

HEAD WEST, JUDE FUCKIN' HALLIGAN

(a collection of mostly nsfw vignettes)

Ashe Kusagaya

Cassidy belongs to @ngc_5139



“Johnny Ringrose,” Jude shouts as he dismounts his horse.

Ringrose’s gang halts, and Johnny looks behind his shoulder—hair a wild mess of strawberry blond curls.

“*Well*, what do we have here?” he sneers, dismounting as well. “You lookin’ for a fight?”

Jude snorts and squares his shoulders. “Do I look the sort?” He flicks his hat back a bit, so he can get a good look at Ringrose. They’ve got some distance between them, but it’s a clear shot.

“A man dressed in all black,” Ringrose says, also squaring up. “I’d say you’re lookin’ like a *real* curly wolf. Death incarnate.”

Georgia’s humidity is oppressive today. High noon—sun’s blazing. Jude can feel sweat trickle down his spine and regrets the long coat, but he likes to keep up appearances. “Can’t let you leave town,” he says, disappointed by the lack of weight in his words. He can’t seem to summon his usual resonance.

“Why not? Just passin’ through,” Ringrose says with a pout. His gang snickers, horses huffing in the heat, kicking up dust.

Jude’s growing irritated. “You know what you did. *Acta deos numquam mortalia fallunt.*”

Ringrose raises an eyebrow. “All my eye. I reckon you’ve lost me... what’s my crime?”

Son of a bitch knows exactly what he’s done. Jude sets his jaw. He’s ready for the draw. A familiar icy animosity overwhelms him, and he’s itching to rid the world of this filth.

Ringrose tilts his head. “Hey, you’re that Jude fellow. Jude... Jude—” He cuts himself off and draws.

Jude draws too *and* he’s faster. Their shots ring out. “Halligan,” he says as Ringrose drops. Jude holsters his Colt and looks at the rest of the gang. They’re silent, eyes wide, horses uneasy. “No money for your heads,” Jude says. “Best you get out my sight before I decide his blood’s not enough.”

They linger, but then exchange glances with one another, and collectively ride off—pulling Ringrose’s horse along with them. They disappear—a muted haze in Georgia’s heat.

Jude collapses, shuddering, caught in coughing fit. He yanks his handkerchief down his chin and gasps. He’d been holding the bout back, and now it’s wrecking him. He hurts. He can taste blood. He glares at Ringrose’s limp body.

It was worth it.

~

“It’s consumption,” Jude’s uncle says.

“Aw come on, Logan, stop fuckin’ ‘round,” Jude says. “It’s just a naggin’ cough, is all.”

Logan looks worried behind his large practitioner’s desk. “You’ve lost some weight.”

“Been keepin’ busy.” Jude shrugs.

“You can’t stay in Georgia.”

Jude straightens in his seat.

“I recommended dry weather. Arizona.”

“Arizona? Give me a goddamn break.” He sits back in his chair. He’s fighting another fit. He swallows it down and Logan narrows his eyes—he knows. Jude’s been feeling all out of sorts. Waking up in the middle of night drenched in sweat. Chest tight.

Jude pulls out his pipe and starts packing it, fingers trembling. *I deserve this.* Too much blood on his hands. It’s all caught up to him. “West huh?”

Logan nods. “I’d stop smoking too. No more late nights. Rest. Take it easy.”

Jude smacks his lips. “Christ. I might as well be dead.”

“You will be.”



“Where you headed anyhow?” Byron asks.

“Logan wants me in Arizona, but I just might post up in Texas,” Jude says, tipping back another shot and wincing at the burn. “Can’t imagine there’s anything outside of Georgia for me though.”

“And how’ve you been holdin’ up?” Byron asks, pouring Jude another.

“Hearty as a buck.”

Byron purses his lips. “You sure? I’ve noticed you’ve been lookin’ rather tired.”

Jude sighs. “That’s got nothin’ to do with...” He frowns. “Pour.”

He does. “Don’t worry you’re still a sightly man. *Hell*. You’ve got all them Angelicas lookin’ as I speak. Famished for a piece of ol’ Halligan.”

“Horse feathers, I see no such women,” he responds with an awkward smile. He pauses for a beat, holding his friend’s eyes. “I’m gonna miss this. One of the best bar dogs around. I’ll write you.”

“Well, I can’t wait to get one of them pretty little poems,” Byron says with a grin. “I’m gonna miss jawin’ with you, Jude. You son of a bitch. Don’t die too soon now.”

Jude laughs. “Well shit, I’ll try just for you.” He polishes off another shot. “Last one. I gotta turn in early.”

“You sure you don’t wanna knock boots with William’s girl before you go?” Byron whispers. Eying.

Jude blinks. “The tailor’s daughter? Alice?” Jude laughs. “What makes you say that? She here?”

Byron tips his gaze over to the tall woman standing by the window. Jude turns as casually as he can. Sure enough, she’s looking right at him, unashamed and with a hint of a smile. She raises her glass and drinks.

Jude turns to Byron. “She’s just bein’ friendly.”

“A strappin’ lass like that doesn’t flaunt her friendliness.” He leans and raises an eyebrow at Jude. “You know I’ve got that room upstairs.”

“Byron, *come on*.” Jude’s tickled. “I really don’t think she’s interested.”

“Jude, you’re a strange one. I’m sure as a gun she’d run up those stairs if you offered.”

He steals a glance over his shoulder again. She’s still looking. He turns, blushing. “I’m leaving tomorrow.”

“Even better.”

Jude snorts. “You’re a true chucklehead, you know that?” But he gets up, sets his hat upon his head and walks over, because he’s always liked Alice—a no-nonsense woman with a charming smile.

~

A few words later and Jude’s ushering Alice into the room upstairs. It seems a little fast for what he’s used to, but *again*—Alice is a no-nonsense type of woman—she practically offered herself. He closes the door behind him and takes in the space. Cramped but cozy. An oil lamp is already lit on a nightstand, and there’s a bed. It’ll do.

“Heard you’re leavin’ town,” Alice says, enunciating every syllable and shrugging off her shawl. Jude looks away from her ample chest and takes off his hat.

“I am. Tomorrow mornin’, actually. I understand if you don—”

“Sit down Jude,” she says, snatching his hat and placing it onto a chair.

He does, a smidge thrilled by her direction. She’s wearing a sensible button-down blouse tucked into a full skirt. She gets to unbuttoning and Jude watches as she undresses. A corset, an undershirt, a ruffled chemisette and silk drawers—Jude’s familiar, he likes the easy access the open crotch provides (he also likes tearing them apart, but he has a feeling Alice won’t appreciate that). Mostly he marvels at all the layers women have to endure. “I’ve seen you wear men’s clothes,” he says—trying to ease the tension.

Alice stops, cheeks flushed. “Is—is that off-putting to you?”

“No, quite the opposite. I love a woman in trousers.”

She parts her lips and considers him for a moment and then continues undressing until she’s completely naked, hair down and brazen. Jude studies her in the dimmed, warm light, and she shifts her eyes away. He gets up to follow suit, but she walks over and sets him back down on the bed and sits between his thighs, back to his

chest. She moves her hair aside, so he can see the nape of her neck. “I’ve heard whisperin’s that you’re quite the lover.”

