A Supernatural Hunger Games

by fandomgirl13

Summary

Dean Winchester, his brother Sam, and his father live together in district twelve, one of the poorest districts in Panem. Dean knows that his stakes are high for being drawn to participate in the annual Hunger Games, but when the time comes to pick two names to compete in the Hunger Games, something even Dean couldn't fathom happens -- his brother's name is drawn instead. Dean is quick to volunteer, but is caught by surprise again when Castiel, a boy who saved Dean's life a couple of years ago, was pulled as the other tribute.
Chapter 1

Dean slowly sat up and stretched, careful not to disturb the sleeping form next to him. Normally he would be gleeful to give his little brother, Sammy, a hard time about huddling in so close, but today was different. Dean quietly slipped on soft leather boots and an old jacket that had shrunk too much for his father to wear, and placed a small round of goat cheese into its pocket; a present from Sam on reaping day. Before slipping out of the door Dean glanced back at his fathers sleeping form, peaceful and still, unlike his waking hours. A scrunched brown head peeked around the bed, eyes narrowing into slits as they focused on Dean. Dean returned the stare and sighed, not quite able to bring himself to regret the decision to keep the cat, Meg, as Sam liked to call her. She turned out to be worth her weight in gold; she was a good mouser and seemed to distract Sam from the hell that was their life. Sighing again, Dean headed out of the house and down the familiar dirt road. No hungry children and coal smudged miners were to be seen in the District today. Everyone chose to sleep in on a day like this, that is, if they could sleep at all. The shutters on the houses were closed tight, and not even the birds sung. Dean could feel the tension in the air.

He stopped in front of a rusted fence, listening for a hum of electrical charge, just as an extra precaution, but there’s none. The Capitol ordered it to be charged twenty-four hours a day to keep out the dangers of the forest, and to keep in the people of District 12, but no one followed that rule. It was rarely charged. Dean slipped under the fence and into the lush green woods. The change in Dean was almost immediate as he picked his way through the undergrowth towards a hollowed out log. His shoulders relaxed as all the stress he usually carried floated away, and the hard lines left his face. After grabbing his dads old gun from within the log, Dean headed deeper into the woods, winding his way purposefully through the brush.

As he trudged through the thicket, Dean warily glanced over his shoulder, always worried that he had been seen or heard sneaking into the woods. As usual, there was no one there. A flash of brown caught his eye, and his head whipped around to find a deer silently leaping through the trees. A smile grew on his face as he loaded his gun, and aimed for the deer’s head.

“Hey, Winchester!” a loud voice yelled from behind him, spooking the deer. Dean’s eyes followed the deer as it darted away, until it was hidden from view.

“Son of a bitch,” he murmured. He turned around to find a tan face staring back at him. “Dammit, Lisa!”

She replied with a simple smile. “What were you going to do with that once you killed it, eh, Winchester?” she asked him.

“I was going to sell it to a peacekeeper or something!” he said, obviously frustrated.

“Not on a day like this,” she shook her head. “Anyway, look what I shot!” She held up a loaf of bread with an arrow in it, and Dean couldn’t help but chuckle. He took the bread from her, and let the smell slowly waft up to his nostrils. The heat radiating from the bread warmed his cold hands.

“What’d you have to trade to get it?” Fresh bread like that was rare for them, and fairly pricey. Only for special occasions.

“Just a squirrel,” she shrugged. He reached his hand into his pocket, pulling out the cheese from Sam’s goat.

“Sammy gave us a little treat too,” he said. Her expression brightened.
“Thank you, Sam. We have a real feast this morning!” Dean led her through the woods and to a small meadow, where they sat down to eat their breakfast.

“Oh, I almost forgot!” she exclaimed, turning to Dean. “Happy Hunger Games!”

“And may the odds be ever in your favour,” he said, finishing her sentence. They smiled at each other, though there was sadness behind their eyes. Lisa picked a berry off a nearby bush and popped it into her mouth. Dean took out a knife, and began to slice the bread. He handed her a piece, and watched as her teeth sink into its soft pastry. Her dark hair blew in the soft breeze, and her brown eyes studied his face carefully. For a moment there was nervous silence, as both think about the day ahead of them.

“We could you it, you know,” Lisa said suddenly. Dean turned to her with a questioning look.

“What?”

“Leave District 12. Live in the woods. You and I. We could, together,” she explained. Dean shook his head.

“We wouldn’t make it five miles. They’d catch us.” She shrugged her shoulders.

“Maybe not.”

“We can’t leave, anyway. You have Ben, and I have Sam,” Dean pointed out. Lisa sighed.

“We’ll take them with us,” she said. Dean laughed stiffly.

“Could you imagine little Sammy in the woods?” Neither Sam, nor Lisa’s brother, Ben, would do very well in the dark woods with all the dangers of bears and poisonous snakes. And they would never leave Ben and Sam behind. If it weren’t for Dean and Lisa, their families would have starved already. Most of District 12 would have starved already if Dean and Lisa didn’t hunt and bring them food.

“Ok... maybe not,” Lisa finally gave in. Dean’s eyes skimmed over the forest surrounding them, chewing on bread and cheese.

“They’re like our children. We’re always taking care of them, always providing the food.”

“I’m never having kids,” Dean states bluntly. He already had a hard time taking care of his brother, and he couldn’t imagine ever having to take care of more than that.

“I would, if we didn’t live here.”

“But we do live here,” Dean argued stubbornly. The whole conversation felt a little odd to Dean. Leave? How could he? His responsibilities were there, in District 12. He could never leave poor Sammy to live alone with his father, an old, ill-tempered drunk. All Lisa’s talk about kids and leaving confused Dean. Why would she bring that up? There had never been anything between him and Lisa except for a strong friendship. No romance, or not that Dean could tell. They got along great, and were great friends. He just never felt that certain... romantic connection. She was more like a sister to him than a lover, and he was perfectly fine with that. Besides, if she did actually want kids someday, she wouldn’t have trouble finding a husband. She was pretty, and the boys in the district always talked about her. It sometimes made Dean jealous, but not for the reason most would think. She was a good friend, and a good hunting partner. He couldn’t afford to lose her to some stupid boy.

