"I'm in acquisitions," he laughed, his eyes sparkling at some private joke.

"Hmm," Tabitha hummed unimpressed. She swiveled towards him on the stool, but also effectively pulling her arm further away from him. "'Acquisitions,' huh? Doesn't sound very intriguing."

He laughed again, leaning towards her conspiratorially. "It has its moments," he confided. "And what of you? Teaching at a university can't be all that adventurous. What is it you teach?"

Tabitha smiled and let her own eyes shine with a private joke. "Oh, you'd be surprised. Teaching on a campus like that is always an adventure. Never the same day twice." She paused, letting him wait and lean eagerly forward for the rest of her answer. "But I suppose I don't teach the most exciting subject matter in the world. I teach English literature. I spend most days reading freshman papers from kids I'm not even sure have a basic understanding of the English language. How some of them got out of high school and into college, I'll never know."

Calev swirled his own wine glass, taking a slow sip before he spoke. "So you come here to unwind from the strains of reading the poor attempts of spoiled American children?"

Tabitha paused thoughtfully. "I suppose I do. Or at least, that's what I was supposed to be doing with my friend," she explained, carefully looking around the bar for her "missing" friend.

"A girl's night out?" he pondered. "I would have rather thought so lovely a rose would rather spend
her time in the company of a different persuasion."

Tabitha let a coy smile come forward, as she laughed, "My boyfriend's out of town actually, so that's
part of the reason for a girl's night."

But her dark companion wasn't discouraged, pressing his hand to his chest theatrically. "Alas, 'tis
always my poor luck. Though I must congratulate the splendid fortune of whatever man may call
you his."

Tabitha let herself blush again, looking away as though in embarrassment.

"I must ask, what does this gentleman of yours do? I find myself interested in what sort of man could
so thoroughly captivate such an exquisite woman. Tell me, neshama, what kind of man must I be to
prove worthy of a beauty like you."

Again, Tabitha felt the blush deepen, actually impressed by his suave and cavalier manner. But then,
she realized she needed to fabricate a boyfriend. And quick. In the past, she'd always tried to stick to
core truths for her covers, but she suddenly realized that she couldn't possibly force herself to use
even general truths about the last man she had slept with.

Realizing she'd been silent too long, she suddenly said, "He works for the church."

*He works for the Church! Where the hell did that come from?* she berated herself.

"'Church?'" Calev repeated. "I take it not a priest or some such thing?" he coyly added.

"No," Tabitha laughed, trying to hide her embarrassment. "Oh, you know, he's one of those guys
who are always thinking he's going to save the world. He's always volunteering at the church, to
help the homeless or something, he's actually in South America now, you know, rebuilding some
village down there somewhere. A missionary trip to help the less fortunate." *Shut up! You're
rambling*, she continued chastising herself.

"I see," Calev answered. "A difficult match I would think."

"Hmm?" Tabitha hummed in confusion.

Calev leaned back as he studied her. "I was only thinking to myself what a shame it is that you've
given your loyalty to such a man. One who would rather give his time and energies to saving and
rebuilding a village in a faraway country, leaving so beautiful a woman all alone to fend for herself.
Should not the love he holds for his partner exceed his need to save mere strangers, removed by
worlds? Should he not be more concerned with seeing to your needs and happiness, neshama?"

Tabitha felt herself leaning forward at the bar, her elbow bracing her weight as she listened to him.
She had to give him credit, he was good. She was almost upset with her fictional boyfriend for taking
a nonexistent missionary trip to a country she hadn't even picked yet.

She forced herself to lean back and sip the wine. "He's very good to me," she maintained. "And
what he does is important work. I know and accept that. And he comes to see me when he's able,"
she told him, trying to maintain the same loyalty the friends of the missing woman said they had.

"Of course," Calev back peddled, raising his hands in surrender. "I surely meant no offense. Merely
stating that I would not leave such a lovely woman behind." He pulled some bills from his pocket
and placed them on the bar, saying to her in apologetic tones, "But I fear I have overstepped my
bounds. Forgive me."
He disappeared through the ever-increasing crowds on the dance floor before Tabitha could stop him. And she cursed herself silently, wondering if she'd come across too forcefully in her "loyal defense" of her fictitious boyfriend.

Or worse yet, if he wasn't her target, and this had all been a wild goose chase.

An hour later, Tabitha thought she might have another possibility on her hands. Shortly after the Calev had left her at the bar, a suave, slick haired man had taken his place. Daniel was every bit as handsome as the man who had preceded him, and just as cunning. Telling her jokes, complimenting her, and even listening to her complain about her terrible friend standing her up on a Friday night and lamenting about the buddies that had likewise stranded him.

"There's no reason you can't still have a good time!" Daniel yelled over the increasing sounds of the bar's music and patrons. "Come and dance with me!"

Tabitha bit her lower lip in indecision.

But Daniel was undeterred. "Just one dance! What'll it hurt?"

She shook her head. "I told you, I have a boyfriend!"

But Daniel only grinned. "We've been stood up by our friends! So screw them, let's have our own fun. But just as friends. Friends who have in common that they have crappy friends," he laughed loudly over the music.

Tabitha considered it, wishing for the millionth time that all vampires were easier to spot. Like some stupid vampire calling card where they all sparkled or something equally ridiculous. But unfortunately, the older they were, the better they got at hiding their differences and mimicking human behavior. And so far, she hadn't had the opportunity to check Daniel's temperature. She'd tried to touch his hands coyly as he flirted with her, but Daniel hardly sat still, his hands moving animatedly as he spoke, and his arms were unfortunately covered by the dark blue sleeves of his pressed shirt.

Finally nodding at his request to dance, Tabitha slid from the barstool as Daniel excitedly stepped beside and slightly behind her, guiding her to the dance floor with a hand hovering at her back.

Remembering the syringe still taped there, Tabitha walked almost sideways through the dance floor as she demurely reminded her companion, "Just one dance though. As friends."

"Of course," he almost gallantly called back over the music.

Daniel finally guided her to the back of the dance floor where there was still a little open space. He stood there for a moment looking down at her, and Tabitha realized he was waiting for her to set the pace.

The music was fast and a thumping dance beat, so she raised her hands over her head and began swaying to the music. Daniel quickly joined her, his hands lightly resting on her hips.

She allowed that for several minutes, just swaying and twisting to the fast pace of the music, not wanting to rush things or be too forceful like she'd been earlier in the evening.

But as she moved her hands down to brush them against the hands at her waist, the pair was jostled by another couple on the dance floor, and Tabitha was pushed hard against the wall at her back.
Daniel cursed as he looked over his shoulder, one hand braced on the wall by her head to keep from crushing her. She again tried to reach up for his hand, but he turned back to her before she could, pulling his hand down as he backed away from her.

"Sorry about that," he apologized. He looked around and suggested, "Hey, maybe we should step outside, I'm getting hot anyway." As he spoke, he pointed to the back door just down the wall from them, leading into the alley.

Tabitha glanced back through the throng, and decided that it might not be a bad idea. At least out there, he might stand still enough for her to brush against his hand, but still be close enough to the bar that she could scream for help if she needed it.

"Sure," she agreed, and let him guide her to the door.

It was definitely colder outside, and the sweat that had built on Tabitha's skin from grooving on the crowded dance floor instantly chilled, making her shiver in the night air.

"You look cold," Daniel observed as he stepped closer and wrapped an arm over her shoulders.

Tabitha's hand snaked up to feel the hand hanging over her shoulder as she reminded, "No. I've got a boyfriend, Daniel."

But before her hand could even reach his, he had shoved her roughly against the brick wall of the bar, his mouth descending possessively on hers. Her head painfully reminded her that she still had a lump to the back of her skull from the ghosts attacking them at Bobby's, but she pushed the pain away.

His mouth was warm, and soured by the tequila he'd been drinking. And just as Tabitha started to raise her knee into his groin to vent her frustrations, the annoyingly human drunk was yanked away from her.

"I do believe the woman told you 'no,' you scum," Calev's deep accent growled.

Tabitha looked up to see the darkened face of Calev staring down into the shorter man's belligerent gaze.

"We were just talking! Who the hell do you think you are?" he demanded.

Calev was unmoved by the shorter man's anger, seeming to draw himself up even taller as he stared down into Daniel's face.

"Do you really want to explain to the police that you cannot understand what a woman means when she says 'no'?" he threatened. Tabitha briefly wondered if he was one of the undercover cops, but immediately wrote it off as she realized he meant just calling the police in general. But she couldn't help but wonder why one of the undercover cops hadn't already taken care of this creep. Or where they were now. They were sloppy not watching the back alley as well.

Daniel scowled for a moment, and then tucked tail and disappeared back into the bar.

Tabitha had regained her balance and stepped forward by then, telling her savior in a low voice, "Thanks, but I could have handled that creep myself."

Calev turned back to her, a small smile growing on his face. "I have no doubt you can look after yourself, but is it not better if you need not?"
"What were you doing out here?" she asked him instead.

"I came out for some fresh air and saw that filth grab you. I only thought to offer my assistance," he offered, his hands raised placating.

Tabitha sighed, annoyed that her night had been a bust. She knew the bar would be winding down soon, and figured it was best to head back to the motel and try again the following night.

She turned to walk around the bar, not wanting to work her way back through the maze of people just to get to the front and hail a cab. But as she walked, Calev fell in step beside her.

Not slowing her stride, Tabitha turned a questioning look on the olive-skinned man.

Calev passed her another winning smile. "I only thought it would be best to accompany you until I am sure you are to safety, neshama."

"Look, that's nice, Calev, but I can look after myself. And I still have a boyfriend," she lied, wanting the night to be over. "And what's that mean anyway, 'neshama'? You've called me that several time now."

"Perhaps one day I shall tell you. But are you certain you are all right?" Calev asked. "He shoved you against that wall with some force." As he spoke, he reached behind her with one hand, his fingers threading through her hair uninvited as he searched for "damage" to the back of her head.

Tabitha immediately fainted away from the man, trying to put distance between them as she felt his gripe tighten, yanking hair from her scalp as she moved.

Moving with greater speed, Calev stepped with her, his other hand reaching around trying to lock her into the embrace of his arms as he lifted her off her feet, easily able to do so, taller than her, even in her heels.

Years of training kicked in, and Tabitha twisted and turned in his arms, kicking backwards as hard as she could, and hearing the satisfying crunch and foreign curses as her stiletto heel connected with his shin. The arms dropped her, and she tried to roll away and regain her feet.

But as she pushed up to run, the cold fingers that had threaded through her hair, sailed through the air in a fist, connecting painfully against her temple.

Chapter End Notes

As always, let me know what you think!
In the End, There Is the Truth

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tabitha woke painfully as she was dropped in a heap on a cold cement floor. Her nose was filled with the bitter tang of old blood and rotten meat. One of her arms was twisted awkwardly underneath herself, but she used it to her advantage, sliding her hand into her pocket, and blindly pushing buttons on her phone.

She could hear Calev moving around the room she was in, but he was muttering what she was certain was foul words in another language, not paying her any attention. She couldn't see much, but from one corner of her eye, saw a rail of meat hooks across the ceiling. Probable an old slaughterhouse from the look and smell, she bitterly thought. Only a vampire's sense of humor.

It would have been easier to slip the phone from her pocket completely, but Tabitha feared drawing attention to the fact that she was no longer unconscious. So, she blindly scrolled through the options on her phone, sending a text to Dean reading only, "vamp" and praying that her practice in using her phone and texting without looking at the screen would pay off. And also thanking her luck that she'd put the phone on mute.

But just as she sent the message, Calev appeared in her eye line, crouching down as he picked her up in his arms, roughly tossing her on an old musty smelling mattress.

"So pleased to see you are awake," he told her as she groaned.

She tried to roll away from him, but he moved quickly, clamping something down on her wrist as she changed tactics and rolled back towards him again, trying to kick and strike at him with her fist and feet.

She missed with the kick of her bare feet, but managed a glancing blow with her fist.

Calev pulled back, his lip split despite the only glancing blow. Yet, he merely smiled. "I knew you would be the perfect choice. And a fighter, too. I'm pleased. I don't want all my children to be docile lambs," he chuckled.

As he stepped away, Tabitha yanked at her arm, but found it was securely handcuffed with a short length of chain to the metal bed frame he'd tossed her on.

Calev stepped away from her as if he was totally unconcerned by her, casually taking off his black shirt and mopping at the blood dripping from his lip. He turned around, looking at her from the distance that now separated them. "Yes. You will make an even better child than my others. No fear in you. Only anger. And fight. I'll enjoy breaking you for myself," he laughed. He looked around and Tabitha followed his gaze to the wall where three blonde women were chained, two by their hands, and one by her foot. All three women were covered in blood, and staring hungrily at her.

The vampire chuckled again. "They had to be taught not to scream, not that it did them any good in the end anyway, but not you. You are smarter," he told her, tossing down the shirt he'd bloodied, and leaning back against a low metal table. "You realize screaming will gain you nothing in trying to escape." He grinned again. "I've been looking for an intelligent child like you. You will do well in this modern world. Times have changed, we cannot hunt as we used to. We must be smarter. Hunt those the humans care not about. And you—you will do well. You'll adapt well."
"I don't want to adapt to what you are," she told him coldly.

His expression became serious as he straightened to his full height. "None want it in the beginning. But you will come to love it in the end. You will flourish," he assured her.

"Come near me again, and I promise I'll kill you," she threatened in a flat voice.

The vampire's smile returned as he began stalking closer, slowly easing in on his prey.

"You do not even fully understand what I am," he growled at her, the grin at a hunt lighting his face and his lips peeling back as his fangs descended over his human teeth.

"I keep my promises," she told him, scooting back on the bed as one hand stretched behind her, scooting back until her other arm was stretched out almost painfully by her shackle.

Calev knelt on the bed straddling her legs, bending his upper body over her as he leaned closer, his eyes closing as he sniffed the air.

"You know nothing," he whispered, his head bending down to her neck.

Tabitha's hand swung up in an arc from behind her back, plunging the syringe into the vampire's bare arm before he could react.

His eyes darkened as he pulled away from her, stumbling on his feet until he fell backwards on the cold cement.

"Dead man's blood?" he gasped in a shocked horror, his hands braced on the cement floor behind his back. "You're a hunter?"

Tabitha ignored his sputtering, using the syringe and needle still in her hand as she began picking the lock of the handcuff.

The vampire was still trying to regain his feet when she finally freed herself, growling warningly at her as she cast about for some sort of weapon to use.

She finally spotted an old, in-wall case with an axe, and ran to it, breaking the glass with metal bar on the chain, and yanking out the axe.

Turning around again however, she found that the vampire was gone. She inched forward, moving barefoot across the littered cement floors, and listening for the slightest sound. The women chained to the wall were the only noises she heard, wailing and moaning as she went by them, even growling and snarling at the walking food source they could see just out of their reach.

Her attention diverted by the women, Calev suddenly barreled into her side, knocking her off her feet, and nearly managing to knock her axe away. She was pinned on her stomach, the axe trapped beneath her against the cement.

"How I enjoy killing hunters," he growled in her ear as he pressed down on her back. "Especially ones trying to trap me."

Tabitha twisted, and drove her elbow at the face leaning over her neck, catching the vampire in the face and nose with the sharp point of her elbow.

He fell to the side, enough so that Tabitha could yank the axe from beneath herself. Seeing her free the axe, Calev rolled further away, trying to get out of range.
With one hand on the axe, Tabitha continued rolling towards the vampire, from her back, onto her stomach again, swinging the axe down in an arc and connecting with the neck of the vampire. The axe struck the concrete with a sickening thud and meaty sound. But Tabitha couldn't stop; she sprang to her bare feet and brought the axe down hard three more times, using both hands as she chopped at the vampire's neck.

Suddenly, it was silent in the old slaughterhouse. The women stared blankly at her as she stood, axe in hand over the head and body of the dark vampire. She stepped towards them, but they shrank fearfully away from her, moaning and crying wildly.

Tabitha stared at them for a moment, but then, the axe fell from her hand with a clatter, and Tabitha limped barefoot out of the abandoned building, stepping under a streetlight as she looked around for an address to give her brothers.

They yelled questions at her when Dean answered, but she simply gave them the address and hung up.

She was still sitting outside on an overturned crate when her brothers pulled up, skidding to a stop as they jumped out of the Impala and ran towards her, machetes in hand.

"Jesus, Tab, are you hurt?" Sam demanded when he reached her, both their hands trying to turn her about to check her over.

"It's not my blood," she assured them. Dean touched the lump on her temple, his fingers coming away with fresh blood. "At least, not mostly. I killed the vamp that had been hunting here and had taken those girls, but I just couldn't kill them, too. I know it has to be done, but they didn't ask for this. They're still chained up inside."

She looked up into Dean's eyes, and he nodded to the unasked request. Silently, he stepped around her and into the old slaughterhouse with his machete still in hand.

"You sure you're okay?" Sam repeated, staying by her side as they ignored the frantic screams and growls from inside.

Tabitha did her best to ignore them, but her eyes closed at the sounds and screams, trying to shut it out. "Yeah. I'm okay. Just a little sore."

She felt Sam lean against the crate beside her, wrapping his arm around her and pulling her into his chest. Tabitha shifted uncomfortably on the crate, the pain from her tattoo now seeming slight compared to the other aches in her body.

"You scared the shit out of us, Tabby. We were all the way across town, and all either of us could think was that we weren't going to get to you in time, and hell, we didn't even know where you were. I was still on with the cell phone company trying to get the location of your burner when you called," he whispered against her head, his grip tightening at the memory.

"I'm sorry," Tabitha whispered. "But he actually caught me by surprise. I'd already written him off when he made his grab at me." She shook her head bitterly, realizing he'd probably orchestrated the whole thing to get her to drop her guard with him and trust him, thinking he was her savior.

"What happened?" Sam asked, pushing back slightly to look down at her.

Tabitha pulled away and wrapped her arms around her drawn up knees, picking at the stains on her jeans that she didn't want to identify. "Later," she whispered to him. "I'll tell you both when we get back to the motel."
Dean came out of the slaughterhouse a short time later, her purse in one hand, and one of her heels in the other. "Found these," he told her, handing them across Sam for her to grab. "But I couldn't find the other shoe. You missing anything else?"

He wouldn't meet her eye as he spoke, but she was suddenly too exhausted to give it any thought. "I think that's all. Other shoe's probably back at the bar alley where he grabbed me."

"Why don't you head to the car. Sam and I'll finish up here," Dean told her, still staring at the pavement.

Tabitha slid to the ground and began carefully making her way to the black Impala over the littered ground, careful not to cut up her feet on the stones and gravel covering the pavement. She'd only gone a few steps however when Sam suddenly scooped her up, carefully depositing her in the backseat.

She watched absently as her brothers entered the old building again, flames eventually flickering inside as they left and came back to the car. She didn't ask Dean if he'd taken care of the three new vampires still chained to the wall, and he didn't speak either, silently driving back to their motel instead.

Freshly showered and changed, Tabitha exited the bathroom to find her brothers silently sitting at the small square table in the corner, multiple empty beer bottles in front of them.

When they'd returned to the motel, Sam had asked her again to explain what had happened, and both of her brothers had reamed her out for going out into the alley with the first guy, but it seemed now, neither of them had anything more to say. She'd effectively stopped their lesson 101 in hunting by silently walking away to take a shower, but it seemed neither one had any more to say.

"Look, I'm sorry I didn't send a text sooner, but I didn't want to say anything unless I was sure. You guys were both so sure I was wrong, and I didn't want to send you a text until I knew for sure one way or the other. I didn't want you rubbing it in my face that I was wrong, and by the time I knew I was right, it was too late," she told them.

Sam looked grim, but Dean's face tightened as he looked away again, and she finally placed the look: guilt.

She sighed, sitting on the edge of the bed nearest them. "It's not your fault. It wasn't anyone's fault," she told them. "If either one of you had been in the situation, nobody would be blaming themselves. You'd have just handled the vampire and end of story. Well, I handled the vampire, so, end of story."

"You could have been killed," Sam quietly reminded her.

"But I wasn't," she insisted, reaching forward and placing a hand on each of their knees. "I had that dead man's blood, and I was just waiting for an opportunity to use it. I'm fine," she repeated.

Dean suddenly stood up, his sister's hand falling away as he did so. "I'm going for a walk," he announced, and left the room amidst his sister's sputtering reply.

"It's alright, Tab," Sam told her, also standing and heading for the bathroom. "Just let him go and clear his mind."

For several minutes, Tabitha could only stare between the two directions her brothers had disappeared. But exhaustion soon proved stronger, and she climbed back into her bed.
Tabitha woke to the sensation of being watched, and carefully rolled over, just cracking one eye open.

"Dean?" she whispered, opening both eyes when she saw her brother sitting on the edge of her bed, his upper body twisted towards her.

"You could have been killed," he whispered.

"But I wasn't," she reminded him, sitting up.

He reached out and ran a hand over her sleep-mussed hair. "I promised Dad I'd keep you and Sammy safe," he told her. "I don't feel like I'm doing the best job."

Tabitha caught his hand and held it in hers. "We're not kids anymore. You can't be responsible for everything we do. We can look out for ourselves and look out for each other. But it's not your responsibility if something happens to me, Dean. Don't be so hard on yourself."

"I should have listened to you," he suddenly told her. "Trusted your instincts and been there to back you up. But because I dismissed them, you almost died. And that is on me."

"We can play this game all night, Dean," Tabitha reminded him. "But what's the point? What's done is done. Maybe next time you'll remember that I do still know a thing or two about hunting." She grinned as she spoke, lightly poking Dean's arm to lighten the mood.

"Yeah, maybe," he agreed, but the smile on his face didn't reach his eyes.

"Come on," she told him, tugging on his arm again to pull him down on top of the covers. "You need to get to sleep."

He leaned against the headboard, his hands running soothingly through her hair as she settled back in, reminding her that just last night, she'd comforted him in the same way to help him sleep.

"You first, Tabby. You're pretty banged up and need the sleep worse," he told her.

She smiled and settled in; sincerely hoping her brother would at least find some sleep in what was left of the night.

When Tabitha felt the sensation of being watched again, she almost ignored it, thinking Dean was still awake, but then she registered the deep impression next to her pinning down the covers, and the sound of the mumbles her older brother made in his sleep.

Her hand automatically grabbed the gun under her pillow, sliding it out as she twisted and sat up. But she froze at the man sitting on the edge of the bed near her legs.

"I'm not here to harm you," Castiel rumbled in his usual graveled voice.

She huffed as she returned the gun to under her pillow. "Jesus, Cas, one of these days I'm going to pull a gun on you and actually end up shooting you!" she hissed in a controlled whisper.

Glancing to the other side of the bed, she saw Dean had scooted to the far edge of it, obviously uncomfortable even just sleeping on top of the same bed as his sister, and barely hanging on to the edge, one arm even trailing over and dangling down to the floor with only his jacket covering him. But as she looked further across the room, she saw an empty bed. She glanced around, but didn't see Sam, and had he heard her talking to someone, he would have surely come running. Still, Tabitha
wasn't too worried. Dean had taken a walk earlier in the evening, and she knew it was quite possible that her younger brother had taken one as well.

"Why are you here?" Tabitha asked, returning her attention to the angel still sitting beside her, gazing at her curiously. "Again."

"What happened to your face?" Castiel asked instead of answering, his head tipped to the side in what was becoming familiar to Tabitha.

She scowled at the angel. "Little tip from human to angel: don't ask a woman what happened to her face or what's wrong with her face. Kinda makes us jump to wrong conclusions." And then she added under her breath, "At least I hope that's the wrong conclusion."

Castiel shook his head as he stared at her. "I don't understand. I wish to know why your face is bruised and cut."

She decided to forgo the lesson on human interaction for the night. "Vampire got the drop on me," she simplified.

He reached out as though he was going to touch the cut at her temple, but then stopped, his hand dropping back to the bed. "I am sorry you were injured," he carefully told her. "You killed this vampire?"

A chuckle escaped at his sincerity, and with a smile she answered, "Yeah. I killed him."

"Good," he told her. "You are more fragile than your brothers, but it is good you are still able to fight as they can."

A part of her wanted to argue with his use of the word fragile, but she didn't have the energy to argue with the angel or explain human emotions to him again.

"Why are you here?" she repeated instead. "And two nights in a row, too."

Castiel started to say something, but Dean suddenly tossed on the other side of the bed, his breathing becoming erratic as a pained noise escaped his throat.

Springing upright, his gaze darted around the room, taking in his sister sitting beside him, staring at him in concern, and the angel sitting across from him, seeming to watch the scene passively.

"Hello Dean," the angel casually told him as he turned more to look further over his shoulder across the bed at her brother. "And what were you dreaming about?"

Tabitha's gaze jerked back and forth between the angel and her brother, wondering at the look on the angel's face, a look that told her he probably knew more about what Dean was dreaming than she did.

She almost reached out to Castiel then, eager to question him as she realized just how much he probably knew. He had, after all, been the one to bring Dean out of Hell. But as she gazed back at Dean and saw the look of horror and fear in his eyes, she realized she couldn't ask. At least not now.

But Dean visibly forced himself to calm, pushing off the bed to stand and shoving his jacket away as he grumbled, "What, do you get your freak on by watching people sleep? What do you want?"

Castiel turned slightly away from Dean, glancing at Tabitha before he spoke again to her brother. "Listen to me," the angel told him. "You have to stop it."
"Stop what?" the siblings spoke at the same time.

But Castiel didn't speak, silently raising his hand and pressing two fingers to Dean's forehead.

Tabitha gasped as her brother disappeared from sight. "What the hell, Cas?" A part of her itched to grab for her gun again, but she stood and stepped towards the angel, shoving at his shoulders as he still sat calmly on the edge of her bed. "What the hell did you do to my brother? Where is he? What's going on?"

Castiel let her shove at his shoulders once, and then twice, but when she made to shove at his shoulders angrily a third time, he grabbed her wrists as he stood, pushing her backwards until he'd pressed her against the wall behind her. He didn't hurt her, and he didn't trap her against the wall, but he did hold her arms in the air between them, immobilizing them.

"I am doing what you wanted," he told her, staring unflinchingly down into her face.

"I didn't want you to make my brother disappear," she growled back, pushing on her arms, unafraid of the angel. "Where is he?"

He released her wrists, but didn't step back away from her. "You wanted to know why the angels are interested in you and your brother. You want to know what we know about what is going on. So I've sent your brother where he can learn all that we know."

"Where? Is he safe? And what's he supposed to stop?" she demanded, her hands rubbing at her wrists, unsure why she even felt the need to absently rub at them. Castiel hadn't held her hard enough to hurt her, let alone cause even a bruise.

"He's safe enough," Castiel assured her, his eyes softening slightly at her worry as he held her gaze. "I have sent him into the past so that he can learn and see what we know. And truthfully, I don't know if he can stop what happened. But if he can, it might take you all out of danger. It might take us all out of the danger we face."

Tabitha crossed her arms as she chewed on her lower lip. "You're talking time travel when you say you sent him back?" she asked him with a quirk of her brow, her face making it plain that she wasn't sure she completely believed him.

He nodded. "Yes. Time is fluid," he carefully explained.

"So why didn't you send me back, too?" she asked.

Castiel stared at her for a moment, seeming to debate answering her, but he finally sighed and relented. "It is not an easy task to send humans through time. One is easier to send and then retrieve than two can be. And given the task he has before him, it is more important that he understand than it is for you to understand and see. And safer that you remain here regardless."

She bristled at his tone, gathering herself to stand taller under his scrutiny. "And just what is his task?"

The angel paused again, but leaned closer to her, his face nearing hers as he stared down into her eyes and adamantly explained, "It is his task to stop Lucifer from rising."

Tabitha felt herself shiver at his tone and words. "If that's his task, what's mine? Why does Heaven have an interest in me?"

Castiel leaned away from her as he straightened to his full height, looking away from her probing
gaze as he whispered, "I still do not know."

As she watched him, she could almost see the way he gathered himself, and she knew he was about to disappear, but she stopped his departure, her hand darting out to grab one of his at his side.

He stopped, looking startled as he stared down at her hand gripping his.

"Should I be worried, Cas?" she implored of the angel. His head snapped up to stare into her eyes again, watching as she stepped closer to him, her hand squeezing tightly around his. "Should I be worried about what my brother's task is supposed to be? Should I be worried about what Heaven could want with me?"

Like so many other times, Tabitha was almost certain the angel wasn't going to answer her when he'd remained silent for so long. And in frustration and disappointment, she dropped his hand and turned away from him, her arms wrapping protectively around her torso once more.

But as she started to step away, Castiel's hand darted out to grasp hers again, tugging one of her hands away from her stomach as he turned her back towards him.

She stared up into the angel's eyes, waiting for what he would tell her.

"You are right to be worried," he admitted, his eyes darting almost nervously about the room. But his hand gripped hers gently, his thumb smoothing across the back of her hand. "For your brother, and likely for yourself. Dean's task will be difficult at best, and it worries me that there has been no indications passed through the chain of command as to what your purpose is to be." He stared at her for several beats, his eyes boring into hers as though he was trying to pass along some silent message with his gaze. "You're right to be worried," he repeated in a whisper, and then his hand vanished from her grip as the rest of him disappeared from sight, leaving only the soft echo of beating wings in the silence of the motel room and the fading warmth in the palm of her hand.

"Dammit, Sam," Tabitha growled as she tried calling his cellphone yet again. But like all the other times she'd tried calling her younger brother, he still didn't answer. She hung up the phone instead of leaving yet another voicemail that he didn't appear to be checking.

It had been an hour since Castiel and her brother had disappeared from their motel room. She'd hurriedly pulled on her clothes, but didn't know what to do next. She was worried about where Sam had disappeared to, and worried about Dean, regardless of the assurances Castiel had given her.

She considered taking the Impala to go look for Sam, but didn't want to leave the motel room in case one or both of her brothers showed back up at their room.

As she turned to begin pacing again, she tripped on a pile of Dean's clothes on the floor. Needing something to do, some sort of distraction, she knelt on the floor to gather the clothes in the pile, neatly folding them and placing them on the bed. With his bag in hand, she stood to start repacking his things, but gasped when she turned to find her brother sleeping on the edge of the bed, his jacket over his upper body, just how he had been before. As if he hadn't ever left.

"He's fine, I assure you," Castiel said, speaking from behind her.

She managed not to gasp a second time, but whirled to face the angel. "It's done, it's finished?" she asked him, her voice sounding almost pleading even to her ears. She hadn't realized until she saw him back in her sight, just how terrified she'd been that he might get stuck in the past somehow, or that something would happen to him.
The angel tipped his head forward in a nod. "He has seen what he needed to see."

"Did he stop it?" Tabitha asked, her hand twirling in the air as she gestured. "Did he stop whatever it was he was meant to stop?"

Castiel shook his head, pulling his arms behind his back again. "I sent him back to see the truth. Now he needs to stop it. Both of you do."

Tabitha felt her hands curl into fists at her side, and fought the childish urge to stomp her foot. "Stop what?" she demanded.

"It is Dean's duty to stop it, but I think you will be able to help them both," he calmly told her. She glared at him in return, silently demanding more of an explanation. The angel stepped past her, reaching out to pull slightly back at the opening of the duffle bag Tabitha had been repacking.

"They don't realize how much you look after them, do they? Even in the years you spent apart, they didn't realize how much you did to hide them and cover for them," Castiel suddenly said, still staring down at the bed and the pile of clothes now at Dean's feet.

"What's that got to do with anything?" Tabitha asked, her arms folding over the worn Quantico sweatshirt several sizes too big for her.

Castiel turned to look up at her. "Perhaps that is your duty. To care for and watch over them."

Tabitha glanced at her brother, but turned her dubious gaze back on the angel. "Heaven has an interest in me because they want me to hang around and fold my brothers' clothes and do their laundry? I don't think so. I just do that when I'm frustrated and don't know what else to do. They did survive without me for all those years."

"But some brotherly quarrels can only be quelled by the dominion of a sister," he said as he gazed into space, almost seeming to speak more to himself.

Tabitha started to ask what he meant, but the angel turned an expectant eye on Dean, and as Tabitha followed his gaze, her older brother woke with a gasp, shoving his leather jacket away as he sat up.

"I couldn't stop any of it," he said in a shaky voice, throwing a look up at the angel. "She still made the deal. She still died in the nursery, didn't she?"


Tabitha moved to stand in front of her brother, but he pushed to his feet, resting one hand on her shoulder to stop her questions as he waited for the angel to speak.

Castiel didn't look at them, but spoke steadily to the room. "Don't be too hard on yourself. You couldn't have stopped it."

"What?" Dean asked, his hand tightening almost painfully on Tabitha's shoulder as he stared incredulously at the angel.

"Destiny can't be changed, Dean." Castiel finally turned to face them, his expression almost sad as he continued. "All roads lead to the same destination."

"Then why'd you send me back?" Dean demanded.

"For the truth," Castiel said, his eyes staring in Tabitha's. Her stomach clenched painfully at his
words. This was what she had asked him for, and from Dean's expression, it had been more than "difficult" as the angel had warned her. And Castiel had at least partly done it because she had asked.

Castiel's gaze traveled from sister to brother. "Now you know everything we do."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Dean whispered desperately, his hand falling from his sister's shoulder as he took a few tentative steps towards the angel.

Castiel turned a pointed look towards Sam's still made bed, the siblings following his eyes.

"Where's Sam?" Dean asked, seeming to pose the question to the room. In the silence that followed, he turned to Tabitha and grabbed her elbow. "Where the hell is Sam?" he repeated.

"I don't know," she told him, pulling her cellphone out of her pocket and holding it up in front of him. "I've been trying to call him for the last hour since you disappeared on your little field trip, but he's not answering his cell, and hasn't called me back."

Looking back and forth between the siblings, Castiel calmly continued. "We know what Azazel did to your brother. What we don't know is why—what his endgame is. He went to great lengths to cover that up."

"Azazel," Tabitha whispered fearfully as she stepped closer to Dean, lightly grabbing his elbow. "Isn't that the demon that killed Mom and wanted Sam to lead his army?" she asked, remembering the awful stories Bobby had finally told her after Dean's death.

Dean nodded almost absently, but placed his arm over his sister's shoulders and pulled her closer into his side. "Where's Sam?" Dean asked the angel again.

Strangely, Castiel didn't hesitate or pause for long pregnant gaps like Tabitha was growing used to. But immediately supplied, "425 Waterman."

Dean grabbed his jacket off the bed, and Tabitha quickly followed him for the door, pausing only to grab her Glock from the bedcover and shoving it under her sweatshirt into the waistband of her jeans at her back.

Pausing to gather his own gun, Dean looked up at his sister and it almost seemed as if he was going to tell her to stay, but he nodded almost imperceptibly, and told her, "Let's go."

As they reached the door, Castiel spoke again. "Your brother is headed down a dangerous road, Dean. And we're not sure where it leads. So stop it. Or we will."

Once more, Dean paused to look at the angel, but then, he turned to stride out the door. Tabitha quickly followed her brother to the door, but paused in the doorway as well, turning to stare back at the angel in their room. She didn't know what to say to him. Didn't know whether to thank him for helping them find out more about their past—even if she had yet to get the story from Dean—be grateful to him for telling them where Sam was, or be hurt and angry that he hadn't told her sooner where Sam was, and that he was apparently doing something the angels didn't approve of.

She almost swore she saw a look of regret pass the angel's face, but he again disappeared from sight, leaving only the soft sounds of fluttering wings.

Chapter End Notes
As always, let me know what you think!
"What happened? Where were you?" Tabitha asked from the passenger seat as Dean drove like a bat-out-of-hell for the address Castiel had given them.

"Castiel sent me into the past," he answered shortly.

"Yeah, that's what he told me," she responded irritably. "But when? And better yet, why?"

Dean did a double take as he looked at his sister in the passenger seat. "What do you mean, 'he told you'? When?"

"After you disappeared," she replied shortly. "Told me not to worry about you or something, and said he'd sent you into the past to see and learn what you needed to know." She made an impatient motion with her hand. "Where and or when did he send you?"

"To Lawrence, back just before Mom and Dad got engaged."

"You saw them? You saw Mom and Dad? Why? Why'd he send you back there? What happened?"

"Too many questions, Tab. I'll answer them later. Right now, we gotta find Sam and figure out what the hell it is we're supposed to stop," he informed her, his foot pressing even further down on the gas pedal.

They finally pulled up by an old abandoned building—what looked like an old warehouse to her eyes. Tabitha had had enough of abandoned buildings to last her a while, but she shoved it aside, the need to find her little brother stronger than her unease with the locale.

Together, Dean and Tabitha edged silently through the building littered with trash and other abandoned goods. They crept carefully along, both with their pistols drawn as they looked for Sam, and finally, as they cleared several other rooms in the old building, they began hearing his voice towards a room in the back. It didn't sound distressed, so they eased slightly as they crept closer.

Coming around a corner, they saw Sam and another woman on their feet, a strange man tied to a chair—demon, by the looks of the traps Sam had drawn.

"Is that—" Dean trailed off in a whisper.

But Tabitha saw it, too, and recognized the woman. "Yeah," she whispered back. "The little brunette from the motel when we found Sam in Pontiac. What's going on?"

Dean shook his head as they silently watched their brother and the woman. Sam and the demon in the chair spoke to each other, but then Sam raised his hand towards the demon, and as the siblings watched, smoke came out of the demon's mouth, but instead of rising up and dispersing into the air, it was pulled down to the ground, the head of the man slumping forward against his chest as Sam finished.

"What the hell was that?" Tabitha whispered in shock, her hand rising to cover her mouth.

Dean's face turned cold and hard, almost becoming someone Tabitha didn't recognize. "That's our
brother doing something he shouldn't," he whispered dangerously back to his sister.

Sam had untied the man in the chair and was helping him to his feet when Dean and Tabitha came through the doorway into the room where a surprised Sam had halted.

"So, anything you want to tell us, Sam?" Dean asked, that dangerous edge still present in his tone.

"Dean, just hold on, okay," Sam pleaded, setting the man back down in the chair. "Let me—"

"You gonna say, 'let me explain?" Dean interrupted. "You're gonna explain this?" he said, gesturing angrily about the darkened room.

Dean kept walking closer to their brother as he talked, his expression making perfectly clear what his thoughts were. "How about this?" he continued. "Why don't you start with who she is and what the hell is she doing here?" Dean demanded gesturing at the woman.

Sam was nearly shaking, his eyes darting about nervously before he turned away from the hard stares of his brother and sister, turning to look instead at the brunette interloper.

The woman looked at Dean with an air of familiarity, smiling as she said, "It's good to see you again, Dean." She turned a bit to include Tabitha in her greeting, her smirk broadening. "And it's nice to finally meet you, Tabitha. We haven't really been introduced yet."

Tabitha moved closer to her brothers, her arms folding over her chest as she scowled at the strange woman.

"Ruby?" Dean asked incredulously. He turned to Sam asking in a tone that begged his younger brother to deny his sinking realization. "Is that Ruby?"

Sam didn't speak, but his expression clearly told them it was.

"Ruby?" Tabitha repeated in surprise. "What the hell are you doing running around behind our backs with a demon, Sam?" They may not have met, but in the months she'd been with Bobby, she had heard of the demon.

Dean scoffed, and before his siblings could react, grabbed the demon by her shoulders and shoved her back against an industrial shelving unit, pulling the demon knife from his belt as he started to swing it down towards Ruby's chest.

Sam reacted quicker than Tabitha did, grabbing Dean's arm to halt the knife's path, shouting, "Don't!" as they struggled for control of the blade.

Tabitha quickly interceded, grabbing the demon by one shoulder and yanking her away from her feuding brothers, shoving her behind her back as Sam wrested the knife from Dean.

Anger still boiling, Dean spun around, ready to take on the demon barehanded.

"Enough, Dean," Tabitha growled warningly at her brother, at least managing to stop his angry march.

"Thanks for that," the demon whispered behind her, her hand descending lightly onto Tabitha's shoulder and squeezing like an old friend.

Tabitha twirled around as she knocked the hand away. "Keep your damn hands off me!" she ordered furiously. "I didn't do that because I want to be your buddy. I did that because despite what you are,
you did help my brothers out occasionally. But I'll only go so far in defense of a damn demon."

Ruby's eyes narrowed angrily as she stepped forward, her fist swinging up in a hook towards Tabitha. But years of training made it easy for Tabitha to deflect the blow with her forearm, knocking Ruby a step sideways with a well-placed shove before the demon regained her balance.

"Ruby, stop it," Sam suddenly ordered, even as Dean grabbed his sister by one arm. It was a tossup if he was trying to hold her back, or anchoring himself to her elbow to keep himself from launching forward again.

The demon halted at Sam's words, but glared angrily at his older siblings.

Dean sneered at the demon, "Well, aren't you an obedient little bitch?"

"Ruby," Sam called again when the demon eagerly leaned forward. "Ruby… he's hurt," Sam told her, pointing to the injured man in the chair when he had her attention. "Go."

Glancing once more at the pair, Ruby turned and went to the man, sliding her shoulders under one of his arms as she hoisted him to his feet.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Dean demanded.

"The ER… unless you want to go another round first," Ruby taunted.

Dean had released his sister's arm, but she returned the favor, grabbing his when he leaned forward.

With another sneer on her face, the demon drug the man out of the room.

Tabitha glanced between her brothers, and then nodded silently to Dean as she trailed out of the room after the demon. No matter what was going on between the demon and her younger brother, Tabitha still didn't trust a demon.

When she exited the building, the demon was helping the man slide into the passenger seat of her car.

"Come to make sure I didn't eat him?" Ruby hurled at Tabitha as she swung around, slamming the passenger door shut with the motion.

With her arms crossed uneasily, Tabitha nodded. "Something like that."

Ruby took a step closer, the gleam in her eye saying she was still itching for a fight. "I haven't hurt that guy. And because of your brother, he's still alive. You should be happy. You should be proud of Sam. Not pissed off at him because you don't like the methods."

Tabitha held her ground, fighting her own urge to step closer and knock the demon woman on her ass. "And just what damage is that doing to Sam, whatever the hell is it he's doing? Just what's the cost? 'Cause anything a demon's helping him to do, has a cost to it. And you and I both know it."

Ruby shrugged as if it didn't matter. "Sam's a big boy. He can make his own decisions. He doesn't need his older brother and sister telling him every decision to make. He knows what the costs are, and he's decided saving lives outweighs it."

Leaning forward, Tabitha whispered in a deathly serious tone, "Does Sam really know what the costs are? 'Cause you and I both know, you're not telling him everything, otherwise, you wouldn't be so worried about me and Dean finding out about what you've been doing."
The two women stared each other down for another minute, both eagerly waiting for the other to make the first move.

Finally, Ruby made an impatient noise, turning away and getting in her car. "I've got to get this guy to the ER," she explained in bored tones.

Tabitha watched as the demon drove away, fighting the urge to get in the Impala and follow the demon, but knowing she needed to check on her brothers. Much as she hated leaving an innocent with a demon, she knew her brothers had to come first.

Just as Tabitha was about to walk back into the building, Dean came barreling out, nearly running over his sister.

"Whoa," she said, quickly righting herself and jumping out of his warpath. "Where's the fire?"

Dean didn't respond, just strode past her to the Impala.

"Dean!" she called out, trying to stop him. "What's going on? Where's Sam?"

Her brother finally paused as he stood between the open driver's door and the car, looking impatiently over the roof of the Impala as he commanded, "Let's go."

"Where's Sam?" she repeated, throwing a look over her shoulder for their brother.

"I don't give a damn!" he shouted, his hand banging down on the black roof.

Tabitha jumped despite herself, knowing how angry he had to be if he was abusing his baby that way. "We can't leave without Sam," she told him. "No matter how angry you are with him."

"Get in the car," he ordered again, pointing an imperious finger against the same roof he'd hit.

Tabitha stepped forward, but stopped several feet short of the car with her hands on her hips as she growled back, "Enough of this, Dean. I get that you're pissed. The whole world does. But we're not going anywhere without Sammy."

Her brother threw an angry gesture towards the building. "Fine. Stay here with him. I'm leaving. But he doesn't need you anymore than he needs me apparently!"

Before she could respond, Dean crawled into the car and drove off to the sound of screeching and squealing tires.

As she watched the oldest Winchester race away, she felt the youngest come out of the building to stand beside her to watch.

Her fingers dug into her hips as she grumbled quietly to herself, "I'm starting to have flashbacks to those fantasies I had as a kid where I was an only child."

Looking up, she saw Sam's worried face staring in the direction their brother had disappeared. "Come on," she told him. "It's a long walk until we can get to a part of town that'll have cabs so we can get back to the motel."

Sam fell in step beside her, but didn't speak as he sullenly shoved his hands in the pockets of his jeans.

"Dean's pissed, but he'll show back up at the motel when he's cooled down," she assured her younger brother.
"You don't know that," he finally whispered in a small voice.

"It's just Dean," she maintained. "He's always been a bit of a hothead."

Silence fell again as they made the long trek to a part of town were a cab might pick them up at these ungodly early morning hours.

"Talk," Tabitha finally commanded as they entered their motel room.

Sam folded himself into one of the chairs at the small table, opening his laptop as he absently asked, "About what?"

Tabitha had bent over near her bed to pick up her bag, pulling the holster for her gun out and sliding the Glock in. At her brother's answer, she shoved the pistol and holster into her bag and threw it down on top of her bed. "Dammit Sam, don't do that. Don't play dumb with me. What the hell are you doing with that demon?"

"I'm saving lives," he defended.

"With a demon?" she asked, her head shaking in disbelief. "Do you even have any idea what the repercussions are to what you're doing?"

"I'm fine," he insisted with a careless shrug. "Don't worry about me."

"'Don't worry,'" she repeated, pacing several steps beside her bed. "All I do is worry. It's kind of my right as your sister," she reminded him. "Don't you get how dangerous this is, Sam? I'm worried about you. You've already been dead once, and Dean's been dead and sent to Hell! Of course I'm worried about you two!"

Tabitha knew whatever Sam was doing was dangerous. Dangerous enough that a damn angel had come to tell Dean and her to stop what Sam was doing. And that should have terrified Tabitha more than it did. But the truth was, she couldn't believe that her brother was doing anything evil, not purposefully anyway. She was far more terrified that he was hurting himself more in the long run than him supposedly being of harm to others. And she couldn't shake the feeling in her gut that told her there was more to the demon—Ruby—than Sam could see. Or was letting himself see.

"Maybe you're just letting the fact that you didn't know Casey was possessed, color your feelings, some part of her subconscious wondered. Maybe the fact that you don't know what that demon had wanted with you makes you paranoid of all demons."

Turning away from her, Sam visibly focused his attention on his laptop as he said, "I know what I'm doing."

Striding forward, Tabitha leaned her hands down on the table as she argued. "You may think you know what's going on, Sam, but you know better. You know demons always have another agenda going on that they're not telling you. She isn't helping you save humans out of the goodness of her heart. I'd be surprised if she even has one."

Sam stood up, angrily shouting back as he pointed an accusatory finger at his sister. "What right do you have to tell me that I'm doing wrong, or that I don't know what I'm doing? You haven't been here. You don't know what I've been through or what's been happening, so don't come in here like you know better than I do." He pushed past her as he grabbed a warm beer off the table, cracking the bottle open and taking a long swig. "And what right do you have to say I should stay away from this demon, weren't you screwing one not so long ago?"
Tabitha ignored the pain in her chest that his words caused, ignored the pain of her fingernails digging into her palms, and ignored the strongest pain in her heart at the mention of a man she had cared a great deal for and respected. She hadn't even realized Dean had shared that information with their younger brother, though it shouldn't have surprised her.

Closing her eyes as she ignored the insult, she pleaded in a whisper filled with dread, "Please tell me you're not sleeping with her."

When she opened her eyes, Sam had his back turned to her. The hunch of his shoulders and the tightness of his back was answer enough, though as she continued, "There's a difference between choosing to sleep with a demon, and sleeping with someone you didn't realize was demon ridden at the time."

She had tried to keep the emotion and hurt out of her voice as she spoke, but it must have seeped through.

Looking over his shoulder, Sam whispered regretfully, "I'm sorry. That was uncalled for and I shouldn't have said it."

With a sigh, Tabitha agreed, "No. You shouldn't have." She stepped beside her brother and bumped his arm companionably with her shoulder as she continued, "But I shouldn't have yelled at you either. Guess I'm getting as bad as Dean about being a hothead." She laughed as she said it, and Sam joined her with a small laugh, even a small smile growing.

"Naw, not quite as bad. You didn't drive off without me," he reminded.

"We still have to talk," she replied to her brother.

Sam ran a hand through his hair, letting out a shaky sigh. "I don't know what to say," he told her.

Tabitha grabbed another of the beer bottles off the dresser in the room, twisting the top off as she gestured back to the table where Sam had been sitting, "Let's have a seat and you can just start wherever you need to."

The beer was warm but smooth going down Tabitha's throat as she sat across from Sam. She was past her college days of swigging warm beer at four in the morning, but she had a feeling she was going to need the beer to take the edge off the coming conversation.

Sam sat nursing his own warm beer, his eyes fastened studiously on the bottle as he avoided looking up at his sister.

"How 'bout let's start with when this all began," Tabitha suggested. "And how it is that was Ruby back there. From what you and Bobby told me, I thought she had been sent back to Hell by Lilith or something."

Nodding, Sam answered, "Yeah. She was, I guess. But she got back out again, and found me a while after I'd taken off looking for a way to bring Dean back."

When he didn't continue, Tabitha prompted, "And what, she started teaching you to do whatever it was that happened back there?"

Looking up to meet her eyes, Sam insisted, "I'm exorcising demons. I'm helping people."

Tabitha took a deep breath as she thought it over, trying not to overreact again. "But you kept it from us. You kept it from Dean, and you kept it from me even before that. So you must have realized
something wasn't right with what you were doing."

Sam suddenly unfolded from his chair and began pacing in the motel room, the room quickly seeming much smaller with his nervous movements.

"Of course I kept it from you," he told her, not meeting her eyes as he paced. "I knew what you and Dean would think. I knew the way you'd look at me. Like I'm a freak. Like there's something wrong with me. And maybe there is. But I'm using it to do something good. So what's wrong with that?"

"Road to Hell and all that," Tabitha carefully said. She didn't miss the slight tensing of her brother's shoulders at her offhand comment. So he's already considered that it might be wrong, despite his best intentions, she thought to herself.

She wanted to reach out and stop Sam's nervous pacing, but she had the feeling he needed to keep moving to work off the nervous energy coursing through him. So instead, she carefully leaned back in the cheap, wobbly motel chair as she spoke. "And you're not a freak, Sam. This isn't your fault, it was done to you. Being different isn't unique to you. Everyone's different. But just because you are different, doesn't mean you should try to manipulate it for your own uses like this. Isn't that what Azazel wanted you to do anyway, to use it? Just because it's there, doesn't mean you have to use it."

Still pacing, Sam glanced up at her, but didn't speak or stop moving.

Finally, he said, "You don't know what it's like to be different. You don't know what it's like to be a freak."

Tabitha laughed, surprising her brother as he stopped to stare at her.

"I know exactly what it's like to be a freak, Sam," she told him as she bitterly shook her head. "I always felt different—like a freak—when I was with my FBI colleagues. They'd all be looking for blood spatter, prints, or witnesses. I was looking for that and hex bags, symbols, emf, or sulfur. And doing my damnedest to make sure they didn't realize what I was looking around for. I get feeling like a freak, Sam. But this," she said, gesturing towards him, "what you're doing goes beyond feeling like you're not like everyone else. You're choosing to make yourself different."

Sam leaned against the short wall jutting out near the bathroom as he faced his sister. "It's still not the same thing, Tabby. You felt different because you know more about what's out there than the people you work with did. I'm different because of what's inside of me. Because of what I can do. It's not the same," he repeated as he sighed, taking his seat across from his sister again.

Tabitha felt the urge to tell her brother more. To tell him that she was apparently different as well. But the words wouldn't come out.

She could tell herself it was because she didn't want to talk about something she wasn't sure she understood herself, but the truth was, she was afraid to tell her brothers.

Just as afraid to tell them as Sam had been of them finding out his secret.

She didn't want to be any more of a freak than Sam wanted to.

She saw her brother's motivations more clearly than he realized—saw his fear—and she knew she needed to reach him, needed to help him with the things he couldn't go to Dean with. The same things she knew she couldn't go to Dean with. Seeing that her brother had settled down some, Tabitha reached her hand across the table, laying it with her palm up. An open invitation, careful not to force him.
He sighed and smiled almost ruefully as he took her much smaller hand in his.

"I know it's different, Sam. But I also know that you're my little brother and I'll love you no matter what. And you can tell me anything. Even things I don't agree with and don't understand. And I'll still love you."

They sat in silence for only a few more minutes before they heard the distinctive rumble of the Impala drive up. As the siblings had sat talking, the sun had begun to rise, turning the sky to a light gray as Dean opened the motel door and stalked into the room.

Dean ignored the pair, steadily grabbing his things and packing his bags as Tabitha and Sam stood from the table.

"Dean, what are you doing?" Sam finally asked. "What, are you—are you leaving?"

The oldest Winchester continued packing, uncaring it seemed of the pain in Sam's voice as he spoke.

"You don't need me," Dean calmly explained, the way he shoved his hanging shirts into a duffel bag belying the emotion he was barely containing. "You and Ruby go fight demons. Tabitha can go back to the FBI. Everyone will be real happy."

"Dean, don't be ridiculous," Tabitha broke in, annoyed by the theatrics.

Dean kept walking for the door, ignoring them both. Trying to stop him, Sam reached out to snag a hold of his brother's elbow.

Tabitha jerked in surprise when Dean spun into Sam, throwing a mean right hook. She jumped closer to the brothers, ready to intercede if she needed to, but knowing full well, some things had to be settled physically between men, especially her brothers.

"You satisfied?" Sam asked, blood trickling from his lip.

His answer came in the form of another right hook as Dean stared angrily at Sam.

Jumping between the boys, Tabitha braced her hands on her older brother's shoulders. "That's enough, Dean," she quietly told him as Sam spoke.

"Guess not," the youngest Winchester replied as he straightened up, wiping away the blood.

She tried to hold Dean in place, but he wrenched her hands away from his shoulders, gripping her wrists in his hands as he gapped down at her. "You're gonna take his side?" he asked unbelievingly.

"I'm not taking sides, Dean. But this has got to stop. This isn't about right or wrong right now. He's our brother," she explained.

"Not about right or wrong," he repeated. "Well it's pretty damn clear that it is about right and wrong. Or else a damn angel wouldn't have told us to stop it." He stared over Tabitha's shoulder at Sam as he continued stepping closer, saying, "Do you even know how far off the reservation you've gone? How far from normal? From human?"

"I'm just exorcising demons," Sam maintained. The same as he'd told his sister.

"With your mind!" Dean bellowed.

Sam looked down guiltily, but didn't respond.
Not finished yet, Dean demanded, "What else can you do?"

To his credit, Sam didn't hesitate in answering. "I can send them back to Hell. It only works with
demons, and that's it."

"What else can you do?!" Dean shouted, shoving Sam back against the wall.

"I told you!" Sam shouted back as Tabitha tried to pry Dean away from their younger brother.

"Stop, Dean," she begged him. "That's enough!"

Dean stepped back as his sister shoved them apart again. "And I have every reason in the world to
believe that," Dean pointed out.

"You don't exactly make it easy to tell you things like this," Tabitha threw angrily at Dean.

He rounded on her. "Don't you make excuses for him. He should have told us this, and you know
it!"

Sam broke in. "Look, I should have said something. I'm sorry, guys. I am. But try to see the other
side here."

"The other side?!" Dean shouted.

"I'm pulling demons out of innocent people."

"Use the knife!"

"The knife kills the victim!" Sam shouted back. "What I do, most of them survive! Look, I've saved
more people in the last five months than we save in a year."

Dean whispered in return, "That what Ruby wants you to think? Huh? Kind of like the way she
tricked you into using your powers? Slippery slope, brother. Just wait and see. Because it's gonna get
darker and darker, and god knows where it ends."

Tabitha sank heavily onto the end of the bed at hearing Dean voice the very same worries and
concerns she'd had, somehow making them more real and terrifying than before.

"You know how I feel, Sam," she croaked, suddenly so exhausted she barely felt like she could find
her voice. Looking up at Sam, she repeated. "Road to Hell, little brother. You know I have the same
fears Dean does. You think you're helping people, and that's great, but I'm selfish, I guess, because I
don't want you to keep doing this and continuing to incur whatever cost there is for doing it. And it
can only get worse."

"I'm not gonna let it go too far," Sam argued.

Dean chuckled mirthlessly. As he turned away, hurling his hand at the lamp on the nightstand and
sending it flying at the wall as he whipped back around. "It's already gone too far, Sam." He stepped
closer and whispered, "If I didn't know you... I would want to hunt you."

Tabitha felt bitter tears well in her eyes at Dean's words, pleading softly, "Stop it, Dean. Don't say
things like that. It isn't helping."

But Dean continued in a shaky voice, "And so would other hunters."

"You were gone," Sam explained, pain laced in his voice. "I was here. I had to keep on fighting
without you. And what I'm doing… it works."

Wiping at the tears with the back of her hands, Tabitha stood and faced Sam. "But I was here, too. And I was hurting just as much as you were, Sam. You could have come to me. I would have gone with you to hunt. I would have helped you," she told him, her voice breaking. "You didn't come to me because you knew you shouldn't have been doing it."

"It works," he repeated.

Dean shook his head. "So tell me, if it's so terrific… then why'd you lie about it to us? Why did an angel tell us to stop you?"

Sam's eyes jerked up at that. "What?"

Dean continued softly, "Cas said that if we don't stop you, he will. See, what that means, Sam—that means that God doesn't want you doing this. So, are you just gonna stand there and tell us that everything is all good?"

Sam looked away as tears filled his eyes, unable to meet the stares of his siblings.

Before Dean could continue, Sam's phone rang. As her brother answered it, Tabitha went to stand at the motel window, staring out at the empty, rundown parking lot as she listened to her brother take the information for what was certain to be another hunt.

She listened absently as Sam explained that another hunter was asking them to look into a case for him.

"So are you coming or not, Dean?" Sam suddenly asked. "We need to look into this for Travis."

In the silence that followed, Dean finally answered, "Fine. Let's do this. Get the car loaded." She could hear them moving around behind her, and then Dean continued, "But this isn't over."

Tabitha's eyes closed tiredly in the gray light of the early morning sun, rubbing her fingers against her throbbing temples, exhausted by the incredibly long night, made longer by the scant sleep she had managed to get since her strange vampire hunt.

"You coming, Tab?" Dean called behind her.

She turned to see him gathering his own bags, still not meeting her eyes, and not seeming much happier with her than he was with Sam.

Yes, she thought to herself, all is bright and cheerful in the Winchester family. Just like old times.

She silently gathered her own bags and quickly followed her brothers out the door.

Ought to be one hell of a fun ride, she bitterly thought to herself.

Chapter End Notes

As always, let me know what you think!
Riding once more in the back seat of the Impala, Tabitha read lore books trying to figure out what she could about Ragarus. Her own experience with them had been limited to the carnage she'd seen in Nebraska on the case where she'd met Collin years before.

She was inclined to agree with Travis and Dean about what had to be done with Jack—tragic or not—but she wouldn't turn down her younger brother's request that they find out more. Death was permanent. And if they could research and find something else to help the otherwise painfully normal Jack, she was willing to put in the time. And the headaches of trying to read in a moving vehicle.

"What is that?" Sam suddenly asked from the front seat, setting his own research down, and turning the radio down to listen to the faint sound. "Is that a phone ringing?" he continued as he opened the glove box and searched through the phones there.

Tabitha paused in her intent task, listening as well.

"Shit!" she exclaimed, dropping her work and pawing through her large handbag as she told them, "It's my personal cell."

Dean glanced at her in the review, but didn't slow down his speed. They'd been coming back from supper after surveilling Jack-the-could-be-Ragaru and then gathering research material to look up more information on whether or not Jack could keep from fully transforming into a man-eating monster.

"Hey Cheryl," Tabitha spoke into her phone, seeing the name on her display. "What's up?"

"Tabitha," Cheryl sighed, sounding relieved. "I'm so glad I finally got a hold of you."

Tabitha sat up straighter in the back seat. "Why? What's wrong, Cheryl?"

But her friend and coworker kept talking as if she hadn't heard her. "I've been calling your FBI number for hours. I finally decided to try your personal cell on the off chance you were still using it," she babbled.

"Cheryl!" Tabitha called, trying to rein in her friend. "What's wrong? Why have you been trying to reach me?"

The woman sputtered on the other end of the line, seeming to stop and start several times, unsure where to start.

"Start at the beginning," she calmly told her friend, her unease building by the second. Cheryl wasn't normally prone to hysterics. She was generally a calm and collected agent. One of the reasons they had built a loose friendship. Cheryl worked in a different division, but out of the same office, so they often got together when they were both around. In fact, they both lived outside of Richmond in Varina, just down the same street from each other. Cheryl had helped her find the modest but well-kept house, and they looked after each other's homes more often than they were both around to see each other.

She heard Cheryl sigh deeply on the other end. "Well, I thought about calling you a couple of weeks
ago, but I didn't want to disturb you if it turned out to be nothing—"

"If what turned out to be nothing?" Tabitha interrupted in frustration.

"OPR has been in the Richmond office for almost two weeks," Cheryl hissed through the phone line. "And it took a while, but I finally got one of those guys to tell me who they're looking into. He didn't think it was a big deal telling me since I'm not in Violent Crimes but in Victim Services—"

Tabitha hissed back at her, "Who Cheryl? Who are they looking into?"

"They're looking into Casey. Going through old case files, and they're looking for something, missing case files I think. And only one reason they wouldn't have called his partner in, too." She had trailed off, letting Tabitha draw her own conclusion.

"They're looking into me, as well," Tabitha absently supplied.

The line was silent for a minute as Tabitha digested the info.

"Wait, you said they've been there for almost two weeks, why have you suddenly been so frantic to get a hold of me?" she wondered.

"Oh, oh!" Cheryl suddenly exclaimed. "Because someone broke into your place earlier tonight. Your next door neighbor called me because they knew you were out of town, so I went over there."

"Anything taken?"

"I don't think so, but I don't know your place that well, Tabitha. It's one hell of a mess besides, so I can't say. Looks more like someone was looking for something. Electronics and jewelry all seemed to still be there."

As she spoke, Tabitha's stomach began to feel like it was descending into a pit, her unease ratcheting up as she scrambled for what someone could have been looking for in her house. She didn't have anything of real value, and couldn't think of anything all that important either.

"But that's not all," Cheryl was going on in hurried tones. "I was checking the police reports to see if this was a string of break-ins or anything, and I found out that Casey's apartment in the city had been broken into hours before yours. Something's going on; someone's looking for something and thinks you've got it." There was silence on the line for a minute. And then her friend and colleague whispered, "What's going on, Tabitha? What were you and Casey involved in?"

"I figured Casey's parents would have emptied his place out by now," Tabitha absently spoke.

Cheryl answered hurriedly. "His parents weren't ready to go through it yet or something. What's going on?" she repeated.

Her head fell forward against the front seat as Tabitha heaved a sigh. "I don't know Cheryl, but I'll look into it. Thanks for calling me with the heads up."

She hung up as Cheryl sputtered a reply, and hit ignore when the woman immediately tried calling back.

"Pull over," she directed her brother as she pointed over his shoulder at a side street.

Dean did so, but immediately whipped around in the driver's seat to face his sister. "What's going on, Tab?"
She began gathering her things and shoving her loose belongings into her handbag as she answered. "Look, I'm not sure what's going on. OPR is in Richmond looking into my old partner. And me, too, apparently since I haven't been called in yet. Something about case files or missing case files. And to top it off, someone broke into his place and mine tonight."

"OPR?" Sam repeated, as Tabitha grabbed her purse and the briefcase with her laptop, scrambling out of the car.

"Office of Professional Responsibility," she off-handedly answered as she reached for the trunk. "Our version of Internal Affairs. Dean! Pop the trunk."

The brothers had followed her out of the car, and Dean used his keys to open the trunk.

"So what are you doing?" Dean asked as he stepped back. "Would this OPR have gone through your place like that?"

Tabitha shook her head as she grabbed her bags from the trunk along with a slim jim from Dean's goodies under the false bottom. "No. They'd use subpoenas, not break in. I don't know what's going on, but I've got to find out."

Her brothers followed her to the nondescript, older tan sedan they'd parked behind on the street, Dean's hand shooting out to stop hers as she stepped up to the driver's door with the slim jim.

"You sure you should be doing this?" he asked. "Maybe you should wait until we can come with you when we've finished with this Rugaru business."

She turned to look into their eyes, "Look, you guys have got to stay and deal with Jack, keep watching him. I can't wait that long. I need to figure out what they were looking for at my place, and I can't let that trail get too cold. Besides, you guys can't be in Richmond with Feds running around. I'll take care of this and I'll keep in touch, okay? Maybe I'll meet back up with you down here."

Dean looked reluctant, and even Sam seemed worried.

"What if something more is going on?" Sam pushed. "Richmond's a long ways from here. We wouldn't be able to get there very quickly."

"I doubt if monsters are looking through my place for casework, and something tells me the missing files OPR is looking for is related to the break-in at my house. I'll be okay. But I have to check into this. Casey was a good agent, and he doesn't deserve to have his name tarnished."

Dean released her hand and stepped back. "Fine," he told her. "But soon as we're done, we're heading for Richmond, no matter what you say. And you call me every two hours to check in."

Tabitha laughed as she quickly and efficiently broke into the sedan, manipulating the slim jim with practiced hands and then handing the tool back to her brother. "I'll be fine Dean. You said yourself that when you were sent back in time that Mom and all the Campbells were hunters. We're tough; it's in our blood."

Her brothers stood by as she reached under the steering column with a knife and quickly hot-wired the car, heading back to the Impala as she drove off. Each of the cars turned and headed in different directions. Each for their own set of problems.

"Sam, I've called and left a message on Dean's phone, too. You guys are starting to worry me," Tabitha rambled into her cellphone as she pulled up in front of the Richmond FBI offices. "I'm
finally here. I decided to head to the office first and see what I can find there while nobody's around. Should be relatively safe." Uncomfortable silence lapsed. "Well, call me back. Or I'll worry."

She hung up her cellphone as she reached down, pulling apart the spliced together wires to shut off the car and climbing out into the cool night air. It had taken her sixteen straight hours of driving, but she'd finally reached Richmond at a little after eleven at night to find the empty parking lot. She briefly considered changing into work clothes, but it wouldn't have been the first time she showed up late at night to get some paperwork in her jeans and a sweatshirt.

She started to step away from the car, but couldn't get over the uneasy feeling churning in her stomach, so she pulled her phone out again, and dialed a number she had called only the day before.

"Tabitha. To what do I owe the pleasure? I'm guessing you're not calling to check on me again, not at this hour."

Tabitha sighed, kicking a stone across the pavement. "How'd you know it was me, Pam?"

The woman laughed slightly. "Psychic, remember. Now, what's troubling you? I can hear it in your voice. No special abilities needed."

"I don't know," Tabitha confessed, glancing at the darkened brick building. "Bad feeling, I guess. I think I was hoping you could tell me if I'm just being paranoid, or if something more is going on."

Pamela was silent on the other end. Slowly, she replied, "Well, I can look into it. Put some feelers out; see what the ether has to say. Why don't you give me an hour or so and hold tight?"

Tabitha nodded to herself. "Sounds good, Pam. And thanks. I'll just head into the office to look up a few things while I wait to hear from you."

"Now, hold on," Pamela interrupted. "I said to hold tight. Just wait until I take a look before you do anything."

Turning, Tabitha leaned down against the roof of the tan sedan. "I need to get moving on this, Pam. I'm already behind on the trail."

Silence stretched again.

"Look," Pamela finally began. "I don't know what it is you're looking for or into, and I don't need to know to make some inquiries, but I'll tell you this: Trust your instincts. If you've got an uneasy feeling about this, there's probably good reason. I'll call you back when I find something."

As the line went dead, she stood and considered her friend's warning, but knew she couldn't let the trail get cold. It had already been over twenty-four hours since her house and Casey's place had been broken into.

Decision made, she calmly walked to the front door, entered her passcode, and was mildly shocked when it buzzed her through the front doors. Of course, that was just the main door. Far from the building's only level of security.

One of the guards looked up from the security desk as she walked through the inner glass doors.

"Hey, Jerry!" she called warmly to the middle-aged guard who glanced up with a startled expression.

"Agent Winchester, what are you doing here?" he sputtered as he dropped his boots from the desk and sprang to his feet. "I hadn't been told you were off leave yet."
Tabitha bypassed the metal detectors, walking around them to step behind the desk with Jerry. She gave a startled Jerry a quick hug as she said, "No, I'm not back quite yet. But I'm working on it. That's actually why I'm here. I have some paperwork to fill out before I can come back, and I never brought it with me from my office when I left. So I just need to run up and grab it. How is Sandy by the way? And Mikey? Wasn't he going to graduate from UV back in May? How'd that go?"

Jerry smiled and puffed up. Proudly saying, "Oh, the family's all good. Sandy's been missing you though, been asking me when you were going to come back so she could send you some more casseroles; try to fill you out so you can find a husband." He smiled almost cheekily as he said it, enjoying their usual banter. "But she's been missing the cookies you usually make me. And I'll admit, I have been, too."

Tabitha smiled easily as she edged around Jerry behind the desk. "And what about Mikey? Did he graduate in May? Find a job?"

Jerry didn't seem to notice that she was maneuvering behind his desk to avoid the metal detectors. Or seem to notice that anything at all was amiss. "He sure did. Did his old man proud, that's for sure. And got a great job for some software company out in California. I don't pretend to understand what it is he does. But he says he loves it and makes good money. So me and Sandy won't complain." He beamed as he said it, his pride in his son shining in his eyes.

"Well that's great," Tabitha told him. "I'll have to catch up with you and Sandy some night."

She kept moving, but Jerry suddenly stepped towards her, his face unsure.

"Tabitha," he began. "I haven't heard that you were back from leave, yet. You sure you can be in the building late at night like this."

She smiled confidently as she walked backwards away from him. "Yeah, it's no problem, Jerry. Besides, I'm just grabbing some paperwork. In and out. You know how the Bureau is with their paperwork. Got to have it done."

Jerry finally nodded. "Well, if you're sure. Don't want to see you delayed by some silly paperwork in coming back to work."

He smiled happily again as he turned back to his desk, propping his feet up once more as he resumed his place in what she was sure was some travel magazine. Jerry loved to look at the pictures of far off places, even though he never travelled much beyond Virginia himself.

Seeing that Jerry was occupied with his magazine and didn't seem to be paying her any mind, Tabitha turned and quietly jogged for the stairs. She knew Jerry wouldn't think it unusual—she often took the stairs instead of the elevator—and this way he wouldn't see what floor she got off on unless he was watching his monitors. And Jerry trusted her enough not to pay attention.

She silently thanked Casey as she jogged to the third and top floor, her hands briefly checking to ensure her Glock 23 was still tucked into the waistband at her back. It had been his tutelage that had taught her to make friends with the people who were in this building the most. He'd always said an agent would never know when they might need a favor or the trust of the people who were truly important around the office.

"Thank you, Casey," she whispered as she quietly opened the doors to the third floor. "You were sure as hell right."

Soft lights lit the main open area of the third floor, rows of desks and computers filling the area. She
knew the floor was empty, but moved silently through the room anyway. Jerry wasn't the only security guard that worked the nightshift, but she knew the other roaming guards would mostly be down on the first floor. They didn't come up to the other floors but a few times a night.

Finding the desk she was looking for, Tabitha sat down and turned on the desk lamp, glancing cautiously around as she did so. As she waited for the computer to power on, she could only hope that Catherine hadn't changed her passcodes in the last five months. The woman was a shameless flirt around the office, and more than a little careless when she entered her codes, not even trying to block the view of her typing.

But as Tabitha entered the passcode and entered the system, she was more than pleased with the woman's carelessness.

Still, she shook her head and chuckled, "Sloppy, Catherine. You're supposed to change them way more often than this."

Tabitha knew she didn't have time to waste, so she quickly searched the mainframe, trying to figure out what files OPR had recently been trying to access. When she found the log, she saw that they had been looking into hers and Casey's last cases. Their next to last, most specifically.

But Tabitha couldn't find the files. None of the electronic copies seemed to be in the system. None of the transcripts. None of the pictures. Nothing.

Who could have so thoroughly erased them? she wondered.

She was by no means a computer whiz, but covering for her brothers over the years had meant that Tabitha had learned a few tricks when it came to erasing files from the FBI system. And one thing she knew, there was always a log of the last person to access or alter a file in the system. And it stayed there unless you corrupted or erased the log as well.

She froze as she pulled up the log. "Oh Casey, what did you do?" she whispered when she saw his login as the last user to alter the files for the missing casework.

"What are you doing up here?"

Tabitha jumped at the sudden question, automatically closing out of the system, and logging off the computer as she stood and faced the man across the way in the large open room.

"Tyler. What are you doing here so late?" she asked the other agent in surprise as she casually sat on the edge of the desk she'd been sitting at.

Tyler Barrett crossed his arms over his habitual gray suit, what Tabitha always assumed must have been one of ten identical suits. "Came to get a file I left up here and saw the light on. What are you doing at Agent Summer's desk?" he demanded.

Tabitha smiled as she looked down at the desk under her hip. "Is this Catherine's desk? You know, they all look alike to me. Must have forgotten what mine looks like," she laughed.

"Yours is down on two. In your office. What the hell are you doing up here? You shouldn't even be in the building," he continued in uncompromising tones.

She raised her hands in a motion of surrender. "Easy, Barrett. I just came to get some paperwork, too. Nothing to get worked up over." As she answered, she began moving towards the outer wall of the room, intending to work her way to the main doors behind him so she could leave before any more suspicions were raised.
"Sure you were," he said sarcastically, turning with her movements and placing himself more squarely in her path. "But I heard you were being looked into by the OPR. So what are you doing snooping around here in the middle of the night? Maybe I should give those OPR agents a call."

Tabitha paused her advance, growing uneasy at his words. "Where'd you hear something so ridiculous?" she laughed it off.

"Just the rumor going around."

Tabitha froze as she stared at Barrett, her heart rate kicking up as she stared at the agent she was only passingly familiar with. Like Cheryl, he worked in a different division.

But while Tabitha hadn't been the slightest bit surprised to hear that her friend had weaseled something out of the tightlipped OPR, she couldn't believe that Barrett would be able to do the same. Cheryl was beauty queen beautiful, quite literally a former teen Miss Georgia or something in her youth, and she had no qualms about using her beauty to charm information out of men. But Barrett was lazy as an agent, too lazy to even keep up on water-cooler gossip, let alone be prying something classified out of OPR.

And his attitude wasn't in sync. He was lazy, but mostly easy-going. Got along with most everyone, and never rocked the boat. And no way would he come back to the office in the middle of the night for any kind of file or paperwork.

Smoothly drawing her gun, Tabitha held Barrett in her sights as she calmly asked, "Who are you?"

His eyes flashed to black for just a moment as the demon grinned at her. "Friend of a friend you could say," the demon laughed.

He wasn't the slightest bit concerned about the gun aimed on him, but then again, Tabitha knew he had no reason to be. A lead bullet would do nothing to a demon. But she edged closer to the door near him, having no other choice but to get to the stairwell and escape.

"What do you want?" she asked as she held her gun steady.

"Why, you, of course. At least, the boss does. But it's simply too bad you didn't bring your brothers along. That would have been icing on the cake," he told her, merely watching as she carefully came closer.

"Oh yeah? Who's your boss? I'd like to know who I should send my regrets to," she steadily told him, eyes darting between the demon and the glass doors.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to send your regrets. You'll have to settle for giving them in person," he grinned.

Tabitha was almost to the doors, just turning towards them as she felt the sharpness of a cold blade press to her throat from behind.

"Hold still and I won't have to hurt you," Jerry instructed, his breath hot in her ear as he yanked her against his chest. "Boss doesn't want you hurt. Yet."

"Jerry," she whispered mournfully.

"Didn't think I was the only demon in the building, did you?" the demon wearing Barrett laughed.

Tabitha had lowered her gun to her side at the feel of the knife pressed to her throat, but hadn't
dropped it.

Barrett stepped closer with his hand held out. "Give me the gun, Tabitha dear. You won't be needing it," he commanded.

"Kiss my ass," Tabitha snarled back.

Barrett's face twisted as he stepped to her, grabbing her shoulder as he pulled her closer, trying to wrench the gun away.

Tabitha used the two demon's grip on her to her advantage, leaning back into Jerry with her upper body as she raised her feet between the two, and kicking away from Barrett's chest with all the strength in her legs.

Barrett stumbled back away from her, his grip slipping from her arm as Jerry stumbled backwards into the glass doors, shattering them as the two fell through and onto the cold linoleum floor amidst the glass.

Tabitha rolled away from Jerry, knocking the knife from his hand with a sidekick as she rolled to her feet.

Shots rang out, forcing Tabitha to crouch low to the ground, raising her own gun, and firing back at Barrett, watching as he stumbled backwards as her shots struck him.

Suddenly, Jerry barreled into her, trying to knock her gun away and grab her. But the force of the hit knocked Tabitha from her feet as she twisted and tumbled down the stairs, pain exploding in her arm as she tried to curl into herself as she rolled roughly down the stairs with Jerry, shots still ringing out in the darkness of the FBI office.

The pair landed in a heap on the landing between the second and third floors. Gasping for breath, and her body screaming in pain, Tabitha tried to roll over and keep her wits, but the demon in Jerry meant he regained his footing from the tumble faster than she had.

Crouching over her, he advanced with his hands held out before him to grab at her. Pulling her knees to her chest, Tabitha waited until he almost had grabbed her shoulders before she kicked out with her legs, heaving all of her muscles into shoving the portly Jerry backwards against the floor-length window on the landing, all while firing several more shots into the security guard.

Jerry stumbled backwards and hit the window, and then, almost in slow motion, the already cracked glass riddled with bullet holes, gave way, shattering outward as Jerry fell with it.

Tabitha didn't wait to listen to the sound of him hitting the ground, but crawled further away from the stairs, just scooting around the corner of the stairwell as more bullets hit the floor of the landing where she'd been.

She pushed with her hands to regain her feet, but one arm gave way beneath her, blood from glass cuts dotting both hands.

"This would be easier on you if you'd just come quietly!" Barrett yelled out from the top of the stairs. "But if I have to shoot you a few times, so be it!"

Tabitha pushed to her feet with her right hand, glancing up through the narrow opening in the stairwell where Barrett stared down at her. "Never said I liked things easy!" she yelled back, limping down the next half-flight of stairs as she heard pounding feet following after her.
She knew she'd never make it all the way down to the main floor and out the door before Barrett caught up to her limping pace, so she pushed through the doors to the second floor and limped down the hallway to the right. This floor was lined with office doors on each side of the hall. Where more senior agents, or those on more prestigious teams, had private offices.

As she'd passed the main doors of the second floor, she replaced her gun at the small of her back and grabbed the pole in the corner with the Virginia state flag, carrying it with her as she entered the door to her own office. She quietly slid the door shut as she melted to the floor just inside the door, pushing the chairs along the wall out of her way as she tore the flag from the standard.

Her hands were still bleeding from the glass cuts as she pressed the flag to the blood on her hands, but she knew Jerry had taken the brunt of going through the glass door. Her real concern was that she hadn't been able to put weight on her left hand or grip with it. Pulling back the sleeve of her worn Stanford sweatshirt, she could see that it was already badly swollen, all the way down to her wrist and fingers.

She wiggled her fingers, and though she had to bit off a curse, she was able to move them and turn her arm and wrist when she concentrated, though the pain made her stomach roll and pitch. She knew the bone was fractured from the sheer pain and how quickly it had swollen, but at least it wasn't so bad to be a broken compound fracture.

"It doesn't have to be this way!" Barrett called out in the hallway, seeming to know she was on the second floor. "Just come on out, and I'll bring you to the boss. No one else has to get hurt. Or… we can keep playing these games, and I can jump from meat-sack to meat-sack, until I've used up everyone you ever knew!"

Gripping the pole in her hand, Tabitha breathed raggedly and waited.

Like a bloodhound, Barrett seemed to know right where she was, her door slamming open as he raced into the room.

Tabitha swung the pole out low across the doorway with both hands, screaming out in pain as Barrett barreled into it and tripped headfirst into her office, sprawling across the corner of her desk as Tabitha crawled on her knees and one hand. She sobbed as she cradled her left arm to her stomach, scooting around her desk to kick Barrett's gun away from his reach, and then rolling towards the wall as he pushed away from the desk, trying to follow her.

But he stopped hard at an invisible barrier, Tabitha just out of his reach as she leaned back against the wall, her knees drawing up to her chest as she curled around the arm pounding with a fiery pain. She gasped deep raged breaths and forced herself to her feet, lightly kicking back a corner of the rug under her desk and chair with her toe as she grabbed a flashlight with a black light bulb from a drawer in her desk, illuminating the hidden devil's trap only visible under the black light.

"Never thought I'd need that in an FBI office," she admitted in uneven tones, pain lacing her words. "But I'm glad the Winchester paranoia runs deep."

"What do you think you're going to do?" he growled at her.

She could hear the frantic calls and shouts downstairs of the remaining security guards, no doubt calling in the sounds of gunfire. And as she stared at Barrett, she knew she wouldn't have time to question him like she wanted. Police and Feds would soon swarm the building.

She also knew that in exorcising the demon, she would be killing her colleague. The bullet wounds in his chest weren't something he'd likely survive.
"Can't kill this meat-sack, can you?" the demon sneered at her hesitation.

Knowing she didn't have time for a longer exorcism, Tabitha began to recite the shortened version still engrained in her memory. "Exorizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus, omnis satanica potestas, omnis incursio infernalis adversarii, omnis legio, omnis congregatio et secta diabolica."

Barrett began to scream and growl at her, but Tabitha leaned back heavily against the wall and closed her eyes as she finished reciting, "Ergo, draco maledicte. Ecclesiam tuam securi tibi facias libertate servire, te rogamus, audi nos."

With her final utterance, the black smoke of the demon was expelled, and Barrett fell limply to the floor.

Kneeling beside the man, she felt for a pulse, a soft sob escaping when she found none. "I'm sorry," she whispered in apology.

But there was no time for tears. She quickly left her office, eyes scanning the halls and stairwell as she turned away from the main entrance, leaving through the fire escape near her office, and racing down the steel steps, not stopping until she'd reached the tan sedan she'd arrived in.

She paused to look back at the office where she had once worked, Jerry's body still lying on the pavement in the shards of glass, the demon seeming to have abandoned him. Yet she refused to let herself dwell on the consequences of this night. Refused even to think of his now widowed wife, or even his fatherless son, the apple of his eye.

But one thing echoed in her mind as she painfully reconnected the wires beneath the steering column with one hand: Her career in the FBI was now over.

And one mystery remained: What did these demons want with her, and how had Casey and missing files been involved with it?

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who are curious, the exorcism spell she uses is one of the ones used by the guys in the series. It's the shortest of several they used since I figured she'd be pressed for time. But if you're interested, here's a translation of the Latin:

We exorcise you, every impure spirit,

every satanic power, every incursion of the infernal adversary,

every legion, every congregation and diabolical sect.

Therefore, cursed demon

You may make your Church safe to serve you freely,

we ask you, hear us.
As always, be sure to give me your thoughts!
She knew she couldn't stay in the parking lot and lament her injuries or her now lost job. Or even the lives lost on this night. If she didn't want to be arrested for the murders of a security guard and fellow agent, she'd have to make a run for it.

Keeping mostly to side streets, Tabitha drove the familiar route to Casey's apartment in Richmond. If she still wanted to figure out what was happening, she was going to have to hurry before the police and Feds got on her trail. And her place in Varina would soon be swarming with cops and Feds, too.

And while she needed to stop there before she disappeared, she had to make a stop at Casey's first since it was on the way. She could only hope the police would be slowed down by the inevitable bickering for jurisdiction with the FBI and further slowed by having to watch the security footage to see just what happened and who had shot an agent and security guard in the FBI building.

Tabitha drove by the apartment building twice looking for anyone staking out the area, and then parked in an alley across the way from the apartment complex.

Silently praying, Tabitha looked to see if either of her brothers had called her back yet. Her phone screen was blank. No voicemails, no missed calls, no texts.

But as she stared at the phone, Pamela's number flashed across the screen.

"Hey," she quietly answered, marveling at the psychic's uncanny timing.

"What's wrong? What happened?" the psychic immediately demanded.

"Demons," Tabitha succinctly replied, wondering if it was her tone of voice the other woman read, or something she'd "seen" or sensed. Tabitha still was unclear how her friend's "ability" worked.

The other woman cursed on her end of the line. "That's what I was afraid of, Tab. You need to get the hell out of there, girl. I don't know what's brewing, but those demons have got a hard-on for getting ahold of you."

"Do you know why?" Tabitha whispered, her arm throbbing as she lightly held it across her stomach.

"Nothing specific, Tab. Just that those demons want ahold of you. 'Course, they want your brothers, too, but they're used to it, so do yourself a favor and get your little ass back to wherever they are. You'll be safer when you guys are all together to watch out for each other."

"I will, Pam. I will. I just have to make two more stops, and then I'm out of this town."

Pamela sighed in frustration. "Just can't take the target off your back, can you? Do whatever it is you absolutely have to, and then get the hell out of Dodge. Where are your brothers at, anyway? Why aren't they watching your ass?"

"Carthage. We split up so I could head up this way. Didn't know it was a trap. I haven't been able to get a hold of them for a while to be honest," she admitted fearfully.
"I'll look into it," the psychic replied, the line abruptly cutting off.

Unwilling to wait to hear back from the psychic, Tabitha dialed Dean's number once more, closing her eyes as leaned her head back heavily against the headrest of the driver's seat, listening as her call went straight to his vague outgoing message.

"Hey," she started, and cleared her throat when her voice came out slightly broken. "Hey. Where are you guys?" she whispered in the deafening silence. "I'm worried. I don't want to hear that you've been eaten by a Rugaru; that'll just seriously piss me off," she mirthlessly chuckled. "Plus, it'll just cap off one hell of a fucked up night. So, please… be okay." She paused as she considered ending the call, but some need drove her to explain more, perhaps to fill the empty space. "I'm in a bit of trouble here, guys. Demons set a trap for me at the FBI office… and… it's bad. Look… don't come to Virginia. I don't want anything to happen to you guys. And I'm gonna clear out anyway. I just need to swing by my place to pick up a few things. And then, I'm out of here… I'll call you later with a location to meet." She almost hung up but whispered, "Please be okay."

She shoved the phone back in her jeans pocket.

When she stepped out of the car, she heard the tinkling of loose glass falling to the pavement, and took the opportunity to shake her clothes out as best she could. To hide the mess she knew she looked like, Tabitha pulled her hood up and stretched her sleeves over her hands to hide the cuts that had at least stopped bleeding. She could only hope the darkness of night hid the blood on her dark blue sweatshirt.

With only her gun and a lock-pick set, she carefully eased into the alley behind the apartment building and up to the service door. She'd complained to Casey several times that while his doorman at the front provided some measure of security, the locks on the service doors in the alley were abysmal at best.

He'd only laughed. "Who would break into a Fed's apartment?" he'd asked. Who indeed.

But abysmal lock or not, it still took her nearly five-minutes to pick the lock with one blood-streaked hand and the occasional use of her throbbing left hand as she muttered curses and bit back gasps of pain.

She made her way up the long flight of steps to the fifth floor and Casey's apartment. Pushing midnight as it was, there wasn't anyone around in the halls. The apartment door still had crime-scene tape across it, but Tabitha yanked it down and fished out the keys she had in her handbag, quietly letting herself into the apartment. She could see the marks where the lock had been jimmed, but it hadn't been damaged, nor had it been replaced yet.

Nothing had changed in five months; she wasn't sure why that surprised her. Perhaps it was because of all the things that had happened to change her in the intervening time. It suddenly seemed like longer than five months. Even more like another lifetime.

With her left hand supported in the sweatshirt pouch across her stomach, Tabitha slipped through the living room and tidy kitchen, noting a few knick-knacks and papers that seemed out of place, but overall, not much seemed disturbed.

She tiptoed into the bedroom, a somewhat familiar room to her, though in truth, Tabitha had only spent a handful of nights in Casey's apartment. It had somehow seemed more illicit to sneak around as they had been inside the city of Richmond where they worked. Somehow, she'd felt more confident in not being caught when they stayed at her place in Varina further from the city.
But she did know the layout of Casey's place. The impersonal bachelor pad, she'd always told him. With watercolor prints in his modern decor bedroom having no more character than hotel art and decor.

She pushed the bi-fold door of the closet back with her fingers, immediately seeing that a piece of paneling in the side of the closet was out of place. Kneeling, she pulled the section back to find that the safe behind it hadn't been shut all the way.

And she knew she'd shut it months ago when she had emptied out the safe in honor of the promise she had made her partner.

"No one else knows about the safe," she whispered to herself. "Or what the combo is."

Leaving the safe door as it was, Tabitha sprinted from the room and back down the stairs, carefully cradling her arm to her stomach as she flew down the flights of stairs.

Someone had been looking for something in Casey's safe.

The contents of which were now in the safe of her own house.

Which had also been broken into.

An old gravel road ran behind the woods that bordered the backyard of Tabitha's place. It had once been an access road for farmers getting to their fields, but as the area became a bedroom community with new homes for people working in the city, the gravel road had mostly become abandoned. Making it the perfect location to park her "borrowed" car so she could creep up behind her place. She hadn't seen any activity around her white, two-bedroom, farmhouse style home—just more yellow tape—but she knew it was only a matter of time until the place would be swarming with authorities looking for a suspected murderer.

Creeping across the leaf-strewn patio in her backyard, she absently reminded herself to sweep and rake the leaves before winter. And then remembered that she'd likely never be back to this place to see the dusting of winter snow.

"Focus," she reminded herself as she lifted a loose brick at the corner of the patio, retrieving her spare key for the patio sliding door. She had keys to the front with her, but for obvious reasons, decided not to risk someone seeing her slip in the front.

Once inside her slightly musty smelling house, she fumbled in the nearby cabinet for a flashlight. As she aimed the small flashlight about her living room, she marveled at the carnage. The place had truly been ransacked. Papers and books flung everywhere; even her furniture and rugs had been pushed around out of place and toppled over. The little house hadn't been anything fancy, but it had been warm and inviting. And all together hers. A simple white house, with warm, homey wood floors, lots of thick rugs, and even an old-fashioned rock fireplace in the living room.

She felt sick at the sight of her once meager but tidy home, but pushed forward, stepping gingerly on books, papers, and parts of broken lamps as she crept into her guest bedroom.

Here too, everything was thrown about. Extra blankets and linens tossed from the closet, and even the bed shoved back against the far wall.

But it was the sight at the center of the floor that held her attention. The floorboards were pulled up, revealing her hidden safe beneath.
The safe had been another teaching from Casey. Somewhere to always keep personal case notes in case they were needed some day in court. And to also keep safe anything else that might come up. He'd made her promise to take his case notes and keep them if anything ever happened to him, and she had kept her promise. But Dean had died so shortly after Casey had that she'd never gone through the box from Casey's safe. Had just shoved it in the safe she'd once previously lamented being too large and empty.

She stepped closer, and heaved a sigh when she saw that her safe was still securely locked. And thanked her lucky stars she had shelled out as much as she had to get a top of the line brand and model. Unlike Casey, she truly had kept things in her safe she didn't want the normal person to find.

On the floor of the closet, she found one of her old, leather messenger bags, and snatched it up before she knelt by the safe. After entering the electronic code, she pressed her thumb to the reader and opened the safe. On top was a bundle of IDs, cash, and a clean cellphone; all of which she had kept handy from the day she and Sam had left together so many years before. Much as she had enjoyed her "normal" life, in the back of her mind, she had always feared that her so-called normal life would one day come crashing down around her. And that day had come. Only it hadn't crashed around her, it had crashed directly on her head.

Shoving the bundle into her empty messenger bag, she next grabbed an old photo album of her mother's that she had always hung onto, and slid it into the bag as well, along with some other family mementos.

In the bottom of the safe was the box she had taken from Casey's safe, as well as several notebooks with her own case notes. She left her own notebooks in the safe, but pulled out the box with Casey's things, struggling to lift the weight with only one hand.

With the flashlight held in her mouth, Tabitha knelt over the box and began pulling out Casey's case notes.

And then, she spotted what she was looking for in the bottom of the box, spitting the flashlight out of her mouth as she fell back in shock.

"Oh, Casey, what were you doing?" she whispered as she carefully retrieved the official FBI case file from the bottom, able to read the official FBI stamp in the moonlight. Thumbing through the pages and thick stack of photos, she recognized the case they'd come back from before they started working on the string of robberies case in north Virginia that he'd been killed on. The file was the very same case with the dead and missing children, the case he'd taken so hard. The one that according to Castiel, he'd been possessed shortly after. The same case that her partner seemed to have erased from the electronic FBI database.

"Why'd you steal this?" she whispered.

"Tabitha? What are you doing here in the dark?"

She jumped at the noise, springing painfully to her feet as she spun to face the doorway, hiding the file behind her back.

"My god!" Cheryl gasped, "What's happened to you?"

"What are you doing here?" Tabitha returned, ignoring the question.

"I thought I saw movement in your place and came to check it out," she explained, waving the matter away as she stepped closer. "What happened to your hands? They're all bloody. And what's wrong
with your arm?"

Tabitha couldn’t help the awkward way she held her arm to her torso, and she didn’t have any good answers to give her friend. Not if she didn’t want to implicate the woman in her troubles.

Kneeling again to shove the file in her hand and Casey’s corresponding case notes into her bag, she muttered over her shoulder. "You don't want to know, Gracie Lou," she affectionately explained. "You should get your beauty queen ass out of here."

"Not a chance, Harley," the other woman cheekily returned, squatting next to her.

Tabitha felt a small smile form at the familiar banter. She’d always teased Cheryl for her beauty queen looks, and Cheryl had always teased her back for her mannish, biker footwear. But Tabitha maintained doors were easier to kick down in boots than in heels. Though she wore them as well when duty and occasion called for them.

"I mean it, Cheryl. You don't want mixed up in this."

Cheryl ignored her, pointing at the now closed messenger bag. "Were those the missing case files OPR is looking for? You took them from the safe at Casey's place?"

Tabitha tensed, whispering, "How'd you know about Casey's safe? Better yet, how'd you know I was here? I came in the back, stayed away from windows, and didn't turn on any lights."

She slowly stood as she spoke, just starting to back away as Cheryl rose to her feet as well.

Sighing deeply, her eyes flashed to black orbs as Cheryl said, "Always have to do things the hard way, don't you?"

Tabitha tried to spin away, but Cheryl's hand darted out to clamp down on her injured arm. And as her fingers dug in, Tabitha dropped to her knees, crying out in pain as Cheryl's fist sailed down through the air at her temple.

It had to have been hours later, but Tabitha wasn't sure just how many hours. As she opened her eyes, all she knew was her body ached so badly she had to swallow back the bile that suddenly rose, and blink furiously at the sunlight. *I wish people would stop hitting me in the head,* she thought to herself.

She tried to roll to her side, but even the slightest movement shot pain through her left arm as she lay on her back on the unforgiving floor. Looking down, she saw her arms were laid across her stomach, her wrists tied together with rope. The awkward angel of her tied hands was causing the most trouble, cranking what had been a dull ache in her arm to a pounding roar.

"Well, look who's finally awake," Cheryl drawled as she walked in the room. "You've been sleeping nearly all day. It'll be dark soon."

Tabitha immediately began chanting in Latin, "Exorcizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus—"

But her words were cut off as Cheryl jumped forward, the backhand hit across her jaw feeling more like a strong left hook with the help of the demon's strength. Her head bounced painfully against the hardwood floor, and even her arm jostling painfully with the hit.

"You mutter one more word of Latin and I'll bust that jaw." Then she smiled almost gleefully. "Or better yet, I'll just cut out your offending tongue. Don't need *that* to still be useful."
"Untie me," Tabitha said in a flat voice as her eyes glanced pointedly at her hands. She knew she had to give up trying to exorcising the demon, at least for the moment. She'd never get through the spell before the demon made good on her threats. Even the backhand hit from the demon had split her lip, causing blood to slowly trickle from her mouth.

Cheryl paused as she considered the request.

Tabitha jerked her booted foot in the air, shaking her foot to rattle the length of chain around her ankle for affect. "I'm obviously not going anywhere, and having my broken arm tied like this hurts like a bitch."

Cheryl stepped closer again and squatted beside her, pulling out a knife that she casually caressed with her hands. "No," she agreed, "I don't suppose you are going anywhere. And the boss did say to bring you back unharmed." She carelessly shrugged and added, "If possible."

With that, she roughly sliced through the rope, standing with a laugh as Tabitha rolled away, biting back a scream of pain, and cradling her arm once more.

When she could breathe again, Tabitha scooted over and sat up against the side of the bed she was chained to. Drawing her knees to her chest while sheltering her arm, she glanced up once more at Cheryl standing and watching her as though her pain was entertaining. Perhaps it was to the demon.

"Do you promise to behave?" Cheryl smirked as she continued to toy with the large blade in her hands.

Tabitha bit back a sneer as she stared at the demon, wishing that she didn't look like the same beautiful woman who had been her friend. Cheryl was dressed in dark slacks, heeled—but feminine looking—boots, and a soft white sweater with a v-cut to display her assets. She didn't look anything like the nasty creature that was riding her.

"Who are you?" Tabitha decided to ask.

Cheryl didn't look at her, seemingly bored. "You could say I'm the boss of someone you once knew." She finally looked up from the knife and grinned at Tabitha. "Someone you knew intimately. At least for a while."

The blood ran from Tabitha's face as she stared up at the demon. "Casey," she whispered in disbelief. "You were the boss of the demon riding Casey?"

"That's right. I was," she confirmed, looking bored again. "Until something blew him to kingdom come that is. Strange that," she continued, glancing up with a raised brow, "since killing a meat-suit normally does nothing to a demon. Hmmm."

"What do you want with me?"

Cheryl laughed as she pushed away from the wall, crouching in front of Tabitha as she tapped her captive's drawn up knees with the knife. "It's not me that wants you, dearie. It's my boss that does."

"Your boss?" Tabitha repeated in surprise.

Cheryl turned her attention back to the knife as she idly played with it again, seeming like a child with a short attention span. "Sure," she answered. "It's kinda like a pyramid scheme, with bosses above everyone making demands, and minions below serving."

"So who's your boss serve?"
Cheryl grinned as she looked Tabitha in the eye again. "Oh, my boss doesn't really serve anyone. Top of the food-chain, you could say."

Gulping, Tabitha asked again, "So what's your boss want with me?"

But the demon rose to her feet, walking away as she paced. "Now, why ruin the surprise? You'll find out when you meet."

She walked away and to the smooth stone fireplace in the room. Tabitha hadn't noticed before, but now recognized that she was in the master suite of Cheryl's house.

"How'd you even get into my house?" Tabitha asked conversationally.

The demon finally frowned, looking away and not meeting Tabitha's eyes as she tried to casually explain, "I was stuck at first, the second I walked through the front door. A neat trick placing one of those traps under the rug just inside your door with that silly invisible black light ink. But one of my underlings was nearby and able to break the trap." Though the demon was trying to seem unaffected, Tabitha could see the strain of irritation in the soft lines around Cheryl's eyes and mouth.

"Well, I'm glad to have caught a demon with it. Even if I wasn't there to exorcise you. Maybe next time."

The demon's head whipped angrily to face Tabitha before she caught herself and forced an unconvincing shrug as she looked away again, pretending that Tabitha hadn't struck a nerve.

"Aren't you afraid of the FBI finding me here?" Tabitha asked, hoping to get the demon talking again as she glanced down at the heavy chain wrapped around her ankle. The lock might not be too hard to pick.

If Tabitha had her lock-pick set.

Or two functional hands.

And no demon watching.

"Nope," Cheryl answered as she stirred coals in the fireplace, setting another log on top. It was the first time that Tabitha registered all the items laid out on the hearth in front of the fire: herbs, bags, tools, and other things she couldn't identify from her vantage. "They were easy enough to send on their merry little manhunt. But they seem quite certain of your murderous ways, became just like your brothers they think," she continued with a self-satisfied smirk.

Tabitha also saw a bowl on the metal grill over the fire that was intended for cooking.

Catching her look, Cheryl gestured to the bowl. "Wondering what that is?" Cheryl waited, but continued to answer regardless of the silence coming from her captive. "You'll find out soon enough. Soon as it's done brewing that is. Took me a while to find everything I needed."

Swallowing hard, Tabitha continued talking, trying to get more information from the demon that she could use. "If this is going to take a while, what's the harm in telling me why your boss wants me? Why'd you have one of your demons possess my partner to begin with?"

Cheryl sat on the stone hearth, crossing one leg over the other and folding her hands over her knee, the knife still loosely gripped in one hand.

"Well, he was supposed to watch you, of course. But then, he got a little more hands on than he was
supposed to," she admitted, smiling almost fondly as she spoke.

"But why? Why me?"

Leaning forward, Cheryl whispered conspiratorially, "To tell you the truth, I didn't think you were anything special at first. Not worth any trouble anyway. But then, that's why I'm not the head honcho." She laughed as she spoke, leaning back as she continued, and pointing her knife at Tabitha. "I didn't sense it, but I'm young—comparatively speaking anyway. At least compared to the boss. My boss is old. Very old. Said you smelled like something from a long long time ago." She grinned as the silence drew out, and Tabitha scowled at the theatrics.

Finally, Cheryl relented and whispered, "Angels."

Tabitha jerked back at that, wondering just what it meant. They could *smell* the angels watching her? And just what did an angel smell like?

"Of course, like I said," the demon continued, "I'm too young to smell it or sense it. We nearly all are. But the boss wanted you watched after that. We knew you had to be important if you had an angel checking in on you. And wouldn't you know it, shortly after we start watching you, my demon gets blown-up by something that shouldn't harm a demon." She flicked the knife under her fingernails as she stared at them. "Interesting, huh? Makes you wonder what that explosion really was," she murmured.

Tabitha kept silent, not knowing what to say or what to give away. Would her chances for survival be better or worse if she just admitted that she could hear an angel's real voice and that Castiel had—what did he say—smote her partner.

Cheryl stood and stalked closer again, crouching once more in front of Tabitha as she slid the knife along the other woman's cheek almost sensually. "Must mean that you're important to those feathered boys somehow, so we're gonna make sure we've got our own foothold on you."

She stood and walked back to the hearth, glancing inside the bowl in the fireplace before she grabbed a key from the nearby table.

"What does that mean?" Tabitha whispered as Cheryl stalked closer again, crouching down to unlock the chain around her ankle.

"Can't possess you without cutting that annoying little tattoo on your ass off," Cheryl answered. "Not that we want to possess you anyway. Too obvious. The feathered crew would notice that. No, we want something subtler. Something just enough so we always know where you are and what you're doing."

She reached out to grab Tabitha, but her head snapped to the side as Tabitha jabbed a punch at her, turning to roll away. But she was brought down hard on her side as Cheryl grabbed her leg, yanking her back.

Before she could fight back again, Cheryl clamped down on her left arm, squeezing until Tabitha cried out.

"Almost as good as hamstringing a captive," Cheryl laughed. "I'll have to remember this."

She drug her by the broken arm to the stone hearth, roughly tossing her down on her side as Tabitha rolled over, once more biting back the bile that rose in her throat.

The demon jerked her back, rolling Tabitha onto her back by the fireplace as the demon yanked her
broken arm up on the stone hearth, shoving her sleeve up as Tabitha moaned and fought.

"Sit still," the demon growled. "You'll only make things worse for yourself." As she spoke, she took a long, thin needle and dipped it into the dark mixture from the bowl, and then started bending down over the exposed skin of Tabitha's left arm.

"This will be over in no time," the demon told her. "And then you can leave and find out for us just what those angels want." The demon grinned viciously. "Too bad for you this new marking we'll give you will seep into your very flesh and mark you as ours. We won't need to possess you to make our own claim on you or force you to do our bidding."

Fire erupted through Tabitha's flesh as the demon pressed the needle into her skin. She tried to twist away, but the pain doubled with every movement as fear ate at her. If the physical pain was this unbearable, what else was it doing to her?

*God, what have I done to deserve this? I don't ever ask for help, but I'm asking now: Please help me. I don't want to be marked by demons. Please, Castiel, someone, help!* she silently prayed.

"Stop!" a deep voice suddenly shouted.

Tabitha opened her eyes to stare at the trench coat wearing angel striding across the room.

The demon dropped the needle and her hold on Tabitha, springing to her feet, a fearful look in her eyes as the angel approached.

With one hand, Tabitha snatched her messenger bag from the ground by the hearth, slinging it over her head and shoulder, and then grabbed the open FBI case file off the table as well. By the time she'd stumbled to her feet, Castiel had spread his palm across the face of the demon, a light seeming to spread from his palm as he grabbed Tabitha by her arm, shouting, "Close your eyes!"

The warning was unnecessary. As he grabbed her left arm and yanked her closer, the pain of the action drove her to her knees once more, forcing her eyes closed as she fought back a sob. She suddenly felt the strange surge of power she now associated with Castiel well up in the air around her, washing over her like a hot summer wind as a blinding light pierced even through her eyelids.

Suddenly, everything was silent, the air cold, and she felt hands gripping her shoulders, giving a gentle shake.

"Are you alright?" Castiel asked, his deep voice rumbling in the silence.

Tabitha forced her eyes open as she took slow breaths through her nose, seeing the angel kneeling before her. She shook her head as she fell back to sit on her butt, and then lowered onto her back, her good arm coming up to rest across her forehead as she stared up at the red streaked sky.

"Where are we?" she croaked, her voice rough and hoarse.

"Not far," Castiel answered shortly. "Are you injured?"

She glanced down her body, looking at the throbbing arm across her stomach. She nodded. "Arm's broke," she whispered.

She sucked in a breath as Castiel carefully pulled up the sleeve that had fallen down again, exposing the swollen, and black and blue streaked flesh of her arm.

"I don't suppose you'd be a friend and just cut that off for me, would you?" she whispered lightly,
hoping it was a smile on her face and not a painful grimace. "I'm getting sick of people grabbing me by it."

Castiel shook his head. "I can do better," he softly explained, reaching towards her and touching her forehead with his fingertips.

Tabitha gasped at the warm sensation that spread through her, and then marveled at the almost euphoric feeling of every single ache and pain in her body from the abuse of the last several weeks disappearing.

She sat up to face the angel almost cautiously, expecting any second for the fiery pain to return. But it didn't.

"Better?" Castiel asked, a small smile growing on his face.

But as Tabitha sat up, she saw the smoldering ruins over his shoulder. The very ground where Cheryl's house had stood. A burning reminder of all that had happened.

She shook her head in reply to the angel. "Not unless you can turn back time and keep people from being used and killed because demons were trying to get control of me."

The angel grabbed her shoulder with one hand. "What?" he demanded. "What happened?"

She explained what the demon had told her as quickly and succinctly as she could, watching as Castiel pulled back her sleeve again to look at the arm the demon had tried to mark.

There was nothing there now, but the demon had said it would seep into her flesh.

"What does this mean, Cas?" she pleaded quietly with him. "What is it that the angels want with me? What is it that would drive demons to so much trouble to lure me back here and try to mark me or whatever?"

"I wish I knew," Castiel whispered, his eyes fixed on the flesh of her inner arm. "But it's good the demon couldn't finish marking you. Perhaps you'll suffer no ill effects from their scheming."

Tabitha threw an angry gesture towards the ruins behind him. "'No ill effect!' People around me keep getting possessed and then killed by either you or me. Which reminds me, I'm now wanted for murder! They'll never stop hunting for the rouge FBI agent who leaves a trail of bodies in her wake! What the hell do I do now? Jesus, it would have been better if you'd left me in that house to blow up, too!"

Castiel jerked back from her like he'd been slapped, sitting back on his heels as he threw a horrified glance at the ruins behind him.

Exhausted and frustrated, Tabitha covered her face with her hands. "I'm sorry," she apologized in a whisper through her fingers. "I didn't mean to sound so ungrateful. I was praying so hard to be saved, and then you show up out of nowhere and save me, then I throw it back in your face. I just… I don't know what to do now. I'll always be hunted by the law now."

She felt warm fingers cautiously pull her hands from her face, tightly gripping them as she opened her eyes and looked into the blue eyes of the angel. "Perhaps I can help with this matter as well. If I take a bit of your blood, I might be able use it to conjure enough blood and bone material that your forensics shall believe you perished in the house as well. I can't change what's been done. But I can ensure that you aren't hunted by the humans for something that isn't your fault."
"You can do that?" she whispered.

Castiel only nodded, his eyes holding hers intently.

She nodded in return, watching as he carefully pushed her sleeve up her arm and then with a knife that appeared out of nowhere, made a shallow cut across her inner wrist.

The pain was nothing compared the broken arm she'd been struggling with for nearly a day, but she still bit her lip to remain silent. A bowl suddenly appeared in Castiel's hand as he collected her blood, his other hand soothingly rubbing circles against the skin of her inner arm as he held her wrist over the bowl.

Tabitha's exhaustion only seemed to increase with the intimate feel of the angel's thumb stroking her skin, and her head fell forward against his shoulder, listening to the steady sound of his breathing and heartbeat beneath her ear.

Finally, the bowl was filled, and Castiel slid his fingers across the cut, healing the wound with that simple warm caress.

"I'll be back," he said softly, pushing her back from leaning against his shoulder. By the time she looked up, he had disappeared.

Tabitha stood, surprised to see that the messenger bag was still with her, and the case file she had grabbed was open on the grass. It seemed pointless now to have grabbed it, but she shoved it in her bag, also ensuring that surprisingly, everything else she had placed there was also still present. Of course, the demon had stripped her of the things she'd had on her: her gun, cellphone, and lock pick set. But those were easily enough replaced. The things in her bag weren't.

"It's done," Castiel said, showing up at her elbow suddenly.

"Thank you," she whispered, looking down. "I don't even know how you showed up when you did, or why you're doing all this for me, but thank you."

Castiel reached out for her left hand, drawing it between them as he stared again at where the demon had tried to mark her. "I came because you prayed for me to come. I heard your prayer to me." He finally looked up and met her eyes, such regret and sorrow shining there that Tabitha's breath caught at the mournful sight. "And I could do no less to repay the harm we've done you. In trying to protect you, we've only made you a bigger target for demons. And I'm sorry for that."

Tabitha stared at the angel for a minute, part of her torn with the desire to be mad and blame him for everything that had happened. But then she saw that grief shining so brightly in his eyes. Eyes that spoke such volumes.

"Did you know it would put me in more harm?" she whispered.

"No," he emphatically shook his head.

"Would the demons have come for me anyway?"

"I don't know," he admitted, glancing away.

Tabitha sighed and stepped forward to lean her head against his shoulder again, wishing the exhausting past days were already over. "Then I can't blame you for what's been done. But thank you for saving me again," she whispered into the rough material of the angel's trench coat-clad shoulder.
Castiel didn't move, but she had the distinct feeling he was uncomfortable by her closeness, so she stepped away, looking back at the smoldering ruins of her former friend's house as she listened to the growing sounds of the sirens getting closer.

"I get that you showed up because I prayed for you to, but what happened to the angel that's supposed to be watching me? I mean, I get what you said about angels being soldiers, not guardians, but as long as that demon had me for, you'd think my personal angel would have shown up."

Castiel shifted behind her and whispered, "She was killed on the field trying to help save a seal. I doubt she's been replaced yet."

Tabitha turned to face the angel, forgetting herself and reaching out to squeeze his hand when she heard the pain in his voice. "I'm sorry, Cas. I didn't know. " She paused. "The seal?"

He shook his head. "Broken. Like far too many," he lamented, staring at her hand. He seemed to stare so often if she reached out to touch him, and she wondered if angels never even touched each other, for he stared almost greedily at the contact she made, seeming hungry for even simple touches, but at the same time, uncertain and uneasy.

"Are you okay? Was she a friend?" Tabitha asked.

Castiel shook his head again, the action looking almost automated as he continued staring down at their joined hands. "We were not in the same garrison. But all angels are considered brothers and sisters," he quietly explained.

"Are you okay?" she asked again.

His eyes finally broke away, only to move that stare to her eyes, holding them as a surprised look flitted through his blue orbs. As though he were surprised by so simple a question being asked of him.

"I don't know," he admitted, seeming almost startled that he'd even answered. "It's difficult to suffer such losses time and time again."

"I'm sorry," she apologized again. "I can't even imagine." She paused and then continued, "It's not going well, is it? Stopping the seals from being broken, I mean."

"No," he admitted, pulling away. "Another of our failures."

Tabitha didn't try stepping closer, instead, turned back towards the smoke. "You're trying. That counts for something. And we'll stop it before the end. We have to."

"I can take you to your brothers," Castiel whispered, changing the subject as he stepped beside her, staring at the ruins as well.

