Guster

The TV sparks and glows. Its fraying pixels send light flickering and dancing along the flat and lifeless walls of the motel room. The air is musty; cold, unfamiliar. The beds are perfectly made. Stiff and impersonal with no promises of loving comforts at the end of the day and no bodies to warm them. The carpet is harsh against bare feet, but still better than hardwood. Its scent clinging in your nose is similar to people musk and cleaning products - a mask over its filth, alighting and burning to the senses. Curling wallpaper clings in shades of dusty sixties pink.

The door hinges are rusty, the sink echoingly dry. Even the shower’s death rattle is audible. There is a phone between the beds, on an old bed stand that’s been battered but never used. A Bible sleeps within.

No matter what angle you see it in, only to a child escaping from reality could make a half-home here. You could stand in one spot of this place for years without a glimpse of the world beyond and never, never imagine anything full enough to touch every wall of this room.

But seeing it is an entirely different matter.

Light spills through the protesting door. The bed gives under the weight of a tossed duffel bag, made of scratchy canvas as boots stamp their impressions in the ancient rug. Bodies penetrate the eeriness in the air and push it, wave it aside, placing themselves there instead. The shadows vanish. The darkness pulls back and retreats down the sink drain. The curtains cough dust as they’re pushed back, and hands beat at them and tie them up. Fresh breeze touches the cheeks of the room as the window is yanked up and the dead taste is consumed, chased out.

A frail table groans in enjoyment as paper bags and boxes alike are settled onto her dinged polished surface. Chairs scrape back and gasp from under the soft jackets tossed over their backs. Laughter and words penetrate the silence. Hands grab the doorknobs and push them open. Thanking squeaks meet them as joints long unused stretch their legs and shiver. When the rumble of the car dies outside and the door is finally closing in the new life, and boots are pushed aside and sockets hold plugs between their teeth; when hands shove at the air in avid gesture, and the heat of a running laptop lulls them into a content silence; when the sun goes down and the curtains are closed again, the sink of the bodies into the mattresses is a finality. A newfound calm. A perfection in its own. And the room’s loneliness is forgotten again, for at least a few hours.

The room is silent when a figure appears at the foot of one of the motel beds. He’s dark, his brow frowning, but his eyes were sullen and blue as they observe the sleeping bodies. His gaze softens; whether by affection or otherwise it is unknown, but his trench coat billows around his legs as he glides over to the window. Reaching out a finger, head canting to the side, he pushes the heavy drape back and his pale face is basked in moonlight. The stubble on his cheeks is defined by the silvery glow as he squints out over the parking lot. The town is quiet. It lays in wait for morning, languish as it prepares for the next day. Sluggish energy clings to everything. The boys are safe, for now. He looks back at the men snoring softly in their beds and lets the curtain fall closed, consuming him in blackness.

DEAN
I imagined punching my foot against the accelerator and flooring my Pinto down the highway, dodging cars and seeing mailboxes fly by like light streams. It was in every way as dramatic and full of burning lava in my veins as I felt right now, but that would take far too long. I had to teleport - I had to be fast. I had to find him. The GPS on his phone had been shut off lone ago. A highway shoulder. A farmhouse in Kansas. I turned frantically, eyes raking the horizon for anything like what Dean has described. A barn. A barn in a field. A barn in a field beside an empty dirt road. Nothing. I angrily teleported eight miles West, repeating my sweep.

My phone sat burning a hole in my pocket. It had been an hour since I got off the phone with Dean - he had finally caved, and called for my help. He wouldn't call Sam. Couldn't. But Cain was still present, and the damage dealt to Dean as a vessel was unspeakable; I could feel it in his voice. He hadn't been sleeping for months. Weeks ago he stopped eating. Then he lost interest in drinking. For endless long nights he sat in hotel rooms, waiting for Cain to find another course of action. Another way to get at her. Another strategy to finish the mission. All he had been doing was slaughtering hordes of demons, trying to get closed to Abbadon. The strength in his arms - impossibly inhuman - as his blade slid through body after body, flesh and gore covering him... It was destroying him.

Dean's body was falling apart at the seams. At this point, anger and willpower alone were holding him together. But Cain was driving him too hard.

