your mother's son

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your mother's son

by darkmillennium

Summary

Adam wants a normal life. He really does. He wants, at least, as close to a normal life as he can get after spending ten years—a *thousand years*—in the Cage. And he's got it, mostly. He's got an apartment and a job and a closet full of clothes that aren't the clothes he went to Hell in. He thinks he's been managing pretty great, all things considered.

But one day, Michael warns him that he's sensed a pack of werewolves move into the area, and then people start dropping dead with their hearts ripped out, and..

Life isn't going to be as relaxed as he'd like it to be, is it?

Notes

cross-posted from ao3! damn, i can't believe this fic is six years old. i never think about backdating my fics. maybe i should....

i'm actually going to include my original author's notes on this one just for funsies:

> i tried my hand at a realistic take on adam's thought processes—he is over a thousand years old, by this point, and he's going to handle things a bit differently than his nineteen-year-old self would've. also for all his wisdom he's still got that chaotic part of him that i love lmao. but perception and the way people experience things changes over time, and he's had nothing BUT time for the past ten earth years. i wanted to tackle him having an experience with a monster on his own + potentially meeting one of au!michael's grace-enhanced monsters, because those mofos are STILL AT LARGE and they were just forgotten about apparently. i also wanted to see if i could nail a portrayal of adam as a little more than human, because i'm fairly sure he is, at this point.

some minor edits have been made! when ao3 is back up, i'll port said edits over.

See the end of the work for more notes

It starts when one of his coworkers, Danny, texts him on his day off.

Hey man do u think u could come in & cover Amy's shift

Adam readjusts his grip on his phone and texts back.

Sure. Did she get sick or something?

Turn on the news

He frowns, reaching for the remote and switching the channel on his TV from *Lilo & Stitch* to the local news station.

"—the murder of Jonathon Baynes, another victim of the mysterious serial killer terrorizing locals—"

Oh, *shit*. A picture of the Baynes family pops up on the screen, Amy and Jonathon standing next to their parents with smiles on their twin faces. Amy was a sweet girl, fresh out of high school and taking a gap year to earn some money for college. Her and Jonathon had been thick as thieves. Adam feels his heart sink.

There's been four deaths already; five, counting Jonathon's. He can't help the pang of guilt that dashes through him—he'd known that there were werewolves that had spontaneously moved into the area, but he hadn't been aware of the killings until after the fourth was already dead, and that had only happened a couple days ago. They'd all died the same way: heart ripped out of their chests, half-torn to shreds. When Michael had given him a quick rundown on werewolves, he'd clung onto the information that they could survive on animal hearts with a little bit of hope that maybe, *just maybe,* they were the peaceful type.

It figured that his hopes would be dashed.

He thinks of Jonathon and Amy, thinks of his own mother, and then sighs. His own words come echoing back to him.

Since when do we get what we deserve?

Adam clenches his jaw, staring at the ground like he was trying to burn a hole in it. He *knows* that it isn't his fault Jonathon was dead, not when he'd only just found out about this entire mess two days ago and certainly not when he couldn't predict what the pack was going to do. It wasn't like *he* was the one who killed him. But Jonathon's death still grates at something raw within him—something that still feels the pain of his mother's death, as vividly as when he first watched it happen right in front of his eyes.

He's gripping his phone almost hard enough to crack it, knuckles white. Michael is staring at him, not saying a word, patiently waiting for Adam gets his thoughts together. And he does. Something else solidifies in him, something that Adam knew wasn't there before the Cage,

and he finally turns to meet Michael's eyes with a request reverberating throughout his mind that somehow manages to be wordless and clear all at once. There's an odd feeling buzzing under his skin, like static, and he's not sure whether it's making him feel a little sick or whether it's just plain numbing him down to his core.

He thinks of his mother. He thinks of Jonathon. He thinks of all the people that had been and would be murdered unjustly because of things out of their control, and he swallows, dryly.

The archangel nods, and the sleep he puts him under feels like a gentle blanket that Adam doesn't think he deserves, right now.

Later, when the werewolves have been wiped out by Michael's steady hand, Michael will assure and reassure Adam that the killings were not the work of a pack just trying to survive —instead, they were the work of a pack who did it for sport. It helps, somewhat. Michael does not judge him for his request to protect the remainder of the town, but Adam judges himself on how easily the request came to him, to ask Michael to take lives on his behalf. It's a silly thought, he knows; after all, those lives were endangering others, and Michael has taken far more in the past for far less reasons.

The thought refuses to leave, regardless.

In a way, he's glad it doesn't.

Adam may not have been wrapped up in the whole "hunter versus monster" community from the time he was little like the Winchesters, but he's somehow found his footing amidst the realization of supernatural creatures actually *existing* far more quickly than he thought he'd be able to. Maybe it's just the result of the Cage and the fact that he'd shared a space with two archangels for centuries, or maybe it was something before that—he's distantly aware of how uncanny it was that he'd trusted the angels so fast all those years ago, even if he *had* been able to see their true forms. They'd still been just a bunch of people that had burst into his heaven and offered him a deal.

He *should've* been more cautious.

But he'd just accepted it, the same way that he'd accepted the fact that the ghouls who'd eaten him and his mother hadn't been human, either, even though he knew for a fact that there were *human* psychos out there who'd also eat poor unsuspecting families alive because *hello,* they were *psychos.* But nope, his mind had instantly jumped to *they're not human* even during the process of getting eaten alive and it had made all the fucking sense in the world, for whatever reason.

And then the angels happened, and then the Cage happened, yada yada yada. The point is, he's very aware of how ridiculously fast he accepted the fact that beings other than humans and animals existed. He can't tell whether his nineteen-year-old self was more perceptive than he remembers or if he was just that naïve. His bet is on the latter, seeing as he put his trust in *Zachariah,* and that guy was a total sleaze.

If anything, he's more perceptive now. Especially since his senses changed as a result of the Cage—and, Christ, they have, more than he would've liked them to. On one hand, it was useful being able to pick out supernatural beings just by looking at them, like he did Lilith before Michael took over. On the other hand, the sheer amount of sensory overload he'd experienced after they'd first escaped the Cage was bullshit. Seriously. He'd gotten used to it by now, but everything had been so *bright* back then. It was as if someone had stuck photography filters in his brain and turned the color, saturation and sharpness settings up to a hundred.