"What, like poof me there or something? Is that how we got out here?" Castiel nodded without looking at her, so she continued, "I wasn't sure if I passed out or what happened."

Silence lapsed and Tabitha wondered if her brothers were even all right since she hadn't been able to reach either of them the last several times she'd tried calling.

"You should at least call them; I can reach out and feel their frantic emotions for you."

Knowing he was right, and relieved to hear Castiel say they were indeed alive, Tabitha reached into her bag and took out the burner phone she had kept in her safe.
There was silence on the line as the call connected.

"Hey, Dean," Tabitha finally managed to whisper.

"Christ, Tabitha!" Dean cried when he finally heard her voice. "We've been going out of our minds trying to get a hold of you. Where are you? Are you all right? Stay right where you are; we'll be to the Richmond area before you know it," her brother frantically ordered. She could hear the loud roar of the Impala's engine in the background as he sped down the road, no doubt making record time from Carthage.

"I'm okay, Dean. At least, I'm okay now. I'll tell you more later. But don't come into the Richmond area. I don't think that would be a good idea right now. I'll meet you somewhere okay?"

She could hear Sam in the background making demands and Dean's quick replies to him before he continued to her, "To hell with that. We're coming to get you. Just tell me where you are."

Tabitha shook her head and she replied, "No. That's not a good idea. Listen, just pull over, and I'll call you back in a bit with where to meet, okay?"

She hung up the phone before he could respond.

"I can't ever come back here, can I?" she whispered to Castiel, eyes still fixed on what might as well have been the ruins of her life. At least the life she'd so carefully built. But it had been a façade, and now the façade had crumbled.

The angel didn't answer her. He didn't need to.

"Can you take me somewhere else first? I need to go somewhere and say my goodbyes before I can leave for good."

Castiel finally turned to look curiously at her.

"I need to go to the Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond."

Taking her hand in his, Castiel pulled her closer beside him, and suddenly, she was standing in the rolling hills of the famous Southern cemetery.

Casey hadn't been buried in one of the ornate mausoleums common to the historic cemetery, but buried with a simple granite headstone to mark his memory on a little hill overlooking the James River. Tabitha only had to walk a few feet to stand at the grave she hadn't visited since her partner's burial. The headstone hadn't been there then. But Tabitha could see him in the simple but elegant scroll of the engraving.

She'd found Casey's burial in the famous Confederate cemetery ironic at his funeral. He had been from a family in Iowa, a state that had been strongly Unionists, and yet, over one-hundred years later, Casey had requested in his will to be buried in arguably the most notorious Confederate cemetery in the country.

But he'd always said he loved the view of the James.

"It must be difficult to lose someone you love," Castiel whispered beside her.

She turned a startled glance up at the angel. "I guess it is. But it's difficult even when you lose a friend, too."
Casting a glance out of the corner of his eye, Castiel spoke almost hesitantly, "You loved him."

"No," Tabitha denied, looking at the angel once more before turning back to the grave. "Casey and I were friends, but I didn't love him. Not like that. And he didn't really love me."

"I don't understand such human relationships," Castiel hesitantly told her. "If you didn't love him, why did you lay with him as a man and wife are meant to?"

The question was posed with such an honest earnestness as he stared into her eyes, looking for the answers he didn't understand, that Tabitha found herself just as earnestly answering, "I'm only human, Cas. And humans crave affection, but most of all, we crave companionship. I guess… I was just lonely. And he was, too. Can't you understand that, Castiel, what it's like to be lonely?"

He shrugged as he looked away from her and back down at the grave. "I don't understand the emotion. I was trained to be a soldier. Emotions are unwanted in soldiers," he stoically replied.

Tabitha was silent for a minute, staring at the angel beside her as she tried to fathom such an existence. But he finally turned to look at her, seeming expectant for some kind of answer.

"I don't believe that you don't feel emotion. I've seen that you do. But I can also see that you don't understand what you feel." She sighed and tried to find the right words. "Being lonely," she tried to explain, "is like you're being swallowed whole by an endless pit, but no one around you can hear you scream. No one around you even notices that you're fading away. And sometimes, the struggle to find someone to see even a piece of you to keep you from fading to obscurity—it can become all consuming. It's all you can think about. But you can't love someone who doesn't see all of you, and so, you still feel like pieces of you are melting further and further away. That's what being lonely feels like, Cas. And I've never been good at being lonely."

Castiel stared into her eyes for several moments as he absorbed her words. "I only feel that sensation—that feeling, this loneliness—in Heaven," he whispered.

"In Heaven?" Tabitha questioned in surprise.

He nodded once. "In Heaven, I am just another angel. Just another soldier. There, I'm nobody in particular, Tabitha. Just another soldier."

She felt her heart skip at the sound of her name rolling almost foreignly off Castiel's tongue. His deep voice gave it a strange inflection, and she realized that in the time she'd known him, he had not once said her name. Until now.

Tabitha glanced down and realized her hand was still gripped tightly in the warm palm of the angel, she hadn't even noticed that he hadn't released her hand when he'd brought them to the quiet old cemetery. It had just felt natural.

Impulsively bringing their joined hands to her chest, she told him, "Everyone's special to someone, Cas. I don't have many friends. Especially not anymore. But my friends are special to me. And you're a friend, Castiel."

"I don't have any friends," he whispered, staring at their joined hands pressed to her chest.

"You've got one now."

Castiel stared down into her eyes with a strange sort of wonderment, and just as he opened his mouth to speak, her phone rang, shattering the peaceful calm of the cemetery.
Tabitha glanced away nervously, pulling the phone from her pocket and muting the call even as she continued to hold Castiel's hand to her chest with his other hand. Only Dean had the number—because she'd called him from that phone—and Tabitha decided she would call him back when she'd finally come up with a safe location to meet.

"Where do you want me to take you?" Castiel quietly asked.

She looked back up into his face—once more impassive—shrugging as she said, "There's an old, out of business truck stop west on highway 60. I can wait there for my brothers."

She glanced away from the angel's stare to see the old abandoned truck stop she had just described.

"You work fast. Thanks," she said, as the angel released the hand still grasped around his and pressed close to her chest.

As he released his hold on her hand, he backed away until his fingers slipped from hers, her fingers clinging almost mournfully at her sweatshirt in his absence.

Eyes still holding hers, he quietly explained, "I must go," and then vanished from sight.

With a shaky exhale, Tabitha stepped over to a dilapidated picnic table beneath the spreading boughs of a huge oak tree, mournful and bare in the autumn wind. Hopping to sit on the table, she called to give her brothers her location.

A half-hour later, the Impala screeched to a halt in the gravel lot, her brothers rushing out of the car as she waited for them at the table.

Sam wrapped her in a fierce hug as she remained sitting, but Dean launched right into her.

"Where the hell have you been? What the hell happened? We've been trying to reach you for hours!"

Tabitha turned her head away from Sam, resting it on his shoulder as she tightened her arms around his torso.

Sam let her cling to him, but tapped the front of her blood-spattered sweatshirt as he tried to look down between them. "Are you alright, Tabby? Are you hurt?" Sam whispered in her ear.

She held Dean's eyes as he waited for her to answer Sam's question. Shaking her head awkwardly against her younger brother's shoulder, she whispered, "No, I'm okay, it's not all my blood."

"'Not all your blood?"' Dean furiously contested. He stepped forward, grabbing her closest arm and shoving the sleeve back to look at her arm and hand. But while her sweatshirt was spattered with her blood and the blood of others, her skin beneath it was unblemished. No trace of the broken arm or the marking the demon had begun drawing remained.

Tabitha reluctantly pushed away from the comforting embrace of Sam's large frame, pulling her other sleeve up to prove to the eldest Winchester that she was indeed fine. "I'm fine now, Dean. Cas healed it all," she explained.

"'Cas?'' he repeated, one brow arching in question.

"Castiel," she clarified. "He showed up and killed the demon and healed my arm and hands… and well, everything, I guess. He saved my ass, too."

Dean shook his head as he ran a hand through his hair. "Start at the beginning. What the hell
happened? That psychic, Pamela Barnes, called us out of the blue and said you were up here in a shit-storm of demon trouble, and as we got closer to Virginia, every radio station was reporting on the manhunt for FBI Special Agent Winchester, wanted for questioning in two homicides. What the hell happened? And why was Pamela Barnes calling us?"

Tabitha pulled her feet onto the bench of the picnic table, her hands clapping over her knees as she tried to quickly explain, "I've been in touch with Pam for a while. Something felt wonky when I got into Richmond, so I called Pam to see if she knew anything. Somehow, the demons set a trap for me. When I showed up at the FBI building to look into the files OPR was looking for, two demons showed up and tried to grab me. In the scuffle, I shot them both and managed to exorcise one, but the other took off." She shook her head mournfully at the memory of the men she'd killed. "Anyway, I needed to get some things from my place before I could leave, but a demon showed up there, too, and had possessed a friend of mine. The demon got the drop on me, and I woke up again a little before dark this evening."

Sighing once more, she bit her lip, trying to decide how much of the story to tell her brothers. She still didn't understand why the demons wanted her, or what it really had been attempting to do in "marking" her.

"Anyway," she hastily continued, "then Castiel showed up, killed the demon, healed my cuts and such, and here I am. Joining my brothers in their murderous ranks and infamy." She smiled wickedly as she said it, finding at least some cruel, sinister humor in the twists of fate.

Dean looked away, "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Tabitha's face scrunched as she tried to figure out what he could possibly be sorry for, but he continued before she could speak.

"We should have realized a long time ago that the demons after our asses might try to grab you, too, to use you. We never wanted you drug into this mess, but we should have realized those demon bastards would come for you sometime."

She opened her mouth to tell her brother that the demons wanted her for altogether different reasons, but no words would come out. Much as she wanted to ease his conscience, she didn't know how to explain the truth. And she didn't want to see the same suspicion in his eyes that she saw when he looked at Sam when he looked at her. She glanced at her left arm. The demon hadn't finished marking her, but whatever it had done was now in her. Just like the demon blood was in Sam.

"It's probably a miracle they didn't come after me sooner," she truthfully answered out loud. "I always knew the day might come when this life would catch up with the one I'd tried to create. I was probably foolish to have tried living so long under my real name. It was only a matter of time before something caught up with me."

Dean finally looked up to meet her eyes, his gaze heavy. "I'm sorry you got drug back into this. You realize you can never go back to that life now?"

She nodded, staring down at her hands between her knees. "I've been sitting here for the last half-hour trying to come to grips with that myself. I know I can never live a normal life as Tabitha Winchester again," she sighed.

"The law will always be looking for you," Sam added in a heavy voice.

"No," Tabitha denied with a shake. "They'll soon decide that Tabitha Winchester died in an explosion. One eerily similar to her partner's death—probably blame that one on me, too—but they'll
"Stop looking for me soon enough."

"How do you figure that?" Sam asked, crossing his arms in disbelief.

"Castiel said he took care of it. They'll find enough blood or bone fragments or something of mine to rule that I died. Or at least that's what Castiel said."

"And you trust the angel?" Dean scoffed

Finally hopping to her feet, Tabitha squared off with her brother. "Let me think about that. Hmm, I'd be dead or worse if he hadn't shown up when he did. And oh, yeah, he drug my brother out of Hell. So, yeah, I'm trusting the angel on this."

Dean stepped away, placing a hand against the imposing oak as he leaned heavily against it his back to his siblings. The old truck stop parking lot weighed heavily with the crushing silence.

"Look," Tabitha finally spoke, "we need to get out of here, and I need to lay low until this blows over some. So we should get moving and stick to side roads until we're clear of Virginia at least."

Dean didn't turn around as he quietly spoke, "We'll take you to Bobby's and you can stay there until he can find another place for you to settle down with a new name."

"What!?" Tabitha incredulously demanded. "You're not ditching me at Bobby's. You're not getting rid of me that easily. I'm still in this. Even more so now. Those bastards have used and killed good people, friends. And I'm not going to spit on their deaths by just walking away. I've got a stake in this now, too."

Dean whipped around at her words and continued staring at his sister, but the youngest Winchester stepped between them. "Come on, Dean," he began, "Tab's right about one thing: we need to get her out of the area. We can talk about the rest later."

Tabitha nodded curtly and turned to follow their younger brother to the car.

She'd only made a half-dozen steps when Dean's hand clamped down on her shoulder, spinning her around. For a moment, she glared up into his emotion filled eyes, but then was engulfed in his arms as he gripped her in a bone-crushing embrace.

But the tighter he squeezed, the more she melted into his arms, needing the support and understanding he had always offered.

Even when he was mad.

Even when she was mad.

Tabitha could put on a brave face and pretend to Sam and the world that she was fine, but Dean read her better. He saw the guilt and sorrow she felt for the deaths and for what she'd lost.

And arguments between them or not, he still offered his comfort and strength.

Perhaps even seeking to assuage his own fears as he held his little sister close.

"When we pulled into your neighborhood," he whispered against her hair, "I was so damn terrified when I saw that billowing smoke. And even when I realized it wasn't your address, I couldn't stop the terror beating in my chest. Even though you'd finally called us and said you were all right, I knew I couldn't believe it until I saw you. I don't think I can take the heartache of even thinking I'm losing
another sibling. Don't put me through this again, Tabitha."

Pushing back, Tabitha looked into her brother's eyes. "Then return the favor and don't either one of you put me through another lost brother," she earnestly answered.

"I'm trying my best here, Tabby."

"I am, too."

Dean looked off into the distance, his eyes unfocused, but the weight of the world in them.

"Dean," Tabitha whispered, reclaiming his attention, "you have to stop taking so much responsibility for everything. For Sam and me. We're not children anymore. We can look out for ourselves now. You don't have to take the weight of the world onto your shoulders."

Dean laughed bitterly as he looked away again. "According to the angel, the weight of the world is on my shoulders. I have to stop Lucifer from rising, remember?"

"Yeah, but you don't have to do it alone. Sam and I will always be here."

Dean's eyes skipped over to where the youngest sibling waited patiently by the car. His eyes paused on Sam as he considered him. "Sam's not all the way back yet," he confided to Tabitha. "But at least he promised to stop the mind crap."

Tabitha glanced over her shoulder at Sam as well. "Good," she said, turning back and sliding her arm through Dean's as they walked together to the car.

"So what happened with the Raguru?" she asked. "It doesn't escape my notice that the two of you look worse than when I left you in Carthage. And I couldn't get ahold of you guys."

"We were a little tied up. Had to take out Jack," Sam supplied as they stopped at the car. "He turned and we didn't have any other choice."

Tabitha saw the resignation and slight fear in Sam's eyes, so she decided to change the topic. "Well, you're both here now, and we've delayed long enough. We should hit the road."

Dean walked around to the driver's door, pausing to ask, "It's just about impossible now, but is there anything you need that you left behind at your place?"

Shaking her head, and tapping the leather bag against her hip, Tabitha explained, "Everything I really needed is right here. My house, car, guns, and everything else back there, belonged to FBI Special Agent Winchester. And she's dead now. All that's left is Tabitha Winchester, hunter. And most of what she needs is right here."

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys liked it! I'm trying really hard to write original stuff and not just copy the episodes, so I hope this is holding everyone's interest. I will be coming a bit more back to the episode canon in future chapters.

And hopefully you noticed it, but we see our first reference to the meaning of the title of this story. Did you catch it? If not, take another look. It's there. I do have meanings in
mind for all my story titles, and they're almost always known phrases, quotes, or even song titles that will resonate throughout the story.

And as always, lay your thoughts on me!
Tabitha huffed as she rolled her aching neck back and forth on her shoulders, pushing back from her hunched position over the laptop she’d been bent over for the past four hours. Pushing back, she stood, her back popping and cracking as she unbent it as well.

"Damn," she mumbled to herself, "I'm getting too old to spend this many hours glued to a computer screen. This isn't college anymore."

She swallowed the last of her long since flat beer, and decided to take a shower. Researching the bizarre case that had brought them to Pennsylvania wasn't getting her anywhere, and if she knew her brothers—which she did—she knew they would have called it a night by now and long since found themselves one of the many German-themed taverns to wet their considerable whistle at. So she figured she was more than justified in knocking off for a few hours to order a pizza and take a shower while she waited for her food.

Dean had put her under strict orders to stay in the motel room while her brothers worked this case—and while she even agreed with the principle that she needed to lay low until they were sure the smoke surrounding Agent Tabitha Winchester had died down—she still chafed at being put on the bench.

Being confined to the crappy motel room for a second night was the worst part. She'd never done well being stuck in any one place. It was one of the reasons she had loved the FBI—always a new case in a new location.

She was starting to feel like she was getting cabin fever and the four tacky walls with their seventies-style flower wallpaper were closing in on her. Or maybe it was motel fever. Surely, that had to be a clinical diagnosis, right?

Shaking her head, she called and placed her order at a local pizzeria—never having been a fan of the chain pizza shops—and climbed in the shower to wash away the stench of her motel fever during her half-hour wait for her meal to be delivered.

Tabitha was still towel drying her hair as she carried her iPod out of the bathroom, singing along loudly to an Aerosmith song as she dropped her damp towel on the foot of the bed, shaking her hair out as she left it to finish air-drying.

"What are you researching?"

Her feet nearly caught beneath her as Tabitha jumped and tried to spin around all at once, gasping as she pressed a hand to her suddenly pounding heart.

"Dammit, Cas!" she breathed as she righted herself. "You scared the shit out of me! Knock next time or something. You about gave me a heart attack," she told the angel as she lowered onto the bed, yanking the wet towel from beneath her when she felt the water was seeping through her cotton boxer sleep-shorts.

The angel was sitting in the seat she had previously occupied at the table, turned sideways in it to face her, his appearance, as usual, completely unchanged.
"What do you want me to 'knock?'" he asked, his head tilting slightly to the side as he questioned her.

Tabitha finally cracked a smile as she shook her head. "Never mind. Just let me know the next time you're going to show up out of thin air like that. You know, make some noise, say something. It's lucky I had already changed in the bathroom and didn't walk out here naked or something."

"I don't understand," he told her, staring at her with his usual open, earnest, but confused gaze. "I did speak. And what would it matter if you walked out clothed or not? You're no different than other humans I've observed clothed or unclothed."

Snorting, Tabitha crossed her arms over her ratty sleep t-shirt and explained, "Here's another tip from woman to angel: Don't tell a woman she hasn't got anything you haven't seen before. Every woman, no matter how ugly, deep down wants to believe that her body is so hot, that it outranks anything you've ever seen before."

Castiel continued staring at her, his eyes drawing together in confusion. "You want me to tell you that your body is 'hot?'" he finally inquired.

Tabitha shook her head again as she ran a hand over her face to hide her laughter. "I guess this is what I get for trying to explain human complexities to an angel." Looking back up at the angel still patiently awaiting her response, she continued, "Like I said before, never mind. I don't know why I expect you to act or speak like normal humans do, anyway."

"What are you researching?" he asked again, gesturing at the open laptop on the table in front of his chair. He seemed to jump from topic to topic without any regard to that last topic, sometimes making Tabitha feel like she was getting conversational whiplash.

Running her fingers through her hair to loosely comb it, Tabitha briefly explained, "I'm not sure to be honest. It's a strange case. Vampires and werewolves it looks like. Only not real vampires or werewolves. Nothing's right about the kills. It seems more like how vampires or werewolves kill in movies, not real life. I'd say it was a hoax by an obsessed movie buff, but something strong did this. I'm just not sure what would emulate movies like this."

"I'm certain you'll find your culprit," Castiel assured her.

Before she could continue, a knock sounded at the door. Grabbing cash from her purse, she went to the door and paid for her steaming pizza, her mouth watering at the spicy aroma wafting from the box.

She set the box down on the table, sitting across the way from the angel as he silently cataloged her movements.

Contemplating her cheap can of beer, she lamented to the angel, "It's not fair that Dean's forcing me to stay in this tacky motel room and drink cheap swill when he gets to enjoy Oktoberfest and real beer. It's got to be considered some kind of torture or cruel and unusual punishment."

Castiel glanced down at the can in her hands. "What's wrong with this beer?" he curiously asked.

Tabitha used the tab to pop open the beer. "For one, it's in a can. There's nothing like good beer on tap. And for another, it's just whatever cheap brand Dean happened to have in his trunk."

As she glanced up from opening her can, she looked across the table to see that the angel was gone. She paused with her can partway to her mouth and then set it down. "Okay," she slowly drew out. "Not strange at all. Definitely need to teach the angel how to say goodbye though," she mumbled as
she flipped open the pizza box, bending down to smell the delicious supreme pizza.

She grabbed a slice out of the box, and then let the lid close on the pizza to keep it warm. As she lifted the slice balanced in her hand to her mouth, she stopped, just managing to choke back a gasp at the angel that had suddenly reappeared across from her.

"You have got to stop popping in and out like that. Humans just aren't used to it," she crossly told the angel as she set her slice down on top of the pizza box.

Castiel held something across the table to her, and she finally looked down from his face to see what his hands held.

"Where'd you get that?" she laughed, eagerly reaching across to accept the German-style beer stein he held towards her.

"A bar across town," he simply answered. "You said it was better than what you had here and that you couldn't leave this room," he shrugged.

She took a healthy swig from the tall stein, humming her appreciation at the stout autumn lager, just the perfect hint of sweetness to it. Maybe even orange, Tabitha considered as she took another drink.

"Thank you," she happily told the angel. "Sure as hell makes being stuck in this motel room a little easier."

The angel nodded, but seemed content to sit and watch her.

Feeling uncomfortable, Tabitha set the mug down, picked up her slice, and asked the angel, "You didn't get one for yourself?"

Castiel shrugged slightly. "Angels don't need food or drink," he explained.

"Yeah, but you can, right? I mean, you're in a human body, so you can drink and eat if you wanted."

"I suppose. But there isn't any need."

"Come on," Tabitha scoffed. "Drinking a good beer is a need all on its own, whether you need it to survive or not. Have you ever even tasted beer?" The angel silently shook his head. "Then you should at least get yourself a beer, too. And you can try some of my pizza. I got plenty in case one or both of the guys came back and were still hungry. You don't know what you're missing until you try pizza and beer. I lived on it in college."

The angel sat and stared at her for a moment, but Tabitha held his gaze, raising a challenging eyebrow as she waited for his move.

Suddenly, he disappeared, and Tabitha grinned in satisfaction as she reached across the table to clear her laptop out of Castiel's way. She'd just sat back down in her seat, curling her bare legs beneath her, when Castiel reappeared in his seat once more, another large beer stein sitting on the table in front of him.

Castiel sat with his hands in his lap, staring down at the mug on the table.

"Go on," Tabitha encouraged. "It's not going to bite." She paused. "Well, it's a good bite anyway," she corrected with a grin.

Glancing up at Tabitha, Castiel cautiously reached out and brought the mug to his lips, taking a small
sip, and then with a hum of approval, took a longer drink.

"Told you you'd like it," Tabitha laughed, opening the pizza box and turning it towards the angel. "Next step to nirvana: pizza."

Castiel reached into the box, and just as cautiously slid his hand under a slice, lifting it upwards and frowning when the cheese pulled and stretched in the air between his slice and one still in the box. "This can't be appetizing food," he said as he stared at the stringy cheese. He leaned forward and sniffed it. "Certainly not a step to a transcendent state. It smells strange," he added.

Tabitha laughed harder than she'd laughed in a long time, reaching out to break the cheese apart so he could lift his slice out of the box. "Guess humans and angels have different ideas of bliss. Just try it," she told him through her laughter.

He sniffed it one more time, but finally took a decent bite of it, his eyes going wide as he chewed the slice.

"See, not so bad, huh? Maybe not bliss, but it depends on your standards and expectations. Mine are pretty low I guess. Plus it's great with beer," she told him.

He nodded and tried another gulp of the beer.

Still laughing, Tabitha licked marinara from her fingers and then reached into the box for another slice, wondering to herself if drinking beer and eating pizza with an angel was either the start of a joke, or some kind of blasphemy she was engaging in.

Castiel didn't seem as impressed with the pizza as he did with the beer, so after finishing the slice she'd given him, he declined another. But he continued drinking from the tall mug, she noted.

"Why are you here, Cas?" Tabitha finally got around to asking. "Not that I'm complaining, but is there something going on or something you needed?"

The angel shook his head, his eyes fixated steadily on the tabletop as though he were afraid to look up. "You said that you considered me a friend. It was my understanding of human interactions and relationships that friends spend time with one another," he deliberately spoke. His expression was drawn, as though he wasn't sure of what he was saying or if it was right. But his eyes darted up to look at her, almost shyly, as though afraid to hold her gaze.

She nodded and gave the angel an encouraging smile to let him know he wasn't wrong. "That's right. Friends do that. And of course you're welcome to drop by anytime. It's definitely more fun talking to you than staring at these walls while Dean has me under motel-arrest."

Silence lapsed for a few minutes. The angel seemed unconcerned by it, finally relaxing in his chair and silently drinking from his mug. Tabitha found she wasn't even all that uncomfortable in the silence as she tended to be with a lot of people. But then she started to feel guilty that Castiel was trying to figure out human friendships and she wasn't finding anything to say.

"How have you been, Cas?" she finally asked as she finished a slice of pizza and leaned back in her chair to continue sipping her beer.

The angel's brow knit together in confusion as he gazed across at her. "I'm fine," he stiffly told her. But the look on his face told Tabitha he didn't really understand this part of human conversation either.

She leaned forward again as she set her mug down on the table. "It's something friends ask each
other, Castiel. They ask each other how the other one is doing, and what's going on in their lives. Friends tell each other what's happening and if they're having problems, or tell each other the good things that are going on, too."

The angel's expression didn't change as he stared down at his own mug on the table. But he finally looked up to meet her eyes as he spoke in a grave tone, "Things are difficult. We've saved many seals. But there are too many seals to save them all. Too many possibilities. And Lilith only needs to break a fraction of them to succeed," he heavily told her. "I've lost many brothers and sisters, and my brethren don't know what it means. Heaven is becoming chaotic."

Tabitha swallowed hard at his confession. It wasn't the lighthearted conversation that normal human friends had, but then, she knew she had to stop expecting the angel to be like other humans. She had told him to tell her his problems. And this was certainly a problem.

"That's a lot to take in," she whispered in return. "But I have to ask, Castiel, if things are going this badly, and Heaven is becoming such a mess, why do you keep showing up down here? Why do you keep seeking me out? I mean, I'm not complaining, like I said, I consider you a friend, and you've saved my life and my brother's life, but I don't understand why you would want to spend time with me when all this is going on."

Castiel stood and walked away from her. She almost thought he was going to disappear again, but he merely walked to the window and looked out between the partial opening of the drapes.

Not wanting to push him, Tabitha stayed in her seat and waited for the angel to speak when he was ready.

"It's more peaceful here than in Heaven," he suddenly whispered to the dark shadows on the other side of the glass.

"'Peaceful?'" Tabitha repeated in surprise. "I would think Heaven is more peaceful than Earth is. It's more like a mad mob down here."

Castiel closed the drapes all the way and shook his head as he turned around to face her, leaning backwards against the now closed drapes. "It's more peaceful in your presence than it is with my brothers and sisters. In Heaven, my superiors only make demands of me for more progress and more answers. The rest of the angels only have more questions for me as well. More demands for what is happening and what will happen."

"I've made demands and asked you questions you couldn't answer, too, ya know," she quietly reminded him, guilt lacing her words at the realization.

Castiel nodded, drawing his arms behind his back as he continued explaining, "Yes. You ask the same questions I ask my own superiors. But you also offer words of kindness. Concern. Angels don't offer each other such things. Only make demands for more answers."

Tabitha tried to swallow again, but found her mouth had gone dry at the angel's admission. She felt like she should respond, but didn't know what to say to the angel.

Seeing her silence, Castiel went on. "When I'm in Heaven, all I feel is… a tightness in my heart. A weight. When I am here with you… it lifts; the tightness in my heart eases. What is that? What is it I feel when I come to see you?" His words had taken on an almost desperate and pleading quality as he spoke. He pushed away from the window, striding closer to stand in front of Tabitha, staring down into her eyes where she still sat.
Tabitha pushed from the chair to stand up, feeling uncomfortable with the angel looming over her. "You feel like the pressure fades away?" she tentatively asked for clarification. He nodded, still eagerly awaiting her answer. "That's comfort, Cas. It's the comfort of friendship. That's what you feel."

The angel's eyes drew together further as he continued his intense stare. "Do you feel this... comfort, too?"

"Yeah, of course I do, Castiel," she lightly told the angel, grabbing his hand in hers and leading him back to the table. The discussion had become entirely too somber she decided. "Believe me, the way you keep saving my butt, I definitely feel comfort when you're around. Plus you're not all over my ass about everything and worrying about me stepping foot outside like Sam and Dean are lately."

Castiel walked with her back to the table, but stayed standing when she gestured for him to sit again.

"I can't stay longer," he apologized to her. "I must return to Heaven."

She was starting to recognize the slight stirring of power that accompanied his arrivals and departs, so she reached out to grab the hand she had previously released.

"You can come back any time you need to, Cas. I may not understand everything that's going on in Heaven, but you can still tell me. Or if you just want to sit and share a beer and some pizza again, we can do that, too," she assured the angel.

Before he could respond, she wrapped one arm loosely around his torso to give him a half-hug. "Be careful, Castiel. Take care of yourself, my friend."

She released the angel and stepped back. Castiel paused, looking down at the woman in front of him, nodding slightly as he said, "Thank you."

And then, he was gone.

"How have things been going?" Bobby asked as they leaned side by side against his Chevelle, each sipping from a bottle of beer.

She held her free hand out in front of her, tipping it from side to side. "So-so," she told the older hunter. "Some days I want to throttle both of the boys for hovering over me and trying to make me stay in whatever motel we're staying in. But then other days aren't so bad. 'Course, then I wake up," she grinned.

Bobby snorted beside her. "I meant how have things been going with you since your demon showdown in Virginia," he clarified.

"I know what you meant," she answered, her feet sliding out further from the car as she leaned her back more fully against it.

Bobby snorted beside her. "I meant how have things been going with you since your demon showdown in Virginia," he clarified.

"I know what you meant," she answered, her feet sliding out further from the car as she leaned her back more fully against it.

Bobby didn't turn towards her or move, but cleared his throat pointedly. "I'm expecting an answer here, girl."

Smiling at Bobby's dig, she finally answered, "I'm just fine, Bobby. It's going as well as I can expect. My life kinda turned upside down on me. But hell, it had over five months ago, didn't it? At least I still had hunting to come back to. Not sure what other kind of job my skills with a handgun were supposed to land me. Can't wear a badge anymore, not for real. Maybe it's better this way."
"Balls!" Bobby swore as he finally turned to face her. "You're as stubborn and prideful about showing your pain as your dern father and brothers. But I know you liked that job, and I know you're upset about those people they're saying you killed. You don't have to pretend you're not upset about it."

Tabitha glanced over at the Impala where Sam and Dean were loading the last of their gear. Dean in particular was itching to get on the road and away from Rock Ridge, Colorado. Not that she could blame him. She knew she and Sam weren't likely to let their oldest brother forget anytime soon how afraid the ghost sickness had made him of everything. From heights, driving too fast, and even to the point of being chased by some little toy-breed dog. If she were Dean, she'd want to put this little burg in their review mirror as quickly as possible, too.

"Of course I'm upset," she responded, bringing herself back to the conversation with Bobby. When Dean's "sickness" had put him out of commission, she and Sam had called Bobby to get him to come help "cure" their brother before his time ran out. But now she was regretting his helpfulness. "And I did kill those people, Bobby," she reminded him.

"Yeah, but they were possessed," he defended.

"Yeah," she agreed with a heavy sigh, "they were possessed." But it still seemed to her like that was the real problem. Not so much that she had killed them. By that point, she hadn't had much other choice. What she felt guiltiest about, was that they had been possessed because of her in the first place.

"You sure you don't want to cool your heels for a while and get over what happened in Virginia?" Bobby asked. "My place is always open to you. You haven't really taken any time since it happened. You and the boys have been pretty much working one case after another since you left my place."

Tabitha turned to lean sideways against the car, facing Bobby. "Is that something you really ever get over, Bobby? Does time actually make you feel any less guilt for killing friends, demon possession or not?"

Bobby's silence was answer enough.

"That's what I thought," she told him. "Better to keep moving and take out a few more of those demons when and where I can, and help the boys take out a few monsters along the way, too. Besides, I hear there's this whole apocalypse thing coming our way, so I might as well hang around and do what I can to help stop it."

The older hunter grunted in response. "You three getting any closer to finding out more on that score?" he asked.

"No. You?"

"No. Not really. Still looking through some old texts I've got."

The pair turned to lean their backs against the car again.

"How are things going with the boys anyway? They doing alright?" Bobby finally asked.

Shrugging, Tabitha honestly answered, "Some days, I think nothing's changed since the days we all hunted with Dad. But most days… I'm just not that sure what to say or do with them. Dean's doing better trusting Sam, but sometimes I can still see the suspicion in his eyes."

"And Sam? Did he really agree to stop the mind tricks?" Bobby pushed.
"Yeah, Dean told me that Sam had said he was really worried about the road it might lead down, and had promised on his own that he was done. And most of the time, I think he's doing fine. He really has great instincts as a hunter, and he's better at interviewing witnesses than Dean is—better at relating and sympathizing with them. Better even than I was trained by the FBI to be."

"But?" Bobby pressed in the intervening silence.

"But... I don't know. I can't give any proof or anything, but he still doesn't seem right to me, Bobby. Something still feels off. Sometimes, the way he looks at me... I just don't know what's going through that big head of his," she whispered lowly as she looked away from Bobby. "I guess I'm just worried about him," she confessed.

Beside her, Bobby sighed, but didn't have anything to offer her. Finally, he asked, "But you three are getting along better?"

She turned back to face him. "Yeah. The boys are mostly getting along better, I think. And Sam's finally letting up on me getting back out on hunts after the Virginia thing. Especially after he had to let me help him here with Dean being too afraid to leave the motel room and all. I just wish Dean would finally let up on me and let me off the leash he's trying to keep me on. It's been a couple of weeks now, and Agent Tabitha Winchester has been officially declared dead. They're not looking for me anymore. He doesn't need to keep trying to place me under motel-arrest all the time."

"He's just being cautious," Bobby defended. "You said it yourself. It's only been a couple of weeks since that all went down. It's not that long. Maybe you should hang back for a while yet. Even if the Feds aren't looking for you, doesn't mean the demons won't still try to grab you to use against your brothers."

Tabitha patently ignored the fact that the demons seemed to have other reasons for hunting her down. "I'll be fine," she assured Bobby with a roll of her eyes.

"What are you guys talking about?" Dean asked as the brothers walked up to join them by Bobby's car.

Tabitha glanced at Bobby and winked at him out of the corner of her eye. "I was just telling Bobby about the case, and trying to make sure I was telling him all the accurate pieces of information in case some other hunter runs across this again." Turning to her older brother, she pointed her half-empty bottle at him and asked, "Now, I wasn't sure, but was it a full-size Yorkshire Terrier that was chasing you and going to kill you, or a toy Yorkie?"

"Shut up," he intoned grumpily, hiding a smile, and swiping the bottle from her hands, downing the remaining beer in several swallows.

Bobby kept a straight face as he picked up the reins from Tabitha. "No, she's right. I really should know the particulars in case another hunter comes across this ghost sickness again. Or do ya think the Yorkshire was another matter altogether? Did it have fangs? Was it cursed? Maybe it was a ghost Yorkie."

Dean pushed away from the Chevelle, walking backwards towards his Impala as he waved the empty bottle at the other hunter. "That's it, you're dead, old man," he threatened cheekily. "You can just keep the two of them, too," he said, pointing at his sister and brother as he turned and climbed into the driver's seat of his car.

"See ya, Bobby," Sam laughed as he turned to follow his brother.
Tabitha gave the man a quick hug, turning to jog several steps backwards towards the Impala. "Sorry, Bobby! I gotta go, they're still my ride. And I wouldn't put it past Dean to try and take off without me."

Bobby smiled to himself as he watched the Winchester trio drive away. Even without his talk with Tabitha, he'd seen the strain between the siblings. But he was glad to see some lighthearted banter between them as well.

He'd truly worry about them if and when that disappeared altogether.

Chapter End Notes

As always, lay your thoughts on me!
"Why the hell do witches have to be so skeevy and disgusting?" Dean complained as they left a victim's house after interviewing his wife—now widow. "I mean, why do they always have to try and ruin perfectly good holiday traditions, too? Razor blades in Halloween candy? That's just messed up." He shuddered as he spoke.

"I'd think you'd be used to witches and their nasty ways by now," Tabitha laughed as she unbuttoned her suit jacket to climb into the back seat of the Impala, careful of the tight skirt and the heels of her FBI outfit.

Sam laughed as he climbed into the passenger seat. The brothers were likewise dressed in their Fed costumes. But it was taking Tabitha longer to accept that her own clothes were now costume as well and that she wasn't a real Fed anymore.

"Dean's more concerned about the violation to the Halloween candy than the fact that witches are involved," Sam chuckled over his shoulder. As he spoke, he glanced down at the hex bag he'd found in the house, carefully opening it to examine the contents.

Dean shut the driver's door with a thud. "Of course I'm upset by it. All that innocent candy," he lamented.

"You've got a one-track mind, Dean," Tabitha laughed. Leaning forward over Sam's shoulder to look, she asked, "So, what's in there, little brother?"

Dean leaned over as well while Sam pushed the contents of dried herbs, a coin, a bone, and other contents around with a fingertip. "I don't know," Sam answered. "Some of this looks really old and pretty unfamiliar to me. Not the normal hex bag material, that's for sure."

Throwing the car in gear with an exaggerated sigh, Dean sullenly complained, "Let me guess, that means we've got to do some research. Wonderful."

As they started down the street, Tabitha tapped her older brother on the shoulder. "We should stop by the morgue though and take a look at the body first. Wouldn't hurt to check the police files, too, to see what, if anything useful is in them."

"Fine," Dean agreed. "I'd rather go to the morgue than sit in a library and research any day of the week. Look it up, where's the morgue in this town anyway, Tab?"

Tabitha tapped away on her phone as she looked for an address. "Most small towns have theirs in the hospital," she absently supplied. "And this town is too small to have their own separate morgue. Yup, it's at the hospital, er, local clinic, I guess."

She looked up from her phone and gave Dean quick directions to the town's small clinic.

Twenty minutes later, they were at the nurse's station asking for directions to the morgue.

"Just who are you three and why do you want to know about our morgue?" a man asked from behind them.
The siblings turned away from the front desk to face what appeared to be the sheriff of the little town, his folded arms and frown telling them plainly that he wasn't impressed with Feds in his territory. He was mid-forties, a distinguished looking older man in Tabitha's opinion, the scattered salt to his dark brown hair making him all the more charmingly distinguished.

Dean stepped forward and held his hand out to the sheriff. "I'm Agent Bob Seger, and these are Agents Pete Carr and Lesley Warren with the FBI. We were hoping to take a look at the body of Luke Wallace." As he spoke, he flipped out his badge with his other hand, Sam and Tabitha following suit behind him.

The sheriff continued to stand imposingly with his arms crossed, refusing to shake Dean's proffered hand, and barely glancing down at the badge. "What do the Feds want with a prank like this in our little town? Strange though it may be."

Sam stepped forward while replacing his badge, Dean silently dropping his hand back to his side and shoving his own badge in his pocket as Sam spoke. "We're not trying to take over your investigation. We're just hoping to take a look at the body and the case files to see if this is similar to other cases we've seen. And maybe look through your files on any other recent deaths that have been similar or unusual," Sam asked.

The sheriff flicked his eyes over Sam, and then lingered slightly longer on Tabitha before they came back to rest on Dean again, telling him, "You can take a look at the files and the body when I've got a written request from the FBI."

Dean immediately fished out one of the business cards with a number that would route to Bobby's FBI line. "Well, you can talk to our superior and let him tell you that we need and would appreciate your cooperation seeing how the FBI outranks local police," Dean tersely told him, obviously fighting to keep his voice even and not snap back at the man.

The sheriff finally unfolded one arm and took the business card, immediately stuffing it into his front shirt pocket. "Still need the official paperwork saying the FBI would like access to our body and files. Proper procedure and protocol after all. You understand," the man snidely returned.

And with that, he turned and began to walk down the stark hallway towards the exit.

"Now what?" Sam lowly asked them. "This is a clinic. It'll be hard to break into, even at night."

"No kidding," Dean angrily bit out, staring after the retreating man.

Tabitha pushed past her brothers, unbuttoning another button on the plain white blouse under her suit jacket as she went. "Men," she grumbled. "Let me show you how to get things done."

She quickly strode after the sheriff, lightly touching his elbow when she caught up to him. "I'm so sorry about that," she told the sheriff in a heavy Southern accent. "You'll just have to excuse Agents Seger and Carr. They're new to my team, and I'm still trying to teach them proper manners and all. They can be a bit demanding, can't they? Agent Seger can be particular pushy and jump the gun."

The sheriff stopped and turned towards her, his eyes roaming over her form again as she stood beneath his gaze, arching her back just slightly as she held her hand out to the sheriff. "We weren't properly introduced, now were we? I'm Special Agent Lesley Ann Warren, and what was your name again, sheriff?"

The man's eyes finally jerked up from her chest as he gently took her hand and held it between both of his. "I'm sorry about my rudeness, ma'am. I'm Sheriff Tom Dalton, but you can call me Tom."
Tabitha smiled coyly at his answer, laughing to herself at how predictably the Southern accent and routine had men hauling out the "ma'am's" and falling all over their newfound politeness. She huskily drawled, "Well in that case, I'll just have to insist you call me Lesley Ann or just plain Lesley."

Dalton seemed to realize he was still holding her hand firmly between both of his, and released it abashedly as his face flushed.

Seizing on his fluster, Tabitha laid the accent on thicker and inquired, "Would there be any way y'all could just let us take a little peek at that body and your case files, Tom?" Seeing he was going to deny her request, she quickly went on, "The god's honest truth, Tom, is that we ain't got any official say-so to be here, but I worked a case a year ago and two states over that was mighty similar, and I just had to take a look at this case and see if I couldn't try to find anything more to connect to my case. My boss doesn't agree you see, but I'd feel better just taking a look. It was a little girl, Tom, and I'd dearly love to be able to tell that little darling's folks that we've finally found a lead on just who might have done something so awful." She reached out and pleadingly laid her hand on Dalton's arm. "We aren't officially supposed to be here, like I said, so I wouldn't dream of taking over your case, Tom, but I'd surely appreciate taking a little look. Maybe you can help me find something to give some answers to little Sarah's heart-broke folks."

Dalton tore his eyes away from her hand on his arm, swallowing slightly before he nodded and said, "I guess it wouldn't hurt for you to have a look since you worked a similar case. I guess at least if you're not officially looking into the case there isn't any extra paperwork to worry about, ma'am—"

Seeing her raised brow, he corrected himself, "I mean, Lesley. I'll head back to the station and put together what we've got so far and you can pick it up in the morning."

"Well bless your kindness and understanding," Tabitha drawled, squeezing his arm once. "Now just where is your little morgue located?"

He blushed some more, pointing back down a hallway and giving her directions to the corner of the basement where it was located. "I'll call Doc Everett and tell him you're bringing your team down and to give you his findings."

"Thank you so much, Tom. And I'll look for those files in the morning. Y'all have a good night now."

She turned and slowly walked back to her brothers, her heels clicking against the linoleum as she passed by their gapping expressions, telling them, "Come on boys, y'all get a move on now."

They hurried after her, catching up to her as they entered the stairwell to the basement.

"I can't believe I just saw that," Dean incredulously exclaimed. "I've never once heard you say the word 'y'all' before. What the hell was that?"

Tabitha stretched her mouth wide in an effort to wipe the saccharinely sweet smile off her face. She looked across at Dean as they walked, smirking and drawling once more, "That sugar, is how a woman gets things done."

Sam laughed. "What happened to feminism and your whole, 'women shouldn't lower themselves in front of men' thing?"

Turning to face the boys, Tabitha backed into the basement door at the bottom of the stairwell. "Well of course I'm still a feminist. But y'all menfolk are just such easy targets. Is it really my fault if y'all just can't help yourselves around a pretty Southern Belle?"
As the boys stared incredulously at her, she could see the wheels turning in Dean's mind as he recounted women he'd met and slept with. She continued in her exaggerated Southern drawl, "That's right, darling. I ain't the only woman to find y'all easy pickings. Why, I can change a tire good as any man, but I ain't changed my own since I was fifteen and The Good Lord gave me these." She indicated to her breasts with both hands, not large by any means, but she knew they served their purpose well enough.

Dean scowled at her. "Jesus, Tab, I'm not sure whether to be impressed, offended, or pissed that you've been doing something like this to get your way."

Tabitha only shrugged and chuckled, pushing back on the door to open it and stepping into the basement hallway. She dropped the accent as she said, "I'm a woman in a world still run by men. I learned a long time ago how to read men and what tactic was best used to get what I wanted or needed. But the Southern Charm is usually a safe bet with most men."

Her brothers continued to ruefully shake their heads as they followed her to the morgue. They certainly couldn't argue with the results.

"Why don't you button your blouse back up there, Jill*," Dean pointed out as Tabitha reached for the door to the morgue.

"It's not like it's indecent," she replied, looking down at the hint of cleavage showing. But she dutifully redid the button. "Come on, Kelly*. Let's get this over with," she added as she opened the door.

"Jackass," Dean muttered.

"Bitch," Tabitha automatically responded.

"Idiots," Sam muttered in return.

"Screw you," Dean and Tabitha said simultaneously, and then grinned at each other as they walked into the morgue.

An hour later, they had examined the body and swung by the local library looking for lore books that might help before returning to their motel room. Specifically Celtic lore since Sam was certain the coin in the hex bag was Gaelic.

Sam picked up the dried herb from the witch's hex bag. "Goldthread—an herb that's been extinct for 200 years," he told his siblings. "And this is Celtic," he continued, picking up the old coin. "And I don't mean some new-age knock-off. Looks like the real deal—like 600-years-old real."

As he spoke, Dean leaned down and picked up a charred looking piece from the bag, leaning down to sniff it.

Tabitha had been leaning down to look, but immediately leaned away at Dean's actions recognizing what it was and saying, "Eww, do you have any idea what that is, Dean?"

"And, uh…" Sam continued, carefully watching Dean as well. "That is the charred metacarpal bone of a newborn baby."

Dean dropped the bone back with the other contents. "Oh, gross."

"Relax, man," Sam laughed, picking the bone up to inspect himself, "it's, like, at least 100 years old."
"Oh, right, like that makes it better?" Dean argued.

"I'm with Dean on this," Tabitha agreed. "I don't like witches anyway, but that's particularly skeevy."

Dean shuddered as he agreed, standing up from the seventies floral couch of their motel room.

"Well, it takes a pretty powerful one to put a bag like this together," Sam agreed, still poking through the contents. "More juice than we've ever dealt with before, that's for sure. What about you guys—find anything on the victim?"

"This Luke Wallace—he was so vanilla that he made vanilla seem spicy," Dean said as he unwrapped more candy to eat.

Tabitha rolled her eyes at her brother's blatant fearlessness in eating candy after what had happened to their victim, but turned to Sam and added, "He seemed pretty squeaky clean. No debts, no secret bank accounts, no secret girlfriends—really, nothing secret about the guy that I can find anywhere."

"I don't see any reason why somebody would want this guy dead," Dean added.

Tabitha moved away from the couch by her younger brother to sit on one of the beds, leaning backwards on her hands as she asked her brothers, "Well, now what? We've got a dead guy that nobody wanted dead, and a pretty powerful witch that killed him."

"Good question," Sam agreed. "We need to know more. Or find out if there have been any other unexplained or strange deaths."

The three siblings split up throughout the motel room to divide up their shares of the research, Tabitha delving into the internet realm, while her brothers each grabbed one of the books of Celtic lore they'd found in the small-town library.

Tabitha suddenly paused in her work on her laptop, looking up with her head slightly tilted as she listened to something. Noticing her attention so sharply focused, her brothers looked up from their books as well.

"What is that?" Sam finally asked, realizing he was hearing a faint noise as well.

"Shh," Tabitha scolded, continuing to listen with her head tilted.

Finally, she reached down for her large handbag by her feet and pulled it into her lap, delving into the wasteland of lost items both of her brothers studiously avoided.

Tabitha smiled at the passing memory of her older brother trying to swipe cash from her purse when they were teenagers and his mortification upon finding tampons and condoms in her purse. Neither of her brothers had gone near her purses or handbags ever again—even to look for cash—but she was still in the habit of keeping her purse nearby so her brothers weren't tempted to "borrow" some money.

"There's been another strange death," she told her brothers as she pulled the handheld police scanner out of her bag and turned the volume knob up to catch the exact address the dispatch was giving.

"You could actually hear that thing turned down that low and shoved in that bottomless pit?" Dean laughed, an air of incredulity in his words.

Tabitha shrugged as she listened to the address and then turned the scanner back down. "Habit, I
guess. I always kept a police scanner handy but turned down low so it didn't disturb anyone when I was a Fed."

Her brothers were already changing out of their civilian clothes and donning their FBI costumes once more, seemingly unashamed or uncaring about stripping down to their boxers in front of their sister. But Tabitha grabbed her clothes and headed to the bathroom, needing a bit more privacy than her brothers seemed to care about.

Twenty minutes later, they'd pulled into a middle-class looking home, teenage kids milling about both outside and within the house.

The Winchesters followed one of the sheriff's deputies into the house and down a set of stairs to the basement, the buzzing center of activity. Even more teenagers stood around the basement, most seeming scared and uncomfortable with the turn of events in their night of youthful fun.

Dean paused at the sight of all the scantily clad teenage girls. "Now this is what I call a party," he said, nudging his younger brother.

Tabitha poked the oldest Winchester in the side, pointing to the body on the stretcher as she told him, "Yeah, at least the kind of parties we're used to. Complete with dead body."

The three paused to look at the body of the teenage girl. Tabitha was certain the girl had been pretty once, but her features were masked and twisted in pain, dark red burns on her skin marring her youthful appearance.

"Damn," Sam muttered.

Tabitha hummed in agreement. "This is one powerful damn bitch."

Looking around the basement, the siblings spotted the sheriff stepping away from interviewing another teenage girl.

"I say we start with interviewing her," Dean declared, his eyes traveling slowly up the body of the blonde teenager in her skimpy cheerleader costume.

Rolling her eyes, Tabitha told her brothers, "Whatever. I'm gonna go talk to the sheriff again and see what he can tell me." She pinned Dean in a warning stare. "Don't be the pervy guy that hits on teenage girls."

With that, she turned away, but stopped when Dean grabbed her elbow. "At least I'm not making passes at a dude old enough to be your father. That's pervy, Little Miss Southern Belle."

Tabitha huffed, but let her eyes travel over Tom Dalton, knowing it would annoy Dean. "He's really not that bad looking. Sorta distinguished. A little bit like Tom Skerritt. He may be a bit older, but it's not inappropriate like you lusting after Little Miss Pep Squad over there."

With that, she turned and weaved through the partygoers and officials, secretly delighting in still being able to get under her brother's skin after all these years. Not that she didn't really think Dalton was too bad looking. The mustache did give him a bit of a Skerritt vibe.

Clearing her throat and plastering her Southern persona back on, Tabitha said, "Good evening, Tom. Looks like y'all got another strange death this evening."

Dalton took her hand in his as he nodded to her. "So it appears." His hand slid down to her elbow as
he guided her back to the steps and gestured for her to go up them ahead of him. "I've got that case file I said you could pick up in the morning. Might as well take it with you now. And I can tell you what we know about what happened here."

Tabitha turned slightly as she walked up the steps, telling Dalton, "Well, bless you, Tom, for being so thoughtful as to bring that case file. And I appreciate your willingness to work together on this."

They reached the main floor of the house and Tabitha followed Dalton outside to his cruiser, waiting beside the car as Dalton reached into the passenger seat and pulled out the file, handing it to her with an almost shy smile.

Tabitha took a few minutes to look through the file.

"You think these two cases are related?" Dalton asked her as he leaned back against his cruiser, crossing his arms over his chest.

Tabitha paused in perusing the file to look up at the man, noting his slightly rumpled uniform, and hair that had been neat this morning, now disarrayed from running his hand through it repeatedly.

"I do think so, Tom. This town's too small for that kind of coincidence," she replied.

Dalton sighed. "I was afraid so, too. We don't get many deaths that aren't natural causes or accidents."

Finally done skimming through the file, Tabitha turned and leaned back against the police cruiser, mimicking the sheriff's stance. "What can you tell me about that girl from tonight?"

"Jennifer Holmgren. Seventeen. Lived here her whole life. Her parents, too. Good people. Good girl." Dalton seemed to be staring at some point on the house as he spoke, but shook himself slightly as he turned a bit to face Tabitha. "Her friends said she was just bobbing for apples. Her best friend had already done it and was just fine. Then when Jennifer tried... well, her friends said she just stayed under for a real long time. Then when she started thrashing, they tried pulling her up. But they said it was like she was stuck. By the time they pulled her out... Well, you saw what she looked like. Looked like something had burned her face. Like boiling water or acid or something. But you tell me, how's water that was perfectly safe for one girl, turn out to be so hot or toxic to burn the face nearly clean off the next girl? I just can't figure it."

Tabitha's interest was piqued. "The first girl, the one that was just fine when she bobbed for apples, which one was she?"

"I was interviewing her when you arrived. Tracy Davis. She was Jennifer's best friend. She was wearing the ugh, cheerleader costume."

Tabitha bit off a smile at Dalton's obvious discomfort. "What about her? You had a lot to say about Jennifer Holmgren. What about this girl Tracy? Who is she?"

Dalton shook his head. "I honestly don't know much about the girl. She moved here not that long ago, 'bout a year. Lives on her own. An emancipated teen. Don't seem right to me, girl like that living on her own. But not much I can do about it."

Tabitha hummed as she thought. "Okay, so let's go back to the two victims, anything in common between the two?"

Dalton gave a short laugh. "This is a small town. Lots in common with everyone. Hell, if your family has lived here for more than one generation, you're related at least distantly to most everyone. There's
only one small grocery store in town, school ain't that big, and everybody knows everybody. You'd be better off trying to figure out what they might not have in common."

"Let's think of obvious things though. Are their families close? Luke Wallace's son wasn't in school yet, so school's out for a connection. What major connections do they have?"

"Well, now that you mention it, they don't have any direct connections, but speaking of Luke's boy reminds me, Jennifer's best friend, that girl Tracy, she's his babysitter. That's the biggest connection I can think of."

*And Tracy went bobbing for apples first. Unscathed*, Tabitha thought to herself.

"Is this something we can expect to happen again?" Dalton suddenly asked. "Folks in this town are gonna be frightened now. Do they have a reason to be? Is there someone gonna attack in some other sick way again?"

Tabitha couldn't bring herself to lie. "I'd say it's a distinct possibility, Tom. Something's going on in this town."

The pair stared silently at the activity of police and other personnel buzzing around the house and parents arriving to take their kids home.

But Dalton finally cleared his throat. "There's uh, a Halloween party going on across town right now. Not a kids' party like this, but a real one. I hadn't planned on going this year, but with what's happened, I was thinking that it might be smart to head over there and check things out, just to make sure everything's all right. And I, uh, was wondering if you'd care to accompany me? Just to keep an eye on things, of course."

Tabitha smothered a laugh, "Why sure, Tom. Just to keep an eye on things… of course."

She looked up to see her brothers exit the house. Sam discreetly held up another hex bag—not that Tabitha was surprised—and motioned her over.

"I just need to speak to my men," she told Dalton as she excused herself.

"Got another hex bag," Dean unnecessarily said when she reached them.

"Got another hex bag," Dean unnecessarily said when she reached them.

"So I see. You guys learn anything useful?"

Dean shook his head. "Not really. Talked to the girl's best friend, but still couldn't find any connection between the sexy nurse and candyman."

"Really?" Tabitha asked, her brow rising. "Little Miss Prep Squad didn't even mention that *she* was a link between the two?"

"What?" Sam demanded.

"Yeah. Found out from the sheriff that our little cheerleader isn't originally from this town. And besides being the latest victim's best friend, she's the babysitter for the Wallace family."

Her brothers looked back at the house contemplatively.

"We need to do more research on this girl," Tabitha told them. "And on the stuff that's in those hex bags. We need to figure out why they're so different from the other hex bags we've seen. So you guys head back to the motel and find more lore. I've got another angle to cover."
"And just what's that?" Sam asked, both brothers crossing their arms over their chests. Tabitha wondered if they even realized they were mimicking each other.

"Headed to another Halloween party across town. One for adults. But with what's happened, it's worth checking out, just to make sure no one there is gonna get hurt."

Dean glared at her, and then flicked his eyes up over her shoulder towards Sheriff Dalton's police cruiser. "Going with creepy old guy?"

Tabitha rolled her eyes. "He's not creepy. And he's not that old. But yes, he did invite me. And I'm going to go check the party out. Besides, I might be able to find out more information about our bimbo cheerleader. Figure out for sure if she's our witch, or if there is someone else pulling the strings."

"I don't like this," Dean said before she could turn away.

"Noted," she shrugged. "See you guys later at the motel." And then she made her way back to the car, smiling slightly as Dalton held the passenger door open for her and helped her into the car.

Tabitha followed Dalton from his cruiser up the short paved walk to the brightly lit house. Sounds of music and partygoers seeped through the windows and doors.

"It's actually supposed to be a costume party, but I figure since we're partly here on business we can get away without having costumes," Dalton told her a little apologetically. "But I guess it wouldn't be the first year I've gone in my uniform."

Tabitha gave a little laugh. "Wouldn't be the first Halloween party I've gone to as an FBI agent," she chuckled, remembering one she'd gone to with her brothers before she and Sam had left for college. They'd been hunting and pretending they were FBI agents so they could investigate, but it was one of the few Halloween parties she'd been to when she had still lived with her family. None of the guys in her family had been real big on the holiday.

Truthfully, Tabitha had come to love it, always attending the ones Cheryl had thrown when she started working out of the Richmond office. It was the one time of the year that people dressed up as monsters, and Tabitha could pretend along with everyone else that dress-up monsters were the only kind out there.

As they entered the front door, a man dressed as a Roman Legionnaire began weaving his way towards them, plastic sword in one hand, and half-full mug of beer in the other.

"Tom!" he warmly greeted, his words only slightly slurred. "So glad you could make it. We heard about the Holmgren girl over at the party at the Jacobson's place. What happened? Should we be concerned? Is there something going on?" As he spoke, he seemed to sober slightly, his words becoming clearer and more focused.

Dalton clapped him on the back. "We're looking into it; you'll know more when we do. But for now, just enjoy your party." He said it with a meaningful look thrown Tabitha's way. But she didn't need the look or to be told. Having been a real FBI agent—and not just playing one—she knew that civilians couldn't know what was going on for fear of causing panic. She'd seen it happen before, and had no intention of creating any unease in this little town.

The man dressed in Roman military garb turned his attention on Tabitha, looking her up and down with an assessing eye. But Dalton cleared his throat, drawing his attention away. "This is Special Agent Lesley Ann Warren. She's got her team down here helping out with the case, so there's no
cause for fear. Between the FBI resources and ours, well figure out what happened to Wallace." He left out what happened to the girl, no doubt hoping for now that the townsfolk would just assume it had been some kind of accident. Tabitha had no problem playing along with that.

Holding out her hand, Tabitha introduced herself, "You can call me Lesley Ann or just plain old Lesley, mister…"

The other man's hand shot out to grip hers. "Bryce Miller. But you can call me Bryce, ma'am."

She bit back another smile at the predictability of men to the Southern accent. "Why then, I insist, Lesley will do just fine."

"Lesley's not from the area, so I invited her to come to your party with me since you serve the best micro-brews in the state and have the best wet-bar in town," Dalton continued when Miller had continued looking her over with his roaming eyes.

"Well, by all means, come in and enjoy the party," Miller enthused, throwing his arms wide to encompass the room before downing the last of the beer in his mug.

Two hours later, Tabitha was on her second beer and beginning to feel the effects of the night. Although, to be fair to herself, she was on her sixth drink total. When she'd begun to feel the effects after the last Old Fashioned she'd had, she'd switched back to beer.

In fact, she hadn't started the night drinking at all, but had ordered a beer shortly after arriving when Dalton had nudged her and whispered that her questions of the guests at the party was too much like a Fed and making the other guests uncomfortable. Knowing he was right, she gotten a beer to blend in with the crowd better and mingled more, asking fewer pointed questions about the new girl in town, Tracy.

Not that her questions had done much good. None of the adults seemed to know much about her. Other than she attended the local high school and babysat for the Wallace family.

Tabitha had also made the rounds through the house over the past two hours looking for more hex bags. But two hours—and six drinks—in, and she hadn't found any signs of one.

So far, the party seemed to have been a total bust.

"I see you switched back to beer," Bryce Miller said as he sidled up beside her again. He had another full beer in his hands, but his prop sword was long gone. As were some of the other accessories of the costume, his wrist vambraces, and even his sandals. Though Tabitha had been itching all night to point out that his sandals had been Greek, not Roman.

She held up her beer mug. "Why, yes I did," she sweetly replied, cursing herself for ever beginning the Southern accent, because she'd had to keep it up all night long. "I figured it was time to slow down a bit."

Miller's laugh was the loud exaggerated laugh only a drunk can perpetuate. "You can hold your liquor better than any woman I've ever seen. Most men, too. You sure you don't want to try something else? Keep trying to test my skills," he leered.

Tabitha shook her head. In between her two beers, she'd tried several different cocktails when Miller had challenged her to order something more difficult than the Jack and Coke she had originally asked him for. So, she'd politely asked for a Manhattan, and then several other cocktails. And she had to admit, Miller could mix one hell of a drink.
"Thank you kindly, but no, I'm good with the beer," she answered.

Seeing that his drunken gaze was fixed a little too steadily on her chest, she turned to weave her way through the crowd again, only to run into the sheriff.

"I was looking for you," he whispered, leaning down towards her ear.

Tabitha could smell the sweet Canadian whiskey on his breath, and nodded in reply. "Looks like you found me."

He jerked his head towards the front door. "You wanna step outside for a few minutes? It's getting kinda loud in here for talking," he continued to whisper in her ear.

"Sure," she replied, realizing she was having to raise her voice a bit to be heard. As the night went, the liquor had begun flowing more freely, and the volume of the music and the people had slowly risen as well.

She followed Dalton outside, thinking that she would ask him to give her a ride back to the motel anyway. The party had certainly been a bust, and other than solidifying where Tracy lived and that she was indeed somewhat of a loner—along with a vague story about some sort of trouble she had gotten into at school—well, she wasn't getting much else useful out of the party.

She'd just stepped out the door when Dalton spun back towards her, pushing her back against the closed door, his hands gripping at the back of her head and the small of her back as his lips crashed into hers.

For a stunned second, Tabitha froze, but then, she twisted her head away and shoved at his chest until he'd stepped back slightly.

"What the hell?" she gasped.

As she stared up at him, she realized she'd miscalculated how much he'd had to drink. His eyes were glassy and slightly unfocused.

"What do you mean? What's the problem?" he demanded.

And without waiting for an answer, he started to lean down to kiss her again.

Tabitha raised one leg, straining against the pull of her skirt as she quickly stomped her heel down on one of Dalton's feet, ducking under his arms as he pulled away and stepping around him.

Before she could say anything, someone cleared their throat behind her. Tabitha and Dalton both turned towards the sound.

"Cas—" Tabitha stuttered, and froze at the sight of the angel standing on the walkway towards the house, his gaze troubled and confused as he stared at her. She cleared her throat and quickly covered, "Special Agent Cassidy. I'll be right with you." Turning a glare on Dalton, she told him, "Goodnight, Tom."

"Wait, Lesley, I'm sorry. Just let me apologize," he said, trying to grab at her arm.

Tabitha twisted away. "Fine. You just did. Agent Cassidy is my boss, so I've got to go. I'm sure he wants to have a word with me. Goodnight."

Tabitha sighed as she walked down the paved path, whispering to Castiel as she passed him, "Come
She felt the angel follow behind her. "Are you all right?" he asked her, falling into step beside her.

"Yeah, I'm fine," she assured him. In truth, she felt slightly guilty. She should have known better than to flirt so much with Dalton. But she'd grown used to the way she could interact with the local LEOS in the bigger cities she had normally worked in with the FBI. In bigger cities, the cops were more used to Feds coming and going, and thought nothing of the flirtations that sometimes came up.

And Tabitha had always enjoyed those flirtations that had been so normal. But she should have known that in a little town like this, Dalton would take her flirtations seriously. And while he was a good-looking man, she just didn't have any real interest in him.

Pushing those thoughts and the guilt away, she turned to look at Castiel as they paused partway down the sidewalk.

"Why you here, Cas?"

"I needed to speak with you. And your brothers," he told her.

But then, he didn't say anything, simply stared at her, his brows drawn together.

"Are you sure you're all right? You seemed… upset," the angel said, reaching out to lightly touch her arm.

Tabitha smiled at the angel, stepping closer as she laid a hand gently on his shoulder, fingering the collar of his trench coat. "You always show up at the perfect time. Thank you," she whispered.

And before she knew it, she had leaned closer, her other hand gripping Castiel's other shoulder as she leaned into him, pressing her lips to his. He didn't move as she leaned into him, her lips sliding insistently against his soft ones.

Suddenly, the angel pulled away from her, backing up several steps as he stared down at Tabitha, shock written on his face.

Before Tabitha could say anything, the angel disappeared.

"Shit!" Tabitha swore, realizing that Dalton wasn't the only one that had had too much to drink.

"What the hell was I thinking?" she grumbled to herself, shoving her hands in the pockets of her suit jacket as she continued down the sidewalk.

"I kissed a goddamned angel," she continued grumbling to herself. "What the hell was I thinking? I'm definitely going to Hell for that."

Tabitha ripped her suit jacket off as she walked into the motel room, throwing it in the direction of her bag as she grabbed the beer bottle out of Sam's hand, untucking her blouse with her other hand.

"What the hell, Tab?" Sam demanded from his place at the table, his laptop open in front of him.

Drinking three quick swallows, Tabitha fell down on the bed, kicking her heels off as she grumbled again, "Definitely going to Hell."

Dean leaned back against the old tacky green couch, his arm thrown across the back as he laughed, "Oh yeah, why's that? What'd you do now?"
She shook her head. "Never mind. So, what did you guys figure out here? Anything useful?"

"Sam's research seems to show that this is all to raise some major badass demon," Dean told her, leaning over the coffee table to spin a book around towards her.

Sam took up Dean's explanation. "They're blood sacrifices to raise Samhain. It's—"

Tabitha cut-off her younger brother's explanation. "I know what it is. And it's pronounced Sow-en, not Sam-hane."

Sam stared back at her with a challenging brow raised.

"Worked a case once with this guy that was obsessed with the Gaelic festival. Thought if he made enough sacrifices before the end of Samhain that his brother would be brought back to life or some shit. Dude was basically crazy, but I learned a lot about the pagan traditions of Samhain with all the research we did. Don't remember blood sacrifices being truly part of it though. But you're saying there is actually a God, Samhain, or rather, a demon?"

"That's the way it appears," Sam said as Tabitha reached over to grab the book on the coffee table, flipping through several pages as she skimmed them and looked at the hand-drawn pictures. "It can only happen every six-hundred years."

"And let me guess, the six-hundred year has just come around?"

"Yep. And this will take some serious mojo to raise him. And if he is raised," Sam stood and reached for the book in Tabitha's hand, flipping to a page and pointing to it, "he'll do a little raising of his own. We need to stop this witch."

"So what're we gonna do?" Tabitha asked.

Tabitha squinted as she stepped out of the Impala; the sunlight was too bright today, even behind her dark sunglasses.

Dean laughed as he stepped beside her, nudging her elbow with his. "Have a little too much last night, did you?"

Tabitha rubbed her throbbing temples. "Lower the volume," she demanded in a harsh whisper; her mouth feeling like it had been stuffed with formaldehyde and cotton balls. "Let's get this over with."

Now that she was sober this morning—or rather, hungover—she was regretting the drinks she'd had last night for more than one reason, not the least of which was the amplification it seemed to give the sun and sounds today.

But mostly, she was really kicking herself for her own actions last night. She still wasn't sure what had gotten into her head then, but she should have known better, Tabitha and that much whiskey weren't usually a good idea. Tabitha had never really been an angry or mean drunk—she rarely drank until she got to that point—but rather, she was usually the type to be excessively happy, singing or even occasionally dancing on the bar—or handsy and inappropriate, as last night had proven. She was still in shock that she had actually kissed the angel. Who the hell does that? Kiss an angel. If I wasn't going to Hell before, I'm definitely going now.

Tabitha followed her brothers into the school, hanging back as they questioned the art teacher their girl had had an altercation with. The teacher explained the altercation, but didn't seem to have much useful to give them about Tracy.
Not that Tabitha had followed things too closely, she just wanted to get back to their motel and close all the drapes so she could sleep off the rest of her hangover. They'd looked all over town and asked Tracy's friends, but still couldn't find the girl anywhere. Tabitha just wanted to rest for a few minutes. But at least they'd had time to change out of their FBI suits earlier, Tabitha felt much more relaxed in jeans, boots, and a long-sleeve t-shirt.

She was the first one through the motel door when they got back, but her head was down as she once again rubbed her temples to relieve her headache, and almost stumbled as Sam pushed past her, pulling his gun as he shouted, "Who are you?"

Her head snapped up as Dean pushed past her as well, grabbing at their brother as he said, "Sam, Sam, wait! It's Castiel…" he explained, pushing Sam's gun down, "the angel."

Tabitha stepped further into the motel room, swallowing against her suddenly dry throat at the sight of the angel sitting on one of the beds, facing away from them.

Dean's eyes darted across the room to where another man stood, staring out the window with his back to them. "Him, I don't know," Dean continued.

Castiel stood from the bed, coming around the end of it to stand in front of her brothers. His eyes flicked over to hers, but then locked onto her brothers as he avoided her gaze. "Hello, Sam."

"Oh my God," Sam gushed excitedly, "er, uh, I didn't mean to—sorry. It's an honor. Really, I-I've heard a lot about you," he said, holding his hand out to the angel.

Castiel looked down at it, unsure what to do it seemed.

Tabitha moved a little closer into the room, leaning against the wall and crossing her arms over her chest as she whispered, "Take his hand. It's a human thing."

The angel didn't look her way, but she could tell he'd heard her when he cautiously reached out and took her brother's proffered hand, shaking it as he said, "And I, you. Sam Winchester—the boy with the demon blood. Glad to hear you've ceased your extracurricular activities."

"Let's keep it that way," the dark skinned man at the window said, not bothering to turn around and face them.

"Yeah, okay, chuckles," Dean snidely replied to the man, and then turned back to Castiel. "Who's your friend?"

Castiel ignored Dean's question. "This raising of Samhain—have you stopped it?"

"Why?"

Castiel turned back to the oldest Winchester. "Dean, have you located the witch?"

"Yes, we've located the witch."

"And is the witch dead?"

"No, but—" Sam started.

"But we know who it is," Dean finished.

"Apparently, the witch knows who you are, too." Castiel walked across the room and picked a hex bag up off the nightstand between the two beds, holding it up as he said, "This was inside the wall of
"We've been looking," Tabitha said, annoyed at the angel ignoring her. "We'll find her."

"That's unfortunate," Castiel said, not meeting anyone's eyes.

"What do you care?" Dean demanded.

Castiel finally looked up, briefly glancing at Tabitha before turning to Dean and explaining, "The raising of Samhain is one of the 66 seals."

"So this is about your buddy Lucifer," Dean said.

"Lucifer is no friend of ours," the other man spat.

"It's just an expression," Dean said to the man's back.

"Lucifer cannot rise," Castiel continued. "The breaking of the seal must be prevented at all costs."

"Okay. Great. Well, now that you're here, why don't you tell us where the witch is? We'll gank her, and everyone goes home."

The angel sighed in exasperation. "We are not omniscient. This witch is very powerful. She's cloaked even our methods."

"That's possible?" Tabitha asked. Castiel glanced at her and nodded once, but didn't say anything else. "Well, look, we know who she is. So, we'll find her."

"Exactly," Sam agreed. "If we work together—"

"Enough of this," the man at the window said.

"Who are you, and why should I care?" Dean suddenly demanded.

The man finally turned around to face them as Castiel explained, "This is Uriel. He's what you might call… a specialist."

Uriel stepped closer, his expression condescending and sneering all at once.

"What kind of a specialist?" Dean asked.

Castiel and the man stared at each other for a moment, holding each other's eyes.

_They don't need to know anything. Just let me handle the matter._

_I'll handle this._

Tabitha heard their voices as though they had spoken out loud, and yet she knew that neither of them had—and she was certain the other man was also an angel—and he had been speaking to Castiel in that same way she had heard Castiel's real voice before. A voice she recognized hearing now.

She glanced at Castiel, and he finally held her eyes, almost imperceptibly shaking his head.

"What are you gonna do?" Dean cautiously asked, not seeming to notice anything having occurred in the silence.
"You—all of you need to leave this town immediately," Castiel said, holding Tabitha's eyes for another second before turning to Dean.

"Why?"

"Because we're about to destroy it," he matter-of-factly answered.

The siblings shared a look of shock.

"You can't be serious?" Tabitha whispered, pushing away from the wall and stepping closer to her brothers as she stared at Castiel. But he wasn't meeting her eyes anymore. And he wasn't meeting her brothers' eyes either, instead staring at the floor.

"So this is your plan? You're gonna smite the whole frickin' town?" Dean demanded, staring back and forth between the two angels.

"We're out of time," Castiel said to the floor. "This witch has to die. The seal must be saved."

"There are a thousand people here," Sam said in disbelief.

"1,214," Uriel broke in.

"And you're willing to kill them all?"

"This isn't the first time I've… purified a city."

"Look, I understand this is regrettable," Castiel interrupted.

"Regrettable?" Dean sneered.

Castiel turned to stare at Dean. "We have to hold the line. Too many seals have broken already."

"So you screwed the pooch on some seals, and now this town has to pay the price?"

"It's the lives of 1,000 against the lives of 6 billion. There's a bigger picture here."

"Right…" Dean laughed. "Cause you're bigger picture kinda guys."

"Lucifer cannot rise," Castiel began again, taking a threatening step closer to Dean as he continued to star up into his eyes. "He does, and Hell rises with him. Is that something that you're willing to risk?"

"We'll stop this witch before she summons anyone," Sam hurried to assure the angels. "Your seal won't be broken, and no one has to die."

"We're wasting time with these mud monkeys," Uriel angrily said to the other angel.

"I'm sorry," Castiel said, shaking his head as he turned away. "But we have our orders."

Tabitha took a step closer to Castiel. "Well, fuck your orders. This is bullshit. You can't just expect us to turn our backs on the lives of a thousand people—excuse me, 1,214. If there's still something we can do to save them, you can bet your ass we're gonna do it. We won't just let you kill them."

Castiel wouldn't meet her eyes as he stared at the wall. "It's for the greater good."

"You—you're angels," Sam began, shaking his head, "I mean, aren't you supposed to—you're supposed to show mercy."
"Says who?" Uriel laughed, a cruel smile on his face.

"We have no choice," Castiel said, still speaking to the wall.

"Of course you have a choice," Dean told him. "I mean, come on, what, you've never—never questioned a crap order, huh? What are you both, just a couple of hammers?"

Castiel's face was impassive, but as Tabitha moved closer, she swore she saw a glimmer of pain in his eyes, and she knew he wasn't the mindless tool Dean was accusing him of. She'd seen his kindness, seen his compassion. But she didn't understand why he was trying so hard to mask it now. She glanced at Uriel, wondering if it was because of the other angel.

"Look, even if you can't understand it, have faith the plan is just," Castiel said in low tones.

"There's nothing just about the slaughter of that many people," Tabitha whispered to him. "Not if there's still something we can do about it."

Castiel glanced over at her. "Our orders come from Heaven. That makes it just."

"Must be nice to just blindly follow orders, never having to give them a second thought or account for your actions," Tabitha ground out as Castiel finally turned to fully face her.

"Must be nice to be so sure of yourselves," Dean added.

"Tell me something, Dean," Castiel said, though his eyes didn't leave Tabitha's. "When your father gave you an order, didn't you obey?"

Tabitha's eyes narrowed on the angel, knowing he was striking a nerve. Because truthfully, Dean had always been the good little soldier to their father. Always followed John's orders. Without question. And without fail.

"That's below the belt," she whispered to Castiel.

Dean cleared his throat. "Sorry, boys, it looks like the plans have changed."

"You think you can stop us?" Uriel laughed.

"No," Dean answered. "But if you're gonna smite this whole town… then you're gonna have to smite us with it because we are not leaving," he said as he stepped in front of Uriel and threw a look over his shoulder at Castiel. "You went to the trouble of busting me out of Hell. I figure I'm worth something to the man upstairs. You want to waste me? Go ahead. See how he digs that."

"I will drag you out of here myself," Uriel angrily began.

"Yeah, but you'll have to kill me. Then we're back to the same problem. I mean, come on. You're gonna wipe out a whole town for one little witch? Sounds to me like you're compensating for something."

Castiel stood watching the exchange, so Tabitha seized the opportunity, turning to Castiel and saying, "I'm with them. We're not leaving. And you can't drag all three of us out of here. So you may as well just let us find that witch and do what we do. We'll stop this. 'Cause we're not letting you kill all these people."

"Castiel, I will not let these—" Uriel angrily began.

"Enough," Castiel told him, holding a hand up as he stared at Tabitha. You know our true orders. "I
suggest you move quickly," he curtly added to her.

She wondered at what she'd heard him say to Uriel, but jerked her head in a nod, leaning slightly closer and whispering under her breath, "I want to talk to you. Alone."

He jerked a nod in return, and then the two angels disappeared.

"They weren't what I expected," Sam seemed to whisper to himself.

"Yeah, they're douchebags," Dean answered.

Tabitha released a shaky breath, and grabbed her insulated denim coat from a chair as she told her brothers, "I need to step outside and get some fresh air for a minute."

She walked down the line of motel room doors, catching sight of Castiel standing near the top of the stairs down to the parking lot. Passing him, she said, "Follow me," and continued to the ground level, turning away from the parking lot and walking around the end of the building into the alley.

"Were you really going to just wipe out this whole town?" she rounded on him when they reached the alley.

"I have my orders," he repeated, staring down at the pavement.

"How can you just be okay with killing that many people?" she demanded.

But Castiel didn't answer her.

Tabitha huffed and took a step closer to the angel, but he mirrored her action and took a step back. She halted and stared at him.

"Jesus," she whispered angrily to herself as she rubbed her forehead with her fingers. She'd felt like her hangover had disappeared with the rushing adrenaline of trying to talk the angels out of smiting the town, but now the headache was rearing its head again.

But still, the angel stared hard at the pavement, refusing to meet her eyes.

"Look, I was drunk last night, and I do stupid things when I'm drunk. You don't have to avoid me like the plague or like I'm going to steal your virtue or something. It was a mistake. Won't happen again."

Castiel finally looked up at her and only said, "Find the witch."

And then, he disappeared.

* For those of you who aren't that old (although I'm not really either) Tabitha and Dean are joking about two of the characters from the original Charlie's Angels. Jill and Kelly Kelly (Farrah Fawcett and Jaclyn Smith) were always the two to dress up in skimpy outfits when they went undercover.

Chapter End Notes

And just a little note from someone who actually lives in (or at least near) a small town, and has lived near small towns my whole life. (I've only ever lived in the city limits of a
town when I was in college) But anyway, a town with a population of only 1,214 wouldn't have basically any of the things that Supernatural showed in this episode, but they tend to be very off on anything having to do with small towns in all TV shows and movies. A town with the population of only 1,000 isn't going to have its own large school system like they show in this episode, and if it does have a school, each grade is probably only going to be around 20-30 kids at the very most, depending on how close the other bigger towns are and how many rural students that school pulls in. And other things in this chapter wouldn't exactly be right either. There probably wouldn't even be a clinic, let alone a hospital, and not much for a police force or a motel anywhere near that big. A town of 1,000 would probably only have 2 or so county sheriffs or deputies in the town, although they'd cover the county around it, too. And a murder like this, a small police force wouldn't handle, they'd bring in police from a bigger force, or just bring the FBI or some other force in to handle it. Small towns of 1,000 are rarely going to see those kinds of crimes so they won't be too well equipped to handle any evidence from them.

I currently live 4.5 miles away from the nearest town which is 650 or so people, and has an elementary school, with one class per grade of 15 or so students (and they're mostly from the rural surrounding area) with the high school in another town 30 miles away. The town has three churches (most very small), a truck stop on the highway, and a grocery store that sells a little fresh food and dented cans and boxes. And that's pretty much it in the town. Most people drive to a bigger town to do their shopping. The town I lived near before this was just over 300 people, so I do know small towns, and I just thought I'd try to paint a little better picture of what small towns are actually going to look like. I think every town I've lived near, except for college, was with a population of under 1,000.

Truthfully, I've lived in South Dakota for a long time now, and it's always surprised me how wrong they get small towns, but also how wrong they get Sioux Falls where Bobby is supposed to live. Sioux Falls is the largest city in the state of South Dakota, not the sleepy little town the show always portrays. It's 156,000 people, which is still a small city compared to most metropolitan states, but not the sleepy little burg they show.

Anyway, just thought I'd try to clear up a few misconceptions!

Thanks for reading, and be sure to leave a shout out!
Tabitha sat outside their ground-floor motel room on a rusty, 50's style metal lawn chair. Her feet were propped up on railing that held up the overhang from the floor above. A cold rain fell at a steady pace, the dampness not touching Tabitha as it fell in heavy sheets from the overhang and splattered across the parking lot. It would have been the perfect weather for sleeping, and she was sure the rain would have lulled most people to sleep. But not Tabitha. Not tonight.

Instead, she burrowed deeper into her old, insulated denim coat—worn and frayed at the edges from years of wear, use, and hunting—simply sitting back and watching the falling rain. She had too many other things on her mind.

"There a reason you're sitting out here in the rain?" Dean asked.

Tabitha looked over her shoulder to see her older brother standing in the open doorway of their motel room.

"I'm not in the rain," she said, tossing her head out towards the night. "I'm under the overhang."

Dean stepped outside, shutting the door behind him, and moving to sit in the other old metal lawn chair on the other side of the door. "I meant, what are you doing out here and not inside sleeping. The couch really that uncomfortable? You want the bed?"

She shrugged in return. It had been her turn to sleep on the couch in their room, but that hadn't been the problem. "I slept most of the day while you drove. Just wasn't tired."

Other things had been on her mind. Other worries.

He nodded almost absently, bringing a bottle of beer to his lips from a six-pack she hadn't seen him holding. Catching her look, he held the bottle out to her.

She shook her head and brought her other hand to her lips, taking another inhale from the cigarette nearly forgotten in her hand.

"When'd you start smoking again?" Dean asked, an edge to his voice.

Tabitha waved her other hand at her brother. "I've given up chocolate and now drinking. Let me have this one last vice right now."

Dean grunted in return and took another swig from his bottle. The pair continued to stare out into the night.

"So what the hell is going on that you've given up drinking now, too, and are smoking again? You've been acting funny ever since Halloween and that hunt to take out Samhain. What's going on? It started that night you came back from having a few too many. Something happen with that old guy?"

"Nope," Tabitha answered simply. Not willing to elaborate. But it wasn't thoughts of that sheriff and his drunken behavior that brought her outside in the middle of the night. But rather, her own drunken behavior.
Dean gave an exasperated sigh as he leaned back against his lawn chair. "Then what? 'Cause something sure happened that night. You've been acting all quiet and squirrely ever since."

Tabitha lowered the cigarette from her lips, turning to her brother slightly as she narrowed her eyes and demanded, "How was Hell, Dean? Since you seem to want to talk."

Her older brother cursed under his breath and downed the last of his beer, staring down at the empty bottle in his hands as he said, "Jesus. Now you, too? First Sammy starts riding my ass about Hell just because of some comment by that douchebag angel, and now, you, too? I already told you both, I do remember Hell, but that doesn't mean I'm talking about it."

Tabitha sighed guiltily and flicked her cigarette butt out into the rainy night, softly telling her brother, "Then respect that there are things I'm not talking about, either."

"This is different," Dean told her. "Whatever is going on in that head of yours is distracting you and keeping you from sleeping. You didn't sleep all that long on the drive here, either."

"Yeah, well, you were driving all day and didn't sleep. And now, you're still not sleeping. And don't tell me that it isn't memories from Hell keeping you awake. So we're still at the same impasse. You have things you don't want to talk about, and so do I."

But deep down, Tabitha knew she wasn't pushing her brother to talk about Hell because it would open her up to having to answer Dean's questions as well. She wanted him to tell her more about what had happened. But there were just too many things she wasn't ready to talk to him about.

The siblings sat in silence again.

But Dean finally broke it. "There's no sense burdening you with that crap, Tabby. It won't help anything."

"Then at least tell Sam if you don't think your delicate little sister can handle it," Tabitha retorted. "I'm not telling him anymore than I'm telling you. Kid blames himself enough for me selling my soul and going to Hell to save his life. Not that I'd have done anything different. He just doesn't need any more burden."

Tabitha sighed and wrapped her arms around herself. "Promise me that you'll at least consider talking to Sam or me about it if it starts to get really bad, Dean. I mean, more than nightmares and not being able to sleep like's been going on."

Dean finally jerked his head in a single nod. "Long as you promise me that you'll do the same. That you'll tell me what's going on before this gets worse."

"Sure thing, Dean."

But truth was, she didn't want or need to talk to Dean about what was going on. She needed to talk to Castiel—wanted to try to clear things up with him. But the angel hadn't shown up since his warning during Halloween to find that witch. He'd shown up to Dean after they'd failed and let Samhain rise—and then Sam had done his freaky demon exorcising crap to send him back down—but Tabitha hadn't seen the angel herself.

She had grown used to seeing him on a regular basis. Usually on nights like this when she couldn't sleep and was sitting alone outside waiting for morning to come. Or during the day if she wasn't with her brothers but was by herself researching or doing something else. Anytime she was alone really, that was usually when the angel would show up to talk for a few minutes. Or even sit in silence for a
while.

But not since Halloween and her stupid drunken mistake. She had apologized to the angel for that, and she was damned if she was going to apologize again for the silly mistake she'd made. But she did want to apologize to the angel for her thinking the worst that day and thinking he actually did want to wipe out that town. Dean had explained to her and Sam that the angels' orders had actually been to follow Dean's orders, and that Castiel had said he had prayed they would save those people.

And they had, but at the cost of the seal.

She'd even tried praying for and calling out to Castiel one night on their last hunt, but the angel hadn't answered. And the angel hadn't come.

And Tabitha was starting to realize just how much she missed his strange friendship. His awkward silences and his general confusion about humans.

"What's that?" Dean asked, seeing his sister fiddling with something on her wrist.

She pulled back her coat sleeve to show him the charm bracelet.

"Wasn't that Mom's? You used to wear it all the time, but I haven't seen you wear it since you came back to hunt with us again," he told her, leaning across the space between them to look at her wrist when she held it out between them.

Tabitha pulled her arm back into her lap, fingerling the charms on the bracelet. "Yeah, I never used to take it off, but then when I started working for the FBI, I quit wearing it. People were always asking what all the charms meant, and except for the couple I got myself, I only knew what two of them were. The cross and the anti-possession charm. So it was easier to just quit wearing it and not have to come up with explanations for it. But I found it in my bag a couple of days after Halloween and decided to start wearing it again."

"The anniversary of the day Mom died, you mean?"

"Yeah. When I found the bracelet, it just seemed like a good idea to start wearing it again," Tabitha shrugged.

Dean glanced at the bracelet once more. "I saw Mom wearing that when Castiel sent me to the past. You know, when I found out Mom and her family were hunters. Makes you wonder about what all those symbols on that bracelet really mean, don't it?"

Tabitha fingered the cross in particular on the bracelet. It was an artistic looking cross, the ends of the points wider than where it intersected. It was silver but inlaid with onyx colored stones. "It does put things in a different light knowing more about Mom now. She told me to always wear it and that it would protect me. And the funny thing is, I always assumed the anti-possession charm was from Dad, but I can always remember it being on the bracelet. And besides, Dad gave me a necklace with an anti-possession charm on it when we started hunting with him. And I wore that even when I was in the FBI. It was easier to hide."

"Huh. I guess I always remember it being on your bracelet, too. Didn't seem weird until Mom was trying to kick my ass and I saw it on her wrist way back then."

Tabitha giggled almost girlishly. "I would have paid good money to see her kick your ass."

"Hey! I said trying. She was trying," Dean said with mock indignation.
"Sure, Dean."

She continued to spin the bracelet on her arm as they sat in silence, wondering at all the different charms on it and what they could mean. She'd gotten the little diploma charm herself when she had gotten her GED early and started taking online college courses. The boys had gotten her the little ghost charm during a hunt somewhere as a means of appeasing her when she'd been mad at them for some annoying thing or another they'd done. And the little revolver silver charm had come from another friend. But the rest she'd never known or understood. They all looked like strange symbols and even strange letters she wasn't familiar with. And she couldn't help but feel like she was protected by it. Even if it was only in her mind.

Beside her, Dean crossed his arms over his chest, trying to ward off the cold air, rubbing his hands up and down arms only covered by a long-sleeve shirt he hadn't bothered to button up.

"You really think we can take the word of this demon?" Dean suddenly asked her.

Tabitha gave a dark chuckle as her mind pulled away from the angel and focused instead on the demon that had sent them on their latest hunt. "I don't know. Instinct says 'no,' but... Sam thinks we can. And he knows her better than we do. He trusts her. So maybe we have to. For now, anyway. At the very least, we can check out this girl she put us onto and find out in the process just how much we can trust Ruby. Besides, if demons are after this girl, we have to at least check it out, regardless of the trust issues you and I have with demons in general. Besides, we already drove three days to check it out. We might as well actually look into it after driving that far."

Dean grunted, but didn't respond.

"There's more going on between Ruby and Sam than he's copping to so far, Dean. And until he's willing to tell that story, I think we need to tread carefully where she's concerned."

Turning towards her with narrowed eyes, Dean asked, "What do you know about the two of them?"

"Sam hasn't told me the story, yet," Tabitha hastened to explain. Though she left out that between things he'd let slip and things she'd questioned Sam about, she was fairly certain their little brother had been sleeping with the demon. But that wasn't for her to tell Dean. Sam had let that slip to her during their argument a while back, and she wouldn't tell Dean unless she absolutely had to. Besides, she'd slept with a demon herself—though she hadn't known it at the time like Sam had.

"I don't like the idea of trusting a demon."

Tabitha chuckled in response. "You think I do? I'd like to see them all sent back to Hell. For good. Particularly whatever demon it was that was after her and had sent other demons to possess and kill so many of her friends and coworkers."

Tabitha reached into her coat and started to take out another cigarette to light.

"Jesus, Tab. You're gonna kill yourself with those things. If you want to narrow down to only one vice, I'd rather you keep drinking than smoking. That stuff stinks," Dean complained.

Tabitha shoved the pack back into her pocket and held her hand out to Dean for a bottle of beer. Besides, it wasn't as though she was likely to get drunk and try to kiss an angel again, especially since he seemed to be so determined to avoid her.

Dean grinned and slapped a bottle into her waiting hand.

As she twisted the top off, she laughed and told him, "Yeah, 'cause drinking is a whole lot better for
"Better than getting lung cancer."

"Ha! Like any of us is worried about living long enough to get any kind of cancer. And like liver
cancer is so much slower to onset than lung cancer."

Dean opened another bottle as he tipped the metal chair backwards, resting the back of the chair
against the side of the motel. "True enough," he told her, "besides, with the apocalypse coming, it's
not like it matters either way."

Tabitha could see the weight in Dean's eyes before he wearily closed them. Hoping to ease him
somewhat, she reminded him, "You're not alone, Dean. We'll find a way to stop it. We will."

He didn't open his eyes as he grimly said, "Yeah, like we stopped Samhain from rising? We really
screwed up on that seal. Who's to say we'll stop any of them?"

"Well, we didn't stop Samhain from rising, but we did manage to change a giant, alcoholic, porn-
loving, needs-an-antidepressant, living teddy bear, back into just a regular old teddy bear. Not to
mention putting the rest of that town back to rights from all their crazy wishes. If that had been a seal,
we would have kicked its ass."

Dean finally gave a real laugh at that, letting his chair drop back down to the concrete as he opened
his eyes and grinned at her. "Yeah, if the rest of the seals all involved porn-loving teddy bears, I
think we'd be well qualified in handling it."

"Yeah, that would be right up your alley."

The siblings sat in silence drinking the rest of their beers as they chuckled over memories of their last
case. Neither willing to voice the fear they both had. That the rest of the seals were likely to be
harder than even the Raising of Samhain had been.

The Winchesters were busy dressing in their usual suits the next morning.

"So what do you guys think?" Sam asked, shuffling through his stack of IDs. "FBI yet again, or
something else this time?"

Tabitha was busy twisting her hair into a French twist, shoving bobby pins into it to hold it in place
as she stepped out of the bathroom and looked at her brothers. "Definitely FBI. We've been going
with FBI a lot, I know, but they'd be the ones to look into missing-persons cases other than the local
LEOs."

"Leo?" Dean asked as he spit out toothpaste in the sink.

"Sorry, cop lingo," she apologized. "LEO means law enforcement officers."

"You cop types and your acronyms," Dean complained as he wiped his mouth. "Frickin' love to
break out the alphabet."

Tabitha laughed as she smoothed her slacks and stepped into a pair of flat shoes. "What can I say?
We Feds are a lazy bunch. We talk in acronyms and police code. Keeps most civilians from knowing
what's going on though. You guys could brush up on your police code to be a little more convincing,
too, you know."
"Tabitha's probably right, Dean, we should know some of that jargon better," Sam added.

"That's what we've got Tabby for. Why do I have to know that, too?"

Tabitha rolled her eyes. "Glad I'm good for something. Come on guys. Let's get this over with. I hate being at mental institutions."

She followed her brothers out to the Impala, once more climbing in the back as Dean got into the driver's seat.

"Why's that?" Dean asked over his shoulder. "I'd think you'd have been around them enough as a Fed."

"Well, yeah, but every time I'm at one, I can't help but think just how easily someone could try to stick you guys in there," she told them, grinning as she added, "and probably rightfully so. You guys would fit right in."

Her brothers chuckled as they made the drive to the facility Ruby had told them about. As they got out, they stared up at the building for a minute.

"Kind of makes you wonder just how many people are in there because they really did see something real, but nobody believes them," Sam wondered out loud.

It was sobering to think there might not be as many crazy people in the world as most people would suppose.

"Come on," Dean said. "Let's get this over with. I'm creeped out already."

As they walked through the building, being lead to the office of their girl's psychologist, Sam paused to look down at his older sister.

"Not that I'm complaining, Tabby," he began in a whisper, "but aren't you the one who generally says showing a little leg gets ya answers quicker when we're on a hunt?"

Tabitha snorted and quickly covered her mouth in an attempt to fake a cough when the young intern guiding them paused to look back at her.

Shaking her head, she turned to look up at Sam. "Yeah, when working with other Feds, or cops of some kind that I'm trying to get to underestimate me or trying to get them to bend over backwards to help the 'poor helpless little woman,'" she explained in low tones. "But you learn pretty quickly when you're in the FBI to dress sedately when you're in a mental health facility. Nothing good comes from calling undue attention to yourself in places like this."

Truthfully, she found herself wearing more skirts and heels when she was impersonating a Federal agent than when she had actually been one, just to help grease the wheels and facilitate their cover.

She paused as they reached their destination, gesturing inside the open door with a jerk of her head as she whispered to her brother in even lower tones, "Besides, I looked on the missing-persons report and saw her shrink was a woman, so showing a little leg isn't going to get me anywhere unless she plays for the other team."

Sam chuckled as they entered the office, and Tabitha even saw Dean biting back a smile out of the
A woman in her mid-forties with chin length, curly blonde hair stood from behind her desk and stepped forward with her hand held out. "You must be the FBI agents my secretary said was coming? I'm Doctor Walsh."

Dean stepped forward and shook the psychologist's hand, Sam and Tabitha following suit.

After a few minutes of introduction, Dean asked if they could see Anna's room.

"Of course," Dr. Walsh told them, leading them down white covered hallways. "I want to help in whatever way I can."

As they stepped into the room, Sam immediately began questioning the doctor. "Now, the orderly has no recollections of Anna's escape?"

"Apparently, she knocked him unconscious. The blow caused some amnesia. He doesn't even remember coming into her room," the doctor explained as Tabitha and Dean looked around the tidy room. Like every other mental institution Tabitha had been in, everything in the room was either white, beige, cream, or maybe even the ever-exciting eggshell. The very blandness of the room gave Tabitha the creeps. Like the life had been sucked out of it and not just the color.

"That's a hell of a right hook to knock out a guy that's got 80 pounds on her," Dean interjected, coming to join the conversation after finding nothing odd or out of place in her room.

The doctor nodded in agreement. "We think she may have planned this, waited behind the door."

"Right," Sam said, seeming unconvinced. "Uh, you mentioned Anna's illness was recent."

"Two months ago she was happy," Dr. Walsh told them, stepping back into the hallway as she continued, "well-adjusted, journalism major, lots of friends—bright future."

"So, what happened—she just… flipped?"

"Well, that's the tragedy of schizophrenia," the doctor continued with a sympathetic look. "Within weeks, Anna was overtaken by delusions."

"Weeks?" Tabitha questioned. "That seems like a very rapid onset. It's extremely rare for schizophrenia to progress so quickly. It generally takes months even though the signs can be easily dismissed. Are you certain there weren't other signs her friends and family weren't recognizing at the time? Or are you even absolutely certain of the diagnosis? Schizophrenia can be easily diagnosed when it's in fact something else."

The doctor bristled slightly, standing slightly taller as she told Tabitha. "We take our work very seriously here, Ms.…"

Tabitha gave a tight smile. "Doctor actually. Doctor Norma Mortenson. I'm a psychiatrist with the FBI; they thought my knowledge might be useful in helping to find Ms. Milton."

Doctor Walsh looked away as she realized psychiatrist outranked psychologist, clearing her throat uncomfortably as she admitted, "Well, I suppose it's always possible that Anna suffered from some other delusion based illness, but I think the more pressing concern here is that the girl is missing, not what her diagnosis was."

Tabitha gestured to the large folder in the doctor's arms. "What about physiological causes? Have
those been thoroughly pursued? Have you done CAT scans and MRIs of the girl? Knowing for sure what caused Ms. Milton's delusions could go a long way in helping to understand her and therefore in more easily locating the girl."

"Of course we've done all the standard tests and scans. And even a few more," the doctor defended, flipping through the folder and pulling out several scans to hand to Tabitha. "We also did standard blood work to look for various genetic abnormalities and hormonal imbalances."

"What kind of delusions did she suffer from?" Sam asked while Tabitha looked through the scans and paperwork.

"She thought demons were everywhere," Dr. Walsh explained, handing over a large artist's notebook.

The three siblings paused to look up simultaneously at her explanation.

"Huh," Sam grunted as he took the notebook.

"Interesting," Dean agreed.

"It's not uncommon for our patients to believe that monsters are real."

Dean shifted almost uncomfortably as he looked at the drawings Sam was flipping through. "Well, that—that's just batty."

*But true*, Tabitha thought to herself as she paused in looking at the scans to look at the drawings as well. Most of them seemed to be drawn in chalk, but were beautiful renditions of what looked like stained-glass windows in a church.

Suddenly, Sam flipped to a page with the words, "Raising of the Witnesses," messily scrawled across the page in black chalk, but what held Tabitha's eyes was the symbol in the center. The very symbol that had been marked on all the ghosts that had attacked them.

She stopped looking at the scans as Sam continued flipping through pages; the next was clearly their failure in letting Samhain rise.

Tabitha shuffled the scans back together in her hands. The girl didn't have any kind of tumor pressing on her brain or abnormalities, no hormonal imbalances, and she certainly wasn't schizophrenic. But she clearly knew things she shouldn't have.

The siblings exchanged a worried look that said they were all on the same page where Anna was concerned.

"That's Revelations," Dean reminded them as Sam paused on the paper emboldened with their failure in the Rising of Samhain. Tabitha and Sam silently nodded in agreement.

"Since when does the Book of Revelations have jack-o'-lanterns?" the doctor scoffed.

Dean chuckled in response to cover the truth, "It's a, uh, it's a little-known translation."

"Ah," the doctor replied, clearly unconvinced. "Well, Anna's father was a church deacon. When she became ill, her paranoia took on religious overtones. She was convinced the devil was about to rise up and end the world." Tabitha swallowed dryly at that, praying the girl wasn't prophesying something that was destined to happen. "I hope you find her," the doctor continued. "It's dangerous for her to be out there alone right now."
The siblings grimly nodded.

"We'll do our best to find her," Sam assured the woman.

The three were silent as they rode from the institution to Anna's parent's house. Not breaking the silence until they were walking up the pathway to the quaint, middle-class looking brown house in the very suburban looking neighborhood.

"I think that girl's got to be psychic or something," Tabitha told her brothers, wondering to herself at how much her life had changed in the past months that she now readily believed in psychics. Until Pamela, she'd thought that was all a bunch of garbage. "She definitely wasn't schizophrenic, the symptoms didn't match up that well unless she was extremely rare case, despite what that shrink back there said. And her brain scans, MRIs, and blood work were all perfectly clean. Plus there's the whole thing with her knowing about the apocalypse and all the seals."

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "Does seem pretty likely that this girl is more than your average human. We need to find her."

"I know," Dean huffed, stepping up to the house to knock on the door. He looked back at his sister as they waited. "How'd you know all that stuff anyway, or even how to read CAT scans and MRIs? I thought you were in the business of busting criminals, not analyzing them."

Tabitha smiled wearily. "Can't do one without the other. Besides, agents really have to know that stuff pretty well for testifying in court anyway. Half the guys we catch for committing heinous crimes try to have their lawyers get them off by claiming they were crazy or diminished capacity or something. And hell, the other half we arrest really are crazy. So, either way, I have to know that stuff to effectively counter any of their claims and arguments when I testify and to know how to best handle dangerous and unstable criminals." Her face fell slightly as she realized she wasn't really an FBI agent anymore. "I guess I should say that I used to have to know that stuff. Don't really have to anymore."

Dean uncharacteristically reached out and wrapped his arm over her shoulder, bending down to kiss her affectionately on the forehead as he apologized, "I'm sorry for what happened, Tabby. I'd change it if I could. But you knowing that stuff really does come in handy for us."

"I know," she replied, forcing a smile as she wrapped an arm around her older brother's back in return. "I just forget sometimes that I'm not actually still with the FBI. But I wouldn't change being here with you guys again. You two aren't even as annoying as before when I hunted with you guys. I mean, you at least throw your filthy clothes in the general direction of your bags now, and you don't snore as badly as you used to, and Sam isn't atomically gassy like he used to be."

Dean pushed her away as her brothers' voices rose in defense of themselves.

Tabitha stepped away from the door while they complained, peeking through the shades to look inside the house, and wondering to herself if Anna's parents were even home.

"Maybe they're not home," Dean voiced in echo of his sister's thoughts as he looked around.

Sam glanced back over his shoulder. "Both cars in the driveway."

Dean tried the door, and it opened easily under his hand.

The Winchesters shared a look of caution, and then Dean carefully led the way into the house. "Mr. and Mrs. Milton?" he called out.
"We're from the sheriff's department," Sam added. "Just wanted to ask you a couple of questions." As he spoke, the three siblings split up into different parts of the house to investigate.

Everything seemed neat and tidy until Tabitha stepped into the living room, finding what she presumed to be Anna Milton's parents, throats slit and bled out on the floor.

"Dean! Sam!" she called out. "Found them!" She uneasily pulled her Glock from the holster at her waist as she bent closer over the bodies. Seeing some yellow dust on the floor, she touched her fingertips to it and took a cautious wiff, immediately jerking her hand away as she glanced over her shoulder at her brothers. "Sulfur," she confirmed.

Sam sighed. "Demons beat us here. Whatever the deal is with this Anna girl—"

"Yeah, they want her," Dean cut in. "They're not screwing around."

Dean paced around the living room as Tabitha stood up and looked around as well.

"All right," Dean began. "So, I'm 'Girl, Interrupted,' and I know the score of the apocalypse, just busted out of the nut-box, possibly using superpowers by the way. Where do I go?"

Dean and Tabitha began thumbing through mail on an end table by the sofa as Sam stepped over to the mantle, grabbing a picture from the narrow shelf.

"Hey, one of you guys got those sketches from Anna's notebook?" Sam asked as he held up a picture frame.

"Yeah," Dean confirmed, reaching into his jacket.

"Let me see 'em." Sam grabbed the folded papers and held one up beside the picture frame in his hand. "Check this out."

"She was drawing the window of her church," Tabitha observed. "Smart place to go if you believe demons are real, I guess."

"She did draw 'em over and over," Sam confirmed.

"Let's go," Dean said.

The siblings quickly ran out to the Impala, diving for their bags to change out of their suits and into more practical clothing for demon hunting. The brothers had no compunction about changing clothes out on the sidewalk by the car, but Tabitha grabbed her bag and darted back into the Milton house. Throwing on jeans, boots, a long-sleeve shirt, and her worn, black leather jacket.

She was still buckling her leather belt as she ran out of the house, her jeans caught up in her boots from her haste as she hustled down the sidewalk with her bag in hand.

"Hurry up, Tabitha!" Dean shouted, slapping the roof of the Impala to punctuate his order.

She dove through the back door Sam held open for her, throwing her bag down on the floor as she set about straightening her clothes. "The two of you have no appreciation for how much longer it takes a woman to change clothes. We kinda have more articles to change than you two bozos do," she grumbled under her breath as she pulled her jeans over her heavy biker boots and then pulling her Glock back out of her bag while she was bent over.

Dean chuckled as he peeled out down the street. "I've never had much interest in how long it takes a
woman to put clothes on," he laughed, "Just in how long it takes her to get them off."

"Jesus, Dean. I don't need that image of you in my head. Especially not on our way to go hunt demons," Tabitha fired back, but was unable to help the smile that came to her face. At times like this, it almost seemed like they had the old Dean back, and that there was still hope he would be just fine.

"No kidding," Sam agreed from the passenger seat as he checked his own gun and replaced it beneath his heavy tan Carhartt coat. "I've seen enough over the years. Don't need to hear more."

Laughing as he drove, Dean told them, "Don't know what your guys' problem is. It's a beautiful thing."

Soon, they had pulled up in front of the little church that were from Anna's drawings and where her father had been a deacon.

With their guns drawn and ready, and the demon knife in Dean's hand, the siblings quietly entered the church, clearing the main levels of pews and the pulpit, and continuing on to the second floor where the stained glass was that Anna had drawn the most frequently.

As they entered a small room, they spotted someone moving behind another piece of decorated stained glass near the outer window.

"Dean," Sam whispered, gesturing towards the movement.

The figure looked slight, and from the heavy breathing, seemed scared. Tabitha replaced her pistol in its holster and motioned her brothers to do the same.

Thinking the girl might respond to another female better, Tabitha gently called out, "Anna?" They moved a little closer when there was no answer. "We're not here to hurt you, Anna Milton. We're here to help you. My name is Tabitha, and these are my brothers, Sam and Dean."

"Tabitha? Not Tabitha Winchester? And Sam—Sam Winchester?"

"Uh, yeah," Sam cautiously answered.

The redheaded girl they'd seen in pictures stepped out from hiding at last, looking at the siblings with something close to awe and fear intermingled. "And you're Dean," she continued. "The Dean?"

"Well, yeah. The Dean, I guess," the oldest Winchester grinned, clearly pleased with the distinction.

Sam rolled his eyes at their brother.

"It's really you," Anna continued in awe, some of the fear slipping away. "Oh, my god. The angels talk about you," she gushed. "You were in Hell, but Castiel pulled you out. And some of them think you can help save us." She paused as her eyes shifted to Tabitha, "And you're supposed to be protected because you're important to the angels." Her gaze shifted to Sam then as she quietly admitted, "And some of them don't like you at all."

Tabitha cleared her throat uncomfortably at the girl's words, not liking them even though she had heard most of it already, but feeling uncomfortable by the girl's excitement over her and her brothers.

But Anna continued on oblivious to the discomfort of all three of the Winchester siblings. "They talk about you all the time lately. I feel like I know you."
"So, you talk to angels?" Dean asked.

"Oh, no. No, no way," Anna hastily clarified, seeming abashed as she looked down. "Um, they probably don't even know I exist. I just kind of… overhear them."

"You overhear them?" Sam inquired in disbelief.

"Yeah, they talk, and sometimes I just… hear them in my head."

"Like… right now?" Dean asked, looking around the room as if an angel might pop out at any moment.

Tabitha stared at the girl in shock. Hardly able to believe that there was someone else who could hear angels' voices in their head, but wondering how it was that the girl had heard everything that she obviously had based on her drawings. Tabitha had only heard Castiel a few times, and Uriel the one time during Halloween.

As Tabitha looked the girl over suspiciously, she wondered if the girl knew that she could hear angels, too. The girl seemed to know something about her, or at least that the angels had protected her in the past. But as the girl stared back at the siblings, her gaze was open and waiting, and Tabitha saw no sign that she knew anything about what Tabitha could do.

"Not right this second," Anna went on in answer to Dean. "But a lot. And I can't shut them out, there are so many of them."

Definitely not quite like me then, Tabitha thought to herself. Or at least, whatever it was that made the two of them hear angels was on steroids with Anna if she heard them that often.

Dean sighed as he said, "So, they lock you up with a case of the crazies when really you were just… tuning in to angel radio?"

Anna suddenly looked relieved. "Yes. Thank you."

"Anna, when did the voices start?" Tabitha asked. "Do you remember?"

The girl got excited. "I can tell you exactly—September 18th."

The Winchesters shared a knowing look.

"The day I got out of Hell," Dean whispered to them.

"First words I heard, clear as a bell—'Dean Winchester is saved.'"

"What do you guys think?" Dean asked his siblings.

Sam scoffed and shook his head. "It's above my pay grade, man."

"Well, at least now we know why the demons want you so bad. They get a hold of you, they can hear everything the other side's cooking. You're 1-900-ANGEL."

Tabitha forced a laugh to hide her reeling thoughts. Wondering to herself if that was why the demons had wanted her so badly, too. Did they know she could hear the angels? Did they think she could hear them all the time like Anna could? Would they ever stop looking for her?

"Hey, um, do you know—" Anna began, "Are my parents okay? I—I didn't go home. I was afraid."
Before they could answer the girl, the door behind them whipped open. The Winchesters turned to see Ruby rush into the room.

"You got the girl? Good, let's go."

"Oh! Her face!" Anna cried out in fear as Ruby came closer.

"It's okay," Sam tried to reassure her as Anna fearfully backed away. "She's here to help."

"Yeah, don't be so sure," Dean replied under his breath.

Tabitha wasn't so sure, either, so she stepped away from her brothers to comfort Anna.

"It's okay," she whispered to the girl, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and pulling her closer. "We won't let anything happen to you." Including Ruby, she thought to herself.

"We have to hurry," Ruby told them, unconcerned by Dean's comment or Tabitha's attempt to put herself between the girl and the demon.

"Why?" Dean demanded, not moving from his place.

"Because a demon's coming—big-timer. We can fight later, Dean."

"Well, that's pretty convenient—showing up right when we find the girl with some bigwig on your tail?"

"Are you sure we can trust her?" Anna whispered fearfully to Tabitha as the demon continued to argue with her oldest brother.

Tabitha shrugged. "My little brother trusts her, and I trust my brother. That's enough for now," she assured the girl.

There was suddenly silence, and Tabitha looked up to see what her brothers were staring at—a marble statue of the Virgin Mother, trails of blood falling from her eyes.

"It's too late," Ruby whispered. "He's here."

Sam looked back at where Tabitha stood with the girl. "Go, hide her," he commanded. "And stay with her until it's clear."

"Bullshit," she replied, not moving from her place. "I'm not tucking tail and hiding while you guys stay and fight."

"Tabitha! Do as Sam's asking. Please!" Dean said, his voice harsh but pleading. "If that demon gets past us you need to protect the girl. She's not gonna be able to fight it. If something happens, get that girl outta here. Get to Bobby's."

Tabitha stared at them for a moment, but then jerked her head in a nod and began shepherding the girl towards the back corner of the room, finding a small broom closet and pushing the girl inside as she waited in front of the door.

She drew her gun, but knew it wouldn't do any good against a demon, so pulled a flask out of her inner jacket pocket with Holy Water in it, and prayed that the demon coming wasn't strong enough to find Holy Water only an annoyance.

She could hear Ruby telling Sam he had to use his mind to pull the demon, and prayed he wouldn't,
fearing what was becoming of her brother in using such powers.

The girl whimpered in the closet behind her.

"It's all right, Anna. I won't let them get to you," she promised as they began hearing commotion in the main part of the room.

Ruby suddenly appeared around the corner. "We've gotta go," the demon hurriedly told her. "This is going bad, quick."

