

Day 49 — 11:59am

"This is bullshit," Jack said to Adam. The group of people sitting in the pew in front of them looked back, their faces twisted into something that gave only the faintest impression of the scowl effect that the group had appeared intent on.

Adam gave a polite smile and brought up his right hand in a kind of combination peace sign/wave motion, "Sorry."

The elder of the group muttered what sounded to Adam like, "Show some *respect*," and turned to face the priest at the altar.

Jack and Adam were sitting in an oak pew in the shelter church, which had received its name only recently—"Love of the Lord." Adam laughed aloud at the thought; the old woman in front of them looked back again, grunting.

"No, but, seriously. This is bullshit," Jack repeated in a whisper to Adam.

Adam ignored him, focusing instead on the priest, Father Calvin, up at the altar. Calvin was holding what appeared to be a fairly heavy, gold-colored metallic urn in his hands. Two of the altar boys carefully removed a white tablecloth, which had a cross with roses behind it stitching, from the altar and set it aside. The two boys, roughly ten or eleven years old, then grabbed hold of the two pegs sticking out of the altar and lifted the grey stone cover off of the altar.

"And now, we lay the ashes of Drew Roberts to rest, and offer his soul up to our lord and father," Father Calvin said, his voice boomed through the speakers placed in the corners of the hall.

Father Calvin removed the lid of the urn. And he slowly poured the ashes into the communal ash graveyard of the shelter. The fallen ashes joined the other six deceased whose guardians had no desire to keep products of the cremations for themselves.

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March 12th (Roughly Five and Half Months Earlier)

Adam was standing in his study, looking through the rows of one of the twelve large maple bookcases which lined his study. All but two of the shelves were filled with books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and office supplies. Eventually, in the bottom row of one of the shelves, he found what he was looking for. He moved a large stack of papers out of the way and set them on the ground, and then he fingered through the unused,

spiral-bound notebooks which filled the row. He chose a notebook with a navy blue cover, grabbed it from the shelf, and walked over to his desk. He grabbed one of the two cheap black pens which he always had at the head of his computer keyboard and opened the first page of the notebook. He stared at the blank page in front of him for a moment, and then put the pen to the first line of the page.

Rae,

Adam's felt his eyes glaze over as he stared at the page. He had the idea of writing the letter without possessing even an inkling of an idea as to what he was actually going to write. He assumed that, like most things he wrote, it would simply come to him when he started. Then again, he thought, he normally used his computer and when he wrote, he never had to write something... Well, *anything* like this.

He sighed and rested his head back on the worn back of the black suede office chair. Reaching his hand out, he pressed the Play button on his computer keyboard, and turned the volume knob on his speakers. He closed his eyes as the music flowed through his mind. He slowly rocked back and forth in the chair for the duration of the song and opened his eyes as the next song came on. He read the poster which was placed on the ceiling above his desk; he smiled as his eyes parsed the phrase at the bottom of it:
RELAX.

I'm going to go ahead and write you a letter. I apologize in advance, because you deserve so much better than this. You and I both know just how sentimental I'm... Well, *not*. And even more than that, you deserve to be spared this letter at all; you deserve to hear this from me, but... I can't. I've tried. I've tried more times than... Well, that doesn't matter now. When you read this, the truth is that I'll be gone. And I

Adam's eyes were blurry, and before he could stop it, a tear fell directly onto the spot where he was writing.

~~And~~

Yesterday, I vowed to myself that I was going to tell you everything. Everything I could, anyway. I woke up this morning—you had already left—and I made all the plans to throw the dinner for you that you and I ate... About three

hours ago, as I write this. You asked what the celebration was; what the roses were for, the candles, the 1964 Dom Perignon. I told you that I'd tell you soon enough—and I was planning to—but you said not to spoil it. You wanted to change.

I sat at my chair at the table arrangement that I had set-up for us. I tried to figure out what I was going to say, how I was going to say it, and then I just decided to, you know, *wing* it. I thought that the right words would come to me as soon as I saw you. So I paced back and forth through the dining room, waiting for you to emerge. And then you did. In a satin blue dress which...

