

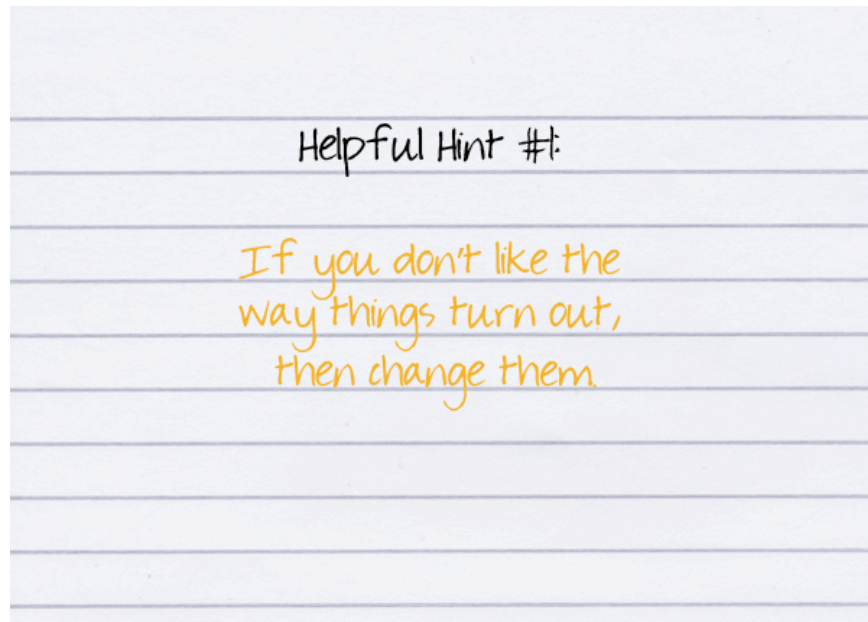


Rating: PG-13 possibly light R ~ **Word Count:** 35,806

Warning: Wincest, sacrilegious elements, language, gory mentions

Plot: The Apocalypse is lost. Dean said yes to Michael. And they still got their asses handed to them on a silver platter. Chaos had been unleashed. Demons are dancing over the dead angels. So it's up to Team Free Will (Sam Winchester-ex demon blood junkie, Castiel-Angel of Thursday and Gabriel Archangel/ex-Trickster/full time pain in the ass) to start Plan B, End Game, the Last Hope We Have For The World To Not End. The Plan is rather simple. Travel back in time to when Sam was on the road to Stanford, have Sam merge with his past self, and rewrite history (in true snarky/kick ass style) As for Dean? Well he remembers nothing of the future and what is (hopefully not) to come. Worse for Sam is that he doesn't remember their relationship. Meaning that ontop of the whole saving the world gig, Sam Winchester has to seduce his brother for the second time.

Hint One



Dean: *What are we going to tell them?*

Sam: *The truth?*

Dean: *What? That their sons are back from the future to save them from an angel that's gone terminator? Come on those movies haven't even been made yet. -The Song Remains The Same*

To: erickripke@cwpublishing.org

From: cshirley777@zmail.com

Subject: New Story

Eric-

Here's a good question for you. If you had the chance to do anything over again would you? Save a life of a loved one? Stop some sort of disaster from happening? Or to just tell someone that you know you are never going to see again how much you care about them?

If you could have a second chance at anything in your life...would you take it? Take it and run with it? Live your life better the second time around? You get a chance to rewrite the story of your life, then you better fucking take it. There are things that I wish that I had not done - mainly felonious acts with person or persons unknown. Sorry I'm probably a little drunk while I'm typing this out.

The script of your life has been written, but even the best masterpieces needed rewrites first. You think Shakespeare thought up his brilliant plays the first go around? If you do then you are totally dropping acid.

(And Willy Boy totally was. Have you read The Tempest? No one can think up Ariel and not be stoned.)

But this isn't about our old friend Will Shakespeare and his possible drug habit, although it's really fun arguing with you over this.

No. This is about second chances and rewrites.

See sometimes the story has to be rewritten. Bad things have to be yanked out. Oddly written parts have to be corrected. People that will hurt others later on can be completely yanked out of the equation. The hero doesn't have to die in the end. Deals can be broken. Journeys to the abyss can be rewound. Demons can be killed, and angels don't have to fight. The pretty blonde with the soulful dark eyes doesn't have to be pinned to the ceiling to burst into flames. The father and older brother don't have to journey to Hell in order to save the lives of family.

...Metaphorically speaking, of course.

See there are two versions of the same story warring it out in my head. I know, Eric. But these stories are fucking there, and I'm itching to write them out. I cannot drown out these images in the bottle anymore.

The first version is the original. It's filled with pain, and suffering, and death, and self-sacrifice and loneliness. It's the kind of story that will leave you dazed and saddened at the end of it. It's a tale of two brothers against the world. And the world is just as against them as it tries to pit them against each other. They are closer than even most married couples, and their love for each other is as deep and wide as the ocean. Their love for each other is simultaneously their greatest strength and their greatest weakness. They would each do anything for the other, even if that means going to Hell, or starting the Apocalypse. But they are filled with pain, and the weight of the world rests on their shoulders. They're scared, and they drift apart. And it's so fucking sad to see.

The original ended with the world burning. One brother lay dead. The other went mad with grief and handed over his body and soul to Lucifer himself.

I know, Eric, it's too fucking sad and hopeless. It's bleak, and it will make you sleep with the lights on for days after reading it. But like I said, there's a second version in my head as well.

I love rewrites. No matter how much I bitch you out about making me do them, it gives me a chance to work with the parts that I hate. But yeah the rewrite, I think that you're gonna like this.

So the other brother (the one who gave himself up to Lucifer in the original) decided to change that. He has a plan and guts. He knows how to fix it. He decides to rewrite the past. It's like fucking 'Back to the Future' but with angels, demons, and a whole host of supernatural beasts, instead of Marty McFly almost taking his Mama out to the prom.

This one is different. It's filled with redemption, and sadness and angst. But the bad stuff is outweighed by the good. There's happiness, and hope, and love, and friendship and courage. It's a journey, a quest, a love story and about finding family all over again. Personally I'm pretty excited about this one.

And this is the one that I sent into you.

So tell me what you think, Eric. I feel like this is a winner

Plus it gets you off my back about new stories right?

-Chuck

Dean: I can't do this alone.

Sam: Yes, you can.

Dean: (looks down and away) Yeah, Well... I don't want to.-Pilot

Silence overtook the battlefield. The stench of burnt flesh, rotting corpses, and sulfur permeated the air. The sky was darkened by a thick cover of black smoke. Blood ran like rivers as the fighting stopped. The

once green grass was burnt and dead. Piles of bodies stretched for miles. The pitiful moans of the dying reached the ears of those who wished they were among them.

The Apocalypse was over. A side had won.

And it was not the one that people hoped would win.

The Archangel Michael lay broken, bloodied on the ground with his eyes wide open. The foggiest of death had settled over once bright green eyes. Dean Winchester's neck was snapped, and a sword of fire stuck out from his chest.

Lucifer had won. Evil had conquered all.

The demons began to celebrate with unearthly howls and cackling laughter. Black eyes watched jeeringly at those foolish enough to fight them. Seas began to boil and turn red. Mountains collapsed onto themselves. Chaos was unleashed. Famine, War, Pestilence, and Death rode across the globe to bring the rest of the world to its knees. The world was ending. And it was going out in the biggest, bloodiest, and most horrible way ever.

Sam Winchester fell to his knees. Blood, mud, and guts splattered up over his face and clothes. One thought ran through his head. It was not about the world ending. It was not about how the angels had lost. It was not about how he now knelt amongst corpses and demons. Nor was it about Lucifer's laughter floating over like the wind in a hurricane. It wasn't how he could almost hear the Devil say that it was too bad that he hadn't said yes, because it didn't have to end like this. It didn't have to end in blood and fire and death all around him. The world could have just eased away, under its own rage and imperfections.

No, Sam Winchester didn't think of that at all.

His thoughts were only about one thing: Dean

Dean was dead.

Dean said yes, and he still died.

Dean had lost.

DeanwasdeadandgoneDeanwasdeadandgoneDeanwasdeadandgoneDeanwasdeadandgon

And no deal could be made to bring his brother...his lover...back to him.

Sam wanted to cry for what he had lost in Dean: a best friend, a brother, a lover, a confidant... He wanted to yell and scream until his throat was raw and bloody. He wanted to curse out Michael, the angels, God (if he was still listening.) He wanted to kill as many demons as he could, until he was covered in their blood. Most of all, he just wanted to stop this rage that consumed him, filled him with fire and fight if left burning long enough.

Sam was *tired*. He was done. He just wanted to die and join his brother.

Although he wasn't sure that Heaven was going to let him in at this point. He was 'the boy with the demon blood' after all. Even with all his apologies and regret, there was no way the Pearly Gates were opening for him. It wasn't the time for pondering that, even if he really wanted to, he couldn't die...he'd promised Dean that he wouldn't.

Despite the fact that he knew how easy it would be. He could just stroll up to a demon, weaponless, and be killed. Or how he could press the gun to his temple and pull the trigger. He was just as sure with a knife – he could ram it through his stomach. But these thoughts wouldn't help. He could never break a promise to his brother.

It didn't matter what he wanted. A plan had been set by Team Free Will. Now it was time to act on it. Sam sighed and stood. He used his shirt sleeve to wipe some of the stuff from his face. Around him people were dropping like flies. With purpose, Sam strode to the Impala. She was still standing, even with all the chaos surrounding her. It was odd that, even with all the demons killing humans and darkness overtaking the Earth; he wasn't getting hurt. He just chalked it up to Lucifer holding out the hope that his only viable host would finally say yes. That guy was on crack if he thought that was going to happen.

He heard the familiar rush of wings as he stood at the car. He ran his hands over her, reverently, feeling her cold metal just as sure as anything he had ever known in his life.

"Gabe? Cas?" asked Sam tentatively to the air. He didn't have to. He knew that they were there.

The beating of wings had gotten stronger and louder. He turned and saw the chosen angels. They were alive but a little worse for wear. There was a huge hole in Castiel's shirt, and blood was splattered across his trench coat. Gabriel's shirt was in tatters, and there was a long smear of blood on his cheek. The archangel wiped it off with his thumb and flicked it to the ground. Castiel looked as if he'd just lost his best friend (which actually he had). Gabriel's face had lost all of its normal mischief.

The tallest, and only human, of the three wrung his hands together silently. He shut his eyes and said

"It's time for Plan B.

Gabe's mouth twitched upward in a gentle smile. Castiel nodded with his blue eyes serious and dark. It was time to save the world.

Fuck the world, Sam just wanted to save *Dean*. Sure some would say that this was the attitude that had got him in the mess that he was in, in the first place. But he was older, wiser, and determined not to unleash Hell on Earth this time. Hopefully if all went well then he was taking Dean to an island in the Bahamas, renting a shack, and not leaving until he'd had sex with his brother at least twenty five times. He could feel the sun on his skin, the white sand between his fingers, and the callused hands of Dean around him now. It was good to have a goal.

Let it be said that Sam Winchester was very good at working toward a goal. He glanced at the angels and nodded. This next part was just going to be *weird*.

Sam felt two sets of fingers press against his forehead.

Suddenly he was yanked from the stench of death and the horror of losing his lover. He could feel himself pulled back, drifting through time and space. He heard the beating of wings all around him and kept his eyes shut tight. He just hoped that he landed at the right moment. Everything had to be precise. It had to go right.

The world *depended* on it.

Dean depended on it more.

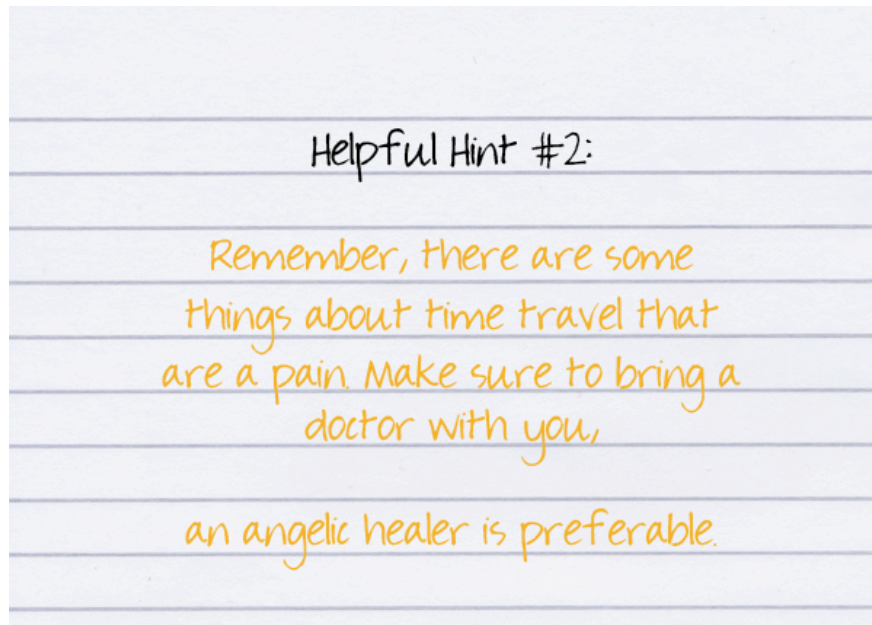
If all went right then his brother would never go to Hell. If all went right then these memories would be part of some horrible nightmare.

If all went right then he could see their little shack on the beach right now.

Sam believed in second chances.

He just prayed that this went better the second time around.

Hint Two



"I was just going to college. It was dad who said that if I was gonna go I should stay gone, and that's what I'm doing."-Sam Pilot

Eighteen year old Sam Winchester trekked across the abandoned highway toward the Maxwell County Bus Station. It was a two mile walk, and the teenager could have run it in his sleep. However, he needed time to process what had just happened. He could feel the raw anger coursing through his veins. His father's last words were echoing through his head like a chant.

"If you walk out that door, then don't bother coming back," said John Winchester with dark eyes.

Sam spared a glance at his brother. Dean was staring at him - a hurt and wounded expression coloring his face before he turned away. The teenager wondered if this is what real true heartbreak felt like. Of course it was mixed with pure anger. His blood felt as if it was burning through his veins. He thought that he was going to explode from the anger and rejection of his family - just for going to college. At the same time though, it felt like his heart had been shattered into a million pieces - broken like fine crystal.

Sam was still angry. But he had this crazy thought that his dad would have been proud of him. A lawyer would be incredibly useful in a family like theirs. Hell! Dean had been arrested twice this last year alone. Sam didn't even want to think about how many times they'd skipped town, because his dad had caught the attention of the local cops. Sam had been surrounded by the supernatural so long that he was curious about the other side. The non-magical world of 'normal' seemed as exciting to Sam as fairytales were to young children. He wanted to know what it would be like to stay in the same place, to have friends that he wouldn't have to leave in a couple weeks.

His Dad was once part of the club. Even Dean remembered what normal was like. But for Sam...hunting was all he had ever known. He just wanted something for contrast. Even if it was mundane and boring, he wanted to know what it would be like to be grounded for once in his life.

He let a string of curses spill out of his mouth and kicked a rather large stone. It flew a good distance before skittering across the hot asphalt. He tried to clamp down on his anger.

"Nice kick," said a deep voice. Sam froze cursing himself for not noticing the other, taller shadow behind him. Slowly turning, Sam bit back a gasp.

He stood face to face (well alright face to chin) with...himself, who was see through.

He barely noticed himself passing out into his own surprisingly solid arms. Because this? This was a whole new level of weird - even for a Winchester.

"Listen, you just want to just get this over with, huh, cause I really can't stand the monologuing."
-Dean Devil's Trap

Dean was the one who came up with The Plan. It was one of those rare flashes of true, absolute genius - the kind that people only seem to get once in a lifetime. The idea for The Plan had been so obvious that they couldn't see it...

Lucky for them, Dean had an unhealthy addiction to this sort of stuff. Movies with time travel had always caught his eye. So after experiencing it, three times by then, he wanted to know more about it.

They were in some crappy motel room. Exactly the same as every other crappy motel room that they had practically spent their entire lives in. Sam was checking for the latest news in apocalyptic disasters. Castiel was reading some ancient tome that looked as if it was new when Cleopatra was still young and hot. Gabriel, who had been with them two months at that point, was eating bon-bons and searching for things with glowing rocks (At this point in time Sam had learned to just go with it, because Gabriel always had good information).

"Cas?" asked Dean looking up from the *Married...With Children* marathon on the television. The sound of one of their actual voices had made Sam jump, because he was finding his rhythm amongst the drone of the television, the clunking sounds of the rocks, and the soft rustle of turning pages.

"Yes, Dean?" asked the angel, barely looking up from the text. He flipped another page.

"What would happen if we time traveled back to when I was alive? Hypothetically speaking of course."

"Why would you want to know that?" asked Castiel with a confused expression on his face.

"Watched the Terminator movies again, Dean?" asked Sam, glancing up from his computer.

"Oh you know it! Sarah Conner is my kind of woman," said Dean with a wicked smile and a wink.

"I thought that you said Sam was..." began Castiel who was quickly muffled by Gabriel. The archangel looked amused.

"Cas, remember what we talked about? Not repeating what someone said without their permission?"

The Angel of Thursday nodded slowly. His mouth suddenly covered by bright red duct tape.

"This is one of those times that I mentioned. Now I'm gonna take the tape off you."

Gabriel snapped his fingers, and the tape was gone from Castiel's mouth. The younger angel rubbed his mouth and looked at the archangel.

"Why do you do that to me?"

"Because it helps you be quiet when you are about to reveal embarrassing information. And I was too lazy to move my ass."

"Can we get back to The Plan please?" grouched Dean. His arms were crossed, and, even then, The Plan had sounded capitalized in his voice.

"So what's The Plan?" asked Sam closing his laptop.

"Well I'll tell you it, Sammy, but first one of the two heavenly hosts over there," Dean gestured vaguely toward Castiel and Gabriel, "has to answer my damn question."

"To answer your question, Dean," said Gabriel in an authoritative 'big brother' voice, "If a scenario where you traveled back to a time where you already existed, since you're physically there, your body becomes incorporeal. The closer in proximity you are to your past self, the more solid you become however if you ever wanted to know how Casper felt, then move away from mini you."

Dean nodded for a moment. He looked at his hands, "Could you possess yourself?"

Gabriel raised an eyebrow. His mouth twitched upward into a grin. He seemed to have caught onto the plan that was forming in the elder Winchester brother's head. He let out a booming laugh that sounded like a summer roar of thunder.

"I take back anything I said about you being stupid, Dean. If your idea is what I'm think it is then you should get a membership to fucking MENSA, the Nobel Peace Prize, and have a huge gay wedding with Sam."

"I am confused," intoned Castiel.

"Yeah so am I," piped up Sam from his spot.

"Brothers," said Gabriel and Dean at the same time. Sam rolled his eyes and fixed them with a long stare.

"Are you going to tell us what's going on?"

"Elementary, my dear Samuel," said Gabriel in a perfect, upper crust British accent, "Your brother's just wondering how it would work if someone went back and changed things. If someone, you know, stopped the Apocalypse, before Lucifer even rolled out of his sulfur pit in the morning."

"Only if we can't kill the miserable son of bitch," Dean chimed in. "Dad always said to have a last desperation plan. And this is it, Sammy."

"It might actually work," said Sam as he leaned back in the chair, "You're a genius, Dean."

"Fuck, I've been tellin' you that for years. It's just about time you realized it."

"Do you want sex tonight?"

"Bitch."

"Jerk."

And that was how The Plan was born.

***"Dean's your weakness. The bad guys know it too. It's gonna be the death of you, Sam. Sometimes you just gotta let people go."* –Trickster Mystery Spot**

Sam Winchester, aged twenty seven, crossed his arms as he watched his younger self sleeping. He had no clue where exactly he was. After his younger self had passed out from shock, Gabriel and Castiel

appeared, scaring the living daylight out of Sam. They'd hauled his younger self's skinny ass to the nearest motel.

Gabriel checked them in under a fake name, with a charming smile and a large wad of cash. Ah money, it is the universal sign of "shut up and don't notice what's going on outside".

His younger self stirred and jumped into action. It was too bad that Sam knew where he kept his knives hidden and had removed them from the eighteen year old.

"Who the fuck are you?" demanded the teenager with his arms crossed.

"You," answered Sam simply, from his spot on the other bed, "from about ten years in the future if you wanna get exact."

"How am I supposed to believe that? Tell me something that only I would know."

"You didn't really want to leave. I mean you did, but you still wanted to be a family. You wanted to get into law school so that hunters could have someone on the inside on their side. If you don't believe what I just told you, then how about this? Your first real hard-on was from watching Dean fix the Impala when you were fifteen," said Sam, examples coming in rapid fire succession.

His younger self backed down almost immediately. He ran a hand through his hair mussing it up and sat down next to Sam.

"You're really me?"

"Down to the birthmark we have on our left ankle."

"Why are you here? Who are those two?" asked his younger self, nodding his head toward Gabriel and Castiel.

"It's a long story," confessed Sam with a sad smile.

"Well whatever you need to do with me isn't gonna happen, until I hear it."

Sam sighed knowing that it was impossible to argue with...himself, (When this was over he was so getting a therapist!) He clasped his hands together as if he were praying and started to talk. He talked about Jess and Stanford, about Dean showing up in the middle of the night with an easy grin, and the news of Dad being missing, about coming home to find Jess on the ceiling with a bloody gash on her belly, and flames licking down the ceiling. It felt like such a long time ago as he told his younger self about his need for revenge, grieving, and falling in love with Dean all over again. He told about how the visions would leave him scared and screaming, questioning his sanity. He talked about Dad, Azazel, and the Colt. He talked about the semi ramming into them, and the smell of oil and blood in the air.

Dean's near death, and Dad's deal spilled from his lips. At that moment he wasn't looking at anyone. He wondered vaguely if even Castiel knew the whole story. Stories of the special children were described in detail, and when he got to the saga of Cold Oak he found himself stuttering and even stopped drinking whatever liquor Gabriel had dropped into his lap between bottles of water.

As he described Dean's deal, he felt as if he wasn't really in the room anymore. The story of the last five years of his life was being whispered like a prayer across the room. He couldn't look at himself as he talked about the final, horrible year. He swallowed his sobs when he reached the part about Dean's death, seeing his brother's mauled body and the wounds made by invisible hell hounds. His guilt for how he couldn't save Dean from Hell was evident as he slowly shrank into himself.

