**Trust Me**

**by** mystrangedarkson

**Summary**

Virgil is running from his past, he is gay, he has a serial killer to catch, and he’s new in town.

(Formerly Fun and Games)

**Notes**

Hello again! A lovely anon on tumblr gave me a prompt that quickly grew beyond what they asked for and into this. I hope you guys enjoy it, and as always, every click, kudos, and comment means the world to me! <3

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Virgil took a deep breath as he walked up to San Francisco PD's Richmond Station. The single story brick building was certainly a huge change of pace from the fortress in Quantico he knew so well, and that's exactly how he wanted it. Shrugging off the ghosts whispering in the back of his mind, he opened the doors and walked into to what would be the greatest adventure of his life. He didn't know that then, of course; all he knew was that this was the fresh start he needed so desperately.

"Virgil Mason, as I live and breathe! Is it really you?"

"Humbert? What are you doing out here? Last I heard, you were Sheriff of a tiny town in Maine." Virgil was shocked to see Graham Humbert, a former classmate from the FBI Academy, as he entered the building.

"Yeah, Storybrooke. Well, a couple of years back, I got mixed up in a bad relationship out there, so I had to get out. An old friend of mine is a writer out here, and he offered to let me crash in his spare bedroom until I got on my feet. We're getting married later this year."

"Congrats, man. And for the record, I always suspected you were gay," Virgil joked.

"Takes one to know one, eh? But I'm bi, actually. What brings you all the way across the country? You were on the fast track to being the star of the BAU back in the Academy."

"Did that for a while; needed a change of pace. San Francisco seemed like a good a place as any. Anyway, where can I find Captain Sanders? He said he wanted to talk to me about something when I got here."

"Oohhh, you're the specialist he's been talking about? We're all losing our minds about this case; we sure as hell need you. I'll let Sanders fill you in, though. His office is through the door at the back of the bullpen, which is down that hallway."

"Thanks, Humbert. Glad to see a friendly face out here. See you around?"

"Of course. And hey, let's get a drink sometime? I'd love for you to meet August."

"Sure," Virgil mumbled, fully aware he'd decline if Graham invited him out, and went to meet his new captain.

Virgil knocked hesitantly on the door.

"Come in," Captain Sanders called.

"Hello Captain. You wanted to see me?"

"Detective Sanders! Good to see you. Please sit, I've got something big for you." Virgil swallowed the knot of anxiety that welled up in his throat and sat down, expecting the worst. "I've heard that you were one of Quantico's best when it comes to serial killers. Is that true?"

"Oh, um, I guess so. That's what people told me, at least. I figure I was just doing my job."
"And humble to boot. Well, your numbers speak for themselves. I'm familiar with what happened out there; are you still up for a big case, should the opportunity arise?"

"Yes, sir. I couldn't keep doing it with the BAU, and it's clear you know why, but it is still what I love to do and what I'm best at. Although, I can't imagine there are many serial killers out here, and as I recall, my position here doesn't involve flying around the country hunting them down."

"I'm glad to hear that, and you're correct that you'll be staying local, but I think there's something big happening. Take a look at this." Sanders handed Virgil a folder, and his heart dropped when he saw what was in it. "Now you see why I wanted you out here as soon as you possibly could. I need you to help me stop this before it blows up. We can't let this become another Zodiac fiasco."

"Of course, sir. What do we know so far? I'd like to hear it from you before diving into the reports from the scene and autopsy."

"Of course. We don't know much more than what is in the file, really. Last week, a body was found in Golden Gate park, right under our noses. His name was Orin Scrivello, a first-year student at UCSF's dentistry program."

"How do we know it isn't hazing gone wrong, a random act of violence, suicide, domestic violence, or any of a hundred other reasons why people kill other people? Especially if there's only one vic so far."

"Cause of death was blood loss and clear evidence of torture, but you'd need to talk to the coroner for more details on the timeline and what happened to him."

"Yikes. Why do you think it's potentially serial, though? What was weird, what was wrong?"

"In his mouth was a piece of paper with the word 'abuser' in black ink and an image of a red puzzle piece."

"Has anyone looked into his history, to see if he was an abuser?"

"Yes. His girlfriend, Audrey Greene, told us he beat her regularly."

"Did she report it? I'm not questioning her honesty, but the killer knew about this somehow."

"No, she didn't report anything until we told her he was dead."

"Interesting. Okay. You said he was found in Golden Gate park- any details, potential habits or other signatures there?"

"The body was left where they knew it would be found quickly."

"Hmm. So almost certainly no revisiting the dump site, meaning they were done with him once he was dead, and want us to know what they're doing. Which makes sense with telling us why they chose him. It's a game to them. Probably him, but it's too early to really say. I'd like to go talk to the medical examiner to get more details from them, if you could point me their way."

"Dr. Vincent Nigel-Murray, he/him pronouns. A bit… eccentric, but absolutely brilliant."

"Eccentric how?"

"I'm sure I couldn't do him justice. But before you go, I wanted to talk to you about something else. Your partner."
"With all due respect, Captain, I won't be working with a partner. I can't put anyone else in danger because of me, and I don't need one. You said yourself that my numbers speak for themselves; please trust me with this."

"Detective, I understand your hesitance, but another set of eyes can never hurt."

"I disagree. 'Another set of eyes' died because I was stupid and reckless. I learned a lot that day, and that lesson came at the price of my partner and best friend's life. Whoever killed Orin Scrivello is intelligent and ruthless, and coming after him will put a huge target on my back. I can't put that target on someone else's too."

"Okay, Mason. I'll let you try this solo. But the second you get in too deep, I'm assigning you a partner, and I will be keeping close tabs on your progress."

"I understand. Thank you, Captain. Is there anything else you wanted to discuss?"

"I don't think so. Welcome to San Francisco, Virgil Mason."

"Thank you, Captain. I'll get this guy before you know it. I know this type, and he's gonna get sloppy before too long, trying to prove how much smarter than us he is."

"I hope so, for all our sakes. You should get going; I imagine there's a lot you're going to want to talk to Dr Nigel-Murray about."

"There definitely is. I'll keep you updated with my progress as it happens."

"Fantastic!" Virgil nodded out of respect before he stood up and left, closing the door behind him with a small smile. Welcome to San Francisco indeed. This is going to be fun.
"Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Logan! Happy birthday to you!" Patton sang, handing their brother a neatly-wrapped package.

"It is your birthday as well, Patton."

"Well, yeah, but we said we weren't going to do anything for each other this year because of everything that's going on, and I couldn't help myself. So today is just for you!"

"It is quite fitting that you mention that agreement, because I, too, broke it and got something for you."

"Oh my goodness, Lo, you're so sweet! Open your present first, though!"

"If you insist." Logan unwrapped the present to find a beautiful leather-bound notebook. "Patton... this is incredible. You shouldn't have."

"Of course I should have. 'The only difference between screwing around and science is writing it down', after all, and your experiments are so important. They deserve to be cataloged in a notebook as beautiful as they are."

"They are our experiments, Pat; you are as integral to their function and success as I am. Would you like to see your present?"

"You are the best brother anyone could ask for. I'd love to see what you got me!"

"Follow me, then." Logan took their hand and led them to the living room, where his laptop was showing a video feed of a dimly-lit room that was empty save for a man tied to a chair.

"Lo, is that...?" Patton asked, voice picking up with excitement.

"Happy birthday, brother dearest." Logan pressed a kiss to the top of Patton's head.

