## Murder at Amazing Phil's

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/12745617.

Rating: <u>Teen And Up Audiences</u>

Archive Warning: <u>Graphic Depictions Of Violence</u>

Category: <u>M/M</u>

Fandom: Phandom/The Fantastic Foursome (YouTube RPF)

Relationship: Dan Howell/Phil Lester

Characters: <u>Dan Howell, Phil Lester, Louise Pentland, PJ Liguori, Felix Kjellberg,</u>

Marzia Bisognin, Martyn Lester, Susan Wojcicki

Additional Tags: <u>Alternate Universe - Coffee Shops & Cafés, Alternate Universe -</u>

<u>Detectives</u>, <u>Implied/Referenced Drug Use</u>, <u>some violence</u>, <u>Light hearted nonsense with a serious back drop</u>, <u>Slow Burn Romance</u>, <u>Phandom Big</u>

Bang, Phandom Big Bang 2017

Language: English

Stats: Published: 2017-11-16 Words: 29,598 Chapters: 1/1

## Murder at Amazing Phil's

by mania jests

## Summary

A missing Duke, big corporations, hard drugs and a cute barista named Phil. None of these things should intersect and yet Detective Daniel Howell was finding that this case is full of surprises.

## Notes

A massive thank you to VanillaSolitude for having the patience to beta my nonsense and to VivianaDC for art-ing the HECK out of my story. Without either of them, this story would have been a throwaway idea I had back in March.

Thanks guys, you're the best.

Link to Viviana's art here --> http://vivianadichiara.tumblr.com/post/167566782149/

"Look, I really have to go."

The modestly sized office the Chief Financial Officer of Smith & Sons had resided in for the last two years was finally empty, with the exception of the two influential businessmen standing inside of it.

There, stood in the doorway was the Worldwide Vice President of Smith & Sons. He had spent two futile weeks trying to prevent the CFO from leaving and was making his final stand, by literally standing in his way.

"You know this is a bad time to leave," said the Vice President, his eyes hard. "What with all the bad press we've been having."

"It's not like they have proof."

"Rumours can be just as damning."

The CFO huffed. "Let Corporate Affairs handle it. That's their job. Now would you please excuse me?"

"Nope, not going to do that," he replied with a shake of his head. "How exactly do you think it's going to look to the public if our CFO packs up and leaves after numerous allegations for company drug trafficking?"

"I'm going on *career break*." Frustration leaked through the CFO's voice. "You know I've planned for this. It's not as though I'm leaving our entire financial portfolio in the hands of some addle brained moron. And it's not like I won't be back in a year."

"You don't think I'm an addle brained moron?"





As a person who had spent their last twenty-six years with mere polite acquaintances, the occasional failed date and, more recently, a decent work colleague, Dan answered Louise's question with an immediate, "Nope!"

Dan blindly fired behind the column, biding himself some time to duck and run for cover to a column closer to the staircase leading to the warehouse mezzanine. Dan pointed the firearm down, quickly unloading it to check the magazine, chamber and barrel before reloading it. He had wasted a lot of ammo. He only had one bullet left.

Louise's voice was loud in his ear. "Dan, I repeat, do you need back up?"
He ignored the question. He needed to flush the gunman out from hiding and take him in for questioning, but the odds weren't stacked in his favour. He pulled out his phone and switched it to camera mode.
"Howell!" Louise shouted in his ear. "Do you require back up?"
No response.
<del></del>
She had to call it in.
Louise burst out of the communications van she had been holed up in. She held a finger to her earpiece. "Dan, I'm coming in. Where are yo-?"
A thunderous boom drowned out her question.
She watched in horror as flames licked out from the shattered warehouse window. "Christ," she breathed out, pressing her finger back against her ear piece. "Dan, can you hear me? Dan? DAN!"
The warehouse door flung open.
Dan Howell, covered in soot and sweat, had unceremoniously dropped the formerly armed assailant on the concrete. The man's hands were handcuffed behind his back.





"I have half a mind to suspend you."

A beat. "What's the other half say?" Wojcicki flashed him an annoyed look. "Sorry."

"Largely thanks to you, our precinct has had the highest recorded number of drug seizures and arrests with ten tonnes of supply intercepted in the past eighteen months."

"But...?" prompted Dan.

"But we continue to have enormous demand for illicit drugs and while we have demand, we will have supply." She leaned back into her chair, her arms crossed. "No matter how efficient our law enforcement efforts are, no matter how many drugs we take off the streets, no matter how many people we arrest, no matter how many proceeds of crime we seize from organised crime gangs, we must do something to dampen the demand for illicit drugs." She sighed. "We need a big win. The media has been on our back with the increasing drug related death toll"

Dan frowned. "Is there something you want me to do, ma'am?"

"Tell me, detective, which demographic typically abuses Einstein?"

Back when Dan had been a rookie police constable, he had spent a very long and confusing meeting wondering what people had against Albert Einstein.

It turned out that Einstein was merely a nickname for a highly addictive methylenedioxymethamphetamine.

The drug had been nicknamed "Einstein" as it reportedly 'helped' users process information quicker, subsequently making the body hyperactive. They were white in appearance, about the size of a coffee bean and were sold for nearly £200 per pill. Users allegedly would get much more work done and therefore taken by those with good paying, but high pressure jobs. Dan had arrested lawyers, doctors and corporate types. He had even arrested a handful of

rich university students, allegedly using the drug to improve their studies. The side effects included increased rate of breathing, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased body temperature, anxiety, paranoia and death.

The toll of Einstein related deaths had steadily increased over the last twelve months, growing from 202 reported deaths in 2015, to a staggering 612 reported deaths in 2017. Precincts all across the country had assembled a task force to end the constant supply.

With the precincts combined, they had identified that the drugs were typically transported in a white, medium weight truck. The truck had always done at least 100,000 kilometres and it was always licensed to the person doing the transporting. The transporter looked like a courier and always wore blue.

It was much to go on.

"I hear that you studied law once," Wojcicki said thoughtfully, when Dan didn't answer her question.

He winced. "Yeah, but I dropped out. I mean, can you imagine me as a lawyer?"

"I can," she replied with a certainty that he didn't like. "I think it's time you do some undercover work, Detective Sergeant."

Dan suddenly imagined himself in barrister's robes and wig. "I suppose I should be grateful that they also wear black. And I guess the wig could be aesthetic, in a way."

"One of our constables has reported a drug dealer in Soho. Reportedly comes out between 2am to 2:15am to deal once a fortnight. I want you there, disguised. Find out if your little explosive act this morning has affected their supply."

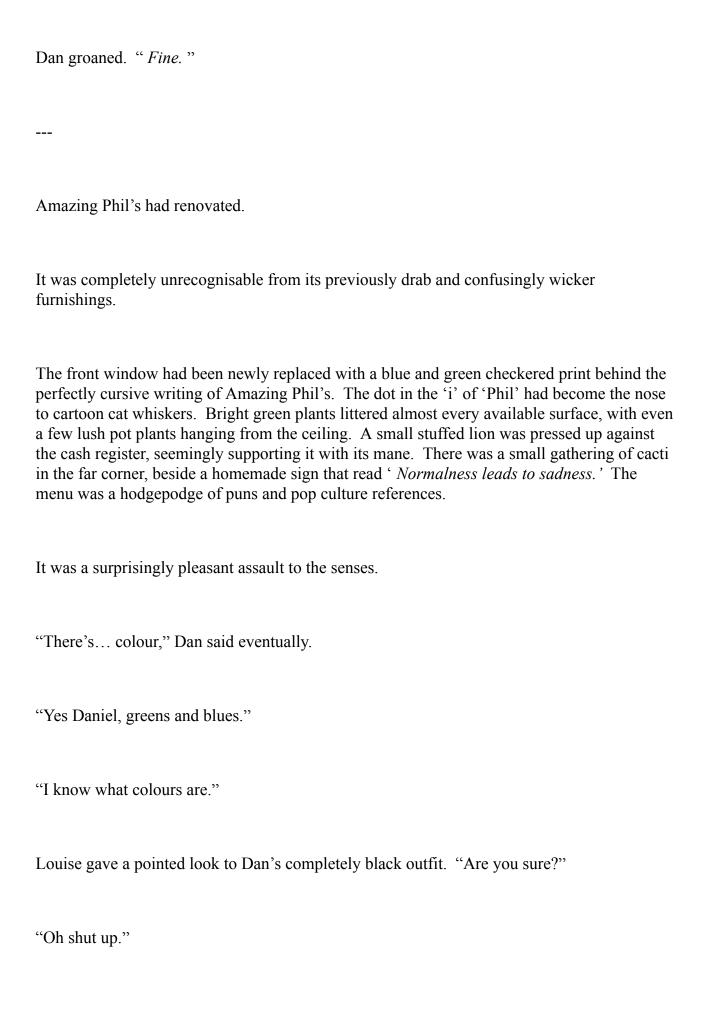
<sup>&</sup>quot;Yes ma'am."





"That's not important, I just know I can't go back there now." She seemed to consider the answer, before pressing on for more. "But why *chicken*?" "Suppressing it Louise. Just let me suppress it." She decided that she didn't want to know. "Well, what about Amazing Phil's then?" Dan rolled his eyes. "It's never amazing, nor is it ever run by anyone actually named Phil. And all the furniture is wicker." He paused for emphasis. "Wicker, Louise." A stack of paper in a manila folder abruptly slapped down on the desk between them. Felix, their resident coroner, had arrived. "Here's the results for your Soho vic from two days ago. Identify confirmed to be Jack Taylor, 28, lawyer. Einstein related drug overdose, as expected." Louise ignored that detail for the moment. "Felix, where should we have coffee?" The Swede groaned. "Not this shit again." "You can't have Felix pick," exclaimed Dan. "He doesn't even like coffee!" "Everyone raise your hand if you vote for Amazing Phil's," said Louise, her hand already raised Felix's hand immediately shot up, possibly for the sake of not prolonging the great coffee

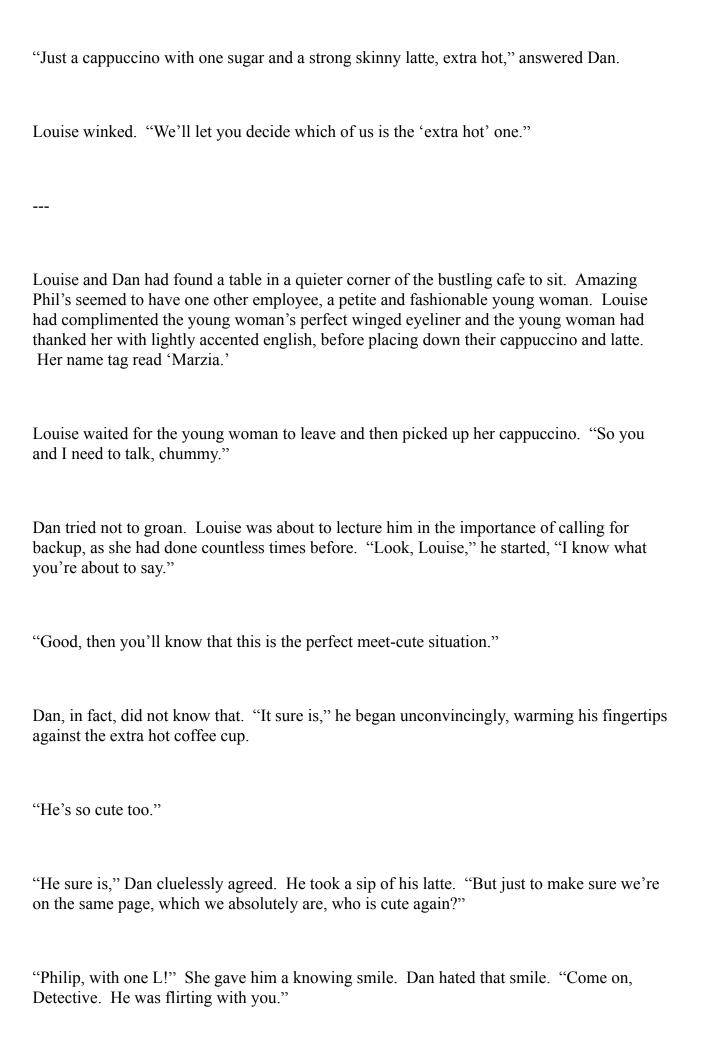
debate. The rest of the precinct had also raised their hands, possibly just to piss Dan off.





Dan could only blink twice at this strange response and Philip with one L seemed to panic.





"Seriously, Louise?" he replied incredulously. "Less lip, more of the ip' is flirting now?"

She nudged him playfully in the side with her elbow. "Cute, awkward barista just can't get his words right around dashing detective Dan. They bond over Cow and Chicken. I'd watch that movie. I'd like that tumblr gifset."

"You really need to stop watching so many romantic comedies."

"Come on, Daniel, would you rather I lecture you about your love life-"

"No," he butted in.

"Or would you rather I lecture you about refusing back up today?"

The tone of the conversation had changed drastically. He was no longer speaking to Louise, his friend who openly wept at the supposed perfection of Mark Darcy from the Bridget Jones films.

They had been arguing. Louise crossed her arms. "Mark Darcy is a human rights barrister from Cambridge. He is the perfect man."

Dan had rolled his eyes. "Mark Darcy has sideburns. Sideburns are literally the worst. Case closed."

No, Dan was now speaking to Detective Sergeant Pentland, his senior detective, famous in their precinct for her brilliant interrogation techniques and perfect confession rate.

Police constables hoping to make detective would watch Detective Pentland with wide eyed awe. Dan remembered being one of them.

He unconsciously swallowed. "I didn't need back up."

Her tone was stern. "I disagree. The commissioner asked me to talk to you about your little plastic explosive stunt."

"Look," he leaned forward, carefully speaking in a hushed tone, "He was going to get away and I had photographed everything before it got destroyed."

"There was only two exits in the warehouse. One out front and one out back. We could have just flanked him. And yes, you may have caught him single-handedly and documented what you could before exploding half the warehouse-"

"It was more like a quarter."

"Not now, Detective." She sounded exasperated. "You could have destroyed evidence."

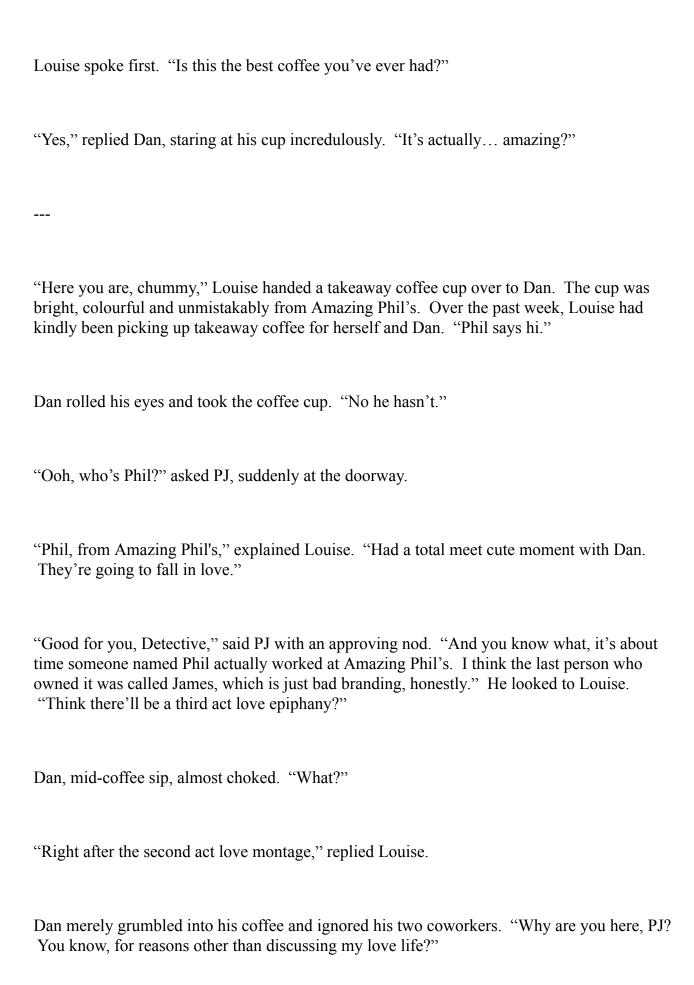
Dan fell silent, not knowing what to say.

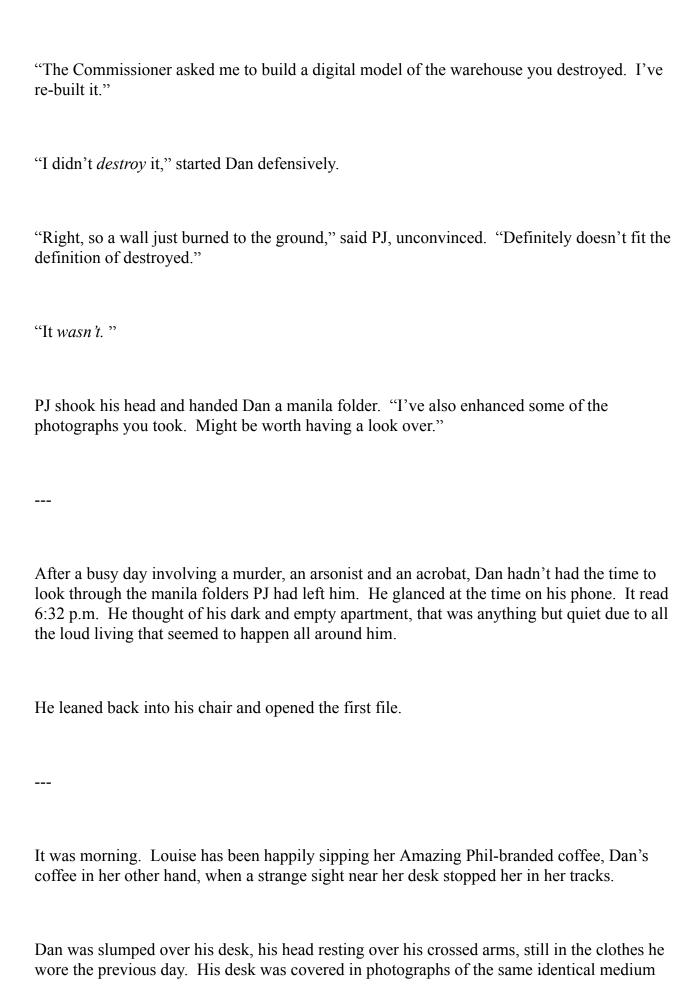
"We need whatever evidence we can get if we want to get to the bottom of the Einstein distribution."

They were both quiet. Dan eventually gave a nod. "I'm sorry. I'm just not used to relying on people."

Louise picked at the foam of her cappuccino with her teaspoon. "You can't do everything on your own, chummy."

They both sipped their coffee in silent contentment before the work colleagues came to the same startling realisation.





weight, white truck. Louise shook her head. Dan did this far too often. She nudged at his arm gently. "Dan Howell, you better not have been murdered at your desk!" The younger detective peeked a sleepy eye open, blinking slowly and sitting up even slower. He rubbed at his face, the square indentation from the corner of a photograph embedded into his cheek. "What time is it?" "8:28 a.m. Here you are, chummy." She handed him his coffee. "Thanks." "Phil says hi." "No he didn't."

"Mmhm... So..." She glanced at the almost identical photographs of the white truck. "This looks... interesting."

Dan sipped at his coffee. "The truck we found onsite a week ago is a little more beat up than the others we've seen." He tapped at a photograph, where the truck looked to have swiped at something, leaving red streaks behind. "Looks like they hit something. It stripped some of the white paint away." He handed the photo over for Louise to inspect.

She looked at the photograph carefully, squinting at it without her glasses. "Looks like a bad hit. Must have been tall and red, so maybe a post box? We can contact the postal service and see if any post boxes have been badly damaged recently."

Dan gave a tired nod, the dark circles under his eyes more pronounced than usual. "What do you make of the other colour underneath the red and white paint?"



PJ flashed him an odd look. "Anyway, we've gotten lucky. It wasn't just painted blue, it had an old logo."

Dan looked down at the photo. There, in blue and white, was a simple font that read, "Smith & Sons?" Dan frowned. "What would Smith & Sons have to do with this?"

---

"Smith & Sons have been a dominant conglomerate since the mid-1800s, founded by Smith brothers George and Charles. At the time, they were the largest packaging company in the world, ranging from consumer packaged goods to pharmaceutical packaging. In the 1920s, Smith & Sons successfully expanded into food and drink production, eventually becoming a multi-million dollar multinational company in the early 1930s. It is one of the few companies in the world that is still run by family members with Smith blood as shown by their current CEO, Katherine Smith, who is a direct descendant from co-founder Charles Smith."