As he began talking about Ruby, and the four months Dean was in Hell, he felt the bed dip and a hand on his leg. Sam glanced up, meeting the bright blue eyes of Castiel, who squeezed his hand in a - for him - oddly human gesture of comfort.

"Perhaps you would like to get some air, Sam. I will tell him what happened after I raised Dean from Perdition."

Sam nodded and stood up to walk out. He wasn't going to go far, because even with a couple feet in between him and his past self, he could see his hands becoming slightly transparent. He sat outside the motel room with his head in his hands. He heard Gabriel's heavy footsteps, followed by the rustle of his jacket as the archangel sat down.

"You had a shitty five years," commented Gabriel, holding out a bag of Hershey's kisses for Sam, who declined with a shake of his head. He rested his head against the wall with a sigh.

"Did I ever do anything right in my life?" asked Sam with his eyes shut. "Telling myself in there what happened, it made me realize that my life is a step by step guide to making bad decisions."

"Don't talk like that, Sam. You and I both know that you couldn't control a lot of that shit. Unless you wanted the demon to drip blood into your mouth when you were a baby," said the archangel as he peeled back the silver foil and popped the chocolate into his mouth.

"Despite what I did during the past year, Gabriel," began Sam, "I never wanted demon blood in my mouth as a baby."

"Just making sure," said Gabriel as he popped two more chocolates into his mouth, "Cas and I were really worried about you in there, kid. You were like a man possessed."

"It felt..." Sam paused, searching for the word. "It almost felt like confession. I don't know. I hadn't been to confession in about four years. I just didn't see the point anymore after Cold Oak and Dean's deal."

There was a pause between the two. Gabriel felt like he should comfort Sam in some way, but he wasn't sure how. Sam was just lost in metaphorically licking his wounds. The archangel sighed and placed a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"You do know that you can be forgiven right, Sam?"

Sam opened an eye and looked at the archangel curiously.

"Look I'm not sure where Daddy dearest was at Earth's greatest hour. But I do know that you still don't blame him for all that happened even if you really want to."

Sam thought about it for a minute, and then he nodded, listening as Gabriel spoke.

"The angels are his children. Humans are his children. In some sick and twisted way demons are his children too. The reason why Dad never really intervenes is because if he did then people would expect it all the time. Parents give their children ground rules, and they're pounded into their thick little skulls. They still break them, but they know that they will be forgiven."

Sam rested his head around his knees. He looked to be deep in thought before nodding.

"So what you're saying is that..."

"God was hiding, because it was high time that we learned to stand up to each other, or at least learned to try to get along. See, Sam, my theory is that the world won't end in fire or a bang. The world is going to end when everyone learns to fucking get along."

"I think that makes sense. Though I'm not entirely sure how this helps."

"I'm just talking so you don't become all broody and shit, man."

"You have the worst mouth for an Archangel."

"It's always been like that. I live on the wild side, dawg," Gabriel then bumped his chest and made a "gangsta" sign with his fingers.

Silence reigned between the two for several minutes, before Sam smiled and then began laughing. It hadn't even been that funny, but he knew that the gesture meant that the archangel was trying to cheer him up. So he accepted it for what it was.

"Please never do that again."

"To be really honest I'm regretting it already."

Sam allowed a small twitch of his lips.

"I guess Castiel is done explaining things to my younger self. Let's see if he'll agree to the merging."

"He probably will."

"I'm a stubborn bastard."

"Your love for Dean outweighs that stubbornness though."

The pair walked back into the room. Castiel was looking thoroughly uncomfortable as he patted the younger Sam's back. The teenager was hugging his knees the way Sam had a couple minutes ago.

"Dean goes to Hell?" asked the eighteen year old barely looking up. His eyes were suspiciously moist.

"Yeah," whispered the elder Sam sadly.

The younger Sam nodded. For several moments he sat with his arms around his legs. He slowly made eye contact with his elder self.

"What do you need me to do?"

"There's this process called merging. Basically we sort of combine ourselves into one new Sam, with my traits and your traits combined. I need your permission in order for it to work."

Younger Sam bit his lower lip for a moment. He fixed his older self with a stony stare.

"Will you be able to save Dean? The world?"

"We're going to sure as hell try."

Sam watched as his younger self stood, making eye contact.

"You have my permission. I may be pissed at Dad right now, but I...I can't let what happened to you happen all over again."

Silence reigned over the room. The teenager shifted nervously.

"So how does th...?"

His question was cut off by his elder self's mouth covering his own.

A bright light erupted from the pair in classic supernatural fashion.

"Sammy is a chubby twelve year old. It's Sam okay?" –Sam "Pilot"

Here's the problem with merging with your past self. It hurts...a lot. Even if you weren't Sam Winchester and somehow merged with your past self it would still hurt. However, since Sam was absolutely himself it hurt a lot worse.

Let's take a look at the facts.

At age twenty seven, Sam Winchester was six foot four and about two hundred and twenty pounds of what was basically, solid muscle. A few strands of gray were mingled in with the chestnut hair due to high stress (Apocalypses can be very stressful.) He had the knowledge of the wicked curses, rituals, and spells he'd learned locked in his brain, and a need for demon blood in some part of his soul, (even though he was on the wagon.) Not only that, but he also had his anti-demon tattoo and Enochian sigils carved into his ribs.

At age eighteen, Sam Winchester was six foot two and about one hundred and ninety pounds when wet. He had fairly long hair, (an act of rebellion.) He was book smart, and had never had a taste of demon blood...or not willingly at least. He didn't know that angels could be major douches, or how tempting demons would become in his darkest hour, or how even the strongest faith can be shattered. He didn't know a world without Dean.

So in conclusion: the merging promised to be very painful. You know those really gory horror movies? Movies Like *Saw*, or something with a lot of physical and psychological torture? The things that happen in those movies are a walk in the park compared to the merging of the two Sams.

Sam screamed as memories filled his head, as a rush of knowledge seeped into his brain. Images of Jessica on the ceiling, Dean's mauled body, Lucifer telling him that there was no way out burned through his skull, making his head feel like it was about to explode. He screamed, until his throat was raw, and he could taste the coppery tang of his own blood.

Bones lengthened. Muscle mass was added. Sigils were carved into his ribs. Old and new wounds appeared on his body before healing at an amazing speed. He could feel the younger part of himself fighting against the addiction and winning. His heart thundered against his chest. He felt feverish and sick.

Monsters, demons, spirits, angels, people that they had saved, people that they had lost danced before his eyes. It was like a never ending horror movie. He could hear Lucifer's voice saying that there was no hope, that he was going to say yes.

He heard Dean saying yes to Michael. He saw his brother's body fall from the sky as he lost. The stench of blood and burnt flesh made it impossible to breathe.

With one final scream of utter agony, the process was completed. Sam collapsed half on and half off the bed. He was too weak to move his legs onto the mattress. He felt one of the angels do it for him as the other slipped a pillow under his head.

"Water," he croaked out slowly, "Please, water."

He felt utterly helpless as a pair of hands held him up, and someone pressed a cup of icy cold water against his dry, cracked lips. Sam took a couple of mouthfuls to relieve the burning in his throat, before his traumatized body sent his mind into the sweet embrace of oblivion.

Jeremy: (to Dean who is impersonating a police officer) I had this most vivid super intense dream, like a bad acid trip, you know...

Dean: Totally. (pauses) I mean, no. –"Dream a Little Dream of Me"

It was a dream and a memory mixed into one. Sam paused in the open doorway of the dingy room, and his heart jumped up into his throat as he saw Dean there.

Dean was sitting on a bed in crappy, abandoned house they'd found a few months prior to the Final Battle. He was bundled up in one of Sam's old sweatshirts from Stanford. The lettering on it was fading, but Dean seemed to burrow into it as if looking for warmth. A pair of gray sweatpants hung low on his hips. Dirty blonde hair was sleep mussed, and green eyes were shadowed. Dean looked up as if sensing Sam's presence in the room and stood.

Sam gulped as he saw the flash of sun-kissed skin as his brother stood up. He remembered that this was the night they'd finally got back together. Dean had just had a nightmare, which explained the utter vulnerability in his brother's face.

Slowly, he moved toward Dean. They had been traveling together again for four days. The world was ending all around them, and Sam pushed back the guilt that came with that thought. It wasn't going to happen this time. The youngest Winchester licked his lips. At this point in his life, it had been a year and three months since they had last touched as lovers. Sam remembered the night before Dean's deal came through. Some dingy motel room, Dean's eyes bright and face flushed as they slowly made love over and over again, until the sky had turned pink with the dawn.

Sam stood before Dean, feeling exposed and needy.

"Hey," he said softly.

"Hey," greeted Dean back, "I stole your sweatshirt."

"I can see that."

An uncomfortable silence rang clear in the air. They had been dancing around each other for months. Dean was pissed because of what Sam had done with Ruby, and Sam didn't believe that he was worthy of that kind of love from Dean anymore.

"I stole it, because it smelled like you," admitted Dean with his hand clenched at his side. "Christ, Sammy, I feel so fucking pathetic. I..."

He couldn't finish his sentence. He didn't need to. Sam heard the unspoken 'I miss you' loud and clear.

A sudden hypersensitivity overtook Sam's senses. He could hear Dean's breathing. He could smell the scent of motor oil, grease, Old Spice, and sweat in the air. His hands felt twitchy, and all he wanted to do was hold Dean. He allowed himself a very quick glance at his brother's full lips, and tried to suppress the urge of lust that overtook him. Sam placed a hand on Dean's shoulder and heard the other man's breath catch.

"What the hell happened to us, Sammy?" whispered Dean sounding broken and defeated.

"Shit happened," offered Sam nodding slowly before letting his hand drop.

Dean let out a humorless laugh.

"Don't I know it..."

Sam was about to leave the room. Then Dean did something that Sam wasn't expecting. He grabbed Sam's hand and squeezed it tightly. The two knew that this was as close as a heart-to-heart, full on Oprah moment as they were ever going to get. Sam missed this closeness, ached for it. On a sudden impulse, Sam leaned in and captured Dean's lips with his own.

He felt Dean shudder against him. Their free hands met and tangled together, and they backed against the wall, kissing. Sam slowly pulled away as Dean looked up at him: face flushed and eyes dark with desire. They stared at each, heavy breaths the only sound in the entire house, and then Dean said the words that Sam had been waiting to hear.

"I've been waiting for you to get with the program, Sammy."

Then Dean pounced and kissed Sam. The pair tumbled onto the bed laughing and kissing as they began to strip each other. The room filled with the overwhelming presence of happiness and joy as they made love.

The scene melted away in a haze of passion, pleasure, and love.

Sam knew that this wasn't another memory. He was sitting in an overstuffed chair in a pleasantly colored room. Dean was across from him. However, his posture was off looking completely uncomfortable in his skin. His clothes were off too, he was dressed in a white button up and stiff new jeans. Sam leaned forward to greet him.

"Hello Michael."

The archangel raised his head and gave a small smile.

"Hello Sam."

Michael stood and moved closer to Sam. Sitting down in a chair next to him the archangel asked.

"What are you trying to do?"

"What does it look like? I'm trying to stop the Apocalypse from ever getting started."

Michael nodded, and Sam sighed, rubbing a hand over his face.

"Are you going to try and stop us? Gabe and Castiel are with me. We're going to do this."

"No, Sam, I'm not going to stop you. This is the best plan we have for Lucifer to fail."

"I...", began Sam. "I just want Dean back. Don't you understand, Michael? I'm doing this for selfish reasons. I just want Dean safe. I'm so *tired*. I don't know if I can keep fighting. It feels like I'm drowning in slow drying cement."

"I know, Sam, I know. I cannot offer much help. But I can offer you some assistance."

"In what way?"

"I can try to keep some of my more...*eager* brothers distracted from your journey."

"Let me guess: Zachariah? Damn! I forgot about him."

"Most of us try to do that."

Sam huffed and raised an eyebrow. He and Michael both knew that Zachariah would still interfere, even if God Himself told him to stop.

"Can't we just kill him? Or lock him up somewhere? The world would be a better place without him."

"He's my brother."

"He's a douche."

"The same could be said for Dean."

"Dean's not on Zachariah's level."

"How about we just let Gabriel deal with him?"

"I can live with that. He'll probably take pleasure from it. Was Gabe always like that?"

"You bet, and those years as a pagan god did nothing to help."

The pair sat in a comfortable silence, until Michael stood and smiled at Sam.

"Good luck, Sam. Hopefully Dean and I will never meet."

"Thanks Michael."

He watched as the archangel disappeared with a wink and snap of his fingers, leaving Sam alone in the room.

Then he woke up.

Sam: The question is why bugs and why now?

Dean: That's two questions. -Bugs

The world felt out of whack. He hadn't even opened his eyes yet, but he could feel the tingling in his skin. He felt as if he were on a boat, rocking with the waves but still feeling kind of woozy. Sam groaned and turned over in the bed, trying to ignore the ache of his muscles. Growing pains were a complete bitch.

He felt the bed dip as someone took a seat beside him, and a cool, wet cloth dabbed at his forehead. Sam shuddered, wanting more of the coolness against his forehead. His eyes fluttered open briefly, and he saw the outline of a man before shutting them tightly as the bright fluorescent lights blinded him.

"You're awake," said Castiel drawing back the cold compress. Sam nodded, slowly pulling himself up. The sharp pains in his joints were dulling down to an almost forgotten ache.

"I'm awake," confirmed Sam cracking open his eyes so they could adjust to the light. "I feel like I was run over by a train."

"If you were run over by a train then you would be dead," said Castiel clearly not understanding the metaphor.

"It's a saying, bro," said Gabriel casually as he strutted in. "Welcome back to the land of the living, Sam."

"How long was I out for?"

"You were unconscious for three days," answered Castiel, "The merging took a toll on your body. The fever you got from it only broke this morning," the angel paused and stood, "I will heat you up some soup."

Sam nodded, and Gabriel took Castiel's spot on the bed.

"You okay, dumpling?"

"...That was really creepy, man."

"I know but it's been so boring! Castiel doesn't respond to my tricks and annoyances like you do. He just kind of stares at me; he could probably just stare anyone to death."

"Not something that I would want to try anytime soon."

"Yeah I guess not. I had no clue what a mother hen he can be, until these past couple days. He kept on putting compresses on your head, straightening your pillows..."

"Before I was a warrior, I was a healer," said Castiel simply as he carried in a bowl of steaming soup.

"You were?" asked Sam.

Castiel nodded and placed the bowl on a tray that Gabriel had conjured. Sam began to eat with gusto, stomach growling from the lack of nutrition and realized that it was Italian Wedding Soup, his favorite. He paused in his eating to give the angel a smile.

"Thanks, Cas."

The angel beamed at him, or at least Sam assumed that was what the expression was meant to be. He wondered if Castiel had always had these mothering instincts, or if he'd picked them up from Dean. Sam took another spoonful of soup, trying to ignore the thump in his chest that overtook him when he thought about his brother.

"So what's the plan?" asked Gabriel as Sam gulped down the rest of the broth.

"Stop the Apocalypse."

"There's that Stanford education kicking in," snarked the archangel. "I meant what's our game plan? What do we need to do?"

"Well first we need supplies," said Sam cracking his neck, "Fake I.D.'s, weapons, salt, a couple of books on lore. I need to get a laptop. Then we need to make a list."

"Like a hit list?" asked Gabriel excitedly. "Because if we're going to whack some people then we need to get some nice suits. Maybe get a tommy gun or two?! Those things are fun!"

The ex-Trickster had way too much excitement in his voice. Sam slowly stood, cracked his back, and walked away from Gabriel, who was still grinning like a madman. He sighed and nodded his assent to the little rant.

"Yeah I suppose we should compile a list of bad guys we want out of the game. People I want to save. Cold Oak should never happen. We need some specific weapons too: the Colt, and Ruby's knife. First though, I should make a timeline of what I remember."

"No Tommy guns?" asked the archangel with a pout.

"Can you find a working one?"

"You forget who you are talking to, Winchester."

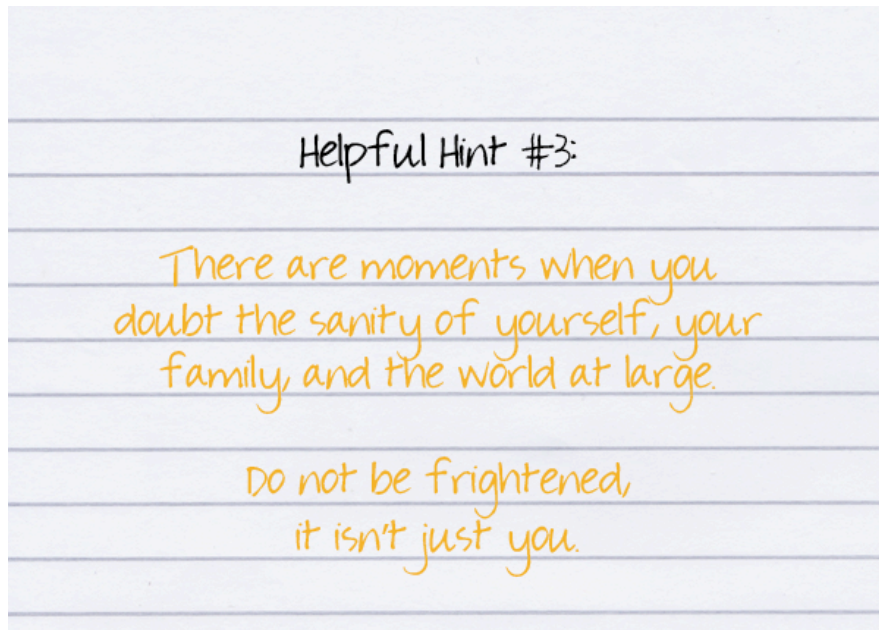
"True, very scary, but very true. If you can find one, then go for it. Just make sure it's good with iron or silver rounds."

"Who is Tommy? And why is Gabriel so enthusiastic about his guns?" asked Castiel.

"Ask your brother," said Sam easily. He grabbed a pad of paper and a pen. He began to write out the list as Gabriel explained the sheer 'awesomeness' of tommy guns. Sam watched the brothers for a moment before making a mental note to call Dean. As he finished writing out the list, he silently promised his brother that this time he was going to save him.

Elsewhere, Dean Winchester slept on; unaware of what was going on with his brother, or what the future held for him. He had no memories of Hell, or of the Apocalypse. He was merely worried about Sam. That was fitting, because Sam was equally worried about Dean.

That was exactly the way the world ought to be.

Hint Three

You know Sam we're allowed to have fun once in awhile (points to a waitress in short shorts) That's fun. –Dean Dead in the Water

Dean Winchester, aged twenty two, drummed a beat on the steering wheel of the Impala. It had been one week, thirteen hours, forty three minutes and twelve...thirteen...fourteen...seconds since Dad had told Sam to leave and never come back. Dean really wasn't happy with either family member at the moment. Although he was angrier with Dad than with Sammy if he had to choose between the pair.

He could never stay mad at his goofy little brother. He knew Sam's reasons for wanting to leave, and, even if he didn't agree with them, he still kind of understood. Sam had never known Mom. All he had known was the hunt, and Dean really couldn't deny him the taste of civilian life. He just hated that it meant leaving him behind. Dean just didn't feel right without his brother near. He'd read about people who'd had a limb amputated and still felt pain in the long gone extremity. He could practically feel his brother next to him, hear him complaining about the music, playing Eye-Spy in the miles of prairie.

He dry swallowed and gripped the steering wheel. Shit! He wasn't going to have a chick-flick moment, even if he was by himself.

His jumped as he heard his cell phone ring. Keeping his eyes on the road, Dean leaned down and grabbed the cell on the seat next to him. He frowned, not recognizing the number but opened it all the same.

"Hello?"

"Dean?" said a cautious voice on the end of the other line. Dean nearly swerved off the road he was so relieved.

"Sammy?" asked Dean, trying to play it cool even though his inner self was jumping up and down with joy and relief at the same time. Sammy was safe.

"Yeah it's me," said Sam with a tone that Dean had never noticed before. It was sad and happy all at once. Dean gulped, noticing the slight change in Sam's voice. No more of that childish softness coloring his words, it was rougher, but, dammit, it was still Sammy *voice*. Dean had missed it after not hearing it for a week.

"Are you okay, Sam? Did you get to Stanford alright? Are the coeds hot?" asked Dean with a smirk, trying his best to play the older brother. As if his younger brother leaving him hadn't hurt at all.

"I'm fine...", there was a pause at the end of the line as if Sam was trying to think what to say next. "I'm not going to college, Dean."

Now Dean had to pull over, because he couldn't believe the words that had come out of Sam's mouth.

"*Christo*," said the elder Winchester brother into the phone.

"I'm not possessed, Dean," huffed out Sam practically making a verbal bitchface, "I guess I just wanted to see if I could do it."

Silence reigned on both ends of the phone. Sam spoke with a resigned tone as if he was coming to a realization.

"I just wanted Dad to be proud of me. If he'd just told me that he was *proud*, I probably would have thrown out the acceptance packet then and there. I've been doing a lot of thinking these past couple of days. I don't want to spend the rest of my life hating the guy."

"Christ, Sammy, no chick flick moments."

"Nah man, I'm just giving you the message to give to him. I don't think that he would be up for talking to me anytime soon. Our family is full of stubborn asses in case you didn't notice."

Dean sighed knowing that was true. Sam took that as a sign to continue.

"Our life is dangerous. I was just sick of worrying all the time about whether or not each new hunt would be the last one for you two, for all of us. I just wanted to know I had other options."

"Yeah I understand, Sammy."

"It's *Sam*, you jerk."

"Shut up, bitch. Where are you? I'll come and get you."

"Some crappy motel in the middle of Bumfuck, Nowhere," said Sam vaguely. There was another pause, and Dean could feel his heart sink, "Dean, I think I just need some time away."

"Sam..."

"No just think about it. I'm still pretty pissed at Dad. He probably doesn't want to see me right now. If we get back together, there's gonna be a lot of tension and trust issues. Shit I can't handle that right now, man. You'll just drive yourself insane trying to play peacekeeper. I've met up with these," Sam paused as if trying to find the right word, "I met up with some other hunters. They're new to all this, and I'm gonna travel with them for a bit."

