

Glass Houses

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Glass Houses

by [kingdumbass](#)

Summary

During the summer of 1975, a string of young men keep turning up dead in the city of Lawrence, Kansas. All within walking distance from one another. All frequenters of the same local nightclub. All appearing peacefully asleep in their beds save for the brutal marks of strangulation encircling their throats. It seems to be the work of a man the local news stations are calling the ‘Sleepytime Strangler’ – a nickname Castiel loathes – but the body count is up to eight with no signs of being caught.

Castiel begins to feel like it’s all just a little too easy.

Out one night at his usual hunting ground, he finds the challenge he’s been searching for in a attractive stranger named Dean, but before he can make his move, Dean’s gone and someone else has to take his place. Over the coming weeks, he can’t stop thinking about him: about the one that got away. And as it happens, the man from across the bar is relatively easy to hunt down, but what he doesn’t account for are the feelings he begins to develop for him or the fact that Dean Winchester has secrets of his own.

Notes

Hey, guys! I present to you my first bang fic! This was partially inspired by Mindhunter as well as Jeffrey Dahmer. It features way too much Vonnegut so if none of those are your jam, well... shrugs lol. Thanks to @AngelwithacapitalA for beta and alpha help and just generally listening to me talk incessantly. Thanks to @embluesparks for beta help and for being my cheerleader. Thanks to @3195 for making some art for this guy. (Title banner by me, in fic art by 3195). And thanks to everyone in the discord server for the moral support! It's been a pleasure being psycho on main with ya'll.

February, 1976

Chapter Summary

“All this happened, more or less.”
— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*



PRESENT

February 21, 1976

“Please state your name.”

“Castiel James Novak,” he stated plainly, if not a little annoyed. “Is recording this really necessary?”

The tall man seated across from him was dressed in a stiff suit jacket and he was poring over the contents of the manila folder laid out in front of him. Next to it, a lined pad of paper and a pen. He uncapped the pen, held it over the paper, and adjusted his reading glasses, scrutinizing Castiel in some undefinable way from the other side of the table. “Does the recorder bother you?” he asked, awaiting some kind of duplicitous reaction.

The red light on the device was blinking at him and Castiel avoided looking directly at it, instead pulling at a hangnail in his lap currently threatening to peel too far. His eyes flitted between his hands, to the red eye of the recorder, to settle finally on the investigator. He considered the question carefully. After a beat, he decided, “No, I suppose not. I’ve got nothing to hide.”

The man simply nodded.

“Excuse me, but shouldn’t I have a lawyer present for this?”

“Oh, I don’t think that will be necessary, Mr. Novak. You’re not under arrest and you haven’t been charged with a crime. We just want to ask you a few more questions.”

“I’ve already given my statement to one of the other officers and yet I’ve been left practically in the dark as to why I’m still here.” That was a lie. Castiel knew exactly why he was still there.

“I know. I’ve got your statement here,” he said, referring to the folder in front of him. “I’d like to talk about it with you, if you don’t mind. Just want to pick your brain a little.”

“Is everything alright?” Castiel analyzed the thoughtful creases in the man’s forehead while he read over the sheets. “You’re not like the others.” After an empty moment, he knew what it was. “You’re... federal?”

Nodding sagely, the man rubbed a hand over his weary face and exhaled. Long hours, no doubt, chasing after the elusive shadow of a man he couldn’t catch. Slipping through his fingers. His red-rimmed eyes were straining under the harsh examination lights.

“So,” the agent mumbled into his palm, voice purposely devoid of interest and hand annoyingly tapping the end of the pen on the pad, “What can you tell me about Dean Winchester?”

Right to the point. Worry saturated Castiel’s features, voice twisting to match. “Is Dean alright?”

“Perhaps.”

“Perhaps? What does that mean?”

“If you would, Mr. Novak. It’s a simple question.”

“It’s not a simple answer,” he countered.

“Just answer it to the best of your ability then.”

“If you refer to my statement, I believe I’ve already answered,” Castiel smartly replied.

The man sat in silence. Waiting.

“Fine.” Castiel huffed and leaned back in his chair. “What would you like to know?”

“Whatever you want to tell me,” he said. “Were the two of you friendly?”

Castiel chuckled. “Yes, you could say that.”

Another nod. “In your own words, describe him to me.”

“I wouldn’t even know where to begin, honestly.”

“Anywhere. The beginning.”

Dean Michael Winchester was born on January 24th, 1949 at Lawrence Memorial Hospital at 6:35pm to John and Mary Winchester.

He was 6 foot 1 inch tall. Weighed 182lbs. Hair a questionable shade of honey brown highlighted with natural blonde, eyes a striking shade of gold flecked green, and a smattering of freckles that only stood out the more he worked in the sun.

He had a younger brother named Sam, who was four years younger than him and had recently graduated from Stanford University School of Law.

Their mother died in a fire when he was only four. His father died a little over a year ago, right before Sam decided to stay in California, leaving Dean alone most of the time. Aside from the seldom nights he'd gone out to the bar to find a warm body or the nights he spent staring down the neck of a bottle.

He restored classic cars at Singer Salvage and Restoration downtown.

He drove a 1967 Chevrolet Impala in the shade 'Tuxedo Black' that used to belong to his father; the kind car enthusiasts called a glass house, spacious and imposing. The trunk was big enough to fit a body and the backseat was big enough to fit two lying down. At least, that was what Dean had told him once.

He secretly liked to be manhandled during sex and, some nights after work, despite all of his machismo and posturing during the day, he would indulge himself in wearing women's underwear when he was alone. Really revelling in the way the dainty material felt against the smooth skin of his cock.

And five out of seven days a week, he took his coffee black.

But Castiel knew more than anybody that to truly capture the essence of Dean Winchester in words was next to impossible. These were just facts. Snippets. Barely grazing the surface. Besides, how could one contain multitudes in only a few sentences? And quite frankly, the fact of the matter was that Dean Winchester was... ineffable.

So he didn't say it quite like that.

Afterall, he wasn't stupid.

"Dean..." Castiel started, searching the patterns in the laminate table for some way to even begin to describe him to this man. A small smile tugged on the corner of his mouth at the mere sound of the name on his lips. "Well, he's-- One thing you have to know about Dean is that he's beyond words," he said with a slight snort, at a complete loss. "Truthfully, I think he had a bit of a crush on me when we first met."

The man scribbled a note. "Is that so?"

Castiel met his bored gaze across the table. "Of course it is, I wouldn't lie to you," he assured him. "I had a bit of a crush on him too, if I'm being honest with you." Honestly, Castiel might have even been in love with him if he allowed himself to entertain the notion.

“But you don’t anymore?”

“No. Not anymore.”

“Why not?”

“To everything there is a season, Agent...?”

“Ford.”

“Like the president?”

The agent hummed. “Like the president.”

Castiel acknowledged it with a sigh. “Dean has a... particular personality. He can be very charming. Caring, even, but he has an awful temper.” He watched as the man jotted that bit down. “He’s not for everyone. Sometimes the bad outweighs the good, and eventually, I decided he wasn’t for me either.” His gaze narrowed in on the pen still scratching against the pad of paper. “What are you writing?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, just taking notes,” he said, waving it off. “What was it about Winchester that made you feel that way?”

“How do you mean?”

“Oh, I don’t know... Did he do nice things for you? Favors, things like that?”

Castiel’s eyebrows pinched in the middle and his head began to tilt. “I’m not sure I understand the correlation. My relationship to Dean was not dependent on the things he could do for me.”

The man hummed and scribbled something else. “No, of course not. Let me rephrase... What were some of the things you admired about him?”

“You might need more paper,” Castiel joked, reaching for his cup of tepid water. He sipped on it for a moment, pondering the question before gently placing it down again. “Well, for starters, he’s loyal to a fault. He would do anything for the people he cares about, especially his younger brother, Sam. Sam decided to stay in California after graduation and that’d been really hard on him, even though he never wanted to talk about it.”

“What else?”

“He’s determined. Once he sets his mind to something he has to finish it. He practically rebuilt his car from the ground up after an accident. A ‘67 Chevy Impala. T-boned by an 18 wheeler and lived to tell the tale.” Castiel lifted his finger to chew on the hangnail. “Hmm... You know, his mother died when he was just a small boy and his father was what you might call an absent parent. He had an issue with drink. Abusive. You know the type. Dean practically raised Sam from infancy. I think that’s really something, you know?”

The man's mouth quirked like he was impressed. "I'd say that's quite something too." His pen moved again. Undoubtedly stringing together a fantastical tale about Dean Winchester's warped upbringing.

Castiel hummed his agreement and continued chewing the nail, absently tasting the tang of salted copper once the hangnail finally caught. "He's also funny, but don't tell him I said that, it would just go straight to his head. His jokes are kind of awful, but I don't know, for whatever reason, he made me smile." He smiled at just the idea. "Now that I think about it, Dean always did come on a little strong. That's actually how we met."

"Oh?" The man paused his notes and looked up at him. "Tell me more about that."

"About what?"

"How you met."

"Well," Castiel shrugged. "It's not a very interesting story, honestly. Just your run-of-the-mill meeting."

"It's special to you. You can tell me about it, if you want."

Scratching at the back of his neck, Castiel huffed and rolled his eyes, the faint ghost of fondness settling in around the edges. "I guess you're right." He licked his chapped lips and sighed. "Well, it was actually at work-- Mine that time, not his."

It had only been Castiel's third shift at Buzzy Bee Coffee and he wasn't used to the morning rush yet. His coworker Steve went to the restroom five minutes before the rush started and there was a line forming at the counter, so he grabbed the closest apron and got to work. The line impatiently waited while he accidentally spilled steamed milk down the front of his novelty apron and added an extra shot of espresso to the drink he was attempting to make.

"Good enough," he muttered to himself. Low enough that he couldn't be heard over the hiss and gurgle of the percolators while he secured the to-go lid on the cup. Turning to place it on the pick-up counter, he called out, "Americano with an extra shot of espresso!"

He waited a moment, but when no one came to retrieve the coffee, he got back to making more orders in the meantime.

He managed to get rid of a couple customers before he noticed the Americano still sat orphaned on the counter.

He called out the order again.

Still no takers.

Taking the still-warm paper cup in hand with a sigh, he turned it to find the name scribbled on it in permanent marker and decided to go with that.

Louder, he asked, “Is there a Dean here?”

In the far corner, the man with his head absorbed in his pay phone conversation perked up, mouth slack before realization smacked him upside the head. “Crap. I gotta go.” He mumbled quick apologies as he maneuvered his way through the line towards the pick-up counter.

“Sorry,” he repeated again with a slight blush once he reached the counter.

He was all sparkling green eyes, long lashes, plump lips, and a light dusting of freckles across the bridge of his nose. Hair artfully disheveled. Black t-shirt hugging all the right places.

And he was looking at Castiel.

Like, really looking.

“Family drama,” he added almost flippantly. “Little brothers, ya know? Sometimes I could just kill him.”

Castiel offered a small, understanding smile and tried not to think about the fact he was covered in milk and donning a cartoon bee.

Family drama. He knew all about that.

“It’s still warm,” he assured as he held out the cup between them.

Dean smiled back. “Thanks.” His teeth were perfect too.

Reaching out a hand, Dean plucked the coffee from Castiel’s grasp, the tip of his finger brushing over his as he did. Castiel could feel the warmth growing in his face, he just prayed Dean didn’t notice.

“Of course,” he replied, with a perfunctory nod.

Once the line dwindled, Castiel noticed Dean still stood off to the side of the counter, staring at him. Assessing him really. Eyes roving over what visible half of Castiel he could see from the other side of the counter. It wasn’t a feeling he was accustomed to, being the object of scrutiny, but Dean looked at him differently even then. Like he was something worth looking at.

“Um...” Cas pretended to busy himself with half-heartedly cleaning up the counter. “Did you need something else?”

A smile twitched the corner of Dean’s lips as he took another sip of his coffee. “You’re new here.” It wasn’t a question, but a statement of fact.

“I am.” Cas tilted his head a little out of confusion. “How could you tell? Is your coffee that bad?”

Dean shook his head, letting out a small chuckle. “Nah, man. Coffee’s coffee. Just never seen you here before.” His gaze lingered on Castiel’s lips while his own lips lingered on the mouth of his coffee. Their eyes met. “You got that kinda face that’d be hard for a guy to forget.”

Castiel just blinked. He didn’t know what to say to that, so he didn’t say anything. He blushed profusely though, especially when Steve decided to grace the counter with his presence again. When he glanced over to him, he seemed thoroughly amused at Castiel’s expense and Castiel’s face felt like it was on fire.

“Um, thank you... Enjoy the coffee,” he murmured weakly to Dean before willing himself to turn away.

“See ya around, Steve,” Dean said in return. A teasing promise clear in his voice.

For a second, Castiel forgot he was wearing the wrong apron.

“That’s a nice story,” the agent said, leaning back in his chair. He heaved his leg up to hold by the ankle.

From across the table, Castiel absently noticed his socks didn’t match. “If I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I’m grateful that so many of those moments are nice,” he quoted, still distracted by the socks. How hard was it to put on matching socks?

“Right.” The agent didn’t understand the reference. And really, why would he? Getting back on track, he asked, “And that was the first time you two met?”

Castiel snapped out of it and rolled his eyes. “Yes,” he exasperated. “He came into the coffee shop many times after that, actually. He always ordered the same thing every time he came in.”

“Oh? You know it by heart?”

“Of course. An Americano with an extra shot of espresso.”

“Huh. Not really a hard order to remember, I guess.”

“No, not really,” Castiel snorted. “Dean Winchester is many things, but unpredictable is not one of them.” Well, not usually.

The man reached for the folder on the table and casually flipped through it, pausing a moment to adjust his glasses again, before resuming. His fingers absently carding through his cropped silver hair. After approximately thirty seconds, he laid it back down. “Now, you said that Winchester came into the coffee shop on various occasions after the fact, correct?”

Castiel nodded, refraining another eyeroll. He just answered that. “Monday to Friday, like clockwork,” he said. “In the beginning, he would come only once in the mornings before his shift started.”

“Around what time would you say that was?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Seven thirty give or take,” Castiel estimated. “It really depended on how long he took getting out of bed. Dean’s not really a morning person. Not without his coffee.”

“That explains the extra shot,” the man quipped.

“Right,” he said with a nod. “After a couple weeks though, he kept finding reasons to come in a second time. He probably wouldn’t tell you this, but I think he’d make up reasons to visit just as an excuse to try to talk with me behind the counter.”

“And that’s where he asked you on the date?”

“...Yes, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves. I went to his work before he asked me on a date.”

“And you knew where he worked beforehand?”

“...Yes and no. I knew he worked close by. I presumed he was a mechanic because of his fingernails.” At the man’s look of confusion: “They’re always dirty,” he explained. “Eventually, he told me he worked at Singer’s just up a couple blocks and around the corner.”

“Oh, is that the chop shop on East Main?”

“Partially. They do body work too.”

“Huh, no kidding? Might have to keep them in mind.”

“You should. They do excellent work,” he said. “We’d talk about that sometimes when he’d come in, the shop I mean, or rather Dean would talk. Car things,” Castiel rolled his eyes, “Truthfully, I don’t really know much about it.”

The man hummed. “So where did you meet up? Aside from the coffee shop, I mean.”

Castiel angled his head, confusion twisting his face. “At Singer’s,” he said dumbly.

“And that was for the date?”

“No, no. Of course not. The date came later,” he said rubbing the stubble on his chin. “I had gone to Singer’s because I was having car trouble and I figured, if anyone could help me, Dean could.”

“What was wrong with your car?”

Castiel grimaced. “Honestly? No fucking clue. As I said, I’m not well-versed in that area of expertise. Dean would be able to tell you better than I could.”

“Dean, you got a visitor,” Bobby Singer announced, banging a hand against the side of the jalopy Dean was working on.

The cacophony of the garage was overwhelming as soon as Castiel followed the gruff, older man behind the front counter.

