

For Me This is *Heaven*

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Rating : R

Pairing : Dean/Castiel

Warnings : AU. Fusion with *How to Train Your Dragon*. Light sex scene.

Summary : Cansae is a town nestled in the foothills of the mountains, surrounded by rivers, trees and ravines. It's a picturesque place to settle. There's only one major problem. Angels.

In cities all across these lands, angel raids on the human inhabitants happen nearly every month. The angels harvest the souls of humans and the cities have bound their efforts together to create an elite army of hunters. Men and women trained specifically in the killing of angels and the protection of the civilians. Each year, any citizen of the age twenty-one can sign up for the training.

This year the training takes place in the city of Cansae and Dean Winchester is determined to be the best, for the glory of the reward of killing his first angel before the city and before his father.

For Me This is Heaven

*H*eavy wind beats the air and the grass ripples silver in the moonlight. A night that had until seconds ago had been still is now abuzz with the clap of horseshoes on cobblestone and the pounding of them over dirt. With the metallic clang of swords and arrows and the heavy weights on the nets. Of men shouting order.

“Get the line in order!”

It’s been over a month since the last attack.

Dean’s feet thud heavy against the stone brick as he runs along the great wall that surrounds his city, pausing only to stare down at the melee below or up into the dark sky. He rarely sees it coming no matter how hard he tries, eyes peeled for that telltale flash of light; a wing in the sky or a reflection of metal armor. No one ever sees them coming until it’s too late and the force of the wind is already bearing down with the beating of a dozen giant wingspans.

The angels are here and the hunters rise to meet them. They mount their horses and ride ahead, fearlessly gallop into the night, to the

edge of the city. Dean will be with them soon and he watches them now with naked awe in his gaze.

The first angel comes from the side. The sudden scream of a horse pierces through the air and Dean's eyes cut to where the angel covers beast and man with its wings. A flash of golden light and the man's soul is gone. One powerful beat of its wings and the angel is a hundred feet in the sky, circling for a second dive, this time joined by a dozen more.

"Ready the nets!"

Dean's gaze finds the owner of the deep voice that calls and rallies the men into attack. That's John Winchester, best of the hunters of Cansae, a city nestled in the foothills of mountains and ravines and rivers. The next city is a week's horse ride away and tonight, they escape siege and Cansae faces it.

A shower of arrows whistles through the air. Flashes of white energy light up the sky where they meet their marks but that's only a distraction. A volley to slow the angels down.

There's only one way to kill an angel.

First you have to down it. Aim for its wings.

Dean watches John swing one of the cannons around. It takes a split second. Find the target. Light the fuse. Keep the aim steady. The cannon sounds off with a bang and a coiled net hisses into the air, the heavy metal weights stretching it out. John Winchester never misses and the net snags and catches the angel's wings. The weights tangle and drag it down.

Angels are clumsy on the ground; their wings are unwieldy. Dean mimes the movements as John draws a silver dagger from its sheath.

Second, you stab it. Skewer its delicate throat but not with any knife. The silver daggers of the hunters are long and indestructible. The flats of them are carved through with angelic symbols. Woven with death spells. Only these can kill an angel and you have to hit it in the throat, beneath the jaw, up into the back of its head.

A downed angel might be a dead one but it's still a dangerous one. A clean swipe with a large wing could break a man's neck but on the ground, men are more agile.

And John *never* misses.

The angel screams, light explodes across the landscape, brightening the scene around it. Dean is left with the impression of wings seared to his retinas until he blinks them away. With the death of the first angel, the rest scatter.

That's John Winchester. That's his dad. That's who Dean wants to be.



There are bodies to be burned the next day, after the sun rises and the angels have left with souls in their grasp. The angels are burnt as well, separate from the citizens of the city, and they look like men upon their death.

Their wings disintegrate and all that's left are impressions in the afterimage. Without those wings, they could be human. Under the armor and chain mail they wear, their bodies are that of the toned hunters. Their eyes are crystal clear. Their blood is red. They burn the same.

One angel and five men. The odds are never in their favor. Dean helps to build the pyres and to stoke the fires high, a task that takes the majority of the day as the angels and hunters are burned on separate ends of the city. The smell of it permeates the air.

The battles started an age ago. War, some men call it. Well before Dean's time and while he knows there are a dozen different theories; all 'why' and 'how' and 'when', Dean only cares about one thing. What's the best way to kill them *now*?

A school was formed and cities from all across the land sent their most eager and dedicated youths to train. Hunters. Train the best, the fastest, and the strongest. The bravest. To kill angels and to protect their families. To keep the civilians safe and the cities thriving.

This year the home of the training compound would be Cansae. The age of training; twenty-one. One week from now and Dean would be in training to take his dad's place as the most renowned angel hunter of his time. He was going to make John proud.



Impala is the fastest horse Cansae has seen in years. John had handpicked her when she was a filly and he had handed her lead

rope over to Dean to train. Raven black and sleek with muscle, Dean had thought *here* is a horse and one that was going to be way too much for him. She'd thrown him at least once a day when she'd grown enough to carry a saddle. But she was smart and when he'd won her over, he'd won an amazing ally. A hunter can only be as good as the weapons he uses and the horse he rides. And Impala is the best.

Dean settles his saddle over her back and she stamps her foot with impatience to get going while he cinches up the girth.

"Hey, Dean!" A voice calls out to him and Dean turns, watching as his little brother winds through the people and animals of the stables to get to Dean's side. Dean knots the girth and waits for Sam to reach him. Sam who isn't little anymore, who's taller than Dean but all long skinny arms and legs and more than his share of clumsiness to go with them. A few years and he'll be able to sign up for angel training as well if he has a mind to.

"Hey, Sammy," Dean greets. "You wanna come along?"

"Can I?" Sam asks, eager as anything and Dean grins and nods.

"Fetch Dodge and meet me out at the west gate." Dean watches as Sam runs off into the stables to halter and saddle his own horse. Handpicked by their father as well, he's a bright bay gelding with an attitude but he'd run head first into anything he's pointed at. Dean's not sure if that's from blind faith in his rider or if the horse is just a little mindless or a lot fearless.

Dean lifts himself up onto Impala and turns her for the city gates. There are three points of entrance to the city. The large main

entrance is heavily guarded by hunters both on horseback and up in the towers on either side of the iron gates. As well, there are two smaller doors and here only a single guard on horse. The rest of the city is surrounded by a stone wall where hunters patrol and guard posts are set up along the perimeter. It shields the city from the wind the angels kick up and gives the civilians some added sense of security, though the high walls do nothing to keep out something that can fly. Within the walls there are lines of square stone houses each marked at the doors with warding symbols to keep the angels from gaining entrance. This doesn't stop them beating the walls down to get in that way, no matter how strong the architects build them.

It's one of the smaller doors Dean rides to. A guard mounted on a stocky tough pony lets him through with a stiff nod and Dean waits just outside the city limits on a beaten road that winds off into the forest for Sam. Dean laughs when Sam rides through a few minutes later, Dodge letting out a quick kick at the pony as he's wont to do and Sam yells at him as he's wont to do.

"Maybe he'll kick the angels down for you," Dean suggests as they make their way along the road, where soon the forest blocks out the sounds of the city at work during the day and then it's just the rustling of leaves and birdsong.

Sam rolls his eyes. "We have more important things to do, thanks."

It's an ongoing argument because Sam doesn't have a mind to be a hunter. He wants to research, more interested in the 'why are they

doing this?’ than the ‘how do we kill it?’ If they can figure out that ‘why’ they might be able to stop the kill altogether. It breaks family tradition and Dean is secretly glad for it. Their mother had been a hunter and it had killed her. John might be disappointed but Dean doesn’t want his little brother going down that track.

It’s why Sam has always got this satchel over his shoulder when they go out riding. There’s paper and pen in there and Sam is always jotting down this or that note. An idea or an observation, anything at all that pops into his head. There’s more to angels than people know, he insists. They attack too intelligently, there has to be a reason behind it and more than the simple genocide of humanity. Dean doesn’t disagree with him, he just doesn’t care. They’re angels. They’re monsters. The only good one is a dead one.

They reach a flat grassy stretch of the trail and Dean grins at Sam. Here’s where Impala gets to stretch her legs and he puts his heels to her sides so she explodes under him, launching forward. There’s a second where Dean is always sure the force is going to send him tumbling backwards off of her before he can feel her strides lengthening beneath him and she grunts with the effort. Behind him he can hear the heavy pound of Dodge’s hooves fighting to keep up.

The trail leads down into a gentle gully, cut through by a stream. Dean only pulls Impala up to a walk when the path narrows and winds through the sapling pine trees that boarder the water’s edges. The horses stop here to drink and Dean and Sam both take in the quiet beauty of the place without a word. It if weren’t for the angels, it would

be perfect. But there are angels and they should know better than to let their guard down so fully.

“Dean!” Sam snaps in a harsh whisper and Dean’s instantly alert. Sam is staring off into the trees and Dean follows the gaze, heart thudding and it takes him a second to see it. Then the wings flex up into the air, huge black monstrosities, as dark as the horse Dean rides.

For all that Sam speaks of the intelligence of angels and their reasons, he looks scared of this one. Only a few hundred feet up the stream from them, the angel cups water in its hands to drink, hidden away around a bend in the stream and a cluster of pine trees. Dean raises a hand to hold Sam steady and puts himself and Impala between the creature and Sam. The movement shifts a rock under Impala’s hoof and the angel snaps to attention, head darting up and eyes immediately locking on Dean’s.

For a moment, they stare across the space, the forest staying silent around them and Dean hardly dares to breathe. The angel isn’t in battle armor, only white cloth covering its torso and down to its knees. Canvas covers its feet and straps of it crisscross half-way up its shins. Its hair is a mess of black but from here, Dean can’t see the color of its eyes, though all angels are said to be jewel bright and hypnotizing.

A snap of a branch in the distance flings the angel into action. Dean and Sam both flinch as it launches with a single downward beat of its wings into the air, breaking through the thin canopy of the trees. Out of the shade and in the bright sunlight, Dean can see its wings aren’t black at all but the deep blue of night sky. Dean has no idea why he

does it but when the angel moves, so does he. He kicks Impala sharply and she launches forward after the angel, her hooves clattering down the rock bed of the stream. The trees pass him by in a blur but above and ahead of them, the angel stays sharp and clear as Dean focuses on it.

“Dean, what the hell are you doing?” Sam yells from behind him and Dean takes his eyes off the angel for long enough to glance at Sam, struggling with Dodge who sets himself to keeping up with Impala, ignoring Sam’s straining hands on the reins.

“I dunno!” He’s chasing an angel, following the gentle curves of the stream and then up onto the rocky ground, winding through the trees as the angel darts above the tops of them. Its deep blue wings push against the air, sending the skinny birch trees swaying and a shower of dead needles raining from the pine trees. Dean can feel the force of it as he pulls level beneath the angel. It looks down at him while Dean stares up, and Dean trusts Impala to guide them safely through the forest.

The angel banks sharply and Dean leans to steer Impala-
“Dean!” Sam voice cries out to him. “The canyon is there!”

Dean yells for Impala to stop, hauls back on the reins as they break through the tree line and there, a few feet ahead of them, the land falls down into a rocky cliff. The angel soars out into the open air, looks back at them once and then it’s gone from sight as Impala pulls up with a skidding half-rear, dirt billowing up around them.

Impala is breathing hard beneath him and Dean isn’t any better. He looks back and finds Sam, wide-eyed and frightened and Dean doubts he looks different except for the part where he’s grinning in

exhilaration. "Did you see that?" Sam glares and shakes his head. Dean tries to find the last speck of the angel in the distance.



They head back to the city at a sedate walk, letting the horses cool from the run and allowing their own quick beating hearts to settle.

"You're out of your mind, Dean. You can't just chase an angel."

Dean rolls his eyes. "You're the one going on about angels being good, blah blah blah."

"I never *said* that. I said they're intelligent. I said there's probably a better way than letting a bunch of people get massacred every month. You're just looking for a cheap thrill."

"Whatever, Sammy. Gotta loosen up sometimes."

Honestly, Dean's not sure why he did it. No one in their right mind chases an angel through the forest unarmed. That angel could have turned and killed them both in an eye blink if it had wanted, armor or no. But it hadn't. It had only tried to lead Dean over the edge of a canyon. Dean snorts and tells himself to quit acting like an idiot. They ride the rest of the way in silence and Dean thinks of the spread of wings more than he should.

When they get back inside the city walls, there's commotion. People are excited, the city alive as they hurry to put the final touches in place for the training. Extra market stalls are going up along the main street, new housing has been built, a whole new stable even. There will be celebration and festivities in the week to come, before the training begins. As Dean and Sam enter the walls, the guard tells them the first of the new hunters are arriving through the main gates.

Dean and Sam ride through the excitement back to the stables at the far end of the city, where they turn the horses loose in a paddock to enjoy the remainder of the day.

"You want to go see who's here?" Sam asks and Dean nods so they wander the side streets to avoid the press of people and get to the gates to watch the newcomers. Dean's heart thumps for a new reason now, anxious to see the others that he'll be up against because it is something of a competition. Only the best of them get the final reward in the end, the chance to kill their first angel under the watchful gaze of the city.

There's a crowd at the gates, all vying for a position to best see what's about to come through and Dean drags Sam away from them to the guard tower. The guards all recognize Dean and they let him past so he and Sam can climb the spiraling staircase to the top of the wall and from here, they can look down over everything. This is more of a crowd than the new hunters should merit and Dean feels his heart picking up with excitement. He thinks back again to the blue-winged angel and that's it. These are angels the gates are opening to admit. Captured and bound, to be used in the training. These are the things Dean is going to be facing off against in a week.

Huge horses, stocky and muscled, haul in solid reinforced wood cages on drays. Five drays. Five angels. The cages are carved with symbols, keeping the creatures inside held at bay, but as the last cage comes through there is a great noise. A high-pitched scream, a thunderous banging as the angel within beats at the walls with its wings hard enough to make the cage rattle and to startle the duo team of horses that pull it. Men are there to hold their reins and steady them. The watchers all gasp at the show of power from the unseen creature inside.

Dean glances to Sam, feeling his excitement welling up with the others, egged on by the crowd below. "That's the archangel. Ash said they had an archangel coming in this year." Dean wonders who caught it. Who managed to take down an archangel and then hold it. He knows his dad could do it.

They watch as the convoy heads into the city, to the other side, across the horse's pasture fields and away from the houses to where the training will be held. That is all new as well. A stadium where the city will watch and Dean will get his own angel killing blade.

Once the convoy is out of sight, Dean grins at Sam and they head back down from the guard tower to meet the newcomers who have followed the wagons in. They're easy to tell apart from the civilians who have come to watch the training from the stadium seats. They wear armor, carry a metal shield, and their horses are some of the most impressive that Dean has seen.

There are three of them here from the city of Sarnia, the closest at a week's ride and the first to arrive. Others will have ridden a month or more to attend the training.

Dean pushes his way through the people who are dispersing now that the angels have passed and to the side of the road. The new hunters spot him, a girl and two guys, and the girl pulls her horse up by Dean's side, swinging her leg around to dismount. She looks tough but her grin is light while her grip is strong when Dean shakes her offered hand.

"You're Dean Winchester," she says and Dean tosses a grin Sam's way.

"See, got a reputation already."

She rolls her eyes skyward. "Your dad has the reputation. And don't forget, Sarnia turns out more successful hunters than any other city," the girl says with an arrogant raise of her eyebrow before she lapses back into a friendly grin. "I'm Jo. The twins there are Andy and Ansem."

"Well welcome to Cansae," and he can't help but add on, "Home of the best hunter living," with the same arrogant look Jo had a second ago. But his excitement overcomes him and he nods back to Sam. "That's Sam. Come on, we'll show you the stables."

Dean leads them around the back roads to avoid the crowd again, walking ahead with Jo, and casually flirting while Sam falls behind with the twins.

"You came in with the angels; they're kept at Sarnia, right?" Dean asks once they've reached the stables and Dean leans back against a wood support to watch Jo settle her horse.

"Yep. It's our hunters who capture them like that," she says full of pride and Dean bites back the urge to tell her that Sarnia may be larger but Cansae still has the single best hunter out of any of them. Again.

"Do they really have an archangel?"

Jo nods and a thunderous expression replaces her previously bright eyes. "My dad was the one to catch it. Two months ago. Then it killed him while they were transferring it into a holding pen the next day." Dean's stunned, staring at Jo who's suddenly all business and now he gets what she's doing here. "And I'll be the one to kill it."



The week passes in a blur of parties and laughing and drinking. More people trickle in until Cansae is fairly brimming over. The new housing fills quickly and then the Inns and after that people even rent their guest rooms to out-of-towners for more money than what ought to be right. There are ceremonies to be had once all the new recruits have arrived. One to introduce them and it's the first time Dean sets foot in the stadium.

