

where forever lies

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where forever lies

by [deansnuggles](#)

Summary

And when he's alone, when Sam's gone, or he's lying in bed... no matter how hard he tries to avoid it, every time he closes his eyes Dean keeps flashing back to that last, horrific moment—Cas smiling as he's consumed by darkness. "You changed me," and "I love you," and "goodbye." He tries to reconcile it in his head, Cas loving him so much that just expressing it was enough to trigger his deal. He tries—and fails. He must have missed a step, lost in the grief and horror of the moment, because it just... it can't be real. Every time he tries to take it out and examine it, his mind shies away, throwing up an impenetrable wall of "impossible."

In the weeks following Chuck's defeat, Dean tries to come to terms with Cas's confession and death. But having your kid become god turns out to have some perks.

Notes

This is canon compliant until right before Jack disappears at the end of 19. I cut out some of his exposition because it's dumb and I don't care. Then we're au from there on... or, you know, post-canon universe bc it's such a shame they never got to finish and air ep 20, you know?

Disclaimer: Dean's self-deprecating internal monologue does NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE AUTHOR he is perfect and deserves only good things.

(Oh and Miracle's a girl now, I make the rules here. The actor dog is a girl, and it's not like Dean actually checked so—fuck it.)

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

They drive away from Chuck in silence, as if speaking will break the spell that was their victory. Dean drives somewhat aimlessly in the general direction of home—it's hours away still and feels unreachable. Sam stares down at his hands. In the rearview, Dean sees Jack staring out the window at the scenery, a small smile on his face. He doesn't know what that means. He's scared to hope for what that means.

After an eternal twenty minutes, Jack speaks. "Would you like me to take us home? I can do that, now. If you'd prefer to drive, I don't mind. Driving is nice."

Dean and Sam exchange glances, Sam shrugs, leaving the decision to Dean. He clears his throat. "Uh, yeah. Yeah, sure, why not?"

He sees Jack nod, sees him raise his hand to snap (do they have to do that, he wonders? Or is it just a habit, a visual representation for their audience's benefit?) and suddenly the car is back in Lebanon. Dean pulls her around the corner and parks on the street near Showalter's. They all get out in wordless agreement.

"Alright kid, you really think you can pull this off?"

Jack just smiles and closes his eyes—guess they don't need to snap, after all—and like someone hit a cosmic "play" button, Lebanon returns, just as it was.

They walk down the block and back in a bit of a daze. "Way to go. I mean it, way to go." Dean chuckles in amazement at the sudden life around them. But he finds himself looking for something before he registers what... something that's still missing. An empty place in his heart, his soul that he's been trying to ignore while they had the end of the world to deal with. But now... "So is that... is that everyone? They're all back now?"

"Almost. There are a few that will take... somewhat more effort." Jack looks off into the distance for a moment, then turns back to them and smiles. "I'll be back soon," he says, then vanishes.

"Is he going to—you think? Do you think he can..." Sam trails off, thank god. Dean can't think about it, can't let hope in. Can't let anything in right now.

"I don't know, Sammy. Guess we'll find out."

They stand there for a minute watching people pass, going about their lives as if nothing happened. Jack must have rolled back their memories, too. He sees Sam's hand twitching by his pocket.

"Go on then, call her."

Sam looks conflicted. "I don't have to, I can wait until—"

"Sam. Call. Her. I'll go... take a walk. Soak it all in a bit."

He watches Sam pull out his phone, take a deep breath, and push the video call button. Waits just long enough to see the smile that means he connected, then walks off to give them some privacy.

They did it, they really fucking did it. Thank god—or Jack, as it were. He rolls his eyes at himself and wanders down the road towards the ice cream shop, hands in his pockets, taking in all the life happening around him. Parents with strollers, joggers with dogs, kids on bikes, harried business workers and laughing teenagers. Birds, butterflies, a squirrel. He sits in one of the red metal chairs out front of the shop and pulls out his own phone, composes a message in the group text of hunters they're closest to. Jody, Donna, Claire, Patience. Bobby, Charlie, Stevie.

Just checking in—some heavy shit went down here, seems like we're out the other side of it. Making sure nothing hit the rest of you.