Dean was sprawled out on his back, headfirst under some hulking piece of scrap metal, when Castiel cautiously approached. Rolling the creeper out from under the frame, Dean’s beamed as soon as he laid eyes on him. “Well, would you look who it is,” he said in way of greeting. “Hey, Stranger! This a new delivery service, or what? Where’s my coffee?”

“Hello, Dean,” he said, blush blooming in his cheeks without his permission. “No coffee, my apologies.” He uselessly held out his empty hands and Dean chuckled. Castiel smiled back, oddly unable to control his face, as he nervously fidgeted with the keys in his hand.

“I’m kidding, man,” Dean assured, “But hey, this is a nice surprise!” Getting to his feet, he wiped his oily fingers off on the chest of his navy jumpsuit and walked past Castiel towards the rickety shop sink. He squirted a handful of orange pumice cleaner onto his soiled hands and vigorously scrubbed them together. Over his shoulder, he asked, “What brings you to my neck of the woods?”

It took a minute to register. Castiel was preoccupied with noticing the way Dean filled out his jumpsuit. The way it curved with the bend in his legs, stretched across his broad shoulders. The way they undulated like waves while he thoroughly washed his hands.

“Car trouble,” he managed to say.

“Car trouble,” Dean teasingly mocked. “Figures. Care to elaborate?”

Castiel tried to the best of his ability. Mostly just using common terms and phrases he’d heard in passing to make up for his lack of inherent car knowledge every man his age seemed to possess.

Dean dried his hands and tossed the paper towel, face mulling it over as he nodded slowly, before he looked back at Castiel. “I think I know what the problem is.”

“What’s that?”

“You don’t know shit about cars, dude.” He laughed. A sound like sunlight breaking through clouds.

“And what makes you say that?”

“Oh, I dunno. Probably cuz it sounds like you just pulled car lingo out of your ass. You tryin’ to impress me? If so, you don’t have to try that hard.”

Castiel huffed a laugh and rolled his eyes, shy smile appearing on his face. “And why would I do a silly thing like that?”

“Who knows?” Casually, Dean shrugged a shoulder, a smirk spreading across his face. “Maybe you got a big ol’ crush on me or somethin’.”

“Or something,” Castiel murmured without even thinking about it. It was the biggest understatement he’d ever heard himself say aloud. He ignored the warmth in his face and the unsettled feeling in the bottom of his stomach and remembered why he was there at all. “Anyway,” he said, deliberately glossing over the implication, “Do you think you could take a look under my hood or not?”

A genuine smile appeared on Dean’s face then and his eyes grew wider only for a brief second, until they changed to something else entirely. Something curious. “Course I can,” he said, “Lead the way.”

“Dean didn’t charge me for the car. He looked under the hood and took care of it on the spot. Turned out to be a real easy fix too. Told me ‘not to be such a stranger’ and then I left.”

“Where’d you go after?”

“Does that matter?”

The man just shrugged. “It might.”

“I went to that new hippie-dippy yoga studio in the center of town, if you really want to know.”

The agent seemed surprised. “Wouldn’t take you for the yoga type if I’m being honest, Mr. Novak.”

“Yes, well, war changes people, Agent Ford. You don’t come back the same. Next thing you know, you start taking up yoga and making macrame to pass the time.” Normal people didn’t want to talk about that sort of thing. The glory of war had faded long before now.

The agent nodded slowly, making another asinine note. “And then, it says here,” he said referring to the folder, “That Dean Winchester asked you on a date the following weekend? Is that correct?”

Castiel pretended to give the question some thought, despite already knowing the answer. “Yes, I believe it was a Saturday. He never really came in on the weekends so I found that in itself odd. Like I said, Dean’s what you might call a creature of habit, so the random appearance was a bit of a surprise to me at the time.”

“And he’d specifically come to ask you on a date,” the man clarified.

“Yes.”

“And I presume you accepted Mr. Winchester’s invitation?”

“Naturally,” Castiel said with a shy smile. “Have you seen him?”

“I’ve seen photos,” he answered with a chuckle. “Good-lookin’ guy.”

“Understatement,” Castiel muttered, reaching for his water again. His stomach gave a rumble interrupting the quiet settled in around them. “My apologies, but is there any chance we could get some food in here? I’m feeling a bit peckish after having sat here most of the afternoon.”

The man gave a reluctant nod. “I’ll see what I can do. In the meantime, why don’t you tell me about Winchester approaching you and the subsequent date?”

“That’s not very interesting either.”

“Humor me.”

Castiel gave a curt nod in return. “Very well.”

It was a Saturday when Dean came through the door looking addled with nerves. He didn’t order anything that day, instead pulling out a chair belonging to one of the small tables by the shop window. He retrieved a copy of an old tattered book from the back pocket of his jeans while he waited for the line to die down.

“I think Romeo’s waiting to talk to you,” Steve said, leaning against the counter and tossing his head in Dean’s general direction.

The last customer of the morning rush had retreated and the coffee shop was practically dead till the lunchtime rush. Castiel was wiping down the counter with a wet rag when he paused, glancing over his shoulder. He hadn’t even noticed Dean had come into the coffee shop. He blushed at the insinuation. “What makes you say that?”

Steve just laughed. “Well, if the fact he keeps staring directly at the back of your head is any indication...”

Sure enough, when Castiel looked back again Dean was looking back at him, his hand holding the spot in his book. He nodded to Steve and abandoned the counter, making his way towards the table under the window, glowing with the aura of early morning sunlight and Dean’s radiant presence. When Dean realized he was coming over, he averted his eyes to the table, scratching at the nape of his neck and fidgeting with the fragile pages under his hand.

“It’s Saturday,” Castiel said in lieu of any real greeting. Confusion taking hold of him more than anything in the moment.

Hesitantly, Dean gave a questioning smile at the statement. “Yeah...?”

“You don’t come in on Saturdays.”

“Well, I’m here now,” he supplied with a laugh.

Castiel gave a small smile. "I can see that." He took a moment to absorb the torn paperback cover sheathing Dean's hand from view. *Slaughterhouse Five*. A Vonnegut classic. "All this happened, more or less," he said with a smirk, flitting his eyes back to meet Dean's.

Blankly staring, a slow, knowing smile spread across Dean's face. "So it goes..." he quipped with a wide grin. "You know Vonnegut?"

"Of course I know Vonnegut. Who doesn't?"

"No one I wanna know." Dean chuckled at that. "What's your favorite?"

"Cat's Cradle," he replied on autopilot, but the more he stood idly by the table with Dean's roving eyes on him, he desperately wished he could change his answer to the book laying uselessly between them.

Dean smiled again. "That one's good too."

Awkwardly, Castiel nodded and rapped a knuckle on the table. "I'm sorry, did you-- did you want to order something?"

Dean huffed a laugh before shaking his head in the negative. "Actually, about that. I was, uh, I didn't come here for coffee today."

"Oh?"

He paused to clear his throat and swallow. His tongue slipped out to wet his lips and Castiel transfixed on the action so long he almost missed the next part.

"I was wonderin' if you wanted to maybe go... on a date... with me," he stammered out eventually.

When the words caught up with him, Castiel's blue eyes grew wide and unblinking. Dry, even. He didn't think he'd heard that right. "You want to go on a date... with me?"

Confidence growing, Dean shook off his nerves and nodded, beaming at him. "Course I do. Face like that, who wouldn't? Not to mention, you've clearly got good taste in books, and you could make me coffee in the morning," he added with a wink.

"Um." That damnable blush returned to his cheeks and he wished he could scrub it away. He never knew people actually blushed this much outside of cheesy dimestore paperbacks. All things considered, a date was probably a terrible idea with someone like Dean and that had everything to do with him and nothing to do with Dean.

Dean was perfect.

A god among men.

He smelled like warm leather and cologne and he could light up any room he walked into.

Castiel was nothing like Dean. But having Dean look at him like he was just then... intrigued, hopeful, enraptured... It wasn't something he was willing to lose quite yet. For a moment that had been far more brief than it felt, Castiel weighed his options. Ultimately, a meager "okay" left his lips. He didn't want to seem overeager.

Dean exaggeratedly inclined his head and cupped his ear "Sorry, what was that?"

"Okay," Castiel repeated, firmer without being anymore sure. "I'll go on a date with you."

Dean threw his head back and laughed. Coming back, he grinned. A proverbial sunbeam straight into Castiel's chest. "Awesome. Definitely know how to take a guy down a couple pegs too."

Castiel rolled his eyes, but a reluctant smile grew on his face anyway. "What did you have in mind?"

The restaurant was quaint. A little Italian place in the center of town. Dean picked him up from his apartment in his elegant beast of a car and drove them with the radio turned down. Loud enough to fill the quiet spaces, low enough to encourage conversation.

They both ordered the spaghetti like some cheesy impression of Lady and the Tramp and they both had more red wine than they should have. Dean held his wine glass like a pauper clutching a string of pearls, uncomfortable, but desperate, and eventually the dinner dissolved into inebriated flirting and fits of laughter, and yet still more drinking.

They both decided to pass on dessert in favor of heading back to Dean's apartment. It was just up the street, or so he'd said as they left the restaurant. Closer so they wouldn't have to drive.

Castiel was never really one to 'put out' on the first date, but there was just something about Dean that made him question that decision entirely. Their shoulders bumped together as they swayed down the sidewalk, arms brushing in a teasing dance, but they didn't hold hands. That wasn't part of the game. Dean's green eyes were sparkling gold under the glow of the streetlamps and the hand that found its way to the small of Castiel's back was strong and warm as it led him soundly around the corner.

They were standing on the stoop of Dean's apartment building less than ten minutes later, Castiel waiting off to the side, as Dean searched for his key.

"Quit checkin' out my ass," he ribbed, voice slightly slurred, as he pushed the key in the lock.

Castiel gave a lazy, drunken smile when Dean grinned back at him. Admittedly, Dean was more of a lightweight than he let on. "I would never." He proceeded to check out his ass the entire way up the flight of stairs. He couldn't really complain about the view.

Dean's apartment was on the second floor. He struggled with that lock too and giggled at Castiel's obviously growing impatience.

Though almost as soon as the door closed, Dean was pulling at him and kissing him. Mouths pressed together like he was still hungry, lips falling into a hot slide as Castiel opened for him. Castiel slid his tongue over Dean's, as he backed him further into the room towards the couch while simultaneously trying to slip him out of his buttoned up shirt. Dean hit the couch on his back with a laugh and a groan at being separated and Castiel followed, laying his weight on him and straddling his hips. Lips meeting his urgently again. His fumbling fingers were desperate to explore under the foggy haze of the sweet wine and they went straight for Dean's belt buckle, the loose leather strap tapping against his own bulge insistently, bringing his attention to it. He moaned softly into Dean's mouth at the sensation and then Dean broke the kiss to come up for air.

"Cas, wait up," he said just as Castiel was rucking his shirt up above his nipples and leaning his head in again.

Castiel pulled back, half-lidded eyes struggling to open fully. "What's wrong?"

"It's," he started, licking his lips. In the moment, it's all Castiel could think about. "Well, I just don't want you t'be surprised s'all."

"Surprised?" He asked in a haze. Dean, what the fuck are you talking about?"

"I, uh, I like to wear... women's panties... sometimes," he mumbled, face visibly turning red. The blush was somehow beautiful and adorable given the context. "It's no big thing..." he said trailing off, attempting to explain. "Just was hopin'--"

"Shh, sh," Castiel shushed him with an insistent kiss to Dean's lips. He kissed him long and simmering, sparking the heat growing between them again. His hands found their way to Dean's jeans again, unzipping his fly in one sure movement, as his mouth moved lower to enclose around Dean's nipple.

Dean moaned at the insistent circling of his tongue, inching his jeans lower under his ass, and Castiel pulled off again to appraise him. The panties he had on were sheer, thin black lace with a tiny pink satin bow right above his full, flushed cock, leaking a darkened stain against the front onto his stomach. Castiel spent what must have been too long staring, mouth salivating, because Dean started to shy away and reach for his pants.

"Don't." With one hand, Castiel gathered Dean's wrists over his head. The other groping over his hot bulge in rapt wonder. He scooted himself down to sit above Dean's knees, and lowered his lips to mouth against the outline of Dean's cock, releasing hot breaths that made the thing twitch under his tongue. "You're the hottest... fucking... thing I've ever seen," Castiel uttered roughly between claiming kisses.

Dean was barely containing his arousal, teeth sinking into the plush of his lower lip. "Cas-- Jesus, fuck," he whined, uselessly pulling at his wrists against the pillow, "I want you to fuck me."

Before he knew it, they were both fully divested of their clothing and his cock was buried deep inside Dean's tight ass. They were both too drunk to have the foresight to use a condom, but the wet heat sliding between them made it that much better. And Castiel couldn't get enough of it, of Dean, sucking on his lips and nipples and making him quiver and shake. His cock twitching in his hand. He'd dissolved into a moaning mess beneath him.

"Ah, right there," Dean pleaded, clenching around Castiel's cock. "Right there. Harder."

Castiel didn't slow until Dean's fingers were bruising his back and he was coming hot ropes across his chest. He fucked him through it agonizingly slow, Dean shuddering each time the head of his cock brushed over his over-sensitive prostate, until eventually he came into him too. Dean gasped at the feeling of his hot come painting him from the inside when Castiel cut off the sound with another sloppy, languid kiss.

The man's pen stopped moving, hovering precariously over the clipboard. "I'm sorry, we're getting a bit off topic," he said, flushed embarrassment coloring his cheeks.

"My apologies. I'm easily distracted," admitted Castiel, forcibly unphased despite the usual nausea. "Perhaps you've picked the wrong profession if you can't handle the gory details, Agent."

The agent gave a reluctant laugh. "Perhaps you're right."

"I only mention it because of Dean's... proclivity for women's underwear. I think - No, I know - Dean felt shame regarding that particular preference and it might have caused him to act rash on other occasions to compensate."

He waited for the agent to finish writing whatever it was he was writing. Something about perversions and questionable morals. "And also..." Castiel said, clearing his throat.

"...Also?"

"It didn't seem relevant at the time, but Dean, he... He asked me to hurt him. During the sex."

"Hurt him?"

Motioning towards his throat, Castiel cleared his again. "He asked me to choke him before he... finished." Something about that information made the agent's eyes light up. In a different setting, Castiel might have laughed. "Naturally, I'd never tried that kind of sexual play before and I was hesitant to try it then as well, but he was insistent and I wanted to please him. But I digress... Dean and I were not exclusive by any means and as it turned out we just wanted different things. His father's death and Sam's permanent move affected him deeply and he ended up not being the person I believed him to be. He was very angry, very often. He started to drink more and he was clinging to the closet door like his life depended on it."

Just then, there was a knock on the interrogation room door. Agent Ford stood to open it and was delivered a plate with a simple, albeit slightly squashed, PB&J sandwich. He set it down on the table between them and Castiel grabbed it almost as quick, devouring the first bite like a hungry lion.

“Thank you,” he mumbled between bites.

“Yeah, no trouble,” the man replied watching him eat with a weird fascination. He cleared his throat and scooted his metal chair back in with a terrible screech against the floor. He reached for Castiel’s statement in the folder and gave it a once over. “Let’s shift gears for a minute.” The man flipped through his folder and settled on something Castiel couldn’t see. “Does the name Cassie Robinson ring any bells? We spoke to your coworker Steve, he said she was a regular at the coffee shop. Worked for the Lawrence Gazette.”

“Cassie Robinson.”

The name triggered another flash of nausea. He could feel the warmth of her throat under his hands, her pulse slowing, more than he could remember her face. The lights were on, all he remembered was the heat of her skin and the whites of her eyes as they bulged out of their sockets and the prickling feeling of vomit surging at the back of his throat.

“Um, yes, I -- I remember her coming in,” he said, as evenly as possible. “She... She used to come in frequently during the rushes. Her and Dean were friends, I believe. ...Is she alright?”

“They were more than friends, weren’t they? That’s what your coworker said. Said he saw them together often enough.”

