

On Gossamer Wings

Author: CK

Rating: P18 / NC-17

Summary: Castiel Shurley is an angel. Yes, angel - because that's what flight attendants of 8th Heaven Jetways are called. Sky Angels. Flying is Castiel's freedom. Boarding a plane, working above the clouds, to him it's like spreading his wings. Lifting off and leaving the world behind - how could anyone not enjoy it? Castiel doesn't understand how there are people who rather stay on the ground. It's almost ironic that he should fall in love with someone who fears flying more than anything else.

Warnings: Mild mentions of homophobia (past)

Disclaimer: I don't want to take anything away from Kripke Enterprises and Warner Bros. Television. Just borrowing their genius creation.

Author's Note: My DCBB 2015 entry. It's also my first time participating, and things didn't go all smoothly, so I'm really glad I can, after all, post this.

I'd like to thank Lotta for her input; as I'd like a person who will not be named now for their support :) Unfortunately, due to some RL problems, I didn't have a beta in the end, so if there's anyone who'd like (and be so kind) to claim that position, I'd be more than happy and thankful and will even try to offer cookies. And hot chocolate.

Now, for the most important thing: The art. Huge thanks to BOWANDBOW for the beautiful drawings which you'll find in the story.

It was a recurring dream he had. The dream about flying.

The fascination that was there to flying was undeniable. Lift up into the clouds, past them even, and watch the world become smaller, more insignificant - nothing could ever have been more amazing.

In his dream, there was this moment when he ran up to the top of a mountain, where fluffy whites hung low and blanketed dark browns and rich greens. There was this moment when he stood at the edge, overlooking miles upon miles of land, feeling as if he was able to see the whole wide world. There was this moment in which he took another step, thrust his arms to the side, only to have wings spread along them, as if there was nothing more normal than that.

And then he was flying. Felt the wind beneath his wings, how it tickled his feathers, how the air masses moved around his body and carried him in their welcoming arms to keep him up there, above everything where he was just a spectator, an observer of the world without being part of it, without having to worry about anything in it.

He would fly past big cities and small villages, over forests and deserts, along rivers and across oceans - heading for whatever was out there, still awaited him, searching for something he didn't yet know he was looking for.

He was flying. And to him, it was the most perfect feeling in the world.

He had this dream often. This dream where even within it, he felt like he was past conscious thought and had escaped into a fantasy realm. A dream he clung to, even after waking up and finding himself back on the ground, where nothing felt light, or easy.

So he would do almost everything in his power to make his dream come true.

Ever since he had been a boy, Castiel Shurley had longed to be up there, in the clouds, where dreary existence on Earth ended and Heaven began. Where he wouldn't have to think - and if only for a while - about things that had been making his life harder for so many years. About lost mothers who didn't know how to give love, and absent fathers who saw importance in so much save for their own offspring. About friends who lacked devotion and lovers who failed to understand.

Castiel wasn't so naive to believe that his problems vanished when he was that far above everything he had to deal with on the ground, but at least he could pretend for a little while. Could do his job and every now and then steal a glance out of the porthole, assured that for that moment, for these few hours, he was in his own world, a microcosm that remained undisturbed for as long as they remained airborne.

As a flight attendant, Castiel had been able to create his own little realm, at least in his mind. He was happy with his routines and his tasks, content to be a caretaker, be the one to provide those on board of his plane with everything that would make their trip as comfortable as possible. And he gladly passed on a part of his happiness he felt all these miles away from life on Earth.

Still his job also met with his preference for keeping his distance from strangers, tending to them only as part of his work, but not having to engage emotionally, personally. Life had made him shy, vulnerable to things that were out to hurt him - to people pretending out of politeness, but neglecting later on when they believed their obligation of pleasantness was fulfilled.

Castiel Shurley did this job because he loved flying. He did it because he wanted to be above the clouds as often as possible, all the while he relished in the chance of sharing his joy and contentment in an environment that didn't hold any danger to his heart and soul.

And how could he have ever known that, contrary to his firm belief, the time between take-off and landing was more than enough to turn his world upside down.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is Gabriel Rickster and I'm your chief flight attendant. On behalf of the entire crew, welcome aboard 8th Heaven Jetways flight 197, non-stop service from San Francisco to Detroit."

However cheerful in-flight announcements were, all he could see them as was much-needed reassurance for passengers and the crew themselves that everything was going to be okay - all the while no one truly believed it. And what reason was there to, anyways? When a bunch of humans was packed into a metal contraption, a tons-heavy thing that was then lifted into the air by what he, despite all his knowledge of physics, still thought of as pure and just as easily distracted willpower, one needed reassurance.

Dean Winchester's feelings when boarding a plane and taking his seat were always the same: He was filled with an impending sense of doom. Flying was unnatural for humans, that much he had decided years ago already. Whoever had come up with the concept must not have been in their right mind.

Why couldn't people travel like it had once been God-given to them? By car? Granted, cars took a little longer and posed a few minor problems when it came to crossing oceans, but still. At least one had both feet - or four wheels in that case - securely on the ground.

Dean Winchester loved cars. Especially his Baby - a 1967 Chevrolet Impala, his pride and joy. Baby had brought him to so many places already, had housed him more comfortably than some motels and

hotels, had always given him a sense of home whenever he was away from the same, on the road somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

But, as it was, Baby was marginally slower than an airplane. And while Dean passionately hated flying, he loved his brother with the same fierceness. And his job. Which, unfortunately, and just to bring these two together, made plane trips necessary. Several times a month.

So here he was. Sitting in an airplane, waiting for the inevitable - the take-off. Which he hated even more than flying itself.

He felt envious of those people swarming about that didn't seem to mind their current situation. They laughed and chatted and fought to stow away their hand luggage in the overhead bins - all the while Dean was already seated and securely fastened by his seatbelt, which held the vain hope that it would be of any use should something happen. Something he rather didn't give any closer thought to now.

8th Heaven Jetways was a relatively new airline, and while Dean usually would have preferred more established and renowned ones, there were two undeniable advantages to this. For one, they were a lot cheaper than the well-known airlines, still having to make a name for themselves. And two, well, the flight times were much more convenient for his schedule.

Working full-time plus overtime may have had its advantages on the financial side - but not when it came to having a social life. Lucky for him he didn't have to go to Detroit every week, as he wasn't needed at the office all the time, but allowed to work from home now and then. Nevertheless he was on the road - or in the air, in that case - often enough, and away from his brother and the few friends he had much too often for his liking. Not that he had much of a choice. Finding a job as such was hard enough, and one he enjoyed even more so. But one he liked and that paid well? Nearly impossible. He had been more than lucky with this one, and he couldn't give it up. Especially not as long as his brother was still studying and, despite his protests and claims he could do it himself, needed the support.

So Dean did what he had to do.

He bested his fear of flying several times a month.

And kept hoping, week after week, flight after flight, that one of these days something would come along and make flying easier and more comfortable for his strained nerves.

He had no idea what exactly he was asking for; but he also could never have guessed it was what found him on this early April day after a rainy, unspectacular weekend that saw him head back to work...

"Cabin crew, prepare for take-off, please."

Domestic flights weren't a dream job, not when it came to work within air travel business and one's desire to see the world. But, as he knew, there were also worse occupations to be had, and Castiel wasn't all that bothered that he was able to stay in known territories, so to speak.

The advantage to such flights was that they had regulars. Business men and women, or commuters returning to their workplace for the week. Castiel liked having around known faces, even if he didn't *know* these people as such; but at least there was a familiarity to the crowd.

Staring into the cabin, he let his eyes roam over the passengers, all busy fixing their belts, talking to their neighbors, reading, or just waiting for the soon-to-come start. It was a curious mixture of people, old and young, casual and business, excited and unhappy and even grumpy. Since 8th Heaven didn't

offer any Business or First Class seats, their planes' cabins created a passenger manifest that was quite unusual, and always fascinating to Castiel. Even more so if there were especially interesting people on board. Like, for instance--

"Cassie, will you sit down already! We're already in position for take off!"

Startled from his thoughts, it took the flight attendant a second or two to process the words that had just been hissed at him; then, however, he scrambled to his seat and quickly put on the belt. And did his best to ignore his colleague and friend Balthazar's glare.

"Something's off with you, lately. What is it, Cas?"

"Nothing's *off*, Balt. I was just... thinking."

"While staring at the passengers? We may be supposed to watch over these people on our flights, but we're not meant to be creepy," the older man - being six years his senior was enough for Castiel to use it as a way of teasing Balthazar when the need arose - remarked.

"I wasn't creepy, I had just..."

"Zoned out?"

"Yeah."

"So who is it this time?"

"What?!"

"You've taken a fancy to a passenger, haven't you?"

"No I haven't!" Castiel protested, struggling to keep his voice at a level that wouldn't let half the plane overhear their conversation. Which, in turn, alarmed Balthazar that he was right in his deduction, because Castiel never rose his voice. "As I said, I was just thinking. Contemplating a few things. And incidentally I missed the take-off announcement, *it happens*, Balthazar."

"Not to you," came the sing-song reply of a man who knew he had just hit the right mark. "Just admit that you were distracted."

"I wasn't. And now be quiet."

Okay, so he had been distracted. And not for the first time. Lately, he had had such moments occasionally - twice a week, to be precise. Or, to be even more exact: Every Monday and Friday when a certain passenger flew with them. It were short moments only, of course; as flight attendant one tended to have a busy shift, with rarely any moment to stop and rest. Or stare, for that matter. But when he did find the time, Castiel recently caught himself a little too often being lost in thought - and his eyes being captivated with the sight of that one person his brain had chosen to... well, fancy, as Balthazar not all that wrongfully assumed.

It was idiotic, he knew that - idiotic and unprofessional. But every once in a while, even someone like Castiel Shurley claimed the right to be not the responsible and level-headed person he was on an average day, but as human as everyone else. According to colleagues and acquaintances he lacked that humanness most of the time, so he believed he was allowed to wallow in it at least every now and then.

"Yup, I can see how totally with us you are." Apparently Balthazar wasn't yet through with his stabs; and really, how could Castiel ever have assumed something different. He knew that man long enough, after all.

"For Heaven's sake, would you two stop squabbling already?!"

Gabriel's voice was an unexpected addition to the discussion; usually he kept out of the other two men's verbal duels. But having had to listen to the whole exchange, he was slowly getting fed up with it. His following comment was nevertheless not only accompanied by an eyeroll, but also a smirk. "You

sound like... like... well, you. Seriously, no hen party can be that bad. And I know, I've been to some."

"Your point, Gabe?"

"That I want you to shut up and concentrate on work. We'll start any second and as soon as we're in the air and seatbelt signs are off you know there'll be enough to do. I'd really like to have that moment of quiet now," Gabriel clarified, voice hushed yet intent on making a statement that couldn't be misinterpreted. Castiel was aware that, while Gabe was fond of both his flight attendant colleagues and oftentimes the craziest of the three of them, he did have his moments in which he was a voice of reason. And he wasn't wrong - this was nothing they should discuss - *squabble* about - at work. Especially not he, Castiel, who couldn't take all that so lightly to leave the matter behind once they had to work.

"You really are getting old, Gabe," Balthazar teased meanwhile, good-naturedly, but the bite behind the words was still there. His friend liked showing his rebellious side, Castiel knew.

"Don't, Balt. Not now. Gabriel is right. We can discuss this later, if we must; but only when we're back on the ground."

"Gosh, you're as much a spoilsport as he is. You're just lucky I love you both enough to be capable of respecting your wishes every now and then."

Nothing else needed to be said after that; Balthazar's little stab was an agreement nonetheless, and the forces pulling at them as the plane set off to start had them shut up anyways.

But Castiel knew that the last word hadn't been spoken in this. Balthazar had found something to poke into - and since it was his friend's mostly non-existent love life, Cas bet on the blond-haired flight attendant of British descent who lacked so much of the island inhabitants' decency picking up the conversation again as soon as possible. Even if there was not much to talk about.

Or at least that was what Castiel desperately tried to make himself believe.

It had been a long, long time since Dean had last to endure the shaking of an aircraft while he was on it. If it had been his decision, it could have been a much longer time also. Unfortunately, no one asked him. So when the plane began to quiver and wobble in the turbulence the pilot had just announced - a notice Dean had very much tried to ignore, true to the motto, *what I don't know isn't true* - worrying became the theme of the moment: His teeth worried his lip, his fingers the innocent armrest, his boots the rough carpet in front of his seat, and his mind in general himself. He really didn't care how ridiculous he looked in that moment, lips sucked into this mouth and eyes screwed shut; he just wanted it to end.

The surrounding air masses wanted something else, apparently.

The shaking didn't stop. It went on and on, causing every muscle in his body to lock in place, even though he wasn't sure what that was supposed to achieve. He did it anyways.

Hours later - he was certain it had been hours, the clock at the head of the cabin showing that only about three minutes had passed was, no doubt, wrong and probably frozen in fear itself - the turbulence finally eased, and very hesitantly Dean dared to breathe again.

There was a rock in his stomach - it could only have been a rock, judging by the heavy feeling - that needed to be taken care of, and even though he was not happy to do so, he carefully detached his left hand from the armrest to push the button on the panel above his head that would call for one of the flight attendants.

He was not prepared for what happened next.

Of course he had seen the steward before, had spotted him during the safety demonstration pre take-off. But the man had instructed the rear half of the passenger cabin, and thus had stood behind his seat. Besides, Dean had been too busy to follow the display. You couldn't see and hear that often enough, and you never knew when you needed it.

Now, though, as the man came to stand beside his seat, smiled at him, and asked him what he could do for him in a rough, rumbling voice that sent a whole different kind of turbulence and shock down his spine, Dean felt ready to believe that there was a purpose to his being on this flight, on a plane in general, other than his brother or his job.

Because this man? This man was going to be his destiny.

Or maybe he had just become light-headed in wake of his anxiety.

"Uh... hi," he began, willing himself to say something to the waiting flight attendant, but unable to remember why he had called for him - for *someone* - in the first place. "I... uh... I was just..." A *complete idiot*. Yeah, that worked.

Entirely robbed of his ability to speak by fear and awe, all he could hope was that his wide-eyed stare helped communicate what he wanted. Certainly the depth in those sapphire blues of the other man had to hold some mind-reading capabilities.

Though Dean wasn't sure that would have been the best of things in that moment. Because he really couldn't control his thoughts right now.

"You look a bit pale, sir. Are you all right? Can I bring you a glass of water? Or would you prefer tea?"

There. Mind-reader. Called it.

Eventually he managed to regain his voice - and ability for speech, telling the waiting steward, "Water would be great, thank you," and even found a smile in his muscle memory. "Not a fan of flying," he added with a light laugh, though it sounded desperate more than anything else to his ears.

He was endlessly grateful that the airline employee only nodded in understanding and with kind smile, but said nothing. Dean had heard it all, already; all the patronizing and entirely unhelpful words of how the aircraft was secure and he needn't worry and the pilot was very experienced and so on. They were useless, he knew, and made him only feel worse, because they added an 'idiot' to his 'coward' he labeled himself with.

This man though, this flight attendant, was different, and it only made his interest grow. It was nice to have someone who actually seemed to care and tried to relate to the passengers, for a change. And he wouldn't like and claim that the other man's good looks didn't make things much better also.

"I'll be right back," he heard, and then was only to watch a just as attractive behind retreat towards the front of the plane.

He ought to think of more things he needed to assure the repeated return of that man.

Feeling certain urgency to the task, Castiel was quick to fetch the water for his passenger. Maybe because the man was not well after the latest turbulence, being afraid of flying, as it seemed.

Or maybe because he just really wanted to go back to him.

To his personal distraction.

He had noticed him before, of course he had. It was hard to miss that man, for that beautiful face alone. Still, as the passenger so far had been very quiet and unobtrusive, Castiel hadn't had any

contact with him yet, aside from probably at one point the obligatory greeting and farewell before or after a flight. He hadn't paid much attention to him either, apart from his short moments of staring when little breaks in his routine allowed him to.

However, now that he had the chance, he couldn't help be struck by how gorgeous that man really was. And apparently also quite nice. There was his gut instinct that had green-lighted the stranger from the very first moment on, even if Castiel had no idea what he was supposed to do with the approval.

And he was definitely not looking for suggestions from his colleagues. He should have known better than to ask.

"The man in 15a - I've seen him a few times now, do you know who that is?" Castiel inquired when Gabriel entered the crew area, followed by Balthazar.

"Little Cassie's smitten with a passenger, after all, huh? I knew it," the older man teased instead of answering, and Castiel rolled his eyes, shooting first Balthazar and then Gabriel, who had come to stand a few feet away from them and snickered quietly, a dirty look.

"I was just wondering why he's a regular," he bit out, already turning to leave.

"Cassie, don't pout--"

"I'm not!"

"Anyways," Gabriel spoke up, effectively stopping new round of bickering that was just about to start.

"The guy's some businessman. Lives in San Francisco, works in Detroit. Designs cars; some rebuild old models project, pretty successful apparently."

"Do I want to know why you are so well informed about one particular passenger?" Castiel kept his tone carefully neutral, but Gabriel was not fooled. He knew his friend who was like a brother to him too well.

"Looked him up after he continued to show up on our flights," he shrugged, "thought the knowledge might come in handy, which it now has, apparently. But don't worry, Cassie - you know he's not my type. Bit too male for my taste." Winking, the older flight attendant turned away to snag the snack basket he'd just refilled and place it on the tray wagon.

As their friend left the crew area, Balthazar came over to pat Castiel on the back. The latter was just about to nod in thanks for the silent support when he heard the whispered, "Go get 'em, tiger."

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Castiel was not in the business of 'getting' anyone. He was a professional, and as such felt bound to the company's rules; which included a clear statement regarding any kind of relationship between flight attendants and passengers. It was for the best also, he told himself; apart from the fact that he didn't even know if this Dean Winchester would be interested in men in general and in Castiel in particular, he also didn't believe there would be much of a future for them. With Dean - *Mr. Winchester* - so busy that he flew across half the country several times a month, he surely wouldn't have time to arrange his schedule according to Castiel's shift plan so they could see each other on a regular basis.

And anyways, why was he even thinking about this? They were flight attendant and friendly *incredibly attractive smart kind-hearted charming funny---Goddammit Castiel stop it!* passenger, nothing more. His mind was running away with ideas and thoughts that were entirely inappropriate, and surely weren't going to make his life - and his interaction with that certain customer - any easier.

Balthazar was not wrong. He *was* 'smitten', as his friend had called it, with Dean. Castiel couldn't remember the last time he had met a person he felt comfortable around so immediately. Usually it

took him long to warm up to people, to connect to them. He was sure able of being friendly, but it was always on a superficial level. Not that interacting with passengers required anything else - or more, for that matter. That his heart beat that little bit faster after only seeing someone a few times, and actually interacting, *talking*, to them just once - that was new. New and surprising and scary - and still intriguing.

With bottle and cup in hand, Castiel returned to his cause of emotional confusion, intent on proving to himself and whoever else cared about that he was, indeed, a professional - smitten or not.

"Here you go, Mr. Winchester."

"You really are dedicated," the passenger said with a smile when he accepted the water and immediately took a greedy sip from it.

"I'm sorry?"

"You know my name. Not sure that's an effort many professionals in your area make. At least I never had anyone on flights call me by my name before." There was color spreading over his face Castiel cursed for its bad timing. So much for professionalism.

"Well, uh... I was... of course when I'm serving you, I..." For some reason Castiel felt as if he had 'creepy stalker' written all over his face, and it was making him self-conscious enough that all he wanted was flee the scene. He couldn't though, could he? He had a job to do. And he'd be damned if he didn't make good use of any second of that job right now.

"Have to know who the water goes to?" the passenger winked and took another sip, which was followed by a relieved sigh that, for some reason, had the flight attendant bite his lip.

"Or who I have to possibly bring another cup to. Just in case," he then found it in him to reply boldly, which earned him a surprised look and slight chuckle.

"Touché."

"So you're a frequent flyer, but afraid of flying?"

"Yeah, well... the things you do for those you love, right?"

There was a dagger formed out of the words he really hadn't wanted to hear right now, and it found a new home in Castiel's heart. Of course would a man who chose to fly on a regular basis despite his anxiety have a very good reason for it. And what else was such motivation than traveling between work and the place where loved ones lives? This Dean Winchester probably had a beautiful wife and the statistical two children and, going by the looks of the man, adorable ones also. Sometimes Castiel forgot that normalcy was still defined in families of man, wife, and children, not loner male flight attendants and worldly, outgoing business men.

"I guess so, yes," he eventually remembered to reply, and forced a smile onto his face. "I assume it's not easy only seeing your family on weekends."

"Nah, it's fine. Is suspect Sammy and Jess are glad when I'm not around to get on their nerves and disrupt their routines." An impish smile filled the passengers face before he continued, "Not that I care much, most of the time they just have to suffer through my presence when they weren't quick enough to announce that they have plans I can't be included in."

Castiel wasn't sure what to say. That didn't sound like a happy family at all - unless, of course, Dean was just joking and it was all harmonic and... But what he said sounded odd nonetheless. And apparently his face gave his irritation away, as Mr. Winchester first frowned, and then had realization dawn on his face.

"You're not actually thinking..."

"No. I'm not thinking anything, I... it's certainly not my place to judge, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have--"

"I was joking, you know. We always have a good time, and I know they are happy to have me around when I'm in San Francisco. And even if they don't want to include me in their weekend plans every once in a while, it's okay. I get it, I mean, who wants to have around their sibling all the time, anyways?"

"Yes, you're-- What?"

"What?"

"Sibling?"

"Yes, Sammy's my brother and Jess his girlfriend. Wait - you didn't think...?"

Castiel wasn't sure what he expected, but the passenger in front of him flinching or the plane suddenly descending a few feet wouldn't have surprised him, seeing as there was a rock dropping down from his heart. So no family; not of his own, anyways, only in a greater sense. And the flight attendant was sure that if there had been family, the other man would have talked about them and not his brother and his brother's girlfriend.

"I must apologize, it sounded like you were talking about your wife and son, and I assumed that you'd have... I'm really very sorry, Mr. Winchester--"

"Dean."

"Excuse me?"

"Mr. Winchester was my father; I really prefer being called Dean."

"I'm not sure I should--"

"But I'm asking you to. As part of your... passenger service?"

"All right. Dean." If his smile was a bit happier and brighter than it should have been in that moment Castiel accepted it as such and didn't give it any further thought. After all, they were supposed to always be open and honest with their passengers.

"Great! And don't worry about that other thing. Seeing as I sort of raised Sammy, your assumption isn't all that wrong, what with him being my son and all." The moment the words had left his mouth, Dean pulled a face however. "No, forget that. That sounds too weird. Anyways. Sam and Jess are my family. Quite a small one, but I love them." Castiel smiled at that.

"I believe it is nice to have someone... anyone, really."

"That doesn't sound like there's someone waiting for you at home."

"No, I--"

"Ladies and gentlemen, as we start our descent, please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position. Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. Please turn off all electronic devices until we are safely parked at the gate. Thank you."

"I'm sorry, I have to go. May I take your cup?"

"Yeah, sure. See you on the other side?" It took the flight attendant a moment to understand the words; he laughed lightly when he did, though, something that was answered by an impish smile.

"I'll be waiting at the door to freedom," he found himself replying, even winking boldly - but also quickly retreating then before he crossed any line.

Any *more* lines.

The ground beneath his feet felt liberating, and the sun shining into his face as he stepped out of the

shadow of the plane like a welcome back embrace of the world. He was safely back on earth, or tarmac, but however one wanted to call it, it was a fantastic moment and Dean savored it by stopping and closing his eyes for a second, even though he was supposed to walk over to the terminal entrance quickly.

The problem was, though, that Dean may have been happy to be back on the ground; but he also actually yearned to go back on board. Not because he wanted to be on a plane, and definitely not because he wanted to be up in the air. But this metal contraption held a person he really wanted to see again, as soon as possible - preferably *now*.

The landing had been unspectacular, and getting off the plane a quick affair - both for which he was quite grateful, especially after that flight and the turbulences. But then, Dean had to admit, was there also something positive to these turbulences - or someone.

In fact, if the result of such frightful moments would always be such a friendly and handsome face, he might have been willing to go through that again. The flight attendant - whose name he, much to his dismay, didn't learn or ask for - had definitely been a bit above that standard level of caring, and doubtless much more than just polite. And now Dean couldn't help but look forward to his next flight with 8th Heaven Jetways, hoping that he'd be lucky enough to catch another one of the man's shifts.

Of course he didn't know what he expected out of it. The chance that he'd be allowed to get to know the flight attendant better, to even see him outside his work, was, given Dean's track record with acquaintances that demanded a bit more effort than being chatted up in a bar or something, rather small, but that didn't mean he wouldn't try. Something told him the dark-haired, blue-eyed - and weren't that eyes of the bluest blue he had ever had the pleasure to look into - man was worth it.

That little voice reminding him that it was entirely possible the man was not in the slightest interested in flirtations he received from someone of his own gender was ignored.

With his bag in hand, Dean maneuvered around suitcases and people alike as he walked the well-known way towards the airport exit. It was time to start his day, and his week; the office was probably already expecting him.