“So what do you want to do until tonight?” Lisa inquired, breaking the long stretch of silence.
Dean shrugged. “I figured we’d go fishing, or hunt.” She nods, and they set off through the woods after finishing their meal. The word 'tonight' rings through Dean’s mind, reminding him of what is to come. A nervous shiver ran through him. After tonight two or more families will be closing their shutters and trying to overcome the sudden horror of losing their children, neighbors, or friends. But that's not what Becky, the district official for the Games, encourages them to do. She prefers that they celebrate after the reaping, for its "an honor" to be picked to participate in the games. And some do celebrate, but not for who was chosen. They celebrate because their child was not chosen, and was spared for the next year.

Dean and Lisa made good time through the woods, unbothered by predators or other hunters. By late morning they had caught a dozen fish, gathered a bag of greens, and picked a gallon of strawberries. On their way home they stop by the Hob, a black market in an abandoned coal warehouse. Although most businesses were closed on Reaping day, the Hob is still bustling with people. Eight of the fish were traded for good bread and salt, and they traded Ellen, a woman who sold hot soup and illegal alcohol, half the greens for some beer. They might have been able to do a tad better elsewhere, but they make an effort to keep on good terms with Ellen, an old friend of the family. She’s the only one they can count on to always trade with them.

Once finished, they headed back into the main square.

“See you later,” Lisa said.

“Wear something pretty,” Dean said flatly, and they parted ways. Dean went to the mayor’s back door to sell half the strawberries. The Mayor, Micheal, has a fondness for strawberries, and is one of the only people willing to pay the price for them. Garth, the Mayor’s son, opens the door. He’s in Dean's grade at school. Most would expect the mayor’s son to be a snob, but he and Dean get along good enough. He keeps to himself, like Dean. Which means they find themselves hanging out together a lot at school: at lunch, during assemblies, and for sports activities. Garth does most of the talking, which is fine with Dean. He usually keeps to himself anyway.

Instead of his usual school clothes he was wearing a crisp button up shirt and a thin black tie. Reaping clothes.

“Nice tie,” Dean compliments gruffly. Garth shot him a look, trying to decide whether Dean was actually complementing him or just being ironic.

“If I do end up going to the capitol I don’t want to look like a slob, do I?”

Now it was Dean’s turn to be confused. Did he mean it, or was he just messing with him? Dean guessed the second option.

“Garth, you’re not going to be going to the capitol,” Dean said coolly. “How many can you have? Five entries? I had six when I was twelve years old.” It wasn’t his fault, of course. It was just the way the reaping system was. It was unfair, but there was nothing they could have done about it.

Garth shrugged, and handed Dean the money for the berries. “Good luck, man.”

“You too.” The door closed, and Dean began to head back towards the seam, lost in his thoughts. He wished he could change the unfair system of the reaping. The poorer a person is, the worse the reaping is for them. A person became eligible for the reaping the day they turn twelve. Their name got entered once. When they’re thirteen, their name got entered twice and so on until they reached the age of eighteen, the final age for the reaping, when their name got put in seven times. That’s true for all twelve of the Panem districts.

But there’s a catch. The poor population of Panem, like Dean and his family, could opt to put their name in three more times in exchange for tesserae. Tesserae provided a years supply of grain and
oil for one person. So at the age twelve, Dean had his name in four times. Dean had had continued to apply for tesserae, so he could get food for Sam and his father. And they are accumulative. So, at the age 16, Dean had his name in twenty times. And Lisa, being 18 had her name in forty-two times.

Since Garth is the governor’s son he has no need to put his name in more than required so there is a very slim chance he would get picked. The poorer people of the Seam resent him for it, even though it’s not his fault that he doesn’t need more food like the poor, it’s just the way the reaping system is set up. Still, it’s hard for some not to be angry or jealous.

Some days, while in the woods with Lisa, Dean listened as she rants about how tesserae is just another tool to cause the districts misery. A way to plant hate between the starving workers of the Seam and the more privileged members of the district. She was always going on about all the things the capitol does to manipulate them and strike fear through the districts. “It’s to the capitol’s advantage to have us divided among ourselves,” she might have said if there were only Dean’s ears to hear it. If it wasn’t reaping day. Her arguments seemed completely pointless to Dean. What was the good of complaining about the capitol in the middle of the woods? He let her vent anyway, though. Better she ran her mouth in the woods than in the middle of the district for all to hear.

At home, Dean found his father and brother ready to go. His dad was wearing a nice button up. It was one of the only shirts he owned that didn’t smell like the cheap alcohol he was so fond of. Sam wore a plaid button up with a white shirt and tie under it; Dean’s first reaping outfit. It was a bit big on him, but he made it work. A tub of warm water awaited Dean. He scrubbed off all the sweat and grime that had accumulated on his skin from the forest. After he was done, he headed to his room where he found one of his father’s clean old shirts and un-ripped jeans.

“You sure you want me to wear your shirt, dad?” Dean asked, trying to be thankful for his dad’s offer and take it. For the longest time Dean had been so angry, he wouldn’t allow his dad to do anything for him. He stayed his father’s good little soldier, listening to orders, and that was it. He didn’t want anything else to do with him. And this shirt was very special to his dad. Mary, Dean’s mother, had made the shirt for their dad a few months before the accident.

“You sure I’m sure,” John said roughly. Dean nodded reluctantly, and began to dry his hair with a towel and dress.

“You look nice,” Sam said with a smile. Dean rolls his eyes and turns to the rusted mirror to fix his hair. He ran his fingers through his sandy locks once, then turned back to his brother. He patted him on the back.

“I’d rather have the dirt on my face.” He faked a smile, for Sam. These next few hours would be terrible and anxiety filled for him. His first reaping. He only had his name in once, and that’s about as safe as anyone can be. Dean wouldn’t let him take any tesserae either. But Sam wasn’t as worried about himself as he is about Dean. Incase the unthinkable might happen.

Dean protected his brother in every way that he can, but he’s powerless against the reaping. Dean was strong, and would endure any pain imaginable, but if his brother was hurt, Dean didn’t know what he would do. He couldn’t stand seeing his little brother in pain. Anguish welled up inside of his chest just thinking about his little brother having to go through anything that could harm him. He almost let his fear show on his face, but held it in- for Sammy. He noticed Sam’s shirt wasn’t tucked in, and forces himself to smile.