Tabitha grabbed the demon as Ruby yanked the closet door open. "You're not taking that girl anywhere," she growled, jerking on the demon's shoulder as Ruby grabbed Anna by the arm.

Suddenly, Tabitha felt her insides jerk, and then they were no longer standing in the church.

She and Anna both grasped at the poorly constructed wooden walls to steady themselves, but Tabitha quickly righted herself, throwing a quick look around the sparse cabin they were suddenly standing in before grabbing the demon by the throat and shoving her against the wall, her Glock tucked underneath the demon's chin.

"Where the hell are my brothers?" she asked in a vicious whisper.

Ruby held still with her hands raised in the air. "Chill. They're big boys. I'm sure they got out of there just fine when things started going south."

"Where… are… they?" Tabitha continued in a lower voice, pressing the gun harder under the demon's chin.

"Like that's gonna do you any good. It's not the Colt, and it's not the knife, so it won't hurt me."

"It'll sure as hell entertain me to aerate your head, though."

"Fine. Just put the gun away. I like this meat suit. And it took me a long time to find one that was unoccupied just to appease your brother's delicate sensibilities," Ruby flippantly replied.

Tabitha pulled back slightly, unexpectedly relieved to know that her brother had insisted Ruby find a body without a person stuck inside it with her, even though she wasn't sure she wanted to know how the demon had achieved that.

"Where are they?" she repeated.

"Like I said, I'm sure they're fine. They've been doing this a while, you know. After we've waited a while to make sure they've made a clean break from the demon, I'll go find them and tell them where we are."

Tabitha stepped away from the demon. "And just where is that?"

"Somewhere safe."

Tabitha dug into her jacket pocket, taking out her cellphone.

Before she could dial the number, Ruby had swiped it from her hand and thrown it at the wall, the phone shattering into hundreds of pieces of now useless technology.

Staring at the demon and itching to shoot her, Tabitha slowly and carefully asked, "What the hell was that for? You're not off to a good start if you don't want me adding additional holes to your meat
Ruby rolled her eyes. "You can't go calling them right now. They're probably still making sure they're getting rid of that demon and we can't risk you calling them and having that demon or his minions overhear something that could give away our location."

Stepping over to the shattered phone, Tabitha looked down at the pieces, but with a resigned sigh, turned away, and left the broken parts. "You know, talking works, too," she huffed at the demon, wildly gesturing between the two of them. "If you really don't think calling them right now is a good idea, then fine. But you didn't have to smash my phone. I liked that phone. Besides, Dean and Sam are gonna have a conniption when they realize me and the girl are gone and they can't get a hold of me."

Tabitha glanced over at the object of their conversation to find Anna still standing with a hand on the wall, her head twisting back and forth between them in a wonderful imitation of a tennis match spectator. Wanting to calm the girl, Tabitha stepped back beside her as Ruby lit a fire in the fireplace.

"I don't know about Dean, but Sam will know I took the girl someplace safe. He won't be worried. He knows I wouldn't hurt the girl. Or you for that matter," Ruby said over her shoulder from her crouched position at the fireplace.

"It's okay, Anna," Tabitha assured the girl, reaching out to run a soothing hand up and down the girl's arm.

"Where are we?" Anna finally asked in a small voice. "And how did we get here?"

Tabitha tugged the girl along, getting her to take a seat at the little wooden table that served as part of the kitchen, dining room, and living room near the fire.

"That's a good question," she kindly told the girl before returning her attention to the demon. "I've seen some powerful demons disappear like that before and take their meat suit with 'em, but I've never seen one take other people with them, too. How'd you do that?" she asked Ruby as she moved to stand down the wall from the fireplace, leaning sideways as she watched Ruby work.

The demon glanced up at her from her work. "It takes a lot of concentration and power. And it takes some years to develop the skill. But still, it's hard enough taking our own meat suit with us, dragging two others along is much harder. And kinda draining." She stood up from the burgeoning fire. "Why else do you think I didn't kick your ass just now?" she asked with a raised brow.

"Aww," Tabitha drawled sarcastically, "I figured it was because you liked me."

"Whatever," Ruby offhandedly responded. "I'm gonna go outside and check the perimeter of the place. Just to make sure we weren't followed. Watch the girl."

Tabitha warily watched the demon step outside into the dying sunlight before going to join Anna at the table. "You all right, Anna?"

The girl slowly nodded. "Yeah. I think so. It's just… a lot's happened, you know, and it's hard to take it all in."

Anna was nervously playing with her hands on the table, and Tabitha reached out to calmingly lay her hand over the girl's. "I know what you mean, Anna. But you're handling this extremely well."

She smiled shyly in return. "I'm just glad to be out of that mental institution. I hated that they kept telling me I was crazy. I knew what I was hearing."
The pair sat in silence for several minutes as Tabitha considered how best to ask what she wanted to know.

Finally, she carefully questioned, "Anna? You said you knew about my brothers and me. Knew what the angels were saying about us. What did they say about me? Do you know why I'm important? Other than having brothers tangled up in this mess, that is."

She almost had herself convinced that was the only reason for the angels' interest when Anna adamantly shook her head. "Oh no, it's more than that. They said that you had to be protected. That you were important."

"Yeah, you said that much back at the church. But do you know why? Do you know what they want with me?"

Anna's head tilted slightly as her face scrunched together in thought. "I think one of them said that they had to protect you because they might need you in case Lucifer rose. But another one said you wouldn't be needed then, that they'd handle it."

Tabitha sat back as she stared at Anna. "So they were arguing about whether or not I was even really needed for whatever they think they need me for." She sighed at the circular logic and then continued, "In the event Lucifer does rise that is."

Anna thought for a moment, and then slowly nodded. "Yeah. But then the one said they had to have you in case things didn't go the way they wanted or the way they were supposed to. I don't remember, but they both agreed that you had to be watched and protected as closely as Dean."

"Huh." Tabitha tried to work through what she had learned from Anna, but try as she might, she couldn't figure out just what the angels could possibly need her for. The information that Anna had was just too vague.

"So, Anna," Tabitha continued again, "you hear the angels say a lot of stuff."

"Yeah," Anna sheepishly admitted. "I doubt they know how much I hear."

"And you just hear it whenever. You don't like, try to listen for what they say?"

Anna quickly shook her head. "No. No way. I tried to ignore what I heard before they locked me up so I could try to be normal. But it was just too hard."

Tabitha cleared her throat as she leaned slightly over the table to look Anna closely in the eye as she asked, "Have you heard the angels talk about anyone else like you? Have you heard them talk about other people who can hear the angels?"

"No. I wish. It would be nice to know I'm not the only one, to talk to someone else who can do what I do."

Tabitha absently nodded as she patted Anna's hand. She could sometimes hear angel's voices, but it still wasn't quite what Anna could do. But regardless, she wasn't ready to talk about it even with Anna.

Turning back to the girl, she gestured over to the small bed at the back of the cabin. "Why don't you try and get some sleep, Anna. I'm sure you've had a long day."

The girl bit her lip as she looked longingly back at the bed, seemingly torn between her need to sleep, and the need to stay awake and now what was going on.
"Go on," Tabitha encouraged the girl. "I'll wake you up the minute anything happens."

Nodding, the girl left and climbed into the bed, her breathing quickly evening out in sleep.

Scrounging in the kitchen, Tabitha found a bottle of Jack in one of the cabinets and procured one of the cleaner looking glasses as she sat back down at the table, hoping to pass the time and ease her mind and nerves while she waited.

She was sipping her second glass when Ruby walked back into the cabin, carrying an armful of wood that she set down by the fireplace.

Without saying a word to Tabitha, she glanced at the sleeping girl and stepped into the kitchen.

"I see you've helped yourself to the cabinet, but did you even think of offering the girl something to eat or drink? I'm guessing she's had a pretty trying day in her normal little life," Ruby said as she maneuvered around the kitchen, not bothering to turn around to face Tabitha as she quietly addressed her.

"No, I didn't think to," Tabitha admitted contritely. She wasn't used to looking after people who lived normal lives. And she wasn't used to the fact that not everyone was used to skipping several meals at a time or drinking theirs as a substitute.

Ruby quickly heated a can of soup on the stove, taking the bowl over to Anna and carefully waking the girl, telling her to eat her soup and go back to sleep.

Tabitha watched the demon's interactions with the girl from the table. Still half-poised to intercede if she thought the demon would harm the girl, but curious to watch her surprisingly gentle actions with the girl.

When Anna had eaten her soup and gone back to sleep, Ruby dropped the dirty bowl in the sink and sat down in the chair opposite of Tabitha.

"Satisfied that I didn't kill or eat the girl?" she snipped.

"Yeah," Tabitha simply answered.

They sat in silence for a while before Tabitha broke it. "Why does my little brother trust you so much? You seem so absolutely sure that he would trust you to look after the girl and trust you with me. Why is that? What exactly happened between the two of you to make him trust you so much?"

Ruby looked around the room, seeming reluctant to answer the questions.

Tabitha held her glass of whiskey in her hand and leaned back in her chair, crossing her legs as she gestured around the room. "Just us girls here, and Anna's not even awake. Talk. Make me understand why Sam trusts you so much and why I should, too."

"It should be Sam's story to tell if he wants to."

Tabitha set her glass back down on the table as she leaned over its surface to bring herself closer to the demon. "I already know that the two of you have been sleeping together. A sister knows more about what's going on in her brothers' lives than they usually realize. What I'm asking for is how this happened, and why him sleeping with you means he trusts you. 'Cause it's more than the fact that he slept with you. We're both big girls here; we both know that just because a man sleeps with you doesn't mean he's ready to trust you with his life. It takes something a whole lot bigger and more important than sex happening for a man to trust someone to that extent. I'm just asking for what it
was that made him trust you."

Ruby leaned back and pursed her lips as she considered Tabitha's words.

"I looked out for him," she finally said.

"Bullshit," Tabitha replied. "It's more than that."

The demon narrowed her eyes and leaned over her folded arms on the table. "I was there for him when no one else was. I was there for him when his brother was gone and you were nowhere around."

Tabitha jerked back like she'd been slapped, but quickly leaned forward again to point out, "I was at Bobby's, I tried to get him to stay there, to stay with Bobby, or at least stay with me. I told him I'd go hunting with him, go anywhere he wanted to go."

"Yeah, but you let him walk away when he was hurting. You just let him go. He went after I don't know how many crossroads demons, trying to make another deal to trade places with Dean. Killed a hell of a lot of them, too. And then just started picking fights with demons trying to get himself killed. He almost did, too—the night I finally found him. Would have if I hadn't saved his sloppy-drunk ass. And then, all he could talk about was trying to find Lilith. Trying to kill Lilith. But when we actually went after her, I finally realized that all he really wanted was for her to kill him. I barely got him out of there. And all along, where were you? You weren't there to pick up the pieces he'd been left in. I did. I did everything and anything I could think of to keep him safe. To keep him alive."

With shaky hands, Tabitha took a long gulp of whiskey. "I would have done anything to protect him, too. But I couldn't find him. He didn't want to be found."

"Bullshit," Ruby threw back, leaning further over the table as she jabbed a finger at Tabitha. "You could have found him if you really wanted to. You sure as hell did when Dean finally came back. The truth is you were waiting for him to fix himself on his own and then come back to you when he was all better. Or waiting to let someone else fix him." Ruby sat back in her chair as she glared across at Tabitha. "I did my best. You may not like how I did it, or what my methods were to get his attentions focused on something else besides getting himself killed, but I did what I could to keep him alive."

Hands still shaking and glass clanking against glass, Tabitha poured herself more whiskey and moved to stand in front of the fireplace, gazing down into the dancing orange glow.

"You're right," she finally admitted, her voice barely a croak. "I let him leave, and I let him stay away. I felt so guilty over not being there when Dean died that I just couldn't stand seeing Sam in that kind of wild grief. But I should have been there for him. It was cowardly of me to just let him go off like that." And she wasn't sure she'd ever be able to forgive herself for not being there for either of her brothers.

"Thank you," she whispered after several silent minutes had passed. Turning around, she forced herself to meet Ruby's eyes, determined not to be a coward and look away now. "Thank you for taking care of and looking out for my little brother when I didn't."

Ruby nodded and looked away, clearly uncomfortable with the moment.

With a bitter laugh, Tabitha replied. "Don't worry, no chick-flick moment of hugging needed. I may be more indebted to you for taking care of Sam than I realized, but you're still a demon."

The demon snorted as she looked back. "Oh good, I was worried we were actually going to have a
moment there."

"I'll do my best to refrain."

The demon stood and moved to sit on the floor by the wall. Tabitha looked at her curiously when the demon lay down on her back.

"I'll be back," Ruby told her. "Time to go pass a message to your brothers."

And then, the demon threw back her head as black smoke expelled from her body and swirled through the air and up and out the chimney.

Tabitha walked closer and toed the body on the floor, watching as it lay limp and unresponsive to her nudge.

She walked back to the table and her bottle of Jack Daniels. "That's just creepy," she whispered to herself.

Ruby and Tabitha heard the boys coming before Anna did, and both stood from the table to go wait at the door as they entered the cabin.

Tabitha briefly hugged both of her brothers. But Dean held her shoulders as he looked her over.

"You all right? Why didn't you answer your cellphone?" he demanded.

With a brief glance at Ruby, Tabitha shrugged her shoulders and said, "It got damaged in our escape. I guess I'll need to get a new one. But yeah, I'm fine."

"Glad you could make it," Ruby told the boys, gesturing them further into the cabin.

"Yeah, thanks," Sam answered, looking around for Anna no doubt.

Sam spotted her on the couch and quickly went over to her, asking, "Anna, are you okay?"

The girl nodded. "Yeah. I think so. Ruby's not like other demons. She and Tabitha saved my life."

"Yeah, I hear she does that," Dean said with an uncomfortable look towards said demon. "I guess I…" Dean cleared his throat uncomfortably. "You know," he uneasily finished.

"What?" Ruby asked, her arms crossing over her chest.

"I guess I owe you for… Sam," he said, indicating to their brother. "And I just want to… you know?"

"Don't strain yourself."

"Okay, then. Is the moment over?" Dean asked, fidgeting uncomfortably though he tried to hide it.

"Good. 'Cause that was awkward."

Ruby snorted. "Try it from my side," she sneered. "You Winchesters and your emotional moments. Enough to make even a demon hurl."

Dean turned to Tabitha and saw her raised brow. Jerking his thumb towards Sam, he explained, "We, ah… had a discussion about Ruby. I just wanted to thank her for looking after him while I was gone."
Sam looked down at the floor uncomfortably as he told his sister. "You already know some, but I'll tell you the rest later. I guess it's only fair that you know, too."

Tabitha waited until her younger brother looked up and met her eyes, shrugging and admitting, "No need. I already made Ruby tell me the rest." Seeing his surprise, she shrugged again. "What? I'm your big sister. You think I wasn't going to make her tell me what was going on?"

Sam turned away and looked back towards Anna still patiently waiting on the couch. She immediately asked him, "Hey, Sam, you think it'd be safe to make a quick call, just to tell my parents I'm okay? They must be completely freaked."

The brothers turned accusing eyes on Tabitha, silently demanding to know why she hadn't told the girl yet.

Tabitha cringed and turned to the girl. She'd known the moment was coming, but Anna had just woken up, and Tabitha hadn't wanted to break her heart just yet. But now that she was asking, Tabitha has no choice. She moved to sit down beside the girl and took one of her hands in hers.

"Anna, I'm so sorry to have to tell you this, but they didn't make it. Demons had found them before we could get to them. I'm so sorry."

"No!" Anna gasped, turning to look up at Sam and Dean, silently pleading with them to say Tabitha was wrong.

"I'm sorry," Sam whispered.

Anna ripped her hand away as she leaned over her knees, rocking back and forth as she cried. "Why is this happening to me?!" she demanded.

Tabitha soothingly ran her hand up and down the girl's back as she rocked. "I don't know, Anna. We have no answers for you."

Suddenly, Anna sat up straight and gasped. "They're coming!"

They all looked up as the electricity flickered, and Tabitha felt the swelling of power she'd only experienced when Castiel made a grand entrance.

Sam and Dean hustled the girl quickly to the back of the cabin, but Tabitha stayed rooted where she was as Ruby locked the door and her brothers came back into the room with shotguns. Dean handed one to her as Ruby bent to look through their bag.

"Where's the knife?" she demanded.

"Ugh, about that—" Dean started sheepishly.

"You're kidding me," Ruby exclaimed.

"Hey, don't look at me," Dean denied, pointedly looking at Sam.

"Thanks a lot," Sam angrily fired back at Dean.


Tabitha finally shook herself from her stupor, looking down at the shotgun she held loosely in her hands as Ruby came to stand beside her and her brothers on the demon's other side. "It's not demons, guys. It's Castiel," she whispered.
Since I really don't know for sure how some demons appear and disappear sometimes, I kinda had to wing it here with Ruby. I also wasn't 100% sure if she had grabbed Anna and teleported or whatever with her, but since it's not really clear, I decided to make up things as I go. (Not that I don't all the time!) I could be way off with things, but it's fanfiction, so I get to make some things up.

As always, thanks so much for reading guys! Sorry no Castiel this chapter, but he'll be back in the next!

And be sure to leave some review love!
The other three turned to stare at her, but then the door flew open with a bang, tearing their attention away from Tabitha as Castiel purposefully strode through the open doorway, Uriel following closely behind.

Tabitha stared as Castiel continued to avoid her eyes, steadfastly locking his gaze on Dean as her brothers and Ruby gaped in surprise at the angels.

Knowing exactly what they were, Ruby gasped fearfully as her eyes flashed for a moment to black.

"Please tell me you're here to help," Dean tiredly asked. "We've been having demon issues all day."

"Well, I can see that," Uriel dryly observed with a nod towards Ruby. "You want to explain why you have that stain in the room?"

The Winchesters glanced at the demon between the three of them at Uriel's disdainful tone.

"We're here for Anna," Castiel explained before any of the Winchesters could answer Uriel.

Tabitha's brow furrowed as she stared at Castiel. Although his features were schooled into his normal impassive mask, she had grown so used to his subtle expressions and all his nuances in the time he had spent with her. And though he was more guarded now than he was when it was just her, she still saw regret and grief in those expressive eyes. But why? danced in her head.

"Here for her like...here for her?" Dean cautiously asked.

"Stop talking," Uriel snapped in annoyance. "Give her to us."

"Are you going to help her?" Sam demanded.

But Tabitha saw the answer written in Castiel's eyes before he even spoke. And she knew now why he was here. What he regretted.

"No," she answered in a whisper so low her brothers didn't hear her.

But the angel did, and Castiel's eyes finally locked on hers as he flatly repeated the answer she'd instinctively known, "No. She has to die."

For the span of several heartbeats, he didn't say anything else, and his eyes didn't move, as though trying to make her understand by sheer force of will what he was doing and why.

"You want Anna? Why?" Sam demanded.

Uriel huffed and took a step closer to their group, saying, "Out of the way."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Dean fired back. "I know she's wiretapping your angel chats or whatever, but it's no reason to gank her."

Still holding Castiel's gaze, Tabitha quietly asked, "You'd kill that girl just because of something she can't help? Because she can hear angels?"
"Don't worry," Uriel interjected before Castiel could speak. "I'll kill her gentle."

"You're some heartless sons of bitches, you know that?" Dean threw back.

Eyes purposefully boring into hers, Castiel seemed to be speaking directly to her as he replied to Dean's words, "As a matter of fact, we are." His eyes turned momentarily on the ground before coming up to meet Dean's again. "And?" he indifferently asked.

"And Anna's an innocent girl," Sam incredulously replied.

"She is far from innocent," Castiel answered him.

_Understand._

The word flitted through Tabitha's mind so quickly and so softly, she thought she might have imagined it.

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked out loud, still wondering if she had really heard Castiel whisper that word in his true voice.

Uriel misunderstood her words and piped up to answer her question as Castiel once again avoided Tabitha's gaze. "It means she's worse than this abomination your brother's been screwing. Now give us the girl."

At the demand, Castiel looked down once more to stare at the ground, pain returning to his eyes. And Tabitha was certain that despite what he said, Castiel certainly felt conflicted. He wasn't as heartless as he would have them believe. Because what she knew he felt, certainly didn't match his current outward demeanor. Question was, which would he act in accordance to, his words, or his feelings?

"Sorry," Dean sarcastically replied after sharing a look of silent agreement with his siblings. "Get yourself another one. Try JDate."

"Who's gonna stop us? You three? Or this demon whore?" Uriel snidely asked, and suddenly, he reached out to grab Ruby by the arm, spinning her around as he threw her against the wall in the blink of an eye.

Grabbing Ruby by the throat, he shoved her against the wall, his hand opening wide and a light beginning to emit as he moved his palm closer to the demon's face in the same movement Tabitha had witnessed when Castiel had taken out her possessed friend Cheryl.

The closest one to Ruby, Tabitha moved on instinct, palming her Glock as she jerked Uriel's shoulder towards her with her free hand and then backhanded Uriel across the wall with the pistol in her other hand. Such a blow would have dropped a normal human, but the angel easily held his feet, dropping Ruby as Dean tried to help by attempting to stab him from behind. But Uriel grabbed Dean's arm and twisted until her brother fell to his knees, the angel landing three quick punches to her brother's face, and then shoving him away as Uriel turned back towards Tabitha.

Holding her pistol in her right hand and her other in a loose fist, Tabitha waited for him to advance, managing to punch the angel in the jaw once with a left hook when Uriel grabbed her right hand and shook the pistol from her grasp.

Sweeping his leg out, Uriel knocked Tabitha to her knees before she could react, pressing his fingers to her forehead as he sneered down at her upturned face.
"What?" he mumbled, suddenly pulling his fingers back from her forehead with a startled expression.

Using his apparent confusion, Tabitha pulled her feet under her body and drove the top of her head up into the angel's chin and face, delighting in the angry grunt he made before he grabbed her shoulder and threw her across the room.

Tabitha's shoulder and arm exploded in pain as she landed in a painful heap, barely registering the flash of light and shot of power swelling in the room before the cabin became strangely silent.

She would have preferred to lie on the floor wallowing in pain, but Tabitha rolled to her knees as she looked around the room. Not seeing the angels and fearing for Anna, she lurched to her feet and threw open the door to the room Uriel had just thrown her against.

As she ripped it open with her left hand, she was treated to the sight of a bloody and shaky Anna leaned over a rickety, old wooden vanity. Strange symbols were drawn above it on the mirror in Anna's blood.

Emergency training kicking in, Tabitha ignored the throbbing pain in her right shoulder and the strange sight, pushing Anna back towards the bed as she clamped her hands over the long cut running along the girl's arm.

Her shaky brothers stepped into the room behind her and Tabitha went into command mode. "Get me something for bandaging," she ordered them.

Dean immediately pulled his coat off and then his button up shirt, leaving him in just a gray t-shirt as he expertly tore the button up shirt into strips of fabric. He didn't look much better than Anna felt, his face was bloody and already swollen from Uriel's fists, but at least he wasn't actively bleeding.

"Are they gone?" Anna shakily asked as Tabitha began wrapping the strips around her cut while applying pressure to the wound.

Tabitha's hands never paused in her work, but she glanced up at Anna as she steeled herself and asked, "Yeah, they are. Did you kill them?"

"No," she whispered. "I sent them away…far away."

Although unable to articulate why—given the current circumstances anyway—Tabitha found herself relieved to know that at least one of the two angels wasn't dead.

"You want to tell me how?" Dean demanded as Tabitha finished tying the bandaging tightly around Anna's arm and inspecting her work.

The girl glanced up at the bloody mirror, everyone following her gaze. "That just popped in my head. I don't know how I did it. I just did it."

Dean exchanged a look with Tabitha before leading Sam out of the little bedroom to talk. Still in command mode, Tabitha tugged Anna to her feet and led her to the tiny bathroom, telling her to clean the rest of the blood off herself as best she could, and grabbing a dingy towel from the rack to wipe as much blood off herself as she could as well.

When she entered the main part of the cabin again, Sam and Dean were discussing the best course of action to take with Anna while Ruby silently stood by and listened.

Joining the demon, Tabitha listened to her brothers' hushed voices as they decided they needed to get Anna somewhere safe as well as dig up more about the girl they were helping. The insistence of the
angels that Anna wasn't innocent unnerved them all.

"Thank you," Ruby whispered to Tabitha.

Tabitha jerked in surprise as she turned to the demon.

"You didn't have to try and take on that angel for me, but you did," she continued, staring down at the uneven floorboards of the cabin.

"No," Tabitha agreed. "But you didn't have to save Sam either, did you? But you did. So I guess that makes us even. And that's more than enough demon-chick-flick-moments for me. Let's make it the last."

She stepped away from the demon and beside her brothers before the moment got any more awkward than it already was.

"You're gonna take Anna to Bobby's?" she asked Dean.

"Yeah," he nodded, turning away from their younger brother. "And Sam's gonna dig up info here on our girl while we make tracks for South Dakota. Anna'll be safer there than anywhere else I can think of."

"You hope," she pointed out.

"Yeah. I hope," he admitted with a sigh. "I don't have any better ideas unless you do, Tabitha," he pointedly continued.

"No. No, not really. But I'll stay here with Sam to help him dig up info if there's any to find. It'll be quicker if I stay to help him," she told her brother.

For once, Dean didn't immediately argue, though it looked like he wanted to. "Fine," he tightly replied. He glanced over at Ruby. "Does that mean you're coming with me then?"

She shrugged. "Sure. Why not? I'll help you protect the girl until we get there and can get her safe."

Sam nodded in agreement as well and said, "Fine. You guys take the car we brought here, and Tabitha and I will hike back down the road until we find another car to take back into town and can get the Impala."

The younger siblings turned to leave the cabin, but paused when Dean tossed his keys through the air and called out, "Be careful."

Glancing over her shoulder as she snagged the keys were her left hand, Tabitha gave a small smile. "We'll be fine. Don't worry about us. Just look after Anna."

Dean scowled slightly. "I meant be careful with my baby. Make sure none of those damn demons are still watching the motel where we left her, and if either one of you damages her, there'll be hell to pay."

Tabitha threw a single finger wave over her shoulder at Dean as they left.

Two hours later, Sam and Tabitha had carefully circled the motel and determined that no demons were watching the still parked car. As they made their way to the Impala, Sam paused by the hood, asking, "Did you want to drive?"
Tabitha went immediately to the trunk instead, opening the lid and then tossing the keys to her younger brother as she dug through one of her bags with one hand, her right arm tucked carefully against her stomach to alleviate the pain in her shoulder. Finding one of the instant cold packs she'd been looking for, she shut the trunk and told her brother, "No. I could go for just sitting back and relaxing for a bit. My shoulder's killing me."

As they climbed into the car, Tabitha immediately began peeling out of her jacket and shirt, causing Sam to uncomfortably look away.

"Whoa. What're you doing?" he asked as his hands nervously tapped on the steering wheel and looking out the side window.

With a pained chuckle, Tabitha pointed out to her brother, "There's nothing to act so prudish about. I've still got a tank top on. I just wanted to take a look at my shoulder and put this cold pack on it."

Turning in his seat, Sam leaned closer and motioned for her to let him look. He hissed through his teeth at the sight when she swiveled around so he could inspect the damage. Her shoulder was already mottling deeply in shades of red, purple, and black. The patchwork of color spanned from the front of her shoulder, all the way to encompass her shoulder blade and back, the whole joint swelling painfully as well. Even her left knuckle was skinned and swollen from punching Uriel. Not that it had done much of any good. The angle had a face like granite.

"Damn. What the hell happened?"

She glanced at him curiously, realizing for the first time that he was pretty untouched looking, while Uriel had wailed pretty good on both Dean and Tabitha. When she voiced as much to Sam and explained what happened to her, he apologetically shook his head.

"Jesus," he swore. "Dean's right, those angels really are dicks. I didn't see much of what happened. Castiel stepped towards me and touched my forehead, and I just dropped and blacked out. When I suddenly came to, they were gone and Dean looked like he'd lost a prize fight and was peeling himself off the ground to go after you and Anna in the other room."

Tabitha's memory flashed back to Uriel touching his fingertips to her own forehead, and his startled expression when nothing happened. She'd seen Castiel do what Sam described to Bobby the first night she and Dean had met him, and she suddenly was certain that Uriel had been trying to do the same to her. Only question was, why didn't it work?

Shaking the thought from her head for the moment, Tabitha gingerly placed the cold pack against her shoulder and leaned back against the passenger seat, closing her eyes for a few moments.

But Sam broke her reverie. "What now?" he asked her. "We need to find more on Anna, so where do we look? I could try to get on the computer and see what I can dig up, but I already looked once, and I'm not sure how long it would take me to dig up more. If there even is any more to find."

Sighing, Tabitha answered without opening her eyes, "Head back to her parent's house. We'll start there. And I'll make a call to see what I can dig up in the interim."

She dug into her hip pocket looking for her phone, and cursed to herself when she remembered that it was lying in pieces thanks to a certain demon.

"Give me your phone, Sam. Forgot mine's busted," she told him, finally opening her eyes as she turned towards him.

"Sure," he answered, handing it over and putting the Impala in drive.
She dialed the number from memory as her brother questioned her while he began driving.

"Who you calling? I mean, you can't use your old FBI resources anymore."

"You think those were the only ones I had?" she laughed.

The call suddenly connected.

"Who is this and how the fuck did you get this number?" a harsh voice demanded.

"Relax, kid," she laughed. "Don't have an aneurism. What's got you so wound up?"

There was silence for the space of almost a minute as Tabitha pulled the phone away from her ear to see if the call had dropped. It hadn't. "Kid?" she tried again.

"Who the fuck is this and how'd you get this number?" he demanded again, his voice dropping low and threateningly.

"Jesus, Shawn, it's me, Tabitha Winchester. Since when the hell did your phone manners go to shit?"

"Tabitha Winchester is dead!" he hissed in return. "Who are you?!

"It's me, Shawn, Tabitha," she insisted, wondering how he'd heard about her "death." But then again, while it hadn't been national news due to the FBI keeping a tight lid on things, she was pretty sure how Shawn had found out. He was very good at what he did after all. She carefully continued, "It's really me, Shawn. And I'm dead kinda like you're officially dead. But we're both still here, aren't we?"

She could hear the soft sniffle he tried to hide, and instantly felt bad for not calling the kid sooner, she just hadn't thought he'd find out about her "death" and hadn't wanted to involve him in her troubles any more than she had to.

"How do I know it's really you?" he cautiously asked.

Thinking quickly, she told him, "Hey, it's exactly one month to the day from when I promised to take you out for your first legal beer. And I'll do what I can to keep my promise, kid. Now who else would know the date of your real birthday or know that I promised to take you for your first legal drink?"

"Tabitha," he quietly exhaled in obvious relief. "I thought you were dead. They said you were, and I hacked into the FBI files when my system flagged your name, but there was a mountain of evidence saying you were dead. Body, DNA, dental records, the whole nine yards. And then I couldn't get a hold of you... What the hell happened?"

Tabitha sighed wearily. "I'm sorry, kid. If I'd realized you would find out, I'd of called you sooner. I didn't realize you had your little electronic eyes on me."

Shawn caught the tone of her voice and apologized. "Sorry 'bout that. I was just trying to keep an eye on you in case you got into trouble or something and needed help. I owe you so much. But by the time my system flagged your name for the arrest warrant the FBI issued for you and I got it, well...by then you were listed as dead." He paused for a moment and then lowly asked, "Did you really kill those FBI agents?"

"It's a long story, kid, and one you're better not involved in. Safer for you this way," she replied, pointedly not answering the question.
"So, why'd you call then? If you're not with the FBI anymore, what are you doing that you need my help? I mean, I take it that's why you're finally calling me."

He sounded slightly put off by that so she hastened to remind him, "Well, yeah, I do need some help, but I've been meaning to call you and remind you about me taking you out for your birthday on the 14th. I figured busy guy like you might have forgotten about me." She said it lightly, trying to tease the kid, and she could almost hear him smile in return.

"I wouldn't forget," he answered. "So, what'd you need?"

"I'm still working on some investigations on the side and need you to do your computer magic and find everything you can for me on one Anna Milton of Defiance, Ohio. In particular, find out if she's done anything wrong or illegal. But find me everything you can. She's got a missing-persons report on her for escaping a mental institution."

"No problem," he confidently answered her. "What are her parents' names or DOB so I'm sure I've got the right one?"

"Her parents are Richard and Amy Milton," she explained as she listened to the keyboard clacks on the other end of the line. "Just look up her info from the missing-persons report. It'll have everything you need."

"All right, I'll look into her and get back to you." He paused before slowly asking, "So, is this kinda like the other stuff I've looked into that's gonna be strange stuff and where you tell me to forget about it as soon as I'm done and not ask any questions?"

"Yeah," Tabitha sighed. "It's exactly like that. Thanks, kid."

"Call you back at this number?" Shawn asked as he continued typing away.

"Yeah," Tabitha confirmed. "My phone got damaged earlier this evening so I have to get a new number, but I'll get that one to you when I get a new phone so you can still get in touch with me. I'm sorry I didn't call you sooner or get my new number to you, Shawn."

The kid sighed almost happily. "I'm just glad to hear that you're still alive. I'll be in touch."

Tabitha tucked the phone in her hip pocket telling her younger brother, "I'll give this back to you after he calls me back."

"Sure. But who was that?" he asked as he pulled into the driveway of the Milton residence again. The place still looked quiet, no crime scene tape since they'd been there that afternoon. Tabitha glanced at her watch and realized it was now early morning and the sun was soon to come up, correcting herself that now it was the day before that they'd been there.

She pulled her shirt and jacket back on, following her brother up the walk to the house. As they reached the door, Tabitha grabbed some vinyl gloves from her pocket and handed them to her brother, pulling a pair on herself. They were careful of what they had touched the last time they'd been here, but since they needed to search the place, it was best to use gloves to keep their fingerprints from showing up at a murder scene—given they were both supposedly dead.

"You all right?" he asked, gesturing to her shoulder as they walked through the still open front door.

"I'll live. Shoulder's just badly bruised. Maybe sprained. Mostly just sore as hell," she explained as she made her way through the house to where she remembered seeing a small home office before.
Sam followed her and leaned against the doorway as his sister sat at the desk and began pulling out drawers of the filing cabinet.

"You never answered me. Who were you talking to?" Sam repeated.

"Uh? Oh yeah. Kid I knew as an agent. Brilliant kid. One of those complete computer geniuses that gets bored in school and gets themselves into trouble doing something they shouldn't," she absently replied as she pulled some folders out and thumbed through the papers. Looking up, she elaborated. "Shawn was smart, but popular and rebellious as well. His dad was a local cop in a little town in northern Illinois, so I think that's where the streak of rebellion came from. But anyway, Shawn was 17, got bored, and decided to hack into some accounts of a mob family in Chicago."

She saw her brother's surprised look and nodded. "I know, right? Not exactly the smartest thing in the world. But he was a kid and thought he couldn't get caught. He gave a bunch of the money to some charities and moved some into accounts he'd made for himself. Well, he never stopped to think that even mobs are smart enough to hire genius hackers to find or protect their money. So they managed to track the transactions or the electronic signatures or something—it's beyond my scope—and tracked him to his dad's place.

"Well, long story short, this particular Chicago family sent some of their men to his house and Shawn's father got killed in the resulting fiasco, and Shawn went underground into hiding. My unit was sent in to investigate—one of my first cases with the Violent Crimes Unit—but we were sent because they'd beaten the holy shit out of Shawn's father before they killed him, so the authorities were thinking it was some kind of torture. It being mob related never even entered their minds since the family had no mob connections and Shawn's father had been a well respected cop."

Tabitha waved her hand in a dismissing motion. "Well, to make the story shorter, I found the kid and with his help, made it look like he'd been killed along with his father so he'd be out of the mob's crosshairs, 'cause I knew they'd never let him go. He moves around some and lives under a few different aliases now, and does some sideline hacking and computer work for money. And over the years, I've asked Shawn to help me look into things when I needed more information for some hunter or another and couldn't overuse my FBI resources. And the kid always comes through for me."

"If he was such a computer genius, how'd you manage to find him before both the FBI and the mob?" Sam asked, and then quickly tacked on, "No offense, Tab. But you were new to the Feds then, right? You were only 23 yourself."

Tabitha leaned back in the desk chair, smiling up at her brother as she answered, "Sam, we've lived our whole lives bouncing around from place to place, basically living underground and off the map and with new aliases all the time. You think I couldn't find a 17-year-old kid that had never used an assumed name before and hadn't ever lived out of his father's house—even without my FBI training? I mean, yeah, the kid was a genius, but I had a bit more knowledge and experience on him in that particular field. I knew where to look around the area, what kinds of motels he'd have to pick, and what kinds of questions to ask people to track and find him. Nervous kid who doesn't have confidence in his assumed identity really isn't that hard to find."

"So you helped him disappear?"

"Well, yeah. I worked violent crimes, not mob crimes, but I knew enough about what mob hits and grudges are like. I didn't think the kid deserved it. So I helped him out, taught him how to live with new aliases all the time, and how to cover his tracks in the real world and not just the electronic world. It was a good investment of time. The kid's been really useful with helping cover the tracks of all you hunters. He even taught me how to end-around some of the FBI electronic safety protocols myself. He was well worth the time and effort."
Sam grinned at her as he pushed away from the doorway. "You may try to couch it as the kid being useful and that's why you helped him, but you had a soft spot for the kid, didn't you? Tough as you try to act, you're really a softy at heart."

Tabitha scowled and threw a pencil at her younger brother's retreating back. "Don't you go around spewing such lies! I've got a reputation to maintain!"

It was an hour later that Shawn finally called Tabitha back. And by then, Tabitha and Sam were getting desperate. They'd swept the house well but hadn't found anything useful. At least nothing that screamed, "Hey! I'm a bloody axe murderer in my spare time!"

Tabitha had even managed to find Anna's high school diary, but there was nothing revealing within its flowery pages. She still seemed like just a normal girl.

"What did you find?" Tabitha asked without preamble.

"Well, hello to you, too," Shawn cheekily fired back. "I've dug through your girl's life. Not much exciting until the girl got stuck in the cuckoo's nest a while back. Until then, she was just your average, good-girl. School records don't have a bad word to say about her. I even dug into her folks, but they were just your boring, church-going, hallelujah, god-fearing kinda people. Absolutely no dirt to them, Tabitha. I even read some of this girl's articles for her college paper. She's kinda naive in her view of the world, but not too bad of a writer. She just seemed perfectly normal until this last time when she had to go back to a psychologist."

"Wait a minute. What do you mean, 'back to a psychologist?' She's been to one before?"

As Tabitha waited for Shawn's answer, she snapped her fingers to get Sam's attention and motioned him closer.

"Well, from what I found, she saw a kiddy shrink when she was pretty little. And then got over whatever her problem was and was a normal kid. Until now anyway."

"What was she seeing a shrink for as a kid?"

"Dunno. Those records are old enough that they're not digital. You'll have to go old-school and look them up yourself. I'll text you the address."

Tabitha grinned as she got off the phone and handed it back to her brother. "We may have finally found something useful. But it'll take a little B & E to get, so we should get going before people start waking up to get ready for work."

"Let's go," Sam readily agreed.

Bobby's house seemed empty as Sam and Tabitha walked through his front door.

"Well, Bobby's gone anyway," Tabitha observed. "His Chavelle isn't outside."

"Yeah," Sam agreed as they looked around the main floor, "but where are the others?"

"Probably in the panic room in the basement," Tabitha guessed with a shrug.

"Hey, Dean!" Sam called out at the top of the steps.

They heard footsteps below them, followed by Dean bounding up the steps to greet them.
"How's the car?" Dean asked as he walked by them and into the kitchen.

Tabitha rolled her eyes, but Sam answered as though it was a completely serious question—which, unfortunately when dealing with Dean, it was.

"I got her. She's fine," Sam quickly replied. "Where's Bobby?" he continued.

"Uh, the Dominican," Dean slowly answered. "He said we break anything, we buy it."

Tabitha trailed through the kitchen behind her brothers. "The Dominican?" she questioned with a laugh. "Please tell me he's working a job."

"God, I hope so," Dean shuddered. "Otherwise he's at Hedonism in a banana hammock and a trucker cap."

"Now that's seared in my brain," Sam grimaced.

Tabitha likewise shook her head and agreed, "Yeah, that image is never coming out. Thanks, Dean."

But the eldest Winchester ignored his siblings, asking, "What did you find on Anna?"

"Uh, not much," Sam began. "Her parents were Rich and Amy Milton—a church deacon and a housewife."

"Riveting," Dean said, throwing several glances back over his shoulder. "But we already knew that."

"Yeah," Sam agreed, "But Tabitha's guy managed to dig up something we didn't know before."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Dean immediately backpedaled, turning to face his sister. "Tabitha's guy? You got a guy I don't know about? Since when? And just who the hell is he?"

She laughed in response, moving into the living room closer to her brother as she told him, "He didn't mean it like that. It's a kid I knew as an agent. Does fantastic things with a computer and does some work for me from time to time. I had him do some hacking and look into Anna's information deeper, and he found that she had been seeing a kiddy shrink when she was pretty little."

"Really? What did he find there?" Dean asked.

"Well, he couldn't find much electronically," Sam answered, opening the folder he'd been carrying and holding it out to Dean. "But he sent us in the right direction to find the files for the shrink she'd been seeing then. When she was two and a half, she'd get hysterical any time her dad got close. She was convinced that he wasn't her real daddy."

"Who was?" Dean asked them as he stood up straight. "The plumber, hmm? A little snaking the pipes?" he laughed with a wicked grin.

"Dude, you're confusing reality with porn again," Sam laughed.

"Wow," Tabitha added. "You're really getting way too comfortable with me, Dean. I'm your sister, I really don't want to know about what kind of porn you've been watching. It's bad enough when you try to get me to buy your 'Busty Asian Beauties' magazines. You really need to find that line for appropriate/inappropriate brother-sister interactions."

"What?" he defended. "I'm a guy, and we have needs. It's totally natural."

"Wow," she repeated with a slight laugh.
"Look, Anna didn't say," Sam continued, steering them back on topic. "She just kept repeating that this real father of hers was mad. Very mad—like wanted-to-kill-her mad."

"Kind of heavy for a 2-year-old," Dean agreed.

"Well, she saw a kid's shrink, got better, and grew up normal," Sam continued to explain.

"Until now. So, what's she hiding?" Dean asked.

"Why don't you just ask me to my face?" Anna suddenly demanded from behind them.

The Winchesters turned together to see Ann standing in the doorway to the room with her arms crossed, Ruby casually standing just behind her.

"Nice job watching her," Dean told Ruby.

The demon half-heartedly gestured at the irate girl. "I'm watching her."

"No, you're right, Anna," Sam told the girl. "Is there anything you want to tell us?"

"About what?"

"The angels said you were guilty of something. Why would they say that?"

Tears were beginning to gather in the girl's eyes as she angrily told them, "You tell me. Tell me why my life has been leveled… Why my parents are dead. I don't know. I swear. I would give anything to know."

"Okay," Sam quietly agreed. "Then let's find out."

"How?" Anna fearfully whispered.

The brothers looked at each other, each hoping the other had some sort of idea.

Leaning casually against the wall, Tabitha piped up, "How 'bout a psychic? We do happen to know one, guys."

Dean nodded with an appreciative smile. "Give her a call and tell her I'm on my way to pick her up, Tab. That way I can check out my baby and make sure she's okay while I'm out."

Reaching into her hip pocket, Tabitha fished out her new phone as she laughed, "You have, like, serious separation anxiety when it comes to that car, don't you?"

Hours later, Tabitha had gotten bored with sitting in Bobby's house waiting for her older brother to return. Ruby and Sam kept stepping away to talk to each other in hushed voices—something Tabitha was trying very hard not to think about—and Anna was an endless barrage of questions about what it was like hunting, what she'd seen, what she'd done, and the endless questions and worries about the quandary that was currently her life.

Tabitha understood Anna's questions and worries, but she was getting to the point where she didn't know how many more ways she could tell the poor girl that she just didn't know what was going on or what she should do. She just wanted a few minutes of peace.

As she walked through Bobby's salvage yard and its rows of rusty cars and parts, she suddenly realized that in her haste to get outside for some fresh air and quiet, she'd left the hex bag that Ruby
had given her on the coffee table in Bobby's living room. She wasn't sure how much she trusted that
what the demon had made could hide them from both demons and angels like Ruby said, but at least
they hadn't been found yet. Still, though she felt more and more conflicted about it, she did worry
about her friend Castiel, and whether or not he was all right.

Tabitha!

She froze at the sound of Castiel's voice, and then whipped around to look for where it was coming
from.

Tabitha! Can you hear me?

"Yes," she cautiously answered, still looking around for the angel. "I can hear you. But where the
hell are you?"

Tabitha! I cannot seem to reach you, and I cannot hear you. You are hidden from me, but I must
speak with you.

"What the hell?" Tabitha whispered to herself, pausing to lean back against a rusty, 40s GMC pickup
in one of Bobby's many rows. She had finally realized that she was hearing the angel's true voice in
her mind, not out loud. But she couldn't fathom why she could hear the angel's voice in her mind,
and he couldn't seem to hear her or why she was even hidden from him.

Something is hiding you from me. But I must speak with you.

His "voice" had taken on a slight edge of panic as he tried to reach her, and though Tabitha was sure
she should ignore the angel given their desire to kill Anna, instead, Tabitha crossed her arms over her
chest and concentrated, trying to visualize the wavelength the angel's voice had come across in her
mind.

"Cas? Can you hear me?" she cautiously asked.

There was a moment of silence before the angel finally answered.

Yes. I can hear you. Why are you hidden? You seem to almost be concealed behind a wall.

She shrugged her shoulders in response, but wasn't sure if the angel would be able to see or sense
that. "I don't know," she told him. "I could hear you fine just now. I don't know why I'm having to
concentrate so hard to make you hear me."

The angel paused again before answering. I have been trying to reach you for nearly a day now. It's
only with a great deal of concentration that I'm able to find this force or shield that hides you. What
have you done?

"I haven't done anything, Cas," she huffed to him, annoyed that after trying to reach him for days,
the angel was now giving her grief about not responding the second he'd decided to try finally
getting a hold of her. "Look, talking to you this way is starting to give me a headache, so why don't
you tell me why you've been trying to get a hold of me."

After a beat, the angel told her, Do you still have the girl?

"Anna? What business is it of yours? I'm not telling either of you assholes a thing. You want to kill
that poor girl because she can hear angels. And here I am. Talking to you and hearing you just fine,
too. So, what? Am I next? Will I be the next one you and Uriel line up to take out just because of
something I have no control over? Sorry, but I'm not going down without a fight, buddy, and I'm not
letting you kill that girl," she angrily huffed, her hand absently twirling her charm bracelet on her arm in her agitation.

Tabitha could almost swear she heard or felt the angel sigh. *Things are more complicated with Anna than you realize. She isn't as you are. You hear an angel's voice when the angel speaks to you, or as I've noticed, when they speak nearby you. But you don't hear all angels no matter where they are. You are a human that can perceive our true voices and visages. No mortal other than Anna can do what she can.*

"I don't care," Tabitha angrily cut him off. "She still didn't ask for this. It's not fair. You can't kill her just because she can hear angels all the time. It's not her fault. I mean, you kill her now, and who's to say that somewhere down the road you angels won't decide that anyone who can ever hear an angel has to die? Does that mean I go from being protected by angels for whatever reason to being hunted by them just like you're hunting Anna?"

*I haven't told any other that you can hear an angel's true voice,* he almost quietly admitted. *You will not be hunted. But this isn't the reason Anna is being hunted. We must follow our orders.*

"Then why is she being hunted?" Tabitha demanded.

*I cannot tell you.*

"Then why are you even getting a hold of me? What the hell do you want?"

*For you to leave Anna to us. Don't stand in our way when we come for her,* he quietly warned, and Tabitha could almost convince herself that there was an underscore of pleading in his voice.

She sighed as she pushed away from the rusty pickup, her eyes still closed in concentration as she resolutely told the angel, "I'm sorry, Cas. I still consider you a friend, even if you've decided otherwise after what happened. But you can't just ignore my calls and then pop into my mind and expect me to just jump when you say. I don't work that way, Cas. If you're coming after Anna, so be it, but I'll be standing beside my brothers in your way."

A hand suddenly gripped her shoulder, shaking her and saying, "Tabitha? What the hell is going on?"

*What do you mean—* Castiel's voice started to ask, but the question faded away as Tabitha's eyes popped open, Dean filling her vision as he shook her by the shoulder, his expression dark.

Tabitha bit off a hiss as he shook her still sore right shoulder, and his expression softened and became questioning as he pulled his hand away from the shoulder she shied away with.

"Shoulder's still sore from where I landed when Uriel tried to give me wings," she said through clenched teeth. Truth was that it was more than sore; it was black and blue, and hurt like holy hell. But Dean's own body bore the marks of Uriel's brunt as well, so there was no point in whining about a bit of pain to him.

"Alright then, but who the hell were you just talking to?" he demanded, his face darkening to match his low growl as he tried to tower over her.

He only had at most an inch on her in height, but Dean had always known how to use every speck of that inch when he wanted to bully or threaten her into behaving and towing the line he tried to lay out for her. And while she didn't cringe away from it like she used to, there was still a part of her that would always be the little girl wanting to please her big brother.
"What's going on, Tabitha?" he demanded again.

She wasn't truly intimidated by him, but still, she couldn't resist the juvenile attempt, "Well…just how much did you hear?"

He stepped closer, lowering his face closer to hers, saying in his best big-brother reproachful manner, "Tabitha."

"All right," she sighed, knowing she couldn't outright lie to her brother. If there was one thing Dean wouldn't tolerate from her—and she wouldn't much tolerate either—it was bald-face lying. They were both world-class avoiders and first-class at omitting things, but not liars.

"You could hardly blame me for trying," she huffed under her breath as she stepped slightly away from Dean, turning to face the rusty pickup and kicking her toe at the old metal rims, the rubber so badly deteriorated and weather-stripped that the tire hardly existed between the rusty metal rims and the dirt of Bobby's lot.

"An explanation better be coming real fast, Tabitha. What the hell were you doing? And why the hell did I find this sitting inside Bobby's house?" he told her in an angry rush, holding up her forgotten hex bag and roughly tossing it at her.

She caught it one handed, turning around to lean her back once more against the pickup as she stared at the little leather bundle Ruby had made.

"I was talking to Castiel," she finally whispered, her eyes not lifting to meet her brother's.

"Excuse me?" he incredulously huffed. "You left your hex bag in the house to come out here and talk to the angel that's trying to kill the girl we're protecting." As he spoke, Tabitha could hear him pacing back and forth, but suddenly his movement stopped in front of her as he stepped closer and said, "Wait a minute. How the hell are you even talking to that dickwad? I mean, we know angels come in dreams to talk to a person. But I sure as hell didn't see him out here. Looked like you were talking to the air, and I sure as hell didn't hear him. How were you talking to him, Tabitha?"

"Wanna say hell a few more times? Maybe it'll make you feel better?" she snippily suggested.

"HELL!" he drew out in a long, angry exclamation to get his point across. "Now answer the goddamn questions, Tabitha!"

She finally looked up from the hex bag in her hand to answer. "I forgot the hex bag in the house. I didn't mean to. I just came out to take a walk when I heard Castiel talking to me—I didn't go looking to talk to him," she hastily pointed out, shaking her hex bag at Dean to make her point. "But I heard him talking to me…so I talked back. Seemed rude not to, and it wasn't like he was here to grab the girl."

Dean bitterly slapped the hood of the pickup she was leaning against. "Did it ever occur to you that he was just trying to figure out where we were, Tabitha?! I mean, think! He could have just been fishing for information. And you still haven't answered how it was you were talking to him, or how he was talking to you."

"We came to Bobby's, Dean. You think that wouldn't be one of the first places they'd think to look? I wasn't giving anything away there," she defended, and then sighed when he still looked at her pointedly. "As for the other…I don't know quite what to tell you. I'm not sure quite how it works…but I can hear him…” she trailed off, not knowing what else to say.

Realization dawned slowly on her brother as he leaned closer beside her and grabbed her right arm—
not paying attention to or not noticing her flinch of pain—and lowly whispering, "You mean you can 
*hear* him, hear him? Like, Anna can do?"

She quickly shook her head. "No, not quite. I don't hear 'em all the time. I can just hear their real 
voice when they're talking and I'm nearby to overhear it. And apparently, when they talk directly to 
me and want me to hear it. Castiel says me being a human who can perceive an angel's true voice 
isn't the same as whatever Anna can do."

Dean looked away for a moment and then his eyes darted back to hers. "That's what happened way 
back that night in Pontiac when he tried to talk to me at that motel and shattered every glass in the 
place, isn't it? You heard him way back then—I remember you asking why I didn't answer him and 
me an' Bobby being confused as heck if you thought that was something trying to talk to me. But 
you knew it was. You heard him back then," he accused.

Jerking a single nod, she simply said, "Yeah."

"Why the hell you been lying to me, Tabitha?" he asked, stepping backwards as a look of hurt 
flushed across his face.

"I wasn't lying," she quickly pointed out. "I just wasn't ready to talk about something I don't 
understand."

"You sure as hell seem to understand it now. You're out here just chatting it up with that dickhead," 
he snidely bit out.

"Yeah, but I still don't understand it, or understand how it even happens or what I'm doing."

"No. But you're plenty happy to just keep hiding things from me, just like Sam. And I've got news 
for you, Tabitha. Keeping something this big from me by omitting it is just as bad as lying about it 
outright!"

Tabitha angrily pushed away from the pickup and stalked closer to her brother as she told him, "And 
what was I supposed to say, Dean? Was I supposed to just shout out, 'Hey! I'm a freak and not a 
normal human! Come check me out!' You don't exactly look too favorably on anything that ain't 
100% normal human. You should see the way you look at Sam sometimes. Excuse me if I didn't 
want you looking at me that way, too!"

Dean's voice lowered in a deadly whisper as he leaned closer and told her, "I'm just trying to keep 
the two of you alive. You think that's easy when he's pulling freaky mind shit, getting threatened by 
angels, and you're tuning into angel radio and making long distance calls to them?" He pointed a 
finger at her as he continued, "And just how long do you think it's gonna be until those dickwads are 
after both you and Anna now that they all know what you can do, too?"

"They don't," she managed to choke out. "All know that is. Cas is the only one who knows I can 
hear their true voices. And he said he—they—won't hunt me for it. They want Anna for some other 
reason. He wouldn't say what."

Dean stepped back and started pacing again. "You got any other huge revelations you need to be 
telling me? Or any other earth-shattering news I don't know about?"

She shrugged and answered, "That's mostly it. Oh, and I slept with one of my professors in college 
on time. He was only five years older than me. But I'm guessing you didn't know about that."

"Dammit, Tabitha, this isn't the time for jokes! Who's to say that this asshole Castiel won't tell his 
buddies that you can hear them and they won't come after you, too. I mean, how long has he even
known? How can you trust him?” he asked as he roughly ran his hand through his hair.

She shrugged again. "He's known since before we first met him with Bobby. And I'm guessing if he was gonna tell his buddies, he would have already." She knew she should probably tell her brother about all the times she had met with Castiel that he didn't know about. All the times they had sat and talked, and even merely sat in silence. But she couldn't bring herself to tell him. She didn't want to lose the specialness of the friendship she had shared with Castiel. There was something almost sacred and untainted about having a friendship that was all her own. Something that she could have to herself and not have to share with her brothers. Everything else in her life was now shared with them. Just as it had been before she and Sam had decided to splinter off and go to college. She wouldn't give up being back with them both again, but she still wanted just one thing that was all her own. Something she didn't share with them.

"Why'd the angel want to talk to you just now anyway?" Dean finally asked.

Tabitha cleared her thoughts away as she tried to remember her conversation with the angel. "He said they still have to kill Anna. He won't say why exactly, but he asked us to stay out of their way. He doesn't want us getting hurt in the crossfire."

"We can't just hand that girl over to them and allow them to kill her," he told her.

"I know," she agreed. "And that's what I told him."

"But that means they're still coming for her."

"Did you doubt they were?"

She stepped closer to place a calming hand on her brother's folded arms, but he jerked away and stepped past her, saying, "Come on. Everyone's gonna be waiting for us at the house."

Silently, she lowered her hand and followed her brother back through the salvage yard to the house, wondering how she had lost all the ground she had labored so hard to regain with her older brother.

As they went, he finally told her in clipped tones, "Keep that hex bag on you from now on. At least until we figure out what to do next, we don't need those angels knowing exactly where we are or what we're doing to get ready for them."

She glanced down at the hex bag that had been forgotten in her hand until now. And suddenly realized that she hadn't had it with her when Castiel had first talked to her, and yet, he'd told her that he couldn't find her and that there was some kind of shield around her.

But if it wasn't the hex bag hiding her, what was it?

Pamela was laughing at something and unashamedly anchoring her hand on Sam's ass when Dean and Tabitha walked down the stairs into the basement. Ruby and Anna stood nearby, both seeming torn between being incredulous and laughing at her antics.

And all the angst and turmoil churning in Tabitha's stomach eased slightly at her friend's easy and laughing demeanor as the psychic stepped towards her with a smile and wrapped her in a tight hug.

"Tabitha!" she laughed. "It's so good to see you again."

As she held her close, Pamela whispered softly against her ear, "What damn kind of mess are you getting into with that angel, girl? You need to get some distance and not be messing with that kind of
danger. I should know."

Tabitha jerked back in surprise as she stared at the sunglass-covered eyes of her friend. "I don't know what you're talking about," she whispered in return. "There's nothing going on."

Pamela smiled sardonically. "Sure there isn't, honey. Then why the kiss?" she asked with a challenging eyebrow and a bit louder voice.

"Kiss? What kiss? What are you talking about?" Sam asked with a nervous laugh, seeming relieved not to have Pamela's attention focused on his derrière.

Tabitha flushed and answered the psychic, "I was drunk, Pam. Didn't mean a thing. I'd of kissed you, too, if you'd been there."

She laughed loudly in return. "Mmmm ummm," she hummed with a wicked little grin. "And just a few years ago, I'd have enjoyed kissing a cute thing like you."

The brothers gaped at them for a moment, seeming to find the same appeal to the mental image most men seemed to share, before they simultaneously made scrunched up faces.

"Eww," Dean said. "You're my little sister. Thanks for that, Tab, you've just ruined a man's favorite fantasy."

She laughed, ecstatic to see some of Dean's good-humor finally returned. "Yeah, well, you know how I feel every time you want me to buy you another 'Asian Busty Beauties' magazine when I go into a c-store for supplies. I just don't need that image, either."

Dean forced a nervous little laugh as he looked at Pamela. "I ah, get it for the articles."

"Sure you do," Pamela laughed as she stepped over to Anna. "And I almost feel sorry for you, honey. Stuck with this crew for days. Let's see if we can't figure out what's going on."

Anna smiled easily at the psychic, taking the same quick liking to her that everyone seemed to as the pair walked further into the basement with their arms wrapped behind the other woman's back.

"You may not have eyes to stare with anymore, but I can still feel you staring just the same," Tabitha irritably snapped at the psychic.

She'd volunteered to give Pamela a ride home after the psychic had helped Anna remember that she was in fact a fallen angel. Not that Tabitha could blame her friend for not wanting to hang around an angel after what had happened to her, but for the past hour, the psychic had been sitting sideways in the passenger seat of the Impala staring across the way as Tabitha drove.

"Why?" Pamela easily inquired. "You feel like you got something to hide?"

"No!" Tabitha vehemently denied. "I haven't done anything. Nothing's going on."

"You seem pretty worked up over nothing," Pamela pointed out.

"Yeah, because you and Dean are acting like I'm doing something wrong. It wasn't my choice to be able to hear angels. It just happened."

"True," Pamela agreed. "But it was your choice to try and hide it from your brother. I didn't catch what you could do the day we met either, but I was a bit distracted with everything that happened," she explained with a wry smile, tapping a finger to her dark glasses. "But I sure saw it when Dean
pulled up to Bobby's today. You've got to be careful, Tab," she repeated in warning. "Getting messed up with angels is just asking for trouble. You don't want to get tangled with anything that powerful, honey."

Tabitha huffed as she irritably tapped her thumb against the steering wheel. "You keep talking like I'm getting involved in whatever the angels are doing, but I'm just friends with Castiel. Nothing more. And I have nothing to do with any other angel. There's no entanglement. We just sit and talk. And I enjoy it."

"It's two angels now," Pamela reminded her. "You've gotten yourself into the path of two angels now. I don't care if one of them is fallen. She's still an angel, and it's all the more reason to get out of that path. Angels aren't like us—you should stay away from them."

Tabitha threw a jaded look over at her friend. "In case you haven't noticed, neither of us is exactly normal, either. You're the only real psychic I know, and I sure as heck don't know anyone else that can hear an angel's voice. Do you?"

Her friend gave a slight sigh. "At least we're human, Tab. At least we're human."

"Are we?" Tabitha immediately questioned. "We're not normal humans. Sam either. And I swear, the way Dean looks at anything not 100% human—the way anyone else would look at us if they knew what we were..." she trailed off looking for the right words. "We're not normal humans, Pam," she finally settled on. "And I don't feel like I'm strange or something less than human when Castiel drops by to hang out. I know it's strange, but when he comes by...it's the most human I feel anymore. Sometimes I don't feel much different from the things we hunt. How many humans have I killed that were possessed by demons, or had been turned by a vampire, or any other number of reasons. How can I be any better than the things we hunt when I've killed as many innocent people as most of those monsters have?"

"It's part of the job," Pamela softly reminded. "You've always known that. And it doesn't get any easier. Or at least, if it does, that's when you know it's time to stop hunting. Look, all I'm saying is to be careful, Tabitha. I don't want to see you get tangled into some kind of mess you'll never be able to get out of."

Pamela fell silent as they continued to drive along the dark highway.

But Tabitha wondered to herself how a person could even know if they had gone too far down a certain path. Would there be warnings along the way telling her she'd gone too far—to turn back or else?

Or would she only know she'd gone too far when she'd come to the end of that path and suddenly had no way out?

Tabitha had a lot of time to think as she drove. She tried to consider her friend's warning—as well as her brother's—but she couldn't force herself to come to any real decision.

Finally, she pulled the Impala over on the side of the highway, realizing she hadn't even been paying attention to where she was as she tried to make some sense of her jumbled thoughts and feelings. She looked up and down the highway as she pulled over to the shoulder, but couldn't see any familiar landmarks in the dark night. Just fallow fields lining either side of the empty highway. And she knew that she had to set at least a few things straight in her mind before she drove any further in the state she was in. Arguing with herself was getting her nowhere.
"I hope I'm not being a complete idiot," she mumbled to herself as she put the car in park and stepped out into the frigid night.

She walked around to the front of the Impala, sliding to sit on the warm hood while rubbing arms only covered by the thin sleeves of her shirt. There was no snow down on ground yet, but the winter air of this part of what she was pretty sure was still Nebraska, still reminded her that it was winter here. And she knew that in the next month or two, this area would see the copious amounts of snow it normally saw in the winter.

But for now, the snap of the frigid air was helping to focus Tabitha's racing thoughts. She reached into the hip pocket of her frayed jeans and took out Ruby's hex bag, contemplating it in her hands as she turned the little leather bundle over. Such a simple little object to be able to keep powerful creatures like angels and demons both at bay.

Reaching her hand away from her body, Tabitha opened her hand and let the hex bag fall to the ground, wondering to herself if she was far enough away from the thing, if it had some sort of range, or if it had to be in contact with her to work.

"Castiel?" she tentatively called out to the darkness.

But after waiting several minutes, there was no answer.

Tabitha even tried concentrating as she had done before to talk to the angel, but no connection was made.

Finally, she closed her eyes and concentrated on the angel she wanted to speak to, thinking of his voice—his real voice—and imagining the brief glimpse she'd seen when Pamela had first tried to find out what he was, this time more forcefully calling out, "Castiel!"

Yes?

With a small relieved sigh, Tabitha told the angel, "I want to talk to you. Alone."

After a small pause, the angel responded, We are talking.

She huffed in return. "I mean in person. Not…whatever this is. It gives me a headache to talk to you this way for very long."

I've told you. I cannot find you. You'll have to tell me where you are.

"Just you," she reminded him as she gave him the highway number and nearest mile-marker that she could see.

The angel suddenly appeared fifteen feet away from her, slowly walking to stand in front of where she sat on the hood.

"You wished to speak," he stated as he adopted a rigid stance, his hands clasped behind his lower back.

"Thank you for coming alone," she told him.

But the angel merely nodded in return.

Now that Castiel was here, Tabitha was unsure where to start, so with a deep breath, she just launched in. "You know we won't just stand back and let you kill Anna, don't you?"
"You don't understand what is going on," Castiel stiffly told her, staring straight ahead and over her shoulder as he spoke. "We must follow our orders."

"Just like that?" Tabitha snorted, "You don't even fully agree with them, I know you well enough to see that, but you're still just going to do it. Not even hesitate or question it."

"I am an angel of The Lord," he repeated.

"Yeah, I caught that the first several times you said it."

His eyes finally turned to stare into hers. "I'm a soldier. I follow the orders I'm given. It isn't mine to question them. Angels do not question their orders."

Tabitha slid from the warm hood, suddenly feeling overheated as she stood and stepped closer to Castiel. "Then I don't know who the bigger fool is. You angels for blindly following orders, or God for expecting his little toy soldiers to behave that way."

His eyes darkened slightly at her words. "It is not the place of angels to feel or to question. We are made to obey. To obey our Father. You cannot understand."

She huffed angrily as she irritably shifted from foot to foot, crossing her arms over her chest. "You're right and you're wrong, Cas. I know exactly what it's like to have a father that demanded complete and unquestioning obedience. Only difference is, I never fell in line like the little drone he tried to raise and train the three of us to be. But I know exactly what it's like to have a father like that. And I know what it's like to have a brother who did absolutely, and for years, follow our father's word—unflinchingly. But I could never understand how it is my brother—or you for that matter—could just blindly follow their father's command when your gut is telling you it's wrong. How can you kill that girl just because you were ordered to? How can that be God's orders? Where's God's love, justice, or righteousness in that?"

"Anna is not what you think."

Tabitha's head fell back in exasperation before she faced the angel again and told him, "Yeah, you keep saying that, but what did she do that's so horrible that angels have to kill her?"

"I can't tell you," he quietly answered her, his eyes darting away again.

"But you expect that you can just come in and tell me that I need to stay out of your way, and not tell me why or what's really going on."

He looked up at her again. "Take it on faith. Trust that I am doing what must be done."

Tabitha took a step closer to the angel, reaching her hand out towards him, but hesitating to actually touch him as she responded. "Trust is a two way street, Cas. It's give and take. Not just take. Why can't you trust that I'm saying I don't think she needs to die. Trust me enough to talk to me. Tell me what's really going on. Do you trust me, Cas?"

The angel stared at her, for once, not even any emotion in his eyes betraying himself to her.

Finally, he whispered, "Anna is a fallen angel. She is sentenced to death for her rebellion."

It was nothing Tabitha didn't already know, but she gave a small sigh of relief that Castiel had truly trusted her enough to finally tell her.

"You don't seem surprised to know that she was an angel," he observed. She minutely shook her
head in answer. "Anna told you," he continued.

"Yeah."

"Then surely you can see why I must follow my orders? She left her post—abandoned it. And now, we can't risk allowing demons to capture her. The knowledge they could gain from her would be devastating to both angels and humans. Please understand why you must stay out of our way and let us have her."

Tabitha lifted one shoulder slightly as she wrapped her arms around herself again. "So that's it? You have to kill her as a strategic move to keep the demons from getting her and using her?"

Castiel stared for another moment before carefully continuing, "She disobeyed. For an angel, there is no greater sin. She knew what the consequences would be. But she made her choice."

"To be human," Tabitha pointed out. "She just wanted to be human. Why can't you guys just give her that? She's been human this long, maybe God truly wants to let her be human."

The angel took a half-step closer, his hands dropping from behind his back to fall to his sides as he sadly shook his head and told her, "She'll never be human, Tabitha. Not really. She'll always be an angel, though fallen."

Tabitha sighed as she lowered herself back onto the hood of the car in a haggard heap, drawing her feet up onto the bumper and folding her arms over her knees.

"There's nothing I can say to change your mind or make you see this differently, is there?"

"And there's nothing I can say to make you see what I must do, or to get you to stay safely out of our path, is there?" the angel sadly answered.

Tabitha shook her head anyway.

Castiel took a step back as he held her eyes, a strange look of loss flashing in his eyes as he told her, "I'm sorry things had to end this way, but I am an angel and I must follow my orders."

Reaching out, Tabitha grabbed his hand to stop his departure, tightly gripping his hand in hers as she whispered to him, "I've missed you, Cas."

The angel disappeared, her hand falling through the empty air as she sighed sadly to herself.

*And I'll miss you*, floated back through the dark night.

Chapter End Notes

All right, I told you there would be more Castiel in this one, and there will be even more in the next!

Be sure to leave your thoughts!
Tabitha parked the Impala and crossed Bobby's salvage lot to where she could see her brother and Anna sitting huddled closely together.

"Figure out anything while I was gone?" she called out as she got closer.

Dean sprang to his feet, a guilty look on his face before he wiped it away. "Naw, not really. My baby okay?"

His sister tossed him his keys with a raised eyebrow.

But he immediately avoided her gaze, glancing back at the house and telling her, "I think I'll go inside and see how Sammy's coming along on figuring anything out."

With a curious look at the angel Tabitha had now been left with, she chuckled and told Anna, "He can be so smooth sometimes, and then be such a bumbling kid at other times—like he got his hand caught in the cookie jar. I swear, I wonder what women see in him."

Tabitha slid up onto the hood of the old car beside Anna, taking the spot her brother had previously occupied.

"I think there's a certain amount of charm in seeing that smoothness deteriorate into the bumbling when he's afraid of you seeing something he doesn't want you to see," Anna admitted with a small grin.

"There must be," Tabitha agreed with a sarcastic look.

"He's a good man, your brother is. I still can't quite believe he actually wants to help me. And while part of me is grateful that you are all trying to help me, part of me just keeps reminding me that it's futile and that you should all run for the hills."

Tabitha pulled her legs up on the hood to sit cross-legged as she gave a self-deprecating laugh. "Yeah, well, nobody ever accused a Winchester of having great self-preservation skills."

"Maybe," Anna smiled, "but there's definite loyalty and honor there."

Shaking her head in return, Tabitha thought about her conversation with another angel as she stared down at the gravel lot, absently remarking, "Doesn't seem that loyalty is real high on an angel's list of traits though, no offense."

Anna shook her head in return. "None taken. It's one of the reasons I fell." She looked sideways across at the other woman. "You probably think it was crazy that I wanted to fall and become human."

Still looking down at the ground, Tabitha shrugged as she admitted, "No, I think I get it actually. To have the freedom that we do. To be able to make your own choices and feel the emotions you were always trying to lock away."

Tabitha finally looked up and turned towards Anna. "But why can't angels? Why can't angels think for themselves or make their own choices and mistakes?"

"We're taught that emotions are forbidden. They lead to question, and then doubt. And that's one of the worst things an angel can do—doubt," Anna carefully explained. "We were made to be soldiers; we weren't made to have the same freedoms as humans. It's why many angels so resent humans, though resentment in itself is blasphemous."

"Explains Uriel's attitude though," Tabitha agreed. "You really were their commander?" Tabitha asked, remembering when Anna had explained her former connection to the two angels sent to kill her.

"Yes. And that's why it's their job to hunt me down now. In some ways, I can't blame them, they're just following orders, but in other ways, I wish they weren't so blind. I wish they would open their eyes and at least think to question why angels can't have the same freedoms humans do. Sometimes, I'm not even sure that the orders that come down to the garrisons are even truly from our Father," Anna admitted with a sigh.

"Do you think Castiel could ever understand why you did what you did or understand that his orders might need questioning?" Anna turned to look at her curiously. "It's just that I—we—know Castiel better and have been around him more. We've only been around Uriel a couple of times and he makes it very clear that he has no love for humans."

"Castiel was always a faithful soldier," Anna explained. "I'm not surprised he was chosen to lead the garrison after I fell. Castiel always followed orders so very well. Never hesitated to follow them, and never deviated from them. I'm sure he's still a good little servant to Heaven's orders."

Tabitha shrugged, but wasn't so sure herself. He might still follow orders, but she knew he questioned them. And she knew he wasn't as good a little servant as Anna thought. He was after all keeping the truth about her a secret from Heaven and the other angels. Was that just omitting unimportant facts, or was he disobeying the wishes of Heaven to help keep her a secret?

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Tabitha walked back into the huge structure that had once been a large barn, but was now just an abandoned building, its rotten wood boards starting to crumble throughout the structure. But it had been the first place they had come across in Kentucky where they could hold up and regroup after failing to find Anna's Grace like they'd been counting on.

She had gone back out to the Impala to gather more lore books to search through, and Dean had decided to stay outside at the car to look through the books he had.

As she entered the barn, she could hear Ruby telling Sam that they couldn't fight both Heaven and Hell. Not both. Not at once. And Tabitha knew she was right, but like her brothers, she couldn't just kick Anna to the curb now. They'd promised to help her. They just needed some sort of plan.

"Where's Dean?" Sam asked when he saw her walk back into the barn.

"Wanted to stay outside to look through a few books," she explained.

He nodded and looked back down at the tome laid out before him.

"Where's Anna?" she asked him.

"Went outside for a walk," he replied, not looking up.
"Huh," she breathed, glancing over her shoulder at the large barn door she'd just come through. She wasn't blind, she'd seen the looks pass between the former angel and her brother. She shook her head as she glanced back down at her younger brother. Wondering to herself at the choices of the Winchesters.

Her older brother was drawn to an angel, while her younger brother had been drawn to a demon. And her? Like always, Tabitha fell somewhere in the middle. She'd certainly slept with a demon—even if unknowingly—and now found her heart aching as she missed her angel friend.

She wanted to decry her brothers' choices, but knew she had no platform to judge from.

"We can't fight both Heaven and Hell," Sam suddenly said, "but the two have always fought each other."

Tabitha stepped closer and set her books down next to Sam as she peered down at him. "What are you saying, Sam?"

He looked up as he continued with a little more enthusiasm. "They've always fought each other, so let's let them duke it out."

She stared at him for a moment, feeling the demon step closer as the two women silently considered Sam's idea.

"You don't think it'll work," Sam told his sister, his face falling a bit.

She held her hand out to stop him. "No. I think it might. You're right actually, it's a great idea. Let them both come after Anna, they'll think one of them will be able to get her, that she's stuck in the crossfire, but when you're stuck in the crossfire, all you have to do is step back and let each side take out the other," she responded, remembering Castiel's words about not wanting her in the crossfire. "It's a brilliant idea, Sam. We just need to figure out how to discreetly offer Anna up to both sides so they don't see the trap."

For a moment, Tabitha worried about leading Castiel into a trap like that, but she shook it from her mind. She'd seen him take out demons with no more than a touch of his hand. He could certainly take care of himself.

"This could be dangerous," Ruby agreed. "But I think I can convince Alistair that I'm offering Anna up to him to save my ass."

Tabitha looked doubtfully at the demon, wondering to herself if she really would offer the girl up to save herself.

"See," Ruby snapped at her. "You can already believe I'd do it. Shouldn't be too hard to convince Alistair."

"Alistair?" she asked.

"He's the demon that kicked your brothers' asses when he came for the girl."

"But this plan would mean using Anna as bait," Sam pointed out, quickly changing the subject. "Is that really a good idea? She's basically human. She can't really protect herself right now."

"She's the one who did that blood spell, Sam," Tabitha pointed out. "And whether we want to believe it or not, she's not the innocent human we first thought she was. Now, I'm not saying feed her to the wolves, but we're running out of options here. Desperate times and all that."
"But how do we convince the angels that we want to give up Anna?" her brother replied. "They said we have 'til midnight to hand her over or they throw Dean back down into Hell. Maybe we should get him to offer her up."

Tabitha bristled at the reminder of the angels' threats, pissed that they would threaten her brother with something like that.

Sam started to stand up. "Maybe we should go get Dean and have him make the offer to the angels somehow."

But Tabitha placed a hand on her brother's shoulder, pressing him down into his chair as she replied, "Let's just go through these books first and make sure we're not missing anything. I think Dean needed a little time to himself, so let's give him some space."

She didn't add that she thought he was actually taking some time with a fallen angel and not really alone. Maybe it wasn't the best thing or the smartest choice, but if the fallen angel could bring her brother a little peace, she wasn't going to stand in the way of it.

Tabitha looked around to find herself standing alone in the forest where Anna's Grace had fallen.

"What am I doing out here?" Tabitha asked herself.

"I wished to speak with you again," Castiel said from behind her.

Spinning to face the sound, Tabitha found the angel walking towards her through the tall blades of dried brown grass, the silver glow of the moonlight illuminating his usual trench coat in an almost ethereal glow.

"This is a dream," she guessed.

"Yes," he answered as he stepped past her, standing beside the giant oak tree that had grown where Anna's Grace had been, and gently placing his palm against the rough bark. Still touching the tree, he turned his head to regard her. "But it was difficult to reach you even in dreams. What have you done to hide yourself so thoroughly?" he questioned again, his hand falling away from the tree, dropping to his side as he stepped closer, his head canting to the side slightly as he continued to silently regard her. "It can't be the hex bag you had. That would do nothing to keep an angel from finding you in dreams."

Tabitha crossed her arms over her chest as she truthfully answered, "I don't know, Cas."

His eyes were drawn down to her chest, and for a moment, Tabitha was surprised at where his stare landed, but then, he reached out and drew one of her hands towards himself, staring at the bracelet on her wrist, present even in her dream.

"Where did you get this?" he whispered.

"It was my mother's," she replied, sudden realization dawning on her. "I haven't worn it in years, but that's it, isn't it? I've always wondered what all the strange symbols were, and there's something on there hiding me from you and other angels."

He held her hand out and gestured to one of the symbols dangling in the air from her wrist, not quite touching it as he said, "This is Enochian. It hides and protects you from angels. It's a very powerful sigil of protection. No angel can penetrate its power to harm you or reach you."
Tabitha's eyes scrunched together. "But you found me. You found me here in my dreams, and you were able to speak to me before. It was difficult, but you did. And what's Enochian?"

"More than difficult," he agreed. "But I understand now why it took such effort on my part to reach you. And even then, you reached out partway to me each time; otherwise I never could have overcome this sigil to reach you. And the only reason I could even reach you partway is because I have can recognize your soul well enough to find the pathway to the wall you are hidden behind. But no other angel would be able to." He looked up and met her eyes, relief awash in them. "Enochian is the language of Heaven—of angels. It's good that you have this protection."

"I don't understand," Tabitha shook her head. "You know my soul? What does that even mean? And does it mean an angel made this?"

Castiel traced a finger across the back of Tabitha's hand as he stared at the path he traced, reminding her that he still held her hand in his. "I can't say who made it. Perhaps an angel, perhaps not. But in the time I have come to spend with you, I know the feel of your soul—it's the force, the energy within you. No soul is like another."

"You know me, know my soul so well, but you've still been avoiding me. Refusing to answer when I called out for you so that I could try to explain what happened and make you understand that it was just a drunken accident."

His eyes jerked up to hers as his brows drew together. "I didn't hear you call for me and not answer. I would guess this sigil kept me from hearing you. I didn't know you had called for me."

"But you've still been avoiding me."

"I thought it for the best," he replied, letting go of his grip on her hand and stepping backwards. Tabitha's hand hung almost mournfully in the air for a moment, and then fell back to her side. "I didn't want there to be any misunderstanding of my intention of friendship."

Tabitha huffed. "Just like any man, you know that? Stop taking yourself so seriously. I was drunk. It didn't mean anything. Other than me offending a friend. But you can't hold the actions of a drunk against them. You can't let it ruin a good friendship."

Castiel continued to stare at the ground, his face drawn and confused. "It meant nothing?" he softly asked, something strange in his voice.

"No," she vehemently replied, trying to reassure the angel. "Other than me scaring off a friend, like I said. And I've missed you, Cas. I really have. But it was just a mistake, and we don't have to let it ruin our friendship. I've missed you," she repeated.

There was a look in his eyes as he glanced back up, sadness, and something else she couldn't place.

"But now we come down on different sides of this latest issue," he softly reminded her, diverting her attention from trying to place his look.

She shrugged in return and argued, "So what? Friends disagree on things. They don't always have to be on the same side. I know this is a little different than the disagreements most friends have. They don't always disagree on whether or not someone should be killed, but we're not normal. You're an angel, and I'm...I don't know what the hell I am. But I'm not normal, Cas. So we can disagree, but we can still be friends. Can't we?"

"Uriel has spoken to Dean," he told her, surprising her with the sudden change in topic.
"And?"

"He tells me that Dean has agreed to give us Anna," the angel quietly informed her, seeming to brace himself.

"Uriel threatened Dean, didn't he?" Tabitha demanded. "I don't mean threatened him personally, but he threatened to hurt Sam and I, didn't he? That's the only reason Dean would actually agree to turn Anna over like that."

"Yes."

Tabitha gave a disgusted snort, walking away and turning herself partially away from Castiel. "And you're okay with that? You're okay with your buddy threatening my brother with harming me and Sam? That's okay if it delivers the results you want in the end."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Castiel step closer, his hands fidgeting almost nervously at his side as he told her, "I don't have the luxury of disobeying direct orders. I have to deliver the results Heaven wants. One way or another."

"And would you do it?" she demanded, twirling to face him again. "If it came down to it, would you hurt or kill me and Sam to get what you need to follow your orders?"

He glanced away, hesitant again to meet her eyes. "I don't know," he admitted in a solemn whisper. "And that frightens me more than you know. But I have prayed to my Father that such a time never comes," he continued, raising his head to show her the pain in his eyes.

"I pray it never comes to that, too."

"Then will you stand in the way? Or when we come for Anna, will you stay out of our path?" he pleaded with her, the pain still unmasked in his eyes.

She looked away and refused to meet Castiel's eyes as she told him, "Just as there is nothing Dean wouldn't do to protect Sam and me, there's nothing I won't do to protect him and Sam and keep you from throwing Dean back into Hell."

Castiel seemed to accept the non-answer, stepping closer as he reached out to lightly grip her hand, softly saying, "Thank you."

Tabitha finally turned back towards him, gripping his hand in a crushing hold and telling him, "Even if you don't understand, I'm trying to do what I think is right. But I'll always do what I must to protect those I love."

"I know," Castiel responded.

Tabitha's eyes jerked open with a start. She looked around and saw that she was back in the old barn she'd fallen asleep in, her head resting on one of the open books she'd been going through. Sam was next to her, sleeping in a similar manner against the old table they'd laid their work out at.

Dean walked into the barn with Anna following behind him just as Tabitha sat up. He glanced at her and Sam next to her, still sleeping away, and then his eyes darted quickly back towards Anna before guiltily looking away from any of them.

Tabitha caught her brother's covert look at the fallen angel, his apparent guiltiness, as well as the way they both were still tugging at their clothes, but chose to ignore it, waiting instead for him to speak first as she leaned back in her uncomfortable wooden chair. She stretched where she sat, her body
feeling stiff and sore from falling asleep in the strange position.

"I did my part," he said in low tones, trying to keep from waking Sam. "The angels are properly baited." He looked around. "Where's Ruby?"

Looking around as well, Tabitha couldn't find the demon. "I don't know. She was here when I fell asleep, but maybe she took off to handle her part of the plan. She said she knew what she was doing."

"Can we trust her?" Dean asked. "This plan won't work worth shit if the angels are the only ones to show."

Shrugging, Tabitha honestly answered, "Well, I think that demon is devious enough to pull it off. We'll just have to wait and see."

Dean looked at her suspiciously. "You didn't ask if I was sure the angels were coming, or how I knew they were."

Tabitha stood and walked a few steps away, stretching her back and looking out through the gaps in the boards over the windows at the dark night as she whispered in return, "Didn't need to ask you. I talked to Castiel, and he has no doubt that you'll just hand Anna over. Uriel was very convincing it seems in getting your agreement."

In the silence that followed, Tabitha finally turned to face her brother.

His face was dark and his words were tight as he carefully spoke, "Well, I guess it's good to have confirmation that the angels believe us, but you need to stop talking to those dickwads."

Tabitha shrugged, knowing her brother still didn't like her talking to the angels, but knowing she couldn't really stop it just because he didn't like it. She couldn't keep Castiel from talking to her if he wanted to, and truthfully, she didn't want him to stop.

Anna's gaze darted back and forth between the siblings, sensing the more than obvious tension that had developed between the two and had yet to dissipate. "You spoke to Castiel?" At Tabitha's nod she slowly continued, "I would have—I should have heard that you spoke to him, it made sense that Uriel was so careful… Which means Castiel is being very careful in coming to you and speaking with you, too. I wonder if it's so I wouldn't overhear it, or so someone else wouldn't overhear."

With a shrug, Tabitha looked away again. She didn't want to discuss it, even with Anna.

"Do you really think this will work?" Dean softly asked. "I mean, this whole plan hinges on us being able to pull a fast one on not only the angels, but the demons as well. Are we getting in too deep here?"

"You don't have to do any of this," Anna replied, causing Tabitha to spin back around. "You could take the angel's offer and keep your family safe."

With an incredulous look, Tabitha stared at Anna, and then turned towards Dean. He held her eyes in the same silent look. The same silent agreement. They'd come too far and risked too much to turn away now.

Without a word, Tabitha turned back around, hearing Dean walk away as he spoke in low tones to Anna.

"We're not turning back now. One way or another, we're seeing this through."
It was late morning when the three Winchesters nervously paced around the barn, waiting with the fallen angel. Waiting for noon when the angels were to arrive. Waiting for what would break loose after that.

Gusts of wind and power suddenly swept through the barn, blowing the doors open as Castiel and Uriel walked through the doorway side by side.

The Winchesters gathered protectively around Anna as the angels came to a stop a few feet away from them. Sam and Dean were on either side of Tabitha and Anna.

Uriel sneered at them all, but Castiel's expression was almost soft and kind as he gently said, "Hello, Anna. It's good to see you."

"How?" Sam incredulously demanded. "How did you find us?"

Castiel glanced briefly at Dean, drawing Sam's attention towards his brother. Dean responded by guiltily looking away, not meeting his brother's eyes.

"Dean?" Sam questioned as Anna turned to regard Dean as well.

But Tabitha looked straight ahead, staring at Castiel until he glanced almost apologetically up at her, his true voice gently whispering, *I'm sorry for what we have to do.*

Unsure if it would work, Tabitha concentrated and pushed a thought silently back at him. *I am, too.*

Sam turned to their sister, saying in an imploring voice, "Tabitha?"

She held Castiel's gaze as she shook her head and responded to her brother, "We all have to make hard choices sometimes, Sam. Sometimes deciding to make the right choice is an impossibly difficult thing and the consequences can be so high."

Castiel gave the slightest nod to her in return, as if acknowledging the hard choice he knew she had to make. But she knew he didn't really understand it.

Dean finally glanced up at Anna, whispering to her, "I'm sorry."

Tabitha broke her gaze with Castiel, glancing towards Anna beside her as she echoed Dean. "I'm sorry as well, but there's no turning back now."

"Why?" Sam demanded, not knowing what deal Dean had struck the night before while he'd been sleeping.

Anna glanced at the other angels before turning to look across Tabitha at Sam. "Because they gave him a choice. They either kill me…or kill the two of you." Sam looked accusingly at Castiel as the angel dropped his eyes. "I know how their minds work," Anna continued.

Castiel looked up again, glancing between Tabitha and Anna, but no refute was on his lips.

Anna turned to Dean, laying a gentle hand on his arm as she turned and stepped closer, pressing a soft, lingering kiss to his lips as she told him, "You did the best you could. I forgive you." She glanced at Tabitha as well. "And I forgive you. I know you can't stop what's been started."

She faced the other two angels with determination, bravely stepping forward as she told them, "Okay. No more tricks. No more running. I'm ready."
"I'm sorry," Castiel told her.

"No. You're not," Anna argued. "Not really. You don't know the feeling."

Castiel shook his head. "Still, we have a history. It's just—"

"Orders are orders," Anna angrily cut him off. "I know. Just make it quick."

"Don't you touch a hair on that poor girl's head," suddenly rang out behind them, causing them all to turn and face the demons that had just appeared in the barn. Two demons stood behind the one that had spoken, holding a bleeding and shaky Ruby up between them.

Together, Dean and Tabitha stepped forward to grab Anna, pulling her towards the side of the barn, out of the pathway as Uriel stalked towards the demons. The two holding Ruby unceremoniously dropped her, allowing her to crawl to the side of the barn out of the way.

As Uriel got closer to the demons, he snidely told them, "How dare you come in the room...you pussing sore?"

The demon that seemed to be the ring-leader sneered in return, stepping forward as he spoke in a slightly effeminate voice as he casually twirled the knife Sam and Dean had previously lost, giving Tabitha a pretty good idea that this was the same strong-ass demon, Alistair, Ruby had told her about. "Name-calling. That hurt my feelings...you sanctimonious fanatical prick."

"Turn around and walk away now," Castiel ordered.

Alistair smirked. "Sure. Just give us the girl. We'll make sure she gets punished good and proper."

Castiel stared at the demons. "You know who we are and what we will do," he softly threatened as he stepped forward beside Uriel. "I won't say it again. Leave now...or we lay you to waste."

Grinning, Alistair told him, "Think I'll take my chances."

Uriel suddenly lunged at one of the other two minion demons, shoving him backwards into one of the support beams, snapping the thing in two as he wrestled with the demon he held as well as the other when it tried to jump him.

Castiel stepped towards Alistair, punching him several times before pressing his palm to the demon's forehead. Tabitha waited for the demon to disappear in a bright light like the others had when Castiel had done that, but the demon remained unaffected, staring back at the angel as Castiel pulled his hand away in surprise.

"Sorry kiddo," the demon told him. "Why don't you go run to daddy?" he continued as he shoved Castiel's hand away, punching upwards at the angel's jaw and sending him flying backwards to land in a heap on his back.

"Shit," Tabitha gasped, shocked that a demon was able to get the best of an angel. Her Latin translations were rusty, but she knew Alistair was essentially praying to Hell for strength, Tabitha just didn't know if the demon was trying to kill or exorcise the angel—if that was even possible. But
it certainly looked bad. Turning, she grabbed a nearby crowbar and ran back towards the struggling
demon and angel, shaking off Dean's grabbing hand when he tried to stop her and swinging the
heavy iron bar in an upwards arc at the demon's face, knocking his hold on the angel away.

Dean suddenly grabbed her arm, shoving her behind him as he punched the demon rising to his feet.

Alistair merely wagged his finger at him in return. "Dean, Dean, Dean…” he reproachfully spoke. "I
am so disappointed. You had such promise," he continued as he stepped around Dean.

Dean backed up as he pushed Tabitha away from him, trying to distance himself from her as the
demon raised his hand towards them.

Sam and Dean both immediately grabbed at their throats, contorting in pain as they fell to their knees,
choking and moaning as they dropped.

But then, the demon threw a surprised look at Tabitha still on her feet, and raised his other hand
towards her, flicking his fingers at her again as she actually felt the wave of power wash around her,
passing her by as though she were a boulder with gentle waves of a stream rolling past.

"What?” he whispered to himself in surprise.

Tabitha turned her head and yelled at Anna. "Go now, Anna, get it before it's too late!

She didn't wait to see if Anna followed her order or not, but held her ground as Alistair stalked closer
to her, seeing from the corner of her eye that her brothers were still contorting with pain.

Holding the crowbar defensively in the air between them, Tabitha quickly began reciting,
"Exorcizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus, omnis satanica potestas, omnis—"

Her words were cut off as Alistair reached out and backhanded her, knocking her sideways with the
force until she fell to one knee, bracing her fall with one hand before pushing to rise and face the
demon again.

"You think you can use a simple exorcism to be rid of me?” Alistair asked, gesturing to himself.
"Whatever your little tricks or spells to protect yourself are, they won't be enough to actually exorcise
me. Or keep me from beating the life out of you if I must. I don't mind getting my hands a little
dirty.”

She glanced over her shoulder, seeing Anna grab the necklace from around Uriel's neck and
throwing it to the ground.

"I don't need to use tricks or spells to get rid of you," she told him. "Just a few tricks to distract you
and buy time.”

Anna suddenly fell to her knees as light began leeching through her very skin. She twisted and
contorted as she yelled to them, "Shut your eyes! Shut your eyes!

The demon's attention fell away from Tabitha as he glanced up at Anna, now almost wholly awash
in light as she screamed one last time, "Shut your eyes!” screaming in pain as power and light began
to swell around her, filling the barn.

Tabitha fell to her knees as she closed her eyes, feeling the demon rush past her as he tried to grab
Anna.

And suddenly, the light and power were gone, silence filling the air where Anna's screams had been.
Everyone slowly got to their feet, stepping to the middle of the barn where Anna had been. Dean paused to pick up the demon killing knife that Alistair had dropped when he grabbed for Anna, disappearing in the light that had burst from her.

Tabitha glanced cautiously at Castiel as the two rose to their feet only a foot away from each other, each looking the other over before their gazes darted away.

Dean stared hard at Castiel, telling him, "Well, what are you guys waiting for? Go get Anna… unless, of course, you're scared."

"This isn't over," Uriel threatened as he lunged for Dean, stopping when Castiel grabbed his shoulder and calmly pulled him back.

"Oh, it looks over to me, junkless."

Castiel stared back and forth at both Tabitha and Dean, finally holding Tabitha's eyes alone as a questioning look filled his eyes.

"Sometimes we have to make hard choices," she repeated to him. "But at least now Anna's strong enough to face whatever's coming for her. She can face whatever the consequences of her choices were on her own now."

He gave an almost imperceptible nod, and then disappeared, leaving the Winchesters standing in the middle of the barn as Ruby lurched to her feet and joined them.

"You okay?" Sam asked her.

"Not so much," she replied, sounding almost out of breath.

"What took you so long to get here?" Dean complained.

"Sorry I'm late with the demon delivery. I was only being tortured."

Dean gave a slight wince and looked away as Sam looked the demon's injuries over.

"I got to hand it to you, Sammy, bringing them all together all at once—angels and demons. It's a damn good plan," Dean complimented.

Sam glanced at Ruby. "Yeah, well, when you got Godzilla and Mothra on your ass, best to get out of their way and let them fight. But I still wasn't sure it was a good idea. Tab's the one who said who should let them go at it and just step out of the crossfire and let them take each other out."

Dean gave a half-hearted laugh. "Yeah, now you're just bragging."

Tabitha gave a small smile as she looked up at her younger brother. "You gave one hell of a performance, Sammy. You could have been one heck of an actor. You had even me believing you were totally clueless about why the angels had come."

He smiled slightly. "You guys, too. I almost believed that you guys were conspiring to turn her over to the angels."

Silence fell for a moment as they thought about Anna and the fact that she, too, was now an angel.

"So, I guess she's some big-time angel now, huh?" Sam quietly observed. "She must be happy… wherever she is."
Dean looked sad as he replied, "I doubt it."

Sam quietly helped Ruby out of the barn, but Tabitha hung back with Dean as she whispered to him, "You okay?"

"Yeah. Fine," he answered in clipped tones.

"It's okay to miss her," Tabitha gently reminded him, ignoring his brusqueness.

He shrugged. "Won't change anything. She's an angel now, and I'm just a human. That kind of thing could never possibly work out, and I'd be an idiot if I ever thought it could. They're nothing like us."

Tabitha watched silently as her brother walked out of the barn, repeating softly to herself, "Yeah, only an idiot would ever think that could work. But Winchesters were never accused of making the smart choices."

Tabitha strolled along the bank of the lake, her hands trailing through the tall grass as she gazed at the placid water, small beads of sweat gathering and rolling over her skin in the humid air.

Suddenly, the lake erupted in a violent splash, peals of laughter coming from the water as Tabitha turned her head to see Dean lazily stroking his arms against the churning water. He swam easily backwards through the water as he called to Sam and encouraged his younger brother to join him in the water.

Tabitha laughed as she watched Sam grab the rope suspended from a limb, backing up and then running towards the lake as he swung out over the water by the thick rope, waiting until he was at the highest point of the arc before letting go, sailing out through the air over Dean's head before landing in the water with another loud splash.

They swam contentedly for a few minutes before turning to the wooded shoreline and calling to Tabitha, laughing and egging her on, encouraging her to join them in the water.

But she stayed on the shore, watching them swim and push and splash each other as she observed their play. She was dressed in a dark green bikini with a white beach sarong wrapped around her waist. Her attire was perfect to join her brothers in their play, but she remained on the shore instead.

"This is one of my favorite dreams," she said with a happy smile. "One of my favorite memories."

"You seemed happy here," Castiel observed.

Tabitha finally looked over to see the angel standing beside her, still in his trench coat, his arms grasped behind his lower back in what she was starting to think of as his familiar and habitual stance.

"I was," she agreed, glancing back out at her brothers, now darting after each other in the water, each trying to grab and dunk the other under.

"I don't understand why watching your brothers bathe in a lake would be a happy memory," Castiel told her, his face slightly scrunching as he stared at their horseplay.

Choking back a laugh, Tabitha told him, "They're not bathing. They're just swimming. And having fun. This is the last happy and carefree memory I have with my brothers. It was like three months before my father and Sam had their last fight and Sam wanted to leave. This was the last time the three of us were together, just young—maybe naïve—but happy. Really carefree and happy. Dad had just taken off on his own hunt, and sent the three of us to look into this probable vengeful spirit."
And we managed to take care of it in like a day and a half, and as we were driving back from this old
country cemetery where we'd torched the bones, we found this little lake out in the country, and we
decided that we'd earned the rest of the day off. So we just pulled over, changed into our swimming
suits, and relaxed, swam, sunbathed—just played and enjoyed each other like we were normal kids,
normal siblings. We didn't have many moments like that growing up where we were just normal
kids. And I remember every one of them."

For a while, human and angel stood side by side in silence, just observing the scene before them. But
Tabitha could feel the change in the angel beside her, and knew he was about to change the mood of
the scene with whatever he was about to say.

Turning from the happy memory to keep it unsullied, Tabitha walked away, calling over her
shoulder to the angel, "Come on."

The scene around them changed, and she was dressed in her usual attire of jeans, boots, and a t-shirt
as she strolled across the back patio of her home in Virginia, sitting on the end of one of her rarely
used lounge chairs. She gestured to the one beside her as she swiveled to face it, grinning when the
angel uncomfortably sat sideways on the low lounge chair like she had.

"I rarely got to use my patio when I actually owned the place, but there's nothing to say I can't use it
in my dreams, huh?" she grinned.

Castiel only nodded in return.

"Say it," she told the angel. "Just say whatever it is that brought you here to my dreams."

"You purposefully lead us into a trap," Castiel said. There wasn't any accusation in his voice, but she
was pretty sure she heard confusion.

She shrugged as she leaned forward, bracing her elbows on her knees as she wished for a beer, and
then grinning when a bottle of her favorite micro-brew in Virginia appeared in her hand. She took a
slow pull from the bottle, and wished to herself that it was a real beer and not just a dream as she
stared down at the bottle in her hands, still leaning on her elbows.

"I'm not going to apologize for that," she slowly told him. "But I will say it didn't go down quite like
we were expecting." She looked up to meet Castiel's confused gaze. "I—we—never would have
risked that if we'd known you wouldn't be able to take out Alistair like I've seen you do with other
demons."

Clenching her fists around the bottle she held and feeling her chest constrict at the mention of the
demon, she told the angel with a voice that nearly broke, "And I wanted to thank you again. I know
I've thanked you before for saving Dean, but I had no idea what he went through when he was down
there. What they did to him, and what that demon made him do. He finally told us, at least told us the
broad-strokes of what Hell was like. I just wanted to thank you again for saving him."

"I was just following orders," Castiel told her, his gaze downturned and his voice soft.

"Of course. But still."

The angel looked up into her face again. "You could have been killed today. What you did was
foolish and more than dangerous. You could have been killed."

"You, too," she softly pointed out.

He looked away as he admitted in a flat tone, "Yes."
"Don't like that a human saved your life, or me in particular?" she asked as she studiously worked on peeling the paper label off her bottle.

Castiel's gaze jerked back to hers. "What you did—facing Alistair like that...facing a demon that powerful...it could have gotten you killed. It was foolish," he repeated.

Instead of looking up, Tabitha continued to peel away at the label with her thumbnail. "Maybe it was. But we brought those demons there. It was partly my responsibility."

The angel blew a loud breath through his nose. "It's my responsibility to protect you," he reminded her. "But you make it difficult when you trick and mislead me," he stiffly continued.

Finally looking up to meet his stern gaze, Tabitha defended herself. "I already told you that I wasn't going to apologize for that. I don't know what Dean said to Uriel, but I never lied to you. I never implied that I was going to do anything other than what I did. If you made certain assumptions and drew certain conclusions, I can't help that."

The angel's head canted slightly to the side as he observed her. "I drew the conclusions you wanted me to come to at the time," he pointedly reminded.

"Maybe," she admitted. "But I meant what I said then, I'll do whatever I have to do to protect those I care for. And dammit, I do care about you, Cas. You're my friend. And if I have to mislead you a little bit to protect you in the end, so be it."

"Protect me?" he incredulously asked, leaning backwards in the lounge chair in his surprise. "How is misleading me and not allowing me to carry out my orders protecting me?!" he demanded, raising his voice more than she had ever heard from the angel when he spoke to her.

Springing to her feet, Tabitha stared down at the angel as she crossly told him, "Because I know you, Cas. I see past that wall you try to put up. You keep trying to point out and tell me that you're heartless and that you'll do whatever you have to, and even Anna thinks you don't feel, but I've seen that you do. You didn't want to follow those orders to kill Anna. I saw the pain in your eyes when you thought about having to kill her. I saw your grief and regret. You didn't want to. And maybe you're not sorry about it like she thinks you should be, maybe you don't feel the same way humans do, or even understand the way humans do, but you do feel. And even though you didn't want to kill Anna, you would have carried out your orders because you're obedient to Heaven. I may not get that, but I understand that you are."

Tabitha paced anxiously as she continued. "Being a friend isn't always about doing what your friend asks you to do, Cas. Sometimes you have to do the opposite to do what's really best for them. Even if it'll just piss them off with you. And maybe that's it. Maybe you're pissed off with me for not doing exactly what you asked me to do, and maybe I'm going to Hell for conspiring to keep an angel from being able to follow his orders, but I'd do it again, Cas. Even if I never see you again, because you are a friend to me and that's what friends do. You didn't really want to have to kill Anna. You knew her for a long time, and didn't want to have to kill her. I saw how much that would have pained you —how much that would have wounded a piece of you. So I did what I had to do to help you."

She finally stopped paced and turned to face the still seated angel, taking in the way he stared up at her with a strange look.

"I won't apologize," she repeated to him.

He slowly stood to face her, stepping closer as he searched her eyes. "This is what friends do for each other?"
Nodding, she explained. "Yeah, this is what real friends do for each other. They make hard choices and do things to protect their friends even though it might incur their wrath." She suddenly laughed to herself. "Although, the wrath of an angel does put a different spin on things than with normal human friendships."

Castiel slowly reached up to touch his fingertips to her cheek, seeming to test the surface of her skin before he completely pressed the palm of his hand fully against the side of her face. Tabitha's eyes slid closed at the warm and peaceful sensation it filled her with. "You saved my life when you fought Alistair. I was unprepared for his strength," he softly told her. "It was foolish and dangerous, but… thank you. Thank you for all you have tried to do for me. No one has ever…"

Tabitha's eyes slowly opened as he trailed off, his blue eyes sparkling down at hers as he stared down at her with unrestrained gratitude.

Impulsively, she leaned forward and softly brushed her lips across his cheek, whispering, "You're welcome," and smiling when he leaned back, his face becoming closed off and guarded once more.

"Relax," she told him. "I'm not being dumb and drunk again. That was just a friendly kiss on the cheek. Just a gesture of comfort."

"A friendly kiss?" he repeated in question.

She laughed up at the angel, shaking her head as she told him, "Yeah. Friendly. Friends kiss on the cheek. And I promise to try not to get so drunk around you again and make any more inappropriate passes. But if I do, you're welcome to push me away and tell me to go sleep my drunk off."

The angel nodded but didn't seem so sure.

"We cool?" she asked him, gesturing with her hand between the two of them.

"No," he slowly answered. "You are a perfectly normal temperature for a human and I am able to maintain my vessel at a normal temperature as well."

Biting her lower lip to keep from laughing, Tabitha carefully told the angel, "It's human speak for is everything okay between us? Can we just go back to being friends again? Like we were. I miss you stopping by to hang out. It's hard just having the boys to talk to all the time."

Castiel nodded in slow understanding of her explanation, but surprised her when he said, "I wish I could hear your thoughts to better understand you. To know what you were truly thinking."

Tabitha jerked back slightly. "'Hear my thoughts?'" she repeated in surprise. "You can hear thoughts?" she suspiciously asked, more than slightly unnerved.

He nodded. "I can see into the mind and soul of any human to read their thoughts and their heart. But not you. With you, I don't know what you are thinking. I can feel your soul, but your thoughts are beyond my reach."

Tabitha glanced down at the charm bracelet present on her wrist even in her dream.

Following her gaze, Castiel shook his head. "Your thoughts were beyond my reach even before you began wearing those charms. I don't know if your thoughts are hidden from me for the same reason you can hear my true voice, or if there is some other reason. I have never known a human like you before, so I can't say."

Staring at the bracelet, Tabitha lightly touched her finger to the charm Castiel had said was an
Enochian sigil of protection. The charm was intricately carved, seeming almost too fine to have even been done by any human. The charm had a small circle in the middle, waving lines running from it to the outer edges of the charm, almost appearing like a stylistic sun, but at the ends of each line, and in between each line, we many more strange symbols she had never seen before.

As she stared at the bracelet, she asked Castiel, "Why did you say it was good that I had this charm to hide and protect me? I thought the angels wanted me protected for some reason anyway. So why do I need it to protect me from them?"

"It protects you from more than just angels," he told her, drawing her attention away from the charm as she remembered Alistair not being able to fling his mojo at her like he had with her brothers. "And I think there is still good reason to keep you hidden from other angels," he cautiously admitted to her.

"But I'm hidden from you, too," she reminded him.

He nodded. "Yes. But I can still find your brothers. And you can still overcome the power of the spell to speak to me." He looked around the patio of her former Virginia home, now bathed in the soft orange and red lights of sunset. "And I can of course bypass its power to reach you in dreams, though it is not an easy task."

"Shouldn't we figure out a way to make charms like this for my brothers?" she asked him, holding her wrist up and indicating to the charm.

Castiel took her wrist between his two hands, gently spinning the bracelet around to stare down at the charm. "This is more than a simple sigil that I can reproduce. There is power imbedded in this charm. Power I cannot reproduce. Besides, it's best that I still be able to find your brothers at need. Dean is important to the angels, they won't hurt him."

"But it's important that I'm hidden from them?" she questioned in confusion.

Still staring down at the hand he held between his, Castiel lowly told her, "Angels are not meant to form friendships with humans. We are meant to watch them. Protect them. But not closely interact with them." He finally looked up into her eyes, almost apologetically telling her, "It's safer this way."

Staring at her for another minute, Castiel whispered to her, "I'm sorry for—"

Tabitha felt herself roughly jerked in a rocking motion. Rolling to her back, she opened her eyes and sat up in the back of the Impala.

Sam pulled his arm back over the seat as he stopped shaking her. "I'm sorry for waking you, Tab. But we found a motel for the night. And I think we found another case, but we need to do a little research to check it out."

"Of course we do," she groaned to herself.

Tabitha wiped the sleep from her eyes as she stepped out of the car, stretching her stiff muscles as she looked at the rundown motel, thinking to herself that if it looked this bad in the dead of night, she wasn't looking forward to seeing it in sunlight.

As she followed her brothers to their room, she couldn't help but ponder the angel's confession that their friendship put her in some danger. Her brother and Pamela had warned her against it as well.

She knew the smart thing would have been to cut all ties with the angel and keep her head down and protect herself.
But she reminded herself once more that she was a Winchester, and the Winchesters weren't always known for making the "smart" choice.

Chapter End Notes

Don't forget to leave your thoughts!
Tabitha shook her head as the Winchester siblings walked away from the magician and his large entourage on the street, supposedly performing a "magic trick" by pretending he was possessed.

"I can't believe you used to want to be a magician," she whispered to Sam as they walked down the sidewalk towards their motel. She glanced back over her shoulder one last time before shaking her head and chuckling. "I'm pretty sure that guy was wearing more makeup than I even own. You can't tell me that's normal for a straight guy, even in show biz."

"No kidding," Dean agreed. "Douche bag looked like a raccoon."

"Hey now," Tabitha laughed, "that's probably unfair to raccoons everywhere. At least they only carry things like rabies. That guy is way worse. And I bet carrying a lot worse, too."

"Come on, guys," Sam defended. "Jeb Dexter is in the entertainment business. And he is one of the most well-known magicians out there."

Tabitha shook her head as they walked. "Yeah, but he's all about elaborate showmanship. If we want to figure out what really happened to our dead guy, we need to figure out who can really perform magic among these charlatans. Not who does the best imitation of Linda Blair—which by the way, that guy sucked at."

Dean nodded. "I think we should start with the Vance's assistant. We've already gotten nothing from checking out the body. Except that he was shish-kabobed without tearing up his clothes. But their assistants know the most about those guys' tricks and such. Probably know who he pissed off, too."

"Sounds good," Sam agreed as they headed for the club their dead magician had been performing in.

Tabitha leaned back in the cheap dinette chair of their motel room and stretched her back.

"You find anything on that tarot card yet?" Dean asked as he stepped out of the other room.

"Not yet," she admitted. "Nothing truly magical anyway. I've found stuff on what each tarot card's supposed to mean in a 'psychic' reading. The Ten of Swords card is all about the abuse of power. You know, using ten swords to kill a guy when one does the same job. Ten is overkill. In tarot reading, it's supposed to be about an unexpected failure or disaster that humbles you, but it certainly did more with this guy. We know he was an ass who probably deserved humbling, at least from what his assistant said, but this went way beyond that."

"Abuse of power," Sam replied in a thoughtful manner. "So maybe someone is working some magic here and is using the tarot cards as inspiration or something. Or as a message. Maybe someone had a beef with this guy and thought he needed to be more than humbled, so they followed the idea from the card to have him killed in the same manner."
"It's a thought," Tabitha agreed. "But I've never seen magic worked quite like this before. No hex bag or anything. Just a tarot card. And nothing physically stabbing the guy? Just puncture wounds that appeared out of thin air? I don't know. I just can't find any magic that fits it quite right," she told them.

Dean pulled his suit jacket back on. "Well, whatever kind of magic it is, we need to find who's working it. Can't stop it until we find them."

"What are you thinking, Dean?" Sam asked, pulling his jacket on as well.

"Let's head on down to that hotel where that guy—Jay wasn't it?—is performing. He's the one that assistant said was being heckled by our dead guy, Vance. Maybe Jay's the one who wanted to do some humbling."

Tabitha waved her hand dismissively at her brothers. "You guys go, do your thing. Doesn't need three of us. I'll stay here and see if I can keep digging around. Maybe I'll give Bobby a call, too, see if he knows anything. Sioux Falls is pretty damn close to Sioux City, anyway. Maybe he's heard something."

"He's the one who sent us," Sam reminded her.

"I know, but maybe he's heard something since he sent us."

"Fine," Dean agreed. "Call us if you find anything. We'll go question the old guy."

"Be nice!" Tabitha called out after them.

Two hours later, Tabitha still hadn't found anything, and hadn't been able to get anything useful from Bobby either. Although he had promised to call her if he found anything that might help them out.

She'd finally changed out of her skirt-suit and took a shower though, feeling much more relaxed and cleaner. And like she'd actually managed to accomplish something useful. But even with a fresh head of steam, she couldn't find anything else to go on. At least, nothing that fit or made sense.

Tabitha had just walked back into the room after hiking down the block to a little grocery store, plastic bags of food still in her hands when she felt the familiar stirring of power that signified the appearance of her friend.

She didn't even turn around as she dropped the bags of groceries on the end of one of the beds, digging through the bags to look for the things that needed to go in their little fridge—which thankfully was in working order.

"Hey, Cas," she casually threw over her shoulder as she continued putting the last of her items in the fridge, but keeping out one yogurt cup and a plastic spoon as she turned around.

Castiel was standing in the middle of the room, hands gripped behind his back as he looked around. "Where are your brothers?"

Tabitha pulled off the thick pullover sweatshirt she'd had on, and sat cross-legged on the end of one of the beds as she kicked her boots off and straightened out her jeans, digging into her yogurt with relish. "They're off investigating," she dismissively told him between mouthfuls, realizing suddenly how ravenous she felt and trying to remember when she'd last eaten. "I decided to stay and do some research," she continued.
The angel nodded somewhat absently and sat stiffly on the end of the bed next to her. Tabitha didn't bother to offer the angel anything to eat, she'd learned from experience that he didn't particularly seem to care for eating human food, and he'd told her more than once that he had no use for it.

