

Ugly Sweater ‘Verse

Art by covered-inrain

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Rating: PG-13 through NC-17

Pairing: Dean/Cas, Sam/Sarah Blake, Bobby/Jodi

Spoilers: none after season 5

Word Count: 80k+ (and counting!)

Summary: If they really go back and think about it... it all started with a tree. A Christmas tree, that is. Castiel is human now, and the apocalypse is not only over, it's been averted. Sam's away at NYU, finally finishing law school, and Dean's stuck in what is probably the most awkward situation of his life. He's not exactly sure how he ended up sharing a flat with Cas in Media, Pennsylvania, but he does know the curious would-be angel is sort of derailing his plans for a life of decadence and booze. Cas is trying to make the best of his humanity by exploring human holidays. Dean can't exactly complain because he's pretty much the reason Cas got his wings clipped in the first place.

Dean didn't actually want to fall in love, but how was he supposed to know it would all start with a goddamn tree?

Author's Notes: I meant it to be a one-off, I really did. All I wanted was Castiel in an ugly Christmas Sweater... 80k later, I still don't know how it happened! Thank you all for your continued support and feedback, without which I'd never have written any of this. There will be an update for every holiday until next Christmas.

(All fics are unbeta'd. All mistakes are my own. There are a couple (er, a lot) formatting issues I couldn't fix on the pdf, sorry! D:

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It Started With a Tree

"Why don't we have a tree inside, Dean?"

Dean glances away from the tv, where he's been mindlessly channel surfing through endless Christmas specials for about a half hour, and looks at Cas. The not-quite-angel is sitting on the floor beside the couch Dean sits on, looking outside distractedly. His attention is fixed on a car stopped at a traffic light; a big, thick Christmas tree is tied to its top with many ropes. The faintest bit of snow is beginning to fall, lightly dusting the tree. Dean and Cas can't hear from inside, but Dean wouldn't be surprised if the family in it was pumping Christmas tunes loud like it's classic rock and singing along out of tune in synchrony like all conventional families do during the holidays. Dean groans and clicks off the tv, standing and tossing the remote on the couch aggravatedly. Cas looks up at him and tilts his head.

"God, Cas, not you too."

"I don't understand."

"Yeah, well, you wouldn't."

Dean gives the car a last grouchy look as it drives off, green branches swishing as it accelerates. Cas eyes Dean curiously, eyes as calculating as they always are when Dean does something he doesn't understand. Which is often. It's been six months since Sam finally announced he'd be moving in with a girl he's found since the end of the apocalypse ("Saving the world kinda puts things into perspective, Dean. We have another chance to live our lives! You might want to do the same."), and three months since Dean and Cas decided they'd gotten a little weary of endless motel rooms and decided to put down a payment on a studio flat in Pennsylvania. They still hunt, unlike Sam, but more and more often they find themselves staying off the internet and away from the newspapers, casually and almost subconsciously avoiding new cases. Dean still drinks and Cas still gets a far-off look in his eyes every now and then, like he's remembering something that's been taken from him.

They avoid the subject of alcoholism and Cas' essential humanity much more effectively than they do potential cases.

Dean walks off towards the kitchen - one of the only positive things about the holidays is the fact that stores start

selling eggnog. He pours himself a glass, and looks through the liquor cabinet. He debates for a moment between brandy and rum and finally opts for the latter. He turns to grab the eggnog and -

"Jesus shit, Cas - don't *do* that." Cas is standing too-close-for-comfort... again. Dean's starting to get used to it, but it's no less disorienting. Or rude. After all, the guy's all out of angel mojo and can't even teleport - he's got no excuse for popping up unannounced anymore.

"My apologies." Cas says, but Dean suspects it's not very sincere (though it may be because he hears it all the time, now). Cas unceremoniously plucks the bottle of rum from Dean's hands and places it on the counter beside them. Dean scowls.

"What the hell?"

"I'm new to this," Cas says evenly, though there's an edge to it, "I've been stationed here for thousands of years, but have never *participated* in this - any of this. Human festivities, their customs... if I'm stuck in this form, forgive me for wanting to make the most of it. I want a tree, Dean."

Dean has a thousand reasons why he doesn't want a tree or Christmas specials on tv or presents or any of that, dating back from November 2, 1979 until the present. Number one being the only other living Winchester - the only person Dean would be willing to put on his holiday face for and make the best of this shitty season. But Sam's in Indiana with a beautiful girl, wrapping presents and eating cookies and planning on what to get her parents when they spend their holiday with them.

So yeah, Dean's festivity reasons are limited.

"You're not missing anything," Dean says dismissively, reaching for the bottle. Cas slaps his hand - lightly, but pointedly.

"I wouldn't know, would I?"

Dean sighs, exasperated, and looks Cas in the eyes. This is something he tries not to do very often. Every time he looks at Cas, really looks at him, he's knocked a little breathless by how *human* his angel looks, more so every day. This revelation comes with waves of guilt every time from the knowledge that Cas' fall, his humanity, is all Dean's fault. But that's another subject they don't talk about.

But now, looking at the earnest look in Cas' eyes, at the little bit of hope that's trying to fight the hopelessness Dean knows Cas faces every day, Dean can't say no. He has to get the goddamn angel a tree. He groans, downing his virgin eggnog and heading for the coat closet.

"Grab the keys, Cas."

"Dean?"

"Don't make me change my mind," Dean says, and Cas doesn't wait another beat. The excitement he exudes as he scrambles to get his trench coat is so endearing Dean almost forgets to be a scrooge.

* * *

There is nothing that can be said of the finished, decorated tree than that it has very obviously been decorated by a 30-something-year-old bachelor and an awkward, nerdy angel. Still, the two of them stand staring at the messy, glowing thing like parents looking at a newborn child. Cas is actually *smiling*, which is such a rare occurrence that Dean is tempted to go out and decorate the whole goddamn front yard, too, the whole shebang, just to keep that stupid cheesy grin on Cas' face. The realization of this makes Dean feel a little weird, though, so after a moment too long of admiring their handiwork, he clears his throat.

"So! Did that satisfy your Christmas fix? Can I have a drink now?"

Cas pries his eyes from the tree to look at Dean.

"No, Dean," Cas says sternly - and somehow he's still able to manage his I-am-an-Angel-of-the-Lord voice despite his lack of mojo because Dean swallows his retorts, unspoken. He eyes Cas a little warily. He still hasn't forgotten the heavenly ass-kicking Cas gave him in that alley so long ago. Dean's pretty sure he could easily take Cas now, in an even fight, but that sort of dizzy awe at the immense power of the celestial being he's friends with hasn't exactly faded from memory. If nothing else, Dean's learned to take Cas seriously.

... That, and maybe the fact that Dean kinda likes the way Cas' face looks when he smiles.

"Alright, what other holiday crap do you want to do, then?" Dean relents.

"Everything. Teach me everything."

And so Dean does. It nearly kills him, too, because Cas plays the holiday CD Dean gets him on repeat for hours and Dean never had any intention of memorizing all of the reindeer on Santa's sleigh but by day two he can recite them backwards. He lets Cas drag him to the mall to window shop (they don't exactly have a long list of relatives to buy presents for) and that weird feeling comes back when Cas stares at the huge tree in the center of the mall like it's some postcard from God or something. And Dean has to admit that the smell of gingerbread cookies throughout the house isn't exactly a bad thing. He doesn't join Cas when he bakes and he pretends to be asleep when Cas watches all the classic holiday movies Dean orders for him, but he can't help but feel a little secondhand warmth from all Cas' excitement.

It's about a week before Christmas when it hits Dean that he needs to get Cas a present.

The idea comes to him at about midnight. One of Cas' movies - Dean's pretty sure it's Rudolph, it's Cas' favourite - has just ended and Cas is passed out on the couch. The little loser's wearing Christmas pyjamas, for God's sake. He looks ridiculous, but Cas is too alien to understand embarrassment and had only wrinkled his eyebrows in confusion at Dean's breathless laughter over it. The whole 'sleeping angel' thing is still kinda trippy, but Dean's

finally used to it. Dean shuts off the tv when the credits end and the room is dark, save for the ethereal glow of their horribly decorated tree.

Cas looks peaceful in sleep, even more so in the light of the tree. *Their* tree. Dean turns his attention to it, giving it a fond look. It's a little crazy that it's even there - that Cas was able to pull an entire Christmas out of him. Dean has never had a Christmas like this before. While before he couldn't remember the last time he'd had a homemade cookie, Dean's pretty sure he's had about every type of cookie in creation in the past two weeks alone. He chuckles at the memory of Cas in a Christmas apron. The guy really wasn't kidding when he said he wanted to do the whole Christmas thing right.

The weird feeling thing has taken up permanent residence in Dean's chest.

It's that feeling that tells Dean he needs to get Cas a kickass present that is *not* from a gas station and not wrapped in newspaper. The weird feeling does not, however, tell Dean what to get.

He sighs, aggravated, and situates Cas so he's not dangling off the side of the couch. Cursing himself for being such a girl, he tosses a blanket over him and then leaves the room before the weird feeling can swallow him whole.

"Christ, Cas, you need *more* things?"

"We don't have a wreath, Dean. I am ashamed. We have no outdoor decorations."

"Nobody decorates a studio apartment, Cas. Married couples decorate their houses. Old people decorate their houses. A hunter and a nerd angel don't decorate shit." Castiel gives a pointed look at the Christmas tree and Dean scowls.

"Fine. I'll take you to the mall, but if I spend any more time in that holiday store I'm going to puke. I'll walk around and you can take your time."

"That works fine. I do have a bit of a list."

Dean's mouth starts to form the word *how*, but he thinks better of it and clamps it shut. There is no reasoning with Cas when he's in decorating mode.

Dean takes the time alone at the mall to search for a suitable Cas present. He has no idea what a sort-of-angel could possibly want so he's got no idea where to begin. He thought about asking Cas himself, but he thinks that might be breaking some sort of unwritten Christmas rule. He also thought about calling Sam, but he isn't exactly sure he knows how to explain the situation. Nothing in the windows seems appealing. All Dean knows for sure that Cas wanted was Christmas itself, and he obviously got it.

An hour later Cas is calling for help carrying things to the car and Dean's circled the mall again and again to no avail.

Cas bought a goddamn fireplace.

It's one of those cheesy fake ones, but it's pretty realistic and it actually gives off heat. Dean's absolutely mortified by the fact that his once-manly flat now has stockings hanging up. Thankfully, the wreath Cas bought does *not* have bows or anything else embarrassing. It's understated and kinda nice, if Dean's willing to admit (and he's not), and doesn't look too bad on their door. Dean's in the kitchen making hot chocolate for the two of them when he hears a crash from the living room. He rolls his eyes and puts down the mugs, idly wondering when exactly they obtained hot chocolate and how long he's been involved in making it as well. Somewhat disturbed by the fact that he cannot remember when, he treks to the living room. Cas is on the floor, scowling at a footstool.

"What were you trying to do?" Dean asks, amused, helping Cas from the floor. Cas points at the doorway to the

kitchen.

"The Internet says I'm meant to hang this everywhere," he explains, gesturing to the box in his hand. Dean takes it, looks it over, and starts laughing because he has no idea how else to react. The box reads, 'mistletoe'.

"Not in here you don't," he says, moving the box from Cas' reach when he grabs for it. "Do you even know what it's for?"

"The box didn't come with directions," Cas replies simply, reaching again for the box. Dean grins and moves away, playing keep-away with the box of mistletoe just for the fun of watching Cas try.

"Explain it to me," Cas says irritably, obviously annoyed that Dean's inhibiting his decorating.

"Ha, no," Dean says. He ends up dangling the box over Cas head, earning a glower from the shorter man. Cas gives him a pout that rivals Sam's and stops fighting for the box. Dean makes a note to punch his brother for teaching that awful look to Cas. It was unfair enough when only Sam did it.

"Please?" Cas asks quietly. Dean swallows, suddenly very aware of where the mistletoe is. He clears his throat and half-shoves the box at Cas.

"No, damnit. Do whatever you want with it."

Cas tilts his head; Dean scowls.

"Just - augh, go pick a movie. I'm almost done the hot chocolate." Cas' face lights up and Dean leaves for the kitchen, confused by the warm, red feeling on his face.

The day before Christmas eve, Dean still has no idea what he wants to get Cas. He knows he shouldn't be so annoyed by it, so fixated on picking something perfect... but he is, regardless, and it's enough to send him three towns over to distract himself with a hunt. It's a low-grade ghost with a thing for bitching it out near the holidays. The house she inhabits was recently purchased by a nice little Jewish family that seriously doesn't deserve to get a crazy lady in a Santa hat for a ghost. It was a pretty clean hunt; the graveyard she's buried in is around the corner and her grave is clearly marked. The grateful family rewards him with homemade fried doughnuts and Dean ends up sticking around for an hour or two.

When Dean gets home, it's already getting dark out. He thinks about stopping at the mall again, doing one last run through, but he knows it's pointless. He's at a loss on what to get his angel and tomorrow is Christmas Eve. His fingers grip tight around the steering wheel and he drives a little faster than intended. Dean Winchester does not accept defeat gracefully.

Dean sort of smells like he's been digging up graves and he's eager to get a hot shower and crawl into bed. Or, rather, into the couch with some blankets and a holiday movie with Cas, some cookies, hot chocolate... but no, of course Dean didn't want that. If Cas *forced* him, sure. It's not like he was looking forward to going home to his cheesy, overly made up house. Not like he grins at the wreath on the door as he turns the key in the lock.

Dean isn't exactly expecting the onslaught of new smells that hit him when he opens the door. It smells amazing. Dean can make out some sort of meat - turkey? - roasting, and the unmistakable smell of pie. He can feel his mouth watering a bit. Cas has seriously outdone himself, and it's not even Christmas Eve yet -

- but then, it might as well be, because Sam Winchester and Bobby Singer are sitting on his couch, chatting it up with Cas, drinking eggnog and listening to that dumb holiday CD and Dean's a little taken aback. He hadn't expected to see either of them any time soon, especially for the holidays. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out who called them to invite them over. Dean pushes down the desire to bear-hug Cas.

This is awesome.

"Sammy!" Dean calls and his giant moose of a brother bounds over and they hug, grinning at each other. Because while, yeah, finally parting ways after so many consecutive years together was long overdo, they're still brothers

and they've still been apart way longer than they have been in any of those years. Sam's hair is at a respectable length now and Dean suspects the new girlfriend had something to do with it. Dean notices she's not around with a certain amount of relief. It's not that Dean didn't like her, but he still couldn't remember her name and, for better or worse, she *is* the one who took Sam from him. Besides, Dean's uncomfortable enough as it is about his bachelor pad being all decked out in Christmas cheer without having some girl come over and coo over all the cute things Cas has done with the place.

"Man, I love what you guys have done with the place," Sam says, instantly reminding Dean that he actually has a massive ogre of a little sister as a sibling. Dean rolls his eyes.

"Of course you do. You shouldn't be encouraging Cas' Christmas fever, Sam! I have no idea what I'm going to do with him the day after everything's over."

Cas glares.

"I'm perfectly capable - "

"So how the hell are you, Sammy?" Dean asks, cutting through Cas' protests. Then Dean remembers Bobby's there, too, and his grin stretches even wider. "Bobby!"

Cas seems to have this sort of glow to him, like he's a little quiet ball of positive energy in the corner of the room. He's not saying much, just quietly observing, but Dean's eyes are drawn to him again and again. He can't help but wonder what he'd be doing right now if not for Cas - probably passed out in a motel somewhere, drunk, or out shagging the cheapest ass he could find at the nearest bar. The most festive he'd get is if said piece of ass was wearing a sexy Santa outfit.

Yet here he is, instead, spending the first real holiday with his entire family by a tree with a home cooked meal in the oven since before he can remember. All because of Cas. The weird feeling in his chest pulses like a knot being tightened. He realizes with a start that he's been staring. Naturally Cas, being Cas, is staring back. Damn angel never misses a beat. Dean looks away quickly.

"I thought you're spending the holidays with your chick and your future in-laws?" Dean asks conversationally, eating yet another of the cookies Cas has laid out. There's eggnog, too, but Cas didn't put out any alcohol and Dean's not sure if it was intentional or not. Knowing Cas, it probably was, but a party's not a party without some booze and Dean's considering getting up to grab some. After a moment decides he might just wait til someone asks, though. Waiting can't hurt.

"We are. That's why Cas invited us over today, instead. Now I get at least a little time with you guys." Dean shoots Cas a grateful look he hopes Cas understands. Cas flashes him a tiny smile and stands up.

"I believe the food should be done. If you'll all gather around the table I'll be out with it in a second."

"I'll help," Dean adds, getting up and following Cas. If Sam and Bobby exchange looks, Dean doesn't see it.

Out of earshot in the kitchen, Dean grabs Cas shoulder gently and looks him in the eyes.

"Thanks, man. Seriously."

"It is nothing, Dean. As much for my benefit as yours. But you're welcome."

Dean isn't expecting that damn weird feeling to do a flip when Cas meets his eyes, but he takes it in stride. He begins pulling dishes from the cabinets.

"Shit, Cas, baking cookies is one thing, but I didn't know you could cook. And from the smell of that thing, you cook fucking fierce."

"It's a recipe, Dean," Cas says idly as he pulls the roast from the oven, "and I've been well trained by the chef on DVR. Hopefully it tastes as good as it smells."

Dean wants to tell Cas that he's pretty sure Cas couldn't fail at anything if he tried, but that's borderline... something, and Dean doesn't want to cross into whatever that something is just yet. He carries out dishes and Cas carries out the roast and they go back to the kitchen to bring out utensils and cups. On their way back in they bump shoulders in the doorway and Dean happens to look up. Cas is unfailingly stubborn; there's mistletoe hanging overhead and Dean's so red he's afraid his face will catch fire. Cas stares at him with such confusion it's obvious that everyone in the room is seeing Dean blush.

"You never explained this to me," Cas says thoughtfully, frowning. Sam and Bobby laugh.

"That's mistletoe, Cas. You hang it up and if two people are caught under it together, they're supposed to kiss," Sam explains.

"I see," Cas says, looking up. He looks at Dean thoughtfully, then, but Dean doesn't stick around to see if the angel's aware that mistletoe does not override personal boundaries and failure to kiss under it does not equate to lacking holiday spirit. He moves swiftly through the doorway, placing a handful of forks and knives on the table and taking a seat. Cas lingers for a moment, watching Dean. This drawn out glance would be slightly unnerving if it wasn't so common. Cas is essentially human, now, and with each passing day he's more and more aware of how humans interact and how human society works... but he still lacks a lot of basic common sense. Like, for instance, the etiquette of staring.

... It has not escaped Dean's notice that Cas never directs any long and lingering stares at anyone else, but he chooses to believe it's a "profound bond" thing and leave it at that.

"Alright, alright, we've schooled the angel on mistletoe. Way to go, Sammy. I won't save you if he tries to kiss you. But enough talk - time to eat!"

Cas' expression is inexplicably irritated for a moment, but it dissolves in a swift second and he takes a place to Dean's right. Everyone starts serving plates and Dean half expects Cas to stop everyone and insist they pray before eating. He doesn't, though, and Dean wishes he was more surprised. Cas hasn't spoken of God ever since the apocalypse ended without the Big Man's intervention. Cas' faith is in a garbage dump somewhere beside Dean's amulet. Dean absently touches his neck. It still feels too bare, even now. He pushes away these thoughts, however, in favour of enjoying his family's company.

His family. All together under one roof, eating a big meal together for a holiday. Who would have thought?

"So when are you two gonna find yourself some gals and settle down?" Bobby asks Dean and Cas as the conversation becomes talk of Sam and the beau he's so smitten with.

Dean laughs. "Right after you do, Bobby," he says, sarcastic, but to Dean's surprise Bobby looks a little sheepish.

"Wait - *wait*. Hold on, Bobby - is there a *lady* in your life?" Dean says, smug and grinning.

Bobby turns beet red. "Shut up, you idjit. It ain't nothing."

"Oh, nothing, Bobby?" Sam asks, his tone gleeful. "Last I heard you said you'd be spending Christmas with the sheriff."

Dean whistles. "The sheriff, eh? Quite a catch there, Bobby."

"Shut up, both of you. That's not what I was talking about, anyway. I'm talking about *you* two," Bobby says gruffly, gesturing to Dean and Cas. "You don't have to stay hunters forever, you know. You've more than earned the apple pie life."

Cas shrugs. "Romance has never occurred to me before. I don't see the appeal to it." His eyes flicker briefly to the mistletoe, but it's so quick it's almost imperceptible.

Dean notices.

"Nobody gets out of the hunter lifestyle, Bobby, you know that," Dean says dismissively, stuffing his mouth with a forkful of roast.

"I don't know, Dean," Sam contradicts, "I seem to be doing fine."

Dean says something in between chews that sounds something like, "Myeh mut yer a gwrl," and follows it with a big gulp of apple cider. Sam rolls his eyes.

"Well, at least you two have each other. Can't say it isn't cozy in here."

Dean opens his mouth to retort, but then closes it when he realizes he has nothing to object with. It dawns on him that he does, in fact, have Cas. And it *is* cozy, all warm and decorated everywhere. It's more of a home than Dean has had since he was four and, though he'd never admit it, he kinda likes it. He likes having Cas around, too. Cas has livened up since he started all this holiday crap and his company's not half bad. Beats living alone, for sure.

"At least until Dean finds a mate and settles down, like you," Cas says conversationally, mopping mashed potatoes from his plate with a dinner roll. His words are said casually but Dean can't help but think of the gravity of them. What *would* Cas do if Dean ever moved out? Human or not, he's still alien to this world. He'd have no idea how to navigate it on his own.

I'd move him in or something, Dean silently resolves resolutely. For whatever reason, though, this promise to himself does not satisfy him.

"Yeah, well," Sam says awkwardly, trying to diffuse the weird atmosphere Cas' statement caused, "You're not too bad looking, Cas. I'm sure you've got chicks lining up to be with you, right?"

Cas shrugs again. It's a very human gesture, and it's slightly disorienting watching him do it. But then, so is eating, yet here they are, gathered around a table and feasting together.

The subject shifts to other things, eventually, like recent hunts and Bobby's auto shop and Sam's upcoming return to law school. It's still a little surreal. The apocalypse is really over. No more dick angels, no more fear, no more weight of the world on their soldiers. They're celebrating Christmas. It's friggin trippy.

They drink wine after dinner, a strange change from their normal hard liquor and countless beers. No one complains - not even Bobby. Both Sam and Bobby seem to be making an effort towards self-betterment for their ladies' sake. Dean's not exactly sure why he hasn't hit the liquor cabinet yet, but every time he glances in that direction Cas catches his eye and he changes his mind. Wine is still alcohol, anyway. They all get a little buzzed off it, but it's a warm, comfortable buzz. Sam barely drinks any; he's the designated driver and he's got leave tonight so he can be back to his girlfriend by tomorrow. The night passes in affable chatter with the tv tuned to Rudolph (of course) in the background. It's the happiest Dean's been in a long, long time.

It's about 1am when Bobby and Sam finally say their goodbyes. There are hugs all around and promises to visit more often.

"Thank you for coming," Cas says and Sam grins, giving Cas a hug he'd obviously not been expecting. He looks surprised, but pleased. The expression is so endearing Dean sort of wants to hug his brother again, just for giving Cas the awkward smile on his face.

Sam seems to whisper something to Cas - Dean can't be sure - before letting him go. Cas looks at him curiously as they go.

Once their guests have safely departed, Cas and Dean fall back into the couch, exhausted. The lights are off, save for the Christmas lights, the glow of the tv and the zillions of gingerbread scented candles Cas has on every open surface in the apartment. The movie has ended and the screen is bright blue.

"Put in another one, Cas," Dean says sleepily. Cas yawns.

"... *You* want to watch a Christmas movie?"

"Shut up before I change my mind. It's Christmas eve."

Cas' smile is almost as bright as the tree lighting his face. He wanders off for a couple minutes and comes back with hot chocolate and blankets, tossing one on Dean and passing him a mug. Dean nods his head in thanks and cuddles up under the blankets. He's content and sleepy from the wine and if he was anyone but Dean Winchester, he'd probably be a little cuddly, too. But Dean Winchester doesn't cuddle.

Cas crawls into the couch, too, after putting on *The Grinch*, and bundles up under the blankets. He's a little too far into Dean's personal space than is necessarily comfortable, but Dean's too tired to care. Their "fireplace" is on full-blast, and the flat is snug and warm. Nothing in the world could bother him right now.

Dean's eyelids flicker every now and then as the movie begins, but he wants to fight sleep long enough to at least

finish his hot chocolate. He's just starting to nod off when he feels a head rest on his shoulder. His eyes blink open and he looks at Cas - who's asleep, now, half-finished cup still cradled in his hands. He's breathing softly and curled up, whole body tucked under the big fleece blanket he has. The weird feeling in Dean's chest is doing backflips. Dean plucks the mug from Cas' weak grip and puts both on the coffee table, then assesses his next options.

Dean really doesn't want to move. He's pretty sure the walls are gonna go vertigo if he tries to stand, now, and he's so comfortable he feels cemented to the spot. Of course, there's Cas, head slowly adjusting to having Dean as its pillow. Dean's sort of alarmed by how little this phases him. He should be freaked out and shoving the sleeping Cas away, but instead... well, instead he's kind of reveling in it.

Dean really, really does not want to acknowledge how perfect it feels to have Cas' head on his shoulder.

His mind is too hazy to properly come up with a proper course of action, so instead he works on auto-pilot. He adjusts Cas so they can both sleep comfortably side-by-side -- their couch is huge, it's easily possible -- and falls asleep before he can think too deeply on how absolutely, impossibly weird this is.

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Dean wakes up to the smell of food cooking—he could seriously get used to this. Smells like breakfast, eggs and pancakes, and Dean's off the couch and in the kitchen as soon as he's conscious enough to smell it. Cas is serving their two plates as Dean arrives, and Cas gives him a hesitant smile.

“I was about to wake you up,” he says, not meeting Dean's eyes. Like he's concerned Dean's going to mock him for getting up early to cook, or something. Dean sort of wants to hug him.

“Cas, this is awesome,” Dean says as he pulls up a chair. Cas finally looks at him, then, and there's a genuine happiness in his eyes that's overwhelming. Cas has been so unhappy for so long, so broken since the end of the world... it's amazing, see him with so much light in his eyes. Dean can remember the exact moment he'd realized that Cas' fall was going to be more painful than he'd thought before. One night, Cas had woken up in the middle of the night and called Dean's name, voice panic-stricken enough to rouse Dean from his slumber. When Dean, sleepy and irritable, had inquired what was wrong, Cas had said simply, *they're gone*. He'd slid a hand up and down his own back and whispered it again and again, ignoring Dean's inquiries at first. When he finally snapped out of what Dean could only assume was shock, he'd said, barely audible, my wings are gone. Thus was the final step in Cas' fall.

That was when Cas had become human. He's been essentially cheerless ever since.

But now... now there is vitality to him, something charming and unexpected that causes weird feelings Dean is not okay with, and Dean breaks eye contact abruptly.

“Merry Christmas Eve, Dean,” Cas says, pulling up a chair.

“Merry Christmas Eve, Cas,” Dean echoes absently. He's distracted, contemplating the warmth in his chest. Cas tilts his head but says nothing more. They're quiet as they eat, but it's a contented one that's only slightly awkward because Dean is never quiet. Still, it's an affable silence. Dean irritates himself in that he keeps glancing over at Cas, catching sight of blue eyes that make the weird feelings squirm around. He thinks of how they fell asleep and he feels embarrassed. Had Cas woken up with Dean's arms around him?

“So!” Dean says when their meal is done, “What happens today? It's Christmas Eve, so I know you have something planned.”

Cas bites his lip “It would seem that I should... but I don't. I've run out of ideas,” he admits reluctantly. Dean raises his eyebrows.

“You can't think of anything to do? This is your thing, though.”

Cas looks sheepish. “Sort of anti-climactic, isn't it? I apologize.”

Dean stands up, shaking his head as he clears the table. “Hell no. We're going out with a bang. I'll figure it out.”

“We?” Cas says, looking confused. Cas grabs their glasses and follows. Dean looks at him like he's crazy, stops where he's walking.

“Um, duh?”

“You were... adverse to the idea of Christmas, before. I just assumed...”

“Yeah, well,” Dean says awkwardly, and now it's his time to feel embarrassed. “You converted me, alright? Let's not make a chickflick moment out of it.”

Cas smiles and Dean's getting really, really fed up with the crazy feelings his insides are causing. He looks up, exasperated – and of course, a la chickflick movie – they're under the mistletoe again. Cas notices, too.

“I should take this down, shouldn't I?” Cas asks. His voice sounds strange, though he seems to be aiming for amused. It's not working, exactly.

“Nah,” Dean says dismissively, continuing into the kitchen, “it looks cool, at least. Mind as well keep it. It's not like we have anyone around to kiss, so what the hell?”

“Mhm,” is all Cas says.

It turns out it makes absolutely no sense that Cas couldn't find anything to do. Dean has an inkling Cas got a little depressed over the end of the holidays and gave up—but Dean's not having that. Cas lazes around on the couch, watching Rudolph for the eighty-millionth time, while Dean scours the internet. It takes all of ten minutes for him to find a wide range of things to do.

“Cas,” Dean says, “go get dressed.”

Cas looks at him inquisitively. “For what purpose?”

“We're going ice skating.”

Cas smiles again and Dean tells himself he might need to get used to it. He only hopes that smile will stick around once Christmas is over.

“You smell like a grave, Dean. Go shower and we'll go.” Dean can't argue with that logic, so he heads off to the bathroom. They rendezvous in the living room 20 minutes later.

Cas is in a big, oversized Christmas sweater and it's only adorable because it's atrocious. It's got reindeer on it, including one that looks suspiciously like friggin Rudolph, and is knitted and looks warm. He's going all out in looking ridiculous, because he's got on one of those lumberjack hats with the earflaps that everyone's been wearing lately. Dean's not even sure when he got it.

Dean is getting seriously, seriously sick of his heart flipping because of Cas. He should be laughing, not fighting the completely inappropriate desire to hug his roommate.

“Ready?” Cas asks.

Dean has to clear his throat twice before he trusts himself to speak.

“Ready.”

Cas can't ice skate.

The first time he falls, Dean loses his breath from laughing so hard, clutching his stomach as his shoulders shake. Cas had glared at him, but seemed genuinely good natured about it and even laughed a little, himself. By the fourth time Cas falls, Dean's starting to get concerned the not-quite-angel might get bruised.

“You're friggin awful, Cas,” Dean says, fighting the smile twitching at his lips.

Cas rubs his lower back as he stands, scowling. “I've noticed.”

“Are you – do you want to like, stop?”

Cas shakes his head vigorously. “Despite my injuries, I am having fun.”

Dean feels a little better about that, but he can't help but feel like Cas would be having more fun if he wasn't falling on his ass every five minutes. Dean crosses in front of Cas, skating backwards.

“Watch me, Cas,” Dean says, “It's not that different from walking. You just have to balance.”

"If that were true, I'd be skating just fine right now." He wobbles a bit, and Dean reaches out to keep him from falling, grabbing Cas' hands. They linger there a moment. Dean swallows.

"It'd be easier to keep your balance if you held on, wouldn't it?" he says evenly, trying to sound as diplomatic as possible. Cas nods.

"I'd imagine so."

Dean takes a deep breath and thinks briefly that this moment is another borderline something moment, but he waves it off. Cas needs his help, it's Christmas eve and Dean's not going to dick it up because his heart's been acting stupid lately. He's just helping Cas skate. No big deal.

Dean skates so that he's at Cas' left, holding one hand as they go, keeping Cas balanced. His face is red, but it's cold enough that it could easily look like his cheeks are just rosy from the chill. Cas' face looks about the same. Dean is inexplicably disappointed when it occurs to him that Cas really is just cold. This disappointment is disorienting.

"Thank you, Dean," Cas says after they've been skating quietly a while. It's obvious from his voice that he's not just thanking Dean for the balance—it's everything, and Dean's not sure how to deal with a thank you that big.

"Hey, no biggie, man," Dean says, "What are friends for?"

Cas' expression flickers for a moment, a hint of something... sad?, and his grip on Dean's hand lessens. The lack of pressure feels wrong.

"Regardless," Cas says, after just a beat too long, "thank you. These past few weeks have been... therapeutic. Well-needed."

"If anyone deserves it, it's you." And Dean really, really means it.

Dean skates around in front of Cas again and grabs his other hand, speeding up their pace as he skates backwards. Cas' eyes widen and his grip on Dean's hand tightens so hard it's amusing. Dean smirks.

"Scared, Cas?"

"I was once an Angel of the Lord, Dean, I've taken on more than one angel at once and I threw a bomb at Micheal's head. I hardly—"

"Alright, alright, point taken. You're a big badass."

"Thank you." As he says this, he loses his footing and falls into Dean, who in turn loses his foot and falls backwards. Dean falls on his ass and Cas topples onto him, pushing Dean backwards into the ice. They lay sprawled there for a minute, Cas' chest against Dean's. Their faces are inches away.

And – Jesus christ – Dean realizes that he really, really wants to friggin kiss the guy.

“Awkward,” Dean says, because it is awkward and there's pretty much nothing else he can say. Cas gets up slower than Dean can handle, but he knows it's because that fall hurt like hell and not for the same reasons Dean would prefer they just lie there as long as they can before freezing. He laments the loss of contact when Cas is finally up. Cas gives him a hand and Dean holds onto it, grateful for the guise of being a helpful. Dean feels a little ashamed. Cas would be freaked out if he knew the stupid thoughts racing through Dean's head.

“Agreed,” Cas says, but his voice sounds strange.

“How long have we been here, anyway?” Dean asks, and Cas checks his wrist – he's one of the few people who actually wears watches and uses them to tell time instead of cell phone.

“Three hours,” he says, and Dean gapes. It barely feels like it's been forty-five minutes.

“Come on, we're gonna be late,” Dean says, skating towards the exit. Cas blinks.

“For what?” But Dean only grins and skates on.

The park is pretty dark, with multiple streetlamps' lights turned out. Cas hovers in Dean's personal space as they walk, but that's nothing new. What is new is Dean's failure to be irritated by it. Dean's pissed at himself for indulging all these stupid weird feelings. Cas is gonna get used to being all up in Dean's personal bubble and it'll be a problem, fast.

Dean's mad at himself for thinking that might not be too bad of a problem.

After a while, they reach the center of the park, and there's a stage. On it, a band is playing Christmas music, beautifully performed and echoing through the park. There are people gathered around, standing or sitting in the provided chairs, listening. Many of them are couples, holding each other or leaning against each other and Dean is seriously, seriously tired of wanting that. He looks at Cas and finds that Cas is already looking at him curiously, head tilted.

“What?” Dean asks, suddenly self-conscious.

“Thank you,” Cas replies, glancing away. Dean swallows.

“Hey, no problem man,” Dean says awkwardly. The band stops playing and a man walks onto the stage, carrying a microphone. “That's the mayor,” Dean quickly explains, eager to break this weird whatever-it-is.

“Why?” Cas asks.

Dean just smirks.

“We're gathered here to celebrate the holiday season,” the mayor is saying, voice loud and very politician, despite the warm atmosphere, “No matter what your religion may be – or lack thereof – this is a time of great festivity, bringing loved ones together. Tonight we will commemorate this special time of year with our annual

tree lighting ceremony.”

Cas' eyes light up like fireflies and he looks at Dean, teeming with happiness and gratitude. Dean fights the urge to grab Cas' hand, but he settles for returning Cas' smile with a grin.

A moment later, the park is suddenly alive. First the stage lights up, covered in bright white Christmas lights. Then the tree to its left does as well, and then another, and then a whole succession of them. All around, the park becomes a beautiful maze of glowing light. Cas does what Dean has been wanting to since they got here – he takes Dean's hand. Dean squeezes it briefly, despite himself.

They spend a long time walking through the park like this, hands held, reveling in how magnificent it looks. Dean doesn't care if they're getting weird looks and he doesn't care that this is probably another borderline-something moment. He's content and he's happy and it's more than he's been in a long, long time.

Finally they've seen all the park has to offer and they reach where they started. Cas looks great silhouetted by Christmas lights. He squeezes Dean's hand like Dean had before, before letting go. When they get in the car, Cas is looking at Dean like he's some sort of angel. Which is pretty ironic.

“Thank you,” he says again, and his voice is conclusive.

“Night's not over yet,” Dean says, and he pulls in drive.

*

The diner they pull up to is in New Jersey, just past the border between the state and Pennsylvania. New Jersey's known for its diners, and this one is no exception. It's lit up and decorated everywhere, and Cas' excitement hasn't waned all night. It makes Dean impossibly, inexplicably happy.

Their portions are huge, though, and Cas is eyeing the menu like a giant. Dean rolls his eyes.

“Pick something, we'll split it.”

“But you have the appetite of an ogre,” Cas points out.

“Yeah, well, I'm ordering myself something, too.”

“You're revolting,” Cas says, but his voice is fond.

Cas orders some sort of fancy pasta thing that is obnoxiously disproportional, coming in a startlingly large plate with meat and cheese, covered in a savory sauce. It easily fits both of them, and halfway through, Dean calls the waitress over to take away his cheeseburger. Dean tries not to laugh at the Lady and the Tramp style dinner – they're sharing a plate because they'd forgotten to ask the waitress for a second one. They're getting a couple weird looks but Dean barely notices them. He's too busy sneaking looks at Cas when Cas is not looking. Cas is making some sinfully appealing mmmhh noises every now and then as he eats, but realizing that is even more weird than everything else he's been feeling tonight and he blocks the thought out completely.

“People think we're a couple,” Cas says conversationally, twirling spaghetti around his fork.

“Yeah, well, let 'em think what they want,” Dean says, dismissive. Because he really doesn't care in the least and that's alarming.

Dean might just be imagining it, but he thinks Cas looks a little pleased with Dean's answer.

“So,” Dean says as they finish their meal, “did you get everything you wanted out of Christmas?”

Cas gives Dean a look that is a little confusing because of how intense it is. “Almost.” His voice is unexpectedly whispery.

There's a strange, strange shift in the atmosphere and they're both quiet, as though holding their breath. Dean subconsciously leans forward and Cas bites his lip. Dean is suddenly aware of how hard his heart is thumping and he pulls back and leans against his chair, putting his arms behind his head.

“Good,” he says, feigning an upbeat tone that's hardly convincing, “like I said, you deserve it. You up for dessert?”

There's a flash of disappointment in Cas' eyes but it's gone in an instant. In reply, he flags down the menu.

He orders two slices of apple pie without consulting Dean, and Dean's a little taken aback that Cas knows exactly what he wants and that he wants it, too.

He sorta wishes that applied to something else, but he's made a habit of pushing down feelings so he does so again, now. It doesn't keep his heart from pounding though.

*

It's late when they get home and they both unceremoniously fall into the couch. Cas looks full and content and Dean feels exactly the same. He knows for a fact that he's never in all his life had a Christmas eve this amazing. He's a little proud that all the planning was done by him, for once, but he knows it would have been nothing if Cas hadn't been there. Just like their little flat – it'd be nothing without Cas there, too. It was a small place, but Dean knows it'd feel way too big without the fallen angel there.

“Tomorrow's the big day, huh?”

Cas nods and says nothing else. They sit in affable silence for a while.

“I'm glad I can spend it with you, Dean,” Cas says quietly.

Dean swallows his 'me too' because it's the too honest. If he'd spoken it out loud, all the deeper meaning there would have been too evident. He responds with a smile instead.

Cas gets up and turns on their cheesy little fireplace and – oh-so-surprisingly – puts on Rudolph. It would be maddening if it wasn't so endearing. That used to be Sammy's favourite, too. Must be an outcast thing.

“This is the happiest I've been since I lost my wings,” Cas admits after a while. Dean's a little speechless - wings.

Dean suddenly knows what he's going to get Cas. It's cheesy and stupid and he has no idea if Cas will like it, but he's up and grabbing his coat before he can finish the thought.

When Dean comes back, the ending credits of the movie are rolling on the screen. The room is dark, save for the light of the tree. Cas is asleep on the couch while Dean puts a medium-sized gift bag under the tree.

After all this time, it's still a little trippy seeing Cas asleep. Angels don't sleep, and seeing him this way is proof of how human Cas is, now. Still, as long as that handprint scar is burned into his upper arm, Cas will always be Dean's personal angel.

Cas is curled up under a blanket and breathing quietly. The picture of it is so inviting that Dean's weird, stupid feelings are all fluttery and stupid like a chick-flick moment on crack. He's tired as hell and the house is warm and he knows Cas is, too, and finally he doesn't care. He takes off his coat and toes off his shoes and crawls beside Cas, effectively spooning the other man. He's in screw it mode, completely self-indulgent, now, so he thinks 'what the hell?' and buries his nose in the nape of Cas' neck. And, since he's completely going for the whole self-indulgent thing, he wraps an arm around Cas. Merry Christmas to me, thinks his sleepy, clouded mind. He's too tired to even hope that they wake up in a less incriminating position.

He falls asleep quickly.

Dean wakes up first. This happens very, very rarely. It occurs to Dean that he might have been a little more excited for Christmas than he thought. He remembers when he and Sam were young, how they'd wake up early because they were too excited to sleep any more. The dawn has barely broken and Dean notices the sky is grey when he looks out the window.

Dean's still holding Cas, exactly the same way they fell asleep. Dean's breath catches in his throat. Cas shifts in his sleep and then Dean hears a yawn.

“Merry Christmas, Dean,” comes Cas' gravelly voice.

“Merry Christmas, Cas,” Dean replies in a whisper into Cas' neck. He feels Cas stiffen and instantly removes his arm. Cas grabs it before he can.

“I don't mind if you don't,” he says, weirdly casual, “It's too early. Go back to sleep.”

Dean doesn't know what to say, so he buries his face in Cas' neck again and does just that.

When Dean wakes again, Cas is sitting on the couch beside him, holding a mug with what Dean assumes is hot chocolate. He's leaning slightly against Dean. Cas glances over when he feels Dean shifting.

"Hello, Dean," he says. Dean sits up, still groggy, and Cas hands him a cup of hot chocolate. He takes it graciously and yawns into the cup before drinking. He sees Cas eyeing the present under the tree.

"You got me something," Cas says, more of a statement than a question.

"Yeah."

"I got you something as well." There's a little wrapped package Dean hadn't noticed before under the tree, towards the back.

"What is it?"

"Open it."

Dean approaches the tree obediently, grabbing both presents. He hands Cas' to him and sits down beside him.

"We'll open them at the same time," Dean says, because that's what he and Sam used to do. Cas nods.

"1...2...3." And they unwrap.

And Dean's mouth drops.

He's holding his amulet amidst the wrapping paper, perfect as it always was. It's the original, Dean can tell. There's a small chip on the left side Dean's familiar with and it's the same size, same colour. But it's not the visual similarities – Dean just knows. He looks at Cas with awe.

"How did you -"

"Dean," Cas says, and his expression is similar to Dean's. Dean can't help but think his gift to Cas is insignificant in light of the one Cas gave him.

"I – I don't know, it's -"

"Perfect," Cas says, and he means it. The truth of it is in his voice.

Cas is quickly putting on his gift in a flash and Dean feels a little warm at his enthusiasm. It's a sweater, nothing particularly out-of-the-ordinary, just a big one like Cas likes... the lure of it, though, is in the back. It's got big, plush wings on it, soft and comfortable but artfully crafted and feathered out in fabric so it's comfortable. Cas looks almost gleeful.

"I have wings," he says simply, running a hand along them.

"I have my amulet," Dean says, looking at the necklace in his hand like he's seeing a ghost, "but how? You can't exactly poof in and out anymore."

Cas glances away. "I asked an old friend for help locating it," Cas says, and Dean's stomach flops. He narrows his eyes.

"Tell me you didn't make a deal, Cas."

Cas laughs and it puts Dean at ease because it's so nice to hear it, so foreign and so something Dean would like to hear more often.

"I'm an angel, Dean. I don't make deals with demons. I don't even think I can. No.. I summoned Joshua. He was kind enough to help me."

"Joshua?" Dean asks, confused, "the gardener? He came all the way from Heaven to find my necklace?"

Cas nods.

"Many angels are quite fond of you, Dean, though they'd never admit it. You and Sam saved the world and stopped Lucifer. That is no easy task. Joshua was rooting for you. He was more than happy than to oblige my simple request. He sends his regards, by the way."

Dean can't stop staring at Cas like he's some sort of miracle worker. He puts the necklace on with trembling fingers. He remembers when Sam gave it to him for Christmas all those years ago. Now, having it returned, is almost just as special. Dean is slightly overwhelmed. Cas had chosen something incredibly dear to Dean's heart, something that had obviously required great thought and a very deep knowledge of Dean. It is painfully difficult not to throw his arms around him.

"Thank you," they both say at once, and both laugh.

*

"Dean," Cas says over breakfast, homemade crepes Cas has added to his repertoire of recipes, "I'm very fond of human holidays. When is the next one?"

Dean chuckles. "There's Valentine's Day in February and Easter in April – but Easter's lame, it doesn't count. And Valentine's Day is no fun if you don't have a girlfriend... or, boyfriend, or whatever, to share it with."

"I see," Cas says thoughtfully. Dean chews his lip and plays with the amulet around his neck.

Cas' hair is a mess and his wings are so adorable the sweater puts Cas' whole collection of oversized sweaters to shame. Dean's staring hopelessly and Cas is noticing, but Dean's still indulging himself. He tells himself he'll stop after Christmas, that this is just one big present to himself, that he can get over it. That the weird feelings will go away once this all ends.

Dean has a sneaking suspicion that's not true, though.

“Dean?”

Dean shakes his head, effectively shaking himself out of his daze. Cas tilts his head.

“Ahh, c'mon,” Dean says awkwardly, “I'm pretty sure there's got to be at least one Christmas special on tv that we don't already have.” Cas doesn't seem satisfied with Dean's answer, but he complies anyway and clears the table. They both leave the kitchen at the same time, yet again caught together at the entryway from one room to the other.

Yet again, under the mistletoe. Dean looks up and Cas follows his gaze.

“Dean?” Cas says again, much quieter this time.

“What did Sam say to you? Before he left, he said something to you.” Dean says, suddenly. Cas goes pale and looks at the ground, clears his throat.

“He said 'Wait for him. He'll come around.'” It sounds very strange to hear such a rough voice sound so small.

Dean's eyes widen and he grabs Cas' shoulder.

“I asked you if you got everything you wanted for Christmas,” Dean says, and Cas is still staring at the ground, “You said almost. What else did you want?”

Cas looks up abruptly, meeting Dean's eyes full on.

“You.”

Dean loses his breath for a minute, pulse pounding, until finally he succumbs to all the stupid, weird feelings that have been plaguing him and he kisses his angel. Cas' lips are warm and soft and everything Dean's ever wanted, he realizes suddenly. Everything he'd pushed down and not allowed himself to want.

When their lips part, their mouths hover close together.

“Me too,” Dean says, words breathy on Cas' lips.

“Merry Christmas, Dean,” Cas says.

“Merry Christmas, Cas.”

* * *

The End! ~

The Importance of Hallmark Holidays

“It's a Hallmark holiday, Sam. No.”

Dean and Sam are sitting at the edge of a dock, feet dangling over the water. At the urging of both Castiel and Sarah, Sam's soon-to-be-fiancee, the two Winchesters are indulging in some long overdue bro-time. Castiel suggested the brothers go fishing – he'd been wanting to try out a new recipe for fish he'd found, anyway – and so somehow they'd found their way to a little lake in New Jersey, about an hour from Dean and Castiel's studio flat in Pennsylvania. Dean's fairly certain there are at least three lakes much closer than this one, but he has a feeling Cas and Sarah are seriously concerned by how little time Sam and Dean spend together and sent them this far intentionally. In all fairness, he *just* saw the guy about a month and a half ago. It's not like they're avoiding each other or something.

Still, their concern is endearing and Dean would be lying to himself if he said he didn't miss his baby brother. The car ride in the Impala felt a little weird – it was the first time they'd been in it together since they split ways after they shut down the apocalypse – but it was the good kind of weird and after the first 20 minutes the whole 'bonding' thing was well under way. All in all, the trip's been pretty great.

Until now, though. The inevitable *My Little Brother is Actually Female and Has to Talk About Our Feelings* part of the trip. Only Sam could make this considerably less awesome than it would have been otherwise.

“Come on, Dean,” Sam says, exasperated, giving Dean the classic puppy dog pout he's worked to near perfection over the years. Dean groans because it's not fair that both his brother and his sort-of-boyfriend-thing have equally potent puppy dog faces. “You know how he is about holidays.”

“Like hell I do, Sam, Jesus,” Dean mutters, tugging on his rod for lack of anything better to do with his hands, “Try living with him during Christmas. And freakin New Years, man, the guy was practically jizzing himself, he was so excited when the damn ball dropped.” Dean doesn't expect how his voice softens at the memory. If he closes his eyes, he can still see the fireworks... and feel them, too, the ones he felt when Cas kissed him when the clock struck twelve. Dean clears his throat.

“So you should *know* –” Sam starts to say, pouncing on Dean's words.

“Know *what*, Sammy?”

“You should know how important holidays are to Castiel, Dean. You know you have to step up. Make it special for the guy, or something...” Sam's voice trails off. It's obvious he isn't exactly sure what to make of Dean's relationship with Cas. And that makes sense, because Dean has no idea what the hell it is, either.

They kiss pretty often, now, seeing as now that Dean knows that the thunder-in-the-heart, sweaty palms, dry throat thing is totally mutual, he has a lot less willpower than he did before. Now if he wants to kiss Cas he just *goes* for it. It's a really good feeling.

But... that's about it. They 'cuddle' – which translates mostly into just violating personal space when the given opportunities arise – but not much else. Nothing that would give whatever their relationship is a little clarity. They still have separate beds and they still keep their hands to themselves. They don't talk about their relationship, either. There's the occasional, *'I missed you while you were out'* said with such conviction that it makes Dean never want to leave the house, or every now and then the inexplicable, *'thank you, Dean'* that Cas never explains or goes into... but aside from that, nothing.

Definitely no *'I love you's*.

“What does that even mean?” Dean grumbles dismissively. By now he's wound up the reel completely and is standing up to cast it back in again.

“A little romance, Dean,” Sam says flatly. His puppy dog pout has dissolved into the makings of a bitch face. “Cas deserves it.”

Sam is right, of course, but Dean's almost as macho as he is stubborn and he's not quite ready to put his heart and soul into the whole Romeo role just yet. Up until recently, he'd never even been into kissing if it wasn't attached to a promise of sex. Obviously that's changed, but Dean's a little unsure what else there's room to change for. He's sure as hell not writing any poems.

“What you see is what you get,” Dean says, gesturing to himself before he casts his reel. “Cas knows that. He doesn't expect anything more from me.”

“That's exactly my point. You could make him really happy if you tried, you know. It doesn't take much.”

Dean doesn't bother fighting back anymore – what would Sam know, anyway? Sam doesn't live with the guy, Dean does. Dean has Cas' smile memorized by now, and he knows the other man's laugh as well as he knows his own voice. And, yeah, maybe both smile and laugh are a bit sparse... but this is *Castiel*, after all. It's a miracle in itself that he smiles at all. Dean's pretty certain Cas is as happy as he's gonna get given the whole 'fallen angel' thing.

“I'll buy him some chocolates if it'll make you feel better,” Dean says, pointedly ignoring how Sam's bitch face is amping up to turbo. “Come on, time to change the subject. All the estrogen you're leaking is going to poison the fish.”

*

Cas can do some amazing things with fish, apparently, because what he makes out of Sam and Dean's catch is nothing short of mouth-watering. This is quite a feat – Dean's never been a fan of fish, especially when it's not deep-fried. Cas' fish is grilled and glistening, doubtlessly *healthy*, but Dean gets seconds, then thirds; it's that good. He's weighing the pros and cons of a fourth serving when Cas chastises him.

“Dean, you are a bottomless pit,” he says distastefully as he watches Dean scrape the last forkful of rice from his plate, wrinkling his brow.

“Don't act like you don't love cooking.”

“I do. I also prefer my food *in* people's stomachs – which yours won't be if you continue eating. I'm going to have to insist you stop.”

“Cas, c'mon – ”

“You realize there's dessert.”

Dean's complaints die in his throat. Cas doesn't bake nearly as often as he cooks – which is every night – but Cas seems to have gone all out because Sam and Sarah are over. The two fiancées look amused, watching the banter between Dean and his angel. Dean flashes Cas a million dollar smile, at which Cas rolls his eyes. Dean is always especially ridiculous when he's being fed.

Cas starts clearing dishes and Dean jumps to his feet to help, speeding the process along. Dean loads the dishwasher as Cas gets dessert ready. Cas pulls out small dessert plates Dean was not aware that they had from the back of their cabinet; they're pink, heart-shaped and have *Happy Valentine's Day!* written all over in brown script. Dean chuckles.

“More holiday spirit?”

“They were on sale.”

Only recently has Castiel's humanity become less overwhelming for Dean. Several months ago, Dean might have felt guilty that a once mighty Angel of the Lord has been reduced to caring about shopping bargains. Now, he's learned to let it go. Cas isn't miserable, as far as Dean knows, and Dean's been through enough hell (both literally and figuratively) in his life to know better than to dwell on things he can't change. Cas is looking at the plates with a very self-satisfied sort of pleasure, anyway, so *he* doesn't seem to be too concerned.

Cas pulls their dessert from the oven with heart-decorated oven mitts, and Dean can't suppress a smile. He wonders for a moment whether it would be possible to get Cas a job at Hallmark. Then, the smell of whatever Cas has pulled out of the oven hits him – it's pie, and for whatever reason this realization comes with an arsenal of butterflies to his stomach. He closes the dishwasher and walks over to Cas, sliding arms around the smaller man's waist from behind. Dean can feel the quizzical expression on Cas' face without seeing it.

“I like it when you bake things,” Dean says by way of explanation, pressing a kiss to Cas' cheek.

“I see.” Cas places the pan on the counter and turns around in Dean's arms so that he's facing him. “I will bake more often, then.”

They look at each other a moment – both tense in a weird way, as though each is poised to do *something*... but neither does. After a brief second of this, the moment is gone and Dean lets Cas go. Cas goes about cutting slices of pie and Dean pours cups of milk. They're both very quiet.

After dessert and sparkling cider (Sam doesn't drink anymore, and Dean has consented to cut back a little, anyway), Sam and Sarah finally head out. Even as they're pulling on their coats, Dean can feel his heart aching for his little brother. He hadn't even realized how much he'd missed having Sam around until spending a solid few hours with him. Dean's a little surprised that Cas knows him so well, knows his habit of shutting feelings down and casting them out instead of evaluating them like a normal human being. It was Cas' suggestion that Sam and Sarah come visit in the first place.

“Don't forget what I said,” Sam hisses as he hugs Dean goodbye – and, *yeah*, Dean even missed this. Even the stupid, anal, insufferable aspects of his brother.

“Like I said. Chocolates.” Sam's scowl is priceless as he leaves. Sarah gives Dean a hug as well on her way out. Dean likes her, thinks she's good for his brother. Sam's face lights up whenever she smiles and it warms Dean's heart. She's tiny, too, so she makes Sam look even larger and goofier, which is always a plus.