I teleported into the middle of a field and whirled to see a black '67 Chevy Impala parked a mile away on the road. If that wasn't proof enough, in between them was an army of demons laying in a sea of tall blood-stained grass. The smell was horrific. Signs of the battle painted a picture of Dean's actions. My heart leaped from my chest and ran ahead of me as I abandoned my teleporting to sprint towards the barn, unable to think clearly.

There was hardly a crack big enough for a man in the large, heavy wooden doors to the barn. I shoved them aside with loud creaks of protest from their hinges, letting early-evening light pour in. The only places the shadows refused to retreat was where he sat. Crumpled against the wall. He was soaked in blood and covered in wounds. The skin visible under his gory facial was pale and gray. His eyes were closed as well, his face lifeless, and that scared me the most.

"Dean." I crossed the room in three steps, kneeling by his side. My eyes soaked him in as I tried to take in his every injury and search for signs of breathing. His chest was still. No. No, he was alive.

Holding out shaking hands, I put my hand on his shoulder, my panic spiking. "Dean, look at me." I demanded.

His dead green eyes slid open dizzily, as if he were delirious, and when they rolled over to rest on me life swelled back into them like the tide had missed its appointment with the beachfront.

"Cas," he gruffly replied, "you came."

I felt my heart twist into sailor knots. "Yes. Of course I came." My Adams apple bobbed as I swallowed. "Are you...?" I trailed off, knowing 'all right' was a useless question.

"I don't know. I can hardly breathe, if that's what you mean," he remarked, without even a hint of his teasing snark.

"Dean." My voice wavered considerably. I felt an irrecoverable amount of emotion rise up my esophagus and close up my throat like an allergic reaction, my eyes burning with fury and a clawing suffocation in my lungs I've come to know as worry. I forced words from my mouth. "It'll be ok, I'm here," I managed.

He turned his head with a painful looking gesture and nodded a bit. "Thanks, Cas... but… its not over. Not yet." He was painful to look at. His face was beaten and bloody, bruises decorating his fine cheekbones and jawline. A fat lip made his speech muffled. A slash above his eye had bed freely and already begun to scab over. His arms lay useless in his lap, cradled as if both hurt, and his mark throbbed on one of them. His knuckles were black and blue and stained. I was sure he'd broken a few ribs. He had been here for at least seven hours, and his entire body was just... broken.

"It is over, Dean." I found my voice, and it was furious. Anger quivered my entire form. "This is over. We are separating you from Cain - I'll call Sam, and we will find a way. This can't go on."

"Cas," he snapped, even as weak as he was. "I have to-"

"No you DON'T!" I shouted coarsely. "You are /dying,/ Dean!" Our eyes locked. The silence between us was so tense you could cut it with a knife. He looked away finally, and I couldn't take it. Reaching out, I grabbed the side of his head, sinking my fingers into his blood-matted hair, the other palm pressing into his cheek, and I pulled him into me. He had no energy to protest. My chin sank into his shoulder. I clung to him, never having known the power of an embrace until this moment. His entire body was limp, leaning helplessly against my trembling shoulders.

"You are killing yourself, and I cannot watch it, not anymore," I shut my eyes and breathed in the smell of his leather jacket, and his sweat, and the blood; God, all the blood.

"I need you, Dean. We need you. You can't die." I rambled feverishly. "Everything, everything you have ever done happened along the path of a righteous man driven into chaos. This isn't your fault. You've got to stop blaming yourself, you cannot just continue and let yourself fall into this rut. This is ripping you apart entirely, Dean, and this time there will be no piecing you back together." My voice broke, so I stopped, and I listened to the wheeze of his breath and felt it on my neck.

"Why?" Came the raspy, bitter reply. "Why can't I just crumble into pieces? It's my own damn choice. It's been coming all along, we all knew it, Cas. Why can't I... Why can't I just decide my own goddamn fate?" He sneered stubbornly.

"Because I /need/ you," I repeated adamantly, "you're not just some man who has sins weighing on his shoulders. You're not just some special vessel. You are Dean - our Dean. Sam's older brother. Bobby's legacy. God's righteous hero. THE Dean; MY Dean!" I could feel his tense surprise. Uncaring, I continued desperately. "Without you, I will have lost the very last piece of myself I don't believe I can live without. You've been more than just my closest and dearest friend, Dean. More than my brother. You've been the link between me and this world." I hugged him viciously tight. "You are my very humanity. And... I cannot... I cannot lose you."

