

The Sum Of My Regrets

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The Sum Of My Regrets

by [LoveIsNotAVictoryMarch](#)

Summary

“A quick trip to the past, that’s all. Look Cas, I know we can’t do anything about all the innocent people getting into the crossfire of our battles, but this I can do. Let me rescue this child and give Lily Sunder back her life. What can possibly go wrong?”

In which Dean Winchester travels through time, learns a thing or two about best laid plans and falls in love with an angel – all over again.

Notes

As always, I'm super grateful to my friend and beta, [Marie](#), who ensures this makes any kind of sense before I get it out into the void.

Note concerning the rating: I'm aware of the consent issues that emerge from the idea of vessels and will address them when needed.

Chapter 1

Dean's standing in the middle of an odd pentagram while Rowena chants witchy gibberish. He can feel the power buzzing in the air around him. The hair on his forearms stands up and a shiver runs down his spine.

Sam, on the other side of the room and past the dark red demarkation lines, holds a golden bowl with assorted herbs and bones and whatnot, his face a careful mask that betrays how much he disagrees with Dean's decision. Cas stands back, eyes fixated on Dean, and he looks guilty as hell.

He better, Dean thinks, but his heart isn't in it. Or rather, it's in it a little bit too much.

Cas is fiddling with his hands and his mouth works like he desperately wants to say something, but Dean shakes his head, and Cas' lips vanish in a tight line. They've been over this, and Dean won't back down.

After everything Cas has done for them he wants to give something back. His heart hurts when he thinks about the angel beating himself up about the death of an innocent. Listening to Ishim judging Cas for his decisions had reminded Dean all too clearly of everything Cas has lost. Yes, Sam and him have told him over and over that he's family. Maybe it's time to make true on that assertion and follow it up with action, even if it's the dumb kind of action Winchesters use to show each other their... affection.

Dean tears his gaze away from Cas and meets his brothers' eyes. Sam's voice is rough when he says "take care", and flicks a match into the bowl. The contents light up in a blue flame. It jumps to the sigils Sam drew onto the floor with Dean's blood, and licks up his body. Rowena is still chanting. The spell pushes against his ribs, sucks the air right out of his lungs, and Dean wants to scream when the pressure builds.

The expression of disapproval and concern on Sam's face morphs into panic and he turns to Rowena.

The room goes black. Dean doesn't feel his knees hitting the floor.

He comes to with the smells of bleeding grass and moist earth filling his nose. Eyes adjusting, he focuses on a daisy right in front of him. He knows the spell worked because a) he's outside and b) it's spring instead of fall and so sunny his eyes fill with tears.

His hands fly to the bag he's carrying – angel blade, some old dollar bills, a map and the pendant that hopefully will bring him back to his own time; if his plan works out.

Plan might be a little bit of an euphemism, though. He'd gone into this on half-formed strategies, cobbled together over a bottle of whiskey and seasoned with a good dose of thick-headed determination. Well, it's more than he has most days when he rushes into action, so it'll have to suffice.

Standing up, he dusts off his pants and sets off west where he can see a road in the distance.

Cas had come to him the evening after Lily Sunder had killed Ishim. He had stood in Dean's room, fists clenched at his side, so hard four white points marked his knuckles. He hadn't said a word for so long that Dean had grown restless. When he finally spoke, his voice had been thin and off.

"I let that child die," he had said, and Dean hadn't asked what he meant. He had gone over and tugged Cas' reluctant, stiff body in a hug and he had held on until the tension slowly bled out of his best friend. He hadn't told Cas that it wasn't his fault, that he didn't know and that he could have done nothing, because he hated it whenever people tried to placate him with bullshit like that. Because it didn't change the fact that Cas felt responsible. *Do you think I deserve to die?*, Cas had asked in the church and Dean's stomach still heaves at the memory.

Cas had trotted off to bed after a while, but Dean had lain awake for hours, before he had gone over to the library.

And that's how he ended up here, clad in a Victorian costume that had cost more than the expensive ingredients for the spell, but less than Rowena's help. He inhales the crisp spring air and relishes the sun warming his back.

Birds are singing all around him. With a start he realizes why they are so loud - because everything else is so quiet. He can't remember the last time he didn't hear any modern sounds at all. Even behind the thick walls of the bunker there's the constant wheezing of the old vents, the labored huffs of the fridge and low hum of the laptops. The deep rumble of his baby and the backdrop of news and soap in the diners are so much a part of his life that he doesn't pay attention to it anymore. It's only now, with the absence, that he's aware of that baseline of sound.

Before the nausea about the sheer stupidity of his plan can bubble up, he turns his face to the sun and promises himself to make the best of it. He's gonna rescue a child and he's gonna give Cas some peace of mind and keep him safe and then he will return home and have some awesome stories to tell about his trip to the past. When he finally

reaches the road and turns left on instinct, there's a new purpose in his stride and a small smile forms on his lips.

Orono, Maine dates back to 1774 when the first European settlers chose the area between Penobscot and Stillwater River to put down roots. They gave their town the name of Chief Joseph Orono of the Penobscot tribe that had welcomed the new Americans and had paid a high price for it. By 1900, about three thousand people called Orono their home, and the most remarkable thing about it is the University of Maine, founded in 1862 and specialized in engineering and agricultural science.

That's about all Dean knows about the town he's (hopefully) headed into. The reality of it sinks in only when he passes the town sign and looks up the main street. No cars in sight. No traffic lights or phones or modern clothes. Only a few people are milling around, women in the trademark silhouettes of Victorian fashion. Small hats sit on meticulously arranged hair, almost playful and in stark contrast to the serene morals of the time.

The men wear loser fits in subdued colors, but they seem to pay equal attention to their appearance. Dean stands and stares for a few minutes. He's always loved to immerse himself in history, and at times he's had to work hard to hold up the façade of grumpy reluctance when he and Sam had to dive into archives for a case. To be in the middle of it, without the immediate danger they had faced in Sunrise, Wyoming, – without having to fight a freaking phoenix – has him giddy with anticipation.

He tugs his bag higher on his shoulder, tips his hat to a mother with three children in tow who cross the street in front of him, and sets out to find Lily Sunder.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

Dean ends up on the carriage of Jacob Miller, a local farmer whose grounds lie next to those of Mrs. Sunder and who happens to know that she will be in the library of the university this time of day. When he stopped beside Dean on the road, Dean told him he's a distant cousin and Jacob offered to take him over there.

Jacob has a broad face, already or still tanned from working outside all day, and calloused hands that hold the leather reins of his black field horse with practiced ease. The cart is old, but well-kept. Dean implicitly trusts a man who takes good care of his ride.

They stay silent for a while, before Jacob turns to him: "Where are my manners. My condolences. It's a pity that the Lord took Jim so early."

Dean's brain needs a second to catch up. Jacob seems to assume Dean knew Lily's late husband who died a while ago. He shakes his head and admits "I haven't seen Lily since before the wedding, never met Jim. Though I hear he was a good guy."

Jacob jumps at the opportunity to share some gossip. He liked Lily's husband and they had worked together to bring the harvest in each year. He speaks highly of the widow, but Dean can see that he isn't as close to Lily. A female scholar still was an exception in these times, and a woman who worked to provide for her child instead of going back to her parents or marry another man still counted as strange.

There's no malice in Jacob's tale, though. He tells him how he helps around the house when something's broken or needs to be lifted and Dean thanks him. Jacob nods in answer.

"Now that you're there, I guess I won't be needed anymore?" His smile is warm and he sounds genuinely glad that his neighbor will have company.

"I'm not sure if I will stay long and if I will stay at the Sunder's farm," he says and Jacob shakes his head.

"You've come all the way here to visit, of course you'll have to stay. And I don't think Lily won't offer you the guest room or the old crofter's cabin. That one needs a whole bunch of repairs, so you'll have something to occupy your hands for a few weeks." Jacob looks awfully pleased with his solution. Dean is sure the whole town will have heard about his plan by afternoon.

Chuckling to himself at the idea that a visitor will be the biggest news in weeks, Dean concentrates on his surroundings again. They leave the town and enter the forested outskirts. Under the high canopy of trees, the temperature drops, and Dean is thankful for his warm clothes.

The road leads straight ahead where a circle of sunlight grows at the end of the dark and cool tunnel. Suddenly, Dean can't wait to be back in the sun and he shivers ever so slightly. The trees open around them – finally – and Dean sucks in a relieved breath.

A few minutes later they stop by a large building with high windows and thick walls made of red brick. Jacob points to the sturdy wooden doors. "Here we are, Mr. Winchester."

Dean extends his hand and shakes with the burly farmer. "Thank you."

He recognizes Lily immediately. She's leaning over one of the broad library tables and the afternoon light flooding through the high windows sets off flames of red and copper in her hair. Next to her, another woman leans over the array of old books in front of them. Dean can only make out dark hair and a white dress. The women are talking animatedly, obviously discussing what they read.

Dean clears his throat when he approaches the table and two sets of eyes land on him. They don't look happy about the interruption. "Can we help you?" Lily asks.

"Yes. My name is Dean Winchester and I'm looking for Mrs. Lily Sunder?" Dean reaches out to shake her hand, and Lily grips it with a surprised glint in her eyes. Right, not yet common. He makes the best of it and offers his hand to the other woman, too. Her grip is tight and she nods. "Francesca Durruti." Despite the foreign name, something feels familiar about her, but Dean can't quite pinpoint what...

Lily's voice cuts through his thoughts.

"I am Lily Sunder. Have we met?"

"No," Dean says, trying to recollect what he wanted to say. "I'm here because I heard about your research about angels and would like to talk to you about your findings."

Her face scrunches up in doubt and distrust before her features smooth into a mask of wary interest.

"I don't think I recall your name. It's not a very popular discipline. I would know your name if you published anything."

Dean puts on his best innocent smile, the one that gets him into the houses of old grumpy men with sawed-off shotguns next to the door. He's not sure if he can fool Lily Sunder.

"You're right. I haven't published anything. I'm part of a larger group that takes an interest in the supernatural. We like to keep out of the spotlight." His gaze flicks over to Lily's colleague and catches her brows lifting in surprise.

Lily turns to her and they seem to have a silent discussion, before her focus lands back on Dean.

“Can you tell me what this word means?” Her elegant fingers point to an Enochian term in one of the books in front of her.

Dean racks his brain and hopes it doesn't show. “It's Enochian and it means law.”

They talk for hours. It turns out that Francesca is an Italian scholar who sought out Lily after reading one of her articles on an Enochian inscription found in a cave in India. Her voice is soft and the vocals drawn out around the words she's not yet fully familiar with, and Dean would think it's cute if he didn't sense the steel underneath. He won't make the mistake to underestimate her.

Their eyes lock over the open books between them that deals with Angelic rules and laws. Francesca's irises are a unique light shade of blue and Dean's reminded of glaciers with millennia old water streaming under and through them. That strange feeling of recognition comes back, and it's silly because there's no way he's met this woman before.

He shakes his head and turns to Lily who delved into a lecture about her studies. Lily explains her research so far and something about it bugs Dean. She doesn't mention the possibility of “summoning” an angel at all. At first he thinks she doesn't trust him, but he can't shake the feeling that everything she's telling him is purely hypothetical.

“Have you ever seen one?”

Lily smiles a sad little smile. “An Angel?” She laughs. “No. I haven't.”

Being a professional liar himself, he's gotten pretty good at reading others. And Lily sounds sincere, exactly like a scientist that still dreams of seeing a live specimen instead of reading books about it. But it's spring, and by now she should have met Ishim and send him away and called Akobel for help. That doesn't bode well. At all.

