

Murder at Amazing Phil's

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/12745617) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/12745617>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Phandom/The Fantastic Foursome (YouTube RPF)
Relationship:	Dan Howell/Phil Lester
Characters:	Dan Howell , Phil Lester , Louise Pentland , PJ Liguori , Felix Kjellberg , Marzia Bisognin , Martyn Lester , Susan Wojcicki
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Coffee Shops & Cafés , Alternate Universe - Detectives , Implied/Referenced Drug Use , some violence , Light hearted nonsense with a serious back drop , Slow Burn Romance , Phandom Big 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?”

“Not with the company.”

“I’m touched.”

“I might change my mind about it if you don’t move.”

“Still touched.”

“Still in my way.”

“Yep.”

The CFO took a tiny step back and sighed. “You know I’ve looked after everything.”

The Vice President didn’t move. “Have you looked after *yourself*?”

The question had caught the CFO off guard and the Vice President jumped at the opportunity.

“You don’t have to get involved in this,” continued the Vice President. “The family wouldn’t want you involved.”

“He *is* family.”

“He *was* family,” corrected the Vice President.

The CFO paused, looking as though he had been slapped in the face, but he stood his ground. “Then you should understand why I’m going.”

“Okay, this is bad, this is really, *really* bad.”

“Jesus Christ, Dan!” rang out Louise’s voice from his ear piece. “There’s smoke everywhere, did you set yourself on fire?”

“Dan is not on fire,” shouted Dan back into his mouthpiece. “I repeat, *Dan is not on fire.* ”

“What did you do then?!”

He could barely hear her over the gunshots. Dan ducked under a stainless steel counter and scrambled for better cover to the nearby concrete column. “Oh you know how it is.” He reloaded his ‘borrowed’ handgun. “It started off as a frank exchange of views.” He blindly fired a few shots, trying to gauge where the main source of fire was coming from. “And then it ended in gunfire.” The source of fire was coming from the north side of the warehouse. He aimed and fired. Silence. “You know, the usual.” He poked his head from out behind his cover, only for several bullets to whiz by him again. “Dammit, I hate when they do that!”

“Do you need back up?”

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.

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.

Dan cleared his throat. “See? Didn’t need back up.”

Commissioner Susan Wojcicki was something of a rarity amongst the ambitious; she was a good woman. She prided herself on knowing right from wrong like the back of her hand. She strived to do right by everyone in her precinct and her country.

Dan realised, perhaps too late, that shooting the plastic explosives in the warehouse to flush their suspect out from hiding was retrospectively a very bad idea.

Wojcicki was terrifyingly quiet for the moment, her eyes darting between Dan and Louise, before settling down on Dan. She pointedly cleared her throat. “So you used *how many* plastic explosives exactly to flush him out?”

“Oh, you know,” answered Dan with a practiced casual wave. “All of them,” he added in a small voice.

“What?!”

“I mean,” Dan started nervously, “There wasn’t a lot to begin with? And I only had one bullet left? And I photographed everything before it blew up?”

Wojcicki pinched the space between her brows. She took a deep breath and seemed to count to ten. And then twenty. And then thirty.

Dan idly wondered if his family would be able to identify his body after Wojcicki inevitably-

Wojcicki finally exhaled and Dan (somewhat disbelievingly) knew he was in the clear. He mouthed *told-you-so* to Louise, who rolled her eyes in response.

“Detective Sergeant Pentland.”

Louise automatically straightened. “Yes ma’am?”

“Go question the suspect.” Dan made a move to protest, but was silenced by a steely glance from Wojcicki.

“Yes ma’am.” Louise immediately exited the room.

“We have forensics scouring the warehouse now.” She gave Dan a pointed look. “That is, what’s left of it.” Dan’s already poor posture deflated. “I’ll need you to fill in the gaps. I imagine you can recall how it looked *before* you destroyed part of it?”

He gave a small nod. “Yes ma’am.”

“You will work with Liguori as he makes a digital replica of the warehouse based on your camera footage.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Wojcicki fell quiet, sitting back down in the large, leather chair behind her desk. There was a full minute of silence. Dan found himself fidgeting, tapping his fingertips against the sides of his pant legs. He had a strange feeling that he was not dismissed.

“Detective Sergeant Daniel James Howell-”

“Well this can’t possibly end well,” he muttered under his breath.

“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.”

“Yes ma’am.”

There were two short knocks on the door.

“Come in,” said Wojcicki.

It was Louise. She shut the door behind her. “Our perp confessed to being a transporter of Einstein’s. Standard stuff, he owns the vehicle and the vehicle is a white medium weight truck. He seems pretty low on the drug trafficking food chain. Didn’t give anything away but signed a confession to drug dealing.”

Wojcicki raised an eyebrow. “Anything else?”

“Not for this case, ma’am.”

Wojcicki gave a single nod. “Alright. Detective Howell, you’re dismissed. Detective Pentland, stay, I need an update on the missing Duke case.”

Dan shut the door behind him, only hearing a glimpse of Louise’s update.

“I don’t think the Duke is missing at all, more like hiding, ma’am.”

“So where do you want to get coffee?”

The collective groans in the office were instantaneous. It was a debate Dan and Louise had everyday, one that every constable on their floor was frankly tired of hearing.

“Marcus’?” suggested Louise.

“It’s too early to have self-esteem issues about my abs.”

Someone in the far corner sniggered.

“Hey!” Dan shouted back defensively. “Don’t you body shame me!”

“Maybe I was referring to myself!” the voice shouted back.

“Were you?”

There was silence in lieu of a response.

He tried not to grumble and absent-mindedly fixed his fringe. “What about Finn’s?”

Louise shook her head, her nose scrunched up. “Subway, Dan. Remember Subway?”

Dan suddenly did remember Subway. “Goddammit Louise, I had suppressed that up until now.”

Louise shrugged. “There’s always Starbucks.”

Dan sighed and shook his head. “I said ‘chicken’ out loud to the cashier the other day.”

Louise blinked. “Why?”

“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 groaned. “ *Fine.* ”

Amazing Phil’s had renovated.

It was completely unrecognisable from its previously drab and confusingly wicker furnishings.

The front window had been newly replaced with a blue and green checkered print behind the perfectly cursive writing of Amazing Phil’s. The dot in the ‘i’ of ‘Phil’ had become the nose to cartoon cat whiskers. Bright green plants littered almost every available surface, with even a few lush pot plants hanging from the ceiling. A small stuffed lion was pressed up against the cash register, seemingly supporting it with its mane. There was a small gathering of cacti in the far corner, beside a homemade sign that read ‘ *Normalness leads to sadness.* ’ The menu was a hodgepodge of puns and pop culture references.

It was a surprisingly pleasant assault to the senses.

“There’s... colour,” Dan said eventually.

“Yes Daniel, greens and blues.”

“I know what colours are.”

Louise gave a pointed look to Dan’s completely black outfit. “Are you sure?”

“Oh shut up.”

There was a bit of a queue, which was more than a little unusual for Amazing Phil's, but they were slowly making their way to front.

"It's brighter in here now," said Louise after a time.

"Yeah, when I bought the place, I wanted to make every window glass," said the man from behind the counter.

Dan's work life was shrouded in bizarre statements, ranging from drug trafficking to murder, and yet this decidedly was the strangest thing he had heard all day.

He blinked. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Good morning," the man continued cheerily, not realising that what he said made no sense whatsoever. "What can I get for you?"

"Just a -" Dan glanced down, a small name tag catching his eye, before averting his gaze back up. Behind the counter was a man a touch shorter than himself, with unnervingly similar hair to his own, just straighter and black. He wore large thick-framed rectangular glasses over his blue eyes.

He looked back to the name tag and did a double take..

"Your name is *actually* Phil?" asked Dan, dumbfounded.

"Well, technically my name is Philip," Phil replied without missing a beat. "With one L. I'm a one L kinda guy."

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

“Less lip, more of the ip,” blurted Phil with a poorly timed snap of his fingers.

Silence.

“Would you say that was worse than blurting out ‘chicken’?” asked Louise.

“Shut up Louise,” snapped Dan.

“Like ‘chicken’ from the theme song ‘ *Cow and Chicken* ’?” asked Phil with a tilt of his head.

Dan was stunned. It was rare that someone else’s mind was on the same strange track as his.
“Yeah, how did you...?”

Phil shrugged. “It’s catchy. *Mama had a chicken, mama had a cow* ,” he sang quietly.

“ *Dad was proud, and he didn’t care how* ,” continued Dan. “Surprisingly good, forward thinking morals from the 90s.”