Silence. Then, "Cas, I can't breathe." I pulled back gently, supporting his chest with my hand, keeping his head steady with the other. The air rushed into his weak lungs. I looked into his face but he would not lift his eyes to mine.

After a few moments of deep, even breathing, he finally glanced up at me, and my heart tripped and staggered at the open rawness in his eyes. "You... You really...?" He pressed his lips into a thin line as he swallowed. "You really love me that much?"

"I do." I found myself saying immediately, hesitation tossed out along with my subtlety.

I stared into his face with blunt last-resort-revelation written all over my own and let him react. Every nerve in my body pricked for rejection, and anger, and disgust, and I braced myself. Dean was not one to be kind to that sort of affront. The last of his anger before he fainted was all I expected.

But he only lowered his eyes, nodding briefly, as if confirming what he already knew, and a great sigh left him. There was a dark and pensive conflict in his eyes. His eyebrows were deeply knit together. Then his chin lifted. "All right," he said wearily, and nodded as he looked back at me. "Let’s end this."

The shock of his reply took a minute to wear off. I stammered out a question of how extensive his injury was, and he said he could not move, let alone walk. I nodded. I could handle that. He did not protest as I put my arm around him, the other sliding under both his knees. As if he weighed nothing, I rose to my feet, cradling him against my torso. He let his chin fall to his chest. His eyes were shut once more. Now, I needed to get him home.

"Want me to drive?" I asked him. His head bobbed just enough to signal a yes.

In the Impala, Dean leaned against the window, unable to sit upright. He stared out at the scenery as I floored it to the bunker. I had sent Sam a text telling him to come quickly. He would be there, regardless if he replied. The roads were clear, thank goodness. There was no clogging traffic.

I handled this vehicle as I did Dean himself. Especially with the knowledge that this was a part of him - the memories, the seat, everything.

It was the most comfortable I've been while simultaneously being incredibly uncomfortable. After all, I'd just basically made a confession of feelings of love above the familiar to a dying man. Who was sitting beside me. Who, without a word, had not denied either a disgust, acceptance, or mutual confession on the subject. It was very... awkward. It itched at my collar and made me want to clear my throat several times. The silence alone was deafening. But he was weak, and this was not the time for drama.

"All this time?" His voice was weak, and getting weaker still by the minute, but it still made me jump. I hadn’t realized how fast he was fading. I should have teleported us. But the impact of his question did not hit me for a few moments. I worked my jaw, loosening its tense grip, and licked my lips.

"Always." I answered quietly.

When we arrived, I shut the car off and ran to get Dean out of the car. I hefted him into my arms. Sam met me halfway to the bunker, and I shook my head when he offered help. "Open the door," I said, and he obliged. I heard it slam shut behind us as I stormed through the bunker to the room Dean had claimed as his own. Pressing my chin into his hair briefly, I shut my eyes in the same moment, just before easing him gently onto the bed. When the burden of his body was left from my arms, I immediately missed it. I sank down directly beside him and stared down at his broken form withering right before my eyes.

"Cas? CAS! He is dying! Why did you take him here?! He needs a hospital!" Sam shouted, standing on the other side of the bed, looking frantic.

"Sam," I replied evenly, "what I'm about to do may seem unorthodox, so I understand if it unnerves you." I ignored his shocked look and turned my eyes back to Dean. Taking a deep breath, I leaned down and touched the side of his burning cheek with my fingertips, pressing my mouth to his. Sam's muffled choke of surprise was an afterthought. Slowly, my mind swirling with chaos, I pushed my angel healing to its very maxed-out limits. It slid off my tongue and onto Dean's, glowing like a sunset. I still can't get the taste of his lips out of my memory.

When I drew back, Dean was unscathed. The cuts were gone. The bruising had vanished. Every broken bone was set and healed. There was only Dean now - not some killing machine, or some tool of heaven, but our Dean. Sam sank down beside him and I retracted my hand from his face, balling it into a fist in my lap. He looked so perfect. Tears stung my eyes, and a sharp stab of surprise hit me. A weeping angel? I pushed the blurriness from my eyes and looked to the mark of Cain. It throbbed gently, asleep - for now.