Immediately responses start coming in, all in the same vein—everything's fine, haven't noticed anything on our end, what's going on? He promises to fill them all in once he gets his feet back under him and slips his phone back in his pocket. He's too wrung out to get into it—the apocalyptic stuff is bad enough, but his mind keeps skipping over the events in the dungeon, like a scratched up record. If he had to explain it, if he had to say any of it out loud...

For now, Dean is... numb. Everything seems so surreal. The last few days had happened so fast, escalated so quickly. Though if he thinks about it his whole life has been a series of escalations culminating in confronting and defeating the literal creator of the universe, so. Maybe needing some time to process isn't all that unusual. He's truly not sure if he'll ever get there, he's afraid that if he stops and tries, even begins to chip away at the numbness that's holding him upright it will all come crashing down. He's not sure he has it in him anymore to put himself back together.

Sam jogs over with a smile still spread across his face he seems to be attempting to rein in but failing. It's fine. Dean wants him to be happy. Someone should be happy. They won.

He forces a smile up at Sam. "Everything good?"

"Yeah! She's good, said she doesn't remember anything, not even any missing time, so. Jack must have fixed it up good."

"Good, good. I checked in with everyone else, same story. As if nothing happened. Looks like we're the only ones."

"Well, that I can live with if it means we got everyone back." He catches Dean's flinch and the smile falls away. "You uh. You alright?"

Dean takes a deep breath, forces out a tight smile. "Peachy." He slaps his thighs and stands up, grabbing his keys from his pocket. "C'mon, let's head home."

He turns toward the car before Sam's concerned look can turn into a concerned conversation. He knows he's delaying the inevitable but he can probably hold Sam off at least another day.

Long enough to feed the numbness with a bottle of liquor or three.

As he approaches the car, something barrels into the back of his knees hard enough for him to stumble, for the adrenaline to kick back in as he turns, hand on his gun. When he sees the culprit, he lets out an incredulous, delirious laugh. “Hey! Hey sweetheart, where did you come from? You remember me, huh?”

He bends down to give the golden shaggy dog a double-handed scratch behind the ears, feeling himself smile for the first time in days. For a moment, he starts to think ahead, to maybe making room in their lives for something joyful, something full of life. They’d have to find something to do with her when they hunt, maybe one of the townies could watch her, Dean’s made a few friends around town and at Donnie’s—then he notices the collar and tag that hadn’t been there before. Of course. Of course the dog has an owner. How stupid of him to think he could ever have anything for himself.

Sam bends down to get his own loving in, and Dean stands back up, shoving his hands back in his pockets. It’s fine. It’s fine. Surely the dog will be happier with whoever lost her than with Dean, who lives in an underground bunker, hunts monsters for a living, and can barely even manage to take care of himself. The dog’s better off.

Then Sam says, “Dean. Dean, look at the tag.”

"Miracle"

If Found, Call 785-555-0128

Ask For Dean

Jack left them a dog.

Dean places Miracle gently in the backseat of the Impala, scratching her behind the ears and trying to push down the déjà vu. “Hey buddy, we’ll be home before you know it, alright? Be nice to the upholstery.”

It’s only a few minutes drive to the bunker but it’s enough for Sam to use to his advantage.

“Do you want to talk about it? About... what happened? With Cas.”

Dean’s hands tighten on the steering wheel, knuckles white and painful. So much for giving it a day. “I can’t. I—I can’t, Sam. Not yet. I’m sorry.”

He sees Sam nod in his peripheral vision but he can’t look at him, can’t see the pity and the worry he knows will be there. Thankfully, Sam doesn’t press the issue, but he knows he’s on borrowed time now.

Miracle whines a little in the back seat, and Sam reaches back to pet her. “Just a couple more minutes, buddy, then we’ll be home.”

The bunker feels strange, quiet. It's funny, they've spent most of their years here just the two of them, with other hunters and family in and out from time to time, and of course the few months where they had a full house of apocalypse world folks. But the last two years, having Jack, having Cas actually stick around, they'd gone from cold empty halls to ones filled with laughter and family. When the world wasn't ending, that is. Now, the emptiness is palpable, the silence is smothering, there are ghosts of memories in every corner. Board games and puzzles, movie nights and research, pizza Fridays and lazy mornings huddled in the kitchen while Dean threw together pancakes for everyone. He can't do anything, go anywhere, touch anything without getting a gut punch of a reminder of what they'd lost.