“Have you?” Jude leans into her, holds her hair for her, and slips his other hand around her belly. He kisses her neck—gentle, lingering kisses. She smells like rosewater and smoke.

“Mm.” She cups her own breasts and melts into him. “Heard you’re dyin’ too.”

Jude snickers against her flesh. “You hear a lot, don’t you? He kisses up her neck and sucks on her earlobe, sliding his hands all over her supple body. She moans, and he grips her throat—cutting it off as he slides his right hand down her stomach and between her thighs. She’s already wet and Jude’s dick twitches against her plump ass.

“Your hands feel amazin’,” she sighs, head lolling to the side, watching as his fingers stroke her clit.

“I wasn’t expectin’ you to be so wet,” Jude says, low and near her ear. He cups her breast and continues swirling his fingers, making her squirm and shudder. “Mind if I taste you?”

“*Jude*,” she moans—clearly embarrassed. Her body feels hot and relaxed as he brings his slickened fingers to his lips.

“Bet I can make you cum with my hands.”

She laughs. “By all means...” she spreads her legs, draping them over his.

He returns to her folds, fondling, listening to her breathing, listening to his hand play with her. He does this for some time, jaw tight as she grows wetter and stiffer. And once he notices the telltale signs that she’s close, he holds her and pulls her down with him. He shifts a little, so he can slip two fingers inside her. Now she’s hollering, and her pussy sounds so sloppy, and her ass is moving so perfectly against his cock that Jude’s afraid he might cum in his goddamn pants. He reaches around to rub her clit as he fingers her, doubling her pleasure, making her groan all sorts of creative curses.

“I’m—I’m close—”

His hands don’t stop, not until he can feel her walls tighten and see the gooseflesh on her skin. She’s holding onto his wrists, eyes squeezed shut, whining, and Jude’s enamored with how ruined she looks.

Alice cums.

His hands don’t stop, not until he has her laughing from near-pain. He releases her, and she turns and kisses him, tongue parting his lips and plunging deep inside his mouth. Jude knows a kiss of gratitude when he receives one.

She pulls away, cheeks red, eyes heavy. “Rumor’s true.”

He smiles. “Think you can cum again?”



“It’s not much,” the woman says as Jude follows her up the three porch steps of the rundown shotgun house. “But it’s fully furnished.” She opens the front door and Jude takes off his hat as he enters after her. He immediately spots the wall of shelves packed with books.

“I’ll take it,” he says before the woman can even draw the curtains open.

“But—but I haven’t even shown you the other rooms,” she says, arms frozen.

“I’ve got the tin,” he offers with a smile. “I can pay you right now.”

She accepts and Jude bids her a kind farewell. He hauls his meager belongings inside and tours the rest of his new abode. One room right into another. Dusty, cramped, and kitschy. His footfall practically rattles the walls as he inspects. The bedroom is nice enough. He sits on the mattress—it’s too soft for his tastes—too accustomed to the cold, hard earth, but he’ll adjust. He always does. The dresser drawers and armoire have been emptied. Bric-a-brac were left behind, little white cats and fat babies, crystal jars, and an abandoned frame. There’s a trunk at the foot of the bed filled with bed linens and random fabric. He eyes the bed with something akin to desire, but he has other matters to sort out. Poe. Work. He drops his rucksack onto the trunk and pulls what little clothing he owns. Another pair of trousers, a banded collar shirt, chaps, a frock coat, long johns, bandana, socks. He’s already dressed in finest—duster, vest, suspenders, button-down shirt, and trousers. He trades his duster for the frock coat.



In comes a vaquero. Jude knows one when he sees one. It's their clothing—the distinctive bolero jacket, sash, and thigh-high chaparreras. It's their air, their walk, and this man's face is in shadow as he approaches the bar. He tilts the brim of his low-crowned hat up with a knuckle, and his expression is friendlier than his demeanor.

“Whiskey,” he says, accent thick. “Please,” he adds, taking a seat and lighting a cigarette.

Jude pours. “Long ride?”

The man takes off his hat and sets it on the bar revealing dark hair gone sun-kissed. He's young and bright eyed but weathered. “*Too* long,” he laughs—short, and knocks back the burn, chasing it with a drag.

“Where you headed?” Jude asks. He's met enough wanderers to know when it's appropriate to ask.

“North.” The vaquero smirks and takes another drag, deep, eyes locking onto Jude's. “What's your name?”

“Jude Halligan.” He pours another.

“Jude,” he repeats and drinks. His accent is charming. “Porfirio Reyes.”

“Well Mister Reyes—”

“Call me Porfirio, please,” he says, folding his arms on the bar, hand still holding the cigarette and positioned in such an elegant way that Jude can't help but stare. “You don't look like a bartender.”

Jude laughs. “No? What do I look like?” It's his turn to lean on the bar. One hand on the bottle, poised to pour for pretty Porfirio.

“Like a bad motherfucker.” He drags, blows upwards, and Jude stares at his long throat. Porfirio catches the look and grins. “Malparido.”

Jude swallows and steps back. He leaves the bottle for the vaquero and turns his attention to tidying.

~

Porfirio can hold his liquor. Jude's impressed, but it's time to close. The rest of the patrons have long since cleared out. He takes Porfirio's well-used glass and looks at him expectantly.

“Thank you for the company,” Porfirio slurs. He pays. Generously. Jude watches as the vaquero stands, wobbles, and slips on his hat. *Never mind*, Jude thinks—lips twitching at the other man's struggle. “Adiós... Jude,” he says, walking backwards, swaying dangerously between the tables, but he manages his way out into the dark.

Jude's sad to see him go but also relieved. He finishes closing and heads out, walking the moonlit path towards home. It's humid. Jude unbuttons his shirt, leaving it tucked, and allows the damp air to kiss his sticky chest. He can't wait to wash and sleep but he's dawdling, walking slow, feeling inexplicably on edge, like someone's watching him.

He stops and listens. A baby crying in the distance. Muffled laughter. The familiar groan and shudder of wooden buildings... Nothing out of the ordinary. He wants to turn around, try and catch whoever's trailing him, but he continues walking instead. *You're losing your mind*, he thinks as he tugs on his suspenders, but he picks up his pace, blaming the nerves on an awful craving. Cigarettes. He has a stash at home for when he's real desperate. One won't kill him. He reaches the edge of town, but his house is some ways ahead. Isolated. He's unsettled by the idea of walking out in the open but presses onwards.

He feels it first, through his boots—the unmistakable thundering of hoofs on earth, and then he hears it—the galloping, but by then it's too late, and before Jude can even react—he's lassoed—tight—arms squeezed to his sides, and then he's yanked off his feet and dragged, body rattled and stinging from the impact and subsequent dragging. He's cussing, dust in his mouth, eyes squeezed shut—confused as all hell. He's trying to protect his hands from the assault, clothes tearing, body ricocheting and twisting along the unforgiving desert ground. Thankfully the painful journey doesn't last long. His captor released him and rides off into a large arc, heading right back towards him at a startling speed. Jude's trying to get his bearings, but he's bound and battered. He rolls onto his stomach, winded, heart pounding—braced for the inevitable.