Inside, the stone walls are higher than he had imagined and he cranes his head upward to take in the rows of stands for the viewers. The ground is sand which his feet sink into and in the curved walls there are five doors across from the entrance. Behind them are angels. Above

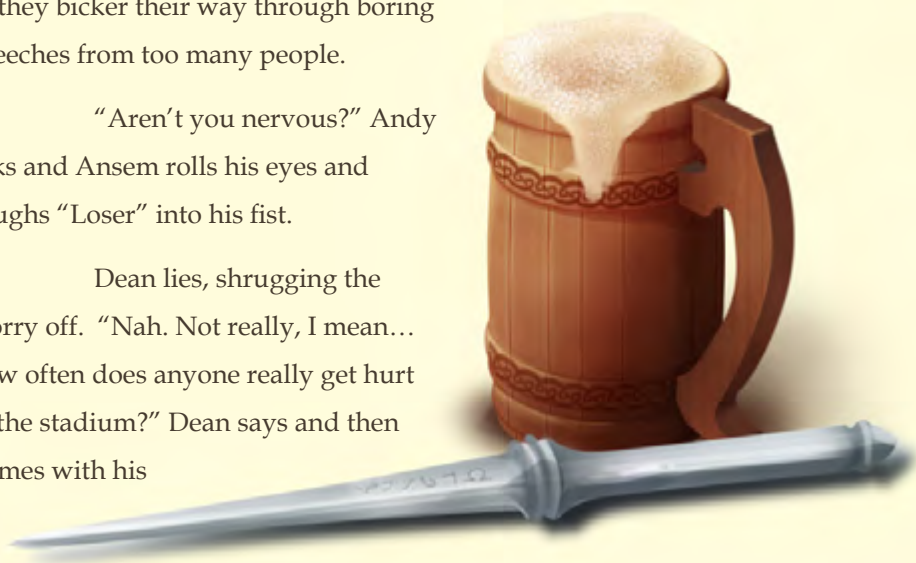
them, the ceiling is a webbing of nets, woven into a symbol of power that the angels cannot break through. There are similar symbols lining the walls. This is where each of the new hunters – twenty-five total – are handed their own silver blades.

Dean studies his own as it's handed to him, deceptively light but razor sharp. He grips his fingers around the hilt and the power of the symbols on the blade resonates through him. The others hold their blades with a similar awe and when Dean looks to his side, Jo holds hers with powerful determination. Dean feels the first ticking of nerves through him.

The opening ceremonies are followed by a feast. With the new hunters and their families, comes food; it's exotic and wonderful, the various towns bringing with them the reaps of their fall harvests. Dean finds a place to sit with Jo and Sam at his side with the twins Andy and Ansem sitting across from them and Dean watches in amusement as they bicker their way through boring speeches from too many people.

"Aren't you nervous?" Andy asks and Ansem rolls his eyes and coughs "Loser" into his fist.

Dean lies, shrugging the worry off. "Nah. Not really, I mean... how often does anyone really get hurt in the stadium?" Dean says and then mimes with his



steak knife while he goes on, "Besides, with those angel blades? We'll just skewer anything that comes close."

"Eating, Dean, thanks." Sam pulls one of his faces.

"Actually, people *have* been killed in the stadium."

Andy goes a little pale at this piece of information delivered deadpan from Jo. "Why did I let you talk me into this?" He asks his twin but Dean just grins and reaches across to slap his shoulder.

"Don't worry; I've got your back." Because nothing is going to take Dean down. Nothing is going to change what he's going to do here. Nothing is going to stop him making his dad proud.

Nothing is going to stop him helping Jo avenger her father and he finds her after the dinner, standing atop the stone wall and looking over the forest. He steps up behind her and nudges her shoulder with his. "We've got 'em, you know. That archangel and soon all the others." She smiles at him. "I've got your back too."



Two days before the training begins, the angels attack Cansae again.

The city is awake late, fireworks cracking through the air and there is drink and food. Dean is admittedly getting a little sick of all the fanfare so he's wandered away from the lights and the crowds, even

gently brushing Jo from his arm. There's a wind, a gentle billowing of the leaves that have fallen in preparation of winter. The sky is patchy with clouds and as Dean approaches the main gates to climb his way up the guard tower and perhaps walk the perimeter of the wall, the guards seem on alert.

Another volley of fireworks crackle into the sky and Dean stares out at the stars. A flash of dark movement cuts in front of them and he frowns. He turns to the guard standing beside him, armed with a quiver of arrows at his back. "Did you see that?" But the guard is distracted by the fireworks. Dean turns his attention back to the quiet skies and after a minute, in another flash of a firework, the spread of black wings against dark gray clouds.

"There's an angel out there."

The guard looks but there's nothing and the wind stays only a breeze. "You ain't a hunter yet, kid."

Dean glares at the dismissal and walks further along the high wall, to where the narrow pathway widens to accommodate three cannons. There are four cannon outposts along the wall, at each corner of the city, and more along the ground, all of them ready loaded with nets, flints to light them laid out in trays. Dean stands by one, reaches for a flint and watches the sky.

Aim. Dean catches movement in the sky and swings the mouth of the cannon around.

Keep it steady. He strikes the flint and lights the cannon. The whistle of the net through the air is overridden by the final explosion of

fireworks but Dean sees a black streak fall across the sky. He hit it. He *hit* it. Elation slams into him for as long as it takes realization to and then he's racing back towards the guard.

"There are angels!" Dean cries but the wind is already there. Noise like a thousand birds and then the alarms go up, a thundering of gongs across the city.

Dean runs down the tower stairs. He put the angel down, now he has to kill it. The guards are already mounted, the gates opening to them so they can meet the challenge and Dean leaps to join, to run on foot if he has to, but a hard hand grabs him by the collar of his shirt and hauls him back.

"You're not a hunter yet, Dean," his father tells him and Dean looks to find him suited for battle.

"But I shot one down!" And Dean has the knife; it rests eager to do its job in the sheath at his hip. He makes another bid to join the hunters but John holds him fast.

"Get back home."

Dean finds himself dragged back another couple steps and then his dad is striding through the gates without looking back, leaving Dean to watch. He stands there for all of a minute before he turns and runs the other way, towards the stables with wind whipping at his back. Everyone else is streaming into homes or to the stables as well. At least Cansae has never been so well defended, as the hunters from outside the city pick up their blades as well, and order their horses saddled to ride

with the Cansae hunters to meet the attack. Dean ignores them all and finds Impala in her stall.

He doesn't bother with a saddle, only grabs the lead rope of her halter and uses the side of the stall to heft himself up onto her back. She's anxious to get out there and he hardly needs to tell her before she's galloping down the line of stalls and into the open. He turns for the main gate and they race out into the dark of night and the howl of the wind, lost to the clash of angels and hunters that fade into the distance as he rides into the woods and no one stops him. No hunter and no angel notice a lone horse and rider leave the city. Dean should know better but he has to find his angel. To have put one down even before training? Unheard of. Dean's going to find it and he's going to kill it.

The wind dies down as he draws further away and he hopes the attack was short lived. That the other angels realized they were out-gunned and left. As he rides, Dean maps out the trajectory of the angel's fall in his head. Somewhere in the Lawrence Ravine, he thinks, and he presses Impala harder to reach it, splashing through a creek, jumping the logs in their path. When Impala's pace slows, he pulls her to a walk, allowing her to catch her breath. The other hunters won't stop him now and it takes Dean until morning to reach the ravine, looking all along the way for signs of the angel and crisscrossing the forest as they go.

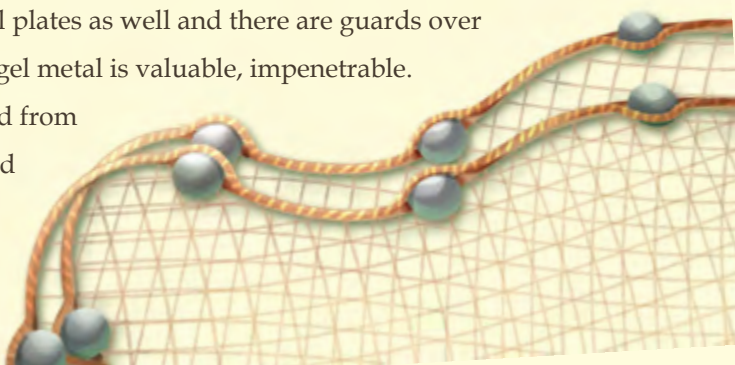
By morning, Dean is ready to give up hope. That it must have been a bad hit, the angel somehow got away. Or maybe one of the others had come to the rescue though he's never seen the angels stand for each other before.

Lawrence Canyon is a small canyon, carved out by a creek and a waterfall crashing down into it; the canyon walls are high and steep, rough rock walls worn down from water and slick in places with moss. Trees and roots grow and crawl down the sides. Dean rides Impala along a winding path down into it, the splash of the water against her legs echoing off the walls.

There's nothing here. A deep wide pool at the base of the waterfall. The banks of the creek are gravel patched with coarse grass. There are old fallen trees that lay across the creek and on the ground, great roots sticking up where some have been torn from the dirt. He's a few steps from a dead tree before he sees it, the huge expanse of a dark wing arching from the ground and Dean nearly jerks Impala away before he realizes that it isn't moving. Dean nudges Impala a cautious step forward, his hand dropping to the hilt of his blade. The angel has wedged itself as tight against the fallen tree as it can and as Dean inches closer, he can see the netting and the ropes wrapped all around it, digging in and holding the angel fast.

Adrenaline beats hard through Dean's veins. The angel is down. Now he has to kill it.

As Dean circles around, he realizes he knows this angel; he'd chased it through the forest days ago. It's dressed in battle armor now, a metal chest plate to cover its torso and shoulders, the skirt of the white cloth covered in metal plates as well and there are guards over the angel's shins. Angel metal is valuable, impenetrable. Every piece is stripped from them, to be melted and



re-forged, usually into the blades that kill them or shields to ward them off. This angel's armor is adorned in decorations of deep blue and depictions of dragons.

The angel breathes but doesn't stir and Dean finds himself relaxing as he takes it in. The great wings are held tight, half-stretched out and immobile. Dean can see even like this that they're damaged from the fall but not how badly. It doesn't matter. He's got to kill it.

He unsheathes the blade and holds it tight. Through the throat and into its head. It's no different than cutting the throat of a deer to finish it off after the hunt. This is just another animal. Dean takes a deep breath and swings himself from Impala's back. His feet hit the ground and the angel's eyes snap open and lock on him. Dean is sure his heart stops, entire body - entire world - freezing as he stares down into bright blue eyes. Or maybe this is them dulled and dark as anger flashes through them before they take in the sight of the blade and then it's fear.

The angel is afraid but it holds itself still, staring at Dean and even just looking at it, Dean can see it thinking. Then it tips its head back, baring its throat but never once breaking eye contact. There's a challenge there, a silent question, and Dean stupidly swears the angel is offering him its trust.

And Dean can't. The thing is laying there waiting to be killed and Dean's heart is beating wildly. The angel is helpless, its eyes are pained. Scared like so many humans, it looks just like so many humans. And Dean did this to it.

He turns the blade to the ropes, cuts through the netting that holds the angel's arms and legs in tangles. Casts aside the heavy metal weights that hold the wings in place. As soon as the weight disappears the angel is on him. Those blue wings beat the ground, Impala spooks with a scatter of gravel beneath her hooves, and the angel moves like lightning, its hand around Dean's throat and strong fingers pressing in to choke him.

The blade is knocked to the side and Dean stares with frantic eyes into the angel's as they bore into him. He grips at the angel's wrist but an angel's hold is unmovable. Give them a grip and they'll shake the life from you. Dean knows this but he looks into the intelligent eyes of this angel and doesn't feel as afraid as he should.

Another minute and the angel shoves him hard, hand against Dean's throat cutting off his air and he falls to the ground, vision graying around him. When it clears again, the angel is running, one stride and two and its wings snap out and launch it into the air. Dean can see what will happen before it does when he sees the awkward way the left wing sits, how it won't open properly. The angel manages a short distance before the wing folds and drops it back to the ground. Dean flinches at the short noise of distress before the angel is on its feet again, launching itself into the air one more time but it only meets with the smooth stone walls where the angel can't get a grip to climb out. Not under the weight of its wings. It screams then, loud enough to startle the birds from the trees above and to make Dean flinch and cover his ears. The screams of angels have been known to turn men deaf.

The movement draws the angel's attention back to Dean, its eyes narrowed and Dean knows it won't let him go a second time. He ducks to grab the angel blade and bolts but the angel can't lift its wing again and it drags along the ground. Dean stops out of the angel's reach and when it tries to lunge forward, he only has to back step. The angel stops, stares at him before closing its eyes in something too close to despair for Dean's comfort.

He whistles for Impala and rides away down the creek, leaving the angel behind.



They way back is quicker as Dean rides Impala on as straight of a line as he can manage and Impala is anxious to get back to her stall and the meal that awaits her there. It's late morning by the time Dean reaches the city and despite the attack there were no deaths and no one is any less excited. It takes Dean a precious long moment to remember *why*. Training starts tomorrow and with that thought, Dean's stomach drops.

He returns Impala to the stables and makes his way to his family's stone house, hoping to slip into his room and avoid detection. He makes it half-way up the steep stairs to the loft before there's a sound from below and he abruptly heads back down. It's not hard to pretend he's only just waking. Tiredness itches at his eyes and roughens his voice. A second later and his dad is calling out his name in an enthusiastic boom that makes Dean cringe.

"There you are, son. I wanted to talk with you." John takes hold of Dean by the shoulders the moment Dean steps over to him and Dean nearly stumbles over their feet. But John draws him along, and together they make their way to the den. Training starts tomorrow."

"I know." Dean can't even pretend to muster up the enthusiasm he'd shown a day ago. "Dad..."

But John smoothly cuts him off and Dean can't interrupt the quiet pride in his voice. "Your mother would be so proud of you."

And Dean wonders if that's true. If maybe she wouldn't just be scared the way Dean suddenly is. If after so many deaths, she wouldn't rather see Dean follow in Sam's footsteps. Maybe Sam had it right all along. Dean can't shake the deep intelligence of the angel's eyes from his head. Maybe he's hypnotized, and this is what the researchers mean when they talk about the depth of an angel's gaze.

They reach the den where Dean pulls from his father's grip and sinks down onto a wood chair that creaks beneath his weight. He can't bring himself to look up at his father. "I just...I don't think I can do this."

This is it, where all of John's faith and pride will fall away because Dean has to admit that he can't kill an angel. He nearly jumps when John laughs again. "First time nerves, boy! I went through the same thing, my first day before training. You'll do fine."

"But I can't kill an angel," Dean tries again, he *does*, shoving the words out into the air between them but John isn't listening. He never listens.

"Yes you *can*." John holds out his hand, expectant, knowing that Dean will take it and after a hesitation, Dean does. John grips his hand tight, a deal made between them, all grins while Dean's hand suddenly feels sweaty with uncertainty. "You're going to make me proud."

Or something, Dean thinks as John finally lets him go and leaves the house to oversee the last minute work on the stadium. He's always been about the job, more so since the death of Mary when vengeance gripped his eyes. The way it does with Jo's and so many other hunters. Dean heads back up the stairs with heavy feet and Sam is there in the loft to greet him. The loft is small where both their beds lay. Dean's head nearly touches the ceiling and already Sam has to duck a little. "Where have you been?"

"Out."

"Out?" Sam's eyebrows raise. "I saw you taking off last night on Impala."

Dean nods and sits down heavily next to Sam on the bed. Sam's been writing in his pad of paper again but he sets it aside, noticing the worry that lines Dean's face. "Did something happen?"

"No." Dean's fingers slide around the hilt of the angel sword still sheathed at his hip and he shakes his head. What would mom say if she knew he left an angel alive? What would Sam say if he knew that angel hadn't gone for the kill when it could have? Angels always went for the kill. Why didn't this one? "Just nervous, I guess."

"You'll do great. Just picture the angels naked."

That makes Dean snort and he glares at Sam. "Fuckin' child. Come on, let's grab some lunch, I'm starving."

He leaves the blade sitting on his bed and they head down to the kitchen together.



Dean stands in the center of the stadium while the sound of cheers and applause echoes all around.

There are six of them in here including Dean. Jo is to his left, along with the twins Andy and Ansem. There are two others to his right, having ridden in only the other night from the city of Medina, James and Dimi. They're large, tough. They have a look in their eyes that tells Dean to watch out for them because they're only going to watch out for themselves. In Dean's mind, they've already failed angel training because to defeat an angel you need to have each others back, to be able to trust the other hunters in the ring or out in the field with you.

Dean also knows the reputation of the man pacing in front of them. Old Bobby Singer, trainer to the new recruits. He'd been one of the best once and if his reputation is true to life then Dean thinks this man could even rival his dad. He looks rough and uncaring and he walks with a pronounced limp. Beneath those canvas jeans he wears, the leg isn't real. The story says an angel's wing had shattered it beyond saving. Even with the handicap, Dean would not want to face this man in anything but friendship.