Dean felt his heart drop into his stomach. He didn't like the idea of Sam traveling with people that he didn't know. However, it wasn't like Dean had any power to forbid. He'd done it himself a couple of times

when the Impala had broken down on a hunt he was helping out with and he couldn't get at his girl with some tools.

Hunters may not trust a lot of other people, but they take care of their own.

"Sammy, you don't know these people."

"They're good guys, Dean," said Sam sounding so passionate about these two strangers that it took Dean by surprise, "I'm just gonna show them the ropes. They're not possessed. I checked."

Dean pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed.

"Fine. But there are gonna be ground rules," said the twenty-two year old, "First off you call me every motherfucking day, you hear? I don't care if it's three in the goddamn morning, you call me, Sam."

"All right."

"Second rule, I want at least a general location of where you are. Third rule, these two guys you're traveling with? They better have this number. If you get hurt they call me. Hell if you get the goddamn sniffles they call me."

"Yes Dean," said Sam sounding amused and exasperated all at once.

"...Are you sure this is what you want, Sammy?"

"I'm not sure what I want. But I'm trying to go with what feels right," Sam paused as if trying to make a decision on something.

He began to speak again but his voice turned stony, "I've been having these dreams of Mom burning on the ceiling, and the taste of blood in my mouth. And I keep seeing Dad dying. Then all I see is you, burning in Hell for me. ...And I see myself doing terrible things. I see the end of the world, Dean. God, it scares me so bad! I don't know if I'm going crazy or not, but these dreams are something that I need to figure out on my own."

Dean felt his chest tighten at that. He had always known that there was going to be a time when Sam had to try something out on his own. He knew in his gut that there would be a time when the youngest Winchester would no longer want the protective cloak of big brother and dad around him. Sam had always been independent, but Dean wished that this day hadn't come. Especially when Sam was obviously in so much pain.

However as much of a big brother as he was, Dean was also practically Sam's parent...

And parents knew when to let their children go, even if it hurt like hell.

"Alright, I understand, Sammy. Just keep yourself safe."

"I will, Dean," promised Sam not even bothering with the correction of the nickname.

They paused for a moment. Winchesters didn't do lovey dovey crap well.

"Jerk." *-I love you-*

"Keep safe, bitch." *-Love you too, kid. Keep safe.-*

Then they both hung up at the same time. Their family wasn't one for long goodbyes.

Dean stared at the phone for a long time before clasping his hands together and praying to a God that he no longer believed in.

Please, please keep Sammy safe.

Dean was trying not to think about how fast his heart had pounded, or how tight his pants had become when he first heard Sam's rough voice. There were some issues that didn't need visiting, especially if the feelings of the other person are in question.

Gabriel: Where did you get the holy oil?

Dean: Well, you might say that we pulled it out of Sam's ass. –Changing Channels

Gabriel watched as Sam flipped the phone shut and rested his head against the wall. He bit into the giant Hershey bar that he had summoned into existence. Castiel was standing by the kitchenette; looking like someone had killed his puppy. The archangel sighed and cursed Dean Winchester for making people so dependent on him. However, now was not the time for thinking of the past...future...whatever.

"So what's on the to-do list?"

Sam lifted up his head from the wall, and grabbed the pad of paper. He seemed to have centered himself.

"To kill, to stop, or to buy?"

"Kill sounds like fun."

"Well we have the three main demons: Lilith, Azazel, and Ruby."

"I call Ruby!" said Gabriel waving his hand around like he was a small child that knew the answer to a particularly hard problem. Sam paused, blinking at the former Trickster, who huffed, placed the candy bar down and explained his reasoning.

"What? We got three main demons that we have to waste. We each take one for the kill shot."

"Then I would like Lilith," said Castiel easily from his corner. He was clutching the bottle of water that he'd gone to fetch for Sam rather tightly. His mouth pressed into a thin, thin line. Dean was Castiel's best friend. Lilith had held Dean's contract, sending him down to hell. Plus Sam had already gotten to kill her once. Fair was fair.

Sam paused, looking like he wanted to protest, but he took another look at Castiel's face and then nodded.

"That leaves Azazel to me then."

Gabriel clapped his hands together.

"Fantastic! I love it when a haphazardly thrown together plan comes to fruition! Now what sort of illicit goodies can I conjure into existence for us?"

Sam cracked a small smile and handed his list over to the archangel, who quickly skimmed it. *Fake credit cards, fake government badges/IDs, nice suit, guns, silver, salt, car...*

All reasonable and totally boring, Gabriel sighed.

"So what sort of car should I conjure into existence?"

"You choose," Sam paused, realizing he was talking to, "Just nothing too strange."

Gabriel felt that was an unnecessarily reasonable request. He chewed his lip for a moment before a wicked grin spread across his face. He snapped his fingers, whistling innocently as Sam, curious, went to the window to see what kind of car they'd got.

Sam stared out the window for several moments before turning. His left eye seemed to have a slight tick to it.

"You should really get that tick checked out, Sam. You know - before it becomes a problem," said Gabriel airily, as if he was talking about the weather.

"A hearse?" ground out Sam, mentally counting to ten in Latin.

"How bad ass would that be?"

"Gabriel, don't make me set Cas on you."

Said angel looked up from his quiet contemplation and cocked his head to the side.

"You're cold, Winchester."

"Change it."

The archangel sighed, a put upon sigh and snapped his fingers. In the place of the bad-ass black hearse was a black 1956 Chevrolet Bel-Air. The paint job and chrome gleamed in the afternoon sunlight. Sam poked his head through the curtains and nodded.

"That's better."

"Figured why mess with the classics?"

"We should probably get going soon," said Sam cracking his back.

"Is your body adjusted to the effects of the merging?" asked Castiel. He walked over, seemingly now out of his funk.

This new Sam stood at his original height of six foot four, but his hair had grown out, brushing his chin, with a thick gray streak going through it. (This led to Gabriel to nicknaming Sam Rogue when he got pissy.) His face still held a youthful quality to it - all softness as all the lines from stress had been erased. His body was smooth lines of lean muscle instead of awkward stick-thin limbs. Grace had taken the place of awkward teenage coordination. A hardness now existed in Sam's eyes that certainly hadn't been in his younger self's eyes. He looked ageless, caught between the harshness of adulthood and the relative serenity of youth.

"Cas, we've been here for a week. I had four days to recover. I'm as good as I'm ever going to get." He paused and clasped his hands together tight. "I just want to get this thing going."

A silence stretched between the three. It crackled in the air.

It was time to start this thing. Sam grabbed the duffel filled with clothes and the brown leather laptop bag complete with the laptop that Gabriel had conjured up. Together the trio walked out to the car, Sam opened the truck to put his duffel in there. He felt around and stopped, realizing the trunk had a false bottom. He raised an eyebrow at the archangel.

"Might as well make it as homey as possible, Winchester. You ready?"

Sam stared into the trunk feeling the energy crackle in him the way it had all those years ago: when his attempt at a normal life had burned in front of him. He looked up at Gabriel and nodded.

"Let's do this."

He slammed the trunk shut.

John: I just got here in time to see the girl take a swan dive. (pause) She was the bad guy, right?
Sam and Dean: (in unison) Yes, sir. –Shadow

"What do you mean Sam is on a hunting trip with some newbies?" demanded John Winchester into the phone, his voice rough.

"Exactly that, Dad," said Dean in an exasperated voice. They had been having variations of this same conversation for the past ten minutes, "Sam's not going to college. He met up with some new hunters. And he's offered to show them the ropes."

"Dean, we don't know these people."

"He tested them for possession. He's not stupid, Dad. He got a full ride to college if you didn't notice."

"You should have gone to get him."

"And what? Drag him back kicking and screaming? Dad...Sammy needs some time. If we just pick up hunting again, then what? He said that it would be all tension and trust issues between the two of you. And I'm inclined to agree with him."

"What are these hunters' names?"

"Erm...", said Dean grabbing the sheet of printer paper to look at the email Sam had sent along with two cell phone numbers, "Their names are Castiel and Gabriel. Some sort of biblical names, I guess."

"I don't like this, Dean. This could be a trap."

"I'm not going to go against Sammy, Dad. If you hadn't make a huge deal about the kid getting into college, then we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"You have something to say, son?"

"No, sir. These are Sam's words. Couldn't have told him that you were proud, could you? He was tired of worrying when he would get that call saying one of us was dead."

Silence hung between father and son as thick as cheap smoke in a dive.

"Dean" began his father in a careful measured tone, "Next time Sam calls you. You get that location from him. And I will get him back. These guys? They do not mean good news. You call me, son. That's an order."

Dean listened as the dial tone filled the phone line.

What just happened? Was not good at all.

He was glad that he kept Sam's dreams to himself.

Dean: (referring to Bela) Can I shoot her?

Sam: Not in public. –Red Sky at Morning

“Nebraska?” groaned Gabriel (*again*) from the driver’s seat. Sam, folded into the passenger’s seat, rolled his eyes.

“Yes, Gabriel. I’m glad that you know your states.”

“Hardy-har-har, Sammy. Seriously though...*Nebraska*?”

“I do not understand,” intoned Castiel from the backseat. “What is wrong with the state of Nebraska?”

“There’s nothing fun in Nebraska,” complained Gabriel, “I die a little inside every time I have to set foot in that state. You’re killing me, Sammy.”

“It is nearly impossible to kill you, Gabriel,” reminded Castiel.

“He’s being sarcastic, Cas.”

“I still do not understand the concept of sarcasm.”

“Something that I weep for every day, bro,” said Gabriel with a huff, “Alright so where in the great state of Nebraska do we have to go?”

“Harvelle’s Roadhouse,” said Sam easily as he opened a map, “We’re going to need contacts and allies. That place is as good a starting point as any. Then we’ll head over to Bobby’s in South Dakota.”

“I like Ellen and Jo,” said Castiel with a quick upturning of the lips, “Though they seemed quite interested in getting me intoxicated.”

“I’m sure they were, bro,” said Gabriel mock seriously before muttering, “I fucking hate Nebraska.”

“Really? I didn’t pick up that sentiment the first hundred times,” snarked Sam as he tried to figure out the best way to get to the Roadhouse on the map. Castiel turned his face to hide the tiny smile on his face.

Gabriel muttered a curse, huffing like a fourteen year old girl not getting her way. Hitting the gas pedal, the scenery became a blur to all in the car.

“How far?”

“About a day and a half...”

“To fuckin’ Nebraska.”

It’s just an average day in the lives of Team Free Will.

Ellen: What, you can’t pick up a phone? What are you, allergic to giving me peace of mind? What, I have to find out you’re alive from Rufus?

Dean: Sorry, Ellen.

Ellen: Yeah you better be. You better put me on speed dial, kid.

Dean: Yes ma’am. –Good God Y’All

Ellen Harvelle had always prided herself on being a strong woman. Part of her strength, she’d found, was her ability to offer motherly advice and help. The younger hunters, those who didn’t know sulfur from mustard, looked upon her as a surrogate mom. Someone who would offer words of encouragement and a

kick in the ass. Older hunters had come to respect her and the sanctuary that she offered. She offered a place where hunters did not have to hide their chosen lifestyle.

She'd never wanted that life for her only daughter, Jo. Though, at sixteen, she was already talking about following in her father's footsteps. That in a nutshell was what was going to keep Ellen Harvelle up at night for years to come.

"Mom?" called Jo in a cautious voice, "Some car just pulled up. I don't recognize it."

"Alright, Jo, you know the plan."

She heard the pump of a shotgun. Ellen grabbed her pistol from her boot. She listened as the door opened and closed.

"They are not here," said one male voice. It sounded rough and gravelly, reminding Ellen of the crunch of Bill's boots on the parking lot all those years ago.

"They're hunters, bro," said another male voice. This one sounded full of laughter and impishness, and it brought back memories of playing pranks on her brothers growing up. "They're hiding somewhere."

"Gabriel has a point Cas," said the third voice the youngest sounding of the trio. However it was also the most heartbreaking to hear; it was full of pain and regret, sending Ellen's maternal instincts into overdrive. "Hunters don't tend to trust a lot of people."

Footsteps echoed through the silent establishment.

"Is this man okay?" asked the gravelly voice.

"He's fine. Just got so drunk that he passed out," said the laughing voice.

Ellen hid herself as the door to the kitchen swung open. In the dim light, there stood a boy no older than his early twenties *at most*. He was tall and catlike in his grace. She could tell by his stance that he was a hunter from the way he cased the area, carefully sweeping over it with his slanted eyes. His chestnut hair fell into his eyes, and in the light she could see strands of gray interwoven in it.

"Hello? Mrs. Harvelle? Anyone here?"

She sneaked up behind him and clicked the barrel into place. The man-boy froze and raised his hands. Outside she could hear Jo holding the other two at gunpoint.

"Sam?" called one of the voices.

The kid, Sam, sighed as Ellen led him out.

"Kind of tied up here, guys."

Ellen turned her attention from the boy to the two men standing before her. She could see Jo's blonde head behind them and the shotgun pointed at their backs.

The two men were roughly the same height. One had dirty blonde hair that curled, pushed behind ears that were slightly too big. His eyes were the color of honey. He looked completely at ease with the situation. He was dressed in the dark green button down shirt, slightly baggy black jeans, and a light gray windbreaker and he was looking around the room with his hands clasped behind his head in a non-threatening gesture.

The other man had mussed brown hair that looked as if it never been combed before, with a heavy five o'clock shadow on his baby face. His bright blue eyes seemed to soak up everything like a sponge. He didn't look like a hunter, dressed as he was in a beige trench coat and suit-tie combo. He had his arms raised in the same manner as the boy, and he reminded Ellen of her old accountant.

"Who are you?" she questioned the three.

"My name is Sam Winchester," said the boy slowly, "I have I.D. on me if you would like to see it."

"Winchester? You're John's boy?"

"You know them, Mom?" asked Jo from where she was.

"I know this kid. The other two I don't know."

"They're newbies," said Sam slowly.

"We had a run in with a couple of pagan gods when we met up with Sam. They were about to have me and my brother for a...Summer Solstice Feast, literally," said the honey-eyed man, "My name is Gabriel Ravenson. You can call me Gabe though. This is my half-brother Castiel Archer."

"I am beginning to prefer Cas," said Castiel slowly. He looked at Sam, "Can I put my arms down? I feel foolish."

"Sure, hon," said Ellen lowering the pistol. She had salt lines secreted away on the property. Sigils carved into rocks scattered around the place. The Roadhouse had been warded against evil by a white witch and blessed by a priest. There was no way these three could mean any harm at all.

Sam turned around, fiddling with the sleeves of his hoodie. He'd grown handsome, oddly pretty in the awkward phase between adulthood and childhood.

"Now how did you hear about this place?"

"I stole my Dad's journal one night. And I saw the Roadhouse mentioned."

"Seriously though? Nebraska?"

Sam turned to shoot (what Ellen assumed) was a very dirty look at the man. He turned to meet Ellen's eyes.

"My Dad kicked me out."

"What for?" asked Ellen as she took the boy's hand. He bit his lip, looking young and lost. If John Winchester had been in front of her at that exact moment there was a very good chance that Ellen Harvelle would have punched him in the mouth.

"I got into college," admitted Sam with a shrug of his shoulders, "He told me to leave and don't come back if I was going. I was so mad that I left. I ran into Gabe and Cas. And I want to keep hunting, but I need help."

"Sweetheart, go to college. Get out of this life," pleaded Ellen softly.

"I can't. You don't understand," whispered Sam with a couple tears escaping his eyes, "I have these dreams. And they scare me so bad. I see my Dad dead. I see Dean, my brother, selling his soul for my life. I see fire and death and destruction every night when I close my eyes. I need to stop this."

"How can you?"

"I was wondering if you'd heard about anything dealing with signs of major demonic activity. These dreams...they have to be connected. I think my mom was killed by a demon. And he's sending these images in my sleep."

Ellen felt her maternal instincts kick into overtime. She wrapped an arm loosely around the teenager's thin shoulders. He was shaking badly, curled into himself, tears making tracks down his face.

"Tell us you can help," said Gabriel as he walked over to them.

Castiel was patting his pockets and pulled out a handkerchief before offering it to Sam. The teenager stared at the piece of cloth.

"Where did you get that?"

"Apparently it was in the pockets of my coat."

"You carry around handkerchiefs?"

Castiel nodded with the serious expression on his face. Sam stared at the piece of cloth before taking it slowly. His shoulders were shaking with silent laughter that began to overturn the fear and pain in his eyes. Castiel looked proud of himself for turning Sam's mood. Jo stared at the trio with a perplexed expression on his face.

"Jo? Can you go get Ash?" asked Ellen from her spot.

"Sure Mom," said Jo relieved to be given concise orders. She walked over to the pool table to awaken their resident genius.

"Ash?" asked Gabriel.

Ash's mullet head poked up as Jo finished waking him.

"Issit closing time already, Ellen?"

"Been that for several hours. You were just too drunk to move," said the elder woman as she stood since Sam had regained his composure.

"He's a genius," assured Jo walking over to Ellen. Ash wandered over yawning widely. Gabriel took a look at him before cocking an eyebrow.

"He's looks like a roadie for an eighties hair band."

Ash grinned, "I like this guy. So what do you need me for?"

"Can you run a search for specific patterns of supernatural activity in the country?" asked Sam seemingly recovered from his semi-breakdown. He was looking at Ash expectantly.

"In my sleep," said Ash with a proud smirk adorning his face. Sam smiled back before holding out a piece of paper and a wad of bills.

"Fantastic then can you research these specific phenomena and how it coincides with nursery fires anywhere in the US? I hope this money covers it. I may have more things that I will ask you to help with."

Ash took the bills and flipped through them before taking the paper, "Dude for this amount of money I will be your ass slave until the day I die."

Sam looked bemused and uncomfortable.

"Um...just the research would be good."

"Spoilsport."

"Actually I think he's taking the more hygienic approach," said Gabriel from his spot. Ash flipped him the bird as he and Sam exchanged phone numbers.

"So you came here because...?" asked Jo.

"I need people on my side. My dad has pissed off a lot of hunters. But I know in my gut that this thing is really big. I know that allies and connections would go a long way. I just need some help."

"Something your daddy never admitted. You have whatever help I can offer you," said Ellen with a smile.

"Thanks," said Sam shifting his feet. He suddenly looked very awkward, "We should go. I saw some signs of a haunting a couple hours away in the local paper."

"Oh no you don't. Let me make you some sandwiches for the road."

Sam looked like he wasn't sure how to react to that before smiling.

"Thanks Ellen."

"No, listen, this is important. I know you don't trust me. Just now I realized something. I don't trust me either. From the minute I saw that blood, the only thought in my head...And I tell myself it's for the right reasons, that my intentions are good, and it-it feels true you know? But I think, underneath...I just miss the feeling. I know how messed up that sounds, which means, I know how messed up I am... The thing is, the problem's not demon blood, not really, I mean I- what I did, I can't blame the blood or Ruby or...anything. The problem's me. How far I'll go. There's something in me...that scares the hell outta me, Dean. In the last couple of days, I caught another glimpse." – Sam Good God Y'All

"So I'd say we had a productive three weeks," said Gabriel as he held up the bottle of beer in his hand in salute.

Sam nodded his assent holding his own bottle of beer up in salute, "Hear, hear."

Castiel drained his bottle before tilting his head to the side, "So what are we going to do while we wait for Ash to finish his search?"

"Hunt," said Sam simply as he finished off his bottle, "We'll get drive to South Dakota in a day or two. Once we get Bobby on our side, then we'll hunt."

"Oh wow, Sam, you sure know how to show a girl a good time."

"Only the best for you, darling," said Sam sending a sweetly sarcastic smile in Gabriel's direction. The archangel grinned and broke into peals of laughter.

"There's a reason that I like you best, Sam!"

Sam grinned before standing, "I need to grab my bag from the trunk."

Gabriel tossed him the keys, "Don't get that fine ass of yours raped, Winchester. I don't want to explain to your brother why your virtue was stolen, before he had a chance to pilfer it."

Sam flicked up a certain finger as he left the motel room. He walked over to the Bel-Air and opened the trunk. He took out his duffel, pausing when his phone rang. He looked at the screen for a couple minutes, but didn't recognize the number.

"Hello?"

"Um hi?" said the shy voice of a young man. "Is this Sam Winchester?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Great! I'm having this problem. And your name came up. Could you help me?"

Sam paused knowing this could be a trap. He bit his lip slowly for a couple moments.

"Are you still there?"

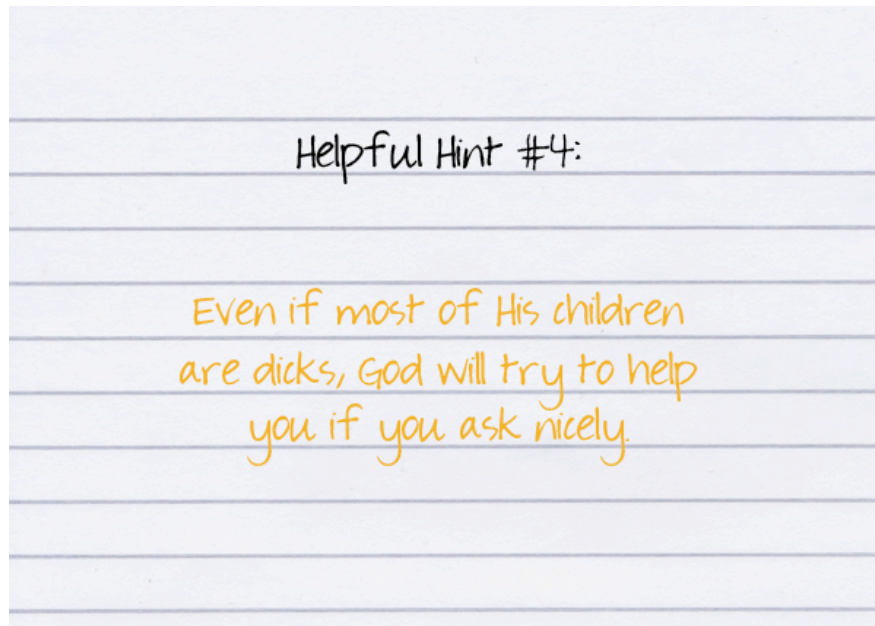
"Yeah I'm still here. Where do you live?"