But the rider stops short, and Jude exhales, stunned.

“Jude Halligan.”

That accent, Jude recognizes it. He's staring up at the stars now, trying to wiggle his way out of the rope.

Footsteps, spurs, closer and closer, and then weight, right on Jude's lap—Porfirio. Sober with a dangerous glint in his eyes.

"Not much of a fighter," says the vaquero, grinning.

"Shit—you didn't give me a fightin' chance," Jude huffs, heart hammering in a different way than before. "You a waddie or a hired gun?"

"Both." Porfirio smiles. Leans. Jude can smell the whiskey. "An actor too," he says with no accent.

"Fooled me." Jude's given up his struggle. "Someone hire you to snuff me out?"

"Yes."

"Well now..."

"But I changed my mind."

"Really? Why's that?"

"They didn't give me all the details."

"Such as?"

Porfirio laughs. "You comfy all bound up like this?"

"Is it that obvious?"

The vaquero sneers. "You're quite infuriating."

"And you're not answerin' my questions."

"I rather have something else," Porfirio admits, and Jude's reacting to his weight and heat. "Seems like you're willing."

Jude's all for a quick one with a rough rider, but his nerves are shot, and his body is aching. "You're makin' me blush."

"You're worth \$300, alive."

"Well, that's just insultin'."

"Pay me double and I'll leave you be."

Jude laughs, hard. "I don't have double to give. Barkeepin' isn't exactly lucrative."

"Well that's a shame, whatever shall we do?"



Jude watches as Cassidy sweeps. He can't take his eyes off the stranger—off his lean body and unruly hair. Jude wants to offer Cassidy a respite—a night in his old shotgun house. His lips part... but there's something about Cassidy. He seems preoccupied, a little slippery, like he'll just tell you what you want to hear, and Jude doesn't know if the guy will even stay the entire night. He closes his mouth and continues stacking glasses and tidying up. He counts the register and tucks fat stacks of cash into a box hidden in the floorboards.

Gunshots ring out and blast through the wooden walls, but Jude's already prone on the floor, taking cover. He instinctively grabs for his Colt and pulls up his neckerchief. The fire hasn't ceased, and he's worried about Cass, but just as he's about to peek over, Cassidy comes flying over the bar and drops down into a crouch beside Jude.

"You've got company," Cassidy says, calmly, with a twist of a smile.

Jude squints. "They after you?"

"No. They after *you*."

"No."

The two men stare at each other as liquor bottles burst open—raining glass and alcohol on them.

A bullet whizzes by Jude's cheek, making Cassidy yelp and fall back in fright. "Fuck!"

The gunfire ceases and it's dead quiet.

Jude sighs, he relaxes his shoulders and readies his revolver. "I'll handle this. You head out back."

"Like hell I will," Cassidy says, readying his firearm too. "I ain't no shave tail."

Jude's smiling but Cassidy can't see it. He suddenly feels a little dizzy, too much adrenaline, and he slumps over—Cassidy catches him.

"You alright there?"

A chill runs down Jude's spine, but he shakes it off. He's breathing shallow-like, trying not to succumb to a fit of coughing. He both loves and hates the look of concern on Cassidy's face. "I'm fine."

Cassidy reaches over and tugs down Jude's handkerchief. The audacity! "You a lunger?"

"Don't matter now. If we don't pony up, we're both as good as dead."

Cassidy scoffs. "That's what *you* think."

"Alright. Let's go on out there. Show me what you've got." But as Cassidy slowly makes to stand, Jude pinches his sleeve, stopping him. "I wasn't lyin' when I said you have some mighty pretty eyes there."

"All that soft solder won't get you anywhere, *barkeep*."

"Can't blame a guy for tryin'."

Cassidy hops over the bar and Jude takes the opportunity to pocket a bundle of cash he had just stored away. Word has probably gotten out—Jude Halligan's got consumption, he's weak, fair game, and he's got plenty of enemies. He needs to skip town. More gunshots ring out and Jude crawls his way over to the edge of the bar, he leans and assesses the damage, the windows are destroyed, and Cassidy's tucked behind a pillar, waiting. He appears calm and Jude's impressed by the guy's composure. The barrage stops, and both he and Cassidy fire back—Jude's rapidly palming the hammer—firing all the bullets from his cylinder out the windows and into the street. Cassidy's dual-wielding, focused, looking like a goddamn warrior, and Jude has to ignore the sudden straining in his trousers. They're both out and take cover to reload but there's no incoming volley—it's gone silent. Jude peers out into the dark, from what he can see there's six men laid out. Cassidy comes up behind him and holsters his pistols.

"Well that was a hog-killin' time," he says as he slips on his hat.

Jude turns just in time to catch a man sneaking up behind Cassidy. Time slows enough for Jude to grab his knife, reach around Cassidy and plunge the blade into the side of the assailant's neck. Cassidy goes stiff against Jude, eyes wide like he can't believe he allowed this to happen to him. But Jude's *got* him, in fact the two are incredibly close now, lips inches apart. Jude yanks his knife out of the guy's neck, letting him drop behind Cassidy.

"Somethin' tells me they were here for you," Jude says, pulling away. He's sweating and doesn't want Cassidy to see.

"You might be right," Cassidy says, eyeing the young man lying in his own pool of blood. "You killed him."

Jude wipes his knife on his thigh and sheathes it. "Sure did."

"That's—"

Jude looks at him, amused. "You'd rather he stabbed you in the back?"

Cassidy purses his lips, hands on his hips. "No."

"Heh. That your hoss out there?" Jude asks, carefully leaning out the window and spotting a horse tied to a hitching post.

"Yes."

"Here." Jude grabs the stack of cash hidden in his back pocket. He thumbs through a few bills and hands them over to Cassidy. "For your troubles."

"You're stealin'?"

Jude's tickled. He tilts his head, holding back a laugh. "What're you some sort of sheriff?"

"Ex."

Jude's smile drops along with his hand holding the cash. He stuffs the bills away, ruminating his options as he chews on his bottom lip. He grabs Cassidy by the shirt, pulls out his knife, and forces the blade against his throat—right against his bread jerker. Jude feels sluggish and Cassidy's unfazed by the threat, although his hands have come up by reflex.

"Someone send you?"

"No."

"But you're a sheriff?"

"Ex," Cassidy corrects again. "You gonna slit my gullet or not?"

"Should I?" Jude won't though, he couldn't possibly snuff out the light behind those eyes. Frustrating—they just met, but here he was not acting on something that might save him in the long run. Jude pulls away but

he's still gripping the knife. "Adiós, Cassidy. Fue un gusto conocerte." He walks over to the bar and grabs his coat and hat.

"Where're you goin'?"

"Home. Gotta pack."

"Mind if I ride along?"

Jude looks behind him, concerned. Why was he concerned? Should he even be concerned? He slips the knife back into its sheath. "A Belvidere like you might draw too much attention."

"A pot calling the kettle black," Cassidy says, fingers hooking around his belt buckle. "Besides, it's night. No one will see us."



Jude stops rummaging and looks over his shoulder. "You talkin' vengeance, drifter?"

Cassidy's leaning against the threshold, arm crossed. "Yes."