Instantly, the taste of his sandwich turned to ash in his mouth and he suddenly wasn’t hungry, but he tried not to let it show, instead chewing with the hopes to will away the saliva coating the sides of his mouth. That same prickling feeling. “Yes, maybe. That was after Dean and myself so I’m not sure of the details of their meetings.” Swallowing was a challenge. “Maybe she would be able to fill you in on the particulars,” he added around another forced bite.

“Well, there’s a small problem with that, Mr. Novak.”

“Oh?”

The man pulled out a sheet of paper -- a photograph -- and slid it across the laminate table. “Cassie Robinson was found dead 48 hours ago.”

“The news reports. The body they found--” Castiel gulped and reached for the photograph on the table, legitimate fear widened his eyes at the prospect of what they’d managed to capture on film.

His eyes settled on the photograph in his unsteady hand. It was the parking lot off the shoulder of I-70. The trunk of the car had been opened for the investigators to photograph, and there was Cassie Robinson under a spotlight huddled in the trunk of the car. Her eyes were milky with decay and her face was bloated. Viscera pooling in the fibers of the car lining from where they’d leaked out of the garbage bags. Limbs he had to contort at odd

angles just to make her fit. In all his time in active service, in all his other extracurricular activities, he'd never had to move a body before. Just the memory threatened to overturn the contents of his stomach.

Castiel breathed out a hefty sigh of relief that there weren't any obvious red flags in the photograph, but he caught it with the palm of his hand. "This is-- This is horrifying." He laid the photograph down between them, and swallowed again. "She was a nice girl. Usually agreeable. Do you have any idea who did it?"

The agent considered him. His reactions. He sucked on a tooth, scrutinizing really. And then he asked, "You heard of the Sleepytime Strangler?"

"Yes, of course." Castiel wanted to roll his eyes at the asinine moniker. "It's been all over the press."

"Earlier you suggested that Dean Winchester is predictable."

"Yes... To my knowledge. From what little I'd known of him."

"Well, here's the thing. Nothing you've told me has made me think he's some cold-blooded killer. Comes on a little strong maybe, has some weird preferences, but he's not out there skinning any neighborhood cats. It's not enough to go on. So, what am I missing? Could you have predicted this?"

Castiel took another bite, but slower. "You think... Dean did this?" The question was born from shock, part feigned, part appalled at the sheer stupidity. And here he'd been thinking he was about to fall into a self-imposed bear trap.

The universe had never treated him so kindly.

"It's the only lead we've got. We did a sweep of the vehicle and of the apartment. No forced entry found in either. There were bruises and contusions found on Ms. Robinson's body that must have occurred while she was still alive. She put up a struggle to somebody that's for sure."

The agent shuffled around more papers in the folder and provided another photograph. An older one from seven months back. His sixth kill. Something he remembered all too vividly and often just because of the timing. He placed it next to the photo of Cassie Robinson and let Castiel absorb the pair of images together and instantly he identified his own mistake: Her bruises didn't match the others. The other's didn't struggle. The others weren't women.

"Do you remember seeing this one in the news?"

Absently, Castiel nodded, head genuinely unsteady on his neck. "His name... Something strange, wasn't it?" Castiel had never learned his name before that broadcast. He'd simply called him Alfie.

"It was proven that Mr. Samandriel was a regular at the popular nightclub La Cage Aux Folles, and upon searching Mr. Winchester's apartment we found evidence to suggest he was

a regular there as well. There was a receipt found from the same night in his apartment,” he explained, “As well as various other incriminating information.”

“I see... Why, um... why are you telling me all of this? Where’s Dean?”

“Now, see, that’s the problem. Nobody’s seen Mr. Winchester in about...” He checked his wristwatch like it meant anything, “Oh, I’d say... at least 48 hours if not longer based on the state of Ms. Robinson. Just up and vanished into thin air like a ghost. So, I guess what I’m asking is, have you seen Dean Winchester?”

“Um. No, not since last Thursday morning.” Thursday was an unassuming day. It was also one of the days Dean came in twice. “He ordered the usual and then he left. He seemed... normal, but I had called out sick Friday with a stomach bug and he doesn’t usually come on weekends, so nothing seemed off.”

“Not your fault, Mr. Novak. Not your job to keep tabs on him.”

“Right. Of course not.”

“Only thing we can’t figure out is why.”

“Why? What do you mean ‘why’?”

“There’s no motive. If he were trying to remain in the closet, at least the others make some sort of twisted sense. But why would Dean Winchester kill Cassie Robinson? She doesn’t fit the pattern.”

Castiel almost wanted to laugh, but he shook his head and frowned. “I’m not sure. Maybe, um... maybe she simply got in the way.”

The man hummed in consideration, closing his folders and putting his pen down. “Anyway, you’re free to leave, Mr. Novak. No further questions at this time, but if you hear anything from Dean Winchester, don’t hesitate. You call us right away. Otherwise, you’re looking at a charge for accessory.”

“Dean wouldn’t call me,” he said, standing from the table. “We’re not that close.”

“Just a precaution.”

With a nod, he collected his trench coat from the back of his chair and shrugged it on, making his way over to the door with his usual limping gait. “Thank you for the sandwich.”

“Oh, and Mr. Novak?” Castiel turned to look at him, hand wrapped around the knob. “Don’t go anywhere. Y’know, out of town. We might have more questions.”

With his best pinched smile plastered on, he asked, “Where would I go?”



August, 1975

Chapter Summary

“He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

SEVEN MONTHS EARLIER

The war had officially ended mere months ago. Castiel had almost finished his tour just like all the rest until he'd been unceremoniously discharged early for incongruous behavior for a service member of the United States. The end hadn't been in sight just yet and on one desperate day, Castiel shot himself in the foot. At the time, he tried to play it off as an accident, but the truth of the matter was that Castiel couldn't take the heat. The air so thick and wet it felt like drowning even when it wasn't wet season. The insects just as lethal as the enemy. The irony was that he hadn't been drafted; he'd willingly signed himself over. Even still, he saw unspeakable things carved into the back of his eyes on the good nights upon returning home. War was funny like that. Society didn't want to hear a man talk about those sorts of things either. Feelings on the subject were indecent. Morally bankrupt. Fighting in a war they didn't even win for nothing. But Castiel was a soldier first and foremost, even if he wasn't allowed in combat anymore, and in that he found some sense of normalcy. A routine. Commonality with other barbaric men who knew what it was like to hold someone's life in the palms of his hands, to look someone dead in the eye and decide to end it all for them. Bullets were quick. Bullets weren't really intimate enough, he'd thought more than once.

Returning home to a place that didn't want you was hard enough. Not having a family to return home to was harder, but Castiel wasn't unfamiliar to the solitude. To the isolation. It seemed to be the only constant in a life that was constantly meaningless. He needed that sense of routine back, that sense of commonality, so he did what anyone else would do. He sought the comfort of other people; but that familiar, primal urge for control never left.

The murders weren't a mystery. Between the usual coverage of the American-Soviet liaison in space, they'd been broadcasted over the local evening news outlets, radio stations, and tabloids. 'Mad man still at large' they'd boasted in block print.

Castiel wasn't mad. Quite the contrary. Sometimes he felt he was too sane.

And yet, despite all the fanfare and theatrics, gay men still flocked to La Cage Aux Folles in droves. Perhaps they didn't take the threat seriously; what with his unfortunate epithet, Castiel couldn't take it seriously either.

And where else would they go?

La Cage was the only queer club the city had. There was nothing particularly special about it.

There were hard bodies and stiff drinks much like one would expect and almost everyone there was prowling for a good time, Castiel included. The music was beating like a steady pulse - a forgettable pop song - the darkness shrouding the dancefloor was cut through with the shimmer of the disco ball, bouncing off the amalgam of sweating flesh writhing together on the dancefloor. Too intimate a space for the sheer volume of people held inside, smothering even in the thick humidity - but then again, that was part of the clubs appeal.

This was a place Castiel frequented often. The shadows offered a certain security that most other places in this area lacked and the sea of intoxicated prey offered a wider selection in a place where he wouldn't get noticed for noticing other men.

Castiel's usual vantage point was sat at the bar, casually sipping on a martini glass full of room temperature tap water in a veiled attempt to maintain the illusion he was drinking like everyone else - an inside joke between himself and the bartender whenever he came, but the truth was Castiel never drank. Not here, or anywhere else. Alcohol dulled the senses and if his efforts here were successful he couldn't afford not to feel every minute detail of his reaped reward. Paying left a paper trail; that wasn't a misstep he was willing to take. He wanted to be able to slip out at the end of the night like a ghost. Like he'd never been there at all, so he sat and he waited for another man more outwardly bold than himself to send over an unappreciated drink.

They usually did.

Tonight, Castiel was outfitted in his usual plain dress: a pair of pressed slacks and an ironed dress shirt. A pair of non-prescription glasses sat crookedly on the bridge of his nose. Inconspicuous. Nothing to draw attention. The only difference being he combed his hair to the opposite side, which, even to himself, made him entirely unrecognizable in the mirror before he left his apartment. Besides that, no one was wary of a man with a limp. The simple attire tended to draw the attention of some young thing looking for a put-together, older man, and usually Castiel obliged an easy target, but tonight he wanted something more.

He needed a challenge.

Some nights he struck out and that was fine, if not frustrating, but he'd been striking out far more often than not as of late and tonight wasn't a night he could afford to lose it again. His sanity depended upon it.

Quite frankly, someone's life depended on it.

As he was perusing the night's offerings across the darkened confines of the nightclub, a replenished drink was placed in front of him on the bar. On impulse, he reached for it and brought it to his lips only to be stung by the pungent aroma of cheap, burning alcohol. He frowned up at the bartender, but in reality he was relieved someone finally took the bait.

"From the man across the bar," the bartender said over the music before he could speak a word, tossing his thumb over his shoulder as Castiel was about to mock-object.

Castiel tracked the movement to the outline of a man seated in a barstool, elbows propped against the bartop in a desperately casual way. Almost as though he anticipated the glance. From the side, the man's architecture was breathtaking. Illuminated by the strobe on every third beat, his cheekbones and full lips were practically aglow. The unignorable need to preserve him as he was in that moment was overwhelming. If Castiel's eyes appeared a shade darker than normal even in the low light, he couldn't deny it. This man was everything he'd been hoping for and more. This man was perfect.

"Does he have a name?" he asked, though it was a slim chance that it would be the real one anyway. Most of the patrons here exchanged in casual, anonymous sexual favors that didn't require the use of a real name.

For a moment the bartender disappeared, conflating with the man across the bar as it were. When he returned, the bartender smiled, laying down a napkin on the bartop as he slid it over towards Castiel. It had a note written on it. 'You look lonely -Dean W.,' it read.

Dean. Castiel's mouth shaped the word without any real sound, tongue teasing behind his teeth. The name suited him. That simple, mid-western sound like a hot summer breeze. And as fate would have it, Dean appeared lonely too. Alone was a more apt word.

Despite himself, a small scoff escaped Castiel's lips at how easy it always seemed to be. Hardly the challenge he was prowling for. "Thank you," he murmured too low to hear over the beat, just enough acknowledgment to make the bartender walk away, but his gaze remained fixed on the man across the bar as he circled the rim of his martini glass with a light finger.

From what he could tell, the man was an Adonis. Broad shoulders, filled out musculature. Equal in stature to himself. The look in his eyes screamed impressionable too. Willing and submissive if his posturing was anything to go by. A man hoping to be taken advantage of in the dark.

Castiel contemplated over the perspiring drink on the bartop just as much as he contemplated the man across the bar. For close to ten minutes he sat contemplating over whether or not he should approach first or wait for the other man to make the first move, hoping beyond hope the other man did first. Over which would seem less conspicuous to the people around them. Over whether or not anyone would even notice if they left together. But then again, the man, Dean, was inordinately beautiful all on his own, and Castiel wasn't difficult on the eyes, or so he'd been told before. Surely someone would have noticed either of them by now.

The feeling of examining eyes pulled him out of the vicious loop. For a second so sharp and quick and obliterating, Dean returned Castiel's gaze, locking in silent communication, droll amusement at his perceived lack of courage. When their eyes met, the air felt electrically charged. There was something in it he couldn't fathom followed by something predictable. Like looking into the eyes of an insect and seeing God's work. Like hearing God whisper directly into your ear, "I made this one for you."

Dean smiled. He was studying him closely from such a distance, checking him out; his gaze was lurid. No different than the others, but somehow entirely different. Dean was better than him.

It was then that Castiel was struck by nerves curdling the acid in the pit of his stomach.

Shame. Hesitation. Performance anxiety. An old, familiar friend he hadn't seen in quite some time. A fluttering of a butterfly's wing tickling his insides. This feeling wasn't new, but it was so few and far between he'd forgotten it existed. Hesitation was weakness. A feeling like shame had no place here tonight.

Practically in the same instant, Castiel slipped off the barstool and headed for the toilets, already feeling sick to his stomach at his own pathetic feelings.

Cold sweat beaded up along his hairline as his clammy forehead met the cool metal of the stall, coated thick with grime and graffiti. He'd just finished trying to emit the sparse contents of his stomach when soft moans from the stall next door superimposed themselves over the echoing beat of synth pop through the bathroom wall. The wet, sloppy sucking of an anonymous cock rattled the barrier between them with every thrust into the receiving mouth. The dueling sounds caused Castiel's cock to stir in his slacks on sheer primal impulse and nausea hit the back of his throat again at the feeling of blood rushing into his groin, thickening against his inner thigh. And behind the backs of his eyelids, painted the color red. The vision of blood on his hands shuffling with the sight of blown pupils like a strobe light.

He took a grounding breath into the bottom of his lungs and exhaled slowly. In the midst of it, his insistent palm was pushing at his clothed erection, willing it away, pleading with it to go away and come back when he was ready and only then.

The stranger on the other side threw his head back so hard the barrier shook and the bit off sounds of smothered release were evident. Sweat and sex and saliva and the grime of a public bathroom. Castiel could practically smell the semen on this stranger's tongue.

He stayed like that for a long while, through another returned blowjob, with far less enthusiasm than the first, until the sound of rubber latex snapped him out of it. He lifted himself off the wall and headed back towards the darkened dancefloor.

Castiel had every intention to round the bar and approach with forced, even confidence this time around, smoothly whisk the man across the bar away from a place like this, but then he'd realized that the man who called himself Dean had disappeared from his spot only to be replaced with another. A myriad of warring emotions washed over him then, but the most prominent one was rage. At himself more than anyone. It hit him like a train. He stared at the spot for a few minutes more, that was until a new body was pressed against his side like a sucking leech. Another one of those young things he wasn't particularly thrilled by anymore, suckling his earlobe without his permission. But for a brief moment, Castiel was absorbed in the closeness and the only thing he was left with was this pale, scrawny thing throwing itself in his arms without any real effort needed on his behalf.

"Do you live nearby?" he found himself asking through the man's messy, overzealous kisses to his exposed neck. He listened to the shouting in his ear that was only as audible as a whisper against the volume of the dance music. As it turned out, this young man did. Just around the corner, in fact. "Would you like to get out of here?"

The young man's enthusiastic 'yes' was bittersweet music to his ears.

Alfie. That was the name the younger man had given him.

Castiel didn't know if that was this man's real name either and he never cared to ask. It didn't matter. By the light of the streetlamps, he was average looking at best with a taste for garish clothing. The only striking thing about him was his milky pale skin in the moonlight. Castiel limped behind him the few blocks to his apartment, around the corner and up a few derelict flights of stairs to a third floor studio apartment hardly saying a word to one another, save for awkward exchanged glances. The occasional mischievous smirk.

"I live alone," the man asserted almost shyly now that they were separated from the pack. The first thing he'd really said since they left the club as he unlocked his apartment door. "Nobody's going to interrupt."

He flipped on a dim table lamp by the door and tossed his keys aside it. Turning to face Castiel, it was clear in his unconfident, yet somehow predatory gaze what he was after as his eyes slid from Castiel's face down to his groin. He began shedding his sparkling jacket from his shoulders, hanging it off the back of the nearby sofa, as he avoided direct eye contact.