“Come on, Sammy, tuck in your shirt,” he said as calm as possible. Sam returned the grin, and began to shove his shirt into his pants. “Now,” Dean started, trying to lighten the mood. “Let’s
There was fish and greens already cooking on the stove, but that was for supper. They decided to save the strawberries and bakery bread for that evening, to make it special. Instead they drank milk from Sam’s goat and ate stale bread, although no one had much appetite anyway.

At one o’clock they headed down to the square: attendance was mandatory. Peacekeepers checked the houses and make sure everyone is at the reaping, and if they found someone still in their house, the person will be imprisoned. The usually lively square was quiet, and an air of grimness settled over the people. A camera crew stood on the outskirts, fiddling with their equipment to get ready for the broadcast.

The inhabitants of district twelve silently began to fill the square. The twelve through eighteen-year-olds checked in, then gather in roped off areas organized by age- oldest in the front and youngest- like Sam- in the back. Members of their family lined up around the edges, holding on to each other’s hands. The men and woman with no loved ones in harms way slipped through the nervous families, and began to bet with each other which unfortunate two kids’ names will be called. Most of the betters went for the older children, who would most likely have their name in more times.

The crowd got tighter as more arrive. The square was large, but not large enough to hold the population of District Twelve.

Dean found himself standing next to a group of other 16 year olds. They all exchanged stiff nods and anxious glances, then turned their attention to the temporary stage in front of the justice building. It held three chairs, a podium, and a large glass ball that held all the eligible children’s names from the district. Dean stared at the small paper slips that fill the ball with nervous anticipation. Twenty of them had Dean Winchester written on them in careful handwriting. And one of them had Sam Winchester.

Dean scanned the crowd for his brother, but without luck, he turned his attention back to the stage. In one of the three chairs sat the mayor, Michael. Next to him was Becky, District Twelve’s escort, fresh from the capitol in a spring green and yellow suit. A murmur went over the crowd as they notice the third chair is empty.

As the town clock struck two, the mayor stepped up to the podium and began to read. He told them of the history of Panem, and how it rose out of the ashes of a country once known as North America. He listed the fires, drought, disaster, storms and the brutal war that tore apart the nation. The result was Panem, a sparkling new capitol ringed by thirteen districts Then came the uprising known as the Dark Days. Twelve districts were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave them new laws and peace. That’s when the Hunger Games were created: a reminder that the Dark Days must never be repeated. The rules of the Hunger Games were morbidly simple - as a result of the uprising two children, boy or girl, from each of the twelve districts must be given up to ‘participate’. The children, called Tributes, were then imprisoned in an arena to fight to the death until one lone victor survives. The survivor won the game and got returned to his or her district. Taking kids from the districts, and forcing the people to watch as they kill each other was the capitol’s way of reminding the districts that they were at total mercy to the them.

To humiliate the districts even further, the capital required they treat the Hunger Games like a festivity, or sporting event of sorts. The last tribute alive got to go back to a life at ease, and their district got showered with food and prizes. The other districts, however, got nothing more than another two children dead.

“It’s both a time for repentance and a time for thanks,” the mayor intoned. Then he read the list of District Twelve’s victors. In seventy-four years there had only been two, and only one still alive.
was Bobby Singer, the old alcoholic. As he heard his name called, he staggered onto the stage and plopped himself in the chair, obviously drunk. The crowd applauded, but he ignored it, mumbling something under his breath. He wore an old shirt and a simple baseball cap.

Mayor Michael glanced at Bobby with disapproval, and quickly introduced Becky, as to get the attention away from the bearded man.

“Happy Hunger Games! And may the odds be ever in your favour!” she happily breathed into the mic. She went on to describe ‘what an honour it is to be there. Dean sighed, and his eyes drifted over the crowd, where he found Lisa staring at him with a slight smile. Dean tried hard to return the smile, but it’s a failed attempt. She could see he is nervous- not for himself, but for Sam. His mind then drifted to Lisa’s forty-two names in the ball, and his nerves spiked up even more. The odds are exactly in her favour, he thought ruefully. Lisa, thinking the same thing about Dean, turned her head away.

It was time for the drawing. Becky strode up to the large glass ball, and her hands hovered inches over the names.

“Well, here we go!” she chirped. The crowd drew a collective breath, and everything went completely silent as she dived in for a name. Walking back to the podium, she unfolded the paper, and leaned her lips close to the mic. Dean held his breath. A name rung out as clear as a bell throughout the square. And it was not his name.

It was Sam Winchester.
One time, when Dean was twelve, he had gotten attacked by a hound in the forest. It left him wounded on the ground, and gasping for air.

It felt almost exactly the same when he heard his brother’s name called. It was like he had forgotten how to speak, how to talk, and he felt a giant pain slice through his chest. The way Becky had said the name, so excitedly, flew around his head. A boy from the Seam grasped Dean’s arm and pulled him up. He realized that he had started to fall before boy had caught him.

This can’t be happening. Sam’s name was one in thousands! he thought dizzily. The odds had been entirely in his favour, but it didn’t matter. A ripple of angry whispers ran throughout the crowd.

Then Dean spotted his brother. The blood had drained from his face, and his hands were clenched at his side as he walked small steps past Dean towards the stage. Parts of his shirt had become untucked, and his brown hair was slightly ruffled.

Dean’s heart leapt inside of him. Hearing his little brother’s name called, seeing him walk fearfully up to the stage, it was all too much for Dean.

“What does it matter?” the mayor repeated again. “Let him come forward.” Sam was screaming Dean’s name, clinging to his arm.

“What does it matter?” Mayor Michael asked irritably. Becky turned to the mayor and glared wide-eyed for a few seconds, then sighed deeply into the microphone. The mayor’s eyes reverted to Dean, and Dean wondered if the mayor even knew who he was. Garth may have mentioned him a few times, and he had been to the mayor’s house to bring them strawberries weekly. He had been the boy the mayor had presented the medal of valour five years ago. A medal for his mother, who had burned alive in a house fire. Did the mayor remember that?

