

Intro

It took one state for Dean to notice how often he glanced at Cas in the passenger seat, three states to come to terms that this was because Cas was unrealistically attractive, and five states to realize that he was kind of maybe in love with his best friend.

The feeling was sure as hell never expected. It crept up on him in a moment and took him over. Cas had been important in his life since the moment they met their sophomore year of high school, but for some reason it never registered in Dean's head that this was the person who would unravel him completely. All of the not-so-platonic moments are easy to point out, and honestly, Dean couldn't believe he didn't realize sooner.

But because he's a dumbass, it took one huge move to the east coast, two years of college, and one hell of an adventure to finally fucking understand how ridiculously in love he was with Castiel Novak.

Part I

"What are you doing?"

Cas walked into their dorm room at the same time he always did on Wednesdays- noon, right after some dumb art history class. Dean turned his face towards the voice to find him looking confused by the doorway.

"What do you mean?" he grunted back, flipping onto his stomach and burying his face into one of the pillows.

"Well, first of all, you're on my bed. And second, you're clutching onto your phone for dear life." He paused, letting his eyes run over the body on his bed. "Also, you look like a mess."

Dean peaked through the pillows covering his face just enough to send a glare. "Wow Cas, thank you."

"Don't mention it." He nodded once, not cracking a smile, and sat down on the edge of the bed. "What's going on, Dean?"

It was just like Cas to do this. He'd take one look at Dean, notice there was something off, and then try to squeeze the truth from him. In that way, Cas and Sam were much alike- always trying to get Dean to spill his emotions like some pre-teen

girls at a sleepover. The difference was that Cas often succeeded. He wasn't sure exactly why this was. Sometimes he was pretty sure it had to do with Cas's, "I will fucking smite you," face when he got angry. And an angry Cas was something Dean liked to avoid at all costs.

Dean shifted back onto his side to give his friend more room. He stayed quiet for a while, trying to figure out exactly how he should phrase what was on his mind.

"Y'know we haven't visited Sammy in almost a year?"

He nodded, waiting for Dean to continue.

"I don't know, Cas. He hasn't called in two weeks; he doesn't answer when I call him. I get he's probably busy studying with that freaking gigantic head of his, but you'd think he'd take the time to call his own brother."

"You miss him."

"Yes, thank you Captain Obvious."

Cas let his eyes wander over him a second, and if Dean wasn't so used to it already it would've creeped him out. "We could visit him."

"That'd be great, Cas, but it's not like we can just get up and go."

"Why not?"

It was official; Cas must have gotten hit in the head with one of his gigantic textbooks. It was the only reasonable explanation. Cas wasn't exactly someone to suggest spontaneous trips across the country. Fuck, this was the same guy who nearly wore the same thing everyday- the same guy who had a fucking panic attack when Dean persuaded him to skip class one morning. If there was anything Cas wasn't, it was spontaneous. Yet here he was all ready to go, like he wasn't the kind of person who organized his sock drawer.

"I don't exactly have money for a couple of plane tickets to LA."

"We'll take the Impala."

Dean sat up at that, but only to press the back of his hand to Cas's forehead. "Are you feeling alright?"

Cas smacked it away like it was an annoying fly. "I'm serious, Dean. We could do this."

The thought of it turned over in Dean's head. They'd have enough money if each person chipped in and they kept their expenses to a minimum. It'd be just the two of them on the road for a few days- sleeping in sketchy motel rooms, chugging cheap alcohol, and taking part in the fine art of roadside dining. So fuck it, if Cas was finally taking the stick out of his ass, Dean could agree to a little road trip.

Dean looked up at his friend, who was still waiting for an answer.

"I can't believe you just talked me into this."

Cas grinned- really fully grinned- and Dean tried to hide the small smile tugging at his lips. It wasn't often that Cas let a real smile take over his expression. Usually it was a slight lift of lip corners or a lopsided kind-of smirk that inhabited his face. Dean's heart kind-of fluttered at the sight, and he pushed Cas off the bed, forgetting to hide his smile.

"Alright, get packing. This was your idea and I say we leave now. I want to make it to at least Ohio by tonight."

About an hour and a half later, the Impala's trunk was packed with a couple of duffels and a backpack filled with provisions (various snack bars they could find around their room and a few energy drinks.) Cas shut the passenger door and Dean turned on the ignition, now realizing how fucking insane they were. He started to go over a mental checklist in his head, but it seemed everything was a go. They had some food, some music, and an idea of where their first stop was- all the necessities. Dean had looked up a couple of maps and directions to vaguely understand how to get there. But he had to admit, he was pretty thankful for Cas's douche-phone- that thing could give you directions to fucking Antarctica.

They pulled out onto the open road with wide eyes and the music blaring.

Part II

Bells clanged together, signaling Dean and Cas's arrival into the small gas station somewhere outside of town. A big, bearded man sat behind the counter, growling out a greeting and generally just looking like someone pissed in his Frootloops.

"Why are we even here, Dean?"

"Because," he said, picking up one of the dusty hand-baskets, "if we're going on road trip, we're going to do this fucking right."

Cas trailed behind him down the aisle until Dean smirked and gave a quick wink, pointing to the bottom shelf. Cas rolled his eyes, but the blush on his face was evident. Dean grinned a little wider as he pulled up two bottles of the nastiest, cheapest wine, unsaturated pink in color, and placed it in the cart.

"We can't buy that. Even if we could buy that, why would we want to buy that?" He tilted his head to the side, like Dean had actually gone mad.

Dean placed a hand on his shoulder. "No, you can't buy it, but *I* can." With his other hand, he flipped out an I.D. showing his fake birthdate. "And we are on a budget, my friend." He squeezed his shoulder once before letting go, and began his hunt for the next item. It wasn't long before Dean's eyes lit up, motioning Cas to the far-end of the aisle. "Pie." He raised his eyebrows suggestively.

"It looks radioactive."

Dean put a hand to his chest, looking offended. "You are such a Negative Nancy, Cas."

"I'm not negative, I'm realistic. And that pie doesn't look made for human consumption." Cas shook his head as Dean ignored him and placed the pie in the cart anyway. "You're impossible, Dean Winchester."

He laughed, looking back up at his friend. "Yeah, but for some reason you still put up with me."

Cas gave one of his half-smiles. "Just get me some granola bars and water- someone has to eat something edible on this trip." He started walking towards the exit. "I'll be in the car."

When Dean came back to the Impala, he was carrying two huge bags of various unnecessary items. He had a grin on his face as he opened the driver side door, and Cas reached for the bags curiously to inspect their contents.

"I spent five minutes trying to decide between the fifty different kinds of granola bars, so I just got you your favorite." He paused, adding offhandedly, "Or I think it's your favorite- the apple/honey kind. It's all you ate practically every day in high school."

He pulled out the box onto his lap. "I can't believe you remembered that." Dean shrugged and Cas continued his search as the car pulled back onto the interstate. He sifted around until he came upon a carton at the bottom of the bag. "Cigarettes? Dean, we don't even smoke."

"No, but it adds to the romanticism. You can't have a road trip without cigarettes, Cas. All the cool characters in books smoke cigarettes."

"Oh, well then I'm glad we're accosting our lungs for the sake of fictional characters- fictional character that can't get lung cancer, I might add." He tossed the carton back in the bag, but looked less annoyed than Dean anticipated. Smiling, he teased, "Adds to the romanticism"? Sounds like something an English nerd would say."

"Yeah yeah, shut up you freakin' hippie." He gestured towards the granola bars, but Cas just smirked. His eyes lingered on Dean's for a second too long before turning away and staring at the repetitious patterns of the green and yellow trees. Cas made a habit of this- staring at Dean, not out of car windows- since sometime in high school. He always shrugged it off as one of Cas's quirks, ignoring it until he eventually became comfortable with it. That is, if 'comfortable' was a squirming in your stomach or slight dizziness to the head. The feeling never faded, and only intensified with time. At this point, he thought the feeling could best be described as one of those "falling dreams." There's a sudden drop, like the bottom of the universe fell out, and then you're sucked back into reality just as fast. The back of Cas's head was the alarm to this dream, and Dean fumbled with the radio, shaking himself awake. He calmed when the classic rock poured into his ears, and let the music fill the car as he turned the volume up.

"I am not listening to this all the way across the country," Cas warned, breaking the silence between them.

"This music is gold, Cas. It's classic for a reason." He increased the volume even more. "Plus, we are not listening to your obscure indie crap."

"It's funny you call it 'crap,' when you're always stealing my CD's."

Dean glared out of the corner of his eye. "It was one CD, okay. One CD."

Cas dropped it, going back to his earlier activities of staring out the very uninteresting window. "You going to tell Sam?"

"Tell him what?"

"That we're going to arrive at his dorm in a couple of days."

"Dunno'," Dean frowned. He honestly hadn't thought about it. For all he knew, Sam was working on some giant project and wouldn't want Dean to show up in the first place. "You think I should?"

Cas shrugged. "It's not really my decision."

Dean sighed, frustrated, and smacking the steering wheel with his hand. Here they were driving almost three thousand miles, and he hadn't even thought to call up the reason they were on the road. Maybe this whole thing was ridiculous. Maybe they would turn around before nightfall and forget this romanticized bullshit- come to terms with reality and wait until they had enough money for a plane ticket. But with ten hours already in, Dean knew they were in this and there was no turning back.

They came upon a motel somewhere around Cleveland. It was midnight and Cas was curled up against the window, his breath fogging up the glass each time he exhaled. Streetlights danced on puddles in the parking lot, the humid air filled his lungs as Dean stepped out the car. He walked to the other side and knocked on Cas's window until he understood what was happening and joined him in the dark.

Once inside, Dean caught sight of the girl behind the desk and put on his "charmer smile," as Cas liked to call it. She had dark hair and dark eyes, was noticeably large in the chest, and bent over the desk like she knew it.

"One room, two beds," he said smoothly.

Cas noticed the quick downward flick of Dean's eyes as she turned to get a key. He tried to calm himself down, jealousy making his stomach churn. It worked until she gave Dean a wink and whispered something too low for Cas to hear. When Dean mumbled something back, Cas shot her a glare. The fluorescent lights, wrinkled clothes, and lack of sleep must have made Castiel look more intimidating than he thought because as soon as the girl caught his eye, she handed over their key looking upset and a little startled.

Cas claimed the bed closest to the door, and cleaned up after Dean had finished showering (and using all the soap.) Dean was on his back, staring at nothing but popcorn ceilings and shadows, when Cas walked out from the bathroom.

"I thought you'd be asleep." Cas slipped under the covers of his own bed, and pulled them up to his chin despite the heat. He flicked off the lamp situated between the two beds before Dean responded. Headlights and streetlamps filtered through the window curtains.

"So did I."

As Cas's eyes adjusted, he could see the outline of Dean's shape. Dean rubbed a hand over his face, and turned onto his side. They stayed in silence like that for five or ten minutes- Cas had begun to doze off.

"Hey, Cas?" Dean whispered like he was afraid to wake him.

Cas smiled at this, whispering back, "Yes, Dean?" He didn't open his eyes when he said this. His body was too exhausted and his mind was drugged with sleep. He let himself linger on the sound of Dean's voice, drifting in the space between two motel beds.

"What are we doing?"

"Something insane that we're completely unprepared for," he mumbled into his pillow.

