What Once Was Sacred

by saltandbyrne

Summary

Los Angeles detective Dean Winchester works tirelessly to atone for the sins of his father one case at a time. When his best friend Charlie drags him to visit Sam at his new job, Dean stumbles onto a bizarre string of deaths that brings him uncomfortably close to his past.

Dean can't stop thinking about Castiel, an enigmatic DJ who plays the sexiest music Dean's ever heard. A chance encounter at Castiel's house reveals that Castiel is an incubus, and Dean must face the lies and the reality of his childhood as a hunter. Dean comes to see that he and Castiel have more in common than he thought, and that guilt can be the hardest thing to cast aside.
Dean was sixteen when they came for him.

The worst part was, he wasn't even with Sammy when it happened. Dean had picked up a part-time job busing tables at the Sunny Sioux, and he'd skipped school to cover Tommy Marsden's shift that Tuesday afternoon. It was warm for March, a balmy 42 degrees and Dean had his shirt sleeves rolled up as he hosed down the dishes. Missouri's sunny-side eggs were the best in South Dakota but they were a bitch to clean.

At first Dean had thought that it was just the usual truancy officers that he'd been charming since he was thirteen. He had his story ready on the tip of his tongue, shaking the dishwater off his hands and wiping them on his apron.

“Are you Dean Winchester?” The guy was wearing a cheap navy suit that had “cop” written all over it. Dean narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest, staring at the man's face. He was an old black guy, wiry like a graying whip cord with hard eyes and a steady gaze. Dean felt the hairs on his neck stand up as the man stared him down.

“Who wants to know?”

Dean had the brief, mad thought of running out the back door. Sam's middle school was 1.2 miles down the main road, and their furnished economy unit was 0.8 miles west of that on Route 42. If this guy was a truant officer Dean was the fucking prom queen.

The slam of the kitchen's swinging doors turned both their heads. Missouri stood with her hands on her hips, eyes narrowed at both of them like she couldn't decide who had offended her more.

“Officer, I will have you know that this young man informed me that he had a half-day at school.” Missouri glared at Dean and shook her head. Dean would almost have felt bad if every hunting-honed nerve in his body weren't screaming at him to run.
“That's quite alright, m'am.” The cop extended his hand and smiled, his eyes lighting up as he shook Missouri's hand. Dean snorted softly. He knew charm laid on thick when he saw it.

“I'm Agent Rufus Turner, and I'm afraid I need to take Mr. Winchester here in for some questioning.”

Missouri's mouth opened into an “O” of surprise as Agent Turner looked at Dean.

“Let's make this easy, son.” The agent spread his hands out in front of his chest. “You just come with me, and let's not give this lovely lady any more trouble.”

“I don't...” Dean felt his mouth run dry as sweat beaded onto his forehead. Something was really wrong here.

“I need to pick up my brother from school.” Dean's chest felt tight and his fingers worked uselessly at his sides, scrunching into his apron. “Sam, my brother, he's at Whittier Junior High and I gotta get him cause, uh, my Dad, he's away with work right now and-”

“You don't need to worry about Sam right now, alright?” The Agent's hands remained spread in front of him, but Dean knew the fighting stance of his hips. He was doing the same thing.

“We already have your brother, Dean. Just come with me and we'll have a nice, long talk.”

Dean felt the fight seep out of him with Sam's name. Why would they have Sam? How could they take Sam out of school, only Dad and Dean could do that, they'd signed the papers and made nice with the lady at the front desk just like they were supposed to.

Dean had been drilled on handling Child Protective Services since he was eight. There wasn't a bruise or scar he couldn't easily explain to the dowdy women and pinched-looking men that showed up from time to time. Dean knew the rules – legal residence, both boys enrolled in school, and no visible signs of abuse, neglect, or endangerment. They hadn't broken any of them.

“I want to call my Dad.” Dean's voice had changed early, deepened with illicit smokes and self-imposed practice. It sounded high and small then, and Dean flushed with shame.
“I wouldn't worry about that, son.” The agent put his hands down as Dean's shoulders fell forward. It was hot, too hot for March in South Dakota. Dean's head felt funny, and he winced at the fluorescent lights overhead.

Missouri's mumbled “Oh, my Lord” rang through his head like a bell, while the Agent's words sounded like they were a million miles away.

“We've got him, too.”

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There are two versions of Dean Winchester's childhood.

The first four years are fairly consistent. Hard-working mechanic father and a pretty blonde mother. T-shirts with bears and birthday parties with balloons and Ronald McDonald. A small house and meatloaf on Wednesdays. Things weren't perfect, but they got by. If Dean tries he can almost remember the strange bump of his mother's stomach, his Dad's hand patting his hair and telling him they were cooking up a new brother or sister in there.

Both stories really start with a fire.

Mary Winchester was set ablaze on the ceiling of her infant son's nursery while a yellow-eyed demon looked on and laughed. The demon marked Sam as his own before disappearing in a cloud of sulphur.

John Winchester, ex-marine and grieving father, took up arms to avenge his wife's death. He studied and trained, bringing his sons along so they could know that monsters were real, that a demon could wear a man's face. He made himself a hunter, and he made his boys soldiers in the war against the darkness.

John's grief was powerful, and he faltered on his road to redemption many times. He drank too much and sometimes, in the dead of night as his boys lay peacefully in their rented beds, John feared the demon's blood coursing through his youngest son's veins.

But John did the best he could, shielding Sam from the worst of it while he taught Dean to drive the car and pack salt rounds and know the triple cowlicks that mark a man as a werewolf.
John killed monsters, saving hundreds of lives with the death of each witch, each demon, each increasingly-obscure Japanese water spirit and West African trickster deity. He recorded them all in his journal, pouring his life's work into the careful illustrations and annotated descriptions, knowing that his sons would one day take up his mantle and rid the world of the blight of Hell.

The second story starts with a fire as well, although various therapists and criminal psychologists have placed it in the jungles of Vietnam rather than an electrical fire in a Lawrence, Kansas split-level.

John Winchester, unfaithful alcoholic and PTSD victim, suffered a psychotic break when his wife died trying to rescue their infant son from a fire. He left behind all traces of his life to roam the country on a desperate quest for vengeance.

Unable to cope with the accidental death of the mother of his children and a woman he loved deeply despite his mistakes, John became obsessed with the occult. He attributed Mary's death to a demon conspiracy theory centered around his infant son, perhaps blaming Sam in part for Mary's death.

His delusions became increasingly outrageous as the years passed. His transient existence and military training made him a dangerous killer, aided in no small part by the diligent work of his eldest son.

John Winchester's first murder was on May 9th, 1985, with the execution of a middle-aged real estate agent named Angela Roberts. John would later identify her as the leader of a dangerous coven of witches. His final murder took place on December 18th, 1994, with the decapitation of David Reuben, a mentally-handicapped man John identified as a “Rugaru”. Dean Winchester witnessed this murder and helped his father incinerate the body.

Both stories end on an unseasonably warm March day in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, when FBI Agent Rufus Turner apprehended John Winchester and turned his sons over to state custody.

Dean doesn't like to talk about either story.

Right now, all Dean wants to talk about is Krissy Chambers and where the scumbag cuffed to his interrogation desk is hiding her.
"We're gonna find her, Terry, I can promise you that." Victor cracks his knuckles, leaning down on the table to bare his teeth. Dean usually plays bad cop, but Glendale tax auditor Terence Boyd has “scared of black guys” blinking above his head in neon and Victor can be a scary motherfucker when he feels like it.

“We've got dogs, Terry. They're sniffing around your property right now.” Victor straightens up and turns to Dean, cracking his neck and winking at him. It's a bold-faced lie. The only dogs they have access to are Victor and Bela's shih tzu and Charlie's one-eared agoraphobic pitt mix. But it makes a fresh sheen of sweat stand out on Terry's forehead and Dean feels his palms itch. They're so close.

“You know what I love about Los Angeles, Detective Winchester?” Victor smiles, all white teeth and black-glint eyes.

“What's that, Detective Henriksen?” Dean leans back in his chair, keeping his expression neutral and his posture non-threatening.

“All that dry, desert air.” Victor takes a deep breath, eyes closed like the room doesn't stink of old coffee and perp sweat. “Makes it so easy for the dogs to track a scent.”

Dean has no idea if that's true or not, but it does the trick as Terry starts to hyperventilate.

“Look, Terry, you know he's right.” Dean stands up and turns his chair around, straddling the back and leaning closer to Terry. “We're gonna find her, it's just a matter of time. And we have enough evidence to keep you here until we do.”

Dean keeps his palms facing out and his eyes open wide. Victor stands in the corner of the room, mouth drawn tight and his fists clenched at his side like he's one wrong word away from an act of violence.

“So you have a choice, Terry.” Dean raises his hands, weighing one against the other as Terry squirms. “You can face a murder charge,” Victor practically growls at that, “or you can face a kidnapping charge.”

Terry buries his face in his hands, craning down to where his wrist is cuffed to the bar on the table. Dean knows there'll be tears when he raises his head.
“Terry, I get it, man. Things happen. Shit goes wrong and it gets out of control, fast.”

Terry doesn't look up but Dean knows the perp's listening.

“If you tell us where she is, if you just tell us what happened, I can make this a hell of a lot easier on you.” Dean places one of his hands over his heart. “You help us bring her back, tell us where things went wrong, Terry? I will go in front of the judge myself and testify that you aided us in this investigation.”

It's an even bigger lie than the dogs. Dean will do nothing to mitigate Terence Boyd's sentence. He will, in fact, mildly perjure himself to exaggerate Terry's poor cooperation and violent outbursts. But Terry doesn't know that, and Dean's poker face would fool a much smarter criminal.

Terry goes still for a moment, the whole room silent except for the wet sound of Terry's breathing. Dean and Victor hold their poses, ready to move on to Stage III if necessary.

“Oh, God, I never meant-” Terry bursts out sobbing, huge wracking cries that streak tears down his cheeks. “I tried to tell her but she wouldn't, she wouldn't...”

Victor appears by his side, sliding a yellow pad of paper and a blue bic pen in front of Terry.

“Just write it all down, Terry, and we'll help get you out of this.”

Three hours later finds Dean with a signed confession, a terrified by very much alive Krissy Chambers waiting for her foster mother to come pick her up, and a fuming criminal defense attorney.

“My client would never have signed that statement if I -”

“Mr. Crowley, it's a clean confession and you know it.” Dean lays a conciliatory hand on the lawyer's arm. “And I'm so sorry to hear about the delay in getting here. L.A. traffic for you.” Dean shakes his head ruefully.

“Oh, please, like that little 'emergency vehicle inspection' on Vine was just a coincidence.” Crowley scowls, mean and tight. “I know how you little shits work.”
“Mr. Crowley, I think you severely overestimate the resources of the LAPD.” Dean smiles winningly. He'd have to send Tamara and Dale a thank-you round of drinks.

Dean heads back to his desk, handing Victor a cup of red eye. They're in for a long night of paperwork, and Victor is the most meticulous dotter of i’s and crosser of t’s Dean has ever met. It's probably why most of their arrests hold up in court.

“Hey, Dean.” Lisa pokes her head over Dean's cubicle, smiling and waving her hand. Her hair's pulled back in a messy ponytail and she looks exhausted despite her ever-cheerful mood. Dean nods, not missing the megawatt grin Victor shoots at her. He gets a well-deserved eyeroll as Lisa steps around the divider.

“How’s it going?” Dean sips his coffee as Lisa leans against his desk. They'd settled into an easy friendship after Lisa's disastrous attempt to ask him out on a date. Dean doesn't advertise the fact that he's gay, but it isn't a secret. Lisa is merely one of many women with the unfortunate combination of knockout good looks and terrible taste in men.

“Not great,” Lisa sighs. “I've been in there with the Chambers girl for hours but she won't say a word to me. So I was wondering...” She smiles and steeples her hands together pleadingly.

Dean takes another deep gulp of coffee and sets his cup on his desk.

“I'll talk to her, no problem.” Dean stretches as he stands up, cracking his back so loudly Lisa winces.

“Dean, I keep telling you, if you want to go to yoga class with me-”

“I'm good, Lisa.” Dean rolls his eyes at Victor. “It's bad enough Vic's wife wants to beat the crap out of me, now you're trying to tie me up like a pretzel?” Dean points an accusing finger at Lisa, who throws her hands up and walks away laughing.

“Bela just thinks you'd be great at krav maga.” Victor shrugs and purses his lips. “But if you're afraid of being beat up by a girl, I understand.” Victor ducks just in time to miss the paperclip Dean wings at him.
Dean isn't entirely convinced that Bela isn't some kind of undercover Bond girl. Art dealer, amateur sommelier and krav maga master – she's an eyepatch short of having her own TNT series.

“She's scary enough to keep your ass in check,” Dean smirks, taking his coffee with him as he heads to the small waiting room.

Benny looks tremendously relieved when Dean opens the door, like he'd rather be stuck in a room with a hungry tiger than a stone-faced teenage girl.

“Hey, Krissy.” Dean sits on the far end of her bench, sipping his coffee as she stares blankly ahead. A sweatshirt falls over her skinny shoulders, and Dean can guess that Lisa draped it there.

“Are you hungry at all?” Dean sets his coffee down as Krissy remains silent. “Because I gotta tell you, the vending machines in the lobby...”

Dean trails off, waiting for the girl to respond. She shoots him a terse look and Dean figures it's the best he's gonna get.

“Have the worst selection ever.” The corner of Krissy's lips turn up as Dean sighs dramatically.

“Seriously, there's Bugles, Fritos and Corn Nuts, but not a single bag of pretzels. And forget about M&Ms. You know what they've got?”

She looks at him again, making eye contact before looking back at the floor.

“What?” she asks, scuffing the toe of her Converse against the rubber-tiled floor.

Dean smiles, spreading his hands out for his punchline.

“Mars Bars.” He nods at Krissy's narrowed eyes. “Three entire rows of Mars Bars. I don't think anyone's bought one in ten years.”

Krissy laughs, a gentle snort as a small smile plays across her face.
“So if you want to go in on a Fritos-Mars Bar feast, you let me know, OK?”

“I'm OK.” She rolls her foot against the floor, side-to-side. “The other lady got me a sandwich.”

“Well now I'm just jealous.” Dean leans over, inclining his head as he asks, “Turkey?”

“Ham,” Krissy nods, smiling again as Dean rubs his stomach with mock hunger-pains.

“Well, I can't compete with that.” Dean watches as Krissy rolls her eyes. Dean's entered the “annoying grown-up” zone, which means he can be tolerated, if not fully trusted.

“I know your foster-mom's on her way from Fullerton, so it might be a while. We can always get you another sandwich, OK?”

“Sure.” Krissy nods and goes back to staring intently at the floor.

“Krissy, a lot of people are going to say this to you, and it's going to be annoying every time they do, but I want you to know that you're going to be alright.”

Krissy shoots him a look that shouldn't belong on such a young face. It's the whiskey-glare of a kid who's talked to too many therapists and counselors and gotten nothing in return.

“If you ever need anyone to talk to-”

“You wear too much hair gel,” Krissy says suddenly, shifting to tuck one of her legs underneath her. She smiles, fake and so defensive it makes Dean cringe.

Dean runs a hand over his hair, making a bashful face as he hits a spiky clump in the front. He had, in fact, put in too much gel, or really, just the right amount of the wrong gel. Dean needed to have a talk with Ash about reorganizing the bathroom cabinets.
“We can talk about hair products.” Dean strokes his chin, looking thoughtful. “My brother uses this weird foam-stuff, but between you and me, he's kinda reaching Fabio levels in the locks department.”

Krissy looks thrown by Dean's nonchalance. Dean knows how “authority-challenging behavior” is usually handled, how stunned he'd been by Pamela's curse words and refusal to rise to his bait when he'd sat in her office for the first time.

“But he's not really that bad, my brother. I've got a sister, too, well, kind of.” Dean looks softly at Krissy. “My foster-sister, Jo.”

Krissy narrows her eyes at him, not talking but not telling him to stop.

“My foster parents adopted us, me and my brother Sam, and Jo. We went to a few places before we wound up with Bobby and Ellen.” Dean snorts, thinking of the McConneleys and their 20-minute graces before every meal. He still feels hungry every time he sees that ubiquitous rose-hued profile painting of Jesus.

“You were in the system?” Krissy asks suspiciously, pulling the sweatshirt closer over her shoulders.

“Yep.” Dean nods, squinting up at the fluorescent overhead lights. “When I was 16. I could've run, I guess, but I didn't want to leave my brother.”

“Was your foster mom a total bitch?”

Dean laughs, thinking of all the times he'd called Ellen just that and worse. He'd apologized many times since.

“She was tough.” Dean smiles and turns himself a little closer to Krissy. “She didn't take any of my shit, and let me tell you, I was a master of bullshit. Honorary PhD in bullshittery.”

Krissy smirks and rolls her eyes at Dean's bad joke.

“But she did it because she cared about me. She was always there for me, even when I didn't think I
“Susan's not so bad, I guess.” Krissy shrugs and shifts around in her seat. “She's just a vegetarian, which I guess isn't her fault, she's like an Adventist or something.”

“Bet that ham sandwich was good,” Dean teases, making a sympathetic face as he imagines a life without pork. He didn't know how Garth made it through the day.

“You have no idea,” Krissy intones dramatically, sighing and slumping back against the wall.

“I mean, she's nice and stuff,” Krissy adds. “And it's just temporary. My dad's gonna come get me back, he's just dealing with some stuff right now.”

Dean nods, trying to keep the sympathy off his face. Dean knows that story, and if he knows how unlikely it is he also knows how important it is for Krissy to believe it.

She sneaks a glance at him, apparently satisfied with his reaction. She sits up straight suddenly, smoothing her hair back.

“He didn't do anything to me,” she blurts out. “I mean, he made me get in his car and he sort of tried to kiss me, which was gross, but he didn't do anything else. Like, sex or anything.”

Dean swallows hard, tasting the familiar bile of his job and feeling his chest tighten at Krissy's definition of “doing anything.” She'd probably been through much worse.

“OK.” Dean nods, giving her a reassuring smile. “Someone will take a recorded statement from you, and they'll use the video in court to make sure he never does it again.”

At fourteen Krissy is still young enough to be spared a courtroom appearance. Tessa would interview her, in a safe space where she could use props to demonstrate what Terry had done.

“Yeah, sure.” Krissy looks sideways at him, fiddling with her shoelace. “I watch Law and Order, I know how this works.”
Dean snorts, shaking his head. She’s funny, and tough, and Dean hopes her dad can get his shit together before he loses her for good.

“Miss Chambers?” Benny steps back into the room, taking a slight bow with his usual Southern charm. “Your mother is here.”

“She's not—”

“Thank you, Benny, I'll get Krissy settled with her foster mom.” Dean practically shoos Benny away. He's got a heart of gold and a gift for sweet-talking the working girls, but he's hopeless with kids.

Dean walks Krissy out to the front office, finding a harried-looking woman with a mass of gray-blonde curls and a faded house dress. She looks frazzled but sweet, and she almost collapses in relief when Krissy steps forward.

Dean stands aside while they say their hellos, Krissy begrudgingly accepting a hug and a fair amount of fussing. When they're ready to leave, Dean hands Krissy a card.

“If you're ever in trouble, call me.”

Krissy takes the card with a soft, “Thanks,” giving him a small smile before she leaves.

Dean watches them go, sighing as the heavy police-station door clicks shut behind them.

He pours another cup of coffee and heads back to his desk to settle in for a long night of paperwork.

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Dean has a book in his bedside drawer.
It's an old composition notebook, the spine covered with cracked black tape and the marbled pattern on the cover rubbed out in places. Faded ink on the front template proclaims it “Dean Winchester, English.”

The corners are battered and torn, the gray pulp of the cardboard cover blossoming open at the edges. The sides are darkened with the lint and dust of countless backpacks, duffel bags and suitcases. It fits into Dean's hand like an old set of gloves, soft where Dean's palm cradles the spine, shiny where his thumb rests as he leafs through the pages.

Dean leans back in his bed, skimming past the familiar front pages of old English homework. There are only four of them. Dean had taken to high school like a duck to a helicopter – not well.

He thumbs past the final page of grammar problems and lets the book fall open in his lap. He pulls his pen from its place behind his ear, twirling it between his fingers as he looks down at the page.

Printed in neat block letters is a list of names, starting with Angela Roberts and ending with David Reuben. Dean reads each name out loud, reciting this nightly rosary of his father's sins. He can recall this list by heart but he reads it every night, moving his lips over each name until he reaches the end.

When he's finished, he flips though a much longer list of names. He settles at the end of this list, silently reading each name as he uncaps his pen.

He closes his eyes for a moment, his chest rising and falling under his worn t-shirt. A small smile tugs at his lips as he puts pen to paper.

Krissy Chambers

Dean closes the book and puts it back in its drawer, laying the pen on top of it. He pulls the chain of his bedside lamp, casting his room into the streetlamp twilight of the Los Angeles night, and closes his eyes to sleep.

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“Oh my God, you are hopeless.” Charlie stands in his doorway, one hand braced against the frame as she looks Dean up and down.
“I know it's your job to embarrass your baby brother, but do you have to be so obvious about it?” She barrels past him, rolling her eyes and heading straight for his fridge. She pulls out a beer and cracks it open on the metal opener screwed to the counter.

“Seriously, a denim shirt? Are you allergic to getting laid?”

Dean looks down at himself. His shirt is denim, yes, but it's one of his newer ones, and his jeans only have one small hole in them. He shrugs at Charlie, who gestures at her own outfit and twirls for him.

“You look like...” Dean trails off, shaking his head as he eyes Charlie's getup. Her usual jeans and inside-joke video game t-shirt have been replaced with black pants so tight they could have been sprayed on. Shiny leather boots lace up to her knees, folded over at the top to reveal a red lining. A holster encircles her right leg, similar to ones Dean has seen at the gun stores. He's pretty sure none of those come in embossed leather with ornate brass buckles.

A fitted jacket cinches her waist tightly, the stiff material gathering into exaggerated points at her shoulders. Another leather harness lays over it, crossing her chest to buckle across her back. A thick cuff circles her left bicep, laced shut with black leather cord and sporting a wolf's-head stitched in crimson thread. Her hair's pulled back in a tight bun, with a red-trimmed cadet's cap pinned at an angle to top it off.

“Like something from a bad porn?” Charlie waggles her eyebrows and flashes her red-lacquered but still sensibly short nails. Dean has heard Charlie's rant about dragon claws in lesbian porn way too many times.

“That's one word for it.” Dean whistles and shakes his head. “Where did you even get that?”

“It's one of my old LARP characters.” She taps the wolf's-head on her arm. “Werewolf Hunters of the SS.”

Dean snickers at the name, crossing his arms over his chest. “And yet I'm the one who can't be trusted to dress himself.”

“I was a werewolf assassin, searching for a submissive mate to stand by my side as I fought the menace of the Axis Vampier Powers.” Charlie makes a serious face, narrowing her eyes and pursing her lips out. “I called myself ... Brigitte.”
“Yep, I have definitely seen that porn,” Dean quips, nodding matter-of-factly as Charles mock-glares at him. “Did you ditch the were-bitches for Moondoor?”

“Nah, it dissolved way before I got into Moondoor.” Charlie shrugs, the high points of her jacket grazing her jaw. “All-girl chapter so, you know,” Charlie pauses, rolling her eyes as far back as they can go. “Lesbian dra-ma.” She punctuates each syllable with a stab of her beer before taking a long swig.

“But tonight is not about lesbian werewolves, although it's good to know I’m properly dressed for any sudden girl-on-girl lycanthropy.” Charlie gets a dreamy look on her face before she shakes her head to continue.

“Tonight is about showing up at Sammy’s new job and amazing his coworkers with our awesome dance moves. And sweet outfits,” she adds, pointing at her leg holster before grimacing at Dean.

“Apparently Officer Please Don't Hit on Me over here missed the memo.” She drains the last of her beer and tosses the bottle into the recycling bin.

“We are like a case study in defying heteronormative stereotypes.” She leans forward on the counter, jiggling her boobs while Dean closes his eyes and pretends to look away in fear. “I'm a sharply-dressed dyke who can't use a powertool to save her life and you,” Charlie straightens up, readjusting her cleavage before pointing at Dean. “You are the least-stylish lover of dick on the planet.”

The snick of a key in the lock makes Dean laugh in spite of himself. Perfect timing.

“Well, one of several,” Charlie mutters under her breath before the door opens.

Ash and Garth come in bearing canvas bags full of vegetables from the food co-op. Dean smirks at Charlie, satisfied that he isn’t, in fact, the worst-dressed gay man in the room.

Garth is clad in his usual white linen pants and matching loose tunic. A gleaming white turban tops off his ensemble. He slips off his buckwheat Toms shoes and inclines his head at Charlie.

“Satnam, Charlie,” Garth says warmly, holding his bow long enough for it to be awkward to anyone
who wasn't used to him. Charlie just waits patiently, tossing off a salute in return.

“Red, looking sharp!” Ash brings the rest of the groceries inside, spilling tomatoes and peppers over the counter. “See you already taxed one of my brews.”

Charlie makes a perfectly innocent face, looking ridiculous against her dominatrix-werewolf outfit.

“Just imagine how much better you'd feel without all those toxins clogging up your chakras,” Garth sighs, making a stern face as he pulls out a large clamshell of beansprouts. It's all for show. Garth adheres religiously to his Kundalini yoga teacher regimen, but he doesn't begrudge Dean and Ash their respective bacon and booze habits.

“Are you kidding me, she'd be lethal at full energy.” Dean presses a hand over his heart. “I'd fear for humanity.”

“Don't change the subject, you.” Charlie glares at him before turning to his roommates.

“I was just explaining to Dean that tonight is about bi-curious co-eds and the potential for free booze.”

“I don't think Sam can-” Dean interjects as Charlie waves him off.

“Yeah, yeah, he's just a bar back, I know. But this is Seraphim! If I can't get a goth girl to buy me a drink the Lavender Menace is going to show up and take my L-card away.”

Charlie turns to Ash and Garth, finding four wide eyes and two stubble-dusted mouths hanging open in confusion.

“Seraphim? The church they turned into a club last year?” Charlie waits for understanding to dawn.

“Oh yeah, the one by Little Tokyo?” Ash nods, while Garth continues to look perplexed. Not that anyone could expect Garth to be up on the latest nightlife news. The guy got up at 3:30 every morning to go to three hours of group meditation.
“I’ve wanted to go forever, but someone,” she jerks her thumbs at herself, “is besties with a total workaholic who’s allergic to fun, so.”

Dean rolls his eyes and turns to Garth.

“It’s the club Sam's working at. I wanted to check it out, and Charlie promised she’d keep me from sticking out too much.”

“Yes, and I can't do that if you're dressed like someone's dad running out to the Home Depot.” Charlie throws her hands up, looking heavenward. “I have to do all the work in this relationship, don't I?”

She stalks away into Dean's room, leaving Dean with his roommates. Landlords might be a better way to put it. Ash and Garth owned the house and rented a room to Dean for cheap. They're quirky, Ash with his computer boards that seemed to multiply like Tribbles around the house and Garth with his weird vegan food. Dean feels his stomach sink as Garth pulls out a huge bag of dried mung beans. Dean doesn't care how good they are for his prana; they made the house smell like old-man armpits.

But Ash and Garth are good guys, and the money Dean saves living with them allows him to help Sam out with his outrageous law school tuition. Sam still has to work part-time, but he has a very safe, brand-new car and a very safe apartment near campus.

Charlie charges back into the living room, the heels of her boots clicking across the floor. She bypasses Dean entirely, slipping an arm around Ash's shoulders and grinning.

“You wouldn't happen to have an extra t-shirt, would you?”

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Dean arrives at Seraphim with a black t-shirt two sizes too small and a half-empty promise to shave one of Charlie's eyebrows off while she sleeps.

“Holy Mother of Siouxsie, look at all these girls,” Charlie sighs, adjusting her cap. “Think I can get
one of them to call me Fraulein?"

Dean glances at the giggling crowd of black-clad girls. The scent of clove cigarettes wafts over from their gaggle, and Dean quickly looks away as one of them catches his eyes and smiles hopefully.

The lines move forward a fraction as a group of lanky hipster boys crosses the black velvet rope. The bouncer clicks it shut, narrowing her eyes as a guy in a pair of chinos tries to slip in.

“I don’t think so, Office Space.” She shoos the guy back and taps her black nails against her clipboard. Her hair falls in black tousles down her shoulders, spilling over her leather jacket to graze the top of her ample cleavage. Dean’s pretty sure she could take someone down in a fight despite the tight corset pulling her waist in like a wasp.

“Aren’t you glad I made you change?” Charlie stage-whispers, grinning smugly as Dean wraps his arms tighter around his chest.

“I’d be happier if I were wearing a jacket.” He rubs his arms along his biceps for emphasis. All those years of South Dakota winter tolerance had disappeared after his first year in LA. It isn’t a cold night by normal standards, but Dean would gladly wear at least another layer against the desert night.

“Not my fault your only outerwear options are cop, cowboy and construction worker. You are seriously one headdress short of being all the Village People.” Charlie smoothes the sleeves of her own jacket, heedless to Dean’s suffering.

“Besides, you look hot. I’d get up on that sausage fest in a second.” She pulls his arms away from his chest, clucking her tongue as he reluctantly lowers them to his side.

Dean looks down, trying to minimize the stretch of his chest under Ash’s old Misfits t-shirt. The faded skull logo is pulled so tight it’s almost see-through, with a smattering of moth-eaten holes along the stretched-out collar. It was one of Ash’s only t-shirts that possessed sleeves, so Dean figures it could be worse. He catches Charlie staring and forks his fingers, pointing them over the bridge of his nose.

“My eyes are up here, big guy.”

Charlie keeps her eyes firmly fixed on Dean’s chest, smirking as she wags her finger.
“Careful, now. You're gonna run out your battery if you keep your headlights blazing like that.”

Dean shoots her a snarky look while she laughs, crossing his arms with a harrumph. It's not his fault he has perky nipples.

“If the rest of your fake id's are this shitty, don't even bother whipping them out.” The bouncer jerks her thumb to the street, shaking her head as the gaggle of gothlings exits the line. “All ages on Wednesdays, come back then.” She sounds as welcoming as a spider before her den.

Dean swallows hard as she looks him over.

“Castlevania here is definitely getting in.” She arches an approving eyebrow at Charlie, who's looking forlornly at the departing girls. “But you...”

She frowns at Dean's feet, clicking her tongue at the workboots Charlie had lamented would have to do.

“Uh, my younger brother's working here, Sam? I think he's behind the bar?” Dean stands up a little straighter, figuring it's nipples or never.

“You're little Sammy's big bro?” Her eyes light up with equal parts delight and unadulterated mischief as she grabs Dean's wrist. She rocks a rubber stamp across the back of his hand, inking in a chain of moon phases. She does the same to Charlie, winking at her.

“You're comped.” She levels her gaze at Dean, batting her eyelashes over wide brown eyes. “You tell little Sammy he owes Auntie Meg a favor.” She throws the heavy door open, reaching her arm out to usher them in.

The first thing Dean notices is the smell. It takes him a moment to place it, sniffing the air a few times as Charlie follows him through the narrow corridor. It's church incense, heavy and rich like the censer that Father O'Rourke had swung down the pews during Dean's stint with the ultra-Catholic McConneleys.

Dean looks up as they walk, tracing over the arched ceiling. It's lit with blue lights, shining dimly
against the faded murals of gilt saints. A smaller arch to the side has a sign stenciled with gothic letters proclaiming “Coat Check.” Dean almost elbows Charlie in the ribs as they turn the corner, cresting a massive room that stops both of them.

It's a cathedral, with soaring ceilings and massive stained-glass windows. Moving spotlights cast the cracked murals in a sea of reds and pinks. Walkways encircle the upper reaches of the entire room, crowded with scantily-clad women and shirtless men.

Cages hung with chains dangle from the rafters, swaying softly as two androgynous people dance inside them. Their outfits look like they were made out of electrical tape and a prayer.

Two women hang from long strips of red silk, wrapping their bodies in an intricate pattern just to plummet in a synchronized tumble. They catch the silks at the last moment to sway above the writhing crowd.

“Holy shit!” Charlie squeaks next to him, echoing Dean's thoughts exactly. She hooks her arm through his elbow, tugging him towards the dance floor. “This is awesome!”

At least Dean's pretty sure that's what she says. It's hard to hear over the throbbing bass-line of the music, pounding into Dean's bones until he can almost feel his cartilage dance. If New Order had decided to take up cannibal butchery on the weekends, it might have sounded like this. The vocals are barked out in something Slavic and scary.

Dean lets Charlie guide him through the throng of people, the skin of his arms catching against latex and leather as she pulls him towards the bar. Dean looks up at the platforms placed in rows along the dance floor, rising to shoulder height with gleaming brass poles reaching to the ceiling.

A small Asian guy wearing a tiny pair of shorts and a massive set of buck's antlers strapped under his chin winks at Dean and jumps onto the pole, twirling gracefully as a gang of heavily-tattooed girls cheers him on.

Charlie jostles him through the crowd, finding an empty spot at the bar and pushing Dean into it. He leans over until he gets the attention of the bartender, a slim blonde with too much eyeliner and a bar pierced through the bridge of his nose.

“Is Sam here?” Dean yells, looking up and down the bar without seeing his brother. The bartender nods and walks away. Dean turns back to Charlie, who's staring ahead with her mouth hanging
Dean follows her gaze to the stage. The steps of what was once an altar lead up to a carpeted platform, flanked on both sides by coils of electrical cables and AV equipment snaking up to a large console. Three laptops screens glow a soft blue against the woman presiding over the altar.

Blazing red hair streams down one side of her head, swaying in a straight waterfall as she moves her head with the beat. She holds an enormous set of headphones to her ear, the padded insulation cupping against a patch of shaved hair dyed a shocking white.

Alabaster skin spreads out under the buckle of her honest-to-goodness cape, the black folds trailing over her shoulders. A cropped black top barely covers her breasts, her cleavage prominent under the decorative lacing. Her hands move from one computer to the other, slender fingers emerging from leather gauntlets to move over the controls.

Most striking of all is the sheer black strip of fabric tied over her eyes. It doesn't seem to impair her vision as she looks at each screen. Her lips purse, stained red and full as she focuses on the front screen.