“What does it matter?” the mayor repeated again. “Let him come forward.” Sam was screaming Dean’s name, clinging to his arm.

“Sammy, let go,” Dean ordered.

“Dean, no! Please, Dean, you can’t!” Sam yelled.

“Sammy, let go of me,” Dean repeated, more harshly this time. His heart was like a stone inside his chest and his throat was tight. He kept his eyes forward, not being able to bear looking at his little brother. He could feel the tears starting to well up in the rims of his eyes, and stiffens. He couldn’t get emotion. When they replay the recording of the reaping that night, they might see his
tears. He’d be labeled as an easy target. A weakling. He took a deep breath and felt himself cutting off the emotion, going numb. Better to be numb then let himself be seen as weak. “Sam, please let go.” He felt Sam being pulled back and turned to see Lisa lifting Sam away from him.

“Up you go, Winchester.” she said, trying to keep her voice steady, then carried Sam off towards their father. Dean climbed towards the steps.

“Well done!” Becky gushed. “That’s the spirit!” She was pleased to finally have some action in the district. “What is your name?”

Dean cleared his throat. “Dean Winchester.”

Becky gasped with excitement. “I bet that was your brother! Didn’t want him to steal all the glory, did you? Well, lets give Dean Winchester a big round of applause! Come on everybody!” The sound of Becky’s soft clapping echoed through the silent square. Not a single person in District Twelve clapped. Dean stood, unmoving, his green eyes surveying the crowd with an uncomfortable gaze. They were bold for not clapping. Though small it may be, it was an act of defiance. A silent protest saying they did not agree. That it was not right.

Then something unexpected happened. First one person, than another, then in time the whole crowd. They lifted their hands and put three fingers of their left hand to their lips then held it out to Dean. It was a gesture rarely used. It meant thanks. It meant admiration. It meant goodbye to a loved one.

Dean took in a deep breath. He had been unaware anyone could care for a rugged hunter like himself. Before any overwhelming emotion could take over Dean, Bobby came stumbling onto the stage.

“This one,” he said, patting my shoulder. “Look at this one! I like this idgit.” His breath reeked of alcohol. “He is… tough!” He ruffled Dean’s hair and then stumbled away. “More than you!” he yelled, pointing towards Becky, the crowd, and then the camera. “More than you.” Then he fell off the stage and was knocked unconscious. Dean used the small time everyone’s attention was trained on Bobby to fish out his brother in the crowd. His jaw clenched. He stood with Lisa and his father, his eyes red and the tear streaks shining in the sunlight. He looked so young. That’s when Dean knew he had done the right thing. He would do anything to save his little brother. He cleared his throat one more time and pushed his emotions farther down inside himself. He could make it through this. For Sammy.

As Bobby was taken away on a stretcher, Becky tried to get back on track. “Well, what an exciting day!” She rubbed her palms down her shirt and tried to fix a few stray hairs that fell out of her hairdo. “And there is still more excitement to come. We still need to pick our other tribute!” She strode back towards the large container of names and stuck her hand inside. In a few seconds she snapped it back out, holding a folded slip of white paper triumphantly in her hand. She quickly came back to the podium to read the name. “Castiel Novak.”

Oh no. Dean thought. Not him. Of course he recognised this name. The odds are not in his favour today. Dean watched as he made his way to the stage. Medium height, black messy hair, clear blue eyes. Castiel’s composure remained, no tears were shed. But his eyes portrayed a different story, Dean noticed. His eyes looked sad, like that of a sad puppy. He climbed steadily to the stage and took his place. Becky called out for volunteers, but no one spoke. Dean knew he had brothers, but they were either too old or didn’t care enough. No volunteers was standard.

The mayor began giving his long speech, but Dean wasn’t listening. His eyes were still focused on Castiel. Why him? he thought. He told himself he shouldn’t care. They weren’t friends. They hadn’t really spoken. They’d only had one encounter and it happened years ago. Castiel probably
didn’t even remember. But Dean did.

It was during one of the worst parts of Dean’s life. His mother had just died in the house fire. His father was drinking a lot, and got angry a lot. Angry at Dean mostly. Dean wouldn’t let him get angry at Sam. Dean put up with his dad’s anger easily at home. He had mostly gone numb after his mom’s passing. After a month, the district expected them to go back to normal, however. They expected his dad to get a job. Only he didn’t. He just stayed home drinking. No amount of pleading from Sam seemed to get him to stop. Dean had to get a job on his own to support Sam. And that had just made his life worse. He had gotten angry at his dad, at work, at school. He was furious and terrified, and didn’t know how to deal with so much emotion, so he began to take it out on some school kids. Once or twice a week he would get into fights at school. The more fights the better. He didn’t want to rush going home to find his dad drunk or mad. His father was locked in his world of anger and sadness.

Dean had kept his dad’s drinking and anger fits a secret, for owning that much alcohol in one’s house was illegal and Dean didn’t want his father taken away from him too. Dean usually won the fights he got himself into at school, either because his anger gave him strength, or that the other kids would let him win out of pity. Except one didn’t. It happened after school. It was raining. Dean had started the fight, as usual. But this time the kid had a powerful punch and began to beat Dean into the mud. Punching, punching, over and over. By the time the kid left Dean, Dean’s face was covered in mud and blood and he ached everywhere. He was left alone, bleeding under the thundering sky. Slowly, he dragged himself under a tree for shelter. Through his tearing and puffy eyes, he saw the small church across the street. Dean scoffed to himself. Ironic, to be beaten and left for dead in front of a church. The Novaks live there, he noted. They were the head of the church. But they were far from friendly people. He knew he couldn’t go in there for refuge, so he sat in the rain, pain shooting through his face. He thought about attempting to go back home and find a way to fix up his face, but he couldn’t stand facing Sammy with this bloody mess, nor his dad’s dead eyes and angry stare, so he stayed. The pain didn’t stop, and soon he began wishing the kid had just knocked him out to save him the pain. He could feel his blood still trickling out from a cut. Come on, Dean, he told himself, man up. Don’t sit here wallowing in self pity. Get yourself together. It’s only a few scratches. But he couldn’t bring himself to move.