"Yeah, I thought so." Dean grinned to himself, shifting until he was comfortable under the thin sheets. They stayed like that, silently thinking to themselves, until sleep overtook Cas. It wasn't as easy for Dean- it never was. He could spend his day running a fucking marathon and still wouldn't be able to fall asleep as easily. He glanced over at Cas- he was passed out and drooling all over his pillow. It would have been cute if it weren't kind of disgusting. But even so, the guy unconsciously making spit bubbles was his best friend, and the only one he'd ever agree to this trip with. Cas was annoying, uptight, and had a bad habit of staring, and Dean wouldn't trade him for anyone else. Because while he was all of these things, they all made him so unbelievably *Cas*- an enigma of contradicting features and personalities that interested Dean from the very beginning. Dean closed his eyes. He could hear the steady pace of breathing coming from the bed next to his, and it was weirdly calming as he finally fell victim to his dreams.

Part III

"Get up, Cas. Time to get on the road." Two hands found Cas's back, nearly pushing him out of the bed. His hair was sticking in different directions, and Dean didn't try to hide the laugh that came up. "Don't even give me that look. This was your idea, remember?" Cas scowled behind the covers, which he had pulled up to his nose, and mumbled something. "What was that?"

"What time is it?" he whined, removing the covers from his face and reaching for his phone before Dean answered. He groaned. "Fuck you, I am not getting up before seven." He buried himself back under the sheets.

"Yes you are." Dean had already packed and changed, and waited with the motel key dangling in his hand. "I'll carry you out if I have to."

"No you won't."

The one eye peeking from under the covers grew wide as Cas realized Dean wasn't joking and the sheets were being pulled away faster than Cas had time to grip them. "Let's go," he said, grabbing beneath his waist and shoulders, and pulling him up bridal-style. Cas flailed in his arms, trying to escape, before giving up and throwing his arms around Dean's neck. His head rested on his chest, and for a moment Dean paused, eyes fixed on Cas. "You feel nice. Warm- I mean."

Cas smirked. "I was before you took me from my sanctuary." Dean huffed a laugh and set him back down on his feet.

"Yeah yeah, go put some clothes on. We've got places to go."

They left the motel with one bad pickup line and another glare shot back from Cas as they headed out the door and left the checkout girl behind. The morning was still humid, but was being burned off fast by the hot sun glaring down the parking lot. Dean cranked down the windows, pushed in a tape, and pulled out onto the next chunk of road they faced in front of them.

Dean tried reaching for something in the back seat somewhere into the eighth hour- grinning when his hands curled around the granola-filled bag from the gas station. "Yes, here it is," he said to himself, gripping something out from the bottom. Cas glanced up from the book he was reading in just enough time to catch the small carton flying at him. "Smoke up!"

"You've got to be kidding me," Cas sighed, turning the carton around in his hands. "Do you even have a lighter?"

Dean dug in his pocket, letting his own cigarette rest between his lips. "Right here," he showed, holding it out in front him. Cas's mouth awkwardly hung open, his eyes fixed on the mouth behind the lighter. "Cas?" His eyes focused back on Dean's and he fumbled to take the lighter. "Take it easy," Dean laughed.

"I hate you." He flicked his thumb until the flame sparked up, lighting his cigarette, and leaning over to Dean to do the same. It was an automatic gesture and one he didn't fully think through until he was already bringing the flame to Dean's lips. Dean was surprised, but didn't flinch as he accepted the light.

"I'm kind of excited to watch you choke over your first cigarette." He smirked, taking the cigarette from his mouth before taking a drag.

"Are you saying it's not yours?"

Dean turned his eyes back to the road. "I used to steal them from my dad every once in a while."

"You never told me that." Cas looked back down at the cigarette and then up at Dean again. "Why didn't you tell me?" His head tilted slightly and his eyebrows pulled together like he was trying to figure Dean out.

He shrugged. "Guess I didn't want Sammy to find out- didn't want him getting into them too." He paused. Cas still stared at him. It made Dean uneasy- the pit of his stomach knotting up- and he hurried to change the subject. Dean turned, sticking out the cigarette between them. "To Romanticism!"

Cas nodded, holding out his cigarette. "Cheers."

Dean waited for the inevitable coughing fit and he wasn't disappointed. Cas took in his first drag- a moment passed- and then he threw his head down, choking. Dean laughed, patting him on the back until the coughing subsided. "You okay?"

"Yeah." His voice was rough, his eyes watering, but he pulled the cigarette back into his lips. He started to get the hang of it. Cas held the cigarette confidently in his fingers, letting the smoke curl around his lips and out the open window.

"That's it," Dean guided, smoothly pushing smoke through his mouth. Cas looked straight ahead, but a smile arched around the cigarette. The sun was directly overhead now, beaming onto Cas's face and hair and those goddamn blue eyes. Dean would have been lying if he said it wasn't hard concentrating on the road. His eyes constantly flicked between the interstate and Cas's profile- his breath catching when he noticed the droop in his eyelids and the way the cigarette lazily dangled from his mouth. There was no escaping the fact that his friend was attractive- more than attractive. A lump in Dean's throat formed as he let this (he wouldn't call it exactly *new*) information wash over him. Cas had always been "cute" or "adorable" in a way that a sleeping cat is adorable. Anytime it escalated to anything more than that, Dean's brain would shut off like some kind of defense mechanism- rationalizing any attraction to natural appreciation for male aesthetics. Dean was attracted to guys- fuck, he was attracted to everyone- so when he stared a little longer than normal when Cas first walked out of their dorm's shower with only a towel slung over his hips- he blamed it on general sexual frustration and not the fact he was attracted to *Cas*. But now as Dean's pupils dilated and his breath shortened, he began to seriously question his past assumptions.

Cas caught his eye; a peculiar smile began to form at the corners of his lips, and Dean tore his gaze back to the road. He quickly pressed the cigarette back into his mouth when Cas didn't look away- taking drag after drag until Cas lost interest and pointed at something out the window.

"We're in Iowa."

"Great. Only five more states to go," Dean replied sarcastically, watching the white "Welcome to Iowa" sign fly by.

He quirked an eyebrow, questioning. "I thought I was the negative one?"

"You are the negative one."

"Realistic," Cas corrected.

"Yeah, well obviously something is broken, because I don't think someone so 'realistic' would suggest this trip in the first place- maybe someone *insane*." He paused, thinking it over. "Actually, no, why *did* you do this? And don't give me any of that 'because you wanted to see Sam' bullshit, because a couple days ago you wouldn't even go off campus to eat because you were too afraid you'd be late to a study session."

Cas hesitated, opening his mouth and then closing it again, trying to figure out the right words to say. "That's it though," he said, slowly. "What you said. I'm tired of being that person, Dean. I'm tired of having my daily planner color-coded and having schedules and plans. For once, I guess, I just want to make it up as I go."

Dean mulled the words over in his head. "So does this mean you're finally going to take that stick out of your ass?"

"I'm trying my best to," he laughed, pushing smoke out of a thin part in his lips as if proving his point, and then laughing again. Dean could feel his face getting hot and Cas smirked like he knew exactly what he was doing to him. "Now when are we stopping to eat? Believe it or not, I actually cannot sustain myself on only granola bars."

Dean raised his eyebrows. "Cas, I think it's time for me to teach you something about the fine art of roadside dining."

"I'm not eating that," Cas protested, eyeing the "Deluxe Bacon Cheeseburger" Dean pointed to on the menu.

"Thought you wanted to live on the wild side?" Dean leaned in closer. "Come on, Cas."

And how could Cas not agree when green eyes peered at him, practically begging him to just try one fucking sandwich? "I'm sending you my hospital bills." He glared as the waitress walked up to take their order.

Dean smirked. Cas wasn't happy about it, but he knew he had won. Dean looked up at the blonde waitress only after she started asking for orders.

"Two Deluxe Bacon Cheeseburgers and a couple of sodas, thanks."

She hesitated before drawling, "Coming right up, boys," giving them an appraising look before sauntering off to the kitchen. Her hips swayed behind her in shorts too tight, but Dean turned his eyes back to Cas whose glare had turned into a look of uneasiness.

"You'll like it, I promise." When Cas didn't say anything, Dean continued. "And if you don't like it, we'll go find a nice vegan roadside restaurant okay."

Cas almost giggled. "I don't think they have those, Dean."

"Well then I guess we'll have to get you a nice, fancy salad from McDonald's." Dean shifted in his seat, leaning closer instinctively, and rested his chin on his palm.

"Oh, wow, you'd do that just for me?" he replied sarcastically, tilting his head and parting his lips in a pretend shocked expression.

"Anything for you, babe," he joked, winking. A blush began to crawl up Cas's face, and Dean wished he had said anything else when the awkward tension settled over them. Dean shifted his eyes down to the tabletop, hit with the realization that he'd just been blatantly flirting with his best friend. Shit, he even used his flirting *voice*- the deeper tone he regularly tried on pretty brunettes with a nice ass. It was probably the reason Castiel didn't respond and why his cheeks were now tinged with pink. Dean mentally cursed himself for finding it attractive.

Before Dean could change the subject and likely make more of an ass of himself, the waitress saved the day- setting down two identical meals and giving a small, "Let me know if you need anything," before turning away.

Cas looked at his burger tentatively. "I'm going to hate you for this," he said, picking up the greasy sandwich.

Dean had already taken a bite, practically moaning around it. "Just trust me." He swallowed. "It's freaking awesome."

He took the burger to his mouth, looking doubtful. Dean watched as he closed his teeth around it, and waited for a reaction.

“So...How is it?”

Cas's face was blank as he swallowed. “That actually wasn't bad.” He went to take another bite. “I think I might like these more than I originally planned.” His eyes were wide, like he was reveling in the sheer power of a Deluxe Bacon Cheeseburger. Dean grinned, holding back his, “I told you so,” and wondering if he could next convince Cas to try a slice of pie.

The car was hot and stuffy, the dark seats burning from being left in the sun. They climbed in and Dean immediately stuck the keys into the ignition, waiting for a cool blast of air. It didn't come. He tried again. Nothing.

“Fuck,” he cursed under his breath.

Cas sighed and gave a face that clearly said, “You have got to be kidding me,” and without speaking, he slid out of the car.

Dean tried a few more times; impatiently turning the keys and smacking the dashboard, but the rumble of the Impala didn't start up. With a final whack to the steering wheel in frustration, Dean moved out of the car. He swung around to the front and opened the hood, staring at it for a minute, before joining Cas on the ledge of the sidewalk.

“Can you fix it?” He looked up, slightly hopeful as Dean sat next to him.

“No.” He shook his head and rubbed at his eyes. Out of all the times it had to break down, it croaked in fucking Sunny Town, USA, with the heat index hotter than Satan's balls. “I have a pretty good idea what's wrong, but I don't have the tools to fix it.” He continued, trying to explain what exactly had happened, with the car jargon he once learned in his dad's Garage. In high school, Dean used to help his dad sometimes in the shop- working odd hours here and there when he wasn't busy, or during his summer breaks. Now he looked over at the car and hated to see such a simple problem without a way to fix it.

Cas stared at him blankly. “Dean, I have absolutely no idea what you're trying to tell me,” he interrupted. “I think I'll just accept my fate. I'm going to die here- melt right in the parking lot. I can feel the water in the air absorbing into my skin. Soon the sun will fry me. And I will be nothing.”

“That was really melodramatic, Cas,” Dean said after a beat. “The sun already getting to your head?” He laughed, bringing up the back of his hand to rest on Cas's forehead. Cas leaned into the touch, and Dean glanced down his neck, noticing the beads of sweat starting to form. It was hot- too hot- too many different *kinds* of hot,

with droplets hanging onto Cas's light tanned skin, and the heat making Dean's brain fuzzy. He wanted to latch onto the neck himself- kiss at his throat and suck down to the collarbone. But instead he removed his hand and turned his eyes away, a strange mixture of panic and lust souring in his stomach.