It's dramatic and sexy, perfect for the dark, throbbing beats pouring out of the speakers. She looks like something that should be air-brushed on the side of a van. Dean can almost feel Charlie's lady-boner poking him.

“Leia Almighty, I think I'm in love.” Charlie mocks a swoon and leans against the bar.

“You sort of look alike,” Dean remarks, looking back and forth between the figure swaying on stage and his best friend.

“Ugh, stop Freuding my new lady-love.” Charlie smacks a hand against the bar. “I need at least three drinks before I can hit on that.”

The blonde bartender returns, setting a glass down in front of Dean. He eyes the glassful of red liquid with an orange slice swimming in it.

“Sangria,” Dean mutters, shaking his head at the misunderstanding of “Sam here”. It's a miracle the bartenders got any of the orders right with the music so loud.
Dean raises his hand about four inches over his head, mouthing “Sam?” while the bartender looks at him like he got into the bad ecstasy.

He's abruptly pulled away by a hand on his elbow. He looks at Charlie's hand and then looks up at Charlie. She points to the other end of the bar, where Dean sees a familiar head of shaggy hair.

“Sammy!” Dean calls, waving his hand over his head as he walks over. Sam hefts down a case of Red Bull, pushing his bangs out of his eyes as he scans the room. He breaks into a smile when he spots Dean.

“Dean!” Sam grins and motions them over to the edge of the bar. He leans over the thick oak, accepting a kiss from Charlie and clapping Dean on the shoulder.

“I guess I should be happy that you're wearing a shirt at all,” Dean yells, giving Sam's black ribbed tank top a wry look. Dean isn't the only one wearing a shirt two sizes too small. The thin straps barely cover the flaming pentacle tattoo over his left pectoral. It's faded in places and stretched into more of an oval now. Sam's a whole lot bigger than when he was twelve. Dean frowns for a second while Sam strikes a ridiculous muscle pose for Charlie.

“Who gave you the stamp?” Sam points at their hands.

“Meg.” Dean arches an eyebrow while Sam blanches a little.

“She scares me,” Sam admits, shaking his head. He reaches behind the bar and produces a beer for Charlie. She seems impressed with the brand, some kind of India something or other with a gargoyle on the bottle. Sam fills a glass with club soda from the tap and slides it over to Dean.

“Hell of a place.” Dean looks around at the men and women dancing on the bar. It's refreshing to see as many men as women dancing for tips.

“Yeah, it has it's, uh...” Sam trails off, his lips parted as his eyes focus on something to Dean's right. “Perks.”

Dean looks over, meeting a set of ribbon-wrapped shins atop a pair of bonafide clear shoes. He looks
up, and up again, because that is one set of legs. Smiling wickedly at the top is a pretty girl with bright eyes and a mass of blonde curls catching the spots like a wild halo. She smirks at Sam and plants her hands on her hips, shifting her weight back and forth on her heels.

A wispy tunic conceals more than it hides, hitched up at the front to bare one thigh. Ribbons trail from her shoulders, fluttering down as she crouches in front of Dean.

“This is Jess,” Sam shouts, grinning like he can impress her with how many teeth he has. “This is Dean and Charlie. He's my brother. I mean, Dean's my brother, Charlie's Dean's friend. She's my friend, too, yeah,” Sam finishes spectacularly, blinking under the spotlight of Jess' amused smile. She turns herself around, one leg winging open to give Dean and Charlie an eye-level view of some remarkably sheer white panties. Dean counts three shiny things before he remembers his manners and looks at her face.

“Nice to meet you,” Jess says, extending her hand to make Dean's acquaintance like a perfect lady. Dean shakes it firmly, smiling and willing himself not to try and figure out how many piercings Sam's crush has on her lady parts.

Charlie bypasses manners entirely, waving at Jess before circling her hand in front of her fly. “Those look...” Charlie shamelessly tilts her head to get a better look. “Hurty.”

Instead of being offended, Jess just tosses her head back and laughs, loud and rich over the music. She hops off the bar and lands gracefully between Dean and Charlie. Dean wonders if there's some kind of labial etiquette he doesn't know about. Is it OK to stare if you have one too?

“My piercings?” Jess shrugs and smiles at Charlie. “They weren't so bad. I did them myself.”

Charlie drops her jaw in a loud “Whoa,” while Dean looks back at Sam with wide eyes. Sam sighs, face dreamy as he practically wrings his hands Pepe LaPew style. Not that Dean can blame him—any girl who pierced her own snatch has his utmost respect and admiration.

“I'm an apprentice at Gauntlet, you should stop by some time.” Jess smiles like she's just suggested a new tapas bar.

“I'm cool with one ill-advised tattoo,” Charlie answers smoothly.
“Jess is in school, too,” Sam pipes in, leaning further across the bar. “She's gonna be peed on.”

“Excuse me?” Dean snorts into his seltzer.

“Ped Onc,” Jess yells, leaning closer to Dean. “It's short for Pediatric Oncology.”

Dean's face dawns with understanding as he gives an impressed nod. No wonder Sam likes his new job so much.

“What's your costume supposed to be?” Charlie flicks a ribbon as Jess does an obliging pirouette.

“It's Tarot night,” she explains, standing up straight and sticking her chest out. “I'm the three of cups.”

Charlie bursts out laughing. “Nice.”

Dean must look as confused as he feels, because Charlie rolls her eyes and holds up her hand.

“A, B, C,” she rattles off, peeling back three fingers. She arches an eyebrow at Jess. “34, most likely.”

“34 abc … Oh.” Dean's cheeks heat up as he gets the joke.

“Nailed it.” Jess takes a small bow as Charlie looks supremely satisfied with herself.

“What about her?” Charlie looks longingly at the stage, where the DJ is swaying back and forth with the soaring choral outro.

“Anna?” Jess smiles and leans in conspiratorially. “I think she's supposed to be the eight of swords. She's cute, right?”
Charlie nods, her eyes still focused on Anna as the DJ sweeps an arm out to her side.

“She takes a break from her set in an hour. If you stick around I can introduce you.”

Charlie says something in return, smiling at Jess. Dean can't quite make it out over the opening bars of the next song. It's loud and fast, with intermittent sounds that remind Dean of the grinding plates at Bobby's shop. It's strangely moving despite the aggressive tone.

“I've gotta go sling some drinks, I'll catch you guys later.” Jess hefts a tray of drinks off the bar and turns on her heel, disappearing into the crowd with it balanced effortlessly on her shoulder. It probably helps that she's a head taller than most of the dancers.

Dean winks at Sam, flashing the universal face of “Brother, you got it bad.” Charlie shoots Sam two thumbs up, eyes wide as she does her patented eyebrow move.

“She's something, huh?” Sam grins, eyes following off in the distance as Jess' blonde head weaves through the crowd.

Dean opens his mouth to respond just as the blonde bartender returns.

“We need more ice,” he barks at Sam, not waiting for a response as he walks away.

“Sure thing, Brady.” Sam shrugs and mouths “Sorry” while Dean waves him away. The last thing he wants to do is get in the way.

Charlie hooks her hand through Dean's arm as Sam disappears behind a supply door.

“I want to dance!” She knows better than to give Dean time to answer, pulling him along with her towards the heart of the dance floor.

Dean capitulates and starts to move along with Charlie, narrowly dodging a flailing arm from a Marilyn Manson lookalike.
It's not that Dean doesn't like to dance. He and Aaron had taken ballroom dance lessons before his sister's wedding, and Dean had enjoyed them a lot more than he'd let on. It just isn't Dean's way to draw too much attention to himself.

That doesn't seem to be a problem tonight. Charlie dances the way she does everything, with unbridled enthusiasm and a stunning duckface. Dean keeps his arms by his sides but sways to the rhythm, and before he knows it he's having fun. His skin warms with the heat of the crowd, bodies brushing against him as they all move.

Dean feels people pressing against him, but no one does anything inappropriate. Dean had been to a handful of the gay clubs in LA, and he'd hated the way so many guys had treated his dancing as an invitation to grope him. While Dean gets his fair share of interested smiles from the men and women dancing around him, the vibe is friendly instead of overbearing.

“This is amazing!” Charlie twirls around him, crossing her arms above her head and circling her hips. She throws her head back as the music climbs higher, lips parted and face flushed. She must be drunker than Dean had thought.

Dean surveys the crowd as Charlie closes her eyes. Everyone around them looks spellbound, bodies writhing in time, faces and arms stretched towards the vaulted ceiling.

Above them all Anna stands perfectly still, arms outstretched and head tilted back. She looks like a flame-haired pieta while Dean watches her. As the droning beat of the music fades to a soaring contralto she shudders. Dean feels a moment of panic as he wonders if something is wrong, squinting at the stage as Anna lowers his head.

Dean blinks his eyes, sure he can't be seeing this correctly. Beneath the gauzy black of her blindfold, Anna's eyes glow an impossible blue, twin stars in the sea of black and red at the altar.

“I want to come here every night!” Charlie shouts into his ear, slinging her arm around his waist and poking her cap into his chin.

When Dean looks back, there's no glow in Anna's eyes. A new song starts and the lights start to flash green, sweeping over the crowd and casting shadows in the arched corners. Dean shakes his head and decides not to ask Charlie about it. She'll just tell him he needs more sleep, which is generally true.
They dance through a few more songs. It's hard to tell where one ends and one begins, beats seamlessly blended together. Dean catches sight of Sam hauling a huge tray of dirty barware and smiles. Sam always works like a horse, whether it's laying fence under Ellen's watchful eye or throwing himself into his latest extracurricular job. Dean hopes he at least gets tipped out by the staff.

Dean hasn't seen Charlie have this much fun since she was declared Unequivocal Victor of the Massacre of Moondoor. She presses two fingers to her lips, catcalling at the antlered go-go boy dancing behind Dean. Dean turns in time to see some impressive pole moves, watching as the guy holds himself horizontal with only the strength of his arms.

It's only Dean's impressed attention that lets him notice the dancer's falter as he sees something on the other side of the club. Dean follows his gaze across the dance floor, to two men in plain black t-shirts. One of them leans in to speak into the other's ear. They both scan the room, one listening and nodding his understanding.

Dean knows security when he sees it. He watches as the shorter man breaks away. He mounts the stairs to the catwalk above the dance floor, stopping to let a man and a woman with matching mohawks pass. He walks slowly but purposefully to a narrow door, opening it half-way and sticking his head in.

Dean quickly scans the room for the taller guard, finding him against the bar with his hand cupped against another man's ear. The man nods and points, dismissing the guard and turning to face the dance floor.

Dean has met many a pimp in his day, and not a one of them will ever cut a figure like the man narrowing his eyes against the bar.

He's enormous, as tall as Sam with muscles barely concealed by his well-tailored suit. His skin gleams dark in the purple spotlights, while the rich violet of his suit reflects it back. A sharp fedora rests on his bald head, and Dean would bet his left nut that he's wearing snakeskin shoes.

The man looks up at the catwalk, and Dean turns his head just in time to see the shorter guard trailing behind a trim man in a black t-shirt and fitted blazer. He marches down the steps with a tight frown on his face, turning to look at the man by the bar. He'd be striking enough, with a chiseled jaw and a plush mouth that Dean can appreciate, but the eyepatch covering his left eye makes him unforgettable.

Dean keeps dancing as he watches the man with the eyepatch cross the dance floor, passing in front of the altar to meet up with the man in the fedora. They share a grim look before heading down a
long hallway.

Dean can feel the familiar tingle on his neck, the tightness in his stomach that always comes when something isn't right. Charlie always gripes that Dean can never stop working, and Charlie is generally right.

Dean catches her attention and mouths “Bathroom,” pointing to the hallway to let her know where he's going. She throws an arm up in the air and spins around to start dancing with the kid from the pole.

Long before Dean became a cop, he'd learned how to read faces. As he makes his way down the long hallway he recognizes the too-blank “nothing to see here, folks” faces of the two guards. Dean pulls out his phone and leans against the wall, pretending to check his messages as he watches the guards.

They flank either side of the men's room entrance, the taller one fiddling with his ponytail while the shorter one rocks back on his heels. A skinny guy in a fishnet shirt is turned away, directed somewhere else as he scowls at the guards.

The black guy emerges from the bathroom, his face stormier than before. He scrubs a hand over his face as he pulls the taller guard in. Dean can't make out what he's saying, but it makes the guard's lips pinch together. He follows after the black guy, leaving the smaller guard standing cross-armed in front of the door. Dean has officially seen enough. He slips his phone into his pocket and pulls out his badge, palming it behind his back as he approaches the bathroom.

“Sorry, this one's closed.” The guard holds up his hand. “There's another one across the-”

“Police.” Dean holds up his badge and starts to push past the guard, who holds his ground with surprising strength for his size. He lays a hand on Dean's shoulder.

“Everything's fine, there's nothing to worry about.”

Dean looks down at the man's hand and plasters on his fakest smile.

“Great, then you won't mind if I check it out.”
The guard's eyes widen like he's surprised, his mouth hanging open. He quickly regains his composure and demands to see some ID. He flips through Dean's badge, muttering “Shit,” before stepping aside. The guy's well-trained, Dean has to give him that. Dean gives him a polite nod as he steps into the bathroom.

“Uriel, I told you to-”

Dean holds up his badge as the man with the eyepatch stops mid-sentence. Dean brushes past him before the man can react, rounding the corner to the stalls. He stalks down to the last one and flings the door open.

A man's body slumps against the toilet, arms and legs akimbo. His black silk shirt is unbuttoned, exposing a bare, tan chest. His slacks are undone, the fly yawning open where the material has bunched around his legs.

Dean is used to seeing horrible things, and he's no stranger to the rictus of death. The smile stretched across the dead man's face is a thousand times worse, a grotesque mockery of a grin that ends in wide, panicked eyes.

“I'm sorry, Michael, I tried to-”

“That's alright, Samandriel,” the man with the eyepatch says from behind Dean. “Please return to the door and make sure we don't have any more unexpected guests.”

Michael does not sound like an evil enough name for the man waiting behind Dean. His smile is tight as Dean turns to him, and Dean instantly dislikes him. It probably doesn't help that he looks like a younger and more polished version of Dean's father.

“This is highly irregular,” Michael says smoothly, a shark's grin on his face as he approaches Dean.

“I would hope so,” Dean snaps back, disliking Michael's familiarity as he lays a hand on Dean's forearm.

“I'm sure he died of natural causes. We've already called the paramedics. There's really nothing more
for you to see.” The tinted lights of the bathroom make Michael's eyes gleam a strange violet. Dean jerks his arm away and pulls his phone out.

“Unless there's some new plastic-surgery craze I don't know about, no one looks like Joker-face over here naturally.” Dean dials the station and turns to look at the body, shaking his head. He jumps as he feels a hand on his back.

“There's no need to call anyone, why don't you hang up your phone and go get another drink. On me.”

Dean whips around and pushes Michael's hand away.

“Why don't you touch me one more time so I can haul you in for obstruction?” Dean glares at him as Lisa picks up on the other end.

“I got a 10-55 at 554 South Flower Street,” Dean reports, keeping his eyes fixed on Michael. “And tell Vic to get his ass down here, too.”

“I'm gonna need a list of everyone who's working here tonight.” Dean crosses his arms and widens his stance, ready for any resistance from Michael.

“I see.” Michael sets his mouth in a grim line and gives Dean a withering look. He turns on his heel and stalks off, leaving Dean alone with a corpse and a long sigh. Sam and Charlie are never going to let him hear the end of this.

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Victor arrives first, managing to radiate resentment with every hastily-assembled inch of his being. Dean can only imagine the look on Bela's face as he'd put his clothes back on and marvels that Victor isn't covered in blisters.

“Nice shirt,” Victor quips, not even batting an eye as Dean flips him off.

He walks Victor through the scene, relating what he'd witnessed between the guards and what he
“Big pimp daddy with the moles on his face?” Victor's assessment makes Dean laugh. Victor's born police, a third generation cop with the chip on his shoulder and dark sense of humor to prove it.

“Guy looks like a dick.” Victor sucks his teeth and nods at the body. “And this guy looks like some fun-house shit.”

The forensics team arrives as Dean starts to answer, crowding the small bathroom.

“They got the outgoings set up?” Dean follows Victor out of the bathroom. It's no small feat to get the name and contact info of everyone leaving a club, but that's what rookies are for.

“Yes.” Dean surveys the departing crowd, most of them looking rumpled and sweaty under the overhead lights. Nothing clears a dance floor faster than blinding fluorescents.

“I'll be right back,” Dean informs Victor, heading toward the bar. Sam leans against it, long arms folded under his chin as he gazes up at Jess. She's perched on the edge of the bar, legs swinging back and forth as her heels clack against the underside of the bar.

“I swear I didn't do it on purpose,” Dean apologizes, approaching the bar with his hands up. Sam rolls his eyes but there's no malice in it.

“I know, I know,” Sam sighs, looking put-upon. “It just figures.”

“Do they think someone killed him?” Jess leans down, flashing her three of cups as Sam almost collapses.

“We just need to interview everyone to figure out what happened,” Dean evades, noting that his police-academy double speak completely fails to fool Jess.

“Shit.” She shakes her head. “I liked this job.”
“Well, they’ll probably be able to reopen in a few days. I don't see any violations that would prevent it.” Dean had been impressed with how above-the-board everything at Seraphim seemed to be. No one was underage, not counting Charlie's perpetual immaturity, and he hadn't found so much as an open candle flame to piss off the fire marshals.

“You'll be back to work soon,” Dean assures Jess before turning to Sam. “Look, if you need any money ’cause you're missing days-”

“Dean.” Sam flashes his bitch-face of “please stop taking care of me.” It's a familiar one. “I'm fine.”

“OK,” Dean backs off, shrugging. “But can you do me a favor? I don't know how long I'm gonna be here, and I was supposed to be Charlie's ride home.” Dean looks down the bar, frowning when he doesn't see her.

“I think she might already have a ride,” Jess smirks, pointing her finger at the stage. Perched on the steps to the altar, Charlie and Anna's heads are bowed so close together Dean can't tell where one redhead ends and the other begins. Anna giggles at something Charlie says, closing her eyes as Charlie trails her knuckles over the patch of shaved hair on the side of Anna's head.

Deeply embedded in Dean's vow of friendship is a commitment to never cockblock if it isn't strictly necessary. He jerks his thumb at Charlie and Anna.

“I've got to interview Queen of the Damned over there, but I guess it can wait till tomorrow.” Dean would be here for the next 48 hours if he interviewed everyone working tonight. And Dean had seen Anna on stage for a solid hour before he found the body, so there's less urgency.

“Just make sure she gets home safe, alright?”

Sam promises and Dean heads up the stairs, eyeing the line of employees waiting to give their statements. Meg the bouncer winks at him.

“Everything alright, big brother?” she purrs at him. Dean wonders how many packs of cigarettes went into that voice.

“Routine procedure, m'am,” Dean calls behind his shoulder, smiling to himself at the disgruntled moue of her mouth.
Dean enters the sideroom they've cordoned off for statements. It's some kind of VIP section, with overstuffed ottomans and thick draperies hanging from the ceiling. A statue of the Virgin Mary stretches her hands out in a back-lit niche, an empty bottle of Moet cradled in her arms.

Victor calls the first in line, a stunningly beautiful woman with chestnut hair who looks like she has absolutely no time for this bullshit. Dean can relate.

She gives her name as Kali Suresh, assuring them with a stony expression and red-nailed flick of her ID that yes, her real name is Kali.

She frowns at the picture of the dead man's face that Victor had printed from the DMV database, face blank as they ask her if she ever knew Mr. Alexander Wilde.

“I do the silks, and sometimes I dance.” She crosses her legs and peers down her nose. “I really don’t interact with the customers very much.”

They let her go after several questions that yield nothing but terse answers and a bored flip of her hair.

Dean shakes his head as she walks out of the room, trading places with Meg and her megawatt leer. Dean's glad to have Victor beside him. He's a lot more experienced with handling dangerous women.

“Hey, big brother.” Meg sinks into a chair and slides her eyes over to Victor, tilting her head.

“Big brother's got a big friend, too. I like it.” She winks at Victor, who stares back at her looking completely unimpressed.

Dean indulges in one fun second of imagining who would win in a fight, Meg or Bela. He can't think of a more evenly-matched battle.

“'Course I recognize him,” Meg answers, looking at the picture in Victor's hand before shooting doe-eyes at Dean.
“I never forget a pretty face.” She bats her eyelashes innocently. “Just ask Sammy.”

Dean scowls.

Meg explains that “Xander” came at least once a week, always alone.

“Poor thing even tried to ask for my number.” She clicks her tongue and shakes her head, leaning in to stage-whisper. “I don't eat where I work.”

They dismiss her and Dean has a moment of fear for his brother's safety.

They interview a steady stream of bartenders, dancers and other scantily-clad employees. The go-go boy with the antlers sits down in front of them, his headpiece gone. Dean feels a jolt of recognition as he looks at the guy's face under the lights.

“I'm Kevin Tran,” he volunteers, and Victor looks at Dean with a matching expression of confusion.

“Kevin Tran?” Victor peers at him. “Linda Tran's son?”

“Oh my God, you totally know her from work don't you?” Kevin buries his face in his hands as Dean tries not to laugh.

Linda Tran's name struck fear into the heart of every Los Angeles detective. She runs the coroner's office with an iron fist and an immovable devotion to her department. Dean had followed the click of her heels many times.

The only sign of Linda's humanity is her desk-adorning pride in her only son, straight-A student and UCLA scholarship recipient Kevin. The same Kevin currently sitting in front of Dean and Victor wearing a pair of shorts that makes Linda's surgical masks look like a generous amount of material.

“You can. Not. Tell her I was here.” He wrings his hands with each word, his eyes wide and pleading. “She doesn't know I'm gay.”
He directs the last statement at Dean, who quickly remembers that he's wearing a skin-tight t-shirt. He couldn't fault the kid's instincts.

“Kevin, we won't say anything to your mom,” Dean reassures him, not adding that he'd be too scared to approach her anyway.

“We just need you to tell us what you know about this man.” Dean hands him the photograph, watching as Kevin's eyes flicker with recognition.

“Xander,” Kevin nods and arches an eyebrow. “He's totally straight, I can tell you that much.”

“I saw him a few times tonight, mostly by the bar. I think he was sitting at Ruby's table for a while.”

“Ruby?” Victor asks, flicking through the list of names Michael had begrudgingly handed over.

“She does, like, fortune telling and stuff.” Kevin glances at the curtains closing off the room from the line outside. “She's kind of scary.”

Dean notes “Ruby – scary” on his borrowed interview pad, wishing he had his own.

“So you really won't say anything to my mom?”

“Scout's honor,” Dean replies, not missing Victor's sardonic eye-roll at Dean's boy-scout joke.

Kevin and his remarkably perky ass (Dean's only human and he'd never been a boy-scout) disappear behind the curtain. Dean turns over a fresh sheet of paper for the next statement, smoothing it down as the next employee comes in.

“Can I get your name, please?” Victor asks. Dean looks up, feeling goosebumps rise on his arm. He already knows the answer.
“Ruby Colt.” The petite woman looks them both over and reaches her hand out to Victor. “And you are?”

Dean's about to remind her just who's asking the questions here when Victor pipes up.

“Detective Henriksen.” Victor beams his most charming smile and shakes her hand. “Pleasure to meet you, so sorry to waste your time.”

Ruby accepts it gracefully, and Dean doesn't miss the brush of her fingers across Victor's wrist.

“But we still have some questions for you,” Dean adds, sparing a look at Victor. “Can we see some ID please?”

She looks bemused as she reaches into her purse, like she's in one some joke Dean can't understand.

Dean isn't sure why he doesn't like her. She looks like a girl he'd be friends with – sleeves of tattoos, a bad attitude and smiles that says she could drink him under the table. A pair of gauzy black wings are strapped over a plain back bustier, leaving her midriff bare over a pair of low-slung jeans. Nestled in her hair is a headband with two sparkly ram's horns curling down over her ears.

A student ID from Pasadena State identifies her as Ruby Colt, and Dean trusts it about as much as he trusts the innocent look on her face.

She recognizes Xander, claiming he'd stopped by her table.

“What exactly is it that you do at Seraphim, Ms. Colt?” Dean asks, pen poised over his paper.

“Well, I read fortunes on Fridays and Saturdays, and I dance on the punk and rockabilly nights, when Gabe spins.”

“Is that Gabriel Milton?” Victor asks, flipping to the shorter list of off-duty employees. He leans forward like Ruby's answer is going to be fascinating.
“Yes.” She waits while Dean makes a note in his pad.

“So you're Sam's brother,” she says, drawing Sam's name out a second too long for Dean's liking. Dean catches her gaze and holds it, the gold flecks around her pupils shining.

“That's amazing!” Victor looks at Ruby and shakes his head. “How did you know that?”

Dean cuts Ruby off before she can respond. “I imagine news travels fast in a place like this.”

“So it does.” She smiles, the flash of her teeth bright as her grin doesn't quite reach her eyes. “We're all so fond of Sam.”

“I like Sam, too,” Victor adds, staring at Ruby like she's about to give him a gold star sticker. Dean gives Victor a stare of his own as he wonders what the fuck is wrong with his partner. Ruby's not even his type.

“What do you think happened to Xander?” Dean asks suddenly, watching Ruby's reaction closely. She doesn't even twitch as she shrugs her shoulders, her costume wings swaying gently behind her.

“Not a clue. Have you talked to Meg?” She smiles at Victor like she's letting him in on a secret. “I think she knew him.”

“We'll be sure to do that,” Dean responds before Victor can say something stupid. “We'll be in touch if we have any more questions.”

Victor stands when Ruby does, shaking her hand again. She slings her purse over her wrist and walks to the curtain.

“Hey, Ruby,” Dean yells as she's about to exit. “Which tarot card are you supposed to be?”

“What else?” She turns to look over her shoulder, the spotlights catching in the glitter of her horns and filtering through her wings.
There are two versions of Dean Winchester's first encounter with a demon.

Dean was 12 years old when his father drove him to a warehouse in Osh Kosh, Wisconsin. It was a chilly night, nearing freezing outside and fogging up the car windows. Dean was shivering in his jacket, nothing but a t-shirt on underneath. He'd left his warm wool sweater tucked around Sam in the backseat of the car.

Dean's breath froze as he waited for his father to slip the padlock free. The hinges of the wide door don't squeak the way Dean expected them to. The door swung open, with a soft whoosh of steel on steel. Dean stared at the abandoned interior, watching the moonlight filter through the paned glass windows. Half of them were broken, and curls of snow swirled inside to bank atop the long-still conveyor belts.

Dean looked back at the car one last time before following his father inside. Dean hated it when they left Sam in the car, but his father had explained that this was something only Dean could see.

Snow crunched under Dean's boots as he trailed behind his father. He could feel wetness seeping into the worn sole of his left shoe but he didn't say anything about it. They'd get new boots when Dad had money.

Dean turned a corner, cringing as he kicked an old can. It clattered and rolled before stopping at his Dad's heel. Dean tensed, waiting for his feather's reprimand about his clumsiness. Instead he just turned and smiled, motioning Dean forward with his hand.

“Gotta watch your step, Dean-o. Lots of rusty old stuff in an old cannery like this.”

Dean relaxed as he fell into step beside his father, passing dust-coated vats and towers of empty cans. They stopped at a double-wide door with “Processing” stenciled over it in faded letters.

“Now, Dean, you got your notebook?”
“Yes, sir,” Dean answered immediately, pulling his worn steno pad from his back pocket.

“Good boy.”

Dean felt a little warmer at his father’s praise.

“I want you to have your exorcism ready, the one we’ve been practicing.”

Dean flipped to the page, knowing its exact location by heart. He’d copied the Latin words dozens of times on scraps of motel-room notepads.

“And remember, whatever happens, don’t be afraid. It can't hurt you.” John pushed the swinging door open, holding it with his shoulder and waiting for Dean to go inside.

Dean's sock was wet, chafing his toe as Dean squared his shoulders and marched inside. The muffled sound of his soles against the cracked concrete floor was steady and sure, despite the fits and starts of his heart. Dean knew what was waiting.

“Heeeeeere's Johnny!” The man, no, the demon's voice echoed off the walls as Dean slowly paced the perimeter of the salt-ringed Devil's Trap.

“Oooooh, and you brought me a snack.” The thing grinned lewdly as Dean stood before it.

“Alright, son.” John put his hand on Dean’s shoulder, ignoring the barrage of jokes the demon made. “Just read through it without stopping.”

“He's pretty, Johnny-boy, you ever think about bringing in some extra income?” The demon threw his head back and laughed, leaving a fresh trickle of blood running from his split lip. He winked the eye not swollen shut at Dean.

“Anybody ever tell you you got a pretty mouth, boy?”

“Just ignore him, Dean, this is what they do.” John squatted next to Dean. “He can't hurt you, he's
just trying to get inside your head.”

Dean nodded, clearing his throat before he started to read. The demon howled and fought against his restraints, flashing his ink-black eyes at Dean and calling him filthy names. Dean read steadily, even as the demon's taunts made him flush. It was the first time he'd heard the word “cocksucker.”

“... Benedictus deus. Gloria patri,” Dean finished, his voice high and thin.

“All things are delivered unto me of my father, and no man knoweth the son, but the father. Neither knoweth any man the father, save the son, and he to whomsoever the son will reveal him,” the demon snarled, his voice strung together from dual pitches that grated on Dean's ears. His head snapped back with a sharp jerk as a cloud of oily smoke rushed from his mouth. Dean watched it writhe around, coiling and sputtering before it darted out of the jagged edge of a broken window.

Dean's body started to shake, like all the cold in the room had rushed into him with the demon's departure. He shook as his father hugged him, easing into the tanned warmth of his leather jacket.

“You just exorcised your first demon.” John's face beamed with pride as Dean's teeth chattered together. “I'm proud of you, son.”

“Is-is he alive?” Dean pointed at the empty vessel still strapped to the chair.

“He's fine, son, he's just resting,” John explained, shepherding Dean out of the room with his arm over Dean's shoulder. “I'll come back for him later, no need to worry.”

“O-OK,” Dean chittered, grateful to head back to the car and make sure Sam was safe.

“Right now, we've got to celebrate!” John threw the car door open, leaning his head up to face the stars. He was smiling and Dean felt the chill leave him.

“What do you say, want to get one of those butter burgers from Culver's?”

Dean felt his mouth water as he slid into the passenger seat. Sam was still curled up in the backseat, peaceful and safely oblivious to Dean's accomplishment. His father was proud of him.
“Yes, sir,” Dean answered softly, and he couldn't remember the last time he'd felt so happy.

Dean was 12 years old when his father drove him to a warehouse in Osh Kosh, Wisconsin.

Dean hadn't eaten in two days. John had left the boys with three days of food before disappearing on a five-day hunt. As Dean had done many times before, he ignored the rumbling ache in his belly as he spooned out the last of their store-brand baked beans for Sam.

Hypoglycemia coupled with inadequate protection from the cold made Dean exceptionally susceptible to his father's suggestion. Dean was primed to see the “demon” that his father had described in detail before he set foot in the freezing warehouse.

John led his oldest son through a dark series of corridors, adding to his disorientation. As he crouched beside Dean and prompted him to recite the “exorcism,” Dean experienced a feeling of euphoria at the rare indulgence of his father's undivided attention.

Dean followed along as his father urged him to ignore the “demon's” taunts about Dean's appearance and sexual orientation. Eager to earn his father's approval and return to his brother, Dean parroted back the descriptions of exorcisms that he had heard from his father.

Dean was rewarded with an indulgent meal by his standards. This night marked a turning point in Dean's adolescence. This rite of passage deemed him a partner in his father's eyes, and from this night on Dean undertook a more active role in John Winchester's crusade.

Simon Worth's body was found five days later by a homeless drug addict searching for copper scrap. His wrists and ankles bore the livid marks of restraint, and his face was crushed in from a variety of pre-mortem injuries. The coroner determined that he had been dead for a week.

~*~

The smoke didn't drift like smoke was supposed to. It bobbed and weaved with the intent of a fighter, coiling back into thick rungs to strike forward.

The light of Dad's lantern diffracted against it, rendered into glossy pools of purplish greens.
Another child would have been reminded of the rainbow hues of bubbles drifting in the sun.

The column-head spun toward Dean, oily and opaque. Dean could feel the evil in it, wrapping itself around Dean's body with a slick embrace that chilled Dean to the bone. He closed his eyes and willed himself not to breathe, pressing his palm over the flaming pentacle tattooed on his chest.

The smoke ran though his fingers, wrapping around his hand like a set of brass knuckles. Dean watched in horror as his hand was pulled back from his chest, an ice-wet grip holding it before him as a barbed tendril broke off. It traced over Dean's shirt, dissolving the material and searing Dean's skin.

Dean's mouth opened to scream but the smoke rushed in, choking him and filling his nostrils with the stench of rotten eggs. He stared, silent and helpless as the smoke dragged across his skin. Ribbons of flush hung in its wake as viscous black blood oozed out between the torn swirls of the tattoo his father had drawn for him.

John stared, black smoke curling out of his mouth as he laughed and laughed.

~*~

Dean wakes with a start, his hand scratching into his left pectoral. He pants for breath as he sits up, blinking his eyes as his room swims into focus.

The second-generation Ikea dresser across from his bed is bare except for two framed photographs. Sam smiles in the first one, his Stanford graduation cap sitting askew over his bangs. Half of Dean's face peeks from the corner, his eyes crossed and his tongue sticking out. The second shows Charlie in her full Moondoor armor, sword at her side and her gauntlets shining bright in the campground sun. Dean stands beside her, a matching look of gravitas on his face as he pinches her breastplate.

Dean scrubs a hand over his face, frowning at the cold sweat on his skin. He looks at Sam's picture and sighs before blinking down at his chest. A darker patch of freckles circles over his left nipple, the hyper-pigmented skin forming a flaming pattern if he looks closely. Dean rarely looks at it very closely.

He grabs his phone from his bedside table, thumbing it on. There's a chain of text messages from Charlie, each with decreasing levels of spelling and grammar prowess. Dean smiles as he reads the last ones.
SaM took me hone Got her #### for a Date like a LADY

Who's a BOSS

BOSS LDAY

STOP WORKING GO TO SLEEP DEAN

Dean responds with a quick Go get er tiger before padding into the living room. He brews a pot of coffee and finishes half a cup before he notices Garth curled up on the floor.