Yeah. Not a fun time. It took him a week before he could look at technological screens without practically going cross-eyed.

What's even less of a fun time is figuring out what the actual fuck he *is* at this point, because he's, like, ninety-five percent certain that he isn't exactly *human.* Not like he used to be. Humans didn't see things in glaringly oversaturated high-definition—at least, not any humans he was aware of. Since there aren't any records of "human gets possessed by archangel, dragged down to Hell for a thousand years, more at 11" that he can look up to try and get a better idea, both he and Michael are basically in the dark.

But, he supposes, it's bearable as long as it's not killing him or anything. Even if it does make him space out, sometimes, thinking about all the differences between how he views things *now* and how he viewed things back *then.* There's nothing quite like staring at your food in the microwave and thinking something along the lines of *this object is merely an arrangement of molecules that are considered edible by the human body.*

"I don't want to...I don't know, lose myself," Adam confesses to Michael, on a clear night when the moonlight is streaming in through his blinds, illuminating the room. His gazes traces over the ceiling, marveling at his ability to pick out every bump, every line, every fine detail that was ever created on the white surface. It's normal and surreal all at once. He can't imagine a world where he can't hear the squeaking of someone's pet mouse four buildings over, but he can remember a time when he couldn't. It sparks an odd sense of unearthliness in him that makes him less than comfortable, and he doesn't realize how much he's tensed up until he feels the warm flood of Michael's grace tuck neatly around his soul, something that promptly reminds him to exhale the breath he'd been holding for a few minutes.

"Down there, it didn't matter. Up here…" he struggles, for a minute, before finally sighing and clasping his hands tightly together on top of his stomach, where he's laying flat on his back. "I don't know."

He doesn't know anything anymore. It scares him. If he's not human, then what is he?

Maybe talking about how scared he is of the world seeming so small now is backwards when he's talking to someone who was there long before it was created, but Adam has to get this out of his head or he thinks he'll explode.

Besides, he thinks, privately and with some humor, if there's anyone who understands the feeling of looking at humans and having the word "small" be one of the first thoughts that runs through their brains, it's Michael.

Michael, who's sitting beside him on the bed, stares down at him with something softer than usual resting in the eyes of his apparition. It's not quite pitying, instead leaning just a little to the left of it—something that skimmed lightly across the waters of their rapport. It doesn't make Adam feel quite as stupid as he thinks he's being, which he's grateful for.

"You do know," he says, his voice as soft as his eyes, and Adam feels it echoing in both his ears and his mind as he says it. "You just have to admit that you know it to yourself, first, I think." There's an expression that flickers across his features for a brief second, an emotion that only comes up when he thinks about God and the entire mess that went down in the bunker, but it's buried quickly as his face smooths out once more. "Besides, regardless of how you've changed from when your life was normal, you still care, don't you? You're still your mother's son. You're still trying to learn the art of healing so you can help people. Isn't that what's important? You haven't changed as much as you think."

Adam takes a second to swallow that, letting the thought roll over his teeth and tongue like a savory foodstuff before slowly ingesting it.

Hm. Halo's got a point.

"When did you get so wise, Saint Michael? I thought you were just some guy with a sword?" Adam lets his lips quirk up at the use of the new nickname, and it turns into a full-blown grin when Michael breaks into an amused smile right back.

"Well," Michael says, shifting his eyes away from Adam to instead gaze at the blinds, at the rays of white light protruding from them. "I suppose it's because I've spent a thousand years in the company of someone wiser than myself. Guess it rubbed off on me." He glances, still smiling, back down to where Adam is staring at him with wide eyes. "It's only fair that I return the favor."

They don't look away from each other for a long time.

Adam is watching TV. This is not anything new. This is an activity that he's taken part in ever since leaving the Cage.

What makes this particular time that he's watching TV so different, though, is that Michael is not with him. Michael, instead, is in Heaven. Temporarily. Which means that the gaping hole he's currently feeling next to his heart and soul won't be there for long.

At least he'd left for a good cause. Though, Adam did feel a little bad for the sucker of an angel who'd drawn the short straw and had to actually come down to Earth and confront the almighty Prince of Heaven after tracking him down on *foot*—because his wings had been completely tattered, like Castiel's had been when they'd met him back at the bunker. And, the poor guy had been practically shaking in his vessel.

"Why have you come?" Michael is almost outwardly seething, and Adam can't figure out why until he realizes, fuck, *angels in close proximity to them means that it's easier for God to potentially track them down because they're outside influences that aren't warded like he and Michael are.*

“V-Viceroy, I don’t mean to disturb you, i-it’s just—” The vessel, a ginger-haired man who’s roughly in his thirties, has a face that’s twisted in fear like Adam’s never seen before, and he’s suddenly, very abruptly, reminded of the fact that Michael is known throughout the universe to be nothing short of the deadliest weapon ever produced. He knows how formidable *he is—he’d seen him fight against Lucifer one too many times for him* not *to know—but he just can’t imagine being* scared *of Michael. Not like this guy is.*

“Cease your prattling. I do not care for it. State your name and explain to me why, *exactly, you have deemed it* appropriate *to intrude upon my life.” Michael’s tone is harsh, commanding, and it reminds Adam of the first few years in the Cage, back when they couldn’t stand each other. A distinct memory of Michael calling him a “pitiful excuse of a worm” resurfaces, and all it does now is make him laugh.*

“M-My name is Habudiel, my prince, and I’ve been sent by Heaven to plead for your aid in rebuilding.” As he speaks, he seems to grow the slightest bit more confident, though his feet are still firmly rooted to the ground like it’s the only thing keeping him from fainting. “Our numbers—they’re small, infinitely so, a-and we’ve been attempting to rebuild, but we simply don’t have the power to any longer. Not like we used to. The angels that the nephilim created can only do so much. Please. Heaven is still on the brink of collapse.”

Michael is quiet, and Adam takes that moment to speak up, whispering softly across their link. I think you should go help them out, halo. At least for a little bit.

The archangel gives a slight scoff. Heaven has stood firmly for *eons.* I leave them for ten years, *ten years,* out of *billions,* and they manage to topple it enough to nearly destroy it? Pathetic.

Adam sighs. Yeah, maybe, but what’ll happen if it actually gives out on everyone? What’ll happen to all the souls up there? Plus, won’t that upset some sort of balance, or something? Heaven and Hell, yin and yang, those kinds of things?