"Well then how do you suppose we're getting out of here? You aren't exactly coming up with any ideas." He groaned moodily, and flopped down his head onto Dean's shoulder.

Dean stiffened at the contact, but soon relaxed into it. Cas's eyes were closed and his breath was heavy, mumbling on about the unforgiving sun. Dean smiled at that, bringing a hand up to his head and ruffling his hair. "You're cranky."

"Your fault. Shouldn't have woken me up this morning."

"We would have never left if I didn't," Dean said, his voice becoming softer.

Cas nestled into the crook of Dean's neck. "Mmmm, whatever." His lips moved over the collar of his t-shirt, vibrating the skin underneath.

The close proximity was giving Dean a headache. His mind was having a war with itself- Cas's intentions weren't easy to decipher and Dean was having the difficult task of interpreting whether his actions were friendly or a little more so. Abruptly, Dean stood up.

"I'm going back inside. Someone working there should know who to call."

So with curious eyes staring up at him, Dean walked back towards the "Family Roadside Diner" with a guilt settling inside his stomach- unsure of exactly where it came from. He never did make it back inside the diner, however. A young man, wearing torn up jeans, a black t-shirt, and sporting a mullet, approached him before he could get to the door.

"You guys having car trouble?" He pointed to Cas who was now leaning up against the Impala.

Dean nodded, taken aback by the stranger.

"I can give you guys a lift, if you'd like. My friend has a repair shop right inside of town- name's Bobby Singer. He can get you guys all fixed up." When Dean didn't say anything he stuck out his hand. "I'm Ash, by the way."

Part IV

Bobby Singer's garage was a local place right outside Des Moines, Iowa. The man in charge was older with a scruffy grey beard and shirt stained with grease. He told the two boys of his wife, Ellen, and daughter, Jo, who ran a small motel just a couple of blocks up from the garage and insisted they stay there for the night as he had a few more jobs to finish before he could attend to them. Promising the car would be ready in the morning, he then shook each of their hands and pointed them in the direction of the place they would be staying.

The walls were pale orange and the paintings mismatched. Ellen checked them in, to Cas's relief, as the girl with nametag reading "Jo," leaned back against the counter and pretended not to stare at Dean. She was blonde and shyer than the girl at the previous motel, but had a look of determination in her eyes that made it clear what she wanted. Cas ignored her; standing closely behind Dean to give her a hint that guy she was currently drooling over was *his*. He smirked when Dean began to walk away with the keys, not paying any attention in her direction.

"Oh, fuck yes." Dean fell back onto the mattress, his eyes rolling to the back of his head. "You know you're at a quality establishment when they have magic finger beds."

"Magic what?" Cas eyed him warily and settled down his bag on his own bed. He tried to ignore the squirming in his stomach that came from watching his best friend completely blissed out.

"The vibrating bed from the gods, Cas."

He nodded. "Of course it is."

It took a moment for Cas to realize when the vibrating stopped and he only *did* realize when Dean was already halfway to the door. "Why are you going?"

"To see what there is to do around here- maybe a bar or something." He shrugged.

"You might have forgotten I don't have a fake ID like other people."

Dean grinned, heading back over to his bag. "I actually have a solution for that," he laughed, pulling out the two bottles of sugary wine from however many miles ago. He tossed them on the flowery bed cover. "Okay, fine, forget the bar. I'll go get some ice then." Dean left the room with Cas staring after him and a smile curling at his lips.

The ice machine was at the end of the narrow hallway and the noise that came from it was as obnoxious as it was loud. For a moment Dean was legitimately terrified he had begun World War III upon pressing the “start” button. Unfortunately, he was not exploding into a spontaneous fiery death, but instead faced a night alone with his more than attractive best friend, a couple bottles of alcohol, and his brain that was constantly at war with itself. Yeah, this was going to go great.

He hadn’t really thought it through when he suggested the idea, or even when he slipped the bottles into his duffle back at the diner, but Cas had looked up at him with big eyes and a small smile and well, Dean couldn’t back out now. There was something in Dean that lived to see that smile light up on his face- whether it was because of cheap wine or making an A on his Chemistry final. Maybe Dean liked it so much because Cas rarely had anything to be happy *about*. A neglectful family with three preferred older brothers wasn’t exactly the best thing for someone’s self-confidence. But Cas pulled through because he always pulls through, and they got out to the other side of the fucking country- content with each other, but still missing the pieces of themselves they left in another state. Because even though Cas left absent parents and two douchebag brothers, he also left the one brother who always made sure his shoes were tied and his stomach full. And even though Dean left a drunken father, he still couldn’t be there for his baby brother going off to college himself.

If Dean believed in fate, he’d say it was the reason they met, the reason Castiel’s pencil broke the first day of tenth grade, the reason Dean let him borrow one of his, and the reason Castiel decided to sit with a familiar face when lunch time came around. They were both broken, but stitched each other’s wounds crudely in the best way they knew how. And even today, more than five years later, there are still scars they’re trying desperately to fix- but now there’s new tools and new knowledge that wasn’t there before and it’s scary- it’s terrifying.

Just as terrifying in fact as the hand that thought it was a lovely idea to grab him by the shoulder when he was lost in his own thoughts. He jolted around quickly, nearly jumping out of his skin when he saw the Singer’s daughter smiling up at him.

“Didn’t mean to scare you,” she laughed, amusement across her face. “I’m Jo.”

He shook her hand. “Dean.”

“Well, *Dean*, I’m going out with a friend of mine tonight and you’re welcome to join us- your friend too.”

Dean smiled politely, sidestepping around her. “Thanks, but I think me and Cas are going to have a night in. We’re pretty tired from driving.” He began to walk away, digging for the key in his pocket.

"We'll be at the bar across the street if you change your mind! Nine O'clock!" she called after him.

Dean waved and entered back into the motel room- his mind was on more important things than letting a pretty girl down.

While the wine sat in the box of ice, Cas went to take a shower- Dean constantly shifting his eyes from the bathroom door to the worn out carpet. He had to keep his breathing focused when Cas walked out with his hair mussed and his pajamas on; which consisted of an old Led Zeppelin shirt, too big for his skinny frame, and a pair of flannel pants that hung low on his hips. Dean swallowed.

"Dude, is that my shirt?" His voice came out a little shakier than he would have liked.

Cas's face was flushed, pink lighting up his cheekbones. Dean blamed it on the hot shower. "Yes."

"I was looking for that a few weeks ago."

"I know. It has a hole in it. I wasn't going to let you wear a shirt with a hole in it."

"So you just took it?"

"Yes."

Dean stopped, taking in the completely serious expression on Cas's face. "You're a freak sometimes." A grin broke over him then and he was laughing, tension escaping him through the air he exhaled. Cas continued to stand motionless, reddening further. "But I'm okay with that." Dean patted the empty space next to him. "C'mere."

Cas made his way to the bed as Dean leaned over and grabbed the wine off the nightstand. He opened it, twisting off the cap as you do with classy wine as such, and tilted the bottle towards Cas.

"Want the first sip?"

Gripping the bottle tightly, he threw it back on his lips taking a couple of big swallows before handing it back over to Dean. His lips twitched into a half-smile as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "That was disgusting."

Dean sat in awe for a moment before taking a much smaller sip. "You wanna slow down there, Cas?"

"Not particularly." He took back the bottle, giving it another gulp. He closed his eyes and winced at the taste, but that didn't seem to stop him.

"Hey hey hey, leave some for me." Cas leaned back onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling as Dean dragged out the liquid into his throat. "You okay?"

He broke his staring contest with the popcorn ceilings, and turned his head to Dean- his eyes wide and his pupils blown in the dimly lit room. Dean watched the silent face, and nearly lost it when Cas's tongue darted out to wet his lips. But then Cas shifted his eyes, nodded, and reached for the bottle.

It went on like this until there was nothing left. Cas had loosed up more with every sip, laughing at trivial things and edging closer and closer towards Dean. He'd let their fingers brush over slowly as they'd pass the bottle back and forth, and Dean would sigh shakily as Cas leaned over and whispered something stupid in his ear.

Dean watched this Castiel through a slightly dizzy haze. He wasn't as drunk as the other, but had a nice buzz that allowed his eyes to linger on what he wouldn't let himself sober- like the hipbones poking out of too-loose pants and half-closed eyes as Cas laid himself out on top of the sheets. Cas smiled up lazily, and Dean's focus shifted to the full lips before glancing back to the hint of blue hidden under heavy eyelids. He tugged at Dean's t-shirt, pulling him down onto the motel mattress beside him.

"Dean," Cas breathed like he was just now realizing the proximity of their bodies. Dean could smell the alcohol on his breath and feel the weight of his stare sinking into him. He was close- his mouth and nose, his hips and collarbones and neck- waiting for the spark in the atmosphere that would pull them together. And in a way, they've really *always* been waiting for something to ignite; waiting for the moment their rapid pulse rates made sense, and the right time to act on impulses created by stuttered heartbeats. Waiting was a constant, always ticking back the hands of the clock without Dean ever noticing. And now the clock was stopped, and he was stuck- teetering on an edge and wondering if he should take the jump. In the end, Dean can't remember who took the first step, but he's pretty sure they jumped off together holding hands.

Dean moved closer and Cas edged in a little more, his eyes fluttered down to Cas's slightly parted lips, and then those lips were on his and Dean's head was screaming. It was soft at first. They were exploring new territory and playing it safe. Their mouths ran lightly over each other, Dean catching Cas's bottom lip in his own, making him suck in a quick breath. He could feel Cas's fingers coming to rest on his hips and a flick of a tongue trying to break through the slip of his mouth.

Dean tried to say something, but the words were caught in his throat and jumbled in his head- his brain malfunctioning from sensory overload. He decided to keep quiet, not trusting the embarrassing things he might mumble into Cas's mouth if given the chance.

The grip on Dean's hip tightened as he opened himself to Cas, letting their tongues finally meet. Everything was beginning to feel hot now; the air, the sheets, the hands on his skin. Cas was leaning in deeper, and Dean pushed back, rolling himself on top while keeping their mouths in motion. A whine emanated from the body beneath him as Dean straddled his hips. Hands were flying to the back of his head, pulling him harder into Cas's mouth, and making it difficult to breathe. He began to feel Cas harden, and Dean increased the friction on instinct, rubbing against the thin material of flannel pants. But now his head was spinning- Cas refusing to let him take a breath- and he was pulling away and opening his eyes, watching Cas writhe beneath him. His face was flushed and his mind wrecked, drunk off his ass too, and Dean had to stop.

Dean slowly began to move back, his eyes wide and breath quickening. He was careful not to touch Cas as he sat himself on the far side of the bed, rapidly trying to think up an excuse. "I've gotta go."

"What?" Cas leaned himself on his elbow, staring up at Dean. "Where?" The question came out soft and confused, Cas's eyebrows puling together. Dean swallowed, keeping his gaze on the floor as he stood up.

"I've got a date with the girl that works here- at the bar across the street." Dean paused, chancing a quick look back. "She invited you too. If you want to come, I mean."

Cas didn't say anything for a while. He shook his head slowly, opening and closing his mouth every now and then like he was going to say something, but decided against it. He shifted his eyes away and rolled onto his back, before making a sound. "Go."

"Cas, I-"

"I said go, Dean."