“And also a really weird show,” added Phil.

“ *I know* , right?”

A person mid-queue pointedly cleared their throat and Phil suddenly seemed to remember that he had other customers to serve.

“Anyway, what are you two after?” asked Phil.

“Just a cappuccino with one sugar and a strong skinny latte, extra hot,” answered Dan.

Louise winked. “We’ll let you decide which of us is the ‘extra hot’ one.”

Louise and Dan had found a table in a quieter corner of the bustling cafe to sit. Amazing Phil’s seemed to have one other employee, a petite and fashionable young woman. Louise had complimented the young woman’s perfect winged eyeliner and the young woman had thanked her with lightly accented english, before placing down their cappuccino and latte. Her name tag read ‘Marzia.’

Louise waited for the young woman to leave and then picked up her cappuccino. “So you and I need to talk, chummy.”

Dan tried not to groan. Louise was about to lecture him in the importance of calling for backup, as she had done countless times before. “Look, Louise,” he started, “I know what you’re about to say.”

“Good, then you’ll know that this is the perfect meet-cute situation.”

Dan, in fact, did not know that. “It sure is,” he began unconvincingly, warming his fingertips against the extra hot coffee cup.

“He’s so cute too.”

“He sure is,” Dan cluelessly agreed. He took a sip of his latte. “But just to make sure we’re on the same page, which we absolutely are, who is cute again?”

“Philip, with one L!” She gave him a knowing smile. Dan hated that smile. “Come on, Detective. He was flirting with you.”

“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.

Louise spoke first. “Is this the best coffee you’ve ever had?”

“Yes,” replied Dan, staring at his cup incredulously. “It’s actually... amazing?”

“Here you are, chummy,” Louise handed a takeaway coffee cup over to Dan. The cup was bright, colourful and unmistakably from Amazing Phil’s. Over the past week, Louise had kindly been picking up takeaway coffee for herself and Dan. “Phil says hi.”

Dan rolled his eyes and took the coffee cup. “No he hasn’t.”

“Ooh, who’s Phil?” asked PJ, suddenly at the doorway.

“Phil, from Amazing Phil’s,” explained Louise. “Had a total meet cute moment with Dan. They’re going to fall in love.”

“Good for you, Detective,” said PJ with an approving nod. “And you know what, it’s about time someone named Phil actually worked at Amazing Phil’s. I think the last person who owned it was called James, which is just bad branding, honestly.” He looked to Louise.

“Think there’ll be a third act love epiphany?”

Dan, mid-coffee sip, almost choked. “What?”

“Right after the second act love montage,” replied Louise.

Dan merely grumbled into his coffee and ignored his two coworkers. “Why are you here, PJ? You know, for reasons other than discussing my love life?”

“The Commissioner asked me to build a digital model of the warehouse you destroyed. I’ve re-built it.”

“I didn’t *destroy* it,” started Dan defensively.

“Right, so a wall just burned to the ground,” said PJ, unconvinced. “Definitely doesn’t fit the definition of destroyed.”

“It *wasn’t*. ”

PJ shook his head and handed Dan a manila folder. “I’ve also enhanced some of the photographs you took. Might be worth having a look over.”

After a busy day involving a murder, an arsonist and an acrobat, Dan hadn’t had the time to look through the manila folders PJ had left him. He glanced at the time on his phone. It read 6:32 p.m. He thought of his dark and empty apartment, that was anything but quiet due to all the loud living that seemed to happen all around him.

He leaned back into his chair and opened the first file.

It was morning. Louise has been happily sipping her Amazing Phil-branded coffee, Dan’s coffee in her other hand, when a strange sight near her desk stopped her in her tracks.

Dan was slumped over his desk, his head resting over his crossed arms, still in the clothes he wore the previous day. His desk was covered in photographs of the same identical medium

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?”

Louise frowned, reaching for her glasses in her handbag and quickly putting them on. “It looks like MAC Cosmetics eyeshadow in the shade ‘Atlantic Blue.’”

Dan blinked. “Er, okay, I was just gonna say ‘blue.’”

The senior detective frowned again, pulling off her glasses. “Do you think they hit something with blue paint?”

Dan shook his head. “Actually, based on the layering, I think the truck might have originally been painted blue. I think we should get PJ to strip the paint back on this truck. I think there might be something underneath it.”

“Dan. *Dan*. Dan!”

Dan shot up, straightening at his desk. He had intermittently been falling asleep for most of the afternoon since his ill-advised all-nighter. He glanced up. “Hi PJ.”

PJ raised an eyebrow. “You look like death.”

“Thanks, that’s what I was going for.”

“Riiight,” he replied slowly, handing a photograph over to the detective. “You were right about the truck. It was painted white, but was originally blue before that.”

“Atlantic blue,” Dan corrected.

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 excitement 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 wheelee case briefcase from PJ and crammed it full of his first year law books and was given two hundred

pounds in cash by the precinct. Under no reasonable circumstances was he to spend the two hundred pounds.

He just needed one more thing.

Felix's fist was tightly closed, his knuckles going white as he warily looked Dan in the eye. "You promise you'll look after her, right?"

"For the millionth time, *yes*. "

" *Promise?* "

"Felix!"

"Alright, alright." The Swede took a deep breath, before exhaling slowly. He looked more worried than Dan had ever seen him. He unclenched his fist, revealing a single Nissan car key in his hand. "I just really love this car, alright? It's my *Nii-san*. "

Dan rolled his eyes, snatching the car keys before Felix could change his mind. "I know, I know, you'll get your Nissan back tomorrow."

"It's *Nii-san*, " corrected Felix like a petulant child.

As an avid fan of Formula One, driving the Nissan 370z was something of a dream. Speeding, changing lanes and taking sharp corners at unnecessarily high speeds was a 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. “

Help with work?”

The man seemed to understand his meaning.

He reached for his wallet that carried the two hundred pounds the precinct had loaned to him. All he had to do now was get into an argument at the price of Einsteins.

“It’s four hundred pounds for one.”

Dan’s hand stopped short of his wallet and he stared up at the man with genuine disbelief. “Four *hundred* pounds!” he repeated.

The man gave a one shouldered shrug. “Supply is low. Demand is high.”

He feigned indignation. “Why? I paid two hundred pounds last week.”

“It’s basic economies of scale, mate. I don’t have time to explain this to you.” He leaned his head down, closer to Dan. “Do you have the money or what?”

“No, I only have two hundred on me.”

The motorcyclist shook his head and immediately revved his bike to speed away.

The next three things happened in quick succession.

Dan reached out the car window with his right hand and grabbed for the motorcyclist.

The motorcyclist caught Dan's hand and drove forward, dragging Dan by the hand until his head met the steering wheel, sounding the horn with a painful thud.

Dan blacked out.

"Oh my god, are you alright?" a voice asked worriedly. "Hang on, I'm calling an ambulance. Hey, d'you think you can open your eyes?"

Dan groaned and made an attempt to do so.

He tried to sit up and immediately regretted it. The driver's seat door was open. He didn't remember opening it. He managed to open one eye and nearly toppled out the door.

A warm, firm hand steadied him, pushing him gently back into the car seat. "Whoa, you need to be careful."

"I'm fine," mumbled Dan, wincing as he reached a hand up to his head and tentatively touched the broken skin above his brow. His fingers felt wet.

"Sure you are," the voice said optimistically. "Hang on, I'm just going to press my handkerchief to your head."

"Ow!" Dan hissed.

"Sorry, sorry!" the voice replied apologetically. "Here, you hold it in place then."

Dan lifted his hand to his head, holding the handkerchief in place. He felt like he had walked into a brick wall that had retaliated by also deciding to fall on him. He squinted down at the person helping him.

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-

“Do they rub cats dressed as doctors all over you and give you their prognosis in a series of meows?”

It was 3:56 a.m. and despite Dan’s best efforts to be antisocial, Phil had stuck by his side.

“No,” Dan replied flatly.

“Well that’s a missed opportunity. Hey, how did this curl over here form?” Phil pointed at what Dan assumed was his fringe. “It looks like a pig’s tail.”

Dan moved his head before Phil could poke at it. “Thanks,” he replied blankly.

“Do you know that saying? An apple a day…”

Keeps the doctor away .

“Makes you not die,” added Phil incorrectly. “But a nectarine a day…”

Dan gave him a blank stare.

“Makes you happy!”

There was silence for all of three seconds and Phil suddenly looked as though he were about to ask yet another strange question. Dan spoke over him.

“You don’t have to wait here with me, you know.”

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?"

Dan winked, properly. “That's how you wink.”