As was Jo, God bless her. Dean spotted the old truck, owned by his colleague and friend, Jo's mum Ellen, right away when he left the terminal. Whenever she had the chance, she would come by the airport on Monday mornings to pick him up and take him to the office, saving him the trouble of either taking a cab or even public transport. This was doubtlessly the most comfortable solution; plus he had nice company.

Dean really liked Jo. Even though she was ten years younger than him, even though she had only just made it into her twenties, she was an old soul he enjoyed having around. Once he had even tried to hit on her, but had been turned down hilariously quick and effective. It hadn't been funny back then, but over time Dean had come to appreciate the blond girl and her badass attitude so much, and a true friendship had grown between them, leaving behind any and all social misdemeanors that may once have been.

Now they spent time together, talked about everything and anything, helped her mum at the café Ellen had, and in general just proved day after day that friendship between men and women was, indeed, possible. Something Dean couldn't have been happier about.

The only thing he sometimes regretted was that they had kissed once. Because damn, Jo was a good kisser, despite her young age and, as he had learned later on, little experience. Now he couldn't help himself but pity that he'd never get the chance to kiss her again; that he had gotten a taste of something he'd be forever denied. Alas, at least he had gotten that one taste. And he was still

convinced it had helped that tension between them immensely.

He also knew if he ever told Jo that she'd kick him back to San Francisco.

"Morning, old man," the woman in question greeted cheerfully, and leaned over to unlock the passenger side door.

"Morning, squirrel," Dean gave back, earning himself a half-hearted death glare, and thus concluded their greeting ritual.

Yep, friendship between them was definitely the best solution for everyone.

"How was the weekend?"

"Good. Spent yesterday with Sammy and Jess, we went to the beach. Not warm enough for swimming, but at least for a bit of volleyball and a huge bowl of ice-cream afterwards," Dean grinned, the memory bringing back the taste of unusual flavors onto his tongue. "Yours?"

"Nice, too, mum had a costumer celebrating her birthday at the café, older lady with her bowling friends. You know how there's a certain age older women have to pass before they become embarrassingly suggestive and dirty-minded? They *were* past it. All of them. I'm sure Ash has been scarred for life. Mum and I had loads of fun though."

"Sure sounds fun."

"How's Baby?"

"Lonely, I guess. Haven't had much of a chance to drive her this weekend." The lack of a reply from his left made Dean turn to his friend, only to find her squinting at him in contemplation. He didn't get around to say anything else, though, before she demanded,

"Okay, spill. What's up?"

"Why do you think something's up?"

"Dean, I just asked about your car and you answered with a measly two sentences. And *that* is not normal."

"There's just... nothing else to tell."

"There's always something to tell with Baby. You usually don't shut up about her. Unless..."

"Jo..."

"Unless you have hooked up with someone," Jo exclaimed, not even bothering to make it a question, and Dean groaned. "That's it, isn't it?! You got lucky this weekend!"

"Nope. Sorry to disappoint you, Jo, but no." And it wasn't even a lie. He hadn't gotten lucky, not if one excluded one's own hands in the definition of 'getting lucky', at least. However, if it alluded to meeting someone really, *really* interesting...

"Oh no, Dean Winchester, you can't fool me. You've met someone, and apparently this someone has left quite the impression on you, too. So. Stop playing coy and give me details. Or you can walk the rest of the way."

"You wouldn't."

"Try me."

Sighing, Dean gave up, knowing that he couldn't win anyways. Jo always got out of him what she wanted to know, and besides, he wanted to talk about it. At least to one person. So if that person happened to be Jo, who was one of his best friends, who was he to refuse?

"It's not... it wasn't a hookup. There was just... a very nice flight attendant on the trip here. That's all."

"Think you're gonna see her again?"

"Him. See *him* again." And once again, quiet filled the car. Chancing a glance over at Jo, he found her staring him incredulously, and blinking rapidly in disbelief. If he hadn't been just a tiny bit worried

about her reaction - even though he was sure she didn't mind - he would have found the picture hilarious. He was just glad that they had to wait at a red light, so Jo didn't have to pay attention to the road in that moment.

"Woah," was her only verbal reaction when she finally found her voice again, after the car behind her made her snap out of it with the help of a hearty honk.

"Yep."

"Woah."

"You said that already."

"Is that... is that new? I mean, how long have you known that you...?"

"Like guys? For years. But since I like them both, the ladies and the guys, I always tended to turn to the female population. Because... well... you know how dad was and all."

"Have you ever...?"

"Wouldn't know that I like them if I hadn't, right?"

Now that the cat was out of the bag, it was astonishingly easy to talk about it.

Not many people knew that Dean was bisexual. He was comfortable in his affairs with women, but he had also early on, when he was still a teenager, come to understand that the other side - or his side, in that case - awaited with many interesting subjects as well. His experiences with other men weren't plentiful; but they existed, and they had only affirmed him in his feelings.

Of course he didn't go and openly tell the world about it. Someone like him, especially with a father like he had had, couldn't expect everyone to happily accept the he had a fondness for both parties. So he didn't and kept mostly quiet about it. After all was his love life his business alone, and no one else's.

Charlie, his other best friend who was queer herself, knew of course; and Sam and Jess had been grudgingly told by him after they had spotted him once in quite the intimate moment with another pretty boy. He hadn't initially wanted to tell Sam because he wasn't sure how his brother would react; he should have known better than to doubt the boy he had essentially raised and who loved him to bits, no matter what.

Now that Jo knew also almost everyone who was truly important to him was informed, and as Dean thought about it, it lifted a huge weight off his shoulders.

"Well, that was unexpected."

"And...?"

"And what? Dean, are you seriously asking me whether I mind?" If he hadn't been sure about the answer, Jo's look that warned him to better not say anything stupid, or else he'd get his ass kicked, told him everything he needed to know. When he shook his head, she continued, "I don't care who you love, or sleep with, as long as you're happy. So, about that flight attendant. What do you think, what are the chances of seeing him again and moving things along?"

And just like that, they were in one of their usual conversations about Dean's love life - yes, Jo, was one of the very few he had those with - with the tiny difference that for once, they were not talking about an already happened one-night stand Jo now tried to convince Dean to rethink his opinion on - which usually was, "*That was nice, but let's move on,*" - but about someone he might just find it in him to care about a bit more than only for a few hours of pleasure and fun.

They weren't yet done when they met again for lunch after Jo had dropped Dean off at his office, or when she picked him up to drive him home to his apartment. But, as the blond woman at some point noted, they also wouldn't get any further as long as his friend didn't even know the flight attendant's

name, or had found out if he was available.

And just like that, Dean found himself with *homework*, as Jo called it, he couldn't wait to deal with.

The week definitely qualified as hellish. If there was a Hell, this was what it looked like: filled with unhappy passengers demanding information on when they were going to start. Three times they had to wait in line before take-off, which caused them delays of up to one hour, and a plane full of cranky customers, their voices mingling to a disharmonic concert made of words like 'refund', 'last time', 'unprofessional' and the like.

In addition to that Castiel was also forced to wait in yet another line, but this time standing there himself, as he needed to renew his driver's license. And naturally he had to pick the day and time when half the city planned to do the same, which meant one and a half hour of standing, waiting, taking one step, stopping again, continue waiting, and listening to a constant flow complaints - though luckily not directed at him this time - and discussions. And if that didn't qualify as Hell, he didn't know what would have.

When Friday came around, he was ready to kill someone - anyone at all - whereas he usually didn't even have the heart to kill a fly that bothered him half the night. The thought that kept him sane was that he was hopefully going to see Dean again.

As it turned out, he was lucky. At least in the respect that his favorite passenger was on the flight. Not so much when it came to the flight in general.

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There was an all too well-known sound the moment Castiel sat down. And he wasn't even taking his seat because he wanted to rest, though he definitely didn't mind that side effect of his action. No, he just needed to tie his right shoe's laces again - but apparently not even that he was allowed to do.

Castiel loved his job, but a flight full of demanding passengers was really no fun at all. Especially because this certain kind of airline guests always seemed to agree on taking the same flight, like the Association of Annoying Commuters went on a class trip or something. And when something broke. Something as vital as the coffee machine.

"It's been twenty minutes, mister, and I am *still* waiting for my coffee!" the man in 9c complained loudly, causing the other passengers around him to look up and around curiously.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but as my colleague, Mr. Rickster, stated earlier, a malfunction occurred and the machine isn't working properly."

"Well, haven't you fixed it, yet?!" With a deep breath Castiel kept as inaudible as possible he collected inner strength he was sure he would still need, before he replied,

"I'm afraid that's beyond my, or any of my colleagues' expertise. We may not tamper with the technical equipment on board, for safety reasons. I apologize for the inconvenience. May I offer you something else?"

"You may offer me," and here the passenger's tone of voice changed to a biting calm one, "the complaint form. I'm having enough of this!" The other people around them who had listened intently now began to murmur, obviously spurred on by the angry man in front of Castiel. One by one others suddenly also demanded the form, and the flight attendant began to reevaluate how much he really loved this workplace. Because in that moment, love was not the word he was thinking of.

"Before you go any further," a familiar yet almost shockingly loud voice unexpectedly boomed through

the cabin, and when Castiel turned around, he indeed found no other person than Dean Winchester standing in his row and glaring at the passengers around with a dark look on his face, "I vote for this nice flight attendant who is *just doing his job*, which, by the way, doesn't include listening to you lot pestering him about something he can't change now anyways, to serve those of us who still have manners."

"Yeah, coffee's not good for the heart and all anyways," a blond-haired woman in 4a piped up, "and I'd very much like some apple juice. And a few of those heavenly tasting cookies!" Catching first the woman's eyes, nodding his thanks to her, and then Balthazar's, who immediately understood, Castiel turned toward the back of the plane and trailed the drinks trolley behind him. When he reached row 15, Dean's usual one, he used the wagon as a sort of a wall between them and the unfriendly passengers.

"I take orange, please," his favorite customer informed him right away.

"Thank you," Castiel whispered, while pouring the asked-for liquid from the bottle into a cup.

"Any time," Dean said, smiling as he did so.

"To be fair, though, I am the person complaints should be directed at; seeing that usually I can solve them and a written one wouldn't do me or my colleagues any good."

"I know. I just wanted them to leave you alone. It's not like you can conjure up another coffee machine just like that. Broken is broken."

"Yeah, that's true," Castiel admitted, then shrugged his shoulders, indicating that he rather change the subject. "So is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Well... after getting off the plane on Monday I noticed a problem."

"I'm very sorry, I hope I can help solve it somehow?"

"I believe you can. You see, the thing is - you know my name, but you've yet to tell me yours, *Sky Angel*," Dean remarked, putting emphasis on the well-known moniker for all of the airline's employees, and grinned as he did so. The other man, on his part, thanked whoever was listening.

"I'm Castiel," he answered and smiled at his passenger.

"Castiel? That's an... unusual name. But nice. Really very... you know... it sounds... beautiful." In tandem they blushed at Dean's words and stared at each other for a moment before Castiel added:

"It is, in fact, an angel name."

"Oh!" the other man replied, eyes wide in surprise, only to be lowered seconds later, a motion that was accompanied by a fainter "oh" that sounded... disappointed? "So it's your work name then, yes?"

The steward frowned in confusion. Work name? What did he-- And then it dawned on him and it was his turn to exclaim "Oh!" quickly followed by a rambling explanation of "No, it is actually my real name, but also the name of an angel. The angel of Thursday, and the angel of travel. The name means 'my shield is God'. My parents were very religious and had taken a special interest in angels. I was born on a Thursday, so they decided I--" Castiel stopped when he found Dean staring at him, suddenly self-conscious and realizing that he had just told a stranger, a customer, half his life story without asking if he even wanted to know. Aside from it being entirely inappropriate to begin with, getting this personal with a passenger. "I'm sorry," he so mumbled, and had already half turned away, an excuse along the lines of, I should resume my work, on his lips, when a tentative hand on his wrist stopped him. The moment he turned back the hand vanished and Castiel missed it immediately, allowing himself a quick glance down as if he expected...what? That his skin glowed because of the touch? That there'd be a handprint left, a mark he'd forever bear on his skin?

Get your act together! he scolded himself and, taking a deep breath, finally looked at Dean again.

The man smiled gently, a gesture that set off a very annoying bunch of butterflies happily flapping their wings in Cas' stomach, and said quietly, "Thank you for telling me."

The flight attendant nodded and then went back down the aisle. His flustered appearance after that little moment with Dean, however, didn't go unnoticed, much to his dismay.

"Wow, you have it bad."

"Seriously, Balt? Don't you have something to do?!" Castiel snapped at the other man standing in the galley and chewing on a lollipop - his only substitute for cigarettes during flights, as he claimed - he had probably gotten from Gabriel.

"Nope," the other man replied, popping the 'p', and swaggered past his friend, throwing a glance past the dividing curtain. "Apart from telling you that it's the same for your darling passenger."

"What?"

"That cute little blush on your face right now? Same on his." Balthazar grinned like the cat who got the cream, and not one that was just telling another cat about the same.

Castiel shook his head at the analogy his mind was providing him with. The last thing he wanted to think about was his friend's possible interest in Dean. Because Balthazar jumped - sometimes quite literally - everything that was attractive enough. And if there was one thing no one was able to argue it was Dean's beauty. Gorgeousness even.

Apparently Castiel's face gave away his thoughts, though, and motivated the other flight attendant to immediately reassure him. "Don't worry, Cassie, he's all yours. Judging by that blush he's still sporting, something I doubt comes from his book about engineering he's reading... at least I hope it isn't, but then he *is* a car--"

"Balthazar!"

"Cassie." There was something patronizing in Balt's voice that made Castiel want to strangle him. "That guy has it as bad for you as you have it for him. Just *look* at him. If he doesn't want you I resign my status as expert for all things sex and romance." It merely took Castiel's raised eyebrow and doubtful look for his colleague to firmly add, "Yes, I have that!" However, before either was able to further discuss this issue, another service bell ring called Balthazar away.

Castiel waited exactly for as long as it took his friend to vanish through the curtain before he allowed himself to fall into his seat in the crew area and bury his face in his hands.

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It was the prospect of seeing Castiel once more before he left that got Dean through the landing this time. He clung to the image of his favorite flight attendant, smiling his brilliant smile, a sparkle in these beautiful blue eyes, and before he knew it, they touched down and rolled into parking position. Dean waited until all other passengers had left the plane before he shouldered his bag and walked towards the exit, silently hoping for the chance of a few more minutes with Castiel.

And indeed he was lucky, finding the other man standing next to the exit, all alone, his colleagues apparently already busy cleaning up.

"I never thought I'd ever say this about a flight, but - that was a very enjoyable one. And all thanks to you, Cas."

"It was my pleasure," the flight attendant answered, and the color rising into his cheeks was more than a little endearing.

And Dean knew all too well that he didn't help matters of Castiel trying to hide same blush when he added, "That's good to hear," while winking at him.

"I... I also like to thank you."

"Nah, as I said, no need--"

"No, I mean... this whole past week was very unpleasant, and it is... nice to have a friendly passenger like you every once in a while. I was... really looking forward to today."

"Always glad to be of service. And any time for you, Cas," Dean replied cheerily, and gave a lopsided smile, wondering not for the first time what the hell he was even doing here, flirting with that guy. Not that he didn't think of him as worth it or something, but... as much as Jo's voice in his head demanded him to take action, the dark-haired flight attendant was still just doing his job, so however was he supposed to know whether Cas' interest went any further than business? Yes, of course he was never going to know unless he tried or said something and--

"Can I ask you a question?" the flight attendant right then stopped his train of thought, something Dean wasn't all too sad about.

"Sure, shoot."

"You're... calling me Cas. I-- why?" And there it was. His confirmation that he had indeed crossed a line. Maybe Castiel was a bit friendlier to him than he was to other passengers - he may or may not have observed their interactions a bit - but that didn't have to mean anything. Some people you just liked more than others. Cashiers at supermarkets also didn't show the same amount of amiability to every customer. Hell, not even Dean himself had it always in him to be as nice to the next client as he had been to the one before, when he had to deal with them. It all depended on sympathies.

"Uh... I'm sorry, I don't think I even really noticed. Bad habit of mine, shortening names. I didn't want to make you uncomfortable." Dean stopped and cleared his throat as heat crept up his face. Quickly he snatched his suitcase and turned towards the exit. "Well, Castiel," he continued, and to his horror the flight attendant actually flinched upon hearing his full name fall from Dean's lips. He left it uncommented, though, even when a strange feeling befell him. "See you on Friday?"

"I think so, yes."

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"Looking forward to it," Dean winked and threw in a boyish smile - for good measure it seemed - and Castiel was sure that no deeper shade of red existed than what had to color his face in that moment.

"Um... so do I... thank you." He groaned inwardly and resisted the urge to slap himself, instead forcing himself to recite the phrase he and his colleagues had to bid their passengers farewell with: "Thank you for flying with 8th Heaven Jetways."

This time, the smile was warm and truly happy when Dean replied quietly, "Any time." Then he was gone.

Slumping against the nearest wall, Castiel took a deep breath and exhaled slowly through pursed lips. No. No no no *no*, he wasn't falling for a passenger. A man he barely even knew. And who was off-limits according to company rules. And who he, in any ways, just might have pushed away verbally by inquiring about the usage of his name by Dean.

"You know these rules are just guidelines, right?" Oh how he hated Balthazar's uncanny ability to read his mind and come up with just the right comment that gave his doubts a hard time.

"And yet they exist for a reason."

"Come on, Cassie. I mean, what if you had met him somewhere else, outside work, and he then decided to fly with us?"

"That'd be different. I wouldn't be using my job to... to... I don't know! Get closer to him, get to know him? It's wrong and unprofessional, and for a good reason."

"We really ought to teach you how to live a little. You don't even go out to have the chance to meet

someone like this man."

"And maybe it's for the best," Castiel mumbled, slightly miserable now that Dean was gone.

"Nonsense. You like that guy, more than just a little, everyone can see that, and you deserve to enjoy yourself for a change."

"I don't even know if he's interested!"

"Remember what I said earlier?"

"Speculation."

"No, Cassie, simple knowledge of human nature. But if you don't believe me, well, I might be pointing out the obvious here, but - there *are* ways to find out if he is interested," the older man teased, earning himself a withering stare.

"Not on the job, Balthazar," Cas growled, making his friend blink in surprise. Someone sure was passionate about this conversation, as much as they wanted to pretend otherwise.

"This must be what they call a vicious circle."

They both kept their promise - if one could call it that - of seeing each other again only a couple of days later, when Monday caught up with them. However, it was a busy shift for the 8th Heaven cabin crew - so much that not even Gabriel and Balthazar could do much to allow Castiel enough time to tend a bit to Dean. They greeted each other, exchanged their how-have-you-beens, and merely managed to smile at each other a few times when the flight attendant passed him on his way to other guests. The frequent flyer didn't even order anything so he wouldn't cause him any more work than he already had.

Even their goodbyes were cut short when the pilot, some Michael Archer or something, if Dean remembered correctly, demanded Cas' presence and the flight attendant had to leave the farewell wishing to one of his colleagues. The look the slim man with the heavy British accent gave him had Dean ponder on for quite a while after he had long left the airport.

His week at work went by torturously slow. There were some throwbacks, problems that needed to be solved, keeping him in his office till the late evening hours and had him fall into bed as soon as he entered his apartment and taken off his shoes. At least it stopped him from thinking about Castiel too much... one should have thought.

Unfortunately, this didn't seem to be the way it worked. Dean even suspected his being distracted repeatedly by thoughts of that one particular flight attendant were what caused one or the other error in his work and thus the problems that kept them all busier than usual.

"You need to get laid," Jo remarked on Wednesday evening at around eight, when they were still in the office, pouring over files and schematics and blueprints the computer told them didn't make sense. Only that same computer of course didn't tell them where to look for the problem, so it was up to them to check every single calculation again.

"That an offer, Jo?" Dean shot back, almost automatically, not really listening to what his friend was saying, and moreover, not giving it much thought. Too busy was he trying to find a solution so they could go home.

"You know what I mean." There was a moment of silence in which he looked up slowly and focused on Jo, narrowing his eyes while adjusting his brain to the conversation they were about to have. It actually took him a few seconds to understand that this was, despite the general remark, about

Castiel.

"I doubt he is the right one to get laid by," he sighed and shrugged his shoulders, wondering for a moment why the words sounded so strange even to his own ears. Only at his friend's frown, he added, "Not any time soon, that is. He is not one night stand material."

"You know full well I didn't mean it like this. But you have to do something. Something more than just ask for his name. If you like that guy - which you obviously do - try to find out if he likes you, too. And for the record, my money's on yes."

"Because you know him so well," Dean said, mocking tone in his words, and it earned him a slap on the arm from Jo.

"Because I have been listening to your stories about what he does and every little move he makes for two weeks and I think by now I know enough to hazard a guess on his opinion about you. And I'll be damned if that man is just nice to you because of his job."

"One and a half weeks," he defended, weakly as the argument was, and demonstratively looked down at the papers in front of him again. "Let's try and finish that, okay? I wanna go home and to bed."

"Alone as it might be," Jo quipped, quietly, and pointedly ignored Dean sticking his tongue out at her.

Several hundred miles away, the flight attendant dominating Dean's thoughts couldn't stop thinking himself. Time and again Castiel's mind went ruefully back to that Monday morning when he hadn't been able to say goodbye to Dean and wish him a nice week. He missed that last smile he had already gotten used to, those few kind words they shared; the verbal reassurance that soon enough, they'd meet again.

His room in some hotel close to the airport in San Antonio was nothing more than four white-turned-grey walls casing him in, and the quietness within reminded him more than ever of his loneliness.

So when there was a knock on the door even though he didn't expect anyone, Castiel was quick to stride over and greet the visitor, whoever it might be.

"Heya, Cassie."

He had to admit that coming face to face with Balthazar was a bit anti-climatic.

"Balt... what are you doing here?"

"I can't do anything about your hopeless swooning over Mr. Dean Winchester, or your crushing on him," Balthazar opened as he pushed past Cas into the room, "but I *will* - and there's no arguing about it - take you someplace you can have a look at some possible distractions."

Without waiting for an answer, he headed straight for the dresser and he took out a t-shirt and a pair of jeans that usually got ignored by Castiel. In fact, he didn't even know why he still packed them, this piece of clothing Balt had once convinced him to buy because it 'made his arse even prettier', as he had said. Surely he was not about to analyze the meaning of him still carrying it around all the time.

"I'm not in the mood--"

"Don't worry, you will be."

"Our shift starts at 7.15 tomorrow. I have to get up at five. This is not the right day to go out, Balthazar," Castiel tried to argue, only half-heartedly trying to push his friend's hands away as they began to undress him.

"I promise you'll be in bed no later than ten, okay?"

"Very funny." He fumbled to remain standing as Balt pushed his pants down, the by now unbuttoned

shirt from his shoulders, and the change of clothes into his hands, but wasn't stopped from his continuous protest. "You know that's not what I meant."

Sighing, Balthazar took a step back and look at Cas with a stern expression. "Cassie. You need this evening. Even if you only get a blowjob out of it. In any case, getting off by someone, *something* else than your own hands will do you some good, trust me. Especially since I somehow doubt that your own hands have much to do these days."

Castiel hated himself for confirming his friend's words by blushing furiously. Balthazar was right. It had been a while since he had pleased himself. Most of the time, he had lacked the right mood, simply hadn't felt like it. And had he taken care of himself one or the other morning, it had been only for convenience, never pleasure.

Deciding that a change of scene couldn't hurt all that much and he could always go back to the hotel if he had enough, he - still grudgingly - put on the jeans and the t-shirt, and let the other man pull him out of the hotel room.

"Where are we going, anyways?"

"There's this bar I discovered the last time we were here. Nice people, good music, pretty barkeeper. Just the place you need right now."

Or was it.

Aforementioned person manning the bar was also the one Castiel spotted right upon arrival. Because how could he have missed him - he who looked like one Dean Winchester's twin brother. Granted, he lacked a few details, looked a little more worn, a little less groomed, and his style was, understandably, not business, but rebel rocker teenager. Alas the good-looking sort. But he had an uncanny resemblance to his favorite passenger, and it was enough to make Cas growl at Balthazar the moment the other man turned to grin at him winningly.

"And? Did I promise too much?"

"The last thing I need," Castiel bit out, ducking away from the barkeeper's sight and choosing a booth that allowed a little privacy, "is some Dean look-a-like that only reminds me of someone I rather forget for now!"

"Good heavens, Cas, live a little! It's not like I want you to marry the guy! But like I said earlier, there's some tension in you that makes me worry you might snap sooner or later, and some relief won't be wrong. And if it is brought to you by someone who is easy on the eyes, with whom you can pretend?"

Castiel opened his mouth to argue, but didn't get around to say something when they were addressed by just the person in question approaching.

"Hey guys. What can I bring you?"

The voice was not right. That definitely didn't speak for the Dean-facsimile. Unfortunately for Cas, however, voice was not really what he paid much attention to the moment he had a close-up of the man. Because there really was, if he didn't give it too much thought and didn't look for too long or too closely, more of Dean in this face than was still explainable by coincidence. In any case it wasn't fair.

"Glass of your best red wine for me and for my friend Castiel here... Cassie?" Balt made him snap out of his thoughts - and staring - and blink a few times before he realized what had been asked of him.

