The Lord Of Nowhere

by Cerdic519

Summary

Alternate Universe story set around the English Civil Wars and their aftermath (1639-1660). Castiel Milton, younger grandson of the Earl of Bradstock, finds the perfect thirtieth birthday present in a lonely Warwickshire barn - a sassy pie-mad omega, stark naked. Dean Winchester being barren does not of course stop the omega from wanting to be knotted there and then, and he is greatly displeased when the alpha manages to hold back – but they more than make up for it later! As England tears itself apart there are dangers a-plenty for our two favourite idiots, some closer to home than others......

Notes

Dedicated to the wonderful staunchlyblue and Tisha_Wyman, who have stuck with my
ongoing domestic Destiel novel thus far, and to MelodyofWings, who so enjoyed and was so supportive of my last historical misadventure. A kind word is balm to a troubled soul.
Prologue/Glossary

Chapter Summary

Who was who, what was what and where was where in MDCXXXIX, the year otherwise known as 1639 A.D.

Rather than bore you with a history lesson, here's a glossary of some of the key people and places in the story:

Countries of 1639

England
A kingdom comprising 42% of Charles' British Isles lands with a population around 4¼ million (70% of the total). In comparison the Spanish Empire has around 30 million people whilst the Holy Roman Empire (Germanic Confederation) and France have around 20 million each. As elsewhere in the Three Kingdoms roads were poorly maintained and rivers were important for trade, which in times of war meant that river-crossings were even more important. England has since 1603 been in a Personal Union with Scotland, when James VI of Scotland became James I of England. This sort of arrangement was not unknown and only rarely resulted in a merger of countries when the two had some reason so to do (say like being stuck on a small island together). James had tried to effect one at the start of his English reign but had failed. His promising eldest son Henry died in 1612 so he was succeeded on his death by his second son as Charles I.

London, the capital of England is far and away the largest city, its 350,000 population is ten times that of its nearest rival, Norwich. Note that this figure covers the small City of London accurately known as 'the Square Mile', and all the other places contiguous to it. About a mile upstream is the City of Westminster, home to the old royal Palace of Westminster (then used by parliament) and across the road backing onto the Thames is the king's principal palace of Whitehall (mostly burnt down in 1698). London only has one bridge at this time, oddly enough London Bridge.

Wales
A principality, usually ruled over by the eldest son and heir of the English monarch. It constituted 7% of the land area and had some 200,000 people, 3% of the total. Its mostly mountainous terrain limited its role in the war mostly to that of providing troops.

Scotland
A kingdom occupying the northern 33% of the island of Great Britain. Population at this time around 400,000. Like the southern country it too is predominantly Protestant with a Catholic presence in an even more thinly populated North.

Ireland
Nominally a kingdom ruled by the king of England, population around 1,250,000. Roughly speaking, 15% English settlers (mostly Protestant) along the east coast and a few other towns, 10% Scots settlers (Protestant) in the northern province of Ulster, and 75% native Irish (Catholics) elsewhere. A religious tinderbox just waiting for a spark, although as the story begins the king’s
governor Viscount Thomas Wentworth (later Earl of Strafford), has actually made the place turn a profit for the first time in... well, ever. It has its own parliament, but that body is totally subservient to the governor.

**British West Indies**
The fast-changing British possessions in the rich Caribbean; St. Kitts, Barbados, Nevis, Providence Island (now Santa Catalina), Antigua, Barbuda and Montserrat. Still being settled by England and her colonial rivals, these colonies changed hands with bewildering irregularity. Providence Island would be lost but the Bahamas, Anguilla and Jamaica would be added during the main part of this story. Total English population is around 25,000.