Michael’s quiet, again, and finally he sighs right back. Adam takes that as a win. Will you be okay on your own? I shouldn’t be too long—I *won’t* be too long. I have no true desire to return there.

I’ll be fine, Michael. Go.

Adam, *Michael’s grace is suddenly enveloping his soul in its entirety, the familiar feeling almost making Adam feel like he’s going to cry, and he’s not quite sure why. Michael’s coming back, he’s got no reason to feel like he’s saying goodbye forever.* Pray to me if you think you need me. For anything.

I will.

Out loud, Michael gives a “Very well. We leave immediately. I won't stay long.” that accompanies a sharp nod of his head. Adam notices how the angel—Habudiel—almost seems to slump in relief, though whether that relief is a product of not dying or a product of the discovery that Heaven isn’t going to fall today is something that Adam can’t quite figure out. Maybe both.

There is a pulse, then, of love and light across their bond that Adam reciprocates the instant he picks out what it is, before he registers the feeling of Habudiel being practically picked up and thrown back into Heaven by a sweep of Michael's grace. And then there's a flash of light, and Adam is blinking around at a room where two other people had once stood.

He's alone, for the first time in a thousand years.

The tears that come are only to be expected, if he thinks about it for too long.

It's only been a day since then, twenty four hours, and he's watching TV. He's not sure when Michael's going to come back—only that he said he *will*, and Adam trusts him on that. He does. He has to.

...Fuck, when did his mind turn into a soap opera?

That clearly had to be Michael's influence on him. Fucker.

Also, if his thoughts could stop jumping to Michael every two seconds, that would be great.

He smears a hand over his eyes and brusquely stands up, grabbing the remote to turn off the TV because he clearly wasn't getting anywhere with what he was watching. Instead, he grabs a light jacket from the back of one of the chairs by his kitchen table and heads out of his apartment to go outside, tugging it on as he goes. He counts it lucky that he can think straight long enough for him to get a place in mind to go to—the small ice cream shop down the block. It's probably still open. If a good ol' strawberry ice cream cone can't cheer him up, at least a little bit, then nothing can. With his newly-enhanced senses, food always manages to taste a thousand times better than anything he'd tasted during his first life, anyways. Another win for the books.

It's when he's already stepping outside of the *little*complex and beginning his walk to the shop, though, that he notices that something's up. And of course something is. Of *course.*

On the other side of the street, there's a man, walking along, on his phone—no, not a man, a teenager. His appearance makes him look like he could be anywhere from a high school senior to a college freshman, along the same lines as Adam himself. He isn't doing anything, but he isn't what Adam's necessarily focused on.

What Adam is focused on is the supernatural creature tailing the teenager at an ever-quickening pace.

He's not sure what it is, only that the air surrounding its body—visible, thanks to his heightened eyesight—is tainted with a bleary, murky gray, and that always seems to be a indicator of species of monsters. Maybe, with time, he'll actually be able to tell individual monsters apart instead of just sorting them by how their weird auras; but, for now, this is all he has to go by.

Right now, he just stares dumbly at the teenager, at the rapidly approaching monster, at the alley up ahead of them that they're just about to pass, at the rest of the street—which is

empty, save for the three of them—and, for a second, he really wants to just fucking *scream*, because *how much fucking worse could his luck possibly get.*

The hole inside his chest aches.

Instead of screaming, his mind instead jumps straight to option B, which just so happens to be *endangerment of the self* and he yells a "*Hey!"* across the street to the teenager, who looks up, caught off-guard. The creature begins closing in, and Adam points wildly to his right—the guy's left—trying to signal to him to *fucking run* while he *also* starts running to him to try and intercept the monster. The guy turns his head around, looks wide-eyed at whatever the hell was making a beeline for him, and turns and begins dashing the other way like someone with an actual brain.

Huh, smart people who run away from danger are rare to see these days, Adam thinks, before pitching forward and crashing into the monster with enough force to tackle him to the ground. They're both hurled, skidding, into the alley, and Adam—he feels something, some type of energy, that almost reminds him of…

Almost reminds him of…

He doesn't get to finish that train of thought, however, because suddenly there are teeth lunging at him.

Oh, wait, no, there's a monster attached to those teeth.

Is this what a vampire looks like? Adam's disappointed. He was sort of hoping for something along the lines of Dracula.

He ducks and rolls out of the way, feeling more and more grateful by the second he'd managed to get Michael to give him some pointers in the ways of combat in case they were ever forcefully separated in a bad situation. *This* particular situation wasn't brought on by any forceful means, but they were still separate, which means that either Adam can try and handle this by himself or he can pray and hope to Christ that Michael makes it in time.

He should definitely call for Michael. He'd said that Adam could pray if he needs him for anything, after all. It's something that any sane person would do.

Instead, he finds his footing, springing upward faster than he ever thought he would've been able to— *thank you,* enhanced body. He'll never complain again if he gets out of this alive.

"You know," the vampire snarled, leering at Adam in a way that makes him feel suspiciously like prey under a predator's watchful eye, "I wasn't gunning for a blond, today. You're lucky I'm not picky," he grins, teeth on full display, cocking his head to the side in a *so-so* manner. "Or, well, *I'm* lucky."

"Yeah?" Shut *up*, Milligan. "You more of a Jodie Foster or a Brad Pitt kinda guy?" *Shut up, Milligan!*

Only he can't shut up, because it feels like every limb in his body is on fire from the sheer amount of nervousness and adrenaline pumping through his veins. He's thinking and not thinking all at the same time, his mind both drawing a complete blank and noting in fine detail the way that the vampire tenses up more on his left leg, which meant that that was probably the leg he was going to push off from when he eventually lunged again. It's an odd feeling, to be able to analyze everything and nothing in the blink of an eye, and it's something that doesn't sit quite right in his stomach as he tenses up in return, trying to see if he can anticipate what's about to happen.

The vampire laughs, something harsh and biting (ha!) that tears its way out of the creature's throat, and Adam's got enough time to recoil at the use of Michael's nickname when he says "Real cute, kid," before he's moving towards him with superhuman speed, slamming him up against the brick wall behind him with enough force to make the breath quickly rush right out of his lungs, and there's that *feeling* again, the energy that seems to be radiating off of this stupid fucking vampire that's both familiar and not, but he doesn't have the time to figure out *why* because the combination of lost air and gleaming teeth in front of him is beginning to spark some very, *very* bad memories.