"Jackson, Nebraska."

"Good luck for you. I happen to be in this town right now. How about we meet tomorrow at noon in the park?"

"Sounds good to me. I'll meet at the bench nearest the fountain."

Sam hung up the phone and stared, wondering what he'd just agreed to.

Hint Four

“When you find God, tell Him to send legs!”-Bobby Good God Y’All

“I’ll meet you at the bench nearest the fountain.”

Eleven fifty-five, Sam sat on the park bench nearest the fountain. His hands were clasped tightly as he surveyed the scene. Families were on picnics, couples were strolling holding hands, old men were playing chess, young children shrieked on the playground nearby, and teenagers were dipping their feet into the fountain to cool off. The sun shone brightly, and the trees were full and green. It was a perfect picture of a lazy day.

Sam felt his lips quirk upward in a smile, as he felt peace overtake him.

After this was over, he and Dean were going to have a lot of lazy days. But this thought was neither here nor there, he checked his watch again. A couple minutes after noon, his mystery caller was late. Then, as if on cue, a shadow fell on the bench.

“Have you been waiting long?” asked a shy voice. Sam turned to meet the man’s startling blue eyes surrounded by thick black lashes.

The hunter gave his companion the once-over. He was a couple years older than Sam’s age now (eighteen not twenty seven) with porcelain skin, and soft black hair that fell to his chin in a stylish mess. He had a thin, waifish form, awkwardly working towards maturity. Sam stood and met his companion’s eyes: same height. The man fiddled with the hem of his white t-shirt.

Still, there was something unnerving about him. The face was a little too perfect. The eyes were a little too blue. Everything about him was just a little too...off in a way that Sam could not put his finger on.

Sam shook his head, “I got here about fifteen minutes ago.”

The man nodded pulling down a pair of old sunglasses over his too blue eyes.

"I would like to get some ice cream. Do you want some?"

Sam would like some answers. He opened his mouth to say just that but the man was wandering off to the old fashioned ice cream cart. With a frustrated sigh, Sam followed him. The nameless man was looking at the menu.

"Can I have the alien one with the gumball eyes?" asked the man looking up at the teenage girl managing the cart with a hopeful, earnest expression on his face. She blushed and dug out the frozen treat. The man turned to Sam.

"What would you like, Sam?"

"Answers."

"All in good time," chuckled the man with a small smile, "It's hot out and my treat."

And he was right. It was pretty damn hot. Plus the blue-raspberry snow cone looked really good. Sam sighed and asked the girl for the blue raspberry snow cone.

The girl produced his bright blue frozen ice after a couple seconds. The stranger took some crumpled bills from his pocket and pressed them into her manicured hands. He smiled at her.

"Have a lovely day, Marie."

He turned, about to walk away, and then stopped, whispering something in the girl's ear. He pulled away, and Sam looked at her face. She was staring at the spot where the man was standing with a look of utter shock on her tanned features. She was practically shaking as Sam turned to catch up to the man.

"What did you tell her?"

"That her boyfriend will wake up from his coma soon," said the man simply as he took a lick of the bright green sherbet of the alien head. Sam ignored the sticky coolness of the snow cone trailing down the paper and onto his hand.

"I want answers. What are you?"

The man paused as if seriously considering the question. He tilted his head in a way that reminded Sam strongly of Castiel. He looked at Sam and shrugged before saying.

"I am not sure. I have just always been."

And Sam really had no idea how to respond to that. He just stared at the man stupidly. The man smiled that shy, sweet smile: the smile of pure innocence. He leaned in and whispered in Sam's ear.

"You have always known me, Samuel."

The young voice sounded so ancient and true, like it was seeping into Sam's weary soul providing a healing balm over the aching and scarred parts. He had never seen this man before in his life. How could he...

Oh.

It couldn't be but...

Sam turned and stared at Him. The trees billowed in the sudden light breeze, seemingly bowing to Him. The flowers' colors shone brightly as if basking in His light. Everything seemed calm, and wonderful and paradise-like. The hunter gulped and whispered,

"God?"

A brilliant, radiant smile overtook the face of God. Sam bowed his head, trying to hide his face away. He was unworthy to be in the presence of Him. He was dirty, and unclean and wrong. The Boy With The Demon Blood, Lucifer's true vessel, should not be in presence of *God*.

A strong, ivory colored hand gently turned Sam's in. The sunglasses were removed and Sam was staring into the bright blue eyes of God. He stared and could see galaxies swirling in those eyes. It made him want to weep. God smiled and said.

"Let's talk, Sam. But first, it is a hot day, and I have grown fond of these alien sherbet heads. So let us enjoy hmm? We have time."

With that the Lord took a lick of the bright green alien head and grinned. With His free hand, He took Sam's, almost as if he were frightened that Sam would bolt. (And it was very likely, because this was God, and Sam had kind of brought on the Apocalypse.)

So Lucifer's true vessel took a walk in the park with God, holding hands, and finishing off what they'd bought from the ice cream cart in between talking about books.

(Well God was the one chattering about books. Sam was still in a state of shock.)

It's one of life's stranger moments. The kind of moment that ends with a punch line...except this wasn't a really fucked up joke. (Except it kind of was if one thought about it.)

God was chewing on the grape gumball eyes of the devoured alien. Sam tossed his paper cone and the stick the alien was on into the trash. The pair took a seat on one of the most distant benches in the park. Sam reveled in the shade of the trees. God folded His long limbs into Himself.

"Why contact me?" asked Sam quietly.

"You and your brother were the only side that had any clue what was going on. You're the one that I was rooting for, Sam," said God with a small smile, "Also, you don't expect me to come in and save the day."

"Most of the angels think that you're dead," said Sam.

God nodded sadly. He stared out at the park: perfect in the summer day.

"My angelic children are unaware of the gift that I left them with. They choose not to see it."

"What?"

God turned and His mouth twitched upward, "I left them with the ability to choose. I left them with Free Will."

Sam turned his head shocked, "You gave them Free Will?"

God laughed like he had heard the best joke in the world, "Free Will is not mine to give. They always had it. But they were fearful of what I would do it if they used it. So I left them, and let them make their choices. They just thought that Free Will was something that only humans have."

"But I thought..."

"Humans do not fear me. Well in the early days they did but not now. But even in the early days, fear did not stop them from making their choices. It only guided them. The angels were obedient, because that was what they thought they should be, like mindless drones. Humans strove toward goodness and truth because they made the choice to. I wanted the angels to know how it *feels* to have the choice, to clearly choose their own path to goodness."

Sam slowly absorbed it in. It made sense in his head. He thought of Castiel, and how he'd changed since they first met.

"Castiel has been looking for you."

God smiled proud of his son, "I know. He always had the strongest faith. He has flourished here. The only one of my children that doubts and believes, finding humanity in his Grace; it makes me proud of him."

"I think that Cas would like to hear it from you."

"I would love to see one of my children again," said God, wistfully, as if remembering times so long ago that the thought of it made Sam's head ache.

"Then see them. I am sure that Cas would love to see you, even Gabriel."

God looked unsure of Himself before whispering, "Would they want me too?"

Sam took His hand and answered, "Do you even doubt them? They are going to be mad. But they will be so relieved to see that you're alive and okay that they will forget their anger until later."

He thought about seeing his father again after four years, and those endless months chasing shadows of him on the road with Dean. God smiled slightly as if reading his thoughts.

"Speaking from experience?"

"I think that you have the answer to that."

They sat in silence for several moments, before God broke it.

"The Apocalypse is the one thing that I cannot interfere in."

"Seriously?"

"I'm afraid so," said God with a sad look that crossed his face. He interlocked his fingers tight, knuckles turning white, "My abilities only extend to create. The Apocalypse is about destruction. I cannot create where there is destruction. Nor can there be destruction where I create."

"Gabriel thought it was, because you didn't want to interfere."

"Gabriel was always the cleverest of my children. I think he always had an idea where this was going. I admit that I wasn't the best parent. But I tried to teach my children well and let them use the lessons that I gave them. Every good parent knows when to say goodbye right?"

"I like to think so."

God twitched his lips into a smile. He looked at Sam before saying.

"I can offer help. The seals have not been broken yet. I can still create. Though I must admit that I am not sure how much help I can offer to you, Sam."

Another silence settled between the two of them. Sam saw how upset He was. Sam knew that look all too well. He had seen it on his own face, his Dad's, and Dean's enough to know what it meant. It was sadness over something that they had no control over. His family would offer comfort in the form of dark humor and small gestures. Sometimes, though, Sam knew he would have liked a hug.

However, the Winchesters weren't a touchy-feely family (in case you hadn't noticed).

Sam would also like to point out what he and Dean did so did not count.

Making up his mind, Sam slowly reached out his arms and wrapped them around God's thin shoulders. He pulled the surprised...being (He was not a man. Sam did not know what to call Him.) close and hugged him. He felt Him stiffen, before a pair of stick-thin arms snaked around his back. Fingers dug into the soft t-shirt that he was wearing.

"Forgive me," whispered Sam into God's hair.

"You've already been forgiven, Sam," murmured God into Sam's shoulder, "Did you even have to ask?"

Sam bit back a sob that threatened to overtake him. He did feel forgiven, and healed and whole in God's warm embrace. After several moments, they both pulled away. God looked at Sam.

"I will give you a gift, Sam Winchester."

"Wh-what?"

God smiled, an air of mystery thick around him, "I will give you a gift. Something to make your journey easier."

Sam stared not fully sure what to say.

"What is it?"

"I will give you the ability to tell who is possessed by an angel, and who is possessed by a demon."

"But why?"

"This is me helping."

Sam stared for several moments not entirely sure how to feel.

"But what about my...other abilities?"

God gave Sam a beatific smile. He whispered softly: old and ancient, "After this is over...I will personally cleanse your blood. You need Azazel's blood to keep him in a false sense of security."

"Wh-what?" asked Sam shocked. He wasn't expecting this.

"I will cleanse your blood. And no visions, no incentive from Ruby..."

"Why?" whispered Sam softly.

God paused before taking Sam's giant hand and holding it tight. He rubbed His thumb against Sam's scarred knuckles before saying.

"Everyone deserves redemption, Sam. Even those who think they are unredeemable."

Sam nodded before thickly swallowing back some tears. God gave him a few minutes to regain his composure.

"So how do we do this?"

"Well...kind of like a deal at the crossroads."

A look of realization slowly bloomed across Sam's face. He sat there for several moments before slowly saying.

"Are you serious?"

"I can do it another way, but it will be very awkward for all parties involved. And really kissing is just easier in the long run."

Sam gulped. He looked into the too blue eyes of God before nodding.

"Alright let's do this before I lose my nerve."

Sam shut his eyes tight. God pressed his lips against Sam's in a chaste, closed mouthed kiss.

Color exploded behind Sam's eyelids. He could hear his blood flow through his veins. His past flitted before his eyes: Dad's rare smiles, Mom young and alive, Dean's laughter, Jess's body close against him, Madison's smiling eyes, Bobby in a rare moment of calm, Gabriel mischievous expression, Castiel learning about humanity. He could recall the feeling of Dean's mouth against his in a needy, desperate embrace, like they were burning for each other. As if they needed each other like one needs air. Kissing like it was their final moments on Earth (which it kind of was those last couple months).

He saw a woman, tanned and beautiful, with long dark hair in tangled waves down her back. She was naked, but it only added to her beauty, like she didn't know better. She held an apple as red as crimson blood in her hands tightly. Her dark eyes were as old as time. She looked up at Sam and smiled.

He could hear the serpent's hiss in the background. And as she faded; he heard the crunch of someone biting into fresh, clean fruit.

In her, Sam saw the promise of redemption. Before he could say her name, God broke the kiss and Sam was forced back into reality.

His eyes flew open like they were really seeing for the first time. His heart fluttered in his chest like bird wings. It felt like he just ran a marathon. His blood rushed through his veins, and an easy feeling settled over his body. It took him several seconds to place that feeling.

It was peace.

He felt *peaceful*.

Sam couldn't remember any recent time where he'd felt like that.

"Sam? Are you okay?" asked God gently. Sam turned his head and knew that the gift had worked.

Surrounding the body of God was a faint outline of color. Constantly in flux, it reminded Sam of things that he only saw in pictures of outer space. Countless numbers of tendrils flowed off the aura and into every direction imaginable.

It was beautiful and slightly frightening.

"Yeah," whispered Sam finding his voice, "Yeah I'm fine."

"I should be going."

"No...", said Sam grabbing God by the arm, "You should talk to Gabriel and Castiel."

"In due time."

"They'll ask questions," stated Sam nervously, "I can't lie anymore. Not about the big things at least. Lying is how I got myself into this situation."

"Then don't. Have faith in me, Sam. I promise that I will not disappoint."

God pressed his lips to Sam's forehead. The pressure was warm and gentle. It filled Sam with clarity, and hope and emotions that he hadn't felt in a long time.

When Sam looked up, God was gone.

He sat there staring at the bench of a long time.

Maybe he wasn't as far from saving as he had previously thought.

Castiel: The decisions been made.

Uriel: By a mud monkey.

Castiel: You shouldn't call them that.

Uriel: Ah, it's what they are, savages, just plumbing on two legs. -It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester

If there is one thing that Sam Winchester wanted the most in the world at this time; then it would be redemption. Or at least the chance to prove himself worthy of it.

Sam always knew that he'd fucked up. Every drop of demon blood that slid down his throat tasted of mistakes. Every time he used his powers, his better nature screamed at him to stop. Sometimes, in the dead of night, he wondered what would happen if he had discovered the courage to say 'No'. He wondered what would have happened if he'd looked Ruby in the eyes and told her to go away.

He was Eve in the garden. Ruby was the serpent, telling him to just take one bite from the forbidden fruit on the tree. After all, what harm could one bite do?

Sam would wonder if Gabriel and Castiel remembered Eden, if they knew Eve. If they understood why. Sometimes he wondered if God saw it come from miles away and still let it happen.

Eve had caused the end of Eden, of Paradise on Earth, Sam had caused the end of the world. The difference was that Eve never, ever regretted her decision. She hated herself and was wracked with agony the rest of her days...

But she didn't regret it.

All she regretted was that she'd dragged Adam into this.

Just like Sam regretted that his stupid mistakes and tainted soul had dragged Dean into this whole mess, into Destiny's winding road.

However, Eve knew something that Sam didn't.

She had the power to make her own path.

Sam had hated himself for these mistakes. He'd made himself ill over them.

Today he'd realized what Eve had, so many eons ago.

He had the power to make his own path.

And that was why God loved humanity.

You don't know my family! What you called the Apocalypse, I used to call Sunday dinner!- Gabriel Changing Channels

Gabriel sighed and stared blankly at the glowing rocks in front of him. He was trying to get a feel for Ruby's power signature. Though the efforts barely used a trickle of his full power, it was incredibly boring and time consuming.

Gabriel was a highly energetic archangel (in case no one had noticed.). He was an archangel of action and reaction, instead of shiftless searching. He fidgeted in his seat, holding his hand over the rocks with eyes shut tight.

"Show me where the demon Ruby resides," whispered Gabriel in ancient tongues as the rocks trembled. In the sheen, the face of a woman took shape before promptly turning into swirling mist.

"Fuck," cursed the archangel as he took a divining rod placed next to him to check the frequency of the rocks.

"You shouldn't curse, Gabriel."

Gabriel froze. He knew that voice, knew that energy. He kept his back to the intruder. Fearful that if he turned around then this would merely be a dream, a figment of his wild and crazy imagination. He clutched the divining rod tight.

A slim, pale hand rested on his shoulder. Gabriel felt a lone tear trickle down his face.

Even if He was a crappy parent, He was still Gabriel's father. And Gabriel loved Him. The archangel turned and looked into the human face of God.

"Hi Dad."

God smiled, "Hello, my son."

Gabriel turned his face away. His attention fully focused on the still glowing rocks. He sighed.

"Why are you here, Dad?"

"I wanted to talk to Samuel."

Gabriel's head turned so fast that he almost got an angelic version of whiplash. His honey colored eyes focused on his Father.

"What did you want with Sam?"

"Overprotective as ever, Gabriel," chuckled God lightly, "We had a nice conversation."

"Are you helping this time around?" asked Gabriel petulantly. He knew that he was hitting a sore spot, that what he was saying was a cheap shot. He was God's Messenger. He, above all his siblings, knew the reason why God couldn't interfere in the Apocalypse.

God frowned. His blue eyes turbulent and sad, "You know why I can't help."

"Why not?!" demanded Gabriel angered, "You're *God*, Father. You could have gotten Lucifer to listen. If you showed your face then maybe we all wouldn't be in this mess!"

God sat there and let Gabriel throw his words of hurt and anger at Him. His face was impassive, but his eyes held sadness and pain.

"Why did you leave us?! Did you not know what would happen?! How it would all go to the Pit? Everyone up there is screaming Apocalypse and destiny and death as we speak. They all went *insane*. Especially the middle management types! We both know they should not be alone unsupervised! This is not how it was supposed to be! We were a family...until my brothers and sisters had to take up arms against each other. There has to be a better way."

A silence passed between them before Gabriel whispered softly, a single tear rolling down his face.

"Why, Father, why?"

God paused for several moments before wiping away the stray tear.

"Because, son, I thought that I was being a good Father. When Lucifer fell...I was bereft. I bore him out of the brightest stars in the night sky and the early rays of dawn. And I love him. He's my child. But when he Fell, all the way down into Perdition and created demons out of anger and pain. I began to think of my failings as a parent."

God looked at his clasped hands. His eyes were dark and suspiciously shiny.

"I realized that if I stayed, then there would be a chance that my angelic children would begin to resent me for creating humanity. Because they were allowed to exercise choice without ill conceived consequences. I knew that in order to prevent that I had to go."

"You left because you didn't want us to Fall?"

"I wanted you all to be able to have a choice. That is all I ever wanted. Unfortunately, I didn't realize that I had to explain Free Will to them. Didn't anyone *observe* humanity?"

"They made a bureaucracy instead."

God paused for a moment. He shuddered.

"Well fuck."

"Are you allowed to curse?"

God raised an eyebrow.

"Right, Almighty God, sorry."

The two sat in comfortable silence for several moments. Gabriel looked at God.

"So do you think we're going to win this?" asked the archangel.

God smiled wickedly.

"You son of a bitch, you know how this is going to end!"

"Spoilers," said God vaguely with the same shit-eating grin on his face. He then turned serious looking at Gabriel, the son he made out of starlight, rainbows, and His laughter. He asked, "Now I have a question for you, Gabriel."

"Yes?"

"I feel that another archangel is needed. How do you feel about Castiel getting a promotion?"

Gabriel stared, before breaking out in a huge grin.

"I think it would really stick in Zachariah's craw."

God nodded and his eyes were bright with mischief. Gabriel coughed before schooling his expression into one of seriousness saying.

"I say that Castiel is most deserving of a promotion."

(referring to Castiel) He's tough for a little nerdy dude with wings. –Dean The Song Remains The Same

Castiel was taking a walk when he felt someone call him. He had gotten comfortable enough to walk amongst the people. Though they gave him odd looks because of the trench coat and suit; the angel knew it was something not normally worn in the summer. But he didn't feel hot, so it was of no concern to him.

The moment he felt the call, he almost began to cry in the street.

It sounded deep, and rumbling, and familiar and strange all at once. The voice reverberated through his body in the way an echo bounces off a canyon walls, or how a loud drum beat would pass through him in the Impala with Dean's music blasting. It took him back to better days, running through the gardens of Heaven with his brothers, curled up under a tree as Joshua would whisper stories to him amongst the flowers, laughing as Gabriel played his pranks, and just being in the stillness of unconditional familial love.

It reminded Castiel of *home*, back when it was a home.

He'd forgotten that he had wings. That he could transport himself from place to place. So in a fit of momentary insanity and joy; he started to run.

Castiel ran through the sparse streets. His trench coat flew behind him giving an illusion of a pair of wings. He wanted this to real. He *needed* this to be real. The scuffed up dress shoes tapped against the pavement and it sounded like a fevered prayer of *please wait, please wait, please be real*.

The feeling of his grace racing through him got stronger. He could hear the rumble of laughter that was around during his fledgling-hood: deep and warm and kind. He ran into the park, skidding as he entered a small clearing in the trees. He was warm and panting from lack of breath. He loosened the tie around his neck even more and unbuttoned two more buttons to cool down.

"Castiel," said a warm voice. Instead of deep and old, it sounded young and true.

Castiel turned and met the electric blue eyes of a young man.

He trembled and fell to his knees. He bowed his head. Tears trickled down from his eyes as he whispered the one word he had ached to utter for a very long time.

"Father."

The young face of God broke out into a grin. He kneeled down and gently forced the angel's face up. Castiel looked into His human face.

"Arise, my son, you have made your Father proud."

"But Father, I have lost my grace. How can say that?"

God smiled softly, "Because you did what I wanted all your siblings to do."

Castiel looked confused.

"You made a choice, Castiel. You choose friendship, love, freedom, hope, and courage. You protected your friends. You helped people. You made a choice, and a good one at that. It makes me proud of you, son. Because maybe I did do something right in raising you."

Castiel bowed his head. A couple of tears escaped his eyes. He felt overwhelmed from the love and pride coming off his father.

"I looked for you, Father."

"I know that you did," said God with a soft smile, "I know that you needed me to come in and save the day."

"Why couldn't you?" demanded Castiel voice sandpaper rough and thick.

"Child, my ability is creation. I create. The End of Days is the one thing that I cannot interfere in. It is about destruction. And there can be no creation in the darkness of that sort of destruction. Just like there cannot be that sort of destruction in the light of creation. The Apocalypse is the only thing that I am unable to interfere in. I wanted to help. But I couldn't. It would be breaking rules older than even I am."

A silence stretched between them.

"I am sorry that I failed you, my child. You must be disappointed."

Castiel looked up. His blue eyes were wide. The angel grasped his Father's hand.

"Never, Father," whispered Castiel with fervor, "You never will disappoint me. You created all this. Your creation is beautiful and wonderful. And I..."

"You see the love."

"I was confused at first. I did not understand why humanity was so special. And then I saw it. The struggle, the ties, the way goodness can come through in the darkness. I see now. Why they are so special. This species is beautiful in their faults."

"You have learned much."

"I had good teachers," whispered Castiel.