"For the record," he started with a dry swallow, "I don't do this often -- bring strange men back to my apartment, I mean."

Castiel considered him from his place in the doorway and decided the man seemed nervous. His lips twisted into an amused smirk. "You think I'm strange?"

"No, I--"

"It's alright. I don't mind." The man stopped as Castiel locked the door behind him. "I noticed you watching me from across the bar," he lied in a pensive way. The truth was, he hadn't seen this man at all before he'd been approached by him. And really, there was nothing memorable about him once he lost the jacket.

At the man's bashful, stuttering attempts to deny it, Castiel crossed the carpet and gripped his limp wrists hanging down by his side. "I'm not here to judge you." Angling his head in close to his ear, Castiel asked lowly, "What were you thinking about?" His pointed nose brushed the smooth, delicate skin of the man's cheek as he exhaled, "Were you imagining my cock?"

The man simply nodded, sucking in a recycled breath, long eyelashes fluttering.

Placing one of his hands on the man's crotch, Castiel cupped his fingers around the growing bulge. "You want it, don't you? You want me to take you," he presumed, but it wasn't a question. "You want me to control you."

Alfie exhaled a shuddering breath at the touch, but his voice was sure when he breathed out, "Yes."

"Are you a cock virgin?"

When the man nodded again, Castiel hummed a soft, contemplative sound into his ear. "Show me." The man attempted to move his hands to the fly of his own tight jeans, but Castiel tightened his grip around the man's cock. "No, no. Not yet. You're going to show me how much you want it first."

"Yes, sir," he nearly whined.

Castiel allowed himself to be tugged towards a small partitioned bedroom by the side of the kitchenette, but no further. Once they hit the partition, Castiel took charge, forcefully walking the younger man backwards. As soon as he fell ungracefully onto the mattress, Castiel roughly unfastened his own belt buckle and shoved his pressed slacks and boxers down to his knees, heavy cock bobbing in the still air as he stood at the foot of the bed. The man propped himself up on his elbows, eyes focused intently on Castiel's erection dangling in front of his face. He stroked enough to get himself where he needed to be and no more.

"Get on your knees," Castiel commanded, voice roughened with his own twisted sense of arousal. "You're going to suck it."

The man's eyes were wide as saucers as he looked upon him, but he didn't seem scared. Castiel hated it, but he did as he was told; riveted more than anything by the display of dominance. Bony knees balancing on the hardwood floor, his tight pants were still wrapped around his legs like rope. He leaned in and delicately kissed the tip and something inside Castiel's chest began to constrict in that familiar rage.

"I didn't tell you you could do that," he chastised, bruising fingers coming to clutch the man's jaw, teeth digging into the meat of his cheeks, "I told you to suck it."

The man eyed him warily as Castiel released his grip and then haltingly took the tip of his cock into his mouth, jaw adjusting to the girth, before he began to suck in earnest. His tongue worked over the shaft, head bobbing along with his fist, until Castiel decided he was wet enough and shoved him off.

"What's your problem?" He asked breathlessly, wiping the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand.

The question spiked his blood back to a low simmer. "I didn't say you could speak," Castiel growled. "Get on the bed and remove your pants."

He still listened, as Castiel anticipated, and once the man was divested of his pants, Castiel eyed his modestly sized erection under the glow of a streetlight trickling in from just outside the bedroom window. Just further back, the blunt end of a plug was nestled between his cheeks, hole still slick with lube as Castiel traced a finger around it causing the man to mewl in an unflattering way at the teasing touch.

"You've prepared yourself," Castiel observed, "You lied to me."

"Sorry," he said weakly. He didn't sound sorry at all.

"You know lying is a sin," he stated evenly. "Should I punish you? Is that what you want?"

The man gulped under Castiel's scrutiny. He could barely discern the blushing nod the man gave him in this lighting.

"Take off your shirt," he said, as he removed his own.

He obliged, if not a little more hesitant than before and Castiel crowded into his space, trapping him into place against the mattress. The man reached a hand up to cradle Castiel's neck, an insistent tug to pull him closer, to kiss him on the mouth presumably, but Castiel didn't kiss. Too intimate. That wasn't what this was about. He jerked himself out from under the man's hand, using the opportunity to gather the man's frail wrists into the pillow over his head, fingers bending at painful angles. Pinning him like an insect for inspection.

Bringing one hand up to the man's lips, he held his palm flat against them as he commanded him to spit.

The man listened, just barely.

The pathetic dribble that escaped his lips and landed in Castiel's palm was laughable at best. He firmly slapped his cheek with the back of his hand and commanded him to do it again. Only when an adequate amount was coating his palm did he use it slick himself up again. He tugged the plug out without much delicacy or caring, causing the man to whimper, and deposited it with a thud onto the floor.

Within seconds, the head of his cock was nudging at the man's already stretched entrance with as little finesse as anything else that had happened between them thus far. The stretching took most of the fun out of this entire ordeal, but Castiel had more girth than the toy and the thickness of his erection went in slower than he wanted, despite his efforts to force himself in deeper, faster. The man keened in an undignified way underneath him at the additional burning stretch, but once Castiel reached the hilt he didn't allow for any time to adjust to the full sensation.

Only the first few long thrusts were slow and the combined saliva and remaining lubricant weren't exactly enough to ease the glide. The man tried to take it in a collected way, presuming maybe Castiel just didn't notice the rough drag of the cock inside him, but as he kept going, the friction became too much to comfortably bear.

"More lube," he heard the man say in a small voice, breath hitching in his throat, "We need more. In the drawer." He gasped, more out of pain than pleasure, when Castiel pushed back in, but Castiel ignored his subtle plea, and increased the depth and pace at which he rolled his hips into him, grip firming on his wrists.

"Please," he cried, a little more desperately as Castiel brushed against his prostate and his body contorted to simultaneously crawl towards and run away from the dueling sensations inside of him.

"This is a punishment," he grunted between sharp thrusts, "This is what you asked for." He didn't deserve pleasure.

"I want to stop," he cried, struggling against Castiel's grip.

But Castiel didn't stop, he wasn't finished yet. "This isn't about what you want." His breaths were coming out in hot, heavy bursts against the man's fragile shoulder as he picked up his brutal pace. His end was close, he could feel the heat tingling up his spine. It had been a while, afterall.

"Stop!" He cried again, "What the fuck is wrong with you!?"

In that instant, Castiel saw red.

The sound of a voice echoing in the deep pockets of his mind, a place he refused to look, asking him why he couldn't just be normal. Asking him why he had to be the way that he was. Asking him what the fuck was wrong with him just like they all did. The sting of a slap across his cheek. The feeling of abandonment when he learned that his father was never coming home. Because of him, he was routinely told. It was everyone he'd ever met, and it was no one lying below him. The voice that came to him in dreams and nightmares, that came to him every time he did. Shrill, nagging, disproving. It was the sound of his commanding officers barking orders. It was the voice of his mother.

The fingers of his free hand wrapped themselves around the long, delicate, exposed throat of this much scrawnier man, helplessly pinned beneath him, and as his orgasm approached, his grip around this man's pulse tightened in tandem until Castiel could feel the blood stop pulsing. The man's arms were shaking violently against Castiel's relentless grip, body kicking in a desperate attempt to get out from under him, as he bore down on his windpipe and his artery, but he wouldn't die. He let go of his wrists to place a smothering hand over his mouth and nose as short fingernails dug into the back of his hands in crescent moons. The pale skin his face shifted like a rainbow, a whole spectrum from red to indigo. The whites of his eyes rolling like a slot machine, until they fell still. Glassy, blown pupils fixed on the popcorn ceiling, seeing without seeing.

And despite his cock still buried inside him, Castiel was alone.

September, 1975

Chapter Summary

“There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of enormous forces. One of the main effects of war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters.”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*

ONE MONTH LATER

The desire to kill wasn't something easily sated. The need for control was what drove his desires, to preserve his victims at what Castiel deemed their most beautiful was what crashed and burned them. It was a vicious cycle, and there were hardly enough opportunities to ever truly leave him appeased.

Weeks had passed, but that ever-present, insatiable feeling never left him, even with the use of a stand-in; it lingered around the edges, waiting for the opportunity to strike again, but for whatever reason Castiel still couldn't figure out, the man from across the bar had been different than anyone he'd ever seen before. All it took was one look for him to crawl his way under Castiel's skin, to ruffle his controlled exterior unlike any of the others without so much as a word.

'Dean' was an ideal. A beautiful target. A light in the dark.

Quite frankly, Dean was the one that got away.

Finding him hadn't been an easy task. It took weeks of perusing the Yellow Pages and visiting addresses he'd obtained through public records, but Castiel considered this time well spent when all his searching came to fruition.

His name was Dean Winchester.

He was Head Mechanic at Singer Salvage and Restoration; a small garage, but seemingly impressive, nonetheless. According to public records, he had a younger brother named Samuel who lived out west in California and his parents had since passed away. It was just Dean out here. All by his lonesome.

Once he'd obtained Dean's full name and place of business, figuring out his routine was fairly straightforward: Dean Winchester was very predictable. He didn't do much outside the repetitive, ritualistic daily motions; wake up, get coffee, go to work, go home. Lather, Rinse, Repeat. Do it all over again until you die, more or less.

It should be noted that Castiel had never done this before. Gone out of his way for anyone. He'd never felt compelled to, for starters. He also didn't see the point in obsessing over any one victim in particular. The people he went after offered themselves over willingly through natural gravitation. Almost no work had been required on his part and for a long while, eight encounters previous in fact, that situation worked out well for him; he'd been mildly sated before.

But now?

Dean Winchester was different. And, well, he did say he'd wanted a new challenge. And that innate animalistic hunger was festering inside him once more. He wanted to learn everything there was to know about Dean. What made him feel joy. Anger. Sadness. What made him feel pleasure. What really made him tick.

This desire to know more was foreign to him too.

Dean Winchester's apartment was a modest brick building located just outside the city. Quite a hike from La Cage, Castiel had noted the first time he tracked it down. Not a place one just happens upon in their daily traversing. Not out here. And Castiel would know, he lived the next town over and had to make the trip into the city multiple times himself.

The street on which the building was situated wasn't busy this time of night, which was the first thing Castiel noticed when he'd come upon the street so he decided out of his preference for habit that this would be the time he always came.

The streetlamp nearby flickered, a thready glow at best, and it provided a small semblance of covertness as he shrank into the shadows. There was an alleyway just across the street from the building and that was the spot he took to conceal himself. This wasn't the first time Castiel had come here nor was it to be the last. The view from the alley stared directly into Dean's bedroom window overhead, and oftentimes, as Castiel had learned from the select times he'd visited, Dean was entirely unaware of the concept of privacy.

Checking the time on his wristwatch, Castiel waited in the dark for the long hand to tick closer towards 10 o'clock. That was the time Dean often migrated from the couch into his bedroom to prepare for a shower. A creature of habit. And like clockwork, the second his watch struck 10, Dean's form entered into view.

Teasingly slow, he stripped out of his t-shirt, firm muscles in his back rippling against the golden lamplight, and if Castiel didn't know any better, he might have thought Dean knew he was watching. His hands moved lower to his fly and Castiel's moved with it. He shimmied the denim over his long, lean legs, stepping out of the material pooling on the floor. He didn't move from his spot in front of the window, he simply admired himself in what must have been a floor-length mirror out of view from Castiel's vantage point.

Dean admired himself like this often.

The only thing preventing him from being entirely naked was an intricately laced black thong strapping down his cock. He watched himself from all angles, seeing how his cock must've looked from the side, how his ass ate the string in the back. And when Dean's strong hands slipped past the delicate hemline of the underwear, Castiel's hand slipped inside his blue jeans.

Moments like this were often why he made repeat visits.

Masturbation wasn't a task Castiel often took part in. More often than not it made him want to vomit ever since that time when his Mother found him as a young boy no older than eleven, but out here in the alley, stroking himself in tandem with Dean's more confident strokes, seeing the pleasure wash over Dean's face from such a basic need, Castiel felt what he could only describe as arousal.

Empathy.

The longer he stood out there, the less alone he truly felt.

But then Dean stopped. He came on his hand and stripped off his used panties and it only occurred to Castiel afterwards that he'd unceremoniously come into his hand too.

Once Dean was out of view and presumably in the shower, the revulsion settled in quickly and he found himself vomiting besides the dumpster.

When he finally managed to get home, he crawled into bed, but he couldn't sleep. That feeling of closeness was becoming more addicting than Castiel bargained for. He resolved to find a way to be even closer.

OCTOBER 1975

Ever since his discharge, Castiel had been experiencing difficulty in finding another place of work. Most employers weren't looking to hire veterans in the first place, and even more were less likely to hire dishonorably discharged ones. They weren't allowed to ask, but it always managed to weasel it's way into an interview evaluation.

As fate would have it, only a few weeks later on another one of those afternoons he'd followed Dean to work, Castiel found a sign hanging in the window at the local coffee shop. Buzzy Bee Coffee. Located only a few city blocks away from Singer Salvage, the coffee shop was one Dean frequented religiously. They were looking to fill the role of a barista, a role which Castiel had no experience, but he managed to charm the interviewer into the position anyway. He figured, how hard could it be to make coffee? People do it every day.

The lying also helped.

It was only his third shift, a Monday, and he realized it was more difficult than it seemed. He wasn't used to the morning rush yet and his coworker Steve went to the restroom five minutes before the rush started and there was a line forming at the counter. He grabbed the

closest apron and got to work. As the line impatiently waited, he accidentally spilled steamed milk down the front of his cheesy novelty apron and added an extra shot of espresso to the drink he was attempting to make.

“Fuck it,” he muttered under his breath. Low enough that he wouldn’t be heard over the hiss and gurgle of the percolators as he secured the to-go lid on the cup. Turning to place it on the pick-up counter, he called out, “Americano with an extra shot of espresso!”

He waited a moment, but when no one came to retrieve the coffee, he got back to making more orders in the meantime. He managed to get rid of a couple customers before he noticed the Americano still sat orphaned on the counter.

Castiel called out the order again.

Still no takers.

Taking the still-warm paper cup in hand, Castiel turned it to find the name ‘Dean’ scribbled in permanent marker. That same handwriting. That same unsettled fluttering feeling returning to his stomach once more, though this time in the light of day it was harder to ignore.

“No, Sam,” chastised a man’s voice from the back corner. He was on the public payphone, facing the corner for some semblance of privacy. “You’re abandoning me is what you’re doing and you know it! --- Oh, and you don’t think it’s been hard on me either, huh? You don’t think I been goin’ through it?”

He cleared his throat. Louder, he asked, “Is there a Dean here?”

In the far corner, the man absorbed in his phone conversation perked up, mouth slack before realization smacked him upside the head. “Crap. This isn’t over, Sam -- I gotta go. We’ll talk about this later.”

Dean mumbled quick apologies as he maneuvered his way through the line towards the pick-up counter. Once he reached it, he was all sparkling green eyes, long lashes, plump lips, and a light dusting of freckles across the bridge of his nose. Hair artfully disheveled due to the distressing phone call he’d just had probably. Seeing him from this close a vantage point without the concealment or security of the dark was surreal. He was even more beautiful than Castiel remembered.

“Sorry,” he repeated, cheeks pinking. “Family drama,” he added almost flippantly to take the heat off himself.

Castiel had never heard the man’s voice before, only through the bedroom window. He offered his best attempt at a small, understanding smile and tried not to think about the fact he was presently covered in milk and donning a cartoon bee. About the fact this man’s voice was seeping into his cracks.

Family drama. He knew all about that.

A barely discernible spark of recognition flitted across Dean's face in that moment. Anyone else might have missed it, but Castiel tracked it, his own eyes honing in to decipher whatever Dean was seeing as he looked at him from the other side of the counter.

"You're new here," he said, sounding unsure of his own recollections. It wasn't a question, but a statement of fact. An accusation, really.

"I am... How could you tell?"