Phil blinked, slowly. “That's what I did.”

“No,” Dan drawled out. He winked again. “That was a wink.”

Phil blinked again. “And that was what I did.”

Dan winked again. He suspected he was starting to look like he had a nervous twitch.

The doctor cleared their throat. “As amusing as this is, I do have other patients to attend to.”
The doctor looked to Phil, pointing with her clipboard to Dan’s head. “Now, everything up there looks good, but he will need plenty of rest. If you suspect anything strange, I want you to take him right back to the hospital, do you understand?”

Phil looked slightly confused, but he nodded anyway.

“Good,” said the doctor. “I can get the paperwork ready and then you two can go home together.”

“Right,” replied Phil with a nod. A pause. “Wait-”

The doctor had already left.

Phil, with genuine confusion, blinked. “Does she think we’re... together?”

Dan said nothing and winked.

“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 out your deluded rom-com fantasies there.”

“Dan!”

Dan turned to look. It was Felix.

“Wow man, you look like shit.”

“Thanks,” Dan replied straight-faced. “Got something for me?”

Felix laughed. “More like the other way around, bro.” He held out an outstretched hand.
“Well?”

Dan was not following this conversation at all.

A full minute passed and he realised.

“Oh no.”

Across town Felix’s beloved Nii-san was being towed.

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 co-workers 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.

Dan rolled his eyes. “I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that. Let’s just wait and see what the locksmiths say.”

It was a little after three p.m. when the dull ache of not having had his morning coffee manifested into a full blown headache. Like a zombie, Dan trudged into the work kitchen.

He hit a series of buttons, some of which lit up and some of which were held on by duct tape. The machine seemed to stumble to life, its internal motor sounding between a large freight train coming to an abrupt halt and an octogenarian smoker. He held his matte black coffee mug under the coffee dispenser and waited.

After several truly pathetic gurgles, the machine spat out what looked like tar into his mug.

He stared down at it with morbid fascination.

Louise popped her head into the kitchen. “Hey chummy, the locksmiths have just gotten back with your res...” she trailed off at Dan’s deflated appearance. “What are you doing?”

He was still staring at his ‘coffee.’ “This is the metaphor that is my life.”

Louise winced, gently tugging Dan away from the machine and prying the mug from out his hands. “Come on, we’ll go get real coffee.”

When Dan and Louise arrived at Amazing Phil’s, the first thing that Dan noticed despite his zombie-fied state was that Phil was busily writing in a notebook whilst wearing a moose hat.

“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 *still* 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. Riiiiight." 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."

“Good luck.”

Dan was still sat at Amazing Phil’s ten minutes later. He was beginning to find the café oddly comforting, despite its surroundings not at all suiting his usual aesthetic. He had been staring at the map of the area on his phone when -

“I hope everything’s alright.”

Dan looked up. It was Phil, no longer sporting the ridiculous moose hat. “Sorry, what?”

“I don’t mean to pry,” Phil said hurriedly, picking up Louise’s leftover cappuccino mug and wiping the table clean underneath it. “I just saw Louise leave in a hurry.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” replied Dan with a flippant wave. “Long story short, someone called her daughter a dugong, everyone is crying and a bunch of six year olds may get arrested. Tune in tonight for the 6 p.m. news.”

Phil snorted. “See, my day is *never* that interesting.”

Dan said nothing, merely staring at the space above Phil’s head where the moose antlers had once sat. “Sure,” he drawled out slowly.

“And hey, for what it’s worth, dugongs are cool.”

“Can’t say it’s the most flattering thing to be called though.”

“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 fin 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.

“You okay?” asked Phil from behind the counter.

Dan tried not to visibly startle. He turned around with a slightly awkward smile. “Sorry, just thinking about work.” He glanced at the time on his phone. 4:12 p.m.

Courier arrived at 4:12 p.m. He'll be back in four weeks.

Dan pocketed his phone. “I should head back to work.”

Phil nodded and smiled. “Off to court?”

Dan’s mind flashed back to a week ago, where Phil had found him unconscious in Felix’s car. The barrister robes had been left in the passenger seat. “Right,” he said more to himself than to Phil.

“I’ll see you tomorrow for when you pick up the beans?”

“Right,” repeated Dan, a little more surer this time.

“Wait,” said Louise over the phone, “Say that all again?”

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?”

“I just can't imagine someone like Phil being in this sort of trouble,” said Dan in lieu of a direct answer. “I mean, he makes things up like ‘dugong high-fives’ and wears moose antlers while doing his accounting. He says things like ‘a nectarine a day makes you happy.’”

“That's not a saying,” deadpanned Wojcicki with a slight frown.

“I know, right?”

“But that’s besides the point, Detective.” The Commissioner tilted her head slightly, an observative look on her features. “Why don't you suspect Phil?”

He had already opened his mouth to say something, an unfamiliar feeling motivating him to defend -

Defend? his mind chastised. *Defend a potential criminal? What are you doing?*

He shut his mouth, suddenly finding that he had nothing to say.

“Eccentricity does not mean innocence,” said Wojcicki, breaking the silence. “And regardless of guilt, Phil is our best lead.”

He forced a nod. “You're right.”

“See what you can learn, Detective. Though I suggest you do it the quickest way possible.”

Dan felt his brows knit together. “What do you mean?”

“I’m sure you’ll work it out,” replied Wojcicki with a slight flick of her wrist that implied he was dismissed. She looked to Louise. “Detective Pentland, the Duke is breathing down my back about his case. Please tell me you have good news.”

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.”

Dan didn't have the faintest idea of how to make coffee that didn't immediately dissolve in boiling water. "Thanks," he replied gratefully anyway.

"Maybe you can text me the details later."

Louise had kindly dropped Dan off to his home with Darcy in tow after a long case involving a missing bartender, an illegal gambling ring and a not so innocent tea house that made excellent scones but a terrible cup of tea. Dan had invited the mother and daughter in for better tea and Darcy instantly made a beeline for Dan's piano. She had played the tune to 'chopsticks' eighteen times and counting.

He had been filling up his kettle with water when he remembered something.

"Hey, what's the deal with your other missing persons case?" asked Dan. "The missing Duke one?" He switched the kettle on and reached for three teacups and three saucers. They were all matte black. "The commissioner has asked about it a few times."

Louise had been assigned the 'missing Duke' case over seven weeks ago and was instructed to investigate the case with the utmost discretion. She had been unable to disclose the Duke's name, nor the names of any of the family members involved to anyone, with the exception of Commissioner Wojcicki.

Louise shook her head, annoyed. "It's honestly not as interesting as you would think. The 'missing' person isn't even the Duke."

"Really?" Dan's interest was piqued. "The Duke's wife then? Or kids?"

"Can't say, sorry."

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?"

Dan shook his head. He knew better than to drink on the job. “Can you just get me something that looks like red wine?”

“Of course.”

“Alright, thanks again Thier-” Dan voice trailed off when Phil entered the room.

Phil was speaking to the maitre d at the front desk, wearing the most ill-fitting suit he had ever seen. The suit itself was an unflattering charcoal, with jacket sleeves that scarcely covered his wrists and trousers that did nothing for his otherwise slim figure. Dan could see just a bit too much of Phil’s hideously orange argyle print socks that clashed horribly with a red button down. His tie was black and without the jacket he easily fit into a My Chemical Romance music video.

Phil waved and smiled from the front desk and Dan tentatively waved back.

Thierry politely smiled as Phil looked his way and subtly leaned towards Dan. “Do I want to know?”

“Nope,” said Dan, through a forced smile.

The maître d’ had walked Phil to the table and both Thierry and Dan continued to smile awkwardly at Phil. The maître d’ flashed a pointed look to Thierry, to which Thierry somehow forced an even larger smile.

“Sorry, I hope I’m not late,” said Phil apologetically, his voice oddly high pitched. He nervously combed his fringe into place and pushed up his glasses.

“You’re ten minutes early actually,” replied Dan as he gestured for Phil to sit down. “Thierry, could you-?”

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 unsightly 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?”

“I don’t like...” He said a final word that Dan still couldn’t hear.

Dan blinked. “What?”

“Cheese!” blurted out Phil.

“Cheese?” repeated Dan.

“Cheese.”

“Cheese?” repeated Dan again, this time with more incredulity as the reality of the word sunk in.

“I don’t like cheese,” confirmed Phil with a mix of embarrassment and shame.

Dan had several questions, all variations of *why* and *what is wrong with you?* He tried not to be biased, as a detective he had to his best to be objective. This particular revelation proved to be an exception. *He’s a criminal. He has to be a criminal. He is most definitely a criminal..* “Does that mean you don’t like pizza?”