"In 2015, Smith & Sons was rocked by scandal when an employee of Smith & Sons came forward, admitting to having taken drugs supplied by former Smith & Sons CFO Geoffrey Jones. Jones was later arrested for possession of two tonnes of a then new methylenedioxymethamphetamine that we now refer to as 'Einsteins.' Jones claims to have worked alone, however the National Crime Agency launched a full investigation on the company regardless. No other Smith & Sons employee was charged with links to possession of drugs. CEO Katherine Smith describes the event to be an 'isolated, but highly unfortunate incident.'"

Wojcicki whistled low, impressed. "The discovery of the medium white truck being a refurbished Smith & Sons vehicle is quite the find, Detective Sergeant Howell. It would suggest that Smith & Sons has had possible continued involvement."

Dan said nothing and Louise very deliberately elbowed him in the side. They were both standing before Commissioner Wojcicki.

He startled awake for possibly the ninth time that day. "Uh, yes! Ma'am, that, uh, yes? I'm ninety percent sure that the answer to this is yes." He looked to Louise for confirmation. "Yes?"

"Yes," Louise confirmed politely, though her eyes said pull it together, Howell.

Wojcicki side-eyed Dan's bedraggled appearance, before looking to Louise. "Detective Pentland, I want you at Smith & Sons tomorrow. See if you can learn why one of their freight vehicles have been painted white. They haven't reported any stolen vehicles, so I'm very interested to know what they have to say to this."

"Yes ma'am."

"Detective Howell, get ready to go undercover tomorrow night with your lawyer alias." Wojcicki tilted her head slightly. "And while I require you to appear as a drug addict, I do not require you to *look* like one during normal office hours. Go home and rest."

"I was just trying to get into character, ma'am." At her disapproving look, he threw in a mumbled, "Sorry ma'am."

\_\_\_

Louise absent-mindedly scrolled through Instagram, searching through the kittens tag. When she had called Smith & Sons not more than two hours ago, identifying herself as a Detective Sergeant, her phone call was immediately fast tracked to the Smith & Sons corporate affairs department. She imagined that a highly public drug scandal had forced the company to have a strict procedure put in place, should any calls of that nature occur again. It was both good and bad. Good that she didn't have to wait on hold for answers. Bad because the answers were too carefully practiced. She'd have to fix that somehow.

A woman in professional business attire approached her. "Excuse me Detective Pentland, Alexander Haughey is ready to see you now."

"How very Fifty Shades of Grey," joked Louise.

The joke fell flat.

"Please just follow me," the woman deadpanned.

Louise hurriedly walked after the woman, quickly thanking her when she opened the door for her, before being greeted with perhaps the most ostentatious office she had ever seen. Her sensible heels made a pleasant clicking sound against the mahogany wood floors as she walked over to the older gentleman sitting behind an enormous desk.. Alexander Haughey appeared to be a man in his late fifties, with pale blue eyes and deep laugh lines that suggested he smiled often. His hair was grey, thick and neatly combed back. He wore a three piece suit and a watch that was probably of equal value to a home deposit. He stood up from his overly plush leather chair, extending a hand out. Louise couldn't help but stare at the expensive looking gold ring on his ring finger. "Good morning Detective Pentland."

She extended her own hand out to the man and shook it once. "Thank you for taking the time to speak with me." She gestured to the chair opposite him, a similarly plush leather chair, though notably smaller than his. "May I take this seat?"

He gave a polite nod and sat back down. His lips were slightly turned up with the beginnings of a smile that made his eyes crinkle.

Louise hated smilers. They were exceedingly difficult to read.

She mentally shook her head and reached into her handbag, sliding a photograph across the marble tabletop she secretly wanted in her own kitchen. "We have come across this vehicle during an investigation. Could you please tell me about it?"

Haughey picked up the photograph. It was the vehicle Dan had found outside the warehouse a fortnight ago, only it was no longer painted white, but rather blue. The Smith & Sons logo was dead centre in the photograph. "This would appear to be one of our transport fleet vehicles," he answered evenly.

"When we had found it, the truck was actually painted white," said Louise.

Haughey frowned and placed the photo back down. "We are very proud of our branding here at Smith & Sons. I can assure you that we do not paint over our brand in white."

"Any idea of how it could have happened to this one?"

The man was silent for the moment. "Our vehicles are leased out to us by a third party transport provider. Once a vehicle has hit a certain number of kilometres, one hundred thousand I think it might be, it gets returned back to the third party transport provider."

Every Einstein delivery car we've impounded had done at least one hundred thousand kilometres. Interesting. She hid her budding exciting with a curt nod. "I'll need the name of your transport provider, as well as the names of any employees that were involved in the end of leasing process."

"I'll have my assistant provide you with their details."

"Excellent." She allowed a brief moment of silence, carefully watching Jones' features - he was still smiling slightly. She cast her mind back to her conversation with Commissioner Wojcicki, scouring her brain for questions that wouldn't give too much of their investigation away. Geoffrey Jones was arrested two years ago, sentenced to prison for seven years. He probably wasn't involved with this. Something in her brain suddenly clicked. "I also have a question in regards to the employee who turned Mr Jones in."

Haughey's expression changed, if ever so slightly. His eyebrows raised. "The former employee in question resigned after the incident to go to a rehabilitation facility."

"The employee in question'?" Louise repeated.

"The employee chose to be kept anonymous and I will honour that anonymity unless you have a warrant."

Dammit . She gave a polite nod. "Of course, I understand."

"I apologise, I can't tell you any more than that, Detective Sergeant. However I can tell you that we have had no contact with the employee, despite numerous attempts to contact them."

Louise gave a small shrug. "In other words, I wouldn't be able to find them either."

"Exactly," Haughey replied, mirroring her shrug. "Your guess is as good as mine."

---

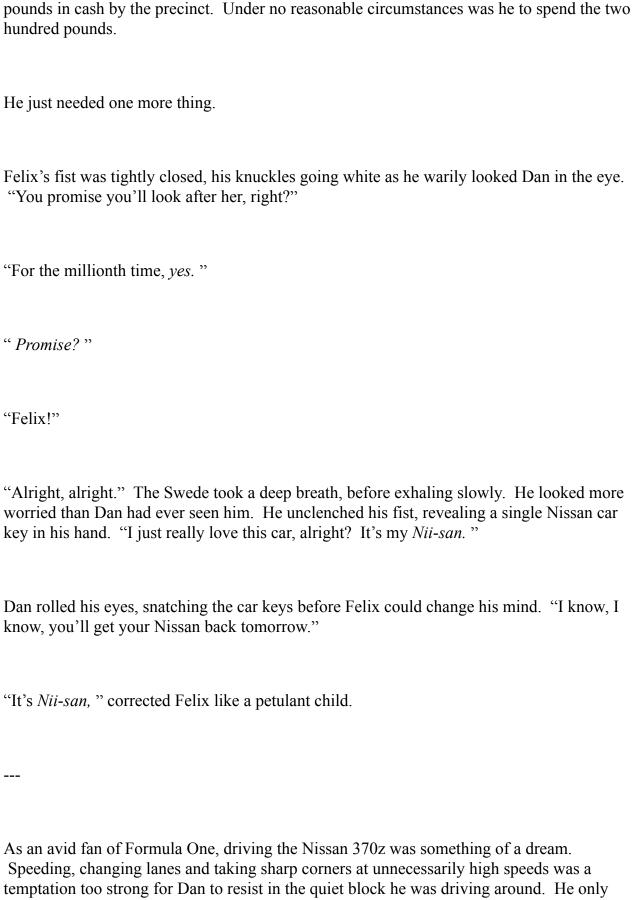
Dan inhaled the last few gulps his Amazing Phil branded latte before letting out a satisfied sigh.

Amazing Phil's coffee had become something of a hit amongst the precinct. Every now and then, Dan would look up from his computer screen and find a sea of colourful blue and green coffee cups, all branded Amazing Phil, littering the desks of his work colleagues. Even the Commissioner had grown fond of the coffee.

He couldn't talk. The Amazing Phil coffee cup was the one exception of colour he allowed on his otherwise darkly themed desk. The cup was empty now. He tossed it into a bin. He had work to do.

---

Going undercover as a well-to-do lawyer was not nearly as glamorous as Dan had thought it would be. He had acquired a wig and barrister robes from the lost and found locker room on the second floor of their precinct, the robe being several inches too short and the wig reeking of cigarettes. He had dry cleaned his best and possibly most expensive suit, a gift from his grandparents for when he 'graduated' from law school (his grandparents kindly let him have it anyway when he dropped out after one year of studying). He had borrowed a wheelie case briefcase from PJ and crammed it full of his first year law books and was given two hundred



temptation too strong for Dan to resist in the quiet block he was driving around. He only slowed down at the 2:00 a.m. mark, stopping at a halt when a figure on a motorcycle pulled up alongside the footpath, stopping to stare at his phone underneath a very dim street lamp.

Right on time.

He pulled the vehicle over, right beside the curb, in front of the jacketed figure and came to a prompt realisation.

He had no idea of what to say to a drug dealer.

Thankfully the windows of the car were tinted dark. He could see the drug dealer staring at the window with a slight tilt of his helmeted head, fortunately unable to see the comically strange faces Dan was pulling as he frantically tried to think of a plan.

"Hey bro, you got some drugs?" he tried with fake whispered confidence. He winced. "Okay, no, that's awful. New plan."

"Excuse me good sir," he said in his best posh voice, "I would like to purchase two grams of your finest - no, no, now I just sound like a prat. Maybe-"

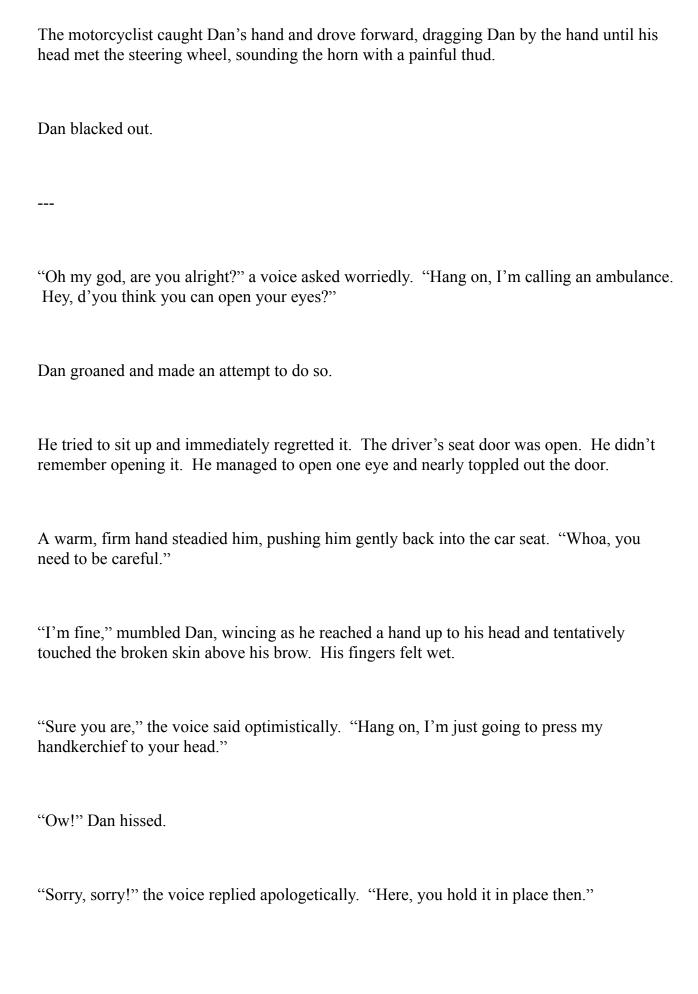
Two short knocks to the driver's window snapped Dan out of it. He cleared his throat, composed himself and rolled the car window down. He lifted his elbow to rest casually against the open window. He stayed quiet and stared back at the man.

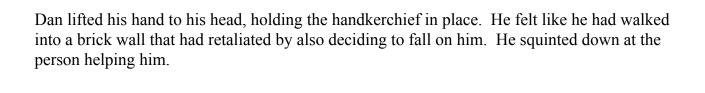
The man was in full black motorcycle leathers, hiding every possible shred of skin. He also wore a matte black helmet with a shut reflective visor. The man looked expensive and Dan quietly approved of the dark aesthetic. He tried to catch glimpse of a license plate. There wasn't one. He could see the brand of the bike was a Honda.

"Are you lost?" asked the man.

"Not at all. But I do need some..." Dan paused, deliberately looking at the wheelie case in the passenger seat next to him, the barrister robes and wig poking innocuously out the top. "







He looked familiar.

The man seemed to recognise him also. "Hey, I know you," he said. "You're extra hot."

Dan would have frowned if it didn't shoot a throbbing pain into his head. "Excuse me?"

"I-I mean," the man stuttered. Dan's vision was starting to clear. The man had dark hair and light coloured eyes. "You went to my café once. Your cappuccino friend always orders your coffee for you. Strong, skinny, extra hot. That's you, right?"

It was said so innocently and sincerely that Dan let the double entendre slide.

"Philip. With one L," Dan recalled. "Less lip, more of the ip."

"Yeah, I probably shouldn't be allowed to speak to people," replied Phil, embarrassed. "But hey, at least you don't have amnesia!" Phil fumbled for an ancient looking phone in his pocket. "Let's call you an ambulance, I think you might need stitches."

Dan stopped and stared at the dated contraption with incredulous fascination. He blinked a few times with his good eye to make sure that he wasn't imagining it. "What in hell is that?"

Phil had already dialled '99' at this point. "It's a phone."

"What, a Nokia 1?"

"Possibly." He dialled the final '9' and pressed the receiver to his ear.

Dan had seen a lot of old phones like these since becoming a detective. It looked like a standard burner phone, one that he couldn't help but associate with criminals. He found that they were primarily used for two reasons. One, they were cheap and two, they were disposable.

He looked to the time digitally displayed in the car. It read 2:18 a.m. He looked back to Phil. Weird time for someone like you to be out.

Phil's phone call connected and he quickly gave the emergency services operator an address. Dan could hear the residual sound of the operator asking what exactly had happened and Phil glanced back at him unsurely.

Dan's mind wasn't quick enough to think of an answer other than 'an undercover drug deal gone mildly wrong.'

"I think he was in a car accident," Phil said eventually. He paused and Dan couldn't make out the garbled noises coming from the receiver anymore. "No, of course I'll stay. Thank you, I'll see you shortly." He hung up and looked to Dan. "They're on their way now. They told me to talk to you to keep you conscious." He peered into the car, spotting the barrister robes and wig in the passenger seat. "So... you're a lawyer?"

Dan extended his free hand out. "Just call me Dan."

---

One ambulance and two butterfly stitches later, Dan was instructed to go to A&E for a CAT scan. He was sat in the uncomfortable waiting room chairs, scrolling through aesthetic pleasing interior design images on Instagram when his brief silent reverie was interrupted by-



The small uneven smile fell away from Phil's lips for a second. Phil's voice was quiet. "You shouldn't have to do this alone." Phil's tone was off. Dan almost felt that the statement wasn't even directed to him, but before he could comment, Phil was cheerful again.

"Besides, have you seen the food here? I couldn't possibly let you eat anything here in good conscience. I think I saw a McDonald's when we walked in." He leaned in towards Dan, his voice low and conspiratorial. "I've heard excellent things about their 'Happy Meal."

---

Dan's CAT scan revealed nothing too serious, only a very, very minor concussion. He was instructed to rest and, ironically, not do any illicit drugs.

"I'll have to open the shop soon," said Phil abruptly, waiting outside the room Dan's test had just been conducted in.

Still here? He glanced at the time. 5 a.m. "Don't you need sleep?"

"It's okay, I know a place to get free coffee." Phil blinked, oddly.

"What was that?"

"You know." Phil clumsily pointed his fingers at Dan, clicking his tongue out of rhythm to some finger gun shooting. He followed it with yet another odd blink. "I can get free coffee because I own a coffee shop."

Dan frowned. "Are you... is that you attempting to wink?"

"Yeah!" He blinked again. "See?"



\_\_\_

"How'd you go last night, Mr Undercover Lawyer?" asked Louise, her eyes glued to her phone to an app that seemed to exclusively sell pastel clothing.

Dan shrugged. "I haven't slept and I want death."

Louise, used to this typical response, hummed noncommittally. "That's nice."

"Also, the price of Einsteins have gone up by a little more than double. Drug dealer claimed not to know why."

"Mmhm. Here you are, chummy," she handed him an Amazing Phil-branded coffee. "Phil says hi."

"No he didn't," he responded automatically. "Anyway, I refused to pay the extra amount, he knocked me out and I spent the night in hospital with a minor concussion."

"Ah, of course," replied Louise, her thumb adding a pastel pink cardigan to her trolley.

Dan mentally counted to three.

"Hospital?!" she exclaimed, nearly dropping her phone and finally looking at him.

Dan made a point to pout, pointing at the two stitches above his brow. His suit was wrinkled and the front of his white shirt was covered in his own blood. "To be honest, I think I'm working it."

"Oh Dan." She shook her head, concerned. "What are you even doing at work?"

"Well, the doctor said someone needed to check up on me, which is kind of hard when you live on your own."

"You should have called me." She frowned. "Actually, why didn't you? How did you even get to the hospital with a concussion?"

"Well, you wouldn't believe it," started Dan with a bit of a frown. "Phil found me."

Louise's hand was instantly on Dan's wrist, squeezing hard. "Phil?" Her eyes were wide with rabid excitement. "As in *Amazing Phil?*"

"I mean, I wouldn't really call him 'amazing.' He was more like annoying Phil."

"Oh my god," Louise practically squealed. "This really is like a romantic comedy!"

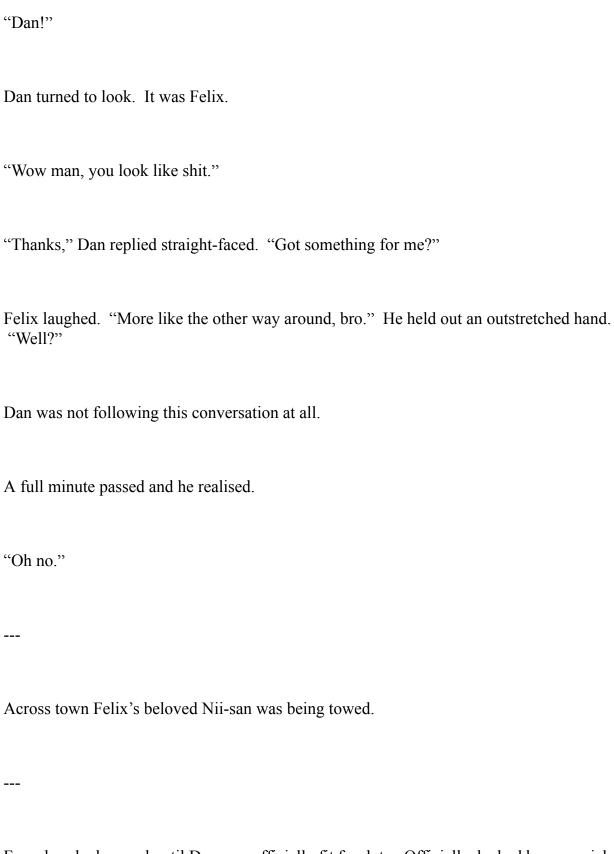
"Oh my god," mimicked Dan with fake excitement. "You're really obsessed with romantic comedies."

"What are the chances of Phil just swooping in to save you like that?"

"Okay first of all, he didn't *swoop* anywhere, nobody *swoops* ever and second of all, he said that 'a nectarine a day makes you happy.' That's not even a saying!"

Louise batted her eyes at Dan, already set on completely ignoring the facts. "Did he carry you in his big strong arms to A&E? Bridal style? Fireman style?"

"Ugh, Love Actually, the ten year reunion that's never gonna happen, is doing casting calls. Go be an extra and live our your deluded rom-com fantasies there."



Four days had passed until Dan was officially fit for duty. Officially, he had been on sick leave. Unofficially, he had consulted on a missing persons case and solved a relatively simple embezzlement case.