"Who is he?"
"His name is Kyle Ren. Twenty-three year old investment banker- a trust fund baby," Logan spat.

"What kind of devil is he?"

"Neo-nazi. Even has fucking swastika and Confederate flag tattoos."

"Logan, I don't know what to say. This is the best birthday ever! Tell me everything about getting him; your way is so much more interesting than mine."

"Falsehood. Simple stalking and abduction is uninspiring. Your… oh, what is the colloquial? Catfishing?" Logan looked to Patton for confirmation before continuing. "It is enthralling. I am singularly brilliant by almost any standard; emotional intelligence being the sole exception. You, my brother, are more emotionally intelligent than any of the imbeciles out there. With a few messages, you have these monsters at your beck and call. I had to start keeping tabs on Kyle as soon as we dumped the last one two weeks ago in order to be able to get him to you in time. While the chase is… exhilarating, it does not even begin to compare to the artistry you possess."

"Logan, you're the sweetest, and I know how hard opening up like that is for you. You did all of this," Patton added, gesturing to the computer, "to make me happy. That's proof that you aren't nearly as emotionally unintelligent as you think you are. If you'd like, I think you could learn a lot from observing my time with Kyle."

"That would be ideal. You have not interacted with him before, so everything would be fresh, pure, perfect. I would very much enjoy watching you work."

"Yay! When can we go?"

"He has been there for three days now. He could sit for a few more days without dying before we are able to teach him, but…"

"Three days is perfect. Like Christ returning to cleanse him of his sins."

"With you as my avenging angel. My thoughts exactly. Get your things; we will leave as soon as you're ready, and I will tell you everything I know about him on the way."

"I won't be a minute!" Patton practically skipped to their room to get their knives and a second set of the clothes they were wearing.

Logan silently turned on the lights and retreated to a far corner of the warehouse as Patton walked up to the man in the chair with a smile. Logan was fully aware that, until they relinquished it, this was Patton's domain. He knew he'd get his turn, but for now he was nothing more than a silent observer.

"Hey kiddo! What's your name?" Patton asked sweetly after making sure that the camera's lighting and focus were good to go, and that it was recording.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"Now now, where are your manners? I'm Patton, and that over there watching us is Logan. I'll ask again- what's your name?"

"What are you, some sort of homos? Your boyfriend's gonna get off on whatever you're about to do to me, you sick fucks?"
“Oh no, my brother won't be doing anything. This is between you and me. I asked you a question, and you will answer me,” Patton demanded, all warmth and cheer gone. “What. Is. Your. Name?”

“I'm not telling you shit, faggot.”

“Wrong answer.” A cold smile spread across Patton's face as they opened up the roll bag they were carrying, revealing fourteen wickedly sharp knives. They gleamed in the harsh fluorescent lights. “Do I need to ask again?”

“You won't do shit to me. People are already looking for me, and once they find me, I'll have your asses locked up for the rest of your miserable lives.”

“Oh my, what confidence. One of many, many things you're wrong about, kiddo. According to my brother, you're known for going on two, sometimes three, week benders with no warning, and no one can get a hold of you. A few days ago, your friends were wondering how long it would be until your next one. No one cares that you're gone. No one is coming for you. You. Are. Alone. You live and die at my mercy and mine alone. Now, I will ask one final time. What is your name?”


“Now, that wasn't so hard, was it?”

“N- no, sir.” A moment of silence passed before the air was filled with a resounding smack.

“You will not refer to me as 'sir' or by any other masculine terms. Understood?” Kyle looked up at them, a bruise already forming under his eye.

“Why am I not surprised that you're a tranny,” he muttered, finding confidence in his taunt.

“EXCUSE YOU?” Logan yelled. Patton turned to him, and he blanched.

“This is my turn, and you promised you'd be quiet. You promised me, Lo.” Patton pleaded, voice full of pain, like they were about to cry. "Are you going to be like them, or can I trust you to keep your word? All we have is each other, and if I can't trust you, we can't do this.”

“I will, Patton, I swear. My deepest apologies for the outburst; I am sure you can understand why I reacted so strongly. That being said, you are more than capable of taking care of yourself these days, and this is, as they say 'not my lane’."  

“Well done with the vocabulary, I can tell you're studying. Now, please, stay quiet so I can keep working, okay?” Logan simply nodded, and Patton turned back around. "I'm sorry about the interruption, Kyle. It won't happen again. Now, where were we? Oh, that's right. You were being incredibly rude, and that's not okay.”

"The fuck do you want from me? Money?”

"I want you to learn your lesson. The irony is, thinking you're so superior is what makes you so disgustingly inferior. You need to be punished for what you've done.”

"I haven't done shit!”

"Tsk tsk. At least the other one was honest with me.” Patton walked up to Kyle and knelt down to his eye level, making a show of picking up one of their knives. "I've heard you have some things under that shirt that make my point pretty clear." They sliced his shirt open, revealing the tattoos Logan had mentioned, one on each admittedly impressive pec.
"Oh, I get it now. You're a liberal sjw cuck who can't handle the fact that I'm right."

"Kiddo, you're going to regret every single word you've said since I walked through that door. I'm done playing games; it's time you learn your lesson. When I'm done with you, you'll still be alive, but all that will be left is the miserable, lonely son of a bitch we both know you are behind all the bigotry and bravado. Then, once you're behaving well for us, Logan has some experiments to run. Now, let's start by removing those tattoos, shall we?"

With a wicked smile, Patton Hart began the reeducation of Kyle Ren.

Chapter End Notes

Logan and Patton Hart are twins. It's their birthday. Logan got Patton a "present", a victim by the name of Kyle Ren who is a neo-nazi. Logan admits to having poor emotional intelligence, Patton offers to let him sit in on Patton torturing Kyle.

References are made to seeing themselves as having a near-heavenly purpose. Kyle says a lot of awful things, including transphobic ones (upon learning that Patton's pronouns are they/them). Patton exhibits extreme ability to control the emotion in his voice. Some tension arises when Logan, who was supposed to just observe, speaks up to defend Patton. Broken trust from an unknown "them" is implied, as is Logan being Patton's sole protector in the past. Patton responds with subtle emotional manipulation. Patton tells Kyle that he will psychologically break him, and then 'Logan has some experiments to run'.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Another body turns up. Virgil makes some friends?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: brief mentions of a dead body, wounds, and torture. Light swearing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Virgil rolled over and groggily grabbed his phone, cursing the day he made his ringtone "Na Na Na" by My Chemical Romance. It was a bop, but absolutely unholy at... oh god. It was 3:12 am and his phone was ringing. He cleared his throat before picking up.

"Hullo?" He winced and prayed it wasn't an important call he started on such an embarrassing note.

"Mason, it's Chief Sanders. I know it's early, but we have a body. I need you at 25th and Lincoln ASAP. I'll keep everyone away from the scene, keep it clean for you." Well fuck.

"Thank you, sir. I'll be there soon."

Fifteen minutes later, he arrived at the scene. It would have been ten, but, even at 3 in the morning, parking in San Francisco was a nightmare. When he arrived, he saw that Sanders had kept his word; the scene was taped off, but other than that it was completely undisturbed. Not for lack of trying by the local media- he had no idea how those leeches knew to be there. Officers were trying to keep them out of earshot, but one voice called out to him, and stopped him dead in his tracks.