“Excuse me for a moment.” Dean turns and runs back to the entrance of the library where he saw a stack of newspapers when he came in. Lily isn't keeping anything from him. It's May 5th.

1900.

Sorry for the short chapter, life is busy. The next one will be longer, I promise. Fran is named after the Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti, because I just read a book about him and it seemed fitting. She's my very first (significant) OC btw.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Alright guys, here's the (only slightly longer) new chapter. I don't know about you, but I already miss Cas, so next week this will pick up some speed.

He's leaning against the dark wood paneling, breathing heavily and cursing under his breath, when Francesca – which he already shortened to Fran in his mind – finds him. Her delicate hand lands on his shoulder and she turns him to face her.

“Take deep breaths,” she advises in her melodic cadence, and Dean concentrates on her features and her unusual eyes until he can think straight again.

“Did you come here with the hope that Mrs. Sunder knows how to speak to angels?”

Dean's head snaps up. She's way too perceptive for her own good, he thinks, and nods slowly. He has to weave a story together, fast.

“Uhm, yes, I ... I lost someone and ... my mom used to tell me angels were watching over me, so when I heard about this research....”

A small smile forms on Fran's lips, and there's pity in her eyes. “You should try to make your peace with the loss.” Her voice is warm but steady, and she closes her mouth as if there's more she wants to say.

“Why? I mean, you're here, too, have you never thought about the opportunity to ask an angel for a favor if you meet one?”

Now the smile turns into something bright and Fran covers her face with a pale hand, eyes gleaming. “I'm sorry,” she says and her face turns serious and compassionate again. “Mr. Winchester, ...”

“Dean”, he interrupts.

“Dean. I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God and I don't believe in angels. And I'm here to prove that I'm right.”

Although she seems sure he's wasting his time with his plan to get the help of an angel, Fran is sympathetic and stands by his side when he asks Lily for her help. His offer is simple: he tells her about meeting Jacob Miller on his way here and how he heard that she might need someone capable of hard work. He'll help around the house and the land over the summer, he bargains, and join in on the research whenever he can.

In return Lily will share her findings with him and let him live in the old guest house. They shake on it and Dean holds her hand awkwardly when he confesses that he might have given Jacob the impression that he was Lily's cousin. She laughs at that and tells him to stick to that story – the people around will accept that explanation more easily than him seeking her advice on angelic studies.

They walk the three miles to the Sunder's home and Lily seems deep in thought the whole way. She doesn't trust him yet, Dean's sure, and why should she. He is a stranger that is about to enter her home, and he could feel her relief when Fran offered to go with them and stay the night at Lily's house.

The tension in Lily's shoulders lessens the nearer they get to her home. The afternoon sun is still bright but it has gotten cooler already with the longer shadows and moisture crawling from the long grass. Dean talks quietly to Fran who's telling him about her small flat on the University grounds and that she gives Italian courses three times a week to cover her expenses. They don't come back to her earlier admission, and he wonders if Lily knows.

The trees open up to a wide field full of spring flowers and Dean takes in the scene in front of him. Lily's home is a dark shade of yellow, a sunflower in full bloom, and looks so friendly and inviting that his hunter brain immediately suspects a trap. A low white fence surrounds the building and frames the small vegetable garden at the front. The dark earth is turned into neat rows and, as they come nearer, Dean can spot the first green peeking through the soil.

Lily takes the steps up to the house swiftly but she isn't fast enough – the door is swung open before she can reach the handle, and a young girl, maybe five years old, tackles her with full speed. "Mama! You won't believe what Myriam did today!"

Lily scoops the kid – it must be May, her daughter, the reason for this whole ordeal – up onto her hip and enters the house in a bubble of excited chatter, turning just for a second to beckon Fran and Dean in. Fran scoops up her skirt and follows mother and daughter. Dean comes in last and closes the door behind him, momentarily blinded by the darkness inside.

Dean meets Myriam Webster, house maid and governess for May when she's not in school, a blond girl with strong arms, a never-ending supply of smiles and patience for May and zero tolerance for anything else. She cooked a tasty vegetable stew for dinner and takes a seat at

the table. After a hasty prayer – Fran doesn't join in – they dig in and enjoy the warm meal. May stops talking for all but five minutes until she finishes her bowl and then picks up the tale about the day's adventures right where she dropped it.

Dean watches Lily and can't believe it's the same person he met in a gritty motel only a week ago. Aside from the different clothes and the fact that this woman still has both her eyes, they seem like two completely different people. This Lily laughs about her daughter's story and pitches in with questions and exclamations, eyes glinting, full of happiness and love. It's almost too much to witness the difference so close and undeniably. He met a broken shell, honed by rage and vengeance, barely human anymore. And with a sudden fierceness he wants not only to do this for Cas, and for May, but for her too. Because knowing the person she became and seeing her now, in such stark contrast, seems somehow like a fate worse than death.

He turns to look at Fran who had watched him closely the whole time. A small crease forms between her perfectly arched brows, like he's a puzzle she wants to solve. Dean answers with a big smile. If everything works according to plan, there are quite a few more surprises waiting for her.

The house is nestled between gentle hills, and Lily told him they used this spot because the ground couldn't be ploughed with a big wain. The fact that this corner of the land looked like a painting out of a story book was just a bonus. The flower beds on both sides of the small path and along the front are overgrown, but Dean can still make out specks of color where a late tulip and a few columbines hold their ground between the weeds.

He grips the package in his arms a bit tighter to keep things from tumbling out. After dinner, Myriam had rummaged around the house to put it together: an old but warm blanket, a soft pillow, one of Jim's jumpers (her eyebrow had curved up accusingly when he had stated he only owned the things he wore, but she hadn't said anything, just vanished to come back with the bundle of off-white cotton), a few pieces of bread and an oil-lamp.

Fran had offered to show him the way and help him getting set up, but that had led to another one of those eyebrow lifts and Fran had only turned to him with a shrug that said "You heard her." Dean had to smile about the dynamics in the house. He was also aware that the women would do well to not trust a stranger. So he had nodded over to Myriam in silent agreement and she had run off to go and search for lamp oil.

When the necessities were finally assembled, the sun had started to drop behind the tall trees. Dean had thanked Lily and Myriam for their hospitality and wished them all a good night. The small path ran from the back of the vegetable garden for about a mile to the guest house. Dean couldn't miss it.

Now he stands in front of the small building and lets his eyes wander over the picturesque view in front of him. Even if everything runs according to his hastily adjusted “plan”, this will be his home for a few weeks.

He can see the signs of neglect. The rain gutter hangs loose and the paint on the window frames is cracking. He’ll have to pull the weeds and repair the two steps up to the door. Jacob was right: he will have enough work on his hands to justify his stay. In the fading sunlight, the house looks inviting even in its run-down state. He will get to work right in the morning. Right now he’ll have to settle in for the night.

He puts the stack of things in his arms down on an old chair next to the door and gets the key out of his pocket. The lock is rusty and hasn’t been used in a while, so he tugs and turns a few times before the door swings open with a loud screech. He’s greeted by the moldy smell of unoccupied houses and dust motes dancing in the low yellow light.

Getting his things inside, he sets up the lamp first and lights it. Then he goes searching for the bed, and finds a solid looking frame and a hard straw-filled mattress in the room to the left from the entrance. To the right he finds a larger room with a small fireplace and a table with four chairs, a cupboard and a dresser, all made from sturdy oak wood and decorated with small pattern.

Beside the cast-iron oven, a back-door opens to the garden behind the house where Lily told him he would find the well. He snatches the tin jug from the table, goes out to fill it with fresh water and take a few big gulps directly from the jug before he fills it again.

It’s getting cold fast and he shivers in the dark, grateful to have a place to stay. He sees the fire wood stacked high on the back of the house and remembers that he’ll have to get the oven going, too. Sighing, he shuts the well and sets to work.

When he finally falls into bed it’s pitch-black outside and he’s fast asleep seconds after he closes his eyes.

Chapter 4

Dean sleeps like someone knocked him out. Time travel is exhausting – he remembers that now, and he isn't even taking into account the upsetting news that he's a whole freaking year early. He sleeps until ten, and stays in bed because the room outside his cocoon of warmth is freezing.

Lying on his back on the surprisingly comfortable mattress and letting his gaze drift through the plain room, he takes stock: he came here to stop Ishim from killing Lily's daughter and then go back home. The pendant Rowena gave him had to be "activated" (that's how Sam translated the witchy term for him) ... by grace.

He had trusted his charm to get Cas to help him back to his own time once he'd get rid of Ishim. That had been his plan – and he had been sure enough he could make it work to let himself be thrown through time with one set of old-fashioned clothes and his talent to improvise.

Now this plan had gotten seriously jumbled. First of all – Ishim hadn't even shown up yet. That might be a good thing, because Dean could just tell Lily to never (even if she really, really wanted to) summon an angel, and be done with it. Problem was, he needed an angel to get back. So he had to get an angel earth-side, plus it had to be one special angel, the only one he would trust not to betray them.

He worries his bottom-lip. Maybe he could just pray? For a moment he lets his mind wander, wondering how it would happen if Cas would react to his message. The gas station? Bursting windows and nearly blasting out his eardrums because he doesn't know yet how fragile human bodies are? Dean remembers the unnerving pressure in the room, the high-pitched sound and the primal knowledge that he wasn't alone, that a powerful being was right beside him...

Goosebumps break out on his skin and he's growing restless just thinking about it. And he should really not, he knows that. He tried to *not* think about all that a lot in the past. The fact that Cas plucked him from hell, even after all these years, makes him queasy. He's still not sure why Cas did it.

He still doesn't know why it had to be Cas and why it had to be him and what it all means for both of them. Did it mean they were some kind of star-crossed... whatever they are? Did their story follow a cosmic script or had Cas been right and they had ripped up the ending via free will and pure stubbornness?

That possibility doesn't give him the slightest bit of solace either, because Cas going against everything he knew, against his mission and his family for him still makes Dean's mind spin and fans the eager little flame deep in his chest, that annoying *thing* he's carried around with him for so many years it might as well be another organ.

Cas would never just be an angel to him, and he wonders: would Cas feel now that Dean wasn't just any human?

If he heard Dean, would he just stride into the room, as he had in the barn, all otherworldly swagger and dominance, sparks raining down around him, while Dean lay here in his undies... He scrambles out of bed at the thought, jumps into his clothes at maximum speed, both because of the cold and to avoid facing Cas without his pants on.

He kneels down at the front of the bed. Feeling ridiculous, but desperate enough to try, he starts: *I pray to the angel Castiel. You don't know me, but I need your help. Could you be bothered to move your feathery a.... (stay polite, Dean) frame down here?*

He still isn't exactly sure how secure angel radio is when targeted on one angel, so he leaves it at that rather ominous question. He hopes he doesn't draw unnecessary attention; this is a shot in the dark anyway. Dean needs a better plan than that. And for that he needs Lily and Fran.

Lily and Fran are long gone to their classes when he arrives at the house. He finds Myriam in the kitchen and is greeted by the stern, reprimanding look he already knows.

"Mrs. Sunder told me to make you breakfast when you turned up. It's closer to noon now..." she indicates the steaming pot full of stew on the stove, "...but we set aside bread and ham for you, so..."

Dean thanks her and takes the two pieces of bread she points to while she cuts off thick slices from the cocked ham.

"When you are done eating, I'll show you the shed."

The shed is small and dark and dusty, but when his eyes adjust after a while, he finds it well-equipped. Lily hasn't left instructions where he should start, so he chooses the tools he will need to fix the rain pipe on the cabin as well as all the garden implements he can carry and goes back to his temporary accommodations.

