

The Dating Show

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The Dating Show

by [zeldar](#)

Summary

In order to pursue an old flame, Dean Winchester weasels his way into being a contestant on a dating show. He's here for one thing: to find love. But, it might come from unexpected places. Especially as he develops a close relationship with fellow contestant, Castiel.

Notes

This fic was previously known as 'Dean Winchester and Dating Shows Don't Mix', but after working on this fic for awhile I honestly started to loathe the name. The chapter names have been rearranged, as well. Sorry to those who are subscribed!

thanks for clicking!! I got this fic idea by watching The Bachelorette and Boy Meet Boy, and turned it into a fun little project. that being said, this is minimally edited (does spellcheck count?) and there's no beta in sight. also I started writing this in 2018 but i was really scared about posting it, but I've finally gotten the courage i guess oWO.

disclaimer: if you're a slut for dating shows beware i do bend rules around to keep it entertaining, and also this fic probably shows dating shows in a more negative light. sue me.

that being said, i hope you enjoy!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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



This might've been one of Dean's stupider ideas, he thinks, fidgeting with his itchy formal suit and staring out the darkened windows of the limousine all so he doesn't have to look at the other men cramped inside. Each one is clutching a flute of champagne—*champagne*, for God's sake—as they take turns gossiping nervously amongst themselves, everyone a phony. Dean pointedly ignores their attempts to start a conversation in favor of nurturing his growing sense of claustrophobia in a solemn, repressed silence.

"So, which girl are ya pulling for?" Dean's brooding is interrupted with a soft bump of a knee against his own, and he turns to find that encroaching on his personal space is a southern gentleman type whose name Dean thinks is Benny.

"Cassie." Dean says, unhesitating and firm.

His clipped answer and curt tone draws uneasy looks from the other contestants, most of which are content to leave Dean alone. Don't poke a sleeping bear, and all. Going against his natural tendency to wise-crack and charm, the first unfurlings of discomfort bud in Dean's chest but he reminds himself that he's not here to make friends. It's gonna be a long night.

"Yeah, she's pretty hot, huh?" Another guy ventures, taking a toothpick to the thick whale blubber that is the tension in the room.

The possessiveness Dean feels is instant, biting, and dangerous. His skin crawls with it, and his forced smile looks akin to teeth-baring as it flops and dies on his face. He knows it's out

of line, and damned stupid, but the rivarly and the cameras and the friggin' champagne knock the bloodlust up a couple amps anyway. It's not helping that this whole situation is his fault to begin with.

Dean blinks in and out, but mostly out of being conscious of his surroundings as the producers chase the other contestants out of the car, fussing over their appearance and instructing them on their entrance. Dean is given a pun to use. Whatever, it's not what matters. He gets to see Cassie again, and that's all he's thinking about save a brief but thorough thank-you prayer to whatever powers that be that Dean isn't the guy they're forcing into chicken costume. And seriously, what the hell? Dean feels like he might be in for more than he bargained for, on that account.

The wait outside is longer than the one in the car, but at least Dean isn't sweating in close-confinement anymore. He's still sweating, just under bright film lights that pepper even the most remote escapes sans a camera in sight. He wonders if he'll get used to that, and come time to leave will wake up in a distress asking Sam where his beauty lights went. He smiles at the thought and then finally, it's his turn.

His legs bounce the whole, taxingly slow ride. He wishes they'd let him drive, because it makes him think of the nights with Cassie, laughing and smiling, with nothing left for them except the relentless, mangled black arteries of the road like the spools of those cassette tapes that they'd listened to and that she made fun of him for having, later smashing them against the pavement and letting their innards melt out, shimmering. They pumped through those roads like racing blood and damn, it drove them wild.

They round another bend and there's two figures standing on the driveway. People couldn't decide who they wanted for a Bachelorette this year so in a sick twist of rules, the contestants themselves would be voting. Dean's resentment for reality TV was bad enough before, but now he figured he couldn't get through an episode of American Idol if he tried. He'll stick to the soap operas, thank you. Why Cassie signed up, he'll never know.

The two women come into clearer view, and Dean is sitting at attention. Cassie is stunning. Maybe he'd expected her to look different from the eight months they were apart, but seeing her unchanged breaks his heart anew. The band aid flies off and he's still bleeding underneath. She's in a floor-length, red evening dress and Dean devours every inch of it, praying that it commits to his long-term memory. He fleetingly acknowledges Lisa in her cheery yellow piece with her radiant smile, and she has such a captivating magnetism that he feels bad for tearing his eyes away to settle back on Cassie, the girl who'd drawn him out here.

They tell Dean it's time, and it's more of a warning than encouragement. He allows himself the one nervous tick of adjusting his tie before he steps from the car, his breath making a home of his throat instead of his lungs. Cassie doesn't know he's here. She could yell, kick him off the show on the spot and yet he's tumbling into view anyways, not ready to embrace what she'll offer him.

He can't look. There sounds a nearly inaudible gasp, hushed under the hungry cameras, and Dean steels himself before dragging his gaze up and into Cassie's eyes. He can't fathom looking away. For a second, they both forget the cameras. Her eyebrows start knitting

together with pain or confusion or longing or all of them at once. He almost breathes her name, it catches on his tongue like a worn key fitting into a new lock but he swallows it into silence.

He beams at her. It's the first time he's seen her in his entire life, and he's giving her the smile that made her fall for him the first time, "I'm Dean Winchester."

That's funny. In all the 'coincidences' it took to get him there, he hadn't needed to change his name.

"Do you have a name?" Dean recites into the 9-volt battery between them, "Or should I call you mine?"

It's not funny. She's not laughing. She's shocked, voiceless and motionless.

"Wow." Lisa laughs, awkward, and Dean looks at her for the first time, "That was bad."

He fixes his grin on Lisa and it's a bit phoney in the middle, teeth going crooked and lips cracking, "Nice to meet you, Lisa."

She opens up her arms and that's how Dean ends up hugging Lisa first. It's a formality, but pleasant enough. Sam tells him that he needs to ground in moments like these, so he feels the soft skin of her back as he rests his fingertips and imagines the roughness she feels in return. She's warm and her hair tickles Dean's face, smelling like something pink. He tries to acquaint himself with these new sensations for the moment she's in his arms.

It's different hugging Cassie. He draws her in quick and she startles, then relaxes in his embrace. He knows what Cassie smells like, knows how his hands meet the dips and swells of her. And yet he's a stranger coming back. Unwelcomed in his own home.

"Hey, Cassie." He marvels at her from arm's length.

She's still unspeaking, her face a mask devoid of expression. Dean, remembering where he is, just grins at her instead of prostrating at her feet.

"I'll see you two inside." He steps away and tries to ignore everything except that, at the last moment, Cassie gave him a hesitant returning smile.

The next couple of hours are torture, frankly. Dean mingles with the other contestants, more out of curiosity and an obligation to the show's contract than anything else. There's the faux loverboys, the white-collars, and a heaping dose of personalities so mind-numbingly boring Dean couldn't pick them out of a line-up. The names of only a couple guys stick. Like Kevin, a nerdy asian guy who looks young enough to be in highschool but seems nice enough. Or a scrawny fella named Garth who's either stoned out of his mind or suffers from being too friendly, and who Dean tries to avoid for the rest of the evening. And there's Micheal and Lucifer, both grade-A douchebags just cut from different cloths. Luckily, they hate each other right off the bat.

Dean gives up on ‘mingling’ and instead settles on the couch, where he’s greeted with another odd character, one with messy dark hair and piercing blue eyes that he fixes on Dean immediately. Uncanny is the word that comes to mind for this man who sits to himself, not talking to anyone. Except that it suits him, and he looks more likely to be in a dated painting than sitting on a reality TV show. The contrast is so surreal that Dean tries to find it amusing, but it settles into intimidation instead.

Dean’s tongue laps the inside of his lip, “What’s your name?”

The man considers him like a microbe squirming pathetically under a microscope, “Castiel.”

He doesn’t ask Dean’s name, so Dean volunteers it with a smile, “I’m Dean.”

Castiel’s eyes leap down, catch a draft, then come soaring back up to Dean’s face. It reminds Dean of his stint in a reformation camp for angsty teens where the camp leader, Miller, roused them all up and asked one by one if they were ‘planning anything’. He was just a paranoid bastard, but it was the look that stuck with Dean. Like he was sizing ‘em up careful, just waiting for one wrong move.

It looks like Castiel decides something before he says, “Nice to meet you.”

Dean would say something back but Cassie and Lisa make an entrance and he’s already standing up, moving towards them, and giving Castiel a nod as he departs. He wants to catch Cassie’s eye again, but the producers rush into the fray and gather up the contestants in their hands, shuffling them liberally and dishing them back out at measured intervals to speak to the Bachelorettes and Dean doesn’t even make it over there before Cassie’s saddled up with someone else.

If patience is a virtue, Dean is going to hell. He rolls his neck, flexes his knuckles, and sighs liberally as he watches the other contestants dole out flirtatious smiles under the dotting lights of the cameras. Dean wonders how he’s gonna endure weeks of this if he’s already sweating after just a few hours, and curses himself for being a goddamn idiot again before they call him up to see Lisa.

Maybe it’s the break from boredom or the pressure cameras, but he finds himself grinning at her with a real warmth as he sits down, pinching his tongue between his teeth for a second as he lets his charm come out to play, front and center. After all, she’s an attractive woman and this is a show about romance, it’d be a shame if he didn’t put on a show. She bats her pretty eyelashes at him for his work and it goes miles in enticing the flirt out of him. It’s something he’s always enjoyed doing, flirting. It makes talking with Lisa like he’s thinking about marrying her—for the cameras—easy.

“Dean.” She smiles at him in greeting, “How’s your night going so far?”

“Fantastic.” His eyes fall briefly to the other contestants, backlit against the golden warm glow of the house, watching and waiting for their turn, before meeting Lisa’s eyes with a new intensity, “Better now that I’m out here with you.”

Her face flushes the slightest of pink with amusement, or maybe he's really flattered her with his cheesy as hell pickup line, but either way Dean admires it, likes how easy he draws it out of her. She takes a breath and smooths the edge of her dress, "The other guys treating you alright?"

"Me?" He raises his eyebrows playfully, still smiling. He's been smiling the whole damn time, "I'm fine. Are they treating you alright?"

"Everyone is nice." She tells him, nodding a bit.

"Just nice?" He echoes, "So you're telling me there's been no surprise proposals yet? No declarations of love?"

She laughs, "No."

"You're not ready to drop everything and elope yet?" He teases.

"No, not yet." She tries to suppress her smile.

"Well, the night's still young." He says gravely, over-done.

"Right. There's hope for me yet." She relaxes against the seat more than she had a moment ago, which Dean considers a job well done. She tips her head a bit, her tone earnest, "So, Dean, what do you do?"

"I'm a car mechanic." He tells her.

"Really?"

"Yep. You wouldn't be marrying me for my money, sadly."

Lisa's laugh is back, briefly, before she's beaming at Dean in a thoughtful sort of way, "This sounds weird, but you remind me of my son."

"Oh, no." Dean's face falls, he tries to recover with a sheepish smile, "I don't think I've ever heard the 'you're like a son to me' bit."

"No!" She waves a hand at him dismissively, giggling, "Not like that! I meant, Ben's got a sense of humor, too. I think you'd get along with him."

"Do you miss him?" Dean asks, and the pain that flashes across her face makes him amend, "Sorry, that was a dumb question. Of course you do, it must be hard."

"Yeah, it is." She breathes, "But, I'm here trying to find a father figure for him."

"I can see why. He seems great, if he's anything like me." Dean jokes.

She's smiling again, but it's not as present, thinking of somebody whose miles and miles away. Dean knows the feeling. "I know you're supposed to get to know me, but my son is the most important person in my life. So, it's important for you to know about him, too."

“Of course.” Dean nods, understanding, “And all this time I’ve been getting to know about what a great mother you are. It’s impressive.”

This time when she blushes, Dean’s sure it’s because he’s flattered her. Though, the rosiness of the garden has a hand in inspiring the romance in the air, the parched hydrangeas framing the perimeter and the twinkle lights overhead start getting to him; he regrets when the next contestant takes that moment to interrupt them, leaving the spark between he and Lisa to fade into the warm dust night.

All the camera lights make his head swim, so once he’s back inside he grabs a drink and chews on his conversation with Lisa. He loves Cassie, loves her so much he’s here. But his heart is big, incapable of keeping out the white noise. He’s never been unfaithful, but it makes it too easy for him to start liking Lisa. To start thinking about liking her.

Then he speaks to Cassie. He’s miserable with his love, his heart trips itself headfirst into asphalt, his palms catching at the scratchy fabric of his pants as he crosses towards her. Her shoulders bob up and down on a great big breath, spitting out turned air.

“Cassie.” He breathes, wanting to kiss it into her skin, missing her even though she’s right in front of him.

“Dean.” She says, and the aches and pains consume him head to toe.

“I don’t know what to say.”

“All this way and you’re speechless?” Her smile shoves itself through the shutters of her house, drawn closed. It’s pinched and flat, hopeless to be made right again.

“Sorry, can I start over, or something?” Dean’s laugh doesn’t take the edge off the evening.

“We don’t have to.” She says in front of the cameras but secretly she whispers to Dean with her eyes and not her mouth, “*We don’t have to have this argument anymore, Dean. I made my choice.*”

“I want to.” The cameras hear, but in earnest Dean says, “*I still want you.*”

“No, you don’t.” Her silken hands encompass his larger, leathered hands and it’s only ruined when she looks at the camera, stiffening, “Just be the real you.”

“The real me came all the way out here for a pretty girl. Pathetic, huh?” He remembers their argument, screaming up crows from houses over with bitter, angry caws of their own. They were so angry, burning out bright and fast and giving everything they had as an accelerant.

“I signed up for this show before you, Dean. You’re just playing catch-up.”

Damn, that smarts. Even more because Dean believed in big gestures, thinking they could just pack it up from where they’d left off, pick up and go. But it’s too late. He never should’ve come.

“You’re right.” He mutters, praying that the editors cut up this conversation so that it’s even passibly normal.

She glimpses the cameras, sits upright in her seat as she flows into the performance, “So, Dean, why’d you come here?”

“I came here thinking I could say all the right stuff.”

“Well, you can’t.” Her smile is careful measures of pity and remorse, “That’s just the reality of love.”

“You’re right.” He says again, looking at her. She’s something sweet crusted over, crystalline. Then he shakes his head, and the moment passes, “Sorry, um. Anyways, you look beautiful tonight.”

“Thank you, Dean.”

“Times up.” Barks a producer from the sidelines, and it’s time for Dean to walk away.

He stands up; he can do it. It’s right there waiting to be grabbed, so damned easy it goes back ‘round to being hard. And he takes a step, then another, leaving the floral perfume of the garden feeling like a drug addict cutting clean.

For the second time that night, Dean needs a drink. Then he needs the obligatory second drink and he even needs the ‘this is probably a bad idea’ drink, which is how the rest of the evening goes blurred and fuzzy in his mind, like he’s watching it unfold through rosy bulletproof glass.

The only thing he finds sobering is the vote, where he scribbles Cassie’s name on a piece of paper and tucks it into an official-looking box. He could be petty and write Lisa, but since he’s screwed up Cassie’s first chance at love he might as well give her another, free of charge.

They’re sent to the rose-ceremony room to wait while the numbers are tallied. Dean admits that it, too, like the rest of the house has an elegant beauty that is unphased even in the horrendous lights of the crew. Vines curl flirtatiously at the windows, open to the world outside of them, and the scratched sand-stone bricks have ragged edges that hold the mysteries of years of use. Then, the host, Crowley, enters and the contestants preen up, bated breaths lodged like lumps of clay to their throats, and without too much deliberation the next Bachelorette is announced.

Cassie takes it well. She doesn’t cry or yell in outrage, just gives a weak, saddened smile as she does a quick goodbye to the room at large. A couple of the contestants noticeably disheartened but none more than Dean, who sinks into himself like a pin has been expertly jabbed into the meat of him, letting his air escape in one massive exhale.

And to add insult to injury, the final surprise of the night is that Dean himself receives a rose—the indicator that he gets to go on to the next round of competition—from Lisa. What she sees in a guy who’s been tippy half the night, finalizing the heartbeat that he’s been putting off for months, Dean isn’t sure. He marches up to her robotically, wondering if she can see the

sickness in his face and hands. Or if maybe he's more obvious than that, and there's a clawed-out gorge vomiting up blood where his heart is supposed to be. Evidently not, because she grins at him as he accepts it. He tries to give her something with teeth back, but it comes out looking like a half-baked sneeze.

He goes to bed as soon as they let him, and he's disappointed but not surprised by the twin beds, packed four to a room, that he'll be spending the next eight weeks of his life in. His two suitcases that carry the entirety of his possessions are pushed to the far wall, closest to the window, so he takes the bed to match. It's lumpy like a hotel mattress, but it's somewhere to rest his head.

He lays down and draws a pillow into his arms, clutching it as he revels in the unfairness that is him being here and Cassie not.

In the morning Dean wakes up late, rubbing fists into his bleary-eyed hangover as he tries to remember where he is. When he does, he wants to flop back down into bed and sleep through it all. He peeks at a bed-headed Castiel in the bed adjacent to him as well as Lucifer at the far end of the room, and wedged between the two is one of the guys whose name starts with an 'A'. An Alfie or Andy, or something. Seeing other people only makes Dean feel worse instead of better, so he rolls over and faces the wall.

He's able to sulk in bed for a couple more hours, dozing in and out of sleep, until the guy whose name Dean can't remember ducks his head into the room, "Hey, thought I'd let you know, they're asking for all the fellas to come downstairs in ten."

Dean, whose lacking dress and readiness to be on camera, leaps into action with a simple, "Oh, shit. Thanks, uh..."

"Ash."

"Thanks Ash." Dean pauses, taking a moment to actually look at the guy, "Sick mullet, by the way."

Ash gives Dean a half-hearted salute and nod of approval, "I'm keeping it real, man."

By the time Dean makes it down to the living room most of the other contestants are there, overflowing the furniture at the direction of the directors, who are trying to get everyone into a good shot. Dean is flushed along to an empty seat next to a guy who sits rigidly, eyes slinking and sliding over every contestant like he's tallying up their flaws and virtues, stacked and ready to deliver.

"What's your name?" The guy spits out, and Dean almost jumps at the low lashing sound, startled to hear him speak at all.

"Dean Winchester." Something in Dean wants to add on a 'sir', formality seeping through nonetheless. He tries again, remembering where they are, "And you?"

“Victor Hendrickson.” The harsh syllables whip automatic from his mouth, and it seems Dean has lost his interest because Victor doesn’t tack on anything else, and Dean doesn’t press. Dean pegs him for a cop.

Dean doesn’t mourn that lost conversation, especially as the director who Dean now recognizes as Rowena, she seems to be somewhat of a top dog around here, is barking at them in a thick accent, “Everyone settle down! We’re about to start rolling.”

Rowena’s announcement adumbrated the near instantaneous arrival of Crowley, the show host, who will be accommodating any and all major show events. Today he’s here to deliver the boys’ first date card, calling upon Andy, Benny, Lucifer, Ash, Ed, Harry, Castiel, Garth, Kevin, and Dean. His insides feel like someone’s got their hand between his stomach and small intestine and they’re trying to play thumb-of-war with his kidney.

As Dean gets ready for the date, he reminds himself that he only has to stay until the end of next week. To prevent guys flooding en-masse after the true Bachelorette was revealed, they’d all signed a contract promising to stay until the second rose ceremony. A short time later, and Dean is wishing Lisa would kick him off long before then.

It’s unbelievable. The sun’s too hot and the water is soaking Dean’s shorts and giving him an undignified chafe, and this *creek* that they’re in—it’s not a proper river—has been mocking him for the past three hours. And on top of all that, they’re somehow in last place. The producers had decided that the first date should promote bonding between the contestants and Lisa, but also between the contestants themselves, which is why they were saddled up with one of their roommates in order to foment friendship.

“Can you stop paddling on the left side of the boat?” Dean is brusque, his temper having gone to boil and steamed out the top of the kettle long ago, and he takes frantic spoonfuls of water with his oar on the right side.

“It’s called a kayak.” Castiel informs him aloofly, and Dean is no longer intrigued by but might actually hate him, especially as Castiel neglects to move.

The team in front of them is becoming more and more pin prick-like in the distance, where objects in Dean’s vision begins to go fuzzy, “We’re not paddling fast enough!”

“It’s not about speed, it’s about rhythm.” Dean might joke about that if he were in a better mood, but as it is he rolls his eyes at Castiel’s cool tone. Dean is eyeing the camera crew on a neighboring bank as Castiel turns to face him, “Are you paddling correctly?”

“Watch where you’re going!” Dean yells, the accusatory tone in Castiel’s voice rubbing him the wrong way. That, and he’s feeling particularly threatened by a log jeering out from the soft sides of the creek, “My paddling is fine, it’s your steering that’s the problem.”

“Well, if you’d just pay attention—”

“I am!” Dean barks back, demonstrating by accidentally jabbing his oar into the log that he was worried about just moments before. It sure snuck up fast. With a thwack, the kayak peters to the left at the same time Dean leans right, overcorrecting and sending their kayak jumping up and down on the swirling waters near the bank.

“Stop moving!” Castiel orders with a roar, trying to use his oar to move them away from the fallen tree. It hits the silken mud bottom and embeds, getting stuck. They’re still riding tumultuous waters and without thinking, Castiel tugs.

It’s all they need to completely topsize them. Dean’s anger burns hot and Castiel’s anger is iced to the core, but the tan, turbid waters that rinse over their vision and dunk over their heads is lukewarm, and it brings them back to a level playing field. Luckily, it’s not deep, and after the initial shock of water shooting up his nose and running down the back of his throat he’s able to stand up and start getting air back into his lungs, even if his tongue reeks all over of salt and mud.

He eyes Castiel, who's fighting the current’s pull on the kayak with face grit full of determination. Dean, who knows that their oars, and their dignity, is long gone, finds the whole thing ridiculous. He thinks this is the stupidest group date idea he’s ever heard of and he’s sure, above anything else, that he’s going home at the end of the week.

Dean, who should probably be helping Castiel, instead watches as Castiel loses his grip and their kayak goes skittering away. Standing there, looking dumbfounded and pissed to Hell and back, Dean wants to laugh. He also wants to curse. He doesn’t know which to act on, so he takes off his shirt.