"Um... just a beer, thanks," he told the barkeeper, who gave him such an intense once-over that Cas was inclined to grab his clothes, just in case the look made them vanish suddenly.

"Sure thing," the stranger purred, eyes still focused on Castiel, and left not without throwing a brilliant smile at his guest.

"Seems like you got his attention. Well done, Cassie!" Balthazar laughed, clapping his friend on the

back. It didn't much help the dreadful feeling the younger man had in his stomach all of a sudden, knowing that this was all wrong. There was nothing of that feeling of 'right' he had had with Dean the first time they had talked; instead he felt like a piece of meat the stranger had just decided to devour.

"This was a bad idea," he murmured, shaking his head to himself.

"Nonsense. Enjoy yourself, take what you can get, and be happy about it. There are no rules here, Cassie. After all, you and frequent flyer loverboy are not exclusive yet. Hell, there isn't even a 'you and' when it comes to the both of you. So, until that changes, I suggest you use the time to get back in the saddle." With a waggle of his eyebrows and a salacious grin, Balthazar added, "Especially when it's a saddle like *that*."

Castiel groaned and rolled his eyes at that. "You're disgusting sometimes."

"And you love me for it!" Cas couldn't help it then - he laughed. He didn't remember the last time he'd been in such a ridiculous situation, but he was sure it had also been with Balt. And Gabriel, possibly. Speaking of...

"Where's Gabe? It's not like him to miss a chance for... well. Such an evening."

"Gabe still got an open tab from last time and is... busy this evening. You know, doing what--"

"Yeah, thanks. Spare me the details." Lucky for Castiel, he was indeed spared then, as right in that moment the barkeeper returned with their drinks.

"There you go. And... if you want anything else - my shift ends in an hour," he commented, once more only looking at Castiel. "I mean, of course, it'd be good if you have *ordered* it by then."

"Thank you. We will." He didn't even know where the answer was coming from - but it was out of his mouth before Cas had even the chance to reconsider the words. Balthazar wasn't any less surprised than his friend, if the light gasp from his side was anything to go by. The barkeeper, on his part, obviously liked the answer, and grinned winningly before leaving the two flight attendants' table.

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An hour later - an hour spent with listening to Balthazar's constant nagging he eventually gave into - saw Castiel standing outside the bar, watching the barkeeper approach him.

"Hello there, handsome. Fancy taking me home?"

"Yes."

"I'm Paul, by the way. And you're name is Castiel?" the man, turning out to be the same height as Cas once there were standing in front of each other, said. His hand curled around Castiel's hip as he did so, and with a pull their bodies met.

"Yes, it is."

"Great. It shall roll off my tongue beautifully later on," Paul growled, and didn't seem even the least bit bothered by Castiel's non-actions and mono-syllable replies.

"Listen, Paul, I... I'm not sure I--" He was cut off the moment the other man's lips landed on his - and a hand squeezed between them to grab his crotch. The kiss was not the best Castiel had ever had - but not the worst either. The touch that came with it, however, was enough to make him squeak in surprise and take a step back, detaching Paul from him. He wasn't going to deny that his body was reacting to barkeeper's actions, but was that really what he wanted? Some stranger getting him off, only to never be seen again? Even if it was just a handjob, or a blowjob - in Castiel's book it still qualified as one night stand. And that was absolutely the opposite of what he wanted.

"I'm not really into going home with someone I've just met an--"

"You're not the short term guy. I get that," Paul interrupted him, once more closing the distance between them, his arms winding around Castiel's body in a way the flight attendant actually craved. It

made him feel safe. Home. Loved. it only it had been the right guy... "But don't worry, handsome. There's nothing shameful about it. I'll make it good for you. And I don't expect anything in return." Letting his hands wander up and down Cas' back with soft massaging movements, he added, "I'll be more than happy to know those muscles are a bit relaxed afterwards."

Paul really knew what he did. He was good at it - more than that even, Castiel had to admit. Sighing, he gave in to the temptation of a man who looked so much like the one he really wanted, and who was willing to welcome him in his arms without asking anything in return. It was almost too good to be true. They kissed again, sinking deep into a lovers' embrace when Castiel, too, dared to touch the other man, and hands roamed for minutes as lips and tongue devoured.

It was only when they pulled back and looked each other deep in the eyes that the flight attendant realized that all this was, indeed, too good to be true. He was fooling himself.

There was brown looking back instead of green.

This wasn't Dean. This wasn't the man he truly wanted. And this also wasn't a substitute, because no matter how much another ever looked, or sounded, or acted like his favorite passenger - he was not Dean Winchester. No one was ever going to be except the real thing; and it was all Castiel wanted. Because this was not about quick sex with a pretty face and body - this was about a bond formed with another human being he had connected to right away.

And it was with *Dean Winchester*.

"This isn't working. I'm really sorry." And then he left as fast as possible.

He was running when he caught up with Balthazar who was walking back to the hotel, and he didn't stop when he passed him. Not even his friend's repeated calls made him slow down; he just needed to go back to the sanctuary of his room, as dreary as it may ever have been.

Balthazar didn't try to talk to him again this evening. He left him alone, and Castiel was more than grateful. When they met the next morning for breakfast, no words were lost about the events of the past evening.

But something did happen nonetheless. When Balthazar passed on his caramel cookie he had gotten with his coffee to Castiel, the younger man knew that his friend wasn't angry at him. Quite the contrary. Because when they had had their affair, that very cookie passing action had only ever meant one thing: I'm sorry.

As the last passengers left the cabin, Dean saw Castiel slowly step up behind Balthazar, whose turn it was to bid farewell to their guests today. Of course the angel-named man knew who the last one to leave the plane was going to be. It had almost become tradition by now, after all.

There was a fluttering sensation in Dean's stomach at the thought that the flight attendant cared as much about it and their goodbye as Dean did himself. And so, not even half a minute later and when all the other passengers were gone, Balthazar turned and grinned at his colleague before leaving the two of them alone.

"Done for the day?"

"For the weekend, actually," Cas answered with a smile.

"So you live in California as well, then?"

"No, I'm from Illinois. But sometimes work requires me to stay in another city."

"Oh. Well... um..." *Wanna hang out? Come over and spend some time together? Or maybe you just*

come with me right away. I could cook something. We could talk. And make out. And spend the time in bed. And--- "That sounds kind of lonely."

"I suppose so, but I'm used to it. I'll just read or take a few walks or whatever I'm in the mood for."

"You ever been to Califor--" Dean began, but then snapped his mouth shut and groaned. "Of course you will have been, sorry. Yet here I am, about to give you a few tourist recs."

A gentle smile bloomed on Cas' face, one that was so full of adoration that Dean felt a lump form in his throat. "Actually, I'd love a recommendation or two. While I've been here a number of times, I never put much effort into sightseeing. I didn't know where to start, was always too tired to really do advance research and planning." He blushed a little bit, his gaze drifting, as he added, "and it's not so interesting when one has to do it alone."

"I get that. That's why I spent most of my time at work when I'm in Detroit, and only go back to my apartment to sleep. Could just as well put up a bed in my office..."

"And you say my time here is lonely," Castiel teased, locking his hands behind his back and bouncing a little on his feet, before he seemed to remember where he was and quickly adjusted his stance to a more professional one. Dean, however, merely laughed.

"Yeah, pathetic, right? Anyways, my recommendations... obviously, there are the classics. You know, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Cable Cars. If you're interested in museums, you should check out the Cartoon Art one, it's my personal favorite. Oh, and the Musée Mécanique, that's really awesome, it has this huge collection of all these arcade games, and you can actually play on them. And... okay, this is embarrassing, I'd actually have to ask Sammy for the more intellectual stuff, he's much better at these things. Speaking of, Stanford campus is pretty impressive, at least it was to me. But hey, what do I know, never been to university, so..." Blushing, the passenger trailed off. He really ought to shut his mouth now.

"Fun is much more welcome than... *intellectual stuff*," Castiel replied, and added a light teasing tone to the words he repeated off Dean. "Thank you, Dean, for your suggestions. I will make sure to have a closer look at them."

"That's... that's great. And you know, you could always... uh..." Why was it so hard to offer company? They got along great, they liked it each other, they had the same humor. And Dean would really like to spend some more time with Cas. On the other hand, there was this ever-present nagging doubt that made him think that this was all just part of his job. The friendliness, the apparent likeness between them. Wasn't that what flight attendants were supposed to do, make their passengers feel comfortable and at home? What did he have to lose, though, if he chanced a question, an invitation to some time spent together?

"So are you staying at a nice hotel?" He was just going to pretend that question was as innocent as he wanted it to sound. No reason to consider that there was information to gain here, valuable information, and if it was freely given, it might just ease one or another insecurity.

"Yes, since the company is paying for it, we have several upper middle class hotels to choose from. They are still not particularly luxurious, and they are far from being home, but at least they are comfortable enough for staying inside when one isn't in the mood for going out. When I'm here I always stay at the Seaside Inn. It's not too far from either the city or the airport, and I can take walks to the sea."

"Yeah, I know that one, have seen it a few times. Good to know it's recommendable, I keep that in mind he next time I have to get rid of relatives," Dean winked and was rewarded with a smile; something he couldn't get enough of, brilliant and infectious as it was.

"So..."

"So?"

"Have a nice weekend?"

"I will make sure of it." Dean could have sworn there was a hint of something else there, something that spoke of a yearning that remained unspoken, and desperately hidden. All of a sudden Castiel began to fidget, just a little bit, barely noticeable, but he felt strangely aware of the other man, even though they weren't more than casual acquaintances.

Or were they?

What if Castiel wanted to spend time with Dean just as much as Dean wanted to? Could he risk it? Could he... or should he wait a little more? There was something yet keeping him from taking the dive head-first. And he wished desperately he could just overcome it already.

"That's good to know. See you then!" And he left.

Gosh, he was such a coward.

Castiel had the strong urge to kick himself. He would have, if it had been possible. It wasn't though - he knew, because yes, he had tried. Groaning quietly and shaking his head, he turned back to the galley to finish up his work, and almost collided with Balthazar when he rounded a corner.

"Ah, there's our lover boy. So how did it go?"

"Balt..."

"Told ya," Gabriel commented around a lollipop from a few feet away.

"I really thought he'd go for it."

"There is no *going for it!*" Castiel yelled, only to stare at the other two men with wide eyes, as if they held an explanation for his sudden and very uncharacteristic outburst. Well, technically, they did. Not that it - or they - helped the matter. Closing his eyes to calm himself down, Castiel leaned against a cupboard. "He's a passenger. There are rules. End of story." Opening his eyes again, the dark-haired man looked at his two friends and colleagues with a serious expression on his face that begged for understanding. "It would really help if you could just accept that and thus make my life easier as well. It's bad enough I have to see Dean twice a week."

"Alright," Balthazar gave in, "We have talked about this, Cassie. You know my opinion. I will continue to believe you're stupid if you let that chance pass, but... there you are. Do whatever you think is right, even though it isn't." After he had finished, Balt nudged the man beside him with his elbow, who groaned unhappily.

"Promise to leave you in peace with your misery, even if I don't approve," Gabriel nevertheless said and shrugged, pushing away from the counter he was leaning against and strolling into the now empty passenger area.

Castiel was about to allow himself to feel relieved, when, as soon as Gabe was gone, Balthazar leaned in suddenly. The younger flight attendant reflexively wanted to take a step to the side, however the other man kept him in place with a hand on his hip when he pressed their cheeks together and brought his lips close to his friend's ear.

"You know, if you need some distraction, we could always... *remember* the good old times," he purred, and it sent shivers down Castiel's spine that walked the narrow path of every fiber of his body refusing the suggestion and yet a few of these fibers not being entirely against the idea. But no. This was the

past, and there was a reason for it.

Castiel's and Balthazar's relationship - or was it affair? - had been moderately short and excessively intense, but free of true emotions, of feelings beyond friendly affection. It had lacked everything Castiel longed, but didn't dare to hope for. The reason he had gotten involved with the man he was happy to now call his friend had been simple convenience - he had only just accepted his preference for men and decided to finally act on it. Balt had been a decent enough candidate - charming, witty, easy on the eyes, and an epitome of self-confidence - to affirm himself, and to give in to his body's desires.

The whole thing had been more practical than anything else. It wasn't as if they'd gone on dates, taken each other out to dinner or lunch, or spent otherwise time with each other, except, of course, at work. They hadn't been a couple, and Castiel was sure Balthazar also never would have wanted to be the same, even if Cas had suggested it. He hadn't, though; and he was certain it had been a good decision by his subconscious mind.

"I believe that ship has sailed," Castiel remarked and pushed Balthazar, who was still too close, gently but firmly away. "And I'm not inclined to call it back to the shore."

"Spoilsport."

"Happily."

Being frustrated at least had one advantage: It brought out his sarcastic side, something that was very helpful when it came to dealing with his colleagues. Usually Castiel wasn't what one would call witty, his mind always stopping his mouth from talking before things weren't thought through. His politeness was, after all, his strongest suit. But over time he had learned to shut his brain up for short moments when he was in the presence of his friends and colleagues, something that was often enough rewarded with raised eyebrows and half-smirks of appreciation. He knew it was a patronizing gesture more than anything else, but at least it was something.

Snapping his luggage - a suitcase small enough to fit into the overhead lockers - he left the plane, waving and calling a goodbye to Gabriel and Balthazar. It was time to go home. Or at least go to his makeshift home that was the hotel he always stayed at in San Francisco. But wherever it was, he just wanted to get some rest, and his weekend started.

And forget certain passengers who were about to remain only but a nice thought.

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"Mr. Shurley! Welcome back, sir," Yanny, the receptionist Castiel had already spent one or the other minute - and sometimes more - having a chat with greeted him with a smile when he approached the counter.

"Hello, Yanny. And thank you. How have you been?"

"Very well. It was a quiet week. Spring holiday season is mostly done, and till the summer tourists arrive it'll be another two or three weeks. So you should also have the spa area to yourself," the hotel employee answered, and added a wink to his last words, knowing all too well how much Castiel enjoyed a swim, especially when the pool was empty.

"I'll keep that in mind and will head right down," he smiled back, signing the slip of paper Yanny had placed in front of him.

"8-20, as usual. One of these days we might just put your name on the door." Castiel knew it was a joke; he understood it as such also. But it stung nevertheless, being reminded that in this city, despite being here on a regular basis, he didn't have a home. Sure, the company would have paid for it, or at least supported him having a permanent residence, but what use was it to have two homes - one in

his actual hometown, one where he travelled to the most due to his job - when he couldn't be quite at home in either? As much as he enjoyed his solitude, he often enough caught himself wishing for someone waiting for him when he returned. Someone who'd smile and take him into their arms and be his company in comfortable silence or during conversations about whatever they found interest in talking about. Someone to spend his free days with as well as his nights, explore the city with, learn from them, be shown all its secrets and wonders, be introduced to a family he never quite had, experience what it meant to be welcomed with open arms by a brother and a sister-in-law, by a partner's close friends who might just become his friends as well and---

With a shocked gasp Castiel looked up. Had he just...? He really needed to stop that. Stop thinking of Dean and how his family and friends could be theirs, how he could ever have a place in this man's, this *stranger's*, life.

"Are you all right, Mr. Shurley?"

"Yes, I'm fine, Yann. And as for the name plate, I don't think that'll be either necessary or useful," he offered with a now tired smile, and took the key card Yann handed him.

"Of course, sir. You have a good rest and nice weekend."

"Thank you. You too."

Exhaustion may have been prominent in him then, but Castiel still found his way down to the spa area after leaving his suitcase in his room. He'd considered to just shower and go to bed, but next to flying, swimming was his favorite pastime, and the next best thing he knew to achieve a feeling of weightlessness. It was the only other thing that made him believe he was able to defy gravity.

He was pleased to find the pool empty; which was not much of a surprise, given that it was late in the evening already and the hotel wasn't booked. In addition to that was the weather quite good, warm and sunny, so most people were probably still out for walks or dinner at one of the many restaurants that offered seats at a terrace or in a garden.

At just the right temperature, the water in the swimming area was exactly what Castiel was seeking - a place where he could relax, where he could just float on the surface, close his eyes and pretend he was drifting through warm summer night's air that gently held him by his wings.

Sometimes he wondered what people would think if they knew of his thoughts; how he wished to be up in their air, but without the means of a plane or any other technological or mechanical help. He knew most would deem him crazy; his notion that maybe, at some point in his existence, some time before he came to be in human form, he was someone else, something else, something that was able to lift up into the clouds on their own volition, whenever it liked and wanted to. A bird, a butterfly, a bee. Or something bigger and more fantastic. Or something - heavenly. Like an actual angel.

Time and again he reminded himself, though, that he had to think of the here and now. Where he was human, bound to stay on Earth unless he either went to work or had earned and saved enough to take a plane.

What he allowed himself were moments like this one, when he relished in the silence of an empty bath and water gave him the chance to hover above ground, even if it was merely an illusion he willingly succumbed to.

His tired bones and muscles carried securely, Castiel allowed himself to close his eyes as he lay on his back, drifting on the surface and feeling as if he was surrounded by silk gently lapping at his skin as his presence and the pump moved the water enough to cause little waves moving back and forth within their tiled boundaries.

Castiel didn't know how long he spent just floating and doing nothing, but the dimmed light inside the

pool area and darkness beyond the glass walls told him that it had been quite a while when he forced himself to move and at least swim back and forth a few times with strong strokes before he climbed out of the water and returned to his hotel room.

A shower washed off the remnants of chlorine clinging to his skin, making Castiel feel refreshed, but also pleasantly tired when he crawled into his bed afterwards. He fell asleep immediately.

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When he awoke the next morning, it was to a grey sky and raindrops drumming against the window pane of his room. He almost considered just staying in bed, ordering up breakfast and spending his Saturday reading; but weekends were short and he hated wasting time. After all, he had some suggestions from a certain passenger he really wanted to follow.

"Good morning, Yanny. On weekend shift again?" he greeted the hotel employee manning the reception when he came down for breakfast.

"Good morning, Mr. Shurley. Yes, caught the short straw again," the man replied, winking as he did so, and handed Castiel the newspaper; a personal service Yanny had once agreed to offer to his favorite guest.

"Then I hope that there'll be only pleasant guests checking in and out today," the flight attendant replied with a smile; then a thought occurred to him. "By the way, someone recommended some sort of mechanical museum to me, one where they have arcade games - do you happen to know that, and where it is?"

"I believe you're talking about the Musée Mécanique?"

"Yes! Yes, that's what he called it."

"I'll have a printout with all necessary information ready for you when you return from breakfast."

"Thank you, Yanny."

Breakfast didn't take him long; he went for a continental one, not in the mood for warm food except for one egg, and ate his two slices of bread with jam and cheese quickly. As he had promised the hotel employee welcomed him back with a sheet of paper in his hand.

"This gives you directions, business hours and entry fees. I also took the liberty of arranging for a rental car."

"Thank you, Yanny. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"I'm sure you'd get by perfectly well, but I'm happy to help and to be needed."

The rain didn't stop once during his trip. He drove up to Fisherman's Wharf, visited the museum and enjoyed himself although he mused that maybe it would have been more fun and interesting with some company. He didn't dare to continue the thought after that, knowing full well where it would lead him; or to whom, to be more precise. This crush he had was bad enough as it was.

He picked a small restaurant to have lunch at, and mourned the missed opportunity of a walk along the pier - because he certainly didn't want to be outside any more than necessary right now, not when even an umbrella wasn't of much help to keep one dry. And anyways, what use was a walk when one had to do it alone?

Shaking his head at his mind's repeated detour into regions of thought he really rather didn't want to have, he quickly made his way back to his car. So he'd just spend the afternoon and evening in his hotel room reading after all.

It surely wasn't the worst pastime.

He knew it was the right thing to do. He'd been a coward long enough.

With confidence and his most charming smile in place, he strode over to the reception of the Seaside Inn. After a restless night that had him tossing and turning and wrecking his brain about what was the right course of action, something entirely new to him who usually was so confident when it came to his affairs and conquests, he'd come to a decision.

For one, Dean had decided that Castiel was and would be neither affair nor conquest. He very much doubted that the other man was the type for it anyways, and if he was honest with himself, judging from everything he knew so far, it would be a waste to have Castiel merely for one or a couple of nights. Especially since it would make their roles as passenger and flight attendant really awkward - not without reason Dean avoided running into one night stands again if he could help it.

Apart from that, he also found himself curious about the man. There was a mystery woven around him Dean knew was there, but couldn't make sense of. And if nothing else, Dean Winchester really liked mysteries. There were too few of those in the world, even more so now that people made themselves transparent by sharing everything about themselves on the internet. Granted, he didn't know for sure if Castiel didn't do that, too, but something told him that the man was very private, and there'd be a lot to learn about him once one took the effort to do so. But it was going to prove to be a challenge, and that was what intrigued Dean most.

That, and the good looks and voice that was pure sex.

Behind the hotel's check-in desk a receptionist was eagerly tapping away on his computer keyboard; he looked up immediately when Dean stepped up to the counter though, a smile that was obviously well-practiced and anything but real plastered to his face.

"Good day, sir, and welcome to the Seaside Inn. How may I be of service to you today?" the man greeted, his voice warm, yet distant.

"Hi, I wanted---" And all of a sudden it hit Dean that he didn't even know Cas' full name. How was he supposed to find out which room his favorite flight attendant was staying when he didn't even know who to ask for?

"Sir?"

"I, uh... I wanted to visit a friend of mine... he told me he is staying here for the weekend, but... um..."

"Can you tell me the name of this person, sir?"

Being called sir really was starting to get on his nerves.

"I... his name's Castiel..." When Dean trailed off yet again and remained silent for another few seconds, the receptionist narrowed his eyes at him.

"I'm afraid I can't give you any information about guests staying at our house when you can't provide a full name."

"Yeah, I get that, hold on a second, it's Castiel..." Should he guess? Try a few common names? Maybe he was lucky. He had talked to Cas so much that he had made himself believe he knew him so well. It was like a splash of cold water. Dean knew next to nothing about his flight attendant. He was just Castiel.

"Shurley," a familiar voice behind him suddenly said, quickly followed by, "hello Dean. What are you doing here?" It was enough to at least stop the man behind the counter stop glaring at him - and it certainly was enough to make Dean blush when he turned around.

"Cas! I... I mean, Castiel! Hey, I, uh..." Lacking his usual quick-wittedness seemed to become the theme of the day. "I had a few errands to run and passed the hotel, so I thought I'd check whether you are in

and maybe bored or something, what with it being a rainy day that doesn't invite to go sightseeing and stuff and..." Trailing off was the other theme, apparently. When he looked up and into Cas' wide, curious and gloriously blue eyes, his decision was made. "This is ridiculous," he declared, earning himself a frown that, to his relief, quickly dissolved as he continued. "I wanted to see you. I wanted to meet you outside our usual flight attendant and customer roles and I was hoping that you'd want the same too, that we could get to know each other, that we could---" When he stopped talking this time, it was because Cas took his hand and pulled him towards the hotel's exit.

"Come on," he said, his voice a conspiratorial whisper, and led them out of the hotel into a thankfully rainless late afternoon. He navigated them through throngs of people, commoners and tourists alike, into a quiet area not far from the hotel; a park of sorts that, for some reason, didn't seem to have attracted the attention of anyone yet. And hopefully it never would, Dean found himself thinking as he looked around the small oasis that presented itself around them in awe.

"This is... wow. Where are we?"

"It's a private garden that belongs to an old lady I met a few months ago. She told me that whenever I'm in San Francisco, I'm allowed to use it. The doorman doesn't even ask anymore, he knows me well enough by now; I come here as often as I can," Castiel explained, a content smile on his face Dean wanted nothing more than to taste with his own lips.

Instead, he stated, "I can see why," and took in his surroundings once more, the fairytale garden amidst the city, plants glittering in the sun with the remnants of half a day of rain. The sounds of people and traffic moving by outside could be still heard, but only faintly. It made it easy to forget the city was still there. Only after a few minutes a thought occurred to Dean. "Wait, which doorman?" Because he certainly hadn't noticed them passing anyone, or any form of entrance, for that matter.

Cas laughed lightly at that. "We used kind of a secret entrance, but it is monitored by cameras, and any unauthorized person would cause an alarm and security escorting them out immediately."

"I feel very special now," Dean quipped at that, suddenly needing to lighten the mood because he believed that strange tension between them would otherwise kill him soon. And the other man didn't help it when he replied,

"That's probably because you are." Turning around to Dean then, Cas added, "I'm really happy to see you," and his voice was quite and laced with shy uncertainty.

And Dean just couldn't stop himself anymore. Taking two quick steps towards the other man, he wound one arm around Cas' waist and the other around his neck to pull him close and press their lips together. It took the flight attendant a second and a surprised noise before his arms locked around Dean's body and his mouth opened in welcome.

As first kisses went, there was some getting used to the other person they had never kissed before, so it was far from perfect - and yet, it was. It was the fulfillment of a longing that had to last too long, in both their opinions. Being finally able to taste and feel, getting what they had been desiring from afar for so many weeks, months even - what could have been more perfect? Both men clung to each other, standing there in the middle of this truly magical garden, and didn't waste another thought to holding back; to rules and regulations and any other reason why this maybe wasn't a good idea.