Jude laughs, short, like he can't believe what he's hearing. "Come inside. Take a breather."

"I'd rather take a gander at your library," Cassidy says, approaching the wall of books in Jude's tiny living room. "Quite the reader."

"Escapism," Jude says and heads into his bedroom. He lights a lamp and goes through his drawers, sorting out what to pack. He figures he'll grab some books too while he's at it. He turns—startled by Cassidy blocking his doorway.

"Cozy." He's taking it all in, every detail as he moves past Jude, slowly walking his way around the room, and Jude feels a little exposed with the way Cassidy's studying his home.

"Charmed?" Jude asks, changing out of his liquor-soaked shirt.

"It's fascinatin'," Cassidy says as he trails his hand over Jude's nightstand, fingers ghosting over his tin of lubricant, "what a man on his own does with his surroundings."

Jude halts, mid-change, clean shirt wrapped around his forearms. "Can't say I have an eye for decoratin'."

"Maybe what you need is someone with a delicate touch," Cassidy says and hops onto Jude's bed. He's surprised by the spring—bouncing and grinning like a damn fool. Jude turns away and slips on his shirt. He's blushing... He can't remember the last time he *blushed*. His heart's acting up too, racking his chest. He can't catch his breath—

"*Shit.*" He doubles over. He can't hold it in. He's coughing.



Jude regains consciousness, jerking upright, but he can't move. He's gagged, lying on his side in the dark, roped up—hands bound behind his back. His right arm has fallen asleep and he dreads the tingling sensation to come, if it ever does come.

He struggles against his bindings, squinting as a single spotlight shines down on him. He looks around and realizes he's on a stage. Panic grips him as he tries to recall how he got here. Night. Ambushed. Beaten and dragged. He hopes Poe's alright and he's pissed at the possibility that maybe Poe is *not* alright. It's been a while since he's felt any semblance of rage...

Jude hears footsteps. Boots and spurs. At least five people. They surround him. Someone grabs him and sets him up on his knees. Jude's gritting his teeth around the gag as the feeling comes back in his arm—it tickles and hurts all at once. Someone unties his gag and he wrenches his head away from their hands.

"What the fuck is this?" Jude moves to stand despite his feet being bound, but a firm pair of hands sit him right back down.

"Where's Cassidy?" a voice asks. Jude can't see their faces; the damn spotlight has casted them dark.

"Fuck if I know. Your guess is as good as mine," Jude says.

"We know you were riding with him for a while."

"I was," Jude admits. "But then he slipped away. No word. No idea. But he's probably a state over by now."



"My hero," Jude says, pulling Cassidy into his arms. He starts gently swaying, leading them into a strange silent dance.

"What—"

"Dancin'," Jude explains.

"There's no music."

Jude starts humming—low and smooth—lips near the ex-sheriff's neck, taking in his scent. Still leading, hand-in-hand, hand-on-hip, and smirking at Cassidy's willingness to fall into step.

"I missed you," Jude says, slipping the words in between hums, half-hoping they'll go unheard.

Cassidy holds onto him tighter, tucks his chin into Jude's shoulder, and it's *enough*. Jude closes his eyes and surrenders himself to whatever this feeling is.

It's just the two of them, battered and bloodied, slow dancing under a single spotlight—the dead all around them.



The lake is a welcome reprieve.

Jude dismounts Poe and takes in his surroundings. A far-off mountain range appears pastel compared to bright blue sky—not a cloud in sight. Prickly trees and overgrown grass all reflected in the serene water. Quiet, lovely—he has to restrain himself from pulling out his scrap paper and pencil... Instead he smiles and pulls Poe over to the lake's edge. Cassidy rides up beside him and Bluebottle huffs.

"Stoppin'?"

"If you don't mind," Jude says, squinting up at him. "I want to swim."

Cassidy raises an eyebrow. "*Swim?*"

Jude's already undressing. "Care to join me?" he asks as he takes off his hat and sets it on his saddle. He locks eyes with the ex-sheriff while untying his neckerchief, pulling it away with a smirk for flourish. "When's the last time we washed?" He peels off his coat, untucks and unbuttons his shirt—feeling Cass' gaze on him, watching every button come undone. He suddenly feels self-conscious and pauses, shirt half open, sweaty chest exposed to the air.

"Don't stop on my account," Cassidy says, dismounting and giving Bluebottle a light pat on the side.

Jude can only laugh at the comment. "You goin' to join me?"

Cassidy's still for a moment, but then he pulls off his hat, and gets to work undressing himself. He tugs off his shirt and notices a hole—sticking a thumb through it and frowning.

"I can mend that for you," Jude offers, unbuckling and unlacing and tugging off his boots.

"You can sew?"

"Sure can. Got a kit. I'll take care of it for you. It's a perfectly good shirt worth savin'." And now Jude's naked. He cups himself and turns away. *Spare Cassidy the horror...*

"For a sick man you're rather strappin'," Cassidy says, and Jude can hear the grin in his words.

"You don't have to humor an old man," Jude says, feeling strangely shy. He sticks his foot into the water—a little cold but the perfect remedy for this dry heat. He eases in, and it's deep enough to submerge himself up to his chest. He dunks his head back to wet his hair, relishing the water, washing away all the days-old dirt and sweat. He feels Cassidy approach and turns, immediately wishing he hadn't, because, *Fuck, Cass is a livin' Adonis...* Jude tries his best to look, well, unbothered.

Cassidy doesn't cover himself, but he's quick to enter the lake—slipping in and agitating the water around Jude.



Jude's resting under the massive canopy of a fig tree, watching as Cassidy tends to their horses by the lake. It's midday, mild, and the sky is bright blue. Jude opens his book and pulls out the scraps of paper tucked inside, they're covered in verse—Jude's dirty little secret. He finds a blank sheet, carefully sharpens his precious pencil with his knife, and gets to scribbling:

You
clever-tongued
dual-wielding majesty.
Trapper of hearts
a legacy of lost formalities.
Eyes—capacious—
I'm lost at sea.

I offer thee a myriad
of tragedies.
Nothing to show
nothing to sow—
only bleak chivalry.

Jude leans back, a little perturbed by what he's just written.

"No happy endings here, lunger," he mutters and looks up—startled as Cassidy's standing in front of him.

"Here I thought you were readin' some pulp." He squats down and pushes his hat back. "You writin'? Can I see?"

Jude snaps his book shut and tucks the pencil away.

"Aw come on. Were you journalin'?"

Jude scoffs, stands, and makes his way over to the lake.

"Please."

"No."

"Please Jude, *oh* I'm dyin' to know. *Please.*"

Jude approaches the lake shore and sighs and massages the back of his neck. He can only take so much begging from Cass. Reminds him of bed-talk. "You'll laugh."

"I won't."

Jude stares him down but gives in and hands over the book. He rushes away, mortified that he surrendered so easily. He just composed the damn poem, so it's fresh in his mind, and the thought of Cass reading every word makes his heart sink—he'll know Jude's sweet on him.

He hears Cassidy shut the book. He doesn't want to turn around, but he does. He's no coward. He wishes he hadn't though, because the look on Cassidy's fine face is too much to endure.