Time flies by working with the surprisingly warm spring sun on his back and a clear goal in front of him. Dean always loved working with his hands, building and repairing things. A simple problem, one step after the other to the solution. If something goes wrong, you can try again.

The boards holding up the gutter have rotted away over the years, so he replaces them and pushes the pipe back up to fixate it on the new ones. By the time he's done with that, he's

sweating in the afternoon sun and goes over to the well for a drink.

The place is quiet, peaceful, and he finds himself breathing in deeply, listening to his own heartbeat and the whistling trees and the birds singing. Out of nowhere, Bobby's voice drifts through his mind: "When you live this far out, you have to learn to get along fine with yourself" and the memory makes him smile. It seems like he has some time on his hands to do exactly that.

The sun touches the tops of the tall fir on the west border of the garden when he finishes pulling the weeds around the house. He'll dig through the patch of overgrown land he found behind the well tomorrow – maybe Lily will share some seeds and he can grow a few carrots and onions himself.

He cleans the tools and takes them back to the shed before he washes his hands and enters the house through the kitchen. May's chirping laughter leads him to the living room, where the others are sitting at the table and playing a card game.

"There you are," Fran sighs, "I'm starving, but May told us it would be impolite to have dinner without you."

May hides behind her cards and nods solemnly. She might be too shy to talk to him yet, but she stands by her word. Dean turns to her and bows. "That's very nice of you, May. I hope I didn't make you wait too long?"

Lily chuckles when May's forehead creases in thought. "No, it's been about five minutes. How was your day?"

Dean tells them about his progress over dinner, earning a warm thank-you from Lily and a nod from Myriam – which he counts as the high praise it probably is. May's lids are drooping by the time they had their dessert and Myriam scoops her up to bring her to bed.

Dean had taken the day to make up his mind about his next steps. Now he seizes the chance to talk to the scholars and ease his way into asking for their help.

"Have you ever tried to summon an angel?" he asks Lily, carefully avoiding Fran's gaze and ignoring her huff.

Lily shakes her head and looks down at her clasped hands. "I tried praying, if that's what you mean."

Of course, Dean thinks, losing your husband at such a young age, with a small kid and a job and quite a few acres of land... she must have been desperate.

He clears his throat. "No, actually. The organization I'm part of has assembled a rather vast knowledge about angels, stuff you won't find in official libraries. We own books, old books you might never have heard of. And I found a spell... if I translated it right, it could be the key to *make* an angel appear."

Fran's head shoots up and he can feel her eyes drilling holes in his back, but he concentrates on Lily. Her head is still bowed, and a valley appears in the immaculate skin between her brows. She doesn't want to get her hopes up, he can see it, he knows the feeling like the back of his hand. The flip of the stomach and the bubble of assurance drifting up your throat until you have to choke it down again. He gives her time to go through the motions before he goes on.

"I just need to fill in some gaps and the spell relies on a few rare ingredients. I had hoped you would be willing to help me with the remaining research and aid me in performing the spell."

Lily finally lifts her head and her eyes sparkle despite her best efforts to rein her personal and academic enthusiasm in.

"I would give anything to try."

It's a unusually chilly morning in the middle of June when Fran and Dean pack a few things and mount the old buggy. Blotches of mist cling to the blooming bushes and the sun reaches out tentatively to dissolve them. They spent the last weeks buried in books and translations, searching for the ingredients and checking the spell again and again.

Now they're on their way to Bangor, 10 miles south, a slightly bigger town with a renowned pharmacy, to buy everything the local shops can provide. Dean takes a seat on the carriage and holds out his hand to help Fran up. She ignores it and jumps into the seat beside him, takes the reins and nudges on the horse. She turns to him with a broad smile, eyes gleaming. She's obviously still sure that they will fail. And Dean sincerely hopes he will get the chance to prove her wrong.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for reading and commenting and subscribing!

After Lily had agreed to try and make the spell work, Fran had been quiet for a long time and had watched him closely. Finally, she asked what she could do to help. Being a scientist to the bone she treated this project like every other - as an experiment.

She had started years ago to gather data on each and every incident of people claiming angels exist, from ancient Egyptian scrolls to modern scholars like Lily. And she had made it her goal to prove that every single one of them was fake or explainable by other causes. Like she did with all her projects, she poured all her energy into this one too and helped them with an enthusiasm that had to look like blind faith to an outsider.

That didn't keep her from commenting on the texts they translated with biting sarcasm whenever the authors spoke of the "otherworldly beauty of God's winged messengers that would blind mere humans with the glow of their supremacy". Fran wasn't a woman easily impressed and laughed about the poetic descriptions they had to comb through to find information.

Dean refrained from explaining to her that seeing an angel could very literally cost you your eyesight, and he refrained from admitting that the term "otherworldly beauty" made some nerve in his stomach twinge sharply. He wouldn't have believed anyone who told him about this either before he met his first angel.

The sun rises higher and melts away the fresh morning air. Fran and him have fallen into that easy kind of camaraderie he had with Charlie or Jo, and the silence between them doesn't feel strained. They are each following their own thoughts, Fran focused on the road to lead the horse around potholes and branches, while Dean lets his gaze drift.

They only need two more ingredients for the spell, mandrake and silver cassia (and what a fitting name that is), which they hope to find in the well-stocked pharmacy in the next town. Maybe they will be ready for a first attempt tomorrow, he thinks, and the low hum of anticipation in his veins spikes to a buzz at the possibility.

The prospect to meet an early version of Cas and the chance that he can return home soon mingle into a complex emotion. When he rubs his sweaty hands down his pants, Fran shoots him one of her trademark looks that always seem to go right through him.

“Stop it,” he says, and she snorts, but turns her head back ahead. Dean wonders what she makes of him and what hypotheses about his behaviour she is currently verifying. She obviously isn’t buying his story about wanting a favor from an angel, and she seems to know that he isn’t telling them the whole truth. But that can’t be all, and Dean would bet good money (he doesn’t currently have) that there are some interesting theories about him whirling through her head.

They arrive in Bangor around eleven and navigate the busy main street to a beautiful building with an off-white façade and an intricate bronze door. It looks out of place in a town like this where most people earn their living as farmers or woodworkers. A dark wooden sign with golden letters announces the shop as Bramble’s Pharmacy.

Fran hops down the buggy and fastens the reins on a nearby handle. She dusts off her dark green travelling dress and squints at Dean against the sun. That weird jolt of recognition is back, but Dean’s used to ignoring it by now. He follows her to the door and into the murky half-light of the pharmacy.

Jonathan Bramble is about Dean’s age, tall, lean, dark-haired and full of that specific unobtrusive self-confidence of people who know that they’re best in their field and don’t have to prove it to anyone anymore. His face lights up when they tell him what they’re searching for. He dives into a story about his travels through Australia from which he happened to bring silver cassia back.

“May I ask for what purpose you’ll need it? I’m always interested in new recipes and I don’t recall the specific usage for these.” He lifts the paper bag with the dried bark.

Dean stutters but Fran’s quick mind saves him. “We found it in a French travelogue from the late 1800s, you wouldn’t have heard of it.”

Jonathan nods. “You’re right. I don’t find the time for reading as much as I’d like to. If you are in Bangor again, will you tell me if it worked?”

Fran promises and pays an unholy amount by the time’s standards. With the best wishes of the pharmacist, they step out into the blazing sun. The drive back is spent in silence again but now it’s taken on an urgent undertone. Tomorrow they will try to summon an angel. And Dean has to make sure that angel is Cas.

He tosses and turns half of the night, every nerve strung tight about the next day. When he finally falls asleep, his dreams are full of thorns. There's screams and torture in the worst of them, and when he awakes, shaking, he can't say if he was the one screaming or the one ripping the screams from someone else. His shirt is drenched and he gets up to change it before he crawls back into bed and prays to get another hour of rest in before the sun comes up.

He sinks back into blackness and this time, the dreamscape changes. Washed-out colors form into a familiar scene. He's sitting at the kitchen table at the bunker, a beer bottle sparkling with perspiration in front of him. This is how this dream begins, every time. His dreamself doesn't turn when he feels the weight of a hand on his shoulder, just soaks the comfort in.

Cas can't visit him in his dreams anymore and Dean is aware of that even now, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that he's calmer, centered.

And because the real Cas has no part in this and dreams are places without rules and restraint, he covers Cas' hand with his own and finally turns his head, reaches up with his other palm. The movement is steady and sure like it would never be outside his own mind. He cups Cas' jaw. And because this is a dream in which even the most impossible things are possible, Cas doesn't pull away with a frown and a total lack of understanding like he would if this was real. This Cas bends down, a slow smile moving over his face.

Yes, the books are right, because Cas is blindingly, breathtakingly beautiful. Dean has to close his eyes.

Their lips meet as if they've done this a thousand times, and they have, here, in the safety of Dean's mind. Here he can hum into the kiss and stroke Cas' cheek and let his heart roam free to try and jump out of his chest. They kiss deep and unhurried, warm, wet, and then the room slowly falls away and Dean drifts back towards consciousness.

When he wakes up, loneliness settles back on his chest like a tailored piece of armor. He breathes in and out until he's familiarized with the weight again and ready to face whatever's waiting next.

Setting everything up in Lily's attic takes nearly the whole day. They have to mix the paint to draw sigils and pentagrams, boil some of the ingredients at a low simmer for hours and purge the room with herbs and incense. By afternoon, Fran's hair has come loose and sticks to her shining face, and her cheeks are glowing from exertion. Dean swipes away his own sweat with an old rag before he puts a dozen candles in their designated places.

At home, Sammy does most of this work, and Dean's reminded just how time-consuming it is. He'll have to thank his little brother for the effort when he comes back... if he comes back. He has to concentrate on the instructions, but during the simpler tasks Dean can't help thinking about all the things that could go wrong.

This morning Fran and him had come to an understanding to leave Lily out of the invocation. They don't want to put her in danger. Dean started to argue that he didn't want a young mother in the center of heavenly wrath should anything go wrong, but Fran was faster: She warned that the herbs could have unknown and negative effects when mixed and consumed in such a high dosage. Lily hadn't been happy with the decision, but had agreed reluctantly. She had to think about May and couldn't afford getting sick from poisoning even for a day or two.

Dean hadn't mentioned the much more severe danger that they could summon an angel with a mean streak or a deep aversion to lowly humans. He had gone over the spell more times than he could count, finding all the spots where he could individualize the wild mixture of Enochian and Latin but he could not be sure it would work. Fran had left the invocation to him willingly – Dean assumes so she can make fun of him for it later.

Lily comes up the stairs and puts the small cauldron with their potion on the table. Two glasses sit next to it waiting to be filled as soon as the liquid is cool enough. They'll have to drink a pint each to begin the ritual. He looks over to watch Fran finishing the last line of a sigil. Their eyes meet over the expanse of the room and Dean nods.

Showtime.

He's halfway through the spell when the pressure in room drops and seconds later a blast of energy kills the candles. His skin is itching with power and a small whirring sound begins to build in his ears, pushing against his eardrums. It's high-pitched, nearly unconceivable, but Dean recalls it all too well. The window panes rattle in their frames.

If they already had a radio it would come to life now and spit out white noise. Dean goes on reading and ignores the unsteady tremor in his voice. When he's finished he looks up to see Fran, wide-eyed, shell-shocked. Unable to help himself, the corner of his mouth lifts just a tiny bit. *I told you so*, he thinks, before focusing back on the phenomena wreaking havoc to the room.