All emotion left Cas's voice and expression, so that only a gravelly tone and slight slur of words were heard through the dense air. The emotionless persona was one Dean had seen him put on at rare occasion- always hiding something away and turning himself on to self-destructive mode. It happened when his dad left without a word and when his only decent brother, Gabriel, went off to college- leaving him with a mom who forgot to pay the bills and feed the kids. But every time something *did* happen, Dean was there. Even if it meant spending hours just to listen to each other breathe, he'd be there the second he realized something was wrong. But now

was different, because all Dean wanted to do was escape the stuffy room and suffocating air. He couldn't help if he was the problem.

Dean huffed a sigh, turned his back, and left.

The bar was loud. Music played on large speakers and the conversations of a dozen people too many were being held in the packed room- each one screaming to be heard over the music. He filtered the room for Jo, trying to find her through the hazy smoke and dim lights. But after a minute, he gave up, making his way to one of the barstools in the back.

"Need a drink?"

Dean gazed up at the bartender, shifting his eyes away when they were met with a pair of bright blue. He came here for a distraction, and this wasn't helping. The man was handsome with hair slightly lighter than Cas's and a set of pink lips that had nothing on his when they were bitten and full. There was a dull ache in his chest as his thoughts travelled back to his friend, but he shook himself out of it, trying to concentrate on now and the present and the absolutely gorgeous guy leaning over the counter of the bar. "Not right now, thanks," he said smoothly, giving a grin even as he mentally winced at the thought of more alcohol piled on top of sickly sweet wine.

"Well let me know if you need anything at all." He winked and went off to take someone else's order.

He tried to concentrate on the patterns in the wooden counter, the pain left by his fingernails digging into his palm, anything that was a distraction. He turned in his seat to look at the crowd, swimming in the low light and sweaty and drunk, they twisted their bodies around each other without a hesitation. He watched this for a while, almost hypnotized by the waves of arms and hips, until he caught sight of a flash of blonde hair making its way towards him.

"Hey, you made it!" She said over the noise, touching his arm lightly. Dean physically stopped himself from shrinking back, and gave the classic 'Dean Winchester Smile.'

"Yeah, 'guess I couldn't stop myself from going out with a pretty girl."

She returned his smile, moving in a little closer. "Where's your friend?"

"Where's yours?" Dean said it automatically, noticing there was no other girl tethered to Jo's side or watching from a distance.

Jo shot him a suspicious eye, raising her eyebrows at the avoidance of the question. "She went home already- didn't think either of you guys would show."

Dean nodded. "He's sleeping," answering her silent question. "He sleeps a lot actually; never wants to leave his bed in the morning, I always have to drag him out." Dean thinks back on ruffled hair and eyes squeezed shut to block out the sun- and shit, this 'distraction' thing wasn't working out as well as he'd hoped.

"Sounds like you two are close," she laughed amused and now raking her eyes over Dean's chest. Fingers curled around Dean's wrist and Jo gave a soft tug. "So you want to dance or not?"

Dean answered by standing up and following her out to the dance floor, losing themselves in a crowd of people and blaring music. She hooked her skinny arms around his neck; Dean following by putting his hands at her waist as the beat pounded around them. He drifted his gaze down, trying to take in all the soft curves of her body- trying to remember the way a girl's skin felt and cleavage looked. Jo caught him staring and took it as a sign to move in closer, stroking her fingers on the back of his neck, keeping with the rhythm. Their faces were inches away, her breath hot and mouth inviting, but all Dean could think of was how the fingers on his neck weren't long like Cas's and the waist he was holding didn't feel the same as when he rolled Cas over onto that motel bed not too long ago.

Her lips finally brushed his and he dived in without thinking, desperate to get the feeling of Cas off of his skin and out of his head. It had been too much before, his body only stopping when his mind had caught up, and he panicked. He panicked because he was a huge baby that couldn't deal being in love with his best friend; He panicked because Cas was drunk and out of his mind; And he fucking panicked because when your name is Dean Winchester, the good things don't last.

Their tongues rolled on hypnotically. Dean shut his eyes harder than normal and gave up- letting the blue eyes occupy his brain. His mouth was in automatic and his thoughts were in overdrive. She was right up against him, her breasts pushing into his chest, but the only thing Dean could think of was how he preferred the hard line of Castiel's cock up against his thigh. The thought was enough to make him loosen his grip around Jo's waist and lose the rhythm of his tongue.

"I'm sorry," he breathed. "I can't do this." He pulled away with an apologetic look on his face.

"What's wrong?" She asked it with genuine concern and it made Dean feel even shittier about what he was about to do; which was leave a pretty, confused girl on the dance floor. "Is this about your friend?" Okay, maybe not as confused as he thought.

"Uh- I- How did-?"

She cut him off with a small, understand laugh, and began to remove her arms from around his neck. "He looked very territorial when you guys were booking your room." She laughed again. "I assumed, especially after you declined the invitation, but then you showed up here so I wasn't so sure."

Dean nodded, trying to process everything she'd just said. Apparently whatever he and Cas had was noticeable to some degree, at least on Cas's part. And according to Jo, Cas was...territorial?

"Territorial?" He asked, making sure he'd heard right.

"Practically leapt on you when he realized I was staring. It was kind of adorable really." She smiled, patting his shoulder. "He likes you."

"Yeah," Dean sighed, rubbing a hand over his face, and thanking the darkness of the room for hiding the blush creeping up over his cheeks. "Look, I need to go. I'm sorry about," he gestured between them, "this."

"Don't worry about it." She pushed at his shoulder. "Now go get 'em."

He left the bar with a clearer head (ironically), part relieved and part terrified. Because even though he understood himself a little bit more, it only made him realize just how badly he fucked everything up.

He half-walked, half-ran back to the motel, a little out of breath as he turned the key to the door- quiet, crossing his fingers that Cas was asleep- and if he wasn't, well, Dean would cross that bridge when he got there.

Unfortunately, there *was* that bridge and he got there sooner than expected. All Dean had wanted to do was coast along the interstate, slipping into bed quietly and pushing away the problems until morning, but one look at Cas and he could see that wasn't an option. He took in the limp form on the bed, nursing the second bottle of alcohol, and stretching his neck up to see Dean as he closed the motel door behind him. Fuck, this was going to be a bumpy bridge.

"Have a nice fuck?" His voice was gravelly and came out in a humorless laugh.

Dean had a quick comeback at the tip of his tongue, but decided against it- keeping his mouth quiet even when Cas began to pull a smug grin. "We've got to get up early tomorrow, Cas. Come one, let's go to bed, ok?" Blue eyes stared at him for a

moment and Dean hoped the Voice of Reason was working, but that hope soon shattered when Cas burst out in a scratchy laugh, sitting up a little straighter, and taking another sip.

“Why’re n’t you spending the night with that girl? That’s what you wanted wasn’t it?” he slurred, messily, falling back down on his back again. His lips kept moving; his gaze at the ceiling, but Dean couldn’t hear him- like a wave of static was roaring through his ears.

It was funny how the most composed people were the ones that broke apart the hardest. Pale limbs were tangled up in sheets, a bottle barely holding onto the tips of his fingers, and a wrecked voice to bring it all together. He’d seen Cas tipsy before, drunk before too, but always under happy and shy pretenses, always smiling and talking and talking and sitting a little closer to Dean than usual, but neither of them ever moving away because it was always warm and nice and not like how it was now. Now was new and different, cold and harsh, and it made Dean’s stomach tighten.

So many years they’d spent together and Dean was just now beginning to realize how much he didn’t know- about Cas, about himself, about how the world seemed to fuck everything over. He hated it- being clueless and lost in the dark. He hated watching Cas pathetically drink and drink down syrupy liquid, drowning down thoughts and throwing up words- and more than that in a couple of hours.

“I hate you so much, Dean Winchester,” he sighed, quirking the corner of his lip. “Y’know that?” His speech was slowing, the bottle becoming looser in his grip. “You were always so stupid.”

Dean swallowed. The words weren’t completely true, but they still dug at Dean’s skin. He began to edge in cautiously, walking up to Cas’s bedside, as his eyelids began to droop lazily. “Yeah, I know,” Dean whispered, gently removing the half-empty bottle from his hand. “I know.”

Part V

He woke up sometime in the early morning to the sound of retching on the other side of the bathroom door. The sun hadn’t peeked through the curtains yet, and Dean groaned when he glanced at the time on the clock. Cas, that stupid bastard.

Dean rolled out of the bed bleary eyed, and padded over to the bathroom door; knocking a couple of times before saying anything.

“Hey Cas, you need me to get you anything?”

The other side of the door was quiet for a moment before Cas answered, hoarse and rough. "Please leave me alone, Dean." He flushed the toilet again, and Dean peered through the small, open crack, watching as he rested his head on the seat.

"I could get you some—"

"*Dean*, I do not want to speak to you right now."

He nodded even though Cas couldn't see, and walked back to his bed with a desperate wish for time machines and redo buttons.

The morning, to put it delicately, sucked. Cas slept like a rock with only a tuft of dark hair peeking out from the covers. And Dean spent an entire hour just wondering if he should go ahead wake him up. But because it was very likely Cas still did not wish to speak to him (assuming even *some* of his memories were intact) and it was also very likely that he would like to sleep off the hangover in a bed instead of a moving vehicle, Dean set off to find some breakfast.

A couple of blocks away, he stopped in a Waffle House and ordered a couple of eggs and coffee to-go and was about to leave when he spotted the flash of blonde hair in the corner of the room. She glanced up and smiled, waving him over like they hadn't almost fucked last night.

"Hey, how'd things go with your friend?" she called.

Dean walked up to where she was occupying a booth alone and forking hash browns into her mouth, and there was a genuine interest in her face that made Dean feel like they'd been friends for longer than just twenty-four hours. "Well, uh, he's not talking to me."

She shook her head like she was disappointed in Dean. "Oh boy, what'd you do?"

"I kind of, uh," he paused, thinking of the right words. "We were kissing and I had a bit of a 'oh god, I really want to fuck my best friend' panic attack. You ever get one of those?" He sipped at his coffee, wondering why it was so easy talk about these things to someone he'd never met before. And he guessed that was exactly it. Strangers floated in and out, leaving just as quickly as they came- a gust of wind in the big adventure. And sometimes those gusts of wind were damn important, carrying you on different trails and sweeping you in another direction, helping you find your way along the road. The cool part about it too, was that these strangers were just people, insignificant faces in a world of seven billion, each with their own

problems and roads to follow- oblivious to their affect on the people they meet and the things they say. He guessed that was why it was so easy to talk to Jo.

She was laughing, nodding her head and grinning. "Unfortunately, I know that feelings all too well." She took a bite of toast and swallowed. "It wasn't while we were making out though," she laughed. "Where are you guys headed?"

"California. We're going to go see my brother."

"Well you've still got a few states to make it up to him." She winked.

Dean grimaced, staring down at his coffee that was beginning to get into the lukewarm phase. "Yeah, I hope so."

"You will," she assured. "I just have a feeling." Her genuine smile was infectious and Dean half-smiled as she threw back some orange juice. "Your car is ready, by the way. It's in the shop. They towed it back and everything."

"Thanks." He glanced at his watch and then back at the to-go boxes in his hands. "I'd better go get this to Cas before it gets cold." Dean began to walk away, but he turned his head back when he was almost at the door. "I'm glad I met you, Jo. Really."

"Likewise, Winchester. Good luck!"

She gave him a salute and then Dean was out the door, the bells jingling behind him.

Cas was stirring awake when Dean came through the door. His eyes were still half-closed, fumbling for his phone and sitting up just enough to see what Dean was carrying.