“Keep him in line,” Dean tells her, and she smiles.

“You got it. Nice to finally meet you – and Castiel, thanks for everything!”

“You're welcome.”

Castiel's still a little socially stupid, so it takes him a second to realize she's going in for a hug. It's a bit painful to watch, but is above all amusing. He still looks confused even as they leave. Dean shakes his head and closes the door once they're out of sight, looking at Cas fondly. Dean's used to this expression of Cas'. Because, while Cas is making wonderful progress integrating into humanity, he's still puzzled by the simplest things. Dean's not sure what train of thought Cas is on at the moment, but he doesn't bother asking. Instead, he lays on the couch and digs around for the remote.

Cas sits on Dean's legs, facing the tv, and sinks back against the couch. It's comfortable enough for the moment, but Dean's pretty sure his circulation is going to be cut off in the next 10 minutes.

Dean successfully locates the remote and idly channel surfs. He stops briefly on an advert for Valentine's day candy and Cas grabs his wrist to keep him from changing the channel.

“Tell me about Valentine's Day, Dean.”

Dean groans.

“Shitty holiday, Cas, seriously. Nothing to tell.”

“You disliked Christmas as well.”

“That's... different.” The guy does have a point, though.

“I believe I recall you liking Valentine's Day, anyway.” This is another subtle difference between Angel Cas and Human Cas. Cas has a normal human memory, now. Cas has to *believe* he *recalls* something instead of having infinite depths of knowledge with crystal clarity at his fingertips.

“Yeah, well,” Dean says awkwardly, “I don't need to get laid by angsty Valentine's rejects anymore.”

Cas is quiet at that, and it makes Dean uncomfortable. He wishes he could find something interesting on TV.

“Why is that?” Cas asks finally, which was inevitable. Comes with the whole 'socially stupid' thing.

“Because, man,” Dean says, exasperated, “I – I don't know, I mean, I have you, right?”

Cas looks even more genuinely confused at this, brow completely furrowed, expression entirely pensive. Dean's stomach is in knots and he's not entirely sure why. He clears his throat and does the only thing he can – changes the subject.

“So! Valentine's Day. The holiday that comes in a box. What do you want to know?”

“I don't know. Tell me everything.” Dean's not sure how to tell Cas that Valentine's Day is nowhere near as fun as Christmas, that he's not going to find any seasonally appropriate ugly jumpers to match with it and there's not nearly as many decorating possibilities. He takes a deep breath.

“Not much to tell, Cas. It's a holiday for lovers. They give each other candy and gifts. There's a lot of hearts going around. Lots of red and pink. That's about it.”

Cas doesn't look remotely satisfied, and Dean scowls.

“Hey, you watch adverts – you can get the gist from all the crap they want you to buy. That's all it is. Buying crap.”

Cas goes from unsatisfied to irritated fairly quickly. “Tell me about *your* Valentine's Days in the past, Dean.”

Dean looks at Cas like he's crazy.

“Do I look like the kind of guy who – ”

“Humour me, Dean. I am curious.”

Dean's quiet a moment, summing up Cas' request. After all, Dean's still a little worried that Cas might backtrack, might lose some of the happiness he's slowly gained in the past few months. He'd let Cas keep their Christmas tree up until mid-January, no complaints, because he was so damn anxious that without some holiday to get all cheery over, Cas would regress. He really likes Cas' smile.

... Hell, he might even be in *love* with Cas' smile.

“Okay,” he says finally, “I can only think of one valentine in my life that would actually count. Like – not a bar hookup or anything. Her name was Katy Smith. It was in eighth grade...”

Dean waits for Cas to laugh at him, but he doesn't. *Of course he doesn't*, Dean reminds himself, *he has no concept of how lame this is*. Emboldened by this realization, Dean plows on with his story. “Me and Sammy were new to the school district. Dad was tracking a chucacabra that kept giving him the slip. Finally he just dropped us off with a hunter pal of his while he went after it. We stayed with that family for about a month. I remember because I was pretty bummed because my dad wasn't around for my 14th birthday. He was finally gonna let me drive the Impala.”

There's a slight note of sympathy in Cas' eyes that Dean picks up on, and takes comfort in. He prides himself on being one of the only people who can read Cas well; he knows few other people would have caught it. Dean's also comforted by the fact that what he sees is not *pity*. Cas has daddy issues like Dean has daddy issues, and if anyone knows abandonment, it's Cas. Cas seems to notice Dean noticing, because he gives one of Dean's hands a hesitant squeeze. He's awkward, though, because being awkward is his thing, and their hands feel weird. Before Dean has the chance to decide to squeeze back, Cas' hand has released his. Dean plows on again, trying to verbally stampede over the awkward.

“But, yeah, Katy. The school was small so we ended up having all the same classes, so our homeroom teacher asked her to show me around. And we just... I don't know. Hit it off. She had dark hair and these crazy awesome blue eyes, I can still remember them. I followed her around like a lost puppy that month. I brought her to this Valentine's Dance at school, went the whole nine yards with roses and shit. I was out of my mind. Never again, man.” Dean chuckles lightly and runs a hand through his hair sheepishly, yet again thankful that Cas doesn't know enough of humanity to make fun of him.

“I see,” Cas says thoughtfully, eyes flicking to yet another ad on TV for chocolates. He is quiet until the commercial ends, expression unreadable. “Valentine's Day is... different, then. Well, regardless, I'm buying lawn decorations tomorrow morning. You're free to come with me if you want any say in the appearance of our flat.”

Regardless of what? Dean wants to ask, but he says nothing. There is a barely-there hint of... disappointment, maybe?, in Castiel's expression that Dean does not miss. It dawns on Dean that Cas has gathered, from Dean's story, that Valentine's Day is *not* a holiday he can participate in. For some reason, Dean feels shame heating his cheeks and he can't make eye contact with Cas anymore. Instead, he puts his arms around the man's waist and tugs him down so that he's cuddled against Dean's chest. They don't say anything – they never do – but their breathing harmonizes on the right frequency and it feels very, very right. Dean wishes he had the courage to do things like this more often, so that it would start to feel more natural. His heartbeat is pounding away a mile a minute in his ribcage, and all the while a small part of him is still afraid that Cas is going to pull away.

They end up falling asleep there, chest-to-chest, limbs tangled up with the TV softly playing in the background. The last thing Dean thinks before he falls asleep is that he's going to prove Cas wrong.

*

“Code Red, Sammy,” Dean says urgently into his mobile. He's in Walmart, pacing around, and everything around him is *red, red, red*. Red and pink decorations are everywhere, either for sale or decorating the store itself. Giant red hearts with *Sale!* and *Always low prices!* hang from the ceiling. There is an entire section devoted to festive candy, which is where Dean is currently. Cas is on the other side of the store, looking at lawn decorations. To the former-angel's absolute glee, there are decorations that light up, like Christmas ones. At the point they discovered this, Dean had accepted his fate – that he'd be doomed to forever be living in one of *those* homes. One of the flats that decorates for every possible occasion imaginable. If Leap Year had decorations, Dean's fairly certain that their flat would be decked out in those as well.

So, it was under the guise of disdain for his manliness that he split up with Cas and headed to the candy section to send an SOS to his little brother.

“Dean? What's wrong?” Sam's tone is very serious, and it occurs to Dean that he probably used his I'm On a Hunt and Need Dire Assistance voice, by accident. Oh well. This is still important. At least now he has Sam's attention.

“What kind of candy are you getting Sarah for Valentine's Day?”

Sam groans. “Are you serious, Dean? All you're doing for Castiel is buying chocolates and you can't even do that on your own?”

“What? - What, no, I... changed my mind.”

“I'm sorry, what was that?” Sam says, and there's something like gloating lying just under his tone. Dean grips the phone tight.

“I. Changed. My. Mind.”

“So what you're telling me is *you*, Dean Winchester – ”

“Changed my mind, Sammy, yes. Jesus. And if I change it again, it'll be your fault. So shut up – no, seriously, shut up. What candy do I buy? He'll be back over here soon.” Despite himself, Dean keeps looking over his shoulder, afraid to catch sight of Cas at any time.

“It's a little sad that you need to ask help for this, man.”

“*Shut up*, Sam. What kind are you getting Sarah?”

“Sarah's allergic to chocolate.”

Dean groans. “Of course she is. I don't know, I think I might be having second thoughts about this girl. Allergic to chocolate? Really?”

“Yes,” Sam says tightly, “But Castiel isn't, which is the point, if you'd kindly stick to it.”

“Huffy, huffy. Alright. There's so many damn kinds of chocolate. Should I just grab some Hershey's and –”

“*No*,” Sam cuts in quickly, firmly. “This is Castiel's *very first* Valentine's Day as a human. It's important that you go traditional about everything.”

“Meaning...?” Dean swears that his brother is his gay best friend sometimes, really. He finds it extremely ironic that he's the one in the non-hetero relationship here.

Well. Sort of relationship.

“Meaning get him the classic heart-shaped box of chocolates that doesn't tell you which kind is which.”

“Oh,” Dean says dumbly, dropping the extra-extra large Hershey's bar he's been examining. It looks pretty appealing in his opinion – it's about half the length of his forearm – but Sam is the expert here. Personally, Dean's always annoyed by never knowing what kind of candy he's about to stick in his mouth... but this is about Cas, not Dean. And Sam's right; Valentine's Day isn't really Valentine's Day unless someone gets a heart-shaped box of vague candies. “Alright. Thanks man.”

“Oh, and Dean?” Sam says.

“Yeah?”

“Don't get the cheap Walmart brand one, please.” Dean rolls his eyes, but has to smile to himself. His brother knows him well.

“Fine, fine. I'll spare no expense.”

“Good. I'm proud of you, Dean.”

“Oh, c'mon, Sam, don't act like I'm the cheapest guy in the world or some – ”

“No, not that. I mean... You're finally making an effort to hang on to something that makes you happy. This is the first time in a long time I've ever seen you do that. So... Yeah. Thanks, Dean.”

Dean suppresses the urge to groan again. Leave it to his chick-flick little brother to make Dean being nice to Cas suddenly some sort of personal present to him.

“I’m just trying to show Cas a good time,” Dean says awkwardly, evasively, because he’s not entirely sure how to deal with the genuine happiness in Sam’s voice. “Thanks, man, I owe you. I’ll let you know how it goes.”

“If you need help picking engagement rings at any point...”

“I am hanging up on you now,” Dean announces, and does so.

*

Castiel is vehemently against cupid decorations, on principle, and Dean would be lying if he said he wasn’t relieved. The little naked, winged babies with arrows freak him out and he’d hate to have them all over the house. He’s okay with the array of heart-themed motifs Cas has decided on. The guy is actually pretty awesome at decorating.

There are rose-scented candles everywhere, filling the flat with a sweetness that is, thankfully, not at all overbearing. Cas clearly prefers them to proper lightning, so Dean doesn’t protest when Cas often jumps up to flick off the lights if they’re not using them for a specific purpose. The warm glow of the candles kinda remind Dean of Christmas lights. He muses that their flat is always going to be dimly lit for one reason or another, and finds that he doesn’t mind at all.

Castiel has the front yard decorated with Valentine’s Day things as well. Again, Dean is grateful for the mutual dislike for cupids; he’d seen a rather ghastly lawn ornament of a lit-up cupid throwing an arrow and had been afraid it might end up on their lawn. Castiel’s tastes are far classier. The railing that leads up the stairs to their house is wrapped in rose shaped lights. They’re very ornate and detailed, gorgeous compared to some of the cheesier options available. The center of the tiny square of grass that constitutes their yard has roses, as well; they are a set of five, plastic and on sticks, each varying in height. Beneath them, on the ground, *Happy Valentine’s Day!* is written in lights. The roses have lights as well, and the yard looks magical at night. They’re the only yard on their block with any sort of festivity, and Dean’s surprised he’s not as embarrassed as he should be. In fact, he’s actually sort of pleased when he overhears the compliments of passersby.

Dean takes note of Cas' obvious (if not horrifically cliché) love for roses. His initial reaction, of course, is to add a bouquet of roses to his slowly building plan for the Big Day, but after a day or so of contemplation, he decides that he can do even better than that.

*

“That man we saved today called us faggots as we left,” Castiel says conversationally over dinner one night. It is four days until Valentine's Day. They're at a diner in Delaware and Dean's fairly certain they smell like they've been digging up graves. Which would make sense, because they have.

“Are you freaking kidding?” Dean asks after swallowing a big bite of the bacon cheeseburger he's eating. About halfway through the drive home, both men realized that making it all the way home on empty stomachs after a long hunt was out of the question. The flickering diner's sign on the side of the road had been a beacon. “I swear to God, some people. He wouldn't even be *alive* if not for these faggots.”

“We must give off the appearance of a couple more than I was aware,” Cas says thoughtfully, between bites of salad. While Castiel's initial dining habits upon becoming a full-fledged human had been almost entirely cheeseburgers, Cas eats pretty healthily now. He says he owes it to Jimmy to take care of the vessel he accidentally, unceremoniously stole from him. When Dean had pointed out that Jimmy was a huge burger fan himself, Cas had just shrugged and said that Dean was missing the point.

Dean contemplates this a moment. They're both quiet as they eat.

“Are we a couple, Cas?” he asks after a beat. He knows it's an awkward question, but it's killing him and they are on the subject, after all. Castiel tilts his head.

“Up until less than a year ago, I was an angel, Dean. Why are you asking me as though *I'd* know, if you don't?”

Dean gives Cas a look like he's not quite sure what to make of the guy – and really, he's not – and then abruptly laughs. “Fair enough.”

They don't say anything more on the subject. They spend the rest of the meal discussing what an ugly son of a bitch their ganked ghost was tonight and whether or not they'll be back in time to catch American Idol.

*

Two days before Valentine's Day, Dean's getting some seriously cold feet. He can't help it – He's *Dean Winchester*, and he's not used to being vulnerable. Pulling out the red carpet for Cas, being boldly romantic... these are things that are way outside his comfort zone. He keeps thinking about the box of candy he got Cas and how roses are on sale right now. That's all Cas needs, really.

Then Dean thinks about the look on Cas' face after Dean had finished telling Cas about Valentine's Day. *I was out of my mind. Never again, man.* The look of disappointment, however slight, on Castiel's face had been unmistakable. Dean hated it then and he hates it now. He doesn't ever want to be the cause of a look like that on Cas' face. It's obvious that Cas' simple holiday decorating gives him a tiny sense of belonging to this holiday, enough to make him a little happy whenever they pull up to the flat and see the glowing roses. But it's not enough. Dean wants to make Cas smile. It doesn't happen often enough.

They're cuddled up on the couch watching – and Dean will deny this vehemently if ever questioned on it – *Lilo and Stitch* when Cas turns to him and asks, “do beaches really look like that?”

On screen, Lilo and company are surfing on pretty, animated waves to upbeat Hawaiian music.

“What? Have you never seen the ocean, Cas?”

Castiel shakes his head. “I was never stationed near one and never had cause to visit.”

Dean's jaw drops.

“Thousands of years on Earth and you've never been to the ocean. That's screwed up, Cas.”

Cas tilts his head like he always does when Dean confuses him. Dean just shakes his head – and then, a second later, abruptly kisses him. Cas kisses back, but his mouth feels confused as well.

“That was sudden,” he comments when their mouths part.

“You've never been to the damn ocean,” Dean says, like this explains everything. On screen, the musical sequence is over and the two men are quickly engrossed in the film again. *Lilo and Stitch* is Castiel's favourite Disney film. They watch Disney films a lot. Dean chalks it up to the fact that Cas is new to humanity. He didn't have a childhood to watch kid movies. With this logic, it's easier not to protest when Cas wants to watch them.

It's also easier to act like he doesn't actually like watching them, too, if he pretends he's just humoring Cas.

*

On Valentine's Day, Dean wakes up early.

Dean *always* sleeps in and Cas usually makes breakfast for them both before he even wakes up, so Dean decided early on that today, he was going to return the favor. He's not the world's best cook, and he's got nothing on Cas, but he's beast with French toast and happens to know that Cas loves it. It is an effort to stay quiet while cooking – he's used to blasting Kansas the few times he's ever actively involved in the kitchen – but he makes sure he's next to soundless so that Cas doesn't wake up.

Dean finds big, heart-shaped cookie cutters in a drawer and decides that today is not a day for pride; he cuts their toast into hearts. He sets a tray with breakfast, coffee (for him) and tea (for Cas), carefully lining up their forks

on top of red napkins. He bites his lip and looks it over, trying to steady the inexplicably taut feeling in his chest. He takes a deep breath before taking the tray to the other room, where Cas is asleep on his bed.

Dean places the tray on the edge of the bed and pulls open the curtains, letting in early morning sunshine to lighten the room. Cas shifts in his sleep and then yawns. Dean goes to his side and sits on the edge of the bed, gently shaking Cas' shoulder. "Morning, sleepy," he says softly, and his voice sounds a little funny.

"Hello, Dean," Cas says sleepily, voice groggy from sleep. He sits up and looks Dean over, then catches sight of the tray. A shocked expression slowly finds its way onto his face. A smile twitches at the edges of his lips that makes Dean's heart do crazy backflips he's inexplicably embarrassed of.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Cas," Dean says. Dean's grinning ear to ear, embarrassed of himself for how proud of himself he is. He feels like a little kid coming home from school to show something he's made to his mom, or something. Cas' face lights up when Dean says it – not just the twitching-at-the-edges smile, but a bright genuine one that seems to make the living room feel brighter. He sits in the seat Dean's offered him, looking at Dean like he's not quite sure he believes what's going on.

"I thought you said, 'never again'?" Cas says as Dean shimmies into bed beside Cas, pulling the tray to their laps.

"Yeah, well, I say that a lot."

Castiel visibly enjoys his meal, closing his eyes as he eats, making quiet noises of contentment every now and then. Dean can barely eat his own meal, he's so caught up in watching Cas. All he can think is how *surprised* Cas is going to be – that Cas probably thinks that this is it. That breakfast in bed is all that Dean has planned. Cas keeps flashing his pretty smile at Dean and Dean's a little afraid he's going to turn into a puddle of melted chocolate if Cas doesn't stop soon.

"Thank you, Dean," Cas says when he's done, and his voice is incredibly genuine.

“No prob, Cas,” Dean says – and Cas kisses him. Dean is caught off guard. Castiel doesn't initiate kisses very often.

“That was... very thoughtful, I wasn't expecting – ”

“Hey, man, thank me once the day is over,” Dean says with a mischievous smirk. Cas raises his eyebrows.

“I don't understand,” Cas says bluntly, and Dean loves him for it, loves him because he really *doesn't* understand, really isn't expecting anything. Cas isn't human enough to expect anything from Dean, and it is because of this that Dean wants to give him everything.

“You'll see. But right now, I want you to take off your shirt.” Dean takes the tray and puts it on the floor beside the bed. Cas tilts his head and gives Dean a curious look.

“Why?”

“Because I'd bet my soul that - ”

“*Dean.*” Whoops. Joking about your soul with the guy who dove into hell to save it probably isn't the best idea.

“Uh, I'd bet my *car* that you're tense as hell.”

“Tense?”

“Just take it off.”

Cas eyes Dean warily but complies, tugging his shirt up over his head. Dean looks him over, clears his throat a moment and steadies himself. This idea wasn't entirely original. Every magazine with a Valentine's Day section on the rack suggested this. He's watched endless amounts of Youtube tutorials on it. He takes a deep breath, steeling himself, before clambering out of bed. He disappears into the bathroom a moment, with Cas watching after him curiously, and returns with a bottle of menthol oil.

"Lay down on your stomach," Dean commands, and this time Cas doesn't question. He still looks a little close to panicking, though, and it's not doing much for Dean's nerves. He hums *Hey Jude* under his breath, and it seems to relax both of them.

Castiel jumps visibly when Dean touches him. Dean knows that his hands aren't cold; it's just suddenly quite obvious that *no one* has ever touched Castiel's bare skin before. Not since the vessel has been under his full control, anyway. The former angel's skin is like a wall of brick – Dean would have been right to bet his car, or even his soul, that Cas was tense. The magazines were right. Cas needed a massage big time.

It takes a minute or so for Cas to fully relax, but when he does, he's practically putty under Dean's hands. Dean revels in the tiny sighs Cas utters every now and then, takes pride in each sharp exhalation of breath. Slowly, slowly, Cas' taut and rigid muscles become more loose. Dean loses track of time, caught up in the feeling of Castiel's flesh in his hands. This is the most intimate the two of them have ever been with each other. It's... nice.

It's also goddamn *hot*, but Dean's not allowing his thoughts to go there just yet.

Castiel's breathing has slowed to the quiet thrum it usually assumes when he's sleeping when Dean finally deems his work finished. He wipes the residual oil from his hands onto his jeans and then crawls into bed beside Cas. Cas' eyes open, half-lidded. Dean's face is inches from Cas' when he tugs the blankets around them.

"Thank you," Cas says, and Dean chuckles. He has no idea what comes over him, but he kisses Cas' nose. He's never kissed a nose before, not since Sammy was a baby. Cas tilts his head up and makes a proper kiss of it before burying his face in Dean's neck. This is new for them. They fall asleep curled against each other, the whole room smelling of menthol.

*

After alternately sleeping and lazing around for several hours more, they finally get out of the house at around 1pm. Dean lets Cas pick the music. It violates everything he, as driver and thus captain of this ship, believes in... but he lets him. He makes it very clear that it's a one time thing, never to be expected or asked for again, but the gravity of the gesture is not lost to Cas. Cas plays The Smiths and Dean doesn't complain. The look of sheer contentment on Cas' face is enough to silence any second thoughts Dean might have as they drive the two hour journey to their destination.

“Where are we going?” Cas asks, about halfway through the ride.

“West,” Dean answers vaguely, his expression smug.

Cas says nothing to this, instead redirecting his attention back outside the window. Dean wonders if it's possible for his face to stay permanently frozen from all the smiling he's doing. Cas is calm and quiet as ever, but Dean picks up on the slight tapping of Cas' fingers on the dashboard. It's enough to show that Cas is excited, eager. It's more than enough for Dean to be beside himself with glee.

When they finally take the exit off the highway, Cas makes a strange face.

“The air smells...”

“Salty?” Dean supplies, and a note of recognition resonates through Cas' expression.

“The ocean.” It's not a question; it's a statement. Dean nods.

“You guessed it.” With that, Dean pulls into a parking lot and parks the car. Cas is staring at Dean, eyes wide. Dean takes the keys out of the ignition and returns Cas' gaze, both of them quiet.

“You can kiss me if you want, man,” Dean says, for lack of anything else to say.

Cas doesn't do anything – which is *extremely* awkward – so Dean decides to kiss him himself before it gets too weird. Cas' expression hasn't changed much when their lips part, though Dean can see that same smile he's seriously getting used to playing at the corners of the former-angel's mouth.

“You do that often now,” Cas says.

Dean arches his eyebrows. “What? Kiss you?”

“Yes. You used to only do it if I asked you.”

“Asked you? You've never asked me to kiss you.”

“With my eyes,” Dean explains, and Dean instantly understands. He knows exactly what kind of looks Cas is talking about. They're the loaded glances accompanied by barely-there lip twitches... Dean had subconsciously noticed them every time. Cas is right; Dean used to only kiss Cas when the tension between them was electric, when the atmosphere was thick with the static need for it. Lately, he's been kissing Cas spontaneously, thinking about it after.

“Yeah, well...” Dean says, stuttering, unsure how to respond, “What, am I breaking some sort of angel code, or something?”

Cas says nothing, only looks at Dean more. Dean shifts, uncomfortable.

“Perhaps,” Cas says at last, “but I’m not an angel any more.” And he kisses him. The kiss is longer than there usual ones, so long Dean considers the implications of adding tongue for a split second, but Dean’s stomach interrupts these thoughts with a loud, audible roar. He smiles sheepishly, and Cas laughs.

“Time to feed the beast,” Cas announces.

“The beast says, ‘hell yeah!’” Dean agrees, and they leave the car.

It’s February and it’s cold, and the boardwalk is appropriately empty. Thankfully, though, there are still some food places and stands open, and they snag some corn dogs so they can eat as they walk. Their footsteps make a satisfying wooden sound as they walk, looking at the beach from a distance and checking out the few shops that are open. At some point, Cas hesitantly grabs Dean’s hand. It feels weird, holding hands, but it would be even weirder to let go, so Dean holds on.

After a walking quite a long while, they vaguely hear music coming from the beach. Cas hesitates at the entrance to the beach leading down from the boardwalk, facing the direction the music is coming from. It’s already starting to get a *little* dark – the day is overcast and the winter sun sets early. Before he has a chance to speak, though, Dean’s already taking off his shoes.

“C’mon,” he says, holding his shoes in his hands. Cas hesitates a minute before following suit. They walk at first, but soon they’re both running to the shore, sand spraying in all directions at their feet. It becomes a race, which Cas easily wins. They forget about the music for a moment and instead focus on the water, which Cas bounds up to, wetting his feet. The air is cold and the water is even colder, but their excitement and the warmth from their run give them some immunity from it. Still, they don’t stay in one place in the water, lest their feet get too cold. They both roll up their jeans and splash around, completely abandoning all pretense.

The sky gets successively darker until they’re finally tired out. They’re both trembling by the time they’re done and both have smiles practically cemented to their faces. Only then do they remember the music that drew them to the beach, which is still playing. Cas’ shaking is pronounced and Dean doesn’t think twice before bounding over to him and wrapping an arm around his shoulder, pulling him close as they walk towards the source of the music.

A short walk away, they find a small band of college kids playing music that sounds like – and probably is – from the 60's. Dean can only describe it as 'beach music', and it's got a fun, upbeat tone to it that makes Dean feel all kinds of happy. Before he can think better of it, he grabs Cas around the waist and then they're *dancing*. Awkward doesn't even begin to cover it, especially because Cas' initial reaction is to freeze up and stare at Dean like he's crazy. Dean isn't deterred, though, and after a moment Cas just goes with it. He lets Dean spin him around and then does the same, and they look absolutely ridiculous.

Dean hasn't danced since middle school, since Katy Smith, and he's pretty sure he's *never* let himself go like this before. After a while of stupid spins and other silly dance moves, they default to a slow-dance. The band loves them, and appropriately changes their tempo to match their new pace. Cas rests his head on Dean's shoulder as they spin, while stars slowly dot the sky. By the time they look up again, the sky is alight with them. This beach is far enough away from everything else that there are more stars than either of them have ever seen before. The view is awe-inspiring.

They don't leave til the band packs it up, everyone wishing them Happy Valentine's Day very enthusiastically. Dean's arm never leaves Cas' waist the whole time, and his face is burning pink from pride from the nature of the looks the bandmates are giving them. It's the same look people give newlyweds, the same earnest smile people flash happy couples when they're warmed by the love that they see. Dean realizes that he and Cas probably made this band's night. He wishes he has a better word for what he's feeling than *butterflies*, because that's a goddamn girly word. He can't think of anything more accurate, though.

Dean can already see the *thank you* on Castiel's lips before he says it, as they reach the car. He hurries to cut him off.

“Not yet. We're not going home yet.”

Castiel looks positively stunned... and something else. There's something else in his eyes, something warm and impossibly sweet and – and *something*, and Dean can't even handle it. He looks away.

They drive about 20 minutes and pull up to a place surrounded by high hedges that hide the interior. There are roses in the hedges and lights laced in the branches. A huge, wooden double-doored gate stands in the middle. On it, in fancy black script, are the words *The Greenhouse*. Dean's become fairly enamored of the inquisitive

look Cas has been giving him all day, and only smiles and shakes his head when Cas directs it at him when they walk up to the doors. He opens the door and Cas' jaw drops.

There are flowers everywhere. Dean has taken special notice of Cas' love for roses and pounced on it. Extensive googling found him this place. It is a restaurant set up in a greenhouse. There are flowers on every surface not used for eating. The utensils are plant-inspired in a decidedly not-girly way, and the handles on the wine glasses have vines on them. The waiters and waitresses are all covered in plants or flowers of some sort, and roses hang from chandeliers on the ceiling. All the walls are glass, and a garden can be seen extending past the back door.

“Reservation should be for 'Dean and Castiel Winchester',” Dean tells the hostess at the front sheepishly. Dean's not sure if he's imagining the faint blush on Castiel's face when he hears that he's been included under Dean's last name.

“Right this way,” the woman says, and leads them through the greenhouse and out the backdoor, through the garden. Dean laughs at Castiel's confusion as he turns to look at the restaurant over his shoulder. He sneakily grabs Castiel's hand. Cas returns his grip, giving him a bright and easy smile.

... Yeah, Dean could really, really get used to that smile.

The garden is like a small, uncomplicated maze, with hedges making little sections. The waitress shows them to a tiny section with a table with two places set – the sections are all little, private dining places. The section is outside, surrounded entirely by roses. There are roses in the hedges that surround the section, and lights in the hedges, just like out front. There are candles and flower petals on table as well. The ground is soft grass. Castiel remains speechless.

The waitress gives them menus and pours them wine, then leaves them to contemplate their meals.

“This is beautiful,” Cas says finally, once she's gone. His voice is very small. He's looking all around – at the flowers, the candles, the sky looming over them.

“Yeah?” Dean says. He doesn't know what to say – he's so proud of himself he's almost uncomfortable. Castiel leans across the table and kisses him, long and slow, and Dean just about melts. Spontaneous kisses are even more rare for Cas than they are for Dean. He savors it like it's candy.

The order spaghetti, subconsciously repeating what they did on their first “date” by splitting it. The waitress looks like she's about to spontaneously combust with how cute they are, and she keeps giggling awkwardly and looking genuinely pleased to be around them. Dean doesn't have the heart to be annoyed. Like with the band members, all he can do is be pleased by how much secondhand happiness he and Cas are bringing people.

Castiel keeps kissing him, and it's deliciously out of character. They have a mini fight over a meatball and Dean eventually gives up and lets Cas have it, and Cas drops his fork and kisses Dean. Dean says he likes Cas' shirt and that gets a kiss, too – just about everything Dean does is suddenly overwhelmingly endearing. Dean has this feeling on his chest he's been trying to name all day, and he's pretty sure he has a word for it, now.

And he wants to say it, too. But he's afraid.

When dinner is done and paid for, the waitress leads them even further into the garden. They lace fingers instinctively, now, as soon as they're out of their seats. Cas doesn't bother with the inquisitive look now – instead, his face is a picture of anticipation, eager to find out what comes next. What does come next is a section of the garden that is simply a garden in itself. Here, Cas can pick a bouquet of flowers for himself.

“They were selling flowers at the supermarket,” Dean says, “but I figured it'd be cooler if you could pick em yourself. I'm bad at this kind of thing.”

Cas is visibly exuding excitement as he strolls around picking flowers. They split up, walking around, and Dean bounds over to Cas every time he finds a flower he deems worthy of adding to Cas' bundle. Together, they end up with an assortment of flowers that don't look like they go together at all (probably because they don't). It's an odd-looking bouquet and it fits them perfectly.

*

The Impala smells like flowers. Strangely, Dean's ego is not at all wounded by this would-be slight to his manliness. He's too distracted by how handsome Cas' face looks, framed by the comically large bouquet. Castiel requests AC/DC on the ride home and Dean briefly considers the idea that God might have hand-crafted this angel to him.

Thinking of the handprint on his shoulder, Dean thinks this might not be too far-fetched an idea.

The drive passes in relative silence, but it's a warm and comfortable one. Driving is slightly difficult because Dean has one hand in Castiel's, but it's not too crippling. More than anything else, it's wonderful – this whole night has been wonderful. Dean tries not to replay the night in his head too much while he's driving, because he's afraid he'll get so giddy he'll cause an accident. He makes a mental note to begrudgingly thank his little brother for being so anal.

The glow of their festive decorations is a welcome sight. The word *home* burns bright in Dean's head, and it's not a word he ever thought he'd be acquainted with. He'd always thought he'd be living as a nomad in motel rooms, alone with his brother, for the rest of his life... and here he is, pulling up to the same flat he's lived in for months with a man he's just spent *Valentine's Day* with. His life has turned out so much better than he ever dared to hope.

And yeah, the few times he did dare to hope it never included a fallen angel and a studio flat in Pennsylvania, but Dean has absolutely no complaints with the way life has turned out for him. For once, he is truly, honestly happy. The best part is that he has a really strong feeling that this is something that's going to stay – he's finally starting to get confident that this isn't going to be pulled out from under him any time soon.

Cas sets his flowers on the coffee table and flops onto the couch, eyes meeting Dean's. They're all lit up like the stars they've been looking at all night. Dean walks past him to the hallway closet, brushing Cas' hair as he walks past.

“One last thing,” he says, pulling something from the top shelf. He takes a seat beside Cas and hands him what he's holding – the chocolates he bought, and a card. The card is about as classic as it gets. After spending about an hour *very* pissed off in the Hallmark section of the local CVS, he abandoned it for the Arts and Crafts aisle. The card he hands Castiel now is completely handmade. It's got everything every enthusiastic, crafty kindergarten girl's Valentine's Day card would have – lace, hearts, glitter.

Sam *did* tell him to go traditional. Dean figures Cas has no basis of comparison, so he has no idea how far off the cheesy deep end Dean has gone. He is seriously grateful for this fact.

There's a simple *Be My Valentine?* message inside, and Cas reacts enthusiastically by tossing the card next to the flowers and wrapping his arms around Dean's neck, whispering "Yes, Dean, I will be your Valentine," into Dean's neck. His token formality makes Dean chuckle. He wraps his arms around Castiel's waist and tugs him down so that they're cuddled together, lying on the couch. Cas presses kisses up and down Dean's neck that make him tingle in more ways than one.

And there it is again, that feeling on Dean's chest that he's been pushing down all night. The feeling that comes with three words that keep burning on his tongue. They are insistent, pushing at his lips, willing themselves from his mouth. They want to be spoken. Dean is terrified.

Cas looks up and meets Dean's eyes dead-on.

"May I say thank you, now?" Castiel asks, and Dean grins and nods. Castiel presses a kiss to Dean's mouth. "Thank you. I'm pleased you made an exception for me."

"I'll always make the exception for you, Cas," Dean replies, and is startled because it's true. So true, in fact, that he's inspired to let the words lingering on his lips finally manifest. He takes several deep breaths and twirls a tiny bit of Cas' hair around one of his fingers.

"Cas?" he says hesitantly. Another deep breath.

"Yes, Dean?"

“Uh – shit.” There is nothing romance novel about this. What the movies and books never tell you is that this shit is *hard* and he's already messed up big time, already lost the chance for eloquence... but if he doesn't say it now, he knows he never will. Cas doesn't say anything else, just looks at him curiously.

“Uh – so, uh. Cas, you make me feel...” This is positively painful. Cas' naivety is doing nothing to help; where a normal person might have figured out what Dean was trying to say, Cas only stares. His stare is deep and penetrating and Dean is quickly starting to feel like the world's biggest idiot.

“I'm in love with you,” he finally forces out, and watches Cas' eyes turn wide and saucers. “Yeah. There we go. Said it. I love you, Cas. That's, uh... that's it.”

Cas continues to watch him, brows wrinkled in what seems like confusion. Dean wonders suddenly, quite panicked, whether angels – fallen or not – even *can* love, if he's imagined everything. That this isn't mutual, that he's been feeling something that isn't there.

But then Cas is kissing him, again and again, squeezing close against him and wrapping his arms around Dean's waist. They're chest-to-chest, face-to-face when they stop to breathe, and Cas finally replies.

“It is about time, Dean Winchester,” he says breathlessly.

Dean raises his eyebrows, honestly shocked.

“What? - Wait, do you, uh...”

Cas kisses him again, then once more.

“Yes, Dean. I love you, too. Happy Valentine's Day.”

They don't say anything else, simply lay there in the dim light from Castiel's many festive candles. The air is floral and the room is quiet. They are *happy*. As they drift off to sleep, all Dean can think is that he finally, finally understands the importance of Hallmark holidays.

Kiss Me, I'm an (Irish) Angel

“Are we Irish, Dean?”

Castiel and Dean are sitting on the couch of their studio flat, sipping hot tea and playing Uno. If ever asked, Dean would very fervently insist that he drinks only *coffee*, and never the pansy herbal teas Cas has gotten into recently... but for right now, he can silently concede that tea is awesome. Dean has no idea what flavor this is – he's sure Cas mentioned it, but he wasn't paying attention and he'd never heard of it, anyway – but his taste buds are doing all kinds awesome things and he's glad he didn't object to the steaming teacup when offered. Dean is not sure when they acquired a tea pot, but there's one full of hot water on the coffee table where their cards are.

“Uno. You suck at this game,” Dean says distractedly, placing down a wild card and smirking at the lone card remaining in his hand.

“Dean?”

“Don't be sore because you suck and I'm going to win -”

“*Dean.*” Castiel's tone is firmer now, attracting Dean's attention. Cas has to use this tone often. Dean is not the best listener. Dean looks up from his card.

“Yeah, Cas?”

“Are we Irish?”

Dean doesn't say anything for a second – he's stuck on Castiel's phrasing of his question. *We*. Are *we* Irish? That small, two-letter word gives Dean a weird, fluttery feeling in his stomach. *We*. As though they are a pair, that whatever Dean is, Cas is. That they are two parts of a set. He knows that Cas didn't think of any of that when he

phrased the question, knows this strange feeling is random and without reason, really... but it causes him to pause, nonetheless.

“Hell should I know? Why do you ask? Your turn, by the way. Color is blue. ”

Cas glances at his hand and frowns, plucking a card from the deck. His expression brightens almost invisibly as he places the card, another wild, down.

“The color is now green. And... never mind, you've answered my question.”

Dean frowns at Cas.

“No cryptic bullshit. *Why* do you ask?”

Castiel looks away. “I was only curious.”

“Angels are sucky liars.”

“Quite.” Castiel is quiet, eyes focused intently anywhere but Dean. Finally, Dean grabs his jaw and tilts his face so that the other man has to look at him. Cas sighs.

“St. Patrick's Day,” he mutters, barely audibly.

Dean instantly laughs, letting go of Cas' face and ruffling the former-angel's hair affectionately.

“You're like a junkie, man.”

“I don't understand.”

“A junkie – you're addicted to holidays. *St. Patrick's Day?* Really?”

Castiel shifts awkwardly.

“It's your turn,” he says, indicating the cards on the coffee table. Dean draws a card.

“Cas, nobody celebrates St. Patrick Day unless they're getting shit-faced at an Irish pub. Which we can totally do, if you really want to celebrate.”

Castiel looks visibly disappointed, then... slightly irritated. He tosses a card into the pile, almost spitefully.

“Irish Americans celebrate it, Dean,” he says tightly, “which is why I asked if we're Irish. Obviously we're not.”

“I wonder if they make an AA for holiday addicts,” Dean says, essentially ignoring Cas. Cas glowers.

“I want to make the best of my humanity, Dean.”

Oh. Cas went and used the *h word*, which always makes Dean all kinds of uncomfortable. That familiar, sinking guilt he's been working on vanquishing settles into his stomach. He can't help but picture what Castiel's wings must have looked like, how he will never get to see them...

“Listen, Cas -”

“I believe you've won, Dean,” Cas says, gesturing to their card game. “I just played a green nine, and you have a blue nine. Congratulations.”

He unceremoniously stands from the couch and walks away. Dean can hear him in the kitchen, taking things out of the cupboards. *Baking*, Dean muses, and while he's a little upset he can't help but think how endearing it is that his little fallen angel *bakes* when he's angry. It is several minutes later when Dean realizes that the card he's holding is an upside-down six, not a nine.

He hasn't won anything.

*

Dean comes home later that night with a plastic bag under his arm. Cas is in bed with another cup of tea and a Vonnegut novel, wearing reading glasses, and Dean smiles softly at the sight. They haven't had the chance yet to talk literature, but the fact that they have the same taste in authors makes him feel warm all over – like years and years could pass and they'd *still* find new things to talk about. It is with renewed courage that he walks over to Cas and sits on the edge of the bed, silent until Cas finally looks up and acknowledges him.

“Can I help you?”

Dean clears his throat nervously.

“I, uh - I googled, Cas, and I can't find shit. When I look up St. Patrick's Day traditions, I just get the same damn story about the actual dude, St. Patrick.”

“I had the same problem,” Cas says slowly, removing his glasses.

“But, uh,” he reaches into the bag he's holding and pulls out a sweater. It's a St. Patrick's Day one, about as attractive as the collection of awful sweaters Cas has from Christmas (which is to say, not much). It's green and has an interesting design of shamrocks on it. It says “Kiss me, I'm Irish!” because Dean's sure that's about as traditional as he can think of. Cas' eyes instantly light up and Dean is relieved.

“Thank you, Dean,” he says warmly, taking the sweater and pulling it on over the tank top he'd been wearing as pajamas.

“Hey, no problem. I'm, er, sorry we're not Irish.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. Dean thinks it's kinda weird to see a former-angel roll his eyes, but he thinks he likes it, anyway. It's amusing, at least. It's such a human gesture for someone so foreign. Dean looks over Cas in the sweater and a tiny smirk creeps onto his lips when he rereads the words. Cas follows Dean's gaze, looking down at the writing. Then he looks back at Dean.

“You're thinking you should kiss me,” Cas states.

“Yes.”

“If it helps, I'm thinking the same thing.”

So Dean does.

*

Hey, you've reached the Winchesters – or, I guess you haven't since this is our voicemail. Leave your name and number and if we like you, we might call back.

“Hey, Dean – *the Winchesters*, eh? Did you guys get some secret wedding I wasn't invited to? Anyway – not why I'm calling. I'm calling about Friday. I was wondering if Sarah and I could come stay over you guys' house? I know it's dumb, but Sarah's got a thing about St. Patrick's day. Her family is really, really Irish. Like half-her-family-is-ginger Irish. Who woulda known? Anyway, her parents are going to Ireland for the holiday and she's pretty bummed she can't do a big family thing for it. So I thought we could give it a try? Talk it over and let us know. It'd be great to see you guys again.”

Dean's practically beaming when he hangs up the phone after listening to the voicemail. Cas is in their tiny dining room eating breakfast when Dean tells him the news.

“I've got a certified leprechaun coming to teach us about St. Patty's, Cas,” he says cheerfully, helping himself to a piece of toast from Cas' plate. Cas wrinkles his brow.

“Leprechauns aren't real, Dean,” he says.

“That is so not true. But not my point, either. Sam's fiancée is Irish and they want to come over and celebrate.” Cas drops his spoon in his oatmeal, and a genuine smile creeps across his face. Dean can't help but smile back.

“That's excellent,” Cas remarks.

“Thought you'd say that. Should I call em back, or -”

“You haven't called them back yet? Dean! Call them at once!”

“Love it when you get all bossy,” Dean teases, but doesn't miss the hint of blush that the statement brings about on Cas' face. There's a train of thought Dean *almost* goes down, but he stops himself and dials Sam's number instead.

“See you in two days, Sammy,” he says cheerfully when Sam answers. He can hear a female cry of *fuck yeah!* in the background, and he decides yet again that he really, really likes Sarah.

Dean's about to have an actual conversation with Sam when Cas cuts him off abruptly, tossing his jacket at him as he pulls on his own.

“We have to decorate,” he says urgently when Dean raises his eyebrows at him. Dean only laughs.

“Gotta go. Martha Stewart over here just caught some green fever.”

*

Castiel's favorite color is green. He announces this on their way back from shopping, after spending a fair amount of the day picking out various shades of green decorations that compliment each other. Dean thinks idly that Sam and Cas are both secretly women and therefore should hang out more. They'd be excellent girlfriends.

“What's yours?” Cas asks, looking at Dean as he drives. Dean starts to reply that he doesn't know, but he catches sight of Castiel's eyes just as he's opening his mouth, and he changes his mind.

“Blue,” he says decidedly.

Something seems to swell in Cas, and Dean looks away. Sometimes he still has trouble dealing with how much and how often he *feels* around Cas, the great depth and extent of his feelings. It's most overwhelming when he sees them reciprocated, when he catches small glimpses into the heart of the man he is very much in love with.

They stop at a stoplight and Cas leans over and kisses him. He kisses him again and again until the car behind them starts beeping because the light has changed. They break away, and Dean gets chills by what he sees in Cas' eyes.

*

"I'd believe leprechauns are real faster than I'd believe fairies are real," Dean argues, wiping flour from his face, "and fairies *are* real."

"Dean, I've been stationed on this Earth -"

"Thousands of years, yeah, yeah, I know. And if a leprechaun was real you'd have seen one. Well, I think they're crafty little fuckers, Cas. That's what I think."

"So crafty they've escaped the attention of angels?"

Dean and Castiel are in the kitchen, and they're covered in flour. Cas more-so than Dean – despite being the regular cook of the two, he seems to have an affinity for making kitchen messes. Every counter is covered with various baking ingredients. They have at least four different types of shamrock cookie cutters.

"Yes. *That* crafty. You've got flour on your nose."

"I always do."

“Last time I tried to kiss it off, it tasted awful. So I'm not doing it again.”

“The gesture was appreciated, regardless.”

“Hey, Cas?”

Cas looks up from the dough he's cutting into a shamrock shape, looks at Dean inquisitively.

“I, uh – I love you, dude. Seriously.” It comes out even more awkward than it did in Dean's head, but Cas just smiles, wipes his hands on his apron (appropriately St. Patrick's Day themed – their collection of aprons is growing at a startling pace) and slips his arms around Dean's waist.

“I don't say it very often,” Dean says sheepishly, now uncomfortable meeting Castiel's eyes. Cas kisses him.

“Neither do I. Do we have to?”

“No,” Dean says slowly, as though this is a fact that has only now occurred to him. “No, we don't.”

“Knowing is enough for me, Dean. I love you, as well.”

Dean wipes the flour from Cas' nose with his thumb, then wipes his thumb clean on Cas' apron. Then, they go back to cutting shapes out of cookie dough.

“I think that was powdered sugar,” Castiel says eventually, as Dean puts the cookie tray into the oven. There's at least a dozen tiny shamrock-shaped sugar cookies on it. Later, they'll ice them with green frosting.

“Yeah?”

“Yes. Which means, you could have kissed it off.”

“Nose kisses are awkward anyway, Cas.”

Cas gives a look that is startlingly close to a pout, and Dean is instantly smirking.

“You know, if you wanted a kiss, all you had to do was ask...” With that, he plucks some powdered sugar from its container on the counter and tosses it at Cas. Cas' face is immediately covered in white dust, and his mouth forms a little 'o'. Sugar falls from his eyelashes when he blinks.

“*Dean Winchester-*”

“Hey, now I have an excuse to-”

And then Cas is cracking an egg over Dean's head, his expression one of smug satisfaction. It's now Dean's turn for his mouth to fall wide open. It's not just because Cas egged him... it's because of how incredibly *spontaneous* the action was, how unangelic and human and friggin' wonderful.

The state of the kitchen quickly falls to shit soon after, as all-out war breaks out. Flour, sugar, eggs and chocolate chips all become viable weapons. If it was a mess before, it is now a landmine, a disaster area. It's so much fun, though, that cleaning up after doesn't even feel daunting. Cas plays some weird Irish music, and Dean surprisingly finds that he doesn't mind much. He might even kinda like it. Dean skates around the kitchen floor

in his socks while he sweeps, kicking up plumes of white dust. At one point he starts dancing with the broom, but Cas doesn't like that much – he takes the broom from Dean and dances with him instead.

Hours and hours later than they intended to leave the kitchen, they collapse onto the couch with a tray of their cookies. Cas puts a sheet down first, so their messy clothes don't dirty the couch. The cookies turn out damn delicious. What's even sweeter is how Cas sits snuggled against Dean, his head laid on Dean's shoulder.

“We're covered in food,” he points out after they've finished all the cookies. They hadn't actually planned on eating everything already – the cookies were meant to be around when Sam and Sarah come over... but they can always make more. “I'm going to go take a shower.”

“No-*oh*,” Dean whines, “I'll fall asleep before you get back.”

“You can't fall asleep covered in food, Dean, you'll attract ants.”

“Well, I'm coming then,” Dean says decidedly. He stands and treks ahead of Cas to the bathroom. Cas follows hesitantly, a peculiar, nervous expression on his face.

“Dean?” he says very, very quietly from the doorway. Dean ignores him and turns on the shower.

“Dean,” Cas repeats, but Dean just pushes open the shower curtain and climbs into the shower with his clothes on. Cas' eyes go wide.

“Dean, what are you *doing*?” he asks, incredulous. He has this look on his face like he thinks he might have missed some sort of Earth tradition in all his years observing them. He's obviously never seen a man shower fully clothed before.

... Which, of course, makes sense.

Dean just grins and grabs the shampoo, pouring it into his hand as his clothes are steadily soaked. Cas hesitates, but finally peels off his socks and clambers in after Dean. Warm water hits his face and gooey flour starts running off instantly.

Dean grabs a washcloth and helps wash off Cas' face, and he can't help but think this is up there with the weirdest things he's ever done (making rank with ganking the homicidal Puerto Rican clown's pet chupacabra that one time) – showering, fully clothed, with an Angel of the Lord. Or, former angel. Same basic idea. There's nothing remotely sexual about it, either. There's no pretense, it's not leading up to anything. It's just...

Silly. They're being shamelessly silly. Dean hasn't been this silly since Sam was young enough to laugh when he made funny faces at him.

“How are we ever going to get dry, Dean?” Cas asks once they're just about clean and the hot water is just starting to taper off into a much less satisfying lukewarm temperature.

“Uh. Shit. That is a good question.”

They end up stripping down to boxers and undershirts, leaving a sopping pile of dirty clothing in the bathtub. They wrap up with towels and then get a big blanket and cocoon together on the couch. Dean had intended to maybe put a movie in, but Cas feels warm against his body, despite the fact that their underclothes are still damp, and he doesn't want to move. So he doesn't.

Dean's thoughts are starting to travel *elsewhere*, somewhere he's never even considered letting them trail before. It's hard not to – this is the first time he's been this close to Cas with this little clothing. He tries to push the thoughts out, and his sleepiness assists.

Soon, they both fall asleep.

*

The mid-morning light streaming through the window looks slightly green when filtered through festive green curtains. Dean awakes to this odd, cheery glow with his face in Castiel's hair. He hadn't intended to sleep through the night on the couch with Cas, but the minty shampoo he's currently inhaling smells nice, and he's not complaining. Dean smiles when he realizes Cas probably chose the scent on purpose. Mint and the color green go hand-in-hand, and green goes hand-in-hand with St. Patrick's Day. Dean is quietly pleased with himself for understanding Castiel's rationale.

"Hello, Dean," Castiel says when he feels Dean stir, alerting Dean that Cas is already awake.

"Hey, Cas," Dean says quietly. His eyes flicker to the coffee table where the empty tray of cookies sits. "We ate them all," he adds.

"I see," Cas concedes, "We'll need more for Sam and Sarah. They're coming tonight, St. Patrick's Day is tomorrow."

"We'll do that today," Dean agrees, "but later. Right now, I'm pretty comfortable with you right where you are."

Cas says nothing to this, but Dean can feel him relaxing in his arms. Dean quickly falls asleep again to the sound of Castiel's quiet breathing and the feeling of the other man's chest rising and falling against his own.

*

When they wake again, Cas changes into green pyjama pants covered in shamrocks and an overlarge black Kansas shirt that looks suspiciously like Dean's. Dean follows suit, changing clothes, deciding that a day in

pyjamas sounds good to him. He can't get over how much he likes the way Cas looks in his clothes, and has half a mind to tell him. He's not exactly sure why he doesn't.

Cas plays his loud Irish music – which he's informed Dean is a mixed playlist of Dropkick Murpheys and Flogging Molly – and they get to baking again after a late breakfast. Soon, they've replenished their cookie supply and then some. They add green cupcakes to the mix, and Cas has a recipe for “Guinness chocolate cake”, which they try out. Unfortunately, Dean thinks it's funny to add twice the amount of Guinness the recipe calls for, and it turns out awful. Cas pouts until Dean gets a text saying that Sam and Sarah will be bringing their *own* Guinness chocolate cake, and then he brightens considerably.

Several hours later, Sam and Sarah show up with cake, as promised. Sarah's face lights up when she sees all of Castiel's decorations. Sam's carrying several brown shopping bags, which Dean helps to carry in.

“Hello, Sam, Sarah,” Castiel says, and while his tone is level, Dean can sense his underlying eagerness.

“Hey Cas! The house looks great,” Sarah says, “Just like when I was a kid. It's perfect.” Cas practically beams at this praise, and Dean swells with pride.

“Thank you,” Cas replies warmly.

“We brought some ingredients for Irish soda bread,” Sam says, gesturing to the grocery bags, “we were going to make it at home, but Sarah thought you guys might appreciate being involved, for authenticity's sake.”

Cas nods eagerly, confirming this theory, and Sarah looks like a kid at Christmas.

“Maybe we should leave 'em to it,” Dean suggests, pulling up a chair at the kitchen table. Sam agrees and sits beside Dean. They're quickly immersed in a conversation about the wendigo that Cas and Dean tracked down last week while Sarah and Cas go about preparing the bread. Sarah pulls buttermilk, baking soda, flour, sugar, and butter from the bags and sets them on the kitchen counter. She makes herself at home in their kitchen,

pulling out round tins from their cupboards as Cas watches eagerly. Dean and Sam watch the other two all throughout their conversation, both of them with matching expressions of absolute fondness. Dean catches this look on his brother and is pleased. He's happy that this girl makes him so happy. She's getting along well with Cas, too, so Dean figures she's a keeper.

Sarah is tickled pink (or green, as it were) that there's a spare St. Patrick's Day apron for her to use when she and Cas prepare the bread. The consistency of it looks weird from Dean's vantage point, but he figures that's probably the point. He's never had Irish soda bread before, and he's sure neither Sam nor Cas has, either. Finally, they put the bread in the oven.

"Now then," Sarah says, wiping her hands on her apron before removing it, "time for leprechaun traps."

The two brothers and their former-angel raise their eyebrows in identical expressions of skepticism, and Sarah laughs. She has a pretty laugh and a smile that lights up her whole face.

"Oh god, humor me. It's tradition, okay? Are we doing this holiday right or what?"

"Alright, alright. We'll humor you," Sam says right away. Dean mimes a whipping motion, but grins and nods her on.

"The story goes that leprechauns roam about the night before St. Patrick's Day, and if you can trap one, you can get their gold," Sarah begins explaining.

"Sounds like a good deal to me," Dean interjects.

"Right? So let's do it! This was so much fun when I was a kid – and Winchester's are basically a bunch of overgrown kids, so let's have at it."

They pair off, the Winchester brothers as partners and their respective significant others as partners. Sarah and Cas huddle in the corner of the room secretively, hiding their project from the boys. Dean catches sight of glitter and green construction paper, and declares valiantly to Sam that they're going to defeat their enthusiastic lovers. Sam just chuckles and shakes his head.

At some point, Sarah catches Dean leaving the hallway closet holding a revolver. He's tying string around the trigger.

"Dean!" she chastises him sharply, "we're *catching* them, not killing them!"

Both Sam and Dean look sheepish. "Old habits die hard," Sam explains. Dean gives her a cheesy smile and shrugs.

"It's instinct to gank the little f-"

"Dean! They're mischievous, not evil," Cas chimes in. Dean raises an eyebrow.

"Thought they weren't real?"

"Hypothetically, of course."