“Cheese on pizza is fine.”

But he’s not a monster. Okay, good, there’s that at least. “Right then, glad we sorted that out.”

The maître d’ returned. “Would you like some more time?”

Dan placed his menu down. “I was thinking we could start with a bottle of red. Perhaps the 2009 *Charmes Chambertin Grand Cru* ?” Dan had arrested someone for stealing a *Charmes*

Chambertin Grand Cru back when he was still a constable. It was also the only red wine he could pronounce correctly.

“Excellent choice, sir,” replied the maître d’, before heading back to the kitchen.

Dan gave Phil a wane smile. “Hope you don’t mind.”

“2009 is good,” nodded Phil. “Like, I mean, 2009 was a good year for me, anyway.”

2009 was largely uneventful for Dan. He had graduated from high school, slowly alienated himself from his friendship group and, idiotically, pursued a failed law degree. “Me too,” he lied easily.

“What were the best parts for you?”

Crap.

“Loads of things,” said Dan vaguely. “I found out I had gotten into law school, so you know, that was a thing.” *That I hated.* “You?”

Phil looked thoughtful. “I had already graduated from University, but I wasn’t ready to leave. I did a Masters degree.”

Dan, oddly, could imagine Phil studying hard. Possibly something creative, given the way his cafe had been decorated and his generally odd way of thinking. He placed his bets on an Arts program, possibly linguistics or something that involved creating something. “What did you do your Masters in?”

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.

Phil didn't seem to notice, instead eying the the wine bottle with the briefest frown, before answering Dan's question. "Economics and finance."

Dan almost spilled his wine. "Really?"

"Yep," confirmed Phil, picking up his wine glass and giving it a tentative swirl. "I was basically an accountant before the cafe."

Huh . Dan was stumped. "That's a pretty huge career shift."

Phil shrugged. "The company I worked for was highly against my wearing a moose hat while I worked."

Dan couldn't help but snort. "Of course they were. You should have sued them for discriminating against your fursona."

Phil chuckled, his head tilted slightly. "What's a fursona?"

"Don't Google that," Dan said automatically.

"Why not?"

"I refuse to accept the blame if this somehow awakens something within you. Anyway, nevermind all that." Dan held up his wine glass. "Thanks for staying with me at the hospital."

Phil smiled and clinked the glasses.

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.

“Great,” replied Dan, a mouth full of gorgonzola as he tried desperately not to laugh at their ridiculous exchange.

“Fantast-”

There was a sudden flash of light.

Dan watched as Phil instinctively squeezed his eyes shut and for a second his skin was a brighter white than he already was.

The gentle buzz of conversation in the restaurant silenced. Dan glanced around the room. The patrons were staring back at him. Why were they staring at him?

No. They’re staring behind me. He turned himself around, already frowning, only to be met by the sight of a very mortified maître. In his hand he held a mobile phone.

“Did you just take a photo of us?” asked Dan incredulously.

The entire restaurant seemed to take a collective breath in, as though expecting some sort of drama.

The maître’d said nothing.

Dan turned around to look at Phil, who was slowly sinking into his seat, his eyes wide and scared. Phil re-adjusted his glasses and combed his fringe with his fingers. Dan had a feeling that he did that whenever he was nervous.

He needed to fix this.

Dan stood, extending his hand out towards the *maître d'*. "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."

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 *maître d'*.

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 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.

“Good news, dinner is free,” said Dan. He then faked a grimace. “Bad news, I may have gotten us kicked out.”

Phil snorted. “Say no more. Do you like fish and chips?”

They had braved the cold London night and walked to a fish and chip shop a few blocks down. Too cold to eat outside, they made their way back to Dan’s meagre 2013 Nissan Sentra, a car that was miles away from Felix’s Nissan 370z.

At Phil’s questioning look, Dan shrugged. “It got towed that night you found me. Towing company scratched it, so now it’s in the shop.”

Phil found this answer acceptable and hopped into the passenger seat.

They ate in comfortable silence, when Phil pointed up at the windscreen.

“Look, steamy.”

Dan snorted and popped a chip into his mouth. “You know you've done well when you and your date go back to your car and your windows steam up.”

“It's the part they always leave out in the films,” hummed Phil in agreement, a side of his mouth full of food. “You think that there's been sexy times, but it's actually just fish and chips.”

“Arguably all sexy times should involve fish and chips.”

“Agreed.” Phil was mid-chip-lift when he suddenly seemed to freeze. “Sorry, did you say date?”

“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.

“I mean, I suppose the question now is, where is my Oscar?” said Phil very seriously.

“I’ll have to inform the mysterious Academy,” replied Dan just as seriously.

“What am I going to say in my acceptance speech? I suppose I could drag you up there with me.”

An extra second of serious critical staring passed before Dan and Phil laughed so hard that they nearly cry.

Dan can't recall a time he's had this much fun on a date.

Dan froze. *Case. I meant case. Fucking freudian slips.*

Phil’s voice was suddenly shy. “Dan?”

Dan looked back, only to find Phil staring at his lips with half-lidded eyes. His heart thudded hard in his chest. “Yeah?”

Phil glanced back up, his blue eyes unsure. “Can I tell you some-”

Dan's phone abruptly vibrated.

A message from work.

His instincts naturally kicked in as he pocketed his phone. He knew better than to read his work messages in front of civilians. Or potential suspects. Or people he wanted to k-

“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 do.” 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.”

“Sounds good.”

Phil hesitated for a second, before seemingly making up his mind and opening the car door.
“Good night Dan.”

“Good night Phil.”

The door slammed shut and Dan was alone in his car. Phil waved goodbye and Dan waved back before turning the car back on and accepting the call. “Detective Howell speaking?”

“Clear,” said Dan, not lowering his firearm at the empty warehouse before him.

“Clear,” said Louise to his right, as they both proceeded to walk down the warehouse container field.

The call Dan had received earlier was from Commissioner Wojcicki. A neighbouring precinct had required back up for a massive heroin sting. Within an hour, Dan had arrived at the designated location, his blazer off and his bulletproof vest over his button down.

“So how did your undercover op go?” asked Louise, aiming her firearm at the next open space. “Clear.”

“He’s a weird guy,” replied Dan, mirroring Louise’s movements. “Clear.”

“Did he give anything away? Clear.”

“Nothing I can use. Clear. He was going to tell me something before I got called out though.”

“Clear.”

“But he changed his mind in the last minute. Clear.” Dan pulled up the radio walkie-talkie clipped to his vest to his mouth. “This is Detective Sergeant Dan Howell, ID number 20091016. Confirming that section C is clear and awaiting further instruction.”

Louise and Dan waited for a response, but only got radio silence.

Suddenly there was the sound of gunfire. Something in Dan’s expression had changed.

Louise gave him a disapproving look. “Dan, *no*. Wait for orders.”

He waited all of five seconds, before running towards the direction of gunfire.

Action scene here maybe - have Dan end up shooting plastic explosives. Again

Dan groaned, pulling off his bulletproof vest and dumping it unceremoniously on his desk, before slumping over the desk himself. It was 3 a.m and he had just gotten back from the biggest drug bust this year. All up, there were twenty-one arrests and seventeen kilograms of heroin bagged.

Louise practically fell on her chair, not even bothering to remove her bulletproof vest. She stared at the ceiling, propping her feet up on her desk. “Why can't we have this sort of luck with our Einstein case?”

“Luck has nothing to do with it, Detectives.”

It was Commissioner Wojcicki, the very picture of police professionalism, suddenly behind them.

Dan and Louise scrambled to an upright position.

“Ma’am,” they both greeted cordially, immediately standing at attention.

“At ease, detectives. You both did good work tonight.” When neither detective seemed to move, she raised an eyebrow. “You may sit,” which they both did instantly. “I have some good news and bad news. Which would you prefer to hear first?”

Louise and Dan spoke over each other.

“Good,” said Louise.

“Bad,” said Dan.

“Senior detective overrules.” Wojcicki folded her arms. “The good news is that we’ll be getting excellent press for aiding the heroin squad’s drug bust. We have reporters arriving at 9 a.m.”

Dan and Louise collectively groaned.

“Was that the bad news as well?” asked Dan.

Wojcicki shook her head. “The bad news is that they’ll ask about how we’re going fighting the Einstein epidemic.”

Dan winced. “I mean, it’s not really an ‘epidemic’ as such.”

Wojcicki flashed a steely look and Dan quickly shut his mouth. “Einstein deaths have increased from eleven a week to twelve.”