Miracle helps, an immediate mood boost anytime she wags her tail or rests her shaggy head on his leg. She takes to following Dean around, even though Sam's always been more of a dog person. She seems to know Dean needs the distraction and the company of someone who isn't going to keep looking at him with knowing, sad eyes. Who doesn't bring with them decades worth of memories Dean's trying to avoid. She gets him out of bed in the morning, gets him out of the bunker at least to hop across the service road to a patch of grass a few times a day. Sam takes her out jogging most mornings, except on the ones Dean's not getting out of bed and so Miracle won't either. It's nice to have something warm and alive, something that depends on him but has no expectations.

Sam sticks around for a while, trying to give Dean space while obviously also a little worried about letting him out of his sight. Surprisingly, he doesn't ask about Cas again, seemingly understanding the precarious state Dean is in and for once not picking at the scab. After a week goes by and Dean seems to at least be treading water instead of drowning in grief and lack of direction, he goes out to meet Eileen more and more. Sometimes they stay in the bunker for dinner, which is fifty-fifty whether it's nice to have the company or grating to see their happiness when his own was ripped from his fingers before he even knew it existed. Over time, Sam gets better at figuring out which mood Dean's in and adjusts their plans accordingly... leaving Dean both relieved and guilty for chasing off the only family he has left.

And when he's alone, when Sam's gone, or he's lying in bed... no matter how hard he tries to avoid it, every time he closes his eyes Dean keeps flashing back to that last, horrific moment—Cas smiling as he's consumed by darkness. “You changed me,” and “I love you,” and “goodbye.” He tries to reconcile it in his head, Cas loving him so much that just expressing it was enough to trigger his deal. He tries—and fails. He must have missed a step, lost in the grief and horror of the moment, because it just... it can't be real. Every time he tries to take it out and examine it, his mind shies away, throwing up an impenetrable wall of “impossible.”

He knows Cas loved him, that was never in doubt. He'd even known that Cas seemed particularly... bonded to Dean, over Sam. He loved Sam too, of course, but Dean couldn't lie to himself that it was the same. He'd wondered sometimes... but no. No, he'd been absolutely certain that Cas's devotion was something else, something otherworldly. Not *love*, not like *that*. Angels couldn't have *that*, he was sure of it. Sure, there'd been a few nephilim created over the millennia, but that was sex, not love. Well, there'd been the Lily Sunder incident, but—there's an exception to every rule, right? That didn't mean that *Cas*...

But then again... maybe it did.

It's been two weeks since the end of the world. He needs to tell Sam.

The problem is, *telling Sam* comes with an awful lot of baggage.

It's not something he ever thought he'd do—in fact, he's spent most of his adult life terrified of Sam finding out. It's not logical, he knows. He knows in his heart that Sam will be fine, that he may be surprised—or may not be—but either way will be accepting, supportive. Probably even go overboard with it—buy a pride flag for the library or some shit. But there's enough lingering doubt, enough trauma and repression and self-hate from years of pushing it down, of ignoring and burying it, of having it burst out uncontrollably and then shamefully crawl back inside. There was never any doubt what John would have said, and it wouldn't have been pretty. His mom, he's not sure. He'd always hoped... but she was barely a memory, a construct, and then when they got her back she'd been here too short, much too short of a time. He'd never worked up the courage, probably never would have. Not until Cas.

Cas. Castiel. Angel of the Lord, Warrior of Heaven, fallen and reborn, ever-present, unfathomable and unyielding but still, miraculously, molding himself around the lives of two flawed and broken humans. To Dean, in particular. He sees it now, had probably always known it, how Cas had loved them both but he'd devoted himself to Dean. Even when they fought, even when they could barely be in the same room together, Dean hadn't doubted Cas's loyalty to them, not in years. He'd just never let himself dwell on why, exactly.

And now—now they know that Cas falling, Cas choosing them, choosing *Dean*, was the first in a long line of dominoes that led to where they are now. A world with true free will for the first time in creation. A free world. A life.

“Hey Sammy. Can we, uh. Can we talk?” He passes over a beer and sits down across from Sam at the library table.

Sam looks up and must see something in Dean's face—Dean doesn't really want to know what. He puts his book down slowly, as if trying not to spook a wild animal. Fair. “Sure, yeah, of course. What's up?”