"Right." Dean puts the revolver back in the closet and goes back to Sam, and they go back to making their trap without lethal weapons. After an hour, both teams are done and ready to unveil their traps.

Cas and Sarah have decorated a small box with green decorations, glitter, and a rainbow made of construction paper. Atop it is a pile of gold chocolate coins. Cas and Sarah demonstrate how, given the slightest pressure, a trapdoor beneath the coins will fall in. They look very pleased with themselves, but Sam and Dean are not impressed.

The brothers' trap is slightly more... aggressive, and much less decorative. It also features a box with a trapdoor, but theirs is much bigger; it goes up just above Sam's knee. The front of the box is cut open so that the box looks almost like a tiny house. There are strings hanging from the "ceiling" of the box, and taped to the strings are little baggies of Lucky Charms. Dean tugs on one of the strings and a pile of VHS tapes falls through the fake ceiling – the tapes were hidden by a second box that was taped over the first box.

Cas and Sarah blink at it several times.

"Where – where did you even find VHS tapes?" Sarah inquires.

"Cas and I had them. He went through this phase where he wanted to go through old technology – he's trying to do the *whole* human experience firsthand. Weird, right?" Dean flashes Cas an affectionate smile. "So we had them in a box in the closet. I saw them when you made me put the revolver back..."

"This is exactly the kind of thing I used to do when I was a kid – it's awesome, guys. Really original."

"We figure the crash of the tapes wouldn't kill the little f- er, little *darling*, but it'd wake us up so we could catch him."

"So! Do we win?" Sam asks. Sarah and Cas exchange looks, and finally Cas nods subtly. Sarah turns to the boys.

"Yes, I think you do," she tells them. Dean and Sam respond enthusiastically with high-fives and bro-fists, and Sarah rolls her eyes.

“What's our reward?” Dean demands.

“Awesome Irish food tomorrow,” Sarah says, “Speaking of – our bread should be done, Castiel. Wanna see what you do to it when you take it out?”

Cas follows Sarah into the kitchen, and Dean and Sam follow after a moment later, curious themselves. All three watch as Sarah pulls the tins of bread from the oven and wraps the bread in damp tea towels. It's one of the weirdest things ever Dean's seen as far as baking goes, but he doesn't say so. Sarah promises that it'll taste amazing in the morning.

By this time, it's quite late, and everyone concedes that sleep sounds good. Sarah and Sam change into matching green pyjamas, which Dean instantly teases them about. Cas and Dean are still in theirs from earlier, so they don't need to change. Cas offers his bed to Sam and Sarah, and Dean offers the couch to Cas, insisting he take the floor rather than Cas. There's an awkward moment where they both stare at each other, and Sam and Sarah giggle. Dean glares at them.

“We can share the couch, Dean,” Cas says very quietly, and Dean nods. They crash on the couch very often, but it's only ever when Cas is too tired to get up and go to his own bed. It's sort of an unspoken rule that they don't plan it out. Still, Dean's too tired to object further, so he crawls onto the couch and scoots so that Cas has room. It's dark and quiet in the room for a while before Cas squirms a little closer to Dean, pressing his back to Dean's chest.

A moment later, Dean happily wraps an arm around Cas.

*

Dean wakes up to the feeling of being pinched hard on his arm.

His eyes flicker open and he looks around wildly, surprised to find Cas' face very close to his, smiling in the morning light. He moves his arm away from Cas quickly, sitting up and rubbing it, making a face.

“Ow! What was that for? There are other ways to wake a guy up, y'know.”

“Happy St. Patrick's Day,” Cas says, “You're not wearing green.”

“I just woke up!”

“Everyone else is wearing green.”

“Cheaters,” Dean mutters, still rubbing his arm, but he's quickly distracted by the smell of food coming from the kitchen. Across the room, Sam is waking up as well – it seems that Sarah and Cas woke up before both of them in order to make breakfast. The aroma is tantalizing; Dean can make out the telltale scent of bacon and eggs. He stretches sleepily a moment before letting Cas lead him to the dining room, with Sam trailing behind. There, the table is already set with food.

The soda bread is on the table, wrapped in its tea towels, beside a jar of honey and a dish of butter. There is a serving dish with what looks like pancakes in the form of shamrocks, though they have a strange consistency. There's another plate with bacon, another with eggs, and a dish with sausage and potatoes. Each place set at the table has a glass with green milk in it.

“Holy shit,” Dean says, looking at Cas and then at Sarah, who has just walked in from the kitchen.

“You're welcome,” Sarah says, “and the pancakes are called 'boxty' – they're potato pancakes. Very Irish.”

“It looks amazing, guys,” Sam says, giving Sarah a delicate kiss. Dean's eyes dart to Castiel's mouth instinctively, but he doesn't act on the impulse. It's still kinda weird kissing Cas in front of Sam.

“Happy St. Patrick's Day,” she says, and Dean and Sam echo it before sitting down and digging in. Cas sits close to Dean, and more than once Dean catches Cas staring at him fondly as he eats. It feels awesome and slightly uncomfortable. In a good way.

After their breakfast, everyone piles onto the couch to watch a St. Patrick's Day parade on tv. There isn't one reasonably close to them, unfortunately, and they are otherwise too stuffed to move, anyway. Cas' eyes are trained intently on each passing float on the screen with such scrutiny that Dean silently likens him to a scientist investigating a specimen. This scientist loves his work, though; Dean can almost *feel* the enthusiasm seeping from his stoic sort-of-boyfriend where their sides touch on the couch. Cas is *definitely* a holiday junkie.

Hours pass with animated chatter and exchanges of anecdotes, each enjoying one another's time. Before long, Sarah announces it's time to get started making dinner – she and Sam have a long drive and they'd like to be on the road before the sun goes down. She enlists Castiel's help in this endeavor, and the two of them file into the kitchen. Sam watches them go quietly for a moment.

“You seem more different every time I see you, Dean,” Sam remarks in a low voice. In the kitchen, the sound of pots and pans and conversation promises that Cas and Sarah cannot hear them.

“Yeah?” Dean replies awkwardly, keeping his eyes fixed on the television.

“Yeah. You're... I don't know.”

“I'm what?” Dean asks, suddenly defensive.

“In love,” Sam says finally, looking relieved to have found words for it. Dean's mouth falls open and then clamps shut. Sam looks at him curiously, wearing a bemused expression.

“So, what of it?” Dean says at last, crankily. Sam smiles.

“It's just nice, man. That's all. Just really friggin nice.”

Dean doesn't say anything. He likes seeing his little brother happy and it's not something he's used to seeing. He knows a lot of it has to do with Sam's new life with Sarah, with quitting hunting and ending the apocalypse... but he's also learning that it has a lot to do with him, too, and Cas. His relationship with Cas. Sam gets secondhand happiness from knowing that Dean is happy. Dean is just realizing this now, and it's a really good feeling.

“Friggin nice,” Dean repeats, and then nods. “Friggin nice is right.”

*

Cas and Sarah have outdone themselves again, somehow accomplishing a spread that looks even more inviting than breakfast had. (Dinner Description!) The little family gathers around the table and they all take their seats, helping themselves to portions of the food laid out. Flogging Molly is playing in the background from the kitchen.

“Hey – before we eat, there should be a toast. Family tradition. Dean, do you want the honors?”

“Uh, sure,” Dean says and stands, holding up his glass, “To St. Patrick's Day?”

“To St. Patrick's Day!” Sarah repeats, confirming that this is an okay choice for a toast, much to Dean's relief. Everyone drinks from their cups. Dean looks at Cas when he sits down, absorbs the little fire in Cas' eyes that is surely burning straight from his heart. Dean wishes every day was a new holiday Cas could learn about, if it always gained this reaction from Cas. Cas looks alive and in love with humanity, and in this small moment Dean doesn't feel guilty at all that Cas isn't an angel anymore. Cas has always loved humans, been enamored of his

Father's creations, but only *now* can he fully appreciate life as one. A little good came from Cas' fall, and Dean seizes it gratefully.

Cas clears his throat and stands, raising his glass as well. The other three fall silent.

“To family,” he adds, and Sam, Sarah and Dean all repeat it firmly, heartily, before drinking to it. Cas looks warmed by their response. Dean takes Cas' hand when he sits down and kisses his knuckles before letting go to eat. Cas examines his hand briefly after that, which amuses Dean to no end.

“We should do this every year,” Sarah says through bites of beef.

“Agreed,” Cas replies readily, and Dean and Sam contribute their assent. They make plans to do it again at Sam's place next year. Cas' eyes are wide while this conversation goes on, as though he's in shock that he's lucky enough to get this *again*. Dean is inexplicably unhappy with this look on Cas. He wants to tell Cas *no, stop looking so surprised when good things happen* – but he knows that only time can make that change come about. Hell, he's still working on it himself.

He's getting there, though. And if he can get there, Cas sure as hell can, too. Dean looks forward to approaching that goal. Together. He's pretty sure neither of them can do it alone.

*

The sun is just making its mind to set as Sam and Sarah bid their goodbyes, driving off in Sam's douchey new escalade. Dean made sure he made fun of Sam about the car as often as possible while he stayed over, so he doesn't feel compelled to mention it again as he watches his brother drive off. Cas is practically glowing in his green sweater, eyes bright and lively. He and Dean go inside only after Sam and Sarah are out of sight.

Flogging Molly is still playing unassumingly in the background, its soft volume at odds with its bold sound. Cas' arms are around Dean before he can even finish locking the door, pinning Dean in place so that Cas can look at

him with the full intensity of his gaze. And *intense* doesn't even begin to cover it – there are so many feelings in this look, such a wide range of deep emotion that Dean feels almost trapped. Dean wonders if Cas had to fall to feel these things, or if these feelings are what made him fall. He swallows, hard.

“Thank you, Dean,” Cas says, and Dean smirks and rolls his eyes because he has no idea how else to deal with the weight behind Cas' gratitude.

But Cas won't have that. He frowns, grabs Dean's chin and directs him so that he has to look at Cas.

“No – really, Dean. Thank you... for sharing your family. For... everything. For giving me something worth falling for.”

Dean's chest feels tight. He clears his throat.

“You gotta stop thanking me every time there's a holiday,” he says lightly, carefully dancing around all the poignant things Cas has brought to the table. “This one was all Sarah, anyway. The Winchester-style St. Patrick's Day is way less fun.”

Cas looks extremely unsatisfied with this answer, but Dean doesn't know what else to say. Because, what do you say to the guy who saved you from hell, fell from heaven for you, and is now thanking *you*? So, Dean maintains an easy smile, despite Cas' expression, which is dangerously close to a pout.

“We can still do that, by the way,” Dean says.

Castiel tilts his head to the side. “Do what?”

“Have a Winchester St. Patrick's Day. Because, y'know, for all Sarah's family fun, she missed the biggest part of the holiday.”

“And what is that?”

“Alcohol,” Dean says, smirking, “No one can drink like the Irish, baby.”

“Baby?” Cas echoes, making a face like the word tastes bad in his mouth.

“Yeah! So, what do you say? Wanna get hammered, Irish style? I know this awesome pub in Delaware.”

“Dean, that's at least an hour from here.”

“Worth it, man. Totally worth it. We'll take the speedline, it won't take long.”

Cas frowns, seemingly searching for excuses. Of course, there are a million reasons why an *angel* shouldn't go get drunk... but Cas seems to be struggling to find any relevance in them now. Dean waits for Cas to reply anxiously, unsure why he suddenly wants this so bad.

“Alright,” Cas says at last, and Dean kisses him.

“Sweet! - but let me get changed. A little green pin isn't gonna keep me from being pinched where we're going.”

*

Dean's shirt brings out his eyes, and Castiel comments on it as they get walk to the speedline. It's, thankfully, around the corner from their house. They're walking hand-in-hand – and it's as awesome as it is awkward. Several houses down, a conservative Republican neighbor is shamelessly glaring at them. Dean winks at her, stops Cas so he can kiss her demonstratively outside her house. The woman goes inside.

Castiel likes the speedline, for the most part, but seems visibly agitated when they go underground. Dean speculates that it might be an angel thing, not liking to be underground. Dean thinks of birds, how odd they look when they're sometimes trapped in the lower levels of speedline stations. He can't help but put an arm around Cas' shoulders when he thinks about the former-angel's lost wings. He really, really wishes he could see them. Cas looks at him skeptically, but settles into Dean's hold after a while.

It's dark and getting late when they arrive at the classic Irish pub, and the building is crammed with people, all having a great time. Live Irish music is playing loudly from a back corner of the bar, and people are dancing. Dean soaks up the atmosphere, thinking idly of the last time he got drunk with at an Irish pub. He'd picked up a very pretty and very drunk ginger girl, then. He chuckles when he thinks of how much things have changed.

Cas is hovering closer than usual – he is foreign to humanity, and it manifests in social awkwardness. Dean reaches for Cas' hand and squeezes it, then leads him to the bar. Several stools down, a busty girl in a short kilt and a tight green vest is eyeing Dean with hungry eyes. Dean catches Castiel glaring and it makes him feel all funny inside. He kinda likes seeing this side of Cas, this trivial human jealousy. He is very taken aback when Cas kisses him suddenly, with much more passion than either of them is accustomed to. Cas wipes his mouth when they pull apart. Dean raises his eyebrows.

“That was interesting,” Dean remarks. Castiel clears his throat and looks away.

“My apologies.”

“Hey, you don't have to – ”

“We should order drinks, correct?” Cas cuts in, and Dean lets it drop. He wants to tell Cas he can do that as often as he wants, but he doesn't know how to say it. Plus, he's pretty sure that Cas only did it to piss the other girl off. He's not entirely sure angels are into that kind of stuff, otherwise.

“Hell yes we should. And I gotta say, man, I'm pretty excited to see what your tolerance is without angel mojo.”

A person next to Cas gives them a very confused look and moves a seat down. Dean smiles at him and waves over the bartender.

“Happy St. Patrick's Day!” the bartender says heartily. He is a large man in a kilt, with an appropriately full and ginger beard. He has a thick Irish accent that adds to the authenticity. “What can I get you boys?”

“Surprise us,” Dean says, “something traditional – as long as it gets him drunk.” The bartender returns Dean's grin and nods, turning away to make their drinks. Castiel looks nervous, which Dean finds incredibly endearing.

“We're gonna loosen you up,” Dean says, but this doesn't seem to comfort Cas. If anything, it seems to make him even more anxious. Dean realizes that Cas may never have actually been *loose* before. Dean, for sure, can't think of a single time Cas was even the slightest bit uninhibited. He's extremely excited, and tips their bartender well when he returns with their drinks. He has two pint glasses filled with Guinness beer and two shot glasses filled with something unrecognizable.

“Irish car bombs,” the man explains when both Dean and Cas look at him quizzically.

“*What?* A drink I've never had? I guess there's a first time for everything.”

“You split a can of Guinness,” the man explains, “- you two seemed like the splittin' type – and drop the shot glass into the pint. Don't look at me funny, boys, it's got hard tack an' cream innit. Then you gotta chug it before the cream can curdle. They'll get you mighty shlossed in a quick minute. Taste like chocolate.”

“Chocolate. Right,” Dean says, raising an eyebrow. But he shrugs and raises his shotglass and motions for Cas to do the same. After a moment's hesitation, Cas complies.

“To us!” Dean says, and drops the shot glass in the pint. Cas does the same, and they quickly chug down their drinks. Both of them wear matching expressions of surprise and delight.

“Those are awesome,” Dean says, and Cas nods vigorously. Dean is beyond pleased with Cas' reaction, and he quickly orders two more, and then two more. It's soon obvious that the alcohol *is* affecting Cas – he has next to no tolerance without his angelic homeostasis backing him up.

“Wanna dance?” Dean asks. Dean's still mostly sober, but he feels a buzz starting and it's enough to get him on his feet. To his shock, Castiel complies without coercion, and readily follows Dean to where the musicians are playing. Several people are dancing in traditional Irish style with varying degrees of talent. The dance requires a lot of moving around, and it's fun and upbeat. Dean and Cas can't keep up with the complicated foot movements, but they join in anyway, locking arms and spinning around and otherwise making fools of themselves. They're not the only awful dancers there – there are plenty of people who are drunk witless – so they fit right in. To Dean's surprise, Cas laughs the whole while, grin uncharacteristically wide.

The night passes with alternating dancing and drinks, until even *Dean* is drunk, and Cas is so far gone that he tries to get Dean to dance on a table with him. He's sitting on the table, about to stand up, tugging Dean close by his forearms, while lively Irish music plays busily in the background. Dean almost complies, but he's pretty sure they're so inebriated they'll end up injuring themselves. He clings to the tiniest bit of common sense his intoxicated mind can muster up and refrains, instead pulling Cas close into a deep kiss to distract him from his whim. He ventures for tongue and someone nearby whistles, and then two more whistles follow. Cas melts into the kiss, throwing his arms around Dean's neck and responding enthusiastically. This is *incredibly* new. They've never done this before, and certainly not in public.

Then Cas remembers why he's sitting on the table and abruptly breaks the kiss and stands up, wobbly, offering a hand to Dean. The table is long and fairly wide, and Dean figures Cas has a better chance of not falling if he's up there with him, so he finally relents and joins Cas. They link arms and spin around until they nearly fall and Dean puts his arms around Cas and draws him close in an effort to slow their pace. Cas kisses him again, and this time several people cheer.

They stay until the pub closes, waving excitedly to everyone as they leave, shaking hands here and there.

“The Irrsh are *awesmm!*” Dean slurs happily as they walk to the speedline, arms linked as they go. Cas just laughs and nods in agreement. They luck out and catch the last running train of the night and spend the ride huddled up together in a seat in the back, Cas nuzzling into Dean's neck affectionately as Dean presses kisses he's only half-conscious of into Cas' hair. After the first half hour, Cas tilts his head and kisses Dean again, with the same passion as before. Tonight is the first time they've ever really made out, and they spend the ride making up for lost time.

They almost miss their stop because they're so distracted and out of it, and Castiel's trench coat nearly gets caught in the doors as the speedline departs. They laugh way too hard over this, and walk with shaky feet home. At some point they stop and dance in the vacant street, trying in vain to replicate the fancy Irish dance steps they sort-of learned tonight. They move on when they almost fall, and finally make it home.

As soon as they're inside, Cas shoves Dean against the door, clutching Dean's jacket with both hands. Dean is reminded of the time in the alley when Cas beat the living shit out of him, and his heart thunders in his chest. This time, though, Cas presses their bodies together and then their mouths, his kisses more fervent and aggressive than the lazy, sloppy kisses on the train. Dean responds eagerly, letting alcohol work on his behalf, helping him act on all the latent desires he's been suppressing. The same seems to be true of Cas, who is pulling off his shirt and then quickly tugging at Dean's.

They make it to the couch in a tangle of limbs, entwined as tightly as possible once they lay down. Dean's breathing is coming short and shallow now, and he notices with a jolt that Castiel's is, as well.

“Baby, you're so *hot*,” he babbles, vaguely aware that he sounds ridiculous.

“Not a baby, Dean,” Cas interjects between kisses, pausing only long enough to speak, “I'm thousands of years old.” His hands trace Dean's thighs over denim, come to rest at the hem of his jeans. Dean stops short.

“Holy shit,” he says, stopping Castiel's hands with his own. “Cas – Dude, Cas.”

“*What?*” Cas looks annoyed and smacks Dean's hands away. Dean immediately regains his grip.

“Cas, you're – you're a virgin, like a *thousand year old virgin*, you can't just...” Dean wishes liquor wasn't making it so hard to think and talk.

Cas makes a sound somewhat like a growl. “You don't *want* me, then?” He mouths at Dean's neck, then his ear, as though trying to prove a point, and Dean stifles a mewl.

“No! I do, I do, Cas – no, you don't get it,” Dean's wondering at what point he got this drunk, and curses the last three car bombs, “it has to be... special, damnit. 'Cause you're... special. It can't be some drunken thing we won't remember.”

Cas stops at this, seems to be thinking it over. He sighs, forces himself up on his forearms so that he can look at Dean properly.

“Very well,” he says quietly, “but it *will* happen.”

“Hell yes,” Dean agrees readily.

“Will you... sleep, with me? In my bed?” Castiel asks hesitantly, eyes darting to the bed they've never shared before. They've crashed on the couch haphazardly in the past, but it's never been a planned, agreed upon thing. There's something that seems almost formal about this. Like it's the start of something. Dean catches his breath, and then nods. He plants a kiss to Cas' nose and smiles.

They make the transition from bed to couch and cuddle up under the blankets. Dean is the little spoon, for once, and he finds that he doesn't mind as much as he would have expected. He feels safe in more ways than one.

"I love you, Dean," Cas whispers sleepily.

"I love you too, Cas."

"I like being Irish with you," he adds as he starts to drift off. It's a drunken sentiment, but Dean understands.

"I like being Irish with you, too, Cas. I really friggin' do."

Laundromats Are For Losers, Anyway

(an ugly shirt short)

Dean and Cas are very bad about getting laundry done.

Sam was always the one who kept Dean tidy and presentable, was always the one to remind him they needed to hit the laundromat or point out if he had food in his teeth. Dean never had to worry about keeping his shit together. But Sam's away and practically married now, and Dean's like a college kid on his own for the first time.

It doesn't help that for a while Cas had some sort of ultra-convenient angelic homeostasis going on ever since he took on a vessel – the guy's clothes never got gross, the blood always disappeared and nothing ever needed to be changed or cleaned. Hell, he didn't even need to shower. Now that Cas is human, he doesn't have that convenience anymore. He's just taking his damn time getting used to remembering that. Needless to say, between the two of them, laundry tends to fall to the wayside.

“Cas, can you bring me my Zeppelin shirt and some boxers?” Dean calls from the bathroom. He's freshly showered, hair still slightly dripping, bare but for the towel clinging snugly to his hips. Cas is in the other room, snuggled in bed, the bedside light on while he reads. There is a long pause before Cas responds.

“The shirt is dirty,” he replies gruffly after a moment.

Dean has absolutely no recollection of wearing that shirt recently. In fact, he knows for a fact that it's clean because he put it away in the back of the drawer so he wouldn't accidentally grab it if he was in a hurry to get changed before a hunt or something. He makes an annoyed sound and leans his forehead against the door frame.

“No it's not,” he says irritably, “Just go check for me.”

“Dean,” Cas says in an even tone, “it is *dirty*.”

“Jesus Christ, Cas, can't you just go look?”

“I'm reading.”

This answer only serves to further irritate Dean. He's 'stranded' in the bathroom – he's never been naked around Cas before, and vice versa, and he really doesn't want to start now. Even with a towel, it'd be weird. They don't have any official rules about it, and after their interesting St. Patrick's Day... thing, Dean's pretty sure Cas would actually *enjoy* seeing him so indecent... but it would still be weird. Dean's still *very* aware of the drunken promise he made Cas – it's one of the few things he does remember of that crazy, amazing night – and his heart and stomach do weird flops whenever he thinks about it. If he didn't know better, he'd think *he's* the virgin contemplating losing his innocence.

So Dean's been treading lightly, cutting kisses short, fast-forwarding racy scenes in movies, cautious about the inevitable. Cas, to his credit, has said nothing about Dean's strange behavior. Still, Dean's on one side of the bathroom door without the shirt he has suddenly decided he *will* wear today, even if it takes all day to find it, and he doesn't want to keep hiding. Cas is obviously uninterested in helping.

Dean darts from the bathroom to their shared chest of drawers and hastily grabs some boxers. Cas is in his bed, covers pulled up to his chin as he reads. Dean rolls his eyes at the sight and then darts back into the bathroom to pull on his boxers. Dean's usually fine with their tiny studio apartment, has never minded not having a bedroom or having space for his own bed... but awkward moments like these are ones where he's seriously considering renting out a bigger space. Sharing a motel with your brother your whole life is infinitely different than the extremely complicated whatever-the-hell-it-is he's got going on with Cas.

Dean leaves the bathroom again, and while in his boxers he's no more covered than he was with the towel, he feels a lot less exposed. He can't help but note the way Cas glances up from his book subtly and looks Dean over, eyes tracing Dean's bare chest. When their eyes meet, Dean expects Cas to look away – but Cas never learned human things like when to be embarrassed. Cas just keeps looking at Dean's eyes until Dean looks away, tugging open the drawer to look for his shirt.

His shirt is not where he left it. It's not in the drawer that follows, either, or the rest – he goes through all of them, goes as far as taking them out and emptying them on the floor before conceding that it is, in fact, not there. He looks up at Cas, expecting to see him looking vindicated. Instead, he finds Cas looking flustered and

studiously avoiding his eyes. Dean doesn't bother trying to decode the look and instead heads for the hamper where they keep their dirty laundry. He starts loading it into a bag before Cas speaks.

“Dean – what are you doing?”

“I'm gonna do the laundry, Cas. I want that damn shirt.”

“You're – you are intrinsically stubborn, Dean. It's nighttime, surely they'll be closing soon.”

“Whatever. I'll be back soon. I need to put jeans on first, though...”

“Dean, must you always - ”

“Jesus, Cas, I'm not gonna be gone long.”

Cas sits up, pushing the covers from his chest and then clears his throat. Dean's so caught up in loading the laundry bag that he doesn't get the point at first.

“It's not in there, Dean,” Cas says, after a moment of going unnoticed.

“Well shit, Cas, it's gotta be some...” Dean's voice trails off when he catches sight of Cas. Cas is red-cheeked and flushed, clearly looking like a child who's been caught doing something wrong. The cause for this blush is not lost to Dean; Cas is wearing his Zeppelin t-shirt.

“Everything else was dirty, Dean, and we were going to bed soon anyway. I didn't realize you would... My apologies, I'll take it off and find something else.”

Dean's across the room in an instant, stopping Cas' hands at the hem of the shirt as he's taking it off.

“It's okay, Cas,” he says quietly, crawling onto the bed and breaching Cas' personal space. Cas tilts his head.

“You wish to wear it, Dean. It's yours.”

Dean shakes his head.

“I like it better on you.” And it's true. Dean can't explain how nice it feels to see Cas in his clothes. The shirt's a little big on Dean; it's *way* too big on Cas, oversized like all of Cas' ridiculous sweaters and it's so adorable Dean's not sure how to handle it. Guys shouldn't be allowed to be *cute* like this. Dean's having trouble processing it. Finally, he heaves a deep breath and then puts a hand to Cas' cheek and kisses him, who practically melts under his touch.

“You should wear my clothes more often,” Dean says against Cas' lips. Cas meets his eyes, as though trying to determine whether Dean is serious or if it's another earth thing that's gone over his head. Dean's not joking, though, and Cas can see.

“I should?” Cas says dubiously. Dean kisses him again, long and slow and unlike the short kisses he's been limiting himself to lately.

“Mhm. All the time,” he says when their kiss breaks, voice lower than it ought to be, “I think it's *hot*.”

Cas goes tense all over at this, and Dean chuckles at the effect his words have on Cas. He then crawls under the blankets and shuts off the lamp. After a moment, he feels Cas lay down, too. It's not long before Cas has inched his way next to Dean. There's a loaded moment when Cas' face is inches from his, where both man seems ready

to do something, anything, but Dean breaks it by rolling over and cuddling in close to Cas, accepting the role as little spoon as Cas slips an arm around his waist.

“Got it, Cas?” Dean says sleepily, yawning all the while, “All the time.”

Dean can feel Cas' nod at the top of his head.

“Got it, Dean.”

The Case of the Mysterious April Antics

“Y'know, Cas, my favorite holiday is in like two days.”

Dean and Cas are at the grocery store, in the aisle heavy laden with smells of herbs and coffee. Despite the fact that the weather's warming up, Cas is still wearing an oversized sweater. Dean was at least able to talk him into a thinner one, but he's pretty sure he's going to have to stage a sweatervention soon.

Cas has two boxes of tea in his hands and has been looking back and forth between them for at least a minute, trying to choose one or the other. After another moment he finally just places them both in the cart.

“I am aware,” Cas says absently, pushing the cart onward to the coffee. He picks the brand Dean likes best without hesitating, drops it in the cart and moves on. In the back of Dean's head, he still can't get over the fact that in his whole life, he's never gotten groceries to last any longer than two days, tops. Ever since Cas, they go grocery shopping once every week and a half and stock their fridge, their shelves. It's kind of trippy.

“Well – I mean, shit, aren't you excited?” Dean's fully aware that his angel is an addict, shoots up holidays like they're heroin. A new holiday three weeks after the last one? Cas should be ecstatic, asking Dean if they make decorations for April Fool's Day or whether there are things he can bake for it. The fact that Cas hasn't even mentioned it is pretty weird. Dean assumed Cas just didn't know about it. Apparently not.

Cas does not reply and instead turns the corner of the aisle, going down the next. He grabs a box of Fruity Pebbles – Dean's favourite – and some Cheerios for himself. Dean clears his throat, fighting irritation. He's not a man who reacts well to being ignored. Cas frowns.

“I don't wish to celebrate this one, Dean,” Cas says evenly, studiously avoiding Dean's eyes as he apparently scans the shelves for something. Dean's eyebrows raise and his expression is nothing short of incredulous.

“Who are you and what have you done with Castiel?”

Cas looks up at Dean and tilts his head, furrowing his brow. “I am Castiel,” he says, and there is clearly honest concern in his tone. Dean groans.

“It's a figure of speech, I know you're – Jesus, Cas, this is a *holiday* we're talking about. And one of the only ones I actually know shit about. What's your deal?”

Cas finally meets Dean's eyes and sighs, looking suddenly quite weary. Dean's a little caught off guard by this, and he almost regrets his question. He's not sure why, exactly, though.

“This is one of the very few holidays we celebrated in heaven,” Cas says, hands gripping tight on the handle of the shopping cart, “My brother, Gabriel, invented it. I... do not like the idea of it in his absence.”

Sometimes Dean forgets that all the feathery, heavenly douchebags he's dealt with in the past two years were actually Castiel's family once. This includes Gabriel, the trickster who killed Dean perpetually hundreds of times... and the angel who gave up his life for Team Free Will. Dean swallows hard.

“I'm, uh, sorry, Cas. I didn't know.”

Cas seems to snap out of whatever memories were playing in his head when he hears Dean's words. He smiles a tiny, hesitant smile and puts an awkward hand on Dean's shoulder.

“It's okay. As it were, I was never fond of the holiday. Very few angels participated in the pranking and very many were the ones being pranked.”

“I take it you weren't one of the prankers.”

Cas shakes his head ruefully.

“Gabriel once got oil in my wings. It was there for a week.”

Dean chuckles. “Right. No April Fool's Day, then. Got it.” Dean seals the deal with a kiss, causing a woman passing by to clear her throat. Dean notes absently that she's their neighbor from down the street, and presses a hand to Cas' cheek just to exacerbate the woman's discomfort.

To be honest, Dean's a little bummed that he has to skip out on the one holiday he's good at, but Cas deals with more than his fair share of Dean's baggage – giving up April Fool's Day is the least Dean can do in return. Plus, he can still send Sam pranks in the mail. Sam and Sarah are on holiday in Canada, doing the whole stereotypical couple-in-love-thing and going to Niagara Falls. Dean will make sure a package without a return address is waiting for his little brother when he gets home.

*

“Don't be too hard on Cas with the pranks, Dean. Seriously. This holiday isn't all warm and fuzzy like the other ones. You might hurt his feelings.”

Dean's on the phone with Sam while he rummages through the fridge and pulls out the ingredients to make a sandwich. Cas is out... buying candles. Cas has a thing for candles like he has a thing for aprons and stupid oversized sweaters. Dean's not sure exactly how to tell Cas that with the sheer number of candles they have all over the house, any visitors they might have would probably assume they're having very romantic sex on a regular basis. Thankfully, they never have any visitors and Dean couldn't give less of a shit anyway.

“We're not doing April Fool's Day,” Dean says, slathering his bread with mayonnaise, “Cas is all depressed that the king of pranks, Gabriel, is all charred-wings-on-the-floor on the holiday he practically invented. So we're skipping out on this one.”

“Oh, Cas,” Sam says, and he can hear Sammy going into complete chick mode. Dean swears that if Cas gets a sympathy card in the mail or something, he's gonna punch his brother square on the jaw.

“Don't 'oh, Cas', Sammy. He's a badass, he's fine.” Dean doesn't like what Sam's tone indicates, like Cas is weak or something. Dean totally gets what it's like to lose a brother (though, thankfully, he got him back), so he's feeling sort of defensive. Angel mojo or not, Cas is still pretty awesome and kinda scary when he wants to be. He doesn't want Sam to get the wrong impression.

... Plus, Cas is always the one who opens the jar of jam when it gets stuck.

“I know, I know,” Sam rushes to clarify, “I just... I can't imagine what I'd do if I lost you, and I never thought about how Cas has lost so many of his brothers, and he can't – ”

Dean hears the front door close and the rustling of shopping bags, and he cuts the conversation short.

“Hate to cut in on your epiphany or whatever the hell it is you're doing over there, but Wings just got home and this just got awkward.”

“Wings?” Sam asks, and Dean scowls.

“Oh my god, Sam, it's not like a pet name, don't make it weird.” Dean growls. It's true; he's never actually called Cas that out *loud*. It's sort of a mental nickname or something.

“Dean? I need your input before I place these candles,” Cas calls from the other room.

“Coming! One sec,” Dean chirps, and he can hear Sam laughing his ass off on the other end of the line.

“Whipped,” he snickers.

“Shut *up*, Sammy.”

“*Coming!*” Sam mimics in a voice way to high to be Dean's, “You sound like a housewife.”

“Dean?” Cas calls uncertainly from the other room.

“Hanging up now, Sam,” Dean says, and clicks the phone shut. He leaves his half-made sandwich on the counter in favor of going to the living room. It already smells awesome and he hasn't even lit any yet. Dean chooses to ignore the sheer *number* of candles Cas has come home with, raising his eyebrows but saying nothing.

“I'm afraid my enthusiasm lacked foresight,” Cas says sheepishly, “I'm not sure where to put them. Most of the surfaces are already covered.”

Dean can't help but laugh. “We'll put some of the old ones away first.”

Cas nods. “Agreed. And I don't think there are any in the bathroom yet.”

Dean's mind plummets to the gutter in about 3 seconds flat. He clears his throat, breaks eye contact with Cas and sets about plucking some of the older candles from their places on various shelves.

“That's *weird*, Cas,” he says, “no one does that.” The odd tone of his voice is not lost to Cas.

“I don't understand,” he says, tilting his head slightly.

Dean sighs. This is a phrase he hears very often. After a beat of silence, he decides to explain.

“People put candles and shit in their bathroom when they intend to have sex in there, Cas.”

Cas' eyes widen and his eyes quickly dart to all the candles in the room. Dean quickly clarifies.

“No – shit, Cas, it's fine to have them out here. Just not in the damn bathroom.”

Dean can see how tense Cas' shoulders have become, the unsure expression on his face. Dean softens his tone, crosses the distance between them to put a reassuring hand on Cas' arm.

“Seriously, Cas, it's fine. I like the candles.”

Cas smiles hesitantly.

“They smell good,” Cas says, as though weakly, unnecessarily defending them.

“They're awesome,” Dean agrees, and presses a kiss to Cas' forehead.

“Have you eaten?” Cas asks, abandoning the bag of candles on the couch and heading to the kitchen. He catches sight of Dean's half-made sandwich on the counter and finishes making it for Dean, who leans on the doorway and thinks about how friggin awesome his life has become.

*

Dean hasn't hunted a wendigo in years, and he's more than grateful to have backup this time around. They're ugly sons of bitches with even uglier attitudes, and he'd hate to have to gank it alone. It doesn't help that the campers they set out to rescue thought Dean and Cas were insane and took a stupid long amount of time to realize they weren't. They smell like the woods, sweat and fire by the time they're done. Dean groans at the idea of filling the Impala with their awful scent, but it's not like she isn't used to worse.

They drive for a while in silence, save for the gentle thrum of Kansas in the background, both bone tired and a little sleepy. Dean yawns and it's contagious, because a second later, Cas yawns too.

“I'm sorry, Dean,” Cas says eventually, looking out the window as trees and houses whiz by. Dean raises an eyebrow and lowers the music.

“For what?”

“For taking your holiday from you. It was... selfish.”

Dean laughs at this, clamps a hand on Cas' shoulder.

“Dude, it's not that serious. Promise,” he assures him.

“You're certain?”

Dean nods, adjusts the music til it's a little louder. "If it was, I would have said something. I don't really care about holidays unless you do."

"Thank you, Dean."

Dean moves his hand until it lays between them, and Cas laces their fingers together. His brains screams *chick flick moment!* but he ignores it. He likes Cas' hands and he likes them even better when they're in his. If that makes him a little sappy... well, it's not like anyone's around to see.

*

Dean's been sleeping in Cas' bed every night ever since St. Patrick's Day. There wasn't any official transition; it was just silently, mutually accepted that the first invitation to stay in bed was not *just* for that night. It beats the couch, for sure, which is where Dean had been sleeping before. They'd had a terrible argument about who sleeps where when they'd first moved in, but Dean, being the stubborn man that he is, won. The place is too small for two beds to fit comfortably.

They usually go to sleep on opposite sides of the bed, but Dean always wakes up with his limbs all tangled up with Cas'. He's not sure which one of them is the subconscious cuddler, but he really, *really* hopes it's not him. Cas has already made so much of a chick out of him that he's not sure if he can take the knowledge that he's the one who initiates the snuggling while they're sleeping. His manliness is tragically at risk.

The night before April Fool's Day, after they've crawled into bed and turned off the light, Cas wraps an arm around Dean's waist and pulls him close. Dean squints at him in the darkness, looking surprised. Cas is not given to indulging impulses. Cas presses his forehead against Dean's. Dean can't really see Cas' expression, but he's pretty sure he's smiling.

Dean waits for Cas to say something, but he doesn't. It's really weird and slightly unnerving. Several minutes pass, and Dean is suddenly aware that Cas has fallen asleep. He decides not to question it, and soon falls asleep himself.

*

When Dean wakes up, Cas is still clinging closely to him. He yawns and stretches, then looks around -

and gasps.

“Cas – what the hell?”

Cas makes a noise in protest, still half-asleep, but he complies and sits up as well. His eyes go wide as saucers as he takes in what has taken Dean so aback. He looks at Dean abruptly, narrowing his eyes.

“Dean, did you – ”

“Nice going, Cas! And you had me fooled with all this 'I don't wanna celebrate April Fool's Day' crap. Gotta give you points for creativity, man, but you're totally helping me clean this up.”

The room is covered in wrapping paper. Everything, every object, is wrapped tight like a Christmas present. Their couch, the couch cushions, hell, their *coffee table* – all are wrapped up. Every candle is blown out and wrapped and there are a friggin lot of them. The wrapping paper is covered in creepy looking jesters. The only thing not wrapped is the bed they sleep in.

“I didn't do this,” Cas says quietly, but Dean's already out of bed, smiling cheerfully at Cas' supposed holiday spirit.

Cas is clearly unnerved as he follows Dean to the kitchen, but Dean doesn't notice. He goes about making his coffee as Cas boils water for his tea. His brow is furrowed, as though he is in deep thought. He sits at the kitchen table and takes a deep sip of tea before clearing his throat abruptly and grimacing tremendously as he swallows.

"Dean," he says warily, "Why are there soap flakes in my teabag?"

It's Dean's turn to look confused. He takes his cup of coffee to the table and sits opposite Cas. His look of confusion lasts for all of ten seconds, though, and then he grins.

"Dude, Cas, your sense of humor is seriously improving. I see what you're doing." Dean takes a drink of his coffee and then coughs and spits it all over the table. Cas tilts his head, perplexed.

"Not cool, Cas," Dean says. "You don't come between a man and his coffee."

"I didn't," Cas says flatly.

"Right, and my coffee just magically tastes like liquorice on its own, then?"

Cas frowns and takes hold of Dean's cup. He takes a tentative sip of it and makes a face. He stares down into the dark cup before placing it on the table. He looks up and makes direct eye contact with Dean.

"You're not doing this, are you?"

Dean does a double take. "No. And neither are you, are you?"

Cas needs no further confirmation; he stands from his chair immediately and grabs Dean's arm, tugging him upward as well. He leads Dean from the kitchen and pulls both Dean's jacket and his own trench coat from their coat rack.

“What the hell?” Dean protests, though he doesn't hesitate in putting on his jacket.

“Someone broke into our house last night, Dean. I'm not doing this and neither are you. This is a serious matter. Sam is in Canada and we have no immediate friends in the area. Can you think of even one person who might go to these extremes to prank us?”

Dean thinks for a moment, but finally shakes his head.

“I didn't think so,” Cas says, “neither can I. We can only assume that whoever – or whatever – it is that's doing this may wish us harm. Breaking and entering is nothing to be taken lightly.”

Dean nods, gets into hunter mode mentally. Cas is right; this reeks of the supernatural. The kind of meticulous wrapping shown in their living room in itself seems inhuman; it's all too perfect, too thorough. And then there's the question of how someone could get past one seasoned hunter and one former-angel without waking either of them.

Dean heads for the Impala, but Cas shakes his head.

“They might have done something to it.”

Dean's look is instantly deadly, and he darts over to his baby like she's wounded. Cas frowns, but follows without hesitation. Dean circles the car, peers in the windows and checks the tires. He pops the hood, but everything within is also in check. He opens the door to the driver's seat and looks inside.

“What the *fuck*?” he hisses.

“Dean?”

“Someone replaced her gas and break pedals with friggin banana peels.” Dean’s fuming – the Impala is a no-fly zone; someone or something has crossed a serious line. “How do you even *do* that?”

“Let’s get some breakfast, Dean. You work better when you’re fed.” Cas puts a hand on Dean’s shoulder and leads him away from the car. They walk down the street towards the nearest diner. Of course, their Republican neighbor is sitting outside on her porch. Her eyes narrow when she sees them.

“The sight of her makes me want to do obnoxiously gay things,” Dean comments. He seems to have calmed down a bit with the promise of food on the horizon.

“I agree,” Cas says. Cas shoots her a smile that’s fake as hell, and Dean can’t help but laugh. The woman does nothing but scowl, completely disregarding Cas’ courtesy. Unable to contain himself, Dean stops them both and kisses Cas. Cas plays along, playfully nipping at Dean’s lower lip in a way that is obvious enough that she can surely see it from where she sits. They consider it a success when the woman goes inside.

“I bet she moves out in two months, tops,” Dean says.

“Let’s hope.”

*

They have a tried and true diner about five blocks from where they live, and it’s come in handy on more than one occasion. It’s not one of the greasy roadside ones Dean’s gotten accustomed to in all his years on the road – it’s a

good, quality diner with mouth-watering food. Dean's said again and the again that the place should be five star. New Jersey's famous for its diners, and their section of Pennsylvania is just close enough to absorb a few of them.

By now the staff all know them by name, know their drink orders and can usually guess what they want to eat given the time of day. The waitress who greets them this morning is named Natalie. She's a tall, busty brunette with a million dollar smile and a bubbly personality that gets just about all of her customers smiling. About a year ago, Dean would have been all over that... but he's got Cas, now, and the thought only barely crossed his mind once. Natalie's completely enamored of Cas and Dean, always calls them the “world's cutest couple”, stuff like that. Dean pretends to be exasperated, but he usually can't fight the goofy smile her compliments bring about.

She looks tired when they walk in, but her expression brightens like the sun coming up when she catches sight of the two of them. She seems to catch herself, though, and quickly assumes a solemn face.

“I'm sorry, we're closed,” she says, obviously fighting the smile twitched at the edges of her lips.

“Uh huh. Is that so?” Dean say elbowing Cas and winking. Cas frowns.

“I don't understand. If the diner is closed, why are you here?”

“... *Cas*,” Dean says, pressing a palm to his face.

“April Fool's!” she blurts out, giggling. “Oh, Castiel, you are too cute! And Dean, the way you... oh gosh, you guys. Cutest couple ever.” She shows them to their seats, handing them their menus.

“One black coffee and one tea with two creams and no sugar?” she asks right off the bat. Dean and Cas nod their assent. “Are you ready to order or do you want to – ”

“Yeah, I am. I’ll take the double bacon cheeseburger, with – ”

“Ketchup, no mustard and extra pickles, gotcha. Castiel?”

“My usual salad, thank you.”

“Back in a few!” she chirps, bounding off. She returns with their drinks a few moments later and promises their food won’t be long.

Dean sips his coffee pensively, staring into its murky blackness every time he places it down. Cas is staring out the window, brow furrowed the way it always is when he’s deep in thought. Dean starts to say something when his phone rings. His ringtone is still the Dropkick Murpheys from St. Patrick’s Day. He makes a mental note to change it. He checks the caller, flips open the phone and answers.

“Sammy?”

“Very funny, Dean,” his little brother hisses the voice on the other end. Dean’s eyebrows raise and he shoots Cas a look, who quickly leans forward to listen.

“What’s funny?”

“Right. Like you don’t know why my hair is friggin’ *purple* right now, in Niagara Falls of all places. Jesus Christ, Dean, you need to grow up. I’m here with my fiancée -”

“Sammy – Sam. Shut up, dude, I didn’t do it. Did you, y’know, think of asking said fiancée?”

“Of course I did. Like, all morning. She didn't do it, Dean. Which leaves the only other culprit being *you*. You are such a dick.”

“... Is your hair seriously purple right now?”

“*Yes*,” Sam all but screeches. Dean bursts into laughter, picturing Sam's long and luscious locks tinged bright purple. He laughs til his sides hurt and tears are forming at his eyes. It takes him a moment to collect himself.

Sam clears his throat. “Are you done?”

“God, Sammy, what I'd give for that to have been my prank. But, uh, for being Mr. Logic you seem to have forgotten that you are literally in another country right now.”

“Yeah... well, I figured you might have...”

Dean rolls his eyes.

“You figured you'd call me up and I'd tell you some miraculous way I dyed your hair from miles and miles away because I'm arrogant as hell and would want to share my master plan, I'm guessing.”

Sam heaves a sigh. “Pretty much.”

“Hate to burst your bubble, but it wasn't me. Cas can testify.”

Sam is quiet a moment. When he speaks again, his voice sounds uncertain.

“Dean... if you didn't prank me, who did?”

Dean sucks in a breath, recognition dawning through him. “Whoever's been pranking me and Cas, I bet.”

“Wait, what?”

“We think it's something supernatural. We're treating it like a case, we'll figure it out. Keep your eyes peeled for headlines or people talking about the same kind of shit and call us if you hear anything. But don't, like, stress. We're all over this.” He flashes a small smile at Cas, who returns in. The waitress arrives with their food and catches their quiet smile exchange and seems to glow with pleasure. She walks away silently when she sees that Dean's on the phone.

“Alright...” Sam says hesitantly. “Call me if you need any help, okay?”

“Right, Mr. Canada, because you could totally help from there.” Dean doesn't need to see his brother to know that he's bitch-facing.

“Whatever. Keep me posted. See ya.

“Bye.”

Dean shuts the phone and frowns at it. He meets Cas' eyes and they exchange a concerned look.

“Well, it's all over the place, apparently,” Dean says unnecessarily as he draws his sandwich to his mouth. Cas is contemplative, quiet, apparently searching his mind for anything capable of this kind of widespread mayhem.

“We'll check the local newspapers when we're done eating,” Cas says decisively as Dean spits out his food and drops his sandwich.

“What the *fuck*?” Dean exclaims for the second time today. Cas' concern is evident; he pulls Dean's plate away from him like the burger might jump up and bite him.

“Dean?”

“My goddamn pickles are made of plastic,” Dean says, glowering at the offending sandwich.

Cas absently sticks a fork in his salad – and is surprised to find that his fork won't get a grip on it; his tomatoes are plastic, too.

“Perhaps it wishes to starve us,” Cas says thoughtfully, as though analyzing something in a test tube and not some unseen force screwing with their lives. Dean places his forehead on the table.

“This is so not cool,” he groans. Cas' hand twitches on the table, hesitant, before brushing through Dean's hair. He seems to think better of it a second later because he moves his hand quickly. Dean holds it, though, resting their hands on the table and lacing their fingers together.

“I'm hungry,” Dean whines. Cas sighs. Dean's eyes are closed against the table, but he can hear Cas picking through his sandwich.

“You can eat it, Dean. Just take off the pickles. The rest seems to be real.”

Dean looks up. “How do you know?”

Cas picks up the burger and bites it before Dean can protest, swallows it and waits a second. He nods affirmatively.

“It's fine.”

“What the hell, Cas? What if it *wasn't*? You don't have angel mojo anymore, you can't just do reckless shit like that.”

“Dean, it's fine. Nothing happened.”

Dean knows he's being irrationally angry, but for some reason this brazen act of potential food poisoning has really gotten under his skin. He glares at Cas, who tilts his head in confusion.

“What's wrong with you, man? Jesus.”

Cas' confusion slowly melts into a glare of his own. He sits back in his seat and looks out the window, scowling. Dean eats his burger only because he's hungry; he's almost too annoyed to finish it. Cas' salad lies untouched on his plate. It's not until Dean's halfway done that he realizes with a pang that Cas isn't eating because he doesn't want to piss Dean off by trying it.

Dean takes Cas' fork and pushes the tomatoes off the plate and then gets a big forkful of salad. He's never been a big salad fan, but this one tastes fine and about as good as a salad can taste. Certainly not poisoned or anything. Cas is still looking out the window, apparently ignorant of what Dean's doing.

“Uh – you can eat, Cas. It's fine, I checked it.”

“That was reckless,” Cas snaps. He looks away from the window and *holy shit*, Dean remembers again that the guy before him was once an Angel of the Lord. Between the sweaters, the baking and the festive aprons, sometimes Dean forgets what an insanely powerful, cosmic being his sort-of-boyfriend once was.

“Shit, Cas. Point taken. Eat, okay?”

Cas doesn't budge, and Dean realizes that this is an Apology Moment. He hates those.

“ 'm sorry, Cas,” he mutters. Most people probably wouldn't have even been able to hear him, let alone accept the half-assed apology, but Cas has always been gracious and patient with Dean. He doesn't acknowledge Dean's said anything, but he does start eating again. Dean takes this as a good sign.

“So,” Dean says after a while of extremely awkward silence, “what kind of monster has this kind of juice?”

“We can rule out anything without a sense of humor,” Cas says seriously. Dean laughs.

“I guess it's not you, then.”

Cas seems to think this over and then a small smile etches at his lips. Dean's irrationally proud that Cas got the joke. Dean touches Cas' foot with his own, affectionately, which apparently startles Cas. Dean grins and does it again, but then realizes the concept of *footsies* is probably lost to angels. Dean stops and rushes on before Cas can embarrass the hell out of him by asking what he's doing.

“I'm thinking fairies,” Dean says, and shudders. “Friggin hate fairies.”

Cas nods slowly. “That seems to be one of the only possible culprits. But why? It does seem like a great effort.”

Natalie comes and asks if they'd like dessert. Cas responds that no, they wouldn't, before Dean has a chance to protest. This diner has the best apple pie he's ever had (second only to his mom and Cas'). He knows Cas is right, though, knows there's no point in gambling with the possibility that something else will be messed with. Natalie gives them the bill and Dean sulks.

“I'll make you pie tonight, Dean,” Cas says, and Dean brightens a bit.

“Once we catch these son of a bitches and put them out of commission,” Dean says, putting his game face on. Cas nods reassuringly.

“We will gank those bitches,” Cas says, monotone as ever, and Dean laughs so hard he loses his breath and tears up.

“Don't ever change, Cas.”

*

Turns out that the news is unnervingly devoid of fairy activity – or anything out of the ordinary, for that matter. Newspapers, tv, internet... everything is clean. Dean, on the way to the convenience store to get aforesaid newspaper, manages to nearly fall into a manhole that he *swears* was concrete a second ago. Cas ends up soaked in water, inexplicably; *he* swears that it started raining abruptly, despite the fact that Dean and everyone around them are completely dry. By the time they get home, they're exhausted and irritable. The living room covered in wrapping paper only adds insult to injury, and they spend a few minutes unwrapping the couch. The rest will be done later, once their mutual irritation subsides.

“So maybe it's not fairies,” Dean concedes as he sinks into the couch. Behind him, Dean hears their drawers opening as Cas rummages through them to get dry clothes. Dean hears wet clothes hit the floor and he shudders.

He knows Cas is only venturing to change in the same room as Cas because he knows that Dean's back is turned. Despite their St. Patrick's day hookup, Cas is still frustratingly modest. It seems alcohol influenced him far beyond the point of inhibition, because Cas is still awkward as hell when sober.

"We're back to square one, then," Cas says, and Dean hears pants being tugged on. He sucks in a breath, realizing a little bitterly that all he managed to see of Cas that night was his bare chest. He's anxious to see the rest... but of course, like everything else in their sort-of-relationship, he has no idea where to start. So, like everything else, he just *doesn't*.

"Maybe it's a cursed object?" Dean suggests. Cas comes to sit beside him on the couch, sinking into it and leaning slightly against Dean. Dean is immediately distracted at the sight of Cas in one of his t-shirts, a blue one that makes the color of his eyes pop. Cas notices Dean looking and looks away, plucking absently at a loose thread on the couch.

"We woke up with our house covered in wrapping paper," Cas points out, "I don't see how we could have touched a cursed object in our sleep."

Dean frowns, looks at Cas with intent at snapping at him because the guy is so goddamn perceptive that it's not fair... but again, the t-shirt distracts him. Instead, he puts a hand under Cas' chin and looks him in the eyes, a small smirk forming on his lips.

"Like it when you wear my clothes," he murmurs, bringing his lips close to Cas'. Cas looks away, clears his throat.

"Focus, Dean. We need to figure this out."

Dean groans and sits back against the couch, cursing himself for his ill-timing and cursing his angel for being so on-task. Rigidity of a soldier, Dean figures. It comes in handy sometimes, but not in this case.

“Well shit, Cas, I have no idea. A few years ago I would have said it was a trickster, but I know better now.”

Cas nods.

“I was thinking the same thing.”

Cas rests his head on Dean's shoulder, snuggling close, and Dean's heart skips a beat the same way it always does when Cas invades his personal space. He thinks briefly of how far they've come so quickly, of Christmas and his anxiety over the butterflies in his chest. Now he accepts them graciously, now that he knows that they're mutual. Now he can kiss Cas, if he wants to. He can kiss can *whenever* he wants to.

“Perhaps if we just stayed here all day,” Cas says abjectly, sighing softly, “didn't move, perhaps we could just... wait it out.”

“Wait it out?”

“I think it may only be an April Fool's Day thing. And it doesn't seem to be affecting anyone but us. So maybe if we just...” Cas gestures to the couch, and Dean gets the picture. It sounds like a good enough plan to him, so he wraps an arm around Cas and tugs him even closer, pulling him til he's sitting on Dean's lap. Cas makes a quiet noise of contentment and settles in, tucking his face under Dean's neck. The stubble on Cas' face feels prickly against Dean's skin. It's kind of weird, having this big badass former-angel snuggled up with him like a cat. Not that Dean's complaining.

“I am *so* okay with this,” Dean says contentedly, pressing a kiss to Cas' hair. He's debating whether he should go for his ear, whether he should press a kiss along the soft skin just behind it, maybe initiate something... but he falters. He know he promised Cas they'd – *ahem* – at some point, but he can't bring himself to do it. He sort of wishes Cas would initiate it, but he knows that his angel is far too ignorant of humanity and its intricacies to even have the slightest clue where to begin.