It took them many minutes before they were able to let go of each other again; before their lips stopped seeking each other long enough for them to lean back and let their eyes meet. They stared at each other for a long time, just speaking through their eyes, ocean to forest, emerald to sapphire.

It must have been half a lifetime before Dean eventually replied, "So am I," to Cas' earlier statement and made them both chuckle. And then they sank into another kiss.

It was Dean's favorite leather jacket that served as blanket when they sat down on the still wet bench overseeing the garden, but for once, Dean didn't care.

There used to be a time he would have refused and protested, protected the piece of clothing that had belonged to his late father with all his might. There also used to be a time when he would never have openly flirted and spent time with another guy, much less kissed him outside the privacy of a locked room *because* of same father that didn't know and accept anything else than the social norm.

For the first time in his life, there was something different about his being with a man: There was no fear. No fear of being spotted, and no worry about judgment. And the cloak of secrecy this jacket had been a symbol for, this reminder of a life he had believed he would have to live, suddenly lost its importance.

Now he and Cas used it to protect themselves from the soaked wood of the bench as they took a seat on it, bodies tentatively touching with their shoulders and legs pressed together.

Lost were words on Dean - and on Cas, apparently, seeing as the man next to him just stared ahead. The smile that adorned his lips was reflected in his eyes, and it made him to Dean the most beautiful person he had ever seen. There was so much happiness in his eyes, happiness that matched Dean's own. And now he only wondered why they had waited so long to do this... if one could call the two weeks since they first talked a long time. They certainly felt like it to Dean.

The evening sun warmed their faces as they relaxed into comfortable silence, neither feeling the need to speak. What was there to say that could have been more important than savoring the closeness they shared in those moments.

A closeness that was cruelly interrupted when Dean jumped at the first sounds of a guitar playing the intro to 'Ramble On' - in his pocket. Grumbling, he fished his phone out and was about to decline the caller, when he saw the id.

"I'm sorry, Cas... gotta take this, it's Sammy," he apologized and got up, walked a few steps away from the bench as he pressed the 'accept' button.

"Dean, where the hell are you? We're waiting for you!" his brother said by way of a greeting.

"What?"

"What do you mean, 'what'?! You've been nagging us for *weeks* about that concert and now you're not here three hours too soon to get on our nerves, but instead are late?"

Concert. The concert!

Dean had actually forgotten about it. He had been looking forward to it for months, had - though he would rather cut his tongue than admit it out loud - indeed nagged Sam about it, and probably several other people in his immediate vicinity as well... and now it had just slipped his mind. Just like that.

Because of one Castiel Shurley.

Shockingly enough, Dean found that he wasn't all that bothered by it. He was more bothered by the fact that he'd have to leave Cas, because as much as the other man meant to him, a Led Zeppelin tribute he just couldn't miss, and not only because the tickets had been horrendously expensive.

Assuring his brother that he'd be there shortly - he really wasn't looking forward to the rush they'd have to put on now - Dean ended the call and turned back to the other man still sitting on the bench who now looked at him curiously, head cocked to one side. Dean couldn't help but smile at the adorableness of it.

"This is definitely the worst thing I have ever had to do in my life, but I have to leave," he announced, face apologetic when he approached Cas again and dropped down beside him.

"Has something happened?"

"No, it's not that... it's just... there's this concert I really wanted to go to and..." A crooked smile appeared on his face then. "Guess what, you're the reason I've totally forgotten about it," he finished, grasping the other man's hand as he did so. With their fingers entwined, they sat for a moment longer, before Dean stood again, pulling Cas up with him.

"I'm really sorry, but I gotta go now."

"It's all right, Dean. We will see each other again, won't we?"

"You bet we will. Monday at the latest."

"Then I will anxiously await for the weekend to be over," Castiel replied, a lopsided smile painted into his features.

"Now that's a sentence you don't hear too often from the working majority. You wanna stay here or do you want me to walk you back to the hotel?"

"I will return to the Seaside Inn, but if you have to leave, you should, Dean. I don't want you to be too late."

"Nah, it'll be fine, don't worry. Enough time still, Sammy called me early. Come on."

Their short walk back was a rather fast one, though they also did their best to take their time at least a bit, so they could make the most of every second. And it was done so in silence - walking next to each other, fingers still linked, shoulders bumping. The smiles on their faces told whole tales, as did the joy reflected in their eyes.

The hotel entrance came in sight much too soon for Dean's taste, and before they could enter, he stopped them.

"I better let you go up alone or I might not be able to leave, after all," he murmured, face close to Cas', whose cheeks turned into a nice shade of pink at the words.

"I hope you have a great evening, Dean. See you on Monday."

The last time Dean had been this excited, there had been an actual date awaiting him - on a Friday. Not a mostly-business meeting on a Monday. On a flight, no less. And yet, this felt so much better.

One last kiss - one *lasting* one also - Dean allowed himself, memorizing the feel and taste of that wonderful man to have something to get through the next day, and week, possibly, as he didn't know if they were going to get some alone-time on Monday. Only afterwards he let Cas go and enter the hotel, waiting for the other man to be out of sight before he sprinted to the parking lot where he'd left Baby earlier.

He was halfway to his brother when he realized that he didn't even have Cas' phone number.

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Dean may not have had Cas' number - but he sure did have Jo's, and he knew that his friend was going to want an update. If she found out on Monday that something had happened on Saturday already, she would definitely make him walk from the airport.

"This is Jo," she picked up quickly, and apparently hadn't checked the caller id before doing so, since she usually greeted Dean much differently.

"Hey squirrel," the man replied, and was sure he could *hear* his favorite colleague's eyeroll over the phone.

"Yeah, love you too, Dean," she huffed, but apparently decided to not mind beyond that, "What's up?"

"You got a few minutes, or is this a bad time?"

"Nah, it's be all right, the cafe's a little busy today, another birthday party, and there'll be a bachelorette party later on, so I can definitely use the break. Something happened?"

"Well... you know about Castiel?" he began, innocent tone to his voice. Lately he may have had talked a bit more about the flight attendant than was still bearable, at least for Jo. She suffered through it bravely, albeit with a heightened frequency of eyerolls and headshakes, both of which were to indicate Dean to finally do something about that situation he was in, about his '*No, I don't have crush, I'm not teenager!*' one.

"The name rings a bell..." she replied, a little vaguely, and a questioning tone included in it.

"I found his hotel today."

"Gosh, Dean, just tell me."

"We kissed." For some reason, Dean felt idiotic saying it like this. Like a schoolboy who told his buddies proudly of his first kiss - and made it a story about how he had totally swept the girl off her feet with it, while in fact he'd been the one with wobbly knees.

"About damn time. Your swooning was driving me nuts. So are you...?"

"Not sure. For now we had to cut our meeting short, because of the concert today."

"You went to Castiel even though you knew you wouldn't be able to stay?"

"Um... actually I had kinda forgotten about the concert..." Dean knew Jo well enough to put a little distance between his ear and the phone as soon as he had spoken the words, and indeed could he still hear his friend's yelling even then.

"You had *forgotten* about the concert you've been getting on all our nerves about for months?!"

"Not you as well," Dean groaned, but didn't let Jo react to it before he continued, "Yes, I kinda forgot about it, so big deal. Happens. It's not like--"

"No, Dean, that doesn't just happen. Not to you. Not about a concert that's as close to your personal Holy Grail of Music as it'll ever get as long as Led Zep don't reunite properly and with the original crew, which you might only have a chance to see in heaven. Or hell, depending. Oh no, you forgetting *that*? You have it bad for that flight attendant, old man, you might as well reserve a space in tomorrow's paper for a big announcement."

"Stop exaggerating!" the man on the other end of the line protested. "I was distracted, okay? Am I not allowed to be when I meet someone who's really... nice?"

"You absolutely are. But then please admit that this is much more than your usual casual fling. Because, Dean, we both know he is. If this works out, if you actually manage to take this a step, or several, further, you're in for something more than just an eventful night. I hope you know that."

He did indeed. He had already decided that Cas would be more than just another notch in his conquest board, and in his mind he was doing everything short of praying that the flight attendant was up for that as well. So far he had a good feeling about it, and he was already impatiently awaiting their next - private - meeting. Hell, a part of him - a tiny one, but it was there nonetheless - even cursed that this concert had to be on that weekend. If only he had been able to stay with Castiel. And even if it had only been for talking, or taking a walk, or whatever. But having to part so soon, and after their first kiss at that...

"Don't mess this up, Dean Winchester," Jo's sudden warning brought him back from his thoughts, and for a moment he frowned at the words.

"I don't intend to."

"Good. Otherwise I'd have to kick your ass. Which would at least serve you to get from the airport to work, because I definitely wouldn't pick you up anymore then."

"Are you my friend or Castiel's?!"

"That's not the point, Dean. From what you've told me so far he seems to be a really sweet and nice guy. And you have a way to sometimes forego your usually caring nature when it comes to the people you sleep with."

Whether Jo was right or not didn't matter right then. Because Dean's mind was already busy rethinking his own words... and coming to the realization that he would like both to be true. He wanted his friends to like him. He wanted them to accept him. He and Cas weren't even... anything yet. And that was to say, if there was a *yet*. Until now they were just two people who had met by chance, found they liked each other, and kissed on one occasion. Who was to say it was ever going to become more?

Though here he was, already wondering about his friends' - and of course family's - approval of Castiel. He was running straight into it, knowingly, and still he didn't even for one second think about stopping.

"...and I strongly suggest for now that is all you do."

"What?" Snapping out of his thoughts, he only now heard not only Jo's voice again, but also the cars honking at him as he stood at a green light.

"Dean, have you even been listening?"

"Gimme me a sec, Jo, I'm almost at Sam's," he said by way of an answer, and took a right turn, rolling through the familiar street until he spotted a free space. As soon as he had killed the engine, he picked up his phone he had put on the passenger seat. "Jo?"

"Still here. So, Castiel. Be the best version of yourself. Something tells me he deserves it," she said, rare seriousness in her voice, for once not the little teasing sister, but the friend who talked to him as an equal. Dean responded in kind, sounding strong and confident as he did.

"I promise, Jo."

He didn't remember when he had ever meant something as much as these words.

If Dean had told anyone about it, they surely wouldn't have believed him. At least not those who had known him for years.

But it was true - he didn't notice the woman sitting next to him on his flight back to Detroit the next Monday, and, on top of that, especially didn't notice how beautiful she was. It was she who *actively* made him notice her in the first place. By talking to him.

"Haven't seen your handsome face around here before," she began, leaning slightly over to him, her raven hair brushing his bare arm and making it tickle. "Off on a short trip, or frequent flyer?"

Dean took a moment to look into her dark eyes, filled with mischief and wit, an attractive sight surely, on several accounts. He grinned then, leaning in a bit himself.

"Frequent. Not happily, but necessary. You?"

"Business trip. I usually work in San Francisco, but my boss sent me to Jackson for a meeting with a client, so... here I am."

"Business trip to a client that takes you across half the country? What do you do?"

"Real estate. Won't bore you with the details, though... Would rather like to know who allows me the

luck of having you next to me?"

"I'm in car business, my company's in Detroit. So I travel back and forth between there and San Francisco."

"I take it you have family to come home to, then, yes?" the woman asked, and Dean sensed there was an ulterior motive to the question, but he answered nevertheless.

"My brother and his girlfriend. Also, all my friends live there."

"That means you're available to San Fran's local female popularity on weekends. Well, isn't that good to know," the still nameless woman purred into his ear, shifting a little closer still, as much as the armrest between them allowed her to. "I'm Pamela, by the way."

"Dean," he replied, and though he was still aiming his most winning smile at her, he noticed himself moving away a bit, the proximity suddenly strangely uncomfortable. As was the hand landing on his knee.

"Nice to meet you, Dean. So given that we're both lonely... we should probably accidentally run into each other," the dark-haired woman suggested, nudging his shoulder with hers, "and then hopefully land on something soft and bouncing when we fall."

Dean couldn't help but chuckle at her words. She was nice, even though her blatant flirting and the touching that was still going on shamelessly were a bit too much for him, and he wondered how he was going to communicate that to her without being impolite. Every other time he would have immediately leapt at the chance that was presenting itself to him, but now... Now it was entirely different. Now there was a certain flight attendant occupying his mind, and he was the one and only person he wanted to fall onto something soft and bouncy with.

"I'm not sure our schedules will match though," he said, putting his hand over hers on his knee with the intention of gently removing it. She, however, took it as invitation to slip it a little further up, and let her other hand come to rest on his chest.

"Believe me, darling, we'll make it work. Just tell me wha--"

"Can I get you a drink, ma'am? Sir?" Pamela was interrupted by one of the flight attendants appearing next to them, and she gave the tall, slim, blond-haired man with his British accent a withering stare.

"Were good, thanks," she said for the both of them, all the while the airline employee only looked at Dean and ignored the woman next to him.

"Very well. Oh, and because you were asking me earlier, sir, you may now use the satellite phone. It's past the bathroom. My colleague will show you how to use it."

"I..." Dean began, confused, but when he looked into the other man's face, he realized that there was something else to it. "Yes, of course, thank you," he so said, believing that the person waiting for him, this colleague to explain the 'phone' to him would be Castiel. Nothing else made sense anyways; even more so since he hadn't seen his flight attendant for a while.

Despite his fear, and consequently his usual caution expressed by keeping his seatbelt on, he now unfastened the same and, murmuring an apology, at least had a good reason to remove Pamela's insistent hands from his body. He got up and quickly walked towards the back of the plane.

"Look at that," Gabriel growled and shook his head as he stood behind the half-closed curtain of the galley and watched the passengers. Or, in that case, two particular passengers. "I don't believe it. What a--"

"Gabriel!"

"It's true, though, Cas! Also, you were the one who came in here looking like you had just seen a ghost."

"Yes, maybe, but it's none of my business, and neither is it yours. So come on, we have work to do," Castiel said, trying to pull his friend away from his stakeout position. He, however, remained steadfast in his position, a scowl on his features. One that was immediately noticed by Balthazar when he joined his colleagues in their little crew area.

"What's up?" he asked, but when he followed Gabe's dagger shooting stare, an answer became unnecessary. "Woah. Isn't he a douche." A groan from behind him made him turn around to Castiel, who stood leaning against the cabinets and shook his head.

"He isn't. It's entirely his thing if he flirts with that woman. It's not my, or either of your business."

"You kissed, Cassie. Yet here he is, chatting up the next pretty lady that happens to be in his orbit," Balthazar argued, opening a few of the cabinets, looking for something. "Now where the hell is the pepper again?!"

"And I still don't know why I even told you that," Cas sighed while pulling out the drawer right next to him and fishing out the refill package, "this was definitely the last time I did. A kiss is not a promise of marriage or something. Besides, who says anymore than Dean being nice to her now will happen between them?"

Perhaps he was putting on a brave face. Perhaps he was fooling himself. But honestly, what else was there to do?

Of course Castiel had seen Dean and that dark-haired woman; had noticed right away how close they were, how they seemed to share the most secret of conversations. On the other hand, he was neither able to see any of their interactions properly or for a longer period of time, nor could he hear what they were saying. It was entirely possible they were just having a friendly chat over some topic they both found interesting, and the lack of distance resulted from the rather loud plane noises that forced everyone on board to communicate a little louder than they probably usually did.

It stung nevertheless. As innocent as it - hopefully - was, Castiel did his best to avoid looking to Dean and that woman.

"Have you seen that guy? Let me tell you, Cassie, he's one for flings, I know these types--"

"Because you're one of them," the younger flight attendant remarked dryly, and at least it helped distract Gabriel for a moment when the chief laughed.

"He's got you there, Balty," the short man teased, grinning widely. Balthazar, however, gave himself entirely unfazed by his colleagues' teasing.

"As I was about to say, I know these types, and yes, maybe I'm one of them, but I've never claimed something else. Whereas lover boy over there actually did promise you you'd meet again, didn't he, Cas?"

"And he'll keep his promise."

"You sure about that? If I was you, I'd have a contingency plan for your next date."

Closing his eyes and shaking his head, Castiel sighed. He understood his friends' concern, but he really could have done with less hurtful words. Even more so since he himself struggled with his faith in Dean and his belief that the passenger was truthful about his statements, and his interest in him. A little flirt on the side didn't hurt, as long as it remained in that state of easy conversation and a touch or two.

"You know what, I can't watch this anymore," Gabriel all of a sudden announced, and though he

should have known better, Cas was about to let out a sigh of relief. That was until he heard the chief say, "come on, Balthazar, we gotta do something," and vanished through the curtain, closely followed by his colleague.

He protest and any attempt to stop them was cut short when one of the passengers rung the service bell; from the person he tended to in the second row he could only catch a quick glance at Balthazar speaking to Dean, before he was called to yet another of their guests.

The next time he had the chance to look towards Dean's row, the man was gone.

When Dean pulled away the curtain that covered the area past the toilets, there was no Castiel waiting. Instead, the third of the flight attendants Dean had seen often on his trips, the one he believed to remember was the chief of them, suddenly stood before him. Meanwhile, he also noticed the other one he had just talked to follow him and come to stand behind him.

"All right, Dean-o, here's the thing," the chief started, "Cassie want us to stay out of his business, but if the little one is unhappy, it becomes our business as well."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You, flirting with that nice dark curls lady next to you. I mean, I totally get it, she is hot, but from what I hear you already have one ball in the air, and I very much suggest that's all you should have right now."

Confused didn't even begin to describe Dean's condition then. Whatever did they want from him? And anyways, why were they meddling in someone else's affairs? Little brother or not, if there was someone to talk to, it was Castiel, but not those two clowns.

"And who are you to intrude on things that are absolutely none of your concern?!"

"I'm Gabriel," the short one on front of him answered, "and that's Balthazar. Castiel and we are not only colleagues, but also friends, and have been for a long time. And we will not watch when you play with Cassie's feelings, Dean-o. So hands off that brunette!"

This without the shadow of a doubt was the most ridiculous situation Dean had ever been in. And that was considering he had had numerous affairs and one night stands, among them not few who had brothers. But never, not even in his teenager years, had he ever had someone approach him like this, to protect heart and honor or whatever of his subject of interest. He couldn't believe that was actually happening.

"Are you kidding?!" he bit out. "She was freaking me out with all her handsiness, but what do you want me to do?! I can't just get up and take another seat, especially since that plane is fully booked!" As an afterthought, he added, "And stop calling me Dean-o!"

"You seemed quite cozy just then, holding hands and all," now Balthazar chipped in, coming into sight beside him with his arms crossed.

"I was trying to remove her hands, but without--- You know, why do I even tell you that? I don't care if you think you have to be Castiel's... whatever, but I don't have to explain myself to you!"

With that, he turned around and stomped back to his seat, falling into it, face a mask of anger and a low growl still resounding in his throat. Only when he looked up and spotted Castiel looking at him with confusion and worry, his features slowly smoothed and soon enough, he even managed a little smile, before Cas' attention was called for by one of the other passengers.

"All done with your phone call?" the purring voice next to him sounded once again, but this time,

before also the hands were able to return, Dean turned his head towards Pamela, looking at her apologetic.

"Hey, I'm sorry I didn't say it right away, but I'm sort of... taken." He didn't know what reaction he had expected, but it certainly hadn't been low laughter and her readily assuming her normal seating position that left some space between them again.

"Of course you, handsome. Guys like you are never free. But should you ever be... you know... find me," she said, winking at him as she did, and took her book that was lying on her tray table. And when he looked up once more, he saw Cas return his earlier smile.

The week went by not as fast as Dean would have liked to, but he also had enough work to distract him, so he only really noticed the Friday that had him glance at the clock on the wall of his office every ten minutes. Or at least that was what it felt like.

The moment four-thirty arrived, his computer was shut down and his seat empty. In record time he reached the airport, even though it was pretty useless, seeing as there was no way he could have gotten an earlier flight. And he didn't want to either, anyways.

The time to board the plane took much too long to arrive, and out of curious mixture of anxiousness and boredom, he almost ordered a whole family menu at the burger place next to the waiting area, but could, at the last minute, stop himself. Instead, he got a salad - Sammy would have been so proud - and a chocolate chip cookie sundae and forced himself to eat slowly and concentrate on his food in hopes it would distract him. It helped only so much.

By the time his flight was ready for boarding he was close to becoming a nerve wreck, but the announcement that finally allowed him to snatch his duffel and walked the well-known way to the plane saved him at the very last second.

It was Balthazar who greeted the passengers this Friday evening, and while he cheerfully welcomed everyone aboard, he narrowed his eyes at Dean.

"Welcome on board, Mr. Winchester," he began, already a warning undertone in his voice, "We hope you have a pleasant time on this flight." Not willing to play this game, Dean simply rolled his eyes and was about to walk past the flight attendant, when the same grabbed his arm and whispered into his ear, "But if you make it too pleasant, we'll make sure to correct that for you."

"Balthazar!" a familiar voice suddenly hissed from behind the blond man, and when Dean turned his head, he saw Castiel, who smiled at him apologetically. The passenger just shook his head at him, a grim smile on his face, hoping that it was enough to show Castiel that it was okay. Dean was surely not bothered by such comments. And, ever since he had time to reflect on that situation with Balthazar and Gabriel on Monday, he had also begun to understand the two of them and their protectiveness, even if he still thought it was somewhat misplaced. But, apparently they truly cared about Cas, and for the moment, that was all he needed to know. Even more so because he very much shared the sentiment.

In no time they were airborne, and just as quickly it seemed they landed again. Dean suspected the wind coming from their back and pushing them forward; the more likely truth was that his mind was too preoccupied to notice much of anything, and that included the flight. Which was actually a good thing, now that he thought about it.

As usual waiting for everyone else to disembark, Dean followed the last passenger to the exit, and

then stopped to wait for Castiel to notice him. It was, to his great surprise, Gabriel who nudged the younger flight attendant and indicated Dean, and to his even bigger astonishment, Balthazar, who had bid farewell to everyone else, left the two of them alone.

"I had an idea," he began, "How about we leave together? I have my car here at the airport; I could wait for you, then you wouldn't have to take a cab or the public transport."

"No," Castiel shook his head, "you go, I have a meeting to attend before I can leave, and it wouldn't take too long now."

"Oh... See you in our garden later, then?" Dean asked, hopeful, because it was then that he realized they hadn't had the chance to talk about what had happened on that Monday flight, and what his flight attendant thought about it; whether Castiel was bothered by it at all. Maybe it was just the other two and Castiel himself didn't care because he trusted Dean, or because... No, he would just stop his thoughts there.

"That sounds perfect," the other man replied, and smiled at him, and quickly squeezed his hand, his thumb gently brushing over the back, before he let go again.

Dean left the plane and headed to his car, intent on going home quickly to shower and change, which he was in dire need of after spending the whole day including the flight in his clothes. Then he'd head over to the hotel. From what he gathered, he should have just enough time to do all that, and if he was lucky, it would save him a too long waiting time.

The garden was still empty when he arrived; Castiel was not yet there. Nevertheless he had no problem getting in, and awkwardly thanked the empty air - in the direction of where he assumed was the camera - and strolled into the area rich of greens and a diversity of colors and sweet smells. His duffel he'd taken with him, just in case, he dropped next to the bench they'd sat on the last time they were there; then he decided to use the time and take a closer look at all the plants and flowers around.

Dean wasn't big on botany and flora, but he appreciated beautiful surroundings as much as the next person, and he was continuously fascinated by what Mother Nature came up with. Jess had a green thumb, her and Sam's apartment a small oasis in itself, but even though she had often offered to show him a few tricks, Dean had never dared to actually risk having something living in his home, especially seeing as he wasn't there all the time.

The rose beds were what drew his attention most - there were colors amongst these flowers he'd never seen like this. Not that he could remember. There was red, of course, and yellow and white, but there was also orange, and different shades of pink, and then there were these mixed ones, like...

"I take the red and yellow one," a voice he'd come to know so well, despite not having heard it that often yet, sounded from behind him, and he smiled when he turned around. "Hello Dean."

"Hey Cas." Every other word would have been a waste of time, Dean decided when he folded his arms around the other man and pulled him into a kiss. "Glad you're here," he whispered when they parted again, and then leaned in for another kiss, just because he couldn't get enough and it had been a week - and anyways, did he really need a reason?

"Had a good reason to come," Cas replied as soon as they let go once more, making Dean chuckle.

"So how was your meeting?"

"Not mentionable. The normal debriefing, nothing special. It's just that it's mandatory, and though

they always try to get through as fast as possible, because for most people attending it's the beginning of their weekend, it does take its time sometimes."

"Sounds a lot like my meetings at work. Boring, pointless, and a complete waste of time," Dean joked, then took Cas' hand and led them to the bench.

"It's not really like that; the debriefings oftentimes are useful. They just tend to be at inconvenient times... like when you know a very charming, handsome man is waiting for you in a secret garden and you can't leave to go to him right away."

"I have no idea who you are talking about. Do I know this guy? Do I have reason to be jealous?"

"I don't know. Have you?" Castiel teased, a gentle smile on his face, and leaned in to peck the other man on the cheek.

Just when Dean was about to come back with a witty reply, a droplet hit his forehead - and another one his nose right after.

"Seriously?"