"How are you?" she finally asked him when he'd been silent for a few minutes, merely watching as she finished off her cup of yogurt and began pulling apart a Danish as well.

"I'm well," he told her, but his voice was ramrod stiff, just like his body language.

But Tabitha had come to recognize that stilted tone in his voice, and knew from experience that he wouldn't say anything more if she pushed him. So she shrugged her shoulders and told him, "Okay. Well, I'm just gonna get back to researching then." As she stood and walked past the angel, she grabbed the remote from on top of the TV and handed it to him. "Here, you may as well turn that on and see if you can find something to watch."

She knew well that if she left the angel alone and gave him time, he'd eventually get around to telling her what was bothering him. Or he'd relax and seem to put whatever that trouble had been out of his mind. Even sitting in silence seemed to sometimes give her friend whatever peace he needed. And she sometimes wondered if he didn't get to have much quiet and solitude in Heaven since he seemed to relish it so much.

Castiel's manner was still stiff, but he accepted the remote and turned on the TV like she'd shown him one of the last times he'd visited, flipping through the channels at a fairly high speed.

Tabitha shook her head and turned back to her computer. If things went like the last time when she'd introduced TV to the angel, he'd flip through the channels for at least 10 minutes straight before settling on something unexpected like a cartoon or something else bizarre like the nature special on spawning trout he'd last watched for two hours straight. She'd asked him the last time why he didn't want to watch something like the news—which was about the only reason she ever even bothered to turn on a TV—but the angel had looked at her strangely and told her that he didn't want to watch humans misreport what he already knew was actually going on in the world.

It was almost an hour later when Tabitha sat back slightly from what she'd been reading on her computer screen and her ears began to register the strange background noises from the other room. She tilted her head for a second as she tried to figure out what the moaning noises were, thinking it almost sounded like someone in pain. As she turned around, she'd almost convinced herself that Castiel was watching some horror movie when other noises began to emit from the TV as well.


Nope, not pain there, she told herself.

Springing up from the cheap dinette table, Tabitha took a few quick strides back into the bedroom to see if she was hearing what she thought she was. And found the angel sitting where she'd left him, his head canted slightly to the side in a curious manner as he studied the images on the TV.

For several moments, Tabitha was speechless, not sure whether to find the scene horrifying, laughable, annoying, or just emotion to settle on. A loud laugh suddenly escaped before Tabitha clapped both of her hands over her mouth to hold the peals of laughter back.

For his part, the angel only glanced at her before turning back to the TV as though the situation was the most normal thing in the world. But his face was so intent as he studied the screen that Tabitha finally reined in her mirth and managed to carefully ask the angel, "Whatcha ya doing, Cas?"
He pointed at the TV with the remote in his hand, simply telling her, "Watching."

Tabitha cleared her throat uncomfortably at his matter-of-fact answer. "I can see that. But why? You almost seem like you're perplexed by it."

Nodding in a slow manner, he told her, "Yes. I am. I don't understand this. Why do humans spend so much time satiating their lust? It seems rather undignified." He tilted his head a bit more as the woman on the screen bent and twisted her body in a manner worthy of an Olympic gymnast. "And sweaty," the angel added with a hint of disdain.

Tabitha had found her own head tilting as she admired the way the woman was able to twist and contort her body. "Oh, you know that's not really comfortable," she whispered to herself before Castiel's words sank in.

Turning her attention away from the soft-core porn the angel had stumbled across, Tabitha nervously rubbed the back of her neck as she considered him.

Sensing her attention, the angel momentarily turned away from the TV and looked up at her, gesturing once more at the screen as he asked her, "Why do humans spend so much of their time in this manner? I've witnessed countless humans over my years watching them on Earth, but I don't understand the appeal. Or their enthusiasm for such activities. Most humans seem to think of little else."

Still nervously rubbing her neck, she could feel the heat of her blush burning the skin of her face and neck at the angel's frank and open confusion.

"I'm sorry," Castiel immediately told her when he saw her reaction. "I've made you uncomfortable."

Quickly shaking her head, Tabitha forced a deep breath and exhale, marveling that the angel was picking up some body language now. "No. It's okay. It's not like I'm some blushing virgin. There's no reason for me to act this way." She wasn't sure if she was trying to convince the angel or herself, but with another deep breath, she shoved her discomfort away and decided to ask the angel a question of her own. "Don't angels have sex? I mean, there isn't really anything living on this planet that doesn't have sex in one form or another. Whether for procreation or for sheer pleasure like with humans. So what about angels?"

Eyebrows shooting up, Castiel slowly replied, "You're asking if angels have sex?"

"Yeah. Do you? I mean…can you?" she insisted, refusing to let silly embarrassment make her back down.

It was now the angel's turn to look uncomfortable. "In Heaven, there is no need for such activities. We're made by God. We're not born like humans are." He answered slowly and steadily, in his usual matter-of-fact way, but then he seemed to become uncomfortable and fidgety as he haltingly continued. "If you're asking if we…that is to say…angels don't engage with other angels like that… but…sometimes when on Earth in a vessel…it's not unheard of…"

Tabitha waited, but it seemed like the angel had finally trailed off for the last time. "So basically you're saying that angels can and do have sex when they're in their vessels," Tabitha carefully surmised.

Castiel merely nodded. So Tabitha continued questioning him. "With other angels?"

He quickly shook his head. "I suppose it isn't impossible. But not that I'm aware of."
"So, what? You're saying that if an angel does have sex, it's with a human?"

Again, he gave a slight nod. "Angels have been known to partake in such activities with humans. Though only rarely as we are not meant to form bonds of attachment with humans. Yet, that is what I don't understand. Angels are not forbidden per-say, but are greatly discouraged from such dalliances because we are not meant to feel as humans do. But humans seem to endlessly go from one such encounter to another with little other thoughts in their heads. You can't tell me that they love each one of these humans they bed?"

Tabitha shook her head in surprise. "No. Honestly, I'd say it's not actually all that common to sleep with someone you love." She shook her head a bit bitterly. "Or maybe that's just the cynic in me," she whispered to herself. Looking back at the seated angel, she tried to explain. "Look, I'm sure there are plenty of people out there who fall into bed together with the greatest of love in their hearts. And sometimes that love fades, and then they find new partners. But sometimes that love was never there. Sometimes sex is just sex. It doesn't mean anything more than that. It doesn't always have to have any kind of deeper emotional attachments than just pleasure."

"Pleasure," he repeated. He turned back to the TV, pointing at the screen once more. "That is pleasurable? It looks ungainly."

Biting off a grin, Tabitha walked closer as her arms crossed over her chest, leaning against the doorway as she casually observed the angel. "I don't think I have to go out on much of a limb to say that you haven't ever had sex, have you?"

He shook his head in answer, but continued to stare at her with an expectant look, waiting for her to come up with some answer that would satisfy him.

She sighed, trying to figure out how to frame an answer to sate the curiosity of someone who in all likelihood, couldn't begin to understand something he'd never experienced, no matter what she told him.

"Don't get me wrong," she finally began, "sex can be all about emotion. It can be strong and undeniable even. But it isn't always about emotion. Sometimes it's just about the physical feelings and sensations."

"The sensations?"

Smiling at his naivety, Tabitha stepped closer, intending to show the angel some of what she couldn't explain in words. She lightly braced one knee on the mattress behind Castiel, her hands gently tugging backwards on the collar and shoulders of his trench coat as she slid her hands under his shirt collar. Her fingers easily and knowingly rubbed and kneaded at the knots and tension she found there, gently caressing the warm skin of his neck.

Castiel had gone rigid at her initial movements, but didn't stand or move away from her, so, boldly, she continued her ministrations, her fingers working further down his back to massage his muscles through his layers of clothing.

Soon, the angel relaxed under her skilled hands, even arching his back as a soft sound of appreciation left his lips. Smiling in satisfaction at the sound, Tabitha knelt fully behind him, her hands working upwards again and threading once more beneath his trench coat and the rest of his clothing, reaching over his shoulders, and pausing to further loosen his crooked tie as her fingers brushed lightly across the warm expanse of his smooth chest.

Leaning closer to him, she dipped her mouth close to his ear as she spoke softly. "You enjoy that,
right? The feel of my hands touching you, massaging you. The feel of my skin against yours?" He gave a faint nod, his ear brushing gently against her lips with the motion. "It's pleasurable, right?" Again, he nodded. And again his ear flicked across her lips. "Humans—and even angels, it seems—like to feel closeness with one another. We're not meant to be solitary. We like to feel the heat of someone else's skin against ours. There's a base—almost animalistic—need in all of us to feel connected. So we don't feel alone. To feel that there's more out there than just us. To feel connected to something bigger than just ourselves. And there's no way to feel closer to someone than when two people lay themselves completely bare to one another."

With one hand, she flicked open the top several buttons of Castiel's shirt, her hands skimming further past his shoulders and down his chest as she sat up straighter on her knees, looking over his shoulder as she pressed her body closer to his back. Castiel stiffened momentarily, but then seemed to press his back further against her as she wrapped her arms tighter around him.

"Humans crave that connectedness," she continued to whisper in his ear. "We crave the feeling of a soft touch just like we crave food and water and everything else we need to survive. Touch is just as important to really be alive."

Her fingers curled and smoothed against the plane of his stomach, brushing against the soft dusting of hair that led downwards, her arms instinctively tightening around him as Castiel pressed back further against her, his lips parting softly as a soft moan escaped.

For a moment, Tabitha's lips parted and then closed gently around the bottom edge of his earlobe, pulling gently before she continued to whisper, "And in that moment of bliss, in that moment of completion, I've always found that if you really open your eyes and look, and truly want to see it, you can tell everything a person thinks or feels for you. All the barriers are stripped away in that moment, and you're left with whatever feelings there are—if there are even any."

Castiel was silent in her embrace, his breathing was deeper and unsteady, but his shoulders were rolled back, his whole body pressed back against hers as his chin tilted up, exposing the white column of his throat to her lips. She licked her lips as she stared at the tender flesh, feeling Castiel's hands fist the covers of the bed on either side of his legs. As she lowered her head towards his throat, the loud shrieks and moans of a woman's pleasure coming from the TV suddenly pierced the silence of the room, dragging her head up to stare at the screen.

Her mind suddenly clearing, Tabitha slowly pulled her hands over Castiel's shoulder, scooting back on the bed a few feet as she swallowed dryly, hardly able to believe what she'd nearly done, how far her ministrations had run from her original and simple intent.

She crawled down to the foot of the bed and sat uncomfortably on the far corner of the now rumpled mattress as she avoided the piercing stare of the angel next to her.

"I'm sorry," she finally croaked. Clearing her throat again, "I'm sorry. I never should have done that. I shouldn't have let that go that far. I forget sometimes that you're not just some naïve buddy of mine that I can tease and get worked up like that. That you're not even human."

Finally, she risked a glance across the mattress to see Castiel glance down, his eyes fixed on the state she'd left him in.

As his fingers unsteadily began to rebutton his shirt and pull his tie somewhat back together, he softly commented, "I think, I understand why humans would have such strong compulsions now."

Tabitha sighed as she stood, shaking her head as she Shakily replied, "I don't think you really can understand it, Cas. It's something you can only understand from experience. And even then, I don't
think any of us truly understand the power it can hold over us. The power that need to feel close to someone can have. It's there in all humans," she gave a tight laugh, "but I swear we should have to take and pass some sort of test before we can even have sex with anyone. Too many people get into trouble because they act inappropriately and ruin good friendships. They don't always take the other person's feelings into account—if they have any complex feelings for each other anyway."

Castiel reached out to grab her hand as she started past him, tugging her to a stop as he stared up into her eyes. "We're still…friends?" he haltingly asked.

"Of course," she smiled. "Of course we're still friends." Her eyes darted down at the uncomfortable state she'd left him in as she continued. "That was my fault. I shouldn't have done that. And I don't even have the excuse of being drunk this time, just not being mindful of the fact that you're not human." She reached down and picked up the remote from the mattress, quickly flipping through the channels until she'd landed on something vaguely familiar. "But to be safe, why don't we change the channel to something tamer," she laughed. "This is something Dean watches when he thinks no one is paying attention. Doctor Steamy or something else silly like that…I can't remember. But it's probably a safer choice than porn."

She released the angel's hand as she moved back to the dinette table and her laptop, but by the time she'd taken her seat and looked back across the room, the angel had disappeared.

With a sigh, she tried to focus on her research again, but didn't even have time to focus her eyes on the screen before the motel room door opened and her brothers spilled into the room. Dean immediately plopped down on one of the beds after he'd glanced at the TV.

"I didn't know you watched Doctor Sexy, Tab," he commented, his eyes glued to the TV.

"I don't," she laughed. "But it's safer than what was on." Sam looked at her questioningly as he sat across from her, but she waved it off. For a moment, she considered telling them that the angel had dropped by, but decided that there really wasn't much to tell. At least, nothing she truly wanted to try and explain to her brothers.

"You guys find anything?" she asked instead.

"Not really," Sam replied as he pulled his own laptop out. "We talked to a couple of magicians, and then we split up. I didn't find anything more. And I don't think Dean's trip was anymore enlightening than what I found. But he won't say much."

There was a wicked glint in her younger brother's eyes, prompting Tabitha to sit forward and lean her elbows on the dinette table as she pressed, "Ohhh? Just what happened?"

She'd asked Sam, thinking Dean was too wrapped up in watching the soap-opera-esque show on the TV screen, but he piped up from the bedroom, sullenly calling out, "I don't want to talk about it!"

Sam continued to grin wickedly as he leaned forward and conspiratorially told her, "The old guys we talked to sent Dean on a wild-goose-chase. Sent him downtown looking for some guy named Chief. And let's just say that Chief wasn't in charge of a police force or anything, but he did want to be the master of Dean."

"Oh. Oh!" Tabitha exclaimed as she sat back in her chair and laughed quietly at the realization. She turned towards the bedroom and called out to her older brother, "What's the matter, Dean? Chief not really your type?"

Dean walked out of the bedroom, grumpily pulling his suit jacket off and tossing it at his sister.
"Yeah, very funny. You and those old guys are just a laugh a minute."

Tabitha chuckled softly to herself a bit more as she pulled the dark blue jacket away from her face and gently folded it in her lap. "So what was going on with them yanking your chain? I take it they aren't our suspects since you guys haven't said so. But why were a couple of old guys giving you two the run-around?"

Dean bent down by the small fridge, rummaging around as he muttered to himself about chick food before finally standing up with three beer bottles in his hands. He held two out towards his siblings, tossing them when they each nodded in return. Tabitha had already grudgingly admitted that drinking wasn't her problem.

"Well," Dean began as he opened his bottle, "apparently it's harder to fool professional swindlers than we anticipated. They said they recognized right off that we weren't real Feds and they thought it would be fun to screw with us. We ended up having to tell them that we were just trying to get info from them since we're trying to start our own magician act."

Laughing again, Tabitha questioned them, "Your own magician act? The two of you?"

Sam shrugged, but Dean puffed up indignantly as he answered, "Sure. Why not? A brother act or something."

"And just which of you is going to be the assistant that dresses in skimpy outfits to distract the audience?" she giggled, trying to imagine the sight in her mind.

Dean snorted. "Sammy of course. Maybe I can figure out sawing him in half and bringing him down to size."

Sam rolled his eyes. "Right Dean. Your cover-up story wasn't even convincing to those guys. 'Rings and doves and…rings?'"

"I can't believe you two got taken by two old guys. And couldn't even maintain your cover," Tabitha continued laughing to herself.

"They were good," Dean defended. "You wouldn't have done any better fooling them."

Leaning back against the chair, Tabitha contested them with a challenging look. "Oh yeah? One little difference. I don't have to work at faking a Fed," she reminded them. "I was a Fed. I can just be me."

Later that night, they had done more research on Jay, whom Sam claimed had managed to pull off an impossible magic trick, but hadn't found anything concrete on him. Once more, they had split up, with Sam going to look for the Amazing Jay himself, and Tabitha filling Dean in on the additional research she'd dug up on tarot cards.

But in the middle of an explanation, Tabitha suddenly stopped talking, her head tipping as she listened to the police scanner in her purse.

She dug it out and turned it up as she and Dean listened to the report of another magician found dead in his motel room.

"You know, you look like a dog when you tip your head to the side like that. Must have the hearing of one, too, to hear that thing in your bag," Dean commented.

She shrugged. "Years of training myself to tune into it like that." She stood and quickly began
changing into one of her pant suits.

"Come on," Dean insisted as he turned his back to give her privacy and pulled on a heavy coat. "Forget the monkey suit and let's get over there. We need to see what we can find before the cops collect everything useful."

But Tabitha was already finished changing, merely pulling her hair back into a tight ponytail as she pulled her gray suit jacket on, following Dean out of the motel room. "You two may have blown your cover in this town, but I haven't," she reminded him. "And I can get into the crime scene easier this way."

As they hurried down the sidewalk towards the hotel not so far from theirs, Dean made a quick phone call to their brother, explaining the situation and telling him to meet them there.

Dean tried to make his way past the local cops blocking foot traffic on the 8th floor, but as Tabitha had anticipated, he wasn't able to make it by them. Flashing one of her badges, she sauntered into the room of the very magician she'd commented wore more makeup than she did. She paused by the body as paramedics and the coroner cut him down from the ceiling fan, and noted to herself that the dark rings of eyeliner wasn't any more becoming on him in death than it had been in life.

After a quick inspection of the room, she made her way back down to the lobby where her brothers were waiting for her. She discreetly flashed them the tarot card she had found as she walked up.

"How's that for sleight of hand?" she smugly asked them as she handed them the tarot card of the hanged man. "I could have been a damn fine magician's assistant."

Sam laughed as he told her, "Sure you could have, Tab."

"What?" she defended, gesturing down at herself. "I think I could pull off one of those skimpy, show-girl costumes quite nicely."

Dean rolled his eyes and gestured back at the tarot card. "Hanged dude on the card and the creep was hung from a ceiling fan. Doesn't take much of a leap to say that this was no coincidence and definitely no suicide. Think someone is marking them? Or maybe a death transference."

"Any connection between the victims?" Sam asked.

"Jeb was a total douche bag to Jay yesterday," Dean replied.

"What about the first guy, Vance, right?" Tabitha asked.

Dean nodded. "Asked around, apparently Vance was heckling Jay at the bar the day he was killed."

Sam snorted and looked discreetly around the lobby to make certain no one was too close. "Okay, so Jay sneaks a card into Vance's pocket, does the Table of Death…"

"And Vance takes 10 swords to the chest," Dean finished.

Sam picked up. "Then Jay slips a noose and Jeb doesn't. Hell of a trick."

"Yeah, I think it's time we had a little chat with Jay," Dean told them and then turned to Sam. "Any luck tailing him?"

Reluctantly shaking his head, Sam told them, "He slipped me."

Tabitha stared at her brother. "He's what? Sixty years old? Come on, Sam."
"He's a magician," Sam immediately defended.

Dean snorted derisively. "Well, surely the three of us can track him."

"Let's go," Sam agreed.

But Tabitha shook her head. "You two go after Jay. It can't take three of us to track an old magician. I'm gonna check into those two friends of his, Charlie and Vernon. Something just doesn't sit right with me about the way those two played you guys."

"But Jay's the one pulling unbelievable stunts, Tab," Sam insisted. "He's got to be the one behind it. He's the one benefiting."

"I know. But like I said, you two can handle him. I just want to look into the other two while you're tailing him. It can't hurt."

She found Vernon and Charlie backstage the next morning, still cleaning up from the night before and setting up equipment for Jay's show that night.

Balancing the long strap of her large leather briefcase on her shoulder, she approached the older pair of men and addressed them as she stared down at the lined pages in her worn leather notebook. "I'm told that the two of you are Vernon Albright and Charlie Schneider," she remarked, still not looking up.

"Yes," she heard one of them slowly answer.

Finally looking up, she continued asking in bored tones, "Can either of you confirm that you are associates of one Jay Jamison?" She glanced down at her papers again. "Also known professionally as the 'Amazing Jay'?"

"Who's asking?" the older man with the beard demanded.

Shifting her notebook into her other arm, Tabitha reached into her jacket and fished out her FBI badge. Unlike the badges Dean had made for himself and Sam, her badge had been forged by one of the best cloggers she'd met while she'd been a real FBI agent. It also helped that she knew from experience every detail that went into a real badge and how to spot a fake.

She held the leather wallet in the air for them to see, holding the folded over wallet up with the small gold shield and card with the director's signature, and then flipping the wallet over to show her ID badge. "Special Agent Betty Perske. I'm assisting the local police in investigating the recent deaths in town," she explained.

They looked at the badge for a moment, and then she closed it and returned it to her inner jacket pocket.

"What is this?" the man with the beard dubiously inquired. "You with those other two jokers who were trying to pretend they were Feds yesterday?"

She let one eyebrow rise in an unimpressed challenge. Dryly, she told them, "My supervisor didn't see the need to send more than one agent to Iowa, so I'm the only agent in town to help the local police force." Flipping her notebook open, she took out her pen and held it to the paper as she asked, "Did you happen to get these 'jokers' names?" she asked them. "We take impersonating a Federal agent very seriously."
They glanced at each other, a look passing between them. "Can't say that I remember," the other man told her. "Still doesn't mean you're a real FBI agent," he challenged. Tabitha noted that the man had a distinctive birthmark over one eyebrow, but quickly dismissed the anomaly.

She smiled inwardly that the two weren't turning in her brothers, but outwardly she merely stared unimpressed for a minute before telling them, "Of course I can understand your hesitancy, so if you'd prefer, we can take this discussion down to the local sheriff's station and you can answer my questions there. They'll be happy to assure you of my status, I'm sure. Or you can even call the nearest FBI offices if you'd prefer."

"No," the man with the beard decided. "We'll answer your questions here. We need to keep setting up for Jay's show tonight. Don't have time for all that. What is it we can help you with?"

"To begin with, are you Vernon or Charlie?" she returned.

He stroked his beard for a moment before answering simply, "Vernon."

She glanced back down at her notepad and jotted down several notes, maintaining her air of importance and annoyance with her task.

Looking back up, she continued, "And you are both associates with one Jay Jamison?"

"Yeah," Charlie quickly answered. "We're friends. And we've been helping with his act. There's some reason you want to know?"

Tabitha continued to take meticulous notes. "Were either of you present when Mister Jamison had a dispute with Vance Hardbrooke at a bar several nights ago?" she asked without bothering to glance up from her notepad.


She jotted down several more notes. "And Jeb Dexter? Were either of you present when Jay and Mister Dexter had heated words in an interview they did together?"

"Now wait a minute," Charlie immediately defended, dropping the prop he'd been holding on the table and stepping closer. "Why are you asking all these questions? You can't think Jay had anything to do with those deaths. I thought Jeb Dexter hung himself. Are you accusing Jay of murdering them?"

Tabitha finally looked back up from her notepad, glancing back and forth between the two men as she flatly told them, "We are still investigating the two deaths. No determinations have been made at this time. We're just looking into anyone who might have had possible grudges against these two men. And your friend's name has come up."

Charlie looked smug as he rocked back on his heels, his arms crossing over his chest as he told her, "Well, Jay couldn't have had anything to do with either of their deaths. He was onstage performing in front of witnesses when they both died. So you can't possibly think he killed either of them."

Tabitha gauged the expressions of both men. Vernon's face was closed off, but she saw the glimmer of something in his eyes: doubt. And she saw the hint of unease there as well. But overall, she saw confusion.

But Charlie on the other hand, was too sure. Too confident.

Was it because he was clueless about the nature of the deaths, or was it because he was confident
that a federal agent would never suspect real magic as being the culprit.

"No," she easily agreed. "I don't suppose Jay could have killed those men himself, now could he? But he's still the only common thread between the two men, both of whom died under mysterious circumstances. We don't believe in coincidence at the FBI. Now, perhaps he wasn't the one to kill those two men himself, but that doesn't mean that someone else didn't carry it out for him," she casually pointed out, not looking down nonchalantly at her notepad this time, but carefully watching the expressions of both men.

Vernon's face drew together in more confusion, but Charlie was a different story. It was just a flash, but it was there. A hint of fear before Charlie had carefully schooled his features.

With a calm expression, Charlie carefully told her, "Vernon and I are Jay's closest friends, and we were both backstage here during each performance helping Jay with his act. Ask anyone."

She nodded briskly and held out business cards to each of the men. "Of course," she told them. "I do plan on returning this evening to speak with all the stage hands so I can finish my list of interviews. In the meantime, if either of you thinks of anything else that might be useful to our investigation feel free to call me, anytime."

Tabitha was walking down the sidewalk later that afternoon, hustling past all the other magic convention goers when she spotted police leading her brothers out of the hotel Jay was staying in. Both of her brothers had their hands cuffed behind their backs as they were loaded into the back of a squad car. As she observed from down the street, she could see Jay talking with the police, his hands gesturing to her brothers periodically as he spoke.

"Shit," she whispered to herself, turning around and walking in the opposite direction. "How the hell did they manage to let that old man get the slip on them again?"

She walked absently in the direction of their crappy motel, needing the moment to herself to think. She knew she could easily get into the police station and question her brothers. They'd know enough not to give away that they even knew her, but then she risked leaving Jay or Charlie—she still hadn't decided which one was really playing with magic—out in the open to kill again. But the longer her brothers were in jail, the higher the chances were that they would fingerprint her brothers and then that would open a whole new can of worms.

Entering their motel room, she dumped her briefcase on the bed and tried to figure out which was the more imminent threat. If things continued in the same pattern, she knew another person might end up dead tonight. But if she was lucky, this Iowa police station might not fingerprint her brothers unless they truly believed that they were an imminent danger. And hopefully her brothers wouldn't do anything to make them believe that.

Checking the time, she saw that Jay's next performance was only an hour away. Making her decision, she left their room and headed back to the hotel Jay was performing in. If she was lucky, she could prevent another death from occurring, and even if she wasn't lucky, she could at least try to figure out which man was working a death transference.

After questioning the stage hands and hotel workers before the performance had started, Tabitha had gotten exactly nowhere. She hadn't found anything concrete or useful. Several people confirmed that besides Jay obviously being onstage during the performances, both Charlie and Vernon were backstage the entire time during the shows.
But Tabitha still wasn't convinced. Though she had no real evidence—only her gut and a few looks —she was certain that Charlie had something to do with the deaths, perhaps Jay as well. One of the two of them had to have planted the tarot cards on their victims sometime before the shows. Perhaps they didn't even need to be anywhere near their target for the death transference to work. Her gut told her she was on the right track, but she was having trouble finding any real proof to back it up.

She could hear the announcer prattling on about Jay's next trick onstage, and knew she frantically needed to figure something out. And as she darted looks around behind the darkened backstage area, something did catch her eye.

Charlie had stepped away from watching Jay's performance, slipping closer to another woman behind the dark curtains of the stage. He moved quickly, his hands moving so deftly that Tabitha almost missed his hand hovering just above her pocket. Stalking closer, she discreetly drew the Glock from her holster at her waist as she silently moved behind him, grabbing his shoulder and spinning him around as she held her gun on him.

In low threatening tones she told him, "Undue whatever magic crap you've got going. Lift the death sentence you just put on that woman."

He stared into her eyes in surprise, but before he could speak, Tabitha heard the climatic gasps of the audience out front. And before her eyes, Charlie jerked in front of her, dots of red blood appearing on his chest as he crumpled to the floor. She dropped to her knees next to him, staring in shock at the empty glazed look in his lifeless eyes.

"What the hell?" she uttered to herself, and then noticed one of his hands closed around something. She pried it quickly open to find another tarot card clutched in his grip. "He wasn't dropping a tarot card on that woman, he was holding one," she whispered to herself as she slowly stood, staring at the card in her hand in shock.

"But the question is, how did you know about it?" a man asked behind her.

Tabitha spun around, only to stare at the sight of a young man bearing the same distinctive birthmark above his eyebrow as the dead body only inches away from her, but before she could react to the shocking sight, pain exploded across her temple, and her last sensation was slowly crumpling to the floor next to an old Charlie's dead body, the sight of a much younger one filling her vision as he leaned over her.

When she slowly regained consciousness, Tabitha looked around to see that she was backstage behind tall stage currents, but one look was all it took to tell her that she wasn't behind the same stage Jay had been performing in and where an inexplicably young Charlie had knocked her out.

She was lying uncomfortably on her stomach, hands bound with strong rope behind her back. Pulling and twisting on the bindings did nothing but further dig into her wrists. And she thought bitterly to herself that she shouldn't be surprised. The man had been a magician after all. He'd know how to tie a knot.

Turning onto her side, she looked down her body to confirm that her mid-calf high boots were still on her feet, her dark gray slacks still pulled neatly over the boots. She had just started to toe one of them off when she saw Charlie walking into her field of vision.

He stepped closer and crouched in front of her, loosely holding her Glock in one hand as he braced his elbows on his bent knees. He held his other hand out, and she saw her charm bracelet dangling from his grip.
"Interesting charms you've got here," he commented. He lowered his hand and stared intently down at her face. "You're not any more a Fed than those other two clowns were, are you? Although, I'll give you credit, you sure play one better. Had me and Vernon going anyway. But we both know that no Fed is going to know what you know, and have the kinds of magical charms, protection talismans, and even hoodoo hanging from their wrist like this. You're packing some serious magical wallop here. I don't even know what some of these talismans are, and I ought to, I've been around awhile."

Tabitha remained silent and unmoving as she stared up at this much younger version of Charlie, refusing to answer him or quell under his stare.

"So who were those two guys to you? The pretty one and the giant. 'Cause you ain't no Fed. But like I said, I give you serious points for pulling the act off as well as you did. Very impressive."

Deciding to change tack and to try to keep him talking, she finally lifted her chin and answered him. "I was an FBI agent. Makes it easy to play the part. And the 'pretty one and the giant' are my brothers. I'm sure they're looking for me now. It might be easiest if you just leave me here and flee now."

He smiled, his fingers still toying with her charm bracelet in his hands, and annoying her with the way he caressed it. "No. I don't think so. Not that I'm worried about them. They're not quite on the same playing field as me," he chuckled, just as the two began to hear another pair of voices out onstage.

"Ahh," he told her. "My friends are here now. You just hang tight back here while we all have a little chat with them. I'll deal with you later."

He stood and walked away from her, dropping her charm bracelet into one of the side pockets of his sport coat as he walked away.

Tabitha immediately seized the opportunity, resuming the task of kicking off her left boot, and then twisting onto her side until she could grab the boot in her hands still tied behind her back. She slid the hidden knife out into her palm, and then blindly sawed at the rope binding her hands behind her.

The voices out onstage began to rise, but then she heard her brother's voices join them just as she finished sawing through her bindings.

Creeping around the edge of the current, she suddenly saw Dean dangling from a rope that was suspended from thin air. Sam was pointing a gun at Charlie and demanding to know where she was and ordering Charlie to drop Dean.

Tabitha nearly gasped when Sam was flung through the air, landing on Jay's table, his hands locked in the metal cuffs as the rope holding the table of knives above her younger brother slowly began to fray.

Her switchblade was still in hand as she crept across the stage behind Charlie, her blade held at the ready as she silently approached him. But Vernon suddenly called out, warning Charlie of her presence, and giving him enough time to spin around, his hand flicking out a rush of magic that knocked her switchblade from her hand and held her immobilized as he stepped closer.

"My, my," he tsked at her as he strolled closer to her. "You managed to slip out of my bindings. Hidden knife I see. Very impressive. I checked you over, but let me guess, it was in your boot. I'll admit, I didn't think to look there for anything hidden since you were wearing your gun so openly on your hip," he told her in complimentary tones. "You'd make one hell of an assistant," he continued to
tell her as he stepped closer and ran his fingers lightly down her neck and across her clavicle. "What do you say? Ditch these bumbling brothers of yours and join us? Have a taste at immortality?"

She let a small smile spread across her face. "Immortality? That's more than a tempting offer. Especially given the more than impressive results."

She pushed at her hands, suddenly feeling the magic release them as she slowly slid closer to Charlie, pressing closely to him as she eagerly touched her lips to his, putting every ounce of fervor and experience she had into the kiss, letting her hands slide to Charlie's waist and then up his sides.

He eagerly responded to the kiss, but then suddenly shoved at her shoulders, pushing her back several steps as his expression darkened. "You think I'm an idiot? That I'd believe you would flip on your brothers, just like that?"

Raising his hand, his flicked his fingers at her.

When nothing happened, his brows drew together in confusion, and she held up her hand, her charm bracelet dangling from her fingertips. "I know a little sleight of hand, too," she replied to him, and then turned to start running towards Sam, who was still straining at his metal cuffs, the deadly blades still just barely suspended above him.

"Stop right there!" Charlie shouted, pulling her gun from his waistband as she skidded to a halt under his aim. "Those little charms truly are impressive…but something tells me they won't stop a bullet."

Tabitha remained in her frozen position, only moving to glance quickly between her two brothers, Sam still struggling beneath the blades, and Dean dangling from the rope, his face slowly turning to a darker shade of blue.

Turning to meet Charlie's gaze, she told him, "They're my brothers. If you have to shoot me, so be it. But I'm still going to go down trying to help them."

"So be it," Charlie repeated, raising the gun a little higher as he looked down the sight on the front of the barrel.

Taking a step forward towards Sam, Tabitha braced herself for the impact of a bullet, but as she held Charlie's gaze, she saw him grunt in pain, and suddenly look down at his abdomen, cupping his stomach as dark red blood began to ooze between his fingertips.

She glanced over her shoulder to see Jay sliding her switchblade out of his own stomach with one hand, no trace of blood on the blade, and pulling a deck of tarot cards out of his pocket with his other hand.

Charlie fell to his knees, calling Jay's name in disbelief as he reached into his own pocket a found a lone tarot card: the magician. "You picked these strangers over me?"

Not waiting any longer, Tabitha rushed towards Sam to yank at the bolts locking the metal cuffs and keeping her younger brother on Jay's magician table, just grabbing his arm and yanking him towards her as the rope finally broke and the blades crashed into the table where Sam had been. The pair tumbled and fell against the stage floor, both rolling to look up at Dean just as the rope hanging him went limp and dropped him onto the stage floor a few feet away.

Tabitha scrambled closer and helped him pull the rope off, patting and smoothing her hand across his back as he knelt, coughing as he tried to regain his breath.

"You guys all right?" Sam asked as he sat up straighter, the three siblings glancing at Charlie's
lifeless body.

Dean nodded, saying in hoarse tones, "Yeah, I'm all right." But he turned and faced their sister. "Where the hell have you been?"

She fell back on her butt beside him, staring at him incredulously as she told him, "Just sitting around waiting for the two of you to get put in some sort of life threatening situation again. What do you think?"

He shook his head and looked across the stage at Jay, telling them all, "I think we need to get out of here."

The next evening, the Winchester siblings entered the popular hangout for magicians during the convention, a little bar downtown. But as the brothers walked through the door towards the bar, Tabitha split off and headed for the other side of the smoky bar.

Dean reached out to grab her elbow and stop her. "Where you going?"

She jerked her head towards the wall to their right. "Bathroom."

His brow raised in question. "Thought you were gonna come say goodbye to Jay with us."

Shrugging, she told him, "I didn't even really know Jay. Didn't talk to him until last night. You guys go ahead." Her brothers had spent more time with him when Jay had dropped the charges, letting them out of jail to help him when he began to realize someone was using his show to kill people.

But as she wove through the few bar patrons, she admitted to herself that she just didn't want to be part of the coming conversation. She was grateful he got her brothers out of jail and all, but she didn't know Jay and had no real need to say goodbye to the man. But more than that, she'd seen the look on his face when he'd killed Charlie to save their lives. And she knew that no matter that he'd done the right thing, he wouldn't want to see them to be reminded of the choice he'd had to make.

And at least in her own opinion, it wasn't fair of them to rub that in the poor man's face. Charlie had been like a brother to the man, but he'd made the "right" choice, and the cost had been so high. She wondered to herself if she would be able to make the same choice if she was forced into the situation. And she prayed against a sinking feeling that that day would never come.

After she'd gone to the bathroom, she stood with her hands braced on either side of one of the sinks along the counter, staring into the mirror, and trying to determine if she'd delayed long enough in the bathroom for her brothers to say their goodbyes.

Tabitha leaned over the sink and splashed cold water on her face, blindly reaching out to grab a handful of paper-towels to pat her face dry. As she dried her face, she felt the slight disturbance of power, and even heard the faint flutter that marked Castiel's arrival.

"You're not supposed to be in the lady's room," she told the angel as she turned around and braced her back against the counter.

Castiel was casually glancing around the outdated bathroom, but turned around at her words, his face tightening in confusion. "Why is this a room only for ladies?"

"What?" she snorted. "Umm...Cas, it's a woman's bathroom. Most public places have separate bathrooms for guys and chicks." Seeing his blank look, she crossed her arms over her white tank top
and shook her head. "Never mind. What's up?"

Castiel mimicked her position, leaning back to brace himself against one of the stall doors, his arms loose at his sides.

Tabitha smiled to herself, thinking that it was a good thing that no one else was in the bathroom with them to see the strange scene. But at least the angel wasn't avoiding her after what had happened at the motel room. She'd half-feared that he'd avoid her again like he'd done after her last idiot mistake.

Finally speaking, Castiel asked her, "Why would you lustfully embrace a man when he was trying to kill your brothers? I thought you had some love for them."

The smile fell from her face as she stared back at the angel. She felt her nose wrinkle as she spread her legs out in front of her, slouching more and leaning backwards on the counter more as she braced her hands along the counter on either side of herself. "You been following me, Cas?"

"At times," he shamelessly admitted. "To watch you and your brothers."

Gesturing wildly with one hand, she asked, "So, what? You followed us and just thought you'd hang out and see if we made it out of that one alive or not?"

The angel didn't move at her hard tone. "I always try to check in and keep a certain awareness of you...and your brothers. But as you know, more and more seals are being broken, and so I can't always come every time you and your brothers are in danger. And like the other many times you've been in danger, you seem to have come through it just fine."

"But still, you knew we were in trouble, and what, just watched it play out?"

He finally shook his head. "In truth, I was not aware of your trouble at the time. We were fighting our own battle to save a seal, one of the few it seems that we have saved recently. I saw the image of what happened in the minds of your brothers when I came to check in on all of you. They seemed quite disturbed by the event."

She huffed and ran a tired hand over her tangled hair, its streaks of dark and light blonde hair pulled sloppily back in a messy bun. "The mind-reading thing," she reminded herself.

He nodded in agreement.

They stared at each other for several tense moments, and Tabitha knew the angel was still waiting for an answer.

Huffing, she recrossed her arms as she paced away from him, pausing to grab a paper-towel from the dispenser and angrily tearing off pieces of it as she paced. Staring down at her hands and still pacing, she told him, "For crying out loud, Cas, you think I really kissed the guy 'cause I was overcome with lust at the thought of that bozo being able to make me immortal or some ridiculous notion? It's called distraction," she snarled at him, turning to face him and holding up her wrist to jangle the charms on her bracelet. "I was just trying to get closer and distract him long enough to grab this back. I could have gone for my gun, but since the guy was wielding magic, this seemed like the smarter choice. It apparently holds some protection against other kinds of magic, too."

"So it seems," he quietly agreed.

She moved to stand across from him again, slouching back in her former position against the counter as she faced the angel again.
"It was a kiss of…distraction?" he slowly and carefully asked.

Feeling her brows furrow deeper, she repeated, "Yeah."

"Not of love or lust?"

"What? No, Cas. Nothing like that," she huffed, and then closed her eyes and took a deep breath, trying to remind herself that Cas was always asking her odd questions about humans and human interactions, and repeating to herself that this was just another instance of his ignorance and that she just needed to calmly explain things to him so that the angel could sate his curiosity about humans.

"Humans kiss each other for as many different reasons as a person can possibly think of," she continued to explain to the angel, her tone finally becoming even and steady as she formed the explanation. "Yeah, sometimes it's love, sometimes attraction or lust, and sometimes it's in friendship. But me kissing Charlie? That was just to distract him. I was just trying to get my charm bracelet back so that I could help my brothers without him throwing magic mojo at me—and I already explained that to Sam and Dean, so I don't know why they're still hung up on it, either. A kiss reflects the emotion one person feels for another, and all I felt for Charlie was a desire to distract him."

"Humans are very complex," he quietly commented, his face still screwed up in confusion, but then, his face tipped back up to meet hers. "You kissed me on the cheek?" he suddenly said. "In friendship? That is what you felt?"

Tabitha laughed lightly as she responded. "Yeah, Cas. Of course. Look," she uncomfortably began, "I'm sorry for what happened back at the motel before. That was my fault, not yours. I let myself get carried away in trying to explain something to you, and it was wrong of me to let things go that far. I know that you're an angel and I'm human and that even friendship is a stretch for you, and truly, I don't want to do anything to lose the friendship we've built." She moved away from the counter, stepping in front of the angel as she reminded herself of how close a friend he had become. Even if he was a bit clueless at times. But it was something she needed to keep reminding herself, because she didn't think she could bear the thought of losing his friendship any more. She felt like it was the only steady constant in her world now.

As she stepped in front of the angel, she realized the tall heel of her clunky biker boots gave her just enough added height that she could look straight across into his eyes. Not that he was much taller than her anyway, but she liked being on even footing with him.

On impulse, she stepped closer and wrapped her arms around Castiel's shoulders, realizing to herself that they were on even footings in a lot of ways. He may not understand humans and human emotions or interactions, but she realized she wasn't much better in practice. She understood other humans much better in theory than she did in reality. Between her strange upbringing and then her job, she hadn't had a lot of opportunities to really learn how normal people interacted and formed friendships.

Her only friends growing up had basically been her brothers, and then as a Fed, her only loose friendships—if she could truly call them such—had been with a few other federal agents. She'd had a series of relationships that had equated to no more than one-night-stands, and then a disastrous semi-relationship with her partner whom she at best cared for as a friend. Was it any wonder she was no better at friendship than Castiel was? But she didn't want to keep making the same mistakes she had been and ruin a good thing.
As she held her arms around the angel, she felt him slowly relax and put his hands loosely on her jean-clad hips, giving a gentle squeeze as she pulled back and brushed her lips across the angel's cheek as she'd done before. When she leaned back, Castiel continued to stare contemplatively at her.

"See?" she told him. "A kiss of friendship. That's what I feel for you." She watched as the angel stared at her and then asked him, "What do you feel for me?"

One of Castiel's hands released her hip in response, lifting to gently press warm fingertips to the hollow of her cheek, the same place she'd brushed her lips across his own cheek. Her eyes closed briefly at the peaceful sensation. A feeling that was far too fleeting, for when it disappeared, she opened her eyes to find the angel gone.

With a resigned sigh at his all too normal vanishing act, she left the bathroom to go find her brothers. She found them at the bar, Jay nowhere in sight as the pair each nursed dwindling glasses of beer. Holding a folded bill out, she flagged down the dark-haired bartender, telling her, "Three wise men," when the woman stopped in front of Tabitha.

Dean gave her a challenging look at the stiff drink order, but only said, "Where you been? What took you so long?"

A slow grin spread as she cheekily told him, "Ran into someone in the bathroom, got caught up talking about different kinds of kisses and then demonstrating."

She laughed at the brief look of fantasy that flickered in his eyes, followed by a sour look when he remembered it was his sister inspiring the image.

"Jesus, Tab," he grumbled into his beer. "Anyone you're not inappropriately kissing?"

The bartender lined up the three shots, and Tabitha started with the Johnny Walker, then immediately slamming back the Jim Bean and quickly following with the last shot of Charlie Daniels.

With a quick breath at the dizzying three shots she admitted, "I'm just trying hard not to do anything dumb and inappropriate."

Chapter End Notes

As you can tell, I moved the scene from in a later season where Dean catches Castiel watching porn. And I reserve the right to rearrange other things to suit my needs in the future. :)

Also, be sure to let me know what you think!
Tabitha was quickly becoming used to their current traveling arrangements. Dean of course drove most of the time—only switching off with Sam or Tabitha when exhaustion was nearly past the point of overwhelming him—and Sam usually rode shotgun. Leaving Tabitha to ride in the backseat.

Not that she minded. She got the whole backseat to herself to stretch out and sleep on and could spread her things out around her without it disturbing the boys too much. And she'd never had a problem with carsickness, so she could easily read or work in the back as they drove, too.

After waking from a long nap, she quietly dug out her laptop and powered it on. She knew she couldn't work too long on it, she'd run her main laptop battery down that morning and had already used a little bit of the power on her backup battery. But at least she could check into a few things that she'd been thinking about as she'd drifted off to sleep.

Looking up as the laptop powered on, she caught her older brother's eyes in the review mirror. He nodded to her, asking softly, "Sleep well?"

She shrugged in return, glancing in front of her at their younger brother. "Well enough," she replied, careful to keep her tone quiet so as not to wake Sam from his sleep in the passenger seat. His head was turned to lean against the side of the car, and whatever folded-over newspaper he'd been reading had slid from his lap onto the floor at his feet.

Dean said nothing, his eyes turning back to the road as she concentrated on her computer screen, plugging in her wireless data card so she could access the internet as they drove.

Tabitha paused as she waited to connect to the internet, her eyes landing on the charms of her bracelet clinking lightly against her laptop. She'd been doing more research on some of the charms, but still hadn't been able to learn much more about any of them. There was one she'd found some obscure references to in some hoodoo lore as a protection amulet against other magics. But there hadn't been much about it online, and nothing she was certain she could really rely on. She was really hoping to find some time to do some research in the heart of hoodoo territory, but wasn't sure when she'd get down to New Orleans.

Her brothers had done some research, too, but were as clueless as she was about the charms. She was just glad that Dean had begun to focus his attention on the mysteries of the charm bracelet instead of still riding her about not telling him she could hear angels’ voices. They'd had more than a few blowups over the whole issue. And Tabitha glumly wondered to herself how pissed off her brother would be if he realized she was spending as much time talking with the angel as she still was, or if he knew how close of a friend she considered Castiel. She even wondered to herself if she wasn't better off finally breaking the news to him about their friendship rather than letting it go on longer in secret.

Finally, she put the matter of the angel and the charm bracelet on her mind, turning back to her computer and her current task.

Her attention was so focused on her computer screen, that she didn't even really notice when her brother had pulled to a stop at a motel. Nor that her younger brother was now awake in the seat in front of her.
"Well," Dean told them as he turned off the Impala, rubbing his neck as he did so, "looks like we're finally here. Figured I'd get us a room so we could regroup and figure out our next move."

Tabitha finally tore her attention away from her computer, looking at the cheap motel Dean had pulled up in front of—their standard fare of accommodations. The old hand-painted sign out front was so faded that it was hardly legible, or perhaps it might have been at one time, if not for the partially faded graffiti painted over part of it. Something about the sign tickled a memory, but she couldn't place it, so she easily dismissed it. It wasn't the first motel they'd stayed in that had been tagged with graffiti. This kind of motel was normal for the Winchesters, and strangely enough, comforting in its familiar, dilapidated state.

"Where are we?" she finally asked Sam as she looked around.

Her younger brother laughed from his seat as he swiveled to face her. "What are you working on so hard that's got your full attention?" he asked instead.

With a careless shrug, she explained, "There's not many people left from my old life that I was close to. Mostly they seem to have been possessed at one time or another and are dead now, but there's still a couple of people I check up on. Those people all think I'm dead, but I can't count on all those demons still believing that. I'm sure Alistair's let that slip by now, so I still feel like I should check on them from time to time just to make sure the demons don't go after them again."

Sam looked slightly chagrined at her explanation. "Sorry," he mumbled by way of apology. But she waved it away. Wasn't his fault. He cleared his throat and continued, "Anyone in particular you're keeping an eye on? Any close friends?"

With a sigh, she shut her laptop screen with some finality. "Truly? Not really. I didn't have a whole lot of friends, even in the Bureau, and pretty much none that weren't associated with the Bureau somehow. The friends I did have are pretty much all dead now. There isn't too much of anyone to really check on."

"But there's still some," Sam astutely guessed. "And there's something or someone you're worried about."

She sighed at his observant demeanor, but grudgingly admitted, "Yeah. There's someone I'm a bit worried about. Kid of the one security guard I had to kill that night. I knew the kid a little bit. Knew him when he was in High School and getting himself into a bit of trouble. But he straightened out and went to college. Got a job out in California at a software firm writing code."

"So what's the problem?" Sam prompted.

"He went back home for his father's funeral of course, and asked for some time off work afterwards, but he still hasn't shown back up at his job. No one's seen him since. And I can't find much of any trail of him since his father's funeral. I'm worried."

Sam sighed as he laid his arm across the back of the seat, turning to face her more as he offered, "Maybe the kid just needed some time away to come to grips with his father's death. Wouldn't be unheard of, you know. It might be nothing."

"I know," she admitted. "And I'm seriously hoping it is nothing," she whispered, not meeting her brother's eyes as she set her laptop beside her on the seat, afraid that if she did meet his eyes, he'd see the doubt there.

"Where are we, anyway?" she asked him instead, desperate for a change in topics, not wanting to
swim in the guilt she still felt for what had happened.

Sam's expression suddenly changed, becoming almost guarded as he carefully replied, "Fairfax. Fairfax, Indiana."

She felt her face scrunch as she tried to place why it seemed familiar. She was certain she hadn't worked any cases with the FBI there, so why did it seem familiar?

"Fairfax?" she slowly said, and then the memory came back to her. "You mean Fairfax, like where we stayed and went to school for like a month?"

Sam nodded, a little grin coming to his expression as he explained to her, "Yeah, I was reading about a case while you were sleeping last night, about a girl that killed another girl at the high school."

"Nothing super unusual there," she pointed out. "Teenage girls are vicious little creatures, I remember too well," she explained, suppressing a small shudder. She'd never understood girls. Maybe it came from growing up with two brothers or from growing up with a father that treated them all like his little Marine recruits, but she had never gotten along well with other girls in her formative years. She'd much preferred the company of boys growing up. Though, when puberty had hit, that had taken on a completely different reason, she thought with a little grin.

"Yeah, but from reading the reports and testimony of the girl in the paper, it sounded like it could have been possession."

"How'd she kill the other girl?" Tabitha suspiciously asked, still not buying in.

Sam looked a little reluctant but finally muttered, "Drowned her in a toilet."

Flicking her fingers dismissively, Tabitha returned, "See? Just vicious girl drama. Doesn't mean demons."

"We should at least check into it. What if you're wrong? Can you just turn away now without at least checking it out, Tab?"

Frowning slightly, Tabitha asked, "Why are you fighting so hard for this maybe case? What's the big deal?"

"I just want to make sure nothing's going on here. Would it really be so terrible to check things out?"

Sensing that this really seemed like a big deal to her brother, she shrugged and relented, "Fine. Whatever. You want to go stomp around a school where went for a while way back when, I'll go along with it."

Dean ducked back in the car then, holding out a pair of room keys as he told them, "Got us a room. You guys want to check-in and regroup or what?"

Tabitha was about to agree with the idea, intent on grabbing a shower to wash away the scent and feel of their long road-trip, but Sam spoke first.

"Let's go check out our supposed killer. They've got her in a psych ward from what the paper I read reported."

"Fine," Dean grudgingly agreed. "Let's get this over with."

By the time Dean had driven to the mental ward, Sam's excitement over their case seemed to have
They parked the car in the back parking lot as Sam turned to his siblings and asked, "So, how should we go about this? FBI again? US Marshals? Reporters? What?"

With a frown at his excited demeanor, Tabitha shot his ideas down. "Marshals probably wouldn't be interested in a case like this, and they'd never let reporters in. But I don't think you'd really get much out of a teenage girl as a Fed either. She'd probably be too intimidated to talk to you and let her guard down."

Swiveling to face her, Dean suggested, "Why don't you play psychologist again? You pulled it off pretty well before."

Her face scrunching, Tabitha replied, "I'd really rather not. I told you guys, I hate being in those places. They creep me out, and I've been in enough of them over the years. Besides, this is Sam's catch, let him go play mad doctor."

As they contemplated it, an employee pushed a large rolling bin of dirty scrubs out by a loading dock, no doubt waiting for their cleaning service to come pick it up.

Smiling at the sight, Sam told them, "How 'bout I go in as an employee? An orderly or something. I'm sure we can find something in there to wear."

Dean waved his hand and slouched down in the driver's seat. "Go, do your thing. Still don't buy that the girl was possessed anyway. So I'm staying here and taking a nap."

With a half-smile, Tabitha told her brother. "Sorry, Sammy. I'm with Dean on this one. Besides, I still have some things I'm looking into on my laptop. And you don't need me to go with you to check this out. Go in and talk to the girl. Let us know if there really is something going on."

Their brother sighed and got out to go snag some white scrubs, then snuck into the building. Both Dean and Tabitha turned back to their own endeavors, both still having a hard time believing what their younger brother was telling them. A girl drowning another teenage girl in a toilet at school just didn't seem like something a demon would decide to do if it had possessed the girl. It just seemed too…juvenile. But they'd let Sam check it out and tell them what he found.

They were back in their motel room that night, both Dean and Tabitha had been trying to research more about the school, their killer, and any other strange deaths or incidents around the school or town. Neither one of them were yet convinced of demonic possession, but Sam had seemed certain that something was happening in Fairfax, and specifically, at the school they'd once attended, Truman High.

"Got covers arranged for us," Sam announced as he walked back into the motel room later that night.

"Awesome," Dean responded, his tone dripping with sarcasm. "Whatever it is, it can wait until morning. I'm getting some shut-eye." And with his announcement, he pulled his long-sleeve button-up shirt off and climbed into bed, almost immediately snoring softly away.

Sam shook his head as he joined Tabitha on the couch, grabbing his laptop from the coffee table in front of them.

Pausing from what she'd been doing, Tabitha turned to look at her brother, and then set her laptop down as she turned sideways on the couch, pulling her legs up to sit Indian-style as she faced him.
"Truman High was that one school you really liked back when you were like 14, isn't it?" she asked him.

Still looking at his computer, Sam shrugged and offered a simple, "I guess."

"Is that why it's so important to look into this?" she pressed.

"I guess it is, Tabitha," he huffed.

Drawing her knees up, she crossed her arms over them. "I'm just trying to figure out why it's such a big deal to you, Sam."

He finally closed the lid on his laptop a little, turning to face her more as he gestured around the room. "Don't you remember staying here? Don't you remember going to school at Truman?"

"Here? As in this motel?" At his affirmative nod, she admitted, "I guess not. I mean, we probably stayed at hundreds of motels that looked just like this growing up." She glanced around the room again, taking in the decor and bedding that was all the original 70's style that it had been when it was built. Just like so many other motels they'd stayed in and continued to stay in.

Reaching forward, he placed his laptop back on the coffee table, grabbing the half-drunk beer can Dean seemed to have forgotten about. "I'm surprised that you and Dean don't remember this place better. Dad dropped us off here and left on a hunt. He ended up being gone for nearly a month. Remember while we were here, we ran into that guy—what was his name?—he was some hunter from down in New Orleans, or somewhere in Louisiana. Remember him? I'd be surprised if you and Dean didn't. The two of you gushed and talked about him for months—hell, a year or more. You guys were so impressed with him."

"Cort," Tabitha softly whispered. "Cort Delacroix."

"Yeah, that was his name."

With a shake of her head, Tabitha looked around the motel room again. "I forgot it was in Fairfax when we first met him. I remember meeting him that first time, I just didn't remember where."

Sam seemed oblivious to her contemplative state, continuing obliviously. "Yeah, I can't believe you and Dean aren't more excited to be back where we first met him. The two of you practically worshipped him. You guys finally found a hunter that you thought was cooler than Dad."

Smiling faintly, Tabitha tore herself away from old memories best left in the past and told her brother, "That was a long time ago. Dean was 18 and I was only 16, still just a teenager at the time. Of course we thought Cort was…cool. But we grew up…things changed. I went down another path for a while, and Dean became a hunter himself. Probably thinks he's a lot 'cooler' than he ever imagine Cort being."

"I don't know," Sam laughed. "Dean couldn't stop talking about him or quoting the guy for nearly an entire year or something. I'm surprised he doesn't still. I mean, I admit that the guy seemed pretty cool to a kid, drove that big Harley, and then Dean wanted a motorcycle for the longest time after that."

"Yeah, he did," Tabitha agreed in a distracted manner. Unfolding her legs, she stood up, grabbing one of her brothers' coats from a nearby chair and pulling it over her shoulders. It turned out to be Sam's coat, nearly swallowing her with its size, but she needed to get out of the room. "I need some fresh air," she told her younger brother, "think I'll take a walk. But you should get some sleep. And then you can tell us in the morning what our cover at the school is going to be."
She was out the door before her brother could respond, stepping out into the bitter cold, and the snap of it stealing her breath.

As she walked away from the motel, she paused near the street, looking back at the old motel sign. The old graffiti on the sign brought back a bittersweet memory now, but she remembered the annoyance and anger she'd felt when she'd first seen it all those years ago.

"Shouldn't you be inside with your brothers?" Castiel asked.

Tabitha turned to look at the angel. She'd been wrapped up in a memory and hadn't sensed his appearance as she normally did, but she wasn't surprised by him showing up unannounced. Or even that he could find her despite her charm bracelet. He could still find her brothers. And he often showed up when she was by herself at their motels, or away from her brothers in some way. He always seemed to know when she was alone, and that was the only time he showed up to spend time with her.

"I just needed to go for a walk to get some air," she finally told him.

Seeing the question in his eyes, and knowing instinctively what he was going to say or ask, she headed him off with a chuckle. "It's one of those common human phrases, Cas. I just mean that I needed to step outside and go for a walk. I just wanted a few moments to myself."

"Do you want me to leave?" he asked, taking a half step backwards.

Grabbing his hand, she stopped him. "No. Stay. It's okay." She jerked her head down the street. "Walk with me?"

He nodded and fell in step beside her as she released his hand.

"Is there something troubling you?" he finally asked her as they walked down a dark, deserted sidewalk.

"No… Yes… It's nothing for you to worry about," she finally got out. "Just a lot on my mind, I guess."

They walked a little further, keeping stride close beside each other, but neither one touching, and neither one speaking.

Tabitha steered their course, walking in a large square around the motel, traveling several blocks along the quiet sidewalks. She realized that even though she wouldn't have been afraid to walk down dark sidewalks by herself, she still felt a little more at ease with Castiel walking beside her. She figured there wasn't much she and the angel couldn't take on together.

As they silently walked, a sight caught Tabitha's eye up ahead. She tugged on Castiel's arm, pulling him to a stop under the darkened shadow the spreading boughs that a large oak created. The angel looked at her curiously, and Tabitha nodded her head down the sidewalk, indicating to a teenage couple in front of a darkened house. The young couple was partway down the block from them, but their giggles and laughter carried down the street to where Tabitha and Castiel watched from the shadows.

"Is it normal for young people to be out so late?" Castiel whispered to her.

Tabitha grinned as she watched the girl, probably 16 or 17, trying to slip away from the boy and towards the little yellow house. And every time she'd almost slipped away, the boy, somewhere near her age, would grab her hand and pull her back into his arms, pressing more kisses to her lips as she
giggled and then pulled away again.

Glancing at the angel, she whispered in return, "Young love. At this hour of the night, I'm sure she snuck out and her parents have no idea she's even gone."

Castiel observed the young couple for another minute, the two of them watching as the teenagers made slow progress towards the girl's house, the boy whispering teases to the girl that they couldn't hear, but causing her to laugh even more. The girl finally became serious, seeming to tell the boy that she had to get back in her house, and Tabitha and Castiel watched as he gave her one last searing kiss before releasing her and watching her run up the steps to her door, quietly easing her way inside.

"They love each other?" Castiel whispered, his eyes still fixed on the sight, watching the boy as he looked longingly at the house before finally turning and walking down the street to where he'd parked his old car.

Tabitha shrugged. "Probably. It's not like I know them, but teenagers probably have the most uncomplicated love. Or at least what they think is love. Things seem simpler when you're that young. Plus all the hormones convincing you it's love. I've always thought of real love as being something that weathers good times and bad, something that's still there after all the highs and lows a couple goes through. Something that endures even when a couple goes through every other spectrum of emotion for and with each other." She nodded her head at the now empty sidewalk. "But to those two kids, I bet they think it's love. Maybe time will prove them right. Or maybe it will prove just to have been teenage hormones."

Castiel finally turned to look at her. "Have you ever loved? Like what you describe?"

She carefully considered her words as she began walking again, Castiel silently falling in step with her once more. "I've been a teenager who thought she was in love, just like I'm sure that girl thinks," she admitted. "But I've grown up and changed. Seen more of the world. I'm not the same naïve girl anymore, and truthfully, I think I gave up on that kind of love a long time ago. You don't live the kind of life I have and still expect to find and have that kind of love. Besides, the life of a hunter isn't exactly any more conducive to dating than my life as a Fed was before."

"Why do those 'kids' as you say, think that what they feel is love if they will likely one day change their minds as you explain? I have seen this often myself. Why do they think it is love when it proves not to be in the end?"

"You ask difficult questions sometimes, Cas," she admitted with a rueful laugh. "I think that the truth is, we humans just don't always know. Maybe it is love, but it's just not the real, lasting kind. We are an impulsive creature, I think. And our emotions drive us. And love, even if it's not lasting, is a very powerful thing." She glanced at the angel as they walked, shoving her hands into the deep pockets of the oversized coat she had borrowed from her brother as a chill washed over her. "What about angels, Cas? Haven't you ever felt love, felt the driving force of it?"

He shook his head. "As I've told you, angels don't feel. We don't experience emotion as humans do. I don't understand this 'driving force' you speak of."

With a slight shake of her head, Tabitha replied, "I still think you're wrong about that, Cas. I do think you feel emotion. You just bury it deep beneath your need to obey and follow orders. Or maybe it's that you don't understand these emotions, just like you said."

"Angels are not meant to feel emotion," he maintained, his eyes looking straight ahead.

Deciding to avoid that and going back to his previous question, Tabitha tried to explain. "Love is
different for everyone, I think. But it's like those two kids back there," she said, jerking her head over her shoulder at the yellow house now behind them. "For those two kids, it's maybe simpler than it is when you get older, just that need to be close, to touch, to kiss, to laugh with each other, and to see the other one smile. As we get older, it gets more complicated, but a lot of those base needs and instincts are still there."

"And humans follow these 'instincts,' these needs?" he asked, finally glancing at her. "That is why they so often sate their lust?"

"I guess," she shrugged again. "Sometimes that driving need is just too strong to deny. You see someone you care about and you just have to touch them, kiss them, and love them."

Silence fell once more as the pair walked. Tabitha wasn't sure if what she'd said made sense to the angel and his need to understand humans, but he seemed to be thinking it over carefully. She just hoped she hadn't confused the poor angel more with her attempts.

The motel was looming ahead of them before Tabitha broke the silence again. "Do you ever wish you weren't an angel?"

Castiel stopped at the sudden question, surprised by the strange topic. "I am an angel," he slowly told her. "I cannot be anything else."

Tabitha had slightly overshot her friend when he stopped so suddenly, so she walked back to stand in front of him, looking at his surprised face, his dark blue eyes wide as they stared at her.

"Yeah, but you don't always seem all that happy being one; not like I would have imagined angels to be anyway. You've told me a little about the other angels in your garrison, and I've met Uriel. But it doesn't ever seem like you want to spend much time with them. You're here with me so often—and you know I'm not complaining about it, because I enjoy your company—but I wonder if you spend any of your free time with any of the other angels. I know you said angels don't really have friends—not even with other angels—and that it's lonely being an angel..." she trailed off from her rambling, trying to finally pull her words coherently together. With a sigh, she continued, "It just makes me wonder if you ever wished that you could be human or something other than an angel. I mean...why else would you be spending so much time with me? I'm just some nothing human. It's not like I'm important and you have to spend all this time with me."

For a moment, Castiel only stared at her, and then, he reached up with his hand, his fingertips just touching the skin of her cheek, brushing down in a whisper across her jaw and chin. Tabitha closed her eyes at the sensation, marveling at how softly the angel always touched her, always just his fingertips gently grazing her skin, as though he was mapping the terrain.

"I have wondered what it would be like to be human," he admitted in a hushed whisper, as though afraid to say the words any louder. "Even wished to myself that I was not what I am and did not carry the weight of my responsibilities and my burdens." He sighed, and his hand fell away, causing Tabitha to open her eyes again as she stared at him, waiting for him to continue. "But wishing does no good. I am what I am. And you are not unimportant. That much...I know. You're...special."

He stepped back, and Tabitha knew he was about to disappear, so she reached out for his hand, stopping him as she wrapped one arm around his shoulders in a hug. She pressed a quick kiss to his cheek in goodbye, smiling that the action still seemed to bring some surprise to the angel's eyes.

"Whether you're an angel or anything else doesn't matter. But I'm glad you're a friend. It's nice to have at least one good friend these days. And I'm glad you finally have one, too, Cas. You mean more to me than anyone has in a long time, even if you are learning to lie better. I'm just some
human. I'm nothing important like you are. Angel of The Lord," she told him with a fond smile at the memory of his pronouncement the night he'd first appeared to them.

"You are important," he stressed. "And important to me as well. You mean… You mean… something to me."

And in Castiel fashion, he disappeared.

Tabitha hadn't slept much that night. Truthfully, she hadn't slept at all. So by morning when the boys were finally up, they found their sister sitting on the low couch in front of the muted TV, folding all of their assorted clothes she'd obviously washed sometime during the night.

Dean walked over and dug through one of her piles, grabbing a flannel shirt in muted brown colors and a dark Van Halen t-shirt to wear underneath it.

"Awesome, Tabby," he grinned as he pulled off his dirty, gray t-shirt and began pulling the clean t-shirt on. "Thanks for doing laundry, Tab."

Sam came over as well, digging through the pile and looking through the stack of folded clothes as Tabitha swatted at his hands.

"What's up with doing laundry, Tab?" Sam asked with a cheeky smile, ignoring her slapping hands. "I thought we were supposed to do our own laundry and not try to treat you like a maid service."

She tossed down the t-shirt in her hands, crossly straightening out the stacks of clothes her brothers had knocked over. "Yeah. You're not. So enjoy it while it lasts," she told them. "I just needed something to do last night; couldn't sleep. And the motel let me use their Laundromat. Seemed silly not to do all the laundry at once. But don't expect that to become a normal thing."

"'Course not, Tabby," Dean laughed. "Man, this smells great. How do you always get it so soft?" he asked, pulling his t-shirt away from his body and rubbing his nose back and forth across the inside of it. It was something he'd done habitually when they were kids, and it finally brought a smile to Tabitha's face.

"It's called fabric softener, Dean. I know, real mysterious stuff, huh?"

"Whatever." He turned to Sam. "So, what's your big idea for our covers? 'Cause I was thinking Homeland Security this time. We haven't done that in a while, and nobody ever really knows what they do anyway. They're just some big, über-scary branch of the government."

Sam hurried over to the small table, grabbing two manila folders and handing them to his siblings as he spoke. "I figured we'd get more answers if we were inside the school and inconspicuous. So I arranged for Dean to be the substitute gym teacher instead of the guy they had originally hired to come in. And after the librarian got an unexpected call about her elderly parents needing her to come home, the school needed someone to fill in as librarian as well. That way you can both interact with a majority of the students to see if any of them are acting strange."

"Man, high school," Dean complained in a whine. "I was just getting used to no more teachers' dirty looks," he muttered as his siblings ignored him.

"Librarian?" Tabitha asked with an unimpressed look, flipping through her folder. There were a few pages detailing her expected duties. Apparently as librarian, she would also be running the computer lab, and working as an aid that helped students with troubles in reading.
Dean on the other hand seemed excited. "Awesome. Gym teacher doesn't need to know anything besides blowing a whistle and making the kids run laps. I can dig that."

"And what are you going to be?" Tabitha asked, noticing that Sam wasn't holding a folder.

"Janitor," he shrugged. "At least that way I can get all around the school without seeming out of place while I check it out."

"Librarian?" Tabitha suddenly repeated, her voice bordering on a whine. "Why the hell do I have to be a librarian? And what the hell does a librarian even wear?"

Dean grinned as he started to say, "Well..." but trailed off as he once again realized it was his sister. "Dammit, Tab. You're killing all of my favorite fantasies."

She let out an unladylike snort. "Good. I do what I can. And I'm not worried about you running out of material. You have a porny mind anyway."

"True," he agreed, not bothering to deny it. "Well, let's hurry up and get this over with."

Tabitha was in complete agreement. "Why don't you guys go on ahead. I'll figure out my own ride there." At her brother's inquiring looks, she responded, "Do you realize how weird it would look if the janitor, librarian, and gym teacher all showed up at school together?"

"She's got a point," Sam agreed.

"I hate to admit it," Dean added, ducking with a sly grin as Tabitha chucked her folder at his head. "Fine. Fine. Let's just get this over with."

Tabitha pulled into the teacher's parking lot at Truman High. She'd paid for the use of a serviceable sedan for a few days from the motel owner for fifty bucks. But at least their cover would seem more believable this way. And she wouldn't have to listen to her brothers' wisecracks about her librarian outfit anymore. Which they'd both had a hand in helping to craft.

She'd finally settled on wearing a charcoal gray, knee-length pencil skirt, dark blue blouse, and a lavender button-up knit. She'd thought a pair of black heels had completed the ensemble well enough, but Dean had insisted she wear a pair of reading glasses as well. Where he'd even gotten them from, Tabitha didn't know, and wasn't sure she wanted to know.

As she walked into the school, old memories swelled in her mind. Memories she hadn't thought of or allowed herself to dwell on in a long time.

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"Class, this is Tabitha Winchester. She'll be joining us for a while. Class, say 'hello' to Tabitha," the portly, middle-aged teacher droned.

The class gave unenthusiastic mumbles in return few of them even really looking up at the new girl as they doodled in their notebooks.

Turning to the girl standing beside him, Mr. Ekren continued, "Why don't you tell us a little about yourself, Tabitha?" His voice was monotone and uninterested as he spoke from rote, and Tabitha wondered if he was even listening to her.

The girl shrugged, shoving her hands into the pockets of her short-cropped jean jacket as she said,
"I'm Tabitha. I'm a Pisces who enjoys long walks on the beach and underwater basket weaving."

Mr. Ekren huffed amidst the classroom's laughter; evidently, he had been listening to her. "Go take your seat," he stiffly told her. "You can find an extra algebra book in the back of the room."

Shrugging, Tabitha went to the back of the room and grabbed one of the extra books off a table, dropping her backpack on the floor beside her as she slumped into the empty desk in the back of the room.

Their teacher started monotonely droning on, but Tabitha ignored it, flipping the book open as well opening one of her notebooks.

"Hey," the boy next to her whispered. "Tabitha, right?"

She glanced at him; he was wearing a Truman High football sweatshirt, proudly proclaiming him as a jock. His brown hair was colored with drastic white-blonde highlights, and spiked with gel. From his archetypical jock appearance—right down to the single stud diamond in his left ear—she was absolutely positive she would find a letterman jacket in his locker as well.

"Wow, you listened to my name," she uninterestedly whispered back, rolling her eyes as she turned back to her notebook.

"You're pretty funny," he continued unperturbed. "And pretty hot, too. You got a boyfriend?"

She glanced back up and told him in a bored tone, "No. I just got here, and my family never stays anywhere very long."

"Want me to show you around the school at lunch? I could introduce you to everyone. I pretty much know everyone that matters in this school since I'm on the football team. I'll be the starting quarterback by next year. And then I'll have my junior and senior years to take our team to state."

She felt her eyebrow rise in an unimpressed manner at his bragging. Her brothers and she wouldn't be there more than a few weeks before their father came back for them, so she didn't much care what he thought he was going to do on the football team in the next two years.

"Good for you," she whispered back. "But I won't be here but for a couple of weeks."

Still not put off, he leaned closer across the aisle, whispering, "I'm Jake, by the way. So…you gonna let me show you around at lunch?"

Wanting him to stop talking before their teacher noticed, she finally gave a small nod. "Fine. Whatever." And then turned back to her notebook.

She could hear the teaching still talking up at the blackboard, the chalk making soft dragging noises as he went back and forth across the board, showing them how to work out the latest equations so they could do their homework. But Tabitha never looked up as he talked, instead, her pencil worked busily away in her own notebook.

She heard Mr. Ekren's voice getting closer, and quickly shut her notebook, looking up just as he came to stand in front of her.

"I know you're new here, Miss Winchester, but we do not write notes to boys in class. Do that on your lunch break or after school and pay attention to the lesson."

She pushed back in her seat. "I wasn't writing to any boys," she huffed, her arms crossing over her
chest. "I just got here. Who do you think I'm writing to? The whole male student body?"

The class laughed, partly at her answer, and partly at her daring to retort back to their teacher.

Mr. Ekren frowned, unimpressed, crossing his own arms, his chalky fingers leaving white dust all over the front of his dark blue shirt. "Then feel free to share with the whole class just what you were working so hard on that was tearing your attention away from the lesson."

Reaching onto her desk, she flipped the notebook open, pointing her finger at it as she said, "I was doing the assignment you already have written on the board."

He glanced back at where the assignment was indeed written in the top corner of the blackboard, scrawled out so that he wouldn't have to repeat it or rewrite it for every class period. Frowning back down at her, he answered, "Homework is meant to be done at home. Not in class. You need to pay attention to the lesson so that you are sure you're doing it right."

He started to turn away, thinking the matter done, but Tabitha wasn't through yet. "I am doing it right. I looked at the examples in the book and taught myself. And I don't have a home, I live in a motel. So I'd rather get my homework done here."

Turning back to her with narrowed eyes, he said, "And you're positive you can teach yourself better than I can?"

She tore the page out of her notebook, handing it defiantly to him. "Why not? I can teach myself as well as any of the teachers I've ever had over the years. And I'm done with the assignment."

The bell rang just as Mr. Ekren took it, the hushed students who had been watching the byplay suddenly springing up from their desks and rushing to their next classes.

Still holding the sheet of paper, Mr. Ekren asked her, "And you're certain of the work here? You don't want to take it home with you and look it over?"

She shrugged and shouldered her backpack. Math was one of the easier classes. The books always had the answers to the odd numbered questions in the back, and then she only had to figure out the answers for the evens. And with half the answers given, she'd always been able to teach herself how to work out the equations in half the time it took her various teachers to drone on about them.

"Yeah. I'm sure," she answered, leaving the room as she dug out her class schedule, looking for her next class.

She bumped into Jake out in the hall, surprised at the bright grin on his face as he fell in step beside her. "Hot, smart, and not afraid to talk back to the teachers. You're just the whole package, aren't you?" he laughed appreciatively.

"Guess so," she mumbled, looking at her schedule and trying to fill in her family's usual stories for the questions he asked about her. She had to admit though, Jake was actually a pretty cute looking jock, and could surprisingly carry on a conversation. He might not be so annoying after all.
Tabitha and Dean slipped out of the auditorium together, finding Sam in the hall, EMF reader in hand as he looked for signs of ghost activity.

Just before lunch, Tabitha and Dean had still been convinced that nothing was happening in the school, and had told Sam they wanted to leave. Although Dean had stipulated that he wanted to stay for sloppy joes at lunch. Tabitha had feared that the power of Dean being in charge of students—even just for gym—was going to Dean's head. He seemed to be really into the gym teacher cover.

But by the time lunch was over, it seemed that they had found the evidence Sam had been looking for. One student using a food processor during Home-Ec class trying and chop the hand off another student had been a pretty good clue that something more was going on at the school. The only luck in the situation was that Sam had been nearby and had seen the kid fall to the ground after everyone else had rushed from the room. And Sam had witnessed the ectoplasm oozing out of the kid's ear.

"Think school's out completely?" Dean asked Tabitha with a grin as they walked. Tabitha only rolled her eyes.

"How's the nonviolence assembly going?" Sam asked as Tabitha and Dean caught up with him.

"Apparently, shoving a kid's arm into a Cuisinart is not a 'healthy display of anger,'" Dean answered as they walked together down the hallway.

"Yeah," Sam agreed, glancing across at Tabitha. "Maybe we should have had you in the Home-Ec class instead of the library."

"Maybe," she agreed. "Hell of a lot more ways for kids to kill each other in there than in a library anyway."

"So, the kid had ectoplasm leaking out his ear?" Dean asked again.

"Which only comes from a seriously pissed-off spirit," Sam agreed. "It's got to be ghost possession."


"Yeah, but it happens," Sam reminded them. "I mean, they get angry enough, they can take control of a person's body."

"All right," Dean continued, as they walked down the hallway, "so, what, we got a ghost in the building?"

"Yeah, but where?" Sam replied, holding up his EMF reader. "I mean, there's no EMF."

"Then let's try to find out who it is," Tabitha pointed out. "To be tied here, the person probably died in the school. Can't be that hard to find out. They would have had to have died bloody. Got to be record of that somewhere."

"Way ahead of you guys," Dean told them. "I had to break into the principal's office to get this," he explained, pulling a folded piece of paper out of his red, school track pants. "Oh, and FYI, three of the cheerleaders are legal. Guess which ones."

Sam and Tabitha both rolled their eyes.

"God, get Dean back in a high school and he goes right back to being the same pervy teenager he
was then," Tabitha chuckled. "Keep your eyes on something a little more age appropriate," she reminded him.

Frowning, Dean looked down at the paper as he continued, "So, there was only one death on campus. It was a suicide back in ’98. Some kid named Barry Cook."

Sam suddenly looked chagrined, a dark look crossing his face.

"What?" Dean and Tabitha simultaneously demanded.

Sam sighed as he admitted, "I knew him. How did he die?"

"He slit his wrists in the first-floor girls' bathroom," Dean supplied.

"That's where—" Sam started.

"Right," Dean picked up, "where the chick got swirleyed to death, exactly."

Tabitha shook her head as they continued walking down the hallway. "So this ghost is possessing the kids getting picked on and using them to get back at bullies?"

"It looks like," Sam agreed.

"Well," Dean asked, "does that sound like Barry's M.O.?"

Sam had a faraway look in his eyes as he explained, "Barry had a hard time." And then continued on to explain what he remembered about Barry being picked on by a kid named Dirk when they’d gone to school at Truman.

"I’d say Barry sounds like our angry spirit then," Tabitha surmised when Sam had finished his story. "Suicide is enough to create an angry spirit."

"Easy enough then. Just gotta salt and torch the bones and then this kid is put to rest," Dean said. "Let's get this done and get out of here."

"You guys go ahead," Tabitha told them, looking down at her librarian outfit. "I'm not really dressed for burning a corpse anyway. Besides, there are a few things I should do in the library before I just disappear."

Dean rolled his eyes. "Right. You just don't want to have to do any digging."

"Well, there is that," she grinned. "But I left my purse in the library, and I really *would* feel bad if all three of us just took off and one of us didn't at least stick out the day."

Sam shrugged. "Well, why don't you hit the computers and find out where Barry's buried then. Give us a call when you figure it out."

Tabitha was balancing a stack of books as she carefully maneuvered through the unfamiliar library.

After she’d gotten back to the library, she hacked into the city records to find the location of Barry’s grave and texted it to her brothers. But once she was done with that task, she'd come out to the front desk where her purse waited for her, only to find the desk littered with returned books.

She had seriously considered leaving the mess for the real librarian when she returned from the "emergency" Sam had sent her on, but felt guilty enough that they’d probably scared the poor
woman, and decided the least she could do was check the books back in and reshelving them. But as she
carted stacks of books around, she realized the Dewey Decimal System was a little more complicated
than she’d anticipated.

"What are you doing?"

Tabitha jumped at Castiel's voice, nearly knocking over the stack of books balanced on one arm as
she tried to shelve a book with her other hand.

Castiel suddenly reached out and took the stack of books from her arm, holding the books in his
hands as he stared at her, waiting for her answer.

She shelved the book she still held and turned to face the angel. "Well, it started out as just trying to
do a friendly deed in exchange for pretending to be the school librarian, but I think I'm nearly out of
goodwill." But she smiled as she said it. She was nearly done with her task anyway, the stack of
books now in Castiel's hands being the last of the books she needed to put away.

She took one from the top of his stack and headed to where it belonged, looking over her shoulder as
he followed her. "You showed up at the perfect time to help me put the rest of this away though."

Castiel continued to follow Tabitha silently as she finished putting away the books.

When she was finally done, she clapped her hands once in appreciation at finishing the task, feeling
slightly better about posing as the librarian for the day.

But when she turned to face the angel, she saw his furrowed gaze looking her up and down.

With a downward glance, Tabitha laughingly explained, "Part of the cover was to pretend I was the
librarian."

Giving a tired sigh, Tabitha smoothed her hands down the front of her form-fitting skirt and
smoothed where her blouse was tucked into it, having long since abandoned the dowdy sweater part
of her costume as she shelved books. "This was what we came up with anyway for me to look the
part." She put the black frame reading glasses back on to complete the look again. "Dean found these
somewhere, too." She struck a pose and smoothed the ends of her hair where they stuck up from the
top of her French twist. "What do you think? Do I look like a librarian? Or more like a porny version
of one?" she laughed, thinking to herself that Dean's addition of the reading glasses put her too close
to the latter.

"'Porny?'" Castiel slowly repeated, stepping slightly closer as his head slanted a bit to the side.

She laughed, removing the glasses from her eyes as she considered them. "Yeah, you know, like I
look more like I belong in a porn movie about naughty librarians or something. You know, a movie
like that one you were watching at the motel that time."

"It was about a pizza man who—"

But Tabitha stopped his words by placing a hand over his mouth, laughing as she told him, "I really
don't want to know what the plot was about." She stepped back and then slipped her heels off,
dangling them from her fingertips as she turned back towards the angel and pulled the bobby pins
from her hair with her other hand, shaking her head to loosen her hair. "But I'm no beautiful, plastic,
done-up actress in a porn film. I'm just plain old Tabitha."

"You are a very lovely human," the angel earnestly told her.
Stepping forward in her bare feet, Tabitha pressed a quick kiss to his cheek, having to rise slightly on her toes to do so even though they were close to each other in height. "It's nice of you to say so," she chuckled as she stepped back, "but I'm sure I've got nothing on an angel's beauty."

"You are more," he whispered in return, stepping closer to close the gap she had created, reaching up to touch her cheek with his fingertips once more.

Tabitha had almost grown used to the feel of the pads of his fingers brushing against her skin, and smiled at the sensation. But when his hand flattened and fully pressed against her skin, spanning her cheek and jaw, her eyes snapped open to stare up into his dark blue eyes. Eyes that seemed even darker with some unreadable emotion as he inched closer to her.

She gasped when his mouth suddenly swept down to meet hers, but her lips were soon eagerly accepting the promise his gave. Her mouth closed along his lower lip, her tongue sweeping out to slowly glide across it as he hummed a noise of appreciation.

Suddenly, his hands were at her hips, lifting her up in the air and walking with her in his arms. One of her hands slid up his back and up to his head, threading in his hair and pressing him closer even as he blindly carried her and unerringly set her on a low table just behind her. As soon as he set her down, his body began to press closer to her, his hands on her hips pulling her towards him as her legs struggled against her fitted skirt to make way for his demanding presence. His lips never once left hers, and his gaze bored into her, his lips and eyes speaking volumes that perhaps only her heart had any hopes of translating.

Her shoes and the reading glasses had fallen heedlessly from her hands, freeing them both to pull at his shoulders, needing the feel of his warmth pressed closer to her body. She was amazed at his fervor and insistence in his kiss, but her mind had no more time for any other emotion or thoughts. It could only savor the sweet mellow taste of his lips, like warm, sweet honey on a summer day.

A sensation of warmth and comfort spread throughout her as her hands slid to his shoulders, just starting to push the trench coat from them so that she could feel more of him. His own hands sliding from her hips, to her waist, and up her sides, his touch leaving a trail of fire along her body, even through her clothes.

"Yo! Tabitha! Where the hell are you?!"

Castiel jumped back at Dean's bellowing interruption, and both of them turned towards the front of the library, trying to look in vain through the rows of bookshelves towards where Dean's voice was coming from. And Tabitha cringed at the thought of what his reaction might be if he saw them like this.

And for that matter, what her own reaction should be.

Chapter End Notes

Well, Cas finally kisses her! But as usual, it won't be smooth sailing from here on.

And sorry to cut it off there. This was getting to be a super long chapter (almost 20k) so I decided to split it into two chapters. So we'll see the fallout of Cas's sudden indulgence in his feelings and impulses in the coming chapters. ;)
Also, this chapter is named after the Alice Cooper song, and 10 points to anyone who can find the couple of lyrics from it that Dean works in!
Knocks Me Off My Feet

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tabitha's hands were unsteady as she gripped the edge of the table, turning to look back at the angel who seemed just as unsteady as she was. His clothes were rumpled and in disarray from where her hands had grasped at him. And his lips now slightly swollen as his mouth hung open, greedy breaths of air being drawn through his lips. Even his hair—normally a boyish and charmingly disarrayed look—was now a harried mess from her roaming hands.

Turning away from the sound of Dean's calling voice, he met her gaze, whispering in an unsteady voice, "I... That's what the pizza man did." He swallowed hard, his chest still heaving deeper than she'd ever seen the angel breathe. "Your brothers have not put the spirit to rest. Be careful," he suddenly told her.

"Tabitha! You all right?!

Tabitha glanced again in the direction of her brother's voice, torn between confusion at Castiel's strange warning and her brother's unexpected presence. But when she turned back, Castiel was gone.

Springing up, she pushed down at her skirt and smoothed her blouse back into the waistband, calling out, "Be right there!"

Dean stepped around the last bookshelf just as she was bending down to pick up her forgotten shoes and the reading glasses.

"Were you talking to someone back here?"

She shook her head and tried to look puzzled as she carefully finger-combed her hair. "No. I was maybe singing or humming a bit to myself as I finished putting books away. But there wasn't anyone here." And no way was she copping to her brother that she'd been—what?—making out with an angel in a library? She wasn't even sure what the hell had just happened, and she wasn't about to tell her brother about her meetings with the angel now, although she had been previously considering coming clean to him about it.

Dean didn't look convinced, but shrugged it off. "Why the hell would you actually be playing librarian? And why haven't you been answering your phone? We were starting to get worried." And though his tone was gruff, Tabitha could indeed hear the worry beneath it.

Still barefoot, Tabitha walked to the front of the library and fished out her phone from her purse. There were several missed calls from both of her brothers, several more texts from Shawn, and even a missed call from him.

"I didn't realize it," she mumbled to her brother as she fired off a message to Shawn. They'd been texting back and forth through the day. His twenty-first birthday was the following day, and Tabitha had been trying to explain to him that she couldn't get away from what she was working on to meet him in Boston and take him for a drink like she'd promised, but that she'd still do it in a few days. But Shawn wasn't accepting the answer and was badgering her for her location, saying he'd come to her.

It'll be a couple of days late, but I promise I'll still take you for a drink.

He texted back almost immediately. We're drinking. U promised. Can't back out.
She rolled her eyes and shoved her phone back into her purse, arranging it with her other things and slipping her heels back on.

"What's going on with you?" Dean asked. "You're acting all squirrely again and won't look at me."

Ignoring the question, Tabitha started towards the entrance of the library, shutting off the lights and locking the doors as she asked him instead. "So it's done? You guys put Barry to rest?"

Dean caught up with her as she started down the hallway, frowning at her before he finally answered. "Yeah. It's done.

"You're sure?" she pressed, feeling uneasy about Castiel's parting warning.

"Yeah. Of course I'm sure. Not my first barbecue. Now we can finally take off out of this town tomorrow. I can't wait."

Tabitha looked curiously at her brother as they walked, surprised by his emphatic desire to leave. He didn't usually care one way or the other about staying somewhere if they didn't have another case to work on. "I didn't realize this town was that bad in your memory. It was the first time we met Cort, remember? You practically idolized him. About as much as you idolized Dad."

Dean frowned even more, glancing at her before he muttered, "I just want to get out of this town." He shoved his hands into his coat pockets. "And I'd rather forget about Cort."

Tabitha crossed her arms as she stared at Dean, surprised by his harsh tone. "What's that supposed to mean? Did you run into Cort sometime since Sam and I left to go to college? Did something happen that I don't know about?"

He shrugged as if it didn't matter, but the tenseness of his shoulders said otherwise. "Saw him once in New Orleans right before Sam came back to hunting." Throwing her a suspicious look, he suddenly demanded, "Why? Have you seen him since you and Sam left?"

She shook her head. "No. Not in years. Why, Dean? What's going on?"

"Nothing. Just forget about it," he insisted with a wave of his hand. "What were you doing back there in that library anyway that you didn't hear your phone ringing?"

"Nothing," she quickly insisted, turning away, afraid that her face might give her away. "I was just putting books away."

They continued through the darkened and silent hallways without another word. Both lost in their thoughts.

Tabitha glanced down a hallway as they went, remembering herself as a no more than a kid really, kissing and groping Jake Mahoney in an alcove like the hormone-crazed teenagers they'd been. And then gently touching her lips as she recalled the much different kiss she'd just received. A kiss that stirred her more than all the kissing and make-outs with Jake had when she'd been that hormone-fueled teenager.

As she stepped out into the night air, her thoughts lingered on the boy she had understood only too well as a teenager, the man she had been crazy about as a teenager but would only understand when she finally became a woman, and the angel she wasn't sure she would ever fully understand if she lived a hundred years. Thoughts and memories of the boy, the man, and the angel filled her mind.

~*S~*U~*P~*E~*R~*N~*A~*T~*U~*A~*L~*~
"I am so gonna kick your ass the next time I see you, Jake Mahoney," Tabitha growled to herself, stepping back to examine her hard work.

Her fingers were pruney from the soap and water in her bucket, and her knuckles torn from where they continued to scrape against the wooden sign of the Pine Motel. But the graffiti still wasn't coming off.

She roughly shoved the motel towel back into the bucket she'd stolen from the maintenance closet of the motel, water sloshing out of the bucket at her feet. But she picked up the towel and attacked the sign once more, trying to wash away the sight of a white, spray-painted heart, with the names Jake and Tabitha painted over the sign of the motel. She had to wash the evidence away before her brothers saw it and gave her hell, or worse yet, before their father got back and saw it.

Even though she was 16 and a sophomore in high school, their father didn't think she should be spending time with boys. That they were only trouble.

She scrubbed harder at the stupid heart and idiot Jake's name, thinking to herself that one stupid boy didn't prove her father right. But all the same, she wanted to erase the graffiti he'd painted, the jerk stupidly thinking it might impress her after what he'd pulled. She was hoping it might erase the memory of his girlfriend slapping her at lunch that day.

Her father might think she didn't understand boys, but she did. She knew he had been lying to her and making out with her just because she was pretty and the new girl. She was the shiny new toy he'd lose interest in and then go back to his volleyball-star girlfriend.

Tabitha kicked the bucket of soapy water, knocking it over in frustration as the spray-painted image only faded a little, having soaked into the wood too deep to completely erase. "Ugh!" she shouted. "I could've been a star at volleyball, or basketball, or something else if we didn't move all the time and I could actually join a team!"

She threw her towel down and angrily stomped a foot, promising herself that she'd punch Jake in the jaw the next time she saw him, and do more than grab his stupid girlfriend by the hair and just threaten to cut it off like she'd done after Kristie had slapped her at lunch. It hadn't been Tabitha's fault. She was new at the school; she didn't know Jake already had a girlfriend. The jerk hadn't told her that. And Kristie should have known her boyfriend was slutty and blamed him, not her.

Her head jerked up as she heard the loud roar of a motorcycle slow down behind her, the rider pausing to turn into the parking lot of the motel. Even in the dark, Tabitha was certain she saw his dark helmet turn and pause on her before he sped up a bit and pulled up to the office of the motel.

Stepping around the now forgotten sign, Tabitha peeked around the edge to see a tall, well-built man step off the gleaming black motorcycle, resting it on the kickstand as he turned away from the office, his unseen face looking towards her for just a moment before he turned and walked into the office, pulling his helmet off as he walked away.

Shaking the encounter off, Tabitha grabbed her stolen items, jogging back to the maintenance room to put them away before anyone noticed their absence.

Her skilled fingers had just twisted the deadbolt back into place with her lock-pick when she heard a voice behind her.

"You're pretty good with a lock-pick set, kid."

With a gasp, Tabitha sprang to her feet, hiding the lock-picks behind her back as she looked up at a
tall man with dark colored hair. From the heavy black leather coat and helmet under his arm, it was the same mysterious motorcycle rider that had just arrived.

He pushed back the loose waves that had fallen in front of his eyes, grinning devilishly as a light twinkled in his brown eyes. Or maybe it was just one of the security lights of the motel?

"Why bother hiding it now?" he asked her, his deep southern voice sweet and slow like molasses, and the grin not leaving his dimpled face as he leaned casually against the side of the motel. "I already saw you break into that utility room and lock it back up again. B and E is pretty advanced for a kid like you." He wasn't a very old man, but older than Tabitha. Somewhere in his low to mid-twenties she figured.

Her eyes narrowed as she stood taller and squared her shoulders, wishing now that she had more on than the short-cropped tank top with Tinker Bell on it. Acutely aware that part of her stomach was exposed between it and the rolled up waist of her pajama pants.

"You try to turn me in, and I'll deny I was ever near that room. And besides, nothing's missing," she defiantly pointed out.

He laughed at that. The dimples in his cheeks flashing in an almost boyish manner with his mirth. "Didn't say I was gonna turn you in, kid. Just said you shouldn't bother hiding it after I saw you."

Not relaxing in the slightest at his assurance that she wasn't in trouble, she pointed a finger at him and told him, "I'm not a kid!"

His eyes suddenly trailed up and down her. "You're not much of one anymore," he agreed. And then he stepped past her, ruffling her loose hair as he said, "Night, kid."

She huffed after him, but watched him go, tracking his movements as he pushed his bike to his room and then grabbed the saddlebags and a duffle bag off the back of his motorcycle before he walked into his room.

She wasn't spying, not really—the room she shared with her brothers was just down past his after all—she just happened to stroll past his room as he held the door open and sprinkled something from a mason jar across the doorway of his room.

Slowing down, she saw that it looked like a red powder he was lining the doorway with. The man glanced up, his eyes still amused and laughing as he told her, "Red brick dust. I'm a bit eccentric." And then he laughed more at the way she wrinkled her nose, closing the doors but not completely shutting out the laughter she could still hear coming from him through the wood barrier.

Huffing, she walked quickly back to her own room, wondering if Dean was back from his "social engagement" yet.

Over the next several days, Tabitha watched the man with the sandy colored hair and the laughing eyes. And strangely enough, she knew that even as she tried to discreetly watch and study him, that he was very aware of her covert investigation of him.

One day, she followed him as he walked from the motel to the courthouse, going inside and not coming out for several hours, a folder of papers in his hand when he did exit. She continued to trail him, following him back to the motel where he started up his motorcycle and drove away.

Seeing her chance—and knowing she would hear the loud motorcycle drive back to the motel—she hurried to the man's door, and careful that no one was watching, picked the lock to let herself in. Something didn't sit right with her about the man. He didn't seem like a mere tourist or just a random
passerby through town. She wanted to get a better look at what this guy was all about. And luckily, Dean was on another social outing, and Sam was busily working on homework, still trying to live the façade of a normal kid. Tabitha let him have his dreams, but had begun to accept that she probably wasn't destined for a normal life herself, and had already begun letting those dreams slip away. At least her brothers' activities left her alone to check out the stranger.

The door opened under her practiced hand, and she stepped carefully over the red dust lining the threshold of the doorway, careful not to leave any trace of disturbance. As she looked around the room, she was astonished at the sight, and felt assured in her suspicions of the strange man.

Computer printed out pages, articles, and pictures lined the walls of the room. Looking very much like what her father did when he was on a hunt. Question was, just what kind of trouble was this guy hunting here? She wondered to herself if he was some kind of scam artist.

As she edged around the room, she skimmed through all the pages and articles, paying closer attention to the scrawling notes the man had scribbled in the margins.

"What're you doing in here, girl?"

Jumping and spinning around, Tabitha turned to face the man, her hand automatically reaching into her back pocket for her switchblade and holding it out warningly towards the man.

"Hold on there, ma chérie, no cause for that," he slowly told her, pushing the door gently closed behind him. "I'm just asking what you're doing here."

"What's all this?" she demanded, pointing at the walls. "What are you up to?"

"Just doing a bit of research. I'm a writer you see," he easily told her. But she knew a lie when she heard one.

"I don't believe you. You're up to something," she accused.

He smiled and leaned back against the closed door, his hands folded behind him. "Says the girl who broke into my room. Pretty good with the lock-picks, aren't you, chérie. Knew you wouldn't be able to help yourself when I left. Looks like I was right. So the question still is, what are you doing in my room?" he spoke the words slowly and carefully, seeming to stress the question with his careful enunciation and slight loss of his accent.

"I knew you were acting strange and up to something," she said simply. "I want to know what."

He took a few steps towards her. "Told you."

She held her blade up warningly at his advance, and he stopped, holding his palms up towards her. "Don't come any closer. I'm not afraid to use this."

"No doubt. But you didn't come in here with any bad intentions towards me," he told her, that infuriating smug smile in place.

"How do you know?"

He turned slightly and pointed back at the red dust that was lined just inside the door. "Brick dust keeps anyone meaning me harm from crossing the line. You're curious about me, but I know you don't actually mean me harm."

She craned a bit to look around him. "That's just superstition," she tried to insist.
When she looked back at the man, she saw his gaze drift down, and she followed the gaze to see the charm on the necklace her father had given her had fallen outside of her t-shirt.

As a look of understanding crossed his face, the man drawled, "I'll be damned."

Her brow furrowed and she said without thinking, "You could be."

He suddenly grinned again as he replied, "You know a bit about superstition yourself, don't you girl?"

Tabitha carefully replaced the anti-possession charm under her t-shirt to hide it from his eyes. "I don't know what you mean. And I'm not a girl."

His lips tugged up a little more as he slowly stepped forward and used the toe of his heavy black boot to kick back the edge of his rug, revealing something drawn in white chalk underneath it. "Thought you was just a curious kid following me, but you know a bit, don't you?"

Glancing down, Tabitha stepped forward herself and kicked the rug back further, staring in shock at the Devil’s Trap drawn beneath the rug, nearly identical to the one in the room she shared with her brothers.

"You're a hunter," she whispered, the pieces falling into place.

"Yup," he agreed. "You're a bit young to be one, though."

She looked up. "My father's a hunter," she automatically answered. Her knife had lowered to her side, but she suddenly lifted it, realizing she should still be suspicious. "Just because you're a hunter doesn't mean you're trustworthy."

"Good girl," he praised.

"I'm not a girl!" she snapped.

"Who's your father? Might know him," he continued, ignoring her outburst.

Pausing for a minute, she considered it, but finally relented, "John Winchester. I'm Tabitha."

He considered the name and told her, "Heard of him. Good hunter. Works alone I hear. But where is he? Haven't seen him in town."

"He's working a job. Be back any day," she quickly insisted.

Shrugging, he continued, "Didn't know he had a daughter. Two boys, too, by the looks of things." She stayed silent. "Knows Bobby Singer from what I hear," the man lazily continued in the silence. "I know Bobby as well, you know."

She gave him a pointed, questioning look, and he seemed to catch on, giving her a flourishing bow. "Name's Cort Delacroix," he told her. "You can call Bobby. Ask him about me. I'm not looking for any trouble with you, just here doing a job."

"What job?" she demanded.

"Not for you to worry about," he told her, one brow rising as he bit back a smile, seeming to find her anger amusing.

Finally, he turned and opened the door, gesturing her to go out it. "If you're not gonna drop that
"switchblade, perhaps you'd be more comfortable leaving, ma chère. Go give Bobby a call. He'll tell you I got no quarrel with a little slip of a girl."

She stomped past him, her knife still in her hand as she exited, spinning around on the concrete pathway outside the room to tell him, "I'm not a little girl." And then she stomped back to her room.

Over the next week, she continued to follow Cort, only this time, he'd quickly drop back and catch her, telling her to go back to the motel, although, occasionally allowing her to tag along after him when he researched. She had called Bobby about the man of course, and Bobby had assured her that he was a solid hunter. Though he had warned her that she should stay away until her father had returned. He'd even offered to come stay with them when she'd told him how long their father had been gone. But she'd assured Bobby that their father would be back any day.

Her brothers had found out about the hunter staying in the same motel as them as well, and while Sammy wasn't too interested in him, Dean often joined her in tagging along after Cort, although Tabitha did her best to leave him behind when she trailed after him, annoyed by all the questions Dean was always asking Cort.

Cort had even finally relented and explained the job to her one day. He explained that he'd heard a story from a man that practiced hoodoo in New Orleans, and that word had spread to that man about a family having been cursed by someone else with a grudge. A family that had suffered terrible luck and tragedies and had since moved north to Indiana trying to escape their poor fortune. Moved to Fairfax. And Cort was tracking them before the curse got stronger and started resulting in deaths.

Tabitha had studied the material Cort had dug up on the family and she had to agree that it seemed like the right one. They'd certainly suffered some horrible tragedies. Their business had been audited and penalized heavily by the IRS, then started on fire and the insurance had lapsed and not paid out on the damage, their home had been struck by lightning, also doing damage, and even the family dog had run away or disappeared.

"I can help you find the gris-gris bag, or talisman, or whatever it is you're looking for in that house," she insisted to Cort as she followed him from the library where they'd been researching, following him right to his motel room door.

He paused in the doorway, looking at her with a raised brow, but finally giving a resigned sigh and stepping back to allow her into his room.

"I'll go look for myself, ma chère," he told her. "The family got cursed years ago back in New Orleans. No telling where to look for the object that was cursed, or even what exactly the object could be. Could be gris-gris, could be mojo bag, could be some kind of rootwork, or even an amulet or talisman. You won't know what to look for. You don't know hoodoo like I do."

"I can find it," she insisted. "Besides, the family's housekeeper is almost always there, Mrs. Stevens rarely leaves home, and their two kids are home in the afternoons after school, too. How are you going to look around without being suspicious?"

"How are you?" he shot back, pacing around the room in an annoyed manner.

"Lucas goes to school with me. He's a year older, but I have a Chem class with him. I'll get him to invite me over to study at his house so I can look around," she told him.

Cort turned back to her with a sardonic look on his face. "That your plan, ma chère? Twist this boy 'round your finger and get him to write your name on some sign in town, too?"
She felt herself flush, but forced herself to steadily meet his eyes and tell him, "I'll get him to invite me over to study."

"I don't like this plan, chérie. What would your father say if he knew I even considered allowing it? Hell, if he even knew I'd allowed you to research it as much as you have?"

"I can do it," she insisted.

The next evening, she knocked on Cort's door, holding her hands behind her back as he opened the door.

He sighed, but allowed her in. "You really shouldn't be spending so much time in my room, chérie. What would your father say?"

She ignored the comment, turning to him as he shut the door, grinning and holding out one of her hands to drop something into his.

His brows shot up at the sight of the dark suede bag in his hand, carefully prying it open to peek inside. "You—you found the gris-gris bag?" he stuttered in shock.

"Yup," she proudly told him. "Spilled a bunch of lemonade on the couch, and as Lucas was cleaning it up, and I 'went to get cleaned up,' I looked around in the attic. And I found an old family chest, and that bag was under the lining of the lid, stuck in a little carved out hollow. Easy as pie."

He shook his head, clearly amazed at the ease she described. Tabitha followed him as he walked into the bathroom, dropping the gris-gris bag into the metal trashcan, and then pulling out the silver flask from the pocket inside his black leather coat. He poured some of the liquid into the trashcan, and then threw a lit match in after it. The pair silently watched as it burned, Cort opening the bathroom window to waft out the black smoke.

"That's it?" Tabitha asked, the disappointment showing in her voice.

"What you expect, chérie?" he laughed, setting the wastebasket in the bathtub and going back into the outer room.

"I dunno, something more," she admitted as she watched him pulling down the pages and pictures tacked to the wall.

"You done good work, ma chère. You can be proud of helping that family out," he told her.

"What are you doing?" she asked as she watched him, ignoring his compliment.

"Job's done," he told her. "Gotta head back to New Orleans and look for the next job."

She felt her heart drop as she watched. Somehow, she hadn't ever thought about what would happen when he was done with his case. Or for that matter, what might happen if her father had come back by the time he'd originally said he would.

"You're just leaving," she whispered.

Cort walked past her and tousled her hair affectionately. "New Orleans calls, ma chère, gotta heed her summons," he laughed again.

Tabitha didn't think, just acted, grabbing the flaps of Cort's leather jacket and pressing herself closer to him, using his coat to lift herself to her toes and pressing a desperate kiss to his lips. For a second
—just a second—he responded, but then the pages fell from his hands as he grabbed her shoulders and pushed her back until he held her at arm's length, a startled look on his face.

"What're you doing, Tabitha?" he demanded in a soft, unbelieving whisper, using her first name for the first time since they'd met.

"Kissing you," she told him, not understanding why he was pushing her away.

"Oh chérie," he whispered, almost apologetically. "This can't happen, ma chére, you're still a young girl. I'm too old for you."

"I'm sixteen-years-old," she insisted. "I'm not a girl."

Cort's thumbs rubbed soothingly against her shoulders as he held her away from him. "Still a girl, Tabitha," he said, using her name again and making her cringe at it. "I have five years on you. And maybe someday that might not be so much. But in your short time, that's a lifetime of difference. This old man has seen more than you can understand in those five years, too. Mostly, I'm a broken wreck of a man. You deserve more. Maybe not those poor lads the foolishly think painting a girl's name on a sign will impress her, but you deserve a man not ruined by his past and the things he's seen and done. You still have an innocence to your eye that can't comprehend the man I've had to become. You deserve a man that can kiss you without holding a part of himself back all the time out of fear of what you might see. And you deserve a man that can kiss you and make the world fade away. But I'm not the kind of man for a bright, innocent girl like you. You should stick to boys your own age."

He released her shoulders then, both of them studiously ignoring the tears building in Tabitha's eyes as he went to the door and held it open. "You should get back to your brothers, ma chére," he whispered.

She forced her head high as she walked past him, spinning once she reached the concrete pathway to face him one last time. "I'm not the little girl you think I am. I've seen and done more than you give me credit for. I've hunted with my dad. I know what happens and what sometimes has to be done."

She glanced briefly away as she steeled herself and fought the gathering tears. "And someday I'll prove it to you."

~*S~*U~*P~*E~*R~*N~*A~*T~*U~*A~*L~*

Tabitha glanced at the sign in front of the Pines Motel as she drove her borrowed car back. The graffiti heart and its two names were indeed faded now, but she could still read what Jake had painted so long ago. She'd understood Jake and his interest in the new girl only too well, but she hadn't fallen for his attempts back then.

And she had spent the better part of a year trying to more fully understand Cort, forcing her father to take her out on more hunts with him and Dean to prove to herself—and to Cort—that she wasn't the naïve girl he took her for.

But he'd proven himself right, too. When she had seen him again almost a year later, she hadn't been the same girl that had pined after him when he'd disappeared on his motorcycle into the night. A year of hard hunting had taken away the last of the innocence that she'd had, and she was older than her seventeen years.

She hadn't seen Cort in the time that passed after their last run-in when she was 17, but she knew from some of the other hunters that he was still out there himself, and still lived in New Orleans, even according to what Dean had divulged. But she'd changed even more in the intervening ten years since she'd been 17. She'd seen and done things that had hardened her even more. Had finally struck
out on her own and changed the path of her life. If only for a while. She wondered sometimes if Cort would even recognize the woman she now saw in the mirror looking back at her.

Her phone buzzed in her purse, indicating a text message, and Tabitha pulled it out to look at the latest message Shawn had sent her. *Know where U R. Coming there 2morro night. U promised.*

She sighed, but didn't answer, knowing that the current boy in her life wouldn't listen. She glanced once more at the Pines Motel sign. Jake may have been a boy from her past, but Shawn was the boy in her current life. And though she knew Shawn had some kind of crush on her, she couldn't muster feelings of that sort for him. She looked at his eyes and still saw the innocence in them. Much like Cort had commented to her when she'd been 16. In only a year's time, that innocence had been gone the next time he had looked into her eyes, or at least, mostly gone. But Cort, too, was now just a man from her past.

Pressing her fingertips gently to her lips, Tabitha thought about the kiss Castiel had given her in the library. She didn't know why he had kissed her, and she wasn't sure what to feel about it. She was almost afraid to let herself feel anything about it. Castiel wasn't human; he was an angel, she reminded herself, just as he had often reminded her. And while she'd more than thoroughly enjoyed the kiss—hell, even enthusiastically participated—she couldn't let herself get too caught up in it now that she had cooled down. For all she knew, it might have meant nothing to the angel other than trying to experience something he'd seen humans do.

The thought that it could mean something more than that was too frightening to contemplate. After the life she'd lived, how could she possibly open her heart up to the angel? He might not have innocence per se in his eyes, but he was a divine being. So far above a lowly mortal.

Still. Her fingers brushed across her lips again as her mind returned to that moment.

That kiss.

What *had* it meant?

Tabitha shuffled her feet and alternately paced around the Impala as she waited for her brothers to finally pack up their junk and meet her at the car. It was well after noon now, both of them having slept in until nearly then.

She'd tried to sleep as well, truly, she had, but like the previous nights, she just hadn't been able to close her eyes. The 15-mile run she'd taken all around town early that morning hadn't helped either. She'd hoped it would push her to exhaustion, but her mind was still filled with swirling thoughts and questions, leaving her muscles aching, but mind and body still wired.

"Would you put that damned thing out," Dean complained as he stepped around her and threw his bag into the trunk.

She turned to see Sam trailing behind their older brother, and both boys frowning at her.

Flicking the ash from the tip of her cigarette, but not putting it out, she said, "Wow. You guys move slower and take longer to pack up than a bunch of women."

Sam threw his bag in the trunk as well. "Dean's right. You really shouldn't smoke. I just don't get why you'd take a long run and then punish your lungs by smoking anyway."

"You're not getting into my baby with that thing," Dean warned her across the top of the Impala's black roof.
With a huff, Tabitha finally crushed the cigarette with her boot heel. "Yeah, yeah. I know," she told Dean, turning to address Sam as the two stepped up the their side of the car and opened the doors. "And of course I know it's bad for you. Kinda like hunting. But I needed something to settle my nerves."

As they all climbed into the car, Sam immediately turned to regard her over the back of his seat. "What's going on? Something's up. Why haven't you been able to sleep the past several nights?"

"I dunno," she evaded. "I'm sure it's nothing. Probably sleep like a baby once we get on the road."

"Tabitha—" Sam started in a reproachful tone.

"Just don't, Sammy. It's nothing to worry about. I'll sort it out on my own. And I don't press you on what's been bothering you lately, so give me the same courtesy."

Sam's lips tightened into a narrow line as he regarded her, but he finally gave a grim nod and turned around, not willing to open himself up to questions.

Beside him, Dean glared at them both, but finally gave a resigned sigh as he threw the Impala in gear, not addressing either of them.

"Swing by the school one last time," Sam directed. "I want to say goodbye to someone. An old teacher."

Dean headed in that direction, but not without a few grumbles. "I told you, Sammy. We don't make friends with regular people, and we don't say goodbye."

But he still pulled into the now quiet parking lot of the school. Most of the kids and faculty had gone for the day.

Tabitha opened her door when Sam opened his.

"Where you going?" Dean demanded of her when she started to follow their brother. "You have an old teacher you wanna look up, too? You guys think this is *Dead Poets Society* or something?"

"Nope. Can't even remember most of my teachers," she replied with a sardonic grin. "But I want to look into school records and make sure we didn't miss anything."

"I told you. We salted and burned the bones. It's done," he insisted.

"I just want to look," she growled back, shoving the door closed with more force than was required.

When she entered the school, she had to duck into a hallway to avoid one of the office staff. Since she hadn't shown up to fulfill her substitute duty that day, she decided it was best to avoid the woman and the inevitable questions seeing her in the school would raise.

After the woman had finally passed, Tabitha continued on her way towards the library, figuring she'd use the computer there to get into the school records system to figure out if someone had died in the school.

She was just about to turn towards the library when she heard a voice; she paused, listening to it.

"You got tall, Winchester."

The voice was that of a girl, and yet it wasn't. Castiel's warning still fresh in her mind, she sprinted around the corner, approaching silently behind a teenage girl as she stood over Tabitha's little brother. From her voice and the fact that she seemed to have gotten the best of her brother, Tabitha
knew the girl was likely possessed by their angry spirit.

Sam was on the ground, twisted on his stomach, but Tabitha could tell by his movements that he was grabbing salt to expel the spirit from the girl. So she quickly maneuvered behind the girl, wrapping her arms around her in a chokehold to immobilize her. Her brother sprang to his feet, and seeing the girl fighting but immobilized, clapped his hand and the salt over the girl's mouth.

As the spirit was shoved out of the girl, the force knocked Tabitha backwards onto the floor as Sam wrapped his own arms around the girl to support her now lax body.

"You okay, Tab?" Sam asked over the girl's head.

Tabitha pushed herself up onto her elbows. "I'm fine. The girl?"

Sam looked down at her as Tabitha pulled herself to her feet, her body aching even more now.