“Cas, buddy, we’re friggin’ screwed.” Dean claps him on the back and Cas (new nickname?) jumps at the touch, tilting his head at Dean like an inquisitive dog but Dean just smiles at him, looking like a maniac all over, before diving headfirst into the water and beginning the long swim to the finish line.

Since they broke the rules, lost the kayak, and finished in last place, Cas and Dean along with the other losing team are not permitted to continue on the group date. Andy gets the date rose. Dean actually considers this a small mercy of the universe, because Dean has mud caked and flaking in places that mud should not ever, under any circumstance, be permitted to cake and flake off of. All he wants to do is shower and mope about Cassie, or make a game-plan about how he’s going to survive the next two weeks. This is evidently too much to ask for, because after he’s gotten the worst of the grime off himself and is drying his hair in bed, Cas enters the room and perches on the edge of his bed.

“Hello, Dean.” His voice sounds like hearing rain on a roof, hushed and apprehensive but solidly there. It’s a stark contrast to the Cas from earlier, who hit Dean with his oar in an ‘accident’.

“Hi.” Dean pipes, awkward. His shower worked the groan from his muscles and wound his nerves way down, but as far as reality-TV goes he think he and Cas might be sworn enemies, now.

“I wanted to apologize for earlier.” Cas says.

That came from way out of Dean’s peripheral vision, hitting him squarely on the side of the jaw, “Come again?”

“I’m sorry for not listening to you.” Cas’s teeth peek over his bottom lip and his eyes skate away in embarrassment, “And for flipping our kayak.”

The man before Dean is not the icy, peculiar bird-of-paradise that Dean thought he was. Cas is sincere and unsettled, unable to meet Dean’s eyes in his humility. It has the effect of making Dean feel like he’s about 52 different shades of asshole. Plenty of people used dating shows as a medium to sink their fame-seeking talons into, so Dean forgot that there might be the oddball here like him who actually came here for love. Genuine people like Cas.

“Shit, Cas.” Dean sighs, “No need, I get it. I got pretty heated there, too.”

“It was a frustrating situation—”

“And you were trying your best. I was being an ass.” Dean can’t believe how civil they’re acting.

“I was bad at the kayaking, though.” Cas admits.

“Yeah, Cas, you kinda were.” Dean’s voice flares up with warmth despite the insult, and he shrugs, “I was, too.”

“It was both of our faults, then.” Cas isn’t exactly smiling, but he’s not exactly not smiling either, which is a win in Dean’s book. Dean can’t help but wonder what the dude would look like with a real smile, though, all teeth and wrinkles around those incredibly blue eyes.

“Both our faults.” Dean agrees.

Cas nods once in silence, and then changes gears. When he speaks his voice is mostly nonchalant, a veiled thread of amusement coloring his words, “I like the nickname, by the way.”

Dean’s ears are left in an oven for two hours at 350 degrees, especially as he realizes that Cas is poking fun at him, “Oh, that. I, uh, sorry—”

“I said I liked it.” Cas chides gently, and gives Dean a small smile for real. It could barely be categorized as a grin but it’s there, lopsided and all, and it makes the stress of the day melt and slink away to become part of the floorboards, completely forgotten.

The next morning Dean saunters down to the kitchen and plops himself at the table in front of Cas. They’re not friends, yet, so it’s a sign of good faith when Dean flashes him an unusually cheery smile as way of greeting. Cas takes the bait, is decent enough to look bemused as he tucks his steaming mug of coffee a little closer to himself and alternates between looking up at Dean and staring into its bitter depths.

“Good morning.” Cas is formal, still studying Dean behind his blue eyes. Dean likes to think that there’s a warmth there, but he’s entirely unsure.

“Mornin’, where’d you get the coffee?”

Cas dips his thumb back towards the coffee pot sitting on the counter, steadily dripping a tap-tap of fresh coffee into its belly. It's a sound that's music to Dean's ears, who was expecting the shitty instant coffee like you'd find in a hotel. Dean stands up, fills a mug, and sits back down next to Cas without bothering with cream or sugar.

He drinks deeply and with a happy little humm, "Mmm...that hits the spot."

"You're friendly this morning." Cas says into his own mug, raising it up to his lips and Dean watches them curl around the rim, trying to look for any traces of a smile.

"Maybe I could use a friend around here." Dean ventures, boldly. But he's decided that Cas is wired less tight than in the night of the first rose ceremony.

"The other men find me peculiar." Cas tells him, perhaps as a warning, because it's resigned and there's no malice towards the other contestants.

"Well, I can jive with weird." Dean thinks Cas's mystery has been wasted on the other contestants, "It's the drama queens I can't handle. You a drama queen, Cas?"

Cas is pensive for a moment, making Dean bite back a grin at the hilarity, "No. I'm not."

"We're off to a great start, then." Dean can't help but give him another smile. For all his peculiarity, Dean finds him easy to talk to, "Although, I'll admit. I still haven't figured out why you're here."

"Why I'm here?" Cas echoes, confusion entering his face and making his eyebrows pinch tight in that way that makes Dean feel he's being studied like an abnormal lab rat.

"Yeah, I mean fame, fun—"

"Love?"

"Yeah, that too." Dean takes a drag from his coffee, "But even then, I don't know what your deal is yet."

"Hmm..." Cas mulls over this information, then he's flashing his eyes to Dean and his gaze is equal parts captivating and intense, "What's your 'deal', Dean?"

"I'm—" He's about to say something snarky, but is struck with a sudden paranoia that Cas will know he's lying. Or deflecting. Back to being a bug under a microscope, maybe Cas has sussed out his mannerisms and is already reading Dean like a book. Dean opts for the truth, as close as he can put it, "My last relationship didn't end very well. I was hoping to get back in the game."

"Fair enough." Cas's opinion on that is unreadable.

"I guess." Dean said, feeling a little like his skin was being pulled too tight across his muscles, "Alright, then. What about you?"

It was Cas's turn to look uncomfortable, looking down at the tile-topped kitchen table where his hands lay, still now that he was finished with his coffee, "Well, to tell the truth, I would like to experience falling in love."

"You've never...oh." Dean says, quickly switching gears, "Well, that's fine."
Cas sighs, "I'm aware it's...odd."

Dean draws a hand across the stubble on his face, trying to figure out what to say. Cas's motivations were odd, but incredibly sincere. It was respectable. He settles for vague, "I hope you get what you came for."

Cas looks up to Dean's eyes but he's somewhere else, somewhere dreamy where the morning sun settles like dopey honey across his features, "I hope so, too."

It's a day later and Dean is sprawled across a plush, faded-orange and lime armchair and sipping on a beer with his elbows propped on his knees so he can lean in to fixate his stare on Cas. They haven't spoken much, yet, and Dean has only barely got a feel for his personality.

"Tell me about yourself." He demands, trying to mimic the intensity of Cas's stare with cartoonish exaggeration.

This rings one of Cas's bells, as he's bringing his fingers up to tap soundlessly at the top of his thighs, "What do you want to know?"

"Hmm..." Dean strides to find balance between boring and dipping past personal boundaries, "What do you do for a living?"

"Pediatric surgery." Cas answers casually.

Dean's face brightens as he sits up, eyebrows practically jumping into his hairline, "Dude. You're a surgeon?"

"Well, I'm a first-year resident." And he looks confused, maybe a little frustrated. Like somebody missing a joke, "Why is that so important?"

"Wow, Cas." Dean shakes his head, impressed, "You must be a genius, is that right?"

Cas's lips fold into a thin line, intent on answering, "I'm not a genius. Although I've never had my IQ tested. I've always fundamentally disagreed with using IQ as a measure of intellect. In fact, it's quite—"

"Cas. I'm a car mechanic."

Cas digests this, looks at Dean like he's imagining it and giving a little nod when he's satisfied with the image, "A respectable occupation. Like a car engine, the human body is an organic machine. You should be proud, Dean."

"Sheesh, you sound like my brother." He says, even if he's a touch flattered, "He's pre-law on a full ride, but he was proud of *me* for getting into trade school."

“Hm.” Cas remarks, thinking, “Are you close with your brother?”

“I practically raised the kid, and he’s the only family I got besides my dad.” Dean wonders if Cas can hear how much he misses Sammy just from his tone of voice, “And you? You got any siblings?”

“I have two brothers, Gabriel and Balthazar. They were my legal guardians. I have a younger sister, Anna, but I didn’t know of her until a couple years ago.” Cas explains, putting it in its simplest terms.

“Oh. Cool.” says Dean, “So your parents—”

“I’d rather not discuss it.” Cas interrupts him, trying for an apologetic smile that turns into a grimace on his face.

Dean nods vigorously, his method of apology, “Yeah, sorry, my bad.”

His brain is now, of course, soaked with morbid curiosity about Cas’s home life but he wrings it out with a deep, refreshing breath and settles for changing the subject, “Anyways, I’ve been thinking. We need to make an alliance.”

“An alliance?” Cas is intrigued.

“Well, you know how these shows work.” Cas stares at him with a look that says no, he really doesn’t, so Dean explains, “The plan is this: we don’t sabotage each other in winning over Lisa, first thing, and then we also are gonna spill about anything interesting we find out the others. Teaming up against the bad guys, and all.”

As Dean speaks, Cas looks charmed, an amused smile creeping at his lips but not fully forming, “And we couldn’t accomplish this just by being friends, of course.”

Oh, sarcasm. From Cas it’s as deadpanned as the rest of his voice and that makes it unexpectedly sharp. Dean blushes, but laughs at his own over-eagerness, “That too, I guess. But we should still probably shake on it.”

Cas gives him a small grin, picking up his beer bottle he’d been neglecting and holding it out towards Dean, suggesting a cheer, “To being friends.”

Dean smiles and taps the neck of his bottle to Cas’s even though it’s the cheesiest thing he’s done to date, “To being friends.”

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!

if you liked, hated, or busted a nut to any part please lemme know with a smexy little comment ;) i thrive on feedback because i'm not a prolific fic writer, like, at all lmao. i have no measure if this garbage is even readable tbh.

so i actually have the rest of this written already sans a few scenes, but i'm doing wanderingcas's december writing challenge so I'm hoping to knock out those last scenes before the end of the year and get the rest uploaded for y'all. im also a senior in high school, though, and will probably have brain rot from finals and such. wish me good luck >_<

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thanks for sticking with my story thus far! I'd hoped to round out this story in December of 2019 but finals and the holidays got to me, but now I'm back on that writing grind. As always editing is minimal and beta?? who's she? I do hope you enjoy, though!

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

Week One

Cas and Dean get into their first TV drama moment together, as true friends do, by running their mouths about the other contestants after their group date. Cas didn't get selected, so Dean is filling him in on their adventures in horse-back riding. Dean had a nice moment helping Lisa put her helmet on and was an absolute pro at riding after watching so many Old Westerns. He only yelped once whenever the beast took off, digging his fingers into its mane and holding on for dear life.

"And Michael, geez, he was an even bigger—" Dean had gotten to filling Cas in about Michael being in his usual humor, annoying with an extra dose of douchebag, but trails off as Michael himself enters the room.

"What was that, Dean?" Michael says with a scowl on his face, looking at Dean like a bug to acquaint with the rubber soles of his shoes. Everybody in the room shuts their mouths, steeped into silence.

Dean reads the room, swallows, and strikes for lighthearted, "I was just telling Cas here that you looked handsome up on your horse, Michael."

Dean's comment doesn't register, going by the storm clouds swirling dark and angry behind Michael's eyes, "If you have something to say to me, you can say it to my face."

"You looked handsome up on your horse, Michael."

"You're too scared to really tell me, then?" Michael crosses his arms with a little huff.

"Dean was just—" Cas starts.

"I wasn't talking to you." Michael barks, and Dean's fist starts itching at the sound it makes, "Maybe you should stop being so friendly to Dean and start focusing on Lisa."

"Leave him out of it. Nobody wants any trouble but you." Dean tries not to get worked up, knowing that there's cameras watching, but a little bile leaks into his voice anyways.

“What? Mad I was mean to your little pet?”

Dean wants to stand up off the couch, stupid as that would be. He’s pretty sure punching another contestant is a sure way to get kicked off the show.

“C’mon, brother. You both need to cool down.” Benny sets a hand on Michael's shoulder, which he shoves off aggressively.

“Agreed. You don’t want Lisa thinking you have a temper.” Cas says, the thinly veiled threat causing Michael to throw scrupulous glances around the room, realizing any one of them might rat him out for bad behavior.

“Whatever.” Michael casts off thunder and lightning as he storms out of the room.

Dean turns to share victory smiles with Cas, but is stopped by the emergence of the producers, who usher Dean out of the living area into the interview room almost instantaneously. He’s spent less time in this room than some of the other contestants, namely Ketch and Lucifer, but he’s not sure if that bodes well or not. One thing’s for sure, though; they got his little disagreement on camera and they can edit it however they want, causing him to slump in his chair dejectedly.

The producers swarm him like sharks for a moment, clipping a microphone to the lapel of his shirt and adjusting the lighting on his face. A woman with shoulder-length black hair and a smile Dean imagines a cat might give to a tasty mouse introduces herself as Dagon and says, “We’re just gonna ask you a couple quick questions, alright?”

Dean nods, he obviously can’t say ‘no’, and in spite of himself is nervous. He taps his fingers against the seat of his chair as they fuss with the cameras. It’s painfully reminiscent of high school photoshoots and Dean feels out of his element.

When they’re ready, Dagon gives a signal and everyone gets to work, a high-strung focus that makes Dean’s skin prickle like he’s an off-tune key waiting to be played at a recital, and speaks, “Dean, do you get along with the guys at the mansion?”

“I guess, uh...” He says, swallows, scrambling to think of a good answer.

“It’s alright, take as long as you need. And try to repeat the questions in your answer.” Dagon is still smiling, but Dean can see her patience wearing thin under the tight stretch of her lips.

Her takes her advice, though, and mulls over his answer for a moment before speaking again, “I’m a friendly guy, and it’s made me some friends here at the house, but I’ve rubbed some people the wrong way, too, I’m sure.”

“Like Michael?”

Dean is thinking of how he will look on television when he blandly states, “Michael and I have very different personalities.”

“Can you say something more about that?” She prods him gently, “What do you think about him being here?”

“I don’t know him very well, granted, but sometimes I wonder if he’s come to this show for the right reasons.” Dean says, and feels like he’s broached a line judging by the triumphant look that sprawls across the producer’s face.

“What about Castiel? Michael said he’s not interested in Lisa, is this true? Remember, you can be honest.”

Dean loathes how they’re setting him up to say crap about Cas, like Dean would ever, “I know Cas, alright? He’s here to find love, for sure.”

“Does that threaten you?”

“What?” Dean’s eyebrows shoot up, voice bewildered, “I’m not threatened by Cas. I want Lisa to end up with someone she loves, and if that happens with Cas and not me, well, I guess I’ll make my peace with it.”

Either that answer is satisfactory, or more likely Dean’s being boring, because Dean is dismissed from the room with a reminder not to discuss the content of the interviews. It’s not a hard rule to follow, but Dean can’t help but admit it’s a little tempting, seeing that Cas and Benny are called in succession after him, to wonder what they had to say.

Week Two

It takes Dean a week to discover that Cas has never been drunk before, and it takes another week for Dean to fix it. The secret came out when Dean was sitting at the edge of the pool, his bare legs dipping into the cool water and occasionally raising to splash absentmindedly in Cas’s direction, “You’ve never been drunk? Never ever?”

It was a habit they’d started where after long days of filming they’d either find a quiet space inside or slip out to the pool where they’d retire to chatting until they were both too tired to carry on. Often times other contestants would join them, especially Benny or Ash, who they were friends with, or Kevin, who they saw more as a younger brother they were tasked to protect from the alpha-male contestants. But that night Cas and Dean were alone, their conversation easy and familiar. There wasn’t much to do besides talk to one another in the off-times they weren’t being dragged on dates or other moments of filming. They’d talked about their lives, the show (not allowed, but everyone did it), and whatever trivial thing had grabbed their attention at the time. Cas was also fond of spitting off rambling, philosophical tangents begging questions Dean felt he himself was too ill-educated to garner a proper response to, but enjoyed listening to nonetheless. Dean, in return, emptied some of his vast knowledge of cars into Cas’s receptive head and laughed when Cas tried to make the similarities between engines and human biology into support for the theory of intelligent design.

“I’m not against drinking, of course, but I’ve never done so in excess.” Cas uses his ankle to carefully flick water into Dean’s lap, coloring Dean’s shorts with tiny, dark blue spots that Dean is too preoccupied to fully notice.

Dean, privately, filed this information deep into the manila folders of his brain and stuck red post-its to the outside labelled, 'Urgent: scheme about upon next opportunity' while distracting Cas from the whole operation by launching into a story about how he'd gotten blackout drunk in college and woken up in one of his professors' home.

At the end of the next rose ceremony, when Cas and Dean weren't sent home, Dean knew it was time to set his plan into motion, because at the end of each ceremony it seemed a general consensus that upon going back to the mansion, everyone was gonna drink. And if everyone was drinking, well, Cas was gonna get drunk.

From the fridge Dean fishes two beers, the first of many, but seen as the kitchen has been stocked full of liquor and junk food as far as the eye can see since day one he's not worried about running out. In fact, he nicks a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. It's no surprise that many of the guys spend every moment of their free time with a light buzz.

Dean returns to Cas and greets him with a light clap against his shoulder, "Alright, Cas. It's time to party."

Cas eyes the bottles in Dean's hand with a frown, "Now? We have to film tomorrow."

"I'm sorry, you got anything better to do?" Dean tries to tuck the bottle into his hand, then lowers his voice a touch, pleading, "C'mon we're not filming until past noon, you'll be fine by then."

Cas gingerly accepts the beer but raises a hand to silence Dean's celebration, stating, "I'm taking this because a drink sounds nice, not because I'm ready to ruin my liver."

Dean leads him to the living room, and a few of the other guys are sprawled out over the furniture and keeping themselves entertained by reading, playing cards, or talking amongst one another. The boredom hangs over them like a plague, Dean included, the only solace being the prospect of finding true love. But, even that starts to stink a little. That's why, after Cas and Dean spend a minute sipping on their beers, people look over when Dean breaks out the bottle of whiskey.

Benny lifts a brow in their direction, "Woah, brother, what are you celebrating?"

"It's not for me." Dean waves him off as he pours a drink and, on second thought, pours another, "Well, mostly not for me. Cas hasn't ever been drunk before."

A few of the other contestants looked around with disbelief, including the gangly guy named Garth, "No way! That's some luck. I get drunk off of one beer."

Dean grins as he tucks the fuller drink into Cas's hand, who takes it apprehensively. He looks miserable at the premise of drinking it, or maybe just from the sudden influx of attention, "Dean, I'm not keen on alcohol."

Michael, lounging on the couch and looking a little red-faced himself, peers over a magazine clutched in his claws and looks Cas coolly up and down, "I say drink up."

Dean, though he secretly detests Michael, nods a little, “Look, even he agrees with me.”

With all eyes on him, Cas is apparently not the type to back down from a direct challenge, so with an exaggerated sigh he brings the glass to his lips and pointedly meets Dean’s gaze with a resolved, yet displeased stare. Dean expects him to balk at the flavor, or for his face to wrinkle at the burning bitterness, but he’s cut from stone as he boldly swallows down half of the glass. Cas drinks, and drinks, and keeps drinking at the insistence of the other men. A half-hour and it’s become a bit of a spectacle, the guys watching as Cas’s face blooms, a cherry tree, and he slumps into the back of the couch. Dean indulges himself, just enough to feel warmth in his chest and let easiness soak into the meat of him.

Dean begins to pour another drink, for Cas or himself he’s unsure, but Cas waves him off, “N-no. ‘M gonna be sick.”

His words slur like they’re stitched together at their starts and stops and it makes Dean laugh, “You alright?” When Cas ‘mhmm’s, he claps him on the back, “Do you think you’re hammered?”

“Fuck yes.” Cas says loudly with a vigorous nod, conjuring up a couple laughs from around the room.

Dean agrees, if Cas’s appearance is anything to go by. His eyes are glassy and his blush now acutely red, fanning across the highs of his cheekbones and plunging deep past his neck. He’s taken off his white button down—too hot, he’d said—and is left in a plain white t-shirt that, having been subjected to the trials of its drunken wearer, resolves itself to collapse against Cas’s chest, slouching at his throat. Cas struggles with uncoordinated fingers to retrieve a water bottle on the coffee table, with Dean watching to make sure it doesn’t go spilling everywhere. At some point Cas has begun leaning against Dean, so Dean feels the prod of his elbow as Cas unscrews the cap and takes a drink before setting it back down, bringing his empty hands to his forehead with a groan.

“Hey, c’mon. I’ve got an idea.” Dean stands up despite Cas’s sounds of protest and begins the long and arduous task of dragging his drunk friend off the couch, “Let’s get you some fresh air.”

Cas grabs at Dean’s arms in an attempt to still him but despite his strong grip finds no purchase, being lifted to his feet where he screws up his face like he’s in pain, “Oh, fuck...you. Fuck you all, mmh...for giving me drinks. This s-sucks.”

Dean has to laugh at him, then, the extravaganza that he is. The other contestants bite back their smiles, but Dean knows they’re enjoying the show. Ed bumps Harry’s knee to catch his attention and point out Cas, and Aaron has been watching with rapt attention in his buzzed state on the couch. Dean has to fit his arm snug around Cas’s back to keep him from toppling over as they start to walk, “Alright, alright, you grump. We’re sorry.”

The floor is so littered with furniture and people, many of them plastered themselves, that Dean half-prays as they pass over a wasted Garth lying asleep on the floor, Dean dragging Cas forward by a fistful of Cas’s wrinkled shirt. Cas, for his part, doesn’t fight it, instead he spews off various vulgarities mostly directed towards the other contestants. But, before they

breach the threshold of the back door Cas swings an unexpected arm haphazardly over Dean's shoulders, pulling Dean's head close to Cas's mouth like he's going to whisper something. Instead, Cas speaks at a normal volume, extra gravelly, and loud enough to be heard clear across the room, "Dean. D'ya think the other guys know I'm drunk?"

Dean looks back at the other contestants, those sober enough having amused smiles glinting on their faces, and looks back to Cas, announcing with a grin, "No, buddy. I think you're in the clear."

Once they're outside Dean plops Cas onto the bench that sits flush against the wall of the mansion, Cas closing his eyes and pushing his head back, and Dean turning to get his sandals from where they sit by the door. It's a stupid, rookie mistake Dean thinks as he turns back and is greeted with the sight of Cas, now standing and creeping to the edge of the pool when suddenly, still in his white t-shirt and shorts, he rushes forward and dives into the pool with a splash.

