

## Gloria Mundi

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# Gloria Mundi

by [xylodemon](#)

## Summary

Dean's not leaving Cas behind.

## Notes

Hi hello this is a Season 13 throwback based on an [early feral draft of 13x06](#) where we learn Dean saved Cas' ashes and scattered them somewhere he thought Cas would like.

I've literally been out of my mind since I read it.

Warnings for canon-typical alcohol use and Dean very much struggling to process his grief. Unbeta'd like an unbeta'd thing.

[Rebloggable on Tumblr](#)

"You say goodbye."

Dean's never been good at that—at surrendering. Letting go. *Giving up*. But he knows what an angel blade through the chest means, had watched the light burst from Cas' eyes and nose and mouth. He'd knelt by Cas' body until sunrise, held his hand until it went cold and stiff.

This is it.

"Well, goodbye, Cas," he says woodenly. "Goodbye, Kelly. Goodbye, Crowley." He takes a breath that smells like split wood and gasoline. "Goodbye, Mom."

"Dean, we don't know if Mom—"

"Yeah, we do," Dean insists. "We do, Sam. Lucifer killed her. The moment he realized we trapped his ass, he killed her. You know he did."

Sam swallows hard and looks away.

"She's gone," Dean continues, clenching his fists until his bruised knuckles sting. "They're all gone."

He sparks the lighter and tosses it on the pyre.

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At sunset, Sam catches the kid's sleeve and herds him toward the house. He pauses on the stairs and asks, "Dean?"

"Yeah." Dean feels like his throat is closing up. "I—in a minute."

Once they're gone, he heads over to the Impala and grabs the fifth of Jim Beam stashed behind their jugs of holy water and cannisters of salt. He finds a tree near the pyre, sits at its base, and brings the bottle to his mouth.

Slowly, the sky fades to black. Dean watches the fire until it finally burns out.

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Dean moves to the porch at some point during the night. He doesn't remember doing it, but that's where Sam finds him in the morning, slouched into a rocking chair that's barely a skeleton, more termite rot than wood.

Sam looks like he slept in his clothes—rumpled collar, wrinkled sleeves. He asks, "Have you been out here all night?" in a voice like a rough patch of road.

Dean shrugs. What's left of the Jim Beam is a guilty plea between his feet. "Yeah."

Light flares behind Sam's shoulder as the sun starts cresting the lake. He pauses before asking, "Where do you think angels go? I mean—you know. After?"

"No clue," Dean says, clearing his throat. "Not sure they really *go* anywhere."

"What do you mean?"

"Cas, uh—he never mentioned them having a heaven, or anything. I think they just turn back into moon rocks or pixie dust, or—I don't know. Whatever Chuck made 'em out of."

Sam says, "Alright," and leans his shoulder against the wall. "What are you thinking?"

"About what?"

"About getting him back."

Dean—he doesn't want to talk about this. He *can't*. He mutters, "Nothing to think about," and rubs his hand over his face. "He's gone."

"We don't know that."

Dean's back and shoulders ache, and a bourbon hangover is squeezing at his temples. He says, "He's gone," again and closes his eyes. "Lucifer shanked him, and he's gone. There's no fixing that."

+

A breeze picks up as they're loading the car—light, but enough to stir Cas' ashes around. There are protocols for cleaning up a pyre: picking out any teeth or bone, turning the ground over until the burn scar disappears, covering the area with new dirt. Dean tried to do it earlier, but he couldn't bring himself to shovel Cas away, figured he deserved to rest out in the open, under the sky.

"Is that everything?" Sam asks.

The ashes stir again. Dean pictures them blowing away, scattering outside the house. Getting walked on, driven on, crushed into the gravel.

"I, uh." His chest aches. He clears his throat before saying, "Hang on a sec."

He heads back into the house and rifles through the kitchen cabinets until he finds an old coffee can. Its only rust spot hasn't chewed all the way through yet, and its plastic lid is brittle but still useable. There aren't any spoons in the drawer, just two forks, a whisk with bent loops, some misshapen mason jar rings, and a handful of dead bugs. He tears a page out of the dusty cookbook beside the stove and folds it until it's stiff enough to use as a spade.

Outside, the sun is high in the sky and blazing hot. He sheds his flannel and drops it on the Impala's hood, then crouches beside the pyre and starts moving the ashes into the can. By the third or fourth scoop, his eyes are stinging so badly he has to close them for a second.

When he opens them again, Sam's shadow is rising up behind him, a towering line that cuts across the ashes before stretching out toward the lake.

"Dean?"

"I ain't leaving him here," Dean mutters. His hands are shaking. *Fuck*. "He's coming with us."