"He will not wake until his body has recovered. That may be days." I forced myself to speak, though my tongue was thick with emotion. "But when he does wake, he will be repaired physically. There is nothing more I can do."

"That was just enough, Cas," Sam replied kindly. "Thank you. You saved his life. Again." He said the last part almost like a playful nudge, but I could not stop staring at Dean's sleeping face.

"I only wish it were enough." I turned away and rose, walking slowly out of the room. I left Sam with Dean and sank into a chair in the reading room, staring at my hands. What would he say when he woke? Would he remember my words? I could only wait and see.

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It was a week before Dean fully recovered. He woke demanding food and a bathroom, which Sam struggled to help him with seeing as he was floppy like a noodle and entirely exhausted still. After those moments, he slept normally and woke normally, drifting in and out between meals and questioning. Sam tended to him endlessly, his patience unimaginable. I'd never seen him so worried.

I rarely went in, and only then when he was asleep. I searched his mind for any discrepancies - any loose ends, anything destructive - and found very little. I was relieved to see him mostly at peace. He was conflicted about a few subjects still, of course, but his mind was finally in order. I wondered if that was my doing and denied it. He knew how to put himself back on track.

After two weeks, he could walk. Sam helped him stretch his legs and get re-adjusted. Two days later Dean was limping around, easy. Mostly to the fridge for beer. His thirst and hunger returning were both good signs.

I had done my best to avoid him at length - mostly claiming to want to give him privacy and time to recover - but when he wandered around, aimless mostly, it was difficult to tell where to avoid. I was searching through files in room 7B when I heard the distinct shuffle of bow-legged footsteps down the hall. Growing tense, I turned to retreat before he approached this room, and froze.

Still exhausted, but with his regular color finally restored, Dean stood leaning against the doorway how I always imagine him. Rumpled shirt, tight around his torso. Faded jeans. The absence of his boots was simply filled by black socks; just like always. I'd think he was fine if I wasn't fully aware of his condition.

His eyes were heavier than anchors but they held a glint full of life and health. His sharp nose lifted with his ghost of a smirk. His lips curled indistinguishably. Casually breathtaking, he held a perspiring beer in his free hand, the other slung in his pocket. The only signs I could tell of his previous fatigue were his obvious lack of vertigo and the bags beneath his eyes.

"Morning." He said simply, making a point to tease me.

"Dean," I began to protest. "I-"

"I'm sorry, Cas," he interrupted, "I don't mean to be a dick about this. I'm just trying to cope." I stared at him, making him sigh. "Look, I get why you're avoiding me. I get it. I'm not exactly the most God fearing man around, but I'm also not the most understanding guy around either." He walked over to me, and I made a mental note that he stepped within my personal boundaries. He looked uncomfortable. "Do you... want to talk about this?" We matched stares for a while. "Ok you wouldn't have avoided me for this long if you did." He muttered.

I wasn't ready. Not even after two weeks. I went to go around him, file gripped tightly in hand, and he grabbed my arm. I tensed entirely. "Release me." I snapped.

"No." Dean said darkly. "You started this, Cas, two weeks ago. You saved my ass, but you started this to do it. Now talk to me." He drew me closer, and I could smell the fresh cologne and aftershave on his face as he looked me in the eye. "You told me something I didn't think I'd ever hear out of any angel."

"And what exactly do you want me to do about it?" I demanded. His hurt look gave me much less satisfaction than I'd hoped. I sighed and he let me go. Shaking out my arm, I felt the imprint of his fingertips through my coat.

"I'm sorry." I said softly. "I'm not going to say I would have said anything, but I would have said anything to get you back here with us, where you belong." Watching his eyes crumble before me verified my greatest hopes. When he looked away I reached out and grabbed his arm, and his eyes snapped back to me. "But that doesn't mean it wasn't the truth."

Seeing his entire face fill with both light and embarrassment at the same time was... impossible to explain. It did something to me I didn't know was possible. I felt a sheepish smile work onto my lips. He made to brush it off, but when his eyes returned to mine he was sincere. "Good." He said with a nod, and pushed his beer into my hand. "Then I got something to tell you, too."