

## The Angel's Widower

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# The Angel's Widower

by [60r3d0m](#)

## Summary

*Associating with angels had consequences, Bobby had explained to him. “They ain’t the God-abiding, harp-toting little healers that you’d expect, Dean. They’re...different. They...”*

*They claim things, Bobby had said, with a shiver. People. They claimed humans and stole them from the camp and whatever happened to them afterwards, no one knew.*

After Castiel dies, the portal to the other world opens and obliterates the universe that Sam and Dean know. Bobby takes them in, teaches them how to survive in a world with new rules and new consequences, a world where humans live in camps enclosed by high walls to keep angels out, where angels will do *anything* and *everything* to seduce and lure humans away. Why and to where beyond the wall, no one knows.

While Sam struggles to find a way home, a grieving Dean loses all hope.

But then one night, while Dean's guarding the wall, in the middle of a snowy blizzard and under the cover of darkness, an angel with beautiful black wings and a familiar face appears.

His name is *Castiel*.

And he asks Dean to go with him.

# The Angel & the Widower

## Chapter Notes

Dean and Cas reunite in the first chapter because even though this is supposed to be a slow burn, I've always been terrible at being patient :P Knowing me, they'll probably be gross and married in no time.

Also this story has a 100% happy ending. I say this because I've always said it ever since I first posted this work, but now, after how the final season ended, I feel like I need to reiterate it because it's important to me. Queer people deserve stories with happy endings. And not subtle happy endings or implied reciprocations of love but loud and blatant in every which way. This story, no matter how angsty it may be over its journey, will have that and I don't feel guilty for spoiling that for you. At any rate, I need as many happy endings for Dean and Cas that I can get, and I hope you very much feel the same!

Bobby coughs into his scarf and frowns.

“You ain’t a prisoner, Dean,” Bobby tells him, but it sure as hell feels like it. “I told you boys right when you got here. Any sons of Mary Campbell, alternate reality or not, are welcome here.”

Bobby rests his hand on Dean’s shoulder for a moment, gives it a squeeze and then walks across the shed. He picks up a rifle out of the line of weapons across the wall, all rusty and barely functional. But maybe that’s just what life in the apocalypse leaves you with.

“If I’m so welcome, why aren’t I allowed to go hunting with you, huh?”

Bobby raises an eyebrow.

“Hunting ain’t a fieldtrip, ya idjit. It’s done to feed people and protect the perimeter of the camp. We don’t take any more people out there than we have to. And definitely not whiny babies like you.”

Dean grits his teeth. He shouldn’t say it. He shouldn’t say it. He shouldn’t...

But he does.

“I’m not a fucking widow!”

The impact’s instantaneous.

Dean’s voice rips out of his throat in a vicious snarl. It echoes in the tiny cement shed, makes the painful emptiness of the room seem even more obvious. And then there’s Bobby’s face,

of course. The careful patience. The pity that crosses it every damn time Dean makes it evident that maybe he *is*.

“I know you’re not,” Bobby says and he’s fucking gentle. His voice is soft. As if Dean’s maybe four and he’s lost Mom all over again. “But that don’t mean you don’t need more time.”

Dean sucks in a breath. Bobby looks at him again, lips pulled back in some sort of sympathetic grimace, and then Dean’s own bottom lip wobbles.

God, it still fucking hurts.

Six months gone by. Six months since Dean held Cas’ body in his arms, the world going to shit all around them. The portal had reopened and he hadn’t even noticed. He’d been too focused on cradling Cas in his arms. Too focused on running his fingers through Cas’ hair and begging him to stay when he’d already been gone. With Cas’ head resting on his shoulder, holding Cas had felt like holding a child.

But in the meanwhile, their own world had disappeared.

“Now look,” Bobby says, and he swings the rifle by its strap over his shoulder. “I’m only about to tell you this because I need you to understand. Your brother’s coming on the supply run with me today, and I don’t want you making no fuss. He’s trained and he’s been ready for weeks but the council just ain’t set on you yet. So I need ya to suck it up, do your chores like everybody else and don’t complain. When you’re ready, I’ll know.”

Of course Bobby would know. Bobby had been the one that had found him, who had seen how damn devastated he’d been, how—

How *damaged*.

Bobby had come, with Sam in tow, and both of them had knelt at his side and had coaxed him to let Cas’ corpse go. In the end, he’d been too numb to move. Whatever had happened, however they’d brought him to the camp, he didn’t know. And for what they’d done to Cas, he hadn’t spoken to them for weeks.

He would never fucking forgive them.

Bobby pushes the door of the shed open, letting the abysmal grey-white light of the snowy morning wash over them. He’s got the gun that he needs, yet he doesn’t move past the threshold.

There’s a dark expression on his face.

He’s not done talking. He’s got one more thing to say.

But Dean already knows what it is.

Four words.

The same ones as always.

*Beware of the angels.*

Walking through camp is always humiliating.

He shuffles through, boots crunching down on a fresh inch of snow, on his way to the barracks that he's been assigned to since they arrived, but that doesn't mean that he doesn't notice the way that the people look at him. That doesn't mean that he doesn't hear what they have to say.

At first, he'd been too caught up in grief to notice. Bobby had let him be. While the rest of the camp had had their daily chores to keep the survival camp running, Dean had been left alone to wallow. Sam had come by, time to time, to check on him, to coax him to eat, but other than that, Dean had stayed curled up in his bunk, fighting wakefulness, hoping for sleep.

But somehow, word had spread. Rumours mixed in with tidbits of truth about the heartbroken newcomer in the camp. Why the man was mourning. Why Bobby and the whole council hadn't chewed him out yet, for not contributing, for not doing his share.

*Dean Winchester*, the rumours had said, *had been widowed by an angel.*

There had been nothing worse in their eyes.

Bobby had explained it to him, the first time that he'd been lucid enough to listen, the first time that he hadn't had the energy to fight and scream at them about what they'd done to Cas, about what they'd inevitably done by extension to *Dean*. Bobby had come in, Sam anxious behind him, and then Bobby had barked at the other occupants in their quarters, until the others had left their bunks, all of them casting their eyes at Dean as they'd filed out, the same way that they'd been looking at him for weeks.

Associating with angels had consequences, Bobby had explained to him. "They ain't the God-abiding, harp-toting little healers that you'd expect, Dean. They're...different. They..."

*They claim things*, Bobby had said, with a shiver. *People*. They claimed humans and stole them from the camp and whatever happened to them afterwards, no one knew.

But the rare survivors would come back changed. They would come, covered with the markings that all the angels wore, black tattoos etched into their skin. And they would weep and they would be withdrawn and they would whisper unintelligible things.

Whatever happened to them afterwards, Bobby hadn't told him.

Sam's waiting for him at the gate.

He doesn't see Dean yet. Maybe he doesn't think that Dean's coming because of what had happened with Cas. Battered armour, probably handed down from a dead warrior, and clutching a machine gun in his hands, Sam's shifting from foot to foot nervously, maybe wondering if he's going to die on this hunt. It wouldn't be a surprise if he did. For six months, they had seen Bobby command a troop each week to take beyond the wall. For six months, every week, someone had died.

When he sees Dean, Sam's face breaks into a relieved smile.

"I thought Bobby wouldn't tell you," Sam says. "He didn't want to, anyway. Thought that you'd get mad, because—"

*Because you always do.*

But Sam doesn't say that.

There's an awkward silence between them. It's been so long since they've seen each other outside of a guardianship context that Dean doesn't even remember how to talk to him freely anymore. Bobby had moved Sam to a different housing unit when it had become clear that it wasn't going to work out. Issued commands, followed orders, that's all Dean knows now.

"Well, camp would hate me even more if I didn't, and they love you so..."

"Yeah," Sam says and he gives Dean a smile that's painfully fake. He starts to fiddle with the pouch at his belt—angel-killing bullets—but he must realize what he's doing because he stops and looks guilty. There's an awkward moment then, where Sam tries to draw attention away from the lethal ammunition by running a hand through his hair, but Dean's eyes don't miss a thing.

Maybe that's his problem. Maybe it's because he's always been like this.

Dean clenches his jaw and pulls Sam into a hug. He has to—it's what everybody does when one of your loved ones is heading out the gate. The other hunters surrounding them are in the midst of the same. A mother holding her son's hand. A husband being consoled by his wife, being promised that she'll return to him—she always does.

But *You shouldn't be so sure of that*, Dean thinks.

Soon enough, Bobby comes, ordering the civilians to stand back because the gate's opening. Dean thumps Sam on the back in goodbye. Sam nods and smiles again. But it's that empty smile again. Their farewell feels just as fake.

When Dean joins the other families, Bobby signals to the wall patrol.

It's not that the gate is some kind of drawbridge. It's not that you have to move because it needs rope to be lowered down. It's because of the wall. It's because of what might be waiting on the other side.

*Don't ever go outside the walls, Dean,* Bobby had said, as if he had expected Dean to run. *Never, Dean. Never.*

The troop that Bobby's commanding ready their weapons. They're filled with all kinds of ammunition. Angel-killing bullets. Demon-killing. Witches. Silver. Some of them even have little wooden stakes for vampire teeth. But it doesn't make a difference. No matter how many sigils and runes that the wall is painted with, it doesn't matter.

No one is ever ready for when the gate opens.

The soup kitchen was where he'd been banished to. After Sam had been well on his way into his survival training, after the council had decided that Dean couldn't afford to stay in the camp anymore, not if he was going to be an extra mouth to feed without doing any of the work. While Dean had been busy grieving, Sam had been the one who had worked hard to draw attention away from Dean, away from the bloodthirsty camp who had wanted him to be exiled to beyond the gate.

Now Dean pulls on an apron from the kitchen. It's breakfast hours, people coming in for their daily food rations. For two meagre meals, Dean hadn't thought that it'd be so busy in the kitchen, but the soup kitchen's so small that there just isn't enough room for everyone to rush in at once. Ai had been proud when she'd told Dean about how she'd been the one to figure out the system. The first day on the job, she'd taken him to her little office—nothing more than a counter, really—and had shown him how meals were continuously rolled out during the day, from six in the morning to six in the afternoon. She'd put him at the front at first, ladling stew into bowls. But it hadn't taken her long to trust him and soon enough he'd been chopping vegetables in the back under her watchful eye.

And she'd been there.

For him.

She'd been there, that first day, when he'd been asked to pick up a sack of beans that had weighed as heavy in his arms as Cas' corpse. She hadn't chastised him when he'd dropped the bag and vomited all over the day's rations. He'd ruined the only food in an already starving camp, in a kitchen full of people who looked at him with hate and disgust, and she hadn't even let him face the consequences set out by the council.

But she hasn't asked him to pick up anything else ever since.

Today Ai spends her time hovering over him. Not that the hovering's new, but today she seems to go the extra mile, watching for a good ten minutes while he pours the day's helping of carrot soup. She's eyeing his beard again, just like she always does when it's getting too unruly. After Cas, his hair had grown out so tangled that one day after work, she'd sat him down on a milk crate in the backroom and had spent hours combing through the knots. It must have been irony then, that just as Dean's own hair had fallen to his shoulders, the same month Sam had cut his own down to nothing more than an inch.

But it turns out that today, it's not the wild length of his beard that's bothering her because finally she says, "That brother of yours left for beyond the wall today?"

He nods. She always knows everything.

"My son went, too." She grabs his forearm and adjusts his sloppy grip on the ladle. He straightens up. "He died," she says.

She watches him absentmindedly for another five minutes, her lips curling into a grim expression, eyes far away as if she's remembering something bitter, something unpleasant. When she finally seems to come back to herself, she spends more time hovering, more time watching him clumsily pour soup. When he spills stray drops onto the counter rather than into the next waiting bowl, she purses her lips but doesn't berate him, only prods his elbow gently to remind him to be careful. "Don't worry," she eventually says. "Your brother won't die. He's smart."

And that's all. The seventy-seven year old gives him a hard smack on the ass and her conversation must be done because she doesn't come see him for the rest of his shift.

The rest of the day goes by slowly. Dean's arm sores after lifting the ladle so many times, and eventually one of the kitchen cooks comes and relieves him, having him chop onions instead. The cook watches him carefully while he handles the knife, and makes sure to grab it back as soon as he's done. When the end of work hours finally come, they have dinner after everyone else. Or what they call dinner. But mostly it's just pushing the camp's leftovers around on their plates.

At first, the council had tried to assign him to the hospital ward, noting his aptitude on the nurse portion of their medical exam. But Sam had hastily intervened, too afraid of what the sight of blood might do to him. Sam must have remembered what had happened when they'd first gotten here, two weeks in. Dean had been standing in the middle of the road, gently being steered by his brother towards the soup kitchen when he'd seen Bobby and the other hunter carrying back a dead comrade. With a mop of messy black hair and an angel blade sticking out of his chest, it was no wonder that Dean had lost it.



Going to the soup kitchen had been useless after that.

He hadn't been able to swallow solid food down for a week.

Now, Ai prods him into finishing most of his meal, boxing up the leftovers for him with quiet threats in case he doesn't finish. He walks her back to the women's barracks in silence, carrying her mysteriously heavy hand bag. They stop a few times so that she can talk to the other women heading home for the night, but this place will never be home and Dean knows that.

It's snowing again when they finally make it to the right doorstep. Ai wraps him in a long embrace, rubbing her hand soothingly over his back and waiting for him like she always does, letting him decide when to let go. His eyes sting. He buries his face into her shoulder, feels his skin itch when his cheek brushes her long white hair. He doesn't even know why he needs her more than usual today. But for the first time, he's so damn aware of how old she really is, how frail.

When he manages to convince himself to move back, she nods and pats him on the arm, letting her comforting hand rest for a moment before she nods again and shuts the door.

He stands there, taking in shallow breaths, and thinks about looking for Sam even though he doesn't want to.

But in the end, he doesn't get to. He doesn't even start.

Within moments of Ai closing the door, one of the council's messenger boys emerges out of the darkness, standing under the stuttering light bulb where Sam usually waits for him.

"Dean Winchester," the boy says, perfectly rehearsed, "the council would like to see you."

The first time that he'd seen the council, it had been a month in to arriving at the camp. Bobby had taken him. By then, his hearing had long been overdue, but because Bobby had been the survival camp's military leader, the council had allowed Dean time to get back on his feet, to come to his senses.

Dean had still been a wreck then.

And besides, it hadn't mattered.

It's getting colder now so Dean hurries it up. There's maybe a minute or two left before curfew sets in, and he doesn't want to have to explain to one of the patrol guards why he

doesn't have a pass. But he can see the old courthouse from here, the camp square's bonfire lighting up the white building with a flickering golden glow.

When he reaches the door, one of the guards pats him down. It's a waste of time. Sam hasn't let him near a weapon since Cas died. At least not without supervision. The sharpest thing that Dean owns is the edge of a dog tag necklace that Sam had given him a month in, engraved with his name and inmate number.

*Don't lose it, Sam had warned him. Lose it and you'll regret it forever, Dean.*

But since Sam's not here to give him orders right now, Dean can't be blamed when the guard grabs the silver tag roughly, almost breaking the chain. He squints at the tiny script and when he finishes reading the back, his hands close around the fabric of Dean's jacket collar with an angry fist.

"Where's your guardian, huh? You ain't mentally sound. Says right here Sam Winchester's supposed to accompany you."

Dean's face flushes. But he's right. He hasn't seen Sam around since he'd left for the other side of the wall and the troop should have been back by now. But he's spared the interrogation when a messenger girl peeks her head out of the courthouse door and urges Dean inside.

Within moments, he's up before the council. They're seated up on their table, on the dais like usual, thirteen old and stern faces peering down at him ominously.

And then there's the *other* seat.

The one seat left open, below the platform in front of them. The one that sits in the middle of a devil's trap and a circle of holy oil, ready to be lit by a servant of the council as soon as it's occupied. The seat that Dean's been in many times.

But never alone.

"Dean Winchester," one of them says when he's in the chair, "you may commence with your oath."

So he starts.

"I reject the devil and his..."

And it goes on and on. The oath that the whole camp knows, the oath that they all have memorized by heart, denouncing all supernatural creatures, exalting humankind. When he nears the end, the council's eyes seem to drill into him harder, because he'd been unable to speak this line for ages, had refused to, until eventually it had come out in little more than a stutter at Sam's prompting.

"...and I reject god and his unholy grace and all of his legions of angels, those that are, those that will be, and those that w-wer—"

He can't say it.

The council looms over him, dark and oppressive.

He starts again.

“...and I r-reject god and his unholy grace and all of his legions of a-ang—”

His voice cracks. He stares up at them with quivering lips. But he can't talk. He keeps thinking of Cas, picturing his coat, his goddamn tie. His face, he can't remember anymore. Two months ago, it had become a blur in his mind. Now he has to use memories to bring Cas into focus, but even then, they're not enough.

He thinks of one now. He thinks of colourful pink plaid and a stomach filled to bursting. He thinks of the buzz of diners and *Is ketchup a vegetable?* He thinks of a room, his room in a bunker that he won't see again, not if they can't figure out a way out of this strange, strange world, and he thinks of fantasies that he'd had, Cas in his bed—fantasies so frequent that they'd become memories in his head, even if only memories of what could have been.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he hears the council talking. Something about Sam. Something about what's happened, about what Sam's been doing to him without Dean even noticing. But he shoves their voices out. He doesn't want to think about a brother whose been lost to him for an age now. He doesn't care if Sam lives or dies.

And maybe that's what snaps him back.

Maybe it's that lie. Maybe it's that lie that he just dared to think that brings him crashing back to reality because it's just so damn wrong.

Loving Sammy is built into the fabric of his being.

So, *Cas would be ashamed*, he thinks, if he saw what Dean's become.

Sam's not dead.

“Now look, angel lover. I know you're a slut for them but if you see one...”

Sam's not dead.

Sam's not dead, but it's when he's fitting his patrol vest on, for the first time in a long time, that he feels something other than grief.

He doesn't know what the emotion is. He's confused when the officer hands him the rifle. He's still confused when he's led to his post along the wall. But finally, it hits him.

He's worried.

It's not for himself. He knows that right away. It's Sam. It's *Sammy*. It's the fact that he's been ignoring his little brother for months, not taking care of him like he should have, and now Dean doesn't know how he's going to live a month with this guilt and anxiety that's bubbling up in his chest.

*Get in the Impala, he's thinking. Grab every spell book. Call Jody. Call Crowley, call Rowena, call...*

*Cas.*

But his kneejerk reactions are useless. He doesn't have any of these things here. Not in this world. It's been six months and he's been tuned out of where he is. Six months and he hasn't even tried to find Mom or Lucifer's baby or the goddamn devil...

It's been Sam doing those things, quietly while Dean's been lost in the shadows. Sam warning the council that Lucifer had been angry, that he might have started gathering a demonic army with his son at the helm. Sam, training, all these months, just to be allowed to go out beyond the wall today, to look for Mom because he'd still had faith.

Dean's faith had died with Cas.

*Your brother's been lying to you, the council had said. He didn't go on a supply run. He's on a mission. He won't be back for a month.*

They hadn't specified the details of the mission. They hadn't told him anything other than letting him know that he was going to be on his own now. That because Bobby was gone, they wouldn't have to tolerate him anymore. That even though Bobby had told him that he wasn't ready, that even though the council had thought the same, it didn't matter now because the camp was vulnerable, Bobby having taken the best soldiers out beyond the gate, and the only way that they would survive the month would be to double up the patrols, double up the protection.

*From now on, you'll be guarding the wall every night, they'd said. From now on, from dusk until dawn, you'll be given a gun and you'll be killing angels and anything that dares to enter this camp.*

*And you'll face the consequences, they had assured him. You'll face the consequences because Bobby won't be able to help you if you don't meet the camp standard because if you fail, you'll just be hanged.*

One month.

For one month, he'd be a hunter again.

*And then, the council had said, when your brother comes back, you'll go back to the soup kitchen.*

*After all, it's where you belong.*

It's always so quiet during the night that the camp feels like a graveyard.

There are no lights on. Not along the walls. Too dangerous, they'd decided, early on when they'd been constructing the barricade. Night was when demons moved quicker, when the battles between the forces of heaven and hell grew more vicious and human casualties were the highest. So why draw their battles closer with light, the camp had reasoned, when both sides were so prone to using human camps as shields.

And it was always night when the angels came.

It was always night when they stole humans from the camp.

No watchtowers. There had been, once upon a time. It's what Bobby had told them. But having watchtowers had just made it easier for the angels. They'd flutter in, hidden amongst the shadows of the towers where moonlight couldn't touch them, and they'd whisper, whisper, whisper.

*Come with me, human, they'd say. Come with me to the outside.*

So the camp had torn the towers down. The camp had turned off the watch lights. And every five metres along the camp wall, they had installed a metal grate covered in protective sigils with which to look out.

*See anything, the soldier had told Dean. See anything out there and you raise the alarm.*

So maybe it's wrong when Dean doesn't.

It's when the snowfall's getting heavier. It's when Dean's been gazing out the grate for hours and the peak of night's come. His hands, shivering around the rifle, a rifle that he doesn't understand why he has when the holes in the grate aren't big enough to shoot.

It's when all of this is happening that Dean first sees the angel.

At first, he thinks he's mistaken. There's a blizzard out there and the grate doesn't make it any easier. But then even past the flurry of snow, he starts to make out the angel's body. He starts to see the angel's uncovered tan skin, the angel's bare feet, the black tattoo inked sigils and Enochian words. His breath catches in his throat when he sees dark hair. He already feels

like he's losing himself, but then he sees the wooden crown on the angel's head, crooked and so reminiscent of a halo. *A reminder*, Dean tells himself. A reminder that angels here are different and—and not *Cas*. But it doesn't seem to matter. He still finds himself caring, still finds himself clenching his teeth with desperation and wanting to help when he sees the angel's wings—massive, powerful, and black—drooping down at the angel's shoulders, dragging across the snow because there's something *wrong*, Dean thinks, and the angel's *hurt*.

He should call out, he knows. He should be alerting the camp, screaming at the top of his lungs that there's a threat, but just as he opens his mouth, just before his voice can escape his throat, it's then that the blizzard eases and it's then that Dean finally sees the angel's face.

He can't breathe.

Dean can't breathe because it's *Cas*, and his fingers slip from around the rifle in his hands and he's gone so weak at the knees that he's going to fall, going to fall and never be able to get up. But he reaches out. He reaches out and presses a shaking hand to the grate, as *Cas* comes closer and closer, until Dean can see how *Cas*' red blood is leaking through the bullet holes riddling his chest, staining the white ground red.

*Cas* keeps coming forward. *Cas* keeps limping towards the grate that Dean's got his hand pressed up against, and Dean's face is wet, and his eyes are wet when *Cas* lifts his own trembling hand and presses it to Dean's own.

Every point where their skin touches across the grate feels like fire. Every place where *Cas*' skin meets the sigilled metal makes his hand bleed and colour Dean's own fingers red.

His blood is warm.

*Cas* quivers, a full body shudder that makes the feathers of his wings ruffle, and he meets Dean's eyes, finally, finally. Dean presses his hand harder, harder against the grate until he's cutting his skin and there's nothing more that he wants then, nothing more than to knock it down and out of the way.

"Dean," *Cas* says, voice soft, quiet, a whisper.

Dean finally breathes.

"Cas," he croaks, swallows hard as his throat tries to close up again and again. "God, *Cas*."

"I'm...injured," *Cas* tells him, and he drops his eyes away, quivers violently again, keeps shivering even afterwards. "I need help."

*Cas*' hand slips from the grate. He sways on his feet.

"Hey," Dean says, terrified, and he clutches at the grate helplessly. "Hey. Hang on. Hang on. Don't you dare leave me. I'm going—*Cas*, I'm going to get you. You're—you're gonna be okay. You're—"

"I can't come inside," Cas says and his eyes glitter. He looks up at Dean again. "They'll shoot me if I do."

*So will you come to the outside, human?*

*Will you come here? Will you come to the outside and take care of me?*

# The Dreamscape

It's not that he *doesn't* have a bad feeling about it. It's not that his stomach doesn't coil up into knots, doesn't swell up with anxiety so strong that he knows that his survival instinct's screaming at him, that there's something *wrong* with all of this, something wrong with what Cas is saying.

He's had that feeling before, when Sam and Bobby had been so quiet, when he'd first learned what they'd done to Cas.

"Did you bury him?" Dean had asked (no), and "Did you burn him?" Dean had asked (no), and "What did you do to him?" Dean had asked, when they'd still been silent.

But they hadn't done *nothing*. They hadn't left Cas out for the animals.

What they'd done had been much, much worse.

So it's no wonder that Dean can't forget the uneasy feeling in his stomach right now.

On the other side of the grate, Cas is the very picture of vulnerability, of defencelessness. He's curled up in on himself, wings wrapped loosely around his body, feathers fluttering, weak like a little bird in shock. Whenever Cas sways, Dean can't help himself. He clutches at the grate, digs his nails into the little holes in the metal, harder and harder. Every time Dean reacts, Cas looks up at him with furtive little glances, through the thickness of his dark, dark lashes, riles Dean up all over again, because then Cas'll just look so *helpless*, so in pain that Dean's desperate enough to believe that he could do *anything* to get to Cas, anything to make sure that he's *safe*.

*Will you help me, human?* Cas says then, in those moments. *Will you come to the outside and help me?*

It's not that Dean doesn't *know*. It's not that he doesn't hear the practiced Enochian words, rumbling and ancient, whenever Cas beckons him, whenever Cas tells him to *go*. Cas' words are so smooth that maybe he's obliterated the concept of fluency, as if this is what the result is, of singing the same beguiling lyrics, a thousand years of luring humans away.

But none of it matters.

Dean's powerless. Dean looks at Cas and he's a goner.

*Careful, Dean,* Bobby's voice echoes inside his head. *These angels...they ain't what they appear.*

*They'll take you. They'll take you far away from the camp and then what happens, boy, only you will know.*



Cas shudders all of a sudden, as if he knows what Dean's thinking, as if he can sense the way that Dean's will wavers, bending away from Cas' own. Cas reaches out and presses his hand against the grate again, lets Dean feel what's reality, what the warmth of Cas' hand can do for him.

*It's me*, Cas seems to say. *It's me*.

But it isn't.

It's not Cas.

This is the *thing* that Bobby spent weeks warning him about.

Cas presses the flat of his hand harder against the metal, as if he wants the same thing, as if he wishes the grate weren't there. Dean's hand is as tight against the metal as it can go, and *This isn't Cas*, Dean reminds himself. *This isn't Cas*, even though every part of Dean's body is aching, craving the touch of the angel on the other side of the wall.

If Dean's not wary, he might just go to him.

Cas coughs then. Blood seeps out of the corner of his mouth as if on cue, seeps along with the leaking blue grace from the bullet holes riddling his chest. His hand falls from the grate—again. He sways—again—on his feet. But this time, it's like he can't hold himself up. He shuts his eyes and falls to his knees in the snow.

Dean reacts. *Of course* Dean can't help himself. He claws at the grate with fear running wild through his blood. He says, "Please, please," as if begging will put a stop to what's happening. He looks at Cas who's watching him again, and Cas drops his eyes back to the ground just as quickly, shivers violently as he draws his wings around himself. If Dean has to watch Cas die again, it'll kill him, that Dean knows.

*I can sense your hesitation*, Cas says then, and his feathers quiver feebly. He won't meet Dean's eyes anymore. He doesn't *believe* in Dean anymore. Cas curls up and rocks himself slowly. Cas looks at the blood dripping down his chest and becomes distraught. *Then look away, human*, he says. *Look away if you don't want me. At least let me die in peace.*

"I'd do anything for you," Dean says, and his voice is low, cracking. He's been digging so furiously into the metal that it's starting to bend. "Who did this to you, Cas? Tell me who hurt you. Tell me and I'll—"

The blizzard seems to ease for a moment. There's something about what Dean's said that seems to interest Cas, that makes the feathers on Cas' wings raise as if in excitement. When Cas looks up at him this time, his eyes are dark, pupils blown wide with desire, and his voice seems to sing to Dean. *It was the humans in the camp, Dean*, he says. *It was your people.*

*How many would you kill to keep them away from me? How many would you slaughter if I asked?*

A heartbeat. It's only the span of a heartbeat that Dean takes to answer. He's so far gone that he can't stop himself. He's so far gone that he doesn't even think, doesn't even see the amusement shining in Cas' eyes when he presents his wish to Dean. Dean sees Cas and he sees someone he's got to protect. He sees Cas and he hears a voice that's hurting, that needs *him*. He says yes so quick that he doesn't even feel any guilt before the wicked word leaves his mouth.

*All of them*, Dean says. *I'd end all of them for you.*

Cas' face breaks into a smile. It breaks into such a joyous glorious smile that Dean's own heart seems to swell with adoration in answer.

But then Dean gets that feeling again. That feeling that he'd had when Bobby and Sam had told him about Cas. That unrelenting anxiousness in his gut that always screams at him, that reminds him that something's just so goddamn *wrong*.

Cas wouldn't ask him to kill innocent people. Cas would never want him to shed blood.

So, "I know what you are," Dean says, "and I know you're not him."

That's all it takes.

For a split second, the angel's eyes burn with curiosity, start to burn with a growing holy light that threatens to blind Dean, and then the angel doesn't seem so helpless anymore. There's *might* in his eyes. There's terrible, terrible righteous power that emanates from the angel's bones as the angel moves. And then the angel's standing again, has his face pressed right up against the grate, nose meeting the warding metal.

"What's the matter?" the angel says, and his lips brush the sigils, his voice a perfect imitation, of an old memory, of an old moment in a barn long ago. "You don't think you deserve to be saved?"

And it's so quick. The shock that jolts Dean. The fact that he can't breathe.

Before Dean can say anything, Cas is gone.

The blizzard's still relentless.

The footsteps and drops of blood on the snow aren't there anymore.

For all Dean knows, he dreamt it.

Six months and three days and it's all gone.

That's how long it's been since Cas died. That's how long it'd taken Dean to get back up on his feet, enough to work, enough so that Sammy wouldn't keep looking at him so worried, wouldn't be checking up on him all the goddamn time.

It takes him six months and three days and it all breaks down over the course of one night.

He doesn't know what he's seen. If it was even real or not. But after the angel disappears, Dean's only left standing for a moment before he collapses. He ends up with his back to the wall, to the grate, curled up with his knees against his chest and he's gasping. He gasps for breath for so goddamn long that his throat starts searing with pain and even then, he can't stop.

Instead he seeks more pain.

He digs his ungloved fingers into the snow and grips on to whatever ice they can find.

When morning comes, he doesn't let the officers see him. He can play it cool—years of pretending to be something that he's not makes it easier than it should be. He's calm enough when he signs off. Over the box where it asks him to report any unusual activity, he neatly writes *Nothing*.

But after he's out of there, he shakes. He shakes violently and he stumbles through the back door of the soup kitchen like he's lost. He's not supposed to be here. He's not on the job anymore. But Ai takes one look at him and ushers him inside.

"Poor boy," she mutters. "What the fuck happened to you?"

The rest of the kitchen's already busy. Breakfast hours have started and even though Dean doesn't have his new schedule yet, working in the soup kitchen's taught him that any soldiers coming off a graveyard shift are entitled to their first meal on command.

Ai doesn't waste any time on that front. It's not his commands that she follows—they're her own. She makes him sit down in the cafeteria and brings him a plate filled with more than what's allowed. If it weren't anything new, he'd worry about the council's wrath, about the lashes that she'd receive. But he's seen enough of her not-so-stealthy robberies to know that she's been pilfering the camp since the dawn of time.

There's no lingering today. She spares him one hesitant look and a hand to his shoulder before she rushes back to the kitchen.

So he eats.

He doesn't want to. But because he knows that she'll be checking on him, he picks up his fork. He moves it across his plate, spears peas and brings them up to his closed mouth. But he can't bring himself to accept the food. He can't stomach the thought of eating when the ache in his stomach isn't from hunger.

For a long time, he pushes steamed carrots around. He pushes them until he's made them so mushy that they look more runny than today's soup. The rock-hard bread, he dips it into thick tomato paste and lets it get soggy.

*Is ketchup a vegetable?*

The voice comes out of nowhere.

He puts his hands up over his mouth and barely keeps last night's dinner in.

For a second, he doesn't know if it's real or a dream.

*Is ketchup a vegetable?*

It's not that he hasn't dealt with this before. He'd done it more than enough in the early days, in the first eight weeks in the camp when he'd been so sure that missing Cas would get him killed. But today he *can't*. He can't deal with this when he's barely made himself get through the night. When he already had to hear Cas' voice, out the mouth of a goddamned ghost, maybe—and he's getting surer—a figment of his imagination. So he pushes up and out of his seat. He doesn't know where he'll go, or if he ought to leave at all. But his nausea's so strong that he's ready to double over at any moment.

He only gets to move a step before he sees her.

Ratty clothes and tangled hair. She's got vivacious eyes and can't be more than nine. But she doesn't look it. In a starving camp, they never do. She looks younger, so thin that she might as well be nothing more than a collection of walking bones. She's so thin that as her eyes wander longingly to his plate, Dean becomes consumed with so much guilt that despite the sick feeling in his stomach, he stops in his tracks.

If Dean hadn't seen more than his goddamn worth in life, maybe he would wonder why she isn't wary. Like the other kids. But there are plenty of orphans here. And in the last couple of months, he's heard enough hushed voices to know that having a family isn't worth the hate that possesses this camp. The hate that has parents whispering about how Dean's *a bad man*, a breaker of the council's sacred rules. That all of his misery, everything that he's gotten handed to him, is what he gets for daring to worship an angel.

She asks questions. The questions, he's heard them all before. Curious four year olds with mischievous glints in their eyes because they've escaped their grandparents' clutches, if only for a few seconds.

"Is it true that you were married to an angel lady?" they always ask. "Is it true that tasting their tears lets you live forever and ever?"

And this nine year old girl's no different. She asks him if angels wings are soft like dandelions before they've gone yellow. She wants to know if he ever got to see *god*, if the reason that he has so many freckles is just because he's been kissed that many times.

And then, softly, softly, she wonders why the angels keep taking people from the camp. If her older sister's going to be okay.

He doesn't know those answers.

Nobody does.

So he gets up and leaves without saying another word.

There's only one other person in the men's barracks. Aarif and he's fast asleep, having just gotten off the graveyard shift on the wall like Dean. He's tossing and turning in bed, mumbling things—maybe he'd gone beyond the gate once. Maybe he'd once been in the place that Sammy's in now, faced with all kinds of monsters and terrors that Dean's never gonna be allowed to know.

God, *Sam*.

It's only been one day since his little brother left for his mission and Dean doesn't know how he's going to get through twenty-nine more.

Dean falls into bed, just because after such a long twenty-fours, it's this moment where his legs stop working. He burrows into the sheets and shuts his eyes, tries to think of something other than Sam, other than Bobby.

And other than the angel that he thought he saw across the wall last night.

*This isn't funny, Dean. The voice says I'm almost out of minutes!*

Dean smiles. When he's here, he can. He shifts on the bed, leans back against the pillows so that he can get a good view of Cas straddling his hips. But Cas doesn't seem to be in that kind of mood today. Instead, Cas pulls him down, prompts Dean to lie on his side and then he wraps his arms around him.

"You're never here anymore," Dean says, against the warmth of Cas' chest. He's not wearing his trench coat. In dreams, Dean's mind undresses him as he sees fit. Trench coats are for angel business. White dress shirts for FBI interrogations. Dean's t-shirts for when they're in bed. And *nothing*, of course, when Dean needs—but Dean shoves that thought away. He's okay with this, what they have right now. Sometimes he thinks it's even better than the other stuff.

As if to prove it, Cas runs his fingers through Dean's hair, starts a path of soft caresses from Dean's cheek to his temple. A good dream tonight then. When Cas holds Dean in his arms, he

keeps him safe.

"I know, Dean," Cas says and Dean can hear his soft sad smile. "I know."