"I got us some breakfast, if you want any." He placed the to-go boxes on the small table, waiting to see if Cas would even acknowledge him at all.

He avoided Dean's eyes and nodded, letting out a small yawn and pushing himself out of the bed like it was the most physically daunting task one could perform. He sat down at the table, mumbled a "thanks," and didn't speak again for the entire morning.

After paying Bobby, who flickered a curious glance between the two of them, and saying goodbye to Ash, who insisted on hugging them both despite Cas's obvious discomfort, they finally drove out of there.

Dean had been ready to get back on the road- ready to feel the gravel traveling underneath his baby's tires- ready to feel movement and motion and the sense of accomplishment over every mile passed. There was a constant, a target they were shooting for, and Dean liked the easiness of it. He liked the road signs and the straight stretch of the interstate, only needing a map to get there. It was this complete opposite reality to everything that Cas was- sharp turns and detours- and Dean didn't have any idea where he was going or even *what* he was going to see when he got there. Cas had turned into this unmarked spot at the end of the map and Dean was traveling on instinct.

He cranked up the radio for the first hour of the trip, trying to drown out the uncomfortable silence that took over the car. But that only worked until the first love song came on and fucking Air Supply blasted through the car unexpectedly. Dean had hurriedly fiddled with the knobs of the radio and Cas didn't move an inch, keeping a distant stare out the window. It went on like this for hours, both quiet and their eyes refusing to meet each other. Cas switched back and forth between staring dazedly out the window and flipping pages in one of the thick books Dean had made fun of him for bringing when they'd first left campus. And Dean kept his mind on full speed, tapping at the steering wheel with his fingers, and rolling down the window to light another cigarette.

He couldn't decide if it was for better or worse to have a clusterfuck of thoughts distracting him from the deafening quiet. It was like an itching at his skin- annoying and encompassing. He'd thought after being friends with someone for over five years that he'd know everything about them- their habits and hobbies and when they were faking a smile. And he *did* know those things, but they were never *everything*. He knew Cas liked the apple/honey granola bars and different colored post-it notes. He knew how he'd bite his lip when he got nervous and how he'd run his hands through his hair when he was frustrated. He knew the freckles on his skin, the finger he was double-jointed in, every which way his hair could look upon waking up, and yet everything now felt clouded and fuzzy and confusing. He thought he knew every side, facet, and quirk to Cas and was now figuring out he had a lot more to learn. People were goddamn complicated.

The sound of AC/DC coming from his pocket pulled him out of his thoughts, and he slid his phone out of his jeans, jabbing the talk button without checking the caller ID.

"Yeah?"

"Whoa, I know I haven't been calling, but you don't have to sound so angry, Dean."

"Sammy?" He thought he saw Cas's eyes flicker to him in interest, but as soon as Dean glanced over, he had already absorbed back into the same book he'd been reading.

“...Yeah. Everything okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, fine,” he answered quickly knowing Sam wouldn’t believe him, but would hopefully still get the hint to drop it. “What’ve you been up to? Busy?”

“That’s what I was calling about actually. I’ve been working on a really big project- I might be getting an internship soon too- so I’m sorry I haven’t really been able to y’know, talk lately.”

Dean nodded, quiet for a moment. “I know you’re filling that big head of yours. Don’t be sorry, I’m proud of you, Sammy.” He could hear Sam huff a sigh that sounded like relief.

“Thanks, Dean.” There was a pause before he continued. “I miss you- Cas, too. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you guys.”

“Well, I have good news there.” And Dean was laughing, forgetting the current circumstances- like the fact that Cas still might not be talking to him by the time they hit California, and he’d have to awkwardly skirt around all the questions Sam would no doubt be asking. “If nothing goes wrong, I’ll be seeing you in a couple of days.”

“*What?*” And Dean could practically see his little brother’s shocked face with his stupid eyes bugging out of his head. “You had enough money saved for a plane ticket?”

“Not exactly. We’re driving.”

“We? As in you and Cas? *Driving?*”

“Yep.”

“Dean, you’re my brother, and I love you, but you are fucking insane.”

“It was *his* idea.”

“You—wait what?” For a kid going to law school, Sam was damn stupid sometimes. “Cas? Color-Coded-Planner-Cas?”

“That’s the one.”

“Wow,” Sam sighed, amused. “Where are you guys?”

“Uh, somewhere in fucking Nebraska.”

“Right. Well, I need to go. I guess I’ll...see you guys soon then? Tell Cas I said, hey.”

“I will.” He knew it was a lie after it left his mouth. “Later, Sam.”

The silence in the car seemed to press down on him even more after he hung up. Cas still hadn’t spoken a word, and only moved when turning a page periodically. It was frustrating to say the least. The hours went by and the inside of the car changed just about as much as the continuous stretch of flat land and cornfields on the outside. The most exciting it got was stopping at one of the sketchiest gas stations of the mid-west. He was pretty sure he and Cas were the only ones with all of their teeth in the general surrounding area, and he high-tailed it out of there as soon as his baby’s tank was full. The sky had begun to dim after that. It seemed that every time the sun sank a little lower so did Dean’s mood- tired, frustrated, his mind numb without thoughts to distract him any longer. That was the worst time he’d ever spent in that car. Everything sucked and it was his entire fault. He fucked it up before anything even began- but he was used to that- he supposed it was inevitable.

And when he thought nothing could get any worse, it started fucking raining like this was some goddamn Disney movie and the water that drizzled was added for comedic effect. He kept on for thirty minutes before giving up and calling it an early night, exiting at Denver to find shelter.

It had been twelve hours since the last time Cas spoke.

“One room, please.” Dean flipped through his wallet, shivering from the cold air-conditioning conveniently placed right fucking above him.

“You boys are lucky. I’ve got one room left.” And the old, balding man slid over the last pair of keys with a smirk on his face.

Great. It was storming, there was one room left; all Dean needed was this room to be fucking haunted and it’d take the icing on the cake.

But when he opened the door, he found something even worse than a ghost infestation or a monster in the closet. A single queen bed was placed in the middle of the room, and Dean really should have known that this would happen. Something twisted in his gut, images of Cas sprawled out on the bed were entering his mind, but he shook them off quickly and stepped inside.

He placed his bag on the floor, and without looking up offered, “Take the bed. I don’t mind sleeping on the floor.”

"You don't seem to mind sleeping on a lot of unfamiliar places."

Dean shot his head around quickly, not expecting Cas's voice- or snarky comment. He was leaning back on the bed, grinning at his own words, and the part of Dean's brain labeled 'appropriate comebacks' shutdown.

"Just because I was drunk last night, doesn't mean I don't remember some things, Dean. So you can stop pretending like last night didn't happen now."

The glare Cas set on him made Dean feel naked, like his skin was transparent, and guilt was seeping into his bones. "I wasn't-"

"Don't lie to me, Dean," he interrupted, lifting himself off the mattress. "I am here right now because of you. I suggested this trip because of you. I fucking *moved* across the country because of you. And do you know what you did?" His voice got quieter. "You left."

Cas was close now; his breath hot and angry on Dean's face. Dean swallowed. His body was still in shock, words were caught in the back of his throat, and it took all of his energy just to keep his breathing even.

"Take the bed, Dean. I won't be needing it tonight." He began to walk away, picking up the keys Dean had dropped on the nightstand, and then turning around. "I'm sure there are plenty of people who would love to invite me back to their room tonight."

Anger flared up in Dean at those words, white and hot. The wheels began turning in his head again, his body thawing, and lips moving before Cas could get to the door. "Really, Cas? Revenge sex?"

"Don't flatter yourself. I can have sex for whatever reason I want to, and I don't see why you would care."

"*I didn't have sex with her, Cas!*" It finally tore through his throat as Cas's hand hit the doorknob. "We danced and kissed, but I broke it off as soon as I realized what a fucking idiot I am."

Cas faced Dean, his eyebrows pulled together as he searched his face like he was trying to find out the truth through Dean's expression.

"And I know I'm pretty freaking slow at these things, and I'm a goddamn coward, but fuck if I've ever felt so wrong with someone else." He sighed, letting out a long breath before continuing slower. "No one feels right like you do, Cas. Even before this stupid trip, there was always this *thing* with you. And I guess I didn't

realize it or I never let myself realize it, but either way I've been lying to myself for a long time."

Cas's head tilted in the way that was all too familiar. It made Dean's stomach hurt, like every second Cas didn't speak was another second closer he was to throwing up. But eventually there was a small step forward and lips began to move and Dean braced himself for the worst.

"You're telling the truth."

And it wasn't a question more than it was a statement of fact, but Dean nodded his head anyway. "I understand if you still want to go."

A small grin perked up at the corner of Cas's lips. "No. I think I'd rather stay."

Dean must have looked speechless- and he was- because Cas was softly laughing now, and moving in a little closer. It wasn't helping the twist in his stomach, or the twist that now travelled to his tongue. When Dean did find his words, they were jumbled up and messy, but Cas got the message- *I'd rather you stay, too.*

So many things happened in the next second that Dean could only remember broken pieces and fragments: the scrape of stubble on his skin, pale lips crashing into his, hands clinging and pushing until Dean was flat on the bed staring up at blue. And then he was dragging Cas back down into his mouth, slower, enjoying every bit of tongue and soft nip of teeth.

"Dean."

The vibrations of his name prickled at lips and were breathed into his skin. It was too much and not enough and just right, and Dean's head was spinning. He pressed another quick kiss to the corner of Cas's mouth before switching their positions, pinning Cas beneath him. Everything was so much different now. The sour taste of strawberries was gone and they lingered at every touch, fully aware of every small movement they made.

Dean dragged his lips down Cas's chin and settled himself on the underside of his neck, biting and pulling. He heard Cas gasp beneath him and took it as a sign to keep moving, descending further and sinking deeper, stopping just at the collarbone to suck a mark onto his skin. The flush that formed along his neck made Dean reach up for another kiss to muffle his groan into Cas's mouth. He felt hands all around him, ruffling his hair and traveling across his back. There was a tugging at his shirt then. In one hand the materiel was being impatiently twisted into Cas's fist, and the other pulled at the hem- letting his fingers brush against Dean's stomach.

He pulled the shirt off and threw the annoying piece of clothing somewhere behind him, closely followed by Cas's button-down. Dean's fingers fumbled on the buttons until Cas's hands were there with his own, eager to help in the process of getting each other naked as quick as possible.

"Wow."

Dean wasn't aware he'd said that aloud until Cas gave a shy smile in return, hooking his hands around the back of Dean's neck. "You've seen me without a shirt on before, Dean," he reminded.

"Not like this."

And as if to prove his point, he swooped his mouth down onto Cas's chest, dragging teeth over one of his nipples as his hands dug into Cas's hips. Cas squirmed underneath him, both boys desperately seeking friction. They began grinding into each other slow and hard, their bodies moving in synch, and Dean's lips tracing Cas's ribcage. He liked the way each individual bone felt pressed against his lips- like he was breathing in life, and warmth, and everything that built Cas into, well, *Cas*. It was a weird feeling, a good feeling, a feeling that sprang from his gut and wrapped around his insides- the idea and physical reality of Castiel arching into him, asking Dean to wrap themselves together with the strings that presently closed off his lungs. The air was thinner here; Dean had to concentrate on each breath as he slid a thumb under Cas's waistband, looking up and waiting for permission. Cas nodded, and Dean slid down his jeans. His head was pounding.

They were both naked. Staring. Everything in Dean felt vulnerable and fragile. But that was okay because Cas was too, and he couldn't think of a better way to break apart than by each other's hands.