There was also a full day of grovelling and a hefty bill to the towing company before Felix was even remotely on speaking terms with him.
Without looking, Felix dropped a manila folder on the desk space in front of Dan. "The constables found a body out in Soho, but we're having trouble identifying him. Our John Doe was found dead four days ago at approximately 6:30 a.m."
"Cause of death?" asked Dan, picking the folder up.
"Betrayal."
For the sake of their friendship, Dan decided to humour him. "So betrayal and maybe something else? Something in the way of a drug overdose perhaps?"
Felix's tone was solemn and Dan fought the urge to roll his eyes. "A betrayal can lead to a broken heart, Detective. And people can die of a broken heart."
"It was just a car, Felix!"
"It was my Nii-san!"
"And I said I was sorry!"
Felix pursed his lips in a childish pout. "Does 'sorry' really fix a broken heart?"

"Seriously?"

"Good morning boys," Louise cheerfully interrupted, the familiar smell of Amazing Phil's coffee wafting in the air from the cappuccino in her hand. Not even looking. Dan extended his hand out to Louise, where she had placed his coffee in for every morning of the last two weeks. "Thanks." Phil says hi. "No he didn't," replied Dan. He had absent-mindedly been flipping through the case file when he noticed his two coworkers staring at him peculiarly. He stared back. "What?" Louise raised an eyebrow at Dan's outstretched hand. In one hand was her cappuccino. In the other was nothing. Felix cringed. "You sure you still don't have a concussion, bro?" Louise, realising what she had forgot, grimaced. She hadn't had to pick up a coffee for Dan in four days. "Sorry chummy." Dan's hand dropped back to his side. "Don't be sorry, I'll just use the coffee machine in the kitchen. Anyway," he turned back to Felix. "You mentioned a dead body?" Felix nodded. "Our John Doe may have overdosed on Einsteins." Dan frowned. "May have?"

Felix flipped through the manila folder on the desk. He stopped at a close up photograph of the man's neck, tapping his finger against it. "See this bruising here?"

Dan squinted at it. "You think he was held against his will?"

"I don't know," he replied with a shrug. "Officially, he died of a drug overdose. But these bruises happened before rigor mortis set in, which indicates they formed before he died. Whether it was accidental or not is for you to work out."

"Lucky me." Dan inspected the picture further. The victim had sustained bruises to the left side of their face, one of the bruises leaving behind a painful gash. "Were these pre-rigor mortis as well?"

Felix gave a nod. "Yep. Whoever hit this guy was wearing a ring when they did it."

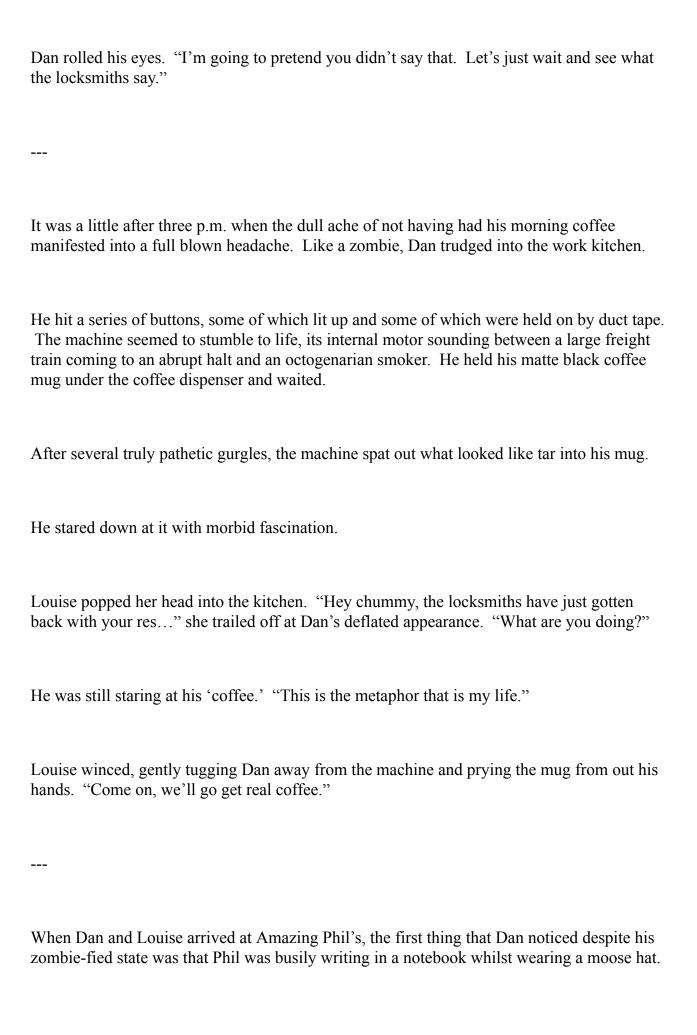
Louise scanned through the case file quickly, immediately recognising it. "I heard about this one. He was found in an alleyway with a dirty paper bag with ninety Einstein pills and a small key with no distinctive markings. His prints were all over the bag, but not on the key."

"Has the key been sent to the locksmiths for cross-reference?" asked Dan.

"We should have the results later today."

Dan flipped through the file, his eyes landing on a photograph of the key. It was black and otherwise nondescript. It had been photographed by a ruler to ensure the correct scale of the key was captured. It measured at a mere four centimetres. "It's kind of small, don't you think?"

"That's what she said," quipped Felix.



"Please tell me that you can also see the moose hat," Dan whispered to Louise.
"Yes, I can," confirmed Louise in the same hushed voice.
Phil snapped the book shut, placing it under the counter as the two detectives approached. He smiled brightly. "Hi Louise! Cappuccino with one again? And Dan, good to see that you are no longer concussed. Are you still extra hot?"
Louise choked back a laugh, as Dan was too busy staring at the enormous plush antlers sticking from the sides of Phil's head to even comment. Louise helpfully spoke for him.
"Don't mind him, he hasn't had any coffee."
Phil smiled sympathetically. "That's alright, if I don't get my afternoon coffee, I turn into Hulk Phil."
Dan tilted his head slightly. "Does Hulk Phil involve moose antlers?"
"No, but I do go green." Phil gave the antlers a gentle poke. "The antlers are purely for accounting purposes. Plus it's how the cafe's inventory and accounts were done before I started here, so it's tradition too."
Before Dan could even question what that meant, Phil was tapping a few buttons into the machine and exchanging money with Louise.

"Anyway, you two go take a seat, I'll have your coffees brought out to you."

Marzia had placed their coffees down onto the table and before she could even turn away, Dan was inhaling his.
He had burned the roof of his mouth, but continued to drink it anyway. His headache had subsided and the world suddenly made sense again.
"He's <i>still</i> wearing the moose antlers," said Dan incredulously.
Louise shrugged, watching as Phil resumed diligently writing in his notebook. "You know, it suits him."
Dan tilted his head and properly looked at Phil. The moose hat had ruffled the front of his fringe in an oddly appealing way and the man had even seemed to coordinate his slightly too big burgundy hoodie to compliment the brown fake fur of his hideous hat. Dan had to concede that Phil looked
Good?
"God, I hope this doesn't make me a furry," mumbled Dan under his breath.
"A furry?" repeated Louise.
"Don't Google that."
"Well now I want to Google that."
"No Googling!" said Dan so loudly that Phil looked up briefly from his notebook. Dan shrunk down into his seat in a feeble attempt to hide and Phil re-adjusted his antlers and continued working. "Besides, you said you had results for me?"

"Right, the locksmith got back to us about that key we found on our Joe Bloggs. It's a custom made motorcycle key for an unregistered Honda CBF125M. The customer was said to be wearing a cap and sunglasses, under six foot and paid for the key in cash." She sighed, annoyed. "So appearance-wise, we have almost nothing and the Honda CBF is one of the most commonly bought motorcycles in the country."

Dan frowned. "He copied the key, right? Can we get an ID on who owned the original key?"

Louise shook her head. "The key's completely custom made. The locksmith said he replaced the original bike's key transmission for the one we found on our victim." She resumed drinking her coffee. "Look, we're actually not far away from where he was found. Maybe we can check it out after this." She placed her coffee down, pulling out her phone and opening up a mapping application on her phone.

There was a large blue dot indicating where they currently were. Louise zoomed in to a street two blocks down, revealing a small dead end street. "He was found here, behind a dumpster."

Dan squinted down at the map, zooming in even further, scanning the area carefully. "I know this area. When was he found again?"

"Four days ago, at 6:30 a.m."

Dan pointedly tapped at the map, suddenly excited. "I was just there four days ago at 2 a.m. And guess what?"

"What?"

"The dealer I ran into - he drove an unlicensed Honda."

Louise merely stared at him in stunned silence. "But... we didn't find the motorcycle at the scene. Why does our Joe Bloggs have a key to the bike he doesn't have?"

Dan's excitement died down almost instantly. "I don't know." A disappointed silence fell over the two detectives. Louise's phone suddenly vibrated. She glanced at the caller ID. It was her daughter's primary school. Frowning, she answered the call and pressed the phone to her ear. "Hello, this is Louise speaking. Yes. Uh huh. Right. Riiiight." A pause. "I'm sorry, could you please repeat that?" She paused again. "I see. I'll be over shortly. Yes, thank you." Dan gave her a quizzical look. "Is everything alright?" Louise was quiet for a moment, as though gathering her thoughts. "One of Darcy's classmates managed to get the entire class to chant 'Darcy the Dugong.'" Dan pulled a face. "You're kidding. Is she okay?" "Well, she retaliated by saying that I would arrest them all." She pursed her lips. "Which I considered." "Of course." "Though now it would seem that the entire class of six year olds are crying." "Ah." Dan sipped his coffee. "You know, a few minutes in jail couldn't hurt them, right?" "I don't think it would, no." She stood, slinging her handbag over her shoulder. "Anyway, I'd best go sort this out. I'll see you tomorrow, chummy."



"Dugongs used to be called *maidens of the sea* and sailors mistook them for mermaids," said Phil with a shrug. "I'd say that's pretty cool." He tossed the cloth he had been using to wipe the table into a nearby basin. He missed completely. "You should give her a mermaid high five!"

"A what?" bleated Dan.

"Well, you make a flipper shape with your hands," explained Phil all too seriously, as he interlocked his thumbs together and flapped his hands in-sync like a truly demented butterfly, "And then you yell *mermaid high five*!" His pale hands continued flap haplessly. "Come on, you should practice."

Dan supposed Phil's hands *could* look like a mermaid finn if he was blind drunk, mildly concussed and in possession of one functioning eye. He winced with secondhand embarrassment when Phil refused to put his stupid flapping hands away. "I really don't think that's a thing."

Phil, completely unfazed, shouted "Mermaid high five!" and Dan, out of either sympathy or confusion, interlocked his own thumbs together and flapped his hands..

"Mermaid high fivvvee....." Dan drawled out unenthusiastically, as their 'flipper' hands connected in the so-called mermaid high five. Dan dropped his hands back to his side. "That felt wrong, I didn't enjoy that at all."

Phil's endless cheerfulness remained unperturbed. "Well, maybe it only works on mermaids."

Dan dramatically feigned hurt. "Are you saying that I'm not a mermaid?"

"Uh," Phil conspicuously started to back away. "Oh look, someone left a cloth here on the floor. I think I'll go pick that up."

"Hey, I could be a mermaid!" shouted Dan, just as someone entered the cafe.

A man dressed as a courier gave him a strange look. He was pushing a platform trolley with five enormous twenty kilogram bags of coffee beans, as well as a box of twenty individual one kilogram bags. The bags were all placed face down and he was unable to read the brand. They all appeared to be encased in a plain brown paper. Dan unsuccessfully attempted to hide behind his coffee cup, pointedly looking anywhere but at the courier. He found a spot out a small back window to look out of and found himself staring at the courier's medium white truck. Out of habit, his eyes drifted downwards to check for a license plate.

It didn't have one.

When he glanced back to the courier, Phil was already signing the paperwork and heading off into the store room with the trolley. Dan quickly left his seat, briskly walking towards the front counter under the guise of looking for sugar. What he really wanted to look at was the courier's uniform.

He flicked through the sugar packets, pretending to read the names of them. Dan gave a side glance at the the courier. The man was wearing a short sleeved work shirt in blue, as well as a matching blue baseball cap covering his shaved head. His lips were unsmiling, the bottom half of his face oval and plain. The blue cap was pulled low, over his eyes.

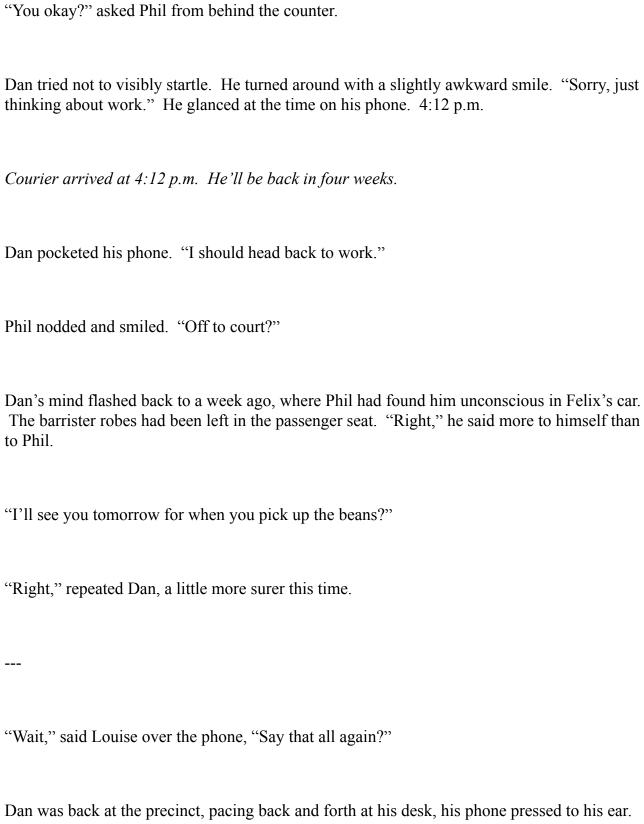
It was a familiar shade of blue.

Dan's eyes flicked up at the breast pocket and then at the right sleeve, where a courier logo would typically be embroidered. The shirt had neither. The man hadn't even donned a name tag.

The unmarked vehicle and an unmarked shirt were nowhere near grounds enough for an arrest. But it was enough for a search. He reached for his badge in his pocket.

"Need some help, mate?" asked the courier gruffly.

Phil exited the storeroom with the empty trolley and Dan's hand froze in his pocket. Phil shot Dan a curious look and Dan let go of his badge. "I was thinking of buying some coffee beans for home," Dan covered quickly. "I didn't know you sold one kilo bags." The courier looked alarmed for the briefest of moments, his eyes flashing to look at Phil, before deciding to keep his eyes low. "Sorry, I'm out of one kilo bags and I can't sell the ones we got just yet," said Phil. It had sounded matter of fact, but Dan couldn't help but feel that there was something off about the statement. "I have to brand them," Phil explained. "I get the coffee beans wholesale and brand them AmazingPhil in store. I'll brand them tonight and you can pick up a bag tomorrow, if you like." Dan gave a single nod and Phil looked to the courier. "I'll see you in four weeks for my next batch? Same time?" The courier nodded with a curt "Yes sir," before retreating to his truck and driving away. Dan's opportunity to search the truck was gone. White medium truck, unmarked, being driven by a man in a blue, unlabelled uniform. Voice was gruff. Claims to return in four weeks. Think, Dan, think.



Dan was back at the precinct, pacing back and forth at his desk, his phone pressed to his ear. "After you left, an unmarked truck and a courier in an unlabelled blue courier uniform arrived to deliver Phil his coffee beans. He left before I could search it, but apparently he'll be back in four weeks, approximately at 4 p.m. I think we actually have a lead!" said Dan, excitedly.

Louise was quiet on the other line. Dan checked his phone to check that the call hadn't dropped out. It hadn't.
"Is everything okay, Louise?" asked Dan after a long pause.
"We definitely have a lead," she agreed gently. "I'm just not sure how we should approach this."
Dan couldn't see what the problem was. "I say we get the precinct to take shifts staking out the cafe from the inside four weeks from now. We can hide out in the comms van until the courier arrives again."
Louise was quiet again. "I didn't say the lead was the courier, Detective."
Dan frowned. "Of course the courier is the lead."
"You don't think Phil accepting a consignment from an unmarked white truck and an innocuous monthly courier isn't cause for concern?"
Dan stopped pacing.
"And you don't find it the slightest bit suspicious that a man was found dead two blocks away from Amazing Phil's?"
"Phil was with me at the hospital that morning."
"What time did you last see him?"

Dan ran a finger over his butterfly stitches carefully, trying to remember. "Around 5 a.m."

Felix's voice from this morning rang out in his head, reminding him. "The constables have found a body out in Soho, but we're having trouble identifying him. Our John Doe was found dead four days ago at approximately 6:30 a.m."

Dan sat back in his chair. He exhaled a breath he wasn't aware he was holding. "Shit."

---

It was the following morning and neither Louise or Dan had gotten their daily dose of caffeine. They were both stood in front of the Commissioner. The Commissioner looked slightly annoyed. She had been drinking a coffee from Amazing Phil's but was now staring at the brightly coloured cup suspiciously.

"How should we proceed, Ma'am?" asked Louise.

The Commissioner placed her cup down. "What does 'Phil' know about either of you?"

"He knows I'm a detective," answered Louise.

"That's not ideal." The Commissioner crossed her arms. "He might get suspicious if you start speaking to him. What about you, Howell?"

"He thinks I'm a barrister," answered Dan. "I haven't really had the chance to correct him on that."

Commissioner Wojcicki pursed her lips. "That's a slightly better stand. Are you up for some more undercover work, Detective?"



Dan discreetly exited the Commissioner's office and shut the door behind him. He pursed his lips. *What's the quickest way possible?* 

---

It was later that very afternoon that Dan got his answer, whilst stood at the Amazing Phil counter with Louise by his side.

Phil may have become the top lead for their case, but it was still an undercover operation. They still had to act normal and that meant drinking copious amounts of caffeine.

Louise offered a casual smile as Dan sipped his takeaway coffee. "Dan wants to have dinner with you," she said to Phil.

Dan abruptly choked and Louise, his traitorous soon-to-be-ex-friend, breezed out of the coffee shop with a perky, "You know, as thanks for the whole hospital thing. Cheerio chummy! Bye Phil!"

Dan's face flooded red with mortification while Phil, annoyingly, merely turned an attractive shade of pink as they both stood in shocked silence.

It unsettled Dan to think that someone like Phil could somehow get involved in... whatever this could be.

Phil spoke first. "You don't have to thank me," he said quietly. "After all, the important thing is that you didn't ingest the hospital food." He snapped his fingers, as though suddenly remembering. "Oh and that you're alright, of course! I probably should have led with that."

Dan snorted in an attempt not to laugh. Phil was weird. "I had meant to thank you. I should have said something on the night. I guess I forgot."

Phil gave a one shouldered shrug. "You had a concussion and an actual bleeding head wound. That's two pretty good excuses."

"My British sensibilities say otherwise." And as does Louise, apparently.

"I suppose we must abide by the rules of British sensibility." Phil gave a solemn nod. "Her Majesty, the Queen would have my head otherwise."

"What an odd but specifically British example." Dan unconsciously wiped a sweaty palm against his jeans. "So is that a yes?"

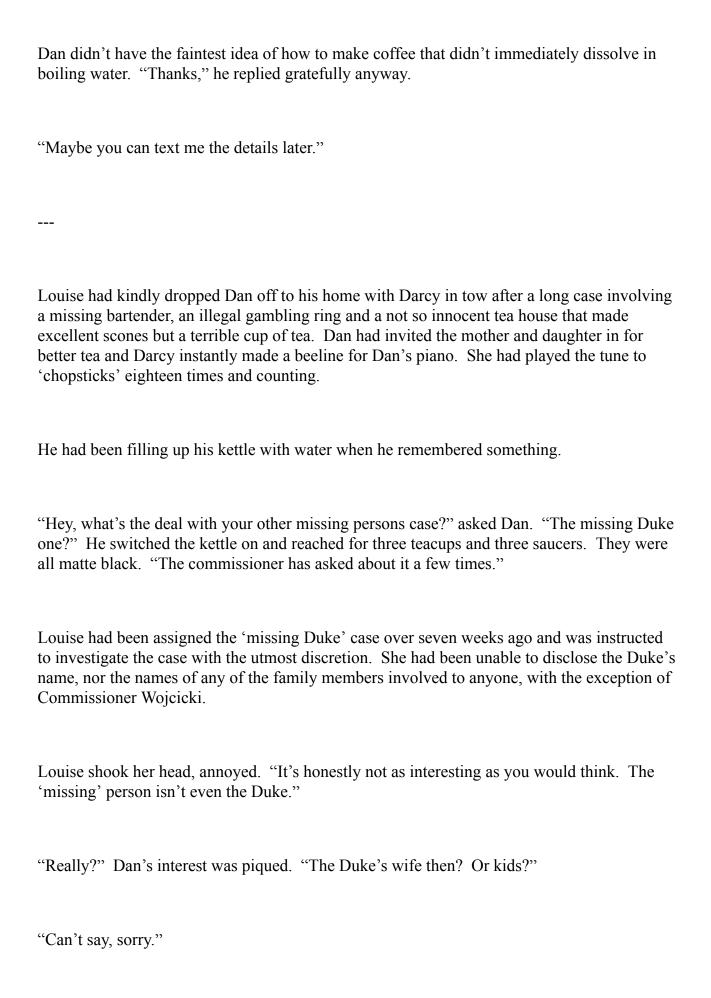
There was a beat of silence and Dan was suddenly acutely aware of how hard his heart was beating. Phil gave a nod and a smile. "Yeah, it is." Dan's heart continued to beat hard anyway.