Cassidy looks *caught*, like he's paralyzed, but then he breathes—deeply—and marches over. Jude takes a couple steps back, a little apprehensive, but as Cassidy approaches Jude can clearly see his expression, dewy-eyed, cheeks and neck flushed, and Jude's thrown. *Gorgeous*. And then Cassidy shoves the book into his gut, knocking the wind out of him, pushing him back.

"You're a romantic," Cassidy says.

"I am," he admits, sheepish.

"Who did you write this poem for?"

"Who do you think?" They're so close. Jude's gripping the book like it's a goddamn shield, anything to protect himself from Cassidy's fire, but it's too late, Jude's galvanized. Love struck. He hates it. He hates what Cassidy does to him.

"You're a fool, Halligan."

“Excuse me?”

Cassidy’s closing in on him. “You heard me.” He’s so close that the book is pressed between them now, and Jude’s hands are trapped.

“How am I a—” But Jude doesn’t get to finish, because Cassidy’s grabbed him, and pulled him into a hug. It feels fantastic. Jude drops the book and hugs him back. He can’t remember the last time he embraced someone. He’s taking in Cassidy’s smell, the shape of his body, he’s trying to be *present*, so he can burn the sensation of Cass into his memory. Jude doesn’t want to pull away, but he has to, because this is dangerous.

It’s a mutual albeit reluctant retreat. They’re holding hands, like two stupid boys unsure of what to do next. But Jude’s not unsure—he wants to fucking *take* Cass, but he can’t even look him in the eye. He’s staring at their boots, churning his thoughts for something to say, and “Kiss me” slips out before he can stop himself.

Cassidy instantly obliges—wholeheartedly—hands gripping the sides of Jude’s face, tongue already sliding into his mouth. Jude’s knees go weak. *Christ!* Even Cassidy’s kisses are sublime. All he can do now is kiss back and try to be impressive, try to be worth this shared recklessness. But then he feels guilty and he pulls away, practically pushing Cass, and it hurts to do so, but this is insanity and Jude’s gotta make things right, and this isn’t *right*. He doesn’t look at Cassidy, he can’t bear to look as he swipes up his book and walks over to the fig tree. He doesn’t sit though, he doesn’t move. He’s got his eyes squeezed shut. He’s trying to slow his pounding heart. He’s trying to make sense of it all.

“I don’t care what happens to me, Jude.”

That’s *exactly* what he doesn’t need to hear right now. Jude tosses his book onto the ground, but he doesn’t turn. He touches the trunk, raps his knuckles, leans his weight on it with one arm and grits his teeth.

“Jude—”

“Don’t. Just shut up. *Please*. I’m fuckin’ beggin’ you.”

Cassidy grabs his shoulder, it’s not tender but it’s not rough either, and Jude allows himself to be turned and pinned to the tree. “I wonder. Does your poetry make you feel as good as *this* feels?” The *this* in question was Cassidy’s hand on Jude’s crotch, fondling—stirring up all sorts of excitement.

“No,” he admits, arching into the touch. He wants Cassidy’s mouth again. One kiss wasn’t enough. A thousand kisses will probably never be enough either because he’s insatiable. He’s growing hard against Cassidy’s hand, and that look of desire is stroking Jude’s ego.

Cassidy can see how bad he wants this. Jude gives in, unfastens his trousers, and allows Cassidy’s hand to slip in and pull him out. There’s nothing but anticipation as Jude watches Cassidy lower himself to his knees all the while eyeing his cock like it’s a mouthwatering meal.

And one exploratory lick is all it takes for Jude to let out the most humiliating moan. There’s no hiding. The sun’s high, and it’s just the two of them and Bluebottle and Poe.

“Cass...”

“Jude.”

He laughs, but it’s cut short as Cassidy slips his mouth over his cock. Jude’s had decent head before, and he’s liked it just fine, but *this*—this is something spectacular. It’s not just the sucking, it’s Cassidy’s tongue, his lips, his hand—all at once—all making Jude’s world spin. He grips Cassidy’s hair, he doesn’t mean to be rough, but the sensations are stoking something savage in him. He’s groaning. He hates how vocal he’s become but he can’t stop the sounds. He has to bury his heels into the dirt to keep from skull-fucking Cass, and—as if sensing Jude’s waning restraint—he opens up and takes him fully, all mouth, all throat, all wet, salivating and Jude’s bucking into him, and Cass is taking it, grabbing his ass, fucking *encouraging* him. Cassidy’s looking up at him like he’s a god, and yet Jude knows he’s looking anything but.

The bobbing, the relentless slurping, and the vibrations of Cassidy’s moans all fold into Jude’s climax and he comes hard, shuddering, a full load right onto Cassidy’s wicked tongue. Jude feels the swallow—prompting another agonized groan. Riding waves of post-pleasure, Jude feels like singing, but instead he’s sweating. A lot. He runs a hand through his tousled hair, and tucks himself away, and pulls off his handkerchief and dabs at his face.

“I’ve been dyin’ to do that for a while now,” Cassidy says, standing and dusting off his knees.

“I should return the favor.”

“You should.” He kisses him and Jude’s reeling at the taste of him on his lips. “There’s a town nearby.”

“Think we can make it before nightfall?”

“If we high tail.”

Jude smiles. He wants to say I love you, but kisses Cassidy’s cheek instead. “Then let’s ride, darlin’.”



Jude can't sleep. Too uncomfortable. Too much pain. He's sweating, fighting a fit as quietly as he can. He pulls his handkerchief away from his mouth and mopes at the blood. He'll never be accustomed to the sight of it. He refuses, because he never feels sick. Exhausted, sure, but never *dying*. Usually the stars provide some comfort, but their distant glow is making him feel insignificant. He sits up and looks at Cassidy across the campfire, sleeping peacefully on his side—the silhouettes of flames dancing on his face. Jude props his elbows on his knees and hangs his head. “I want to be strong for you,” and he feels foolish saying that aloud. He balls the damp hankie in his fist and breathes, slow and as deep as he can, but something’s off. He tastes blood and dread takes hold of him and he wants to weep. But he doesn’t. He never does, not because he’s too proud, more like him yielding to his despair will lead him into a never-ending spiral of self-pity, and he can’t fathom a life like that, not now. He stands and stretches and walks over to Cassidy to cover him properly. He lingers, suspended, one knee down. He brushes a lock of hair away from Cass’ eye and sighs. They've been riding together for a little over a month now and Jude's been feeling all sorts of ways about him. Ever since he walked into his saloon it's been Cass, Cass, Cass and he's damn near going insane. He stands and puts some distance between them, because he can't tell if the man is into him or not. Sometimes Jude catches him looking. Sometimes Cassidy catches *him* looking... and Jude's got a growing bundle of saccharine verse about the ex-sheriff. *Your eyes this... your laugh that...* Jude walks farther away, embarrassed. The desert is—despite its sterility—rather beautiful, and even in the dark Jude can make out the slopes of a far-off mountain range, tall cacti, shrubs, but the wildness of this arid landscape isn't enough of a distraction. He coughs, bracing himself, but it's a harmless affair. Jude peers over his shoulder at the camp, at the Cass-shaped lump, and all he wants in that moment is to huddle up behind him and hold him and... he bites his bottom lip. “Oh no you don't,” he says, glaring down at his crotch, but his body's already responding to the idea of Cassidy's firm ass, his broad chest, armpit hair, fucking perfect mouth. Jude laughs, disgusted with himself, but he drops to his knees and pulls himself out, awfully erect. Fuck, what he'd do for that mouth. He's all impulse now. He spits into his palm and caresses himself, back turned to the camp, eyes staring off at nothing particular in the cold night. He groans, recalling Cassidy's naked body at the lake, wet and relaxed, and Jude's growling low now, deep in his chest, hand stroking himself with such an intensity he feels like he's a goddamn schoolboy again. He murmurs nonsense, leaning back onto his heels, his knees and the balls of his feet supporting all of his wretched weight. He wants to spit on his palm again, but he's got an incredible tempo going and he's imagining Cass erect, Cass spread, Cass slamming into him, Cass coming inside him, and Jude's suddenly jealous of all his past lovers, because *Christ*—he wants to be a fucking footnote in Cassidy's story too. He's on the brink, he's making too much noise, but he's so close now that he doesn't even give a shit. He's imagining a lifetime of lovemaking, he's imagining the taste of him, imagining how he might look when he's climaxing, and Jude comes, shivering and groaning, making a mess of himself. And after a moment of stupid bliss he sighs and tucks himself away. Content but also incredibly lonesome.