"Detective! I know you can't ignore someone as fabulous as I am; what happened? Whose body is that?" Ignoring the anxiety attack he could feel trying to break through his well-built defenses, he strode over to the reporter.

"What's your name, and who are you with?" Virgil demanded.

"Roman Prince, SFGate, at your service!"

"Here's the thing, Roman Prince, SFGate. There is nothing 'fabulous' about standing over a dead man's body, desperate for a tidbit of information you can spin into some fairy tale to get a byline. At my service, eh? Then get away from my crime scene and stop hovering like the vulture you crime journalists are. And if a word of this gets out, I will personally see that you don't write another word in this city." With a glare at the crowd of reporters, he turned on his heel and went to examine the scene.
Virgil had seen more dead bodies than he cared to count, but he'd never seen anything like this. Turning on his phone's voice recorder and putting gloves on, he began taking notes.

"Victim appears to be male, mid twenties. Shallowly buried in leaves from the shoulders down, possibly mimicking the parental act of tucking a child in to bed, or possibly indicating remorse. Bruising and lacerations consistent with the victim being punched in the face repeatedly. Clearing the leaves away reveals the vic wearing slacks and a white t-shirt. No socks or shoes. The shirt is clean; however, there are clearly deep wounds underneath the shirt. I will not disturb the shirt on scene.

Ligature marks on his wrists and ankles, and wounds up and down his arms. If I didn't know and better, I'd say someone took a giant cheese grater to his left arm in particular. Consistent with the torture theory, and it seems that this victim endured even more than the last one. Opening his mouth, there's a piece of paper. Red puzzle piece and 'fascist' on it." Virgil paused the recording and swore under his breath. As he went to resume, a tech handed him a piece of plastic. "The victim had ID on him- name of Kyle Ren, twenty three. Otherwise empty pockets- the killer left us this. He wanted us to know who the victim was- confirming that this is primarily about the victim, not the crime itself. I will withhold any more speculation until I have more information. This concludes my on-site analysis."

Putting away his phone, he briefly discussed evidence collection logistics with the tech team before leaving the scene, planning to grab coffee on his way back to the station to review the file from the last body. His anxiety had other ideas, however. As soon as he got into his car, he started shaking and got lost in memories.

"Hello? I know you've got, like, that whole 'loner' vibe going on, but not only am I your partner, we both know that I am far too fabulous to ignore."

It was Virgil's first week at the BAU; the culmination of years of busting his ass to prove everyone wrong. It's just his luck that the man who sauntered into the office like he owned the place, wearing a leather jacket and aviators with a Starbucks tea in his hands, was his partner.

"The name's Remy, boo. Remy Wake." Taking a deep breath, Virgil turned around.

"Virgil Mason. Not your 'boo'."

"Oh my god. I did not come here to be attacked."

"Just to get on my nerves, then?"

"You are, like, literally the rudest. I cannot work like this."

"That makes two of us, babe." Virgil sneered.

"Mason! Wake! My office. NOW." Their supervisor, Aaron Hotchner, called from across the room. They shuffled in, embarrassed, and took a seat when Hotchner indicated for them to.

"You are both incredibly bright young men. I'm sure I don't need to recount why I called you in here. What I do need is for you to sort out your issues. I have never seen two agents more suited to be partners than you two. Wake, you have outstanding interpersonal skills, but your attention to detail and ability to read between the lines is less than ideal. Mason, you more than make up for your lack of people skills with an uncanny knack for seeing through lies and finding connections no one else sees. I firmly believe that the two of you can be the best pair of agents the BAU has ever seen, should you put in some work outside of your cases. Do you understand?" They both nodded, and he
dismissed them.

"Hey, uh, Remy, I'm sorry about my attitude earlier. I, uh, I'm kind of terrified, to be honest, and lashed out- no friends means no one to disappoint."

"I get that. I came at you with my armor up too, girl. Let's squish the beef and start over?"

"Sounds great, boo." With a wink and an eye roll, respectively, Virgil and Remy went to get coffee and better acquainted.

Virgil emerged from the memory still in his car. He checked his phone; it was 4:55. He'd been out of it for about 45 minutes. Swearing, he turned on the car and headed to the coffee shop near the precinct. He'd heard it was amazing, but the owner had been having some sort of family crisis, so it had been closed since a couple of weeks before Virgil arrived in the area. It opened back up the previous day, and it was all anyone at the station was talking about.

Miraculously, he found a spot right in front of We Hart Coffee.

"Good morning! Welcome in!" Virgil cringed at the too-peppy voice as he walked up to the counter to see that the source of the voice was an attractive man in his late twenties, by Virgil's estimation, with brown eyes and curly brown hair.

"Morning. Can I get a large Americano?"

"Sure thing! Wait, I think I know you. You moved into an apartment complex in the Outer Sunset about a month ago, right?" Virgil's senses went on high alert. He looked closely at the man, trying to place him and failing.

"More like three weeks, but yes. Have we met?"

"I thought so! I live next door to you! I'm so sorry I couldn't say a proper hello when you moved in; my mother died, so I went to be with my brother for a few weeks. My name is Patton, and I own this place!" Virgil relaxed, no longer concerned. Something about Patton made him feel safe, like he could trust him, a feeling he hadn't felt in a very long time.

"I'm so sorry for your loss, and glad you weren't alone to grieve. I'm Virgil. Nice to meet you." He stuck out his hand, which Patton excitedly shook.

"Oh my, I should start your drink. I get so excited about meeting new people, I completely spaced. I'm so sorry!"

"Hey, no worries. How much do I owe you?"

"Absolutely nothing. It's on the house- consider it a 'welcome to the complex' gift."

"You really don't have to."

"I want to. It's important that where you live feels like home, not just a place you sleep and keep your stuff."

"Okay, then. Thank you." Virgil acquiesced, putting a ten dollar bill in the tip jar when Patton turned around to make his drink.

"I hope this isn't too forward of me, but… I wrote my number on your cup. Maybe we could get
dinner or something sometime?"

"Oh, I, um, thanks. Maybe?"

"Oh no I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I don't even know if you are attracted to masculine folks at all! I'm so sorry, Virgil."

"No, no, it's not that. I'm definitely gay. I just… am awkward, and I've got a lot of stuff going on right now. But, uh, I really appreciate it, and I'll text you, if that's okay?"

"Whatever makes you comfortable. The last thing I want is for you to feel in any way pressured or obligated or anything."

"Thank you, Patton. I've gotta get going, but since we're neighbors, I guess I'll see you around?"

"For sure! Have an excellent day, Virgil!"

"You too." With that, Virgil headed out the door, added Patton's number to his phone, and left to meet with the coroner about the new body.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so much for reading! It really means the world to me <3
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Let's see what Roman has been up to!

Chapter Notes

Note 1: I know nothing about journalism at all whatsoever. My apologies to any journalists reading this lmao
Note 2: Powerless is not mine, it's patentpending's. It's my favorite fic of all time, and I did get permission before using it here. If you haven't read it, go do that ASAP. I cannot overstate how much I love it. I'll put it as a hyperlink on the name when it comes up.

Warning: homophobia

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Month Earlier, SFGate offices

Roman Prince was at his desk, getting ahead of his deadlines for once, when he heard them. Sirens. Best friend of defense attorneys and crime journalists alike. Aspiring crime journalists included. As it was, Roman wrote whatever his Editor In Chief, Dan Humphrey, told him to. That night, however, it was late- Roman was the only writer in the office. The only other person in the building was Mr. Humphrey himself. With as much composure as he could muster, he got up from his desk and walked into his boss' office.