“Okay, yeah, that’s bad.”

“I can keep the reporters at bay, but in light of the heroin bust, we’re going to need to start showing results from our own precinct. How did your undercover op go? Did you learn anything?”

“Nothing pertinent to the case. I’m not sure he trusts me just yet.”

Wojcicki pursed her lips in thought. “Do you have any reason to believe he may be engaged in criminal activity?”

Dan shook his head, then paused as an afterthought. “He doesn’t like cheese.”

“God, I knew he was too good to be true,” mumbled Louise.

Wojcicki was as solemn as always. “Highly troubling news, though not quite enough for an arrest. Try and gain his trust before the next shipment arrives in four weeks.”

“Yes ma’am.”

She looked to Louise and Louise grimaced.

“Let me guess,” started Louise, “You want to discuss the Duke case?”

“God, what is it about this Duke case?” asked Dan, exasperated and curious all at once.

“It’s complex,” Wojcicki answered, though her face gave nothing away. “We desperately need a win for our own precinct, Detectives. Otherwise I’ll have to rationalise our headcount.”

Dan blanched, instantly understanding her meaning. “Wait, you’re going to have to fire some of us?”

While Wojcicki’s face remained as impassive as ever, Dan had the faintest feeling that she hadn’t intended to say that.

She turned to Louise. “Detective Pentland, we can discuss the Duke case in my office.”

Dan had slept all morning, only trudging into work at midday. Across from his desk was Louise, similarly miserable and tired and mindlessly completing her paperwork. She held out an Amazing Phil coffee cup to him, not even looking up.

“Phil says hi,” she said, as she always did.

Dan pulled out his own pile of paperwork, before taking the cup from Louise’s hand. “No he didn’t.”

“Last one to finish their paperwork buys coffee?”

“Deal.”

They were quiet for some time, filling in their paperwork for the first hour.

“So how are you going to gain Phil’s trust in four weeks?” asked Louise.

Dan signed a document off and filed it away. “Don’t know. Any tips?”

“If there’s anything rom-coms have taught me-”

Dan groaned, pausing at dotting the ‘i’ in his writing. “Noooooooo.”

“Romancing someone gains peoples trust pretty quick.”

“*Noooooooooooo.*”

“It’s too bad you two didn’t fall into the ‘love at first sight’ trope,” said Louise, putting a file away. “That would have made things a lot easier.”

“No such thing.”

“Sure there is.”

Felix, who had merely been making his way to the lab, was abruptly pulled aside by Louise, who was still frighteningly somehow doing her paperwork with her free hand.

“Felix, do you believe in love at first sight?” asked Louise.

“Of course,” answered the Swede, not missing a beat.

Louise flashed Dan a triumphant look . “See?”

Dan rolled his eyes. “Wait for it.”

“Wait for wha-”

“I knew when I first saw Nii-san,” said Felix dreamily. “And I knew she was the one for me.”

“What,” bleated Louise.

“Yep, there’s your true love right there, Louise,” said Dan with a snort.

Louise slapped Felix’s arm, effectively snapping him out of his day dream. “Felix, what about a person?”

“A person?” repeated Felix with disgust. “Fuck no.”

“See?” said Dan pointedly.

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 *nobody* 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.

“WE ARE ALL GETTING COFFEE!” shouted Louise unexpectedly, her nostrils flared and her neck an angry shade of red.

The two grown men shrank in their shoes and walked the rest of the way in silence.

They had arrived at a fairly quiet time at Amazing Phil’s. So quiet that no one was even at the counter, though there were other patrons scattered about.

Phil’s voice suddenly rang out from what Dan assumed was the storeroom. “Marzia, would you mind looking after the counter a bit?” His voice sounded slightly panicked. “I’ve dropped icing sugar everywhere and now it looks like a cocaine den in here!”

Felix didn’t bat an eye, merely glancing at the overhead menu board as Marzia popped behind the counter.

“Do you need help in there?” shouted Marzia over her shoulder.

“No, it’s too late for me, save yourself!” he shouted back.

Marzia shrugged before smiling politely at the small queue Dan, Louise and Felix had formed. “What can I get you?” she asked Felix, at the front of the queue.

“I’ll have a...” Felix finally glanced down and his voice immediately trailed off.

Felix looked positively stunned.

“Uh, I’ll have a...” Felix trailed off again and Marzia raised her eyebrows at him.

“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?”

“What other thing?” asked Dan, confused.

“The *other* thing,” repeated Louise, a small smile on her face already beginning to form. She looked as though she had just won something.

“What?”

Louise’s small smile turned into a full fledged grin. “*Love at first sight* .”

Felix covered his embarrassed face with his hands just as Dan deadpanned, “You've got to be fucking kidding.”

“I’m going back to Sweden,” mumbled Felix between his fingers. “I’m stealing that motorcycle over there, going to the airport and fleeing.”

Louise tutted. “You really shouldn’t say that to a police officer. Dan, keep an eye out for any nearby motorcycles.”

Dan rolled his eyes, but surreptitiously looked out the floor to ceiling windows for any potential motorcycles. He immediately spotted a Honda motorcycle parked on the footpath of the small side street. “If you stole that bike, it’d be like cheating on your Nissan.”

“Nii-san,” Felix automatically correct.

“Sure.”

Felix grumbled. “But you’re right.” He sighed before glancing back at Dan. “I’m surprised you can spot a brand from that far away.”

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 the bike, leave -

Phil grinned and made his way inside. Dan let out the breath he didn't know he was holding, before quickly shooting a text to Louise.

Check if the key works on the bike NOW, he wrote.

Now that Dan had successfully managed to get Phil back inside the cafe, he suddenly found he hadn't the slightest idea of what to say. Phil was in the process of clearing away the empty coffee mugs left behind by Dan's co-workers after a friendly 'hello, how are you,' seemingly assuming that Dan's gesturing to the empty seat in front of him as a request to clear things away.

"So," started Dan faux casually, "Any chance you can take a bit of a break?"

Phil glanced down at the dirty mugs in his hands, contemplating.

Marzia then re-entered his line of sight, already in the process of removing her apron and hanging it on a hook behind the counter. "See you tomorrow morning, Phil!" she said with a smile and a wave. She exited the cafe.

Phil's shoulders deflated a little as he sheepishly smiled back at Dan, the dirty mugs still in his hands. "I actually have a bit to do before I close up."

Dan sensed the opportunity immediately. *Distract Phil. Scope out area.* "I can help." He gestured to the mugs. "Like, I can do dishes, that is."

His grandmother would be proud.

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.

“Okay, you can wash these mugs,” said Phil eventually, pushing the mugs he had been holding towards Dan. “It’s been quiet today, so I’m going to close up in an hour so you probably won’t have to serve any customers.”

“Smart, I’d probably sell an axe to a twelve year old.”

Phil gave him a look. “I don’t sell axes.”

“Exactly.”

A pause.

“I’m just going to close up now.”

“Good idea.”

Dan had managed to wash a handful of dirty mugs and wipe down a few tables and countertops with ease. He watched Phil as inconspicuously as he could, waiting for him to retreat to the storeroom, only to be annoyed and disappointed when he didn’t.

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 one quickly.

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

And that they were handwritten while moose antlers were worn.

He pushed the books aside, pretending to wipe away some dust that had built up.

A silvery glint caught his eye.

Dan squinted. There was a locked compartment behind the shelf.

There was suddenly a loud crashing sound and Dan jumped, standing up abruptly.

Phil had dropped a chair and was smiling sheepishly. “Sorry, everything’s fine, just dropped this thing.”

Amidst Dan’s snooping, Phil had neatly stacked all the chairs and pushed them up against the wall. It looked like he was getting the floor ready for vacuuming and mopping. Dan couldn’t help but note that Phil had left two of the stools by the bar counter as they were.

Dan pushed the books back into place and went back to helping Phil.

It had taken perhaps an hour and the Amazing Phil cafe looked odd with its chairs pushed aside, but very clean.

Dan stretched his arms behind his back. “Well that’s my exercise for the year.”

“Running this place has definitely improved my cardio,” said Phil with a nod.

“So do you go home at this point?” asked Dan.

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,

“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.

Their food had arrived.

Phil hadn't noticed that the bike was now gone.

The police constables pushed the Honda CBF motorcycle towards PJ, who was already wearing his latex gloves and goggles.

PJ was going to find every possible scrap of evidence left on the bike.

Phil had ordered too much food.

Dan had initially scoffed, stating that there was *no such thing as ordering too much food* , but was now very much regretting that statement with a groan.