"Just never seen you here before." Here being the operative word. His gaze lingered on the blue of his eyes, over the planes of his angular face. Their eyes met again. "You got that kinda face that'd be hard for a guy to forget," he said with a disbelieving chuckle, "Have we met before?"

"No, I don't believe so," Castiel said with a quirk of his head. "I think I would've remembered you." And he did. And that was the entire problem.

Dean blushed beautifully, but Castiel expected nothing less. The older woman waiting behind him cleared her throat loudly as she tapped her foot which only exacerbated the tint in Dean's cheeks.

"It's still warm," Castiel assured as he held out the cup between them.

"Uh, yeah." Awkwardly, Dean smiled back, but his mind was still rolling like a ticker tape. "Thanks," he said. From this close, his teeth were perfect too.

Reaching out a hand, Dean plucked the coffee from Castiel's grasp and handed him the change, the tips of his fingers brushing over his as he did. Castiel could practically feel the warmth spreading across Dean's face at the touch.

"Of course," he replied, with a perfectly perfunctory nod.

Once the line dwindled to nothing, Castiel noticed Dean still stood off to the side of the counter, ruminating, staring at him for a brief, indignant moment as he watched a young woman across the coffee shop. That was, until he shook himself out of it and walked over to a table. There was a girl with tacky fuschia lipstick seated by the window with her head in that morning's issue of the Lawrence Gazette. At the first turn of a page, Dean approached her from the side with a friendly greeting.

He sat himself down in the chair across from her, a smile twitched the corner of his lips like a well-worn mask, not entirely reaching his eyes, as he took a sip of his coffee. At her returning smile, he outstretched his arm across the table and offered out his open palm. She took it in her own and they traded quiet words over coffee. Laughing casually, like their life was normal and easy. Almost like a hallmark greeting card.

Out of all the times he'd stood outside Dean's apartment, of all the times he'd watched him through the window, of all the times he'd followed him on his way home from work, not once had Castiel seen this woman before. He must have been missing something. The occurrence sat wrong in his gut.

When she got to her feet to dispose of her trash and leave, Castiel heard Dean call her “Cassie.” From where he stood, Castiel just blinked as he absently cleaned the counter in some desperate attempt to seem like he wasn’t eavesdropping.

Once upon a time, his older brother used to call him that. The only family member to which he’d felt any sense of real connection before he was killed in an automobile accident when Castiel was a child. To hear the name come from Dean Winchester’s lips in his whiskey-laden tenor was on par with the sound of angel’s singing, even if it wasn’t for him. Despite how much Castiel knew already, Dean didn’t even know his name. The sound struck a bittersweet chord.

When Steve decided to grace the counter with his presence again, Castiel adamantly ignored the fact he’d been caught staring.

On his way out the door, Dean informed him the Americano was made precisely to his specific tastes.

“Of course... Enjoy the coffee.”

“See ya around, Steve,” Dean said in return with a half-hearted wave to the man standing to Castiel’s left. The bell tinkled over the door and then he was gone.

November, 1975

Chapter Summary

“There isn’t any particular relationship between the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects.”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

NOVEMBER, 1975

Dean Winchester was a regular morning fixture at Buzzy Bee Coffee. Every morning around the same time, the bell would chime over the door and signal Dean’s arrival, and every morning Dean would order an Americano with an extra shot of espresso, of which Castiel would make it to his exact liking.

Sometimes when Dean arrived in the morning he would use the payphone, always fully submerged in the heat of an argument with the person on the other end of the line. Usually his brother Sam by the sounds of it. Though Castiel didn’t envy whoever was on the receiving end, he knew Dean’s order by heart, so the second he caught the scent of leather and motor oil coming through the door, he knew to set about fixing his order.

Once while preparing Dean’s order, he ventured to ask about the nature of his discontented phone calls, but Dean brushed him off more often than not. “Just family shit,” he’d say. What reason did he have to share that kind of information with Castiel? Dean seemed smarter than the other’s based on that self-preservation instinct alone.

Unfortunately, Cassie Robinson was also a coffee shop regular who came in twice a day, everyday. Apparently, she’d recently began work at the press office around the corner, the Lawrence Gazette, or so he’d overheard through passing conversation. Her specialty was in investigative journalism and he had a sneaking suspicion that, if not her, then someone over at the Gazette came up with the brilliant moniker of the “Sleepytime Strangler”. Regardless, Cassie’s occupation was not of importance to him. Most of the time, he preferred to ignore her existence entirely, aside from the times he had to wait on her usual table.

Though, the days Dean arrived unperturbed and unaccompanied were infinitely better.

At least they were for Castiel.

Those were the days Dean actually smiled. At something he’d said on seldom occasion where he could think of something witty and pertinent enough to add to conversation. Sometimes he even sang along to songs playing over the radio. Dean had a nice voice when he tried.

Though, he still looked at him with a secretly knowing gleam in his too-green eyes. Like he'd seen Castiel's face a million times since that night, but he wasn't allowed to say where. He knew something. They both did. And the knowing was really eating at him. But he refused to bring it up again, choosing instead to simply let it consume him.

It was on one of those days, a distraction free one, where Dean divulged his workplace to Castiel directly. It would have felt momentous if he hadn't already known, but doing so could only mean one thing: Dean was beginning to trust him.

For some reason the notion meant more than that.

He was wearing his dirty coveralls then, having walked the few blocks over from the garage in the cold. The ones with the grease stains and the embroidered 'Dean' emblazoned on the left breast in what was once white thread turned permanently grey. Throwing the change from Dean's dirty hands into the till, Castiel pondered over it, as if he hadn't already known Dean's place of work this whole time.

"You ever hear of Singer Salvage?" He found himself asking as Dean wrapped his palm around the hot cup of coffee. He never said it didn't require a little goading.

The question caused Dean to pause and skeptically regard him from across the counter. His eyes were especially green at this hour of the day, which wasn't something Castiel ever anticipated himself noticing, but it seemed indecent not to. Like rings of gold circling the sun.

Dean's lips quirked like he couldn't decide on whether or not to smile or frown. "Rings a bell," he said breezily with a shake of his head and a disbelieving chuckle, "What about it?"

Admittedly, they'd only spoken in casualties up till this point, but Castiel had listened to Dean speak to other patrons plenty by now and he was clutching at straws for a reason to make that change.

"Are they any good?"

"They're the best," he asserted with that same kind of brazen pride he usually offered Cassie Robinson blossoming across his features. "You're looking at their number one mechanic."

Castiel's lips twitched into a small smile. Dean was consistent, at least. "Is that so?"

"You bet."

"Do you have any proof of that?"

"Sure do. Employee of the month, four years running, just check the Yellow Pages. Got an ad and everything," he said, as if Castiel hadn't checked the Yellow Pages inside and out just to find him. "Who's askin'?"

"Just me," Castiel offered pathetically with a weak shrug of a shoulder.

Dean laughed. An honest one, not one of the insincere ones he gave to random strangers at the coffee shop. Not like the ones he gave to Cassie Robinson. "Well, 'just you', I tell you

what, you ever need someone to take a look at your car, you bring her on in, you hear? I can do you in and out in under an hour.” With a cheeky smile, he picked up his coffee and idly scanned the coffee shop, presumably for an absent pair of vibrant fuschia lips, before heading for the door.

To his credit, Castiel waited approximately one week before finding a reason to pay a visit to the garage. A week was believable.

The brass bell over the door jingled obnoxiously as Castiel set foot in Singer’s. The reception area smelt like dirty concrete and car exhaust and the whizzing and whirring of power tools and a static radio filled the empty space. He approached the desk with its peeling laminate wood front and tapped the call bell sat on the ledge. Within moments, a scruffy older man in a trucker hat appeared through the door behind the desk. Castiel recognized him from the times he’d watched Dean work in the salvage yard.

“Bobby Singer,” he grumbled, eyeing Castiel’s clean, white shirt warily, “What can I do ya for?”

“Is Dean Winchester available?”

“Who’s askin’?”

Castiel shook his head at the familiar question. “My apologies.” He held up his car keys looped around his finger. “He told me to stop by if I ever had a problem, and I’d like to take him up on the offer,” he explained when his previous question was met with still more skepticism.

After a considerable moment, Bobby Singer gave a curt nod and motioned for Castiel to follow him behind the front desk into the open garage. The sounds from the waiting area only intensified and so did the smells, with the added layer of natural musk thrown into the mix.

“Dean, you got a visitor,” Bobby Singer announced, banging a hand against the side of the jalopy Dean was working on.

Dean was sprawled out on his back, headfirst under some hulking piece of scrap metal, when Castiel cautiously approached. Rolling the creeper out from under the frame, Dean’s face twisted in confusion as soon as he laid eyes on him, but then it morphed into a smile. “Well, would you look who it is,” he said in way of greeting. “Hey, Stranger! This a new delivery service, or what? Where’s my coffee?”

“Hello, Dean,” he said, blush blooming stubbornly in his cheeks. “No coffee, my apologies.” He uselessly held out his empty hands and Dean chuckled. Castiel mirrored the smile, unable to control his face, as he nervously fidgeted with the keys in his pocket.

“I’m kidding, man,” Dean assured. Getting to his feet, he wiped his oily fingers off on the chest of his navy jumpsuit and walked past Castiel towards the rickety shop sink. “But hey, this is a nice surprise!” He squirted a handful of orange pumice cleaner onto his soiled hands

and vigorously scrubbed them together. Over his shoulder, he asked, “What brings you to my neck of the woods?”

It took a minute to register. Castiel was preoccupied with the broken stuttering of the radio propped up on a rusted shop stool. The steady voice of a radio personality cut up by poor reception and metal scraps.

“Yo, Bobby!” exclaimed Dean in a rush of intrigue, “Turn that shit up!”

The older, scruffy man reached for the knob and Dean’s attention was rapt in trying to decipher the morse code of the radio broadcast.

“The body of a young man Gordon Walker was discovered over the weekend. Having been missing from his workplace for over a week, friends and family called into the Lawrence Police Department and a wellness check was conducted when officials discovered the body allegedly strangled and raped. Officials have not disclosed a possible motive, but it appears to be in connection with a string of other violent crimes in the area---”

The radio cut out again into a patch of hissing static and when Castiel blinked and looked back to Dean, the man’s eyebrows were raised expectantly at him. His stomach was in knots, but he remained forcibly collected as he spoke. “I’m sorry, I must have missed the question. What did you say?”

“I said, you hear about this shit? The ‘Sleepytime Strangler’ or whatever?” He said the epithet mockingly with a snort and Castiel might have been mad if he didn’t feel the same way. “Crazy, right?” He gestured to the radio with the wrench he had fisted in his hand. “I’ve been following the missing persons on my police scanner the past couple months.”

“Police scanner?”

“Yeah, made one out of an old CB radio. Catches the 911 calls,” he said offhandedly, “Whoever did it is more than a little coo-coo for cocoa puffs if you ask me. Hope they catch the sick bastard.”

Castiel let out a brittle chuckle and nodded. “Humans are certainly capable of indescribable things.”

“That’s one word for it, sure,” Dean remarked. “Anyway... what brings you here?”

“Oh, yes, of course... Um, car trouble,” he managed to say.

“Car trouble,” Dean teasingly mocked. “Figures. Care to elaborate?”

Castiel tried to in a way that sounded authentically ignorant. Mostly just using generic terms he’d pulled from the console manual in an attempt to seem pathetically inept and in need of assistance.

Dean dried his hands and tossed the rag, face mulling it over as he nodded slowly, before he looked back at Castiel. “I think I know what the problem is.”

“What’s that?”

“You don’t know shit about cars, dude.” He laughed outright.

Castiel smirked. “And what makes you say that?”

“Oh, I dunno. Probably cuz it sounds like you just read up on the latest ‘car lingo’ in a shop rag.”

Castiel was uncomfortable with just how accurate Dean’s assessment of the situation really was. Maybe he was laying it on a little too thick.

“You tryin’ to impress me? If so, you don’t have to try that hard.”

Castiel huffed a laugh and rolled his eyes, shy smile working itself out. “And why would I do a silly thing like that?”

“Who knows?” Casually, Dean shrugged a shoulder. “Maybe you got a big ol’ crush on me or somethin’.”

“Or something,” he muttered. “Anyway, do you think you could take a look under the hood or not?”

A genuine smile appeared on Dean’s face then. “Course I can, it’s what I’m here for,” he said, “Lead the way.”

The car belonged to the elderly woman Mildred Baker who lived down the road and, for some reason unbeknownst to Castiel, she was generous enough to lend her beat-up old car to him in exchange for household favors. Mainly, picking up the groceries after work.

The Cadillac was in no working order -- he’d made sure of that this morning before his shift started -- but as it were, his research had paid off. It needed to be something trivial enough to get repaired on the spot, but important enough to render the vehicle unusable. A hose clamp seemed to do the trick. He led Dean over to where he’d parked it along his usual vantage point, not so far off from Dean’s own car, which was something he figured out quickly based on how much effort Dean placed in doting upon it.

“Wait a minute,” Dean said as they approached, “I’ve seen this car before.”

The statement took Castiel off guard. Perhaps he hadn’t done quite as good a job in being discreet as he’d thought, but this time of year, the nights got colder. Dread settled like a lead weight in his stomach. “You have?” he managed to ask.

“Hell yeah, it belongs to Mrs. Baker, right? Lives near the town line? Good lady. Used to come into the coffee shop all the time before her dementia got bad. Used to fix up her car a lot. What’re you doing with it?”

“She lets me borrow it,” he defended quickly.

“Ahh, I know what that means. You got grocery duty.”

“Unfortunately, that would be the case, yes.”

“Well, hey that’s okay. Just means you’re a good guy,” he said with a hearty slap to Castiel’s chest. Apparently, that was the universal code for ‘good guy’. “Can you give me some more details?”

“Details?”

“Yeah, like what’s She doing? Running rough?”

“Mildred?”

“The car,” deadpanned Dean.

“Overheating,” Castiel answered simply. “What do you mean, ‘she’?”

“Gotcha,” said Dean, visibly making a mental checklist of possible causes as they walked in step around the vehicle. “And yeah, She. All cars are ‘she’s. Common knowledge, dude.”

Almost as soon as he laid hands on the old Cadillac, Dean set to work. Ever the professional, he rolled the sleeves up on his coveralls exposing the tanned skin of his forearms as he dove headfirst into the engine to diagnose whatever Castiel had managed to fuck up in his clumsy efforts. As he tinkered under the hood, Dean tried to strike up idle chit-chat, which was hard to do seeing as how they’d never really spoken much about anything specific.

“Do you have any family?” Castiel already knew the answer, but it was always more interesting to hear it first hand.

Dean paused, clearing his throat, and then continued. “Uh, just my little brother Sammy. Y’know, from the phone calls. Lives out in Cali, gonna become some big-shot lawyer.”

“And you’re not happy for him,” Castiel noted, based almost entirely on the snide way he said it.

“What? Course, I am. Who wouldn’t be?”

“Exactly. Who wouldn’t be. So why aren’t you?”

Dean sighed. “Look, I’m proud of him. Really. After our mom died, practically raised him myself. Just... couple months ago, our dad passed away too and it gets lonely without family around, y’know?”

“I’m sorry to hear that. How did she die?”

“Uh, thanks... There was a fire. I went in to save Sammy, she went in to save me. She didn’t make it back out. Sometimes I wonder what woulda happened if I hadn’t gone back in there, but then I wouldn’t have Sammy. Well, not like I have him now anyway.”

That explained the separation anxiety. “And your father?”

“Cirrhosis of the liver or some shit -- he was an alcoholic.”

“For how long?”

“My whole life.” Dean cleared his throat again, looking uneasy. “Sorry, I don’t know why I’m telling you all this crap. Not your problem. I don’t even know your name.”

“It’s Jimmy,” Castiel was quick to offer. The small gesture quelled the anxiety in Dean’s face for the time being and it eased into a small smile.

“Jimmy,” he repeated, squinting against the high noon sun. “Nice to meet you, then. Sorry for the sharing is caring crap.”