"In all fairness, they did forecast rain for the evening."

"Hey, whose side are you on?" Dean protested in mock anger and glared skywards when the next bit of water fell down on him. He really wanted to spend a little time longer in this beautiful scenery; this was definitely not how he had planned this evening to go. Not that he had planned anything... and wasn't that yet another instance of him lying to himself. Like he would go into such a meeting without a plan. His duffel that was still lying next to their seat was proof enough.

Same back was snatched only a few minutes later when Cas suggested to find some shelter after all, as the rain began to become heavier, destroying their hopes that maybe it were just a few lonely drops of a some even lonelier cloud flying by. A thought that had been in vain anyways, if the darkened sky was anything to go by.

It was, unsurprisingly, the hotel their feet carried them to. After a quick look around when they entered the entrance hall, they slipped past the reception desk and into the elevator quickly, riding up to the eight floor in a comfortable silence. But when they finally came to stand in front of Cas' room, the quiet became slightly awkward. Where to go from here? Would they part ways now? Would they continue to meet like this? Was there even a--

"Do you want to come in?"

A rare thing as it was - this was apparently one of the very few times Castiel's tongue conspired with some secret decision making fraction of his brain. Both of which were living off a much bigger reserve of braveness than he was.

"Do you want to come in?" he heard himself asking, and felt his stomach drop... until he saw Dean smile.

"I'd love to," the other man said, and Cas wasted no time to fumble for his key card. If only his tongue had had some bravery to spare for his shaking hands.

The door was open seconds later, and saw two men hurry through it, before it was closed again quickly by a foot kicking it shut. Because hands and other body parts suitable for closing doors were already busy grabbing onto each other, trying their best to explore as fast as passion demanded and it was humanly possible. Clothes were flying in all directions as they were thrown away carelessly, for they were not of any importance then. Only their boxer briefs were left when they finally found their

way to - and onto - the bed.

It was then that their movements slowed, their urgency reduced a little, and they came to lie side by side, facing each other, and kissing gently, softly, faces framed with each other's hands and legs entangled to keep close.

There was such warmth and tenderness to Dean's touch as his thumbs caressed Castiel's cheeks and his fingertips massaged his scalp that the flight attendant could do nothing but stare with fascination into the kind green eyes of the other man. It had been a long time since he had experienced physical affection past a quick hug or a reassuring shoulder clap, and until now, Castiel hadn't expected to ever find someone he even wanted to have such moments with again. He was slow when it came to getting to know people, and even slower when it was about letting them into his life and heart and, ultimately, bed, but Dean... Dean was different in so many respects. Cas trusted him, and he felt he knew him so well, even though they had barely spent time with each other, *talked* to each other, apart from their passenger/flight attendant conversations on the plane. Even if those had been more private than any such talk should ever be, they still were strangers in most respects.

Castiel's heart disagreed nevertheless.

When he leaned in for another kiss, he found it eagerly deepened by Dean, getting eventually past the light teasing and necking and back on track for what both expected this night to lead to. Disengaging his hands from Cas' face, Dean let them glide down the other man's body, and Castiel became unable to concentrate on the ongoing encounter of their lips when he got lost in the feeling of warm palms and clever fingertips on his skin instead.

They seemed to be everywhere at once. Roaming his back and kneading his shoulders, trailing down his chest and stomach, firmly grabbing his ass cheeks through hindering fabric and rubbing and rolling his nipples to sensitive attention.

Castiel was hardly able to follow, to keep track of all the touches and caresses and catalog them so he'd be able to remember them later on; much less was he able to reciprocate in a way he wanted to. Too much was Dean skillfully and cleverly keeping his mind and senses occupied.

Dean didn't seem to mind, though. He climbed over Castiel to come to hover above him, and entwined their fingers, thus keeping the flight attendant's hands securely and immovable next to his head, while he ducked down to follow the path his palms and digits had taken before, kissing and licking down Castiel's neck, chest, stomach, as far as their locked hands would allow.

Meanwhile, he lightly rocked his hips against the other man's; not the whole time, but only every now and then, much to Cas' dismay as he waited and hoped for more friction so he wouldn't feel so on edge. Though he realized just as he was thinking it that it wouldn't help much, as he would probably be even more aroused if Dean kept this up. Maybe actively taking part in the action wasn't such a bad idea, after all.

Surprise was on his side when he freed his hands of Dean's grip with quick movements and wound his arms around him, hands resting on his to-be lover's lower back and fingertips brushing past the elastic of his briefs, while Cas lodged one of his legs between Dean's. The sudden pressure against his erection made Dean yelp, and he Cas felt him instinctively flinch and pull away - and so he had, hadn't he been held fast by arms and seduced by lips seeking attention.

Castiel didn't remain long on his partner's mouth with his and instead took up a path down neck and over shoulders, as far as their position allowed, and then a bit further when he released Dean from his grip and used his now free hands to nudge the other man a bit higher so he was able to reach his pectorals and the little hard nubs in the middle of them. The effort it took to meet Dean's nipples with

his tongue was rewarded when the other man gasped and shivered, crawling up even further so Cas had easier access.

Thus the loss when Dean pulled back all of a sudden irritated the flight attendant. Unwillingly he let go when his partner lifted himself away to lean to the side where his bag had somehow come to stand on the ground next to the bed. It was mostly an automatism when he stopped the man in his movement, whispering questioningly, "What are you doing?" The reply was just as quietly.

"Condom."

"Um... do we need one?" Cas asked hesitantly after a few seconds. The desire to feel all of his lover burned hot inside him, but when Dean tensed and leaned back a little, he quickly added, "My job requires regular health check-ups, and I haven't had a partner in..." Averting his eyes, the last part was only an indistinct mumble. "A very long time." There was no reaction from Dean whatsoever, and Castiel wasn't sure if he was supposed to be worried now - or relieved that the other man was still there. So he simply asked, "You?", and tried to hide his uncertainty.

But when he dared to look up then, he was surprised to find that his to-be lover had turned a few shades of red.

"Dean?"

"I... uh... may have planned ahead? When I knew I had to try my luck and see if you're also interested, I got a check-up. Just in case," Dean explained, and added a quiet "Sorry" as an afterthought. But Castiel only chuckled and then kissed his partner hard.

"Perfect."

For a moment Cas believed they were done with words and could return to actions - he hadn't counted on Dean, however, and on his openness. Much less had he counted on it completely taking his breath away and making him stutter in his thoughts and actions alike.

"I want you inside me," his lover growled into his ear, and Castiel's breath hitched. How could he...? He hadn't...? "Have you ever topped, Cas?" When he shook his head, he found Dean leaning back and looking down at him. "Don't worry. I'll show you. You'll love it."

"I'm... I'm not sure... I don't want to... to hurt you?" Dean smiled at that, a gentle, reassuring expression that lit up his face and Castiel caught a quick glance of before he closed his eyes automatically upon the other man's face coming close and his lips being claimed again.

The kiss ended too soon for Cas's liking, and was followed by Dean's, "You can't hurt me. Trust me," before his partner pulled back and once more reached down the side of the bed and into his duffel. He rummaged a moment through his stuff, then came back up, a familiar looking bottle in his hand.

"Can't say you're not prepared," Castiel couldn't help but quip at the sight of the lube, completely new as it seemed. From his experience with Balthazar, he was used to little foil packages; only later on he had bought a bottle for himself, simply for practical reasons. It gave him a funny feeling in his stomach that Dean hadn't brought the one-time use only packages that always had given him this impression of something quick and unimportant. Which it had been.

"Hey, Cas? You all right?" Castiel blinked, realizing that he had zoned out to thoughts of Balthazar, of all people, while the man who was important right now - and hopefully would be for a long time - was right there in bed with him... and fumbling with opening the bottle.

"Yes, Dean. I'm fine," he thus replied, smiling warmly and taking the object of offense from him. Within seconds he had cracked the seal, and squirted a bit of the clear substance onto his hand, before he handed the bottle back and boldly let his hand sneak down their bodies and into the other man's briefs, where his wet hand closed around Dean's cock.

"Jesus, Cas!" Dean yelled and bucked into his hand, and the bottle fell down into the sheets as the other man had to use both arms to support himself. "Warn a guy next time, will ya?"

Castiel only smiled happily, his eyes glittering with joy as he leisurely stroked his lover and not let himself be hurried by the impatient snapping of hips above him.

"You're a terrible tease, has anyone ever told you that?" Dean complained, a half-hearted grumble in his voice and words, before he leaned down and claimed his lover's lips again, using tongue and teeth to try and spur Cas on, but he had none of it. Instead, he pulled his hand back, which was answered with an unhappy groan, and reached for the lube again.

"Not until now," he replied to Dean's comment and pecked his nose while his hands were busy with the plastic bottle. "Also, I always thought that's what makes it interesting?"

"Not when you're on the receiving end of it," was the answer he got, a whiny note in the other man's voice, as Castiel was just the progress of pushing Dean's boxer briefs out of the way and letting his fingers roam over the firm globes he found beneath. A single finger strayed tauntingly between the cheeks and towards the entrance Dean was awaiting - and demanding - him to touch, but Castiel still held back, only came close, but never made contact.

"Oh for the love of-- Cas!" Dean protested once again, much to the other man's delight, and ground his hips against his partner's, causing friction to both their erections and making them moan in unison. It also helped Castiel's finger find its destination, the tip of the digit rubbing over the puckered hole, smearing lube over it and letting Dean hiss in pleasure.

He didn't quite expect the other man to pull back suddenly, though. Confused he watched as Dean got up and quickly shed the remaining piece of his clothing, then almost roughly pulled off Castiel's underwear as well, leaving them both finally naked. The flight attendant shuffled a little to the side when his lover crawled onto the bed again, where he fell down on his back next to the other man, and unceremoniously spread his legs wide, pulling them back with his arms around his knees so that he was open and exposed, something he seemingly didn't mind at all.

"It'll be easier this way," he said by way of an explanation and wagged his eyebrows, making Castiel, now once again under the scrutiny of his lover, blush and smile shyly. It had been somewhat easier when Dean had still been above him and Cas had the chance to either kiss him or hide his face in the other man's neck. At the end of the day, he *was* very shy when it came to sex, especially when his partner looked at him so openly and attentively as Dean did now. And their new position, with his lover presenting himself like this without hesitation, didn't exactly help.

Not that he wasn't going to make very good use of that opportunity now. There he was, his fascinating and gorgeous passenger who happened to also have a wonderful, kind and charming personality, and he was ready and willing to become Castiel's lover, so how could he have let that chance pass, even if this timid self with its tendency to be rather inhibited wanted him to.

Gliding smoothly over to kneel in front of Dean, the flight attendant rubbed his palms along the other man's legs and over his hands, before finding his ass cheeks again. In a moment of braveness he leaned down and kissed first one, then the other, enjoying the way Dean's breathing hitched, and drawing a gasp right after when he placed a digit on the hole before him.

Blindly he reached for the lube while he used the rest of the watery substance still on his hand and his lover to continue the light massage he had started earlier; circling the tip of his finger along the rim without applying any pressure. He knew he was going to drive Dean insane with it, but something in him wanted to know how much his lover was going to be able to take.

"Get on with it already! Please, Cas!"

Not much, apparently.

Quick work was done with the bottle of lube once he had it - and it allowed him to do exactly what both he and the man who was currently at his mercy wanted: He waited another few seconds to make sure Dean was relaxed enough and then pressed the tip of his finger in.

A low moan was his response, and confirmation that obviously, he was doing it right. He did his best to remember everything he had ever experienced himself and read about it, intent on making this perfect for Dean. His finger he thrust in and out a few times, a slow movement he felt no need to rush, no matter what his lover demanded. Only after several moments he sought out that one particular spot inside Dean - the one that left the man release a strangled gasp.

"There! Again!" he called out, apparently all he was able to produce in regards to coherent speech. Not that Castiel had trouble understanding him. Feeling the muscles loosen slightly around his finger, he dared to carefully add a second to the one already inside, causing Dean to automatically try and pull apart his legs even further, to open himself even more for Castiel. His lover swallowed hard at the sight, and rewarded Dean with another brush against his prostate, which was answered by a jerk and a whine. He continued his light touching of that sensitive spot inside the other man, while he resumed the slow and rhythmic thrusting motion with his hand, getting Dean used to the intrusion and movement.

He changed the angle now and then, lightly pulling at the muscles surrounding his two fingers, carefully stretching Dean's hole while keeping the movement to a steady in and out. Soon enough, a third finger followed, easily finding a way in.

But Castiel's extensive preparation didn't seem to be all that much in Dean's interest.

"Come on, angel, I'm ready!" he demanded - a sudden sound after minutes of only heavy breathing, moans, a gasp or two, and maybe some keening noises - and it was obviously in an attempt to spur the other man on, but he actually achieved the contrary when Castiel suddenly stopped, taken too much by surprise by the new pet name to continue what he was doing. His lover just freezing and doing nothing anymore seemed to have Dean worried then, though. "Cas?"

"Angel?"

"Uh... yes? You said yours was an actual angel name, your people are called Sky Angels and... well... you're..." Now it was, and this was something that warmed Castiel's heart immensely, for Dean to blush and throw a wide-eyed look at the other man. "You're... *my*... angel."

Preparation and even arousal forgotten for the moment, Cas leaned forward and kissed his lover, deeply and lovingly, and the response met what he was giving, free of rush and passion, just the relish of a gesture that said a lot more than they were yet willing to express in words, or even conscious of.

"I guess angel is approved of, then?" Dean murmured against Castiel's lips when they slowly ended the kiss, and the flight attendant could only do so much to keep that funny feeling in his stomach in check as he nodded and pecked the lush, pink skin in front of him once more. Soon enough though he found himself nudged to continue what he had interrupted a few minutes before, when Dean rolled his hips against Cas', brushing their cocks together.

"Impatient," Cas laughed, and kissed his way down Dean's body once more.

"I think we've establi--" A moan swallowed the words when Cas sucked the head of Dean's cock into his mouth. "Established that - you're killing me here, angel!"

There was no verbal response this time - Castiel decided that the flesh in his mouth deserved the attention more than Dean's ears. As did a certain other part of his lover's anatomy, which he pushed three fingers into again, much to the other man's enjoyment, at least judging by the pleasure-filled

growl it drew from his throat.

Only a few times he moved his hand back and forth, feeling the loosened muscles around his fingers and deciding that Dean was indeed, as he had claimed earlier, ready.

The response to his pulling back was not happy - until his lover understood what Castiel was about to do.

"Want me to turn around?"

"Turn around? Why?"

"Just... dunno, thought you might prefer it?" With a confused frown, Cas shook his head.

"I want to see you, Dean. I want to see your face," he said with a finality that he hoped Dean wouldn't argue with; and indeed the other man gave a quick nod of understanding and then smiled, as if he hadn't expected this, but was happy about it. It also gave Castiel the courage to add, "I want to see your face when you fall apart because of me," and he had to take a shaky breath afterwards, not quite believing he had actually said that. His lover's surprised, but delighted expression however confirmed that he had indeed uttered the words, albeit quietly.

Moving above Dean, Cas reached for the lube and slicked his cock and Dean's entrance up with a generous amount of the clear liquid. He stole another quick kiss from the other man's lips before he locked his eyes with him and at the same time brought the head of his erection to his lover's hole, gliding over it a few times and then slowly pressing in.

It was fascinating for him to watch as Dean let his head sink deeper into the pillow, his eyes fluttering closed, his teeth biting his lower lip, but the same springing free as he gasped when the crown of Cas' cock snapped past the first ring of muscle.

"Don't stop," Dean moaned, and Castiel found legs around his lower back that urged him on, so much that he sank all the way in faster than he intended. Not that his lover minded, going by sounds coming from him. Or was it Cas himself making a few of them as well? He wasn't so sure anymore. But the sensation was incredible, and his willpower to take this slow, out of care for Dean and in the light of his inexperience as the one topping, was waning dangerously.

With his pelvis resting snug against Dean's, Castiel experimentally rocked forward a few times, causing friction to his own cock as he moved slightly inside his lover, but also to the man beneath him, whose erection was now trapped between their bellies. And Castiel knew exactly how *that* felt.

"Teasing, Cas!" Dean growled, and the flight attendant caught the words with his mouth as he let it descent upon his lover's. It was a kiss without finesse, sloppy and wet, but neither cared, moving on instinct clouded by desire and the longing to be close in every possible way.

It took Dean wriggling and his hands finding purchase on his lover's shoulders so he was able to counter any movements before Castiel pulled back, almost all the way out, and pushed in again, a slow but constant glide that he felt every inch of. Three times was he allowed to repeat that motion the same way, before his partner very clearly - albeit non-verbally - told him to get a move on.

Though still being somewhat unsure, Cas hesitantly sped up his thrusts, until he felt them both fall into a rhythm that seemed to have been there for years; as if they weren't entirely new to each other and met only a few weeks ago.

It were the most intense minutes he has experienced in his life this far.

There was a nearness he couldn't quite explain; nor was he able to understand it. As they rocked together, desperately heading for their climaxes, they clung to each other, Dean's hands finding purchase on Cas' shoulder blades as if he tried to hold on to his angel's non-existent wings, and Cas cradling Dean's head in his hands, while his lips by now were just resting against his lover's, to kiss

whenever they felt like it. And they felt like it a lot.

It was a soundtrack made of gasps, groans, harsh breathing, broken kisses and two bodies relishing in their intimate connection that filled the room as movements became more rushed and impatient by the second; and when Castiel eventually regained enough mental clarity to change the angle of his thrusts so his cock would rub along Dean's prostate, a conglomerate of a yell and a yes was added to the sounds, and repeated several times, before the man beneath him had to give in to the overstimulation he was experiencing just then, and came with a shout, taking his lover with him as his hole clenched around the shaft inside him.

When Castiel finally pulled out and slumped down beside his lover, several seconds - or possibly even minutes - has passed, and yet both men were still breathing heavily, unable to do much, whether it was speaking or moving. It was only when they had calmed down enough that Cas got to face Dean again when the other man turned onto his side.

"Hey," he smiled, brushing over and then wrapping his pinky around Castiel's where his hand lay between them.

"Hey," the flight attendant gave back, pushing his hand slightly against his lover's in a gesture of approval.

However, when Dean wanted to pull Cas closer and get comfortable to sleep, the other man resisted, keeping a small distance between them as he faced his lover, tired blue eyes staring into green ones.

"So tell me about your week? I visited the--" a yawn interrupted him and tired him out even more, making him remain quiet for a few seconds before he managed to force himself awake again. "--the Musée Mécanique last weekend, you know, the one you told me about the other day. I didn't get around to tell you yet, but I wanted to thank you for the recommendation, it really was great. How often have you been there?"

Silence answered him, and when Castiel managed to open his eyes he hadn't even noticed closing he was met by a look he could only identify as worried.

"You trying to make conversation to... actually I don't know why. So - why?"

"Just thought it'd be nice to talk for a bit," Cas replied, words already slurred. He mustn't fall asleep though. He couldn't risk it.

"It'd be nice to sleep for a bit. And talk tomorrow. How does that sound?"

"But will you be here then?"

"What? Will I-- of course I'll be here, Cas! That's what this is about?!"

"Dean..." the flight attendant only murmured, now after all following his body's instincts and pressing himself against the other man, needing as much of their bodies touch as possible, and if only to reassure himself that his lover was still there, and wouldn't go anywhere.

"You can go to sleep," Dean whispered gently into his ear as he still fought against dozing off, "I'll be here when you wake up." And it was the promise that helped Castiel to eventually allow himself to fall into a restful slumber.

The first thing Castiel noticed when he woke up was that feeling of being cold, but in an unfamiliar way. It wasn't the way he felt when during the night he had kicked off his blanket and laid bare and open to the cool air; nor was it like when in winter months the dark hours turned out to be colder than expected and that low temperature had crept into the room.

No, this was different. This was...

The warmth of another person.

And it was missing.

Sitting up abruptly, Cas quickly shook away his sleepiness and looked around. Indeed, he was alone. Dean was gone. There was nothing of the other man left, nothing that indicated that maybe, he was only in the bathroom, or... or...

Not, it was silly to even hope.

How could he have been so wrong about Dean? He really had thought that there was a connection, that they both felt it. After all, he had come to the hotel with the intention of seeing him, of... well, maybe only to see him for that one night. Granted, there had been tension between them on these past flights, tension someone else than Castiel might have taken a step towards resolving much sooner. Alas, he wasn't that kind of person - wasn't someone to let another in his bed and life quickly, wasn't someone to give away what he believed were the most intimate and vulnerable moments in one's life; that precious time of togetherness he had wasted once too often with Balthazar, who has no regard for what Castiel thought of as so special.

Yes, he had never told Balt his opinion on it, too eager to learn and experience; and he surely hadn't told Dean before he had allowed him into his hotel room, knowing all too well how the evening would end.

And now he had to pay the bitter price for it - a taste of a man he had hoped he could have so much more with and that would result in a yearning for things he'd probably never find again, and a broken heart that would not be mended for a long time. Not as long as he would have to see Dean on their flights; and he was quite certain that the other man wouldn't just reschedule his whole life to use another airline, all of which didn't have these for the business man convenient flight times 8th Heaven offered.

As of this moment, Castiel had entered his personal hell, and he had done it blindly yet willingly. This one time his gut feeling let him down - or this one time he maybe hadn't listened properly - he had walked right into this cruel trap feelings awaited with; had let himself be lured in and readily embraced his heart's doom.

But the worst part was - he couldn't even be angry at himself. He should have been; should have taken it as a lesson learned the hard way, as something that would forever be a warning to him, a red flag whenever he even considered doing it again. And maybe it was, to some extent; but as far as Dean was concerned... if he had a time machine, if he had been able to turn back these hours spent with that man - he would do it all again. Because this... this had been special, no matter how it had turned out in the end.

Castiel had a broken heart, but not because he mourned his bad decisions - but because this one night had been so perfect that he wanted to experience it again, and he wouldn't be able to. He was angry and sad that fate denied him this little bit of happiness.

He wouldn't look back though. He'd deal with it, somehow, and he'd try his best to see the good in this - the night, the intimacy, the moments no one would ever be able to take from him.

He'd be brave. Just as he had always been in his life, out of necessity that spoke to his survival instinct. Even if he didn't want to.

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Getting out of bed, Castiel stretched and took a deep breath. He needed to start his day, to be productive; needed to distract himself until he felt ready to deal with his broken heart, to take care of it and sooth it with memories he would thrive on.

He was just in the progress of searching for his underwear when he heard the door lock click, announcing someone entering. Quickly turning towards the window and thus away from the entrance, he quickly dismissed, "I don't need cleaning services right now, thank you," and hoped the hotel employee would get the message - and not think of him as a too impolite guest, since he spoke with his back to the person and didn't acknowledge them any further.

"I'm not a regular in hotels, but I'm sure that eight in the morning is a bit early for the cleaning team," a familiar voice answered, and Castiel whirled around, eyes wide as he came face to face with the subject of his earlier thoughts and worries.

"Dean?" he breathed, his voice just now deciding to refuse working. In return, he earned himself a frown and an apprehensive half-smile.

"Yeah," the other man replied, drawing the word out, "who did you expect...?" And just as he said it, Castiel saw realization dawn on his lover's face. "...or not expect, oh no, Cas, I'm sorry, you didn't think I was...?"

It wasn't as if he could have done much about the blush on his face then, but for once he also didn't worry about it either. There was, after all, no shame to thinking that Dean had left without a single word, a goodbye, or at least a written message - and to have been upset by it.

"You were gone when I woke up, so... yes, I thought you--"

"No, angel, don't ever think I'd do that to you!" Dean exclaimed while rounding the bed and, after throwing the paper bag Castiel only noticed now on the desk that was standing on front of the window, wrapped his arms around the still bewildered flight attendant. "Well, okay, so we've only known each other for a short while, and, uh... like this," he moved his head back and forth to indicate the two of them, since his hands were occupied holding his lover, "an even... shorter while, but Cas, I'm not... you gotta know, I'm not doing this. You know, just leave without a word. *If* I had left, I would have written you a note or something. Which, thinking about it now, doesn't make it that much better, but still, I would--"

And that was when Castiel stopped Dean and his admittedly somewhat adorable rambling the best way he knew: He kissed his lover. Kissed him deeply and without hurry, a gesture that held all his relief and happiness, and everything else he was feeling, but couldn't and didn't want to define.

Much later Dean finally got to explain why exactly he had left.

He hadn't lied when he had said he wouldn't leave like that. There had been a time, a few years back, when he was younger and, well, wilder, that he had indeed been a collector of hearts and, consequently, one-night-stands. When he had sought the warmth and pleasure of another body for a few hours, but also let the sun crawling up from behind the horizon be his signal that it was time to go. He did leave notes then, but rarely ever such that allowed the other party to contact him again. His phone number was reserved for the special ones, the ones he found memorable enough to repeat such a night with. But that was a handful, not more.

Recently, however, things had changed. His life, his job, traveling back and forth between two states only so he could be close to his brother as often as possible, even if same brother, four years his junior,

was now a young man himself already, and on his way to become - what Dean believed - a prestigious lawyer and - what Dean hoped - a family man soon, took its toll on him, physically and emotionally. Having one-nighters had been fun once; now they weighed on him, told him of the things he didn't have. Like a real home. Or a family. Someone to come home to, someone he could be himself with, someone he wouldn't have to put all energy into to charm and win over. He may have been good at it, but that didn't mean it was free of any effort.