“Morning,” Dean mumbles, wondering how Garth's knees can bend that way. The soles of his feet point to the ceiling, his legs crossed as he rests his turbaned forehead against the floor.

“Good morning, Dean,” Garth greets him, voice muffled against his yoga mat. “After I finish my hour of bound lotus, Ash and I are going for a hike in Griffith Park. Care to join us?”

“Sorry, dude.” Dean drains the last of his coffee. “Might've caught a case last night, gotta spend the day doing interviews.”

“Is the game afoot?” Ash rounds the kitchen counter and starts digging in the cabinets for a bowl and the bag of dreaded mung beans.

“Yep, I gotta run.” Dean eyes the bowl beans as Ash pours water over them. “Might be a late night.” Especially if the apartment is going to smell like wet socks.

A quick shower and a shave has him out the door. He texts Victor while the garage door opens.

On my way. Old fashioned or jelly?

He makes a right and checks his phone at the light.

Both you bad fucking stereotype
Dean arrives at the station with his suit jacket slung over his shoulder and a bag full of sugar-coated heaven. Between mouthfuls of Boston Cream and Cinnamon Crumble he and Victor map out the day's interviews.

They'll hit Echo Park and Silverlake first for the requisite tattooed hipster staff – a few bartenders, two go-go girls, a fire-eater and what the hell a “Lyra artist” is. Victor flips through the list of uninterviewed suspects, grouping them by neighborhood.

“This is strange,” Victor notes, pointing to the names and addresses of the three in-house DJs.

Anna Milton – 4169 Holly Knoll Drive
Gabriel Milton – 4169 Holly Knoll Drive
Castiel Milton – 4169 Holly Knoll Drive

“Huh.” Dean looks up the address, finding a large house in Los Feliz. “They must share the place. How much does a DJ get paid, anyway?”

Victor shrugs his ignorance before setting down the stack of employee documents Michael had given them.

“Looks like the rest are basically in West Hollywood.” Victor finishes his old-fashioned and sighs. “Bela's going to kill me if I keep eating donuts every day. You're a goddamn bad influence, you know that?”

“Trophy-husbanding ain't easy.” Dean smirks and grabs his jacket. “Want to hit the east side first? Then we can check out the Von Trapps of Los Feliz.”

“I prefer to think of myself as a rakishly handsome man of the streets.” Victor pulls a wounded face as he stands up. “Trophy-husband just sounds so … common.” He annunciates the last word in a deeper version of his wife's accent.

“Whatever gets you through the day.” Dean grabs his notebook and heads out for a long day with the men and women of Seraphim.
Several hours later Dean knows what a Lyra is and has a great deal of respect for anyone who can hang upside down from a glorified hula hoop.

The interviews had yielded a consistent picture of Seraphim – a nice place to work, good tips, no shady shit with the bosses. No one seemed particularly fond of Michael, but both of the dancers had sworn that Uriel was a nice guy. One of the bartenders recognized Xander, citing him a regular who liked pretty girls and rum and cokes.

Dean groans as he steps out of Victor's car, cracking his neck and hoping they can get more useful information out of Chez Milton.

Victor presses the single doorbell as he and Dean both raise an eyebrow. The house looks big enough for at least four apartments.

After a two-minute wait Anna answers the door. Her hair streams over one shoulder, the red soft against the black silk of her robe. Subtle floral patterns catch the sunlight as she stands in the doorway.

“Good morning,” she greets both of them, blinking her eyes and idly scratching at the patch of blonde over her ear. Dean doesn't need to look at his watch to know that it's almost 2 o'clock.

They formally introduce themselves and follow her inside, passing through two large rooms hung with tapestries. Antique furniture rests beside industrial pieces that could be sculptures or really uncomfortable chairs. The high ceilings and light from the mission-glass windows keep them from feeling too cluttered.

She leads them to a smaller room off the kitchen, walled on three sides with floor-to-ceiling windows. A low table sits in the center of the room, surrounded by tufted cushions.

“Please, have a seat.” Anna gestures at the table with a sleepy grin on her face. “I'll make some tea.”

Victor frowns at the cushions on the floor as Anna steps into the spacious kitchen. Dean shrugs and does his best to fold his legs underneath him, patting the cushion next to him and winking at Victor.
Anna returns bearing a tray with a steaming pot of water and several small cups. They have a delicate vine pattern printed on them, a pale silver that looks like it was hand-painted.

She sets the tray down and sinks to the floor, her robe pooling around her in dark folds. Dean watches as she carefully arranges the tea things. Even off-duty, she still looks like something out of a pack of tarot cards.

“How are you feeling this morning, Dean?” Anna opens a small pot and scoops out a green powder, tapping the tiny spatula against the side to level it off. “I imagine you didn't get much sleep.”

“I'm fine,” Dean answers, meeting Victor's perplexed look with one of his own.

“Charlie seemed very concerned about your well-being,” she continues, pouring her small scoop into one of the cups. “She must be a very good friend.”

“Oh, uh, yeah, yes she is.” Dean didn't think Anna had noticed him, and he wonders what exactly Charlie had said about him.

“I'm sorry, you're a friend of Charlie's?” Victor interjects, shifting on his cushion. Anna pours water into the cup, mixing it with a small spoon until the green powder dissolves. She slides it in front of Victor and smiles.

“I'd like to be,” she says enigmatically, looking down as she prepared the next cup of tea. She misses Victor's face, which is just as well. He looks like an awkward cross of wildly intrigued and incredibly uncomfortable.

“I'm sure you heard about the incident last night, Ms. Milton.” Dean accepts his strange beverage and cups his palms against the small cup.

“Please, call me Anna.”

“Alright, Anna, we'd be much obliged if you could answer some questions for us.”
“Of course.” She stirs her own cup and lays down the small spoon, keeping it perfectly parallel with the spatula.

She takes small sips as Dean and Victor ask questions. Victor jots down her responses, which for the most part aren't very helpful. She doesn't recognize Xander and she can't recall anything unusual about last night.

“So you live here with...” Dean leads, more out of curiosity than anything else.

“My brother, Castiel, and our cousin, Gabriel.” She sips her tea and tilts her head at Dean. “I imagine our living arrangements seem unusual, but we're a very close family.”

“Speaking of that, what is your relation to Michael Milton?”

“Michael is my father.” She takes another sip of tea.

“I see.” Dean does a double take as he recalls the man from last night.

“That seems sort of unusual, for a man's children to work at his nightclub,” Victor notes, sniffing his tea suspiciously before taking a sip.

Anna's mouth quirks into a funny smile. “I suppose it does, but I've been around his businesses my entire life. Michael has owned clubs since I was born. It just felt natural to me.”

She catches Dean mid-sip and smiles.

“Do you like it? It's matcha.”

“It's good,” Dean agrees, setting his cup down. He likes the earthy taste and creamy texture. It's a whole lot better than the medicinal teas Garth is always forcing on him.

“So what do you think happened to Xander?” Anna brushes her hand against Dean's as she reaches for his empty cup.
“We don’t know the official cause of death yet. We’re still waiting for the coroner’s report.” Dean accepts a new cup of tea and nods his thanks.

“Do they think it was an accident?” Anna’s face is serene as she concocts her own cup of tea.

“I’m afraid we can’t say yet.” Dean’s face is equally impassive as he sips his tea. Anna’s eyes narrow a fraction before she turns to Victor.

“Would you like some more?” She reaches for his cup, her knuckles grazing against the back of Victor’s hand.

“No, thank you,” Victor replies, angling himself towards Anna and leaning an elbow on the table.

“Was there anything unusual about Xander’s death?” Anna asks Victor, like she’s going to get a better answer out of him.

“His face,” Victor says instantly while Dean splutters into his tea.

“He had this huge grin frozen on his face, like this.” Victor pulls his lips into a chilling imitation of Xander’s rictus.

Dean’s so taken aback he almost misses the way Anna’s jaw tightens as Victor yammers on.

“It was totally creepy, and his fly was -”

“I think that’s enough, Vic,” Dean grates through his teeth. “We don’t want to upset Ms. Milton.”

Anna’s hand hovers in mid-air, her cup gripped tight enough to just conceal the way her hand shakes. Dean meets her eyes when she looks up.

“I apologize, sometimes my curiosity gets the best of me.” She sets her cup down and furrows her
brow. “I suppose you'll want to speak with Gabe and Cas as well?”

“Yes, thank you.” Dean cuts Victor off and gives him a steely look. Victor looks … odd. He's usually pretty affable despite his gruff exterior, but he looks half-way to stoned right now.

Dean pushes up from the table, making sure to jostle Victor on the way. Victor lurches to his feet and shakes his head.

Anna rises as gracefully as she sat, the long sleeves of her robe fluttering beside her. She leaves the tea tray behind as she leads them to the back of the house.

Dean pauses as they pass a large, airy room. A grand piano occupies one stately corner, sheafs of sheet music spilling over the stand. Racks on the walls hold guitars and other strings, with more music stacks on shelves. A cello rests on its stand, the oiled wood glimmering in the light.

“What do you play?” Dean asks, gesturing at the music room with his chin.

Anna raises an eyebrow. “All of them.” She shrugs at Dean's disbelieving expression. “We all do. We're a very musical family.”

She leads them up a flight of stairs, passing a large window that overlooks a back garden. It's brimming with the succulent plants native to the area. Hens-and-chicks cactuses and glossy jade plants overlap one another, making a mottled green carpet that reminds Dean of some undersea landscape.

“Gabe should be up here. I haven't heard him leave yet.” Anna points at the door and smirks. “He probably has company.”

Dean doesn't have a chance to knock before the door opens. A blonde man stands in the doorway, lit from behind by a flood of light. What must have been a magnificent pompadour last night has been crushed on one side. An old tank top covers the tattoo spanning his chest but leaves the zombie pin-up girls tattooed on his arms free to stare up at Dean.
“Time for the jailhouse rock already?” He leans against the door, stretching his arms over his head and yawning. He stinks like sex and cheap beer, with the self-satisfied smile to prove it.

“Gabe, these detectives have some questions. About what happened at the club last night.” Anna fixes a level stare at her cousin before turning to Victor.

“Is there anything else you need from me, detectives?” She tilts her head at Gabriel. “Gabe can take you to Castiel when you're done.” She arches an eyebrow at Gabriel and saunters off under Victor's appreciative stare.

“What are we, giving tours now?” Gabriel rolls his eyes and turns to Dean with a fake smile.

“I'm a little busy right now, can we make this quick?” Gabriel yawns lazily and scrubs a hand over his face.

“We just have a few questions for you.” Victor's smile could burn that hangover off a man twice Gabriel's size.

Gabriel groans and leads them to a room that Dean can only describe as “Tiki Inferno.” Leering statues with potbellies and forked tongues line the walls, interspersed with old prints of topless pinup girls. Rattan chairs upholstered in a clashing array of Hawaiian barkcloth are clustered around low tables. Empty beer bottles litter most of the surfaces, and the palm-fronded ceiling fan has a dazzling array of undergarments hanging from it.

“I can't be the only one who needs a little hair of the dog,” Gabriel says as he steps behind the lei-strung bar in the corner. He pulls three Coronas from a small refrigerator and cracks them open before Dean and Victor can refuse.

“No drinking on the job,” Victor says simply, pushing the beers back across the table as Gabriel sits down. Gabriel shrugs and picks one up, draining half of it before sighing loudly.

“So what's up?” Gabriel rests his feet on the table and takes another swig of his beer as Victor leads him through the questions.

Gabriel's story is similar to Anna's – he doesn't recognize the deceased, with the crudely- phrased point that he doesn't pay much attention to the male patrons of Seraphim.
A tall woman with blonde hair ambles into the living room, wearing nothing but a thin tank top and a pair of panties. Dean and Victor look away politely.

“Amber here can vouch for my whereabouts for the last, oh, I don't know, 24 hours or so.” Gabriel smiles while Dean continues to look pointedly at a velvet Elvis painting.

“I'm Tara.” The girl rolls her eyes and shakes her head as Dean risks a curious glance. “Amber's still sleeping,” she explains, and Dean's tempted to make a joke about Victor's face staying that way.

“I'll be back soon, kitten.” Gabriel pats her on the hip. “You go get some more rest.”

Tara pouts as she wanders out of the room.

“You were saying?” Gabriel turns back to them like he didn't just dismiss a supermodel to go back to bed with her friend.

“When was the last time you were at Seraphim?” Victor asks, clearing his throat and trying to act relaxed. Dean would be perfectly happy to never imagine Gabriel having sex with anyone, but there's a certain inexplicable quality that begged consideration.

“Last Wednesday. We all take turns doing the all-ages nights.” Gabriel leans forward and toasts to no one in particular. “They only need to be 18 to get it.”

Victor's lips purse in distaste as Gabriel takes another sip of his Corona. The guy looks far too amused with himself.

“Have you noticed anything unusual at work, lately?” Dean shifts around in his seat, which was clearly chosen for style rather than comfort.

“Aside from working for my uncle at a nightclub that used to be a church?” Gabriel asks sarcastically.
“Any new employees or changes in personnel?” Victor cuts in, sounding more like himself than he did with Anna.

“We've got some new dancers, I can tell you that.” Gabriel drains his beer and picks up another one. “Did you meet Kali?” Gabriel whistles through his teeth and shakes his head. “She is something.”

“Yes, we spoke with Ms. Suresh. She didn't mention you.” Dean may be a professional, but he's only human. “Ruby, however, did.”

“Ruby.” Gabriel raises his eyebrows. “Little thing with all the ink? She's a tough little shitkicker, ain't she?”

Dean raises his own eyebrows in answer.

“Don't know much about her.” Gabriel shrugs. “Not my type. I'm a leg-guy, know what I mean?”

Dean knows for a fact that Victor is also in the “leg-guy” club, which makes Victor's scowl at Gabriel that much better.

“If you gentlemen,” Gabriel drawls pointedly, “will excuse me, I'd like to get back to my guests. It's rude to keep a lady or two waiting, wouldn't you agree?”

“Indeed.” Dean stands up, tugging his jacket straight. “If you'll just get, uh,” Dean flips his book open again to that weird name. “Castiel?”

“He'll be holed up in the attic.” Gabriel rolls his eyes. “Straight back and make a left, up the stairs.” Gabriel turns to leave.

“Don't you want to let him know we're coming?” Dean asks. He's seen plenty of weird shit during housecalls, but letting a cop wander around your house was almost unheard of.

“Oh, trust me.” Gabriel yawns and stretches lazily. “He won't mind you wandering in.” He gives Dean one last suggestive smile before disappearing into this bedroom.
Dean shrugs at Victor and heads after him, the sound of giggling echoing behind them.

~*~

Victor leads the way down the hall. They pass three more rooms before they reach the stairs, each gaudier than the last.

Dean's taste in décor falls somewhere between “is it free” and “will it fall apart,” but he'd take his own sparse room of castoffs over the clashing patterns and excessive Elvis memorabilia of Gabriel's quarters.

They ascend a flight of spiral stairs, Victor two steps ahead of him as the old wood sighs with their weight. Dean takes a deep breath, relieved to leave Gabriel's company behind. Dean could usually get a good read on someone after a short conversation, but he couldn't settle on Gabriel. He's trouble, no question, but Dean can't tell if it's the harmless kind or the dangerous kind.

Dean takes another breath, stopping mid-stride with one leg bent before him. That smell seems so familiar, just like the incense at Seraphim had conjured up images of fostered mass and awkward confessional visits. This smells different, but still related, part of the same picture of warm, sacred place and the hushed voices of the pious and polite.

It's sweet and warm in his nose, with the curious absence of any food associations. It's holy, somehow. Dean shakes his head as he realizes that Victor has left him behind. He's supposed to be investigating a suspicious death, not playing name that weird smell.

Each curving step brings Dean closer to a sun-drenched room with sloping white walls and angled skylights. It's a balm to his eyes after Anna's jagged Victorian and Gabriel's tiki-a-go-go. Dean's shoulders fall, releasing a tension he didn't know he'd been holding.

Victor's waiting at the top of the stairs, leaning against the railing and frowning. Dean follows his partner's gaze across the room and almost trips over the top step.

A man stands at the other end of the room, his back bare and turned to them. The panes of the skylights break the sun into sloped lines that fall across his skin in broad bands. His skin looks warm,
with the natural tan of an olive complexion.

His shoulders are broad, naturally so, with none of the excessive bulk of regular weight-lifting. His waist cuts neatly down to a generous swell above the waistband of his jeans. Dean would guess that he runs, that there's a set of leanly-muscled legs underneath those ratty jeans.

His arms flex as he flits back and forth between the computer screens in front of him. Waves of color rise and fall across the screens, flashing blue at the bottom and peaking into red tips. They're so mesmerizing that it takes Dean a moment to realize that they're sound waves. He's listening to music.

“Excuse me, are you Castiel Milton?” Victor asks, his voice loud and clear but doing nothing to catch the man's attention. Dean indulges himself for a moment, letting his eyes linger on the dip of his spine, up between the wings of his shoulder blades, along the curls of dark hair at the nape of his neck.

“Excuse me, are you Castiel-”

“He can't hear us,” Dean interrupts. The headphones cradled over the man's ears are the size of an In-n-Out Double and probably cost more than Dean's last two paychecks combined.

Victor shoots him a withering look, because of course Victor had already deduced that brilliant bit of detective work. Dean tries to look contrite as he walks as loudly as possible across the room.

“Excuse me.” Dean's standing right behind him, close enough that he could reach out and trail his finger down the V of his back, circle it over the twin dimples smiling up at Dean from their post above the man's belt loops. If Dean took a step closer he could tickle the man's hair with his breath, part the curls above the man's neck with his nose and breathe him in.

*Beeswax.* It hits Dean suddenly, a jolting memory of the shadowed apse of St. Francis in Brandon. Mrs. McConneley had kneeled beside him before taking a slim candle in her hand, holding the wick to the flame of one of the blazing mass of candles melted over the table.

“These flames burn forever, Dean, did you know that? Before this candle burns down, another will take its place,” she'd explained, finding an empty space for her candle. “The priests make sure they don't go out. Each flame is a prayer for someone who's been summoned to God's side. Would you like to light one?”
Dean had lit one out of politeness, knowing that playing along was the path of least resistance in this charade of a family. He'd watched the white cotton catch fire, its little flame blending in with the eternal prayers of people who didn't know any better. He'd been so sure then, watching the candles burn and remembering the demon who had stolen his mother. He knew that his father would return for them, rumbling to the front door of the McConneleys to pick him and Sam up and drive off, safe in the leather seats of the Impala and the surety of the hunt. The scent of beeswax had lingered on his fingers for hours.

Dean's face feels flushed, too hot suddenly as he reaches a hand out to brace himself. His fingers graze over warm flesh before the man snaps into action, turning around and clamping his hand over Dean's shoulder.

Dean's always been good at reading faces, and he could lose himself in this one for hours. Wide blue eyes blaze at him from beneath a mass of unruly dark hair. Dean can read a lifetime of nervous gestures in the pushed-back cowlicks of his hair, as clearly as watching him run an absent hand above his forehead.

He does run his hand up now, pushing the wide band of his headphones down to cradle his neck. A fuzzy beat issues from the earpieces, punctuated with a repeated croon and Delta-blues guitar riff that Dean recognizes. It's John Lee Hooker.

Dean's about to introduce himself and express his surprise at the man's choice of music when he catches the man's eye. They're flitting back and forth between Dean's face and man's own hand, still firmly planted on Dean's shoulder. His pupils are dilated and the chapped seam of his lips is parted, and Dean can see his nostrils flair as he takes in a deep breath. He's afraid.

“Hello,” Dean says cautiously, straightening up as the man draws his hand back. “I'm sorry if I startled you.”

“Are you Castiel Milton?” Victor comes to stand beside Dean, close enough to back him up but not too close to crowd the guy.

“Yes, yes, that's me,” the man, Castiel, answers, staring down at his hand like something had just stung it. Dean and Victor both wait a beat until the man shoves his hand in his back pocket.

The same blues riff hums out of Castiel's headphones. He must have it on a loop.
“I’m Detective Henriksen, this is my partner Detective Winchester.”

Dean watches Castiel's face closely during Victor’s introduction. Rather than growing more agitated at the D-word, Castiel visibly relaxes. He tugs his headphones free from his neck and lays them on one of the small tables by the computers.

“I see. Is everything alright?” Castiel’s voice is scratchy, and Dean wonders if this is his first conversation of the day.

“We’d just like to ask you a few questions about your employment at Seraphim.”

Castiel arches an eyebrow when Victor says “employment,” his gesture so similar to Anna's that Dean smiles. Dean's never thought that he and Sam looked terribly alike, but occasionally they would make such similar facial expressions that Charlie would shriek “uncanny valley!” and burst out laughing.

“Is there any place we could sit?”

“Of course, of course,” Castiel says, shaking his head like he's just remembered his manners. “Right this way.”

Castiel leads them around a corner, passing stacks of crates teeming with records. From what Dean can glimpse it's an eclectic mix with no apparent system of organization. He spies Robert Johnson, Big Daddy Kane and the Talking Heads stacked on top of each other, while Bessie Smith nestles next to an Exene Cervenka spoken work album. Dean sees a dozen things he'd like to pull out by the spine and pore over like a teenager at a really great yard sale.

Instead Dean follows Castiel to an approximation of a living room, with an equal mix of milk crates and mismatched chairs. At least it has chairs.

Low tables flank the semi-circle of the makeshift seating. Dean should probably recognize the style, mid-century something or other. Dean smiles as he thinks of Charlie's endless jests about his taste. He cared about as much about interior design as he did about clothes.

Dean's smile freezes on his face as he sits down next to one of the tables. Pools of wax anchor a motley assortment of candles to a large tray. Fat pillars mix with slender tapers to make a forest of
beeswax. The smell makes Dean feel dizzy.

“\textcolor{red}{I prefer natural light,}” Castiel explains, tucking of his legs underneath him as he perches on a rattan lounge chair. Dean notices that Castiel hasn't bothered to put a shirt on. At least Dean can still thank God for small favors.

“I'm sensitive to artificial light, so I often light candles when I'm home in the evenings.”

“They're beeswax,” Dean says, and he's not sure why.

“Yes.” Castiel smiles like he's pleasantly surprised. “They have a warmer flame.”

Dean thinks of the church-bound blaze of Mrs. McConneley's prayers. He clears his throat.

“That's interesting,” Victor says drily, pulling Xander's photograph from his jacket pocket. “But we wanted to ask you some questions about this man.”

Castiel takes the photograph and peers at it, furrowing his brow.

“I don't know him, I'm sorry.” He hands the picture back to Victor. “Has something happened to him?”

The guileless expression on his face gives Dean pause. He's either completely ignorant of his family's workplace tragedy, or one of the most proficient liars Dean has ever encountered.

“You haven't heard?” Victor narrows his eyes, clearly not buying Castiel's ignorance.

“Heard what?” Castiel blinks and absently pats at his chest, like he's looking for a shirt pocket that isn't there.

“I've been working on some new music, I lose track of time once in a while...” He trails off, looking around the room.
“I don’t know where my phone is,” he admits sheepishly, and the faint blush on his cheeks has no business looking that good.

“I’m afraid Alexander passed away at your father’s club last night.” Victor watches Castiel like a hawk.

“That’s terrible.” Castiel’s eyes widen, and Dean would bet his left eye that his surprise is genuine.

“We have some concerns about his death,” Victor explains, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees.

Castiel’s eyebrows slant down with concern. “I haven’t been to the club in...” The same sheepish expression creeps over his face. “What day is it?”

“It’s Friday,” Dean says softly, smiling in spite of himself. Normally he’d find this flighty behavior irritating, but it only adds to Castiel’s charm.

“Oh.” Castiel tilts his head with surprise. “Three days, then.” He shrugs, as though losing days of his life is a mildly irritating but common occurrence.

“Must be one hell of a song,” Dean jokes. Castiel visibly perks up.

“Do you like the blues?” Castiel asks, his voice still scratchy even with excitement.

“I, uh, I do, actually.” Dean grins with what he knows is a charming smile. “Quite a bit.”

“I'm remixing some Hooker's early work. I've been pulling out some of the vocal nuances and bringing up the back scratch, laying it over some old house bass lines.” He leans forward farther, waving a hand in front of him. Dean would be worried about Castiel tipping out of his chair if he weren't so captivated by his enthusiasm.

“Everything's digital these days,” Castiel explains, flinging an arm back towards the front room and,
“A warmer flame,” Dean whispers, feeling his skin prickle as Castiel looks at him like he's really seeing Dean for the first time.

“Exactly.” Castiel regards Dean with a curious smile, his lips tugging up unevenly at the corners.

“Well, Dean will just have to come and see you play sometime,” Victor says with a too-sweet smile on his face. As Sam's primary caregiver, Dean is an expert at deciphering bitch faces. Victor's is a fairly standard “stop flirting and get back to work.”

“I'll put you on the list,” Castiel promises. Dean clears his throat in an unsuccessful effort to quell the warm feeling in his stomach as Castiel gazes unblinking at him.

“Well, that'd be great.” Dean smiles at Victor with his own too-wide grin before turning back to Castiel.

“What can you tell me about Meg?” Dean flips open his pad.

The snort Castiel lets out surprises Dean.

“Meg.” Castiel arches an eyebrow and smirks, which is an even better expression than his sheepish grin.

“Meg and I are friends, of a sort. She's worked with us for years. She was, well, rather persistent in her affections when she started if I'm being polite.” Castiel levels a knowing gaze at Dean.

“Meg’s lovely, in her way, but she's not exactly my type.” Castiel's eyelids sweep down to half-mast as Dean tries not to shift in his seat.

“I see.” Dean doesn't mean to say it with so much heat in his voice. He can practically feel Victor's glare boring into his skin.
“Indeed.” Castiel breaks his gaze to look at Victor. “But we've worked all that out.” His smile falters as he continues. “You don't think Meg is involved in this somehow?”

“We're just exploring all the possibilities,” Victor says blandly, every inch the cop.

“I know she can be abrasive, but that's part of her job. I've seen her haul out men twice her size.” Castiel's eyes widen as he realizes what he just said. “But she wouldn't kill anyone, I swear.”

“Tell us about Ruby,” Dean says suddenly, remembering the unease that she'd left him with.

“Ruby,” Castiel mutters, his eyes unfocusing like he's trying to recall her. “She's not one of us, I mean, she's new. I don't really know her.”

“She seemed pretty sweet on my brother,” Dean jokes, shaking his head.

“Your brother?” Castiel tilts his head in confusion.

“Oh, yeah, sorry.” Dean rubs his eyes. “I know it's a little unusual, but my brother just started working at your club. He's a bar back.”

“I'm not sure I'd know him. I don't drink,” Castiel admits.

“Me neither.” Dean gives Castiel another look. Usually Dean kept his business to himself but Dean didn't usually interview anyone like Castiel.

Most people met Dean's sobriety with sympathetic inquiries about how long he's been sober or assumptions that he was some kind of Mormon. Castiel just nods knowingly.

“He's tall, sort of gangly. Looks like a lost puppy with an unfortunate haircut.” Dean shrugs as Castiel laughs at his description of Sammy.
“Got it.” Castiel grins, adding to the roster of best faces. “I'll be sure to say hello.”

Victor clears this throat and pointedly ignores Dean's sidelong glare.

“Have you noticed anything unusual at Seraphim lately? Anything out of the ordinary, any personnel changes or strange activity?”

“Unusual is a relative term, but no, I can't think of anything.” Castiel shifts on the couch, tucking his other leg beneath him.

“And you're sure you can't tell us anything about the man who died last night?”

Dean shoots Victor a quick glare before frowning sympathetically at Castiel.

“It's just terrible,” Castiel says softly, wrapping one arm over his chest to rub his arm. “Was it drugs? I won't be much help to you, I'm afraid. I don't touch anything harder than coffee.”

“We're still waiting to hear from the coroner. Cause of death is currently unknown,” Dean explains.

“If I hear anything, I'll let you know. I work other parties sometimes. People talk.” Castiel shrugs. “They don't really talk to me that much, but I'll keep an ear out. If that would help.” He looks up at Dean, his eyebrows knit together.

“That would be a huge help.” Dean fishes in his jacket pocket and pulls out a card and a pen. He scrawls his cell number under the LAPD logo before handing it to Castiel.

“You can call me any time.” Their fingertips brush together as Castiel grasps the card. Castiel's eyes flutter shut for one moment, his hand suspended in mid-air. His lashes are thick and dark against his high cheekbones as he tilts his head. Dean swallows, feeling his adam's apple bob at his throat as he wonders what it would be like to kiss Castiel there, to sense the soft trace of his lashes against the seam of his lips. Dean lets his thumb slide against Castiel's ring finger, licking his lips as the callused edge of his nail bed catches against the corner of Castiel's finger.

Castiel's eyes fly open, his pupils wide and dark as he blinks at Dean twice before drawing his
eyebrows down and sighing. He looks unhappy, and Dean feels his mouth open and close a few times as he mentally stammers with confusion. Dean knows interest when he sees it, and there's no way Castiel isn't into him.

“Thank you,” Castiel says softly, tucking Dean's card between his fingers. He frowns slightly as he bows the card into an arch, pressing it up with his middle finger.

Victor clears his throat loud enough for it to echo off the walls. It startles Dean out of his reverie. He shakes his head and rubs his knuckle against his eyes. He could use a nap.

“We'll be in touch, Mr. Milton. Thank you for your time.” Victor shakes Castiel's hand once they're all standing. He arches an eyebrow at Dean and turns to leave.

“Yes, thank you.” Dean holds his hand out, putting on his most charming smile. Castiel hesitates a moment before taking it. His skin is warm.

“You know, I'd love to hear your music sometime.” Dean lets the handshake linger before drawing his hand back and stepping a few inches closer to Castiel.

Castiel sighs, again, a huff through his mouth this time. He chews his lip, the rounded point of one canine tooth worrying at a patch of rough skin. He looks off to the side before licking his lips and glancing up at Dean.

“I do a podcast. It's original stuff and a mix of other music, whatever I feel like when I record it. It's called Blue Knight. With a k,” Castiel explains, rolling his eyes a little and smiling. “Anna came up with the name.”

“I like it,” Dean says truthfully, thinking how well it fits the little he knows of Castiel.

“She has one, too.” Castiel's mouth quirks into a wry grin. “It's called Death Cunt.”

“I... well, I'll have to check yours out.” Dean glances at the other end of the room, where Victor is waiting with his back pointedly turned. He smirks and looks back at Castiel.
“I’ve gotta go, or he's probably gonna lock me out of the car.” Dean runs a hand through his hair. “So sorry to take your time like this.” Dean can think of about a million ways he'd like to take his time with Castiel.

“It's no trouble.” Castiel's voice makes it clear that he has other types of trouble on his mind. Dean watches his chest rise and fall, letting his eyes linger on Castiel's nipples for a beat longer than professional conduct should allow.

“See you around, Cas.” Dean likes the way that sounds, Cas. He likes the way Castiel's eyes widen at his familiarity even more. Dean smiles and turns to leave, feeling his skin prickle as Castiel watches him walk away.

He'd call Dean in two days, tops.

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Four days later, Dean is positive that his phone is, in fact, working properly despite the distinct lack of calls from a certain shirtless DJ. He's checked it enough times to know.

“Don't do it,” Charlie hisses, elbowing Dean in the side as he starts to lean forward. His phone sits in the middle of the coffee table, next to a mountain of chicken wings.

Dean sulks and grabs a wing instead, piling four more on his plate and swiping another small plastic container of blue cheese dressing. He leans back against the couch, resting his plate in his lap and sticking his tongue out at Charlie.

“Why do you keep checking your phone, anyway?” Sam looks up from his sprawl on the floor. “I thought nothing was happening with the case right now.”

“It's not.” Dean dips a wing into his sauce, watching the orange and white swirl together.

“Dean has a cru-ush,” Charlie sing-songs, wriggling back as Dean menaces a wing in her direction before taking a bite.

“Do not,” Dean grumbles around a mouthful of chicken. Charlie arches an eyebrow and stretches her arms over her head. Dean's about to change the subject by asking Charlie the meaning of the bent
knee with an arrow through it emblazoned on her t-shirt, when she leans down to whisper conspiratorially to Sam.

“He's got the total hottie-hots for one of the guys he interviewed for the case. Who just happens to be the brother of a certain lady companion someone is taking out on a date tomorrow.” Charlie claps her hands and throws her head back.

“It'll be amazing! We can all live in a big house together and have each other's surrogate gaybies.” She takes a dramatic pause, wiping a fake tear from her eye. “It's like our lives are finally becoming the LOGO channel sitcoms they were always meant to be.”

Dean's “I hate you” is drowned out by Sam's snorts of laughter and Dean's own mouthful of extra crispy.

“Aww, I'm sure he'll call, Dean.” Sam picks up a stick of celery and crunches it between his teeth.

“Save the pity party, Sasquatch.” Dean picks up a wing and stops mid-air, narrowing his eyes at Sam. “And seriously, what is even wrong with you? Who eats the celery that comes with wings?”

Sam takes another bite, looking affronted as he chews his decorative vegetable.

“I'm gonna side with Dean here, big guy,” Charlie agrees. “The sole purpose of that celery is to act as intra-package cushioning to protect the blue cheese.” She pats Sam on the shoulder and shakes her head. “It's basically the styrofoam of the vegetable world.”

“Yeah, well,” Sam huffs, picking up another sauce-tinged spear, “don't come crying to me when you get, like, gout.”

Charlie's peals of laughter are contagious, and soon Dean is laughing with her as she puts on her worst English accent. “Excuse me Lord Winchester, pray tell how is your gouty foot on this fine day?” Charlie snorts with laughter.

“Anyway.” Sam wipes his fingers on his napkin and rolls his eyes. “Where're you and Anna going?”
“I have planned the perfect date.” Charlie purses her lips and does her dramatic jazz-hands. “Roller. Derby.”

“Roller derby?” Dean pulls another strip of chicken off with his teeth.


“Perfect date. And it's right by that really good fish taco place.”

“Fish tacos, Charlie?” Dean splutters around his mouthful of chicken. “There are so many vagina jokes I could make right now my head is actually spinning.”