Tiny whirlwinds stagger over the floor like drunken goblins. The buzz has built into a screech and drowns out every other sound. Dean takes a deep breath and raises his voice to be heard over the racket. "Sorry for the summoning. We just want to talk to you."

The sound recedes slowly but the pressure in the air still pushes against his skin and there's the smell of ozone that comes with the exertion of grace. All the signs tell him he's sharing

the room with an angel – and he hopes it's *his* angel. Even in the midst of this pandemonium, his mind stumbles over the word, like it always does, and if he had said it out loud he would change the topic now to gloss over the slip-up.

With a hiss the pressure returns to normal and the electric whizzing stops. One of the candles flickers back to life.

“Is it gone?” Fran sounds nothing like her usual cocky self, her voice tiny and unsure.

Dean nods.

“Why?”

“He might not have a vessel yet.” The thought hadn't occurred to Dean before, but it would make sense. Cas had said himself he didn't spend much time on earth before they met.

“What do we do now?”

“We wait.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Unbeta'd, so all mistakes are mine. Sorry for that.

Dean wakes up the next morning from insistent knocking on his door.

Last night performing the spell took its toll; Dean fell asleep right after returning home and slept the whole night without dreaming. Now he shuffles into his pants and drags his half-unconscious body to the front door.

Opening it, he finds Fran, dapper as ever, complete with a neat little hat and carefully coiffed hair. No one should be able to look like this so early. The morning sun is blinding behind her. Dean shields his eyes with a hand and grumbles “Yeah?”

Fran never cared much for etiquette but this she seems to find rude, if the small crease that builds between her brows is anything to go by. It can't be helped: Dean's charming persona is directly tied to having had breakfast and coffee and not being dragged from his bed at ass o'clock in the morning for no good reason.

“You wanted to speak to me,” she states, and Dean tries to remember what she's talking about. Coming up with only a vague memory that he promised her to tell her more about angels and vessels, he turns and beckons her in.

“Come in. I need coffee before I can think clearly.”

Fran follows him and stands in the middle of the kitchen, looking around with big curious eyes. She's never been to his house, they mostly meet up at the university or over at Lily's. Not that there's much to see – it's a simple cottage and Dean hasn't added anything other than a few books and bits and pieces for the kitchen. He stokes the fire in the stove and sets a pot of water to boil.

Fran walks around the room slowly. She touches the wooden panels and a rag on the table as if she's interested in the texture. Dean has seen her doing much weirder things so he concentrates on the coffee. He pours the boiling water over the ground coffee beans and lets it all soak. The smell always reminds him of lazy mornings at the bunker, when they have time to have a proper breakfast before they dive into research for the next case.

There's always a next case.

With a start he realizes that he hasn't killed anything for over a month. Must be a record. For some reason the thought doesn't make him antsy like it used to, maybe because he could occupy his mind with the task at hand over the last weeks.

Fran is done inspecting the room and focuses back on him. He's gotten used to her crazy scientist stare by now and knows he should just let her take her fill. It's worse than ever today. She looks like she wants to take notes on his behavior and he tries hard not to be offended by that.

"So...", Dean starts to distract her from her observations because he's sure she can see things he much rather keep hidden.

She tilts her head and takes a step closer.

"You invited me and said you want to talk to me."

Dean shrugs. "I honestly don't remember what we wanted to talk about. Yesterday was all kinds of crazy. But I can imagine that you have a lot of questions. "

Fran comes closer still and it's unnerving. Dean would step back but he can't because the stove is hot and he's already as close as he can stand to it without getting burned. He holds up his hands when Fran crosses the last line into his personal space. Seriously, wha-

"You are not from this time." It's a statement and finally Dean knows what she has been pondering those last weeks. How did she find out? From the things he knows? His language? He wasn't as careful as he should have been because he felt comfortable in her presence and let down his guard. Well, he would have had to tell her the truth anyway.

"Uhm, yeah. Sorry I kept that from you. I'm looking for a way to get back to my own time."

"And you need my help for that." Dean's surprised by her cool demeanor. He would have thought she would bounce with excitement at the sheer possibility of time travel. Maybe she is still in shock from the events the day before. She holds his gaze steadily. Dean rubs his neck.

"Yes? I think so."

Fran's still *right there* and Dean's body reacts to that closeness in a way it hasn't ever before. Fran is his friend, for god's sake, and he was never interested in her like that. So why is his skin buzzing all of a sudden and his pulse picking up speed? It's ridiculous and totally uncalled for.

He licks his lips, as much a nervous gesture as a symptom of that weird attraction, and Fran's eyes flick down to follow the movement. Dean's stomach tightens. It's been a long time, a very long time since he last got laid but this is a bit over the top. He's not a teenager anymore and the only person that makes him feel like one is –

A sudden premonition makes his heart pound even faster.

Holy. Shit.

He locks gazes with that set of glacier blue eyes. They're big and inquisitive and wise and just a little bit arrogant and ... old. A shiver shoots along his spinal cord and leaves a ice-cold

trail. It's not possible, or is it? His throat works around a sudden lump. He needs a few tries before he can croak out: "Cas?"

The crease reappears and the eyes narrow, cutting away from the mesmerizing blue.

"I am Castiel, angel of the Lord. As such, you should show me some respect."

Dean can feel the relief deep in his bones, where it battles with the absolute surreal experience to see Cas in the body of another person. Intellectually, he knew all along that Cas wouldn't show up wearing Jimmy, but he hadn't really thought it through. Now, he's facing a vessel he knows, a female vessel, and that messes with his brain like nothing else. He's still trying to process the news when Cas speaks again.

"To summon an angel without due cause is a crime against heavenly law and punishable by death. So tell me: Do you have due cause?" Cas sounds like he doesn't care one way or the other and Dean has a déjà vu to the early days when Cas was all heaven's model student, following orders to the point. Good thing Dean knows he has a rebellious streak a mile wide – and had it a long time before he plucked Dean from hell.

Dean has to find a way to work with that knowledge, but first things first.

"I need coffee. Sit down." He turns and prepares the coffee pot, sugar, milk and cups. He takes his time to sort his thoughts. When he comes to the table with two steaming mugs, Cas sits at the far end, back stiff as the neatly pleated dress Fran's wearing. Dean's taken aback once again to see him like this, but oddly enough he already starts to see Cas through all the exterior. He doesn't dwell on what that means and tries to concentrate on the task at hand: convincing Cas to help him.

"You came from the future to save a child from an attack of one of our most accomplished warriors which would happen in about eleven months. For this, you have no proof other than your word. And by summoning me, you think you changed history so that the attack will not take place. So you want me to send you back to your own time ...," he seems to grope for the right word "... as a personal favor."

Okay, when you worded it like that, it sounds a bit sketchy, but Cas isn't wrong.

"Yeah, that's the gist of it."

"I don't grant favors." Cas' voice is cold and lacks the melodic tone Fran uses. Dean wonders how he could ever mistake them for each other. "And Ishim would never harm a child."

"You sure about that?" He can't believe Cas trusts that dickbag. If Ishim was anything like his later self, the one Dean met and instantly despised, Cas must have felt that something was off about him.

“I trust my brothers and sisters with my life. Of course I am sure.” While he says it Cas tucks his head back a fraction, and it could be indignation, but Dean knows it’s not. Cas is lying.

“Uh-huh. Okay. Then let me just tell you: I’m sure it’s not a one-time thing. Ishim has a serious problem with rejection and a fucked-up sense of superiority when it comes to humans, so you might wanna watch that one really closely.”

Cas contemplates that for long moments. Then he nods. “I will take your advice into consideration. And since you seem to believe your actions were necessary to save a child, I will overlook your transgression in summoning me. I warn you to never attempt that again – another angel might not show as much mercy.” He fixates Dean until Dean promises under his breath.

Cas puts his hands on the table. Fran has long elegant fingers with perfect oval fingernails and it occurs to Dean that he never paid attention to them before. He looks down to his own hands, calloused and tanned from the farm work. The difference is striking, but that’s nothing new.

“You might want to close your eyes.”

“What, wait, Cas ... Castiel.” Dean grabs for the hand closest to him and Cas’ eyes shoot down to where they touch. Dean knows he’s pushing his luck here but he doesn’t have a choice. When Cas is gone he might never come back. The realization that he’s losing his one chance to get back home hits him with sudden clarity. “What about me? I need your help to get back.”

“I’m not here to do your bidding. You should be grateful I let you live. Now, I ask you to close your eyes.”

Dean doesn’t. The flash of grace will most likely knock him out, but it won’t kill him or blind him, so he watches as the pure energy that is Cas breaks free from somewhere deep inside of Fran. It fills the eyes and spills from her lips and surrounds her head before it’s so bright Dean can only see the outlines of her body. The blast pushes him back and he crashes to the floor and then the room goes black.

Dean wakes up lying down with his head cushioned on Fran’s thighs. She’s holding a wet rag to his forehead and keeps stroking his cheek. It’s nice to regain consciousness like this.

“You owe me an explanation,” she says softly, “or rather a bunch of explanations.” She doesn’t sound angry or even curious, just tired and maybe a bit resigned. Dean can relate.

“Seems like we have a whole life-time for that now.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for the feedback, it's really appreciated! As you see, I'm planning for 12 chapters now and I changed the rating somewhat. The next chapter is nearly done, I hope to post it within the next week.

Let me know what you think?

“He came to me yesterday evening.” Fran is looking down on her clasped hands as if to make sure they are hers again. “He was only a voice in my head. I was sure I had gone mad.” A small smile forms on her lips when she looks up at Dean again.

“How did he convince you?”

“He told me to cut my hand. I said no. He insisted.” She inhales deeply. “I finally did it. I thought the pain would rip me out of this hallucination and clear my head. I had read that somewhere.”

“But...?”

“The cut healed immediately. So I did it again. And again.” She chuckles without humor, a dry and bitter sound. Fran shrugs and faces him with big eyes. “I guess I was wrong. Angels do exist.”

“Yes, they do. But you were right with most of your findings before. Most of the legends and myths about them are wrong.” Dean tries to put all the empathy he has for her situation in his eyes – he doesn’t want her to question her life’s work.

“What’s wrong about the legends?”

“Well, for one, angels are dicks. Most of them anyway. They don’t care for humans all that much and always have some secret agenda.”

“How do you know that? You never mentioned any of this.” Her voice is still calm and she watches Dean with a steady gaze. He wonders if she just accepts everything he says as truth now. It doesn’t seem likely. Her scientist’s brain will catch up soon enough. Dean has to decide how much to tell her, and with a long look at her open face, he settles for the truth.

“Fran, I know the last day was a lot and I know how hard it is to have your worldview shattered like this, trust me, but there’s more I have to tell you.” She nods, just a slight tilt of

her head and Dean feels something twist in his chest at the gesture. “Uhm, I don’t know how to phrase this...” Inhale, exhale, just do it. There’s no way he can think of to soften the blow. “I came from the future?”

Fran keeps staring and it’s starting to freak him out a bit. “What year?”

God, she must be really in shock. People in shock should put their heads down, right? He should know since he has to deal with people in this situation on a daily basis. But then again, Sam is the specialist for the comforting of victims and witnesses.

“2017.”

“Hmmm.” Fran stands and walks around the room. Her aristocratic posture and her immaculate clothes stand out against the rural interior. The room seems too small for her.

“So you’ve met angels before? Do they appear more often in your time?”

“Uh, yes, I guess. But I might be a special case. I’ll tell you later.”

“And you know this angel? The one that possessed me?” Her back is stiff and her voice controlled but Dean can see the light tremor in her hands.