"Welcome to your first day of angel training," Bobby addresses them, turning to face them finally and his eyes lock on Dean's for a moment. The spectators settle as Bobby speaks, his voice carrying as the circle of the stadium is designed to make it do. Dean swallows beneath his gaze and wonders if Bobby can read the truth in his eyes, how much Dean doesn't want to be here. But he moves on and takes in each of them the same way.

"You might want to get to know the people in the ring with you right now; this is who you'll be training with for the next month. You'll have each others backs; you'll need to trust each other. These are real angels you'll be fighting in this ring and they won't hold back. Got me?" His gaze zeroes in on Dean again and Dean can feel himself nod though he's less sure than ever.

"Good. Then let's get this show on the road." He moves away from them and the first of the five doors creaks as it begins to slide open.

"Hang on!" Andy yelps, panic raising the pitch of his voice. "Don't you have to, I don't know...*teach* us first?"

Bobby grins, the six of them tensed and not even a bit ready. "You learn better if it's on your feet. Angels are resourceful. You're going to need to be as well." And then Bobby is out of the stadium, the heavy iron entrance gate is secured behind him and the first cage door slides open.

The angel within explodes from the cage, its wings kicking up the sand in a whirlwind and Dean stumbles backward in anticipation of an attack. But the angel ignores them; it beats its wings against the

ground, stirring sand until Dean can barely see it. It gets airborne, struggling to reach the netting and freedom, but just as quickly, the angel hits the ground with a thud.

The wings are clipped, Dean realizes as the dust settles and the angel gathers itself. It stretches the wings to their full span and Dean thinks again to the angel in the woods. The long pinion feathers that Dean could have touched. This angel doesn't have them and it can't raise itself from the ground or control its flight when it does.

Dean can see it clearly now. Her. Her hair is long; her form is small, so exposed without the angel's armor covering her. She looks at them and Dean can see the fear in her eyes. She's trapped and she wants out. But the six of them are standing in her way and she angles towards them, fierce determination in the lines of her face.

"A downed angel might be a dead one," Bobby calls out to them, bringing Dean's mind back into the game. "But that doesn't mean they ain't dangerous."

To kill an angel, you need to bring it down. Once you do that, you're more agile but an angel is far from helpless themselves. Watch out for the wings and no sooner does Dean think it than the angel darts forward and he only just manages to jump above a heavy swipe aimed for his leg.

Dean casts his gaze around the ring but there are no weapons, only a single net. This lesson is about team work and capturing this angel alive.

The angel rounds on Andy and Dean's instincts push him to start barking orders. "Jo! Get the net. You two, distraction," he snaps to James and Dimi. Angels can't speak English but Dean swears this one is narrowing its eyes and watching him intently.

They dive to their places and circle the angel who watches them in despair, trying to keep them each in her sights, swinging with her wings, using them to stir up clouds of sand and block their vision. Anything at all to keep them off of her, to keep that net from dragging her down again.

The angel buzzes them, a quick launch into the air and straight at Dean, her wings snapping an inch from his head before he rolls out of her way and back to his feet. The sand is difficult to find purchase on and the angel stumbles while Dean escapes. Dean watches as she turns away, wheeling around for another run like a bird of prey, her sharp eyes mapping each of them out. Who is the biggest threat?

Dean takes his eyes off her for a second to look at the others and sees Jo and the twins, pressing together, ready to pen the angel in. The angel does as well and she aims for them. Her wings cut outwards and this time she strikes with enough speed to send Andy flying back against the wall, wind knocked from his lungs.

Jo yells at Dean and Dean realizes he's just standing there, just watching in fascination as this creature moves, precise and elegant, and the angel is about to move on Andy, who lies dazed and useless.

The other four are there as well. Together, they stretch the net and catch the angel's wings to drag her back to the cage. They almost

have her when she screams and Dean flinches from the noise that would have deafened them all if not for the wards surrounding the stadium. The angel rips the net from their hands and Dean finds himself on the ground with the angel bearing down on him. Her fingers reach for his forehead and he closes his eyes but she never makes contact.

A heavy net has been shot onto her wings from a canon post along the outside of the stadium and she's being hauled back into her cage. He sees her struggling uselessly against it and then Bobby takes up his field of vision.

"Never let an angel touch you. They'll always go for the kill."

Except when they don't.



They're dismissed after a debriefing where Bobby paces before them and lectures them on everything they did wrong. Except Jo, who he praises in an offhand gruff manor and Dean would feel ruffled by this, that Jo had bested him but he doesn't care anymore. And Andy, who suffers bruised ribs in the medical building. A day in and already an injury because Dean can't get his head on straight.

Jo tries to call him over as they exit the ring, but Dean ignores her, pressing through the six new recruits that file in for their own lesson, making his way towards his house, where he throws together a bag with some food and he steals Sam's paper and pen. Then he's off to the stables,

dodging his way around people that might try to stop him, thankful that his dad is busy at the stadium or out with old hunters and Sam is nowhere to be seen. Impala waits for him and he saddles her quickly.

He leaves by the side door and rides along the worn trail to Lawrence Ravine. He wonders if the angel will even still be there or if its fellows will have gotten him but Dean doubts that. From what he's seen, there's little care between them. They don't return for their fallen.

At the canyon, he leaves Impala to forage knowing she'll never stray far from him and walks into the canyon, dragging his bag along after him. He stays near the security of the wall for a moment, hidden amongst rocks and spindly trees, peering out as he searches for the angel. He spots it – him? – after only a moment.

The angel is sitting on the bank of the stream, his wings are spread around him and he's combing his fingers through one. Littering the ground at his feet are feathers, bent and broken and wet. Dean can see the blood glisten on the angel's fingers and the angel keeps reaching into the stream to cup the water and bring it to his wings. Cleaning the injuries, Dean realizes and feels his stomach sink a little whenever the wing twitches in hurt. One wing still sits awkwardly and if anything the bend in it looks worse. The angel's armor has been discarded in a pile next to it so it only wears the white cloth and sitting there, it – he – looks strangely vulnerable.

Dean wishes he could kill it. It would be a mercy, wouldn't it? The angel's wing is broken, it's trapped here. But Dean looks at *him* and sees his fear. That angel doesn't want to die anymore than Dean does.

He takes a cautious step forward and his bag scrapes against the rock wall as he leaves the gap. The angel's head snaps around immediately, eyes narrowing as they catch sight of Dean and then he's on his feet, good wing flaring up behind him while the other lays limp on the ground.

Dean raises his hands to show they're empty. "Hey uh... It's okay," Dean says and feels like an idiot. The angel can't understand him, they don't speak English, Dean doesn't know if they speak at all. They scream. Researchers have taken them apart and found their larynx to the most complicated of any animal. A source of power. Dean thinks then that they must talk.

But the angel in front of him doesn't show any signs of understanding. His wing doesn't relax the defensive posture, feathers puffed in agitation, and he stares at Dean like one wrong move will mean the end. Dean knows it will so he stands still with his hands up.

Those blue eyes keep boring into Dean's and Dean's sure he's going to have a heart attack if one of them doesn't do something. The angel's gaze flicks over him, his eyes settle on the angel blade at Dean's side and Dean swears the angel growls at him for it. A base rumble at the back of its throat and when Dean moves, it gets louder, jerking the angel forward a half-step, wings bristling even while one drags along the ground.

"Wait wait," Dean snaps out, one hand still raised while his other drops to the knife and the angel is on him – broken wing or not – almost before Dean can toss it aside, back into the rocks where neither of them can easily reach it. But the angel is still there, hard breaths

that ruffle through Dean's hair and Dean cries out despite himself and stumbles back, squeezing his eyes shut.

He only opens them when he realizes that the angel is just standing there again, inches away and staring at him. The conflict is gone from the angel's eyes though deep-set wariness remains. That stare makes Dean want to shift on his feet but he forces himself to meet it.

"See, buddy? No harm." Dean thinks the angel might roll his eyes at him before turning and stalking back to his place by the stream.

The angel goes back to combing out his wings, pulling bent or ruined feathers and washing away the mostly dried blood. Dean moves forward a few steps, until the angel glares at him and then Dean settles down onto the ground, sitting cross-legged and pulling his bag onto his lap. The angel studies him for a moment; Dean almost sees curiosity in the tilt of his head, before he goes back to grooming his wing.

From the bag, Dean pulls Sam's pen and paper and spends the next hour uselessly sketching while he lets his mind wander. He's sitting maybe ten feet from an angel and they haven't killed each other yet. Dean wonders why. Why the angel isn't attacking him and then he wonders why he isn't attacking the angel. What would dad say? Sam would be jealous that he wasn't the one here performing this little experiment, possible proof that there's more to angels than any of them know. Maybe Dean really should be the researcher in the family.

At least the angel seems content enough for them both to stay where they are but when Dean lifts



his head after a while to glance over, the angel is gone and Dean jumps to his feet. Only to spin around and find the angel is again mere inches from him, making Dean flinch and trip backwards onto the ground. He looks up at the angel and the angel peers down at him before holding out his hand. It takes Dean a second to get it and then he's handing over the pad of paper, blushing for some inconceivable reason while the angel glances over the page filled up with sketches of feathers or various symbols that Bobby had told them to memorize.

This time, when the angel makes noise it sounds like words and Dean can hear the tone of a question.

"Angel language? I can't understand that," Dean says and the angel tilts his head. "And you can't understand me." Dean sighs and wonders how they'll get over this roadblock. Then the angel turns away from him, broken wing whispering along the ground as the angel holds it up as best he can and Dean catches sight of the slightest smirk before he does. "Hey! You *can* understand, you-" Dean reaches out, touches his hand to the angel's wing to stop him. He has the quickest sensation of soft feathers against his fingers and then he's being struck hard and thrown back to the ground.

The angel has his wrists in a vice grip, lip curled back into a snarl as it presses Dean down against the sharp rocks of the creek bed. Dean yelps out, wide-eyed, "Sorry!" For a second he's sure this is it but like every other time, the angel hesitates for a second and then pulls away, releasing Dean from the grip and allowing him to gain his feet.

Dean rubs at the back of his head where it had struck the ground. "Touchy, jeez."

They stare at each other for a moment, Dean gingerly pressing the back of his head, until the angel sighs and reaches out for him with two fingers. Dean's eyes widen and he stumbles back but the angel grabs hold of his wrist again when Dean holds his hand up to ward the angel away. Those fingers find Dean's forehead. Dean has seen what happens when an angel touches a man this way and prepares for encroaching darkness to take him. It doesn't. Instead the pain from the fall lifts away into nothing.

The angel lets go of him and steps back, eyelids drooped in sudden weariness. "Wow...um. Thanks, I guess."

Dean had no idea angels could heal with a touch. He doubts anyone else did either.

"Neat trick. Guess that doesn't work on you though, huh?" Dean says and glances back to the angel's broken wing.

The angel follows his gaze, first with eyes and then he touches his fingers against the bend in the wing bone, flinching and pulling away quickly.

"I did that..."

The angel looks at him sharply, expression accusing until he takes in the guilt in Dean's gaze.

"Come on," Dean says to break the moment and he turns to his bag, not bothering to look and see if the angel follows him. There's a rustle of feathers that says he is. Dean crouches down and opens the bag to bring out some of the food he shoved in. He has no idea what angels

eat. The hearts of men, his dad might have said. Dean wonders if they hunt deer the way humans do or maybe they don't eat anything at all.

"You must be hungry, I didn't really know what you eat but if there's anything that catches your eye?" Dean turns to look at the angel while he lays out the wrapped food on the ground between them and sees that something has definitely caught the angel's eye. His nostrils are flared like he can actually smell the bar of chocolate Dean had stolen from the hiding place Sam thinks he doesn't know about. "Go on then."

The angel's fingers wrap around the bar and it looks like he's going to take the food and run before he visibly stays himself. He breaks the bar in half and offers it to Dean. The feathers of his wings practically ripple in pleasure when he eats it. Who knew angels had a sweet tooth?

Dean leaves soon after, returning to Impala and the city, and tomorrow another day of training.



As far as Dean is aware, no one knows more about angels than Bobby Singer. The only time Dean gets a chance to see Bobby is during training, as the man is a little reclusive the rest of the day and busy when he's not holed away on his own. When Bobby's leg demanded he no longer fight them, he turned to research instead, digging up every scrap of information there was but Bobby's information is biased. Bobby's information is the best way to kill them,

the best way to defend against them. But there are other things, bits of knowledge that might prove handy against them one day and he's been around longer than the others, he might have heard something younger hunters haven't.

"But no one has *ever* tried talking to them?" Dean calls out to Bobby, who shakes his head and rolls his eyes.

Behind Dean, Jo yells out his name and Dean only just manages to dive to the ground and avoid the cut of a wing against the back of his head as it lances through the air. "Pay attention!"

Dean shoots her a glare before rolling to his feet and ducking behind one of the walls that make up the maze the training ring currently consists of. Each of them carries a bola, a ball and rope, to try and bring the angel down. Not as effective as the cannons. They need to be thrown hard and fast and the angel will always be able to duck if it sees you coming. Trying to outmaneuver it through the maze is the only way to get behind it and take it down.

"You didn't answer the question!" Dean shouts back to Bobby, jogging down one of the maze paths and wondering where the others are. He's lost track of them, focused more on Bobby than on working together.

"You idjit! Angels *can't* talk. They ain't humans, just animals."

"But has anyone tried?" Dean insists.

"Angels are for killing, not sitting down and having tea with. Now pay attention!"

Dean turns a corner and the angel is on the other side, causing Dean to skid to a stop and stare at the angry flare of wings that spread up from the angel's shoulders. These wings aren't clipped and the gray feathers are practically spiked outwards in their agitation as the angel rushes at him. It's stopped short by Jo's bola wrapping around its legs and dropping it to the ground. A moment later and the angel is tangled in nets that drag it back to its cage.

Jo catches Dean before he can slip away this time, ducking in front of him to cut off his path of retreat. "What are you doing, Dean? You're falling apart in the ring." She sounds equal parts confrontational and worried.

"Can't stay and chat, Jo, I gotta find my brother," he lies and darts around her, jogging off towards his house. He can feel her eyes on him as he leaves.

Impala takes him back to the canyon, where he turns her loose in anticipation of spending the remainder of the day here. Like last time, his heart thuds at the prospect of seeing the angel or at the prospect of the angel being gone. Dean still isn't sure the other angel's won't come for it or that it won't try to drag itself away and then it could be miles off.

For a moment, Dean walks into the canyon, heavy bag slung over his shoulder, and is sure that's what happened, the angel managed to find some way out and he shouldn't be disappointed by that. But Dean turns and there's the angel, breathing down his neck, and Dean swears the angel takes amusement in that. His eyes crinkle at the corners as Dean

startles and Dean shakes his head and grins in return. Dean thinks the grimace the angel makes is his attempt at a similar smile.

Dean wanders down to the stream and lets the angel follow him, sitting on the edge and from the bag, he pulls another bar of chocolate. The angel brightens a little in response and takes it from Dean's hand, only a little wary as he does.

"You'd better appreciate it," Dean says. "That stuff isn't cheap."

The angel takes the candy a little ways away and sits by the stream. Dean sighs a little and the next few minutes are spent trying to be sneaky about getting closer. The angel keeps casting him looks so it's obvious that he knows what Dean's doing. But the angel doesn't move, not until Dean is reaching out to touch the angel's good wing and then the angel turns to face him, wing sweeping around behind his back and out of Dean's reach. But he doesn't get to his feet and doesn't attack, just remains sitting and watches Dean.

"I can help if you let me," Dean offers.

The angel seems to turn this over, sucking the last of the chocolate from his fingers and once the long moment has passed, he stretches his good wing around within Dean's reach. Dean stretches his fingers out to the wing, the angel watching him the entire time, gaze intense. The angel tenses further when Dean lays his palm against the feathers, a slight shifting but the angel doesn't move and Dean lets his fingers card along the feathers, marveling at the softness of them. The angel sighs.

"Not so bad, right?"

The angel looks at him and Dean hopes he's agreeing. When he gets to his feet, the angel tenses again, immediately alert and Dean tries to move as nonthreatening as possible as he walks around behind him. Still the angel allows him, though Dean can see the brief search over his person to make sure there are no blades hidden. The injured wing looks worse close up. With patches of feathers missing and Dean can tell the failed attempt the angel must have made at resetting the bone. There's still blood dried in to the feathers at the back of the wing, where the angel can't groom. Even the other wing's feathers are looking ragged. They must groom each others wings because there's no way an angel could reach here and that realization shifts another aspect of angels in Dean's mind. They do care about each other.

"I can fix this. It's gonna hurt for a minute though."

The angel is looking back over his shoulder at Dean before he stretches out his bad wing and Dean places his hands along the bone, either side of the break. The angel nods and Dean readies himself for a scream when he sets the bone back into place but the angel doesn't make a noise. There's only the sickening crack of the wing and the angel breathes hard.