Dean licks his lips. If he tries hard enough, he can ignore the fuzziness in Cas' voice. It doesn't rumble as deep anymore. At least not the way that Dean's gut tells him that it should. Sometimes, the fuzziness obscures Cas' face. Sometimes all he can see is Cas' fingers. Those are the nights when he can't conjure up details anymore.

A malicious voice in his head tells him to imagine what he'll remember in ten years.

But *Don't think of that*.

For what feels like forever, they just lie like this, Cas' hand soothing the muscles of his back without hesitation. Enveloping Dean so wholly in his arms that the bunker's cold can't bite him. When Dean shuts his eyes and listens to Cas' heartbeat, Cas' heartbeat seems to grow even louder, seems to echo as if it's the heart of the bunker itself, loud enough that the walls reverberate.

*But that wouldn't be wrong*, Dean thinks. Cas is the heart of his home.

After a while, Cas prods Dean's elbow gently. He tells Dean to get up. "I don't know when we'll be able to talk again," he says, "and I miss our talks when we don't."

It's not that Cas is wrong. They see each other every night, but most times, it's Dean with Cas' body cold in his arms. It's Dean begging him to get up when Cas' spirit's long gone.

So he doesn't want Cas to let go. He's warm and there's nothing wrong for once and he wants it to stay like this, comfortable in Cas' arms.

He doesn't really get a choice.

The sun's rays burn when he blinks his eyes open. Water laps gently against their bed. They're not in the bunker anymore; they're on a lake, and opposite them, across the water, Dean sees it.

The *woods*.

He shivers. Tries to push down all the bad feelings that come up when he remembers what happened among those trees. Maybe Cas senses his discomfort, because Cas' wings are visible now, dark feathers glistening in the light. Dean sits up, gives in to Cas' wish, and Cas wraps his wings gently around him. Dean's head, he lets drop onto his shoulder.

Cas still keeps his arms around him.

"How's Sam?" Cas says. "You seem worried about him."

"I don't know. He went past the wall."

There's silence then. Cas is shivering. He's trembling so much that Dean lifts his head up from Cas' shoulder, presses a hand to his cheek. Cas must be remembering what Sam and Bobby did to him.

"Hey," Dean says. "It's going to be okay. They didn't go that way."

"I don't like the other soldiers, Dean. They didn't listen to Bobby."

Dean drops his hand from Cas' face. He leans his head against Cas' shoulder again and stares out across the lake. He stares at the woods.

"I know what they did to you," Dean says and like always, it's this that gets to him. It makes him hurt like hell inside, makes him ache and grieve all over again. Cas pulls him in closer, whispers something about the night sky, about the fireworks that he and Sam lit a long time ago as kids, and maybe because Cas so desperately wants to comfort him, as if on cue, the sky lights up.

But Dean's fists curl up at his sides. His teeth clench and his throat closes up.

So, "Tell me what you would say," Cas breathes into his ear, "if I were here."

Dean lets out a shaky breath. Cas' voice makes the world stand still.

The fireworks stop.

The lightning halts mid-flash in the sky.

It illuminates the darkest parts of the woods.

"Don't look," Dean tells him when he sees what Sam and Bobby are doing over there. "Cas, keep your eyes shut."

They shift. Cas' arms let go of him. This time it's Dean who pulls Cas to him. This time, he wraps his arms around Cas, makes sure that Cas' back is to those woods.

Makes sure that Cas can't see.

"I miss you," Dean says and his voice cracks—he's never said it before, not once in a dream. Saying it is believing that he's not coming back. Saying it is breaking Cas' trust.

But Cas doesn't blame him. He nudges his nose against Dean's neck and sighs into his skin.

*I know you're hurting, Cas says. I can feel it from the inside.*

*So one more time, human. One more time. Will you come to the outside? Will you come to the outside and let me take care of you?*

Dean swallows. Dean shudders.

Cas kisses his neck and Dean almost says *Yes*.

Ai wakes him up three hours before his shift's due to start. For someone who cares a lot about what he eats, she doesn't seem that bothered with his amount of sleep deprivation.

"Sit," she says, shoving him until he's cross-legged at her feet. She's on the bed, brandishing a comb, and even though she ought to be at work, he doesn't bother asking. She's always done what she wants and the council seems to be okay with that, no lashes and the whole nine.

The men's barracks are still empty. The only occupant is still the sleeping soldier. So maybe it's because Aarif's still tossing and turning that Ai asks Dean, "Bad dream?"

Dean lets out an exasperated sigh. "You're not supposed to always start with the negative, alright?" he tells her. "Good dreams. You're supposed to ask about them first."

Ai doesn't say anything. Maybe she's cross with him. But when she starts running her comb through his tangled hair, she's gentle all the same.

They're like that for a while. Dean grumbles when she gets experimental and braids a strand of his hair. When she picks up her scissors to chop off his beard in one go, he cowers until she desists.

"I like it," he says. "I wanna keep it."

She huffs.

"Next time," she says and then motions to his long hair with a wicked snip. "This, too."

He doesn't protest. They both know when the time comes, she won't because he won't let her. The longer his hair grows, it's a reminder of how long Cas has been gone. And he needs that. He needs to remember. He needs to keep track.

It's somewhere when she's making a second braid for her own amusement that the clocks in the men's block sing five. In another hour, the others will be returning from the work day. Another hour after that, and Dean'll have to go back to the wall.

Maybe that's why he seizes up.

He might not be able to remember his dreams. Not often. But he still remembers the hallucination from last night.

So, in a low voice, he croaks, "I saw *him*."



Ai doesn't react. She continues braiding. But they both know that it's what she's been waiting for. She must have known right away, when he'd walked into the kitchen such a mess. For months, she'd seen him like that. Today hadn't been the only time that he'd glimpsed something that wasn't really there.

So, eventually, she says, "A bad dream."

And it should be settled at that. He's supposed to agree and realize it. That what she's saying is right.

But this time Dean looks at his feet. This time, "At the wall," he mumbles, because brushing it away isn't so easy. "I saw him at the *wall*."

Ai's hand falters. She pulls it away from his hair and holds on to his shoulder, as if she's steadying herself and not Dean. She doesn't say anything. For half an hour, she spends it braiding his entire head. For half an hour, Dean thinks of Cas.

When she begins unbraiding, he finally tells her what he should've told her right away.

"He asked me to go with him, Ai. He told me he wanted me to come outside."

And it's so *fast*. Ai's reaction jolts him again. Her nails dig into his shoulder blades this time, his hair abandoned. He turns around when he hears her gasping, and he wonders if it's the end for the old lady, if she's having a heart attack and planning to leave him, too. But instead, he's met with a terrified gaze. Instead he's met with eyes that push him into him with a resolute hardness. Eyes that command, *Listen*.

"Stories," she says sharply. "You got them stuck in your head."

So, *Never go outside*, she says. *Never listen to your stupid head*.

It feels harsher than he expects. It feels like the sting of rejection.

"I know," he says and he looks away from her, peers down at his toes again. "I know it wasn't real."

And maybe saying it is enough to make him believe it. While she undoes his braids, the angel that he saw at the wall already feels like a dream, like a hallucination. The Cas with the lilting, manipulative voice starts to become fainter. By the time Ai's done with his hair, he's fighting the sinking feeling in his stomach, the feeling that never lets him forget that Cas is *gone* and he's not coming back.

At six sharp, she leaves him, with one braid still in his hair and a pinch to remind him that he better come for dinner. The barracks aren't so empty anymore. It's not just Dean and Aarif. With all the men trickling back in from the end of work, it's getting loud and maybe that's why he almost doesn't hear *it*—the first time's so soft.

But then Aarif tosses again in his sleep and mutters *it* again, loud and angry enough that it carries through all of the noise. Aarif turns again in his sleep, pulls at the sheets with his

hands rolled into fists, and he says the only word that could possibly make Dean *believe* again.

“*Castiel*,” Aarif says, and Dean's heart seems to stutter to a stop in his chest.

## Stupid Goddamn Hope

Before Sam and Bobby had told Dean what they'd done to Cas, they'd told him something else.

That in death, Cas' body had transformed. That after dying, Cas' clothes had turned to dust, the tattered remnants of his coat carried away by the spring wind. And the marks of Cas' burnt wings. The marks scorched into the dirt, whose sight had brought Dean to his knees, whose sight had had him clawing at Cas' trench coat trying to rouse him desperately even though Cas had long left. It had been those marks, Sam had said, with awe shining in his eyes, that had been replaced with soft feathers instead.

*Real wings, Dean.* Real wings with gleaming black feathers interspersed with the darkest blues, purples and reds. Feathers that Sam had *touched*, only to draw his fingers away with wonder because he'd never felt anything so soft. And then wisps of black ink that had swept up from the bottom of Cas' bare feet, trailing up his naked body like vines, the Enochian sigils blossoming here and there like little flowers with bursts of blue light.

But that light hadn't travelled to Cas' head.

Cas hadn't had a *halo*.

A gnarled wooden crown had sprung forth from the earth and had molded itself to Cas, but the colour had been dull. There'd been no electric current running through it to make it burn blue.

The life from Cas' body had still been gone.

But maybe it had been that whispered story of Cas' transformation that had buried some semblance of hope in Dean's heart. Maybe it's why, even now, Dean's heart is beating and fluttering like it is, with that same stupid hope—a stupid goddamn hope that had come alive last night, that tells him that the angel that he saw was real and not just an otherworldly Cas either. A hope that makes him tighten his fingers into a fist and believe that it's *his* Cas that's been haunting the camp's walls at night, lost and disorientated and in need of Dean's help.

So maybe that's why Dean doesn't do anything.

He doesn't go to dinner; Ai'll be mad and he still knowingly ignores the guilt that curls up in his stomach because of that. Instead, he sits on the edge of his little cot for half an hour and prays that a sleeping man that he barely knows will mumble Cas' name again. Instead, he clenches his jaw, tries his damn hardest to hear above the din of a double dozen men getting ready for bed, because that's just how fucking desperate he's become.

If Aarif's lips mouth *Castiel*, then the angel that he saw at the wall last night becomes *real*.

And then that stupid hope in Dean's heart becomes something more.

But Aarif doesn't. He still tosses and turns. He still talks in his sleep. But it's about things that make it clear to Dean that he can't even ask the man about what he said. Instead, Aarif's mouth opens to mutter about *killing* angels, things that can't help but make Dean feel afraid.

It's not that he doesn't know how foolish it is, wanting to keep *this* Cas safe. That much like how Rufus in this world is Bobby's gun, despite all of Dean's goddamned hope, this might not be his Cas. This might still be a Castiel that he won't be able to recognize, a version who maybe enjoys tempting innocent people to come over the wall for him. To hurt them, maybe.

He shouldn't want to protect someone like that.

But Dean can't help it.

Dean still prays because something is better than nothing and his faith won't let him believe that it's someone else.

So it's what he's thinking about when curfew sets in and he's marching to the wall for duty. It's what he's thinking about as he shivers in the cold, because it's snowing just like last night, and it feels so much like a dream that it makes Dean's feet move a little faster, so damn eager that is he just to get to a six by twelve inch grate. Just to glimpse blue eyes because even though Aarif's lips never moved to form *Castiel*, it doesn't kill the hope that Dean has—it just slows its growth.

But he doesn't get there.

To the grate.

Watch duty starts but the commanding officer pulls Dean aside before he can even finish strapping on his patrol vest.

"The council," the officer barks. "Come back immediately."

And then in Dean's place, he puts Aarif by the wall.

At the old courthouse, it's the same guard as last night. The guard remembers him—when the whole goddamn camp knows you as *the angel's widower*, it's not exactly the easiest to make yourself a forgettable face. But even then the guard grabs him by his necklace again. Inspects it carefully as if he doesn't know that it's the infamous Dean Winchester.

"How'd a thing like you get such quality silver, huh?" he says and he lingers over Dean's chain, thumbs over the engraved piece for another second before he shoves Dean through the door.

And it's instantly dark.

It's instantly foreboding.

In front of the council's dais, the seat that sits in the devil's trap is there like always. The uneasy feeling that always drags Dean down whenever he's in this place swells up in his chest as if it never really left. But the closer he gets to the chair, the more he's aware that

things have changed since last night. That today, there's a small table in front of the chair. A walkie-talkie placed perfectly in the centre. And around it all, more guards than he's ever seen before.

He doesn't want to sit there.

He's afraid that if he does, he'll never be allowed near the wall again.

But the longer he hesitates, the longer Aarif will be at the grate where Cas might appear. And the last thing that Dean wants is a man who dreams about murdering angels to meet Dean's own.

So he sits in the chair. He lets himself be trapped in a ring of fire when the council's servant lights up the circle of holy oil. And he prepares himself for the moment when the council will say, *Dean Winchester, you may commence with your oath.*

It doesn't take forever. Not like last time. He doesn't falter. His voice is smooth when he rejects the devil and god. Maybe it's because he thinks he's seen something tangible of Cas, something outside of his dreams and the tricks that his mind plays on him when he's awake. Maybe it's because it's not hard to reject dick angels if Cas...if some part of Cas is still alive.

But after he finishes, the council's silent for a long time. They're silent as if they know what his new confidence means.

"Dean Winchester," they finally say and the uneasiness clinging to the air seems to intensify. "Your brother contacted us today to report back on the progress of his mission. He wished to speak with you."

It's pathetic how afraid he is when they tell him to pick up the goddamn walkie-talkie. How Dean holds his breath at the thought of having to speak to Sam, as if he doesn't want to, even though he promised that he would be a better brother now and be there for him. And even then, even past all of the hesitation, there are just about a thousand things that he wants to say. Angry things. For Sam not telling him that he'd be leaving for a goddamn month. At Bobby, for making it seem like Sam's stroll out the gate was gonna be routine. And the worry, too. A hundred lines of anxious advice and maybe a word with Bobby, to make sure that at every turn, he's there to keep Sam out of harm's way.

But none of these things are for the council's eavesdropping ears. And in the end, what he wants to say gets obliterated from his mind because as soon as he clicks to accept the message, "I found Mom," Sam says, "and she's not...good."

*The angels got to her.*

It's curfew and it's late and he should be back at the wall already, prying the grate and the potential for Cas' reappearance from Aarif's bloodthirsty hands, but he doesn't go back. He goes shaking to Ai's doorstep instead.

There aren't any patrol guards around. He'd dodged enough when he'd veered off his approved path, but maybe luck's on his goddamn side for once so *Ten minutes*, he promises. Ten minutes and he'll go back to duty. For ten minutes, he prays that Cas'll be safe.

The forewoman answers the door. Every barrack's got one, making sure curfew hours are obeyed and to facilitate menial household tasks—who gets to do laundry on the Friday, when most of the camp's non-essential personnel get the day off work. Or who fetches the water from the well, who empties and scrubs the chamber pots and sweeps the floor. Most of the time, all of those tasks had been Dean's, but then Bobby had noticed and the man in charge had been stripped of his status and given ten lashes instead. *Not fair*, the man had howled afterwards. Not fair that *the dumb grieving widow* gets to sit around and do nothing while the rest of the camp's got to work, but that hadn't mattered to Bobby. It had only mattered to the council.

But Dean knows he'll be okay with the forewoman here.

Because unsurprisingly, it's Ai.

It doesn't take her long to usher him outside to the outhouse. It stinks in here but it's the only place where they can get some privacy, and that must be important to her because as soon as she takes in his pale face and quivering shoulders, she's already sure about what he's going to say.

"You saw your angel again," she says but she's wrong.

He watches her face change as he tells her about what Sam said. Not any details—Sam had given him none. Not if Mom was found still coherent or if she'd been marked like the angels with their black ink. All Sam had said was that she would be coming back to the camp without him, that whatever his mission was, it wasn't over, and that it would be Dean's responsibility to take care of her.

*You can do that, Dean*, Sam had said. *Right?*

It'd felt like a slap in the face hearing the panic in Sam's voice, when he'd asked. As if he hadn't been sure that Dean *could*, if Dean was *stable* enough, even though Dean had spent his whole goddamn life taking care of him, feeding and clothing Sammy through worse.

And it's what Dean had believed. For about ten seconds. But then there'd been a feeling gnawing at him. Maybe uncertainty, maybe something confirming all of the doubts that Sam was having, all of the doubts that had already begun crossing Dean's own mind.

*You don't even know anything about the angels' victims*, some voice had whispered in his ear. *Where they go. What they do.*

*What happens to them afterwards...*

Sam had always shielded him. He'd never let Dean see when the victims had been brought through the gate.

And maybe what the truth is *is* worthy of nightmares. Maybe it's why Sam had sounded so frantic when he'd asked Dean to take care of Mom because after he tells Ai, after he talks about the angels having touched Mary, Ai's face is like ash and she puts a hand to his shoulder, tells him harshly that she hopes that his mother dies before she reaches the camp because *You don't want to know*, she says, *what the council will do*.

And then she won't tell him anything more. She presses her lips together and keeps her mouth shut and she looks at him for the longest time, with maybe some of that same fear that he'd seen in her eyes when he'd told her about Cas trying to call him over the wall. She looks and she looks while he tries to reason with himself that whatever it is, it can't be so bad, if Sam's willing to let Mom come back to the camp without him. *But you know what Sam did to Cas*, that same voice in his head reminds him. *You know what he did so why do you think this is going to be any different?*

But ten minutes are up.

It's time to head back to the wall.

At the grate, Aarif's back is stiff. His eyes, trained on what's beyond. He doesn't turn around when he hears the crunch of Dean's boots on snow.

"You can go," Dean tells him.

But Aarif doesn't move.

Instead, "Someone told me you were watching me sleep today," Aarif says and *Of course*.

*Of fucking course* because Dean's not surprised. Ever since he set foot in the camp, he's had eyes following him. It doesn't matter whose eyes they are. Whether it's the council's own spies or a gossiping old man. The point is, people in the camp don't trust him. They starve and they're hopeless and if exposing a crime to the council is what it takes to have their food rations upped, then nothing else matters.

Surviving is everything here.

And picking on the angel's widower might just be the most guiltless way to do it.

So, "You were talking in your sleep," Dean says by way of excuse, "and it was distracting."

And Dean leaves it at that. Dean expects that Aarif'll accept it and move on, even if Dean will be thinking about it all goddamn night. Even if every time Aarif takes a nap, Dean'll be listening, eyes peeled, waiting for him to say what Dean needs so badly to hear.

And he thinks it's okay. He thinks Aarif leaves it at that, too, because he starts turning around, finally abandoning the post, finally going back to whichever grate he's really assigned to. But when the soldier faces Dean, he only takes one step forward before he stops again and says, "Or *maybe*, you were watching me because you heard me call your lover's name."

And the pain in Dean's chest is instant.

The shock, enough to stop him breathing.

Aarif *knows*.

He hadn't considered that possibility—that maybe the reason that the soldier had called Cas' name was because he'd heard it before. That maybe Dean had imagined the angel at the wall last night after all, because Aarif hadn't been talking about any real angel in existence—just the one that the whole camp hated Dean for.

Except for the fact that nobody knows Cas' name.

Except for the fact that Cas' name is private and aside from Bobby and Sam, even Ai's never been told.

So Dean's feet move without thinking. Dean's got his fingers digging into the man's shoulders and he's pinning him against the wall without a second thought. And then Dean's snarling the question, demanding it, and he hates it. He hates how fucking *broken* he sounds even asking. He hates how all of the stupid hope that he's had cradled inside of himself since last night—all of it's starting to warp, starting to turn back into the ugly, ugly grief and loneliness that he's so used to because losing Cas has felt like losing his own goddamn life.

Aarif smiles. He smiles and it's not a happy one either. It's angry and bitter like the whirlwind of emotions raging through Dean's blood like a fucking hurricane, and it's a smile that doesn't reach Aarif's eyes.

"You think I wouldn't know," Aarif says, "if you've been crying the name of the monster that took my sister beyond the gate?"

*You've been calling his bloody name for weeks. I'm not the only who talks in his sleep.*

So, "I know you're not any fucking widow," Aarif says. "I know Castiel isn't dead. And when I find him, I'm going to fucking kill him."

And that's it.

That's all it takes for Dean to get the confirmation that he's been seeking.

*Cas was real.*



He knows he shouldn't be wishing it.

Not when Aarif thinks that Dean's lying. Not when Aarif thinks that Cas isn't really dead and that Dean's here in this camp pretending to be heartbroken, planning something nefarious while in cahoots with the other angels.

But the man doesn't have any proof. Bobby had seen Cas' body. As long as Cas is a no-show at the wall, Aarif can't take Dean to the council.

So why is it then—why is it so damn hard for Dean to stop praying?

Hours pass. He watches the sky stutter as snow comes and goes and halts and goes again. He watches for hours, alternating between worried thoughts about the council and what they might do to Mom, and worried, longing thoughts about Cas—about how he *needs* him, about how it's just safer if Cas doesn't reappear. And yet—none of it matters. Instead he still holds his rifle tight with both hands clasped, and maybe it's a sin this way, to beg for a god's attention when he's got violence held between his fingers.

But maybe someone knows what his heart's true intentions are.

Maybe someone hears him.

It's only in the distance at first, just like last time. It's far enough that it's only the arching of wings and the glinting of light off feathers. It's *anticipation*, making Dean's heart pound because it could be any angel out there and maybe that's just a part of the game.

But then Cas comes *closer*.

Cas takes a few tentative steps towards the wall.

There's a sound low in Dean's throat, words that he wants to say but can't because he'd be too loud. Cas is goddamn *menacing* tonight, his halo crackling with wicked electricity, and he's not the shivering naked little bird from before. He's not *weak*. He doesn't need Dean's help tonight because he's dropped that farce and as he walks, he's heaven's *glory*, making lightning pour through the sky in a terrifying weather display with every step that he takes. A warrior of God, Dean reminds himself. A warrior dressed in robes like Dean's seen a hundred times in portraits depicting heaven's armies except Cas' robes are black. Cas' garments are so fucking sheer that they do nothing to hide every tattooed inch of his skin, every muscle, every part of him bare to showcase his splendour.

There's something hard to swallow about that last thought. Something that stirs uncomfortably in Dean's gut knowing that *anyone* can see him, because maybe he's a sight

that Dean doesn't want to share. He's a sight that has Dean's blood rushing to his head, fingers gone from the gun because they're clutching at the grate again with desperation, with thoughtlessness, and *Get away from there!* Dean wants to tell him. *Get away, you dumbass,* because the moonlight's too strong and every soldier on this side of the wall will be watching—how couldn't they when Cas looks like *this*?

But Cas doesn't budge.

He stops *moving*.

Cas stands there, as if he's teasing Dean, as if he knows exactly how Dean's holding his breath, and Cas is careful, careful as he lowers himself to the ground, as he sinks to his knees so gracefully as if it's all just a dance. Cas sits there on the snow-covered earth, wings arching, flaring and stretching, challenging the whole goddamn world in some stubborn display of strength because they're just so damn *huge*, those wings—just so damn *visible*, before Cas brings them back to curl around himself.

*Do you like what you see, human?* he almost seems to say, when he runs his fingers over his own body, over soft, soft feathers that Dean's yearning to touch, and it's as if he's bathing, just enjoying the feel of the moonlight on his skin while he looks so stupidly pretty, so goddamn handsome that it steals Dean's breath away. "God, Cas," Dean mutters then, and he presses against the grate harder, pining and wanting, wishing a thousand times that Cas would come closer, but still so fearful because he knows it's too much, that wish, when any soldier could see, when anyone could *catch* him.

And it's like Cas wants to prove him wrong.

It's like Cas wants to reassure Dean that he's *almighty*, that he's all powerful and can't be stopped, because as if in answer to Dean's anxiety, the snow seems to glow an ethereal white and the black sigils on Cas' body start to burn blue.

The ground beneath Dean's feet starts to hum.

There's a moment then, a long moment where Dean gazes at Cas with fucking wonder, because somehow, it seems as if time's halted in its place and the hum of the earth is like a groaning gear that's trying to move again, trying to get the hands of the clock to go, but there's nothing that can be done, not when an angel's pulling all the strings.

Cas' eyes are closed.

Cas' body is so still that he could be a statue.

But then he opens them again and they're shining with holy light, and there's some sort of *fury* in them, some sort of terrible divine fury that has Dean's whole form shaking. Minutes pass or maybe seconds, really, but the light just seems to go on and on, starts to drown out Dean's vision and he should look away, he knows, but Dean just *can't*.

*Keep your eyes on me, human,* Cas' voice seems to ring out inside Dean's head, glorious and deep. *Look at what I can do.*

And the ground keeps shaking. And the light keeps growing and there's heat around Dean's neck, as the chain and tag of his inmate necklace seems to become molten metal against his skin.

The next thing Dean knows, he's waking up at the foot of the wall covered in fallen snow, the necklace still burning hot and the angel beyond the wall gone yet again.

# The Pining Man

## Chapter Notes

There's a dream sequence at the beginning. The last bit of the dream is pretty darn sad but the chapter does lighten up right after (\*•٠•\*)و

Also embedded into this chapter are song lyrics (so 2000's!). You can listen to *Tu est partout* by Edith Piaf on YouTube [here](#), if YouTube works in your country. But the English translation is a little off.

It starts to happen more and more frequently.

That Dean'll see Cas, beyond the wall, but Cas will never be close enough, never near enough to touch, to talk to.

Most of the time, Dean wonders if he's dreaming. Most of the time, none of it feels real. There'll never be any evidence. No footsteps in the snow. No soldier running out and screaming that there's an angel along the wall, one that needs to be killed.

It's like Cas' little displays of power are just for Dean.

It's like Cas knows that every time Dean sees the angel without being able to hear his voice, there'll be a fire burning in Dean's gut, one that only grows the longer that they're apart.

Sometimes Dean thinks that he catches Cas smiling, a small barely noticeable uplifting of the lips. Cas' smile will be full of pleasure, so delighted and smug as if he knows exactly what he's doing, as if it's exactly what he planned. And then, when it's Dean's fifth night guarding the wall and Cas doesn't appear, it's almost as if Dean can feel it in his gut, too, that Cas' first absence is *purposeful*, just to stoke that little fire in Dean, just to keep Dean desperate and squirming.

That night, the impatience gets to him. That night, by the time morning comes around and his patrol shift is over, Dean's rocking on his toes, so anxious when he's writing up his sign-off report that even the officer in charge gives him a look.

But he can't help it.

He can't stop his heart from twinging in his chest, when he gets to the question that asks him if he saw anything on duty. He can't stop himself from gritting his teeth with frustration, when he has to write *Nothing* truthfully for the first goddamn time. And then when he gets to the men's barracks and tries to get in his sleep for the day, he tosses and turns in bed, because maybe whatever Cas intended, it's *working*.

So he spends an hour on his back, staring at the ceiling while Aarif mumbles threats in his sleep. So he spends an hour picturing Cas' face, Cas' wings, and what Cas might say, if only he would come closer for once, if only he'd talk to Dean.

It doesn't occur to him, when it happens. When between daydreams, his eyes close and he slips into sleep, and even here, it's the same thing on his mind, the same person like always.

*You should show me some respect. I dragged you out of hell; I can throw you back in.*

"You seem happier," Cas says, when they're sitting in bed together in the bunker. Cas' face is crystal sharp today. He's so real that when Dean runs his hands over Cas' skin, he can feel the stubble on his jaw. Cas smiles at him, at the ticklish feeling, and reaches out and lets his fingers tangle in Dean's hair. "When was the last time you cut this, Dean?" he says and his nose wrinkles with amusement.

Dean tries not to think about it. It's not exactly something that he wants to remember. But it's like his mind's not capable. The dream doesn't change so, "Before you died," Dean says and Cas' face is immediately pained.

Dean makes an unhappy sound low in his throat, wants Cas to know that he feels the same, and he looks down at his feet, clenches his jaw. But Cas' fingers travel there. Cas' fingers massage the tension away and then he opens his arms, lets Dean settle in against his chest.

"You'll be okay, Dean," Cas tells him and he wraps his wings around them both.

Dean leans his head on Cas' shoulder.

*Nous nous aimions bien tendrement*

*Comme s'aiment tous les amants*

*Et puis un jour tu m'as quittée*

*Depuis je suis désespérée*

*Je te vois partout dans le ciel*

*Je te vois partout sur la terre*

*Tu es ma joie et mon soleil*

*Ma nuit, mes jours...*

They're quiet like that for a bit. They listen to the sounds of music floating down the hall from Sam's room, an old French number from the forties. *Eileen's favourite*, Dean knows. But he doesn't know how he knows this.

Cas starts running his hand down Dean's back, the palm flat against the fabric of Dean's shirt. Up and down, rubbing so soothingly that Dean feels his heartbeat slow, feels his eyes droop as if he'll drift off at any minute, even though he knows that it's a dream.

So he buries his nose into the crook of Cas' neck. He uses Cas' scent to ground him and remind him that none of it is real (not that it's something that he wants to remember).

Cas leans his head against Dean's.

Cas starts humming.

*Des fois je rêve que je suis dans tes bras*

*Et qu'à l'oreille tu me parles tout bas.*

*Tu dis des choses*

*qui font fermer les yeux*

*Et moi, je trouve...*

The water in Dean's room is higher today. It laps at the edges of his bed in a strange harmony with the voice coming through the walls. When Dean opens his eyes, they're on the lake again, their bed no longer anchored, just floating gently across to the other side.

But Dean can see where the waters turn violent.

Dean remembers what Sam and Bobby did.

When Dean goes stiff, Cas' hand on his back stops moving. Cas starts to crane his neck, turning around to see what Dean's looking at over his shoulder but "Don't," Dean says. "Cas, don't."

In the distance, Eileen's song starts back up from the beginning.

*...tu m'as quittée*

*Depuis je suis désespérée*

*Je te vois partout...*

It's not enough. Ever. Knowing what they did. Knowing that Sam, above all, was a part of it.

Maybe if Dean could've been allowed to burn the body, Cas could be at peace now. Cas wouldn't be shivering in Dean's dreams.

But then, tonight must be different. Because the bed lurches. Because it starts sailing again, in a different direction, and it's not a lake anymore, it's a river. They're moving away from those violent waters, away from those *woods*.

They both relax.

Cas' hand doesn't start running up and down Dean's back again. Instead, he pulls Dean down, tired of sitting, and they lie curled up close, knees connected, noses almost touching but not quite. For a few moments, Dean can't seem to take his eyes off Cas. He's mesmerized. Cas seems so *real* today.

But then Dean blinks back in surprise because Cas leans in close and kisses his nose.

"Hey," Dean says, affronted, and Cas starts laughing. It's soft and hiccupy and, "I've never heard you laugh before," Dean says because he hasn't, he realizes. He'd heard Cas laugh possessed by leviathans and Lucifer but never on his own.

There hadn't been enough happy things for them for that.

"Never had you in my bed like this either," Dean says and he wonders about the thousands of other things that he missed.

*Tu es partout, car tu es dans mon cœur,*

*tu es partout, car tu es mon bonheur.*

*Toutes les choses qui sont autour de moi,*

*même la vie...*

There's a bitterness that comes with knowing that everything that he's done here, he doesn't really know. The feel of Cas' lips on his nose. The touch of Cas' hand, Dean thinks, as he reaches out even now, aching, and grasps it. Dean weaves their fingers together and kisses every bump of Cas' knuckles. Cas watches him quietly as he does it.

*Tu ne pourras pas oublier*

*Les jours que nous avons passés.*

It's like even in dreams, it's forbidden. It's like his mind knows that to dream it would be to spoil the real thing. Cas wraps an arm around his waist and pulls Dean closer, but no matter how bad Dean wants it, he's never able to kiss Cas' mouth, to feel the press of their lips together. Instead, he settles for a flurry of kisses to Cas' shoulder. He digs the fingers of his free hand into the feathers of Cas' wings, a fistful, just to try to imagine that softness that Sam had encountered.

Cas groans.

"Not so rough," he says and he's breathless.

Heat pricks the tips of Dean's ears.

He politely smooths the ruffled path of his chaos with a thumb.

*Nous nous aimions bien tendrement*

*Comme s'aiment tous les amants*

*Et puis un jour tu m'as quittée*

*Depuis je suis*

*désespérée*

He straddles Cas' hips. Cas peers up at him with entertained eyes when his shirt disappears in accordance with Dean's fantasy-fuelled whims.

"I didn't know it was going to be this kind of dream, Dean."

Dean grins. Dean wants to kiss him so bad.

But he settles for rolling his hips. He settles for grinding his ass against Cas' clothed cock so that he can watch that plush mouth instead, watch how that mouth gasps open when Cas closes his eyes and sinks into the pleasure that Dean gives him. Dean lets out a filthy moan of his own when Cas reaches up to grab his hips and guide his movements.

Dean hasn't dreamt about this in ages. Dean hasn't wanted this since everything happened.

He wasn't even sure that he could ever feel like this again.

*Tu es ma joie et mon soleil,*

*ma nuit, mes jours, mes aubes claires.*



*Tu es partout, car tu es dans mon cœur,*

*tu es partout, car tu es mon bonheur...*

He doesn't know when, or maybe he just never noticed it, but he sees now. He sees Cas' body covered with black markings, endless Enochian words. He sees the halo on Cas' head, an electric blue circlet teeming with energy.

He sees the angel from the wall.

Cas doesn't change. Not his face. Not the way he looks at Dean so intensely, because he always has. But Dean reaches out with his hands and runs them over the markings as if they're foreign. Dean touches the muscles of Cas' bare chest and Cas jerks at the sensation.

Cas shudders.

Cas is hard and throbbing under him.

*Peut-être un jour tu reviendras,*

*je sais que mon cœur t'attendra.*

*Tu ne pourras pas oublier,*

*les jours que nous avons passés.*

*Mes yeux te cherchent sans arrêt*

*écoute bien,*

*mon cœur t'appelle.*

*It's okay, Cas tells him. It's just an effect of widowhood.*

But it's still humiliating. It's still stupid. He's been sitting with his back to Cas for five minutes staring at his crotch, but nothing's happening. It's like he hopes that if he's angry enough, it'll get rid of the pathetic softness between his legs.

As if on cue, Cas says, "Glaring at your penis is not going to make it better, Dean."

Dean grits his teeth. He tosses the nearest pillow at Cas' head.

"That's easy for you to say when you're still sporting a fucking semi."

Cas gives him a long suffering sigh. The sun beats down on them. Maybe Dean shouldn't be surprised that their bed ran ashore and stuck them on a fucking desert island. Sea, lake, river, Dean doesn't even fucking know.

"There are other things that we can do, Dean. It—"

"Oh, yeah? If you want me to suck you off so bad, Cas, why don't you just say it."

Cas grumbles behind him.

"You're being ridiculous," he says.

They spend the next little while like that. Dean, huffy, with Cas at his back. Cas, patient, waiting for Dean to calm down. But finally, well, maybe, Cas isn't really that patient. Maybe the Cas in his dreams has just about the same level of patience that Dean does because he *is* Dean, a figment of himself anyway, and maybe that's why Cas gets so tired of looking at him sulking. "Other things, Dean," he says. "We can do other things like..."

*I could hold you*, Cas says softly.

And that hits hard. A strangled sort of sound comes out of Dean's throat. His bottom lip quivers.

It was all just a bad fucking idea. Trying to have sex with Cas when he can't even get himself to kiss him in a dream. And maybe there's another problem. The fact that the last time that Dean had dreams about riding Cas into the night, he could wake up all hot and bothered and know that Cas was still out there. That Cas and everything he'd fantasized about could be his, if only he'd get the courage to pick up the phone and dial Cas' number, tell him how much he meant to Dean.

Not anymore.

Cas can never hold him. Not really.

But Dean's brain must be stubborn. Dean's brain must be the most pigheaded he's ever comes across because despite his realization, behind him, Cas moves anyway. He puts a concerned hand on Dean's elbow, as if he can sense that Dean's going to break at any second because Dean's just shivering that hard.

And Dean *does*.