Sam says, "Okay," and shifts sideways, into Dean's line of sight. A chunk of charred wood rolls away from his foot. "You need some help?"

"No," Dean says, even though his next scoop misses the can and falls back into the dirt. "Shit." He couldn't get Cas out of Purgatory, and he couldn't get Lucifer out of Cas' meatsuit, and last night he wasn't quick enough, couldn't stop Lucifer from stabbing Cas in the back. After all that, the least he can do is bring Cas home himself. "I'm good."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Just—get Rosemary's Baby in the car. I'll be right there."

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North Cove is 1700 miles from Lebanon; that's a three-day haul now that Dean's pushing forty, maybe three-and-a-half.

He doesn't open Google Maps, doesn't plan out any stops. He just pulls onto State Route 105 because it's headed southeast and leans on the gas.

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As they're crossing into Wyoming, Sam says, "Hey. We still got probably twelve hours until we're home. You want me to drive?"

Dean cuts him a sideways look. "Do I ever want you to drive?"

Sam hesitates for a moment. Then: "Look. Losing Mom, and Cas—that's a lot to process, Dean, especially on no sleep. And the kid—"

"The kid?" Dean scoffs. "C'mon. You know how this plays out." When Sam doesn't answer, he continues, "Look, when we try to bend the rules, pretend that the bad guys aren't so bad, or that things will get fixed—that's when people we care about get hurt. And then we end up doing what we shoulda done in the first place, which is end the problem. So this time, let's start with the obvious."

Sam glances at the backseat, like he's afraid little Damien's awake and listening to them, but Dean just keeps going:

"As soon as I find a way to take care of... it."

"Dean," Sam says quietly. "The *problem* might be our only shot at saving Mom."

Dean looks over at him again. Baby's engine fills the silence before he says, "Mom's gone. There's no fixing that."

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Dean can feel Sam glaring murder at him, but he doesn't really give a shit. He's not letting Lucifer's kid laugh at cartoons when what's left of Cas is in a coffee can in the Impala's trunk.

"You're on the couch, sport. Alright? So... why don't you go over there. Sit down, and—" Dean snorts. "Read a book." He lobbs the motel Bible in Jack's general direction, doesn't watch to see if he picks it up. "We're outta here in a few hours."

Sam apparently wants to hover over the kid, so Dean just leaves him to it. He shrugs off his jacket and sits on the edge of the bed. His back aches from driving all day and cutting enough wood for a pyre the night before, and his hangover is still hanging around, a dull throb behind his eyes and pressure at the base of his skull.

As he reaches down to untie his boots, he hears Sam and Jack murmuring on the other side of the partition. A beat or two later, Sam walks over to the beds with his bag over his shoulder and a pissy twist to his mouth. Dean doesn't bother, just wrestles his left foot out of his boot and starts on his right. He's already irritated—the room is shitty, and having three "adults" bumped the price from \$75 to \$110. The last thing he needs is Sam giving him another song and dance about Antichrist Superstar being their only hope.

"Dude," Sam says finally. "You can't just—"

"I thought you said you wanted some grub."

"What?"

"Food," Dean grunts. "Or was someone else bitching about us needing to eat for the last two hours?"

Sam stares at him for a long moment before heaving out a sigh. "Whatever. Fine."

"Great." Dean yanks his boot off and leans back enough to dig his keys out of his pocket. "Here."

"Oh, *now* you want me to drive?"

"Sure," Dean says, shrugging. "If it gets you outta my face."

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The invisible hand crushing Dean's throat disappears as soon as Asmodeus zaps out, but Dean still feels it for another full minute—the pressure, the dizziness, the pain. He stays on his knees, hunched over on himself, scrabbling at the sun-bleached scrub grass as he tries to catch his breath.

The ground shakes again. Sam is red-faced and gasping. Beside him, Donatello flops onto his back and lets out a groan.

Jack's eyes are back to normal, and he looks uncertain now, spooked by what he almost did, what he might be capable of. But before—Jesus Christ.

He's a grenade without a fucking pin.

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Missouri and Jody are up in Omaha: east on US 36, north on US 81, east and northeast on I-80. Dean makes the trip in one shot, nursing a mud-thick cup of coffee he bought at the Midway Co-Op—the only gas station in Lebanon.

He picks up a decent classic rock station as he's passing through Lincoln, but he loses it about twenty minutes out. After that, its static, static, a local talking head, more static, a televangelist peddling fire and brimstone for dollars. He turns it down to a buzz and replays his last conversation with Sam in his head.