I still remember the last time you wore that dress.

I remember that I had just finished up the last final exam, thus signaling the end of my junior year of college. And, to celebrate, some friends and I went to a bar to, big surprise, get drunk. By the third drink, my four housemates had all found companions. Feeling bored, but not ready to call it a night, I went and sat by a bar. I ended up talking to a girl that sat next to me. She was, if I remember, a waitress. At Hooters. She was very pretty and incredibly nice, if not lacking a bit in... Well. She was nice.

Somehow, I got talking about Mice and Men. Not even sure why anymore, but it came up. I went on a lengthy little discourse about something or other. After I was done, the girl said that she was so sad when the little boy's pet mouse was eaten by the neighbor's Golden Retriever. I was speechless. I don't even think I responded. She said she had to go to the bathroom, asked me if I'd "be a dear" and get her a drink for when she got back.

I was trying to flag down the bartender, when I heard a soft, sweet voice from my left say, and I remember it exactly, "You got a real *winner* there, buddy."

And I turned to see who it was. What I saw was a thin girl dressed, fairly elegantly for a bar, in a long, thin satin navy blue dress. The thin straps drew attention to her soft white shoulders. Her small hands took hold of a shot sitting in front of her

at the bar, and she drank it, and slammed it—softly, somehow—on the bar counter. I asked this girl, who didn't appear to have looked at me yet, "What?"

She turned her head to me, and smiled the kindest smile that I'd seen outside of a movie. Her eyes, which seemed almost an indigo color, looked straight into mine. "It's your own choice if you decide on breasts over brains tonight."

At that instant, I knew exactly what had to be done. "How about a drink?"

She smiled, but shook her head, "Nah."

"Oh..." Then, and I'm not even sure where it came from, "Well, I know this great place across the street. How about dinner?"

"I can't even begin to tell you how glad I am you didn't just walk away," she smiled again, and grabbed her purse from the bar counter.

"I'm Adam," I said.

"Rachel," you replied, "Good choice on ditching the bimbo."

I'm so sorry.

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Adam and Jack were just emerging from the line of people leaving the church after Drew Roberts' father had delivered his last words to his deceased son. "Come on, you know as well as I that this whole event is bull—ow, fucking Christ, what the hell?"

Adam elbowed Jack in the stomach as he noticed a short, brunette woman standing outside the front of the church. She was staring straight into the crowd of people who were emerging from the church. Adam walked up to her, and gave her a hug. "I'm so sorry about Drew, Mara," he said to her, "He was a good kid."

Adam looked at her, and noticed that her brown eyes had remained unmoved, showing no reaction whatever. He looked back, in an attempt to follow her gaze, but it appeared that she was just focused on the line of people still coming out of church, with no specific target. Adam looked over to Jack, who shrugged in response. When Adam looked back, he noticed that Mara's lips were moving, but if she was saying anything; he couldn't hear it over the commotion of the people leaving the church. He leaned in, Mara's whispered words barely reaching his ear.

After a few moments, Adam walked back to Jack, who said, simply, "That lady doesn't know what the fuck, man."

"I'm not so sure," Adam said, looking back at one of the men standing just outside the large, wooden double-doors of the church, which were currently propped open.

"She lost her kid, man. Blew his skull in. Right in the goddamn apartment," Jack said, then after a short pause, "How the hell he got a gun is anyone's guess, though."

"Yeah..."

"Your thought-in-progress demeanor is so very subtle."

Adam had finally figured out what Mara was looking at. It was the man on the stair's hat. The grey fedora. She had been staring at Kain. "Any idea what she said?"

"Oh, yeah, reading lips is one of those talents I picked up right before we all came here. Figured it'd come in handy when I came in contact with the masses of my would-be *mute* neighbors."

"You tried, but that really went nowhere," Adam said, laughing.

"Yeah. I figured she was just repeating *redrum, redrum* and waving her finger in the air," Jack said, complete with imitation, "Am I right or am I right?"

"Closer than you'd think," Adam said, looking back at the church one more— Kain's eyes met his and he turned around. "She said the kid was murdered."

"Huh."