"Can I help you?" Humphrey asked before Roman could get to the door.

"I'm sure you heard those sirens. They're headed towards Golden Gate Park, and none of the other crime writers are in."

"And you want the story." It wasn't a question.

"Yes, sir. I think I have proven that I'm good enough for this."

"I agree."

"And, as I said before, there's- wait, you agree? I can have the story?"

"That's what I said. Don't make me regret it. Now go- the sooner you're there, the more information you can get before they shut everyone out."

"Yes, sir. Thank you!"

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Twenty minutes later, Roman was at the scene. Swallowing his nerves, he pushed his way to the
front of the gathering press to get as good of a look at the situation as he could.

Roman had seen crime scene photos before; he'd written papers in school about grisly murders and other violent crimes without blinking. Seeing a mutilated corpse in person, though, was more than anything he could possibly have prepared for. More intense, more odorous, more messy, more nauseating. He refused to vomit, however; he only had one chance, and, in the words of the immortal Lin-Manuel Miranda, he was not going to throw away his shot.

By the time the body was removed from the scene and the police forced everyone to leave, it was well past midnight. Roman had what he needed to start writing, so he went back to the office to do just that. If he was good enough, he could get it ready to post online before the city started to wake up the next day. He was determined to do just that; if he had to pull an all-nighter, so be it. Fortunately for his circadian rhythm, it didn't require all night. Two hours, three drafts, and one conversation with Mr Humphrey about decorum in articles and what details should be left out when breaking a story like this, the article was all set to publish at 6 that morning, so Roman went home.

"Home" might have been an overstatement. "Home" was a shoebox in Presidio Heights with a bathroom and an ancient stove. It did, however, have the love of Roman's life; a long-haired rescue cat named Meeko. If he were being completely honest, though, he didn't mind his place that much. Sure, he dreamed of a mansion behind a waterfall, but all he really needed to be happy was Meeko, his laptop, and some inspiration. He wanted the crime byline, yes, but not as much as he wanted to finish his novel. Powerless was going to be his magnum opus, a scathing criticism of the prejudice and hatred he saw and experienced everyday while questioning what it would mean to be a hero in such a world. Well, it would be, if he could get past his writer's block. If he were seeing a therapist, they would tell him that he was struggling with it for the same reason he wanted to be a crime journalist. They'd throw around words like "consequentialist", and Roman wouldn't argue. Most things in life were spectrums- gender, sex, sexuality, etc., but morality was not one of those things. Sure, there was a range of reasons people did good or bad things, but at the end of the day, all that mattered was the outcome. Having such a black-and-white ethical worldview, while comforting and easy to process, made writing a novel with a morally grey protagonist was incredibly difficult. Roman Prince never backed down from a challenge, though, so he cracked his knuckles and got back to it.

A Week Ago, SFGate offices

It was 3:07 am, and Roman was still at work. Again. He was seriously considering getting another coffee from the ancient machine in the break room and accepting his nocturnality when Mr Humphrey walked up to his desk.

"You're still here, Prince?"

"Yes, sir." Roman bit his tongue to hold back the ' obviously. We wouldn't be talking if I wasn't. ' that was on the tip of his tongue.

"It's your lucky day then. Police are responding to a body in the same spot as the one you reported on a few weeks back. You did a good job with it and everything you've done since. Go cover this one too. I'll be watching your work closely; you could have a bright future ahead of you. Don't let me down, and I can help make that happen."
"I won't disappoint you, sir. Thank you for the opportunity."

"I don't need your thanks, I need you to get going."

"Yes, sir!" Roman grabbed his bag and practically ran out the door.

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He was pleased to see that he was one of the first reporters on the scene and that there was just a pair of beat cops trying to keep everyone from the body. Given the location, he thought there was a chance that the body would be in similar condition; he'd read and written enough about serial killers to know to look for patterns, and body dump sites is a common one. Roman took down every detail he possibly could before the detectives showed up. Well, detective. Singular. Tall, impossibly thin, and looking like he knew what he was walking into and didn't like it, Roman called out to him.

"Detective! I know you can't ignore someone as fabulous as I am; what happened? Whose body is that?" The detective stopped mid-step and turned to him, sharp features dropping into a scowl and eyes flashing with anger and, unless Roman was imagining things, pain.

"What's your name, and who are you with?" the detective practically growled.

"Roman Prince, SFGate, at your service!" Roman replied in his most charming voice, refusing to be intimidated.

"Here's the thing, Roman Prince, SFGate. There is nothing 'fabulous' about standing over a dead man's body, desperate for a tidbit of information you can spin into some fairy tale to get a byline. At my service, eh? Then get away from my crime scene and stop hovering like the vulture you crime journalists are. And if a word of this gets out, I will personally see that you don't write another word in this city." He turned on his heel and strode over to the taped-off crime scene.

Half a dozen reporters shuffled away, but despite the threat, Roman stuck around, trying to get any more information about this detective and his thoughts on the case. When it was clear he wasn't going to get any more, he went back to the office to get to work.

When he arrived, it was 4:15, and people who, unlike Roman, stuck to a normal and consistent schedule, were showing up to start their days. Seeing a far too familiar face, Roman ducked his head and prayed he wouldn't be noticed.

"Hey Prince! I heard there was a murder in the park this morning, and that Humphrey gave you the story. What were you doing in the office so late with him, huh? We all know you're dying for a real byline, and rumor has it Humphrey's a fruit too. Any comment?" For months, Roman had been biting his tongue at Adam Jenkins' taunts and homophobia, but this was his big shot, and he was not about to let anyone give him shit about it.

"We're gonna need hazmat suits for all that toxic masculinity, Jenkins. I get that you're jealous that I earned my spot here instead of being handed it because of who my mom is, but there's no reason to take your sexual frustration out on me. And did you just for real use 'fruit' derogatorily in 2018? If you're going to be a homophobic ass, at least keep it fresh. We're members of the press; I'm sure there are some words from this century in that huge head of yours. Now get out of my way; I have actual work to do." Without a second glance, Roman walked past him, head held high.
Two hours later, Roman put the final draft of his story on his boss's desk and went home. He needed a drink and a nap, in that order.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again! I know there wasn't any forward progress in the story here, but Roman needed a whole chapter, and more non-Roman things need to happen before I could advance the plot.

As always, thank you so much for reading! Every click, comment, and kudos means the world to me, and I love you all <3
Virgil made his way to Dr Vincent Nigel-Murray's lab with a bad feeling in his gut. He hadn't been able to meet with the pathologist about the first victim, as the doctor had left town suddenly shortly after Virgil arrived. But he was back, and it was time Virgil met the man he'd heard so much about.

"Doctor Nigel-Murray?" He knocked on the doorframe, peering into the lab. "Are you here?"

"Ah! Yes! You must be Detective Mason, yeah?" Virgil wasn't sure what he'd been expecting, but a 6-foot-tall Brit with dark hair and startling blue eyes who was practically bouncing with excitement was not it.

"Yep, that's me. Nice to meet you, doctor."

"Please, call me Vincent. Or Nigel. I also go by Vin, Vinnie, Vincenzo, any of those. My ex used to call me Vino Delectable."

"I'll stick with Vincent. And you can call me Virgil."

"A lovely name! Did you know that the famed Roman poet Virgil was homosexual and included erotic homosexual themes in two of his famed Eclogues?"