"Whether you know it or not, son. You did what I wanted you to do. I left because I wanted you and your siblings to know the power of choice. And you used you that power. I love you, Castiel. You were born from that love and joy. And I can never be more proud of a child."

"Father..." murmured Castiel voice thick with held back tears.

"Castiel," said God, "my child. I think we need to talk about some changes this time around. You deserve a reward for doing my will. I think we should talk about a promotion."

Castiel could only nod.

God grinned before pressing two fingers against Castiel's forehead.

The trees in the park all simultaneously grew three feet, all the pregnant women in a five mile radius were suddenly expecting triplets, and the earth shook underneath humanity's feet. Also the town's water supply briefly turned into red wine (the winos rejoiced).

Sam paused feeling the raw power in the air and shuddered before going into the motel room.

Gabriel let out a whoop of joy as the power rushed through him, Castiel was safe. He *finally* found the body Ruby was possessing. All in all it was a rockin' night.

He grabbed the youngest Winchester, pulling him into a happy embrace.

The young man turned his golden rimmed eyes onto Gabriel in annoyance and fond exasperation.

He then froze and took in Gabriel's angelic grace with pure awe coloring his expression. A golden light surrounded Gabriel's form. It refracted into a billion colors like a rainbow. The tendrils of light and color worked its way into the air. His wings (six hundred if Sam remembers Pastor Jim's lessons correctly) are each a different color.

And it's beautiful. Gabriel's wings are like the archangel himself, bright and cheerful with a undertone of darkness.

"Take a picture, kiddo, it'll last longer. Glad to see that Daddy's gift is working out for you though."

Sam rolled his eyes before smirking, "Six hundred wings huh?"

Gabriel flashed a shit eating grin. His eyes were bright with levity, mischief, and hope, "I give all other angels an inferiority complex."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"Wait till you see Castiel."

"What do you mean?"

Gabriel only smiled mysteriously and tossed Sam his cell phone, "Don't forget to call your brother."

Sam glared at Gabriel for changing the subject but obligingly called Dean anyway.

Meanwhile, in a park located in Jackson Nebraska, the angel Castiel slowly faded into the night.

And the Archangel Castiel, protector of Humanity and guardian of Choice, unfolded his six hundred wings and stared into the true face of his Father.

Now things would get interesting.

Hint Five

Helpful Hint #5:

while archangels can be complete d-bags, there are two that are scary sons of bitches when pissed

. Especially if you try to hurt someone(s) that they're fond of.

Pastor Gideon: Why does it have to be me?

Castiel: You are a true servant of heaven.

Pastor Gideon: And you're an angel.

Castiel: A poor example of one. -99 Problems

Archangels are made of the elements that God created. Each one of them has wings that are made completely from one of these elements, and because of that they have complete control over it and can bend it to their whim and command.

Raphael was electricity. Crackling, pure energy that was quick in justice, not striking twice. He never needed too. His wings were made of plasma, the swiftest lightning bolts, and pure power. He was the angel that God would send to enact His judgment on Earth. He was unquestioning but not unfeeling back in the early days. Raphael was the one who had taught the youngest angels how to fly and about their Father.

Gabriel was light. Constantly surrounded by a glow that seemed to seep into his form; he was said to be second only to Lucifer in beauty. His wings were the colors that light produced. Heaven was brightened by the sound of his laughter. Humanity was frightened and soothed by the glow he could give. So God made Gabriel his messenger. He let the light from which he'd made his child be a beacon, and a comfort and a reminder of His will.

Michael was air. He was cool, collected, and constantly there. It seemed like he was a part of every corner in Heaven, his presence just as familiar and safe as their Father's. There was a hidden danger to Michael as well. He could lay waste to cities; spin the air to be just as destructive as - and somehow worse than - any other element. His wings were made of the spring breezes and the collective breath of life. He was the True Warrior of God, the fiercest of all the warriors, only to be called in the time of greatest need and deepest sorrow. A more peaceful job than being Heaven's number one warrior, was spreading the breath of their Father on the wind.

Lucifer was fire. He was passionate, driven, and burned with deepest emotions and desires, until at last they consumed him. He was as swift as an out of control forest fire and smoldering like dying embers in a fireplace. He could be warm with love and trust, but, all too often, scalding with his pride. He burned the

brightest of all the angels. His wings were made of wild flame, so hot that it burned blue-white. No one could rival his destructive beauty. No one even dared. Even Gabriel was in awe of him.

When Lucifer was cast from Heaven, he was sent down into Perdition, to a place where his fires burned uncontrolled for all time, where his fire would twist and mangle souls for eternity, burn away all the good and leave the bad in its wake. Because of this God made it so that fire burned all things. A hint to the people of what happens when they let fire, outer and inner, overtake them and guide their actions.

So what of Castiel?

As the Angel of Thursday, he had two glorious wings. They were the largest in size of his garrison. As a regular angel His wings, like all the others, were made of starlight. Still as he refused to lose faith, they never dimmed only glowed brighter. Even as his faith was battered, and his Grace slipped like sand through his fingers; his wings would impress his brothers. They impressed merely because of their brightness, an indicator of his faith.

So when he became Castiel the archangel, his wings of bright starlight would not sustain him in flight or hold back his power. His Father took serious consideration into this matter. He blessed Castiel with water as his element.

His wings, all six hundred of them, were made of the clearest, bluest seas in summertime, and the feeling of cleansing that comes with the first rain. Water fit the new archangel perfectly. At times he was as gentle as waves of the ocean lazily lapping against the shore. At others, he could be as fierce as the rough currents and tides during a storm. Water was healing, cleansing, reflecting his past as a healer. Water was pure, and Castiel was the purest angel in his faith, in his actions, in his motivations. It could be destructive, laying waste to cities and drowning nations in its wake. Castiel, even though he detested fighting, could be as deadly as Michael in combat.

So God gave Castiel the power of water, because it was the perfect fit. Then the Lord made Castiel His Champion of Humanity, Guardian of Free Will, the Protector of Earth, because He knew that his purest child would always love humanity, flaws and all, until their final days.

Castiel looked at him with wide eyes. His eyes were a crystal clear, beautiful, too blue: the color of water itself. He could feel the power rush through his Grace - his restored Grace - feel something akin to the rushing water rustle in his wings. He basked in his Father's light, for Castiel felt like he had come home. After so many eons of feeling awkward and out of place, he felt like he had *finally* been given his purpose, and a clear direction in his life.

God whispered softly into Castiel's ear.

"You do know what this means, my son."

"No Father," said the newest archangel. He honestly had no idea.

God smiled. He was so world weary and innocent at the same time. A lovely, rare, and precarious combination, He hoped that it would never be beaten out of Castiel by life, by his siblings, or even by Himself.

"You have the power to visit Heaven and Earth. Once this horrid mess ends; you are allowed to remain. Gabriel has the same ability."

Castiel's eyes widened. His mouth twitched upward in an imperceptible grin.

"Father, thank you," said Castiel in a voice full of happiness and devotion.

God winked, "I have no idea what you mean, Archangel Castiel. Now go to your friend, to your brother. Trust that this will work out well in the end."

"I will, Father," said Castiel, "We can stop this."

God disappeared without replying to Castiel's statement.

Castiel let out a bark of happy, relieved, strangled, shocked laughter. His new powers coursed through his Grace, raced through his blood. It made him feel energized, truly alive and comforted.

The sudden summer rainfall, that Castiel called, because he could, sounded like laughter and felt like good memories.

(to Adam) "So you know you can't trust them, right? You know Sam and Dean Winchester are psychotically, irrationally, erotically co-dependent on each other, right?" –Zachariah Point of No Return

Dean wouldn't admit it out loud, but he really missed Sam. But since he wasn't a pussy, he had done the same thing he's done throughout the majority of his life: repressed his inner emotions.

It was the Winchester way after all, and that was something that Dean had clung to his entire life like a security blanket.

Saw his family's home burn to the ground?

Repressed it.

Every time that his Dad came home half dead from a hunt?

Repressed it.

His first dead body, glassy eyes staring up at him?

Repressed it.

The image of Sammy when he was sixteen with long hair and out of proportion body, his eyes shining mischievously as he straddled Dean after winning a fight that kept him hard for months on end...

Ahem, alright then...

Fuck yeah, there was some major repression going on there. No ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Dean had never been away from Sammy for so long, and it set him a bit on edge. It had been five months, six days, nineteen hours, and fifty-seven minutes since his brother left home. Without Sammy there and all the bitchiness, and dry humor and emo-ness that entailed; Dean was feeling empty.

It was a constant, gut-wrenching ache that had gnawed and gnawed at Dean's gut for months. As the seconds on the clock ticked by, slow as molasses, the hole in the pit of Dean's stomach grew.

The only time that it ever seemed to fade was when Sam called, because then Dean had his brother's voice on the line: deep, laughing, and as smooth as expensive scotch floating into his ear. Sometimes, alone in his bed, he would pretend that he was not Dean Winchester, that he was someone worthy to have that voice whisper words of passion and lust in his ear. That would cover his skin in goose bumps - the good kind.

Sometimes he had the thought that he was someone who could love Sam wholly and fully, no reservations, without feeling accusing stares on his back, his every move.

Repress.

Repress.

Repress.

The phone's ringtone cut clear and true across the motel room, almost like a knife.

Dean grabbed the phone.

"Hey Sammy."

He repressed the thought, buried it deep within him.

"Dean."

Sam's voice sounded so happy, so warm that it gave Dean the small spark of hope.

Maybe...this is one thing that he can have.

Dean: Look man, I gotta tell you. I dig your style, you know. I mean, I do. I mean...phew! And the slow dancing alien...

Trickster: One of my personal favorites. –Tall Tales

Gabriel knew that what he was about to do would be his most important trick yet. He had prepared for the past couple of months. He'd watched his target, talked to Castiel, and waited very patiently. He knew that this was an occasion where he could combine his Trickster talents and his Angel of Judgment senses. He allowed himself to grin evilly.

This was going to be epic, in ways that made Gabriel laugh with joy.

Ah how he loved fucking with the plans for Armageddon. And bonus! He would get to kill the demon wench that helped to start it.

Things were definitely starting to look up. Maybe he'd even get that ridiculously expensive chocolate cake with gold bits in it to celebrate when he was done.

The door opened, and an evil presence sent all sorts of bells and whistles to Gabriel's archangel senses. He straightened his back and hid himself further into the shadows.

A dark-haired, dark-eyed, olive skinned beauty sauntered into the dive. She leaned over the counter and flashed a grin with her red, red lips. Gabriel licked his lips and waited until she had the drink in hand. Then, he cracked his neck and grinned.

"Showtime," he whispered as he snapped his fingers.

Gabriel, in disguise as Sam Winchester, stepped out from the shadows and ambled over to the demon Ruby.

Ruby was drinking her beer, looking for another body to overpower. This one was beginning to get a little too confining, constricting. She hated spending more than three months at a time in one, especially one without the human soul attached. Somehow, it just wasn't as much *fun* without hearing the human's soul

beg and scream for release. Ruby downed the ice cold beer, somewhat grateful for it in the humid weather of the bayou.

She liked the bayou; the humidity in it kind of reminded her of her own section of Hell, except without the demonic alligators to eat her entrails and the mutant mosquitoes that would pierce her jugular regularly... well so the humidity was the only thing that really reminded her off it.

"Can I buy you a drink?" asked a rough voice.

Ruby turned fully intending on telling the guy off, when she caught a glimpse of his face.

Shit.

Sam Winchester.

Sam Winchester a.k.a. one of Azazel's Special Children a.k.a. the Predicted Harbinger of the Apocalypse.

Lucifer's Future Vessel.

She flashed a beautiful smile, flicked the long black hair over her shoulder and said.

"Thanks, handsome."

Sam Winchester smiled as he signaled the bartender for another round of beer, "It's Sam."

'I know,' thought Ruby with vindictive glee. Vision of promotions danced in front of her eyes. She held out her hand, nails manicured and painted the color of blood, smiled with her too red lips saying.

"They call me Ruby."

Gabriel, disguised as Sam, took her hand and kissed the back of it. He smiled at her calculating stare. Demons were very predictable. He double-checked that his Grace was hidden deep enough to fool Ruby, but not so deep that he couldn't, as Dean would put it, 'angel whammy' her.

Smiling at the demon's gullibility, he put on Sam's best innocent 'college boy, gee whiz, aw shucks' face before asking.

"Well then Ruby, can I buy you a drink?"

Sam: (staring at the frog on the road) Yeah, you're right, that's completely normal.

Dean: All right, maybe it's fairy tales. Totally messed up fairy tales. I'll tell you one thing, there's no way I'm kissing a damned frog. -Bedtime Stories

Somehow they always ended up sharing more when they were apart than together.

Sam would maintain that it was because that way they couldn't look each other in the eye afterward.

Dean just coughs and awkwardly rub his hand against the back of his neck.

Because, really, it's kind of true.

Dean's laughter echoed through the phone: tinny, out of focus, but just as clear and as *happy* as Sam remembered it. Dean hadn't laughed a lot those last couple of years, not his deep belly-laugh that had been present throughout his childhood, and those first two years back on the road. Sam felt weirdly proud to have coaxed the laughter from Dean again (or whatever... time travel is a bitch!)

"So anyway, we're going after the ghost, right?"

"Oh God no more, Sammy, no more," begged Dean, wheezing from his side of the phone.

"Shut up, man. You wanted to hear the hunting stories that I have, so I'm telling them to you."

Sam had missed this. During those last three years, there hadn't ever been any real time for laughter, for fun, for them just being the Winchesters, screwed up as they were. Sam had missed their kind of normal.

"I still don't believe that this Castiel guy had half of those succubi following him like lost puppies, because he wasn't able to fall under their thrall."

"Castiel is...very pure in some aspects," said Sam with a small smile on his lips, "He can kick major ass though. You would like him."

"Are you setting me up on play dates now, Sammy?"

"Dude, you used to bite the other children when Dad tried to make us do those things."

"Fuck you, I was six, and that was *one time*."

"Dean, you drew blood."

"In retrospect staying up late to watch classic Dracula the night before probably wasn't the best idea."

Sam snorted and shifted the phone. He was alone in the motel room. Castiel was out practicing his archangel powers- at which he was improving all the time. And Gabriel had left about three hours ago, saying something about a bar and completing his task.

Sam knew what that meant, and, in the back of his mind, he tried to mourn for Ruby.

But she'd played him really well, so it was hard to muster up anything other than searing rage and hoping that whatever Gabriel came up with would be messy, violent, and hilarious. Hilarious was what Gabriel excelled at, so Sam had high expectations.

"It sounds like you're doing good, Sammy," whispered Dean into the phone. Sam heard the slight dip in his brother's voice and gulped.

"Dean..." began Sam, but his throat closed up. He wanted to beg Dean to come to the motel. He wanted to curl up in his brother's arms. He wanted to confess the whole thing, the truth, the future that he would fight tooth and nail to protect Dean from.

He wanted to say that he loved him back the way that Dean loved him.

Sam wanted to be selfish, to have Dean all for himself; to hang onto Dean and never, ever let him out of his sight again.

However, every time that Sam was selfish. It didn't end to well for anyone.

So he bit his tongue, swallowed the lump in his throat, and shoved down the want that crawled through his blood.

"I really miss you, Dean," said Sam really truly meaning it, "It's just not as much fun without you around."

"When can I see you, Sammy? Dad's been driving me crazy about this. I know that you're safe," Dean paused letting out a sigh, "But I need to see with my own eyes that you're well fed and not missing anything vital."

"Soon, Dean, soon. I promise. I swear it, Dean," promised Sam, murmuring softly into the phone. "We'll meet up soon."

"Are you still having those dreams, Sammy? About mom and dad and me?" asked Dean worriedly. Sam almost sighed at this, really wishing that he hadn't needed to make up the lie about the dreams. However, it had been the only way that he could get Dean to believe him.

"Sort of," admitted Sam, "It's the same cycle. And I dunno...these things... they feel so real that it's like I'm trying to stop them from happening."

"You think that you're psychic or somethin' Sammy?"

Sam paused.

"Aw shit," cursed Dean, "You are, aren't you?"

"Um...", began Sam but stopped, "You're not mad, are you?"

He must have sounded really pathetic, because Dean jumped into full mother-hen, caregiver, big brother mode.

"No," sighed Dean, speaking softly. "No, of course not, Sam. I was just surprised. Look, whatever this thing is that these visions are giving you, go do it. But sooner rather than later, because I'm going to track you all down and join up with your little club, okay?"

"I promise, Dean. Soon."

"Alright man," said Dean gruffly, "I should get going. I need to get some gas money for my baby."

"Okay, Dean," said Sam.

Right before Dean hung up, Sam spoke up again, "Dean?"

"Yeah, Sammy?"

"Promise me that you'll be careful."

"I promise, Sammy."

They hung up at the same time. Sam stared at the phone, wanting to call Castiel to go and get Dean. He needed to see him again. He wasn't strong enough to do this.

As if on cue, a pair of thin arms hugged his shoulders.

"I am not sure if I am doing this right," said Castiel in his soothing, rough monotone, "But you two will be reunited again."

"I hope you're right, Cas."

"I miss Dean also, Sam."

"I miss what we had, Castiel," Sam paused. "I think he's the only person that I could really fall in love with."

Sam leaned his body back into the angel's stilted and awkward embrace. It felt different from having Dean's large arms around him. It was comforting all the same though.

The new archangel looked at his friend and promised himself that he would make sure that Sam and Dean would find each other again. He stared at the wall as Sam drifted off to sleep.

Perhaps when Gabriel was done killing the demon spawn known as Ruby, Castiel would ask for his help. He could see his brother helping him on this.

Ruby: What?

Dean: Nothing it's just...an angel and a demon, riding in the back seat. It's like a setup for a bad joke. Or a Penthouse Forum letter.

Sam: Dude. Reality. Porn.

Dean: You call this reality? -Heaven and Hell

The motel door was flung open. The couple stood in the doorway. Her dark hands were tangled up in his messy, chestnut locks. His large, calloused hands were gripping her hips. She bucked her hips against him as he ground against her.

They stumbled into the hotel room. He made short work of her shirt, ripping off all the buttons as he kissed her neck. She let out a shuddering moan as he sucked on the skin. She made slow work of his shirt, dragging things out almost agonizingly as she unbuttoned his shirt. He let out a long, almost pained moan.

"C'mon, Ruby, faster."

"Calm down, silly boy. I like taking this slow."

"Come on girlie," growled out the Winchester, "I want this rough and fast."

"Oh?" murmured Ruby as she took off his under-shirt. She briefly admired the sculptured abs, slick with sweat and triggering a deep seated need in her. She was going to turn Sam to the dark side. She would show him what wonders demon blood could do; have him addicted to her, and then at the right moment, get him to free Lucifer.

She was so going to show up that bastard, Alistair.

Maybe Lucifer would make her a consort, because she really did appreciate Winchester's body.

"Can you do me a favor?" growled Sam's voice. Ruby crushed her lips to his in a frenzy of need, desire and lust for power.

"Just ask me, Sam."

"I want you to bite me," said Sam as he licked the skin behind her earlobe.

"What?" she purred out, shuddering in pleasure as his tongue touched a particularly sensitive spot.

"Bite me," murmured Sam, "I want you to bite me hard enough to draw blood."

So he was kinky. Ruby could work with kinky. She could introduce her blood like that. First, though, she would agree to his request. She would ooze her way into his life and claw out a place there. Then she would soon be by Lucifer's side, ruling as Consort.

"If that's what you want," she murmured demurely. Sam lay back on the bed: shirtless and looking almost godlike in the moonlight. His jeans were around his ankles. Ruby climbed on top of him and palmed his hard member.

"As you wish then," she said with a sweet smile as she situated herself on top of him. She slowly led a trail of kisses up to his shoulder. She kissed, and nipped and sucked for several moments while Sam let out breathless, needy moans.

Then she bit down, hard enough to draw blood.

Sam gasped and groaned, hips thrusting upward rubbing against her jean clad thighs.

She smiled intending to pull away as to not have the taint of human blood in her mouth.

It was too late, however, a couple drops of blood slid down her throat.

Ruby gasped and began to scream. She looked at Sam Winchester's face.

A look of vindictive glee had overtaken his handsome features.

Dean: These punishments, they're almost poetic. Well, actually they'd be more like a limerick, but still... -Tall Tales

"Seriously? I'm a bit disappointed. This was really too, too easy," said Gabriel with a bright, cheery smile. He flipped positions with Ruby. She was sweaty and burning under his touch, and as he snapped his fingers her mouth was suddenly covered with bright red duct tape to stop the screams that threatened to escape.

You think drinking demon blood is bad?

Archangel blood is a hundred times worse if you're a demon. Literally, it traps a demon in its meat-suit. Then it makes quick work of cleansing the demonic in the body.

This meant burning the body inside out; cooking the organs, frying the muscles, boiling the blood.

So Ruby was basically in a lot of pain right now.

"Though I did do a good job acting like Sam didn't I?" said Gabriel brightly, "I certainly had *you* fooled. Maybe I can go to Hollywood after we save the world."

Ruby stared at him as she writhed on the bed. Through the haze of burning pain, her eyes held the question that she desperately wanted to ask.

Who are you?

"Oh I forgot to introduce myself didn't I? Silly me, Castiel and Sam say that I need to work on my manners more. Which is really wrong. I'm a class act all the time, naturally. But I figure since that I will be killing you and all, that you should know who I am."

He raised his hand and snapped his fingers again, revealing himself still fully dressed.

"Archangel Gabriel, at your service."

She struggled more frantically against the bindings that Gabriel had snapped into place.

"Now see, we're trying to stop your boss's plans at world domination. And since you actually played a pretty big part the last time around, we needed you out of the way. Since Sammy got to kill you last time, I wanted to have a shot at it. I mean you got him addicted to demon blood. I figured only fair's fair that you should have a taste of mine."

Gabriel smiled pleasantly for several moments.

"Now I know that my blood can't purify you enough that you won't exist anymore and that really sucks a lot. But I figure that getting stabbed with your own knife would add brownie points for me. We kind of need it after all. Castiel wants to modify it into a sword and then use it to kill Lilith."

Ruby's eyes widened as Gabriel's hand snaked up her leg, stopping where her knife was hidden. With a wicked grin, he slowly unhooked it from the garter belt to which it was attached and slid it down from the leg of her jeans.