Dean's vision blurs as tears obscure it. He's crying like he's fucking five, with shaking shoulders and hands over his face. From behind him, Cas wraps his arms around him, strokes his hair and hushes him, tells him that it's going to be okay. Cas is there in a way that he might not ever be when Dean wakes up, so Dean just takes this damn opportunity and goes to him. Dean just curls up needily against him and shuts his eyes tight, tries to remember a time when things weren't so shit.

Maybe he's just been holding it in too long.

Maybe that's why it hurts like the first day.

"Dean?" Cas says, and his voice comes out warbled. *Forgotten*, Dean knows. He starts to wonder if Cas' voice was ever really like that, or if he's been imagining it wrong.

"We were never fucking married, alright?" Dean says and he knows that it's out of the blue. He knows Cas isn't expecting it. But Cas' earlier comment gets to him. It has him clenching his fists as more stupid tears leak out. "It's not an effect of freaking widowhood because I'm not one, alright? I'm not a goddamn widow because we weren't anything. I was a coward, Cas! I couldn't even tell you—and I just *miss* you now. I just fucking miss you all the goddamn time and it's never going to be anything else."

Cas tightens his arms around him. *I'm here now*, he tells him. "I'm not going anywhere."

But, "You're not here," Dean bites. "You're not here. This is a dream."

Dean lets out a shaky breath.

"I think I'm losing my goddamn mind," he says. "I wanna believe so bad that it's not some psycho angel wearing your face out there but I can't think straight when I see him. I see him and I believe everything he says. I see him and I'm so sure that it's you, but I'm still scared that it's not. And then you're here, and you're nothing like him. And I'm not sure after that. I want to believe he's really you. I want to believe you're not dead."

Cas is quiet when he listens. He listens as if what Dean's spewing even makes sense. As if he can pick out Dean's meaning even though there are a thousand conflicting emotions running through him right now, a thousand angry thoughts.

Sam. Mom. Cas.

He doesn't know how to express them. He just doesn't.

So he finds himself begging. He finds himself pleading like he always does when he just needs Cas so bad, when it doesn't matter how or why.

"It's you, isn't it? At the wall?" he says. "Cas, tell me it's you. Or god, tell me that this isn't just a dream. Tell me I'm wrong and you're dream-walking and you're out there somewhere. You're out there and I can get to you if you just tell me where to go."

But Cas' mouth stays shut. It's not the first time that Dean's asked him this. And maybe that's why Cas doesn't answer. Maybe Cas doesn't have the heart to tell him for the hundredth time that *No, Dean, this isn't dream-walking. This isn't me. None of what we have here is real.*

Maybe hours pass after that. Hours where he feels fucking hopeless. Where the doubt starts to crawl in again and where the bad feeling in his stomach, that gut instinct about the angel at the wall seeps back. It feels surreal, how he can go from point A to B like this, how he can go to sleep desperately wanting to see Cas at the wall to afraid, to uncertain, that that might not even be Cas—*his* Cas.

*This is your problem, Dean. You have no faith.*

Somewhere in that time afterwards, the memory of Cas disappears. The bed's still run aground but this time, Dean's all alone, and those woods—those woods where Sam and Bobby—those woods appear right behind him, just across the river, looming closer and closer in the wrong place.

He can see them there. His brother with the wire. Bobby with his soldiers.

But then the darkness is illuminated. At the heart of those trees, there's a light, such a bright, bright light that's concealing what's happening there. Dean's heart beats faster. He doesn't know how he knows. But his expectation's not wrong. Just like that, the light fades away. And then, standing at the bank of the river, the angel from the wall appears.

Cas watches him from the other side of the river, wings trailing the ground. Cas stands there for so long that Dean's sure that he's just there to taunt him, like he's been doing for days. But then, slowly, slowly, he starts to *approach*.

Cas starts walking through the current, sure and steady, through rushing rapids that go up to his waist. Dean tenses, nails digging into the bed's mattress as he watches, as second by agonizing second, the angel gets nearer, hair damp and clinging to his forehead. And then at last, with his wings dripping water onto the soil, he's finally *here*, standing at the edge of the river, *glorious* and emanating that same familiar might, just feet away from Dean's bed.

No grate. No wall.

Somehow, so, so vulnerable.

*I've been hearing you, human*, the angel says. *I've been hearing you ache for so long that your hurt led me here.*

*Is it my absence, human? Is that what causes you to pain so, to yearn like a mourning widow? I'm sorry for causing you that hurt then. I'm sorry that I did not meet you at your wall.*

Dean swallows.

"I'm not..."

And Cas' eyes shine. Cas smiles that same amused teasing smile that's been dancing around his lips every night and, *You're not what, human?* the angel says. *Not a widow?*

*When you're this devoted unto me, who could challenge our bond, human? Who could say we were not wed?*

And that gut feeling in Dean's stomach instantly changes. It goes from anxious to pining and needy. His face goes from pained to a different kind of broken, a desperate kind of want that takes ahold of every part of his body.

"Cas," he says and he's clambering off the bed. *Cas*, he says, and he's finally going to be able to touch him, without metal in the way, without cement.

But then Cas takes a few steps back.

He goes back into the river.

*Go sleep some more, Dean, he says.*

*When you wake, feel better.*

*And tonight, I promise you, human.*

*Tonight nothing will stop me from seeing you.*

When he wakes up, he lies in his cot a little longer.

He's on his side, one arm tucked under his head, his legs bent ever so slightly. There's warmth at his back, as if someone's been holding him, and he lets his eyes flutter closed at that thought, even though he knows it's just the scrappy little blanket that he's got thrown over his shoulder.

But he's calm. He's so calm.

It feels like he's slept a year.

He lets himself drift for a bit. At ten in the morning, it's still too early, even though years of hunting have conditioned him to getting a sick satisfaction from having only four hours under his belt. He tries to let his mind go fuzzy, maybe to get back to whatever he dreamt about, but it's not easy remembering. It's usually only nightmares that haunt him when he's awake.

So, *Must've been a good dream*, he thinks. *Must've been Cas and me.*

He lets a small smile work its way onto his lips. He pulls the blanket a little higher over his shoulders.

*Hello, Dean.*

It's sudden. It's out of nowhere like always.

The voice comes from his right side, as if someone's standing at a distance to his back. He stiffens but then it's like he's being enveloped by a warm body, heat spreading across his spine. His necklace is pleasantly snug against his chest. The blanket, just tight enough.

*Cas?* he thinks, stupidly hopeful.

But the voice comes again, this time puzzled.

*Is ketchup a vegetable?* it says.

*Oh*, Dean thinks.

He's hearing things again.

After that, it's hard to fall asleep. After that, he starts picturing things, thinking things that make the ache from before return to his chest. The obsessive thoughts that he'd gone to bed with, about the angel at the wall, about the disappointment that Cas hadn't been there on his last shift—they all come flooding back.

But...there's something else, too. The anxiety in his gut doesn't *peak*. He's pining but he's not scared that Cas might not be there tonight, even if he has every reason to believe that that's what's going to happen. It's like he's certain this time, as if he's been reassured, and maybe, that makes him nervous in a whole different way.

He sits up and stretches. Aarif's fast asleep, deep and heavy in a way that's almost admirable, but it still doesn't stop the man from turning this way and that, always angry, always talking about murdering angels. For a moment, Dean lets himself listen. But Aarif doesn't say Cas' name.

There's another man in the barracks today. Alejandro, the foreman, and it's only then that Dean remembers that today's Friday. Most of the camp will be off work, crowds to navigate through the square now that there's no neat schedule coordinating where people have to be at a given time. It gets hectic, but usually Fridays are better days for Dean. The people are less stressed, less likely to snap at him. Sometimes, he can even go unnoticed.

Dean stays quiet when he slips out of bed and pulls on his boots. Alejandro pays him no mind. Maybe it's because when the other foreman had mistreated Dean, Bobby had had him whipped publicly and designated as a sanitation worker—shovelling dirt on the far side of camp, hauling shit from the outhouses to bury away. It hadn't been easy finding a replacement, someone who didn't loathe Dean's guts so openly, but Alejandro's been fair enough. And now that Dean's a soldier at the wall, he's exempt from Friday's house duties anyway.

So he makes his way to the other end of the dorm unimpeded. The lockers are mostly open, unguarded, but Dean knows what they'd do to his if he let them have the chance. It's not like he's got anything valuable; his phone had died three weeks in. Without electricity, the pictures of Cas and Mom lost. But maybe he should've been smarter about that. Maybe he shouldn't have looked so many times.

So down on one knee, he undoes the knot that keeps his key attached to his shoelace. A twist and a click, and his locker swings open. The rest of his movements are automatic. Routine makes him grab his toothbrush. Routine has him already halfway through locking his belongings back up before something—before something else makes him pause.

This isn't routine. What he's looking at, he's made himself ignore for six months and six days.

He's made himself like *this* for Cas.

So he doesn't know how to feel about it. Or why he's even compelled to look, now of all days. It's sitting there underneath his old wallet, stuff that he'll never get to use again unless they figure a way back to their own world. But he finds himself reaching for it today. He finds himself picking the damn thing up, pushing aside the wallet roughly just to get to it. He thumbs over the metal once it's in his hand, twirls it even though it's still sharp from the day it'd been first commissioned to him, even if the blacksmith's work is a little clumsy.

Six months, six days.

This is what Ai's wanted for ages.

But going back to his old routine would be ignoring his new one. Going back and doing something that he'd done on the regular when Cas had been alive, it would be letting his memory go. It would be...

It would be *not* mourning him.

A betrayal.

So he puts the razor back. He takes his key and turns the lock on the shut door. He's only steps away, but almost gone, when the voice from earlier that morning comes to him.

*Whatever I ask, you seem to do the exact opposite.*

He tells himself that it's because he believes that Cas is alive. He tells himself that it's not disrespecting Cas' memory every time he feels guilty about what he's done because goddamn it, Cas isn't dead. He's just *lost*.

And maybe that belief helps him. Maybe it grows and grows the more that he thinks about it, because that stupid, damn hope that he has returns, and maybe—maybe that changes him. With every step that he takes, it's only with his convictions strengthening. With every step, it's with that immense grief that he's been carrying alleviating its burden somehow, its weight, because tonight, he'll see Cas, *shaven* and *familiar*, and maybe Cas'll finally *see* him, too.

It's about five minutes in that he notices it. It's not surprising that it doesn't hit him right away. People are looking at him, and that's not new. He's used to their whispers trailing him

—*angel whore, angel lover*, as if the latter's got a connotation that's any nicer in this camp—and maybe that's what clues him in. Maybe it's the fact that he *doesn't* hear any whispers today, any muttered conversations about the man who'd dared to love an angel, because today the way that they look at him, it's different.

They look at him and they don't recognize him.

And god, there's something powerful about that.

He doesn't know when he began slumping his shoulders, but now he walks straight and tall. He breathes and it's like it's the first time that he's getting air. His hair's still long—he hadn't been able to cut it himself—but it's the first time in half a year that the people in the camp are seeing his old face, the face that Cas knows best, and maybe throwing insults at him will just be harder now, when the grief that crosses his features is so much more open.

But that grief doesn't weigh him down.

Not like it did just last night.

Not like it did just minutes ago.

So maybe that's why a guard stops him in the square. Maybe it's because Dean's changed so profoundly with the hope billowing in his heart that when the guard spies him walking past the old courthouse, it's like seeing a stranger go. The guard rushes down—it's him again—Rob Zhang, his identification says—the one who's always badgering Dean at the council's doorstep—and Rob grabs him by the collar again, gives him the third degree with his beady eyes alone.

For a long time, Dean waits. For a long time, Rob glares at the tag on Dean's necklace and back to his face before his grasp finally slackens and he steps back, spitting at Dean's feet.

“Well, don't you clean up nice.”

It's all that he can muster.

Word starts to spread after that. The whispers in the camp are reborn. But they're not completely venomous this time. They're not just disgusted slurs, hurled at him as he goes. They're whispers filled with wonder, with curiosity, because no one in the camp seems to be able to believe their eyes, believe that it's this man that they've been tormenting, this man who's been a stain on their camp's reputation.

“It's the *widower*,” they say and they keep saying it, with more and more marvel. “It's the widower.”

And those are the ruined people that languish in Dean Winchester's wake.

Those are the astonished words that follow him even as he makes it up to the doorstep of the women's barracks.

When Ai opens the door, “I want you to cut my hair,” Dean says.



She's unhappy.

But she still does it.

"I thought you wanted this," Dean says. "I thought it'd make you happy."

"Not like this," she says. "Not anymore."

An hour's gone by. She's excruciatingly slow. She'd wanted to wash his hair. She hadn't asked him why he hadn't gone to the camp barber, when he's got more than enough coupons accumulated from over the months. Not that the coupons would have been needed. Soldiers get cuts for free. And maybe soon enough, Dean would've been forced to go, to fall in line, because the camp liked their forces to look all the same, one intimidating fearsome weapon.

There are duties, of course. She's forewoman, and that means that on a Friday, she's not at the soup kitchen. She's in the barracks, like Alejandro, giving orders and making sure that her assigned section of the women's camp remains clean for another week. So maybe he shouldn't be here. Maybe he shouldn't be letting her comb his hair, so seriously going about it as if it's going to matter, when it's all snipped off and lying on the floor.

"Are you sleepy?" she says.

He shakes his head, when she pauses to hear his answer, and it's true. He's wide awake. He's thrumming with energy, god knows why, and maybe there's a bit of impatience to it. Maybe he just can't wait to be himself.

"You're a liar," she says.

She runs her fingers through his hair, soothing his scalp and, "I'm not," he says. "I'm not tired, Ai. Really, I'm not."

"You're a liar," she hisses, "because you're cutting your hair for the angel at the wall."

And god, how quickly he goes cold.

He pulls away from her. He's been sitting at her feet while she's been resting on her cot, and he can't help it. He looks guiltier when he does it, when he looks around wildly to make sure that no one's heard what she's said, but he should know that she's smarter. He should know that she always knows, because the barracks are empty for the first time since he's entered and now, he realizes, she's seizing her chance.

He swallows.

“I’m not,” he says again. “I told you—I—I didn’t see him after that first time.”

*It was like you said, he lies to her. Just stories getting to my head.*

But she doesn’t believe him. He’s been too shamefaced these last few days. She’s rougher with her comb when he sits back down at her feet.

“I’ve got another story for you,” she says.

And maybe he should’ve seen it coming.

It’s about her son, of course. The one who’d died beyond the wall. When she’d first told him, when Sam had left, he’d only assumed that he’d been a part of Bobby’s troop once, a man who’d met an unfortunate end at the hands of one of the monsters that lurked beyond.

But, “It was an angel,” Ai says. “It was an angel who took my boy away.”

Her hands on his hair are steady as she talks. She snips the hair closest to his ears, tells him how at forty-nine, her son had long been an outcast of society. “Like you,” she says. “No one bothered with him.”

He hadn’t been her son by blood. Like Dean, she’d taken Akash in, nurtured him throughout his manhood alongside the woman she’d loved. When her partner had died, their son had been all that she had had left. And then the gates of heaven and hell had ripped open and spilled chaos onto Earth.

He’d never had anyone, she’d explained. At seventeen, she’d found him homeless on the streets, shivering and alone. A runaway perhaps. A dysfunctional family maybe, whose way of upbringing had made him what he was, too anxious to talk to other people, so much so that his presence would only alienate all those around him. He’d been so broken that even Aiko had never managed to coax the truth from him.

But it wouldn’t always be like that.

The truth had come out easily enough to the angel at the wall.

“I didn’t know,” Ai says. “I didn’t know until he went through the gate. He left his journal.”

And maybe that’s where the story ends, Dean thinks, except Ai has more to tell him. Words that seem familiar. Words that Bobby had reiterated to him often enough—that the angels weren’t the holy warriors that they seemed. That they claimed the humans that they stole, marked them and owned them, and afterwards, nobody knew what they did, only that it was terrible.

And Ai’s story doesn’t stray from this path. Ai recounts what she read in Akash’s journal. How the angel had sung to him, had carolled sweet, sweet verses all to lure him beyond the wall. How Akash hadn’t responded, had still been wary, so the angel had tried other things, had shown him her power, her wings, her body. Had said anything and everything, until at last the angel had figured it out, the perfect way to manipulate him, the perfect thing to make

him respond. She had come to him one night again, injured, hurting, unable to utter a single word. She had come to him in the same way that Akash had come to Ai.

That's how the angel had seduced him. That's how she had compelled him to come over the wall. And then, she had stolen him.

It's at this point that Ai's hand finally becomes less sure. It's at this that she has to put her scissors down, because the only way she seems to be able to keep her fingers from twitching uncontrollably is by digging her nails into her thighs.

"I wish my boy had stayed away," she says and she doesn't sound like herself. Her voice is soft, vulnerable like he's never heard before. "I wish that if he had to go to the angel, he would've stayed with her, instead of coming back."

Because the council had *done* something. Something that Ai won't say. And it's the part of the story that Dean never hears. It's what chills him every time, because he has to remember their conversation about Mom, where Ai had wished Mary dead, and even though it's been three days since Sam's call, Mom hasn't returned and Ai thinks it's better that way.

Ai doesn't talk anymore after that. Ai doesn't even open her lips to chide him when he moves suddenly and she almost cuts off his ear. She's quiet and she lets him linger in the story she's told him, thinking about Mom, thinking about Cas.

Finally, she finishes cutting his hair.

He stands up.

"I know you're seeing your angel," she says, "and I know I should report you to the council."

But she won't.

She won't because she's afraid of what they'll do to him, that council, when he's a man who's already defied them more than once, who's already done more with an angel than they could ever really tolerate, and because she doesn't want to lose another son.

Night doesn't come quick enough because that's what worry does to him.

He spends the rest of the day in the men's barracks, trying to sleep. When that doesn't work, he sits up and goes willingly to the foreman, asks Alejandro if there's a Friday house duty that he can do, something to keep the damn day occupied, a reprieve from his panicked thoughts about Cas and Mom.

Alejandro's surprised at his request, or maybe it's the fact that ever since this morning, Dean doesn't look like Tom Hardy from *The Revenant* anymore. He gives Dean a smile even, maybe because there aren't enough hands to get what needs to be done today or because he's been too afraid to ask too much of people when they expect a break. So Alejandro nods and says, "Yeah, kiddo, I got something," and he sends Dean off to do laundry.

Dean spends hours beating sheets by the pathetic stream that runs through the camp. Every time his mind turns to Cas, to Ai's story, he attacks them even more aggressively, as if like this, he can ward the intrusive thoughts away.

*But you saw him.* Ai's voice springs up inside his head. *You saw him acting just like my son's angel. Hurt. Riddled with bullets. Restored to perfect health the next day.*

*He asked for your help. He tried to deceive you.*

*To make you go over the wall for him.*

He grits his teeth at that. He scrubs harder and refuses to damn listen.

*It's Cas,* he tells himself. It's Cas, so it doesn't matter—it—he'll go to the goddamn ends of the earth if he has to. He'll do what needs to be done to bring Cas back.

*He used his power to tempt you, boy,* Bobby reminds him. *He used his wings and his body.*

*So ain't you worried, Dean, if it's even really him? How'd he know how to do those things, huh? How's he already so practiced, so alluring? Because he's already spent a thousand years honing those skills, that's how, trying to lure idjits like you.*

*How'd you know it's your Cas, when you know what Sam and me did to his body...*

Dean grits his teeth. Abandons the bedsheet in the stream and closes his eyes, tries again to block out the thoughts that keep circling him. He takes a deep breath, tries to inhale deep and steady. But it's useless. The thoughts, they storm in anyway.

About Mom. About her and what Ai said, about what's going to happen when she comes back. What she'll look like, after being owned by an angel. About what could be so ugly, so bad that being an angel's captive would be preferable to being the camp's survivor.

*You didn't even try to find her,* Sam's voice tells him.

*You left her for dead.*

*Your own mother...*

*You know Cas wouldn't have wanted that.*

Dinner finally comes, when he's beaten the last bedsheet for so long that it's ripped in half. He gathers everything up, gets to hanging it for the night breeze. He'll offer to take what he ruined for his own bed. He only hopes that Alejandro won't put him up on trial with the council.

In the soup kitchen, he lines up faithfully even though he's not hungry. Ai's not there and it's what he planned. He can't look her in the face right now, but she'll know if he keeps skipping dinner. The rest of the kitchen staff's got him on her watch list.

But without Ai's eye, they give him less than they ought to. The glamour of his new appearance doesn't seem to change that, even if one of the female servers does another take and seems to forget to breathe for a minute.

He would've smirked at her one time.

But he doesn't anymore. He takes what she gives him and shuffles off quietly to a table to eat what he can.

And then, after time feels like it stopped moving ages ago, at last, he's back at the wall.

It seems to be routine now that Dean'll get there, be halfway through putting on his patrol vest when the commanding officer will yank him aside and send him somewhere else. This time before Dean can even move a foot in the direction of his post, the officer smacks him on the shoulder and tells him that the morning watch hours have been extended.

"Honestly, feather slut, when I heard the talk of the town this morning, I didn't believe it, but turns out that the gossip's true. Dean Winchester's finally learned how to shave."

The officer smiles, wide with teeth, then sends him to the blacksmith, tells him how for the first three hours of his shift, he'll be doing his *favourite activity*, which turns out to be melting down angel blades and fashioning them into killing bullets.

And if Dean doesn't swallow down vomit at that.

It's not just the idea. It's not the fact that there are *twenty* blades of twenty slaughtered angels that gets to him. It's not even the fear—the *what if*, because of fucking course his mind's running, already wondering if the reason that Cas hadn't been at the wall last night was because the troop who had brought these blades in through the gate today had killed him.

Surprisingly, it's not *that*.

It's not that because for some reason, Dean just knows that Cas is going to be there tonight, so what has Dean barely keeping himself together is because of what Sam and Bobby had done to Cas six goddamn months ago.

He doesn't—he can't. Think about it. He keeps all his focus on the blacksmith's instructions, as the man shows Dean and another three soldiers how to refashion the blades. But of course it doesn't work. Maybe it's because he really should've gotten more sleep today. Maybe his will is weak because of that. But he thinks about what Sam and Bobby did anyway. He thinks about that and then he thinks about what had happened to Cas' own angel blade.

*We had to melt it down, Dean*, Sam had told him, when Dean had woken up in the hospital ward drugged out of his mind, sedated, the day after Cas had died. *I wanted to save it, Dean. I really did. But the camp...they have this council. Bobby's hands were tied.*

So they'd destroyed Cas' blade. They'd burned away his last remaining essence, his grace, all so that they could have some more goddamn bullets, more angel-killing machines because life was hard, Sam had explained to him. In this world that they'd stumbled into, life was hard and the people couldn't afford to waste things. They couldn't afford to do that when they could salvage, as if Cas and his effects had been worth nothing unless they could be used for more murder, used for more blood.

*I'm sorry*, Sam had said, before he'd told him everything.

Before he'd told him about what they'd done to Cas' body.

It's snowing.

It hadn't last night. When Cas hadn't been here. But tonight at the grate, it is, and that's all he needs for hope.

It doesn't matter that his fingers are burned from the forge. Or even that they'll be bitten in the cold. He keeps them ungloved. He doesn't bother with his gun. If any guard comes by, it'll only be to see how carelessly Dean's strewn the rifle on the floor.

He closes his eyes and prays.

Hours go by. So many that Dean wonders why he hasn't lost hope, why he's so sure that Cas is coming. But it's like Cas has given him some sort of vow. It's like Dean knows, somehow, deep in his heart, and whatever that promise is, it's *unbreakable*.

And he's not wrong.

He's not wrong because then, like always, in the distance, Cas is *here*.

It's not bright tonight. The clouds are heavy and the moonlight dim. But that doesn't seem to stop Cas from making himself known. That doesn't seem to pry away the luster that's always there surrounding him, because his wings still shine—because it's like there are a thousand stars hidden in the darkness of those feathers, that would twinkle, even if the Earth were plunged into pitch.

And of course Dean's *gone* just at a glimpse of him.

His heart thuds in his chest. Bobby's warnings, Ai's story from just hours ago rewind in his head and still, he doesn't care. He's so happy that *happy's* just not a word that could do him justice. He sees Cas and he's *enraptured*. He sees Cas, and he's so caught, so bound that he's

*ensnared* along with all of his senses. There's nothing that could tear him away. Nobody who could manage to keep him from the angel.

He'd do *anything* to be with him.

And it doesn't worry him how strong those feelings are. It doesn't hit him that maybe just days ago, he hadn't been so enthralled, hadn't been so engrossed because he'd had enough logic then, enough caution to remember that this might not be *Cas*, might be some creature that's more dangerous than Dean's ever encountered before.

But none of it matters.

One day apart and Dean's like *this*.

One day without seeing him and Dean's convinced himself that it's *his* angel at the wall, all remaining doubts flown just at a peek of wings (and even if it isn't, he's not sure that he could pull himself away).

Cas is slow to come. Cas is too slow, his approach making Dean's guts twist from just how goddamn anxious, how goddamn impatient he is. For a long terrifying moment, Dean thinks it's going to be like the other nights. That Cas is going to stop, drop to his knees in the snow and just sit there, flaunting his presence, flaunting the fact that he's just far enough away from Dean that Dean couldn't call out to him, couldn't touch and feel the angel's hand through the metal of the grate like he so badly wants to, but then...

But then maybe the waiting game starts to get to Cas, too.

Maybe Cas can only keep on teasing for so long.

Cas' walk is mesmerizing then. Cas' walk is intoxicating, his body moving as if he *believes* that he's a god.

It doesn't take long after that. It doesn't take long but every bit of that time is unbearable, has Dean on the goddamn tips of his toes in a wait that seems to be an agonizing forever, but then, finally, god, finally, Cas is inches away.

Dean can't speak. Dean can barely breathe.

It's only been a few nights. It's only Dean's sixth night guarding the wall and yet, it's like it's been a thousand years since the first. Cas' face is *breathhtaking*. Cas' features are so goddamn divine up close that no dreams of Dean could ever do them justice, no memories that could be anything but rough sketches of an already poor portrait in his head.

His imagination can't capture the perfection that his eyes see.

So, "God," Dean finally mumbles, in a stutter that only seems to reveal how goddamn shaken he is. "God, Cas, it's *you*."

Cas doesn't speak. Not immediately. Cas looks at him and it's *shy*. Cas looks at him with his eyes lowered, demure and elusive little glances as if in the few feet that it's taken him to walk

here, he's gone docile, lost all of his heavenly power.

He looks at Dean as if he wants to convince him that he couldn't crush the human into nothingness if he so desired.

And that's the incredible thing. That's the unbelievable and the improbable thing that happens because Dean just *falls* for it. Dean just fucking *goes* as if he hasn't spent the last few nights watching Cas demonstrate his goddamn almightiness, as if Dean hasn't seen how his power can temper storms, make the world stop spinning on its axis at a moment's notice.

So Dean's pressing his hand to the grate. It's why he's clawing at the the damn, damn freezing metal in an act of such goddamn desperation and it's why, "*Hey*," Dean says, so soft, so gentle, as if he really believes Cas is that fragile, that he could break into pieces just like that, if Dean dared to speak any louder.

Cas looks up, up and back down through the thickness of his lashes so quick that Dean can't even catch his eyes, can't even hold his gaze. Cas' eyes are just so fleeting, so tauntingly playful that all Dean can do is swallow and hold his breath with hope, that Cas'll let his eyes wander again, that Cas'll let Dean have just a moment where he can look at him, take him in as fully as he needs to.

And Cas does.

Cas meets his eyes this time, leans in just a little closer, so slight that it shouldn't even be happening—the way that Dean's heart's beating faster, the way that it's speeding up with his nerves at the barest of the angel's actions—and Cas carefully brings his own hand up, presses it against the sigilled grate against Dean's own.

When their hands touch, Dean thinks he hears Cas' breath hitch.

He thinks he hears that and he just about loses it.

*Hello, Dean*, Cas says.

And god, how his fingers dig into the metal. God, how he reacts at those two words, because he just. can't. help. himself.

"*Cas*," he says and his voice fucking cracks. "*Cas*," he says, and he's drowning.

Cas averts his eyes again, looks away to the side in a move that drives Dean crazy, and maybe Cas knows that. Maybe Cas knows because for a moment, Dean thinks that he sees Cas' lips lift, the barest jubilant twitch that betrays Cas' delight, Cas' triumph that Dean's falling into his spell so goddamn willingly, so goddamn good.

But then it's gone. It's gone in the blink of an eye and Cas is there just the same, dazzling beauty against the grate, so fucking handsome that Dean doesn't even know what to do with himself.

Cas speaks again. Cas speaks and maybe what he says, he's rehearsed a thousand times. Maybe it's a song he's sung to a thousand poor souls like Dean, and even if that thought



crosses Dean's mind, it doesn't matter—Dean falls head over heels all the same.

"I tried to keep myself away," Cas says. *I tried so hard, human, when you wouldn't help me last time, but I couldn't.*

*I missed you.*

*I missed you, and I don't know why.*

And Cas' voice is soft. Cas sounds as if he's confessing the darkest secret that he's ever harboured, as if he's not the best pick-up artist that Dean's ever seen, as if he isn't just trying each and every successful line that he's used over the centuries until he finds one that sticks. Dean's heart skips a beat. Dean hears that sweet sadness in Cas' words and he just reacts, ready to do anything to make it better.

"Hey, don't worry," Dean says. "You'll be okay. I'll—Cas, I'll—it'll be okay. I"—Dean's breath catches—"I *missed* you, too," he says.

Cas looks distraught then. Cas hangs his head low and his wings seem to droop in unison, every part of his body relaying his troubles. "I don't understand," Cas says. "I don't understand how you could miss me, when you wished to see me dead."

And, "No," Dean says, horrified, maybe just as distressed as Cas seems to be. "No, god, no, Cas. I would never—I wouldn't—"

*But you did, human. That first night we met, I came bleeding to you and you cast me away.*

*Why did you do that? Why did you wish to see me go?*

*I must be so foolish, human. I must be so foolish to desire you when you only desire my death.*

And *how* that ploy works.

How *well*, how *easily* Dean falls for it, because he's gritting his teeth then, pressing harder and harder against the metal, as if maybe this way, he can comfort Cas with the little touch that he can give him, their two hands meeting only through the pores of that godawful grate in the wall.

Cas mentions dying again and Dean just fucking loses it.

"You're not foolish. Cas, you're not. I—I made a mistake. I—"

And then Dean's saying the same thing as he had that first night, and there are no regrets. There's no Bobby's voice floating in his head, and there's no guilt in his stomach when he says what he says. Dean's *gone*, so close to losing himself to Cas, and if Cas asked him to slaughter a million people after this, Dean would. Damn it, Dean would.

"I'd do anything for you," Dean says. "Anything, Cas, anything. Just—just..."

*Don't leave me again.*

But he doesn't say that. His voice goes hoarse. He's whispering a thousand things, begging a thousand things, but he can't give volume to any of those words.

Cas doesn't try a line then. Cas doesn't ask him to go *to the outside* with him. But Dean's so intoxicated that Cas should. Cas could ask and Dean would say yes in the same second. Every minute he stays longer in Cas' presence, it's a minute closer to no return.

But Cas doesn't ask. Cas stays quiet instead. He keeps looking at Dean and Dean's own eyes can't do anything but stare lovingly back.

They don't say anything then. Maybe they don't know how to put whatever they're feeling into words. They look at each other and maybe Dean tries to picture what it'd be like to be here without the wall in the way. Cas keeps his hand faithfully on the grate. His eyes, they pierce Dean's own, and then, "You look different, human," Cas says quietly. *You wear a different face.*

And Dean's heart swells then. A strange euphoria that runs through his body because maybe—maybe Cas recognizes something. Maybe Cas is remembering because it's really *him*.

"I did it for you," Dean says and he moves as close to the wall as he can. "I did it for you, Cas—I—do you like it?"

And for a split second, it's *there*.

The satisfied, smug smile. That smallest, smallest hint that everything that's happening, there's pleasure being derived from it by Cas, a corrupt, corrupt joy as Dean shows how far gone, how compelled he really is.

*Did you?* Cas says and he sounds triumphant. *Did you, human?*

But then, it's gone. Then Cas is ducking his head, drawing his eyes away shyly in a move that leaves Dean even more wanting, that drives him wild, and when Cas looks up again, it's in that same flirtatious way, in that same bashful, bashful way as he says, *Then if you did it for me, human, I suppose I am obliged to tell you how handsome you are.*

And Dean's face flushes. It goes hot and it feels like for the first time in a long time, he's *happy*.

And Cas seems so happy, too. He seems so pleased and it's like he can't stop himself. Cas flutters between those two personas that he seems to have. He wavers and the shy, tame creature that he seems to want to pretend to be melts back into the angel that Dean's watched in the distance for days now—the one with *might*, the one with the glorious, glorious awesome power that could crush him in an instant.

*I didn't know that you thought of me beyond our time at the wall, human,* Cas says, and his voice is lower, richer. Cas talks and his wings seem to quiver with that same corrupt joy, with an excitement that Cas just can't seem to keep under lock and key. Cas moves closer to the grate, willingly catches Dean's eyes this time and stares deep into them as if he can see straight into Dean's soul.

*You seemed so stubborn when you turned me away. You seemed like a challenge.*

*I didn't think that you would fall so quick.*

And Cas' eyes leak holy light then. Cas' wings flare up against the sky, stretching and still trembling with that same delight that's been coursing through him, and just for a second, Dean's own exhilaration fades and his gut twinges.

Dean's gut feels *doubt*.

It's not long. It doesn't last. But the reaction is instantaneous. In a split second, Cas' wings come back down. In a split second, the divine light from Cas' eyes dies. The demure, docile angel returns.

"Did I scare you, human?" Cas says then in a small, small voice. *I know your people think of me as a beast.*

And Cas shivers. Cas keeps his eyes lowered and curls his wings around himself and, *I'm sorry*, Cas says, voice warbling like a little bird. *I know that I should not desire you so.*

Cas steps away from the grate, pulls his hand away from Dean's.

"I don't think I should see you anymore," Cas says and he sounds like he's mourning. *Angels and humans are not made to mix. I know my love for you is unwelcome.*

And that's all. Nothing more.

Cas turns around and turns his back on Dean. Cas turns and he doesn't just disappear into the night like he's done so many times before. This time, Dean can see every step he takes away. This time, Cas makes Dean watch as he walks away and leaves him.

And god, Dean's there pounding at the grate. And god, it works so well, and Cas must know it does, because Cas keeps moving away, slowly, slowly and it just drives Dean mad.

"Don't go," Dean finds himself pleading, in pathetic broken whispers. "Cas, don't go."

But Cas can't hear him. Cas is too far away.

And he shouldn't.

Dean shouldn't.

But he does.

*Cas!* Dean calls into the night and he's fucking desperate, digging his nails into the cement wall even though it's painful. *Cas!* he calls and he can't even keep himself quiet, his voice echoing for all of the camp to hear.

And it *works*. God, it works because Cas stops then. Cas turns around and looks back.

“Cas?” Dean says and that’s when it happens.

The voice that Dean’s been hearing since the morning comes back.

*I love you.*

*I love you*, the voice says and Dean feels chilled. Dean hears Cas’ voice repeat *I love you* again and again in his ear, as if it's filling up the space between them, and Dean feels a lump in his throat grow, because damn it, he *knows* this voice, he knows this moment, this memory, and he thinks that it's going to break him all over again.

And maybe the angel across the wall recognizes it, too.

Cas’ body stiffens and a queer look crosses his face, a strange look, as if he can hear the words that Dean hears, as if that memory of Cas slumped and dying on the couch in front of Sam and Dean and Mary is replaying in his mind, too. Cas stares at Dean then, with confusion in his eyes, and then, with something sharp, something calculating. Hesitantly, so, so hesitantly, Cas takes a step back in the direction of the grate.

