

## Allegory

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/264439) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/264439>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Supernatural</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Dean Winchester</a> , <a href="#">Sam Winchester</a> , <a href="#">John Winchester</a> , <a href="#">Bobby Singer</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Violence</a> , <a href="#">Non-Linear Narrative</a> , <a href="#">Weirdness</a> , <a href="#">Allegory</a> , <a href="#">Metaphors</a> , <a href="#">Mythology - Freeform</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe</a> , <a href="#">Discussions of Suicide</a> , <a href="#">Child Sam Winchester</a> , <a href="#">Child Dean Winchester</a> , <a href="#">Child Neglect</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 10 of <a href="#">Author's Favourites</a>
Stats:	Published: 2011-10-13 Words: 3,354 Chapters: 1/1

# Allegory

by [pprfaith](#)

## Summary

Dean has an imaginary friend. It all goes downhill from there.

## Notes

First, I should tell you that this was written and posted for the first time some time around early season four. So.

Secondly, it took me an embarrassing amount of time to notice that yes, the tree outside the house in the pilot actually *does* move. Yeah.

And lastly, wave if you see my sanity passing, because this story sort of killed it.

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## **Allegory**

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“You’ll take me down, won’t you? When my year runs out?”

*Yes.*

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Death is an old friend of Dean’s.

They pass each other in the hallways of haunted buildings, occasionally bumping shoulders, if the way is narrow and the hurry great.

Sometimes Death sits at the foot of Dean’s bed all night, watching over him. Once, when Dean is sixteen, he sits at Sammy’s bed until Dean tells him to go away.

Death throws his head back and laughs, the sound like bells and bombs and only Dean can hear him. Then he looks down at Sammy with something akin to fond exasperation in his gaze. Sam, unconscious and clammy with sweat and blood loss, notices nothing.

*Alright, kid,* Death says and with a headshake he leaves Dean to patch his brother back up.

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Sammy is fraying at the edges, about to fall apart when they find out that the miracle worker that is supposed to fix Dean is really a con man who kills people while he’s at it. Figures that even here, they find a hunt.

Dean sighs as Sammy frets and shoulders his gun, ready to do his job. Yes, even if it means there’ll be no miracle for him.

He drags Sam along in his wake as he always has, barking when his little brother moves too slow and praying that he will be alright when big brother is gone.

*I can’t decide whether you’re incredibly brave or incredibly suicidal,* a voice hisses on the wind and Dean glares at the man in the corner without fully looking at him, well versed by now, in looking without looking, speaking without speaking.

“I’m doing my job,” he whispers, knowing he will be heard. “You can collect me afterwards.”

Death smiles, disappears in a rush of wings and does not return for a week.

That is the second time Dean lives when he shouldn’t.

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“That thing is death walking, Dean,” Sammy snaps at him one early morning on the road. “Going up against it without a plan is suicide, man.”

“It’s not,” Dean counters, his eyes on the road, his ear on the rumble of the engine beneath him.

“What the hell? Of course it is, Dean. You’ve seen those photos, too.”

“It’s not Death walking,” he elaborates, ignoring the outburst. “Death doesn’t tear people apart, Sammy. Death just is.”

Sam, slack jawed and in stunned awe of his brother’s unknown and hitherto untapped depths, gawks and falls silent.

Dean looks in the rear mirror at the dark man lounging in the backseat, raising an eyebrow at the driver. *What?* he demands, *You want a cookie?*

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He does not speak of abstract concepts and ideas, when he speaks of Death. He speaks of a man who rolls his eyes a lot and never quite leaves.

The first time Dean meets Death he is four years old and lying in bed, his blanket drawn up to his ears, staring fixedly at the window. The tree outside is *moving*.

Something stirs in the far corner suddenly, moving in the shadow of the closet, moving *out* of it. A moment later a man stands where before there was nothing, tall and dark, his skin too pale and his features strangely blurred.

“Who’s you?” Dean demands, quiet and scared. There should be no strange men in his bedroom, he’s sure. Daddy would have told him so.

*Sleep, child*, the man says and his mouth *does not move*. He uses it to smile and Dean draws his knees to his chest, making himself impossibly small.

“No,” he tells the stranger, because he is not sleeping. The tree is moving and there’s someone in his room and something’s not right. Not right with Sammy. He should probably go check.

*No. Don’t check on Sammy. You can’t. Not tonight.*

“Why not? I’m a good big brother.”

