

Bottom Shelf

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Bottom Shelf

by [domesticadventures](#)

Summary

Cas is becoming human and Dean, for all intents and purposes, is ruining him.

Notes

inspired by [this post](#), [cecilia](#) absolutely doxxing me about it, and every garbage food decision i've ever made

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

Cas is becoming human and Dean, for all intents and purposes, is ruining him.

He's picking up all of Dean's bad habits, all his bad taste. When they're on the road and stop for gas, Cas grabs Corn Nuts and Snickers and Mtn Dew Code Red and Dean stares daggers at Sam, willing him not to say anything as he stands there with his sad overripe banana and bruised apple, looking like a disappointed parent. When they're at home, Cas turns up his nose at salads, at vegetarian literally anything, at smoothies. He wants Dean to make him burgers and tater tots, the boxed mac and cheese that comes out an unnatural shade of yellow, he wants frito pie and grilled cheese sandwiches and Totino's® Pizza Rolls® and Dean isn't going to tell him no.

But he can't help but think that surely if Cas knew there was better stuff out there, if someone had taught him better, he would choose something else.

So Dean takes it upon himself to be a better teacher, because it's not just the food, it's...everything. It's the way Cas dresses in torn jeans and faded t-shirts and secondhand flannels, it's the way he'll spend an entire day binge-watching *Catfish: The TV Show*, it's the way he'll read whatever dime novel Dean puts in his hands but can never find time for Emerson or Thoreau or Kant.

It isn't too late to fix the damage he's done, Dean tells himself. They finish working a case outside of Chicago and Dean picks up some last-minute tickets to *Anastasia*. Cas raises an eyebrow at Dean's announcement that they'll be leaving Sam at the motel to spend a night at the theater, but he obediently puts on his fed suit, lets Dean drive him downtown, ignores Dean's swearing as he tries to find a good place to park. Dean thinks the whole thing is going pretty well right up until the point where Cas falls asleep with his head on Dean's shoulder before they even hit intermission.

"Do you want to leave?" Dean asks, as the lights come on and Cas jerks awake, rubbing at his eyes with the back of his hand.

"No," Cas says. "No. Sorry. Just tired from the hunt." At Dean's skeptical look, he adds, "I want to stay. I want to watch the rest of it with you."

Cas manages to remain conscious through the second half, but when Dean asks him for his review as they make their way out with the rest of the theater patrons, Cas shrugs.

"It was all right," Cas says. "But I like the cartoon version better. The one with the actual sorcerer in it."

And it's not that Dean disagrees, but his heart sinks a little, anyway.

So he tries something different the next time. They off a Jersey Devil and drive into New York the next day, wander through the Museum of Modern Art a bit aimlessly, neither of them really knowing what to do. Cas squints at the pieces made by some dude whose name Dean forgot the instant he learned it, carefully examines all the bizarre art Dean doesn't

understand, even after he dutifully reads the accompanying plaques—the table covered in egg shells, the painted bones, the pot filled a foot past the brim with mussels.

“Well,” Dean says as they leave, “what did you think?”

“I think,” Cas says slowly, “maybe I just don’t ‘get’ art. But I appreciated the experience, anyway.”

After that, Dean decides maybe he’s aiming a little too high. Maybe he just needs to start a little simpler, that’s all. What could go wrong with, say, a nice meal?

Dean picks out a well-reviewed place on Yelp and tries to temper his expectations as he and Cas sit up on a balcony in the ambient lighting, surrounded on all sides by people there for business meetings, for lunch dates.

He’s disappointed as soon as he takes his first bite. By all accounts, it should be good—how did a restaurant this expensive manage to mess up mashed potatoes with gruyere and bacon?—but it just...isn’t. Or maybe it *is* objectively good and Dean is simply incapable of enjoying it. He was raised on MSG and high fructose corn syrup and maybe he just can’t tell, maybe his taste buds are permanently broken.

Cas’ tiny bites, his half-finished food, tell Dean he feels much the same, and it makes him feel like shit. He can’t shake the feeling that Cas would have been able to enjoy normal people food if Dean hadn’t fucked it all up for him.

Cas deserves better than this, Dean thinks, as he turns on the car, grips the wheel to steady himself. Cas deserves better food, better dates. He deserves someone who can show him all life has to offer, someone who isn’t too scared to get on a goddamn plane, who would take him to see the seven wonders of the world instead of pulling off the highway to see stupid shit like the country’s largest rubber band ball. He deserves to be tired not from running from one hunt to another but from doing things that are actually fucking fun, to lay down at night next to someone who can sleep for more than a few restless hours at a clip. Cas deserves someone who didn’t learn everything he knows about making other men feel good in truck stop bathrooms or against the sides of 18 wheelers, someone who doesn’t occasionally still freak out in the middle of sex and need to be gently coaxed out of the past and back into the present. He deserves someone who knows how to take care of him, who doesn’t ask for so much while giving so little back.