Dan held his full stomach and moaned miserably. "Regret. Everything feels of regret."

Phil was looking at his plastic spoon as though it had betrayed him. "This was a mistake."

The two grown men quietly wallowed in abject misery longer than either of them wished to admit.

It was Phil who eventually spoke. "We should think happy thoughts."

“There are no happy thoughts,” said Dan grimly. “Only regret. And nothingness. And then more regret.”

“You mentioned Mario Kart.”

“Now that’s a non-sequitur.”

“I have my Nintendo Switch.”

Dan paused, suddenly interested. “Go on.”

“Playing Mario Kart will be like we’ve exercised the food off.”

It was ridiculous. “Let’s do it.”

It was a week later and Dan had beaten Phil for the fourth time that night. They had gotten into the habit of playing Mario Kart every night, right after the cafe closed.

Phil was in the process of chewing his Nintendo Switch controller when he said, “This wouldn’t happen if this was on Nintendo 64. I was the King of Mario Kart back then.”

Dan pried the controller from out of Phil’s mouth before he could do any serious damage. “I’ll have you know that I also would have beaten you on the Nintendo 64, because I was *also* the King of Mario Kart.”

“Please, are you even old enough to know what Nintendo 64 is?”

“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, *bro*. 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.

What Dan needed to know was what Phil was hiding in the compartment underneath the cash register.

“Seriously Phil, get accounting software,” said Dan abruptly.

Phil pulled off his moose hat and stowed it away. “Nope, it’s tradition.”

Dan had recalled Phil had said that before, back when he hadn’t had enough caffeine to question it. “How is that tradition?”

“It’s how it was done before I ran the cafe.” Phil was oddly still for a second. He shrugged quickly, distractedly wiping down the counter down clean. “Anyway, I don’t mind it.”

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.”

Phil fell quiet and Dan suddenly wondered if he had said something wrong.

Phil tossed the cloth he had been using clean aside, completely missing the sink.

“If you beat me in the next Mario Kart match, I’ll get accounting software. Best out of three.”

Dan’s shoulders sagged with relief. “You’re on.”

Dan won all three rounds all too easily, when Phil got a slight mad glint in his eyes again.

Dan could feel the word ‘no’ crawling out of his throat just as Phil shouted,

“All or nothing!”

The following morning, Louise handed Dan his coffee without saying “Phil says hi.”

Dan stared up at Louise expectantly, when the senior detective shrugged.

“Phil wasn’t at the cafe this morning,” she said. “Marzia made these.”

Dan took hold of his coffee and took a tentative sip.

Marzia made good coffee, but it wasn’t quite same.

“Did Phil mention anything to you?”

Dan shook his head. “No, though he might be at the bank depositing excess cash in the till.”

Louise shrugged again and sat back at her desk.

Dan would later receive a text before he finished work from Phil that would read,

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?”

“An Amazing Phil coffee but not made by anyone named Phil,” repeated Dan. “Ma’am, may I be excused?”

“PJ!”

“Dan?” PJ lowered the small blood-stained kitchen knife he had been holding, a murder weapon from a different case. He placed it down on the stainless steel work table. “Did you just run here?”

“Amazing Phil’s!” Dan shouted, making a few other forensic lab technicians turn. “Who else worked at Amazing Phil’s? They weren’t called Phil, were they?”

PJ blinked, confused. “Well, no. Phil only started running it a few months ago. Before Phil, it was run by someone else.” He paused, frowning until he could recall the name. He snapped his fingers. “James! James used to run the cafe.” He tilted his head at the detective. “Why do you...” His question trailed off as Dan ran out of the lab.

“James Jenkins ran the Amazing Phil cafe before Phil did,” Dan blurted out to Louise who up until Dan’s outburst, had been on pinterest looking up unicorn hair.

Louise lowered her phone. “Come again, chummy?”

“I just got off the phone with James’ mother who is, by the way, insanely wealthy and had no idea her son was working at a cafe until they found his body in an alley near the cafe.” Dan pulled a chair up next to Louise. “What was his employee record like at Smith & Sons?”

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.”

Louise and Dan turned to the police constable who had just rushed over to their desks.

“What’s happened?”

“Panic alarm has been activated at Tesco,” replied the constable.

Louise sighed but stood up. “Probably some kid who pressed it out of curiosity.”

“I definitely never did that,” said Dan, a little too quickly and much too defensively.

Louise stared back at him oddly. “I didn’t say you did.”

Dan winced. “Let’s just go.”

It turned out that a kid had pressed it out of curiosity and was getting the biggest dressing down of his entire life from the terrifying Senior Detective Sergeant Pentland. Dan could only wince in sympathy.

It was just after 7 p.m. when Dan was finally able to knock off work and get dinner. Fish and chips in hand, he found himself walking back to his car and about to head over to the cafe for Mario Kart with Phil when -

He paused, his hand hovering over the door handle to the driver’s seat.

He shook his head, jumped in his car and drove back to his house.

The following morning, Dan accompanied Louise to the Amazing Phil cafe.

Phil, was still not at the cafe.

Dan and Louise flashed each other worried looks when -

“Before you say anything,” shouted Phil from the storeroom, “I think you should know that I fell down a flight of stairs.”

The detectives were both startled into silence, before they abruptly spoke over each other.

“What happened?” asked Louise.

“Are you okay?” asked Dan.

Phil finally entered the main cafe, back first, pulling a flat bed trolley full of coffee beans to 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 parallel 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.

Dan flashed Louise a look for confirmation, who gave a single nod in response. She had thought the same.

“Is there anything we can do?” asked Louise. “Like... I could arrest the staircase?”

Phil laughed and finally turned around. “And I guess Dan could sue the staircase?”

Dan and Louise didn’t laugh.

Dan wasn’t entirely sure he was breathing.

Phil’s left eye had been bruised and almost swollen shut. His glasses were being held together by duct tape. His neck was a terrible purple mess of bruises. There was a graze on his left cheek and his bottom left lip had split open.

It was all too similar to the dead ex Smith and Son employees and the mere thought made Dan’s blood boil.

“What happened?” he asked softly.

Phil gave a casual smile, as though his face wasn’t horribly bruised. “I fell down a flight of stairs which, by the way, I one hundred percent do not recommend. I plan to give that staircase a terrible yelp review later.”

Dan fixed him a look. “What *actually* happened?”

Sensing that this was perhaps not the best time to joke, Phil’s expression faded into something carefully neutral. “I’m alright,” he replied gently in lieu of a proper answer.

“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?”

Marzia paused, her lips pursed into a worried pout. “I don’t know, I asked him the same question.”

“What did he say?”

Marzia shrugged. “He said he preferred to be here. He doesn’t really want to talk about the, you know,” she gestured to her own eye and the detectives instantly knew what she meant.

It was an interesting choice of words, that he ‘preferred to be here.’ Dan frowned. *Is he hiding here?*

“I haven’t seen your coroner friend in awhile,” said Marzia, abruptly snapping Dan out of his thoughts.

Louise cast her a sly smile. “Felix doesn’t like coffee.”

Marzia seemed to pause contemplatively, before giving Louise a tiny hopeful smile. “Could you tell him I said hi?”

Louise’s smile turned into a full blown grin. “Of course.”

Dan, slack-jawed, waited for Marzia to be well out of earshot before letting out an incredulous, “What the fuck?”

Louise shrugged. “I told you, chummy. Love at first sight.”

Dan immediately groaned, lifting the coffee to his lips, unable to shake the feeling that Louise was perhaps right about these sorts of things.

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.

The door didn't budge.

Dan frowned. That hadn't happened to him before.

He pushed at the door again, a little more forcefully this time.

It still didn't move, but the noise seemed to startle Phil, who had looked up.

A panic-stricken look flashed across Phil's features for all of a millisecond and he shoved the brown package underneath the counter, before heading to the front door. He opened it slightly, just enough to fit his head through the open gap. "Hi Dan."

Dan officially needed to know what was in that brown package. "Hi Phil."

Phil ruffled his own fringe and re-adjusted his glasses and Dan was suddenly reminded that Phil had done the same thing when he was being scrutinised at Thierry's.

He's nervous, Dan realised.

Now he *really* needed to know what was in that package.

"I just wanted to apologise," said Dan.

Phil frowned, apparently not expecting that. "For what?"

"For this morning," replied Dan. "I think I freaked out when I saw you..." he trailed off, gesturing vaguely to Phil's bruised face. It looked even worse up close and Dan found

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.

“Why can’t I say no to you?” Phil’s voice ran out in Louise’s headset.

The senior detective suppressed a squeal.