“He didn’t possess you. He took you as a vessel. You *did* consent to that, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did. I didn’t think it would work though. I told him I didn’t believe in God and angels. It didn’t seem to matter.” Her voice is small. “I guess I’m not an atheist anymore then.”

“I don’t know. You didn’t believe in God because you had no proof. Now you have proof, at least for the existence of angels. I don’t know what that makes you, what that makes us. I sure as hell don’t put much stock in God saving me, or in him being a benevolent being. I always thought that is the core of faith.” She turns to him at that, and there’s that spark of curiosity she lost since yesterday. Her eyes are gleaming again. She sets aside everything else he said and goes straight for the fleshy bits.

“You met God?”

Telling his story takes hours, even if he concentrates on the most important events. Mom, dad and the demon, his time downstairs and Cas rescuing him, the almost apocalypse and bits and pieces of the later adventures.

They share a simple meal of bread and bacon and some strawberries from his garden for lunch. Fran listens quietly most of the time and Dean wonders what she thinks about his tale.

“So this angel, Castiel, he is not like the others?” she asks at one point.

“No,” Dean says with a soft smile, “he’s not.”

“You trust him?”

“More than almost anyone else,” he admits and it’s the truth. He trusts Cas with his life and with his soul, and the thought lets some of his anxiety melt, because nothing is lost yet. Maybe he can still convince Cas to help him. He just needs another chance to talk to him.

He must have zoned out a bit, because Fran says his name as if she has tried before. When his attention is back on her, she stays silent though, watches again, and he knows he’s being analyzed.

“Would you stop that?” He’s increasingly irritated by both her stare and the stretch of silence.

“What?”

“Staring at me like I’m some kind of experiment, like you want to put me under a microscope.”

She smiles her cocky smile, the one that reminds him painfully of Charlie. Those two would have gotten along so well, he thinks, and his heart hurts.

“Oh I’d like that. You are a very fascinating man, Dean Winchester.”

When he ends his recollection of the things that will or might or might not happen to Lily and May, it’s the middle of the afternoon and they both are tired, despite copious amounts of coffee. He leaves Cas’ part out – just tells Fran about Lily and Ishim, and how he met Lily and wanted to right the wrongs done to her. Fran will know he’s not telling her the whole truth, and maybe he will fill the holes in his story later. Right now, he can’t bring himself to admit he’s done all this more for Cas than for Lily. He still feels raw about their encounter and he’s not sure how Fran would react to knowing Cas was among the angels that came to punish Lily.

They relocated to the bench Dean put next to the door, between two old rose bushes. The first bulbs are bursting with white and light pink blooms and the fragrance hangs in the air around them. Birds are singing and a soft breeze carries the scent of pine and earth over from the trees. It’s peaceful and Dean tries to feel grateful for that. Life here is nothing like what he’s used to. He can’t remember spending so much time outside, and it starts to show in the tan of his face and hands, and in the way his muscles get accustomed to the field work, and in the way he isn’t on alert 24/7. The angel blade is the only weapon he carries, but he doesn’t really miss his gun and the knives. He feels lighter without them.

They stay silent for long minutes, following their own thoughts, coming back to look at each other and smile a little.

“How does it feel?” Dean asks at last.

“What? Being a vessel?”

Dean nods.

Fran smoothes a non-existent wrinkle out of her dress. “In all those years, you never... had one of them inside of you?”

Dead cringes. Surely she must know how that sounds. Fran’s chuckle confirms his suspicion. It’s good to know she’s well again to make puns, and absolutely inappropriate ones at that, given the year and the area.

But at the same time he can’t help the wistful undertone when he says “No, I haven’t.” Because a bad joke is enough to remind him of all the things he might never get a chance to say to Cas or share with him. He misses him, *his* Cas, with a sudden fierceness that makes his lungs constrict and his whole body ache.

Fran’s laugh cuts off immediately. “Oh.”

Dean doesn’t know what she thinks she just found out, but her soft tone indicates she’s not far from the truth. He doesn’t want to see her pity him, so he lets his eyes wander over the flowers in front of them, buzzing with bees, down the lane to his house, along the dark green wheat field and over to the forest surrounding Lily’s property. Cas would like it here, he thinks, the simple life, the silence.

Fran doesn’t answer for so long Dean’s sure she’s forgotten the question.

“I don’t think I can describe it. I felt hot all over, as if I had been in the sun too long or had a high fever. And then I sank into an unconscious state, I wasn’t sleeping, just kind of shoved to the back of my own mind, but I still could feel what he felt, like a distant sound. Those weren’t my feelings, I knew that much.”

Dean’s voice cracks as he clears his throat. “What did he feel?”

“Confusion, doubt. And recognition, like he knew you. But that can’t be possible from what you said, right?”

A sliver of hope rises deep inside him at Fran’s words, a small flame that he isn’t ready to share yet, that he wants to shield with his own hands to keep it alive. “Right,” he mumbles.

Fran doesn’t pry. He likes that about her; as inquisitive as her mind is, she respects his boundaries. “Are you okay? With what happened?” he asks her.

Fran takes a deep breath. “I think so. I have to let it all sink in I guess. And I will have questions.”

Dean laughs at that. “I’m sure you will and I will be happy to answer them.”

“What about you? What are you going to do?”

He can't stop the defeated sigh that tumbles from his lips; he's too tired and strung out. The tiny flame of hope flickers and twists. It's not enough to keep the cold at bay. "I'll have to find another way to go back home. Another spell maybe."

"I will help you," Fran promises and she stands. Her dress unfolds like the flowers around them. "Tomorrow."

Dean falls into an uneasy sleep soon after Fran is gone. He dreams. He's running through the endless corridors of the bunker, searching.

Cas isn't there.

Chapter 8

The summer is spent between books and field work. Dean falls into bed every night, bone tired and exhausted, and gets up early to make use of the hours before the sun stands high and staying outside is nearly unbearable.

He meets with Fran in the cool halls of the library then, and together they search for another way to get him home. They are able to dig up some old grimoires, and Dean writes down the spell that brought him here to search for similarities. By pure chance, they find it again, not that it does them any good without Cas' help.

Dean prays regularly, but to no avail. He keeps the prayers short and simple, without addressing the summoning or the fact that they met. He doesn't want to get Cas in trouble, and if Cas wants to talk to Dean, he knows where to find him.

All the while Lily immerses herself in her own research – she studies all the books Dean pointed her to, perfects her Enochian and translates ancient scripts Fran brought with her. They don't tell her Cas showed up. Dean can't say exactly why, maybe it's Lily's obsessive persona, but he wants to keep her away from the angels as far as possible.

The evenings are used for tending to his own garden – he has sown a variety of vegetables and thinned out the old apple and cherry trees and is rewarded with a rich harvest. Sam would laugh at him – or be mighty proud, that dork - if he saw how much green stuff Dean is eating. Dean promises himself to not tell his brother.

It's the end of July when Cas visits him the first time.

It's one of those stifling warm nights filled with the buzzing of insects and the heavy scents of earth and ripe barley. Dean lies awake, sheets pushed to the side, and relishes in the gentle breeze from the open window. He must have dozed off for when he opens his eyes again, Fran is sitting at the foot of the bed and watches him. It only takes a few seconds this time for Dean to realize that this isn't Fran. The air is humming with grace and a faint glow caresses her silhouette.

Dean's skin is prickling with anticipation and nervousness. He's happy to see Cas, but doubts he's here because he changed his mind. Only one way to find out. "What do you want?" His voice is sleep-rough and deeper than usual, and it sounds way too intimate in the small space

between them. Cas' gaze wanders over his body and Dean can almost feel it, on his chest, his thighs.

Cas' brows meet in a confused frown. "My grace..." he starts and cuts off. His hand reaches out but he tugs it back. He seems awfully insecure for a full-powered angel that doesn't grant favors to mere humans.

Dean can't help to feel a tiny bubble of petty glee at seeing Cas out of his depth. Cas says, "It's drawn to you, and I don't know why," and he sounds angry and distressed, like this is all Dean's fault, and maybe it is. Dean can't regret it though – to know that Cas' grace reacts to him even now let warmth bloom in his chest and he fights back a smile.

It's a losing game.

"I can't tell you how that works. We'll meet in another time, but that's still over 100 years away. But I'm glad your grace led you back."

Cas' turns his head to the side as if he's heard a distant sound.

"I have to go."

Dean dresses while Cas leaves with the lighting bright explosion of grace, and later accompanies Fran back to the main house. She leans heavy on his arm and doesn't say a thing until they're at the door.

"Will he help you?"

"I don't know."

One morning, he stumbles into the kitchen of the main house and instantly grabs his angel blade. Ishim is standing by the stove, chatting idly with Myriam. She turns and gives him a clipped "good morning", while the angel grins brightly and comes over to reach out his hand.

Dean stops himself from stabbing him in the last second. "Jonah Webster", the man says with a warm voice. Dean takes his hand and shakes it. His voice is unsteady when he gives his name, so he clears his throat and goes over to stack his breakfast plate.

"I will be helping with the farm work over the next weeks. I hear you were busy already with the cottage and the gardens. With the two of us, we'll have the harvest done in no time." He drones on and Dean concentrates on eating and humming approval where it's needed. The surge of adrenaline fades slowly. It shouldn't be such a surprise that he would meet Ishim's vessel one day. He'll get over it.

Still, he prays to Cas again that night. *Please keep an eye on that buddy of yours , please don't trust him.*

Three weeks later, Cas is back.

“Do you really think Ishim would lay with a human?” he asks instead of greeting. He’s sitting on the bed again, that stalker, close enough to touch.

“Oh yeah, Cas, but that’s not the problem here. The problem is that he’s ready to kill her because she broke up with him.”

Cas ponders that for long moments, clearly taken aback that Dean doesn’t seem to find human-angel-encounters all that offensive. *If you knew I had sex with your sister , he thinks. If you knew what you and I are up to in my favorite kind of dreams.*

“How can that not be the problem – it is one of our most sacred laws.”

“Mmmh, you won’t think that anymore in about a hundred years, trust me.”

“We know each other well, in your time?”

“One could say that. You will rescue my ass from hell, and I will rescue you from a couple smaller predicaments, and we will be friends, so yeah you could say we know each other pretty well.” Whatever he thought which part of this summary Cas would concentrate on, he doesn’t anticipate the next question.

“So you will be the reason I will change my mind about our laws?”

The question’s innocent enough, but Dean chokes on his own tongue. “Huh, what? No! I mean, yes... uhm, what are you asking here exactly?”

“Will I change my mind because you and I *know* each other?”

“Like, in the biblical sense?”

Cas nods and his eyes are on Dean with laser focus.

The blush creeps up Dean’s chest and his neck and his face like quicksilver. He’s glad it’s dark, but on the other hand, Cas will be able to see it just fine. Jesus, what is it with those invasive questions? First Fran with her weirdly phrased vessel inquiry, now that.

Dean is tired and his nerves are on fire and he doesn’t know how to handle this version of Cas. He shoots a quick look over. Cas hasn’t moved and clearly still waits for an answer.

Dean searches for the right words. (There are none, he knows, since he has been searching for them for a long time). “I... no, we’re not. I mean, we don’t have...” He takes a deep breath. “The reason that you will be opposed to the idea of... being with me... are not grounded in heavenly law.” He can’t meet Cas’ eyes while he stumbles through this explanation.

The blush is a full body thing now, his skin burns wherever Cas’ gaze lands and a low hum is building in his ears – it’s his own blood and it’s Cas’ grace. He had forgotten how that power can feel, how it can destroy and heal and soothe and drive him crazy with the barely contained power directed at him.