... But then again, neither does Dean.

Just as Dean's starting to feel himself nod off into the makings of what will probably be an awesome nap, a loud, explosive laugh echoes through their living room, its source unknown. Cas sits up immediately, one hand clutching protectively around Dean's bicep, hand gripping firmly around the hand print he left so long ago. Dean is reminded of once, when they trapped Raphael in a ring of holy fire, the wrathful archangel had made the windows explode in a shatter of glass. Cas' immediate reaction, knee-jerk and without a moment's contemplation, was to cover Dean with his body and yank him out of the way. Dean hadn't thought much of it then, but now, seeing that same instantaneous reaction to protect Dean, Dean's a little awed by it. The guy has zero angel mojo but is still acting like a guardian, Dean's guardian. It's... nice.

Despite the little surge of warmth this tiny gesture brought about, the more pressing matter is, *hello*, inexplicable and fucking creepy laughter resonating through their flat. Dean checks his breath, but there's no cloud of cold air; he sniffs around, but there's no scent of sulfur. That rules out ghosts and demons – so what the hell is this?

Castiel is tense, a statue, eyes darting around the room. Neither of them speak for quite some time, shaken in the silence following the startling laughter. Finally, Castiel speaks.

“... Gabriel?”

Dean gives Cas an incredulous look. He's pretty sure angels can't have ghosts. If they could, he, Cas, Sam, Bobby – they'd all be screwed by now. There are probably a million clever ways of killing them that wrathful angel spirits could come up with. Now, though, Dean's not so certain.

“Cas?” he whispers, but Cas doesn't seem to hear him. He's still looking around the room, desperately trying to find the owner of the phantom laughter. Another tense minute goes by, and then the sudden, unmistakable whoosh of wings announces the presence of an angel. A real, living, not-ghost angel.

“I was wondering when you two lovebirds would figure it out,” the angel says with a cocky smirk that goes ear to ear. It *is* Gabriel. Inexplicably, impossibly. For the first time today, Dean wonders if he's having some sort of

really, really trippy dream. He's pretty sure if Cas wasn't sitting on his and gripping his arm, he'd have fallen out of his seat or something.

“What the hell?” Dean says at the same time Cas says, “*Explain.*” Gabe's amusement only amplifies. He takes a seat next to Dean and Cas, getting all up in their personal space intentionally, just to bother Dean. Cas is looking at Gabriel like he's seen a ghost – which, yeah, makes sense.

“Sam brought me back,” Gabriel says simply, grin somehow widening even more at the matching looks of shock and confusion on Cas and Dean's face.

“Aren't you two just as cute as a button?” Gabe says, reaching up and pinching Cas' cheek. Cas makes a face and Dean has to concede that Cas really is *that* cute. But now's not the time to comment.

“What the hell do you mean?” Dean growls, just about fed up with Gabriel's characteristic evasiveness. “Better question – give me one reason I shouldn't gank your ass, because there is no reason you should be alive right now.”

Cas maintains his composure, but Dean notices a split-second of panic in his eyes that almost makes him regret the threat. Gabriel throws up both hands in a gesture of surrender.

“Jeesh, can't take a joke, can you? Fine, I'll explain. Basically, God's got a thing for you Winchesters – and you, Cas. For whatever reason, you're like his pets or something. He's brought you back more times than I can count, Cassie. Anyway, for whatever reason Senor Moose gets the idea of praying for me to come back. Something about Cas being an angstbucket about April Fool's Day. Jesus, Dean, your brother should write Hallmark cards. I think the exact words were '*everyone deserves a big brother*'. So sweet. Anyway, God seemed to deem it a fair enough request, so here I am.”

Castiel's eyes go wide and his mouth falls open slightly. Dean's still skeptical, but the story does seem plausible. Gabriel's right – Cas has been brought back from the dead more than once. Would it really be that impossible for Gabriel to come back, too?

“Father brought you back, for me?” Cas whispers. Dean's always liked the way Cas' voice sounds when he's whispering; the gravelly tone his voice mixed with the low volume gives Dean chills in the best sort of way.

.... Not the best thing to be experiencing while Gabriel's here, though.

“Yes, dumbass. Like it or not, the Big Guy loves you.”

Cas' face isn't too expressive – it never is – but his eyes say it all. If he was the hugging sort, he probably would have lunged himself at his big brother by now, given the intensity in his eyes. This doesn't redeem God in Dean's eyes, not by a long shot... but it's something. If, y'know, Gabriel's telling the truth.

“So you've been pranking us all day,” Dean says flatly.

“Wouldn't be April Fool's Day without that, would it?” Gabriel says, maintaining his cheesy grin.

“And Sam's purple hair?”

“Guilty. Though taking all his left shoes was my personal favorite. He's having a Black Rock moment. He's currently trying to find a rabbit foot in the hotel he's staying at.”

“Y'know, most people just *call* when they're in town.”

“That would have been so anticlimactic, Dean-o. By the way, do you guys have any candy?”

“We have – ” Cas starts, but Dean clamps a hand over his mouth.

“Fix all our shit and you can have our candy,” Dean says firmly. Gabriel rolls his eyes, muttering *killjoy* under his breath before he snaps his fingers. The wrapping paper disappears from every surface.

“We've got Reese's in the cupboard in the kitchen,” Dean says, and Gabriel saunters over to the kitchen. Dean and Cas exchange looks.

“It's him,” Cas says immediately, meeting Dean's eyes head-on, anticipating Dean's skepticism. Dean raises his eyes.

“How do you know?”

“Because... I just *know*, Dean. I know my brother.”

Dean can't really protest that, because he knows the feeling. He knows Sam inside and out, could spot an imposter from even the slightest detail. If there's anything Dean gets, it's weird brother connections.

“I didn't even know you two were close,” Dean says, voicing what he'd been thinking ever since Cas delivered the No-April-Fool's ultimatum. He'd refrained from asking before because he figured it'd be kind of rude, considering the guy was dead and all.

“I have... *had* many brothers. We functioned like an army, there was little room for the kind of camaraderie you're picturing. But... Gabriel was the only one who ever veered from what was expected. I think I always quietly admired him for it. I am one of the youngest of my brothers, so he liked to pick on me...”

“And somehow taunting translates into Brother of the Year?”

“Dean, you have to understand. Special attention is all but unheard of in the garrisons. Everyone is equal to the point that we are almost nonentities. To have another angel – an archangel, at that – acknowledge me personally, enough to harass me... he was easily my favorite.”

Dean nods, slowly understanding. Gabriel inadvertently made Cas feel special by messing with him all the time. In a place where feeling special doesn't really happen, it's easy to see why Cas looks up to Gabriel so much, why he grieved his death as he did. Dean smiles, running a hand through Cas' hair.

“Hmm, should I start taunting you, too?” he says playfully.

“You're already my favourite human, Dean,” Cas says seriously, not catching the humor in Dean's tone, “there's nothing you could do to earn it any more than you have.”

Dean's caught off guard by this brazen honesty. It's not uncharacteristic of Cas to say intense things casually, mostly because the guy has no concept of what's intense or not, but Dean's always stunned nevertheless. He gives an awkward laugh.

“Good to know.”

“Where's the rest?” Gabriel calls from the kitchen, indicating that he's gone through their store of candy.

“I – I could bake pie,” Cas calls back, sheepishly. He and Dean get up and walk to the kitchen, unwilling to leave Gabriel unattended in their kitchen for very long. Gabriel's smirk is back, directed at Cas.

“You *bake*,” he says, obviously holding back raucous laughter.

Cas looks at the ground. “Yes.”

“My, how the mighty have fallen,” Gabriel says, but his tone is light and playful. “Dean, you’ve made my little brother into a housewife.”

“Hey, he makes damn good pie and his brownies are fucking awesome,” Dean says defensively, not liking the implications of what Gabriel’s saying. Maybe it’s the whole diving-into-hell-for-him thing, but Dean’s always quick to defend Cas’ BAMF status. The guy scares the shit out of him sometimes.

“Hey, whatever floats your boat. And I can’t say I’m not gonna benefit from it. Brownies sound perfect, Cas.”

Cas nods and sets about getting out ingredients. His back is to Dean, but Dean can see through Cas’ (subtle, *subtle*) body language that he’s exuding happiness. And while Gabriel’s getting on his last nerve already, he can’t help but love the guy for making his angel so happy.

“So are you banging my little brother?” Gabriel asks conversationally as Cas stirs ingredients. Dean blanches and Cas freezes mid-stir.

“Uh. No.”

Gabriel looks instantly indignant.

“Yeah? And why *not*? He not good enough for you? Or are you getting it somewhere *else*, because let me tell you something, Winchester, if you think you can just -”

“Easy, firecracker! I'm not sleeping with anyone, okay? Christ.” Dean's bright red at this point, looking everywhere but at Gabriel. Cas starts stirring again, slowly, but Dean knows Cas is probably blushing crimson himself.

Gabriel raises an eyebrow. “If you're waiting for marriage, I gotta tell you, I-”

“We are so not having this conversation,” Dean cuts off, glowering something awful.

“Oh yes we are. Why aren't you fucking my brother, Dean? Are you having like a gay crisis or something?”

“Dude. No. I've always liked guys, too – Jesus Christ, I am so not having this conversation with you, get off it.”

Dean's wondering if he can escape to the bathroom to grab some Tylenol from the cabinet. His head is throbbing already and Gabriel's been here all of fifteen minutes.

“No wonder God sent me back,” Gabriel says, snickering, and Dean puts a palm to his face.

“Aspirin. I am getting aspirin.”

*

Gabe, Dean realizes, is surprisingly not that bad of a brother. The three of them are sitting in the living room, Gabe having positioned himself straight between Dean and Cas, just to piss Dean off. He asks Cas a lot of questions – how the apocalypse went down, if his sacrifice helped (and he looks relieved when Dean and Cas both vigorously say that it *did*), and, most startling to Dean... whether or not Cas is happy. Cas seems to be glowing quietly in the presence of his obnoxious big brother. He doesn't hesitate when Gabe asks him this.

“Yes. I have never been this happy before, Gabriel.” Gabe's eyebrows shoot up, surprised. Both he and Dean know that this is no small thing to say; Cas is thousands of years old. That this is the happiest point in his life, even without wings and mojo, is quite a feat.

“Then I'm glad,” Gabriel says. His smile is sincere, very unlike the cocky smirks that Dean is used to. The kindness in it helps Dean understand, a little, why Cas loves him so much.

“Though if you think it's good now, just wait til you experience the wonders of *sex*,” Gabe tags on, ruining whatever moment they might have been sharing. Cas clears his throat and Dean grabs a couch pillow and whacks Gabriel with it.

“Gross, man,” Dean says, “That is not the kind of shit you say to your little brother.”

“You were *always* trying to get Sam laid, Dean,” Gabe points out, “I'm just being a good brother.”

“Yeah, well,” Dean mutters, unable to think of something to counter that.

The doorbell rings unexpectedly, causing Dean to jump despite himself. He flashes a look at Cas, who shrugs subtly. Gabe smiles.

“You should get that, Cas.”

Cas stands and does so, casting an uncertain glance over his shoulder as he opens the door. Gabe leans over quick, lowering his voice so only Dean can hear him.

“Just so you know, Dean-o, I *very strongly* considered giving you a permanent boner for April Fool's Day. Just until you manned up and got on with it.”

Dean glares, facing going red with indignation and embarrassment at the very thought of it.

“I would punch you in the face so hard, I swear to God-”

“And I'm an angel, so it wouldn't matter. And I didn't do it, did I? Though the way you're talking, I might change my mind...”

Dean's eyes widen in panic and he holds back his hands in surrender. “Christ! Sorry. No perma-boner for me, got it? ...I'm gonna screw your brother at some point, okay? Is that what you wanted to hear?”

“It's a start,” Gabe says, just as Cas comes back to sit down. He's holding a pizza and looking puzzled.

“We didn't order a pizza,” Cas says, frowning.

“I did,” Gabe says, flipping open the lid and helping himself to a slice.

Dean's pretty sure Gabe summoned up a pizza for the sole reason of getting to have his little chat alone with him, and he almost doesn't grab a slice on principle. Almost.

“So, what do you two do all day if you're not sleeping together?” Dean notices that Cas' face is strategically blank; he's been able to reign in the blush a lot better than Dean.

“We hunt monsters,” Cas says, breezing over Gabe's comment, “and volunteer at the community greenhouse a couple miles away, sometimes.”

Dean briefly considers smacking his angel in the head. Volunteer work is *not* something he likes other people know about, especially not someone like Gabe. He has his rep at stake, here, for crying out loud. Still, Cas is like a kid coming home from school, eager to share the picture he's drawn... Dean can't get too mad at him for wanting to show off his life, what he's made of humanity.

Dean just really, really wishes it wasn't Gabriel he was sharing it with.

“*Dean Winchester* has been planting things?” Gabe says, practically giddy. Cas nods.

“He's has a 'green thumb',” Cas says, quoting one of the gardeners. Gabe snickers.

“That's adorable.”

“What about you, Gabe?” Dean cuts in, tone harsher than intended, “how was the whole 'being dead' thing?”

Gabriel shrugs. “Dark. I think.”

“You think?”

“Yeah, I wish I remembered the juicy details of whatever's behind the veil for angels, but I don't. Not that it matters, since neither of you are angels.”

Cas squirms at this, which makes Dean wish he hadn't brought it up. Outside, he sees the sun setting. He sighs, dreading the inevitable but willing to push forward.

“So, uh,” Dean says awkwardly, “Are you, y'know, crashing here?” He's more than a little afraid that Gabe's going to take up permanent residence with them or something, but thankfully Gabriel shakes his head.

“Nah, I'm not that much of a cockblock. I've got places to go, people to prank. The night is still young. Plus, there's a certain younger Winchester I'd like to thank for the whole resurrection thing.”

“Do you have any other pranks planned for him?” Dean asks, grinning despite himself.

“I think the moose I sent was prank enough. That and the fact that he still thinks he's hunting a renegade leprechaun. I'll be in touch.”

“... moose?” Dean asks, but there's a whoosh of wings and then Gabe's gone. The asshole made sure he turned off all the lights and lit the candles as he went, sending a clear message. Cas and Dean stand awkwardly, silently in the darkness for a minute before Dean clears his throat.

“Your brother is about as subtle as an elephant in a tutu, man,” Dean says, walking over and turning on the lights. Cas is still staring at the spot where Gabe had been standing, a fond smile etched at the edges of his lips. Dean's heart goes all light at the sight of it; he's still pretty damn in love with Cas' smile, even though he sees it much more often now.

“But, God...” Cas words trail off, but the rest of the sentences doesn't need to be spoken – *doesn't exist*. Dean crosses the space between them, putting his arms around Cas' neck and looking into his eyes.

“Hey, does it matter? We don't even know for sure if it was God, dude. I mean, you came back a couple times and there was never a 'you're welcome' sticky note attached. Maybe... maybe good things just happen.” Dean is surprised by his own words, because they remind him of something Cas told him when they first met: *Good things do happen, Dean*.

Cas nods, looking comforted by Dean's words. Dean can tell Cas isn't really ready to tackle his beliefs or disbeliefs on God, or ready to broach his bitterness and sense of abandonment. Right now it's best to focus on the inexplicable gift of getting his brother back and not think about the implications. If anyone knows about good, healthy repression, it's Dean.

“He sure is persistent, isn't he?” Cas asks fondly, looking at the candles. Dean nods, kisses Cas gently on the nose. Cas smiles and Dean smiles back, both of them looking smitten and, admittedly, cheesy as hell.

“Your brother may be a dick,” Dean says, “but – best April Fool's Day ever, huh?”

Cas nods.

“By far.”

“Next time I see him, I'm kicking him in the face for messing with the Impala,” Dean adds, gruffly. Cas laughs.

It's then that Dean remembers that Cas is still wearing his shirt and it still makes his eyes look impossibly bluer than usual. He clears his throat, tries to shake his thoughts, but as long as he's looking into Cas' eyes like this, he can't. One of his arms finds its way around Cas' waist, tugging him tight. Cas catches his breath, tilts his head and looks at Dean curiously.

“How 'bout I kiss you like I did on the speedline,” Dean says, voice low, and heated, “but without alcohol, this time?”

Cas responds by kissing Dean himself, mouth eager but endearingly hesitant. He's much more inhibited when sober, and somehow it's better this way – more like Cas, a comfortable sort of uncomfortable. Dean deepens the kiss, feeling Cas melt against him like butter. His hand strays to the hem of Cas' shirt as he debates what pace he should be taking this with. Just as he's deciding it couldn't hurt to slip his hand under the shirt, feel his angle shudder under his touch, there's a loud popping noise and then... a shower of confetti.

A piece of paper with writing on it floats down with the confetti, whose source is impossible to determine and therefore probably not human-made. Dean grabs it, scowling. Gabriel's messy handwriting is on it, two words that make Dean's blood boil and his face hot. The paper reads, *Atta boy!* With a little winking smiley face and all.

Dean and Cas stare at the mess and then at each other, both of them looking equally sheepish.

“Maybe we should...” Cas begins.

“... Watch a movie?” Dean offers.

Cas looks visibly relieved and Dean can't help but feel the same. His nerves are shot and his pulse is racing – two sensations that do not sit well together. They curl up on the couch with a blanket, legs entwined, some movie in that neither of them paid attention to while picking. The lights are off, save for the multitude of candles, and the atmosphere is quiet and nice. Dean thinks that if he leaned over and kissed Cas in *just* the right way, he could initiate something...

... but he doesn't. Instead, he lets Cas tug him close, chest to chest, buries his face into Cas' neck. The kisses he leaves along the skin there are innocent.

“Next year we will prank Gabriel,” Cas says with a yawn, carding a hand through Dean's hair.

“Hell yeah. Now *that* is gonna be the best April Fool's Day ever.”

April Showers and a Little Sunshine

Dean hasn't been this sexually frustrated since middle school.

He's sitting in a dressing room on the bench outside one of the changing stalls, mouth slightly agape. He's in Banana Republic, of all places, and the cause of his disoriented mental state and the heat in his lower stomach is his angel, clad in a suit and tie, looking sheepish and eager for feedback. His hair's all messed up from dragging his shirt over his head when he got changed, but he is otherwise orderly and put together. The combination of would-be sex hair and dapper attire has left Dean momentarily speechless.

“Perhaps a different colour tie?” Cas says uneasily, casting furtive glances at the full length mirror behind Dean. Cas' tie is a subdued, pastel pink. His suit isn't tuxedo-formal or anything, but it's still classy as hell. He's wearing a dark blue blazer over a tight black vest and a white button-up shirt, and the way he's biting his lower lip nervously at his reflection is borderline unbearable. Dean's silence seems to be perturbing him.

“Dean.”

Cas' voice, now irritated, snaps Dean out of his reverie.

“Don't change anything, you look fucking h... awesome,” Dean says enthusiastically, standing to his feet and striding over to Cas. He's never asked Cas how he feels about PDA, and they don't make a habit of it (unless they see their over-zealous Republican neighbor – she warrants impromptu near make out sessions on the spot), but Dean currently can't help himself from slipping an arm around Cas' waist and tugging him into a kiss. He's vaguely aware that a public men's dressing room probably isn't the right place for it, but he doesn't care. Still, he tries to keep the fire that he's feeling through his bloodstream out of the kiss. He still hasn't gotten past a drunken one-off hit to second base, and he has a feeling now isn't the best time to push forward.

... But *damn* if Cas doesn't look good in a suit.

“Even the pink?”

“*Especially* the pink. It's for Easter, man, you're supposed to be all pastel and shit.”

“Right,” Cas says, fussing with the tie. Dean bats his hands away and straightens the tie, which Cas has inadvertently pushed askew.

“Now take it off,” Dean says. When Cas gives him a peculiar look, he quickly rephrases, feeling his face burn red. “Er – so we can buy it. You have to... yeah. Change clothes.” He clears his throat awkwardly and looks away. Cas looks confused at Dean's strange behavior, but he doesn't comment. He goes back into the stall to change and Dean curses himself at the way his thoughts plummet when he hears Cas' zipper. He's pretty sure this is all Gabriel's fault, somehow, and he really wishes a good ol' stake in the heart would do the guy in. He totally deserves it.

“Now we'll find yours,” Cas says from the other side of the door.

“My what?” Dean asks distractedly, mentally focusing on things that are decidedly *not* Castiel in a suit. Like wendigos and homicidal grandma ghosts and headless vampires.

“Your suit, Dean,” Cas explains as he opens the door. He's not wearing a sweater, for once, and his frame looks significantly thinner without one. The weather is officially too warm for the cozy clothing Cas has gotten so used to. The angel had been quite unhappy when Dean insisted this morning that Cas change into something lighter because all that fuzzy fabric was making him warm just looking at it. Cas had settled on wearing one of Dean's lighter jackets.

Which, of course, made Dean feel all funny inside too. He's pretty sure he's in heat or something.

“I’ll wear one of my Fed ones,” Dean says dismissively. The thought occurs to him that Easter’s supposed to be all about Jesus or some shit, but he can’t stop picturing his sort-of-boyfriend in high definition incredibly unholy imagery. Complete with soundtrack.

“No. They are not ‘pastel and shit’,” Cas points out, quoting Dean’s words in his characteristic monotone voice that makes it impossible for Dean to take him seriously when he curses.

Dean snorts. “Not really a pastel person, Cas.”

“But it’s for Easter, Dean.” There’s a certain undertone to Cas’ voice that reminds Dean implicitly of Sam when he was little, asking for something he’s afraid Dean won’t be able to give him. Like money for a field trip when he knows they’re broke, or to keep a kitten he knows their motel won’t let them have. Like with Sam, Dean finds it very, very difficult to refuse this tone.

“Yeah, well. What would you have me wear?” Dean says, already caving. Cas smiles – and *God*, does Dean ever love that smile – and flags down one of the men who work in the store. The man is tall and has dark hair along with well manicured stubble. He’s beautiful, stunning and is eyeing Cas like he’s some sort of meal.

“How may I help you?” the man asks, and he’s got a damn Italian accent on top of everything else. Dean’s guard is up immediately, feeling his turf being invaded. Cas, blissfully unaware, gestures to Dean.

“He needs something to wear for Easter,” Cas explains, “I presume your advice will be better than mine.”

The man laughs, puts a hand on Cas’ shoulder and smiles, all pristine white teeth and charm.

“I’m sure well find something suitable for your friend,” the man says – and that’s about it, all Dean needs to step in and defend his territory. He puts an arm around Cas’ waist possessively, tugging him subtly away from the man. The man raises his eyebrows in question.

“Yeah, my *boyfriend* can talk me into just about anything, even a suit. Can’t you, Cas?”

Cas says nothing, only looks at Dean with wide, round eyes.

“I am your boyfriend?” Cas asks, and the man laughs again, flashing Dean a sympathetic look. Dean glowers, tightens his grip around Cas until Cas glances down at his hand, frowning subtly.

“Dean?”

“Your friend seems to have had some sort of misunderstanding,” the store clerk says, and Dean sort of wants to rip his lungs out.

“I’m not his *friend*,” Dean spits, words like acid venom. Cas looks like he’s been struck in the face and even the man looks startled. Dean’s feeling about as defensive as it gets. The hand not clutching Cas is slowly balling into a fist as he pins the store worker with a glare usually reserved for demons and vampires.

“I don’t understand,” Cas says, inching out of Dean’s grasp. Dean looks away from his would-be rival to look at Cas, who he hadn’t realized now appears distant and withdrawn.

“Should I go?” the store worker asks, Italian accent still so pretty Dean wants to cause him bodily harm at all costs.

“Hell yeah you should,” Dean says, and the man doesn’t hesitate to go. Dean turns his full attention to Cas, who is thumbing through a rack of shirts distractedly.

“Cas?”

“You are not my friend, Dean?” Cas says evenly, eyes focused on each shirt as he looks through them. Dean suddenly gets it and his stomach drops. Cas misunderstood and Dean hurt his feelings. He almost curses under his breath, but catches himself – now is not the time to appear exasperated. It *is* frustrating sometimes, though, dealing with a once cosmic being who has the people skills and social knowledge of a five year old.

“Cas, you’re more than my friend,” Dean says gently, easing into Cas’ personal space until their shoulders are pressed together. Dean looks at Cas intently until Cas has no choice but to look up from the clothes rack and meet his eyes.

“First off, you’re my *best* fucking friend and I love you almost as much as I love Sammy – which is saying something, seriously – but you’re more than that. ‘Friend’ doesn’t cut it.” Dean hates talking about his feelings, of course, and the fact that they’re in Banana Republic just makes everything worse. What he’s saying feels almost physically painful to vocalize.

“I see,” is all Cas says, and Dean is torn between wanting to kiss him and wanting to strangle him. He’s like, baring his soul over here and all Cas can say is *‘I see’*?

“I think I should start calling you my boyfriend, Cas,” Dean says decisively. Dean’s never been sure, exactly, what to call their relationship. In his head, Cas is just ‘my angel’ or ‘my sort-of-boyfriend-thing’, but Dean figures now is as good a time as any to clearly define it. Since, y’know, he’s already baring his soul and all.

“I would like that,” Cas says, and a genuine smile flickers to his lips. Dean’s heart skips a beat – he’d sort of thought Cas would have no opinion on the matter, which would make Dean feel a little stupid for caring so much. It’s nice that Cas appreciates the real life equivalent of changing a Facebook setting from ‘It’s Complicated’ to ‘In a Relationship’ as much as Dean does.

“Good. Now no more talking to seductive Italian men, okay?”

“You were concerned he would... 'seduce' me?”

Dean snorts. “Hell no. Not with me around. Let's buy your stuff, Cas, we'll come back when Mr. Suave over there is off his shift.”

“No, Dean,” Cas says firmly, “That is ridiculous. Buy your clothes now and we won't have to come back.”

“Cas – ”

“*Dean.*”

Cas' I-Am-an-Angel-of-the-Lord face is on in two seconds flat and Dean swallows his retorts. Cas is pretty friggin' scary when he wants to be, and Dean knows when to pick his battles. Besides, this little shopping excursion counts as a *holiday thing*, and Dean's learned by now that Cas has final say in holiday things.

Dean gets a tan blazer that is decidedly more dapper than his fed suit, a darker tan vest and a pastel green bow tie that Cas says looks nice with his eyes. Dean can count on his fingers how many times he's worn a bow tie in his life (three), but the way Cas looks at him wearing one now makes him consider the pros and cons of wearing one every friggin' day. He feels a little funny all dressed up like this when he's not working on a case, but he can't help but admit that his reflection in the mirror looks pretty damn nice.

Banana Republic bags look out of place in the back seat of the Impala, but Dean's taking it in stride. So much of his life has changed that the few shopping bags he sees in the rear view mirror are hardly worth a thought. For a brief, bizarre minute Dean pictures the back seat with something *else* entirely – something it hasn't had since Sam was very, very small. He shakes the thought from his head immediately, not even allowing his mind to form

the word. He looks visibly unnerved the whole ride home, fists clenching the wheel. Cas looks at him curiously but doesn't ask; he knows Dean well enough to know when he needs his space, even if it doesn't seem to make any sense.

By the time they're home, Dean has thoroughly freaked himself out over how apple pie and domesticated his life has become. For whatever reason, all his internal warnings are kicking in, telling him that this not a life that Dean Winchester can have – *deserves* to have. He can't get rid of the stupid *car seat* from his mind, can't get the word out of his mouth where it itches to be spoken about. He's inexplicably angry, again, and all the while Cas is watching this unwarranted turmoil of emotion from surface level.

“Dean?” Cas asks after they've been sitting about a minute in the car, ignition still turned on. Dean seems to snap out of a sort of reverie and he turns off the car. He plasters on a smile, swallowing his anger, and chuckles.

“Spaced out a sec there. Need help with the bags?”

“I'm fine. What's wrong?”

There's a beat where Dean decides how to answer. A flurry of possible lies go through his mind before his mouth blurts out, more roughly than intended, “Put your shit in the house, we're going to Cape May.”

“Cape May... New Jersey? Two hours from here?” Cas asks dubiously.

“Yeah, I was looking through the news last night and they've got clear signs of vampire activity. Don't think there's any hunters in the area.”

Cas opens the door without further word, grabs their bags from the back seat and takes them out to the house. Dean sits back in his chair and rubs his temples with his forefingers, closing his eyes. Cas is back in a flash – Dean suspects he may have thrown the bags on the couch – and is buckling his seat belt before Dean knows it. He doesn't ask questions, doesn't mention the new recipe he'd been telling Dean about earlier, the one he was

going to make for dinner. He doesn't say anything, just sits back and gives Dean a look that clearly tells him to drive.

*

It's dark and very late on their drive back, April rain dotting the windshield. The ride back feels even longer than the ride down did. It's spent in tense silence, broken only by the quiet patter of rain against the car. Dean's knuckles are white from how hard he's clutching the steering wheel, eyes fixed sternly on the road.

Cas' right forearm is bandaged from elbow to wrist, wound tight in white bandages. Dean's got several deep scratches on his face and arms, but nothing major. Both boys are covered in blood that is only half their own. Cas has been staring at Dean the majority of the ride. Cas' ability to stare is nothing new to Dean, not out of the ordinary in the least, but it's doing nothing to lighten his mood.

"You have a window for a reason, Cas," he says finally, exasperated, when the staring has finally gotten to him. Which, admittedly, takes a while. It's strange how used to it he's gotten.

"You're brooding, Dean."

Dean says nothing, just focuses on the long and empty road ahead of them.

"This is because I was injured." It's not a question; it's a statement. Dean doesn't say anything for a while, just drives and drives while Cas stares.

"Well, shit, Cas, of course it is," he snaps at last, meeting Cas' eyes for the first time since they got in the car. "I could have gotten you fucking killed."

“We're hunters, Dean,” Cas says, and Dean winces. “Danger is generally expected.”

Dean thinks back to their battle with the vampire – which had turned out to be three vampires, once they got there – of the way Cas' face went distorted with pain when the vampire flung itself at him and sank its teeth in his flesh. Dean remembers the surge of adrenaline he felt, the store his body reserves for when people he loves are *directly* in threat of being killed (never, y'know, a minute or two ahead of time for God's sake). He'd been on the ground, then, halfway across the room, but he managed to scramble to his feet and stick a machete through the ugly son of a bitch's neck before he could do any lasting damage. Cas had returned the favor almost immediately, hacking off the head of the vampire who had snuck up behind Dean in his process of heroism. Dean had been pretty impressed at the time; Cas killed the thing left-handed because the pain throbbing through his right was too great.

Now, though, he can feel nothing but revulsion.

“Not for *you*, Cas,” Dean answers and Cas' eyebrows narrow, confusion slowly replaced with something else.

“What do you mean?”

“You're – shit, Cas. This?” Dean gestures to Cas' injury “This, right here? This should *never happen*. You're – you *were* an angel, Cas, you could take those sons of bitches out with your pinky. But now – ” Dean thinks back to the first day they met, when he'd wanted nothing more than to gank Cas like every other monster he'd ever met. He remembers sending bullets at him, lunging a knife into his chest. “Because of me, you're not an angel anymore. You can't heal yourself. You're mortal. I did this to you.”

This is all my fucking -”

“Pull over.”

“What?”

“*Pull over,*” Cas growls, putting a hand on the steering wheel as if to demonstrate that he’ll willingly do it himself. Dean obeys, too startled to really process what’s going on. As soon as he puts the car in park, Cas is out of the car and rounding to Dean’s side. He pulls open Dean’s door and drags him out by the lapels of his jacket. He shoves him against the back door, glaring at him viciously.

“Don’t ever let me hear you say that again,” Cas says, fire in his words so great it renders Dean speechless. He’s in Dean’s face, leaving no choice but to look him in the eyes. Cas is still remarkably strong, despite his relative slowness in physique. It’s as though his muscle memory remembers that it once had incredible strength, and is clinging to that.

“You didn’t *do* anything to me, Dean Winchester. Or do you think me to be some small child you coerced into sin? Impressionable and easily manipulated? *I chose this, Dean.*” Cas gives the slightest shake of Dean’s jacket in his fists, as if to reiterate the point. Out here in the dark and rain, the low growl of his voice sounds even more intimidating. “Thousands and thousands of years of rigid obedience. Do you really think I’d throw it away without thinking?”

Dean makes a small sound, tries to avoid Cas’ eyes and fails.

“*I love you, Dean.* A thousand injuries are nothing compared to the happiness I’ve found with you. So *shut up.* This whining is pathetic.”

“Cas -”

“Now get in the car and drive us home.”

*

It’s nearly midnight when they get back, and the rain has picked up to a much harder downpour. The porch light is on, though, making their flat look like a warm and inviting beacon.

Cas starts to get out of the car and notices that Dean isn't following.

“You go ahead, Cas, I'll be back in an hour or so.”

“Where are you going?”

“Tough hunt, man. I need a drink. I won't be gone long, don't wait up-”

“No. Turn off the car. You're coming inside and watching Lilo and Stitch with me. I will make us hot chocolate and we'll finish the brownies in the fridge.”

“Cas-”

“And then you'll kiss me because you've irritated me very thoroughly today.”

“... Hm. That so?”

“Yes. You have to make me forgive you.”

Dean sighs, cracks his neck and turns the key in the ignition, turning it off. Then, swiftly, he leans over and kisses Cas, slipping a hand to his cheek. Cas reciprocates immediately and the kiss soon blurs into a series of kisses. Dean can feel Cas' pink, chapped lips grow puffy from all the attention and he smiles as their lips connect. Whatever doubts he may have had ease away. He feels childish.

“It's cold,” Cas says, *just* as Dean's thinking about going for tongue and maybe doing something about all his sexual frustration (which had been momentarily forgotten in all of today's manly angst). Dean successfully pushes down a groan of irritation before opening his door. He'd forgotten about the rain, which pours on his head adamantly as soon as he steps out of the car. He darts to the sidewalk and Cas takes off his trench coat quickly and puts it over both their heads. They make a run for the porch and, thanks to the coat, are only slightly waterlogged.

“Tomorrow we go shopping for Easter lawn decorations,” Cas mentions as Dean puts the key in the lock.

Dean resists the urge to roll his eyes.

*

The following day breaks with bright blue skies and sunshine, leaving the damp sidewalks and wet grass as the only indication that there was ever rain at all. Dean wakes up curled up next to Cas, legs loosely tangled. Cas is already awake, propped up on an elbow and running his fingers absently through Dean's hair.

“Morning,” Dean mumbles, groggy.

“Good morning, Dean.”

“... c'mere,” Dean says and reaches out his arms. Cas accepts the embrace and cuddles in, his back pressed against Dean's chest. Dean nuzzles his nose into the back of Cas' neck and presses kisses there.

“I'm sorry,” Dean murmurs into Cas' hair, “for being a dick all the time and whatever.”

Cas grabs Dean's hands and laces their fingers together.

“You wouldn't be you if you weren't. I forgive you.”

There's a peaceful quiet for a while. Dean revels in the way he can feel Cas' breathing through his chest, likes how soft Cas' fingers are. His *boyfriend's* fingers are. He likes that he can say that now.

“Do you forgive me enough to make me breakfast?” Dean asks after a bit. Cas chuckles.

“Yes – as long as you come with me today. I have a long list of things to buy.” Cas sits up, stretching for a moment before standing up. Only then does he notice that Cas is wearing boxers and one of Dean's t shirts. Dean clears his throat, looks away from the bit of Cas' back that is exposed when he stretches.

“Augh, fine. Just no more candles!”

Cas pauses mid-step on his way to the kitchen.

“But, Dean -”

“We *just* got new candles like four days ago.”

“They weren't *Easter* candles, Dean!”

Dean groans. He wasn't even aware Easter candles existed. He reminds himself that it's a *holiday thing* and that Cas has free reign here, so he just shrugs and clambers out of bed himself.

“Whatever you say, Martha Stewart.”

*

Dean is pretty sure that Cas could singlehandedly keep the Holiday Store in the mall in business, just by the sheer amount of time and money they spend there. After the first half hour they spend sniffing candles – they're Easter egg shaped and smell like cake and tulips and other festive things like that – Dean's just about had it with the store. He gives Cas a kiss on the forehead and tells him that he's going to lose his marbles and gank the nearest Easter bunny if he doesn't get out of the store soon. Cas nods understandingly and suggests that Dean walk the mall.

Dean returns an hour later to find Cas at the register, heavy-laden with bags. Dean rushes to his aid, grabbing the largest one. Dean has his own bag, which he adjusts so he can hold the new one as well. He inspects the Cas' bag's contents as they walk out of the store.

“You seriously found light up lawn ornaments for *Easter*? Dude, I've never even heard of those. I thought that was a Christmas thing. And then after Valentine's Day I thought it was, y'know, a Christmas and Valentine's Day thing – they seriously make outside light up bunnies and Easter baskets?”

“Obviously,” Cas says, gesturing toward the bag. Dean rolls his eyes. Cas notices the other bag in Dean's hand and eyes it curiously.

“What is that?”

“Uh. Gift for you.” He puts the bigger bag down when they reach the car and fumbles through his pockets, busying himself with his keys to hide the inexplicable blush adding a pink tinge to his sandy freckles.

Cas' expression doesn't change, but Dean notices the way his eyes light up. He decides that it's a good look on Cas, that sort of eager curiosity, and he's pleased he's the one that put it there.

“What else did you get?” Dean asks once they're in the car and on the road. Cas looks through the bags, taking inventory.

“The Easter egg candles, as you know. The store worker said they're very potent and the house will smell nice instantly. I have several Easter rabbits to put on the coffee table and bookshelf and kitchen counters and -”

“Basically every free surface in the house, I'm guessing.”

“Well. Yes. I got a new apron as well. It has rabbits on it.”

“I'm guessing you like bunnies, eh?”

“Yes. I think they may be my favorite animal. Aside from humans, that is. I bought us plastic Easter eggs and an egg dyeing kit. I've invited Bobby, Sheriff Mills, Sam and Sarah to Easter dinner and I'll devil the eggs after we've colored them. Why do people color them, anyway, Dean? I don't understand that part.”

“Dude, no one does. It makes absolutely no sense.”

“I don't really understand anything about this holiday, considering it is said to be about the supposed resurrection of Jesus, yet is celebrated with bunnies and... eggs.”

“Beats me, man. But hey, it's colorful and there's a lot of gratuitous chocolate, so what the hell?”

Cas nods. “It's a foolish holiday, but I am fond of it anyway. I also bought tulips to plant in the front yard. I think that's it.”

They pull up to their flat and carry their bags in, setting them on the couch so Cas can take everything out and decide where it goes. No sooner do they set the Holiday Store bags down does Cas round on Dean and pluck the other bag from his hands. Dean just chuckles.

“Only compromise is that you're not allowed to wear it out of the house, okay?”

Inside the bag is a thin, white sweater, appropriate for the newly warm Spring weather. The novelty of it is that it has a hood, and on the hood is a pair of floppy fabric bunny ears. Cas pulls it on at once, putting the hood up and letting the ears flop over his face. He looks absolutely ridiculous and equally adorable, and Dean can't fight the grin that etches its way onto his face.

“I'm wearing this everywhere, Dean,” Cas says seriously, giving one of the ears a tentative tug.

“No way, man. You look like a nerd.”

“You've always called me a nerd,” Cas points out. “'Nerd angel',” he quotes, air quotes and all.

“Touche. You're gonna kill my rep with that, though. My boyfriend the Easter bunny. I'll lose all my street cred.”

“Street cred?” Cas muses, crossing the distance between them and putting a hand on Dean's waist. “Overrated.” He kisses Dean, a soft little thing that reminds Dean somewhat of a rabbit, for whatever reason. Dean wraps both arms around Cas' waist and kisses him back.

“Maybe,” Dean says, “I've got something better, anyway.”

“Hm, really? And what's that?”

“You.”

*

Cas is all dirty and Dean loves it.

It's the day before Easter and they're outside in the front yard, both kneeling in the flower bed outside the porch of their flat, bearing spades and covered in dirt. Turns out that the earth in the tiny flower bed was hard and inhospitable to incoming plants, so Dean and Cas had to dig up quite a lot of it in order to soften the ground. They figured adding water would help their cause, but today is the first time they've used the hose that came with the flat and they weren't aware that the water pressure was so intense. They ended up with a veritable ocean of mud. Cas got the worst of it; he made the mistake of staying in the flower bed when Dean turned on the hose, not anticipating the intensity of water flow, and was splattered with mud. Dean's only dirty because Cas threw some at him in protest.

There's mud on the tulips, too, and the whole flower bed looks like an awful mess. Dean's having a little trouble caring, though; Cas is wearing a tight white tank top and a pair of old jeans and Dean has lost the ability to think clearly. Cas' palms are black with dirt and there's smears of mud on his face. All in all, Cas as a gardener is sexy as fuck and Dean was not prepared for their little Easter activity to leave him – yet again – painfully sexually frustrated.

Cas sits back on his heels and observes their handiwork. “They're about as appealing as our Christmas tree was,” he remarks, attempting to swipe some dirt from one of the flower petals and only further smudging it.

“It's got Winchester appeal. A little rough around the edges but there's some charm there.”

“Perhaps. If nothing else, it brings color to the flat.”

“... Cas. Our front lawn is lit up every night with glowing bunny lights. Don't think we're lacking for color here, man.”

“*Natural* color, Dean.”

“You're such a girl, dude. I need to keep you away from Sam.”

Cas scowls. Dean notes that Cas is kinda hot when he does that, too, and he mentally adds 'angry sex' to the steadily building list of fantasies he has regarding Cas. His eyes dart to Cas' lips, bright pink and chapped as ever. Cas notices.

“What are you thinking about, Dean?”

Dean clears his throat and swallows hard.

“Uh – church,” Dean evades quickly, saying the first thing that comes to mind. “Are you making us go to church Sunday? For Easter mass or whatever? Cause I hate to break it to you man, but they're not the most gay-friendly places in the world, especially around here.”

Cas shakes his head.

“We're going to church – ” Dean groans at this “– but not to a Christian service. I don't want to spend my holiday amongst people who would make us uncomfortable, but I *do* want to do everything that the holiday includes.”

“But *Cas* -”

“Holidays are my domain, Dean. This is my first year immersed in humanity. Let me explore it. We're going to church.”

“Whatever you say, Cas,” Dean grumbles.

They end up laying in the grass of their front yard, staring at the blue sky overhead. The whole world smells of Spring and rebirth; the grass has a fresh scent to it that makes everything feel brand new. Dean takes Cas' hand as he searches for pictures in the clouds.

“I know that's not what you were thinking about, by the way,” Cas says offhand after several minutes in quiet tranquility. Dean blanches.

“Er, what are you talking about?”

“You know, Dean. And I'm still interested. I think about it, too.”

Cas gets up, then, and walks into the house. Dean lays there a while longer, brain going over and over Cas' statement, psychoanalyzing it. *I think about it, too*. He closes his eyes and thinks about the implications of that. A shiver runs down his spine.

He really, really needs to get on that.

*

Cas falls asleep in a pair of boxers and his bunny sweater, hood up and ears draped across his face. He's the picture of innocence in sleep, and Dean wonders at how this man can be at once the scariest and cutest thing he's ever met. He lays in bed til he's sure Cas is asleep and then sneaks off to the kitchen to put Cas' Easter basket together. He fills it with all the essentials – chocolate bunnies, caramel filled Easter eggs and Peeps. He hasn't had a proper Easter since before his mom died, but he's pretty sure he's covered all the basics.

He shuts off the kitchen light and takes another peek at his angel. He can see him faintly in the light of the three candles he's left burning for Dean before he goes to sleep. He chuckles at the sight of the bunny ears. Figures Cas would like such a dorky thing, figures his favorite animal would be a rabbit.

With that thought, an idea strikes him. He grabs his coat and his keys and slips out the door, casting one last fond smile at Cas before he leaves.

*

Dean wakes up to a kiss on his temple. He smiles, eyes flickering open to the sight of Cas, all bright-eyed and extra happy like he always is on holidays.

“Hello, Dean,” Cas says, “Happy Easter.”

Dean responds first with a kiss to Cas' mouth.

“Morning, Sunshine,” he says, “Right back at you.” Then, Dean hears a quiet rustling sound from the far end of the room. He panics quietly and looks at Cas – Cas has heard it, too.

“Did you hear -”

“I don't know about you, but I'm dying to try that Easter tea you got. I don't even know how you managed to *find* Easter tea.”

“Internet,” Cas responds with a shrug. He peers in the direction the sound came from, but Dean distracts him with another kiss.

“C'mon, get up,” Dean says, nudging Cas' thigh gently with his knee. Cas stretches and does so, helping Dean up directly after. The two trudge sleepily to the kitchen and Cas puts water to boil. Dean sits back in his chair and watches Cas pull out things to make breakfast. Soon there's a host of ingredients on the table – milk, eggs, sugar, vanilla extract, pumpkin pie spice and apple butter. Dean raises an eyebrow.

“Dude, what's with all the stuff? You're making Easter dinner tonight for like five people, don't wear yourself over breakfast.”

“I don't intend to. That's why I picked something simple.”

Dean looks at the counter skeptically. “With that many ingredients?”

“It's not as hard as it looks. I'm making apple butter french toast.”

Cas isn't kidding; breakfast takes all of 15 minutes to make and looks phenomenal. By now the tea is finished steeping and Cas serves them both, coming to sit beside Dean. Their table is big enough that Cas could sit opposite Dean, but he never does. Their lack of personal space thing dates back way before they were dating – though the word *dating* feels strangely inaccurate to Dean – and it doesn't seem to make much sense to quit it now. Their elbows bump affably every now and then as they eat.

Dean makes a face of pure delight as he puts the first forkful of french toast into his mouth. It's by far better than any french toast Dean's ever had, and he groans blissfully as he swallows. Cas gets a peculiar look on his face at that, but Dean's too busy enjoying his food to analyze it. The tea is amazing, too. It's called 'Thé de Pâques'; it's

spicy and citrusy and fruity at the same time, black and sweet enough to be drunk without cream or sugar. He closes his eyes a moment, savoring it as he drinks. He's gotten over thinking that tea is for pansies. Tea is *awesome*.

"God, I love you," Dean says as he finishes his food. Cas gives a small, contented smile.

"I love you, as well. And I have something for you."

"Yeah? I've got something for you, too," Dean says, unable to fight a grin. Cas looks surprised, like he wasn't expecting Dean to play along with the Easter thing, and Dean hopes the time comes when Cas stops being surprised when good things happen. He's excited, though, knowing his present might earn him a full smile from Cas.

Cas grabs his Easter basket for Dean from one of the kitchen cabinets, and Dean brandishes his basket for Cas from the hallway closet. They sit on the couch and exchange them, both wearing matching smiles as they look through their candy. Dean's has a piece of apple pie wrapped in pastel cellophane that can tell from sight is homemade (he wonders idly when Cas managed to make it without Dean knowing). Cas looks quietly pleased as he tears open the box of Peeps. He pops one into his mouth and his face goes all soft and happy at the taste.

"Thank you, Dean," Cas says sincerely, making firm eye contact with Dean.

"Not yet. I've got one more present for you." As if on cue, the same rustling from earlier sounds again. Cas looks at Dean curiously as he gets off the couch and grabs something big and rectangular and covered with a pastel green blanket and a little blue ribbon. There's a loud skittering sound from within it as he drags it over to the couch.

"Happy Easter," he says, and Cas pulls the blanket from the object.

The object is a small cage, and within it is a rabbit. It's small with overlarge ears and bright blue eyes. Dean hadn't needed even a moment to pick her out – her black fur and blue eyes reminded him instantly of Cas. The pet store owner, who had thankfully been working overtime last night, had assured Dean that this particular breed is extremely affectionate, not the sort to shy away from human interaction. As if to prove this, the bunny stands up on her hind legs and presses her feet against the side of the cage, twitching her nose at Cas.

“Dean,” Cas says quietly after staring at the rabbit for several moments, “Dean, thank you,” he whispers. Before Dean can answer, Cas grabs the back of his neck and pulls him in for a kiss, pulling Dean's lower lip between his own. Dean makes a little sound like a sigh and a whimper and kisses back, wrapping an arm around Cas' waist and tugging him closer. Dean inhales deeply and swallows his fears, surging forward with tongue and getting instant reciprocation. He tugs Cas even closer, effectively dragging him onto his lap, when a loud clock alarm goes off across the room. Startled, he breaks the kiss and glares at the clock.

“Why do we have an alarm clock set?” Dean asks breathlessly, jaw clenching. Cas looks sheepish.

“To remind us to get ready for church.” Dean scowls. Cockblocked by *church*. It's fitting, he supposes, but right now all he wants to do is get in Cas' pants before he loses the nerve.

“Do we have to go?” Dean half-whines, pressing kisses against Cas neck. Cas makes a noise like a gasp that sends chills down Dean's spine, but, to Dean's dismay, nods.

“It's Easter, Dean,” Cas says, like this explains why church is better than whatever they were about to engage in. Cas disentangles himself from Dean, crawling off his lap and sitting back against the couch. He heaves a sigh and then gives Dean a tiny smile.

“Besides, I'd like to see you in your suit again,” he adds, and if he were anyone but Cas, Dean would swear the statement was laced with innuendo.

*

“Sam is going to Easter mass with Sarah and will join us after. Bobby, of course, could not be coerced to join either of us.”

“Why can't Sam just go to mass with us?”

They're pulling up to a church in the Impala, Kansas playing through the car speakers as Cas fiddles with his tie. The church is small but beautiful, featuring a large circular stained-glass window at its top, surrounded by several smaller windows. It has the effect of looking like a sun. Dean's not impressed, though; he finds that pretty churches tend to be dull and traditional. Not that he's had very much experience with churches, really. He can't remember the last time he visited one voluntarily or without needing something holy for a hunt. He *does* remember that one smokin' hot priest in Tampa, but that's neither here nor there (though, for the record, chastity vows suck).

Dean's picturing Cas in a priest outfit and weighing whether or not this is attractive when Cas nudges him, pointing out that the car is parked and they've been idling for a minute. Dean shakes himself from his lewd thoughts, reminding himself he's about to enter a church.

“You're sure the whole dude slash dude couple thing isn't gonna make anyone stare? Because I don't think I can stand like two hours of bitchy staring.”

“It's only an hour, Dean. And no, I promise that no one will stare.”

“As long as I don't kiss you,” Dean grumbles as they walk through the precipice. Cas sighs, rolls his eyes and kisses Dean full on the lips to prove his point. No one mingling in the lobby outside the sanctuary even flinches. They get quite a few hearty welcomes but are otherwise left in peace. Dean wishes he could remember what kind of church Cas said this one is. He can't spot any crosses or crucifixes, so he's starting to think it might not have any Christian affiliations. A non-church-church doesn't make sense, though, so Dean stops trying to figure it out.

At eleven, people start filing into the sanctuary and Dean and Cas follow. Dean instinctively leads them to a pew in the very back. He debates whether or not Cas would be offended if Dean took this opportunity to nap. He reminds himself that it's only an hour and that the whole Easter shebang is really important to Cas and resolves

to at least *try* to keep his eyes open. Dean notes that, while many people are all dressed up like he and Cas are, many people are in jeans and t-shirts and even sweats. He's never seen such a laid-back church, and he appreciates that Cas went out of his way to find a place where they'd be comfortable.

The pastor is startlingly young and is sporting a bow tie, like Dean. He's got a lively nature to him, a brazen humor that puts Dean at ease almost instantly. He starts out with jokes, even wishes his congregation a happy “zombie Jesus day”. Cas is listening intently, leaning slightly into Dean, and Dean starts to think maybe the whole Easter Sunday thing isn't so bad after all.

The sermon is not about the Bible, though it mentions it occasionally. Instead, the pastor's focus is on new life and freedom – looking to the future. He talks about the renewing, refreshing feelings that Spring brings and the relevant symbolism in the resurrection of Christ. He also talks about Buddha and cites quotes from other religions, bringing them into the common theme of moving forward and reveling in the perpetual newness of life. Dean absorbs it all. He thinks about Cas, thinks about how different their lives have become since they ended the apocalypse and accidentally fell in love. He thinks about his apprehensions, too, about his fear that this new life of theirs will fall apart and that he doesn't deserve this happiness. He wants to let all that go. He wants to look toward the future, his future – one he wants to spend with Cas. He resolves to try harder to do that.

Church lets out exactly an hour after it began. Many people thank Dean and Cas for coming, beckon them to come again. Much as Dean liked the service, he knows he has no plans of visiting on a regular basis. Church just isn't his scene, though he thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Cas is wearing an expression that Dean has come to know as being pleased. Cas is never terribly emotive – even when he's happy, he doesn't smile wide very often, but Dean's learned the intricacies of the other man's emotions. He kinda likes knowing that he can do that, knowing that he can read Cas like a book just from a certain light in his eye or the way his lips twitch at the edges. He knows all the subtleties and nuances of Cas in a way he's never been able to with anyone but Sam. It's... nice.

The two of them go home and Cas immediately heads for the kitchen, plucking hard-boiled eggs from the fridge. Dean takes the hint and pulls the egg-dyeing kit from one of the kitchen drawers. He grabs a few plastic cups and fills them with water for the eggs. He hasn't done this since Sam was a kid, and even then they only dyed eggs a handful of years. Like with every holiday so far (sans St. Patrick's Day, since he's never celebrated it before this year), Dean's feeling like he's getting a tiny bit of his childhood back. He feels childish and a little dumb, but Cas' enthusiasm makes up for it.

Cas ducks out of the kitchen for a second and comes back with his rabbit on his shoulder. Dean opens his mouth to protest that the bunny might fall or something, but the sight of the rabbit and Cas together with their matching blue eyes and dark hair makes him grin and he knows it's not worth the pout he'd get.

"You got a name for him yet?"

"I think so. I think I may name him Sunshine."

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"You called me that this morning," Cas says, dropping the color tablets into the cups of water and adding vinegar, "I thought it was endearing."

Dean gets over the initial embarrassment and snorts. "What if I wanna call you that again? It'll be weird if the bunny's got the same name."

"I'll know the difference," Cas says simply, and drops the first egg into the water. He reaches for the little scooping wire the kit provides right off the bat, and makes a face at the egg when he plucks it out.

"Cas, you have to *wait* first. It's not going to dye right away."

"Oh." With a splash, Cas drops the egg back into the water and adds eggs to the rest of the cups. He sits on the edge of the counter and looks at Dean.

"I like Easter," Cas remarks. Dean walks over and ruffles Cas' hair.

“Yeah? Well, I like *you*.”

Cas looks puzzled. “I should hope so.” Dean groans and rolls his eyes.

“I was being cheesy, Cas, Christ. You really are a moment ruiner, you know that?”

“How did I-”

“Check your eggs, dude.”

Cas does so. The eggs are all bright pastels and Cas looks visibly happy at the sight. Dean's happy, too; he's not sure what's so damn charming about colored eggs, but he likes the sight. Cas is practically an Easter post card with his pink tie, bunny on his shoulder and egg in hand. Dean almost wants to take a picture.

They make about twelve more before Dean tells Cas he's going overboard. Dean demonstrates how he and Sam used to mix the colors and get all sorts of new colors and shades. Cas especially likes the vibrant green they get when they mix the green, blue and yellow. For the last egg, they mix all the colors together and get a weirdish, black or dark purple color that's decidedly more unattractive than the rest.