Dean licks his lips, heart pounding, the edges of his vision starting to white out with adrenaline. He rolls the beer bottle he'd grabbed between his hands, tries to concentrate on the sensations, the condensation, the cold. He had an entire speech planned, a buildup, a gentle slide into the truth, but now that he's here he can't stomach it. Pulling off the bandaid and getting the hell out is all he has in him.

“I'm in love with Cas.”

He waits a beat. Another. Holds his breath and flicks his eyes up to Sam's, wide and blinking, face frozen and unreadable. Dean feels nauseous. He claps his hands on the table and stands. “Okay, well, good talk.”

“No, no, Dean, wait!” Sam grabs at his sleeve and Dean stops, looking up at the ceiling with his lips between his teeth. “I just—when did you—” he shakes his head in frustration. “No,

that's not... thank you," he says, full of patented Sam sincerity. "Thank you for telling me. Can you... can you sit back down? Please?"

Dean takes a steadying breath and sits, tense and braced to flee. Sam says, "Dean, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I knew this was hard for you but... I had no idea. I guess I probably should have, huh."

Dean shrugs. He's not surprised Sam didn't know, though he'd always wondered. He's not sure how he feels about the fact that all his deflecting had actually been successful.

"Jack could still bring him back, you know. He's probably working on it right now—"

"It's been weeks, Sam. He's not coming. I don't know if... if Jack had problems with the Empty, or, or maybe Cas..." he swallows, hard. "Maybe Cas isn't... isn't interested in hanging out now that the world finally isn't ending. He's, you know, he's an angel. Probably has shit to do." If he's even alive, which Dean doubts more every day.

"Dean. You know that's not true. He'd be here, if he could. You know he would." He gives Dean a long look. "He loves you too, you know."

Dean pinches the bridge of his nose, willing the tears not to fall. He hasn't cried, not since that night, not since he forced himself up off the floor of the dungeon. He's just been numb. *Empty*. "I know." Because he does. He doesn't know what that means still, can't let himself think about what that means, but... he does.

"Do you... want to talk about it?" Sam is treating him like a spooked animal again, but he can't blame him. He kind of is.

He shrugs, picks at the label on the bottle he hasn't even opened. "What do you want to know?" He's already here, might as well get all the questions out of the way now. Let it all out and then get shitfaced alone in his room.

"I... I guess I'm just wondering how long? It makes sense, you know, with how, um. Intense you guys are. I just never—yeah." He trails off.

"How long since Cas, or guys in general?"

"I, um. Both? Either? Whichever you want to talk about?"

Dean rolls his eyes and opens the beer, takes a long drink to gather his thoughts. "I've been into guys as long as I've been into anything. Just don't, y'know, advertise it. With Cas, I don't know. It's kind of always been there, but I don't think... I didn't really *know*. I didn't let myself know. Not until Lucifer killed him."

"Oh, shit."

"Yeah." He shrugs. "So it's been a few years, I guess. I wasn't gonna say anything, probably never would have said anything, but. Now he's gone again and I just wish more than anything that I had." Instead, he'd stood there like an asshole while Cas bared his soul and sacrificed his life for them yet again.

“You don’t think he knew?”

“I know he didn’t. He said... to summon the Empty, he said he’d made a deal last year for Jack’s life. When he allowed himself to be truly happy, that’s when it would come for him. He told me the one thing that would make him happy was the one thing he knew he couldn’t have.” He hears Sam suck in a breath but he can’t look at him, not til he gets this out. He rubs his arm where Cas had grabbed him, where he’d had a scar burned into his skin so long ago, lifetimes ago. “He told me he loved me and that was enough. He pushed me out of the way and the Empty took him right in front of me.”

“Jesus, Dean. That’s... that’s awful. I’m so sorry, you’ve been carrying this alone for weeks and I had no idea. I mean, I knew you were upset, but... why are you telling me now?”

It’s a good question, and the echoes of him asking Cas the same thing don’t escape his notice. *Why are you telling me this now?* And the answer lies there, too.

“Cas...” his voice catches, and he has to stop, swallow, and restart. “Cas laid it all on the line to save me, to save everyone. It doesn’t sit right with me, keeping that under wraps. He was so, so goddamn brave to the end. I owe it to him—I, I want to honor him by not hiding it. Us. Me.”

“Yeah. Okay, yeah. I—thank you. I’m... I’m really glad you told me.”