**British North America**
The religiously-inspired northern colonies and the tobacco-trading southern ones are divided by the New Netherlands and New Sweden (European countries were good at settling distant lands, not so good when it came to thinking up original names). Total English population is also around 25,000 but will rise by that amount in each of the next two decades. The largest town is Boston (population 3,000) settled about ten years back; both Massachusetts and Virginia have about 10,000 people in them. Other settlements are Bermuda, Newfoundland, New Scotland (later part of Nova Scotia), Maine (sold to Massachusetts 1691, regained independence 1820), New Hampshire, the Plymouth Colony (merged with Massachusetts, 1691), Rhode Island & Providence, Saybrook (merged with Connecticut, 1644), Connecticut, New Haven (merged with Connecticut 1665), Gardiner's Island (merged with New York, 1688) and New Albion (Delaware Valley, failed by 1649).

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**People of 1639**
King Charles I of England, Scotland and Ireland (born 1600, king since 1625): An idiot. It is often said that the Stuart monarchs' troubles came about because they believed in the Divine Right of Kings. This is partly true, the problem being not so much they believed in it – Elizabeth I had done so even more – but that they also believed that they did not have to do anything to maintain their positions because God was on their side. Elizabeth had appreciated that she could be much more secure if the people who she sometimes had to ask to pay taxes could see she was working hard to keep those demands to a minimum and stamping down on corruption. Charles in particular had an ostensibly expensive court and cared nothing for criticisms – and this led to trouble.

In 1629 relations between king and parliament broke down over Charles' refusal to accept parliament having any role in the running of the country, so he used his power to dissolve them and start his Personal Rule. This sort of thing was not unknown at the time – but there was a snag. Charles needed money from somewhere, so he had to resort to a range of unpopular taxes to keep the country going. This led to his reintroduction of Ship-Money, a tax levied on the English maritime counties (about half of them), which was only mildly resisted. So naturally being Charles he had to push it.

Charles decided to double his take by extending the tax to the inland counties. Reaction was fierce and collection proved difficult in many areas and impossible in some. It became clear that if he was going to get anywhere the king would need to win a test case on the issue, so the judges accepted a protest against the tax from former member of parliament and Buckinghamshire landowner John Hampden in 1637. Charles of course packed the bench but still only obtained a narrow victory in 1639 just before this story starts, and opposition to the tax only increased.

This would have been bad enough had Charles not made a complete pig's ear over Scotland at one and the same time. The Scottish Reformation had been unusual because the monarch (Mary Queen of Scots) had been out of the country at the time, so the nobles were able to grab all those lovely church lands for themselves. As you might guess they were not exactly rushing to give them back,
and during James' reign had reacted angrily to his moves to have the weakened bishops back in government. They had backed down only when James had promised not to seek the return of their lands – but Charles did not consider himself bound by his father's word. There was going to be trouble.

The Scottish noblemen were fomenting rebellion against the king from after his much-delayed Scottish coronation when his behaviour contrived to annoy them even more. Their chance came in 1636 when Charles listened to his almost equally foolish Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud who suggested that Scottish worship practices should be brought into line with English ones. Charles' advisers in Scotland published the new prayer-book in 1637 and there was an immediate riot. Charles had managed to get an army together and march north against his northern subjects (First Bishops' War) but the nobles had outmanoeuvred him completely and he had had to agree to an expensive truce.

Charles also made a mess of foreign affairs. In 1618 Europe had begun the Thirty Years' War when his uncle Frederick Elector of the Rhine Palatinate accepted the vacant throne of Bohemia and as a result lost all his lands. Europe was divided into two political camps, France and Habsburg (Spain-Austria-Italy), and Charles' decision to side with the latter had angered many in England who remembered Spanish atrocities before and after the Armada.

Charles' other big problem was his wife the French Catholic Henrietta Maria, who openly sought to convert people to her own religion and boasted when she managed it. There were fears by many that she would convert her husband and drag England back to the terrible burnings of Bloody Mary; Charles' faith made this virtually impossible but he did not see that what mattered was that people thought it might happen.

As I said, an idiot.

Oliver Cromwell (born 1599): A moderately wealthy country landowner and great-great-nephew of Henry VIII's ill-fated Vicar-General Thomas Cromwell - Oliver was also descended from King Edward I of England, so the Puritan and the king whose head he would one day remove were eleventh cousins once removed! 'Old Ironsides' as he became known had been the member of parliament for his local town of Huntingdon when the king had dissolved the last parliament in 1629. A legal dispute that same year not only nearly ruined him but caused a mental breakdown, and he became a committed Puritan thereafter. A family inheritance in 1636 set him back on track, and he would become the member of parliament for Cambridge in 1640.