“Let em dry, we're going to need them in like 10 minutes,” Dean says.

“What for? I don't need them until Easter dinner tonight.”

“You'll see.”

*

Dean found this place by accident. He'd been driving home from the grocery store about three weeks ago, bag of flour for Cas' most recent recipe in tow, when he'd caught sight of something darting behind an abandoned building. He thought he saw its eyes flash – he wasn't sure, but his hunter senses were tingling, so to speak – so he pulled over and decided to check it out. He went through the tall, creaky wooden gate and through tall weeds to the yard behind the building. What he found was anything but frightening.

The building had been uninhabited for years, yet behind it was a beautiful *garden*. It was a little overrun, but was obviously cared for on a regular basis. Dean was instantly reminded of something, though it took him a moment to place it. All at once he realized that the place seemed almost *exactly* out of the Secret Garden, that girly kid's movie Sam had been so obsessed with when he was 13. It was surrounded on all sides by a tall wooden fence that hid it from view of anyone who might pass by. It was nothing short of breathtaking, particularly for the sheer serendipity of it.

Dean caught sight of what he'd thought was something supernatural; it turned out to be a human, nothing more. The man reminded him remarkably of Joshua, heaven's gardener. He had that same sort of tranquil look to him, and Dean wondered how he managed to confuse him with something threatening.

“Some garden you got here,” Dean had said, for lack of anything better to say.

“You're free to come whenever you like,” the man had replied quietly, “She deserves some attention. Lately, I'm the only one who ever sees the beauty here. There are flower blossoms everywhere now that it's Spring.” He absently snipped at an overgrown twig and smiled at Dean.

“Uh, thanks,” had been Dean's intelligent response. He'd left almost immediately after, feeling slightly perturbed and a little awed at his discovery. Only recently did Dean remember it.

Now, he pulls up to the familiar building with Cas beside him, still clad in his Sunday best. He's holding two baskets – one is full of the eggs they dyed and the other is full of the plastic sort that pop open to hide surprises

inside. He eyes the building warily when they pull up, then looks around at the surrounding buildings as though wondering if he's missed the reason for their current parking lot. Dean's amused by Cas' confusion.

“Come on,” Dean beckons as he gets out of the car and walks towards the gate. Cas follows behind, brow furrowed, clutching at both baskets.

Cas is more than a little amazed when Dean opens the gate. The garden is in even better shape than it was before; the gardener seems to have put in some extra time since Dean last saw the place. Dean now wishes he'd asked more questions – why is this place here if the building is abandoned? Why keep up with it? Whether he knows or not, though, he's grateful. The look of wonder on Cas' face is priceless.

“We're gonna have an Easter egg hunt here,” Dean says. “I figured it'd be less crowded than the public park.”

Cas looks down at the baskets in his hands. “What are the plastic eggs for?”

“You're gonna hide the dyed eggs and I have to find them, and I'm gonna hide the plastic eggs and you have to find them. We'll have like, a contest. Whoever finds them all first gets a massage when we get home. Sound good?”

Cas nods.

“This is such a frivolous holiday.”

“No shit, Cas. We're two grown men in a vacant lot playing hide and seek with pastel eggs. None of this makes any sense.”

“Perhaps that's why I like it.”

Dean shrugs. “Figures. Who hides their eggs first?”

“You may.”

Cas waits outside the gate while Dean picks expert hiding places for his eggs. In trees, in high grass, between flower petals... Dean tries to be as thorough as possible. He wants this to be fun for Cas, wants him to get a kick out of his first Easter egg hunt like every little kid in the world who's doing the same thing right now. They've got fifteen eggs each and it takes Dean a while to find all the best hiding spots, but he hears Cas clear his throat loudly from the other side of the fence and he figures his time is out. He opens the door, jerking his thumb in the direction of the garden.

“Your turn – and no looking while you're hiding yours, that's cheating.”

“Understood. I'll call you in shortly.”

Dean leans against the fence and waits, eyes up on the clouds. He *swears* he sees a cloud shaped like a bunny and is just about to do a double take when Cas beckons him in.

Dean does a quick scope of the area, but he can't spot any eggs right off the bat. What he *can* see is that Cas is trying to conceal something in his hand. Something bright pink and round.

“Cas! You cheater!”

Cas flushes red and looks at the floor.

“I – I wanted to see what was inside.”

Suddenly, it's Dean's turn to flush red.

“Did you, uh – Did you open it, or...?”

“Not yet. Shall we start the game with a count of three?”

“Sounds good. One, two... three.”

They split up and go to opposite sides of the garden, Cas taking the far side and Dean at the side closer to the gate. Dean's got an Easter basket in hand and feels absolutely ridiculous, but he can't help but feel a little childish pride when he manages to spot an egg tangled in some ivy along the fence. The competitor in him wonders if Cas has found any yet – and, more importantly, if he's opened any. He looks across the garden and sees Cas standing still, staring at something in his hands. Dean can only assume Cas has opened one and is looking at its contents. Dean studiously looks elsewhere.

Twenty minutes later, Dean has found fourteen eggs. He has no idea how many Cas has; whereas Dean shouts “Found one!” every time he locates an egg, Cas is quiet the whole time. Dean's going a little crazy trying to find this last egg, having searched the garden over and over at least five times. Cas, however, seems to be taking his time.

“How many do you have, Cas?” Dean asks after a while of futile searching.

“Eleven.”

“I totally have you beat, man. I just can't find that damn last egg.”

“How long have you been looking?”

“I’m pretty sure I’ve spent at least ten minutes on this one egg alone. You hid it well.”

A small smile creeps onto Cas’ lips, and then he laughs. Dean raises his eyebrows, surprised by this uncommon display of emotion. Dean understands when Cas slips a hand into his pocket and pulls out a bright blue egg. Dean gapes.

“Cas! Not cool, man, you totally screwed with me.”

Cas looks quite amused and entirely pleased with himself. “I thought it would be amusing.”

Dean snorts. “You’re a jerk, you know that?”

“Hm, perhaps. But you’ve won yourself a massage, so you can’t exactly complain.”

Dean is reminded of the prize – he’d forgotten. Honestly, he’d been kind of hoping Cas would win. He’s not sure he can take the feeling of Cas nimble hands all over his bare back. He might actually lose his goddamn mind. He swallows, shifts his bow tie and absently clears his throat. He takes a seat in the grass, opting to watch Cas search for the remaining eggs while he tries to mentally steel himself for later.

Turns out Cas has lost because he’s opening every egg as he finds them, pausing to look each one over. He doesn’t say anything about them, just keeps searching every time. It makes Dean incredibly uncomfortable, being unable to read Cas’ reaction. He doesn’t like how self-conscious Cas’ silence is making him.

At last, Cas finds the last egg and joins Dean on the ground. He's got a basket full of open eggs – and notes. Dean meticulously filled every egg with little notes for Cas. Every note has a reason he loves his boyfriend. Dean tries not to look at the basket and can't bring himself to look at Cas. His little gesture suddenly feels very, very lame.

“I love you,” Cas says, “I love all of you, everything. Thank you, Dean.” He sounds earnest, voice full of more emotion than Dean's used to. He thinks back on all the notes he stayed up writing last night. Things like *I love your hands, dude, they're fucking beautiful* and *You threw a Molotov cocktail at Michael's head, you're a friggin badass*. He seriously lost all sense of dignity writing these; he's delved so far into chick flick land that he's actually concerned the testosterone levels in his body might get thrown off. Some messages were even worse. *I love waking up next to you every morning*, for one, and *Nobody can tell me off like you can and it's awesome*. Cas is just staring at him now, eyes full of so much *feeling* that Dean doesn't even know what to do.

“I love you too, Cas,” Dean says, voice small and he feels smaller. He feels tiny under the impressive weight of all Cas' feelings for him.

*

They get back with just enough time for Cas to make dinner before Sam, Sarah, Bobby and Jodie arrive. They're still in their Sunday best when they get home, but the kitchen heats up quick when Cas sets the oven to preheat, and Cas puts his suit jacket, vest and dress shirt on the back of a chair in their tiny dining room. He's left wearing only a tight white tank top. Dean does the same, though he leaves his dress shirt on. He takes in the sight of the muscles in his boyfriend's back, his visibly thin but strong arms.

Dean peels the colored eggs so Cas can try out his recipe for deviled eggs. Cas finely chops smoked salmon to add to the eggs once they're prepared, combining it with a bunch of herbs Dean's not really familiar with. It looks appetizing, though, and Cas hands look cool as he chops everything and then whips it all together. It reminds Dean of all those chef shows on the Food Network, the way they all look impressive because they're professionals. Cas, of course, is not a professional, but sometimes Dean thinks that he should be.

Once Dean's done peeling, Cas says he doesn't need his help anymore. Dean pouts but otherwise doesn't complain; he has an inkling any more of his touches in the kitchen could potentially sabotage their dinner. He sits on the edge of the only counter Cas isn't using and watches him working, eyes tracing the movement of the other man's hands. Cas boils asparagus, chops shallot and puts it all together with a blend of salad greens, spices,

oil and vinegar. It's one of the most appealing salads Dean's ever seen, and that's an incredible feat. Dean's not exactly a salad person.

Cas says he's not much of a ham person, and the recipe for lamb chops he's found sounds a lot more fun to cook, anyway. He goes about preparing it, nimble fingers squeezing lime and mincing garlic cloves. The sight of Cas' hands in a flurry of motion is driving Dean a little crazy; he can't stop thinking of all the *other* things Cas could be doing with those hands. He hops off the counter and strides over to Cas, wrapping his arms around Cas' waist and pressing his own chest to Cas' back. Cas' chopping pauses briefly, but after a moment the rhythm picks up again.

Dean presses a kiss to the side of Cas' neck and moves his mouth up to Cas' jaw, closing his eyes when his lips brush against scruffy stubble.

"Dean, I'm trying to cook," Cas says, but it's a weak protest and Dean ignores it. Instead, he brings his mouth to the back of Cas' neck and nips a bite at the soft, sensitive skin there. Cas' whole body tenses up and he drops the knife on the counter with a loud clang.

"Dean," he says, voice low and notably more gravelly than normal. Dean grins and does it again, earning a shudder from Cas.

"Dean – Dean, if this lamb isn't in the oven in the next ten minutes, it won't be done in time," Cas says, obviously struggling to keep his voice steady. Dean traces his nails up and down the fabric of Cas' tank top, over his sides. Dean inhales a shaky breath and places his hands over Dean's, gently pulling them off. He turns around and gives Dean a painfully chaste kiss.

"Go straighten up the living room," he orders and Dean pouts as convincingly as he can. Cas isn't swayed, though, and Dean concedes to his fate. He treks out to the living room feeling sorry for himself, but he tucks his new found knowledge into the back of his head – the back of Cas' neck is a *very* intense weak spot.

Dean puts away any clothes that are hanging around their bedroom slash living room where they shouldn't be, dusts off the TV a bit and then plops onto the couch. He perks up when he hears the sound of the oven door closing, though.

"Cas," Dean whines, "come here and kiss me."

"I have potatoes, rolls and pie to make, Dean."

Dean makes a discontented sound but says nothing else. He takes Sunshine out of her cage and sits back on the couch, settling in and petting her. She's friendly and she twitches her nose at him, pressing her front paws to his chest and looking at him with a curiosity that reminds Dean of Cas. He lays his head back on the couch and closes his eyes with the sole intention of resting his eyes.

He awakes what feels like seconds later to the sound of the doorbell.

"Dean," Cas says from the doorway of the kitchen. His tie is hanging loose from his neck and he's pulling on his jacket over his vest and dress shirt. "Dean, get dressed." The doorbell rings again and Cas scowls. "My tie is undone."

Dean yawns and stretches. "Sammy's early," he mumbles.

"No, you fell asleep for an hour and a half. Get *dressed*." Cas opens the door, then. Bobby and Sheriff Mills are standing at the entrance; Sam and Sarah haven't arrived yet. Jodie is looking lovely in a white sundress, though it's disorienting seeing her in anything but her uniform. Bobby looks happy as a lark, from Dean's vantage point where he's tugging layers on.

"Hello, Bobby, Sheriff Mills," Cas says, "Happy Easter."

“Please, call me Jodie,” Jodie says warmly, smiling. “Happy Easter to you too, Castiel!”

“What she said,” Bobby says gruffly. Cas invites them in and Dean shakes hands, pats backs and revels in how happy Bobby looks with Jodie. Every time Bobby looks at her it's like he's eying a million dollars, and Dean can't remember the last time he saw Bobby this happy. Jodie looks equally pleased.

“It smells amazing in here,” Jodie says, looking surprised. Cas looks shy and busies himself with lighting his dorky Easter candles.

“Yeah, well, that's my Cas,” Dean says, and it sounds cheesy even to his own ears. Bobby's expression is beyond amused, borderline smug, but he doesn't say anything. He just exchanges knowing glances with Jodie. Yeah, Dean's got it bad – and apparently, everyone has noticed.

“Well, get cozy. Sam should be here soon,” Dean says, ushering them to the couches. The bunny's on the floor scampering about.

“Dean, that is one of the sissiest pets I've ever seen,” Bobby says when he catches sight of it. “You boys got yourselves a damn bunny.”

“Hey! Shut up. Sunshine's badass.”

“*Sunshine?*” Bobby mocks. Jodie gives him a light punch on the arm.

“Quiet, Bobby, it's cute. She's obviously an Easter present.”

“Yeah, I got her for Cas,” Dean says awkwardly. The rabbit bounds over to him and stops at his feet, looking up at him expectantly. Dean rolls his eyes, but picks her up.

“*Right*. For Cas,” Bobby says, that same knowing smirk on his lips. Dean scowls. Before he can retort, however, the doorbell rings. He puts Sunshine on his shoulder like Cas was before and quickly answers the door. Sam's there in Easter Sunday best, wearing a pastel blue tie. Sarah's there, too, in a bright yellow sundress and a matching yellow bow in her hair. The most remarkable thing, though, is Sam's hair. It's *short*. Dean hasn't seen it this short since Stanford.

“Someone trimmed the mane!” Dean exclaims as he gives his brother a hug. “Sarah, man, I could kiss you. I've been telling this loser to cut his hair for years.”

Sarah grins. “I told him he had to sleep outside until he cut it. He is *not* supposed to be the Rapunzel in this relationship, thanks.”

Sam snorts. “You didn't mind when we first met.”

“Oh yes I did. I just saw the *potential* there.” She twirls a strand of Sam's hair fondly.

“Hmph,” Sam says, but the happy look on his face betrays him. Sam has it bad like Dean's got it bad, and Dean's grateful he's not the only one wearing the stupid-in-love look on his face that he knows he has.

Cas gives Sam an awkward hug and Sarah an even more awkward handshake, wishing them both a very formal Happy Easter. His stiffness is endearing. Dean reminds himself it's impolite to constantly kiss his boyfriend when there's company, but he can't stop himself from giving Cas a quick peck on the lips. It'd be much easier to be polite if Cas wasn't so damn adorable.

“Help me in the kitchen, Dean,” Cas beckons as he goes into the kitchen. Dean follows obediently as Sam and Sarah strike up conversation with Bobby and Jodie behind him. Cas has the seldom-used cupboard with the wineglasses open, a bottle of wine in his hand.

“I need you to carry some of these,” Cas says. Dean raises an eyebrow.

“Wine?”

“The Internet says it goes well with Easter dinner.”

“Whatever you say, Cas,” Dean says, and plucks five glasses from their cabinet.

“You're short one,” Cas says, reaching past Dean to grab another glass. Dean shakes his head.

“Nope. I wanna be totally sober for... uh, later.”

Cas meets his eyes and seems to get the meaning, because he plucks a glass from Dean's hands and puts it back. Dean takes this as an incredibly good sign.

“Then I will refrain as well,” Cas says evenly. Dean gulps. He's pretty sure he's getting all green lights at this point, and he's starting to think he might actually move forward in the more intimate aspects in his relationship with Cas. The idea makes him nervous for some unknowable reason, though; his throat goes dry as he starts to think about it. He reminds himself that they have guests and pushes the thoughts out of his mind.

Bobby eyes Dean curiously when he doesn't drink with everyone else, but again acknowledges it only with a raise of his eyebrows. This time his knowing glance is exchanged with Sam, who smiles and reflects it. When Sam notices that Dean is witnessing this exchange, he has the grace to look guilty. Bobby, however, seems to have an eternally smug expression plastered on his face.

“This wine is great, Cas,” Sarah says, “Best I've had in a while. How'd you hear about it?”

“Internet,” Cas responds with simply. “There was a website about Easter. Among the crucifixes and Bible verses were recipes and wine recommendations.”

Sarah nods. “Makes sense. Catholics love to get their drink on.”

A timer dings from the kitchen and Cas smiles.

“Dinner is done,” he announces, “Dean, come help me set the table.”

Dean complies and follows Cas into the kitchen, plucking plates from the shelves. It dawns on him that he actually friggin loves holidays now. He's not sure at one point he transitions from “eh” to this new state – it snuck up on him, it seems – but he's beyond happy. The familiar clink of multiple plates being pulled out, the enticing aroma of a big family dinner... it's everything he never had when he was growing up. It's nothing short of amazing that Cas, a fallen angel who knew nothing of humanity, is the one who brings them all together again and again every time a holiday rolls around. He likes seeing his brother and Bobby so often, likes the sight of everyone all dressed up and formal. It feels warm in a way Dean hasn't felt since he was four years old, before his mother died. Cas in himself makes him feel warm all over. Dean's finally starting to realize that he doesn't have to doubt anymore; this new life of his isn't going away any time soon.

“Cas, you've outdone yourself!” Jodie exclaims once all the food's been served. Everyone else chimes in with their assent and load their plates with enough food to leave them more stuffed than is probably healthy. Everyone updates everyone else on their lives, affable chatter and the smell of excellent food filling the tiny dining room. Sam and Sarah are aiming for a Summer wedding, apparently. Jodie and Bobby eat dinner at Bobby's every night. Bobby's face does something dangerously close to *blush* when this information is disclosed, and Jodie rolls her eyes. All in all, everyone seems happy.

... It's actually kind of trippy.

They filter into the living room once they're done eating, waiting for their food to digest before tucking into dessert. Cas sits next to Dean, holding Sunshine, and leans into him. Dean's overwhelmed, yet again, and he can't stop himself from tugging Cas into his lap. He refrains from kissing him in fear of being obnoxious at this point, but Cas tilts his head and presses a kiss to Dean's lips and Dean can't really blame himself for *that*. The kiss goes on longer than it ought to with company around.

“Jesus, guys, get a room. Little brother is here. Right here. Seeing you. I need to bleach my eyes.” Dean responds with his middle finger, but his lips part from Cas' with a tiny smirk. Cas' eyes are shining in the way they do when he's especially pleased.

“My apologies,” Cas says, giving Sam a sheepish smile, “I'm just... happy.”

Sam's returning smile is bright. “Hey, me too Cas. Me too.”

The evening ends with an *awesome* apple crumb pie and warm cups of Easter tea. Everyone looks at Cas like he's some sort of saint – and really, he should be – when it's time to leave. Sarah and Jodie ask for recipes as a last minute thought on their way out, and the three of them go to the kitchen to grab them.

“So,” Sam says.

“So,” Dean replies, raising an eyebrow.

“You planning on popping the question any time soon?” Sam asks with a smirk, and if Dean had been drinking something he probably would have spit it out all over Sam's face. The look he gives him is incredulous.

“Jesus, Sammy, it's a miracle I'm even in a relationship. I'm gonna go ahead and pretend that question never happened.”

“You better get on with it, idjit,” Bobby chimes in, “It’s about time.” Dean turns his incredulous look on Bobby.

“Not you too, man. You can’t be serious. I thought you’d be defending me.”

“You’re not getting any younger, Dean,” Sam says, and Dean glowers.

“One more *word* and I am not responsible for any bodily harm that comes to you from my fists.”

Cas and the girls come from the kitchen. Cas has a peculiar expression on his face, and Dean can only assume the ladies and he had a similar conversation in the kitchen. Dean groans.

“You’re all, like, diabolical. Get out of my house,” Dean says, teasing, and gives his everyone hugs on their way out. Cas’ hugs are stiff but genuine, and they earn a laugh from Jodie.

“This was nice, Cas. Thanks for inviting us,” she says, smiling and ruffling a hand through Cas’ hair.

“Thank you for coming. It was my pleasure.”

All too soon, they’re alone in the house. It seems extra quiet in wake of the party of people, and Dean is painfully aware of his own breathing.

“Dean,” Cas says, taking a lighter from the coffee table and lighting all the candles that have blown out throughout the course of the night, “I still owe you a massage.”

Dean swallows. Yeah. That.

“You don't have to, man,” Dean says offhand, like he hasn't been thinking about it all day.

Cas shakes his head. “You won the Easter egg hunt, Dean. That makes this a 'holiday thing'. My domain.”

Dean nods slowly, eyes flickering to the bed. “So I should just...”

“Take off your shirt.” Even though Cas says it in an even tone, the words make Dean's pulse pound. Dean takes off his blazer and vest and starts fiddling with his bow tie when Cas strides over and pulls his bow tie loose himself. He unbuttons Dean's shirt as well, lovely fingers working down the front. Dean inhales sharply, exhales. *Just a massage*, Dean tells himself, though he really doesn't believe it. Cas slowly, slowly pulls the dress shirt off Dean, and Dean pulls his tank top over his head. Feeling brazen, Dean plucks Cas' tie loose and pulls his blazer off him with artificial composure. Cas unbuttons his own shirt and leaves his tank top on, much to Dean's silent dismay.

“Lay down,” Cas says, and again his voice is level but the command makes Dean's heart flutter, anyway. He obeys, though, walking to the bed and laying on his stomach. Cas disappears into the bathroom to grab the same menthol oil Dean used on Valentine's Day. He shuts the lights off on his way over, leaving the room illuminated only by the numerous candles all around the room. A quiet sigh slips from Dean's lips when Cas coats his back with the tingly wet substance.

To Dean's complete and utter surprise, Cas doesn't massage him standing. Instead, he gets on the bed and puts his knees on either side of Dean, essentially straddling him without really touching him.

“Cas?” Dean asks, somehow hiding the quavery note his voice wants to make.

“I looked up the best way to do this,” Cas explains, “as I've never done it before. I was advised that this position would give me the best leverage for the right pressure on your back.”

“Oh,” is Dean's intelligent answer. He's still stuck on the word *position*.

Cas fingers pressing hard against Dean's back are borderline more than he can bear, but he manages to keep his breathing steady and his hands from clutching at the sheets or something equally embarrassing. Cas' hands are as expert kneading his muscles as they are mincing things in the kitchen, and Dean's having trouble keeping it together.

“You're quite tense,” Cas mentions as he works, “Am I doing this wrong? Should I stop?”

“No,” Dean hisses, and is surprised by the fervor in his voice. Cas seems surprised, too, because he pauses a moment. He continues after a beat, though.

Dean's back does relax after a while, though; whatever tutorial Cas researched definitely knew what it was talking about. After an indeterminable amount of time, Cas stops massaging him and instead presses kisses to Dean's spine. Dean shudders and isn't sure if Cas notices. Is Cas intentionally being this sensual, or is his angel really just naïve and full of love? Dean's sure it's the latter and chides himself for his thoughts.

When Cas bites at the place between Dean's shoulder and neck, any doubts on whether Cas is trying to turn him on are gone. He turns around quickly and wraps an arm around Cas, dragging him down til he's laying atop Dean. Cas' eyes are dark, and Dean's pretty sure it's not the low lighting to blame. He's also pretty sure his eyes are equally lust blown as Cas'.

“Dean,” Cas says, and there's something in his voice that makes Dean shiver again. He does not wait for further dialogue and kisses Cas, not hesitating to part the other man's lips with his tongue. Cas responds eagerly and Dean realizes suddenly that *this is it*. This is happening.

Cas ghosts pretty fingers over Dean's bare chest, first tantalizingly light and quickly fading into something more intense. Smooth caresses become scratches, increasingly needy. Dean's not sure when each touch became electricity, but he decides all at once that it's incredibly unfair that he's the only one shirtless. He tugs at Cas' shirt and Cas gets the picture, pulling the shirt over his head and going back to kissing Dean immediately. There is breathing – ragged, breathy breathing – *barely* breathing. Urgency heightens with each passing moment.

The candlelight dances shadows on the walls, making the room around them feel small. It helps in making the rest of the world slip away; soon all and everything is Cas, Cas, Cas. Cas' chest against him feels *right*, like it's something Dean hadn't realized he'd been missing but had actually needed desperately. He feels like a kid, wanting to bite and brand Cas with hickeys and scratches. And yet, there's something soft about it all, despite the urgency, the *need*. It's romantic. Dean has never had intimacy as romantic as this. Every kiss is *I love you*, every touch, be it gentle or otherwise, is an unsaid whisper, a mantra of love declarations. Dean sucks bruises against Cas' collar bones, his neck, and hopes his mouth can speak without words.

Thunder claps outside and startles them both, Cas jumping visibly and then casting a glare at the window as though the ensuing rain outside it had made a conscious decision to interrupt. The rain seems to ignite something in Cas, though, and the fierce look he casts at Dean makes his heart skip a beat. Then Cas is trailing kisses down, down, down, stopping to lick into Dean's belly button. Dean whimpers, throws his head back and gasps again and again for air. Cas lingers at the line of Dean's slacks, tongue and lips and teeth giving attention that might literally make Dean lose his mind. He resorts to shameful begging.

“Cas – please –” he says, voice sounding hoarse and broken to his own ears. He's suddenly reminded of the first time he said those words, begging Cas for mercy. The situation had been so different – Cas had been beating him within an inch of his life in a cold, wet alley. Dean had failed Cas miserably, then, and Cas' righteous fury had exploded into the worst beating of Dean's life.

“Just *do it*,” Dean pleads, again echoing his words from that night. Circumstances are different, now. No one's failing anyone. The only thing in this room is shallow breathing and unadulterated love. Dean's hips tremble as he fights their insatiable will to buck forward, body willing to be in synch with the nonsensical whimpers and begs flowing from his mouth. Cas – Cas actually *chuckles*, low and dark and completely unexpected. Dean can't take it.

“*God*, Cas,” Dean half-hisses, “Cas – Cas, fuck.” Dean's starting to forget every word in his vocabulary but Cas' name. Dean can feel Cas' smile against his flesh as he moves up Dean's body and nips at Dean's nipples.

“You fucking cocktease,” Dean growls, hands quickly reaching to Cas' hair and tugging at it relentlessly.

“What?” Cas asks, pausing, clearly unfamiliar with the expression. Dean groans.

“It means I might actually explode if you don't suck me off or fuck me *now*.”

“Oh,” Cas says, and aptly goes back to Dean's nipples, as though he's decided he's perfectly fine with being a cocktease. Dean tries to protest but his words are interrupted by a tiny moan he didn't give his throat permission to make.

“You're going to *kill* me,” Dean says, and he knows he sounds wrecked and needy. He hasn't wanted it like this in a long time – maybe never.

His hands slip to the small of Cas' back, trying to go on the offensive, trying to make Cas feel like he feels. Cas moans, a small, muted thing, and Dean feels mostly successful.

“Cases of death due to sex between two consenting parties are rare, Dean.”

“Oh God – Word to the wise, Cas? Do not take anything I say during sex literally.”

Cas stops what his mouth is doing and looks at Dean curiously, furrowing his brow and tilting his head. It might look comical, Cas looking so confused with his hair all disheveled and his lips kissed pink and puffy, if Dean weren't so turned on. He is, though, and his lust-filled mind is screaming at him that any type of stopping is *bad*.

“No – fuck, ignore that. Not *anything*. Like if I tell you how friggin' hot you are – or, y'know *fuck me*, you should take that very literally.”

“I see,” Cas says. Dean slips one of his thighs between Cas' leg and thrusts upward with his hips. It has the intended effect – Cas' eyes squeeze shut and breathes hard, whimpers, seems to fall apart a little. Dean leads Cas' face to his with a hand to his jaw, kisses him again and again.

“How long have you wanted this?” Dean asks, breathless.

“Since before I fell. I think that I have always been yours, Dean. Since the moment I branded your soul with my hand, I was yours.”

Cas places his hand over Dean's scar and squeezes, and this information is almost too much. Cas has loved Dean a very, very long time.

“Didn't know angels could want this,” Dean says, thrusting up, creating glorious friction that left Cas mewling.

“The want felt different then. Restrained. With my humanity has come a new-” Cas' words are broken off with a gasp; Dean has his palm over Cas' crotch, gripping lightly. Cas' breath comes fast and shallow.

Dean leans forward, presses his mouth to Cas' ear.

“Show me how human you are,” Dean says, voice a low growl. He can feel Cas shaking at the stimulation in the sensitive nerves around his ear. “Fuck me.”

Cas looks at him, meeting his eyes for a moment and then glancing away.

“Dean,” he says, sounding suddenly stilted and awkward, “I want to.” He gasps again when Dean bucks his hips forward. “But – Dean ... *how?*” He sounds so sheepish Dean wants to hug him. Which would be really weird under the current circumstances.

Dean realizes that Cas has no idea what he's doing. He's going on pure instinct here – he's never been with anyone before, never seen porn, has no prior knowledge of sex. All he has is what his body is telling him, Dean's words and actions. While it'd probably be easier to roll them over and take over, teach Cas by example, it's inexplicably important that Cas leads for his first time.

... He seems pretty comfortable on top as it is.

“I'll teach you,” Dean says, “But you might wanna get us out of our pants.”

Cas nods, awkwardness gone in a flash. He makes quick work of stripping Dean of his pants and boxers and then his own. Cas moans properly for the first time when their dicks make contact with bare skin. Dean revels in it, shivers shaking through his system. The sound is like gold.

“Fingers inside me, man,” Dean says, trying to keep this from being awkward, “you gotta, uh...”

Cas complies immediately, seeming to get Dean's idea right off the bat. Which would be seriously lucky for Dean if he hadn't forgotten a *seriously crucial detail*. Dean grits his teeth, sucking in a sharp breath and then gasping, shaking his head but unable to speak because... *ow*. It's not Cas' fault he didn't know about the necessity of lube, but Dean hasn't bottomed in years and the pain is pretty intense given Cas is only two fingers in. Thankfully, Cas plucks his fingers out immediately at the sight of Dean's duress.

“Dean?”

Dean heaves another great sigh and collects himself. He points at the menthol oil Cas used on his back and gives a small chuckle when Cas gives him a curious look.

“If you're sticking anything inside me, it's gotta be wet,” Dean explains, and something seems to click in Cas' brain.

“Dean, I’m so-”

Dean shakes his head vigorously. “Cas, shh,” he breathes in and out, chest shaking, “My fault.” Cas is hovering over him, looking like a strange mix between concerned and completely wrecked with *want*. The sight pulls Dean up short and he realizes he needs to get this show on the road *now*. He’s pretty sure he can’t handle seeing Cas so undone any longer if he plans on keeping it together.

“Cas – need you, Cas, please -” he says, giving the bottle of oil a pointed look. This quiet plea sets Cas in motion, and he coats his hands, his dick in the slippery substance. His fingers hesitate this time before they push in, but a very undignified whimper from Dean gives him the courage to try a second time. This time, the contact of fingers inside him makes Dean’s back arch and he gasps – there’s nothing awkward about this, for friggin’ sure.

“Sc – scissor -” Dean instructs, but Cas looks confused. Dean stares at the ceiling, groaning at his awful luck. They should have watched porn together first or something.

“Fuck, uh – open me up, dude, you’re about to stick something really big somewhere really tight.” Cas nods and acts accordingly. His fingers abjectly brush Dean’s prostate and his whole body freezes up for a short moment.

“Fuck – fuck, okay, I’m ready. Like *now*. Shit,” Dean’s half babbling, pressing down in Cas’ fingers. He’s got his face buried in Cas’ neck and the kisses he leaves there are almost worshipful.

Cas seems to like the whole cocktease thing, because instead of complying he brushes that sensitive spot *again* and Dean’s completely taken apart, mouthing forming an ‘O’ and breaths shuddery against Cas’ skin.

“Now what?” Cas asks, and Dean is pretty sure he’s going to lose his marbles at this point.

“Now you shove yourself inside me and *move*, Christ.”

Cas nods. “I thought so.”

Dean might have rolled his eyes if Cas' fingers hadn't hit that *spot* again before they pulled out. Cas positions himself over Dean, heaves a deep breath and pushes in. And – and somehow this naïve, awkward, confused fallen angel manages to hit Dean's prostate on the spot, first time. Dean throws his head back and is completely not in charge of the animal noises that slip from his mouth.

Cas' body seems to finally know what it's doing because he doesn't need to ask Dean what to do anymore. He rolls his hips forward, hitting that spot again and again. Again, there's something acutely romantic in it. Cas' thrusts seem somehow *meaningful* – this isn't just sex. It's being one with the man Dean loves. It's being filled with the guy who went to friggin' *hell* to save him.

Dean's fists curl in the sheets and Cas places his own hands over them, squeezing tight. Every time Dean opens his eyes, he sees Cas' blue eyes staring down, startlingly dark. Dean can't keep his eyes open for too long at a time; Cas' stare is simply too intense.

Cas leans forward to whisper in Dean's ear. “I love you,” he says, nearly inaudibly – and that's it, that's a wrap, Dean's a goner. He quickly buries his face in Cas' neck, unfurls his hands so he can hold Cas' as he comes, great quavery shakes and tiny whimpers streaming from his mouth. Cas pulses forward only a few thrusts more before his body seizes up and he comes, too.

They lay in a heap together, panting and recovering, chest to chest as they regain a normal rate of breath. Finally, Cas leans up on his elbow and looks at Dean.

“Happy Easter,” he says, and Dean laughs.

“You're really something, Cas,” Dean says, grinning. Cas grins back – and a grin from Cas is a rare occasion. Dean absorbs the mental image, wonders if Cas will always smile this wide after sex. Dean hooks an arm around Cas and pulls him to his chest, rolls him over so he can spoon the man who pretty much just fucked his brains out.

“I'm glad I'm human,” Cas says after a while, so long that Dean thought he might have fallen asleep. Dean presses kiss to Cas' hair.

“Me too, Cas,” he agrees sleepily, and after a moment, “Happy Easter.”

They fall asleep in their messy bed with their feet entangled. The last thing Dean thinks before he drifts off is that the phrase 'made for each other' suddenly makes a whole lot of sense.

Thunder

Castiel isn't an angel anymore, so he cannot determine Dean's exact body temperature just by looking at him. If he had to guess, though, judging by the way Dean's flesh trembles and seems to burn beneath his fingers, he'd place it at least 100 degrees. Castiel thinks he might be running at that temperature, too, thinks he might be quietly igniting and he loves it. He decides, here and now, that humanity is infinitely better than anything else. Dean shaking and shivering and breathing unevenly, all because of Castiel's touch – that's worth even losing his wings for.

More than worth it.

Castiel is in tune with Dean on every level; this is something that has not changed since he fell. He is acutely aware of Dean's breathing, the way he's trying to behave himself and steady it. He wonders if Dean believes that he's succeeding in hiding it from him. Castiel shifts a little on his knees and presses hard against a particularly taut muscle, and Dean makes an almost inaudible gasp. Castiel furrows his brow. He is learning that the sounds the human body makes for pain and pleasure are unsettlingly similar.

“You're quite tense,” Castiel says, a note of concern in his voice. “Am I doing this wrong? Should I stop?” He's not sure what to make of how Dean seems to be frozen all over – he knows that he's meant to be loosening Dean up.

“No,” is Dean's sharp, jarring response. Castiel pauses, taken aback. It seems his suppositions were incorrect. He wonders, though, why Dean sounds so angry if he is truly enjoying himself. Still, Castiel chooses not to question it and obediently carries on.

Time goes on, and Castiel has trouble focusing on what he's doing. This human body of his is sending him all sorts of messages, each of them like liquid fire. It tells him that this slow touching is not enough. His body wants *more*, and a part of Castiel is certain that it will get its wish tonight. He has resolved not to stop until Dean is relaxed, though. He wants these tense, taut muscles to be soft against his hands. Eventually, Dean's back seems to bear no further stress. Pleased, Castiel presses a kiss to the skin he just worked into something malleable.

Dean's entire body seems to come alive at this, though he barely moves. It's something that Castiel simply *knows*; as Dean's angel, it is his job to know. Emboldened by this powerful reaction, Castiel gives more kisses, tracing Dean's spine with his lips. Dean's hands twitch and Castiel's body commands *more!*

It seems right to add teeth to the equation, and Castiel praises this human body for knowing that it was – Dean reacts instantly, supplies the *more* Castiel has been wanting. He rolls over, tugs Castiel down atop him, pressing their bodies together. They are both on fire, and now that they are one, they are a roaring *flame*.

“Dean,” Castiel gasps. His voice sounds odd, inexplicably hoarse, but it flips a switch in Dean that sets him into action.

Dean's mouth is wet and warm and urgent as he swiftly probes the inside of Castiel's mouth with his tongue. This is an strange sensation, made even more so by the absence of alcohol, but it is a *good* one and Castiel's heart begins to pound with the force of a rushing train. There is a short moment when Castiel's mouth tries to figure out how to reciprocate this kind of kiss, but the instincts he has become so grateful for kick in and soon his tongue trades places with Dean's, licking into his lover's mouth insistently. If the quiet noises Dean is making are any indication, Castiel is performing well.

It strikes Castiel that tonight, one of his greatest wishes will be coming true. One way or another, he will be *one* with the man he loves more than life itself.

Castiel's body tells him to *touch* and he complies, mapping out his lover's body with his fingertips. Dean's chest is already a tiny bit wet with sweat, as though the fire within him is quickly taking over. Castiel's fingertips are replaced by fingernails, quickly scratching over Dean's skin and leaving red marks so pretty that Castiel is caught off guard. Again, the fine line between pain and pleasure surprises him, but he likes the way Dean's skin looks, the sensation of his nails dragging into flesh. The contact of nails to skin seems to create invisible sparks where they touch. Castiel has thought and thought about this, about being this close to Dean... but his thoughts never came close to this, the real thing.

Dean tries to peel off Castiel's shirt and Castiel readily assists, just as eager as Dean to be closer still. Skin to skin leaves Castiel short of breath for a moment; he is ready for this, for all of this, *so* ready to be within Dean or have him within himself – anything to be closer. Their mouths collide, hot and heavy, and every inch, every pore of Castiel's flesh seems to scream with pleasure and that same desire for *more*. They bite at each other's lips, suck on tongues, explore each other's mouths fervently, with purpose. Each time they break to breathe, their lips hover close enough to exchange each other's air. Castiel cannot even recall what breathing feels like in the absence of Dean's breath. He thinks perhaps that oxygen is artificial air, and all that is truly real is the wind from Dean's lungs.

Right now, Castiel's body feels exactly as his heart always has – entirely, completely connected to Dean's. The rest of the world is ephemeral, unimportant; Dean, his flesh and his searing eyes, panting breath and burning heart – these are what matter. And, at this moment, they are all that *exist*. The light from the candles Castiel has grown to love so much only add to this, casting a subdued and quiet light that makes Dean look almost holy. It's an adequate representation of how Castiel feels about Dean.

There is a powerful warmth between Castiel's legs that is at once both familiar and impossibly foreign. Since he fell, he's had everything a human has, including a sexual appetite. He knows the feeling of hard-on, has come to associate it entirely of Dean and all the things he's wanted to do with him, to him. This, though, is much different. Much *more*. This is a heat with an answering heat. Every time their hips collide, Castiel has to close his eyes because he can now physically feel it all being reciprocated. Dean's body, the stiffness between Dean's legs, everything is reassuring Castiel that Dean wants him, wants all of him. Wants this. Their hips clash again and again, upward movements from Dean mirroring downward movements from Castiel. Castiel is not used to having no control over his vocal cords, but he doesn't mind the array of gasps and whimpers dripping from his mouth.

Dean gives strange new kisses, ones with teeth and suction that leave bright bruises flowering on Castiel's neck. Castiel loves them. They make his toes curl and his eyes clamp shut, steal his breath away. He knows that tomorrow, in morning light, these bruises will be there, all bright and fierce. The thought makes him shiver. Traces of Dean will be with him all over his flesh, for anyone to see. Everyone will know that he belongs to Dean. His mouth urges him to lean forward, to whisper '*I am yours, I am yours, I am yours. All that I am belongs to you*', but he refrains. Instead, he covers Dean's mouth with his in a wet and messy open-mouthed kiss laced with shudders and underlying near-moans. Dean quakes below him. They share a sort of fervor, a quiet desperation that has them all hands, everywhere, as though memorizing the plains of each other's skin.

Dean's mouth is on Castiel's neck, then his collar bones – this proves to be a sensitive spot that makes a whole new surge of heat blossom between Cas' legs. He is trying hard to steady his breath when a

loud burst of thunder crackles outside, filling the room with its roar. Rain follows shortly after, and Castiel is immediately irritated with the interruptions. This moment is his and Dean's alone; the elements have no right to intrude. Another wave of thunder makes Castiel's pulse pound, though, as though it somehow managed to charge his flow of blood. Lightning silhouettes his features when he looks down at Dean again. Dean visibly gulps, and Castiel is fairly certain that the gaze he's giving Dean might finally be conveying all the contained wildfire lingering just below the surface.

Castiel's movements are on autopilot. It feels right to move his kisses elsewhere and he does so; Dean's rapid reactions, his staggered breathing and twitching body affirm that this is true. Dean's chest, his stomach, his bellybutton – all are uncharted territory. This new expanse of Dean's body to explore is excited, sends jolts downward to pool below Castiel's stomach like an electric storm. When Castiel licks into Dean's bellybutton, the instantaneous response is rewarding, invigorating. Dean throws his head back against the pillows, vocalizes his pleasure and *want* with a series of undignified whimpers. Castiel notes that the farther down he directs his attention, the more wild and uncontained Dean's reactions, which makes sense.

“Cas – *please* –” Dean chokes out in a hoarse and broken voice. Castiel doesn't waver. He thinks he knows what Dean wants, can feel it in his gut, but he is enjoying the way Dean is writhing and is not willing to move any lower just yet. He is savoring every moment, every second. Dean is beautiful when he is undone, and Castiel is content to watch him fall apart beneath his own mouth and tongue.

“Just *do it*,” his lover begs, and Castiel surprises himself with the low chuckle that escapes his own lips. He's vaguely aware there's something dark and dirty about this laugh, something that gives everything a new edge. Dean's hips twitch and he's slowly unraveling beneath the careful nips and bites Castiel is giving the skin above the hem of his slacks. Dean seems to have lost all control of his vocal cords. The desperate whimpers and nonsense pleas that stream from Dean's mouth are like a symphony that Castiel is not yet willing to turn off.

“God, Cas,” Dean spits the words like he's angry, but Castiel knows better. “Cas – Cas, fuck.” Castiel isn't sure why Dean's profanity and growing desperation makes him smirk, but he makes sure his lips are close to Dean's skin when he does. He wants Dean to *feel* it. Castiel can feel his own nipples hardening, feels how tingly and sensitive they are, and it occurs to him that this is another place on Dean that needs his attention. He trails kisses upwards and nips and sucks at Dean's nipples. Dean's hands find their way to Castiel's hair and he tugs again and again, a desperate gesture that makes Castiel gasp and shake all over. He finds that he really, really loves having his hair pulled. He wants to tell Dean that he can tug harder, that it feels *good* and it will feel better with more force, but his words are lost in all the gasps whimpers he keeps forgetting that he's making against Dean's flesh.

“You fucking cocktease,” Dean says, voice coming out like a growl. Castiel stops short – what does that mean? He doesn’t know if this is a good thing or a bad thing; he has never heard this expression before.

“What?” Castiel asks unsurely, moving his lips from the Dean’s stiff nipples, now wet from Castiel’s mouth. Dean groans like the question is mind-boggling.

“It means I might actually explode if you don’t suck me off or fuck me *now*,” is Dean’s fervent answer, and he flexes his hips just the smallest bit to reiterate his point. Understanding dawns on Castiel; Dean wants the same *more* that Castiel does... but Castiel is not ready to give it. Not yet. He has work yet to do.

“Oh,” he responds before abruptly returning his tongue to Dean’s nipples. The contact rips a shaky moan from Dean’s throat, and Castiel shivers all over. He likes the quiet noises Dean has been making, but he especially likes *this* sound. He hopes he can hear more of it.

“You’re going to kill me,” Dean gasps, voice urgent like he’s pleading with a serial killer. It sounds so honest that Castiel is momentarily concerned, but his thoughts are frazzled when Dean slides a hand across his back, rests it on the small of his back before scratching hard in every direction. Castiel moans, muted but still sounding loud in the quiet room. Castiel is surprised at how his mouth no longer needs permission for the sounds it makes. Dean’s breathing is erratic and Castiel finds it dizzying, intoxicating.

He’s still mildly concerned about Dean’s sentiment, though, and makes sure to comfort him. “Cases of death due to sex between two consenting parties are rare, Dean,” he assures him, replacing tongue for a quick close-mouthed kiss to Dean’s chest in an effort to be reassuring.

“Oh God – Word to the wise, Cas? Do not take anything I say during sex literally.”

This is a confusing concept, and it makes Castiel pause again and look up at Dean with curious eyes. He tilts his head, a question on his mouth, but Dean corrects himself quickly.

“No – fuck, ignore that. Not *anything*. Like if I tell you how friggin hot you are – or, y'know *fuck me*, you should take that very literally.”

“I see.” This takes a second to decompress – how exactly is Castiel supposed to know when Dean is being literal or figurative? He supposes it’s something that he will learn with time. Dean does not like this pause, though; he introduces a form of pressure into the equation that is entirely, utterly new. Dean slips his thigh between Castiel’s leg and thrusts upward with his hips hard, creating an intense friction that overwhelms Castiel for a moment. His eyes cement shut and his breath goes on a roller coaster ride, short and fast and hard, interrupted by unholy whimpers and other sounds he was not aware he knew how to make.

Dean makes use of Castiel’s momentary distraction and grabs hold of his jaw, yanks him upward so that he can kiss him over and over. The clash of lips and tongues and teeth feels somehow heightened with this new friction. Now there’s heat *everywhere*.

Dean grips Cas’ face with his hands when they break to breathe. “How long have you wanted this?” he asks suddenly, as though the answer is quite imperative.

“Since before I fell,” Castiel responds without hesitating, “I think that I have always been yours, Dean. Since the moment I branded your soul with my hand, I was yours.” To add to this point, Castiel places his hand to Dean’s handprint scar. Of course, the two click together like a puzzle piece. Something, some feeling dances in Dean’s eyes and Castiel is fairly certain that it’s love.

“Didn't know angels could want this,” Dean says, and there is a note of genuine surprise beneath the dark lust that overlays the words. He thrusts upward with his hips and Cas gasps and gasps again and again, a drowning man scrambling for air. He likes this drowning, though, likes the ache building up in him. He could drown and drown forever with Dean.

“The want felt different then,” Castiel explains, “Restrained. With my humanity has come a new-” Castiel’s sentence stops in his tracks because Dean’s hand has found its way to his crotch and is applying pressure. Castiel is rendered speechless, eyes wide and throat only capable of nonsense sounds and shallow breathing. Dean brings his lips to Castiel’s ear, and his uneven breathing mirrors Castiel’s own. The feel of it against his ear makes Castiel feel wild inside and that agonizing cry for *more* that he body has been sending out culminates into a vicious wave of want.

“Show me how human you are. *Fuck me.*”

Castiel’s heart thrashes in his chest and his lungs seem to be confused, but he realizes he’s met an unfortunate standstill. He has no idea how to proceed, no idea how to give Dean what he wants. All of the sudden he feels inadequate. Dean could be with a legion of practiced lovers, yet he is stuck with Castiel, in all his naivety and inexperience.

“Dean, I want to,” he pants, and his sentence quavers sharply because Dean punctuates it with an upward thrust. Castiel tries again. “But – Dean ... *how?*” he finally manages. His voice sounds small.

“I’ll teach you,” Dean says without missing a beat, seemingly lacking all of Castiel’s misgivings. “But you might wanna get us out of our pants.”

The idea of more of Dean’s flesh exposed is enough to shake the shyness from Castiel and he quickly sets to work stripping them both as quickly as possible. He’s proud of his efficiency, though the thought barely has time to register before the friction from earlier is restored, but this time it is without any clothing barring flesh from flesh. Castiel moans again, though it lacks the muted quality from before; this is much louder, much more shameless. It trails off with a hiss that Dean swallows up with his mouth.

“Fingers inside me, man,” Dean instructs, “you gotta, uh...” Castiel thinks he understands and complies quickly; he’s eager to move forward, to explore every inch of Dean with every inch of himself. If Dean wants Castiel’s fingers within him, Castiel isn’t going to waste a moment in giving it to him. Castiel inserts a finger, then two, eager for Dean’s reaction...

... but it’s all wrong. Castiel has learned that pain and pleasure sound similar, that a body seizing up all over can be either good or bad. It is confusing, sometimes, but in this instance he needs no clarification. Dean is in pain. His teeth are gritted and he’s shaking his head like he wants to talk but can’t. Castiel pulls his fingers out as soon as it registers that Dean’s sharp breaths are an indication that something is very *wrong*, not the opposite. He pulls back to rest on his elbows so he can look at Dean.

“Dean?”

Dean seems to be steadying himself, recovering from whatever Castiel did wrong that's made him hurt so badly. Castiel feels a gnawing guilt bubbling to the surface. He does not know what he did to cause Dean pain, but the weight of knowing that *he* caused it is nearly enough to sober his thoughts completely. He wants to kiss Dean again and again, apologize for whatever fatal error has caused Dean to feel anything but pleasure during this.

To Castiel's surprise, Dean chuckles and gives Castiel a genuine smile once he's collected himself.

"If you're sticking anything inside me, it's gotta be wet," he explains, gesturing to the bottle of menthol oil Castiel had been using before. He gives Castiel a look that is at once sympathetic and pained, like he wants to roll his eyes but is refraining for Castiel's sake. Basic physics quickly comes to mind to back Dean's explanation and Castiel briefly considers hitting himself on the head for not thinking of it.

"Dean," he breathes, peering down at Dean's flushed features and lust-blown pupils. Castiel's concern and overwhelming desire are conflicted. His shame outweighs them both, though. "I'm so-

Dean quickly shakes his head, cutting Castiel's sentence off with a soft, "Shh" that effectively soothes him. "Cas, shh. My fault." Their eyes meet and there's another invisible spark of electricity and everything seems to get back on track. It's as though all they needed was to link eyes and *see* the intense need there to plow forward and move past this awkward moment. Dean still wants him; Castiel can see it in the heat of his gaze. The eye contact seems to have inspired a whole lot of *something* in Dean, who grabs Castiel's jaw and kisses him harshly, panting against his lips.

"Cas – need you, Cas, please -" Dean whimpers, looking at the menthol oil pointedly. Castiel's hands tremble as he grabs for it, nearly drops it (though, thankfully, Dean does not notice), and cautiously opens the top. He covers his hands with it – and, after a quick second's contemplation, realizes that they're not the only thing needs to be wet. His heart pulses ever faster as he thinks of it, as it dawns on him as he applies more oil that he's going to be *one* with Dean for the first time since the pit.

He hesitates the briefest moment before pressing fingers in again, though, afraid of a repeat of Dean's initial pain – but this reaction is completely different than before. Dean's response is instant and intense; Dean's back arches in a way that makes Castiel dizzy and Dean gasps short and sharp and

euphoric. The fire in Castiel's bloodstream kicks into overdrive. He's drunk off of Dean, incoherent with *want*, a pressing need for more.

“Sc – scissor –” Dean rasps, and again Castiel curses his inexperience. He has no idea what Dean is asking for, and the exasperated groan Dean gives out indicates that he's just as frustrated and eager to get this show on the road, so to speak, as Dean is. Castiel hopes the look he gives Dean is enough to tell him that he needs to *explain*.

“Fuck, uh – open me up, dude, you're about to stick something really big somewhere really tight.” Castiel nods; this makes sense. He adds a finger, then another, forming 'scissors', as Dean put it. He opens Dean up as instructed, savoring the trail of filthy noises that are streaming from Dean's mouth. Then... then *something* happens, something that causes Dean to go still all over, whole body tense and rippling with what appears to be pleasure. Castiel hit something – some spot, some aspect of Dean's anatomy that seems to have sent a rush of ecstasy through his nervous system. Castiel surges with pride.

Dean presses down against Castiel's fingers something close to desperately, voice all heat and fire. “Fuck – fuck, okay, I'm ready. Like *now*. Shit,” he babbles, followed by cries of, “Fuck, Cas” and “Jesus *Christ*” and other nonsense as Castiel strikes that spot again and again. Dean buries his face in Castiel's neck and leaves kisses everywhere, mouth eagerly coating skin. Castiel's breath is becoming increasingly erratic as he struggles to keep his head in light of how Dean's coming apart.

Castiel ignores Dean's request at first, instead taking a moment to absorb Dean's intense reactions, the way his mouth seems to even forget how to kiss as he breathes with an open mouth against Castiel's skin. It occurs to Castiel that there is even *more* to come – and it also strikes him that he is yet again unsure how to proceed. This time, though, he has a fairly good idea.

“Now what?” he asks, trying not to be embarrassed at his lack of certainty.

“Now you shove yourself inside me and *move*, Christ.”

“I thought so.” With one last stroke to that *spot*, which renders Dean gasping yet again, Castiel withdraws his fingers. Dean sucks in air like a man drowning and Castiel positions himself, takes a steadying breath and pushes in.

For a moment, Castiel's mind is shocked completely blank. All that is conscious are his senses, each nerve cell bursting like supernovas beneath his flesh. The white hot heat that is *Dean* encasing Castiel, surrounding him, is all-encompassing. As the wheels in Castiel's head start to churn again, the first thought he thinks is *this was worth falling for*. It's not about the pure, carnal pleasure of sex, though that is certainly something to be spoken of. It's about *Dean*, about this blinding perfection of being one with him. If Castiel ever forgot for a moment that he burned a mark on Dean's soul, he is reminded in an instant. With their bodies linked like this, Castiel doesn't need his Grace to feel the full strength of this connection.

Oh, Castiel is very much in love.

Dean is writhing beneath him, making noises and saying things Castiel is almost sure the other man isn't conscious of. It's mostly sentence fragments that make little sense and a recurring whisper of “*Cas, Cas, Cas*” that nearly knocks the breath from Castiel. Castiel's body is on autopilot now; he doesn't need to think to know to rock his hips, doesn't need to focus on maintaining a steady rhythm because his body knows what to do. It is something Castiel appreciates very much about humanity. Dean's legs wrap around Castiel's waist, shifting their angle slightly and make it that much more intense. Beads of sweat collect on Castiel's forehead and all over his body. All that his brain is registering is shock after shock of sheer bliss with each roll of his hips.

Dean's fists claw wildly at the sheets and then bury deep in them. Castiel slips his hands over Dean's and squeezes tight before lacing their fingers together. He watches Dean intensely, looks at his face as he thrusts inside him, memorizing every single wave of emotion that pulse through it. Dean's eyes are mostly closed, but he opens them often and sees Castiel looking at him. Their eyes lock again and again. Castiel can't look away. Dean seems overwhelmed every time, like this kind of connection runs so deep it's overpowering.