He’s gotta get out of here before he loses what little grasp he has. He shrugs, standing. “Yeah, well. Anyways. Just, uh, just wanted to get that out there. I’m gonna...”

“Dean.” Dean flinches and turns back, Sam’s wearing a nervous but determined expression. “If you ever need to talk, you know... I know it’s not really your thing, but you can always talk to me.”

“I know Sammy. Thanks.”

It’s 1:30 on a Thursday afternoon five weeks after the end of the world, and there’s a knock at the door of the bunker.

Sam pops up from where they’ve both been sitting with their laptops in the kitchen, flicking his shut and tucking it under his arm. “That’s Eileen, we’re gonna go catch a movie or something.”

Dean grunts, not bothering to lift his head. He’s happy for Sam, he really, truly is, but the domestic bliss is starting to grate on him. He knows it’s not fair, but it’s getting harder to hide and he knows Sam can tell. Him and Eileen have been going out more and more instead of spending time at the bunker. Which helps in one respect, but it also leaves Dean alone with his thoughts more than he probably should be. He’s trying. He’s trying not to spiral out, he’s trying not to drink himself numb, he’s trying to put one foot in front of the other for Cas’ sake if nothing else. Some days are harder than others, and none of them are easy. He’s not sure they ever will be.

Today is a hard day. He woke up with nightmares before dawn after tossing and turning well past midnight. Sure ten, fifteen years ago four hours would have gotten him through just fine but not now, not on the wrong side of forty. He's dragging, his head feels like it's caught in a vice while simultaneously being cloudy as shit, his back hurts. His heart hurts. Three weeks ago he'd have crawled into a bottle and not come out for a few days, but. Ever since he told Sam, ever since he'd finally admitted to himself that maybe, maybe it *was* real, maybe *they* were real, maybe it was in fact the only real thing in all of existence—Cas's love for him. Ever since then he's been trying to honor that, one small baby step at a time. Drink less. Get out of bed. Cook food. Take a shower. Do some laundry, do some cleaning... things that usually bring him some small bit of peace and routine but currently feel like climbing backwards up a mountain on his hands and knees. He can't always accomplish all of them in one day—sometimes he's lucky just to get one—but he's trying.

They haven't been hunting either, from some unspoken agreement neither of them have been looking for cases. Dean doesn't think they're *done*, not forever, but with all the big bads out of the way it just doesn't have the urgency it used to especially with the rest of the hunter network out there handling things. From decades of personal experience Dean knows that throwing himself back into hunting when he's this fucked up is a really, really bad idea.

Miracle lifts her head from where she's laying at Dean's feet and cocks an ear. Dean smiles down at her and leans over to give her a scratch. "You hear Eileen, baby girl?" The dog whines softly, looking between Dean and the doorway before following Sam's path. Dean blinks. Miracle is quite friendly and social when out and about but around the bunker she's not prone to leaving Dean unless food or a leash is involved. She doesn't normally follow Sam or greet Eileen at the door.

"Dean!" That's Sam's "get here now" voice—different from his "imminent danger" voice, but not by much. Possible scenarios start racing through Dean's head as he springs up and grabs a gun from under the table. An injured hunter, an enemy—though there's not many of those left. Maybe Rowena? He sprints down the hall to the war room, rounds the corner and skids to a stop.

He locks eyes with the figure coming down the stairs, Sam beaming behind him, and he can't breathe. He can't speak. He can't even blink, for fear it will break the illusion in front of him

The figure stops at the bottom of the stairs and says, with a small smile, "Hello, Dean."

His breath rushes out of him finally in a near sob. "Cas?" Cas nods, and Dean feels himself moving before he's consciously doing so, dropping the gun on the map table and grabbing Cas in a crushing hug. He feels Cas's arms come up solidly around his back as he buries his face in Cas's shoulder.

He's never, in twelve years and so many resurrections he's truly lost count at this point, allowed himself to fully let go and soak up their embrace. The smell of his coat, the feel of his neck against Dean's cheek, the solidness of his shoulders under Dean's arms, the weight of his arms around Dean's back. He slides a hand up to the back of Cas's neck, feels the short hairs there, the warmth of his skin, and a sob finally escapes that he stops trying to hold back. He knows Sam's there, probably grinning like a loon, but for once in his life he just doesn't give a shit. He sinks into Cas and lets himself have this moment.