Suddenly, the church doors cracked open and the youngest son, Castiel, came out. He looked back at the church warily, then quietly ran over to where Dean was slumped up against the tree. Dean had seen the kid at school a couple of times, but never held a conversation. And of course Dean didn’t attend church. It was one of the only things the peacekeepers weren’t strict about. Castiel crouched down next to Dean and began to dab Dean’s cuts with some sort of gauze. Dean cringed, and put up a hand to stop him. But Castiel shook his head and continued. Then he revealed some alcohol from his coat and poured a little into Dean’s cuts. It hurt, but it would keep them from getting infected. Dean looked away out of embarrassment as Castiel finished tending to the wounds. Once he was done, he sat back. Dean looked up, and their eyes locked for a second, then Castiel ran back inside the church. From inside, Dean could hear his parent’s questioning what he had been doing and how dare he leave without permission and especially in the rain and lightning.

Dean’s pain had been dulled to a low throbbing. He gathered enough energy to lift himself off the tree and make his way back home. He arrived to find his dad already passed out and his little brother eating at the table. He smiled at his little brother, who looked concerned at Dean’s condition but then smiled back. Dean went into his room and threw himself onto his bed. Why had that boy done that? Dean couldn’t explain his actions. He didn’t understand. He went to school the next day and saw Castiel, but Castiel didn’t even glance at him. Strange boy… Dean thought. After school, Dean didn’t start a fight. Nor the next day. Or the next.
And he still hadn’t had a fight with a schoolmate since that day. Dean stood on stage, staring at the boy. For a second their eyes met, just like they had that day, then Castiel quickly looked away. Dean had thought about thanking him at one point for what he had done, but the time had never arisen. And now it never will. Because they were all about to be sent into an arena to kill each other. How was Dean somehow going to fit a thank you in now? Surely it wouldn’t be sincere if he said it as he’s smashing his skull in, right?

The mayor finally finished his speech, and gestured for Dean and Castiel to shake hands. Castiel’s handshake was firm like Deans, but his hands were soft, unlike Dean’s rough hands of a hunter. Castiel’s eyes once again met Dean’s and he gave Dean what he thought was a reassuring squeeze of the hand. Or maybe it was just a nervous spasm.

They turned back towards the crowd and Dean put on his stone, expressionless look. The anthem played.

Oh well, Dean thought to himself, there will be twenty four of us in the arena. Hopefully someone else kills him before I do.

Although, the odds had not been very good lately.
Chapter 3

The anthem ended and Dean and Castiel were escorted by a group of peacekeepers into the Justice building. Once inside, Dean was brought into a room and left alone. His eyes ran over the rich contents of the room. To his left was a velvet couch and a few chairs, and beneath him was thick, deep coloured carpet. He ran his fingertips over the velvet as he tried to mentally prepare himself for what was to come next. The next hour was given to the tributes to say goodbye to their loved ones. Dean inhaled deeply. He knew crying was not an option.

His brother and father came first. Dean reached out to Sam, and Sam quickly embarrassed Dean in a hug. His father stood next to them, awkwardly. For a little bit, nobody talked, nobody moved. Then Dean began to tell them all the things they need to remember to do, as Dean won’t be there to remind them anymore.

Sam was to not take any Tesserae. They could get by on selling milk and cheese from Sam’s goat, if they’re careful. Lisa could get them the herbs that Sam did not already grow, but he must be careful to describe them because Lisa didn’t know herbs as well as Dean did. She would also bring them game, and would probably not ask for compensation but they should give her some milk or cheese in return.

Dean didn’t suggest Sam learn how to hunt. He wanted to keep Sam away from that life as much as possible. He had tried to take Sam a couple times, but he kept telling Dean that they could save it and he could let it live.

When Dean was done with instructions of fuel and trading and staying in school, he turned to his dad and gripped his shoulder tightly. “Listen to me. You need to stop drinking and start acting like a father again.” A flash of anger flared in his father’s eyes, but then diminished. He took a deep breath and looked at his son.

“I know. I’ll try-” His eyes strayed towards the floor.

“No trying. You will. There’ll be no me to support both of you this time. It doesn’t matter what happens. It doesn’t matter what you see on the screen. You have to promise me you’ll fight through it!” Dean’s voice rose to a yell. His father pulled his shoulder from Dean’s grip, his anger beginning to rise. “You have to take care of him!”

“Dean,” Sam interjected. “It’ll be alright. You’re brave and strong. Maybe you can win this.” Dean knew he couldn’t win. And somewhere in Sam’s heart, he must have known too.

“Maybe,” Dean said. He had to pretend he hadn’t already given up, to show his dad not to give up either. Besides, it wasn’t in Dean’s nature not to go down without a fight. “Then we’ll be as rich as Bobby.”

“I don’t care about being rich. I just want you to come home. You have to try, Dean. Really really try,” Sam said.

“I will,” Dean promised. And because of Sam, he know he really will have to try.

Then the Peacekeeper was at the door, signaling their time was up. Sam hugged Dean so hard it hurt. “I love you,” Dean told Sam, and then they were taken away. Dean collapsed in a velvet chair and covered his face with a pillow.

Someone else entered the room. Dean removed the pillow from his face and was surprised to see
the pastor, Castiel’s father, standing in front of him. Why would he have come to visit Dean? They did know each other a bit, but he knew Sam better. Sam and Dean would trade with them sometimes, but would always wait until the wife was gone, because the pastor was much nicer. Dean felt certain he would never hit his son the way Dean saw his wife did. Why why had he come to see Dean?

The pastor sat awkwardly on the edge of a plush chair. They sat in silence, the pastors eyes watching Dean heavily. Then the Peacekeeper summoned him. “I’ll watch over your brother and make sure he eats,” he said at last, as he left the room. Dean felt a small amount of pressure rise from his chest at the pastor’s words. People seemed to be fond of Sam. Maybe that fondness would help keep him alive.

Dean’s next guest was also unexpected. Garth walked straight into the room. He was not teary eyed or evasive. There was a tone of urgency in his voice. “They let you wear one token from home in the arena. Will you wear this?” He held out a circular gold pin, one that was on his shirt at their earlier meeting. Dean hadn’t paid much attention to it before, but now he saw it was a bird in flight.

“Your pin?” he asked Garth. Wearing a token from the district was the last thing on Dean’s mind.