From his bag, Dean grabs bandages and from the sticks on the ground he splints and binds the wing as well as he can. The angel sits still for it, listening with a cocked head to Dean's explanations of what he's doing. The wing is bound down against the angel's back, making the angel look and move awkwardly when Dean is done. At least the



angel can move more freely now and Dean wonders if he will walk away. Back to wherever the angels live.

“It’s for the best. Don’t try to move it.” The angel immediately stills his wing and looks at Dean with slightly large eyes. After a moment’s consideration, he stretches out his good wing towards Dean in an unmistakable gesture. Dean rolls his eyes but he sets back to work, cleaning and straightening the feathers that the angel hasn’t been able to reach.

It takes Dean a short while to notice, caught up in running his fingers through an *angel’s* feathers, that the angel is purring beneath his touch. The steady rumble cuts off when Dean laughs. “So you’re part bird, part cat?”

The angel pulls away abruptly, annoyance narrowing his eyes but there’s a light blush creeping across his cheeks as well.

“You got some objection to that?” Dean challenges. He just *knows* this angel can talk because he sure understands Dean well enough. But the angel snorts a breath and shakes his head. “Come on, angel, I know you can talk. Start small. You must have a name?”

The angel looks up, to the tree lines above them, the birds that circle, the sparse covering of clouds. As if speaking might bring something down on him but he seems to make a decision and Dean finds himself on edge to hear a simple answer of the angel’s name. “Castiel,” the angel eventually says on a rough whisper of a voice that Dean hadn’t been expecting. Not with the high-pitched scream these things can give off.

“Castiel,” Dean repeats and the angel – Castiel – nods. “That’s great. I’m Dean.” And it feels stupid to introduce himself now but since this entire thing is a lesson in stupidity, Dean holds out his hand. Castiel stares at it for a long moment before grasping it in his own and Dean grins. Castiel’s smile looks more natural on him this time.

“I’m not supposed to talk to you,” Castiel says and then he looks up again.

Dean shrugs. “Yeah well, I’m not supposed to talk to you either.”

Their eyes meet and Castiel still has a tight grip on Dean’s hand but Dean can’t name what it is that passes between them. When Castiel finally pulls back and turns away, his shoulders tight, Dean follows him a step.

“Can I ask you some questions?”

“You can. That doesn’t mean I’m at liberty to answer,” Castiel says and Dean tries to wrestle down his irritation. His want to demand *why* Castiel can’t answer or why an angel isn’t allowed to speak with him. Can’t angels do whatever they want? Dean can’t imagine someone or thing easily controlling the creature in front of him, with his fierce gaze and powerful voice.

“Why can’t you talk to me?”

“It’s not allowed,” is the angel’s non-answer.

“Okay...” Dean tries again, a more pressing question. “Why do you attack the cities?”

Castiel turns back to Dean, a wall behind the clear blue of his eyes but the emotions his face hides, his free wing gives away. Shifting uncomfortably. Nervously.

“Come on, man. Don’t you think you owe me a few answers?”

This time, irritation flashes in Castiel’s eyes plainly and he turns away, towards the fallen tree on the stream bank where he stands and picks a thumbnail against the bark. “No.”

“Angels killed my mom.” Dean can’t hold back from being accusing but right here is a chance to learn *why* and Castiel is holding out on him. Dean could have – should have – killed the angel when he had the chance. He wants Castiel to give him a good reason why he hasn’t, there has to be a good reason.

The angel stands, shoulders stiff and even his free wing is tucked tightly down against his back. “Then you probably should have killed me.”

“Yeah, I probably should have.”

Castiel faces him again. “But you didn’t.”

“No.”

Castiel looks upwards again with the same expression as last time, waiting for the punishment his words will surely bring down on him. “Our hands are forced,” Castiel says quickly, quietly so that Dean has to step nearer to him.

“By who?”

"I can't say."

"Well maybe we ca-"

"Dean."

Dean throws his hands up in defeat. "Okay, fine. Fuck." They stand awkwardly, both of them looking somewhere else until Castiel shifts his wing towards Dean, eyes wide in apology and together they sit on the old tree and Dean combs out his feathers again.

He works his way down to the base, where the joint of the wing meets Castiel's back and Dean can see the smooth blend of feathers into skin through the complicated looking catches of Castiel's white cloth that allows his wings through. He's busy wondering how Castiel gets that on and off by himself when his fingers rub down against a bump at the underside of Castiel's wing, hidden beneath the thick down feathers Dean is brushing through and the angel makes a noise before he's collapsing like all his strings are cut. Just like that and all the life goes out of him.

"Castiel!" Panic swarms through Dean for a moment while he catches hold of the angel before he can slide off the log and that's when Dean realizes that Castiel is purring again, rumbling out noise and looking blissed out of his mind. It's a moment after Dean takes his fingers away from Castiel's wing that the angel cracks an eye open and glares up at him.

"Do not do that again," he bitches at Dean and hefts himself up again, flexing out his wing before settling it close against his back.

Dean can see the other one twitch with the desire to move as well but Castiel keeps it still.

“I don’t even know what I did.” But Dean’s pretty sure he does now and just to test it, he presses his fingers along the base of Castiel’s wing, finds that mass of nerves again. There’s no reaction until he presses down harder and then there’s an instant half-comatose angel practically in his lap. “That’s gotta be the worst design flaw,” Dean jokes when Castiel picks himself up again, taking a couple careful steps back from Dean this time.

“It is only for the most trusted. Family, friends. Mates.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Nice to know where I stand.”

“...Did you bring more candy?” Castiel changes the subject and Dean hands over the sweets he’d again stolen from under Sam’s bed.



The angel standing in front of Dean has fiery red hair and deep red-brown wings to go with it. The fire in her eyes could give Castiel a run for his money and she’s got all of them on the defensive. She’s too smart to be caught by tricks and too quick to be taken down by the bolas. Dean almost thinks she’s toying with them and when she stops playing games and goes on a real attack, Dean knows they’re going to be screwed.

Dean's more focused this time, watching the angel and trying to learn her moves the same way she's trying to do with them. He just needs an opening, a second to get close enough and then he can end all this without anyone getting hurt.

He gets it when James and Dimi tag team her, nearly grabbing hold of her wings which nearly throws her into a rage. Dean understands more than ever now why they don't want their wings touched and he ducks as one goes sailing over his head as she spins to face the other two. Dean darts in quickly, knows he's putting himself at risk when she turns again and her hand is suddenly around his throat and he chokes.

Focus, he tells himself, don't panic. And he reaches around her back while her other hand is reaching for his forehead and he can hear Jo calling his name and rushing to help. But his fingers reach the angel's wing first, find the cluster of nerves and he presses down hard.

The angel falls in a heap to the ground.



"Dean! How did you do that? Dean!" Jo is calling after him again but Dean brushes her off like he always does, leaving her to huff out a breath and cross her arms in irritation. He should feel guilty, but they've both lost family members to these creatures and if they carry on like this? They'll lose more and that's not a question of if. Dean didn't

believe in another option before but suddenly it's there, standing in front of him.

The same way Sam is, who's offered him this way out so many times but Dean always refused.

Sam is waiting for him when Dean heads into the kitchen, nearly jumping out of his skin to find Sam in what has always been an empty house up until now. He and dad and Sammy are the only ones living here. Dean sees Sam in the stands, always taking notes, watching the angels more than he watches the hunters. Dean sees Sam at dinner but it's been days since he's seen his dad. Probably a good thing when John would only lecture Dean about his performance because Dean is *better* than this. If only dad knew how much he really isn't.

But this time, there's Sam, leaning back against the counter and blocking Dean's way into the cupboards for the bag of fresh made ginger snaps he bought earlier from the market. Since the influx of people, there's been an influx of sweets, rare and delicious. Dean is going to end up spending all his savings on the angel and he doesn't even mind.

Everything about Sam is confrontational and Dean tries to play him off with an easy grin. "Hey Sammy."

"What are you doing, Dean?"

"Getting a snack?" Dean tries hopefully but knows before Sam rolls his eyes that his brother isn't going to buy it. If there's anyone that knows him, it's Sam.

"I'm not blind. You've been sneaking out every day after the training. Which you've been entirely vacant for even when you're in the ring." So Sam watches more than just the angels and he switches from irritated to concerned just like that and Dean sighs.

"It's nothing. I'm just...getting in some extra practice." Which is only true in that he's been spending all of his afternoons hanging out with an angel.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm hungry," he says pointedly and gestures for Sam to move which Sam only does after a prolonged moment of staring. Dean can practically feel Sam trying to root around in his head for the answer that Dean obviously isn't giving. But Sam does step aside and Dean goes to the cupboard to find the wrapped cookies, shoving them into the inside of his jacket pocket. He takes the angel blade from his side and leaves it abandoned on the counter before turning to Sam. "I gotta run. I'll see you at dinner tonight, okay?" And he's out the door and down to the stables before Sam can respond.

The ride out to Lawrence Canyon always seems to take too long and though by now he knows that Castiel will still be there, there's still a part of Dean that worries. Castiel has spoken to him when he's allegedly not supposed to and if Castiel is worried about something swooping down from the sky to punish him, then Dean is as well. He pushes Impala a little harder than usual and promises her a good portion of warmed oats when they get back.

At the canyon, it takes him longer than usual to catch sight of Castiel and Dean feels his heart rise up in his throat. The pile of armor is where it's been since Castiel first discarded it and there are still a few stray feathers across the ground or trampled into the dirt but where's the angel?

"Castiel? Hey, I brought cookies, man, where are you?"

A shifting of movement from the corner of his eye and Dean finally spots the mass of wings. Castiel is in the shadows of the cliff side, his wings blanketing him and seeming to melt into the dark, the same way the angel did in the sky when Dean had shot him down. The angel is sleeping and seems disinclined to wake up. Dean sees a head of mussed dark hair peek from beneath a wing but the moment Castiel catches sight of him, he's tucking his head back down and settling again.

Dean moves over to him, crouching down by his side and tries not to feel too gratified that when he presses his hand against Castiel's wing, the angel extends it in open trust. He even lets Dean brush his fingers lightly along the base.

"Come on, lazy wings. I brought something."

Castiel perks up as Dean pulls the ginger snaps from his pocket, shifting his wing and sitting up until they're facing each other. Dean shares out the cookies between them. He's asked before if Castiel needed more, if Dean should bring him some deer, some vegetables, anything, and now along with the treats in his bag, he packs a small portion of bread or cheese or smoked and salted deer. Castiel always eats his dessert first though.

"So I was thinking since you obviously speak English pretty good, maybe you could teach me some of your language," Dean suggests and Castiel gives a pleased nod in response.

"Though you won't be able to say many of the words on your tongue."

Dean snorts. "You have no idea what my tongue can do," Dean says before he thinks and then blushes crimson.

Castiel doesn't notice though. Dean looks at him and Castiel's attention is away, his entire being frozen as he stares intently at the entrance to the canyon across the way from them. "Someone's there," Castiel says and before Dean can react, the angel is on his feet and then Dean sees Sam.

"Wait, Cas!"

Dean clammers up, feeling suddenly clumsy next to Castiel's grace, his head spinning at the quick onset of panic. Sam found them and even with one wing bound Castiel is faster than Dean could hope to be. Sam doesn't see the angel appearing out of the shadows of the rocks until it's too late. Castiel has hold of him, hauling Sam around by the front of his shirt and his wings flare up behind him. Both of them, the broken wing rips straight through the bindings and Dean is shouting out again for him to stop.

"That's my brother!" That's Dean's little brother in the grasp of an angel and Sam looks terrified, trying to pull back and squirm away with wide eyes that Castiel must be able to see would never hurt anything. Dean's mind flashes back to his mother and then Castiel is

releasing Sam from his hold and Sam falls backwards to the ground, pushing himself away as far as he can while Dean steps between them. "That's my *brother*," Dean repeats. He presses his hand against Castiel's chest and the angel takes a step back at Dean's push.

"Dean, what the hell is going on?" Sam demands from the ground, voice high in fright.

"Shit. What are you doing here?" Dean reaches down to help Sam to his feet, knowing full well that Castiel's gaze is drilling into his back, seeing without looking the frown that's marring his forehead.

"I followed you. I wanted to know what you were up to." Sam glances back to Castiel and then at Dean who's perfectly comfortable with turning his back on the angel that just attacked his brother. Dean looks at Castiel and steps back a little so he's no longer blocking the path between them. Sam looks like he wants to hide behind Dean's back at this.

"It's fine, man. He's not gonna hurt you." He takes in Castiel. "And you either. My brother's not a hunter, trust me."

Castiel studies them through narrowed eyes before he nods stiffly and walks away. He goes to the stream, by his armor, his broken wing folded awkwardly against his back. When Dean looks back at Sam, his brother is staring at him in open astonishment.

"He can understand you?"

Dean shrugs.

"Will you please tell me what's going on?"

Dean sighs and gives in, the way he always does when it's Sammy's big stupid eyes staring at him. "He's trapped here. You remember...remember the attack before the training started? I thought I saw an angel in the sky and I used one of the cannons to shoot it down and I shot down Cas." Sam mouths 'Cas?' at him in confusion, glancing again to the angel, who's sitting on the bank watching them. "I shot down Cas and I came out here looking, thinking I'd...I dunno, prove myself to dad by killing an angel before training even started. I just...I couldn't do it. I looked at him and I couldn't kill him."

"Dean--"

"I know it's stupid, okay? And yeah, I'm playing with fire but he's safe, I swear."

"I was actually just going to say I told you so about them. Can he speak English?" Sam asks and Dean thinks that Sam has no right to look that proud of him. Dean let the city down, he let their dad down and he's a little afraid that he let their mother down. Still, he looks at Castiel and feels maybe just a little proud as well.

"Ask him yourself."

Sam doesn't look so sure about this, nerves clouding over his expression and he glances back and forth between Dean and the angel before Dean gives a snort and heads over to Castiel who's still glaring at Sam. Dean nudges his boot against Castiel's ankle. "Will you stop with the death glare? I'm trying to show Sam how you *don't* bite."

Castiel doesn't look sure about that at all but Dean waves Sam over anyway. Dean hopes that sitting down will dispel some of the

tension, Sam following suit and then the three of them are sitting in the awkward air instead of standing in it. Sam absently picks at a loose thread at the hem of his shirt sleeve and Castiel stretches out his good wing so the feathers brush along Dean's back. The move startles Sam a little.

"I guess I do have a lot of questions," Sam says hesitantly.

"As I've told Dean, I can't answer most of them."

Sam startles again when Castiel speaks and Dean wants to smack him to just settle down. "How come you know English?"

"Because we've been here for a long time. We watch and we learn."

"And you hunt us."

"As you hunt us."

Dean thinks again to the forest, the thrill of chasing Castiel through the trees and he would have killed the angel that day. Unprovoked if he'd had the weapons to do so. Unthinking, he reaches out his hand to smooth against the ruffled feathers of Castiel's wing. He never can seem to stay hands off the wings for long but he brushes it off as having always been tactile and ignores the look that Sam is giving them while Castiel leans into his touch.

"Castiel was gonna teach me some angel language," Dean brings up and just like he'd hoped, Sam immediately perks up at the words. At the prospect of knowledge.

Together, they spend the rest of the day watching Castiel draw strange letters and symbols into the dirt with a stick. It strikes

Dean after awhile that there is power here, like there's power in the symbols carved into the angel blades. And again the trust that Castiel has shown him threatens to take some of his breath.

Before they leave, Dean rebinds Castiel's wing, standing close to the angel while Sam waits for them by Castiel's armor, tracing fingers over the patterns and trying to decipher their meaning. Castiel's good wing stretches out and shields them from view.

"Thanks," Dean says. "For not maiming Sam."

Castiel waits a moment before lifting his hand and pressing two fingers against Dean's forehead. Dean closes his eyes to the touch but it's not fear he feels twisting his gut. "I trust you. It is not so hard to extend the same courtesy to him." His fingers slip down the side of Dean's face and when they step back, the sun is beginning to set behind the tree line.



The next day at training, Jo puts the angel with the clipped wings down so hard that the sound of its wing cracking beneath the stress is heard clear across the stadium. And the crowd cheers her, while the angel moans pathetically in the dirt. Training ends early then and the angel is taken away, not to its cage, and Dean knows they'll kill it. The others swarm Jo to congratulate her and Dean can only hang back

and watch until he has to leave the ring, ducking past Bobby and his watchful gaze.

He goes to the canyon in a fury. At the people of the city, himself, the angels. Whatever it is that's pulling all the strings and whatever is putting Dean in this situation he has no idea how to get out of. He wishes again that he could have just killed Castiel; it would have been easier for all of them. When he confesses this, Castiel agrees with him but it's too late. They're in too deep and they spend the afternoon leaning back against each other in the shade of the canyon wall, drawing shapes in the dirt while Castiel teaches him more.

In the training ring, Dean does everything he can to prevent another of the remaining three angels from getting hurt, putting them down before the others can. Sometimes from within its cage they can all hear the archangel raise its wings and beat furiously at the door. They can hear its screams suppressed through the power of the symbols. Dean's never heard so much anger and despair from a single creature and he wants to open the doors and let it go. Sometimes Dean thinks it's no wonder the angels hunt them.