"Son of a bitch." Dean says, already running, flinging off his shirt before jumping in after him.

Cas isn't surfacing from where Dean saw him disappear, and Dean hopes he hasn't done something stupid like swan dive into the concrete bottom. It lends him urgency as he paddles through the cool water and dives underneath, eyes stinging against the intrusion of chlorinated water, and fumbles around searching for Cas's solid form. The pool is scarcely lit with tiny disc protrusions of light that cast eerie glowing circles of cyan that fail to negate the heavy, blackening waters they're meant to combat. Dean has to surface for air, on account of his racing heart, as he's plagued with the fear that he's inadvertently caused the first death in the history of the Bachelorette. Yet upon sinking into the waters once more he's rewarded by finding purchase on Cas's shoulder, and as he blinks uncomfortably he makes out that Cas is placidly sitting on the bottom of the fucking pool.

Dean uses two hands to hoist Cas up from his watery grave, pulling them both into a standing position, with the pool water lapping at their chins in its height. Cas stirs underneath Dean's touch, so Dean is relieved to find that he is at least still alive.

"What the hell, Cas?" Dean spits out through the pool water in his mouth as soon as they're breathing air, not letting go for fear Cas might sink back to the bottom of the pool, "Didn't know drinking would make you suicidally stupid."

"M'not drunk." Cas says stubbornly, breaking away from Dean and moving defiantly towards the deep end.

Dean sees that Cas can actually swim, but splashes water at Cas for getting him worried, "And I'm not Dean Winchester."

"No, you're Dean." Cas says absolutely, distractedly flicking back water, "I know a Dean when I see one."

"Sure." Dean says, and he can't fight the grin tickling the corners of his mouth, "What were you doing down there?"

“Thinking.”

“About...?” Dean prompts.

Cas neglects to reply for a moment, kicking himself up so that he can lie on his back and float, giving himself a view of the nighttime sky. The stars aren’t that visible with the lights of the house blinking out at them, but the moon is thick and triumphant above them.

Cas sighs, a twisted sound weighted equally with anxiety and pain, like he’s steeling himself for something, “I’m troubled.”

Dean’s worried about the somber tone of Cas’s voice, the cool water having a sobering effect on the both of them, because it prognosticates the kind of conversation Dean loathes to have, “Troubled about what?”

“Producers want for Lisa... for me to talk about my family. To her.” Cas has trouble getting out his sentence, but Dean thinks the liquor in his system has nothing to do with it.

“And your family is...” Dean already knows, of course.

“Challenging.” Cas finishes, splaying his fingers across the water, “Not atro-shious... not perfect either.”

Dean’s lips downturn and the center of his brows pinches with empathy; Dean didn’t have a perfect childhood either, but he feels Cas deserved better. He wants to help, but doesn’t know if this conversation will become something Cas regrets in the morning. Still, Dean knows being drunk doesn’t changing your desires, just your inhibitions. Deep down, Cas probably wants to vent, “Well, you can tell me about it, for practice.”

“Hm...okay.” Cas pauses, drawing down the light of the moon as he blinks up at it, “Lemme tell you, an’ you tell me how to tell her.”

“Alright.” Dean says, swallowing. He can be a good listener.

“It’s nothin’ remarkable. M’ mother was seventeen when I was born.” Cas starts.

“That’s not that—”

“Dad was forty-three.”

Dean’s stomach drops to the balls of his feet with an inaudible thud and he to take in a breath to try and dredge up a response, “Cas, I’m so sorry. That’s awful.” It’s the best he can do.

“He’s in prison. Rightfully so.” Cas’s expression is distant; he’s not in the pool with Dean at all, “He’s a teacher. Was a teacher. Gabriel and Balthazaar were the same age as my mom. She’s got Anna now, seventeen. Doesn’t know Anna’s met me, wants nothing to do with me.”

“Cas—” Dean starts and breaks off, because truthfully there is nothing he can say to remedy Cas’s awful situation. Instead he brushes his hand over Cas’s shoulder in a mild gesture of comfort.

Cas looks to Dean and sees his concerned expression, and bizarrely Cas smiles at him, “‘It’s okay. ‘M not complainin’. But I dunno how to talk about it on television without sounding odd.”

Dean’s face slips into angry lines of skin as he remembers that the producers are pressuring him to talk about it, “You shouldn’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

“Lisa needs to know.” Cas says, as he returns to a standing position briefly before lounging against the concrete wall of the pool, “But just. Y’know. How am I gonna know about love? How do I know what love is? I never saw that growing up.”

“Plenty of people don’t, but that doesn’t mean it’s hopeless.”

Cas doesn’t comment on this, just turns to ask Dean, “D’your parents love each other?”

Dean sucks in a breath, taken aback for just a moment as the conversation’s focus shifts to him, “My mom and really loved each other, yeah.”

Cas smiles, dopey and big, “That’s nice. They happy you on the show?”

“Well, uh. My mom actually passed away when I was little, but I think she’d be happy. My dad thinks it’s stupid, but he doesn’t really mind it, either.” Most of the time Dean avoids telling people he’s down to one parent, but it feels easy to confess to Cas.

“M’sorry.” Cas says, but it’s not laced with the cringe-inducing pity Dean is used to, “Bad shit happens to good people.”

The sentiment is nice, so Dean gives him a dim smile. They end up swimming for much longer, until Dean’s fingers are pruny and cold, talking away the night. Cas is steadily tipsy for the duration of the conversation, and ends up telling Dean all about his siblings: his mischievous playboy brother Gabriel who’s fourteen years older than him, his well-meaning but impetuous brother Balthazaar who was eighteen when Cas was born and therefore able to be Cas’s legal guardian, and his younger sister who he’d recently discovered. Dean enjoys hearing Cas talk about Anna, if only for the fondness seeping heavy into Cas’s voice. In return, Dean tells him more about Sammy and his fiancée, Eileen. He also opens up about how much of a hard-ass his ex-marine father could be, as Cas tells him stories about what it was like to be raised by teenaged older-brothers.

When Cas starts nodding off in the pool Dean is hit with the very real fear of Cas drowning, so he leads them both to bed. Cas strips and is snoring within minutes, but Dean leaves a bottle of water and aspirin on his bedside table for Cas to find in the morning.

Week Three

When Dean lands his first one-on-one, he’s oddly excited. He didn’t expect to last this long in the competition, and although the one-on-one date is the first time he’s contractually allowed to leave he doesn’t think he will. Living in the house isn’t that bad, he gets to travel around

the world, and maybe falling in love again will help him heal for Cassie. Plus, he'd feel bad for leaving Cas alone in the competition when they're supposed to look out for each other.

Now, in the third week of competition, Dean has gotten used to being on camera, so he's hardly phased as he greets Lisa by wrapping her in a hug. She tells him that they're going to be touring an old castle, and they taper into an easy-going conversation right away. Though the castle is interesting, Dean only has eyes for Lisa. He thinks she has a sweet-looking smile, so he tries to coax it out of her any chance he gets. He's trying to work up his wittiness and then he's caught off-guard when she says something about Led Zeppelin.

"Wait, you're a classic rock fan? I never would've guessed." Dean can't halt his excitement; there's only a few hallmarks of his character and being a Led Zeppelin fan is one of them.

"I'm old-fashioned."

"Yeah? Well, I've still got a '67 Impala with a cassette player. And you better bet she's got all the best rock tapes."

"I'm impressed." Lisa says, "That year was good for Chevy."

Dean thinks this might be a match made in heaven. And he shows it, too, letting his hand linger from where he's instinctively reached out to support her as they traverse the castle's unrefined interior floors. Most of the time when Dean's into somebody he puts off signals without realizing it, but with Lisa he makes sure to give her a few more casual touches before they're done touring the castle. All that walking worked up an appetite, and with a few quick words from the producers they're talking about food, this time Dean has a proposition.

"I'm not really into all this fine dining. I'm more of a bar food type of girl." Lisa tells him.

"Pinch me, I must be dreaming." Dean draws in a dramatic voice, "My favorite food is a burger."

"Gosh." Lisa's eyes close and her face screws up in anguished memory, "I miss burgers. I haven't had one since they stuck me on this show."

"Really?" Dean asks, and come to think of it, he hasn't had a good burger in some time, either. He could always make some at the house, but food is always better in the right company.

"Nope, it's torture. All I've had is this elegant food that makes me think I'm not cut out for television, because the whole time the only thing I'm thinking is that I'd kill for a burger."

Dean laughs, "I'm with you, I'm awful at the fancy business. Before this, I could count on my fingers the number of times I've worn a suit."

Lisa smiles at that, "And wearing a dress for every dinner is surreal."

"Well," Dean says, reciting what the producers had sprung on him earlier, "Why don't we go find, just like, the greasiest burger? In jeans?"

“You know the way to a girl’s heart.”

They’re informed of the nearest burger joint courtesy of the producers, and it’s a brief walk away and then they’re getting a table and ordering drinks as the cameramen set up. Lisa orders a beer, causing Dean to smile in approval, and puts in an order for pretzel sticks. Over dinner Dean talks to her about how his dad gave him his first beer when he was fifteen, which prompts a subsequent discussion of Dean’s dad, John, and his parental friend Bobby, who practically adopted Sam and Dean whenever their dad footed the bill. Lisa listens with sympathy and talks about her own father. She spends a lot of the meal talking about her son, Ben, too. Dean enjoys hearing about him and discovers he’s got a lot in common with Ben, so while the prospect of being a father might dissuade him at first, he’s surprisingly come around to it.

After dinner, they take a walk on a boardwalk. It’s a quiet evening, so quiet that beneath their voices Dean can make out the water lapping against the wooden docks and the slapping of the underside of boats against the tiny waves. It lulls him into a sleepy sort of happiness, and he’s suddenly thinking about Cassie. His thoughts of her have been fleeting, but it’s the first time he thinks about her without a pang of sadness tinging his mind. He lets the thought drift out of his mind as easily as it entered, gently redirecting his thoughts to Lisa.

The night is drawing to a close, so it’s time to exchange goodbyes as the twilight melts into dark. He pulls Lisa into a hug, brief but firm, and holds her at arm’s length for a moment afterwards, the lights of the camera making him dizzy with warmth.

And then, almost hearing the cue of romantic violins piquing in the background, Dean captures her lips with his own. It’s quick, more of a hello than a goodbye, breaking off as he smiles into her mouth, going all teeth as he pulls back to look at her. He doesn’t lean back in, the rolling cameras deterring him from more.

“I had a lot of fun today.” He says.

“Me, too.” Her answering smile is dazzling, a little flushed at its edges from being kissed, “I can be myself around you.”

“Exactly.” Dean breathes, tagging on something to sate the cameras, “I felt a connection tonight.”

“So, will you accept this rose?” She presents it to him delicately, biting her lip like she’s worried he’ll reject it.

He could reject it. He could go home tonight, hear Sammy’s voice on the phone. He could take time to heal from Cassie before getting back in the game, focusing on his work. But, the image that conjures seems so lonely he can’t help but to reach forward and take the rose from Lisa’s hand, still smiling, “Of course.”

The post-date interview lasts for around an hour, and then he’s back at the mansion. The guys in the living room are the first to greet him, asking how it went. He tells them vaguely without dishing out any details, and heads up to his bedroom to undress for the night,

realizing he's pretty tired. Inside the room Cas is lounging on his own bed, reading a book, but pauses to give Dean a smile in greeting.

"Hello, Dean." He lets the book fall flat on the bed, holding his place, "How did your date go?"

"Good. I'll tell you all about it after I catch a shower."

Dean is showered and changed and hopping into his own bed faster than Cas can scrounge up a bookmark, instead dog-earring his crumpled book and setting it on the nightstand between his and Dean's bed. Dean muses about how lucky he was that Cas was assigned the bed next to him, but can't too contemplative as Cas is asking for more details about his date. Dean launches into the explanation, definitely oversharing in what he's contractually allowed to talk about, and dwells on the best part. It takes him awhile to explain, Cas meanwhile sitting at rapt attention.

"Dean," Cas says at the conclusion of his story, dragging his name over his teeth like a plea, "I'm never gonna get a one-on-one."

Cas looks a bit miserable, then, sprawled out on his bed with the comforter tucked over his shoulders, like he's hiding from the world.

Dean perches on the edge of his own bed, across from Cas, sighing at him, "Don't be so down. Lisa likes you, too."

"She doesn't know anything about me." He pouts, "Nor I about her."

"It's not about what you know, it's about the connection."

Cas looks thoughtful for a moment, chewing his bottom lip, "Do you think I have a connection with her?"

"Yes." Dean says immediately.

He doesn't look satisfied, a little frown appearing on his face, "Yet you share common interests with her, right?"

"Maybe." Dean can't lie, curses himself, "A couple."

Cas scoots closer to the edge of the bed, digging his elbows in until the side of the mattress is curving towards the floor. Unphased, he props his head on his hands and straightens his legs out on the bed behind him, "I suppose you can't enlighten me."

There are absolutely rules against sharing Lisa's likes with Cas. But, there aren't cameras actively rolling here in the bedroom and of the rules he's broken (like sneaking into the competition on false pretenses anyways) telling Cas that Lisa likes rock music doesn't seem so criminal.

"I've told you I love Led Zeppelin, right? And bar food?" Dean says with a wink-wink nudge-nudge in Cas's direction.

“I see.” Cas gives a little nod of resignation, “I don’t particularly care for bar food, except burgers, and you know my taste in music.”

Yeah, Dean knew his taste in music. And it was pretty awful. Besides knowing scantily few classical songs—and if you’re gonna listen to anything ‘classic’, why not make it rock?—Cas’s taste in music was practically non-existent.

“The burger thing is good. Like, really good. And I’m sure music taste isn’t a deal-breaker.” Dean thinks Lisa might like someone who’s her polar opposite, “But, wait, you seriously don’t have a guilty pleasure food? A shitty, processed snack that you hate to love?”

“No. Although, I do enjoy honey despite its caloric content far outweighing its nutritional value.”

“Doesn’t count.” Dean tells him, “Have you tried anything else?”

“Not really.”

This leads Dean to shake his head in disbelief, a decision firmly planting itself in his head before he can think about it as he rolls to the opposite side of the bed and fishes for a plastic bag that crinkles loudly against other similarly-wrapped plastic things. When he turns back around he presses a finger to Cas’s lips, silencing any protests he was intending to offer.

“Rule number one is to always stash snacks for later.” Dean splits open the bag and carefully plucks out a twinkie, handling it like it’s inlaid with precious stones and presenting it to Cas with the conviction of a religious devotee bringing a newcomer into the light.

Cas unwraps his present and discards the plastic neatly on the bedside table, Dean perching on the edge of his seat as Cas sighs and takes a hesitant bite, chewing nonchalantly and swallowing. His face gives nothing away, and he mumbles a soul-crushing, “It’s alright.”

Dean deflates, realizing that Cas is a lost cause, “This is the holy-grail of snack cakes, Cas, and you call it ‘alright?’ I hate to break it to you, but you are one weird guy.”

“I’m aware.” Cas deadpans, handing Dean the Twinkie. It’s not even half-eaten.

“You a weird health nut or something?” Dean bites into the Twinkie’s exposed end, relishing the sweet creamy deliciousness as it dances on his tongue, “It’s okay if you are.”

“No, not really.” Cas watches Dean’s mouth moving, and Dean wonders if he’s a germaphobe, or something, being a doctor and all. But, Dean’s pretty sure Cas drank beer after him, so he shrugs it off, “Although I’ve preferred salads to sweets ever since my childhood.”

“Were your brothers rude, or something?” Dean finishes his food in another bite, and wonders if it’s impolite to lick his fingertips.

“Quite the opposite. They’re quite free-spirited, though that’s landed them in trouble...” Cas trails off; he clearly has a complicated relationship with his brothers, “Gabriel adores snack food, actually. So much so that it’s turned me off of it, I guess.”

“What do they think about you being here?” Dean lifts his thumb to his lips.

“I’m sure they’re very surprised.”

Dean sucks on his fingers absentmindedly, leaving them slick when he pulls them from his mouth, “Surprised?”

“My experience with romance has not been vast.” Cas’s eyes flit to Dean’s fingers and back to the floor, just as the tops of his cheeks warm, “I’m, uh, rather virginal, in a sense.”

Dean freezes with his lips wrapped over his own pointer finger, and he fights down the urge to feel embarrassed as he slowly pulls it away, resting his hand by his side, echoing weakly, “In a sense?”

At this, Cas’s blush materializes in full, “Well, entirely.”

“Oh, well that’s—” Dean tries his best at a response, but he’s getting distracted by the sticky wetness clinging to his fingertips that he wipes away on his pants.

“It’s alright, Dean. I know it’s pathetic.”

Dean shakes his head furiously, “No, not pathetic. A little unusual, yeah, but plenty of people wait. And it’s nice you’re coming onto the show for those experiences.”

“I suppose.” Cas agrees without really agreeing, mulling it over, “Thank you for saying that, Dean. And for sharing your food with me. But I’m getting tired, I think I’ll go to bed.”

“Yeah, me too.” Dean says, crawling underneath his covers, “Night, dude.”

Cas flicks off the lamp and, while their roommates Ash and Lucifer will filter in at some point, for now it’s just the two of them that are submerged in darkness. It reminds Dean of his exhaustion, but as tired as he is he can’t help but smile as Cas tells him, “Sweet dreams, Dean.”

Dean struggles as Cas shoves Dean’s head underneath the chlorinated water of the pool, the surprise of the attack causing Dean to snort water up his nose. He emerges, coughing, shoving Cas away and cursing him playfully. Cas kicks off and dives towards the football floating next to them, which Dean tries to thwart by tackling Cas from behind. Cas is quick to flee and Dean only grabs ahold of his calf, Cas’s other leg slamming into Dean’s chest and forcing Dean to let go. Cas swims away, raising the football above his head triumphantly.

“You cheated and I still got the ball.” Cas brags, tossing it in the air towards Dean.

“You were the one who tried to drown me.” It’s hard to believe Cas hasn’t played football, but Cas confessed that he spent all four years of high school on his school’s swim team, which explains how he caught on so quickly after Dean dragged him out here to play ball.

Dean throws the ball back just as easy, maybe a little far, because Cas jumps and arches back, splashing on his back as he catches it and sinking into the water. He stands and wipes the

water from his eyes, lobbing it back towards Dean. Dean then throws it towards an unsuspecting Benny, who fumbles a bit but eventually catches it. Besides Cas, Benny is Dean's favorite contestant, which is why he didn't protest when Benny hopped in the water in hopes of joining their little game.

"I reckon we get some teams together. Have a real game." Benny tosses it back to Dean, who rockets it to Cas.

"That would be fun." Dean says, keeping a keen eye on Cas as he picks up the ball.

"I don't know." Cas's frown is nothing but worry, "There's a lot of animosity."

"Oh, c'mon, Cas. Lighten up." Dean teases, "It'll be a perfect way to let out the tension."

"It's settled, then." Benny says, already in route to the house, where he will announce they're having a game.

It takes a moment for the new players to change into their swimwear, and in the meantime Cas migrates towards Dean so there's no question which team he's on. To Dean's delight, Benny joins them along with Ketch. Opposing them are Garth, Alfie, Lucifer, and Michael with the latter two bickering about being stuck with the former.

"I want Dean on our team." Lucifer barks, and if it were any other person Dean might feel flattered.

"No way, Jose." Garth says, "Dean and Cas are the ultimate duo, you can't break them apart!"

"What?" Dean questions at the same time Cas echoes, "'Cas?'"

"C'mon you two," Garth wags his eyebrows, "You're totally the best friends of this season."

"Which one of us is Robin?" Dean grumbles under his breath.

Cas, on the other hand, speaks with the utmost sincerity, "I want to hear more about this television trope, later."

Either Lucifer or Michael gets fed up with the delay, because suddenly the football is hitting Dean square across the face and it's game on. Garth proves to be a slippery little guy, able to score several touchdowns with the help of Lucifer and Michael, who bully the offense into submission. But Cas is fast. And what the other team has in tactic, they make up in teamwork. Not that Dean is inclined to work with Ketch, but he can at least be civil which beats the constant arguing of Michael and Lucifer. Dean loathes to think of what they could accomplish if they ever decided to work together.

They play for about an hour, at one point drawing an audience of the other guys who lounge around the pool and try to get some sun, and eventually retire when they all become too tired to keep score. The cool of the water has begun to feel chilling, and Dean's fingertips are pruned which is always a bust. He's looking forward to taking a hot shower and lounging on

the couch, preferably next to Cas so he can stave his boredom by bugging Cas to explain what he's reading in those medical books he always carries around.

"Garth, are Dean and I best friends?" Dean hears Cas say under his breath.

Dean's drying off by the door, too far away to respond, because Dean wants to say, 'Of course, stupid' but listens instead for Garth's reply, "Every season has a pair, but you're up against Ed and Harry. Y'all are secretly my favorite, though."

Dean rolls his eyes, laughing under his breath as he goes inside to shower. He beats the others, who will scrap for the remaining bathrooms, and returns downstairs warm with still-wet hair dripping onto his stretched AC/DC shirt. He plops down next to Cas, who still smells faintly of chlorine and is peeking over the edge of a medical textbook.

Dean gets himself dealt into a card game with Ed, Harry, and Kevin—there's never a shortage of games at the mansion; everybody is trying to kill time—and relishes in the fact that none of them have a poker face, winning himself a pile of Skittles.

He shows his winnings to Cas, his hair sending droplets onto the glossy medical diagrams in Cas's book which causes Cas to glare. "I'm ecstatic. You can finance the water-damage repairs to my textbook."

Dean laughs, and can pinpoint a faint fondness behind Cas's eyes which makes him think he's forgiven. Nevertheless, when Dean presents Cas with pocket aces and slyly whispers to Cas asking how much he should bet, Cas tells him to fold.

Week Four

"So how did it go?" Dean prompts when Cas arrives, back from his first one-on-one date, plopping himself next to Dean without so much as a greeting.

Dean is practically shaking with anticipation to hear the details, which is why he's disappointed when Cas gives him a vague, "Good" with no indication of elaboration. But, Cas has got the rose in his hand, rolling it back and forth across his palms. It's only later, when they get a moment alone after the others have gone to bed, that Cas drops his guard. It's a relief that the happiness doesn't melt entirely from his face, but when the fake smile vanishes it's replaced with something tinted with notes of uncertainty that makes Cas look distant.