Dan, true to his word, cleaned up the cafe, neatly pushing the tables to one side and stacking the chairs so he could do a proper vacuum. Phil, meanwhile, donned his moose antlers and did his accounts in one of the many notebooks Dan frequently saw him writing in.

Dan, wiping down the counter, edged closer to where he had seen Phil shove the brown package into. He could see it peeking from out the shelf, though Phil surreptitiously pushed the package out of sight when Dan got too near.

“No point wiping down this counter yet,” said Phil. “We’re gonna eat soon anyway.”

Eventually the pair did begin eating in a comfortable silence.

Every so often, Phil would reach up and rub his left temple, just a few millimetres from his black eye, and wince, before resuming eating.

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?”

“Because you obviously have a headache,” answered Dan.

Phil snorted. “Am I that obvious?”

“Sometimes.”

“There’s ice in the freezer.”

Dan quickly made a makeshift ice pack and moved to press it to Phil’s eye. He paused a few centimetres away. “Take off your glasses, move your fringe and hop onto the counter.”

Phil didn’t move an inch. “Well aren’t you demanding.” He had a lopsided smile that distracted Dan for a moment.

“Come on, this’ll help.”

Phil gave Dan a long deliberating look and Dan merely stared back, unsure why Phil was so reluctant to do so.

Phil sighed, hopping onto the counter and pulling off his broken glasses and running his fingers through his fringe until it was away from his forehead in a slight quiff.

Phil’s eyes were cast downwards, which was good for Dan, because Dan suddenly couldn’t stop *staring* .

Phil’s eyes looked larger and somehow bluer without the glasses. The quiffed fringe somehow brought his cheekbones out. His lips, although battered, were noticeably turned up at one corner, as though smirking.

Dan had conceded months ago that Phil looked *good* , 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. *Still on the job, you idiot.* "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.

“Hiding in the one little honest patch he has in an otherwise bigger story.”

Dan took a gamble. “I was going to buy Einstein’s.”

It was true, at least. Phil didn’t need to know that he done it as an undercover cop.

Dan deliberately avoided Phil’s gaze until he felt Phil drag his hand down, taking the ice pack away from his face when doing so.

When Dan turned to look at him questioningly, he wasn’t sure what he would see.

If Phil really was trafficking drugs, he would have expected he would look a little bit pleased at having a new ‘customer.’

But Phil looked utterly *devastated*. His voice was small, his eyes wet. “Dan?”

Dan blinked, surprised. “What?”

Phil seemed to shrink down, somehow looking tiny despite his actual height. His shoulders shook. He pressed the heel of his palm to his good eye. Dan could hear Phil take a shuddering breath in.

“Phil,” he tried plaintively, but Phil hopped off the counter and began to pace. “Phil,” he tried again.

He was being ignored.

Phil eventually stopped pacing, his back turned to Dan. It felt like an eternity before Phil spoke again.

“Not you, Dan,” he said brokenly. “Not you too.”

Dan was at loss. “What do you mean?”

Phil abruptly whipped around, crossing the room in several quick paces until he was inches away from Dan’s face. “I can help you.”

“What?”

“I can help you get better.” Phil’s eyes were hard, despite the wetness that had begun to gather in the corners. “Do you want to get better?”

Dan’s brain couldn’t keep up. “What?” he bleated again.

“I know a good rehabilitation centre.”

“Rehabilitation centre?” Dan repeated weakly.

“They can help you.” Phil looked searchingly into Dan’s eyes. “I promise they will. Just...” His confidence faded away and Phil looked small again. “Just please don’t take Einstein’s. I couldn’t bear it if...”

Dan finished his sentence for him. “If I overdosed.”

Phil flinched like he had been struck. “Yeah. I... I can’t do it again.”

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

he overdosed. And I - his wake was at his apartment and his mum wanted help sorting his personal things and I found them.”

Dan frowned. “What?”

“Scales.”

“ *Scales?* ”

Phil nodded. “A whole bunch of different kitchen scales. He had bought them before he,” his voice drifted, “You know.”

Dan's mind was reeling. “I don't understand. Was he dealing? Was he weighing the drugs on the scales?”

Phil shook his head sadly. “No. He was weighing the coffee beans.”

Dan looked back down at the record book nearly forgotten in his hands, his eyes on the record Phil had pointed at. “This order is 50 grams short,” he said incredulously.

Phil nodded, before flipping a few pages ahead and stopping at another seemingly innocuous record. “So was this one.” He flipped a few more pages ahead again. “And this one.” Flipped ahead. “And this one. And this one.”

Dan couldn't believe it. “It happens every four weeks.”

“Same supplier, same time. Now, look at this.” Phil handed Dan the blue notebook that had been locked away. “This was Jimmy's notebook.”

Dan quickly scanned through it. It wasn't Phil's handwriting and the dates were dated back from before Phil had bought the cafe.

But the pattern was the same.

Phil had just blown his case wide open and the words flew out of his mouth before he could even think. "Phil, *you're a genius.*"

Phil could only blink at his outburst. "I haven't even met this supplier though, they always send a courier to do the deliveries."

"You're still a fucking genius." Dan excitedly flicked through the notebooks, before looking back up at Phil. "Where are your other notebooks? We need to get these back to the precinct and get this..." He scanned the notebook again looking for the supplier's name. "*Ahoy Shipping* company before they do anymore damage."

Phil tilted his head. "Precinct?"

Fuck.

"The police, I meant." He grabbed onto both the notebooks. "Come on, let's go now."

"Wait, I don't even have my glasses on." Phil backtracked back to the counter, semi-blindly reaching for the counter. "And those are the only notebooks I have here. I've sent the rest to my brother's parcel locker."

Dan paused, his back turned to the front door. "Why would you do that?"

Phil pulled his glasses back on. His jaw dropped.

“Because Phil here,” an unfamiliar voice suddenly spoke, “Worked out who I am.”

Dan felt a metallic jab between his shoulder blades. Someone was holding a gun to his back.

Phil’s eyes widened, his hands raised up. “Haughey, he doesn’t know anyt-”

There was a hard hit to the back of Dan’s head and then black.

“ Because Lester here, worked out who I am .”

Louise pressed her finger to her ear piece. She knew that voice.

“ Haughey, he doesn’t know anything!” Phil’s voice came in loud and clear, shrill and panicked.

There was a loud thud.

Dan wasn’t speaking.

“Shit.” Louise scrambled into the driver’s seat. She needed to get to the cafe.

“ Oh my god, Dan?” Phil’s voice was on the verge of hysteria. *“ Dan ?”*

“ Come on, Phil, I need you to come with me .”

“ Oh thank god, he’s still breathing. ” Phil and Louise breathed in a collective sigh of relief.
“ Let me just call him an ambulance. ”

“ Phil, ” Haughey started warningly. *“ Don’t you dare reach for your phone. ”*

“ Please, ” begged Phil. *“ I’ll do whatever you want, just - ”*

Louise turned a corner just a gunshot rang out, the sound jolting her into running over the curb slightly.

Her heart pounded.

“ I said, ” Haughey’s voice cruelly bit out, *“ You’re coming with me. ”*

The cafe was only two blocks away.

“ Alright , ” replied Phil shakily. *“ Where are we going ?”*

Dan held an ice pack to his throbbing head. “And that’s all you heard?”

Dan had only woken up ten minutes earlier with a throbbing headache and Louise half carrying him into the van. She was bringing him up to speed on what he missed.

Louise turned sharply, the van making a loud screeching sound as she did so. “Sorry chummy, I drove as fast as I could, but they were both gone. Haughey didn’t say where they

were going. All constables out on patrol are on the lookout for him.”

Dan groaned. “Christ and he took both the notebooks as well.”

“Did you see an address for Ahoy Shipping?”

“No, it wasn’t in Phil’s notes.” Dan wracked his rattled brain for something, anything that could help them. The thought of Phil being trapped with a drug dealer, turned probable murderer made his stomach turn.

“I should’ve noticed,” Louise said abruptly, her eyes focused on the road. “Alexander-fucking-Haughey wore a fucking ring, just like the assailant who attacked Adrian Hall and James Jenkins. It’s how they ended up with cuts on the their faces.”

“He must have gotten to Phil before,” Dan realised. “Same injuries.” He suddenly snapped his fingers. “Phil mentioned he had a brother!”

“I already thought of that,” said Louise, parking the van at the precinct. “Phil didn’t mention a name or a way to even contact him.”

They both simultaneously stepped out of the van, hurriedly making their way to their desks.

They had pulled out enormous maps of the area and started making markings, creating a radius for how far Haughey could have possibly travelled.