He takes a final shaky breath before backing up, leaving a hand on Cas's shoulder that he can't bring himself to remove. "Is this—are you—tell me I'm not dreaming, buddy. It's really you?"

Cas smiles softly in response. "It's really me." Dean's eyes roam over his face, body, looking for injuries and also just *looking*. He has no idea what his face is doing but it's probably extremely embarrassing.

Sam clears his throat behind them and Dean blinks his way back to the present. Sam holds up his phone. "I just texted Eileen, I'm gonna go meet her in town instead."

"But—"

"Look, I'm sure there's a story, and I'll be happy to hear it. Later. We've got plenty of time, right Cas?"

"Y-yes, I assume so, at least." His eyes flicker to Sam, then back to Dean.

"You're safe, healthy, nothing's chasing after you, no deals we need to be aware of?" Sam asks.

"That is... correct. It was Jack's doing, there shouldn't be any unforeseen complications."

"Great! Then I will see you kids in,"—he checks his watch—"let's say 6 hours? We're gonna head to Smith Center, run some errands, get dinner... I'll text before we head back, okay? Oh, and we're taking the pooch." He grabs the leash off the banister and Miracle full-body wags her way over to get hooked up. He gives a little wave and heads out the front door. Subtle.

The door shuts, and Dean buries his hands in his pockets. "So..." Dean starts, feeling all kinds of awkward. "You, uh, want a beer or anything? We don't have much, we've been kind of, um, cutting back I guess." More accurately, he'd been cutting back. After that first week. He scratches at the back of his neck, stomach turning—of course he doesn't want a beer, you idiot. He only ever drinks them because you do, because you shove them at him.

Cas smiles at him again, the small one that raises only one side of his mouth but softens his eyes to the point where Dean needs to look away. "Actually, if it's not an imposition, I would really like a sandwich." Dean must make an incredulous face, and Cas elaborates, "The process of... saving me, of bringing me here, my grace is not at its normal levels. I'll need to eat, and—and sleep, to maintain myself."

"I thought you said you were okay? You said you were healthy."

"I am," Cas assures him. "There is nothing wrong with me, I'm not ill or injured, but... it's a long story that I'd prefer to tell over lunch. If... if that's alright."

"Sure, sure buddy, of course."

They make their way to the kitchen, Dean's mind spinning through a thousand different scenarios so quickly they might as well just be white noise.

As they pass the pantry shelves Cas goes for a loaf of bread and Dean knocks his hand away. “Uh uh, nope, family who come back from the dead don’t make their own lunch. Sit, I got you.”

Cas, the contrary son of a bitch, just leans against the counter next to him as he starts pulling ingredients out. Dean feels his presence on the back of his neck, electricity running down his spine and dancing around in his stomach. He lasts through slicing half a tomato before he can’t take it anymore—he puts the knife down and braces his hands on the counter for support. “So. We, uh, gonna address the elephant in the room, or what?”

“I’m sorry?”

It was probably too much to hope for, that Cas would do all the heavy lifting for him. He already did—it’s Dean’s turn now. If he wants to know, he’s gotta ask.

He forces himself to turn towards Cas, crosses his arms in front of him as a shield, then thinks better of it and puts his hands back in his pockets. This isn’t a confrontation. “Did you... did you mean it? What you said about... about wanting what you can’t have.”

“I did.”

“And what is it—what is it that you think you can’t have?”

Cas looks off to the side, evasive. “Dean, we don’t have to—”

“Yeah, yeah we do Cas. Because I think all of this,” he gestures between them, “all of this has been pretty fucked up by us *not*. We gotta... we gotta push past this, man. We need to. Otherwise we’re just gonna fall back on what we always do, on what’s comfortable, and that’s not. That’s not enough, man, not now, not anymore. So what is it, Cas? What do you want, really?”

Cas meets his gaze, eyes searching, then lifts his chin resolutely. “I want... I want you, Dean. In any capacity you will have me. In—in every capacity. I told you I love you, that hasn’t changed. It won’t. I would spend my life by your side, if you’d have me.”

“Is that all? Just to be... with me, that’s all you want? That’s everything you want?”

Cas pauses. “That is all I want, but it’s not everything. Everything would be... would be by your side, and in your heart, and—and in your bed. All of you, all of me, everything we are. That is what I want.”