He'd meant it when he said he didn't sign up to babysit the Satan Spawn, that he just wants to get back to work. He's a grunt, a monster-killer. He protects people from the stuff that goes

bump in the night. But all this cosmic bullshit—Princes of Hell, archangel nephilims, portals to other dimensions—it's above his paygrade, always has been.

He's tired. So fucking tired. Tired of having to swing at things that are so much bigger than him and losing people when he misses.

And now he's stuck with a ticking timebomb that looks like Cas, sometimes talks like Cas, keeps calling Cas his father, and Cas is gone, and all Dean has left is the ache in his chest.

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"How ya doing?" Jody asks.

Dean says, "Dandy," and pastes a smile on his face like she won't see right through him.

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Sam says, "Dean," and raps his knuckles on the map table. His chair squeaks as he sits up straight. "You said you'd kill him."

Dean rolls his eyes a little; this is the last thing he needs after two fourteen-hour drives and a fight with a wraith. "It wasn't exactly like that."

"Then how exactly was it?"

"I told him the truth," Dean says, flat. They've already had this argument about twenty times, but if Sam wants to go another round—fine. "See, you think you can use this freak, but I know how this ends, and it ends bad."

"I didn't."

"What?"

"I didn't end bad," Sam repeats. "When I was the freak." He stands as he continues, "When I was drinking demon blood."

"C'mon, man. That's totally different."

"Was it?" Sam demands, anger flushing his cheeks and jaw. "Because you could've put a bullet in me. Dad *told* you to put a bullet in me. But you didn't. You *saved* me." His next breath is ragged, short. "So help me save him."

"You deserved to be saved," Dean barks. Sam is his *brother*; killing him was never on the table. And Dean knows, somewhere deep down, that killing a kid Cas wanted to protect shouldn't be on the table either. But Cas' *isn't here*. All Dean can think about is the noise Cas made when the blade went through, his wings scorching shadows into the dirt. "He doesn't."

"Yes, he does, Dean. Of course he does."

Dean says, "Look," and moves out of the doorway. "I know you think you can use him as some sort of interdimensional can-opener, and that's fine. But don't act like you care about him. "You—" he points at Sam "—only care about what he can do for you. So if you want to pretend, that's fine. But me? I can hardly look at the kid. Because when I do, all I see is everybody we've lost."

"Mom chose to take that shot at Lucifer," Sam insists. "That is not on Jack."

"And what about Cas?"

"What *about* Cas?"

"He manipulated him!" Dean shouts. His anger is a living thing—churning gut, pounding pulse. "He made him promises—said paradise on earth. And Cas bought it! And you know what it got him? It got him dead! You might be able to forget about that, but I can't!"

Sam's shoulders slump. He says, "Dean, whatever Cas saw, whatever he believed—"

"Don't," Dean snaps. "Just don't."

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Mia sighs. She says, "You're angry, Dean," and fiddles with the mug in her hands.

And?" Dean counters. That shot of Wild Turkey is burning the back of his throat.

"And, if you don't want to do anything about it, that's your business. But you're aiming it at everyone in your life."

Dean's about to say, *No shit, Sherlock*, when Sam comes busting in with his gun out.

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As they're leaving, Mia stops Dean with a careful hand on his elbow. When he turns around, she says, "You lost someone else. Besides your mother."

His mouth opens around a lie, but he makes himself swallow it. It's not like he's ever going to see this chick again. "Yeah. He—he died right in front of me. I couldn't save him."

"That must be difficult," she says—genuine sympathy, no pity. "Was he your partner? Boyfriend?"

"No," Dean replies, throat tight. "He—we weren't, um. It wasn't—no."

After a pause, she says, "You had unfinished business."

"You could say that."

"Do you have a picture of him?"

Dean has four pictures—

*Cas at the Bottle Tree Ranch after a werewolf hunt in the Mojave Desert, color dancing on one side of his face from the sunlight reflecting through the glass; Cas standing outside his Gas N Sip in Rexford, his hair combed flat and his blue vest missing a button; Cas leaning against the Continental in a motel parking lot in College Station, the no vacancy sign a orange-red smear over his shoulders; Cas in the bunker's library, surrounded by piles of books*

—but Dean squeezes his hands into fists so he doesn't grab his phone. He's sure what Mia does helps some people, but he doesn't think it would help him. Having Cas back for a few minutes just to lose him again would probably send him straight off the deep end.

"Not with me, no."

The look on her face says she isn't buying what he's selling, but she doesn't push it. She says, "I know you think therapy is crap, but finding closure is important. Visit his grave, or a place you shared together, and be with him there. Say the things you wanted to say."