PJ, Felix and Commissioner Wojcicki had also gathered around to give their feedback.

Collectively, they had gotten nowhere.

“Shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit, shitshitshitshitshit,” 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.”

Dan flashed Louise a confused look, who merely looked back and mouthed *I'll explain later* before looking back to the Earl.

“What are you doing here?” Louise asked again.

The man handed Louise the large postal satchel. Louise quickly rummaged through it and pulled out several notebooks.

Dan recognised them instantly.

“My brother sent me these,” Martyn explained.

Dan grabbed the top notebook from Louise’s hands, flicking through the pages until he found exactly what he was looking for.

Ahoy Shipping’s address. A warehouse about fifteen minutes away.

Martyn pursed his lips. “He’s in trouble, isn’t he?”

Dan yanked on his bulletproof vest, already making a move.

“Not if I can help it.”

For the first time in Dan’s entire career, he requests for armed backup.

“ It’s for Phil’s sake, ” Dan had said when Louise had given him a shocked look. *“ It’ll be quicker to search the warehouse this way. ”*

Louise had merely nodded in response. *“ Good call, detective. ”*

The police force stormed the warehouse with carefully practiced ease, arresting several people who had been opening familiar looking coffee bean bags and removing the Einsteins from inside. They had to have found at least six kilograms worth of Einsteins, with a market value of six hundred thousand British pounds, in just the first room they had stormed.

“This’ll be good press for the precinct,” muttered Louise.

Dan couldn’t have given a rat’s ass about the precinct at this point. “Where the fuck is Phil?”

He saw a door shut from out the corner of his eye. His eyes travelled upwards.

A small office on the mezzanine floor.

He ran for it.

Halfway up the mezzanine stairs, shots began to fire. Dan instinctively ducked and the police officers on the main floor instantly scattered for cover.

Dan glanced up. The glass from the windows and door had been shot through. He stayed low, crawling up the stairs one by one until he had reached the small office. He pressed his back against the wall, trying not to make a sound as he stepped through the broken glass.

Crap , thought Dan. His cover was less than ideal. Between Haughey and Dan was what was left of an office wall and the moment Dan stood up from his crouched position, Haughey could almost too easily shoot him. He calculated the risks in his head.

I might survive. I have the bulletproof vest.

He winced.

Unless he shoots me in the head. That'd be bad.

Dan chewed the inside of his cheek.

He'd have to run out of ammo eventually .

"I swear to fucking god, Phil," Haughey's voice rang out angrily from inside the office, "I will slit your throat if you so much as move!"

But he has a knife. Great. Just great.

The gunshots from Haughey had ceased, which didn't necessarily mean that he had run out of ammo.

"There's police absolutely *everywhere* , Alexander." It was Phil's voice. Dan suppressed an audible sigh of relief. "I think you should turn yourself in."

Haughey scoffed. "Look, that's not going to work on me."

Phil sounded confused. "What do you mean?"

"I know you somehow persuaded James to turn your old CFO predecessor in. It won't work on me."

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.

He was gone.

The following day, the press had had an utter field day at the precinct.

Dan, for the most part, tried to lay low. As big of a drug bust yesterday had been, he was still a detective and he still had multiple cases keeping him occupied.

The media had also somehow gotten hold of an ‘unknown heroic civilian’ who was pivotal in the biggest drug seizure of the year.

He sent Phil the twenty-fourth text he had sent in the last twelve hours.

Seriously, we need to talk. Can we, please?

He hadn’t received a response to a single message.

A visit to the Amazing Phil café quickly explained why this had been the case.

“He’s not working here anymore,” said Marzia from behind the café counter. She handed Dan an ancient looking brick of a mobile phone. Dan recognised it was Phil’s burner phone instantly. “He even left this behind,” she added.

Dan was speechless. Louise kindly spoke for him.

“Did he say where he was going?”

Marzia shrugged. “‘Back to reality’, whatever that means.”

Dan spent the next week attempting to organise an appointment at Smith and Sons to see Phil at work.

All attempts, all thirty-two of them, had not worked. It seemed that things at Smith and Sons were under heavy scrutiny after news had gotten out that yet another Smith and Sons employee had been involved in drug trafficking.

Worse was that tabloid media was now implying that a police officer had instigated a relationship with the newly dubbed ‘unknown heroic civilian.’

Dan did not at all appreciate being ‘shipped’ with someone who no longer wished to speak to him.

It was Louise who managed to get Dan an appointment at Smith and Sons, a full two weeks after Phil had ‘disappeared.’

Fed up, lonely and miserable and knowing that Phil was merely a doorway away, Dan barged into the meeting room, first seeing the back of a person Phil was talking to. He couldn’t care less about them, immediately zooming his eyes onto Phil.

Phil, who stood up, his blue eyes wide and alarmed. Phil, who Dan almost couldn’t recognise without his thick framed glasses and fringe. The bruises and cuts from his face had faded, only leaving faint patches of yellow and purple. His quiffed hair made him look older, more refined somehow. His suit cut an impressive silhouette, a rich navy blue, tailored

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 *needed* 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 Commisioner.

"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.

Wojcicki cleared her throat. “Well, you see, if a certain Smith & Sons employee were to engage in... *relations* with a certain detective sergeant...”

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?”

“Yes.” Dan had honestly never seen Phil so red. “But if you’re after something platonic, than we can most definitely pretend this never happened.”

“Absolutely not, not after what we’ve been through.”

“Right. Good. Agreed.”

“I’m game if you are.”

Phil gave an odd blink that Dan immediately recognised as a failed attempt at winking. “I’ve always been an ‘all or nothing’ type of person anyway.

They both cracked a smile at each other and Dan had an odd feeling that everything was going to be alright.

“Look, I really have to go.”

The modestly sized office CFO Phil Smith Lester resided in had a strange amalgamation of colourful personal effects and house plants. Sat on his desk was a bright colourful mug and a matte black coffee mug. His moose antlers hung on a nearby coat rack. A parcel, poorly wrapped in brown paper, was tucked under Phil’s arm.

Stood in the doorway was the Worldwide Vice President of Smith & Sons, more commonly known as Martyn Smith Lester. He had spent two futile minutes 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 Martyn, his eyes hard. “What with the press shipping you with that detective.”

“It's not like they have proof.”

“Rumours can be just as damning.”

Phil 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 our new head of corporate affairs when you've dumped all this work on her at 4 p.m. on a Friday?”

Phil rolled his eyes. “Cornelia loves this sort of work.”

“Ah yes, but her husband, a.k.a, me, doesn't.”

“Come on Martyn, you know I have plans. And it's not like any new work can't wait until Monday.”

Martyn groaned. “You know, I think I almost preferred it when you looked after yourself a lot less.”

Phil snorted. “Really?”

“Nah.”

“I'm touched, but you're still in my way.”

“Yep.”

Phil half heartedly shoved Martyn out of the way, shouldering the door open and instantly running into -

“Dan! You’re already here!” Phil positively beamed.

Dan gave a big grin in response. “You said you had a surprise for me.”

Phil immediately handed Dan the poorly wrapped brown parcel he had been carrying. He had been planning this for months.

Dan tilted his head at it consideringly, before realisation dawned on him. “Wait a minute, I recognise this. I saw you hiding this back at the cafe!”

Phil gave an excited nod. “I was terrified that I might ruin the surprise. Go on, open it.”

Dan carefully began unwrapping it. “You know, I definitely thought you had drugs in here the first time around.”

Phil couldn’t help but laugh. “Really?”

“Oh yeah, you were crazy suspicious, it was kind of ridiculous.” The parcel was now partially unwrapped and Dan could now see that it was a Nintendo console of some kind. Particularly an older one.

A familiar one.

He ripped off the last bit of paper.

It was a Nintendo 64.

But not just any Nintendo 64. He opened the box, inspecting one of the controller's.

A black refurbished controller, with a little 'XD' face carved into it.

This was *his* Nintendo 64.

Dan was speechless, though the silence was easily interrupted by Phil's sheer excitement.

"I thought we could play Mario Kart and prove just who is the *real* King of Mario Kar-"

Phil's face was suddenly accosted by Dan's firm hand pulling his neck forward to give Phil one hell of a thank you kiss.

Phil eventually pulled away, breathless but pleasantly surprised. "Or we could make out a bunch, that would work out too."

"Oh no you don't," Dan started challengingly. "We're proving tonight who's the King of Mario Kart once and for all!"

It was three games later and Dan and Phil had settled comfortably on their couch, in their home and all was right in the world until Phil shouted

“All or nothing!”

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