The door slams open. Jude's not even sure which one of them did it because their hands are all over each other. They stumble in, kissing, tugging on each other's hair. Jude kicks the door behind them to close it as they stagger their way to the bed. It's sundown, but it's still hot in their cramped room. Someone's playing the piano downstairs in the saloon and the laughter from drunk patrons can be heard through the floorboards.

They fall onto the bed—Jude beneath Cassidy—and the old mattress creaks beneath their weight. They bounce a little, which wrenches their mouths apart. They laugh. Forehand to forehead, arms wrapped around one another.

“What a shit hole,” Jude says, but he knows Cassidy doesn't care. *Hell*, Jude doesn't really care either, but it felt appropriate to complain. It's been a good day so far. No fits. No aches. He sighs, loving the weight of Cassidy on top of him. Nothing like this in the world. He watches as Cassidy unbuttons his top, knuckles brushing against Jude's chest as he makes his way down. He tenses and sucks in a moan as Cassidy tongues his sensitive nipples.

He wants Cassidy's lips wrapped around his cock, wants those pretty eyes looking up at him all the while, but he's also enjoying the gentle kisses and bites all over his pecs. *Fuckin' heavenly*. Cassidy cups Jude's tits and bites down onto his nipple, and Jude responds by wringing his fingers through Cassidy's hair.

“*Mn*, this feels like punishment.”

Cassidy peers up at him, through those goddamn long eyelashes, and gives Jude's abused nipple a good long lick. It makes him tremble and curse and Cassidy looks so satisfied with himself and then he looks bothered, as if he's remembered something. Something annoying.

“Shit, I forgot we ran out of oil.”

Jude blinks. He's disappointed. He was looking forward to having Cass balls deep inside him.

“*Sic vita est*. I've got a perfectly good hole right here,” Jude hints with a kiss.

“Tempting.” But Cassidy's back to undressing Jude. Boots off, trousers off, shirt still on but thrown open for easy access, and now he's standing at the foot of the bed, clearly admiring.

Jude sits up and tugs on Cassidy's belt buckle. “Off.” And Cassidy complies, unbuttoning his own shirt as Jude slides his hands all over his thighs and ass. Even clothed, Cassidy's legs are magnificent, and before he can slip out of his trousers Jude leans forward and takes his bulge into his mouth, teeth raking against the rough fabric. He can feel the hard heat beneath his lips and tongue, and the quick jolt of a response against his mouth. Cassidy's moaning, like a fucking hymn, an angel song, enough encouragement to make Jude grip his ass and hold him in place as his mouth works him through the fabric. Cassidy's pulling on his hair, leaning in.

The sun's gone down and the saloon below them has grown rowdier, but Jude's solely focused on Cassidy's airy sighs. Jude unbuckles and unfastens his lover's trousers and pulls them down enough to free him. Jude loves the smell of him, the taste of him, but he doesn't slip his mouth over the length, no, he likes to *tease*. He trails his lips from the base along the shaft to the tip where he can savor the sweetest ichor. Cassidy's yielding to his touch—head thrown back. Eyes closed. Lips parted. Adam's apple bobbing with each swallow.

They don't need any goddamn oil—not when they're both unraveling from this.

Jude could get off like this, if he really wanted to, but he's still stuck on the notion of Cassidy's lips wrapped around his cock, so he pulls away and helps him out of the rest of his clothes. And as if reading his mind, Cassidy's on his knees, tucked between Jude's thighs, hand already stroking him. Jude wants to light a lamp, so he can see better but he doesn't dare move, not while Cassidy's palming him.

“Quickest hands in the west,” Jude says through gritted teeth. He's trying to be cute but delivering anything impressive is proving difficult.

Cassidy snorts and takes Jude into his mouth, slowly. Jude braces himself, his thighs tense and he can't help but release a low groan. Sitting at the edge of the bed, Cass between his legs, head bobbing, hand stroking, Jude was *sure* this was paradise, had to be—he was already dead and being serviced by an angel. No matter how often they do this Jude can't get enough. Cassidy knows *exactly* what he likes, and there's something incredibly hot about that. He knows Jude likes sloppy head, he knows Jude likes the eye contact, and Christ—the spoiling is enough to bring him to the edge, and Cassidy knows that too, so he pulls away, leaving Jude groaning for more.

“Class...”

He looks up, lips wet, but he doesn't need to be told anything. He *knows*. He climbs onto the bed with Jude, lies on top of him, kisses him, and then their hips move, in tandem, cocks pressed side by side between them.

Jude closes his eyes, tilts his head to the side, and Cassidy attacks the sensitive flesh there, giving him goosebumps. Their hips are still moving, and the slow frottage feels more amazing than Jude had anticipated.

Cassidy's got one thigh over Jude's. He's doing the work now, keeping a delicious rhythm going, and Jude's just holding on for dear life, clutching the sheets, jaw set. Filled with so much fire for this man that he feels like he's about to erupt. Jude spreads his legs, and gropes Cassidy's ass with silent urgency.

Cass must be feeling pretty good cause his hips are moving faster, as if he can't get enough of Jude's pelvis rubbing against his cock. Jude's close. There's something so incredibly erotic about this, no penetration, just good ol' humping, kissing, bodies pressed so close together. Cassidy's panting something animalistic.

"You're gonna make me come, Cass. I'm so fucking close," Jude whispers in his ear, arms holding him tight. This man was all his, and how fucking glorious was that?

But Cassidy's gone, he's lost in their passion, face buried in the slope of Jude's warm neck, moaning.

Jude comes, and Cassidy makes quick work of slicking himself up with the mess, and once he's satisfied with the slip he returns, same position, hips picking up speed.

Jude's cock is overstimulated but he's enjoying every minute of this. "Come for me, Cass. Come for me darlin'."