Meeting Castiel, getting to know him, it was showing Dean how it could be. Even if they had only had one night with each other so far; but Cas was someone he could talk to, someone who was intelligent and a kind and gentle soul. He was the kind of person Dean believed he would be willing to try more with, to try and make it work with; the kind of person he... he could fall in love with.

Oh God, what had he gotten himself into.

"So why were you outside? What did you get?" Castiel asked as they were lying in each other's arms, a lazy movement of his foot pointing in the general direction of the desk and the paper bag on it.

"Breakfast," Dean grinned proudly, and disentangled himself from his lover's limbs to quickly fetch the little surprise he'd brought. Which was, when he thought about it, just another point on his list of 'Signs that Dean Winchester is getting emotionally attached'. He had never brought breakfast. So he had never been at the hotel room of someone else, never spent the night and had to wonder about morning meals. Either he left before that ever became a subject, or he was at someone's home where he simply made do with what was there, if he decided that staying a little longer than till sunrise was acceptable.

But actually leaving to buy breakfast and then return? For someone who would have the meal service due to the hotel stay anyways?

Nope, that was definitely a first. And Dean decided that while he was totally on board with what his mind - heart - had made him do, he wouldn't give it too much thought. For now.

The bag in hand, he wormed his way back under the sheets and into Castiel's welcoming arms, before he slowly revealed the contents of his purchase by dipping a hand into the papery case and pulling out one of the objects it held, all the while he carefully watched his lover's face. Which was set in curious expectation and topped by adorably ruffled hair, courtesy of their earlier round of morning lovin', as Dean had called it at one point, much to Cas' amusement and, in turn, his delight.

With a cheerful "Tadaa!" he eventually had the object that was now easily identified as a muffin freed and held it under the other man's nose. Carefully Castiel sniffed, before he stuck out his tongue and licked. *Actually* licked. Dean had a hard time to control his jaw so it wouldn't just fall down. Other parts of his anatomy proved harder - literally and figuratively - to control in the face of that display, even more so now that Cas, still wary of what was presented to him, placed his lips on the pastry and then bit down slowly.

"Remind me to never take you out to dinner or something. I'd probably jump you before the first course is through." Dean's toneless comment - and really, what he was just witnessing was too erotic, but in an innocent kind of way, for him to still pay attention to what he said, or even how he said it.

Castiel, on the other hand, seemed aware enough of his surroundings to freeze at the words and start to blush. Dean was certain he was going to die when his lover let go of the baked good and pulled back.

"What?" Cas asked, hurrying to chew and swallow the piece he had bitten off.

"Angel, you sure know how to turn a guy on."

"I don't-- oh." The blush deepening told Dean that his lover now not only had heard, but also

understood his words, and he smirked before he leaned forward to kiss a little crumb off the edge of his mouth.

"Please do that again."

"Tell me what that is, first. Please. It tastes... different, but also familiar." And just like that, Dean's arousal was forgotten - at least for the moment - and his smirk turned into a winning smile when he announced, "Breakfast muffins!"

"Breakfast muffins?"

"Yep. There's this little bakery not far from here that has specialized in them. They're technically normal muffins, but, as you may have noticed, not the normal sweet ones. Instead they leave out the sugar and add ingredients for a hearty taste, like ham and bacon and cheese and even potatoes. Then they add spices and onions and bell pepper and stuff and it tastes like a whole breakfast, but in the form of a handy pastry."

"That is quite clever," Castiel admitted, and closed his fingers around Dean's wrist to pull the hand still holding the muffin to his mouth again and take another bite. And while Cas was busy chewing with a contented hum, it was for Dean to swallow hard. And keep himself from devouring his lover, who was so much more interesting than the breakfast. One had to know, Dean Winchester was no one to ever forego a meal, so this? This was a big deal. Something Dean was slowly beginning to realize.

"You're not going to eat something as well?" came the question from his side that pulled him from his thoughts, and Dean blinked for a moment, before he leaned forward and took a bite from the muffin he was holding, earning himself a playfully shocked and hurt look.

"I have more," he said by way of explanation, munching happily while eyeing the pastry in his hand, and wondering if Cas was up for a little competition. "I'd hurry if I was you, or else there'll be nothing left of this one," he thus joked - and just like this found himself in a little battle he hadn't quite intended, but enjoyed all the same.

It didn't last long though; too exhausted they were from earlier, and anyways was food as source for strength just the thing they needed then, so some ten minutes later found them sitting next to each other, shoulders still touching as if it was impossible for them to be too far apart right now, and eating their unusual breakfast.

Conversation was easy, and questions exchanged to get to know the other better.

"I wish I had wings..." Castiel replied thoughtfully to Dean's enquiry about his dreams and hopes, "I could fly whenever I wanted to and not be limited by anything." He sighed. "Didn't have to wait and hope for being hired by an international company."

"Really? You want to make that effort yourself when it's so much more comfortable to just sit in a comfy seat and let yourself be flown to your destination?" Dean teased gently, nudging the other man's cheek with his nose before placing a light kiss at the same place.

"Says the man who hates flying. Besides, to go anywhere by plane you need money, Dean," Cas grumbled, trying and failing to give his lover an equally disgruntled look, instead letting himself be kissed again by insistent lips and a clever tongue. A hand came to rest on his waist as Dean turned fully towards his lover, then slipped up his side and finally around his shoulder to press him close as Dean deepened the kiss, effectively making Cas forget whatever he had wanted to be unhappy about.

It was only a long while later, when they were lying content in each other's arms, that Dean spoke again.

"You know I am afraid of flying, but... what are you afraid of?"

"Falling. An airplane crash."

"Really?"

"Yes. Every time I set foot in an airplane, it's like spreading my wings whereas else I can't. It's the only way I know. If I happened to be in a crash it would be like... losing my wings. If I survive, that is."

Dean remained quiet after that, simply pulling Cas closer and holding him. He could relate to that, somehow. That sense of freedom he felt whenever he was driving his Baby, it was unique and nothing his life could give him otherwise. It wasn't as if he didn't enjoy his life as it was, but there were restrictions and limitations he felt every day, something the Impala took away for a while.

If something happened to him while driving Baby, if there was an accident, whether by his fault or anyone else's, it would surely shake up his world immensely. Mostly of course because it would mean that his car was damaged, perhaps even beyond repair. And then? Nothing would ever be able to replace the Impala that held so many memories, was such a vital part of his life, his history.

And nothing would ever be able to replace the *meaning* it held. It wasn't just about any old car, it was about the freedom he associated with the Impala, a feeling imprinted on his soul since his childhood. He wasn't even sure why, how this feeling came to be, but it was there, like an instinct, a part of him that was unexplainable, but didn't need explaining either.

"Dean?"

"Fears are a strange thing, aren't they?"

"I always assumed they're there to remind us how fleeting and precious life is. To protect us from being stupid and heedless."

"Yeah, maybe... if only they didn't also stop us from doing things would enjoy and that would do us good."

"That's why fears are also there to be overcome," Castiel replied thoughtfully, and Dean didn't have to be a genius to understand that his lover was most probably also thinking about them. Of a fear of being rejected and laughed at overcome.

Because more often than enough, besting one's own fears opened doors to places. And people. And *that* Dean definitely knew a lot about, he mused with a smile as he pulled Cas just a little bit closer.

It was right on his flight the following Monday that Dean was in for a surprise. Arguably not one of the good variety; not entirely at least.

He started when he left the small cabin of the toilet and - once more, just like on that flight the week prior - found Gabriel standing before him, in his personal space. And the chief flight attendant didn't lose any time getting right to the point.

"Listen; Dean-o," he began, using the nickname he knew Dean hated, "if you hurt him..." There was a pregnant pause the steward used to raise his eyebrow and twirl his hand in front of him in a meaningful gesture. When he didn't continue after several seconds, Dean growled in irritation.

"What? You kill me and make it look like an accident?"

Gabriel huffed, then tsked him. "Don't be ridiculous." Again he let a few moments pass, to create a more dramatic air, but only succeeding in making Dean more impatient. "Castiel kills you. But I will help him hide the body. And give him an alibi." The smile was too brilliant for the words he had just spoken, but at this point, nothing could really shock Dean anymore about Gabriel Rickster. Or, as he'd come to call him, the Trickster. Suited him better, anyways.

"Yeah, got it," he dismissed and tried to squeeze past the flight attendant in the small passageway, but

Gabriel wasn't finished yet. His face turned dead serious - an expression Dean didn't have expected him to even know - before he spoke again, all cheerfulness gone from his voice.

"I'm serious, Dean. Don't hurt him. Take care of him. I told you before, Cassie's like a little brother to me and Balthazar. He doesn't have anyone else. Don't give him hope when you're not planning to go through with it."

The two men stared at each other for a long time then; not to see who blinks first, though, but in silent communication, and in confirmation that they understood each other. Neither of them wanted Castiel to get hurt, and Gabriel knew it as much as Dean. The passenger even appreciated the other man's concern for his friend; he knew he wouldn't have acted any different had this been about Sam. So he could relate to the sentiment; to Gabriel's protectiveness, especially if he saw Castiel as his little brother. Those needed to be kept an eye on, even if they were grown-up and standing on their own feet already; that much he knew all too well.

Nodding once, both men turned at the same time; Dean to return to his seat, and Gabriel to resume his work.

Their little exchange, however, stayed on Dean's mind for a while after that. Of course he didn't plan on hurting Cas; it certainly was the last thing on his mind. Hell, it wasn't on his mind at all. In their short time together, the flight attendant had become important to him in a way he hadn't thought possible. Dean had had relationships - okay, affairs, but still - and enough of them to be familiar with a certain pattern when it came to them. But with Castiel? It was different. He didn't know why, he didn't even really know in what way, but there was something that made this thing with Cas, whatever it was, whether a long-ish affair or a relationship or maybe even more, strangely and still comfortably new. This one he wanted to last. Sure he had wanted the same with his other relationships, but this time... this time he was willing to work for it, and hard. He wouldn't, *couldn't*, let it go just like that.

"Hey," the subject of his musings pulled him from the same, and Dean looked up into Castiel's smiling face.

"Hey yourself," he smirked, quickly squeezing the hand his lover had strategically placed on Dean's armrest. It was the only contact they allowed themselves in public; at least in that kind of public that was Cas' workplace. It was also a promise, one he was certain was going to be fulfilled.

"Can I bring you something?"

"No, thanks Cas, I'm fine," he replied, then however lowered his voice to barely above a whisper and added, "unless it's yourself on a silver platter." Castiel's eyes widening scandalized and with the slightest of embarrassment surely was worth it, Dean thought, and winked at his lover with a grin. Who was quick then to overcome his momentary shock.

"I believe you already had that often enough. Just this morning, for example," he gave back, equally quiet, before he turned away to tend to the other guests. He never saw the proud smile on his lover's face as he watched the retreating form of the flight attendant he was so hopelessly... well.

Whatever it was, Dean had long since accepted that it was much more important and essential than an affair with a good time and even better sex.

So no, he thought at Gabriel, because he wanted to pass on the message even if the other man wouldn't hear it now, there was not a chance he would ever hurt Cas on purpose. Find himself done with his beautiful lover and leave him. If it was ever to come to such a situation in which Castiel was going to get hurt, he'd feel the pain just as much. And as much as it scared Dean - he also knew he had found something worth the risk of getting his heart broken.

Going home these days didn't mean the hotel anymore for Castiel. It meant taking the train to another part of the city, getting out on a never resting, always noisy plaza, and walking a distance of about two additional miles.

Until he reached Dean's apartment.

The flight attendant didn't mind the effort one bit.

Though sad about losing a regular customer he had obviously become fond of, Yanny was thrilled for Castiel when he was told by the same that from now on he was going to stay at Dean's as often as possible. May Cas himself have regretted having to leave behind the familiarity of the Seaside Inn; the prospect of becoming an even bigger part of his lover's life by being allowed to stay at his home whenever he was around was more than enough to make him forget these few sorrowful thoughts.

Now it was indeed like coming home, like *going* home, whenever he left the airport to head down to San Carlos. And so far it had been great. But this day... this day, as he stood on the train, too agitated to sit down, dread filled his stomach with every passing stop, with every mile he got closer to Dean.

There was something he had to tell him, and he wasn't all that sure it was going to be received all that kindly. Not that he was exactly scared of his lover's reaction; they'd known each other maybe not long enough, but they sure knew each other well enough for Cas to not worry about any kind of violent reaction from the other man. If anything, Dean was going to be accepting and supportive.

Which didn't mean that it made it easier.

"Cas, hey! Missed you on my flight yesterday, was kinda hoping we could go home together," Dean greeted him seconds after he had rung the door bell, then swept in and captured his lips in a kiss, not giving Castiel a chance to reply before he was already being pulled into the apartment. It was the noise coming from the next room that made him push Dean away gently, putting an arm's length between them - and giving Cas a moment he took as cue.

"Dean, I... we need to talk." Instantly, his partner's eyes narrowed with worry.

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, it's just... there's something..."

"Dean! Stop lurking out there with your boyfriend! We want to meet him!"

"Uh... Sammy and Jess are here. And Charlie." Lowering his voice, he added, "They've been nagging me to introduce you to them. Sorry I didn't give you a heads-up. Wanted to do that on the flight, but then you weren't on it and they fetched me from the airport and I forgot to call you."

"Dean!" How the three managed a synchronous call was beyond the flight attendant.

"Yes, one second!" He rolled his eyes, and once again only spoke loud enough for Cas to hear, "I love them, but sometimes they drive me insane. Okay, are you ready for this?"

Castiel knew he should have stopped Dean. He should have asked, if not demanded, to talk first. What he had to tell could change things, and maybe not for the better. What use was it to meet Dean's family and friends now, when he didn't even know if not tomorrow he'd look back at this day, this evening, as the last he'd seen him, been with him privately? What if Dean sent him away and then even chose another airline to fly with?

His thoughts must have shown - in the fear he surely expressed - because his lover suddenly stepped right in front of it and framed his face with his hands, making Castiel look at him.

"Cas? What is it? You're starting to scare me here, babe."

Maybe diving in head-first wasn't such a bad idea.

"I received a job offer. Intercontinental flights."

"That's great, Cas! That's..." The flight attendant literally saw as realization hit Dean. Realization what it meant. There was the tell-tale widening of eyes, and the slumping of shoulders, the flash of sadness and disappointment in his expression. But Dean was quick to school all of it, hiding it away and putting a brave smile in place. Only his voice wavered the tiniest bit when he continued, "That's all you ever wanted. Congratulations." And then he leaned in and kissed him on the cheek, and Cas knew it was mostly because his lover needed a reason to hide his expression that had once again began to slip during his few words.

Should he be honest? Should he tell Dean that it wasn't great at all, because it meant that he'd barely get to see him anymore? Should he take that first step before Dean could, in vain hope that it'd protect his heart at least a bit? Should he say they could just as well call whatever that was between them a quits? Sure, 'whatever that was between them' run deep, that much was undeniable. But was it enough? And moreover, if he declared now that he would turn down the job offer, just so he could be with Dean - would he scare the other man off?

Right now, there wasn't much of a commitment. They spent as much time together as possible, and as far as Castiel himself was concerned, he loved every second of it - he didn't want it to end. He needed Dean in his life, that much he knew already, and he didn't dare to think about them parting ways again, for whatever reason. He had gotten so used to having Dean around, relied so much on his warm words, his gentle touches, his shy intelligence, his ability to make him laugh. All the little things that Castiel loved so much, just as much as he...

He...

He *loved* Dean.

It hit him out of the blue, and yet it didn't come as a surprise. Of course he loved him. Had for quite some time. Why else should he have thrown all cautions in the wind and allowed himself to have an affair - a relationship - with a passenger, when it was strictly against company policy?

Castiel Shurley never broke rules.

Unless, apparently, it was for Dean Winchester.

Unless it was for someone who he didn't doubt for a second was worth it.

Still reeling from his realization, from his mind putting into words what so far he had only had a vague grasp at, Cas almost missed the other man slowly letting go and turning away. In the last second he put his hand on Dean's arms, preventing him from leaving - be it symbolically or really just to follow the repeated calls of the others in the next room - and tugged lightly so his lover would face him once more.

"We can do it, right? We can make this to work." Castiel knew he was pleading; it was hard to miss the undertone in his voice and his words. But he didn't care if right now he appeared desperate - desperate to keep something he wasn't even entirely sure they had. He could only hope they were, despite never having talked about it, on the same page when it came to the status of their relationship.

"We can try, Cas," Dean replied, and a strange pressure formed behind Cas' ribcage. They stared at each other, neither saying another word for a long while, and it seemed even the shouts from the living room had stopped. Or maybe he wasn't just hearing them anymore over the rushing sound of blood in his ears.

This lost in thoughts and zoned out, he couldn't help but flinch and let out a little gasp of surprise when Dean, without warning, spoke again, determination prominent in eyes, voice and body

language: "To hell with it, we *will* try, and we *will* make it work! I've been stupid often enough in the past, I won't be so stupid to let you go again!"

To his embarrassment it took Castiel several seconds - or maybe it were even minutes? - before he was able to react.

"Are you... are you sure? Do you mean...?"

"Yes. Let's be together. Let's do the whole nine yards. You know, meeting the families and friends, moving in together, arguing about holiday destinations and who does the dishes and brings out the garbage and stuff. Let's make it official."

There was no answer left in Cas. He just stared at Dean, mouth hanging open, eyes blinking too fast as they tried to erase a picture that was too good to be true. He had never gotten what he truly wanted in his life so far. And now he got two things at once - the ideal job *and* an amazing, perfect partner? He barely resisted the urge to pinch himself. If this was a dream, he didn't want to wake up anyways.

"Yes." More Castiel didn't have in him, but the smile he added to the word told Dean everything he couldn't put into words right now.

"That means though that you still have to meet the eggheads in there, you know that, right?" And Castiel let out a laugh that had never felt more liberating.

Introducing Castiel - now officially his... boyfriend? Nah, they weren't teenagers. Lover? Not quite a name for someone you were in a relationship with. Partner? Could work, but had a cold, clinical air to it. Significant other? Okay, they definitely had to talk terms at some point.

Whatever they were going to label each other now, they were together, and it was really all that mattered. Dean didn't have to pretend anymore, didn't have to wonder how much was too much for two people who weren't in a relationship, didn't need to worry about calling him just to talk, just to say goodnight or good morning, or because he longed to hear his voice. So maybe they had done that in these past weeks already, and neither of them had complained or wondered about it, but now that they were official... it felt different. It felt as if it had a future. As if it *had to have* a future.

And though Dean was definitely not the praying type, he still asked every deity that was willing to listen to make this thing, this *relationship* now, between him and Cas last.

After all, even the universally dreaded 'meeting the family' could be marked with a sign of approval.

Introducing Castiel to his brother, to-be sister-in-law, and his best friend went much better than Dean had expected. Not that he had expected problems to begin with, but the three apparently fell in love with him at first sight.

Dean could relate to that.

Of course he and Cas had to answer questions, and not few of them. Every detail of their first meeting was enquired, as was how they had taken that next step from passenger and flight attendant to, well, *more*. Not that the latter was asked for to get details added, but Dean took a lot of delight in his brother protesting and the women giggling. And Castiel blushing.

"So, Cas," Jess began at some point during the evening, "you still got to tell us your secret."

"I don't believe I know what you mean."

"Well, how you made of fly boy here relationship material."

"Shouldn't he be fly boy?" Charlie piped up, thumb pointing into the flight attendants direction, and popped a potato chip into her mouth, munching away happily on it.

"In the literary sense of the word, yes, but-- all right, car boy then. Dean's car boy. Suits him better anyways. But the question remains. How did you do it?"

"I didn't do anything," Castiel answered, slightly confused.

"Ignore them, Cas," Dean growled, though the tone of voice was less directed at his lover and more at his as-good-as-dead almost-sister-in-law. Who, in turn, was very good at not paying him any attention. "So?" she continued, entirely unimpressed, and stuck her tongue out at her future-brother-in-law when he threw a cashew nut at her.

"Because you gotta know, Cas, he never was before." *And thank you very much, Charlie.* Dean rolled his eyes when his best friend suddenly decided to partake in the conversation as well - how he had ever thought that she'd always come to his rescue was beyond him. As if it wasn't enough that one of the girls was obviously trying to ruin him, all the while his dear brother - why again had he done so much for the overgrown baby? - sat there, grinning. Traitor.

"That is probably because he hadn't found the right person yet. Some people search their whole life; others at least half of it. We have both been lucky to meet the other, or I wouldn't be in a relationship either." Castiel's no-nonsense tone of voice as he stated what were simple facts was enough to have all of them - even Dean - stare at him open-mouthed. Dean was the first to recover, being used to how his lover was, and smirked.

"Point goes to Team Shurley/Winchester. Sorry, guys, but I have the better player with me." A short but sweet kiss followed Dean's words, before he added, "Welcome to our weird, nerdy little family, Cas."

Cheers and clinking glasses expressed the approval of the older Winchester words' in the following, as did the hugs the other three gave the flight attendant. Dean watched it all with an increasing warmth surrounding his heart, his very being, that was so alien to him that at first he didn't even know what it was. And when he eventually recognized it, he didn't quite dare to believe it.

Was he really...? Had he truly...? There was this big four letter word floating in the air just in front of him, and he still wasn't all that sure how to grasp it. How long had he known that man? Surely not long enough to... to... *fall in love*. And wasn't it a curious idea to have. Dean Winchester, in love.

Was he in love with someone he bought breakfast for? Invited into his home? Spent his weekends with? Talked to on the phone for hours? Introduced to those very few people he held so dear to his heart that he never once before had let any of his conquests meet them? That he hadn't even told those others who had shared his bed for a night or sometimes two that there were people he considered family?

No, surely Cas was nothing special, seeing as all this didn't apply to him.

And then surely Dean Winchester wasn't in love either.

Oh, who was he kidding.

He'd probably been a hopeless case the moment he first met Castiel. Naturally so - who could ever resist the charm of a handsome man with his innocent friendliness and clueless charm? Cas was what Dean had never known he was looking for. Not someone who was calculating and too self-assured in themselves; but was an honest and kind soul. Not spoiled and rotten by this world that taught so effectively to everyone that it was good to be someone, just not oneself.

Cas was just who he was. A good man with modest dreams and faith in the good things that could happen.

And now it was for Dean to prove to Castiel that what they had was another one of these good things.

+

"I'm gonna get the rest of the finger foods. Help me, Cas?"

"Of course," Castiel immediately replied and got up, following Jessica into the kitchen. But once there,

the blond woman entirely ignored the fridge that held aforementioned snacks; instead, she whirled around and faced the man behind her in a movement so quick that Castiel had to take a step back.

"Hey, Cas, now that you're family... gotta ask you a question. You know that thing with commitment we were talking about, and how it's not exactly the Winchester boys'?"

"I'm not sure I can follow you."

"Well... if there was something... something big... do you believe they'd be in for that. Either of them?"

"If you're asking about what Sam's reaction would be to such a... thing or... event, I believe I'm the wrong person to ask. As you are aware, I only met Sam this evening."

"Yes, I know, but..." Jess took a deep breath and rubbed a hand over her face, the other stemmed into her side, as if she was trying to hold onto herself. "I'd still quite like your opinion. As someone who's basically new to the family, maybe you have another insight. It's just... I'm not sure..."

"Jessica, are you pregnant?" Castiel didn't even need a verbal answer then. The woman's reaction, scrunching up her face and inclining her head, was more than enough. "I am absolutely sure that Sam will be delighted. He loves you, Jess. I'm anything but an expert on human relationships and interactions," at that, Jessica laughed lightly, but Cas didn't allow himself to let himself be distracted by it, "but it doesn't take much to see that Sam loves you very much and will be more than happy to have a family with you. Also, aren't you engaged already?"

"No, but we do have talked about marriage and agreed that it's a definite possibility."

"Then I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. Some things can't be timed."

"You're a weird muffin, Cas," the indignant squeak the flight attendant gave at that got completely ignored, "and I couldn't be happier that you're a part of our family." And before he even knew what was happening he found himself wrapped up in hug he was quite sure only monkeys were capable of - what with the clinging and all.

A slight cough made them part a few seconds later, to discover a smirking Sam who had entered the kitchen.

"So he got the JM Seal of Approval, I take it?"

"Absolutely. He's totally adopted."

"Not quite the kid I imagined us to have one day, but there you go," Sam chuckled, and patted Cas on the back.

"Yeah, about that..." Jess started, just as Cas, having recognized the cue, said, "I leave you two alone."

"What? What's going on?"

"There's something I wanted to tell you..." was what the flight attendant heard before he was out of ear shot and back in the living room, settling down next to Dean. His lover didn't even get around to ask what was up before there were joyful yells and cheers sounding from the kitchen.

"Uh... did we miss something?"

"I'm sure we'll know in a few seconds."

Castiel had barely finished his sentence when, indeed, Jess and Sam stormed back into the room, holding hands, wide smiles on their faces.

"Have you *finally* asked her, then?" Dean instantly remarked, his words not really a question, though he was gracious enough to let it at least sound like one.