“If it makes you feel any better, my father was as well. An alcoholic, I mean. He walked out on us. My mother was overbearing among other things, and my older brother died in an accident when I was a child,” Castiel offered.

Dean snorted. “No, uh, no that doesn’t really make me feel better, but it does kinda make me feel less alone out here. Thanks, Jimbo.”

“Of course.”

He wasn’t sure what compelled him to share the truth with this man, but there wasn’t anything he could do about it then. Dean could relate, and for a brief moment, Castiel felt understood. For some reason, the idea made Castiel actually blush. Though inevitably, despite whatever Castiel had set out for in this pathetic attempt, the conversation veered towards Cassie Robinson.

“Man, I tell you, she’s something else, y’know,” Dean said as he searched for a different sort of wrench in the tool box.

Feigning ignorance, Castiel asked, “Who is?”

“Uh, Cassie. The girl I’ve been seeing.”

“Oh.” Truly, he just wanted to hear the name in Dean’s mouth. “How long have you been seeing each other?” He asked, without really caring much for the answer. It wasn’t as though he didn’t already know the answer. About as long as he’d been following Dean.

“Not so long. But she’s stuck with my dumbass through my ups and downs, even when I hit the bottle sometimes. Could be something maybe, y’know?”

“No, I can’t say I do.”

There were nights Castiel laid in bed thinking about Dean, wondering if maybe what he wanted from this man was different from what he wanted all those other times. If maybe he were capable of something even close to resembling human desires, but the possibility always fell short because as much as some foolish part of him wanted something he knew he could never have, the all-consuming desire to preserve Dean, control him, took an overwhelming precedent. Those feelings only increased the longer he observed him.

Dean paused whatever he was doing under the hood to stand up straight and wipe his hands on his coveralls. He considered Castiel who was leaning his weight against the brick facade of the garage, watching as he worked, imagining which panties he might have on today, as Dean chewed his lower lip in quiet pondering.

Castiel raised a hand to shield his eyes as he calculated Dean's thoughtful expression. "What?"

His green eyes met Castiel's across the pavement. The sound of metal clanging in the cold heat of the midday sun filled the silence between them. "You mean you, uh, never been in love or whatever?"

Love. What a trite concept.

"Not that I'm aware of," Castiel answered after a moment. If he had been, he'd suppose this alien feeling pulling him towards Dean Winchester was the closest thing he'd ever encountered. "Truthfully, I think I'm incapable of the feeling," he admitted.

Dean snorted loudly. "I don't buy that for a second."

"No?"

"Nah, man. You seem alright. Good-looking or whatever. Put together. Hell, you help old ladies with their groceries."

"What does that matter?"

Dean gave a noncommittal shrug. "Just does."

Castiel hummed. "And might I ask, why do you care?"

"Ah, nothing. No reason." He shook his head and got back to digging around. "Just, for your sake, I hope that changes. I think everyone deserves to feel that. Love is what keeps people human. Without it, well, fuck, you might as well be somethin' else."

The bile in Castiel's stomach curdled and soured the back of his throat as he willed away the spark of jealousy creeping in, but he didn't dignify the statement with a response. What he wanted to do was ask Dean about his secret trips to La Cage. But he didn't. He kept it locked.

"Pretty sure I found the problem," Dean said with a short, disbelieving laugh as the rest of his words trailed off.

Fixing a hose clamp proved to be quick work and as Dean promised, it was completed in under an hour. "How much do I owe you?" he asked, reaching for his wallet.

"On the house," said Dean as he wiped his hands on an oily rag.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly--"

“Jimbo, I insist. Besides, you listened to my droning so it’s probably a fair trade.”

“Thank you, Dean.”

“No problem.”

Awkwardly, they stood outside the garage, one of them not wanting the exchange to be over quite yet, but Castiel honestly couldn’t decipher which one of them it was. There was a small possibility it could’ve been both, but he didn’t know what to make of that. Glancing around their periphery, Castiel noticed the Chevrolet Impala parked on the other side of the bay, black lustre blinding in the sun.

“She’s a beautiful car,” he said, looking back to Dean. “Is she yours?”

The way the other man’s face lit up at the praise was more blinding than the car itself, and almost wishing he’d never asked, Castiel was being regaled with every fact known to man about the 1967 Chevy Impala Dean dubbed his ‘Baby’.

December, 1975

Chapter Summary

"All time is all time. It does not change. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply is. Take it moment by moment, and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber."

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

DECEMBER 1975

Castiel knew what Dean did on every day that ended in 'y'.

At least he thought he did.

His daily routine Monday to Friday never wavered. It was the weekends that left Castiel feeling troubled. Of course he had to maintain the illusion of normalcy by keeping up with his job and running errands for Mildred and whatever else it was that made people think he was a 'good guy'. It wasn't as though he could just tail Dean all day everyday. After a certain point there hadn't been a need to. He'd known what Dean was doing in his spare time and the answers he had weren't especially enthralling. And heaven forbid he had any time to himself too.

But one night as Castiel had parked a few blocks down from Dean's apartment, Dean was dressed to go out without any aforementioned plans Castiel could remember. He followed the Impala from a safe distance -- in his own vehicle he'd managed to scrap the cash together for this time, not Mildred's; he wasn't about to make that mistake twice.

He'd wanted to be surprised when he saw Dean make the turn onto I-70. Even more so when, after twenty minutes, Dean flashed his turn signal to take exit 3. There was only one reason Castiel could fathom. He'd driven this route often enough to drive it with his eyes closed.

Dean had gone to La Cage again.

Over the last few months of getting to know Dean, he'd seldom visited the nightclub aside from the one time their paths crossed, but lately Dean seemed to be making it a point to find the time. What bothered Castiel most about this was that Dean only stayed for an hour at most and he always left the nightclub alone with that same disappointed look souring his face.

Feeling comfortable in knowing what Dean was doing at any particular moment on any given day, Castiel decided to indulge himself in getting some answers. He knew that if Dean wasn't working late on a Friday, then there were only two options: he was going to the city or he was

going to see Cassie for sex. Fortunately, he'd overheard plans for the latter that morning at the coffee shop so he knew he had a few hours at the very least.

The relationship the two of them had was increasingly strange, however. Cassie never showed her face around Dean's apartment and Castiel couldn't tell if that was by choice or if Dean didn't want her around. Perhaps he didn't want her to find out about his secret predilections for women's undergarments. It might have been because Dean's apartment wasn't on the best side of town. Despite his quirks, Castiel had found himself growing attached to Dean's familiar routine. It provided him a sense of comfortability. Whether she knew it or not, Cassie Robinson was a threat to that comfortability and given Dean's increasingly frequent trip to La Cage, Castiel needed to see for himself just how serious their relationship was becoming.

Though, it should be noted that Castiel had never done this before. Breaking into someone else's apartment, that is. The others sort of just,, let him through the front door of their own accord.

There were three points of entry into Dean's apartment. The front door was the most obvious course of entry, but the most secure, no doubt. He scrapped the idea the moment he had it. The other two being the fire escape leading to the bathroom and the window over the kitchen sink. He tried the fire escape first, but when it didn't open easily, he moved on to the kitchen window. He slid on his leather gloves as he crossed the street. He took the fire escape up to Dean's floor, but the tricky part was that the kitchen window had to be accessed by a ledge. By the grace of God, he managed to shuffle over the few feet to get there without falling into the bush below. Shimmying the weathered wood upwards, it slid open just enough for him to squeeze his torso through and collapse into the sink full of dishes which sounded as loud as a car backfiring in the quiet of the apartment.

It beared repeating that Castiel had really never done this before.

He cursed under his breath as he righted himself and straightened out his clothing. He looked out the window and waited for the inevitable sound of concerned neighbors, but they never came. Just more quiet blanketing the neighborhood like the silently falling snow. Sometimes Castiel wondered if Dean were the only one to actually live on this street.

Suddenly a crisp static crackle emitted from around the corner. The sound nearly caused him to jolt until the low murmur of a police report filtered in through the other side of the wall. A CB radio and nothing more. He sighed with relief and pulled the knit hat from over his eyes.

The apartment was on the wrong edge of darkness, but he didn't dare turn on a light. The kitchen he was standing in was small, dated. Clean, save for the dishes he'd crash landed on. There were faded photographs on the refrigerator held under gaudy, cartoon magnets. A woman with blonde hair posed in the way portrait studios forced you into. His mother Mary. Castiel could tell without reading the handwriting on the back. They had the same green eyes. Another of two older bearded men with a fishing poles standing beside the mouth of a river, one was Bobby Singer, the other one with beer bottle in hand. His father John. That didn't require rocket science by any means. The most prominent photograph centered eye level on the freezer door was of Dean himself standing next to a taller, younger man, that Castiel could only presume was Sam. The photograph must have been taken at his high school

graduation because Dean looked younger than he did now. Happier, even. Appearing around the same age as most of Castiel's victims.

When Castiel killed, he often felt compelled to commemorate the ordeal by taking a keepsake home with him. He had a locked box under the floorboards in his bedroom dedicated to exactly that. With Alfie he'd kept that ridiculously garish sequined jacket, rolled it up and stuffed it in besides the others. A way to remember him. To preserve him. There were various other things in the box from the others. A bottle of cologne. A rosary. A book of matches. A hair comb. A wedding ring. A fetish collar. A glass eye he hadn't realized was glass until after he'd choked the man out. His personal favorite. A war veteran undoubtedly. Castiel had kept the purple heart. One of them even had a gold tooth which Castiel added to his collection. Sometimes he took more than one thing from them, but he always took something. The urge to take this photograph was stronger than any of those other things, but Dean wasn't his victim. Not yet anyway. His fingers were itching at his sides to move the magnet, but he willed himself to move on. Surely, Dean would notice something like that missing.

The kitchen lead into a proportionately small living area. A second-hand couch, a box television set with the TV antennas sticking out askew. Nothing of note. Sparsely decorated. No sense of Dean, let alone another living soul. Barely enough to feel like it was lived in by someone. Perhaps he'd somehow managed to move all his belongings to Cassie's nicer apartment on the better side of town without Castiel noticing a thing.

That in itself was odd.

In the corner Castiel noted a bookcase. Curiously, he made his way over to it, running his gloved fingers along the uneven, broken spines. He was surprised to find books of poetry. Classics. Most prominently, Dean seemed to have a strong interest in Vonnegut. Growing up, Castiel was never allowed to read books like that. Books that questioned God or authority. He'd never actually read much now as it were, but judging by the spines alone, these were Dean's favorites. They were practically falling apart. Yet another thing Dean would miss. He was starting to get the feeling that Dean was the kind of man to keep the bare essentials, but that everything around him was put there with express purpose. Castiel couldn't fault him; he was the exact same way. He never expected them to have anything in common, much less this. But as he passed the bookcase by, Castiel idly made a mental note to stop at the public library over the weekend to check out Kurt Vonnegut.

Like the other two rooms, the bathroom was nearly barren. No gory details to be found in the medicine cabinet, unless of course ibuprofen had any street value. A nearly depleted tube of Colgate and a brand new toothbrush. No wonder his teeth were perfect. He noted that there was only the one toothbrush too. No regular night visitors. Closing the medicine cabinet door, Castiel avoided looking at himself in the mirror. The shadows cast across the angles of his face made him look gaunt in comparison.

He moved onto the next room on his personal tour: Dean's bedroom.

Nearly the size of the living area, what it lacked in size was made up for in strange decor. It seemed the only place in the apartment Dean bothered to hang anything. There were multiple mirrors hung on the walls, and as Castiel had predicted, a floor-length one positioned in the corner by the window overlooking the street. The set up was odd, but Castiel clearly wasn't

one to question it. Dean liked watching himself and Castiel was obviously fascinated in watching him too. Out of all the rooms in this quaint apartment, the bedroom smelled the most like Dean. Leather, the subtle tinge of Dean's spicy citrus scented cologne, some undefinable odor that seeped out of the bed linen. But knowing what Castiel knew about Dean and this room in particular, he could detect the undercurrent of sex whether it was imagined or not. For some reason, thinking about it didn't make his stomach churn. For the first time, he found himself seeking it out. He wanted to know what Dean smelt like after he came.

He approached the dresser set against the far wall and looped his finger in the pull rings of the drawer he knew without a shadow of a doubt was the place Dean stored his collection. The drawer slid out easily, hardly a screech, and there in front of him was an entire array, almost full to burst. Different colors, materials, cuts. Reaching into the pile, Castiel searched for the one he wanted, but when he couldn't find it he pulled out one particularly lacy red thong, turning it around in his gloved hands. Analyzing it. It wasn't the same, he knew that, but it was close. Knowing nobody was watching except him and God, he lifted the panties to his face and inhaled expecting to experience some sort of divine revelation, but there wasn't anything notable about it. They smelled like scented laundry detergent. Disappointment sank into his bones as he slammed the drawer closed. Fingers coming up to entangle in his hair and tug. He'd thought maybe this might have been different, maybe Dean would be different.

In his frustrations, he moved on to the closet. There was a laundry basket in the corner which he noticed first. Above it, on the high shelf, sat a small safe as well as an old shoebox.

Abruptly, Castiel's brief flash of disappointment subsided into rapt elation.

Sat atop the pile of unwashed clothing was Dean's favorite black thong. The one with the string in the back that disappeared when he pulled them on. Subsequently, they were Castiel's favorite pair as well. And here they were presented for him like an offering, cum stain hardened between lace roses. The image of Dean touching himself in front of the mirror painted itself across his eyelids as he inhaled. The feeling of his own release coming in time with Dean felt more real than a memory. This was the feeling he wanted. He could feel his cock twitch against his thigh and, for the time being, he didn't feel repulsed. His eyes cracked open to regard the box on the high shelf and with his free hand he reached for it too, clumsily stumbling backwards to land on Dean's bed.

Unlike Castiel's box, Dean's didn't have a lock. The lid came off relatively easy, considering Castiel was only using the one hand. He wasn't sure what he was expecting to find in it, but on the off chance he'd thought to himself a pile of random newspaper clippings, he'd be mostly correct.

He set the box down on the bed and reached inside. The first clipping he pulled out was an article from the Lawrence Gazette. He could tell by the way the cheap newsprint made the ink smudge. It was about a young man by the name of Alfred Samandriel. Twenty one years old. Was studying theater at the University of Kansas. Had dreams of becoming an actor on Broadway when his life was tragically cut short. It didn't dawn on Castiel that the article he was reading was about his Alfie until he came to the end and there was a photo of him in that God awful jacket.

Curiously, his brows knit together as he placed the clipping back in the box. He shuffled them around a little before grabbing another one from a different paper. As he read it, he slowly lowered the underpants from his face. There was no point to inhaling them as he'd almost forgot to breathe. Another one of his victims. Viktor Henrikson. The one with the glass eye.

Scouring the contents of the box, Castiel found that every single one of the clippings in this box were about his victims from various news outlets. Some about the victims themselves, though most were about Castiel... well, the 'Sleepytime Strangler'. There were black and white photocopies of the victims, alive as well as post mortem. Some had the tight scratch of Dean's handwriting on the corners. Names, dates, locations. Poorly drawn maps of the area surrounding La Cage Aux Folles.

As it turned out, the clippings weren't so random at all really, and after all this time, who would have suspected the object of Castiel's dark desires had a secret obsession with him.

Who was stalking who?

Castiel couldn't make rational sense of what was in his lap. He blinked away the dryness in his blank stare and then he noticed the safe on the high shelf again, hoping against hope that its contents might provide context for all of this. Racking his brain, he conjured up every set of numbers he'd memorized in his efforts to locate Dean and he decided to start with the basics. Dean's birthday. He held his ear next to the combination lock and spun, listening for the telltale shift of the gears to slide into place, all to no avail. Sam's birthday. No luck. His Father's death. No. And then he realized he should have started with Mary's all along.

The mechanisms clicked open softly and it was difficult to see in the shadow of the closet, but from what Castiel gathered, the safe contained a box of ammunition and an antiquated handgun. No more, no less.

He'd hoped breaking into Dean's apartment would provide him with some answers, but the only thing Castiel left with were more questions.