Cassidy pulls away from Jude's neck and groans and Jude's taking in as much of his lover's face as he can; it's dark, but he can make out the parted lips and furrowed brow. Most days—the *real shit days*—Jude can't wait to get back to this. *Fuck*, he wishes this could be the default, naked, buzzing on desire, and wrapped around each other.



There are no words shared between them as Jude bends Cassidy over the table.

Jude doesn't bother undressing, he's too impatient, but he pulls off his hat and tosses it aside. He doesn't know where it lands because his eyes are fixed on Cassidy's naked form—his muscled back, his perfect ass. Jude trails his fingers down his spine, relishing the response—the shiver and tension. Jude's not thinking straight—he's practically snarling—got too much of the fight still in him. He has no quips, no jokes, not even sweet words. He just wants the violence of gratification. *He wants Cass*. So, he pushes against him—rough fabric and leather on smooth skin and slips his hand through his hair, gripping it and forcing his head back a bit—curving that spine in the most beautiful of bows. Free hand drifting south, slipping between Cassidy's cheeks, searching for that puckered sweetness. Jude finds it and teases it. This is new, this switch, and Jude's mouth is salivating at the flip of their roles—or maybe it's the way Cassidy's responding to his touch that's whetting his desire. Further down and Jude's passing over his balls, gripping his cock and stroking it—loving the way Cassidy's thighs are trembling, the way he's writhing on the table, hands balled into fists. Jude's not a biter but he's wants to sink his teeth into Cass, and he does—gently at first, testing, and Cassidy's gooseflesh is all he needs for permission. He marks every inch of his back, down, to his ass—hands firmly holding Cass down, fueled by his moans. Jude can smell his lover's bottled passion, *his* scent, and it's enough to make Jude hike one of Cassidy's thighs onto the table, dick still hanging, ass spread. Jude licks him—balls to asshole, tongue quivering on the ring, sweet tasting, like honey mixed with sweat. Jude buries his face, lips pressed to his entrance. He kisses, slurps—hands gripping Cassidy's ass—holding his cheeks apart, then releasing them so he can fondle his hips as his mouth works him. Cassidy relaxes against his tongue, opens up to him and Jude darts his tongue into his hole, savoring, fucking. Cass melts further and whispers a *Goddamn*, and Jude takes that as declaration of *more*. He doesn't touch Cassidy's cock, doesn't even touch his own—he'll come in his pants at this rate—tongue lapping away, tongue tunneling, mouth sucking—everything imaginable, everything to keep Cass cursing and jerking back into him, cock swinging—hitting Jude's chin, ribboning his chest and neck with precum. He moans, holding onto Cassidy's bucking body, as he pushes his tongue in as deep as he can. Eyes closed, brow furrowed, cock straining and reacting to his lover's pleasure. Jude hears his name over and over—pleading, demanding—and he comes, ruining a fine pair of trousers, but he's not bothered, in fact he's even more inflamed because of it. Only Cass could do this to him. The walls are thin enough, and he's rimming loud enough that he's sure people can hear their passion. He smirks—something about that is hot and he settles on making it wetter and louder. Cassidy's panting, grinding his ass against Jude's face until he stops, stiffens and shudders. Jude pulls his lips away and sees the pearly trail, he's not letting that go to waste—he dips his head, takes it into his mouth and swallows it, along with Cassidy's cock, making him groan and shoot a more substantial load. Jude licks his lips and finishes Cassidy off with another rimjob—face slowly moving side to side, tongue dragging across his hole. Once he's satisfied that Cassidy has endure enough, he gives one last kiss and then parts.



The door slams open. Jude's not even sure which one of them did it because their hands are all over each other. They stumble in, kissing, tugging on each other's hair. Jude kicks the door behind them to close it as they stagger their way to the bed. It's sundown, but it's still hot in their cramped room. Someone's playing the piano downstairs in the saloon and the laughter from drunk patrons can be heard through the floorboards.

They fall onto the bed—Jude beneath Cassidy—and the old mattress creaks beneath their weight. They bounce a little, which wrenches their mouths apart. They laugh. Forehand to forehead, arms wrapped around one another.

“What a shit hole,” Jude says, but he knows Cassidy doesn't care. *Hell*, Jude doesn't really care either, but it felt appropriate to complain. It's been a good day so far. No fits. No aches. He sighs, loving the weight of Cassidy on top of him. Nothing like this in the world. He watches as Cassidy unbuttons his top, knuckles brushing against Jude's chest as he makes his way down. He tenses and sucks in a moan as Cassidy tongues his sensitive nipples.

He wants Cassidy's lips wrapped around his cock, wants those pretty eyes looking up at him all the while, but he's also enjoying the gentle kisses and bites all over his pecs. *Fuckin' heavenly*. Cassidy cups Jude's tits and bites down onto his nipple, and Jude responds by wringing his fingers through Cassidy's hair.

“*Mn*, this feels like punishment.”

Cassidy peers up at him, through those goddamn long eyelashes, and gives Jude's abused nipple a good long lick. It makes him tremble and curse and Cassidy looks so satisfied with himself and then he looks bothered, as if he's remembered something. Something annoying.

“Shit, I forgot we ran out of oil.”

Jude blinks. He's disappointed. He was looking forward to having Cass balls deep inside him.

“*Sic vita est*. I've got a perfectly good hole right here,” Jude hints with a kiss.

“Tempting.” But Cassidy's back to undressing Jude. Boots off, trousers off, shirt still on but thrown open for easy access, and now he's standing at the foot of the bed, clearly admiring.

Jude sits up and tugs on Cassidy's belt buckle. “Off.” And Cassidy complies, unbuttoning his own shirt as Jude slides his hands all over his thighs and ass. Even clothed, Cassidy's legs are magnificent, and before he can slip out of his trousers Jude leans forward and takes his bulge into his mouth, teeth raking against the rough fabric. He can feel the hard heat beneath his lips and tongue, and the quick jolt of a response against his mouth. Cassidy's moaning, like a fucking hymn, an angel song, enough encouragement to make Jude grip his ass and hold him in place as his mouth works him through the fabric. Cassidy's pulling on his hair, leaning in.

The sun's gone down and the saloon below them has grown rowdier, but Jude's solely focused on Cassidy's airy sighs. Jude unbuckles and unfastens his lover's trousers and pulls them down enough to free him. Jude loves the smell of him, the taste of him, but he doesn't slip his mouth over the length, no, he likes to *tease*. He trails his lips from the base along the shaft to the tip where he can savor the sweetest ichor. Cassidy's yielding to his touch—head thrown back. Eyes closed. Lips parted. Adam's apple bobbing with each swallow.

They don't need any goddamn oil—not when they're both unraveling from this.

Jude could get off like this, if he really wanted to, but he's still stuck on the notion of Cassidy's lips wrapped around his cock, so he pulls away and helps him out of the rest of his clothes. And as if reading his mind, Cassidy's on his knees, tucked between Jude's thighs, hand already stroking him. Jude wants to light a lamp, so he can see better but he doesn't dare move, not while Cassidy's palming him.

“Quickest hands in the west,” Jude says through gritted teeth. He's trying to be cute but delivering anything impressive is proving difficult.