"I, um, didn't know that. Why would you bring that up? Have people been talking about me, gossiping about the gay new guy? I thought San Francisco was going to be better than this." Virgil narrowed his eyes, preparing for the worst.

"You're gay? I did not know that. What a coincidence! Fun fact- in 2017, it was estimated that 8.2% of Millennials identify as LGBT+."

"You didn't know? Then what's with all the facts?"

"Facts are the stitches that hold the fabric of the universe together. I apologize if I'm being annoying; I've been told it's a rather bad habit." Vincent looked down and put his hands in his pockets; Virgil relaxed, suddenly understanding.

"It's an anxiety thing, right? Things get overwhelming sometimes, but facts are grounding."
"That is exactly right! If I may ask, how could you tell so quickly? Almost everyone gets there eventually, but it's only been a matter of minutes."

"I was one of the FBI's best profilers. Also, I do the same thing with sarcasm and hostility."

"It truly is a pleasure to meet you, Virgil. Now, follow me, I have two bodies with stories I think you'll want to hear."

Virgil followed the doctor into his lab. He was no stranger to morgues and autopsied bodies, but he could never get over the weird feeling in his gut when they were rolled out of the cooler. As always, he ignored the feeling and followed Dr Nigel-Murray to the first body.

"This is Orin Scrivello, the first victim. You can see the ligature marks on his wrists and ankles, and the scabbing indicates that he was tied up for quite some time and struggled a lot. This is just conjecture, but I'd wager it happened while the killer was inflicting these wounds." He pointed to the deep cuts on his legs and chest.

"Those look really deep. Cause of death?"

"You'd think, but no. The killer stayed clear of any major veins and arteries."

"So what's cause of death?"

"Blood loss."

"You literally just said-"

"He didn't bleed out through any of these wounds; he's got a single slice right along his brachial artery."

"Do we know what was used to cut him up?"

"Standard kitchen knife. Dime a dozen, available anywhere knives are sold."

"Great. Anything else interesting?"

"A couple of things. First, there were signs of dehydration, but not malnutrition."

"Any idea on how long they had him?"

"About two weeks, probably."

"The killer kept him fed while they tortured him for two weeks? Why would someone do that?" Virgil muttered. "The second interesting thing?"

"Particulates indicate that he was held in a warehouse. Nothing more specific than that, unfortunately; the killer did a really good job of covering their tracks."

"Just not good enough. Okay, let's talk about the second vic?"

"Indeed. Kyle Ren. Just finished his autopsy, in fact."

"Cool. Okay, let's start with what's the same between the two."

"Same ligature marks, although it appears that the killer kept him longer; I'd say closer to three weeks. He was also dehydrated but not malnourished. He was also tortured, but very differently."
"How different?"

"Orin had a relatively few, deep cuts. Kyle's arms are covered with dozens of shallow cuts. Obviously, he was hit in the fact repeatedly, and the killer removed some of the flesh on his chest. Two rectangles, one on each pectoral."

"That's so weird. There was no flesh removal on Orin?"

"Nope."

"What was going on in this guy's head? Anyway, what are these on his thighs?"

"Electrical burns."

"So the killer cut, beat, and electrocuted him, sliced part of his chest off, and finally strangled him while also keeping him fed?"

"That's consistent with what I've found, yes."

"This guy is smart, angry, and escalating. Damn it. Okay, thanks, Vincent."

"My pleasure, Virgil. Hopefully we'll see each other again under better circumstances?"

"Maybe. By the way, and you really don't have to answer, but how did you decide you wanted to be a coroner?"

"Oh, it's quite the story. I was studying to be a forensic anthropologist in DC, and I got shot by a serial killer we were closing in on. I survived, obviously, and when I recovered... I don't know. Flesh and blood was a lot more interesting. So I finished my anthropology doctorate and went back for pathology."

"That's nuts. I'm glad you made it, and even more glad you're out here. You're a cool guy, Vincent. I gotta go talk to Kyle's next of kin. It was great meeting you."

"You too!"

----

"Mason!" Virgil flinched when his captain's voice echoed through the bullpen. He took a deep breath before answering the summons.

"Yes, sir?" He asked once he reached Captain Sanders' office.

"Come in, it's time we talk about the case."

"Yes, sir." Virgil took a seat in one of the chairs across from Sanders' desk before continuing. "I met with the second victim's parents today- they confirmed the killer's assertion that he was a fascist. The pieces of flesh removed had swastika and Confederate flag tattoos. Apparently his grandfather was a high-ranking officer in the German military in World War 2. The victim was very vocal about his beliefs online; we have a tech team looking into his online interactions for potential suspects."

"Good. Now, tell me about the killer."

"He's wicked smart and almost certainly has a medical background. He's what we call mission-oriented, and his mission is vengeance. He's detail-oriented and covers his tracks well, but I don't think he has a criminal background before these kills."
"Killers usually do. Why not him?"

"How he treats the bodies after killing them. The things he did to his victims before killing them were violent and messy, but he cleaned them up and covered them carefully with leaves like a blanket. Yes, the cleaning served the purpose of eliminating most of the particulate evidence, but the clean clothes in the right size shows an extra step of care. He also kept the victims well-fed. He wanted them healthy, aside from the torture. It may seem illogical, but he has very high empathy. He punishes his victims because he genuinely cares about people.

Once he's punished them as he sees fit, they're human again, and deserving of respect and care. The violence is tied to the victim's crimes or sins, however he chooses to label them. Our killer isn't violent or malicious outside of the conditions that triggered the killings; he's probably perceived in his community as perfectly normal. Not creepy like Dahmer or manipulative like Bundy. Just an average person. He's probably lived in the area a long time, if not his entire life, and has a stable, long-term job."

"Sounds like he's going to be hard to catch. What's with the puzzle pieces, though?"

"He will make a mistake sooner, rather than later. The puzzle pieces are a taunt, daring us to solve the puzzle of who he is. He wants our attention, he wants to prove that he's smarter than we are. And that's what's going to hang him. He sees himself as an avenging angel, but he's just an Icarus."

"How does that help us catch him?"

"Honestly, sir, I'm still working on that part. I want to consult some papers from an old colleague before I add any more details to my official preliminary profile. I have a few ideas, but he was always better with mission-oriented killers than I am. I know it isn't the answer you want, but I learned the hard way how dangerous jumping to conclusions can be when dealing with someone like this."

"Mason…" Sanders started, softly.

"With all due respect, captain, don't start with that. I'm fine. I just want to make sure we do this by the book. Like you said on my first day- 'we can't let this become another Zodiac fiasco'."

"I can't say I like you using my *exact* words against me, but your work has been above reproach. I'm officially declaring this case yours and yours alone- I won't pressure you to partner up anymore. Just keep me in the loop okay?"

"Of course. Thank you, sir."

"You've earned it. Now shoo, you've got more important things to do than sit here with me."

"Okay." Virgil chuckled as he stood up and left.

---

"Patton don't do this. It's not a good idea. You don't know who this guy is, how much of a threat he might pose to us and our work."

"You do realize you sound just like *them*, right, Logan? Thinking you know best, trying to tell me what I can and can't do because of how it might affect you instead of thinking about what I want and need."

"That's not fair. You know that I love you, and they never loved either of us. I want you to stay safe;
I can't protect you if I don't know who you're associating with."