And really, it *is*. Castiel has never had sex before, but he firmly believes that no one in the world has ever felt like this. There's something powerful between them, an incredible force, forged in the very deepest depths of hell. Each time Castiel rocks back and forth, pushes his body in and out, it's like that bond is renewed again and again. It's bliss.

Castiel's body is shaking all over and his mouth is uttering sounds he never made the choice to make. Humanity is strange in this way. As an angel, Castiel was aware of every minute intricacy of his existence. He was conscious of every pulse of his vessel's heart and every tremble of his vocal cords. Now, though, he's hardly conscious of the whimpers and tiny moans his throat is coming up with. He's only vaguely aware that he's been saying Dean's name under his breath almost constantly, whispering it like a prayer every time he catches his breath.

All these feelings, physical and emotion and deeply, deeply spiritual, are too much. Dean has to *know*, has to understand what all this means. All Castiel can think to do is to lean forward and bring his lips to Dean's ear, and all he can think to say is "*I love you.*" His voice is wrecked and broken and gravelly but it seems to resonate all throughout Dean.

Dean quickly, quickly buries his face deep in Castiel's neck and moans Castiel's name as his whole body shakes and releases. Warm liquid fills the space between them and in a brief second Castiel wonders at how a bodily fluid can be so *symbolic*. Dean's body goes limp beneath him and his eyes, dark green in the candlelight, are so fond and so overflowing with love when he looks up at Castiel that he simply cannot bear it any longer. Castiel's body quakes and his movements become erratic before he seizes up, gasps like he's been punched and comes as well.

They are a limp heap of sweat and breathlessness as they both breathe hard but quietly, collecting themselves. Their chests are pressed together and Castiel's head lays tucked under Dean's chin. They're quiet an unknowable amount of time before Castiel props himself up on his elbow to look at Dean.

"Happy Easter," is the first thing that comes to mind to say – and really, it *is*. Dean laughs.

"You're really something, Cas," he says, and his voice is soft and fond and makes Castiel warm all over. Castiel smiles big and wide and a little goofy, surprising himself. His face doesn't do this very often. Dean wraps an arm around Castiel's waist and pulls him down and positions him so that they're laying on their sides and Castiel's back is pressed to his chest. Castiel has learned from Dean that this is called 'spooning'.

"I'm glad I'm human," Castiel says with a yawn after many minutes in contented silence. He feels Dean press a kiss to the back of his head.

“Me too, Cas,” Dean says back, sounding equally sleepy but incredibly honest nonetheless, “Happy Easter.”

One of Castiel's favorite things is falling asleep next to Dean. He can feel the other man's heart beating gently and the soft rhythm of his breathing against his neck. It reminds him of flying, back when he had wings. It's decidedly better than flying, and Castiel is grateful that he has Dean as his wings now, instead.

Castiel falls asleep smiling.

Hey, Sunshine

Dean wakes up on a particularly bright Thursday morning to Cas straddling his waist and leaning over him, eyes dark and blue and intense as ever. It's a very interesting image to wake up to, and in Dean's groggy, half-asleep state, he's not sure how to react.

“Hey, Sunshine,” he says tiredly, pressing a palm to his eyes to rub them awake. Cas responds with an oh-so-subtle downward push of his hips. Dean's still half-unconscious, so he's only vaguely aware of what's going on.

“Hello, Dean,” he replies – and seriously, that tone of voice is extra sinful this early in the morning. “Wake up.”

“Cas, ‘m tired,” Dean says, pulling the pillow over his face. Cas yanks it off and tosses it aside.

“Dean.”

“Wha-at?” Dean whines, opening bright green eyes to pout at his angel. Cas leans forward and lays against Dean's chest, bringing his lips to Dean's ear. The very feel of his breath alone is enough to wake Dean up by degrees.

“I’d like to sleep with you,” Cas growls in his ear and Dean is suddenly very, very awake.

“Christ, Cas,” Dean breathes, voice already hitching, “morning wood, much?”

“I was dreaming about you,” Cas says, ignoring what was probably a term he’s not familiar with, “Couldn’t wait to wake up and feel you, Dean.” And – and holy shit, but Dean’s awkward nerd angel is seriously dirty talking right in his ear. Dean’s pretty sure Cas doesn’t even know that’s what he’s doing. That makes it even hotter – the fact that Cas is just talking, saying what’s really on his mind. Dean suddenly feels way too warm.

“Yeah?” Dean answers stupidly, ‘cause he’s still a little taken aback by the fact that he woke up with a lap full of angel eager to screw him.

“Yes. You were moaning. Saying my name. I wished to hear the real thing.”

“That so?” Dean manages to croak out, because his throat suddenly feels very, very dry. Then Cas licks into his mouth insistently, biting and tugging at Dean’s bottom lip until it’s wet and swollen. Dean kisses back eagerly, slides a hand up and down Cas’ bare back.

“My morning breath not bothering you?” Dean asks with a little smirk. Cas shakes his head.

“I love your mouth, Dean,” Cas says against his lips, “I love how you taste. I’ll always love how you taste.”

Well shit, if this awkward dirty talk thing isn’t going straight to Dean’s dick.

“What else did you dream?” Dean says, mostly just to keep Cas talking because it’s seriously doing it for him.

“I dreamt you were inside me,” Cas whispers. “I think I would like that.”

“Well, fuck,” Dean says, because this sounds like an awesome idea. So far, Dean’s been more than content to let Cas fuck his brains out again and again because the guy is so damn good at it. For someone so recently deflowered, Cas caught on quick and seems to have some otherworldly knowledge of just about everything that can make Dean crazy with want. Dean wouldn’t be surprised if some of Cas’ angel mojo stuck around for the sole reason of being able to screw Dean senseless. It’s not that Cas has any real finesse, really – the guy is very obviously still learning, still awkward and unpracticed – but Cas knows him inside and out, and Dean’s been more than happy to bottom and benefit from that fact. Hell, topping hasn’t even occurred to him until now, which is saying something. Now that Cas mentions it, though, the idea of being able to pound into his boyfriend has Dean’s blood running hot as hell.

“That is the idea, yes,” Cas replies with a low chuckle, and Dean smirks because he’s pretty sure he taught Cas that cheeky comeback. Cas kisses him then, deep and dirty and promising all sorts of things. Dean’s dick is going concrete, fast.

“What else?” Dean prompts as Cas runs fingers through his hair, tugging lightly every now and then. Cas looks inexplicably shy for a minute, and Dean’s curiosity is piqued. What the hell is this look about? Dean’s more excited than he ought to be.

“Cas? Tell me.”

Cas presses a kiss to Dean’s jaw. “Humanity is strange. I don’t understand why this body desires the things that it desires. I – I dreamt that you bound my wrists to the headboard,” Cas says, and his voice is so quiet on the last sentence that it’s scarcely audible. He lays his cheek against Dean’s, and Dean can feel his angel’s face burning hot beneath his scruff with what is probably blush. Dean sucks in a deep breath of air because holy shit.

“You – you want me to tie you up and fuck you into the mattress, Cas? That what you want?” he says, and his voice is embarrassingly breathy and shallow considering how little touching they’re doing. Cas shuts his eyes, clearly embarrassed of himself.

“It was a foolish dream,” Cas says meekly, and – and Jesus Christ, Dean’s already coming apart at the mental image alone and Cas is ashamed for some reason.

“God, Cas, you kinky son of a bitch,” Dean says, and his voice is shaky and has something like awe in it. Dean tilts his head so he can kiss Cas heatedly, trying to assure him that holy fuck yes, this is a very good idea.

“Kinky?” Cas asks, seemingly dropping a little of his apprehension in light of Dean’s enthusiastic kisses. Dean gently moves Cas off his body and gets out of bed, looking around the room.

“Dean?”

“Do we have any rope?” Dean turns to look at Cas, and even from where he’s standing he can see the way Cas’ eyes darken and how he swallows hard.

“Yes. When we moved the couch in, we secured it to the truck with rope – ”

“Where?”

Cas clears his throat like he’s trying to keep it together, and his voice breaks the tiniest bit when he replies. “Hallway closet.”

Dean finds it in a flash, tugging it from the top shelf where it's sitting. The rope is a little coarser than he would have liked and he frowns at it as he walks past. Cas is looking at him like he's seen the face of God or something.

"Cas, man, this rope is gonna burn your wrists a little. Maybe..."

"No, Dean, I don't care. I want it. Please. The marks... I want everyone to see who I belong to."

Well, shit, if that isn't the biggest turn on in the goddamn world. Dean thinks he should ask again, insist, but Cas is so damn eager and seriously, Cas can't exactly go around saying shit like that without expecting to follow through. And Dean can't expect himself to double check when Cas looks so hot for it, like the idea of some light wrist burns has him going a little crazy inside. Dean wants to make him crazy, push him over the edge. If tying him up will do it for him... well, it'll do it for them both, and Dean's sure as hell not going to hesitate another second.

"Get on your back, Cas," Dean instructs, and Cas complies immediately. He reaches his hands up to the bars of their headboard and Dean crawls over him quickly, tying up Cas' wrists. Cas gives a soft little exhale like he's been holding his breath, and Dean feels a little dizzy with want. When Dean's done tying, Cas gives an experimental tug on the ropes. They barely budge, and something comes alive in Cas' eyes.

"Gonna make you feel so good, Cas," Dean says, aware that he sounds kind of dumb – but really, whatever, it's not like Cas has any basis of comparison. "So fucking good."

"Yes, Dean," Cas rasps, meeting Dean's eyes with that intense eye-fucking thing that he does. Dean kisses him, tongue probing the inside of his mouth, and Cas' eyes flicker shut and a tiny noise like a stunted moan escapes his mouth between kisses. He arches up ever so slightly, putting pressure against Dean's groin and making his breath hitch. He vaguely wonders why he waited so goddamn long in introducing the wonders of sex to Cas.

"Let's try something new," Dean says, like they aren't already going through a list of new everything this morning. He moves down the length of Cas' body til his mouth is hovering just above the edges of Cas' boxers. Dean hears the thump of the headboard against the wall – Cas is straining against his ropes, making the headboard move back and forth loudly. Dean looks up at him and grins wickedly, savoring the desperation he sees on Cas' face.

"Dean, Dean –" Cas rasps, feet losing placement on the bed again and again as he struggles to keep himself still. Dean chuckles, sounding dark and more dirty than intended.

"Like that idea?" he asks, and Cas nods vigorously. Dean presses a kiss to the band of Cas' boxers and Cas makes a very satisfying mewling noise. Dean shakes his head. "You gotta do more than that, baby, you gotta tell me. I wanna hear you."

“Not a baby, Dean,” Cas interjects, though the retort is so broken with want that it’s not very intimidating. Cas is not a fan of pet names that don’t make sense to him, like ‘sugar’ and ‘baby’, and Dean has an unfortunate habit of using them all the time during sex. Cas never fails to correct him, though, even if he’s in the middle of half-begging or something.

Dean pushes Cas’ boxers down marginally, just enough to get Cas’ full attention, and sucks a hickey to the skin above the hem of the fabric. Again the headboard loudly makes its presence known and Cas’ legs shake.

“Dean, please,” Cas says, and his voice is a quiet, reverent growl.

“Hmm? Please what?” Dean asks, biting the sensitive skin where he just left a hickey that’s already bruising beautifully.

“Please – Dean, stop this, this isn’t f–“

“Stop?” Dean asks innocently, starting to move away. Cas’ whimper is practically heartbreaking.

“Dean.”

“Talk to me, Cas,” Dean says, placing his thumbs on Cas’ hips and rubbing circles. Cas breathes hard, but all else is quiet for a moment.

“I want you to – to, um,” Cas sounds awkward, like he’s not even entirely sure of the wording for what he wants to happen. Dean’s pretty sure he’s going to end up with something like ‘let us engage in oral sex’ or something to that effect, but if it’s coming out of Cas’ mouth Dean’s pretty sure it’ll do it for him. This expectation is why he’s surprised when Cas says, “I want you to suck me off.”

... Well, shit.

Dean grins, utterly, shamelessly dirty, and looks up at Cas with lust-blown pupils. Cas groans and his hips thrust forward just the slightest bit.

“Dean – Dean, please, I want... I want your mouth on me, please. I want to feel you.”

“Keep talking, sugar,” Dean says, and Cas scowls at the pet name. Dean makes amends by licking into Cas’ navel and then catching the skin there between his teeth. The noise Cas makes is shaky and borderline desperate.

“Suck me off, Dean,” Cas growls, and this time when he bucks forward he’s not so subtle. Dean chuckles.

“You’re the one tied up, Cas. You’re not giving the orders here. I want you to beg for it.”

“Dean – this isn’t funny, Dean, I can’t – ”

“Beg, Cas.”

Cas heaves a deep sigh and then mewls abruptly when Dean drags nails down the backs of his thighs.

“Please,” Cas whispers, “Please, Dean, I need you.”

“Can’t hear you,” Dean says, though he knows he’s about to cave. Cas’ voice is gravelly and broken and Dean’s going a little crazy at the sound of it. He nuzzles into Cas’ crotch.

“Please,” Cas says – and this time it’s a moan, uncharacteristically loud and breathy and needy and Dean can’t ask for any more than that. He yanks Cas’ boxers down properly and Cas’ hips shake and his breathing picks up even more. His cheeks are flushed and his skin is warm and the heat in Dean’s lower stomach feels like it might burn right through him. He takes Cas’ cock in one hand and rubs his thumb over the head, watching Cas intently as the other man’s eyes flicker shut and he gasps, loud and sharp, and his hips thrust forward. Dean braces Cas’ hips with one forearm, holding him down.

Then, he takes Cas into his mouth.

Neither Cas nor Dean are terribly vocal in bed – mostly hitched, spastic, erratic breathing, normally – but Cas’ sudden moan right now is big and loud and shameless. Dean thinks vaguely of the neighbors because their flat is a townhouse, after all, and their kitchen wall is connected to another house’s kitchen wall. He’s not sure if Cas’ voice reaches that far, but Dean seriously doesn’t doubt it. Cas arches upward, feet pressed against the bed and even after his moan fades out, his mouth forms an ‘o’ and all coherency is lost. His wrists strain against the ropes and Dean’s certain there will be angry red marks by the time they’re through.

Needless to say, Dean feels pretty fucking proud.

Dean’s not exactly the king of blowjobs – he’s out of practice, it’s been a long damn time – but Cas’ reactions are so intense that he momentarily feels like a friggin porn star or something. His cheeks hollow out and his head bobs and Cas’ eyes are shut tight. Cas has never been sucked off before, so he doesn’t know that the way he’s thrusting his hips forward is just shy of gagging Dean. But Dean – Dean just takes it, because holy fuck does it feel good to know how undone he’s making Cas.

And then he stops, abruptly, and Cas lets out a sharp mewl and then he’s glaring at Dean.

“Dean, why – ”

“Don’t wanna end this too soon,” Dean says, and he sucks a hickey to Cas’ thigh. The headboard hits against the wall because of how fiercely Cas is pulling against his restraints.

“Dean – Dean, please,” Cas begs, and Dean shivers. He really, really likes it when Cas begs. He sounds desperate, too, and he knows there isn’t a single bit of this that’s faked. He really does need Dean so much that he’s willing to plea. Goosebumps are all over Dean’s skin despite how hot he is, how sweat is covering his body.

“Love the way you say please, Cas,” Dean says as he bites all over the other thigh, tantalizingly close to Cas’ dick, “like you gotta have it, need it – ”

“I do need it,” Cas hisses, and he wraps his legs around Dean’s torso in a way that’s borderline aggressive and really, really hot.

“Not gonna let you come, Cas, not yet,” Dean says – and yeah, the fact that Cas is all tied up and can only beg and writhe and cry out is more of a turn-on than Dean expected it’d be. Because, Jesus Christ, Cas’ hair is a mess and his face is flushed and he’s powerless... but in a good way, in a way that Cas wanted. For a moment Dean revels in how willing Cas is to be vulnerable with Dean, how much he trusts him.

Then Cas starts repeating Dean’s name like a chant or a prayer and using his legs to push him down, and Dean’s brought back to the present.

“Not yet, Cas,” Dean says, “want you to come when I do. Want you to feel everything I’m feeling.” And Dean’s surprised that this comes out in a whisper, and his heart is doing something weird and he knows this isn’t just sexual – he wants them to share this because he wants to connect with Cas as deeply as he can. He wants to go over the edge together.

Cas slams his head against the pillow and loosens his legs’ grip just slightly.

“Trust you, Dean,” he says, and his tone has fallen to the quiet one Dean’s has, even if it’s broken up by ragged breathing. “Do whatever you want with me, I want it – need you, Dean, please.”

Dean moves up Cas’ body to kiss him, slow but deep, tongues tangling warmly and sensually. He feels noises rumbling in Cas’ throat, moans Dean is swallowing up with his mouth. It’s, to say the least, incredibly hot.

“Hold on,” Dean says, and takes a moment to slip a hand over the edge of the bed and under it, rummaging blindly for the lube they keep there permanently. He finally grabs hold of it and coats his fingers with it. Cas’ eyes are wide as he watches Dean.

“Is it going to hurt?” Cas asks suddenly, and averts his eyes like he’s suddenly shy. Which is seriously adorable.

... God, since when has Dean ever thought of ‘adorable’ and ‘sex’ in the same context?

“Not too much, I got you,” Dean reassures him, kissing his temple. “Your body knows mine.”

Cas nods fervently.

“It would be okay – if it did hurt. I don’t mind.”

Dean glances at Cas’ wrists, all red and chafing, and he’s pretty sure Cas isn’t kidding. So Cas likes it rough when he’s bottoming, apparently. It’s usually slow and smooth when Cas is on top, sensual and goddamn romantic. Yet there’s something romantic about this, too, despite how different it is. It finally hits him that no matter what he does with Cas, that feeling will be there.

He likes that idea.

Dean tentatively slips a slicked up finger into Cas and Cas sighs heavily. Dean freezes a moment, lets Cas adjust to the new sensation before Cas nods his permission to move on, add more fingers. Dean’s incredibly careful and Cas is lying flat against the bed, chest heaving, hips stuttering slightly forward every now and then.

Finally Dean deems Cas ready and he pulls Cas’ legs around his waist – Cas gets the picture and grips tight with them. Dean closes his eyes a moment and then opens them to find Cas’ blue eyes looking straight up at him. The sunlight from outside lights up Cas’ features and the lust in his eyes is so evident that Dean surges forward, entering Cas with a swift movement.

He waits – or tries to wait, but Cas writhes against his restraints and hits the headboard against the wall and growls, “Move, Dean,” and Dean figures Cas has all the prep he needs. He rocks his hips forward, slowly at first, but then carries on with a faster rhythm when he sees how blissfully Cas is responding.

Dean can tell when he hits Cas’ prostrate by the way his whole body freezes up and his breath hitches and his body arches up and it’s one of the greatest sights Dean’s ever seen. Pleased that he’s found it, Dean hits it again and again at Cas’ insistent urges of harder, please and Dean, faster and other whimpers. Cas seriously likes it rough. Dean’s thinking he might need to take up running or something if him topping Cas is gonna be a recurring thing, because this is a damn workout. The headboard is beating against the wall again and again and this kind of sex is a completely new thing entirely.

“Dean, I’m going to – ”

Dean shakes his head vigorously.

“Not yet, angel, stay with me,” he says hoarsely, because he can feel release warm in his own lower stomach and he knows he’s close. He wants to come with Cas. In the (very, very) back of his mind, he notes that ‘angel’ is one pet name Cas seems to be okay with.

Cas gasps and gasps and tries to nod stiffly. Dean commends his effort.

Then Dean can't talk anymore, can't control his breathing, is essentially powerless to what his body is doing. In a quick movement, he grabs Cas' cock and gives it a couple pumps, just to be sure – and that's it, that's all he needed.

Mission accomplished; Dean's body shudders out one hell of an orgasm and Cas arches up below him with something just as strong. It's sticky and gross and fucking amazing. Dean pulls out and then collapses on Cas in a heap. He reaches up and unties Cas' wrists, with some difficulty because he's so damn tired all of the sudden, and Cas is finally able to touch Dean. And he does it like he's been starving for it, roaming his hands all over, over Dean's chest and his back and the back of his neck. He brings his palm to Dean's cheek and kisses him before he presses his sweaty forehead against Dean's.

"That was much better than my dream," Cas says after his breath has steadied a bit. Dean laughs.

"Well, good," he says, and he realizes his voice is hoarse as hell from the essential mouth fucking during Cas' blow job. He kinda likes it, for whatever reason. "If it wasn't, I'd have to kick my dream self in the ass."

Dean wraps an arm around Cas' waist and tugs him close. Come is gross and sticky between them but the afterglow is so intense that he barely notices.

"Hey Cas?" he says eventually. Cas lifts his head weakly and looks at him.

"Yes, Dean?"

"Let's save this shit for special occasions. Cause that was..." Dean doesn't know how to say 'almost over the top' without sounding like a dick.

Cas gets it, though. "Agreed."

Dean tucks his head below Cas' chin and gives soft kisses to his throat before he finally falls asleep, lips pressed to Cas' skin.

... and nasty come is stuck between their bodies, but really – who cares?

Birthdays Are Holidays, Too, Dean

"I don't think this swing can support our combined weight, Dean."

Dean and Castiel are in a playground. It's dusk; the sky is blushing a soft and lovely pink, as though the premature moon has been complimenting it. Castiel looks nice in the warm light, though Dean thinks the repeated surges of love pulsing through his body - and Castiel's, too, he's sure - may be making him biased. The weather is as perfect as everything else about this moment. Trees around them are blossoming with tiny white and pink buds, and the whole air smells of spring.

Castiel is sitting on a swing and Dean is straddling his lap, pressing his forehead against Dean's been kissing him periodically, more often than not. This is Castiel's first time on a swing. Dean had been appalled when he discovered Cas has never swung before, and had driven them both to the nearest playground immediately upon receiving this information. The concept of swinging had been foreign to Cas and he started out flailing back and forth on his own. Dean had eventually caved (out of pity, mostly), and pushed his angel on the swing. He'd tried the whole while not to fixate on how impossibly girly it was, how sickeningly sappy... but Cas seemed pleased, and it was enough to distract Dean from his embarrassment. The park is mostly empty, anyway.

After a while, the desire to hold his boyfriend became overwhelming. Which is where he is now - sitting on the swing with him, straddling his lap so they can comfortably share it. Cas is propelling them gently back and forth with his feet pushing against the ground. Their position looks a little incriminating, but they're being mostly innocent. Besides, no one's around to see.

"We're fine, Cas," Dean assures him, despite how the swing is creaking suspiciously every time it moves back and forth.

"Hmm," Cas replies, clearly not believing his boyfriend.

"Trust me," Dean says with a grin, and kisses Cas' nose. Jesus Christ, Cas has turned into such a girl.

It's been even worse since they finally... consummated their love, or whatever it's supposed to be called. Now, Dean's all over Cas all the time. He's always touching him, now, always kissing him. It's like the afterglow never wore off. Cas is still a little more reserved, but he always seems pleased with the attention.

"I trust you. I do not trust the swing. It is clearly very old."

"It's fine," Dean says dismissively, and Cas huffs a sigh. They're quiet for a long while after that, just gently swinging back and forth and enjoying a comfortable silence.

"It's almost Sam's birthday," Cas says after a while.

"Yeah. We inviting him over for cake and ice cream?"

Cas frowns a little at that.

"No. I was picturing something a little more... festive."

Dean laughs.

"Are you gonna go all holiday over Sam's birthday? 'Cause birthdays aren't really as big a deal, Cas. Sam will be happy with some cake and a present."

Cas wrinkles his brow and looks visibly annoyed.

"I see no difference. I am very grateful that Sam was born. He deserves to be celebrated."

Dean rolls his eyes.

"I'm pretty sure you're just a holiday junkie, Cas."

"Regardless, we must plan something worthy of commemorating your brother's birth."

"Yeah, yeah, we'll do something big. Any ideas?"

"I was hoping you might have some."

"Me? You're the get-together planning guy."

Cas sighs.

"I enjoy being able to create what you and Sam were unable to have as children. Like proper holidays, for instance. And now, Sam's birthday. What's something that Sam would have liked for his birthday as a child?"

Dean is quiet for a moment, because he never thought about it like that. That Cas might love organizing holiday things because Dean and Sam never had them growing up. That Cas had even thought of it that way. It makes Dean feel warm all over.

"You gotta give me a sec on that one," Dean says, "It's been a while since we were that young."

Cas nods.

"We have several days."

Just then, Dean catches sight of something out of the corner of his eyes. He turns around quickly, instincts on autopilot after so many years of learning that something sneaking up on him is rarely a good thing. It's not a Supernatural creature, though - it's a little girl. She bursts into giggles when she makes eye contact with Dean. She looks all of five years old. She keeps staring longer than is comfortable, and Dean feels compelled to say something.

"Uh, can we help you somehow, little girl?" he asks, turning in Cas' lap to face her properly.

She starts giggling again and nods her head.

"Are you two daddies?" she asks, and Dean is taken aback by the question.

"What?"

"Are you two daddies? 'Cause my friend Marcel, she has two daddies and they always take us out for ice cream with rainbow sprinkles sometimes 'cause it matches their flag and they're really nice and maybe if you're two daddies, you can buy me ice cream, too?"

Dean laughs at the little kid's logic and shakes his head.

"Sorry, kiddo. We'd need our own kids to be dads, and we don't have any."

The little girl looks thoughtful, as though this has never occurred to her before.

"Can you push me on the swing?" she asks abruptly. Dean looks skeptical. All the while, Cas has his brow furrowed, as though communicating with a small child is a daunting feat and they're talking to some foreigner who barely speaks English.

"Um. Is your mom or dad around here somewhere?" Dean asks dubiously. The little girl nods and points in the direction of the parking lot.

"She's on the phone 'cause she's got messages. She can see me from here." Sure enough, a woman is in the parking lot facing them, leaning against the car with a cell phone to her ear. The little girl flashes the woman a thumbs up, and the woman returns the gesture with a smile.

"Er - sure, why the hell not?" he says with a shrug, and clambers off of Cas.

Dean helps the girl into a swing (she insists she's too big for the harness ones) and tentatively pushes her. She giggles with delight – again – and urges Dean to push harder. Dean complies, swinging her higher and higher until Cas says sternly, "Careful, Dean."

Dean rolls his eyes – something he does habitually around Cas.

"Lighten up," Dean says, and the girl chimes in with her assent.

"What's your name, kid?" Dean asks her after a while of swinging.

"Lyric," she responds, smiling brightly as though this question always pleases her to answer.

"I'm Dean and this is my – this is my boyfriend, Cas." This is the first time Dean has introduced Cas this way, and he finds that he likes it, even if the word feels strange on his tongue.

"Salutations," Cas says, and Lyric laughs. She laughs a lot, apparently.

"You talk funny," she informs Cas, and he wrinkles his brow in confusion. It occurs to Dean that Cas has probably never thought of this before.

The girl's mother is off the phone now, Dean notices, and is walking toward them.

"Thank you," the woman says warmly when she arrives, and Dean grins. "She would have been whining at me if not for you."

"What can I say? I have a soft spot for the little ones."

And it's true; he does. Little kids remind him of when Sam was young and needed him. Sam was cute, then, brimming with questions and enthusiasm. He'd been a chubby little thing until early middle school, and Dean used to dote on him in as manly a way as possible. Little kids remind Dean of a time when everything was simpler – a time before the apocalypse and Lucifer and dick angels. They were just two kids from a broken home, but it wasn't so bad. Not as bad as it got, anyway.

"You were on the phone too long," Lyric pouts. Her mother sighs wearily. Dean notices that the woman looks very tired, though she's actually quite beautiful. Her appearance practically screams 'single mom.' He's vaguely aware that if he didn't have Cas, he'd probably be hitting on her by now.

"I'm sorry, honey. But you know Mommy's trying to find a babysitter for you..." She notices Dean's curious look. "Lyric's daycare is closing down. I've got about a week to find her a full time sitter or

I'm hosed. I've gotten about three calls about my online listing, but we're so close to Philadelphia... they all sound like creeps." She shudders.

Dean exchanges a long look with Cas – a silent conversation. They do this a lot. These looks that speak without words feel almost telepathic, sometimes. Dean often wonders if it's a hell thing, if it has to do with the fact that Cas pulled his soul from the deepest corners of hell with his bare hands. He thinks it might.

Cas nods subtly and Dean gets his answer.

"Hey, if you don't end up finding your babysitter in a week, we'd be glad to watch her until you do. She seems to like me anyway. Can't say I blame her, I'm kind of a stud."

"They're boyfriends, mommy!" Lyric exclaims enthusiastically, "Maybe they'll take me for ice cream?"

Lyric's mother rolls her eyes. "She's got a fascination with gay... everything, lately; you'll have to excuse her. But I might just take you two up on that offer. You seem much more competent than anyone on the phone calls I've gotten. And, you're right, she does like you. Which is quite a feat."

She digs into her pocket and pulls out a pen and an old receipt and hands it to Dean, who writes down his number.

"Hit us up in a week," Dean says with a smile. The little girl hops up and down excitedly.

"Will do. Thank you."

Dean and Cas leave soon after that because Dean's stomach has started audibly making its emptiness noticed. They drive to their regular diner, and the whole time, Dean can't shut up about how cute the little girl is.

*

"We haven't gone hunting in a couple days. I don't like it."

Dean and Cas are in their flat playing Twister. Their bodies are contorted to the point where it's a struggle to actually reach and spin the arrow that dictates where to move next. Dean is painfully aware of the fact that one of Cas' legs is in between both of his. He's kind of hoping this little game ends up with sex – hell, if he's honest with himself, he actually purchased it with sex in mind.

"You're restless," Cas says, and it's a statement rather than a question. Dean spins the arrow and scowls when he sees how far his left leg is expected to go.

“Yeah. I don’t like knowing that that there’re evil sons of bitches out there and I’m not out there killing them.”

Cas smiles fondly.

“Always the hero complex,” he says.

“What, you don’t like saving people?”

“I’m happy whenever you are happy, Dean.”

“Huh.” Dean focuses intently on inching his leg forward, trying to reach the intended spot, in hopes that Cas might pay attention to that and not the blush creeping onto his face.

Cas spins the arrow and sighs at the nearly impossible position he’s been issued. He reaches an arm over Dean’s back to try and reach the spot, but he’s simply not long enough to reach it. The arm not reaching buckles under his weight and he falls on Dean. Their limbs end up tangled up on the floor and Dean groans.

“I’m too old for this,” he announces. Cas chuckles. Cas laughing is still a weird sound. Dean wonders if it’ll ever not be weird.

“Besides, the whole ‘credit card fraud’ thing actually starts to make me feel bad if I’m not hunting,” Dean says thoughtfully after they’ve been laying there a while. It’s not exactly comfortable, but Dean likes the way Cas is carding his hands through his hair and he doesn’t want to get up.

“Doing good makes you feel justified?”

“Well, yeah. If I’m saving people, the fraud thing is just... a paycheck.”

“Dean, this is sounding like you may be developing a conscience. Should I be concerned?”

Dean shoves him playfully. “Oh, shut up.”

“Perhaps you could teach me to play pool,” Cas suggests, “between the two of us on a regular basis, we could likely support ourselves.”

Dean snorts. “Not well, dude. It’s not exactly a dependable income. I don’t wanna lose our flat if we happen to have a couple of bad games in a row.”

Cas nods. “We could always find jobs like normal civilians.

Dean laughs at that. “When have we ever come close to normal civilians? The simple solution is to just get off our asses and hunt more.”

Cas smiles and rolls his eyes – another surreally human gesture. “If it will sate your conscience. Perhaps we can take a week to travel around the tri-state area and do that?”

Dean contemplates this a moment. “Can’t say I miss the motels, but you might have an idea there.”

Cas kisses him then, and Dean closes his eyes, and deepens the kiss, sliding his tongue easily between Cas’ lips.

“Gotta admit, Cas, I had ulterior motives for getting Twister.”

“I assumed as much.”

Dean raises his eyebrows, wondering whether he’s become completely transparent or if Cas can just read him like a book. He’s not sure which thought scares him more.

“So... wanna have sex?”

“That sounds appealing. Though you realize you’ll miss the Phillies game?”

Dean’s eyes dart to the TV, then back to Cas. He’s taken up watching baseball lately. Their local major league team is actually pretty badass. He hasn’t had time to watch baseball since he was a kid and he finds he really enjoys the nostalgia of it.

“I’ll get over it,” he decides, pushing a thigh up between Cas’ legs. Cas’ eyes flutter shut.

“You’re wearing far too much clothing,” Cas informs Dean in a low growl.

“You’re damn right about that,” Dean agrees. Then there are lips crashing and fingers fumbling and quiet, breathy noises and yet again, Dean marvels at the amazing course his life has taken.

*

They catch the tail end of the ninth inning – the game ran long, thankfully – and suddenly Dean has an idea.

“Dude. Baseball.”

Dean looks at Dean and tilts his head in confusion.

“Yes, Dean. This is baseball.”

“Well – no shit, Sherlock, of course it is. Not what I was getting at. Sammy’s birthday, man. Let’s take him to a real major league ball game. The Phillies are playing a home game on Wednesday. He was

always bugging Dad to take him as a kid. He always wanted to play little league, too, but we moved around too much. We've never been to a real game before. He'll love it."

Cas' eyes light up.

"Dean, that's perfect. I had my own idea, as well. I thought, perhaps, we could have a barbecue? By the lake, a couple miles from here. I presume you've never done anything like that before, either?"

Dean grins. "Sure haven't."

"Then it's settled."

The game ends about 15 minutes later and Dean starts nuzzling at Cas neck, kissing it every now and then.

"Is it too soon for more sex?" he asks in his boyfriend's ear. Cas shudders.

"Your constant libido is flattering, Dean," Cas replies, "but I think you're overestimating either of our recovery times. Later."

"Erghh," is Dean's reply with an agitated sigh. "Well. How about pie?"

Cas kisses Dean softly on the lips and nods. "I will bake pie. We will have sex afterwards."

"Fuck yes."

*

Naturally, Cas plans out everything. They decide early on that it should be a secret. Of course, Sam knows they're inviting him down for his birthday, but he doesn't know everything they have planned for him. Sarah is in on the surprise and has been sworn to secrecy. The days leading up to Sam's birthday are filled with a sort of anxious excitement. Dean's surprised how eagerly he's anticipating the look on Sam's face when he realizes cake and ice cream are not the only things on the agenda.

They spend a hell of a lot of money getting the best last minute tickets possible, and Dean shreds the card under the name "Robby Steinhardt" as soon as they're ordered. He's seriously considering honest methods of earning a living, but most of them include a 9 to 5 job and he seriously can't handle that. He and Cas might have some semblance of an apple pie life – something he never in his wildest dreams thought he'd get – but there are some things he simply can't bring himself to do. He can't go from saving lives on a regular basis to working a cash register or tending a bar.

It doesn't help that he knows Sam's earning an honest living now. He works in Sarah's father's antique shop – that and scholarships help pay for his college classes. The damn kid's condo is even paid off – he shares it with Sarah, and she inherited a pretty large sum from an aunt who's even richer than

Sarah's father, about a year before Sam met Sarah again after the apocalypse. They split the bills and live comfortably. Sam doesn't need credit card fraud and pool hustling to support himself. Dean's very, very confused as to why he finds himself jealous about this.

He puts these thoughts out of his head as best as he can, though, because there's nothing he can do about them.

Cas has a recipe for cake he's been dying to try out, but Dean's always been partial to pie and whines whenever Cas mentions baking anything else. Now, Cas is delighted to have a proper reason to give it a go. It's chocolate mousse cake, and Dean can't get over the pun. A mousse cake for his giant moose of a brother – it's too fitting.

On May 2nd, Cas gets started on the cake about two hours before Sam and Sarah are supposed to show up. All the while, Dean is intent on distracting him, sliding hands over his stomach and kissing the back of his neck where he knows he's sensitive. Cas resolutely sends him away again and again, insisting that getting caught in the middle of intercourse is no way to start Sam's birthday.

The day is more chilly than normal for this season – much to Cas' delight. He's got a Phillies sweater and matching baseball cap from Dean he'd been hoping to wear, and when the weather report announced low to mid 50s, he was visibly pleased. He looks cute in it, bounding around the kitchen looking like he's ready to play ball. Dean adds playing baseball to his mental list of things he wants to do with Cas sometime.

Dean has to admit that the smell of chocolate permeating the house is pretty enticing, and maybe this cake business may have some merit. Sam and Sarah arrive around one o'clock. Sam's all smiles, wearing a big grin that lights up his face. He's exuding the same excitement Dean's been feeling all week – and all that over what he thinks is just a small get-together and Cas and Dean's place. Dean's practically buzzing with how happy he is over everything they have planned.

"Happy birthday, Sam," Cas says warmly as he lets them in.

"Thanks, Cas." Sam goes for a hug and it's as awkward to watch as it must be for both Sam and Cas to experience, but Dean's happy they went for it anyway. Cas is family and everyone's acting like it, and it makes Dean feel really, really good that Cas has been accepted so thoroughly by the people he loves. Sam's approval means everything to him. Dean figures after the whole apocalypse bit and the falling-from-heaven thing, Sam's got more than enough reasons to like Cas, anyway. The honest happiness Dean sees on Sam's face – even through the awkward hug – proves how much of a Winchester Cas has become in Sam's eyes.

"I'm very glad you were born," Cas adds, and Sarah laughs.

"I am, too!" she agrees enthusiastically, and hugs Cas herself. Again, awkward but totally heartwarming. Dean hugs Sarah, too, and slaps his brother on the back.

“So how old are you now, Sammy? Thirty-five? Forty?” It’s only funny because Sam’s only twenty-eight and looks fairly young for a guy who went through the apocalypse and conquered Lucifer – the devil himself.

“You realize the older you make me when you joke, the older it makes you,” Sam points out, and Dean groans.

“In which case, you’re fifteen.”

Sarah shakes her head in contempt. “That would make me a creep. Let’s just stick to twenty-eight.”

“Twenty-eight it is,” Cas decides.

“Yeah, but that still makes me old,” Dean pouts. Cas gives him a level look.

“Dean, do you realize who you’re talking to?”

Dean shuts up because, yeah, he kind of forgot his ex-angel boyfriend is like thousands of years old or something. Which – awkward.

Sam starts to take off his jacket, but stops when he realizes that Dean’s putting his on.

“Er – going somewhere, Dean?”

“Yup. And so are you. Cas, get the stuff.”

“Stuff?” Sam asks, but Dean ignores him.

“I can’t carry it all. I need your assistance,” Cas replies. Dean complies and they walk off to the kitchen, leaving Sam looking incredibly confused. The cake is all packed up and ready to go, as are the burgers and hot dogs for grilling. They’ve got two bottles of lemonade to bring, too, and have everything concealed in a bag so that the secret’s kept til the last possible moment.

Sam eyes the bag suspiciously when they leave the kitchen, and Sarah’s got a hand over her mouth to keep from giggling.

“No chance you’re gonna explain right now, are you?” Sam asks.

Dean responds, “Hell no,” and Cas shakes his head solemnly.

They all pack into the Impala – Dean lets Sam drive for once and he sits shotgun. Sam plays his awful music because the law of the car says that driver picks the music, shotgun shuts his cakehole, even if said driver is not the rightful owner of the car. Besides, it’s Sam’s birthday. Sam keeps grinning as he scrolls through his iPod – the bitch had to go and bring his stupid adapter thing – and looking at Dean

like's a superhero. Dean feels like he used to when Sam was really little and he'd buy him ice cream and it was like his big brother singlehandedly lit up the sky or something.

It's nice.

Sam's not from the area (hell, he's not from the state), so he has no idea where they're going, even as Dean gives him directions. He blindly navigates the highway and obediently takes the exit he's directed to (though there's a momentary argument between Dean and Sam over which exit to take, which irritates Sam to no end). They talk and talk as they drive, filling each other in on everything they've been missing out on. Sam talks about law school – NYU Law this time instead of Stanford, so he can be close to Dean and Sarah can be close to her family. He's doing well, excelling in all his classes, despite the huge gap between his undergrad years and now. Dean's not at all surprised.

Dean and Cas talk about recent hunts, all the ugly sons of bitches they've been ridding the world of. They discuss their vague road trip plans and Sam thinks it's a good idea – though his reasoning is that Dean needs to “get it out of his system”, which is not what Dean meant by it at all. Dean goes on about Lyric, too, even though Sam teases him and calls him a creeper for it.

“You thinking there are kids in your future, Dean?” Sarah asks, and Dean can't tell if she's kidding or not. He snorts.

“No. That would interfere with my need to be able to fuck Cas whenever I please.”

Cas turns red and looks out the window intensely, scooting as close to the door as possible as though trying to disappear.

“Jesus Christ! Dean! Little brother in the car here! Not a mental image I wanted. God. You're so graphic,” Sam exclaims dramatically.

“You're such a prude, Sammy,” Dean says, ruffling Sam's hair. The road they're on has slowly become shrouded on both sides by high trees, and the light is shadowy. Even so, Dean can feel the sun through the branches – it's warming up, big time. Dean's found that Pennsylvania weather this close to South Jersey can only be described as “bipolar”. Its ups and downs are crazy. Cas shrugs out of his sweater to reveal a bright red Phillies t-shirt underneath.

“Make a right up here,” Dean says, indicating an upcoming turnoff. Sam does as he's told, and only when he sees the sign reading LAKE GARRISON does realization dawn on him.

“Are we – ”

“Figured we'd take you somewhere scenic for your birthday,” Dean says with a grin and Sam looks about happy enough to burst.

“Dude – thank you, seriously, you didn’t have to...”

“This part’s all Cas, you can thank him.”

Sam swivels in his seat and turns his million dollar smile on Cas.

“Thank you, Castiel. Seriously. This... means a lot to me.”

Sam parks the car close to the water and gets out, stretching his long limbs like the ride was long, even though it was only about 30 minutes. He looks out at the water like he’s never been to a lake before or something. All Dean can see when he looks at his brother’s blatant excitement is the little kid he watched grow up without special occasions like this.

“Wish I brought my swimsuit,” he says as everyone else piles out of the car.

“Good thing I thought ahead,” Sarah responds in a singsong voice, pulling a pair out of her uncharacteristically overlarge tote bag.

“You were in on this?”

“I’m in on all of it,” she replies. The emphasis on the ‘all’ part is lost to Sam, who is busy marveling at how pretty the lake is. Dean and Cas pull all the food from the car and they trek out to the short beach and pick a picnic table to set up at.

“Remember the last lake we went to, Dean?” Sam asks as he helps unload.

“Augh, do I ever. That was the one with the creepy ghost kid who kept drowning people.” Dean shudders at the memory. That had been a particularly bad experience – a little boy had almost drowned.

“This lake looks nothing like that one,” Sam says, and it’s true. That one had been a deep, dark and ominous blackish blue. This one is nearly clear and has a small beach around it. There are people swimming and playing around the water everywhere – there’s a surprising amount for a Wednesday afternoon.

“Yeah, we made sure of that,” Dean says, and Sam smiles appreciatively.

“I’m really glad we can overwrite all these bad memories you two have with good ones,” Sarah remarks. “It’s about time you guys have some decent times to weigh up against the bad ones.”

“You said it,” Dean agrees, and Cas nods.

“You’ve both more than earned it,” he says. Sam and Dean both look uncomfortable, like Sam is just as unsure what to do with these compliments as Dean is.

“C’mon, Dean,” Sam whines after a beat, tugging on his brother’s arm and glancing at the lake. “Let’s go swim.”

Dean rolls his eyes because, serious, when did Sam switch into little kid mode? Not that Dean’s complaining – he likes seeing this side of his brother. He hasn’t seen it since Stanford. Maybe even before that. Unfortunately, Dean has to set up the barbecue.

“Sorry bro, I’ve got a grill to light up. Take Cas instead.”

Cas looks alarmed, as though this is the first time he’s considered the idea that he might actually have to get in the water. Dean snickers at him.

“I will take over the barbecue, Dean. Go swim with Sam, it is his birthday. I will...join you later.” Dean seriously doubts that, and he frowns at Cas.

“No way, man. Dinner and baking and all that... kitchen stuff, that’s all you. But I’m pretty sure the grill is my division.”

Sam’s mouth makes an O shape and he covers his mouth with a fist, presumably to keep from laughing. Sarah’s eyebrows raise. Cas, on the other hand, is glowering fiercely – and the look is pure angel, all wrath and cosmic power, despite his humanity and Dean feels chills even though the sun is hot against his back. He takes a slight, subconscious step backward.

“Uh – did I miss something here?” he asks, laughing awkwardly. Cas takes a step forward, getting in Dean’s personal space in a way that is decidedly menacing. Dean swallows.

“If you ever compare me to a housewife again, Dean, I will cause you bodily harm,” Cas hisses.

Sam’s expression is very much that of a teenage girl looking both pleased and scandalized over a juicy piece of gossip. Sarah’s smile is twitching at the edges of her lips like she’s fighting it with all she’s worth. Dean, for the most part, is slightly terrified.

“Yes sir,” he mutters automatically – and he’s not being facetious, either. It just feels like the only possible response he can give.

“Good,” Cas replies, “Now go swim with Sam.”

Dean wrinkles his brow and says nothing else, just pulls off his shirt and tugs off his jeans – he has swimming trunks concealed underneath – and treks off toward the water. Sam follows after, making a whipping gesture (and corresponding sound effects) and laughing at his big brother’s expense. Dean

shoves him so hard he nearly falls over into the sand, and they end up shoving each other until they make it knee deep into the water – at which point Sarah pushes them both into the water with a colossal splash.

*

Cas grills as well as he cooks – which is to say, friggin badass. He puts at least half the burger joint Dean has been to in his life to shame. Apparently Cas had some sort of recipe up his sleeve, because the seasoning on them is mouth-watering. Cas looks incredibly pleased with the blissful looks on everyone's faces as they dig in. He also looks... something else when Dean makes borderline-explicit noises – mostly throaty “mhh!”s with closed eyes – every time he takes a bite.

Dean may or may not be eating his hot dog after in an intentionally dirty matter once he realizes Cas' subtle reactions to his noises. He's being stealthy, though, careful only to venture into sinful gestures when Sam's distracted by other things. Cas' hand is gripping the edge of the picnic table to the point where his knuckles are white. Dean feels very accomplished.

“Stop,” Cas hisses, and Dean flashes him an innocent smile.

“Stop what, Cas?”

Cas only makes a nearly inaudible grown in the back of his throat in response.

Cake follows the food and Sam and Sarah look visibly impressed by the culinary masterpiece Cas pulls out of the cooler. Naturally, everyone agrees that they should sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Sam, much to his valiant protests. They ignore him and sing – they even light candles, which he refuses to blow out – and Sam is practically red with how embarrassed he is. He does blow out the candles, though, to his credit. Dean successfully fights the desire to push his brother's face into the cake, if only because the cake is so damn pretty.

At Sarah's insistence, they wait a while after eating before getting back into the water. Sam lies in the sand and promptly falls asleep. Dean and Sarah wait until he starts snoring before they bury him deep in the sand. He wakes up 20 minutes later to sand everywhere – in his shorts, in his hair, coating every inch of his body. He glares at Dean and Sarah ruefully.

“This is how you treat me on my birthday?” he groans, sitting up and shaking the sand from his body. He whips his hair like a L'Oreal commercial, sans the model smile. His hair does kinda shine in the sun like a perfectly lighted advert, though. Figures.

“My duty as a big brother doesn't take a day off, Sammy,” Dean says.

“Likewise,” Sarah agrees, “snarky fiancée' doesn't have an off switch.”

“At least Cas is loyal,” Sam grumbles, shooting Cas a grateful look.

“Of course.” Cas nods.

“We’re getting back in the water,” Sam announces decidedly.

“Fine by me,” Dean agrees, standing from the picnic table and stretching. Cas stays where he’s sitting, though. Dean looks at him skeptically.

“You coming?” he asks.

Cas stares studiously at his hands.

“No.”

“What the hell, Cas? This whole thing was your idea. Why the hell wouldn’t you go?”

“I chose this because I believed Sam would enjoy it. But... I don’t know how to swim, Dean. I’ve never had occasion.”

Understanding dawns on Dean in an instant. He grins and ruffles Cas’ hair, leaving it even more unkempt than its usual state.

“Don’t worry Cas, I’ve got you. I won’t let you drown. Jesus. Did you seriously doubt that?”

Cas doesn’t look up.

“That would hinder your fun.”

“What? Cas! You staying out here when we’re all in the water would ‘hinder my fun’. I’ve got you, man.”

“You two are adorable,” Sam says, and his tone is only half mocking. Dean punches him in the shoulder lightly.

“Whatever. You coming, Cas?”

Cas looks at the water behind them dubiously, but after a second he nods.

They get knee-deep into the water when Cas stays put, glancing at the shore uncertainly. Dean doesn't notice at first because he's too busy having a splashing war with Sam, and he only turns around when they're up to their chests. He could hit himself for forgetting Cas, and runs as best he can chest-deep in water back to his boyfriend.

"Sorry, Cas."

"No need to apologize," Cas says quietly, eyes still trained on the shore.

"Get on my back," Dean says abruptly, and Cas tilts his head in confusion.

"What?"

"Get on my back. Piggyback ride. I'll carry you."

Cas looks doubtful.

"I'm too heavy for you to carry, Dean."

"Quit doubting me, Cas! If I say I've got you, then I've got you."

"Hey, lovebirds, the fun's happening out here!" Sam calls from where he and Sarah are up far enough that they're treading water. They're just deep enough that if they start to sink far enough they can push up against the bottom if they need to, but from where Dean and Cas are, they look very, very far.

"The water will make you lighter, anyway," Dean adds. Cas' face has gone white, but when Dean offers his back, he only hesitates a moment before climbing on. Cas is thin and hardly heavy at all, and once they get deeper into the water, he barely weighs a thing. Cas grips at Dean's ribs for dear life the whole while and says nothing.

"Bout time," Sam says when they get there.

"My apologies," Cas says, and looks like he means it down to his core. Sam seems visibly alarmed.

"Dude - Cas, I'm joking. I totally get it. Hell, I'm afraid of clowns and that doesn't even make sense. At least your fear does. And you're, y'know, conquering it."

"For you," Cas adds, "because it's your birthday."

Sam gets all smiley over that and Dean clears his throat a little more loudly than necessary. And if he's a little jealous, he makes no further indication.

A forgotten beach ball floats by them at some point, and Sam and Sarah pass it back and forth, throwing it higher and higher every time. Every time it goes too far, Sam sighs but goes after it. Dean wants to play, but his promise to Cas is more important, so he just laughs whenever Sam's forced to swim far out to bring the ball back.

"Dean. Perhaps - perhaps you could let me off your back. If you hold on to me tightly, I'll still be... safe." Cas appears conflicted, but firm. Dean doesn't protest; if Cas is comfortable enough to suggest it, Dean's not gonna disagree.

He lets Cas down and wraps an arm tightly around his waist. Cas looks panicked at first, but he eases up a little when it becomes obvious that Dean's not going to let anything happen to him. Still, he wraps both arms around Dean so tight that it's almost uncomfortable, but Dean doesn't mind. Dean's got one free hand, now, and he can play ball with Sam and Sarah.

They stay out in the water til they're too tired to swim any more. Dean carries Cas out on his back and Sam does the same with Sarah, just because. They clear up their picnic site and wash off all the excess sand in the sort-of-shower things the lake management provides. The hot water doesn't work and they're freezing by the time they're all cleaned up, especially because the air is getting a little cooler. Their beach towels are huge and fluffy, though, and both couples huddle up until they've warmed up a little. Only then does Dean check his cell phone.

"Shit. Shit shit shit," he says and hands the phone to Cas. The clock on it reads 6pm. Cas frowns.

"You'll have to drive fast."

"Am I missing something?" Sam asks, and Sarah laughs.

"There's changing rooms over there, guys. Let's get dressed - quickly - and get going.

*

Dean pumps the heat in the Impala the whole ride to Philadelphia. Sarah is driving – apparently she's a speed demon when she drives, so she's most likely to get them there in time. Sam's riding shotgun but Dean reaches over the seat to turn on the heat the moment he feels Cas shiver.

Sarah's as intense a driver as Sam warned, and she makes the 35 minute trip ten minutes faster than expected. There's an unnerving amount of honking from the Impala's otherwise underused horn, but Dean figures it's worth it when they hit the city at 6:25 even. Sam looks confused as hell by their destination, but he can't coerce anyone to explain why they're in Philadelphia.

The city traffic hinders their progress by about ten minutes but it's not so bad, because Dean now Dean can watch his little brother growing visibly excited as he tries to figure out where they're headed.

"I didn't know we were going somewhere else," he says unnecessarily. Dean smirks and Cas smiles.

"This was Dean's idea," he explains, and Sam looks so proud that Dean looks away, inexplicably embarrassed.

"So where are we going?" Sam asks for the thousandth time. This time, Dean takes on the window, indicating that Sam should look outside.

The Citizen Bank Park Phillies' stadium is massive and all lit up. Over the front entrance is an enormous display featuring a Phillies baseball cap - the same as the one Cas is currently putting on his head - and a baseball. A smaller, though still huge, features the Phillie's mascot, the Phillie Phanatic. The greenish mascot is a green, fuzzy creature that sort of freaks Dean out, but not enough to comment. Besides, he's too stuck on the way Sam's face has become a shining beam of light, all lit up with happiness.

"We're here," Dean says, though there's no real need to it. The look on Sam's face clearly indicates that he knows exactly what's going on, now. And if Sam's looking a little teary-eyed, Dean pretends not to notice.

"Dean... I've always wanted - when we were kids, I always -"

"No chick flick moments," Dean cuts off quickly, and Sam, to Dean's relief, doesn't continue on with his sappy speech. Instead, he rolls down the window and leans his head out, marveling at the bright lights and plethora of fans decked out in baseball paraphernalia. Dean casts a glance at Cas, who looks quietly happy. His expression mirrors Sam's - all childishly blissful - and Dean feels very much in love.

Parking at the stadium is a bitch, what with the big turnout at a home game. Fans from Philadelphia are infamous for their intense, obsessive and borderline frightening love for their team. It's no surprise that the place is packed, even on a Tuesday evening. It's 6:45 when they're finally parked and make it out of the car. It's another ten minutes before they're inside and trying to find their seats.

Dean's a little bit in awe. It's one thing to watch baseball on TV, but he finds that it's another thing entirely to be there in real life. The place is big, bigger than he imagined. Sam seems to be feeling just as impressed, because he's looking all around surveying the seats and the field and the displays flickering everywhere.

"Forgot I always wanted to do this," Sam says, and Dean barely hears him over the roar of the crowd - but he does, and the sentiment makes all this better, somehow. Sam's even happier because this is something that Dean pulled out his memory, dug out deep from his childhood. Dean's pleased he remembered. He's also pleased that Cas insisted that he try.

They find their seats fairly easily, because Cas has a map and has already checked online for information on how to find their seats. Dean's gotta admit, his boyfriend is pretty clever... though that's not really new news.

"We'll get snack and shit next inning," Dean says, and everyone agrees. No way is anyone missing the first pitch.

7:05 on the dot, the game starts. The visiting team - the Atlanta Braves - is up to bat first. Dean finds himself holding his breath as the first pitch is thrown, and he's not even sure why. Beside him, he can feel Sam doing the same thing. Cas is looking at him curiously, and Dean laughs and ruffles Cas' hair.