Cassidy snorts and takes Jude into his mouth, slowly. Jude braces himself, his thighs tense and he can't help but release a low groan. Sitting at the edge of the bed, Cass between his legs, head bobbing, hand stroking, Jude was *sure* this was paradise, had to be—he was already dead and being serviced by an angel. No matter how often they do this Jude can't get enough. Cassidy knows *exactly* what he likes, and there's something incredibly hot about that. He knows Jude likes sloppy head, he knows Jude likes the eye contact, and Christ—the spoiling

is enough to bring him to the edge, and Cassidy knows that too, so he pulls away, leaving Jude groaning for more.

“Cass...”

He looks up, lips wet, but he doesn't need to be told anything. He *knows*. He climbs onto the bed with Jude, lies on top of him, kisses him, and then their hips move, in tandem, cocks pressed side by side between them.

Jude closes his eyes, tilts his head to the side, and Cassidy attacks the sensitive flesh there, giving him goosebumps. Their hips are still moving, and the slow frottage feels more amazing than Jude had anticipated.

Cassidy's got one thigh over Jude's. He's doing the work now, keeping a delicious rhythm going, and Jude's just holding on for dear life, clutching the sheets, jaw set. Filled with so much fire for this man that he feels like he's about to erupt. Jude spreads his legs, and gropes Cassidy's ass with silent urgency.

Cass must be feeling pretty good cause his hips are moving faster, as if he can't get enough of Jude's pelvis rubbing against his cock. Jude's close. There's something so incredibly erotic about this, no penetration, just good ol' humping, kissing, bodies pressed so close together. Cassidy's panting something animalistic.

“You're gonna make me come, Cass. I'm so fucking close,” Jude whispers in his ear, arms holding him tight. This man was all his, and how fucking glorious was that?

But Cassidy's gone, he's lost in their passion, face buried in the slope of Jude's warm neck, moaning.

Jude comes, and Cassidy makes quick work of slicking himself up with the mess, and once he's satisfied with the slip he returns, same position, hips picking up speed.

Jude's cock is overstimulated but he's enjoying every minute of this. “Come for me, Cass. Come for me darlin'.”

Cassidy pulls away from Jude's neck and groans and Jude's taking in as much of his lover's face as he can; it's dark, but he can make out the parted lips and furrowed brow. Most days—the *real shit days*—Jude can't wait to get back to this. *Fuck*, he wishes this could be the default, naked, buzzing on desire, and wrapped around each other.



Summer storms. Jude loves them.

He's got the window open and he's staring at the dark sky, leaning out just enough to exhale smoke but not get wet. Cassidy would be pissed if he caught him but he's deep asleep from all the lovin'. Jude looks over his shoulder at his husband on the bed, flat on his back and at an angle with the sheet draped over his crotch (Jude's doing). There're clothes strewn about and a single lantern struggles to illuminate their small rented space, stuffy from their fervent exchange. Jude smiles as Cassidy feels around in his sleep (probably for him) and then peels his eyes away.

Jude's naked, relaxed, drowsy. The rain is rhythmic and soothing, and even the thunder stirs something within him. Fear. He drags, long and hard and watches as the stream of smoke disappears into the evening, masked by the heavy downpour. It's all sound at this point, and it's all closing in on him.

“I was ready to die, Cass,” he murmurs, flicking ash out the window. Suddenly the tobacco doesn't taste quite right, and he snubs the cigarette out on the windowsill.

Jude never thought he'd have a reason to live after the diagnosis. He was running the clock and living in the present... and then along came Cassidy with those soulful eyes and that tight stride right through the saloon's batwing doors, looking like moonlight and everything that could take Jude's breath away... He discards the evidence, letting it fall, listening to the rain. *Déjà vu*. Jude's been here before. Feeling torn and warm and restless. He turns attention to Cassidy, sleeping inelegantly but inviting nonetheless. He walks over and pinches the corner of the sheet, gently tugging—exposing his husband to the night's air.

Soft. But Jude can fix that. He carefully crawls over Cassidy and lowers himself for a kiss, startled by the sudden feel of hands on his back—arms closing around him and pulling him down.

“How long you been awake?” Jude whispers, eyes closed, nose pressed against Cassidy's.

“Long enough to smell that damn tobacco.”

“I didn't smoke the entire thing.” Jude kisses him again, deeper. “Just a taste.”

Cassidy makes an irritated sound but he's melting into Jude, hand gripping the back of his neck, legs urging him closer. Hard. There's a flash, delayed thunder, the lull of heavy rainfall, and Jude knows this is as close to heaven as he'll get.

"I wish you cared more."

"I do," Jude says, a little hurt.

"I meant about *you*," Cassidy says, lifting his hips so Jude can slide his hands under him and cup his ass, which he does—almost by reflex.

"I care enough." But Jude's already losing interest in the conversation. His lips are busy with his husband's throat, collarbone, shoulder. He squeezes, and the way Cassidy's breath catches makes him fall in love all over again. He kisses his way down and rakes his teeth along his favorite parts—smiling at every gasp and spasm. He slips his lips over Cassidy, tasting himself and precum, salty then sharp. Hands in his hair, that inner struggle, that urge to buck and curse—held back because Cassidy is *just* that sweet of a man. Jude's giving him enough to stoke that fire, get him breathing deep and tensing.

"Jude..."

A cue and it's all he needs. He guides Cassidy to flip over onto his belly, hips flush to the mattress. Jude spits in his palm and strokes himself, eyeing every inch of his lover beneath him. More spit, a ridiculous amount, and he's sliding his cock between Cassidy's cheeks, pressing them together around him for the added pressure. It feels incredible and Jude loses himself to the sensation.

"Goddamn, Cass, your body is gratifying."



It's the smell of black coffee and sausage that wakes Jude up. He squints into the dusty light streaming in from the window. Cassidy liked to rise with the sun—Jude preferred the dark—but admittedly there was something comforting about the way the thin curtains swayed in the warm breeze, something about the way the sunlight filtered in... made Jude all at once a little despondent, a little delighted. *Another day.*

He can hear Cass downstairs. No one sound in particular, just *him*, moving about their miniature kitchen. Jude rolls onto his side and smiles into Cass' pillow, breathing him in. Last night was a sweaty one. Fevered, rough, a little kinky... Their lovemaking felt more intense lately, more burning and raring. Sweet Cass was muttering all sorts of lovely nonsense into his ear, holding onto him like they were both ripe for combusting into tiny, unsalvageable pieces...

Jude snorts and gathers his strength to rise. He slips into a shirt as he descends the cramped and steep staircase. The two of them had done up their dwelling rather nice. Sturdy second-hand furniture and spectacular linens courtesy of the local grannies. Cassidy's charming bric-a-brac, Jude's bookcases stuffed with hardbacks, fresh flowers gathered from their rides together...

"Got me a man who can cook," Jude says, coming up behind his husband and slipping his arms around him, pulling him close, and kissing the back of his unruly hair.

He laughs. "All this is cookin' itself. I'm just observin'."

"Mm, I like 'em humble."

Cass leans into him. "Sleep well?"

"Like the dead." The answer makes Cass tense and Jude immediately regrets it. "You drained me," he offers—anything to alleviate the evitable—but it's too late, Cass' shoulders sag.