“Promise you’ll wear it into the arena, Dean.” He fixed the pin onto Dean’s shirt. “Promise?”

“Yes.” Dean said. Then Garth is gone, leaving Dean thinking he and Garth actually were friends.

The last visitor was Lisa. She rushed in to hug Dean. “Listen,” she began. “Getting a knife should be pretty easy, but you have to get your hands on a gun. That’s your best chance.”

“What if they don’t have a gun?”

“Then find a knife. You know how to use those. Dean, it’s just hunting. You’re the best hunter I know.”

“It’s not just hunting. They’re armed, and they’re humans, Lisa.”

“You’ll have more practice than half of them. You know how to kill.”

The Peacekeepers were back too soon. Lisa asked for more time, but they began to take her away. Dean began to panic.

“Don’t let Sam starve!” he yelled out.

“I won’t! You know I won’t! Dean, remember, I-” They pulled her out of the room, leaving Dean to only wonder what Lisa would have wanted him to remember.

It was a short ride from the Justice Building to the train station. When Dean removes himself from the car, he finds the station swarming with reporters. It was a good thing he hadn’t cried. He detached himself from his emotions, training his eyes on what was ahead, trying to ignore the millions of camera’s pointed directly at him.

Castiel, on the other hand, looked confused and puffy eyed. Dean wondered if that would be his strategy in the games. To appear weak, but then come out fighting.

Finally, they’re allowed on the train. Once inside, the train started moving. Dean was surprised by the speed of the train. Their journey to the capitol would take them less than a day. The tribute train was fancier than the room in the Justice Building. They each had their own chambers with a bedroom, dressing area, and private bathrooms. The drawers are filled with fine clothes. Becky tells the two tributes to choose any of the clothes and use anything they want to their disposal as
long as they’re ready for supper in an hour.

Dean peeled off his father’s clothes and took a hot shower. He’d never taken a real shower before, only baths, and never this hot. Once finished, he dressed in a plaid button up and pants. At the last minute he remembered the pin Garth had given him. For the first time, he got a good look at it. The golden bird was connected to a gold ring around the outside by its wings. The bird looked familiar to him… a mockingjay. His mother had been particularly fond of mockingjays. Something about the little bird seemed comforting to Dean. Like a little part of his mother was with him. He fastened the pin to his shirt.

Effie came to collect him for supper. He followed her down a narrow corridor to the dining room. Castiel Novak sat waiting for them, the chair next to him empty.

“Where’s Bobby?” Becky asked brightly.

“He’s taking a nap,” Castiel answered simply.

The supper came in courses. A thick carrot soup, green salad, lamb chops and mashed potatoes, cheese and fruit, a chocolate cake. Throughout the meal Becky kept reminding them not too get too full, for there was more to come. But Dean stuffed himself anyway. He had never tasted food so good. Once the meal was over Dean fought to keep his food down, and he noted that Castiel looked a little green himself.

They were escorted into a room with large TVs to watch a recap of the reaping across Panem. One by one they watched the other reapings, the names being called, examining their competition. Then district twelve’s reaping came on. Dean watched himself as he volunteered for his brother, the desperation in his voice, then Lisa pulling Sam away. Bobby fell of the stage and the stretchers took him away. Castiel’s name was drawn and he quickly took his place. They shake hands. The anthem plays and the program is done.

“Your mentor has a lot to learn about presentation!” Becky snaps.

“He was drunk,” Castiel states. “He’s drunk every year.”

“Every day,” Dean mumbled with a smirk.

“Yes,” Becky hissed. “How odd you find it amusing. Your mentor is your lifeline in these games. The one who advises you and lines up your sponsors.” Just then, Bobby trudged into the room.

“I miss dinner?” His voice was slurred. He vomited, then fell into the mess.

“So laugh away!” Becky glared at Dean, then hopped over the mess and fled the room.
Chapter 4

For a few moments, Castiel and Dean took in the scene of their mentor trying to rise out of the slippery vile vomit. Dean and Castiel exchanged a glance. Bobby didn’t seem like much, but Effie was right about one thing. He’s all they had once they’re in the arena. The two boys each took one of Bobby’s arms and helped him to his feet.

“I trip?” Bobby asked. “Smells bad.” Dean and Castiel half led half carried Bobby back to his room. Since they couldn’t exactly set him down on his embroidered bedsheets, they dumped him into the bathtub and turned on the shower.

“It’s okay, Dean, I can take it from here,” Castiel said.

“Okay... well, have fun.” Dean turned to exit the room.

“I don’t understand, you think this is fun? It doesn’t smell very good and-”

Dean smirks. “Castiel, it was sarcasm.”

“Oh.” Dean exited the room and enters his own bedroom. He realised he was still smiling, and quickly wiped it from his face. Castiel was acting kind. People like that had a way of working their way inside Dean and rooting there. He couldn’t let him do that. Not where they were going. From that moment on he decided to have as little as possible to do with the pastor’s son.

He walked across his room towards a window. For a while he stood staring out the train window, watching the landscape speed past him. In the distance, he saw the light of another district. 7? 10? He didn’t know. His mind strayed towards his brother and father. What was Sam doing right now? Was his father still drinking? The answer was probably yes, but he wished it was no. Sam would undoubtedly have a hard time sleeping that night. Dean pictured that old cat, Ruby, watching over Sam. If he cried, she would wriggle her way into his arms and curl up there. That thought comforted Dean. He’s glad he hadn’t drowned that cat. Imagining his home made him ache of loneliness. It felt so long ago since Lisa and Dean had been eating blackberries in the forest. Had it really only been that morning? It seemed like a lifetime ago. Maybe if he went to sleep, he’d wake up in district 12, where he belonged.

The drawers of the dresser held a multitude of nightclothes, but Dean just stripped off his shirt and pants and crawled into the bed in his underwear. If there ever was a right time to cry, it’d be then, at night, alone in his room. But the tears didn’t come. He felt to numb and too tired to cry. So he let the train rock him into oblivion.