"Cool," replied Dan lamely and slightly off pitch. He deliberately made a point to look down at his phone, as though checking the time for another appointment. "I better head back to work soon, but I know a place a few blocks down from here."

"Before you go then, here." Phil ducked a hand under the counter briefly, before producing a one kilogram brown paper bag, stamped on the front with an Amazing Phil logo. He pulled out a colourful pen that had been tucked into the pocket of his apron and quickly wrote something on the bag. "Here are the coffee beans you wanted from yesterday," he explained before handing the bag over. "And my phone number as well."

Dan had already reached into his pocket for his wallet when Phil quickly waved him away.

"We can sort that out later," said Phil. "You should get back to work."



Darcy had played 'chopsticks' two more times until the kettle had finished boiling. Dan poured two cups of tea and a cup of just plain milk for Darcy. He handed Louise her cup of tea, which she gratefully accepted and left the cup of milk for Darcy by the piano. The little blond girl said a bright' 'thanks' and continued to play 'chopsticks' for the twenty-second time.

"Thanks for the tea chummy," said Louise. "I'm starting to have two cappuccinos a day since we've started going to Amazing Phil's. I really need to cut back for the sake of my health." She sipped her tea. "It'll be terrible if he's actually a drug lord."

"Do you really think he is?"

"Do you really think he's not?"

Dan didn't answer and waited for Chopsticks to re-start before speaking again. He needed to snap out of his ridiculous instinct to defend Phil. "So how are we doing this? Should I wear a wire at dinner?"

Louise shook her head. "Not just yet. You should try gaining his trust first, gauge just how much he knows, assuming he does at all. Where were you planning on taking him?"

"I was thinking Thierry's."

---

Thierry's was fine dining at its most pretentious, only holding twelve tables with a maximum occupancy for forty-eight diners. It's menu was highly experimental and changed daily, coveted and adored by critics worldwide, one of its most famous (but ridiculous) dishes being a bacon flavoured balloon. It boasted a whopping forty-eight chefs, essentially equating one chef per diner. It had held a three star Michelin rating since 2009. Patrons would be refused entry with anything less than formal dress and were expected to pay upwards of three hundred and twenty pounds per patron. All bookings *typically* required a four to five month wait. All bookings, except Dan's, that was.

Two years back, Dan had arrested Thierry's sous chef for stealing five thousand pounds of liquid nitrogen from a cryogenics lab across town. Thierry had since owed him a favour for keeping the media at bay. It was also very conveniently located near where his John Doe had overdosed and Phil's cafe.

Dan had arrived fifteen minutes earlier, wearing the nicest black chinos he owned and the smartest blazer he could afford. It was grey with a very faint checkered pattern. He had pressed his second best white shirt and wore a black tie. He sipped at his sparkling water-

"Detective Howell!" shouted a lightly accented Frenchman.

And nearly spat it right out.

"Thierry!" Dan sputtered out, frantically whispering and gesturing for the head chef to lower his voice.

Thierry seemed confused but lowered his voice anyway. "Is something the matter?"

"No, nothing's the matter," Dan replied hastily, "It's just, can you do me a favour? Can you keep the detective stuff on the down low?"

Thierry nodded, a somewhat over dramatic look of understanding dawning upon his features. "Ah yes, of course. Many of my, shall we say, *regular* customers request a certain level of discretion. I understand."

"Thanks, Thierry."

"Will you be drinking?"



Thierry had become absorbed in the pattern and colour that was Phil's socks.
Dan pointedly cleared his throat and Thierry snapped out of it.
Thierry's tone was practiced and cordial. "I'll give you gentleman some time to look over the wine menu."
Phil smiled and nodded, before picking up the menu to open and rather unsubtly obscuring his face with it. "How was your day?" he asked from behind the menu.
"Good," replied Dan. A pause. "Busy," he corrected. "And yours?"
"The same. Good. Busy."
Phil hadn't lowered the menu from his face.
"Are you alright?" asked Dan after an awkward pause.
Phil's menu lowered just enough to show his eyes. "Yes, why do you ask?"
Well, you're hiding behind a menu, wearing a hideous suit and currently carrying the illustrious position as main lead for both my drug trafficking case and my murder case.
Dan shrugged. "No reason. What are you thinking of ordering?"
Phil possibly thought he was going for casual, but he sounded anything but. "The chicken, probably."

Dan grimaced. "From the cocktail menu?"

Phil blinked, his eyes focusing in on what he had been pretending to read. The menu lowered from his face slightly and Dan could now see that his face had gone red.

It was indeed the cocktail menu. And to add insult to injury, it was upside down.

Phil lowered the menu down onto the table. "Sorry, I'm just nervous. This place, it's just... it's..." he shifted his eyes from one corner of the restaurant to the other, before resting down at the ill-fitted sleeves of his jacket. "It's *fancy*." He shrugged a shoulder. "I guess you're probably used to that though."

Why would I be used to... oh right, rich lawyer.

Dan flipped the menu right side up and slid it back towards Phil. "Seriously, try not to think about it." He glanced at the menu faux casually, somehow forcing himself not to blanch at the price of wine. "I can order for you, if you like?"

Phil shrank in his seat with relief. "That would be great."

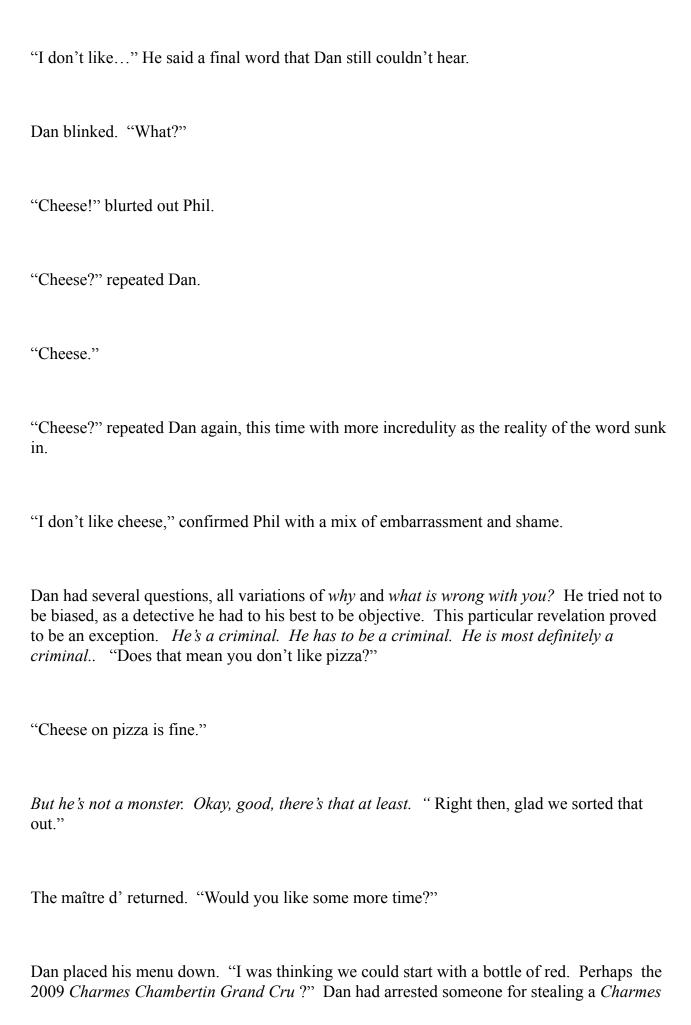
Dan flicked through the menu. "Is there anything you don't like?"

The seemingly innocuous question had visibly startled Phil. The man fidgeted his hands, tugging down at a shirt sleeve that didn't cover his wrist. "Uh, well..."

"Well?"

Phil then said something in a voice so hushed that Dan completely missed it.

Dan leaned forward. "Sorry, what?"





The maître d' returned, customarily showing them the bottle of wine before pouring them both a glass and setting the bottle aside. The maître d flashed an odd look at Phil's socks and an even odder look at Phil's face before exiting back to the kitchen.



Dan took a miniscule sip and couldn't help but notice the wince on Phil's face as he drank his.

It wasn't long before Dan had ordered their entrées and both Dan and Phil had settled in a sort of easy going banter that Dan hadn't expected of a suspected criminal. Dan really didn't want to know what this said about his personality.

The maître d' then returned with their entrées. Phil at the time was animatedly explaining his love for Buffy the Vampire Slayer, when Dan couldn't help but notice that the maître d' lingered out the corner of his eye, for far longer than necessary. The maître d' topped up both their wine glasses in a smooth automatic action. Dan carefully followed the maître d' line of sight.

The maître d was staring at Phil.

Why are you staring at Phil? His suit?

"And then I actually bought a cardboard cutout of Sarah Michelle Gellar," finished Phil, embarrassed, his face in his hand. "I had her sat next to me on the ride home."

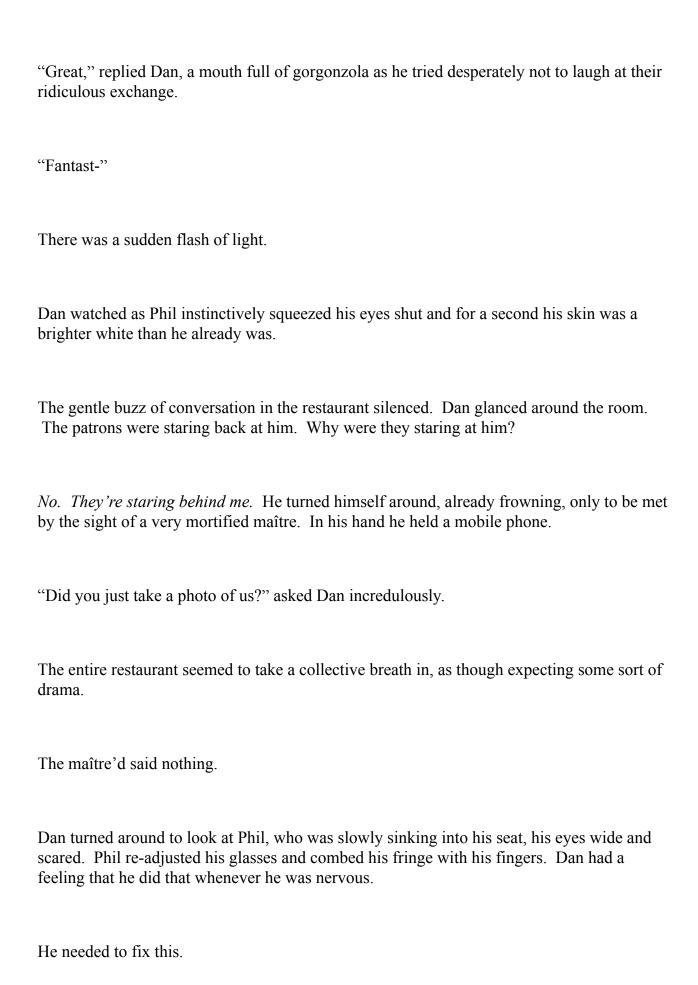
Or that.

The maître d' quickly explained what the entrée involved and Dan did his best to seem indifferent with his plate of duck liver parfait with truffle emulsion, buttered brioche, gorgonzola and vanilla raisins - which sounded disgusting, but was actually very, very good.

In spite of the odd maître d', entrées breezed by with relative ease. He had also learnt that Phil had one older, married brother, a father who worked in real estate and a mother that had an office job that seemed exceptionally difficult. He also had one set of grandparents who happened to be first cousins and another set of grandparents who once had hedgehogs in their garden.

He wasn't sure how hedgehogs came up in conversation, but it felt oddly natural at the time. Dan in turn gave vague details about his own family, some truthful, some not and at all as fond as Phil's descriptions. He moved the raisins around with his fork, doing his best to avoid eating them. Phil seemed delighted by his. "Ooh, I do love a good raisin," he said, disgustingly eating them with a pleased smile. "Really?" asked Dan with mild disgust. "You like raisins but you don't like cheese?" Phil shrugged. "No need to be raisin-ist." "No need to be so cheese-ist," countered Dan. "Raisins deserve to have a happy, loving home." Phil had already reached across the table with his fork, stabbing at Dan's plate and scooping up the raisins, holding them up triumphantly with his fork. "They should obviously be with me." Dan, somewhat indignant that Phil had taken something from his plate, reached over to pierce Phil's gorgonzola with his fork. "By that definition, then I say your gorgonzola belongs with me!" He mirrored Phil's position, also holding up his stolen food with his fork. "Well, fine." Phil popped the raisins in his mouth. "Fine." Dan ate the gorgonzola.

"Good," said Phil, his mouth full as he fought a smile.



Dan stood, extending his hand out towards the maîtred'. "The phone, please?"
The maître d' slowly met Dan's eyes, before quickly lowering them down to the ground. He handed the phone over.
"I also want to speak to Thierry," said Dan firmly.
"Wait, Dan, it's fine," Phil piped behind him. "You know, if we're on public property, taking photos is technically legal afterall."
Dan actually did know that. It had prevented him from arresting a handful of irritating paparazzi members more than once. "It's the principle of the matter. Just wait, I'll be right back."
<del></del>
Once in the privacy of Thierry's office, Dan lost all sense of diplomacy.
"What the hell, Thierry!" Dan held up the maître d's phone. "You know I'm here on a case, what the hell was that?"
Thierry had no answer and so Dan turned to the maîtred'.
He took a deep breath and lowered his voice. "Why did you take a photo of us?"
The maître d' shuffled uncomfortably, avoiding Dan's eyes. "Your friend looks like a regular patron of ours."

Dan couldn't imagine running a	cafe would pay terribly well.	There was no	way Phil could
afford a place like this regularly.	"Who's this regular patron of	of yours?"	

The maître d' flashed Thierry a look, before leaning towards the restaurant owner and whispering something in his ear.

Thierry's face gave nothing away and the maître d' resumed his fearful standing position by his boss. Thierry cleared his throat. "I'm afraid we can't tell you."

"What?!" Dan practically spat out.

"Like I said earlier. Many of my regular customers request a certain level of discretion." Thierry crossed his arms. "I have my own principles to uphold, Detective. If you want more information, I'm afraid you're going to have to get a warrant."

Dan couldn't believe this. "Fine," he snapped, annoyed. He scanned through the maître d's phone. "But I'm deleting your photo."

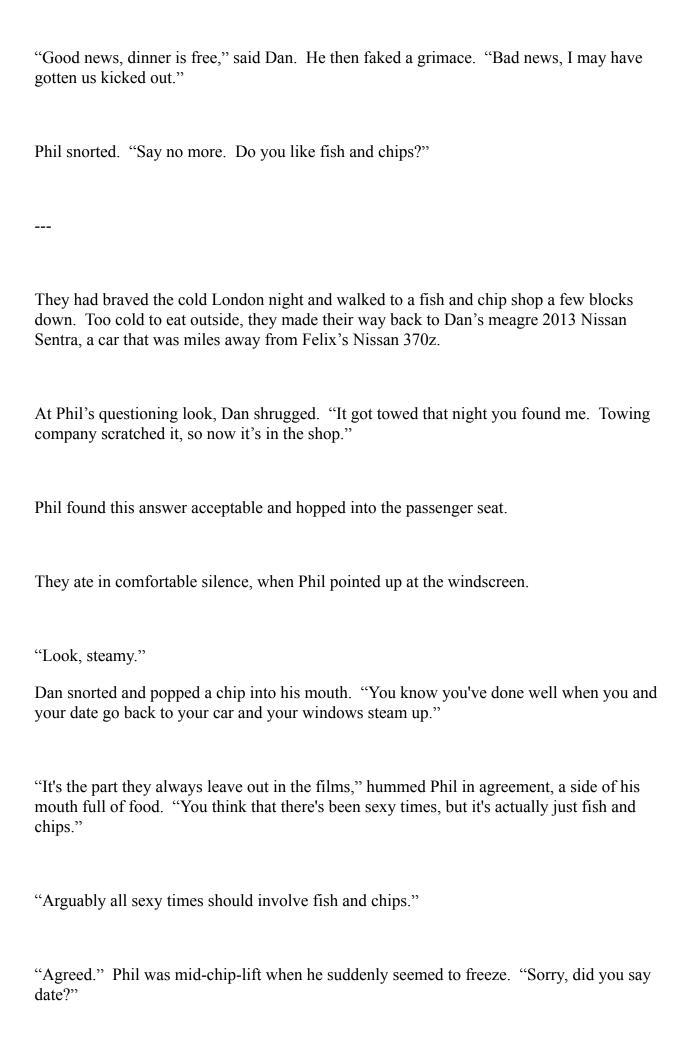
The maître d' merely gave a nod and Dan deleted the photo before handing the phone back.

Thierry's tone was still oddly polite. "I think it's perhaps best that you and your friend leave, Detective. Your entrée and wine will remain free of charge, of course."

He didn't want to be gracious but he did his best anyway. "Thanks," Dan muttered begrudgingly.

\_\_\_

As Dan made his way back to the table Phil immediately stood up.



"Uh," was all Dan managed to reply. He suddenly wished they were back in the cold - the car was stifling. "Um," he tried again, stupidly.
Phil kindly didn't push it, merely tilted his head at the fogged up windscreens and asked, "You know what this needs?"
Dan forces himself to find some words that don't sound high-pitched or idiotic. He half succeeds. "A good clean?"
"A Titanic-esque handprint. Like this." Phil pressed a hand against the window, ruining the even layer of steam. He's about to pull his hand away, when Dan suddenly finds himself reaching over to cover Phil's hand with his.
"You only have one shot to get this right, so called Amazing Phil," he managed to say, somehow coherently. "Or else the aesthetic is ruined forever."
"Right." Phil was actually concentrating. "If I swipe too much to the left, it'll look like a rejected Tinder date." Dan shouldn't have found that so endearing.
"We're trying to make something tasteful here."
"Maybe-"
"How about-"
They spoke over each other as Dan guided Phil's hand down the window, in what was ironically the most perfect steamy, nonsexual handprint of all time.

Phil pulled his hand away, Dan's own hand coming away with it.



"Sorry about that," he tried apologetically. "Lawyer hours are pretty bad. What were you saying?"

The unsure look in Phil's eyes was gone. "That's alright, I shouldn't," he hesitated for the briefest of seconds. "It sounds like you might have some important lawyering to so." He paused. "Is lawyering a verb?"

Dan had no idea, but whatever moment they could have had was now gone.

Not that Dan had moments on a *case*.

Phil fidgeted with the hem of his shirt. "Hey, thanks for dinner. I should probably get going."

"Wait," Dan suddenly felt himself scrambling. "I could drive you home?"

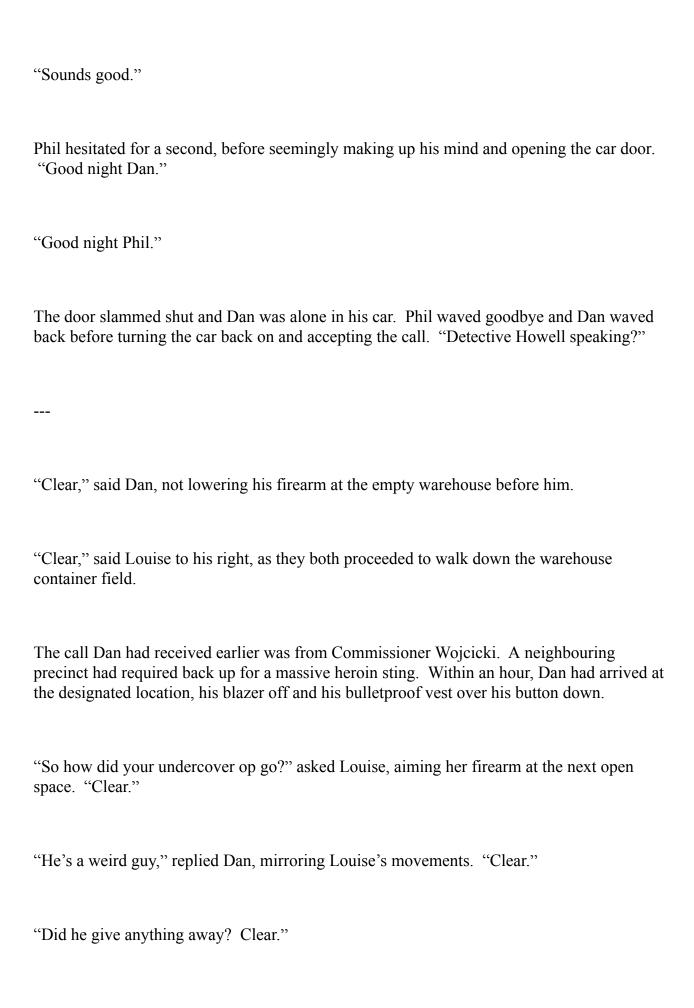
Phil shook his head. "I'm not too far from here."