But that’s when the first bullet from the camp fires and pierces Cas’ arm.

That's when Cas looks down at the blood and grace leaking out of his bicep and he flees.

And then, a hand seizes Dean from behind and pulls him away from the grate.

# Camp Politics

## Chapter Notes

chapter warning: dubious kiss (gets resolved through a conversation shortly afterwards); references to a whipping/punishment that ultimately never takes place; descriptions of acute shoulder pain.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's always that chair.

It's sitting there in front of the council as usual, smack-dab in the centre of the devil's trap, the ring of holy oil. But this time there are dried flower petals scattered on the floor. There are incense sticks and candles courting its circumference. And *manacles*. Large, heavy sigilled manacles that were no doubt made by the camp's clumsy blacksmith, to imprison anyone bound for the chair.

Demons. Angels.

*Dean.*

They haul him up.

But they don't shackle him.

They don't even light the circle of holy oil.

In the distance, he can still hear the sirens going off. There are shouts and angry barks, panicked civilians being herded by camp guards into the warded bunkers that Bobby had helped design. *Angels on the wall*, the guards are saying. *Here to come claim you. Here to steal you away.* But it's fearmongering. Cas didn't come with a goddamn army. It wasn't like Cas was there to bring war.

Cas came alone to see Dean.

And now he's not coming back.

So maybe that's why his lips don't move when he's prompted to state his name. Maybe it's because he's just too goddamn heartbroken for that. Because it's his fault, isn't it? It's his fault that Cas is shot and bleeding and *gone*. It's his fault that he was so desperate that he couldn't stop himself from calling out to Cas, giving himself away to the council, and worst of all, giving away *Cas*.

So maybe he should just keep his mouth shut from now on.

Moments pass in silence as the council appraises him. It's just an unearthly quiet while Dean refuses to talk. And maybe that's just good timing, because now that he's an official traitor, they can't ask him to recite their stupid oath if he's already broken it.

But rituals in this room mean something to the people here.

Except rituals in this godforsaken camp are just the goddamn day-to-day and his silence is intolerable. So it only takes one councilwoman to raise her hand in protest for something to happen. It takes one mere second for a council guard to come stomping over and spit, "Did you hear that, Winchester? They're asking for your name."

And Dean doesn't say anything.

But his lips quiver.

And then Rob Zhang's grubby hands are on him in an instant.

"Allow me, council," Rob says, and he fists Dean's necklace in his hands, "to identify the angel scum who stands before you."

It doesn't take long after that. There are only so many letters that can be engraved onto that tiny piece of metal, but they seem endless all the same. Insulting descriptions, rattled off. Things about how he's *unstable*, that he's not allowed to go anywhere without his guardian, Sam Winchester, by his side. *Angel sympathizer*, Rob reads. *Granted immunity for his crimes at the request of Robert Singer*. And a thousand reminders about how far he's fallen. Reminders about how after Cas died, Dean stopped taking care of his brother. Gave up on his mother and let her be claimed by all the goddamn monsters beyond the gate.

And Cas.

How he hadn't tried to get him back. How he didn't think he could, after what Sam and Bobby had done. And then just the damn fact that he's never seen another angel come back to life, except for—and weeks and weeks in, Cas hadn't. He'd still been gone. He'd still been dead.

So there's a rush of humiliation that runs through Dean while Rob reads. Because maybe that necklace isn't just camp identification. Maybe it's something more.

Maybe that dog tag's a gravestone that was etched the day Dean Winchester fucking died.

After Rob's done, the heavy silence from before falls over the room again. Rob sneers at him and steps back into the shadows. The council continues to observe him.

He doesn't look at them. He keeps his eyes on the floor, on the new chair set-up. If it isn't for him, then there must've been someone right before him, someone they'd been questioning. Someone who they didn't trust. Months later, Dean had never seen the ritual objects that were surrounding him now so maybe...maybe there was someone else that the council could be more angry at, someone who could inadvertently help the council spare Dean.

He wasn't worth the effort to them most days anyway, but what he'd done tonight was enough to be put to death.

He doesn't know the councilwoman's name but she starts the proceedings. Truth be told, nobody in the camp did. Each member of the thirteen person council was almost never seen outside the old courthouse. Their food prepared separately. In the soup kitchen, Ai had always been commanded to send it off with one of the council's messengers to take to the white building.

The council dwelt here. They slept here.

They only came out to punish.

"Do you remember what we told you, Dean Winchester, when we first rescinded your guardianship requirement and allowed you to partake in the camp's fortification efforts?"

He doesn't answer.

He doesn't have to.

"We said that you would be hanged for failing."

*Is ketchup a vegetable?*

Dean swallows.

"Fortunately for you, your brother is carrying out a very important mission for us. Hanging you would be ungrateful." The councilwoman pauses. "But the camps in the west are growing uneasy. Word of the angel's widower has spread far and wide. There are those who have threatened to place sanctions on this camp. To halt trade that is essential to our survival."

So what do you have to say for yourself, Dean?

What are we going to do to appease everyone?

*How will you be punished?*

They don't torture him, when they question him. They want to, Dean knows. There's a sick thrill from it, after all, and the guards have built up the appetite since the war's second wave broke out. But, *He'll bleed in due time*, the council had promised them. It isn't that urgent yet. It isn't the apocalypse here. Bobby had made that clear to Dean from the beginning. It

wasn't like the goddamn 2014 that Zachariah had showed him once, crawling with croats and Lucifer and despair. Life wasn't nearly as painful as that, because this was just what people were used to.

*For a thousand years*, Bobby had explained. For a thousand years, humans had been witness to the angel-demon war. Humans had stayed hidden inside sprawling, tall cities with walls that were even higher, to keep out the angels who would try to seduce them, to keep safe from the demons and the witches and all the other monsters out there. But then the war had grown more aggressive. The human cities destroyed, bystander casualties in the hundreds of thousands. That had been two hundred years ago. They had rebuilt since then. They had sprung thousands of smaller walled villages across the continent, governed by a familiar organization called the Men of Letters.

The *council*.

Just as day's breaking, the guards ease off him. It's pointless and they're beginning to see that. They ask him a thousand times about the angel at the wall, a thousand questions that he refuses to answer. They make him strip and scour his body for Enochian sigils, any sign that he's already been taken. But there's nothing there. His skin's still unblemished from the night Cas had last healed him. Now all he has left is the memory of Cas' hand across the grate.

Before curfew's over and the camp can see him, the guards ferry Dean away from the interrogation room to the northwestern part of camp, where the old jailhouse is. They don't even let him properly dress. All he's got on are his pants before they make him march barefoot in the snow, his arms huddled around his shoes and shirt and jacket. His military vest, they'd taken away.

*You won't be needing that anymore.*

Thirty minutes later, he's shoved into his cell, cold, damp and shivering. It's dilapidated and overrun with vermin, but that's how the camp wants it. He curls up in the corner after redressing. With the wall at his back, it's just a little warmer.

There's nothing to do but wait.

*If the pizza man truly loves this babysitter, why does he keep slapping her rear?*

He doesn't know when he fell asleep. Or how long he's been dreaming. But suddenly he's aware of Cas, sitting at his side, his wings drawn around Dean and their bed still on the deserted island from the night before.



“Hey,” Dean says, grinning brightly. Cas gives him a gummy smile back. His face is a little blurry today.

They don’t do any talking. It’s not that kind of dream. Or maybe it’s because the last time that Dean had dreamt this, it hadn’t gone so well. Maybe his subconscious is just trying to make it better, because Cas is on him in a second, clambering to straddle him, giving him fierce kisses on his neck. Dean pants, wants to kiss him back more than anything, wants to get his damn mouth on Cas’ lips, but *Don’t do that*, he reminds himself. *You don’t want the first time to be a dream.*

So, “Cas?” he says, and Cas pulls back.

They settle in. Dean leans his head on Cas’ shoulder. The water rushes up and the bed starts drifting again.

Down the river, they go.

“Things aren’t good right now,” Dean says and he mumbles it into Cas’ shoulder. “You left. I was stupid and you left me at the wall.”

Cas runs a hand through his hair. He kisses Dean’s forehead.

“The camp knows about us. They’ve got me locked up and Sam’s not coming back for another three weeks. It’s been days and Mom isn’t here either. And—”

And doubt. Dean doesn’t say it. But doubt.

Still a niggling persistent doubt in his stomach that the Cas at the wall isn’t his own.

He lets it drop.

For hours, they float on that river. For hours, they don’t speak and Cas just holds him. Dean’s too tired to do anything else. It’s been a damn long day, a damn long night, and maybe that’s beneficial in some way, as if he can get better sleep like this. But when their bed runs aground, Dean fears that the dream’s coming to an end.

It’s too soon.

He doesn’t want to wake.

So he’s up. He sits up and he scrambles for Cas. They clumsily manoeuvre together as Dean gives him desperate kisses to his collarbone. Cas eagerly lets him, lets Dean wrap his legs around his waist until he’s practically sitting in Cas’ lap. And then it’s Dean’s turn to get kissed. It’s Dean who gets to throw his head back and shut his eyes tight as Cas sucks little bruises into his skin.

But when he opens his eyes again, just past Cas’ shoulder, it’s only to see *him*.

The angel from the wall.

It's strange. It's goddamn jarring. He's sitting in Cas' lap but Cas isn't really there. Dean can still feel him. He can still feel Cas' warmth, the way that Cas' hands dig into his waist, the way that Cas' wings enclose around him but it doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't matter because damn it, there's another Cas here, a *glorious* mighty angel that has Dean's breath stuttering, who's the only one that Dean has eyes for.

Dean's *captivated*.

The angel doesn't come closer. By now, Dean should know this game all too well, this teasing. But that doesn't stop Dean from craning his neck, straining his eyes to see past Cas' shoulder. The angel's on the other side of the river again. He's wearing those sheer robes, the ones that do nothing to hide his body. He's standing there calmly while the halo on his head crackles with a frenzied energy, while the world inside Dean's dream starts changing rapidly from day into night.

The halo glows even more wickedly at that.

The moon peaks out from behind the clouds.

It illuminates the bed.

And then snow. And then, out of nowhere, snow begins plummeting from the sky, just like it always seems to do when the angel from the wall comes to meet Dean at the camp. Just like it always does, like now, because as if on cue, the angel takes a step forward.

But maybe it's only to see better. The angel's watching Dean. He's watching the way that Cas kisses Dean's neck, presses his mouth to Dean's burning skin while Dean gasps for breath, his eyes fluttering closed with pleasure every once in a while. There's something about this scene that has the angel's own eyes full of curiosity, full of interest. The way that Cas worships Dean's touch-starved body has the angel rapt.

The angel starts moving.

It's agonizing, of course. It has Dean tight with tension in a way that the Cas holding him can't fix. The angel from the wall doesn't enter the river this time. Maybe he doesn't want to get wet. So it's with *awe* that Dean watches the angel's wings beat against the earth. It's with chills running down his spine that Dean watches the angel—Cas—swoop up into the sky and cross that expanse of water until he lands neatly beside the bed.

Dean can feel the power radiating off his body. Dean's own hands start shaking.

There's no grate. There's no goddamn wall.

The angel is inches away and all Dean has to do is reach out to touch him.

*Is this what you've been conjuring each night, human?* the angel asks and his voice is deep and dark. *Have you yearned for me so often and dearly that you've kept me in your thoughts at night like this?*

*Touching you?*

*Bedding you?*

Dean can't seem to make his throat work. He swallows and tries to say something, anything, but his goddamn hands are shaking too hard. "Is ketchup a vegetable?" Cas asks then. And at the sound of Cas' voice, the angel turns his attention away from Dean to his facsimile.

He looks amused.

For a moment, Dean thinks that the angel is reaching out for him. The angel's hand is moving forward, and Dean's heart beats wildly, but then the angel runs his fingers through Cas' feathers, grasps them in his fist and rips them out brutally quick. He lets them fall before Dean's face.

Under him, Cas doesn't make a sound.

But then, "Is ketchup a vegetable?" he asks again.

*How dull, human, the angel says. How dull your mind has made my wings in your dreams. How feeble a creature.*

The angel's wings flare. And it's *true*. The angel's feathers gleam a thousand times brighter than the Cas of Dean's dreams. The angel's feathers are *glossy* and *vibrant* and his face isn't blurry like Cas'. It's sharp and radiant. It's so fucking beautiful that maybe Dean ought to look away, and then there's opportunity to do that, because there's holy light leaking out of Cas' eyes and Dean can't help but squeeze his own eyes shut. There's heat coming from the angel, there's some strange godly deepness resonating from within him as he says, *What do you think of my mightiness now, human? How does your imagination compare to this?*

And for the longest time, Dean's blinded. He has his eyes shut and there's still nothing that he can do. The angel is just too *glorious* for that. He's so dazzling that there's *nothing* that can stop Dean from witnessing him in all of his power, all of his might. Dean wonders if all the other times he saw the angel in his dream were even real or if it was just his brain, trying to recreate things, because how could he have ever imagined *this*?

Dean's almost sure of it now, that those times were never real. But now? The angel's finally *here*. And there's no denying it.

When the light from the angel's eyes dies down, Dean opens his own only to see that the angel's hand is moving again, to Cas' chest, and maybe with horror, or maybe with awe, Dean watches as the angel tears Cas' heart out, dripping blood, still beating.

The angel smiles jubilantly.

Cas looks up at Dean, puzzled.

Cas looks only mildly concerned that he's heartless now.

"Is ketchup a vegetable?" he says one last time before he bursts into an explosion of feathers.

The angel lets Cas' heart drop to the ground.

Dean doesn't register anything. Cas is gone and he's alone on his bed but he doesn't get to think for a second about whether he's upset that Cas just died in front of him again, turned into a thousand feathers that are now scattered all over the bed, stuck in Dean's hair, sticking to his clothes. He doesn't get to register that because before he knows it, he's on his *back*, the angel pinning him to the bed.

"Hello, Dean," the angel says and his smile is triumphant. *Hello, human.*

Dean can't breathe.

He's frozen with shock. His mind's goddamn reeling with it. Days and days, he's stood at the fucking wall. Days and days, he's had nothing but the feel of Cas' hand through the metal of the grate, and now Dean doesn't know what to do. Dean doesn't know because Cas is pressing him into the bed, *touching* him, his hands on Dean's hips like iron, and everywhere their bodies meet, there's *fire*, there's—god, he doesn't know. All he can do is shiver. All he can do is squeeze his eyes shut, just for a moment, because damn it, goddamn it, it's too much.

"*Cas*," he says, voice cracking and his eyes are wet, and maybe it's a goddamn joyous reunion after a long time, because he clasps Cas' face in his hands with wonder, touches him and touches him, doesn't think that he'll ever be able to let go.

And Cas' eyes are curious again. Cas looks down at Dean with a strange, strange expression on his face, as if he's not sure why Dean's got his hands on him, why the only expression on Dean's face is that of reverence. Cas' wings flare out, cast a shadow over both of them, before they fall back gently to the edges of the bed. He gazes down at Dean with the same intense look in his eyes that he'd had when he'd watched Dean being kissed.

Maybe it's envy. Maybe it's desire.

But whatever it is, it doesn't fade. It only grows stronger and more penetrating, the way that Cas watches him, as if Dean's an enigma, something that he just can't figure out. And then, with a crushing strength, Cas pulls Dean's hands away from his face, presses down on him just a little bit more, moving closer, his focus all on Dean's mouth. Cas brings a finger, a curious, curious finger and runs it gently over Dean's lips, experimentally tracing the contours of his mouth as if he's not sure why he's attracted to the human creature beneath him. Dean pants. Dean's open-mouthed and gasping, barely resisting the urge to take in Cas' finger and suck on it, maybe let out some filthy moans.

And then Cas wraps his hands around Dean's wrists. Cas pins him so fucking well.

All Dean can do is let out a whimper when Cas brings his mouth closer to his.

But he doesn't kiss Dean.

He doesn't.

Cas just hovers there tantalizingly close.

*You're still in a dream*, Dean tries to tell himself. *It wasn't supposed to be like this.*

*This might not even be your Cas.*

But Dean's *helpless*. Dean wants this so much that he can't bring himself to care. He whimpers again, lets a low whine escape his throat, and, "Please," he begs, not sure if Cas'll even understand him. "Cas, please."

But then their lips meet.

Cas kisses him so fantastically that Dean's lost—Dean just *succumbs*. Cas' tongue seeks entrance to Dean's mouth and Dean just lets him, so eager, all of his previous convictions gone in an instant, and he wonders briefly if it's Cas who's doing this to him, making him want the angel so bad. But then he finds that he's hard for the first time in months, finds that he doesn't care what the damn truth is, not when he's arching up against the angel who's got him ensnared. It's just the same—it's just the same feeling over and over again reverberating throughout his goddamn mind.

He just *wants* him. He just wants him.

So it's over too soon.

It's over so soon that when Cas pulls away, Dean feels the loss, moves forward, tries to catch Cas' mouth again, tries to chase him back for another kiss, but Cas just doesn't fucking let him.

*Bastard*, Dean wants to say. *Bastard*, as Cas' eyes seem to glow with delight, glitter with amusement at his antics, so instead Dean doesn't say that. Dean doesn't say it because instead he notices Cas' concentrated look, his eyes that still seem so curious despite all his gloating, and Cas is hard against his thigh, too, aroused like Dean is aroused, and Dean—voice rough, voice husky and low—Dean says, "What? You thinking of fucking me?"

Cas' wings flare up again at that. His eyes leak holy light.

He revels in the words escaping Dean's dirty, goading mouth.

*Is that what you want from me, human?* he says and he sounds exultant. *Have you fallen for me so well that you'd give yourself to me so quick?*

And Dean doesn't stop for a second. Dean's just *gone*.

"I want you," Dean says. "I don't know if you're—if you're controlling me, Cas. If you're trying to—I can't think about anything else when you're here. I can't think about—just *you*. Just you."

And Cas smiles at that. Cas looks so triumphant, so damn gleeful that he seems to quiver with his pleasure, the feathers of his wings bristling.

*But I have no influence over you, human*, he says. *In dreams, no enchantment works here.*

*You have fallen for me of your own free will.*

*You have fallen for me with such obsessive devotion, so unlike that of any human creature that I have ever known.*

And Dean's heart fucking swells at that. Dean's even more enamoured, even more *gone*.

"I'd go over the wall for you," Dean says and his heart thumps wildly in his chest with the knowledge of the gravity of what he's saying. "Ask me and I'll go."

Cas' wings flare again with barely suppressed pride. Cas smiles.

But he doesn't ask him to. He doesn't ask Dean to go. Instead, Cas eases off. Cas releases his wrists and sits up. Dean's on him in a second, clambering into Cas' lap, and Cas looks down at him with barely concealed amusement.

*Did you miss me, human?* he says softly and he lifts his hand, caresses Dean's head hesitantly as if he's not sure that he's doing the right thing. *Did you think that I was truly leaving you when I fled your wall?*

And Dean swallows. Dean looks down and he can't meet Cas' eyes when he says, "You got shot because of me. Why...why would you come back?" Dean's voice grows smaller. "You said you wouldn't see me anymore."

Maybe there's something heartbreaking about the way that Dean says it. Maybe it's because Dean can't even look at him, while he confesses it, and he's so hurt that Dean suddenly feels the angel's arms around him, pulling him close to his chest. And then Dean's leaning his head against Cas, and Cas' wings are surrounding him with their warmth, and even though he's done this a thousand times with the Cas in his dreams, it's only now that for the first time, it feels real.

"I did say that," Cas says then, quiet. He tightens his arms around Dean and they sway a little, rock just a little. Dean wraps his arms around Cas' waist in return.

"Were you teasing?" Dean says then and god, he hates how fucking desperate he sounds. How *hopeful*. "Were you teasing like you've been teasing me for days, Cas? Were you—"

*Yes*, Cas says. *I wanted you to come to the outside, human. I wanted you to ask me to go but you didn't.*

Dean shifts. He looks up at Cas.

"I'll—I'll go," Dean says. "I'll go, Cas. I just said that I would."

And Cas smiles at that. A soft smile but there's something off about it.

For a long time, the angel's silent. For a long time, Dean sits curled up against him and Cas continues running a hand through his hair, caressing his head with absentmindedness. But then he says, "When last I saw you at the wall, Dean, I heard something strange."

*Tell me, Cas says, what this means to you.*

Dean feels Cas' fingers on his forehead. A two-fingered tap and then the world of Dean's dream disappears. Dean sees a memory. Dean sees Cas clutching his stomach on a couch, gurgling black goo on the brink of death. He sees Sam and Mom and himself, standing by as Cas says his last words.

*I love you.*

*I love all of you.*

And then Dean's back.

Safe.

Enclosed by Cas' wings and arms.

"Thought you were gonna die," Dean mumbles. "And I thought—so I made you the mixtape—that same night we brought you home, I stayed up until the sun shined."

And the angel doesn't say anything. And then Dean's heart skips a beat because it's *Cas*. It's Cas' face staring back at him just now. The expression—it's puzzled. It's—goddamn it, it's *Cas*.

Dean's fingers dig into Cas' skin, into his waist.

"Hey," he croaks. "Hey—look at me, Cas, do you—"

*Do you remember?* Dean wants to say, but he doesn't. He doesn't because the look passes and then it's the angel at the wall again, the angel who's been wearing Cas' face, who has Dean hoping against hope that it's *his* Cas, just confused, just lost, who just needs Dean's help to come back to himself.

"Home?" the angel echoes then in English. He seems unsettled. He picks back up in Enochian. *Tell me, are you happy in your home? Would it please you to stay there?*

But, "I wanna go with you," Dean's saying desperately again. I wanna go with you because I know you're in there and I need you (but he doesn't say that). Instead, "Home isn't here, Cas," he says. "Home isn't this godforsaken camp. Home's the bunker and we gotta get back. You and me and Sam and Mom."

*Do they hurt you in your camp, human?* Cas asks and his arms seem to tighten around Dean. His wings seem to pull just a little closer.

And maybe Dean doesn't have to answer that. Maybe the pain radiating off of him is enough and somehow Cas knows. When Dean wakes up from this, he'll be back in his cell in the old jailhouse. He'll be punished, however they mean to do it, and then what'll happen to him, he doesn't know.

So, *Would you like me to take you to a place, Cas asks, with endless joy? Do you want paradise, Dean?*

But, “I only want you.”

And Cas is pleased all over again. Cas’ eyes glow. Cas’ wings gleam in the holy light and he’s jubilant and, *Then you will have me, Dean,* he says. *I vow it.*

For a long moment, there seem to be no words. For a long moment, Dean’s heart speeds up and beats frenzied in his ears, because maybe Dean *knows*—maybe he knows what the next words out of Cas’ mouth are going to be, what he’s going to hear because he’s already heard it before, on their first meeting, and the only thing different will be his answer.

*Will you come, Dean?* the angel from the wall sings. *Will you come to the outside with me?*

And Dean says, *Yes.*

Dean says yes and then there’s blinding light. Cas’ wings flare up around Dean, protectively cover Dean’s eyes, shut the light out, but it’s too strong. It’s too goddamn strong just like it was earlier so he buries his face into Cas’ neck, feels his necklace burning and burning, and then when it all fades away, Cas lets go of Dean, pulls his wings back behind him and, “Lie down, Dean,” he says, eyes still alight with grace, halo still crackling. *Lie here in this bed.*

And Dean obeys.

Dean lays himself down on his back with a swallow, his throat so dry, and his hands are shaking when Cas puts his own fingers underneath Dean’s shirt. Dean sits up, lets Cas pull it up over his head, reaches for the sheer robe that covers Cas’ body, but Cas stops him. Cas continues reaching for his other garments instead. Soon enough, Dean’s there, curled up naked in front of the angel’s roving eyes, lying back down only when Cas presses his hand gently against his chest.

“Turn over,” the angel commands and his eyes glitter. *On your stomach, Dean.*

With hitching breath, once more Dean obeys.

When Cas runs his fingers over his backside, Dean squeezes his eyes shut. Dean digs his fingers into the mattress and barely bites back a moan.

Cas lets his fingers trail down his body until he grasps Dean’s ankles, nudges his legs slightly apart. And then it’s so quiet that the only thing that Dean can hear is his own ragged breathing, his own low groan that escapes his lips. He ruts against the mattress, so hard, so eager for some friction, but Cas says, *Be still.*

Dean’s not expecting what comes next.

It’s a jolt. A twinge of pleasure that cascades from his left ankle and spreads throughout him, that seems to pierce his very soul. He moans, pants, and feels Cas’ finger trace some word, some Enochian word into his skin, every movement, every contact of his hands on Dean bringing that same wonderful feeling coursing through him.



“Cas?” he groans and he lifts his head from the bed, looks back at the angel at his feet, cowers at his glorious sight, because for a moment—just for a goddamn moment—Dean glimpses not Jimmy Novak’s old face but Castiel’s *divine form*, a fearsome, fearsome true form that has Dean averting his eyes. Cas is dark, a beautiful, beautiful dark that rivals the cloud-covered night sky, made up of *talons* and *feathers* and *horns*—and yet made up of *beastly*, horrific scales, a true image so demonic that if it were not for the holy celestial light escaping his eyes, Dean would’ve mistaken him for hell spawn.

*You wished to have me, Dean,* the angel says and his voice reverberates dark and deep. *And now you will.*

*I’m marking you. I’m claiming you in the name of all of Heaven and my Holy Father.*

*So let tonight be witness to our wedding.*

*Tonight let us make our glorious union.*

And Dean begs, "Please." Dean says, "Damn it, I need you."

Song fills Dean’s dream then. Cas sings, in Enochian, in the same tongue that he’s spoken in since they met, but this time, Dean can’t understand it anymore. This time, Cas doesn’t let his powers make the words intelligible for Dean’s ears, because whatever he speaks, he speaks it in secret.

It goes on. It goes on for so long that Dean wonders if it’s been years, centuries that he’s been submerged in mindless pleasure, endless ecstasy. He keeps his eyes closed. Lets them flutter open only once when Cas turns him onto his back, and then closes them just as quick as he glimpses Cas’ beautiful monstrous form. By the time that it’s over, he’s a shivering mess, and Cas takes him into his arms, holds him and cradles him against his chest until at last, he quiets.

His body’s covered in sigils.

The tattoos that Dean had heard of from Bobby, about the angel’s victims, they mark his own skin now.

*Willingly*, Dean thinks with another shiver. Willingly, he's done what Bobby warned him against.

Cas takes his hand in his own. Entwines their fingers.

For a moment, Dean feel excruciating pain shoot through his left shoulder.

Then, he hears one word.

*Wake.*

Dean jolts awake.

He doesn't remember his dream.

For a few hours, the cell's silent. Dean tries to go back to sleep, knowing that he's gonna need it, but there's a rat sniffing around his foot and he's just too goddamn cold.

Big fucking surprise.

Outside, through the bars of the window, he can see the snow, relentless and heavy like always.

He wonders how long they'll keep him here.

Sometime around midday, he hears the creak of the jail door opening from above. His stomach rumbles, but they don't bring him any food. Instead, Dean glimpses another poor bastard being thrown into the cell next to him, for god knows what petty crime. Defying the council, maybe. Stealing food rations, probably. It's common enough. It's what had gotten the woman from last week flogged.

But maybe what this prisoner did was far worse. Maybe what they did was considered daring, and downright disrespectful to the council, because they're brought in with a black bag over their head, and when they're thrown into the cell, it's the one with the heavy wooden door that keeps them out of sight.

Solitary confinement.

Dean should be lucky that the guards didn't remember to throw him in there.

Eventually, as the minutes tick on, Dean forgets about the prisoner. Eventually, Dean's pacing his cell, because of course he's already itching. Because of course he's already fucking desperate and needy and thinking about *him*.

He can't lie and say that he's not afraid.

He can't because he doesn't know what happened back there, at the wall, after their last meeting. Whether Cas meant what he said, about *leaving* him, forever, for *good*. And yet none of it fucking matters. Not when he's goddamn terrified. Not when he's a mess because he's frantic about Cas' safety.

Because he can take Cas leaving him. He can take Cas not loving him. But the thought that the angel bullet that hit his arm might've seriously incapacitated him—the thought that maybe Cas wouldn't survive the camp's angel hunt, because of course there's going to be one and Dean's already dreading it—that thought is the one that's unbearable.

He can't take Cas dying again.

He'd do anything to prevent it.

So he spends the next hour like that. He spends it afraid and anxious, slowly losing more and more of himself. And maybe that's what causes it. Maybe that's why one moment, he's pacing his goddamn cell, and the next, he's on the ground, screaming loud enough that the guards hear it, just as he's overwhelmed with the worst pain that he's ever experienced, worse than all of Alastair's toys.

It's sudden. It's unexpected.

But his shoulder feels like it's on fire.

The sounds of the guards' boots follow quickly enough. They thump on in, watch him writhe, apprehensive that it's just an escape attempt, and when the prisoner in the cell next to Dean's starts wailing, too, they don't know what to think. But maybe it goes on for far too long. Maybe it's so obvious that it's real, because soon enough, the door's open, the two guards crouched beside him while he gasps and gasps even as the other prisoner goes quiet.

"Cas."

It's what he says because of course it's his name that comes unbidden to his lips. He calls out again and again, prays to him, to help him, to save him, until eventually there's nothing leaving his mouth except the most pitiable of all sounds.

The pain's gone as chillingly abrupt as it had come.

He's left shivering on the floor.

Ai comes to see him.

He doesn't know how she's already aware that he's been arrested or how to even find him. Maybe when she hadn't seen him today, she'd known right away because he'd realized her worst fears, just like her son. She sits with him on the dirty floor of the cell, on the other side of the bars. She sits with him for a long time and doesn't say anything, and maybe it's what she intends to do for her visit, but then the pain returns and he's thrashing again on the ground while she watches him with horror.

"What has the angel done to you?" she says, but when the pain's gone, he can't answer. His teeth are chattering too hard.

She takes pity on him eventually. She reaches through the bars of the cell and strokes his head, pushes the hair back from his eyes as he tries to calm at her feet. But peace never lasts

long. The pain always comes back, again and again, relentless and seemingly worse each time. Soon enough, it's night again. It's the first time that he's not at the wall.

"I-I th-think the c-coun—they did—the c-c—"

He stops trying. He swallows down a whimper.

"The council didn't do this to you," she tells him. *It was your angel.*

The next time that he thrashes, she leaves him in the midst of it. He tries to call to her. He's afraid and he doesn't want her to go. But a moment later, she's there, back with the guards, in a heated argument. *He needs the hospital ward*, he hears her say. But they tell her that it's time for his trial. It's time for his punishment.

He's barely conscious when they haul him up. From the prison to the camp square, he's dragged down through the streets, paraded, a criminal. But the angel's widower's always been guilty and it must bring them satisfaction that he's finally going to get what he deserves. In a few minutes, he's on stage, the platform in the square where all the public whippings take place, shackled this time to the chair that usually sits in the council's chambers. With the square's bonfire lit, the faces of the onlookers glow eerily, as the entire camp murmurs and watches him. On the other side of the stage, the council are gathered and seated.

One woman has a nasty black whip curled in her hand.

The proceedings don't start right away. The crowd grows restless—it's not easy being summoned to stand after curfew when it's snowing this mercilessly. But even their interest is captured when the howls start to echo throughout the pitch black night. Even they fall silent, eyes on him, waiting with bated breath, because of course it's him that's howling. It's him that's crying out, unable to keep his mouth shut.

The pain in his shoulder's back yet again.

"C-Cas," he mumbles feverishly, after it disappears. He keeps up a litany, a prayer to the angel, barely comprehensible except maybe to himself. The councilwoman with the whip moves to him. The rest of the council members are out of their seats, murmuring amongst themselves at this new development, and then, having received her orders, the woman turns to the guards.

"Did you not examine him?" she says. Her voice is cold.

But of course they did. Two members of the council had been present, too. They hadn't found anything.

Yet it doesn't stop the council from demanding that they strip him again.

The camp becomes uneasy. There are young ones in the audience, required to be here, to learn the way of the world. The last thing that the parents want is a naked man before the bloody and brutal flogging that's going to follow. But it doesn't get that far. All the guards

have to do is remove his shirt and then the hush is unlike anything that Dean's ever heard before.

Dean's heart feels just about ready to burst.

On his shoulder, Cas' handprint is *back*.

And then the silence turns to noise. The people's voices grow wild with fear, wondering what this new mark means. They've seen the tattoos from the angels before. They've seen the markings that the angels leave on the humans that they claim, but the handprint's unlike anything else and they don't know what to make of it.

Even the council stares at him unable to hide their shock.

Throughout the commotion, Dean struggles against his bonds. He wants to touch the mark on his shoulder. He wants to feel closer to Cas. He doesn't know what's happened. How it got there, when he's never been outside the goddamn wall, when he's never even been able to touch Cas, save for the press of his hand against the grate. So he starts calling his name, hoping that somehow, he'll be heard. So the prayers whispered privately under his breath become public. He's inconsolable. He's unlike himself.

He's exactly like all the others that have come before him.

So maybe that's what hushes the audience again. Maybe it's the familiarity of what he's doing, just like another angel victim, covered in marks, raving mad. Or maybe it's because just as another wave of pain descends down and cuts his prayers short, the handprint on Dean's shoulder begins to *glow*, red as hellfire.

For a second, he tumbles somewhere deep inside his mind.

For a second, he sees the angel at the wall, beautiful, eyes glittering, whispering, *Wake*.

And then he doesn't know anything anymore.

He's not aware of how long the agony lasts this time—only that it goes on longer than he can handle. The whispers in the audience start up again. At his side, the council talk amongst themselves furiously, about how they can't let the camp know how lost they are. About how what's happened here tonight is inexplicable and they need to regain control, before the camp realizes that maybe those who govern them can't protect this place from the monsters that lurk at their doorstep after all.

So, "Bring out the other prisoner," the council says. "Bring out the other victim."

Dean's not aware of who it is at first. He's gone back to mumbling Cas' name, barely conscious of where he is. But eventually when the pain's been gone long enough and his mind is clearing from its hazy fog, his heart drops and he goes still.

Because it's *Mom*.

And she's unrecognizable.

It's the first time that he's seeing an angel's victim. It's the first time because Bobby and Sam had never let him come to these things, had begged the council to keep him away from angel business until the council had relented and only made the public whippings mandatory. And now he knows why.

It's goddamn devastating.

The bag that he'd seen on her head earlier is gone. Because of course she'd been the other prisoner in the cell with him, and now, knowing this, maybe the reason the council had had their chair so decked up in their chambers had been because they'd been questioning *her*. Now she's gagged and wild, struggling but aimlessly, as if she's not trying to get away—just thrashing because her body can't stay still. She mutters against the cloth in her mouth, angry muffled words that no one can understand. When she sees him, she smiles wide and unhinged, her eyes blank, even as she raises her arms and reaches for him desperately.

From her neck down, she's marked with the angel's tattoos.

The councilwoman speaks to the crowd then, introducing the history of Mary Winchester, as they know it, while two guards fasten her to a rack on the other side of the stage. The council recites the story of how she'd been found, by her son, Sam Winchester, and brought here days ago, interrogated, until they'd seen everything that they had needed to see.

*No hope for her*, the crowd is told. *It's time to bring her peace*.

They blame Dean for what's happened. They blame him for consorting with the angel at the wall. They tell the entire camp, that the mark on his shoulder is a sign of what he's been doing in secret (even if the council doesn't know anything about it), and they hold him responsible for his mother's condition.

"What a poor son," the councilwoman says, her voice low and condemning. "Look at what the angels did to his own mother, the very monsters he loves."

They go on. They talk about the cleansing that must be done, for him, for Mom. They talk about how Mary Winchester's never going to be free from her pain, how the cloth in her mouth is the only thing preventing the audience from hearing her screams, seeing her fully in the throes of a madness all caused from the angels' marks. It's the tattoos that tarnish her, they say, and the only way to bring her relief and silence her cries is to remove them.