Grey light leaked through the curtains when a tapping on the door roused Dean. He could hear Becky’s voice, calling him to rise. “Up up up! It’s going to be a big, big day!” Dean climbs out of bed and put the plaid shirt back on, figuring it isn’t too dirty from one night’s wear. Dean traced the gold outline of the mockingjay pin, thinking of his mother, and of his father and brother having to get up and get on with things.

As Dean entered the dining car, Becky passed him holding a cup of black coffee. She glared at Bobby as Bobby sat chuckling at Castiel, who looks slightly embarrassed about something.

“Sit, sit!” Bobby said gruffly as he saw Dean enter the room. The moment he slid into his seat he was served an enormous platter of food. A cup of dark brown liquid was set in front of him.

“They call it hot chocolate,” Castiel told him. Dean took a sip. The warmth of the liquid spread
through him. It was delicious.

Once Dean was done stuffing the food in his mouth, he sat back, watching Castiel and Bobby. Castiel was still eating, breaking off bits of his roll and dipping it in the hot chocolate. Bobby was drinking a red liquid which he kept thinning with a white liquid he poured from a flask. Judging by the smell, Dean guessed it was some sort of spirit.

As Dean observed Bobby, he realised why the District 12 tributes never stood a chance in the games. It wasn’t that they were underfed or lacked training. The District 12 tributes hardly ever got sponsors and Bobby was a large part of the reason why. The sponsors didn’t want to deal with an unmannerly drunk like Bobby.

“So, you’re supposed to give us some advice,” Dean said to Bobby.

“Here’s some advice. Stay alive.” He laughed then took another swig of his drink. Dean and Castiel exchange glances. Dean is surprised by the hardness in his blue eyes. Then Dean quickly looked away, reminding himself he isn’t to have anything to do with this boy.

“That’s not very funny,” Castiel said. He lashed out at the drink it Bobby’s hand, knocking it out of his hands. The glass falls to the floor, sending the blood red liquid onto the carpet.

Bobby considered that for a moment, then punched Castiel in the jaw, sending him stumbling backwards. When he turned back to reach for his spirits, Dean grabbed a butter knife in his hand and smoothly stabbed it into the table, between Bobby’s hand and the spirits, only missing Bobby’s fingers by a few. Dean braced himself to deflect his hit, knowing how from spending so many years with an angry father, but the hit didn’t come. Instead Bobby sat back in his chair and squinted at them.

“Well, what’s this?” He asked. “Did I actually get a pair of fighting idgits this year?” Bobby stared at them some more.

Castiel rose from the floor and pulled himself back into his chair. He reached for the ice that had been keeping the fruit cold.

“No,” Bobby said. “Let the bruise show. The audience will think you got into a fight with another tribute before you’ve even made it into the arena.”

Castiel tilted his head. “But it’s against the rules to get into a fight with another tribute before the arena-”

“Only if they catch you. The bruise says you fought and weren’t caught. Even better.” He turned to Dean. “Can you hit anything with a knife besides that table?” Dean yanks the knife out of the table and throws it across the room. It wedges between to wall panels. A hint of a smile reached Dean’s lips.

“Stand over here, both of you.” Bobby nodded to the middle of the room. They obeyed, and he began circling them, prodding them, checking their muscles, examining their faces. “Well, you’re not entirely hopeless. Once the stylists get a hold of you, you’ll be attractive enough.” He stared at them for a few more seconds. “Alright, I’ll make a deal with you. You don’t interfere with my drinking and I’ll stay sober enough to help you. But you have to do whatever I say.” It wasn’t much of a deal, but it was a huge leap from where they were ten minutes ago.

“Fine,” said Castiel.

“So help us,” Dean said. “When we get to the arena what’s the best strategy at-”

“One thing at a time. In a few minutes we’ll pull into the station. You’ll be put in the hands of
your stylist. You’re not going to like what they do to you, but don’t resist no matter what it is.”

“But...” Dean began.

“No buts. Don’t resist.” Then Bobby grabbed the bottle of spirits and exited the car. As the door swung closed, the car went dark. Dean figured they must be going through a tunnel. Dean and Castiel stood in silence as the train sped along. The train began to slow and bright light flooded the compartment. Dean and Castiel rush to the window, staring at the glistening buildings that tower over them in a rainbow of hues. Oddly dressed people strolled down the streets in extravagant wigs and exaggerated clothing. All the colors seemed artificial, the blues too light, the greens too bright, the pinks too deep. The people pointed at them eagerly as they realised it was a tribute train. Dean stepped away from the window. It was sickening to him, their excitement, knowing they couldn’t wait to watch him die. Castiel, however, held his ground, staring curiously at the strange people. He doesn’t look away until the train pulls into the station, blocking them from his view.

Dean stared at the boy. Maybe he had misjudged him. He thought of all of Castiel’s actions since the reaping. The friendly squeeze when they shook hands. His father showing up and promising to help Sam... had Castiel put him up to that? His puffy eyes at the station. Volunteering to help Bobby but challenging him the next morning, once his nice-guy act failed. And now looking out the window, already trying to win the crowd. Dean sensed Castiel had a plan forming. Castiel hadn’t accepted death, he was still fighting hard to stay alive. Which also meant that the kind boy who had helped Dean clean his wounds after the fight would be fighting hard to kill him.
Dean cringed as the strange razor ran along his jawline. “Sorry!” the woman chimed with her strange capitol accent. “But we’ve got to get you shaved!” Dean watched as the woman with golden eyebrows shaved the stubble from his chin, wondering why they talked in such high pitches and why everything they said seemed to go up at the end as if they were always asking questions.

“All done!” the woman piped with a smile and set the razor down on a metal table. Dean lifted his hand and ran it along his now smooth face.

Dean had been in the Remake Center for more than an hour and still had yet to mean his stylist. Apparently his stylist didn’t want to meet him until the other members have cleaned him up, which included not only the shave but a head to toe body scrub that not only eliminated all the dirt but at least three layers of skin, leaving Dean feeling raw, a feeling which he did not like. But he kept the deal with Bobby and didn’t protest to anything.

“You’re doing well,” another said. “I just hate the ones who whine.” The others agreed. Dean was removed from the table and asked to remove the thin robe they had given him and he stood there, completely naked, as they observed their work.

“Excellent! Now he looks more like a human,” they all laughed and Dean forced himself to smile and thank them for their work.