"He has," Jess replied for Sam, and grinned winningly; then she bumped her hip against her new fiancée, a gesture Castiel was certain was meant to encourage the younger Winchester to speak.

Who then, with an air of nonchalance, announced, "We also gonna make you uncle."

Right then, Castiel was sure he was able to hear the penny drop. Because it reached the ground with a clearly audible 'pling' before all hell broke loose.

For the first time in his life, Cas believed he understood what family meant. And that he never again wanted to miss it.

"Hello Dean."

The by now so familiar voice, and the words that had become something that could almost be called tradition, soothed Dean's strained nerves. It was so good to have the chance to talk to Castiel, even if it was only over the phone. It was rarely enough these days, their busy schedules and his lover traveling the world keeping them apart more often than not, but for now...

"Hi Cas. How are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you, Dean. I... I was wondering when you will be home."

"Um, next Friday in the early evening, I guess, as usual. I should definitely be back before you return."

There was silence on the other end of the line, and a strange feeling settled in Dean's stomach. "Cas?"

"Oh. Okay. I will hope then there will be no delays."

"Cas, what's up? Something has happened, hasn't it? Where are you?" Another pause, then a sigh. And it hit Dean what the answer would be before the other man replied.

"My schedule changed. I'm in San Francisco now. At your apartment door, actually."

"Oh crap, I'm so sorry, Cas! I thought since you won't be home this weekend and Sam's gone as well, I'd just stay in Detroit... damn. You know, let me check if I can find a flight, then I can be home--"

"No, Dean," Castiel interrupted, almost a bit too forceful, before he continued in a softer voice, "it's okay, I have a reservation at the Seaside Inn, so I'll just stay there. You don't have to come back now. You won't get a flight before tomorrow and I will be leaving Sunday at noon again anyways."

"You don't have to stay at the hotel, that's what I gave you my keys for--"

"But I don't want to be here without you. It's all right, Dean. Yanny will be happy to see me, too."

Seconds passing in silence seemed to become a bad habit of this phone call when yet another few moments neither of them spoke. Dean kept wondering if there wasn't something he could do, any way he could meet up with Cas so he could at least see him for a few hours, but then he guessed the effort would be too great. He would do it, but he couldn't ask it of his lover who he knew liked staying in the calm and quiet of a hotel room or apartment when he wasn't working.

Lately passengers had become harder to deal with and to please; even Dean had noticed it, and he felt sympathy for Castiel who oftentimes came back exhausted from his flights with yet another group of unusually difficult flyers. Plus, intercontinental flights were of course much more demanding, what with time zone changes the aircrew had to endure, as well as moody weather that never quite fit the reports and, consequently, the clothes they packed.

It were times like these when Dean simply took Cas to bed and pleased him with his hands and mouth, which always tired him effectively enough so he fell into a deep slumber, one he wasn't risen from by outside noises or nightmares. The following mornings always awaited with reciprocation from Castiel's side, sometimes slow, drawn-out love-making that left Dean writhing and begging, sometimes passionate sex that was repeated as often as they were physically capable, and afterwards a good breakfast.

Next to just being together and talking, it had become Dean's favorite way of spending his time with

Cas.

A thought occurred to Dean then; maybe they couldn't be together right now, but that didn't mean that he couldn't at least try and relax his lover a bit.

"Cas?"

"Mhh?"

"I got an idea. You at the hotel yet?"

"No, I'm still at your apartment building."

"Okay, go over there quickly, and call me back when you've arrived."

"Dean?"

"I explain it to you then. Please, Cas?" Dean hoped that the other man wouldn't ask any more questions now. He knew how much he relied on knowing things in advance, which gave him a certain kind of security and control, but this was something he couldn't give Castiel a heads-up on, or else his lover would deny it right away; that much he knew.

"I call you in a few minutes."

"Thanks."

What followed for Dean were a torturing long twenty minutes in which he paced back and forth in the small one-room apartment he was renting in Detroit. That there wasn't a hole in the carpet when his phone finally rung again surprised him immensely.

"You there," he didn't waste any time when he picked up on the second ring.

"I am, yes."

"I want to try something, Cas. I want us to... have some fun together. Over the phone."

"Dean," Castiel said warily, a shiver in his voice, and the other man didn't need to see him to know that he was blushing. Clearly he had at least understood.

"It's all right, Cas. Just trust me, okay?"

"I always trust you. You know that." Dean had to swallow hard then, the words making a tingling feeling explode in his stomach he rather didn't give any further thought to right now; not if he wanted to go through with his plan and make it good for his lover.

"Then undress and lie down on the bed," he thus only instructed, and heard a how Cas put down the phone and then the rustling of clothes. Seconds turned into minutes and, as it seemed to Dean's impatience, hours, when he waited, and he let out a breath he hadn't even noticed he'd been holding when Castiel finally picked up the phone again.

"Okay," he said, his voice even more shaky now. Dean couldn't help but smile fondly.

"Put your phone on speaker and place it next to you. Close your eyes." Not even a word came as reply then; a humming sound was the only affirmation. Dean lowered his voice and followed his own instructions by closing his eyes so he'd be better able to imagine being with Cas. "I'm there, Cas," he spoke, slow and soft, "I'm right there with you. And when you let your hands touch your chest now, it'll be my hands caressing you." He waited another few seconds, before inquiring, in an almost-whisper, "What are my hands doing, Cas?" He heard the intake of breath, the attempt to speak, but his lover took a moment to mobilize his voice again.

"Brushing down my chest, my stomach. Like you always do."

"I love touching your body, Cas. You are so beautiful, all muscles and yet softness in just the right places. Now give your nipples a bit of attention. Remember how I always rub them gently? I'm doing it right now. I lie beside you and I tease you, just as you like it."

"Yes..." the other man rasped, an erotic sound he had heard so often in these past weeks, and wasn't

able to resist. This was about Castiel, but still he couldn't help himself when he quickly pushed down his pants and briefs, and pulled aside his already half-open shirt.

"I want you to leave one hand up there now, Cas. Leave your left hand do what I want to do so much right now, let it caress and roam your body. And your right hand you bring down between your legs. Can you do that for me, Cas?" There was a jerky sound on the other end of the line, and Dean believed it to be nodding. It should have been enough; he knew Castiel well and didn't need verbal confirmation, but he craved to hear his lover's voice. "Talk to me, Cas. Tell me you've understood."

"I do. I have. I--"

"Spread your legs a little, Cas. Allow me to touch you without hindrance." The whimper that followed Dean took as answer then, not forcing the other man to actually respond with words; he was sure he wasn't able to anymore anyways. "I'm there, Cas," he reminded gently, "and when you touch your cock now it'll be my hand; it'll be me wrapping my fingers around you. Are you hard already, Cas? Can I feel how much you like that touch?"

Another hum, accompanied by a very faint *yes*, let Dean's own arousal grow, and he stroked himself a few quick times in hopes of calming himself down a little. The plan sounded better than the result.

"I'm there, Cas. I'm there, with you, and my hand moves faster. Let your thumb brush over the head of your cock, like you know I always do. The way you enjoy so mu--"

A loud moan interrupted Dean's word, made him almost choke on air. It were those sounds that rewarded him every time he pleased Castiel even though he knew that night he wouldn't find release unless it was by his own hands. But hearing Cas, seeing him getting lost in the sensations - it was always enough.

Dean had always been someone who cared first and foremost about the pleasure of his lovers, and not his own. Because if his bed partners had fun and a good orgasm afterwards, he was assured he'd get the same.

Phone sex was a new experience, even to him. He had never tried it before, never *dared* to try it. Never had the right partner, maybe. But with Cas... His lover was vocal, and the noises he made alone enough already to bring Dean to the brink. But even without the sounds he was making, even without that wonderful voice, thick and dark with arousal, coming from the speaker of his phone, Dean realized with a start that he would have done it anyways. As long as he was able to do something good for this man he...

"Dean...?" Snapping out of his musings, Dean scrambled to get his thoughts back on track - bring himself back to that man on the other end of the line who waited for further instructions.

"I'm here, Cas. I'm not leaving. I want you to know that my hands feel you right now. My fingers trace your cock, and my thumb rubs your slit, and it slides so easily in the precome there. My other hand splays on your stomach, because I love it to feel your muscles as your body readies to come. But you have to help me, Cas. Do it for me, okay?" The breathing in his ear became heavier, pants and little moans replacing the normal, steady rhythm Dean had so often fallen asleep to recently. He knew Castiel was getting close, but he had one more thing planned. "Cas?" he asked quietly, a different tone to his voice that tried to get through to his lover. A low growl was his answer, and it had to do. "Do you have lube somewhere?" Again a sound, this time something Dean recognized as one of painful pleasure; the one he always got to hear when he took especially long to tease Cas before allowing him to come, or entering him.

Once again unable to resist his own body's demands and rubbing his palm against the head of his cock that was resting hard and heavy on his stomach, he nearly missing the mumbled, "here," telling him

that the other man had what he'd need now.

"Good. Let go of your cock, now, Cas," he ordered, and at the noise of protest he repeated firmly, "I need you to lift your hands off your body for a moment, and then I want you to put some lube on your fingers. I know you can do that." The squelching sound that followed drew a sigh of relief from Dean, even though he wasn't quite sure what he was relieved about.

"Dean, please." The words came unexpected. And they almost broke his so far iron will that kept him from tending to himself and leaving Cas to his fate. He knew that his lover needed the guidance now; he was too far gone to continue on his own, and Dean would never leave him hanging like this. But the words hit him, in places he didn't know such words were even able to reach, and Dean had to force himself to concentrate, which was not an easy feat in that moment.

Swallowing a few times to get rid of that lump in his throat, Dean hoped that his voice wouldn't leave him now as he prepared for sending Castiel across the finish line.

"If I was there with you, my one hand would now take your cock to stroke it," he paused for a moment to let it sink in that it was what he wanted Cas to do and took another moan as his go to continue, "and my other hand, Cas... my other hand would find that sweet little hole of yours, massage and press against it, hoping it gives in. Move your other hand down and feel what I do to you, Cas." Once again he lowered his voice to a whisper when he asked, "How is that? Is that good, Cas? Can you come for me now? Will you come with my hand on your cock and my fing--"

He had talked over the hoarse chanting of 'yes yes yes' that came from the other end of the line, but stopped the moment when Castiel moaned his name, drawn out and with a broken voice. And it was only then that Dean reached down and brought himself to a quick but intense climax.

For endless minutes nothing but breathing could be heard over the connection, fast and full of little gasps from both sides. Dean reveled in those sounds; in the thought that his plan had worked out and he had succeeded in exhausting Cas enough so he would hopefully fall asleep soon.

He gave his lover another few minutes, before he decided that there was one last thing he needed to do.

"Cas? You still with me, babe?"

"Mhh..."

"I need you to clean yourself up a bit. Do you have some tissues close by?" Distinct rustling and creaking told Dean that the other man was looking around possibly reaching for what he had asked him about. Not waiting for confirmation, he continued, "when you're done, get the sheets over yourself. I don't want you to get cold, now that I'm not there to warm you." His voice was gentle and he kept it low, trying to soothe Castiel. "Don't forget to hang up, love," Dean whispered at last, and tried not to think about what endearment he had just used, "have a good night, sleep well. We talk tomorrow."

"Good night, Dean," came the mumbled reply, before the line indeed went dead, and Dean was almost proud that Cas had still managed to answer.

Heaving himself from the bed after having disposed of his phone on the nightstand, he went to the bathroom to clean up. He was too tired to shower, feeling as relaxed as he had aimed to make Castiel, and barely managed to brush his teeth before he fell onto his mattress again and struggled to get under the sheets. He was asleep not even five minutes later, slipping into unconsciousness with thoughts of Cas on his mind.

It was going to be the best surprise. At least he hoped it was.

For once, boarding the plane was almost easy. True, the take-off was still made in hell, as was the landing later on, but the rest was actually quite fine. Maybe it came from his mind being so occupied with what he'd do in a short time. Who he would see in just a few hours.

When he'd received news that there had been a change of plans and he wouldn't be needed to work at the office this week, Dean hadn't hesitated even one second. How could he, with the prospect of seeing Cas, and even if it was only for a short time? By taking the first flight on this Saturday morning he made sure that he'd arrive as early as possible back in San Francisco, and there'd be many hours to spend with his lover before Sunday noon.

Now Castiel only had to be there, and hopefully not out. He hadn't wanted to call, so it'd be a surprise. When he strode into the hotel lobby Dean spared a single, cautious glance towards the reception. Even though Cas had told him that Mr. Grumpy - Yanny he believed his name was, but their first encounter had left a lasting impression - was actually a nice guy and approved very much of their relationship, he was still not so sure. He knew the personnel did their best to assure the privacy of their guests, trying to keep away any visitors that weren't announced, and as much as Dean appreciated the sentiment, he really didn't need that confrontation right now. Even if Mr. Grumpy would let him pass - and possibly even without alerting Castiel - Dean couldn't be sure about the others.

Alas, his way to the elevators was unhindered, and within not even a minute, Dean was on the eighth floor. Lucky for him Cas always stayed in the same room - the advantage of being a frequent guest - so he hadn't needed to ask his lover for the room number and thus raise suspicions, and spoil the surprise.

When he came to stand before the door that had 8-20 written in golden digits on it, he took a deep breath, willing the excitement in his belly to stop making him all giddy, before he knocked twice, and a third time after letting three seconds pass - their more or less secret sign.

Castiel's eyes were almost comically wide when he came face to face with Dean, a look of disbelief on his features for a moment, before his brain visibly caught up with the situation. And then he started to blush furiously.

"Hello, Dean," he still managed to get out, before he turned and walked back into the hotel room, leaving the door open for the other man to follow.

"Hey. Sorry for not warning you, but... turns out they actually don't need me in this week, I can work from home, so I got on the next plane and... here I am." With an anxious edge to his smile, Dean stood in the room, his arms spread, waiting for a reaction. But Castiel was still standing a few steps away from him, fidgeting, worrying the seam of his shirt like a schoolboy who had just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. And that, in turn, began to worry Dean.

"Cas? Is everything all right? Do you... is this a bad time, do you want me to--" he began to offer, half turning and pointing at the door, even as his stomach sunk.

But here a fierce and too-loud, "No!" from his lover interrupted him, and in the blink of an eye he found himself engaged in a forceful, if not bruising kiss. Dean allowed it for a few seconds, before he gently pushed the other man away.

"Woah, woah, okay, Cas, slow down. What's the matter with you?"

+

Castiel breathed heavily, his fingers digging into Dean's shoulders, as he slowly rose his head to look at

Dean.

Of course he had no idea. How could he. It wasn't as if he had told him anything last night, before they had hung up after their...

Castiel was not open when it came to sex. He preferred to keep it all private, in a locked bedroom, and best with the lights turned off. Sex was still a peculiar thing to him, as much as he enjoyed it - especially with Dean. Only with Dean. The few encounters he had had before were not even mentionable; quite the contrary. That excluded Balthazar of course, but then things with Balt had been different in so many ways.

Where his parents had been religious, and his upbringing in his childhood up to his mother Naomi's death very conservative, living with his aunt Becky had been... anything but. The lack of a father figure, as aspiring but never quite successful author Chuck decided to rather travel the country and world instead of taking care of his offspring, didn't help; nor did Castiel's growing interest in boys instead of girls, where the latter should have been 'natural' and 'right'. It all had confused him greatly, and with no one to talk about it, with no one to tell him that it was okay, as Balthazar had done many years later, he'd learnt to hide and keep quiet.

He may not have been a virgin anymore when he met Dean, but he still considered his lover as his first true sexual experience. Of course couldn't the other man know that his lack of same experience had made him shy and hesitant over the years. And that phone sex was nothing he would ever have even considered trying.

It had hit him after they had hung up last night; what they had done, and how he, Castiel, had been lying on that bed in a hotel room, one he hadn't locked or marked with the 'Do not disturb' sign, one he hadn't even drawn the curtains on, and that he had been naked and fully aroused, touching himself, pleasuring himself, under the guidance of someone who was several hundred miles away.

Even though his mind had been in the progress of shutting down for sleep, the sudden realization that somehow managed to get through to his brain had him awake again in no time - and didn't let him get rest for half the night, as tired as he ever was.

It worried him. He couldn't explain, not even to himself, why it did, but it was a fact. He had lost control, and he wasn't sure he was entirely okay with that. Though it hadn't brought any harm. No one had seen him, nor heard him, he hoped, and he had had been with his lover. Technically. Maybe next time they should use Skype or something.

But no. No, this was nothing he was keen to repeat anytime soon. Not because he hadn't enjoyed it, but... what use was pleasure if afterwards he felt guilty and embarrassed?

"Dean... last night..." Castiel began, but trailed off when he failed to think of how to say what he wanted to say. Instead he bit his lip nervously.

"It was good, wasn't it?" Dean grinned, oblivious yet, or maybe simply trying to lighten the mood, but his face fell when Cas didn't respond in kind. However, it was the flight attendant himself who felt horror befall him when his lover suddenly took a step backwards, completely breaking any physical contact between them. "Oh God... did I make you uncomfortable? Cas, no, you should have told me! You could have said no, you can always say no with me, gosh, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to..." Hadn't the situation and Dean distancing himself from Cas scared him so much, the flight attendant probably would have watched with fascination how the other man's face drained of color with every word. But when Dean, almost white as a sheet, stumbled backwards until his back hit a wall, he knew he had to do something, and fast.

"Dean, no, it's okay, everything's okay. It's just..." Carefully he approached the other man who seemed

to have relaxed a bit upon hearing Castiel's reassurance, but still watched him warily as he came closer. "It was different. I didn't..." Once again he trailed off, and groaned. He didn't know how to explain it. Hell, he didn't know *what* there was to explain.

"I *did* make you uncomfortable," Dean repeated, not a question anymore now, but a statement. The sadness, the apology in his lover's features, it didn't ease Cas' worry that a huge misunderstanding between them was to occur that could possibly cost them their relationship.

"A little bit, yes, but Dean, that has nothing to do with me not wanting it. I would have stopped you, I *could* have stopped you. But I didn't *want* to. You see, in the past, in my childhood and youth... my upbringing..." Groaning, Castiel shook his head. He needed to sort his thoughts before he was able to explain what needed to be said, just so Dean would understand and not fear a mistake on his side anymore. Carefully, he began to speak again, considering the words he used to describe the situation and what had been going on in his mind, so Dean wouldn't get it all wrong and blame himself.

By the time he was done, they were sitting on the bed, turned towards each other, and Dean was gently playing with the fingers of Castiel's left hand, caressing and massaging them as he listened intently. The flight attendant was sure that the light physical contact was meant to reassure him, to let him know that his lover was still with him. He smiled a silent thanks when, after he finished talking, Dean remained quiet for a little while longer, only lifted Cas' hand and tenderly kissed his palm.

Castiel was sure minutes had passed before the other man finally spoke.

"Whatever happens, Cas, whatever you worry about or keeps you from doing something, or enjoying something, you have to let me know, okay? I'm glad you told me this, but next time, do it right away. This is for us both to have a good time, and it's of no use when it keeps you awake half the night. I want you to feel happy, not miserable." Castiel nodded and was quick to meet Dean when he leaned forward to kiss him, exchanging a slow, loving kiss free of any rush or even passion. It was the kind of affectionate gesture he enjoyed most, maybe even more than any good lovemaking or orgasm; because it went so much deeper and kept his hope that this could be more than two people taking pleasure in each other for a limited time alive.

"Now that we don't see each other that much, we have to be open with each other. So we can make the most of the time we have," Dean added after they parted again, and Cas hummed in agreement, realizing how right the other man was. He could be honest with him, that much he knew, and he should well make use of it.

"I want to learn, though, Dean. I think I have to so we can truly enjoy our time together."

"That's not how you should think. Whatever we can offer each other will be fine. First and foremost, we have each other, and that is what counts most. Even if it doesn't involve phone sex." The last sentence was said with a wink, and once again Castiel blushed, but also smiled shyly at his lover.

"It *was* good, though. Regardless of my worries afterwards," he murmured then, referring to Dean's earlier words. The other man only chuckled.

"Well, we'll practice that one. Next time we'll only be a room apart or so. Speaking of which, we really ought to find an apartment for the two of us. One that is actually ours and you're comfortable to come back to, even if you are alone. But Cas, you know that you can always stay at my apartment, even if I'm not there, right?"

"Yes, I know, it's just... it holds too many things of you, and you alone, and it would have reminded me too much that you're not there," Castiel shrugged, and soon found himself in a tight embrace he returned by pressing one hand between Dean's shoulder blades and burying his other in his hair, something he knew his lover liked very much. And indeed was the other man's voice a very contented

rumble when he asked,
"You up for going there now that I'm with you?"
"Absolutely."

The doorbell rang just as he had hung up the phone. And really, after that conversation he wasn't in the mood for visitors. He wanted to be alone; he wanted to be *left* alone.

It was bad enough when one only saw their lover every once in a while; sometimes it took a week, sometimes two, and sometimes even more. But not being able to match their schedules for over a month?! That was torture.

Dean had always known that he wasn't one for long-distance relationships. Granted, he had never thought he'd be one for a relationship, period, but then had he learned early on that life wasn't exactly predictable, or plan-able, as much as he wanted it to. And it wasn't as if this part - the whole relationship thing, having Cas in his life - was bad. The contrary, two-hundred per cent.

Still. It was ridiculous. This wasn't even long-distance anymore. This was long-distance of-around-the-globe or something. Or in short: too far. Not having Cas around for a short time was unbearable. And he never knew if the phone calls - at least those they tried to have once a day, if not more often - made it better or worse. But the prospect of not being able to see him for a full month? it made him actually question the whole thing. As much as he hated himself for it, and his brain for having such thoughts, but what use was a relationship if the respective others barely ever saw each other?

Dean was aware that he'd have to have a talk about that with Cas, and soon. But did he really want to? Did he really want to know where this was going to lead to, also? Did he want to face to possibility that they'd have to accept they had failed at making this work, even after Dean's passionate speech about how they'd manage? And most of all, did he want to waste only one minute of their precious time together for such an unpleasant conversation?

Those questions didn't need an answer. Actually, he rather tried not to give them one, not even in his mind.

As if his mind was ever going to listen to him.

Right now, Castiel was stuck in South Africa, after their flight had been delayed for safety reasons. Something was wrong with the plane, and while Dean was all for not taking any risks, especially when it came to flying - and his lover - it meant that Cas wasn't going to be back in time before Dean had to leave for Detroit again. And it had been like this the past two weeks, just as it was about to be in the upcoming couple of.

He felt restless. He felt like someone had taken a vital part from him and put it on the other side of the globe, practically unreachable for reasons made by time, money and certain anxieties.

The doorbell rung again, more demanding this time; or at least so it seemed. In any case was it getting on his nerves, and that was exactly what he was about to delay to whoever dared to come to him now that he was in such a bad mood.

"Hey Dean, warm up your Xbox, I got the new game!"

Or maybe not.

"Hey Charlie," he greeted, feeling tired all of a sudden. His best friend was the last person he wanted to attack just because he couldn't be with Cas, and not being able to get rid of this dark cloud above his head made him resign.

Even though the redhead walked straight into his apartment without waiting for an invitation - not that she needed one - she also turned around immediately as soon as she was past him and he had closed the door, opening without preamble,

"Woah, what's up with you?"

"Nothing."

"Dean. I'm not stupid."

"I miss Cas."

"Well, he'll be back tonight, won't he?" Shaking his head, Dean trudged to his sofa and slumped down on it.

"He won't. His flight got delayed due to technical problems, and now they will probably leave South Africa not before tomorrow morning, maybe even noon, which means he won't be here before the afternoon or evening, and I can't leave any later than three pm. So - I'm not gonna be able to see him, not even for at least a few minutes, and that sucks majorly."

His friend didn't even answer. She just looked at him sympathetically and hugged him; and when she let go again, she just snagged the bag of chocolate chip cookies and the Xbox controller and pressed it into Dean's hands.

Five months. That was how long it had been going on already. How long they had to have arrange their schedules, trying their best to find times and places when they could meet, and if only for a few hours. They managed, somehow - but it was never enough. It was eating at them, a constant weight they carried, each meeting overshadowed by the knowledge that soon, too soon, they had to part again, and they didn't know with a one hundred per cent certainty whether their next planned date was going to happen.

Dean hadn't lost faith in them belonging together - because they continued to be perfect. Never running out of things to talk about, even though they called each other almost every day, being good at solving arguments quickly, if they arose at all, which was already a rare occurrence, and of course the sex was great as well.

Being apart so often though - that was anything but perfect. It meant wistful longing up to a point where it didn't make the relationship more interesting, as people around him likes to claim when they heard of his misery, and emphasized the bedroom side of things especially. Instead this was the kind of missing someone that meant when they finally saw each other, they didn't spend the time having wild sex; sometimes they just savored the minutes they were together, holding each other, sharing meals, taking walks. Sure, it also included making love, and yes, it *was* still very, very good - but when time was short, one had to find priorities, and those didn't lie in carnal needs.

"You know," Charlie, sitting next to him and powering up the game console, suddenly spoke again, "maybe you don't have the right groove yet. I don't mean that as an accusation or something. I just mean... you've never been in that kind of relationship, and from what I gather, nor has Cas. It's new to the both of you."