"How many times do I have to tell you that you don't need to protect me any more? I know you mean well, but you have to trust me. You said yourself that I'm better with people than you are."
Patton paused. "This isn't about protecting me at all, is it? It's about how you know that without me, you're alone. You have nothing without me, and you can't handle that."

"I… you're right. I need you, Patton." Logan admitted, falling to his knees.

Patton reached down and cupped Logan's face with their hands, tilting his face up. "Logan, you are and always will be the most important thing in my life. But I can't shake the feeling that getting to know him could change everything in the best way."

"That's exactly what I'm worried about, but I'll trust your instincts. I love you, Pat."

"I love you too, Logan. Thank you." Patton walked to their room, leaving Logan on his knees in the living room, alone with his thoughts.

*Patton's right; this date changes everything. If we are deviating from the pattern in favor of indulging other desires, well, I would be a fool to let this opportunity pass.*

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so much for reading! Every click, comment, and kudos means the world to me! <3
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Hey y'all! I'm so sorry this took so long- somehow I just couldn't get into the fluffy mindset. Thank you all so much for being so patient <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thursday

Virgil stared at the empty conversation for what felt the millionth time, trying to find the right words. *Fuck it. I need to just do this. Like a bandaid. I can do this.*

[To:Patton]- Hey Patton, this is Virgil.

[To:Patton]- From your coffee shop the other day.

*Fuck, that was bad. Well, there's nothing I can do about it now.* He opened the case files he brought home to review, trying to distract himself, but gave up after about 10 minutes and started watching The Office for the fifteenth time. He was three episodes in when his phone went off.

[Patton]- Hi!! I hope this doesn't come across as pushy or anything, but do you wanna go out sometime? I'm really bad at communicating through text, and I think you're really cute

[Virgil<3]- it totally doesn't. Yeah, I'd love to meet up. What are you up to on Saturday?

[Patton]- Going to the de Young with you, hopefully? I have a membership

[Virgil<3]- That would be amazing!! I've been dying to go see the Monet exhibition.

[Patton]- Me too! I'll pick you up at noon on Saturday, then?

[Virgil<3]- Sounds great!

[Patton]- I can't wait! I guess I don't need to ask where you live lol

[Virgil<3]- haha yeah I guess not. I'll see you then :)

Virgil put his phone down and took a deep breath. *Holy SHIT am I really doing this?? Patton's so cute, but I'm a mess. But it's Monet at the de Young, and Patton seems so… good. Like, too good for me. God, I'm really good fuck this up, aren't I?*

[Patton]- Take a deep breath; it's gonna be great. There's absolutely no need to worry :)

… *Holy fuck I'm so gay.* Patton had attached a selfie with a huge smile and a thumbs-up.
Taking a deep breath, Virgil looked in the mirror and adjusted his tie. He didn't even wear ties to work, but a date to see Monet's works in person deserved better than his everyday work attire, let alone his usual weekend outfit of a t-shirt, an old hoodie with purple plaid patches, and black jeans. He tried not to think about the last time he wore the black tie, but he couldn't shut the train of thought off fast enough.

- 

It's raining. Of course it is. He loved the rain so much; it's only fitting it's raining when we have to say goodbye.

"He'd hate that we're all here being sad, you know. He'd say we were being lame and that he deserves something more fabulous. He'd also be pissed that I'm talking to you, not him, at an event about him, even if it is his funeral. So, Remy, you dramatic, self-absorbed ass, I'm standing in front of all of these people, and I'm gonna talk to just you.

First of all, I'm more sorry than I can say. You told me he would be willing to break his rules, and I didn't trust you. You were always right, and I hated that. If you were here, you'd tell me to shut the fuck up and say that I know I love you. I absolutely and completely love you. And that's why it kills me that I couldn't protect you. You weren't just my partner, you were my best friend, and I failed at the absolute minimum. God, Remy, you deserved so much better. I'm sorry I couldn't be better.

But fuck this melancholy shit. You told me once that you wanted to put the 'fun' in funeral. So, everybody," Virgil continued, addressing the crowd again, "as Remy said so often, 'let's cut the shit and drink'. Scandals downtown is ready and waiting for us to fuck shit up in his memory."

- 

Coming back to the present, Virgil wiped the tear from his cheek and rolled up the sleeves of his purple dress shirt. Patton's gonna be here any minute; I need to finish getting ready.

Before he knew it, there was a knock at the door. He took a deep breath and was glad he did when he opened the door and briefly forgot how to breathe, because standing there on his doorstep was 5 feet and 7 inches of the most beauty Virgil had ever seen in one person. Patton wasn't the most conventionally attractive- whereas society as a whole prized hard lines and defined muscles, Patton was soft lines and the kindest eyes imaginable. Virgil couldn't explain why, but Patton exuded kindness and trustworthiness. He didn't realize he'd been staring until the sound of a throat clearing startled him.

"Oh, um, I was staring, huh?" Virgil asked, embarrassed.

Patton nodded, blushing. "Yeah, but I was too. You look really good."

"Thanks, you do too, but I guess you already knew that I feel that way." In his efforts to avoid eye contact, Virgil noticed the pin on Patton's shirt- simply reading 'they/them'. "Are those your pronouns?"
"Yeah, they are." Patton's posture immediately shifted—standing straighter and narrowing their eyes. "Is that a problem?"

"Not in the slightest." He smiled when Patton visibly relaxed, their megawatt smile returning in full force.

"Wonderful! Now, let's go see some art almost as beautiful as you. I'll drive." Patton winked and started walking. It took Virgil a second to remember how to breathe, let alone move, but he quickly caught up once he did. He stopped short again when he saw their car—a classic black VW Beetle in perfect condition.

"Holy shit, Patton. Your car is gorgeous."

"Oh my goodness thank you! She was my dad's."

"Like I said, it's- she's beautiful. Maintenance must be a nightmare, though. What year is she?"

"1955. Maintenance isn't that bad- my dad taught me how to keep her in shape after I came out in high school. He thought getting my hands dirty would turn me into 'a real man'."

"Shit, I'm sorry, Pat." They shrugged.

"It's no big deal. Joke's on him- I'm still queer as hell, but now I can keep this beauty in good shape. Get in! She's old, but she won't bite!" Laughing, Virgil got in the car, and they left for the museum.

"Monet was a founder of Impressionism as a counterpoint to Realism, which had been popular for about ten years before Impressionism started developing and twenty-four years before the term Impressionism was first used.

Realism grew in popularity with the rise of photography; artists wanted their works to look objectively real, and strove to remove emotion. They largely focused on the working class and depicted life as it was, without any sentimentality or heroism.

Monet never really bought into that. His early works, though chronologically in the Realism era, were always painted with intense emotion, and he rarely painted people. He began playing with the concept that what we understand of reality is just our perception, and he was far from alone in those thoughts. Marx held that belief as well, going further and saying that all we have in our minds are ideologies, not facts or truths, and they act as filters, shaping everything we experience.

Rousseau died two centuries before the rise of Impressionism, but he summed up the philosophy well when he said 'I feel before I think'. Monet's paintings, while indistinct and 'messy' up close, evoke strong emotion only when one looks at the piece as a whole. We feel it before we get close enough to see and think about what it's really made of." Strictly speaking, Virgil didn't need to be speaking softly into Patton's ear with his hand on their waist, standing so closely behind them that he could feel the movement of their chest with each breath. Neither of them, however, would ever dream of complaining.

Patton reluctantly stepped out of Virgil's embrace and turned to look at him in awe. "That's incredible, Virgil. How do you know all that?"