"Now with a bit of archangel pizzazz," said the Messenger of God in a light tone. He murmured a blessing over it. Enochian symbols appeared on the blade under his sure whispers.

He ripped the duct tape off her face and watched as Ruby bit back her screams. She would not let him have the satisfaction of hearing her suffer. He used the knife to slit his wrist, blood pouring from the wound and pressed it against her mouth. The wave of blood made it impossible for her to scream. It burned, and burned and burned.

Gabriel stared at her with a serious expression his face.

"Choke on it, bitch."

With his free hand, he stabbed Ruby in the stomach.

And she was no more.

Gabriel pulled his wrist back.

No one messed with the Winchesters but him now.

Staring at the mess, he sighed. He hated clean ups.

Sam: (despondently) I lost my shoe...-Bad Day at Black Rock

Three days after he'd ganked Ruby, Gabriel was staring at his brother, Castiel with a look of shock on his face. Sam had gone out to grab some dinner, and Castiel had very seriously said that they needed to talk as soon as the youngest Winchester left the room.

"So let me get this straight," said Gabriel slowly, wondering if he was drunk or high. (It had been a while since he had been either. He didn't really remember the sixties, but then again who did?) The archangel met his brother's unblinking gaze, "You want us to help Sam and Dean do the deed?"

"What deed?" asked Castiel with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Have intercourse," clarified Gabriel, feeling as though he should be at least half drunk for this conversation.

"Oh, then yes."

"This is officially the most fucked-up situation that I have ever been a part of," stated Gabriel with a sigh, "But I suppose that, if we don't, Sam will go on an emo kick about how he doesn't deserve a second chance with Dean. Then, knowing Dean, he would pine and pine away but refuse to make a move, because his head is too far up his ass. So there will be the kind of unresolved sexual tension when we finally get them in a room together that will drive all of us up the walls. I'm not built for sexual tension, Castiel."

"I know, Gabriel," said Castiel patiently.

"So we're going to help the brothers to shack up, huh?"

"That is the general idea."

"Well, I've already broken just about all the rules there are. What's one more, right?"

Castiel looked to be thinking over his statement. Gabriel sighed and summoned a bottle of Jack. In a practiced move, he downed half the bottle.

"Castiel you were just supposed to agree with me."

"Why would I do that?"

"I'm the older brother, that's why."

Castiel looked like he did not accept his perfectly valid argument but did not push it. Gabriel placed the bottle down.

"I have some herbs that can promote love and lust, breaking down the walls. But we need Sam and Dean in the room together for it to work properly."

"After I kill the demon, Lilith, then we can plan on how to get Sam and Dean to have intercourse."

Gabriel really did not need the mental images that sentence brought. He wondered if he could score some peyote from Coyote.

"Speaking of Lilith, do you have the demon killing knife procured from Ruby?"

Gabriel lazily tossed the knife to Castiel, who caught it deftly.

"So how are you going to shank the bitch?" asked Gabriel, ready to steer the conversation from 'Team Wincest' (which apparently consisted of him and his little brother. He wondered if there was therapy for archangels.)

"I have a plan."

"I hope it's a good one."

"I'm very proud of my plan," stated Castiel defensively.

"Well then I'm sure that your plan will get Lilith killed."

There was a silence between the two. After a couple moments, Gabriel broke it.

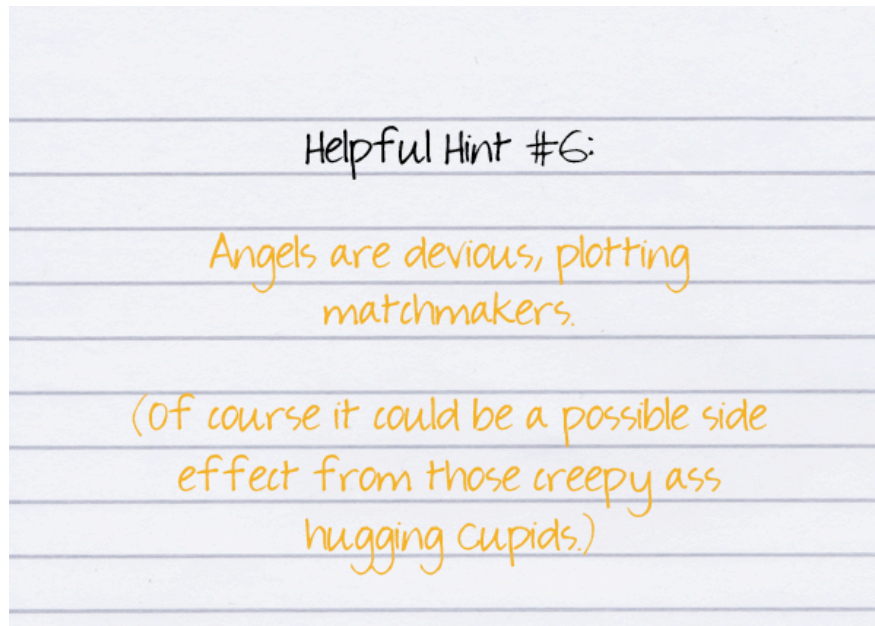
"You have no clue at all do you?"

Castiel sighed and took a swig at the bottle of Jack.

"I figure that I have hung around Dean enough to learn the fine art of 'winging it'."

Gabriel really didn't have an argument for that.

Hint Six



Sam: *(gasps out loud and jerks awake from another nightmare)* Why did you let me fall asleep?

Dean: *Because I'm an awesome brother. (pauses)* What did you dream about?

Sam: Lollipops and candy canes – Bloody Mary

Sam stared at the cell phone sitting innocently on the bed mocking him. Gabriel was amusedly looking between the cell phone and Sam. Castiel had gone out to gather intel on where Lilith was hiding.

"You know Sam I could take a hit out on the phone."

"Bite me."

"Sorry, darling. You're not my type. I prefer bottoms... and girls."

Sam flushed and glared at Gabriel, who just smiled as innocently as he could.

"You don't have to call him."

"I kind of do," said Sam with a sigh, "He has books that we need."

"I can mojo them out."

"Dude! No it's *Bobby*. I'm not going to steal from him."

"It's not stealing if an angel does it."

"Gabriel, I hate to break it to you, but I think you're too fucked up to be considered a full angel anymore."

Gabriel paused before nodding, "It's true."

"You sound way too proud of yourself."

"I wub 'ou, Sammy," sang Gabriel laughing.

Sam rolled his eyes, trying to not laugh and encourage the archangel/reforming Trickster. He picked up the cell phone and turned it over in his hands a couple of times. He stared at the phone for several moments in deep contemplation.

"Sam, call the freakin' number or have sex with the phone."

"You're sick," grumbled Sam as he began to dial.

"It got your lazy ass moving didn't it?"

"Shut up, you angelic bastard. It's ringing."

"Singer Salvage Yard," said Bobby's gruff voice.

"Hey Bobby. It's Sam."

"SAM?!" shouted out Bobby.

Sam winced and gulped.

"Yeah Bobby, it's me."

"Damn boy. You got your daddy worried about you."

"I've been checking in with Dean."

"Dean told your Dad that he hadn't heard from you in weeks," said Bobby.

"Bobby...", began Sam slowly, "I can't go back to Dad, not yet. We had this huge fight, and he told me that if I wanted to leave then I should stay gone."

"Idjit's boy. Your whole family...", muttered Bobby under his breath.

"Bobby, I really need your help on something," said Sam remembering the reason for his call.

"Sure kid. Did you and the newbies that you're with get into trouble?"

"How do you know about them?"

"Boy, you're daddy has been pitching a fit since Dean told him about it. Question is who doesn't know about you're travel buddies. Now answer the question, you in trouble?"

The youngest Winchester sighed and rubbed his hand over his face.

"I dunno, Bobby," murmured Sam, "We were exorcising this demon a couple weeks ago...and it started to talk."

"Kid, you know not to believe what demons say."

"It was talking about mom. It had a name, the name."

Bobby quieted down almost instantly.

"It told us to look into weather patterns around the time of nursery fires. Before we finished exorcising it, it yelled out one name."

"Yeah?"

"I found someone to verify the weather patterns and stuff, but he knows nothing about demons. So Bobby, can you look up the name Azazel for us?"

"Are you sure kid? What about your Dad?"

"I don't want to get his hopes up. You just said it, demons lie. Besides we said things that would make it hard for us to talk to each other without breaking into a fight," here Sam let out a sigh, "But I don't know... you ever get the feeling like a piece of information sounds so right?"

"Yeah... Yeah I do kid. Alright I'll look it up for you. I can get you at this number?"

"Yeah," said Sam with a small smile, "Can you do me a favor?"

"Sure."

"Tell my dad to lay off the search. I'll come back when I'm good and ready. I don't know why Dean didn't call him. But I think it's because he knows that we would get nothing done if we were working together again."

"Alright. It's not like I'm talking to John right now."

"Why?"

"We got into a fight. I won't say what it was about. But let's just say that if your dad shows his face on my property anytime soon. He's getting an ass-full of buckshot."

"Dad always was a charmer."

Bobby snorted into the phone, "I'm glad that you called, kid."

"Thanks for doing this Bobby."

"Anytime, Sam, anytime."

Sam hung up the phone.

"Scary as you thought?" asked Gabriel from his spot, "Do you want to lock yourself in the bathroom and have a good man-cry of relief?"

"Hardy-har-har," mumbled Sam as he tossed a pillow at Gabriel's head.

(laughing) You turn yourself into a freak. A monster. And now you're gonna bite? I'm sorry but that is honestly adorable.-Lilith Lucifer Rising

Castiel buried his Grace, tying it as tight as he could allow himself. He could not reveal himself, until the moment was right. He peered over the newspaper as he sensed her approach. The air stank with her potent scent. It made Castiel's Grace struggle against its bonds, wanting to lay waste to her then and there. He shoved it down further, promising it that there it would be released soon.

Castiel watched the slip of a girl, a pretty little thing really, walk the streets as the early rays of sunset colored the sky. She couldn't have been older than fifteen; dressed in a pure, snow-white dress made of taffeta and lace, with the heels of her patent leather, white Mary Jane's clicking on the sidewalk. Her pale blonde hair flew around her face as her long, white wool coat trailed behind her.

Castiel hid himself and became the air as he followed her. She would be what most humans would think of when they thought of angels. However, he knew what sort of sick and twisted creature inhabited her body. He knew the evil darkness that had eaten and burned the girl's soul until there was no more, only a defiled being, only emptiness that remained. It churned his stomach and, were he a weaker angel, it would have filled him with fear.

She was a parody of innocence and light. She was the sort of evil that would trick a person with a beatific smile and kind words into her trap. Then she would stab the person in the back and let their entrails drop onto the floor.

Evil hidden by false masks are always the most dangerous and tempting to humans.

The new archangel watched her as she turned the corner; going to a home filled with rotting corpses and the stench of death. Her own brand of evil surrounded it. The trees were already dead, not merely preparing for winter and the grass wilted and browned even more as she stepped onto the property.

He could kill her right now.

But now was not the time, even though he was now an archangel. Castiel knew of remedies that would repel her evil powers, of herbs that would make it impossible for her to touch him, so he silently watched the girl hum as she skipped up the steps. Her skin was almost eerily pale in the rosy red glow of the twilight as she entered the house.

Castiel watched before disappearing, making sure that his Grace would not alert her to the fact that he'd been there.

A bell-like laughter echoed through the house as the archangel disappeared. It was an innocent sound, the kind people would hear at slumber parties and whispered secrets that would float through the hallways at any sort of school. It did not betray the evil that was going on in the house.

A young girl, a pretty little thing, smiled, slow and sweet, with pale pink, almost blue, lips as she cut the throat of her mother. Blood splattered across the lily white slick of her face. Her milky white eyes glowed in the bloody light of twilight. She licked the blade and smiled at the little boy who was cowering in the corner.

She had no idea what sort of wrath she had brought upon herself.

Dean: I have to look out for you! That's my Job.

Sam: What do you think my job is?

Dean: What?

Sam: You saved my life! Over and over! Man you sacrifice everything for me! Don't you think I would do the same for you? -All Hell Breaks Loose Part 2

Sam tipped his head back onto the headboard. Some of his hair splayed out behind him, giving a parody of a halo. Books, papers and handwritten notes lay strewn messily across his bed. The hum of the heater pierced the odd silence of the room. Gabriel had gone out to grab some dinner, because he knew that Sam needed some alone time. Castiel was elsewhere, preparing to kill Liliith.

Sam was left with his thoughts, and his research, and a tiredness that went soul deep. He couldn't bring himself to feel rage or anger or hatred. He just wanted this over and done with. He wanted Dad and Dean safe.

More importantly, he wanted the small shack in Tahiti with Dean spreadeagled before him. He wanted passion, and happiness and the love that came from their fucked up relationship. He just needed something consistent in his life. Frighteningly, nothing seemed to be consistent except the desire to smoke the demonic bastards and stop the motherfucking Apocalypse.

A knock on the door broke the silence of the room.

Sam sat up, momentarily surprised by the sudden burst of noise. He knew that it wasn't Gabriel, that bastard would just mojo his way in from the parking lot, and Sam was fairly certain that he had never seen Castiel use a door in his life. Slowly he stood, grabbing his curved knife with Enochian sigils carved into the blade and easily hid it behind him.

"Who is it?" he called.

"It's the freakin' Easter bunny," grumbled the voice from the other side of the door.

Sam stared the door in shock. His gut churned with emotions that he didn't want to think about right now. This could be a dream. This could be a very cruel dream. He was going to wake up the moment that he flung the door open. And all that would be left was the sick feeling of disappointment in his stomach, heavy like lead, and something that would feel a lot like heartbreak.

Sam nervously licked his lips before reaching for the doorknob. He turned it slowly, praying with all his heart that this wasn't a dream. That he wouldn't wake up, alone, and sad and so motherfucking hard for Dean that it was painful.

He opened the door and stared at the sight of Dean on the other side of the threshold.

"Dean?" asked Sam, praying that his voice wouldn't crack from repressed emotion.

Dean smiled his laziest smile. The one that had waitresses, and bartenders and anyone who came under its power fall to their knees and cater to his whims. The best part was, Sam realized with a little pang, that it reached his eyes. It was a real smile.

Sam hadn't seen a real Dean smile in such a long time.

"Hey Sammy," greeted Dean cheerfully. His duffel bag was by his feet, "Mind if I drop in?"

Sam, still not trusting his voice or his mental state, slowly held out the flask of holy water that he kept near the door. Dean grabbed it, spun the top open with practiced ease, and took a long drink. Sam swallowed and quickly calmed himself down.

"Of course, man," said Sam stepping aside, "I was just about to call you anyway."

"Yeah?" asked Dean lazily.

"Yeah, I just talked to Bobby," said Sam easily. Dean froze, and the youngest Winchester brother continued, "So why are you lying to Dad about me?"

Dean had a sheepish grin on his face as he opened his mouth to answer. However, due to the gift of having the worse (or best) timing in the whole universe, a voice cut in.

"Ooooh! Family drama," sang Gabriel from the doorway, "I'm so glad that I picked up the white cheddar popcorn!"

Dean stared at Gabriel.

Sam could feel his bottom right eyelid twitch.

Gabriel pretended not to notice as he shut the door and sauntered into the room, dumping the bag of Chinese food on the small table along with the car keys. The ex-Trickster and the aforementioned bag of white cheddar popcorn took up residence on the other bed with a two liter bottle of Mountain Dew on the nightstand next to him. His eyes were alight with wicked mischief, and the smile of the Trickster was on his face.

"Dean this is Gabriel," grumbled Sam, wondering if he could kill an archangel and still get into heaven, "Gabriel this is Dean."

"Oh so this is Dean!" exclaimed Gabriel in perfectly acted surprise and shock, "Fantastic! Lovely to meet you, Dean-o. I'm a fan of your work."

"Huh?" said Dean looking at Sam with an expression that clearly said 'you've been traveling with insane asylum escapees'.

"Sam's told me about your prank wars! Nair in the shampoo? Brilliant!"

"Gabriel, down!" said Sam firmly as he put down his knife, "you're scaring him."

"I'm sure that your brother has faced things scarier than me."

"Not while they were hopped up on candy and energy drinks, he hasn't," said Sam before threatening, "Don't make me take your Mountain Dew away."

Gabriel pouted and crossed his arms, "Aww you're no fun, Sammy."

"Bite me."

"Must we have this conversation daily? You're not my type, darling. Nothing personal, I just like people of average height."

Sam rolled his eyes and flipped the archangel the bird with a casual air.

"So this is one of your new friends, Sammy?" asked Dean slowly as if trying to think of a coherent reason why Sam would be friends with Gabriel.

That was the same question that Sam had wondered about almost three times a day, and he still hadn't come up with a good answer.

"So why haven't you told Dad?"

Dean sighed and flopped down onto one of the chairs. He glanced at his brother casually.

"Because you were right."

Sam stared at Dean before intelligibly saying, "Huh?"

"I said that you were right. If Dad forced you to come back, then you would be miserable. I would be miserable. Dad would be paranoid and have trust issues."

Sam snorted.

"More than normal," amended Dean quickly, "I figure that you're eighteen. Most of the time you do have a general idea what the fuck to do; plus I knew that you would call me if you were in over your head."

Sam smiled a little bit, "Thanks, man."

Dean shifted uncomfortably in his chair. This was getting too chick-flick like for his taste.

"So looks like you found a hunt," said Dean by way of changing the subject. He stood and walked over to Sam's research strewn bed.

"Oh he's found something bigger than a hunt," said Gabriel lightly, ready to churn up trouble.

Dean shot a confused look to Sam, who rubbed the back of his neck after throwing a bitchface at the archangel. Sam swallowed thickly before saying.

"I think that I may have found the thing that killed Mom."

Dean's face turned ashen, and he reeled backwards. (fell heavily to the floor in a sitting position.) I honestly don't think that Dean would fall to the floor in shock.

"Shit, Sammy. What the hell have you gotten into?" whispered Dean.

No, no, no,no...Mr. Trickster does not like pretty angel boys.-NutCracker Host Changing Channels

Castiel slowly stripped to his boxers and stepped into the old washtub.

"Hey Cas...", began Gabriel as he walked in. He then saw his brother's state of clothed-ness and clapped a hand over his eyes, "Oh Dad! That's something I never needed to see."

"Hello Gabriel," said Castiel calmly.

"Why are you half naked?" asked Gabriel.

"I am preparing to go kill the demon Lilith."

"What does this have to do with you being almost naked?"

Castiel did something very close to huffing and fixed his stare onto Gabriel, "I am using various holy oils and herbs used to repel her evil, in order for her powers to have a less significant impact on me. So I am rubbing them into my skin and since I only have one change of clothing. I would rather it not be oily."

"But you don't care if you're boxers are oily."

"Brother, I am in a wash tub in the middle of an abandoned house in small town America. If someone happened to stumble upon me then I would rather be partially clothed than naked. Now pass me the oil of Abramelin and uncover your eyes. This is not the most awkward position we have seen the other in."

"You coming in during my having sex just proves you need to learn about doors," grumbled Gabriel but he did as his younger brother asked.

Castiel poured the oil into a small basin and mixed it with the caraway herb. Gabriel perched, watching his younger brother work everything into a paste.

"So Dean showed up," said Gabriel by way of a conversation starter. He suppressed a grin as Castiel fumbled with the bowl.

"He did?"

"Yeeeeeep," drawled out the archangel as he cracked his knuckles.

"So after I lay waste to Lilith then Sam will want to go after Azazel," stated Castiel as he rubbed the paste into his skin.

"Pretty much."

"How did you leave the room without Dean noticing?"

"I'm using one of my doppelganger techniques," said Gabriel with a small smile. He turned serious suddenly. His concern for his youngest brother was clearly shown on his face, "You sure you're ready for this?"

"Thank you for your worry, Gabriel, but I will be fine. I promise."

"Alright, little bro," Gabriel paused, "If you say so."

"I do," said Castiel as he finished working the paste into his skin, "I appreciate your concern."

"Yeah well I'm just happy to have a brother on an equal level that's not a complete asshole."

Castiel's lips twitched up into a small smile. He waved his hands, and his clothing reappeared on his body.

"Good luck Castiel."

"Thank you, Gabriel," said Castiel with a small smile, "I am going to go shank the bitch, now."

Gabriel's loud, surprised laughter followed Castiel as he disappeared in a flurry of wings.

Ruby: I want Lilith dead.

Dean: Why?

Ruby: I told you why.

Dean: Oh right, because you were human once, and you liked kittens, and long walks on the beach!

Ruby: You know, I am so sick of proving myself to you! You want to save yourself, this is how, you dumb spineless dick! (is punched by Dean) –No Rest For The Wicked

She was still dressed in white when Castiel found her again. It was a dress that went to her mid-calf made of purest white satin and lace. She wore a pair of white high heels outlined in rhinestones. They were probably her vessel's first pair ever. She was still wearing the white wool coat. Castiel dropped the power that kept him hidden. His Grace was loosely bound, ready for him to call at a moment's notice.

It was best to let her think that he was an ordinary hunter for now.

He walked into the church. The priest that lived there was dead, killed by her pretty, pale hands and her false words. He silently asked his Father for strength and guidance for the fight that was about to take place.

He sat in the pew across from her.

She turned staring at him with unblinking eyes.

"Demon," murmured Castiel softly.

Suddenly, she smiled and laughed as clear as bell and innocent as a bird's song.

"A hunter," she sounded as delighted as a child on Christmas morning, "Oh, it's been too, too long since I had fun like this."

She stood and smiled, "So you know that I am a demon."

He nodded carefully, "I know that you killed the girl's family."

"Oh yes," said Lilith enthusiastically, "That was a lot of fun too! She screamed so very prettily as I killed the family that she thought she wanted dead. Of course she was long gone after I got to Mommy. Baby brother was the sweetest kill. He watched it all happen. He cried so hard."

Castiel stood and began to murmur an exorcism. Lilith laughed again and with a flick had Castiel pinned against the wall. The new archangel allowed her to think that she had the upper hand.

"Oh really, hunter, do you think that could harm me? No mere mortal can."

She went to caress his face before pulling her hand away quickly. It was smoking, and she grimaced.

"Caraway plant," hissed Lilith as she blew the smoke away, "Someone did his research."

Castiel smiled, "All the sweeter when I kill you."