So he took Cas's fingers in his own and leant down to press their lips together for the hundredth time that night, letting their tongues flow together as they got used to the sensation of skin on skin. Dean let his hand stroke down Cas's chest, finally gripping the throbbing erection pressed between them. Cas moaned at the touch, and it was all Dean needed for reassurance as he let his fingers move over Cas's cock.

He took in this new side to Cas- the different faces becoming less scary now and more like an exciting puzzle. This Cas was a lot more impatient; demanding in his hips and shy in his voice. He was messy, out of control, frantically gripping the bed sheets or onto Dean's neck. His face flushed as he mumbled Dean's name along with a number of indecipherable things, and Dean nudged beneath his jaw, pressing a sloppy kiss there.

"I want--," he broke off panting, and before Dean could figure out just what he wanted, a firm hand slipped around his cock.

“Shit, Cas.” Cas gave a small smirk like he was proud of himself, but it wasn’t there for long. Dean wiped it clean off his face- removing Cas’s hand and replacing it with his own, gripping both of their dicks at once.

A whine escaped Cas’s throat and Dean was biting into lower lip. They picked up the pace, Dean’s fingers moving faster and their hips grinding closer. A few more pulls- a few more flicks of the wrist sliding their cocks together- and Dean knew he’d be done.

“I never thought-“ Cas was mumbling again as Dean sucked at his pulse point, but those three words were clear.

“Yeah, me either.” He sighed against his neck before biting down. And Cas was gone.

There was a quick inhale of breath, a stutter of hips, and then Dean’s fingers were being covered with come. Cas’s head was tilted back and he made a soft ‘o’ with his lips. The sight made Dean’s mouth grow dry and he was soon coming just as hard between their stomachs.

They stayed pressed together, Dean leaning slightly over him, for a while- catching their breath and steadying their heads. When the dizziness had faded, Dean brought his hand up to his lips and licked off a stripe of come, grinning when Cas’s eyes widened.

“I wouldn’t do that unless you’re up for a round two, Dean Winchester.” Cas eyed him hungrily.

“Mmm, maybe in the morning.” Dean rolled off the bed, smiling to himself, as he headed off towards the bathroom- bringing back with him a wet washcloth and sliding back into bed next to him.

He wiped them off the best he could- Cas’s eyes on him the whole time. Dean finally glanced up as he threw the washcloth on the floor, and swallowed as he took in the look on Cas’s face. In that moment they were the only two people in the world, glassy-eyed and silent- disbelieving the present and hoping for all the things in the future.

Cas curled himself into Dean, throwing an arm over his waist and burying himself into the crook of Dean’s neck; and Dean gently pulled the covers over them, pressing his lips to Cas’s temple.

“You make me very happy.” His voice was sleepy and muffled against the spot where shoulder met neck. He sighed, content.

“Yeah, well, you make me confused and frustrated, and downright *angry* when you organize my desk without telling me, but I guess somewhere under all of that you make me happy too.”

He could feel a smile against his skin. “Goodnight, Dean.”

“Night, Cas.”

It took a little longer for Dean to fall asleep. He listened to the steady rise and fall of breathing, thinking about Cas and years spent wasted, thinking about how a few days ago he’d never had thought he’d end up here- exhausted in his best friend’s arms after coming all over each other. But as the land changed, so did they; every mile and motel bed marking another point in their lives with each other. There was no going back now because there was only the road ahead, and for once Dean wasn’t scared. They had a long trip to go, longer than driving across the United States, and it was only just beginning. Dean didn’t have a map or any clue of what he’d encounter on the way, but he knew he and Cas would figure it out- they were good at that. After all, they were making it up as they go.

Part VI

If this was a G rated movie he’d wake up to the sound of birds chirping outside his window or sunlight caressing his face, but this was not a G rated movie. Although he did wake up to something equally as awesome in his opinion- Cas wrapped around him with the line of a hard cock pressed against his thigh. He tried shifting away at first to give Cas some space, but his arms just clung tighter. Dean inwardly groaned at the situation, his own dick getting half-hard just thinking about it.

He was in the middle of extricating Cas’s hands from around his waist when his eyes fluttered open. There was a moment of confusion and haziness at first- Cas still getting his bearings of where he was and realizing the night before hadn’t been a dream. Cas stared at Dean before glancing down between them, and grinned back up at him lazily when he noticed they were both hard now.

“You look like you’re up for round two,” Cas observed, his voice thick with sleep

Dean had stopped pulling away, giving in to being tangled up in Cas’s limbs. “I never thought you the one for morning sex.”

“I am always one for any sex.”

And he said it so seriously, that Dean had to close his eyes for a second and let out a laugh- thanking Fate, and the moon and stars, and just his legs for carrying

him to the desk next to Cas's that day they'd met. He planted a kiss on his forehead, still laughing. "I'm still shocked you'd suggest physical activity this early."

Cas answered by pressing a quick kiss to his shoulder before sliding down the length of his chest; and Dean watched as the black tuft of hair disappeared under the covers. The wet ring of lips that came around his cock made him gasp, and he could feel Cas smirking beneath the sheets. His hands automatically grabbed for the dark hair atop the head that was now bobbing up and down, swirling his tongue, and generally turning Dean into a pile of goo. Dean gave up on trying to keep his hips steady, Cas taking him, letting him fuck up into his mouth. It didn't take long for him to come. Cas licked along the underside of his cock and Dean had lost it, biting down on his lip as he came hard and fast.

Blue eyes peeked from under the covers and finally Cas came up, an innocent look on his face, but with red cheeks and swollen lips. Dean swiped at the corner of Cas's lip with his thumb; bringing it to his mouth and sucking off his own come, loving the way Cas's eyes widened and breath quickened. He then remembered that Cas's hardness was what had woken him up in the first place, and he drug a hand down to remedy that.

Cas stopped him though, grabbing his wrist. "I think we both need to shower."

Dean smiled. The future looked good.

Where as the day before had been the christened the worst day in the Impala, this day was going down in history as the best. The windows were rolled down, sunlight and air poured in, and for the first time in a couple of days Dean could breathe. There was a weight that had been lifted, a pressure that left his mind. He was so fucking happy he even let Cas push in one of his stupid mix CD's- one with obscure artists and acoustic tones that Dean definitely did *not* steal before.

They talked about everything, making up for the silence before. They talked about Sam, and school, and how Cas's hair was getting long and thick, but that was okay because Dean liked to grab at it when they kissed. They talked about the book Cas was reading, and about how Dean needed to stop reaching for the cigarettes because Cas was worried about his health. Dean shrugged when Cas pulled the carton away and laughed when he instead took one out himself and asked for the lighter. He only agreed because Cas looked sexy as hell with the paper between his pale lips and smoke curling out his mouth. It made Dean's eyes dilate and face flush each time the cigarette was brought to and from Cas's lips. And to make it worse, he knew it too, teasing him with long pulls and sidelong glances.

They ended up throwing the rest of the carton away at the next stop- partly for their lungs, but more so Dean wouldn't crash the car.

At some point, between all of the flirting and teasing, hands became involved, and it was like playing the 'see how much Dean Winchester can get groped before driving off the road' game.

"Cas, I'm trying to drive- aahh." Cas palmed at his crotch, leaning in to kiss him on the cheek. Dean let out a long breath, and tried to keep his eyes focused on the road. "Mm, not now."

He dragged his lips to his neck. "Please?" The stubble scraping against his skin was enough for Dean to consider it and five minutes later the Impala was parked on the side of the interstate.

It went on like this for the rest of the time spent in that car: A blowjob on the Utah-Colorado border, hardcore grinding at a deserted rest stop, Cas leaving hickies on his collarbone when the traffic was bad (and when it wasn't.) He added it to his mental list of new discoveries- Cas liked sex. A lot. And Dean was in no way opposed.

"Mmm, Cas, we'll never get to California like this."

Dean said it as he unbuttoned Cas's jeans in the backseat. His only reply was a moan as Dean lightly grazed his mouth over the hard line showing beneath the underwear's thin material. Cas's head was thrown back against the window and his back dug into the car door, but there were no signs of discomfort on his face as Dean began toying with the elastic band.

*I'm on the highway to hell
Highway to hell*

Shit. He pulled out the vibrating phone in his pocket frantically, and was about to turn it off when he saw "Sam" flash up on the screen.

"This better be goddamn important, Sammy," he snapped, flipping open the phone.

"Don't get your pink, satiny panties in a twist! What're you doing that's so important anyway?"

Dean blushed furiously. "That was *one* time. And if you must know, I'm-" He looked back down at the body beneath him. Cas was still hard, his breathing shallow

and his eyes wide. Dean watched as Cas tried to keep quiet, his dick throbbing for a simple touch, and it only turned Dean on more. He wet his lips and swallowed around the lump in his throat.

"You what?" Sam prompted.

"Uh— driving. I'm driving with a purpose, Sam. You can't just expect me to pick up happily all the time. Sometimes I have to switch lanes and things."

Dean knew Sam was rolling his eyes. "Right. Well, so you know, Gabe's here. I told him you and Cas were coming into town and he drove down here last night." And then as if knowing what Dean was going to say next, "No, I didn't invite him. He just showed up."

He heard laughter in the background and then Gabriel's voice, "Stop acting like you're not happy about it."

Sam huffed into the phone. "When're you guys getting here?"

"Tomorrow- early afternoon probably. I think we're spending the night in Utah."

Cas began to reach down for his boxer-briefs, but Dean slapped his hand away. He whimpered quietly, his eyes pleading, and mouth hanging open. Dean couldn't refuse that look. He brought a finger to his lips, signaling for Cas to be quiet, and gently traced the outline of Cas's cock in the underwear. His eyes became blown and dilated, and Cas sunk his teeth into his lip.

"Shouldn't you be out of Utah by tonight though?"

"Yeah, uh, there's been some traffic. And detours. And other stuff." He slipped Cas's cock out and Dean must have been panting heavier than he thought because all of the sudden Sam made a disgusted noise.

"Oh God- Dean, you could have just told me you were with someone. Gross."

Before he could explain anything, Sam hung up, and Dean threw the phone behind him as soon as he realized the call had ended. He used his new free hand to pull Cas in for a kiss.

"What are we going to say to him?" he asked when they broke apart.

"*Them*," Dean corrected. "Gabe's in town."

"Well, that should make things more interesting."

Dean pressed a soothing kiss below his ear. "We'll figure it out. Don't think about it right now."

And then he slid down his body, to take Cas in his mouth.

Their final night on the road consisted of a bag of chips and Dr. Sexy reruns curled up on a king sized bed at the edge of Utah. They left the curtains open, letting in the universe and stars from the clear sky, illuminating the room with soft light that stretched across Cas's face. Dean had an arm thrown over his shoulder, and Cas fitted them together- their bodies pressed against each other from toe to torso. It was warm and comforting like bonfires, and sweaters, and childhood blankets- unlike the heat that set his body on fire when they fooled around in the back of the Impala.

Tomorrow they'd be at Sam's apartment. They'd be wondering how to tell their brothers delicately that they were now fucking. Gabriel would be teasing them as soon as they'd walk through the door and Sam would probably sigh with relief that there were now two other people for Gabriel to mess with. Dean was excited- he was. He wanted to see his brother's stupid face and play pranks on Gabe like he did in high school. But right now- this- he wanted to stay wrapped up in it. He wanted to stay hidden in this nest until the sun exploded and the world ceased to exist. With Cas's head resting at Dean's shoulder, his hair tickling Dean's cheek like feathers, there was no other place he'd rather be and he wanted to sink into the moment forever.