"Oh, um, thanks. I really like art philosophy, and Monet is my favorite artist. I dunno, something about making order out of chaos is really calming."
"I feel the same way! Life is sorta like a puzzle, or Monet's brush strokes. Each one, taken individually, doesn't make much sense. We all feel and experience things like that, things that are confusing or sometimes even scary. But as we keep going, we find more and more pieces, and things make more and more sense. Feeling like a half-missing puzzle set is okay, as long as we remember the big picture. If any of that makes sense," Patton chuckled nervously, scratching behind his ear.

"No, it made perfect sense. What would you say the big picture is?"

"Well, I'd say it's doing as much good as possible. Whether it's big things, like being a doctor, firefighter, or teacher, like my brother, or small things, like putting a smile on someone's face with a pun or a good cup of coffee. It's our duty as people to make the world around us a better place, however we can."

"That's a really beautiful way of looking at things, Patton." Virgil gave them a small smile. He started to say more, but he was interrupted by the growling of his stomach. "Oh, shit. I was so nervous this morning, I forgot to eat. Wanna go to the cafe and get lunch? My treat, since you still haven't let me pay you back for the coffee."

"I told you, it was a gift! And don't think for a second that you tipped almost triple what you would have paid if I had charged you." Their smirk was only slightly lessened by the fact that they had to tilt their head back slightly to make eye contact.

"You got me there, but I'm still buying. No, stop that- no amount of puppy dog eyes can change my mind."

"Well, you can't blame a guy for trying," Patton shrugged. "Alright, let's go get some food. You're already almost alarmingly skinny- if we don't get some food in you, you might disappear altogether." Patton started walking backwards towards the cafe, not breaking eye contact.

"Hey! I'm a perfectly normal weight for my height." Virgil started walking too, shaking his head.

"Which is what, 6'3'? You need to eat more than the average person, not less. Skipping meals isn't good for you, kiddo."

"I know that. You're just really cute, and I got nervous," he admitted, blushing.

"Flattery will get you everywhere. Now come on, let's eat." They winked before turning around and skipping away. Virgil followed, completely smitten.

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"Mr. Dean, a minute?" Logan called after his least favorite student. It was almost 7 pm- students on campus at this hour outside of football season was unheard of, and the last game of the season was weeks ago.

"Greetings and salutations, Mr. Reed. It's JD, though. Mr. Dean is my father." He sauntered to Logan, disdain clear on his face. Logan couldn't be sure if it was towards himself, Mr. Dean, or both.

"Yes, erm, JD, what are you doing on campus so late? Your attendance record in my class alone indicates a disinclination towards being here during school hours, let alone so late."

"That's just the thing, Mr. Reed. No one wants me to be here now."

"Ah, I see. A contrarian. It's not safe to be out here alone, however. The sun set hours ago, and
there's a killer on the loose, if the news is to be believed. Come with me, I'll drive you home."

"Thanks, sir, but I'm fine. I'm a fighter, you see. Let the bastard come after me- it'll be the last mistake he ever makes."

"Save the bravado for your peers. I will not take no for an answer- if anything happened to you, it would be on my conscience. My car is in the parking lot. Go." Logan commanded.

"If you insist." He gave a mocking bow before turning away from Logan and walking to the car. If he turned back around, he would have seen a cold, malicious smile spread across his teacher's face. He didn't turn around.

Chapter End Notes

as always, thank you so much for reading, and every click, kudos, and comment means the world to me!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Logan and JD get better acquainted.

Chapter Notes

Y'all. Read the warnings. This chapter gets really intense. I marked the actual graphic description of the violence with ******** before and after, but none of it is sunshine or rainbows. It isn't just senseless gore- there is important character and plot happening here as well. This is the second most intense part of the whole story, and probably the most graphically violent.

I'm putting a summary of the whole chapter in the end notes for those who are more comfortable skipping this one.

Also! There is a chapter count! It's subject to change, but it's looking like 11 and an epilogue <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

15 minutes passed before Logan broke the silence. "I understand that two members of the football team committed suicide two weeks ago. I know that you are new to the school, but it must be difficult nonetheless."

"Not really. I bounce around so much, I don't bother learning names or faces, let alone care about anyone. Besides, I heard they did it because they were gay and too homophobic to deal with it. No major loss there, in my opinion."

"That is… an interesting perspective, JD. I am almost afraid to ask about your thoughts on Heather Chandler's death."

"Sometimes even the shiniest of ivory towers are prisons, I suppose. One has to wonder, though, how much the bullying rate has dropped since she kicked the bucket. I mean, sure, one of the other Heathers is trying to take her place, but even she knows that she'll never measure up." He looked out the window and then back to Logan. "Hang on, I never told you where I live."

"I know where I'm going. What do you know about how Heather, Kurt, and Ram died?"

"If you say so," JD began, hesitantly. "Only what everyone knows. Heather drank drain cleaner, and Kurt and Ram shot each other. I heard someone saying that they used some special kind of bullets called ich lüge."

"Ich spreche auch Deutsch und ich weiß dass Sie sie umgebracht haben."

"H- how could you possibly know that? No one knows that. I was careful. I was perfect."
"Obviously, you were not. If you were truly careful, you would not have said anything about the bullets. You wanted to applaud yourself for being so much smarter than everyone else. You also would not have chosen such an emotionally-driven accomplice. I understand the appeal. We have a lot in common, JD. We both understand that emotion and personal attachments are nothing more than hindrances. But there is that one person who changes all of that. Who makes you want to know how to feel things. But ultimately, they will always choose their emotions over us. I was not completely certain that you killed them until you bragged about the bullets. Killing people who had been cruel towards your person, Miss Sawyer, aroused my suspicions. Rule number one of getting away with murder: only kill people to whom you are not linked."

"It's you, isn't it? The killer everyone's talking about. The Park Puzzler."

"That is the first honest and correct thing you have said all evening." Logan paused, considering JD's words. "Is that really what they are calling us? Disappointing, but not surprising. The best and brightest certainly do not go into journalism."

"You aren't gonna kill me. You said yourself, the first rule of getting away with it is killing strangers." Logan was filled with a savage glee, seeing the terror in his student's eyes, his desperate attempt to save himself.

"In most circumstances, yes, killing you would be a mistake. However, your father is known for leaving town and taking you with him unexpectedly. You have attended 10 high schools, I believe, and it is your senior year? Everyone knows that the killer is punishing people for their unpunished crimes, and how would a simple teacher know what you did? Especially one who does not interact with other teachers, let alone students. No one was around when you got in my car. No one has ever seen us interact outside of the rare occasions you showed up to my class." He sighed when he saw JD reach for the door handle. "Don't be stupid- there is no point in trying to escape. I engaged the child-lock this morning. You cannot open the door from the inside, and breaking through the window is difficult with only a fist for exceptionally strong individuals. Looking at you, I estimate that you have slightly below average upper body strength for an 18-year-old male."

"Well that's awfully rude, teach. So, I'm gonna die. Why? Why not just turn me over to the cops?"

"You are a young, white man who, when you want to, can be quite charismatic. The American justice system is skewed to protect people like you. Even that is predicated on the assumption that a prosecutor would take the case, which is unlikely, given how well you were able to convince everyone that they were suicides. Your kills were cold-blooded with very little motive outside of bloodlust, and you left very little to no evidence. Truthfully, I am rather impressed."