Everything that happens after that is in the blink of an eye.

Dean's removed from his chair, forced to his feet by the guards.

"There'll be no whipping for Dean Winchester tonight," the woman announces. "Tonight is for his mother."

A knife is placed in his hand.

The guards push him towards Mary who's bound helplessly to the rack.

And then Dean finally learns what had happened to Ai's son, why she had been so afraid.

*Tonight, you're going to carve every piece of flesh tainted with angel marks off of your mother's body, the council says. Tonight, you're going to free her from the their ownership and then set her on fire and watch as she burns alive, her freedom brought at last.*

She won't go to heaven. She won't go to hell.

Death is the only safe place.

*And then tomorrow, Dean Winchester, we'll do to you, too, what we must.*

But as the audience watches the council deliver its verdict, none of what they declare ever happens.

Because a guard comes running through the crowd, and it's Aarif, and he's panting hard.

*There's an angel at the wall*, he says, just as chaos erupts in the camp.

## Chapter End Notes

Did you guys think I was kidding when I said they'd be married in no time ;)

# Over the Wall

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Getting up. Eating. Brushing his teeth.

Those had been the hardest things to do after Cas had died.

He hadn't been able to carry on. Not like Sam, who'd thrived and practically made himself Bobby's understudy in a matter of weeks, winning the camp's favour, the council's—power and influence happily handed over to him without a second thought. But nothing had been that easy for Dean. Not when his heart had felt broken.

"I'm doing this for you, Dean," Sam had said once. Dean had been curled up in his cot, blanket thrown over his head, trying to sleep, because at least in sleep, he could see Cas. "Look—the camp knows about Cas, okay? Bobby had to tell the council. They know you're mourning an angel. But—the way you're acting...they think you were *in love* with him."

And Dean hadn't talked to Sam in weeks at that point.

Not after how Sam had caved under the council's pressure and done those sick things to Cas' body with Bobby, with the soldiers. Not after what he'd inadvertently done by extension to Dean.

But that day, he hadn't been able to stop himself. He hadn't been able to swallow down his anger and grief. The words had ripped from his throat so uncontrollably that Sam had gone quiet.

"I *was*," Dean had said with a lump in his throat. "I was and I never told him and now it's too fucking late."

Tonight, Dean doesn't know why it's these memories that come to him. Maybe it's because the camp's wild before his eyes, Aarif's words causing them to squirm with fear, and that in turn makes Dean terrified, too. Because it's *Cas*. Of course, it's got to be Cas that's at the wall, and the camp'll hurt him, if they haven't already.

He'll *die* again.

And Dean still won't have told him.

*I was getting too close to the humans in my charge.*

Moments later, Dean finds himself being forced up by the council's guard, Rob. Dean sways and stumbles off the stage—he's weak from the pain. Behind them, Aarif's commanded to get Mary. There'll be no executions tonight, plans cancelled, not when there might be an angel attack imminent. Instead, the citizens are escorted to the safety bunkers, the second time in too short of a time, and the forces are gathered, the soldiers readied to be launched.



Soon enough, Dean's being marched in the snow.

They're going back to the prison.

*My superiors have begun to question my sympathies.*

It's strange, the eerie silence in this part of the camp, where there are no dormitories, no people. The prison's located near the entrance, but as they pass by, Dean sees that there are only a few guards here. The gate's usually secured heavily, but with a shiver, Dean realizes where they are now: in the bunkers, guarding the civilians, and on the other side of the camp, where Aarif had spotted the angel.

The hunt for Cas is on.

*They feel like I've begun to express emotions. Doorways to doubt.*

"Always knew you were no good, Winchester."

Rob's voice cuts through the darkness, his teeth glinting in the light as they pass under a torch, his hold on Dean's shoulder tightening. When they'd left the camp square, Dean's hands had been shackled, a chain running between them securing his imprisonment.

Mom's shackled, too, even though she's barely here.

Her eyes are unfocused.

*Is ketchup a vegetable?*

"I gotta confess, always hoped I'd be the one to catch you. I would've liked to carry out your punishment. Reward and all that. Jealous you got him first, Aarif. Caught him red-handed with another feathered son of a bitch."

Aarif's jaw stiffens when Rob mentions him.

But he doesn't respond.

*I was getting too close to the humans in my charge.*

"You know what always sickened me?" Rob shoves Dean a little harder down the path. "The fact you always got the good stuff without earning it. Council bending over backwards for your fucking brother. You, crying for an enemy angel. Still getting those food coupons while the rest of us worked and your ass lay in bed." Rob grabs him by his necklace then, glancing at the tag like he's done a thousand times to confirm his identity, except this time, he doesn't bother hiding his envy. "Fucking necklace, too, made of good silver. Why you deserved that, I'll never figure out."

Dean avoids his eyes. He drops them down until they rest on the guard's own badge.

*Robert Zhang, it reads. Suffers from kleptomania.*

Rob continues his chatter. Aarif tells them to speed it up, but Rob seems to want to relish the time that he has to insult Dean.

Dean grits his teeth as Cas' voice echoes inside his head again.

*I see nothing but pain here. I see inside you. I see your guilt, your anger, confusion. In paradise, all is forgiven.*

Maybe it's some kind of torment. Maybe his brain conjures it all up, memories to hear, when he's missing Cas, when he's pining. As Rob grabs the scruff of his neck to urge him along, Dean stumbles on the road and falls to his feet. Up ahead, Aarif stops with Mary.

*I'm the one who gripped you tight and raised you from perdition.*

He can feel it. The handprint scorched into his arm. Any moment now, the pain's going to be back, a knife to his arm, incapacitating him.

It's already numbed his mind.

*Dean and I do share a more profound bond.*

It's *there*. The pain. It hits him all at once, like always, out of nowhere. He's writhing on the ground. He doesn't know anything else.

But once again, he's calling for Cas in his delirium.

*I was getting too close to the hu—*

Mom's screaming. She's still screaming when the pain fades away. He blinks, tries to pick himself up and go to her. But when he does, Rob holds him back.

Aarif swears.

Even with a gag in, she's loud.

So, "Mom," he says. He reaches for her, like she had at the camp square, and maybe there's the slightest bit of recognition there. She goes quiet. She shudders. She says something behind the gag. She reaches for him, too.

But, "Alright. Enough. Keep moving," Aarif says and they're wrenched even further apart.

The distance between Mom and himself feels unbearable.

The rest of the way there, Rob continues with his digs. How does it feel to love an angel, he says, when an angel did this to your own mother? And Dean can't *help* it. Because for what it's worth, because even though he knows that Cas is different, he's been in this world for far too long. He's absorbed too much of their hatred, and there's *shame* there, making him so guilty for what he did in the last few months, ignoring Bobby and Sam, ignoring his brother's pleas for help to find Mom.

And maybe it's because he's so caught up in these thoughts that it takes his brain a moment to register what happens next.

All of a sudden, Aarif comes to a halt.

It's quiet.

It's dark.

Maybe something's here.

So, "What?" Rob says.

Aarif doesn't answer.

He just stares at Dean with an indiscernible look.

Rob grows uneasy. He starts to shift his weight from one foot to the other, his grip on Dean's collar slackening. They're far from people, far from any guards, in an alleyway that leads to the prison's backdoor and with nighttime fully cloaking them, the warehouses on either side seem to loom up even more ominously.

Two more blocks to go.

There isn't even a torch lighting the way.

Rob shifts again. "What?" he demands, more indignantly this time, more nervously. When Aarif fails to answer again, under his breath, Rob mutters *Christo*, and then tenses, expecting it, expecting Aarif to flinch and reveal black eyes, but Aarif still doesn't react. Rob starts reaching for his pistol. "Why we stopping?" he says.

And this time, Aarif makes a move.

He lets go of Mary. Mary starts to wander slowly away.

"Hey, what the fuck!"

Rob starts rushing forward then, intent on recapturing the prisoner, dragging Dean along by his shackled hands. He points his pistol at Aarif's face the whole time, spooked, daring him to make a move, but Aarif doesn't.

Or at least, not until Rob's within arm's reach.

Dean doesn't know what happens then—only that he's shoved to the ground. He struggles to get to his feet, but Cas' handprint starts *burning* again, and then he's screaming, because the pain's *worse*. The pain's so *much* worse this time, as if before, it'd been nothing but the prick of a needle, and it goes on longer, and *longer*. Somewhere outside his inner chaos, he hears grunts. Somewhere out there, there's a scuffle, someone fighting for their goddamn life. He hears the thump of a body colliding with the ground. When he's aware again, Dean presses a shaking hand to his cheek, wet with tears.

There's blood coming out of his nose.

Rob's knocked out cold.

Aarif clasps his hand over Dean's mouth.

"Quiet," he says.

"I don't know what kind of heartless person you are. I don't know why you'd do it. Tell me, did he brainwash you? Did Castiel promise you something like he did for my sister? Why did you come to this camp? Is that what you do? Infiltrate? Persuade? Make Castiel's victims feel comfortable so that they'll listen to him, huh? Was there someone else in your place? Was there someone in this camp before you came, who told my sister to go? Give me their name and I'll spare your mother. Give me that and I'll let her run free once we're outside the gate. I—I keep my promises, Dean. Just—*just tell me.*"

They keep on marching, Dean taking one quick step after another. Aarif's gun presses into Mary's skull without wavering.

Leverage.

It's what keeps Dean moving.

Somewhere far behind them, Rob's trailing them.

"You're not doing this of your own free will, are you? Castiel has your mother—is that it? You're like me, aren't you? Saving your mother like I'm trying to save my sister? She's... she's—she's a-alive, isn't she? She m-must be. I—I *need* to find her. I need to take her back from Castiel. I need to keep our family together. Baba died the same day Mom left. All I had—all I had were my two sisters. And then she went through the g-gate. Six months ago. We've had victims come back years later...changed. Is that—is there a cure to the angel madness, to the claiming marks? Has Castiel promised to release your mother? Is—is that why you're here, carrying out a mission for them, the angels? Because then...I'd do it, too. I'd do it in a heartbeat."

The blacksmith's forge comes into view.

The camp's so silent.

So empty.

If Dean didn't know about the underground bunkers, he would've thought everyone died.

“I did you a favour, you know. They would’ve executed you. And your mother. Your brother would’ve come back to find you gone. Your mother, they would’ve burned. It’s the only way to cleanse the angel marks. But then, you. Dean. Maybe they would’ve burned you. But I don’t think so. Not with you on Casti—the monster’s side. No...they would’ve taken you outside the gate. They would’ve taken you to the woods. They would’ve done to you what they do to all angels. So...you’re lucky I saved you. You’re lucky I lied about seeing your angel at the wall today. Because now the camp’s afraid and the gate’s penetrable. We can slip through. And then your angel will come. Castiel will come to you, thinking he’s safe. And I’ll either take back my sister or I’ll kill him.”

Dean wants to tell him. He wants to tell Aarif that he’s wrong about Cas. That it must’ve been another angel who seduced his sister beyond the wall.

But the gun at Mom’s head is so firm.

Dean’s afraid.

It’s moments later that they reach the forge. It’s not empty. Felipe’s not there, but Dean sees his brother, Alejandro. Dean’s dormitory foreman is hurriedly working on angel blades—melting them down, more bullets in case the angel attack that Aarif talked about comes to fruition.

But that was a lie.

And Alejandro realizes it.

“Calm down, kiddo. C’mon,” he says, voice soothing and paternal, when he sees the gun in Aarif’s hand, finally away from Mary’s forehead if only to be pointed at this elderly man. “Look—”

It doesn’t matter.

A moment later, Alejandro crumples to the ground, knocked out with the butt of the gun. When he doesn’t stir seconds later, Dean wonders if he died.

It’s the weapons that Aarif’s after. He moves around the forge, gathering angel-killing bullets and angel blades that haven’t been melted down yet, as if for security, shoving them all into a duffle bag that he steals from the smith’s shelves. The gun’s pointed at Mary’s head again, daring Dean to make a move.

Dean doesn’t.

He stays complacent.

But he knows if he lets Aarif beyond the gate, Cas’ll die.

Because it’s not like Dean doesn’t see it. There’s a fervour in Aarif that Dean recognizes. It’s one that’s fierce and unstoppable, a desperation that doesn’t cease until everything that can be done has been done. Because Aarif’s not Alejandro, sixty-three years old and patient. He’s

not Rob, who's fifty-six and still can't seem to behave. Aarif's *twenty-six*, who'd fall desperately to his knees at a crossroads, who'd do the *unspeakable* if he had to.

He's still a fucking kid.

He's Dean.

Two minutes later, Aarif's ready to go. With a shake of his head, he indicates the door. Soon enough, they'll be on their way, to the gate, where Dean doesn't know what'll happen—by what means Aarif will get through to the other side. And then, what'll happen to Mom and himself.

But they only make it halfway out the door.

That's as far as they get because then Dean starts writhing. In seconds, Dean's on the ground, convulsing, and this time, there are no pained screams. Instead, Dean gurgles. Instead, Dean wheezes, clutching at his neck with his shackled hands, terrified because maybe he doesn't know what's happening to him, just trying to gasp for breath but failing miserably.

Dean makes it believable.

It's when he starts turning blue that Aarif finally lets go of Mary. He drops down next to Dean, thumps him on his chest and, "Hey," he says. "Hey—you better not—"

Dean rolls them over and chokes him with the chain between his wrists.

Aarif struggles. Wildly, kicking arms, kicking legs. But Dean's done this one too many times.

Aarif doesn't stand a chance.

He goes limp.

After that, it's a rush. Dean grabs Aarif, hauls him into the forge and ties him to a table leg. Aarif groans, sluggish as he regains consciousness, but by then, Dean's already got Mom, breaking both of their shackles. Another second, and the gag's out, but Mom doesn't say anything coherent, just mumbles nonsense under her breath.

He wants to hug her.

But they don't have time for that.

The truth is, Dean doesn't know what to do anymore. Even as he pulls Mom along as he runs, it's without direction. He knows they can't stay here anymore. He sure as hell wishes Sammy were here, to get them out of this goddamn mess, but that's weeks away until he returns from his trip, and right now they've only got hours.

There are possibilities, Dean knows. He could take Mom, and they could hide, somewhere in the camp. The camp's not huge, but it's not small either. It'd take a while to find them, maybe even weeks if Dean played it right, but there would be too many things left to luck, too many things that could fall victim to chance.

So...

It's the *outside* then.

There's fear there. Hell if he knows why. Maybe it's because of all of Bobby's stories. All of Sam's warnings and worries. Because there are *things* beyond the wall. Not just angels. Not just demons. Creatures that Dean's never hunted, never seen. Creatures that don't even exist back home. And it's not like Dean hasn't noticed that every time Bobby takes a troop out there, someone comes back dead.

His gut twinges with anxiety.

*Sammy.*

But he can't think about that right now.

He wonders then when he got so weak. When he became afraid of the things that go bump in the night. Hasn't he wanted to be out there for days? With Cas? And even before Cas, to go hunting with Bobby—they'd even argued about it the day that he and Sam had left. But now Dean's not so sure. It's hard to be, when there's inches of snow covering the ground. When he's shivering and probably frostbitten because they'd stripped him of his shirt on stage. When he hasn't eaten in a day. When he has *Mom*, who's out of her mind, who even now whispers things that he doesn't know. What if he makes it out there and they just die from starvation? From the cold? What if he finds Cas only to be turned away? Because Cas had *left* him last night, hadn't he? He'd *gone*. He'd said, *I don't think I should see you anymore*, and then everything had gone to shit.

God, *doubt*.

It's haunted him more than anything lately.

So he takes a moment to breathe.

In the end, that moment's all that he allows himself. That moment's the only one that he'll have for the rest of the night, right up until he'll cross the border between the camp and the danger out there. And then he's on the move. He's tugging Mom even more insistently, until they hit the wall.

The gate's still a ways away. He can't see it from here—the weapons shed is blocking the path. But he knows that all he has to do is walk across to be met with soldiers.

There were six an hour ago.

It's strange enough that this section of the wall's unguarded, when it's so close to the gate. It only goes to show how vicious the council's hunt is, how they're concentrating all of their forces to get to Cas, perhaps to the point of foolishness. Dean can't see any other soldiers. There's a grate beside his shoulder, no one else here.

For a moment, with the night still pitch black, he feels like nothing's changed, even though he's got Mom's hand in his own. That it's just another day at the wall. Just another

excruciating shift where he'll be hoping that he'll see Cas, that he'll get to feel the press of Cas' hand against his own.

So he knows that he shouldn't look.

He knows that time is running out, and that he should be doing anything and everything to get out of the camp (how did all of the other victims escape?), and that he shouldn't allow himself distractions, but...

He has no self-control when it comes to Cas.

He takes a peek. He presses his nose against the grate and looks.

Cas is *there*.

A year ago, Dean remembers that he'd done something stupid.

Granted, it hadn't been the worst thing that he'd ever done. Hell, he'd made more than his fair share of hasty, half-assed decisions while working cases. He'd done things like shacking up with waitresses who'd made him feel good for a couple of minutes and then made him feel empty for the rest of the night. He'd drunk himself into a stupor more than once, over stupid small things like Sam deciding to read a book about drinking blood for its magical properties (for a case, Dean had known that—it wasn't gonna be like *last time*), and over Cas being flirted with by a man on a trip to the convenience store.

But those had been different levels of stupid.

And what had happened a year ago had been something far smaller—a glass of water, filled right to the brim. And then, knowing that it would spill all the way down the hall to his room, he'd tried to carry it, anyway.

Dean doesn't know why, but that's the feeling that he gets now.

His breath hitches in his throat. His heart stutters in his chest like it always does, whenever he sees the angel beyond the wall. Before he can even think, he puts his hand to the grate, clawing madly. Because Cas is there, except he's on the *ground*, curled up in a little ball against the trunk of a tree, knees drawn in, his whole body smeared with blood, the shoulder where he'd been shot last night already festering, already making him *ill*.

Cas doesn't see him. Not right away. Cas' eyes are closed, the breaths that he takes shallow and slow. His wings are drawn around himself protectively, as if he can keep the entire world away like that. But it doesn't *work*. One of his wings slips down, the feathers quivering



violently, to reveal the expanse of his chest through his sheer robes, the three fresh bullet holes—what the camp’s done to him.

The soldiers haven’t even gone outside the wall for the angel hunt yet.

But already, they’ve got him.

It’s like the first time, Dean realizes then. It’s like that night, not too long ago (even if it feels like an eternity) when Cas had first come to Dean, at the wall, riddled with bullet wounds in his chest. And it’s the same feelings that Dean gets. It’s the same terror and desperation, because the thought of Cas dying scares him more than anything else.

So, “Cas,” he calls, softly from the other side of the wall.

So, “Cas,” he says, pressing closer and closer, his other free hand that’s clutching Mom’s fingers loosening as Dean’s whole world seems to shift, until it’s only the angel that occupies his mind.

And Cas’ eyes flutter. Cas sees him and he stiffens, as if he hadn’t planned on Dean finding him like this. As if maybe he hadn’t *wanted* to see Dean, because maybe Cas had meant those words that he’d said last time, about not being able to meet Dean anymore, or *loving* him.

But then slowly, Cas pulls himself up to his feet.

And then he starts to move.

He doesn’t speak. He makes his way through the snow, painting it blood-red. He falls and seems to tumble to the earth with despair in his eyes more than once, each time striking fear in Dean’s heart, each time making Dean tense. But finally, after what seems like too long, he’s close, so close that Dean can feel his warm breath on his nose, so close that Dean could count the little hairs that make up his eyelashes if he wanted.

Close enough that Cas’ eyes pierce his own and pull him in without resistance.

Dean swallows.

Dean brings himself closer to the grate.

But, *Hello, human*, Cas says, closing his eyes, leaning his forehead against the grate, against Dean’s own forehead that’s pressed up against the metal, so, “Hello, angel,” Dean says quietly back, his own eyes squeezed shut. “Hey, *Cas*.”

It’s maybe strange, how it always happens. How seeing Cas hurt is enough to spur him into a frenzy. How it’ll have him desperate and on edge, how even though he’s spent the day writhing with the strange pain emanating from his shoulder, from the handprint, it’s only Cas’ pain that matters to him, his safety the only thing that he cares about.

Cas has power, and he has it over *him*.

So Dean loses it a little when Cas doesn't say anything after that. So Dean worries maybe to the point of madness when Cas' eyes flutter again, when Cas tumbles again to his feet before the grate.

Cas' head hits the snow.

He falls onto his back. His wings crumple at his sides. For a moment, Dean freezes. For a moment, all Dean sees is Cas' body, his wings burnt into the ground, his legs bent in death.

But then Cas opens his eyes.

He opens his eyes to look up at Dean and he looks upset.

*Why did you do that?* he says.

Dean doesn't know what to say.

But his heart twinges painfully.

*Why did you let them hunt me?* Cas says and his bottom lip wobbles. *Why did you reveal my presence to your camp's soldiers, last I came to see you?*

*They couldn't see me before, as long as you kept our secret. But then you drew their attention and now they know me. And look what they've done.*

And Dean's wrecked. It's like it always is, his eyes only for Cas, his focus only for him. Somewhere by his side, Mary's mumbling furiously upon hearing the angel's voice. Somewhere in a place where maybe he ought to be smarter, there's something stirring in his gut, telling him that he ought to be asking Cas about Mom's angel marks, how the handprint on his own arm got there. And then that feeling of water splashing over a cup when he should've known better seems to trail into his mind.

As if he senses Dean's doubt, as if on cue, Cas' face grows even more distraught, and then Dean's gone.

*I gave my love to you, human,* Cas says and his voice swells with his hurt, higher and musical. *Even when it was forbidden. I was only supposed to be yours. But perhaps you wanted to share me with them. Perhaps this was what you intended all along.*

"Cas, I wouldn't—I—"

And Dean doesn't know what he can do to make it better. He hates the hurt on Cas' face. He hates that Cas is in pain. So he says the only thing that he can say. So he says what he should've said before Cas died, before it was too late.

"I love you," Dean says and the words come out soft and frightened. The words come out in a way that only shows that they were always meant to stay hidden.

But they catch Cas' interest.

They make Cas' head perk up.

Cas looks at him then, even though Dean's own eyes have dropped down, unable to make eye contact, already regretting his confession, already imagining rejection. Cas looks at him and then he sits up and a strange shudder runs through him, his wings thrashing against the snow.

Dean feels flecks of ice hit his cheek.

He looks up again.

But it's not the bits of snow flying through the grate that gets his attention. It's not the shudder that runs through Cas' body. It's the fact that just then, Cas says, "*Dean*," not tinged with his Enochian accent, not wrapped in the careful intonations of the angel at the wall. Cas says, "*Dean*," and it sounds like *him*, waking Dean up in the mornings, presenting a cup of coffee, before they head out for the day's case.

Dean clutches again at the grate.

"Cas—"

But then Cas stops shuddering. For a moment, he seems utterly confused. And then it's as if his eyes regain purpose, clearing and calculating.

*Did you...*

*Did you just say that you love me, human?*

Dean straightens up. His hand shakes against the grate.

Cas is on his feet again, swaying. He presses his hand against Dean's own. Dean shivers.

*If you love me, human, then why are you still on the other side of this wall? Why have you not come over, to the outside, for me?*

"I told you I'd do anything for you," Dean mumbles. "Last night, but you didn't ask me. You—you left."

And Cas smiles, amused and knowingly. Cas says, *But you have already answered me, Dean, even if you don't know it yet, and I have already asked.*

*So what are you waiting for?*

*Come, human. Come to the outside with me.*

It'll only be a split second.

Dean waits, tense, on the edge of the shed, Mom at his side. The guards are still at the gate. There are more of them now, a full eight, maybe returning to their posts, unable to find the angel that Aarif had described.

*I'm weak, Cas had said, shivering. I'm dying.*

*But I still have enough strength for this. For a moment, I can clear your path.*

For ten minutes, nothing happens. For ten minutes, Dean wonders if Cas is okay, or if they got to him. But then a soldier from the other side of camp comes running in. *A trueform angel*, she shouts. *East, giant, towering above the trees.*

She wants all of them to come. She tells them that it was commanded.

The soldiers are uneasy. Leaving the gate unguarded is unheard of. But it doesn't take long after that. Monique's eyes are alight with passion, and she's convincing as she urges them to help the cause. *She loves me*, Cas had whispered to Dean with a small smile, *but I, not her. Nevertheless, she will do what I ask.*

*(Cas—you've been talking, to others at the wall?)*

But Dean doesn't get to ponder that thought right now. Dean doesn't get to think about that flare of jealousy that had consumed him when Cas had revealed what he'd been doing. Because it's then that the soldiers depart, save for one, and Dean knows that he doesn't have long.

He nudges Mom out from behind the shed.

The soldier's already nervous on his own. When Mary wanders towards the gate, he doesn't know what to think. But it's his indecision that's his downfall. Before the soldier knows it, Dean's on him, disarming him, knocking him out cold.

And then, there's nothing in the way.

Just the gate.

Dean hesitates.

*The angels...they ain't the God-abiding, harp-toting little healers that you'd expect, Dean. They're...different. They...claim things. People. And whatever happens to them afterwards, no one knows.*

*Don't ever go outside the walls, Dean. Never, Dean. Never.*

He knows that he doesn't have time now. To think. To reflect. To even let Bobby's voice torment him. He doesn't know why the doubt's so strong still, even now, when he's pushed it down a thousand times. It's *Cas*, isn't it? It's *Cas*, so that's all that should matter. Hadn't he told himself a thousand times, that Cas was just lost? That it was really *his* Cas, in need of his

help? Not another angel out to get him. Not another monster who'll take him and do god knows what.

So once more, he ignores his gut feeling. Once more, he does something against his conscience.

He opens the gate.

Mary goes out first. She wanders past the threshold and a smile erupts on her face, as if she's free, at last. And then Dean's moving, just as the knocked-out soldier starts waking up. Just as the soldier begins scrambling to his feet to get to Dean...

...and just as the pain that's coursed through Dean Winchester all night comes back again.

Before he can cross the border of the camp, he's on the ground, screaming.

It's worse again. It's the one where he can't think or move, only pray that it's fucking over. If he were aware, maybe he'd realize the hands on his legs, the soldier dragging him back into the camp. Or maybe he'd be aware of Mom, who takes hold of his arm, pulls him away from that same soldier, pulls him over the threshold.

As soon as his body crosses the border of the camp, the pain's gone in an instant.

He gasps. He looks back at the soldier who's still got his legs, in a tug-o'-war with Mom.

He kicks the man in the face.

And then, with Mary's hand in his own, he runs.

The woods are deep. They run for what feels like hours. They run, and Dean's eyes scour the place, looking for a sign of the angel, looking for Cas.

But Cas never appears.

They're on their own.

It's dark, night in full swing, and it's when Mom's too tired to take another step that he, too, collapses. He's on his knees in the snow, shivering, and it's then that he starts to wonder if he ought to go back. If maybe Cas had been too injured to move into the woods like he'd promised. If maybe Cas had just fallen, right by the wall in plain sight of the guards and something horrible had happened.

What if he needs Dean's help?

But, of course...it doesn't go that way.

Because instead, Cas *arrives*.

At first, all Dean hears is the soft sound of feet. He looks around, but he can't see. He looks for him, hoping and hoping, with his heart hammering inside his chest. With his fists curled at his sides. But then, in the barest of light that enters the dense canopy of the evergreen trees that tower above them, he sees the outline of a figure, tall, triumphant, and beautiful.

His heart skips a beat.

Cas comes and he's *glorious*. Cas comes and Dean almost forgets to breathe. He's no longer wearing his sheer robes, or if he is, they're hidden. Like the ebony of his wings, Cas is draped in a long black fur coat, magnificent and imposing, his halo crackling with new electricity that's so damn vivid, so damn *alive*.

He stops a few feet away, cloaked in the shadows, a soft smile on his lips.

*Hello, human*, he says and Dean's heart races.

Dean scrambles for him. Dean's so quick that it's a miracle that he doesn't bowl the angel right over when he throws his arms around him, and then Cas pulls his own arms around him, too, warm and encompassing. There's no more wall between them. There's nothing, and Dean breathes him in. It's been too long. It's been months. And now, they're finally *together* again.

"I missed you," Dean mutters. "God, I missed you."

When Dean pulls away, it's only because he remembers the blood that he'd seen earlier.

So, "Lemme look at you," he says, with worried fingers. He pulls the edge of the fur away, the edge of the coat. He undoes the straps that hold Cas' sheer dress together, and Cas stands still and patient, as Dean's hands run over smooth and unblemished skin, no bullet wounds in sight, nothing left to indicate that Cas is hurt.

Cas watches him.

Cas watches his confusion with a devious smile.

"C-Cas...?"

Dean's voice trembles.

And it's then that it all goes to shit. It's then that the feeling of water brimming the cup returns, Cas doing nothing to distract him this time. It's then that they hear the sound of running feet. And it's then that *Monique* appears, the soldier who Cas had used to clear the gate, and when Monique pushes past Dean and clings to Cas, Dean takes a step back.

Because maybe Dean isn't the only one that the angel had lured beyond the wall today.

Maybe it would've been okay, Dean thinks in those few seconds that follow, where his head pounds, where he feels cold and afraid. Maybe Dean would've reminded himself, convinced himself that Cas was just lost. That the angel was his Cas, and just needed Dean's help to get back to himself.

But then something else happens and every semblance of hope in Dean's heart falls to pieces.

Because Mom stands up, and she's smiling, and for the first time, Dean hears coherent words come out of her mouth, words that fucking devastate him.

"Castiel?" she says. "Will you take me back to paradise like you promised?"

And the implications of what Mary says sink in so fast. That maybe the reason that Mary was covered in marks was because Cas had done this to her. That maybe the reason that Mom was out of her mind, a mess, was because Dean had been stupid, and he'd been *wrong*, and maybe this wasn't Cas, after all.

This was a *monster*.

Dean stumbles back. Dean has every intention of taking Mom and running, far from here, maybe back to the goddamn camp, but he doesn't get anywhere. In seconds, Cas captures him. In seconds, Cas is there, towering above him, and his eyes are glowing with holy light in the dark, and, *Where do you think you're going, human?* he says.

And then Cas presses his hand to Dean's cheek.

And then he caresses Dean's temple with his thumb.

*Remember*, Castiel commands.

There's a second where all Dean hears is silence. There's a second where the world seems to stop and only he and Cas seem to be the ones still present. But then the handprint on Dean's arm begins to glow. And there are memories rushing through him. Memories of dreams, never remembered, always forgotten. Memories of words: *You have fallen for me*. And memories of Cas, running his fingers over his naked and shivering body, tattooing him, wedding him, and when Dean looks down, they're there: angel marks covering his entire body, the evidence of what he had done so willingly.

For a moment, they pulse grace-blue before they disappear.

The handprint continues to glow.

And then the only light in the woods is the one that's coming from Cas' eyes as the angel fits his hand over the print branded onto Dean's shoulder.

*You're not going anywhere*, he says.

*Because I own you now*.

## Chapter End Notes

And now the real enemies to lovers drama begins!!!



# Something Awry

## Chapter Notes

This ended up being a bit of a filler for plot reasons. My biggest fear is that it's mightily boring, but hopefully, soon enough, the action will pick up again :P

Within weeks of arriving at the camp, the council had tried to pressure Dean into marrying. A woman had been presented to him, nothing out of the ordinary for a place where the council controlled all aspects of life.

But who would've wanted to wed him? The widower of an *angel*? Even standing before her, he'd seen it on her face—disgust, loathing and everything that had promised him that their life together would've been wretched for the both of them.

*You're broken*, the council had made him believe. *This is the only fix*.

Bobby had tried, of course. Sympathetic face, a hand to his shoulder, he'd pulled Dean aside and had told him how much easier it would be if he fell in line. Had said Sam would marry all too soon, had already had a bride picked out for him, healthy and of child-bearing age. The camp would love Sam, even more than they already did, and if Dean could build a family, then maybe all of his past crimes could be forgotten (but never forgiven).

But Dean hadn't paid him any attention. Not when he'd still loathed him and Sam for what they'd done to Cas' body. For what they'd done by extension to Dean.

Now, he wishes that he had.

How many times had Bobby warned him? How many goddamn times had he told Dean to be wary, because angels here weren't what they were back home, and Dean hadn't listened—he'd only longed, he'd only pined, had only *grieved*.

Now he's on his knees before the angel that he's wanted for so long.

And the angel is smiling at him, full of pleasure, full of deception.

He's not Cas.

Dean swallows and tries to think. His eyes dart to Mom, who's standing beside the other woman, Monique—the soldier with whom Cas had been talking, because Dean hadn't been *it* for Cas. And it's stupid. It's stupid how even when Dean's realized the truth of what's happened, he feels biting jealousy in the gut of his stomach. He feels it and he loathes himself for it, because it means *something*—that maybe Dean's in love with this monster who drove Mom mad, just because he wears Cas' face, just because he talks to Dean as if he *needs* him.

Had Cas ever needed him?

But...

He shuts that thought down.

Dean lets out a shaky exhale. He looks back, tries to meet that holy light leaking from the angel's eyes, even if it blinds him. Facing the monster—that's something Dean knows all too well. But then the light dies away and it's the Cas that he'd seen at the wall. The Cas who'd limped, who'd bled, who'd needed and had wanted Dean's help. The Cas who Dean had thought he'd be able to hold in his arms.

Cas smiles wider, watches Dean as if he knows what Dean's thinking. And then the angel's hand on his shoulder drops. Instead, the angel cradles Dean's face, and in his gaze, there's nothing but adoration.

*You remember now, human, he says. You remember everything.*

*How you chose to lie in that bed.*

*How you chose to be wed.*

*And now you are here and it cannot be undone.*

*I own you now, Dean. I own you now and forever.*

But because he's not Cas, "You don't own me," Dean says.

For hours, they walk.

For hours, Dean prays that the goddamn soldiers from the camp will find them, because at least the camp means *Sam*. At least there, when Sam and Bobby finally return from the mission, they might be able to untangle the mess that they left behind, but then Dean remembers the stage in the camp square. He remembers the execution that the council had tried to get him to carry out, and he's as hopeless as he was before.

There's no fucking fix.

He should've listened to Sam. He should've tried just as hard to get them both home.

Dean doesn't know where the angel is taking them, but he keeps his distance. He trails behind, and maybe it's with a half-hearted hope that if he manages to get back far enough

from the group, he can make a break for it. But...he knows that he can't leave Mom. And even if he could, it's no use. As soon as he wanders too far, Cas—not Cas—appears out of nowhere to usher him along.

*How fare you, human?* the angel will whisper then, with a hand on Dean's bare arm, on the handprint, and every time, Dean'll find himself shivering. The angel will stop him, tilt Dean's chin up so that their eyes meet, and then Dean's heartbeat will inevitably quicken. He'll pant, and Cas'll watch his open mouth curiously, rapt like he'd been when he'd kissed Dean in his dream, and Dean doesn't know what happens to him then. He'll find himself moving closer to Cas, the angel's warmth the only shield from the frosty night.

*Stay close, human,* Cas'll say then. *These woods are dark and deep and if you are lost, even I may not be able to find you again.*

And maybe there's some truth to those words. Maybe something far more insidious dwells here, because sometimes the angel will stop suddenly, tilt his head and look over his shoulder, and then draw all of them close within the warmth of his quivering wings.

Monique and Mary under the cover of one, Dean under the other.

And it starts to happen more and more. The further into the darkness that they get, the more tense those wings will be as they wrap around Dean. But the angel's worry doesn't seem to be for Mom or Monique. Instead, it'll be *Dean* that Cas' eyes will turn to. It'll be *Dean* that he'll yank until he's pressed up against the angel, an arm encircling his waist as the angel's wings hide him from view.

*Quiet, humans,* Cas will say, in a voice low and dangerous. *Quiet, or they'll find you.*

Dean doesn't dare ask who.

But something about Cas' voice makes him think twice before making any noise.