“Your soul shines in my presence, which is understandable, if we share a special bond. But your body reacts, too. Why is that?” Cas’ curious head tilt is the same as in the vessel Dean knows, as is the monotone voice that Dean mistook for indifference for a long, long time.

Dean has no way to wriggle out of this. He could tell Cas it’s fear or nerves, but even if the angel hasn’t spent much time on Earth, he might know the signs of arousal. So Dean goes for (part of) the truth. “Grace,” he whispers, and tries to calm his breathing, make his body relax.

Cas’ scrutinizes his attempts with interest. Then the soft, light-blue halo flares and that power in the room is touching Dean’s heated skin. It’s hot and electric and Dean closes his eyes, stifling a moan. This isn’t fair, he thinks, that this Cas is suddenly curious enough to reach out to him, even if it’s with his grace, that Cas is curious to feel Dean’s skin, when Dean hungered for a touch like that for eight freaking years.

A slightly hysterical chuckle breaks free, and transforms into a sigh when his back arcs under the caress of Cas’ grace. His body screams for him to let Cas explore and do to him whatever he likes, but his mind is reeling with the wrongness of it all. It feels like he’s cheating.

“Please, stop,” he chokes out, and fists his hands in the sheets to stop them from reaching out. And just like that, the feeling is gone, and Cas says “I apologize, I don’t know...” An eerie silence falls over the dark room and accentuates Dean’s ragged breathing.

This time Cas doesn’t tell Dean to close his eyes. Dean stares and stares and feels tears burning in the corners while Cas leaves.

He wakes up hours later, next to Fran’s sleeping form, and he never felt so alone in his entire life.

Dean is cranky and quiet for the next few days. He has his hands full with the farm work and Fran gives him his space. After a week has gone by she comes over to his house one evening and sits with him on the porch.

“You love him, do you?”

There's no reason to lie to her.

"Yes." He swallows. "I do."

"I'm sure he loves you too." She touches his arm, gently, and catches his darting eyes. Dean shakes his head.

"How can you be sure?"

"He doesn't even know you now and his whole being is drawn to you like a moth to a flame. I feel his curiosity, his fascination, and I can't even imagine how all of that would grow if he knew you for so much longer, shared so much with you."

Dean averts his gaze. "Eight years are a long time to learn that the person you thought interesting is full of flaws and not worth your time."

"Then tell me this: have your feelings for him lessened in all those years?" She pats his arm and stands to go without waiting for an answer. While he watches her form vanish in the night, he allows himself to entertain the idea, if only for one second, that Cas, *his Cas*, might want more too.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your feedback! We're getting closer to the end now - only three chapters to go after this ...

Autumn is approaching in nearly imperceptible steps, in misty mornings and clouds and early evenings, and before Dean knows it, September turns into October and the last harvest is done. He doesn't see much of Lily and Fran until then. Days blur into each other making hay and cutting wheat and bringing baskets full of root vegetables into the cellars of the main house.

While he's working, his mind has time to wander, and its destination is Cas more often than not. With only the sun on his back and the dark earth around him, there's nothing to keep the memories away.

He is reluctant at first to let his thoughts drift into the box he had danced around for so long. But after a while he draws up his courage and decides to face it. This might be a chance, and he feels like it might be the last, to face all the things beneath the cracking veneer of the persona he made up forever ago. He's got to sort out which parts to keep and which to leave behind.

The truth is this.

He has always been one for the love thing. So much so that he built a well of fear and doubt and sarcasm around that longing. And he thought for a long time that that was the right way, the only way to survive and make sure his brother survived. Now, though, he's not so sure anymore.

Jody, Garth and Donna and now Fran are not afraid to love and be open about it. And they are stronger for it in his opinion. They fear rejection and they know it makes them vulnerable and they open up anyway. It's one of the bravest things he can imagine.

It's not that this idea is something new, he always admired the ability to live like this in others. But now he can't help but ask himself if he is really beyond the point of trying it for himself. Dean wonders if it will be better in the end to take a chance and lose than not taking it and forever ask himself what could have been.

He can't forget the power in the room when Cas came to him, how in retrospect there had been that special *thing* between them from the beginning. He's wasted years to fight it, will it away, push it down, because that's what he does, because Dean Winchester doesn't do feelings.

Maybe it's time that changes too.

He doesn't see Cas again for weeks, but some nights he wakes up to the sound of rustling feathers. And while he waits to fall asleep again, he prays to Cas to make up his mind.

It's a crisp November morning when Fran takes the carriage to Bangor to get more supplies. They want to stock up on the ingredients for the grace spell just in case.

She comes back in the evening and finds Dean in the kitchen. He's scrambling eggs for dinner and invites her to sit down.

A few hairs have escaped from her bun and for the first time, Dean really notices how stunning his friend is. There's still no spark between them, nothing to pull him closer, but at this moment he almost wishes there was. The nights are getting longer, and he wakes up in the middle of night, craving the nearness of another body like he hasn't in years.

Fran tucks the loose strands behind her ears and says, "I visited Mr. Bramble and found all the things on our list, and when I paid he stopped me to tell me another customer had come in a few weeks ago to buy cassia. He found it interesting that it would happen with only a few months between the instances when he never heard of anyone needing it before."

Something dark and heavy settles in Dean's stomach. He has to clear his throat before he can make himself ask: "Who was it?"

Fran lifts her left eyebrow. He already knows the answer. "Lily."

"Yes. She summoned an angel on her own."

They go over to the house together. Lily sits at the table in the living room, a book open and ignored in front of her. She looks up when they enter, and he notices the dark circles around her eyes and the haunted expression that makes her look years older.

She straightens her spine while her eyes flick from Fran to Dean and she finds what she's been looking for. She knows that they know.

"I couldn't just let this chance go." There's no apology in her tone.

Dean sits down beside her and leans heavily on his forearms on the table, suddenly tired. "I know."

"He... wasn't like I imagined them to be. He's cruel and when I told him to leave..."

"He didn't." Dean works hard to keep the accusation out of his voice. He should have seen this coming, he should have known history can't be changed that easy. He would have given a lot to keep that fear out of Lily's face. Now he can only try to keep worse from happening.

Fran comes closer and slings her arms around Lily's shoulders. Dean goes over to the kitchen and comes back with a sharp knife. He cuts deep into his palm and watches the blood well up. Then he draws a sigil on the wall next to the door to the garden.

"If he comes back," he instructs, "you have to cut your hand and complete this to make him go away." Lily's face is blank when he puts the knife into her hand. Fran nods. Their eyes meet over Lily's head. They will need help for this.

They repeat the spell that first brought Cas to them. They don't have to wait long this time for the pressure in the room to rise and bring them to their knees. Dean sees Cas taking over Fran's body and he can pinpoint the exact moment the pilot changes.

Cas speaks up as soon as he straightens from the crouch on the floor and dusts off the dress with careless pats and swipes. "I only found out today," he admits, and Dean can hear his gruff tone even if the higher cadence of this vessel. Fran's delicate hands, usually full of life and painting images while she speaks, hang close to the sides of her body. The angle of the chin is Cas' as is the tilt of the head as he waits for Dean's answer.

"Yeah, we just heard, too. They must have met for weeks now, and when she told him she doesn't want to see him anymore, he threatened to take her away from May."

Cas' eyes narrow. "I will have someone come down here and guard her while I sort this out."

"Be careful," Dean says before he can stop himself.

Cas looks at him as if Dean said something really stupid, but then he nods and takes off.

Akobel arrives an hour later. He's one of Cas' most trusted soldiers, he tells them, and Dean hopes that will be enough.

A day goes by, then two.

Ishim doesn't show up and somehow, as it tends to do, life goes back to normal. Akobel stays close to Lily – she takes him to university and introduces him as a colleague – and after a while, the tension leaves her shoulders and she smiles again.

The knot in Dean's stomach stays. He worries for Cas and waits anxiously for news from him.

When Dean comes into the library one morning in December, he's surprised to see Fran talking to a guy he hasn't seen before. They part as he comes closer. The man, broad-shouldered and handsome, tilts his head slightly in greeting and brushes past Dean to the exit. Dean looks after him for a second and then turns to Fran. He notices that her cheeks are flushed and her eyes are glowing, and asks "who's that?" with a grin.

She blushes and it's so adorable Dean promises himself to tease her more often. Fran casts down her gaze and fiddles with a loose thread on her gown. "He's a new teacher in the faculty for agriculture. He just came here from Poland."

"And you like him." It's not a question. He can see it in the glint in her eyes and her nervous movements.

The corners of her lips tug up into the barest of smiles and she sighs.

"Yes. Yes I do."

Dean chuckles and tugs her into a tight embrace. She stiffens but then goes liquid in his arms, leans her head against his shoulder and takes a deep breath. "I'm so happy for you," Dean mumbles into her hair, and he really is, because Fran deserves all the good things. "What's the name of the luckiest guy on this planet?"

She looks up and a broad grin splits her face.

"His name is Aleksander. Aleksander Novak."

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

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

They don't hear from Ishim or Cas for weeks. Christmas comes and goes, and the New Year brings a thick layer of snow that mutes the world around them. Dean's little house is buried under a few feet of white and he only leaves it when he has to. He had time to get accustomed to the silence and having only his own thoughts for company, but some days he craves the sound of another voice so much that he fights through the snow to visit the main house and sit with Fran and Lily for a while.

Akobel is always there but he keeps his distance from them. Only May can catch his interest, it seems, because he smiles when she tells him her stories. May doesn't mind that he never says anything – Akobel is a captive audience and she delights in recounting her favorite fairy tales to him.

The grown-ups get so used to him standing silently in a corner of a room that they begin to forget he's there.

The fourth night after the first snow, Cas visits Dean. He's standing by the foot of the bed when Dean wakes up. Fran's dress is immaculate and dry and Dean is grateful that Cas flew here instead of walking. He wonders, not for the first time, if Cas asks Fran to dress before he comes over or if he just zaps the clothes on. He never really thought about those small details, because there's only Cas in his trenchcoat in his own time and when they meet, they're more often than not in the middle of a life or death situation. Not the time for small talk.

It's eerily bright in the room. The moon stands over the house and reflects in the perfect surface of the snow. Fran's skin looks pale and otherworldly and Dean thinks that her aristocratic features are a perfect fit for Cas' stoic appearance.

They don't speak for a long time, just look at each other. Even with his thick blanket and two layers of clothes to keep off the cold, Dean feels exposed under Cas' gaze.

"When I first came here, you asked me for my help to get you back to your own time," Cas says.

“Yeah. I need grace to activate spell.”

Cas nods and seems to think about it.

“Since you were right with your warning against Ishim, I reconsidered your request. I would be willing to accommodate your wish.” Even for Cas, that sounds awfully stilted. As if he feels obligated, but would rather pull out his own fingernails than help Dean. Come to think of it, there’s another thing Dean hadn’t thought about. How do you get grace out of an angel without having another angel at hand to pull it out of him?

“How would it work?” Dean watches Cas closely. His shoulders draw up a bit and he doesn’t meet Dean’s eyes.

“I would have to concentrate on setting it free. While I do that you have to cut me and catch some of my grace in a vial.”

Okay. Dean understands his reluctance now. Cas would be vulnerable while he gave his grace. He would have to trust Dean with his life. And while Dean would lay his own in Cas’ hands in a heartbeat, Cas knows next to nothing about Dean. Yes, they seem to have some kind of connection, but for a warrior that doesn’t count for much in terms of trust.

Dean sits up and reaches under his pillow to retrieve his angel blade. Cas’ eyes go wide when he recognizes it. “How did you get that?” he breathes.