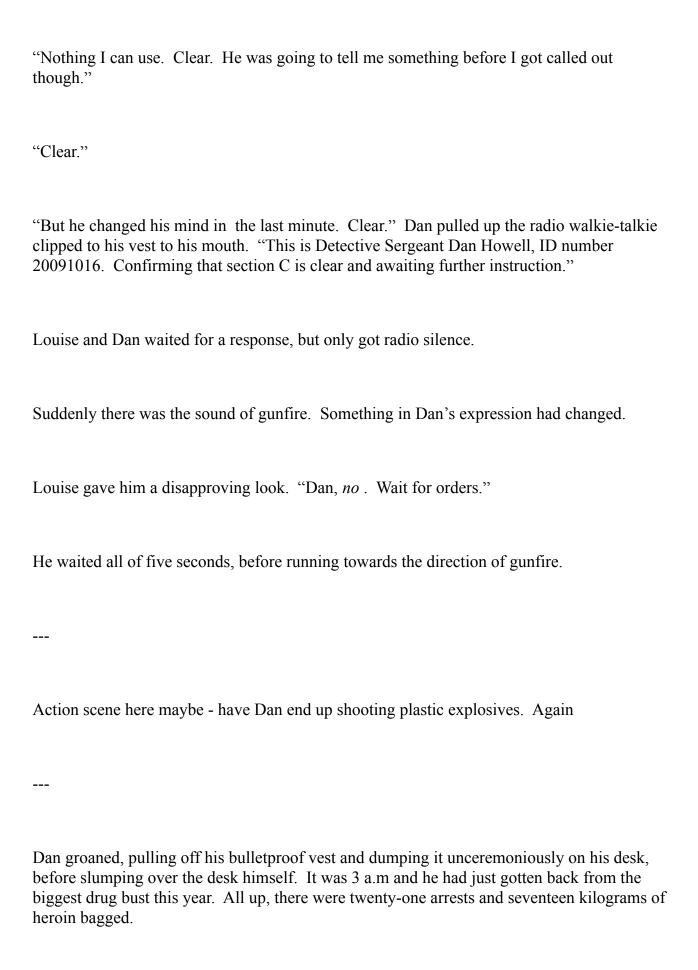
Dan frowned. "You live in London?"

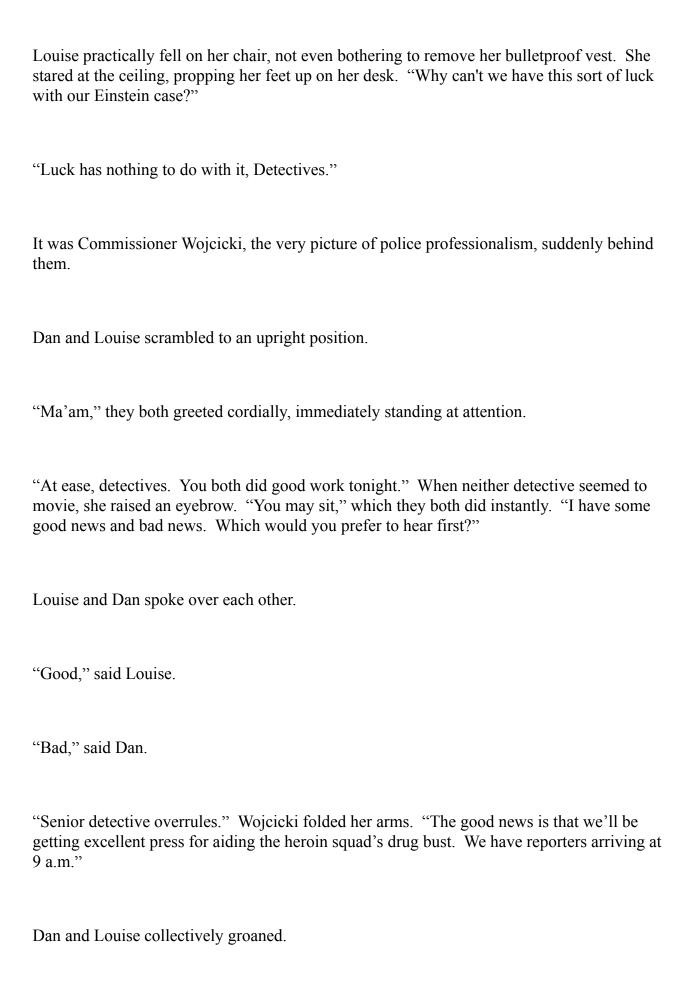
Phil's mouth fell open for a brief moment, before hiding it with a smile. Dan's phone was vibrating again. "Might be important. You should answer it."

Dan was going to throw his phone out the window and run over it repeatedly at this rate. He glanced at the caller ID. It was a work number. Worse, it was a work number that only emergency calls were made on. He had to answer it. He sighed. "See you in the morning?"

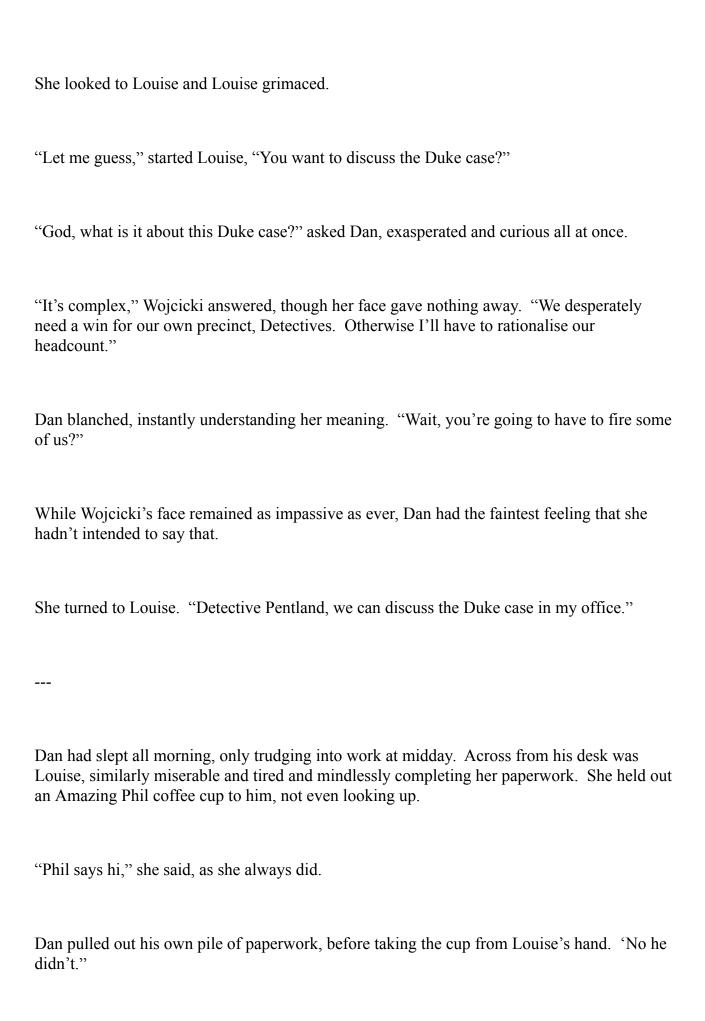
Phil's smile grew a little wider. "Strong, skinny and extra hot has your name all over it." He paused. "Er, you know what I mean."







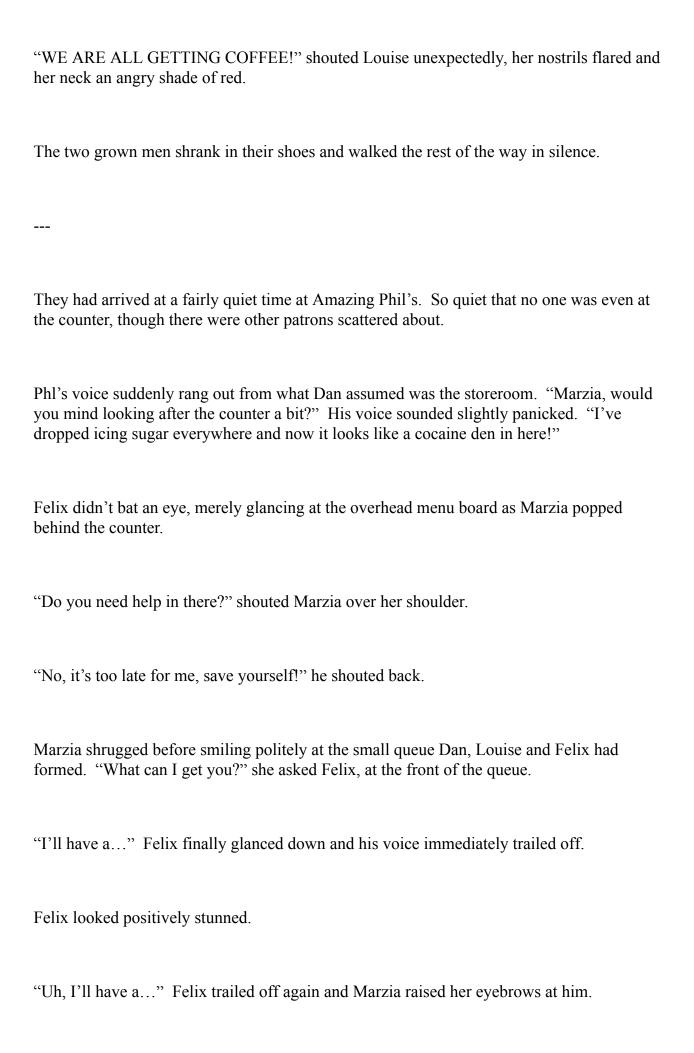








Louise rolled her eyes and flipped a manila folder shut, before dropping it in her 'done' pile.
It was only then that Dan realised that Louise's 'done' pile was twice the size of his.
She flashed him a grin. "You owe me a coffee."
In a rare instance of spontaneity on Felix's part, he joined Louise and Dan for coffee, mostly as Dan was buying.
"You don't even like coffee," argued Dan as they approached the Amazing Phil cafe.
"You still owe me after what you did to poor Nii-san!"
"Oh my god, you really need to get over it."
"Never!"
"Children," said Louise warningly, in that tone only a mother could do, "If you don't behave, we're turning back to the precinct and <i>nobody</i> gets coffee."
Dan crossed his arms like a petulant child. "Fine by me."
"Yeah, he'll probably get my coffee towed," added Felix, also crossing his arms.



"A...?" she prompted. "Menu board," replied Felix, stupidly, pointing up at the overhead menu. "The thing on the menu board." Marzia glanced over to Louise for aid, who merely shrugged in bemusement. "Which thing on the menu board?" asked Marzia. "ALL THE THINGS," shouted Felix, impossibly high pitched. "Don't mind him," said Louise to Marzia a touch apologetically, leading the Swede by the elbow to a table., "Just a glass of water for Felix over here and a capp for me and a latte for Dan." Marzia cast Felix an odd look before punching the orders into the cash register and Dan paying. Dan then set about making his way to his coworkers, who had sat in a far corner near a window. As he approached, he saw that Louise was patting Felix on the back sympathetically. Dan sat down and spoke in a hushed whisper. "What the hell was that?" Felix was holding his head in his hands at this point, his face gone red. "Oh god, do you think she noticed?" "Noticed that you were a complete weirdo? Yeah, I think she might've noticed." "Oh no," groaned Felix. "What about the other thing?"



Dan shrugged. "It's a Honda CBF125M."

Just as he said it, memories of his poor attempt at a drug deal came flooding back.

Honda CBF125M. Unregistered. Man in full black motorcycle leathers. John Doe found dead, two blocks down, dead end street. Body found with a small key, with no distinctive markings.

Louise's voice suddenly rang out in his head. "The key's completely custom made. The locksmith said he replaced the original bike's key transmission for the one we found on our victim."

"Louise," said Dan a low whisper, "Was that motorcycle there when you got coffee this morning?"

"No, it wasn't," replied Louise, her face dawning with the same realisation. "I need to get the key from the precinct."

Marzia then arrived with their coffees and the Detectives sat up sharply, smiling as casually as possible.

\_\_\_

Louise and Felix quickly beat a hasty retreat, after Felix had spectacularly fumbled yet again around Marzia, shrieking that he 'had a dead body he needed to cut up', when he had really meant to say 'thank you for the glass of water.' Felix had then proceeded to run away, Louise occasionally grabbing onto him in the increasingly likely chance he ran into oncoming traffic, as Marzia stared at Felix's retreating figure in abject shock.

In the insanity, Louise had flashed Dan a meaningful look, suggesting that she would go retrieve the key and confirm their suspicions.

All the while Marzia threw Dan a confused look and Dan grimaced nervously.

"Felix is a coroner," he tried to explain. "Hence the dead body he needs to cut up."

Marzia stared at him silently for a moment, before saying a very quiet "okay" and walking away.

It was then that Dan noticed out of the corner of his eye that Phil had stepped outside, indeed covered in a fine white powder that Dan genuinely hoped was icing sugar. Phil seemed to be making futile attempts to shake and dust the powder off, only to sneeze violently in rapid bursts. Dan held back a snigger as the icing sugar forcefully expelled from off his clothing, leaving a befuddled Phil to look up miserably at the Honda CBF.

Phil's head tilted slightly at it and Dan suddenly felt a rise of panic.

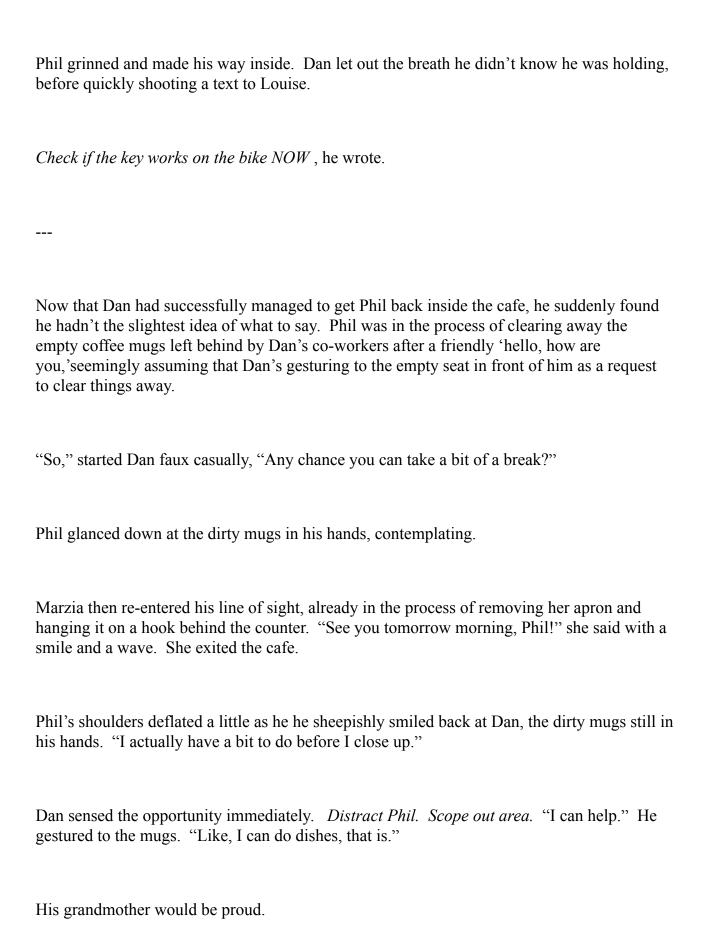
If Phil was at all involved in this, Dan really couldn't have him taking the bike away.

Wojcicki's voice echoed in his head. "We desperately need a win for our own precinct, Detectives. Otherwise I'll have to rationalise our headcount."

He knocked frantically at the glass between them and Phil, startled, finally noticed him. Phil raised an icing sugared hand and waved, smiling before staring back at the bike consideringly.

Dan knocked against the glass again, louder this time and Phil turned back around. Dan lifted up his coffee cup, gesturing to the empty seat across from him.

Leave the bike, leave the bike, leave the bike, leave -



Phil, on the other hand, seemed startled. "I couldn't let you do dishes." There was an adorably distraught pause. "You're a *customer*."

"You said you needed help," replied Dan. "Besides, I figured that you and I are..." He trailed off. He didn't know where he was going with that.

Judging by the confused look on Phil's face, he gathered that Phil didn't either.

"Er," said Dan in a poor attempt to cover the awkwardness, "I figured I wasn't *just* a customer, if you know what I mean."

Dan had *no idea* what he meant.

"Like..." Phil seemed to choose his words carefully. "A friend?"

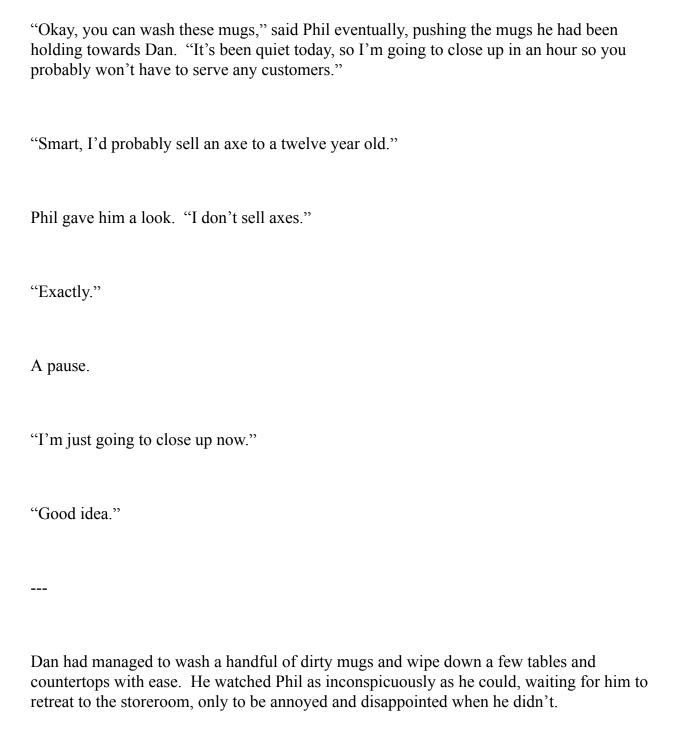
The earnestness of the question did something strange to Dan's heart, which he ignored in favour of his brain's cold reminder that Phil was the lead suspect in the biggest drug trafficking syndicate in the United Kingdom. Dan found his voice. "Yeah, a friend." He cleared his throat. "You'd let a friend do dishes, right?"

"Maybe a roommate."

"I have coffee here all the time, I might as well live here."

It had startled a laugh out of Phil, though he still looked unsure. He cast a look back at the storeroom, his lips pursed.