"Everything go okay, Cas?" Dean asks, thinking Cas will open up. Cas just nods, so he continues, "Do you think you have a connection?"

"Yes." Cas breathes, a hint of smile returning, "I had begun to think I misjudged her from the first night, but she's very down-to-Earth."

Dean resists the urge to call him a dork for worrying about it in the first place; he knew Lisa would like him, "That's awesome. You feel better now?"

“I—” Cas hesitates, setting off screaming sirens in Dean’s head. Cas scrutinizes his surroundings, like he’s scouting for hidden microphones, before speaking, “I may have more uncertainties than before. I enjoy Lisa’s company, but this evening felt a bit platonic.”

“Not romantic?” Dean clarifies.

“Not romantic.” Cas confirms.

Dean catches his lower lip on his teeth, mulling, “Well, did you give her a goodnight kiss?”

“No.” Cas averts his eyes, hastily explaining, “Not that I didn’t want to! I was just afraid to.”

Dean’s eyebrows pinch in confusion, “How come?”

“I’ve kissed relatively few people. I didn’t want to fumble on camera.”

Dean waves a dismissive hand, “Nah, kissing is easy. Like riding a bike.”

Dean moves a little, scooting closer to Cas on the couch without realizing that’s what he’s doing, but once he’s there he decides he likes it. The couch cushions dip under their combined weight, sending their shoulders and elbows to bump each other like at a slumber party. But it’s pleasant being close to Cas, an intimacy only shared by good friends.

Cas gives him the side eye, displeased with his choice in metaphor, but it doesn’t last long and his eyes flit away like they were nervous to look in the first place. His eyes fall to his lap and he slouches a bit, “I don’t know if I remember how.”

For some reason, Dean’s gaze falls to the crappy motel-quality curtains lining the window of the room, quivering at their bottoms from the air conditioner being pumped into the room. It reminds him of how far away he is from his apartment, in that instant, because with the lights dimmed down and with the other contestants all asleep, when it’s just the two of them sitting here, it almost feels like they’re back home.

“Well, it’s just like—” Dean’s tongue curls across his bottom lip.

He turns and Cas looks up. Dean takes a moment to take in what he sees, realizing then that Cas is damned handsome. He’s harsh lines and stubble interrupted with a soft expanse of lips, pinker than they should be, kissable as all hell. Objectively, of course. Dean realizes he’s staring at the dude’s mouth and his eyes snap back to Cas’s on reflex. Cas’s eyes are burning blue with sincerity, heeding every word and micro-action, like he’s just grateful for the time of day. Ogling at Dean like he’s a hero, or something, Dean doesn’t get why Lisa didn’t lean in and kiss him herself.

“All you do is lean in, slow.” Dean explains.

Dean assures himself that he’s not intending to kiss Cas. But if this were true, it’s a pretty awful idea when he leans in a fraction, just to demonstrate. Cas misses the memo, thinks he’s the one leaning, and his eyes fly wide at the unexpected brush of skin against his own. They both freeze. Dean makes a lot of decisions, all at once. The kiss should be a blimp, an accident over in an instant as each party pulls away. But it’s not. It’s formless, like a song you

don't know in a language you don't understand, but it's soft as hell, so Dean chases it and makes lyrics from those indefinite sounds. It's enough to constitute a kiss, a real one, and then they're both drifting away like it hadn't happened.

But it did. Dean says, "Yeah, like that."

And then they both laugh. Dean starts telling Cas about the drama he missed when he was away, and that's it.

Chapter End Notes

how are we feeling about that last scene, folks? things are heating up,,this is just a taste of whats to cum. *come, sorry. ;) If you have any comments, good bad or even if you just want to describe to me last night's dinner I would marry you if you shared them with me! I love hearing what you guys think and if I need to change anything. Where do you see this little flirtation between Cas and Dean heading?

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Thanks for joining me for the next installment of this fic! earlier I'd planned to have this in three chapters, but now I'm thinking more like five? whoops. but I hope you enjoy! it would've been up earlier but i needed time to emotionally recover from ep 15.09. 0-0!!!! y'all know what I'm talking about.

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

Week Five

On the next group date, the contestants are tasked with a mixology class that will let them get to know Lisa while demonstrating their knowledge of drink making. Dean's excited, in addition to knowing his way around a bar he's being joined by some of his favorite contestants: Benny, Kevin, and of course, Cas. In fact, most of the contestants are going except for Andy, Aaron, and that weird guy Raphael who Dean always forgets about. With only 13 contestants left, everyone was getting more time with Lisa.

Dean didn't expect to get this far, if he's being honest. But he's beginning to think he could have a real chance to win and marry Lisa. It's just up to him to decide if that's what he really wants, he guesses he has a chance to decide that on today's date.

The mixology instructor comes around to the different stations with little buckets of ice, but the rest of the supplies they need are spread out in front of them or tucked below in cabinets. Today they're making three different drinks: a 'Little Red Rooster', a 'White Rabbit', and a 'Magic Carpet Ride' which are apparently based off of Lisa's favorite drinks, but Dean knows she'd rather be drinking beer. The instructor gives them a quick, regrettably brief, demo on each cocktail and then asks them to recreate the drinks, which Lisa will be sampling and deciding the winner.

In order to help them along, the contestants are permitted to pair up with another contestant to form teams of two. Dean picks Cas, of course, and knows that, unlike last time, they'll be able to work as a team to secure the win for them both. Cas and Dean head to their station and are pleased to see they're across from Benny and Kevin, who make up another team.

"You guys are going down." Dean taunts, fixing a determined look on his face as he stares down Benny.

"No way!" Kevin chimes, half his face curling into an evil grin as he brags, "Benny used to be a bartender."

"Friggin' cheater." Dean mutters under his breath, but it's nothing but playful.

“You wish, brother. This is pure talent right here.” Benny returns, looking smug.

Cas sighs and rolls his eyes at them, but Dean knows he’s laughing on the inside. Before Dean can say something snarky back they’re interrupted by the instructor announcing something else—there would be a twist. Under each station was a notecard with special instructions for each group’s drinks. Dean fumbled around for the folded notecard and opened it, presenting it to himself and Cas.

“What cocktail isn’t vegan?” says Dean immediately, frowning at the word.

“The egg whites.” Cas tells him, and Dean groans to remember that the ‘Magic Carpet Ride’ is made using egg.

“Let’s start on the Rooster for now so we can put it in the freezer.” Dean says, not having much of a plan besides that.

“And while we’re working we can brainstorm for egg white substitutes.” Cas agrees, and they spring into action.

The first drink is the easiest to prepare, just requiring the measurement of vodka, cranberry juice, and orange juice. Cas’s job is to double-check the labels of everything to make sure it’s without animal products, and he also spends a moment cutting an orange into slices to garnish the top of their drink. Dean is proud of this little flair, but soon realizes that Benny has somehow made an orange into an open, starburst-shape design that he places onto his glass with a little smirk thrown towards Dean.

“Show-off.” Dean says.

“Jealousy isn’t a good look on you.” Benny informs him, and after a moment frowns, “All our drinks are sugar-free. I have to over-compensate.”

“I tend to agree.” Cas chimes from where he’s now onto slicing a papaya into chunks, “Artificial sweeteners are cloying.”

“What’s your twist?” Kevin asks, struggling to wield a knife and sneaking little glimpses at Cas as he cuts up his own fruit.

“We’re *vegan*.” Dean says, with a hint of judgement laced into his voice. How anybody could give up bacon cheeseburgers was beyond him.

“You’re kidding.” Benny says, sighing, “That’s so easy!”

“No!” Dean protests, “We can’t use egg-whites!”

“Yeah, but you can use—” Benny cuts himself off, suddenly smiling wholeheartedly and with wicked delight.

“Benny!” Dean yells, setting down the lime he was juicing in favor of running to Benny’s station and grabbing the man’s shoulders, giving him a vigorous shake, “You gotta tell me, man!”

Benny fixes a tight-lipped mask of mild annoyance to his face, “You’re in my way, Dean. I’ve got an egg to crack.”

“Benny, have I ever told you how cool you are?” Dean tries instead, and he can see Benny’s mouth twitch towards a grin. Kevin and Cas, meanwhile, are watching the little display with smiles of their own, “I mean, damn. You’re just the coolest guy I’ve ever met.”

“Hey, Dean?” Benny says, looking increasingly pleased from where he stands with Dean’s fingertips digging into his shoulders, though he’s looking somewhere behind Dean.

“Yes?” Dean says, hopeful.

Benny’s voice is low as he answers, “Turn around.”

Dean listens. And then he’s blushing and frantically side-stepping back to his place as he’s met with Lisa, looking particularly cute in an over-sized chef’s outfit. She’s been going around and checking each group’s progress, and apparently it’s their turn. She smiles, a little skeptical, as she asks, “What’s going on here?”

“Dean’s trying to cheat.” Benny nods solemnly.

“Am not!” Dean spits back immediately, and then realizing his mistake gives a little awkward laugh, “I’m just asking for some advice from our resident bartender, is all.”

Lisa winks at him, “I’m *sure* that’s all, Dean.”

“Of course!” Dean enthuses, pretending to be appalled, “I’m—I’m offended anyone would suggest otherwise!”

Benny snorts under his breath, and Lisa turns her attention to him, “Benny, I have high expectations for you...”

Dean leaves them to their conversation, needing to get back to work lest he be a bad partner, and eventually Lisa moves on to the other contestants’ tables. Dean realized some time ago that he doesn’t get to speak to Lisa much on group dates, but just knows that she’ll be watching from afar to determine who she likes best, so he tries his best to have fun. Even in a competition like this, he’s happy to clown around with his friends while making drinks for a few hours even though it might not be the best tactical strategy in the long-run. Dean just hates suck-ups like Micheal who will interrupt everything just to make a passing comment to her, like having a couple extra seconds of contact will win over Lisa’s heart.

“Maybe we could use club soda instead?” Cas asks, bringing their egg problem back to the forefront of Dean’s mind.

They both watch Benny wince, and silently acknowledge that no, they will not be using club soda instead. Dean is the next one to suggest something, “Beer?”

At another one of Benny’s faces, Cas tries, “Simple syrup?”

That's all it takes to break Benny, who curses and leans over the table to quickly whisper, "It's aquafaba! Use aquafaba! Just please, stop torturing me."

Dean laughs, victorious, though he's got no idea of what aquafaba is. It takes Cas a moment of rummaging underneath the counter before he produces a bag of white powder labelled aquafaba, and they combine it with water to make a gooey, gelatinous substance that Dean wrinkles his nose at.

"C'mon, let's add it." Dean says, and Cas dumps it into the rest of their ingredients and begins shaking it.

Dean begins preparing the last drink, the 'White Rabbit', which involves espresso and several sweet-sounding ingredients that Dean adds hastily, maybe going a little heavy-handed on the butterscotch liqueur as he watches Cas to make sure he's finishing up things alright.

Dean frowns, "Cas, bud, I don't think you're shaking that right."

"I'm shaking it." He deadpans as an answer, like that should be good enough.

Dean puts down the bitters he was holding, coming up to Cas, "Here, let me show you."

Cas does not hand it over, turning his back so Dean can't reach it, "Dean..."

Dean does not heed his warning, instead reaching around Cas's side and grabbing the cup in his hands, fingers overlapping as Dean tries to wrestle it away from him playfully. Cas moves to step away but his back accidentally nestles against Dean's chest and he relinquishes his grip entirely, and somehow this leads Dean to be standing, his left wrist and hand peeking out from underneath Cas's right arm, the rest of Dean's arm pinned against his chest by Cas's back. Dean's right arm is free and circles back around to grip the cup with both hands. He can't actually shake the cup like this, so he freezes, exhaling onto Cas's neck. He tries not to notice the goosebumps there, and suddenly he's thinking about that kiss again.

Dean meets Benny's gaze across the table, and Benny has one eyebrow cocked like he knows what was going through Dean's head and suddenly Dean is stepping back, so abruptly that he almost drops the bottle as his arm knocks against Cas's. He gives Cas a demonstrative shake of the cup that's not as vigorous as he was intending and is left to hope that his resulting blush doesn't end up on any cameras.

They don't speak much as they finish up their respective drinks before time is called. The taste-test is pretty informal, after Lisa tries all of the drinks they take turns trying their own creations. Dean is surprised to learn that his favorite is actually the sweet, frilly 'White Rabbit' made using coffee, even if Benny's sugar-free version tastes better than his somehow. Cas drinks all of their 'Magic Carpet Ride' happily, telling Dean he prefers to not drink egg-whites, anyways, and smiling until Benny tells him that aquafaba is made using "bean juice".

Cas and Dean place third, each looking at each other with a meager, satisfied shrug to learn that, at the very least, they weren't last place. It was a pretty good day, all together, especially as Dean overhears Michael and Lucifer get into it over their last-place standing.

“I hope you get sent home!” Michael shouts a little too loudly, making Dean bite his tongue to hold back laughter.

Dean bumps his shoulder to Cas’s, whose sitting next to him, and finds that Cas shares his amusement. But, when he checks to see Benny’s reaction the other man is sipping on his winning cocktail and giving Dean a weird look. Dean finds himself getting embarrassed without knowing exactly why.

Later that night, after the date, Dean decides to do some investigating. He sits down next to Benny where he’s playing solitaire across the living room’s coffee table. Discarded from earlier, Benny has a plate of picked-over nachos pushed to the edge of the table and helps himself to a stray chip as he eyes Benny’s game. Benny, noticing the company, sits back and mutters to Dean, “Got any suggestions?”

“Hm...?”

“I’m stuck.” Benny says, sounding pained.

“I’m no good at solitaire.” Dean tells him, clearing his throat a little, “So, today’s date was fun, huh?”

“Sure was. I loved whooping your ass.” Benny starts to collect his cards from where they were neatly laid out, “Where’s Cas?”

“Asleep.” Dean says immediately, because he’s just come from seeing Cas off to bed, but pauses, “Uh, I think.”

Benny looks at him for just an instant, eyes scanning the planes of Dean’s face, before going back to cleaning up the cards, “I was just wondering, I’m very bored.”

“Do you wanna play cards?” Dean suggests.

“Not really.” Benny tells him.

Dean frowns and feels like he’s getting nowhere with Benny’s strange behavior, “Okay, well...”

Dean doesn’t have time to think of something before Benny is speaking, sounding more enthusiastic than he has all evening, “Let’s play FMK.”

“What?” Dean blinks.

“C’m on Dean, were you never a kid? Fuck-marry-kill.” Benny clarifies, a hint of a teasing smile gracing his lips.

“No, I know what you’re talking about, I just—” Dean realizes he doesn’t have a good excuse for not wanting to play, besides feeling a bit juvenile, so he sighs, “Alright, let’s play. I’ll go first...Kate Winslet. Natalie Portman. And, uh...Angelina Jolie.”

“Fuck Kate, marry Angelina, and kill Natalie.” Benny says, after some deliberation.

“Seriously? I’d marry Kate all the way.” Dean says, praying that nobody can hear this conversation. He’s been putting his best foot forward during this competition, it’s not good to lapse now.

Benny laughs, “Fine, here’s yours: Robert Downey Jr., Beyoncé, and Tom Cruise.”

“Marry Beyoncé, obviously, and...” Dean groans, “C’mon, I can’t pick between two dudes. It’s the lesser of two evils.”

“Hm, sorry.” Benny says, not sounding apologetic, “I just don’t know many celebrities off the top of my head.”

“Who said we had to do celebrities?” Dean tells him, “FMK Lisa, Cassie and...ha...Kevin.”

“I’d marry Lisa, obviously, since I already wanna put a ring on it.” Benny checks Dean’s reaction, as it’s always awkward to bring up the fact that they’re all dating the same girl, but Dean just nods along, “And for Cassie and Kevin? Well, sorry Kev, you’re like a brother to me.”

Dean snorts a laugh under his breath, surprised by his ability to talk about Cassie without pain. And he could never see himself joking about Cassie being intimate with somebody else, “That’s fair. Alright, give me a good one.”

“Lisa, Cas, and—” Benny grins evilly, “Michael.”

“Ugh...well, you know who I have to kill. And for the others...” Dean pauses, frowning as he thinks it over, “Damn, you really want me to fuck Cas, huh? Because I’d want to marry Lisa, of course.”

“You could always marry Cas, y’know. Have it be a platonic marriage. It’s all about strategy, Dean.” Benny tells him, unphased.

“Fine, I guess I’m marrying Cas for his money, then... I hope Lisa can cope.” Dean pretends to pout, but ends up smiling at his own joke, “What would you do?”

“I’d still marry Lisa.” Benny says, “But I think I’d fuck Michael. I always love a good hate-fucking.”

“Benny, you dog.” Dean tries to grimace at him but it can’t overcome his smile, “That’s so gross, it’s Michael!”

“What? He’s alright, besides his personality.” Benny defends his position, looking up with both his eyebrows raised like he’s challenging Dean to a counterpoint.

“But still, he’s...” Dean trails off, suddenly feeling awkward.

“A dude?” Benny finishes.

“Yeah.”

Benny gives a roll of his shoulders, very mildly saying, “And is that a big deal?”

“Oh...” Dean doesn’t know how to react, “I guess not.”

Benny blinks at him, like Dean might be the most clueless person in the world. There’s something else there, too, something Dean can’t put his finger on. Then Benny is quickly back-tracking, “I mean, don’t get me wrong, brother, I prefer women and I consider myself straight. But if the right *guy* were to come along, who am I to say no?”

Dean chews his lip as he thinks this over. He’s aware of bisexuality; he did, after all, go to college, but Dean didn’t know what to make of guys like Benny who were, what, straight with some wiggle room? Dean “preferred” women, too, negated only by a couple instances of experimentation during high school. But, that was just teenage curiosity. He’s not open to a relationship with a guy, just isn’t into them romantically, “Well, that’s fine. I’m 100 percent straight, though.”

“You’re 100-percent-straight Winchester?” Benny teases, and he can’t know how Dean’s heart skips a beat as he remembers that Benny saw them earlier with the cocktails.

“Guilty. And you’re 99-percent-straight Lafitte?” Dean teases right back, trying to take it in stride. He just didn’t expect to meet somebody so open on the Bachelorette. Besides Sammy, none of Dean’s family had ever expressed any outward acceptance of all that.

“Guilty.” Benny fakes a sheepishness with his answer.

Dean’s smile lifts the side of his face for a moment, but then his expression returns to neutral, if not a little uncomfortable, “I gotta ask, do you think Lisa would care?”

“Not really.” Benny muses, looking over to Dean and back to the coffee table with a weird pause, “There’s probably bisexual guys here.”

“You think?” Dean starts running through the contestants in his head.

“It’s pretty common. I thought you might be into dudes, actually.” Benny must have a talent for saying stuff with a straight face, Dean thinks, because the words fly off his tongue with ease.

“What?” Dean says, his mouth going dry, as his stomach drops to the floor, “You did?”

“Why do you think I brought all this up, brother?” Benny winks, “Think I actually wanted to play FMK like a 14-year-old boy?”

Dean is shocked into silence, before he says, without any real venom, “I fucking hate you, Benny.”

Benny blows a kiss towards him, “I love you too, Winchester. Like a brother, of course.”

“Suck my dick.” Dean tells him.

“Maybe later.” Benny jokes back, but then he stretches and lets out a massive yawn, “Actually, make that ‘maybe tomorrow.’ I’m getting pretty tired.”

“Then go to bed, stupid.”

“Night, Dean.”

“Goodnight, you son of a bitch.”

Dean watches Benny climb up the stairs leading to the bedrooms and Dean watches him go, still boggled at their conversation. And though Dean isn’t aware of it, a part of him whispers a tiny, fleeting ‘thank you’ to Benny’s receding figure.

The next morning, Dean steals a play from Benny’s book whenever the contestants are delivered a stack of mediocre, incredibly dated magazines as a form of entertainment. Dean wakes up late, and by the time he gets downstairs there’s only a 2005 copy of *Girl’s Life Magazine* sitting on the coffee table, seemingly reserved for him. Dean picks it up, feeling only a little emasculated, and flips through for something to do. At first, he thought the magazine was better than nothing but he’s about to change his mind when his fingers land on a ‘Are you REALLY best friends?’ quiz and he lets out a little snort.

“Something funny, Dean?” Cas asks, sneaking up behind him with two steaming mugs of coffee in hand.

Dean graciously accepts, looking down at the first question on the quiz as he responds, “I dunno, Castiel... whatever-your-middle-name-is Novak.”

“It’s James.” Cas tells him, raising an eyebrow in question.

“Alright, I guess I missed the first one.” Dean says, holding out the magazine to Cas as explanation, where the first question reads, ‘Do you know each other’s full names?’, “Your turn.”

“You can’t measure an emotional bond by the quantity of information known about one another.” Cas says in a measured voice, almost robotic-sounding to the untrained ear, but Dean knows better.

“You don’t know my middle name, do you?” Cas offers no response, and Dean smirks at him as he plops down on the sofa, “Trick question. I don’t have one.”

“So, I’m winning?” Cas suggests with a hint of teasing in his voice, joining him.

“We’ll see.” Dean frowns at the next question, “Favorite color? C’mon, who even cares about stuff like that?”

“Mine’s green... olive, really.” Cas remarks, looking at Dean and then looking away.

“Olive? Alright, color snob. I like plain blue.” Dean frowns, retrieving a pencil from the coffee table and trying to mark a faint ‘x’ by the first two questions that they missed. He

reads off the next question, “How often do you and your BFF fight?”

“What are the options?” Cas scoots over next to Dean so he can peer over the magazine, “I’d say ‘sometimes’ if you remember the kayak.”

“Don’t remind me.” Dean says, faking a groan, and then laughs a little at the next question, which he reads in his best impression of a teenage girl, “Your BFF has a new boyfriend who you know is bad news! What do you do?”

“I would tell you, of course.” Cas says, immediately. Dean appreciates his sincerity.

“I’d beat him up.” Dean says, making a fist and presenting it to Cas, as proof.

Cas gives him an unamused face, “Option 3, then.”

Dean marks it, continuing “Do you know fun facts about your BFF?”

“Hm.” Cas thumbs at his lip as he thinks it over, the image of a philosopher, “What constitutes a ‘fun fact?’”

“Here’s one: I’m afraid of flying.”

Cas nods, seeming to understand, then states, “I’m fluent in five languages.”

Dean pauses. He has to take a moment to digest that, cursing himself for forgetting that Cas is a borderline genius, “Seriously? Which ones?”