The real kicker, Dean thinks, is the fact that it isn't the things that should make him upset that finally do it for him.

It's not the fact that Cas made Mom go insane. It's not Cas lying to him, manipulating him until Dean did the unthinkable by coming over the wall for him. It's not even the fact that Cas is a grade A asshole who wears a stupid fur coat and smiles at Dean as if he knows all of his secrets.

It's not what makes him shake with frustration.

It's not what makes Dean finally go off the handle.

It's the fact that sometime in the couple of minutes that Rob and Aarif escorted him to the prison, Rob Zhang stole his fucking necklace.

It's *ridiculous*.

Dean realizes it about two and a half hours in. He doesn't know why it gets to him—the necklace was worthless. A reminder that the camp owned him, stamped with a number. And maybe he should've seen it coming, what with the way Rob had eyed it again and again, jealously comparing it with his own rusting copper. Maybe it had been its value on the camp's black market that had made the hotheaded guard want it so bad, and maybe that's why Sam had told him never to lose it—like he shouldn't have lost Cas, like he shouldn't have lost Mom or Sam or himself. His brother had told him to keep it safe or he'd regret it, and now it's another mistake on a long list that only keeps growing.

Dean stops walking.

Takes a shuddering breath.

Watches the fog of his breath dissipate only to return with every exhale.

God, it's cold.

He wraps his arms around himself. Up ahead, the angel's pace is steady. Mom and Monique follow, just as spellbound as before. If Dean doesn't catch up, soon enough the angel's going to be on his case, prompting him to move, telling him about all the things that go bump in the night, as if Dean isn't experiencing it firsthand by being his prisoner.

Dean shivers again.

He should be *colder*.

He should be *hungrier*.

Ever since the camp had searched his body for the angel marks, he's been shirtless in the snow. He doesn't even remember the last time he had food. But instead, hunger and cold exist like a distant dream. Something there but not quite tangible. And maybe it's that that gets to him, too.

So, "What are you doing to us?" he says.

His own voice startles himself. It's loud and piercing in the darkness of the woods, and up ahead, the angel stills.

"Why don't I feel hungry?" Dean says, louder, and his voice croaks as if he hasn't used it in years. Suddenly, he's not sure how long it's been. "Why the fuck isn't my ass freezing out here?"

The angel turns. His wings drag in the snow as he moves. Mary and Monique cling to his side.

But before Dean knows it, the angel's in front of him, mouth inches away from Dean's.

*Quiet*, the angel hisses and his voice seems to make the very air vibrate. He moves his hand forward as if he's planning to clasp it over Dean's mouth, but instead, it comes to rest on the side of Dean's jaw. Ca—the angel—tucks a stray hair back behind Dean's ear. *Quiet, human, or they'll hear you.*

Dean closes his eyes and suppresses another shiver.

“There isn't anyone here, *angel*.”

At the word *angel*, Cas' hand on Dean's jaw tightens.

*There is, Dean. And you would be their most precious treasure.*

*I don't want them to have you.*

When Dean lets his eyes flutter open again, Cas isn't watching him like he expects. Cas is peering over his shoulder, as if he expects some monster to come swooping down. In the distance, Mary and Monique stand unmoving, frightening shadows in the scarce moonlight.

Cas turns his gaze back to him.

He smiles.

*I only did what I needed to do to give you comfort, Dean. I gave you warmth. I took away your exhaustion. I took away your hunger.*

*But maybe you would like something in your mouth after all.*

Dean flushes. Dean stumbles back and Cas looks at him, eyes shining with amusement. But, “Don't use your mojo crap on me,” Dean spits. “You're—”

*You're not him*, Dean wants to say and his heart feels heavy in his chest. *You're not Cas.*

The only angel that Dean had ever let touch him was gone.

Dean swallows. He takes a few shallow breaths, tries to avoid the angel's eyes, the angel's face. He's afraid if he looks, he'll see the helpless visage that had tempted him at the wall—Cas, bleeding, broken, in distress.

But maybe the angel's not interested in pretending anymore.

Not when he's claimed Dean.

Because he presses a finger to Dean's forehead and says, *Very well, human. Have it your way.*

And then all of the hunger, all of the exhaustion and cold hits him at once as Dean tumbles to the ground.

When Dean wakes up, he knows he's in a dream.

He's had too many not to know. He's in the bunker again, in his bed, and Cas—

Cas isn't here.

He *should* be. He's *always* been. But the last dream that he'd had, the angel had torn Cas' heart out of his chest and reduced him to a pile of feathers on Dean's bed. Maybe Cas is gone.

Dean sits up, feels a flood of grief overwhelm him. He should've known better. He should've been smarter.

Uneasy, he sees the door to his room open, the lights in the hallway flickering.

Someone's out there.

Dean can hear sounds.

Quietly, he slips out of bed.

He wants to call out, of course. It's Cas' name on his lips, aching to be uttered. But something's not quite right tonight. With every step that Dean takes down the hall, he hears a humming sound that only grows. Someone's singing, and he doesn't know where they are.

After an eternity of wading through the shallow water in the hall, he arrives back at his room.

The angel's there.

Dean halts at the door.

The angel doesn't look up when Dean comes in, just a few steps over the threshold. He's perched in Dean's bed with his wings draped across the room. But then Dean sees that he's not alone. The camp soldier, Monique, is lying at the angel's feet, while the angel drags his talons across her back, painting her with sigils. The angel's in his monstrous true form, scales and horns and feathers, and it should terrify Dean, except Dean just keeps watching him with a strange feeling in his gut.

He's wedding her. Cas is wedding Monique like he'd wed Dean, like he must've wed *Mom*.

As if sensing Dean's despicable jealousy, Cas stops and looks at him.

*Hello, Dean,* he says.

His voice emerges cavernous and deep. It echoes in shades of sound as he speaks.

He beckons Dean closer, talons outstretched.

*Come here,* he says. *Sit with me.*

Maybe because it's a dream, Dean goes to him all too easily.

By the time that he reaches the bed, Cas is wearing Jimmy Novak's face again. He's flesh and blood and bones and he pulls Dean into his lap, encloses him with his arms and wings. Dean buries his nose into the crook of his neck, forgets that this isn't Cas, forgets that this very monster tore out Cas' heart in a dream not too long ago. Cas breathes against him as if he's real.

"You marrying her, too?" Dean mumbles. "Like Mom?"

Cas' arms tighten around him.

*I claimed them, Dean, but you alone, I wed.*

*It's what the sigils speak that matters.*

*And what I carved into you is unlike anything else.*

Dean presses closer to him, falls into some kind of slumber against Cas' chest, and Cas chants something, in Enochian, as he claims Monique. At times, Dean thinks that he hears snatches of intelligible conversation—promises of paradise, promises of rewards now that Monique's come over the wall, things that makes Dean wonder why he'd even been claimed in the first place, before setting foot outside the camp like Monique. Or why he's got a handprint on his arm, the only visible sign of Cas' claim, when the sigils on Mom and Monique's bodies are etched on the outside while his are hidden from view.

But then he forgets his questions. He drifts further, sees memories that aren't his own. Monique's mother and father, starved to death in the poorest part of camp. Monique's soldier brother murdered for challenging his own conscription into the camp army. Everything becomes a blur—of his mind, of Monique's. And then Dean finds himself too tired to care. Too hungry. Too cold. He lies slumped against the angel, drifting to sleep once more.

It's not like it was before.

When Dean wakes up, he's not confused and he hasn't forgotten anything. He knows what he saw. He knows what he did. And maybe he's ashamed that he let the angel get to him again.

For a moment, he thinks it's snowing. He sees it, heavy and harsh, but when nothing falls onto his face, he stirs. The angel's stupid fur coat is wrapped around his body, encasing him, mirroring the warmth of his night-black wings. Dean sits up, shivers when the coat slips off from around his shoulders, still shirtless, finds that he's in some sort of cave, the early hours of morning creeping in.

Outside, the storm's relentless.

"Mom," he says, grasps around blindly as if he expects her to be sleeping next to him, doesn't know how many hours it's been, how many days, but a look into the depth of the cave finds her sitting with Monique, cross-legged next to a curious grace-blue fire that seems to be burning from nothing. Monique's previously clean body's covered in sigils now, only further confirmation that what Dean had dreamt was real.

But the angel in question is nowhere to be found.

Dean pulls himself to his feet, only to stumble back down to his knees. His head's spinning, he's weak from the lack of food, and he's not gonna get anywhere unless he finds something to eat. When he falls, Mary looks up, and to his surprise, she extends her arm out, reaches for him.

"Dean?" she says, as if nothing's changed. As if she's still sane.

He gets back to his feet, takes only a moment to steady himself before rushing to her. Mary looks at him as if she's not sure who he is, even as she utters his name again. She shakes her head, her blonde locks whipping around wildly, and then, "Are we in paradise?" she asks. "Is that why you're here?"

Dean swallows.

"Mom..." he says. "*Mom.*"

She furrows her brows. "Where's Sam?" she asks. "Where's John? Castiel promised they would be here."

Hearing Dad's name catches him off-guard. It's been years now, hasn't it? A goddamn decade since Azazel had taken him. And here, in this world, even longer. Bobby had said that he'd never met John. Dad had died ages ago. Whatever the angel's selling, it can't be real.

But, "I saw him," she insists. "With you."

Dean takes a shaky breath. Takes her hand. Looks her steadily in the eyes. "Dad's dead, Mom," he says, stresses it by punctuating every syllable, "and that monster's not Cas."

But it doesn't matter.



She shakes her head resolutely. She stares out into the distance.

“The pain’s gone,” she says quietly. “We must be in paradise.”

He doesn’t know what pain she’s talking about. For a moment, he wonders if it had been the same debilitating pain that had wracked his shoulder back at the camp, after Cas had claimed him in his dream. As soon as he’d crossed the camp’s threshold, it had vanished, but even now, the handprint’s tender. Thinking about it makes him self-conscious enough that he tenses up, anticipating another blow. When he comes back out of his thoughts, Mary’s disappeared again, her eyes unfocused and mumbling something that he can’t hear.

He wonders if he’s lost her forever.

Maybe Sam’s the only one he’s got left.

And even he’s not here.

He tries to usher her up. If they run now, they can lose the angel, make their way to... somewhere. Another camp, where nobody knows that he’s the grieving widower of an angel. Another anything, as long as they’re safe. He’ll find Sam, and they’ll find a way home. Search the books back at the bunker. Find a goddamn fix to bring Mom back to reality.

So, despite thinking these things, he doesn’t know why his mind goes back to the camp.

Or maybe he does know, because he thinks of *Ai*.

He runs his hands over his face. If he’d listened to Bobby, he’d be getting up this morning, working in the soup kitchen. Ai would be berating him for one thing or another. Nagging him about shaving, about cutting his hair. He wouldn’t have been sent to the wall to replace his brother’s absence. If he’d just been enough of an upstanding citizen, he wouldn’t have seen Cas, riddled with angel bullets, begging for help, intending to deceive him.

Luring him over the wall.

What must Ai think of him now? How disappointed must she be, knowing that Dean ran away with an angel like her son had? For all he knows, the camp’s punishing her for his mistakes.

That thought’s enough to make him queasy. He finds himself bowling over. At Mary’s side, Monique watches him like a hawk. She hasn’t lost her mind yet like Mom, even covered in the angel marks. When Dean’s heaving becomes worse, she pushes Mary aside and goes to him.

“What’s wrong with you?” she says.

Dean doesn’t know what to tell her.

She watches him warily from then on. Maybe she remembers their joint dream with the angel. When he clutches his stomach as another hunger pain gnaws at him, she tells him that the angel’s gone to get him something to eat, her voice filled with adoration for the monster.

*She loves me*, the angel had told him, *but I, not her*.

And Dean knows that he shouldn't think it, but he wonders why the angel wed him when it's clear he loves no one.

The angel comes back nearing nightfall. Daylight's dying and the woods are becoming dark and uninhabitable again. Dean shudders violently with every blast of cold air that makes it into the cave. All day, he thinks about running away. All day, he can't get himself to budge.

He can't leave Mom.

Dean doesn't see him arrive. He's lying curled up by the fire at Mom's feet in a daze, his back facing the mouth of the cave. When the angel comes, the last thing Dean's expecting is to be carried away. The angel lifts Dean up into his arms like a bride, and Dean only shoves half-heartedly at his chest, too busy feeling miserable. It doesn't matter anyway. Dean's bundled up in the angel's stupid fur coat and his shoving is nothing but a poke through the heavy fabric.

When the angel sets Dean down, they're deep inside the cave, Monique and Mary hidden from view behind a bend. The angel starts another fire, grace-blue that materializes out of nothing. Dean sits up, makes a feeble attempt to move and go back to Mom.

But the angel catches him by the wrist, keeps him seated. Runs his eyes over Dean's mouth as if he wants to devour him.

*Eat*, the angel says. *Or die*.

Dean stares at him. Watches his face to see how real the threat is. The angel looks back, his gaze moving away from Dean's mouth to meet his eyes, that barely-there smile playing on his lips—that smile full of pleasure that Dean had seen so many times while falling for his tricks.

But maybe the angel's lost his charm.

Dean licks his lips. "Got a real way with words, don't you?"

The angel drags his fingers down Dean's wrist and takes his hand instead, tender like a lover.

*You are already faded, human*, he says. *If you fail to nourish yourself, you will perish*.

And it's true. Dean's dizzy. As if to prove it, another hunger pain wracks his body and he clutches at his stomach. The angel tilts his head, tilts it in a way that painfully brings up

memories of Cas rushing through Dean's mind. Dean swallows and looks away, shivers when the angel holding his hand brushes his thumb across Dean's knuckle.

It's such a familiar touch.

Dean clenches his jaw.

Soon enough though, the angel gently lets Dean's hand go. He gets up, leaves, only to return before Dean can even register his absence. With a triumphant smile, he drops two dead rabbits at Dean's feet.

Dean bites his lip.

"Took you all day to catch two measly rabbits, angel?"

The angel's expression darkens with displeasure.

*I was warding the perimeter, human.*

*They were near and they would have caught your scent.*

*But if you remain insolent, then perhaps I will give you away.*

Dean doesn't ask about it. Whatever seems to be stalking them—*him*—can't be worse than the monster in front of him and Dean's got enough on his plate as it is: forming an escape plan, getting Mom better, maybe murdering this angel and finding a way back home with Sam at his side. So Dean really doesn't have time for this.

But the pain in his stomach reminds him that he hasn't had a full plate in a while.

It's a bit of a challenge cooking the rabbits. The angel watches him move with curiosity burning in his eyes, clueless as to why Dean won't eat them raw. When Dean asks him for his angel blade so that he can get to skinning them, the angel's silent.

But then, *I will not hand you the weapon that could take my life*, he says and Dean curses under his breath. Worth a try.

In the end, it's Monique who procures a small knife from her boot and it's she who cooks the meat because, "You're shaking," she says, when a wave of hunger-induced nausea hits him. But Dean sees the way that she eyes the rabbits. Even though the angel's taken away her hunger, not eating must leave an empty feeling inside.

He helps Mom eat first. He tries to get her to swallow a few bites, but she doesn't seem interested. The angel's mojo's sustaining her, but if they're going to get out of here, he needs her independent.

At last, there isn't anything left to distract Dean from the angel. He's satiated, warmer now that his body's got sustenance, and even the exhaustion's starting to ebb away as his energy returns to normal.

For the rest of the time, the angel watches him.

Outside, the sun begins its descent downwards.

It's not like they'd never done anything.

It's not like Dean had been lovesick without cause, stricken with an aching grief without anything to show for it.

They hadn't spoken about it. They hadn't said *I love you*—at least, not until Cas had broken that rule. At least not until Dean had tried to show that he was willing to give a piece of his heart to him when he had handed him the mixtape.

He's not sure if Cas ever got it.

He's not sure if Cas knew what Dean meant by it.

But in purgatory, things had been different.

It hadn't taken days or weeks to get to that point. The very first night that Dean had found him, he'd slept with Cas' hand in his own, afraid that if he didn't, Cas would be gone. The second night, tired of sitting up against scratchy tree trunks, he'd asked Cas to lie down with him, had asked Cas to wrap his arms around him so he'd know that Cas was there.

Cas had done that, night after night. In Cas' arms, that'd been the only time that the bloodlust in Dean's veins had settled, too used to fighting and killing as they made their way through that pit of monsters. And other nights when Dean hadn't been able to settle, when nights came where leviathans swept down to try and take his angel away, Dean had slept with his arms tight around Cas' waist, nose buried in his neck, breathing in the scent of him.

He'd liked those nights best. Protecting Cas. Keeping him safe.

Taking care of people was the very essence of his being, and Dean didn't know how else to show someone that he loved them.

Tonight, it feels like a purgatory night.

When the sun sets, the angel extinguishes all of the fires.

*There are eyes out there, human. They would see us.*

And then, the angel leaves.

At night, the chill's something other. Dean tries not to think about the camp, about being warm and fed and sheltered. Curfew had always been an hour after sunset, and soon after, the start of Dean's shift at the wall. And then...hours of waiting. Hours before Dean would get what he wanted, when the angel would show up and Dean could indulge in fantasy.

He wonders if that's why the angel's left now. Off to the camp to lure another sucker in.

Dean had been a fool.

Dean swallows and runs his hands over his face, looks towards the cave's mouth to see if he can still make out the angel leaving, but he's vanished. The snow coating the ground ensures that it doesn't get completely dark, moonlight bouncing off like a mirror. But it's hard enough to see at the back of the cave so Dean has to feel around for Mom, and when he presses his hand to hers, he jolts when he realizes how cold she is.

Dean sits cross-legged next to her, takes the angel's black fur coat and wraps it around her. But within moments, he's numb. His fingers start aching painfully, and if he's not careful, it'll be frostbite before the end of the night. It's Monique who reminds him that he's being stupid.

"Your mum can't feel anything," she says. "Castiel's love protects us. You shouldn't have refused him."

But maybe she's not completely heartless because she gives him her patrol jacket, the camp's one size fits all. He tugs it on, zips it up, grateful to be fully clothed again. And then like he'd done at the camp wall, Dean tries to soldier through. He sits at Mary's feet, refuses to take the blanket off her because even though she perceives warmth, the temperature of her hands still scares him. Monique and Mary close their eyes, but Dean knows that they're not really sleeping—the angel's mojo's made sure of that.

Only Dean tires.

So maybe he's hallucinating when he sees him.

Cas.

He doesn't know why he thinks that it's him. It's still the angel, now returned from wherever he went, standing in the distance outside the cave, barefooted in the snow. The angel's back is to him and Dean can't see his face, but maybe it's the way that the angel carries himself that has Dean's heart speeding, palms turning sweaty, breathing harsh and quick.

It can't be happening again, Dean thinks.

It can't be his Cas when there's no need for the angel to pretend anymore.

When there's no more *wall*.

So Dean hesitates where he is. He keeps watching, apprehensive, distrustful. Cas is unmoving in the moonlight, his electric halo casting a grace-blue glow over the back of his neck, his wings gently tucked behind him.

Dean realizes that he's so distracted that he doesn't even feel the painful throbbing in his freezing hands.

It hasn't been long since the angel left. At camp, it would've been curfew, Dean just leaving for the wall. Every time Dean had seen him, it'd been much later—it's too early for the angel to put on a show.

But the angel *does*.

For a second, Cas sways. For a second, he trembles, as if he's at the wall again, as if he wants to deceive Dean again. But then his wings come undone and droop to the ground. Dean watches him, watches how the electric light in his halo falters and flickers, goes out like a blown-out candle, and then the angel's done for, tumbling into the snow.

Dean hesitates.

Dean hesitates with his heart hammering for all of one second before he's running out of the cave.

When Dean makes it to him, the sight of Cas lying there makes his knees go weak. Cas is on his back, wings spread, eyes closed. He looks like when he'd died again, the same time of night, in the same position. He looks like it and Dean's frantic then, falling to his knees at his side, grasping at his face with his hands, begging him to get up.

Dean can't go through this again.

Dean won't be able to *survive* it.

So "Cas," he says, shaking the angel desperately. "Cas!"

For the longest time, Cas doesn't respond.

But then when the moon disappears behind a cloud, when darkness falls over them, it's then that Cas' halo crackles back to life. Cas gasps, takes a lungful of air, and his eyes flutter open, wild and fearful, and he looks at Dean.

Cas shivers.

Cas doesn't say anything.

But he sits up.

Dean does something that he knows that he's going to regret, because this isn't Cas, and he should know better by now, but still he wraps his arms around him, feels the way Cas seems to collapse against him, and something in Dean's mind seems to lift, something in his heart, a burden gone.

*Your body is cold*, the angel whispers against his chest. *I wish that you would have let me warm you.*

Cas pulls his wings around him, encloses him in a cocoon of feathers and heat.

*You should not have ventured here. If they catch your scent, they will take you.*

Dean tightens his grip, and as if in response, Cas' wings press closer. Cas lies quiet and calm against his chest, lets Dean hold him, and when Dean closes his eyes, for a moment, he can pretend it's purgatory and he's just protecting Cas, keeping the people that matter to him safe.

Something he hasn't done in awhile.

"What happened to you, huh?" Dean says and he shifts, pulls Cas closer. "I thought you were \_\_\_"

Cas shivers.

*Something is awry with this world*, he says.

And then he says something that brings Dean's worst fears to life.

*Every night, Dean, I die.*

# The Weeping Angel

## Chapter Notes

chapter warning: dubious consent

Once a month, the council had relaxed its curfew.

After all the public punishments had been carried out, after all the executions that Dean had never been allowed to go to, at the end of the month, the camp had held a celebration by the square bonfire, an extra meal for every hungry mouth that showed up.

Dean had always gone. Not because he was welcome but because Ai had made him, and he'd sit at the steps of the old courthouse where the council was holed away, trying to make himself as inconspicuous as possible.

But it hadn't helped.

As soon as he'd arrive, the whispering would begin.

*Angel worshipper*, they'd say. They'd speculate, wonder if he'd ever tasted angel tears, rumoured to grant immortality. They'd scrutinize his body, gaze at the skin of his neck that peeked out from under his jacket collar when he bent his head one way or another, looking for evidence of the marks that would've confirmed that an angel had touched him.

Of course they hadn't found any.

And it wasn't just because the camp knew about him, about Cas and how desperately he'd been grieving him. He hadn't been the only reason that the camp had talked about angels on those bonfire nights. Rather, talking about angels on those nights had been tradition. To warn little children. To remind the camp of what was out there, beyond the walls. And why they would have to continue to sacrifice loved ones whilst venturing out, to salvage blades and melt dead angel essence into bullets, always remembering that no matter what an angel said, it was only to lure some poor soul away.

But why and to where, no one had known.

They have true forms, the camp folk had whispered. Beastly forms that could tower above the trees and clouds. They were the cause of thunder. They were the lightning, their weapons made of grace hurtling down to earth whenever they missed a target. It was the wind that they generated out of their beating wings that sent hurricanes across the land and sea, and they were merciless, with little care for what destruction they wreaked in their path.

So Dean wonders why the angel in his arms seems so much the contrary now.



Dean doesn't hold him for long. The angel shudders for a few moments after he admits that there's something wrong with the world, that he dies every night only to resurrect again. At the same hour, under the same moon, every night, it happens.

At the same time that Cas had died.

And Dean knows that he shouldn't be succumbing like he is, to the same trick that the angel's pulled on him, a thousand times, at the wall. That just because he seems vulnerable, Dean shouldn't be putting his hand on the angel's back, shouldn't be trying to comfort him, when he knows that this isn't Cas—can't be.

But god, he *looks* it.

And god, he sounds like it, when he tilts his head and softly says, "Dean."

Dean swallows. Dean shuts his eyes as if that can steer the monster away.

But Cas' gaze just seems so damn familiar, warmth and confusion and fierceness all in one go. Cas blinks, and Dean's fingers tighten on him, keeping him close even when he ought to be running.

"Dean?" Cas says again, puzzled and he reaches out, places a hand on Dean's cheek and Dean freezes, digs his fingers into him.

"Cas?" he says.

But in that same moment, he's reminded that it's just the same fucking deceptive angel from the wall. Within the space of another blink, the confusion dies from the angel's eyes and the wings encircling Dean ruffle and shake. The angel turns his head to gaze deep into the woods, any weakness caused by his death gone.

*Quick, human*, the angel says, and he pulls Dean back into the cave with Mary and Monique. *They're close enough to catch your scent.*

They don't leave the cave. A week—or at least, what Dean thinks is a week—goes by, and the angel shows no signs of wanting to move. Instead, he's always gone. Dean never sees him while light is out, but he must stay near, because once or twice a day, there'll be food at the entrance. Usually a dead rabbit. Sometimes berries and mushrooms or strange-looking fruits that Dean's not quite sure are edible, or even meant for humans. On one occasion, the angel brings him a deer, and maybe the reason he doesn't do it again is because he hears Dean cursing, about how the dead animal's only gonna rot because Dean'll never be able to eat that much on his own. As if to appease him, that same evening, Dean finds a giant boulder at the

mouth of the cave, cracked open to reveal glittering amethyst inside, and a single black feather. Because Dean can't kick the fucking boulder to show his sentiments in return, he stomps the feather into oblivion and kicks it back outside.

The longer that the angel's away and the longer that Dean's stuck here, the more openly hostile that he gets. Sometimes he forgets that the angel could turn him to ash at a mere whim, but maybe the angel just finds Dean's frustration amusing.

At any rate, the boulder mysteriously disappears within the hour.

"You're so ungrateful," Monique tells him a few days later. She's always watching him, as if on duty, still mysteriously unburdened by the madness that possesses Mary even though they both have the same tattoos. Either she's a spy or just envious that the angel seems to like him better—but Dean already knows what it's like when angels have plans for you. "Soon, we'll leave this place for paradise and once you see for yourself, you'll be begging for forgiveness."

Dean laughs. He's antsy from being trapped in the cave, and every mention of paradise—from Mom, from Monique, or the fucking angel who slithers in each night to tell them bedtime stories of a place where everything's perfect and painless—only drives him up the wall faster. Dean's lived long enough to know a place like that isn't real—can't be—and pretending, even for a moment, is something that makes his blood boil.

So, "How'd he play you, huh?" Dean asks, while cutting the day's portion of fruit. "What'd he do to bring you over that goddamn wall? Did he pretend to be your dead best friend? Did he pretend to fucking fall in love with you? Tell you that he needed you or he'd die in front of your eyes all over again?"

And maybe that's what the angel had done, because Monique shuts up.

Thinking about it, of course, only makes it worse. It makes him pace and pace, head in his hands, and he wonders why he's not enamoured anymore, why he's not clamouring for any glimpse of the angel's pretty face like he had back at the wall, because maybe it'd be easier if he were. Whenever he'd seen the angel at the camp, Dean hadn't cared about logic. It hadn't mattered that Cas was battered one night and perfectly fine the next, that he'd be gloating about his victories one moment and then so timid that he couldn't meet Dean's eyes. It hadn't been natural, and whatever power the angel had exerted on him, he clearly didn't care enough to use it anymore.

But maybe that's because he owns Dean now.

*Do not leave this place, humans*, the angel will remind them, each night when he finally shows his face. He'll sit by the fire with his legs crossed, and tell stories about a place filled with roses and sun. He'll take Mom's hands in his own, look her in the eyes and promise that her sadness will be gone soon, that she'll see her husband and be at peace again. To Monique, he'll clasp her by the shoulders, speak avidly of paradise and food plenty, of people who live on, even if they're gone now, and Monique'll weep openly, thinking of her dead parents and brother.

But for Dean, he never gets the same treatment.

Throughout it all, the angel never promises anything to Dean, maybe because he has no intention of letting him go.

Instead, when he's done spinning his web of lies, he'll bid them all to sleep. He'll lie down and pull Dean into his arms, and Dean'll shove and struggle and utter threats for a few minutes like a proper prisoner before reluctantly going lax against his chest. The angel will pull him in tight, pull the ridiculously stupid fur coat that Dean had tried to give to Mom over the both of them and whisper in Dean's ear, stroking Dean's hair and murmuring to Dean to always wear it, because *It will hide your scent, human. It will ensure that they never find you.*

Whenever Dean asks who they are, he doesn't get an answer.

But the way that the angel will shudder has him afraid nonetheless.

If the angel dies every night like he says he does, Dean sure as hell doesn't know it. The angel's careful to conceal his moments of weakness after the first time, staying out well into the night before returning, and even though Dean has all of this time, even though he should be using that window of opportunity to run with Mom, he can't because the angel's always watching, ready to recapture them. Even if they could run, the angel's wings would overtake them, and Dean's stuck with that dilemma, that if he's never able to venture out and explore their surroundings, he'll never be able to get away, never be able to learn the lay of the land so that even if they can't outrun the angel, maybe they can outsmart him.

So most days, Dean just sits around the cave warming his hands by the strange blue fire. He sits huddled up in the angel's stupidly oversized coat like he's been told to, spending hours plotting a way to see the outside, and then only to grit his teeth in frustration when he'll discover a loophole and have to start all over again. And then night will fall and his time'll be up, where he'll be smothered in the arms of a monster who'll remind him that he has no intention of ever letting Dean go.

But then, after so many days, Dean finally finds a solution.

He finally forms a viable plan.

It's the second week when he puts it into play, or what Dean thinks is the second week, because the mundaneness of their life has each day bleeding into the next in a way that makes it hard to count. He spends the entire day running the steps of what he has to do in his head, turning them over and over to make sure that there are no loopholes, even though he's not expecting to find any in a stupid plan straight out of *Dr. Sexy M.D.*

But then it's late at night.

And there's no time to backtrack.

The angel's here.

This time, the angel returns wearing another fur coat, white and shimmery like the snow, one that Dean's never seen before but something that confirms yet again that he's a fucking asshole. The angel struts in and Dean waits for him, towards the back of the cave where they usually sleep. Monique and Mary are already lying with their eyes closed, even though Dean suspects that the angel's magic means otherwise.

The angel tilts his head, intrigued, when he spots him.

Usually Dean pretends to be passed out already.

*Are you not tired, human?* the angel says, eyes roving over Dean's body, watching him with an unquenchable curiosity. He takes a step closer to Dean, but then, as if changing his mind, turns away. *If you are not careful, night will bleed into day and you will still be here.*

Dean huffs. Brings his knees up to his chest and hugs them. He stares at his feet before he mutters, "Kinda hard to be exhausted, angel, when all I do is sit on my ass all day."

The angel quirks an eyebrow.

*How else would you sit?*

Dean bites his tongue. The angel turns his back to him, dismissive at once. Dean's grievances aren't worthy of his attention, not unless they have to do with the angel's pride, some slight to the notion of his ultimate mightiness that he thinks can be appeased by giving Dean a glittery rock.

But that vanity is what Dean's counting on.

So, "I'm hungry," Dean says.

At first, Dean thinks the angel doesn't hear him. He's busy with bedtime preparations, drawing sigils in glowing blue grace across the stone walls. To keep them from escaping, Dean's sure, even if the angel says they're for protection. Dean watches them pulse in the darkness, but just as he's about to repeat himself, the angel speaks.

*You are not hungry, human. I saw you devour the hare that I brought you. You were particularly ravenous today, I will admit, but your hunger was satisfied.*

Dean swallows at hearing the confirmation of what he's been thinking all along—that they're being watched without even knowing it. What else has the goddamn bastard seen? What if he's heard his conversations with Mom, promising to get her out?

"Well, I'm still hungry," Dean says and stretches his legs out, leans against the wall and rebelliously crosses his arms with more confidence than he feels. "And bored. You leave me here all day with nothing to do. I thought I was your fucking bride or something. You're not really proving you're a good husband."

At that, the angel turns around, his cape-like coat swishing dramatically behind him, a sigil forgotten halfway through its creation at the mere suggestion that he's inadequate. Dean

watches the blue light fade from the walls, and then he's instead met with electric eyes of the same colour, as the angel takes a seat before him, right at his outstretched feet.

*I did wed you, human*, the angel murmurs and he smiles, mighty and proud. He wraps his giant hands around Dean's ankles, and all Dean has time to do is take in the amusement dancing on the angel's lips, before the angel drags him forward by the ankles so that Dean's flat on his back. Dean lets out a surprised yelp as he's dragged, and then the angel's straddling him, pressing down, massive wings caging him in. *Your eyes were so despondent that I could not help but take you into my fold.*

The angel noses at Dean's neck, trails his mouth along the curve of Dean's jaw, close enough that Dean can feel the heat, but agonizingly far enough that Ca—that the angel's lips never make contact with his skin. Then the angel pulls back to look at him, and like in dreams, he's got his eyes on Dean, watching the way that Dean's open-mouthed and panting, maybe even aware of how stupidly responsive Dean's body is to his touch.

*I think I have found a way to alleviate your boredom, human.*

Dean swallows, barks a shaky laugh, and shuts his eyes. This isn't part of the plan, but *god*, his heart's racing and he's aching inside. He feels the press of the angel's hips against his own, remembers for a moment how good being with another person can feel. But he also damn well knows that this can't happen.

"Yeah, angel? What, by fucking me in the same room my mother's in?"

When Dean opens his eyes to catch Cas' blue, Cas is frowning.

*Is that a problem? I could make your mother disappear.*

"You really know how to sweet-talk a guy, don't yo—"

Cas presses a hand to his jaw, stops Dean's words in their tracks. He thumbs over Dean's cheek, brushes back his hair gently before he clasps Dean's arm, the same place that has the hand print. Dean knows that it's not possible, that he's got a shirt on, that he's still bundled up in the stupid fur coat, but when Cas touches him, he can almost swear it's as if he's touching skin, no fabric in the way.

A bolt of pleasure races down Dean's body.

And Dean moves.

It's not much—an instinctive roll of his hips, seeking friction for his hardening dick like he's done on a lot of occasions in his life—but it's enough for him to snap out of it. A sense of betrayal overwhelms him, maybe for the same reason that it took him so long to shave back at the camp. Maybe for the same reason that in dreams, he can't ever get himself to kiss Cas. Because like all of it, that'd be disrespecting Cas' memory. That'd be *not* mourning him.

So this time when he rolls his hips, it's not because he's seeking to forget. This time, he grinds back with calculated purpose, reinventing his plan when the angel decides to throw a

hitch in it. With Dean's movements, the angel stirs, grips Dean's arm harder as another strange bolt of pleasure runs through his body, so unlike the piercing pain that he'd experienced back at the camp. The whole while, the angel watches him, seems to feast his eyes on the sight of Dean's mouth, is gonna kiss him any second, like when he'd claimed him.

But Dean knows better this time.

Dean stops the slow grind of their hips, feels how hard the angel's cock is, sees what the loss of movement does to him, so maybe that's something that he can use to his advantage. The angel moves his hand off Dean's arm, instead grips Dean's waist with both hands, as if he's commanding Dean to buck up against him, but instead, Dean buries his nose into the crook of the angel's neck, digs his fingers into the base of the angel's wings in a way that makes the angel shudder violently, and then Dean whispers into the angel's ears.

"C'mon," Dean mumbles, lets his lips brush a sensitive spot that has the angel panting. "We can't do this in front of Mom. If she woke up, I'd die of embarrassment. But—but I'm so goddamn *bored*, angel, waiting for you to come back to me, night after night. I got nothing to do all day—so can't you take me with you, huh? Even for an hour? I know there are things out there. I know you're just trying to protect me. But you're so *mighty*, angel. You're like a *god*—strong. Fierce. I bet you could keep me safe."

Dean pauses, pulls back to look at the angel, an angel who's *enamoured* and *drunk* already on Dean's tales of his own power. The angel smiles with delight, lifts a hand off Dean's hip to reach for his jaw. He strokes his thumb across Dean's lips, gazes at him as if he wants to do nothing more than to devour him.

Or maybe he's just waiting to hear Dean sing more praise.