"She's out, but I think she'll be okay."

"What about you?" she asked, pointing at his chest where there was a dot of blood growing slightly from a puncture wound.

"I'm fine," he insisted. "It's not that deep."

As Tabitha approached her brother, they shared a look. "This isn't over, is it?" he whispered in a tentative voice.

"No," she agreed, sadly shaking her head. "This isn't done yet. We missed something."

She turned away to head for the library.

"Where are you going?" Sam asked her retreating back.

"I'm gonna go see if I can find what we missed. You take care of the girl and tell Dean that this isn't done yet."

"How are you going to find anything else?"

Tabitha paused to answer with a grin, "Computers in the library are on the school's main server. And the real librarian has her login information taped to the bottom of her keyboard."

Tabitha flipped through the papers she had printed out at the school as they pulled off the road in the middle of the country to regroup.

Sam sat down outside the car as he dabbed at the wound on his chest. Dean grabbed a bottle of whiskey from the car, handing it to him as he said, "Trust me. This will help."

Taking the bottle, Sam clumsily tried to dab at the wound and pour the liquid onto his own chest.

Handing the papers she'd been thumbing through to Dean, Tabitha grabbed the bottle from Sam. "Let me do that," she told Sam and then threw over her shoulder at Dean, "Take a look at the student records of those three kids."

Sam hissed as Tabitha pulled his t-shirt out of the wound, dabbing some of the whiskey on the rag and wiping away the blood before pouring a little more whiskey onto the wound to disinfect it.
Dean's look turned dark at Sam's groans. "That ghost is dead! I'm gonna rip its lungs out!" He turned back at his siblings' incredulous looks and shrugged. "Well, you know what I mean."

"It knew my name, Dean," Sam pointed out. "My real name. We burned Barry's bones. What the hell?" He hissed again as Tabitha dabbed at the wound.

"Well, maybe it wasn't Barry. Maybe we missed something," Dean tried.

"Just like I said," Tabitha huffed. "Look at those papers, Dean."

"What am I looking at?" Dean asked as Tabitha continued to clean the wound.

"Look at their bus routes," she told him, pulling out some gauze to tape over Sam's wound. "Pull your t-shirt off so I can wrap some ace bandage over this, Sammy. You were lucky this wasn't deeper."

"Damn," Dean muttered as he paced and Sam followed his sister's orders, "they all rode the same bus."

Sam held his hand out for the papers and he winced while Tabitha wrapped an ace bandage around his chest and over his shoulder.

"Okay, so maybe the bus is haunted," Sam wondered.

"Well, that would explain why there's no EMF at the school, but not the attacks," Dean said as he stopped pacing and leaned against the trunk. "I mean, ghosts are tied to the places that they haunt. They can't just bail."

"Apparently this one can," Tabitha pointed out as she stood from bandaging her brother. "But it can happen, guys. We've heard stories about spirits possessing people and then riding them for miles. And when they leave the body, they're yanked back to their usual haunt."

"So a spook just grabs a kid on the bus and walks right into Truman?"

"It's possible," Sam agreed.

Dean started pacing again. "Ghosts getting creative—well, that's super."

Bending over, Dean pulled out three beer bottles and passed them around. "Guess this means we have to start over trying to pin this ghost down."

Halfway through her bottle, Tabitha paused to pull her buzzing phone out of the back pocket of her jeans.

"Dammit, kid," she muttered to herself when she read the text message on her phone.

"What's up?" Sam asked her.

Firing back a message, Tabitha replied, "That kid that does some work for me that I couldn't have the FBI do, Shawn, I promised him I'd take him for a drink on his twenty-first—which is today. But I was trying to put it off a day or two since we were on this hunt, and the stubborn kid won't take no for an answer and somehow tracked us down. Says he's in Fairfax right now and he's waiting for me to take him out for his promised drink."

"So tell the kid we've got a ghost to take care of first," Dean suggested.
Pacing as she continued to text with Shawn, she replied, "Right, Dean. I'm not gonna do that. The kid doesn't know anything about this stuff. I've kept him out of it, and I'd prefer it stay that way. He thinks I do PI work now that I'm dead to the FBI." She growled as Shawn sent another text. "Damn stubborn kid."

"How'd he know where you are?" Sam asked.

"Hacked the cell info, I'm sure," she dismissively replied.

"Look," Sam started as he stood up, pulling a clean shirt on over his bandages, "we can look for the spirit, you go take the kid for his drink. He did help us out last time, and it sounds like he isn't going to leave until you take him out. We can handle looking for the spirit."

Chewing her lower lip thoughtfully, Tabitha considered the idea.

"Sam's right, Tab. We can handle one ghost. Go do your thing," Dean added.

Tabitha walked back to the Impala as the boys followed. "Fine, but you guys call me the second you even think you are in trouble or need help."

"Shot of Jack," she told the bartender as she sat down at the crowded bar, holding out a folded bill for the bartender.

Shawn turned beside her to face her, a grin on his fashionable scruffy face. "Starting off heavy, huh?" he laughed.

"What about you?" she asked him as the balding bartender dropped her glass off. "What sounds good for your first drink as a legally acknowledged man?"

"How about a shot of Wild Turkey?"

She nodded to the bartender, repeating the order and holding out another bill.

The pair raised their glasses to each other in a toast. "Twenty-one," Tabitha told him as he quickly repeated her toast. She downed hers quickly, and grinned when Shawn downed his with a slight grimace.

"Why'd you even order Wild Turkey if you don't like it? I know you've been drinking for a while, regardless of your actual legal age," she chuckled, hailing the bartender again and asking for two tap beers.

Shawn shrugged, his face darkening slightly. "I've never had Wild Turkey before. I was saving it for today."

Tabitha bumped her shoulder against Shawn's, taking a sip of her beer as she asked, "Why?"

Shawn wrapped both of his hands around his pilsner, not drinking but staring down into the tall glass. "Wild Turkey was what my dad always drank. It's what he promised to take me out for today," he softly admitted.

Guilt assuaged her at his admission. She'd been so focused on her own problems, and trying to finish the hunt with her brothers, that she'd forgotten how truly young Shawn still was in many ways. She hadn't realized how much he still struggled with the death of his father. Or how much he'd been counting on her to be there to take him out for the drink his father had promised.
"I didn't know your father, Shawn," she told him. "But from what I heard, he was a good man. And I think he'd be proud of how much you've grown up, and done it on your own, too. He'd be proud of just how much you've overcome."

"I'm not so sure he'd be proud of the choices I've made. What I did got him killed," he muttered.

"You made some dumb choices as a kid," she agreed, "but your heart was in the right place. You donated most of that money to charities, and I know you still do donate heavily. And the things you do for me, it really does help people. You can feel good about that."

He finally swiveled towards her a little. "The stuff I do for you that you tell me to immediately forget all about. That stuff you mean?"

She turned and ruffled his short blonde hair, smiling when his whiskered cheeks turned red as he pushed her hand away. "Yeah, that stuff," she laughed, thinking that while the scruff was supposed to be fashionable, he still looked like a little boy playing at being a man.

"What really happened with the FBI?" he asked her then.

Tabitha sighed and pulled her hand away, wrapping it around her glass, draining it, and then holding out another bill to order another shot of Jack. "You really don't need to be asking or looking into that, kid. Promise me you won't. It could be dangerous."

When he stared at her and didn't answer, she turned towards him again and demanded, "I mean it, kid. It could be dangerous looking into that. Leave it be. Promise me."

For a beat, he stared at her, probably measuring her resolve and seriousness. Finally, he nodded and said, "Fine. I promise. But you must have done something for it to be so dangerous."

Sipping her whiskey, she muttered, "I wish I knew." She'd give a lot to know why the demons were after her.

They spent the next few hours talking about more inconsequential things, both careful to keep the topics more lighthearted.

Tabitha started to feel a bit of a buzzing in her head, and decided she had better keep to beer or even switch to water, though she was surprised that the alcohol was affecting her; she normally held her liquor much better.

Tabitha! she suddenly heard ring out in her mind, and realized the angel had been trying to get past the protection of her charms to get her attention and that it wasn't the liquor affecting her.

Though she knew it was useless, she sat up straight and looked around the room.

Castiel? she carefully thought at the angel.

I've been trying to reach you. Your brothers could use your help.

She stiffened but asked, Can't you help them? I don't know where they are.

They've gone after the spirit; they're on highway 40 just outside of town. Leave now. I can't go; I'm on the field of battle.

She could almost feel the thread of connection cut abruptly away, but still called after him, Please be careful!
"I've got to go," she told Shawn, turning to see that he was staring at her strangely. "I've got to go help someone."

He stood as she did. "What's going on? I'll help you."

"You can't," she hurriedly told him, grabbing her large purse and slinging the long strap over her head and shoulder. "I've got to go now. My brothers are in trouble."

Shawn followed her out as she weaved through the crowded bar and into the dark parking lot.

"Brothers?" he incredulously said. "I thought they were dead."

She finally spotted a fairly new condition motorcycle and pulled out her switchblade, prying the panel off to pull the wires from the starter and hot-wiring it. Over the roar of the Ducati, she told Shawn in clipped, sarcastic tones, "Yeah. They're dead. You're dead. I'm dead. Maybe we can all sit down someday and talk about what it's like being dead."

Before she could take off, Shawn suddenly swung a leg over the bike behind her, climbing on despite her protests. "I'm going with you."

She considered fighting him off, but didn't want to waste the time, so she gunned the bike, spitting gravel across the parking lot as she headed for highway 40 just as fast as the bike could travel. She weaved around traffic until she got out of town and could really open the bike up, ignoring the way Shawn's arms tightened uncomfortably around her waist.

As she sped around a corner, she barely caught sight of road spikes thrown across the asphalt in the dark night. A bus was pulled haphazardly to a stop just beyond it. Knowing her brothers' handiwork when she saw it, she immediately braked and downshifted on the handlebars, feeling Shawn's weight slam unexpectedly into her back as she held tight and drove around the spikes in the grassy ditch, slamming on the brakes suddenly again behind the Impala as she swung her leg over the front of the bike, leaving Shawn to steady the bike as she ran to the open trunk of the car, grabbing a sawed-off shotgun and a canister of salt that she shoved into the top of her purse against her hip.

Sam was on his back when she ran up to the bus, a chunky teenage boy straddling him and wailing away. She saw Dean running into the bus. Likely looking for whatever they needed to put the spirit to rest.

But Tabitha couldn't wait for Dean to find it. Sam was getting wailed on by a kid that outweighed him by at least fifty pounds, as well as having supernatural strength.

Stopping by the two on the ground, she slammed the butt of her shotgun into the temple of the boy, tossing the salt from the canister into his face when he looked up.

The possessed boy rocked back on his heels as he bellowed in pain, but Tabitha saw the blinding anger growing in his eyes.

She looked over the kid's shoulder at where Dean was looking through the pockets of another man on the ground.

"Hurry up, Dean!" she shouted, dropping the empty canister and shouldering the shotgun as she eyed the boy again.

"Got it!" Dean yelled, and suddenly the boy straddling Sam threw back his head as the spirit was expelled in a puff of fire and smoke.
Tabitha stood staring at the scene for a moment, suddenly realizing how out of breath she was, and bending over to catch it.

"Little help?" Sam squeaked from underneath the unconscious boy.

She stepped forward as Dean leaned back against the bus, looking at the scene.

"Ew." His nose wrinkled up. "He's giving you the full cowgirl."

Tabitha pushed at the boy's shoulder. "Dammit, Dean. Give me some help. This kid's heavy."

With his help, they finally managed to get the kid rolled off their brother, each grabbing one of Sam's arms to pull him to his feet.

"What was that?" Shawn suddenly asked, appearing a few feet away, his voice and body both shaking,

"Who's this and where'd he come from?" Dean asked with a jerk of his head towards Shawn.

"This is Shawn. The kid I told you about," she explained to her brothers.

"What the hell was that?!" Shawn suddenly shouted, his shaking increasing despite his yell.

Tabitha looked around at the scene, two bodies unconscious outside the bus, and a bus full of guys and their coach, staring out the window at them. "We need to get out of here," she told her brothers in a low voice.

They nodded in agreement as she grabbed Shawn by the arm, silently propelling him back towards the Impala and pushing him into the backseat, leaving the Ducati she'd stolen behind as her brothers packed up the car and quickly got in.

"Any chance I can just tell you that you didn't see anything?" she half-heartedly asked Shawn.

"What the hell was that?" he repeated in a softer whisper.

Dean turned his head and looked over his shoulder as they drove away. "What the hell were you thinking bringing that kid out here, Tab? How'd the hell you even know where we were?"

Shifting uncomfortably under her brother's scrutiny, she quietly admitted, "Castiel said you were in trouble and that he couldn't get there to help. So he told me where you were."

The Impala suddenly swerved to a screeching halt as everyone else braced their hands against something to keep from flying forward.

Dean whipped around to face Tabitha behind him. "You're still talking to that angel? He show up again, or'd he talk to ya..." he trailed off and pointed at his head.

"Yeah, that," she mumbled in return.

"Dammit, Tabitha," Dean thundered, his hand slamming against his seat. "We can't trust those damn angels. You were there when they were trying to kill Anna. They'd of gone through us to do it," he continued crossly. "And they still might come after you because of what you can do."

"Look, I don't want to argue with you about this again," Tabitha growled in return. Ever since Dean had found out about her little ability, they'd had nothing but arguments every time the topic or the angel was brought up. She had just started feeling grateful that they had finally stopped talking about
the whole mess. "Castiel said you guys were in trouble and told me where. Just be glad he did, 'cause for one, I'm pissed that you guys got yourselves into that kind of mess and didn't call me like you'd promised."

Dean pointed a commanding finger at Tabitha over the back of the seat. "I don't want you talking to that damn angel anymore. They're nothing but trouble, Tabitha. And I want to know if he tries to talk to your mind again or whatever the hell it is he's doing that you can hear. It ain't normal and it ain't safe."

Leaning forward, her gaze narrowed on her older brother, she told him, "I'm not a teenager you get to still think you're in charge of, Dean. And Cas talked to me to warn me about you guys because he couldn't get to you. You're not responsible for me, so stop acting like you're my father and can tell me who I can talk to."

Her brother leaned closer to her as well, whispering in low angry tones, "I am your brother. You're damn right I'm still responsible for you. So stop arguing with me."

Throwing a hand at Sam, she argued, "I don't see you laying down the law and telling Sam that he has to report in every time he talks to his demon buddy. Or telling him that he absolutely can't see her again. And for my money, a demon's a helluva lot worse than an angel anyway."

"Hey, don't bring me into this," Sam backpedaled.

Throwing a glare between them both, Dean continued, "What the hell is wrong with you two? One of ya running off with a demon and the other cavorting with a damned angel. Why can't the two of you run around with normal humans?" Dean suddenly pinned his sister with a suspicious glare. "God! You're not sleeping with the angel, are you?"

Tabitha managed not to wince or look away from her brother as she truthfully answered, "He's an angel, Dean. And no. I'm not sleeping with an angel." She glanced over at Shawn watching from beside her, his head jerking back and forth between them as he stared in utter shock at them all. She sighed and let her head fall back against the seat in defeat as she continued, "And Shawn's as human and naïve as they come. And now the poor kid's traumatized by all this supernatural crap."

For a moment, Dean paused to look between all of the occupants of the car, and then he turned back to Tabitha. "Where we taking him?"

"His car is in Fairfax at that bar 2 blocks down from the Pines Motel. Head there first."

By the time Dean pulled into the parking lot, Tabitha was just finishing her brief overview of the world as it really was. Not the world as Shawn had known it.

"You're really serious about all this?" he asked as Tabitha walked him to his nondescript blue Honda. "Angels, demons, ghosts, werewolves, vampires—they're all real?"

"Sorry, kid. But that's the truth. Good news though, Bigfoot is still just a story. Leprechauns, too," she tried to joke.

It fell flat as Shawn stared down at the keys in his hand, idly standing by his still locked car. Tabitha took the keys and pressed the electronic fob, unlocking the doors. "Either stay the night and then get on home in the morning, or get going back that way tonight. You're probably better off getting home where things are familiar and make sense to you. I won't call you for a while to ask for anything."
Give you time to digest all this and sort it through in your mind. Or if you don't want me to contact you again, I'll do that, too. You just let me know," she told him, patting his shoulder and then walking away as he silently got into his car.

"Kid handling it okay?" Sam asked as she got back into the Impala.

"Kid's had his feet knocked out from underneath him. It takes time to adjust and wrap your mind around such a huge change in your life. He'll mull it over for a few days. Probably won't sleep much for a while, but he'll either come to grips with it, or decide it wasn't real and it was a momentary lapse of insanity." She sighed as she let her head fall back against the seat once more, her eyes falling shut. "I can relate to the feeling," she whispered. "It's hard knowing where you stand when you can't get back to your feet after having them knocked out from under you."

"What's knocked you from your feet?" Sam whispered, causing Tabitha's head to jerk back up as she stared at him. "Something's going on," he continued. "You've been off. And you haven't been sleeping, either."

"Nothing." Tabitha insisted, glancing between her brothers' probing gazes, and then focusing on Dean. "Just drive."

But as Dean put the Impala back in gear, her traitorous fingers stole up to her lips, softly touching them as her mind drifted back. Castiel had contacted her once since that kiss, but she wasn't any closer to knowing what the hell he'd meant by kissing her that way.

Just what the hell had that kiss meant?

And why did even the thought of it still knock her from her feet?

Chapter End Notes

The lyrics he used from School's Out were: "no more teachers' dirty looks" and "school's out completely."

Be sure to leave your thoughts!
"God, Dean. Could you at least take a few breaths between bites?" Tabitha asked her brother as he wolfed down his bacon cheeseburger.

"What? I'm hungry," he told her around a mouthful of food.

Tabitha cringed as she turned back to her own sandwich, absently dipping it in the au jus dip as she turned back to her laptop on the table next to her plate. "I can really see what attracts a woman to you," she muttered as she scrolled down the page on her screen.

"Damn right," he agreed, washing his food down with the last of his beer.

"Your table manners do leave a little something to be desired," Sam agreed, still picking at his salad.

Dean shrugged unconcerned, flagging down their waitress for another beer and proceeding to flirt unashamedly with the ditzy girl.

Tabitha didn't look up from her screen as she commented, "At least you know to flirt with dumb bimbos like that who don't know to set their standards any higher."

She could almost hear the grin in his smug reply. "Exactly. Just my type."

"You gonna eat that thing or just marinate it, Tab?"

Hearing Sam say her name, she finally looked up from her computer screen with an ineloquent, "Huh?"

With a pointed look at her plate, Sam said, "Your sandwich. You going to eat that or just keep holding it in your au jus until it falls apart?"

Finally, following his look, Tabitha saw that her French dip was indeed beginning to fall apart in the cup of juice, the bread soaking up the dip and turning soggy as it fell apart.

"Oops," she mumbled as she set her sandwich back on her plate, no longer finding it all that appetizing or that she had much of an appetite.

"What is going on with you?" Dean demanded as he pushed back from their table, leaning his chair back on its hind legs.

But Tabitha wasn't fooled by the relaxed pose. Dean was coiled and ready to strike on whatever she might let slip. And she was damn well determined not to. At least not to let slip what had been on her mind the past two days. She'd been doing her damnedest to think of anything but that.

Instead, she told them what was currently on her mind. Though her current problem wasn't much more pleasing to spend her time dwelling on.

"I think I need to split off from you guys for a couple of days."

"What?" Dean demanded in a harder voice, his chair falling forward with a resounding and final thud. "We just got to town to check out this vengeful spirit. And you want to take off for somewhere
else? Not until we're done here."

She'd known it wouldn't be easy, but she still fought not to roll her eyes at her brother. "We just got
done handling a vengeful spirit—one you insisted the two of you could have handled just fine on
your own and didn't need me—so I guess you don't really need me on this one either. And it's just
for a few days. I need to head to California to take care of something."

"What's in California, Tab?" Sam asked, trying to be calm and levelheaded.

"Something I need to take care of."

"Oh, no!" Dean argued, glancing around when his voice carried across the marginally filled
restaurant and lowering his voice. "You're not getting by with that. You wanna take off, you better
tell us what's going on."

Tabitha pushed her laptop until she'd spun it around to face her brothers, pointing at the screen. "I
finally caught an article pertaining to a kid I've been looking for. Mikey—son of the one security
guard I had to shoot at the FBI building back in Virginia," she told them in a low voice, carefully
scanning around the room. "He took time off work after his father's funeral, and nobody had seen
him since the funeral. But he finally showed back up out in California."

Sam and Dean leaned forward to scan the article.

Looking up, Sam commented, "Says here that he bypassed a security alarm to rob a jewelry store,
and was caught when a silent alarm inside the store was tripped."

Dean looked grim as he told her, "Also says here that this wasn't his first crime. Did some shoplifting
as a juvenile offender, and even was suspected of some other crimes and thefts. Doesn't sound like
this is anything that we handle, Tab."

"No," she agreed. "It might not be, but I still need to go check on him. Mikey had some…sticky
hands let's say, but after he stole a neighbor's car for a joyride, I helped his dad straighten him out.
Told him that if the neighbor chose to report it, that it would be his third strike and he'd be sent to jail
for a long time. Especially since GTA was a federal crime—"

Sam cut her off. "I thought the kid was a minor. The third strike mandate doesn't apply to minors like
that."

Tabitha shrugged. "I may have embellished things a bit. I was trying to scare the kid into
straightening up his life. And he did. He went to college and got a job out in California I guess. But
I'm worried that the death of his father is what sent him back onto this kind of path."

"Tab, what happened with his father isn't your fault," Sam kindly told her, reaching across the corner
of the table to affectionately squeeze her shoulder. "And it's not your fault if this kid decided to make
stupid decisions in the wake of his grief. You can't keep taking in troubled kids like this."

She knew he was referring to the similarities between Shawn and Mikey, and couldn't argue there.
"Kids dealt a rough hand in life whose fathers are dead. I guess I can relate to them," she commented
with a sad smile.

"Look, I can understand feeling some responsibility for this kid," Dean told her, a look of real
understanding in his eyes. "But how 'bout we finish this case, and then the three of us will blow over
to the west coast and you can check on this kid."

But she shook her head. "I don't want to wait. They're pushing to start his trial already by next week,
and I want to go see him before then. See if there's anything I can do to help him out."

"How's it going to be of any help to him? One, the kid thinks you're dead. And two, the kid knows…” but Dean trailed off, seeming to realize how cold it was going to come out.

Tabitha finished for him. "Knows I killed his dad. Apparently for no reason. I know. But maybe there's something I can do, even if it isn't safe to go talk to him. I just feel like I can't abandon the kid after what I did."

Sam folded his arms over the table and pushed his salad plate away. "I hate to point it out, Tabby, but the last time you split off on your own is when the kid's dad got killed. Maybe you leaving on your own isn't the best idea. This could be demons again. We still don't know why they were after you, but it might be they know what you can do. You know," he commented pointing discreetly to his head and glancing around the room to make sure no one could overhear them. "Maybe it would be safer to take Dean's advice and wait until we can all go together. Just in case this is the demons setting another trap for you."

"I don't want to wait," she insisted.

"Fine," Dean told her, shocking her with his sudden agreement. But then, he crossed his arms over his chest. His surefire sign of stubbornness that meant she wasn't going to like or agree with whatever came next. "I'll stay here and take care of the vengeful spirit, and Sammy can go with you to California."

Tabitha stared in shock between her brothers. Sam looked reluctant, but wasn't arguing with Dean's command.

"No," she told them in a hard voice. "You're not staying here alone to deal with a vengeful spirit. That last one nearly kicked both of your asses. You're not taking one on alone. I can drive to California by myself and back just fine."

"I'm sure you can," Dean agreed. "But it's not happening. Sam's right. What if this is another trap? I'm not letting you walk into another one all alone."

Slowly, Tabitha reached forward and shut her laptop, clearing it off the table as she thoughtfully told them, "I might have a decent alternative for us. If you don't want me to go alone, I might know of another hunter that will say yes if I ask him to go with me."

"Tabitha? Tabitha? Can you hear me? Where are you?"

Tabitha had been feeling the tightness and pressure in her mind for a few minutes, and had started to suspect that Castiel was trying to reach her, so she wasn't surprised when his words finally reached her mind—or however it was that she heard him.

She let out a tired sigh and considered ignoring the angel's calls—after all, it had been several days since he'd sent out his warning for her to go save her brothers, and then hadn't bothered to contact her once since—but she knew it would be petty to ignore him. And though she felt too exhausted to consider launching into the conversation they needed to have, she concentrated and told him, *Headed north on I29 in South Dakota, just past exit 62.*

"Where are you going?" Castiel suddenly asked from beside her in the passenger seat.

She huffed. "I'm headed north. Thought I'd go over into Minnesota and watch the Vikings play. Jeez, where do you think I'm going, Cas?"
"I didn't think there were any more Vikings," the angel murmured almost to himself.

"You're thinking of the North Stars. Lost them to Texas years ago."

The angel just stared at her, not understanding her references and teases. "Forget it," she mumbled, "I'm too tired to get into an explanation of the history of area sports teams tonight."

She continued driving for several miles, waiting for the angel to speak. But a heavy silence filled the car she had acquired earlier in the evening. True it had been silent before—the stereo didn't work in the car she'd stolen for this trip—but somehow, the more crowded the old Pontiac had become, the heavier the silence had also become.

"Sooo," she drew out, pointedly clearing her throat. "You tracked me down, Cas. What did you want?" she asked. Somehow, she knew he wasn't there just for company or to sit in the silence that reigned over the vehicle.

"I needed to talk to you," he almost nervously explained, his voice soft and unsteady.

"Okaayy," she slowly drew out. "Sooo…talk. Say whatever you needed to say."

"It was a mistake," he told her in a soft voice.

Tabitha's eyes cut away from the empty interstate, straining to see him in the darkened interior of the old car. The angel was sitting stiffly in the passenger seat, his hands clapped against his knees as he stared straight ahead into the dark night.

"'Mistake,'" she slowly repeated. "What? Coming here just now? Or something else?" she carefully asked, though a part of her had more than an inkling as she looked back at the lonely interstate.

"What happened," he lowly admitted, but didn't say more.

She shifted in the uncomfortable driver's seat, the hard springs of the seat digging into her as she moved to find a more comfortable position. Glancing across at the angel again, she lifted her left foot to rest against the pocket in the recess of the door, resting her left arm against her drawn up knee as she drove, able to turn better now and regard the angel just across the seat from her.

"You mean that kiss," she finally said when he remained silent. Castiel might not want to be blunt about the matter, but that didn't mean that she was going to dance around it.

He finally glanced across at her, his whole body remaining stiff and his movements slightly jerky. "I should not have acted that way," he told her. "It was wrong."

"Why?"

His brow furrowed a bit at her whispered question. "We are…different," he finally told her.

She felt her own body stiffen in response. "You mean that I'm human."

But he shook his head. "No. I mean that I'm an angel."

Her eyes left the road again as her confusion built. "What's the difference?"

Castiel stayed quiet though, not seeming to know how to answer. "It is," he finally whispered.

Tabitha stared at the road for several more tense minutes, half expecting the angel to disappear at any moment, but he merely sat rigidly across from her, seeming as though a stiff wind would break him
or blow him over.

"Why did you kiss me?"

Castiel had turned to look back at the interstate, but jerked at the sound of her voice, turning to look at her with guarded eyes. "What?" he finally whispered.

She raised her voice a bit more, repeating the same question. "Why did you kiss me?" When he continued to stare, she huffed and elaborated. "Were you just curious about what it would be like? Or did you want to kiss me like that for some reason? Or was there some emotion driving it? What?"

He turned to stare down at the dashboard in front of him. "I don't know," he whispered.

Tabitha let out a growl of frustration as her other hand slapped the top of the steering wheel. "Dammit, Cas! I get being confused. I'm confused as hell myself, but I don't know what to think about any of this when you can't even tell me why you would do something like that. And then you sit there and tell me it was a mistake. Well...maybe it was, but how am I supposed to go along with that when you can't even tell me why you did it in the first place? Am I so inconsequential in your mind that you can just sate your curiosity about something like that with me, and then just shove me aside without any explanation whatsoever? I thought we were at least friends!"

Though she had told herself not to be petty, she couldn't help the frustration and emotions creeping in, causing her to raise her voice and yell at the infuriatingly silent angel.

"Say something," she finally growled.

"I don't think angels are meant to have friends any more than they are meant to have feelings," he suddenly admitted in another soft whisper, still staring down at the dashboard, his frame coiled and rigid.

He suddenly heaved a sigh and finally turned to meet her eyes again. "Even hoping to maintain a friendship with you is something Heaven would be displeased with. More could be catastrophic. The charms on your bracelet hide you from Heaven's gaze, but if our...friendship was discovered...you...we...could be in great danger. More than friendship...is not possible."

For several weighty and silent minutes, Tabitha tried to absorb what Castiel had told her. Struggling to process all of his words.

"You still haven't said why you kissed me," she whispered, staring ahead into the darkness.

She turned when she saw the angel open his mouth out of the corner of her eye, but it held open for a moment, and then shut, no words passing his lips.

Both of her hands wrapped around the steering wheel as her frustrations built.

"Get out of this car."

Castiel's head tilted just slightly at her whispered words.

She raised her voice and added, "I mean it."

"Perhaps it is selfish of me to even want your friendship," the angel suddenly told her. "I don't feel so...lonely...when I am in your company. But it puts you in danger. Your charms do hide you from their eyes...and I can hide my movements...but I fear what might happen if our friendship is discovered. And yet...I yearn for the kindness and concern only you have ever shown me. But as I
said...perhaps it's foolish to put you in that kind of potential danger. I don't want anything to happen to you. I am after all, charged with keeping you safe."

Tabitha drew in a deep breath to try to calm herself, angry that suddenly the angel couldn't seem to stop talking. And yet, in everything he had said, he still wouldn't answer her simple question.

"So it comes back to poor, simple, human, me. You're doing whatever you're doing to protect me, and I get no more explanations from you, and no say in anything because I'm just a dumb human," she hissed.

From the corner of her eye, she saw his knuckles whiten as his hands tightened on his knees. "That's not what I'm saying," he growled, struggling to contain the anger in his own voice.

"Just get out of this car!" she yelled in return, struggling to hold her eyes straight ahead on the interstate. "Get out! If you can't treat me like a friend and equal and be honest, just get out! Get out before I saw something I'll regret!"

Silence filled the car, and Tabitha didn't need to look across the way to know that it was empty. There was an almost tangible feeling of loneliness and...sadness left in the angel's wake.

Looking down, Tabitha saw she was pushing the old beater car to nearly 100 mph on the deserted interstate in her anger, and as her foot let up on the gas pedal, some of her frustrations and anger began to slip away.

Tabitha honked her horn several times as she sat outside Bobby's house next to his Chevelle, waiting for him to come out so they could get back on the road.

He had a few duffle bags slung on his shoulder as he stepped out the door, waiting on the top step with his arms crossed and an unimpressed look on his face as he stared at her from in front of the closed door. She finally huffed and got out the car, bounding quickly up the steps and taking a few of his bags from him.

But Bobby held onto the straps when she tried to pull away, jerking her back around to face him as he remained planted on the step.

"What bug crawled up your behind and died?" he lazily drawled. "Something's got you in a right foul mood."

She let out a long sigh and pushed her frustrations further away, immediately apologizing to the older hunter. "I'm sorry, Bobby. I guess I am in a foul mood tonight, and I have no right to take it out on you."

"Better," he simply said, pulling his bags back from her and slinging them onto his shoulder again as he walked down to her stolen car, examining it with a coldly critical eye.

"Where'd you swipe this heap?" he asked.

She shrugged. "A little slum area of Detroit that was heavily frequented by drug dealers, users, gangbangers, pimps, and prostitutes. You can have it when we're done. I doubt it'll be reported as stolen."

Bobby circled it as he looked it over with eyes that had assessed thousands of cars in his lifetime. "Doubt it'll even make it to California," he muttered.
"You got a better idea?"

"Sure," he replied, straightening up from where he'd bent down to check the tires. "A bicycle."

She rolled her eyes at the heavy sarcasm. "Well, I don't want to take the Chevelle. Unless you've finally replaced the shocks on it, it's rougher than sin, Bobby."

He chuckled. "Wouldn't know about that, Tab. I'm unaccustomed to sin myself." He moved away from her, heading in the direction of one of his old barns, throwing over his shoulder, "I had something else in mind actually. Leave that pile of junk there."

Giving another careless shrug, Tabitha quickly grabbed her gear and headed after Bobby, finding him waiting just outside one of his old barns, his hand on the door, waiting to push it open.

When she reached the door, he threw his shoulder into it, and slid the wood door open.

Tabitha's eyes strained to peer into the darkness, stepping a little ways into the dusty barn as her eyes took in the detail of the charcoal gray car waiting just inside the door.

"Is that—" but she trailed off, hardly believing it was even possible.

"They were selling it at auction, so I took a trip and bought it," Bobby explained, stepping past her and running a hand along the trunk. "I knew you wouldn't be able to get it yourself, and I figured you'd appreciate having at least something of yours back. I know you weren't able to take much when the FBI was looking for you." He turned and looked up at her with a half-smile as he continued explaining, "I had to change it from the original blue we'd restored it to, so I figured I'd go with this dark, smoky gray you'd always wanted it to be. And 'course, I changed the VIN numbers. You've got a clear title and registration for it now in one of those aliases of yours, too."

Tabitha finally tore her eyes away from the '69 Mustang Boss 302 that she had Bobby had started restoring when she'd turned 16. The straps of her bags fell from her shoulders as she wrapped Bobby in a fierce hug, ignoring his half-hearted protests. The two of them had spent years working on it together, anytime she'd stayed with Bobby for more than a day or two, but they hadn't yet finished it when she had left to go to college with Sam, and after that, she hadn't left college very often to go see Bobby.

But the day she'd finished her training at Quantico and gotten her badge, she'd driven back to the tiny house she'd been renting to find the finished Mustang with a note from Bobby in her driveway. He'd finished it to mint condition and left it in her driveway as a present, though she hadn't even known he'd come that day for the ceremony were she'd been given her badge. She hadn't realized anyone had come to the ceremony that day, but according to Dean, both he and their father had been there as well as Bobby. But none of them had let her know of their presence during the ceremony.

And now, Bobby had surprised her again just as thoroughly as all those year ago.

"Thanks," she finally squeaked out, releasing Bobby as she turned back to the car, knowing he didn't like to be gushed over. "It looks great," she told him.

Bobby shrugged, trying to retain his gruff demeanor as he too looked back at the car. "It's not bad," he casually agreed. "I'll admit, even though this isn't one of the original colors like it should be, it doesn't look half bad."

She grinned as she stared at it, "Dean's gonna be so jealous," she told him, remembering the fights they'd gotten into growing up because Bobby had given her the old car and had helped her rebuild it.
Bobby chuckled. "Boy got the Impala from your dad, so he's got no cause to complain. Just never could understand why Sam never wanted a car though. I'd have found him one if he wanted."

Tabitha shrugged as she opened the driver's door, smiling at the familiar dark interior and black leather bucket seats. "Sam never did care much about cars. He'd probably drive something newer if it was up to him."

Bobby joined her in the car, and soon she had thrown the white round gearshift into first gear, her feet dancing against the pedals as she easily slid through the gears, grinning at the familiar whine of the engine as she tore down the gravel roads, knowing that no other drivers would be out on the roads with her at two in the morning.

Bracing himself against the door at her speed, Bobby finally asked her, "So what is this situation all about that demanded your immediate attention in California? You were a little vague on the details as to why this Mikey Sanderson was such an important matter to you."

Tabitha quickly outlined the important details, explaining that he'd been the son of one of the possessed men she'd had to kill that night at the FBI offices in Virginia, and so, therefore, one of the men she'd been wanted for murdering.

"So you think this kid just stole some jewelry because he was grieving over his lost daddy?" Bobby slowly asked.

"He's had some trouble in the past with shoplifting and such," she admitted. "I think his grief just made him get in over his head. He's a good kid. I just want to see if there's anything I can do for him."

Bobby shifted uncomfortably beside her.

"What?" she asked him.

"They're not just trying to charge him with robbery, Tab," he finally explained.

"I'm sure they've tacked on B&E and several other charges," she agreed.

He shook his head. "That's not what I'm saying. After you called, I looked into the case, and the ADA is trying to get assault charges and a few others added to the docket. Seems this Mikey kid got into the jewelry store as the last employee was closing up. And beat her up pretty good, but she's fighting the ADA on pressing charges since Mikey was her boyfriend. He doesn't sound quite like the good kid you remember, Tab."

Tabitha's hands tightened on the steering wheel as she tried to process the new information. It hadn't been in the article she'd read, but then, it wouldn't have been if the Assistant District Attorney was still trying to get the girlfriend to press charges.

"That just doesn't sound like the Mikey I know," she whispered.

"People change," Bobby replied. "Grief's hard on some."

She glanced across the way, knowing that Bobby knew more about it than most.

Seeming to sense her stare, Bobby quickly changed the subject. "What had you in such a foul mood when you pulled up?"

And instantly, she could feel that mood starting to return as she remembered the less than successful
and less than pleasant conversation she'd had with Castiel. She wasn't even sure why she had gotten so mad at the angel when he wouldn't explain why he'd kissed her. Part of her did want to know why, but another part of her was terrified at finding out. And everything together was just putting her into a foul mood.

With a suspicious look, she told Bobby, "We're not having a heart-to-heart, Bobby. Just because you gave me a car, doesn't make you Oprah."

He laughed, but finally relented. "Fine. Be that way. I'm gonna get some shut-eye though. Too old to be up all night all the time."

"So, how should we play this? What cover should we use?" Tabitha asked Bobby after she'd showered, walking back into the main part of their room in a t-shirt and shorts as she looked through her clothes.

"'We?'" he repeated, straightening the tie of his gray suit. "There's no 'we' anywhere in the equation. Not like he won't remember the woman who killed his father."

Tabitha bristled at the blunt reminder, but knew Bobby was just trying to bluntly point out the truth of the situation.

"I'm going to go offer the kid some new legal counsel. He's still in lockup, so law and order, or law enforcement are the only ways to get to him. The kid didn't have enough money for a real defense attorney, so he's got a public defender. I figure he might be more inclined to tell me everything he knows if I offer to take his case pro bono rather than me going in there and pretending to be a Fed or something."

Tabitha paced at the foot of her bed as she thought. "Good. That's a good idea. I think I'll play Fed though and go take a look at the crime scene, see if there's anything helpful there."

Bobby crossed his arms as he looked at her. "You really think there's more going on than just this kid robbing a place he thought might be easy pickin's because his girlfriend worked there?"

"I do," she insisted, digging out one of her skirt suits. "Mikey was never a violent kid. Liked to take risks, sure, but never violent. It just doesn't seem right to me, Bobby. I think there's got to be more going on here."

"All right," Bobby finally agreed. "But if we're gonna split up, you damn well better promise to be careful."

Tabitha had easily managed to wave her FBI badge and get past the patrolmen stationed at the back entrance of the jewelry store. They were always so intimidated by federal agents anyway, so they didn't have the guts to stop her—though she didn't fool herself into believing that they hadn't called in her presence as soon as she was out of sight.

Actually, since a week had passed, she was slightly surprised that the crime scene hadn't been released to the owners for clean-up yet, but she supposed the ambitious ADA hadn't allowed it yet since he was still trying to add on charges and was pushing for trial so quickly as well.

She was surprised by the sight of the actual crime scene. Since she knew Mikey, she had assumed that the kid had figured a way to bypass security completely, or now knowing his girlfriend had been working at the store, had assumed he'd used her to gain entry. And while the outer doors with security alarms had somehow been cleanly bypassed, the inner glass door had merely been smashed,
no attempt even made to unlock it.

Tabitha stepped carefully over the shattered glass strewn on the tile floor, trying not to slip in her heels as she tried to imagine the gentle Mikey she'd known shattering the glass door with such vehemence, that glass was scattered for a dozen feet or more.

The main showroom and beyond was just as confounding to her. The glass display cases were smashed from the top rather than any attempts made at unlocking the sliding doors to them, but in the room beyond the showroom, Tabitha could see the vault door hanging open. The vault door didn't have a scratch on it, and from what Tabitha had read in the reports, had somehow been bypassed just as the security system had. In fact, it had been the act of smashing the display cases after the vault had already been opened that had triggered a silent alarm.

The finesse and careful planning on one hand, just didn't add up with the absolute destruction on the other hand. It was almost like looking at a case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

"Quite the mess, isn't it?"

Tabitha turned at the man's voice behind her, watching as a trim looking man with short brown hair carefully stepped through the same broken door she'd come through only minutes before.

"And you are?" she asked, staring at his familiar Latino face and trying to place that self-assured smile.

"Detective Shane Ramos," he told her, stepping forward and offering her his hand. "I was on my way down when the patrolmen let me know that a Fed was sniffing around. They didn't say it was such a pretty Fed on my territory though."

She smiled automatically at the flirtation, still trying to place the man, almost positive she'd seen him somewhere before.

Finally, she had to ask, "Have we met before?"

He held onto her hand after he'd shaken it, staring curiously into her eyes. "I had the same feeling," he told her. "You do look very familiar, Agent…"

She gave a little smile. "Of course. Special Agent Margarita Cansino. But everyone calls me Rita."

"Huh," he muttered, still not relinquishing her hand. "You do look familiar. I was thinking something more like Tracey or Tiffany though. You ever work in Seattle? I was a detective there before. And I know I've seen you before somewhere."

Seattle? she groaned to herself. That's why he looks familiar. But she didn't let her internal panic show. She'd only briefly dealt with the local police in Seattle, and had only had a brief conversation with Detective Ramos that she could remember. Since he might remember her visit, she knew she had to stick to the truth. Thankfully, most people easily confused names, so changing her name shouldn't prove too problematic.

"There you go," she told him. "I worked a series of deaths in Seattle. Women raped, strangled, and left in parks throughout the city. The FBI was called in to help with the case after the fourth woman was found."

"Right," he said, satisfaction laced in his voice at placing her. "I remember now. The Belvedere Park Rapist." He finally seemed to realize he was still holding her hand and released it.
Like all monikers that killers and rapists were dubbed with, it wasn't exactly accurate. The name had been coined early on, when the first two bodies had been dumped in Belvedere Park, but the next five bodies had been dumped in different parks throughout the city before the FBI had identified the suspect and arrested him.

"So," he began, "what brings you here, Special Agent Cansino? This is a robbery, not exactly rape and homicide. I thought that was what your little team handled, the gruesome stuff."

Tabitha hid a grin at his assessment of her former team, moving around the showroom to continue looking at the scene. "We handle violent crimes," she said, stepping behind the register to look at the blood drops and pools mingled on the ground with the shattered glass. "Robbery and assault fall under our umbrella," she continued.

"But why are you interested in this particular robbery and assault?"

She shrugged, not looking up at the detective behind her. "Thought it might have the earmarks of a string of other robberies. So I came to take a look."

Seeing she wasn't going to give any more information, Ramos followed her behind the counter, unbuttoning his suit jacket as he crouched beside her, pointing at the small blood pools. "That's where we found the assault vic. She was closing up the store when her boyfriend bypassed the security system. She tried to stop him once he made his way into the store, and got beaten for her trouble. Broken cheekbone, two fractured ribs, and a sprained wrist. The guy probably broke in when she was closing up thinking that she would go along with it."

Tabitha stood and looked around the store. "This is a jewelry store. Lot of expensive merchandise in here. So why was there only one employee closing up the shop all by herself?"

Giving a reluctantly impressed smile at her accurate assessment, Ramos explained, "Yeah, there was supposed to be two employees closing up, but the vic said her friend wanted to cut out early to go pick up his girlfriend for an anniversary dinner, so she decided to cover by herself. Look what her troubles got her."

"And the boyfriend just happened to know that she'd be closing up by herself that night and that it would be the best time to hit the store?"

Ramos heard the disbelief in her voice and bristled as he defended, "Maybe he just got lucky. Or hell, maybe she told him she was gonna close up by herself."

Something caught Tabitha's eyes as she passed one of the shattered display cases. As she bent over it to get a closer look, she told the detective, "I don't exactly believe in luck. Good or bad."

"Everything in those cases has been cataloged," he warned her with a smirk as she leaned closer and reached into the jewelry case filled with diamond rings of various sizes, cuts, and colors.

She let her finger trail across the glass at the bottom of the case, picking up some of the substance she'd spotted as she glanced across the shattered display at Ramos. "I'd rather a man gave me a diamond ring than steal one," she told him.

He coughed and looked away uncomfortably. She chuckled at the predictability, but took the opportunity to smell the yellowish dust on her finger. Her nose wrinkled at the acrid sulfur smell. Demon, she glumly thought to herself. But at least she had an explanation for the strange behavior of the gentle kid she'd known.

Now several questions remained: Why had a demon jumped into Mikey? Chance? Or something
"You're sure it was sulfur?" Bobby asked her as they sat at a small diner eating and drinking coffee as they shared their day's findings.

"I know sulfur when I see it and smell it, Bobby. It's hard to mistake," she grumbled, taking another bite of her burger.

"I tested the kid," Bobby told her. "He had no reaction to the mention of God. I also flashed a rosary when I was pulling stuff out of my briefcase, and I even managed to sneak a bottle of holy water in that the kid drank. Nothing affected the kid."

"So the demon jumped out of him," she shrugged. "What did he have to say about the robbery?"

Bobby leaned back in his side of the booth, cup of coffee in hand as he admitted, "That he really didn't remember much about it and wasn't sure why he'd do something like rob his girlfriend's store and beat her up."

"See," Tabitha pointed out, struggling to quickly chew and swallow her mouthful of burger. "The sulfur, the violence, his memory loss—all hallmarks of possession. We just need to figure out how to get Mikey out of there now. He doesn't deserve to be in jail for something he didn't do. Maybe we can arrange bail for him or something for now. Then help him disappear."

Finger's tightening around his cup, Bobby dourly explained, "We're kinda beyond that now, Tab. ADA convinced the girl to press charges against him now, and with the added charges, they've taken bail off the table. In fact, they're moving him from county lock-up to a federal maximum security prison."

Slumping back against her seat in shock, Tabitha wildly tried to grip at other and new ideas for how to get Mikey out of his jam.

"I'm sorry, Tab," Bobby kindly told her.

"Damn sorry," she whispered in return, her eyes slowly drifting back up to the man across from her. "Some demon jumped Mikey. I can't help but think that it has to be my fault. Why else would a demon just randomly jump him? I need to get him out of this mess. It's my responsibility."

"Whoa now, girl," Bobby told her, setting his cup down hard on the table as he leaned over it and sternly told her, "Look, if you're right about demons getting this kid because of you, then that's all the more reason to get out of town as quick as we can. I know you feel bad about the kid, but you getting captured or killed by demons ain't gonna make it right for him. If you really want to see the kid out of this mess, I'll pass the information along to someone else and see if I can't get another hunter or two to try and get the kid out."

"When are they moving him to the maximum security?" she asked instead.

With the reluctance of having teeth pulled, Bobby finally admitted, "Later tonight. They're planning to move him after the last shift change at the county jail so there are fresh guards on duty for taking him to the federal prison. Sometime after 9 this evening."

Tabitha looked briefly towards the ceiling in frustration. "Tonight," she muttered. "Then we have to do something when they're moving him or just before. Another hunter won't be able to get him out of a maximum security prison after he's been moved there, even if you could get another hunter to try something so crazy."
"Maybe you should call your brothers," Bobby suggested as if the word "crazy" heralded their names, his arms crossing stubbornly over his chest again.

"Why?" she demanded. "To have them agree with you even though you and I both know I'm right. If we don't get Mikey out tonight, our chances go down to next to nil. Mikey's best shot for getting out of this is for us to get him tonight. I can't just walk away from him, Bobby. He's probably in this mess because of me. And besides, I owe him. I did kill his father after all."

Bobby frowned as he met her gaze. "You killed a demon that just happened to be possessing that boy's father. The man dying too was just an unfortunate side-effect of a lot of exorcisms."

Tabitha grimaced bitterly. "I didn't actually exorcise that demon, Bobby. I shot Jerry—the guy he was possessing—and he fell back against a pane of glass that was already riddled with bullet holes, and by the time he hit the ground outside, he was dead and the demon had disappeared."

Understanding filled Bobby's eyes. "So that's how a demon would know to go after the kid and where he would be."

"Yeah," Tabitha agreed. "I should have figured out a way to exorcise that demon at the very least instead of letting it go. So it's my fault every way you look at it."

"I'm really not even sure how we would go about getting this kid out of police custody, Tabitha."

The wheels had already been turning in Tabitha's mind. "We could go in there as Marshals, say we're taking him into custody on Federal charges somewhere else. I could forge paperwork easily enough. If we do it just before they're going to move him, they might not have time to make any calls to check on the validity of the papers."

Bobby shook his head. "Or, they'd decide to just keep him where he is overnight until they can check on the paperwork and then our covers are blown. Besides, I've already been in there as his lawyer, and you said you told that detective at the crime scene that you were with the FBI. But regardless, you couldn't go in there alone demanding they hand over a prisoner to you."

Absently spearing the food left on her plate with her fork, Tabitha thought some more. "How about a simple 'smash and grab' then when they try to move him?"

Bobby picked up his coffee again as he looked at her in disbelief. "'Smash and grab'?" he repeated.

"Well," she defended, "you don't think finesse will work. Then we're kinda only left with brunt force."

"There's only two of us," he pointed out.

"But I've got the law enforcement experience here, Bobby," she reminded him, pushing her plate aside as the plan started forming in her mind. "If they're going to wait until so late to move him, then I can just about bet they're only moving just him. They wait until middle of the morning to move large groups of prisoners to different facilities. And if they're moving just him, it'll probably be in a small transport van or even in a car. At most, there might be three or four men, probably only two if they take a car." She leaned eagerly forward, hoping Bobby would accept her plan. "This is our best shot."

"'Smash and grab,'" he slowly repeated. When she nodded, he told her, "We're gonna need to find a pretty hefty pickup."
Tabitha glanced at her watch. It was only 8:30. They still had another half-hour to wait before they really had to start watching for the transport from county lock-up to the federal lock-up. They'd already been waiting for an hour to make sure they were in place plenty ahead of time and could make sure there was nothing out of the ordinary going on.

An hour had already been far too long for the silence in the old pickup to stretch on. She looked across at Bobby behind the wheel of the 50s Ford pickup they'd found to use, but Bobby seemed unconcerned with the silence or the wait. He was slumped down in his seat, his eyes half-closed. But Tabitha knew from experience that his posture was deceptive. Even when he'd been slouched in his recliner in his living room like that, she and her brothers had never been able to sneak by him. He'd always known where they were and exactly what they were trying to sneak into or out of.

Her heavy boots tapped anxiously against the floorboards as she sighed and looked away, wishing there was some kind of action going on to keep her mind occupied. Without something happening, her mind kept drifting. And kept drifting right back to where she didn't want it to go.

She caught her hand creeping up to her lips, and balled it into a fist as she huffed in frustration at its traitorous action. For days, she'd been telling herself not to think about it. But for days, she found herself coming back to it again and again. She wasn't even sure why she wanted to know the reason behind the angel kissing her. Because truthfully, she wasn't sure what she wanted his answer to be.

And wasn't even sure if knowing the answer would settle the knot that had grown in her stomach, or just add to it.

Did she want Castiel to have kissed her like that?

Or did she just want things to go back to the way they'd been before?

One thing she knew for certain, she did miss the angel. Even if she'd been angry with him and had told him to leave. Things had been simpler before the angel had kissed her that way. But no one had ever accused her of wanting something simple.

And she felt guilty now about getting so upset with the angel and kicking him out of the car. She'd never really fought with the angel before, and wasn't sure what course she should take next.

It wasn't that she wasn't used to arguing. Hell, people who had known her knew that she'd argue for the sheer pleasure of it, but she didn't know what to do about arguing with the angel.

Everyone else in her life was easy to argue with. She argued with her brothers constantly. Lately, she argued especially with Dean—and strangely enough, it was mostly about the angel. But with her brothers, they argued, and then ignored each other until they'd cooled down, and then usually didn't even bring the matter up again.

With the other men that had been in her life—and they were usually in her life for the same reason—arguments usually led to and were resolved in rounds of make-up sex.

She blushed at the last thought and turned away from Bobby.

"What's occupying your mind that's got you all squirrley?" Bobby asked her, still slumped over in the driver's seat.

She frowned. It was the same thing Dean was always accusing her of, and she wondered if Dean had gotten the term from Bobby, or if Bobby had gotten it from Dean. She couldn't remember who had started accusing her of it first.
"Nothing," she said shortly, still looking out her window at the side mirrors showing the closed gates of the county jail behind them. She was slightly cool in the pickup, almost wishing now for a sweatshirt to pull over her long-sleeve t-shirt, but she knew she wouldn't want the bulk in the way when the action started happening.

"Right," he snorted. "You're back in the same foul mood you were in the other night. Something's going on."

"This still isn't a talk show and this so isn't a psychiatrist's couch," she dryly reminded him, glancing back at him to prove she wasn't afraid to meet his discerning eyes.

The old hunter snorted again, but didn't have any more comments and didn't press her any further.

The pair waited in silence for several more minutes. Both were tense, and Tabitha knew that Bobby wasn't overly enthused about their plan, but he hadn't been able to come up with anything better, either.

And truth was, Tabitha was just as concerned and nervous about the plan as Bobby was. But it didn't lessen her determination. She knew saving Mikey wouldn't absolve her of her guilt, but she couldn't help but hope that it was a step towards making some kind of amends for all the destruction and death she'd somehow brought with her.

Finally, Tabitha saw the heavy chain-link and barbwire fence to the county jail rolling open. Pulling her gaze from the side mirror of the old pickup, she glanced across at Bobby. But the older hunter had seen the movement as well, watching the progress in the review mirror as he absently pulled his seatbelt a bit tighter.

They shared a look, and Tabitha copied his motion, snuggling her own seatbelt as she turned back to watching out the side mirror. She could hear Bobby slide the manual gearshift of the pickup from neutral into reverse, his foot still on the clutch as he waited.

A nondescript blue sedan slowly rolled through the open gate, pausing as the gate rolled shut behind it.

"Now!" Tabitha commanded as the gate was nearly closed, feeling herself lurch forward against her seatbelt as Bobby stomped on the gas, sending the pickup flying backwards amidst squealing tires.

Tabitha's body was coiled and tensed in anticipation, but in her mind, she suddenly remembered from her training in Quantico that tensing your body during a car collision—even an intentional one—was behind many of the injuries people suffered. Their tightened muscles being more prone to tears and injuries than if a person was relaxed.

So at the last second, Tabitha closed her eyes to block out the sight of the stopped sedan growing larger in the mirror as she let out a sigh and willed her body to relax as much as she could.

The pickup suddenly lurched to a stop; the sounds of metal, fiberglass, and glass shattering and exploding in her ears as her body was jerked back and forth between the back of her seat and the tightened seatbelt. Even forcing her body to relax somewhat, it still hurt more than she expected, but there was no time to consider the pain.

"Go!" Bobby yelled beside her as they both fumbled for their seatbelts.

But Tabitha was already partway out of the pickup, her shotgun snug against her shoulder as she cautiously jogged back to the blue sedan. The side of the car was caved in, and the sedan was rolled over onto its passenger side from the force of the hit. The pickup had suffered as well, though not
nearly as badly. The heavy metal of the old pickup better able to withstand the hit than the lightweight more modern car had been.

The unmarked police car wouldn't be going anywhere, whereas the old pickup would still suit them just fine for a getaway as only the bed had been crumpled a bit.

But the sights of the damage were only fleeting in her mind as Tabitha carefully rounded the front of the overturned car, peeking around the hood of the car to make sure the officers inside were still dazed.

Seeing the driver out cold and the passenger dazed and barely moving, Tabitha quickly advanced, using the butt of her sawed-off shotgun and throwing her weight into it as she smashed away at the windshield. It was already cracked in spider webs and with a few more hits, she was able to grab the edge with her gloved hands and peel it away from the car. She was glad now that Bobby had suggested the gloves, telling her that she'd want them with all the shattered glass. But she wasn't altogether surprised by his knowledge. Even if he hadn't purposefully hit a car before—though a nagging feeling told her that he seemed to have experience with it—he'd also dealt with plenty of busted up vehicles at his salvage yard.

The officer in the passenger seat was just starting to regain his senses as Tabitha and Bobby together peeled the windshield away. The uniformed officer was trying to reach for his gun, even in his awkward, sideways state and through his disorientation. But Tabitha moved quickly, slamming the butt of the shotgun against his temple to knock the man out. Luckily, there were only the two officers inside the overturned car.

"Grab the keys," Bobby commanded, hunched near the car as he threw glances back at the still closed gates of the jail. It wouldn't be long though until other cops came running out to investigate the loud crash just outside their gate.

They had known it would be risky trying to grab Mikey so close to the county jail, but it was the only place where they could for sure know where the transport vehicle would be. It would have been impossible to know for sure what route they might have taken to the Federal lockup.

Tabitha carefully crouched amidst the scattered shards of glass and vehicle parts until she had snagged the keys from the now knocked out officer as well as taking the keys from the ignition. From her position, she'd looked through the metal cage to Mikey in the backseat, but he wore the same dazed look as the officers, so she didn't waste her time trying to talk to him.

"Got them," she finally told Bobby as she stood up.

He gestured up at the side of the vehicle in the air. "Get on up there," he directed. "We need to get that boy and get the hell outta here."

She nodded in agreement as she handed her shotgun to Bobby, carefully hoisting herself up onto the side of the vehicle. She wasted no time in kneeling on the driver's door as she unlocked the back door and then scooted around to lower herself inside the vehicle.

Nudging at Mikey's shoulder, she tried to rouse him. "Come on, Mikey," she told him, continuing to shake him with one hand as she tried to release his seatbelt with the other. But the buckle wouldn't budge, so she settled for cutting him out with her switchblade instead.

Mikey was shaking his head now, trying to clear the cobwebs from his mind as he fell away from his seat, caught by Tabitha who was busy reaching behind him to uncuff his hands and then the chains at his feet.
He was still disoriented in her arms, looking around the sideways interior of the car as she began pushing him up towards the open door above them. Luckily, he seemed to take the hint and began scrambling up as she pushed him out, stumbling out of the car towards Bobby.

He glanced down at himself several times, taking in the sight of his orange jumpsuit and then glancing back at the overturned car. Glass and car parts crunched under his feet as he turned in a slow circle, looking around at the scene.

"Let's go," Bobby gruffly advised them both, tossing the second shotgun back to Tabitha as she jumped down from the car.

"What are you doing here?" Mikey suddenly demanded as he stared at Bobby. "I thought you were my new lawyer."

"No time now, kid," Bobby quickly told him, trying to propel the boy back towards their waiting pickup. "Get him inside," Bobby ordered to Tabitha as he made for the driver's side.

Mikey turned to look at her, stopping cold when he saw her face. "You're dead," he whispered, yanking his arm from her grasp as he fell back a step. His face contorted in rage. "You killed my father!"

Tabitha tried to step closer again to grab his arm. "We don't have time for this, Mikey. We need to get you out of here now."

Even as she spoke, she could hear the commotion and shouts of police officers running towards them and the heavy creaking of the gate rolling open once more.

She lunged and tried to grab him, but Mikey swung away from her, avoiding her grip.

"Dammit, Mikey," she growled. "We don't have time for this! Unless you want to end up in a federal prison for the next ten to fifteen years."

With another lunge, she managed to grab him and started dragging him, despite his reluctance, towards the pickup.

"Tabitha! Watch out!"

Tabitha heard Bobby's warning shout just as she was pivoting back towards the front of the pickup, but couldn't stop the motion before she found herself looking down the short barrel of a compact .40 caliber Smith & Wesson.

She froze with one hand still on Mikey's elbow and her shotgun lowered to her side, her eyes flicking up and past the barrel of the pistol at the man holding it. Directly into his black eyes.

Her body remained carefully frozen, but she glanced across the crumpled bed of the pickup to see Bobby just as carefully frozen and facing another demon.

"You ain't going anywhere," the demon facing her said with a grin. She quickly took in the appearance of the man the demon had taken over, but didn't notice much noteworthy about him. Just an average looking working class man, his pale hands habitually stained with dirt and grease, and dressed in jeans and a dirty flannel shirt. The one facing Bobby wasn't much different, though a bit older and with a beer-belly to match Bobby's.

Tabitha slowly pushed a silent and stunned Mikey further behind her, between the bed of the pickup and her back before releasing her grip on him as she tried to gauge how quickly she could lift her
shotgun and get a shot off, and wondering to herself if the salt rounds would even do any good. They'd sting a demon, but she wasn't even sure it would be enough to help.

The demon seemed to sense her intent, shaking the forefinger of his free hand at her as if she was a naughty child. "Tsk tsk. I wouldn't try anything if I were you. You're pretty well surrounded."

She glanced over her shoulder to confirm it, and grimaced when she saw the lifeless black eyes of the uniformed officers jogging through the gate from the police station.

"A trap," she whispered, more to herself than to anyone else.

"Yep," the demon in front of her replied, a smug satisfaction in his grin. "Although I had figured you might have tried something a bit sooner."

"Sorry we kept you waitin'," Bobby dryly retorted.

The demon waved his free hand in an almost imperious manner. "On the contrary. You're an added bonus. We knew the girl would come," he looked away from Bobby and focused on Tabitha, "but we hadn't counted on being able to bring the old hunter to Lilith along with you."

Tabitha felt her heart clench and her breath catch even as Bobby cursed lowly under his breath. Lilith.

Tabitha now knew who wanted her, and knowing did nothing to comfort her. She almost wished now that she had her ignorance back. *That* somehow seemed a lot more comforting now.

"What does Lilith want with me?" she asked the demon surprised at the calmness she suffused her question with. She'd asked before of course, just why Lilith wanted her, but the demon then either hadn't known or hadn't been forthcoming with the information.

The demon in front of her made another flourish with his hand. "I don't know," he said in a careless fashion. "I just follow orders. She says to get you. I get you."

Mikey had been silent behind her, but seemed unable to hold his tongue any longer.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded.

He'd stepped slightly to the side of Tabitha, and she reached behind her trying to blindly grab him to shove him safely behind her again, but he had stepped just out of her reach.

The demon's eyes cut over to Mikey with an annoyed look. "You're asking questions about things you can't even comprehend, human. And besides, it really doesn't matter." The demon's hand deftly moved as he changed his aim. "You were just the bait."

At the short range, the sound rang painfully in Tabitha's ears before her mind truly registered that the demon had fired a shot. For the barest of moments, she looked down at herself thinking that the demon must have shot her. But there was no pain save for the deafening roar filling her ears. In the next instant, Tabitha glanced over her shoulder, her eyes filled with the sight of Mikey's lifeless body sliding bonelessly down the side of the pickup bed, a trickle of red racing down from the red dot in the center of his forehead.

Her next movements were instinctive and memorized from many years of training and practice. She hardly had time to register her own movement, but her actions replayed in her mind in slow motion. Hand-to-hand combat and self-defense had been drilled into her in the academy. And her moves had
flowed with a practiced ease as her free hand came down hard on the demon's gun hand, pushing the barrel towards the ground as she stepped into him and drove her knee up into his groin.

The hit would have been enough to bring down a normal man, but it only slowed the demon. So Tabitha released his arm as she stepped back, swinging her sawed-off shotgun up with both hands and firing at the demon center mass.

The demon hit the ground snarling in pain, and Tabitha whirled to face the demons closing in behind her. She could hear Bobby struggling against the other demon on his side of the pickup as she gauged the rushing demons. There were six demons—counting the one Bobby still fought.

Too many. Too many for just the two of them to take on.

Her eyes drifted down to Mikey's lifeless eyes staring accusingly up at her. She could do nothing more for him. She'd failed him. And she knew his sightless accusing eyes would haunt her dreams.

But there was nothing more she could do, and there were too many demons to fight.

She spun on her heel and raced around the front of the pickup. The other demons from the county jail were nearly on them and she needed to get herself and Bobby out of the minefield.

Bobby was grappling with the demon when she rounded the front of the pickup. She couldn't risk firing a salt round at the demon and possibly hitting Bobby. But she hadn't brought anything else with her to use against it. They hadn't expected a trap of this magnitude, and had hoped to grab Mikey and be out quickly, so she hadn't weighed herself down with weapons against demons.

But she did have one thing that would help. Her left hand palmed one of the charms dangling from her bracelet as she started reaching for the demon.

The demon suddenly jerked forward towards Bobby and she heard the older hunter gasp and cry out in pain, his face contorting as his body curled forward towards the demon.

Tabitha gasped as though she herself had been stabbed, the sight of the man who had been as much a father to her as anyone could have been being stabbed searing through her heart. But she couldn't pause, couldn't dwell on the sickening sight. She swung her shotgun at the demon's head with all her might, seeing him stumble sideways to one knee, a bloody knife in his hand. Before the demon could scramble back to his feet, Tabitha rushed forward, pressing the black jeweled cross on her bracelet to the demon's forehead.

As it screamed in pain, she knew she didn't have time to exorcise it, so she impulsively recited, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, and though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me."

She didn't finish the psalm, but she'd recited enough to keep the demon writhing in pain for a while.

Tabitha turned away and dropped to her knees beside Bobby, her hands quickly covering the bleeding wound at his midsection, a fearful whimper slipping past her lips at the sight of the dark viscous blood welling through her clenched fingers.

"Go," he ordered, his voice low and pained.

"I won't leave you," she argued, shaking her head and fighting tears. *It's too late, she thought to herself as she glanced up at the demons nearly upon them. It's too late to run now, and I can't just leave Bobby behind.* Her mind quickly drifted back on her regrets. She didn't have many; she'd
always tried to live her life without regrets. But not being there for her brothers was one. And
fighting with Castiel and not getting to tell him she was sorry was another. I wish I could see you one
last time, Cas.

Suddenly, the angel appeared between her and the demons, standing in profile to her as he glanced
down at her and then at the demons skidding to a halt.

Tabitha rocked back on her heels in shock, somehow not believing that the angel had actually shown
up after the fight they'd had and her ordering him away. Yet, there he stood, looking down at her
with a strange expression in all his usual trench-coat-wearing-glory.

"Go," he ordered her. And unlike Bobby's command, she instantly nodded in agreement, wrapping
Bobby's arm over her shoulder and helping him struggle to his feet. Bobby staggered to the pickup
with her help, and she eased him inside, as gently as she was able trying to shove him across the
bench as she climbed in after him.

But she paused in closing the door, glancing back at the angel twisting and dodging in the middle of
the demons. Throwing punches to knock them back and then grabbing at one as he pressed his palm
to its forehead. He met her gaze as a blinding light emitted from his hand, the demon falling lifeless at
his feet, and he gave her one last nod before he turned back to the other demons.

Tabitha slammed the driver's door, the tires of the pickup squealing as she punched it, throwing
worried looks at Bobby beside her as she sped towards the nearest hospital.

Bobby had slumped over in his seat by the time Tabitha skidded to a stop in the bay of the
emergency room entrance. She couldn't tell if he was conscious or even still breathing as she threw
her door open, screaming for help as she drug Bobby back across the bench with her. He fell
gracelessly across the seat on his back, his hands falling away from the wound in his stomach. And
Tabitha screamed again as she pulled on him more, pressing her own hands at the wound to stem the
flow.

Suddenly, it was a flurry of activity as nurses, doctors, and hospital staff began buzzing around her,
helping to pull Bobby out of the truck and onto a gurney. She heard them telling her to move, trying
to slip in to replace their own hands with hers, but she barked orders at them, afraid to move her
hands and allow him to bleed anymore. So instead, her hands remained steadily pressed against the
wound as she almost automatically called orders at the ER doctor that seemed to be in charge, telling
him in a detached, clinical matter that Bobby had been stabbed in the abdominal cavity with a six-
inch blade and then giving him an estimate of how much blood she thought Bobby had lost. Her FBI
training made it easier to slip into a clinical, detached mode.

The doctor barked orders, allowing her to remain beside Bobby as they pushed the gurney through
the outer rooms of the ER, headed further in for a trauma bay.

They began cutting away Bobby's shirt, and the doctor asked her more question, she thought perhaps
to keep her distracted. But she remained eerily calm until a nurse tried to take over from her, trying to
push her back from Bobby.

"Get your hands off me," she growled at the young nurse.

She brunette nurse barely even glanced up at her, still trying to wedge her way between Tabitha and
the gurney. "You need to let us take over, dear," she calmly replied.

"You come between me and my father and I'll cut that hand off," Tabitha hissed as she lowered her
head to the shorter nurse's level.
The woman looked up into her eyes, finally seeming to catch the wildness in them that she hadn't registered before in Tabitha's voice. She stared up in real fear as she fell back a step, but stopped when a hand descended on her shoulder.

"Leave."

Tabitha glanced up at the whispered order, her eyes locking with Castiel's concerned gaze. She stared at the angel as he looked around the trauma bay and repeated the order louder. Some kind of glaze seemed to fill the eyes of the doctors and nurses as they stopped their hurried work and calmly left the room, not saying a word to Tabitha as they passed her.

"They cannot help him," Castiel finally told her in answer to her questioning look.

She felt a pained gasp escape her lips at the angel's pronouncement. She didn't want to accept it, couldn't believe that she would lose another father and that this time it would be all her fault.

In many ways, Bobby had always been more of a father to her than John had ever been. It had been Bobby she'd always run to when she needed someone to talk to, or needed refuge. It had been Bobby that taught her all about cars and even how to drive. And it had even been Bobby who had uncomfortably pulled her aside when she was 14 and had first gotten her period, explaining it all to her and even giving her the birds and bees talk. Even promising her that he'd skin alive any man that didn't treat her like a princess.

In so many ways, Bobby had been her world. The one person she could fall back and rely on.

But she still didn't lift her hands away from his wound as she brokenly whispered to his prone form, "I'm so sorry, Bobby. It's all my fault." She felt her eyes squeeze shut, the tears she'd managed to hold at bay now spilling through her closed eyes, streaming silently down her cheeks as she felt her body tremble with the effort to keep herself from falling to pieces.

"I can help him," Castiel quietly told her. Her eyes popped open, staring at the angel and fearing to hope. He gestured down at Bobby's wound under her hands. "If you'll let me."

When the nurse had tried to get her to move her hands, she'd refused, fear and desperation not allowing her to turn Bobby over to anyone else. But she had no such hesitation at Castiel's offer. Even after their last argument, she implicitly trusted the angel, suddenly realizing that she felt she could rely on Castiel just as much as she'd always been able to rely on Bobby.

Pulling her blood-coated hands away, she nodded almost desperately, saying, "Yes. Please help him. Please."

Castiel held her eyes for a moment, and then stepped forward, gently placing his hand over Bobby's wound. As he gingerly pressed on it, Bobby unconsciously groaned, his back arching against the angel's touch. But then, Castiel's hand slowly pulled away, and Bobby gave a soft sigh as he relaxed against the gurney, the twist of pain no longer marring in his features. There was no longer even blood at his midsection to mark where the wound had been.

The angel glanced up at her and gestured to Bobby's forehead, his fingers pointing to a gash at his temple that Tabitha hadn't even noticed until now for the presence of the substantial abdominal wound. "The head injury is slight but will be enough cause to explain to the humans why he is here."

Tabitha nodded in a mute, stupefied manner as she stared down at Bobby's relaxed body on the gurney, a shuddering sigh escaping to know that he wasn't lost to her.

But then, the doctors and nurses silently filtered back into the room, swarming around Bobby and
checking his head wound as if Tabitha and Castiel weren't even there.

"Come," Castiel quietly told her as he gently guided her out of the trauma room with a hand at her elbow. Tabitha felt a little reluctance, but the shock of thinking Bobby would die one moment and then seeing him healed the next moment was almost more than she could take. So she docilely let the angel lead her out into the hallway. He paused and let her stare back through the long narrow window in the door as people hovered around the older hunter.

The repercussions of nearly losing Bobby suddenly hit Tabitha like a ton of bricks. She doubled over, leaning back against the wall and bracing her hands on her knees as her entire body began to tremble. She wasn't sure if she felt the need to throw up, or if she was going to hyperventilate, or even break into tears. Somehow, her body seemed to settle on the latter as great heaves wracked her. All she could see in her mind was Bobby bleeding beneath her hands, and the sightless, accusing eyes of Mikey staring up at her.

"He'll be fine," Castiel hastened to assure her, his voice coming from nearby though she could only stare down at her own feet as she continued to tremble. "He'll have no lasting damage from the head wound, and I have insured that he will sleep soundly through the night."

Her fingers dug into her knees as she tried to focus on Castiel's reassurances, repeating it over and over to herself until her tears had finally stopped. She forced herself to straighten, leaning back to brace herself against the wall, afraid she couldn't completely hold herself up. But her tears had thankfully dried.

With an almost automatic nod, Tabitha finally turned and focused on the angel. "Thank you. For showing up when you did and for saving him." Her eyes fell from his, dropping to her hands in front of her as she stared at the now drying blood coating them, reminding her again of what could have happened. "I don't know what I would have done if anything had happened to him," she admitted in a whisper.

"He will sleep through the night," Castiel repeated, drawing her attention back to him as she lifted her eyes, feeling his hands grasp both of hers between them as he stepped closer to her, her back pressing harder against the wall as he closed the gap between them. "So you should rest for the night as well," he continued.

Tabitha glanced away from his piercing gaze, suddenly realizing that the busy hum of the hospital had vanished, replaced instead by the quiet hum of a motel heater. Somehow, the angel had instantly transported her from the hospital to the motel room she had been sharing with Bobby.

"You should sleep," the angel kindly reminded her as she stared around the room in an almost dazed, detached manner.

She shook her head, intending to tell the angel that there was no way she could sleep when she was covered in Bobby's blood, a blatant reminder that because of her insistences, she was responsible for yet another death, and nearly had been responsible for Bobby's as well.

But then, she glanced down at her hands, and saw that the blood was gone. Her hands and clothes returned to the state she'd started the night: clean. Yet she couldn't help but wonder if she would ever feel clean again.

"Mikey's dead because of me. They used him to lure me into a trap, and it got him killed. And Bobby nearly died, too, because I just had to come out here and try to help him. Maybe my father and Dean were right; maybe I had no right to try to live a normal life. Maybe it wasn't fair for me to put their lives in that kind of jeopardy just because I liked the idea of living a normal life and doing
normal things. It's all my fault."

She felt her body tremble once more as she spoke aloud the guilt that was piercing through her. Her eyes squeezing shut at the images that flashed through her mind. The images of those that she'd worked with who were now dead because of her: Cheryl, Jerry, Agent Barrett, her own partner Casey, and now, Mikey. Even the sight of Bobby bleeding on the ground flashed in her mind. Reminding her again how close he had come to joining the ever-growing list. Not that she needed the reminder. His near death would haunt her dreams along with all the others.

A warm hand suddenly cupped her cheek, and without thought, Tabitha turned her face into it, knowing that it was Castiel and seeking the feeling of peace that his touch always seemed to bring her.

"It's not your fault," he whispered to her. "You can't take responsibility for those demons coming after you."

She finally opened her eyes to stare up at the earnest blue eyes of the angel. "Are those demons dead?" she asked him in a low whisper.

He nodded, his hand remaining pressed against her jaw as his thumb lightly brushed across her cheek.

"They won't be the only ones after me, will they?"

The angel shook his head, not voicing his answer, but Tabitha not really needing him to.

"It was Lilith," she suddenly said. Castiel stiffened in surprise, his hand starting to pull away from her. But Tabitha quickly reached up, pressing his fingers against her jaw again, not willing to lose his warmth yet.

When the angel continued to stare at her in shock, she explained in a bitter, desperate tone, "Those demons were sent by Lilith. I'm guessing they all were. It's Lilith that wants me. And she won't stop until she has me."

A fierce look suddenly filled the angel's face, his other arm lifting to cup her face between his hands as he fervently told her, "Nothing will happen to you. Lilith won't get you. I won't let her."

Tabitha's hands were anchored on the angel's wrists, gripping him tightly as he stared at her, his eyes burning with his promise. But her hands fell from his wrists, grabbing the lapels of his tan coat and pulling him closer, her lips crashing against his as his arms quickly slid around her, locking her in place against him and cradling her as closely as their bodies would allow.

She moaned at his ardent response, humming an appreciative sound in her throat as his hands slid against her body, one cupping the back of her head just below her ponytail and the other pressing against her lower back in an effort to bring her closer.

Tabitha shuffled her feet, pushing on Castiel's shoulders to force him backwards, and his feet shuffling with hers until his legs hit the bed behind him and he fell against it. She paused at the sight of him reclined back on his elbows, staring up at her with a look that was mingled longing and fear.

"You're always here for me," she whispered to the angel, marveling the fact to herself. Even after their fight and the discomfort that had grown between them because of it, he had still come for her. Still helped her without hesitation.

"Of course," he returned, seeming slightly confused by her distinction.
And Tabitha remembered that fighting with him had been one of her few real regrets. She sometimes lived her life impulsively, choosing to do whatever felt right in the moment—and while that sometimes led to choices she perhaps shouldn't have made, she tried to never let herself regret them, because in the moment, they'd felt right. And she didn't normally let herself dwell on choices that she had already made.

The recent deaths would haunt her, and the lingering guilt would take a long time to dissipate, but she knew that deep down she couldn't really regret the choice that had led her to the FBI, regardless of what she'd said earlier.

But she regretted fighting with Castiel. Castiel who had come to her aid and saved the life of the man who in her heart of hearts would always be her father. Castiel who always came for her, and made her feel better even when he was sitting and staring at her in silence. Castiel who could ebb the icy flow of guilt, grief, and sadness in her heart.

She stepped forward, toeing off her boots and socks before crossing her arms over her chest as she pulled her long-sleeve t-shirt over her head, discarding it behind her as she knelt over Castiel's thighs.

The angel's hands instantly reached up to cling at her sides, his fingers digging into her bare skin almost painfully as he held her away from him. She could feel every small tremor that passed through him while he stared up at her, visibly holding himself back just as he held her away from him.

"We can't do this," he whispered to her. "If Heaven found out, it could be your death and mine."

Her arms were braced on his shoulders, but she twisted her left wrist just a bit to jingle the charms there. "I thought you said they couldn't find me because of this." He nodded, but it was somewhat reluctantly. "Then they don't need to know," she assured him.

"Angels aren't supposed to have emotions," he tried again, but it sounded like a weak protest even to Tabitha's ears.

But she paused nevertheless as she considered it. "I don't know what emotions you have," she finally told him. "I'm not even sure what emotions I have about this. But it doesn't have to matter right now. I don't want to be alone right now. Please don't leave me alone. I'm afraid that if you leave now, the guilt and grief will just rise up again and swallow me whole. I don't want to feel that. I don't want to feel that or anything tonight. I don't want to feel the fear that's scratching at my throat when I think of Lilith coming after me. I just want to stay in your arms and not feel anything. Please. Don't leave me now and let that grief and that fear rise up. I don't want to be swallowed whole by it. I just want to think about what happened in the past. I don't want to think about what might happen in the future. I just want to think about right now. This moment."

Castiel stared up at her, and she could see the emotions battling across his face. But as he opened his mouth to voice another objection, Tabitha curled her body and leaned down to capture his lips with hers once more, silencing whatever he might have said. And whatever the feeble objection had been fell away unspoken, Castiel's fingers releasing her waist as he wrapped his arms around her, his hands sliding up her back to anchor on her shoulders as he pulled her closer, suddenly seeming to need their bodies pressed closely together just as much as she needed it.

Tabitha hummed against his mouth, her hands bunching the coat and suit jacket together in her hands as she roughly shoved them back over his shoulders, smiling in triumph at the way an almost petulant moan escaped his lips when he was forced to release her and yank his arms out of the clothing. But his arms quickly attached to her waist again, his fingers once more digging in as she moved on to loosening the crooked blue tie, her fingers then fumbling with the white buttons of the shirt as she struggled to undo them all.
Castiel had released her lips, leaning backwards just a bit to stare up at her, an almost awed expression on his face as she finally undid the last button, yanking the loosened tie over his head and then pushing his shirt back down his arms as well. His chest lifted up and down as he breathed in almost shuddering bursts, but he remained still, just gripping her waist as Tabitha likewise leaned back to examine the angel.

In the back of her mind, she knew this wasn't what he truly looked like. She knew it was just the shell housing him. But she still took the time to admire the beauty of it. Smooth chest muscles led down to a flat, lightly muscled stomach, and trailed with a fine dusting of dark hair that disappeared into his waistband. He was more of a lean-build than well-muscled like men she had been attracted to in her past, but she knew the angel within the shell made him stronger and more powerful than his appearance let on.

And while a part of her vanity admired the pretty package he was wrapped in, she knew it was more than the packaging. There was a sense of peace and warmth his touch brought to her, and that was the angel alone that gave her such peace and warmth. He was her protector, her confidant, and more than anything else, her friend. The first being she'd ever felt this incredibly close to. The first she'd been able to speak candidly with without fear of having to censor her words about what she really was and what she did.

And she couldn't deny that the angel made her feel something that she'd never experienced before. Perhaps it was just companionship—she couldn't truthfully put any kind of name on it—but she was glad for it nonetheless.

She knew, too, that the angel's real face was no less beautiful than the shell he now wore. She'd seen it only briefly when Pamela had tried contacting him, but it had been lovely. Though, unlike any human face. Not handsome in the traditional sense of a man's face, but lovely in its softness and ethereality.

Castiel's fingers dug into her a bit tighter as his face tightened slightly. "I don't… I have never…" he trailed off his whispered words, not seeming to know what to say any more than what to do.

Tabitha gave him a gentle smile, trailing one hand down to her waist and prying his hand away from her, lifting it to the back of her neck, and splaying his fingers there.

"Touch me," she told him, amazed at the husky sound that left her lips. "Kiss me. Do whatever you want. There's no right or wrong, just do what feels natural and what feels good."

The angel massaged her neck with his hand, and Tabitha let her head fall back as a moan escaped. She blindly reached down and brought his other hand up to cup her breast through the blue satin bra, encouraging him with her moans when his fingers tentatively skimmed pleasurably across her chest.

Soon, she felt his lips experimentally brush across her chest as well, his lips lightly nibbling flesh pebbled by the cool air. And then she shivered when his tongue slid out to swipe across her skin, gasping when the cool air hit the wet trail he left behind.

Her hands couldn't hold still, reaching down to skim across his own chest, brushing across his nipples and lightly dragging her nails across them.

He gasped in surprise, his eyes darting up to hers at the unexpected pleasure her simple touch had brought.

His hands unerringly found her waist once more, gripping her as he suddenly twisted on the bed, rolling with her until her back connected with the bed and she was positioned directly underneath him.

For a moment, he froze, seeming unsure of what to do next, so Tabitha let her legs rise up on either side of his hips, letting the soles of her feet graze across the backs of his thighs as she nuded him closer. She reached up with her hands, caressing his jaw with each hand before pulling him down to meet her waiting mouth, delighting in the way he eagerly responded to her kiss.

She felt her body getting hotter despite the cool air of the room, and her body trembled in response to the differing sensations of hot and cold. Soon, she had to break away to catch her breath, tipping her head back as Castiel's hands moved from bracing himself against the bed on either side of her shoulders, to lightly caressing up and down her sides. Her breaths began to come out in shallow pants as Castiel continued to kiss down her neck, across her chest, and finally down to her stomach, seeming to take great care in laving across the flat plane, even dipping down into her navel.

Her breath caught altogether when his hands suddenly and impatiently moved to her jeans, pulling on the button as he tried to release it. In another setting, Tabitha might have found his frustrated concentration on the button of her jeans and the zipper below it humorous, but she felt just as impatient as he was. Her hands brushed his away, quickly undoing the buckle of her belt before attacking the button and zipper.

Castiel's hands instantly gripped at her hips, grabbing handfuls of her jeans as he quickly jerked them downwards in one smooth motion, dropping them on the floor as he stared at her bared skin. Only her simple light blue panties and bra were left to cover her from his searching eyes.

Tabitha made a move to sit up, but Castiel suddenly leaned forward, placing one knee between her legs as his hands lightly skimmed up her outer thighs.

The light touch made her flesh pebble again, and she bit her lower lip in an effort to contain the moan at the strange pleasure so light a touch brought her. She continued to watch him through lidded eyes as his hands explored the expanse of her exposed skin. Alternating between feathery caresses down her legs, and then tightly gripping and massaging his way back up her legs, occasionally piercing his touches with light kisses across her thighs.

Unable to stand the exploratory touches that inexplicably drove heat rushing through her veins, Tabitha sat up, pushing at his chest until Castiel stood between her open legs.

She quickly reached out to undo the button and zipper of his pants, dragging them and his boxers past his hips before letting them go to fall at his feet. As she looked up into his face, she almost laughed at the surprised look he wore staring down at his own arousal. Instead, she scooted back on the bed, dragging him forward with one of his hands in hers.

Gingerly, he toed off his own shoes and socks before following her back onto the bed, allowing her to push him onto his back, his head resting on the pillows as she straddled his legs. She paused for a moment on her knees, looking for any sign that he wanted to stop, but saw only a very human look of hunger in his eyes.

Slowly, she reached behind her back, flicking the hooks of her bra and letting the straps fall down her arms and tossing it away. Then, she reached up and let her hair down, shaking her head to settle the loose waves always present in her honeyed locks. Castiel stared at her, tentatively lifting his hands to slide up her sides. When she didn't object, he let one hand slip around to cup a breast, brushing his thumb across the hardening nipple.
Tabitha felt her head fall back as she let out a gasp, the sound turning into a moan as Castiel boldly rolled the nipple between his fingers. As he continued to touch and caress her, Tabitha quickly pushed her panties down her hips, shifting from one knee to the other as she quickly discarded them as well.

Castiel paused again when she was finally bared to him, his eyes hungrily traveling up and down her body.

She lightly stroked his arousal in response, letting her hand wrap around him as she smoothly glided her grip up and down his length once. His head punched back into the pillow in response, his eyes clenching tightly as he moaned something guttural that she didn't understand. Emboldened by his response, Tabitha tightened her grip, stroking him more firmly as he lengthened in her hand, his hips jerking upwards slightly beneath her.

He groaned something else she didn't understand, his hands flailing against the covers of the bed before finding purchase against her knees. He gripped tightly, pulling on her knees until he had pulled her further up his body.

Tabitha knew that heated look in his eyes when he lifted his head to pin her in his stare. An almost hungry desperation that screamed one sentiment: Now.

So Tabitha lurched partway off the bed, snagging the edge of her bag as she dug into the zipper pocket. When she sat up straight, she found Castiel propped up on his elbows, curiosity mingled in his hungry gaze.

She expediently tore open the foil packet, and then expertly rolled the condom into place. "I don't know much about how things work with angels," she told him as she worked, noticing the way his body tensed at her touch. "But I figure it's better safe than sorry since you're in a human body."

For a moment, Tabitha paused again, looking into Castiel's intense blue eyes as he watched her in return. Leaning over his chest, she pressed a kiss to his lips, his arousal twitching against her belly as she gave him an almost chaste kiss. She pushed up just enough to look back down into his eyes, searching for any hesitancy or regret.

"You mean so much to me. You're always there for me, Cas," she whispered against his lips, dropping another gentle kiss against them.

She felt his hand slide up her nape, threading into her hair as he pulled her closer, his other hand sliding to her hip, massaging and kneading her flesh as he pulled her flush against his body. They moaned in unison as their heated flesh touched. Castiel's arousal twitching more against her lower stomach.

Tabitha tore her mouth away, her lips already feeling sensitized and swollen from his fevered kisses. Her head twisted as her nose burrowed against the side of his neck, her tongue darting out to lightly taste the musky scent of his skin. He hissed in response, dipping his own mouth to her neck, laving kisses there and then trailing them down to her shoulder. Her breath caught, and to stifle another moan, she lightly dug her teeth into his shoulder, causing him to shudder and arch into her, his hips jerking reflexively beneath her.

She suddenly pushed up and looked down into his eyes again. "Say 'stop' and we will. Tell me to stop and I'll walk away right now," she tried to assure him, feeling the need to give him the out if he wanted it. But she bit her lip nervously at the thought of him telling her to stop. Of him getting up and disappearing. "Or tell me not to stop," she suddenly pleaded, hating the begging tone in her voice but unable to stop. "Tell me not to stop and stay here with me. Stay."
"Why do you want me?"

Tabitha paused at his question. Staring at him in confusion. "I don't understand."

"Why do you want me? I am nothing special. I am nobody. Just an angel."

Tabitha held her stare on him, but finally saw that he was genuinely confused—that he truly couldn't understand why she could want him in particular.

She sat up straighter, placing his palm on her chest over her heart. "When my heart is so filled with pain and grief, you touch me, you talk to me, and it all fades away. You push away the void of pain and grief, make me forget it—even if only for a while—and sometimes, just your touch replaces it with warmth and peace. No one else can do that. No one else can wipe away that pain like you do. You're special to me. I don't know what this is, but with you, I can live in this moment. I can forget the past and the future. There's only here and now. Tell me not to stop."

Castiel finally leaned up towards her, his hand sliding around her back as he pulled her down closer again, staring intently into her eyes as his other hand cupped her cheek, his thumb stroking her skin so familiarly. He leaned closer as her eyes shut, whispering a gentle plea into her ear, "Stay. Don't stop. Stay with me."

His lips gently kissed along her jaw as she relaxed, sliding her hand between them as she gripped him and slowly slid herself down onto his arousal. She paused when she'd taken him completely in, letting out a long exhale as she willed her body to relax and adjust to him. But as she shifted her weight, his hips gave an involuntary jerk, and she tensed against him. He pushed her back to stare into her eyes with concern.

She gave him a reassuring smile as she explained through shallow breaths, "Just give me a minute to adjust, I'm a bit out of practice."

"I have no practice," he told her, his brows scrunching in a worried manner.

Tabitha finally straightened over him, slowly rolling her hips as she drew his hands back to her waist. "Just do what comes naturally," she reminded him.

His hands clutched at her waist for several minutes as she slowly rocked her hips, her body quickly heating as her skin became more sensitized. Every nerve ending felt electrified, and soon, she couldn't hold back her slow teasing pace. She was soon twisting and rocking her hips in a frenzied pace.

Castiel had steadfastly watched her, his hands caressing and massaging at her waist as he studied her with rapt attention. But as her pace grew frantic, he suddenly sat up beneath her, forcing her to wrap her legs around his waist as he held her hip with one hand, guiding her up and down as he rolled and twisted his own hips underneath her. She leaned back in his grip, her eyes closing at the sensations of the changed position, feeling him stroking her deeper and caressing her in just the right spot as her breaths left in shallow, unsteady pants.

She felt her body tense, and knew by the erratic rhythm of his thrusts that Castiel was nearly there as well. But as she let her head fall back, preparing for the wave to rush over her, she suddenly felt Castiel's hand slide into her hair, gripping a handful as he guided her head back up, his eyes boring into hers in a silent demand. He didn't voice it, but somehow she knew he needed to see her eyes, needed to look into them.

And as her body tightened and began to convulse around him, she fought to keep her eyes on his,
even as her back arched at the waves of pleasure washing through her.

His arms tightened around her, his fingers digging almost painfully into her hip as he gave a few last erratic jerks beneath her calling out something guttural once more. Then his forehead fell against hers, his throat working as he swallowed thickly and fought to even his breathing.

He held her locked in a tight embrace against his chest as they melted into each other, neither saying a word or pulling away as they slowly regained their breath.

But as her breathing evened out, she felt the previous heat leaking from her body as the cool air licked across the sweat sheen on her skin, and she fought against the slight shivers causing the current tremor of her muscles.

Castiel pulled slightly away from her, looking curiously into her face as he asked, "Is something wrong?"

She shook her head. "Just cold." And then pulled at the covers to climb beneath them, tugging him to lie down beside her. "Aren't you cold?" she asked, her hands skimming under the covers across his chest, feeling the damp iciness of his skin and marveling that he wasn't shivering like her.

He shrugged as she carefully lowered her head onto his shoulder. "Angels don't feel such minor discomforts as humans do."

Castiel hadn't moved when she placed her head on his shoulder, so she moved closer, wrapping her arm over his waist and curling into him, hoping to build and share some heat between them. "Well I'm cold enough for both of us," she quietly joked.

He looked down at her curled against his side, and tentatively pulled her closer, wrapping an arm over her shoulders as she nuzzled closer, her nose pressing closer to his neck as she inhaled the sharper, salty tinged sweetness and musk of him. And feeling his arm wrap around her and bring her closer, she finally let her eyes close and fell asleep against him. Somehow knowing that when she woke, he would still be beside her, and the notion building on the feeling of warmth and peace that had driven away the pain and grief that had previously filled her heart.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I'm always nervous about writing the first adult content (lemon/sex scene) in any story, because it's so daunting to set the tone for what two characters' chemistry is going to be like. Hopefully I haven't disappointed, I know a lot of people were waiting for this scene, and believe me, it was hard to write.

These two were hard to know how to write because we all know that Tabitha is no blushing virgin, and that (in my story) Castiel is a virgin. But I didn't want him to be completely clueless. Yes, he's a virgin, but I guess I imagine that after thousands of years watching humans, you at least understand the mechanics of sex, if not learn a trick or two. In my mind, Castiel understands the fundamentals of sex, he's just never been in a vessel and had the kinds of urges that humans get, so can't really understand the urges and desires until he feels them, but that doesn't mean he doesn't know what to do.

Hope that makes some sense, and that I've done our pair some justice.
And yes, they've finally made this huge step! But believe me, this is only the beginning.

Be sure to leave your thoughts!
Mikey's body slid bonelessly to the dirty pavement. He didn't move. Couldn't move.

Would never move again.

But his eyes were locked on Tabitha's. Sightless. But accusing.

"It's your fault," he denounced in flat tones echoing in the silence of the looming darkness.

Tabitha moved closer, her hand clutched at her chest as her eyes fixed on the slow trickle of blood chasing down between his eyes and across his nose. "I know," she lowly admitted. "It's all my fault."

She waited, but Mikey didn't move. Even though she expected him to jump up and grab her to punish her for his death. And despite the fact that she was certain she deserved that punishment, he still didn't move. Just stared at her with those sightless accusing eyes.

"He's right. It is your fault."

Tabitha twirled to see Bobby standing behind her, one hand clutching at the wound to his stomach, heedless, it seemed, to the oozing blood slipping through his fingers.

"I know," she repeated to him. "It's all my fault."

"You killed me, girl," he continued as he lifted his bloody hand to point an accusing finger at her. "I always knew you'd be the death of me. You'll be the death of this whole world."

Tabitha tried and failed to choke back a sob at his accusation. "I don't want to hurt anyone, Bobby! Least of all you!"

"You'll be the death of us all."

Tabitha jerked awake, trying to stifle a strangled sob as she pushed away from the warmth under her cheek.

Arms suddenly unwrapped from around her and Tabitha found herself staring down into the startled eyes of an angel.


And now, her lover.

She fought a ridiculous blush as she swallowed thickly and cleared her throat.

Castiel was silent, but she saw question in his drawn gaze.

"Nightmare," she quietly supplied as she rolled partly off the angel's chest and onto her side.

The night before, she'd lived in the moment, hadn't given one thought to the fact that an angel was in her bed. But as the old adage proclaimed, things were different in the cold light of day.
Or rather the graying light of dawn.

By her sore muscles and puffy eyes, she knew she'd only been asleep a few hours. But she was also just as sure that Castiel hadn't slept or even moved at all in that time. Only further highlighting that her lover wasn't a normal human.

She didn't regret what had happened—it had certainly felt right last night—but she also knew that didn't mean it should have happened. He was an angel and she was human. They were about as different as could be. Way beyond interracial. Not even the same species.

And she couldn't help the church-morality part of her mind that told her she'd somehow sullied the angel. Or perhaps committed blasphemy. Even if he'd been a more than willing participant.

Things were simpler under the cover of darkness. She hadn't even thought of him as an angel. It had simply been Castiel touching her in that way. But morning always brought truths easily brushed aside in the dark.

She'd had sex with her friend Castiel.

And she was wondering if it was becoming a pattern that she kept sleeping with her friends.

Except for the new angel twist anyway.

*What happens now?* she wondered to herself. But there was no answer.

Only the angel in her bed staring up at her. Looking up at her with the same question in his eyes it seemed.

She rolled away from him and slipped from the bed, dragging the top sheet with her to cover herself. Castiel's eyes silently watched her as she crouched near her bag to hastily pull out clothes, slipping underwear and a pair of jeans on underneath the sheet wrapped around her.

Trying to shrug away any discomfort, Tabitha nonchalantly dropped the sheet as she began pulling a bra on, walking around the end of the bed as she picked up her clothes from the night before, as well as Castiel's and tossing them to him on the bed. She bent back over her bag to dig out a t-shirt and sweatshirt to tug on.

Castiel caught his clothes one by one as he sat up. "What does this mean?" he asked her, still sitting on the bed.

"When someone throws your clothes at you, it means 'put on your clothes,'" she directed, tugging a pair of socks on before pulling on her boots from the night before. She still couldn't quite meet his eyes, choosing instead to try to keep herself busy by dressing and packing up her bags as she tried to sort her mind out.

"That's not what I meant," he mumbled, but did begin pulling on the clothes she'd tossed at him. Pants on, and pulling on his shirt, he tried again, "I meant, what happens now?"

She didn't look up as she grumbled, "It's supposed to be the girl that asks the obligatory 'what does this mean?' and 'what happens next?' Hell if I know."

There was no answer to her grumbles, so Tabitha sighed as she finally looked across the motel room. Castiel's eyes weren't on her now, instead focused dubiously on the blue tie in his hands, staring at it as though it was a Rubik's Cube that he was trying to solve.
Carefully taking the tie from his hands, Tabitha pulled his collar until it stood up, and then slipped the tie overhead, smoothing the collar back over it. She started to pull the tie straight, but left it loosened and crooked. It somehow fit the angel better than neatly squared away.

"I don't know what happens now," she admitted as she picked up his suit jacket from the bed and handed it to him. "But I think I better understand why you couldn't tell me before why you'd kissed me. You didn't know what this was or what to call it. Well…I don't know, either. And I'm not sure there is a name to put on this. I don't know what we're supposed to do. I guess we just roll with the punches."

"'Roll with the punches?'" he repeated, his forehead scrunched as he looked down at his crooked tie, trying to push it underneath his dark blue suit jacket.

She shrugged. "Take it one day at a time. See what happens."

He finally looked up into her eyes. As usual, his face was wiped of emotion, but she saw a flicker of fear in his expressive eyes.

Emboldened by the emotion she'd seen, she reached up to cup his jaw with one hand. "You're still the closest friend I've ever had. I don't want to lose that. No matter what," she assured him.

He relaxed somewhat, whatever fear there had been in his gaze easing at her words, and she gave a relieved sigh that she'd at least partially read him so well.

But she still needed some time to come to grips with the change in their relationship dynamic, so she stepped away as she gathered her bags and Bobby's as well. "I should get back to the hospital; try to get Bobby out of town just as soon as he wakes up. No telling if or when more demons might show up," she commented, her eyes trained on the floor again.

She hovered near the door, feeling the need to say something more, but not sure quite what it should be. Castiel saved her the trouble, stepping closer to her, his fingers gently guiding her gaze back to his.

"That's probably a good idea," he whispered. "Be careful. Now that we know it's Lilith after you, you must be more vigilant than ever to stay hidden from her and any of her minions."

He was silent for a moment. Not a muscle in his body moving, save for his thumb stroking against her cheek. "Perhaps you are right. I don't know what this is either. I've told myself that I am selfish to continue coming back to you, but I cannot seem to stay away. But this puts you in more danger now. It puts us both in more danger now. If either Heaven or Hell found out… No one can know about this."

"Don't worry. No prying eyes can see us, right? And it's not like I'm gonna run back to my brothers and tell them anything about this. Dean still likes to believe in his mind that I'm an innocent little virgin. He definitely doesn't need to know about this."

Castiel silently stared down at her upturned face. "Perhaps I was wrong to have indulged last night. The danger it places you in…"

He trailed off, and Tabitha reached up to softly kiss his lips. "Maybe it was wrong," she conceded. "Lord knows I've done plenty of things that were. But it didn't feel wrong last night."

She stepped away and readjusted the bags on her shoulders. "I've gotta go check on Bobby. See you around, Cas."
Tabitha drove silently to the hospital where she'd left Bobby, thankful that they'd left her Mustang at the motel so she didn't have to boost another car to go get him.

But her dream weighed heavily on her mind. Reminding her that she was now responsible for more deaths. And she knew she couldn't be the cause of any other friends dying because of her. Not that she had many other friends still left alive.

But there was one who didn't know the dangers that could come after him.

Fishing out her phone, she scrolled through the recent call log and dialed. The call quickly connected, but no voice answered on the other end.

"I guess I deserve that, kid," she reluctantly told Shawn. "But that's okay. You don't have to say anything. I'm sure you're still trying to come to terms with everything, and I promised I'd leave you alone and not bother you until you were ready. And I'd really like to keep that promise, but I need you to do something for me, Shawn."

"What?" The single word was soft, but spoken with an edge.

"I can't tell you everything. But I need you to pack up and move outta Boston. It might not be safe." She could hear his indignant and stuttered reply building, so she quickly cut him off. "I mean it, Shawn. You can be pissed at me all you want, but I need you to pack up and move. Just go... somewhere else. And don't tell me where. Leave nothing behind to lead back to you. Just do it. There's been more...trouble...and I don't think there's anything that can lead back to you. But I'd rather you be safe than dead. So just do this for me, Shawn. Just go."

Silence filled the line for nearly a full minute before she heard the reluctant sigh from the other end. "Fine. I've been in Boston for a while anyway. So I'll go."

"And tell no one," she reminded him. "If you need anything, you can try this number, and if for some reason I don't have it any longer, you know the other emergency ways to get ahold of me. Just...be careful."

"Fine." And with the single utterance, he hung up.

With a heavy sigh, she acknowledged that even if he was still mad at her, he was at least going to do what she told him, and hopefully that would be enough to keep him safe.

Castiel proved to be true to his word, and Bobby was still peacefully sleeping when she'd found his room number. A bandage was wrapped around his temple, but otherwise, he could have just been sleeping peacefully in his own bed.

She gave a silent prayer of thanks to Castiel, sitting beside the old hunter as she gingerly picked up his hand in hers.

The hunter jerked slightly at her touch, his eyes fluttering open as he looked around. "Where am I?" he asked.

"Hospital," Tabitha supplied, gratefully squeezing his hand and scooting her chair closer. "But you're fine. Got your head wound stitched up, and we can leave anytime you want."

Bobby's face tightened in confusion as he lifted his blankets, his free hand hesitantly touching his hospital gown-covered midsection. "How can that be?" he whispered to himself.

Tabitha opened her mouth to explain what had happened, but suddenly hesitated. Castiel had told her
that they had to be careful now, that no one could know what had happened between them. Would telling the older hunter that the angel had come and healed him make him ask too many questions?

She pasted a smile on her face, deciding she couldn't place Bobby in any more danger because of her choices. "What, Bobby? You just had a head wound. That demon hit you pretty hard, I think knocked a few nuts loose, maybe the bolts, too," she laughed.

Bobby let the blankets fall to his torso as he glanced back at her. "I was stabbed in the stomach last night. Wasn't I?"

Tabitha laughed again and reassuringly squeezed his hand again. "No, Bobby. How hard did that demon hit you? You weren't stabbed. Just a hit that cut to your temple and rung your bell. You've been out all night. I'm just glad to see you awake."

Bobby shook his confusion off, swinging his legs over the side of the hospital bed. "Whatever," he shrugged. "Just get me some clothes and let's get outta here. Hate these damn places."

"You and me both," Tabitha laughed as she handed him his duffle bag of clothes, standing and pulling the curtain around his bed to give him privacy.

"Errggh, why don't you try asking the question one more time!" Tabitha growled as she threw down the newspaper that she had hopelessly been trying to read. She might have been able to at least skim through it, that is if her older brother would have stopped hounding her.

"I'm just trying to figure out how you got out of a trap set by demons and managed to drag an unconscious old man with you," he angrily replied, pacing in their motel room at the foot of the beds.

Tabitha leaned back against the headboard of the bed she'd commandeered, fighting the urge to repeatedly bash her head against it. It might have been better than Dean's repeated questions. At least there she had the chance of knocking herself out.

"I already said," she repeated in an exasperated voice, "that Bobby got knocked out, and I threw some Holy water I had at the demons, buying me enough time to exorcise them." She closed her eyes, trying to count backwards from a hundred at having to repeat her story for what had to be the tenth time.

"So you threw Holy water on a bunch of advancing demons and that just happened to buy you enough time so that you could exorcise them all?"

"Yes!" she answered, swinging her legs over the side of the bed as she leaned forward, tapping her nose with one hand and pointing at Dean with the other. "That's exactly what I'm telling you." She wasn't exactly lying. Saying, "that's what I told you," wasn't the same as saying, "that's what happened."

"Then why didn't you call us right away to tell us that Bobby was hurt and that the two of you had been in an ambush? Sam and I both called your number and Bobby's for hours. Why couldn't we get ahold of either of you for so damn long?" he rounded on her, stepping in front of her and staring accusingly down at where she sat.

Hating the height advantage, Tabitha sprang to her feet and brushed by her brother, throwing a glare at her younger brother lounging on the other bed, silently watching their verbal sparring match—just like he'd been doing for the past hour that Dean had been grilling her. He silently raised his hands in defeat. He'd asked her a few questions at first, too, expressing his own doubts, but he had shut up pretty quickly when Tabitha pointedly reminded him that he might have to answer a few of her
questions if he kept prodding.

"Did you ever think that maybe I was kinda upset at the notion of Bobby being hurt?" she threw over her shoulder, squatting in front of the small fridge to get another beer. She had already had three during their argument, and she had the feeling she might need a few more before it was done. "I was upset and didn't think to stop and call you. My first thought was just to get Bobby to a hospital."

Which was completely true, she merely left out that he'd actually been knocking on Death's door at the time instead of a little bump to the head.

But Dean wasn't easily fooled.

"For a hit to the head and little gash that only needed a few stitches? It doesn't make sense, Tabitha. Why the hell did you even take him to the hospital for something little like that?"

Tabitha had guzzled nearly half of her bottle of beer, and twirled to face her brother again, slamming the bottle down on the dresser beside her. "I was upset!" she yelled in return. "Head wounds can bleed a lot, and all I saw was the blood and just freaked at the thought of something happening to Bobby. Excuse me for being cautious about something like that." Still no lies. Just not full truths.

"Bullshit," Dean whispered, still standing at the bed where she'd been sitting, staring at the now empty space.

"What did you say?"

"You heard me," he ground out, turning to face her down. "I've seen you stitch up both Sam and I, and even Dad when we were a helluva lot worse off than a bump to the head, and you were always calm and collected about it. And hell, after your FBI training, you got even calmer about it. You've seen the two of us way more beat up than a little bump on the head, hell, even jumped in and took care of Anna when she'd sliced her arm up like a Christmas Turkey. Didn't flinch or bat an eye. But you expect me to believe that you 'freaked' just because Bobby was bleeding a little from his head? There's something you're not telling me, even Bobby says certain things didn't make sense to him. So what the hell is it you're hiding?"

Throwing her head back, Tabitha groaned in frustration. "I'm telling you that there's nothing I'm hiding. Why can't you accept that?" she insisted, huffing as she went to stand and stare out the window. She swallowed the rest of her bottle before she muttered to herself. "I shouldn't have left my Mustang at Bobby's. I should have taken the damn thing and gone my own way."

"The hell you are!" Dean shouted at her back. "You aren't going anywhere on your own until we know just what the hell it is Lilith wants with you. You've already walked into two of her traps. Sheer dumb luck that you walked out of either of them. Next time she might be there waiting for you herself."

Tabitha spun around to glare at Dean, having to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from telling him that she'd gotten out of both traps because the angel he always grumbled about had saved her life. That luck had had nothing to do with it. But she'd already decided she couldn't tell her brothers about Castiel. That it was safer if they didn't know anything at all about the angel being present that night.

"I told you what happened," she slowly ground out, trying to keep from raising her voice again even though her face felt hot from her ever-rising temper.

"And I say it's bullshit," Dean returned. "There's something going on that you're not telling us. You're lying about something."
"Well if you're so goddamned smart, why don't you tell me what it is!" she shouted, bending down to grab her previously discarded black leather jacket, yanking it on with stiff movements as she headed for the door.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Dean demanded, stopping from his wild pacing in the room.

Tabitha paused in the doorway. "I'm going for a walk, and I swear to God, you try to order me to stay in this room, and you're gonna walk with a permanent limp!" she shouted, slamming the door shut behind her with an echoing finality.

She didn't zipper her worn leather jacket as she walked, feeling overheated from her frustration and anger, despite the bitter temperatures that reminded her real winter weather was around the corner in this part of Iowa.

Part of her anger and frustration was with herself. She hated having to tell even partial lies to her brothers, but she had to keep reminding herself that it was best for them. But there was still a part of her that wished the annoying oaf would just accept what she was telling him and stop questioning her.

It had started when Sam and Dean had picked her up from Bobby's place, and had only stopped when Tabitha had put headphones on in the backseat and laid down, refusing to listen to the same questions and demands over and over again. But once they'd stopped for the night in whatever part of Iowa they were in, Dean had started in again, like a dog with a bone, refusing to let up.

She snorted to herself. She'd been looking for some way to get Dean to let up on hounding her about being able to hear angels and not telling him, but this wasn't quite what she'd had in mind. True he hadn't brought the angel thing up in a while, but she could just envision her brother harping on the details of her failed California trip for the next month or more.

The wind was biting as Tabitha walked down the line of motel room doors. But she barely felt the chill as her mind whirled with questions and worries. She stopped at the end of the motel wing, contemplating whether or not to brave the full force of the wind by stepping out of the partial shelter from the wind that the motel provided.

Instead, she leaned against the door furthest down the line, closing her eyes as her thoughts swirled around. As she silently leaned against the door, she felt the strangest sensation slide up her spine, something almost akin to the sensation of being watched, mixed with the strange, eerie sensation she'd heard people describe when they talked about someone walking over a person's grave.

She opened her eyes to look around, but there was only her and the low whistling of the bitter wind.

Carefully thinking of the angel, she whispered, "Cas, if you're not busy, I could really use someone to talk to right now."

For several moments, she waited, but only the whistling wind answered her. She knew that her friend might be busy, or that she might not have called out to him strongly enough to overcome whatever her bracelet did to hide her. But she couldn't bring herself to call out again, not wanting to be a bother.

"Tabitha."

Her eyes snapped open and her head jerked up from where she'd let it fall against the door behind her. "Cas?" she said, surprised to see the angel actually standing in front of her when she'd written
him off in her mind.

"What's wrong?" he asked, stepping closer as a frown creased his face.

She gave a matching frown as she remembered her earlier ire. "Just arguing with Dean," she shrugged as she glanced down, her hands nervously fidgeting in front of her. "I hate lying to him," she admitted in a whisper. Looking up, she started to ask, "Maybe it would be best if I told them—"

Castiel quickly stepped forward, his fingertips lightly touching one cheek as he apologized. "I'm sorry you have been put in this position. But he cannot know. An angel could read the thoughts in his mind and know the truth. But no angel can read your mind. Not even Uriel was able to breach your thoughts."

"Would it really be so terrible if it got out?"

"Angels are forbidden from such longstanding and…close interactions. We are forbidden to form human emotions. I'm charged with protecting you. I cannot put you at such risk."

"I don't get it. You say I'm to be protected, why would I be in danger?"

He gave a suffering sigh, seeming to weigh what he should tell her before he grudgingly continued, "Angels are not the only ones punished for such interactions. In the rare occurrences that such…lasting interactions were formed, the humans were always struck down along with the angel. Heaven could easily resurrect you after…" He'd trailed off, seeming reluctant to continue, but his thick and heavy tone said enough. "If Hell discovered…it would be even worse. If they thought they had a human they could leverage against an angel…"

Once more, he'd trailed off. But once more, the words he'd left unsaid spoke volumes. I can't believe I'm involved in some twisted version of Romeo and Juliette, she thought to herself. But quickly corrected the dismal thought. The young lovers had faced feuding families but their true danger had been their own idiotic joint-suicide. The consequences Castiel was describing were far worse. Death, torture, and likely things even far worse. Probably more akin to Macbeth than Shakespeare's play of young lovers.

She knew if she were smart, she'd get out while she still could. But she was a Winchester after all. And she'd always been a bit of a moth to the flame. Too entranced by the light as she danced in the fire of her own destruction. But perhaps the price was worth the dance.

She sighed, coming back to Castiel's words and knowing he was right. She wouldn't put her brothers in jeopardy for the choices she made. So she repeated in a whisper, "I know. I just hate lying to them."

Castiel stepped back from her, letting his hand fall away from her face. "I am the one who has put you in this position. It's my fault. It won't happen again."

Pushing away from the shelter of the motel, Tabitha reached out to halt Castiel's retreat, grasping his hand again. "That sounds kinda final," she told him. "And I don't want this—" she gestured her hand between them, "whatever this is—to be over. No one has to know. I just wish my brothers would trust me."