“Well, it wouldn’t be a *fun* fact if I told you.” Cas says dryly, sarcasm hitting every note. On second thought, he adds, “You can guess, though.”

“Spanish?”

“Sí.” says Cas, and Dean remembers enough of freshman Spanish to know that’s an affirmative.

“French?”

“No.” Cas looks forlorn, like he’s confessing a failure.

“German?”

“No.”

“Japanese?”

“Give up.” Cas says, giving a slight shake of his head, “I want to know what great ‘BFFs’ we are.”

“Fine. Hm, this one’s interesting, ‘Do you get along with your BFF’s other friends and family?’”

Cas thinks this question over, too, “Well, you’ve never met my brothers, of course, but I think they’d you better than they like me, if I’m being honest.”

“You have more in common with Sammy than me.” Dean retaliates, frowning a bit at Cas’s answer, “I thought you were pretty close to your brothers?”

Cas had gotten around to telling Dean much more about his brothers, over the past couple weeks, and Dean told Cas all about Sammy. He felt like they all already knew each other, at least in theory.

“Oh, I am.” He ensures Dean, “They just think I’m occasionally uptight.”

“Well, uptight can be good. Sammy would like if I took things more seriously.” Dean contrasts, even though Cas’s definition of ‘uptight’ wasn’t in like with Dean’s.

“I can’t fathom why.” Cas gives him a little smile, and Dean smacks him with the magazine, “What did we get?”

Dean quickly tallies the points and flips to the results section, “We got 50%. It means we have a good relationship, but we aren’t stuck to each other like glue.”

When Cas speaks, Dean thinks he must be imagining the note of disappointment, “That’s probably for the best.”

There were a lot of things Dean didn’t expect about being on a dating show, and among them was how intimately the producers would get to know him, or he the producers. He’d begun to recognize the show’s staff by name and now knew the particular way each head producer operated. Dagon was very invested in the drama aspect, Azazeal liked playing up the romance, Asmodeus went in-depth on backstory, and Ramiel just seemed like he wanted to quit his job. So, when Dean wanted to ask for a favor he knew he should go to Ruby, an intelligent, cunning woman who seemed dedicated to the premise of the show and who normally worked alongside Azazeal.

What Dean wanted was a guitar. For the past few weeks, he had been thinking about Cas’s music problem, and how that related to Cas’s Lisa problem, and how *that* tied into Dean’s secret, selfish desire to keep Cas on the show, just so he could have a friend. The idea of Cas leaving and Dean having to spend all the time in the house without his closest friend was almost intolerable. And for all of Dean’s Walkman’s efforts, Cas just wasn’t loving his music. So, he thought he might change Cas’s mind in person.

At last, he was permitted to use a guitar for a day, since he had been complaining so much about how his skills were getting rusty. It was like Christmas morning, the other guys crowded around him as he carried it through the house and straight up to his room, no time to waste since they had things to get on with that day. In fact, Dean was supposed to be going for his second one-on-one date later.

“Hey, Cas?” He calls, interrupting Cas’s reading as Cas’s eyes fly wide.

“Dean, I thought we weren’t allowed to have instruments?”

“I got a favor from one of the producers, I thought you should hear some real music.” Dean says, cheeky and nervous at the same time.

“You got this for me?” Cas sounds awed.

“Well, for me, too.” Dean can’t resist giving him a shit-eating grin, “So I don’t have to live with my best friend having a crap taste in music.”

Cas sits forward with his head resting in his hands, intrigued, “Go on, then.”

Dean sits and gets adjusted, fidgeting a bit more than strictly necessary and taking a deep, calming breath. It’s weird for him to be nervous; it’s just Cas and besides, he plays for people all the time. He finds his fingers going into a familiar song as he strums Zeppelin’s “Going to California” and there’s an extra tremble to them as he starts off with the lyrics. He’s no rock god but he can carry a tune.

Cas’s face slips first into surprise at Dean’s singing, and then he smiles. It’s reassuring to Dean, who starts singing with more vigor, remembering he has to convince Cas to actually like the song. The lyrics hold a lot of meaning to Dean, who thinks about his own quest for love mirrored in the song’s hauntingly sweet rendition. It makes him a little hopeful, a little hopeless, and he ends up closing his eyes for most of the lyrics, opening them only when he trails off to an ending.

Cas actually claps, which Dean finds endearing, “That was amazing, Dean.”

Dean smiles as a thank you, still strumming absentmindedly, and his fingers fumble into the opening of “Rain Song,” from sheer habit, and he soon regrets it as he has to start singing the sappy opening verse. He looks away as he stumbles and bumps over that first awkward ‘you’ that punches like a fist through the hushed air.

When Dean looks back up during the long instrumental, Cas’s eyes are fixed to his face in a way that reminds Dean of how Cas had studied him when they first met. Now, Cas’s elbows were propped on his knees and he catches his chin in his outstretched palms as he listens to Dean play. Dean smiles at him a little, not being able to help it after seeing Cas so struck by his mediocre skills.

Dean keeps on playing, knowing most of the song by heart despite its length, not skipping a single note on account of Cas listening. He wants Cas to really enjoy it, Dean being an unfortunate sap when it came to music, and he thinks about it as paying Cas back for being a great friend. He continues into the second verse with much more heart, meeting Cas’s eyes head-on but suddenly thinking of that accidental kiss they’d shared. He tries to squash it back down, but something about that memory has him feeling warm all over and suddenly he’s sauntering through the last verse, voice going soft as he sings to Cas. When he finishes, there’s no more strumming, ending with an extra refrain of, “Oh, but I know...that I love you so.”

“Dean.” said Cas, who’s glazed over with some unidentifiable emotion. He looks like he’s been hung out to dry.

His one-word response makes Dean laugh, shaking off the little saplings of doubt in his mind as easily as a dog shakes its coat from rain, “So, are you a fan of Zeppelin now or what?”

“Yes.” Cas said, looking far from recovery.

Dean should’ve known it was all a set-up.

Leaving Cas a little wonder-struck on the bed, Dean got ready for his one-on-one with Lisa and was surprised when they asked him to bring along the guitar. But he didn’t think anything of it until, halfway through their date, they were directed towards a theatre and the producers told Dean he would be playing for her, and they specifically requested “Rain Song,” telling him they’d heard him practicing it earlier from the hallway.

Dean’s throat feels dry as he thinks about them hearing his sappy, crooning version of the song he’d played like some lovesick fool even though he’d just meant it as a nice gesture, not a declaration of any sorts. But now, he figures, it’s supposed to be a declaration, and it feels all wrong knowing he sang it to Cas just earlier that day.

Yet Dean isn’t one to complain as he takes his spot on top of the stage, Lisa being the only member of his audience, if you don’t count the many cameramen and producers. He likes playing the guitar, though, so when he starts playing he’s at ease, flashing Lisa a winning smile and hoping his voice sounds good on camera.

But, even barely through the first verse he can hear that his heart isn’t in it. It’s not like with—well, it’s just different. He’s not singing the song for her, or even himself, just the oppressive force of the cameras. It’s a bittersweet moment when Lisa gives him a standing ovation and climbs on stage to pull him down into a kiss.

The rest of the date goes well, Dean thinks, but on the inside he’s soured and salted and feeling restless. If Lisa notices, she doesn’t mention it, even if Dean is brief during their scheduled ‘talk-about-feelings’ session at the end of the night. When Dean gets in the car to go home, he’s got the strangest urge to cry.

Upon getting back, he immediately goes to Cas.

They sit on an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar house, the only homes being the ones they carry with themselves and with each other. Dean ignores the way his shoulder meets Cas’s or how Cas has crossed one leg over Dean’s outstretched ones; he misses his family and friends and his entire life, and it’s making him touchy. That’s all.

“Cas, can you keep a secret?” He whispers against his best friend’s side, knowing the answer already but trying to provide an introduction to the topic that keeps rattling around in his head, desperate to get out.

“Of course, Dean.” Cas says with a conviction that suggests if Dean asked him to hide a body he’d merely sweep his eyes over Dean once, as pause, before suggesting the best burial

places.

“I’ve been thinking about Lisa...” And here the confession bubbles at his lips and refuses to rise, needing to be enticed. Dean looks away.

“I would hope so, Dean.” Cas’s voice gravels out like he’s being serious, which somehow makes it worse, “That *is* the point.”

“No,” Dean’s eyes fall back to where they’d ached to ever leave, Cas’s piercing gaze holding him steadfast, “I don’t know if I can fall in love with her.”

Cas is good at hiding his emotions. Which is why, when his blue eyes cool into steel and his shoulders stiffen into action, Dean imagines him as Atlas braving the weight of the world.

“Oh.” Cas breathes, his features softening like water softens clay, erasing the hard lines and leaving something sympathetic in their place, but their cloudiness smothers secrets, “When will you be leaving?”

“What?” Dean is flabbergasted, loathes the thought of leaving everyone, of Lisa and Benny and Kevin and Cas, “I’m staying until she stops giving me roses.”

“Dean—” And it’s the voice Cas uses when he’s explaining something difficult, “If you don’t think this could be serious, maybe you should leave.”

Dean shakes his head, anger rearing up quick and bitter, “That’s—you’re supposed to be reassuring me right now, not talking me into quitting.”

“Dean.” He states again, and why the hell can’t he keep Dean’s name out of his mouth? And why does the sound drag Dean’s eyes right back to him again?

Cas’s hand moves from its place on the bed, materializing at the crest of Dean’s shoulder and Dean feels his warm fingertips sink into taut muscle. He’s tempted to sink into the sensation, but Cas’s eyes, that fix Dean’s own, are such a brilliant blue, pupils almost shaking in their sincerity, that Dean remains at rapt attention as Cas speaks, “I only want what’s best for you.”

Cas sounds like he means it. Dean knows he means it. And Dean is furious, standing up as he shouts, “I’m not leaving the show, that’s outrageous!”

“It’s not outrageous.”

“This is my shot at finding the one! I can’t believe you want me to give that up.”

“It’s not that.” Cas sounds exasperated, and his hand clenches the sheet where Dean was just sitting, “I just think—”

“I’m tired of hearing what you think.” Dean cuts him off, “I shouldn’t have asked you for advice.”

Dean storms off, and Cas doesn’t protest.

Several hours later, Dean is drunk at the rose ceremony. It's not his best call, he'll admit, but at least he's already got the date rose, and he can be passable for tipsy if not for his awful decision-making skills. Those skills leading him to half-fall into Lisa's lap as the cameras focus on his flushed, dopey face. Strategically, he's got no reason to be here, but he's trying to make a point to anybody watching of how much he likes Lisa.

Not that he cares what people think, Dean reflects, as he glimpses Cas across the room, who's eyeing him with something like pity with his royal blue suit making his eyes dance like they're on friggin' fire, or something, coiled balls of heat lightning fanning across a tumultuous sea. Every shade of blue. And then Dean's distracted as he finds his mouth on Lisa's, hands flying to her waist as he impolitely nudges his tongue past her lips with mislaid enthusiasm. He takes his time, savoring the kiss and extending its ending with a peck to the side of her mouth. She's blushing and smiling, clearly dazed by the unexpected kiss. Dean just beams right back, and if Cas's murderous expression is the cherry on top, so be it.

But Dean's victory turns to regret during the rose ceremony whenever there's only a couple roses left and Cas's name hasn't been called yet. Dean is struck by the fear that his last interaction with Cas will have been a fight, and fidgets in his suit as Lisa plucks the second to last rose from its place and, after some deliberation, calls out Cas's name. Dean lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding and decides that it's just not worth it to fight with Cas.

The rest of the night is a little hazy, unassisted by Dean's refusal to slow his drinking, and he turns in early once they've stopped filming. He just wants to sleep off the events of the night and start fresh in the morning, hopefully making amends. But he only gets a couple hours of shuteye before something wakes him up.

It's Cas, the scent of his lavender cologne still clinging to his fresh-shaven skin and settling across Dean's bed like a silken blanket. It's dizzying, the rich floral spice a lullaby to Dean's senses and almost entrancing him back to sleep, even amidst Cas's squirming underneath his sheets, trying to gauge where Dean is with a series of quick pats to Dean's shoulders and head.

Dean's sleepiness dissipates and his eyes are thrown wide open, goosebumps running down his neck as Cas suddenly jumps close, hot breath tickling its way across his neck and carrying the gruff, acute whisper, "*Dean.*"

"Cas?" Dean tries to chase the sleep from his eyes as he rolls to face Cas, coming nose-to-nose with him in the confused, hazy state of consciousness that comes from being simultaneously tipsy and hungover and roused so unexpectedly. Some sort of protest threatens Dean's throat, maybe at their closeness, but his thoughts fall from him as Cas's hands find purchase on Dean's chest, Cas's finger warm even through the pinched fabric underneath.

"I was jealous." Cas spits out, his thoughts miles ahead of Dean like he's breaching some long-winded explanation, Dean scrambling to catch up.

Tonight's events come crashing back down, Dean giving a shake of his head as he whispers blatantly, almost disgracing the hushed sanctity of the moment, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have been kissing Lisa like that—"

“Dean.” Cas interrupts him, and Dean listens, for the strained urgency in Cas’s voice predicts something severe, “No, Dean. I wasn’t jealous of you.”

Dean’s heart, in a circus trick, jumps through his throat and sticks to the roof of his mouth. He’s overcome with rampant thoughts, desperately listening to what Cas is saying, trying to decode it. Trying to disassemble and reassemble it like an engine he’s making start again.

“Do you get what I’m saying?” Cas’s whisper shakes against Dean’s skin, his nose almost against Dean’s, never looking away, “I wasn’t jealous of you.”

Dean has never heard English before, or maybe this is a prank and Cas is speaking to him in one of his many languages. Cas’s words fall on ears deafened by the too-loud beating of Dean’s heart. Cas’s teeth wear into his lip and he glimpses away to encase himself in steel, at last looking back and his eyes colliding with Dean’s in a wreck of green and blue.

“I was jealous of her.”

Dean grabs Cas—his arms, his hair, his anything—as he bruises his lips against Cas’s mouth.

Dean knows he’s slow to self-revelations, but he’s unprepared for the desperation his shaking hands hold, not noticing until now that he’s not even *living* until Cas’s mouth is on him, glued to him, extinguishing him entirely and raging a different fire through his veins. It’s unlike anything he’s ever had, his desire compressed and metamorphosed by having been squashed so far down.

Cas sighs, right against his mouth, and it sounds like Dean’s name, but Dean can only hear the too-loud mantra in his head: *Cas. Cas. Cas. Cas.*

Then someone coughs and, remembering where they are, they break apart for fear of being caught. A surreal moment passes where Dean stares at Cas’s mussed hair and pining, vanquished lips with the only accompaniment the roaring of their hearts and Dean, in spite of everything, yawns.

“Sleep.” Cas tells him, voice so low it’s almost a growl, hoarse in its whisper.

“Fine.” Dean mumbles a reply, head feeling like a well-stirred soda. Regret looms, a thick smoky cloud above him, tiny tendrils leaping down to curl at his arms and chest and battle back the want coursing so thickly through him. And so he draws his arms back and tucks into himself, fleeing the temptation as he lies, “M’ drunk.”

He hears Cas swallow in the dark, a pained sound, “Goodnight, Dean.”

They scramble away from one another, having toed the line enough for now.

Thank you again for reading! As always, any kudos or comments are greatly appreciated, even if you just keysmash. :)))

I did some research into the drinks they made and based it off actual recipes, though I know absolutely nothing about mixed drinks. The best friend quiz was fun, too, as I went through several quizzes with one of my actual best friends (thx bro u keep it real) and modified some questions. oh, and I 100% made one of my friends reenact the grabby cocktail scene positioning without telling her what it was for but, hey, it's all for the creative process amiright??? Overall, I had a great time writing this even if the last scene was giving me trouble :0

I'm hyped to keep writing and finish this fic out for y'all, and the support I've received has really kept me going. Much love. xx

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

hi guys I hope this fic is finding you well from the quarantine! finally an update, huh? I sat with this chapter for so long because I can honestly say I detest it, but there's nothing like getting your school cancelled to really increase productivity and motivate you to post something :) anyways, you might find that the next chapter comes a bit sooner (hopefully?), especially because I may be quarantined for the next two weeks cuz I might be infected. stay safe and please for the love of fuck go wash your hands.

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

Week Six

Getting the contestants together without fighting is a rarity: the suffocating presence of cameras makes the four walls of the mansion feel closer to a prison, so it's only to be expected that a couple buttons get pressed or a few wires get crossed. But that wasn't movie Night. Movie Night, or rather 'Netflix Night,' was the only time contestants were permitted to watch television. It was a sacred event, a true outpouring of peace even though they weren't allowed to watch the news and the crew always picked what they'd be watching.

Tonight's selection was something Benny had never seen, *Breaking Bad*. It seemed interesting enough, though, a high-school teacher turned meth cook. And the guys liked it, they piled on the couches until every available seat was taken and some of them sat on the floor. Nobody was eliminated last week, so with ten contestants around the place was still pretty crowded. Though Benny was fond of most of them, he was excited to see some of those spots on the couches clear out, as long as he wasn't one of them.

Right now, Benny sits at the edge of a three-seater with his companions, Garth and Kevin. They're nice guys, if not a little geeky, and despite his better intentions he spends most of his free time hanging out with them. He wanted his best friends to be Cas and Dean, they were more Benny's speed, but sometimes they were intolerable. Benny tried and failed to not feel like a third wheel, but Cas and Dean were inseparable, damned near telepathic.

Like tonight, for instance, they'd snagged the two-seater couch and the few feet of separation they had from the other contestants might as well have been miles. There hadn't been enough blankets to go around, so Cas and Dean had ended up sharing. Benny was jealous of how cozy they looked snuggled up together, but respected that they had their own weird little bond.

Benny is distracted from the Cas-Dean lovefest as the show starts and bowls of popcorn are passed around. Kevin ends up ducking his face towards Benny's shoulder at the gorey scenes and Benny laughs and gives him a few pats on the back, being a fan of the gruesomeness

himself, and when a half-dissolved body falls through Jesse Pinkman's ceiling, the whole room gasps in shock. Benny's face is split ear-to-ear by a devilish grin that could only be brought about by seeing something so horrifically awesome.

Benny turns to Dean, knowing it's right up Dean's alley, and hopes to catch his eye and revel in the hilarity of it together. Yet Dean is more focused on watching Cas's reactions to the show rather than the actual show itself, and the moment passes without him even looking at Benny.

Benny stares, dejected but not surprised, when Dean suddenly lifts the edge of their blanket, adjusting it. It's only for a second, but Benny feels like a voyeur because that second is long enough to see that Cas's hand is resting on Dean's lap, intertwined with Dean's own.

Benny blinks, looking wildly around the room to see if any of the other contestants had seen what he'd seen, and relaxing when he realizes everyone is engrossed in the show. Cautiously, his eyes flit back towards Cas and Dean who are sitting inconspicuously as friends, if not a little close. Benny had sensed a bromance brewing, of course, but he didn't know if it would go any farther. But, maybe they were just platonically holding hands? Maybe Cas's hands had been plagued by a sudden frostbite and Dean was trying to save use of his fingers, or maybe Dean was secretly terrified of the show's carnage and had to grip Cas to prevent himself from running screaming out of the room?

Benny could entertain a thousand outlandish explanations if he wanted to, but when the viewing party comes to a close and Dean and Cas stand up, stretching and stepping away from each other like they weren't just holding hands, folding the blanket while hovering in each other's spaces like two celestial bodies drawn into orbit but flung back just as quick, Benny thinks to himself, They're so gone on each other.

Maybe he's reading too much between the lines. But maybe he isn't. Either way, Benny has a strict policy of minding his own business, so he's not gonna tell anybody and he sure as hell won't bring it up to Cas or Dean. Watching Dean and Cas ascend the stairs together, one of Dean's hands pressed into the small of Cas's back, he decides he believes in love despite unconventional circumstances. Even if he's left wondering what'll happen next.

They don't talk much about the kiss, but not much changes except for now, Cas doesn't hesitate to touch him, running his hands across Dean's arms or curling next to Dean on the couch whenever they're away from peering eyes. They don't talk about what it means and Dean doesn't quite know. And as long as they don't talk about it, Dean can blow it off as touched-starved loneliness, the college days receiving an extension.

Today, Dean's embarked on the mission of creating a home-cooked meal. Most of the contestants, barring the dates, have been eating out of the microwave for the past few weeks and Dean is no exception. He tries to stir a mess of flour and water into some form of pizza crust dough, Cas watching languidly from the counter. The day is sunny, lazy almost, as they bide time until the next date. Dean frowns at the light streaming through the kitchen because the yellow reminds him of Lisa, yet the sunshine is nothing but Cas.

He jabs his spoon dejectedly into the mixing bowl, the pizza dough bearing the brunt of his frustration. It's a momentary distraction, so he almost jumps when he feels hands sweeping down his front, grabbing at the spoon and trying to wrestle it away.

"Need any assistance?" Cas says, light and teasing.

Dean doesn't respond and the whole ordeal turns into more of a hug with Cas's arms loosely enveloping Dean as Dean stills. Dean doesn't think, just turns, his lips landing at the corner of Cas's mouth in a curt kiss. He pulls away before it can become anything else and diverts his attention back to stirring the mixture in the bowl.

Cas doesn't move and, for a moment, Dean's thinking that he crossed that haphazard line that they'd drawn and redrawn in the sand only for it to be swallowed up by the encroaching tide, and that Cas will distance himself, eclipsing the sunny mood. But Cas leans his weight against Dean's back, hands resting against the soft part of Dean's stomach, and then his lips brush the side of Dean's face, chaste and sweet.

Dean's face grows rosy in a way he can't blame on the sunshine.

Later, when Cas gets sent on the group date and Dean is the one staying behind, he's decidedly bored. The only other contestants left at the house are Ketch and Micheal, and since Dean isn't talking to Micheal anytime soon he instead tries to make small talk with Ketch, though he's always found Ketch grating; something about the way he talks sounds like a Lifetime movie. After a backhanded comment about Dean being a mechanic—and, c'mon, Ketch is an attorney—Dean goes into the kitchen.

He paces for a moment, feeling antsy, and would like nothing more than to be taking something apart for reassembly. To occupy his hands, he gets a piece of paper and pen and starts to doodle. A circle becomes the wheel of a car, and another becomes a creepy-looking eye peering out at him between the cyan lines. Dean doesn't consider himself an artist and his drawings are nothing fancy, leaving his mind free to think about who he'd really like to speak to: Charlie.