"What are you going to do when your wing is healed?" Dean asks Castiel when he's grooming water through Castiel's wing, who sits at the edge of the stream with his sandaled feet in the water. Dean sits behind him to work at his wings, legs outstretched to either side of Castiel's. He can see that the wing is healing, faster than Dean had thought it would and he wonders if Castiel will be an enemy again when it does.

“Return home, I suppose.”

“Then what?” Dean snorts in anger and Castiel tilts his head a little to look back from the corner of his eye. “Go back to trying to kill each other? I can’t do that.” It hurts that Castiel might be able to.

“No. But there are others of my kind whose minds might be changed.”

“Wanna run away?” Dean asks, only half-joking and half-hoping, but when it becomes clear that Castiel isn’t going to answer him, Dean tips forward to press his forehead against the back of Castiel’s neck. His hands leave Castiel’s wings to slide around his chest and pull Castiel back against him and Castiel shivers when Dean’s mouth ghosts against the back of his neck.

If Castiel isn’t going to run away from *this* then Dean’s going to push a bit, heart hammering against Castiel’s back as he mouths up the side of the angel’s neck and nudges at Castiel’s cheek with his nose until Castiel turns his head more. Until Dean can kiss the corner of his mouth and then Castiel is giving in and craning his head back, arching his neck uncomfortably so their mouths can meet properly and Dean feels his stomach bottom out.

This is the mother of all bad ideas and Dean has had a lot of them lately. Every single thing he’s done involving Castiel has been a bad idea. So he’s not going to stop with this one, not when Castiel stretches his arm up to cup the back of Dean’s head and Dean runs his hands over Castiel’s chest and down over his stomach.



The cloth Castiel wears is cinched here with a leather belt and Dean traces beneath it, rubbing against Castiel's belly and hips over the thick cotton. It's enough to make the angel moan and press back against him.

It's almost too easy to do this, to slide the knee length gown up Castiel's legs and to reach between them to find Castiel's dick with his fingers, pressing past the strip of cotton that covers him there.

"Dean," Castiel gasps and arches, breaking the seal of their mouths to tip his head back against Dean's shoulder. Dean just switches his attention to the angel's throat and Castiel lets him, arches his neck to expose this sensitive powerful part of him. Dean is hard, pressing against the small of Castiel's back, and this new show of trust is nearly enough to send him undone.

Castiel goes first though, with Dean's hand wrapped around and stroking him in hard long motions. His wings vibrate and Dean is lost in this sea of feathers and Castiel, until the angel is keening in his arms and the sheer awe of it is enough to send Dean over as well.

Dean will fight. For this, he'll fight.



It's nearing the final day of training and Dean can't remember most of the lessons. He can hardly remember being in the ring, putting down angel after angel. Finally getting his head in the game according

to Bobby but Dean just wants it all to be over with. The last month is a sea of wings but it's all Castiel when it should be about the training.

They had taken the splint from his wing the day before and Castiel had flexed his wings and said it would never be as good as it was. But he can fly and he has Dean to thank for that. He has Dean to thank for shooting him down in the first place, Dean thinks. He watches as Castiel attempts a short flight, a few hundred yards, but the wing is weak with disuse and Dean fights back relief that Castiel won't be flying away just yet.

In the training ring, all sense of relief and thoughts of Castiel waiting for him are wiped away when all twenty-five of the new hunters are called into the ring. There are no lessons today, only the announcement of who has earned the honor of killing the archangel tomorrow. The stadium is more packed than Dean has seen it yet; people from the other cities all present, waiting in anticipation to see if their city will be the one with the honor of producing the year's top hunter.

Dean's been paying so little attention to any of the proceedings that he doesn't recognize any of the faces outside his own group and even then, he'd be hard pressed to say anything about them. He has no idea who's shown the best performance and it's with a rush of dread that he realizes Bobby is looking at him and Dean forces himself to focus.

"Dean," Bobby barks at him.

"What?"

Bobby looks like he's going to smack Dean any moment. "Get up here, boy." Dean does and his legs are shaking as Bobby grabs hold

of his wrist and lifts their arms high. "Champion of the cities," Bobby announces and Dean has to fight not be sick all over their boots.

"Me?"

Bobby nods. "You."

And Dean's dad is up there, cheering for him, proud for him, along with the rest of the stadium.

"No no. It can't be--"

"Shut up and take the applause."

He can't do this. He can't kill an angel. The noise is a weak din in the background and he can feel a few of the other new hunters come up to shake his hand or slap his back. To invite him for drinks, to stop being so damn reclusive. As he's stumbling from the ring, the archangel screams its torment like it knows. Like it heard and it's calling Dean out, challenging him. Dean looks back to see the door of its cage rattling.

"That one's going to be a good fighter." Dean looks around to see his dad standing before him, smiling and straight-backed. Dean tries to remember the last time they shared more than quick words before one of them took off. Things to do. More important things than each other and Dean wishes he could run away from John now but his shoulder is caught in a firm grip. "I knew you could do it."

"Yeah. I kind of think... maybe Jo..."

John laughs. "Come on, Dean. I know we haven't had much time for each other lately but we'll celebrate this. Fetch your brother."

Dean nods and takes the opportunity to escape. He doesn't go to find Sam in the dispersing crowd though; he runs for the stables and races Impala to the canyon.

"Cas!" he's calling out as soon as he's in the canyon, jumping a little when Castiel drops down from the sky above him. He looks pleased with himself, sweating a little from the forgotten excursion of flying, and Dean spends just a second to be pleased that even free to leave, Castiel came back.

Castiel's pleased smile falls away when he takes in Dean.
"What happened?"

"They picked me!" Dean throws his hands out to the side and once he would have been so happy. Now it's just icy fear about what will happen if they push him into the ring with an angel that he can't – won't – kill. "Of all the people they could have... They're going to shove me in that ring tomorrow and I'm going to have to kill the archangel. We have to get out of here."

"Someone's there," Castiel says before the last words can even tumble out of Dean's mouth and he's gone in a gust of wind and flurry of feathers.

"Was that an angel?"

Dean turns to the surprised voice and there's Jo, jumping out from behind a large tree, eyes tracking the path that Castiel just took into the sky. Dean can feel everything falling apart at once as Jo pulls her angel blade and holds it tight in her hand.

"Put the blade down, Jo. Why does everyone have to follow me out here?"

"Because you're being secretive and weird and I'm pretty sure no one has ever looked as miserable as you to be picked as the one to kill the angel."

Dean sighs, glancing down to the ground before squaring his shoulders and when he looks up, he calls out in the direction Castiel went. He knows the angel won't have gone far, that Castiel is likely watching them from the edge of the canyon and sure enough, at Dean's call, Castiel appears on the ledge and jumps off. Dean holds his breath as Castiel's wings catch an up draft and he glides in, graceful and deadly and gorgeous. But his wing will never be perfect and he stumbles a little on the landing. Dean thinks Jo doesn't notice and Castiel carries himself straight backed and proud. Just because Castiel is injured doesn't mean he will ever be easy in a fight.

Jo sees *that* because she takes a step backwards as he approaches them and raises her blade into the air.

"Jo," Dean starts. "Meet Castiel. Cas, this is Jo, training friend."

Castiel looks between them, quickly calculating the situation before dismissing Jo and her defensive stance to focus on Dean. "I think I'll have to teach you about stealth."

Jo's gasp when Castiel speaks is nearly comical and when Castiel doesn't appear a second away from attacking them, she relaxes her stance slightly but keeps her grip on the blade. Jo's no fool and she won't be taken by surprise. "You can talk."

"Of course I can."

"...You're gonna have to tell me this story, Dean."

Dean does and he supposes if any of the hunters were going to follow him, he's glad it was her. She thinks about things before she reacts, asks questions before she shoots even though her past gives her no reason to. If Dean had known that about her before all of this, he would have written her off. Now he thinks it makes her a better hunter than any of the others. She still looks skeptical as Dean talks and Castiel stands there like an intimidating shadow.

"So what are you going to do now?" Jo asks when Dean is done and Dean sighs.

"Run away?"

"That doesn't seem like you." She glances to Castiel.

"Granted none of this does."

"I don't know what else to do. If I go into that ring tomorrow and can't do it, everyone is going to know. Somehow I don't see that turning into anything good." His dad will know and Dean would rather run away than face his father.

"Dean. You were the best hunter in that ring and you subdued every angel without even hurting them. You already impressed everyone. If you hadn't, I wouldn't be standing here talking about this right now and your angel there would already be on the ground." She glances at Castiel with a slight grimace. "No offense." Castiel doesn't say anything but he gives a twitch of his wing as if to

wave the concern off. "Everyone will be at the ring tomorrow, your dad included. I say it's time to show them what you can do."

Dean closes his eyes, breathing out slowly at the brush of feathers along his back when Castiel stretches out his wing. "Maybe..." But changing an entire society's way of thinking? It's going to take a lot more than a little trickery with an archangel. And Dean doesn't think for a second that the archangel will make it easy on him. He trades a long look with Castiel, whose lips part on sympathy and sorrow. Jo is still watching them, seeing with her smart eyes what's between them and she sighs.

"But right now, you better come back. Your dad is going to tear apart the whole city looking for you. Running won't stop someone else from killing those angels. Or the angels from killing us. I just want it all to stop too, Dean."

Great, the chick is logical and dangerous. Dean looks to Castiel to see what he thinks and the angel is staring at Jo in surprised approval. Dean would kind of still rather run away but he's outgunned and he's not going to go anywhere if Castiel isn't going to come with him.

"Fine. Just...give me a bit, I'll come back soon. Tell my dad... something."

They watch her leave and Castiel looks to Dean once she's gone, tone belying his surprise. "You know some very impressive people, Dean. I hadn't ever thought a hunter would be so adept to change. I'm not...entirely sure we can expect the same from the angels," he admits, somewhat ashamed.

"Yeah, well, don't go expecting the rest of the hunters to be like this either. C'mere," Dean says, lifting his hand and Castiel steps willingly into his embrace. Moves willingly to Dean's mouth and Castiel circles his wings around them. "This could get dangerous. The archangel in that cage is pissed and I don't blame him."

Castiel presses a kiss near his ear and says lowly, "Call my name when you have need of me. I'll come."



The archangel is screaming again. Screaming and throwing its wings against the doors with all the force it has. Even the symbols are beginning to show weakness under the onslaught and the doors creak on their hinges. The archangel knows what's about to happen, it knows death lies around the corner and it's not going to take it lightly.

Dean's sure he's never been quite this terrified. Where his knees feel weak and his heart races so fast the rush of blood in his ears blocks out the noise of the crowd. The archangel doesn't scare him as much as what he's trying to do, how he's sure it will fail but he's going to do it anyway. He tries to think about Castiel, tries to center himself and find his calm the way the angel had attempted to teach him. With Castiel's chest rising in deep breaths against his back, Castiel's wings surrounding them in peaceful dark. Sam *had* told him to think about the angels naked. A smirk falls into place and Dean is as ready as he's ever going to be.

He has a bola gripped in one hand, his blade in another. His dad is sitting right above the main gate of the archangel and when Dean gives a stiff nod of his head to signal he's ready, it's his dad that pulls the rope to work the cogs and open the heavy doors.

The archangel bursts free from the doors before they've opened more than a crack. It breaks the symbol painted on them, renders them useless, and the doors splinter into shards when the archangel throws itself at them.

It's the most impressive sight that Dean has ever seen. The angel himself is small, unassuming, but the *wings*. Pure fury radiates from the creature. His wingspan is greater by far than Castiel's, every feather purest white and tipped in gold. They vibrate in anger and Dean meets the archangel's gaze and sees golden-brown eyes blazing in return. The archangel doesn't even glance around, doesn't try to escape the way all the other angel's do before attacking whoever is in the ring.



He settles his sights on Dean, curls his hands into fists and steps forward. Even from here, Dean can hear the deep base rumble in its throat, the build-up of a scream that would probably render the whole of the stadium deaf.

Dean drops his bola and he tosses his blade to the side out of reach. The archangel snaps straighter at this, a little out of his defensive stance and his eyes narrow as he casts his gaze over Dean, searching out a hidden weapon that isn't there. Behind him, Dean can see his dad jump to his feet and Dean holds out his hands, palms open for the angel to see as well as the rest of the stadium.

The archangel still advances on him but he's turned from full out confrontational to wary. The archangel waits to see how this will play out and he tilts his head in the same cat-like curiosity that Castiel does.

"I'm not like them; I don't want to fight you."

But the archangel only sneers at him and steps forward again, falling back into his aggressive stance and Dean's losing him. He's losing all of them. He glances back over the archangel's shoulder and sees his dad frantically talking to someone, to Bobby, who tries to wave him off, calm him. This is how Dean works, he's never once taken down an angel with a weapon and it sinks Dean's stomach a bit to realize John didn't know that. John had never been in the crowd of onlookers watching until the end.

"Please listen to me," Dean tries to plead, raising his voice to the people of the stadium. "They're not what we think. We don't have to do this!"

The archangel takes another step, Dean can feel the touch of his wings as he flexes them forward, as he studies Dean and this close even his small size manages to tower above Dean's height. Dean can't stop himself from leaning back a little, from wishing for a second that he had his blade. Maybe the archangel sees it in his gaze or maybe it's the sudden cry of his dad that makes the angel snap when he touches Dean with wingtips.

"Someone get him out of the ring, dammit!"

The archangel lets loose a half-scream and lunges for him. Dean rolls to the ground but the giant wingspan catches him and pitches him into the sand. The archangel is on him then and Dean grapples with the sand to find purchase and push himself backwards. He manages to roll to the side just in time for a heavy wing to beat the ground with a force that would have broken his rib cage.

"Open the gates! Get in there! Dean!" His dad is calling out for him and Dean hears the gears of the heavy main gate. "Get out of there!"

Dean scrambles to his feet, sees the gateway open and runs for it. One push of his wings and the archangel is on Dean's back so they both crash heavy to the ground, the breath rushing from Dean's lungs.

The wind is kicked up all around them, scattering the sand in a whirlwind as the archangel beats at the ground, as Dean fights tooth and nail to get free. He lands a heavy kick to the angel's chest and he falls back. If Dean could only get his hand on the archangel's wing but the archangel isn't giving him a chance.

“Angel! There’s an attack!” Dean hears the cry, he hears the alarms going off and thinks ‘no’. Not now. This can’t happen now, the angels never attack during the day. Hopelessness fills him for a moment and the archangel sees the weakness and takes the chance, driving Dean again to his back, where it poises for a kill that never comes.

It’s the canyon with Castiel all over again. Dean squeezes his eyes shut and waits for the blow, opening his eyes only to find the archangel staring at him in confusion. Then the weight of the archangel is knocked from his chest and beside him, there’s a great screaming fight. Dean catches sight of Castiel throwing the archangel clear across the ring with a hard hit from his wing to the archangel’s throat. Castiel has himself squarely between the archangel and Dean, midnight blue wings spread in warning.

“Gabriel,” Castiel’s voice rumbles out in anger. “Stop this.”

Movement catches Dean’s gaze from above and he can’t find his ruined breath fast enough to shout out a warning for Castiel and the archangel. Nets fly into the air and tangle in their wings and Dean cries out as Castiel is brought to the ground in a hard tackle by John Winchester, who never misses.

“No! Dad, stop!” Dean ignores the burn of his ribs and struggles to his feet, running forward even as Castiel finds the strength to knock John away. It doesn’t matter, the weights on the nets drag his wings down and Dean sees a flash of blind panic in his angel’s eyes before there are hunters in the ring. Hunters that swarm in to subdue Castiel and the archangel.

“Dad! Don’t hurt him!”

John turns to him askance, down at the angel who’s now at his feet and Dean never wanted to see those wings wrapped tightly in netting again. John’s foot presses down on one, mindless of the grimace of pain that crosses Castiel’s features. To the side, the archangel thrashes and twists but the nets have him as well and four hunters drag him down to the ground.

“Please dad.”

“...Get back to the house.” When Dean starts to shake his head and step forward, another hunter grabs him from behind and Dean’s left without choice, struggling against the hold until a second hunter joins them and he’s dragged out of the ring.

“Cas!”



Dean is shoved unceremoniously into his house and though he tries to leave, the hunters that brought him here slam the door and remain outside to guard the entrances. Dean squeezes his eyes shut in frustration and worry, pacing the length of the entrance hall until his ribs ache too much and it gets difficult to breathe.

Castiel is probably dead already. Dean should have forced them both to run when they had the chance. He should have killed the angel before it ever got so far. It’s not only the pain of his ribs that

makes it difficult to breathe; the back of his throat is burning and his eyes swim as he sinks down to the floor, back braced against the wall and he stares listlessly, waiting for the door to open.