“I like extra special sauce on my fish tacos,” Charlie chimes in, her face angelic.

“I legitimately do not know which one of you is grosser.” Sam grimaces and shakes his head.

“Oh, it's definitely me.” Charlie beams, resting her chin on her folded hands.

“So what's on the movie roster tonight, sensei?” Dean wipes his fingers on a napkin and stacks his plate on top of Charlie's.

“It was a tough call, but I settled on Starship Troopers. Sam, I don't even want to hear it.” Charlie chops her hand through the air as he starts to protest, which Sam did pretty much every week it wasn't his turn to pick the movie. “It is a work of.”

Charlie's phone lights up and hums as it vibrates across the table, butting up against the styrofoam takeout container. Dean hopes no one noticed the brief flash of hope across his face before he saw the dead, mocking screen of his own phone.

“Aw, shit,” Charlie curses, groaning as she grabs the phone. “I have to take this, new client.” She swipes the screen on and staggers off the couch.
“Halo, Herr Friedrich.” She makes a pained face at both of them before heading to Dean's room and closing the door behind her.

Dean isn't stupid. He knows that most of Charlie's “freelance consulting” work falls far afield of the right side of the law. They have an unspoken agreement. As long as she keeps it behind closed doors, Dean doesn't see a thing.

“Hey, look.” Sam scoots around until he's sitting cross-legged, looking up at Dean. “I'm going out to Victorville next week. It's some kind of administrative day at school and I'm not working, so I'm gonna go see him.”

Dean's lips draw into a tight line.

“Sam, we've talked about this.”

“No, Dean, we haven't,” Sam stage-whispers, glancing at Dean's bedroom door before continuing. “I don't think you clamming up every time I mention him really counts as talking.”

Dean lets out a long breath through his nose, his nostrils flaring as he tries to stay calm.

“Look, Sam, if you feel like you need to go see him, then you go do that. But you can go by yourself.” Dean closes his eyes, pressing two fingers over his left temple. “You're a big boy.”

“He'd like to see you.” Sam looks up balefully. “He always asks about you.”

“Oh, I'm sure.” Dean snorts and straightens up on the couch. “And I'd like a lot of things, Sam. I'd like a unicorn that shits money and a room full of naked Dr. Sexy lookalikes. I'll be sure to run out to V town after I get them, OK?”

“He's apologized, Dean.” Sam looks down at his floor, his bare toe scratching against the worn edge of Ash's carpet.

“Oh, well, isn't that nice?” Dean hisses, pushing off the couch to stand. “He's sorry. Good thing that just fixes fucking everything, isn't it?”
“Dean, I didn't—”

“I know, I know.” Dean paces a few steps back and forth, rubbing the back of his neck with a sweaty palm. “You do your thing, Sam, I just...” Dean stops, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Just leave me out of it.”

Sam doesn't say anything as Dean heads to the bathroom.

The cold water on his face isn't all that refreshing. Dean pats his skin dry with a hand towel, squeezing his eyes shut and rubbing the towel against his eyes until he sees white stars.

He blinks his vision back into focus as he hunches over the sink. He lets the water run for five seconds, watching it swirl around the drain.

When he returns to the living room Charlie has reclaimed her throne in the corner of the couch. Sam smiles at Dean, the grin not quite reaching his eyes.

Dean snatches his phone before Charlie can say anything. He tries not to frown at the empty mailbox before grabbing a Dr. Pepper. He cracks the tab open, taking a sip before settling cross-legged on the couch.

“This one's for Argentina,” Dean quips, forcing a smile back at Sam. Charlie points the remote and queues the movie up. Sam stares pointedly at the screen as the opening credits roll.

Dean's eyes drift to his phone throughout the entire movie, the blank screen staring back at him each time.

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“Well, this one was a doozy.”

Linda Tran snaps a glove on and arches an eyebrow before pulling open the cadaver drawer.
Xander's smiling face greets Dean and Victor.

“I have the full report on my desk, but my current hypothesis is cause of death, oxytocin overdose.”

“Is that like OxyContin?” Victor asks, frowning as he looks down at Xander’s face.

“No, it's a hormone, isn't it?”

Linda and Victor both look up at Dean with surprise.

“What? I read.” Dean shrugs and sticks his hands into his pockets.

“Yes, it is.” Linda crosses her arms over her chest. “Some people call it the 'cuddle hormone.' It's related to several functions in the human body, but it's probably best know for its relation to sex.”

She looks them both dead in the eye like she's anticipating schoolroom humor. Dean's half-tempted to give her a “Yes, m'am” before she continues.

“Oxytocin floods the brain after acts of physical intimacy, like sexual contact, orgasm, even while a mother nurses a child. It delivers a euphoric feeling and promotes pair bonding. It may also promote hostility to outsiders. It's still being studied and they're finding new things all the time.”

“So is this some new street drug? It sounds like some kind of high-end MDMA.” Victor sucks his teeth and shakes his head. “It's getting harder and harder to keep up with all the new shit they're cooking these days. I mean, uh, stuff, they're cooking, pardon me.”

Dean smirks a little at Victor's tongue-tied apology. Linda's the sort of universal mom-type who can make anyone watch his language.

“Unlikely.” She spares a look at Victor before continuing. “First of all, extracting real oxytocin would take a great deal of skill. Delivering it would be even more difficult.”

She gestures at Xander's body. “This young man doesn't have a scratch on him, not that injecting it
would do anything.’’

“Why not?” Dean wonders, glancing over at an equally-puzzled Victor.

“Oxytocin is a relatively bulky molecule. It can’t pass the blood-brain barrier.”

Victor relieves Dean of the duty to ask what that is, while Linda smiles patiently.

“It’s like a sieve at the base of your brain. It keeps molecules over a certain size out of the blood supply that feeds your brain. We’re pretty sure that many age-related mental illnesses result from a weakening of this barrier.”

Dean and Victor both nod their understanding.

“Even if someone did obtain a sample of human oxytocin, which, as I’ve said, is extremely unlikely,” she explains, shrugging and shaking her head, “he could pump himself full of it and it would just break down in the GI tract.”

She inclines her head to one side and purses her lips. “There have been some studies that have used nasal inhalers to bypass the blood-brain barrier, but the expense is astronomical.”

“But it’s possible? I mean, could this kid have gotten his hands on some souped-up Nasonex?” Dean has learned that if designer drugs are going to happen anywhere, it’s LA.

Linda sighs and shakes her head. “That was my thought as well, but the nasal mucosa shows none of the trauma that I’d expect. This man’s nose is pristine compared to most of the club-hopping trash that comes in here.” Linda wrinkles her nose in distaste. Dean feels a new sympathy for Kevin.

“So how the, uh, heck did it get in his system?” Dean absently picks at the callus on his thumb as Linda widens her eyes.

“I’m afraid your guess is as good as mine.” She walks across the room, the low heels of her sensible pumps clicking against the tiled floor.
“You can check the numbers yourself,” she says as she picks up the slender manila envelope. “But his tox screens were negligible. BAC as expected for the circumstances, not so much as an aspirin beside that.” She clicks her tongue.

“But this,” she points at a number on the lab report, “this is extraordinary.”

The number is meaningless to Dean, a 238 pg/mL sandwiched in between several rows of abbreviated lab terms.

Linda taps her short fingernail against the number and raises an eyebrow.

“The usual levels are somewhere around 7 to 15 picograms per milliliter. They're usually double that after sexual activity.”

Dean lets out a low whistle and shakes his head.

“Well I guess that explains the grin.” Dean notes, shooting Victor a wry expression. Victor scrunches his nose up, like he doesn't want to laugh in front of Linda.

“So this guy basically orgasmed to death?” Victor clears his throat and runs a hand over the back of his neck, looking slightly bashful.

Linda’s eyebrows knit together as she frowns. “Essentially, although...” She flips through her report and nods as if confirming something with herself. “There were no signs of any sexual intercourse, or ejaculation. The whole thing is just … strange.”

Dean straightens up from where he’s leaned against Linda's door. Dean doesn't like strange, and he likes it even less from someone as no-nonsense as Linda.

“I'm sure we'll figure it out,” Dean says briskly, taking the report from Linda and smiling. His grin falters a little as he glances at the photographs of Kevin holding pride of place on Linda's desk.
“Thank you so much, Linda.” Victor beams a smile at her and gives Dean a saccharine look. “And how is Kevin doing?”

“He's excellent, Victor, thank you for asking. Linda's face brightens at the mention of her son. “He's just been selected to play lead cello for the UCLA Student Orchestra. He's been staying late every night to rehearse.”

Dean smiles blandly at the picture of Kevin, an honest-to-goodness sweater vest adorning his chest underneath a tight smile.

“He's a good boy,” Linda sighs, a proud smile on her face. Dean feels a tinge of unease, both for Kevin and his mom. It’s not like Kevin was less of a good kid just because he liked getting half-naked and shaking his stuff. It must be hard to hide a whole side of your life. For all that Dean’s haphazard family didn’t fit the traditional mold, he had never felt like he had to hide his sexual orientation. Ellen and Bobby already knew all the things that Dean was truly ashamed of.

“We'll be in touch, Linda. Thank you for this.” Victor turns to leave, stretching his neck from side to side. Victor would never say it, but he doesn't like being around stiffs.

Dean gives Linda a last smile of thanks. He watches as she efficiently slides Xander back to his chilled tomb. The hatch clicks shut and Dean stares at the gleaming metal exterior, the pained curved of Xander’s death-grin lingering in his mind.

Shaking his head, Dean follows Victor down the hallway. They had a lot of work to do.

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“Dean, darling,” Bela greets him, kissing both cheeks before sliding into the booth and under Victor’s arm. She looks around the dingy bar, her eyebrow arching at the motley crew of old bikers, Mexican gang-bangers and genuine Motley Crue fans.

“My love,” Victor says affectionately, planting a kiss on Bela's lips and smiling at her. “Let me finish this beer and we'll get going, alright?”
“I'm in no rush.” She flags down the harried-looking waitress and procures a healthy glass of Bulleit Rye, neat, which Dean would have sworn on his life this place would never carry. It's entirely possible that Bela frightened it into existence. They make a quick toast when it arrives, Dean sipping his coke and clinking his glass with both of them.

“It's best not to arrive at these things too early. Even Victor can't scare off that monstrous bitch from Saatchi and I don't intend to spend my evening comparing dicks with my competitors.”

Most of Bela's art-world talk is lost on Dean, but he had to give her points for colorful language.

“I do wish you'd join us, Dean.” Bela takes another sip of her drink and gives him a pointed look. “I know a dozen people I could introduce you to, and they're all extremely handsome.”

Dean snorts and takes a long pull from his coke. “You do know I have more dating criteria than "handsome and has a dick,” right?”

“It worked out just fine for me,” Bela teases, beaming at Victor.

“Don't think the MoCA patrons' gala is really my scene, Bela. But thank you for looking out for me.”

Bela's first attempts to set Dean up had ended with a series of disastrous dates to wine bars and cutting-edge art galleries. She'd relented when Dean had started seeing Aaron, although she'd always been quick to remind him that he could do better. It hadn't been a matter of doing better, not really, that had finally made Dean end it. They'd just wanted different things. Dean was gung-ho for marriage equality but had blanched at the thought of actually getting married, which Aaron had clearly been heading towards. The last Dean had heard, Aaron was dating a nice accountant from Burbank. They'll settle down soon, no doubt, and Dean will still be fending off Bela's attempts to introduce him to the big gay art world.

“Well, thank you for keeping Victor company.” She knocks back the rest of her drink and turns to Victor. “And I'm sorry that meeting ran late, darling. You know the French have a unique sense of time.”

“He only cried for you, like, once,” Dean confides jokingly, winking at Victor and draining the last of his soda with an audible hiss through the straw.
“I'll see you tomorrow.” Victor shrugs on his jacket as Dean gets up.

“Yeah, I'll try to get some work done on the -”

“Dean, take the night off.” Victor adjusts his cuffs and raises his eyebrows at Dean's protests. “Seriously, you can't burn yourself out, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah, enjoy your gala.” Dean drags out the last word as Victor glares at him.

They part ways in the parking lot, with Victor yelling “No work!” from the window of Bela's BMW. Dean sits in his Camry and frowns. For all Dean's jokes about Sam being the egghead in the family, Dean feels adrift when he's not entrenched in work. He's sitting on a dead end with the club case, at least until he can contact all the local research labs working with oxytocin. He'd interviewed every possible connection that he and Victor could come up with.

Dean pulls his phone from his pocket and swipes the screen on. He still hasn't heard from Castiel, he of the no shirts and ridiculous fuck-me hair. Five days is too long, even for someone who's playing coy. Dean couldn't have been imagining the energy between them, not with the looks Castiel had been giving him. Dean knows body language like a native tongue and Castiel had been clear as a bell.

He shakes his head, frowning at the glowing screen before tapping it off. Maybe Castiel already has a boyfriend. It would make sense. He must meet hundreds of people at work, and even if he wasn't already insanely hot, DJ is up there with firefighter and bartender for most-fuckable careers. Not like cop was too bad, and Dean was not above making frisking jokes.

Dean runs a hand through his hair and puts the car into gear, backing out of his spot as he runs through his options for the night. Sam is studying for something called tort law, Charlie had informed him two days ago that she was not to be disturbed until she finished State of Decay, and Garth and Ash were going to some kind of all-night chanting thing for charity. Dean is on his own for the evening.

After stopping by Roscoe's and debating between the chicken and waffles or the smothered chicken, Dean arrives home with an order of each and sets up his kingdom on the couch. There's a Die Hard marathon on TNT, so Dean catches the end of the first one and half of the second one as he eats his dinner.
Dean drags a biscuit through the remaining pool of his sausage gravy, wondering how the hell they got it to taste so good and deciding he's better off not knowing. By the time Dean clears his plate and washes up, he's already pretty bored with the movie. He weighs his options and contemplates staying up for Die Hard With a Vengeance before shutting the TV off and heading to his bedroom.

Dean's already wearing pajama pants and one of his favorite old t-shirts, a gray one with a frayed pocket and a hole on one shoulder. He settles on his bed, kicking the covers down to bunch under his ankles the way he likes. He thumbs through the old copy of On The Road that he's been re-reading, unable to focus on the epic road trip of Sal and Dean. Dean sighs and sets it aside on the nightstand.

Dean had inherited Sam's old laptop once Sam had started law school. The white cover of the old Mac is scuffed and it's got a dent on the left corner, but it still works fine thanks to Ash's computer whispering skills. Dean opens Spotify and clicks around, opening a few playlists without settling on one. He's not sure what he wants to listen to, hovering over some Zeppelin before minimizing the window.

His phone sits dark and still next to his bedside lamp. Dean goes to pick it up and stops himself. It's not like him to obsess over one random guy like this. Dean had been skirting the limits of professional conduct at it was, so maybe it was for the better this way.

Clicking open a new iTunes window on his screen, Dean hovers the mouse over the search box, telling himself that this is not a smart idea. He should not be hunting down podcasts by random cute guys that are clearly not interested in him. But maybe his music would be terrible, and it would help Dean get over his marginally obsessive thoughts about Castiel's hair and how it would feel between Dean's fingers.

Blue Knight is easy to find. Dean clicks through a backlog of episodes, reading the descriptions before starting the most recent one. It had only gone up two days ago.

There's no introduction, no words at all as it starts. Just the soft hum and crackle of an old record while a muffled voice proclaims, “The kid is in rare form tonight.” A staccato break beat kicks in, skipping just enough to get Dean's attention before the piano lays over it. The distorted vocals come in fuzzy and cut-up, the voice of some old blues singer even Dean doesn't recognize. “Ain't but one kind of blues,” he croons, over and over, the strange syncopation of his voice reminding Dean of the old schoolroom tales about playing Sabbath records backwards and hearing the devil.

Dean's head moves before he realizes it, swaying slightly as the back beat builds up. The clean, synthetic melody filters through the grimy samples perfectly, setting off the cycling grit of each drawn-out wail and percussive skip. His fingers drum against his knee as he smiles. This shit is fucking great. It's not something Dean would ever have thought that he'd like if someone had
described it to him, but he finds himself biting his lip as the song starts to fade out. The music fades to a soft hum, with the pops of an old record skipping off the needle repeated like a heartbeat.

Another beat picks up as the soft pops fade to the background, a galloping riff that Dean has heard on a dozen old rhythm and blues records. Dean narrows his eyes to focus on the vocal sample that comes in, scratchy and warm over the relatively crisp beat. “It ain't what I got, it's what I do with what I got.”

The vocals build layer by layer, soft hums and skipped *ohs* and *ahs* that mingle with the guitar riff perfectly. Dean licks his lips, closing his eyes and letting his head sway with the beat. He lets out a long breath, leaning back against his pillows and rubbing a hand along the side of his neck. A tension he didn't realize he'd been carrying drains away, as the busy layers of the song meld together into something that quiets his mind and seeps into his body.

A warmer flame. Dean smiles, thinking of how fitting that image is. He feels warm, soothed somehow but alert to the soft press of his head against the pillow, the weight of his hand as he lays it over his chest. The crinkle of the old blues samples catch against his ears and make his skin prickle, sensitive to the worn material of his shirt. He shifts slightly, humming a little at the loose rustle of his flannel pajama bottoms.

Dean slides his hand across his collarbone, massaging his palm into the wing of it before squeezing his shoulder. He turns his head to the side, resting his cheek against his pillow and blowing out a breath through his lips. A scratchy horn section starts up in the background, soft and fuzzy like the sheets underneath him. Dean rubs his face against the pillowcase, licking his lips again and letting his hand come to rest on his stomach.

The song fades again, the same gritty buzz sinking in as a slower beat kicks on. Slack-key guitar and a tinkle of piano drift from Dean's speakers as he splays his palm over the small curve of his stomach. His fingers drag against the frayed hem of his shirt, laddering it up to expose the faint trail of hair running down from his belly button. Dean brushes the edge of his pinky finger through it, biting his lip and humming at how good it feels to touch himself. His other fingers trail after it, scratching lightly across the swell of his stomach and landing at the incline of his hipbone.

“Mama, that's alright,” a voice warbles, skipping over the drawn-out syllables to lace over the backing drag of a low, distorted lament. Dean bends his left knee and huffs out a breath as his dick brushes against his pants. He rolls his hips, just enough to make it happen again so he can groan and bite his lip. It's so easy like this, laying here and feeling the steady throb of his cock between his legs, to imagine another hand slipping under the bunched-up edge of his shirt, another hand dragging slender fingers up the dip of his chest.

Dean rolls his neck, turning his face to the other side as his eyes drift open. The faded flannel of his
pants taut against his bent leg, straining against the buttoned fly. Dean lowers his leg, just for the pleasure of seeing his dick press up as he scratches his nails over the curve of his pec.

A loop of music so distorted Dean can't discern the instruments thrums from his computer, not that Dean needs to know. The beat swells down to nothing, a simple hiss and pop holding the place before it all rises back with the same heartbeat drone that makes Dean ache. It's gritty and strange and sexy as fuck. He pictures Castiel, shirtless and candle-lit like a debauched saint, running his fingers over the knobs and sliders of his control board to create this. It makes Dean cup his hand over his dick, squeezing down over the paltry barrier of his pants. If this is what Castiel's head sounds like he can't even imagine what his mouth would feel like, what the attention of those skilled hands could do to him.

The callused edge of Dean's thumb glides past the edge of his nipple, prickling Dean's skin and making him groan at the drop of precome that seeps through his pants. He bites his lip in anticipation as he brings his forefinger to meet his thumb and squeezes, rolling them together hard enough to make his dick twitch.

Dean grinds his palm down, letting the heel of it press against the head of his dick. He can feel wetness seeping through the thin cotton, making the material catch against his skin as he slides his hand back and forth. He groans, dragging the edge of his thumb down his nipple and snaking his fingers down to cup over his balls. They're heavy in Dean's hand, sensitive to the soft squeeze he gives them in time with the lazy beat playing from Castiel's music. Dean rolls his hips, up and down in time while he bites his lip and lets his hand roam to his other nipple. It's hard, pebbling up under his attention and Dean cracks his eyes open, looking down at the wet spot spreading across his pants.

“Yeah,” he mumbles, not to anyone or anything in particular, just because it feels good to hear his own voice come out whispered and hoarse over the soft static of Castiel's break beat. Dean hums in his throat, trailing his hand down his stomach as slow as he can stand. He palms his dick through the soaked cotton and drags his hand up, shifting his hips to rub against it as he tickles through the curls of hair peeking out over his waistband.

When Dean can't stand it any more he loops his thumbs into the stretched-out elastic and tugs, baring his teeth as the rougher material scrapes over his dick. His cock springs free, slapping against his belly and leaving a shiny smear on his skin. Dean hooks the waistband of his pants under his balls, snug against them for the little bit of pressure he always likes.

Dean cocks his head and looks down, lips tugging up into a grin. His dick sticks straight up, curving slightly and pearled at the tip. Dean breathes, in and out as the music fades and sinks into the vinyl-hum pause.

His cock feels hot in his hand, the sort of straining hard that Dean makes himself wait for. That's the
best part, the tension, skirting his hand back up his chest to lick his palm and shift his hips. His skin tingles, warm and prickly as he squeezes a spit-wet hand around the base. He watches, lips parted and cheeks flushed as he strokes upwards. A fresh bead of precome leaks from the slit and Dean wonders if Castiel would kitten-lick it off or close his lips around the head and suck.

Dean strokes himself again as the music flares back to life, a brash hit of cymbals before a rolling piano sample starts up. The hummed vocal loop plays off-tempo, skipping the beat just to sync up with the first bar of the piano sample. Dean hums in his throat, liking the way it feels as he licks his lips and speeds his hand.

He squeezes, catching the webbing of his thumb on the crown of his dick and groaning. Would Castiel bend over and spread himself, let Dean tease him open with his mouth and claw at the sheets like a wild thing, or is he controlled, tight and slow with his teeth bared as he sinks down and rides Dean with a hand splayed on his chest? Would he hiss when Dean pulled his hair or would he just laugh, feral and arching into it?

Dean glances down over the rise and fall of his chest to watch the head of his dick disappear into his hand, rising back slick-red and flush with each stroke. He alternates his pace, speeding up until he's riding on the edge of it just to pull down and clamp himself off. Sweat beads on his forehead and his breath hitches, catching before he drags his thumb over the slit of his cock and groans.

Dean bites his lip again as a vocal hum swells in the background, matching his own and making him shift against his sheets. Dean pictures Castiel with his eyes closed, lost in the grimy sound of some old blues man telling his baby that it's alright, baby, it's alright, and Castiel wouldn't need any gentling to take Dean's cock to the base and swallow. Would he keep his eyes closed when Dean came or would he glance up, gag-tears welling in the corners and smile around the stretch of his lips?

Dean lets his hand fly, the slick noises of skin against skin playing dirty over Castiel's music. He cups his balls with his free hand, feeling them tight and drawn and heavy-hot against his palm. His fist pumps over his cock tight and steady, his pace even as he gives his balls one last fond tug before dragging his thumb over his leaking slit. He sucks the wet drop into his mouth, savoring the pressure of his lips around it, the salty taste on his tongue and he'd kiss Castiel afterwards, drag him up and lick into him and make him come until the only music he can remember is Dean's name wrung out of him in a thousand notes.

Dean's toes curl, the tight knot in his stomach unfurling to flood his skin with heat and static, everything fading under the white hum of his body.

“Fuck, fuck,” Dean curses, throwing his head back and gasping as he feels a hot spurt of his own come hitting his chin. He hasn't come this hard jerking off since he was in high school and he laughs, peering down at the white stripes painted over his chest. He lets his breathing settle before grabbing
his t-shirt and cleaning himself up.

He settles his head against the pillows, dragging his crumpled t-shirt across his forehead before chucking it across the room. It lands next to the hamper and it can stay there. Dean isn't getting up unless the house catches fire. He closes his eyes and listens to the soft crackle and pop of Castiel's outro, letting it soothe him to sleep.

~*~

Sam's mouth was stained red. His fingers bore the same red hue, with thin rivulets running down to his wrists. His tongue snaked out, licking up a stray drop before he smiled at his brother.

“You sure you don't want a popsicle, Dean? They're good.” Sam bit through the tip of his treat and crunched, the ice making squeaking noises that just added to Dean's already-irritated mood.

Dean looked away, leaning back against the creaking porch swing and pushing off with his heel. The air was stagnant with the late summer heat of Arkansas, and even the slight breeze felt like a wet palm against his neck.

“Can I have yours?”

The heat didn't seem to bother Sam the way it did Dean. It made Dean's skin feel itchy, like he was wearing a pair of boots that gave him blisters all over. They'd driven two days straight to get here and Dean could feel the grit in his hair.

“Whatever, Sammy,” Dean groused, ignoring the cherry-red smile Sam flashed at him before peeling open the half-melted popsicle Miss Tina had allotted to Dean.

The chain creaked as Sam shifted on the porch swing, grating on Dean's nerves. He stood up and walked to the banister, leaning against the old wood and staring out at the yard. Barren trees dotted the overrun lawn, with a kaleidoscope of colored bottles capping the ends of the leafless branches. The sunlight filtered through them and split into a million different colors, like a church window shining its light on the weeds and bundles of sticks littering the ground.

“Boys.” Dean turned, sullen and skulking against the porch railing. Miss Tina was 80 if she was a day, with cloudy cataracts and a jaundiced smile that made Dean feel equal parts afraid and insolent.
She smelled funny.

“I'm ready for you.”

Sam seemed to have taken a shine to her, his 10-year-old soul easily won over with a few popsicles and a pat on the head. Dean wasn't so easily swayed. He followed her inside, sparing one last look at the car through the diffracted light of the bottle trees. His father glowered from the front seat until Dean turned and followed the old woman into her house.

It smelled weird in here, too. Dean wrinkled his nose as they walked through the first floor. The front parlor had plastic-covered furniture and huge bouquets of obviously fake flowers. At least it wasn't as hot as outside.

“Out here,” Miss Tina barked, marching through the kitchen and pushing open a screen door. It clanked shut after Dean reluctantly followed, banging against the door frame a few times.

The back porch was in worse shape than the front. Old terracotta planters crowded in the corners, half of them broken and spilling over with green plants and suspiciously shiny berries. The floor was rotted through in some places and Dean narrowly avoided stepping right into a gaping hole. Two tables flanked the door, teeming with jars, bowls, broken bits of pottery and an alarming number of bones.

“Sit.” She motioned at two folding chairs tucked into the corner. They'd been white, once, but now they bore the cracked yellow of old plastic and the black threads of what Dean was pretty sure were mildew. Sam hopped into his seat without a moment's hesitation and Dean rolled his eyes.

“Sit,” Miss Tina repeated, staring right at Dean until he obeyed. “You need this more than little beanpole does, son.”

Dean fidgeted in his seat as Miss Tina sighed and gathered a wide, shallow bowl. She tucked it under her arm as she pattered around the porch, plucking some leaves from the plants and throwing them in with some things from the tables. She hummed as she worked, something low and mournful that made Dean go still while he watched her.

The bowl still perched on her hip, she walked over to Dean and reached out.
“Ow!” Dean flinched as she plucked a hair from his head, doing the same to Sam and dropping both of them into her bowl. Dean crossed his arms over his chest and frowned. His dad had made him promise that he’d do whatever the old woman said, but Dean thought anything that needed his fucking hair sounded like witchcraft, and Dean's few encounters with witches hadn't left him feeling particularly fond. Hoodoo, voodoo, root work and witches – Dean thought it was all best left alone.

Miss Tina placed the bowl on the ground, groaning with the universal sound of old people about to bend their knees. She squatted down in front of the bowl, grabbing a smooth stone from between two of the railing posts. Dean peered at the bowl, his eyes going wide as he saw the curved fang of some animal's tooth. Gross.

Still humming her song, Miss Tina took the stone and started grinding it into the bowl. She stopped to smash it against the tooth a few times, grunting with satisfaction when it splintered into small shards. As the sweat rolled down Dean's back and ran a miserable river down the crack of his ass, Miss Tina pulverized the tooth, leaves and God knows what else into a dry, sickly-looking paste.

She tilted her head and stared at the bowl before nodding. After she'd scraped the stone clean and smeared the remnants back into the bowl, she pursed her lips and made the same sound Sam makes when he sucks his teeth. She lobbed a healthy wad of spit into the bowl and Dean had seen enough.

“Oh, gross!” Dean couldn't help himself. Dad couldn't have expected him to put up with this.

“Gross?” Miss Tina's head snapped up, fixing Dean with a look that kept him glued to his chair. “It is gross, ain't it?” She arched an eyebrow and started to mix the contents of the bowl together.

“Kind of gross nothing wants to eat.” She tilted her head, staring down at the viscous paste. She stood up with a long, time-worn groan, hefting the bowl with her.

“Look at me, Dean,” she demanded, leaning down to peer at him through her milky eyes. “Do I look like one of your magazine girls? Do I look like some pretty young thing you can talk into your bed?”

“No, m'am,” Dean answered softly, regarding her gap-toothed grin and papery skin. Miss Tina was terrifying. Dean glanced at Sam, who was staring at her with saucer eyes while his pink teeth protruded from his hanging mouth.

“Mm-hmm,” she nodded, scooping up a sticky handful of her poultice. “Cat tooth tells 'em you ain't prey.” She smiled at Dean, the wrinkles of her face furrowing up until her eyes almost disappeared.
“Crone spit tells ’em you ain’t open for business.”

She smeared a wide cross of the paste onto Sam’s chest, shooing his hand away when he reached up to touch it. Dean turned his head as she did the same to him, dragging two fingers across his sternum. It itched something terrible.

“Don’t wash until it goes away.” She pointed her bony finger at Dean. “Specially you.”

Dean glared at her without saying anything.

“Are we done?” Sam piped up, bouncing onto his feet like he’d already forgotten he was wearing an old-lady spit-and-bone tattoo.

“Yes, Sam,” Miss Tina said fondly, ruffling his hair. “All done now.”

“Why didn’t my dad get one?” Sam asked, fiddling with the popsicle stick in his hands.

Miss Tina sighed and looked away, her eyes fixed on something in the distance.

“It’s too late for your daddy.” She shook her head and put her smile back on. “But you tell Mr. John to come back any time. I still owe that man some favors.”

“Thank you, m’am,” Dean said as politely as he could manage. He took Sam’s hand and followed her back through the house. At least they were done, and no one could say he’d disobeyed his father’s orders.

Dad was still sitting in the car, which was probably gonna be hotter than Satan’s asshole. Dean sighed and went to follow Sammy down the front stairs when he felt a hand close over his shoulder.

“That fear’s gonna make you strong, Dean, but it also makes you weak.” Dean turned, his eyes wide. The light from the bottle trees did strange things to the afternoon sun, and for one moment Dean could swear he glimpsed two other women standing beside Miss Tina. One was young and beautiful, with a loose white slip and long hair tumbling over her shoulders. The other was older, middle-aged and rounder in figure with her hair in a neat bun and a crisp apron cinched around her waist.
“Be careful, Dean Winchester,” they whispered in unison.

Dean ran for the car without looking back.

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“You are not going to fucking believe this.” Victor's voice has the tinny edge of someone on speakerphone. Dean groans and glances forlornly at the slice of lasagna cooling on his plate.

“Bela finally kill someone?” Dean jokes, cutting off an oozing bite with the side of his fork and shoving it in his mouth while he still has the chance.

“I wish. I'd rather be on my way to the Home Depot for some lye and an extra large tub.” Victor sighs. “There's been another death at the club.”

“Who was it?” Dean sits up and swallows his half-chewed bite. Images of Castiel with a hideous grin painted on his face flash through Dean's mind. His chest tightens.

“Caucasian female, early 20s.”

Dean feels a guilty sink of relief at the news.

“I'm on my way.” Dean watches the steam rise from his lasagna and sighs as he lets his fork clatter against the plate.

There's already a crowd milling around the club when Dean arrives. He parts the crowd of concerned, glittering faces and crosses the tape. He nods at Benny and jogs up the stairs.

Dean spots Victor as he walks through the large double doors. Crime scene bulbs flash around him as two techs snap pictures.
“You ready?” Victor claps a hand on his shoulder and grimaces.

“Name's Mary Turino, everyone calls her Delta. Been doing coat check for about six months.” Victor smiles tightly at one of the photographers. She smiles back and steps aside.

“Same MO as Xander?” Dean steps up to the counter.

“You tell me,” Victor snorts as Dean leans over the counter.

It's even worse this time. Delta might have had a certain rough-edged beauty while she was alive, but Dean shudders at the sight of her. Her body lies slumped on the floor, the sharp bangs of her Bettie Page haircut hanging askew. A stylized pentagram points between her cleavage, the ink standing out sharply against the mottled red of her skin.

The discoloration worsens as Dean takes in her face. The red of her neck morphs into the blood-rich purple of a fresh bruise. Her tongue protrudes from the corner of her mouth, an ugly blue against her bright red lipstick. Her eyes bulge from their sockets, burst blood vessels blossoming over the streaked remnants of some heavy-handed eye makeup.

“Jesus,” Dean whispers, shaking his head as Victor leans next to him.

“The fuck is this,” Victor mutters to himself. Dean doesn't answer. The twisted grin marring Delta's face dances in front of him, doubling as Dean presses his fingers over the bridge of his nose. Bile rises in his throat, bitter and acidic. A cold sweat springs up across his forehead, creeping under his collar to make the hairs on his neck spring up.

“I gotta, I just, I gotta make a phone call,” Dean mumbles, pushing off of the countertop and staggering back. The overhead lights of the club seem too bright suddenly, leaving halos around Dean's vision. The impassive faces of his coworkers blur together as Dean charges for the door. He just needs some air.

Dean brushes off Benny's small talk as he descends the steps, taking them two at a time and narrowly missing a collision with walkie-wielding rookie.

Dean finds an empty stairwell half-way down the block. A rusted chain marks it as closed but there's plenty of room for Dean to duck under it and sit down. He folds his knees up to his chest and presses
his palms against his eyes as the dank scent of earth and stone fills his head.

~*~

Grave dirt had a peculiar scent to it. Years later, Dean would learn that the formaldehyde used to embalm bodies inhibits the growth of certain soil bacteria, changing the pH of the environment and allowing a variety of unusual flora to flourish.

All Dean knew then, as he rested the palm-worn handle of his father's iron shovel on his shoulder, is that it smelled sick.