*I know you are. Always will be, Dean Winchester. You’ll die for him, won’t you?*

Dean, four years old and tired, fails to notice the difference between ‘you will’ and ‘you would’. He just nods. And the man reaches out one hand, ruffling his hair and telling him to sleep. *I need to talk to your Mommy for a moment, okay?*

He walks out, the shadows rustling behind him like wings.

The next thing Dean knows is Mommy screaming and the smell of something burning.

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He is ten by the time he figures out that he's not supposed to be able to see the man lurking in the far corners of every room.

"Why can't Sammy see you?"

He'd tried introducing Sammy to his cool friend earlier, but little brother ran off and locked himself in the bathroom, saying Dean was pulling his leg. Dad came home and Sammy kicked up a fuss and so he explained until Dad lifted one threatening hand and told him to stop telling lies.

You'd think, Dean thinks, that a hunter would take his son a bit more seriously when he speaks of a man that's always there.

*The better question, kid, is why can you see me?*

"I shouldn't be able to?"

There is a moment, a hesitation, something he doesn't notice now but will remember later, a second where Death looks like maybe, somehow, he knows why Dean can see him but won't say it out loud.

*No-one else can.*

"Is that why you always hang around, because I can see you and no-one else can?"

*Don't flatter yourself. I'm everywhere.*

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The first time John takes Dean on a hunt, leaving Sammy in the care of a sweet neighbor, they come too late.

The spirit is laid to rest but the woman it was haunting lies on the ground, bleeding out. Dean kneels next to her and bends down low, whispering something in her ear that John can't quite make out. She gasps, gurgles and shakes her head, eyes wide and scared.

He should probably pull the boy away from this dying woman but he can't seem to move, transfixed by the sight of an eight-year-old kneeling in a puddle of blood, listening to a human being drowning in their own blood, completely unfazed.

"Oh," he says and he sounds surprised. "It's beautiful," he whispers after a moment, smiling beatifically down at Susan Jones as she breathes her last. When her heart stops and her breath too, Dean stands, wipes his bloody little hands on his grubby jeans and turns to look at his Daddy.

“We can go now,” he says, “She’s fine.”

For a moment, John thinks he can hear the rustle of wings. Then he grabs his son and gets the hell out of dodge.

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Linda Howard.

Another one lost, another one he couldn’t save. Sammy sits against the wall where the haunting flung him, breathing hard, holding his shoulder. Linda lies at Dean’s feet, her eyes already glassy, already empty.

On the other side of her corpse, Death stands, eyes closed, smiling as a distant breeze ruffles his hair. Behind him, great black wings unfurl, spanning the room, impossibly big and dark, a whisper of shadow.

Death’s eyes open as he throws a negligent smile at the hunter and then he beats his wings, once, just once, and disappears, taking Linda Howard with him.

A single feather stays behind, sinking swiftly to the ground. Dean reaches out with one hand, catching it like a snowflake, watching as it melts away just the same.

“Dude?” Sam asks, watching him catch invisible things with a silly grin on his face, a dead woman at his feet. “You alright?”

Dean drops his hand and shrugs, putting the safety back on his gun and ordering, “Move it, Sammy, we still got a body to burn.”

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Sam thinks Dean is reckless and stupid, risking himself the way he does for everyone and every cause. He doesn’t understand that Dean simply does not fear Death.

In that hospital, full on Swayze, Dean isn’t scared. He knows he’s not dying. Death is nowhere to be seen, he’s not lurking in any corners and the beat of his wings is strangely absent in this half world between waking and dying.

He’s just hurt. He needs some time to heal, that’s all.

When Tessa looks up at him with an earnest face and tells him she’s a *Reaper*, he laughs. He laughs and laughs and laughs because does she really think he’ll go with her?

When he was four, a man appeared in his bedroom and he ordered Dean to stay away from the nursery. He saved his life. And one day, he will collect it.

That day is not today and Tessa will not have his soul. Once he’s done laughing he bends down low, his mouth close to her ear and he tells her, “He’s not here.”

She pulls back, startled and understanding perfectly. Understanding that he knows what no mortal should. She opens her mouth to speak but her eyes turn yellow then and the next thing Dean knows is the white ceiling above his bed.

Dad whispers in his ear like Dean whispered into Tessa's, of Death and killing and saving Sam. Dean's responsibility. Save him or kill him.

Wings rush. Daddy's gone and Sam's coffee cup hits the floor in a spray of scalding liquid. It's the third time Dean lives when he shouldn't.

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When he is twenty-three, Dean Winchester is alone in the world for the very first time. Mommy's long gone, Sammy's run away and Daddy left him without a word.