Just thinking about his fiery best friend has him feeling a bit better, smiling fondly as he remembers some of her antics. He can't wait to tell her about the ins-and-outs of the show, giving her the long-awaited answers about what life on the show is actually like, "Do you think there'll be cameras in the bathrooms, Dean?" And Benny! Dean knows that those two would hit it off like none other, just as she knows Charlie would hate Micheal even by a mere description.

And then there's Cas, and Dean feels his ears involuntarily turning red again. What would Charlie think? He can't imagine she'd approve of the...whatever...he and Cas have going on, but then again she'd be more than on board with Cas, y'know, being a dude. It's the sneaking around part she'd abhor. But only if she knew the ins and outs.

Contestants are permitted to write letters while they're on the show, as long as they don't contain information pertinent to the competition itself. A small mercy, Dean thinks, as he starts to pen out the opening to a message to Charlie, right under the car-eyeball hybrid

monster Dean has created. He writes quickly, letting his thoughts fall freely to the paper in a lazy scrawl.

Charlie,

I miss you like hell. I've got so much I wanna tell you whenever I finally get to talk to you again. But I'll jump right into it.

You wouldn't believe it, but there's actually some cool people here. There's a ton of douchebags, too, but I've made some real friends. Like Benny. He kinda reminds me of a weird mash-up of you and Sam, but with a lot more of my interests. Perfect, right?

But, then there's this guy Cas thrown into the mix and I swear, we're attached at the hip. Don't get me wrong, you're still my BFF and I love you with all my heart and all that jazz, but Cas is endlessly interesting, and funny, and really smart. He's an even bigger nerd than you, and he's gonna be a doctor. A pediatric surgeon, actually, because he's got a good heart and wants to help people. But when I first met him I hated him. He hit me with an oar. Then we talked it out and now we're besties. Then we kissed.

It was an accident, of course. The first time. But it happened again, for real, and it hasn't stopped happening since. Benny was telling me about this 'exception' thing. I dunno, I didn't get it at first but now...holy shit he might be right. I think I'm liking Cas.

And we might already be kinda-sorta together? Yeah, yeah, I can hear you yelling at me to communicate but it's a little complicated when it's you two and a bunch of other strangers slumming it in a mansion together. And you're both dating the same chick. Don't get me wrong, I still like Lisa. A lot. And I still wanna win, so I know everything I'm doing with Cas is a total conflict of interest but Cas and I just happened, somehow. Maybe we're just...fuck, passing the time?

Benny said he'd go for the right guy if the right guy came along. Maybe Cas is my right guy, but I don't think I can do this with him forever. I can't imagine telling Sam or Bobby or for fuck's sake, my dad. It's just one exception.

Please just tell me that I'm still straight even though I'm doing this stuff with Cas, because I'm kinda freaking out. Wish I could hear your voice right now.

Dean

After signing his name, Dean spends the next half-hour picking apart his paper, shredding it into a blizzard of snowflake-scrap so small as to be completely illegible.

Week Seven

Though some of them were infuriating, Dean had been pleasantly surprised by the contestants on the show and the friendships he'd made. Spend enough time trapped in a house with people and you sort of expected them in your life, a familiar routine. The contestants felt like their own little family, albeit somewhat estranged, so when Kevin, Garth, and Andy were eliminated at the end of week six it was a loss felt by all. The two dorks had always brought a little joy to everyone's day, even grumpy Micheal, and Andy's refusal to get into drama had garnered him a lot of respect.

It felt like something had changed. Dean looks around at the remaining contestants with the same reverence found in the eyes of two strangers hunkering down under the awning of a bus stop during an unexpected storm, the kinship there unfounded and fleeting but nonetheless real. They stare back at him with the same. Something had definitely changed.

Upon returning to the mansion, Benny had flopped down, face-up on one of the couches and now stared blankly at the ceiling. Cas sat on the armrest of his couch, giving Benny an unsure little pat on the forehead and shooting Dean a pleading glance, looking to him for rescue, and expression turning into a mix between wide-eyed anxiety and glowering resentment as Dean abandons him to go to the kitchen.

Dean procures three beers, tucking one into Benny's hand and saving the others for Cas and himself. Benny sits up a little so he can drink, looking a little more alive, and mutters, "Thanks."

Cas sighs, relieved that, at the very least, Benny hadn't died from his grief and that Cas wouldn't have to have a hands-on refresher of his training in med-school, "Thank you, Dean."

Dean takes a swig, "At least we're still here."

"Yeah." Benny says, and there's an edge to his voice that Dean's having trouble placing the origin of.

Dean's conflicted. There's no denying the guilt he felt while marching up to Lisa to accept his rose, knowing that it would do nothing to calm his frantic, thundering heartbeat until Cas's name followed close behind. So he drinks, in solidarity, in remembrance for his departed friends, and to numb that gnawing welt cemented in the walls of his chest, threatening to overwhelm him.

Interrupting Dean's self-pitying is Micheal, slapping Dean roughly on the back, "C'mon losers, let's play poker or something. You guys are depressing."

Dean supposes that's his way of comforting them, so he shrugs in compliance as Micheal rounds up the rest of the guys and starts passing around poker chips. He's not a fan of

Micheal, but in this moment he can respect the guy's leadership capabilities.

The last seven contestants gather around the coffee table, with Benny, Cas, and Alfie sitting on the couch and Ketch, Micheal, Dean, and Ash sitting on the floor. They're all stocked with drinks and a bag of potato chips is left opened and half-spilled so that everyone can partake, leaving greasy smudges on the cards as they get passed out.

Dean knows he's good at poker. Bobby and his dad alternated teaching him how to play a good game when he was growing up, and he had plenty of practice cleaning up with the drunk patrons of local bars when he got older. That's why as soon as he sits down, he starts sizing up the others at the table to look for the weakest links. It's Alfie's turn to deal first, and as he stumbles to flip up the cards Dean has him pegged for the sucker.

"So, Castiel, I was reading an article the other day about spinal anesthesia in infants..." Alfie starts, and Dean remembers that he's studying to become a nurse, but Dean's more interested in the fact that Alfie watches closely as Cas raises by a red chip.

Ash ends up winning the hand—Dean has shit cards anyways—and they start anew. Dean checks his cards in a flash and sees he has clubs and hearts, they could end up as a straight if he's lucky, but his time right now is better spent observing the other contestants. Micheal bets, Dean's thinking he just has a high card, and everybody but Benny calls. Alfie raises a red chip. Dean recalls that he's never seen Alfie playing poker before.

As the game progresses, Dean watches Alfie, face flushed from his one beer, hanging onto Cas's every word and practically making googly-eyes at him as they talk about niche medical stuff and share war stories from the field. Dean doesn't know whether to find it endearing or annoying, but he knows how to exploit weakness and evidently so do the others, because after a few rounds Alfie's running low on chips, and after a few more he's out. He is unceremoniously dismissed from the circle; the others double down their focus to the game at hand. It feels real now.

Dean tries to size-up his remaining opponents, and notices Cas is unexpectedly strategic. He knows Cas isn't a gambler, but with a pinched, brooding face that betrays no emotion he scrutinizes the cards in his hands and folds more often than he bets, holding onto most of his money and taking away a few hands. Micheal is loose-fisted and aggressive when he thinks he has something, turning away most of the others except Ketch, who meets him enthusiastically. They both make away with big pots of money but their stacks dwindle over time. Benny is the most conservative, limping and wringing his hands before slapping his cards down in a fold. Dean thinks Ash is his greatest competition, going from announcing that he is folding at the start of each hand to spree-betting, each change of play-style throwing off Dean and letting Ash win, all the while he talks nonchalantly to them like he couldn't care less about the game.

On the next hand Dean is dealt a five of diamonds and a five of hearts and before the flop Micheal bets hard like he has something good, and everybody folds except for Dean and Cas, who call, feeling it's worth the risk. The first three cards are the ace of spades, the king of spades, and the ace of diamonds. Dean has two pairs, not the strongest hand unless it turns into a full house, but watching Micheal scoot forward a smaller bet than last time, Dean raises him by half. Micheal curses, announcing he'll fold before they've even moved onto

Cas, who's been studying their interaction and now gently slides forward double the amount that Micheal bet, raising even Dean.

Dean tends to bet aggressively when others are being aggressive, but knowing Cas, and knowing how observant Cas has proved to be, Dean thinks Cas knows this, too. Dean also thinks Cas doesn't have anything yet, but is pressing Dean to expand the pot in a half-bluff. Half-bluff because something enticed him to stay till the flop, at least. Maybe he has pocket spades, or is working on a straight. Dean's mind clanks like spinning gears as he studies Cas for a tell, but there's nothing tangled in the long stretch of his fingers or hidden in the planes of his face, their only interruption the stubs of stubble that rise along his jaw. Dean blinks away to prevent distraction.

A four of clubs is next, which doesn't help Dean except he bets high anyways, gauging the reaction. Cas extends a hand out and smoothly places his chips in the center, slinking like a cat trying not to draw attention to itself as he raises, by just a bit higher than last time. Dean thinks he's figured Cas out: he's trying to bluff Dean, playing like he has a good hand and is trying to not scare Dean off while reeling in the money, hoping that Dean will think he has a good hand and fold, leaving him the riches. Dean tosses in his own chips feebly, like he's reluctant to do so, hoping Cas will take that as a sign that his plan is working.

Ash has been intrigued by their entire interaction, his eyes feasting on Dean and Cas's faces though he plays it off mild interest, him being the dealer and all. The other players are similarly invested, hoping to see the tension between Cas and Dean come to a head especially because the pot is the largest it's been since the start of the game, each one of them refusing to back down. Ash takes longer than is needed to flip the last card, and everyone leans in to see what it will be.

Three of spades. Dean barely registered it before his eyes fly to Cas's face, desperate for a hint in his demeanor. Yet it seems Cas has had the same idea, because their eyes meet in a brawl of hazel green and cerulean blue and they glare at each other across the table, pressed lips unspeaking. Cas is unreadable to him, and yet Dean has to make the first move.

He bets high, confident, daunting Cas with his eyes and his body language as he places a large stack of chips at the center of the table and hoping it'll inspire a fold. Cas doesn't relent, immediately moving to call, and yet coming back with a stack even larger.

"I'll raise it to double." Cas says, eliciting a gasp from both Benny and Ketch.

If Dean calls and loses it's game over for him. And if that wasn't formidable enough, Cas finds Dean's eyes across the table and he slowly, deliberately, seductively glides his tongue across his bottom lip, and Dean's gaze can't help to follow, Cas's mouth just begging for someone to kiss off their shine. And then Dean is looking up again as Cas's eyes flicker up and down Dean's body before coming to rest on Dean's face with a fucking wink. And then Cas's face relaxes into a sexy half-smile, distracted, eyes sizing up Dean like he's something to eat.

Dean's brain short-circuits. He's never seen that look on Cas's face before, and that's a shock, coupled with the realization that he would, very much, like for Cas to eat him. Dean's mouth

goes drier, drier still as he notices the other contestants are staring at him, waiting for him to play.

Dean doesn't think, "I-I fold."

This is psychological warfare, Dean thinks. Cas's wink was, to what? Throw him off? Make him forget that the last spade came up, Cas has the flush, and surrender to Cas's huge raise? Dean's sweating under the other contestants' fixed stares, and Cas has returned his face to an emotionless slate, offering him no comfort.

Cas doesn't grin as he rakes in his winnings, so Dean thinks he's made the right choice. But it seems Cas can't resist gloating a little, because without prompting he flips up his cards as he sends them in to be reshuffled, not pointedly but casually, and they're revealed to be the king and queen of clubs, not spades, meaning he just drained Dean's wealth on a pair.

Micheal gives a spineless laugh, "He played you."

"I'm gonna grab a beer." Dean spits out, scrambling away from the others.

Dean retreats into the dark of the kitchen, grabbing another drink from the fridge that he barely sips from before deserting it on the counter, its cap misplaced. His hands rest atop the cool marble surface and he faces towards the cabinet, eyes closed, deep in thought.

His ears are brushed by the sound of someone entering, and even before looking he knows it's Cas who leans against the counter next to him. Dean opens his eyes and sees Cas's head tipped back, the dark crown of his hair blending into the walnut paneling behind him. He clears his throat, an abrasive sound, "Dean, I'm sorry—"

Dean interrupts by kissing him fervently, violently. It tastes like the look of gasoline and feels like the sound of a rock concert, Dean's synapses firing like his brain has been commandeered by a strange pair of hands that plays Bagatelle No. 25 across its lobes. The thermostat jumps through the glass as Dean kisses both his frustration at losing and excitement at Cas winning into Cas's receptive mouth, all the while he hopes Cas can feel the chanting at the tip of his tongue, *'You're a dirty cheater'*. He hopes Cas cheats every time they play, especially when Cas grabs him by the collar and yanks him further into the kiss. Dean likes the feeling, likes when Cas can best him like he knows Dean inside and out.

The lights flip on and they break apart, panicked at the intrusion. Dean doesn't know what their visitor just saw, and yet he's afraid to turn around for fear of his face betraying it all. Instead he watches Cas's face adopt a mask of normalcy as he says, "Hello, Benny."

Cas looks at him, which he takes as his cue to turn around in greeting. He tries to look angry, like he was arguing with Cas, rather than gearing to feel him up. Benny's still wearing his poker face as he goes, "I thought you were gonna start a fight."

Dean swallows and opens his too-big mouth, "Whaddya mean?"

Playing dumb doesn't appease Benny, who doesn't explain. Cas tries, sounding more genuine, "Dean's a sore loser, but not violently so."

"O-kay. C'mon, then, let's finish the game...unless you two weren't done?" Benny's eyes flick between the two of them, looking like a chaperone.

He's talking about fighting, right? Dean hopes he's talking about fighting, "No, no. Let's go."

It turns out Cas's victory doesn't matter much, as Ash manages to wrangle every last chip from them before promptly passing out drunk on the couch. Dean supposes even a drunk genius is still a genius. After that, it's the general consensus that they all turn into bed, as it's nearing three in the morning. With Ash away, it's just Cas and Dean in their room, and he wonders if Cas can hear the constant, slo-mo repeat of their kiss that Dean's got on full-screen in his head, try as he might to shut it out. Cas doesn't give any indication that he can, just eyes Dean a bit whenever Dean flops down on his mattress much harder than necessary, squeezing his eyes shut and hoping for sleep. An hour later and Dean thinks he has claim to the title of 'world's worst insomniac'.

It's a hot night despite the crooning *fwoosh* of the air conditioner, the type of jungle-humid night that leaves Dean tossing in his constricting sheets, skin beading with salted sweat and buzzing with restlessness so that he's hyper aware of the tug of linen, the scratchy cheap comforter, and each droning sigh that he unleashes to the cavernous room around them. Dean lets out a huff of surrender and sits up, drawing the eyes of Cas whose wide-awake and statue-still on his own bed. There's a question unfurling across his face, his eyebrows rising to the occasion.

Dean's answering whisper is a hoarse scratch against the wet heat, "I'm going swimming."

He doesn't wait for an answer, the pinching ache behind his eyes and in his neck forbids it, and he staggers out of the room with the faintest acknowledgement that a set of carpet-dampened footsteps paints an echo against his own. He unfastens the latch on the backdoor with as much hesitation, finding purchase on concrete and tilting his head towards the moon as the nighttime breeze leaps at the opportunity to lap up the sweat pooling at the valley of Dean's back.

Cas stands beside him, the moonlight casting his tan skin into its paler sister. It's peaceful out. Behind the rustic cobblestone fence they can make out mountain peaks lush with trees that cling determinedly to their steep slopes, looking a deep, purplish navy instead of their original green. And it's the kind of heart-stopping quiet that seeps right into one's soul, even the rippling sound of the pool water has stilled under the looming mountains' gaze.

Dean frees himself of his shirt, lowering himself into the water in a fluid motion as to not disrupt the silence, and the cool water is an instant relief. It leeches away the warm clamminess and washes clean and chlorinated over Dean's skin. The headache he's nursing begins to wriggle away.

He watches as Cas slips into the water in the same manner, the pink feverish hue of his neck fanning across his chest and curling to a stop just where the skin of his stomach breaks free of his boxers. He wades to where Dean is standing and, by some sort of unspoken consensus, they both turn their eyes to the sky.

The light pollution from the city still spills over their view of the sky but it's less, up here, and there's yet to be a starry night that's less than breathtaking, with or without excess light muddying it up. Wispy white clouds frame the horizon non-threateningly, and the moon cuts a near-full shape through the blanket of dark with its pinprick star accompaniments.

Looking at the sky, Dean's mind feels blurred with sleep as he turns and presses a firm hand to Cas's waist, ticklish and sweet even through the waxy haze of water. Cas jumps against the sudden intrusion, and Dean smothers the surprise on his face with a brush of lips.

"Hm?" Cas's eyes meet Dean's face, slink down the length of Dean's body and snap back up in one fluid motion.

"You looked lost." Dean mumbles, his grumble of voice almost at a whisper.

They press forward again, their lips meeting, a fever dream in the burning neon pool water and sticky air laden with chlorine. Dean's hands wet the hair at the nape of Cas's neck and the leverage sends them into each that much more.

Dean breath pitches forward, once, as Cas's mouth and tongue spill goosebumps across Dean's neck, Dean tilting his head to let Cas tickle his pulse point and his skin is shocked alive by the battling sensations of cooling water and Cas's burning warm lips. It drives him crazy.

Dean skirts the sides of Cas's ribs and Cas trembles, ticklish. It leaves Dean smiling as his mouth finds a home underneath Cas's ear, moving down his jaw and meeting the bristle of stubble. Even with the water, Dean can taste the spice of aftershave in the hollow of Cas's throat and it makes his lips tingle as he brings them back up to Cas's.

Cas sighs, a pretty sound, pressing and pulling until Dean's thighs splay around Cas's insistence and his heart drums loudly within the confines of his chest. In the roar of it, Dean loses himself to Cas's hands on either side of his face and he prods Cas's mouth with the gentle swipe of his tongue. They entangle abrasively together and Dean can taste peppermint and something else that is uniquely Cas and he pulls away, saliva-slick and hungry.

The earth-and-ocean clash of their eyes ignites something in Dean and his hesitations are discarded somewhere in the all-forgiving water of the pool. He doesn't look away as his hand sinks to the front of Cas's boxers, brushing him through the fabric. Cas makes a noise like a hiss in the back of his throat and his nails leave five crescent-shaped indentations on Dean's back.

Dean's other hand pulls Cas's leg up around his waist so Dean can replace the hand stroking Cas through his underwear with something else, pushing them both to the side of the pool until Cas's back brushes concrete.

"Cas, get up here." Dean's voice is a gruff plea.

Cas's eyebrows pinch together with the briefest moment of confusion even as he untangles himself from Dean and slides up onto the side of the pool, his legs still dangling into the

water below, but as Dean's hands rest on either of his thighs realization dawns and nervousness graces the planes of his face.

"This okay?" Dean asks, and Cas nods.

Dean can hear the launch and backflow of his heart sending too-warm blood underneath the slight of skin, flushed and rosy as he slides his fingertips under the expanse of elastic at Cas's hips and begins to tug. He holds steady eye-contact with Cas, ready to stop if something seems wrong, but Cas just studies the whole thing unfolding with his tongue lapping at his lower lip, pupils blown wide.

Then Dean starts exploring him with the glide of fingertips and rough scrape of palm, hand squeezing at the base with a couple light strokes to warm him up after the cool of the water. Cas hardens in his hand and starts to adopt the flushed look that Dean was so recently sporting. Dean wonders if he'll go that far as he looks up to Cas, lip pinched between his teeth and lids half-drawn, and decides as his next stroke coaxes out a drop of precum that drips down Dean's knuckles, leaving a sticky trail in its wake.

Dean raises his hand to his mouth, slowly, and Cas stills as he watches Dean's tongue slide out to clean up the spillage, leaving his fingertips glistening. Then Dean sinks, the water coming up to just below his chest, and Cas is met with curious lips and a nerve-heavy tongue tasting the intimate bits of his skin. Cas is slippery softness in his mouth, warm and heavy against the curve of his tongue as Dean slides down and up, pooling wetness dribbling out over Cas's skin. Initially he tastes chlorine cloying his taste buds, but he sucks it away and it's replaced by a tasteless cleanness, with the barest whisper of salt.

Cas whines and curls his toes, knuckles paper-white from where they clutch to Dean's shoulder and tangle in his hair, but Dean's more surprised by his own desperation. He needs to taste and touch and swallow every inch of Cas, so he ignores the embarrassing squelch of his throat being forced wider and nuzzles the inside of Cas's thigh with his nose. Dean's hand skirts down to tend to his own aching but he gets distracted by Cas's trembling hips, threatening to propel upwards into Dean's mouth, so Dean plants his hands forcefully on Cas's sides and pins him to the concrete.

He's kinda beautiful like this, Dean thinks—Cas becoming a mess underneath Dean's hands and in his mouth. God, he hasn't done something like this since college but if Cas is any indication, it's like riding a bike. Dean probably looks stupid; he's practically drooling, mouth chapped and saliva smeared across his chin, nonetheless his face is contorted in concentration. Dean pulls off for a moment, lips popping over the head, if only to study his handiwork but at the opportunity Cas's mouth is crashing against his own, tongue pressing to gain entrance.

Dean leans into the kiss, swiftly replacing his mouth with a curl of his palms, stroking Cas enthusiastically as the crescendo builds. Cas breaks away from the kiss he first sought and ducks into Dean's neck, panting and warm. He presses his mouth to the skin there to keep from crying out, and Dean tries to commit the sweet tickle of breath to memory.

Dean feels lips moving against his throat and shivers as it sends a delicious shower of goosebumps racing up down his spine, "Dean, I've never—"

Cas's sentence is interrupted by his own gasp, his thighs collapsing into shudders as he begins bucking up into Dean's hand, "I've never—"

And then he *was*, yelling through his teeth that bite down onto Dean's shoulder as his hips jump and fall, a sweet shock curling through him as he splashes all over himself and Dean. And then with an extended groan he falls back onto the concrete, chest heaving and spent.

"I've never experienced... that, with someone." Cas finally manages around his loud, rapid breaths. He swallows, "Well, I hadn't."

"Well, uh, thanks for letting me be your first, then." Dean mutters, and his face bursts into an afterglow-grin despite him not having attended to himself.

Cas laughs weakly, "Don't mention it."