January, 1976

Chapter Summary

“All moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist...It’s just an illusion here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once that moment is gone it is gone forever.”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

JANUARY 31, 1976

It was a Saturday, around the time the mornings just started to take on that late biting winter chill and the sky was spitting flurries of snow when Dean came through the door looking addled with nerves. He didn’t order anything, instead choosing to pull out a chair belonging to one of the small tables by the shop window to warm up. The table usually reserved for Cassie, though thankfully the latter was nowhere in sight. He retrieved a copy of one of his old tattered books from the back pocket of his jeans while he waited for the line to die down.

“That guy you like is here,” Steve said, leaning against the counter and tossing his head in Dean’s general direction after the last customer left.

Castiel was wiping down the counter with a wet rag when he paused, glancing over his shoulder. He hadn’t even noticed Dean had come into the coffee shop. He flushed at the insinuation. “What makes you say that?”

Steve just laughed. “Well, if the fact you always stare is any indication...”

“I don’t always stare,” he countered, but Steve wasn’t buying the lie.

Sure enough, just then, Castiel subconsciously looked toward Dean, who was surprisingly already looking back at him, hand firmly holding the spot in his book. Wordlessly, Castiel nodded to Steve and abandoned the counter, making his way towards the formica table under the window, glowing with the aura of early morning sunlight breaking through the clouds. When Dean realized he was coming over, he quickly averted his eyes to the table, scratching at the nape of his neck and fidgeting with the fragile pages under his hand.

“It’s Saturday,” Castiel said in lieu of any real greeting. Confusion taking hold of him more than anything in the moment. This wasn’t part of the routine and that notion shook Castiel more than it should have.

Dean gave a questioning smile at the statement. “Yeah...”

“You don’t come in on Saturdays.”

“Well, I’m here now,” he supplied with a laugh.

Castiel attempted a small smile. “I can see that.” He took a moment to absorb the torn paperback cover sheathing Dean’s hand from view. Slaughterhouse Five. A Vonnegut classic. “All this happened, more or less,” he said without thinking, flitting his eyes back to meet Dean’s.

Blankly staring, a slow, knowing smile spread across Dean’s face. “So it goes...” he quipped with a suddenly wide grin. “You know Vonnegut?”

“Of course I know Vonnegut. Who doesn’t?” He’d just returned this one to the library last week.

Dean chuckled at that. “What’s your favorite?”

“Cat’s Cradle,” he replied on autopilot, but the more he stood idly by the table with Dean’s roving eyes on him, he desperately wished he could change his answer to the book laying uselessly between them.

Dean smiled again, seemingly never having stopped. “That one’s good too.”

Castiel nodded and rapped an idle knuckle on the table. “Did you want to order something?”

Dean huffed a laugh before shaking his head in the negative. “Actually, about that. I was, uh-- I didn’t come here for coffee today.”

“Oh?”

He paused to clear his throat and swallow. His tongue slipped out to wet his lips and Castiel transfixed on the action so long he almost missed the next part.

“I was wonderin’ if I could get your opinion on somethin’,” he stammered out eventually.

When the words caught up with him, Castiel’s blue eyes grew wide and unblinking. Dry, even. He didn’t think he’d heard that right. “You want my... opinion?” He couldn’t recall a time when anyone’s ever wanted that, let alone Dean.

Confidence waxing, Dean smiled and nodded, practically beaming at him. “Course I do. You’re an unbiased third party. Not to mention, you’ve clearly got good taste in books, and you make good coffee,” he added.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Nothin’ probably, but I see you everyday, and you see Cassie everyday, and I figured, what the hell?”

“Um.” For a moment that had been far more brief than it felt, Castiel weighed his options. Ultimately, a meager “okay” left his lips.

Dean exaggeratedly inclined his head and cupped his ear “Sorry, what was that?”

“Okay,” Castiel repeated, firmer without being anymore sure. “I’ll help you. What would you like my opinion on?”

Dean threw his head back and laughed. Coming back, he grinned. “You’re a weird little guy, Jimbo, you know that?”

“I’m hardly little,” he countered, which just made Dean laugh again. He seemed to be in an oddly good mood this morning and Castiel wasn’t sure what to make of it.

Dean’s hand lost its place in the tattered book and the yellowed pages slowly fell closed as he reached into the pocket of his worn pair of jeans. He retrieved a little black velvet box. When he opened it on its hinges, a silver key sat in bed of satin, glinting in the sunlight streaming through the coffee shop window. He offered it out to Castiel with another broad beam.

Taking the delicate thing between his fingers, Castiel eyed it warily, unsure what he was supposed to be giving an opinion on. “It’s a key,” he stated plainly.

“No shit,” Dean said with another laugh. He let Castiel observe it for a moment before taking it back and snapping the ring box closed. “What do you think of it?”

“I think if there’s a key, it must mean there’s a lock.”

Dean rolled his eyes, but a fond smile grew on his face anyway. “Buddy, it’s for Cassie. I’m taking her out in a couple weeks for her birthday and I figured I might give it to her. Got it all planned out and everything.”

Apparently his theory that they’d already moved in together flew out the window. “And what would you like my opinion on?”

“Uh, well, she’s never been over before.” Dean fiddled with the ring box, tapping the padded corner on the formica tabletop, as he chewed his lower lip. “You think I’m making a mistake?”

This was the opposite of good news as far as Castiel was concerned. And he knew, above all else, that somewhere in this seemingly hallmark relationship, something was bound to break. Afterall, Dean was lying about something, Castiel just wasn’t sure what that was. People didn’t just frequent nocturnal cesspits like La Cage and send drinks to random men at the bar unless they were accustomed to doing that sort of thing. Unless they wanted to get something out of it. Their entire relationship was founded on lies. More importantly, Dean was lying to himself. Castiel despised that, even when it came from someone as perfect as Dean Winchester. Maybe even especially when it did.

If the smile he plastered on his face seemed less than sincere, Dean didn’t seem to notice. “Not at all, Dean. What did you have in mind?”

FEBRUARY 12, 1976

Obviously, this wasn't the first time he'd watched Dean. All those times at the coffee shop amounted to more than he could bother to count. Of course, then there were the times when Castiel would park Mildred's old Cadillac on the curb across from the shop only to see Dean's oiled skin glistening under the unforgiving eye of the summer sun. On an odd day, he might have even been so inclined to sit around and watch as Dean fixed up another pile of scrap or shined his own Impala after a hard days work. He'd never ventured so far as to follow him knowing full well he wasn't alone.

Let's just say, there was a first time for everything.

It was an inconspicuous Thursday night; the night Dean had planned to give his key to Cassie. He'd made reservations at Little Italy for 8PM sharp, or so he'd told Castiel. He was going to put on the best shirt he owned, despite the restaurant being drab. He was going to wait until the dessert came around to ask. That is, he was going to do that until Castiel advised him that was as cliché an idea as one could possibly fathom, and Dean changed his mind. He would do it normally with the ring box in tow, maybe take a knee if he was feeling bold enough, and then he would ask. And if everything went according to plan, Cassie would answer with an enthusiastic 'yes' and yadda, yadda, yadda. Honestly, Castiel had stopped listening about midway through, only tossing in the occasional smile and nod to encourage Dean to keep giving him the details he'd really been after.

Dean's Impala was parked outside the restaurant at 7:45PM, having driven over from the garage.

Deciding to arrive on foot, Castiel had been waiting across the street ten minutes before Dean even arrived, idly checking his wristwatch to be sure he'd had the right time. But when Dean parked, he didn't immediately get out of the car. From what Castiel could see, he was coaching himself from behind the steering wheel, mouthing words that didn't carry sound through the glass, conducting an entire lengthy conversation with himself alone in his car. Another person might have found the whole charade endearing, but to Castiel, it was pathetic more than anything else.

Cassie was a fine girl maybe, but more than that, she was a waste of precious time and energy. A waste of space as far as Castiel was concerned. A placeholder. Castiel wasn't oblivious to the way Dean's eyes connected with his own every time they spoke and based on the way it kept happening, he couldn't imagine Dean being oblivious to it either. Even if by chance he hadn't seen Dean at La Cage, his impression of Dean would remain unchanging of that he was sure. The fact was, Dean Winchester didn't love Cassie.

Castiel hadn't been lying to himself then at the garage. He wasn't capable of the feeling, but maybe Dean was different in a way Castiel wouldn't confess aloud. Even the notion seemed ludicrous, yet here he was, standing in the shadow of a streetlamp across from a cheap Italian restaurant, waiting for something. For months. For what, he wasn't even sure.

Ten minutes passed before Dean got out of the car. He adjusted his leather jacket and laid flat his silk tie in the side mirror before he headed across the street with the hopeful gait of a man exuding far more confidence than Dean had just displayed when he thought he was alone.

Fortunately for Castiel, the table Dean reserved was on the other side of the large-paned window. A full-frontal view from the cheap seats.

Dinner passed slowly, and if Castiel didn't know any better he would have estimated that Dean was stalling. It wasn't as though he could hear their saccharine banter from across the road, but there was only so long one could extend an entree. Eventually the waiter came and cleared the table and Dean's typically over-confident air receded into barely concealed anxiety as he looked Cassie dead in the eye. His lip caught between his teeth in that pensive way he tended to think about anything, and then he turned to face her fully, clearly not feeling so bold as to take the knee. He began to speak, utter bullshit undoubtedly, and then slowly, Dean reached his hand into the pocket of his suit pants and pulled out the same black velvet ring box he'd presented to Castiel at the coffee shop. The only thing on Castiel's mind was the way Dean had done it for him. The way his expression brightened and his eyes filled with sunlight and mischief and hope and wonder, none of which were present on this Dean's face as he'd asked "What do you think?" Which seemed to be the exact question he'd just proposed, and again Castiel remembered, a man like Dean was hardly unpredictable.

The answering 'yes' rang clear as a bell even from Castiel's vantage point across the road.

February, 1976

Chapter Summary

“How nice -- to feel nothing, and still get full credit for being alive.”
— Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse-Five

Chapter Notes

alternatively, "everything was beautiful and nothing hurt."

FEBRUARY 12, 1976

They'd had too much wine. Castiel followed them on foot. It wasn't a far walk to Dean's apartment from the little Italian place and he kept pace with them despite the fact they were meandering much slower than Castiel cared for. When they came to the front door of his apartment building, the sounds of their inebriated giggling carried across the street as Castiel took to his usual night vigil. Though nothing about this was his usual anything. Cassie had never been there before to Castiel's knowledge and he didn't want her to be there now either. Yet still, he stood and watched Dean's bedroom window preparing himself for the inevitable show.

He must have been stood out there for what might have been only twenty minutes, but it felt like an eternity. His wristwatch was set ten minutes faster on purpose, but sometimes that quirk annoyed even himself. There was no sign of Dean nor Cassie through his view of the window for that entire twenty minutes. Maybe Dean was stalling again. Castiel could understand that given the Hall of Mirrors funhouse situation he had going on. How would he even begin to explain the panties?

Almost as soon as he thought it, the dim lamplight of Dean's bedroom flicked on across the road and Dean and Cassie were barrelling across the room towards the mattress. There wasn't any sense of arousal present as Castiel looked on, only sheer revulsion as Dean pulled her panties off. A beast was clawing at Castiel's resolve. Maybe this feeling was jealousy as her fingers clawed down Dean's spine.

Dean was his. He'd put in the time. He'd done the research. They had things in common. Dean understood him even if only slightly. Dean was just as obsessed with Castiel as he was Dean even if he didn't know it. That had to mean something. Like kismet or fate or some other hokey ideology Castiel never really believed in until that night he saw Dean across the

bar. To Castiel, it meant everything. Like the voice of God whispering in his ear again, it said, "Take it. Take what's yours."

He'd never thought about killing a woman before. There wasn't any challenge in it. It wasn't unusual to find a woman that wanted to be controlled either. But he realized that wasn't what this was about. He didn't want to control Cassie Robinson. He simply wanted her out of the picture.

With renewed sense of purpose, Castiel started across the street in what felt like a fugue state with the express purpose to reset his own sense of equilibrium when he heard a sharp crash and a smothered scream. The telltale thud of a body hitting the floor. It had to have been coming from Dean's apartment. Castiel halted his footsteps and shrank back against the apartment building, ears tuned as he awaited more information. Not even five minutes later, Dean was stumbling out the front door bundled up in his leather jacket and seemingly out of breath, large bursts of breath escaping past his lips as he thundered towards the Impala. He had his car keys on him and maybe his wallet, but nothing else Castiel could see. He got behind the wheel and started her up, and then he was gone.

Curiosity and confusion getting the better of him, Castiel waited approximately five minutes before he approached the front door of the building and found it hadn't been closed properly. He wasn't sure if that was a sign or a coincidence, but then again, Castiel never really believed in coincidences. Not anymore, at least. Not since Dean. He took the stairs up to Dean's apartment and found his door hadn't been secured either.

The door creaked open quietly revealing a darkened apartment. It was eerily silent. He entered cautiously, hackles raised, when he saw the sliver of golden light creeping out from under Dean's bedroom door, but he couldn't bring himself to approach. Out of the corner of his eye, Castiel spotted the ring box sitting on the coffee table in front of the couch. There was a folded piece of paper placed underneath it. Upon closer inspection it had his name on it. Well, not his real name. 'JIMMY' it read. And still, he didn't dare switch on a light. He reached down and took the scrap paper into his gloved hands and unfolded it carefully. "I KNOW IT'S YOU."

He didn't know how long he stared at the words on the paper, maybe twenty minutes more, and no sound escaped from Dean's closed bedroom door. When he finally blinked, light flooded the room.

Naturally, it was Dean. He could tell by the smell of leather and motor oil. Looming in the doorway with his pistol dangling from his limp wrist.

"I know you've been watching me," Dean spoke lowly from inside the doorway, voice a thready grit like finetooth sandpaper. Like he'd been crying. "I know you broke in before. Took things. I know I saw you at the club the night that guy was killed."

Castiel wasn't sure what he was feeling, but it seemed close enough to betrayal that he didn't question it. "And this? What was all this?" He held up the ring box. Regarded it between his fingers. "A trap?" The drink. The voyeurism. The newspaper clippings. He chanced a glance at Dean.

Dean nodded stiffly. Red-rimmed eyes not leaving Castiel's. They were all traps.

"That's very clever of you," he had to admit. "And let me guess... the girl? Out the fire escape, I presume? Phoning the police as you stall for time? Writing another silly article about the 'Sleepytime Strangler'? The heroes that saved the city?"

"No."

Castiel looked at the gun. "No?"

"No," Dean repeated firmly, if not a little frustrated, "That's not why I tried to find you. That's not what this is about," he stressed, crossing the room to put the gun down on the table. Once in front of it, Dean sank heavily onto the couch, holding his head in his hands.

"You tried to find me?"

"Yeah," he breathed. "That night I saw you. I'd been looking for you, only I didn't know it was you I was looking at. You never took the bait. That's why I kept going back. But then you fucked up." At Castiel's confusion, he clarified, "You took the panties. I left 'em on top on purpose, you dumbass."

"Caught me red handed it seems." Another trip wire. He still had the pair in his coat pocket for easy access. Maybe Castiel really was a dumbass. He reached into his pocket and instinctively wrapped his fist around them.

"I saw the way you were watching me at the club, man. I knew it was you. I felt it in my gut. I'd seen you there before, I just didn't think the famous 'Strangler' would be so much of a pussy he'd up and run out on me."

Castiel considered it, smirking slightly at Dean's brazen insults towards a man he knew took and murdered other young men in cold blood. "And if your original plan had worked? Then what? Were you actually hoping I'd kill you, Dean?"

"The way I look at it, I'm already dead," he admitted with an empty laugh. "Figured it was a 50/50 shot of feeling better than I do right now, whichever way it swung."

Castiel calculated his success rate and placed it at a higher percentage than fifty. "So then what is this about, if you're not trying to offer my head on a silver platter?" He asked.

"You've got me here. What's your plan now?"

Tentatively, Dean chewed his lip. "I..." He swallowed, jaw ticking "I want you to show me."