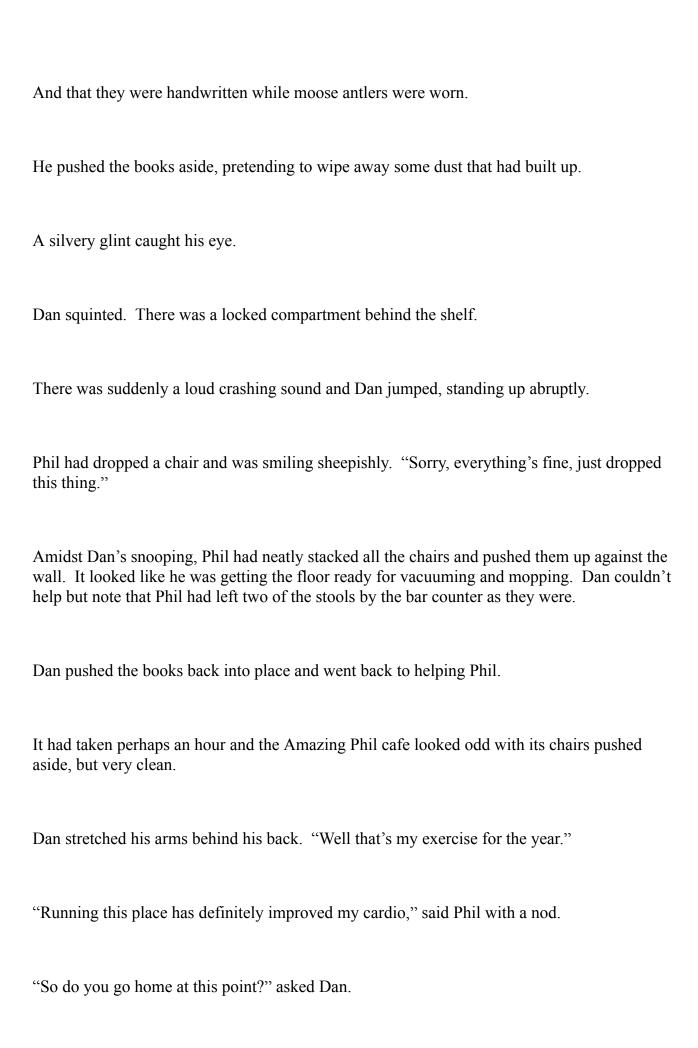
The door to the store room was closed. It was always closed. Dan didn't think he had even seen Marzia go in there.



All standard. Balance sheets, income statements, cash flows. The only thing remarkable about them was that they were handwritten.

one quickly.

Dan examined his surroundings carefully, but as far as he could see, nothing seemed out of place inside the cafe. The only thing of note was the handful of notebooks in a small shelf compartment underneath the cash register. Dan recognised one as the notebook he had seen Phil writing in previously, while wearing his ridiculous moose antlers. Dan flicked through



Phil shook his head, gesturing to the two bar stools by the counter. "Actually, at this point, I usually do my accounts."

Dan glanced at the two bar stools, realising. "I have no idea of how to do that and I'm ninety percent sure accounting is some kind of witchcraft."

Phil laughed. "That's alright, I wouldn't have asked you to. I was just thinking that maybe I get some food delivered. You know," he gestured clumsily at the empty cafe, "As thanks for helping clean up."

"Oh." Dan's phone suddenly vibrated and he automatically glanced at the message preview.

It was from Louise. The key worked.

Dan blinked at the message, reading it several times before it sunk in.

They had found the vehicle their John Doe had been driving before he had been possibly murdered.

"Unless you're busy, of course," Phil suddenly blurted, bringing Dan back to reality.

Dan dropped his phone back in his pocket and smiled. "Sounds good."

\_\_\_

As they were waiting for their food to be delivered, Phil pulled out one of the notebooks from under the cash register, donned his moose hat and began handwriting what appeared to be a cash flows report. Phil had gone through four receipts and written down several lines when Dan asked,

<sup>&</sup>quot;Isn't there an app for that?"

Phil had stopped writing, thoughtful. "Well, probably."

"Wouldn't that be easier than having to write everything down? You said you were an accountant before, right?" Dan tilted his head. "Surely you would have had accounting software or something."

"Yeah, we did," said Phil, still holding his pen. "Though to be honest, writing it out helps me understand things better." He fidgeted with the pen. "It's actually a habit I picked up back at university. I'm sure you would have done something similar while you were studying for your law exams."

Dan snorted. He still had some of his law books in their original shrink wrap. "I mostly played Mario Kart and avoided writing when I could." He waved his left hand. "I'm left handed so everything I write turns into a smudge-fest."

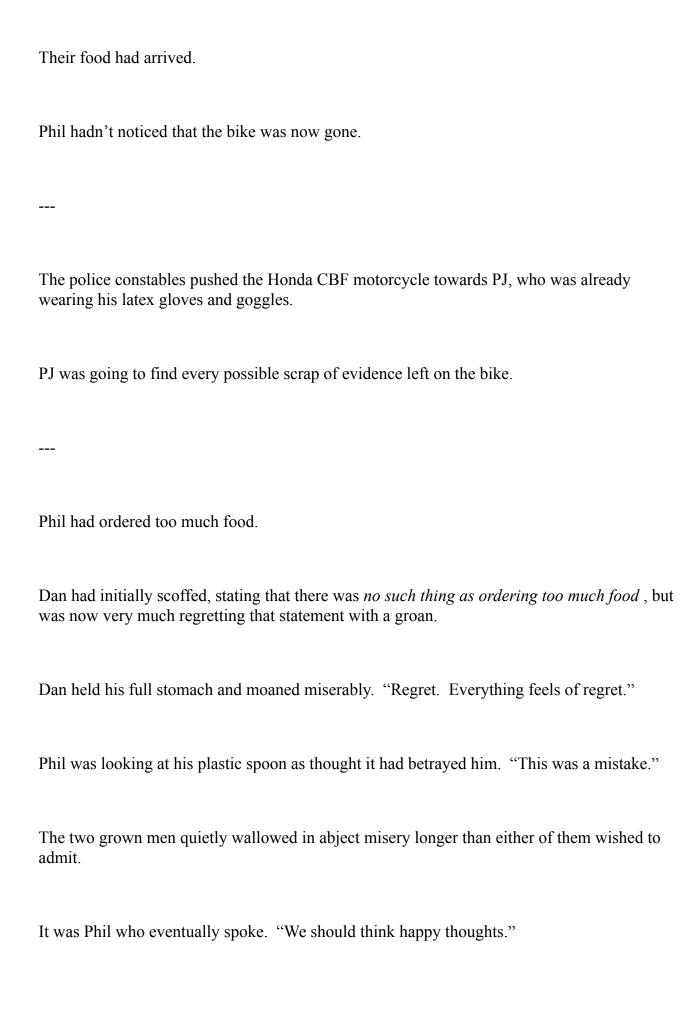
"My old roommate used to complain of the same thing, he was left handed as well." Phil's eyes lowered a fraction, before regaining eye contact with Dan. "Actually, Jimmy was the one got me into the habit of doing accounts by hand. We used to race through accounts and whoever finished last had to do the dishes. Whenever I finished last, I'd argue that he didn't really win if I couldn't read through his smudged reports."

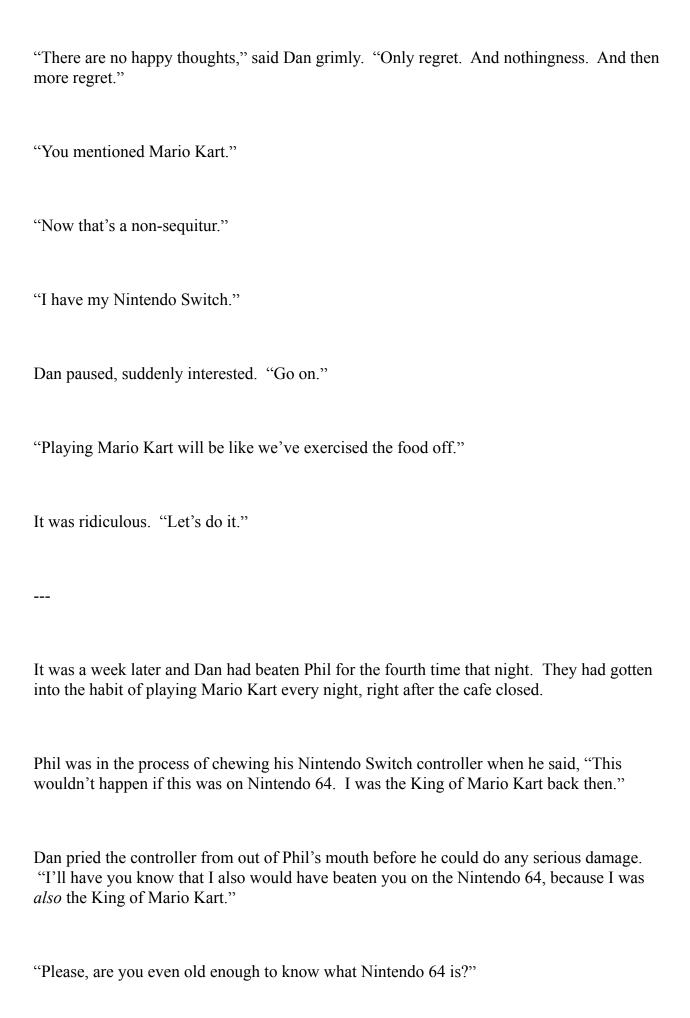
"That's oddly nerdy and adorable," said Dan. "I'm sure he's pleased to know that you've kept up the tradition."

Phil's grip on his pen unconsciously tightened. He tried to hide it with a smile. "I'd like to think so."

Dan knew he had struck a nerve but before he could learn more -

A knock on the glass door.





"Yes, I am old enough," Dan retorted brattily. "I had a black refurbished controller and everything. I even carved a little 'XD' face into it."
"If you're so sure, why don't you bring it around next time." Phil's eyes had lit up, challengingly. "You and me. Rainbow Road track after school."
"You are literally the worst at Rainbow Road."
Phil puffed his chest, all fake bravado and poorly concealed smiles. "I said what I said, <i>bro</i> I'm all or nothing."
"Well too bad, because I gave my Nintendo 64 to my neighbour's kid before I left for law school."
Phil narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "A likely story."
"Hey, it's actually true!"
For once.
Dan wasn't sure why he said what he said next. Maybe he was enjoying his time with Phil.
Maybe it was the guilt for lying.
"It really is!" exclaimed Dan. "Ask my old neighbour from Reading, they'll tell you all about my 'lolrandom' phase."

Phil continued to stare back dubiously. "Alright," he replied eventually. He picked up the switch controller. "But I was serious about the 'all or nothing.' If I beat you in this final round, I technically win for the night." Phil held his hand out expectantly. A handshake.

"Fine," replied Dan, shaking Phil's hand with an annoyed huff that was possibly more fond than he had intended.

Phil later won the round and lorded it over Dan's head for the rest of the night.

---

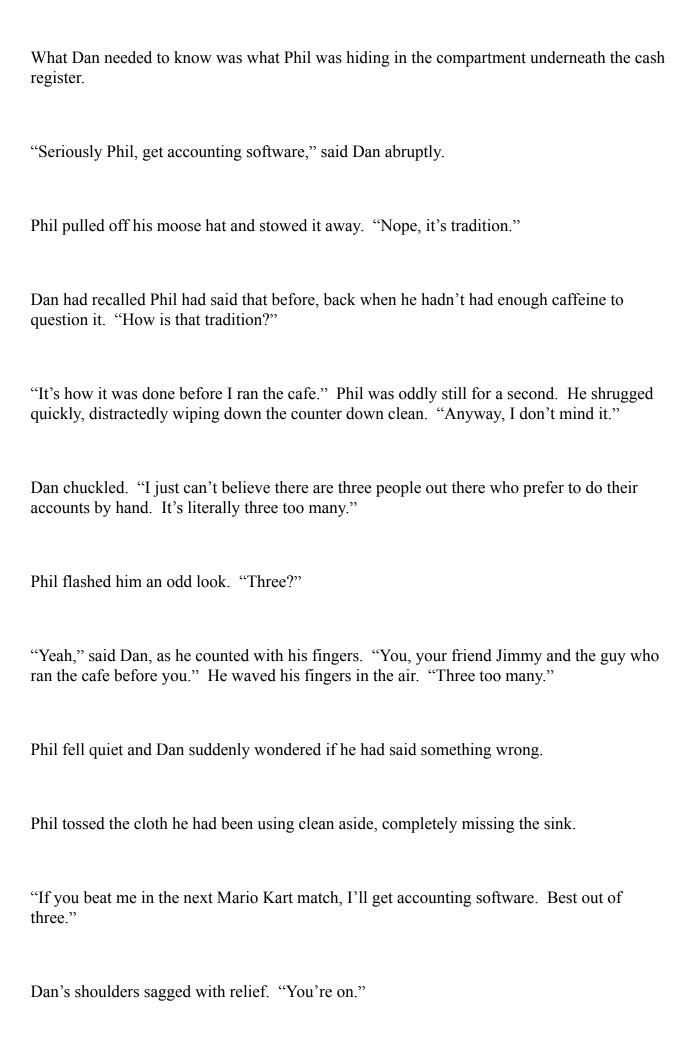
Phil had just been finishing up an inventory and accounts report by hand, which Dan was starting to find more ridiculous than the fact he had to wear a moose hat while doing so.

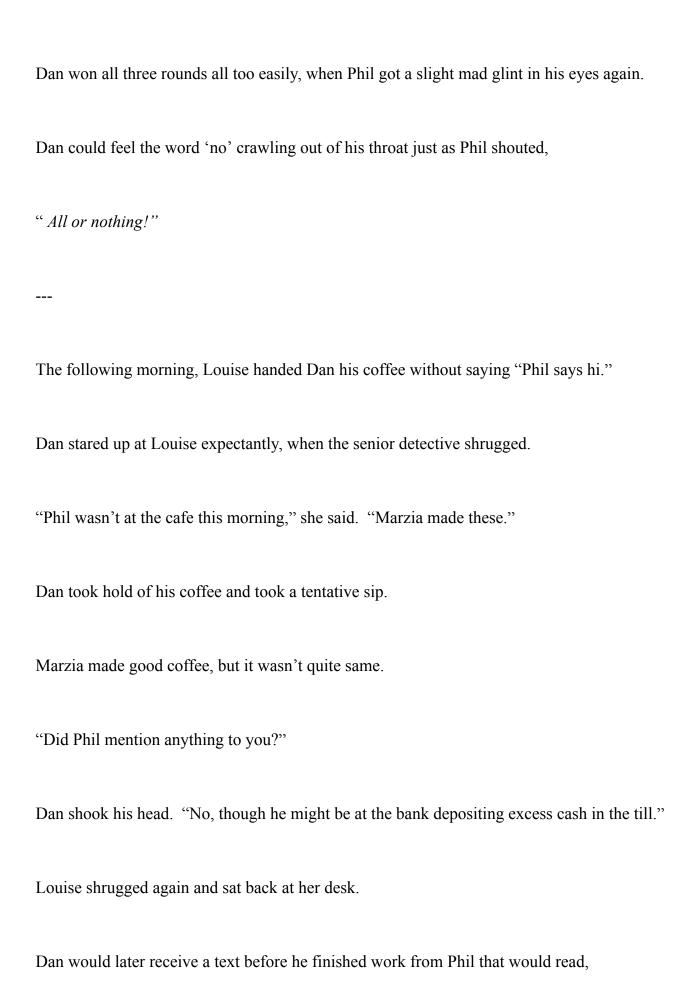
Dan cleared away their take away containers and Phil stood and stretched, indicating he had finished his report. Phil slotted the book back in its place underneath the counter, unknowingly making a metallic *clank*, as the book hit the locked compartment that Phil didn't think Dan knew of.

In the past fortnight spending time with Phil, Dan knew that it couldn't have been the cash register money for the day being hidden away. Phil kept all the cash, which was minimal, in a safe hidden in the storage room. Every three or four days, depending on how much cash was accumulated, Phil would deposit the money at a bank.

Dan had actually gained access to the storeroom, which he had assumed Phil had kept secret for a reason.

It turned out that the only secret was that everything was coated in a fine layer of icing sugar, from when Phil dropped an enormous bag some weeks prior. The storeroom itself was basic and as expected. It had large scales, flat bed trolleys and, as one would expect of a cafe, coffee beans.





Won't be at the cafe tonight. Still recovering from my Mario Kart de-throning:{
Dan immediately sent a message back with a link to some accounting software.
The following morning, Dan accompanied Louise to the Amazing Phil cafe.
Phil was still not there.
The detectives flashed each other worried looks, before ordering their coffee as casually as possible from Marzia.
Commissioner Wojcicki pursed her lips, staring at the empty Amazing Phil coffee cup on her desk. Dan gathered someone had brought her a cup and she had just finished drinking it. "Where do you think he could have gone?"
"I don't know," replied Dan. "Marzia, the other employee at Amazing Phil's, was told that he would be returning tomorrow, but that was all."
"He didn't drop any hints to his whereabouts to you?"
Dan frowned. He had been wracking his brain for the last two days trying to remember. He couldn't recall anything remotely helpful. "I don't think so."

"I don't suppose you could just find his location via the GPS signal on his mobile phone?"
Dan shook his head. "Phil's mobile phone is ancient, it has no signal to track."
They both fell quiet, lost in their own thoughts.
Dan recalled the last conversation he had with Phil in person. It had all seemed to be good natured fun.
Dan chuckled. "I just can't believe there are three people out there who prefer to do their accounts by hand. It's literally three too many."
Phil flashed him an odd look. "Three?"
"Yeah," said Dan, as he counted with his fingers. "You, your friend Jimmy and the guy who ran the cafe before you." He waved his fingers in the air. "Three too many."
Wojcicki folded her arms across her chest, carefully observing the detective. "It's strange, isn't it?" she asked, staring at the Amazing Phil cup. "To have an Amazing Phil coffee but not have it made by anyone named Phil."
Dan visibly startled, her words unexpectedly triggering something in his mind.
There was a name. He couldn't recall it, but he had heard someone say it, not long ago.
God, what was it?
The commissioner tilted her head at him. "Detective?"



Louise pulled out a file from her desk, quickly flicking through it. "He was a model employee, was basically an accountant but apparently a very good one. He was a shoo-in for a finance role at Smith & Sons, he had even finished top of his Masters at Oxford..." she trailed off, reading through the file, "Sounds like the stress got to him and former CFO Geoffrey Jones gave him Einsteins to keep up with the workload. James developed an addiction and resigned after Jones was arrested."

"Right, well, his mother says he went into rehab and lost contact with everyone afterwards."

Louise shrugged. "It would be hard to go back to normal after that." She flipped the file shut. "So James bought Amazing Phil's and worked there right up until his overdosed."

"But here's the thing, James mother said that James had been doing a lot better. The overdose was completely unexpected."

Louise paused. "You don't think it was an accidental overdose?"

"I can't say, an autopsy was never done. But!" Dan's eyes were alight with excitement.

"James' mother had requested that James have a close casket for his funeral."

"Why?"

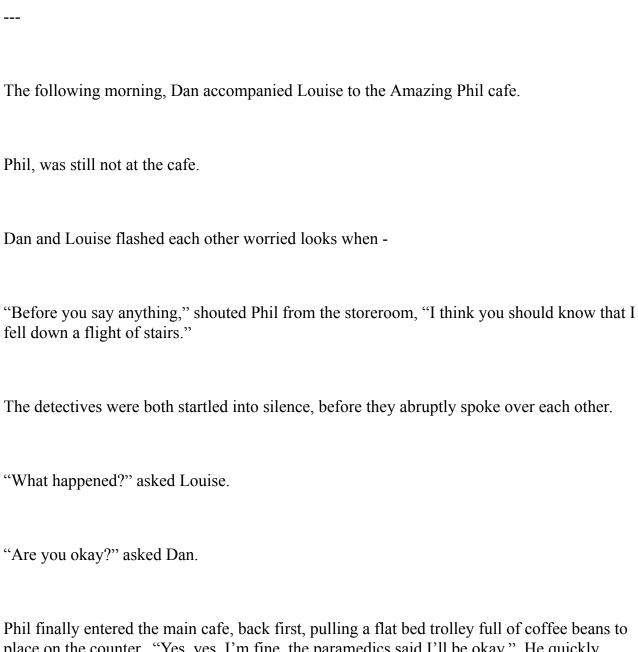
"He had bruising on his neck and to the left of his face, as well as a gash to his left cheek. And you know who else had similar injuries when they were found dead of an 'accidental drug overdose' in an alley by Amazing Phil's?"

Realisation dawned on Louise's face. "Adrian Hall."

"Two ex-Smith & Sons employees, now dead."

"Detectives, we have to mobilise."





place on the counter. "Yes, yes, I'm fine, the paramedics said I'll be okay." He quickly moved some coffee beans to the lower shelves.

It was an odd angle, but Dan could see Phil's arms littered with perfectly lined parallelled bruises. The knuckles on one hand looked particularly badly scraped, as though he had landed on it after he had stopped falling.

Dan had had his fair share of assaults and homicides via staircase and this particular sight indeed looked consistent with someone who had fallen down the stairs.



"Phil, what the fuck happened!"

The cafe fell quiet for a moment and Phil, to his credit, didn't at all look like an animal who had been backed into a corner. He was somehow composed, despite his battered state and Dan came to the startling realisation that Phil was actually very difficult to read.