Several moments passed as the pair stared at each other, each waiting for something—some sign from the other.

"I don't want to give you up," Castiel suddenly admitted, seeming surprised that he'd actually spoken.
It was all the encouragement Tabitha needed, stepping into the warmth Castiel offered, one arm wrapping around his shoulders as her other buried in his hair. He responded with equal fervor, his arms sliding around her back to pull her body flush against his as he battled with her for dominance in their kiss.

Something solid pressed against her back and Tabitha suddenly realized that he'd backed her against the motel room door behind her.

Smiling at the opportunity knocking at her back, Tabitha breathlessly pulled away from the angel, twisting in his arms as she fished one of her lock-pick sets out of the pocket inside her leather coat, fumbling with the old motel lock as Castiel's hands braced against the door on either side of her, his own breathing strained. But at least the old motel hadn't switched to electronic key cards.

"What are you doing?"

Biting off a grumble at her fumbling hands, she replied, "There's no car parked anywhere near this end of the motel, so I'm guessing this room's empty. I'm trying to get the door open."

Castiel removed one hand from where it was braced at her shoulder level, sliding it over her hands and pulling them away before simply twisting the knob and opening the door in his hand.

She nearly stumbled into the darkened room as she turned a questioning look at the angel. But he merely shrugged as if to say "so what?"

With a small shake of her head, she pulled him further into the room. "That's pretty handy," she told him.

As they moved to the foot of the motel bed decorated in tacky large flowers of 70's decor, Tabitha began pushing the trench coat from his shoulders. Already the act was starting to gain a warm familiar feeling to her.

But the angel stopped her movements before the coat was over his shoulders, reaching up with his hands to cup her face.

"Are you sure this is what you want?"

She gave his question due consideration, but finally resumed pushing the coat past his shoulders, forcing him to drop his arms so the coat could fall to the floor.

"I don't know a lot about what I should or shouldn't be doing anymore. But here in this moment… this is what I want," she assured him.

As she pushed his suit jacket over his shoulders as well, she stepped into his embrace again, allowing him to push her own jacket away as he bent to kiss her again.

She didn't settle for slow and gentle, there was nothing chaste in her responses to him. She channeled all of the past hours of frustrations and anger with her brothers into passion. Her brothers couldn't know the truth of what she was doing, but she would wring every moment of pleasure and bliss out of these moments in exchange for those frustrations and the lies she was forced to tell.

Perhaps she could make that passion overshadow the ache in her heart for her lies.

Castiel seemed of equal opinion, eagerly and expeditiously sliding his hands underneath her sweatshirt and t-shirt, sliding them together up and over her head before staring down at her like a starved man.
"I don't want to give you up," he whispered.

Tabitha awoke the next morning alone. But she'd had the vague memory of Castiel telling her he had to leave as she drifted off. She'd only meant to nap for a while, and then return to the room with her brothers before they knew anything was amiss.

But as she scrambled out of bed and hurriedly stuffed herself back into her clothes, she realized there wouldn't be much hiding that she'd been out all night. And she'd have to scramble for something to tell her brothers.

She briskly walked down the path to their room, still casting about for what to tell them as she cautiously let herself through the door. Dean was sitting on his bed, bent over tying his shoes, and Sam was packing the last of his clothes into his duffle bag. They both stopped to stare at her in the doorway. Brushing their stares off, she continued into the room and grabbed her own bags, untouched from when she'd brought them in the night before.

"Where've you been?" Sam asked her as he paused in his packing.

Tabitha was surprised that he'd been the first one to break the silence, but she figured that if she turned around to look at Dean, she'd see that he was preparing to blow a gasket.

"Out. Went for a walk."

"All night?" Dean incredulously demanded. "Yes, all night. Needed to blow off some steam."

"All night?" he repeated again.

"Yes. All night. What do you care? I was sick of arguing with you. And now you've just reinforced why." She tried to step around him, but he mirrored her movements, not allowing her out.

"Where the hell did you spend the night?" he growled, leaning forward towards her, and rounding his shoulders threateningly.

She narrowed her eyes and fired back. "Walked down to the nearest bar, had a drink, and grabbed the first man I came across and had my way with him. Would you like all the tantalizing details?"

Dean immediately blanched, and then his face began rotating between a horrified paleness, and an angry red. She almost smiled at the comical sight as her brother tried to decide which emotion to settle on.

Finally, he turned away and crossly told her, "You shouldn't disappear for hours on end when we know that demon bitch is after you."

"So noted," she bit out, and then held up her cell phone. "But you could have called, too. I did have my phone with me this time."

Dean didn't answer, but wouldn't meet her eyes either, finally telling her, "Sam found a case not too far away, in Bedford. We're headed there now."

"Come on," Sam quietly told her as he brushed past his siblings and headed out the door. "Let's load
our stuff and I'll tell you what we know so far while Dean finishes packing."

"Super," she sarcastically intoned, giving him a tight smile.

"Why does the PD keep sending you guys? I already said, I don't want a lawyer," Adam Benson grimly told her from where he sat across the table, staring at the thing like he hoped it would swallow him.

Tabitha scooted forward on the uncomfortable metal chair. "You need legal representation, Mr. Benson. The DA's talking about pushing for the maximum. You need some kind of counsel."

"I'm pleading guilty. I don't need counsel to do that," he returned.

"At least talk to me," she tried again, pushing her lined notepad away and leaning further over the table. "Help me to understand what happened and why you wouldn't want to accept the legal counsel I'm trying to offer you. Just make me understand what happened. Was she cheating? Were you fighting? What were the circumstances that led to this?"

Adam Benson sighed across the way, setting his cuffed hands heavily on the metal table separating them as he stared down at the metal encircling his wrists before hesitantly meeting her eyes.

"The circumstances? The circumstances were that I killed my wife. And you wanna know why? For making plans without asking me."

Tabitha's lips pressed into a thin line. "Have you had fights over things like that before? Fights in general? That seems like a little thing to fight over."

"I know," he whispered, looking down again as shame filled his face.

"Did you feel some urge to suddenly hurt her? Did you feel out of control or like you weren't aware of your own actions?" she gently probed. She was glad now that she'd talked her brothers into going to check with the ME and letting her interview the suspects by herself. They'd argued that a woman interrogating men who'd by all accounts gone nuts and killed their wives wasn't a good idea, but Tabitha had a feeling she just might get more out of them then two guys might. That a little gentle questioning might just be the ticket. And besides, as she reminded them, she was more than well equipped and used to interviewing hostile suspects.

"I knew exactly what I was doing," he told her, the shame in his face spreading and seeming to weigh his whole body down. "I was crystal clear."

"Then why?" she continued to gently press.

He shook his head, a few tears gathering in his eyes. "I don't know. I loved her. We were happy."

Tabitha leaned back as she considered her next move. Trying to decide between pushing him harder, or continuing her gentle probing.

Somehow, she didn't think it would take much more prodding to break him and get him to tell her what she already knew. "There are only a few reasons that a man who truly claims to love his wife would kill her. Love. Now, you say you loved her, and she loved you, but sometimes we can't keep from loving more than one person. So either you were lying and she was cheating and you were jealous, or perhaps she wasn't the one cheating. Some people decide they can only love one person." She left her words hanging between them, watching as his eyes jerked back up to hers.
"You know?" he whispered in disbelief.

"I know you spent a lot of money at a strip club, and there's only one reason a man would continually spend that kind of money returning time after time to the same strip club."

His face turned grim again as he admitted, "Her name was Jasmine. I didn't mean for it to happen, I don't like to go to strip bars. My buddy was having a bachelor party, and there she was."

"Jasmine."

"She came right up to me," he explained, almost sounding slightly eager now. "And...I don't know, she was just...perfect. Everything that I wanted."

"With that kind of woman, when the price is right, she can be anything you want," she tried to point out.

"It wasn't about the money," he hastened to contradict. "It wasn't even about the sex. It was...I don't know. I...I don't know what it was. It's hard to explain," he said, sounding frustrated as he slumped back in his seat.

"Did your wife know?"

He shook his head. "No, she never had a clue," he said, seeming pretty sure of himself.

"Then why? If you could have kept her clueless and had them both, why kill your wife?"

"For Jasmine," he slowly explained. "She said we would be together forever. If...if only Vicki was..."

"Dead," Tabitha supplied.

He nodded reluctantly across from her before continuing. "Afterwards, me and Jasmine were supposed to meet and she never showed. I don't know where she lives, I don't know her last name, I don't even know her real first name! I'm an idiot."

Tabitha couldn't agree more, but she kept it to herself. "Why didn't you tell this to the cops, or to one of the other attorneys they tried to send over?"

"What for?" he asked, his body curling in on himself as he hunched over more. "The stripper didn't do it, I did it. And I know what I deserve. The judge doesn't give me the death sentence, I'll just do it myself."

"What did you guys find out?" Tabitha asked as she slipped into the back seat of the Impala when her brothers drove up to the prison to pick her up.

"That Sammy cock-blocked me," Dean grumbled under his breath.

Tabitha wasn't certain she had been meant to hear it, but she still turned to the youngest Winchester with a wide grin. "Oh? What's this now? Has Sammy found himself a lady?"

Sam bit back a grin even as Dean's scowl deepened. "Cara and I were just talking," he insisted. "And it's not my fault she liked me better, Dean." His eyes cut across to Dean even as a small, but smug smile tugged at his lips.

"Oh, it's Cara now? Not Doctor Roberts?" Dean shot back with a frown. Tabitha could almost see
the wheels turning in his head as he tried to figure out what the woman saw in Sam that made her more receptive to him instead of Dean who was so used to women fawning over him.

"I think I've got this figured out now," she told her brothers, leaning back in her seat and feeling a wave of satisfaction at their little brother finally attracting a woman over their older brother. "The key word was 'Doctor,' Dean. The woman's a doctor. Not your usual fare."

"Shut up," he grumbled, but both Sam and Tabitha could tell he wasn't really all that upset.

"Anyway," Dean continued. "What did you find out from the husbands while we were at the hospital?"

"Oh, you mean while you were striking out with the doctor lady?"

Dean looked up to glare at her in the review, but there wasn't any real heat in his look.

"Pretty much the same story from all three guys. Spent a ton of money on a stripper who then less than subtly convinced them they should off their wives so they could be together forever."

"You sure it was a stripper?" Sam asked.

"You know anyone that would choose to name their daughter Jasmine?"

The boys grunted in agreement.

"'Cause nothing says love like killing your wife for your stripper mistress," Sam responded.

"These guys fess up?" Dean asked.

"Yup. All of them. One drained their savings, another his IRA, and one emptied his kids' college fund, all on the same day," Tabitha replied.

"For strippers?" Sam clarified.

"For strippers," Tabitha agreed with a nod.

"I checked into it," Dean supplied. "All three guys went to the same place. Place called 'The Honey Wagon.'"

"They all have affairs with a stripper named Jasmine, too?" Sam asked.

Tabitha shook her head as she leaned forward. "This is where it gets interesting. Yes to the fact that they were all strippers. But they all had different names. And each described very different looking women."

"So these chicks connected somehow? Working together or something?" Dean asked, looking up into the review again.

"Well, there is one thing," Tabitha began. "They described physically different women, but there was one thing each of the guys said about them that was exactly the same. That they were perfect and everything they wanted."

Sam snorted. "Yeah, at least until Dream Barbie convinced them to murder their wives."

"Yeah," Tabitha agreed.
"What if it's some kind of love spell?" Dean asked. "Could be a coven of skeevy witches."

Tabitha smiled a little at his obvious dislike of anything having to do with witches. Not that she disagreed.

"Could be," Sam agreed. "And it caused them to become totally psychotic."

"Absolutely," Dean almost happily agreed.

"You seem pretty cheery," Sam laughed.

"Strippers, Sammy. Strippers. We're on an actual case involving strippers. Finally."

"Oh joy," Tabitha sarcastically intoned.

Dean frowned as he looked at his sister in the mirror again. "Maybe you should sit this next visit out. That's no place for a nice girl like you."

Tabitha nearly burst out laughing at his serious tone, as if he really thought a strip bar would somehow be damaging to her mental health or something.

"I've been to strip clubs," she told him between little giggles that slipped out. "Had to for a few cases. And even went a time or two just for fun," she told him as she waggled her eyebrows. As his jaw dropped open, she continued, "'Course, the ones we went to for fun were more along the lines of 'The Thunder from Down Under' than the kind you're thinking of."

"That's just wrong," Dean mumbled, refusing to meet her eyes again.

"Relax," she assured him. "I have no more desire to go to a strip club with my brothers than you guys have for bringing me with to one. Besides, I've probably ruined enough of your silly man-fantasies. Just drop me off at the motel and I'll start researching. See if I can't start digging into what we might be facing."

She could see Dean relax slightly in the front seat, but he still wouldn't look up to meet her eyes as he headed for their motel. Shaking her head, she turned to Sam and began asking him to fill in what they'd found out at the hospital. She'd need all the information they had to start researching what they were facing.

Tabitha was just walking out of the bathroom after a long shower when she heard the door to their room open.

"Jesus, Tab! Put some damn clothes on!" Dean exclaimed as he quickly spun away towards the door, running into Sam who immediately threw a hand over his eyes like a little boy that had seen a scary monster in a movie.

Tabitha looked down at her shirt, tugging a little at the hem in response to their virulent reaction. She wasn't altogether sure what the big deal was. The t-shirt covered her underwear, and her brothers had certainly seen her in swimsuits before.

But she obligingly tossed the bottle of lotion she'd been rubbing onto her legs into her bag, and then began tugging on a pair of jeans, tossing the rest of the M&Ms from her hand into her mouth. There was a lingering guilt in the return of her chocolate habit—she hadn't much touched chocolate since it had too strongly reminded her of the encounter with the ghost of her former lover and partner, but it seemed that her abstinence from chocolate had a direct correlation to her celibacy. And now that her
eight-month celibacy had gone out the window, her abstinence from chocolate had cracked, too.

"Dude, why the hell are you wandering around the room half-naked anyway?" Dean asked her into Sam's chest.

She snickered at the sight of the pair facing each other and unmoving, as though the slightest movement might mean they'd suddenly see their sister in ways that would scar them for life.

"Dude," she sarcastically snickered back, "I was more than decently covered. And you have no idea what a bitch it is to pull on tight jeans when you're fresh from the shower. I was just trying to air dry a little. Besides, I figured I'd have a couple of hours more to myself. Last call isn't for a few hours yet, and I assumed you guys would stick around until then. It is a strip club after all."

Sam's face scrunched up a little behind his hand. "Are you decent yet?"

She finished button-fly of her faded jeans. "Yeah," she grunted with another snicker.

Her brothers finally turned to cautiously face her again.

"There wasn't much reason to stay very late. We couldn't find too much there...and we figured it probably wasn't a good idea to leave you alone for too long," Sam admitted.

Tabitha heaved a sigh. "I'm perfectly fine. Not gonna walk into a trap again anytime soon. I think I learned my lesson there. And I can take care of myself as well as you guys can, probably better if the two of you are spending too much effort on worrying about me. There's a lot of shit going down for all of us, so I think we all need to do a better job of keeping our eyes out for protecting ourselves."

Her brothers paused at her reminder that they all had various reasons to be wary.

"You find anything useful here? We couldn't find much. Asked around the club, but even the manager couldn't even remember if he had girls working there by the names Aurora, Ariel, or Jasmine," Dean told her, steering the conversation back around.

Dropping onto the bed where she'd been working, Tabitha opened up her laptop again, and handed it to her brothers. "Actually, Bobby and I have come up with a theory on what's going on."

"Yeah?" Sam asked, taking the laptop and looking at the screen with interest. "Siren?" he asked in a contemplative voice.

"What? Like Greek myth siren, The Odyssey?"

Sam and Tabitha both paused to turn astonished looks on the eldest Winchester.

"Hey, I read!" he defended himself.

"Actually, yeah. Like that, but they're not actually a myth. Bobby says they're more like a beautiful creature that preys on men, enticing them with their siren song."

"Let me guess," Dean drawled, "Welcome to the Jungle? No, no. Warrant's Cherry Pie."

"It's a metaphor, Dean. Not an actual song," Tabitha explained as she rolled her eyes. "It's their appeal...their allure. You know, how I said all those guys talked about these chicks being perfect in every way?"

Sam finally handed the laptop back to Tabitha, saying, "So what, they do whatever to perfectly entice each man? Give him exactly what he desires and he just does her bidding?"
She shrugged. "I guess. Sirens lived on islands; sailors would chase 'em, completely ignoring the rocky shores…and dash themselves to pieces."

Sam nodded. "Sounds like these three guys."

"And if I were a siren in '09, I couldn't think of a better place to set up shop and wait for a bunch of morons to destroy themselves. You men at strip clubs are kind of easy marks anyway."

Dean grunted, but didn't argue with her assessment. "So whatever floats the guy's boat, that's what they look like?"

"Yeah," she agreed. "They're supposed to be able to read minds. They see what you want most and then can somehow cloak themselves. Like an illusion."

Sam pulled his suit jacket off and tossed it at the foot of the other bed. "So this could all be the same chick? Morphing into, uh, different dream girls?"

Tabitha unfolded from sitting on her bed, picking up her brother's crumpled and discarded coat, shaking it out, and reaching up to smack the back of Sam's head as she passed behind him to hang the jacket up. "Probably," she agreed. "Sirens are supposed to be pretty solitary."

Dean took his own jacket off and tossed it at Tabitha, grinning when she caught it with a glare and hung it beside Sam's. "How do we kill it?" he asked her.

She shrugged. "Bobby and I are still working on that part. There are lots of stories of sailors smashing their ships on the rocks because of a siren's call, but so far nothing about anyone actually walking away from them."

Sam was ruefully rubbing the back of his head, earning another glare from his sister. She hadn't hit him that hard. "Besides, our real problem's gonna be finding it. It could be anyone."

"Why do you think Dean wanted to stay back at the motel while we went and interviewed Lenny Bristol?" Sam asked as he and Tabitha stepped out of the Impala once they'd returned to the motel.

Tabitha paused, flipping the keys around her pointer finger as she looked at her younger brother across the hood. "He said he wanted to catch a little more sleep. He hasn't been sleeping all that well since he got back," she carefully pointed out.

Sam gave her a jaded look as he popped one hip on the edge of the hood, turning so he was in profile to her and still able to look at the motel. "Don't try to sell me on something you don't really believe yourself. He didn't just hang back because he wanted sleep. I'm asking why you think he really stayed back."

She shrugged and copied her brother's movements, easing partly onto the hood herself, her purse tucked under her arm. "I'm sure Dean has his reasons. He usually does. I'm just glad to have some piece for a while."

Sam's expression turned a little darker as he glanced across the distance between them. "You're not afraid he's going to try and figure out where you were the other night?"

A sharp chuckle of disbelief escaped before she could stop it. "And just what is Dean gonna find? Besides, I'm a grown woman, if I want to spend the night out, I don't have to ask you boys for permission."
For several moments, a small frown creased her brother's face as he seemed to internally weigh something. "Tabitha, I have to tell you, I'm with Dean on this matter. You were lying about whatever happened the other night, and you were lying about whatever happened out in California. It's not like you to keep lying about stuff like this. Big stuff. What's really going on?"

Tabitha slid quickly off the hood of the Impala, stalking around the front of it to stare up at her brother. Even partially sitting, he was still taller than she was. But he'd been taller than her for a lot of years, and it had never stopped her from putting her younger brother in his place.

Glaring up into his eyes, she told him in low tones, "You wanna know where I was the other night? Having sex. You wanna know what positions I favor? I'm a grown damn woman, and I make my own choices. But, oh, you wanna talk about lies? How 'bout we start with you, little brother? Where do you go when you sneak off in the middle of the night? Who do you talk to when you make secret phone calls you think no one can hear? We all live in glass houses, Sam. Especially in this family. I'd think carefully about those stones you're tossing about. Someone might just decide to toss it right back. And while we're at it, Dean might be focused on riding my ass about the other night and about California, but don't think for one minute that he hasn't noticed everything I have about you."

She didn't give her brother the chance to retort, but spun on her heel to stride towards their motel. But as quickly as her anger had come, by ten steps, it had quickly dissipated. Half-way between their car and the motel, she stopped to face Sam again. He'd just stood up to begin following after her, his face looking closed off.

"I'm sorry, Sam," she whispered in a low voice. "I had no right to take a hunk out of you like that. I keep promising myself that I'm not gonna let us drift apart again, and then I turn around an' snarl at ya."

He drew closer and gave her a reluctant smile. Shrugging, he told her, "Hey, we're Winchesters. Taking a hunk out of each other is practically the way we say 'I love you.' And you're right. I've got no business casting stones." The last part was said in a quiet voice as he looked at the ground, deliberately not meeting her eyes.

A torn feeling welled in her heart. She wanted to question Sam about his secrets and disappearances as much as Dean did. She worried about him just as much. But as they stood staring at the ground between them, they both knew they were at an impasse. To question one was for the other to have a fair shot at questioning them back. And it was clear to them both that they each had things they wanted to keep secret. The question that remained was who would hold onto their secret longest. Just who felt their secret was more desperate to keep than was worthy of leveraging against their sibling for answers?

Tabitha sighed, and Sam gave a reluctant sigh as well. And they both knew the impasse would remain.

Jerking her head towards the motel, Tabitha told her brother, "Let's go fill Dean in on what we found out about our last night's vic."

Dean looked nervous when his younger siblings entered their motel room, and both Tabitha and Sam paused to glance curiously at each other.

But Sam shrugged it off and told Dean, "Lenny Bristol was definitely another siren vic."

"You guys got in to see him?"

"Yeah," Tabitha confirmed, peeling off the jacket of her skirt suit. "This time, our vic brought home
a stripper named Belle. And then a few hours later, he offed his mother. Belle, of course, seemed to disappear in the wind.

Dean leaned forward from where he'd been sitting at the small table. "Wait, he killed his mom?"

"The woman he was closest to," Sam confirmed.

A phone rang on the table, and their eyes all turned to see that it was Sam's Blackberry.

Dean gestured at it and then tossed it to Sam as he stood. "Yeah, you, uh, forgot your cell phone."

"Hey Bobby," Sam answered.

Tabitha's forehead furrowed. She was surprised that Bobby was calling Sam since she had been the one working with him on the research. Slipping her purse from her shoulder, she quickly dug through it looking for her cell.

Dean cleared his throat, holding her iPhone up from the table in front of him as well. "Forgot yours, too," he told her, not meeting her eyes.

She glanced at the missed calls from Bobby, and started to call her older brother on his lie when Sam put his phone on speaker so they could all hear Bobby's voice.

"Sam, did you find her yet?"

"Uh, no. And, uh, it doesn't seem like she's slowing down any. What about you? Got anything?"

"Well, some lore from a dusty Greek poem. Shockingly, it's a little vague."

"Big surprise," Tabitha muttered, still looking suspiciously at Dean while he avoided her eyes. She knew when her brothers were lying as well as they seemed to know when she was. And she knew she'd put her phone in her purse that morning.

"It says you need 'a bronze dagger, covered in the blood of a sailor, under the spell of the song,'" Bobby continued, the pitch of his voice telling them he was quoting some text.

"What the hell does that mean?" Dean asked, staring at Sam's phone from where he stood.

Bobby sighed on his end. "You got me. We're dealing with 3,000 years of the telephone game here."

"Best guess?" Sam prodded.

"Well, the siren's spell ain't got nothing to do with any song. It's most likely some kind of toxin or venom. Something she gets in the vics' blood."

"That makes them go all Manchurian Candidate," Sam surmised. "Uh, what do you think, she infects the men during sex?"

"Maybe."

"Supernatural STD," Dean grunted sitting down across from Sam.

"Well, however it happens, once it's done, the siren's gotta watch her back. If she gets a dose of her own medicine..."

"It kills her," Sam finished.
"Like a snake getting iced by its own venom."

"So we just gotta find a way to juice one of the OJs in jail?" Dean asked.

"It's not that easy. None of those guys are under the spell anymore. Haven't got a clue where you're gonna get the blood you need."

"What about from the blood sample you guys said that doctor took?" Tabitha asked. "You guys said she'd told you it had something in it. What was it again?"

"Oxytocin," Sam answered. "Yeah. That might work."

"Be careful," Bobby cautioned them. "These things are tricky bitches. Wrap you up in knots before you know what hit ya. And where you been, Tab? I've been calling. Was starting to get worried... You've been quiet, too. W asn't even sure you were there."

"I've been here, Bobby." She glanced at Dean who looked quickly away again. "Sorry about missing your calls. Forgot my cell in the room when Sam and I went out. But thanks for the info."

"Be careful," he cautioned one last time.

"There a reason you snagged my phone?" Tabitha immediately asked Dean.

He finally looked up at her and shrugged. "You must have forgotten it here. You gonna tell me more about where you were the other night or what really happened in California?"

Tabitha rubbed her forehead at the feeling of the headache she knew was coming. Bypassing Dean's stare, she stepped further into the room to grab her duffle bag from the floor. Pausing in the doorway of the bathroom, she told her brothers, "Why don't you guys go back to the hospital and talk to that doctor again. Try to get that blood. I'm gonna change, maybe do a little more research, and then go check out the crime scenes myself. Maybe I can find something there to give us some more clues on finding this siren."

Dean stood and took a step towards her before she could shut the bathroom door, his eyes narrowed. "Alone? And just how are you gonna go check out these crime scenes?"

"I'll borrow another car. I've become quite good at boosting cars again," she sardonically replied. "And I'm perfectly capable of checking out a crime scene, Dean." She let her own eyes narrow warningly on her brother. "We need to stop fighting, Dean. We've been fighting non-stop ever since you found out about me overhearing angels. And I'm getting tired of it, Dean. I know I should have told you about that sooner, but I was still working through what it meant in my own mind. Can you just at least trust me a little, Dean? Can you just trust that I'm not keeping anything from you maliciously? I'm your sister. Trust me."

Dean stared at her for several moments before turning away without acknowledging anything she'd said. He looked at Sam and told him, "Just let me get changed and then you and me can go head back to the hospital."

It was the early morning hours when Tabitha had finally left the last crime scene. She hadn't found a single thing of use at any of the scenes—though the first three had since been released from the police and cleaned—but she hadn't even found anything at the latest scene either. The only thing she had accomplished was to gain a little distance and perspective from her brothers in her hours alone. They were with each other for such huge chunks of time, and she knew she wasn't doing enough to get a little time to herself to think as it was. And she vowed to herself that she would do a better job
of jogging regularly so that she would have at least some alone time. Not to mention it was a good counter-measure for her returned chocolate habit.

She glanced at her cell phone as she left the house of Lenny Bristol—still an active crime scene—but didn't see any new texts from her brothers. They'd both kept her updated throughout the evening—and she'd updated them on her own lack of progress—but she hadn't heard from either of them in a while. Sam had last reported that he was checking security tapes with the doctor to look for who could have stolen the missing blood samples, and Dean had headed back to the Strip Club with an FBI agent that had shown up, doing his best to keep the Fed occupied and out of the way while still looking for their siren.

Tabitha's phone suddenly rang. She glanced at Bobby's name on the screen before answering it. "What's up, Bobby?"

"Are you with either of your idgit brothers?" he huffed. But despite his gruff voice, she heard the hint of worry beneath it.

"No. Why? I just left the last crime scene. Looking for anything that might have been missed."

"Dean called me about an hour ago, told me he thought Sam might be under the siren's spell, said he thought it was the lady doc. But he said he was gonna check it out. And now…I can't get a hold of him, Tab. And I'm not sure if I should try calling Sam. Not if he is under the siren's spell."

Tabitha cursed under her breath. "I haven't heard from either of them in over an hour either. But why the hell isn't Dean answering his phone if he thinks Sam's under the spell? And why the hell didn't he call me?" She didn't expect an answer from Bobby, so she kept talking as she ran for her "borrowed" car. "Look, maybe it'll be tipping Sam off if I call him and he is under the spell, but I've got a bad feeling about Dean not answering his cell. Thanks for calling me, Bobby. I'll find them," she assured him.

"You got a bronze knife?"

"In the trunk of the Impala," she reluctantly answered, already pushing her stolen car hard towards their motel.

"Which is where?"

"Wherever the hell Dean is."

"I'm thinking one or both of them are under the spell," he told her unnecessarily.

"I know," she whispered.

"Neither of them is gonna be up for dealing with this thing even if one of them ain't under the spell. Siren's ensnare men too easily. You've got to find it and deal with it Tabitha. From everything I can tell, it either doesn't have any effect on women, or just doesn't go after them. And I'm too far away to be of help, so you've got to handle this and take care of those idgits."

"I will." She hung up her phone without another word to Bobby, quickly trying Dean's number first. It wasn't much of a surprise when there was no answer, but still, she'd hoped he would pick up and say he just hadn't heard his cell over the music of the strip club. Without any hesitation, she next called Sam, needing to talk to at least one of her brothers, under a siren's call or not.

"What's up, Tab?" he amiably answered.
"You heard from Dean?" she cautiously asked.

He sighed on his end. "Yeah. Fought with him on the phone and now I'm headed back to the motel again. He thinks Cara is the siren and that I'm under her spell. Just won't listen when I tell him I feel fine."

Tabitha didn't respond to his assessment of himself. She was sure all the other men had thought they felt fine as well. But they were exactly the best judges of their own actions or feelings when they'd been under the siren's spell.

"Where was Dean? What was he doing? I haven't been able to reach him."

"He was at the strip club with that Fed we ran into at the hospital. I texted you about him, didn't I? Nick Munroe. Guy from Omaha with the Violent Crimes Unit."

Tabitha felt the blood drain from her face as she processed the information.

She spoke hurried rush. "Dammit, Sam. There isn't a Violent Crime Unit in the Omaha offices. And nobody by the name of Nick Munroe on any VCU team in any part of the country. Why didn't you tell me more about this guy sooner?" There were certain to have been new hires to VCU teams since she'd left the Feds, but she knew they hadn't opened entirely new teams. The two added together certainly equated to the man being a counterfeit.

The sound of a door opening echoed over her frantic reply to her brother. And she heard a small gasp from him.

"Nick. What are you doing here?"

"Sam!" Tabitha shouted out, damning the speed limit and racing for their motel. But as she strained against her phone, hoping to hear something from her brother, she caught only muffled sounds, and then the call was disconnected. Even though this Nick didn't fit the usual pattern, she was certain he was their siren.

And surely, if this Nick was in their motel, then Dean was as well. And as long as her brothers were both together, she'd do anything to protect them, even from themselves.

When she skidded into the parking lot, she was relieved to see the Impala parked nearby, and it only took her a moment to dig through the trunk for the bronze knife she needed. Now she just had to get some blood from her brother. Dean might not be under the spell—maybe neither of them was—but she didn't think that the Winchesters would get that lucky.

Sliding the knife into the waist of her jeans at the small of her back, she ran into the motel, cursing that all the rooms of this motel had only interior doors. She much preferred the smaller motels that had been built in the style of the old motor inns, each room having a door to the exterior that a guest could pull their car directly up to. Each step she took into the interior of the motel and up the stairs to their third floor was agonizing.

When she finally reached their room, she could hear the raised voices of her brothers as they yelled back and forth at each other.

She was finally close enough to the closed door to make out Dean's words. "And it's not the demon blood or the psychic crap. It's the little stuff—the lies. The secrets."

Tabitha moved closer and waited, not wanting to miss her best advantage.
"Oh, yeah?" she heard Sam answer. "What secrets?"

"The phone calls to Ruby, for one."

Tabitha sighed, she'd figured as much as well, but that was neither here nor there at the moment.

"So I need your say-so to make a phone call?"

"That's the point. You're hiding things from me. What else aren't you telling me?"

"None of your business," Sam answered.

"See what I mean? We used to be in this together. We used to have each other's backs!"

Tabitha pressed a little closer to the door, trying to judge where her brothers were, and trying in vain to listen for Nick. She needed to know where the siren was most of all before she did anything rash.

"Okay, fine," Sam continued. "You know why I didn't tell you about Ruby? And how we're hunting down Lilith? Because you're too weak to go after her, Dean. You're holding me back. I'm a better hunter than you are—stronger, smarter. I can take out demons you're too scared to go near."

Tabitha tried to muffle her sharp intake of breath at the nasty barb Sam had thrown, but luckily, neither one of them seemed to hear her.

"That's crap," Dean growled.

"You're too busy sitting around feeling sorry for yourself or trying to order me and Tab around. But we don't need you and all your whining about all the souls you tortured in Hell. Boo-hoo."

She heard scuffling and then the telltale noises of punches being thrown and furniture breaking. Tabitha's patience went out the window. She couldn't stand by while her brothers beat the tar out of each other, regardless of the fact that she still wasn't sure where the siren was in the room.

The knob on the door wouldn't budge when she tried it, so she stepped back and lifted her foot, glad now that she was in her heavy biker boots and not her dress heels.

The door crashed open with a thud as she stepped into the room, her pistol drawn and in her grip before she even realized she'd automatically drawn it. The three men froze and glanced up at her less than subtle entrance.

"We having a party and no one thought to invite Tabitha, huh?" she tried to lightly joke.

Her brothers were standing only a few feet from each other, both with bloody faces and skinned knuckles. But Tabitha's eyes only skimmed over them, quickly lighting on the strange man seated on the edge of one of the beds, his hands folded over his crossed leg at his knee, looking for all the world like a spectator at a tennis match.

"Interesting," the man commented, looking her up and down.

She returned the favor. "I'd say likewise, but you're definitely not what I had in mind for a siren turned stripper."

He shrugged. "I'm just providing what they want. And it wasn't some piece of ass in a G-string. It was a sibling they could count on. One that was strong—and loyal. One that they could trust."

Tabitha eased further into the room, her gun lowered as she moved to where she could keep an eye
on the siren as well as her brothers. "Yeah, well. We're full up on siblings in this family. No need to apply. And the mess that is our family is what makes us Winchesters. It's not for everyone."

The siren looked away from her, seeming bored with her as he spoke to her brothers. "Nothing's changed. Whoever survives can be with me forever. But we don't need a sister."

Sam and Dean had both been frozen in a tableau, but came to life at his words, both turning to look at her as their faces darkened even more.

"You're no better than him," Dean said with a jerk of his head towards Sam. "Worse even. You lie to my face and then have the gall to tell me that you're trying to do what's best for our family. And you're just as much of a freak as him. I should get rid of both of you. I'd be better off."

Sam grunted beside him. "She's nothing like me. She's weak—weak like you. Too caught up in the people who die because they get in the middle of this war against demons. Grow up, Tabitha. There are always casualties in war."

She frowned as they both focused their attention on her, but waited at the ready for one of them to make a move.

Sam moved first, his face contorting with rage as he stepped at her, his fist swinging at her in a wild arc. But his fighting was wild and uncontrolled from what the siren had done to him, so Tabitha only had to step closer to Sam, raising her arm and blocking his hit. With her too close to him, his hit missed completely, his reach longer and his arm striking hers where she'd reached up to block. With her other hand, Tabitha brought the butt of her gun down hard against the base of Sam's head, dazing him enough that his knees gave out and he crashed to the floor.

Dean took the moment of weakness to launch his own assault at Sam, his eyes fixed on his target as he advanced. Tabitha only had to let him step closer, suddenly sidestepping and sweeping out a kick to connect against the back of his knee, causing it to buckle. As Dean fell to his knees next to Sam, Tabitha yanked out the hidden knife from behind her back, swiping it across Dean's bicep to color the bronze blade red with his blood.

The siren had stood during the melee—perhaps sensing that the fight wouldn't end as it had thought—and was starting to flee through the open door when Tabitha looked up.

It moved fast, too fast to chase, so Tabitha changed her grip on the knife and threw it, watching as it embedded in the back of the fleeing siren.

And suddenly, the spell was over. Sam and Dean had been struggling to their feet next to her, but abruptly sat down, staring at each other and at her in shock.

She shared their stupor for a moment, but then turned to assess her brothers and the damage around them. The room was nearly destroyed—or at the very least looked like it had been professionally trashed by a Rock band—but her brothers didn't seem too worse for wear. No worse than usual anyway.

Finally, she shook herself and turned away from the stunned looks of her brothers. "We need to pack up and get the hell out of here," she told them. "Someone will have called in all the commotion by now."

They nodded and for once mutely followed her bidding. She'd have found some pleasure in that fact if not for the circumstances of the night.
They hadn't driven far when Dean pulled over into an empty parking lot in a mostly deserted looking part of town. None of them said anything to each other as they climbed out and awkwardly gathered around the Impala, but Tabitha knew her brothers wanted to talk.

Hoping to alleviate the tenseness of the moment, Tabitha went around to the trunk of the Impala and pulled out three bottles from the cooler they kept there. Coming around to her brothers again, she handed a bottle to each of them.

"Soda?" Dean asked with a raised brow as he took his.

Tabitha grinned as she popped the top off her own bottle. "Well, you're driving," she pointed out.

"I'm not," Sam pointed out as he held up his own bottle, frowning a little at it and pointed looking at her own bottle of beer.

"Yeah, well, the pair of you were fighting like damn little boys, so I figured soda was more fitting," she explained, giving them both a cheeky smiling, trying to lighten the moment.

Dean let out a huff, but had to bit off a smile as he opened his bottle and took a long drink.

Sam took a drink from his own bottle before shifting as he leaned against the Impala, nervously clearing his throat. "Thanks, Tabby. You know, if you hadn't shown up when you did…"

She shrugged it off, looking down at the bottle in her hands as she absently peeled the label up with her thumbnail. Raising her head to pin them both in a pointed stare, she told them, "What are sisters for? And I am your guys' sibling."

They both nodded and looked down at her gentle reminder that she was their sibling, not some siren.

"Besides," she continued, "We watch each other's backs even when we're ticked off with each other. It's just what we do."

Silence followed as the boys continued to stare at the bottles in their hands.

"Are the two of you going to be okay?"

They finally looked up, and then glanced a little hesitantly at each other.

"Yeah, fine," Sam assured her.

Dean agreed. "Yeah, good."

Not quite buying it, Tabitha told them, "You know, from everything I read, those things were nasty creatures. So don't feel too bad about getting caught up by it." She paused to look at Dean. "How's your arm doing?"

His hand brushed across his bicep where she'd hastily cleaned and bandaged his wound before they'd left their trashed motel room. "It'll be fine," he assured her. "Barely a scratch. That knife throw was impressive though, haven't seen you throw a knife in years."

With a dry laugh, she admitted, "Me either. I'm just glad I didn't forget everything Bobby taught me." Being a girl and woman, and obviously never going to be as strong as a man was, Bobby had always insisted on teaching Tabitha to fight defensively, and to use weapons that gave her a longer range so she didn't get drawn into a close-quarters fight where her lack of strength might get her hurt or killed. Her father being a Marine had only really known how to teach her to use guns in such instances, but
Bobby's added teachings had rounded her out.

And the FBI had taught her how to fight defensively in close-quarters to negate her opponents' strength.

"Sorry about trying to take a swing at you," Sam mumbled apologetically.

"Me, too," Dean added.

She shrugged. She'd been able to sidestep them both well enough, but they were both experienced enough fighters that she doubted even all her training with Bobby and the FBI would have helped her if her brothers hadn't been a little out of control from the siren. They hadn't fought in their normally cool and collected manners.

Meeting Sam's eyes first, she told them both, "No worries. That kind of thing just seems to be how we say 'I love you' in this family." Then she impulsively stepped forward and wrapped Sam in a theatrical hug, dramatically telling him, "Aww, I love you, Sammy." She pressed a kiss to his cheek as he laughingly pushed her away and then grabbed Dean as he tried to back away, giving him the same exaggerated hug and kissing his cheek as she told him, "And I wuv you, too, big brother."

Dean was laughing as he pushed her away, nearly spilling his soda as he danced out of her reach. "Enough of that," he told her, trying to maintain a scowl and a growl. "We're not that kind of family." But the darkness had fled her brothers' eyes, replaced with a little light as they laughed at her. And she was willing to do more than play the clown if it returned that kind of light to their eyes.

Glancing at Sam, Dean asked him, "You gonna say goodbye to Cara?"

"Nah, not interested," Sam replied as he settled back against the car.

"Well, look at you. Love 'em and leave 'em," Dean said in an almost impressed tone.

Sam turned serious. "Dean, Tab, look, you know I didn't mean the things I said back there, right? That it was just the siren's spell talking?"

"Of course," Dean hastened to reply. "Me, too."

A heavy silence built.

"Kay. So...so we're good?" Sam asked.

"Yeah, we're good."

But as the three Winchesters glanced around at each other, they could see that none of them fully bought it. Tabitha hated the distance that had returned between them all, but wasn't sure how to fix it. More laughter wouldn't do anything to actually solve their problems.

For an instant, Tabitha considered coming clean to her brothers about everything. It would light the burden she'd been feeling since she'd first had to lie to them, but as she opened her mouth, she realized that telling them now would be selfish. All it would really accomplish was to make her feel better. But she'd made choices now that put her in danger—put Castiel in danger—and if her brothers knew, might put them in danger. And she knew that she couldn't selfishly unburden herself of those secrets just because she felt guilty. She knew the guilt was well deserved. It was the price she had to pay for her choices.

But even knowing the price, she wasn't sure she would have changed what she'd done. And she
wasn't sure she could keep from making the same choices in the future.

So she closed her mouth and shrugged. "I guess we should get back on the road," she lamely told them.

But they shrugged and half-heartedly agreed as they all climbed back into the Impala, the secrets of the Winchesters still unshared.

Chapter End Notes

I know, no Bobby in this one, but I figured it was okay since he was in the last one. And since I figured Tabitha was there to cover her brothers' butts.

And be sure to leave your thoughts, it's my crack!
Tabitha rolled her head back and forth on her shoulders and reached over her head with her arms as she stretched the muscles of her back. Her muscles were achy and felt unsteady like Jell-O, but the sensation was a pleasant reminder of her long run. She considered stopping by their motel room du jour to take a quick shower, but instead walked past the rows of rooms towards the family-style diner just down the street.

Sam and Dean were sure to complain about the fact that she hadn't stopped to shower before meeting them, but the growl in her stomach was louder than their growls were sure to be, and the need to slake her hunger superseded her desire to wash away a little sweat just for their benefit.

Wiping a few beads of sweat from her forehead with the sleeve of her zip-up sweatshirt, Tabitha prepared to enter the restaurant where Sam had texted her that he and Dean would be waiting for her to join them.

"Tabitha."

Jumping at the unexpected voice, Tabitha turned and reached for the small of her back where she normally kept either her Glock 22 or her Smith and Wesson 9mm, but her hand touched only her back. She rarely carried a handgun when she jogged as it was hard to conceal in her running pants and the weight annoyed her, although Dean was always arguing that she should.

"Cas?" she huffed in relief, letting her hands fall against her thighs as she braced herself and leaned down towards the ground. "You about scared the life out of me," she continued as she straightened up.

His face drew up in his normal confused manner as he stiffly told her, "Forgive me."

But she waved it off. "What are you doing here?" she asked instead. Not that she was complaining, but she hadn't seen him in a few days and they were trying to be discreet about their meetings.

"Heaven requires you and your brothers to handle a…situation for us," Castiel almost formally explained.

"So why are you here asking just me? Why aren't you asking Dean? Seems to me that he's the one more important to Heaven. After all, you did pull him outta Hell." She'd given the matter a lot of consideration and although Castiel was protecting her as well, Dean still seemed to be the more important one. He was the one yanked out of Hell, and he was the one that the angel had taken back in time to learn more about their family's history.

"I'm asking you."

Some locals stumbled out of the little diner, prompting Tabitha to move towards the alley next to it to be less conspicuous, motioning the angel to follow her.

"I'm not sure I like the sound of 'Heaven' 'requiring' us to do something. Last time, it was you guys wanting to kill some girl," she told him as she crossed her arms over her chest. She trusted Castiel, but that didn't necessarily extend to the rest of his Feathered Band of Brothers. And she didn't miss that Heaven was behind this request. Not Castiel.
The angel became very still as he stared at her, only his hands flexing ever so slightly at his sides. "She was no 'girl,'" he answered with a quiet intensity.

"No. But you guys were still trying to kill her."

"I follow orders."

She ignored his usual warning, leaning slightly forward as she reminded him, "I don't have to."

"You'll not help?"

She gave a tired sigh. "Can't you even trust me a little bit now? After everything. I just want to know if what 'Heaven' wants us to do is gonna be like the Anna situation all over again."

"Where you tricked me?" he asked with a slight edge.

Clenching her hands on her arms in frustration, she again admonished, "Still not apologizing for that. Like it or not, I did it for your good, too. I just want to know what Heaven is asking my brothers and me to walk into."

"You think I would send you needlessly into perilous danger?" he asked, his expression darkening more.

Forcing herself to relax slightly, Tabitha rubbed at the tension behind her forehead. "You? No. But you made a point in saying that 'Heaven' is requesting this. Not you. Forgive me if I don't trust the rest of the angels like I do you. Especially after all of your warnings about not ever letting them find out about me and what I can do, or even about you and me," she told him, gesturing her hand in the space between them, though the width of the alley separated them.

Silence hung over the alley like a pall, and Tabitha fought to keep from nervously fidgeting in the heavy air crowding around them. Still, she shifted her weight slightly from side to side as she stared across at Castiel, the angel not moving a muscle or even blinking.

Finally, he said, "You'll not help."

She sighed. "Cas," she carefully began. "I know things are different now between the two of us, and I do trust you. More I think sometimes than you trust me. But it doesn't mean that I'm gonna fall in line and do whatever Heaven asks just for the asking. I don't trust them. Besides, maybe it would be best if you went to Dean straightaway. He and I are still trying to iron out our differences and keep from jumping all over each other. I come to him and tell him that the angels want us to do something, and it's gonna start trouble up all over again between him and I. Just talk to Dean about whatever it is Heaven wants. Don't put me in the middle."

Castiel stared across the alley for several tense moments, and then from one blink to the next, disappeared amidst the faint fluttering of wings.

"Dammit," Tabitha quietly cursed to herself. She didn't want to cause trouble between herself and Castiel—her relationship with him had been the one constant, steady point in her life while everything was so tense between her and her brothers—but she also wasn't going to just blindly follow orders from Heaven just because she'd started sleeping with him.

Running her hand through her flyaway hairs, she muttered, "Maybe things are simpler with celibacy. If only I could figure out how to live celibate."

Her brothers looked up from their table as she walked into the diner, Dean jerking his head towards
the empty seat beside him where one of them had ordered a burger for her.

"You stink," he muttered as she sat down.

She shrugged and began digging into her burger as she listened to Sam talking on his cell. "And you always smell like a bed of roses," she retorted absently. When he grunted in return, she turned away from Sam's conversation—she was pretty sure he was talking to Bobby anyway—and looked at Dean. "Besides, I was hungry after my run. I'll shower next."

Sam finally ended his call and looked back at his siblings.

"What's up?" Tabitha asked him.

Sam sighed as he shoved his phone into his pocket. "Oh. Bobby found something in Wyoming," he answered, looking at his laptop on the table.

"A job?" Dean asked him.

"Maybe."

Tabitha continued eating her own burger, snatching some onion rings off Dean's plate and wishing he'd gotten her some instead of fries. "Go on," she encouraged him, ignoring Dean slapping at her hand.

Sam smiled a little at their byplay, but didn't lift his eyes from his laptop as he explained, "Small town, no one's died in the past week and a half."

Dean looked confused. "That so unusual?" he asked around his mouthful of burger.

Answering without looking up from his computer, Sam said, "Well, it's how they're not dying. One guy with terminal cancer strolls right out of hospice; another guy gets capped by a mugger and walks away without a scratch."

Tabitha frowned as she tried to search her mind for answers, but caught the sly smile on Dean's face beside her as he asked, "Capped in the ass?"

Per usual, Sam ignored their brother's suspect humor. "'Police say Mr. Jenkins was shot in the heart at point-blank range by a 9mm,'" he explained in a voice that said he was quoting something, likely a news article from the tone of it.

"And he walked away after a 9mm slug went through his heart?" Tabitha asked in surprise. "No way," she said as she shook her head.

"Locals are saying it's a miracle," Sam answered.

"Okay," Dean shrugged, turning back to his food.

Sam closed his laptop and leaned towards them over the table, asking almost conspiratorially, "It's got to be something nasty, right? I mean, people making deals or something."

"Could be," Tabitha agreed. "Can't rule it out, but people usually make crossroad deals to get something specific. I mean, you guys haven't ever run across someone that asked for something like invincibility or anything. Have you? And more than one person suddenly becoming unkillable. Doesn't quite add up to a crossroad deal."

Sam thoughtfully nodded, but Dean kept chewing on his burger, shrugging as he carelessly spoke.
"You think?"

Frowning, Sam asked, "But what else would it be?"

"I don't know," Dean answered, his mouth once more full.

Tabitha was used to his lacking manners, but still cringed at his careless attitude. Though they'd all agreed that what happened and was said during the siren case wasn't to be taken seriously, there had still been a thick, uncomfortable cloud hanging over the Winchesters. They all seemed to agree not to speak about it, as was usual with the Winchesters, but ignoring the issue didn't seem to be resolving it as easily as it normally did.

Staring at Dean for a moment, Sam seemed to consider their brother, but finally turned away and began packing his laptop, briskly telling his siblings, "All right. You guys get that stuff to go. Come on."

Sam stood and grabbed his laptop case as Tabitha quickly took another bite of her burger, grabbing a handful of fries as she stood.

But they both froze and turned to Dean when they realized he wasn't moving.

"What?" Sam demanded.

Dean swallowed and looked around as he finally answered. "Sure you guys want me going with you?"

"Why wouldn't we?" Sam asked in surprise.

"I don't know," Dean answered. "I don't want to be holding you back or nothing."

Sam huffed as he replied, "Dude, I've told you a hundred times, that was the siren talking, not me. Can we get past this?"

Dean stared for a moment too long, and Tabitha responded by smacking both of her brothers in the back of the head, ignoring their winces at her unexpected hits. "Would the both of you please grow the hell up. I'm tired of this getting hashed over again and again. It's over…and it's done. Let's forget about what's already happened and focus on this case Bobby's throwing our way."

Dean set the remainder of his burger down, brushing his hands off. "Yeah, we're past it."

"Good," she replied, reaching across him and picking up her own burger again. "Now, you boys go pack up the car, and I'll run back to the room and take a quick shower before we head out."

She didn't wait for their response, but quickly jogged in the direction of the motel.

A part of her felt bad for not taking whatever case it was that Castiel had come to talk to her about, but she couldn't imagine how much trouble Dean would be making over matters if she had been the one to bring something to the table now instead of Bobby. Dean was prickly enough at the moment that she swore he was just looking for a fight, and she'd rather not throw herself in the line of fire by even hinting to him that she might be bringing a case to the table that was from the angels.

"Now, you three said you were bloggers?"

Sam nodded eagerly as Jim Jenkins sat down next to Tabitha and across from her brothers at his dining room table. "Yes, sir. Floored by The Lord dot com."
Dean nodded as well as he added, "All of God's glory fit to blog."

Clearing her throat at the unbelievable cheesiness of their current cover, Tabitha placed a calming hand on Jim's arm as she probed. "Some of the people around town are saying that what happened to you was a miracle, and we'd sure love to hear about it."

Jim nodded beside her. "It was. Plain as day."

"How can you be so sure?" Sam somewhat skeptically asked.

Jim countered, "How else do you explain it? The doctors can't. There's a bullet in my heart, and it's pumping like a piston."

"Well, how do you explain it?" Dean asked in return.

Tabitha made a face at his tone across the table, but quickly turned to Jim and gently told him, "What he means is, how do you think such a miracle occurred?"

Jim looked around the table at his three guests, then into the other room where his wife and children were quietly playing. With a tired sigh he admitted, "Look, honestly, I was nobody's saint—not exactly father of the year, either."

"Okay," Dean encouraged.

"But when that guy shot me and I didn't bleed a drop? I just knew The Lord was giving me a second chance," Jim explained.

Tabitha frowned at the man's conviction, wondering to herself it was possible that he was right. Perhaps God had granted mercy to this man and given him a second chance. He seemed repentant and genuine in wanting to be a better father for his kids.

And she wondered to herself about her own second chance. And third and so on. She should have been dead several times over, but instead was sitting in poor Jim's dining room helping her brother interrogate him. If Jim thought he should dedicate himself to being a better father with his second chance, what was it she was meant to do with her own?

She hadn't even agreed to help the angel who had given her that second, third, and fourth chance. With the angel, she had hesitated and even been unwilling to help him with the problem he'd come to her with. Instead jumping at the case that Bobby had thrown their way. She owed Castiel her life and more, shouldn't she have been more open to whatever problem he'd been coming to her with?

Tabitha realized that the conversation had continued around her despite her inner thoughts, and she started paying attention as she heard Sam asking Jim about crossroads and people with black or red eyes.

It was a reach, but she uncrossed and re-crossed her legs, managing to stretch her leg kitty-corner across the table to kick her younger brother in the shins for his too blunt questions.

Jim looked wary and suspicious anyway as he leaned across towards Sam. "Who'd you guys say you were again?"

With her practiced smile, Tabitha kindly told him, "Never mind. We just want to thank you for your time and we'll be on our way." She stood with her brothers and tried to discreetly shoo them out the door and hide her frustration with Sam's less than stealthy questioning.
Tabitha ruefully shook her head as she helped Sam lay everything out on the grave. They'd decided that they needed to know more about the last person in Greybull, Wyoming to die, and that had been a boy named Cole Griffith. It had been Sam's bright idea to use a spell that would allow them to talk to the spirit of the dead boy himself. Sam theorized that something might be going on with the grim reaper that should be reaping souls in the town.

"You guys sure this is gonna work?" she asked as she fought to keep from shivering. It wasn't the cold that brought the sensation of chill on, but rather what they were doing in a cemetery in the middle of the night. Digging up bones to put a spirit to rest was one thing, but actually conjuring a spirit was another matter in her opinion.

Dean looked up from where he sat on a headstone thumbing through their father's journal, and shrugged in response to her question, turning towards Sam, whose idea it had been to try this spell in the first place.

"No," Sam replied. "But if his spirit is around, this should smoke him out."

Tabitha finished lighting candles as her younger brother finished pouring ingredients into bowls.

Dean huffed from where he sat.

"What?" Sam huffed in return.

"This job is jacked. That's what," Dean answered.

"How so?"

Tabitha rolled her eyes at Sam's answer.

"Really, Sam? Look around. We're trying to perform a spell to conjure some boy's spirit. Not your normal sibling Friday night on the town," Tabitha answered with a gesture.

"Yeah," Dean agreed. "You want me to gank a monster or torch a corpse, hey, let's light it up. Right? But this? If we fix whatever this is, people are gonna start dropping dead. Good people."

Sam gave an exasperated sigh as he stood from his crouch. "Look, I don't want them to die, either, Dean, but there's a natural order."

"You're kidding, right?" Dean interrupted in disbelief.

"What?"

"You don't see the irony in that?" Dean demanded. "I mean, you and me, we're like the poster boys of the unnatural order. All we do is ditch death."

"Yeah, but the normal rules don't really apply to us, do they?" Sam answered.

Dean gave a dark chuckle in return. "We're no different than anybody else."

"I'm infected with demon blood. You've been to Hell. Tabitha's got demons chasing after her for some reason we don't even know, and can hear angels. Look, I know you want to think of yourself as Joe the Plumber, Dean, but you're not. Neither am I. And neither is Tabitha. The sooner you accept that, the better off you're gonna be."

"Ah, Joe the Plumber was a douche," Dean answered in exasperation.
Tabitha stood and walked a little closer to her brothers. "Sam's right, Dean. We're not normal anymore. If we ever were. I may not have died like you two have done—" Though I've been damn close and would have been if not for a certain angel. "—but I'm not normal either. We can't change it. Just try to do what we can with the second chances we've been given."

And she decided to herself that she would make things right with Castiel as well. Maybe try to get a hold of him when they were done with their current case and try to help him with whatever he'd come to her about. She'd still be cautious about taking on something "Heaven" wanted them to do, but she'd help her friend if she could.

"You guys gonna help me finish this?" Sam was asking.

Dean finally stood from the headstone, and Tabitha turned back to examine the candles she'd lit. One had blown out, so she crouched to light it again.

"Hey!" a man suddenly called out to them.

The Winchesters all turned to see who was approaching.

"What are you doing here?" the man demanded, sweeping across them with his flashlight.

"Uh, just…" Sam stuttered. "Take it easy."

The man continued sweeping across them with the flashlight, causing Tabitha to shield her eyes so she could protect her night vision as he continued asking, "What the hell is this?"

"Okay, this—this—" Dean started. "This is not what it looks like."

"We're just trying to hold a memorial," Tabitha attempted, hoping the man wouldn't come close enough to see the pentagram.

The man gave a derisive snort. "'Cause it looks like devil worship."

Dean gave a theatrical denial. "What? No! No, this is not devil worship. This—is—this—is, uh…" Dean looked across at his brother and sister. "I don't have a good answer."

Sam sighed and looked back across at the man. "Look, we're leaving."

Shaking his head, the man told them, "You're not going anywhere…" He stepped closer to them as he continued. "…ever again…Sam."

He turned to look at Dean, his eyes turning a sickly white to mark him as a high-level demon.

"Alastair," Dean grimly greeted.

His eyes returned to their normal human appearance as he glanced at the last Winchester. "Tabitha. The tricky Winchester."

"So lovely to see you again," she answered, hoping her voice sounded cool and calm.

Dean spoke before Alastair could answer. "I thought you got deep fried, extra-crispy."

"Nah," Alastair answered, shaking his head. "Just the pediatrician I was riding. His wife's still looking for him. It's hilarious. Anyway…no time to chat. Got a hot date with death."

The demon lifted his hand, and suddenly Dean sailed through the air, slamming into a headstone
fifteen feet behind him. Tabitha had been standing beside him, and braced herself when Alastair turned to her, but when the demon raised his hand at her, nothing happened, just like the last time he’d tried to fling her.

Sam shouted their brother's name, bringing the demon's attention back to him. Alastair lifted his hand in the same motion, flicking his hand at Sam.

Spinning, Tabitha turned and ran for their pile of supplies, reaching for one of the sawed-offs from the stack. She had her .40 tucked into the back of her jeans, but it would do nothing to the demon. But as she swung the shotgun up, Alastair appeared at her elbow, knocking the shotgun away, his other fist sailing into her jaw.

Tabitha fell to her knees but her head was yanked up as the demon grabbed a fistful of hair and yanked until she was facing her younger brother.

Sam stood where he had been, staring at them in shock. She was surprised to see him still standing, she'd been so sure that Alastair had flung Sam like he'd done with Dean—like she'd seen him do to Sam before—but Sam was still on his feet.

Giving a yank on her hair, and roughly pulling some from her scalp, Alastair told Sam, "You're stronger, Sam. But it's no little trinket that's stopping me like with your bitch sister, is it?" He shook her a little, causing Tabitha to grimace as she tried to pry his hold from her head. Alastair continued. "You've been soloflexing with your little slut?"

"You have no idea," Sam answered.

Tabitha had begun discreetly reaching into her pocket when she realized the demon was more focused on her brother than her. As the demon went to shake her again, freed her switchblade and jabbed her arm upward over her head in an awkward stab at the demon's arm, losing her hold on her knife as he released her with a surprised grunt of pain.

Rolling away, she came to her feet as she saw Sam flick his fingers at Alastair, flinging the demon further away from her and holding him against a tree. He raised his hand further, but before he could do anything, the demon disappeared out of the man in a rush of black smoke.

Falling back to her knees, Tabitha stared at her younger brother as he jogged up to her.

"You okay?" he demanded, grabbing her jaw and turning her to look at the other side of her face without waiting for an answer. "You're bleeding."

She absently touched the side of her mouth, feeling a trickle of blood there. But the pain hadn't set in yet. Maybe it was shock.

"What did you do?" she whispered to her brother.

His gaze darkened a bit as he held her stare. "Nothing. Just trying to protect you." He stood as he answered, obviously trying to move away from her.

She stood as well. "What the hell was that, Sam? How'd you keep him from flinging you around?"

Running a hand through his hair, Sam returned, "What about you? He couldn't fling you, either."

"Yeah, and we're pretty sure it's something on my bracelet. Don't change the subject. What's going on?" she demanded as she stalked closer.
He turned away. "It doesn't matter, Tab." When she started after him, he swung around to face her, angrily telling her, "Stop asking. Or I'll start asking where you've been disappearing to and what you've been doing. This is my business, Tab. Just like whatever you're doing is yours."

She made a frustrated noise and looked away. Her eyes landed on Dean, reminding her that she'd been caught up in what Sam had done and hadn't even thought of her older brother.

Kneeling beside him, she gingerly shook his shoulder to rouse him. "Dean? Dean. You okay?"

His eyes fluttered open. "My head hurts." But he sat up and looked around in a dazed fashion.

She heard Sam's phone ring, but kept her eyes trained on Dean as she helped steady him. He didn't seem real focused yet, and Tabitha wasn't even sure he knew where he was.

After a few minutes, Sam stepped closer, sliding his phone into his jeans and cleaning Tabitha's switchblade on his pant leg before handing it to her and telling them, "We should get out of here. That guy will be okay, but we can't be here when he wakes up."

"How you guys doing?" Sam asked as he stepped back into the motel room.

Dean was lying on one of the beds with an ice pack to his head and didn't look up. But Tabitha was reclined against the headboard of the other bed, her head tilted back as she held an ice pack to her jaw.

She shrugged as she answered. "Been hit harder. It was an awkward hit since I'd started to turn away from it."

"You're lucky," Dean said, still not looking at them. "You could have been flung into a gravestone like me. I think I've got a concussion. That's how I'm doing."

"You want some aspirin?" Sam asked.

"No thanks, House," Dean replied.

Tossing down her ice pack, Tabitha stood and moved over to her brother's bed, pulling his ice pack and hand away to look at him. She didn't have a flashlight, so she used the light of her cell phone in one hand as pried one eye open and then the other as Dean tried to push her away.

"No concussion," she told him. "Probably that famously thick skull of yours that protected you."

He laughed mockingly in return as Tabitha sat beside him, her eyes trained on her bracelet as she considered the charms. "Maybe we could try to replicate the charms on this thing for you guys."

Dean shook his head. "We've been over this, Tab. Until we can find something that explains what those charms are or what went into making them, it would be too dangerous to try replicating them. Might do it wrong and make a charm that attracts demons or something else pleasant like that."

Tabitha sighed but didn't argue further. It had been a half-hearted suggestion anyway since she agreed with Dean's worries. She just felt guilty about his aches. But her jaw was a reminder that the bracelet only protected from so much. She stood and leaned against the wall as she thought.

Changing the subject, she told her brothers, "Well, at least we know now that people in this town not dying isn't likely to be because of miracles."

Dean agreed as he finally sat up. "Yeah, demons, I guess."
The siblings nodded in quiet agreement.

"And what the hell happened with Alastair again?" Dean asked.

Sam gave a little shrug. "I told you, he tried to fling me or whatever, and it didn't work, so he bailed."

Tabitha opened her mouth to contradict her younger brother, but Sam had been moving across the room and came to stand beside her, throwing a subtle elbow into her side while Dean looked down at his hands in confusion. She shot her younger brother a glare, but he only stared down at her with one challenging brow raised.

She held his glare and finally mouthed back to him, "For now." She knew she shouldn't keep her silence, but she wasn't altogether certain if Dean knowing the truth would actually help matters. They needed to concentrate on what the demons were doing first, so she let his lie pass.

"Well, how come he couldn't fling you?" Dean was asking, drawing their attention back to him as he looked up again. "He chucked you pretty good last time."

"Got no idea," Sam told him.

A hard look filled Dean's face, proving that he wasn't unaware of their brother's lie. "Sam, do me a favor. If you're gonna keep your little secrets, I can't really stop you, but just don't treat me like an idiot, okay?" His gaze swept across to encompass Tabitha as well, and she looked down at her feet rather than meeting his look.

"What?" Sam tried to deny. "Dean, I'm not keeping secrets."

"Mm-hmm," Dean hummed in disbelief, turning the look on his sister.

Still not looking up, she whispered, "Anything I'm keeping from you is to keep the two of you safer, or is just plain things you really don't want to know."

"Whatever," Dean dismissively said. He changed the subject. "So, did you guys go back and Q and A the dead kid?"

"Didn't have to," Sam answered. "Bobby called. He did some digging."

"And?" Dean pressed.

Sam moved to sit on the bed across from Dean, leaving Tabitha still leaning against the wall by herself.

"He thinks I'm right," Sam was saying. "Local reaper's gone. Not just gone—kidnapped."

"By demons?" Dean asked. "Why?"

"How?" Tabitha added. "I thought you couldn't even see the things unless they were about to reap you."

Sam opened the old text he'd been holding in his hands. "Listen to this, 'And he bloodied Death under the newborn sky—sweet to taste, but bitter when once devoured.'"

"Swanky," Dean commented. "What the hell's that mean?"

"Well, it's from a very obscure, very arcane version of Revelations," Sam answered.
"Holy shit," Tabitha whispered.

She hustled over to her bags, Sam and Dean turning to watch her, each asking what was wrong. Her clothes spilled out of her bag as she dug to the bottom, coming up with the old Campbell family bible she'd continued to carry.

"I've read that passage in here," she told them as she thumbed through the book looking for the passage under Revelations. "Here," she told them, holding the text out and pointing to the passage and the faded drawing next to it. It showed a shrouded figure on a mountaintop, beneath a low hanging moon. The drawing had the obligatory scythe that one thought of with a reaper, but this drawing didn't have the figure holding a scythe, but instead the scythe was turned towards the shrouded figure.

The boys looked at the passage and the drawing before Dean leaned back and said, "Which means what I think it means?"

Sam and Tabitha both nodded as Sam answered, "Basically, you kill a reaper under the solstice moon—tomorrow night, by the way—you got yourself a broken seal."

Dean looked surprised. "How do you ice a reaper? You can't kill Death."

"I don't know," said Sam. "Maybe demons can."

Tabitha looked at the drawing again. "Maybe this is telling more than we think. Maybe you can kill one with a scythe."

Dean glanced dubiously at the drawing. "A scythe? I don't know about that."

Sam shook his head and closed the book in his hands. "Where the hell are the angels is what I want to know. We could use their help for once."

Tabitha's head snapped up to look at her brother, wondering to herself if this wasn't the reason Castiel had come to her in the first place. But before she said anything to her brothers, she needed to find out from the angel if she was right.

Dean said in answer to Sam, "It looks like we're gonna have to take care of this one ourselves."

"What are we gonna do, just swing in and save the friendly neighborhood reaper?" Sam asked.

"You got a better idea, I'm all ears."

"Dean, reapers are invisible," Tabitha repeated. "The only people that can see them are the dead and the dying."

"Well, if ghosts are the only ones that can see them…" Dean began.

"Yeah?" Sam asked in disbelief.

"…Then we become ghosts," Dean finished.

Tabitha shook her head as she stood up. "Maybe you do have a concussion, Dean. And you were right; this job is messed up if that seems like a rational answer to this problem. Hell, that it's even a solution to any problem is messed up." She shook her head and then lightly touched her jaw when the motion hurt. "I think I need a drink."

Dean only grinned as he answered, "Sounds crazy, I know."
"It is crazy," Sam agreed. "How?"

"We'll need a little help from a certain psychic," Dean answered.

Both of the brothers glanced up at Tabitha.

"What?" she asked.

"You wanna go pick Pamela up?" Dean asked. "You guys are friends after all."

Immediately, she shook her head. "This is your bright idea. You go sell it to her." Besides, she wasn't very excited about the idea of seeing her friend at the moment. The psychic—blind or not—saw and knew too much. And she wasn't looking forward to the lecture that she knew she was bound to receive from the woman about her recent activities with Castiel.

Dean tossed down his ice pack and stood. "Fine. I'll go get her then."

"You gonna keep trying to ignore me?"

Tabitha considered doing just that, but finally turned around to lean back against the wall next to the window she'd been staring out.

"Doesn't sound like a half bad idea," she told the psychic sitting in a chair at the foot of Sam's bed. She glanced at her younger brother, but looked away with a frown, finding it strange to think that her brothers' bodies were laid out on the bed while their spirits were who knows where. It seemed more than a little creepy to her.

In truth, she'd been trying to call out to Castiel for hours—had gone for several walks trying to call for him as well—but the angel either wasn't hearing her, or wasn't answering her. Maybe the latter was closer to the truth, and that was what worried her. She wasn't sure if Castiel was mad at her for their last discussion, but she worried that she'd damaged their friendship.

"You still mad at your brothers for not letting you go on this little spirit journey with them?"

Frowning, Tabitha truthfully answered, "Yeah. Of course I am." But she sighed and followed with, "I understand though, even if I don't like it. I get that they wanted me to stay here with you since this is dangerous. Understanding the practicality behind something like that doesn't equate to being happy with it though."

Pamela tilted her head slightly as she leaned more heavily on her fold-up cane. She was silent for a minute, but Tabitha could see that she was gearing up to tell her something.

"And here I figured you were staring out that window to avoid talking to me about what you've got going on with that angel boy of yours."

Tabitha crossed her legs and slouched more against the wall, folding her arms over her chest and trying not to dig her fingers into her biceps.

"Not going to try to deny it?" Pamela asked, turning her sunglass covered eyes to stare at Tabitha.

She forced an easy shrug, knowing she was anything but easy. "Doesn't sound like there's any use denying it."

"Dammit Tabitha," Pamela sighed, "What the hell are you doing? I warned you. I warned you that you were getting in over your head. You tried to say nothing was happening, and now...now you're
sleeping with an angel. What the hell is in that head of yours? You didn't think you were living a dangerous enough life? Thought you'd make it even more dangerous by letting an angel into your bed?"

Tabitha pushed away from the wall, making an angry motion with her hand as she said, "Enough. Enough, Pamela. You've made your position and thoughts very clear. But I don't recall asking your opinion. And I'm not getting into anything. He's still just a friend—"

"A friend!" Pamela interrupted with a mirthless laugh. "You're kidding, right? You're not just friends now. And if you think so, you're fooling yourself."

Pacing, Tabitha told her, "We're still just friends. Don't make more out of it than it is. It's not like we're madly infatuated and professing our undying love. We're friends."

Pamela placed both of her hands on top of her cane, slowly moving the top of the cane around in a circle as she leaned back and replied, "Honey, friends with benefits doesn't even work when it's just two humans involved. This is deep water you're getting into and I'm just worried about how well you can swim in the ocean."

Feeling a little deflated, Tabitha stopped pacing and answered, "I appreciate the concern, Pamela, but I'm fine. I'll be fine."

Pulling down her sunglasses, Pamela showed her false white eyes. "Yeah. I know just how fine a person can be when dealing with angels."

An uncomfortable silence filled the air. Tabitha began idly pacing around the room again as Pamela continued to comfortably wait at the end of the beds. She kept glancing at her brothers laid out on the two beds, but had to fight a shiver every time she looked at their still forms. She tried reminding herself that they were alive and well, but couldn't fight off the creepiness of it.

"You're sure they're spirits or whatever and that they're okay?" she couldn't help but asking again.

"They're fine," Pamela told her, but then reconsidered and said with a smirk, "Well, just as fine as they ever are I guess. Whether or not they're figuring anything out…well…your guess is as good as mine."

For a while, Tabitha contented herself with pacing throughout the room, but finally, her nerves couldn't take it anymore. Pulling on her leather coat, she told the psychic. "I'm going out. I can't sit here any longer. I'm gonna see if I can go talk to Cole's mom and find anything helpful."

With a challenging look, Pamela asked, "You sure you should? Your brothers won't like you going off on your own with demons around. But then…there's a fair bit that you're not telling them, isn't there?"

Pausing in the doorway, Tabitha turned back to her friend, but didn't rise to her bait. "You going to be all right here?" When Pamela nodded, Tabitha told her, "I've got my cell if you need anything."

"Mrs. Griffith, I'm Demetria Gene Guynes. I'm sorry for bothering you today, but I just wanted to see if you could spare a few minutes of your time?" Tabitha asked when the woman opened her inner door and stared out through her screen door.

The woman regarded her silently for a moment, but then pushed the screen door open as she drew her sweater closer about her torso. "What can I do for you, Ms. Guynes?" she finally asked, her voice slightly hoarse and breaking as though she'd been a smoker, or—as evident by the red and
swollen eyes—like she'd been crying.

It almost seemed like a struggle for the woman to talk, and she dropped her eyes as if she was in danger of breaking into tears again.

"Ma'am, are you okay?" Tabitha couldn't help asking, reaching forward to lay a gentle hand on the woman's arms crossed over her torso.

The woman waved it away. "I'm fine. Fine," she insisted, sniffling and swiping at her nose and eyes. "Now, what did you want?"

Tabitha had been prepared to tell some lie to the woman, but seeing how broken up she was, suddenly couldn't go through with it. "You're taking your son's death pretty hard, aren't you Mrs. Cole. Can I ask you a question?"

She looked confused, and nervously pulled her sweater tighter around her as she leaned against the doorjamb, slowly saying, "Yes. Any mother would find their son's death difficult." She sniffled again. "Who did you say you were?"

"Someone who might be able to help."

"What's your question?" she asked after a few beats.

"Can you still feel your son here? Sense that he's still around?" Tabitha asked, weighing all the signs and almost certain she was seeing more than just a grieving mother. She was seeing a woman tormented by a spirit that couldn't let go.

Clutching at her chest, the woman whispered with an edge of desperation, "How did you know? How?"

"I know a little something about these things," Tabitha whispered in return. "Can I take a look at your son's room by any chance? Maybe look around the house?"

She jerked her head in an affirmative. "Yes. That's fine. Just go on in. There's no one else home. Just...go on in."

The woman then stepped away from the house, pushing past Tabitha.

"Where are you going?" she asked the woman as she retreated from her own home.

"I just…I just can't stay. I have to leave for a little while." And the woman was gone before Tabitha could say anything else.

"All right," she slowly whispered to herself, opening the door and letting herself in.

But she froze as she turned away from the door and into the house.

"I didn't realize there was still anyone here," she cautiously explained to the woman standing in the middle of the foyer.

The woman seemed suddenly surprised, glancing all around her as though she wasn't sure whom Tabitha was talking to.

"Mrs. Griffith said that there wasn't anyone in the house," Tabitha continued, slowly reaching her hand underneath her leather coat at the small of her back as she stared at the strange woman. She was shorter than Tabitha, with dark hair that fell past her shoulders and accentuated her soft features well.
But the cool metal grip of her smaller, compact Smith and Wesson .40 was reassuring beneath Tabitha's fingertips. Because the woman in front of her and her reaction definitely put her on edge.

"You shouldn't be able to see me," the woman said with a frown, tugging a little on her brown leather jacket.

"Yeah…well…I do," Tabitha slowly told her.

The woman looked off to the side a little, almost as if she was looking at something Tabitha couldn't see and hearing something she couldn't.

The woman's eyes tracked back to Tabitha as she looked her up and down in an assessing manner. At least assessing in the way a jockey sized up a horse. "So. You're Tabitha Winchester. Sister to the infamous Sam and Dean Winchester."

Her comment was the last strike for Tabitha, and she smoothly drew her .40, taking aim at the woman. "Wonderful," she replied, staring down the barrel held in her two-handed grip. "Now—of what—the hell are you? And how do you know who I am?"

Thinking it might be a demon, she switched the gun to one hand, reaching into her jacket for her flask of Holy Water.

The woman watched her movements with an almost amused eye. "I'm not a demon," she told her with a nod at the flask. "That Holy Water won't even get me wet."

For good measure, Tabitha tossed the Holy Water at the woman anyway. Only…it went right through the woman. As if she were a ghost. But she didn't seem to have the same angry vibe that most ghosts powerful enough to manifest gave off.

"What the hell are you?" she repeated, lowering both of her hands a bit.

"You can call me Tessa," the woman answered. "It's one of the names I've been known by. As for what—well—I'm a reaper."

Swallowing thickly, Tabitha replied, "Not quite what I expected. I figured you'd be a little more…grim. And a little less girl-next-door."

The woman laughed softly in return. "I have many forms."

"Well, we've been looking for you," Tabitha continued. "Seems the demons are trying to kidnap you. My brothers are supposed to be running around as spirits or something looking for you. Or what happened, I guess."

The woman—Tessa—glanced off to the side again, the corner of her mouth pulling up before she turned back to Tabitha. "Oh, I know. Ran into them here a little while ago. Although Dean keeps ranting about how you aren't supposed to be here."

Tabitha's eyes jerked back to where Tessa had been looking. "They're here?"

"Yeah."

"This is just creepy," Tabitha swallowed.

Tessa gave a little laugh and stepped closer. "Interesting that you can see me so well though. I'm a reaper. You shouldn't be able to see me. Not right now. I wonder why you can."
The reaper slowly began to circle around Tabitha—who, unnerved by the casual perusal, shoved her gun back into the waist of her jeans, and quickly turned in a circle with the reaper. "How is that even possible?" she asked the other woman. "People die every day. How is it that I'm just now suddenly actually seeing a reaper?"

Tessa shook her head. "I don't know. You shouldn't be able to. No human can. Unless they're dead or dying."

"I know that," Tabitha huffed. "So why am I suddenly seeing you?"

Tessa glanced away again—presumably at Dean—and then back to Tabitha. "You wouldn't have suddenly started seeing reapers. If you can see me now, you've always been able to. The why I can't answer. But I'm guessing you just never realized you were seeing us. We don't exactly hang around to chat for a long time—your brothers apparently are the exception—we normally have a lot of work to do. You probably have seen a flash of us from the corner of your eye and just easily dismissed it."

Thinking back, Tabitha wondered if Tessa was right. She'd sworn she had seen something from the corner of her eye after Casey had been killed in that explosion. But she'd written it off as just an after-flash in her sight from the flash of the blast that had blown the building. Of course, she'd only months ago learned that Castiel had been the one to kill Casey and that it had been because her partner was possessed.

Feeling a headache coming on at the dizzying thoughts, Tabitha rubbed her forehead. "This is crazy," she whispered to herself. But maybe it wasn't so much crazier than seeing angels.

Looking up, she got back to the more pressing issue. "Do you know what's going on in this town? Did the demons grab the reaper that should have been here reaping people?"

With an unconcerned shrug, Tessa answered, "I don't know what's going on here. Just that this town is off the rails and I'm trying to get it back in order." She looked off to the side again and sighed. "Although Dean reminds me that I've agreed not to reap the boy until he can figure out what's going on."

"Cole?"

"Yes."

"So let's figure out what's going on."

Tessa looked over again and sighed, relaying another message from Dean. "Your brother wants you to get back to Pamela and stay with her."

Ignoring the directive, Tabitha asked, "If the demons do have the other reaper, how could they have gotten him or her or even be holding the reaper for that matter?"

With a little chuckle as she glanced where Tabitha assumed Dean was, Tessa returned her attention to Tabitha, seeming to ignore Dean just as Tabitha was. Of course, Tabitha was finding it easier than normal to ignore her older brother. It was amazing how easily it was now that he had no form.

"It's not easy to hold one of us," Tess told her. "But there are a few ways. But I'd be surprised that any of the demons would know them."

Before Tabitha could reply, the front door of the house slammed open, a rush of black smoke spilling into the room and swelling around the foyer. Tabitha threw her arms over her head to ward against the smoke, but as suddenly as it had come, it rushed back out the door. And when Tabitha raised her
head again, Tessa was gone.

"Shit!" Tabitha swore. "That's probably not good."

She looked around the room, suddenly regretting her selfish little pleasure in not being able to see her brothers.

"I don't know if you guys can hear me," she told the room at large, not sure if they were even still there. "But we're in big trouble now, aren't we?" Silence met her. "My gut says to trust that you guys can keep doing whatever you're doing in the astral plane or wherever you are, so I'm gonna do what I can in the physical one. Maybe I can find something that's out of place in this town."

She headed for the door, and as she opened it, fought back a chill as her body involuntarily shivered and goosebumps broke out. In her mind, she could imagine Dean yelling at her to do what he'd told her before and stay at the motel with Pamela. And the thought brought the ghost of a smile to her lips.

"Sorry guys," she whispered. "But since I can't even say for sure that you're telling me anything, I'm gonna have to overrule our last agreement and do things my way." She started out the door again. And stopped again. "You guys be careful," she whispered, and finally slipped out the door.

Hours later, and she had covered most of the town, but hadn't found anything that was out of the ordinary.

It merely seemed like a sleepy little town.

Where no one was dying.

She pulled the Impala along the sidewalk as her mind turned the thought over again. A town where no one was dying.

So why are there so many lights on in the funeral home and several cars parked around it? she thought to herself.

No one stopped her as she eased her way into the funeral home with a sawed-off shotgun tucked against her shoulder. But as she neared the main viewing room, she could see that all the lights were on and hear voices. As she got closer, she thought she could make out Latin.

When she heard something about reaper blood and something opening to Lucifer, she quickened her pace.

Peeking around the corner into the room, she saw Tessa and a man in a suit laid out in the middle of a large spell on the wood floor—a spell obviously trapping the reapers. The tall man speaking Latin was kneeling with the other reaper pulled partly off the floor, a scythe in his hand wrapped around the neck of the reaper.

Before she had time to move closer to take a shot, the demon jerked the scythe through the reaper's neck, dropping him back to the floor amidst crashes of thunder and lightning.

Tabitha had a moment to think that she'd been right about a scythe killing a reaper, but the thought quickly fled as a demon nearly blindsided her.

Twisting towards it at the last second, she squeezed off a shot of rock salt into its abdomen before another demon stepped in and knocked the shotgun from her hands, punching her in the same spot...
on her jaw where Alastair had. The blow buckled her knees, allowing the two demons—one at least cursing her in pain from the shotgun blast—to drag her forward to the demon that had been kneeling over the reapers.

"The sister, too. Isn't tonight just full of wonderful surprises?" the demon asked, his slow tone and speech telling her he was Alastair.

But then, she registered his words and looked past him, finally seeing her brothers trapped behind an iron chain barrier. For some reason, she was surprised that they looked just like they always did. For some reason she had figured their "ghosts" should look different. At least other than their horrified looks as they stared helplessly at her.

"It's nice to see you, too, Alastair. I just couldn't stay away when you were partying with grim reapers" she replied with a nod towards the reapers on the floor. "Just too tempting to pass up such a wonderful party," she snidely added.

Alastair stood from the first reaper, stepping closer to her and pausing to run a too gentle finger down her cheek, causing her to grimace and pull away from his touch.

"Not dead or dying. But you can see them. You just get more and more interesting, don't you? I can't wait to get better acquainted."

"You leave her out of this, Alastair," Dean shouted from where he was trapped. Tabitha glanced back at her brothers. Though they both had the angry spirit look down pat now, she was still amazed they'd managed to manifest themselves as they had in the past few hours.

"Oh, I'll look forward to playing with her, I assure you, Dean," Alastair answered, moving back to the reapers and jerking Tessa from the floor up to her knees. She'd been still as death before, but once he grabbed her, her eyes jerked open and she began glancing frantically around the room. He glanced at the demons holding Tabitha and told them, "Hold onto her. I'll deal with her later." And then he turned back to Tessa. "But first things first," Alastair continued.

He began reciting in Latin again, and Tabitha frantically tried to think of what she could do. One of the demons who held her also held her shotgun loosely in his other hand, but she couldn't overpower them both to get at it.

Then, she looked up at her brothers, and saw Sam silently trying to draw Dean's attention up to the wrought-iron chandelier hanging above Alastair and Tessa. She knew her brothers well enough to read his single glance. Sam and Dean both concentrated on the chandelier, trying to use their ghost state to move it.

It shook ever so slightly, and Tabitha found herself staring at it along with them, concentrating on it as well and willing it to break from the ceiling and fall.

The hook gave way then, and the chandelier suddenly crashed into the wooden floor, breaking the spell holding Tessa in place before Alastair finished his incantation. And she disappeared from his grip.

Tabitha didn't hesitate, lunging in the grip of the two surprised demons holding her, and grabbing her shotgun from the stunned grip of one, twisting to fall on her back as she fired her shotgun at him. The other demon came out of his stupor, leaping towards her even as she pumped another shell into the chamber and fired at the second demon, both writhing on the floor in pain from the close blast of rock salt.
"Exorcizamus te, omnis immundus spiritus," she said as she began to exorcise them, but they smoked out of their meatsuits before she could finish.

Dean and Tessa appeared at her elbow, Dean wildly gesturing back the way she'd come in. "Get the hell out of here," he told her.

Throwing a glance at Alastair slowly turning towards them, she couldn't agree more, so she followed the two out of the funeral home and onto the street.

Dean pointed frantically at the Impala. "Get the hell back to the motel and protect Pamela. I think Alastair might have sent demons."

Tabitha looked around. "Where's Sam?"

"I'll find him. Go!"

"What about Alastair?"

He threw his arm towards the Impala again. "Go! He'll be more likely to come after me than you."

That hadn't been what she meant, but his order to protect Pamela had finally sunk in, so she sprinted for the car, throwing it in gear with one last look at her brother as he flashed out of sight.

When Tabitha got back to the motel, she knew there was trouble before she opened the door. Their room was in shambles, and Sam was hovering over a pale and shaking Pamela. But the smell of coppery blood and sulfur had met Tabitha's nose before she entered the room.

Pamela had been leaning near Dean, whispering something to him. Sam was just helping her into a chair between the beds when Tabitha got further into the room.

"Hey, we just got to talk to Tessa, that's all—" Sam told the psychic as he held her arm. "Get her to hold off reaping till we get you better."

Tabitha froze at his words. "What happened?" she asked in a shaky voice as she moved around her younger brother to get a better look.

Pamela moved her hand away from her abdomen, dark red blood immediately spilling over her fingertips. Tabitha had an instantaneous flashback to seeing Bobby bleeding in the same way. And then another image of him telling her in a dream that she would be the death of everyone. She wondered if he was right.

"I'm pretty sure she's started up again," Pamela answered in a shaky voice.

Tabitha knelt in front of her friend, pressing her hands against the wound to stem the flow. "I'm so sorry, Pam," she whispered in a voice the broke. "I'm so goddamned sorry. I should have been here. I shouldn't have left you alone."

Dean suddenly gasped from his bed and sat up straight in the air.

"What happened?" he demanded as he turned towards them.

"Dean, where's Tessa?" Sam asked instead.

"She's..." he trailed off as he stared at the psychic.

Tabitha jerked unsteadily to her feet, staring at the dark vicious fluid covering her hands. "I'll go find
her," she managed to choke out. "Get her wait." She looked frantically around the room, expecting the reaper to be there any second.

"Pamela, I'm so sorry," Sam regretfully whispered.

"I'll find Tessa," Tabitha continued frantically insisting. "It'll be okay."

"Stop," Pamela shakily told them.

But Sam continued mournfully telling her, "You don't deserve this."

"Yeah, I don't," Pamela agreed with an edge as her breathing became unsteady. "I told you I didn't want anything to do with this. Do me a favor? Tell that bastard Bobby Singer to go to Hell for ever introducing me to you three in the first place."

Tabitha turned away as Pamela began coughing and her breathing became more ragged. She could hear her brothers trying to comfort her friend, but her attention was fixed on the compassionate eyes of the waiting reaper.

"You can't change what's happening," Tessa quietly told her. "It's time."

"It's not fair. It shouldn't be her time. It's my fault. I should have been here to protect her. Just…don't take her. Let her stay," Tabitha frantically pleaded.

"You know she can't stay," Tessa answered. "It's time."

"I'm ready," Pamela coughed unsteadily. And Tabitha turned to face her as she realized Pamela was speaking to her and Tessa.

Pamela had been leaning forward to whisper something to Sam, but fell back as she coughed up blood, staring past Sam's shoulder at Tabitha as she told her, "If you think you know what you're doing, you haven't got a clue what you're mixing up in. And things are only going to get more dangerous now." She coughed again, and Tabitha had to strain to hear her last words. "You'll be death…"

"Pamela!" Dean shouted when the psychic went still.

Dean turned to Sam. "What did she say to you?" And then he looked over at his sister. "What the hell did she say to both of you? What the hell was she talking about that you're getting mixed into?"

But neither Sam nor Tabitha could look up to meet his demands.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much to everyone for your wonderful reviews! Every review is lovely crack for my addiction!

Here's a loose translation of the Latin Alastair speaks as he's killing the reaper:

This reaper's blood, that seal, and respect, that Lucifer is bound to open up again!

Also, anyone know who Tabitha's alias really is in this chapter? I follow the same
pattern with all of her aliases (except a little different with her very first, but I won't include it in the list) so does anyone know the pattern? Here's the list of her aliases in this pattern so far:

Chapter 11: Norma Mortenson

Chapter 14: Betty Perske

Chapter 17: Margarita Cansino

Chapter 19: Demetria Gene Guynes

Anyone see the pattern or know who they are? :) 10 points apiece if you do!

And be sure to leave me more hits of crack…I mean…more reviews…yeah…that's what I meant…reviews. ;}
Her bed was warm and impossibly comfortable. Like a fluffy cloud in a sunbeam. But then, her bed was always warm and impossibly comfortable in her dreams. And only in her dreams did she allow herself to wallow in the comfort of soft warm sheets, and heavy encompassing blankets that wrapped her in a soothing hug.

She prepared to snuggle further into the consoling embrace of her blankets, but realized she wasn't alone. Twisting under the sheets, Tabitha turned over to see Castiel sitting in the oversized easy chair next to her bed. She'd gotten the mammoth micro-suede creation at a garage sale, and loved to curl up in it wrapped in a blanket with a good book and a cup of coffee or hot chocolate. Sadly, time for curling up and reading had been as rare in her life as wallowing in bed.

Of the things she'd lost in her house because of her "death" that chair had been near or at the top of the list. But she could still have it in dreams at least.

Tabitha stared across the expanse of her bed for several moments, waiting for the angel to speak. But he was silent in his regard of her as he stared at her from his deceptively relaxed position. The only thing that gave him away—his eyes—told her he was anything but.

"I've missed you," she whispered, reaching towards Castiel, her hand hanging in the air in invitation.

Castiel continued staring. Tabitha let her hand fall with a sigh of disappointment. "Dean said he talked to you. That you were actually the one that sent us to Greybull, not Bobby. That it was one of the seals."

"Yes."

"That's what you came to me about the other day," she stated.

But Castiel still seemed compelled to respond as though it had been a question. "Yes."

Her eyes closed as she felt a single tear slip past the dam. The first she'd allowed since the night Pamela had died. Somehow, Castiel's monosyllabic answers hurt nearly as much as her guilt over Pamela's death.

"I should have listened to what you had to say."

Though her eyes were closed, she could feel his stare resting heavily upon her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, opening her eyes again. "I don't say that often, but…I'm sorry."

Castiel finally leaned forward, scooting to the front of the oversized chair with his hands braced on the front of the armrests. "You are usually easier to deal with than your brothers, but perhaps I was mistaken in thinking that you would not still be as contrary as your brothers at will. Regardless of…"

He nodded towards the space between them as he trailed off.

"I don't know what we are now," she told him, feeling another tear slip from the corner of her eye, trailing wetly down towards her temple after the first tear. "But I miss my friend, Cas. Pamela died and we had to bury her today."

"I need my
friend, Cas."

She felt a hand close around hers where it still lay open between them. She lifted her eyes to see him sitting on the edge of her bed, turned slightly towards her.

"I lost another of my sisters tonight," he whispered, opening himself up enough to let her see the grief in his eyes.

She held the blankets up, tugging on his hand and pulling him down next to her. He let her, settling behind her and spooning against her back as she pulled his hand over her waist and down to press his palm against the soft vulnerable skin of her stomach under her shirt.

For a moment, she just enjoyed the feel of him at her back, even fully clothed and in his trench coat.

"I can't promise I'll always jump to do Heaven's bidding—I still don't trust the other angels—but I'll do better at listening to what you have to say instead of just shutting you down. I shouldn't have done that. I think I was afraid of what our changing dynamics meant for us. I promise though to at least listen to you. But I can't promise I'll always be able to be the go-between for you and my brothers. They'll find out things they shouldn't know if I have to be the buffer between you and them. But I'll try to help where I can."

She wasn't sure Castiel was going to answer her, but then, he pressed his palm harder into her stomach, tucking her closer into his body as he whispered in her ear, "Thank you."

After a few minutes, she softly asked, "What does me being able to see reapers mean?"

His grip around her tightened ever so slightly. "I don't know," he admitted. "Perhaps it is because you can see angels, but I've never heard of another human that can see reapers."

He didn't say it, but she could hear the fear and caution in his voice, so she let the subject drop. Whatever the reason was that she could see them, she knew Cas didn't think it was a safe thing. Not that she had supposed otherwise.

"I'm sorry about your sister," she whispered back after several comfortably silent minutes.

"And I'm sorry for your friend."

Her fingers intertwined with Castiel's against her stomach as she burrowed her head into her pillow. Pamela's warnings swirled in her mind, but she pushed them away for another day. Because with Castiel's hand pressed against her vulnerable skin, she finally stopped feeling alone. That abyss finally stopped trying to devour her.

And she feared being alone most of all.

"I'll see you soon," Castiel whispered into her ear as her eyes closed and she knew she was soon to wake.

Tabitha trailed behind the Impala with her brothers to grab her bag out of the trunk. "I'm with Dean on this. I don't like taking cues from Ruby," she said to her brothers' backs as they grabbed their own bags. "Don't trust the bitch any further than I can throw her," she muttered under her breath. "Which ain't near as far as she could throw me."

Sam stopped to throw a pointed glare at his sister over his shoulder. She held her hands up in surrender.
"Just sayin'," she muttered.

"Whatever," Dean announced as he pulled his bag from the trunk. "We'll talk about it after I've gotten a few hours sleep." He stepped aside to let Tabitha grab her bag. "You need sleep, too. You only slept for about a half-hour there as we drove, and you haven't slept any more than that since…"

Tabitha swallowed hard as her brother trailed off in an almost guilty tone. Grabbing her bag and turning away towards the motel, she finished his statement. "Since the night I let Pamela get killed you mean."

"Nobody is blaming you, Tab. We were just as responsible for involving her," Sam pacified, trying to minimize her guilt.

She could have told him it wasn't working. She was the one that had left Pamela alone, forcing her to face that demon on her own. And regardless of what Sam said, she was responsible for leaving Pamela by herself. And it didn't escape her notice that while Dean never voiced any blame, it was still there in his eyes.

Every time she tried closing her own eyes, Pamela was there, joining the others who blamed her for their deaths. Perhaps Pamela's last words that night had been right. Maybe she was death. It certainly felt that way. The little sleep she'd managed to get without accusing ghosts to greet her had been the brief dream Castiel had appeared in.

"Well, you've got to get some sleep sometime, Tabitha. You can't keep going this many days with no sleep. It's going on four days now," Dean gruffly told her. In usual Winchester-avoidance-fashion, he chose not to bring up her part in Pamela's death any more than they were breaching the subject of her seeing reapers. But she wasn't complaining—the latter still freaked her out a bit.

"And you would be the expert in proper sleep habits," she sullenly returned, knowing sleep wasn't likely to be forthcoming just because he told her to.

Dean ignored her reply as he pushed open the door to their room proclaiming, "Ah, home crappy home."

Sam slipped past him and flipped the light switch.

"Winchesters."

They all froze at Uriel's deep voice.

Tabitha was still standing in the doorway, but immediately searched the room for Castiel, suddenly remembering that only a few hours ago, she'd seen the angel in her dream and he'd told her he would see her soon.

She didn't immediately spot him, but finally saw him further into the room, standing off to the side in the back corner, almost as if he was trying to remain hidden and unobtrusive.

"Oh, come on!" Dean exclaimed in exasperation.

"You are needed," Uriel answered.

"Needed?" Dean demanded. "We just got back from needed!"

Uriel shook his head and disdainfully told them, "Now, you mind your tone with me."
The answer infuriated Dean who stalked angrily forward. "No, you mind your damn tone with us."

Sam tried to hold his older brother back and intervene. "We just got back from Pamela's funeral," he calmly explained.

Tabitha moved slowly into the room, letting the door close behind her as she dropped her bag and stepped into the motel kitchenette. Trying to help Sam diffuse the situation, she lightly hopped up onto the small table, sitting with her boots dangling in the air. "It's been a long few days," she tried to help clarify. "We just need a little time to mourn the death of our friend."

Since Uriel seemed to be the one doing the talking, she addressed her words to him, but did steal a glance at Castiel, catching his slightest wince when she spoke of mourning a friend. But to the untrained eye, he could have been a statue, standing stock-still and staring ahead with unblinking eyes.

"Pamela—" Dean snidely explained, "you know, psychic Pamela? You remember her?" He turned his attention to Castiel when Uriel gave no reaction. "Cas, you remember her. You burned her eyes out. Remember that? Good times! Yeah, then she died saving one of your seals."

Castiel had glanced over when Dean addressed him, but gave no more reaction to Dean's words than he would to a passing wind.

Dean continued in a yell, "So, maybe you can stop pushing us around like chess pieces for five freakin' minutes!"

Uriel shook his head without an ounce of compassion. "We raised you out of Hell for our purposes."

"Yeah, and what were those again? What exactly do you want from me?"

"Start with gratitude."

Dean scoffed, but Castiel spoke before the pair could continue their mutual diatribe.

"Dean, we know this is difficult to understand."

But Uriel pointedly cut him off with a censoring look thrown over his shoulder at Castiel. "And we..." he turned back to Dean, "...don't...care."

Castiel seemed visibly chastised, and slowly turned to stare straight ahead again as he had been.

Tabitha dug her fingers into the edge of the table, and longed to tell Uriel to get the hell out of their motel, but held her tongue instead. She didn't know what the undercurrents were, and she could almost swear that Castiel's stiff body posture seemed almost...frightened. Whether he was frightened of Uriel or something else, she couldn't say. But she knew she didn't want to draw Uriel's attention to herself. Castiel had always been very adamant that she had to be careful around other angels. Not let them know she could hear and see their true voices and visages, but also that it was imminently dangerous to allow them to know about the two of them.

Dean had glanced curiously at Castiel's silent stature, but turned his attention back to Uriel when the angel continued.

"Now, seven angels have been murdered—all of them from our garrison. The last one was killed tonight."

She'd known about the one that had died that night, but as she glanced at Castiel, she realized he'd
been bottling up more of his grief than she'd realized.

"Demons?" Dean inquired, his tone more subdued.

Uriel made an almost noncommittal noise. Not quite disagreeing, but not quite agreeing either, and the lack of answer set Tabitha's nerves on edge.

"How they doing it?" Dean questioned.

"We don't know," Uriel quietly stated.

Sam finally jumped in. "I'm sorry, but what do you want us to do about it? I mean, a demon with the juice to ice angels has to be out of our league, right?"

Uriel tritely answered, "We can handle the demons, thank you very much."

"Once we find whoever it is," Castiel broke in.

Dean sighed and paced a little. "So, you need our help…hunting a demon?"

Castiel finally stepped forward from the back of the room, moving beside Uriel with his eyes focused solely on Dean. "Not quite."

His focus on Dean seemed very deliberate, so Tabitha assumed she'd been right in thinking that something was off. Or perhaps nothing was and he was merely being cautious. This was the first time they'd been together in the same room with either her brothers or another angel. She vaguely remembered the first awkward weeks after she had started sleeping with her former partner and how nerve-racking it had been, thinking that everyone at the FBI would see the scarlet letter she felt was tattooed on her forehead. But eventually, they'd gotten used to it, and no one had ever been the wiser. Until he'd died anyway.

"We have Alastair," Castiel slowly told them.

"Great," Dean agreed. "He should be able to name your triggerman."

"But he won't talk," Castiel informed them, an almost apologetic look in his eyes. "Alastair's will is very strong. We've arrived at an impasse."

Tabitha's feet instantly stopped aimlessly swinging beneath her, her breath catching as she started to grasp why the angels were in their room. Why Castiel look apologetic.

"Yeah, well, he's like a black belt in torture. I mean, you guys are out of your league," Dean casually commented, not quite getting it yet.

Tabitha dropped heavily to her feet, stepping away from the table towards the angels as she furiously told them, "You're out of your frickin' minds is what you are. There's no way in hell you're going to ask this of him."

Castiel finally glanced over at her, his eyes meeting hers for only a fraction of a second before they swept away, and she heard his real voice brush across her mind, whispering in a tone that told her it was useless to argue, I'm sorry.

Uriel looked over at Tabitha, his lip curling up at her in disgust. "I don't recall asking your opinion, mud-monkey. You get no say in any of this, little girl."

Tabitha nearly launched herself forward at the dark angel, only stopping when Dean threw his arm in
front of her, his face drawn in confusion as he asked her, "What are you talking about, Tab? What's going on?"

Uriel answered before she could, telling Dean, "She's talking about why we've come to his student. You happen to be the most qualified interrogator we've got."

Comprehension filled Dean's face as he slowly let go of his hold on his sister, his face going still as he looked down at the floor.

"Dean," Castiel softly called. "You're our best hope."

Forgetting her decision to keep her interactions with Castiel minimized, she took a step towards him and tried to entreat him. "How can you ask something like this of him? Please don't do this."

Still, Castiel would not look at her.

"No," Dean answered in a whisper. Gaining volume, he repeated, "No way. You can't ask me to do this, Cas—not this."

Uriel laughed in a dark tone more fitting to a villain than an angel. Stepping towards Dean, he leaned closer and replied in a silken whisper, "Who said anything...about asking?"

Dean glanced to each side at his siblings, and as they looked back, he suddenly disappeared. The angels had gone, too, leaving Sam and Tabitha frantically casting about the room.

"Damn it!" Sam swore, just as Tabitha vowed, "I'm gonna kill that sonofabitch!"

Sam slammed his fist down on the table, looking up and asking his sister, "What the hell do we do now? We can't let them force him to torture Alastair. He's not strong enough for that."

"Strong enough?" Tabitha repeated incredulously. "I'm more worried about him finding a taste for it again. He's strong enough to torture, but I don't think his heart is strong enough to live with the sick pleasure he'll get out of it if he starts up again."

Sam stared at her, and Tabitha could see that he didn't really understand.

"Never mind," she waved it off. "But you're right, we've got to stop this."

"How? You can talk to angels, right? Any chance you can get Castiel back here and talk to him? I know you saw that he didn't seem as eager about this as Uriel. Maybe we can convince him to stop this."

With a faint nod, Tabitha agreed. "I'll try," she told her brother, but somehow didn't have much hope. Castiel's whispered apology had seemed pretty final and immovable. He might regret it more than Uriel did, but she didn't think he was going to go against his damn orders.

Still, she stepped outside where she could clear her mind and began calling for him.

Time continued to pass as Tabitha paced and called for Castiel. And the more time that passed, the more pissed she became with the angel.

He wasn't answering her, and she'd even taken off her bracelet to make sure he could hear her. The answer was simple. He was ignoring her.

That was just one of the myriad of things pissing her off. But the more she paced and thought, the
more pissed she was with his visit to her dream as well.

Before she'd been thankful for the brief rest his visit in her dream had given her, but now she realized he'd known at that time that he would shortly be seeing her. And he had to have known why and what they were going to ask of Dean.

His allowing her to be blindsided by their decision to take her brother made her want to punch the angel, even though she was sure it would do nothing but cause herself pain. He'd known that they were going to take her brother, and he'd done nothing to warn her.

And now...now they were forcing her brother to torture the demon that had tortured him in Hell.

Sam didn't understand it. Didn't get what it would really do to their brother. It wasn't that Dean wasn't strong enough to torture that demon—she'd seen enough glimpses at what her older brother tried to hide to see that darkness had taken root in him—it was that he could torture that demon. And that dark part of him would get a twisted rush and thrill from it. But the rest of him—the parts that were still the old Dean—might not be able to withstand it. He could lose himself to that dark part that had taken over to survive and had indeed come to love torturing other souls in Hell.

Tabitha had seen it enough working Violent Crimes with the FBI. There was a reason that statistically so many criminals and violent offenders had themselves been victims of violence in their youth. A dark part of them grew in order to endure the pain and violence. And then that part blossomed and bloomed, until they had to become the actual perpetrator of the violence. Learning to revel in that sick thrill.

*That's* what Tabitha feared most. Not that Dean would fail to torture Alastair. But that they would lose Dean to Alastair. To the darkness Alastair had fostered in Hell.

She finally gave up trying to reach Castiel after nearly two hours of shouting for him and calling for him in her mind. He wasn't listening. So she slipped back into their motel room.

Sam was tense as he looked up from the small table in the kitchenette, and Tabitha was immediately wary.

"What?" she cautiously asked.

He tried to give a nonchalant shrug, but Tabitha didn't move, pinning him with her best stare until he squirmed and told her, "I called Ruby. She's on her way here. She thinks she might be able to help us locate Dean."

"You went to a demon for help?" she slowly asked him, finally moving forward and pulling out the chair across from him to sit down. "How does that even seem like a good idea, Sam?" She tapped one finger against the table. "First, we're in goddamn nowhere Cheyenne, and those angels could have taken Dean anywhere in the world. Hell, anywhere in *time*. How's the demon gonna help with that?"

Sam shoved his chair back, the thing skidding with a loud scrape as he sprang up and began pacing around the room. "Well at least I'm doing *something*. I notice you didn't seem real successful in getting ahold of the friggin' angels."

Tabitha ignored his outburst, tapping two fingers down on the table in front of her as she continued. "Second, you went to a demon for help. A *demon*, to help get Dean from wherever they're holding *another* demon captive. You ever stop to think that maybe she's just trying to get to Alastair to free him? I sure as hell don't think Dean should be torturing Alastair, but I also don't want to see that
demon back on the loose."

With quick angry strides, Sam paced in the small kitchenette, hardly able to extend his long legs before he was forced to turn in the other direction each time. "Fine, you don't trust Ruby, I get that. But trust me," he insisted, his arms crossed imposingly over his chest. "She says she can help us find Dean, and I can take care of Alastair. I can make him talk."

"Listen to yourself, Sam!" Tabitha exclaimed, shoving her own chair back as she stood and leaned over the table, bracing herself on both hands. "You can handle Alastair? What the hell is going on with you? You shouldn't be able to do the things you've been doing. And it's dangerous. The angles said you had to stop doing whatever it is—"

"You really think we should be listening to those assholes right now?" he interrupted.

"They may be a bunch of feathered assholes," she readily agreed, "but that doesn't mean they are wrong about this. This crap you're doing—exorcising demons with your mind—it isn't right and isn't good." She blew a disgusted puff of air through her nose as she stood up straight, her head falling back as she looked plaintively at the ceiling for some kind of answers. "I swear," she muttered, "I spend every minute worrying that I'm gonna lose both of my brothers to the darkness trying to swallow them whole, and the idiots are determined to rush headlong into that damned pit."

"You're one to talk," Sam fired back, his voice dripping with disdain. "Dean may have been avoiding this since Pamela's death, but you can't tell me that there isn't some kind of darkness in you, too, Tabitha. You can see reapers! That ain't normal. So don't stand there and pretend that you're holy than thou art. And what the hell else you keeping? What was it that Pamela was talking about you getting into?"

Jaw tightly shut, Tabitha looked back at her brother, slowly asking through clenched teeth, "And just what was it that Pamela was whispering in your ear, little brother?"

They continued their standoff, each trying to stare the other down.

"We have to do something," Sam finally said, struggling to keep calm in his voice. "And Ruby can help, so I'm gonna take whatever assistance she can give."

Tabitha jerked a stiff nod before silently turning and walking out the door, not sure she trusted herself to speak.

But Sam demanded, "Where are you going?"

She paused, glancing down at her feet as she commented, "Maybe our whole family really is cursed or something. Maybe we're all damned to our darknesses. But I'm sure as hell not going to turn to that darkness for help. I'll find help where we should, from Bobby or someone else. Not a demon."

With a glance over her shoulder, Tabitha looked to see if her words had any impact on her brother, but there was a defiant resolve in his eyes she'd seen so often in his youth. He'd been easier to deal with then. She couldn't throw him over her shoulder anymore and make him do what she thought he should. He'd have to make his own decisions now.

Without another word, she walked out into the parking lot.

Bobby didn't prove to be any more useful than Castiel had been. But at least Bobby had answered when she called.
She tried calling a few other hunters she'd known from her years with the FBI, but they hadn't been any help either. The few fellow hunters from her father's acquaintance proved to be fruitless as well. No one knew much of anything useful to use against angels—actually, most still didn't think they existed.

The saying was desperate times called for desperate measures. And that was the only thing she could think of to adequately justify or explain what she was doing in the middle of grass lot near an abandoned gas station.

"You prayed for me," Anna said as she appeared in front of Tabitha, a surprised look on the fallen angel's face.

For a few moments, Tabitha just stared, trying to reason with herself whether it was right or wrong to go to Anna, but finally decided, that she was the only one Tabitha could turn to, and that the former angel could take care of herself better than most.

She bent down to pick up the charm bracelet she'd taken off so she could be sure Anna would hear her, and put it on as she told her, "I need your help, Anna."

"My help?" Anna asked in surprise, stepping a little closer. "Just what is it you think I can do?"

"Castiel and Uriel took Dean," she explained. "And I've tried calling for Cas until I was hoarse, but he's not answering. So I need your help getting my brother back."

"I know," Anna softly admitted.

"You know?"

She nodded. "I've been to where they're keeping Alastair—where they took Dean." She shook her head as she gave Tabitha an almost pitying glance. "Castiel wouldn't listen to me, wouldn't listen to reason. You aren't going to change their minds, either."

Tabitha paced a few steps as she absently rubbed her arms, trying to fight off the chill of the cold night air, and wishing she'd brought something more substantial than her old leather coat when she'd stormed off from their motel room.

Finally, she told Anna, "I don't care what you think. Just take me there. Let me talk to Cas. I'll make him see reason. They can't do this to Dean. They can't make him open that door again. It can't be God's Will that they use Dean this way."

Anna shrugged. "I'm not sure who could say what God's Will is. Maybe this is His Will, maybe not."

Tabitha glanced up at Anna with an assessing look. "You're not one of the few angels that's seen God, are you?"

She looked surprised. "How do you know? Most humans would assume we all have."

"Cas told me that only a few angels ever have. So if that's true, how can anyone be certain that this is really what he wants? It just can't be."

Anna continued to stare at Tabitha in surprise, but the surprise turned to a thoughtful look as she continued staring. "You think Castiel will listen to you?" Anna whispered.

With an eager nod, Tabitha agreed. "Yes. I'll get him to listen. To see reason. Just please, help me
find where they are. Take me there."

The fallen angel finally gave a nod of agreement. "Fine. I'll help you get there, but I can't get you there now. I just came from where they are, and Castiel will be watching for me, and trying to keep me out. We'll have to wait a while until his guard drops again."

Tabitha sighed in dejection and fought the tears she suddenly felt stinging her eyes. "The longer Dean's there…" but she trailed off, unable to speak her fear.

"I know," Anna said anyway. "But it can't be helped now. Go get some rest. You look like you might fall over where you stand. I'll keep a watch, and when I see a chance, I'll come get you." Her face darkened as she looked Tabitha up and down. "Although you seem to be hard to locate at the moment, even standing before me."

Not explaining that the bracelet was the reason, Tabitha pointed at the abandoned gas station over the angel's shoulder. "I'll wait there for you."

"Fine," Anna agreed, and disappeared in the same manner Castiel always seemed to.

Tabitha had been staring at her phone for the last half-hour, trying to decide whether to call Sam and tell him her plan. But she knew that by now Ruby was likely with him, and she didn't trust the demon—didn't want her near wherever they were holding Alastair. She'd paced for an hour before, trying not to think about what Dean must have been doing in the many hours since he'd been taken. But her mind couldn't help but dwell on it as she stared at the phone in her hand.

It had been a long time since she'd felt so helpless.

The dirty glass door to the old gas station moaned in protest as Anna suddenly strode in.

"We have to go," she announced. "I think I can get you in now, but only you. Cas will be watching for me."

Tabitha dropped to her feet from the dusty counter she'd been sitting on, brushing the dust from her jeans as she told Anna, "Let's go. I'm ready."

Anna stepped forward and touched her fingertips to Tabitha's forehead. But she looked confused when nothing happened.

"I don't understand. I can't locate you if I try, and I can't send you anywhere. I was able to find you when you prayed for me."

Biting her tongue to keep from responding that she had taken off her bracelet when she prayed to Anna, Tabitha took a deep breath and tried to reach out to Anna like she did to speak to Castiel, telling her only, "Try again."

She felt Anna's fingers return to her forehead.

"Tabitha?"

She opened her eyes to meet Castiel's confused look as he strode closer to her.

"You shouldn't be here. How did you find this place?" He paused for a beat as comprehension dawned. "Anna."

She shrugged. "Well, she at least wasn't ignoring me."
Castiel turned away, his posture once more becoming rigid as he stared at the wall in front of him. "I don't bow to your will."

Tabitha felt her jaw clench in anger, but she forced herself to look away from him and around the cavernous old warehouse they stood in. "Where is my brother?" she asked only.

"Doing God's work," was Castiel's stiff reply.