"I think we've managed pretty well so far," Dean defended, not quite sure what his friend wanted to tell him. He and Cas were great together - what else could they do to become even better? Was it even possible? Perhaps there was this problem of them being apart all the time due to their jobs, but really, that wasn't their fault. It wasn't as if they could just quit.

"Not saying you haven't. The couple part? You're fabulous at that, from all I've seen and you've told me. But you do that whole relationship as you both believe it has to be done, because you've learnt it like this from watching others. You're unique though. Think about what you have, and what you want,

and then try to bring those together."

Charlie was right. He had never thought he would once have a relationship. For more than thirty years, this had never been something he took into consideration with any of his affairs; not even those he saw several times and got along with really well.

Neither had he ever expected to once have someone he really *loved*, so much that he missed them to a point where it hurt. And that was something no one had taught him to deal with. Sure, he missed his brother when they were a few states apart, and he missed Charlie and Jess as well, because they were family, they were like sisters to him. But this, this thing with Cas? Entirely different. And maybe, in a way, even stronger.

Yes, their situation was unique, as Charlie had said, evidently so, since no couple he knew, or had ever met, had to live like this - apart from each other for long periods of time, sometimes so long that Dean feared one of these days he had to rely solely on his heart to recognize Cas, because his eyes had forgotten him.

The fact that there was no one he knew of who had that kind of long-distance relationship also made him wonder if that was because it just wasn't possible. Maybe, for a short time, like they had endured it five months now. But how long was this going to work, not having the person one loved close by? It was painful. It was insufferable.

It was even more because - what if this was one-sided? The intense missing, and the feelings that were behind it? They'd never talked about this. Sure, they were together, thought of themselves as a couple, but had they ever talked feelings? No. It was entirely possible that Cas was not in it for the long run. It was improbable, going by everything Dean knew about his partner, but... well, there was always a *but*, wasn't there?

If he asked his heart, he had no idea what to do. There were a lot of wrongs and no right.

If he asked his head, however, the answer was clear, as was the cause of action he had to take: Something had to change. Even if, in the end, it broke his heart.

The phone was picked up on the third ring. Unusual for someone who claimed to always have their phone close by in case 'some arrangements for the night came up on short notice, the caller shouldn't have the chance for second thoughts.' Not that Castiel was such a candidate.

"Heya, Cassie. What's up? You're making yourself scarce lately," Balt opened when he answered, sounding slightly out of breath.

"Hello, Balthazar. Is this an inconvenient time to call?"

"Nah, all fine. So to what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I wanted to ask whether you have time to meet?"

"Sure, always for you, Cassie. When and where?"

"Today?" Castiel asked hesitantly, still unwilling to seek advice. Even though he considered Balthazar a friend and someone who was most likely the best option he had, it still wasn't easy.

"Can be at the Heaven's Door around seven, I guess. That okay for you?"

"Yes, thank you. See you then."

"Later!"

Heaven's Door was the regular bar for all 8th Heaven's employees, once chosen by them. Incidentally,

it bore the right name for that group of people, which may or may not have helped the decision. But by not being far away from the airport, and having moderate prices and nice personnel, it was okay; even if it didn't have the most outstanding offers in food and drink. And it definitely was a nice meeting place.

This evening, much to Castiel's relief, it was rather empty. He nevertheless chose a table in one of the corners, where new arrivals wouldn't spot them right away. He needed to have that conversation with Balthazar, and he needed it have it alone.

Just as Cas was five minutes early, Balt was, as usual, ten minutes late, which gave the younger flight attendant the chance to think through what he needed to bring up. Knowing full well that it would be gone again by then anyways. But there were things weighing on him, and he hoped that the self-proclaimed expert on 'all things sex and romance' held at least the idea of an answer.

Showed how desperate he was, Castiel realized, but decided to ignore it.

When Balthazar entered Heaven's Door, Cas found himself spotted quickly. After a detour to the bar, at which Balt obviously ordered red wine, he approached his friend's table.

"Now. What's the big drama?" he didn't waste time with niceties as he fell into a chair.

"No big drama, just..."

"It's Dean." At Castiel's short hum, Balthazar added, "Trouble in paradise?"

"No. No, that's not it, it's just... well, yes, sort of. It's complicated."

"Isn't it always. I thought it was all good and happy and so on with you two."

"It was. It *is*. We are happy. We can talk for hours and hours and it never gets boring, and we... well, you know, we're good together..."

"In bed."

"Yes," Castiel growled, knowing just as well as the other man that there hadn't been the necessity to say it out loud. And make him blush. "Anyways. His family likes me, and I like them. I want that, I really do, Balthazar. I just don't know how we're supposed to make this work any longer. We're rarely ever see each other, and if we do, it's oftentimes only for a few hours, sometimes a day, and that's it. I mean, every second is great, but... it's not enough. And I wonder how long this can go on like this. I mean, I... I don't even know... I mean, obviously there's something, but we have never..."

"You like him."

"Yes."

"As in, *really* like him."

"Yes..."

"More in the 'that other word with an I' like-category."

Frowning, Castiel warned, "Balthazar..." but the man in question dismissed it with a hand wave.

"Taking a stab in the dark here, but you - in all your talking you do, according to what you've told me - you have never talked about *it*. Am I right?"

"I'm sure you don't need an answer to that."

"Not really, no. For the why, however... I'd quite like one to that."

Shrugging and shaking his head, Cas remained quiet for a short while, sorting his thoughts. There wasn't actually anything to say to that. They'd never talked about it. End of story. He liked what they had. And he knew that Dean was - had been - more of a one night stand, no-feelings-involved kind of guy. What if he told the truth - said those words that so often changed so much, while at other times they were simple confirmation for something that had always been clear anyways - and it did change something? And not for the better, because while they were so good together, Dean still saw them as

nothing more than, as it was called these days, friends with benefits? Of course, he had introduced him to his family and all, but was that really indication for anything?

Castiel didn't know. And how could he. If he wanted to be sure, he had to tell the truth. And ask.

Both those things, however, had the potential to end something he didn't want to lose. No matter how hard it was to cope with not seeing each other for weeks on end, being so far apart most of the time, practically not really having a relationship in a classical sense. So they were not 'classical' either, but that didn't mean that a little bit of that standard mainstream normality that was usually associated with relationships shouldn't apply to them, too.

"Cassie?"

Balthazar's - surprisingly gentle - voice pulled him from his thoughts. Right, a reply. If only he had one.

"I don't know. There was never an opportunity, I guess." His friend's raised eyebrow told whole tales of how much Balt did *not* believe what Cas was saying. "All right. I cannot be sure if Dean returns my feelings for him. I know he likes me, but... Love is a big word. What if I scare him away with it?"

"Then he'll be gone and you'll find someone who wants and deserves you loving them. And loves you back." When Castiel failed to answer once again, Balthazar sighed and continued, "Okay, different question. What do you want?"

"Dean. This relationship with him. More time with him. I just don't know if I can continue like that. If we can."

"Have you at least talked to Dean about *that*?" Castiel pulled a face at that, and he was aware that Balthazar didn't require a verbal answer anymore then, so he saved the energy for the lecture he was sure going to get now.

It never came. Save for a mumbled, "of course, what was I thinking," his friend just sighed and took another sip of his wine, all the while watching Cas intently over the rim of his glass. And Castiel knew that look. The one that indicated Balthazar was about to say something he wouldn't like.

"If you can't talk, or won't, or whatever, make a decision, Cassie. One of you has to," Balthazar stated matter-of-factly. Castiel was almost afraid to ask - and he knew the answer already.

"And what decision do you suggest I should make?" There was no pause after that. They both knew the answer - and unsurprisingly, Balt was not shy to put it into words.

"The one to end it."

"Hey babe, you're crazy, you know that?" There was a moment of silence on the other end of the line, and Dean believed it was because of some delay. Way to the satellite and back took its time or something. However, when Castiel answered, the sound was as clear as if he was right next door. Wondrous technology.

"Hello Dean. Why?"

"Because you're calling from Australia. On your mobile. Do you know how expensive that is?!"

"I just wanted to hear your voice. I miss you."

"I miss you, too." Another moment of silence occurred, and Dean realized that it must have been Cas taking his time with answering, and not some technical reason. Thus instead of waiting - and straining his lover's phone bill - he continued, "So when are you going to be home?"

"I... actually I..."

"You're gonna come back later than planned, right? Like that time when you were in South Africa?"

"No, in fact I'm--"

"I hate waiting," Dean murmured, interrupting Castiel. "I wish you were here with me. And on my flights."

"Dean..." The man didn't listen, though. He rambled on, as if a damn was broken.

"But that's unfair. And selfish. This is your dream job. Who am I to expect you to be here with me when you can be out there, seeing the world, and do what you love. I'm sorry, Cas, this is stupid of me. I should probably hang up before I make even more of an idiot--" The door bell ringing made Dean halt in his words, and confused he looked up. It was ten in the evening, who the hell could that be?

"Cas, give me a sec, there's someone at the door." While the phone was still pressed to his ear, he didn't notice that there came no reply from the other end, too focused on his late-night visitor.

Replies and phones became unimportant the moment he opened the door.

"Cas," he breathed, his voice gone all of a sudden when it got through to his brain who the opening door revealed.

"Hello Dean." The older Winchester couldn't help himself then - he laughed. He laughed and pulled Castiel into his arms and held him so fast that the other man actually let out a small noise of protest.

"You're here! Why are you here? Did the flight get cancelled? Did they change your flight plan? How long will you stay? What have you--"

"Dean!" When Cas said his name this time, the other man snapped his mouth shut. And was immediately filled with worry. There was fear and sadness in his lover's eyes, but also relief, and Dean really didn't want to think about what that meant. Though he was certain it could only mean one thing: Cas had made a decision.

This was it. This was the moment it all came to an end. How had they now managed to fight for it, as he had once promised Cas all those months ago? He had been so certain they could make it work. Why was it so hard? And why didn't he just give up what was keeping him from the one thing, the one person, he really wanted?

Now it was too late. He couldn't just announce he'd give up his work, stay at home, get a less demanding job, but at least be there whenever his partner came back. It would make him make look desperate, and if he knew one thing, then that desperation and, consequently, the dependence behind it, was even more of a death sentence for a relationship, any kind really, than being apart all the time.

With a growing lump in his throat and a stomach continuously dropping Dean watched how Castiel took a deep breath, surely having to work up the courage to say what he wanted to tell him. Well, at least he wasn't unaffected by it, which meant that Dean did have a place in Cas' heart.

"I quit."

And there it was. The brick that slammed into Dean. A whole brick wall, actually. Stumbling back, he let Cas enter the apartment, though he didn't pay much attention to what his lover did as he quickly sought something to sit down on. Cas quit. He ended it. He was done with...

It was only then that he realized just what his lover had actually said. Cas quit. But one didn't quit a relationship, did they? One ended it, or left, or both agreed that it didn't work out anymore. But quit? One quit a job. So had he heard that right? Was Cas seriously ending his employment just because... well, for them? But... he couldn't! He had waited so long for that, and Dean... now he would throw that way just for Dean? No, he couldn't allow that. He'd go and beg Cas' boss to take him back. Yes, that's what he would do; what he had to. He owed that to his lover.

"Dean?"

"You quit."

"Yes, I--" But Dean didn't want answers to questions he already knew the same to. He just needed to sum it up for himself, to be sure he truly understood what he had just heard.

"You quit."

"I handed my letter of resignation to my boss this morning."

"You quit the job you've wanted for so long, you've always hoped for."

"As I said--" It was his lover's sharp headshake more than his following verbal response that made Castiel stop midsentence then.

"No, Cas. No! I can't ask you to give that up for me. It's your dream!"

"You're not asking me, Dean. I'm doing that because I want to."

"How can you want to... to... throw away something you've been working for and dreaming of so long?!"

"There are things that are more important now." Jumping up, Dean began to pace the room then, making Castiel take a step back in what the other man recognized as alarm, and for a moment he hated himself that he didn't react to it. But he couldn't right now. He just couldn't.

"What in the name of... whatever can be more important than your future?!"

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The question Dean asked him was the one he had wondered about as well - in the beginning, when he had first started to think about quitting after his conversation with Balthazar. But the answer had come so naturally to him, without almost any consideration, and without doubt.

"You, Dean!" the flight attendant shouted, recoiling instantly when he realized the, for his standards, violent reaction. Calmer, he continued, "I want you. I want to be with you. Look at us. It's hurting us, to be apart all the time, to not be able to arrange our schedules, to miss so many of our dates because something has come up! Something will always come up. Something will always keep us apart as long as we carry on like this. I don't want that anymore."

"But this is your career! I told you we'd make it work. Maybe we just have to try harder. Need a new strategy. But you can't just let it all go now. One day you will hate me because you gave up something you always wanted for someone like me." Cas didn't answer right away; he simply shook his head, staring at Dean with sadness in his eyes.

When he eventually spoke again, it was with a quiet voice.

"I don't understand why you have to think so little of you, Dean. You're worth so much more than that. I will never hate you. I've been on this Earth for three and a half decades and never did I feel so sure about anything. Not even about my career choice, despite my love for flying. I love you, Dean, and nothing else matters. I'm not an impulsive person, I think things through. You know that. And I've thought long about that decision. It is the right one."

When he was finished, Castiel felt as if a huge weight had been lifted off him. It felt good to just say it, to put into words what he had been carrying with him for months. The depth of his feelings for Dean had only grown with every day, every time they saw each other, until he realized that he didn't want to waste that chance, however small it may ever be. In his thirty-odd years, Castiel had never loved, never felt the way he felt for Dean now. How could he ever let that go without giving it every chance it could get? Castiel wasn't a brave man, by any standards; most of his life he'd gone for the safe way, the one he knew he wouldn't risk too much on. He could have been a pilot, as it had always been his dream, but flight attendant had been the safer option. He could have worked harder and risked more, gotten into intercontinental flights a lot sooner, but he rather had a secure job than what he had

always wanted.

But now? Now what he wanted, who he wanted, was right there. And if there was something Castiel didn't want, it was to be alone. He was not good when it came to relationships of any kind, and he had never even dared to think about, much less hoped for finding someone one day. And definitely not someone like Dean. Even if it didn't work out in the end - which he doubted, for some reason - he rather had that now, than regret his whole life to have not even tried it.

"You love me?"

"I..." Cas blanched. Of all the things he had said, this was what his lover picked. And he hadn't even meant to tell Dean that. Not yet anyways. He knew those were big words, meaningful words, and they held more weight than any declaration that he wanted them to be together and make their relationship work could ever had. He had planned on taking his time saying those words out loud, and find the right moment. Maybe he had been naive - maybe there was no right moment for this. But surely there were wrong ones, and this applied to all those times when he wasn't yet sure it wouldn't make the other man turn and run. As firm as he was in his decision, he certainly didn't want it all to end just yet, if it had to end at some point.

But then, Dean was still here, wasn't he?

"Yes. I love you, Dean."

"That's... that's good. I guess."

"You... guess?"

"Yeah, because..." Coughing slightly, Dean took a step closer to Castiel, taking great interest in the floor for a moment, before he looked up again, straight into Cas' eyes. "Because I love you, too."

"Oh."

"Oh?!"

"Oh. It's... unexpected? I didn't think you... you know... returned my feelings." Dean snorted.

"Same here, babe." He grinned, then, wrapping his arms around Cas. "And I thought you were here to tell me that you wanted to end our relationship."

Squinting at Dean in irritation, he wondered, "Why would I ever want to do that?" and found his partner looking at him with a wide-eyed look that told him that apparently neither of them wasn't all that sure about the answer. Even if before, they might have known.

"Well... because we were apart so much and I would never have expected you to quit your job for us, for me, so... dunno."

"I admit I worried about the same." And wasn't that enough to make Dean laugh.

"We're a couple of dumbasses."

"'In love' should be the preferable expression. Less dumb, less ass."

"Still a couple, though," Dean whispered before meeting his lover's lips in a kiss, stealing whatever reply he wanted to give then off his tongue. "Does that mean you're jobless now?"

"No," Castiel smiled. He waited for Dean's confused frown, indulging in that expression he adored so much, before he explained, "I'll return to 8th Heaven and work with my old crew. Which is actually quite nice, because I missed Gabriel and Balthazar."

"Really?"

"Really." Another kiss was exchanged, slow and loving, soothing the little bit of grumpiness Cas sensed about Dean. His following words did the rest. "But not as much - never as much - as I have and ever will miss you."

"Good."

» Epilog «

"Cas?! I can't find the passport, have you seen it?"

"I thought you had already put it in your hand luggage?" came the muffled reply from the bathroom, and Dean smiled when he heard water splashing and then a high-pitched, happy squeal.

"Mine yes, but not Mary's," he gave back, eventually arriving at the bathroom door and carefully peaking in, a fond expression on his face as he watched his partner and their little seven month old baby girl they had adopted a few weeks ago.

Sitting in the bathtub, Castiel carefully bounced Mary on his knees, and then laid her against his bent legs, holding her with his hands wrapped securely around her as she stemmed her tiny feet against his stomach. Water splashed when she struggled a little, and the jumping droplets fascinated and excited her even more. Mary loved water, that much Dean and Castiel had already found out about their daughter.

She also loved Dean's cooking and singing, and Cas reading stories to her; she got excited whenever Uncle Sam played airplane with her or had her in his arms in general, because it allowed her to see so much more than when she was with either of her fathers. She enjoyed cuddling with Aunty Jess and was always quick to fall asleep when Dean's sister-in-law carried her around, and the toys and colorful pictures Aunty Charlie showed to her always made her look at them with wide eyes and every now and then a mouth formed into an engrossed 'O.'

But mostly, she was a happy baby because she had a family that loved and adored her. And spoiled her.

The decision to take in a new family member, provide home to a little being that didn't have a proper one and give it warmth and love all the while giving themselves what was cream on top of their happiness Dean and Castiel had found with each other had been easily made. The adoption process had been an a little bit nerve-wrecking one, but it had only affirmed both men in their choice, even more so when they were rewarded in ways they could never have hoped for. Their daughter was the light of their life, adding loads to the joy they already felt by just being together.

Things had changed for them; and not only because of Mary. Arrangements had been made early on so they would see each other more often than only on weekends and on flights twice a week.

It had taken some effort and negotiation to convince Dean's boss that he just as well could do his work in his company's office in San Francisco, and that staying in Detroit was unnecessary, unless it was for short business trips that now happened once or twice a month and didn't last longer than three days at a time.

Their plan to adopt a baby had worked in their favor, also. Dean's boss Jody Mills, a woman who was as strict and fierce as she was fair and kind, had been delighted to hear of their family plans, having taken a fancy to Cas the first time she had met him, and supported their relationship ever since. Under the promise that the couple would visit her with their new family addition soon, she signed off the papers that allowed Dean to give up his Detroit apartment and get comfortable at his new desk in Palo Alto.

They had never thought it possible, but adopting little Mary proved almost even easier than arranging with their jobs and bosses. Both Cas and Dean were entirely unprepared, as hard as they had worked

on making their home ready for the baby, when they received word that soon enough, they'd be fathers to the six-months-old girl.

With a little help from all sides and supported by what both men had saved already, they had even been able to buy a small house just outside of San Francisco; one that was perfect for their little family, and had a garden where Mary and her cousin, Sam's and Jess' baby boy Kevin, ten months himself, could have carefree playtimes.

"Check the right desk drawer, if we haven't packed the passport already, it'll be there."

Dean did as Cas suggested, checking the work table in their little office. There were moments when Dean stopped and actually wondered if it was odd how much they shared - everything they had, everything they did, was a joint venture. He already had people warn him that sooner or later, they'd get tired of each other, and Cas had similarly been told to be careful; but the truth was, they were just making up for all the time they'd lost when they were together and never saw each other. Plus, it worked. There were moments when Dean wondered how exactly it did, seeing as only a little over two years ago, he had still been a bachelor who loved his solitude and freedom.

Now he was a father and, to some extent, a husband - a 24/7 job that required full commitment, no matter what he wanted or was in the mood for. Lucky for him, there was nothing more he wanted than to be with his family, with Cas and with Mary, as much and as often as possible. So nothing about that closeness they shared was worrisome to him, contrary to what some people seemed to try and make him believe.

And what did they know, anyway.

Opening the desk drawer Cas had indicated, he found what he was looking for right away, the passport lying atop some other papers. When he snatched it, it wasn't his intention to take a closer look on what lay under it, and if for time reasons only, but something caught his eye: the hard-to-miss headline on a webpage printout that said in big letters 'Preparations and legal proceedings for your wedding.'

Dean's jaw definitely took a dive at what he saw. Wedding? Now that was new.

It was also something - the involuntary discovery as well as the topic itself - he wasn't going to keep quiet about. They had, after all, agreed on talking about things that might cause misunderstandings.

"Found it," he announced when he returned to the bathroom, where Castiel meanwhile had gotten out of the tub and was just in the progress of wrapping Mary into a fluffy towel, which was rewarded by the little girl with a happy smile.

His partner though was still stark naked, a distraction that almost made him forget what else he had wanted to say when he had come back from the study. Almost.

"Was it in the drawer?"

"Yep. There was also something else." At Cas' quick side glance that included a questioning frown, he continued, "Marriage?"

"Uh... marriage. I take it you saw..."

"They were in your drawer," he said, his voice apologetic, "Hard to miss. Sorry, babe."

"No, it's fine. I... I wanted to talk to you about it, actually." Castiel coughed slightly, and blushed when he continued, "I have gotten a bit of information on the whole topic. Thought we might be able to see if we agree on its usefulness."

"How romantic," Dean remarked, but there was no malice in his tone, just amusement. By now he knew his lover well enough to know he would not get such words wrong, words anyone else might just have taken as hurtful.

"You know what I mean."

"Of course I do."

"So... do you think we can talk about it during our holiday?"

Dean hummed in agreement. "Want me to fetch the papers as well?"

"No, it's all right, I know what they say." There was a sneaky little smile on Cas' face which told whole tales to his partner - who found himself enjoying it immensely. It was that side to Castiel no one else got to see; the one that showed that beneath all that innocence and, oftentimes, obliviousness, he was still a man who was aware of the finer details of human interaction, even if he didn't make use of it often. And that was huge fun.

"I go get our stuff, okay? Mary's car seat is in the nursery. I also put out her clothes."

"Thanks, Dean."

"Oh, and for the record, Cas?"

"Mhh?"

"I think a wedding will be very useful."

An hour later saw them bring their suitcases, bags and little Mary, bathed, dressed into her favorite jumper and snuggled into her car seat, to the front door. With a good fifteen minutes still in hand, they were ready to go - on their first real holiday as a family, and only their third one since they'd become a couple.

"I'm really looking forward to that trip," Cas said, a sigh in his voice as he repeated the words for probably the fifth time that morning. Dean only chuckled, rolling his eyes good-naturedly.

"No, really? Who would have thought," he couldn't help but tease the other man, taking the now empty coffee cups they'd just had and rinsing them out.

"I can't begin to tell you how much I'm going to enjoy that for once, I'm not responsible for any passengers on the plane, or tourists around me. I'll just be one of them. And I swear I'm going to frequent that spa area with its variety on massages very often. I think that's going to be the best thing about that resort."

"You what's also great about the place?"

"A lot. But what do you mean?"

"They offer childcare services."

"You want to give Mary away?!" If the sheer horror in Cas' face hadn't been so heartwarming, Dean might have laughed. Instead, he smiled fondly and wrapped his arms around his partner, gently nuzzling his cheek with his nose.

"Just for a little while. I hate to entrust our baby girl with someone else, too, but we haven't had a bit, you know... us-time in a while. I miss you." He didn't give Cas the chance to reply; he simply caught his lips in a kiss that found quick approval and a passionate response; one that left them soon without their shirts and threatened to make them lose their pants, too. That was, until a cooing sound interrupted them.

"Case in point," Dean groaned, letting his forehead rest against Cas' for a moment, before he detached himself unwillingly and snatched his shirt from the ground, struggling to get into it while walking over into the living room and the portable cot Mary was lying in and playing with the mobile hanging from the handle. She squealed happily when she saw her dad.

"Hey sweetheart, what's up? You really don't want your dads to get laid, huh?"

"Dean!" Castiel immediately protested, having followed his lover into the room.

"Come on, Cas, it's not like she understands a single word of what I am saying."

"I wouldn't be so sure." And indeed, much to Dean's confusion, the baby girl looked at both her fathers with huge, questioning eyes. It was a little staring contest that ensued, one which seemed to have Mary waiting for an explanation - or at least that's the strange feeling that befell Dean. She couldn't possibly... Nah, it was stupid.

Shaking his head, he grabbed the car seat and his suitcase, announcing, "We're going to be late for our flight," before he headed out through the door leading to the garage. "I'll secure her in, lock up, will ya?" And with that, he was gone.

With a sigh Castiel picked up his own suitcase and the baby bag, and took another look around. It was going to be the first time he left home and went to an airport not to work, but to find a temporary new home, rest and relaxation - with those he loved most close by.

Those who had shown him that he didn't need to fly in an airplane to spread his wings and feel free. Because sometimes the only wings you needed was the weightlessness that the feeling of being happy and loved brought into your life.

FIN