"Aw, look, sis! He's a screamer." Laughter, more pain, and then a whisper, right by his ear as too-strong fingers tore away flesh from his stomach. "Let's hope your daddy screams even louder when we get our hands on him*."*

And Adam, suddenly, cannot find it in himself to be scared. Not of this—this *thing.* No. No, he's lived through too goddamn much to die by the hands of some Dracula-wannabe with pointy teeth. He's willing to bet that he's older than this piece of shit, for fuck's sake.

He knows, then and there, that dying isn't in the cards for him. Not here. Not today.

Right as the fangs lean forward to presumably tear his throat out, Adam's fist swings upwards, smashing the asshole square in the face. When he—*it*—stumbles backwards with a shout, Adam draws his arm back and does it again and again and *again*, his hand protesting in pain against the rigidity of what seems to be a reinforced skull, but he doesn't care. It's like a dam has been unleashed inside him, and all the little parts of him that have become a little more than human have been channeled to his fists, striking the creature over and over in an effort to just get it the hell away from him. It lashes out in return, knocking him back a step, but Adam barely feels it—can't bring himself to care about the dull thuds against his sternum, or the way the top of his head is grabbed by the hair and smashed against the man's knee. All that exists is the rush of blood in his ears and the way his arm pulls back and surges forward, over and over again until reality is lost to him—and, for a brief moment, he cannot remember anything else, not even the Cage.

It scares him, for a moment.

A final blow connects with the side of the vampire's cranium, and Adam stumbles back—both into reality and physically—breath coming in ragged gasps as the monster clutches its bloodied face with a low howl of pain. And then Adam is being thrust back against the wall, *again,* when the thing charges him with a noise just short of a roar.

He's getting really sick of walls, he thinks, when his head gets snappagained back against the brick with enough power to make him dizzy. He sucks in a breath, only to choke on it when a hand wraps around his throat, cutting off his airflow and making him see spots with how quickly he loses the ability to breathe. His brief rage disappears as fast as it came, and it's all he can do to try—and fail—to shove the fucker off of him.

"It's been fun, asshole, *really.* " The monster's face is inches from his own, breath hot and rank. "But I can drain your blood just as well *dead* as I can *alive.* And I want you to really *feel this.*"

The feeling's back. That *energy.* He can feel it, pulsing and buzzing, but it's not under his skin—it's under the *vampire's*.

And he *knows* it. Or, at least, something similar to it. He knows it, he *knows* it, he…

"Hang on, can I borrow some of your grace, for a sec? I just wanna see if I can get this."

Michael chuckles, sitting next to Adam with a bemused little grin on his face. "Sure, kid. Go nuts."

"Alright, alright, lemme just…" he winds the silver lines of power around the bones of his hand and fingers, threading them through his capillaries almost ridiculously easily—it's as if they existed solely for that purpose. The balled-up wrapper from his empty bag of chips goes flying with a flick of his wrist, landing directly in the center of the trash can across the room. Adam fistpumps in victory with a soft "yes!" as Michael laughs. The apartment is warm, with the smell of the freshly-made brownies that Adam had thrown together from a recipe online still hanging in the air.

Soon, they're both laughing, and Adam thinks they'll be okay.

That is *Michael's grace* vibrating under the skin of that vampire, but it's also not, and Adam is confused for all of a second before he thinks of the memories shoved into his mind by Castiel and remembers that *oh, yeah,* there was some other version of Michael running around before he and his Michael were released from the Cage. Maybe his grace had exploded when he'd died or something and gotten absorbed by a bunch of monsters? Adam didn't know, and, honestly, he didn't particularly care.

But...Michael's grace is still Michael's grace, right? Even if it's from another universe?

And Adam knows Michael's grace like he knows the iciness of the Cage. That is—*extremely* well.

He's smart enough to know that this is a stupid idea. He's dumb enough to think *oh, what the hell* and do it anyways.

In the blink of an eye, he's got his hand raised, planted firmly on the arm of the vampire like he's trying to rip himself free of the stupid thing's hold. It laughs at him, but Adam's eyes are closed, now, focusing on the power he can feel purring wildly just under the surface of its skin. There's something entirely rancid about it, sour and cold in all the places that his

Michael's grace is usually light and warm, but he can still feel the way it responds to him—how it begins shifting and turning and writhing, and just as he thinks he's about to lose consciousness Adam tightens his grip on the vampire's arm and *pulls.*

The effect is instantaneous—the weight on his throat is lessened as the creature rears back, suddenly letting out a shriek of agony. Adam coughs as air rushes back into his throat, but he's *not done.*

Keeping his hand firmly clasped on the thing's arm, he gives another sharp mental pull, coaxing and crooning at the grace under its skin to come to rest under his, instead; and Adam doesn't *want* it to—he can sense how spoiled it feels from *here*, and it still has yet to come into actual contact with him—but he has to win this. He has to. He's not sure what's compelled him to *not* pray to Michael, after he's let everything get *this far* already, but—

But he is not the nineteen-year-old child he was back when he'd been defenseless, screaming helplessly as he was held down and eaten alive.

And he needs to accept that.

He *will* accept that.

The vampire screams when Adam rips the grace from his veins, accepting it into his own body with a sharp gasp and a shudder, and oh, *oh,* this shit is toxic. Adam can practically taste the slimy rage, the venomous sadism that drips off this stuff like water from melting ice. *His* Michael's grace feels like fire, almost—a bonfire, a wildfire, something bright and chaotic that burned with love and ambition and passion. *This* Michael's grace feels like a fire, too—but, to Adam, it was just the kind that someone would run from. It was destructive and twisted and hellish—fitting, he supposes, for someone who'd supposedly ravaged the Earth until there was barely anything left.

The grace snakes up his hand, passing through his skin like a knife through wet paper and stretching its way up the bloodstream of his arm, feeding into the rest of his body like acid. It makes his stomach turn violently, like he's going to throw up, but he's got shit to do first—he can vomit later.

Adam turns his attention back onto the vampire, who's hunched over and panting from the stress of having archangel grace ripped out of his body. There wasn't much to rip, if Adam's being honest—he's used to the roaring, burning inferno of Michael's grace, so this feels like the tiniest trickle of water from a faucet in comparison—but it's enough to do what he needs to do. To get the job done.