"Dean?"

"Mm?"

They spoke quietly over the commercials on the television, Cas beginning to play with the hem of Dean's t-shirt nervously.

"You don't have to answer if you'd rather not, but— am I your boyfriend?" He paused. "I mean. We don't have to put a label on anything. I just wondered what we're telling your brother and Gabe."

Dean blinked. He hadn't given it much thought. He hadn't given it *any* thought, really. The term 'boyfriend' felt too small and ordinary of a word to describe them. They were best friends who happened to fall for each other. (Of course in this case, one had hit the ground a little *too* hard upon falling and took a while to regain consciousness.) But Cas looked up at him now from his spot on his shoulder with questioning eyes, and Dean found himself giving a small, reassuring grin.

“Well, you are a boy and you are my friend. And I like you and I think you like me too considering how many times I’ve seen your dick today.” Cas huffed a laugh. “So, yeah, I’d say you’re my boyfriend if you want to be.”

“I’d like that.”

Dean let his fingers stroke through Cas’s hair lightly. “Me too.” He could feel Cas’s breathing slow, and he looked down to see eyelids drifting closed as he began to let sleep overtake him. “Yeah, Dr. Sexy’s voice puts me to sleep too. It’s very soothing,” he whispered, jokingly.

Cas just smiled, his eyes still closed. “Let’s go to bed, Dean.”

After the television was turned off, their bodies sunk further under the covers as they lied down next to each other, and a thousand stars filtered through the window- watching over them in their sleep.

The six hours in the car the following morning felt like nothing. Cas slept for most of it, and Dean shamelessly listened to the mix CD- the volume on low so Cas wouldn’t wake up. When he *was* awake, they sat in comfortable silence or talked about Sam and Gabriel, and joked about how they were probably driving each other insane by now. Their hands didn’t search each other frantically today, but lingered casually on shoulders and knees and eventually found their hands interwoven between them.

They pulled up to Sam’s apartment in the early afternoon, both smiling with the sky clear above them. They’d come three thousand miles, eleven states, one fight, and one first kiss. The road had been long; it was tiring, dark, and seemed never-ending at times. It twisted in ways they didn’t expect, lifted them up hills and down mountains, scorched them in heat and drowned them in rain. But the road had created them- they were born from the asphalt. The rocks and sand and every cloud they passed became apart of their anatomy. They understood it; they felt it. They thanked the road for tearing them apart because it was the catalyst in colliding them together. And now their first road had run out and they looked up at the apartment complex, happy just to have survived it.

A mop of thick brown hair was the first thing to greet Dean as the door opened- Sam catapulting himself into a hug and mumbling an, “It’s about time.” Cas was attacked by the giant sasquatch next, and they followed him afterwards into the apartment.

"Hey, Deano! Who's that freak behind you?" Gabriel was laid out on the couch, a bag of M&M's balancing on his stomach. It wasn't an unusual sight, really.

Dean could see Cas glaring down at his brother from the corner of his eye, but there was a small smile that cracked as Gabriel got up from the sofa and headed over to them.

"Hello, Gabriel," Cas responded, a warmth in his tone and eyes that he would never express through words.

"Hey, little bro." He pulled Cas into a quick hug. "Has this doofus been taking care of you? You look like you haven't eaten in days," he said, poking at his ribs. "Although, you always were the scrawny one."

"Oh, he has. Your brother's been practically making love to burgers half the trip."

"Yeah? Looks like that's not all he's been making love to either." And Gabriel flicked at the purple hickey just visible above the collar of Cas's shirt, before disappearing to the kitchen- leaving behind two reddening faces.

They turned to each other simultaneously, and Dean shrugged. "Well, that was quick."

Cas nodded, his eyes still wide. "It's because you give gigantic hickeys." He pulled down the collar of his shirt to expose the discolored flesh spread over his skin.

"You like it," he grinned, and the blush on Cas's face deepened.

Soon, Gabriel and Sam walked back into the room- a beer in each hand, passing one over to their respective brother. Gabriel sunk into the armchair, lazily sipping his drink and the other three squeezed onto the sofa.

"You buying booze for my little brother, Gabe?"

Gabriel gaped back innocently. "*Dean*, as the sole legal purchaser of alcohol in this group, I believe it is my duty to provide for the less fortunate."

Dean tried holding it back, but the laughter spilled over, and soon everyone was joining in, heads tilted back and eyes watering, just happy to finally be with each other again.

The afternoon went on in a sequence of conversations- usually talking about school or bringing back memories from the past. Gabriel reminded them of all the embarrassing pranks he pulled, and Dean told a few of his own he'd pulled on Gabe, making him send of a glare that rivaled Cas's.

It was a nice sort of reunion. He missed the bickering and laughing; he missed this family they had made for themselves. Things hadn't been the same since Gabriel left for college. He'd only moved a couple hours north, but for how often he visited, he might as well have lived across the country. Their family got smaller and they went their separate ways, Dean and Cas to the east coast, Gabriel hiding away under textbooks up north, and Sam busy collecting scholarships at home. They kept up, called often, but it had been years since they were all together like they were now- hanging out and teasing each other, ordering Chinese takeout because all of them were too lazy to cook.

They sat around the coffee table eating noodles. Sam and Dean took up the couch, and Cas transferred to the ground, leaning his back on Dean's knees. Gabriel sat on the floor opposite them. He would glance between Dean and Cas every now and then, but didn't say a word. Although he did catch Dean's eye as Dean's fingers absentmindedly twirled around bits of Cas's hair, and he winked with a smirk.

The conversation lulled and they turned on the television for a while before heading off to bed. Dean offered to share the guestroom with Cas so Gabriel got the sleeper sofa and Sam had the room to himself. Gabriel rolled his eyes at this, but Sam didn't seem to notice, too busy saying goodnight and heading over to his own room. Dean and Cas were about to retreat as well, but a hand came down on Dean's shoulder, stopping him.

"Wait up, Deano, I want to talk to you real quick." Gabriel raised his eyebrow, and Dean's stomach dropped a little bit.

"What?" He faked nonchalance.

Cas turned around, waiting for Dean, but Gabriel shooed him off. "Go to your room, little bro." He scowled, ready to say something back, but Dean nodded and helped up a hand.

"It's okay, Cas."

He wavered in the hallway for a bit before huffing a sigh and entering the guestroom. When the door had shut behind him, Gabriel turned his attention back on Dean.

"Now we've been friends for a long time, but don't think that will change anything if you hurt him. I will still rip your lungs out. Got that?"

Dean nodded, keeping eye contact. He knew this speech. It was the standard "Big Brother Speech."

"I've watched you two pine over each other long enough, so don't mess this up." He paused, patted him on the shoulder as if dismissing him and said, "Now go take a shower. You smell like sex and stale french-fries."

Dean rolled his eyes, but nodded again signaling he understood. "Thanks, Gabe, by the way," he said before turning to leave. "Y'know, for being cool with it."

"Cool with it?" He laughed. "Please. I've been rooting for you guys for years- so has Sam." He laughed harder when Dean's eyebrows shot up. "Now, seriously. Go take a shower. I wasn't kidding."

Dean left the room processing all he'd just learned in the last two minutes. He supposed as far "Big Brother Speech's" go, it could have gone a lot worse- his lungs the only thing threatened. Water from the showerhead poured over his body and he felt a calmness fill him up. Everything was going to be okay. Him and Cas were going to be okay. Gabriel approved and from the sound of it, Sam was going to break out in a fit on rainbow confetti. He smiled to himself under the bubbles of Sam's girly shampoo and wondered how for someone so unlucky, he had all the luck in the world.

He entered the room with a towel slung around his waist, forgetting to grab his clothes before getting in the shower. Cas was sitting at the edge of the bed- his pajamas already on and his gaze fixed on the carpet. He looked lost in thought, unconsciously playing with the tear in Dean's old t-shirt that he wore over his thin frame.

Dean shut the door behind him and blue eyes shot up, noticing he was in the room for the first time.

"Oh." Cas sucked in a breath, looking Dean up and down before staring back up at his face. "You look-" He swallowed.

Something in Dean's chest coiled tightly- too tight for someone who was already well acquainted with Cas's anatomy. Cas still gazed up at him through thick eyelashes, his eyebrows slightly lifted, and his lip worried between his teeth. It made Dean want to fly apart and scream and kiss him until they were both purple.

"Gabriel's fine with it." He said it just to have something to do with his mouth, to fill the silence that was closing in on him. "Just gave the standard 'you hurt him, and I'll kill you' speech."

"Dean," he interrupted. Cas's fingers played with the sheets nervously, but his voice kept steady. "I want you."

"You have me." It came out so naturally that he wondered if he'd even said the words at all. The small shake of Cas's head confirmed he had.

"No, I know. But-" his eyes traveled down to the towel resting at Dean's hips, "all of you."

Dean's eyes widened, but he found himself nodding. "Okay," he breathed. His mouth was suddenly dry as he went to his bag, fumbling for the condoms and a bottle of lube he'd bought at some gas station in Nevada just in case. He threw each on the bed.

"We don't have to..." he trailed off, casting a glance in Dean's direction.

He walked over to where Cas's legs hung over the bed and placed himself between his knees. "No. I want to."

Their foreheads were touching now, their breathing heavy. They were caught still in the moment- a wire ready to be cut- a bomb ready to explode. And when Dean brought his thumb to Cas's jawline, everything set like a forest fire.

Hands frantically pulled at clothes, bodies rolling over and into each other, hair being twisted into fingers. Dean straddled Cas's waist, and they worked together to get their clothes out of the way as fast as possible. Soon, skin made contact on skin, leaving Cas gasping.

"Shhh," Dean reminded, moving his mouth south. "Don't want to wake anyone up." He sunk his teeth into the skin over his ribcage, soothing it over with his tongue, and then sucking the mark over again and again.

Cas gripped the pillowcase and squeezed his eyes shut, stopping himself from screaming out as Dean's mouth descended lower. Lips spread over his hipbone, and Dean began to suck on the well-defined bone structure, making Cas's head swim and stomach flip.

There was a different feel in the room compared to their quick backseat hand jobs and even the dizzy euphoria of the first time they touched each other's skin. The air was more charged, electric. Heat rose from their bodies and enveloped them, filling and suffocating their lungs. There was a responsibility Dean felt now. He wanted to leave Cas's bones shaking and blood pounding- to give him everything he could and a little more. They'd come under each other's hands plenty of times, but to *actually be inside of someone*- to be so close to the point of breaking- Dean nearly came undone thinking about it.

“Dean, please,” he whispered, his voice wrecked. “I need you.”

Cas was begging and Dean looked up from where he hovered over his thigh. He smirked. He liked watching Cas on the edge- knowing Cas was writhing because of him. Dean climbed back up his body, kissing him quick before leaning into his ear.

“What do you need, Cas?” he asked husky and rough, making Cas’s eyes roll back and his breathing become heavier.

All that came out was a whimper.

Dean bit at the lobe of his ear, and tried again. “You want me fuck you? Finger you open? Come on, Cas, tell me what you want.”

He groaned, pulling Dean to his mouth and nibbling at his bottom lip. “I want you inside me.” He was panting, his eyelids almost closed. “Now. Please, Dean. Fuck me.”