"Hey Phil, just our usual coffees, please?" Louise suddenly interjected.

Dan gave her an annoyed look, but Louise merely handed Phil money and ushered the younger detective to a seat.

---

"What the hell, Louise!" he whispered angrily as Louise all but shoved him into a chair.

"He wasn't going to talk," replied Louise, calmly sitting down in her seat. "And why would he? He's at work and he has customers to serve"

Dan, reluctantly, had to concede that Louise had a point and sat down. "Okay, fine."

"When you've been a detective as long as I have, you know when a perp isn't about to confess." She flicked her eyes over to Phil, who was calmly making their coffees. "He has a better poker face than I would have thought. For the record, I actually do think he fell down the stairs, but it's not the complete truth. It's rather clever of him, really," she added, impressed, "Hiding in the one little honest patch he has in an otherwise bigger story."

Marzia stopped by to drop off their coffees and Dan took the opportunity to ask,

"Hey, should Phil even be working?"



Louise picked up her coffee. "So what do you think happened?"

His next words were automatic. "Two right hook punches from an assailant possibly wearing a ring and then attempted strangulation." He felt his hands shake, but forced several gulps of coffee down in an attempt to quash his irrational anger.

"Agreed." Louise sipped her coffee. "I can't say I know what to make of this, but it doesn't look good for Phil."

"I'll find out what happened tonight," said Dan, without thinking. "After work, I'll drop by here like I've been doing the last fortnight."

The senior detective gave a nod, before glancing back at Phil. "Good call. I think you should wear a wire tonight, in case he does talk. I can listen in."

Dan gave a nod. "Alright. Tonight then."

---

Dan tried not to fidget with the wires and microphone underneath his clothing. The sound being fed back into the van Louise had holed herself up in several blocks away was one way. Louise could hear him, but not the other way around. They had debated on equipping Dan with an earpiece so he could hear Louise, but the earpiece itself was unsubtle and too difficult to explain away.

They had agreed that if Dan were in any sort of trouble he would say, "I think I should head back to work now."

Dan had bought fish and chips the second night in a row and the heat of the paper wrapped bundle was starting to become uncomfortably warm. He could see Phil wiping down the counter, a brown package tucked under his own arm. With a deep breath, Dan pushed the door glass door to the Amazing Phil cafe open, completely ignoring the 'closed' sign hanging from it.



himself ignoring the way his heart constricted. "You know."

Phil looked relieved, though the gap in the door didn't get any larger. "It's alright."

"It's really not. Falling down the stairs is pretty serious. You could have broken bones, traumatic brain injury," Dan began listing, "Damaged organs, a mangled spinal cord, massive internal bleeding..."

"Internal is where the blood is supposed to be," piped Phil adorably.

"Tell that to your busted lip and that giant cut on your face."

Phil fell quiet again and Dan let the silence linger for a moment before clearing his throat.

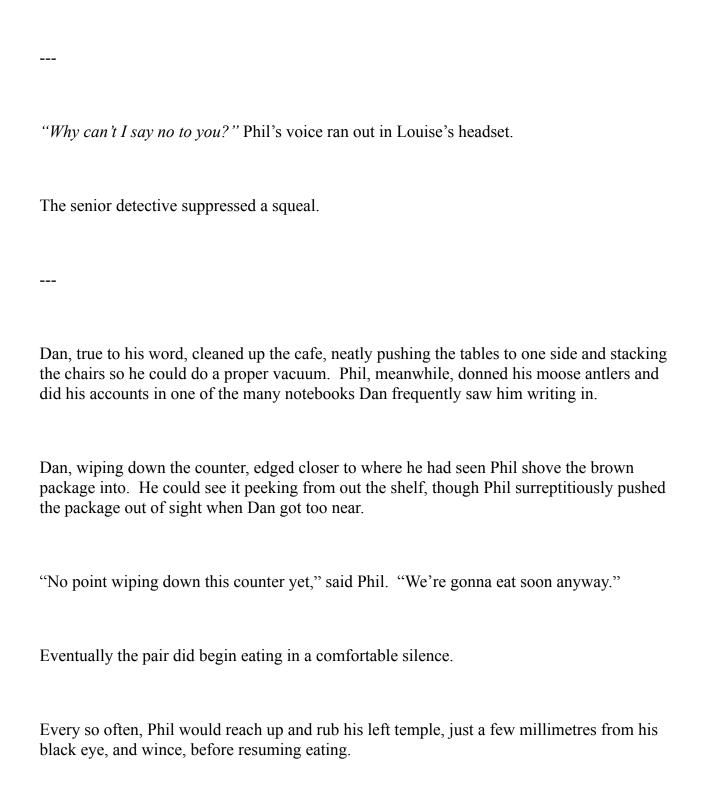
"Anyway, I brought a peace offering." Dan waved the wrapped paper bundle of fish and chips. "It's the same place we went to after Thierry's."

Phil's interest looked slightly piqued as he glanced between Dan's face and the food. "I'm seriously not even mad though, you didn't need to bring a peace offering."

Dan pressed the bundle into Phil's chest and, as Dan expected, Phil flinched and took a step back. Dan had guessed that Phil was bruised badly under his shirt. "Look, I'll help you clean the place up. You're in no shape to be lifting chairs and pushing tables around anyway."

After what felt like several minutes, Phil relented, stepped aside and allowed Dan in.

Phil muttered something under his breath and while Dan couldn't be completely sure, Louise heard it clearly from her van, several blocks away.



By the time they had finished eating, Phil had rubbed his temple fourteen times.

Dan threw the remains of their dinner into the bin and turned to Phil. "Do you have an icepack?"

Phil frowned. "I don't think so. Why do you ask?"



Dan had conceded months ago that Phil looked <i>good</i> , even in the idiotic moose antlers, but this was different.
Phil looked fucking good .
And with that revelation, Dan panickedly shoved the ice pack into Phil's face, shushing Phil's startled "oww" with a loud, "Don't move!"
"I'm not moving!" Phil shouted back, placing his hand over Dan's, who was still holding the ice pack.
Dan needed to get his act together.
Phil suddenly chuckled and he squeezed Dan's hand gently. "This kind of reminds me of when I found you passed out in your car all those nights ago."
Dan seriously hoped Phil couldn't feel his thunderous pulse through his hand. He tried a laugh. "We should probably stop meeting like this."
Phil huffed a laugh. "Yeah, probably."
Dan needed to get this conversation back on track. <i>Still on the job, you idiot.</i> "You know, you never did tell me what you were doing out there, so late at night."
Phil glanced up at Dan. "You never told me what you were doing out there either."
Dammit. Dan carefully met Phil's gaze as he debated on the merits of whether or not to tell Phil the truth. He recalled Louise's words from earlier that day.





Dan frowned. "Again?" Phil swallowed hard, as he pointedly avoided Dan's gaze. "Jimmy," was all he said in lieu of an answer. "Jimmy?" Dan repeated quietly. "Your old roommate?" "University roommates, yeah. We even ended up working for the same company after we graduated." Phil swallowed hard and Dan waited patiently for Phil to continue. "It was stressful where we worked. *Really* stressful. One day one of our colleagues offered Jimmy an Einstein and then... Well, that was it. He was hooked." This story was awfully familiar to Dan. "I told Jimmy to tell the police what had happened and things got pretty crazy at work. But Jimmy went to rehab and he got better, which was the main thing. But then..." It suddenly occurred to Dan why he knew this *exact* story. "But then he overdosed," finished Dan. "Jimmy... that's a nickname, right?" Phil gave Dan a confused look. "Yeah, it is." He paused. "Was," he corrected miserably. "What was his name?"

Phil continued to stare back at Dan, confusedly. "James," he answered. "James Jenkins."

Everything was suddenly falling into place. Dan couldn't help but stare in dumbfounded astonishment. "You bought the cafe when Jimmy passed away."

"I was in shock when he died. He had been doing so well! I couldn't believe that he had overdosed. So I..." He gestured to the cafe. "So I bought this place. I was desperate to find something, *anything*, to prove that maybe he hadn't overdosed."

Dan flashed Phil a curious look. "You don't think he did?"

Dan hadn't either, but he was curious to know how Phil arrived at the same conclusion.

Phil walked behind the counter, pulling out one of his notebooks, a red notebook and placing it down on the counter. Dan was just about to flick through it, when Phil reached for the back metal compartment that Dan had been trying to look into for days. Using a key that had been hidden inside Phil's wallet, he opened the compartment.

It contained a single blue notebook.

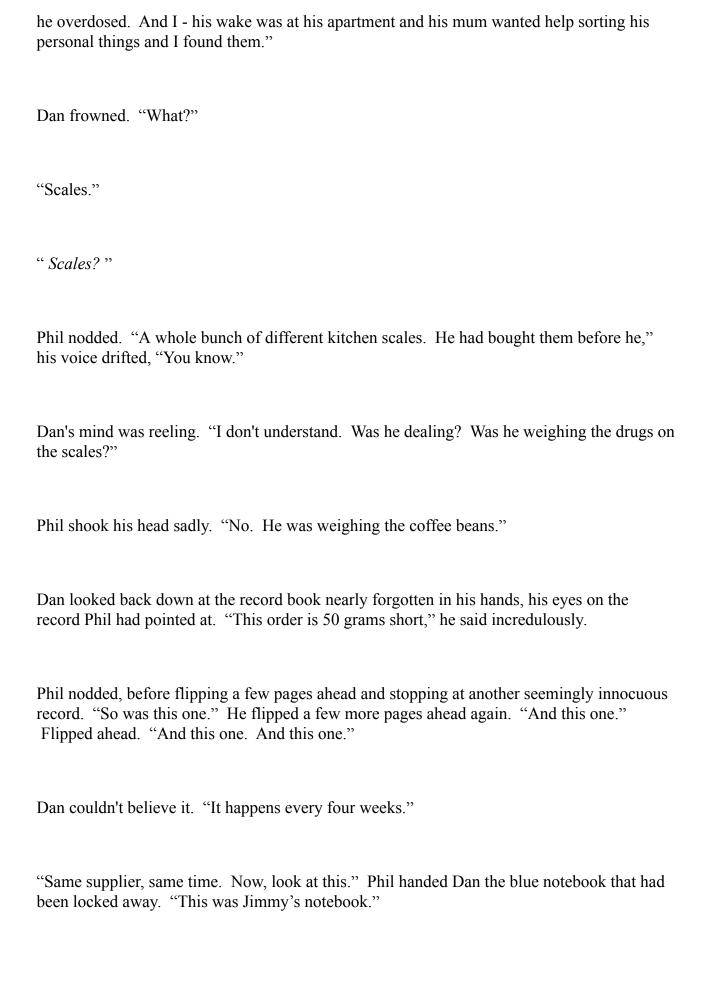
Phil pressed the red notebook into Dan's hands, his eyes downcast. "Go on."

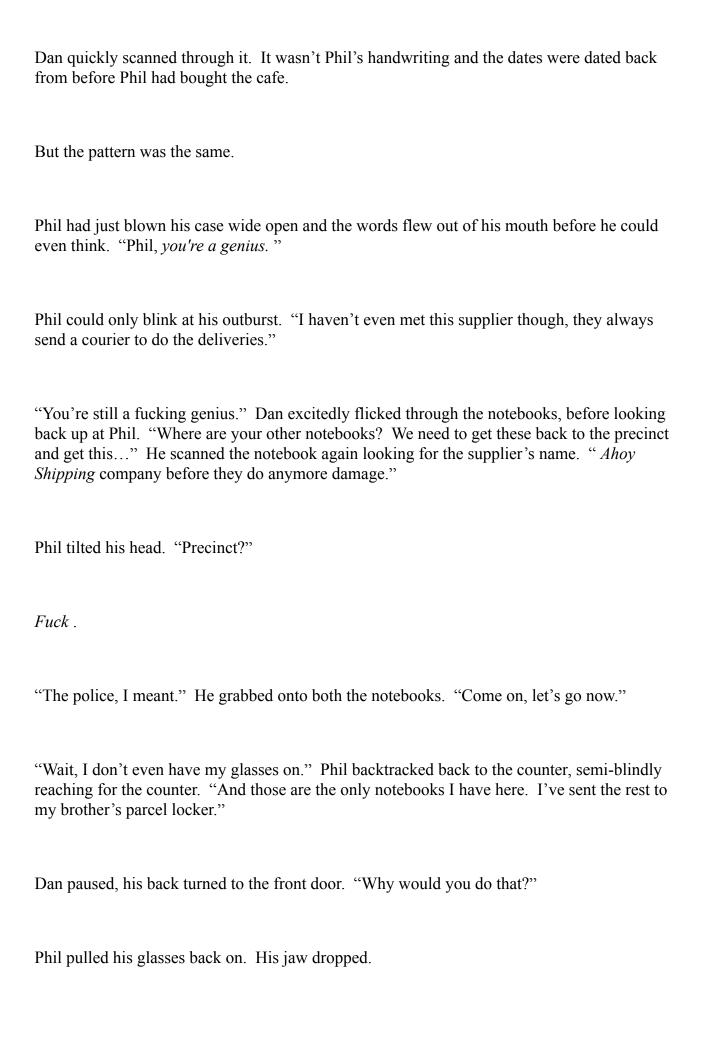
Dan opened it, carefully inspecting each line. It genuinely appeared to be an inventory and accounts report. "I don't understand."

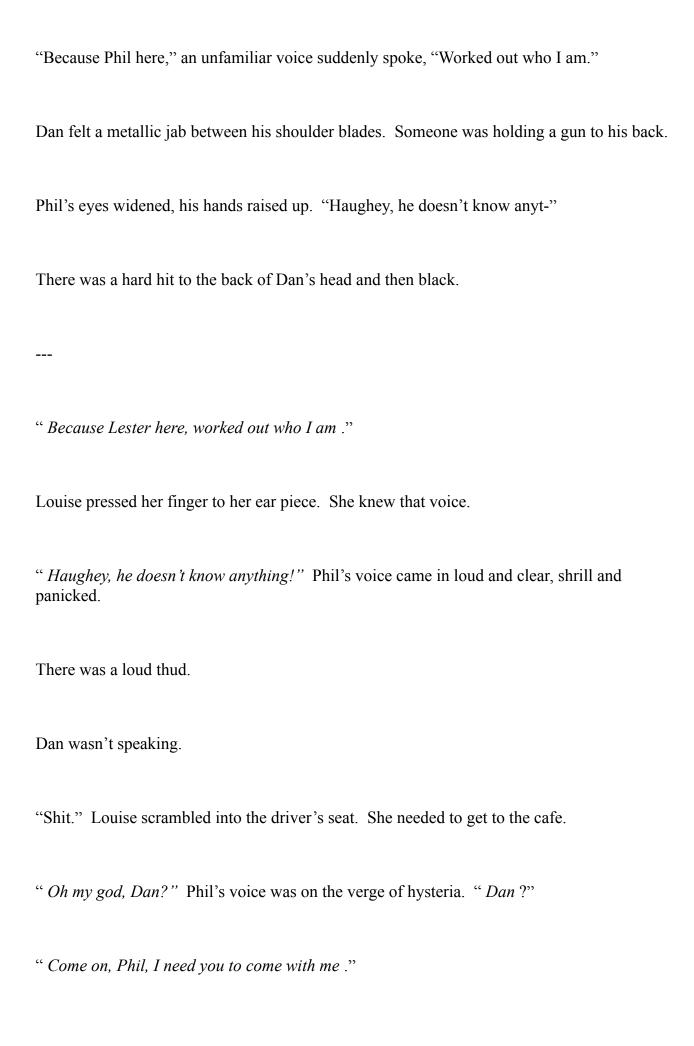
"It's a record of every supplier I ever dealt with," clarified Phil. "I have three main ones, but this one," he tapped his finger against a single inconspicuous record, "This one seemed off."

"Off how?"

"Before Jim died, he was convinced that one of his suppliers was short-changing him." Phil fidgeted with the blue notebook in his arms. "I thought he was back on the drugs again, you know? That it was just paranoia kicking in. And then," he paused, his eyes hard. "And then











"Shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit, shitshitshitshit," Dan paced the floor.

"Detective," Wojcicki tried placatingly.

"Don't you *detective*, me!" shouted Dan, in the middle of the precinct, his sense of reason officially gone. "I spent *months* thinking that Phil was a *fucking drug dealer*. He's a *civilian*, Commissioner. A very sweet and kind civilian that, who, at the mere *thought* of me taking Einsteins, instantly recommended me a place to get reha-*fucking* -bilitated!" Dan sharply looked the Commissioner in the eye. "We've just let a dangerous criminal kidnap an innocent man. He's just a guy who runs a cafe."

"He's also a CFO, when he's not on a career break," a voice suddenly said casually.

It was only then that they noticed that a civilian was stood near them, flanked by two police constables who had obviously escorted the man over.

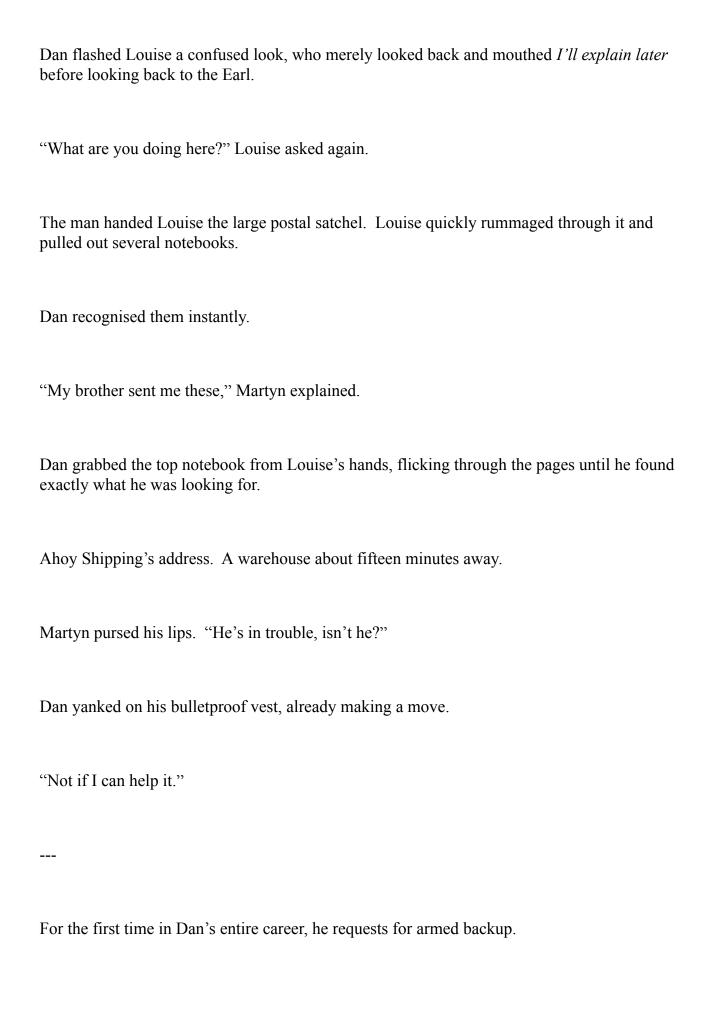
The man had very short, light brown hair and faint stubble across his upper lip and chin. He was pale and his eyes were blue. He wore an expensive looking suit. Tucked under the man's arm, was a large postal satchel.

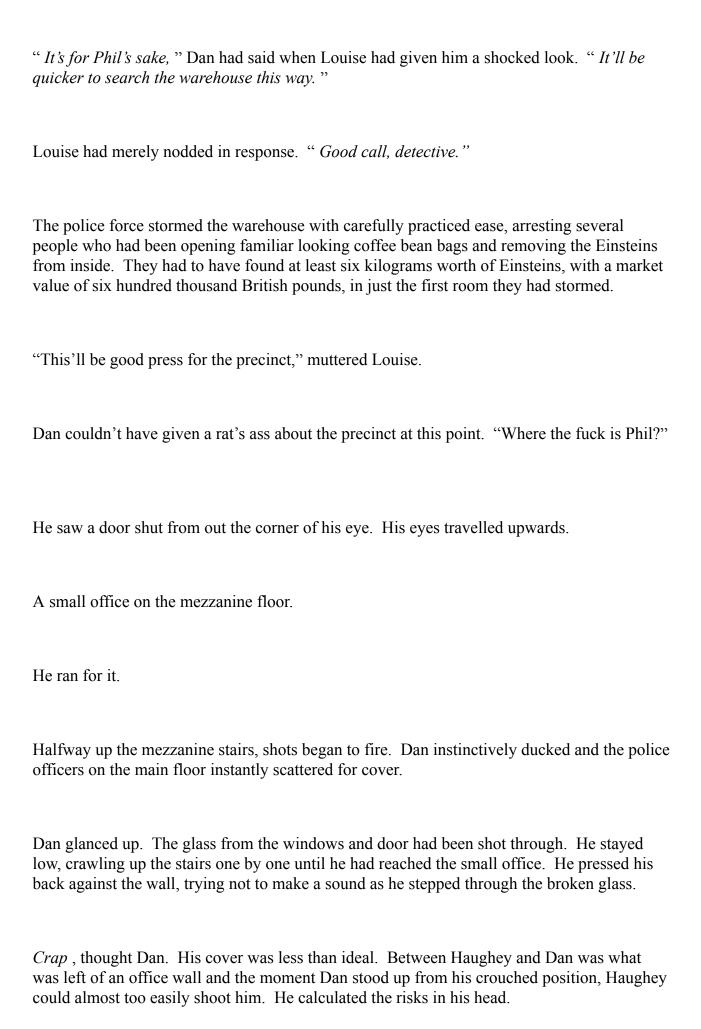
Dan couldn't help but feel like he knew this man somehow.