When the vampire looks up, they lock eyes. Adam's not sure what's reflected in his own, but, apparently, *something* in his expression is enough to make the monster before him pull a face that's reminiscent of Habudiel's upon seeing Michael— it's not quite as outrightly terrified, but there is still fear, pale and shaking on its—*his*—face, and hell if it doesn't make his insides twist with guilt.

Adam raises his hand a final time, and his middle finger and thumb come together, a clean *snap* that echoes down the stone walls of the alleyway. The grace within him responds

eagerly, *too* eagerly, and there is an instantaneous burst of fire, a final, anguished scream, and silence.

And ashes. There are ashes, too.

He doesn't know how long he stands there, staring down at the charred remains of what was once a being that had him pinned against a brick wall, fighting for his life.

What he does know is that what little remains of the other Michael's grace is still roiling inside of him, and *part of it is trying to enter the space by his heart, and*—no. No. That's not happening.

Only one Michael belongs there, and it's not whatever's left of this noxious jackass.

Adam doesn't remember the walk home. He knows he *walkwalkeded* home—there's no other way for him to *get* there, after all—but there's nothing left except static in his brain.

Something he also knows is that he wants this grace out of him, stat.

So, what does he do? He makes his way to his cabinets, pulls out a Tupperware container, pushes and shoves at every tiny speck of grace within him until it's well and truly drained, and then seals the damn thing with the brightly colored lid.

And then he sticks it in the fridge, because, hey—out of sight, out of mind, right?

Fuck, he wants a shower. His entire body aches, inside and out, and his skin is crawling even with the grace gone—he feels contaminated, polluted, and the sweat sticking to his skin isn't helping matters. His head is pounding from where it had gotten slammed around, and the more morbid sense of humor he'd picked up in the Cage—before he and Michael had begun their interactions, when there was nothing but silence and the slowly growing sense of complete delirium that he'd nearly lost himself in—pipes up in the back of his mind, snickering quietly about tipping an entire bottle of aspirin down his throat to fix it, like a shot glass. Adam shoves the thought away with more force than probably needed, feeling even sicker by the minute.

He catches sight of his clock, hanging just to the left of his TV. It was 9:23 P.M. when he left. It's 9:40 P.M. now.

Fuck, time is so annoying.

...He's tired, okay?

Adam thinks he should pray to Michael, now, if only so they can both figure out what to do with the grace in his fridge. He almost wonders if he should put it in the freezer, maybe see if he can turn it into a grace-sicle.

He doesn't do either.

Two days after that, Adam is relatively calmer. He calls in sick at his job and spends his time watching bad movies from the 90s that make him feel nostalgic and figuring out how to bake bread. He sends the odd thought here and there up to Michael, telling him about some of the more fun scenes from the movies and chattering absentmindedly about anything else he can think of—though, since they're not actually *prayers,* he's not sure whether or not Michael's actually receiving them.

That's fine. Adam just—needs to talk. Needs to feel a little less like he's living in a dream. The alternate Michael's grace has been tucked firmly into the back-right corner of his fridge, behind the milk and the Chinese takeout he'd never actually finished. He's content to keep it there as long as it doesn't blow up, which has honestly become his policy on basically everything in his life at this point. It's not the best policy—his mother would *kill* him if she were still alive for acting like this—but it's the best he's got. So he watches his movies and laughs at his failed attempts at bread-making and he doesn't *bury* the fact that he set a man on fire two days ago but he tries to *live* in spite of it and that—that has to mean *something*.

The hole in his chest has diminished, though, and he is—strangely enough—a little proud of that fact. It's proof that he can take care of himself and it's proof that he hasn't grown weirdly codependent with Michael like the Winchesters seem to be with each other. You know what? He'll take it.

Adam's little sense of half-normalcy lasts until two in the afternoon, and then the apartment is shaking and glowing and Adam can feel Michael—*his* Michael—descending upon the area around him.

Miss me? A voice, so familiar and soft and *real,* sounds in his head, and it makes him chuckle, just a little bit, in a mixture of happiness and relief.

Michael, he murmurs, allowing his body and soul to open back up from the guarded shell it had been ever since the previous Michael's grace had inhabited him, *you have no idea.*

He feels Michael flow back under his skin, settling in the space around his heart like there was nothing else more natural in the world, and he can sense it the *second* Michael realizes that something is wrong, that Adam is not the same as when he left him three days ago.

Kid? Michael says, still soft, in that way of his that makes Adam press his lips together tightly, almost as if he's trying to suppress the hysterical laughter that he's so, so sure is about to claw its way out of his throat. The archangel's apparition materializes next to him on the couch, leaning forward like he's searching for something on Adam's face that his mind isn't giving away, and all Adam can do is smile sadly, wryly, as something within himself *snaps* like the click of his fingers on *that day* and he just...lets go. Lets the memories be thrust out into the open of their mental link as he sinks into the couch, tipping his head back against the cushion and closing his eyes. He can feel Michael scrutinizing the memories, turning them over and over again, and the sense of love that pulses gently around his soul through their bond makes his hands clench into two tight fists as he swallows back the beginnings of a sob.

Michael says nothing, at first. Not out loud. But there are words chiming away on the inside of Adam's mind, words said in a thousand different languages, words that he'd never be able to share for fear of losing their meaning.

It would be sacrilege, he thinks.

Two hands find one of his own and gently undo his curled fingers, leaving them loose and lax before moving on to the do the same with the other. When Adam opens his eyes, he finds Michael gingerly lifting his hand—*the* hand, the one that he'd used to burn someone alive with—and examining it, almost like he always did with human objects that he didn't understand. His face wasn't curious, though, not like it usually was; it was calm, almost wondrous, mirrored in the way that he traced the hand with his fingers, feather-light and delicate. And then a memory is transmitted over to him, one that he thinks he shouldn't have forgotten, as Michael's hands cease their tracings of his own and, instead, enfold around it, holding it with a tenderness that sends sparks racing up his arm—all the way to his heart.

"You're still your mother's son."

Adam believes him.

"Sorry for the shitty welcome home, Mike," Adam says, later, when he's on his third cup of coffee at three in the morning. He's got too much cream and sugar mixed into this one, a combination that makes Michael's nose wrinkle up in a way that brings a smile to Adam's face. "It's probably not what you expected."