“Oh, this is nothing, dear. By the time Charlie is done with you you will be so handsome!” The one with gold eyebrows said as he bopped Dean on the nose. It took all Dean had to keep the smile on his lips. “Let’s call in Charlie!” Dean wiped the smile off his face as soon as they left the room, but he found it hard to absolutely hate them. They were just idiots who were trying to help. Dean resisted the urge to put his robes on, assuming his stylist would just ask him to remove them again. Instead he ran his hands through his clipped and styled hair and across his smooth jaw line.

The door reopened and a young woman who must have been Charlie entered. Dean was surprised by her lack of extravagance. She seemed oddly plain and calm compared to the others that inhabited the capitol.

“Hey, Dean. I’m your stylist, Charlie,” she said in a friendly voice that seemed to lacked that capital trill that most voices here had.

“Hey,” Dean greeted cautiously.

“Just give me a moment, k?” She began to circle around Dean, taking in every inch of his body. Dean distracted himself by staring off at the white walls around him. It made Dean slightly uncomfortable, which usually lead to some cocky remark made, which he figured wouldn’t help him at the moment. So he tried to stay quiet and ignore the awkwardness of it all.

“You’re new, aren’t you?” Dean said hesitantly.

“Yep, first year doing this.”

“And that’s why you’re stuck with district twelve,” Dean assumed.

“No, I asked for this district,” she stated without further explanation. “Why don’t you put your robes back on and we’ll have a chat.” Charlie led Dean into a sitting room and the two of them sat down on lush red chairs. In between them was a small table. Charlie pressed a button and the table
split open and out rose two fresh burgers. Dean’s eyes lit up hungrily.

“You looked like the burger type guy,” she commented. She turned the plate around to reveal a piece of pie and smiled. Dean’s mouth began to water happily, but still he wondered what it must be like to live where food was available at the touch of a button, and suddenly the food seemed a little less appetizing.

“We must seem despicable to you,” Charlie said, as if she had read his mind.

“You are, but I can’t resist this burger,” Dean picked it up hungrily.

“While you’re eating, I’d like to discuss your costume for the opening ceremony. As you probably know, the costumes will have to reflect your district.”

“So I’m guessing it’ll be some sort of coal miner getup?” Dean asked with slight irritation. District twelve had had some of the worst costumes in the past few years and Dean was the least bit thrilled to have to wear one.

“Not exactly a coal miner’s outfit. Seems a bit overdone to me, don’t you think? I want to put you in something you’ll be remembered in.” Dean hoped that wouldn’t mean he’d have to go naked or something. “I want to focus more on the coal than the miner. You’re not afraid of fire, are you?” Charlie sees Dean’s expression and grins.

A few hours later Dean was dressed in simple black from ankles to neck. Charlie told Dean he was going to be lit on fire.

“It’s not real fire, just a synthetic fire that I came up with,” Charlie explained. But Dean still wasn’t convinced he wouldn’t be barbequed by the end of the ceremony. Charlie ran her fingers through Dean’s hair a few times and then took a step back and looked at him. “I want the audience to remember you. Dean, the boy on fire.”

Soon after Castiel appeared, dressed in a similar outfit. All the stylists seemed giddy about the impression the two of them would make. Except Charlie. She seemed to keep her distance from the others a bit. Though she still had an almost dorky smile on her face.

Castiel and Dean were whisked down to the main level of the Remake Center, which was essentially a giant stable. The opening ceremony was about to begin. Groups of tributes were put on the chariots pulled by horses. Castiel and Dean were guided onto theirs and arranged them how they wanted them.

“What do you think about the fire?” Dean whispered to Castiel.

He looked wary. “Well, I’d rather not die before I even get into the arena.”

“Bobby said to listen to the stylists, but I don’t think he ever considered they’d light us on fire…”

“Where is Bobby anyway? I thought he was supposed to be here.”

Dean grunted. “With the amount of alcohol in him it wouldn’t be the best idea to have him around fire.”

Castiel squinted his eyes at him and nodded. “I guess that wouldn’t be such a good idea.”

The opening music begins and district 1’s chariot began to pull out. The crowd began to cheer as they sew them. District 1 is always a favourite. Then district 2 exited and so on. Just as district 11 begins to go Charlie appeared with a torch in hand.
“Well, here we go!” And before either of the two boys could react they were both on fire. She let out a sigh of relief as she watched the flames. “It works.” She smiled at them. “Remember, heads high! And smile!” She eyed Dean directly as she said ‘smile’.

As the chariot began to move and Charlie disappeared Dean took a look at Castiel. He looked amazing with the fire blazing around him. But he didn’t look too thrilled. Dean noticed his hands holding onto the front so tight his knuckles went white.

“Castiel,” Dean whispered as they entered the city. “Relax. You’re not going to burn to death.” The boy nodded but didn’t look any less nervous. “Hey, loosen up. Put on a smile for the crowd.” Dean catches a glimpse of how they look on one of the large screens. They look stunning. The crowd is cheering loudly, but Castiel is still stiff as a board. Then Dean gets a sudden, crazy idea. He reached for Castiel’s hand, pries it from the bar he was holding to, and holds it in his own. Castiel looked at him with confusion but Dean shook his head.

“Don’t look at me, look at the crowd.” Castiel obeyed and turned his attention to the roaring crowd. The people of the capital were going nuts, screaming, throwing flowers, shouting their names. For the first time Dean seemed to feel a bit of hope.

It’s not until they’ve reached the City Circle that Dean realised he was still holding Castiel’s hand, and tried to let go.

“No, don’t let go. I might fall out of this thing if you do,” Castiel said.

“Okay.” The horses pull the chariots up to Lucifer’s mansion and come to a hault.

The president, a man with sandy hair and a strong frame, gave the welcome speech and then the anthem played and the horses pranced around the circle one more time and then head back towards the Training center. As the doors closed behind them the prep teams came out and began showering them in praise. Charlie extinguished their flame and Dean and Castiel finally let go of each other’s hands.

“Thank you for, uh, holding on to me out there,” Castiel said.

“Oh, sure. No problem. Whatever.” Dean turned away quickly and reminded himself that Castiel is probably plotting his murder as they speak.

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