It made sense, really, when he thought about it. Dean had no childhood memories of peaceful graveside visits, with bunches of flowers or handfuls of stones for fondly-remembered grandparents. Dean knew that graveyards housed one thing. Evil.

Dean's back cramped as he swung the shovel down. He stretched his neck side-to-side once before planting the iron head in a hard-packed mound of dirt. He'd been careful to time his grunts of effort with the impact of the shovel. John grunted when he dug, but his sounded forceful somehow, a chant of mastery where Dean sounded like he'd won last place at a track meet.

There's a rhythm to this kind of work. The finger-numbing cold of the night air, the protesting burn of his muscles, the ever-present eye of his father above him – they all faded to the background as Dean dug. He shoveled and tossed the heavy clay soil of the Colorado earth over his shoulder until he forgot where he was.

He hit the coffin lid with a thud that jolted him back to awareness. Turning the shovel in his hand, Dean scraped away a clear swathe of dirt. The blue-white beam of his maglite confirmed that he'd hit wood.

“I've got it, sir.” Dean looked up and yelled before carefully scraping the rest of the dirt aside to reveal the lid. He routed out a two-inch-wide trench around the frame, wide enough to give him some space to open it.

“It's dug, sir,” Dean repeated, a little louder. He waited a few seconds before sighing and resting the shovel against the side of the freshly-turned earth.
The braided rope dangling over the edge of the hole grated against his palms. Dean kicked the toe of his boot into the dirt to get a better foothold as he dragged himself up. His elbowed his way out and brushed the largest clumps of dirt from his shirt front.

Slumped next to the rope's cinched point around a headstone was Dean's father. His glock was firmly held in his hand even in sleep, and Dean was careful not to do anything too sudden. Dad got twitchy when he'd been drinking, and Dean was glad that Sam was sleeping in the car.

“I'll just take the crowbar, sir,” Dean announced, clearing his throat for extra emphasis. His father stirred, smacking his lips and fluttering his eyelids. His head rested against the engraved memory of Oscar Munves, Loving Father and Husband. Dean picked the crowbar off the ground and headed back to his grave.

A sweep of Dean's flashlight confirmed Dean's suspicions. It was a halfsie. Dean wasn't really sure what the proper name for one these coffins was, but he knew it was easier to open the ones with the smaller top door.

It opened with a creak and a pop, the hinges giving way under his leverage. Dean surveyed the padded lining of the coffin, raising an eyebrow. Double-quilted satin with tasteful faux pearls at the pintucks. Someone had shelled out for the deluxe package.

“Sorry, Mrs. Munves.” Dean crouched down, pressing his handkerchief to his nose. Fifty years underground hadn't been kind to Mrs. Munves, but Dean liked the small cross around her neck. A few wisps of white hair remained stylishly curled around her skull, Aqua Net stronger than death itself after all these years.

Dean could imagine that she was a nice lady. She probably went to church and gave her grandkids the old pinch-and-twist when they acted up, but in a fond way, like she really cared about how they behaved. She probably made meatloaf and baked really great pie. She didn't look like a woman who was killed by a sex-crazed incubus, a woman who had been haunting the vacant split-level house on the north side of town.

Dean looked at the twist of her mouth, the dry curl of her lips over bared teeth. For one thrilling, terrifying moment, Dean entertained the traitorous thought that his father was wrong. Her face wasn't “fixed in a feral grin of wild satiety,” whatever that shit in Dad's book meant. She looked like any of the dozens of corpses Dean had unearthed. The flesh of her face had shriveled, pulling her lips back like that. His dad was wrong about this one. He'd been right about the others, of course, but maybe this time he'd made a mistake. Maybe Dean should check with him, just make sure -
“That's my boy.”

Dean jumped, knocking free a small slide of earth and dropping his flashlight. His heart beat so fast Dean was sure his father could hear the thump of Dean's brief betrayal.

“Cracked her open all by yourself.” John huffs out a dry laugh. “Pretty soon you won't need your old man to go hunting, will you?”

Dean brushed the dirt off his shoulder and righted himself. Dean felt the faint flush across his cheeks that always accompanied his father's praise. It was an uncommon mercy and Dean felt a twist of shame for doubting his father. He'd always need his dad. They were a team.

“Need a hand up?” John bent to one knee and reached down. Dean grasped his father's callused palm and hefted himself up.

Dean was tall for thirteen, but he couldn't imagine that one day he'd be as broad as his father. Dean's forehead stood level with John's mouth, just close enough to smell the fog of Wild Turkey. Dean had a wild impulse to hug his father, to lay his head against that broad-barreled chest and close his eyes.

Instead Dean cleared his throat and bent down to pick up the dented can of lighter fluid.

“It's just like I told you, isn't it?” John nodded and pulled out two canisters of salt. They were smaller than the usual ones, but they'd stopped at a Waffle House with a flirtatious waitress and a stoned fry cook prone to taking smoke breaks while he nodded off and blasted his Walkman. Dean had lifted two cases of the stuff while John had gotten friendly with Susie Lynn.

“Incubus attack, no doubt about it.” The smell of lighter fluid filled the air, acrid and sharp. As far as Dean was concerned, it was still better than the wet stink of the grave. “You see it, right, son?”

“At least she can have some peace now,” Dean said softly. He pulled a book of matches from his breast pocket. They made a matched pair with Waffle House salt and Dean felt his stomach rumble.

Mrs. Munves went extra crispy without a fight. Dean slumped his shoulders and buried his hands in his jacket pockets, letting his thumb worm through the threadbare hole in the corner. John coughed into his hands before clapping them together over the flames.
Warmed by the fire and eyes focused on the yellow lip of the flames, Dean rocked back on his heels.

“Dad, do you think…” Dean blinked, the smoke making his eyes water at the corners. The fire popped and hissed as the roar of the fluid ignition subsided.

“What's that, son?” John looked at him, the flames dancing across his eyes. Dean shivered, feeling the chill night air and cold guilt creep across his neck.

“Think I could have a sip of your whiskey, sir?” Dean turned from the dying fire and forced a smile.

John stared at him for a moment, face impassive and Dean had the brief, mad thought that John could read his mind, that he'd know what Dean was thinking and leave him here, with the stink of smoke and dead things.

Instead John smacked his knee and let out a bark of laughter.

“Chip off the old block, Dean-o.” He shook his head and smiled, pulling the dinged-up flask from his inside pocket and passing it to Dean.

Dean took a sip and let it burn in his chest.

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White stars dot Dean’s blurred vision when he opens his eyes. He blinks them back, trying to get a handle on his ragged breathing.

“You want to tell me what the fuck is up with you?” Victor has always had a way with words.

Dean snorts and rubs a hand over his neck as Victor sits next to him.

“You know I don't like the freaky shit, Vic.” Dean stares down at his hands.
They'd never discussed the details, but Victor knows what he needs to about Dean's past. Victor has the instincts and the good sense not to pry, but Dean knows Victor's looked into his records. He wouldn't be the kind of partner Dean trusted if he hadn't.

“I know.” Victor drums his fingers against his knee and frowns. “I don't like it either. Everyone seems a little too close-lipped at this place, you know?”

Victor turns to Dean. “I mean, who doesn't like talking shit about their boss, right? Everyone here seems to think Cyclops and Big Daddy Kane in there are the swellest guys in town.”

Dean snorts, thinking that he'd be scared to call Chief Mills a bitch even if her back were turned and he had three solid feet of concrete between them.

“Look, man, if you need some time off from this shit, I know Mills would-”

Dean turns to Victor, narrowing his eyes and snorting.

“I want to find out who did this, and I want to stop it.”

Dean stands up and brushes the grit from the seat of his slacks. Victor gives him one of those pursed-lip frowns that manages to communicate both his immense frustration and begrudging admiration for his partner.

“Alright, let's do this. Last person to see Delta alive was, wait for it...” Victor beats a drumroll against his knee. “Mr. AP Calculus himself.”

“Ah, fuck.” Dean shakes his head and follows Victor back into the club. “Poor kid's probably one bad line of coke away from a nervous breakdown.”

“He's not high.” Victor climbs the stairs to the cordoned-off VIP area. “But he's freaked as shit about missing his cello recital tomorrow morning, and frankly, I'm kind of scared for him, too.”
Dean can only shake his head in agreement.

Kevin is wearing slightly more clothing tonight, if the wisp of black fabric clinging to his arms counts as a garment. His hair is spiked up with enough glitter to make Dean feel sympathy for his shower drain. Black sequined discs cover his nipples and Dean doesn't even want to know how they're attached to his skin.

“OK, I know you guys need to talk to me but I have a cello recital at 11 AM tomorrow and if I don't get home soon-”

“Kevin, Kevin,” Dean shushes him, pinching his fingers over the bridge of his nose and sinking into one of the ottomans.

“We'll get you home, I promise.” Dean sighs and flips his notebook open.

“As far as we can tell, Kevin, you were the last person to see Delta before-”

“I am on a full scholarship and I swear, even if Delta was kind of a shady bitch, I would never, I mean, I couldn't-”

“Deep breath, kiddo.” Dean waits until Kevin has heaved in a few breaths before continuing. “You aren't in any trouble. It's just that anything you can tell us, any little detail you might remember, it could us figure out what happened.”

Kevin takes another breath and nods.

“I was by the sink, the ones between all the bathrooms with the big mirror.” He touches two fingers to his hair. “They have the best light.”

Victor arches an eyebrow up at his own bald head.

“Anyway, I do my makeup there before I go on. There's a dressing room but it's always crowded and it smells like old hairspray and B.O.” Kevin wrinkles his nose.
“Delta was there, too, touching up her lipstick. I sort of smiled at her and she was just like, 'What?'” He rolls his eyes. “She was kind of like that all the time even though, hello, I'm just trying to be polite.”

“And you didn't see her after that?” Victor leads.

Kevin pauses for a moment, frowning down at the floor.

“Kevin, anything you tell us is confidential.” Dean leans forward. “And it could help us prevent this from happening again.”

Kevin looks up, biting his lip as he rolls a chunky ring around his index finger.

“I came back, I don't know, maybe five minutes later. I'd left my ring off after I washed my hands.” He holds up his hand and shrugs.

“Delta was by the bathrooms, on the other end of the sinks from me.” Kevin draws his eyebrows together like he's searching for courage.

“She was talking to Meg,” Kevin says softly, as though she can hear him even here.

Victor clears his throat after Kevin remains silent for a few moments.

“Did you hear what they were saying, Kevin?” Victor prompts.

“Well they both looked pissed, which is kind of default-face for both of them. Delta said something like, 'You don't know what you're talking about,' and Meg grabbed her wrist, and I'm sure it hurt because Meg's nails are no fucking joke, I'm pretty sure they're acrylics—”

“What did Meg say, Kevin?” Victor's trying his best to sound patient.
Kevin looks at the curtain partitioning the room before he leans in.

“Meg said, 'If you don't stop, you're going to wind up dead.'” Kevin's stage whisper doesn't hide how scared he is.

“Thank you, Kevin.” Dean flips his notebook shut and twirls his pen in his fingers. “Kevin, what would say Meg's frame of mind was? How did she seem?”

“She seemed...” Kevin frowns, picking at the frayed hem of his short-shorts. “Kind of freaked, which was weird, cause, you know, Meg.”

Kevin shrugs like that's a sufficient explanation, which Dean imagines it pretty much is.

“You need a ride home?” Dean's in no hurry to return to his own home, and he'll gladly take the excuse of chauffeuring Kevin if it keeps him from what will inevitably be a bad night's sleep.

“I have a car.” Kevin rolls his eyes before Dean can say anything.

“And I haven't been drinking, God. What do I look like, an amateur?”

Victor barks out a laugh and stands up. “Let's leave this to the professionals, shall we?” He lets himself out through the curtain.

Dean hesitates before following him. “Look, Kevin, if you ever need anyone to talk to, I know how hard it can be-”

“I really appreciate the it gets better speech, Detective, but I have enough positive gay role models to cast a progressive ABC sitcom.” He smiles patiently.

“Unless you've got some advice about overbearing tiger moms who don't approve of anything but studying, in which case I'm all ears.”

Dean raises his eyebrows and holds his hands up.
“Yeah, I got nothing.”

Kevin departs with a look of relief and a generous dose of body glitter sticking to the seat. Victor smirks as Dean steps out into the main hallway.

“I can't believe you just got shot down by a 90 pound kid wearing pasties.”

“Shut up.” Dean glares at him. They walk down the stairs to the empty dancefloor. It looks even larger without the usual throng of bodies. The overhead lights are fluorescent, but even they can't disguise how beautiful the place is. Inlaid woodwork that gets lost under the strobe lights stands out now, and the smaller details of the tapestries look rich and colorful in the brighter light.

Dean catches sight of Michael standing on the other side of the balcony. His mouth curves down in a tight frown as he scans the room. The place must be hemorrhaging money and Michael looks like a man who values business above all else.

“We'll need to do the usual statements rigamarole.” Victor sighs. “Bela's gonna kill me if I miss her next sparring match.”

“Great, more statements.” Dean rolls his eyes. “I don't even know what kind of case we're working here, Vic. I just know that I don't like it.”

“Hey, I got something to cheer you up.” Victor grins slyly. “You wanna take a statement from your shirtless space case?”

Dean doesn't mean to blush, but thankfully Victor doesn't push it. Dean rubs his chin, smirking a little as he thinks of his last one-sided interaction with Castiel.

“Sure thing.” Dean makes a sympathetic face and pats Victor on the shoulder. “Always happy to help you out, Vic.”

Dean checks his phone after they walk to the parking lot. There's a missed call from Ellen and a text from Charlie.
Dean slides into his front seat and smiles at the ridiculous picture of Charlie's dog flopped upside down. Ellen's voicemail rattles on pleasantly, telling him to call whenever he gets a chance, no rush, miss you, darlin'.

Dean sighs and tosses his phone onto the passenger seat before driving off into the Los Angeles night.

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“What are you doing?” Dean catches sight of himself in the rear view and sighs. He's looked better, for one. The only sleep he's managed to catch since Delta's murder has been peppered with unpleasant flashbacks and jarring images of grinning corpses. Ellen would probably tell him he's looking thin.

The case had been officially declared a murder investigation, which gave Dean a little more leeway and a hell of a lot more work. Work like doubling back on old interviews and visiting a certain Milton residence to get official statements about alibis.

The small digital clock on his dash reads 8:27 PM, well past the appropriate time for a police visit and skirting into the gray area for a personal one. It seems fitting. Dean's not really sure which role he's playing right now.

Dean's thumb taps against his phone absently, the “slide to unlock” bar glinting at him. Dean opens it one last time, just to be sure that Castiel hasn't managed to send him a message in the last 4 minutes and 25 seconds.

The clock turns mutely to 8:28 as Dean runs a hand through his hair, just to smooth it back and squeeze his eyes shut. It's not like this is going to get less awkward, and if Dean hasn't thought of a way to politely ask why Castiel hasn't called by now, he isn't going to in the next five minutes.

The house is dark save for the slanted windows of the top floor. He knows Anna won't be home. She and Charlie are out on their first date. Dean had been updated on Charlie's last five outfit changes and a minor meltdown about the benefits of hair up versus hair down before radio silence, so he assumes things are going well.

Dean leans against the door of his car after locking it and bites his lip, worrying it between his teeth
as he glances up at the faint light filtering through the paned glass. He takes a deep breath and draws himself up, tugging the lapels of his jacket straight and pushing his tie up. He'd go in professional, just Detective Winchester following up on a case.

The doorbell chime seems to echo through the house after Dean presses the buzzer. He hums “Happy Birthday” to himself, using the song to time an even minute before he presses it again. His finger is raised for a third try when he hears the creak of footsteps approaching. A moment later the door opens, with Castiel resting one hand against the door frame.

“Hello, Detective.”

Dean had wondered if he had possibly exaggerated the scratch of Castiel's voice in his memory. It had seemed too sexy in hindsight, just like the curve of his lips had seemed too full as Dean had pictured them wrapped around something much thicker than the tension with which Castiel greets him.

“Mr. Milton.” Dean smiles, trying to look polite as he scoffs inwardly. It's all better than Dean had remembered if anything, especially with the seemingly recurrent disdain for shirts that leaves Castiel's chest bare for the second time.

“I was hoping I could take a moment of your time.” Dean places one foot forward and hesitates, waiting for Castiel to ask him inside. Castiel's face is a strange mix of expressions, with reluctance, curiosity and resignation warring for dominance across his wide eyes.

“Of course.” Castiel sighs and steps aside, giving Dean room to enter. It's not exactly the “hey I lost your phone number and was hoping you'd stop by” that Dean had maybe been secretly hoping for, but it's still an invitation.

He follows Castiel up the stairs, passing through Anna and Gabe's deserted quarters before mounting the steps to Castiel's space. Dean is here for professional reasons but he's still human, and his humanity wants to personally thank whoever made those tight black jeans that stretch over Castiel's ass each time he climbs a stair.

“You'll have to excuse the mess.” Castiel shakes his head and looks back at Dean as they turn the bend of the spiral staircase. “I've been working on something new.”

Dean pauses as he hits the top step. The smell of beeswax greets him again, thicker now than it was
the last time. Glowing circles of flame cluster on several flat surfaces, spreading into pale pools that drip down the sides of the tables and milk crates supporting them. Most of the light centers around the computers and audio equipment in the middle of the room. A smaller cluster of candles burns on the floor next to a sparse mattress with a tangled clump of sheets in the middle. Castiel turns and catches Dean staring at the incongruous bed.

“Some of my best ideas come to me while I'm sleeping.” Castiel shrugs. “So I drag my bed in here.”

Dean has moved his fair share of beds in his day, and his throat gets a little thicker at the image of Castiel wrestling a mattress all by himself. He must be even stronger than he looks.

“That makes sense.” Dean nods and clears his throat, trying not to think about how much sense it would make for him to fall into that bed and find out just how strong Castiel really is.

“We can sit back here.” Castiel leads him to the makeshift living room and moves a pile of clothes off a chair.

“Thanks.” Dean sits on the edge of his chair and pulls his notebook out, flipping it to a fresh page while Castiel sits cross-legged on a pile of pillows spilling off a large chair.

“I'm sure you've heard about Delta by now.”

“Yes.” Castiel clasps his hands in his lap and sighs. “She seemed like a nice girl.”

“I just need to know where you were two nights ago.” Dean taps his pen against the page. “We're collecting statements from everyone, of course.”

“Of course.” Castiel looks down at his hands. “I was here. I recorded a new episode of my podcast and mixed some music. I’m sure you could check the timecodes on my computer if you needed to confirm it.”

“I'll let you know if we need to.” Dean lays his notebook aside and leans forward. “You know, I listened to your show.”
Castiel looks up slowly, his mouth curving into the first genuine smile Dean has seen on him since he got here.

“Really?”

“Yeah.” Dean raises his eyebrows. “I really liked it. A lot.”

Castiel uncrosses his legs, letting one of them dangle off the edge of the chair. “You sound surprised.”

“Well, I'm usually pretty traditional. You know, when it comes to music.” Dean arches an eyebrow, not missing the way Castiel's lips quirk. “But your stuff is so … visceral.” Dean settles on the word, shamelessly remembering the pulse of his dick over his hand. He licks his lips and leans forward a little more. “I can't stop thinking about it.”

Castiel's lips part, just a hairsbreadth but it's enough for Dean.

“Can't seem to stop thinking about you, either.” Dean's lets his eyes rove down the length of Castiel's chest before looking him in the eye. Castiel's mouth opens and he blinks, looking at Dean with such longing that Dean's bracing himself for impact when Castiel lets out a long sigh.

“Detective, I'm -”

“Call me Dean.”

“Dean,” Castiel says, all soft gravel and Dean can almost feel the trace of his tongue over each letter. He looks at Dean, eyes so open that it's almost shocking when he presses them closed. The candlelight casts soft shadows on his face as he takes a deep breath and squeezes his eyes tight.

“You don't mean that, Dean.” Castiel looks down at the floor when he opens his eyes, a sad smile slanting his eyes down. “You don't really want to be here.”

“Uh, yeah I do.” Dean can handle mixed signals but no one needs to tell him what he wants. “Look, if you want me to go, I'm gone. But trust me, there's not too many places I'd rather be right now.”
Castiel looks surprised. He tilts his head and stares at Dean, snorting out a soft laugh. “God, no, I don't want you to go, but...” It's so soft Dean barely hears it. Castiel shakes his head and sets his jaw out, rising to his feet.

Dean follows him, coming to stand and looking down the scarce inch between them. Castiel smiles, small and sad and Dean has to curl his fingernails into his palms to keep himself from kissing that expression right off him.

“Dean, you want to go home and forget about me.” Castiel's reaches out and presses his hand against Dean's shoulder, squeezing softly before he turns and walks half-way across the room.

“Can you quit telling me what I want to do?” Dean crosses his arms over his chest and plants his feet. “I don't know what's up with you, and I can take a hint, but don't act like you didn't feel something.” Dean throws his hands up, feeling equally frustrated and mystified with Castiel's behavior.

“Look, if this is some kind of on-the-DL, keep it in the closet bullshit, I'll leave.” Dean runs a hand through his hair and takes a few steps closer to Castiel. “I'm gay, and I'm out, and I'm not gonna be someone's weird, secret sex thing. Is that what this is about?”

Castiel has kept his back turned through Dean's minor tirade, but he looks over his shoulder as Dean draws closer.

“What?” Castiel turns slowly, his eyes wide like he's completely taken aback.

Dean gets up in his face, then, closing the distance between them with a few long strides.

“Is that it, Cas, you're not into guys? Bullshit.” Dean breathes out through his nose, his heart beating fast in his chest. “I shouldn't even be here, fuck, I could lose my job for this. But I couldn't stop thinking about the way you looked at me, Cas, and if I know one thing, it's people. Tell me you don't want me and I'll leave, right now.”

Castiel's face would be funny if Dean's blood weren't running so hot. His eyes flare with a look of sheer disbelief while his mouth works wordlessly. He blinks rapidly, like Dean has left him dizzy and he can't quite remember how to speak.
Castiel kisses him out of nowhere, hard and rough like he has a point to prove and nothing to lose. His hands mold to Dean's face, pulling him closer and getting Dean's dick so hard so fast there's gotta be a whiplash joke in there somewhere. Dean growls with the pleasure of it, stunned at the hot swipe of Castiel's tongue over his bottom lip.

Dean's momentary shock wears off with a vengeance, his hands curling up into Castiel's hair and fuck, that is so much better than Dean had imagined. He curls his tongue out to meet Castiel's, tilting his head just to feel the toe-curling prickle of their stubble rasping together. Castiel groans, deep and gritty and fucking dirty when Dean tugs on his hair and drags his teeth over the rough skin of Castiel's lip.

Castiel pulls off suddenly, leaving Dean dazed and heaving for breath. If that was a kiss, Dean's been using the wrong word for all the other mouth-to-mouth bullshit he's been doing all his life. He leans forward, done with being teased because he just needs more, when Castiel stops him.

“Dean,” Castiel says, his voice low and commanding. He looks right into Dean's eyes, his mouth flushed red but tight with effort. “I want you to cluck like a chicken.”

Dean rarely finds himself at a loss for words, so kudos to Castiel for that. After his brain catches up and he's done a good blinking owl impression Dean pulls back. He widens his eyes and lets his eyebrows go as far up as they can before choosing his words carefully.

“Uh, Cas, I can get down with a lot of stuff, but maybe we should have dinner or something before we whip out the really freaky sex stuff?”

Castiel stares at him for what feels like an eternity, mouth open in a silent “O” while his eyes don't even blink.

“I mean, no judgment or anything, I just-”

“Dean.” Castiel smiles, smiles so broadly it scrunches his eyes up and shows all his teeth and really makes Dean want to get back to the kissing portion of the evening. “Dean, Dean, oh my God,” Castiel laughs, throwing his head back as he gasps for breath. His laughter fills the room, echoing off the walls until Dean starts to worry that he's hysterical.

“Uh, Cas?” Dean asks, carefully placing his hand on Castiel's arm.
Castiel wipes tears from his eyes and blinks at Dean, shaking his head.

“Nothing, it's nothing.” Castiel kisses him, a firm press of his lips before he smiles again. “It was just a joke.”

“You've got a hell of a sense of humor.” Dean arches an eyebrow and shakes his head.

“God, Dean, I don’t know how,” Castiel mumbles senselessly, his eyes darting all over Dean's face while his hands paw over his back. He stops suddenly, Dean's suit jacket bunched in one hand and his eyes sparkling wide.

“I want you to tell me, Dean. Tell me what you want, right now.” Castiel brushes his lips over Dean's, a soft tickle that makes Dean shiver.

“I want to kiss you,” Dean answers honestly, leaning in to do just that before Castiel pulls back.

“Are you sure?”

Dean smirks, reaching his hand up to brush his thumb over the part of Castiel's lips. He shrugs up against the weight of Castiel's arms over his shoulders, barely giving Castiel any warning before he reaches down. Dean bends his knees and hooks his hands under the curve of Castiel's ass, pulling him up with a grunt of effort that Castiel seems to appreciate. He wraps his legs around Dean's hips as Dean stands up straight, taking a few staggered steps to press Castiel's back against the wall.

Dean might not be as jacked as some of the guys he works with but he keeps up with his fitness requirements. Castiel might be an inch shorter and slightly thinner, but he's made of muscle and writhes like a cat in heat. Dean's thighs scream with protest as he holds Castiel up against the wall but it's so, so worth it when Dean crushes their mouths together. Castiel groans and wraps his legs tighter, and Dean's not the only one who's hard.

“Yeah, Cas,” Dean pants, rocking his hips forward to grind his dick against Castiel's ass. “I want to kiss you.”

Castiel goes lax in his arms, pliant and open as Dean licks into his mouth. It's messy and loud and if
Castiel keeps moaning like that Dean's night will be ending a lot sooner than he'd like.

“I want to kiss you everywhere,” Dean rasps against the stubble dotting Castiel's jaw, letting his lips catch and slide against the coarse pull. He darts his tongue out to trace it over the curve of bone and grins as Castiel tips his head back and moans.

Castiel scratches at his back, bunching up the fabric of Dean's jacket before he lets out a moue of frustration.

“Take. This. Off,” Castiel growls between kisses, wriggling down from Dean's arms and tugging at his jacket like he hates it. Dean hates it, too, shrugging out of it as fast as he can. It falls to the floor as Castiel presses him forward, their feet tripping where neither of them can be bothered to look at the ground.

Dean tugs his tie off as Castiel claws at the buttons of his shirt. His fingers scratch over Dean's bare shoulders as he pulls Dean's shirt off, tossing it aside and grumbling again as he hooks his hand into Dean's undershirt.

“Why do you wear so many fucking shirts?” Castiel growls, making short work of Dean's last layer. He pulls back as it joins Dean's button-down on the floor and sighs.

“You're gorgeous,” Castiel whispers, licking his lips and running his hands up the bare expanse of Dean's chest. Dean's skin prickles, gooseflesh warm everywhere Castiel touches him. He jumps as Castiel skates a thumb over his nipple, arching into it reflexively. Castiel groans and does it again, a delighted smile quirking his lips up.

“Sensitive?” Castiel teases, rolling the hardening bud between his fingers. Dean manages to sigh out something affirmative into Castiel's mouth, curling a hand into Castiel's hair to press him close. He can feel Castiel's hard-on pressing through his jeans, rubbing against his own as Dean tucks his fingers into the low-hanging waistband.

“Fuck,” Dean mumbles, smiling against Castiel's open mouth because of course Castiel isn't wearing any underwear, of course. Dean slides his hand down, cupping over the smooth muscle of Castiel's ass and squeezing. Castiel rolls his head back, arching into Dean's hand and moaning as Dean answers the tempting call of his exposed neck.

Castiel's skin tastes soft and salty, yielding under Dean's mouth to tilt his head to the side so Dean
can graze his teeth over the stubble-dusted arch of his jaw. He runs his lips along the faint line where Castiel's skin turns smooth, right over his pulse point.

“Dean,” Castiel moans, his hips rocking forward as his free hand closes around Dean's belt. “Why are we still wearing pants?”

Dean chuckles, loving the way he can feel it reverberate through Castiel's chest. A sense of humor about sex is wildly undervalued in Dean's opinion, and if possible he wants Castiel even more for it.

“I want to take yours off with my teeth.” Dean licks up the warm shell of Castiel's ear, cracking an eye open to look over Castiel's shoulder and confirm his suspicion that yes, they've been slowly zig-zagging their way towards Castiel's bed. Castiel just shivers, letting Dean walk him back the last few feet.

Castiel's heels back up into the mattress as he reaches blindly for Dean's belt buckle. Dean reaches down to help him but Castiel bats his hand away, huffing against Dean's neck until he manages to pull Dean's belt free. It sails out with a soft whoosh of worn leather against Dean's belt loops, landing on the floor with a clank of his buckle. Castiel noses his way along Dean's jaw as his fingers unhook the clasp of his slacks, dragging his lips along Dean's chin until he's looking right at Dean as he slides the zipper down. Dean's pants pool around his ankles as Castiel licks his lips and cups his hand over the bulge in Dean's boxer briefs.

Castiel is beautiful, with those kiss-swollen lips and that fucking hair, but the sheer look of wanton delight on his face as he grinds his hand against Dean's hard-on is divine. His eyes narrow and his mouth parts, a soft sigh escaping his lips before he brushes his lips against Dean's.

“Tell me, Dean,” Castiel mumbles, half-kissing it into Dean's mouth, “tell me what you want.”

Dean grins, lop-sided and wet against Castiel's lips. He reaches down, molding his hand over Castiel's and dragging it up to splay over his stomach.

“I want to suck you off,” Dean rasps, his voice thick as he inches Castiel's hand down. “I want to taste you and lick you open until you beg me to stop.” Their fingers twine together and Dean guides Castiel's hand down, dipping into the elastic of his shorts and past the soft curls of hair beneath it. “I want to fuck you until the only thing you can say is my name.”

Dean's breath hitches as Castiel's hand closes over his naked cock, deft fingers curling around the
base and gripping tight. Dean draws his own hand back, inching his underwear down until it joins his pants on the floor. He skates his hands up Castiel's sides, savoring the way Castiel shivers and moans each time he strokes Dean's cock.

Dean kicks out of his pants and nudges them aside, letting his hands cup over Castiel's head as he kisses him. Castiel never seems to stop making noise, moaning and sighing and licking into Dean's mouth hungrily. Every touch of Dean's hands, every curl of his tongue seems to elicit something new and desperate from Castiel and Dean hasn't even gotten his fucking pants off yet.

“I want to hear you come;” Dean growls, running his hand into Castiel's hair to give a fond tug. Castiel moans, open-mouthed and dirty when Dean brings his other hand to close over Castiel's hard-on. “Jesus, Cas, you're so fucking hot.” Dean runs his fingers over Castiel's fly, feeling the laddered bump of a button fly. Dean grins, wide and wicked as Castiel arches up into his hand. Perfect.

Dean sinks to his knees, keeping his eyes on Castiel's as he undoes the top button. He slots his hands over the curve of Castiel's hips, which, fuck, the angles on Castiel's body should be copyrighted. Dean traces the smooth arch of his hip bones, running his tongue along the hollow dip of his stomach as Castiel stares down at him. He looks dazed, his chest heaving already as Dean kisses his way to the top of his fly.

Denim catches between Dean's teeth as Castiel's mouth drops open. Dean remembers the first time someone had done this to him and the effect isn't any less jaw-dropping from this perspective. He tugs down, popping Castiel's fly open one button at a time. His nose tickles into dark curls of hair as he works his way down, and fuck he smells good, salty and musky and warm. Dean tugs the last button open and curls his fingers into Castiel's waistband, pulling it down with a sharp tug.

Castiel makes a sound that should be illegal, or at least available for scientific study and replication. Strangled and wet, he chokes out a groan as his cock flags up to wave in front of him. Dean looks up and licks his lips, not having to try very hard to make it look as filthy and hungry as possible.

Dean traces his lips up the underside, letting them part enough so he can run the tip of his tongue between them. He can hear each breath Castiel takes, and the long sigh he makes when Dean flicks his tongue through the bead of precome pearling at the tip of his cock is even better.

Dean's dick pulses sympathetically as he closes his lips around the crown of Castiel's cock and sucks. He hollows his cheeks and swirls his tongue against the ridge, sighing at the salty taste of Castiel's hot skin. He closes his eyes as he slowly works his way down, slicking Castiel up with his spit just to hear the noises he can draw out as Castiel moans for him.
“Dean, God,” Castiel sighs, breathless and losing that last letter as Dean takes a deep breath through his nose and wills himself to relax, taking Castiel's cock as far into his throat as he can. It's pretty damn far if the half-frantic scrabble Castiel gives his hair is any indication.

Dean works his throat, drawing off just far enough to steal another breath before diving back in. Soon he's fallen into a rhythm, his eyes closed as he loses himself in the slick weight of Castiel's dick. It's not that Dean isn't dying to get his own dick wet but fuck he loves this, the way everything just fades away when he's got his mouth and his undivided attention on his partner.

Castiel's hands in his hair are tentative at first, his fingers flexing against Dean's head until Dean pulls off long enough to glance up at him, dark-eyed and flushed and Castiel seems to get the message. Dean ignores the thin trail of spit running from the side of his mouth as he cranes his neck and deepthroats Castiel again, groaning as Castiel gets a firmer grip on his hair and starts to fuck his face in earnest. The tension seeps from Dean's body and he barely even notices his own cock slapping against his kneeling thighs as Castiel speeds up, letting out a litany of half-mumbled curse words before he growls Dean's name and clamps a hand over the back of his neck. His hips stutter and Dean knows he's close.

Dean digs his hands into the meat of Castiel's ass, hard enough to bruise and it works. Castiel comes in a hot spurt down his throat, pulsing twice before he pulls back just far enough to let the rest of it land square on Dean's tongue. Dean glances up, following the taut line of Castiel's neck where his head is thrown back. Dean can't see his face but he can hear the cracked, gut-wrenched growl he makes as his cock twitches again.

Dean takes a ragged breath when Castiel pulls him back, panting through his mouth and wiping away a trail of spit with the back of his hand. He's about to close his lips when Castiel tugs at his hair.