Halfway into the second inning, Dean realizes that he's holding Cas' hand. Cas notices him noticing and looks at Dean expectantly, because hand holding is not a thing they do on a regular basis, and especially not in public. Dean threads their fingers together in response to Cas' silent question, and Cas seems to relax.

Dean's stomach is growling by the third inning and Cas gives him an incredulous look when he announces that he's hungry.

"Two burgers and three hot dogs, Dean," he reminds him, and Dean grins and shrugs.

"What can I say? Baseball makes me hungry."

"You're a bottomless pit," Cas says, exasperated. He tells Dean this often.

Dean tells Sam and Sarah that he and Cas are heading to the snack bar. Sarah requests French fries and Sam asks for a pretzel. Dean groans at their lack of creativity.

"We're in Philadelphia and you're getting French fries and pretzels? Where's your imagination? They've got friggin hoagies and cheesesteaks out there."

"We're normal people, Dean," Sarah says, rolling her eyes, though her tone is affectionate. "We're not hungry yet. We'll go out to eat after the game."

"Psh. I'm not gonna last that long. C'mon, Cas," he beckons his boyfriend, and Cas follows after.

The line takes forever. It takes half an inning, actually, but Dean's mostly concentrating on how Cas is still holding his hand and how little he cares that people can see. He likes the feeling of Cas' hands, even though they're cold. Dean remembers some old saying that goes like 'cold hands, warm heart' or something, and he thinks it's pretty accurate. Regardless, he puts all his energy into warming them up.

"Dean?" Cas asks when they finally make it to the front of the line. Dean realizes he's been staring at Cas and the concession worker and people in line behind him are getting irritated.

"Your face is distracting," he mutters, and realizes too late how lame that sounds. They order their food and get on their way. Dean catches Cas looking at him as they walk back and their eyes meet. He holds their gaze as they walk, and even amidst the loud multitudes of people around them, all he can see is Cas.

*

The Phillies win. Sam and Dean go hoarse with their shouting and cheering along with everyone around them. Sarah does her fair share of cheering, too, though she has the foresight to keep the

volume low enough to spare her vocal cords. Cas watches them with his head tilted. He looks very much like an angel trying to figure out humanity – and really, he still sort of is. He'll always be Dean's angel.

If traffic was a bitch before the game, it is now a raging PMSing dragon. Dean drives them to a hoagie shop not too far from the stadium so they can wait out the bulk of the traffic while they eat. No one does hoagies like Philadelphia, they've heard, so Dean declares it's about time they capitalized on their proximity to the city and tested this theory. They order their hoagies and sit down, and Sam and Sarah excuse themselves to either respective bathroom. Their food comes while the others are gone, and Cas retaliates for Dean's earlier antics with not-even-a-little-subtle pornographic noises as he eats.

"The minute they leave, you're fucking me so hard into the mattress, Cas," Dean growls in a low tone, and Cas nearly gags on his bite of his sandwich because he's so taken aback. A woman sitting in the booth behind them promptly leaves her table. Cas is silent, just stares at Dean with a heated look that can only be described as eye sex. When Sam comes back to the table, he has to clear his throat to break them from their reverie.

"Y'know, the whole creepy staring thing makes much more sense now," Sam says, "I mean, before you were together it was just freaking weird, but at least now I know you're actually in love or whatever."

"Or in heat," Dean grumbles under his breath, but Sam doesn't hear him. Sarah rejoins them at the table and they all dig into their sandwiches – and yeah, Philly hoagies definitely live up to the hype.

The ride home consists of, first, constant chatter about the game from Dean and Sam, which eventually dissolves into a comfortable silence. Dean's driving and Sam's riding shotgun, and it's bringing back memories of the days where this car was their home and the road was their life. So much has changed.

Yet, looking at his little brother smiling softly out the window with his scruffy hair in his face, Dean realizes that some things never change.

*

"You should take Sam for drinks, Dean," Cas suggests when they get home, and Dean thinks some one-on-one brother bonding is actually a great idea. But he has to protest a little on principle.

"We can't just leave you two," Dean says, indicating Cas and Sarah. Sarah rolls her eyes and Cas looks perplexed.

"We'll be fine, guys," Sarah says, waving them off. "Go do your brother thing. Just call us when you need us to pick you up."

"We're not going to get that drunk, Sarah," Sam says. Sarah just wears a bemused expression and insists that she drive them. A fiancée and an ex-angel firmly set in their decisions are a force to be

reckoned with, so Sam and Dean have to concede after a minute or two of protesting. Sarah drives both brothers to the closest pub, lest they get the idea to walk in their potential drunken state. Sam gives Sarah a kiss through the window she's rolled down to tell Sam happy birthday again in a quiet, warm tone that seems very soft and intimate. Dean takes a couple steps away and studiously looks at the ground to give them a moment.

Finally, Sarah drives away and they enter the bar. They start out with just a shot of vodka each – but when the Dean proudly tells the bartender that today is Sam's birthday, she says the next two are on the house. Four shots in, Sam's already tipsy. Figures. For someone so huge, he's still a lightweight.

"Dean," he says abruptly, so seriously that it's comical because it's obviously due to alcohol. Dean raises an eyebrow as he signals to the bartender to bring two more beers.

"Yeah, Sammy?" Dean replies, amused.

"Dean, thank you," he says the words slowly like Dean will miss them if he doesn't, and Dean groans.

"I got it, I got it, you're thankful. You're welcome, Sam, Jesus. Remember I said no chick flick moments?"

Sam is quiet for a moment and then he nods, like he's processed this information and is content with it.

Another two shots vodka and two shots of whiskey later, Sam is utterly drunk and hugging Dean and it's so awkward it may actually be physically painful. It would be worse if Dean wasn't buzzing, himself, thankfully. From the glances the bartender is shooting them, it's clear that she thinks they're gay for each other. Which is – ew.

"I love you, man," Sam says into Dean's shoulder, and makes a sound that is quite possibly sniffing.

"Love you too, Sam," Dean says, patting Sam awkwardly on the back.

He flags down the bartender and orders another beer.

"So like... how gay are you?" he asks Dean out of the blue a couple minutes later.

"... What?"

"Are you like gay gay or like... gay?"

"Sammy, yer drunk," Dean slurs firmly and Sam huffs a frustrated breath.

"Answer the question!"

"What does that even mean?"

“Are you, like, the bitch or –”

“So not having this conversission.”

“It’s okay to be the bitch, Dean,” Sam says – and he’s seriously using The Concerned Empathetic Voice, the one he uses when they’re dealing with families who’ve just lost someone and they have to ask if there were flickering lights and cold spots beforehand.

“You are so lucky ‘s your birthday.”

“Cas really loves you,” Sam says, ignoring that.

“Yeah?” Dean says, because he doesn’t know what else to say.

Sam nods. “He’s good for you.”

“Thanks, Sammy.”

“Thanks?”

“For likin Cas. ‘Cause if you didn’t he’d haveta go. And I like Cas.”

Sam looks at him long and hard for a minute before he laughs.

“You’re stupid.”

“Bitch.”

“Jerk.”

*

When they finally leave the bar, they’re singing Happy Birthday at the top of their lungs and staggering all over the place. Sam sings “to me-ee!” when Dean sings “to Sammy!” toward the end of the song, and they both start laughing and can’t stop. Sam takes out his phone and seems to send some sort of text, but Dean doesn’t know what it says.

They’ve got matching grins on their faces as they head home on foot, because it didn’t occur to either of them to call either of their respective partners. That’s why they’re both surprised when Sam’s car pulls up beside them as they walk.

“Get in,” Sarah says. Cas is riding shotgun and looking vaguely concerned.

“How’dyaknow?” Sam asks, staring at Sarah like he’s seen the face of God.

“Well, Cas and I were able to decode your text ‘Singin, got cut off’ and we came after you.”

Sam beams.

“See? I like this girl right here. She’s smart,” he declares, and even in his drunken state he’s so full of love he practically glows under the streetlight. Sarah blushes slightly.

“Get in,” she tells them, and the two brothers comply. It’s a short drive to the flat, but Dean realizes as soon as he sits down that he’s grateful Sarah and Cas came for them. His legs feel like jelly. He hasn’t been drinking in the past couple months, not since he and Cas fell for each other or whatever, so he seriously overestimated his tolerance level.

Cas and Dean share the couch, like they always do when Sam and Sarah stay over. Dean goes straight for the back of Cas’ neck – his weak spot, Dean knows – with lavish kisses and tiny bites. Cas tenses all over, but immediately puts his hands on Dean’s face to push him away.

“We have company,” he says quietly, indicating Dean’s already sleeping brother.

“We can be quiet,” Dean says, wiggling his hips suggestively. The only tiny part of him that’s thinking clearly is wondering if he’ll remember this in the morning.

“No we can’t, Dean. Shush, you are drunk. Sleep.”

Dean sighs and complies, pulling Cas close to him and wrapping an arm around him. Cas tucks his head under Dean’s neck and they both fall asleep.

*

Dean wakes up with the biggest hangover he’s had since St. Patrick’s Day. He groans when he sits up; his pulsing head protests at the motion and he wants nothing more than to lie back down. He frowns at the empty space beside him where Cas ought to be – but then he catches scent of breakfast wafting in from the kitchen and he decides that Cas’ absence is justified. Across the room, Sam stretches and then makes a groan similar to Dean’s own and Dean assumes Sam’s hangover is probably as bad as his own.

Dean shuffles into the kitchen, the smell of food compelling enough to get him on his feet. Cas – Cas serious, somehow, procured a Phillies apron and he’s already pouring Dean a cup of coffee. Dean accepts the mug graciously and kisses Cas.

“You’re a godsend, Cas,” he says and Cas chuckles.

“I am, actually,” he says, and Dean grins because, ironically, that really is true.

“What are you making?” Dean asks sleepily, taking a seat at the table and slumping into the seat.

“Greasy breakfast,” Cas says, “I believe you told me once that that is the best treatment for a hangover?” He tosses Dean a bottle of Ibuprofen and Dean takes two with his coffee, giving Cas a look like he’s Jesus or something.

“What would I do without you?” Dean asks – and he finds that he means the question more than he realized.

Cas shrugs. “Go to diners for your greasy breakfast.”

Dean snorts.

“Nothing tops your cooking, Cas,” Dean says gently, and he hopes that Cas understands all the unspoken words behind it. Cas seems to smile with his eyes, so Dean takes it as confirmation.

Sarah comes into the kitchen, followed by Sam, who is clutching his head like he’s been wounded. Dean tosses Sam the bottle of pills and Sam drops it and groans. Sarah rolls her eyes and picks it up for him.

Two pills and one cup of coffee later, everyone’s sitting at the table and tucking into Cas’ stellar breakfast. He’s made a different, much healthier lunch for himself and Sarah because neither of them have hangovers – Dean has to admit that the crepes look good, but nothing’s as enticing as the food on his own plate right now. Dean keeps bumping elbows with Cas, which makes Cas look at him with a confused expression which is – if Dean’s honest – really friggin adorable. This is probably why Dean keeps doing it.

Cas serves tea after breakfast and everyone crowds onto the couch to try it out. It’s awesome, like most of Cas’ suggestions and it seems to help, somehow, with both Sam and Dean’s hangovers. It’s after everyone’s finished their tea that Sam and Sarah finally announce that they have to leave.

“Aw, guys, you don’t have to go,” Dean says, because he seriously doesn’t want them to. He enjoys their company, and it hits him all at once how much he’s going to miss them. Sam seems to only visit on holidays, and Dean has no idea when the hell the next one is.

“Yes we do,” Sarah says with a sigh, “We’ve got a date with my parents at some restaurant in honor of Sam’s birthday.”

“Some fancy one,” Sam adds, and he slumps against the couch. Dean understands – if Sam’s headache is anything like Dean’s, he’s probably not too eager to go anywhere ritzy like that. Dean, for instance, plans to spend the day in his pyjamas watching TV and – okay, yeah, cuddling with Cas.

“Monkey suit and all?” Dean asks, smirking.

“Monkey suit and all,” Sam admits ruefully.

“The drive’s at least two hours and Sam needs time to recuperate. But we’ll visit soon, okay?” Sarah’s tone is sincere, and Dean really wants to believe her.

“Okay,” is his only reply. He hugs Sarah and gives Sam a slap on the back. He can see a ‘thank you’ forming on his brother’s lips, and he quickly cuts him off.

“No. Chick. Flick. Shit,” he says, and Sam just grins.

“See you soon, Dean.”

“See ya soon, Sammy.”

Cas exchanges hugs as well – albeit awkwardly, of course – and finally all the goodbyes have been said and they leave.

No sooner is the door closed behind Sam and Sarah does Cas turn to Dean, cutting quickly into her personal space and pressing close against him. Dean raises his eyebrows, but he doesn’t have time to say something facetious before Cas’ lips are crashing against his and his hands are sliding against Dean’s skin beneath his shirt. Dean kisses back eagerly after a millisecond of confusion

“Cas?” Dean whispers when their mouths part for air.

“I believe your exact words were, ‘the minute they leave, you are fucking me so hard’, were they not?”

“Jesus,” Dean breathes.

“I prefer ‘Castiel’,” Cas says with a smile playing at the edges of his lips.

“My head hurts,” Dean protests weakly, but he knows the battle is already lost.

“I can easily distract you from that,” Cas says, and essentially attacks Dean’s mouth, all tongue and teeth and urgency. Dean closes his eyes and shuts up... because, seriously, the only downside to Sam’s birthday was being deprived of this.

In Loving Memory

Dean walks out of the kitchen and shuts his cell phone with a dramatic roll of his eyes and a huff of air. Cas looks up from the book he's reading – *The Vintner's Luck*, apparently it's quite good – and eyes Dean curiously.

“Dean?”

“Sammy wants to go visit *Mom's grave* for Mother's day,” Dean replies, scoffing. “Morbid little weirdo, man. He already got us tickets to Lawrence – like he seriously thought I was going to go.” Dean shakes his head.

Cas gives him a sideways glance.

“I think it's a good idea, Dean,” Cas says quietly after a moment. Dean looks incredulous – then, pissed.

“Uh – sorry, *what* did you just say?”

Cas frowns.

“It would be good for you, Dean. You lived your whole life fighting to find her killer, and the apocalypse followed closely after. You haven't had time to heal. Perhaps – “

“Perhaps, nothing. Do you know what I'm going to do on Sunday? The same thing I do every Mother's Day – go out and get drunk as hell. And, y'know, have distraction sex all day,” he adds, winking at Cas and sitting on the couch beside him. He flashes a grin he hopes doesn't look as fake as it feels. Cas' expression is clearly unhappy.

“I don't like when you treat your problems with alcohol, Dean,” he says seriously.

Dean leans forward and presses a kiss to the back of Cas' neck – Cas' weak spot, he knows. He nips at the skin there lightly, dragging his tongue over it and smiling.

“Hmm, that so? Maybe I can settle for the sex, then,” he says, eager to distract Cas from his argument. Cas tenses and Dean thinks, for a moment, that he's won the fight. No such luck. Cas closes his book and glares at Dean.

“You're repressing. It's unhealthy,” Cas says blankly, inching out of Dean's reach and crossing his arms. Dean's pissed again, and he glares at Cas in a fiery sort of way that he hasn't used in a while.

“How would you know, anyway?” Dean says, and he stands from the couch and heads for the coat closet. A part of him knows he's being a dick, that he's overreacting... but this is *Mom* they're talking about, and Sam and Cas are trying to dredge up memories Dean's long since buried. Of course it's not Dean's fault he's defensive, that he's acting slightly over the top. “It's not exactly like you've got a mother. It's kind of a *human* thing.” As soon as the words are out of his mouth, Dean realizes he's crossed a line... but he doesn't feel like taking it back, either.

Cas flinches like he's been hit, eyes widening before they narrow into a glare like daggers that might have terrified Dean if he wasn't so damn pissed. Dean pulls his jacket from the closet and tugs it on.

“Where are you going?” Cas demands.

“Out.”

“Where?”

“*Out*,” Dean repeats, more sharply than intended. Cas stares at him in that intense way of his, as though he’s staring right through Dean’s flesh and into his soul or something. Dean breaks eye contact because he’s pretty sure that look could make him feel really guilty, really fast.

... But Dean is obviously *right* and there’s nothing to feel guilty about. At least, that’s what he tells himself.

“If you happen to *repress* to the point where you can’t drive home, call me,” Cas hisses just as Dean closes the door. Dean stands in front of the closed door under the glow of their porch light for a moment, annoyed that Cas had to go and show Dean that he cares, even as he’s insulting him.

*

Dean wakes up the following morning in a fog. When he’s conscious enough to realize it, he knows something is very wrong – the kitchen doesn’t smell like breakfast or coffee. Furthermore, he’s on the couch and not on the bed with Cas, who is sitting there, cross-legged, and has his nose in a book as usual. Dean’s head is killing him and – which is also weird – there’s no aspirin in reach.

Basically, Cas is not acting like he usually does when he suspects Dean will be hung over.

“Cas?” Dean grumbles, sitting up. Cas only looks up from his book for a moment, raising an eyebrow.

“I’ll drive you somewhere to eat if your delicate head is hurting too much to do it yourself,” Cas says tersely. “But brush your teeth first, your mouth likely smells like a brewery.”

This is a lot of information for Dean’s admittedly throbbing head, and he leans back against the couch for a minute, closing his eyes and squeezing his temples with his forefingers. He tries to remember last night, but he’s finding it hazy and difficult.

“Gotta pick up the Impala,” he says groggily after a moment, vaguely remembering having taken a cab home. Apparently he *had* gotten too drunk to drive, but was, typically, too proud to call Cas and had managed to navigate a phonebook on his own.

“Done,” Cas says curtly.

Dean opens his eyes.

“You walked there?”

“It’s not far.”

They’re both silent a moment and Dean thinks that Cas might have gone back to his reading.

“What time did I come home?” Dean asks, finally breaking the silence.

“12:47am,” Cas says. Dean finds it weird that Cas knows the exact minute... but then, it’s Cas, so it’s not really that weird at all.

“What time did I leave?”

“9:30.”

“Shit.”

Well, that would explain why Cas is pissed.

Dean hasn't gone out drinking like this since well before Christmas – before he realized how he felt about Cas and decided that he wanted to hold onto something good in his life, for once. It's not that his ghosts went away, per se, but rather he's had something else to focus on. A warm, positive little ball of light in his life that made everything haunting him take back burner. He hasn't *needed* to drink.

“Why don't we go to a diner?” Dean asks, hoping that Cas might just let this go and Dean can smooth it over.

“I can drop you off at a diner, if you wish.”

Dean sighs. He's not going to get off easy, it seems.

“Listen, Cas – “

Cas clears his throat... and there's something in it, some weird undercurrent Dean picks up on because he knows Cas inside and out. It puts him on alert.

“Dean, please be forward with me. Did you go home with anyone last night?”

Dean stares at Cas dubiously, trying to process what he's just been asked.

“What?”

Cas sighs and refuses to meet Dean's eyes, despite how intently Dean is trying to look into his.

“If you cheated on me, I'd like to know. It's not an impassable roadblock, but...”

Dean stares at Cas like he's grown another head.

“What? Whoa, whoa, easy, Sunshine. I would never – “

“There was blonde hair on your coat when you came home. You didn't smell like you.” Cas doesn't look angry; he looks weary. More tired than Dean has seen him in a while. Dean feels all sorts of feelings tugging at his heart and he hates all of them. He wonders whether the wave of nausea in his stomach is from all the alcohol he drank last night or something else.

Dean wishes to God he could remember last night. For all his blankness, though, he knows that no way under the sun could he cheat on Cas. Cas is too important to fuck up over a one night stand.

“I did not mean to push you too hard, Dean,” Cas is saying suddenly, “I – Sam and I... I fought my way through hell for you, slayed legions of demons for you. I just wanted to help you fight your own demons. Dean, I,” and Dean can hear Cas choking slightly, almost inaudibly, on the words. It breaks Dean's friggin heart. “I love you. I apologize. Please do not sleep with anyone else.”

Dean's off the couch and crawling into bed beside Cas in half a second, even despite the protests from his ailing head. He kisses Cas and kisses him again, then kisses his forehead and nose. He pulls back a bit so he can look in Cas' eyes.

"I love you, too," Dean whispers, pressing his forehead against Cas'. "I didn't sleep with anyone, Cas, Jesus. Don't you know..." Dean shakes his head slightly because he sucks at the whole feelings thing, particularly articulating them. "Don't you know you're all I need, man? Shit, Cas, I've never been this happy before. Like. Ever." This has surged so deep into chick flick land that Dean feels like he may possibly be betraying his manhood. He swallows this feeling, though, because the look in Cas' eyes catches him off guard.

"Oh," Cas replies flatly, like all the fight's been drained from him.

They're quiet a moment, just looking at each other.

"What about the blonde hair? And perfume?" Cas asks, but there's no accusation in his tone. He only sounds curious, now.

Dean glances at his jacket, which is draped over the back of the couch where he apparently left it last night. Then his eyes travel to the floor beside the couch and his face lights up with understanding.

"Oh, shit! Duh. Christ, okay." Dean scrambles off the bed and over to the couch. There's a shopping bag beside it and he grabs it and quickly climbs into bed with Cas again.

"I don't remember the majority of last night – okay, that sounds bad, sorry – but I remember this, now. I think. I was taking a cab home and saw this in the window of a department store and I thought of you. And they were having some sort of late night special or whatever, I don't remember, but they were open and I told the cabbie to wait. And I think I pissed off a few people? Probably. And the chick that helped me pick it for you was kinda touchy-feely if you get what I mean, and she was blonde, so that'd be it. And the perfume is probably from that part of the department store where they try to sell you scented shit for girlfriends. I was pretty drunk, man."

Cas glances at the bag.

"What is it?"

"... I honestly don't fucking remember."

Cas heaves a longsuffering sigh and opens the bag. His face lights up when he sees what's inside – even though Dean knows the guy's struggling to keep from looking too happy because he doesn't want Dean to get off that easy. Dean's sure he should be ashamed at stooping to bribery, but if there's one thing Cas likes, it's sweaters.

Cas has been pretty bummed lately that the weather's simply too warm for all his dorky, awful sweaters. Since early May hit, even the angel had to concede that the time for knit and wool things had past. He's got an array of t-shirts, now, and a few light jackets, but Dean catches him sometimes looking a little wistfully at all his ugly sweaters when he sees them in the drawer.

So, Dean's decided that can at least have cardigans. He's pretty sure they're like, similar enough or whatever. Same general idea. Even when he was stupid drunk last night, the display window showing off a new line of completely atrocious cardigans had reminded Dean of Cas. They bear similar patterns to the thick ones Cas is has become so fond of, but are made of a lightweight material with a nice v cut, perfect for warmer weather. The design is busy and the colors are weird, but he can tell that Cas loves it so it's worth the eyesore.

“You like it?” Dean asks after Cas has inspected it.

“Of course,” Cas says, like the question confuses him. “I love it, Dean.”

Dean grins.

“So, truce?” Dean asks, ruffling Cas’ hair. Cas’ expression is suddenly less cheerful.

“No,” he says flatly.

“What? What the hell, Cas?”

“You came home at one in the morning, Dean. I was... worried about you.” He says the last part like he’s embarrassed of it or something. Dean’s reminded of all the times he’s been worried about Sam, how relieved and equally pissed he’d been when he figured out whatever happened each time. He gets why Cas is pissed.

“I said I was sorry,” Dean says in a pouty voice, flashing his sweetest smile at Cas, puckering his lip oh-so-slightly. Cas is unfazed.

“I am not swayed by bribery, Dean. I love the sweater, but I’m angry at you.”

“Well, shit,” Dean says, “What can I do? Are you, like, ever going to forgive me?”

“Yes. But I have conditions.”

Dean groans.

“Number one – you agree to *never do that again*. Either bring me, if you must, and I’ll drive you home, or just don’t get piss drunk in the middle of the night.”

“Done,” Dean says immediately, because he has no intentions of doing that again. He didn’t like the way Cas looked at him earlier, like he was afraid everything was going to fall apart or something. Like he was afraid of losing this, what they have together. Dean hates that he was responsible for that look.

Cas looks wary, but he plows on. “Two – you make me breakfast.”

“*What?*” Dean whines. “I’m the hungover one here.”

Cas shrugs. “That is your own fault. The only thing you are better at making than me is French toast. I’d like that.”

“Fine,” Dean grumbles, because he’s not exactly in the position to be complaining.

“Three – I’d like to sleep with you, right now.”

Dean swallows.

“I am *so* okay with that, man,” Dean says, biting his lip subconsciously. He thinks it’s kinda funny that Cas says it all formal like that, every time. Dean just says ‘fuck’, like he always has, but Cas doesn’t seem to mind his lack of tact.

“I’m angry with you. I’m going to be rough and you’re not going to complain,” Cas growls.

And – yeah, okay, Cas is typically kinda gentle when he tops for whatever reason, which is cool with Dean because (and he'd never, ever, admit it, ever), he's a little afraid of going at it too hard when he's not entirely in control. Cas doesn't mind what pace they're at no matter *who* tops, but they've got an unspoken agreement that Cas doesn't slam into him so hard he feels it the following day. It's part of that weird symbiotic relationship they've got going on, the whole thing where they don't always need to speak to understand what the other wants.

Dean swallows again, because this is a big step... but he also realizes right away that he's willing to take it. He's almost looking forward to it.

"Fine," he says quickly, and Cas looks taken aback, like he'd been expecting Dean to protest.

"Lastly, we're celebrating Mother's Day."

"C'mon, Cas – " Dean starts to protest because, *seriously*, are they really back to this subject? Cas puts a finger to Dean's lips before he can say anything else, though.

"It does not have to be Sam's idea. You may choose. Even if it's very small, Dean. We could eat dinner in her honor or plant a flower outside for her. It is your decision."

Dean is quiet, picking at loose threads in the couch, mulling this over.

"Your mother was a remarkable woman, Dean. Her memory should be celebrated. I don't want it to cause you pain every year."

Dean heaves a heavy, heavy sigh, and looks up and meets Cas' eyes.

"Okay," is all he says.

"Okay?" Cas repeats, incredulous. It's obvious he'd been expecting Dean to fight the idea til it died. Cas smiles.

"Thank you, Dean."

"I think you mentioned something about sex?" Dean says, skirting over whatever Cas is trying to articulate. Cas rolls his eyes... but then, before Dean is even properly prepared, he's kissing Dean, crawling into his lap and licking into his mouth, biting at his lips and tugging at Dean's shirt.

"That's what I'm talking about," Dean breathes, and Cas just chuckles against his mouth and pulls his boyfriend's shirt off completely.

*

Cas ends up making the French toast. Dean claims he can barely sit, let alone *cook* and Cas doesn't even argue. In fact, as he serves them both and pours Dean coffee, he's got this smug little self-satisfied grin on his face that he seems to be trying valiantly to fight. He's humming under his breath as he pours his own tea, and Dean thinks the tune might be 'Hey, Jude.'

Dean knows he's smiling a little stupidly, too, though he's trying just as hard as Cas not to look all cheesy about it.

Cas puts their food in front of them at the table and sits beside Dean. He puts an elbow on the table and cradles his chin in his palm, looking at Dean with an entirely pleased expression. Cas' hair is a mess and so is Dean's. Clearly sex hair on both counts.

Dean slumps back in his seat and groans.

"Jesus, Cas," he says, "I'm going to be feeling this all goddamn week." Dean isn't even sure if this is an exaggeration.

"It was good?" Cas asks, eyeing Dean warily, even a little self-consciously.

Dean laughs.

"Are you kidding? That was fucking awesome, man. We should have makeup sex more often." Dean is not sure this is actually a true statement. One the one hand – *shit*, Dean is having a little trouble believing that Cas was a virgin a couple weeks ago. Or maybe the whole 'being in love' thing just makes him feel like his boyfriend is a sex god or something. On the other hand, this is the kind of intense fucking you can only handle every so often.

Cas laces his fingers with Dean's and kisses his knuckles before letting go. "Thank you."

"You gonna stop staring at me all dreamy so I can eat?" Dean asks, though his smirk betrays him. Cas shakes his head.

"I enjoy the way you look after sex," Cas says casually as he pours syrup over his breakfast.

"You're not so bad yourself, Sunshine," Dean says with a wink. Cas is wearing one of his t-shirts and Dean's practically drooling over the sight of it.

"Speaking of," Cas says, "the rabbit needs food, she's running out."

Dean groans again.

"There's no way you're getting me out of the house in this condition."

"Dean."

"I'm *injured*," Dean whines.

"No, Dean, you're just well bedded."

"I can't walk."

"You're exaggerating."

"*Cas*."

Cas sighs.

"We'll go later. She has enough for right now."

Dean feels very proud that his whining actually succeeded, for once. Dean blames it on the afterglow.

*

"I think we have a case," Dean says a couple hours later, and he turns his laptop around so that Cas can see the news article he's looking at. Cas puts down his book and peers over, eyes quickly scanning the page.

"I agree," Cas says after a moment, nodding his head. "Good eye, Dean. Succubi are difficult to spot."

Dean rolls his eyes. "Give me some credit, man. I've been hunting since before I could form complete sentences."

"True. It should be a fairly easy hunt, yes?"

"Yeah. They're like demons without the human host, which means she can be ganked quick and easy. I think there's a spell that skewers em up barbecue style."

"You realize that if she uses her charm on either of us, her effects will not wear off for quite some time?" Dean is fully aware of this. Succubi are nasty sons of bitches. They use sex as a weapon – if one touches a person, he's got libido worse than a teenage boy for hours and he's too distracted to keep the thing from sucking out all his energy. Telltale sign of a succubus in an area is a bunch of dudes turning up dead with boners.

"Of course I do. You ready for potential marathon sex if she gets one of us?" Dean grins, winking at Cas.

"I am not opposed to the idea."

"C'mon, it's in North Jersey. If we leave now, we can beat traffic and be there in an hour and a half." Dean stands up and goes to get their jackets.

"Dean?" Cas asks as Dean tosses him his own jacket.

"Yeah, Cas?"

"Mother's Day is in two days. Have you chosen something, yet?" He seems worried, like Dean's forgot.

Dean has not forgotten.

"Workin' on it, Cas. Can we talk about this when we save those poor bastards out there being killed through their dicks?"

Cas wrinkles his nose.

"You're crude, Dean."

"You love me for it."

"I do," Cas agrees, and catches Dean's lips with his own on his way out the door. "But we *will* talk about this. You promised, remember?"

"Yeah, yeah," Dean says dismissively. Cas stands in the doorway and pouts and Dean makes a mental note to kick Sam's ass because he's pretty sure he taught the former-angel that look. Dean sighs.

"I *will*, okay? Scout's honor. Geez."

*

The succubus does *not* end up touching neither Dean nor Cas, which turns out to be a good thing because they're both exhausted by the time they get home. Dean strips to his boxers the second he gets through the door and flops face first into the bed. Cas takes a moment to light a few of his favorite candles and turn off the light before he undresses, puts on pajamas and crawls into bed beside Dean.

Dean curls up next to Cas and pulls him close, entwining their legs and tucking his head under Cas' chin. He feels safe and warm, like he always does when Cas is beside him. He remembers a time when he *never* felt safe, when the whole goddamn world was out to get him and his little brother. That time feels like a long, long time ago.

Dean is okay, now. More than okay.

" 'm gonna do it, Cas," Dean whispers, kissing Cas' throat softly.

"Hm?" Cas asks sleepily.

"I'm gonna do it. Go to mom's grave on Sunday."

This catches Cas' attention.

"Are you sure, Dean?" he asks carefully, quietly. Dean nods.

"You were right. Mom's 'portant." Dean yawns, losing track of what he's saying. "She'd be sad, if she knew I act like Dad every Mother's Day. Gotta go see her."

"I'm proud of you, Dean." Cas tilts his head so he can kiss Dean. Dean closes his eyes and smiles into it, enjoying the feel of Cas' scruff against his face.

"Plus, you're a holiday junkie. Can't deprive my boyfriend."

Cas chuckles.

"I love you very much, Dean."

"Love you too, Cas. Let's go to sleep."

*

Cas packs a picnic lunch for a graveyard.

It's Dean's idea, actually, and it's more than a little weird... but it seems kind of fitting, and Cas doesn't mention it. Sam doesn't even make fun of him for the idea, either. Dean gets the feeling that they're both just grateful Dean agreed to go. Neither of them wants to risk making him change his mind.

What's worse than, y'know, facing his inner demons and man pain or whatever the hell else he's going to be doing today, Dean has to ride on a *plane*. He'd sort of forgotten that in the midst of his sleepy sentiments Friday night. Now it's Sunday morning and Dean is slightly panicked.

"We can't just drive?" Dean asks the tiniest bit frantically. Sam's sitting in his kitchen with Cas and they're both drinking tea. It's ridiculously early in the morning and Dean's still in his boxers. Sam's wearing a goddamn *suit* and Cas keeps fighting with his blue tie. So far, he has it on backwards and it keeps coming loose.

“No, Dean,” Sam says, at least having the decency to sound sympathetic, “not if we want to get there, y’know, *today*.”

“C’mere, Cas,” Dean grumbles, crossing the kitchen and straightening Cas’ tie for him. Sam snorts.

“Married,” he says in a singsong voice.

“Dude, no,” Dean says, dropping his hands quickly once Cas’ tie is fixed. Cas tilts his head in confusion.

“Dude, yes. So friggin married.”

“Married couples don’t fuck as much as we do, Sammy.”

“God! Dean! Not a mental image I wanted!”

“I think I win.”

“We should get going,” Cas cuts in, “We’re going to miss our flight.”

Dean swallows. He’d been kinda hoping that would be the case.

*

Airplanes are hell. Dean would know; he’s *been* to hell. Shit, if the sadistic fuckers down there had really wanted to torture him, they could have just stuck him on a never-ending plane ride. He feels like he’s going to lose his lunch when the plane departs. An hour into the trip, Cas’ hand is probably throbbing with how tightly Dean’s holding on to it. Cas doesn’t comment as such, though.

Sam, all the while, is incredibly amused at Dean’s expense.

Turbulence shakes the plane and Dean’s eyes practically bug out of their sockets. Cas rubs reassuring circles over Dean’s hand with his thumb. Dean looks up at him, a picture of misery, and Cas kisses him. Across the aisle, a man clears his throat loudly and pointedly.

Cas turns around and frowns at the man.

“Can we assist you?”

“Hell yeah, you can. I’m trying to eat here.”

Cas looks genuinely confused.

“You may have to take up concerns about the food with a flight attendant.”

“Smartass,” the man grumbles. Cas looks even more confused, and Dean momentarily forgets his phobia in favor of being very, very pissed.

“You have a problem with my boyfriend?” Dean hisses, leaning over Cas so he can make absolutely certain the guy hears him – as well as catches the death glare Dean is sending him.

“They’ll let anyone on planes these days,” the man remarks, scoffing.

“Yeah, I thought they used to have a douchebag alarm but I guess they’ve slipped up on the security or you wouldn’t be here.”

“Excuse me?” the man says, clearly completely taken aback and equally disgusted by Dean’s comments, as though he hadn’t realized the men he taunted could taunt back.

“The only reason my fist hasn’t hit your face yet is because – “

“Dean!” Cas says firmly, putting a hand over Dean’s now balled up fist.

“He insulted you,” Dean says vehemently.

“I am not insulted. The musings of ignorant men do not bother me.”

Dean snorts but his fist unclenches and he looks away from the man, and back into Cas’ eyes.

“If I really want to piss him off, I guess I could just kiss you again.”

“There’s always that.”

“And again, and again...” Dean leans forward for what he intends to be a kiss completely inappropriate for a plane, but Sam taps him (or, rather, smacks him) on the back urgently.

“Um. Little brother. Right here. Sitting right next to you,” Sam says, looking so traumatized that Dean has to laugh.

“Too PG-13 for you, Sammy?”

A sudden bout of turbulence wipes the smile off of Dean’s face instantly. Sam sniggers, looking vindicated.

“We’ll land soon, Dean,” Cas assures him.

“Not soon enough,” Dean says through gritted teeth. And if he leans into Cas a little more than necessary, well, no one has to notice.

*

“Sure you wanna do this?”

Sam, Cas, and Dean are standing at the precipice of Lawrence’s prettiest graveyard, staring in. The cab that brought them there is driving off already, though Dean supposes it’s not too late to call him back. He’s not going to, though. Instead, Dean replies to Sam’s question with a nod, unsure whether he trusts himself to speak or not.

It’s kind of surreal, being in a cemetery where they’re not there to dig up a grave and torch the remains. Dean finds that it’s actually sort of peaceful without fear and adrenaline forcing him to dig deep holes that were never meant to be dug up again. Many of the graves have flowers and there are trees all around in full bloom. Dean thinks idly that spring is a good time of year for Mother’s Day.

Everyone follows Dean to Mary’s gravesite, because he’s the only one who’s ever been to it. Sam had been a baby when they last came; Dean’s surprised he remembers where it is at all. He does, though, and he’s able to lead them all right to it. Her headstone is under a tree, which was substantially smaller when Dean was last here. It’s a pink flowering tree that has blossoms fluttering in the breeze everywhere.

Dean takes a huge breath and lets his eyes trace the words on the tombstone. *Mary Winchester. Loving Mother, Beloved Wife.* And – and, shit, Dean can feel his vision blurring and he stares at the sky, breathing in and out deeply again. Sam has walked over to the headstone and is plucking roots and grass off it that have overtaken it from years of neglect. There's no remains buried beneath it, of course, though Dean thinks her ashes might have been placed in before the hole was covered. He distinctly remembers his four year old self not getting why they had dug up a whole and closed it up again.

He understands why Sam and Cas wanted to come here, now. He can't put it into words why, though. It's just an understanding that's hit him. It hurts, seeing this, but it's the good kind of hurt. The healing kind.

"Hey, Mom," Dean whispers, and to his credit his voice only cracks a tiny bit.

"Happy Mother's Day," Sam adds, though he's looking at the sky and not the grave. Dean gets it; Sam thinks their mom is in heaven, and so does he. Despite everything, Dean has a feeling God – if he's real – gave her a little amnesty. She did kind of have a lot of forces working to make her make that deal, after all.

And she was a damn good mom, too. Dean remembers that.

Dean rubs his palm against his eyes roughly for a moment. When his hand falls back to his side, Cas takes it in his. Dean is grateful for the familiar pressure in the gesture.

"Well!" Dean says after a moment of silence. He clears his throat because the word didn't come out quite as light-hearted as intended. He tries again. "Well! Okay, I think we all said that remembering Mom isn't supposed to be a sobfest. I don't know about you, but I'm hungry as hell and I think Mom would definitely approve of Cas' apple pie, so let's make this slightly less awkward and unpack the food."

Sam flashes Dean a grateful smile. His eyes are red, and Dean knows Sam's been crying a bit too. It's a little different for Sam – Sam's missing someone in a completely different way. He's missing a woman he'd have given anything to have in his life. He's missing a presence that should have been there. They'd met briefly when they were sent back in time, and the look on Sam's face had been awed. There was love there, instant and pure and running deep. It must have killed Sam to get a brief glimpse of her and know he'd never get it.

Sam's getting closure now, too, Dean realizes. This is good for all of them.

Cas is pulling out his – get this – red and white checkered picnic blanket, just like the ones in the movies. He gets to work pulling out typical picnic dishes. Pie, salad, sandwiches, chips, potato salad, an All-American picnic and Dean is pretty sure Cas googled this. Dean is pleased, and he kisses Cas on the nose to show it. He's wondering if it's a bad sign that he's not even embarrassed that Sam saw him doing such a ridiculously cheesy thing.

The sandwiches Cas packs are, unsurprisingly, delicious, and Cas makes Dean a potato salad lover against all odds. Sam keeps glancing at Mary's headstone and then back to Dean with this strange look on his face like he can't decide whether to grin or cry. Dean decides this look is okay with him and he stops worrying.

When they're done eating, they all lay down on the blanket and stare at the sky. The day is bright blue with puffy white clouds like cotton balls, slow moving across the sky and making indistinct shapes. One looks like a pair of wings and Dean elbows Cas and points it out. Cas smiles.

"This was weirdly nice," Sam says after a while of them all laying quietly.

“Weirdly”? Were you expecting something else?” Dean asks.

“Well...” Sam says sheepishly, “I know I kept trying to reassure you, but I was afraid it was going to be gloomy as hell. But this is... nice.”

“Well, Mom’s awesome,” Dean says offhand, and it hits him how good it feels to be able to talk about Mom so easily, without it feeling like his heart is carrying a load of bricks. This was such a good idea. The longer they stay here, the more grateful he is that he agreed to this, that Sam suggested it all.

Sam chuckles. “Yeah she is.”

Cas gets up and goes over to the picnic basket, rummaging through it. Dean’s about to tell him that if he eats anything else, even pie, he’s going to explode, but Cas pulls something else out. He’s got a little package in his hands, and when he comes closer Dean sees that the package contains seeds.

“I thought of bringing flowers,” Cas says, tearing open the packet, “but I thought it would be better to plant our own. They’ll thrive when we’re gone. We can’t visit often, so Mary will always have flowers...” Cas trails off, like he’s not exactly sure this is a good idea now that he’s saying it out loud. Sam and Dean look equally excited, though, and when Cas notices, the apprehension seems to drain from his body.

“Cas, that’s a great idea!” Sam says at the same time Dean says, “Dude, you’re awesome.”

Cas has three tiny garden spades and he hands one to both Sam and Dean. They each dig their own respective holes and bury the seeds deep into the ground. Cas chose bellflowers because (or, so the Internet has told him), they live very long and bloom very bright. They’re, apparently, a vibrant purple and grow in clusters. Dean’s already wondering when their next trip back will be, because he’s eager to see how the flowers turn out.

Surprisingly enough, the time goes by quickly. Soon the sun is setting and it’s time to catch their plane home. They say awkward goodbyes to the rock with their mother’s name on it before they leave. There’s none of the somberness that was there when they first arrived, though; it’s as if some weight has been lifted from their shoulders.

It’s a good feeling.

*

When they get home, Cas goes to boil water tea in the kitchen right away, out of instinct. Dean’s often mused that Cas is almost as addicted to tea as he is to holidays, sweaters and candles. If he’s not already, he’s certainly getting there. Before he can turn the knob on the stove, though, Dean comes behind him and his hand slides over Cas’, stopping him.

“Thank you, Cas,” Dean purrs in his ear.

“You have nothing to thank me for,” Cas breathes, though Dean notices from experience the slight shift in Cas’ voice.

“Yes I do. You pushed me to go. I wouldn’t have done it if you didn’t want me to.”

“I am happy I could help. Mary is important to you.”

“So are you,” Dean says, losing track of the conversation as he kisses Cas’ jaw. Cas makes a tiny, noncommittal noise.

“Let’s have a bubblebath, Cas,” Dean says suddenly, spinning Cas around in his arms until he’s facing him. Cas smiles, more with his eyes than his mouth, like he usually does. The thing with Cas is that he *means* it when he smiles with his eyes. A smile with his mouth is just bonus points.

“I’d like that,” Cas says, and the smile does reach his lips, now.

“Best Mother’s Day ever, Cas,” Dean says offhand as he slides Cas’ tie from his neck. “Never celebrated it before.”

Cas’ eyes trace the movement of Dean’s hands, and Dean’s not even entirely sure he’s listening.

“I’m glad I was here for it,” Cas says once the tie falls to the floor.

“Me too.”

It’s a little trippy that Dean spent Mother’s Day in a graveyard and had a pretty friggin’ awesome time – but everything with Cas is trippy, Dean’s learned. He likes that. He actually kind of loves it.

Still a Soldier in My Eyes

Dean finds Cas in a gazebo in the park around the corner from their flat, curled up in on himself with his forehead on his knees. Dean walks over, irritated out of his skin because of how he's worked himself up on the way over. He walks straight to Cas and grabs his shoulder, shoving him a little.

"What the hell, Cas?" he asks sharply, "I'm in the middle of grilling, I turn around and you're gone, man? Our burgers are probably cold by now. I've been looking for you for an hour. What the *fuck*?"

Then Dean realizes the way Cas is looking at him, some combination of angry and really, really upset. Dean's caught a little off guard.

"You didn't tell me what this holiday is truly about, Dean," Cas says after a second of silence. "Fallen soldiers."

This answer further serves to piss Dean off, and he gives Cas a level glare.

"Oh, so you're pissed I lied and you run off on me? FYI, everybody barbecues and parties it up for Memorial Day. The meaning got lost a long time ago. Not an excuse to be a dick."

Cas is silent for a very long time after that, and Dean feels vindicated. By default, Cas obviously owes him make-up sex and Dean is topping the *fuck* out of him. Those are the rules.

"I know so many fallen soldiers," Cas says finally, "So why me? Why do I get to live when so many of my brothers have fallen? Why have I been brought back when so many..."

... Oh. That explains it.

"No, Cas," Dean says immediately, shaking his head, realization dawning on him, "No, no, no. Shut up."

Cas looks at Dean blankly, shaking his head slowly with an even, awful smile. Dean's heart clenches in his chest. This angel – this warrior of God, who fought his way through hell and helped save the goddamn world – he's seriously having survivor's guilt right now?

"You wouldn't understand, Dean. Your brother is alive – you went to hell to save him. I did... I did *nothing* to save my brothers. I killed many of them myself. Why do I deserve to –"

Dean can't take this, can't hear another second because Cas is *so wrong* and Dean's so bad with words that he doesn't know how to tell him that in a way he'll believe. He kisses Cas instead, full on the mouth and slightly desperate in the way only someone whose heart is breaking a little can be. Cas' eyes widen; he doesn't reciprocate, just lets Dean ravage his mouth and clench at the lapels of his jacket. He looks confused when Dean pulls away and searches Cas' blue eyes like he's hoping his kiss might have fixed it.

Of course, it didn't. Dean scowls.

"You're – shut up, Cas, Christ," he says, shaking a little at Cas' trench coat, "You think you're the only one who's watched soldiers die when you should have? Ellen, Jo, my dad... why am I alive, Cas? Why are any of us alive? You tried to stop this war. If anyone deserves to live, it's you."

Cas looks uncertain, though not entirely unreceptive. Dean takes the initiative to kiss Cas again, and this time Cas kisses back, hot and heavy like they're not in a damn park on Memorial Day. To be fair, the gazebo is secluded in a faraway section of the park, shaded heavily by a circle of trees and Dean decides right away that he doesn't give a fuck.

"Love you, Cas," Dean says between kisses, "God, I love you. So glad you're alive, Cas, so glad I've got you."

This causes Cas to pause and look at Dean in that deep way he always does, like he's looking past Dean's skin into his soul or something.

"I love you as well, Dean." And then they're kissing again.

Cas ends up in Dean's lap, mouthing and biting at his neck urgently, sucking bruising kisses over the hickeys that are already there, just starting to fade. Dean gets looks for them all the time, on the streets, in the grocery store, everywhere, and he loves it. He fucking loves it. He wishes he could show off his handprint scar, show everyone who he *belongs to*, who called dibs on his ass in hell... but he can't. This is the closest he'll get and he loves it.

Cas' hands slide under Dean's shirt and they're everywhere, slipping up and down Dean's torso, clawing at him. This is Cas showing Dean that he's grateful, Dean realizes. Dean actually *helped*, put something into perspective, made something *click* for a second. It's usually Cas making things better, and Dean revels in being important for a minute.

Cas tugs at the edges of Dean's shirt, willing him to take it off and it's a little weird because they're in a park, for God's sake, but Dean goes with it because Cas needs it and he needs it a little, too. Dean's got soldiers in his rearview mirror, too, and he'd be lying if he said he didn't feel like Cas is feeling, sometimes. Like he's wasn't worth saving, like someone else should have gotten to live instead.

But he's got Cas, and here and now and all he can do is that whoever there is to thank that he survived for moments like *this*. Dean lets Cas pull off his shirt and then he's pulling off Cas' jacket and shirt, too. His nails ghost up and down Cas' back, teasing, and Cas whimpers.

"You're my favorite soldier, Cas," Dean breathes slightly aware that it's a stupid sentiment that makes no sense.

"I am somewhat broken, Dean. I'm not an angel anymore. Not a soldier."

"Still a soldier to me," Dean says – and gasps, because Cas is biting at his ear in a way that is sinfully perfect from practice and the fact that he just *knows* Dean in a way no drunken hookup ever could. "Love that you're mine. Love that I've got you, that you're here. I think you were brought back for *me*." Sometimes Dean is a little stunned at how much of a girl he's become. Then he sees the way Cas looks at him when he says this kind of cheesy shit, and he forgets to be embarrassed.

Cas fingers are on Dean's zipper and Dean can feel his heart hammering in his chest, pulse going crazy. A sudden thought strikes him and he groans, irritated.

"Save it for the bedroom, baby," Dean says, breathless, "no lube here."

"Not a baby Dean," Cas growls, reaching for his discarded jacket. He produces a packet of lube and Dean's dick goes from interested to *very interested* in about two seconds flat. He raises an eyebrow at Cas.

“In your pocket? Seriously?”

“I think of you often,” Cas says, by means of explanation, “How I want you, where I want you... it makes sense to be prepared, should the opportunity arise for those-“

“Shit, Cas, you’re fucking killing me here,” Dean says, because Jesus *Christ*, Cas is basically admitting to the fact that he fantasizes about Dean all the time and that he’s game to fuck pretty much anywhere. The idea has Dean’s blood running hot.

Cas’ fingers are at Dean’s zipper again, pulling it open and tugging Dean’s jeans and boxers down below his ass. The wooden floor of the gazebo feels extremely weird but Dean ignores it because Cas’ hands are on Dean’s dick too fast for him to care. Dean throws his head back, hitting the gazebo wall with his head. Cas chuckles and the sound of the packet of lube opening sends a tiny bit of electricity coursing through Dean’s system. It’s wet and slippery on Dean’s dick and borderline unbearable. Dean’s slightly desperate to be inside Cas right about now.

Dean tugs at Cas’ jeans and pulls them down, urging Cas on. Cas awkwardly gets on his knees so he can pull his jeans all the way off – in a fucking *park*, Jesus *Christ* – and then Dean’s got a lap full of naked angel and it’s slightly overwhelming. Because, again. Park.

“Right here, Cas?” Dean asks, tone smug and slightly awed, “Want me so bad you need me right here, where anyone can see us?” This is borderline dirty talk which isn’t normally Dean’s style, but he is so far past caring it doesn’t even matter. And if the way Cas’ voice is coming short and shallow is any indication, it’s doing it for him, too.

“I can cross it off my list,” Cas says – and that’s it, that’s a wrap, Dean is *so* done with the slow buildup thing. He plucks the lube from Cas’ hand and slicks his fingers up with the rest of it. Cas’ eyes flutter and he rests his forehead on Dean’s shoulder, voice doing all sorts of obscene things.

It’s more than a little awkward trying to prep Cas at this angle, but Cas’ quiet whimpers and near-moans are making up for it by far. He squirms, pushing down into Dean’s fingers, mouth forming an ‘o’ against Dean’s neck.

“No more, please, Dean, let me ride you –“

“You’re killing me here, man-“

“Get inside me, Dean. Now.”

Dean’s nothing if not a soldier, and he’s not going to disobey a direct order when it’s so damn insistent. He slips his fingers out, eliciting a soft hiss from Cas. Cas wastes no time, pressing close to Dean and pushing onto him. Dean’s head hits the gazebo again and he moans, vaguely aware that he’s way too loud for their current location. They’ve never tackled this position before and good *God* does this pressure feel good.

Then Cas is moving, pulsing his hips like a pro and Dean’s hands are everywhere, scratching and pulling. They end up in Cas’ hair, tugging in a way that he knows is just shy of painful (just how Cas likes it). Cas breath chokes and Dean knows he’s hit his prostrate. His thrusts become slightly less calculated, then, breath punctuated by sinful noises that are making Dean a little crazy. His arms wrap around Cas’ waist and he tugs him close. Cas’ chest his heaving against his, shuddering over and over. Dean loves being this close to Cas, feeling his heartbeat, especially during sex. It’s trust in its highest form, gripping each other like this, nearly

clinging. He kisses Cas, gasping all the while, and every flex of Cas' hips is love, love, love. It should be weirder than it is.

But it isn't.

One of Dean's hands finds Cas' dick and it's all whimpers, then, just a mess of incoherency and whispered nonsense pleas and Dean's actually caught off guard when he comes. Cas follows shortly after, splattering across Dean's chest and they're in a fucking *park* and it's *awesome*. Cas keeps kissing Dean through their orgasms, one hand on Dean's face and the other carding through his hair.

Cas presses his cheek against Dean's and brings his mouth to Dean's ear in a tiny whisper.

"I am glad I'm alive, Dean. You make me happy to be alive."

"Me too, Cas," Dean says, chuckling and out of breath. "Me too."

"Happy Memorial Day, Dean."

"Happy Memorial Day, Cas."

Dean kisses Cas' nose with a smile.

... and that's when the cop walks by.

From LJ Comments:

"You there! Is that man naked?" the cop asks, stopping in his tracks. Dean groans. Figures.

"Are you fucking blind? Of course he's naked."

The cop is silent a moment, clearly unsure how to proceed. Dean figures this isn't in their training. Cas is tense in his arms and Dean chuckles.

"Okay, I think you're actually dreaming, man. You're asleep. Like, seriously, what are the odds of a naked dude and another half-naked dude just chilling in the park like it's normal?"

The cop is still silent, staring blankly. It is incredibly weird.

"I'm dreaming," the cop repeats, nodding. "Okay."

"Happy Memorial Day, man!" Dean calls as the cop walks away. "Also - you're dreaming about gay porn, you might want to think about that!"

Dean can see the man go white even from where he is, and the man's pace picks up immediately. Dean laughs out loud and presses a kiss to Cas' head.

"Cas?"

"Yes, Dean?"

"Put your pants on."

Like Twilight, Only Not

Dean is beautiful in sleep.

Castiel always wakes up first, eyes flickering open the moment golden light slips through curtained windowpanes to kiss his eyelids. It's nearly summer, now, and Castiel gets less sleep than he used to, what with the sun's prompt rising. Castiel doesn't mind, though. It gives him a few more quiet moments to watch Dean.

Castiel is propped up on an elbow, sitting up slightly so his eyes can roam all over his lover's sleeping form. He's tracing patterns absently in Dean's skin, some of them meaningless shapes and others Enochian words with meanings so profound the English language could not begin to express them. His touch is a ghost, feather light. He leans forward and presses a gentle kiss to Dean's shoulder and leans back again. He has a small smile on his lips, the kind only Dean can pull out of him, even in slumber. Sometimes Castiel marvels at how he never once smiled in all his thousands of years of existence – and now he does it so often, so easily. All because of Dean.

Dean twitches slightly in his sleep – dreaming, Castiel knows. Castiel often wishes he could visit Dean's dreams, like he used to. If only just to observe. For so long after the apocalypse, Dean had terrible dreams. Dean does not know that Castiel knows this. Dean used to thrash about on the couch, whisper his brother's name under his breath in a panic. Castiel would lie awake in his bed – sleep came with great difficulty, those first months – and wonder whether or not to wake Dean and save him from his imagined terrors. It had not been Castiel's place, back then. Dean doesn't thrash about in his sleep anymore, but Castiel still worries.