“I told you we were friends in my time. A lot will change. Hunters and demons will get their hands on these blades. I’m showing you this because you will hand it to me in my own time. You will trust me to not use it against you. Do I need to cut you with this to retrieve the grace?” He holds the blade up and it twinkles in the moonlight.

“Yes. A normal blade would not suffice.”

Dean stands and goes over to Cas. “So how do we do this?”

Dean ends up sitting next to Cas on the bed, and he holds Fran’s slim arm in his lap, careful as if he had caught a frightened bird. Five candles give a bit more light and paint drunken shadows on the walls.

Cas tells him that he will envision a spot between his wrist and his elbow. Dean looks down at the delicate skin under his rough fingers.

The thought of cutting into Fran’s body makes him sick, even if Cas will heal it immediately. He tells Cas to tell her what they’re about to do and ask her if it’s alright.

Cas falls quiet for long moments, and they communicate in that crazy mind-meld thing they do. Dean knows it's stupid, but he can't help the pang of jealousy at watching it. If Cas could really see his mind instead of picking up random thoughts ... if Dean could feel what Cas feels... he always hated the thought of being a vessel for someone but he thinks he would make an exception for Cas.

The moment ends and Cas tells him Fran has given him permission. Dean has to take Cas' word for it, but he knows him well enough to know he would not lie. He keeps one hand on Fran's arm and grabs the blade with the other. With a nod he gives Cas the sign that he's ready.

Cas closes his eyes and stops moving. Small lines of grace start to appear under Dean's hand, forming patterns and flowing here and there. It's beautiful, mesmerizing. Dean had no idea Cas could do that. And it stings to think of the possibility that he can't do that anymore or ever again with his grace depleted. Dean will never fully know how much Cas gave up for them.

He strokes along one of the moving lines with the tip of his index finger and the line curls around it in response. This is the closest he has ever come to touching Cas, Dean realizes, his true form, the unbelievably old, this unfathomable being beneath the snark and the wrinkled too big suit, and it's exhilarating and devastating at the same time. He plays with the tendril of grace some more, but then stills his hand.

Cas told him he would bring a bit of grace to one point, and when it gathers there, Dean has to act fast. He doesn't know how much time passes until the moving patterns settle and form a circle under the skin. Dean brings the point of the blade to it, steels himself with a deep breath, and cuts. A few drops of bright blue light break free and Dean sets aside the blade to bring the first of two small vials Cas gave him to the wound. He catches the liquid, then puts on the cap and fills the second vial.

When he looks up again, Cas opens his eyes and meets his gaze. Dean can't be sure, but he sees a longing in them that he knows shines out of his own. The moment feels stiflingly intimate, so he breaks the contact and looks down to where Cas has already healed the small cut.

"Thank you," he murmurs, and lets go of the arm. He misses the warmth of Cas' skin immediately.

Cas stands.

"You are welcome."

"Will you be able to stop Ishim for good?"

"I hope so," Cas answers, and then he's gone with a flap of his invisible wings.

Dean is free to go now, but he can't unless he's sure that Lily and May are safe. And so he waits for word from Cas. He sees Fran falling in love and catches her daydreaming on more than one occasion. He even talks to Aleksander a few times and finds him a bit too serious but clearly absolutely gone on Fran. He seems like a decent enough guy. Not that Dean would have any way to stop Fran from seeing him even if he tried. So Dean sits back and lets Fran's smiles and her happiness warm him while he misses his brother and his best friend so fiercely his heart hurts.

Cas comes to him in the middle of the day. His rigid posture and all the little things that make him Cas look out of place in broad daylight. Dean straightens from the crouch he spent the last hour in to sow carrots and salad. He dusts off his pants and shades his eyes against the sun.

Cas starts without preamble, and despite the sun, a shiver runs down Dean's spine.

"I tried everything to stop Ishim. He brought a lot of powerful angels behind him. In the end, all of this comes down to believing one of our own or the word of a human. The angels chose to believe him."

"What does that mean?"

"Ishim told the others that May is a Nephilim. The news started an uproar. I tried to make them see reason, told them Lily would not live if May was a Nephilim. But they didn't listen. Ishim convinced them that I stood against him because I had reason to keep it all a secret. He knows I visited Earth without permission."

"So what? He did, too."

Cas casts down his gaze. He looks defeated. "He told them I had relations with a human. They will punish me soon."

"That's ridiculous, Cas, and your buddies should know that."

"Is it?" Cas narrows his eyes. "It doesn't matter. They don't see clearly. This is our greatest crime and my word stands against that of my superior. I have no way to prove my innocence."

Dean's throat constricts around a growing lump. This can't be happening. It's his fault Cas is in this position. He ruins his life even now. "What will they do to you?" He sounds hoarse in his own ears and feels angry tears prick at the corner of his eyes. He takes a step closer to Cas without a conscious decision.

Cas looks up and his eyes flicker over Dean's face as if he wants to memorize it.

"I don't know," he says, and Dean takes another step and tugs him into a tight embrace. It feels weird at first: Fran's body is small and delicate compared to Jimmy's strong and lean physique. But at the same time, when he leans his cheek against the dark hair, something in him recognizes the person in his arms. Cas doesn't lift his hands to hug back, but he doesn't push Dean away either. Despite himself, Dean has to smile. This Cas hasn't learned how to hug yet. The thought that Dean might never get the chance to teach him makes him tighten his hold.

"I have to go." Cas' voice is unsteady and low.

Dean steps back and cups Cas' jaw in a sudden rush of urgency. The fear that he might lose him forever makes him brave. He brings their faces close and brushes his lips over Cas' – not even a real kiss, just a tender touch. He pulls back and Cas brings his fingertips to his lips, and there's the head tilt Dean would have sworn would follow Dean's silly and needy gesture. Dean smiles through his tears.

"Please be careful," he whispers. Cas nods and leaves Fran's body in an explosion of light.

For the first time Fran gets through it all without losing consciousness. One look at Dean is enough to tell her something's majorly wrong.

"What happened?"

Dean tells her.

Ishim and his angels come to the house the next morning. Dean stayed over just in case. He didn't sleep the whole night. Now he watches the group from his post on the kitchen window as Ishim briefs the others on the far end of the path to the house. His heart jumps when he sees Fran's silhouette amongst them. So they let Cas live. The fact that he stands with them tells Dean that they somehow brought them on their side. Quite possibly they stripped his memories. It's not the first time and it won't be the last.

To know that Cas will have forgotten their time together hurts, but the relief that he's still alive is worth so much more.

Dean turns his back to the window to end his preparations. He puts one of his grace vials in May's ugly doll and the other one in his breast pocket. The spell is ready. He scans the ingredients one last time and lays everything he'll need out on the table. Lily and Akobel are in the other room. He asked them to not enter the kitchen.

This is the last option he could think of to save May. He talked it through with Fran yesterday, and finally they agreed to try, before they said their goodbyes. No time for second

thoughts now, although his conscience screams at him that he will put a mother through a hundred years of hell.

He hears Ishim talk in front of the house. Akobel talks to him. Then Fran's voice, cold and lifeless: "*Akobel, Seraphim of the Sixth Choir, you have lain with a human and you fathered a Nephilim .*" Yep, Cas was clearly brainwashed. Dean tries not to think about it and dashes to the living room to give May her doll.

"Thank you May for letting me talk to Suzy for a while. She said she wanted to be with you now. Can you hold her?"

"Of course", May says, her face full of somber sobriety. Dean goes back to the kitchen and just closes the door when he hears Ishim come in. He and Lily fight. Dean holds the bowl and a burning piece of kindling while he whispers the Latin words.

Lily screams. "*No. No! Stay away from my daughter!*"

Dean's hand trembles. He lets the kindling fall.

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you all so much for the kind feedback!!! Reading about your reactions and your (sometimes absolutely spot-on) theories really keeps me going. I'm currently working on the last two chapters and hope to get them done soon.

Chapter 11

It's completely dark around him when Dean comes to. For a second he panics that he fell into some vortex and landed in the void. He feels around the floor around him.

Dirty, cold concrete.

Then his eyes adjust and he can make out shapes around him. The air is glowing dark, dark red.

A hand grips his arm and he jerks around into a defensive position. A small form appears next to him.

"Dean?" A high, frightened voice.

"May?" he whispers back.

Instead of answering, May wraps her tiny arms around him and burrows her head into his shoulder. He picks her up and stands to look around. Soon he can make out the source of the ominous light. It's an old alarm light next to the steel door. They landed in the middle of the pentagram he started this journey from, somewhere deep in the bowels of the Men of Letters bunker.

"Don't worry, May, I know where we are." He tries for a soothing tone and hopes he succeeds. They are in the right place, alright. But did they find the right time?

He goes over to the door and tries the handle. The massive metal reacts with a scream. Dean flinches. If he is found in the bunker while it's still in use he will have a serious problem. He takes a few steps into the empty corridor and turns to the stairs. It's absolutely quiet.

He's careful to not make any sounds nonetheless. The staircase brings him to the upper floors. Still not a soul in sight. His breathing comes easier now. Everything feels just like he left it. The next corridor leads to the war room.

Sam is slumped over the table, sleeping, his head cushioned by a massive layer of notes and open books. He startles awake when Dean comes closer, and a yellow post-it note still stuck to his cheek. Dean has to smile when Sam turns around and understanding slowly dawns on his face. He goes over and clasps his hand on the massive shoulder of his younger brother.

"Good to see my absence doesn't keep you up," Dean drawls with a grin. Man, it's good to see Sam's face again, even if it's twisted into a smirk like right now.

Sam huffs. He stands and gives Dean an awkward half-hug on Dean's free side. May still doesn't show her face. "And who is this?" he asks softly.

Dean looks down at the child in his arms. "This is May. She's Lily's daughter."

Sam gulps visibly and his eyes are full of questions. But he sounds all friendly and composed when he says, “nice to meet you, May.”

May turns then. “Is the bad man gone?”

“Yes,” Dean tells her, “he’s gone. And we will bring you to your mother.” He doesn’t ask where Cas is. If he were in the bunker, Dean would know by now.

Dean sent Sam to knock on Lily’s door and try to prepare her while he waits on the motel floor with May. She’s making up games, jumps from swirl to swirl across the heavily patterned 70s carpet. Dean had told her yesterday that Lily had been sick and that she may behave a little bit strange when she met her. May nodded and promised that she would care for her mom until she was better.

The drive here was an adventure. May didn’t know cars, paved roads, traffic lights and had never seen so many people. She pointed at everything she saw and never ceased asking question. Dean obliged, and he was grateful for the constant chatter. It kept his mind from asking himself how Lily would react.

Sam had told him about Lily’s spells and the way she had given away pieces of her soul in exchange for a long life and wisdom. Was enough of it left to let her daughter back in her life? Did he make the right decision in bringing May with him?

The door opens again down the hall. And then Lily stands in the middle of the hideous carpet and sinks to her knees. May squeals and runs over to her, flings herself into trembling arms, and Dean’s sure he made the right call. Whatever happens next, they will figure it out. Lily nearly crushes the kid and sobs openly into the long blond hair of her daughter. Sam emerges behind her and leans to the wall, watching the reunion with shining eyes.

They don’t get to see scenes like this often. The happy ends mostly happen after they have left the state. They never talk about it, but Dean knows Sam cherishes these moments just like he does, commits them to memory for the bad days. Sam looks over and their eyes meet in understanding.

Lily calms down after a while. She lifts her head and mouths “thank you so much” at Dean. He just starts to answer when he feels a presence at his back and sees Lily’s eyes dart to a point on his left. Dean knows it’s Cas without having to turn to him, and he can’t say for sure if he’s always been that in tune with him and never noticed or if it’s a new thing.