He cocks his gun and places it under his chin, not really intending to pull the trigger. Just testing the feel of it. He loves life too much to off himself, loves fighting and hunting and kicking ass.

*You do that*, Death says, lounging on the motel bed that should be Sammy's but is empty, *And I swear I will leave your ass on this plane to haunt this motel room forever.*

Dean grimaces and lowers his weapon. "Don't panic. I'm not gonna do it, man."

*Good.*

Laughing, maybe a bit drunk, he throws the gun on the bed where it passes right through his uninvited guest and bounces on the ugly bedspread. "You know," he tells him, "You keep saying shit like that, I'll start thinking you don't want me either."

Then he clamps his mouth shut because, Christ, chick flick moment, anyone? What the hell is wrong with him?

Death moves, sliding off the bed and crossing the distance between here and there with a simple blink and an effort of endless will. He kneels in front of Dean, taking his face in both hands. He tries to pull away but the hands holding him in place are steel and cold and they don't move.

Two thumbs trace the lower outline of his eyes and as they flutter closed on reflex, those same fingers touch his lids in strange and silent benediction.

The Greeks once put coins on the eyes of their dead so they could pay the ferryman to carry them into the afterlife.

*You're an idiot*, Death hisspers in his head.

+

Dad and Sam are having it out yet again and Dean flees, unwilling to put himself in the middle even as he silently admires the pair of lungs twelve-year-old Sammy has on him. The

neighbors will be banging on the walls before long.

He trudges through the late summer evening, hands stuffed in his pockets, absently fiddling with the knife hidden in the left one. "Life sucks," he proclaims to thin air.

Beside him a deep chuckle, quite like an earthquake sounds. *You're funny*, Death says as he falls in step beside the teenager. *Where are you going?*

"No idea," Dean answers even as he takes a left and enters the small park he and Sammy played ball in last weekend. He finds a spot under an old oak and lies flat on his back, staring at the darkening sky through the canopy of leaves.

*They fighting again?*

"As if you don't know already."

*I'm not omniscient, kid. At least not when it comes to the living.*

For a moment, Dean rolls that statement around in his head and then he chuckles drily. "You know, I'm probably totally crazy and imagining you. Cracked my head when... the night of the fire and since then, crazy Dean. You're not real, are you?"

*If I were a figment of your imagination, would I tell you?*

"Shit."

*Quite.*

"Shut up. Just... shut up."

He's nuts. That's it. He's completely cracked in the head. He imagines that Death is his friend, imagines that he and his family hunt demons and werewolves and ghosts, everything. He probably died the night Mom did. He died and never had to take care of Sammy, never grew up in an endless slew of motels, never broke a bone, never sewed up his father's gaping wounds. Never learned how to pick pockets in order to buy Sammy dinner.

Never, ever, ever.

He's nuts.

*Dean –*

"Shut the fuck up. I don't want to hear it."

He closes his eyes and waits.

But Death never goes away and Dean never wakes from this dream of a life. And he keeps picking pockets and hustling pool to feed Sammy. It's what he does.

"You should have taken me when you took Mom."



Wings rush. Silence echoes. Above the boy and his invisible friend, the moon rises.

+

“Give him back!”

Dean clutches Sammy close, shaking him, hugging him as if enough pressure could put the life back in him and for once not caring who hears, who sees. He glares at the black figure standing at Sammy’s shoulder, wings spread wide, eyes sad, and he screams.

“Give him back!”

Bobby, giving up on hunting down the kid that did this, that stabbed Sam, returns, sorrow on his face, tears in his eyes, confusion drawing his brows together.

“Son,” he starts, but Dean ignores him, clutching at his brother, keeping him upright.

“No! You give him back,” he snarls, glaring at a spot of empty air, something Bobby can’t see. “I never asked you anything. Never. But you give me back my brother.”

*You know I can’t, kid. He’s gone. Let me take him away.*

“No! Not him. Not Sammy!”

*I’m sorry, Dean.*

A rustle of feathers in the dark, unseen wings beating upwards. Death is gone and Sammy with him. Dean screams.

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“Dean,” Bobby tries again, for the third time in an hour, to draw him away from Sammy’s corpse. He doesn’t budge, doesn’t move his gaze from his brother.

*Listen to him. He’s worried.*

“Don’t,” he snarls, throwing an accusing finger at the far corner – every corner – where *he* lurks, the way he always has, “Don’t you fucking tell me what to do. You took my brother away!”