"Well…" Michael begins, raising his eyebrows a little as he looks from the coffee cup to Adam. "I had a feeling something was wrong—your voice didn't sound right. It's why I came back early."

Adam frowns. "My voice?" and then, with more concern, "Oh shit, did I interrupt something important? I'm s—"

"Adam," Michael cuts in, not unkindly, "there isn't any need to apologize. I came of my own free will—" he huffs out a small laugh at his choice of words, "—and Heaven is still standing. Angels are what power it. It isn't that they necessarily require more numbers, it's that they're low on power. Naomi is handling the situation as adequately as she can, given the circumstances. All I did was supply them with the energy they lacked. I gave them enough to tide them over for a while—it's not a replacement for the numbers lost to the Fall, but it's a start." Adam's about to ask what the Fall is, if it's the reason that Heaven is so thinned out, but then Michael gives a shake of his head and continues. "And yes, your voice. You do recall speaking to me over the last two days?"

"Oh. Oh, I didn't know you could hear those!"

"They count as prayers."

"..So, what you're saying is, I have the ability to bug you no matter where you are?"

Michael laughs.

"Yeah, kid. Always."

“So, do we actually have any use for this stuff or can I try to bake it in, I don’t know, cupcakes, or something?” Adam says, shaking the Tupperware container in front of his face and watching the alternate Michael’s grace bounce around in it like some weird combination of liquid and air. He doesn’t want to touch it—not after last time—but it doesn’t scare him like he thought it would, either.

“Bake it into your *cupcakes?* ”

“I mean, if there’s nothing else to do with it, why not?”

Michael stares at him for a second, before raising his eyes to the ceiling and shaking his head in an *I-can’t-believe-this* manner, failing to hide the small, baffled smile that comes springing onto his apparition’s mouth. “Out of all the things in the world that someone could do with a marginal amount of archangel grace, of all the people who would kill to get their hands on such power, he wants to try and *bake it into cupcakes.*”

Adam snorts at Michael’s melodramatics. “*He* is right here, and he *already asked you* if there was any use for it, and he also wants to know who you’re talking to, while he’s at it.” When Michael drops his eyes back down to pull an unimpressed face at him, Adam laughs, full and bright and louder than he’s laughed in days. It twitches the archangel’s face back into a smile —warmer, this time.

“So!” Adam announces, slapping the bottom of the container against the palm of his hand, “I say we have ourselves a science experiment! What happens when you mix archangel grace and cupcake batter?”

The answer to that—Hell. You get Hell.

Adam, the one who’d coaxed the grace to meld with the batter, hadn’t expected to open the oven to find a massive conglomeration of thoroughly baked cupcake staring back at him. It had swelled up to fill the *entire oven*. Michael peers at it over his shoulder.

“It’s highly radioactive,” he comments, with some degree of amusement, and Adam splutters for a second—radioactivity won’t bother *him,* but there are *other people* in this building, for Christ’s sake!

“How highly are we talking?”

Michael tips his head to the side for a second, and then replies. “It’s comparable to that Chernobyl incident. The one you watched a documentary about the other day.”

Adam guesses that his panic might just be showing on his face, because Michael also quickly tacks on, “I set up a shield around it to contain the radioactivity when I felt the levels beginning to spike. The people in the complex are fine.” And, sure enough, when Adam turns to look back at his unholy creation, his eyes can pick out the faintest glimmer of Michael’s grace shimmering around it from all angles, which makes his entire body deflate in relief.

He takes a moment to consider himself extraordinarily grateful that he hadn’t accidentally managed to give everyone within a twenty mile radius radiation poisoning, even if Michael

would’ve been able to reverse any effects done with a snap of his fingers and a flash of his eyes. Once he gets over his brief terror, he turns to Michael with a slight grin.

He was no chemistry freak, but, hey—Google existed, right?

“What do you say we cut this thing open and see what happens?”

“It’s an *abomination,* kid.”

“It’s *science,* old man.”

Michael tells him stories, sometimes. Stories of Creation, and of the times when it was just God and the archangels, not counting the Darkness before they sealed her away. He speaks of things like when the first star was made, the wonder that radiated from each of the archangels as it burst into existence. Adam always loves hearing them, *all* of them, especially when Michael uses his grace to make 3D projections of the event in question. For someone who was normally so matter-of-fact, the archangel could make a pretty damn good storyteller when he really set his mind to it.

When they were in the Cage, God used to be included in these stories. Now, God is glossed over, no longer a focal point of the stories; instead, He's turned into a simple stumbling-over of words, as Michael's mind attempts to include Him before remembering what He'd done to him, to everyone.

"If there are so many universes out there," Michael says, one day, staring at the ground with an expression that looks just short of despair, "how am I to know for certain that I truly experienced these memories? How do I—” he cuts himself off with a sharp, almost cruel laugh that makes Adam wince in sympathy. “How do I tell whether or not I’m just a stand-in for the first Michael? The original one, if I am not him? *This* universe could’ve just been created to center around the *Winchesters*. I have no way of knowing if my memories really *happened* or if they were simply placed in my mind to create a *character! ”* he snarls, and he’s started pacing, now. There’s a metaphorical whirlwind spinning on his side of the bond, thoughts spiraling like mad as distress and bitterness hit Adam so hard he feels like he could drown in it. “For all anyone knows, this universe could have only began at the point when *they* were first born, and everyone else was just—added to it!”

Adam knows that Michael is mostly speaking to himself, at this point, but he looks and *feels* so miserable that he can’t help reaching out, tugging lightly on the sleeve of the archangel’s apparition to get him to stop his pacing and look at him, instead.

“Maybe you *were* just a character put here to...I don’t know, move the Winchesters’ story along. Maybe we both were. Maybe you’re the first Michael and everything you experienced was actually real. We don’t know. We probably never will.” Adam’s not quite sure what kind of a point he’s trying to make, but he keeps going, anyways, letting his emotions flow freely from one side of their bond to the other, meeting Michael’s frazzled eyes with his own and *willing* him to understand.