“No,” Castiel grunts, falling to his knees and leaning in before Dean's brain can catch up with what's happening. Castiel's eyes are still closed but he finds Dean's mouth easily, framing Dean's face with his hands and licking greedily into his mouth.

“Holy fucking shit,” Dean slurs, and it's probably not his best moment but holy fucking shit Castiel is licking his own come out of Dean's mouth and Dean is suddenly, painfully reminded of his own leaking hard-on.

“You want to fuck me, Dean?” Castiel licks at the corner of Dean's mouth, his breath skirting over Dean's chin. “Just say it, Dean, please, tell me, tell me what you want.”
Dean swallows, blinking his eyes as he tries to find the right string of words to express the torrent of images in his head. He growls again, with his own delicious frustration and because he thinks Castiel will like it.

“I'm gonna fuck you, Cas.” Dean kisses him again, wet and messy and rough. Castiel melts into him, sighing as Dean slides his hands over Castiel's shoulders. “I'm gonna fuck you and then I'm gonna make you come again, would you like that?”

Dean gently pushes Castiel onto the bed, straddling his hips and leaning down to kiss him again. Dean glances down the length of their bodies, smirking at the string of precum dripping from his dick onto Castiel's stomach. Castiel's lips work but he just whines as Dean rolls against him.

“Think you can come on my cock, Cas?” Dean slides his hips down, smearing a wet spot onto Castiel's skin. “Or maybe you wanna come with my dick in your mouth, couple fingers up your ass?” Dean breathes against Castiel's ear, nipping at his earlobe as Castiel writhes underneath him.

“Want to come while I eat you out, jerk yourself off while I spread you open?” Castiel's answering moan is almost too much, and Dean hikes his hips up to spare himself the embarrassment of blowing his load just from the friction of Castiel's skin against his dick. Dean watches a healthy amount of porn and he's done his fair share of talking dirty but he's never seen anyone respond like Castiel.

“Yeah, there it is,” Dean teases fondly, flicking his tongue against Castiel's ear one last time before kissing his way down his throat. Castiel's body undulates between throbbing tension and boneless pliancy as Dean sucks his way down.

“I want to see you, Cas,” Dean murmurs against his hip, sucking a lazy bruise onto his skin. Castiel's jeans are still tangled around his knees, so Dean tugs them off and tosses them aside. Castiel's legs fall open, giving Dean a teasing glance of his hole.

“Get on your belly,” Dean growls, licking his lips and rearing up on his knees. He reaches down to stroke his cock while Castiel stares at him like Dean's the only thing he's ever wanted to look at. Dean flushes a little under the attention, feeling his mouth water as Castiel nods wordlessly and rolls over.

Dean quickly reaches behind himself to peel his socks off, because no one wants to be the guy wearing just socks in bed. He inches forward, his cock bobbing in front of him as Castiel lays flat on the bed. His arms spread out above him and his hips work in tiny circles as he bends one leg to the side. Dean falls to his hands and perches above Castiel, leaning down to run his nose against the damp curls at the back of Castiel's neck. Castiel moans, breathless and needy until Dean gives him a
soft bite that makes Castiel throw his head back.

“Don't be such a tease,” Castiel growls, arching his back until the swell of his ass brushes against Dean's cock. Dean laughs, letting his breath fog against Castiel's skin as Castiel smiles lazily over his shoulder. He snakes his tongue out to trace it over the little divot at the top of Castiel's spine, kissing over the spot before working his way lower.

Dean maps his way down Castiel's back, tracing his tongue over the dip of his spine and letting his teeth drag against the tender skin at the curve of his ass. Castiel hikes his hips up with each rough swipe of Dean's tongue, arching himself towards the promising tease of Dean's mouth.

Castiel looks back, his face pressed against the mussed sheets and his eyes half-closed. Dean spreads a hand on either side of Castiel's ass, kneading his fingers in until Castiel's eyes roll back. Castiel's balls hang heavy between his legs, their weight stretching the skin smooth and Dean noses against it until Castiel whines for him. He spreads Castiel open until he can see the tight furl of his hole, pink and pretty. Castiel's soft for now but Dean knows that won't last much longer.

Dean's jaw still aches from sucking Castiel off but it's a welcome pain, especially when Castiel curls into the press of his tongue and moans like that. Dean's done teasing, flattening his tongue and dragging a sloppy circle against the flutter of muscle. He traces over each ripple of skin until Castiel pointedly spreads his legs wider.

Dean should probably say something about how hot Castiel looks like this, how the curve of his ass under Dean's hands feels fucking amazing, but Dean's not willing to let up long enough to form words. Not when he can dart his tongue and catch a thumb on either side of Castiel's hole, spreading him wide and spearing into him while Castiel opens up for him. Each stroke of Dean's tongue brings him deeper, his chin jutting up against the taut skin of Castiel's taint.

“So fucking pretty,” Dean mutters, pulling back to stare at the pink flutter of Castiel's hole. He sucks his thumb into his mouth, pulling it off with a wet pop for Castiel to hear. It sinks in easily, slipping in to the first knuckle as Castiel cants back for it. Dean leans in to flick his tongue around the stretched rim as he pushes his finger into the base.

“Dean,” Castiel moans, turning to look over his shoulder with a face half-way between ruffled impatience and desperate lust. Dean draws his thumb out to the tip and gives him a teasing nip on the crease of his ass as he sinks it back in, just to see the sexy bitch face Castiel makes.

“I've got some stuff in the bathroom,” Castiel pants, gesturing a hand towards the other end of the apartment. “I can-”
“I got it.” Dean smirks, kissing over the pink marks left by his teeth. He knee-walks to the edge of the mattress and grabs his slacks, fishing around in his back pocket until he finds what he needs.

Dean was never a boy scout but he believes in always being prepared. He flings a condom onto the bed and catches the small packet of lube in his teeth. He'd bought a bunch of them the last time Charlie had dragged him to Babeland. This is admittedly his first chance to use one, but Dean still manages to act like he knows what he's doing as he tears the notched plastic top off with his teeth.

He drizzles a good glob of lube over his index and middle fingers before squeezing some of it directly into Castiel's spit-flushed hole. He doesn't need much prep, taking Dean double-knuckle deep after a few thrusts of his fingers.

“You good?” Dean huffs, sinking his fingers as deep as he can and leaning over Castiel's back.

“God, yes, just do it, Dean,” Castiel groans, bucking his hips back in case Dean missed the point.

Dean smiles, fucking his fingers in and out a few times as he presses a kiss between Castiel's shoulder blades.

“Think you can take it on your back for me?” Dean murmurs against his skin, sure that Castiel's arms must be sore by now and sure that he wants to see Castiel's face when he pushes inside him.

“I, no, I'm better like this.” Castiel looks over his shoulder and nods his head in affirmation.

“Yeah, sure, ok.” Dean licks his lips and smiles, disappointed too strong a word when Castiel looks this good bent over in front of him. “I don't mind the view or anything.”

He reaches out, patting along the mattress until he finds the condom. He tears it open and rolls it down his cock, biting into his lip at the sensation. He squeezes the rest of the lube onto his cock and spreads it over the head before lining up with Castiel's hole.

Castiel stretches his arms over his head at the blunt press of Dean's cock. His hands fist into the sheets as his back arches up, giving Dean the perfect angle to press down. Dean hisses as he feels his cockhead ease through the tight grip of Castiel's rim, Castiel's fingers spreading out just to curl back
into their hold as Dean keeps pressing in.

“You feel so fucking good, Cas,” Dean grits through his teeth, bringing his hips flush and heaving in a breath. He wraps his hands around the smooth curve of Castiel's hips, willing himself to hold still so Castiel can acclimate. Dean's on edge already, heat coiling in the pit of his stomach and running scatter-shot over his skin with every minute movement Castiel makes.

“I won't break, Dean,” Castiel barks, bowing his head and rocking back against Dean. Dean's brain grinds to a halt for a moment, his mouth open until his hands take over. He digs his fingers into Castiel's skin, holding him still as he draws his cock back.

“I know,” Dean husks, his chest heaving as he feels the crown of his dick catch against Castiel's hole. “I know you can take it.” He sinks back in for emphasis, not bothering to add that he's not sure how long he's going to last.

“Then fuck me already,” Castiel snarls, his shoulder blades pointing together as he twists himself to look back at Dean. The grin on his face has no business looking that bitchy and hot at the same time.

“Bossy,” Dean teases, giving a few slow thrusts as he clicks his tongue. Castiel chuckles, throwing his head back and clenching around Dean's cock like a challenge.

Dean sinks himself to the base and curls forward, laying his chest over Castiel's back.

“I like it,” Dean purrs into his ear, leaning his full weight forward until Castiel sinks flat onto his belly. Dean can't get as deep like this but it's better, the sweat-slick drag of Castiel's skin against his making him growl as he speeds up his pace. Dean's toes dig into the sheets as he looks for purchase, his thrusts already losing any kind of rhythm as Castiel moans against him.

Dean curls his hands under Castiel's shoulders, wrapping them across his back to pull Castiel down onto each thrust. He lets his lips drag over the stubbled curve of Castiel's neck, tracing over his jaw and nipping at the tender flesh beneath it. He closes his eyes and lets himself go, far past caring whether he impresses Castiel with his stamina and far more concerned with drawing out every cracked, breathless sound Castiel makes as Dean fucks him senseless. Castiel gives it as good as he takes, making the most of his limited range of motion to arch back into Dean until their bodies come together with hard, wet slaps that are more than Dean can take. His skin hums with each thrust, the pressure behind his balls mounting until Dean's teeth grit with the effort of holding it back.
“Do it, Dean, come for me,” Castiel growls, and if Dean's being honest he was gone before Castiel even opened his mouth. He wants to kiss him, his lips searching for Castiel's just to find his face buried in the mattress. Dean makes do with the tender spot behind his ear, grunting as his cock twitches and spurts into the clenching, open pull of Castiel's body shuddering around him. They both groan, the dissonant mash of one another's names and every curse word Dean has ever learned coming together as Dean buries his cock deep and loses himself.

Castiel's chest heaves beneath him, rising and falling as Dean stutters into him. He mouths along Castiel's jaw, groaning happily as Castiel finally turns his head to meet him in a kiss. Dean doesn't want to pull out but he can't let himself go soft, so he scissors his fingers over the rolled base and draws out, not sure who makes the more discontented noise.

Rolling Castiel onto his side makes up for it, though, because he kisses Dean with both hands on his face and sidles up against him. Castiel's hard again, and Dean lets out a huff of surprise as he slides his hand down.

“I can wait,” Castiel mumbles, brushing Dean's hand off and rolling him onto his back. He molds himself to Dean's side, throwing a leg over him as he trails his fingers over Dean's chest.

“I'm tired,” Castiel says, shaking his head like it's an unusual occurrence. “That was amazing.” He takes a deep breath and nuzzles against Dean's skin.

Dean runs his hand into Castiel's hair and kisses him on the forehead. “I'm not letting you sleep for a good long while, I don't care how tired you are,” Dean teases.

Castiel looks up at him, his eyes searching and curious.

“Dean, were you ever in a cult?”

Dean finds himself momentarily speechless for the second time this evening. He can imagine this will be a pattern with Castiel.

“Cas, between this and the chicken stuff, I think we need to work on your pillow talk.” Dean laughs softly, wondering what on earth Castiel could mean. He looks down and finds Castiel's hand next to his old tattoo.
“Oh, that?” Dean reaches down and traces his own finger over the hyper-pigmented skin. “Most people don't notice it. It was, uh, something I didn't need any more.” Dean shrugs.

Castiel seems to sense his discomfort, shaking his head and leaning up onto his elbow.

“I'm sorry.” Castiel covers the mark with his palm. “You're just … different than anyone I've ever met.”

Castiel moves up, straddling Dean and leaning down to kiss him. He smiles broadly, his lips hovering over Dean's.

“Now what was that about making me come while I suck your cock?”

~*~

Dean wakes up sore in muscles he didn't know he has and happier than he's felt in ages. He's sticky in a staggering variety of places and he stinks like a whorehouse, but he can't stop smiling.

He's never really seen the appeal in shower sex before, but he's also never seen Castiel dripping wet and covered in hickeys. They fuck until Dean's fingers are pruney and Castiel comes against the shower wall with a groan that echoes off the tiles.

“I could eat a horse,” Dean gripes afterwards, drying his hair off with one of Castiel's mismatched towels. Dean's stomach agrees, grumbling as Castiel leans in to kiss him.

“I have to confess something, Dean.” Castiel presses his forehead against Dean's, a few damp curls getting caught between them. “I am a terrible, terrible cook.”

Dean laughs, closing his eyes and letting Castiel press him into the edge of the sink. Castiel kisses him, toothpaste-fresh and sweet. Dean's dick is significantly less interested in breakfast as Castiel's chest molds against his, their skin catching warm and damp as he drags his teeth over the tender swell of Dean's lip. Then Dean's stomach has to go and ruin the moment with an impressive, albeit embarrassing, rumble that makes Castiel laugh.
“I think it needs to be fed. At least let me buy you breakfast.” Castiel presses one last, quick kiss to Dean's cheek before he wanders out of the bathroom and into the bedroom. Dean doesn't bother hiding a pout when Castiel fishes a pair of boxers out of a pile of clothes and slips them on. He grabs a pair of jeans slung over the mattress-less bed frame and tugs them up his legs while Dean leans against the door.

“You want to borrow some clothes?” Castiel slips a white ribbed tank top over his head and ruffles a hand through his hair.

“I'm good,” Dean smirks, still stark naked as he strolls over to Castiel. “We're just gonna take it all off again after we eat, right?”

Castiel makes a sound, a soft grumble in his throat that manages to sound sexy, grumpy and impatient all at once. Dean kisses the frown on Castiel's face and looks down between them, grinning. This is the first time he's seen Castiel with a shirt on.

Dean dresses in his clothes from yesterday, figuring they're fresh enough for some scrambled eggs. He leaves his suit jacket folded in half and rolls his shirtsleeves up to the elbows.

“I know a great place on Hillhurst, they make a breakfast burger with hollandaise.” Castiel leans against the cast-iron railing of the stairs and looks at Dean, suddenly concerned. “You do eat meat, don't you?”

Dean stands speechless for a moment, his phone dangling from his hand. This gorgeous man that Dean had fucked halfway into the floor last night wants to buy him a burger for breakfast. Dean blinks and smiles slowly.

“Yeah, Cas, I do.”

He follows Castiel down the stairs, smiling as Castiel rattles off his favorite burger joints and says something about milkshakes that makes Dean feel a little weak in the knees. They pass through Gabriel's rooms, which are thankfully deserted. Dean can't imagine how he would tolerate the guy before noon and a really strong cup of coffee.

They walk side by side down the hallway of Anna's quarters. The music room is lit with morning sunlight, making the glossy surface of the grand piano sparkle. Dean pauses and turns to Castiel.
“What do you play?”

“Most things,” Castiel answers sheepishly, shrugging like it's not worth mentioning. “I'm pretty good on the piano.”

“Will you play for me, when we get back?” Dean asks suddenly, desperate to know what Castiel looks like when he's playing music.

“OK.” Castiel leans in closer, hooking his finger into Dean's belt. The sunlight catches on his hair and makes his eyes glow a vivid blue. “I'll play for you after you fuck me.”

They are never going to make it out of this house. Dean groans and lays a hand over his belly, giving Castiel a pleading look.

“I need some fuel before that happens,” Dean jokes, kissing Castiel and shaking his head. “You're gonna suck the life out of me.”

Castiel frowns, his breath hitching. His eyes are sad as he pulls back.

“Hey, I didn't say I minded or anything, I'm just starving.” Dean tilts his head and arches an eyebrow. “We can get it to go if you wanna get back here faster.” Dean licks his lips, just in case Castiel missed the memo that yes, Dean really, really wants to fuck him.

“Yeah, yeah, sure.” Castiel presses his lips together and gives Dean a half-smile. Fuck, this guy is hard to read. “Sounds good.”

Dean nods his head and takes a step towards the doorway before Castiel stops.

“Shit, I forgot my keys.” Castiel rolls his eyes and backs up, patting the back pockets of his pants. “I'll be right back, just wait here.”

“Think Anna would mind if I grabbed a glass of water? I'm pretty thirsty.” Dean nods his head towards the kitchen. “I know the way.”
“Of course, help yourself.” Castiel smiles, a little fuller this time, before turning and leaving the room.

Dean sighs and rubs his eyes, wondering what had happened to make Castiel so cagey. Dean heads to the kitchen, replaying last night's events and finding himself unable to come up with a good explanation. Dean is good at prying into people's motives. He'd been able to parse Aaron's emotional immaturity and chronic underachievement in a matter of weeks. But Castiel baffles him, reticent one minute and raw the next with no rhyme or reason between the two.

Dean's lost in thought as he rounds the bend to the kitchen, so he makes it a full three steps inside before he realizes that's he's not alone. His first thought is that he can't believe there are two people on this earth who have tattoos of Princess Leia straddling a 20-sided die on their asses. What are the odds?

Dean's caffeine-deprived brain clicks into gear as it dawns on him that this is, in fact, Charlie's ass, and those are not Charlie's hands grabbing it. Dean raises his foot to take one silent step backward, hoping to avoid the major serving of awkward and quasi-sister cooties he instinctively feels at the sight of Charlie making out with someone. He glances up at Charlie's face to make sure she hasn't noticed him.

Dean's starving on an empty stomach and some probable dehydration, which makes the sick flop of his stomach ten times worse. His hand flies to his mouth to stifle the horrified noise that tries to escape as he stumbles back.

Anna's eyes are slitted open like a cat's, her hand curled into Charlie's hair. Charlie arches into her kiss, their mouths not quite meeting. The glow of Anna's eyes bores into Dean's skull, a blinding blue that makes his pupils dilate and his chest constrict. He tries to breathe, the air hissing through his mouth as he watches the swirling blue light that seeps out of Charlie's mouth like a cloud of smoke. Anna drinks it in as her eyes flash, a look of sheer bliss on her face.

Dean staggers, his feet stuck in place while his heart races, telling him to run, now, his elbow slamming back into the wall with a dull thud. Anna's head snaps up, while Charlie turns to look over her shoulder. Dean's pulse pounds in his ears, so loud it's all he can hear before he feels a hand on his shoulder.

“Oh, shit.” It's Castiel, hands held out in front of him like he doesn't want Dean to do anything too sudden.
“Dean?” Charlie turns to face him, her face oddly chagrined as she steps toward him. “What are you-”

“Get away from her!” Dean shouts, snapping to his senses and grabbing Charlie's arm. He has to get the civilians out, get them out of the way before he addresses the threat.

“Dean!” Charlie tugs her arm back so hard it makes Dean sway on his feet. “What the fuck are … Look, I know this looks weird, but can we just talk for a minute?”

She rubs at her wrist and frowns before going back to Anna's side. Anna clasps her hands in front of her and stares cautiously at Dean.

“Your eyes,” Dean mumbles, panic rising in his chest as Charlie takes a deep breath. There's sympathy, or maybe pity in her eyes and Dean braces a hand against the doorframe as he feels his breath catch in his chest. “I saw it, what was, what the fuck, oh, God, fuck, fuck,” Dean's voice rises, high with panic as he stagers backwards.

“Dean.” Castiel reaches out for him. “Please.”

Dean shoves blindly at Castiel, sending him into the wall as Dean stumbles out of the room. This can't be real, it can't be, not when Dean knows that things like glowing eyes and people sucking the breath from his friends are impossible. But he saw it, right there in front of him and God, is this what his father saw, is this what madness feels like, crystal-clear and terrifying?

“Oh my God.” Dean sounds hysterical even to himself, stopping half-way across the music room. “Oh my God, it's happening.”

Dean leans against the piano, his fingerprints smearing on the polished wood as he heaves in a breath. His mind races, cycling through his two options. Anna is some kind of monster, or Dean is going insane. Dean squeezes his eyes shut, tears beading up in the corners of his eyes.

“It can't be real, it can't be real.”

“Dean, please listen to me.” Castiel approaches him slowly, the floor creaking slightly under his bare feet. “I can explain, OK?”
Castiel looks stricken, his eyes open and pleading as he takes another step towards Dean.

“Was that real?” Dean digs his fingers into the piano, fighting the urge to run to Castiel and hold onto something solid and warm.

“Yes.” Castiel stops, wringing his hands and sighing. “Dean, my family … we're not like everyone else.”

Castiel waits a moment as Dean eyes him warily.

“I know this sounds crazy, Dean, but what you saw, however it looked, it wasn't hurting Charlie, I swear.”

Dean narrows his eyes. “I don't know what I just saw, Cas.”

“Have you ever heard of an incubus, Dean?”

Dean's heart plummets down to his stomach, joining the roil of anxiety gripping his gut. He shakes his head, his hands shaking as he pries them free of the piano. This isn't happening, Dean's having another nightmare and he's going to wake up soon.

“That's what we are, Dean. We feed off of energy, it's difficult to explain, but I promise Anna wasn't hurting her.”

“What did you do to me?” Hysteria makes Dean's throat tight, his hands tensing into fists as Castiel moves another step closer.

“Nothing, Dean, nothing, that's what was so … amazing about you.” Castiel rushes towards him, his hands out in front of him. “Normally we can influence people, but you're … I don't know, immune somehow.”

It makes a hideous, sick kind of sense. All of the bizarre behavior at Seraphim, Victor's malleability
around Anna, Castiel's inscrutable insistence that Dean didn't really want to be with him. Dean thinks of Anna's blindfold and the phantom glow of her eyes.

“This is crazy.” Dean presses the heel of his hand against his eyes, willing himself to wake up or make it stop.

Castiel is still there when Dean opens his eyes, his fingers opening and closing like he's holding on to a phantom of Dean's shirt.

“I know it seems implausible, but I swear, Dean, if you just sit down with me, I can explain everything. Let me get you something to eat, you'll feel better.”

“Stop telling me how I feel!” Dean lashes out, throwing an elbow in Castiel's direction. Castiel ducks it easily, but he looks like Dean just broke his jaw as Dean glares at him.

“Stop telling me crazy bullshit and lying to me. No one lies to me, Cas, not any more.” Dean bats away Castiel's extended hand.

“Dean, I'm not … look.” Castiel holds his hands up, leveling his gaze at Dean. He blinks, opening his eyes wide. His brow slopes down with concentration, his eyebrows drawing together as his pupils contract. The sapphire of his eyes starts to swirl, with ribbons of electric blue coursing through his irises until they glow the same shocking color as his sister's.

Dean steps back, feeling dizzy as he stares into the unearthly sight of Castiel's eyes. Castiel closes them, sighing before he opens them to their normal color.

“No, no way.” Dean mutters, stepping back and knocking against the piano key-cover. The small shelf slams closed, making a dissonant clank. Dean flinches, his heart pounding in his ears as he turns and runs from the room.

“Dean, please don't go,” Castiel calls after him, his voice echoing off the high ceilings.

Dean slams the door behind him without looking back.
Dean doesn't sleep well for the next few nights. He gives up entirely after a while, turning the light back on and pulling his notebook out.

One of the worst things after Dad had left had been the therapists. They'd loved Sam, who'd placed off the charts academically and spoke candidly about their transient lifestyle. The little brat had always been a chatterbox.

Dean had always been a good liar, naturally charming and intuitive when it came to telling people what they wanted to hear. He'd been through a dozen counselors before his thirteenth birthday and he'd talked circles around every one of them.

It was Pamela who'd finally gotten to him. Dean had begrudgingly liked her from the start. She was hot, for one. Dean could already recognize what his feelings for other boys meant, but he still appreciated badass when he saw it. Pamela wore black jeans and motorcycle boots and cursed constantly.

Dean and Sam had settled with Bobby and Ellen by then. The McConneley's had tried their best, but Dean's persistent flirtations with their teenage son had gotten them kicked out, just as Dean had hoped. Sam cried but Dean knew it would be easier for their father to break them out of one of the crowded boy's shelters they'd get sent to.

There'd been no break-out, just a case of lice for the both of them and a nasty fight in the showers that had gotten Dean flagged as “high-risk” and ensured that no one fucked with Sam. No one had been more surprised than Dean when they'd been shipped off to Bumfuck, Nowhere South Dakota in the company of a very skeptical caseworker.

“These folks seem to know Agent Turner.” She'd snorted and pulled into the long driveway. “You'd better not screw this one up, young man. Not too many people'd take a chance on two troublemakers with a convict for a father.”

Dean had simply smiled sweetly, determined to ride this place out just like all the others.

The problem was, Bobby and Ellen's place wasn't like all the others. It wasn't like any place Dean had ever been. Unlike every other foster mother and concerned waitress Dean had ever met, Ellen seemed completely uninterested in nurturing Dean. The staggering list of chores she'd laid out for
both boys hadn't left time for much else.

Bobby had even less to say. Dean thought he'd known gruff from his father, but John Winchester was a ray of sunshine compared to Bobby Singer.

A week passed with no one asking Dean how he felt or offering to “talk about it.” Ellen made meatloaves with strips of bacon crisscrossed over the top and Bobby put on Van Morrison records and danced her around the kitchen when he thought no one was watching.

Sam and Dean weren't alone at the Singers. Tucked into an attic bedroom was Jo, a pigtailed 11-year-old who slept with a shiv under her pillow and had scars on her back that she won't discuss to this day. She'd shown Sam and Dean her makeshift knife and asked if they'd ever killed someone. After Dean had groused and given her a “maybe,” she'd let them be and smiled when Sam had offered her his share of dessert.

It was clear that Ellen loved her something fierce, which seemed to be only way Ellen did anything. Even her corn muffins had little chunks of jalapeno mixed in. Sam gained ten pounds and grew so fast Dean could almost hear it if he strained to listen.

While Sam flourished under Ellen's cooking and Bobby's shockingly impressive library, Dean remained steadfast in his loyalty to his father. At least that's what he told himself.

The first time Dean had a chance to run, he told himself he didn't have enough cash on hand to make it with Sam and his hollow leg. He'd wait until Sam's growth spurt had leveled out.

There was always a perfectly good reason that Dean couldn't go. Gas, money, Sam's new favorite book that he should really be allowed to finish, Dean's promise to teach Jo how to tie snares -Dean always found a reason to stay.

Greater even than the betrayal of Dean's doubt was the shameful secret that Dean liked it here. His bedsheets were worn thin and spotted with girly daisies but it was the most comfortable thing Dean had ever slept on. Bobby let him help around the shop and Dean acted like he didn't care but he was proud when Bobby said he was a natural with the engines.

Dean knew it was temporary, but maybe this was the kind of life he and Sammy and Dad could have once Dad broke out and they finally tracked down Yellow Eyes.
The Impala stood waiting in the yard one morning and Dean punched a hole in his bedroom wall. He didn't care that Rufus Turner had pulled some strings to make sure Bobby bought the car, and he didn't care that Bobby promised it'd be his when he turned 18. He'd watched Bobby drive it into the barn and refused to touch it.

It was an hour drive to Sioux Falls and Jo humming along to Backstreet Boys songs didn't make it go any faster. Pamela's office took up what must have been a nice Victorian parlor in its day. Dean liked to stare at the old chandelier while they talked. They spent a whole session talking about Led Zeppelin, and one day Pamela told him about spending a summer on tour with Pantera and Megadeath. Apparently Phil Anselmo loved pie as much as Dean did, and Dave Mustaine was a huge dickhead. Jo and Sam talked to Pamela, too. Jo came out sullen and tight-lipped while Sam bounced in his seat and drove Dean crazy.

Dean would never have admitted it, but he'd started looking forward to his visits, too. Sometimes he didn't even notice that he was talking about his father, just that he felt a little better on his drive back to the Singers. Pamela didn't look at him like he was crazy or, even worse, pitiable, she just regarded him with a skeptical purse of her lips when he talked about the whispered promises of crotticas and the rare cases of fairy changelings.

One day, Pamela met him at the door and told Sam and Jo to wait on the porch with Bobby. A man Dean didn't recognize was sitting on her couch, the knees of his slacks stretched taut as he perched on the edge.

“Ignore him.” Pamela narrowed her eyes at the Fed, no question that's what he was. “He has to be here for this but he is not,” she barked, pointing at the stricken-looking man, “going to talk to you.”

Dean had never sat in this room before and he frowned as Pamela slipped a tape into the VCR. Bobby had made him get a legit, government-issued license and Dean was sick of watching state-mandated videos.

“There's something I want you to see, Dean.” Pamela hit the power button and blinked at the blue screen. “We don't have to talk about it, but it's time.”

The input switched to the video feed as Dean sank down into one of Pamela's overstuffed vintage chairs. The green velvet had worn down to nothing on the arm rests. Dean ran his thumb over the coarse patch as the screen went from black to color.

“Interview sixteen, May 12th, 1995, Winchester, John.” A thin man with a goatee and a sport coat that had seen better days cleared his throat.
“Mr. Winchester,” the man said calmly, and Dean knew a court-appointed psychiatrist when he saw one. “Would you mind telling me more about your son, Sam?”

Dean's father sat across the table, his hands steepled together.

“We named him after his grandfather, on Mary's side. Never met the man but it made Mary happy.” John looked down at his hands and frowned.

“You mentioned earlier that Sam is special.” The psychiatrist sat with his pen poised over a pad of yellow paper. “Would you care to elaborate on that?”

“Sure,” John snorted, “so you can tell all your shrink buddies what a choice nut job I am?” He shook his head, his lips curling with disdain.

“The problem with you civvies is you wouldn't know trouble if it bit you on the ass, and you damn sure don't know help when it shows up.”

John rubbed a hand over his eyes, stretching it wide to massage the circles under his eyes. He looked like he hadn't slept in days.

“I don't care what you, or some fat judge or the whole world thinks. I'm not crazy.” John sneered at the camera, looking at it head on without blinking. His eyes were bloodshot over the faint yellow tinge of his whites. Dean's heart beat fast in his chest, a stray thread from the pintucked seam of the chair caught between his fingers.

“You know what's crazy? I'll tell you what's crazy, that you've got me locked up in here while the goddamn key to the apocalypse is out there.” John's voice rose with each word.

“Can you tell me about this key?” The doctor asked in the same calm voice, leaning forward and rubbing behind his ear. It's an old trick, everything about his body language meant to establish rapport and get John to trust him. No way his dad was falling for that.

“Like you don't already know.” John spat, leaning away and crossing his arms over his chest. “You have the stink of sulphur on you, doctor.” John tsked and shook his head.
“I know a lot more than you think,” John continued, smiling bitterly. “I know that your master, the yellow-eyed beast Azazel, spawn of Satan, christened my infant son with his blood.” John's grin was all teeth and blazing eyes. “I know that Sam bears the taint of Hell in his veins.”

Dean swallowed, his throat dry and tight as he looked around the room. The agent stared doggedly at the floor, his cheeks red like he's too embarrassed to look at Dean. Pamela sat rigid and composed, her mouth in a tight line.

“If you value your life, doctor, if you value the lives of your children and the souls of every innocent being on this earth, you'll get me out of here.”

Beads of sweat dotted John's forehead, sliding down his temples and disappearing into the ragged hairs of his beard. Dean bit his cheek, grinding the flesh between his teeth.

“I'm the only one who can do what needs to be done.” John's hands were wrung together so tightly Dean could see his knuckles straining white against the mottled red of his hands.

“I should have done it,” John muttered, running a hand through his hair. It stuck up at odd angles, like it hadn't been washed in weeks. “I was weak, Mary, I couldn't...”

Dean sat stock still as a strand of dread unspooled in his belly. He gripped the chair, his own knuckles white as John pressed the palm of his hand to his forehead.

“What was it you couldn't do, John?” The doctor peered over the rim of his glasses, his eyes drawn together with sympathy.

“Don't you see?” John yelled, his voice hoarse. “The signs, the signs were all there and I had all the pieces.” He slammed a fist against the table. Dean cringed and felt the incipient burn of tears. His father's hands were shaking.

“He killed Mary, he had her blood on his hands and the demon's mark on his soul and the powers of hell inside him.” John's eyes were so wide Dean could see the jaundiced whites all around. His jaw ticked and he snapped his teeth together, and Dean pressed a hand over his mouth. His father was shaking so hard his teeth were chattering.
Suddenly John went perfectly still, taking a deep breath and drawing up straight. He looked straight ahead, his eyes focused on something beyond the camera.

“I should have killed my son when I had the chance.”

Long after Pamela had shut the television off and the agent had left, Dean sat on his chair, picking a dime-sized hole in the upholstery.

“Why does he look like that? Is he sick?” Dean dug his finger into the hole, scratching at the coarse filling. Sawdust stuck to his finger. “Why is he shaking like that?”

“Your father's in withdrawal, Dean.” Pamela looked at the damage Dean was doing to her chair but didn't comment on it. “He's drying out. It can get pretty ugly.”

“He wants to kill Sam.” Dean crossed an arm over his chest, staring at the flecks of sawdust spilling out onto the green velvet.

“Your father is a very troubled man, Dean. He needs help.”

Dean brushed the dust off the chair and placed his palm over the hole. “I saw him, one night. He was standing over Sam's bed, when we were in Charleston. He had a gun in his hand but I just thought, I don't know. I thought it was just training or a bad dream or something.”

More than loyalty to his father, more than avenging his mother's death or wiping the world clean of evil, Dean loved his brother. No matter what his father had alluded to in the dead-drunk of night, Dean had never doubted Sam's goodness. Sam's gap-toothed grin and his mulish insistence that things could be different had kept Dean going on the days his stomach ached with hunger and his hands cracked and bled from digging graves.

“He won't hurt Sam,” Dean bristled, clenching his fist until his knuckles scraped against the rough stuffing of the chair. “I won't let him.”

“Dean-”
“I want to go home.”

A year, Dean would testify against his father. He sat in silence in the courtroom as John Winchester was sentenced to five consecutive life sentences with no probation. Dean was exonerated from all pending charges and started his adult life with a clean record and a vow to never see his father again.

Dean leans his notebook against his chest and closes his eyes. He could still see his father's face in that courtroom. He hadn't looked insane, not when Dean had spared him a last look before he was led away. With his hands cuffed behind his back, he'd looked like a sad, beaten man. It was the last time Dean had seen him.