+

US 281 is a two-laner between Red Cloud and Lebanon, cuts a nearly-straight and narrow line through cornfields and flint hills. Sam is dozing with his head tipped against the window; Jack is futzing with a plastic hand-puzzle they picked up at a fuel stop in Des Moines. Dean has Iron Maiden in the tape deck—"Hallowed be Thy Name." He squints against the afternoon sun slicing through the Impala's windshield.

They pass a windmill a few miles over the Kansas line, an old Aerometer with a slight lean and three or four missing blades. Dean's driven by it at least a couple hundred times. He's never given it much thought, but Cas mentioned it once, on a trip to North Dakota to check out some funky deaths, had started rambling about the wonders of human engineering, the marvels of the human mind.

Dean had enjoyed listening to him, even if some of it had gone over his head. Usually, Cas had sat in the passenger seat like a stiff, all straight shoulders and back, but right then he'd been bright-eyed, smiling, waving his hands. Dean wishes now that he'd asked more questions, kept him talking longer.

He wishes they'd had more time.

*Finding closure is important. Be with him there. Say the things you wanted to say.*

Fuck.

Dean slows down enough to flip a U-turn and heads back toward the windmill. Once he's even with it, he pulls onto the soft shoulder, bumping over ruts and rocks and patches of wild scrub.

The rough ride jolts Sam awake; he sits up with a bleary noise and looks around. "What—what's going on?"

"We're stopping," Jack says helpfully.

Sam asks Dean, "Everything alright?"

"Yeah." Dean's voice dips. "I'm gonna, uh. I was thinking—" He gestures outside. "Cas."

"Cas?" Sam asks slowly. He looks around again, like he thinks Cas is waiting on the side of the road. A beat later he figures it out; he adds, "Oh, okay," and nods his head. "Out there?"

"Yeah, I—" Dean cuts off, swallows hard. "Looks nice. Peaceful."

Jack leans over Sam's shoulder and asks, "What's he going to do?"

"He's going to scatter Cas' ashes out in that field," Sam explains. "He's going to put him to rest."

Hearing it like that makes Dean bristle, but he knows Sam didn't mean anything by it, so he bites back a shitty remark. Instead, he asks, "You coming?"

After a pause, Sam says, "No. You go. You should—yeah."

The coffee can is still in the Impala's trunk, wrapped in an old flannel shirt and braced between two cannisters of salt. It hasn't felt right—leaving him in the dark, letting him rattle around with the rosaries and gun oil and salt rounds, but Dean didn't know what else to do. The field behind the bunker is local boondocking spot—asshole kids pitching tents and pissing on trees and throwing beer cans in the brush and tearing up everything with their dirt bikes—and keeping him an urn on a bookshelf like some kind of fucked up trophy would probably drive Dean out of his mind.

He grabs the can, closes the trunk, and wades through the knee-high prairie grass between the windmill and the road.

The property's been abandoned for years; the last things standing are the windmill, a rusted water tank, and a house that's more ribs than shiplap. Behind that, there's the corpse of a tractor and a pile of wood that probably used to be the barn.

Near the feet of the windmill, a stream is ribboning through the grass, about two-feet wide and sluggish. One bank is blooming with wildflowers, maybe ragwort, something with fluffy centers and long, thin, yellow petals. Dean walks over to where they're growing the thickest, crowding up around a pair of boulders just big enough to sit on. He spreads the ashes there as evenly as he can, watching as they sift down between the leaves.

"Cas," Dean says quietly. "I know you can't hear me, but I figured I should give this closure thing a shot." He looks around as he continues, "I think you'd like this place. You were always telling me how much you loved nature.

"I'm sorry. I—I shoulda been watching your back that night. I shoulda known Lucifer was gonna come crawling outta that hole in the Matrix. I shoulda—"

He cuts off, chest aching. He sets the coffee can on one of the rocks so he can rub his stinging eyes.

*Say the things you wanted to say*

He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. He can't decide if it's because he's a coward or because too much was left unsaid. Either way, he just stands there needing a drink and feeling like he's going to puke.

+

Apologies usually go better with gifts, so Dean hands Sam a beer before saying, "Listen, man," and sitting on the edge of the table. "Back at Mia's... I was outta line. I'm sorry for being a dick lately."

*Dick* is an understatement, Dean knows, but Sam just says, "Thanks."

"And, maybe you're right about the kid," Dean continues. "I mean, he tries. I'll give him that. And he tapped his powers, saved our asses, so that's a win."

"Yeah," Sam says, closing the book in his lap. "I guess." He tosses it on the table and sighs.

Dean asks, "What's up?"