Dean shifts in his sleep and unconsciously wraps an arm around Castiel's waist. Castiel lays down and lets himself get pulled in. Their legs tangle up, as they always do. Castiel presses a kiss to Dean's jaw and lets his lips linger there, against his lover's skin. Skin – skin that Castiel himself knit back together, restored from a decaying mass of shredded oblivion. Beneath this skin is Dean's soul – also battered, though Castiel had been unable to knit *that* back together wholly. It is still very worn at the edges, littered with scars, more than a bit broken from so many years of ceaseless torture. Castiel did the best he could. He has seen Dean's soul, exposed and raw and throbbing in the fiery depths of perdition, and he thinks that it is beautiful. Castiel slips a hand over the scar he left on Dean when he bound Dean's soul to flesh. He likes to think he is close to Dean's soul when he does this.

Chest pressed to warm chest, Castiel cannot get over the idea that he was crafted for this very purpose. Every angel is designed with a specific function to perform. All are soldiers, certainly, but on an individual level, each has a role he is built for. Some are strategists of war, others are researchers. Some, like Anna, are stationed on Earth to study its humans for thousands of years. Castiel always thought that was his role, as well. Angels are

rarely told their purpose until it is necessary for them to know. For thousands of years, Castiel did not know that his purpose was to meet Dean.

And, perhaps, to fall in love.

There is a certain joy an angel experiences when he discovers his piece in the grand scheme of the universe. Castiel thinks, perhaps, this is why Anna fell. She must have had some higher purpose she had not yet been able to fulfill. Her being felt incomplete and her restless spirit, in an anxious fleet of fear over the infinity of a purposeless existence, caused her to tear out her Grace. Castiel had never understood it, not until long after he was assigned to save Dean from hell. Only in hindsight has Castiel realized how empty he had been before he was told *why* he was created. He sympathizes with Anna, now.

... He does not grieve her death, though. She nearly killed his Winchesters. That is an irredeemable offense.

Dean would claim free will brought them together, but a small piece of the lingering soldier in Castiel still wonders if it was fate, or some divine will. The part of him that is still a son dares to hope his Father ordained this. Castiel cards his hands through Dean's hair and he feels that this is *right*. It was right to rebel, to fight for this. If nothing else, Castiel was crafted to save Dean. Who is to say that Dean was not crafted to save Castiel, as well?

Dean stirs again, and this time he turns to face Castiel. His green eyes flicker open slowly, and he smiles. He often smiles when he wakes up to see Castiel already awake, looking at him.

"Hey, Sunshine," he grumbles, still sleepy, and presses a kiss to Castiel's nose. Castiel wrinkles his nose, but returns Dean's smile.

"Hello, Dean."

"You're a creep, you know that? Going all Edward Cullen on me, watching me sleep." His tone is fond, though.

"Perhaps. It is worth the indulgence, I think. I believe I understand his motivations."

"Hey! I'm totally not the Bella in this relationship."

“Perhaps we should stop comparing ourselves to bad fiction.”

“Agreed. Hey – I got an idea. Let’s get you a new sweater today, hmm?” Dean’s eyes are flickering shut again and he’s mumbling now, nuzzling against his pillow.

“It’s June, Dean.”

Dean waves his hand in the air passively, dismissing the statement.

“Mh. Cardigan, then.”

“*June.*”

“Sweater vest?”

“Dean.”

“Uhh – I don’t know, hideous cardigan sweater vest?”

Castiel smiles.

“I would like that.”

Yes – this, all of this, is definitely *right*.

Daddy Issues Are So Last Season

It's 85 degrees Fahrenheit out, and Dean's shivering. He's wearing the thickest pair of sweats he owns and is sitting on the couch, swaddled in a blanket. His nose feels cold, and he wrinkles it several times before pulling the blanket over his face. Through the fabric, he glares in Cas' general direction.

"Cold enough for you, Cas?" he asks sarcastically, irritated.

Cas, on the contrary, looks practically gleeful. He's wearing a giant, oversized ugly sweater that is hideous, even for his standards. It's striped with weird, clashing colors and Dean doesn't understand how anyone in any universe could ever think they went together. Worse than the colors, though, is the fact that there's a pile of kittens along the side of the sweater, each with button eyes. The look in Cas' eyes when he discovered it at their local thrift store had been, in Dean's opinion, borderline manic. Currently, Cas is sitting beside Dean on the couch, surrounded by a pile – a literal *pile* – of sweaters they picked up earlier today. 'Content' doesn't begin to describe it. He's humming some indecipherable tune under his breath and Dean only sees Cas this blissed out after sex.

... He's slightly jealous that a pile of sweaters could put that same look on Cas' face, but whatever.

"Yes, Dean," Cas says, oblivious to Dean's sarcasm, "I can now comfortably wear my sweaters."

"Cas. It's June. You're not *supposed* to be able to wear your sweaters."

"I see no reason why not if we have such a powerful air conditioning unit."

"Because I'm friggin' freezing, Cas, that's why." Dean's pretty sure the temperature in the house is well below 65.

"You're welcome to one of my sweaters, Dean."

Dean groans.

"I'm taking you to Sweaters Anonymous or something."

"To... what?"

"It's like – nevermind. Get under the blanket with me and make it warmer."

"Yes, Dean," Cas says, and Dean can hear in the angel's voice how pleased he is.

Dean lifts up the edge of the covers and Cas cuddles in close, wrapping an arm around Dean's waist as Dean covers them up again. Cas resumes his quiet humming, and Dean smiles.

"Y'know, Cas. There's another holiday coming up. Got any big plans for Father's Day? And – I'm saying this right now, man, no more graveyard holidays. Sam and I came to terms with Dad's death, okay? We saw him like, climb out of hell. I think we're good."

Cas goes taut and tense and Dean raises an eyebrow, confused. Holiday talk usually makes Cas light up even more than sweaters. Dean's confusion intensifies when Cas remains silent, unmoving, for several moments more.

"Cas?"

"I'm sure you and Sam will find a suitable way to spend this holiday, Dean," Cas says at last, in a quiet, even tone that is carefully stoic. "I have no desire to participate."

"What the hell, Cas?" Dean asks, irritated, because holidays are *Cas' thing*, not Dean's, and the only reason he even mentions them is because of Cas. He's not sure why it stings that Cas is casually dismissing such a big holiday, but it does. The only reasoning Dean can think of that Cas might be having is a general dislike for John... which is seriously fucked up, and Dean won't have it. "Do you have a problem with my dad? Because Dad might have been a lot of things, but he sure as --"

"Dean. John Winchester raised the two most important men in my life. I bear him no ill will. He deserves for you and Sam to celebrate him."

Dean narrows his eyes. "But not you?"

Cas is silent again, which is beyond irritating.

"Cas," Dean barks. When he meets Cas' eyes, he finds the former-angel glaring.

"Not everyone has a father worth celebrating, Dean. I *apologize* if I lack the conviction for celebrating a holiday manifest to remind me of my own father's shortcomings." His tone is scathing and sharp, and Dean is taken aback.

Sometimes Dean forgets that Cas has daddy issues, too, and that he lost just as much as Dean – if not more – in the wake of the would-be apocalypse. He lost his faith in his father, for one, which was once his most defining characteristic. No wonder he's not big on the whole Father's Day idea. Dean kind of feels like a dick, now.

"Easy, buddy," Dean says gently, completely off the offence now. He presses a kiss to Cas' head, nose nuzzled in the other man's soft, dark hair. "We don't have to celebrate Father's Day."

"Yes you do, Dean," Cas says, tone unchanging, "Your father was a good man."

"Well," Dean replies, "Yours wasn't."

"This is not up for discussion," Cas says tersely, shifting to find the edge of the covers so he can get out of their blanket cocoon. "I will not be responsible for Sam losing this time with you. I will be content at home on that day. I'm done talking about this now."

"Yeah, well I'm not," Dean retorts, but Cas is already leaving the couch. A couple minutes later, Dean hears the shower running. He leans back against the couch and sighs. As his anger inevitably wanes, he spares a moment of vague amusement over the fact that their flat is so tiny that taking a shower is pretty much one of the only places they can get away from each other. He muses briefly over the idea of a bigger flat – or a house, even. He shakes the thought immediately. Houses require mortgages, mortgages require jobs, and jobs are for civilians. Dean is no civilian. This flat is just a nicer version of a motel and Dean and Cas are just playing normal. There are no mortgages in their future.

Dean takes the opportunity to dart out of his blanket fortress and shut off the A/C before Cas gets out of the shower. He grabs the covers and plops into bed, hiding under them and pretending to sleep in order to divert any possible repercussions from Cas. Dean hears the bathroom door open, followed by a short sharp bitchy noise that is clearly irritation on Cas' part. He doesn't turn on the A/C, though.

Dean waits, expecting Cas to come to bed eventually, but he doesn't. The lights get turned off and eventually the TV, too, but Cas doesn't join Dean. Finally, Dean sits up and looks around in the dark. Cas is on the couch, asleep, something he only does when he's pissed. The son of a bitch is *pouting*.

"Real mature, Cas," Dean mutters before laying back down and going to sleep.

*

Cas is gone when Dean wakes up, and Dean decides he's had enough of his fallen angel being a brat. Dean hasn't summoned an angel in a while – he hasn't had to, there's only one angel he cares about and he's not an angel anymore – so Dean has nearly forgotten how to do it. He messes it up twice before he finally gets it right. The telltale sound of feathers swooshing announces Gabriel's arrival.

"Dean-o! To what do I owe the pleasure?" Gabriel is shirtless, clad only in an American flag patterned boxers and a pair of Uggs. He's holding a martini glass which seems to be full of Jell-O.

"Dude, what the hell?" Dean asks, gesturing to Gabriel's outfit.

"You're better off not knowing. What is it you want? I was in the middle of something."

Dean decides to let it go. "Cas is pouting. I have no idea where he is right now."

Gabriel groans and rolls his eyes. "You brought me here to play relationship counselor for you and your husband?" He snorts. "Somehow I think I'm the wrong person for the job."

Dean shakes his head. "We're not – whatever, it's not a relationship thing. It's Father's Day."

"Ohhh," Gabriel says knowingly, nodding. "Cas is going all boohoo over his daddy issues, I'm guessing?"

"Pretty much. I figured since you guys have the same dad, you could talk him out of it."

Gabe plops onto the couch, rummaging through the cushions for the remote.

"I don't know, Dean-o. Dad really screwed him over. I'm not sure if talking about his feelings is going to solve anything. Got any candy?"

"No, we don't," Dean mutters, annoyed. "Listen, I'm not saying God's not a dick – he is. I'll be the first guy to tell you that. But we gotta help Cas get over this. I don't do holidays without Cas, and Cas is making me do Father's day –"

"*Making* you?" Gabriel asks with a wicked grin, miming a whipping motion.

"– so we're kind of at a road block here," Dean grits out, scowling at Gabriel's implication. "At least try to talk to him? Please?"

"Yeah, yeah," Gabriel says with a wave of his hand, "just go buy me some chocolate."

“Fine,” Dean says. “Don’t touch anything while I’m out.”

*

Dean comes back with a bag of mini Snickers and a tub of fudge ice cream. When he arrives, the house is at subarctic temperatures and Castiel is there sitting on the couch beside Gabriel, wearing another sweater. This one has cats, too, and Dean wonders vaguely whether or not their bunny is offended by this abundance of cat sweaters. Dean makes a mental note to buy Cas a new sweater with a rabbit on it... then bristles at how impossible, irrevocably gay he’s become. He’s seriously thinking about the *emotional wellbeing* of their pet *bunny*.

“Hey, Cas,” Dean says uneasily, slipping in the front door. For once he’s grateful for the chill; it’s hot as hell outside. Dean’s pretty sure the candy’s already starting to melt. He tosses the bag to Gabriel, who catches it eagerly, and places the ice cream on the coffee table.

“Hello, Dean,” Cas says, averting his eyes.

“We were just talking,” Gabriel says as he rips apart a candy wrapper with excessive force due to his enthusiasm, “about Dad.”

“Yeah?” Dean says, feeling friggin’ awkward. He kind of wants to turn tail and walk out the way he came. He hadn’t expected Cas to beat him home.

“Yes. Gabriel was telling me what Father is like. He’s one of the few who have actually met him.” There’s a barely-there note of bitterness that Dean picks up on, but he notices that Cas is hiding it fairly well.

Dean walks across the room and takes a tentative seat on the bed, facing the two brothers. “So, uh, what’d he tell you?”

“That Father is childish and selfish,” Cas says, and Dean glares at Gabriel. Gabriel just smiles.

“What the hell, Gabe?”

“Wasn’t lying,” Gabriel says, shrugging.

“He also told me that Father loves us,” Cas goes on. “He pointed out that he’s brought me back... many times. Gabriel as well.”

Dean nods. He’s not entirely comfortable with the whole ‘forgiving God for fucking everything up’ thing, but he supposes that’s why he called Gabriel here. To say the things Dean couldn’t because of bias.

“Most importantly, though,” Cas says, “Father gave me you. And Sam, as well. I may not forgive him, but... I do respect that he tried. He allowed me to have my prize. I will try not to...” Cas’ voice trails off, but Dean figures the unspoken words are ‘hate him’.

Dean is turning red a little – in a very manly way, of course – because of what Cas just said, how Cas described him. As a prize, something desirable and worth having. Dean looks away, looks at his hands, because he’s not sure how to process those remarks. He can feel Gabriel smirking in his direction and he tries to focus on the fact that the dick just helped him out here.

“So you’ll do Father’s Day with me and Sam?” Dean asks hopefully, once he’s managed to recover from Cas’ offhand compliments.

Cas nods. “I will not be celebrating my Father, but I am willing to do participate.”

Gabriel abruptly stands and grabs the tub of ice cream from the table.

“My work here is done,” he announce, “You’re welcome, Dean.” And then he’s gone, invisible wings flapping audibly as he leaves.

“You called Gabriel,” Cas remarks.

“Uh. Yeah.”

“You must have been quite desperate.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t like it when you’re angry at me. Especially when I didn’t, y’know, *do* anything.”

Cas is quiet a moment, looking at Dean. Dean looks back, like he always does. Like he always has, ever since their first few staring contests so long ago.

“I believe this means I owe you ‘make-up sex’,” Cas says finally, and Dean’s mouth flickers into a devious grin.

“You believe right, baby.”

Cas wrinkles his nose. “Not a baby, Dean.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “You make me say stupid shit when you turn me on. I’m not at all responsible for anything that comes out of my mouth from now until 20 minutes post-orgasm.” He wraps his arms around Cas and tugs him close, pressing their bodies together.

“Hmm. I would like to hear more of this ‘stupid shit’,” Cas says in a low voice, invading Dean’s personal space. “Tell me how you’d like me, Dean.”

Dean swallows hard.

“Let’s start with on your *knees*,” Dean supplies in a voice that is slightly more choked than he’d like. When Cas immediately complies, kneeling to the ground instantly, obediently, Dean can’t help but think that fights with Cas seriously are *not* that bad.

*

“I was thinking we could go out to eat in his honor or something,” Sam says through the phone. Dean’s driving along a dark road miles and miles from home and Sam’s on speaker. Castiel is holding the phone and looking at it curiously with his brow wrinkled, as though he’s been thrown a curveball and he’s not sure how to react. Apparently he’s never seen the speakerphone feature before.

“Isn’t that kind of... lame?” Dean asks, raising his eyebrows at the phone. He hears Sam chuckle.

“Our parents are dead, Dean,” he says flatly. “Our options are kinda limited.”

Dean laughs. “Story of our lives, Sammy. Dinner it is. Do we have to get dressed up?”

“Yes, Dean,” Cas cuts in, “it should be formal.” Dean frowns.

“Why? I hate wearing monkey suits, I just end up feeling like I’m about to impersonate a fed.”

“Because I *like* you in suits,” Cas replies, adding suggestive emphasis on the ‘like’. Dean swallows and Sam clears his throat.

“Little brother on the line, people. I seriously don’t want to hear where this conversation is going.”

Dean catches sight of a forlorn woman on the side of the road far ahead, wearing a white dress and looking up and down the road. He jerks his head in her direction, getting Cas’ attention.

“Well, you’re in luck, Sammy. We’ve just got sight of the Woman in White we’re after. I’ll have to call you back.”

“A Woman in White? Wow. We haven’t hunted one of those in... years.”

“Right? It’s actually kinda nostalgic.”

“How do you keep getting cases, anyway? How many hunts can one area have?”

“We’re actually in Maryland right now,” Dean replies, and he hears Sam snort.

“Maryland? Getting a little desperate, guys?”

“Yeah, shut up. Not everyone can just plop back into civilian life like you. If that means we have to drive a couple miles to gank a son of a bitch... well, so be it.”

The Woman in White is just ahead, and Dean slows down his car.

“Talk to you later, Sam,” Dean says.

“Goodbye, Sam,” Cas adds just as Sam says “Seeya, guys.” Cas ends the call without further ceremony.

Dean pulls to a stop in front of the Woman, who approaches the car.

“Need a lift?” Dean asks with an easy smile. He scans the area behind her, looking for something. The woman’s bones have been salted and burned; he and Cas figure she’s only around because she has some leftover possession from when she was alive left out here. He glances at Cas and sees his eyes light up – he’s seen something Dean hasn’t. Cas is out of the car in a second, wielding a lighter. The ghost pays him no mind, taking the opportunity to climb into Cas’ recently vacated seat.

“Hey, sugar,” Dean says to keep her busy. She looks at him with doleful eyes before she’s pressing close, trying to make a move on Dean. Dean isn’t exactly sure what he should do – he needs to keep her occupied while Cas is working on getting rid of her – but he sure as hell doesn’t want to kiss her. He squirms after a second of her trying to force him to reciprocate her eerily cold, ghostly kisses and shoves her off.

She looks nothing short of deranged at his aggressive rejection. Thankfully, she erupts into flames just as Dean’s starting to get a little concerned. Outside the car, Dean can see Cas silhouetted by another flame, where whatever they were searching for is burning. The ghost finally disappears and Cas climbs into the car.

“That was lame,” Dean remarks, “we never get anything like, challenging anymore.”

“We’re just very good at what we do,” Cas replies, giving Dean a small smile as Dean puts the car into drive.

“Whatever,” Dean grumbles. “Sometimes I think we should go back on the road again, man.”

Cas frowns.

“What about my candles?” he asks seriously, brow furrowed with concern. Dean can’t help but laugh at the absurdity. Dean’s suggesting uprooting their entire life, everything they’ve built here, and Cas’ first thought is his *candles*.

“Y’know, I think Sunshine would be appalled at your priorities, Cas,” Dean says, and Cas reddens, looking out the window.

“Naturally we’ll take her with us...” he mumbles, and Dean raises his eyebrows, surprised.

“Whoa, whoa, Cas. You know I’m not serious, don’t you? We’re not moving just ‘cause I’m bored. I wouldn’t do that to you.”

Now Cas looks surprised.

“Oh,” is all he says, and Dean’s stomach feels a little weird at the thought that Cas could believe so easily that Dean would be capable of being so selfish. He’s bored out his mind, yeah, but that’s nowhere near enough cause to undo everything they have.

“Maybe I just need a job or something,” Dean says offhand, just thinking out loud. Cas tilts his head and looks at him curiously.

“Like a civilian?”

“No!” Dean says indignantly, immediately. “Well. I don’t know,” he concedes after a moment, “Maybe. As a side thing. Just to keep busy or whatever.” Dean is gripping the steering wheel much more tightly than is strictly necessary and his knuckles are subsequently going pale.

“I see,” is all Cas says, and it’s incredibly unnerving. As well as he can read Cas, he still often has no idea what the hell the angel is thinking.

*

When Dean wakes up the following day, Cas isn’t there. He treks sleepily into the kitchen to find a note on the fridge that says “*Gone food shopping – will make brunch upon return*” and he scowls. He’s hungry as hell and there’s no Cas to make him breakfast. Upon further inspection, Dean finds the cupboards bare of cereal and the fridge devoid of any other substantial breakfast items. He figures Cas probably set out to make breakfast and wasn’t able to, so he decided to dart off to the store while Dean was asleep. While Dean appreciates the effort, he’s still hungry and sort of wishes they could of just gone to a diner or something instead.

He settles for a cup of coffee and waits, cradling the mug in his hands as he leans over the table tiredly. They don’t have a clock in the kitchen, so Dean has no idea how much time passes. He is aware that it’s much too long, though, and he gets more and more irritated as time goes on.

Finally, *finally* Cas returns with an array of bags on his arms, at least five bags to each arm. Dean's out of his chair and across the room to help Cas in a second – damn angel always insists on trying to carry the whole damn load of shopping bags in on his own. Cas smiles gratefully, but Dean doesn't return it.

"I'm hungry. Why'd it take you so long?"

"Good morning to you too, Dean," Cas replies. Dean takes a moment to enjoy the fact that Cas is learning the joys of sarcasm.

"I was talking to a German man," Cas goes on, and Dean's instantly on red alert. Germans are (usually) hot, and he doesn't like the idea of Cas talking to one when he's not around. He swallows the surge of overprotectiveness that has just rushed to the surface, reminding himself that he usually ends up looking like a dick when he gets like that. Cas is usually oblivious to when he's being hit on, anyway, and most people hitting on him take it as a rebuff. Dean doesn't really have anything to worry about.

"Yeah? And what did the German dude say that was so important that it delayed my breakfast two hours?"

"You're coming very close to treating me like a housewife again, Dean," Cas says in a warning tone, and Dean shuts up. He distinctly remembers the last time Cas got this impression from him. The result had included two pairs of handcuffs, several very large bruises and a level of orgasm denial that was just shy of being unbearable. Cas is creative when he's pissed.

"Sorry," Dean mumbles, looking at the ground.

"The German man asked me directions, at first. He's new to this country and could not find very many people in this area who speak German. Thankfully, I was there--"

"Whoa, you speak German?"

Cas looks at him funny.

"Of course, Dean. I speak every language."

A very vivid mental image of Cas doing his awkward dirty talk thing in a variety of different languages comes to Dean's mind, and he grins. He is so, *so* trying that out. He makes a mental note to ask later.

"Good to know," he says with a wink, and Cas looks even more confused. He doesn't acknowledge the statement, though.

"We happened to be walking in the same direction. He told me about Father's Day in Germany. Männertag. It is... different than ours. In fact, I can't think of anything paternal about it. In fact, if I were a father I would never consider participating."

Dean's caught off guard by this statement – he's suddenly picturing Cas with his own child. Cas as someone's *dad*. He thinks back to Lyric, the little girl they met in the park that one day several weeks ago. Cas had been so cautious and protective, telling Dean to slow down when he was pushing her on the swing. Dean also remembers the distinctly disappointed look on Cas' face when the girl's mother called and told them she found a new daycare, but thanks anyway.

He doesn't know what to do with the fact that the idea makes him feel warm all over. Naturally, because he's Dean, he shoves the feeling deep down and plows onward.

"Why? What's wrong with it?" he asks, painfully aware that the lapse between the statement and his reply was too long. Cas doesn't make any indication that he noticed, though.

"It involves hiking, a wheelbarrow, and copious amounts of alcohol."

Dean raises an eyebrow.

"Those don't sound like a very good mix, man."

Cas shrugs.

"Perhaps not. And I don't see how it would be a celebration of John at all, but I am interested in experiencing it." Of course he is. It's a *holiday*. "Naturally, we would bring Sam."

"And Sarah?"

Cas shakes his head.

"It is... not that kind of holiday."

Dean's curiosity is more than piqued. Germans are weird. He's pretty sure this holiday will be nothing short of the same.

"Are you gonna, like, explain it to me?"

Cas opens their laptop, which is sitting on the table, and taps it awake.

"I need to research it more, and then I will explain."

Dean shuts the laptop on him.

"After breakfast."

"But Dean--"

"*After*. I'm a dick when I'm hungry."

"Aren't you always?" Cas jokes. Again, Dean's proud that Cas has a sense of humor now. Dean likes to take full credit for that.

"Yeah, shut up. I can help, if you want," he adds, just to reinforce the whole you-are-not-my-housewife thing. Dean can pull his weight.

"I would appreciate that. Would you begin dicing tomatoes for me?" Cas reaches for an apron – the St. Patrick's Day one, for whatever reason – and puts it on. Dean smiles. He knows for a fact that Cas doesn't *need* an apron to make breakfast.

"Should I get you a Father's Day apron or something? Or like a sweater?"

Cas hesitates. "I am not a father, Dean."

Dean snorts. “So what? You’re not Irish, either,” he says, gesturing to the ‘*Kiss me, I’m Irish!*’ apron Cas is wearing. “Besides, who cares what you wear? If you want one, I’ll get you one.”

Cas’ eyes light up.

“I would like that, Dean.”

The genuine pleasure in his angel’s voice is enough to have Dean tug him close for a kiss.

*

“I can’t find a single Internet article that has anything positive to say about Männertag,” Cas remarks. He’s sitting on the couch with his legs tucked under him, where he’s been for the past hour. Dean’s beside him, flipping through TV channels and bored as hell.

“What are they saying, then?”

“That it sets a poor example and should be done away with,” Cas says with a frown. “Perhaps I should be looking at German articles...”

“Well, bad ideas are essentially the Winchester way. If the Internet doesn’t want us to, I think it’s a pretty good reason to go for it.”

“Regardless of the connotations behind the articles, I think I have a general understanding of the holiday. It has many names – *Vatertag* and *Herrentag*, for example. It’s more of a ‘men’s day out’ than a celebration of fathers, apparently. It involves heavy drinking, often bar tours – but, no, there’s also the traditional version with hiking, which I much prefer –“

Dean grins, big and wide.

“Testosterone and alcohol? It sounds perfect.”

“... Should I call Sam?”

“Yes. Like right now.”

*

Sarah agrees not to complain about not being invited as long as the boys promise to go out to dinner with her afterwards in John’s honor. The conditions are that she picks the venue and what they wear, and they must be entirely sober when they arrive. They’ll be going to Sam and Sarah’s neck of the woods – upstate New York – for the dinner, so they have to plan their time accordingly. They’ll probably end up eating quite late, so Cas and Dean will crash at Sam and Sarah’s place for the night and leave the following day. In the meantime, Sarah can spend time with her own father.

Sam arrives in Philadelphia via train Sunday afternoon. He says the trip costs less because of gas and saves time because of traffic, especially because of the holiday, and he likes the scenery. Cas and Dean are there to pick him up when the train pulls in. Cas is wearing an oversized t-shirt with an awful striped design that says “HUG A FATHER TODAY” in big black text, in lieu of a sweater given the hot, sticky weather.

“Sammy!” Dean says enthusiastically, hugging his moose of a brother in a (manly) one-armed hug.

“Hey, Dean!” Sam says, grinning. Dean returns the grin.

Dean always loves the sight of his brother. A part of him – a bigger part than he’d like to admit, really – is still the codependent mess he’s always been. It feels weird not living with Sam anymore after growing so accustomed to it. It’s weird knowing Sam’s living a normal life, has a fiancée and is going to law school again. Some days Dean feels almost panicky when he looks around and sees a flat devoid of his little brother. Seeing an empty passenger’s seat when he looks over in the Impala is sometimes overwhelming. He’s still adjusting to an existence where Sam is his own person.

Cas helps with that, though. He has an uncanny ability to tell when these sorts of thoughts are creeping into Dean’s head. He catches the blank stares Dean gets sometimes when he’s reliving something and can pick up on the subtle clench of Dean’s fists when he’s struggling with a feeling he can’t deal with. And most of all, Cas organizes stuff like this – holidays that bring him together with his brother again. Dean knows he’d see much less of Sammy if not for Cas. He’s grateful.

“Hello, Sam,” Cas says and shakes Sam’s hand. The sight is so awkward that Dean can’t help but laugh. Cas looks uncomfortable and Sam looks amused. He turns the handshake into a proper hug, which is equally awkward, and Dean’s tearing up from how hard he’s laughing by the time the whole ordeal is done with.

“So. Crazy German Testosterone Day, huh?” Sam asks.

“Männertag,” Cas says, like he’s correcting him.

“He’s very official about these things,” Dean says, chuckling. Sam nods.

“Right. Männertag. I take it you know where we’re going?”

Cas nods.

“Dean refuses to purchase a GPS-“

“We’re not douching up my baby!”

“-so I have printed it out via ‘MapQuest’. First, we need to pick up the wagon.”

“... Wagon?” Sam asks dubiously.

“The term is *Bollerwagon*, actually.

“Don’t question it, man,” Dean says, “there is literally no reasoning with him.”

They all head to the car, with both Sam and Dean snickering at the air of determination with which Cas walks.

*

“That is a hell of a lot of alcohol, Cas,” Dean says as they load the last of their supplies into the back of the Impala. Sam’s eyeing the trunk skeptically as well. Cas tilts his head at both of them.

“It’s not all alcoholic,” Cas explains, “While the Germans’ intent is to get excessively, indecently intoxicated, I would like us to remember this experience. Our cargo is half-full of nonalcoholic spirits.”

Sam looks relieved.

“Good thinking. Cas. I’m sure Sarah will appreciate it, too.”

“What’s with the wagon?” Dean inquires.

“*Bollerwagon*,” Sam corrects, and Dean scowls.

“Not you, too,” he groans.

“When in Rome, Dean.”

“We’re not *in* Rome – or Germany, or wherever. We’re in friggin Pennsylvania.”

“The *bollerwagon* is to carry the alcohol,” Cas cuts in, look at Dean like he’s stupid. Which, yeah – stupid question.

“Wait a minute. Where are we going with all this shit again?”

Cas heaves a longsuffering sigh. Dean thinks he might vaguely remember having this conversation with Cas before. “Hiking,” he says simply, and both Dean and Sam look scandalized.

“... You want us to go hiking half-drunk carrying a heavy-as-hell wagon and be back in time to catch a train from Philadelphia to New York and get there sober?”

Cas nods. “Yes, Dean.”

Sam and Dean exchange looks.

“Well,” Sam says unsurely, “I guess we should get on our way, then.”

Cas looks pleased with a small, self-satisfied smile on his face. It makes Dean smile, too; Cas catches Dean’s expression and their eyes lock in that way they always do, unwavering and intense. It is, in many ways, the same look they shared when they first met and Cas boldly declared, “*I am the one who gripped you tight and raised you from perdition.*” It is different in some ways, though – it’s still every bit as intense, but with a different type of intensity. Sam notices it and studiously looks away, busying himself with closing the trunk and letting himself into the car.

“Cas – I, uh –“

“Me too, Dean,” Cas replies, anticipating Dean’s words.

Sam abruptly beeps the horn and both men jump. They turn and find Sam laughing his ass off. Dean gives him the middle finger, but he’s laughing too – laughing because it’s friggin ridiculous and impossible and wonderful that he’s in love. Cas laughs a little too, in that awkward way of his. In this moment, Dean decides that there is no better feeling than laughing with the two most important people in his life.

*

They drop off the Impala at an overnight parking garage, much to Dean’s protests. They figure they’ll be unfit to drive by the time they’re done with their adventure, and they’ll have to rely on a cab to get them to the train station. They walk half a mile from the parking garage to their intended destination. About halfway through, Dean grabs Cas’ hand. No more than two minutes later, Sam catches sight, rolls his eyes and groans.

“Dean, come *on*. I refuse to be the third wheel here.”

“Perks of dating a dude,” Dean says with a smirk, “he comes along for Man Day or whatever it’s called.” To emphasize his point, he presses a sloppy kiss to Cas’ cheek, mouth pressing against Cas’ stubble.

“Dean!” Sam exclaims irritably at the same time Cas interjects, “*Männertag*, Dean!”

“Christ,” Dean mutters, raising both hands in a sign of surrender.

They arrive at the bottom of the upward trail they’ll be taking. It’s steeper than Dean anticipated, and much more packed with trees and other plant life, making it shady. The trail is just wide enough for the wagon to fit comfortably. Dean stares down the path ahead and grabs a beer, cracking it open and chugging it down. Sam stares at trail for a moment as well before following suit. With a certain amount of hesitancy, Cas also grabs a beer. Both brothers are done quickly, and only after the empty bottles are tossed back into wagon do they face down their trail again.

“Tell me again why this is a good idea?” Dean asks, raising an eyebrow at Cas.

“It’ll be more fun the drunker we are, Dean. And hiking is great even when you’re not drunk, though. Y’know, nature, exercise –“

“Not everyone is a granola-crunching hippie weirdo like you, Sam. That’s *not* my definition of fun.”

“It will be fun, Dean. It is a German tradition,” he adds, like this is definitive proof that the holiday is best spent getting drunk marching upwards in a goddamn forest, or whatever this is.

“The wagon will take two people to pull,” Sam observes, “We can take shifts. I’ll take the first one.”

“I’ll help you,” Cas volunteers. Dean grabs another beer.

“And we’re off!” he says dramatically. He heads the group as they embark. To Dean’s surprise, he does start to enjoy himself right off the bat. There’s something about the sound of the wagon – *bollerwagon*, whatever – that gives the hike the right sort of rhythm and puts Dean at ease. Only a few minutes in, he forgets his complaints.

They talk about Dad. It’s not as awkward as it might have been a long time ago. The conversation comes easy; fond anecdotes float to the surface and they laugh. Dean realizes that sometimes he forgets all the good things amidst the bad things, and it feels good to talk about the better parts of their dad with Sam. There was drunkenness... but there were also piggy back rides and blasting mullethead 70s rock and driving for miles and miles. There were holidays their dad completely forgot about, but there were also ones where John tried – Dean distinctly remembers a Christmas with a two foot tall Christmas tree and a cheeseburger in his stocking. A *cheeseburger*. Sam doesn’t remember because he was too young, but he laughs at Dean’s tale anyway.

They joke lightly about what an awful parent he was, too. Dean tells them that Dad let Sam fall asleep covered in cake on his third birthday. Sam tries to remember their first fight – they had *so many* – and he thinks it might have been over the length of his hair.

Cas, of course, can’t contribute to the conversation, but he is a quiet force beside the two brothers and does not seem unhappy. Dean looks at him often, makes sure to meet his eyes and scan them, searching for any underlying sadness. After all, Cas barely wanted to celebrate the holiday; it’s not like he knows enough of his father to tell them. Cas seems content, though, and returns all of Dean’s smiles.

They pause every now and then for more drinks, putting rocks behind the wagon's wheels to keep it from sliding backward. With every drink the whole idea of this Männertag business sounds even more absurd and equally endearing. Cas' good intentions with the nonalcoholic spirits would have worked better had the boys actually interspersed their alcoholic drinking and nonalcoholic, instead of digging through the wagon to find all the proper beers. The wagon is now full of empty bottles and virgin wine and beer.

During one of their breaks, while all three of them are sitting on the ground leaning against the wagon, Dean slings an arm lazily over Cas' shoulders and kisses him.

"Yer my anjull," he slurs, "and you make GOOD holldays ideas." He mouths at Cas' neck and Cas pushes him away gently.

"We have company, Dean. And thank you. No more alcohol from here on, though." Cas has been drinking most of their nonalcoholic wine, and he is decidedly *not* drunk.

"Cas, you're the best brother-in-law," Sam says. He's just as drunk as Dean but slightly more in charge of himself verbally. "Our dad is practically – practically, like, y'know –"

"Like your dad, too!" Dean cuts in.

Sam bursts into laughter.

"Man, we're all so fucked."

"John Winchesters' kids," Dean says, echoing Sam's laughter, "'course we're fucked. Fucks're middle name."

"How are we even like – like, *alive* right now? I was – I was, *was*, what, 8 months when Mom died?"

"Six!" Dean says, and starts giggling. Cas looks from one brother to the other like a ping pong match as each one speaks.

"So like... six months. Didn't I – I, need like bottles 'n shit? Diapers. Diapers, too. Can dad change one o' those? How am I not dead?"

"Bobby!" Dean says enthusiastically, gesturing dramatically to nothing with his hand. Sam immediately nods. They're both quiet a moment before Dean nods again, suddenly.

"Yup. Bobby. We gotta call him. Is there connect- con... phone stuff out here? Connect... service, phone service. 's there phone service? We gotta call him, 's Father's Day 'n he taught us baseball."

Sam turns and looks at Cas seriously. "Bobby is our other dad. I mean not like *gay* with our dad but he raised us basically--"

"Yes, I know. He is a good man," Cas replies with an honest, fond smile. Dean likes that smile. It shows that Cas values Bobby as much as he and Sam do. "I am grateful you both had him."

"Need a phone!" Dean says loudly. Cas rolls his eyes and plucks his phone from his pocket. All three lean close and Dean dials the number – which is thankfully on speed dial, so Dean can't botch it.

"This is Bobby Singer's phone – I ain't home, idjits, and if you're gonna leave a message it better be good. I hate checking this damn thing."

“HAPPY FATHER’S DAY!” Dean shouts and Sam chimes it, equally loud. Cas clears his throat and adds, “Happy Father’s Day, Bobby,” once they’re done, and Dean laughs.

“Bobby, man, you shoulda been here. We have a *wagon –a fuckin wagon* – and fake wine and real wine and fuckin *nature* too... why do you live so *far*?” Dean’s practically whining by the end of it.

“South Dakota is far,” Sam adds, in case Dean wasn’t clear enough.

“We think y’should MOVE,” Dean says emphatically, gesturing wildly.

“Move here, we have beaches,” Sam adds earnestly.

“I’d bake for you,” Cas adds feebly, quietly, and Dean almost kisses him again.

“Thanks for baseball, Bobby,” Dean says, and his voice is suddenly as firm as it can be considering the amount of alcohol in his system.

“Thanks for everything,” Sam says, and his voice is quiet.

“More of a father than Dad ever was,” Dean says after a moment. “So yeah.”

“Yeah,” Sam echoes.

“Bobby,” Cas says suddenly, “Thank you, as well. My father... well, you have shown me more care in the past two years than my father ever has.”

“That was deep, Cas-“ Dean starts.

“*Your message has reached its limit,*” an automated voice says from the phone, followed by a loud and somewhat obnoxious beep.

“Sonofabitch,” Dean mutters, and Sam laughs.

“Bobby hates long messages.”

“I bet he’ll cry man-tears,” Dean says and this sets all three of them laughing, leaning back against the wagon until they feel it slip forward slightly, straining against the rocks holding it in place.

“We’re almost to the top,” Cas says, “let’s keep going.”

*

There’s a clearing at the top of the hill and they lay down in the grass, laying on their backs and watching the clouds roll by. Cas passes out water bottles before he lays down and instructs everyone to drink and aim for sobriety. They lie there for a while, staring at the sky and occasionally pointing out shapes. Dean’s holding Cas’ hand again, squeezing it tightly every now and then. A bit of Dean’s skin is exposed where his shirt rises up slightly, and Cas traces absent circles there. Sam doesn’t notice; his eyes have slipped shut and he looks close to sleep.

“This was cool, Cas,” Dean says after a long while, turning to look at his angel. “Thanks, man.”

“Thank you for humoring my whims,” Cas says, smiling contentedly, “I know they do sound strange sometimes.”

“Nah, I always know they’ll turn out awesome. You’re good at that.”

Cas looks very happy. His smile doesn’t widen or anything – because, in all fairness, it’s *Cas* and the guy doesn’t grin very often – but there’s something about his countenance that seems to glow or something. Dean likes it.

A telltale loud growling sound comes from Dean’s stomach and he smiles sheepishly.

“We should probably get going. Apparently, I’m hungry.”

Cas sits up abruptly, and Dean thinks briefly of a husky or something, jumping up at his owner’s command. Dean shakes the thought, though – he knows Cas would hate the comparison. It’s probably filed under the whole “housewife” thing. Instead of waking Sam or something, Cas walks over to the wagon and starts rummaging through it. He takes a large lunch bag – the kind used for picnics to keep food cool – out of the wagon. Dean hadn’t noticed it before.

“I brought food,” Cas explains, “traditional German sandwiches, *Das Butterbrot*.”

Dean looks at Cas skeptically, because that doesn’t exactly sound appealing. Still, Cas is rarely wrong when it comes to food, so he tries to muster up some enthusiasm for it.

“*Butterbrot*. Right. So what’s in it?”

“*Aufschnitt*,” Cas replies simply, like this explains it. Dean looks at him blankly. Cas sighs.

“That means ‘cold cuts.’ *Butterbrot* is a type of sandwich that uses sourdough bread, made with rye.”

“... You’re lucky I trust you,” Dean says, eyeing the bag warily.

“It’s more than luck,” Cas says, sitting down as Dean sits up and gently shakes his brother.

“Wake up, Sam. There’s food. I mean, weird German food, yeah, but... food.”

Sam yawns and stretches. “Food sounds good right now. Even weird German food.”

“*Butterbrot*,” Cas corrects.

“Gesundheit,” Sam responds, and Dean laughs.

“At least you got the right language.”

They all sit in a circle (more of a triangle, really), on a picnic blanket Cas has provided. Dean notes that it’s different than the one at the cemetery; this one has a plaid pattern of blue and green. Dean appreciates it. It’d good to separate this memory from that one, even in small ways. Dean’s not entirely sure why he feels like that, but he’s glad Cas shares the feeling.

As always, the food is awesome. It’s really different, but not so far out there that it doesn’t suit his palate. He’s pleasantly surprised that the opposite is true. Sam makes blissful noises and compliments Cas’ talent with food

every other bite, and Cas looks like a little ball of positive energy. Dean leans over and presses a kiss to Cas' hair, and Sam laughs.

"What?" Dean asks, inexplicably self-conscious.

"Nothing, Dean. It's just... happiness looks good on you, man. Really good. All I've ever –"

"Dude. Could you be more gay?"

Sam gives him a look that is both incredulous and borderline bitchface.

"I don't know, Dean, I could be dating a man and living with him and having – augh – gay sex all the time."

Dean snickers.

"Still not as gay as you, man."

Cas looks completely and utterly confused, and when both brothers realize this, they laugh some more (at Cas' expense). Cas furrows his brow and tilts his head, which is damn adorable. Dean tugs him into a quick, awkward hug, and Cas looks at him with uncertainty. Dean doesn't bother explaining his banter to Cas; he's pretty sure it's too far over the new-to-humanity angel's head.

The laughter eventually dies down, with all three quietly enjoying their meal. Dean eats three and thankfully, Cas packed accordingly. He finishes eating after everyone else. Sam has been watching him since he finished his own food, his expression unreadable. Several times, he opens his mouth to speak, but closes it again. Dean notices it and raises an eyebrow at his little brother. Cas must notice it, too, because he stands up.

"I am going to – uh – take a walk," he says stiffly, and walks off before Dean can question it. Sam watches him go, biting the inside of his cheek. Finally, he speaks.

"Dean, I want you to know that this day isn't just for Dad and Bobby."

Dean is silent. He picks at the grass, studiously looking anywhere and everywhere but at Sam.

"I had one more father figure in my life, Dean."

"Oh, c'mon, Sammy, I didn't –"

"But you did, Dean. *You* made my dinner every night. You made sure I made it to school. You came to the spelling bees and the award nights – hell, I think you even came to a parent-teacher conference once. You kept me safe." Sam's voice cracks a little at the end, but he's still looking at Dean earnestly.

"I was just doing my job," Dean says, still staring at the ground.

"Exactly. Your job was to be my father when Dad wasn't able to – which was *all the time*. It was our whole life, Dean. You had to be both my dad and my brother."

Sam reaches into one of his enormous pockets and Dean finally looks up.

"Sam, no –"

“Dean, yes. I got this for you. It’s nothing big or expensive, so don’t let your macho pride get bruised.” He hands Dean a little box from his pocket, wrapped in the Sunday newspaper comics. Dean knows it’s just because of tradition, now, and no longer out of necessity. He smiles despite himself.

“Bitch,” he mutters as he takes the gift.

“Jerk,” Sam replies brightly with a grin.

The present within the little box is simple, but Dean loves it immediately. It’s a leather bracelet, almost wide enough to be called thick, but not quite. A silver pentagram is embedded in the band. Dean loves it because he can always wear it, just like his amulet. He’ll never throw it out, either. He won’t make the same mistake twice.

“Thanks, Sam,” Dean says quietly, putting the bracelet on his left hand.

“Happy Father’s Day, Dean.”

*

Needless to say, the downward journey is much easier than the upward one was. The only constant annoyance is the wagon, which keeps trying to scoot downward faster than they can walk. After the third time the wagon hits the back of his heel, Dean suggests they hop in and ride it down rollercoaster style. Sam and Cas stare at Dean with matching expressions of disbelief.

“I value my life, thanks,” Sam says, taking the wagon from Dean to relieve him of his shift.

They drink water and ‘fake’ beer the whole way down, and by the time they reach the end, they’re essentially sober. They’re also tired as hell. Dean aches in places he didn’t even know he *had* and seriously needs to piss. He spies a bench at the edge of the path and sinks into it, leaning back and squeezing his temples. Sam and Cas join him, both leaning back tiredly. Cas takes out his phone and calls a cab before the three of them fall into a tired, affable silence waiting for it to arrive.

“This was fun,” Sam says after a while, smiling at Cas fondly.

“I’m glad you enjoyed yourself.”

The cab arrives soon enough and they all pile in. They head for the station, with only a small detour for Dean and Cas to grab their things from the Impala. They have appropriately fancy outfits, approved by Sarah over Skype.

They tip the cabbie when he drops them off and head for the train. It’s a close call; they barely make it to the station in time and have to run to make it, much to the protest of their ailing muscles. They collapse into their seats, with Dean and Cas on one side and Sam sitting opposite them.

They all sleep the majority of the trip. Sam stretches out across his chair and the vacant one beside him, fitting as best he can, given his large frame. Dean falls asleep against the window, with Cas’ head resting on his shoulder. It’s a quiet little moment in the long, hectic timeline of Dean’s life, and the last thing he thinks before he surrenders to his sleepy eyelids is, yet again, that he’s goddamn *happy*. He is reveling in the depth of that truth when sleep finally pulls him under.

*

It's dark when Dean awakes. A quick glance at his phone says he's been out for hours. Sam is still asleep, but Cas is already awake beside him. Figures. Cas always wakes up first. His hands are in Dean's hair and it's obvious he's been running his hands through it. He freezes when he sees that Dean is awake.

"Did I wake you?" he asks, pulling his hand away.

"Mhh, no. That felt nice, you can keep doing it," Dean says sleepily. Cas hesitates, but then resumes what he was doing, carding his fingers through Dean's short, soft hair.

"We're nearly there. Next stop, actually," Cas informs him. He presses a kiss to Dean's neck and Dean shifts so he can kiss his mouth. Dean darts his tongue slides easily into Cas' mouth and his bites gently at Cas' lip. Cas takes a sharp intake of air and then shakes his head.

"Your brother is asleep across from us and we are in a crowded train."

Dean ignores him in favor of sliding a hand to the back of his boyfriend's neck and pulling him in for another kiss. Cas goes with it without protest, sighing quietly against Dean's lips when their mouths break apart.

"Public area," Cas reminds him.

"That didn't stop you on Memorial Day in that park."

Cas flushes red and looks away.

"That was very inappropriate," Cas mumbles. Dean leans forward, bringing his lips close to Cas' ear.

"I *liked* it," he whispers, and Cas shudders. They are abruptly interrupted by Sam loudly clearing his throat. Dean groans and sits back in his seat.

"Cockblock," Dean says, and Sam gives him his classic bitchface.

"We're on a *train*, Dean," he says exasperatedly.

Before their bickering can escalate any further, the train intercom announces that they've arrived at the next stop. The subject of inappropriate kissing is lost in favor of gathering their bags and heading for the exit.

Sarah is waiting for them on the platform when they arrive, and Sam's smile is almost embarrassingly dopey. He runs to her like he's been gone for weeks and not just a day, both literally and figuratively sweeping her off her feet when he hugs her. He spins her around a bit and it's horrifically cheesy – though Dean can't help but think that happiness looks good on *Sam*, too. He gets what his little brother meant, earlier. Sam's features are light and his eyes have something decidedly bright in them when he looks at Sarah. Dean hasn't seen Sam look like that since Jessica, so many years ago.

"Hey, Sarah! Good to see you," Dean says with a grin, once the dramatic hug has ended. He gives Sarah his own hug – much less dramatic, obviously – and Cas shakes her hand in that awkward, formal way of his.

"You too! I missed you both," she says with a warm smile that shows how much she means it. "Okay - our reservation is in an hour. I'm taking you home and everyone's getting quick showers – and I mean *quick*, boys – and then we head off. Got it?"

Dean salutes her like she's an army general. "Got it."

The other two mimic him and Sarah leads the way to the car waiting outside.

*

Cas and Dean barely get to see the house, because Sarah rushes them through it. Dean notes that it's very beautiful, filled with paintings that her father probably came across in his years of auctioning that were too beautiful to part with. It's well furnished, too. Sarah owned the house before she met Sam; it was a gift left to her in a will from a grandmother and is already paid off. Sam works as an intern for Sarah's dad, now, and he and Sarah live well. Certainly better than Dean and Cas are in their studio flat, living off pool hustling and credit card fraud that is getting increasingly difficult to pull off and equally difficult on Dean's conscience. Looking at Sam and Sarah's house, however brief the glimpse, makes Dean wonder again if he should get a job or something.

They're sent to a guest bedroom equipped with its own bathroom and are told to be out in fifteen minutes, "or else". Dean appreciates that she assumed he and Cas would be showering together, because now he doesn't have to ask Cas himself. They both climb into the shower together and Dean turns on the water, hot and steaming. He'd intended to make *some* sort of move, but the water feels nice and he realizes yet again how exhausted his body is. Sarah's somewhat formidable threat of "or else" is also at the forefront of his mind, so in the end he just settles for washing Cas' hair for him and otherwise showering innocently.

Sarah's gone when they finally emerge from the guest room, fresh and clad in their fancy suits. Sam's sitting in the living room looking just as dapper.

"Where's Sarah?" Dean asks him, looking around the room.

"No idea. I got out of the shower and she wasn't here."

As if on cue, the front door opens and Sarah's there, looking lovely in a black dress and pretty, dangling earrings, with her hair braided. She smiles and tilts her head toward the door.

"Come on, boys, our reservation's in five."

"Where'd you go?" Sam asks skeptically.

"Hmm? Oh – I ran to a friend's house, had to borrow a pair of earrings," she replies, gesturing to the earrings.

"... Sarah, I've seen those earrings before. Aren't they yours?" Sam says, looking even more suspicious.

"Nope," she says simply with an unreadable smile, and heads out the door, beckoning them after. Sam's wary look doesn't fade, but Dean brushes it off. Girls are weird.

*

The restaurant is ritzy and upscale, and Dean immediately feels out of place. He starts messing with the bottom of his tie, rolling the edges around his fingers. Cas notices and places a hand over Dean's hand, squeezing it gently. The message is clear: *I'm here*. Dean drops his tie and squeezes back. No one notices this quiet moment in their world, and that makes it better. Dean likes these small moments that only he and Cas share.

The waitress leads them through the crowded restaurant, weaving through tables and people to a booth by the window. Dean and Sam stop short before they make it to the table, though.

“Bobby?” both boys ask at once – because Bobby’s already there, sitting at the table. He’s dressed up, too, though he’s still wearing his hat. He looks slightly uncomfortable in the place, sitting by himself. He smiles when he sees everyone coming.

“Yeah, ya idjits, it’s me,” he says gruffly, standing to hug them as they approach. Dean and Sam practically run to him.

“Happy Father’s Day!” they say, again at once. Bobby looks mildly overwhelmed.

“I’m not-“

“Nope, shut up. Yes you are,” Dean says, and that settles that. They all take their seats and the server comes with menus a minute later. Dean lets Cas order for him and Sam does the same with Sarah; neither of them know much about high-class food, but their respective partners are much more well versed. Sarah has learned from years of experience and Cas has learned from various cookbooks and... Google.

“Wait... how’d you get here, Bobby?” Sam asks after their meals have arrived.

“Don’t look at me,” Bobby says, jerking his thumb in Sarah’s direction, “this was all her.”

Sam looks at Sarah uneasily.

“Sarah... er, can we afford that?” He looks more than a little embarrassed, but Dean’s pretty sure he would be, too.

Sarah smiles and bites her lip.

“I’ve been telling my Dad about Bobby,” she says, sounding shy – which is a rare occurrence for her, “and how much he’s done for you and Sam. He thought it was a shame that Bobby couldn’t spend Father’s Day with us.”

“Bobby accepted a free ticket?” Dean asked, looking at Bobby, who is looking at his plate.

“I didn’t think he would,” Sarah says, smiling at him fondly, “so we bought him a nonrefundable ticket without his permission.” Her smile evolves into a mischievous grin, and Dean remembers why he told Sam to marry her so many years ago.

“Bastards,” Bobby grumbles, but his smile betrays him.

Dinner is great, but the company is even better. The conversation ranges from ‘how are you’s to life updates and anecdotes from the brothers’ childhood, where Bobby served as father to both boys growing up. They tease Bobby for going a bit red at all the praise and attention. It’s good feelings all around, and Bobby looks happy to be there. Again, it’s another instance of someone whose face is so unused to happiness that it catches Dean off guard. Happiness looks good on Bobby, too.

The meal is over what feels like far too soon, despite how long it’s been. They opt out of dessert because dinner was filling enough. Once the bill is paid and the waitress is tipped, they all pile into Sarah’s car and head back to Sam and Sarah’s place. On the way, she convinces Dean and Cas to stay another night more than intended because Bobby is staying longer, too. It didn’t take much coercing for them to say yes.

By the time they get home, everyone is exhausted. Between the hiking, drinking, the train ride and dinner, Sam, Dean and Cas can’t wait to hit the sack. Sarah directs Dean and Cas back to the same guest room as before and

they all say their goodnights. Sam tries to bid Dean another ‘Happy Father’s Day’ before he heads upstairs, but Dean reacts in a *very mature* manner by clamping his hands over his ears, and shouting nonsense as he ducks into his room. He hears Sam huff a sigh and can practically feel his bitchface through the door.

Dean turns around and Cas is there, inches from him. Dean jumps; he hadn’t heard Cas and wasn’t expecting him to be in such close proximity. Cas wraps an arms around Dean and kisses him. Dean smiles into the kiss and pulls Cas toward the bed, and after an awkward moment of shucking most of their clothing, they curl up together. They’re both too tired to do anything more than lay together.

“Thank you, Dean,” Cas says.

“Thank me? You’re the one who planned all this.”

“You called Gabriel.”

“Yeah, well...”

“I love you,” Cas says, and kisses Dean again.

“I love you, too. And – thank *you*, man. Another kickass holiday because you’re so...”

“So?”

“So *you*,” Dean says, gesturing up and down Cas.

“I’ll take that as a compliment, I think.”

“Good, ‘cause it is one.”

Cas looks pleased. “Happy Father’s Day, Dean.”

“Happy Father’s Day, Cas.”

They climb under the covers and lay chest-to-chest with their feet entangled. They’re both nearly asleep by the time Dean speaks again. His speech is garbled by how sleepiness.

“One day,” he whispers, nearly inaudible into Cas’ hair, “we might be dads, too.”

Cas responds with an indistinct mumble that sounds something like *Go to sleep, Dean*. Dean’s almost instantly grateful that Cas didn’t hear him. He’s not sure where the sentiment came from, but he’s pretty sure it’s better left where it came from, deep in the recesses of his mind. He presses a kiss to Cas’ head and very soon after falls asleep.