Lilith laughed again mockingly, "You really think that you can kill me? You're human. A disgusting speck of dust that I will enjoy ripping to shreds."

"I am not human," said Castiel letting a little of his hidden Grace slip through.

"*Angel*," spat out Lilith sneering, "What? Is this for extra credit? Trying to get on your Daddy's good side?"

"He's your master's Father as well."

"Awww that's sweet. Are you going to save me?"

"No. You are beyond saving."

"Misguided, featherbrained fools like you have come before. And I have ripped out their Grace and stripped their vessels of their flesh. What makes you think that you can defeat me?"

"Simple," said Castiel, "I have more power than you can ever dream of."

Lilith backed away her eyes the purest white. She trembled as if truly afraid whispering one word.

"Archangel."

Castiel smiled and unfurled all six hundred of his wings. He could feel her struggle to get out of the body of the girl. However, the sigils he had drawn in his blood, mixed with the caraway seeds, kept her locked in nice and tight. She ran forward to claw at him, growling like a caged animal.

Castiel sidestepped out of her way.

"I have not heard of you, archangel," growled Lilith. Her true voice bled into the dulcet tones of the young girl, and it sounded like nails on a chalkboard, mixed with the squelching sound mud makes when someone treks through it, "You are not Michael. His true vessel is unknowing. My master is still locked in his jail. No one has heard from Gabriel in millennia. Raphael rarely leaves his perch in heaven."

"I am new. Recently promoted by will of my Father," said Castiel allowing his true voice to mix in as well. It was like rough waves crashing down heavily on rocks and the sound of storms brewing, "You have committed many egregious acts against humanity, Lilith. I cannot allow you to live."

His Grace unbound a little more, spiraling out of his vessel. Lilith howled in the holy light as she was bathed in it. Castiel brandished the knife as his vessel's hair, filled with the light of his Grace, flew around him. A ring of bluish white light crowned his head. His eyes were slowly overtaken until they had become pure blue orbs, the color of the Caribbean Sea.

Lilith screeched and tried to run away from the light of him.

However, Castiel was quicker and surrounded by both the glory of his Father and his own Grace. A sudden shower of rain began to pound outside echoing through the church.

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

It was the sound of cleansing.

Lilith threw some of her kinetic energy at Castiel, who briefly sidestepped it. He merely walked toward her. The sound of his pristine dress shoes echoed throughout the church, mixing with the sound of the rain.

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

She growled and bared her teeth. The girl's hair fell around her face, almost blue in the not quite light of the church.

"I will not fall to you, archangel!"

Castiel tilted his head.

"It is too late," murmured Castiel. His voice rumbled in time with the crash of thunder outside.

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

She was on top of the altar now, crouched in a position reminiscent of a feral animal. Castiel stepped before the altar and felt the power of his Father burn through his body. He waved his hand, pinning Lilith down. She screamed and spat and cursed his Father.

Quietly and methodically he leaned and pressed a kiss to her forehead, silencing her screams and rants. He then he gently raised the knife, apologized to the young girl and finally slit her throat.

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

As the blood trickled out, he pulled out a silver urn that had been blessed by two archangels. It had the Devil's Trap drawn on every side of it along with other Enochian sigils. Lilith's blood was what harkened the Apocalypse. So they were going to keep it under lock and key, just to be safe.

Castiel watched as Lilith's eyes and mouth became white and bowed his head. She was gone from this plane. He gently stroked the cheek of Lilith's vessel, her neck slit and drained dry of blood and gently closed her blue-grey eyes and put her pale hands across her chest.

With a gust of wind, he was gone.

The rain still pounded on the roof of the church as the storm continued.

On the altar, there lay a slip of a girl. She was a pretty little thing really. Her skin was bluish white and her pale blonde hair fell around her head and off the ends of the altar like a halo. She was dressed in a white dress made of satin and lace. Her white wool coat was stretched behind her like angel's wings. In the lightening lit up the rhinestones of her white, high heels (her first pair).

Her hands were crossed over her chest.

She was a pretty little thing, what people thought of when they would think of angels.

And she had been the vessel to the key that humanity could only dare to imagine.

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Rat-ta-tat-tat

Her face was at peace.

Pretty little thing.

Real Estate Agent: Let me just say. We accept home owners of any race, religion, color, or... sexual orientation.

Dean: Right. Um, I'm going to go talk to Larry. Okay, honey? (smacks Sam on the ass as he walks away) -Bugs

Dean really wasn't sure of what to make of these people that Sam had decided to travel with. He had been hanging around their crappy motel room for a week, waiting for Bobby to call Sam back with information on the thing that Sam believed had killed their mom.

So he watched and got into the rhythm.

Gabriel was bat-shit insane. A possible escapee from a mental asylum was all that Dean could come up. Still he liked him. He had a wicked sense of humor, wickedly sweet tooth, and a penchant for life and fun that made Dean feel like he had been living as a nun these past twenty-two (almost twenty-three) years.

And coming from Dean that was saying something.

Still he liked Gabriel, even though his instincts were screaming at him that there wasn't something quite right about the man.

Castiel, well Dean knew instantly that there was something not quite right about him. However, there was something about the nerdy guy that dressed like his tax accountant that got to Dean. It was an easy familiarity that both surprised and frightened Dean. It felt like he'd known him before somewhere that he couldn't place.

Castiel tilted his head, stared at him long and hard before saying that he just had one of those faces.

Seriously though, did he ever blink? It was freaking Dean out.

Then there was Sammy.

He was suddenly familiar and different to Dean at the same time.

The eldest Winchester brother had no idea what had happened over these past couple months.

But whatever it was had been kind to Sammy, and it had added a whole new batch of pictures for when Dean wanted to whack one off. He was still Dean's goofy little brother, but he was this new person at the same time. This person who would wake up screaming at four in the morning due to nightmares and visions that he wouldn't tell Dean about. Dean, who was sharing Sam's bed, would roll over and toss his arm across his younger brother's bare chest and try not to think about how much enjoyment he was getting out of it.

Especially when he would wake up to Sam's breath ghosting against his shoulders, somehow switching their positions as they slept with Dean ending up as the little spoon.

And fuck no. He may take it up the ass, but Dean Winchester was so not the little fucking spoon. He elbowed Sam in the solar plexus to get him moving.

"Dude, go and brush your teeth. You have fucking morning breath."

Sam stuck out his tongue before sleepily rolling out of bed and wandering into the bathroom.

"So how long have you like-liked Sammy?" asked Gabriel from his spot on his own bed. Castiel looked up from his reading to stare at his brother.

"What?" said Dean (in what was definitely not a squeak. His voice just went up when he was caught off guard. It was not a fucking squeak).

"Gabriel is asking if you want to have intercourse with Sam."

"No I'm not, Cas! I'm asking if he likes Sam like that."

"Sam is in the bathroom," groaned out Dean covering his face with his hand.

"Sam is dead to the world first thing in the morning. He's probably asleep in the tub."

Dean hated to admit that they were probably right.

"You seem to be taking my probable incestuous feelings with my brother pretty well."

Gabriel shrugged, "Everyone's fucked up. Believe me, this is not the oddest situation that I have seen -- or even been in."

"Our family is a little unorthodox as well," stated Castiel stoically from his spot.

"So answer the question, Dean-o."

Dean sighed and felt like a thirteen year old girl, "Yes okay? Why do you want to fucking know anyway?"

Gabriel grinned, "Well did you know that when Sam's had one too many he's a very open person?"

"What?" asked Dean.

Gabriel grinned. His eyes were bright and laughing, "Dean, Sam has feelings for you too."

Dean stared blankly at the wall before letting out a burst of hysterical and relieved laughter. He rubbed a hand over his face.

Castiel and Gabriel slyly gave each other an excited thumbs-up.

Dean, however, felt relieved and happy at the same time. Sammy had these feelings too.

Maybe this was the one thing that he could allow himself to have.

Dean: I just talked to an eighty four year old grandmother who's been having phone sex with her husband...who died in Korea.

Sam: Ugh (looks disgusted)

Dean: Completely rocked my understanding of the word necrophilia. -Long Distance Call

It wasn't that hard to bribe Gabriel and Castiel to vacate the motel room for a couple of hours. Because when Dean Winchester found out that he could have something that he wanted, he would almost always jump on it with the enthusiasm of several hundred Brad Pitt fan-girls.

Little did he know that 'Team Wincest' (a.k.a. Castiel and Gabriel) had set some herbs to stimulate sexual urges and feelings of love; while this wouldn't force love onto the subjects, it would break down walls enough for their feelings to be free flowing.

Dean went out and bought pizza and beer before returning back to the motel room.

Sam was perched on the bed again; doing more research.

"Hey Sammy," said Dean to get his brother's attention, "Take the night off and have some dinner with me."

Sam looked at his work before smiling and closing the laptop, "I think I can do that."

Dean smiled and turned on some crap sci-fi movie. Sam grabbed a slice of pizza and bitched about the little green peppers that Dean knew he secretly loved and refused to admit it. They sat close together on the bed, alternating between eating the pizza and laughing at the cheesy effects of the movie.

"Dude I just saw the guy's foot!"

"Shut up; you did not!"

"Did so!" said Sammy childishly; there was a light in his eyes and an easy grin on his face.

"Did not, Gigantor."

"You're just jealous that you're a shrimp."

"Oh it's on now, bitch."

With that Dean tackled him and wrestled Sam to the ground. They laughed, mock-wrestling for what felt like the first time in ages. Dean flailed about as Sam tried to get him in a headlock. They fought on, kicking empty beer bottles around as greasy paper plates fluttered about in the air.

It felt so good to have his Sammy so close that Dean could hear his light breathy laughs. It filled up a long forgotten ache in his chest a little bit. Repressed emotions bubbled to the surface as Sam was able to pin him to the bed.

"Looks like I won," said Sam with a triumphant grin on his face.

"Yeah looks like you did, Sammy," said Dean staring into Sam's catlike hazel eyes.

They didn't break the position.

"I'm going to do something stupid, Sammy," said Dean slowly, "And if you don't want me to do it again, then just say so, and we'll forget it ever happened."

Sam stared at him as a slow smile spread across his face, revealing his deep dimples.

"Alright," whispered Sam, like he almost couldn't believe what he thought was about to happen.

Dean slowly moved up as Sam dipped down. Their lips met in a kiss.

Dean could see stars. His blood was electricity racing and roaring through his veins. He knew that this was right, that it felt right, that it was better than anything he could imagine.

It felt like home.

They reluctantly pulled apart.

Sammy, from his place above Dean, grinned brilliantly. Dean couldn't help but smile back.

"Can we do that again?" whispered Sam slowly. His hands were still pinning Dean's wrists down, and he was straddled over Dean's hips.

"Fuck yeah," said Dean as they kissed again.

Just for a brief moment, everything was absolute bliss in the lives of Sam and Dean Winchester.

Hint Seven

Helpful Hint #7:

Revenge should not consume your life.
However, when you finally nail the
bastard who made your life, your
family's lives a misery and inadvertently
led you down the path to starting the
Apocalypse... well no one can blame you
for wanting to toy with the bastard.

Dean: *What if we win? I'm serious. I mean, screw the angels, and the demons and their crap Apocalypse. Hell, they want to fight a war? They can find their own planet. This one's ours, and I say they get the hell off it. We take 'em all on. We kill the Devil, we even kill Michael if we have to, but we do it our own damn selves.*

Bobby: *And how are we supposed to do that?*

Dean: *(shrugs) I've got a G.E.D. and a "give them hell" attitude, and I'll figure it out.*

Bobby: *You're nine kinds of crazy, boy.*

Dean: *It's been said. -Sympathy For The Devil*

Dean woke up to the soft murmur of voices. There was a sleepy, warm feeling in his stomach that floated through his blood. It felt good, safe.

Dean couldn't remember the last time he'd felt safe. He burrowed deeper into the blankets

He turned over, and the voices fizzled in and out like a static-y radio.

"Azazel...ritual...sacrificial..."

"Dad...no...knife..."

"Holy...angel...cemetery..."

Dean slowly opened his eyes, still in that luxuriously pleasant place between sleep and wakefulness. He didn't move though as the static-y sensation faded, leaving crystal clear sound behind it. He felt bad for eavesdropping, but he knew there was something off. Even though he and Sam had told each other their gay, incestuous feelings (well not tell, but the heavy make-out session the night before had clarified a couple things); there was still something bubbling underneath the surface. He shut his eyes again, praying they hadn't notice him wake.

"I should do this alone," said Sammy clearly, "We made it clear that we each got one of the three key demons to the Apocalypse. Gabe got Ruby. Cas got Lilith. I get Azazel."

"We're not saying that you cannot do it," murmured Castiel in his deep monotone, "But this is the demon that set your family on the path to destruction. You should at least tell your father and Dean that much."

There was the sound of someone sitting down heavily on the bed. Quiet ruled the room for several moments.

"What am I supposed to do?" whispered Sammy. (Christ, when did his brother become so *broken*?) "What am I supposed to tell them?"

"As much as you can," whispered Gabriel, speaking for the first time.

What the hell had Sammy gotten into?

"Dean," said his brother suddenly, "I know you're awake."

Dean opened his eyes and slowly sat up. He fixed his brother, sitting on the bed opposite with his head in his hands, with the hardest stare that he could muster. He threw his legs over the side of the bed and made sure that he could keep watch on Sam's face.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Sam looked up with certain deadness to his hazel eyes.

"Trying to stop the Apocalypse."

"Like as in the End of Days, Four Horsemen type deal?"

"Yeah," said Sam ruffling up his hair.

"What the hell did you get involved in, Sammy? I can't believe the Apocalypse is going down right now. I haven't heard of rivers of blood and plagues sweeping across the land, or any of that shit."

"It won't if we have anything to do with it," said Castiel simply.

"Look," growled out Dean. "I want a straight answer from someone, and I want it now!"

"Whoa, whoa," said Gabriel with his hands up. "Calm down, Dean-o. I'll explain."

"Gabriel," snapped Sam, sounding so very old and so very dangerous.

Gabriel rolled his eyes and continued on.

"The Apocalypse is scheduled to happen some nine years from now. And what happened was that it went down, and all that's good and beautiful was lost," said Gabriel seriously before shrugging. "Not to worry though. See the only people who were looking to y'know actually save the world came up with a plan. A soul was sent back in time, with all its memories intact to stop the thing."

"And I was the soul," whispered Sam.

Dean licked his lips not really sure whether to believe this or not. However, he studied Sam, really looking at him. The hunched shoulders, the heavy lidded eyes, the nightmares, keeping everyone at a distance, even Dean, these past couple months...this was his Sammy for sure, but it was a Sam with another set of memories - of something so bleak...

Dean shut his eyes tight, wondering why it wasn't him with that haunted look.

"You died," said Sam as if reading his mind. "You died in the final battle."

"Sammy..."

"You don't know what you did for me, Dean," whispered Sammy, "You don't know. We shouldn't have kissed but...but...God Dean. We were *together* in that future. And those were the only good memories that I had. I just wanted that so much. I needed that so much."

Dean noticed that Sammy's eyes were suspiciously wet. He watched as his younger brother swallowed back tears and choked back the sobs that threatened to spill over.

"I led to your destruction. I can't let that happen again."

"Sammy," whispered Dean softly, the way he'd always done when his younger brother had a bad dream.

"No Dean. Don't say it isn't my fault. You sold your soul for me. You went to Hell for me. And I was too weak to even try to survive without you. I can't let that happen again. Not this time. I don't want the world to be overrun by demons and turned into ash. But, most importantly..."

Sam stared at Dean with eyes full of unshed tears, full of fear at how Dean might react, and full of such overwhelming love that it made Dean feel unworthy of that gaze.

"I don't want to know a world without you by my side ever again, above the world, above all others. I can't lose you, Dean."

Dean stood and slowly walked over to take a seat next to his brother. He wrapped a tentative arm around Sam, slowly pulling his brother closer. He gently pressed his lips to Sam's, hoping to shut him up. They stayed like that for several moments until reluctantly they broke the kiss.

"End of Days huh?"

"Yeah."

"Okay," murmured Dean pressing his lips to Sam's hair, "How do we stop it?"

"We? Dean..."

"Dude, do you really think I'm going to let you go into this alone?"

Sam looked to be at a loss for words. He sighed, knowing that Dean was just going to be stubborn if he told his brother no.

"So this demon that killed mom?"

"Azazel," said Sam slowly. "He took a bunch of babies, selected through deals and random chance, and he would sneak into their nurseries on their sixth month birthday and..."

"And?"

"The demon Azazel would feed the infant his blood," said Castiel seriously.

The Winchester brothers jumped, realizing that they had completely forgotten about their audience. Dean stood, staring down at the two man-shaped creatures.

"I know you two ain't human. So what the fuck are you?"

"Angels," said Gabriel simply, "Or rather Archangels. Of course, I could be much more specific."

"Angels?" asked Dean dubiously. He glanced at Sammy for confirmation. Sam smiled reassuringly.

"They're legit, Dean. Castiel was the one who saved you from Hell."

Castiel nodded seriously.

"And Gabriel?" asked Dean.

"Besides being the Messenger of God? Well I did leave home, went pagan, and am now sticking my neck out for you all."

"Angels are dicks for the most part," said Sammy simply. "Their true forms would melt our eyes out of their sockets, and their true voices would make us deaf."

"Pleasant."

"You have no idea," said Sammy as he stood.

Dean sat back down on the bed again. He clasped his hands together tightly and went into deep thought for several moments. Finally, he spoke.

"I'm not sure how much of this I would believe on my own," said Dean finally. Sam's face assumed a crestfallen expression, "However, I do believe Sammy. And if he believes this...then so do I. This is really fucking weird though."

"You're not the one with memories of an apocalyptic future in your head," said Sam dryly.

"One rule though," said Dean.

"Yeah?"

"We're not telling Dad the whole story. He may not be as understanding as me."

Sam laughed bitterly, "I didn't plan on it."

"Alright," said Dean finally, "So what do we do?"

"We plan and call in the Calvary."

"And pray," said Castiel seriously.

"And drink!" crowed Gabriel holding a bottle of tequila in his hands.

"An archangel you say?" murmured Dean.

"Reformed Trickster if that makes you feel any better."

"It really doesn't."

Sam sat back and stared at the group of people surrounding him.

"This is Team Free Will," said Sam under his breath.

"Yes," said Castiel, hearing Sam's murmur of disbelief.

"Amazing we kept to The Plan at all really."

And as Gabriel and Dean argued back and forth about proper morning drinking etiquette, Sam and Castiel leaned back on the bed in wonder.

John: Get back in the car.

Sam: No.

John: I said, get back in the damn car.

Sam: Yeah. And I said no. —Dead Man's Blood

It had been two weeks since sort of coming clean to Dean. And they were in a crappy motel about twenty miles outside of Lawrence, Kansas. Sam sat on the bed, cross-legged, watching as Dean paced back and forth. Gabriel alternated between watching them and the movie on the shiny, new, totally out of place television in the room. Castiel sat on one of the totally out of place, squishy chairs that Gabriel had conjured into existence, with an ancient tome on his lap.

"I can't believe you told Bobby to tell Dad where we are."

"It's part of the Plan, Dean," said Sam as calm as could be, "He wasn't around when we killed Azazel the first time...so he may want to be there when I kill the bastard."

"I say we should name the Plans instead of capitalizing the word plan at random and then expecting everyone to know what plan is being talked about," said Gabriel.

"For the last time, Gabriel," said Sam with a fond exasperation coloring his voice. "We are not calling the plan: Ganking Azazel."

"Why not?"

"It sounds like a porno; that's why."

"Guys!" called Dean, whistling sharply in order to get the archangel's and his brother's attention. He sighed, focusing on Sam to pick up their conversation. "He's not going to let you near him."

"But I'm the one who has the ritual, and I called dibs. Besides, who has the knife that kills demons?"

"We should've grabbed the Colt," murmured Castiel from his spot.

Sam waved him off casually with a small smile on his face. The past couple of weeks with Dean near him had done wonders for Sam's psyche. Sure, there had been the phone conversations, but actually having him near to touch, to sleep next to, to kiss...

Well they hadn't done anymore than kiss.

Dean, Castiel, and Gabriel had noticed, each with their own brand of relief, that the shadows in Sam's eyes had begun to recede, that he seemed more driven and less tired. There was something almost akin to peace with himself settling over the youngest Winchester. The nightmares were still there, but they didn't have Sam screaming bloody murder and begging for forgiveness from long dead ghosts until he could be woken up again.

The last three days or so since they'd settled in the motel, Sam had been quiet, not withdrawn but quiet as if he was trying to figure something out. It was an almost meditative silence, and he faced the world with a Zen like calm.

"What's he doing?" Dean asked Gabriel on a dinner run.

"Sam has a temper," said Gabriel, "I think he's trying to get to a mental place where it won't affect the outcome of this grudge match. Azazel knows some of the chinks in his armor. Demons know how to press his buttons just right. If Azazel can't get a rise from Sam, then it will make him nervous and so much more vulnerable to attack."

Something in Gabriel's eyes when he said that frightened Dean a little; he had gotten the idea that the archangel turned trickster, who was now apparently reforming, usually took the less serious route. There was a steeliness in his eyes that made Dean's honed senses scream at him not to mess with Gabriel when he was like this.

"Simple, Castiel," said Sam simply and with a tone in his voice that showed he had thought at length about this, "I don't want to shoot the bastard. I want my face to be the last thing that he sees ever. I want vengeance."

There was a pause.

"And after that we can get the Colt," continued Sam.

"And after we get the Colt?" asked Dean.

"Well," said Sam, "then that's your call, Dean. Personally, I'm hoping you decide for a trip to Tahiti on Air Angel. We could use a break."

Dean sat down next to his brother and gently pressed a kiss to his temple.

"No planes?"

Sam smiled indulgently, "No planes. Babes, booze, and personally I'm hoping to get acquainted with the bedroom."

Dean opened his mouth to answer, when a familiar knock echoed through the motel room.

Team Free Will froze.

"Dean! Sam! Open this door right now."

John Winchester and the cavalry had arrived.

Azazel: You know the truth right? About Sammy? And the other children?

John: Yeah. I've known for a while.

Azazel: But Sam doesn't, does he? You've been playing dumb. -In My Time of Dying

Castiel had always been curious about John Winchester. Even as the world ended, Dean and Sam would still refer to their father and their childhood. He was a phantom presence, truly gone but always bubbling underneath the surface. His actions in a situation would dictate Dean's and Sam's. While Dean would try to do what his father wanted, Sam rebelled to a point.