“But we’re still...*here,* right? In the present. We’re sitting here and talking. We’re alive. And that’s gotta be worth something. Maybe you didn’t experience the memories of the past, or maybe you did, but they’re still there, in your head—” he taps the side of his own head for emphasis, “—and that means you can still take stuff from them. Learn from them. And that means you don’t have to—to keep on being your dad’s character. So what if you aren’t the only Michael? There are thousands of people in the world named Michael, and that’s not counting the fact that there are apparently millions of other versions of them in different universes. But they’re all different. They all had different...y’know, *influences* in their life that made them who they are. You’re definitely nothing like your other self—” the memory of the alternate Michael’s grace flowing through his veins still makes him shudder, just a little bit. “—you’re *you.* And no other version of you can come close to being you.”

Adam is not a philosopher, not a poet, and he’s *certainly* not any sort of optimist, not anymore. He hasn’t got a clue whether or not he’s just talking nonsense out of his ass or if he’s actually making *sense.* But he tries, one more time, in Enochian, in case it manages to actually make a difference.

“*You are not defined solely by your memories, Michael. Nor are you defined solely by your past. You become who you are by the choices you make—and, I can assure you, there is not a single counterpart of yourself named Michael who has made the exact decisions you have. Perhaps you started as a* character—” There isn’t a word for *character* in Enochian, not one that’s associated with the context he’s trying to use it in. There could be, potentially, but that would require him to bastardize it—and Michael was *not* fond of bastardizing Enochian—so the English word slips out, instead, with an Enochian lilt to it that he hadn’t meant to keep speaking in when he switched. “*—but you have become a person. Is that not what should be considered most important?”*

Adam brings his hand up and lays it on top of his own chest, directly over where Michael’s grace lays, buried within him. Michael watches the movement with wide eyes. The whirlwind’s completely ceased to be, now, and Adam wouldn’t be able to pick out what the archangel’s currently thinking even if he tried. His other hand has moved from loosely snagging Michael’s sleeve to fully encircling his wrist, and he’s suddenly very, very hyper-aware of how close they are.

Finally, Michael seems to respond, bringing his own hand to splay out over his chest—the hand with Adam still hanging off the wrist—mirroring the way that Adam had done it. They do that a lot, Adam notices, suddenly. Mirror each other, he means. He’s not sure how he hadn’t managed to pick up on it until now.

“Perhaps,” Michael murmurs back, gaze sweeping over Adam’s features; almost as if he’s trying to memorize them. “*Perhaps it should.”*

The next morning, Michael regales him with a tale that Adam had heard many times before in the Cage, but still always asked him to tell anyways. The story eventually comes to an end, as all stories do, and Adam’s in the middle of brushing his teeth when Michael hits him with a curveball of a question.

“Don’t you get tired of hearing the same story over and over?”

Adam pauses, frowning, turning around to look at him because he's not visible in the mirror. Then, he remembers he has a mouth full of toothpaste and he leans into the sink and spits before turning back to Michael.

"Nah. Why would I? You're the one telling it, and, besides, it's a fun story. I like listening."

"...I see."

Adam doesn't, but that's okay. He's got a job to get back to, after so many missed days.

He's on his way out of the grocery store when he notices the woman.

She looks like she's in her late thirties, maybe her early forties, and she's got two kids with her—a girl, no older than four or five, standing quietly to her left, and a boy, maybe two or three, seated and screaming in her shopping cart. It's only half-full, with simple groceries in it that look almost painfully familiar to what he used to see stacked in the pantry or the fridge of his mother's house in Windom.

It only takes three seconds after that for Adam to hear that her card's been declined, and it's almost like he's been transported back to another place, another time—back to when he was little, when his mother was leading him out of the grocery store by his hand with only half of what they'd originally gone in there for because they hadn't had enough to pay for all of it. It's jarring enough to make him still, for a moment, and it's only when Michael speaks up with a quiet *Kid?* in the back of his mind that Adam is snapped back to reality. The woman is trying to handle the situation and shush her crying son all at once, and there's a line beginning to form behind her filled with impatient people, and Adam just— *acts*.

"Excuse me? Excuse me—ma'am?" he says, jogging over with his bags still in his hands, "I can pay for you, if you want."

The woman turns to him, wide-eyed, and Adam can easily see the way she almost, *almost* turns him down—whether out of politeness or pride, he's not sure—but she glances at the food in her basket and her two kids and then asks, quietly and hesitantly, "If it's not any trouble?"

"No trouble at all, ma'am." He sets his bags down on the ground and opens his wallet, sticking his debit card in the chip reader and completing the transaction while the woman wor*being*ks on comforting her weeping son. The little girl to her left waves at him, and he smiles and waves back.

Good thing I save money on not having to eat, right? he mentally jokes, putting his card back in his wallet and picking up his bags again. Michael doesn't verbally answer, seemingly deep in thought—or, at least, contemplating something, since Adam doesn't get anything back except a wave of affirmation over their bond. Odd, but not unusual.

Both he and the woman and her kids begin to walk away, but before he can begin to head the opposite direction, she stops him.

“I’m sorry, I can’t...pay you back, or anything,” she explains, apologetically, and Adam holds up his hand to stop her before she can start feeling too bad around it.

“There’s no need to. Really.” His eyes flicker downwards, to glance at the children, and then move back up to meet hers with a smile. “I get it.”

The tension that had built up in her shoulders seems to deflate out of her, and she smiles back, warm and grateful and relieved. It somehow manages takes Adam completely off-guard —and he’s not even sure *why.*

“Thank you.”

“Of course.”

“You helped that woman,” Michael comments, that night, when Adam’s halfway through one of the Thor movies. “Why?”

Adam, sensing that this was probably about to turn into a lengthy discussion on something or other, reaches for the remote to pause the TV.

“Well,” he voices, after a beat, “because she needed it. And because I’ve been in that sort of situation before, and it sucks.”

“A combination of empathy and pity, then?” Michael’s not looking at him, instead staring directly ahead, but he’s not quite looking at the TV either.

He twists at his bottom lip with his teeth, thinking. “Yes and no. Empathy, yeah, because, like I said, I’ve been in that sort of thing before. Pity...no. She’s just living life like the rest of us. No need to feel sorry for that sort of thing, right? I would’ve hated it if someone came up to my mom and I and started acting like they pitied us.”

“So help is offered to those in need by those who have experienced the same type of suffering?”