*It is true, human*, the angel says and his eyes begin to glow and his voice rolls deep. *You have acquired a most powerful mate, I who have long been the envy of all angelic and demonic creatures alike.*

*I do not know how you have managed to ensnare me but I am besotted. There may be those who would seek to steal you away from me, but I will not let them have you, you who are my most glorious prize.*

The angel gazes at him, eyes alight with triumph at his own conquest. Dean shuts his eyes, just as the angel's grip on his jaw tightens painfully. And then when Dean looks back, the angel's greed finally catches up with him. The angel starts leaning in, starts to make a move for Dean's mouth.

But when he comes close, Dean seizes his opportunity.

Instead of letting the angel take his mouth, he turns his head away, presses his lips to the angel's ears and whispers again, whispers and pretends that they're at that goddamn wall again, except this time, it's Dean who's performing the seduction and the angel who's gonna be the fucking goner.

“I know I’m lucky to have you, angel,” Dean tells him and strokes his ego some more, runs his fingers through the angel’s wings in a way that has the angel writhing against him. “I wasn’t thinking before...but you’re a goddamn hero, rescuing me away from that camp. You outwitted them all. I’ve been a dumbass these last couple of days, and I—I didn’t mean those things that I said. It’s just—it gets stuffy in here, is all. And lonely, because *you’re* not here. I miss you. I—I want you. I wanna be by your side when you’re out there.”

Dean pulls his hand away, and the angel lets out a sound of displeasure at the loss. But Dean only slots his hands underneath the shimmery white coat. This time when Dean runs his hands down the angel’s back, it’s skin on skin. He pulls the angel close, grinds up against him once more and the angel slides his own hands under Dean’s coat, too, trailing down to the waistband of his pants.

*I understand that I have deprived you of my presence, human. Creatures like yourself are not accustomed to having their marital bed empty so soon after they have wed.*

*I see now what it has done to you.*

As if to put the matter to rest, the angel hooks his fingers on the waistband of Dean’s pants, smiles as if he knows all of Dean’s secrets.

And maybe he does.

Maybe he knows what Dean’s denying himself, what Dean’s pretending to resist even when his dick is stirring, hot and heavy with heat, straining against the confines of his pants. Dean swallows, bucks up, eyes glued to the angel’s face, a face that could be Cas’ if only the goddamn asshole would stop smirking.

For a moment, the entire plan derails when the angel pulls Dean’s pants down just below his hip bones.

Dean’s throat goes dry.

The angel watches him with renewed hunger.

And then, tentatively, as if the angel’s almost unsure, as if he’s *Cas*, the angel unhooks his fingers, presses his hand down over Dean’s cock, cups him through the slim fabric of his worn camp-issued pants and touches him there.

When Dean groans, the angel’s confidence comes back. His eyes glow with holy light.

His halo crackles.

*I would very much like to bed you now, Dean,* he says, *so I shall.*

And Dean squeezes his eyes shut. Dean’s a goddamn writhing mess because the angel presses his lips to Dean’s neck, kisses him there, sucks little bruises into his skin, and no matter how Dean struggles to steer himself onto the right path, all he can think of is Cas, all he can think of is rocking their bodies together, getting some friction for his aching hard dick.

“C’mon,” Dean croaks, and he’s utterly lost. “Cas, c’mere,” he says, as if Cas is somewhere far away, unreachable even when he’s lying between Dean’s legs.

But like always, the illusion breaks.

All it takes is for the angel to growl *I’m going to ravish you, human*, and Dean’s hips come to a stop.

It’s not too late, Dean thinks then, trying to cling to his plan even through the fog of arousal clogging his mind. It’s not because when Dean slows their grind again, the angel’s just as desperate for friction. He glares at Dean in his discontentment, grasps Dean’s jaw and watches Dean’s mouth with lust, and Dean meets his gaze, brave in a way that he hasn’t been in a while.

They’re not Cas’ eyes.

Cas’ eyes were never so greedy.

So Dean says, “I want you but we can’t do this.” Dean says, “I’m dying for you, but Mom’s here.” Dean says, “Tomorrow, when you take me outside, when we’re alone, I’m yours.”

Hearing that, the angel’s eyes glow with fury.

*You are already mine.*

And Dean shivers at that, because the angel’s voice grows dark and deep, rolls out from somewhere other than his body, emanating from his very true form, and the angel suddenly seems bigger, taller, more terrifying.

For a moment, Dean doubts whether he has any goddamn free will at all. For a moment, Dean’s not sure if he’ll ever be able to get away.

But then there’s something mournful sinking in at the edge of the angel’s voice, something full of regret and self-loathing that rattles Dean to the core.

*You are already mine*, the angel says again, sad and softer this time, almost with pity in his eyes as if he knows what Dean’s gotten himself into, as if he knows something that would send Dean running away from him, if only Dean knew what it was.

So, even more desperate this time, Dean tries again.

He goes back to his plan.

“C’mon,” Dean says, “Let’s go to bed. You don’t sound so good.”

And Dean tries everything that he can think of. He stays still when the angel drapes his heavy wings over them. He curls up against the angel’s chest for the first time voluntarily and rubs his hand up and down the angel’s arm, because, all of a sudden, the angel’s not *happy*, and Dean can feel it in his gut, feels a similar anxiety beginning to boil up inside himself, too.



Dean wonders if it's a survival instinct, if he'll go day in and out now, trying to appease the egomaniacal angel, if Mom and he can't get out. If maybe some kind of Stockholm syndrome is setting in, and the stupid worry that Dean feels for the angel's changing mood is just a way that his brain's chosen to stay alive.

So maybe now's not the time to be provoking the angel.

But time's running out, too.

So Dean's gentle. Dean tells him that he doesn't just want to go with the angel on his daily missions because he's bored, but also because he's *worried*, too, and he just wants to take care of him, to make sure that he's okay.

And Dean's not expecting it, really. But the angel seems to grow calmer, looks at Dean as if he's seeing a person for once instead of something to devour, and the angel listens, takes just as well to Dean's promises of protection as the compliments and praise that had seemed to work him into a frenzy.

"So let's go to bed now, Cas," Dean murmurs again into his ear, "but when morning comes, will you take me with you? Will you take me to the outside?"

The moment before Dean hears the answer feels like an eternity. A moment where Dean pictures the angel succumbing to his simple request, unaware that Dean'll be scanning the world outside the cave, unaware that the entire time that Dean's out there with him, Dean'll be plotting, preparing to trap the angel and escape, if only he can get out of here.

But then, upon hearing those familiar words, the angel smiles sadly and flips Dean onto his stomach, presses him into the floor.

*No*, he says and he sounds like he's mourning, *because I know that you are a liar*.

That night, Dean has a nightmare.

That night, Dean relives a memory rather than seeing something made up by his mind.

It's...not really a memory, if he's being completely honest, because he was never there. But when Bobby and Sam had told him what they had done with Cas' body, what Cas' final resting place would be like—even if they had tried to spare him the details—every tidbit of what they had said had lodged itself into his brain, and every tidbit had recreated the moment for Dean as if he had stood beside them, helped them hurt Cas in that very same way.

So when Dean finally becomes aware that he's in a dream, when he finally takes in his surroundings and sees that he's standing at the river, opposite those woods and that godawful place, he lets out a low sound, a groaned *No!* and stumbles back until he slips and falls.

He doesn't want to see Cas' body.

Seeing Cas' body would make it real.

Seeing Cas' body would shatter him.

In the end, he doesn't know where he ends up going. He runs far from that place, only to see it re-emerging in the horizon. He tries again, a different direction, but those same woods pop up, this time with soldiers from the camp, with Bobby and Sam, who stare at him from the distance with remorseful faces, guilty because of what they'll ultimately do, for what they'll have to tell Dean later.

And then, maybe because even his mind can't bear it anymore, the dream changes.

This time when Dean runs, it's a lake that comes up, the angel from the wall curled up at its sandy shore. Dean approaches him warily, but tonight, he doesn't look menacing at all. There are no massive fur coats to hide behind. There's no goddamn smirk adorning the angel's features.

Instead, in a sheer white robe that clings to the angel's wet skin, the angel's sitting there with his knees pulled to his chest, wings drooping at his sides, and he's weeping.

Dean's heart drops in his chest.

Worry overwhelms him.

Of course he knows that it's not Cas. He knows, if anything, that he oughta be furious with the angel, for refusing to take him outside the goddamn cave. But seeing him wear his best friend's face while so distressed tugs at him like nothing else. Within moments, Dean's there, standing a few away, the angel oblivious to his presence.

When the angel sees him, the last of his tears slide down his cheeks.

His eyes are swollen red.

*You shouldn't be here, human,* he says and he looks afraid. *Why have you come? It's too soon...*

*Perhaps tonight, I made another mistake.*

The angel swallows heavily, turns to gaze at the moon hanging in the night sky. Dean doesn't know what he's talking about. Instead, Dean takes a few more tentative steps towards him, reaches out to lay his hand on the angel's shoulder.

"Is this real?" Dean asks, remembers all of the goddamn times that the angel had deceived him before, claiming him even when he'd thought that he was only dreaming. "Am I just

imagining this or are you dreamwalking again?"

The angel avoids his eyes.

*This is real*, he says, *but I am not dream walking*.

*This is too soon. This should not have happened*.

Dean watches him, watches his face, waiting to see some sign of a lie, something to let Dean know that he ought to get away if he can. But as if sensing Dean's doubt, the angel says, *No creature can lie in dreams, Dean. Not even an angel*.

And Dean's not really sure if he believes it, but maybe there's some truth to it. Maybe there really is something freeing about the dreamscape, because Dean's mouth moves so goddamn readily, blurts, "Why're you here, huh? Isn't it enough, you making me miserable back at that fucking cave? You gotta come and do it in dreams too, you dick!"

The angel flinches.

Dean's words cut like steel.

*I do not mean to*.

Dean paces around for a bit, takes a few deep breaths. When he looks out across the lake, his heart stops. The woods are there. Sam and Bobby are gone, but he can see a shadow, the outline of Cas' body.

All of a sudden, he's on his knees.

The angel behind him remains quiet, but when Dean starts gasping for air, the angel's frantic, too. His wings quiver and thrash, the tear tracks on his cheeks gleaming in the moonlight as he moves, and Dean focuses on his face desperately, as if that can remind him that Cas is okay, that Cas isn't over there, in the place where the goddamn camp disposes of angels. Maybe it works a little, because when he braves a look back across the lake, the woods are gone and it's the open sea that greets him.

*Do you know what happened there, human?* the angel asks. *Do you know what happened to me?*

But, "That's not you," Dean says.

Dean feels a stupid feeling in his gut then. *Guilt*, for snapping at the angel. As if it's not the goddamn angel that ought to be guilty, stealing him from the camp and breaking Mom. And then when he starts thinking about, the feelings rush out of nowhere, resentment and an overwhelming anger, filling him up when he thinks of what he'll see when he wakes up, back in that prison of a cave with the angel who won't let him outside.

Without seeing the outside, escape's hopeless.

So, "Why were you crying?" Dean says bitterly then. "What do you even have to cry about, huh?"

Maybe it's just the nature of dreaming. Maybe it's the reality when the angel says that lies don't belong in dreams, because Dean can't hide his frustration anymore. When Dean wakes up, his old plan to woo the angel into submission will be in fucking shambles. And then he'll never be able to get away.

But even then, Dean can't get himself to backtrack.

At Dean's question, the angel curls up on himself.

*You won't like the answer, he says.*

And Dean doesn't press it. Dean doesn't really want to know, in the the same way that he can't bear to look at those goddamn woods. But when the fog of sleep seems to be lifting, when the dream starts to collapse at its edges, maybe the angel can't keep it in anymore because that's when he admits the truth.

*I was weeping, human, he says, because I will have to do something very bad very soon.*

*I can't hide you from them for much longer.*

*And then, when they come, you will despise me.*

*You will never wish to speak to me again even though we are wed.*

The angel bows his head, weeping once more.

*It was a mistake claiming you, Dean.*

# Past, Present, and Future

## Chapter Notes

Hi! It's me! I know it's been like five years since this thing truly updated, but here I am with another chapter at last, and I'm determined to finish this story this year! Words can't even describe how sorry I am. I know it's been ages. When I started this story, Cas was dead, and tragically, he's dead again. I was in school then finishing up my bachelor's degree, and tragically, I'm in school again for another bachelor's degree. Yeah. Full circle.

Since so many things have transpired since then, I know a lot of people won't be around anymore, but if you are, please give me a shout, because it would mean the world to me to know someone still wants to read this story!

Anyway, I'll stop here because otherwise I'll be writing another thousand words where I just tell you how sorry I am, so again, from the bottom of my heart, I am SO sorry :')

Writer's block had me really bad, so I decided to revamp chapter nine and change up the ending and switch some events around which will pop up in the story again later. So if you're thinking you've read chapter nine before, you're right—but most of the chapter is completely new stuff; it's only the beginning 25% or so that's the same.

I also super apologize if this chapter's boring or repetitive. It's similar to last chapter because I wanted to slow the story down since it's been like five years. A way to ease back into it for me and also for you, if you're still here. I thought jumping straight back into the action would be a bit abrupt so it's a little bit of a filler. Again, I'm so sorry!

Anyway, I hope you like it! It's been a really long time since I've written anything but I hope it's still okay! :')

-

chapter warning: dubious consent

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Dean wakes up, the angel's still there.

It's never happened before.

Dean shifts the slightest, feels like he oughta be squirming and pushing away, but doesn't bother. He's still sleepy. With his eyes shut, he can pretend that it's Cas with him, that they're in Dean's bedroom in the bunker where their most pressing concern is maybe a cranky ghost in need of a salt and burn, that—

That it isn't another goddamn dream but *real*.

But then yesterday's nightmare comes rushing back into his mind and the illusion breaks.

He opens his eyes, faces the creature that's got him entangled in its arms. The angel's breathing is slow and deep, as if he's not just *pretending* to be like this, and a quick glance in Mom and Monique's direction reveals the same easy respirations.

Maybe Dean's wrong. Maybe angels really do need rest in this world.

For a moment, Dean considers running. He thinks about scrambling to his feet, getting away as fast as he can with Mom. It's not like they have any other options. Dean remembers his dream. He remembers his anger at the angel, for not taking him outside the cave, so there's not a goddamn chance in hell that the angel won't remember it, too. His plan to survey his surroundings, to seduce and outwit the angel by stroking his massive ego, is in motherfucking shambles. But that's what he gets for making a plan based off the latest *Dr. Sexy* episode.

Then again, it's not like he'd had a lot of options.

After what feels like an eternity, the angel starts to rouse. His wings flex, and Dean gets a mouthful of feathers, but when the angel blinks his eyes open, it's only to growl and pin Dean on his back again, as if he's intent on finishing what they started last night. The morning wood pressing up insistently against Dean's thigh seems like a pretty damning piece of evidence.

"Hey," Dean says, indignant. "I'm not open for business."

But the angel doesn't seem to hear him as he noses at Dean's neck.

*You smell like me*, the angel rumbles. *Good.*

*They won't be able to find you.*

Dean swallows, waits for the angel to pull away. Or maybe the angel's not going to. Maybe Dean made a mistake with his stupid plan, pretending to want the angel, and with last night's dream, now that Dean's revealed how keenly he detests the angel, maybe the angel's gonna take what he wants anyway.

But nothing happens.

He keeps Dean pressed to the ground, continues to breathe slow and deep against the crook of Dean's neck, but doesn't make a move. Then, with his lips ghosting across Dean's neck, *I am feeling woeful, human*, he says.

Dean doesn't know what to do.

The angel's wings droop sadly to his sides, one draping over Dean's entire leg, heavy and stupidly reassuring. The feathers are all out of place. Without thinking, Dean reaches out and starts smoothing them back.

Cas shivers.

He pants softly against Dean's neck.

Dean doesn't know what compels him, but he keeps raking his fingers through them.

For a long time, Cas is quiet. He keeps his wings limp while Dean fixes his ruffled feathers, and when the awkward position makes it hard to reach, Dean tells him to sit. Without protest, he pulls himself up and Dean leans up against the wall, Cas cross-legged at his feet, and barely registering the time that passes, Dean works.

It feels as if he's done this a hundred times before, and maybe in dreams, he has. Or maybe it's the memory of sitting at Ai's feet that has nostalgia coursing through him, remembrances of her hands running through his hair as she'd tried to make him presentable when he hadn't even been able to feed himself. Like her hands, his own move instinctively. He fixes damaged feathers, pulls oil from the glands at the base of the wings and preens, something that has Cas shuddering, taking quickened breaths. When Dean finishes the first wing and moves on to the next, that's finally when Cas speaks:

*I haven't had anyone do this for me in a long time, Dean.*

Dean shifts, presses closer, lets Cas continue talking. Cas leans back, ever the slightest, and for a moment, his back makes contact with Dean's chest. Dean reaches up and presses a hand to his shoulder. Rubs it up and down the length of Cas' arm in what he hopes is a comforting gesture. Then he gets back to work.

*For the first time since we wed, I feel us mated.*

Cas' voice is soft.

*The last my feathers were preened by another hand, I was but a fledging. But now it will be your hands, human, as custom has ordained it. You will take care of me, and I, of you, for the entirety of our lives.*

The angel grows quiet again. Maybe he's noticed how Dean's fingers have stiffened at the knowledge of his future fate. Dean forces them to keep moving, but it isn't the same anymore.

For a moment, he let himself forget that this isn't Cas.

For a moment, he let himself forget what happened to Cas' body in those woods.

For a moment, he let himself believe Cas might still be here.

But he knows the truth.

It all comes rushing back.

The thing that had haunted Dean the most, it hadn't been what Sam and Bobby had done to Cas' body.

When they'd done that, they'd hurt Dean.

But what had *haunted* him had been what had happened just before it.

Dean had been unconscious. The first day that he'd arrived at the camp, he'd been sent to the hospital ward, sedated, because he hadn't been able to function. He didn't know how they'd managed to drag him there, away from Cas because Dean had been holding onto Cas for dear life. But they must've done it. Somehow. And then the next thing that Dean had known, he'd been waking up, in an unfamiliar room in an unfamiliar bed.

That was when Sam had told him.

He'd screamed, had thrashed, had tried to get out of his bed and run (to where, he didn't know), so they'd put him out again, and for the next three days, had left him like that, until the heavy murkiness of the drugs had subdued him completely.

How he had *survived* after what Sam had revealed to him, that was something that Dean hadn't been able to understand, when every part of him had been riddled with pain. When every part of him had been grieving and grieving and *grieving*.

They hadn't gone back for Cas' body once, Sam had said. They'd gone back for him *twice*.

There hadn't been time to retrieve Cas, Sam had explained, at the same time that they had left that awful place where Cas had died. Dean was lost, had been mad with grief, and it had taken both Bobby and Sam to wrestle him back to the camp, no hands left to haul Cas' body, too. And then, when Dean had been safely tucked into bed, sedated, that was when Sam and Bobby had gone back to Cas for the first time.

But it hadn't been to recover Cas' body.

That was what Sam had *thought* they would do.

The camp had had other plans.

*I wanted to get him*, Sam had said, biting his lip. *But Bobby said we needed to get Cas' angel blade first. He said the camp's safety was of the utmost importance, Dean, and they needed all of the angel-killing weapons that they could find, that they couldn't afford to lose a single asset.*

It was this first time, Sam had explained, when they'd removed the angel blade from Cas' body that they'd seen how Cas had been transformed in death. Somewhere in the time in



which they'd transported Dean to the camp and returned, Cas' wings had appeared, and his tattooed body and his unlit halo, something that had pierced Dean's heart with hope, had been something that had made Sam hopeful, too.

*I thought he might wake up*, Sam had said, with a sad smile. *You know, like how he always comes back? So I wanted to wait with him, Dean, while Bobby went to deliver the angel blade back to the camp.*

But the hour had already grown late. Bobby had forbidden it, had dragged Sam back, Cas' blade in hand, as fast as he could because he'd been afraid of what would happen, when the sun went to sleep and all the monsters came out.

*His halo's dead, boy*, Bobby had growled. They'd checked him over, after all, had hauled him up and tapped on his unlit crown, wondering if maybe he was still alive, so barely that he looked dead. But Cas had been lifeless. Cas had been cold, death having stolen his warmth many hours ago. *I'm sorry. Truly am. But no angel's capable of coming back from that.*

So they had left.

After that, it hadn't taken them long to return. The council had decided that it wouldn't send a good message to the other angels, if they left Cas out there in the woods without doing what they always did to angel corpses. Within hours of returning to the camp, Sam and Bobby had gone back to Cas, for a second time, with other soldiers in tow. Under the moon, they'd marched, following Bobby's lead, who even at night could navigate the land without ever getting lost.

But when they'd arrived at the spot that Cas had died, Cas had been gone.

At first when the soldiers had been unable to find Cas' body, they'd blamed Bobby for it.

*Old man*, Rob Zhang had said, kicking the dirt in exasperation, fingering his copper dog tag. *Getting on in age. Your memory ain't what it used to be.*

And maybe Bobby had thought that, too, as he'd furrowed his eyes at the spot, glaring at the sandy terrain, looking for imprints of Cas' wings and body. But there had been nothing there. The wind had swept away any marks that could've been left and the ground had looked untouched.

So the soldiers had searched.

Using Sam's young memory, they'd looked for another clearing, for two more distinctive trees whose trunks could have been gnarled together, at the base of which Sam had remembered that Cas' head had rested. Yet an hour of wandering had yielded no results. The only clearing with trees like those had been the one that Bobby had already pointed out.

*It don't make no sense*, Bobby had said, frustrated when Cas hadn't turned up. *Could've sworn he was here, boys. Dead as they come.*

And maybe they would've given up their search, would've concluded that the darkness was too thick that night and that they would come back tomorrow at first light, but just then, a straying soldier had run out of the trees.

She'd found the body.

Sam, Bobby, and the crew of soldiers had raced after her, had expected to find themselves in a clearing that they had initially missed in their fruitless search. Instead, the soldier, Monique, had led them through the trees, until at last, they'd left the forest behind to find a river, and under the moonlight, at its edge, had been *Cas*.

No one had been able to make sense of it all, how Cas' body could have been transported from the clearing to there. Bobby had craned his neck, stared out into the distance, as if concentrating hard enough could deliver him the answers to this particular mystery.

*Animals, Dean*, Sam had told him. *It must've been animals that took him*.

But it hadn't been animals. When Dean's distress had magnified at the thought that Cas had been bitten and mangled in death, Sam had reassured him that Cas had looked the very picture of peace, that he'd been well at rest.

And then Dean had understood what the soldiers and Sam and Bobby hadn't been able to figure out that night.

That was when Dean had realized that somewhere between the first and second time that Sam and Bobby had gone out to see Cas' body that day, that somewhere in that span of time where Dean had been unconscious and imprisoned in the hospital ward back at the camp, Cas must've dragged himself, must've crawled on hands and knees to that riverbank where he'd finally collapsed.

Cas had still been *alive*.

Lucifer hadn't been able to kill him.

Cas must've woken up, must've gone searching for them—for help—and Dean hadn't been there for Cas when Cas had *needed* him.

And maybe this miraculous tale of survival would have lit a spark within Dean, would've given him the hope necessary to get out of bed, march through those gates to find him, but then...

Then Sam had told him what they had done to Cas' body.

What they had done to Cas while he had still been *alive*.

And then Cas had simply had to be dead.

There was no coming back from that.

Maybe it's because he can't get himself to continue. His fingers dig into the angel's wings but there's a lump in his throat and he doesn't have the energy to finish off the rest of the feathers.

Why is he even bothering in the first place?

The angel shifts then, turns around and before Dean knows it, he's got arms around him, a cocoon of feathers enclosing him like a safety net. *What's wrong, human?* the angel inquires, and Dean succumbs, digs his hands into the angel's stupid fur coat and buries his face into his chest. *I sense that you are woeful, too.*

Dean swallows.

"I miss...I miss you."

The angel tilts his head, squinting in confusion.

*I am here, human. You have nothing to miss. I am glorious. I, who have long been admired by all creatures, I who am the epitome of—*

Dean doesn't know what his asshole husband says next. He drowns out the self-congratulatory speech, clings to the angel's coat with shaking hands as if holding on for dear life, and maybe this lookalike angel's the only thing that's staving off the panic building in his chest.

He keeps *seeing* it.

He keeps picturing Cas' body, what Sam and Bobby did to him.

He keeps thinking about Cas' last moments, moments that he missed, will never know about, and maybe Dean's just gonna drown in memories, except just then he realizes that the angel's not talking anymore.

Instead, he's staring at Dean, intensely, watching as if he's expecting something, as if he knows that Dean's about to do something that even Dean doesn't know yet.

"What?" Dean says, suddenly self-conscious, and the angel reaches, strokes the hair away from Dean's temple in such a gentle manner that Dean finds himself swallowing, feels something warm ignite itself in his chest despite himself.

*I do not wish for you to be unhappy, human,* the angel says and his eyes are piercing. *Do you know this?*

And again, the angel's eyes bore into him, and Dean—Dean doesn't know what the angel wants from him—doesn't understand why the angel's looking at him like this, but maybe all the angel wants is an answer, a confirmation that Dean knows that it's *true*, that the angel might actually give a fuck about his feelings, but Dean *doesn't* know that. He doesn't know *anything*. And he *needs* to know.

When Dean doesn't answer, the angel quietly disentangles himself from him, and Dean fights every instinct not to reach and pull him back. It's not Cas, he knows that, but maybe Dean needs something, *someone*, to anchor him, away from those memories, away from what Sam and Bobby did to Cas' body, before he loses his mind and slips away completely.

So, "Why'd you claim me?" Dean says. "Why'd you do it like you did—not like Mom, not like Monique. You—you said you *wedded* me, that I'm—I'm your goddamn *treasure*. Why?"

The angel tilts his head again.

*Because you were like no other, Dean.*

*Your devotion unto me...was such that none have ever born witness to its like...in all of angelkind.*

But, "That's not an answer," Dean says. "That's not good enough."

The angel's head tilts even deeper and his brows furrow. He studies Dean, casts his eyes over his body—not like earlier, not like when he'd wanted to fuck him—but as if Dean's a puzzle that he needs to solve. This time, the angel's eyes search, but not for Dean to do something, not for whatever the angel was expecting of him. This time, the angel seems to look within, and when he arrives at the answer, his wings rustle with unease.

*I...do not know*, he says.

Dean can't help the sour laugh that leaves him. He runs his hands over his face. God, he's tired.

"Wasn't expecting love or anything, buddy, but *this*? Jesus, angel."

He shouldn't feel bitter. He shouldn't feel disappointed. Hell, hadn't he known this? Hadn't the angel told him time and time again? That it was *Dean* who'd been obsessed. That it was *Dean* who'd, lovesick and in grief, had sought the angel at the wall, for something *more*, when all the angel had wanted to do was claim Dean the same way that he'd done Mom and Monique, to take him and do whatever angels did to the humans that they stole.

Hell, Dean had thrown a wrench in the angel's plans. The angel had wed Dean, gone a step further, because Dean had sung him praises, and praises were all that the angel wanted to hear.

He'd wed Dean to stoke his ego for the rest of eternity.

It was laughable.

It's *still* laughable.

No wonder the angel doesn't know why he'd taken Dean in such a different way, at least not beyond his fascination with Dean's *devotion* to him.

Dean shivers. He pulls the angel's coat around himself, tighter, to make up for the loss of body heat, now that the angel's wings are no longer enclosing him. And it must be true what Dean's been thinking because, "Love?" the angel echoes and he looks at Dean as if it's a foreign concept, as if he hadn't spoken of it a hundred times when he'd tried to lure Dean over the wall.

Clearly, the angel had never understood it.

So, "Forget it," Dean says, as images of Cas, and Sam and Bobby haunt him again.

Dean spends the rest of the morning moping.

He doesn't move. Not from the spot the angel left him in. He stays huddled under the angel's fur coat. He should be thinking, trying to figure out another plan to escape now that Dean's recklessly revealed everything to the angel. But he can't. He curls up on the floor. He can't get himself to do anything.

The angel's not gone for long. When the angel finally returns, it's only to ask Dean to outstretch his hands, and then the angel drops twelve round pebbles in them. The asshole smiles triumphantly, puffs up his chest with pride and looks at him as if he's expecting applause.

Dean resists the urge to fling the rocks at his head.

*I looked long and hard for them, human, and now you have these spheres. Go. Entertain yourself. You need not suffer from your desolation any longer.*

There's a long moment then where the angel smiles at Dean while Dean tries to search for the right words. Things like *You fucker* and *I'm gonna end you* and *Eat me* come up a lot. At a particularly pivotal point in the thought process, Dean even manages to suppress the urge to strangle the angel, knowing it's only gonna get either himself or Mom killed. Finally, Dean closes both hands over the stones, licks his lips, and says, "Thank you."

His voice must sound murderous enough because the angel stops strutting around like a peacock.

*You are disappointed,* the angel observes.

“You could say that.”

Dean turns his back to him, curls up in a nook in the wall, carelessly depositing the pebbles at his side.

They clatter to the ground, sending echoes everywhere.

The angel frowns.

*I don't want you to be unhappy, human. I am powerful and glorious. There is rare an angel mightier than me. Surely, I can provide. In fact, I desire it so. Tell me what I should do. Surely I can give you....love...the thing that you seek from me.*

“Yeah, keep tooting your own fucking horn.”

The angel frowns.

Dean closes his eyes, puts his head in his hands. He grits his teeth when the angel settles down next to him. It's like this morning, and Dean's not really in the mood to be pinned underneath him again. Already with his massive wings, Dean feels caged in.

*I know love comprises of praise, the angel says and he pulls both of Dean's hands off his face and into his own, tender and soft, as if he's goddamn Romeo. Humans...wish to know that they are adored. Perhaps I have neglected this.*

The angel clears his throat.

*I am enamoured by you, human. I adore the way that you are so devout to me—perhaps not as of late but surely in the future when this childish anger of yours recedes. Though the human form is not superior to that of an angel's, your body captivates me in a way that I cannot explain. Perhaps it is these strange pinpricks of discolouration that mark your face and arms, for I do admit that they are charming. In fact, I greatly desire you and I adore your small hands, which will preen my wings and pleasure me when I bed you. Your hands, while not as utile as my talons, do afford a certain—*

Dean clenches his jaw. He pulls his hands back. “You don't know shit about love or humans, okay? We need lots of things—not just your goddamn backhanded praise but other things, like—like exercise and sun and—you can't just confine us to a goddamn cave for days on end and expect love in return!”

The angel shifts. For a second, Dean thinks he might even look hurt at Dean's words and that his efforts to show love haven't been appreciated. But then his brows furrow again, deep in thought, as if he's turning an infinite number of complex possibilities over in his head. Dean wonders how long and hard his brain worked before he thought giving Dean a pile of rocks was a great idea.

Whatever the angel thinks of, Dean doesn't find out.

Like always, abruptly and without warning, the angel leaves.

Dean doesn't see him until nightfall. Mary and Monique wait by the fire, expecting the angel to tell them stories about paradise, but tonight, the angel commands them to sleep and, eager to obey, the two go out like lights.

Dean doesn't move from his spot. He stays curled up where he is, eyes open, not pretending to sleep but not willing to acknowledge the angel either. Any second now, regardless of what Dean does or says, the angel will sweep him up, bury his nose into his neck, and enclose him in his wings. He'll say something about them being mated—he always does—and Dean will think about what the rest of his life's going to look like, trapped in this cave, hiding from whatever invisible monster the angel's so afraid of.

But for once, the angel doesn't do that.

Dean never feels him move in.

The angel draws his sigils on the wall, like always, but then he sits, quietly, away from Dean.

And maybe because Dean's not expecting that, he doesn't know what to do.

Minutes pass, minutes and then half an hour, and Dean tosses and turns, unable to sleep. Maybe it's the chill that's getting to him. Maybe it's because when the temperature drops, the angel's always there, with his stupid but indisputably warm wings, and after weeks of being the angel's prisoner, Dean's gotten too used to that.

But just when his resolve's weakening, just when he thinks he can't take it anymore, just when his toes twitch, ready to go to him, the angel comes.

*I will take you outside*, he says and he offers Dean his hand.

Dean doesn't take it but he follows close behind.

They don't venture far. It's not a view of anything new, nothing that Dean could use to his disposal to help Mom escape. It's not even as far as the night that Dean had run out, when he'd seen the angel die the first time. They settle against the exterior wall of the cave, just up and away from the entrance, and the angel leans against it as if he's so very weary. But leaving the cave, the air already seems fresher, and the sting of snow and ice sharper still.

The angel wraps Dean up in his wings.

*So they can't smell you.*

The words come out of his mouth on an exhale of breath.

And then, just like each and every night, the light in the angel's halo stops spinning, his wings droop, and he dies.

If it hadn't happened before, Dean would've lost it. But this time, he leans his head against the angel's chest. Presses his ear to his heart. And counts the silence.

The angel's made a mistake, letting him see it happen a second time. Dean could run, take Mom and go, but they've already lost precious time. But tomorrow, when Dean knows how long they have, by god, he's *booking* it. There's no point waiting around to form another plan. Maybe running aimlessly is what they should've done all along.

When the angel wakes again, he sees Dean pressed up against him, and maybe mistaking it as a moment of tenderness rather than Dean's diabolical plotting, he caresses Dean's cheek. He starts to run his hands through Dean's hair. Dean listens to the angel's heart beat again.

*I wish something of you.*

Dean swallows.

"What can I give you, angel? You already have everything."

The angel's hand continues to stroke Dean's head.

*Not everything.*

"Listen, I'm not a virgin, if that's what you're hoping for. Cherry's popped so...you know."

The angel squints with confusion. It's so goddamn Cas that Dean's breath hitches in his throat.

"How would one 'pop' a cherry, Dean?"

The English coming out of the angel's mouth takes Dean aback. It's not that the angel's never done it before. Back when he'd been trying to lure Dean over the wall, he'd done it just about enough. But those times, he'd been pretending to be *Cas*. Since then, the angel hadn't bothered, using only his native Enochian, and an enchantment no doubt, because there was no other goddamn way that Dean could've ever understood him.

So it's what takes him aback.

It's because when the angel uses his English, his voice goes higher, no longer the deep darkness of Enochian, but a voice that sounds like *Cas*. And there's no reason for the angel to pretend anymore. He already *has* Dean. So it makes Dean feel *insane*. It makes Dean's stupid heart hope again even when he thought hope couldn't exist and, if he's not careful, he'll end up giving everything to the angel, whatever he asks, just because of that stupid goddamned hope.

So, "What do you want?" Dean says, because he knows whatever it is, it'll be something nightmarish, another thing that'll remind him of how the angel's claimed him for eternity, and the terror of that alone will ground Dean back to Earth again.



But the angel doesn't do that.

He doesn't ask to bed Dean, like maybe Dean's expecting. Or to preen his feathers again, while reminding him that this is going to be his housewifely duty from now on. Instead, back to Enochian, the angel says, *I wish you to teach me*—and then, after a moment's hesitation—*about love*.

With piercing blue eyes, he looks at Dean, awaiting an answer.

And fucking hell, Dean's already lost again.

Dean's dream that night is of purgatory.

He runs through the woods, blade in hand, hunting leviathan, searching for Cas.

"Where's the angel?" he says, over and over again, and he feels his blood hot under his skin, his heart beating harder and harder as he gets more frantic.

He can't find Cas. He can't find him. But he *needs* him.

And then, running and running, the woods change. He comes to a clearing, the river where he'd found Cas before. And, because they're not purgatory woods anymore, he comes to the place where Sam and Bobby had found Cas' body after it had gone missing.

He doesn't want to see this. He doesn't want to see what they're going to do.

But Sam and Bobby aren't here. Instead, it's the *angel*, and he's standing over Cas, staring down at the face that matches his own.

It's like looking into a mirror.

But Cas' halo doesn't light up.

Cas' halo is dead.