Cas's hair is plastered to his forehead, and his flushed skin looks hotter than he'd been in the sauna of a room. He should get into the pool again, but not with all that mess. Carefully, as to not startle his sensitivity, Dean bends and laps clean Cas's muscular thighs. Cas still gasps, eyes flying wide as he props himself up on his elbows, watching.

It's a weird gesture, sure, not typical of Dean, but Dean loves putting that look on Cas's face. The one where his features melt into a sort of appreciative awe, desire still haunting his peering eyes, and then turns less appreciative as Dean ghosts over his spent skin and Cas almost complains about the sensation, but Dean is gentle enough he's able to relax under the touch. Once satisfied, Dean encourages Cas to slip back into the pool with him despite Cas's protests about it being unsanitary. The chlorine freshens up their salted skin as Dean pulls Cas, wobbly-kneed and exhausted, into a lazy hold. He happens to bump Dean's shrinking problem.

"Oh, I should— do you want me to...?" Cas trails off, one of his hands beginning to skirt downwards.

Dean brushes him away gently, "It's okay."

A part of Dean wants Cas to return the favor, but part of him thinks it might ruin him. Cas just makes a noncommittal noise as response, dipping his head against Dean's so that they're standing, foreheads in tandem. After a moment Cas sees the double-crescent mark he left at the base of Dean's neck, and Dean knows this because Cas lifts one hand, brushing over the puckered red skin with a slight frown. The gesture is apologetic.

Dean reacts by cradling Cas's chin in the flat expanse of his palm, his eyes asking as he slowly tilts Cas's head away to reveal the tan expanse of his neck. He brushes his lips against the curve of it, barely a tickle, but can feel Cas's pulse thrumming loud and steady below him.

"Can I?" Dean whispers, eyes blinking closed and arms coming to wrap around Cas.

Cas hesitates before answering, considering not just the act but the significance, before tilting his head the rest of the way as invitation, "Please."

Dean kisses him in earnest, now, sucking a warm red mark into Cas's skin. Cas's fingers stroke absentmindedly against Dean's back as he waits, and when Dean pulls back he sees Cas's face, a mask of peace. Dean brushes his finger across the pink impression of his mouth and, realizing how wrinkled his fingers have become, pecks one last kiss to Cas's neck and stands.

"Bed time?" Dean asks.

Cas nods, a yawn stretching pinkly from his lips, so they go to bed. They both undress and intend to climb into their beds, separately, but somewhere along the way Cas's hands prove themselves to be both firm and insistent as they pull Dean to his chest. Dean just curls into him, lazy and sweet, peppering closed-mouth kisses to Cas like falling asleep in his arms is the most natural thing in the world. Sinking into Cas's familiar warmth and feeling happiness settle deep into his gut, Dean is hit with the thought: *I think I might be falling in love.*

Chapter End Notes

well, I hope that ending was certainly worth the wait. ;)

my soul is a nuclear reactor core and your comments are the uranium. i will give you a hug from at least three feet away if you leave a comment telling me what you like about this fic, what you hate about this fic, or something completely off-topic like telling me a long-winded theory that our dreams are actually our minds being transported into alternate realities. whatever you have to say, now is your chance. im positive i'll love it.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

soooo.... i left the spn fandom for awhile. I have never been so wrong. please accept my apologies :0 with cas's confession and a new episode airing tonight,,, i don't know what i was thinking. i love these 2 so much.

originally I was going to post the entirety of week eight as one chapter, but it ended up being 10k so i've divided it into two parts! DONT WORRY PART TWO IS ALREADY WRITTEN. I am also debating whether to include the "epilogue" with it or post it as a seperate chapter.

hope u enjoy. if you have been waiting for me to update this, im so sorry.

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

Week Eight

The fantasy suite date is something that the guys have been gossiping about for weeks, ever since it became a real possibility in their minds that one of them was going home with a marriage proposal. And while most buzz with excitement at the opportunity for alone time with Lisa—sexual or otherwise—Dean and Cas have a shared, unspoken apprehension. Cas, at least, has an excuse for taking things slow since he's one of the two virgins on the show, but Dean has always played at being a ladies man and he doesn't want that reputation laid to waste. Not in the heat of competition.

He's not anxious about performance, or that he won't like it, but maintains the ridiculous worry that if Lisa gets him undressed she'll miraculously divine that he's been doing...things with Cas. The movie-scene plays out in his mind: she'll be so outraged that she'll send him home on the spot with a big, screaming message about Dean being a homo, or something equally traumatizing.

There's also his feelings to consider. There's only five contestants left after they said 'adiós' to Ash and Alfie, so at this stage Dean supposes he should be head over heels for Lisa, like Benny is. But, he does think he's falling for Lisa and, besides, two grade-A douchebags are still walking around with the names Ketch and Micheal so Dean can't exactly lower the quality of the dating pool.

This week, after what Dean anticipates to be an awkward-as-all-hell group date, Lisa will pick three contestants to move onto one-on-one dates that ultimately end with her going to the fantasy suite, an overnight stay without cameras. And just because you go to the fantasy suite doesn't mean that you won't be eliminated; two guys are going home at the end of the

next rose ceremony. After that comes the family meetings, and then Lisa will pick her future husband.

For the first time, the contestants are split up as they're all flown to a hotel in Roatan, Honduras, getting time by themselves to prepare for their group date. Dean uses the opportunity to take a century-long nap and flip through the three channels on his hotel television, all of them in Spanish. It does little to dissipate his sour mood, but he instead tries forcibly shoving away as he gets ready.

Their group date for today is an adventure excursion that involves following a local guide on a five mile hike at an incline through the rain forest, and as they reach the summit that they've been traversing they're surprised to see a zip-line setup to save them the trouble of going back down.

Dean is a little nervous, being somewhat afraid of heights, but he puts on a brave face in front of Lisa and, more importantly, Micheal. Lisa jokes good-naturally with them as they get suited up with helmets, but even so Dean turns to mutter a complaint to Cas and is surprised to see Cas stepping into the harness at the edge of the platform.

"Wow, Cas!" Lisa says, and it's worth noting that even she has adopted his nickname from Dean, "There's no need to be brave."

"I've been zip lining before." He explains, giving them all a reassuring smile, "It feels like flying."

Oh, great. For Dean that comparison can only conjure the image of airplanes and he finds himself fighting back a shudder. Still, when it's his turn he goes bravely and death-grips the harness, squeezing his eyes shut as he steps off the platform and his stomach runs away from him.

The entire ride only lasts about a minute, but for Dean it's centuries. When his feet finally hit solid ground, he lets out a breath of relief and counts his blessings. Cas and Ketch—who've already gone—make fun of his ghost-like complexion and he glowers at them.

Their date continues as they head to the beach for a cookout, and the whole thing feels like the end of an era. The contestants, Dean included, aren't as high-strung as they chat and joke with Lisa, building sandcastles and jumping waves and tasting the local food. Everyone buzzes with energy, knowing that this is the last date before the finale and after that, they'd all be going home either single or with a marriage proposal.

The date stretches on, to ensure that they all have ample time with Lisa, and when the sun sets they build a huge fire on the beach and sit around drinking and talking before the one-on-one segments start.

"Cas, as a reward for your bravery, why don't I talk to you first?" Lisa suggests, and the two walk off.

Dean watches them walk off, nervousness bubbling in his stomach though he can't determine the cause, until he's interrupted with Micheal snapping fingers in-front of his face.

“Dude, can you stop being gay for Cas for one second? I asked you a question.” Micheal says, annoyed.

Dean’s heart sinks to the floor and he floods with adrenaline, his breath coming quicker. What gave it away? He stops himself mid-spiral, forcing himself to breathe normally and meet Micheal’s eyes. He realizes Micheal was probably joking, even though doubt lodges somewhere deep in his chest.

“What?” He says, blandly. He tries to ignore how Ketch and Benny are both also looking at him. The former with the same mild annoyance as Micheal and the second with something like alarm. Probably anxious that a fight will break out, Dean thinks.

Then Micheal asks him some stupid question about Dean’s college education—or lack thereof—and the moment passes. Dean’s tipsy by the time Lisa calls him around, but that’s pretty standard for these interviews, anyways. Their conversation mainly centers on Ben, and how Dean will act if they meet. Dean’s able to vouch for his parental skills, citing that he practically raised Sammy—which was true.

By the time filming wraps up, he’s pretty exhausted and relieved to get off the beach. Cas ended up falling asleep sprawled out on the sand, so Dean and Ketch silently agree on pouring a bucket of frigid seawater over his back in order to rouse him. He gives Dean the silent treatment as they part ways.

Before he’s fully free, the camera crew sets up in his room and films a sequence of Dean getting a knock on the door, opening it, and finding a date card that declares Dean is lucky enough to get a one-on-one date. He smiles down at the white piece of paper, but as soon as the cameras leave the edges turn down.

The underside of Dean’s skin tingles like something’s trapped there, so he checks out the measly treadmill the hotel considers gym facilities exhausts himself by running until one of the show’s crew ushers him back to his room at curfew. After a quick shower he collapses into bed, trying to block out the light spilling in from his room’s window.

Burying his face into the obnoxiously clean-smelling pillow, he realizes he misses Cas. Beyond the gruff exterior Dean presents, he’s a cuddler, and he discovers now it’s too easy to get used to having somebody to curl up with. It makes Dean feel pathetic, and he flips himself over to stew in self-resentment while staring at the ceiling.

He wonders idly what Cas is doing, runs through a scenario of Cas receiving the date card and can imagine his fractional smile falling in consternation as he overthinks. The fantasy progresses and in his head Dean sees Cas smiling with Lisa on his date, holding her hand and impressing her with his knowledge of the fauna and flora of Honduras (because he would know) before kissing her easily, confidently.

Dean would like to say he doesn’t play out the scenes of the fantasy suite, but he chews over the possibility of Cas saying yes. Dean had a hand in that, half-swiping Cas’s card so that he’d probably have no hang-ups to fully cashing out. Dean adds that to the surmounting list labeled “Why Things With Cas Are a Mistake.”

He notices he's dwelling, and dismisses his thoughts of Cas with a sigh, pulling a pillow flush to his chest. He doesn't imagine it's anyone, of course, even if he's snoring soon after that.

In the morning the time for emotional hang-ups passes because the producers practically barge through his door and frantically fuss over him as he gets ready for his date and brief him on the day's activities. He also has to sit through the worst sex-talk of his entire life, reminiscent of being a high-schooler, and he pulls a face nearly the entire time.

But his annoyance at the lousy morning falls away as he comes to appreciate that he's in the beautiful Honduras, with crystalline waters and an idyllic weather that dissipates any of Dean's storm clouds that might threaten to crowd the horizon. He's smiling as he lays eyes on Lisa, dressed in a bubbly pink shirt that matches her cheery humor. He pulls her into a hug as greeting, trying to dodge the swell of nerves.

Their date consists of a tour of a local animal reserve on the island, fit with stunning exotic birds and white-furred monkeys with angry red faces that make Dean laugh until his stomach hurts, especially when he's holding one and it tears away to terrorize Lisa instead by pulling her hair. They also attend a snorkeling excursion, and Dean thinks the corals, teeming with life, are breath-taking. Even though a passing jellyfish has him swearing and jumping out of the water. Lisa agrees to watch the marine life from the safety of the dock.

He can't squash the dialogue in his head, wondering what Cas would think if he were here. He imagines Cas would probably have some weird telepathic animal bond, siccing the monkey on Dean instead and rolling his eyes at Dean being scared of jellyfish, citing some bullshit fact about how jellyfish are the most docile creatures in the sea. He's not here to make comparisons, but they come anyways.

Dinner is equally as fun and exciting as the rest of the day, with Lisa squealing gleefully as iguanas run unrestrained around the patio where they eat. The meal is served up hot and greasy by some locals who poke fun at them in Spanglish, and Dean jokingly asks the waiter the only phrase he remembers from high school Spanish class, "¿Dónde está el baño?"

When Lisa looks impressed Dean furrows his brows, confused, "Am I crazy, or don't you speak Spanish?"

Lisa gives a little shake of her head, "Nah, the only thing I speak is English. And barely that."

Dean laughs it off, but it nags at him that he'd forget something like that, until he remembers that it's Cas who's fluent. The realization dampens his appetite a little bit, and he stops playfully throwing out Spanish words with the waiters.

Before he knows it, they're at their final destination for the night—the fantasy suite. Lisa looks to him, a question in her eyes, and Dean finds himself nodding, almost on accident, and then they share grins as she leads him inside. Dean swallows his nerves and follows.

The place is elegant, but cheesy, and clearly intended for sex. The bedroom is dominated by a gargantuan king-sized bed overflowing with rose petals and accompanied by a mood-lit

chandelier and flutes of champagne. They opt for the couch instead, enjoying their drinks and making small-talk for the cameras.

“So, have you put any thought into what happens after this?” Lisa asks, sipping nonchalantly.

Dean pauses, gnawing on his bottom lip as he tries to muster up the appropriate response, “No matter what happens, I know a lot of things will change.”

If Dean doesn’t win, it will be the first time in a long time that he’s been truly alone, no chasing Cassie or having the girl of the month (or even week) keeping him company. And he might be nursing two heartaches instead of one, this time.

“And what are your feelings right now?” She prompts, interrupting his dismal fantasies.

“I can see a future with you.” He admits, “I think...I think I’m falling for you.”

“I think I’m falling for you, too.” She says, then kisses him.

It’s not like his heart bursts into a cascade of broken mirror shards that embed themselves into his soft organs or some other frilly metaphor, but it’s fine. They progress to the bedroom and he does all the right things, checks them off like it’s a list, before the nerves start biting at him again. Neither one of them are undressed yet, so he excuses himself to take a shower.

He tries to let the hot water soothe away his apprehensions, and figures he should try to get himself a little more excited for his time with Lisa. He slinks one hand downwards and starts doing his usual, running through his normal fantasies that get him in the game. But as he fumbles with himself under the cascade of water, nothing riles him up.

He finds his mind wandering in that unfocused way, where he doesn’t realize he’s thinking about something until he notices himself getting hard, and then he slams on the brakes as he realizes that thing he’s thinking about is Cas.

He’s already been in the shower awhile, so he thinks ‘screw it’ and continues, letting himself remember that night with Cas in the pool: the heat, the wet of the pool, and the taste heavy on his tongue. And then, he starts imaging himself and Cas alone in the back of his Impala, Dean on his back with Cas—*Oh, Cas*.

In the shower, Dean reaches around with two fingers and starts to mimic the sensation, now sprinting towards that edge and as he gets closer he finds himself biting back a moan, the sound still spilling forth and splattering against the tile walls.

And then, a knock, “Dean, do you want me to pour more champagne?”

Shit. Dean remembers the task at hand, and calls back, “It’s up to you. I’ll be out in a sec, just gotta rinse my hair.”

He rushes out of the shower and performs the Olympic equivalent of speed-drying before tossing on clean underwear, and the frenetic moment causes him to lose most of the gusto from earlier. He decides to forego his other clothes and strolls out, still towel-drying his hair.

Lisa has also dressed-down, and in any other moment Dean might find her downright delectable sprawled out on the bed.

But as it is, he finds himself hesitant as he crawls into the bed with her, resuming their earlier activities. And he tries, really, to be into it. But he's too nervous, too weirded out by the crew's sex talk, and too focused on the fact that this is on a television show. At least that's what he tells himself as he pulls away.

"Lisa, I don't know if I can do this." Dean confesses, then rushes to explain, "It's not you, seriously, you're gorgeous. But if we're gonna do this, I want it to be on our own terms and not because we feel pressured by a TV show."

"You feel pressured?" She asks.

"No, it's more like—" and then he lies, "I want you in my car. Or, at my apartment. I want to take you to my favorite burger joint and drink beer, not champagne."

Lisa smiles at him a little, "I understand. And that's pretty romantic, Dean."

Dean gives her somewhat of an awkward laugh, "Really? It's a lot lamer than Honduras."

She shakes her head, still grinning, "Come here."

They curl close together on the bed, Dean's head perched above Lisa's as he stares at the wall opposite of him. Dean supposes it's the unfamiliarity of the room that keeps him awake.

The morning brings the strangest walk of shame—if you can even call it that—that Dean has ever experienced. They're allowed to sleep in till nine (a small mercy, Dean still gets about five hours of sleep a night) before they're roused by the producers. They have a few minutes to say goodbyes and Dean is too shy to kiss Lisa because of morning-breath so he instead hugs her, then they're separated and ushered off to get on with the day. But before Dean can even get breakfast he's hit with an embarrassing, oddly-personal string of questions about last night's activities, cut short only by the fact that there were none.

Then the cameras roll in for his post-date interview and it lasts eons, mostly because in the light of a new day Dean finds himself much less forthcoming about his feelings towards Lisa. He's embarrassed that the questioners have to prod him to elaborate, and are nowhere near satisfied when he rambles off some bullshit about finally falling in love. They want him to act smitten in front of the cameras, not bored, even though he is. He leaves knowing they're all hoping he's eliminated so they can twist the footage into a dramatic story arc.

He's given a late lunch and then endures a very long, very boring car ride to a new hotel that's less local and closer to the airport so that the contestants can catch a plane ride as soon as they wrap up the last of the overnights. The hotel—and its sister, both enclosed by separate gates yet sharing the same parking lot—is more run-down but also more of an American tourist trap than the last, so Dean almost feels at home.

He's not told the other contestant's room numbers and he has a curfew at 9pm, but other than that he's left to pass the time. Alone. He hasn't been by himself in weeks, and the snail's pace

of the day is only exasperated by the absence of cameras that leaves him feeling directionless. The security guards give him strange looks as he walks the hotel aimlessly once, twice, and until they don't even look up at his passage.

Back in his hotel room the boredom only intensifies and, ever the insomniac, he passes the time by pacing to-and-fro in front of the window. It makes his skin itch and he idly adjusts the thermostat even though the sweat toying at his collar isn't because it's too hot. As time passes he feels wider awake and wilder in the head. Finally, just past 1 am, the overbearing silence drives him out of the room.

Dean spots a potential pitfall: covering the opening of the door was a strip of masking tape, now shredded in two. Dean starts snickering under his breath; do they think he's in high school? He remembers a rare occasion where he went on an overnight trip for school—or, actually it was Sammy's Mock Trial group that Dean had tagged along to—and taught his younger brother how to circumvent the 'ole masking-tape-on-the-door trick by stealing a roll from the hotel's maintenance closet. And, since he'll have to heist some new tape, he might as well stretch his legs, right?

A whiff of fresh air is just the thing he needs to settle his nerves, he thinks, and manages to make it out of the hotel lobby without incident and then he's free to explore the balmy night. He sticks to a radius outside of the hotels that allows him plenty of nighttime sight-seeing without straying too far, and he's crossing by the second hotel's pool when a voice startles him into clenching his fists.

"Dean!" The voice practically growls, but Dean relaxes when he recognizes its owner.

"Hey, Cas." He says, watching Cas emerge, bleary-eyed from behind the gate separating the outdoor patio from the rest of the world.

Cas doesn't look pleased to see him, "What are you doing out here?"

"I could ask you the same." Dean's voice is light as he leans against the black wrought fence and claps his hands together on the other side, but when Cas's gruff expression proves unwavering he sighs, going for the more sincere, "I needed to clear my head."

Cas looks close to rolling his eyes, but is, at least, forgiving, "Well, you're going to get caught. Just now, you nearly missed a security guard."

"Aw, you were watching me?" Dean teases, "My guardian angel."

This time Cas does roll his eyes, "You need to hurry before they return."

"Alright." Dean concedes, beginning to climb the fence. Cas makes a noise of protest but it's ignored as Dean deposits himself on the other side, giving Cas a mischievous grin.

"What are you doing?" Cas hisses without any real venom.

"Well, I've gotta make sure you don't get into trouble." Dean explains, clapping a hand to Cas's shoulder and walking him inside, "C'mon, now."

Cas goes along somewhat willingly, even if he spouts litanies about how, “We’re gonna get caught, Dean” and “You should just go back to your room.” Cas switches from complaining to standing, arms-crossed with a disapproving look that could rival Sammy’s as Dean loots an unattended maintenance cart and presents Cas with a single roll of masking tape. It’s the most exciting thing he’s done all night.

At the threshold to Cas’s room, Dean knows he should usher and seal Cas inside before returning to his own bed, their evening over. But something else in him prevails, and before he knows it he’s hopping into Cas’s still-made bed and breaking through some of Cas’s boundaries like tape on doors in one swoop.

“Dean.” Cas protests half-heartedly, perching on the opposite edge of the bed nonetheless.

Dean fixes him with a smile that melts some of the ice off his face, “So...how’d your date go?”

Cas shakes his head a little, “Oh, I wasn’t picked.”

“Oh.” Dean tries to sound dejected for him, but there’s an unexpected note of relief that bleeds through his tone that he hastily swallows back, “Sorry.”

“How was yours?” Cas moves to sit against the headboard in one swift movement, playfully shoving Dean away to make room.

Dean tries to fight back from his disadvantaged position of being on his back, batting Cas with exaggerated gestures brought on by a sudden wave of giddiness. It stalls momentarily, “Nice. I don’t wanna brag, though.”

“But I’m asking.” Cas accentuates his point by jabbing his finger into Dean’s ribs.

Dean yields, “It was fun. We saw a lot of wildlife and stuff, but dinner was my favorite. The locals can cook, man. It was awesome.”

Cas’s face breaks out into a grin and he shakes his head like he can’t believe he’s friends with such an idiot, “Food seems to be the highlight of all your stories...it’s interesting to see where your priorities lie.”

“Yeah, my priorities.” Dean nods, distracted, not sure how else to respond.

“You left out a big part, though.” Cas muses, looking towards the far wall and elaborating only after Dean’s prolonged silence, “The fantasy suite?”

“What?” Dean stammers, already blushing at the perceived accusatory tone in Cas’s voice, as he scrambles up to his elbows so he can better see Cas’s face.

Cas’s eyes are shining in the low-light of the hotel room, his expression unreadable as he fixes them on Dean, “Did you go to the fantasy suite with Lisa?”

“Not sure why that matters.” Dean deflects, not wanting to explain the intricacies of last evening.

“Of course it matters.” Cas is beginning to sound hostile. “Dean, you can’t have...”

Dean tilts his head up to meet Cas's eyes, glaring, "My sex-life isn't any of your business, actually."

And suddenly, Cas is above him. Dean finds his arms are pinned to the bed and Cas is straddling him, "Really? None of my business?"