"Show you?"

"You know. How you do it," he said, "I want to see you do it."

"And why would I do a silly thing like that?"

"Because you were trying to find me too. Don't even try to deny it."

Castiel had to give credit where it was due. He didn't try to deny it. Instead he crossed the room and halfheartedly scanned the titles on the bookshelf. Fingering at the loose spine of Slaughterhouse Five. "You're not a murderer, Dean. You're a 'good guy'," he said, harkening back to their past conversation. "You don't have it in you."

Dean snorted, bitterly. "Trust me, I know I'm not a murderer. Just figured that out, loud and clear. That's not what I'm askin'." His eyes fixed on his bedroom door for a long moment. "I want to feel what you feel when you do it." His face was empty when he spoke. Hollow like how he felt.

"And what is it you think I feel?"

"Alive," he whispered, impassioned without missing a beat. A single, hot tear rolled down his cheek and absorbed into the leg of his jeans.

The broken way he said it touched something inside Castiel; a place he wasn't even sure existed before Dean entered his monotonous life. He didn't like it at all.

"Are you hearin' me, Jimbo?" His voice cracked on the verge of tears. "Am I ringin' you loud and clear here? I'm askin' you to kill me."

The notion did ring loud and clear. That was what he'd set out to do this entire time wasn't it? But none of them had asked for it first. And it must have said something about him that after all this time Castiel still hadn't done it yet. Or maybe, it said something about Dean. "And if I don't?"

"Honestly? This is as far as I got. Either way, I'm fucked." His gaze settled on the pistol in front of him, but he didn't reach for it. He just stared, unblinking.

Idly, Castiel returned his attention to the bookshelf and pulled out Slaughterhouse Five, flipping through the worn and tattered pages, in an effort to seem collected and unaffected. "And the girl?"

"She's tied up in there," he continued, motioning to his closed bedroom door, "I- I tried. To choke her out. I tried. I knocked her out, but I couldn't do it. I didn't feel anything. You can have her if you want."

Castiel didn't say anything to that. He didn't want her, but it was too late now. She knew too much.

Dean emitted a wet sound, a solitary laugh. "You remember Slaughterhouse Five?" He didn't wait for Castiel to acknowledge the question, he stood and crossed the room and took the tattered thing out of his hands. "Billy Pilgrim?" He flipped to a certain dog-eared page he knew by heart and began to read: "I, Billy Pilgrim, will die, have died, and always will die on February Thirteenth, 1976." He closed the book. He looked Castiel dead in the eye when he confessed in a whisper, "I wanna go out like Billy Pilgrim. I wanna see it coming. But I'm too much of a chickenshit to do it myself. I couldn't even pull the damn trigger." Another tear escaped when he blinked.

“It’s the twelfth, Dean,” Castiel replied pragmatically.

“Only for another hour.” His plush lower lip caught between his teeth as it usually did and Castiel’s eyes tracked the movement. “I need you, Jimmy,” he pathetically whimpered, “I need you to do it for me.”

His eyes roved over the angled planes of Dean’s face at such close range, expecting to find the betrayal he’d felt only a moment ago etched behind his eyes, but when he looked into them, into his watery too-green eyes, the only thing Castiel found himself feeling was pity. The same kind of pity a regular person would feel for roadkill that wasn’t lucky enough to die by the first hit. Cautiously, drunkenly, Dean leaned forward into his space and brushed his lips against Castiel’s. The sensation was foreign, but he didn’t feel the urge to vomit. It was Dean, for christsake. With purpose, Dean kissed him again. Harder. Castiel didn’t kiss back even still. He didn’t even close his eyes.

“Tell me what to do,” Dean choked out so close to his face, Castiel could feel the humid heat against his lips. Impatiently, he tugged at the lapels of Castiel’s coat. “Please.”

“Lie down on the couch.” Dean searched his unreadable eyes, but did as he was told. As Castiel always knew he would. “Wait here,” he said, turning his back to him altogether. He headed for the bedroom door to take care of Cassie Robinson first.

Her prone form was still unconscious. Her wrists bound to the headboard with the novelty handcuffs Dean kept in his underwear drawer. Castiel approached the side of the bed, trying his best not to let his eyes linger.

She was still naked.

As much as Castiel felt repulsed by his attraction to men, the female form he found even more unpalatable. It reminded him of his mother. He decided to make this as fast as possible. He hoisted himself over her limp figure, knees planted on either side, boots firmly locked in place for leverage. Her throat was soft, delicate, warm, not like that of a man, as he wrapped his hands around it.

It felt bizarre this way. Without the sexual component. Without the struggle. She didn’t even wake up until the end.

Within minutes her pulse slowed to a stop and Castiel stared at her with a curious sense of cold disinterest. Absently he noted she looked better this way, and he couldn’t help feeling a small sense of spiteful pride that he’d gotten to strangle her in her sleep.

He slipped off the bed and returned to the living area promptly. Dean was still lying on the couch just as he’d been told to do.

“It’s done,” he said as if sensing Dean’s silent question. Nothing in Dean’s expression changed. No shock, no hurt. “Take off your clothes.”

Dean hesitated for the briefest of moments, but complied and started by removing his leather jacket and his henley. His hands were shaking as he pulled it over his head. He had on a

necklace.

“What’s that?” Castiel watched as Dean’s adam’s apple bobbed in his throat. His skin raised with goosebumps from the cold draft.

“It was a gift. From Sammy.”

Castiel nodded once. When he didn’t remark on it further, Dean removed his jeans in one swift motion, hips bouncing off the cushion as he tugged them out from under his ass. He was wearing the red pair of panties. The not quite right pair. Reaching into his coat pocket, Castiel instructed Dean to put on the correct pair.

Dean did as he was told.

In his eyes, Castiel could see himself reflected in the wetness there as he raked his sights over Dean’s exposed body. A sight he’d seen a hundred times, and yet seeing it this way, it might as well have been the first time. He hadn’t even noticed his own erection burgeoning in his slacks.

It struck Castiel then that Dean was sprawled out on that second hand sofa beneath him willingly. He’d never done it like this before.

“Touch yourself,” he commanded, “Like you do for me at the window.” Dean’s hand shook itself out before it slipped down his torso and wrapped itself around his slowly firming cock. “Did you come earlier?”

“No,” Dean breathed out through his nose, “Couldn’t, ah, couldn’t without you watching. Fuck.”

Once Dean’s erection was flushed and full, Castiel began to get that familiar feeling roiling low in his gut at the breathy, stuttered noises Dean was letting out as he stroked himself. He undid his belt buckle as he watched, fully intending to touch himself in tandem with Dean’s strokes the way he was accustomed to, when Dean asked, “Are you going to fuck me?”

Castiel blinked, hand pausing as Dean’s had. “Is that what you want?” He’d never done what the other person wanted before either. “You want my cock?”

Dean couldn’t bring himself to say it aloud, but his gaze said enough. He stared hungrily, and if it were at all possible, desperately, just like he’d pleaded before. Wordlessly, his fingers slipped further back, hypnotically encircling his rim. It was all it took to ignite a fire inside Castiel’s veins. It overcame him as he grabbed at Dean’s wrists, pressing them into the pillow above his head as he’d done all the others, but Dean didn’t try to squirm free. If anything, Dean’s arousal only grew. Castiel shoved his middle finger between Dean’s lips and he sucked on it readily, coating it in saliva. When he pressed the first finger inside, Dean’s hole was tight and puckered around it. Tighter than even he was used to. He pulled the string aside and a low growl erupted from his chest as he worked a second finger in, scissoring just enough his tip inside if he wanted. All the while, Dean moaned at the sensations and his cock was leaking onto his stomach as his ass spasmed around Castiel’s fingers. Sinking his head lower, Castiel inhaled the heady aroma of Dean’s fresh precum soaking into the panties.

Normally in this situation, Castiel would try to lure their trust by making the experience slightly enjoyable to start, but he didn't have to do that here. Dean was asking for it. Dean was willing. He pulled his fingers and abruptly lined himself up, forcing his thick cock inside as Dean keened. He bottomed out and grunted as he worked his hips slowly at the rough drag of skin on skin. A warm, wet sensation eased the glide fractionally, and it only occurred to Castiel that sensation was blood when the copper tang hit his nostrils.

Dean cried beautifully too. Just as beautifully as he'd done most things. His whole body jolted at every rough pass against his prostate, but his eyes never left Castiel's face the whole time. Open, vulnerable, pained, frantic. But more importantly, alive.

Castiel was absorbed in watching the way Dean's swollen hole swallowed him, when Dean's hoarse voice cut through him like a knife. "Choke me," he bit out between thrusts. "Now. I'm close. Do it now."

When Castiel met Dean's eyes, he wasn't scared, he was pleading. Any other time, any other victim, Castiel would have been filled with rage at the sight. It was only then it struck him: Castiel didn't want Dean to be afraid of him.

Releasing his wrists, Castiel used both hands to wrap around the corded muscles in Dean's throat. He beared down as he continued to fuck into him, and on automatic bodily response, once Dean's air supply was running low, his body started convulsing with orgasm and the need for oxygen. Fingers clutching at Castiel's hands the way the others had. But Dean wasn't like the others. He'd never been like the others. He would never be like the others.

Dean was harder to kill.

He applied all his weight to his larynx and smothered his nose and mouth under his broad palm, but his body was still convulsing. Not fading like the weaker prey Castiel typically sought. On sheer impulse, Castiel grabbed at the pistol on the coffee table and discharged a single bullet between Dean's eyes and his body fell still almost instantly. So it goes.

The time was 12:01AM. February 13th, 1976.

Only then did Castiel find release.

But instead of running, he fell asleep curled up next to Dean on his second hand sofa. He buried his nose in the scent of Dean's sweat and aftershave and toyed with the cord hanging limply around his bruising throat. Months ago he'd thought that this moment was worth the wait, but now that he was laying in it, watching a slow trickle of blood from the hole in Dean's head, cataloguing the lifeless look in Dean's fading eyes, Castiel could say with certainty he felt anything but alive now. Just alone as he rested he wrapped his arms around Dean's body and rested his head on his shoulder.

He would deal with the rest later.

February 21, 1976

Chapter Summary

“And I asked myself about the present: how wide it was, how deep it was, how much was mine to keep.”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

PRESENT - FEBRUARY 21, 1976

With a bursting sigh fogging up the freezing air, Castiel sank behind the wheel of his own car in the police station parking lot, staring out into the ink soaked night, and he wondered to himself where to go from there. Home seemed as good a place as any at the moment, so he started up the engine and put the car in drive.

The drive across town seemed to happen in the blink of an eye. He'd been zoned out the entire way down the interstate. Mind preoccupied with other things. Things that couldn't be helped now. To the course of events that transpired on the twelfth and the subsequent days to follow.

Stowing Cassie Robinson in the trunk, Castiel had waited until sunset to ditch the Impala off the shoulder of I-70. It was the only thing he could think to do at the time. He'd found a suitably abandoned parking lot to buy himself some time and walked a few miles along the interstate through the woods before the sun came up on the fourteenth. Valentine's Day. He'd hitchhiked back into town just as the early morning sun bled orange across the lavender sky.

And then it had started to snow, much like it was now. Castiel hated the snow almost as much as Dean did. Another thing they'd seemingly had in common. He'd always complained about it whenever he came in to the coffee shop.

Though, Castiel had hoped the tactic would have bought him longer than a week.

He arrived home to a darkened house. His shoes left neat footprints in the falling snow along the front walk as he headed for the door. The house was quiet and Castiel didn't bother turning on a light, choosing instead to drink a glass of water by the kitchen sink. He wasn't hungry after the pitiful PB&J he'd been fed at the station and truthfully his stomach was still feeling unsettled.

Without Dean, he was beginning to find he didn't have much in the way of interests or hobbies. He didn't even have the compulsion to go to the discotech to prowls like he might have in the past.

Castiel decompressed with another pushed out sigh, sucking in fresh gulps of stale air to prepare himself for going down the hall. Heading for the bathroom, he stripped out of his

clothing and decided to take a long shower to kill the time.

The water shut off with a groan and Castiel rang the water from his mop of hair into the rusting drain, watching as the droplets dripped like time. He hung his head, planting his forehead against the porcelain tile, and closed his eyes. The bathroom smelled like steam and Irish Spring, but Castiel knew that would change the second he walked down the barren hallway to his bedroom. It wouldn't be enough to mask it. He dried himself with a towel for longer than necessary until his skin felt raw with friction before he mustered the resolve to leave the bathroom.

The overwhelming stench of rot hit him like a brick as he approached the end of the hall. It made Castiel's eyes water as he stood in the doorway, but at least the initial vomiting subsided yesterday. He hadn't known what to do a week ago. This was the part he still hadn't figured out. Theoretically, a week didn't feel very long. What could happen in a week, he thought then. As it turned out, a lot could happen in a week.

Dean's lifeless form was lying flat on the mattress. Back straightened and limbs contorting from rigor mortis, dull eyes looking heavenward. They'd stopped being green two days prior, instead turning to a sullen milky grey. He'd dressed him almost immediately before they'd left Dean's apartment because it seemed indecent not to as well as less conspicuous. The dried blood tracking from the bullet wound over his eye was brown and flaking along his hairline. The bruises settled around his neck were ghastly. His skin was like mottled wax. Cold. Stretched thin.

Castiel had planned to deposit Dean in the Impala as well, but for whatever reason, he couldn't part with him. And then he'd had this haphazard idea to cover his tracks and the way everything fell into place like it had, Castiel thought this was what he was supposed to do.

Idly, he noticed the necklace Dean's brother had given him still hanging around his neck. It was tighter than it was a week ago from the bloat. Coming up to the side of bed, he traced the pad of a finger over the amulet and considered it a moment in the low light coming in through the window. He didn't want to see anymore than he had to. With a quick tug, the necklace clasp snapped off and Castiel held the thing up to eye level. It was certainly a curious little thing. Crouching on his knees, he dug his fingernails into the grooves of the loose floorboard under the bed until it budged out of place. He placed the board aside and pulled out a lock box he'd gotten specifically for Dean. Dean deserved his own and not only because Castiel had kept many things from his apartment, but also because he meant something, whatever it was.

He popped the lock open and gently placed the cord inside amongst the other belongings he'd kept: Dean's black lace thong, the antiquated Colt, a few worn copies of Kurt Vonnegut, and that one photograph that hung on the fridge with the gaudy magnet. The one of a younger, happier Dean and his little brother Sammy. Holding the photograph between his fingers, Castiel sunk to the floor completely and wondered to himself what it might actually be like to meet Dean's younger brother. If they were at all similar, despite their incessant arguments. If they had the same gold color circling their irises, or if Sam's were a different color altogether.

Dean had mentioned once in passing that in California it never snowed. Castiel wasn't sure if that was accurate or not, but it got him thinking he might like to find out for himself now that

he didn't have a way to kill the time. Afterall, Dean was a solitary creature. If he were going to make his story a convincing one, if Dean were legitimately the Strangler on the run, there would be no where else more logical to go than to his only living relative on the sunny West Coast. And California was big. He could start over there. Find somewhere new. Find a place to lay Dean to rest so that he'd be near his brother until a lonely hiker stumbled upon him or a police dog sniffed him out. It was the least he owed him for using him as a scapegoat. He could leave a letter of admission in the breast pocket of his leather jacket. Leave him with the Colt maybe to tell the tale he couldn't. By then it wouldn't matter, he'd be rotted to the bone. He'd just need to time it right before the feds found out he'd skipped town.

It wasn't as if Castiel had much in the way of personal possessions. Starting over would be relatively easy provided he got a decent head start.

Yeah, California sounded nice. Real nice. For a minute, he wondered what it might've been like to see Dean in the golden California sun. Looking at a young Dean smiling in his hands, just for the one minute, Castiel didn't feel quite so alone. But then it all came crashing down.

So it goes.



“If you protest, if you think that death is a terrible thing, then you have not understood a word I’ve said.” - Billy Pilgrim, Slaughterhouse Five.

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