The angel from the wall kneels down. Places his hand on Cas' chest. And then his hand sinks in, reaches into Cas' ribcage, and from blinding white light, pulls out Cas' angel blade.

"Leave him alone, asshole!" Dean shouts and he charges forward, his own purgatory blade in hand, and he doesn't care what the angel thinks, doesn't care that the angel will know how bloodthirsty Dean is for him. What happens after he wakes up doesn't matter. And Dean can't pretend, anyway, not in the dreamscape.

The angel's *hurting* Cas. So Dean is going to *kill* him.

The angel doesn't notice Dean coming. Instead, he's staring at the angel blade in his hand. And then, slowly, the blade begins to melt under the angel's scrutiny. It trickles down his fingers, down his arm like molten silver. It follows the lines of the tattooed Enochian over his body, lighting up blue, following the paths of the markings like rivers, visible even through the angel's sheer robe.

When Dean reaches him, the angel's eyes light up with his grace.

Cas' angel blade has disappeared.

And Cas' body disappears with it.

*What are you doing, human?* the angel says, when the light has died from his eyes. *That weapon cannot kill me.*

But Dean's fuming.

"Give it back," Dean says. "Give me back his angel blade."

*How could I, when you are in this state? Calm yourself. I am not your enemy. And I will not have a mate as disobedient as this.*

Dean hurls himself at him anyway. His purgatory blade pierces the angel's chest but the angel pulls it out with ease. He takes Dean in his arms, in a grip so tight that it restrains him, and Dean, as much as he hates it, bawls into his chest. His tears trail down the angel's skin.

*You grieve for me,* the angel says and his arms around Dean relax, now tender in their nature. *I know this. But why, human? This I cannot understand. I am here.*

He cradles Dean against him, and Dean's legs give out. They both sink to the ground.

"Why the hell do you keep coming here, huh? Can't you fucking stay out of my dreams for once? Leave me and Cas alone, goddamn it! Don't you get it? This is the only time I get to see him—the only time I'll *ever* see him and you just gotta—"

Dean's words get strangled in a sob. The angel strokes his back slowly, soothingly.

*I do not mean to trespass.*

*It is our bond, Dean. When I wed you, my grace became entwined with your soul. Soon, we will be one, in more ways than you can fathom, more than just in dreams and in memories. That is why I am always here. That is why I cannot go even when you desire it.*

*Soon there will be no place where you and I do not exist together. This is our future.*

Dean shudders. Dean's whole body reacts in horror at what the angel's just said.

And maybe the angel takes pity on him. Maybe the angel finally realizes for once that Dean didn't *want* this, that the very thought of it terrifies him. God, Dean was so stupid. Why the hell didn't he think? Dean gave himself to the angel so entirely that soon there'll be nothing of him left.

As if sensing his sadness, the angel's hand on his back stops moving. He releases Dean from his arms. But maybe he doesn't intend to let him go.

Dean finds himself flat on his back, the angel kneeling above him, his true form looming over the trees.

*I sense your fear*, the angel says and his hands slowly run down Dean's body, removing his clothes. Dean shivers and it's like the night that the angel had claimed him, had *wed* him. The angel traces his fingers over the invisible Enochian symbols on his skin. He makes his way down Dean's thighs. *You are afraid of what it means to be one with me. You have forgotten the exhilaration you felt on our wedding day. Remember, Dean, this is what you wanted.*

Dean shudders when the angel tugs his pants down, exposing him to the night air. The angel's hand curls around his cock and Dean can't help himself, can't help the groan that escapes his mouth, can't help the way his dick hardens at the angel's touch. He squeezes his eyes shut and the angel lets go, instead trailing his fingers to rest above his entrance. When Dean opens his eyes, the angel's body wavers, sometimes looking like Cas, and sometimes his true form—dark, glittering black, starry like the night sky with his talons and horns—as if he can't decide which shape he wants to assume.

*You worry about giving yourself to me*, the angel says and his voice echoes deep in the cavernous space of his true form. *But Dean*, the angel says and he smiles and his thumb presses against Dean's entrance. *You are already so good at submission.*

The angel's thumb sinks into Dean's body, and maybe the angel knows Dean better than Dean knows himself because Dean can't help it. He bucks up into the angel's hand. Practically begs with his body, and the angel fucks him slowly, tortuously slow, his thumb delving in and out of Dean's entrance in a way that has Dean emitting embarrassing sounds he never could otherwise produce.

Dean can only picture what he looks like. What the angel sees when he looks at him. Face flushed red, cheeks still wet with his tears from earlier, his hips grinding into the angel's hand as his dick fills with his lust.

*You do not have to be so afraid, human*, the angel says and he presses another finger against his entrance. Dean shivers. Dean groans as the angel pushes and it's *too much*.

He struggles to take it.

The angel's so much *bigger* than Dean. Always has been. But in dreams, the difference is all the greater. When the second finger finally breaches him, all he can do is gasp as his dick flags. *You will barely notice the change. Our bond is still weak. It will be until we consummate our relationship in the physical plane. And that will take time. It will be slow. We will be one and you will not even know it.*

A third finger starts to press against his entrance. Dean swallows.

“I can’t,” Dean gasps. “Cas, it’s—it’s too much. *Please*. Cas, *please*.”

But maybe Dean’s wrong. Hearing his protest, Cas pulls his hand away and Dean’s left empty when all he wants is to be filled again.

*It will take time because you are small*, the angel says and the angel brushes over Dean’s entrance, this time back in his true form. Dean shudders as he feels the scrape of his talons. *You will not be able to take me*.

And then, eyes glittering with desire, the angel’s voice grows deeper.

*First, you will have to learn to take my fist*.

And Dean knows he should be terrified. Or maybe he ought to be rolling his eyes as the angel brags about the size of his dick. But Dean’s not either of those things.

Instead, Dean’s *burning* with need. Instead, the thought of the angel breaching him has his dick dribbling and wet, and he can feel how flushed he is, how hot his skin is, and even though he’s ashamed at his lust, he can’t help but *want* it.

He can’t lie in dreams.

Or maybe it’s their bond already at work, confusing him, placating him, making them *one*.

But the angel doesn’t touch him again. He clothes Dean’s trembling body. And then Dean’s hit with sudden overwhelming sadness.

It’s not Dean’s this time.

It’s the *angel’s*. Dean can feel his misery consuming him.

*You are not the only one who must submit, Dean*, he says and just like the dream the night before, the angel begins to weep.

*Soon, I too will be at your mercy*.

*You will know all my secrets. You will know the terrible thing that I must do*.

*I thought I could delay it by letting you keep your legs closed but our bond has progressed further than I could have imagined, even without our consummation*.

*I have failed*.

*You will be mine in body alone. Your spirit will break. You think yourself broken now, but it will be nothing compared to then, Dean. I should not have claimed you*.

So, “What are you going to do?” Dean says and his words shake. The fear from earlier comes rushing back to Dean’s bones. This is the second time he’s heard the angel say it, the second

time he's seen the angel so terrified. "Wh-What could you possibly do that could make me hate you more?"

But the angel curls his wings around himself, as if to hide away, and he refuses to answer.

*If I speak of it, I will not be able to hold back the truth.*

And Dean thinks that that's all that's going to happen, that he'll wake up again, the dream at its natural end, but it doesn't happen. Instead, things begin to shift once more. They're in the bunker, in the kitchen, and Dean's sitting opposite Cas at the breakfast table, and Cas is shredding a blueberry muffin that Dean made him.

Dean *knows* this day. And his heart starts to pound in anticipation.

So he says what he said that day. He says, "You're supposed to eat that, Cas."

Cas across the table gives him a sheepish smile.

"Of course, Dean," he says and he pops a broken muffin piece into his mouth. Then, unconvincingly, he says, "Mmm. Thank you. It's very tasty. The molecules."

Dean rolls his eyes, but he can't help but smile fondly at him. He's an idiot. But god, he *loves* him.

From the corner of the kitchen, the angel watches them silently.

"So how you feelin'?" Dean asks, and Cas can't meet his eyes.

"Better. Crowley saved my life."

The words are neutral, as if Cas wasn't gurgling black goo just the night before. As if he hadn't told Dean that he loved him, before telling them to run because he was going to sacrifice himself to Ramiel, not a goddamn thought given to what that would've done to Dean.

But Dean *doesn't* say that. Dean doesn't want to fight. Instead, Dean reaches into his pocket with sweaty hands, and pulls out the mixtape.

"I, uh, made this for you," he says and Cas takes it gingerly in hand. Dean waits, heart thudding in his chest, and even though it's a memory, it still feels like the present. He waits, like he did that day, to see if Cas gets it. If Cas knows what it means when someone makes a mixtape.

But Cas' expression is careful. He just says, "Thank you, Dean," quietly, and puts it in his pocket.

Nothing more.

And *of course* Dean can't let it go. Dean's not content with that.

“I made it for you,” he says again, and then blurts, “Cas, I made it—*just* for you.”

And before he can lose the smidgeon of courage he’s mustered up, he reaches across the table and grasps Cas’ hand.

He’s breathing, quick and shallow, and he looks at Cas, looks at him and prays to him, thinks *There’s something I gotta tell you*, knows that he can’t stop now, knows that Cas *needs* to hear it from him.

*I love you*, Dean wants to say but that day, he didn’t say it.

Without Dean uttering the words aloud, Cas says, “Dean, I—I *know*.”

But Cas *didn’t* know. Dean knows that now.

Cas rises from the table then, but Dean’s still holding his hand. Dean remembers what he’d thought then—that everything was out in the open now, that even as an unsaid prayer, Cas had finally figured Dean’s feelings out—and Dean gets up from the table, too, just like he’d done before, and wordlessly, he crowds Cas up against the wall, gasps for breath, wants to kiss him.

He almost did that day.

His mouth had hovered just an inch from Cas’ lips, his hands fisting Cas’ trench coat. Cas had also started to pant, maybe expecting Dean’s mouth to collide with his, but then Dean had spotted a streak of black goo on Cas’ collar, something that he’d missed when cleaning it, and he’d buried his face into Cas’ neck instead.

“Don’t ever do that to me.” His voice had sounded broken. “Cas, never again, you *can’t*—”

And he hadn’t been able to say anything more.

He’d just clung to Cas, until Sam had walked in on them, and Dean had pulled himself back, coughed, pretended that he’d been giving Cas his customary thank-god-you’re-not-dead hug, and after that, Cas had smiled again, but something had been off in his eyes, and he had thanked Dean again for the mixtape before disappearing.

Cas disappears now.

Dean sinks to the floor.

Dean should’ve *told* him. Dean should’ve *kissed* him. Dean should’ve shown him what love *meant*.

As if the angel can hear his thoughts—and maybe because of their bond, now he *can*—the angel says, *Is this love?* and he looks shaken. *This is not what I thought it was.*

Dean doesn’t answer him. He pulls himself to his feet, sprints out the kitchen door, desperate to find Cas, desperate to tell him, even though he knows it won’t change anything.

But he doesn't get far.

He's halfway down the hall when the bunker lights turn red and the wail of a siren echoes throughout the building.

*Intruder.*

It shouldn't be possible. Not in a dream. Not in a memory where this never happened. But maybe Dean should know better by now.

The siren stops.

All the lights go out.

A voice reverberates through the darkness, has the very walls shaking until the bunker starts to collapse in around them.

*We are not far, Castiel, the voice says.*

*We know where you are.*

*We know what you have done.*

*There is nowhere you can run.*

## Chapter End Notes

Again, I'm SO sorry. I never thought it would be such a long delay getting back to this. Every few months, I took this story out, tried to work on it, and every time, the writer's block would come biting back. Even though it's been ages, wildly I still remember exactly where this story was heading and what was going to happen, because I've never stopped thinking about it!

I super apologize for the mess this chapter is. I know the characterization's all over the place. Hopefully it'll be less shaky in the coming chapters as I get back into the swing of things.

If you're still here, please let me know! I would love to hear from you! And again, so that I can say how sorry I am :')

I'm excited to get the next chapter out! Hoping everyone is well—the last couple of years were certainly rough. And, um, again, I'm SO SORRY :')

# A Terrible Thing

## Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I'm back with another chapter! No, this isn't an April Fool's joke. Sorry it took a while but hey, at least it wasn't literal years this time! :) I wanted to give people a chance to reread and catch up if they wanted to, and the next couple of chapters will be coming sooner than this one. Also HUGE thank you to everyone who let me know they're still here! It was majorly encouraging. I was really afraid no one would be around so I was ecstatic to see so many familiar faces! I love you guys! <3

This one's kind of more plotty than usual so I hope it isn't too boring (or confusing)! I wanted to include a lot more but it was getting too long. And then I cut out stuff because it fit better for another chapter, so maybe it's not long after all?

Anyway, I'll stop rambling. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dean can't see anything.

When he wakes up, the world's gone pitch-black or maybe he's gone blind, or at least that's what he thinks has happened, until he realizes that he's not in the world at all—he's still in a dream.

Except now it's a nightmare.

When the dust settles, when the bunker's walls have finally stopped groaning and shuddering, Dean reaches out, feels for a way out from under the rubble, but his hands touch feathers instead.

It's the angel.

He's shielded Dean from the damage.

His wings *are* the pitch-black darkness.

Dean pushes, feels for the slippery material of the angel's sheer robe, and when he finds it, the angel doesn't move even when Dean places his hand on him—he's barely breathing. And in this world, from what Dean knows, angels *need* to breathe.

So, "Hey," he says and shakes him. "Hey, wake up!"

Nothing. The angel doesn't even stir.



“Angel, c’mon, damn it!”

Still nothing.

“C-Cas?”

And Dean can feel the panic suffusing him. He *knows* it’s a dream, that at any moment, it should be over, and he’ll wake up and be right back in that cave, but something about this just doesn’t feel *right*. Not since the voice that echoed in the bunker, that had promised Cas that they’d *get* him, that there was nowhere Cas could run. They’d said they hadn’t been far, but this doesn’t feel like being *near*—this feels like they’re here already.

And maybe it’s that fear, that panic that changes things. Maybe the terror in his mind is so strong that he *wills* a change, because suddenly, the aftermath of the bunker’s collapse disappears. The smell of crumbling bricks lifts. The weight on them, crushing them from all sides, is gone. And then Dean, when he pushes against Cas’ wings, frees himself at last.

Cas, no longer held upright by the debris from all sides, falls. And maybe because Dean’s mind constantly torments him, Cas falls the same way that he’d done when he’d died, when Lucifer had stabbed him.

On his back. Legs tucked in. His massive wings spread out.

If he weren’t breathing, Dean would think him dead.

And maybe that’s exactly the trick his brain plays on him. When he looks at where they are, they’re in that same place, by the house where Cas had intended for Kelly to give birth, by the water and the mountains, and just in front of where the portal to the other world had opened, sucking Dean, Sam, and Cas in with it.

Dean’s on his knees beside Cas’ body again.

So he cradles Cas’ face. He begs him. He slumps over him, buries his head into Cas’ chest, shaking, shaking, shaking. And then, because this isn’t Cas, the angel takes a shuddering breath, and his massive hand rests on Dean’s head, fingers stroking his hair.

*You are...unharmmed.*

*Good.*

The angel moves then, slowly sitting up, but even as slowly as he goes, he still sways and, now, finally out of the darkness, Dean sees what happened to him.

The angel’s bloody, his wings battered, crushed, and broken. He looks like the angel at the wall, except this time, he’s not pretending.

“Who did this to you?” Dean says, swallowing. “That voice, who was that?”

*The ones...that I...have been hiding you from, Dean,* the angel says and his chest heaves with every word. *The ones that will...make me...do something...from which you will never recover.*

And then—maybe because the angel knows that if he says another word, he'll speak the truth—the angel falls onto his back once more, no longer able to sit upright.

His eyes close.

He passes out again.

He tells Dean nothing that he doesn't already know.

Maybe they're stuck here.

Maybe the people who are after the angel did something and now they can't escape, can't wake up.

Dean waits and waits for it. He sits beside the unconscious angel, anticipates the moment he'll be back by the cave, but it never happens. The world shifts, but it's only another dream, another warped collection of memories, the kind of dreams that he hasn't had since the angel claimed him.

The type of dreams that never really make any sense.

He's in a diner, squished beside Cas in the booth. That dick Ishim's just left after calling Cas names, and Sam's taken his old spot across from them. Dean knows this scene well, can still feel his blood buzzing under his skin.

Dean finds himself mouthing the same words from that night: "Why do you let him talk to you like that?"

And it goes the same way that it had done the first time. Cas spouts off an angry retort about how he's gotta do his part to make sure no other angels get killed, and then he's storming off, because Dean knows that he's frustrated with the situation, but maybe also a little frustrated with Dean's silent treatment from just hours ago. Except this time, Dean's *smarter*. This time, Dean catches him by the wrist and stops him, something in his gut telling him that if he lets him leave, he'll never see him again.

"Hey," he says in a low voice and he puts a hand on Cas' shoulder. "Look, Cas, I know I've been an ass, but you know I've got your back, right? Gimme the word and I'll beat Ishim's ass into next week."

From the booth, Sam watches them covertly, pretending to fiddle with a napkin. When Cas grits his teeth and starts to head back out the door, Sam's interest perks. This time, Dean gets impatient and bowls right into Cas, slamming him up against the hotel room wall.

“C’mon,” Dean begs. “Talk to me.”

For a moment, Dean’s lost in time. He’s still thinking about Ishim, is still picturing the multitude of ways that he could make that bastard pay, but then he finally takes in his surroundings and realizes that they’re not in the same scene anymore.

The diner’s gone. They’re in a hotel room, and it’s weeks later because today’s the day that Cas had played him, stealing the fucking Colt from underneath Dean’s pillow. That’s why Dean’s here. That’s why he’s supposed to be angry.

But Dean’s not.

Dean just wants Cas to talk to him.

So, “Cas, please,” Dean says and he loosens his grip from Cas’ shirt, instead wraps both arms around him and buries his face into the crook of his neck. “C’mon, man. I miss you. Say something.”

Cas opens his mouth and black goo spills out from between his lips.

The dream’s changed again.

Dean knows what’s supposed to happen. Dean knows that Crowley will save Cas, break the cursed staff, and Cas’ll be healed, that Dean’ll spend the rest of the night making him a mixtape, but maybe not in tonight’s dream.

Instead, Cas continues to gurgle and choke against his shoulder, and this time, no one’s saving Cas—Cas is just gonna die again. Dean opens his eyes then, cradles Cas in his arms, turns around to search for help, but they’re alone in that shed, and the poisonous sigilled staff is nowhere to be seen.

Against his chest, Cas goes still.

Dean rocks him in his arms, begs him to wake up, and when he looks around again, it’s then that he spots him.

The angel from the wall’s awake now, is hunched up on the floor, watching them.

Dean says, “Do something.”

The angel doesn’t. The angel tries to sit up, wavers, falls back again. He looks at Cas with fright in his eyes.

*What happened here, human?* he says, before the scene in Dean’s dream changes again.

But this time, Cas isn’t here.

Dean’s arms are empty.

This time, it’s a place that Dean doesn’t recognize.

They're in a meadow, somewhere with wildflowers and breathtaking mountains towering on each side. The angel's still here, except he's not wearing his shimmery white coat anymore. This time, it's black fur, the same coat that Dean's been wearing for ages now, night after night, ever since the angel kidnapped him. The angel manages to rise to his feet this time, and the look of fright he'd had when he'd seen Cas die in Dean's arms is still there in his eyes. The angel looks at him frantically, as if he wants to say something, and Dean takes a step towards him, reaches out to grab his arm because the angel's shaking, is gonna topple over any minute.

But then things change.

But then the other angels appear.

And that's when Dean realizes that this isn't his own dream anymore.

It's the *angel's*.

"I'm sorry," the angel says and dread begins to grow in Dean's stomach.

There are three of them altogether—one angel, clad in a grey coat, flanked by two angels who look like bodyguards. At first, Dean can't make out their faces. They're still in the distance, but as they approach, Dean realizes he knows them. With a sickening lurch, he recognizes *Naomi* in her grey coat, *Ishim* and *Uriel* at her side, and when she stops in front of the angel, she smiles.

*What an unexpected surprise, Castiel,* Naomi says and she places a hand on the angel's shoulder. *We thought you had been killed. We felt your essence fade. Six months we have not heard from you. Imagine our surprise when you called for us.*

The angel doesn't say anything. At least, for a moment. He looks at Dean, looks at him in a way that knows that Dean can see everything, that knows that whatever secrets he's been hiding, they're about to come out into the open.

*I'm sorry, Dean,* he says. *For what...you are about to know.*

Naomi hums, and circles the angel like a predator. She turns her head and her eyes land on Dean. But she can't see him. She stares right through him. This time, it's Dean who's in a place he shouldn't be. This time, it's Dean who's invisible, in a memory that's not his own.

*Have you nothing to say for yourself, Castiel?*

The angel shifts unsteadily on his feet.

*I...I do not know what happened, Sister. Death did take me, but then I was reborn. My grace is disturbed. My memories fractured. I...I do not feel myself at times. For many months, I did not know...my purpose.*

Naomi purses her lips.

*That does not surprise me, Castiel. You sense it, too. Something is not right. Things have entered our world. Things that should not be here. They have upset the balance that has long reigned here.*

Naomi turns her head to look into the distance.

*And a strange energy grows in the west. Its grace reeks of a nephilim's.*

At the word *nephilim*, Uriel and Ishim let out sounds of shock. A curt look from Naomi silences them, but Dean sees that the angel's wings quiver, too.

Dean has the sudden stupid urge to go to him.

*We will speak of it at another time*, Naomi says abruptly. She waves her hand. *I am pleased that you have returned. You have always been such a good little soldier, Castiel. Tell me, how many creatures have you gathered at the camp thus far? Paradise is quite lacking at the moment and you know how that is.*

Cas' wings shake. Then, *None*, he says.

*None?* Naomi echoes. Her nostrils flare. *How could you have none, Castiel? Did you not resume your duties? Just six months ago, you lured a woman out of the camp, even as her foolish brother tried to pull her away. How could you have none, Castiel, when mere hours before we sensed your supposed death, you sent word to us that you had found yet another soul, wandering the woods, the peculiar blonde woman not of this world? Where is she now, Castiel? Did you lose her?*

When Cas doesn't answer, she pauses in her circling, coming to a stop before him.

*Perhaps you have lost your touch.*

She frowns then, her displeasure clear, and Cas trembles.

*Or perhaps you have forgotten what you used to do altogether, Castiel. Perhaps you need a reminder of how things are done.* She places her hands on Cas' coat, slips it off and lets it fall to the ground to reveal the angel's body. She runs her fingers down Cas' chest, over sheer fabric, the same robes that had left little to the imagination all those times that Dean had seen the angel at the wall. Dean watches him now, a lump forming in his throat while Naomi touches Cas, in places that have Dean's fists curling and he can't stop the fierce protectiveness that comes over him. *How do you expect them to come to you, Castiel, wearing a heavy coat like this?*

*Humans are carnal creatures.*

*Sometimes, even more so than angels.*

*Use your body.*

She pulls away from him at last.

*I will be back, Castiel, she says. This time, I will be kind. I shall come and I expect you to have found and returned that creature you lost to me. And then, each time the moon is whole, I will come and I will collect those poor souls who are in need of paradise. Do not disappoint me.*

Naomi moves to turn away. Ishim and Uriel follow, their bodies in sync.

*But what of the camp? Cas says. I...I have seen it. It is heavily fortified, Sister. I do not remember how I used to do it before. My death...robbed me of those memories.*

Naomi smiles.

*Oh, Castiel, you truly did forget, didn't you?*

She outstretches her hand.

*Come. Let me show you.*

Cas hesitates, but only for a moment, and then, in the blink of an eye, the mountains disappear. As soon as he takes Naomi's hand, they're at the edge of a clearing in the woods, snow pelting down on them from every side.

With a chill running down his spine, Dean sees where they are.

It's the camp.

It's night, the guards at the wall, and directly across from them, Dean sees *himself*.

It's the night the angel had first come for him.

*Do you see him? Naomi says and she points right to Dean behind the grate. He is the offspring of the blonde woman you hunted. You have no need to fear the camp. Their council works for us. Why, it was you who struck the deal with them. Souls for us, in exchange for the promise that no harm will befall their settlement in the holy war. I daresay it has been a satisfactory arrangement.*

Naomi comes up behind Cas, places both her hands on his shoulders, and whispers in his ear.

*That post at the wall is enchanted, Castiel. Whichever soul stands there, whichever soul the council sees of no benefit to its camp, they will send that soul to that post and that soul will go to you easily. Their council has ensured it. All you must do is talk to him. He will fall for you with little persuasion, succumb deeper and deeper with every word. And then, when it is time, the council will banish him for consorting with an angel.*

Naomi laughs.

*You see, Castiel? He will walk straight into your arms, straight into paradise.*

Naomi then pushes Cas forward.

*Go. Do your duty. And when I come back, I expect two souls, Castiel. That woman who escaped you and...him.*

And Naomi makes to leave again, but the hesitation marring Cas' body stays.

*I cannot do this, Sister,* he says.

This time, Naomi's eyes flash with her anger.

*You will, Castiel. You must.*

She moves back to him, pressing two fingers to Cas' head. Cas' eyes glow with his grace. His face contorts in pain. And then when she pulls away, his eyes seem blanker.

*Do you remember now, Castiel, how much you enjoy luring these creatures away? Think of the pleasure that this conquest will give you. Think of the wonderful feeling you will have when that human falls for you.*

*You will be the mightiest angel in his eyes, Castiel. Is that not what you want?*

And it must work, whatever she does. Because Cas smiles then, full of joy, full of that same corrupt happiness that Dean had seen so many times, when the angel hadn't been able to hide his true emotions at the wall.

Naomi smiles again, satisfied.

*My good little soldier,* she says and Cas glows.

Uriel and Ishim, as if sensing their imminent departure, disappear. But before Naomi goes, she gives the angel one last warning.

*Do what you must to obtain him. But remember, Castiel. Do not venture into his dreams. The council's magic has no jurisdiction there. If you do, he will sense your trickery and you will surely lose him.*

Naomi's wings stretch, and soon, the only evidence that she was ever there are the footsteps in the snow.

The angel, as if entranced in his own dream, stumbles forward.

Dean watches him, watches how he limps to the grate, watches how he presses his hand to the metal.

And this time, Dean can see himself for once. This time, Dean can finally see what he looked like that night.

The angel asks the Dean in his dream to go to the outside with him and Dean watches his own face contort with unnatural eagerness, already smitten, already *lost*.

And then Dean remembers yet again what the angel had told him.

That Dean had fallen of his own goddamn will. The angel had come to him, despite Naomi's warning, in a dream where the camp's enchantment couldn't have worked, and Dean had still been obsessed, had still only wanted him, had still wed him without a goddamn thought.

Everything that had happened, everything—like always—had been *Dean*.

He doesn't know how much time passes.

After she's gone, Dean sits there under the snow, watches the angel seduce him at the wall, playing out the rest of his memory like Dean had done so many times. And then, maybe because the memory's over, the dream changes again.

At first, he doesn't think anything's different. They're still at the wall, closer this time and he doesn't see his own face. Instead, through the grate, it's Aarif and his sister.

"What do you mean, Amina?" Aarif's saying and he's got his sister by her shoulders. "What do you mean you've been seeing an angel at the wall?"

They argue, but just then the wind picks up, and their hushed voices are carried away. When Dean hears them again, he can already hear the way Aarif's sister's consumed, lost to the angel's wiles, mind already made submissive by the council's spell.

"—he's a good angel, Aarif. Castiel says that he can bring me to my husband. He says Sergei's *alive*."

And Aarif's voice is hysterical then, while he tries to persuade his sister to be smarter, while he tries to warn her, and doom starts to well up in Dean's gut, knowing how it's all inevitably gonna go down. When he looks again, the angel's just ahead, shedding his coat. There are bruises covering his body. The gnarled crown on his head's crackling, as if he's barely clinging to life.

The same way that he'd played Dean so many times.

Dean watches him limp to the grate. Hears the joy and the subsequent distress in Amina's voice when she sees him. And then when she asks the angel what happened to him, the angel lies with ease.

*It was my kin, human. They have become suspicious. Soon, they will know that I am trying to help you and your mate, and then, they will lock me away and I will not be able to come to you.*



And Dean shuts his eyes. Doesn't want to see the godawful scene that's about to take place, doesn't want to hear the angel asking Amina to come outside.

But before that can happen, the snow pelting his face abruptly stops.

It's the angel, his damaged wings encircling them. Dean looks at the wall, sees another version of the angel still there, seducing Amina. The angel watches himself alongside Dean, as if he's seeing someone else, as if someone else committed the crime instead of him, and maybe that's why he's here, instead of playing the part that he ought to in his own memory, as if he can pretend that it wasn't he who did such a terrible thing.

But, "That was you," Dean says, wants him to know it, and the angel's wings around him droop.

Dean doesn't know if it's their bond but suddenly he's hit with a wave of the angel's guilt, so overwhelmingly powerful that he feels nauseated. As the angel's wings melt away from him, the snow begins to hit Dean's face again.

*I do not remember this, human,* the angel says. *It happened before I died, six months before we met.*

*I am not this angel anymore. In death, I was changed. And with every night, with every death, that change grows.*

*You must believe me, Dean. You must not resent me for the things that you have seen tonight.*

But Dean pushes him out of the way. Dean's had just about enough.

"And what about the things that you're still going to do, huh? What about handing me and Mom over to Naomi and the other angel dicks? And newsflash, asshole! Just because you don't remember it doesn't mean you didn't do it!" Dean grits his teeth. "That's who you are, angel. And you can't fucking hide it anymore!"

Dean swallows. Wishes like hell that he'd wake up already, be freed from this torment. But yet again, the dream changes. They're back in a diner, except it's not the one where Ishim had been an ass. This time, it's the diner where they'd gone when looking for Claire, and Cas asks, "Is ketchup a vegetable?"

Dean doesn't answer Cas. He's so angry that he can't make his mouth move.

But at those words, the angel's eyes widen. He looks at Cas as if seeing a ghost.

Dean shoves out of his chair, squares his jaw and walks out the door.

The angel's there in an instant.

He's still a mess. His wings are still in ruins. But maybe he's healed a little bit because he's no longer panting, no longer wavering, even though he walks with a limp.

*Halt, human*, he commands, as if he believes Dean will listen to him just like that. And he probably does think that, since he'd told Dean not too long ago that he wouldn't tolerate having a *disobedient* mate. But Dean doesn't listen. He keeps going. He keeps going until the angel pins him up against Cas' pimpmobile.

"Dean!" the angel hisses and he sounds so much like Cas when he's being pissy that Dean's heart aches.

"Go away," Dean croaks. "Secret's out, buddy. There's no denying it. Already heard your evil master plan so you can cut it out—there's no need to pretend anymore."

A wave of hurt hits Dean like a tidal wave and he *hates* it. He hates this stupid bond. He hates what he did to himself. And as angry as he is, feeling the angel's sorrow softens him nonetheless. He goes slack in the angel's grip.

"That's what it was, wasn't it? The secrets you didn't want me to know. The terrible thing you gotta do. You're"—Dean swallows—"you're giving Mom and me to them. Monique. Harvesting our souls for gods-know-what crap."

But the angel's wings bristle in his refusal.

*I am not giving you to them*, the angel says. *It is why I wed you, Dean. My kin will be angry, but I could not let you go. You are a prize far too precious to share.*

"And Mom?"

The angel goes quiet.

Dean laughs bitterly.

"Yeah, that's what I thought."

Dean screws his eyes shut. Wills the dream to go away. Wills for it to end.

He needs to get Mom. He needs to run.

*It is not so awful, human*, the angel says and he sweeps back Dean's hair. *A life in paradise is a life fulfilled. Your mother's soul will experience joys beyond imagination, what will seem like an eternity of wonder, and then she will be at rest.*

*There is no pain there. No suffering. You will miss her, certainly, but with time, that too shall fade. The sooner you accept it, the sooner you will be free.*

The angel's voice grows softer.

*And her life will have served a great purpose. Her soul has already been claimed in the name of Heaven. Her soul will be used to smite legions of demons in our holy war, to bring peace to our world. A human soul has power, Dean. Far more power than you could ever imagine. My kin need her.*

Dean opens his eyes.

Stares at the angel with hatred in his eyes.

And the angel must know. Had always known what was to come.

He had said it earlier, hadn't he? The angel had wept, knowing what was to become of Dean, knowing what would happen if the angel gave Mary away.

*You will be mine in body alone*, he had said. *Your spirit will break. You think yourself broken now, but it will be nothing compared to then, Dean. I should not have claimed you.*

And then at last Dean's wish comes true.

And then at last Dean confirms what the angel had thought.

"You know I'll never forgive you," Dean says just as the dream finally comes to an end.

Something about waking up makes it all the more real.

Or maybe it's because as soon as Dean opens his eyes, he sees the full moon, a promise that the angels are coming for them.

The angel's still stirring but Dean's out of his arms in an instant. He marches into the cave, pulls Mom to her feet, and he doesn't care anymore. The angel can't do worse to them than Naomi.

"Dean?" Mary mumbles as he drags her out into the snow. "What are we..."

Dean doesn't hear anything else, only snippets, only the word *paradise* over and over again.

He swallows down the horror.

They barely make it to the trees before the angel's on them.

His hand curls around Dean's wrist. Dean tries to pull away.

But, *Don't be foolish*, the angel snarls and his eyes glow with grace.

There's a moment where Dean vividly imagines stabbing the angel, even scans his body to see if maybe the angel's blade is somewhere within reach, but it's not. The angel pries Dean and Mary apart, and with a simple command, Monique, who's been watching the drama unfold, comes to fetch Mary.

Then they're alone.

The angel watches him silently, waiting for his next move.

Dean doesn't have one.

Dean doesn't have anything except: "Let Mom and me go."

*You know I cannot do that, Dean.*

So Dean begs. Dean puts his hands on the angel's face. Cradles it tenderly as if he cares.

"I'll do anything," he says. *"Anything."*

But the angel's stoic. His hands curl into fists at his sides but all he does is shake his head.

Dean clings to him even more desperately.

"You want me to preen your wings for the rest of my goddamned life? I'll do it. You wanna hear praises every time you go to sleep? Fine. Hell, you can have my body. We can—we can do the consummation or whatever you need to finish making our bond, but—but"—Dean's voice breaks—"not Mom. Please. Not Mom. Let her go, angel. Or hide her. Just—just don't let the others take her, damn it—please—*please*—"

The angel doesn't budge.

But as if he can't bear seeing Dean's pain, he averts his eyes even as his wings shake.

*I wish I could, Dean,* he says, *but Naomi's wrath will ensure our demise if I do.*

So Dean fists his hands into the angel's coat.

"You asked what love is," Dean says and he swallows. "You wanted me to teach you. Well, it isn't this, angel. You don't freaking hurt the ones you love. You don't tear their fucking family apart. You don't—I shouldn't have to beg you, I shouldn't—if you loved me, if you even had an inkling of what love is, you wouldn't do this, angel. You wouldn't."

And Dean can see the angel's shoulders dropping with his guilt. Dean can see the wall that the angel's put up breaking down.

"Castiel, please," Dean says again, and hearing his name roll off Dean's tongue, the angel shivers.

*Very well, Dean,* he says and he stares into the distance. *I shall hide the other humans away.*

*But we do not have long.*

*They are almost here.*

*And I do not know how we will survive this.*

## Chapter End Notes

Andddd this chapter concludes the "enemies" part of the "enemies to lovers" trope we got going on here. Now we're strictly tumbling towards "lovers" :D

I hope this chapter wasn't too boring! It was kind of plotty but just something that needed to be done. I'm suuuper excited for the next three chapters. They're gonna be wild (at least in my opinion). Next chapter's called The Consummation :P

As always I would love to hear from you so please do let me know what you thought! Any theories? Any wishes? April Fool's jokes?

Anyway, hope you're having a great evening/morning! See you all soon <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!