It's only Sam when it does. Still Dean is on him, in his face and demanding to know what's going on. What the hunters are doing to Castiel and even to the archangel. The hunters which Dean doesn't even consider himself one of anymore and he's not sure what the makes him. Sam's face is drawn with his own worry as he nudges Dean back a step.

"They're alive still. Castiel and the archangel. They've got them trapped in the ring with fire."

The fire traps are rarely used, there's too much of a chance they'll get out of hand and burn the forest, and Dean can only think of one time he's seen one. A ring of cursed oil that when lit, angels can't step over without their wings instantly burning away. The worst part is that it doesn't kill them, just leaves them in screaming writhing agony. Dean has already seen Castiel's wings damaged, the thought of them *gone* makes bile rise at the back of his throat.

"We have to get them out."

Sam shakes his head. "We can't do anything right now. There are hunters guarding the house and guarding the stadium. Dad's gonna be here any moment and look at you, Dean. You're a mess. Come on, into the kitchen and let me clean you up."

Dean lets himself be steered to the kitchen with little choice in the matter and when he catches sight of himself in the reflection of a window; it stops him for a moment. He hadn't even noticed the sticky

trail of blood down the side of his face, not while his thoughts have been a jumbled mess of panic and Castiel. When he slows down and takes a deep breath, he realizes just how much his body aches. There's the cut at his temple, caked in sand, a scrape all along his arm in a similar state. And the bruises from the archangel's wings impacting with him so many times.

Sam presses him down onto a chair and Dean puts up with it, only hissing a complaint as Sam cleans and bandages everything he can.

"I should have run." Dean drops his head into his hands and Sam's big hand settles on his shoulder. When he looks up, John is standing at the kitchen entrance and Dean has never once seen him look so angry, not since he hunted down and killed the angel that killed mom. "Dad..."

"You wanna explain to me, boy, just what the hell you thought you were doing out there?"

"I-"

"You could have gotten yourself killed! You could have gotten someone *else* killed."

"Not if you would have liste-"

"That's *enough*, Dean. Why can't you do what's expected of you? Listen to the simplest orders. Both of you." John is shaking his head, looking between them, at Sam who stands by Dean's side and Dean feels John's disappointment hit him like the archangel's wing to his chest. He never wanted to disappoint- No. Dean's not going to fall back this time.

"You're not listening to *me*. You never listen. Just please don't hurt Castiel. I can explain--"

The name gets John's attention more than anything else Dean might have said and he steps in, looms over Dean who's still sitting beneath the pressure of Sam's hand on his shoulder. The contemplation in his gaze sparks all sorts of warning bells but Dean can't stop what he's started now. He wishes to god that he could. "Castiel?" John echoes.

"The angel. They're not like what we think. They're being controlled, they--"

"The angel *said* this to you?"

"Yea- No. Dad, no." Dean's on his feet, grabbing for his dad's arm as John turns away. "Just *listen* to me for once!" But he tries to tug John to a stop and John shoves him away, back into Sam who catches Dean and holds on. The door slams on John's retreating back and Sam and Dean exchange helpless glances.



The hunters keep close watch over the house, no doubt under John's orders and every attempt to sneak by them fails. The hunters that guard Cansae are good; Dean and Sam alone don't stand a chance. What they need is a little outside help and when there's a scuffle outside the main door, Sam cautiously opens it, finding Jo standing on the other side with the guard unconscious at her feet.

“Jo?” Sam questions in astonishment. More of a surprise is the twins standing behind her.

Dean grins as he shoulders past Sam. “Thanks, Jo.” She grins back but their relief doesn’t last long before Jo’s smile is falling away. “What’s happening? Is Cas okay?” Dean demands.

Most of her answer is in the way she won’t meet his gaze. “They put the archangel back in its cage. Your dad has Castiel held at the jail house and no one is allowed in.”

It’s all Dean needs to hear. Castiel is still alive. The jail is small though, thick concrete and only a couple of cells because there isn’t much crime to be had. Among the citizens, Cansae is harmonious when they have the larger worry of the angel attacks to keep them all drawn together. It’ll be harder if John has said no one gets in. Jo catches his arm and stops him before he can get through the front entrance.

“John’s interrogating him.”

Dean closes his eyes for a long moment. “You mean torturing him.”

“And there’s five guards outside the jail on horses. What are you going to do?”

Dean honestly has no idea and again, he finds himself needing outside help. He glances between Jo, the twins, Sam. At Sam, the smile spreads out over his face and Sam glares because he already knows Dean’s answer. “Something stupid. Come on, to the stadium.”

They tie and lock the unconscious guard inside the house and then make their way along the side streets but the town is mostly

subdued and empty. Everyone has turned in; shut their doors to gossip amongst themselves. About angels and Dean and the bad reputation that Cansae has now surely earned. Dean can't feel guilty about that, only glad that there's no one to stop them across the town and at the stadium, everyone has cleared out. Dean hopes it stays deserted, that the training won't return here, that it won't ever have to return anywhere.

He lifts the main iron gate with Jo's help and they secure the rope pulley to hold it there before following the other three into the ring. They stand facing the five doors. Four of those hold angels behind them and Dean takes a deep breath before he steps up to the one containing the archangel. He crosses his fingers that the second time is the charm and opens the heavy doors.

The archangel is there to greet him but he isn't so quick to attack this time, staring through the doors at Dean with narrowed eyes though he stays put in the shadows of the cage.

"Just hear me out, okay?" Dean gets out quickly, before the archangel can decide ripping his head off would serve him better. He can sense the nervous gazes of the others behind him.

"I don't need to hear anything," the archangel responds and Dean's eyes widen in surprise that he spoke at all. The archangel prowls forward until Dean takes a step back, gritting his teeth to force himself still as the archangel circles him once. Assessing.

"Cas called you Gabriel, right?"

"Cas calls me a lot of things. Gabriel's one of them."

Dean swears the archangel is actually messing with him as he steps away from Dean and turns his scrutinizing attention on the group of new hunters behind him. Dean's a little proud of the way they lift their heads and stare at the angel right back. They're trained hunters after all and that still means something.

"He tells me a lot of things too," Gabriel goes on, turning his back on the others in a show of confidence so he and Dean are standing face to face again. "And I wanna make it clear that I'm not helping you, I'm helping him." He softens just a little, his wings losing their tense pose and folding down to his back, and he extends his hand to Dean's. "Angels were a family once. We should be again."

"Good enough for me," Dean says and he grins as he takes the archangel's hand in his own to shake on it.

Gabriel opens the remaining doors, putting his strength to use to allow them to walk out. Each in turn is surprised to see him and they bow their heads almost meekly, casting nervous glances between the hunters and the archangel. Dean has never seen a group of angels looking so scared before. All save for the final angel, the fiery red-head. When she walks out, she's held high and she meets Gabriel's stare. They share a quiet smile and then Gabriel is turning to address them, angels and hunters alike who stand side by side. Looking at them, Dean has a vision of a future that can't possibly come to pass.

"Alright kids," Gabriel addresses the hunters but gestures over to the angels. "We are gonna help you out. So no killing or

maiming from *anyone* while this little truce is going on. We need to get my brother out of there before he says something no one wants to hear.”

“And what is that exactly? What’s John trying to get out of him?” Jo speaks up, meeting the archangel’s gaze.

“My guess? The location of the city of angels, which is the last place humans want to be going.”

“Why?”

Gabriel rolls his eyes. “You ask a lot of questions. It’s irritating. I know what you’re thinking. ‘Oh the city of angels! We could exterminate them all, pesky fucking birds.’ Right? But you’re the ones that’ll end up on the chopping block. It’s better the way it is.”

“Cas said you were being forced,” Dean breaks in. “We could help.”

“Castiel talks too much. Now tell me where he is.”

The jail house but there’s no safe way of getting there during the daylight hours. The moment the angel’s are spotted they’ll be put down and killed, something they’d all like to avoid. Night is marginally better but with flashy wings like Gabriel, the archangel and the other grey-winged angel are too high profile. Which leaves the red winged one – Anael, Gabriel calls her – and the brown winged – Sariel.

In the mean time, they’ll have to wait and Dean is stuck knowing that his angel is alone and scared, with god knows what happening to his wings. That it’s likely his dad who’s inflicting the pain.

They break the lines of the sigils on the insides of the cage doors and the angels reluctantly walk back in to wait there out of sight, doors closed behind them. They'll be able to break free without the wards in place and Dean climbs up to the netting to cut one of the lines of the symbol there as well. There's nothing to be done about the deep carvings on the walls but the angels can get out now. Afterwards Dean and the others leave the ring, careful not to draw attention as they go their separate ways with an agreement to meet back at the stadium after nightfall.

Dean can't stay away from the jail house, sneaking up to the back where there's no entrance and the small windows to the two rooms are barred with thick iron. He has to push up onto his toes to see through and he wishes he hadn't.

The room is dim without much natural light coming through the window and there's nothing lit inside except for the low burning ring of fire that surrounds Castiel. He's strapped down to a chair, sitting in the middle of a symbol that renders all his strength useless. His wings are bound in crisscrossing rope and it takes Dean a moment of staring to realize there are more symbols woven there. Simple ones but they all work to have Castiel staying listlessly where he's been put without a fight.

Castiel is alone for the moment and Dean hisses out his name to get his attention. Castiel doesn't move save a subtle shifting of his head and Dean knows the angel has heard him. "Gonna get you out of there, Cas, just be ready." There's a noise on the other side of the door and Dean quickly ducks down out of view.

"Alright, angel." Dean closes his eyes at the voice of his dad and he wants to be angry but a month ago and Dean knows he would have been doing the same thing. Angels were animals, worse – they were monsters to most the population and angels have never given anyone reason to think otherwise. Sometimes Dean's not even sure himself, when Castiel won't answer his questions and now Gabriel, who says it's better the way it is. Dean wants to know why as much as his dad but not like this.

He stays with his back pressed against the rough wall of the jail; head cocked a bit to catch the sounds from inside. After a moment of imposing silence, the door creaks open again and Dean wishes he could chance peering into the room again to see who it is. But whoever else entered the room stays silent, and it's John's gruff voice that breaks the quiet.

"I know you can understand me. I know you can answer me, so answer. Where is the city of angels?"

There's no answer and after the silence has been allowed to draw out for a moment, a sharp noise echoes from the room and Castiel is hissing in pain. Dean clenches his eyes tight shut, wills himself not to move. There's nothing he can do yet and jumping in half-cocked is only going to make everything worse.

"I know you can speak, angel. *Speak!*"

Dean can hear the low rumbling growl of Castiel voice before his words come, hoarse and quiet. "I did not start this fight."

“No?” Dean does not like the tone in John’s voice. He’s heard it before, the ‘I know you’re lying and I just caught you in the act’ tone. “Why don’t we bring my boy in here and he can tell us what he thinks. Dean?” Dean’s heart stops when his dad suddenly calls his name, pressing back harder to the wall as if it could swallow him from sight. “Don’t be foolish, come in here.”

Dean still pauses a long moment, until he feels like he can maybe breathe through this without hyperventilating and then he walks around to the front of the jail house. The hunters guarding the entrance let him past and John is there to greet him outside the cell. Dean could run but he knows as well as anyone that there’s no point. A deep breath and he steps into the room and the first thing he sees is Bobby Singer standing just to the side of the ring of fire that surrounds Castiel.

Bobby isn’t the only other one there. There’s another man, a hunter that Dean recognizes as the general of Sarnia, with a lust and a talent for killing angels that rivals his dad’s. Dean glances between the three of them and at Castiel, who strains against his bonds but his wings and arms and legs are all wrapped too tightly.

“What’s going on here?”

“It’s time you knew a truth not many people do, Dean,” John says though he glances to both the Sarnia general and Bobby for confirmation. The general gives only a stiff nod. Bobby looks less sure but under the intent gazes of the other two, relents with a shrug.

“Boy’d find it out on his own now anyway. Stubborn idjit.” Bobby’s tone is resigned but he goes on, staring at Dean until

Dean wants to shrink away into the shadows again. "There's a whole committee dedicated to tracking down the location of the angel's city. Those top researchers out there ain't just picking apart their weaknesses." Bobby turns his gaze on Castiel, who meets his stare with a hard glare, promising violence in a way Dean hasn't seen before. He's seen Castiel angry but this is the first time he's really looked at the angel and thought Castiel might follow through on the threat in his gaze. "But maybe it'd be best to hear it from the angel's mouth."

Bobby reaches to the side when Castiel thins his lips and refuses to speak, to a table in the shadows and while Dean expects him to draw a weapon – the protest is on the tip of his tongue – Bobby only holds out an old worn book. He flips it open to the beginning, crossing the low burning line of the fire, and holds it so Castiel can read the first passage. With a wary glance to Bobby, he turns his eyes to the book and does so.

It's silent until Castiel glances at the humans with wide eyes. "How do you know all this?"

John snorts. "Did you think you were the first angel to talk to a human?"

Castiel lowers his gaze. "I know that I'm not."

"Then you probably know what happens when you don't cooperate. So it's your turn to shed some light on this. Start from the beginning."

Castiel only lifts his gaze when he comes to a decision, eying them all before eventually resting on Dean and he begins in a rough

voice, "It was all a very very long time ago and I can only tell my side of the story... When we were peaceful and united under the leadership of our brothers until they fought and split us down the middle."



The fight can be heard across the entirety of the city. Most in them hardly pay it any attention, a slight pause in their activities before they're twitching their wings in irritation and going on with their day.

Michael and Lucifer are arguing again.

Castiel has the misfortune of being nearby them, privy to the way their wings flare out and if their voices can carry outside the walls of the citadel they all reside in then up close, they are sharp and painful. He wonders if there's a way to escape the building without being noticed and beside him, he thinks Anael is wondering the same. They share a look and hunker down a little over their work, wings arching above and around them in a futile attempt to drown out the shouts of an old tired argument.

"You're jealous, Michael," Lucifer will sneer. And Michael will snap his wings at Lucifer in anger and claim to be the better of them. "I am a good son," Michael will say, "I do what's told of me."

Castiel could recite the words in his head.

"Please," Lucifer will scoff next, "They all like me better than you."

“You think they’d get dizzy from going around in circles,” Anael whispers to him and Castiel smiles. He won’t laugh; their work is delicate, carving sigils into the armor of the cities guardians. They spend some extra time on their own and the dragons of Castiel’s are a tracery of powerful Enochian. He gazes at them a little too prideful and nearly manages to drown the heated argument out until Anael’s wing collides with the back of his head.

“Anna...” he starts to warn but she cuts him off.

“Listen.”

The alarm in her voice makes Castiel tune back into the argument across the citadel. It’s the first time their fight has gone beyond harsh but ultimately consolable words.

“A challenge,” Michael says and now his voice has gone soft but still it carries to Castiel and Anael and indeed, to the entirety of the Host. They can’t not hear one of their generals make such an important and altering declaration.

Lucifer frowns and appears as taken aback by it as Castiel feels. “You must be joking.”

Michael never kids. “I am done with this, Lucifer. A challenge and I’ll show you who He made in a better image.” Michael doesn’t wait for the response; he turns and walks away, a flare of his wings because the brothers have always been dramatic. It’s never come to anything past that.

There have been rumblings though. Quiet whispers in privacy. The great garden below them thrives with new life and occasionally angels are caught looking over the edge. From their city into the new ones that spring up below with creatures that are so like them and so different. The new child of their father who leaves his first ones unchecked because surely they're *old* enough. They can watch the city and each other, except Michael and Lucifer have always fought.

Lucifer is one of those caught peering over the edge into the abyss. Watching the greenery below, the beauty of it that they don't hold here in Heaven, in their own city. Which is beauty but not color. All is silver and gold and marble. While those same colors in the cities below hold a plethora more, here they do not. All their wings are silver and all their eyes are gold. All their clothes and their skin and their hair is marble and all that means here is gray. Below, those colors hold a tracery of others threaded in to make them stand out vibrantly.

Castiel had stood on the bridge once, where a waterfall careens over the cliffs and down into mist. When the mist parts, the water falls away into nothing and below, he had seen the new cities for the first time. Lucifer had joined him on the bridge and Castiel had stepped back from the edge, head bowed demurely to his superior but Lucifer's arm had found his shoulders and drawn him back.

"Do not be afraid," Lucifer told him and so together they had looked, with the spray and the mist from the waterfall ghosting along their wings.

“They are...” Castiel started and stopped, unsure if he should admit his thoughts but Lucifer must read his mind.

“Beautiful. And spoiled.”

Castiel had glanced at him in surprise but he shouldn't be really. That Lucifer in that moment sounded like Michael, who has always been so jealous. They are more alike than they will ever admit, always striving to rise and become more than they're meant to. In the end, Castiel knows it will come to a battle the same way all of them know and it's there he chooses his own side, falling in line with the awe in Lucifer's gold eyes. The sympathy and the brotherhood of them.

Lucifer watches the activity below with a sort of longing. For their color and their freedom, perhaps. For the attention that falls on them even if they're unaware of it. Michael watches Lucifer with his gaze thoughtful and eyes narrowed. And on their last fight, as his parting words before he leaves the citadel, he tosses back over his shoulder:

“If you like them so much, Lucifer, maybe you should join them.”