And Tabitha knew then that in the many hours it had taken her to find her way to the warehouse where she stood, that Dean had been torturing his former tormentor.

"If committing torture is God's work," she wearily replied, "then He's not a God I want anything to do with."

The angel remained silent and stationary.

"Dammit, look at me, Cas! What's going on? How could you let me be blindsided by this, and how can you stand by and allow it to happen?!" she demanded, stepping in front of the angel to force him to look at her.

But his eyes didn't even seem to register her; he could very well have been looking right through her.

"What, is this Uriel's idea? And since when do you listen to Uriel? How can you stand by for this? You can't be so heartless. You have to see that this could ruin Dean," she tried again, nearly pleading with the angel.

When he remained silent, her anger burst and she shoved at his chest until he was forced back a step. "Say something!" she shouted. "You have to feel that this is wrong, too."

His gaze finally dropped slightly downward, meeting hers as he callously answered, "I feel nothing. I cannot. I have been reminded that I have grown too close to my charges. That I have begun to express emotion. It is the gateway of doubt. And I am not Anna to Fall. I am an Angel of The Lord. I don't answer to your brothers…" He trailed off but continued in a whisper, "Or to you. It would be wise if you remembered your place and stayed away from angels and their business."

His gaze shifted again, and he went back to staring through her rather than looking at her. An ache cut through her at his words, but she ignored the implications of how deeply his warning and threats truly cut through her. She'd consider why it hurt so badly when she wasn't staring at the very source of that hurt.

"You're a heartless son of a bitch, Castiel," she whispered harshly instead. "And damn you and your angel crap. I'll find Dean myself," she spat as she turned away, searching the warehouse for her brother.

There was no sign of him in the cave-like room she and Castiel stood in, but she finally spotted a heavy iron door that led into another room. As she approached it, she could just make out muffled sounds over Castiel's protests and warnings that she step away from the door.

But as she laid her hand on the handle, she heard a muffled sound of pain from Dean, and the angel was forgotten as she opened the door.

The sight of Dean on his knees as Alastair pummeled him met Tabitha's eyes as she stepped into the room. Neither seemed aware of her presence as the demon continued to pound on her brother, his face matted with blood, and swollen almost beyond recognition.
Looking around the room for some kind of weapon, all Tabitha could see was a table with torture implements laid out on them. But they were obviously implements to torture a demon, so she ran to the table. She almost cried in relief when she saw Ruby's knife laid out with the other torture implements. A knife at least, she was comfortable and familiar with handling. And would kill the son of a bitch pounding on her brother.

When she turned around, Alastair had picked up her brother, holding him in a grip at his neck against a wooden pentagram overlaid with chains, his fingers digging into Dean's neck as he told him, "You've got a lot to learn, boy. So I'll see you back in class, bright and early, Monday morning."

Tabitha plunged the knife into Alastair's chest. "Class has been canceled," she told him.

But the hit had just missed his heart as the demon had just started to turn towards her. But his hand fell away from Dean, allowing her brother to drop to the floor.

She tried to keep her hold on the knife, twisting at it and trying to angle it into his heart. But Alastair broke her grip, shoving at her shoulders and sending her flying backwards into the far wall where she crumpled in a heap on the floor.

"Oh, almost, little Winchester girl," Alastair gleefully grinned as he glanced at the knife. "Looks like God is on my side today, but I'd love to have you on my side, too. Maybe see if the sister is made of the same stuff as her brother."

Tabitha tried to push her back against the wall, vainly hoping to use it for leverage to regain her feet as the demon almost cheerfully advanced on her, paying the knife in his chest no attention. But her legs flailed uselessly beneath her, and she realized that she couldn't get her lungs to take in any air either. The hit had knocked the wind from her lungs.

Castiel suddenly appeared in her vision, cutting off the demon's path to her as he held his hand up, making a slight twisting motion as the blade in Alastair's chest twisted in correspondence.

Alastair grunted painfully in return as the knife continued twisting, but then grabbed the handle of the blade, and yanked it out, screaming as he launched himself at the angel.

Tabitha still couldn't quite draw breath properly into her lungs—it would only come in shallow pants—but she managed to stumble over to her brother, kneeling painfully beside him as she picked his head up in her lap, carefully wiping away at the blood as she tried to feel for a pulse in his neck. It was there, but weak, and his breathing unsteady.

The angel and demon continued to fight around her, the sounds of their punches and grunts filling the room. But when Tabitha glanced away from Dean, she saw Alastair gaining the upper hand, shoving Castiel backwards into an iron support beam. He had shoved Castiel's back against a jagged piece of metal the jutted out, and was holding the angel in place with a hand at his throat as blood trickled from Castiel's mouth and the wounds on his face.

"You know..." Alastair started telling the angel, "like roaches, you celestials. I really wish I knew how to kill you. But all I can do is send you back to Heaven," he continued, shaking his finger at the angel in the way a parent would scold a child.

Castiel struggled against Alastair's hold, but couldn't slip it.

As Tabitha watched, a bluish light began to emanate from Castiel's eyes and mouth, and his face twisted in pain. Although she hadn't brushed up on her Latin like she'd promised herself to, she could make out some of the incantation Alastair was using, invoking the power of God to recall his angel.

She tried once more to push to her feet, but Dean was still lying unconscious in her lap, and her body nearly wilted under the effort to stand. A feeling of helplessness and hopelessness filled her as she watched Alastair trying to banish the angel back to Heaven. And as she saw the look of pain in Castiel's eyes, she wished with all her might that Alastair couldn't hurt the angel anymore—that he couldn't even touch him.

Alastair's words were choked off as he suddenly was flung away from Castiel. And for a brief moment, Tabitha could only revel in the sight of him held immobile and frightened against the wall.

But then, her mind caught up, and she thought to wonder how he could have been flung away from the angel. She glanced over her shoulder, but there was no one else in the room.

The moment she looked away, Alastair was again able to move, and began stalking closer to her and Dean. Castiel had slumped to the floor, but stared at her in horror and shock. And in that instant, she realized that she had been the one to fling Alastair away, and realized that she had helped her brothers drop the iron chandelier the last time she'd seen Alastair as well. She just didn't know how she'd done it, or how it was even possible.

"Well, isn't the little sister just full of surprises," Alastair gleefully told her as he came closer. "You and I are going to have so much fun."

She tried to imagine flinging him again, but nothing happened. Alastair continued to come closer to her and Dean. Her eyes closed as she hunched protectively over Dean, waiting for whatever would come next.

But a loud thud filled her ears, and as she looked up, Alastair was pressed once more against the far wall away from her.

"You Winchesters and your stupid pet tricks," Alastair groaned.

"Who's murdering the angels? How are they doing it?"

At the sound of Sam's voice, Tabitha whipped her head over her shoulder to see her younger brother standing confidently in the middle of the room, his right palm held out towards the demon.

"You think I'm gonna tell you?" Alastair laughed in a rasping voice.

"Yeah, I do," Sam responded, twisting his hand in the air and pulling it slightly towards him.

Alastair began gagging as his eyes turned to milky white.

"How are the demons killing angels?!" Sam demanded in a louder voice.

The demon almost seemed to convulse as he made guttural noises and reluctantly forced out in an inhuman voice, "I...don't...know!"

"Right," Sam replied, twisting his hand more, causing more pain for the demon it seemed.

Castiel had begun to push himself up into a sitting position, but continued to stare intermittently around the room, his gaze darting between Alastair and Sam, but also resting on Tabitha with a bewildered look.
"It's…not…us!" Alastair continued. "We're…not doing it!"

"I don't believe you," Sam told him.

Alastair shook his head. "Lilith…is not behind this. She wouldn't kill seven angels." He began to laugh bitterly as he went on. "She'd kill a hundred. A thousand."

Sam let his hand drop slightly, and Alastair began to pant heavily for air.

"Oh, go ahead," Alastair smugly told Sam. "Send me back…if you can," he taunted.

With a smile that frightened Tabitha for the darkness in it, Sam replied, "I'm stronger than that now. Now I can kill."

Both Tabitha and Castiel turned to stare in shock at Sam's statement, but both too dumbfounded to do more than watch as he raised his hand again.

Alastair began screaming in earnest as light pulsed through him and he finally fell over dead.

"What did you do?" Tabitha whispered, breaking the sudden silence of the room.

Sam looked away guiltily for a moment, but then strode closer and knelt beside her. "Are you all right?" he asked, brushing some loose hair away from her face. Then he looked down at Dean and sucked a breath through his teeth. "Jesus. Is he…"

Turning her attention back to where Dean still laid in her lap, Tabitha touched his neck again, watching the unsteady rise and fall of his chest. "Still hanging in, but he's bad," she replied.

She bit her lip and looked up again to where Castiel had been, intending to ask the angel to help her brother, but the angel was gone.

"We need to get him to a hospital, now," Sam frantically told her, bending down to slide his arms underneath Dean and lifting him from her lap.

Tabitha wasn't sure why she'd come here. Perhaps some sense of familiarity and comfort. But for once, the comfort she normally felt in a church was strikingly absent. As she sat in the small hospital chapel with her rosary clutched in her hand, all she could feel was anger. Anger…and disappointment.

She'd never been a regular churchgoer—her job interfered too much for that—but she'd gone to a little Catholic church not far from her place in Virginia for several years whenever she could. It had always filled her with a sense of peace to sit in that old building with its ornate stained glass windows. When she sat and prayed, she could almost feel a sense of security and absolute belief in the Will of God.

But sitting in the small, sparsely furnished chapel of the hospital, all she could think was that if she had been praying to the same God that had asked so much of her brother, and then left him broken in a hospital room upstairs…well…she was certain she'd been praying to the right God.

The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end, and Tabitha didn't need to turn around to know who was so suddenly behind her.

"Did you heal my brother?" she asked him in a stark voice. She felt so empty of anything but anger and resentment, that she was surprised how devoid of emotion she had sounded.
"I can't," Castiel whispered as she heard him take a seat in the pew behind her.

The rosary that she had been caressing between her fingertips nearly fell from her hand as she felt a tear fall. Until that moment, she hadn't realized that she had been praying. Not to God, but praying that Castiel would come and heal her brother.

"Then why are you even here?" she demanded, a little heat returning to color her tone.

"I have to follow orders, Tabitha," Castiel said, his tone telling her he was trying to explain something more to her than his words said.

She rocketed to her feet, spinning to face the angel sitting behind her. "Orders?" she incredulously repeated. "How can that have been God's orders?" she demanded. Throwing her arm out to gesture at the chapel around them, she continued, "I thought God was supposed to compassionate and benevolent. How can all this be so wrong? How can the God I've prayed to for so long have asked such a thing of my brother, and then left him so broken afterwards."

Castiel stubbornly shook his head, his eyes fixed below her gaze on the top of the pew she'd been sitting at. "Read your Bible. God is wrathful as well."

"Yeah," she bitterly agreed, her hand swiping at the few tears that had escaped. "But I thought he was supposed to encourage us to love and forgive."

When Castiel didn't respond, she let a bitter laugh escape. "How could you have asked my brother to do that?"

He finally let his eyes travel up to meet hers. "I'm following orders."

She slammed her fist down on the pew between them, kneeling on the seat to get a little closer to the angel. "Damn your orders, Castiel. And damn you for following them and breaking my brother like that."

He met her with a blank stare.

"How did you manage to throw Alastair with your mind?" he suddenly asked.

"What?" she sputtered, surprised by the topic change. In truth, she'd been too worried about her brother for the past day to think very much about what she'd done. The sight of Dean in his hospital bed, hooked up to machines to help him breathe filled her mind.

"How?" he repeated.

She let her head fall back in frustration. Finally, she told the angel what her few suspicions were. At least the few that had run through her mind when she wasn't worrying about Dean. "I think it has something to do with when that demon grabbed me in Virginia. That one that tried to mark something into my skin. I know she didn't finish before you showed up, but she did something to me," she admitted in a shaky whisper.

Castiel nodded, and Tabitha knew that the same thoughts had been running through his mind as well.

He looked up to meet her eyes again. "Tell no one," he directed.

She huffed. "Who the hell would I tell?"

"Don't let other angels know," he continued.
Her eyes narrowed on him. "Like I want a damn thing to do with any angel now."

Castiel stood from his pew, forcing her to stand from where she'd been kneeling so he wasn't towering over her.

"I'm sorry for what happened to Dean," he finally told her. "I've already spoken with Sam, and told him that I don't know how Alastair escaped from that trap. He shouldn't have. I laid it myself."

She felt her lip curl as she snarled at him. "You're sorry for what happened to him, but not sorry for making him torture Alastair?"

"I follow orders," he repeated, a slight edge appearing in his voice that hadn't been there before. "I follow God's Will. To disobey His Will is our greatest sin."

She leaned a little closer and whispered in a heavy voice, "And you think it was God's Will that Dean torture that demon? Maybe that was the test. To know that God would never ask such a thing from one of his people."

A flash of doubt surfaced in the angel's eyes before he looked down between them.

"I follow God's Will," he repeated in a low whisper.

"If that's all you have to say to me, then get out. If you won't heal my brother, then there's no reason for you to be here."

But he stood where he was, staring at the top of the pew separating them.

"For your…for the good of all my charges…I have to follow the Will of God," he whispered again.

She spun away from him, facing the front of the chapel again as she repeated, "I don't want to hear any more about what you will and won't do under Heaven's orders. Whatever we were doing—it's done. This friendship, this, whatever it is, with you…and me…it's done. The cost is too high, and I won't be involved with someone who would allow something like that to happen to anyone, let alone my brother." Another tear fell as she raised her voice to yell, "Get out!"

A flutter of wings marked his departure.

Castiel stood along an abandoned pathway, waiting to see if Anna would answer his call. The surrounding area was dark, but the pathway he stood on was illuminated by a tall light post. The ingenuity of humans still amazed him. The devices they made to light their way.

But no light post would light Castiel's way. No light post could guide him and tell him what he should do. He'd never felt so utterly lost before. Never felt so empty. Never so alone. Not until he'd been offered friendship from a human, only to have it ripped away.

"Anna, please," he called again.

Perhaps that was why Heaven forbid them to form such attachments with humans. Perhaps angels weren't equipped to deal with the loss of such attachments.

And in truth, he did feel…something. He wasn't certain what. But he felt something.

The bright, normally laughing brown eyes of Tabitha Winchester usually caused a strange…flutter…in his heart. While at the same time easing a knot that had tied itself in his stomach over the many long millennia of his existence. At first, just the sight of her smile and her bright eyes had been
enough to...to ease something in him. He had been able to just watch her and remain hidden, just observing her. Though she didn't smile enough in his opinion, her smile did ease him.

But then, it hadn't been enough just to watch her and remain hidden.

It had started when she had offered him her friendship. So simple but foreign an idea to an angel. It had seemed harmless enough. But he had begun to feel that he was...different. Unique even. That he wasn't just another angel. Not just like every other of his brothers and sisters in Heaven.

The feeling had been addictive. He'd longed to distinguish himself more in her eyes. And then he'd felt her touch. Even just the feel of her hand on his had filled him with an indescribable feeling. But she'd shown him so much more than that simple touch.

And then taken it away.

Her brown eyes darkened with grief and tears filled his thoughts.

He wished she would smile again.

Wished her eyes would fill with that light again. That light that told him she always seemed to find something humorous in him, even when he couldn't fathom what.

He wished she would just smile.

His chest didn't seem to hurt when she smiled.

Was that what it was to have feelings? He had thought feelings were something abstract—something that couldn't be touched—but he wondered if they weren't actually physical. At least they seemed to have physical pain.

But he didn't understand these feelings. They confused him. Seemed to only bring him an ache in his chest.

It was a lie, he knew, they also brought him that light feeling in his heart. That flutter. That feeling wasn't painful, but...pleasant even.

Perhaps if he'd been able to tell her more, perhaps then Tabitha might not have looked at him with those tear-darkened eyes. Perhaps then she wouldn't have taken away the friendship he'd come to cherish.

Truth would only endanger her more. She was safer if she cut her ties with him. Safer if Heaven didn't begin to suspect that he felt a stronger closeness with his female charge than he did with Dean. He'd been so careful to ensure that they didn't look her way. So careful that they wouldn't have reason to watch her as they watched her brothers. But if they suspected that he'd grown far closer to Tabitha than they had accused him of growing to Dean... Or suspected the strange things she seemed able to do... He feared the thought. They questioned his sympathies for Dean, but he felt something for Tabitha.

Better for Tabitha if she distanced herself. Even at the cost of the ache now in his chest.

Still, something wasn't right in Heaven. If Sam was right—and he had no reason to doubt the boy—then it wasn't demons killing his brothers and sisters. And if it wasn't demons as their directives had insisted...then something was wrong in Heaven. Could he stand for more of his garrison to be slaughtered? What if the danger put his charges in harm's way? What if it brought more danger to the only human that had ever called him friend? Was Uriel right to consider disobeying Heaven?
The light above him flickered, and Castiel turned to see Anna behind him.

"Decided to kill me after all?" Anna asked him.

"I'm alone," he answered more honestly than he'd intended. He just hoped Anna didn't hear the truth behind his words.

"What do you want from me, Castiel?"

He knew that she above all angels might understand. "I'm considering disobedience," he told her without hesitation.

"Good," she nodded.

"No, it isn't," he argued. It would only bring danger. But if danger was already there, what choice did he have? "For the first time…I feel." He tried to think of what it was he felt. What…emotion. But all he felt was that ache in his chest.

"It gets worse," Anna informed him.

He looked down, vaguely disappointed in her statement.

But she continued, stepping closer to him. "Choosing your own course of action—it's confusing…it's terrifying," she finished as she joined him under the light post.

She laid a gentle hand on his shoulder, but as when she'd touched his hand at the warehouse, he flinched from it. Angels were not prone to physical interactions with each other, but more than that, her touch had seemed…somehow disappointing. It made him uneasy. Though he'd come to enjoy such casual touches with Tabitha. He wondered if the difference was her humanity. But something felt different—wrong, when Anna touched him.

Anna let her hand fall away, taking her own meaning from his reaction.

"That's right," she told him with a hard edge. "You're too good for my help. I'm just trash…a walking blasphemy."

He didn't dissuade her from her assumption, for in truth, she wasn't far off in part of her assumption. She was a reminder of the fine line he was trying to walk. A reminder of what could happen if he, too, Fell. A reminder that perhaps he was straying closer than he wanted to admit.

He called out to her when she turned to leave, "Anna…I don't know what to do." Admitting it was hard. But he'd followed Anna for so long. And she had already Fallen. He prayed that she would have some insight into what he should do—what he could do, so that he could keep from Falling. "Please tell me what to do."

She looked back, and a look he thought might be pity came over her face. "Like the old days?" she asked. Her face hardened. "No. I'm sorry. It's time to think for yourself."

And she left him with no more answers than he'd started with.

He glanced around him, wondering what he could do, when a water fountain caught his attention. A pipe ran from the ground near it, the spigot slowly dripping water. And as he stared, a question formed in his mind.

Returning to their warehouse, he crouched near the Enochian trap he'd laid out, touching the spot
where water had dripped and washed away just enough to invalidate the trap. Following the pipe, he found a spigot that had been turned just enough to create the drip, and used his mind to shut it off.

"You called?" Uriel asked as he appeared behind him. "What do you say, Castiel? Will you join me? Will you fight with me?"

"It's strange..." Castiel began, "strange how...a leaky pipe, can undo the work of angels when we ourselves...are supposed to be the agents of fate."

Uriel shook his head. "Alastair was much more powerful than we had imagined."

"No," Castiel argued, finally seeing the truth that had been in front of him but that he hadn't been willing to consider. "No demon can overpower that trap. I made it myself." He considered the other angel for a moment before continuing. "We've been friends for a long time, Uriel." Though he'd always known that angels didn't comprehend friendship as humans did. "Fought by each others' sides, served together away from home...for what seems like...forever. We're brothers, Uriel. Pay me that respect. Tell me the truth."

"The truth is...the only thing that can kill an angel..." He let his angel blade drop from his sleeve, holding it in the air between them. "...is another angel," he whispered.

"You."

"I'm afraid so," Uriel answered.

"And you broke the Devil's Trap, set Alastair on Dean and Tabitha," Castiel supplied.

Uriel shook his head, almost in denial. "She shouldn't have been there. And Alastair should never have been taken alive. Really inconvenient, Cas. Yes, I did turn the screw a little. Alastair should've killed Dean and escaped, and you should've gone on happily scapegoating the demons. And you'd have been content with that. Content with her...your human. The one you've taken such great lengths to hide...the one our powers can't seem to touch. You hoped I wouldn't notice, but I tried to use my powers on her at that cabin when we went to get Anna...and it was as if I'd become human. My powers did nothing. So I started looking into her. But it seems she's impossible to spy on. You went to a lot of trouble to hide her. You could keep her, you know, if you just continue letting the demons take the blame."

Castiel ignored the sudden weight in the pit of his stomach, and chose not to rise to Uriel's bait. "Blame them for the murders of our kin?"

"Not murders, Castiel," he emphatically denied. "No. My work...is conversion. How long have we waited here? How long have we played this game by rules that make no sense?"

Fearing the direction Uriel's disobedience was headed, Castiel turned away and reminded him, "It is our Father's world, Uriel."

"Our Father?" Uriel angrily interrupted. "He stopped being that, if he ever was, the moment he created them. Humanity. His favorites. His whining, puking larvae."

Turning back to the other angel, Castiel asked, "Are you trying to convert me?"

"I wanted you to join me, and I still do. With you, we can be powerful enough to—"

"To?"
"To raise our brother," Uriel whispered, a touch of awe in his voice.

"Lucifer."

"You do remember him," Uriel said. He stepped past Castiel, his voice taking on a far off tone. "How strong he was... how beautiful. And he didn't bow to humanity. He was punished for defending us. Now, if you want to believe in something, Cas, believe in him."

"Lucifer is not God."

"God isn't God anymore! He doesn't care what we do. I am proof of that."

"But this? What were you gonna do, Uriel? Were you gonna kill the whole garrison?" Castiel asked, circling to face Uriel again.

"I only killed the ones who said no," he answered. "Others have joined me, Cas. Now, please, brother, don't fight me. Help me." When Castiel didn't respond, he added. "I could help you keep the girl safe. She'll just be cast off when Heaven is through with whatever they have planned for her, you know this. Or worse, they'll kill her if they realize that she has some kind of resistance to our powers. Or for giving you cause to doubt their orders. They'll find a reason, Cas, and she'll end up dead. Join me, and I'll ensure that you can keep her."

Castiel didn't respond, though he wanted to keep his charges safe, and Uriel had so painstakingly laid out the very fears he had, he still couldn't condone Uriel's actions. If Uriel raised Lucifer... Lucifer would see all humans dead. All of them. There would be no protecting Tabitha. Or her brothers.

Uriel picked up where he'd left off. "Help me spread the word. Help me bring on the apocalypse. All you have to do... is be unafraid."

The apocalypse would mean to end of humanity. Every single one. The end of Tabitha. He briefly met Uriel's eyes before looking down again as he spoke the only words he could, the only choice he could follow. "For the first time in a long time..." he looked up again to show Uriel his resolve. "...I am."

Before Uriel could strike, he shoved at his chest, sending the other angel flying backwards. Uriel crashed through the brick wall, but stood and dusted himself off. Castiel quickly lost track of how many blows they exchanged, both trying to withhold the use of their blades, for that would be a final ending.

They brawled like humans, using their fists and bloodying their vessels. Until Uriel grabbed a length of iron and used all of his strength to strike Castiel in the face, bringing the angel to his knees, still weakened from his encounter with Alastair.

From his knees, with the blood of his vessel trickling down his nose and face, Castiel told his brother, "You can't win, Uriel. I still serve God."

"You haven't even met the man!" Uriel shouted, grabbing Castiel's shoulder. "There is no Will." He punched Castiel to punctuate his words. "No wrath! No... God."

His final punch never came. Anna appeared behind him, her blade slicing into Uriel's neck as she whispered to him, "Maybe or maybe not. But there's still me."

She removed her blade, letting Uriel fall to the ground. Together, Castiel and Anna watched as his Grace exploded from his vessel, leaving only the marks of his wings behind on either side of the
empty vessel.

"Thank you," Castiel whispered to Anna as he pulled himself to his feet.

Anna stood silently beside him before she finally said, "You're different."

Castiel looked down at himself, but wasn't sure what Anna could mean.

"Uriel was right. You care for her."

He stiffened, but didn't reply. Didn't ask who.

"She brings out something good in you, Castiel."

With her words, Anna disappeared.

Tabitha was beyond exhausted, but still couldn't bring herself to sleep. The most rest she'd gotten was in laying her head down on the edge of her brother's bed, pillowing the side of her face on her arms as she held Dean's hand. She was almost afraid to let go. Feared that if she fell asleep now, she'd wake up to find that he was still on ventilators, and that he wasn't actually awake and breathing on his own.

He'd fallen asleep hours ago, but she'd remained beside him, not returning to the motel with Sam, and refusing to allow the nurses to bully her into leaving her older brother. He wouldn't talk about what had happened, but she knew by the haunted look in his eyes that he'd either broken, or come damned close from what the angels had forced him into. And she wouldn't leave him alone to face the demons of his own mind.

She initially dismissed the slight twitch of his hand in hers, thinking he was only dreaming, but then a voice broke the silence of the room.

"Are you all right?" Castiel asked, and she sat up to see the angel sitting in a chair on the other side of Dean's bed. His head was tipped back as though in exhaustion.

"No thanks to you," Dean croaked. Tabitha started to stand to get him water, but Dean's grip tightened on hers, keeping her beside him.

Castiel looked down briefly, as though he actually felt some kind of remorse for his responsibility in putting Dean in his hospital bed, but his face was ever impassive as he tipped it back up again. Not looking their direction, he said, "You need to be more careful."

Tabitha could almost feel a push from him, as though he was trying to indicate the words were for her, but she gripped the charms of her bracelet in her palm. The hard points digging into her skin as she gripped it and pushed the angel away. After what he'd done, she didn't care what messages he had.

"You need to learn how to manage a damn Devil's Trap," Dean replied.

"That's not what I mean," the angel replied, only glancing at them as he continued in a flat voice, "Uriel is dead."

"Was it the demons?" Dean asked.

"It was disobedience. He was working against us," Castiel replied, but Tabitha knew him well enough to hear the regret in his voice for Uriel. He didn't regret Dean's current position. But he
regretted the death of his scornful, hateful brother, who had actually been the one behind the deaths.

Dean glanced up at her, and she could see him hesitating, as if he wanted to ask her to leave, but he finally turned back to the angel, asking him in a fearful voice, "Is it true?" Castiel had tipped his head back again, but turned to look at Dean. "Did I break the first seal? Did I start all this?"

Tabitha felt her breath catch in her throat, and she looked up at Castiel, pleading with her eyes for him to tell her brother that he was wrong. She feared her brother couldn't take much more in his fragile state.

But Castiel unpityingly replied, "Yes."

Dean looked away, his hand closing almost painfully over Tabitha's as silent tears rolled down his cheeks.

"When we discovered Lilith's plan for you…we laid siege to Hell, and we fought our way to get to you before you—"

"Jump-started the apocalypse," Dean finished in a voice that broke.

Castiel looked up as he continued, "But we were too late."

"Why didn't you just leave me there, then?" Dean demanded in a harsh whisper. Tabitha moved closer, clutching his hand with hers and running her other hand soothingly down his arm as she tried to comfort and shush him.

"It's not…blame that falls on you, Dean. It's fate," Castiel explained. "And the righteous man who begins it is the only one who can finish it. You have to stop it."

"Lucifer? The apocalypse? What does that mean?"

When Castiel looked away, Dean shouted at him in a hoarse voice, "Hey! Don't you go disappearing on me, you son of a bitch. What does that mean?"

"I don't know."

"Bull!"

"I don't," Castiel insisted. "Dean, they don't tell me much. I know…how our fate rests with you."

"Well, then, you guys are screwed. I can't do it, Cas. It's too big. Alastair was right. I'm not all here. I'm not—I'm not strong enough."

Dean turned more towards his sister, pulling her hand closer over his stomach as he clutched at her like a lifeline. "Well, I guess I'm not the man either of our dads wanted me to be."

Tabitha finally stood as more of his tears slipped down his cheeks, resting her hip on the edge of his bed as she continued trying to calm him.

But Dean ignored her attempts as he told the angel, "Find someone else. It's not me."

He repeated his last words like a litany as he broke into tears. Unable to stem them, Tabitha climbed fully onto the bed and pulled Dean closer, wrapping her arms around him and holding him as his tears fell and he continued to repeat, "Find someone else. It's not me."

She had resolved not to speak to angel for fear of what she might say, but as she smoothed her hands
through Dean's hair and down his back, she looked over her brother's head and told the angel, "Just leave. He can't handle this right now. You didn't have to tell him..." she trailed off. She'd intended to say that he didn't have to tell Dean right now, but she didn't believe even that. "You didn't have to tell him that. He didn't have to know. You made him go there, and for nothing. Not a damn thing was gained. But a hell of a lot was sure lost there," she whispered in a vicious voice. "Just leave," she repeated. "We're done."

Castiel stood, and for the first time since he and Uriel appeared in their motel room in Cheyenne, she felt his full regard on her as he stared into her eyes. He glanced down at Dean, but her brother seemed unaware of anything around him as he continued to repeat his litany.

He held her gaze as he slowly told her, "I do feel...regret." He frowned and glanced away, as though not sure of his words or not satisfied with them. He added in a low whisper, "You must be careful now."

And the angel left her rocking her brother in her arms, alone to deal with the aftermath of destruction they'd left her brother in.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know. No one is happy to get to this part. But it can't all be wine and roses, even with an angel. Maybe especially with an angel. But there could really be no other outcome to this portion of the story. There was no way that Tabitha was going to be accepting of the events as they had to happen.

So we'll just have to suffer through it with Castiel.

And how was Castiel's narrative? I was very nervous about writing a portion of the chapter from his perspective. I've always planned to do a section from his view, but the only one I had really planned was much further down the line. But when I came to this part of the story, there were a few ideas that just spoke to me—or maybe that was Castiel whispering in my ear—but I just had to slip it in.

If you're curious, here's the translation I found for the Latin Alastair used, the Angel Banishing spell:

"I invoke the power and authority of God
I invoke the power and authority of God
Worship Earth
This Angel in [Your] service
Lord, Reveal [Him]
Lord, Reveal [Him]
This Day God Temper."

Here's all the names that Tabitha used, they're the real names of famous actresses.
Chapter 11: Norma Mortenson ~ Marilyn Monroe

Chapter 14: Betty Perske ~ Lauren Bacall

Chapter 17: Margarita Cansino ~ Rita Hayworth

Chapter 19: Demetria Gene Guynes ~ Demi Moore

And as always, be sure to leave some hits of review to feed my addiction. Come on! I know they say enabling is bad…but it feels so good! Lol

You're all the best!
Tabitha and her brothers approached the man behind the counter of the comic book store. He looked up in surprise and suspiciously looked them all over, his eyes lingering a little longer on Tabitha as they each pulled out their badges.

"Uh…can I help you?" the man asked with a raised brow. From his balding head, thick glasses, and stained sweatshirt, Tabitha was guessing that he lived in his mother's basement. Or maybe above her garage. She glanced around the store, thinking that at least he seemed to fit in with his clientele.

Dean spoke for them. "Sure hope so. Agents DeYoung, Shaw, and Bullock. Just need to ask you a few questions."

Sam immediately began the rapid-fire. "Notice anything strange in the building last couple of days?"

"Like what?"

"Well, some other tenants reported flickering lights," Dean replied.

Still with a confused look, the man stammered, "Uh…I don't think so. Why?"

"What about noises? Any skittering in the walls? Kinda like rats?" Sam continued.

Tabitha looked away and rolled her eyes. She needed to give her brothers a refresher course on interview protocol. They weren't even trying to not sound crazy.

The short man on his stool behind the counter seemed to think so, too. "And the FBI is investigating a rodent problem?" he dubiously asked.

"What about cold spots?" Sam asked without slowing down. "Feel any sudden drops in temperature?"

A look of dawning realization came over the chubby man's face, his round and scruffy cheeks pulling up into a smile that was surprisingly…cute…for a chubby little man.

"I knew it!" the man exclaimed. "You guys are LARPing, aren't you?"
Tabitha immediately cringed. That was a new one to be accused of, but she knew her brothers weren't being careful enough. The FBI side of her wanted to lash out at being accused of role-playing, though.

"Excuse me," Dean immediately responded.

"You're fans."

"Fans of what?" Sam demanded.

Dean followed up with, "What is 'LARPing'?"

The man grinned. "Like you don't know."

Both Sam and Dean stared at the man in confusion, while Tabitha shook her head in frustration. Pushing past her brothers, she leaned against the counter, looking the man in the eye as she told him, "Look, these two are new to the team, so they can come off a little dense, but I assure you, we are not role-playing or doing fantasy dress-up."

"You're kidding, right?" the man asked, swallowing as he slowly leaned back away from Tabitha's intensity.

She pulled her badge out again, slapping it on the counter as she said, "I am Special Agent Annie Mae Bullock with the FBI. And that's a real badge." She pulled her coat and suit jacket aside, displaying her Glock in its holster on her hip. "And that's a real gun. Do I look like I'm kidding you?"

"N-no ma'am," he stuttered. "You're obviously not. I just thought...you know...from their strange questions, that you guys were LARPing. You know, using fake badges and rock aliases and asking about haunted buildings...like in that one series, 'Supernatural,' I think."

She could feel her brothers bristle behind her, so she held up one hand to silence them. "What are you talking about? I've never heard of this series." When the man looked confused, she continued, "The bureau likes to be made aware of anything even of a fictional nature that our agents might be...confused with."

"Sure," the man answered, some of his confidence returning. "Your two partners could definitely be confused for LARPers, but you've got the whole, scary, in-charge vibe down pat. You definitely give off that FBI feel." He came around the counter, looking through a bin for something. "Your partners...they could use some work."

Fighting a grin, she flatly told the man, "Just got them from Quantico. Haven't had the chance to break them in yet."

"Sure," he agreed. Then ducked his head and told her. "I dig your in-charge vibe, though. It's hot."

She fought the urge to stammer, managing to keep a straight face as she emotionlessly asked, "Are you hitting on a federal agent?"

He paled. "No, ma'am." The book in his hands moved into her line of vision as he shoved it towards her. "Here's what I was looking for. There's these two guys in it that travel around the country fighting ghosts, demons, vampires, and things like that. I can't remember their names. Steve and Dirk? Uh, Sal and Dane?"

Sam took the book after Tabitha had glanced at it and passed it back. "Sam and Dean?" he asked.
"That's it! There's a chick, too, their sister, but she's more of a side character. Doesn't travel with the brothers." He turned to look Tabitha up and down, snapping his fingers as he told her, "Come to think of it, she's supposed to be a real FBI agent. You'd totally be able to pull her off. If she wasn't fictional that is. I can't remember her name, either. Tamara, or Teresa. Something like that."

"Tabitha?" Dean asked, taking the book from Sam.

"Yeah!" the man exclaimed, and then he looked at them suspiciously again. "You sure you guys aren't fans? You sure seem to know about the series."

"Not a thing," Dean assured him. "But you're saying this is a book series. A whole series?"

He nodded. "Yeah. Didn't sell many copies, though." He gestured to the bargain bin where he'd grabbed the book. "Kind of had more of an underground cult following."

Dean flipped the book over and read the summary out loud. "Along a lonely California highway, a mysterious woman in white lures men to their deaths."

Sam grabbed the book back and flipped through its pages, his expression when he glanced back up at his siblings told them that they had a serious problem.

Tabitha turned back to the store owner. "I'm going to need to requisition every copy of this 'Supernatural' series that you've got. The Bureau doesn't like to be blindsided by things like this that apparently inspire fools into playing dress-up as federal agents for their…LARPing."

"What the hell is LARPing?" Dean asked behind her once more.

"Later," she whispered, staring at the owner and waiting for him to comply.

With another swallow, he nodded. "Sure. They're all in this bin."

Tabitha reclined against her bed, flipping through the pages of the book in her hand as she skimmed through it. On an abstract level, it was somewhat intriguing to read about her brothers and their hunts while she'd still been with the Bureau. At least it was an interesting way to get more of the stories from that time than either of them was willing to share. She just wondered how accurate they really were.

She paused and glanced up at Dean. There wasn't quite as much worry in her heart when she looked at him now, but it was still there.

Surprisingly, whatever crazy field trip that new angel, Zachariah, had sent her brothers on several weeks before had actually seemed to help her older brother. He wasn't quite back to normal yet, but then, if she was honest with herself, none of them were. It had taken most of the three months between the showdown with Alastair and the new angel showing up, but Dean's body had finally healed from the damage that Alastair had inflicted on him.

And seeing the strange mundane life he could have had, and seeing that he was still drawn back to hunting, seemed to have helped something inside Dean as well. So Tabitha turned back to her book, deciding she wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth, even if she did worry about the new angel from the outfield.

With a gasp, she suddenly slapped the paperback in her hands closed, holding it out at arm's length as she exclaimed, "Ew. Ew. Ew."
Dean sat up from where he'd been reclined on the other bed flipping through another book. "What?" he demanded in an annoyed voice as he glanced up to look at her.

She held the book between her thumb and forefinger, tossing it at him. "I thought it would skip over that. Or maybe just lead up to it and tastefully pull away. But damn…that's just wrong. I did not need to start reading that and get that mental image in my head."

"What?" Dean demanded in confusion.

Sam looked up from his laptop. "What are you talking about, Tab?"

"Please tell me you did not bang twins, just so you could cross that off your bucket-list before you went to Hell," she demanded of her older brother instead of answering Sam directly.

Dean looked a little ashen as he grabbed the book she'd thrown at him and began paging through it. It was obvious when he found the scene. He cleared his throat a little. "Dude, this is freakin' insane. How's this guy know all this stuff?"

"You got me," Sam answered, not seeming to understand why his siblings were acting so horrified.

"He knows everything that you guys did," Tabitha told her younger brother, shock still clear in her voice. "Everything."

Coughing a little, Dean unsteadily added. "She's right. Everything. From the racist truck to—to me having sex. I'm full-frontal in here, dude."

Sam choked back a laugh and shook his head as he turned back to his computer.

Dean avoided his sister's eyes as he held the book she'd thrown at him away from her, nervously telling her, "I'll just…uh…read this one myself…later. Nothing in there you need to be reading anyway."

She picked up another book, biting her lip as she cautiously opened the tacky romance themed cover. Her cautious movements seemed more appropriate for a loaded weapon or an armed bomb, but somehow, the image of her brother that way had her wishing it was a bomb and not a tacky paperback that seemed to be featuring her brothers in erotica. A bomb would have been easier to diffuse than the tension that choked the room.

But at least she knew now to skip ahead if things looked like they were starting down a certain road.

Tabitha had just settled into a different paperback that was telling her far more about Sam getting killed and the deal her older brother had made to bring him back than either of the boys had deemed necessary to tell her, when Dean suddenly stood from his bed. His feet hit the floor with heavy thuds as he thundered closer to her, his face tight as he shook the book in his hand at her as if it was a weapon. "Collin?!" he demanded.

"What?" she asked, completely baffled by his sudden anger as she looked up from her current book. "What about Collin?"

"You slept with him! You slept with Collin McGilvrey. The hunter? You slept with a hunter?! What did I always tell you? Stay the hell away from hunters! That's what I always told you!"

Tabitha felt her jaw drop. Rising to her knees on the bed, she snatched the book from his hand, looking at the page Dean had been holding it open to as she continued to gape. She looked back up from the incriminating—and extremely detailed—pages. "I can explain this," she began.
He stared at her, his look dark and foreboding.

She shook her head and gulped a deep breath. "Okay. I could explain, but I think it would be best if I didn't…and instead we just all forget about this," she went on, holding the book behind her back as if it might make her brother forget about its existence. Out of sight, out of mind and all.

"I'm gonna kill that son of a bitch," Dean swore. He glanced over at Sam who sat at his laptop staring at his older sister. Dean ignored his brother's stupefied look, ordering him with a commanding gesture, "You do your thing, Sam. Find that asshole so I can go kill him." He began pacing a bit as he continued ranting to himself. "What kind of hunter knowingly sleeps with another hunter's little sister? I knew Collin. Thought he was all right. But he's dead now."

Tabitha finally swallowed and leaned back against the headboard of her bed, discreetly shoving the offending book under the pillow behind her. "He is dead, Dean. Bobby and I found him dead during the Rising of the Witnesses thing a while back. And there's no need to get so bent out of shape. I'm not a child."

Dean stopped at her pronouncement, but muttered to himself about still bringing Collin back from the dead just to kill him again.

"What?!" Tabitha snapped at Sam when she felt him still staring at her.

"Collin?" he incredulously asked. "I just can't believe it, Tab. I didn't think he'd really be your type. I never got the impression he was the sharpest tool in the shed."

She let one brow rise, considering whether Dean could handle it if she picked up on Sam's unintended innuendo about tools, but finally decided that from the way Dean was still muttering that he probably couldn't. She finally went with honesty. "Collin was sweet. And charming…in a simple way. And he could make me laugh. It really wasn't a big deal."

"Not a big deal?" Dean suddenly demanded, his hands waving around dramatically. "From what that said, you talked to him…a lot. Threw cases his way, and when he was anywhere near the east coast…" he trailed off, looking a little green around the gills.

Shrugging again, she pointed out, "At least it wasn't some random night with two girls whose names you never got and know only in your mind as 'The Doublemint Twins.'"

Dean stomped over to Sam, looking over his brother's shoulder as he demanded, "How's this guy know so much? And how come we haven't heard of these books before?"

Sam glanced back and forth between his older siblings, uncomfortably clearing his throat as he tapped on the screen, explaining, "They're pretty obscure. I mean, almost zero circulation. Uh, started in '05. The publisher put out a couple dozen before going bankrupt. And, uh, the last one—'No Rest for the Wicked'—" Sam turned the laptop around. "Ends with you going to Hell."

Tabitha rose from her seated position on the bed. "So if they end there, why am I even in the story? I thought that guy at the bookstore said I was a side character or something."

Dean turned a glare on her as he caustically replied, "Oh, you're a side character. With your own side stories sprinkled throughout. A wonderful heaping side of stuff I don't need to know about my baby sister."

Tabitha cleared her throat. "I think we can all agree that when looking at these books, that if one of us runs across anything…of a personal nature not pertaining to yourself, that we should just give the book to that person."
They all nervously agreed, no doubt each running through their minds things they didn't want their siblings to know.

Dean shook his head in disbelief. "I reiterate. Freaking insane." He bent over the computer and scrolled through the site Sam had found. "Check it out. There's actually fans. There's not many of them, but still. Did you read this?"

Sam looked slightly chagrined. "Yeah."

Continuing, Dean said, "Although for fans, they sure do complain a lot. Listen to this—Simpatico says, 'The demon story line is trite, clichéd, and overall craptastic.' Yeah, well, screw you, Simpatico. We lived it." He looked further down the page. "Or this one—animelover56248 says, 'The character of Tabitha is just a distraction from a story meant to be about two brothers. She's unnecessary, except as a convenient plot device for when Sam and Dean need help covering something up or getting out of some mess. She could be axed from the story and absolutely nothing would be lost.'"

Tabitha snorted, glancing back at where she'd hidden one of the books under her pillow. "Believe me, I'd have been just fine with being axed from those books. I really didn't need to know that any part of my life was out there in public like this."

Sam laughed. "There's fans of your character, too. Mostly chicks, but that figures. Although I think some of them are dudes."

Dean frowned a little and read another comment. "Huh, listen to this one. Cuckoo on a String—at least they come up with fitting names—says, 'I think everyone needs to chill on Tabitha's character. The author wouldn't have been including her if she weren't going to be important down the line. Even if only to show how much Sam and Dean's work affects real cops who are left with their messes to clean up. At least she tries to plausibly explain things for people in the 'real world,' thereby keeping the boys hidden to continue their work. They should give her a break, too, they never even realize how much they're imposing on her life. It's a good reminder, that while the boys are dealing with everything supernatural out there, that she still has to stay back and deal with the multitude of natural murders that occur every day. The boys could give her a bit of a break in my opinion. They didn't even realize she helped get them into and out of that prison right after she'd been choked by that john that was attacking prostitutes. I think we'll see more of her in the future. I'd love to see her and Casey become hunters instead of working for the FBI. Or maybe see her finally get together with that mysterious hunter from her past that she's always thinking about, but won't ever talk about."

Tabitha muttered quietly, "At least this Cuckoo on a String has a good head on her shoulders."

Head shaking, Dean turned towards her. "There is so much about all of that that we need to talk about."

She held up her forefinger. "One. The getting choked thing was no big deal. FBI helps local PD with stings sometimes—in this case, Vice—and I fit the physical type that one of their johns was attacking. I just happened to be the bait that got picked up that night by the perp, and he somehow managed to get the jump on me. But I got out of his grip, and put him on the ground until I could call for back-up. It was one time that I let my guard slip. No big deal." She held up another finger. "Two. Well… Actually, all the rest we can file under the column of personal business we don't really need to be asking each other about."

"Casey?" Sam asked anyway, trying to place the other man the reader had mentioned.

She felt a twinge of guilt but waved it away. "My former partner with the FBI. The dead one."
Sam nodded and gestured back at his laptop. "Keep reading. It gets better."

Dean turned back to the screen. "There are 'Sam girls,' 'Dean girls,' 'Tabitha/OC fans' and—what's a 'slash fan?'"

Tabitha clapped a hand over her mouth to keep the laughter in.

Sam merely looked grim as he answered, "As in…Sam-slash-Dean. Together."

"Like, together together?" Dean asked, a horrified look dawning.

"Yeah."

"They do know we're brothers, right?" Dean paled even more in horror. Not that she blamed him.

"Doesn't seem to matter."

Tabitha let a little giggle escape, not even able to fathom how anyone could imagine her brothers that way. Sam turned a sour look on her. "I wouldn't laugh if I were you, there's some fans out there who seem to insist that deep down, you bat for the other team."

"Ew," she answered, immediately sobering. "Not even in college." She glanced down at herself. "Just because I carry a gun and happen to like biker boots does not mean I secretly like other women."

Dean continued shaking his head in disgust. "Oh, come on. That… That's just sick." He slapped the laptop shut. "We got to find this Carver Edlund."

"And I vote for killing him," Tabitha chimed in, not feeling charitable after realizing how much of her life was out there for public consumption and speculation.

"Yeah, that might not be so easy," Sam answered dubiously.

"Why not?" Dean demanded.

"No tax records, no known address. Looks like 'Carver Edlund' is a pen name."

"Somebody's gotta know who he is."

"Sure," Tabitha reasonably answered. "Let's start with the publisher. They have to have record of who he really is so they can send his royalty checks to him."

The Winchesters paused outside the Impala when they pulled up in front of the publisher's house. Sam walked back to the trunk to get something out of his bag, leaving his siblings to wait for him. They'd decided go with the cover of writing an article, so they'd stayed in their civvies rather than changing into their FBI getups.

Dean gave Tabitha a significant look, so she stepped beside him, leaning her back against the Impala as she waited for him to speak.

"A hunter, Tabitha, really?" He frowned and gave her another familiar disapproving look. "I thought I'd told you enough times to stay away from hunters. That they were no good for you. Hunters aren't even close to being the kind of steady material you should be looking for in a guy."

She let out a derisive laugh. "You do realize I'm back to hunting full-time, too, now, right? Guess
that doesn't make *me* the steadiest kind of material, either."

"You know what I mean."

With a serious nod, she responded. "Yeah. I do. But it's not like it was anything serious with him, Dean."

He grimaced and looked away.

"I know that's not anything you want to hear as my big brother. But you've got to stop looking at me like I'm still a little girl. I'm grown up. And guess what? Not a virgin. Haven't been for a long time."

He was still frowning when he shoved his hands into his jean pockets. "So you had this thing going on with Collin, and then something going on with this Casey guy, too? But it wasn't serious with either one of them."

She shrugged, frowning a little as she asked, "So?"

"You deserve better than that, Tab. That's why I wanted you to stay away from hunters. Find something real and settle down maybe. Have a real life."

Bumping her shoulder against her brother's she explained, "That was probably never going to happen for me, Dean. Even in the FBI, my job just wasn't conducive to dating or having a normal life. That's why things fell together with Casey. I could talk to him about cases and things we'd seen that I could never talk to a civilian about.

"And I guess that's why things fell together with Collin, too. As much as there was that I *could* talk to Casey about, I was never going to be able to tell him everything in my life. There would have always been secrets with him. Me always sneaking around to help you guys...or Bobby...or some other hunter. I couldn't tell him about a lot of things. But I could talk with Collin about all of those things, and it was nice not having to censor myself. It was easy. But since he *was* a hunter, things were never going to be more than casual."

"You could still get out of this life and have a normal one," he pointed out.

"Sure, Dean. 'Cause seeing and talking to angels, and seeing reapers just spells all kind of possibilities for a normal life," she dourly reminded him. "I think it's time we all stop lying to ourselves about living normal lives. Sam and I tried. We just got sucked back in. It is what it is."

"You never thought about telling this Casey guy the truth? Do like those psycho fans said and tell him you knew what real evil was."

She gave him a sidelong look as she frowned, telling him in a voice that slowly turned sarcastic, "Sure, Dean. I thought about it. Wondered what it would be like to tell him the truth, have him help me and maybe hunt alongside all of us. One happy, messed up family. Thought about it with all my other fairytale and princess dreams. Like finding out that I'm the long-lost heir to some kingdom I've never heard of. But it's not like any of that was ever gonna happen. It's all just silly dreams. Casey was never gonna just drop everything sane and normal that he'd known and join our family hunting the big baddies that go bump in the night."

They stood beside each other as the silence lapsed.

"I can't believe that douche Collin actually slept with my little sister, though. He should be happy he's already dead," Dean jokingly pointed out.
Tabitha looked up at her brother with narrowed eyes. "When did you meet Collin?"

He paused as he thought back. "Not long. I guess a year or two before I went down under."

She cleared her throat. "I hate to break it to you, Dean, but I knew Collin first then. I was pretty sure that was the way it went. He said he didn't know you and Sam except by reputation when he and I first met."

"He should have told me he knew you then when I met him."

With a dark laugh, Tabitha replied, "I can just see how that would have gone. 'Oh, you're Dean Winchester? Wow. I know your sister. How? Well, you see, I've been…'"

Dean waved his hand at her. "All right, all right. I get the picture. Not exactly something he could tell me right off the bat." He gave her another narrowed look. "He should still be glad he's dead.

"Yeah, him and Casey both," she glumly agreed.

Her brother's look softened in sympathy. "Sorry. I didn't think about the fact that they both were killed or how that might have hurt you. You all right with all of it?"

There was nothing she could to but shrug again. "Kinda sucks that my track record with men has been so rotten lately. Either dead or an…" she nearly bit her tongue as she slammed her mouth shut, her teeth actually rattling in her head. She'd let herself get comfortable talking with Dean, and had nearly blurted out something disastrous. But seeing his look narrow, she quickly finished with, "…guys that act like asses."

Her older brother gave her an unflinching stare, telling her he hadn't missed her near slip. Thankfully, Sam appeared beside them, his distraction timely as he told them, "Well, let's go see if we can find our author."

"What is up with you women getting tattoos on your ass?" Dean asked as they drove away.

"I'd say that great women think alike, but that chick was flat-out crazy," Tabitha laughed in the back seat. "Big fan of you guys, though. But I guess she falls on the side of thinking I'm an unnecessary character," she continued chuckling. She'd have been more offended if she wasn't fairly certain that the crazy woman was more than half in love with what she thought were fictional characters and just hated the "character" of Tabitha for taking focus away from "her boys" as she kept calling them.

"And seriously, telling her we cry all the time?" Sam asked her, throwing her a glare over his shoulder.

She grinned. "Oh, come on. She was crazy. I was just having fun. Besides, I think I can count on one hand the number of times the two of you have sat and had tearful confessions with each other." She pretended to think. "Maybe two hands. Unless you guys were doing a lot of that those years I was working with the FBI. In which case, I gotta wonder if I'm cramping your style. If you two need some guy time and want me to step back so the two of you can have your space…you know, to cry, laugh…hug it out, whatever—you just tell me, and hey, I'll give you guys space."

Dean whipped around as he was driving to throw an accusing gesture at her. "Hey! I don't cry. We…don't cry. And don't you forget it."

He quickly turned back around as Sam was about to reach out to steady the wheel.
Sam turned in the passenger seat to regard her. "What's going on with you?" he asked.

"What?" she asked, baffled by the strange question.

"Something's up with you. You don't usually bait Dean so much unless you're in a funky mood and trying to distract yourself. Or unless he's really pissed you off." He paused as he leaned his arm over the back of his seat and swiveled more towards her. "So which is it? Dean do something I don't know about to piss you off and you're getting even, or did something happen that you're trying to distract yourself from?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she stiffly replied, looking out the window away from the probing stares of her brothers. Her mood was effectively soured, though. Mostly because her brother was right. She shot a glare at the back of her little brother's head when he finally turned around, wondering to herself when he'd gotten to be so smart.

Because the truth had been that she was trying to distract herself. And until that moment, she'd been splendidly avoiding the thought of a certain, infuriating angel. Infuriating because no matter how much she told herself to forget him, she couldn't get him completely out of her mind. She'd even nearly let his name slip to her older brother early that day.

And worst of all…she missed him. Truly missed him. Missed laughing at his usual confusion when she said something he didn't get. Missed talking with him about mundane things like whatever case she and her brothers were on. And even talking with him about the important and scary stuff she couldn't talk to her brothers about. Like what it meant that she could see reapers.

Mostly she just missed his comforting presence.

Why was it that the one being that gave her such a feeling of comfort and peace, was also the one that had been responsible for her brother nearly being pushed back over the edge? How could she reconcile that in her mind? And how could a part of her still want nothing more than to see him again, even after what had happened to Dean? It seemed so traitorous of her. She should hate him for what happened to Dean. Not miss him.

"You okay?" Dean asked when she fell so suddenly silent.

She picked up one of the books that she'd brought with, intending to find out a little more about her brothers' lives while they'd been apart. Even reading the parts about herself was interesting since it was from an outside perspective.

"I'm fine," she quietly assured him.

The music in the background had been easy to tune out as Tabitha read, but one song suddenly pricked her attention. Setting the book temporarily in her lap, she lifted her head to listen to the fast beating song.

_I never meant to be so bad to you_

_One thing I said that I would never do_

_A look from you and I would fall from grace_

_And that would wipe the smile right from my face_

Tabitha sat up straighter as she listened to the song. Her mind had been on the book in her hand, reading about Dean making his deal with the crossroads demon that had led to his trip to Hell, so her
mind was sluggish in placing the song.

As the chorus began, it finally clicked in her mind.

*It was the heat of the moment*

*Telling me what my heart meant*

*The heat of the moment showed in your eyes*

"Change it to something else," she irritably told her older brother, thinking to herself that for all she had lived her life "in the heat of the moment" and had thought it was the right way to live—that she'd actually been very wrong. She'd always told herself that living in the moment was right and that it didn't bring her any regrets…but she had regrets now. One in particular. And she wished what they'd done in the "heat of the moment" could be taken back. Because she couldn't get over what he'd allowed to happen to her brother.

Dean's head bobbed a little in time with the Asia tune. "Why?" he asked, not reaching for the radio.

She cringed as the chorus started again, leaning forward as she threw the book in her hand at the radio, hitting it hard enough to depress one of the preset buttons and change the station. "There," she said with satisfaction. "Took care of it for you."

"What's your problem with Asia?" Dean demanded as Sam bent over to pick up the fallen book by his feet. "They're not so bad," Dean continued.

Sam came to her defense however. "I'm with Tabby on this one, Dean. I had to listen to that song every morning for I don't know how long when the Trickster had us stuck in that Mystery Spot. I'm pretty sick of that song now."

Tabitha had heard this story—and skimmed through the book as well—but she hadn't read or heard the part about the song. Not that it was important, other than in supporting her effort to not have to hear the song.

"Whatever," Dean grumbled. But he looked up into the rearview mirror. "What's *your* problem with that song though?"

"Just don't like it," she maintained, picking up another one of the books she'd brought with and opening it. It was named "Wendigo" and she cringed at the unoriginal title. "This guy could have used an editor's help," she mumbled as she began looking through the book.

Dean pulled to a stop along a residential street. "Well, you can be sure to tell him that. 'Cause we're here."

They walked slowly up the sidewalk to the unkempt house. The yard was overgrown and weed infested, and the house looked…ramshackle…at least to Tabitha's eyes.

Once they climbed to the top step at the door, they each exchanged a look of trepidation, wondering what they were going to find. Dean quickly pressed the doorbell, tapping his foot impatiently as they waited for it to be answered.

The man who opened the door was a fair reflection of his home—shaggy and unkempt—wearing a bathrobe that looked and smelled to Tabitha like it was past needing a wash. Likely the man beneath it was, too.
"You Chuck Shurley?" Dean asked the man in the bathrobe.

"The Chuck Shurley who wrote the 'Supernatural' books?" Sam clarified.

The man looked a little flustered as he answered. "Maybe. Why?"

Dean introduced them. "I'm Dean. This is Sam and Tabitha," he explained, nodding his head towards each of them. "The Dean, Sam, and Tabitha you've been writing about."

Chuck nodded and then shut the door, not seeming to believe them.

Dean immediately rang the doorbell again as they continued to impatiently wait.

"Look, uh..." Chuck began in frustration upon opening the door. "I appreciate your enthusiasm. Really, I do. It's, uh, it's always nice to hear from the fans. But, uh, for your own good, I strongly suggest you get a life."

He tried to shut the door again, but Dean stopped it with a fist on the pebbled glass. "See, here's the thing. We have a life. You've been using it to write your books."

Dean pushed past Chuck, shoving him aside as his siblings followed into the house behind him.

Tabitha paused as she passed Chuck, getting a strong whiff of the whiskey leeching from his pores as she added, "Yeah, and you've been using way too damn much of our lives, too."

"Now, wait a minute. Now, this isn't funny," Chuck protested helplessly as they entered his house.

Tabitha might have felt bad about invading his personal space like that—that is if he hadn't invaded their personal space first by writing down so much of their private lives and spilled parts of her past that her brothers had no business knowing about.

"Damn straight, it's not funny," Dean was agreeing as Chuck backed away from them into his living room, becoming more fearful. Tabitha moved away from the men, letting her brothers corner the little man as she examined the scattered state of Chuck's house, pausing when she found his desk and computer.

"Look, we just want to know how you're doing it," Sam told him.

"I'm not doing anything," Chuck maintained.

"Are you a hunter?" Dean pressed.

"What? No. I'm a writer."

"Then how do you know so much about demons and tulpas and changlings?" her older brother was demanding.

"Is this some kind of 'Misery' thing?" Chuck asked. Tabitha looked up from the papers she'd found to see that Chuck had fallen over sideways on his couch. "Ah, it is, isn't it? It's a 'Misery' thing!"

"It's not a 'Misery' thing," Dean insisted. "Believe me, we are not fans."

"Well, then, what do you want?!"

"I'm Sam. And that's Dean."
Tabitha came back over with the papers in her hands, standing beside her brothers as she said, "And I'm Tabitha." She looked down at where he was sprawled on the couch, his eyes wide with fear. "And close your robe. Nobody wants to see your boxers."

Chuck immediately jerked the robe closed around him. "Sam, Dean, and Tabitha are fictional characters. I made them up! They're not real!"

Tabitha ignored his insistence, handing the pages she'd found to her brothers. "This was on his printer. He was writing about us walking up to his house as we were walking up to his house. Something messed up is happening around here."

Her brothers glanced at the pages, and then Dean bent down to grab the fearful author, dragging him by the arm out to look in the trunk of the Impala.

"Are those real guns?" Chuck asked in disbelief as he stared at their cache.

"Yup," Dean agreed. He leaned into the trunk. "And this is real rock salt and these are real fake I.D.s."

Chuck laughed, still not understanding. "Well, I got to hand it to you guys. You really are my number-one fans. That's awesome. So, I—I think I've got some posters in the house."

"Chuck, stop," Dean demanded as the author turned back towards his house.

"Wait. Please, don't hurt me."

"How much do you know?" Sam demanded. "Do you know about the angels? Or Lilith breaking the Seals?"

"Wait a minute. How do you know about that?" Chuck demanded.

"The real question is, how do you?" Tabitha shot back.

"Cause I wrote it."

"You kept writing?" Sam asked.

"Yeah, even after the publisher went bankrupt. But those books never came out." The Winchesters exchanged a look as Chuck laughed and continued, "Okay, wait a minute. This is some kind of joke, right? Did that—did Phil put you up to this?"

"You're not getting this, Chuck," Tabitha sighed. She gestured to her brothers and herself. "We're the real Winchesters. Dean, Tabitha, and Sam."

Chuck paled a little. "The last names were never in the books. I never told anybody about that. I never even wrote that down."

"Well, you did write down plenty of other things that I wish you hadn't," Tabitha muttered.

Chuck opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out. Instead, he turned and walked unsteadily back into the house, the Winchesters trailing after him.

They followed him into his kitchen where he fixed himself a drink with shaking hands, downing it and then turning around towards them. He groaned when he saw them. "Oh! Oh, you're still there."

"Yup," Dean agreed as they waited to see how Chuck would handle things.
"You're not a hallucination."

"Nope."

"Well, there's only one explanation. Obviously, I'm a god."

"You're not a god," Sam huffed.

"How else do you explain it? I write things and then they come to life. Yeah, no, I'm definitely a god. A cruel, cruel, capricious god. The things I put you through—the physical beatings alone."

"Yeah, we're still in one piece," Dean chimed in.

"I killed your father," Chuck apologized. "I burned your mother alive. And then you had to go through the whole horrific deal again with Jessica."

"Chuck," Sam tried to interrupt.

"All for what?" Chuck continued. "All for the sake of literary symmetry. I toyed with your lives, your emotions, for…entertainment."

"You didn't toy with us, Chuck, okay?" Dean told him, pushing away from the wall he'd been leaning against. "You didn't create us."

"Did you really have to live through the bugs?"

"Yeah," Sam agreed.

"What about the ghost ship?"

"Yes, that too," Dean sighed.

"I am so sorry. I mean, horror is one thing, but to be forced to live bad writing…"

Chuck turned to Tabitha, "And I am so sorry for killing the last two men you had relationships with. And then making you start up with…" He trailed off with a gulp as she leaned forward with murderous intent in her eyes.

He swallowed and continued speaking to them all. "If I would have known it was real, I would have done another pass."

Dean had reached his frustration level. "Chuck, you're not a god!"

"You're probably psychic or something," Tabitha told him, feeling a twinge of grief at thought of the last psychic they'd known. "But I doubt a god would be sitting in this heap in a dirty bathrobe."

Chuck disagreed. "No. If I were psychic, you think I'd be writing? Writing is hard," he insisted as he sat in front of his computer.

"It seems that somehow, you're just…focused on our lives," Sam tried to explain.

Dean agreed. "Yeah, like laser-focused." He paused before asking, "Are you working on anything right now?"

"Holy crap," Chuck uttered under his breath.
"What?" Dean asked.

Chuck picked up some of the other loose papers that were still on his desk. "The, uh, latest book. It's, uh, it's kind of weird."

Sam immediately jumped on his statement. "'Weird' how?"

Rubbing his face, Chuck reluctantly told them, "It's very Vonnegut."

"'Slaughterhouse-five,' Vonnegut or 'Cat's Cradle,' Vonnegut?" Dean demanded.

Tabitha almost laughed. Trust her brother to make those references. "I'm surprised you've read Vonnegut. I never really got him."

"What?" Sam asked Dean clearly surprised that their brother had read Vonnegut, maybe even surprised he'd read any book.

"What?" Dean parroted, trying to seem offended.

"It's, uh, 'Kilgore Trout,' Vonnegut. I wrote myself into it. I wrote myself, at my house...confronted by my characters."

"I'm sitting in a Laundromat, reading about myself sitting in a Laundromat, reading about myself—my head hurts," Dean complained as he poured through the printed out pages.

"There's got to be something this guy's not telling us," Sam commented as he grabbed a wad of his clothes to shove in a washer.

Dean continued reading. "'Sam tossed his gigantic darks into the machine. He was starting to have doubts about Chuck, about whether he was telling the whole truth.'"

"Stop it," Sam demanded as he turned to face Dean.

"'Stop it,' Sam said." Dean looked up from the pages with a little grin. "Guess what you do next."

Sam glared for a moment before turning around again.

"'Sam turned his back on Dean. His face, brooding and pensive.' I mean, I don't know how he's doing it, but this guy is doing it. I can't see your face, but those are definitely your 'brooding and pensive' shoulders."

Sam sighed and looked up at where Tabitha sat crossed-legged on a top-loading washing machine just down from him.

"He's right," she smirked. "That definitely your 'brooding and pensive' face."

"You just thought we were dicks," Dean commented as he looked up.

Sam looked mildly impressed as he turned around. "The guy's good."

"I'm hurt, Sammy. Truly hurt by that," Tabitha chuckled, turning back to the pages in her hands. She didn't even want to attempt reading the current pages of what they were doing—just the thought of it gave her a headache, but she wanted to look through what Chuck had written since he stopped publishing, just to make sure the smelly little man hadn't written about everything.
"Tabitha sat on top of the washing machine, relishing the sight of making her brothers do the laundry for a change. She took the time to read through the pages of work that Chuck had written, just to make sure the smelly little man hadn't written about *everything.' What does that mean, Tabitha?" Dean suspiciously asked.

She nearly choked on her suddenly inhaled breath. "Goddamn, Dean. That's just creeping me the hell out. Stop reading from that." And she quickly made the effort to remove all thoughts from her mind.

He pointed at her with the pages in his hand. "What does this mean?" he insisted. "What are you worried about me finding out about?"

"It means that I want to make sure that neither one of you is going to stumble across anything of mine of a personal nature. Like that bit with Collin that you read last night."

His hand dropped back to his knee as his face paled a little. But he still managed to crossly tell her. "One of these days I'm gonna make you tell me everything, and not let you use the threat of telling me intimate details of your…sex life…stop me." His face had taken on an almost comical sour look as he said the "S" word, causing Tabitha to grin despite his anger.

"Is that day going to be today?" she asked.

He paused, but then grumbled, "No."

"Then I guess I'll keep falling back on that defense until it comes."

The next day, the Winchesters sat around Chuck's living room as he walked in with pages in his hands, waiting for the author to speak.

Sam finally prompted, "So…you wrote another chapter?"

Chuck nervously held the pages in his hands as he told them, "This was all so much easier before you were real."

"We can take it," Dean assured him. "Just spit it out."

"You especially are not gonna like this," he told Dean.

"I didn't like *Hell.*"

Chuck gave a dramatic sigh and said, "It's Lilith. She's coming for Sam."

Tabitha felt her breath stop…and then leave in a rush. And she instantly felt guilty for being relieved that Chuck had said Lilith was coming for her brother, and not her.

"Coming to kill him?" Dean asked.

"When?" Sam wanted to know.

"Tonight."

"She's just gonna show up? Here?" Dean pressed.

Chuck sat on his couch and pulled out his glasses to look at the pages. "Uh…uh…'Lilith patted the bed seductively. Unable to deny his desires, Sam succumbed, and they sank into the throes of fiery
demonic passion."

Sam laughed mockingly as Dean and Tabitha stared at Chuck in shock.

"You're kidding me, right?" Sam asked them all.

"You think this is funny, Sam?" Tabitha demanded.

"You don't? I mean, come on. 'Fiery demonic passion?' he mockingly quoted.

"It's just a first draft," Chuck quietly defended.

"Wait, wait, wait, wait," Dean interrupted. "Lilith is a little girl."

Chuck shook his head as he consulted his pages. "No, uh, this time she's a—'comely dental hygienist
from Bloomington, Indiana."

"Great. Perfect," Dean stressed with sarcasm. "So what happens after the…'fiery demonic'
whatever?" he asked, closing his eyes.

"I don't know. That hasn't come to me yet," Chuck answered regretfully.

Sam jumped to defend himself. "Dean, Tabitha, look, there's nothing to worry about. Lilith and
me? In bed?"

Tabitha and Dean shared looks that said it didn't seem so far-fetched to them. They both knew about
Ruby after all.

Dean ignored their brother's plea and addressed Chuck. "How does this whole psychic thing of
yours work?"

"You mean my process?" he corrected.

"Whatever you want to call it," Tabitha irritably huffed.

"Well, it usually starts with a headache. A really bad headache. Aspirin is useless, so…I drink. Until
I fall asleep. The first time it happened, I thought it was just a crazy dream."

"The first time you dreamt about us?" Tabitha clarified as she leaned back in one of Chuck's cleaner
looking chairs.

"It flowed," he continued. "It just—it kept flowing. Still does. I—I can't stop it, really."

Sam broke in. "You can't seriously believe—"

"Humor me," Dean snapped. "Look, why don't we, we just…” he stopped in surprise as he realized
Chuck was already handing him the pages he'd been reading from. He continued in a more subdued
tone. "Take a look at these and see what's what." He turned to Chuck. "You—"

"…knew you were gonna ask for that. Yeah," he commented in a resigned voice.

Dean hummed thoughtfully.

As the Winchesters were finally leaving Chuck's place, Tabitha paused inside the house once her
brothers had left, grabbing Chuck by his shirt front—and thankful that he was dressed this time—and
pulling him closer as she asked, "You know about me and…" But she trailed off, not wanting to
voice it if he didn't know. She was still somehow hoping that her bracelet might just keep her hidden from Chuck's eyes as well.

Chuck swallowed with difficulty as he held his hands up in surrender. "You mean you and Castiel?"

Her grip loosened a little in defeat. It had been three and half months since she'd even seen the angel, but he hadn't ever seemed to completely leave her mind. Even in her brief moments of sleep, she would swear she was catching a glimpse of the angel, but when she would turn to search from him, he would be gone, and unnerved, she would immediately wake from her dreams, shaking in a nervous sweat, like a drug addict gone too long without a hit. Worse yet, she continued to vacillate between anger with him, and missing him. And then return to anger with herself for missing the angel she held responsible for the long months it had taken her brother to recover.

"Have you written about...that...yet?" she asked, her throat suddenly dry and tight.

With a shake, he answered, "No. It just didn't seem...right. You know. It seemed kinda...porny...to write that about an angel, I mean."

She gave a dark bark of laughter. "I read the stuff you wrote about Collin and me—thanks for that by the way, Dean read that—and you make some erotica seem tame by comparison."

"It just seemed wrong writing that about an angel. I was afraid people wouldn't think it was believable."

Her hand released him as she shook a finger at him and threatened, "Just make sure that you don't ever even hint about that in your books."

Chuck instantly nodded in agreement, seeming more than a little frightened of her, for which she wasn't sure whether to be flattered or offended. "You do know it's wrong to be hiding something like this, don't you?" he asked.

She took a threatening step forward again. "Nothing is going on anymore. But I guess you know that. So there's nothing to talk about, is there?"

"I don't think even you really believe it's over."

"It is. It's been months since he was even around."

A look briefly flitted across his face, but he sighed and stepped lightly around Tabitha, letting out a relieved sigh as he put a little distance between them. "Then why do you keep trying to convince yourself of it?" He shuffled his feet and shoved his hands into his pockets as he stared at the floor. "I don't know how things are going to end up—I don't see that far—but I do know you're headed down a path of a lot of heartache."

Gritting her teeth, she headed for the door once more, pausing to softly insist, "I'm not heading down any path."

The next day—after realizing they couldn't get out of town with the bridge closed off, and in an effort to not follow the pages they'd gotten from Chuck—they all tried to do the opposite of what had been written. They'd left Sam at the Toreador Motel—since Lilith was supposed to find him at the Red Motel—and had even taken away his laptop so he couldn't research; leaving him hidden from demons by the hex bags they'd placed around the room. And then Dean and Tabitha had gone to park Impala somewhere since the two of them were supposed to drive around in it all day.
"Where you going?" Dean asked when she started to walk away from him and the Impala.

She shrugged as she walked backwards away from him. "I figured it might be best if we split up. Especially since we're trying to maintain your whole idea of opposite day and you and I were supposed to spend the day together."

After a moment, Dean finally jerked his head in agreement. "Fine. But whatever you're gonna do, be careful. Lilith may be here for Sam, but she could come after you, too. And no skateboarding!"

Tabitha laughed at the ridiculousness as they parted. She was across the street when she heard screeching tires, a blaring horn, and the concerned shouts of a lot of people.

Immediately, she whipped around to look—and ran into a teenage boy that had been zipping down the sidewalk on a skateboard. The boy hopped off the skateboard to avoid her, and her feet tangled on the contraption, one foot falling on it as she lost her balance and rocketed forward. Into a tree.

Tabitha was picking herself up off the ground before she even quite realized she'd fallen down, one hand cupping the eye she'd slammed against the tree as she shrugged the worried skateboarder off, biting back curses and assuring the kid that she would be fine.

Looking over her shoulder, she saw Dean sprawled out on the ground. Where he'd been struck by a minivan. Just the way Chuck had written.

She ignored her rapidly swelling eye as she ran back towards Dean, pushing past bystanders and telling them she was the injured man's sister when they tried to stop her. As she broke through, she dropped to her knees in time to see a little girl gingerly placing pink flower band-aids on his face as another woman bent over him.

Dean was just starting to come around, his eyes opening as he muttered, "Stars,"

"What was that?" the woman leaning over him asked.

"Crap," Tabitha swore, helping to support Dean by his elbow as he started to sit up. Everything was happening just as Chuck had written it, no matter how improbable it had seemed.

"Are you okay, Dean?" she whispered to her brother as he blearily blinked his eyes.

"I'm so sorry," the other woman was saying. "I just didn't see you. Are you okay?" She looked up at Tabitha. "Are you okay?"

Dean sat up further, but didn't speak.

"We're fine," Tabitha tried to assure the woman.

"And sorry about...you know," the woman continued. "M-my daughter's going through a doctor phase."

"What are you talking about?" Dean finally asked.

"You're better now," the little girl confidently told him and then turned to Tabitha. "Do you want me to fix your owie, too?"

Tabitha shook her head at the little girl and turned back to Dean, gesturing at his face and forehead. "Pink flower band-aids," she whispered to him.

Dean finally seemed to focus on her face. "What happened to your eye?"
She gritted her teeth and admitted, "I tripped on a skateboard and fell into a tree." Just like Chuck had written, she thought to herself.

He turned to look at the Impala, and Tabitha turned with him to see that the back window was busted out and the driver door hanging open.

"Oh, no," Dean huffed. As he stood and walked over to the car, Tabitha waved the bystanders off, assuring them that her brother was fine before she followed him to take in the damage.

"There's duct tape and a tarp in the trunk," she softly told him, remembering that Chuck had written that they'd drive away, the tarp in the back window, flapping like the wings of a crow.

Dean's only response was a muttered curse.

Chuck's hands were full when he reentered his house, but he didn't seem all that surprised to see Dean and Tabitha sitting in his living room waiting for him.

"Dean. Tabitha," he quietly greeted.

"I take it you knew we'd be here," Dean replied.

"You guys look terrible," Chuck told him instead.

"That's 'cause I just got hit by a minivan, Chuck."

"And I tripped over a skateboard," Tabitha snapped, readjusting the stolen bag of frozen peas over her eye.

"Oh," he commented unsteadily.

"That it? Every damn thing you write about us comes true. And that's all you have to say, is 'Oh?!'" Dean shouted.

"Please don't yell at me," Chuck nervously pleaded.

"Why do I get the feeling there's something that you're not telling us?" Dean demanded as he stood and came closer to Chuck.

Tabitha tried to calm him a little, but not so hard that she actually rose from her chair or disturbed the frozen peas over her eye. "Take it easy, Dean," she half-heartedly tried.

"What wouldn't I be telling you?" Chuck continued to nervously stammer.

"How you know what you know for starters!"

"I don't know how I know. I just do."

"That's not good enough," Dean told him, grabbing him by his shirtfront.

Tabitha hadn't expected his anger to come to a head so violently, so she finally sprang up, letting the bag of peas fall, and trying to hold Dean back and remind him that they couldn't find out anything if he killed the guy.

Dean ignored her, slamming Chuck against the wall. "How the hell are you doing this?!"
Inserting herself between the two, Tabitha finally managed to shove her brother back.

But they both stopped when a voice behind him commanded, "Dean, let him go."

The siblings turned in shock to see Castiel, and Tabitha almost winced at her competing emotions of longing, and anger at the sight of him appearing so suddenly after the long months that had passed.

"This man is to be protected," Castiel told Dean, holding only her brother's gaze and avoiding Tabitha's.

"Why?" Dean cautiously asked.

"He's a prophet of The Lord."

Tabitha looked over her shoulder at Chuck who was still cowering behind her from Dean. "Doesn't look much like I'd expect of a prophet."

Chuck was staring over her shoulder at the angel. "You...you're Castiel...aren't you?"

"It's an honor to meet you, Chuck," Castiel told him in his usual dry manner. "I...admire your work." He paused to pick up one of the open books on an end table near him, flipping through it.

Tabitha turned to face Chuck again. "I notice you aren't exactly surprised at the news that you're supposedly a prophet."

He cringed a bit.

"Whoa, whoa. This guy, a prophet?" Dean exclaimed in disbelief. "Come on, he's—he's...he's practically a Penthouse forum writer!"

Tabitha shrugged noncommittally. Her brother probably wasn't far off the mark from the things she'd read. She hadn't exactly ever thought of her own life as all that exciting, but reading some of those excerpts from Chuck's books made her sex life seem almost porn-worthy.

Dean suddenly seemed to catch what she'd said before, turning to Chuck and demanding, "Wait...she's right. You don't seem surprised. Did you know about this?"

"I, uh, I might have dreamt about it," he admitted, sitting in a chair and opening a bottle of beer.

"Calm down, Dean," Tabitha soothed as she paced and tried to avoid looking at the angel who stood calmly flipping through one of Chuck's books.

"It was too preposterous," Chuck explained. "Not to mention arrogant. I mean, writing yourself into the story is one thing, but as a prophet? That's like M. Night-level douchiness."

"This is the guy who decides our fate?" Dean demanded as Chuck began proving the skills of a semi-functioning alcoholic.

"He isn't deciding anything," Castiel absently commented. "He's a mouthpiece—a conduit for The Inspired Word."

"The word?" Dean asked. "The Word of God?"

"That crap is Inspired Word?" Tabitha incredulously asked.
"What, like the New New Testament?" Dean continued.

"One day these books, they'll be known as the Winchester Gospel."

"How the hell do we end up in a gospel?" Tabitha demanded. "There ain't exactly a whole lot that's holy about us."

"You got to be kidding me?" Dean and Chuck simultaneously demanded.

Castiel closed the book, looking up and flatly telling Dean, "I am not...kidding you."

Chuck suddenly lurched to his feet. "If you'd all excuse me one minute." And then he scurried up the stairs, glancing down at them all as he hurried away.

"Him? Really?" Tabitha couldn't help asking. There was absolutely nothing divine about the guy.

Still not looking at her, Castiel commented, "You should've seen Luke."

Sick of being ignored, yet somewhat thankful at the same time, Tabitha took to leaning against the wall as she watched her brother and the angel.

"Why'd he get tapped?" Dean asked as he paced.

"I don't know how prophets are chosen. The order comes from higher up on the celestial chain of command."

"How high?" Dean asked.

"Very."

"Well, whatever. How do we get around this?"

"Around what?" Castiel slowly asked.

"This Sam-Lilith love connection," Dean angrily told him.

Tabitha couldn't hold her tongue any longer. "You know, my other brother being in mortal danger," she snapped.

Castiel finally turned towards her; for a second, surprise flashed there, and she remembered that her eye looked pretty bad. She lightly touched her fingertip to the skin below her eye, winching at the pain, but thankful that it hadn't swollen shut. When she looked back at the angel, he was suddenly closed off to her; shut down so completely, that she couldn't even see any of the normal emotion in his eyes.

"How do we stop it from happening?" Dean continued, unaware of the undercurrents between his sister and the angel.

Castiel turned back to her brother, his head tilting back in frustration as he replied, "What the prophet has written can't be unwritten. As he has seen it, so it shall come to pass."

"You can't be serious, Cas," Tabitha demanded.

He turned towards her again, his brow furrowed. "Why would you doubt my seriousness at a time like this?"
She huffed in frustration, not finding his normal confusion cute or charming like she once had. "There has to be a way around this."

"There isn't," he assured her in heavy tones. "I cannot change this any more than I could disobey orders."

Dean glanced back and forth between their angry stares, finally turning away and telling his sister. "Come on, Tab. We're getting Sammy and getting the hell out of town. I don't care if we have to drive through that river or even swim it. We're leaving."

Castiel grabbed Dean's arm. "She should remain here. It's safer."

Dean jerked in surprise, and Tabitha stared at the angel in shock. She was about to object when Castiel's voice whispered in her mind for the first time in months, *Please stay.*

Before she had given it any thought, she had turned towards Dean, who was also about to object. "Maybe he's right, Dean. Lilith is out there, and she's looking for Sam. You go get him out of town if you can. I'll stay here and see if there's anything else I can get out of the stuff Chuck has written. Maybe something will be of use in helping to protect Sam."

She was almost surprised at how easily she had acquiesced to the angel's request when she'd been trying so hard to avoid him. But she'd heard the worry and desperation in his plea, and had responded to it before she could remind herself of the promise she'd made not to. More than three months of silence from him, and you still hop to his bidding because he asks, she silently berated herself.

Dean looked momentarily suspicious, but Castiel's face hadn't changed despite his sudden request, and Tabitha had managed to school her features as well. "Fine. Maybe that's a good idea. Get anything you can out of Chuck. I'll come back for you after I've gotten Sammy somewhere safe."

He left quickly, and Tabitha found herself alone with the angel just as she had sworn she wouldn't allow to happen.

Shuffling her feet, she quietly said, "So…"

Castiel turned toward her, his brow furrowed. "So?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes at his confusion, but it had managed to break the ice. "So… Over three months of silence from you, but I'm staying here. Like you wanted. Even if I don't get why. And I'm not even sure why I'm listening to anything you have to say."

"You are angry with me?"

With a huff, she looked upward in silent appeal, but then realized whom that implied she was turning to for help. So she shook her head and answered as honestly as she knew how. "I don't know what I am with you anymore." She ticked the list off using the fingers of her hand. "Angry, *sure.* Frustrated, *you bet.* Disappointed, *oh yeah.* And a whole lot else I can't put a name to. You let my brother nearly get beaten to death."

"That wasn't my intent. Uriel freed Alastair…if I had known what would happen…" He gave her a frustrated look as he shuffled his body slightly, folding his arms behind his back and standing stiffly. "I would have given anything to have not had to ask Dean to do any of that. But I must follow orders. For the good of all."

It wasn't anything she hadn't heard before, but she still made a frustrated noise as she moved
restlessly in Chuck's living room. Finally, she came to a stop in front of the windows looking out on the street. She didn't turn around, but spoke to the angel she knew still stood somewhere behind her. "But you disappear without a word for more than three months." And until she spoke the words, she didn't realize how much his long absence and silence had hurt her, despite the fact that she'd told him to leave and had tried to convince herself that she didn't ever want to see him again.

"You told me to leave. That you didn't want to see me ever again. I have done my best, but I am still responsible for your welfare, so I can't forever avoid your company," he tightly responded.

She glanced over her shoulder at him. There was bewilderment in his eyes, but also frustration. Problem was, she was bewildered and frustrated, too. His absence had hurt, but she wasn't certain she could have dealt with seeing him any sooner. Wasn't even sure if she could deal with seeing him now. Just the sight of him brought the pain of betrayal swirling back to the surface.

She turned back to stare out the window, speaking before she could give it too much thought. "Maybe it was a mistake. Us getting more involved with each other. I keep trying to think of you as more than an angel now—even though you took great pains to remind me that you're not—and I expected you to act differently than an angel should, I guess. Maybe we should just go back to that way things were in the beginning. You just do your angel duties, and I'll just stick with my brothers."

Silence filled the cluttered mess of Chuck's living room. She wasn't sure what the angel was thinking, but her own thoughts had taken a dark turn. Giving them voice, she half-heartedly asked the angel as she glanced over her shoulder, "I don't suppose you can do anything to help get Sam out of town before Lilith shows up, can you? So I actually have both of my brothers to stick with."

In the instant that Tabitha had looked over her shoulder, she caught a dark, almost pain-filled look in the angel's eyes, but it quickly vanished, replaced by a softer look of regret. And regret was in his voice as he told her, "As it was written, so it shall come to pass. I can't change it, Tabitha."

With a bitter laugh, Tabitha responded, "You angels are just determined to try and destroy what's left of my brothers, aren't you?"

"I can't interfere," he maintained.

"Of course," she flatly agreed. "You're an Angel of The Lord. Nothing more important than that."

She pressed a hand to the filmy glass of Chuck's window, leaning heavily against it as she tried to think of what she could do to help get Sam out of town. Castiel had proven he would be no help, so she figured she had one slim hope left. Pushing away from the glass, she turned around to face the angel again. "I guess I better go grill Chuck and see if he knows anything useful I can use to help my brothers."

Castiel reached out to catch her arm as she lightly stepped past him, halting her retreat. "I would have given anything to keep Dean from having to torture Alastair. And I would give anything to be able to help Sam now. But I also would give even more than I have to keep you safe. But I fear I don't know how well I'll be able to protect you, or even how much your charms will be able to protect you. Zachariah has grown too curious of you." He stared into her eyes for a moment, and then reached his other arm across to press against her chest as he softly lamented, "Forgive me for this."

For a second, Tabitha thought to ask what he wanted forgiveness for now…but then the pain hit her like an ocean tide, knocking the breath from her lungs and stealing her strength. She would have fallen to the floor if Castiel hadn't been holding her by the arm as waves of pain seared through her torso.
Then suddenly, the pain stopped, and Castiel released her. She stumbled back from him, but her hands flailed and managed to find purchase on the entryway into the living room as her other arm wrapped around her torso. For several minutes, she merely clung to the entryway and breathed as she kept her arm protectively wrapped around herself. Or at least she struggled to breathe.

Finally, she turned to the angel and demanded, "What the hell was that, Cas?"

"Added protection." He moved to stand against the other side of the wide entrance as he spoke, leaning back against the wood trim as he stared at her.

"Against what? Being able to breathe? I don't know if you realize it or not, Cas, but breathing is something we human-types generally like being able to do."

His frown deepened. "Yes. I am well aware that humans require being able to breathe to regulate the oxygen in their lungs and in their blood. It is a very important function."

She shook her head but managed to smile a little as she again asked him, "Protection against what?"

"Other angels. I carved sigils on your ribs to hide you from any angel. It will hide you more absolutely than the charms of your bracelet, though they still well protect you from other kinds of harm."

Tabitha looked down at herself, tenderly touching one of her ribs as if she could feel the sigils. Her ribs didn't quite hurt anymore, but still felt slightly...warm. "Okaayy," she slowly told him. "Thanks. I guess." But she wondered. "Why is Zachariah curious though? I haven't even met him. I just heard about him after he sent Sam and Dean into that little bizzaro world. I only heard about him after they woke up and told me about their little trip. He didn't even bother sending me on that field trip."

"Not for lack of trying," Castiel informed her. "He couldn't send you. But he did try. And now he's asking a lot of questions about you. I told him I had placed sigils of protection upon you after you had been attacked several times by demons on Lilith's orders." She opened her mouth to question his surprising lie, but he continued with a pointed look. "And now I have. The sigils I placed shouldn't be able to keep him from using many angel powers on you—such as sending you into another reality, but hopefully they will be enough that he'll stop looking into you. There are too many things that you are able to do now that other angels can't know about."

She swallowed. "The stuff I can do because of the mark that demon started putting on me?" When he nodded, she voiced her own fearful theory. "I've been thinking about it a lot the past months, and I think there was demon blood in it," she whispered as she looked away. "It would explain why I've been able to do some of those things, like moving stuff with my mind."

"Perhaps," he agreed, his tone grim. "Have you still been using your mind to—"

Shaking her head, she cut him off. "No. I'm half-terrified to even try."

He nodded once with a satisfied look. "It might be for the best."

Tabitha stared across the wide entryway into Chuck's living room at the silent angel. Finally, she had to ask, "Why are you going to such lengths to help me so much? The things you're doing…the trouble you've gone to…I just don't get it. You've made it very clear that you have to follow orders, and then you turn right around and do something that contradicts that. Why? Why not help Dean? He's the one you say has to stop the apocalypse. So why allow them to force him into torturing Alastair and nearly breaking him in the process?"

"But he didn't break," Castiel reminded her. "And I do everything in my power to protect my
charges."

"But you couldn't keep from almost breaking Dean or letting him get wailed on, and you can't help Sam now?"

He didn't answer, and silence filled the space between them once more.

"Why did you want me to stay here?" she finally asked.

"It's safer here," he maintained, moving away from the entryway and wandering around the room, picking up a book here, some scattered pages there, and pausing to look at them before setting them down. He finally continued, though he still didn't look at her. "Lilith is out there, and so you would be safer here. Prophets are protected by the fiercest archangels. No harm can come to you while you are near the prophet, for it might harm the prophet as well."

Castiel suddenly stopped wandering around the room, circling back to where she was standing, his arms gripped behind his back once more. "I am doing my best to help…and to protect you. There is nothing fiercer than an archangel protecting his prophet. He will smite any demon or other danger that threatens the prophet. Remember that."

With his final warning, he disappeared.

Tabitha stood silently trying to decipher his last words. Somehow, she had the feeling that it meant more than it seemed—that it was some kind of message—but she couldn't figure out what.

Eventually, she moved over to Chuck's computer, reading through the pages he'd printed off, and then breaking into his computer to read what he hadn't printed yet. But she wasn't having much luck in finding anything useful about stopping Lilith from finding Sam.

"What are you still doing here?" Chuck demanded in surprise as he came back down the stairs.

"I was just about to get you," she told him. "You and I…we're gonna talk."

Dean stormed into Chuck's house, surprising both Tabitha and the frustrated author. She'd been grilling him for nearly an hour, and had resorted to asking him to try inducing a vision. But they hadn't had much success.

"What are you doing here?" Chuck demanded from where he sat on the couch, a blanket wrapped around him. "I didn't write this. I didn't write any of this."

"Why aren't you getting out of town with Sam," Tabitha demanded.

"I tried, he won't go," Dean answered her in clipped tones, crossing the room to grab the drink from Chuck's hand and then manhandling him through his house, telling him. "Come on. I need you to come with me."

"What? Where?" Chuck fearfully asked.

"To the motel where Sam is," Dean explained.

Tabitha set down the glass she'd been sipping whiskey from, jumping up to follow her brother as she questioned him, "What? Why?"

Chuck paused and told Dean in confusion, "That's where Lilith is."
"Yeah, exactly. I need you to stop her."

"Are you insane? Lilith?" Chuck angrily demanded.

Tabitha cautiously added. "He's right, Dean. This guy is just a writer. How's he gonna help?"

Chuck continued, "I know what she's capable of, Dean—I wrote her."

Dean ignored his sister for the moment, telling Chuck, "All right, listen to me. You have an archangel tethered to you, okay? All you got to do is show up and boom!—Lilith gets smoked."

Chuck stuttered in protest. "But I-I-I-I-I haven't seen that yet. The story—"

Feeling like a dunce, Tabitha shook her head and grimaced, quietly exclaiming, "You're an idiot, Tabitha." Because Castiel's strange warnings about an archangel protecting Chuck finally made sense. He had actually been trying to help her. She just hadn't gotten it.

Dean paused to give her a searching look, but turned back to Chuck, pleading with him. "Chuck, you're the only shot that I've got left."

"But…I'm just a writer," Chuck fearfully fell back on.

Dean shouted, "This isn't a story anymore, man. This is real! And you're in it! Now, I need you to get off your ass and fight."

Tabitha placed a bolstering hand on Chuck's shoulder. "You don't even really have to fight, Chuck. Just come with us."

Chuck seemed to gather himself up a bit, and stepped past Dean.

"Come on, Chuck," he encouraged him.

But then Chuck turned back to face them as he grabbed his liquid courage again. "No friggin' way."

Dean let out a resigned sigh. "Okay, well, then, how about this—I've got a gun in my pocket, and if you don't come with me, I'll blow your brains out." Tabitha cringed a little, looking around the room in case an archangel might suddenly appear at the hint of threat.

Chuck shuffled as he held his drink a little closer. "I thought you said I was protected by an archangel."

"Well," Dean began, "interesting exercise. Let's see who the quicker draw is."

Chuck continued to stare at them, so Tabitha stepped between them, slowly pulling her Glock from the small of her back as she told the author, "Look, Chuck, I have no intention of truly hurting you, but if this can protect my little brother, then you're coming with us. And either you can walk out of your house like a man on your own two feet, or I can knock you over the head and carry you out like the sniveling drunk you seem to be trying too damned hard to become. So which is it? 'Cause I'm down with either choice when it comes to protecting my brothers, and you know it."

"You're sure I have an archangel protecting me?" he thickly swallowed.

"Cas said so himself," Dean assured him.

Tabitha glanced at her brother, somehow surprised that Castiel had given her brother the same piece of information. Surprised…but pleased as well, because Dean had put it together when she hadn't.
"I'll go with you," Chuck meekly decided.

"Good choice, Chuck," Tabitha told him, still not putting her Glock away in case he changed his mind. "Let's go," she directed, gesturing towards his door.

Dean kicked down the door to their motel room—whose sign was partially burned out and now read "The Red Motel"—and Dean, Tabitha, and Chuck ran into the room to see a pretty blonde woman—Lilith—straddling Sam, Ruby's knife in her hand.

It was a step down from what Tabitha had uncharitably feared, but her brother was in no less danger.

Chuck stepped forward and held warding hands towards the demon as he unsteadily told her, "I am the prophet Chuck!"

Lilith leaned away from Sam, a look of real fear on her face as she exclaimed, "You've got to be joking."

As though it was a signal, the walls around the motel room began to shake and Tabitha could feel a swelling of power that she had associated with angels, but the strength unlike anything she had felt yet. *Castiel wasn't kidding about these guys.*

"Oh, this is no joke," Dean told her over the rising noise. "See, Chuck here's got an archangel on his shoulder."

Things around the room began to fall over and off the wall as a light built outside, spilling into their room as Lilith stalked closer to them.

"You've got about 10 seconds," Dean continued warning, "before this room is full of wrath and you're a piece of charcoal. You sure you want to tangle with that?"

Lilith threw a look over her shoulder at Sam, and then looked forward at Tabitha, warning her, "This isn't over. I'll be back for the two of you." She threw back her head and disappeared in a swirl of black smoke, the woman falling to the floor as the power and noise around them immediately stopped.

Tabitha stepped around her shocked older brother and Chuck, walking to the bed and asking her panting younger brother, "You okay, Sammy?"

He nodded but didn't seem to trust himself to speak.

"You asked me to come?"

Tabitha whirled around to face the angel that had so suddenly appeared behind her. "Even in dreams, you manage to sneak up on me and scare the holy hell out of me."

"You asked for me," he reminded.

She shuffled her feet. "I wasn't sure how these sigils worked, if you'd still be able to answer me or come to me in a dream. Heck, I wasn't even sure if I'd be able to call out to you in a dream like this, regardless of the sigils."

He waited, but she wasn't surprised by his silence. She'd obviously gotten her answers since he'd appeared. Sigils or not, she'd somehow made sure he would hear her.
She came across the room to sit on the foot of the bed near the window Castiel was looking out.

"Why is my dream here in the Toreador Motel? I fell asleep in the back seat of the Impala, and it's not like this place holds any special meaning to me. Kinda the opposite."

Castiel paused to look back at her over his shoulder, and then moved to sit at the small table near the window, his hands folded loosely on the surface of the cheap imitation wood grain. "I cannot begin to fathom the intricacies of the human mind and their dreams. Perhaps you dream of it simply because it is where you last were."

"Angels don't dream, do they?" she asked, though she was nearly certain of the answer. She'd never seen Castiel sleep.

"Angels have no need for sleep, and therefore do not dream."

She made a soft, regretful noise. "I think that's sad. I may have a lot of bad dreams, but I also get to see places and people in my dreams that I'll never get to see again when I'm awake. And there's a lot of things I can only do in my dreams." As she spoke, she moved from the bed to take the seat across from Castiel, leaning back in the chair as she gazed out the window as he had been.

In the unfathomable way of dreams, it wasn't the sight of the parking lot beyond the glass, but instead a scene that seemed perfectly natural in the unnatural ways of dreams. Beyond the glass spread the expanse of Bobby's salvage yard on a warm summer day. Her teenage self stood with a bit younger version of Bobby as the hunter once more demonstrated the art of knife throwing, trying to reposition the stance and grip of her teenage counterpart. Tabitha watched as her younger image tried and failed to throw the blade at the chipboard target like Bobby had shown. She even smiled at the sight of her younger self growling and stomping her feet in anger when she couldn't immediately do what Bobby had.

"I'd forgotten what a pain in the butt I could be to teach. I've always been a bit impatient, but Bobby really was a saint to put up with me so well like he always did," she commented.

Castiel didn't speak, but glanced out the window as well before turning back to her. "Did you request my presence to discuss the peculiarities of human dreams?"

She frowned slightly, but admitted, "No. I didn't." After shifting a bit in her seat, she finally leaned forward to brace her forearms on the table surface. "You helped us with Sam."

Unlike her, Castiel didn't move or shift. Even in dreams, he didn't act as a human would. He answered simply, "I only explained the nature of archangels."

Not arguing with him or pointing out what they both knew he'd done, she leaned forward to gently pull one of his hand into hers, simply telling him, "Thank you."

His hand turned under hers, lying on the table palm up as he lightly returned her grip. But he remained silent.

"You've been there in my dreams the past three and a half months, haven't you?" she quietly inquired.

Castiel didn't move or answer, but she didn't need him to. Having him next to her in her current dream made her finally recognize his familiar presence, and made her realize he'd been there all along, watching her from the shadows of her dreams, and disappearing when she was about to notice him.
"Why?" she wondered.

Without looking at her, the angel admitted in a quiet voice, "You told me to stay away, but I found myself needing to return—to check on you. I thought you might not notice my presence if I hid myself in your dreams, but you have dreamt so rarely in the past months. And even in dreams you seem to quickly sense me."

She nodded once. "I think a part of me always knew you were there. And that's why I didn't want to sleep. I wasn't sure if I was ready to see you even in dreams."

They sat in a comfortable silence for several minutes before it was broken, strangely, by the angel.

"You aren't angry with me now?" he curiously asked.

Tabitha glanced back out the window. "I think memories like that—" she started as she tipped her head towards the scene of her throwing her hands theatrically in the air and grumbling at Bobby while stomping around, "—are good reminders that I'm sometimes quick to anger. I've mellowed a little with age I'd like to think, but the truth is it's still quick to come out when I'm protecting the things I care about, like my brothers. I'm not saying I condone what you made Dean do, but I guess I can't expect you to have the same protective drive for them that I do. And I've got to accept that you're an angel and you've got responsibilities and orders that I can't understand and won't always like. But I guess that doesn't mean you won't come through for me—and my brothers—when you can. And I do appreciate that."

Castiel looked briefly at their entwined hands as he told her, "I'm glad you're no longer angry with me."

She sighed, not wanting him to think things would go back exactly as they'd been or that a part of her wasn't still furious at what had been asked of her brother. "I'm not saying that, Cas. But the blinders are off now. I know that I can't hold you to the same standards as a human. You're an angel, as you're so quick to remind me. You'll follow your orders and make the choices you have to…and so will I. But I can't deny that you're there in my heart now. You've carved out a little place…and I'm not ready to give up our friendship. If this is going to be like it was between us…or at least something like it was…we're both going to have to accept the choices the other makes even when we don't like them. Especially when we don't like them. But, Cas, my brothers will come first, so don't ask me to choose between you and them."

He was still turned slightly away as he gazed out the window, but he nodded in answer. She wondered what he was thinking, but he remained silent, leaving her to ponder it to herself.

The silence stretched on again until Tabitha spoke once more, her eyes gazing out the window just as his were. "Will you at least promise to warn me if something big or potentially dangerous is happening or about to happen concerning my brothers?"

"I can't promise that." His face was still turned away, but there was something dark and foreboding in his words.

She sighed at his refusal, but reluctantly nodded. "Well…I guess I have more respect for you not making a promise you can't keep than if you took the temptation to just lie to me instead."

"I will tell you what I'm able to," he finally promised.

They continued sitting across the small table from each other, neither looking at the other, and only their two hands clasped between them. They watched the scene in Bobby's salvage yard unfold.
Bobby's patience with a frustrated teenage-Tabitha as she slowly learned the movements he was showing her, and finally throwing a blade so that it nearly stuck in the wooden target.

"I finally started getting this lesson the next day," Tabitha absently explained. "It was too bad I couldn't have kept at it this first day though. I almost had it. But then a storm came in, and we had to stop."

Tabitha and Castiel continued to sit at the small table as they observed storm clouds roll in. The sky turned dark, intermittently illuminated by steaks of lightning as thunder shook the motel around them.

But they remained seated across from each other, silently observing as the thunderclouds drew closer, hands gripped between them as they watched the coming storm.

Tabitha wondered if she was now making the right choice when she'd sworn to stay away from the angel before, but she knew only that something in her was changing, and that she didn't want to turn away from Castiel now.

But maybe the coming storm would change her mind.

Or maybe it would only draw her deeper.

"Danger is coming," he whispered, his grip tightening on her hand.

Her answer was a simple nod. She could see the dark abyss of clouds rolling in as they sat and watched.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone know what alias Tabitha used this time? She used Annie Mae Bullock, anyone know who that is?

This was definitely an interesting portion to write. I think my head hurt, writing about Dean sitting in a Laundromat and reading about himself, sitting in a Laundromat reading about himself…oy! My head hurts trying to keep it straight!

Also, fair warning, there's been a lot of feels as they say so far in this story, and there's more coming. But no one said the apocalypse starting was going to be a joyride!

Thanks so much for the kudos, and be sure to leave your lovely reviews. We're coming into the homestretch on this story.

If you've liked the story so far, let me know! Or if you haven't liked something, let me know that, too! :)


Caught Up in the Rapture

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The moisture from Sam's shower was steaming up the mirror as Tabitha braced her leg over the sink just outside the bathroom to shave her legs. She didn't even want to think about how hot he had to have the water turned up to be creating so much steam that it was fogging the mirror even through the closed bathroom door. It might have been fun to lecture him about how bad the hot water was for his skin, but she wasn't sure any of them were ready for teasing. Not after giving a hunter's funeral to a brother they hadn't even known existed a week before.

Tabitha herself wasn't sure what to think about their brother Adam. In her heart, she thought that he was probably better off having never gotten into the mess they'd spent their lives in—and at least now, he never would. She wasn't sure if it was morbid that she sort of envied that her little brother was dead and didn't have the worries she and her other brothers still did. But she guessed that it probably was.

Adam was in a better place. That's what she kept telling herself.

She hoped it was a better place. Though she was beginning to have some doubts about Heaven.

Truthfully, she really envied the life that Adam had gotten to live. It was one she and her other brothers had never been granted. Much as their father had said he wanted her out of the life, he'd been one of the first and most frequent of hunters calling to use her for her new FBI connections when he thought it might help him out in some way.

Adam had at least lived his whole life thinking the world was what it showed on the surface. Not knowing what really lurked beneath the glossy veneer of life. Until his final moments anyway. But the Winchester curse still found him, and he had died bloody and brutal.

At least he hadn't lived in fear of the end that found him.

Wasn't it better to live never knowing what kind of end was coming for you?

Tabitha paused as she rinsed off her razor in the running water of the sink, wiping away the condensation on the mirror to look herself in the eye. The eyes that looked back at her were cold and hollowed by dark circles, holding no illusion in them. Those eyes knew that the end waiting for her and her remaining brothers was going to be brutal and bloody. She saw no other end for them. The only question was when.

She frowned and turned back to the remaining foam on her leg, twisting a bit to reach the side of her calf. It was no use dwelling on what awaited them or when. First, they needed to do their part to stop the apocalypse from coming. No sense worrying about some monster tearing them to shreds if the apocalypse wiped out the world first. They needed to worry about one thing at—

The door swung open, smacking into Tabitha's elbow.

"Dammit," she growled as her razor slipped and sliced into the thin skin over her anklebone, blood immediately trickling down to her foot.

"Sorry, Tabby," Sam hissed as he pulled a t-shirt over his head, leaning towards the sink as Tabitha hopped a little and twisted to keep the blood dripping into the porcelain bowl.
Tabitha glared up into the mirror at her brother leaning over her shoulder to assess the cut. "Could you be a little careful in your lumbering, Bigfoot?"

Instead of returning the glare for her comment, Sam seemed transfixed by the cut, leaning closer over her shoulder with a strange look on his face. When his eyes widened and his nostrils flared, Tabitha threw an elbow nervously into his stomach and pointedly cleared her throat. "Ya wanna back off there, Sasquatch? I'm kinda bleeding all over here and I don't need your help with that."

Sam shook himself and stepped back, his voice suddenly breaking as he told her, "Sure…sure. Sorry about that." He reached out and fumbled to grab one of the single ply, sandpaper-esque tissues from the box in the wall near the sink, handing it to her. "Here. Do you need a band-aide?" His throat worked almost nervously as he swallowed and stepped back further from her.

"Sure," Tabitha absently replied, wondering at his obvious discomfort. It wasn't as if her brothers were squeamish at the sight of a little blood, even if those annoying little cuts over a woman's ankle did bleed like the dickens.

As he crossed the room to where his bag was, Tabitha's eyes caught on the sight of Dean still sleeping. She had almost dismissed the sight when she realized something tickled her attention as she looked at him. Almost as if she could nearly hear or sense something going on at the corner of her field of vision, but couldn't quite see it.

But as she focused on him, he suddenly sat up from his bed with a loud gasp.

His sudden movement startled her, and Tabitha dropped her razor and jumped a little. Even Sam jumped some as he walked back to Tabitha, handing her a band-aide without looking at her.

"Morning," he laconically told Dean.

"'Bout gave me a heart attack," Tabitha grumbled, dabbing at her leg and smoothing the band-aide over the cut.

Dean stared at her for a moment. "Why do you have your leg in the sink?"

Returning to her task, Tabitha told him, "Sam was bugging me that he wanted a turn in the shower, so I decided to shave my legs out here so he could."

Dean shook his head and rubbed at his forehead. "Whatever. We have to go. We need to go meet Cas somewhere."

Tabitha was just finishing and cupping water in her hands to rinse off her leg as Dean spoke, startling her again so that she nearly spilled the water from her hands. Steadying herself, she managed to calmly ask, "What do you mean? What's this about the angel?"

Her older brother was already out of bed, hurriedly grabbing at his scattered clothes to get dressed. "Cas showed up in my dream. Told me he couldn't talk to me there because someone could be listening or something, and told me to meet him at some address. So we need to make tracks and find out what's going on."

"So we're just gonna drop what we're doing and jump to this angel's bidding?" Sam incredulously asked. "'Cause that's worked out so well for us so far."

Dean didn't have time to reply to Sam before Tabitha demanded, "He told you this in your dream? How is that even possible?" But she realized that was what she'd sensed when she looked at Dean. She'd heard the angel before when he'd talked to Dean in his sleep and couldn't understand why she
hadn't heard him now.

Her brother gave her a strange glance as he paused to look up at her. "I've told you he's angel-stalked me in my dreams before. Why are you acting so surprised? I thought he'd angel-stalked you once in a dream, too. During that Anna business. What's so surprising?"

Realizing her error—and that Dean didn't know the extent to which she could hear angels—Tabitha sputtered for a moment before she regained her composure, grabbing a towel to dry her legs as she shrugged and replied, "I'm just surprised that he came to you in a dream since I can hear him when he talks to me is all."

Dean yanked at the zipper to close his bag, staring at her with narrowed eyes. "I thought you said that bracelet of Mom's kept him from being able to talk to you like that. That you couldn't hear any angels when you were wearing it."

Tabitha glanced down at the charm bracelet. "Right," she laughed, trying not to sound forced. "I guess I forgot. That must be the reason. Not sure where my mind's at."

Her brother softened a little, seeming to buy her excuses. "Maybe it would help if you got more sleep. You still haven't been sleeping much these past months."

Sam quickly chimed in. "You didn't sleep at all as we drove last night, and you were awake before me this morning. Didn't look like you'd slept even for a minute."

"I'm fine," Tabitha tersely insisted, grabbing some clothes to go change into in the bathroom.

Neither of her brothers pushed her, but she knew they were right. She still wasn't getting much sleep, and what little she did get was only after she was so exhausted that neither she nor all the caffeine she'd been drinking could keep her eyes open.

Dark dreams still haunted her sleep, and worries haunted her waking moments. The fact that Castiel had gone to Dean about some kind of trouble only added to her worries. She tried to tell herself that he'd gone into Dean's dream because she hadn't been sleeping last night, but she was pretty sure that the angel could still reach her with a bit of concentration, even over the protection of her bracelet.

She paused before pulling a clean t-shirt on, her fingers brushing against her ribs. Perhaps that was the difference, Castiel had told her he'd given her added protection sigils carved into her ribs. Could that be the answer?

But it only gave her more questions. He'd given her the sigils in her ribs as added protection against something. Then disappeared again for the past few weeks since she'd seen him in her last dream. Now he came to Dean instead of her about some kind of trouble.

And she had to wonder if it was all related.

The address Castiel had given Dean in his dream seemed to lead to a dark, abandoned warehouse—a setting that was apparently a favorite for the angel.

"What'd he say, Dean?" Sam demanded as the three walked through the warehouse, their flashlights sweeping the area as they looked for the errant angel. "What was so important?"

"If I knew, would I be here?" Dean replied in a tired voice.

Tabitha held her tongue. She had all the same questions and worries as her brothers, but there was a
sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. One that told her something was very wrong.

They climbed a set of stairs to the second level of the warehouse, and were treated to a sight that looked more appropriate to a battlefield than an old warehouse. Lights flickered and electricity crackled in the room, but the sight of utter destruction held Tabitha’s eyes.

"What the hell?" Dean muttered as they cautiously spread out into that field of destruction.

"Looks like a bomb went off," Sam commented.

Tabitha jumped as loose electrical wires danced and sparked near her, but continued cautiously looking around, calling out for the angel softly in her mind.

Huge metal shelving units were twisted and overturned, and Tabitha's skin prickled at the leftover sensation of power crawling over her skin. She'd never felt anything quite like it, but it felt similar to the power she'd come to associate with Castiel.

"There was a fight here," she whispered to her brothers.

"Between who?" Sam asked her.

Dean tapped her on the shoulder as she paused to looking at a heap of rubble, drawing her attention across the room. "Check it out," he told her and Sam.

A large sigil similar to the one they'd seen Anna draw had been hurriedly painted in blood on the concrete wall.

"Look familiar?" Dean asked them.

"Yeah, it does," Sam agreed.

"Anna used something like that to wish the angels back to the cornfield," Dean continued.

"Which means something big and bad happened here," Tabitha whispered.

Sam doubtfully asked, "So, what? Cas was fighting angels?"

"I don't know," Dean answered.

But Tabitha nodded. "I think that's exactly what happened," she replied, fear creeping into her voice as she remembered his warnings. He'd told her that he—and she—could be punished if it was discovered what they'd done. But she'd started to lose the fear of that danger. They'd only begun to even tentatively rebuild their friendship. She'd still barely even seen or spoken to the angel in the past four months. Had another angel discovered what they had been doing all those months ago? Was this her fault?

She heard a soft inhalation, and twisted to look for the sound. Spotting the angel unmoving on the ground, she ran to his side, dropping to her knees as she tentatively touched his cheeks and slid shaking fingers to check his neck, finding warmth and pulse.

"Cas? Cas! Are you all right," she demanded in a tremulous voice, hearing her brothers run towards her at her words.

Her hands unsteadily shook him, finally rousing him as he jerked awake. He sat up and backed away from her as he fearfully looked around, demanding, "What's—what's going on?"
"It's okay, Cas. You're okay," Tabitha tried to reassure him, breathing a relieved sigh as she grabbed his hand and helped him to his feet.

He clamored ungainly to his feet, jerking his hand away from her in stiff movements as he patted his chest and cast jerky glances all around him.

"Cas, you okay?" Sam asked as her brothers reached out, trying to steady him.

Tabitha reached out for his hand again, heedless of her brothers beside her as she tried to calm the seemingly frightened angel. "You're okay, Cas. We're here now, we'll deal with whatever is going on—" her words trailed off as she suddenly dropped her gaze down to look at the hand trembling in hers. Castiel never responded physically like a human did. Never even shuffled or squirmed like a normal person did. He was always still unless his movements were deliberate.

She concentrated more on the warm hand, and realized there wasn't an ounce of power vibrating beneath his skin. Something that had been so subtle, that she'd never noticed it until the moment it was gone.

Jerking her hand away, she fell back a step as she whispered in horror, "You're not Castiel."

"Castiel?" he repeated in a strange voice, looking down at his dirty clothes and trench coat. "I'm not Castiel. It's me."