Adam doesn’t know where the hell Michael is going with this. All he can do is answer, and give it his best shot. “I mean...yes and no, again. Yes, because people who’ve gone through the same shit tend to lean more towards helping similar people. But that doesn’t mean people who are entirely different can’t also be helped. You help people because they need it, at the end of the day, no matter what other reasons there are.” He pauses, and then, “Well, I do, anyways. I can’t speak for everyone else.”

Michael sighs and finally turns to look at him, but it’s not a sigh of annoyance—it seems more humored, than anything. “Must humanity always be so complicated? Can’t I get a straight answer, for once?”

Adam grins and laughs, at that. “Nope. We’re all just a bunch of overly-complicated brains walking around inside meatsuits, halo. Including me.”

“No,” Michael says, looking him over. It’s almost like he’s giving him a once-over, but he’s slow instead of quick; languid, in the way his grace wraps around his soul. “No, I think

you're much more than that."

And what, exactly, is Adam supposed to say to that? Even with his enhanced senses, even with his altered perception, he'd accepted it all the way back in that alleyway with the vampire that he still is, at his core, Adam Milligan. And Adam Milligan was just some kid from Windom who got tugged down into Hell and left there. He wasn't a hero or a villain or even someone that was mildly important in the grand scheme of things—he's just some guy who happened to be related to the Winchesters.

"Yeah, well, you're probably the only one who does," Throwing the archangel a sardonic smile, he un-pauses the TV and returns to watching the movie.

He tries not to think about the differences in the two faces; of the vampire who feared death at his hands and the woman who was grateful to him for paying for her groceries.

A week and a half ago, Adam killed someone for the first time.

He sometimes wonders how something can manage to affect him so little and so much at the same time. On one hand, he *killed* someone. That alone is enough to make him wince, enough to make the nineteen year old kid that he'd once been cry out at the injustice of the world. He'd wanted to become a doctor to be like his mother; to *help* people. Killing people was, supposedly, the opposite of that. But he's lived too long now to not know that gray areas were apparent and prevalent in too many aspects of life—another thing about humanity that Michael often found utterly confusing, to Adam's never-ending amusement.

On the other hand, the vampire had been out to hurt someone, someone who had been close to the same age he was when he'd been eaten alive. So, in a way, he *had* helped someone—helped keep them from getting killed. Killing was just a thing that was bound to happen, with the way things were going right now, and he honestly might as well get used to it.

Maybe that didn't have to be a bad thing. It would've been one, before the Cage, but he's no longer in that time period. Getting used to something was not the same as desensitizing himself to it—and he should know, seeing as he'd long since gotten used to the near-total isolation he'd suffered when he was back in Hell, even though it had never stopped aching. It was just another change; just another part of life, right? This weird-but-normal little life he'd managed to scrape together after the Cage. There was no use comparing it to his past life, because it wasn't. It never would be. His past life hadn't included monsters, for one thing.

Well, not until the very end, at least.

It didn't mean he wanted to kill anyone again, though. He'd leave that to the fighter-types.

"'Fighter-types'?" Michael questions, raising his eyebrows at Adam from the chair opposite him. They're at the kitchen table, Adam sitting with his laptop open in front of him. He's got the site for the nearby community college pulled up, looking through the degree offerings, and his cursor hovers over the *Associate of Applied Science in Nursing* link, hesitating only for a moment before clicking on it.

“You know what I mean! People like you or the Winchesters or whoever—the kind who run into places guns blazing, swords swinging, whatever.”

“*Ri—ight.* Okay,” Michael says, dragging out the *i* in *right* to make himself more dramatic, no doubt. Adam knew all of his little idiosyncrasies, by now, kept them tucked away in a corner of his mind to smile about when the archangel in question wasn’t paying attention. “So, what does that make people like you?”

“Um,” Adam starts, beginning to bounce his leg a little in an unexpected burst of anxiety. “That depends. Do you have anything against college?”

Michael squints at him, inspecting him for a moment, before realization seems to dawn upon him. “You want to go back?”

“If you’re cool with it,” Adam offers, a little sheepish. “I know you used to rule Heaven and everything, and that was probably more exciting than sitting in a classroom with *me* would be, so if you think it’d be too boring, or whatever, then we don’t *have* to. It’s just...I don’t know, a new place to start, maybe?” He sends Michael a little grin. “As much fun as working in an organic food store is, it doesn’t really...do it for me, y’know? And I doubt that it’s any fun for you, either.”

The archangel tilts his head backwards, a little bit, regarding Adam with the manner of someone studying something particularly fascinating. If Adam couldn’t feel Michael’s emotions, couldn’t feel the constant flow of love and curiosity and amusement and contentedness—to name a few—he would honestly believe that Michael viewed him as some sort of odd little *pet*. He wouldn’t be surprised if other people got that impression, either. As it is, though, he’s spent long enough with the winged bastard to know that that’s just how Michael *is*. Unintentionally—or intentionally, when concerning people that he didn’t particularly care about—supercilious, until Adam one-liners him back into reality. It’s honestly just funny, at this point, especially when he can pick out what Michael’s *actually* thinking during his more haughty moments.

“I wouldn’t mind,” he says, at last, adopting a small half-smile that makes Adam perk up and smile in return. It’s when Michael reaches across the table to take Adam’s left hand in his own, though, that Adam’s brain short-circuits. Just a little bit.

Michael’s always like this—he’s not sure what he’s short-circuiting *now* for. Maybe because he wasn’t expecting it? Wait, no, that doesn’t make any sense because he almost *never* expects it because Michael has the stupid tendency to just drop things on him *out of the blue* because he was never taught subtlety in his goddamn *life*.

“Okay—okay! Great. So, people like me. The people with the stethoscopes and...stuff. Helping people out and—and stuff. Yeah.” Very smooth, Milligan. Your mother would be proud.

“Yes, she would be,” Michael intones, reading his thoughts like a wide-open book, and all of Adam’s inner screaming comes to a stop when he feels the playfulness radiating from Michael’s grace and sees the light that's dancing about in his eyes, all glimmering and iridescent and warm like he's an innocent angel and not a *sneaky fucking bastard*.

He’d taken his hand to make Adam flustered on *purpose,* and Adam was *absolutely* going to deep fry his gigantic fucking wings and eat them, KFC-style.

First, though, he had a college application to fill out. After all, wasn't going to happen by itself. But after that?

Oh, it was *on.*

End Notes

thanks for reading! my tumblr is @adammilligan if you'd like to stop by and say hello :)

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