Dean glances at the picture of Sam on his dresser. Dean doesn't know what he would have done without Sam. Stripped of his purpose as his father's lieutenant, Dean had funneled all of his devotion into Sam. He'd followed Sam to Stanford, picking up part time jobs in three different auto body shops while he got his Associate's in criminal justice. Sam's scholarship covered his dorm, so Dean rented a studio with faulty heat and a five-minute walk to Sam's room. He bought a shitty Camry and fixed it in his spare time, the Impala left behind under a tarp and a sad nod of understanding from Bobby.

Sam earned a 4.0 while Dean joined the Palo Alto PD with flying colors. Chief Visyak said she'd never seen anyone get a perfect score on the written and physical exams. She'd given him a glowing letter of recommendation when he'd left for LA, following Sam to law school and deftly avoiding any conversations about Sam's insistence on remaining in California.

It hadn't been a secret that Sam wanted to be close to their father. Dean had never asked too closely about Sam's “weekend camping trips,” and Sam had never volunteered anything. It had worked well enough for Dean. Sam didn't know the worst things about their father and Dean hoped to keep it that way. Even at the height of his repentance John couldn't bring himself to admit the extent of his murderous intentions.

It's a burden Dean is still happy to bear, even if he had to suffer Sam's entreaties to forgive their father and go visit him. Dean had always borne the brunt of their father's abuse, so it only seemed fitting that Sam should shoulder his apologies.

Dean runs his thumb down the cracked spine of his notebook before placing it back on his nightstand. He rolls over onto his side, staring at his phone and squeezing his eyes shut.
Victor had easily accepted his flimsy excuse about coming down with a cold. Dean had ignored Sam's first three calls, finally sending him a terse text message that he was busy. He prayed that Charlie wouldn't say anything to Sam, although he certainly wasn't ready to answer her calls and find out.

He should be thinking about this like a case. There are facts and evidence, and reasonable conclusions drawn from the two.

Dean is insane. Dean was hallucinating when he saw Charlie with Anna. He's witnessing the early stages of his descent into madness and he will wind up like his father. All of Dean's work to distance himself from his father's legacy has been a lie.

Dean is not insane. He really did see Anna's eyes glow while she pilfered some kind of life force from Charlie, and Castiel was telling him the truth. The man he just slept with is a life-sucking sex demon and Dean's entire adult life has been a lie.

Dean is not insane, but everyone else around him is. Castiel, Anna, Charlie and God knows who else are involved in some elaborate conspiracy to convince Dean that there's such a thing as an incubus. The best sex Dean has ever had was a lie.

Dean's mind races around two contradictory conclusions until it seems easier to pull the covers over his head and fall into uneasy sleep.

~*~

"You've finally done it, big guy." Charlie stands in the doorway to his bedroom, her arms crossed over her chest. "You've made me abuse my emergency spare key privileges. Are you happy with yourself?"

Dean pulls the comforter over his face and curses. He'd forgotten about the key.

"And I brought back-up."

The mattress groans as something jumps on it. Dean's comforter doesn't do much to muffle the thump of a tail against his side.
Dean pulls the blanket down until he meets a set of brown eyes and smiles in spite of himself. “Hey, Leia.” He frees an arm from the covers and scratches along the seam of her ear, careful to avoid the scars on the other side of her head. Leia lolls her tongue out and closes her eyes.

“If you try to run, I'll sic her on you. She's vicious.”

Dean snorts as Leia rolls onto her back, legs splayed to the sides. Dean had once watched all vicious 60 pounds of Charlie's dog hide from a mouse.

“So, that was weird, huh?” Charlie clicks her tongue and raises her eyebrows, trying so hard to sound casual Dean shakes his head with fondness.

“I don't want to talk about it, Charlie. I just … I freaked, OK? I'm sure it was nothing.” Dean keeps his eyes on the dog, positive that she's making a nicer face than Charlie.

“Oh, we're talking. I will seriously sit on your legs until you listen to me.” Charlie marches over and smacks him on the shin for emphasis, which hurts. Charlie might look like a pasty string bean but she could chop a watermelon in half with a broadsword.

“Dean, it wasn't nothing.” She sighs and sits down on the foot of the bed. “What you saw, with me and Anna,” she waits until Dean looks at her. “It was real.”

“Anna's an incubus. Well, she might technically be a succubus, I haven't asked. You know, you don't want to get too gendered with these things nowadays.” She shakes her head as Dean stares at her.

“Sorry, anyway. Look, Dean, I know this has to be hard for you, I mean, fuck, it was hard for me when I found out about all this shit.” She sighs and scratches her fingers over Leia's hip, smiling fondly as her tail wags.

“I know we don't talk about it, and I'm happy to keep up the pretense that I do totally legit freelance programming so you can keep being Good Cop Ken and I can be Hot Hacker Barbie, but you know what I do, Dean. I've come across a lot of … stuff.”
She frowns a little, pulling her hand back.

“And I know we never, ever talk about it, but I know about your dad, Dean. From what little you and Sam have told me, and what I looked up which, by the way, a determined sixth-grader could get into those files, sealed juvie records my ass.” She rolls her eyes. “I know I violated your privacy, and I apologize for that, but I only did it out of concern.”

Dean takes a deep breath, feeling the familiar shakiness settle over him.

“My father was sick, Charlie, he was crazy and he ruined any hope Sam and I had of a normal life. None of that shit was real.” Dean runs a hand through his hair, squeezing his eyes shut.

“I can't even imagine, Dean. But there's a lot more out there than most people know. I knew what Anna was the second I talked to her, I had an ex who had a slightly-more-than-human friend who had these crazy parties back at Oberlin, so, yeah, not my first ride on the sexy lady monster train.”

She sighs and spreads her hands out over her knees.

“I would have told you, and I should have, I know, but … I figured you'd kind of freak out a little bit.”

Dean lays his hand over Leia's side, letting it rise and fall with her steady breathing. She looks at Dean, the small black peanuts over her eyes drawing together like a pair of concerned eyebrows.

“So Cas is…?” Dean voice catches.

“Yeah.” Charlie lays her hand over Dean's. “He was telling you the truth.”

Over the sea of mixed emotions coursing through Dean, he knows that this is true. Castiel hadn't been lying, and neither is Charlie. The implications make Dean's chest tighten.

“Charlie, are there … are demons real?” Dean's afraid to ask but he has to.
Charlie looks at him, her mouth set in a sad line. “As far as I know, yeah, they are.” She shakes her head. “I've never seen one, but I did a job for this Earth Core activist who'd infiltrated Monsanto and...” She nods. “They're real.”

“Jesus.” Dean closes his eyes, pressing his lips together and willing away the tears and the hysterical laughter that are battling in his head. “So all those people, that we, were they...?”

“I'm so sorry, Dean.” Charlie sounds like she's close to tears, too. “From what I can tell, most of them were just … people. He may have been right about a couple of them.” She shrugs. “He probably stumbled across a lot of truth in all those years, I don't know. Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't watching you, that kind of thing.”

Dean sinks back against this pillow, closing his eyes and pressing his arms against his sides.

“You did the right thing, Dean.” Charlie draws in a shaky breath. “You did what you had to do to keep Sam safe. What kind of life would he have had?”

“I sent my father to prison, Charlie.” Dean's words hang in the air. Even Charlie doesn't have a snappy comeback for that one.

Leia rolls onto her side and noses against Dean's shoulder. She looks up at Dean with wide, sad eyes, the stump of her former ear moving forward as she nuzzles against him.

Dean lets himself cry then, and Charlie knows to leave him be.

~*~

Dean pulls himself together eventually. Sam's always been the big crier.

Charlie's sitting on his couch when he drags himself out of the bedroom. Leia trots after him, jumping up on the couch and pawing at Charlie like she just remembered her person had been there the whole time.

“When I said I brought back up, I didn't just mean drool face over here.” She points at the counter.
“It's probably cold by now but I know that's never stopped you.”

Dean looks at the crumpled Jack in the Box bags and smiles. “You're a saint.”

His triple meat breakfast sandwich is soggy and lukewarm and possibly the most delicious thing Dean has ever tasted. He hasn't eaten a solid meal in days.

Charlie pops a limp fry into her mouth. “I brought some time-tested life-avoidance medicine, too.” She reaches into her messenger back and pulls out a DVD case.

“Princess Bride,” Dean mumbles around a mouthful of sandwich. “Nice.”

“I do not think that word means what you think it means.” Charlie narrows her eyes and laughs.

“Look, Dean, I know it's not my business, not like that's ever stopped me, but I think you should call Castiel.” She holds up her hand to keep Dean from protesting.

“He was distraught after you left, seriously. I own a one-eared rescue dog and I've never seen anything so pathetic. I think he's afraid to call you.” She tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear. “At least give him a chance to explain. I'm sure you have questions.”

Dean puts his sandwich down and sighs. “I got 99 problems, Charlie.”

“Yeah, yeah, save it. He seems pretty sweet on you.” She scrunches her nose up. “He implied some things about your meat wand that kind of made me want to barf, although it does explain why you don't bother dressing up.”

Dean rolls his eyes.

“I'm a lot more worried about the dead bodies piling up at his family's business than what he thinks of my dick.” Charlie sticks her tongue out and makes a grossed-out face. Dean doesn't bother adding that he sort of wouldn't mind hearing more about the latter.
“Both of the stiffs we found, and Charlie, I swear to God, keep this to yourself,” Dean adds, shooting her a look. “They were both pumped full of this hormone, oxytocin. Like, off the charts, medically impossible amounts.”

“Oh fuck a duck.” The color drains from Charlie's face. “I thought it was just drugs, like on The Wire or something when they send out the new bags of heroin and a couple people die. Dean, fuck ...” She shakes her head.

“That's how they kill people, isn't it?” Dean twists his napkin between his fingers. “Incubi, incubuses, whatever, that's what kills their victims.”

“I'm not an expert or anything but yeah, that seems to be how it works.” She bites her lip. “Having an incubus feed on you, it feels like, God, it's like every cell in your body has twelve orgasms all at once. It's insane.” Her cheeks heat up as Dean raises his eyebrows.

“Anyway, most of them seem to be able to control it. But maybe someone couldn't.” Charlie sighs and kneads her fingers into Leia's back. “What are you gonna do?”

“I don't know, Charlie.” Dean pops the DVD case open and pries the disc free. He feeds it into the DVD player and queues up the main menu. Westley's face smiles back at him as the opening bars of the theme song play.

“I don't know.”

~*~

Victor calls him the next morning, confirming what Dean already knows. There is no inhalable oxytocin unaccounted for at any lab, research facility or pharmaceutical company within 200 miles of Los Angeles County. Dean tells him to take a break before Bela murders him.

Ash and Garth won't be back from their solstice retreat for another few days. Dean's glad to be alone, but he wouldn't mind the distraction of Ash's easy small talk or Garth's unique brand of earnest advice.

Dean drags himself out of bed and takes his first shower in three days. He closes his eyes as the shampoo rinses out, trying to forget the feeling of Castiel pressed up wet and warm against him.
Work always makes Dean feel better. After throwing on some clothes and brewing a pot of coffee, Dean opens his laptop. He sighs as dozens of emails pop into his inbox.

His eyes glaze over as he scrolls through his messages, until a new icon Dean doesn't recognize pops up on his taskbar. He clicks the small music note and frowns.

Of course. Dean had subscribed to Castiel's podcast. He minimizes the screen and takes a sip of his coffee. Dean hadn't even found out how Castiel takes his coffee. Dean always thought that said a lot about a person, how much sugar and milk they needed to cut their caffeine. He couldn't imagine Castiel using artificial sweeteners, but he probably likes a good splash of cream.

Thinking about Castiel is not going to distract Dean from, well, thinking about Castiel. He sets his coffee down and goes back to his messages. There's one from Ellen, with a few pictures from Jo's birthday party a few weeks back. Dean had hated to miss it and he feels a tinge of guilt as he looks at the pictures. Bobby looks as miserable as ever while Ellen smiles with benevolence of someone who has better things to do.

Ellen's email explains that the girl with long black hair and cute snub nose is Jo's new girlfriend Gwen. They'd met at Jo's EMT night classes. Jo had sung her praises the last time they'd spoken, boasting that Gwen could outshoot Dean even if she isn't as pretty as he is. He misses Jo, even if she's an incurable smartass.

There's an email from Aaron which gives Dean a moment's pause before he realizes it's just a mass email promoting one of his latest medical marijuana fundraisers.

Dean closes his eyes and remembers the first time he'd slept with Aaron. They'd gone on a few dates first. Aaron was surprisingly old-fashioned for a huge stoner. It had been nice. Aaron was slow and sweet and he had a fantastic ass. He was attentive and considerate and he'd made pancakes and bacon the next morning. It was all perfectly nice.

But nice was all it had ever been. Nice, and eventually, astoundingly boring. There had never been any sparks, not like the surge of need Dean can feel just remembering Castiel's touch. He can imagine Castiel being slow and sweet, sometimes, but never, ever boring.

Already half-way down bad idea lane, Dean reopens the minimized window. His heart skips as he reads the list of episodes.
Each one so far had simply been labelled “Episode 1,” “Episode 2,” and so on. Dean feels his throat click on the swallow as he reads the newest title.

For Dean.

He drags his finger across the trackpad, watching the triangular play button appear beneath his cursor. He darts his hand back to his lap and looks away.

Charlie's copy of the Princess Bride sits on his coffee table, left there for “emergency purposes.” Castiel had said his family wasn't like other people's. Dean can relate.

He considers finally calling Sam back, who would probably be ecstatic to give Dean romantic counseling. A glance at the clock reminds him that Sam is in class. Old habits die hard and Dean still memorized Sam's school schedule, even if he didn't admit it to Sam.

Besides, Dean already knows what Sam would tell him to do.

Dean clicks the play button and leans back, not sure what to expect. Instead of the soft record scratch that leads off his other recordings, this one opens with the unexpected sound of Castiel clearing his throat.

“You said you wanted me to play for you.” Castiel's voice is raspy-soft, like he hasn't slept in days and lost his confidence somewhere along the way.

“Here you go.”

Dean waits, his hand curled around his mug and clinging to the warmth inside.

Castiel clears his throat again. The speakers make a muffled rustle, like Castiel is moving the microphone.

Six simple notes play, back and forth with a lingering pause between. It starts so soft Dean can
barely hear it, like a tentative whisper. They play again, just a fraction louder and a second faster. Dean presses his hand over his mouth and closes his eyes. The music sounds like someone crying.

The notes repeat twice more, gaining a melancholy confidence like someone working their way up to a full sob. When they change, climbing up the scale just to sink down to a bass note, Dean feels a thickness in his throat. He blinks his eyes, listening to the simple melody repeat several times. It's one of the saddest things Dean's ever heard, more heartbreaking for the raw, forlorn beauty of it.

Dean never took music lessons and he'd never tried to teach himself, but he thinks that it sounds like a simple enough song to play. He can hum along after a few bars, easily picking up on the repeats. Even when Castiel settles into a steady pace it isn't fast.

The simplicity is deceptive, though, the sparse arrangement leaving room for a multitude of emotion. Each note is laden, heavy with it, holding each somber strike to softly echo into the next. Each chord washes over Dean, sounding a different emotion in his chest – sorrow, loneliness, desperation, and under it all a hum of bittersweet hope. Dean can taste the yearning in each play of Castiel's fingers on the keys.

He can imagine Castiel playing, his head bowed in supplication as he pours out this wordless apology. Would his eyes be closed as his hands spread over the keyboard? He probably plays barefoot.

Dean's hand is still pressed to his mouth. He moves it slightly, letting the edge of his knuckle drag across his lips. Dean's never heard this song before but he can tell that it's old. Does it have words that Castiel mouthed to himself? It doesn't need them and Dean's grateful to be spared the sound just now. He can feel his lip quivering against his hand.

There's something like a solo as the music skips across variations on the tune, rolling smooth one moment like a great steady breath before a torn cry of sharp notes. Dean's throat goes dry, the muscles of his jaw flexing as he tries to stave off the burn in his eyes.

There's a pause after a string of melody and Dean wonders if it's over, if that's all there is. He takes a breath, letting himself count the empty beat of his heart as he holds it, one, two, three.

The melody starts again and Dean lets a tear slide down his cheek. He feels every empty moment of his life hanging in the pregnant pauses between each note, all the darkness and fear of being something no one can truly understand. Each keystroke curls against him, searching for solace and comfort and expecting nothing in return.
The song ends, the final note lingering in a long keen that slowly fades to nothing as Dean tries to breathe.

“I'm playing on Thursday night. Come and see for yourself.”

There's another muffled sound, the muted swallow of Castiel's throat before he sighs. There's a click and then silence.

Dean hovers over the trackpad, not sure if he want to listen to it again or throw his computer through the window. He glances at the clock in the corner of the screen. *Thurs 2:59 PM.*

There are many moments that Dean regrets in his life. There are little ones, like the time he stood Lacey Macombs up for her junior prom and never called her, or the time he ditched Sam at the Tuskaloosa County Fair to chase after Bobby Anderson. The bigger ones, the ones that still get to Dean after all these years, are the things he didn't do. Things he didn't stop, things he never spoke up about, things he turned a blind eye to and walked away from because he was scared. Those are the biggest regrets of Dean's life.

Dean closes his eyes and wonders how much he'll regret walking away from Castiel.

~*~

There's no line outside of Seraphim as Dean pulls up. He parks in the lot, leaving his Camry between two empty spots. The arched windows on the side of the church light up, flashing blue before fading into white strobe lights. Dean sighs and turns up the collar of his Dickies jacket. Charlie wouldn't approve of his wardrobe choices, but she'd be so happy that he's going she'd probably keep her mouth shut about his outfit.

One of the security guards is working the door tonight, Samandriel if Dean remembers correctly. He clearly remembers Dean.

“Twenty five bucks.” He holds his palm out and purses his lips.

“I think Castiel was going to put me on the list, Dean Winchester.” Dean eyes the guy's clipboard.
“Can't say I see your name on it,” Samandriel answers, without glancing at the list.

Dean hands his money over and smiles sarcastically before heading inside.

It's strange to see the club back in action. He checks his coat and tries not to think about Delta. The new girl bats her eyelashes at him and hands him his ticket.

“You picked a good night to come, the DJ's great.” She leans against the counter and looks yearningly towards the dancefloor.

“Yeah, he is.” Dean folds a dollar into her tip jar.

The crowd is smaller than last time but no less vibrant. Castiel seems to draw a less flamboyant crowd than Anna or Gabriel but they're no less enthusiastic. The music drifting from the two-story speakers is faster than anything Dean has heard on Castiel's podcasts, but it has the same grungy, sexy vibe.

Castiel bends over his turntables, wearing the same huge headphones that he'd been wearing the first time Dean saw him. He is wearing a shirt, however. The spotlights swivel and catch on Castiel's face. Dean could swear Castiel is looking right at him.

*Come and see for yourself.* Dean looks out at the swaying crowd, hands flung in the air and hips writhing with the beat. A woman with spiky black hair turns her face to the ceiling and smiles, dancing with herself and looking perfectly content. Every face Dean sees bears the same look, eyes unfocused, mouth parted as they all dance.

The music swells slowly, a thick beat pulsing louder and louder as it distorts the soul-drenched vocals. Every couple, threesome and massive group pressed together writhes in time, hips rolling and hands grabbing the nearest willing person. Immune or not, Dean would have to be dead not to feel the energy in the room. It's palpable, a heartbeat of sex and joy and timeless need.

Dean hesitates, closing his eyes as the bass line thrums through his chest. He hugs his hands over his chest, taking a deep breath before willing himself to look up to Castiel.
Dean's breath catches in his throat. Presiding at the altar, Castiel raises his hands and opens his eyes as Dean lets himself see.

There's a tense pause as the whole crowd seems to rise and swell as one, heads tilted back and chests arched forward with a single held breath. The music throbs, faster and faster until it crests with a heavy bass boom and everyone goes wild.

Castiel's eyes glow feral and bright, a steady azure against the strobing flash of the lights. His mouth is parted as he sways slightly, a look of sheer bliss on his face. Dean's seen that look before, in that brief moment before Castiel had hid his face in what must have been some attempt to protect Dean from this truth. He's gorgeous like this, inhuman and terrifying but so full of joy Dean can't imagine anything more beautiful.

It should be worse, the crumbling of so many years of denial and self-recrimination, but with a deep breath and one tear rolling down his cheek, Dean believes. The black and white of his carefully-constructed world fades into the warm gray area of Castiel's energy consuming the room. This is magic, and Dean feels a communion with the ecstatic crowd of dancers that makes his skin hum.

He stays for the whole set, watching Castiel work the crowd into a frenzy just to bring them back to the mellow hum of contentment and hips pressed together. Dean loses track of time, but when Castiel finishes his last song it feels like no time has passed at all. He bites his lip as Castiel disappears off stage, wondering how soon he'll be able to kiss him and try to apologize.

The crowd disperses as recorded music starts to play. Dean smiles. It's the same set of remixed blues songs from Castiel's podcast.

Part of Dean wants to rush backstage, find Castiel wherever he is and say … well, Dean has no idea exactly what he wants to say, just that he needs to get it off his chest and into Castiel's arms. But Dean also recognizes that he just showed up at Castiel's job, even if he was invited. Castiel will find him when he's ready.

Dean makes his way to the bar, wandering past people pressed close together or talking like they've never heard anything so interesting. The whole place feels comfortable, laid back but still charged with lingering sexual tension. Dean wonders how many relationships have begun on this dancefloor.

Dean smiles as he sees Sam's shaggy head bent over a case of beer. He waits for Sam to notice him and chuckles at the way he almost trips over himself when he does. To be fair, Dean had been avoiding his brother for days so his surprise is anything but feigned.
“Dude, where have you been?” Sam motions Dean to the far end of the bar and reaches out to smack him on the shoulder. “I was starting to get worried.”

“Yeah, sorry, Sammy.” Dean shrugs apologetically and leans against the bar. “I had some stuff come up.”

Sam frowns at him, his eyes scanning the room before returning to Dean.

“You ok?”

Dean sighs and looks up at the pulpit.

“I think so.” He accepts a club soda from Sam and takes a sip. “We got a lot of shit to talk about, Sammy.”

“Yeah?” Sam doesn't look at him, a minor miracle considering Dean just willingly mentioned talking about things. He keeps looking out across the club like he's expecting something.

“What's up with you?” Dean turns to look out at the crowd, noticing nothing out of the usual.

Sam frowns, wiping absently at the bar with a towel.

“It's nothing, I just...” He leans across the bar. “Jess went on her ten minute break over half an hour ago. I haven't seen her. And with everything that's been happening...”

Dean takes another sip of his soda. The carbonation does nothing to quell the uneasy feeling in his stomach.

“Maybe she's upstairs?” Dean offers, glancing up at the balcony.

“It's closed.” Sam shakes his head. Dean's disquiet deepens as he notices the red velvet ropes
discreetly closing off the upper levels. “And I didn't see her go up there.”

“It's just not like her to take extra time.” Sam wrings his fingers together. “She's very reliable.”

Dean has to smile, because Sam says it in the same tone most men would say “She can do a full split.” He'd raised him right.

“I'd go look for her but I'm not scheduled for a break for another hour. Brady's a total asshole about the schedule.” Sam glares at the blonde brooding behind the other end of the bar.

If Dean knows how to handle one thing, it's total assholes. He stands up straight and pulls his badge from his back pocket.

“Let me talk to Brady.”

Ten minutes and a pierce-lipped scowl later, Sam is leading Dean down a concrete staircase. Bare bulbs light the way, casting wide shadows as they enter the basement. Clearly Michael and Uriel's lavish taste in décor didn't extend to the employee-only areas. The air is dank and cold, raising goosebumps on Dean's arms.

“This is where they store all the booze,” Sam gestures, pointing out the steel-cased industrial shelves lining the walls. Cases of liquor are organized by type and brand, with large barcodes plastered onto each box. “They keep really close track of the inventory.” Sam points at the security cameras and the barcodes. “They inventory every week, and so help you if a bottle of Bacardi goes missing.”

They pass row after row of every conceivable form of alcohol on the planet. Dean scans each one to no avail. Even though they're empty he can't shake the feeling that something is very, very wrong down here.

“This is the staff lockers and the break room. They're legally mandated to give us a ten-minute break every two hours, although they always act like you're doing something wrong.” Sam leads Dean around the corner.

“We each get a locker for our stuff. We can't have phones on the floor so most people come down here to check them on their breaks.”
“Are there cameras?”

“No, I don't think so. As long as we aren't stealing from them I don't think they give a shit what happens to our stuff.” Sam snorts and shakes his head.

The small break room is empty except for a small table and some government-mandated safety posters. Sam steps inside and crosses his arms over his chest. He sighs and turns to leave before stopping short.

“Shit,” he mumbles, rushing back to one of the folding chairs in the corner. He reaches down and pulls out a thin green cable.

“This is Jess' phone charger.” He dangles the cord between his fingers. “She always joked about getting the lime-green one, said it was so ugly no one would steal it.”

Dean swallows hard, trying to hide the alarm rising in his chest.

“I'm sure she's fine, Sam, is there anywhere else-”

Sam and Dean's heads swivel at the same moment, Sam's eyes wide while Dean's narrow in concentration. No amount of normal life could erase their years of training, and the muffled sigh that issues from behind them has them both running from the room in an instant.

Dean reflexively reaches for his side, groaning as he realizes that his gun is sitting at home. Sam jogs ahead of him, stopping in front of a nondescript door.

Dean places a finger over his lips and jerks his head towards the door. Sam creeps over and grasps the handle tightly, pressing it down as quietly as possible. Dean leans forward, ready to rush in and risk his neck because that's what he does. Sam swings the door open and stops dead in his tracks, his mouth hanging open.

Ruby's hair falls like a curtain over Jess' supine form. Her hands cradle Jess' head, cushioning her as Jess writhes beneath her and moans. She's slumped awkwardly against a stack of cardboard boxes labelled “STEIN 22 OZ FRAGILE”, her legs folded beneath her like she'd sunk down from
Jess' chest arches forward as she moans again, reaching towards Ruby and shifting the black waves of hair shielding her face. Dean can hear his own heart beating in his chest as he sees the blue tendrils of energy swirling between their mouths. Jess' eyes roll back in her head as her leg twitches, and Dean recoils as he sees the smile stretched across her face.

“Get the fuck off her!” Sam lunges forward as Ruby looks up. Her eyes fix on Sam with pure hatred, glowing a deep violet that makes Dean think of venous blood. She hisses, letting Jess slump to the floor.

“Like what you see, Sammy?” She steps over Jess without a second thought and struts over to Sam, her eyes flaring. “Wanna join us?”

“What are you?” Sam says through grit teeth, his eyes darting back and forth between Jess' unconscious form and Ruby. “It's you, isn't it? You've been killing all those people?”

Ruby holds her hands up, putting on a pout as she rolls her eyes. “You caught me. Better take me away, Officer Ken.” She bats her eyelashes at Dean and flops her wrists forward, stepping out of the room.

“Grab her arms, Sam. I'm gonna check on Jess.”

Ruby sighs dramatically as Sam grabs her above the elbow. She looks far too pleased with herself, and Dean is ready for it when she snatches for his arm.

“You two meddling blow up dolls are gonna have to wait your turn.” Her eyes flash as her grip tightens on Dean's arm. “Go stand in the corner and wait.”

Dean looks over her head at Sam, who's staring down at Ruby with an expression Dean would label “Bitch, please,” if he were in the mood to tease Sam. Instead he feels a flood of relief. Castiel must have been right, their Dad must have hit on something with all the faith healers and spirit whisperers he'd dragged them to.

“Let go of me and wait until I'm done with Big Bird in there.” Ruby digs her fingernails into Dean's skin. Her eyes flash again as Sam snorts and tightens his grip on her arms.
“How about I call in my buddies and we lock your crazy ass up?” Dean shrugs her hand off and pulls his phone out.

Ruby looks stunned for a moment, looking back and forth between Sam and Dean. She narrows her eyes and raises her lip in a snarl.

“What are you two?” She jerks her arm and finds Sam's grip unyielding. “Djinn? Vetala?”

“We're the Winchesters,” Dean answers with a toothy smile, sliding his phone on.

In hindsight, taking his eyes off the psychotic murdering monster was probably not the best idea. Knowing that he and Sam could resist Ruby's influence leant Dean a measure of confidence he wouldn't have felt if Ruby were a normal crazy person.

Dean's index finger is an inch away from Dispatch's number when he feels a sickening blow to his stomach. He doubles over, his phone clattering across the concrete floor as Ruby hits him square in the chest with both feet. She uses her momentum to flip herself over in a move that would leave every one of Bela's krav maga instructors speechless. Dean flies back, his head grazing against the wall as he lands on his ass.

Dean scrambles to his feet, stars dancing in front of his eyes. He knows there'll be blood when he touches the back of his head, but right now he's a lot more worried about the motherfucker of a knife Ruby's got fixed at Sam's throat.

“Back it up, Detective,” Ruby snarls, fixing the point of her blade into Sam's skin. A trickle of blood runs down the side of his neck. “I don't give a shit who you are, you're in my way.”

“Why'd you do it, Ruby?” Dean keeps his hands where her batshit-crazy eyes can see. “You're too smart to leave those bodies out unless it was for a reason.”

Flattery plus distraction is a classic police tactic. Dean tries to back up imperceptibly as Ruby laughs, keeping her grip on the knife perfectly steady. Sam's back arches at a painful angle to meet her height and Dean inwardly curses himself for underestimating her physical strength. Sam would have been able to disarm her at one point in his early life, but he'd never had Dean's training and experience.
“Gold star sticker for porn-star Sherlock,” she taunts, smiling as she snakes her tongue out and drags it along Sam's shoulder. Sam shudders.

“You know what your oversized girlfriend tasted like, Sammy boy?” She arches an eyebrow and smacks her lips together. “Food. That's what you all look like to me, because that's what you are. Food and slaves.”

Dean swallows the bitter taste in his mouth and keeps his hands visible.

“My father taught me, showed me how we were supposed to live. He was strong, and fearless, and he would have changed the world.” Her voice has the high pitch of hysteria, and Dean takes a deep breath.

“Let me guess. He failed.” He knows he's hit a nerve when Ruby audibly growls.

“He was cast out by his own kind! We had to live in Reno.” She says it like hell would have been a preferable choice. To be fair, Dean has been to Reno and it's a pretty fair draw between the two. “We had to hide like fugitives and live in a fucking trailer and feed off filthy drifters.”

She gets a hold of herself, steadying her hand and digging the knife in deeper. “These fucking cowards, hiding behind their dance floors and all their goddamn money. You pathetic fucks will pay anything at the door just to feel good for one moment in your sad little lives.”

“So what, you're gonna rip off this club and ride into the sunset?” Dean tries to take another step back but stops when Ruby jerks her chin and glares at him. She chuckles and shakes her head.

“Uncle Michael didn't even recognize me when I showed up.” She smiles, her eyes alight with her madness. “How much money do you think his little club will make when the bodies keep piling up?”

“You don't have to do this, Ruby.” Dean lets his eyes flicker around the room, looking for anything he can improvise as a weapon and feeling his chest tighten as he fails to find anything. Ruby's clearly out of her mind but her reflexes are quick, and Dean's not willing to chance Sam's life on his own fighting skills.

“No, I don't have to.” She smiles, her cheeks flushed red and her eyes wild. “I want to. I want them all to suffer like I suffered. I want them to know my name. My father was Lucifer Milton and he...
plucked Michael's eye out. I'm taking the other one. They'll all know, all of them, they'll know that I was the fucking best of-

Dean only sees a shadow moving over Ruby's shoulder before something smashes into her head. Glass shatters, hitting the floor as Ruby goes limp. Her knife clatters to the ground as she slumps to the floor, her head hitting the concrete with a sick thud. Sam kicks the knife to the other end of the room and spins around.

Jess stands with the broken handle of a beer stein clutched between her hands, shaking as she sways on her feet.

“Get the fuck away from my man.”

~*~

“I never liked that bitch.” Jess leans against Sam and buries her face in his shoulder. Sam hasn't let go of her since they tied Ruby to a chair.

“You sure you're alright to watch her?” Dean glances at Ruby, still unconscious but most definitely alive. That nylon cord should hold someone three times her strength but Dean's not taking any chances leaving her alone.

“Yeah, I'm ok.” Sam arches an eyebrow down at Jess. “And if she gets rowdy again I'll just have Jess take care of her.”

Jess rolls her eyes and hugs Sam a little tighter.

The crowd upstairs is still dancing like nothing has happened. Dean holds his phone in his palm, tapping it against his side. He should call this in. That's what he does.

Dean looks back at the dance floor and sighs. He'd asked his father once why they never called the police. John had just snorted and said that some things were better left outside the law. Ruby might be one of them.
Dean's still waffling over his phone when he feels his skin prickle.

“Dean.”

Castiel stands still for a moment, his arms pressed to his sides and his lips parted. He's flushed from being on stage and his hair looks like it went a few rounds with a vengeful squirrel and he's absolutely perfect.

“I knew you'd come,” Castiel sighs, shaking his head and smiling softly. “Dean, I'm so sorry, I-”

“It can wait,” Dean mumbles, reaching out to pull Castiel close to him and everything else can just fucking wait for now. His hands fit perfectly into the curve of Castiel's back and the press of Castiel's lips to his is the only explanation he really needs. They'll figure the rest out.

Castiel cups his hands behind Dean's head, resting their foreheads together. “You're here, that's all that matters.”

Dean smiles, feeling Castiel take a deep breath.

“Yeah, I'm here.” Dean sighs, wishing he could walk out with Castiel right now. “But I need your help.”

“What's wrong?” Castiel's eyes go so wide Dean has to kiss him, just one more time. Dean has a feeling he won't get sick of seeing kitten-face on Castiel for a long, long time.

“It's Ruby,” Dean says quietly, leaning in close.

“The short girl with the attention-whore tattoos?” Castiel raises an eyebrow and looks utterly puzzled. Dean snorts, amused at Castiel's succinct description. The brief moments of bitchiness he'd seen from Castiel were charming in that rumpled way of his. He's probably fucking adorable when he's grumpy.

“She's the killer. Sam and I caught her feeding off of Jess and we-”
“Feeding?” Castiel widens his eyes and lowers his voice. “Is she a vampire?”

“No, she's, you know, like you.” Dean raises an eyebrow. “Seriously, vampires? They're real, too?”

Castiel wrinkles his nose. “Real and very unhygienic. There's no glitter, trust me.”