Sam looked startled from where he stood between his siblings, demanding, "Who's me?"

"Jimmy," the man responded as he looked around again.

Her hand pressed to her mouth as Tabitha fought back a sudden wave of nausea, remembering the first night Castiel had appeared in that barn. He'd told them then that he was in the vessel of a devout man, but she'd gotten so used to the angel, that she'd long since forgotten that he was borrowing some poor man's body.

Images flashed in her mind of the things she and Castiel had done, and she stumbled backwards another step as Sam reached out in surprise and tried to steady her. She pushed him away, taking staggering steps towards the wall until she could brace herself as a surge of dry heaves hit her. The things she and Castiel had done, all while a man—an unconsenting human—had been locked inside himself… She trembled as she tried to control her muscles and her suddenly rolling stomach. How could she have forgotten that there had been a human being trapped inside his body with the angel?

Had he known? Had he known the things she and Castiel had done?

Dean appeared at her shoulder then, pulling her hair back as she heaved once more, rubbing her back as he demanded in a voice that was gruff with the fear he was trying to hide, "Jesus, Tabby. What the hell is going on? What's wrong?"

She jerked his hands from her back, stepping away from the comfort she didn't deserve as she turned and leaned against the wall. Her body was still shaking as she told him, "I'm fine. Fine. It's nothing; just the leftover power in this place is a little overwhelming is all."

His eyes narrowed as he grabbed her by the shoulders. "You can feel the power leftover from some angel prizefight?"

She jerked an unsteady nod.

"We're talking about this later," he promised in a dark voice as he pulled her back over to the man—
to Jimmy.

Again, she shook out of her brother's hands, wrapping her arms around herself and keeping her eyes fixed on the ground at…Jimmy's feet. She couldn't help but feel…dirty. Like she'd…violated the poor man that had been housing Castiel. She very much doubted that he'd been compliant in their activities all those months ago.

"Where the hell is Castiel?" Dean demanded once he and Tabitha had stepped back over.

"He's gone."

Tabitha risked a glance up, seeing the man shaking his head as he looked at the three of them.

A few hours later, they had returned to their motel room, plus one vessel, and a bag of fast food that…Jimmy…was currently scarfing down.

"Mind slowing down," Dean drily told the man as the brothers sat across the small table from the former angel vessel. "You're gonna give me angina."

Jimmy made a blasé motion with his hands, reaching for his drink as he barely slowed his chewing to reply, "I'm hungry."

"When's the last time you ate?" Sam curiously asked.

"I don't know—months," Jimmy suddenly paused and looked up. "October, I think," he muttered, turning his attention back to his food.

Tabitha fought back a gasp as she stared across the motel room from where she'd perched on top of a tacky, pressed wood dresser—the furthest place she'd been able to isolate herself to without retreating into the bathroom and drawing undue attention to her unease. October had been shortly after FBI agent Tabitha Winchester had officially died, and her brothers had kept her quarantined until they were sure everything from that mess would blow over. It had been during that time when Castiel had shown up one night to spend time with her. And she'd gotten him to share some beer and pizza after she'd lamented not being able to go out and enjoy a decent beer during Oktoberfest.

She jerked her eyes away as Jimmy continued to focus on his food. But it did answer the question of whether or not he had been aware of anything while the angel had been controlling him. Like a human ridden by a demon, he seemed to have been at least partially aware. She shuddered to think how much else he'd been aware of.

Jimmy seemed to quickly dismiss whatever discomfort the moment of remembrance had brought, focusing again on his food and digging in with obvious relish.

"What the hell happened back there?" Sam finally asked as Jimmy continued his fast-paced eating. "It looked like an angel battle royal."

Jimmy shrugged. "All I remember is there was a flash of light, and I, uh…I woke up, and I was just, you know, like, me again," he rambled.

Despite the hollow pit that had formed in her stomach, Tabitha couldn't seem to stop herself from looking back up at Jimmy again and again. He made sounds of satisfaction and enjoyment as he ate. His body moved and twitched as he continually shifted in his seat and reached for the food laid out in front of him. Even his face was bright and animated by every emotion that flitted through him.
Everything about him—even his rambling—was so...human. And so completely unlike the angel she'd become so accustomed to seeing wearing that body. There was no mistaking them as anything but two completely different entities, and it only made her feel guiltier that she hadn't thought before about the man that should have been controlling that body.

"So, what—" Dean was asking, "Cas just ditched out of your meat suit?"

"I really don't know," Jimmy answered around a mouthful of food.

"You remember anything about being possessed? Anything at all?" Sam asked.

Tabitha cringed at both the question and her brother's phrasing, wondering what the hell was wrong with her that the last two...men...or beings...she'd slept with had been...controlling a body that didn't belong to them. She hadn't known with Casey, but she should have known better with the angel.

"Yeah, bits and pieces," Jimmy replied, and for a brief moment, Tabitha swore his gaze flicked up to hers. But he waved it away, continuing to eat and talk in his seemingly blasé and unconcerned manner. "I mean, angel inside of you—it's kind of like being chained to a comet."

"Well, that doesn't sound like much fun," Dean commented.

"Understatement," Jimmy agreed with a look of irony.

"Cas said he wanted to tell us something," Sam tried again. "Please tell me you remember that."

Jimmy shook his head. "Sorry."

Dean gave a frustrated look. "Come on. What do you know?"

A sudden look of concentration filled Jimmy's face. "My name is Jimmy Novak," he told them. "I'm from Pontiac, Illinois. And I have a family," he continued in a whisper.

As Jimmy continued his tale, Tabitha stood and retreated into the bathroom, propping the window open and digging out her stashed pack of cigarettes from her leather jacket as she continued listening to Jimmy's tale of wife...child...and perfect suburban life. And how his faith had been tested by an angel.

Dean appeared in the doorway of the bathroom as she was finishing her third cigarette. "What the hell are you doing in here smoking? What the hell is wrong with you tonight?"

She crushed the butt in the sink and waved her arms through the air, wafting the smoke out the window. "I'm sorry," she mumbled, not meeting Dean's eyes as she told him. "This whole thing is just freaking me out a little. I mean, had you even stopped to think about the guy Cas was...possessing for all those months since we met him?"

Her brother shook his head. "No. And I get that that's creepy, but it doesn't explain why you're smoking like a goddamned chimney in here. What the hell's going on with you?" He looked suspicious as he grabbed her by her shoulders and forced her to look back up at him. "This have something to do with you feeling whatever happened back there?"

"I guess," she at least partially-honestly answered.

"How long you been keeping that secret?" he demanded in a harsh whisper.
"I don't even know how to explain it," she defended, this time being completely honest. "I can sorta feel some kind of tingle of power when an angel does…angel stuff or whatever…but back there… that was some serious shit that went down, because it about made my skin crawl right off with just whatever power was lingering."

Dean stared at her for a moment before he jerked his chin over his shoulder. "Come on, we need to step outside with Sam and discuss this whole thing while…Jimmy finishes eating."

"At least I'm not the only one fumbling for how to refer to that guy," she told her brother as they left the bathroom and stepped out into the night air outside the motel.

Sam had been pacing in the parking lot, but immediately turned to face them. "So, what do we do?"

Dean gave their brother a startled look. "What do you mean? The guy's got a family. We buy him a bus ticket, send him home."

"I don't know about that," Sam cautiously replied. "Dean, he's the only lead we got."

"He doesn't know anything," Dean argued.

"Are you 100% about that?" Sam demanded.

"You think he's lying?" Dean asked.

They both turned to Tabitha looking for her to jump to the defense of one or the other of them. She slid onto the trunk of the Impala, pulling her feet up on the bumper and wondering to herself how much crap Dean would give her if she lit up again. They were outside after all.

"Don't look at me," she mumbled, her fingers tapping nervously against her knees. "We need to know what Castiel was trying to tell us…" When a satisfied look crossed Sam's face, she rushed to add, "…but…it ain't exactly fair to this guy…Jimmy…to hold him hostage either. Like Dean said, he's got a family."

"What is it you think you're gonna do, Sam? Go Guantánamo on the guy?"

"Maybe he doesn't even know what he knows," Sam tried again.

"Huh?" Dean and Tabitha uttered in unison.

"I say at least we get him to Bobby's. Maybe all he needs is—is hypnosis or a p-psychic, or, hell, maybe Cas will just drop back into him."

"I don't know man," Dean grumbled.

"Dean," Sam argued, "back there, that was angel-on-angel violence. Now, I don't know what's going on, but it's big, and we can't just let the only lead we've got just skip out." When Dean shook his head, Sam demanded, "What?"

"Remember when our job was helping people—like getting them back to their family?"

Sam huffed in answer. "You think I don't want to help him? I'm just being realistic. I mean, hell, we're doing him a favor."

"How?!

"Dean, if we want to question the guy, you can damn well bet the demons do, too."
Dean threw back his head and gave a frustrated groan.

"Back me up, Tabitha," Sam demanded.

"I really hate being pitted in the middle," she groaned to herself, and then continued before Sam could argue with her, "But...maybe Sam's right about this. We can't just let demons get a hold of him. And he's got a point; they would want to get a hold of him in a big bad way."

Dean shuffled his feet, his hands shoved in the pockets of his leather coat as he gave her an assessing look. "You think Sam's right about that scene back there—that it was angel-on-angel violence?"

Picking at the chipping nail polish on her fingernails to keep from meeting their eyes, she softly admitted, "Yeah. I think he's right. It felt like powerful angel...mojo or whatever."

"Can you reach Cas in any way?" he pressed. "Talk to him or whatever you do?"

She shook her head and admitted, "I've tried calling out to him several times. No answer. Whatever went down, he's not picking up the phone right now."

Dean began to pace again. "Any chance you can find out from that guy if there's anything else he might know? Or you got any FBI tricks up your sleeve, like hypnotizing the guy?"

Looking up, she answered, "I don't think I can be any help there, either. Hypnosis isn't exactly standard FBI training." And she wasn't so sure it was a good idea for her and Jimmy to sit around poking at his memory together. He might remember things she'd rather her brothers not know about.

"Then I guess it looks like we try to figure out a way to get the guy to Bobby's," Dean agreed in frustrated tones.

"Where the hell have you been?!” Sam angrily demanded from the doorway of their room as she jogged up to the motel.

She tugged her earbuds from her ears. "I went for a run. What the hell's your problem, Sammy?"

He tossed something at her, and Tabitha barely had time to grab the duffle bag he'd thrown at her before it hit her. She hadn't even realized he'd been holding her bag. The bag fell to the ground as she planted her hands on her hips. "You better start talking real fast, little brother, and begin with apologizing for yelling at me and throwing my stuff around."

Dean stepped around Sam, carrying his own bag as Sam stooped over to pick up his. The oldest Winchester threw a glare at the youngest sibling as he passed him, telling his sister, "Big tough prison guard here let little Jimmy McMook slip past him last night. So now we've got to go track him down."

Her older brother came to a sudden stop when he reached her. "You look like shit, Tabby," he bluntly told her.

"Thanks," she drawled with a sneer. "I'd have liked to have taken a shower, but since you guys already packed for me, I guess that's out."

"No. I'm serious, Tabitha. What the hell were you doing running last night anyway? You need to get some sleep. Those circles around your eyes make you look more like a dang raccoon than my little sister."
Self-consciously, she crossed her arms over her chest. "I couldn't sleep. Figured I'd go for a run," she told him, grabbing her bag from the ground and turning away as Sam waited impatiently at the Impala.

Her brother's hand darted out to catch her elbow, halting her retreat. "I'll throw the bullshit flag on that one, Tabitha. This not sleeping thing and running yourself into exhaustion has got to stop. You've lost weight, your skin looks pale and hollow, and honestly…you're starting to worry me, Tab."

She glanced back at her brother. He was only worried about her, she knew that, but she had too many worries on her own mind. "It's nothing. I just couldn't sleep last night, Dean. Sharing a room with my brothers is one thing, but sharing a room with three dudes is another. I was feeling a bit restless is all. Stop riding me." She jerked her chin towards Sam. "He's the one that said he'd watch Jimmy last night and then let him get away…ride his ass about that if you're feeling the need."

Dean dropped her arm in a huff, pushing past her to stride to the driver's side of the Impala. "Get in the car," he told her in clipped tones.

Sam shot her a glare when she reached the passenger's side. "You said you were just going for a quick jog and then you'd be right back. It's not my fault that you took off for the entire night and didn't help with watching the guy."

Tabitha paused to give Sam a glare, but as her brother stood beside her, he started leaning closer and closer, his nose twitching as he sniffed at her.

Pushing him away, she asked, "What the heck is wrong with you? Stay outta my personal space."

Sam straightened and pulled back from her. "Sorry. Y-you…uh…you know, j-just smell good is all."

Her eyebrows shot up in surprise. "I stink like sweat. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing," he irritably denied.

Opening the rear door, Tabitha took a page out of Dean's book, telling her younger brother, "Get in the car."

"Hey, guys."

The car swerved as Dean and Sam let out startled gasps in the front seat, and Tabitha jumped sideways in the backseat beside the angel that had suddenly appeared beside her.

"Jesus, Anna," she breathed, "little warning next time maybe?"

"Smooth," Anna commented as Dean corrected his course and barely kept the Impala between the lines.

"You ever try calling ahead," he growled.

"I like the element of surprise," she casually commented.

"Mission accomplished," Tabitha groaned as she leaned against the door, turning to look at the angel that had scooted into the middle of the bench seat.

Dean looked over his shoulder again, giving the angel a longer look as he salaciously told her, "You look terrific."
"Um…yeah," she slowly replied, glancing between the siblings. "Not the most appropriate time, Dean," she told him.

"Besides, I've heard enough about your sex life," Tabitha muttered behind her brother.

Anna dropped the small talk, immediately launching into the deep end. "You let Jimmy get away?"

After a surprised look over his shoulder, Dean jerked his thumb across at Sam. "Talk to Ginormo here."

Sam gave Dean an annoyed look, but didn't argue.

Her attention turned to the youngest Winchester, a strange look coming over Anna as she studied him. "Sam…" she trailed off after addressing him. "You seem…different," she finally said.

"Me? I don't know." He let out a forced laugh. "Haircut?"

"That's not what I'm talking about," she replied, leaning towards him.

Sam finally looked away, breaking the angel's attention on him and forcing her back to the current subject. She twisted to look at Tabitha. "So, what'd Jimmy tell you? He remember anything?"

Tabitha's brow furrowed at the angel focusing her attention on her instead of her brothers. "Why does it matter? What's happening?"

Anna paused, but finally told her, "It's Cas. He got sent back home. Well, more like dragged back."

"To Heaven?" Dean asked over his shoulder. "That's not a good thing?"

"No," Anna emphatically denied. "That's a very bad thing. Painfully, awfully bad. He must have seriously pissed someone off. Or done something very bad."

Anna looked across at Tabitha at the last sentence, and Tabitha swallowed thickly, wondering if it was possible that the Fallen angel knew about what had happened.

"Is Cas alright?" she asked in a small voice.

"I don't know," Anna confided, her own voice tight with fear. "This is very bad," she repeated, her eyes unfocused for a moment. But they focused again as she turned across to Tabitha. "What did he tell you? What was going on?"

Tabitha opened her mouth, but no words came out when she realized she didn't know what to say. Would admitting everything now help Castiel out, or only get them both into more trouble?

But Dean beat her to the punch, answering Anna's questions. "Cas said he had something to tell me—something important."

Anna looked surprised, her eyes darting back and forth between Tabitha and Dean. "Something he was going to tell Dean?" she asked. When Tabitha nodded in confirmation, Anna eagerly sat forward on the bench, asking him, "What?"

"I don't know," Dean answered.

"Does Jimmy know?"

Dean answered again, but didn't seem so certain of himself this time. "I don't think so."
"You don't think so? Whatever it is, it's huge," she told them. "You got to find out for sure."

Sam cut in. "That's why we're going after Jimmy."

She replied in reproach, "That's why you shouldn't have let him go in the first place. He's...probably dead already."

Anna was about to disappear, but Tabitha reached out to stop the angel, placing a hand on her arm. She concentrated and silently asked the angel, **Will Castiel be all right?**

The angel jerked beneath her hand, and stared at her as Tabitha heard her fearful answer, **I don't know. Cas seems to have been keeping a lot of secrets. You need to be careful.**

The angel disappeared before Tabitha could ask her more.

"Your family is pretty amazing," Tabitha told Jimmy as she joined him in leaning against the Impala.

Jimmy looked up from where he'd been staring at his feet, glancing across the deserted parking garage to where Sam had hotwired a car and was explaining to Jimmy's wife, Amelia, to shut the car off by pulling the wires apart.

At his confused look, she clarified, "They're both taking this pretty well. You showing up after being gone for a year, and then finding out that angels and demons, and all that crap is real. Getting attacked by a demon..." Tabitha paused to throw an admiring look at the slight-built blonde woman. "She had to have been scared out of her mind, but she just went after that demon like there was no tomorrow as she tried to protect her daughter—your daughter."

A small smile briefly crossed his face as he stared after his wife. "Ames was always the strong one," he confided in a whisper. He glanced back at Tabitha. "You and your brothers were right. I only brought them trouble."

"For what it's worth, it's not something any of us are happy about."

Silence lapsed.

"Will my family ever be safe? Will my daughter ever grow up to experience all the things she deserves?" Jimmy suddenly asked her.

Tabitha turned to give him a curious look.

He made a motion to encompass her and her brothers. "I get that none of you had a normal upbringing. That demons have been after all of you most of your lives. Is that what my family is damned to now?"

It would have been easy to lie to him. Just as they'd tried doing by not honestly telling him up front that he would never be able to stay with his family. Sam had been blunt in reeducating him, telling him he had to stay away from them or put a bullet in his head, but that hadn't meant her little brother was wrong in what he'd said. And she wouldn't lie to Jimmy, either.

"I don't know," she finally replied, glancing over to where his daughter waited by herself, standing a little ways apart from anyone else. "They're both tough, I can tell that much. But I can't tell you if they'll ever get the normal lives they deserve. None of you deserved what you've been drug into, but neither did my brothers and I. Yet, here we all are. You fold or play the hand you're dealt. But you can't change the rules to the game after it's been started."
He seemed to be absorbing what she told him. "My daughter deserves to have a normal life where
demons are no more than an abstract thought," he finally spoke.

She gave a little nod of agreement. "And I'd like nothing more than for her to have that life. But I
wish I'd grown up with a mother and father inside that white-picket-fence-life and my worst worries
being two annoying brothers pulling on my pigtails. I'd have given anything for that life to have been
the one I lived and not the one where I look back and wonder how my last two lovers have been a
demon and an angel, and why every man I could even think about caring for—my brothers included
—are either killed by supernatural means, or are at threat of it every day. I'd give anything for that
white-picket-dream. But since I'm never gonna get it, I'd give anything to see your little girl still have
it." A bitter laugh escaped. "I think I'd even make a deal with a crossroads demon or the Devil
himself to see her get it, just to know that it was actually still possible for someone to have that
dream."

Jimmy shifted uncomfortably beside her for a moment before speaking. "He thought about you a
lot."

She jerked in surprise at the topic change as she turned towards him.

"Castiel," Jimmy clarified. "Most of what he thought and did was a blur to me, nothing that's really
helpful to the questions you and your brothers have been asking, but what I do know is he thought
about you a lot."

Swallowing thickly, Tabitha asked, "About me? What about me?"

Jimmy shrugged. "I don't think he really knew. Or at least I didn't. He seemed confused a lot of the
time." He seemed to stare into space for a moment before he whispered, "Ames—Ames confused me
a lot in the beginning, too."

He pushed away from the car and started to walk away.

Tabitha reached out to stop him, but then jerked her hand back when he flinched at her touch. "I'm
sorry for everything," she told him in a heartfelt voice. "If I'd known you were… I never would
have…"

Jimmy jerked his head down once. "You didn't know. I can tell it's bothering you, but it's not your
fault that you didn't know. Whatever happened…it wasn't me. I share some of his memories because
I wasn't really there. I guess I'd just rather not think about it or dwell on it now. I love my wife. And you and the angel… That's your business, not mine."

He silently walked away from her, saying tearful goodbyes to his wife and daughter as Tabitha
watched, her heart going out to the guy. She and her brothers knew about getting dealt raw deals,
too. None of the hand that he'd been dealt was fair, but her heart was eased a little by his words.

What had happened between her and Castiel hadn't been about Jimmy, though she wouldn't quite
forgive herself for forgetting about him, even if Jimmy didn't seem to hold her any ill will for it. Still,
it was a silent car ride as the four of them drove away from Jimmy's wife and daughter.

Jimmy was the first to step out of the Impala and start towards the warehouse, but Tabitha slid across
the backseat to follow him, grabbing at his arm to stop him. "Wait up," she cautioned him.

"Demons have my family," he irritably reminded her.

"Just wait," she repeated.
Her brothers joined her beside the impatient and distraught former vessel. It had been hard to keep the man calm in the time since he'd gotten the call that demons were holding his wife and daughter captive, but Tabitha was doing her best to keep the man from rushing headlong into some kind of danger that would only get him and his family killed. It seemed like the least she could do for the man.

Dean stepped closer, telling Jimmy, "All right, they're expecting you to come alone. That's exactly what you're gonna do."

Tabitha whipped around to face her older brother. "What?!" she demanded. "I've been trying to keep him calm and tell him not to go racing recklessly into danger!"

Sam placatingly patted her shoulder. "It's okay, Tab. We'll work our way through the catwalks. We'll be right behind him."

Dean addressed Jimmy, "All you got to do is stay calm and stall. Let us do our job."

Jimmy twirled to face Dean. "You want me to stay calm?" he demanded. "This is my family we're talking about."

"Listen to me—" Dean continued, unfazed by Jimmy's anger. "This will work. You understand? Nobody's gonna get hurt."

"Yeah, whatever," Jimmy distractedly told them. He turned to start towards the warehouse, telling them, "Give me a minute, okay?"

Tabitha waited until he was out of earshot before turning on her brothers. "This is ridiculous. You know there's no way that this place isn't crawling with demons. And they had to know that we'd come with him, Dean. There's no way this isn't a trap."

Her older brother nodded with a grim look. "Yeah. I know. That's why I have a plan."

He started towards the warehouse, leaving Sam and Tabitha to follow in his wake.

"Why is it Dean saying that he has a plan doesn't fill me with any kind of comfort?" Tabitha asked her younger brother as they followed after Dean.

"Because you remember as well as I do how well he's plans usually work out for us," Sam glibly retorted.

"Nice plan, Dean," Sam told their brother as demons hauled them into the warehouse.

"Yeah, well, nobody bats a thousand," he replied.

Tabitha snorted. "I'd settle for a single base hit at the moment."

The demon possessing Jimmy's wife, Amelia, stopped in front of them. "You got the knife?" she asked her minions.

The female restraining Sam held Ruby's knife up in the air.

"And you know what's funny?" Amelia asked.

"You wearing a soccer mom," Dean tried to joke.
"Is I was actually bummed to get this detail," Amelia continued without pausing at Dean's joke. "Picking up an empty vessel? Sort of like a milk run. Now look who landed in my lap."

"Yeah, well...you got us, okay?" Sam told her. "Let these people go."

"Oh, Sam. It's easy to act chivalrous when your Wonder Girl powers aren't working, huh?" Amelia taunted.

Both Dean and Tabitha turned confused looks on their younger brother, but kept silent.

"Now for the punch line—" Amelia continued, pointing a gun at Sam, "—everybody dies."

But instead of firing at any of the Winchesters, the demon turned and fired at Jimmy, the bullet catching him in the abdomen as he stumbled to his knees.

Amelia turned around, telling one of her minions, "Waste little Orphan Annie."

The Winchesters watched as the demon walked around Jimmy on the floor and approached Claire where she was motionless and tied up in a chair.

Tabitha and her brothers struggled against the demons holding them, but couldn't break free.

"For the record," Tabitha huffed as she continued to helplessly watch, "next time, I'm picking the plan."

But before the demon could smash down the metal bar he'd raised over his head to slam into the girl, she woke, and yanked her hand free of its bindings, pressing the suddenly glowing palm against the forehead of the demon as light spilled from his mouth and eyes, destroying it.

Tabitha and her brothers jumped at the opportunity, each turning on their captors and fighting the demons in their moment of confusion.

She lost sight of her brothers, but feared they weren't faring much better than she was as Tabitha lost ground against the demon. Before she could break free, the demon overpowered her, lifting her with a hand wrapped around her throat and shoving her against the wall as his grip tightened. Helplessly, her feet dangled above the ground, kicking uselessly at the demon as her vision darkened.

Then, a bright flash burst through her darkened vision, and she fell to her knees, gasping in greedy gulps of air.

When she looked up, it was to see Dean just sitting up from the floor while Claire pulled a demon away from her brother. Her movements were unsteady, but she managed to make it over to her brother, grabbing his shoulder. "Are you all right?" she squeaked through her sore throat.

He nodded, and they both looked up at the girl staring strangely down at them.

Regardless of the vessel, Tabitha knew the feel of that angel. "Castiel," she whispered.

But Castiel didn't respond to her, turning instead to look at Sam.

Dean scrambled to his feet, pulling his sister up with him as they stared in horror at their younger brother crouched over the remaining demon, Ruby's knife in his hand. When he turned to face them, there was blood smeared around his mouth from the demon's neck.

"Sweet Jesus," Tabitha muttered in shock.
Sam turned away from them, slamming Ruby's knife into the heart of the prone demon.

When he stood, he threw his hand out towards them, and Dean and Tabitha jumped away in surprise, turning to see Amelia running at them from behind. But where Sam had been unable to take on the demons before, he suddenly had no troubles yanking the demon out of Amelia now.

The woman fell to her knees as the demon left her, Dean rushing to her side to steady her.

Tabitha stared between her brothers momentarily, but then kept her attention focused on Claire approaching Jimmy as she crouched near the mortally wounded man.

"Of course we keep our promises," Castiel told Jimmy. "Of course you have our gratitude. You served us well. Your work is done. It's time to go home now—your real home. You'll rest forever in the fields of The Lord."

"No," Jimmy groaned.

"Rest now, Jimmy."

"No," he continued, his voice pained, "Claire."

"She's with me now. She's chosen. It's in her blood, as it was in yours."

"Please, Castiel. I mean, just—just take me. Take me, please."

Castiel hesitated, and Tabitha sprinted closer, kneeling and grabbing Jimmy's shaking hand as he lay on the ground, begging the angel to spare his daughter.

Jimmy's hand tightened around Tabitha's as he turned to stare up at her. "Please," he brokenly begged as he stared up into her face. "You owe me this at least."

She closed her eyes at his broken sob, knowing he was asking her to make Castiel see reason.

"You know what you're asking for?" she hesitantly asked Jimmy.

He jerked a nod. "My daughter deserves a chance at life."

An unlikely understanding settled between them. And their prior unease disappeared as they both fell side-by-side in their agreement of what they wanted for the girl, no matter the cost.

"You can't do this, Cas," she pleaded with the angel, feeling Jimmy's hand tighten desperately around hers as she looked up to meet the angel's flat stare. "It isn't right. You can't keep his daughter. She's just a child. It's not fair to her. Let her go."

Castiel's eyes finally flicked up to Tabitha's, startling her to see the familiar cool emotions in the eyes of a child. "I don't answer to you," Castiel coldly told her.

Tabitha leaned forward over Jimmy, heatedly whispering to Castiel, "I'm not asking you to answer to me, I'm asking you to do what's right. To answer to decency." She looked up to see her brothers and Amelia approaching, and lowered her voice further as she begged Castiel, "If there was ever an ounce of caring in your heart for me, then please leave this girl alone. It isn't fair to her." She hated the thought of this man being stuck inside his body again, but she hated the thought of it happening to the girl even more. Jimmy at least knew what he was volunteering for. And they both agreed to the costs of protecting his daughter.

Castiel stared at her for a tense moment, and then turned back to Jimmy. "I want to make sure you
understand. You won't die...or age. If this last year was painful for you, picture a hundred—a thousand more like it."

Jimmy reached up with his other hand to grip Castiel. "Doesn't matter," he panted as blood began to trickle from his mouth. "You take me. Just take me."

"As you wish."

Castiel gripped Jimmy's face as a white light began to blind Tabitha. She threw her arm in front of her face to shield her eyes from the light as power swelled all around her.

The power suddenly subsided, and the hand she had been gripping jerked away from her fingers. She turned to watch Castiel—now returned to Jimmy's body—stand and step away as Claire fell panting to her knees.

Tabitha reached out to steady the girl, and was surprised when she launched herself into Tabitha's arms. As the girl clung to her, Tabitha could hear her sobbing and thanking her.

She released the girl when Amelia dropped to her knees beside her, relinquishing the girl to her mother as Amelia sobbed and wrapped her daughter in her arms.

"Cas, hold up," Dean told the angel when he started past the boys. Tabitha climbed unsteadily to her feet, walking to her brothers as Dean continued. "What were you gonna tell me?"

Castiel stared at Dean, but glanced at Tabitha as well as he bitterly told them, "I learned my lesson while I was away, Dean. I serve Heaven. I don't serve man."

Tabitha approached behind her brother, reaching out to steady herself by clutching Dean's shoulder as the angel's eyes discreetly looked past her brother and locked on her as he icily continued, "And I certainly don't serve you."

He walked away from the warehouse without another word, leaving the siblings to stare at each other.

Tabitha glanced at her baffled older brother, but then her eyes fixed on her younger brother, staring at the stains of blood still visible around his mouth as the sinking realization of what he'd done sank in.

Swallowing back her fear at the startling knowledge, Tabitha sprinted after the angel, ignoring Dean's calls until they drowned away. She finally caught up to the angel just outside the warehouse, stopping him with a hand on his elbow.

He jerked away from her as if she'd burned him, but turned to face her.

"What the hell is going on, Cas?" she pleaded in a small voice.

"I've told you and your brothers."

She threw her arm back the way they'd come. "That wasn't any kind of explanation. What the hell happened? Why are you acting this way?"

He stepped closer to her, his eyes narrowing. "You are human, as I've been reminded. Beneath me. And I have no business lowering myself to you," he acidly repeated.

Tabitha jerked back from him more effectively than if he'd slapped her.
"I thought we were at the very least friends," she told him in surprise. "Things are going to hell right now and you choose this moment to act like an ass? One of my brothers is supposed to stop the apocalypse from coming, and the other one is—" A choked sob escaped as she continued in a stark voice, "—he's drinking demon blood, Cas. I just lost a brother we didn't even know we had, and everything around me is falling apart. Not to mention not having a clue about what's going on with me or what I seem to be able to do. I thought at least you were the one constant in my life." She looked him up and down, hardly recognizing the angel even though he was again wearing the familiar body of Jimmy. "What's happened to you?" she whispered.

The angel stalked closer until he'd stopped just short of touching her. "I am an angel, and I will not continue to debase myself by associating with you."

The resounding crack that echoed through the darkness gave her no more satisfaction than the sight of Castiel's head twisting to the side at her palm striking his cheek. His head turned back towards her, but he gave no real indication that he even felt her blow.

She felt a single tear escape as she coldly told him. "You really played me for a fool, didn't you? I trusted you…told you things I've never told anyone else." She threw her arm back at the warehouse again. "Things I haven't even told my brothers, I told you!"

For a moment, she started to turn away, but her anger surged again and she twisted back towards him. "I've never claimed that I was holy or virtuous, but I've never felt dirtier than I do right now because of you. At least every other man that only wanted meaningless sex from me was completely upfront about it! They never tried to pretend that they were anything more. I was such an idiot to think that we were really friends, wasn't I? You're no different from Uriel. Worse even. At least he had the decency to be upfront about his revulsion. You let me think we were friends—you slept with me—and apparently you feel nothing but contempt for me."

She wrapped her arms around herself in an effort to hold herself together as the angel stared at her, completely unaffected. "I tried to tell myself that there was something good inside you. And even after what you did to Dean, I tried to tell myself that there was still goodness there, that you were just different because you were an angel, but I was a fool. You're not good or bad. You're just a heartless, cold and unfeeling shell. Worse even than one of those demons, because at least they're upfront and honest about being heartless bastards. You angels like to pretend you're holier than thou art, but you're not. Being heartless doesn't make you better than us."

Before she could lose the last shred of her composure, she turned to stalk silently back to her brothers.

Heaven and Hell might be trying to crush them from both sides, but she was going to make damn certain that the demons weren't going to keep their hooks in her little brother. The hook an angel had ripped from her side was painful enough.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for your reviews, and if you've been a silent reader, please drop me a line and let me know what you think, or what you like or dislike.

Remember, reviews are the only payment a fanfiction writer gets.
"Are you sure we're doing the right thing?" Tabitha asked her older brother again.

Dean sighed, but the silence was shattered by the sounds of their younger brother calling out to them from the basement, begging them to let him go as he pounded on the walls. "You really want to keep letting him get strung out like this?" he pointedly asked.

Bobby walked into the living room with three tumblers of whiskey, handing one to each of the siblings. He opened his mouth to say something, but stopped when Sam let out a particularly loud and pained sounding scream.

"How long is this gonna go on?" Dean helplessly wondered.

Bobby took a seat at his desk, and then after taking a long sip, leaned forward as though to reach for something. "Here, let me look it up in my demon-detox manual." His hand fell away as he sarcastically finished with, "Oh, wait. No one ever wrote one."

Tabitha cringed as Sam let out yet another painful scream. "I don't think now is the time for humor, Bobby," she chided in a soft tone as she sank bonelessly into a chair next to the cluttered desk.

With a little nod, Bobby came back with, "No telling how long it'll take. Hell, or if Sam will even live through it."

Both siblings looked up to give Bobby dirty looks for voicing something they all feared, but before Tabitha could scold him again, the older hunter's phone rang.

Picking it up, Bobby answered with, "Hello?" He paused and then calmly but sharply replied, "Suck dirt and die, Rufus. You call me again, I'll kill you."

Tabitha grimly shook her head as Bobby slammed the phone back in the cradle. She'd never met Rufus in person, but had talked to him plenty, and had always had the feeling that he was as cantankerous as Bobby was, so she reminded herself that she shouldn't be surprised at them apparently sniping at each other.

"What's up with Rufus?" Dean asked.

"He knows," Bobby insisted.

Smiling a little, despite their circumstances, Tabitha told Bobby, "I really shouldn't be surprised I guess about two crotchety old men getting pissy with each other, but is it really necessary? I mean, especially now?"

Bobby looked over at her with narrowed eyes. "What do you know about Rufus?"

With a little shrug, she admitted, "I've never met him. Just talked to him on the phone. When I was still working for the FBI, and regularly in touch with hunters looking for information, Rufus would sometimes call me and ask me to pass on one case or another to one of those guys. I always wondered why he wasn't calling you with the information, but if this is how the two of you play together, I can see why now."
Bobby opened his mouth to say something, but stopped when Tabitha's cellphone began ringing in her pocket. She dug it out, and hesitated when she didn't immediately recognize the number, but still reluctantly answered. "Hello?"

"Tabitha? This is Rufus. I've got some information for you, and that bearded redneck of yours won't listen to me, so I want you to pass it on to him."

"To Bobby?" she clarified.

"Yeah, I know you're there with that old coot. Or do you know more than one bearded redneck? And you tell that grizzly, flannel wearing old man that he can kiss my leathery—"

"Whoa, whoa there," she quickly cut him off. "I don't need to be put in the middle of your Grumpy Old Men, pissing match." She closed her eyes and rubbed her temples to avoid the angry glares Bobby was giving either her or her phone—which one was a tossup. "What did you call to say, Rufus?"

"Oh, right. I called to tell Bobby about some weird things that are all happening at once. Something big is coming, and we all need to be prepared. Even that wrinkly—"

"Rufus! Back on point!"

"In a matter of hours, Key West has seen 10 species go instinct. And in Alaska, a 15-man fishing crew were all blinded—cause unknown. And in New York, a teacher went postal, locked the door and killed exactly 66 kids—"

"Jesus Christ," Tabitha muttered.

"Exactly. This ain't good," Rufus confirmed. "There's more, but I emailed you all the details." Rufus paused and softly added, "You take care of yourself, kid. Word is that you're right in the middle of things with those fool brothers of yours. Not the safest place to be."

He hung up before she could respond, but she was still too dumbfounded to form any sort of answer anyway.

She looked up and told Bobby, "I need to use your computer. Rufus emailed me some details about the shit that's hitting the fan."

"What?" Bobby cautiously asked as he stood from his desk and gestured for her to come around.

She darted a look between Bobby and her brother as she told them, "It sounds to me like seals breaking. Breaking fast."

"Can you believe Bobby?" Dean asked his sister as he joined her outside. He copied her stance, leaning down to brace his forearms on the railing of the porch as they looked out across Bobby's salvage yard. The two men had fought and nearly come to blows when the older hunter suggested that maybe they weren't doing the right thing in keeping Sam off the battlefield, and that they should continue to let their brother be used as a weapon.

"I can understand what he's saying, Dean," she conceded, not looking at her brother, but continuing when he started to sputter a protest. "But...I agree with you wholeheartedly. We can't just sacrifice Sammy like that. Not if there's even still a chance that we can figure out some other way to stop this and kill Lilith." Her eyes finally cut over to her older brother. "The two of you are the only things I have left in this world. You two and Bobby. And I'm sure as hell not going to condone throwing
away what little I still have."

Dean frowned a little at the bitterness in her tone, but leaned down on his forearms beside her again as he agreed. "I'm there with you. Now we just have to figure out how to stop the apocalypse, and how to dry Sammys out."

She snorted. "Oh? Is that all? Should be a piece of cake. Just another typical Wednesday night."

Her brother stood and turned to lean his back against the railing, looking down at her as he crossed his arms stubbornly over his chest. "Fine. You're right. We don't know where to start or what we're doing on either score." He paused, but Tabitha had no reply, so he continued, "We could use some help, Tab."

She craned her neck to look up at her brother, but otherwise didn't move from her hunched over position. "No shit. You got any ideas though?"

He stared down at her for a moment, as though waiting for her to come to some understanding. When she only stared blankly back at him, he sighed and kicked one foot absently at the floor as he stared down at the worn boards. "You can talk to those angels. So why don't you talk to them?" he somberly admitted.

Shooting up, Tabitha turned sideways to the railing as she stared incredulously at her brother. "How the hell is that going to help anything?" she demanded.

He huffed and ran a hand through his hair. "We need help, Tab. So I'm asking you to give the angels a call. See if they can help with Sammy."

"No."

Dean's eyes shot up at her soft utterance. "No?" he repeated. "Why the hell not? They can help us."

"Maybe they can," she agreed. "But that doesn't mean they will," she argued. "You saw the angel back there. And he damn well saw that Sam was drinking demon blood. But he walked away. He knew what was going on, and he isn't going to help us now."

"It's worth a shot," Dean argued, his arms tightening across his chest. "He did help us with getting Lilith away from Sam."

Tabitha began to anxiously pace across the worn floorboards of Bobby's porch. "Yeah, that asshole helps only when it suits his purposes though. He sure as hell didn't help with you after he'd made you go after Alistair. And like I said, he saw what was going on with Sammys back at that warehouse, and he walked away, Dean. He's not going to help us."

Dean gave her a hard look. "Still, what's it hurt to ask?"

She stopped pacing and planted herself in front of her older brother, angrily telling him, "You wanna call out for him? Be my guest. He can hear you just fine, and he'll show up if he damn well feels like it. But I'm not asking that...angel...for anything. That angel has proven that he's as much of a dick as you've maintained all along. We don't mean a damn thing to him, and we were just fooling ourselves if we thought we ever did. He's proven that he doesn't care about us any more than Uriel ever did. So if you wanna waste your time appealing to that feathered, heartless asshole, go for it. But we can't trust him. You were right, Dean, all we can count on is each other. And I'm sure as hell not trusting that angel with helping one of my brothers again. The two of you and Bobby are all I can count on."
Her brother stared down at her for a moment, his forehead creased as he frowned at her. "What the hell did he say to you back at that warehouse?"

She fell back a step in surprise. "What?"

"I saw you go after him back at that warehouse. And when you came back, you looked like you were torn between being pissed off enough to tear someone's throat out, or breaking down and crying like someone had run over your kitty," he told her, giving her a suspicious look.

"I've never had a cat," she fired back, and then irritably replied, "He just made it very clear how little we mattered and that his orders were all that did matter to him."

It wasn't a full answer, but true nonetheless. And all Dean ever needed to know.

Dean watched her as though he was trying to gauge the truthfulness of her statement, but finally huffed and turned away from her. "Castiel may be a douche bag like the rest of them, but he might be able to help, too. We've got to try every option, Tab."

She waved a dismissive gesture at him as he walked into Bobby's lot. "Fine. Just knock yourself out, Dean. But don't be surprised when you don't get the answer you're looking for."

Her brother didn't reply as he walked away, so she turned to stalk back into Bobby's house, feeling the sudden need for some heavy drinking. She'd managed to avoid thinking much about the angel or what had happened between them, but now that Dean had broached the subject, she couldn't seem to push the angel from her mind. Or the sight of him coldly telling her that she was beneath him.

The words echoed in her mind, a painful reminder of a sentiment that had echoed in her subconscious all along, and it stung to know that the angel had felt that way all along. She'd always been of the opinion that nothing a man could say to her could ever really hurt her feelings. And she'd always made sure never to let a man into her heart far enough that they could hurt her in such a way.

But she'd been foolish and let the angel in. She hadn't even realized how far he'd wormed his way into her heart until it felt like it would shatter at the contempt he seemed to truly harbor for her. All her life, she'd been so cautious about letting a man get that close. Not even Casey—whom she'd shared her bed with for more than a year—had penetrated the walls around her heart. He'd been a friend. Nothing more.

She'd thought it was the same with the angel. That he was just a friend—a friend she'd been sleeping with briefly months ago—but just a friend nonetheless.

How wrong she'd been.

Somehow, he'd become more than just a friend to her. And just as Pamela had warned her, it had ended in disaster. He'd proven her to be a fool. She'd protected her heart from men, why hadn't she continued to hold those walls around her heart? Why had she been foolish enough to let the angel in and trust him so much?

And knowing what she knew now, why did a part of her wonder if she'd have made any different choices?

Sam's screams from the basement halted her in her tracks as she crossed Bobby's living room. Reminding her of what she needed to focus on. Not the mistaken choices she'd made.

But she didn't know what to do for her brother any more than she knew what to do with the ache in her chest.
Being the Winchester she was, she knew the one tried and proven method of drowning sorrows and worries. Winchesters knew it well.

She couldn't fix her brother, and she couldn't change the choices that had led to her aching heart, but she could bury the pain, and her fears for Sam, under layers of whiskey, just like John had so expertly demonstrated their whole lives.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but you willingly signed up to be the angel's bitch?" Bobby asked as he leaned back against his desk. When Dean shot him a sour look, he amended the statement. "I'm sorry. You prefer 'sucker'?

With a sigh, Tabitha dropped down into one of the chairs in Bobby's living room, holding the icy glass in her hand against her forehead and letting the cold ease her suddenly throbbing temple. "What the hell kind of idiot move was that?" she murmured to her brother without looking up.

Bobby made a noise of agreement with her and continued to chide her brother. "After everything you said about them, now you trust them?"

Tabitha pulled the glass away from her forehead and quickly downed the whiskey within. It wasn't necessarily her drink of choice, but it was what Bobby had in the house, and after drinking a steady supply of it all night, Tabitha was starting to think it wasn't so bad. "Hell, I told you not to trust them. And then you turn around and 'give yourself to the service of God' or whatever. Are you trying to make sure I'm left as an only child? I mean if you are, just tell me. I'll learn to readjust my thinking about everything accordingly. I mean, I used to fantasize about being an only child all the time, so it shouldn't take me too long to adjust to the idea again."

Dean ignored her heavy sarcasm, telling them both, "Come on you two, give me a little credit. I've never trusted them less. I mean, they come on like shady politicians from planet Vulcan!"

Tabitha snorted at his statement, laughing a little to herself as she waved her hand in the air and added, "An' jus like politicians, they'll screw you an' make you think they care about you. But really, they're jus screwin' you."

Dean gave her a strange look as if he didn't understand her. But it wasn't as if she'd said anything that wasn't true. Her brother stepped closer and plucked the glass from her hands, sniffing at the ice cubes still rattling against the sides of the tumbler.

"Are you drunk?" he asked her.

She considered it for a moment before she nodded in agreement, trying to reach out to reclaim her glass. "You know…I think I might be."

Dean held the glass on his other side out of her reach. "You've had enough. It's not even noon."

"Well, it's two-er-uh-five er something summer-er-somewhere," she unsteadily replied with a shrug, trying to reach across her brother for her glass. But Dean continued to hold it just out of her reach. "Fine," she huffed, standing a little shakily from the old recliner. "I'll let you in on a little secret," she whispered to her brother as he leaned away from her with a grimace. "I actually don't mind warm whiskey so much. An' bless 'em—" she pointed in Bobby's general direction, "—Bobby's got stashes of whiskey all over this house. So you can just keep that glass if you really want it so bad."

To prove her point, she walked a few steps to the bookshelf and pushed aside a stack of old texts, finding another half-bottle of cheap whiskey, which was continually tasting better and better in Tabitha's opinion.
The men stared at her for a moment, but turned away as she leaned back against the bookshelf, continuing their conversation.

"Well, then why in the hell—" Bobby began as though there hadn't been any interruption.

"Because what other option do I have?!" Dean yelled. "It's either trust the angels, or let Sammy trust a demon?!

"I see your point," Bobby agreed.

"I don't," Tabitha snorted, unscrewing the lid of the bottle and taking a long drink. "Believe me, no matter how good it is at the time, gettin' screwed by an angel ends up hurtin' way worse than gettin' screwed by a demon." She giggled a little to herself at the innuendo Bobby and her brother wouldn't understand. "At least with a demon, you know how it's gonna end. I mean, I didn't realize what Casey was, but I knew somein' was wrong, so it wasn' really a shock when he said nasty things, you know. I jus didn't really care."

Dean pointed at her with her confiscated glass. "What the hell are you rambling about?"

She belatedly remembered that she shouldn't be talking about having slept with demons or angels with either Bobby or her brother, so she shrugged and quickly covered, "I don't know. I forget."

The men stared at her, but after a moment, Dean turned towards the basement. "Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Tabitha asked, turning to strain her ears.

"That's a little too much nothing," Bobby replied.

"Huh?" Tabitha asked, not understanding. How could there be too much nothing? Wasn't that like a negative or double infinitive or something? She seemed to remember something like that from an English class somewhere. Or maybe it was math. You couldn't have too much of nothing because if you multiplied a zero by something, you still had zero.

She hadn't realized she'd been talking out loud until Dean answered her. "We're not talking about math," Dean told her, yanking her bottle away as he and Bobby ran for the basement. She was frozen in place for a moment, but hurried after them as quickly as possible. Wondering to herself if maybe she really had had too much to drink when it suddenly felt like she was trying to run down stairs on stilettos.

When she reached the panic room, the sight before her went a long ways to sobering her.

Her little brother appeared to be having a seizure. Which in and of itself wouldn't have seemed so strange, except for the fact that he was flying around the room while having a seizure.

"It's like a demonic grand mal seizure," she whispered to herself.

Dean whipped around to look at her. "You had medical training in the FBI, right? What the hell do we do?" he frantically demanded.

She threw her arm out towards Sam spinning around the room. "They didn't exactly cover seizures induced by the withdrawals from drinking demon blood! I don't know what to do. If this was a garden-variety seizure, I'd say to hold him so he didn't slam his head against something, but with him Hulked-out on demon blood, he'd only hurt one of us, too. We just need to wait."

"There's gotta be something we can do, dammit! We can't just stand here!" Dean yelled at her in
frustration.

Tabitha groaned. "Then we try to tie him down."

Bobby and Dean rushed forward into the room, the pair grabbing Sam and pulling him down to the floor as Dean pulled his belt off. He thrust it at Tabitha, returning his grip to Sam when Bobby struggled to hold their thrashing brother alone.

Without waiting for instruction, Tabitha slid the belt into their brother's mouth, slipping her hand under his chin to clamp his teeth against the leather while the guys tried to hold Sam's arms against his body.

"We're gonna have to tie him down to keep him from hurting himself," she told the men.

Bobby changed positions in preparation for moving, but Dean stared stupefied down at Sam. Tabitha couldn't move her hands, but leaned closer to her brother, yelling, "Dean! We have to move him. I'm the one that's drunk here. Pull yourself together!"

Dean jerked and looked at her and Bobby, finally saying, "Yeah, yeah! Let's just get it over with!"

"I'm gonna ask one more time," Bobby told them as they sat once more in his living room, all looking slightly shell-shocked from the scene in the basement. "Are we absolutely sure we're doing the right thing?"

Dean stood from the couch. "Bobby, you saw what was happening to him down there. The demon blood is killing him."

Bobby shook his head in denial. "No, it isn't. We are."

"What?"

"I'm sorry," Bobby continued. "I can't bite my tongue any longer. We're killing him. Keeping him locked up down there. This 'cold turkey' thing isn't working. If—if he doesn't get what he needs... soon...Sam's not gonna last much longer."

Dean had been pacing, but stopped to face his sister. "What about you? He's your brother, too. You agree with Bobby?"

Tabitha had been sitting in one of Bobby's old recliners again, leaned forward with her head braced against her tented fingers as she listened to them. She finally sat back, looking up into her older brother's eyes, the same sheen shining in his gaze that she felt in her own.

"We're killing him," she whispered fearfully to her brother.

"You think the demon blood isn't?" he demanded, his voice breaking slightly.

She sighed and fell back against the chair, looking helplessly upward for some kind of answer. Unsurprisingly, none came. "I'm not sure how much more I can take, Dean. Dad's dead. You died. Everything else that's happened," she vaguely intoned, "and now what's happening to Sammy? I don't want to see him die. I think Bobby's right. This cold turkey thing obviously isn't working."

"Well you know of any methadone type treatment for demon blood?" Dean fired back. He stepped away from them, looking out the window for several moments before turning back to his sister. "I'm not giving him demon blood. I won't do it. And you can't do it either. Could you live with doing that
to him?"

He held her eyes for several moments as they silently communicated. They knew each other well enough to share all their worries and fears by mere looks.

"And if he dies?" Bobby demanded.

Dean turned back to him. "Then at least he dies human!" he shouted.

Bobby turned an imploring look on Tabitha. But she almost reluctantly agreed with her brother. "It makes me sick with grief, but Dean's right. We can't do this to him. It's bad enough he's done this on his own for whatever misguided reasons. But we can't continue making him into a monster ourselves and we can't let him keep doing this to himself, either. We just can't. This is the line we can't cross I guess."

She lurched unsteadily to her feet.

"Where you going?" Dean asked her, worry making his voice tight.

With a look thrown over her shoulder, she told him, "I'm either going to find another bottle and keep drinking, or going to find a bathroom to throw up in. Haven't decided which."

Dean took a single step towards her. "You can't keep drinking like that, Tabby. Don't you think I want to? I'm hurtin' over what's happening to Sammy, too."

She let out a bitter laugh. "I know you're hurting over Sammy, too. But I'm losing one brother to demons and the other to those lying, deceiving angels."

"I'll be fine, Tabby," Dean insisted.

She turned back around in the doorway, leaning against the frame heavily with one shoulder as she pointed her hand accusingly at her brother. "Don't try to lie to me and tell me that you actually believe that. Because I know you better than that. You know that trusting them isn't safe, but you're still willing to risk it to save Sammy. And God knows, if I thought it was possible, I'd make the same choice. But I'm not...you are. So not only is it looking like I'm gonna lose my little brother no matter what we do for him...but I'm also looking at losing my older brother as he tries every last-ditch-effort to save Sammy." She paused and leaned her side and head against the doorway. "And I'll be left with nothing and all alone. No brothers. No angel. She looked away at her bitter thoughts. "So excuse me if I'd prefer to numb myself with alcohol for a little while. But you're right, and that doesn't really help anything. But since I've already got a massive hangover going, and this conversation isn't particularly helping anything, I think I'll go throw up now."

Tabitha had showered and cleaned herself up a bit by the time she came back out of the bathroom. She'd spent most of the afternoon lying on the cool floor and purging the alcohol from her system. When she'd finally felt a little steadier, she showered the booze from her pores, and left the quiet sanctuary of the bathroom—her sanctuary from the thoughts and worries about everything that was happening.

She gave a slight smile at the sight of the large bottle of aspirin sitting on the hall table across from the bathroom, a post-it note in Dean's handwriting that simply read "Tabby." With the welcome bottle of relief, she headed into the kitchen for a glass of water, stepping quietly through the house when she realized how dark it was and not hearing Bobby or Dean about.

A strange sensation of power licked across her skin as she drank her water, and Tabitha dismissed it
for several moments, thinking her skin still felt strange and tight from her hangover. But when the power grew, she set the glass down, edging out of the kitchen into the living room. As the power got stronger, she realized it had a familiar feel. One that came from a familiar angel.

Like a lodestone, the power drew her closer, until she had begun to tiptoe her way down the stairs into the basement. And like in her dreams those many months after Dean's encounter with Alistair, she could almost swear she was seeing the angel. She expected it to be as it had been in her dream—a wisp of smoke at the corner of her eye that disappeared when she turned towards it.

She stopped partway down the stairs, turning to look into the corner of the room as she called out, "Cas?"

The image of the angel suddenly solidified, and she could see him turning his hand as he did when he was using his powers to move something.

The angel had frozen in shock to stare back at her, but her attention was instantly yanked away from him as the steps beneath her audibly creaked.

"Tabitha?" Sam asked in a hoarse voice as he began to ascend the staircase.

"How did you—" but she stopped to throw a disbelieving look at the angel. Despite what had happened between them, she was hardly able to believe that the angel would actually let her brother go when he was in such a state.

Sam eased up the bottom few steps, pulling her attention back to him as she held her hands up waringly. "You need to turn around, Sam. This is for your own good," she tried to tell him, unsure if she even believed it herself.

"I have to leave, Tab," he told her, still advancing up the steps.

Tabitha held her ground, knowing that although her brother was stronger, taller, and outweighed her, that she had the higher ground, and wasn't stung-out and in withdrawals.

"I can't just let you go, Sammy. So you might as well turn around."

She had been expecting his hands to be empty, so it caught her off-guard when he suddenly yanked a knife from the waistband of his jeans and rushed her. Her thrown up arm effectively blocked the knife, but he'd moved quicker than she'd anticipated, sweeping her legs out from underneath her.

Her back hit the steps with an echoing thud, her head actually bouncing painfully against the step as she fell. When she shook herself and managed to blearily look up, Sam was crouched over her, leaning closer to her and sniffing as he moved the knife closer.

It effectively brought her around as her attention focused on the knife. She struggled away from it, but Sam held her completely still against the steps, pulling the collar of her t-shirt aside and pressing the knife against the side of her neck in almost slow-motion.

She gasped when he lightly drew the blade against her skin, lifting the knife to his mouth and slowly licking at it.


Her brother stared down at her, and for a brief moment, a glimmer of recognition appeared before it was wiped away again, the knife descending towards her throat once more.
The knife suddenly flew from Sam's hand, imbedding deeply in the wall of the stairwell beside Tabitha's head. The siblings twisted to look down the open side of the staircase, Castiel's hand still raised towards them.

Sam turned back to look down in shock at his sister, finally seeming to really see her. "I'm so sorry, Tab," he choked out, and then he scurried up the stairs away from her.

She knew she should go after him, but the shock of seeing something so wild and dark in her brother's eyes left her sprawled helplessly on the stairs. Any shred of hope she'd had for her brother was obliterated at the sight of those dark eyes staring down at her and not seeing her. Even talking to him and begging him hadn't seemed to reach him.

Arms slid under her and picked her up. Arms that she knew belonged to the angel by the familiar vibration of power that flicked along her skin. Arms that she knew she should push away. And yet, they were arms that she couldn't seem to find the strength to push away when grief clutched her so tightly.

Instead, she let her head fall against Castiel's shoulder as she felt him carry her up the stairs. The cruelty of his kindness after his words to her—and especially after he'd so maliciously and inexplicably released Sam—only drove the stake deeper into her heart, but she couldn't seem to turn away from the pain. She wondered when she'd become such a masochist.

"He was after the demon blood that's in me now, wasn't he? He was so strung out that he could smell it."

She felt Castiel nod. "I fear so."

The couch depressed around her as the angel set her down, and she finally forced herself to pull away from him, wrapping her arms around her drawn up legs as she stared at him where he'd knelt on the floor to set her down.

"Why?" she demanded, her bare whisper sounding like a shot echoing in the silent house.

To his credit, the angel didn't ask her to clarify or try to play dumb.

"I have to follow orders. That is what it is to be an angel."

She could feel a small trickle of wetness down her neck and pressed a hand to the side of her throat as she continued to stare at the angel. From the slow trickle, she knew it wasn't much to worry about; it wasn't arterial gushing, but it still needed to be bandaged properly when she could.

"That's all you can say?" she demanded instead of tending her wounds. "You let my brother go—my brother who's sick and been drinking demon blood—you let him go because of orders? What good could possibly come from that?"

"I cannot afford to question my orders," he told her.

"But Dean already agreed to be Heaven's bitch and stop the apocalypse. So why let Sam go? Why can't you just leave at least one of my brothers alone?"

"Dean has agreed to give himself over to Heaven. He will play whatever part they deem for him," Castiel told her, looking away from her eyes. Still avoiding her, he added, "Please do not interfere in what I must do. I'm trying to keep you safe."

The last sentence floated softly in her mind as he turned back to her, his eyes almost seeming to beg
for something before they drifted down to her neck.

When he reached out towards her, she jerked back to press into the couch. "Don't touch me!" she hissed, not certain she could stand the exquisite torture of his touch again. She had to remind herself of why his touch would be torture. "After everything you've done, the fool you've played me for… And now you show up here to rip my brothers away from me, too. And leave me with nothing. Fine. Then just leave me with nothing and don't touch me."

Castiel stood from the floor, looking down at her with an expression she would have once sworn was regret. At least when she had believed him capable of emotion. "I am sorry for the way you feel now. And I'm sorry for your pain. But I can't allow you to interfere with what will happen. Please stay out of the coming danger."

He turned away, but stopped at her whisper.

"Why did you even kiss me that first time all those months ago?"

"I don't understand."

"Why did you kiss me? I could have been happy with things continuing like they had been—I mean, I know I kissed you first that one night, but I was drunk—I wouldn't have done it again. We could have kept being just friends. So why did you kiss me like that that night? Everything changed that night. If things had stayed the same, you never would have wiggled your way so far into my heart. But then you kissed me like that…and it changed. I let you into my heart and let myself feel things for you that I've never felt before. Never let someone have so much power to hurt me the way you did."

Castiel's eyes jerked away from her, even as his face hardened and he wiped all expression away.

"Did it even mean a goddamned thing to you? Did you even feel anything for me? Besides your contempt for humans?"

"You should not take The Lord's name in vain," he flatly whispered, but said no more.

She stood to face him, letting her hand fall from her neck and pointing a bloody finger at him. "What an idiot I was. You were right all along, weren't you? Angels aren't capable of emotion. Certainly not capable of love. And I was an idiot to ever think you were any different from the rest of those angels. You're no different from any of them."

He cast a fleeting look her way. "I am an angel. I am not supposed to have feelings."

"Go to Hell!" she shouted, her hold on her temper dissolving. "I never want to see your face again!"

"Tabitha? What's going on?" Dean shouted as his steps lumbered down the stairs.

She glanced towards the staircase from the second floor, and when she glanced back in front of her again, the angel was gone once more.

Dean skidded to a halt in front of her, his hands darting out to clamp against the wound at her throat as he frantically asked, "What the hell happened to your neck?"

Feeling suddenly deflated, Tabitha sank back into the couch, forcing Dean to drop to his knees to keep his grip on her neck. She hadn't felt it before, but she was beginning to feel a little lightheaded and unsteady as he tore at the tail of his flannel shirt and began wrapping the strips around her neck.
Pulling away slightly, she reminded him, "Not so tight, I still need to be able to breathe."

"Dammit, Tabitha," he worriedly shot back. "What the hell did this to you?"

"He cut me," she told him, still almost too stunned to say it out loud. An idea that just seemed too ridiculous to have actually occurred.

"What?! Who? Who the hell cut you, Tabby?" he asked her again, tying off the last makeshift bandage and shaking her a little by the shoulder to get her attention.

"He got out. I didn't think he'd really cut me. Even when I saw the knife." She felt herself sway a little and looked down at her side, gingerly touching the green t-shirt she'd been wearing and seeing her whole side darkened with blood. "It bled more than it felt like it was," she absently noted.

Dean grabbed her chin and forced her gaze back to his. "Sam? Sam got out? He did this?"

"I don't think it's his fault. Not really. He's not himself. It was like it wasn't even his eyes I was looking into. More like it was someone or something else staring down at me. You know, kinda like in those horror movies or something," she continued stating, not seeming to be able to stop talking.

Her brother gently pushed her down onto the couch as he tried to give her a reassuring smile. But the worry was still in his voice as he tried to lightly tell her, "Note to self: When Tabby's been bleeding too much, she rambles just like she does when she's had too much to drink. Good to know."

Her mind seemed a little sluggish, but she couldn't help asking, "Am I drunk?"

"No," Dean assured her. "I think you'll be okay, the bleeding has stopped, but I've got to go find Sam. Or at least Bobby. He wasn't upstairs. I need to make sure he's okay, too."

"Okay," she slowly nodded, feeling her eyelids shut.

"That's it, just sleep it off," Dean told her.

Tabitha woke with a start, her body jerking upward into a sitting position on the couch. The pounding headache made her instantly regret the sudden movement.

"Easy there, girl," Bobby told her as he walked into the living room, a glass of water in one hand and a plate with a sandwich in the other. He set them both down on the table in front of her and handed her the bottle of aspirin he'd been carrying in the crook of his arm. "Here. Take a few of these. Didn't expect you to be up quite yet, but I'm glad I had the food ready just in case."

She blinked a few times as she looked around her, first noticing the nearly empty bag of blood sitting on the back of the couch, the plastic tubing running down to a needle in her arm.

"Where'd you donor blood, Bobby?" she asked him, easing the needle from her arm and rubbing at the site to stem the trickle of blood.

"Always keep a few bags of O around just in case. Good thing, too, you needed a bit to perk you up. Looked pretty white when Dean and I got back in. He was worried when you wouldn't wake up, but then we found a pretty big goose-egg on the back of your head."

Tabitha reached up to thread her fingers through her hair, cringing when her fingers found the large knot. "No wonder my head feels like someone's been using a jackhammer on it."

Her fingers trailed down to her neck, feeling some gauze pads taped over her wound.
"Now you'd best leave that there a bit longer," Bobby scolded her when her fingers started to peel back a corner. "I threw some stitches in, but it'd be best if you leave it covered for another couple of days. You got real lucky it didn't hit nothing major. Still bled like hell though."

She nodded in agreement as she looked down at the couch she was on. Someone had cleaned it up, but faint bloodstains were still visible. "Guess you're gonna have to finally get a new couch," she joked.

When she looked up, Bobby was silently pushing the water and aspirin into her hands, a hint of worry still in his eyes. "Relax," she told him as she obligingly swallowed a few of the painkillers he'd handed her along with the aspirin. "It could have been worse. But I think even crazed, Sammy was still in control enough that he didn't really want to hurt me. Lord knows he could have."

Bobby turned away as if the thought was painful. Which Tabitha could agree with, but she wasn't going to walk on eggshells about what happened. She wasn't going to let Bobby or anyone see her as a victim. Reaching out for the sandwich, she told Bobby, "Soon as I find that big oaf, I'm gonna nock his head around a little for the shaving nick though. Not like I needed the close shave, never been one of those women that gets a beard or mustache. 'Course, I might need a step stool so I'm tall enough to actually give him the whupping he deserves, but I figure I'll manage."

The older hunter jerked to his feet, frowning down at her as he lectured, "This isn't something to joke about, girl. That boy could have easily killed you. He made that cut an inch over, an' you wouldn't be sitting here now."

She chewed her bite before she paused to answer the riled up hunter. "I know that Bobby. But sitting here crying about what could have happened isn't going to fix anything. And that was't my little brother back there. So I'm not going to hold him responsible for it. Even if I am gonna deal him a little punishment for it."

Huffing, Bobby turned away. "You may not hold the boy responsible, but Dean sure as hell does. Kid cut the neck of his own sister. That's crossing some lines and descending into some bad places, Tabitha."

Setting her partially eaten sandwich down, Tabitha carefully rose to her feet, her hand on the back of the couch to steady herself. "Where is Dean?" she slowly asked, looking around the room suspiciously.

Bobby hesitated, but finally sank into the chair behind his desk, wearily rubbing at the tension lines in his forehead. "Sammy got the jump on me last night, too. Took off in one of the salvage cars. Dean left early this morning to go after him."

"And he left me here?!"

With a droll and pointed look, Bobby told her, "You weren't exactly in any kind of shape to go hunting Sam down. Dean wanted to go alone and left you here for me to look after."

"That little—" she trailed off but continued cursing her brothers under her breath as she paced a little. Finally, she came to a stop and told Bobby, "I'm going after him. Dean's gonna need all the help he can get to bring Sammy back."

Regretfully shaking his head, Bobby told her, "No. You're not. You're staying here. That wound needs to be looked after. And I won't tell you a thing about where they went. So you can sit your little ass back down and get comfortable. Dean's gonna have to handle Sammy on his own."
She sank back into the couch in resignation, half-knowing that Bobby was right—she wasn't in any kind of shape to face Sam again—but half-pissed at the man's stubbornness. "You really think Dean can bring Sam back, though, Bobby? He was spitting mad when I last saw him. You know what kind of temper he's got."

"Yeah," Bobby agreed with a short chuckle, crossing his hands over his stomach as he leaned back in his chair. "Same one all you Winchesters seem to have," he continued with a pointed look at her.

"Exactly." She closed her eyes and leaned back into the couch. "I don't see this ending well," she muttered.

At the flutter of wings and shift of power, Tabitha tensed, her heart not ready to see the angel again so soon. But the power was different—just as strong, but a harder edge beneath it. She looked over her shoulder from where she'd been hunched over Bobby's porch railing again.

"Anna," she greeted. "What are you doing here?" Somehow, it wasn't all that surprising that the angel had found her though. Protective sigils or not, looking at Bobby's place would have been a safe bet to check out for finding her or her brothers.

"What are you doing here?" Anna returned. "You should be with Dean trying to bring Sam back. You know he won't be able to do it alone. He's too angry with him right now to make Sam see reason. You can't just sit here waiting! We're down to the homestretch, the final seals!"

Tabitha gave a little shrug. "I'm starting to think getting Sam back is hopeless no matter what. It seems to be what you angels want anyway, so they're not gonna let us stop bring him back."

"What?" Anna demanded, her hand on Tabitha's shoulder, pushing the blonde woman until she faced the angel.

"Castiel let Sam go. On 'orders,' he said, so there isn't really going to be anything me or Dean can do now. It's what they apparently want. Even if I don't get it."

Anna made a little motion with her hand like she wanted Tabitha to go back to something. "Wait. You're saying Castiel actually told you that he let your brother go."

Face drawn together in confusion, Tabitha clarified, "No. He didn't have to. I saw him let my brother go."

Now Anna looked very surprised, speaking almost to herself. "I can't believe he'd actually let you see him do something like that. Not try to hide himself."

She hesitated, but Tabitha finally told Anna, "Well, he was a little hard to see at first, but I could feel where he was, and when I looked over, he was just standing there."

The fallen angel stepped back a little in surprise. "He didn't mean for you to see him then. But you did anyway." Anna's head tilted to the side a bit, the same way Castiel's did sometimes when he looked at her and tried to understand something. "You are full of surprises," Anna whispered.

Irritably, Tabitha waved it away and paced. "Whatever. It doesn't matter now. My brothers are both out there. I've lost Sammy to those demons now, and Dean's given himself to the angels. I've got nothing."

Stepping closer, Anna stopped Tabitha's pacing with a hand on her arm. "There might still be a way
to stop Sam if you can get to him.”

Frozen in place, Tabitha asked, "How? Dean just texted to say that Sam took off again. That he's
going after Lilith still. So how am I supposed to find him?"

"By finding Lilith yourself."

Her breath stopped at Anna's suggestion. "Find Lilith myself?" she incredulously demanded. "You
do realize that bitch has been after me for a while now anyway? You want me to go offer myself up?"

"You need to find Sam and stop him. You can't let him do this. You can't let him kill Lilith. You
can't let him break the final seal," she confided, her eyes fearfully darting around. "Finding Lilith will
help you find Sam. Are you willing to take the risks to protect him?"

Bristling, Tabitha answered without hesitation. "Of course I am. Only one little problem though…
actually finding Lilith! It's not like I can Google her location. Or do you know where she is?"

Anna ignored the sarcasm, her eyes still darting around as if she thought something would jump out
of the shadows to grab her. With a deep breath, Anna steadied herself and looked Tabitha in the eye.
"Haven't you ever wondered about just how Lilith got onto your trail in the first place? Haven't you
ever wondered why she had a demon take over you partner when she did? When you were away
from hunting and in the FBI? I think there's more behind that then you realize. You just need to look.
Figuring out why and how she targeted your old partner are the keys to finding her."

Tabitha opened her mouth to ask a question, but slammed it shut when Castiel appeared in front of
her. His back was familiarly covered in his trench coat as he stood between her and Anna.

"I'm right, aren't I?" she heard Anna ask Castiel.

She started to move out from behind the angel that had planted himself in front of her so she could
see what was going on. But Castiel's hand blindly darted out behind his back to grab her wrist,
halting her movement as he pulled her closer behind his back.

There would be no shaking his grip if he didn't want her to, so she stood on her toes to look over his
shoulder, seeing Anna standing stiffly and defensively as she stared at the silent Castiel.

"Why did you let Sam Winchester go?" she asked him, a question Tabitha wanted answered as well.

The angel between the two women didn't directly answer the question though, instead almost sadly
telling her, "You shouldn't have come, Anna."

"Why would you do it?" she again demanded.

"Those were my orders," Castiel replied. Tabitha tried to jerk away at the answer, wanting nothing
more than to find something sharp and pointy at hearing that fallback answer yet again. But as she'd
known, the angel's hold didn't budge. But she froze when his thumb wrapped around her wrist and
suddenly began to soothingly rub up and down the underside of her arm.

"Orders?" Anna was asking, stepping a little closer on the porch. "Cas, you saw him. He's drinking
demon blood. It's so much worse than we thought. Dean and Tabitha were trying to stop him."

"I protect my charges."

Anna's eyes narrowed on him. "We both know who you're really trying to protect."
"You really shouldn't have come," Castiel repeated, his thumb speeding up as if to impart an apology on Tabitha's skin with the movement.

As Tabitha watched, two more angels appeared around Anna, grabbing her and disappearing in a swell of light.

When they were again alone, Tabitha yanked her wrist away. Castiel allowed her to this time, but didn't turn to face her as she stumbled away from him into the worn siding of Bobby's house. "What will they do to Anna?" she whispered.

Castiel still did not move as he whispered in return, "I don't know."

"She knew it was dangerous coming here, didn't she? She knew you'd try to trap her here and she still came to warn me."

"I suppose."

Tabitha let out a frustrated huff to the angel's back. "Can anyone really trust you?" she whispered, watching his back stiffen.

"You need to stay here," he told her. "You'll be safe here." And then he disappeared without ever having turned around.

"Like hell I will," she whispered to the night air. "Anna risked capture to come here and tell me what she did, so there must be something important to it."

But she stayed frozen where she was against Bobby's house. What Anna had told her might be useful or important, but how was Tabitha supposed to look into how Lilith had found her or Casey? How was she supposed to know why Lilith had placed one of her demons in her partner? It had been over a year ago now.

Then she remembered. She remembered the last case they'd been on before Casey had started acting strange. She'd chalked it up to him just hitting overload from their caseload. That particular case had been hard to handle.

But it was the very case that Casey—or perhaps the demon riding him—had stolen files from and had hidden in his safe. Files she'd taken, and now resided in her room on the second floor of Bobby's house.

She didn't know what she'd find, but she knew it was a good place to start.

Chapter End Notes

As Anna said, we're in the homestretch. There's just one more chapter to Nobody In Particular, and then we move on to the next part!

The overall series will be called So Fell the Angels, and the second story will be called Angels on My Shoulders.

Be sure to leave your thoughts!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

For hours, Tabitha had been sifting through the box of case notes and files that Casey had kept in his safe and that she had moved to her own safe upon his death. The pages and folders were presently littered seemingly haphazardly on the floor around her, hardly an inch of floor uncovered by the pages she'd been pouring over, looking for some kind of clue—or maybe more appropriately, a needle. A needle that might stand out in a stack of normal looking needles.

One group of stapled pages suddenly caught her eyes. They were peeking out from inside one of the official FBI folders Casey had stolen, but the folder hadn't been what caught her attention. Casey's handwritten notes in the margins of the page peeking out drew her in.

She flipped the folder open and began reading Casey's notes. Most of the official report she had already seen and read when they'd been working the case, but her partner's notes weren't something she'd seen. As she flipped to another page, a loose picture fluttered out. The color image held her eyes. It was a close-up of a yellow powder on white linoleum floor tiles. Turning the picture over, she saw more of her partner's familiar neat scrawl.

Yellow powder found to be sulfur. Sulfur in a pediatric ward? Why? How could it have gotten there?

The stapled pages of computer printed documents and reports with his notes in the margins held her utter attention now. She hadn't seen the evidence photo with the sulfur before—didn't even remember it coming up in the case, and she would have remembered sulfur.

She finally flipped the stapled papers over at the last page, finding it full of Casey's handwriting, his notes taking on an almost journal like quality as he questioned himself and what to do.

Nothing about this case is adding up. Children disappearing from pediatric wards. Sometimes taken by nurses who've been trustworthy employees for years, sometimes taken with no trace of how. And the sulfur? How do I explain that? Or the missing children we have managed to find. Upon further examination, I was able to find traces of sulfur on all of the children. The bodies all looked like they'd been gnawed on, and all exsanguinated. Why steal children from pediatric wards only to drain them of their blood? Some kind of ritual? Something occult?

None of this seems...normal...human. Could something be doing this? Wish I could tell Tab, but how can I? She'll think I'm crazy if I tell her I seriously suspect something was responsible for the deaths of all those children.

Tabitha felt tears of guilt gather as she read his notes. He'd started to suspect what was really out there, but had been afraid to come to her about it—even though she could have told him everything. Guilt nagged her more as she realized how much she'd missed on that case. She should have seen the same signs her partner had. Maybe then he'd still be alive.

One last piece of paper caught her eye, an employee record printout from the last hospital where babies had gone missing. There was a post-it note stuck to it with a place and time and a note that the nurse had been working in the hospital during all the times babies had gone missing. The place and time appeared to be Casey arranging to meet the woman, probably to confront her. It was the very same day that she remembered her partner had begun to act...strangely when he'd come by her place for the evening.
She grabbed the employee record and turned to her laptop, thankful now that Shawn had shown her how to use a backdoor access into the FBI database as she used it to search for the nurse. It was a long shot, but if the nurse had been possessed then, chances were decent that the demon might still be using her. Demons did grow fond of a meatsuit once they got in one. And they tended to stay until they'd used them up.

How it all could relate to Lilith still puzzled her, but she knew Lilith was old and insanely crazy from what her brother had said about her. And she liked to use children as meatsuits. She didn't understand why she might be draining infants, but it seemed like something insane enough to fit the crazy demon they'd described to her.

Tabitha paused as she snuck down the stairs of Bobby's house. She had a work address for a little hospital in Maryland where the nurse that Casey had been going to meet, had just started working at only a few weeks ago. It was a long shot, but it was her only lead.

Glancing back up the stairs, she considered going and waking Bobby, but finally shook her head to herself and continued out of the house alone. He'd only try to stop her. Especially if he knew she was actively looking for Lilith. But if there was even the barest of possibilities that finding the bitch might help her save her little brother, she was taking it. She couldn't let Bobby stop her now. No matter how long the odds seemed.

She paused at her mustang, knowing that at least was likely to wake Bobby. And also knowing he'd try to track it. But she'd already arranged to fly to Maryland anyway—it would get her there faster. All she had to do was get to the Sioux Falls airport before Bobby stopped her. And hopefully her aliases and their various flights—as well as changing planes in Minneapolis would be enough to keep Bobby off her trail.

The lights in Bobby's house flicked on as she peeled out of his salvage yard. And the old hunter had just reached his porch when she looked up into her rearview. His call to her cell a few seconds later wasn't a surprise, but she ignored it and let it ring, whispering to herself, "Sorry, Bobby. This one I go alone."

Flashing her FBI badge to stop one of the frantic nurses, Tabitha asked her, "What's going on? What's all the commotion about?"

The young nurse looked frazzled, but paused to push her brown bangs from her eyes and ask her, "Aren't you with the others?"

Tabitha glanced across the parking garage towards the marked and unmarked police cars and police and FBI milling about. "Yes," she easily lied. "But why is the staff out here in the parking garage and so frantic looking?"

The young woman seemed to become even more worried looking, darting glances around as she swallowed and explained, "But they said we could go home now. They interviewed us about that missing nurse and the baby she tried to take. But I don't know anything. I just want to go home like everyone else."

Maintaining a professional and detached manner, Tabitha pulled out a pad of paper and asked, "You're speaking of nurse McKellan? She's the nurse that has disappeared?"

"Well, yeah. That's who all the cops are looking for," the young nurse slowly told her.
"And she tried to take a baby but the baby is still here?"

The young woman scrunched her face up as she stared up at Tabitha. "Yeah. Shouldn't you know all that? They found the baby in the parking garage here, but that new nurse had just disappeared. I guess she changed her mind about stealing the baby."

"You know nothing about where this woman might have gone?"

"No. I already told those detectives that interviewed me. And they said I could go."

"You don't know anything about where she might have been staying or where she might have been spending time?" Tabitha continued to push.

"No. I don't," the woman answered shortly, crossing her arms over her pale blue scrubs and glancing back towards the building where most of the cops were gathered.

Tabitha smiled as she backed up a step, casually dismissing the young nurse before she raised the attention of the cops near the hospital. "Of course. You're free to go. I just wanted to make sure nothing had been missed."

But she cursed inwardly as she walked away. The demon wouldn't have just left the baby behind after going to the trouble of getting it that far out of the hospital. Her best bet was that Sam had managed to find the same track she had, but had beaten her to the nurse. Only now, Tabitha had no next move to make in tracking him down.

"Hey, agent…uh…agent!" the nurse called behind her.

Tabitha turned around to face her again. "Special agent Marianne Faithfull," Tabitha supplied. "What was it you needed?"

"I just remembered something, I don't know if it's helpful or not," the young nurse told her with an anticipatory edge.

With an impatient gesture, Tabitha urged her on, "Yes? What?"

"I remembered that a couple of days ago, Nurse McKellan asked for directions out to Mary's Convent in Ilchester. She said she was going to meet some friends there in a few days. I told her it was a dumb idea, but she seemed pretty intent on going there."

Holding her eagerness in check with her doubt, Tabitha questioned, "Why would you tell her not to go there?"

The nurse seemed confused for a second, but her face cleared as she continued, "Right. You're not from around here. I told her it was a creepy place to meet friends, even if that is your thing. I mean, seeing as how that priest killed all those nuns in that convent back in the early seventies."

Instantly, Tabitha was certain she was back on the right track. For the first time in many hours, she was sure she knew where she was going. But she hastened to tell the nurse, "I'm sure it's nothing of any use, but I'll have a patrol car swing by there just in case. Thank you. You've been very helpful."

She was walking away when the nurse called out again. "Don't you wanna know my name or something?"

Over her shoulder, Tabitha pointed out, "Didn't need to ask, you've still got your name tag on Nurse Reinhardt. I can match your name with your records."
Not wasting another moment, Tabitha slid into the driver's seat of her borrowed sedan in time to hear her cell phone ringing once again.

She flipped it open impatiently. "What?" she demanded even as she used her smart phone to look up directions to the old convent in Ilchester.

"Girl, I outta tan your hide for that tone," Bobby warned her. "Taking off in the middle of the night, not answering your phone...and now taking an attitude with me. I've had enough of you Winchester kids acting like the spoiled little brat on the playground that keeps getting picked last for kickball. Suck it up and realize that maybe it's your own piss poor damn attitudes playing a pretty big part."

"We get the picture, Bobby," Dean growled over the line, telling her that Bobby had his phone on speaker. "Where the hell are you, Tabitha? And why haven't you been answering your phone?"

"I'm going after Sammy," she answered in a clipped voice, not appreciating his own brusque tone. She could be to the convent in under ten-minutes. At least from the directions her phone gave.

"I already tried that," he growled at her.

"Oh? How'd that go?" she needled, knowing from his pissed-off tone that it hadn't been a warm reunion between them. He hadn't told her before how it went, just sent a text saying Sam had taken off again. And she knew her brother well enough to guess just how it went down.

"Didn't. Which is why you're gonna get your ass back here. He could have killed you last time. Besides, I don't even know where he's gone now, so you might as well stop wasting your time."

"I think I know where he's headed."

There was an extended pause on the line before Dean sweetly asked, "And just where are you at, Tabitha?"

She snorted at the falsely sweet tone as she told him, "Yeah. Like I'm real excited to tell you that. I'm doing this, Dean. You tried going after him, now it's my turn to try."

He immediately dropped the fake sweetness. "Just how the hell do you think you're gonna find him? I already tracked him down once, and he's gonna be more weary now. Just leave him."

Tabitha sucked in a breath at the vehemence in her brother's voice. "I will find him," she swore.

"How?" he fired back. "You got special psychic powers now that you've been lying about, too?"

She ignored the barb. "He's going after Lilith, right?"

"Yeah," Dean slowly answered. There was a loud thud of something hitting the floor over the phone line as Dean seemed to catch on. "Oh, hell no, Tabitha. This is a stupid idea. That bitch wants you, too. To skin you and make a woman suit out of you for all we know. But she wants you, so this is a bad idea."

"I'm just tracking her to find Sam," she reasonably answered, pushing back her own fear.

There was another silence before Bobby asked, "You really think you can find Lilith?"

"Yeah. I do. It's a long story, but it went back to her sicken one of her demons on my partner, Casey. I think he got too close to finding her, and she had a demon jump him when she realized he was my partner. I think it was just chance that she came across me that way. But the case that led
Casey to her gave me a lead in how to find her now."

"Where are you?" Dean asked in that deceptively calm voice again.

She sighed but told him, "Maryland. Not like it matters. You're in South Dakota, so you can't stop me. I'll either have found Sam by tonight or well…”

"First Sam, and now you!" Dean yelled at her. "I swear, I've had enough of this damn family. None of you listen, and you're all trying to turn into monsters or get yourselves killed!"

"The feeling is mutual!" she growled back into the phone. "You're the one who signed up to be Heaven's personal bitch gofer. I'm just doing my best to hang onto what I can of this stupid family that seems intent on getting itself wiped out one way or another."

"At least she's trying to reach him, Dean!" Bobby shouted through the phone. "I already told you to stow the whiney crap and stop being like your father. Stop pushing him away. Be a stronger man and help your sister reach him!"

Tabitha could hear someone moving around the room as she paused to check her directions again. She was getting closer to the old convent. Another turn on one of the dark country roads would get her there.

"I don't know, Bobby," she barely heard Dean say.

"What the hell!" Bobby suddenly shouted, alarm and fear in his voice.

Tabitha had made her last turn, but slammed on the brakes at the unusual fear in Bobby's tone. "What? What happened?" she asked.

"It's Dean," he told her. "He just disappeared outta thin air."

Tabitha sighed as she looked down the road to where the church lay. She could see a few cars outside of the supposedly abandoned church. "Angels took him," she explained, knowing it was the truth.

"What now?" Bobby asked her, his voice coming and going as he paced.

"Now we hope for a miracle, Bobby. I'm here, and my gut's telling me that Lilith is, too."

During the long pause that filled the space of her borrowed car, Tabitha was almost certain Bobby was going to try to order her away, too. But he only told her, "Please be careful, Tabitha. That demon's one tough bitch."

"I know, Bobby. But if I can kill her to protect Sammy, I will."

She hung up with phone without ceremony or goodbye, and prepared herself for whatever awaited her in the seemingly busy abandoned church.

Tabitha hadn't even reached the side door of the church when she heard the demon come up behind her.

"You're not the Winchester I was expecting."

She turned around to face Lilith wearing the same dental hygienist that she had smoked out of when they’d led an archangel to her. But her face was turned up in a pleased smile this time.
"I like to surprise people," Tabitha told her with a shrug, slipping her hands into the pockets of her leather jacket.

Two demons appeared on either side of her to immobilize her arms, yanking her hands back out of her pockets.

"Ah-uh," Lilith scolded her as she stepped closer. With her chest almost brushing Tabitha's, the demon reached into each pocket to pull out the contents. She held the flask in one hand and the rosary gingerly in the other. "Well, that's not playing very nice," Lilith tsked her.

"I never play nice," Tabitha assured the demon.

Lilith flicked her hand at the two male demons holding her. "Check her over. Make sure she's not holding onto any other surprises."

The demons thoroughly patted her down, but seemed to dismiss her charm bracelet as nothing more than normal jewelry.

"I expected your younger brother, but not you," Lilith told her as she walked around Tabitha and leaned back against the doors of the church.

"Like I said, I'm fond of surprises."

Lilith's smile widened. "Something tells me that you came here looking for him." She leaned forward and winked. "But I've got a feeling he'll be here soon enough." She leaned back against the doors again with a dramatic sigh. "Not that you'll be around to see it."

"Oh?" Tabitha asked as the demons finished taking the last of her weapons, stepping away to leave her standing free before Lilith. "And I was hoping to see the show. I really didn't want to miss seeing you die."

A strange pleased look came to Lilith's eyes at that. "We've all got to go sometime. Even demons. It's what our death means that matters."

Tabitha could feel her scowl grow at the demon's perplexing answer. "You don't seem all that worried at the thought of dying."

"Do you?" Lilith asked as she tried to divert Tabitha's question back on her. "You're gonna die. Soon," the demon leaned forward and whispered, as though they were girls sharing a secret.

"I thought you wanted me taken alive or something," Tabitha hedged, her fingers rubbing the cross on her bracelet in her palm.

Lilith shrugged. "I did. Until I found out what you are for. Now I know you have to die. Can't leave you alive and running around to be a future threat. Of course, your brother will have to go, too. Now that he's served his purpose in breaking the first seal and getting the ball rolling. But at least I can make sure you die now. That way you won't be a threat to our Father."

Lilith snapped her fingers as Tabitha's mind whirled with the demon's strange announcement, but she didn't have much time to give it thought as the two demons stepped closer to grab her again.

She held the cross in her palm and with it clutched in her hand, crossed herself as she knelt and recited, "Therefore God has also highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in Heaven and of those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory
The demons fell to their knees as she recited the verse, each of them screaming in pain at the power of the words of God. Lilith didn't fall, but did clutch her head and cringe.

But before Tabitha could begin an exorcism spell, something grabbed her by the shoulders from behind.

When she looked around again, Tabitha saw that she was no longer outside the convent in Maryland, but standing instead in a nondescript motel room.

"What in the name of hell?" she muttered to herself as she slowly spun around. When she'd made a complete circle, she finally spotted the familiar trench coat covered back of an angel. "I guess I should have said, 'What in the name of Heaven,'" she corrected herself.

"Were you trying to get yourself killed?"

Tabitha frowned at the angel's back.

"I was looking for Sammy," she told him.

"How does your death at Lilith's hand accomplish that?" he tersely demanded, still standing turned away from her, as though something fascinating about the ivory painted wall held his utter attention, although Tabitha couldn't fathom what.

"I would have been fine," she tried to insist, although, nothing had quite gone how she'd pictured it in her mind when she'd approached the convent.

Castiel actually snorted, the sound seeming so foreign to Tabitha coming from him. "I suppose you had forgotten that Lilith is a powerful demon not easily killed by a mere exorcism spell?"

Crossing her hands stubbornly over her chest as she planted herself in the middle of the room, Tabitha admitted, "I didn't think I'd have to try an exorcism on her. I figured I'd scope the place out and then wait for Sam to show up. I didn't really expect them to get the jump on me like they did."

She saw Castiel's back stiffen a little as he crossed his arms at the small of his back, his fingers digging deeply into his wrists. "You shouldn't have been anywhere near a demon that wanted to kill you. Getting killed would have done nothing to help your brother."

"I didn't ask you to save me!" she snarled at his back in response to his imperious demeanor. "And besides, I didn't really think she wanted to kill me. She's been trying to capture me all along, so I wasn't too worried when she showed up. Figured I'd get away before Sam showed up or something. It wasn't until she said she was gonna kill me that I got worried."

He snorted derisively at her admission, but continued to stare at the bare wall.

Tabitha shifted a little bit to look around him, trying to figure out what held his attention so acutely, but couldn't see anything. Not even a crack in the paint.

"Dammit," she growled. "Would you just turn around and talk to me? Tell me why the hell you brought me here even when I didn't ask for your help."

Castiel was silent for a moment, but then he slowly told her, "I am trying to keep my face hidden."

She immediately shook her head in confusion. "Why?" she demanded in an incredulous voice. "You
got a big pimple or something you're worried about? Believe me, that should be the least of our worries right now."

He hesitated again, but then slowly told the wall, "You told me that you did not wish to ever see my face again."

Mouth hanging open in shock, Tabitha could only stand and stare. She suddenly recalled that when he'd shown up to nab Anna, he'd kept his back to her then as well. Tabitha fell back on the bed behind her as she laughed bitterly. "Jesus, Cas," she muttered as she stared up at the ceiling, her arms braced behind her on the bed. "I didn't exactly mean that literally—well, I guess I sorta did—but since you're here now, I'd rather talk to your face than your back."

The angel almost cautiously turned around, seeming to wait for her to tell him to turn away from her again.

When he'd turned to face her, she leaned forward to brace her elbows on her knees, her hands gripped between them. "Now, tell me what the hell I'm doing here, 'cause it sure as hell isn't helping Sam by being here."

"No," he agreed, giving her a little nod as he leaned back against the wall, his gaze hooded as he glanced carefully up at her. "You will not be helping Sam."

Her jaw clenched tightly as she mashed her teeth together. "I take it you took Dean somewhere like this, too?" she ground out.

"Zachariah did," he nodded again.

"Why has Lilith suddenly changed her tune? Why does she want me dead instead of captured?" Tabitha asked. "She said something like she'd found out I would be a threat or something. What was that supposed to mean? What did she find out about me?"

"I cannot say."

Tabitha fought to keep from rolling her eyes. "Cannot or will not?"

His hooded stare was his only answer.

"How'd you even find me?" she tried asking when he remained silent.

He held her gaze for a minute before glancing away and softly admitting, "Dean asked that I go to you and stop you from going after Lilith to find Sam."

She thought for a minute before continuing her next thought. "And now Zach is holding Dean somewhere else and you're holding me here?" she clarified.

He nodded again.

She remembered her conversation with Anna, and began piecing together a few pieces of the puzzle together, though many of the crucial ones were still missing. Like trying to solve a puzzle with none of the middle pieces, just the edges to give her a vague notion of what the picture was. "You don't want anyone to stop Sam, do you? You want Sam to be the one to kill Lilith. Even though you told Dean that he had to stop the apocalypse. Why?"

Castiel stiffened again, and she knew she was asking the right questions, but he would only say, "I'm just following orders." And then disappeared.
"Screw this," Tabitha growled to herself as she hopped to her feet. But as she pulled on the motel room door, the nob would only spin…and spin. Looking around, she realized the room wasn't quite the standard motel room. There wasn't a window in sight. Not even in the bathroom.

She was fuming when she made her way back to the door, lifting her leg and kicking at the door with all her strength. But the door didn't even creak or groan.

Fifteen minutes later, she'd finally accepted that the angel wasn't going to let her leave any time soon. She'd even taken to slamming the chairs against the door. Only for them to shatter uselessly. And then return wholly untouched when she turned back to the table.

Her cellphone also proved useless, given her a message that she was out of her coverage zone. She couldn't seem to reach anyone and couldn't do anything about her imprisonment.

Throwing her head back, she shouted uselessly at the angel that had imprisoned her, "Castiel! When I see you again, I'm gonna tell you to do more than not show your face again! I'm gonna tell you to go screw yourself, and actually expect you to figure out how to do it!"

Unsurprisingly, there was no answer to her threat.

After many hours had passed, and she'd long since grown bored with pacing around the silent room, Tabitha calmed herself and sat on the foot of the bed once more. Closing her eyes, she concentrated on Castiel and called for him, hoping that he would return.

She knew the moment he'd reappeared, even with her eyes closed and although he didn't break the silence of the room.

Keeping her eyes closed, she asked, "Is Sammy still alive?"

"Yes."

"Is Lilith?"

"For the moment."

She opened her eyes to see him leaning back against the wall across from her. As if he hadn't ever left her and kept her locked alone in her angel jail cell.

"You know," she told him as she pressed her palms together between her spread knees and leaned forward a little, "I've had a lot of time to sit here and think over the past however many hours since you locked me up. And I'm starting to find some of the crucial middle pieces of the puzzle, I think. It took me a while, and I feel stupid for not getting it sooner. They were there all along."

Castiel waited for her to continue, looking at her from beneath his still hooded eyes even though he didn't answer her.

"See, it was something Anna told me that should have tipped me off. But there were other clues, too. You finding me like you did was the very first. You said Dean told you where I was, but he only knew I was in Maryland somewhere. Not where specifically. Even with those sigils on my ribs and my bracelet, you found me. You knew right where I was. Because you knew right where Lilith was. That's what got the ball rolling. I realized that as powerful as you angels seem to be, you sure seemed to be screwing the pooch on stopping the demons from breaking seals. And according to Anna, we're at the final seal or seals now."

She waited to see if Castiel would respond or contradict her, but he continued to stare at her as if
unconcerned.

With a sigh, she stood from the bed and stepped closer. As she closed the distance, she saw something flicker in his eyes. Apprehension maybe.

When only a foot separated them, she stopped, looking into his eyes to gauge his responses as she continued. "Like I said, it was what Anna said to me that finally clicked and started making sense. She told me that I had to stop Sam; that he couldn't kill Lilith. Couldn't break the final seal." She crossed her arms over her torso as she continued. "You see, I thought she was talking about two different things. I thought she was concerned—like I was…and am—that Sam couldn't kill Lilith and still be the same afterwards. And that something might happen to him or he might do something afterwards that would break the final seal. But I've replayed what she said in my head a hundred times now. And what she was really telling me was that Lilith is the final seal. That Sam couldn't break the final seal by killing her."

Looking away from Castiel's ever darkening stare, she began to pace, gesturing about with one hand as she walked back and forth. "It makes sense now. Given what Lilith told me, too. She kept talking about death not being so bad—even for a demon—when you died for a reason. I thought she was trying to talk about killing me, but she was talking about her own death. Somehow, she's got to be the one to die to let her daddy out, huh?"

There was no answer, but she hadn't really expected one. Still on a roll, her pacing increased as she continued, her loose hair fanning out around her as she turned sharper and sharper at the end of each line she paced. "That's why Heaven was so damned intent on letting Sam go. They want him to keep drinking blood so he's strong enough to kill her. They don't want anyone else to try because they might not be strong enough to ice her ass. And Sam's been obsessed with killing her ever since Dean was sent to Hell. It wasn't hard to fan that desire into an obsession, even without his demon bitch egging him on all this time. All you guys had to do was sit back and let it happen. I mean, what's it matter to you angels anyway? I'm sure you'll all be safe in Heaven once the fireworks start. It's just a bunch of humans that'll die in the coming Armageddon, right? And what do you care about us?"

She finally stopped her now frantic pacing, coming to stand in front of Castiel as she stared up into his eyes. "Tell me I'm wrong," she demanded. "Tell me the angels aren't just letting the apocalypse get triggered."

In return, he continued to stare at her.

Her face turned bitter as she looked away. "That's as good as an admission that I'm right," she whispered to him. "You suck at lying, so you try to not say anything to hide that you can't lie worth a damn. But with you, that's as good as telling me I'm right anyway." She turned away to stand sideways to him, her shoulder only inches away from him as she squeezed her eyes shut and she struggled to hold her emotions in. "I just don't get why you didn't let Lilith kill me back there. Why save me if we're all gonna die in the apocalypse?"

"You have your part to play."

When her head snapped back to look at the angel, she found that he'd turned partly away from her, too, turning to face the opposite direction she'd turned. But his shoulder almost brushed hers, and his head was only inches away from hers as they stood side by side. Yet his eyes remained shut. Almost as if he couldn't bear to turn and look her in the eye.

Before she could respond, he whispered, "Even if I hadn't been ordered to save you from Lilith, I wouldn't have let you die at her hand."
Her heart strained to hear anything beneath his words, anything meaningful…anything that could prove he had some shred of emotion. But she didn't trust her heart. Was it only grasping at straws when it told her that there was regret and longing in his voice? Was it only what she yearned for to justify how much she'd let herself care for him?

"We can still stop Sam. Still stop the apocalypse and everything else. It's not too late," she begged him.

"They don't want it stopped. It's already too late," he seemed regretful to tell her. He opened his eyes and turned to look at her, whispering to her, "I'm sorry."

She knew it was probably foolish. Knew it might be only desperation, but she reached up to cup his cheek in her hand, rubbing her thumb across his familiar stubble as she watched his eyes slide shut again. Not caring that she was begging, she pleaded him with increasing desperation, "If you ever felt a shred of emotion for me…if you ever felt even the *glimmer* of real feelings for me…please help me. At the very least, take me to Dean. Take me to one of my brothers."

Her eyes shut as she felt his face turn into her hand. And for a moment, she let her heart readily believe the things it had felt all along. She savored the simple feel of his skin and whiskered cheek beneath her palm. She cherished the way his arm brushed against hers and the primal way their breathing slowed and evened until it was in-sync with each other. For that moment, she allowed herself to live in the yearning promise of that simple touch.

When she opened her eyes again, they were standing in an ornately decorated room with lots of gold and filigree, and platters of what appeared to be burgers laid out along a long, buffet-style table.

Mutters caught her ear, and her hand fell to her side as she turned to see Dean pacing, his cellphone in hand.

He looked up and stopped, then crossed the room to drag her into his arms, dropping a kiss to the top of her head as he held her and she fervently returned the embrace. As she looked over his shoulder, she mouthed a silent thanks to the angel as he motionlessly observed them.

"You scared the ever-loving piss outta me, Tabby," he whispered to the top of her head. "Going after Lilith like that. I thought I was gonna lose you, too. Where the hell have you been?"

"Stuck, just like you are. Although in slightly less posh surroundings," she whispered against his shoulder.

"No more taking off without a word to me or Bobby. Got it? You let us in on your crazy plans from now on."

"Ditto," she returned, a small smile lifting the corner of her lips.

"You know the score on what's going down? What they want Sammy to do?" he whispered into her hair, his voice dropping even lower.

"Yeah."

Dean finally stepped back to hold his sister at arm's length, giving her a once over—and reaching up a hand to brush against the bandage still taped to her neck—before turning back to Castiel.

"Thanks for at least bringing Tabitha here," he tersely told the angel. "Even if I've been asking you to do that for hours." He paused and then irritably asked, "Any chance you wanna just go ahead and zap Sammy here, too?"
Castiel turned to position his back to the wall, going into his angel-statue mode.

"Why are you even here, Cas?" Dean demanded.

Castiel turned to look at him. "We've been through much together, you and I. And I just wanted to say, I'm sorry it ended like this."

"Sorry?" Dean scoffed, stepping away from his sister to punch the angel. She hissed as his hand painfully connected, not seeming to affect the angel in the slightest.

Undeterred, Dean shook his hand and told him, "It's Armageddon, Cas. You need a bigger word than 'sorry.'"

The angel gave Dean an annoyed look. "Try to understand—this is long foretold. This is your…"

"Destiny?" Dean cut him off in anger. "Don't give me that 'holy' crap. Destiny. God's plan… It's all a bunch of lies, you poor, stupid son of a bitch! It's just a way for your bosses to keep me and keep you in line! You know what's real? People, families—that's real. And you're gonna watch them all burn?"

"You can't just let the whole world burn, Cas," Tabitha pleaded, stepping beside her brother as she placed a hand on his arm in unity with him.

"What is so worth saving?" the angel demanded in return, taking a stride closer as he looked between the siblings. "I see nothing but pain here," he spat as he stared meaningfully at Tabitha, then he turned his stare on Dean. "I see inside you. I see your guilt, your anger, confusion. In paradise, all is forgiven. You'll be at peace. Even with Sam."

Dean scoffed and stomped away, but Tabitha remained frozen, staring at the darkened expression on Castiel's face as he stared at the spot beside her where Dean had been.

"You're right," she whispered in return. "There's a lot of pain here. I'll be the first to agree with you on that. And I've felt a lot of it myself. Those I've…cared for…have given me a lot of pain in return for what I felt for them."

Castiel turned, almost curiously regarding her, staring into her eyes as if to understand what she was saying by force of will.

Seeing she had his attention, she ardently continued, "But I wouldn't trade it, Cas. Not one minute. Not one cut to my heart that made me bleed. I wouldn't trade that pain for anything. Because the stronger that pain was, the deeper the good emotions were, too. Joy. Happiness. Peace." She glanced away from him as his face softened somewhat, finally admitting to him, "Even the love I felt that couldn't possibly be returned. I wouldn't trade it no matter how deep the corresponding pain was. Because it would take away that joy and happiness, too, Cas. That's what emotions are. They hurt and they're painful. But I wouldn't give them up for all the promise in the universe of an artificial happiness. Because it'll never feel real if you've felt that gut-wrenching…heart-stabbing…knock-your-breath-away kinda pain that comes from real peace and happiness."

For several moments, Castiel only stared at her, seeming to struggle with understanding her words.

But Dean came back to them, his hand on his sister's shoulder as he stepped between them, bending down to place his face in the angel's, telling him, "You can take your peace…and shove it up your lily-white ass. Tabby's right. 'Cause I'll take the pain and the guilt. I'll even take Sam as is. All I need is my brother and sister as they are. It's a lot better than being some Stepford bitch in paradise. This is simple, Cas!" Dean yelled as Castiel turned away from them. "No more crap about being a good
soldier. There is a right and there is a wrong here, and you know it. Look at me!" he demanded, spinning the angel back around. "You know it!"

"You were gonna help me once, weren't you?" Dean continued as Castiel began to fidget and look like a cornered animal. "You were gonna warn me about all this, before they dragged you back to Bible camp. Help me...help us—now. Please."

Castiel looked around almost frantically, then, his eyes darted almost pleadingly back to Tabitha's. Still unsure if she was imagining the emotion she saw in her eyes, she threw the warnings in her mind behind her, grasping at his imploring look, to beg him again, "Please, Cas." She darted a look at Dean's fixed stare on the angel, and silently begged Castiel, *If you ever felt anything at all for me, please help us now. Show me I wasn't a complete fool to have ever believed that an angel could have possibly felt...anything at all for me.*

He inhaled deeply before asking, "What would you have me do?"

"Get us to Sam," Dean desperately pounced. "We can stop this before it's too late."

"I do that, we will all be hunted. We'll all be killed," he feverishly replied, darting a concerned look at Tabitha.

Tabitha reached out to grab Castiel's palm in her right hand, and then gripped her brother's hand in her left one, holding the two on either side of her as she told them, "Lilith was right about one thing. Some things are worth dying for...this is one of those things, Cas."

He stared almost fearfully into her eyes, shaking his head slightly as he looked away, and then glanced across her at Dean before dropping his gaze and looking away once more.

"You spineless...soulless son of a bitch," he growled as he yanked his hand away from his sister, stalking to the nearest wall.

Tabitha pulled her right hand from the angel as well, crossing her arms over her chest as she told him in an uneven voice, "I was right, wasn't I? You angels just aren't capable of emotion. Not capable of feeling anything at all. And you're just like the rest of those angels. I thought you were different. But you're not. You're just like every other angel up there in Heaven."

She looked away and stepped in the opposite direction that Dean had stalked in, not wanting him to see her tears or the depth of her devastation.

"Tabitha," Castiel softly called after her.

"Just leave," she brokenly answered.

"We're done!" Dean added from his side of the room.

Tabitha felt the angel leave, but didn't turn to confirm his departure as she struggled to regain her composure.

"Can you believe that robot?" Dean asked her as he began pacing around the room.

Tabitha tried to smile at her brother's obvious deflection from his own emotions.

"I guess we shouldn't be surprised," she tried lightly replying, playing along.

"It's gonna be okay, Tabby," he rushed to assure her. "I know you're worried sick about Sam, but
he'll be okay." He lowered his voice and whispered more to himself, "He has to be."

She didn't try to correct his assumptions about her current tears—though if she was honest with herself, it was just as much worry about Sam as the…pain…spreading in her heart.

"Of course," she tried to smile in return as she came across the room to fold into one of the chairs, pulling her legs up on the seat and wrapping her arms around them. "It's Sammy. He's always all right," she continued lightly.

Dean was still pacing across the way when Tabitha felt Castiel reappear in the room. She jerked her head up from where it had been bent down to her knees, turning in time to see the angel slam her brother against the wall.

She scrambled from the chair, running to grab at the angel's arm as she saw him silently hold Ruby's knife out between them. The man and angel shared a look, and Dean nodded slightly in return to whatever passed between the two, though Tabitha was left confused.

The siblings turned to look down as the angel drew the knife across his already exposed forearm, blood welling thickly around the cut. He dipped his fingers in the blood, quickly working a sigil with the viscous fluid on the wall.

Dean grabbed Tabitha by her arm, pulling her back a ways from Castiel as they silently watched him, trying to figure out what the angel was doing with his own blood.

"Castiel!" another angel shouted as he appeared in the room. Tabitha hadn't yet met him, but recognized him as Zachariah from her brothers' descriptions of him.

"Would you mind explaining just what the hell you're doing. And what the hell the girl's doing here. The Winchesters seem to be suddenly multiplying like rabbits, I know I left only one in here," he sneered.

As he strode closer, Castiel finished the sigil, slamming his bloody palm against the marking as Zachariah disappeared in a sudden swell of power. One Tabitha recognized from when Anna had sent Castiel and Uriel away.

"He won't be gone long," Castiel hastily told them. "We have to find Sam now," he continued.

"Where is he?" Dean asked, looking slightly shaken by the sudden rebellion of the normally obedient Castiel.

"I don't know," Castiel answered before Tabitha could speak. "But I know who does. We have to stop him, Dean, from killing Lilith."

"But Lilith's gonna break the final seal," Dean replied as Castiel handed him Ruby's bloody knife.

Tabitha broke the death-grip her brother had formed on her elbow to tell him, "Lilith is the final seal, Dean. That's why the angels wanted Sam to kill her."

Dean stared at her in disbelief, and then coldly looked at Castiel.

The angel confirmed. "She dies, the End begins."

He suddenly grabbed both Winchesters by their elbows, transporting them to Chuck's house.

The author was fully dressed this time, but was on the phone, pacing about his living room as he
said, "Then, uh, I'll take 20 girls for the whole night." Tabitha's head twisted in surprise as he paused before telling the person on the other end, "Lady, sometimes you got to live like there's no tomorrow."

He turned around, spotted them, and then froze in surprise.

"You try to take on 20 women in one night, and there might not be any tomorrow for you there, Chuck," Tabitha told him. She considered him for a moment, her head twisting a little more as she thoughtfully added, "Unless you got other superpowers we don't know about."

Dean shot her a glare across a confused looking angel.

Chuck stammered, "Wait. T-t-this isn't supposed to happen." He pulled the phone up to his ear again as he told the woman on the other end, "No, lady, this is definitely supposed to happen, but I just got to call you back." He hung up and turned to the three of them as he continued to stutter, "I…I-I-I. What are you doing here?"

"We need to know where Sam is," Dean demanded, making his way to Chuck's computer without waiting.

Tabitha started following her brother to tell him where Sam would probably be, or at least where Lilith had been, but was stopped by Castiel grabbing her arm.

"What?" she asked him. "I can tell him right where Sam is. Or at least where Lilith was. So can you," she pointed out.

"Please…wait," he softly entreated her.

She nodded once, deciding that she could hold her silence for now given what the angel had done for them. When Castiel dropped her arm, she felt strangely lost. Not knowing why Castiel had decided to rebel, and feeling uncomfortable with just him and her in Chuck's living room, she turned to follow Dean into the kitchen.

"St. Mary's? What is it, a convent?" he was asking Chuck as he leafed through several pages.

"Yeah," Chuck agreed. "But you guys aren't supposed to be there. You're not in this story," he told them.

Castiel glanced down at the pages on the table, blandly replying, "Yeah, well…we're making it up as we go."

Tabitha gasped as she suddenly felt a swelling of power that seemed to steal the very oxygen of the room. Castiel wrapped an arm behind her back to support her as the power unsteadied her balance.

The room shook and lights flickered with an aching familiarity. Even Chuck recognized the return of his archangel as he groaned, "Aw, man! Not again!"

Instead of the warning the archangel had apparently given with the small waft of power she'd felt before, Tabitha knew by the sheer magnitude she felt now that the archangel was fully unfurling his wings and meant absolute business in protecting his prophet from them.

"It's the archangel!" Castiel shouted over the rising din, pulling Tabitha closer into his body as she panted through the all-encompassing power. Turning to Dean, he told him, "I'll hold him off! I'll hold them all off! Just stop Sam!"
Dean seemed to understand something Tabitha wasn't capable of comprehending at the moment, giving her a strangely pained look as he shouted to Castiel, "What about my sister?"

"She'll be safe here! The archangel won't hurt her! Stop Sam!"

"Make sure she's okay!" Dean yelled.

Tabitha managed to raise her head from where it had fallen against Castiel's chest in time to see the angel press his palm to her brother's forehead, sending him away.

She grabbed at the angel's hand as Dean disappeared, panting and asking him, "What…about…my brothers?"

Castiel shook her hand from his, reaching down to cup her cheek in his warm palm as he pressed her closer into his chest, giving her a look unlike anything she'd ever seen from him. Something almost…sweet…and…tender.

"I've done my best for them," he whispered to her as she stared up at him, barely hearing him over the mighty roar. "But I wanted to make sure you made it here to safety. That's why I brought you here. You'll be safe…here."

The angel's slow, even breathing was so at odds with her own shallow pants. And she briefly tried to close her eyes and concentrate on his breathing beneath her ear as she melted against him. But she only succeeded in allowing a few tears to fall wetly on her lashes.

"I wanted you to see me the way you once did…" he softly confided to her, her head rising and falling with his chest as he spoke. "…different from the other angels. I liked being…unique…different in your eyes. I didn't want to go back to being just another angel in Heaven…nobody in particular. I wanted to be someone…unique in your eyes again. Even if only for a moment."

Opening her eyes, she looked back up into the expectant eyes of the angel. "They'll kill you for helping us, won't they?" He nodded once, his eyes telling her that he was resigned to his fate. "Oh, Cas," she softly exhaled, her hand clutching fiercely at the lapels of his trench coat. "You could never be nobody to me."

For just a brief moment, he bent down to brush his lips across hers. It was nothing like the first fevered and impassioned kiss he'd given her in that library so many months ago. Didn't even last a fraction of that first kiss. But she knew she'd remember every sensation of that brief, sweet brush against her lips. She'd never forget the simple peace of that chaste brush across her skin. And how it swept away the pain that had welled up in her heart for so long. Proving that the price of such pain was worth the reward of such peace.

Like all of the best things in life, it lasted for just a moment. Not even a fraction of a second. And then it was over. He pushed her back and towards Chuck, who seemed to belatedly understand and helped to support her as she struggled under the ever rising power of the archangels flexing their power.

She tried to struggle out of Chuck's grip, but could barely muster the strength to continue her shallow pants as Castiel turned towards the bright light filling Chuck's picture window.

He seemed almost peaceful as he waited, bathed in the light bent on ripping him away.

For just another moment though, he paused to look back at her, smiling briefly as he told her, "If angels were capable of emotions…I would have had them for you."
Like an ocean tide, the power roared and swelled as it washed over them, filling the room with the destruction of the light as Chuck pulled Tabitha away to shield her. Away from the dying of the light. Away from the rising of the Morning Star.

Chapter End Notes

Shew. That's over. You have NO idea how hard that chapter was to write. And yet, when I got started on this one, I just sat down and wrote away at it in one sitting! I'd had this one in my mind for a while, and I knew just how I wanted it to go.

Season 4 finally over, and on to season 5. I'm really excited about that one, because I have a LOT of fun stuff planned, and even some fun times with some of my own characters! :)

And Marianne Faithfull—the alias Tab uses—is the actress that played in the cult film Lucifer Rising. She played Lilith. It just kinda tickled my funny bone to have Tabitha use it. :)

* Philippians 2:5-11 This is supposed to be a very effective bible verse against demons and demonic possession. Not necessarily in the show, but if you believe in that stuff in real life…I've read that it's supposed to be effective against demons. Easier to remember than Latin anyway! ;)

Be sure to leave your thoughts!

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