Cas puts a hand on Dean’s shoulder in greeting, but he stares at the scene in front of them, eyes wide. “You brought her here?”

“It was the only way to save her, Cas. I’ll tell you the whole story later.”

Cas nods. He looks like he has seen a ghost. “Thank you,” he says and his voice cracks.

When they get back home, Sam vanishes in the library and comes back with a stack of papers. “You were gone for five days. I started digging, tried to find something to prove you made it to the past. I unearthed these in the bunkers files.” He hands Dean two of the off-white sheets.

Dean takes them and scans the first page. His heart jumps in his throat and he swallows it back down. He traces the neat writing with his fingers. “It’s a letter from a friend,” he manages to say.

“Will you tell us what happened?”

Dean folds the paper and puts it back into the envelope Sam hands him. He’ll read Fran’s message later when he’s alone.

He clears his throat and turns to Cas who hovers somewhere near the stairwell as if he’s unsure about his welcome. Dean doesn’t meet his eyes. Seeing Cas like this is deeply unsettling, so familiar and completely new with everything he learned. Coming to terms with his own feelings doesn’t mean he’s ready to confront Cas’. So he just beckons Cas to sit at the table in the war room, and he starts his recollection of what happened in 1900 and 1901.

Sam, that nerd, has a truckload of questions, and interrupts Dean’s tales at every turn. Dean sighs and acts exasperated but he enjoys describing his life in the past. When he finally ends, it’s close to midnight. The take-out they got halfway through still litters the table between the empty beer bottles. Dean is pleasantly buzzed. Enough to finally dare meeting Cas’ eyes.

Cas hasn’t said anything through the whole story. Dean left out the more intimate parts. This is not the place or time to share them. But Cas seems to know Dean didn’t tell them everything. He squints and tilts his head and Dean hopes Cas doesn’t call him out. Cas could ask why the other angels punished him for only visiting earth. Or he could ask why the hell he would risk everything for a human he didn’t even know. Cas holds his gaze steadily. And Dean’s suddenly pretty sure Cas already knows the answers to those questions.

Dean coughs to break the tension. “What’s most important in all of this is: you didn’t fail that child, Cas. You tried to help even then, but you got brainwashed. It’s not your fault.”

Cas looks like he wants to argue, but then he drops his gaze to the table and murmurs, “thank you, Dean”.

And there it is again. The rift between them that Dean just doesn’t know how to cross. He wants to go over and hug Cas and tell him it’s alright and that he made the best out of a shitty situation, that Dean thinks he’s awesome because he even then defied his brethren and stood

up for what he thought was right. Cas will only see the defeat, Dean sees Cas' brave and noble nature. But he chokes on the words whenever he tries to tell him that.

The stale air of the bunker is stifling all of a sudden. Dean stands and grabs his jacket and his keys. "I'm heading out," he says and Sam jerks up from his half-unconscious position.

"Why?"

"I need some fresh air. Be back tomorrow."

He doesn't look at Cas when he passes him. He needs to clear his head. And he needs to get his shit together.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

It's done! I loved working on this fic for the last few weeks and am so very grateful for all your kind feedback, to all of you who subscribed and recced and left kudos. Thank you so much!!

And my biggest thanks go to my awesome beta [Marie](#) for your insight and encouragement!<3<3<3

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

It's a twenty-five hour drive to Orono.

Dean stops halfway at a shitty motel to get a few hours of sleep. When he drives up to the main house, he is wired and strung out, and it feels a bit like coming home after a long exhausting journey.

He knocks on the front door and half expects May to open it. Instead he finds a feisty woman, blond hair in a loose bun. She looks like an older, hippie version of Myriam.

Dean tells her his hastily put together story about how he's interested in rural architecture and heard about the small cottage on this farm. The woman, Susan Miller, *just call me Suzy*, beams at him. "Yes, our little house is charming. You're lucky. It's free this week. Would you like to stay?"

Dean's relieved she turns to get the key so he has time to get his features under control. "Yes," he chokes out, "I'd like that very much."

Dean is sitting on the porch, on a bench much like the one that stood here 116 years ago. The sun is setting over the empty fields and taking the mild autumn air with her. Against the blazing orange, he makes out a figure coming up the path. Cas' trench coat billows around him and his head is cast down as if he's careful where he steps.

Warmth blooms behind Dean's ribs while he follows Cas' movements. Lost are the awkward angles he used to hold his limbs in, long gone the stiffness in his shoulders. Time and loss have smoothed his edges.

Cas comes up the last steps and lifts his head. Their eyes meet just like they have a million times before, and Dean still feels like it's the first.

"What are you doing here?"

"I got a letter, too. I thought I might find you here."

Cas sits down beside him and keeps his gaze on the horizon.

Dean takes in Cas' profile, the strong jaw dusted with stubble, the straight nose and the high cheekbones. If he squints, he can see the bold and clear-cut lines that his friend passed on through the generations. Fran's words come back to him. Dean read her letter ten times at least.

I don't know what I should believe, now that I know that angels exist. Is there something we should hope for? Is there a reason and a plan behind all of this? I can't say. What I believed my whole life and still believe is this. Whatever comes next, and even if there is an afterlife, this life is too short to not grasp every chance for love and happiness. This life is too short for fear.

Dean takes a deep breath. Then he reaches for Cas' hand, the right one close to him, and takes it in his own, straightens out the long, elegant fingers on his thigh.

Cas' knuckles are busted and scabbed over, and beneath the old blood lie scars. Cas wouldn't have them if they never met. But Cas is sitting next to him now, and Dean has made peace with the idea that Cas is here because he chose to be nowhere else, because he chose to be with Dean.

Dean turns the hand and traces the lines inside with his fingertips. Cas lets him, and he doesn't ask why.

"I'm done being afraid," Dean murmurs, and his voice betrays him. He *is* afraid, still, but this is too huge, it's too important to be fearful.

Cas doesn't say anything. He closes his hand around Dean's and stands. They go inside and stop beside the bed. It's the same frame, Dean notices, darker, wearing the marks of time.

Cas touches his cheek and then he leans in and brushes his lips over Dean's.

"Okay?", Cas whispers, and Dean nods. Cas' lips are warm and dry, and they fit against his own as if they were made for this. Dean flicks out his tongue to trace them, and Cas' breath hitches before he moves to press their mouths together again, to lick along the seam of Dean's lips.

Dean invites Cas in, eager now, and sighs when their tongues meet. He wants to feel more of him, needs to have him close, needs to make sure they're both alive and in this together. He lays the words still stuck in his chest into his hands and lips to leave them on Cas' body and press them into his skin.

His heart beats in his throat, and his hands are shaking when he reaches out to shove Cas' coat from his shoulders. They move slow, unhurried, as if they've done this countless times before.

Dean maps out Cas' body with his hands. He feels solid and real under his fingertips. A low hum builds in the air and Cas gasps when a spark flies between Dean's hand and Cas' chest. "That's my grace," Cas says, eyes wide with awe.

"Yeah," Dean answers, "you gave it to me to lead me back home."

"I'm sorry I don't remember."

Dean hums in agreement. "Doesn't matter now. I'm here." The grace inside him sings when their lips meet again, and this time Dean deepens the kiss to taste and draw a low moan from Cas. His hands drop to Cas' belt and open it, and while Cas' slacks fall to the ground he ditches his own jeans. Cas reels him in again and presses close. His hands frame Dean's face, steady and sure, and Dean grabs Cas' hips and brings their bodies together.

Cas' skin is hot against his, and he can feel Cas' heart beating against his own chest. "I want you," Dean rasps out between kisses, and takes a step back to lie down on the bed. Cas stands between his open legs, hair messed up, lips red and shining, and his loose white boxers do nothing to hide his arousal. The sunset reaches through the small window and touches his smooth skin with rays of honey and rose and copper. Dean has never seen anything more beautiful in his life.

Dean waits and lets Cas look his fill, too. Then he reaches down and slips his hands into the waistband of his boxer briefs, gaze locked with Cas', and pushes them down his legs. Heat blooms wherever Cas' gaze lands. Cas' eyes, dark and blown and hungry, flicker to Dean's groin and he leans forward to tug the fabric further down.

While Dean is sad that Cas had to give up most of his grace and he can no longer see the powerful being swirling underneath his scarred skin, he isn't any less awed by the fact that this Cas, the human one, is willing to be with him. In the end it doesn't matter if Cas reaches out with his grace or with his hands – Dean will always be waiting for his touch.

With swift efficient movements Cas undresses too, and then he's crawling up Dean's body until he's hovering over him, and slowly sinks down. They both groan when their bodies meet, skin on skin from chest to thighs. Dean trails his hands down Cas' back and lifts his chin to find Cas' mouth again. They start moving at the same time, a slow sensual rhythm that is mirrored in the way their tongues and lips meet.

Dean had always thought it would happen after a fight, frantic, leaning against the back of an old warehouse, while the blood dried on their clothes, while they were still dizzy with adrenaline and panic for nearly losing each other. He had been close to shoving Cas against the nearest wall so many times he lost count years ago. What he had never anticipated is this.

Cas' body moves languidly on top of him and Dean revels in the weight and the friction of having him so close. He can smell the drive here on his skin, the sun and Cas' own scent of storm and lightning, mixing with their sweat and the earthy smell of sex.

Dean meets the motion of Cas' hips, their lengths aligning and thrusting into the slippery heat between their bellies. Dean has a thousand elaborate plans stowed away somewhere in his brain how he wants to bring Cas pleasure, and he hopes he will get to use them one day, but right now, this is all he needs. He trails his fingertips down Cas' spine and grabs his ass to urge him into a faster rhythm, a mirror to his frantic heartbeat.

Cas turns his head and breathes against Dean's neck, and Dean can feel his muscles bunching up beneath his fingers. "Yeah, Cas, like that. I got you," Dean whispers against Cas' temple and then Cas seizes up and spills against Dean's stomach with a sigh.

Dean keeps still and holds Cas while his breathing slows down. Then Cas pulls back his head and catches Dean's gaze. The hum builds and the energy pushes against Dean's skin from inside and from every point their bodies touch. He can feel Cas' grace glow with love and happiness, and when Cas ups the volume with a smile, that spark runs down Dean's spine and he tumbles over the edge, too.

They breathe together.

"I love you", Dean says, and it's the most natural thing in the world, as if the last year, the last eight years, his whole life led him to this single moment. Cas says nothing, just looks at him, then brings their lips together again, eyes wide open.

While he's drowning in Cas' gaze, Dean thinks he can see a flash of Fran's ice blue irises deep inside them. He doesn't shy away from the sudden pang of loss, lets it mingle with the heady mixture of emotions coursing through him.

Cas leans back and whispers, "I love you, too."

Castiel,

you won't remember me, but I will remember you for the rest of my life.

I spent a year with one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. I don't need to tell you what kind of man Dean Winchester is, as I know you know, I felt that you know.

Experiencing you falling in love with him may be something no human has any right to be privy to, but I have, and I will forever cherish my memories of it. Your story is proof that love can't be contained by time, it can't be destroyed by fate, it will find a way.

I can't say if your feelings have lessened or changed over the years. But I can tell you that his haven't.

I feel silly to give advice to an angel, but if you want it, here it is: Go to him. Don't let the fact that the road was long and winding keep you from taking the last step.

*Glaciers move slowly,
and no one knows their destiny
until they reach the sea.*

Francesca Durruti, Orono/Maine, June 1901

Chapter End Notes

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