“Dean,” Cas says, startling him out of his thoughts. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” Dean says. “Everything is fine.” The fact that he’s still sitting with the car in park and his knuckles white against the wheel says otherwise, but Cas is nothing if not impossibly patient with him. He clenches his jaw, swallows. “I just wanted you to have a good time.”

“I did have a good time,” Cas says, “with you.”

“No, you didn’t,” Dean says. “You’re being polite about it, but you didn’t like dinner, and you didn’t like the museum or the theater or—or—any of that stuff.”

He can see Cas frowning out of the corner of his eye, but his voice is gentle as he asks, “Dean, what has all this been about?”

“I wanted you to be able to experience stuff that’s actually good.”

“I’ve experienced plenty of good things.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Dean says, heat rising up his neck, creeping into his face. “You find shit like the theater and museums and actual good fucking food just as boring and bland as I do.”

“Okay?” Cas says. He seems legitimately confused, like it isn’t obvious how badly Dean has screwed everything up. “There’s nothing wrong with those things. They’re just not for us, and that’s okay.”

“It’s not okay!” Dean says, louder than he means to. “It’s not okay. I’m—I’m ruining you.”

Cas’ frown deepens. “I’m not a baby,” he says. “You didn’t shape me from birth. Give me some credit for my own personality.”

The heat spreads across Dean’s cheeks, burns behind his eyes. “I don’t—I don’t think that. But it’s just…”

“It’s just what?”

“You just. You don’t get it, okay?” Dean twists his hands against the leather, tries to keep his voice steady. “You’re not supposed to be the kind of person who likes the—the—the absolute worst garbage humanity has to offer. If you’d been human from birth, you’d know that. You’d know better. I’m the dollar menu equivalent of a person and you just haven’t realized it yet.”

There’s a long moment of silence during which Dean has plenty of time to imagine Cas telling him he’s insane, getting out of the Impala, and slamming the door behind himself.

Instead, Cas slides closer to him, their knees knocking together, and turns off the car. He reaches up and moves Dean’s hands from the wheel, holds them in one of his own. Uses his other hand to cup Dean’s face, stroke a thumb across his cheek until Dean hesitantly turns towards him, meets his gaze.

“Dean,” Cas says quietly. “You’re right. I haven’t always been human. I wasn’t raised in human society. But I like to think that gives me a certain different perspective.” He considers Dean carefully, looking from one of his eyes to the other. “I didn’t learn what I should or shouldn’t like from other people telling me. I’m learning it by doing. By trying and figuring it out. I mean this in the nicest way possible,” he says, the corner of his mouth ticking up in the barest hint of a smile, “but I don’t have all of your same hangups. To me, there’s just what I like and what I don’t. And what I like is fast food, and dumb movies that will never win a Tony—”

“I think those are the music ones—”

“Whatever,” Cas says, rolling his eyes. “You see my point.” He shifts to sit with one of his legs folded up on the seat, faces Dean more fully. “Dean. I know you grew up in a world that devalued you and the things you love. I would undo that if I could, but I can’t. All I can hope to do is to somehow convince you that you have value. I know what the other options are, and I want you to know that I’m not settling on you. I’m choosing you intentionally.”

Dean squeezes his eyes shut as Cas leans forward, as he presses a kiss to the corner of his mouth—so easily, so gently that it makes Dean’s breath catch in his throat.

“I love you,” Cas murmurs, “just as you are.”

Dean reaches his hand up, lays it over Cas’ own where it still rests against his cheek. “How’d you get so good at this, huh?” he asks, a little hoarsely. He runs his thumb against Cas’ knuckles and hopes he gets what he means—this tenderness, this comfort, this honest emotion. All of it.

Cas huffs a laugh. “This part I did learn from you.”

“Oh,” Dean manages, trying his best to internalize it as Cas kisses him again, more deeply this time, as he runs gentle fingers through the hair at the back of Dean’s neck. By the time Cas pulls away, Dean feels almost normal. Whatever ‘normal’ is for him, anyway. “Okay,” he says. “I’m okay.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” He clears his throat. “Yes.”

“Good,” Cas says, sliding back into his own seat. He nods once, decisively. “So can we pick up Taco Bell on the way home? That meal was extremely unsatisfying and I’m still hungry.”

Dean surprises himself by laughing. He thinks, wildly, that he’s never loved Cas more than he does at this moment.

“Yeah, Cas,” he says, turning the key in the ignition. “Whatever you want.”

End Notes

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