Cas can be a cagey bastard when he wants to, but when he’s earnest, sincere... he doesn’t hold back. It’s a gut punch, every time. *Everything. He wants... everything.* “Cas, I... why? Why did you think you couldn’t have that?”

Cas blinks at him, brow furrowing. “Well for one I’ve, um. Always known you to prefer female companionship,” he says, looking awkwardly off over Dean’s shoulder. Right. There’s... that. To be honest, other than having to come out to Sam, Dean barely even

considered that aspect anymore. What they have, what Cas is to him, is so far beyond any old hangups he might have had.

“Yeah well I also prefer not getting hate-crimed in dive bars, Cas—the lives we lead? Women are safer.” He runs a hand down his face and takes a deep breath. “Man, of all the reasons why I thought this would never happen, you thinkin’ I wasn’t interested wasn’t really on the list.” He licks his lips, tries to push down the anxiety quickly building in his chest. They are *so close*. He just needs to find the right words. “Did you really not know? I mean, it’s not like I go around advertising it or anything but you—you’ve been in my dreams, you’ve seen my soul. I thought—I always just figured you knew. The, uh, the guy thing.”

“I... knew. But. I didn’t think it was something you were comfortable with, about yourself.”

“Well it’s not, I mean... look, I got a metric fuckton of shit to work out about all of this, the—the relationship shit, commitment stuff and, uh, just accepting what’s even real after Chuck and all that. And yeah, the um, the sex thing, that’s got a lot of baggage I’m not gonna lie. But it’s... it’s you, Cas. It’s worth it, if it’s you. That’s not even a question.”

Cas’s eyes unfocus, as if looking back at their whole messy history with a new perspective. Dean knows the feeling. “I thought—I always thought that I’d know. I thought I knew what it looked like, when you... wanted someone. But that wasn’t—it’s not the same, is it?”

Dean huffs out a laugh. “Yeah, uh, no. I mean, I want...” he clears his throat, “I want *you*, trust me I... really, really do. But you’re not some—some barroom hookup Cas. What we have... it’s not that. And hell it’s not like I ever wanted you to see it. Not until, well.” He bites his lip, looks up at Cas through his lashes.

“So what you’re saying is...”

“What I’m saying is if you want this, if you want me... you can have me, Cas. You already do.”

As Cas’s eyes widen in wonder, it hits Dean finally, truly— *we can have this*. After all of it, the pain and the losses and the fighting, they’re here, now, together. Facing the same direction with their eyes open for the first time. The world is never going to be safe, and the nightmares of their past will never truly leave them, but. Maybe their broken pieces can fit together to make something new. Something worth fighting for. Something worth saving.

He tilts his head, crooks his mouth up in a smile just a touch too shaky to be cocky. “So, uh. What’s a guy gotta do to get a kiss around here?”

There are many times in their future when Dean will see Cas’s eyes darken with desire, from countless times in their bedroom, various hotel rooms across the country, the library, the park, the car—god, the car—to one particularly memorable occasion in a Walmart fitting room. But to his dying day this, the first time, will be the one he can recall with absolute vivid clarity.

Dean’s had many first kisses in his life, more than he even remembers. There’s nothing like that first roller-coaster swoop of the stomach, that fingers-toes-spine tingle of someone else’s

first touch. He's only had a few occasions to kiss someone he really cared about, that warmth and intimacy was something he craved in his bones but rarely found, hadn't felt at all in almost ten years. But he's never, in all his life experienced a first kiss with someone he already loved with his whole heart.

It's more than the sum of its parts. It's slipping into the driver's seat of his car, it's falling into his bed after a month on the road, it's the first bite of a favorite food, the opening notes of a favorite song, the opening scene of a beloved movie. It's like...

It's like coming home.

...But, with fireworks.

Dean had, on occasion, allowed himself to imagine what a first kiss with Cas would be like. Sometimes it was rough, passionate, adrenaline filled in the aftermath of a battle. Sometimes it was sweet, hesitant, a slow coaxing of lips and hands, falling together in a quiet moment. Certainly they will have both of those and countless more ahead of them, but this, their first, Cas approaches with the single-minded focus and care he brings to most things. The intensity of interest Dean is just realizing Cas directs at him and him alone, distilled into its purest form.

They pull away to breathe, their foreheads pressed together, Dean's hands inside Cas's coat and Cas's hands on Dean's face, just sharing breath. Dean feels the wetness on his cheek at the same moment Cas does. Cas pulls back and meets his eyes, concerned, wiping his cheek with his thumb. "Dean... are you alright?"