“Christ, do we have a lot to talk about,” Dean sighs, envisioning the many awkward conversations in his future. “But Ruby was doing the same thing I saw Anna pulling on Charlie, I'm sure of it. You couldn't tell she was, I don't know, one of your own kind?”

“I had no idea.” Castiel shakes his head in disbelief. “And it's not like we have a homing beacon for each other, Dean. I know the other incubi because they're my family, or they're from one of the other families that I know of. I don't have a list.”

“OK, OK,” Dean concedes, “I'm sorry. But Cas, she's been killing people. We have to stop her and I don't know what to do.”

Dean runs a hand through his hair. “I'm a cop, Cas. I slap cuffs on people and make sure there's enough evidence to get them convicted.” Dean snorts and rubs a hand over the back of his neck. “I can't just drop her crazy ass off at the station with a handy 'rogue succubus' sign taped to her back.”

“It's incubus.” Castiel grimaces at Dean like he's just made a big faux-pas. “It's like saying stewardess or actress, it's a little old-fashioned.”

Dean has to smile, having the absurd thought that he'll finally be able to clear that one up for Charlie. “Well whatever the fuck I'm supposed to call her, I can't just hand her over, Cas. I don't know what kind of voodoo shit is keeping me and Sam above her bad-touch mind control, but the second she gets in a room of normal police you know she'll get out.”

“She will.” Castiel looks down and sighs. “You can't arrest her, Dean. We have to tell my father.”

Dean doesn't like it but he knows Castiel is right.
“Can you get him? I want to get back to Sam.”

“Of course.” Castiel runs his hand up Dean's arm, a small smile on his lips. “Thank you, Dean.”

Dean doesn't have a chance to ask what exactly Castiel's thanking him for before Castiel leans in to kiss him, and it's enough of an answer for Dean.

Ruby's still out when Dean arrives downstairs. Sam doesn't look like he's let go of Jess since Dean left.

“What are we gonna do?” Sam glances at Ruby and hugs Jess a little tighter. “And what the fuck was that? What was she doing?”

“I don't really know,” Jess answers with a bewildered look. “One minute I'm charging my cell phone and the next thing I know, all I wanted to do was kiss Ruby. Which is not ever, ever something I've ever wanted to do, ever. She's totally shady and she's definitely not tall and doofy enough to be my type.”

Sam blushes slightly.

“It felt...” Jess shakes her head and blows a breath out through her lips. “It felt amazing, but I couldn't stop it. I'm glad you found me.” She looks up at Sam. “She's been killing people, hasn't she? That's how she does it?”

Sam looks to Dean with his eyes wide.

“Yeah. She's an incubus.” Dean sighs, his eyebrows furrowing together. “Remember when I said we had some stuff to talk about?” He sucks his teeth. “That was definitely on the list.”

“Dean, does this mean-”

“I don't know what it means, Sam. Not exactly, not yet. I know that one of Dad's crazy field trips to the local witchdoctor must have worked. We're immune, that's why she couldn't understand why we weren't following her orders.”
“Jesus.” Sam makes a chagrined face at Jess' questioning glance. “I'll explain later, Dean and I had a kind of … unusual childhood.”

“Please tell me it involved brother-touching.” Ruby cackles, coming to with a huge, unstable grin on her face. She strains against the rough nylon cords lashing her hands to the chair. “No handcuffs? You sure know how to make a girl feel second-rate.”

“Shut up,” Dean and Jess bark in unison. Ruby huffs out a sigh.

They all turn at the sound of heavy footsteps behind them. Uriel brings every inch of his impressive, peacock-blue suited bulk to stand in front of Ruby while Castiel rushes to Dean's side. He throws his arm around Dean's waist without a moment's hesitation while Sam looks back and forth between them and grins.

“That was kind of on the list, too,” Dean mumbles, ignoring Sam's incredibly dorky thumbs-up and letting himself lean against Castiel.

“Did you really think you were gonna get away with this?” Uriel bellows, and Dean realizes that he's never heard Uriel speak before. Scary motherfucker is probably a kind way to put it.

“Did you really think those shoes were a good idea?” Ruby snarks back, glaring down at Uriel's flame-tipped ostrich loafers.

Uriel turns his back to her and crosses his arms.

“You know I don't like having outsiders involved in our affairs, Castiel.” Uriel narrows his eyes at Castiel, who straightens up next to Dean.

“If it failed to escape your notice, Ruby would still be killing people if it weren't for Sam and Dean.” Castiel turns to Dean and surreptitiously rubs his hand on Dean's back. “And they're not outsiders.”

“Seriously, asshole, your wayward niece or whatever the fuck she is just tried to mouth-rape me to death. I think I'm pretty involved already.” Jess draws up to her full height and shoots a challenging look at Uriel.
“Fine,” he answers tersely, turning back to Ruby. “You know, Ruby, I knew your father. He couldn't stand to watch Michael succeed. Maybe I'm lucky I never had any siblings. No one to be jealous of, no one to hold me back.” He shrugs and adjusts the cuffs of his jacket, tugging them straight. “Your daddy didn't have some grand master plan. He just wanted attention.”

“You don't know what you're talking about!” Ruby snarls, tossing her hair over her shoulder. “He told me, right before he died, that I had to carry on his legacy. When I get out of here, I'll show you.”

“You're not going anywhere, darling,” a rich voice purrs from behind Dean. The woman standing in front of Michael looks like she could skin a man with her nails and an old tube of lipstick. Her hair shines bright red in the overhead lights. Meg skulks behind her, a recalcitrant look on her face, while Michael stands with his arms crossed and his eye stony.

“Abaddon,” Ruby whispers, her face going ashy. “You're supposed to be-”

“Dead?” Abaddon tosses a shoulder and purses her lips. “A legend? A ghost story?” she mock-whispers, her voice going raspy as goosebumps spring up on Dean's arm.

“Inconvenienced is more like it.” She rolls her eyes and tsks her tongue at Ruby. “Little sis told me you were getting into some trouble, and then cousin Mikey here calls me up for some help.” She heaves a dramatic sigh. “It's like a girl can't just have a few friends for dinner without the phone just ringing off the hook.”

“Meg, you knew?” Castiel releases his grip on Dean and turns to her. “All this time?”

“Oh, Meggy and I go way back,” Ruby sing-songs, winking at Meg.

“We had a thing, it was a long time ago.” Meg rolls her eyes and shifts uncomfortably. “I was young, it was Vegas, you know.”

“Oh, please,” Ruby scoffs. “Meg helped me rip off a bunch of high-rollers, and a few of them didn't quite make it home, did they?”

“I didn't kill anyone,” Meg growls, moving towards Ruby before Castiel stops her with a gentle hand
on her arm.

“Just because you ate the appetizers doesn’t mean you're not responsible for the meal,” Ruby snarls.

“I caught her with one of the customers, and when I told her she had to stop, she threatened to go to the police.” Meg shrugs. “So I kept quiet. I tried to warn Delta to stay away from her but she wouldn't listen, stubborn bitch.” Meg shakes her head.

“Meg, how could you?” Castiel asks quietly, his eyes drawn together with concern.

“Not all of us are as spotless as you, Clarence.” Meg shrugs his hand off and gives Castiel a spurned look.

“Well this is nice and angst-ridden, but I have a date and a bottle of Domaine Leflaive on ice.” Abaddon makes a show of cracking her knuckles. She turns to smile sweetly at Michael. “I got it from here, cuz. You're all welcome to stay if you'd like, of course.” She struts over to Ruby, the heels of her motorcycle boots tapping against the floor.

“Get the fuck-” Ruby starts, her whole body going rigid as Abaddon runs the tip of her red-lacquered nail down her cheek.

“I don't mind an audience.”

“I'm out,” Jess snorts, shaking her head at the whole group. “Sam?”

Sam nods and tucks his arm over her shoulder. “Dean?”

Dean stares at the people gathered around him. Ruby sits paralyzed, the muscles on her jaw ticking as she tries to fight Abaddon's hold. Michael and Uriel stand on either side of her, arms crossed over their chests and not a drop of emotion on their faces. Meg looks equal parts sullen and amused, while Abaddon stands with the sort of self-assurance that would impress Dean if she weren't about to kill someone. And maybe eat her, Dean's not too clear on that part.

“You don't need to see this.” Castiel grabs both of Dean's hands in his own, squeezing them and
shaking his head.

Dean nods, keeping his grip on one of Castiel's hands.

“'I'll let you take care of this,” Dean says to Michael, “but if it happens again, I'm dealing with it myself.”

“Thank you,” Castiel whispers, pulling Dean closer and kissing him softly. They leave together, and as Ruby starts to scream, Dean wonders if some things aren't better left unknown.

~*~

“You know, I still owe you breakfast.” Castiel stands on his doorstep, his hands slung in his pockets. The sun is just filtering through the final blue tinges of the night, the witching hour when Los Angeles looks like a whole other planet. Dean's always liked dawn.

“I know a great place on Hillhurst.” Dean climbs the steps and sits down on the top one.

They'd decided to come back to Castiel's. Dean had about a million excuses to make and subtle cover ups to maneuver, but he figured it could wait another day. Castiel sits down next to him, letting his shoulder rest comfortably against Dean's.

“Although I like the hash browns at Fred 62 better.” Dean yawns and rubs his eyes. Castiel smiles and stares at Dean, his eyes wide and his head angled to the side.

“What?” Dean jostles his shoulder against Castiel's.

“You're just...” Castiel sighs, dreamily if Dean's being honest. “I've never met anyone like you.”

“And you haven't even seen me eat breakfast,” Dean jokes, instinctively deflecting the earnest look on Castiel's face.

“I've seen you eat plenty of other things.” Castiel's face is so composed it takes Dean a minute to
realize that he just made a dirty joke. Dean snorts and leans into him.

“I'm serious, Dean. Do you know what's it like, being like this?” Castiel turns to him, his face suddenly serious. “The first guy I ever slept with was named Adam. He kind of looked like you, actually.”

Dean shrugs as Castiel continues. “Guess you have a type, huh?”

“We were in high school, and I had the biggest crush on him.” Castiel smiles wistfully. “Our powers don't really manifest until puberty. I was sort of a late bloomer. I suppose I'd always had an influence on people, and I knew we were different from everyone else, but I didn't understand it, not really.”

Dean gently lays his hand over Castiel's.

“There was a dance, and we both had dates, I can't even remember who I took. But afterwards, I worked up the courage to talk to him, and it was amazing. He couldn't keep his hands off me. We did it in his Jeep and I went home thinking I had a new boyfriend.”

Castiel closes his eyes, taking a deep breath through his nose.

“The next day, he came up to me and he hit me. And called me some really colorful slurs, but that was nothing new.” Castiel glances at Dean, his eyes clouded with emotion. “He said I must have put something in his drink, to make him sleep with me.” Castiel hangs his head. “He left school the next day.”

“Cas, you didn't know,” Dean offers, trying to imagine how devastating that would be.

“Does it matter?” Castiel says softly, kicking the toe of his boot against the step. “Dean, the majority of the human race is incapable of even basic consent when I'm around. I try to keep a damper on it but I never know. I never know if someone likes me, or really wants me, or if I'm just throwing off roofies.”

Castiel looks up at Dean.
“I know I should have stopped myself, Dean, but you can't imagine what it was like, hearing you say,” Castiel's voice cracks, somewhere between a laugh and something darker, “say all those things, God, I felt like I was the one being drugged.” He smiles weakly. “I'm sorry.”

“I'd accept the apology but you don't owe me anything.” Dean squeezes Castiel's hand. “Christ, Cas, I have plenty of shit I need to tell you, too, trust me.” Dean feels dizzy just thinking about where to start.

Castiel looks at him, his face so open and trusting that Dean's voice catches in his throat. “But I don't want to. I just really want to kiss you right now.”

They stumble inside, both of them walking sideways so they can make good on Dean's wish. They navigate the stairs with a few fits and starts, trying to keep quiet as they make their way to Castiel's space. They both laugh at the racket of snores coming from Gabriel's floor before tripping up the spiral stairs.

Castiel's bed is much as they left it last time, a tangle of sheets and pillows with a Cas-shaped nest in the middle. It still smells the same, warm and just musky enough, a softer version of Castiel. Dean tumbles into it as Castiel pulls his own shirt off, blindly following Castiel down.

“I want to see you,” Dean mumbles between kisses, letting his t-shirt land somewhere on the mattress. “I want to see you come.”

Castiel just nods, rolling onto his back and hooking one of his legs around Dean's hip. Dean brackets an elbow on either side of Castiel's face, kissing him as he grinds his hips down. Dean's shoulders bow down as he lets himself taste Castiel, tongues curling together as their cocks brush against one another's. Castiel's fingers scratch against his back and Dean hisses, trails of shocks sparking in their wake.

“Like this, just like this,” Castiel mumbles, and Dean's not really sure what he means but can't bother caring when Castiel drags his nails across Dean's back and over the bend of his waist. Dean sucks Castiel's bottom lip between his teeth, leaving some marks of his own before he rears up just enough to reach Castiel's fly. He tugs the button open and slides the zipper down, not as careful as he should be but Castiel just growls, soft and raspy into Dean's mouth. He's just as rough as he makes quick work of Dean's zipper.

Castiel hikes his hips off the bed and tugs his waistband around his thighs. Dean glances down between them, groaning at the sight of Castiel's cock curving up against his belly. He shifts himself, getting ready to kiss his way down Castiel's chest and swipe up every drop of precome that's beading
Castiel stops him, shaking his head as he pulls Dean back for a kiss and hooks his thumb into Dean's waistband. He pushes down, making a frustrated grunt as the elastic of Dean's boxers catches over the swell of his cock. Dean brain catches up the second time Castiel pushes insistently and he curls his back, pushing his waistband down until his pants sit just below his ass and his cock slaps free.

Castiel's groan is approving, and Dean's is just plain filthy as Castiel turns his head to the side and licks a flat-tongued swipe over his palm. He reaches between them, wrapping a spit-wet hand around both their dicks and inching his hips up until they're slotted up next to each other. His thumb brushes over the wet slit of Dean's cock before flicking to his own, mingling their slickness together as Dean makes a valiant attempt at not blowing his goddamn load right there.

Castiel's strokes them a few times before pulling his hand back, looking up at Dean and flitting his tongue over the wet web between his thumb and his forefinger. Dean moves, minutely, just enough to catch the crown his dick against Castiel's. Castiel nods, his eyes open wide as he sucks the last lingering drops of precome off his hand. Dean does it again, dragging their cocks together as slowly as he can stand and leaning his head down to watch the blue of Castiel's eyes start to swirl.

Castiel runs his hand up Dean's side, pressing him down until Dean has to lay his weight on Castiel. With anyone else he'd worry about hurting him, but Castiel just rocks up into him and stretches his arms over his head. Dean's nose brushes against Castiel's as he traces his fingers up the pale underside of Castiel's arms, letting the backs of his nails catch against his skin. He can feel every little shudder Castiel makes, feel the rise and fall of his chest as Castiel breathes and ruts up against him. Dean can feel the sigh he lets out as their hands lace together, the warm trace of Castiel's breath against his lips as Dean squeezes and circles his hips.

It's maddening, the slip and slide of their cocks together just enough pressure to bring Dean close to the edge. He speeds up, smiling against Castiel's open lips as he hears the wet sound of their skin gliding back and forth. Dean's never been much of a leaker but Castiel gets wetter with each pass, the tight channel of their cocks together getting slicker and smoother as Castiel starts to pant for breath.

His fingers curl into Dean's hands, his nails blunting into the backs of Dean's knuckles as his eyes squeeze shut. Dean doesn't stop rocking them together but he pulls off from the searing curl of Castiel's tongue in his mouth.

“Cas,” Dean whispers, “look at me.” Castiel blinks before his eyes go wide, shining so brightly Dean can't see anything else. He doesn't want to, not when he can watch the passage of surprise and trepidation in Castiel's face give way to the open pleasure of the moment. Dean knows that no one has ever seen him like this, his eyes wide and his mouth working into a wordless O as his hips start
to lose their rhythm.

Dean takes over, grunting in time with each hard press of his hips, the wet catch of his dick angled to make Castiel go tense beneath him before he throws his head back. He comes with Dean's name on his lips, choked out as he pulses between them. Dean groans at the hot spread of Castiel's come over his cock, rutting his hips into the slick mess before he peels his hand off of Castiel's.

It only takes a few strokes for Dean to finish himself off, Castiel still twitching underneath him as Dean shoots onto his belly. Castiel pulls him down while he's still pulsing wet between them, kissing him and wrapping his arms around Dean's neck as his eyes flash bright. They roll over, their skin sticking together and ruining any lingering possibility of keeping Castiel's sheets clean.

Dean manages to kick his pants off as Castiel does the same. Castiel settles his head on Dean's shoulder, his hand splayed over the laser-blasted remnants of Dean's tattoo. Dean nuzzles into Castiel's hair, taking a deep breath and closing his eyes for just a second.

Dean doesn't know what time it is when he wakes up but the sun is streaming in through the windows, spreading across the floor in angled panes. He blinks a few times, smacking his lips together and yawning. His nose itches so he goes to scratch it, smiling as he realizes it's Castiel's hair tickling him.

“You don't snore,” Castiel mumbles against his chest, throwing his leg over Dean's hip.

“Surprised?” Dean stretches his arms up, wriggling his hip against Castiel's post-nap boner. Is there such a thing as afternoon wood?

“Pleased,” Castiel answers simply, snuggling into him.

“I'll say,” Dean teases, rolling onto his side and inching down until he can kiss Castiel. Dean runs a hand through the tangled mess of his hair and smiles sleepily.

“Do you sleep?” Dean asks suddenly, looking at Castiel's clear, alert eyes. “Or do you not need to?”
“I sleep, Dean,” Castiel snorts, rising onto his elbow and rolling his eyes affectionately. “And I go to the bathroom, and I pay taxes, and I fight with my father.” He traces a hand over Dean's cheek. “We're not really that different from you.”

Dean's about to say something when he hears a muffled rumble from Castiel's stomach.

“Guess you need to eat, too?”

Castiel laughs. “I love to eat.” He leans down to kiss Dean softly. “And I'm going to buy you breakfast if it kills both of us.”

It doesn't kill them, although the dried jizz stuck on Dean's happy trail does significantly delay their departure. They eventually manage to shower and drive to the closest place serving breakfast at 5 PM.

Dean pauses half-way through his pancakes and watches Castiel chew his mouthful of Meat-Lovers Scramble.

“I didn't think I'd ever meet someone who could out-breakfast me.”

Castiel smiles and swallows his food before taking a sip of his coffee. It's got a good dose of cream in it, just like Dean thought it would.

“But seriously, how do you live if you don't, you know, feed off of people?” Dean slides his fork into his pancakes and pushes the fluffy triangles into his reservoir of syrup.

“I do,” Castiel says thoughtfully, looking up at Dean. “I feed every Tuesday, Thursday and alternating Saturdays and Sundays, depending on Anna and Gabe's schedules.” He takes a small bite of his eggs and chews while he arches an eyebrow at Dean.

“So it's the music?” Dean spears his fork into his food.

“Not quite.” Castiel sighs and tilts his head. “It's not really correct to say that we feed off of sexual energy.” He drums his fingers against the table. “When people have sex, or, well, good sex, they're
completely alive in that moment. That vitality, that perfect instance of awareness and joy, that's what fuels us.”

Dean nods, understanding the sense in it.

“But there's lots of things that can make people feel that way.” Castiel smiles softly. “Like dancing to music.”

“Is that why the crowd gets so wrapped up?” Dean had never seen anything like that before.

“It's a give and take,” Castiel explains. “It's pleasurable for them, and in turn that draws them in deeper. It's really a mutually beneficial thing. Any energy I draw from them is replenished by the next day, and everyone feels better.”

“I'm sort of sorry that I can't feel it.” Dean frowns and takes a bite.

“I'm not.” Castiel shakes his head. “And it's not like I can't make you feel good.” Dean feels heat rise in his cheeks as Castiel's foot brushes against his under the table. “I just have to do it the old-fashioned way.”

Dean swallows his pancakes and looks at the empty booth next to theirs.

“But you can feel it, when I, you know,” Dean leans in, lowering his voice, “when I come?”

“Yes.” Castiel gets some color of his own on his cheeks as his eyes widen. “It's hard to describe. It's like smelling something really delicious but not being able to eat it.” He brushes his foot against Dean's shin as he leans across the table. “It gets me really fucking hot.”

“Want to get the check?” Dean licks his lips, suddenly uninterested in his remaining bacon.

Castiel smiles and nods, signaling for their waitress and pushing his plate to the side.
Dean arrives home later that night with a hickey on his hip and a huge smile on his face. It's one of the last nights he'll have the house to himself, so he cranks up some music and walks around in his underwear.

Castiel had finally kicked him out after his third orgasm. They'd spooned in bed, Castiel's chin tucked over his shoulder as Dean gave him the crash course in Dean's Fucked Up Childhood 101. Castiel had just listened, holding his hand over Dean's stomach and murmuring in understanding. There was plenty left to talk about but Dean felt lighter from just that small confession.

He texts Charlie and Sam, assuring them that yes, he is alive, and yes, Charlie, they could go on a double date soon. Dean thinks about calling Ellen back and decides it can wait until tomorrow. He does put on some Van Morrison in her honor.

Dean sits for a while, mentally composing some good explanations to give to Victor. Maybe he'd tell Victor the truth eventually, but for now he just needed a good enough story to explain his sudden dismissal of the club case and Ruby's unexpected departure. It wouldn't be hard to talk Mills into accepting a natural causes closure as long as no new corpses turned up.

Once Dean has something feasible in mind, he leans back in his bed and closes his eyes. Even if the case will remain open on the books, Dean feels the warm weight of satisfaction settling in his stomach. Instinctively, his hand reaches for his notebook.

Dean stops in mid-air, turning his head to the side and tracing his eyes over the marbled cover. The stark black and white pattern starts to fade toward the edges, rubbed over until the cardboard pulp shows through. Dean runs his finger over one of the gray areas, smiling a little.

He opens it to a fresh page and taps his pen against his knee. Dean closes his eyes and takes a deep breath before putting pen to paper.

*Castiel Milton*

Dean sleeps well that night.
Two days later, Garth pauses in the doorway, his duffel bag slung over his shoulder. “There is some wild stuff going on with your energy right now, man.”

Dean rolls his eyes and pulls himself up from his sprawl on the couch.

“I'm guessing sex.” Ash squints his eyes over Garth's shoulder and nods. “Yep, definitely some really good sex.”

“I missed you guys, too.” Dean stretches and tosses his book onto the coffee table. Dean had gotten halfway through Castiel's copy of *A Winter's Tale* before he'd succumbed to an afternoon nap.

“How was New Mexico?”

“Wild.” Garth widens his eyes as he carries their bags inside. “I think I astrally projected into one of my past lives.”

Dean has heard much stranger things after Garth's pilgrimages. “Cool. Ash, I think Charlie managed to leave at least one beer in the fridge for you.”

“Bless her,” Ash intones, pressing his palms together and bowing before throwing the fridge open. He cracks a beer and takes a sip, closing his eyes and smiling beatifically. “Missed you, buddy.”

Dean's not sure if Ash is talking to him or the beer.

“Yeah, what'd we miss?” Garth fills a glass of water and plops into the old armchair next to the couch.

Dean leans his head back, closing his eyes and smiling.

“Oh, you know. Nothing much.” He jumps as he feels his phone start to vibrate. He glances at the screen and stands up.
“I gotta take this, sorry.”

Ash immediately steals his seat on the couch and gives him a thumbs-up.

Dean closes the door to his room and answers it.

“Bobby,” Dean says warmly, a big smile spreading across his face. “Sorry I haven't been answering my calls, things got busy with work.”

“I know, I know, you got better things to do than talk to the old man.” Bobby laughs, the warmth of his chuckle going fuzzy over the line.

“No, it's good to hear you.” Dean scratches a hand through his hair. “How you been?”

“Aw, nothing too new out here.” Dean can hear him grumble as he sits down. “Ellen's running me ragged getting the place fixed up. Ever since we got the damn cable all she wants to watch are these goddamn home improvement shows.”

“Uh-oh,” Dean laughs, remembering a particularly hot and humid weekend steaming wallpaper off the upstairs bedrooms. Ellen could be a brutal taskmaster when she felt like it.

“At least she's not making me do the stenciling project. Man's gotta draw the line somewhere.”

“Seems fair.” Dean sits on the side of his bed and sighs. “How's Jo?”

“Top of her class and rising. Girl's a natural out in the field, or so they tell me. Only one of ’em that hasn't fainted. And you have to meet Gwen.” Bobby whistles. “You should see ’em together. She makes Jo look like the delicate one. She's a hell of a shot, too, I think her daddy was some kind of spook.”

“Military?”
“Florist.” Bobby snorts. “Yeah, right, and I'm fucking Santa Claus. I'm guessing special forces, maybe private contractor. But Gwen seems alright.”

“Can't wait to meet her.” Dean quirks an eyebrow. “We can take her out to skeet shoot, see if all this boasting's true.”

“That'd be nice.” Bobby pauses, taking a deep breath. “Look, Dean, Ellen's going nuts with this whole 'curb appeal' craziness. Now she's telling me having more than four cars in the yard on c-blocks makes us white trash.”

Dean laughs, rubbing a hand over his neck. “Yeah?”

“So I was thinking, you know, if you want to, we still got the old girl tucked away in the barn. I could use the space if you felt like taking her home with you.”

Dean closes his eyes, sighing.

“Hey, I get it, Dean, I just thought it wouldn't hurt to ask is all.”

“No, no, it's alright.” Dean bites his lip and nods his head. “I'll do it.”

“You'll do it?” Bobby doesn't bother hiding his surprise, not that Dean can blame him. Bobby's last attempt to give Dean the car had ended in an ugly fight and some slammed doors.

“Yeah, I've been doing a lot of thinking.” Dean smiles. “Shame to have her locked up like that.”

“Sure is.” Bobby's respect for a good car is the closest thing the man has to a religion. “She still needs a little work but it's nothing I can't get to before you make it out here. Besides, it'll give me a damn good excuse to get away from Ellen's tiling projects.”

“Happy to help.”

“Maybe you could get Sam to come with you, have some company for the drive back.”
“We'll see.” Dean swings a leg up on his bed and leans back. “Some company would be nice. I'll let you know when I can make it.”

“You take care, son.”

“Give my love to Ellen and Jo, alright?”

“Course.”

Dean leans his head against the pillow and rests his phone on his stomach, staring at the ceiling and smiling. He takes a deep breath and picks up the phone again. The other end rings a few times before a familiar voice picks up.

“Hello, Dean.”

“Hey, Cas.” Dean hears music in the background, something with strings.

“You ever go on a road trip, Cas?”

~*~

Epilogue

“Nothing can beat the stiletto.” Dean shoots Victor a withering look as they walk down the hall. “I'm not saying ice pick isn't cool, but come on, she stabbed the guy with a shoe.”


“Who the fuck wears hat pins any more, Vic?” Dean stops in front of the glazed glass leading to Linda's lab.
“Bela has some,” Victor shrugs. “They were her grandma's or something. They're sharp as shit.”

“Of course she does,” Dean mutters, shaking his head. He pushes the door open and follows Victor inside.

Their latest stiff is laid out on the table, a middle-aged man with a paunch and the livid wounds of a stabbing peppering his chest. Dean's pretty sure the murder weapon won't be anything more exciting than a kitchen knife.

“How was the big family dinner last night?” Victor looks around the room and leans against an empty slab.

“Delicious.” Dean raises his eyebrows. “Anna's an amazing cook.”

“Too bad these things don't run in the family,” Victor jokes, and Dean grimaces as he remembers Castiel's last attempt to bake cookies when Victor came over.

“Charlie's dog ate a bunch of shrimp and barfed everywhere, and Kali and Gabe managed to get in a fight and have makeup sex before dessert.” Dean shrugs. “It was fun.”

“How was Bela's trip?” Dean had entertained Victor during his week of faux-bachelorhood while Bela was in London. The all-night Halo fest had been fun, although Dean suspected Victor was more upset than he let on that Castiel had completely destroyed him. His boyfriend's hand-eye coordination was no joke.

“She got a Rothko and five new pairs of shoes.” He smiles and raises an eyebrow. “Those Laboo-whatevers cost a goddamn fortune, but she likes to try each one on while we-”

“Detectives.” Linda smiles as she steps through the supply-room door. Dean bites his cheek and manages not to smile too much as Victor splutters.

“You're looking for a nine-inch kitchen knife and a very angry short person.” Linda hands Victor her report.
“Defensive wounds?” Dean looks at the body as Linda shakes her head.

“He was too drunk.” She sighs and nods at the folder in Victor's hands. “BAC through the roof.”

“Yeah, we figured.” Dean already had a pretty good account from their suspect, who seemed as much a victim as the dead guy occupying Linda's table.

“Thanks, Linda.” Victor turns to leave, tucking the report under his arm and blowing a breath out.

Dean smiles at Linda and follows after Victor, pausing as something catches his eye on Linda's desk. The usual pictures of Kevin grin back at him, but nestled behind them is a small rainbow flag. Dean squints and smiles as he reads “PFLAG” stenciled over the colored stripes.

Linda catches him staring and shoots him a challenging look. Dean grins and inclines his head.

“Have a great day, Linda.”

~⁎~

March 12th, 2017

Dear Detective Winchester,

My name is Krissy Chambers. You may or may not remember me. You were one of the detectives who found me after I was abducted by Terence Boyd.

I never got a chance to say thank you, and I hope I can do that now.

I recently applied for a scholarship program at Cal State for their BS in Forensic Sciences. I wrote my application essay about you and how much you inspired me to pursue a career in criminal justice. I am happy to report that I was accepted to the program with a full scholarship and will be starting there in the fall. Maybe one day you and I will be able to work together.
Thank you for everything that you do.

Sincerely,

Krissy Chambers

~*~

The drive to Adelanto is dusty and bleak. The sun beats overhead, washing everything out as the road stretches on. Dean turns the radio off once they hit the dead zone past Ontario, listening to the wind whip past him.

The Victorville Federal Correctional Complex sits squat on the horizon, with clusters of concrete buildings spread across the heavily-fenced acreage. Guard towers loom on the periphery, the sun glinting off of spotlights and what Dean assumes are some high-calibre sniper rifles.

The heat rises from the parking lot asphalt in visible waves, distorting the long walk to the entrance. Dean stands next to the car and sighs, squinting into the sun. It must be tough to spend much time in the yard when the sun's up.

Dean lays a hand on the roof of the Impala, cringing at the heat. He pats her once and squares his shoulders. The passenger seat is empty. Castiel had offered to come, of course, but Dean knows he has to do this by himself.

He flashes his badge to the officer manning the entrance. He'd just as soon skip the frisking and accept the professional courtesy as the corrections officer waves him past the line of frowning visitors.

“I didn't get a notice about an interview today, officer. Which sack of shit are we pulling out of the pen for you?”

Dean smiles at the man, holding his badge open in front of the guard's face. The guy frowns as he reads it.
“I'm here for a personal visit.” Dean clears his throat. “I'm here to see my father, John-”

“Winchester.” The guard, Walker according to his tag, draws his lip back in a sneer. He looks at Dean with such bristling hatred that Dean has to wonder how bad John had fucked the guy up.

“I've got my eye on you.” Walker points his index and middle finger at his own eyes before leveling them at Dean. Dean manages to keep the smirk off his face as he nods. He hopes John makes this asshole's life hell.

Dean files into the visiting room and sits at an empty table. A few tough-looking women and their sullen children sit around him, while a guy with a neck tattoo and a nasty scar on his face cracks his knuckles.

He hears a buzzer sound in the distance, the droning kind that seems to be ubiquitous to all prisons. Dean bites his lip before blowing out a long breath. He could leave now, charge out the door and never look back. Dean glances at the door, catching Walker's glowering stare.

Dean turns away, staring down at his own hands. He strokes his index finger across the webbing of his thumb, just like Cas does when they're sitting next to each other on the couch. He takes a deep breath, closing his eyes and counting to ten.

Dean makes it to nine.

“Dean?”

Dean opens his eyes, looking up and facing his father for the first time in fifteen years. In the hundred times Dean had envisioned this scenario, he'd always imagined his father looking horrible – gaunt and sallow with haunted eyes, or bloated with the cheap potato moonshine that Dean knows they brew in sneakers and stolen plastic jugs. He'd never imagined that John would look so good.

His face is tanned a rich brown, with deep crinkles around his eyes and streaks of gray shot through his hair. He's muscled and broad, with biceps that bulge against his short-sleeved uniform. Tattoos that are new to Dean cover his skin, shaky and faded under the graying hair of his arms.
Dean feels the weight of everything he's wanted to say to his father, every hurtful word and heartfelt apology and every looming question that still needs answering. Dean just smiles and lays his hands on the table.

“Hey, Dad.”

THE END

End Notes

Written for the 2013 DeanCas Big Bang. Thank you to the mods for organizing such an incredible challenge!

I wrote almost all of this story by hand over the summer, as I sat on the beach and doggedly avoided adulthood. Transcribing it was a labor of love to put it mildly. I never imagined that I would write something this long, and I couldn't have done it without cheerleading from my fandom-spouse verucasalt123. Thank you, bb.

I owe fobsessed54 a huge thanks for her fast and immensely helpful beta-read and encouragement.

I based Seraphim on the Limelight, a legendary NYC church-turned-club where I cut my little goth girl teeth back in the day. Michael's eye patch is an homage to Peter Gatien, the much-wronged owner of the Limelight.

This story features a lot of music. I made a soundtrack, which you can find here. The music Castiel plays on his show was inspired by the incomparable Kid Koala album 12-bit Blues. Castiel's “apology song” was inspired by Benny Goodman's Goodbye.

Soundtrack now on Spotify! Find it here

I loosely borrowed some of the incubus mythology and imagery from Lost Girl. You don't need to know anything about the show to follow along.

This story was one of the last ones standing for art claims, which only made my delight that much greater when paxdracona snagged it. Thank you for an amazing collaboration. Thank you for your amazing art, your patience with my many drafts, and your enthusiasm which kept me inspired as I struggled to finish this. Please check out her amazing art post and shower her with love!

A note about the warnings, with spoilers and possibly triggering material, at my LJ Masterpost
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!