"And we're back to my question. Why do I have to die for doing such good work? You're a killer too. Why should I die, when you're no better than I am? If the papers are accurate, killing me will even up our body counts, so you aren't even better than me on that front."

"The quality of your work was admirable, but it was still wrong. You took three innocent lives, simply because you wanted to. I only kill those whose crimes go unpunished by the corrupt justice system. We are both killers, but my crusade is a righteous one."

"I still don't buy it. I trade in half-truths, straight-up lies, and manipulation, teach, and there's more to it than you're saying. You're gonna kill me anyway, and clearly we aren't to wherever it is you're taking me to do the job. Why not pass the time with a good old-fashioned villain monologue?"

"All will be revealed in due time. I have been reliably informed that people tend to dislike 'spoilers'."

"You're absolutely nuts. You know that, right? You're even more delusional than I am. And that's
my self-harm of choice is fucking Slurpees."

"I find it interesting that you truly believe that your obsession with what is colloquially known as 'brain freeze' is less sane than your manipulation of Veronica Sawyer and the cold-blooded murders of your peers."

"Peers? That's bullshit. They were, at best, vapid instruments of the system."

"And for that, they deserved death?"

JD shrugged. "I would do anything to protect Veronica from assholes like that."

"As I would do anything to protect my sibling from a world that turns a blind eye to the crimes of assholes like you. We are at an ideological impasse. That impasse, however, is rendered irrelevant by my superior intellect. Ah, here we are." Before JD could respond, Logan reached across the car and emptied a syringe into his arm.

---

The first thing JD noticed when he came to was the rope around his wrists tying him to a chair. Struggling revealed that his ankles were bound as well, and the chair was bolted to the ground. He was surprised to find that he wasn't gagged. Looking around, he reasoned he could only be in a warehouse, and it was empty except for him and a video camera. He continued to struggle against his restraints, barely noticing when the rope burn broke his skin. He was also hungry, and his mouth felt like sandpaper.

"How long was I out?" JD croaked, unsure if anyone was there.

"Approximately eighteen hours. It is 2pm on Saturday." JD jumped, not expecting Logan's voice to be so close behind him. "You are in luck. Normally, Patton would take a turn with you before I do anything, but they are… otherwise occupied. You should thank me- you will be useless to them once I have started with you, let alone finished. I am saving you potentially weeks of agony. The last one took a week and a half to learn his lesson. Only then could I begin my experiments."

"Experiments? What the fuck are you going to do to me?"

"As many things as you can endure."

"Why? Why not just kill me and get it over with? Satisfy your 'righteous crusade' without wasting time."

"And waste the opportunity to study how much the human body can endure? I think not. In all honesty, I care about the cause far less than Patton does. As I said, you will be spared their particular brand of torture, both physical and mental. I can only imagine what they'd do to you, given the fact that you murdered children, despite being a child yourself."

"We were all 18. Technically not children. Why, may I ask, won't I have the pleasure of making their acquaintance? They sound absolutely delightful."

"I am not surprised that your listening skills are subpar. They have other business to attend to."

"They're with someone, aren't they? That's why you've got such a big bug up your ass about emotional attachments and me and Veronica. It's rebellious child 101, teach. Lash out to get their attention. You aren't the center of their universe any more, and it's eating you alive." Logan flinched, and JD smirked; he'd hit his mark.
"Those who speak of what they know find too late that prudent silence is wise. This is doubly true for children who know nothing." He raised a hand, cutting JD off. "No more talking. Feel free to scream, however. Your responses will be recorded on that camera," he pointed, "and further analyzed later. I tend to get… distracted in the moment."

Logan briefly returned to the shadows of the warehouse before returning with a tank that seemed to be smoking. "This, JD, is liquid nitrogen. You mentioned your fondness for cold-induced pain. Let us see how you feel about it in the extreme. And remember, this is for posterity, so be honest."

He put on thick gloves and an apron before opening the lid and pulling out a ladle full of liquid nitrogen. Very carefully, he stepped forward and slowly emptied the ladle onto JD's arm.

The first drops hit JD's skin with a sizzle, causing JD to flinch. That flinch quickly turned into convulsions and a scream he didn't know he was capable of making when the stream grew thicker. It burned. Every second was more painful than the last. He was on the edge of unconsciousness when the agony stopped getting worse- Logan had stopped pouring. JD didn't know how long he sat there, face contorted with pain, before he was able to open his eyes and look at his arm. He immediately wished he hadn't. From wrist to elbow, his arm was mostly violently red and blistered. What truly horrified him, however, were the areas that weren't red at all, but were an unnatural grayish-yellow.

"That is third degree frostbite. Those uniquely discolored areas should turn black over the course of our time together." JD tried to scream, to swear, to cry, but he couldn't. He was hit with a wave of dizziness and nausea when he tried to open his mouth. "Ah yes, that would be the shock setting in. Breathe with me, JD. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight." Logan led him through the breathing exercise until he returned to a slightly more normal temperature. "Well done. Keep focusing on your breathing; I will be right back with some first aid.

"Wh- why bother?" JD asked when Logan returned without his gloves and apron, carrying a first aid kit. "Why not let me die from this?"

Logan gently began heating the frostbite with a warm, wet towel before responding. "There are more experiments to run. Even if this was the only one I had planned for you, seeing how it heals is a crucial part of the process. My goal isn't killing you. My goal is observing how the human body reacts to and recovers from various extreme stimuli. Letting you die would be extremely counterproductive. For now, at least." Logan began wrapping JD's arm with bandages. "There we go. That should be adequate to keep you alive and will hopefully prevent gangrene. The point is to study frostbite, not gangrene."

"Why thank you." JD smirked the best he could, but even he knew that it was, at best, a pitiful attempt.

"You certainly are strong, JD. Most people would not dare being sarcastic in the face of their torturer. Drink this." Logan demanded, holding a water bottle to his lips. "Good. I suggest you get comfortable. I will be back tomorrow to change your bandages and check on you. Can't have you dying before I allow it."

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Sunday
"Oh Logan, he's absolutely wonderful. He's so smart, kind, and handsome. He didn't even blink when he learned my pronouns! And he said the most beautiful things about Monet and Impressionism. Aahh, I wish I could stay and tell you all about it and him, but I have to spend some time at the coffee shop- between our work and Virgil, I haven't spent nearly enough time there!"

Patton got to the door before turning around. "Oh, and I'd love to know what you were up to yesterday- I called, but you didn't answer or call me back. That's why I had to come check on you before going to work. I'll be back around eight tonight, okay? See you then!" Patton was out the door before Logan could respond. Eleven hours. Plenty of time to tend to JD and come up with a convincing lie.

Chapter End Notes

*peeks out from behind hands* y'all still with me?

The German translates to: I speak German too, and I know you killed them.

Summary: JD calls Logan out for acting out because of Patton's date with Virgil. Logan admits that he doesn't care about the punishment aspect much at all, he just wants to torture, to push the limits of what the human body can endure and recover from. Does provide first aid, however- he only wants JD dying on his terms. Logan is deliberately hiding the fact that he has kidnapped and is torturing JD from Patton, who at the moment is too giddy about Virgil to really question what's going on with Logan.

As always, y'all mean the world to me. Every hit and kudos means the world to me, and i LIVE off of comments. <3 Love you all

End Notes

Bonus points for identifying all of the different fandoms I've referenced here and the others that are coming!

You can find me on tumblr at mystrangedarkson <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!