Louise, on the other hand, definitely knew this man. "Duke of Leicester? What are you doing here?"

Dan felt his mouth unconsciously drop open. "This is the Duke you keep talking about?"

The man shook his head. "No, no, my father's the Duke. I'm just an Earl, if you're into titles and that sort of thing. Personally, I prefer to be called Martyn."







From across the warehouse floor, he saw Louise behind some makeshift cover in the centre of the warehouse. Dan gestured to the senior detective, tapping at his eye. He was trying to indicate if anyone had a clear shot of Haughey.

Louise shook her head and tapped her fingers against her lips. She meant that Haughey was talking and thus distracted.

Dan peeked his head through the broken window and, thankfully, Haughey's back was facing towards him. Phil, on the other hand, could see him clearly. Dan gestured with his hands in the universal sign of *keep making him talk*.

"I sometimes wish I hadn't," Phil said carefully.

Dan observed the room quickly. The room itself was a mess of scattered office equipment, coffee mugs and paperwork. Haughey had run out of ammo, judging by the discarded firearm on the ground. He had a knife trained on Phil, though it was thankfully not trained anywhere near his throat. So long as Haughey didn't make any sudden movements, Phil would be okay.

Regardless, Dan still needed to move quick.

"If you hadn't have made him talk, James would still be alive," Haughey said, seemingly for cruelties sake.

Dan carefully stepped through the broken window, mindful of not making any noise.

"He would have still been a drug addict," replied Phil sadly.

Haughey huffed. "And you'd have rather him dead?"

Dan was only two steps away when an errant shard of glass made an audible cracking sound under his shoe.

Haughey was on instant alert, whipping around at the source of the noise, his grip on his knife tightening, ready to stab his unexpected intruder.

Dan instinctively ducked and threw his weight into a left hook aimed at Haughey's side. It knocked the man off balance, but the Head of Corporate Affairs was incensed. He lunged for Dan again with his knife again and Dan grabbed hold of the knife wielding arm, trying with all his might to push it away when -

A loud crack and suddenly Haughey was off balance, spinning to the floor, almost taking Dan with him. The older man fell to the ground with a heavy *thump*!

Alexander Haughey was out cold with several bits of ceramic in his hair.

Dan glanced up to see Phil holding the cracked remains of a coffee mug. He had cracked the mug over Haughey's head!

And just like that, it was over.

\_\_\_

Outside of the warehouse was pure and utter mayhem. Police cars and firetrucks had blocked off the area. The media had arrived and several news anchors lined the edges of the blockade, attempting to report what had happened. Dan had even spotted a helicopter from the ambulance he was holed up in.

Paramedics had given him a blanket for the inevitable feeling of shock once the adrenaline had worn off. He was instructed to sit and immediately did the opposite.

He walked to another ambulance, the one housing a man that somehow kept surprising him.	
Phil was also covered in a blanket and sat alone on ambulance stretcher.	
"So" started Dan, getting his attention. Phil blinked at him several times, as if unsure if he were really there. "So I've heard that you're the current CFO of Smith and Sons."	
Phil flushed sheepishly. "Well, I did tell you I was a 'basically an accountant."	
Dan raised an eyebrow. "And your dad's a Duke?"	
Phil lifted a shoulder. "He's in real estate. I told you back at Thierry's."	
Dan had to fight the urge to laugh hysterically. He settled for sarcasm. "Way to underplay it."	
Phil gave Dan a long stare, his eyes going from his face and then focusing in on Dan's chest. "At least I didn't outright lie."	
Dan glanced down. There, emblazoned in perfect capital letters across his bulletproof vest, read a single word: POLICE. His palms suddenly felt very sweaty. "Look Phil, I-"	
Suddenly, there was a microphone and a camera in his face.	
It was someone from the news.	
Out from the corner of Dan's eye, he saw Phil comb his fringe over his face and re-adjust his glasses.	

"Can you tell us what has happened here?" The news anchor asked forcefully. "What drugs were apprehended? Who are the parties involved? How did you get the civilian out?"

Thankfully, Commissioner Wojcicki arrived before Dan could scramble up an answer. She cleared her throat and gave a pointed, but calculated glare at the news anchor. "My precinct will be issuing an official statement tomorrow morning. Until then, you are to ask none of my staff any questions."

The news anchor didn't look deterred in the slightest, merely turning to Phil and shoving the microphone to his face. "Can you tell me what happened here?"

To Phil's credit, his expression became carefully blank. It wasn't a look Dan liked on him. "I do not wish to be interviewed. I have nothing to say to you."

The news anchor gave Phil an observant look. "Do I know you from somewhere?"

Phil's tone was polite. Practiced. Not unfriendly, but not at all friendly. "No, I don't believe so."

The news anchor pursed their lips, clearly unsatisfied at having found nothing and moved on to question someone else.

Commissioner Wojcicki turned to Dan, once the news anchor was out of earshot. "Excellent work, Detective. You've certainly put our precinct on the map."

Dan avoided looking at Phil. "Thank you, ma'am."

"I ought to be thanking you. Without your outstanding undercover work, I would have had to rationalise our headcount. You've saved many jobs." In the distance they could see the constables confiscating all sorts of drug related contraband and securing it into police vans.

"This is an enormous win for us. Honestly, a job very well done." She turned to Phil. "My thanks is, of course, extended to you-"

Phil raised his hand, effectively stopping her. "No need. If you don't mind, I'd like to be alone for a moment. I have a number of things to sort out."

"Yes, of course." The Commissioner bid a hasty retreat, though Dan remained rooted in place.

Phil didn't look at him and nothing was said for several minutes.

It was Phil who finally broke the silence. "I'll issue a statement for your constables for your files."

Dan frowned, not at all expecting the conversation to even broach that topic. "Okay," he drawled slowly. "Look, I think we should talk about this."

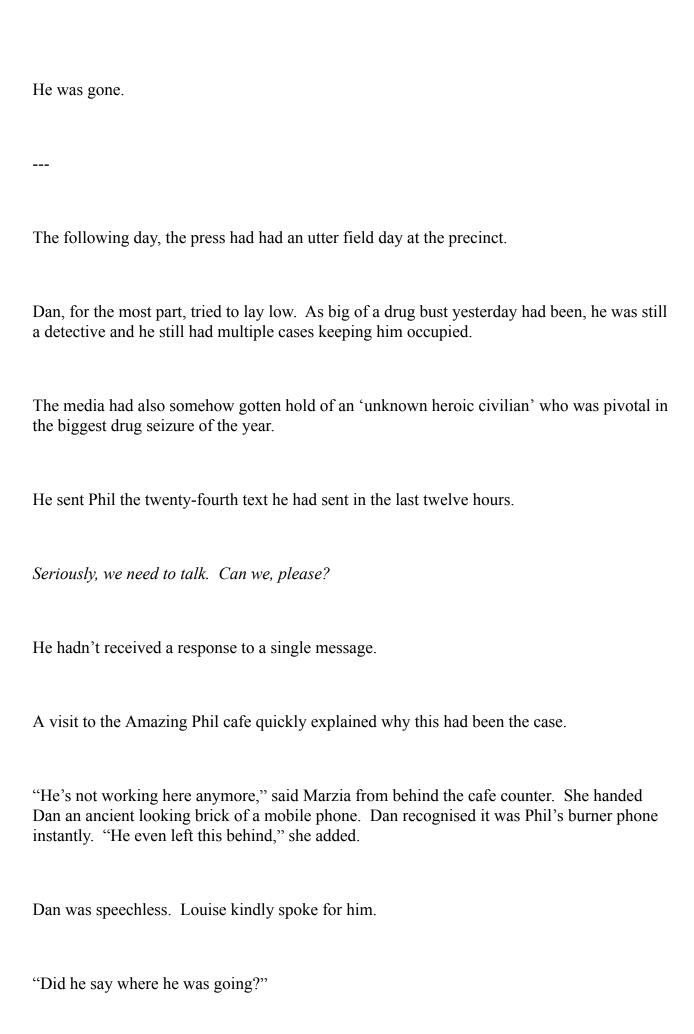
Phil shook his head. "Not necessary. You had a job to do, I can appreciate that." He pulled the blanket off from his shoulders, dropping it against the stretcher. "I think I'll go give my statement now actually. I really do have a lot of things to do, in light of everything." He had already begun to walk away.

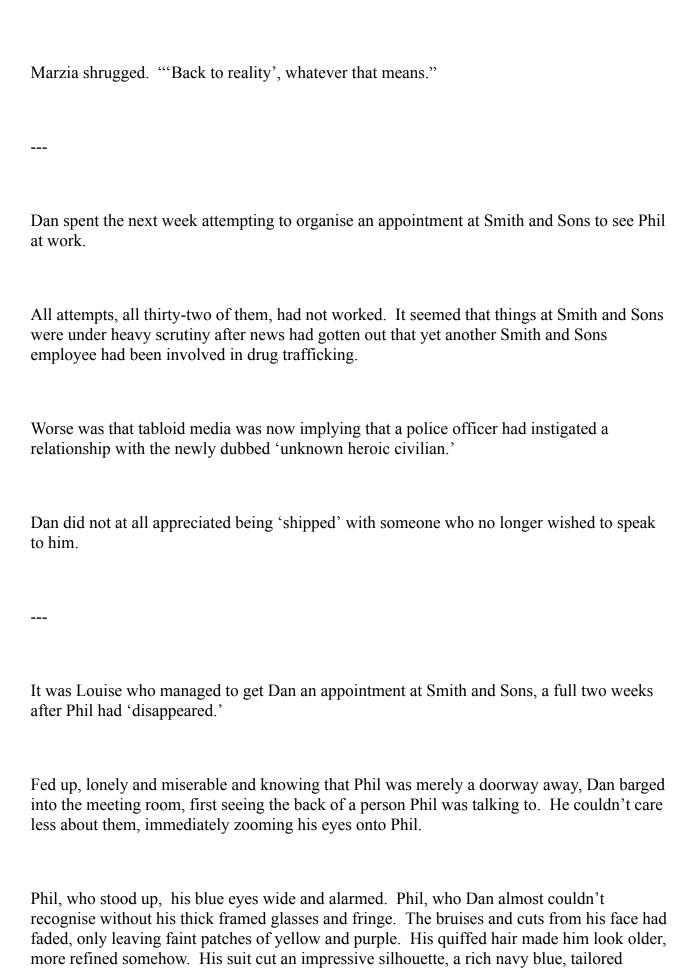
"Phil, wait." Dan attempted to follow him, only to be stopped by yet another news anchor. "Seriously *you*," he sneered at the reporter, "Not now!"

"Goodbye, Detective," he barely heard Phil say over the crowd. Dan tried to push through.

"Phil, wait!"

Phil ducked and weaved through the sea of reporters like a pro, before completely disappearing from Dan's line of sight.





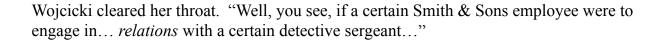
within an inch of his life. His tie was a deep burgundy, with miniscule white polka dots, contrasting nicely from his pristine white shirt. He stood tall, looking every bit the CFO Dan had never expected. The words *unfairly handsome* had sprung to mind and Dan suddenly felt self-conscious in his black skinny jeans and Yeezus t-shirt. "Detective? Do I need to come in for questioning?" asked Phil eventually, undoubtedly confused as to why Dan was openly gaping at him. "No," Dan almost stuttered, as he tried to regain some semblance of composure. "Nothing like that. It's just... you haven't given me a chance to explain." "Nothing to explain." Phil's voice was carefully polite, his face impassive and annoyingly difficult to read. Dan had really never given him enough credit for his poker face. Dan shuffled uncomfortably. "Well, I want to apologise then." Phil's expression remained unchanged. "It's alright." "But-" "Dan." Phil's voice was firm and the speech Dan hadn't actually prepared died in his mouth. "You had a job to do. You've saved a lot of people and you're going to save a lot of people. It's alright." For a fleeting moment, Dan actually believed that.

"But that's not the point," said Dan.

There was a pause. Then what is?" asked Phil quietly.
Dan blurted the first thing that came to mind. "The point is that Louise does this thing every morning, where she gets my coffee and tells me that you said 'hi."
Phil frowned and Dan can't help but speak a little louder because he <i>needed</i> to get his actual point across.
What is my point?
"My point is that I don't hear that anymore," he said after a miserable pause. "My point is that I didn't think it would bother me. My point is that I go to the AmazingPhil cafe and no one called Phil works there. My point is that I play Mario Kart on my own. I eat fish and chips on my own. My point is that I don't get to see you do that weird blinking thing that definitely isn't winking."
"Dan-" Phil tried to interject. He sounded just as miserable.
"My point is that I've bought so many fucking nectarines because of your stupid 'a nectarine a day makes you happy' saying and I'm no happier because you're not around."
Dan lowered his eyes to the ground. "My point is that I miss you and I don't want you to hate me."
Silence.
Then
"I don't hate you," said Phil and Dan's stupid heart began to hope. Phil then crossed his arms, as though steeling himself for what he was going to say next. His posture was confident, his voice not nearly so. "I actually really opposite-hate you."

If Dan's heart could beat any harder, it would pop right out of his chest and crawl its way into Phil's hands.
But Dan needed to get his act together. He had spent an two agonising weeks alternating between waiting at Amazing Phil's and sending texts to a burner phone that sat on the side table by his bed.
"If you 'Opposite-hate' me so much, why haven't you tried contacting me?"
"I suppose I should answer that," another voice suddenly interrupted. Dan had completely forgotten someone else was there. The large plush chair suddenly turned around.
Dan instinctively straightened.
It was Commissioner Wojcicki.
His eyes flicked from the Commissioner to Phil and back to the Commissioner.
"I'm confused."
"Phil had arranged a meeting with me in light of the, shall we say" Wojcicki pulled a face. "Complicated media proceedings. Smith & Sons has taken quite the public hit with Alexander Haughey's arrest."
Dan frowned. "What does that have to do with this?"

Phil suddenly flushed and reflexively he reached to push up the glasses that he wasn't wearing, instead tapping at his nose awkwardly.



Phil somehow flushed even redder.

"I suppose the concern is that they'll assume that Smith & Sons is doing something untoward, which would negatively impact both them and us," continued the Commissioner. "Our meeting here is come to some kind of compromise."

Dan blinked one. Twice. He knew his mouth was agape as he scrambled to find the words. "So are you telling me that you," he gestured to Phil, "Met with my boss, to try and work out if we could *date*?"

Phil winced. "See, it sounds stupid when you put it that way."

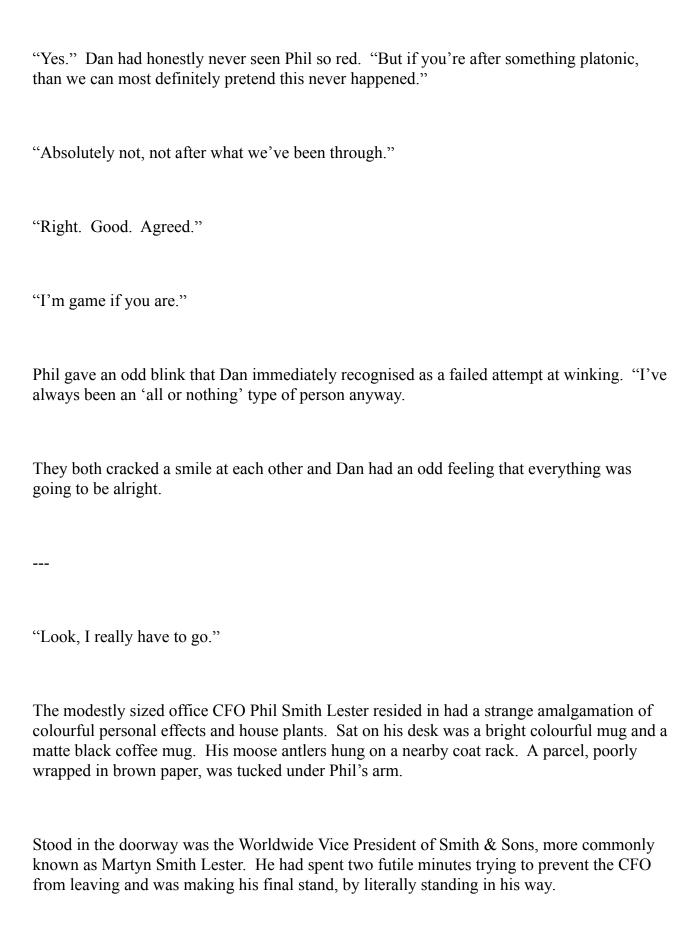
"Uh, because it is?"

"I didn't want to ruin your career!" Phil exclaimed defensively. "Things get complicated when you're a CFO and a Duke's son. Why do you think the maître d' photographed me back at Thierry's? Can you imagine what would happen if you had an undercover job again and we were, *not the I'm saying that we are or will be*, but hypothetically for this example, the effect our dating would have on your work?"

Dan fought the urge not to pace about in the room. "You're basically telling me that when you said 'you had things you needed to sort out', you actually meant 'I need to sort out my life and do everything I can to fit you in it."

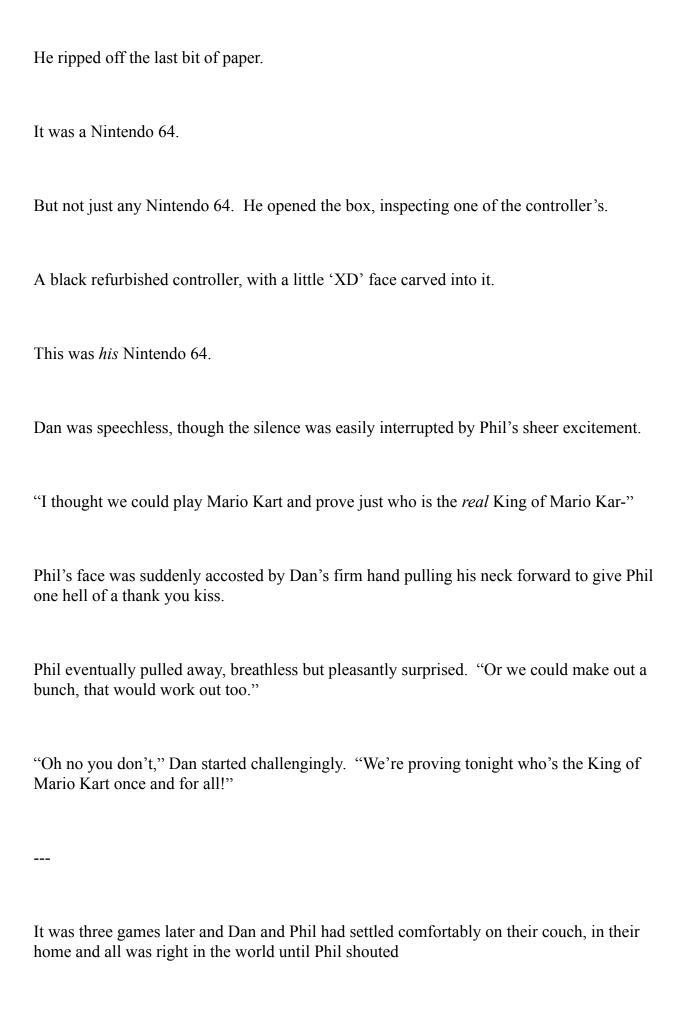
Phil paused, carefully processing his words. He snapped his fingers, off-beat. "Basically."

"And just to be clear, when you refer to 'dating', do you mean romantically dating?"









"All or nothing!"

Please <u>drop by the Archive and comment</u> to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!