“Dean!” Bobby tries for the fourth time, shaking him. “Who’re you talking to, son? There’s no-one there.”

Dean drops his arm, turns his face away, silently.

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Dean thought he knew Death, inside out. But he doesn’t.

*You shouldn’t have made that deal, kid.*

“Well, I didn’t exactly have an alternative, did I?”

*I collect the dead. I do not kill them. You know that. There was nothing I could do. The dead to not rise.*

“Sammy did,” he proclaims, angry, tense, barking his words low and deep, gravel and gunfire.

*And that changes everything.*

Surprised, Dean turns to face Death for the first time since Sam died and sees a face full of sorrow.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

*It means Sam is different now.*

Remembering the words the demon spat at him in that graveyard, the mocking question, Dean shakes his head in silent denial and walks away, not caring what the other thinks.

As such, he might imagine the words carried to him on a breeze. *He wasn’t meant to be like you.*

+

He’s twenty-five, sitting in the dank basement of a haunted house, trapped there by cannibalistic ghosts with no-one coming to help him. Dad’s on his own hunt and Sammy’s living the easy life in California.

Both doing what they want, what they love, while Dean Winchester dies, lonely and alone in a random basement, chopped to bits by hungry spirits.

And since there’s nothing to do but wait, Dean turns so his head lies in Death’s lap and squints up at the man in the dark. “So tell me something,” he demands, “You figure out yet why I can see you?”

Hesitation. Death may be Death, but his pokerface sucks. Memory of fifteen years earlier, another moment gone by. Death lied then, feigned ignorance. He won’t today. Dean won’t let him.

*Yes.*

A beat. “Well, what is it?”

*Can’t tell you. Not yet.*

“Man, I’m about to become shish kebab. Now’s the time you say all those things you always wanted to say.”

*You won’t die.*

“How do you know?”

Death raises and eyebrow.

“Yeah. Right. So. Why can I see you?”

*Will you leave it alone if I asked you to?*

“What do you think?”

*I mistook you for mortal, once. But you never were, Dean Winchester. We are of a kind.*

“What the hell?!” Dean calls, sitting up, confusion and disbelief written on his features.

But before he can demand an explanation the door bangs open and Bobby comes storming in, gun at the ready, blood trickling from his temple. He cuts Dean’s bound hands free and throws him a sawed-off. Then they run.

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“Dean?”

“Yeah?”

“Bobby said... he said you were talking to someone. When I was...”

“Maybe.”

“Who was it?”

Dean stops, turns around to look at his brother in the play of light and shadow, cast on them by the trees all around them. “Remember my invisible friend I wanted to introduce you to when you were six?”

Sam hesitates, then shrugs. “I... yeah. What’s that have to do with anything?”

Raising one eyebrow in silent challenge, Dean starts walking again, leaving his brother to puzzle it out.

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A week after he crawled out of hell, shaking, shivering, a mess of madness and blood and memories, Death comes in a rustle of wings that curl around him, wrap him up in warmth and darkness.

“Why am I alive?” he manages, his voice a memory of a whisper.

Three times someone else died in his place. Mommy, Daddy, that nameless man in the parking lot. A million times he slipped away at the last moment, surviving when others would have died. And now he crawled out of hell. He died. And now he lives.

Just like Sammy, who was dead, too, and lives. Sammy, who's like him now, whatever that means.

*Hush, little brother, Death whispers, You live because that is your nature.*

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Years later, while Lilith is burning and pillaging her way in from the West Coast and the last of Azazel's army – leaderless, because Sam never did take over – wreaks havoc in the South, Dean lies on the hood of his baby, staring at the night sky.

In the bar behind him, his brother sits, giving orders and making plans for the last stand of the hunters, united under the banner of the boy king they would once have killed without a thought.

United against hell on earth.

Last week Dean got shot in the heart and he died again. Death didn't take him away.

"I get it now," he tells thin air. "What I am. What I made Sammy when I brought him back. Why I can see you. I get it."

And he does.

*You do?*

Sam who never falters, never gives up, never stops fighting, who can never see Death, who lives still, somehow, among all this dying and shines so brightly. Sam, who lives forever.

"Sam is Hope," he tells the dark figure sitting next to him.

And he, the one who always dies, the one who falls and falls and falls for every friend, every human, every cause. The one who is closer to Death than all others because, in a way, he is Death.

*And you?*

Without moving his mouth, Dean answers, *I am Sacrifice.*

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*You'll die for him, won't you?*

Dean nods, *Always.*

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