After a couple false starts, Sam asks, "What if you're right? About Mom?" He sighs again and looks away. "What if she is dead, and I'm just in denial?"

"Don't say that."

"What—? You've been wanting me to admit it since it happened."

"I know I have. But—" Dean shakes his head. "Don't say that. I need you to keep the faith. For both of us. Because right now, I... I don't believe in a damn thing."

Sam is quiet for a long moment. Then: "Look, I know you and Cas, uh—I know he... meant a lot to you, but—"

"Sam," Dean warns.

"Hey." Sam holds up one hand in surrender. "I know better than to ask questions. I just want to say, from experience, it's never going to be easy, but it does get easier."

Dean swallows some beer before asking, "Jess?"

"Yeah."

"I guess you'd know," Dean says. It's the closest he's ever come to admitting it, except to himself. "I just—right now, I don't believe that either."

+

"You've changed," Billie observes. "And you tell people it's not a big deal. You tell people you'll work through it, but you know you won't. You can't, and that scares the hell out of you. Or... am I wrong?"

"What do you want me to say?" Dean asks tiredly. "It doesn't matter. I don't matter."

Billie lifts an eyebrow. "Don't you?"

Dean—he doesn't fucking know. "I couldn't save Mom. I couldn't save Cas. I can't even save a scared little kid." Billie's just staring at him, but now that he's started, he can't make himself stop. "Sam keeps trying to fix it, but I just keep dragging him down. So... I'm not gonna beg, okay? If it's my time, it's my time."

"You really believe that," Billie says. It isn't really a question, so Dean doesn't answer. Billie's mouth twists as she decides, "You want to die."

*Want* is a strong word. Dean just doesn't care anymore.

Billie says, "Dean," and moves to the shelves, skims her fingers over the spines of the books. "Every notebook on this particular shelf tells a version of how you die. You, specifically." She touches one and adds, "heart attack," then another, "burned by a red-haired witch," and then another, "stabbed by a ghoul in a graveyard... and on and on and on."

Dean looks at the shelves—the height, the width, the number of books just dedicated to him—but he can't wrap his head around it. He doesn't even try.

"But," Billie muses. "Which one's right?" She tips her head to the side and gives Dean a long, narrow look. "That depends on you. On the choices, you make."

*Castiel? He's dead—all the way dead. Because of you.*

"Well, I guess I made my choice."

Billie's mouth twists again. "But, unfortunately, none of these books say you die today."

"Come again?"

"Since I got this... new job," she says, walking closer to Dean, "I stand witness to a much larger picture. Do you know what I see? You, and your brother. You're important."

"Why?"

She says, "You have work to do," and gives him another inscrutable look. "That's all you need to know. And trust me, having my eyes opened to the necessity of any humans, especially Winchesters, is not a thrill. So... you want to die, but I say, keep living."

+

"I just need a win. I just need a damn win."

+

They're cruising past a crossroads town called Last Chance when Dean's phone rings.

He knows the voice on the other end must be a hallucination, but that doesn't stop him from leaning on the gas.

+

"Cas?" Dean asks. A siren wails in the distance. "Is that really you?"

"No," Sam says, before Cas can reply. "You—you're dead."

Cas says, "Well, I was," and walks toward them. The blue-bright light from the payphone casts his face in shadows and angles. "But then I annoyed an ancient cosmic being so much that it sent me back."

"I—" Sam just stares at him. "I don't even know what to say."

Dean says, "I do," with his heart in his throat and closes the distance between them. "Welcome home, pal."

He pulls Cas in too roughly, hugs him too long and too tight and too close. He can't stop himself from breathing Cas in, from touching the back of Cas' neck as he moves aside to make room for Sam.

As Sam steps back, Cas asks, "How long was I gone?"

"It's been—" Dean clears his throat, swallows hard. "It's been awhile."

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Dean says honestly. "Much better now."

Another siren. Sam asks Cas, "What do you remember?"

"I came to in a meadow," Cas replies. He pauses like he's picturing it. "There was an old windmill with a garden near a quiet brook. Then I walked here."

Sam nods. "That's where Dean spread your ashes, after we burned you."

"You liked the windmill?" Dean asks. "I thought it was a real calm, zen sorta place."

"I did," Cas says, smiling. "It was a nice touch."

+

"I can't believe you brought your own hat," Sam says.

Dean scoffs. "I can't believe you didn't."

"You're in a good mood, huh?"

"Yeah? And?"

"Nothing. I just—you've been having a rough go. It's good to see you smile."

Dean smiles. He's breathing easy for the first time in two weeks. "Well, I said I needed a big win. We got Cas back. That's a pretty damn big win."



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