The challenge is met. Michael and Lucifer will finish their rivalry the way they were always meant to, on a battle field like the warriors they are.

Castiel doesn't expect to get drug into it but with Michael gone, he and Anael are alone with Lucifer in the citadel and his gaze falls on them.

"Castiel. Anael." They stand, setting the armor they'd been working on aside and approach. They're two of the first to give Lucifer their allegiance for they too are curious about the new worlds below.



The battle is held on the fortnight. Every angel is braced as if they will be the ones to walk into the citadel but there are only four that will. The rest of the Host is locked out but though they cannot see the fight, they can feel it. Those attuned to Michael, to preached defense of the golden city, will feel his determination and his pride. Those attuned to Lucifer and his sympathy and his curiosity, will feel his sorrow in this act and behind that as well, pride. In the end, it's what drives them both.

There are four angels of power within the city. Archangels who command the rest. Two generals and two beneath them, waiting to take the place of a fallen. These two walk in with Lucifer and Michael and they stand on the edges of the citadel, at the North and South. They have their allegiances as well, made on the same speeches and politics as every other angel's decision.

Raphael stands to the south and if Lucifer falls, he'll rise by Michael's side. Gabriel stands to the north and wishes secretly that Lucifer would fall so that Gabriel could go along with him to the cities below. With their colors and temptations that have snared a great many of them now. Perhaps not so secretly, when he had confessed to Anael and she in turn to Castiel.

When the battle is engaged, it draws out for an age. For weeks, months. Angels are tireless in Heaven but Michael and Lucifer push the boundaries of that, pressing until one of them falters. Lucifer is the first to bend beneath his brother's hands and Castiel feels Lucifer's shock as the first spark of pain blooms out along his wings. With that first spark, the fight is lost. Lucifer loses his control for a moment and he finds himself cast from the citadel and indeed, from the city. To fall to the Earthly planes and the first one to fold his wings and follow is Gabriel.

Michael calls the rest of them forward, Lucifer and his followers to be thrown to the ground. God does not love them more, Michael says and Castiel dons his armor and the golden gates of the city slam shut on them. They'll never open again.



They fall scattered among the Earth, hundreds of them, and Lucifer calls for them to join him. They are disoriented, weakened from their fall and the unexpected affect of the different planes. Some of them crane their heads upwards, trying to catch sight of the gates they know should be there. But all they see is blue sky and a bright sun that hurts their eyes in its intensity.

Their wings, light and flexible in Heaven, are heavy and constraining here. They cannot appear where they want at will and instead flying is slow and tedious and their wings grow tired. Castiel

had never known exhaustion before. He had never known his wings to ache or for the feathers to turn dirty and torn.

There are all manner of strange creatures here as well, ones he had not seen when looking down. The color of the world had blinded him maybe; he hadn't paid attention to the way of the animals that inhabited it. Some are harmless and flee when they see him, others bare long teeth but they too run when he flares his wings. And others...the ones that he *had* watched, the new child of his father's creation. They are more like angels in their appearance and in their speech, in their intelligence. Castiel thinks to approach them.

He's been following Lucifer's call for days and getting no closer. Occasionally he can sense other angel's across the link but he can't tell how near they are. All of them push to Lucifer but as it is, Castiel has not rested for days. He's never needed to. Now he stops, finds a cove of trees that will keep him sheltered from the elements for he has discovered as well that the heavy rainfall water-logs his wings and renders them useless and heavier than ever. They do provide some warmth from the chill of the night as he wraps them around him.

It's the first time he's needed sleep and he wakes to the sound of men nearby.

He unfurls his wings and listens to their laughter and their peaceful voices, the movement of the horses they ride. They're nearing him and Castiel quickly moves to reveal himself to them, to ask their assistance. He steps through the trees with his unwieldy wings held in close to his back but when he opens his mouth to speak to them, the

noise is so startlingly great that the horses spook and the birds above rush from the trees. It's the first time Castiel tries to speak and he snaps his mouth shut with a click of his teeth.

It's too late. The men's ears bleed and Castiel watches wide-eyed as their horses throw them to the ground and leave with a clatter of hooves on the rocky ground. The men are on their knees, pained and shocked, and that's when another angel enters the scene from above. Castiel recognizes the archangel Gabriel and with swift moves, Gabriel cuts the men's throats with the blade he carries.

"Why did you do that?" Castiel cries, forgetting his voice again but there's no men around this time and any animals have fled.

"They'd only have bled to death." Gabriel's voice is more controlled, a steady tenor that speaks of practice. "There are too many things about this world we didn't know." Gabriel looks to the men at his feet, frustrated and then shakes it off. "Come along, we're nearly to Lucifer."

Nearly is many more sunsets away. They need to stop continuously to rest their wings and sleep. Hunger and thirst plague them both until Gabriel discovers they can drink from the streams and that many of the animals in the forests are good to eat. They stumble along and learn as they can and Castiel counts the days and thirteen go by before he and Gabriel, joined by then by several others, find Lucifer at the base of a rocky outcropping.

Lucifer greets each and every one of them, praising their loyalty and reassuring them. Castiel greatly misses home and he thinks

even Gabriel will agree with the sentiment. When finally they are all gathered, nearly a thousand strong, among the rocks and the caves and the trees, Lucifer restores order to them. An angel isn't much without order, without a voice to listen to. Lucifer is theirs.

He questions them all about what they've learned on their journey here and knowledge is shared and stored and discussed. Made into something they can all understand.

Gabriel speaks of their voices and agrees to teach the others control. Anael speaks of the animals and it's Anael who makes the discovery of the color that has begun to bleed into their wings. Her silver wings have begun to molt and replacing them are deep red feathers. Others express similar findings and when Castiel is on his own, he takes the time to examine his own wings and finds new feathers, deepest blue and nearly black.

Everything around them is changing.

There is talk of the men, the idea of contact with the creatures that had caught their attention in the beginning. A scouting party of three angels is sent out. One does not come back; another comes back with her wing torn and bleeding, stuck through with arrows. They learn about death and mortality and the cruelty of men.

Lucifer takes them far out of human reaches. Towards the North, where ice and snow cover the landscape and no humans live. But the angels thrive in the cold and here they construct a city from the ice. Here where even the white snow holds a thousand colors within it. Where their wings turn every shade, where they lose the tint of their skin

and their hair and their eyes. If it weren't for the wings from their backs, Castiel would mistake them all for men.

They grow weak and all around them, in the lands to the south, mankind grows stronger.

Lucifer grows delusional and spends many hours staring upwards to the sky, searching out the gates. What would he do if he found them?



Gabriel is the first angel to leave.

Lucifer speaks to him one day while Castiel guards the entrance to his temple and here, like in the citadel of Heaven, even quiet voices carry. "It's those things out there."

"This world was made for them. We're the ones that need to adapt to it," Gabriel answers. It's a tired argument, like the one between Michael and Lucifer. Lucifer's pride won't let him see Gabriel's options. The ones where they need to learn, to change.

"Gabriel, you were always so laid back. Very feng shui of you, stand back and let it happen. But they're sucking the energy from us. All of them grow strong and we grow weak." He gestures with a flick of fingers to his own pitch black wings, blacker than Castiel's, there's no real color to them at all. "We need to strike before they do.

Don't argue, you know they will, they already hunt us like trophies when they get the chance."

There's no arguing with him and here, the way things are, his word is law. Gabriel leaves, shaking his head and pauses as he passes Castiel. The pitying look Gabriel gives him makes Castiel's wings lower uncomfortably and then Gabriel is squeezing a hand against his shoulder. Gabriel's eyes are more expressive here than ever in Heaven. Golden-brown to Castiel's blue. Everything keeps changing.

"Good luck with him. I'm not sticking around to see this all go to hell."

Gabriel walks from the temple and he spreads his brilliant white and gold wings, kicks up a flurry of snow around his feet and it's the last Castiel sees of him for a very long time.



Gabriel might be the first to leave but he's far from the last.

Six others leave in his stead, following him into the jungle of humanity.

Lucifer sends out scouting parties with more frequency. "Learn the ways of the humans. Learn their language and their customs. Learn their weapons." He sends the most loyal, those who won't falter from their path, won't act as traitors like Gabriel. Lucifer grows more and more angry.

Castiel has always been loyal. He had given his word, his armor and his trust to Lucifer. Sometimes he thinks it's naive to believe that Lucifer will handle this trust delicately. Once he would have but as this world changes all of them, it changes Lucifer the most. Castiel finds his loyalty wavering at points, as he's sent with others into the realm of man and they learn their words and how to control their voices. But they also learn the best ways to attack from above, with speed and fury.

Man learns of them as well, of their weaknesses and it isn't long before Castiel sees an angel ensnared in nets and dragged down to the ground. The angel screams but their voices have turned weak from disuse and the men only flinch. Castiel signals his team to move in, to fly to their brother's aid and before they can get there a blade is shoved home through the throat of the angel and it dies in a blast of white light.

Castiel and the others scatter.

It's the first time he sees an angel die.



Somewhere there is a traitor.

Man has come into contact with their words and the power in them. With their armor and their metal. Both the advantage and the weakness of their wings. Men steal their light and suck them dry, and every one of them feels it when it happens. Men will kill them all!

Lucifer preaches all of this and Castiel, like many of the others, finds himself nodding along.

It's only a short time later that Castiel and his newly formed hunting party come across one of the early deserters. The angel is only recognizable as such by the armor it wears, by the way it's standing in an open valley and screaming Lucifer's name in their tongue. Its wings are gone. Burnt away to nothing and blood oozes thick and sluggish from where the wings used to be.

Castiel kills it and as it dies in his arms, he hates humans with a passion to rival Lucifer's.

The first raid on the humans comes after. Where the wind from their wings beats down their houses and destroys their harvests. On their first raid, they kill thirty humans before a single angel falls and the flash of light again scatters the rest of them.

They return largely triumphant to Lucifer's presence, a victory made more so when an angel steps forward before them all. Zachariah who gives loyalty that rivals Castiel's but does so for his own gain. He holds in the cusp of his hands a golden light, so bright and swirling with colors that it rivals Heaven.

"I killed the human and this was in its eyes. So I took it."

Lucifer is transfixed. He dips his fingers into the orb of light and the reaction is like a sun exploding. It crawls up his arm and into his eyes and every angel takes a step back at the sudden oppression of his restored power. He cries out for more, that the humans rob them of their light - their grace - and so they will rob humans of theirs. Their



souls, their strength. And the angels will take it for their own to keep *them* strong.

The hunts continue but as the angels grow better at attacking; the humans grow smarter at defending themselves. Gone are wood buildings, replaced with stone. Stone houses to protect the people inside. Stone walls to protect the crops and livestock. New weapons, to launch heavy nets into the air.

Castiel's wings make him perfect to scope the cities first, to find the layout of their defenses, to plot the guard stations and their weak points. They always attack at night and Castiel's wings are a match for the sky.

Anael stops him once, her hair turned fire red to match her wings, and Castiel thinks her stunning. They all are now. "What are you doing, Castiel? This isn't you. To kill without remorse or thought?"

Her words are unsettling but Castiel is firm in his loyalty, his conviction of Lucifer's words. "We have orders."

"You're hunting them without discrimination."

"As they would do to us."

"Not all of them."

He doesn't see Anael within the walls of the ice city again after that. Though he does find her once for they had been close within Heaven. They'd built their armor together, they'd traded words and smiles which had seemed rare before but were more so now. He sees her in the arms of a human male. They lie together in a creek and he strokes her wings and she spreads them for him. They're laughing and happy, and Castiel leaves the scene confused, instead of killing the man and bringing Anael home as he should have.

The sight leaves him troubled and torn. Anael's words stay in his mind.

Had he made a mistake?



Lucifer orders such traitors punished. A quick death is too good for them, consorts of humans, who feed man the knowledge and tools of the angels. Castiel knows that this is untrue, Anael would not

betray them. He holds his tongue for fear of the new prison that Lucifer has constructed.

The cursed oil is found here, an all too human creation, which Lucifer turns on his own. Other things as well and a new language is formed, a new series of symbols to bind them. To pain them.

It's only a matter of time before the humans get their hands on these as well and Lucifer has no one to blame but himself.

Castiel keeps his head down and does as he's told. Coward that he is. He watches. He watches Lucifer and the decay of his mind as he consumes the human souls that were never meant for them. As he destroys angels with that same madness. He watches the humans and finds that slowly he begins to envy them. The humans fight to protect their own, they are family. The angels are only a hierarchy and all of them too frightened and cowed to challenge the top. Castiel watches the city and watches the raids where the angels fall with none to replace them and wonders what will become of them.

"You're not down there with the others."

A voice startles Castiel, as he stares down at a raid, high above the cloud-cover careful to stay out of the flashes of light from the dying. Gabriel hovers behind him, splendid as ever. Castiel turns his gaze back down to the fight below them.

"I find things aren't as simple as I once thought."

"You know I had more hope for you. You're slower than I thought."

Castiel frowns at the insult. "I'm unsure what to do."

"Figure it out for yourself. I'm not gonna tell you. It's missing the point if I just tell you."

"Where have you been?"

Gabriel shrugs. "Here and there. Communing with nature. You wanna know a great human invention? Candy. Try some. Every angel that's given in to it has a sweet tooth." Gabriel winks at him before he grows serious again. "Stop being so scared to take a chance."

Castiel's frown deepens and Gabriel leaves. It's all Castiel can do not to follow and to turn his attention back to the carnage.



Not long after, he hears news of Gabriel being taken down and held.

He spends weeks after thinking over what Gabriel had said. He seeks solitude in the forests, taking in the colors that had once caused joy in him. They haven't now for a long time and he stays until he finds it again. The shades of the leaves, the breeze, the song of the animals. He opens his wings to the winds, stands with his feet in a cold stream. He remembers Anael and her human. Gabriel's clear eyes with no aid from a human soul.

It's there that he makes his decision, before he ever meets Dean who spares his life and Castiel stays his hand in return. He is offered candy and yes, indeed, he has a sweet tooth.



Castiel is no longer talking to the others in the room, his gaze fixed on Dean's. "There is an energy in the Earth that a wise angel can use. Slower than a soul but more lasting and stronger in the long run. That's what Gabriel tried to tell me and others have discovered on their own. Those souls are not ours." He lifts his gaze finally from Dean and takes in John. "And our grace is not yours."

John and the other two are standing back, watching with contemplative frowns, and for a moment Dean feels hope spark in him. John looks between him and Castiel and his gaze softens. For a moment. Before John shakes his head and looks away.

"We must look after our people." He turns to the general of Sarnia. "Call together volunteers and organize the mission. We ride north to the ice fields."

"Dad..." Dean starts to protest, even knowing how useless that will be. John sees in black and white and all it comes down to is protecting his people. Even if this is not the way to do that. Winchesters have stubbornness issues.

"The way is not passable for man," Castiel tries and John turns on him, fire in his gaze.

"This is a *war*. And we fight it on any front we have available. Or do you have a better idea, *angel*?" He sneers the word like a vile curse.

Dean is sure Castiel will back down; the angel's eyes waver a moment, but his gaze holds firm and he licks his lips. "Perhaps. I have no wish for the deaths that would come from a full out confrontation. Men cannot reach our city and men cannot kill this angel who leads us. I could not kill him. But there is one here who can."

"Gabriel?" Dean finds himself asking in surprise, wishing he hadn't when all eyes turn on him.

But Castiel nods. "He's been waiting. It was never up to him to start things." He looks back to John, silent and watchful. "Extend me the same trust your son has. You'll kill me if I've lied."

"You're right I will."

Dean almost wants to shout victory as John does what he never has before and gives in. His gaze wavers between Dean and Castiel, and in that gaze he weighs the options which are so few. Dean's hand lands on Castiel's shoulder, grin threatening his face as he glances over to Bobby who shrugs in agreement.

"What's the worse we can lose?"

The Sarnia general grunts reluctantly but John just sighs, eyes lingering on Dean's hand touching the angel and Dean's smile fades. "Anything happens to my son and I will end you," John says. Then they cut Castiel's binds and douse the ring of fire.

Castiel cringes as he stretches out his limbs and his wings, standing stiffly from the chair and his wings fill the room until they're wrapping around Dean and Dean finds himself finally grinning as Castiel pulls him into a strong embrace.

"I was such a fool for so long," he whispers against Dean's mouth. "I apologize for that."

"You weren't the only one. Come on, let's go save the world."



It's dusk when they leave the jail and even with hunters like John and Bobby standing behind them, there's a whole city filled to the brim with black-and-white minded hunters. John throws loops of rope around Castiel's wings and he and Bobby lead the angel as one captured through the town towards the stadium. Dean doesn't miss the way John pulls the general of Sarnia aside and he catches the quiet words for him to gather men, to be ready in case this last ditch effort goes wrong. But they will end this soon, one way or another. Dean ducks his head and walks behind them, while Castiel walks with his head up and proud despite the ropes, and the scattering of people they pass cringe away.