Dean forces himself to take a stabilizing breath and give Cas a sincere if watery smile. "Yeah, yeah I'm just—god damn it's good to have you back." Cas's face relaxes, and Dean reaches up to press Cas's hand against his face before he can pull away. "And I just... I'm sorry. I'm sorry you didn't know. I'm sorry it took me so fucking long to say it. I'm sorry you thought you had to carry this alone." He licks his lips, forces himself to not look away as his heart claws its way up his throat. "I love you, Cas. You gotta know that. You gotta..."

Cas smiles, catches more tears with his thumb, his own eyes shining. "I do now."

"I was so fucking stupid, for so long."

"We both were."

"Yeah but—you're the one who finally said it, you're the one who did something about it. I just stood there like a fucking idiot, couldn't even process what was happening til it was too late. Fuck."

Cas looks at him for a long moment, then tilts his head, eyes sparkling. "Make it up to me?"

"Yeah? Do you, uh, have any suggestions?"

"Well first, you can make me that sandwich."

Dean barks out a laugh, his chest swelling with love, joy burning away the doubt and grief. “I can do you one better—how about a burger?”

Cas grins, nose scrunching up and eyes crinkling. “Yes.”

Over lunch, Cas explains how Jack had saved not only him, but any angels who agreed to pledge themselves to humanity first, and heaven second. How Jack had brought them all to Heaven to recuperate and used their presence to repair the broken foundations of paradise while also tearing down the crumbling walls to let the souls be free. How he’d given each of the angels a choice—stay as guardians of Heaven, caretakers of the souls, or be sent to earth to guard and protect humanity. The former would keep the full power of their grace, while the latter’s grace would be... dampened, to encourage them to live alongside their charges as equals, not gods.

“So you... won’t ever be full-power again?” Dean isn’t sure how he feels about that. A more human Cas who eats and sleeps and lives alongside them was something he’d always felt selfish for wanting, especially since Cas always seemed upset when he wasn’t at full strength.

“Well, yes and no. I am ‘full-power’ currently, I just don’t have access to it all at once, and using it will drain me. Jack even repaired our wings... I’d forgotten what it felt like, to not be in constant pain. I feel like myself again. And I can still help, still protect the people I love, which is—I would have stayed by your side regardless of the consequences, if it meant ripping out my grace to do so it would have been a small price to pay, but this. This is more than I ever could have hoped for. I can live as a human, be your guardian and protector, age alongside you, and when you finally leave this plane many, many years from now I can join you in Heaven and become a guardian there.”

Dean knows he’s staring, knows he should probably say something, but the enormity of Cas’s choice, of the idea of eternity together... it’s unfathomable.

Cas must see that play out on his face and he grimaces nervously. “I’m sorry, was that... too much? I know this is still new, I don’t want to overwhelm you or, or pressure you—”

“No! No no, nothing like that, it’s fine, it’s...” he reaches out to take one of Cas’s hands between both of his and smiles. “It’s perfect. That sounds perfect, Cas. I’m just... it’s a lot to take in, you know? Good things don’t usually happen around here, especially not this many at once. I think I’m gonna be waiting for the catch for, well, a while. But. It’s good. It’s fantastic.”

“Yeah?” Cas smiles softly, the corners of his eyes crinkling. Dean is struck again by how different he is, how different they both are from the people who met twelve years ago in a dirty barn, completely alien to each other with no idea what lay ahead. How Cas had discovered free will and Dean had discovered, well, faith. How human Cas has become and how that’s not a bad thing, that’s not a sign of how Dean has corrupted and debased him but is in fact the exact opposite. Cas’s humanity, his individuality had saved the world. It’s going to take a long time to fully accept it, that this is what Cas wants, this is what makes Cas happy. But he’s going to. He will.

“Yeah, Cas. Forever sounds really fucking good.”

It's not quite happily ever after, not yet. There will be roadblocks and detours, backslides and bottlenecks, but they'll get there. Dean has faith. He's always had faith in Cas.

End Notes

thank you so much for reading!! I do really appreciate comments and kudos but also just thank you for going on this journey with me. I hope you enjoyed it. deancas is canon, folks!

(the title is from monsters by shinedown because I am old and lame)

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