Dean let out a heavy breath, each one of Cas’s words setting off a firework in the pit of his stomach. He unwrapped one of the condoms, Cas groaning quietly as he slipped it on, and slicked his fingers up with lube. The noises Cas made were obscene, somewhere between a moan and whine, as he slid in one finger. After he nodded to continue, Dean didn’t hesitate in pushing in a second, scissoring his fingers and watching Cas squirm against him. It made Dean’s heart stutter, the way he arched his back against his fingers. He slowly brought in a third and Cas looked like he was ready to burst.

“I’m ready- please- Dean,” he choked out.

“Someone’s impatient.” He took his fingers out just as he said the words, reaching for more lube, and slicking up his dick before lining it up with Cas’s hole.

He edged his dick in slowly at first, watching Cas’s face for any signs of discomfort. When none came, Dean pushed in further, gasping at the way his body fit into Cas, the way Cas felt around him, surrounding him tight. A moan escaped Cas’s lips, encouraging Dean to go on. And he did, closing whatever remaining space existed between them. He kept still with all his energy, with every instinct telling him to snap his hips back and forth, waiting for the okay. Cas took a few deep breaths. It was fucking gorgeous to watch- pink tinting his cheeks down to his neck, dark hair plastered across his forehead, his hips just beginning to move, grinding up against Dean to take him in further.

“Mmm, move.” Cas commanded and Dean didn’t hesitate in carrying out his orders- pulling away and thrusting back in slowly, leaning his forehead into Cas’s neck.

A claw-like grip secured itself around Dean’s back, leaving crescent moons into his skin. Cas’s wrecked voice was at his ear mumbling a mix of, “faster” and “more,” and Dean snapped back in, his hips positioned at a different angle. If the digging at his flesh and the poorly muffled scream were anything to go by, he’d found the magic spot and continued pounding into it until Cas was at his breaking point. There was something beautiful in watching a person fall apart- like a glass building shattering to the ground or a plane burning in the sky with reds and oranges being painted against shades of blue. He buried himself inside of Cas, finally gripped his fingers around the neglected cock between them, and with a few strokes Cas was gone- his mouth parted in a silent scream. Dean kept on pumping Cas’s cock through his orgasm; He was coming close himself.

Hands grabbed at Dean’s hair, forcefully dragging him to his mouth, and Cas fitted their lips together as he wildly thrust his hips up- catching Dean off-guard and making him see white. He moaned into Cas’s mouth with his skin prickling and mind reeling, and came harder than he’d ever had.

They exhaled and inhaled together, their bodies in rhythm like waves on a beach- ebbing and flowing against white sand. Dean traced at Cas’s collarbone as he waited for his head to stop spinning. When it did, Dean pulled out, and Cas gasped softly at the loss. Their foreheads were pressed against each other’s now, both their eyes open and staring, perfectly content on not moving for another century.

“That was really nice,” Cas whispered, the room suddenly falling still except for their steady breaths.

Dean giggled, actually fucking giggled, and bumped his nose against Cas’s own. “It was a little more than nice.”

Cas seemed to light up at the words, a smile taking over his whole face. He leant up slightly and gave Dean a small kiss. Dean responded with another quick kiss, and another, and another. It was these kinds of kisses that turned Dean’s insides into a soppy mess- comprising of all of those weird feelings that were larger than himself and Cas and seemed to spread across the entire universe.

He gave one last kiss to the side of his cheek before rolling away, tying off the condom lazily and making a mental note to take care of that in the morning (Sam would kill him if he knew). He grabbed for one of their shirts that hung at the end of the bed and wiped off their bodies, throwing it onto the floor when he finished, and Cas turned onto his back, letting his hands rest on his chest.

“Hey, Dean?”

"Yeah?" He waited for Cas to continue, nervous energy making him feel almost sick.

"I love you." Cas paused, letting out a long breath. "You know that, right?"

All of the air seemed to be sucked out of the room and Dean was choking. A repeat of his words echoed in his head; He turned them over and sifted through them making sure his ears hadn't tricked him. He was pretty sure they hadn't.

This all processed in the time of two seconds and as they were up, Dean shifted closer to Cas's side, bringing an arm around his waist and resting his head against his shoulder. "I love you, too." His lips formed the words over skin and his voice vibrated bones.

Castiel curled into him. Dean would never let go.

The smell of pancakes drifted in from the kitchen and something shifted restlessly in his arms, making his eyelids flicker open to dark hair tickling his face. And maybe his life actually *was* a Disney movie, because birds were chirping at the window and sunlight streamed on Cas's face at the perfect angle, highlighting his cheekbones and making his skin glow. A smile formed lazily on Dean's face as he watched Cas bury himself further in the covers, hiding from the brightening sun. He shook Cas's shoulder lightly.

"They're making breakfast," Dean sighed, content.

Cas groaned at being woken up, his eyes half-opened as he turned to face away from Dean. "No."

A laugh tumbled out his mouth. "C'mon, Cas. I think I smell pancakes."

"No."

"You should take a shower," he reminded. Dean nosed at his neck, kissing beneath his jaw. "I'll clean up in here."

A huff came from Cas somewhere buried in the pillow, but he agreed, slowly slipping out from under the warmth of the covers and scouring the room for a pair of clean clothes. Dean would be lying if he said he didn't check out Cas's ass as he bent down for a pair of underwear, and he'd also be lying if he said he had expected to be caught at it.

"You're staring," he grinned, catching Dean's eye.

He blushed. Cas grinned wider.

"You have a very nice ass too, Dean." Cas said it as if he was trying to reassure Dean of his ass insecurities.

"Thank you, Cas," Dean deadpanned.

He laughed as he walked out the door, leaving Dean feeling warm all around and inside his body.

Dean was right. There were pancakes. He entered the kitchen, in a different set of pajamas that wasn't used to clean up come from the night before, and was greeted by Sam flipping pancakes onto plates and Gabriel drowning his own in syrup and whipped cream.

"Morning, guys."

They both turned around to look at him, Sam smiling like the sun fucking embodied him and Gabriel shooting a glare. Dean gave him a questioning glance, but ignored it, deciding he had more important matters to worry about right now-like pancakes.

"Hey, Dean," Sam replied, turning back to the stove to clean up.

Dean forked over a few pancakes onto a plate, grabbed and poured some orange juice from the fridge, and sat down at the small wooden kitchen table. Gabriel joined him soon after while Sam ran the pan under the sink, leaning in a little closer to make sure Sam couldn't overhear.

"You do realize the sleeper-sofa, my bed, my safe place, is directly on the other side of the guestroom." He narrowed his eyes. "You horny rabbits could have at least waited until I was asleep."

Dean shrugged his shoulders in an apology, smirking a little at the thought of Gabriel traumatized, and Sam came back to the table with a plate stacked high of his own.

"What's up with the pancakes, Sammy? You didn't have to do anything just because we're here. I know how much you like your weird health cereal or whatever."

Sam laughed. "Well it's the least I could do after my brother and his friend drive across the freaking country to see me."

"Yeah, well," Dean looked away, embarrassed. "I guess I just missed your stupid face."

A silence stretched on and Gabriel rolled his eyes. "If you two keep looking at each other like that, I'm going to throw up. Now eat your breakfast, kids."

Dean was about to give him the finger when Cas walked in, his eyes still a little bleary with sleep, but his hair clean, and skin fresh. He wore the dark flannel pants Dean was fond of and their university's hoodie (probably trying to cover Dean's "gigantic hickey's"). Gabriel seemed to have guessed that too, raising his eyebrows, amused, as Cas sat down at the table and began putting a pancake onto his plate.

"Sleep well, Cassy?" He winked.

Cas ignored him and Sam shifted his eyes between the two, seeming confused. The breakfast went on like that, casual conversations interrupted by sexual quips made by Gabriel every now and then- Dean trying to distract from them by bringing up another subject. Sam kept his eyebrows furrowed, knowing something was off, but not exactly what it was. As Dean had said before, for being the brightest one in the family, Sam wasn't very smart sometimes.

Soon his fork was scratching against the bottom of the plate. A conversation was going on between Sam and Cas- probably talking about some nerd thing Dean had never heard of. Gabriel stabbed at the last remaining pieces of his breakfast. It all made a deafening rhythm mixed in with each ticking of the clock. He watched everything back and forth- his heart rate quickening with the beat that seemed to form around him. Cas caught his attention, and for someone without 'morning' in their vocabulary, he looked fucking gorgeous with his hair drying in different directions and eyes bright in the sunlit room. Dean glanced at Cas's hands on the table and wanted to take one of them in his own, playing with the delicate fingers and closing them warm in his palm. He looked back up at Sam and sighed. Fuck it.

"Hey Sam, Cas and I are dating now, could you pass the syrup?"

Sam's fingers touched the syrup bottle before he looked up, questioning what he'd heard. "Wait, what?"

"The *syrup*, Sam. C'mon, use that big lawyer brain of yours."

"No, the other thing."

“Oh, that.” Dean shrugged casually, pointing a finger between him and Cas. “We’re together now.”

Dean probably should have brought a boat so that he didn’t drown in all of the gay rainbow confetti seeming to spew from Sam’s mouth and ears. His eyes widened, and there was a big grin plastered on his face as he looked between the couple.

“Took you two long enough,” he laughed.

Gabriel nodded. “I was beginning to think Dean was emotionally constipated.”

Dean sent him a mean look, trying to hide the smile curling at his lip. Cas was blushing, but smiled too, watching the reactions around him. Sam’s was undoubtedly the best, his eyes like a freaking anime character. And if Dean knew Sam, he looked like he was about to go pull on the “I love my gay son” sweater.

“Sam, if you hold that face long enough, it’s going to get stuck like that,” Dean said, picking up his clean plate and heading over to the kitchen sink.

Sam followed, coming up behind him. He leaned against the counter. “I’m happy for you. For both of you.”

“Whoa, no chick-flick moments, man.” Dean tried to escape the hug, but there was no use in trying to escape a Sasquatch. They stayed holding onto each other for longer than intended, and despite Dean’s strict “no chick-flick policy”, he squeezed back and muttered a thanks into Sam’s shoulder. It finally ended with a couple pats on the back, a mutual smile, and returning back to the room where they left Cas and Gabriel.

Later that morning, they found themselves sprawled out in the living room together- the TV turned on to old cartoons as they planned the rest of the day. Dean was pressed right against Cas’s side, and he finally gave in to the feelings from before, capturing Cas’s hand in his own, and resting them on top his thigh. He glanced over and saw his lip twitch up, then turned his attention back to the two other boys who were currently fighting over if they should see a movie or go to the beach.

Cas pressed a quick kiss to Dean’s cheek while they were distracted- Dean reacting by squeezing Cas’s hand a little tighter. It occurred to Dean that they were becoming one of those disgustingly cute couples that couldn’t keep their hands off of each other. They had always annoyed Dean, but now he couldn’t give a fuck. He

could handle teasing from Sam and Gabriel and jealous staring from random passerby as long as Cas was there to distract him- preferably with long kisses and shameless handholding.

He looked at each person in the room- Sam, Gabe, Cas- then back down to his fingers, and Cas's fingers, and the way they fit together. Warmth spread through him, relaxing his body, keeping his heart in a steady, slow beat. He began thinking about how he wouldn't even be here if it weren't for Cas- his ridiculous plan and the sly way he got Dean to agree to almost anything. The road, the days and states and little family diners, all played their part in joining Cas's hand in his. And even more, he had to thank the broken cars and unexpected friends, king sized beds and cheap, pink wine. They made the experience- were the experience- that transformed them on the road- like rocks that changed with immense heat and pressure, creating something new and beautiful.

And when he looked at Cas again, he saw everything that they were then and now- two rocks in the earth's crust, two stars being born, and two bodies learning each other's souls.