Dean parts his mouth to say something but Cas snares Dean's words in the net of his mouth, sealing off their escape with a searing kiss that sends blood to thirty different places in Dean's body at once. Cas drags his hot, furious lips across Dean's and leaves him collapsing against the bed and he struggles to entangle their tongues.

Dean yelps at Cas already grabbing him through his pants with one hand and ripping at his shirt with the other, like he can't get to Dean's skin fast enough, and Dean rests his hand atop Cas's to stall its ascent up the planes of Dean's stomach, the fabric of his t-shirt twisted in his white-knuckled grip. Cas breaks away from kissing Dean and Dean finds himself already panting, flushed as Cas speaks to him steadily, "Do you want me to stop?"

Dean's chest heaves. "No."

Cas grins, triumphant, "Of course."

And then they become a tumble of skin and heat and friction and rapidly firing neurons and it's enough to kill him. Dean is worked to the edge and returns the favor to Cas just as readily, but it's not enough, not until Dean realizes he's in the position of asking or not asking and he'll regret it if he does and regret it if he doesn't.

Entangled, naked, and aching hard, Cas decides for him. He grabs Dean's hips and presses a kiss right underneath Dean's ear, confessing in a blistering whisper, "I want you."

"Then take me, Cas." Dean's reply is instant, unthinking, and yet he's grinding into Cas and guiding his hand to where he needs it.

Cas enters him first with his fingers, then with everything. And then he moves and Dean doesn't feel human anymore. He feels like he's flying, though he hates flying, and he pants and curses and groans as the sensation builds and builds. He breaks, and starts chanting Cas's name while Cas croons the returning, 'Dean' over and over until Dean prays it's the last thing he hears before he dies.

And finally it's a shout as Dean's body clenches and he shudders, his limbs failing him as he surrenders. His eyes pinch close and he turns his head because for a moment he can't even bear to look at Cas, to look at anything as he is ravished by Cas's body and his own.

After a long moment Cas sprawls out over him, his arms and legs fitting into the gaps of Dean's and his face is pressed into Dean's neck. Dean is relaxed, still blissed-out and jelly-limbed as he absentmindedly strokes Cas's bare back. They don't move for a long time, long enough that Dean cools and finds himself grateful for his human blanket. He could lie here forever.

“I didn’t sleep with Lisa, by the way.” Dean murmurs at last, right onto Cas’s skin, “To save you the trouble of forcing it out of me.”

He can feel Cas’s cheeks rise as he grins, “I’m sorry that sex with me is so troubling.”

“More like spectacular.” Dean corrects, “The trouble is that I’ve gotta head back before they kick me out.”

“Maybe it’s time to leave the show.” Cas then tells him, shattering the peaceful moment.

“What?” Dean says, his hand stalling, as he lifts his head.

Cas shifts, catching Dean’s eye and fixing him with a look filled with pity and sentimental sweetness. Then soft-lipped honesty spills out of him like iced honey, tantalizing to all the senses but one, “I want you, Dean. I want you more than I could ever want Lisa and I think that... you possibly, hopefully feel the same.”

Dean blinks, caught up in the waves of a sudden storm and close to being thrown into their ravenous depths. When he speaks his voice is pinched between two very hard spaces, “What’s wrong with what we’re doing now? I mean, c’mon. Why can’t we just enjoy this?”

Dean moves to kiss Cas’s jaw, kiss his troubles away, but Cas rolls away to sit on the side of the bed, his back to Dean. Even caught in shadow, Dean can see where the creamy tan of his skin is interrupted by lengths of muscle angry pink stripes that Dean painted there.

“Dean.” Cas’s lips form his name and sighs it out, where it cuts Dean right to stomach. Dean wants to pummel down the next phrase, but it leaps out before Dean can even process its predecessor, “We can’t keep doing this.”

The air is sucked out of the room, leaving a dry, heavy sensation that chokes Dean as he sits up, resisting the urge to reach out and touch Cas, “Sure we can.”

Cas’s next words lie flat and bitter, “It’s unfair: to Lisa, to you, to me. We’re living a lie.”

“This isn’t a lie.” Dean protests, admitting, “I’m—we’re real.”

“Prove it.” Cas turns his head over his shoulder, crooning like the sweetest of sirens, “Leave with me.”

“I don’t wanna go yet.”

“Why not?” He finally catches Dean’s eyes and they shine with anger, “What’s so crucial about being on this show?”

“Lisa—” Dean starts.

“You’re not falling for her, Dean!” Cas interrupts with a shout, “What are you staying for?”

Dean feels like he’s been doused in ice water, scrambling to come up with an excuse, “Because I came here—”

“To find love?” Cas presses, “Evidently not. Why did you really come here?”

“To find Cassie!” Dean spits out in a sudden roar, probably waking up Cas’s neighbors. He regrets it immediately; he meant to never tell Cas about his past relationship.

Cas’s eyes fly wide, and he leans away from Dean on instinct while Dean fills with horror. At first Cas’s brows come down, confused, and it’s like Dean can practically hear the gears turning in his head, and then his expression is dipped in anger, mouth parting like he’s about to yell.

But, he doesn’t speak, and Dean’s devastated to see him settle into a disappointed sort of acceptance, “She was your past heartbreak.”

It’s not a question, but Dean can only nod, looking away.

“You weren’t over her.” Cas’s voice is soft, calm like he expected something like this, “I’m just a rebound, then. A distraction.”

“No, Cas—” Dean starts to explain, but swallows. He doesn’t know how to make it better.

“You should leave.” Cas breaks through the silence of the room, almost speaking to himself, “I’m— I’ll tell Lisa I’m leaving before the rose ceremony.”

“Cas, wait.” Dean says dejectedly, “We can talk about this.”

“No, we can’t.” Cas says, standing up as Dean reaches for him. With his back to Dean, his voice whips out, “You’re too much of a coward.”

If that’s really what Cas thinks of him, he has no interest in staying. Dean storms out and slams the door behind him, only stopping to sloppily plaster a piece of masking tape back in place. It hangs sideways, almost coming off at one end.

Dean sighs before fixing it.

Chapter End Notes

UM!! yeah :) hopefully y'all like where this is heading. i love comments btw <3

the final part is coming up on SATURDAY nov. 14th at. the. latest. im so sorry for making all of u wait, i hope it was worth it >.<

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

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

Week Eight

Dean's head swims as he makes his way back to his motel room, the flare of his temper making his hands itch into fists, and he curls and stretches them in unison to ebb the emotion. A roll of masking tape is on his wrist like a bracelet, and he stops short outside of his room, trying to figure out how to tape the outside of his door, when he unexpectedly runs into Benny. Benny's in a pair of flannel pajama pants and a baggy t-shirt, looking like he was just roused from sleep with a yawn plastered across his face.

"Benny, whatcha doing out here?" Dean asks, once he's been spotted.

"Had a pipe burst in my room." He explains, blinking the sleep from his eyes and looking Dean over, trying to piece something together, "What about you?"

"Me?" Dean echoes weakly, and the blood in his body starts flooding to the tips of his ears, warming them up to a pink as he remembers what he'd just been up to with equal parts anger and embarrassment, and because he's just remembered the rules he's breaking.

"Oh, Cas. I mean, I was with Cas." Dean starts off, easy and almost nonchalant before realizing his mistake and stumbling into his next words. He recalls that, in his rush, he only threw on his jeans and a zip-up hoodie—currently unzipped—and that, right now, he's got his t-shirt and more incriminatingly, his boxers, tucked between his arm and half-bare torso. He laughs nervously, trying to act casual, "I was doing nothing with Cas, y'know?"

"You were with Cas?" Benny asks, his eyes not finding Dean's and instead snapping to Dean's neck, where Dean grows warmer as he realizes that there's a good chance he has a hickey or two under where the collar of his shirt would be. Benny's face betrays nothing, but he blinks blankly at Dean.

Shit. Shit. Shit. Dean is so busted, it physically hurts. Dean opens his mouth to say something, anything and his voice comes out dry, "So, anyways—"

But, Benny's speech overlaps and interrupts him, nice and easy, "Is there something going on between you two, brother?"

Dean's face screws up in resistance at first, cheeks pinching up high and teeth bearing almost in a snarl but then he falters, all the fight drained from his expression, and his face instead sinks into a draw out, given-up sigh. He swallows, tells the truth, "Not anymore."

Benny surprises him: his expression turns sympathetic, soft at the edges without even a glimmer of surprise and he reaches out a hand to give Dean a stifling pat on the shoulder. Dean appreciates the fact that he doesn't need an explanation as he answers, "Rough night?"

“Yeah.” Dean says, and for the moment he sinks down on the outside of his door, masking tape still in hand. He thumbs at the sticky side and thinks about how stupid of a gesture it was, that it still is. He tells himself that his little conversation with Cas was for the best, that now they can both move on and Dean can focus solely on Lisa.

Benny sits next to him on the same side of the wall, even though the carpet has probably kissed the bottom of hundreds if not thousands of people’s shoes and the pea green walls are enough to make anybody sick. He leans his head back against the wallpaper and closes his eyes for a long moment before uttering, low and quick, “Listen, I’m not one to be telling you what to do, but if you two got something, don’t discount it.”

“What?” Dean blinks, bewildered, and not at all expecting Benny’s reaction.

Benny looks at him, quirking an eyebrow, “Did you get an overnight date?”

There’s another question there, of course, but Dean doesn’t feel embarrassed when he answers. Not like he did with Cas, “Yeah, Benny, I did.”

Benny shrugs, looks away to some god-awful buzzing light fixture that looks like took a stroll right out of the seventies and into this hotel lobby where it decided it’d make its home, “Well, maybe you were with Lisa and something felt, I dunno, wrong, and you had to come back” he waves his hand vaguely in the air, thinking of the phrase, “to Cas.”

“Dude, stop psychoanalyzing me.” Dean barks out gruffly, feeling like Benny had just slid something sharp and metallic underneath the first layer of his skin, “I was fine with Lisa. I like the women, for the record.”

“But you also like Cas.” Benny counters, not in a mean way but with a gentle, almost playful lift of his eyebrows and a half-smile that he seems hesitant to even put on his face, in case Dean gets the wrong message.

“Okay, fine.” Dean gives up his share of that territory, moving on to better guard his remaining turf. He looks away, this whole heart-to-heart in the middle of a shitty hotel hallway that looks the same as any shitty hotel hallway except that Dean’s in a whole different country making him want to shut his eyes and just fall endlessly into sleep, “But that doesn’t mean I could fall in love with him or anything. It’s just a guy-crush, or something.”

Benny looks at him a little disbelieving, and Dean feels his cheeks flare-up again on their own accord. He just told Benny he has a guy crush, for God’s sake. Benny speaks slowly, “Are you sure? I mean, the way you look at the guy...”

“Wait, what?” Dean spits out, feeling his nerves twist themselves into knots almost instantaneously, “Has it been obvious this whole time?”

Benny laughs at his sudden anxiety, “Not to the other guys, no, but for me? Well, I’m somewhat of a love expert, so...”

Aw, shit. Well, it was only a matter of time of them getting caught if they were being so flippant about it. Dean guesses he’s thankful that it’s over then, except for something twisting

sharp and rusty right into the depths of his heart.

“You’re an asshole.” Dean mutters, but there’s nothing but affection behind it, “And Cas basically broke up with me, so I guess we’ll never know.”

“Dean, you should think about what you’re doing to Cas. And what you’re doing to Lisa. Maybe he’s what’s best for you.”

Dean fumes from where he’s sat on the carpet, but there isn’t much heart in it, “What do you know, really? We’re all on this shitty dating show. Maybe you’re trying to sabotage me.”

Benny is taken aback, coming off defensive and with a new bite to his voice, “I wouldn’t do that, brother.”

“I know, I know.” Dean sighs, already feeling bad for what he said. But, there’s a truth there. This is just a shitty dating show where he barely knows the other contestants, including Cas. And what’s done is done. He can’t just leave, even if a small part of him wants to.

They don’t have much to talk about, after that. It seems Dean’s made up his mind, and Benny isn’t stupid enough to try and change it. And they’re both too much of a gentleman to gossip about their dates and besides, Dean is finally starting to get tired so he stands up, stretches and grabs his clothes off the floor.

“Do me a favor?” Dean asks.

Benny raises his eyebrows as he gets up off the floor.

Dean continues, tucking the masking tape into Benny’s hands, “Once I’m in the room, tape it up for me.” He can’t resist winking, just for good measure.

“You sneaky bastard, what would you do without me?” Benny teases, a smirk coming to light up his weary features.

“Have a lot less fun, that’s for sure.” Dean remarks as he goes, closing the door behind him and smiling for a moment even as the darkness of the room overtakes him. He stares into it, let it overtake him as his eyes adjust and he’s able to make out the faint outline of his bed and the lights outside peeking in from underneath the heavy blackout curtains at the other end of the room. Everything blurs into a hazy shade of grey as he takes in one great gust of breath and lets it all fall out of him like a swirling mess of dust and sorrow.

“Son of a bitch.” He mutters, to no one in particular.

In his dream, Dean’s watching Sammy put together a poster for his high school science fair. He’s sitting in the living room of his childhood home, and Sammy keeps pestering him to go look for glue sticks. Just as he’s about to get up, his dad comes thundering down the steps.

“Dean, what the hell is this?” John Winchester roars.

Dean’s heart is already hammering, but he jumps as his dad slams a magazine down on the coffee table in front of him. John’s face is a mix of anger and outrage, and so Dean looks

down at what's in front of him.

Two Bachelors Find Love, but Not With the Bachelorette!

Below, a high-def image of him locking lips with Cas.

Dean wakes up to the sound of rapping at his door. He sits up, disoriented, and pulls a half-tied tie from off of his face as he sits up. Shit, he was supposed to be getting ready for tonight's rose ceremony, not napping. He pulls open the door and is greeted by two of the regulars, Max and Alphie, "I'm sorry, guys. I misplaced my pants for a sec, I'll be out in a second—."

"That's alright, Dean. It's not time yet. Can you just come with us first?" says Max, looking a little uncomfortable as he asks.

Dean swallows, battering back the sirens in his head. He follows them to a small room with a working set-up of monitors and technology that Dean doesn't pretend to understand lining the walls. It's clearly behind-the-scenes, and he's not sure why he's here as they direct him to sit down. Then, they pounce on him.

"We just wanted to talk—" Alphie starts as Max fiddles with a keyboard, interrupting any conversation with a video.

Up on one of the monitors is the footage from some remote camera and with a sinking, wretched sense of dread Dean realizes that it's centered on the pool in the backyard of the mansion, and that he and Cas are in it. Dean feels heat flood his face and a heart attack building in his chest as he watches himself kiss Cas, and he knows that it was that night and that the whole thing was being recorded. He has to look away, feeling that he might actually get sick. Max pauses the video and Dean gives the screen one last fleeting glance and sees himself mid-lowering himself to Cas's groin and he tears his eyes away as his stomach roils with nausea.

Dean stares down at his hands, numb, like he wasn't just caught cheating on the Bachelorette with a dude and like this isn't about to be the biggest TV scandal for the next five years.

"Dean, we've known about this for awhile." Alphie's voice is unexpectedly soft, and Dean wants to hiss out, "And you didn't say anything?" but the words don't find him. "We've never, well, we've never had a situation quite like this, and we're willing to get rid of the footage if you put an end to it right now."

"Get rid of it?" Dean echoes, his voice not sounding like his own.

"It doesn't follow the narrative we're trying to create, frankly." Max chimes, "But if it continues, we'll be forced to kick you off the show and the audience will want a reason."

"Does Lisa know?"

"No." says Alphie, and Max glares at him.

"You need to cooperate with us, are you going to call this thing off?" Max says.

It dawns on Dean that they didn't just have the footage of the pool, but probably the countless moments in between, all of the times they'd thought they had a moment to themselves.

"It's already over." Dean says flatly. He doesn't feel real anymore, and a weird complacency settles over him, "Cas is gonna leave tonight."

"Oh." Alphie says, and he and Max exchange a look. They probably think he and Cas are over the moon for each other and that Dean's entire relationship with Lisa is a sham, or something. Dean almost starts laughing.

"Alright." Max says, clapping Dean on the shoulder, "Good talk."

After this little intervention, Dean is left to mix up a strong drink and wait for tonight's rose ceremony. He doesn't have to let this change anything, and resolves to just go on pretending it never happened. That's something Dean Winchester has always been good at.

It doesn't mean he doesn't feel thorns in his chest whenever he sees Cas for the first time that evening, dressed in a near-black navy suit that sparkles under the scorching TV lights. He wishes now, more than ever, that he could explain all of the reasons that it's a bad idea.

They nurse their respective heartaches on opposite sides of the room, and though Dean's gaze doesn't stray far from Cas for the entire night his eyes skitter away anytime Cas goes to look at him. Dean guesses they're both waiting for the same big moment, and as Lisa is stolen away by each of the guys in turn Cas's time on the show draws to a close.

Dean feels clammy, nervous sweat bubbling up on his skin despite him wiping it away so that it isn't caught under the view of the camera. His heart catches every time he sees Cas get close to Lisa, and sinks into relief everytime he walks away. That's why he sees Cas's face flash with mild surprise when Lisa calls out, "Cas?"

There's a confusing mash of emotions on her face, soft smile marred by glistening eyes and behind them, pain. Crumpled in one hand is a piece of paper, and Dean watches as Cas sees it, his expression suddenly a baffling calm. As he walks away, he holds his chin high like he's walking into violent battle. Dean tries to resist watching, but Dean's a moth to a flame, only interrupted by the arrival of Micheal by his side.

"You better thank me. I just did you a huge favor." Micheal tells him, and the baffling combination of a) Micheal talking to him and b) claiming to do anything that would help Dean, ever is what breaks Dean out of his trance.

"You what?" He finally looks over to see Micheal's huge smirking grin.

"I told Lisa about Cas." His voice drips with self-satisfaction.

"What?" Dean echoes, this time with more alarm.

"Ya see," Micheal starts, and the edge of his grin creeps up higher, "I was gonna borrow a tie from Cas, ended up finding a weepy letter addressed to you, Dean."

“You went through Cas’s stuff?” Dean’s teeth clench, his heart rate picking up as he starts figuring out where Micheal is headed.

“Like I said, you should thank me. Props to you for being friends with him, but it’s time for him to go. He’s not playing for Lisa’s team.”

Dean draws in a long, pained breath, “Let me get this straight: you told Lisa that Cas is...gay?”

Micheal flashes his teeth in the widest smile Dean has ever seen on his face, “Not just Lisa. I made sure the cameras were rolling. The whole world’s gonna know he’s a flamer.”

Dean doesn’t make the conscious decision to punch Micheal in the face, but his fist ends up flying into Micheal’s nose anyways. There’s a crunch under his knuckles, and then Micheal’s face starts leaking blood. Micheal wheels back, looking enraged, and Dean laughs at his expression. He’s ready for a fight, but the security team pounces on them before anything more can happen.

Two beefy guys seize Dean, and he lets them take him, knowing when he’s lost. He’s sure he’s done it now; they don’t tolerate violence on the show. Strangely enough, laughter bubbles from deep from his chest and leaks out of him, an unstoppable stream. He stifles giggles as they sit him in an outdoor patio, remembering Micheal’s expression and thinking about his impending punishment with equal parts chagrin and relief.

And then it strikes him that he won’t be able to say goodbye to Cas, now, and reality comes crashing down all around him. Micheal didn’t need his fist, because Dean’s chest feels like something ran right through him, shattering those careful walls he’d built around his heartache. Cas is really gone.

Looking out past the patio, around the curve of the mansion’s brick and lush landscape, Dean spots the winding gravel road that brought him here. In the distance, there’s a limo pulling up to the drive and a lone figure that Dean can identify from this far away, could probably identify at any distance, getting inside.

The second rash decision of the night comes easier than the first. Dean leaps up, and is immediately met with the shouts of both security members, cautioning him to stay put. They’d expected him to go back through the mansion, if anything, and so the thirteen foot or so drop from the patio is completely unguarded and Dean makes his breakaway, but not before one security guard grabs him arm and he has to throw a punch to shake the offender off.

He lands awkwardly but is back on his feet in a flash, sprinting towards where the limo starts its slow crawl towards the gate. He has to cover quite a bit of ground to even make it to where Lisa and the contestants stand outside, and he runs so hard a stitch forms in his side. The arms of his suit jacket are constricting, so he jerks it off and flings it to the side in one fluid motion. He waves to the limo driver, desperate to be seen, as he chokes on great, desperate lungfuls of the night air.

He supposes he's finally ordered his break of good luck, and he gets it in the form of the security guards being called off and the limo coming to a stop right outside of the house, though a film crew pounces on the opportunity and set up their cameras to greet Dean as he runs up on them.

He hears Lisa call out to him, curious, as he runs past her and the others, but Cas is stepping out of the limo now and Dean won't be stopped. Instead, he calls out between panting breaths, "Cas, wait!"

"Dean, don't!" Cas yells at him, his words a blurred flurry of rage and hurt.

But Dean's pace doesn't relent; he's getting close now, though he doesn't know what he'll do when he arrives. He just knows that this is wrong, something needs to change, "Please!"

Dean is close enough to see him clearly. Cas's mouth is twisted into something raw and angry, splitting the edges of his otherwise carved and stoic features, tears running unhindered down the planes of his face like they were put there by some willing god. It seems the world is watching, and maybe it is, as he growls out the phrase, whipping low and deep into the parts of Dean that most hurt, "Fuck you, Dean Winchester."

"I'm sorry." Dean goes to say—though it's not enough, can never be enough—but Dean is upon him now, and the words get caught up in the kiss he slams into Cas's mouth.

The whole world stopped for Cas and Dean as they kissed: the cameras, the contestants, all of it melting into streaks like rain on car windows, like a velvet nothingness. Dean entangled himself into Cas's coat, crushing forward, his heart singing as he breathed in Cas and felt his warmth curl around them. Cas, startled at the premise, sank into the kiss, using his leverage to yank Dean forward.

Dean kisses him, again and again, muttering into his mouth, "It's you."

Cas balances Dean's head in between his two palms, looking into his eyes as they pull apart. He's no longer crying, but the tears still pool on his face. He gives Dean a small smile with no fight left in it, "Okay."

"Let's get out of here." Dean says, and in that moment it's a promise.

"I couldn't agree more."

Chapter End Notes

there we have it!! hopefully a big dramatic kiss is what y'all needed. one of the reasons there was a delay in posting was because i could never quite settle on an ending i liked, but hopefully this is good enough ://

as always, tell me what you thought!

p.s. epilogue chapter to be posted ASAP.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!