The ropes come off as they reach the stadium and Bobby and John stand back, hands hovering over the hilts of their blades. Castiel ignores them to stride forward and Dean jogs to catch up, whispering as

he glances around the ledges of the stadium. "There's probably about a dozen hunters closing in up there, you know that, right?"

But Castiel only smiles at him for a moment before his attention is taken by the cage doors and he steps to the one with the archangel. The cage opens under his touch and the dim evening light spills in to illuminate the archangel's wings. They're arched to attack but they settle once Gabriel catches sight of Castiel and he steps out into a waiting hug.

"I was about to come rescue you," Gabriel tells him as they step back.

"I can take care of myself."

At the sound of their voices, the other angel's push open their cage doors and step out. Castiel takes them all in, sharing a fond smile with Anael when he comes to her. It's only a minute for the reunion before Castiel is snapping back to attention. "We must leave. Immediately. The hunters have discovered the location of the city."

The angel's snap to attention, taking in John and Bobby in the background. John's hand is raised in what Dean knows is a sign to hold other hunters back. John is keeping his word, giving them this chance and they can't afford to screw it up.

Gabriel takes in the situation, eyes quickly calculating before his wings settle and the other angels follow him. "Oh great, and who gave them that bright idea?" Gabriel demands and Castiel looks anywhere but at the archangel. "Got anymore while you're at it?"

At that, Castiel does look at Gabriel and if Dean were the archangel, even he'd be backing down under that stare. "Yes, actually." Castiel folds gracefully down to the ground, drops to one knee before Gabriel and bows his head, wings sweeping around to either side of him. Gabriel stares on in shock the other angels follow suit, bowing before him, exposing their wings.

The archangel looks like he's half ready to bolt as he stares at the four angels at his feet and Dean steps back when Gabriel looks across to him, hands raised. "Don't look at me; I'm not getting my knees dirty for you."

That gets a bark of laughter from Gabriel. "Get up, all of you get up. A mutiny, huh?" he asks Castiel when the angels are back on their feet and Castiel gives a single nod. "Alright. Let's get out of here then."

Castiel turns to Dean first, question in his eyes. "You know I'm coming. I'm behind you, Cas, no matter what crazy ass idea you've got in mind," Dean says while Castiel touches his face. Gabriel rolls his eyes in the background and pretends to gag. "That's who you wanna put in charge, really?" Dean says and Castiel's eyes crease with amusement.

John's voice stops the angels from leaving, Castiel's wings resettling on his back as the older hunter walks into the midst of them, still wary and looking to each of the angels in turn. There's an angel blade at his hip but he wisely keeps his hand away from it. Dean can see how on edge the angels quickly become in his presence. John Winchester carries a reputation among the angels as well but Castiel

stops any action they might take by greeting John with a respectful bow of his head. Dean catches Gabriel muttering “crafty” from behind them.

For a long moment, John just watches them and Dean thinks he might see a whole new level of appreciation there. It’s respect that he takes Castiel in with. “Don’t forget our agreement, angel. You bring him back whole.”

“I will. By my own life if I have to.”

It’s enough of an answer to satisfy John though when he leaves, it’s still with a warning, “Don’t think the hunters won’t be following you,” and he goes to gather an army in preparation.

“You know...” Castiel starts though his resigned gaze says he knows where this will go. “This is between angels, Dean. You don’t need-”

“Shut up, feathers. I’m going with you.”

“And so are we.”

Dean looks and there’s Jo. Sam and the twins all stand armed and ready beside her. Even the horses are saddled and there. Impala pulls from them and Dean welcomes the press of her nose into her hands. The angels don’t scare her.

Stubbornness issues. Dean and Castiel wisely don’t try to argue with them.



They ready themselves under the angels' instructions. Dress warmly. Bring the angel blades which can be easily hidden beneath thick furs and nothing else. The humans will slow them but perhaps this united front and this new generation are the best offer they can make to the angels who hide beneath the shadow of Lucifer's wings. Look at us. Look at how it can be. Dean looks at Castiel, donned now in his armor, and he sees how it could be.

Suddenly standing before Dean is a creature regal and powerful. Dean almost wants to bow to him the way Castiel and the others had to Gabriel. He kisses him instead.

"Gabriel can do this right? He'll kill Lucifer and then the others..."

"Will bow before him. And he will be a righteous leader and there will be peace again." But there's doubt in Castiel's gaze. Dean meets it with silent question until Castiel looks down. "But Lucifer has consumed so many souls and Gabriel none."

"You could help him."

Castiel shakes his head. "That is not our law. For the others to follow Gabriel he must defeat Lucifer on his own. He'll select a second to take his place if he cannot battle. But then all would be lost for there is no other archangel or any angel who could stand up to Lucifer."

Silence falls between them, uncertain and heavy, until Dean thumps his forehead down against the breastplate of Castiel's armor.

"How were they captured? I mean...they're all smart and hey, archangel."

"The same way I did. They allowed themselves close to humans." Castiel smiles and brushes his fingers through Dean's hair. "The last time I saw Anna, she was happy with a man. She said he was caught and killed for treason and they captured her when she was blinded in anger."

"Jesus... I never knew it was that bad."

"We'll fix it."

"Or die trying?" Dean tries to joke but there's only silence in the wake.



The way to the ice fields is long. The trail winds high into the mountains where Cansae rests at the base, up steep rock faces and along narrow canyon paths.

It takes a week to make it to the trail head, where the path snakes up a gully and into thick woods. The angels are anxious, wanting to move faster than the hunters and their horses can, where every hour they spend winding through trees could be another one where Lucifer discovers their intentions. But Gabriel holds them back and Castiel stands firmly at his side. If this is about anything, then it's about uniting two races and they need to approach Lucifer together for that. The city of angels and the cities of man need to see what they can do.

The angels take it in turns to circle ahead or back, checking the way and bringing along intel of the path or the army of men sneaking in behind them. Always John Winchester's army trails them but he keeps to his word and stays at a distance.

Ahead of them, towards the angels, Israfel – the grey-winged angel – says that Lucifer is beginning to stir.

Dean stares at Castiel for a long moment but the words don't quite want to connect. They weren't fast enough. "How long do we have?" They can at least warn John and the hunters, but Castiel shakes his head.

"Not long enough."

"Then I guess we're going flying," Gabriel speaks up and he's already standing with his hands on Jo's shoulders when Dean looks over. It takes a moment for those words to click in Dean's mind as well and then his eyes are widening and he's shaking his head, taking a step back from Castiel.

"Oh no. No no no."

But they don't have the luxury of argument and soon enough, Dean finds himself caught up in Castiel's arms, sure he'll throw up all over the angel's wings while the tree tops skim by too quickly under him. Jo is busy whooping delight in a precarious dangle from Gabriel's arms and when Dean chances a glance to the side where Sam is with Anael, he's grinning. The twins are as well and Dean hates them all.

Dean forgets his fear eventually, watching as he dangles from Castiel's arms. The air grows colder, the clouds low and thick. Snow begins to build up until that's all there is and there in the distance, shining with golden light, a city rises up on the barren landscape.

"We carved it from the rock and ice for years," Castiel whispers into his ear.

"It looks so quiet."

"It used to be full of life. Now Lucifer suppresses us and those left within the walls wait in fear of him."

The city looms in front of them for hours before they begin to get closer. Gabriel draws them to the side, hides them in an ice cavern where the angel's stretch and rest their tired wings. It's freezing even with the heavy furs and cloaks he and the others wear and Dean shivers as soon as he leaves the warmth of Castiel's arms. The cold doesn't seem to have any effect on the angels whatsoever.

Castiel's wing wraps around him again, feathers insulating against the chill breeze that finds its way into the cavern.

"How's the wing?" Dean asks and Castiel grimaces.

"Sore. But we won't rest here long. And I suppose you'll want to go right up to the gates with us?" His look is patiently resigned and one that Dean has seen aimed at him many times over the years. Dean only grins in reply and Castiel nods once. "You'll stand back with Israfil and Sariel." Castiel addresses all the hunters. "If there is danger or if the fight goes on too long, they'll take you somewhere safe."

“And warm?” Dean doesn’t like the idea of standing back and letting things happen but he knows the sense in trying to join in a fight against angels is about as much as him coming here at all. Still the angel blade is tucked away beneath his jacket and he won’t let Castiel face these things alone. Screw whatever laws they have. If Castiel needs help, Dean is going to be there.

“Alright, kids. Time to get going,” Gabriel calls to them from the mouth of the cavern and the angels step up to him, expectant. “You three,” he gestures at his angels, “Watch these kids – and that one in particular,” he points at Dean, “Since I’m sure he’s not gonna stay put even if I tell him to.” Gabriel makes a pointed look at Dean who straightens up stubbornly. “Castiel, you come with me.”

Castiel jolts a little in his surprise, glancing at Anael. “Someone else...”

“Nope. You or no one and we’re wasting time standing around here. Let’s go.” Gabriel throws them a wink and he’s gone into the sky, disappearing from the cavern.

Castiel stands for a moment and Dean kind of wishes they had time for...something. Goodbye? That could be what this is but the moment he realizes it, Castiel is already gone and Dean stares across the field of ice before shaking it off. He subjects himself to being hauled along by Anael, forgetting fear of the height as he fixes his sights on Castiel.

There is a gate of thick ice and iron bars before the city and not unlike the city of Cansae, a high wall of ice surrounds it, swirling

with colors like marble. Dean lays a palm against it and judges it near hard as stone before Anael is drawing him back while Gabriel stands before the gates and calls Lucifer out.

The way to the city from the gate is still long. The city itself is more like a castle, with huge pillars and towers arching towards the sky. A sudden splash of black is visible against the white and shining gold, and as it draws closer, Dean realizes it's an angel. Its wings are dark as pitch, darker than Castiel's with no hint of color. They're larger as well, larger than Gabriel's.

Lucifer. And behind him a gray angel with angry eyes that sweep over those gathered with Gabriel as they land.

"Gabriel. And Castiel, I wondered where you disappeared to," Lucifer greets them before his eyes land on the hunters, standing back with the other three angels and Dean bristles, fists clenching, while Jo lifts her head in arrogant challenge. "I don't suppose you brought a gift to make up for your absence."

Castiel almost jerks forward when Lucifer takes a step towards Dean, but Gabriel snaps out before he can, "I challenge you," and everything stops again.

"You wouldn't dare."

Gabriel rolls his eyes and steps forward, Castiel matching the stride. "I challenge you," he says again, calm and firm.

Lucifer lets out a sharp bark of laughter. "Over these things? Which you would dare to bring to my doorstep."

"I told you once it was us that needed to adapt. Us that invaded their world. Well some of us have and we're better for it. Look

at you, Lucifer, you're insane. And you lead your followers down the same path." Gabriel glances to the angel standing at Lucifer's side, his smoldering fury fixed on Dean.

Lucifer's eyes are blazing, white in their righteous belief that he's right. "If you like them so much, Gabriel, you'll join them in the ground. I accept your challenge."

It's all the warning Gabriel gets to brace himself before Lucifer attacks, wings and armor plowing into Gabriel's unprotected form and every bone in Dean's body screams at him to help. Lucifer is mad and powerful. But the other angel's remain still and tense. Castiel backs out of the way but Dean can see his fingers curling in the want to help.

They use no weapon save their wings, Lucifer delivering crushing blows that Gabriel staggers under. When he tries to return them, Lucifer's armor doesn't even dent. Gabriel retreats to the sky and Lucifer follows him, the rest of them looking up so fixed on the battling angels they don't see the gray angel of Lucifer's move.

A blade flashes in his hand and Dean is unprotected for a heartbeat when the angel rushes him.

He remembers Castiel shouting his name too late in warning while Jo shoves Dean hard out of the path of the angel's wings before the ground gives way beneath him and there is burning pain through his chest. A wind like a thousand angel's wings beats all at once. He has time for one last act and he grasps his angel blade and tosses it to Castiel.



There are still wings all around him when Dean wakes again, warm and comforting, but they don't stop Dean from catching his breath at how he aches all over. He moans as he shifts and the noise turns questioning when he realizes that yes, he's on a mattress. And it's not just wings that cover him, it's blankets. It's not Castiel's arm beneath his head, it's a pillow. His pillow and his bed and the familiar feel of his room.

Dean's eyes snap open and he'd sit bolt upright if Castiel's wing wasn't stretched across his chest, pinning him down. Castiel...in his room. The angel is staring down at him, propped up on one arm and bright blue eyes smiling. Castiel in his bed. Dean stares at the angel and then around his room, making sure they are where he thinks they are but though it's impossible, the surroundings remain the same.



"Cas," Dean manages on a raspy voice. "You're in my room. Does my dad know you're in my room?"

"You've been sleeping for some time," Castiel answers with and Dean grimaces when he presses at Castiel's wing.

"I feel like a horse ran me over. What happened?"

Castiel pauses and then begins, "We smote the devil that was Lucifer."



Lucifer breaks the rules when he allows Zachariah to act.

There are angels everywhere suddenly, flooding from the city and from behind the wall. All of them raging. Such deceit. So many lies and so much anger. They see standing with these rebel angels humans that do them no harm after so much death. So much death and there's time for one more. They call for Lucifer's blood. Betrayer to their ways.

Lucifer and Zachariah are set upon and dragged down.

The angel-killing blade is heavy in Castiel's hand until he throws it to Gabriel.

The shockwave as Gabriel shoves it into Lucifer's throat is felt across the ice field. It is greater a light than the death of any angel has ever produced and it rumbles along the ground and brings the city of angels to ruin as the ice cracks and the rock falls to pieces.

The wall goes first. Cracks run like spider webs through the side until the entire structure crumbles. Then the city, where the great towers wobble and collapse in on themselves or fall to the side to bring down the rest. There are angels that flee the wreckage as the prison is broken open, by wing or foot. Until all is rubble and at last there is a flash of gold light as the human souls pass on.

Castiel kneels by Dean's side and the rest drop as well. All bow before Gabriel. The human hunters stare on in awe.

With all angels on their knees and the humans parting before him, Gabriel approaches Castiel, looking down at Dean with a smile. Dean's chest no longer moves, crushed beneath the wing of Zachariah. There are no white puffs of breath from his mouth. Sam kneels there as well and he begs for them to do something. Save Dean because Dean saved all of them just by getting them this chance.

Gabriel smiles at them. "All of you saved us. So I'd better return the favor."

Castiel watches as Gabriel calls upon the pure energy of the Earth and lays his hands on Dean's chest.



"I died?" Dean interrupts and Castiel smiles at him.

"For a moment. And your resurrection at Gabriel's hands showed the angels the truth in what we need and reminded them of the beauty and energy we saw in this world when we first looked down on it. They'll follow him until the end now."

"And my dad?"

"John Winchester welcomed home the victorious. And he welcomed a brand new world."

"Is it?" Dean's head is spinning.

"It is indeed. But why don't you come outside and see?"

They walk out into the sunlight and Dean stares around them. There are angels in the skies – Sariel and another Dean doesn't recognize – a breeze in the air, but there is no panic. There are smiles and laughter and an angel across the street with a child on her back as she flies a few feet into the air while the mother looks on, a little worried but trusting. Israfel.

"I'm not still dead, am I?" Dean asks, wide-eyed.

Castiel only laughs. "You aren't in Heaven yet, Dean. But perhaps we'll be there one day. And this is a good start."

"This is incredible."

"Dean!" That's Sam, running up to them and there's Anael who lands at his side. "You're up!" Sam bear hugs him until Dean can't

breathe anymore and when Sam backs off, John is there as well and Bobby and Gabriel.

John hugs Dean the way Sam had and Dean folds against his chest and squeezes his eyes shut as John apologizes to him. Another first, one long waited for. Then Dean is passed around and slapped on the back. Castiel fairs little better and Dean gets the idea that Castiel must have waited by his side because he's being hugged by Anael and shoved good naturally by Gabriel.

Soon neither of them can take it anymore and Dean says, "Get us out of here."

Castiel gladly obliges, grabbing Dean under the arms and lifting them both into the sky and away. He takes them to the stables, setting Dean onto the ground and Dean has to catch the angel when he nearly falls, the both of them laughing. Angels in the city are going to take getting used to. Castiel smiles at him. "I know you prefer to ride."

Dean does and Impala is in her stall and Dean pets her for finding her way home. He saddles her up and hauls himself onto her back.

"You know this is only a beginning. This is a revolution and there's still work to do. This city may have accepted the change but others will take time and not every angel can be trusted."

Dean rolls his eyes at the graveness in Castiel's voice. "Later, Cas. Let's just get out of here."

He rides Impala through the side door of the wall and Castiel flies overhead. When they get into the forest and onto the grassy stretch

of trail, Dean kicks Impala to lengthen her strides into a gallop and above them, Castiel's wings span across the trees.

And Dean chases an angel through the woods.



—❁— *The End* —❁—

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