Some say that this would be classic mirroring of Michael and Lucifer; however, Castiel was more inclined to compare their actions to himself and Gabriel. Michael was a warrior, almost machine like. He did everything while questioning nothing. Dean, as his vessel, may have displayed those traits in earlier years. But even without living through an Apocalypse, Castiel could see that he was beginning to change. Dean was always faithful, (like Castiel himself) but Dean always questioned.

Lucifer was a sweet talking, charismatic, prideful being; traits which Sam embodied, up to a point. The difference between Sam and Lucifer was that Sam was always willing to admit that he was wrong. Oh, it often took some time, and he was frequently hurt by his confession, but Sam Winchester was always ready to admit when he'd messed up. Sam was always ready to ask for forgiveness and accept it with a good grace. Lucifer never asked, never admitted that he may have been wrong. Gabriel, in contrast to Lucifer, and a lot like Sam, was willing to admit when he was wrong. Again it took some time, but in the end Gabriel had asked Castiel for forgiveness.

Castiel pulled himself out of his musings as he calmly stared down the barrel of Pastor Jim Murphy's shotgun. He sat on the bed next to Gabriel (who looked on with a mixture of amusement and anger). Their hands were tied behind their backs with bindings that they could easily get out of (but wouldn't, in order to gain the hunters' trust.)

"Oh this reminds me of the good family memories," muttered Gabriel as he watched Sam and John stare each other down. He seemed unconcerned by the fact that Bobby Singer's gun was in his face.

(To be perfectly honest, both Pastor Jim and Bobby felt very bad about shoving guns into their faces. However, it was either that or John would shoot out their kneecaps for them. They had apologized as they tied Gabriel and Castiel, which Gabriel thought was rather considerate of them.)

Castiel turned his head and looked at Gabriel.

"Will they be speaking soon?"

"Dunno," began Gabriel, "I think they're trying to establish who the alpha is. It's like watching a nature documentary on Animal Planet; except there's a better chance that someone's going to end up getting shot...or stabbed. Sometimes I forget how twisted Sammy can be with a knife. What I really want for this is popcorn."

Bobby raised an eyebrow at Gabriel, who shrugged.

"You're not all there are you?" asked the elder hunter.

"Not in the slightest," said the archangel easily.

Castiel turned his head to watch father and son square off. Dean sat on a bed looking between them helplessly. Sam's body language screamed non-threatening teenager, from his slouched shoulders that made him look smaller, to the hands in his pockets. However, Castiel had a suspicion about how fast Sam could go from passive to threatening if John Winchester prodded the right buttons.

"What were you thinking, Sammy?!" growled out John Winchester. His entire body posture screamed aggressive. He made a valiant attempt to tower over the slouching Winchester brother, but, even slouching, Sam was still taller.

Sam didn't answer. He merely pursed his lips and stared impassively back.

"Well?! Answer me!"

"Why?" asked Sam softly.

"What?"

"Why?" murmured Sam as he stood taller, "Why should I answer you?"

"I'm your father."

"And I know a secret," said Sam voice still quiet and calm, "And the worst part is you know it too."

"What are you talking about, Sammy?"

"I know what Azazel did that night."

And with that sentence, John Winchester's face turned ashen gray. He sat heavily on a chair. Sam looked at him from under his long ashes.

"I have demon blood in me, Dad," began Sam before pausing and licking his lips, "And you knew it."

"I suspected it," said John Winchester.

"Dad...", said Dean finally sounding a little bit betrayed.

Sam nodded, "All right then."

That shocked everyone in the room. Castiel assumed that they'd been expecting a temper tantrum, to have Sam scream and yell at John Winchester for what he'd kept secret. Maybe Sam at eighteen would have done that, but this was a Sam who had lost his father close to four years ago; he wasn't up to rehashing old wounds.

Sam sat down next to Dean and gave his brother a gentle smile that said Dean wasn't going to have to play peacekeeper this time, and then he turned and stared at his father for several moments.

"What do you want to know?"

"How do you know this, Sammy?"

"Dreams...", began Sam as if he was choosing his words, "Visions if you want to get specific about it. Whatever the blood was supposed to do kicked in early for me."

"This bastard did this to more families?" asked Bobby, not taking his eyes off Gabriel.

"Demons," said Castiel from his spot, "especially powerful ones, tend to mess with the Earth's atmosphere. Electrical storms, mysteriously dead cattle and other signs show that there is a powerful demon in the area. They are naturally against the order of things."

He then fell silent again before asking, "Can we not be tied up anymore? I do not think that I like it."

"Good to know that my kid brother isn't kinky."

Dean snorted. Sam's mouth twitched upward into a smirk.

John Winchester was decidedly not amused.

"I still think that it's too convenient that you two appeared suddenly."

"Well we are not human," began Gabriel easily.

The rifles' got pumped.

"However," continued Gabriel, "we're not anything bad."

"What the hell are you then?" demanded Bobby, voice having gone cold.

"We are angels of the Lord," said Castiel seriously.

"Sent to make sure Sammy there kills Azazel and stops the Apocalypse," continued Gabriel cheerfully.

"Angels," said Pastor Jim, looking like he wanted to desperately lower his weapon. He was a man of God after all.

"Prove it," demanded the eldest Winchester.

No sooner than the words had left his mouth, the room shook with unrestrained power. The streetlamps outside exploded in a shower of sparks and broken glass. Sam gulped as he took in the sight of Gabriel and Castiel unleashing enough of their Grace to bring the shadows of their wings into existence.

It was terrifyingly beautiful.

Blue-green light swarmed around Castiel. It reached out to everything, almost cautiously. It reminded Sam of when he and Dean went to the beach a couple years back. The ocean was glistening. They hadn't got swimsuits, so they'd run in, jeans, and wife beaters and all.

Dean laughed, and Sam fell a little bit more in love that day.

Gabriel's Grace was more untamed. It was light and color. It wrapped around everything and bounced off the walls. It reminded Sam of prisms in science class, how they refracted light. He turned to look at Dean who looked equal parts curious and on edge. The colors of Gabriel's Grace, unseen to all but Sam and the archangels, caught up in Dean's eyes making them shine.

Sam smiled and heard the gasp come from everyone in the room.

He turned his head. He knew what everyone else in the room was seeing - vague shadowy outlines.

Sam saw something very different. He saw color, and creation, and the world and beauty. He wondered what the angels' real wings looked like, wondered if he could stand the sight of them. He was seeing only shadows, and that was so beautiful that it hurt. He wondered if this was what divine ecstasy felt like; wondered if people's eyes burned out if they felt just the briefest moment of this tendril of bliss that he was feeling. He could understand why Pam had been so upbeat after losing her sight if that was the case. They were chasing the memory of that perfect moment, of that Nirvana.

"They really are angels," murmured Dean softly.

"Yeah," answered Sam, "They really are."

And that was that.

John turned his eyes onto his sons. He slowly met Sam's tired gaze, wondering what his youngest had seen to give him such old eyes.

"So you have to kill the bastard," he stated.

"Yes, sir," said Sam with steely resolution.

"I don't like this, Sam."

"You don't have to like it. I have the ritual. I have what's going to kill the bastard. And I have two archangels of God on my side. I'm taking this sick son of a bitch down."

"What do you have that will kill a demon? I heard that the Colt was the only thing in existence that could do that."

"It's not the Colt," said Sam.

"We found a demon on the run from her own kind, who had a knife specifically made for the killing of other demons."

"What happened to her?"

"I overtook her and killed her with the knife," said Gabriel nonchalantly. The shadow of his wings had disappeared along with the bindings, "So what do we say about wasting this bastard? I say, go team!"

The archangel paused for a moment, "Maybe I should conjure some cheerleaders in."

Sam felt bad for Pastor Jim, because the elder man looked like whatever he was expecting from angels, Gabriel wasn't it.

"Gabriel, behave," called Sam. The archangel stuck out his tongue but went silent. Sam rolled his eyes and continued, "Tomorrow night is when we do the ritual and kill him. All the conditions are going to be right. And..."

Sam paused feeling all eyes in the room on him.

"And I just want this over with."

Everyone returned that sentiment rather heartily.

Sam: *Maybe we could tell them there's a gas leak, that might get them out of the house for a couple hours.*

Dean: *Yeah, and how many times has that actually worked for us?*

Sam: *Yeah. (long pause) We could always tell them the truth.*

Dean and Sam: *(in unison) Naaaaah. -Salvation*

Dean wasn't sure what he was expecting of the thing that had killed his mom. He'd imagined it at lot as a child: a nightmarish creature with a cruel face and long, sharp teeth. He pictured something that oozed so much evil that it would practically bleed into the air itself.

He imagined the worst monster that had ever walked the planet Earth.

Because it had ripped his mother, young, and beautiful and his *mom*, who sang 'Hey Jude' to him every night, away from him, away from Sammy, away from their family.

Dean really missed his mom.

So yeah, after Sam had done the ritual, and an ordinary man appeared, (possessed though he might have been) Dean was a little bit disappointed.

Then the man's eyes turned a muddied yellow, the color of sulfur, and Dean felt the smallest shiver of fear. He could feel his Dad tense up beside him. Castiel and Gabriel on the other side of Sam stared down the man.

They stood in the ruined remains of the church attached to Stull Cemetery, so overtaken by evil that water wouldn't even touch it. Gabriel and Castiel looked brighter than everything else, because of their angel mojo.

The man with yellow eyes stared at them before smiling.

"Sammy," he greeted in a voice that reminded Dean of his Trig teacher (the old douchebag!) "You're early."

Dean could feel something thrum in his veins. His only thoughts were directed toward his brother.

Keep safe, Sammy. Keep safe. Please, please don't die. Sammy has to stay safe.

Because as wrong as it was, (and Dean knew how wrong it was)...

Dean loved him.

And maybe, just maybe, that was what was going to get them through this.

(But Dean knew he wouldn't breathe properly, until Sammy was no longer anywhere near this guy)

(To Sam) I don't know if it's being a big brother or what, but to me, you've always been this snotted kid that I've had to keep on the straight and narrow. I think we both know that's not you anymore. I mean, hell, if you've grown up enough to find faith in me, the least I can do is return the favor. So screw destiny right in the face. I say we take the fight and do it our way. -Dean Point of No Return

So in his sophomore year in college in the other timeline, Sam had had to take a course in the classics. He'd chosen a class about ancient Greek heroes, both obvious and not. During one of the lectures, his teacher had pointed out something that Sam couldn't now get out of his head as he stared down Azazel.

In every great ancient mythological story, there's a time when the hero goes into the Underworld. It's a metaphor for the soul having to journey into the darkest parts of itself in order to come out stronger in the end. Sam had always taken it to mean that a person has to look at the ugliest parts of themselves, hidden under masks and layers, in order to come out a better person.

Those who partake in the journey have to face anger and loss and utter agony. They have to hate themselves, despise their darkest thoughts. They have to face their inner demons, and Sam had always thought that those were a lot scarier than the things his family hunted.

Sam had been toyed with his whole life. He and Dean were merely instruments to an end. Since the moment blood was dripped into his mouth as a baby; dominoes had fallen, and beings of much greater power had made sure they followed their pre-destined paths.

Sam had for sure journeyed through the Underworld since he'd seen Jess on the ceiling; going in deeper as the years passed by. He'd faced his inner evil, his darker urges, the parts of himself that truly frightened him. He'd been clawing his way out, fighting back the ghosts, and the evil that he knew he had.

Now it was time to come into the light.

This was the moment that he had been waiting for. The moment where he could arise from the ashes of all he had destroyed.

He stared Azazel down, feeling more hatred course through him than he ever had in his life.

The demon had no idea. And somehow that was going to make it all the sweeter.

"I didn't know that I was supposed to call at a certain time," answered Sam dryly.

Azazel smiled and moved toward Sam.

The youngest Winchester made a vague motion.

Gabriel and Castiel simultaneously threw up the sigils. Sam could hear the screams of the evil embedded in the ground as they were purified. He heard Azazel's pained shout as he was forced into the perimeter that Sam had outlined in his blood earlier.

"You have help," gasped Azazel.

"I'm not stupid enough to think that I wouldn't need divine intervention."

"Very clever, Sammy."

"I try to be."

"So is this revenge for your mommy?"

"Her, yes," said Sam with a nod, "See apparently my powers kicked in a bit early. And I've been having these nightmares. Oh, and I see these really terrible things. Horrible actually...a future where the world ends, and demons rise."

"Sounds like my kind of future."

"Not mine though," said Sam as he brandished the knife.

"And what're you going to do with that? You know that won't hurt me."

"Actually," said Sam with a wide honest smile, "It will. This little bad boy is what the demon Ruby used to kill several demons, before we took it away from her."

Azazel paled.

Sam smiled.

"See I know the players. I know how to end this. Gabriel killed Ruby for the knife. Castiel killed Lilith to take her out of play. I assume you know her destiny."

"Lilith's dead?" rasped Azazel.

"Deader than a doornail," clarified Sam. "So that leaves you. And since I know that you were hoping for me to lead the army of hell on earth; I was very eager to be the one to kill you. You killed my mom. You're the son of a bitch that was going to take everything away from me, from my family. And I can't let that happen."

Sam stared Azazel dead in the eye. Sulfuric yellow met golden hazel.

Azazel knew what was coming.

"Sammy boy, you don't want to do this."

Sam continued to stare.

He thought of his Mom and Dad when they were young, and hopeful and totally untouched by dick angels or apocalypse dreams. He imagined his father, from growing up, as he hunted down anything and everything to dull the ache of Mary being gone. He thought of Cold Oak, and the psychic children, and the massacre, and the ruined lives that came with it. He saw all the people that had been used as pawns since Azazel had cold-bloodedly sent his family down the path of the Apocalypse.

Sam thought of Dean.

He could hear his brother scream from Hell as he was tortured until he'd broken, until he slowly turned to the dark side. He could see him with shadows in his eyes that should never have existed there.

He could hear the echo of Dean's defeated "Yes" to Michael.

He saw his brother with his neck broken, and a sword of white hot flame sticking out his chest.

Sam walked towards Azazel.

He carried the weight of all that was never going to happen on his shoulders. He carried all the deaths, and demons, and inner pain that he had gained over the years.

Tomorrow morning, Sam Winchester was going to wake up and try not to hate himself.

Right now, his only thought was of his self hatred, and the demon blood coursing through his veins.

He saw the world in ashes and blood.

Sam leaned in real, real close, until he was staring straight into Azazel's yellow, yellow eyes.

He grasped the demon's shoulder hard, smiling when it cried out in pain.

"Only Dean's allowed to call me Sammy, you asshole."

Then he stabbed Azazel through the heart with the knife.

He could hear Lucifer screaming, trapped for all time.

And Sam smiled.

Hint Eight

Helpful Hint #8:

If you somehow manage to change the ending, maybe you've even made it better than before; then you hold onto it and never let go.

Find that open road and drive, until you see the splendid mess that we inhabit. Live. Run. Save. Cry. Make peace. Fall in love. Get dirty. Be happy. Enjoy freedom.

Patrick: *Sorry kid. Aces full.*

Sam: *(to female witch) You're crying. For a witch, you're so nice that it's kind of creepy. It's okay.*

(to Patrick) It's a great hand...Just not as great as...four fours.

Patrick: *Well played. You know the whole 'going out of your head' bit...very method. There's more to you than meets the eye.*

Sam: *Cash these in for Dean, please.*

Patrick: *With pleasure. -The Curious Case of Dean Winchester*

God found them three weeks later, in some diner in the mountains of Pennsylvania. Dean and Sam had decided to do some brotherly road-tripping together. Gabriel had taken Castiel off to show him the finer things of life on Earth (which Sam took to mean helping Castiel lose his virginity without getting any sexually transmitted diseases.) and maybe giving him proper instruction on how to be an archangel.

Sam wasn't holding his breath though.

Once Azazel was dead and gone; the Winchester clan had hauled ass back to the motel where Sam made his wishes for a break perfectly clear. Monsters or not, he needed to rest and get his head back into some semblance of a working order.

Needless to say, everyone else was in agreement.

Dean was the one who suggested quality time together, just the two of them - that is if Sam didn't want to go to college. Sam had laughed and said that college really wasn't part of his plan any more, and that he didn't plan on going anywhere anytime soon.

Dean's small smile had lit up his entire face when Sam said that.

Their Dad was taking a vacation as well, getting under Bobby's skin at his place; working as a mechanic. He told his sons that he planned to get back to hunting soon, but he wanted to celebrate the fact that the demon that killed Mary was dead.

Sam definitely understood that.

So now here they were in a small, relatively nice diner, arguing over whether to travel to New York City to mess around there or head to Baltimore for some crab. It was an easy and light argument that they were both grinning through.

The bell above the door ringing was what caught Sam's attention.

He stared in obvious and pleasant surprise. Dean turned, wondering what had caught his brother's eye so quickly.

"Sammy, you dog," began Dean noticing the tall, handsome, rail-thin young man, who had entered the diner.

"Dude shut up," muttered Sam, his face flushed in embarrassment, "He's someone else."

"Is it another of your angel buddies?"

"Not really...He's above them."

Dean's eyes went wide. His mouth moved in shock, obviously figuring something out.

"No!"

Sam smiled nervously, "Yep."

"That's...the Big Guy?" questioned Dean, doing some sort of gesture with his hands.

"Yep."

"Damn, Sammy."

God had obviously been listening in. He walked over to their booth with a pleasant smile on His face. His crystal clear, blue eyes were shining brightly.

"May I join you two?" asked God with an amused expression on His face, "Hello again, Sam."

"Hello again," said Sam as he moved over, making room for God in the booth.

He slid in easily looking amused at Dean's open mouth gaping.

"Hello Dean," greeted God with a wide smile on His face, "It's a real pleasure to meet you in person."

"Uh you too," said Dean, "This is probably the weirdest meeting of my life."

"Oh I'm fairly certain that you're right. I just wanted to come and congratulate Sam on a job well done."

Sam flushed but cracked a small, true smile. Dean felt relieved to see those smiles coming easier lately. Sam may not be a huge grinner, but when he smiled for real, it always reached his eyes. And Dean had missed those smiles. These days, they always seemed to come after they'd made out or traded hand-jobs, when Sam would thread his thin, long fingers through Dean's (and Dean would call him a girl but squeezed his hand a little tighter.) and smiled like there wasn't a problem on the planet Earth. And all Dean wanted to do was drink those moments in, because those were their rare peaceful times now.

(Sam knew that it would be awhile before Dean would be comfortable with the idea of the two of them having sex. They were brothers that had crossed a line. Not that they cared, but they did have to

acknowledge that societal line. Sam had made his peace with it long ago and knew that once Dean had come to terms with it then it would be fan-freaking-tastic.)

"So, Sam," said God with a smile, "I think I promised you something as well."

Hazel eyes went wide as Sam remembered the promise to have the demon blood cleansed from his system. God smiled softly and rested his hand on Sam's.

"You're going to clean my blood?"

"What?" asked Dean.

"I promised Sam that I would cleanse the demon blood from his system. No more visions," said God softly, "They won't have sway over him anymore. Sam will just be Sam."

Sam felt Dean's calloused fingers squeeze his gently. His sandpaper rough voice telling God seriously,

"Sammy was always himself. But if he wants his blood cleansed... Then it's his decision."

"It is his decision," agreed God, softly turning his electric blue eyes onto the youngest Winchester.

Sam licked his lips and thought about it. A few months ago, hell a few weeks ago; he would have done anything to get the demon blood out of his system. Sam *hated* himself for what he'd done in the other timeline, hated what he'd become. That kind of self-hatred ran really deep.

However, Sam had changed the timeline. He'd stopped the Apocalypse and was able to get Dean back in the process, (with the added bonus of clear eyes and peaceful dreams.) He had the future laid out before him, unknowable and vast and clear. He was no longer the Boy with the Demon Blood. He was no longer Lucifer's Vessel. He had a future without Destiny, or Heaven and Hell hanging above him.

Sam was trying this new thing. Well...Dean was getting Sam to do it.

It was called loving himself, accepting himself. (And fuck didn't that sound so corny?)

Demon blood, however forcibly it was given, was a part of who he was.

"You know?" said Sam, his voice whisper soft as he met God's gaze, "I think I'm good."

Dean squeezed his hand tightly, giving some weird form of approval.

Sam needed the demon blood in him as a reminder of what he'd lost the first time around, and what he wasn't going to toss aside this time. God seemed to understand this and smiled at them.

"Well then," said God, standing, "I should take my leave. But I would still like to leave you with a gift."

"What?" asked Sam.

"You've both sacrificed a lot to protect people," began God slowly, "And you have broken My Commandments. Normally that would send you straight to fire and brimstone."

Sam stiffened and saw Dean do the same out of the corner of his eye.

"However," continued God, "I feel that the Winchesters, and the majority of the hunting community deserve a free pass. Rest assured that you two are going to Heaven, same as your father. Paradise awaits you for all you have done. Good luck, boys."

With a wink and wave, God got up from the table and walked out of the diner disappearing into the late afternoon sunshine.

Sam and Dean stared at each other for several moments before Dean broke the silence.

“You know I always pictured God with a white beard and flowing robes. I’m not sure what I think of this boy-band, pretty God.”

And in a diner in the mountains of Nowhere, Pennsylvania, Sam Winchester threw his head back and laughed, deep and full, for the first time in forever.

Dean smiled.

They would kiss later in the Impala as they drove off into some sort of wonderful, strange future. The slate was blank. The ending was unknown.

But it was happily ever after for now.

(And really that’s all they could hope for.)

Dean: (referring to Chuck) Him? Really?

Castiel: You should have seen Luke. –The Monster at the End of the Book

To: cshirley777@zmail.com

From: erickripke@cwpublishing.org

Subject: New Story

Chuck-

You’re an insane motherfucker, man.

But you’re MY insane motherfucker.

Have the printed version of this on my desk by Monday morning. And I don’t want to hear any shit about Becky, and her turning off the alarm clock, because you couldn’t drag your lazy ass out of bed.

I’m onto you, man.

My desk. Monday morning. 9 a.m.

Or I hunt you down.

You horribly twisted brilliant man!

I smell movie deals, book signings, crazed fans...maybe a TV series.

I’ll call you with the details of your flight.

-Eric