Phineas Earl of Bradstock (born 1564, earl since 1625): Elderly alpha owner of a middle-ranking lordship based just north of the university city of Oxford. Had to wait until just four years back to become earl as his father and predecessor Earl Nebuchadnezzar (they had lovely names in those days!) inconsiderately lived into his eighties. The title does not include a place in the upper house of the English parliament (the House of Lords).

Charles, Lord Hampton (1586-1639): Earl Phineas' late and un-lamented eldest son. Married Rebecca Newton (1590-1610) and had two sons, Raphael and Castiel. After her death during an unsuccessful third birth he married her sister Sarah (born 1592) and had four more sons; Michael and Lucifer (born 1611), Balthazar (born 1613) and Gabriel (born 1615). Unlike her sister Sarah was Catholic, so Earl Nebuchadnezzar threw a fit and promptly disinherited all issue from this union. English law made banning a current heir difficult (Lord Charles got one thing right when he solved this problem by dying months before the start of this story), and Lords Raphael and Castiel were brought up as Protestants so were not disinherited.

Zachariah Milton (born 1588): Charles' younger brother and therefore Castiel's uncle. The sort of beta who gives the nobility a bad name. One son, Uriel (born 1609).

Raphael, Lord Hampton (born 1608): Alpha heir to the Bradstock Estate, married to Naomi Silverman. Last year saw the birth of their fifth son, which amazed many that they had stopped
arguing long enough for.... well, you know. Yes you do!

Castiel Milton (born 1609): Raphael's full brother, also an alpha. Unmarried despite the best efforts of the ladies and omegas of Oxfordshire. Yes, his hair does always look like he has just walked through a tornado. Lives in a small cottage across the river from the brother and sister-in-law whom he frankly cannot stand. The sort of alpha who gives the nobility a good name.

Dean Winchester (born 1614): Tall and unfortunately barren omega who lives in his even taller beta brother's house about twenty miles north-west of the Bradstock estate, Sam having just turned twenty-one and taken over the running of things from his mother Mary (their father John had died back in 1630). Dean is of course unmarried; barren omegas are not marriage material for most alphas. Most....

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Institutions of 1639

Parliament: The English parliament is bicameral in that it has two chambers, a Lower House (the Commons) and an Upper House (the Lords). The Lords are all hereditary except for the bishops while the Commons are elected, although usually by very small electorates (2). The two Houses are of roughly equal strength when the story begins; the king has strong support in the Lords but his failure to summon any parliament for the past ten years is about to show him that this is not the case in the Commons. Members of both Houses were unpaid, an excellent idea which should be brought back forthwith.

Monarchy: The key to running a good monarchy is, as always, money. The English monarch has lands – the Crown Estates (3) – from which they receive a revenue to run government and defer their own expenses. For expensive things like wars they normally have to call a parliament to vote the taxes needed to raise extra money, in which members would promote laws furthering their own self-interese.... I mean the common good. Elizabeth I had kept parliament at bay by a mixture of bribery, chicanery and occasional Tudor terror, but the Stuarts had largely not bothered and were about to pay a heavy price for their indolence.

The Army: There wasn't one. Soldiers were raised as and when needed, many rich men co-opting their own tenants to go into battle with them. Quality was more important than quantity; Charles' army had outnumbered that of the Scots in the recent stand-off but everyone had known full well who would have won if they had come to blows, and it wasn't going to be the Stuart. Counties and larger cities had Trained Bands (semi-professional soldiers) on call at all times, but they were only rarely willing to serve outside their own area. And the local militia - literally peasants with pitchforks - was on call if they were really, really desperate.

The Royal Navy: The ships that had once crushed the Spanish Armada were a shadow of what they had once been. Charles had wasted much money on one particularly large ship called, immodestly, 'The Sovereign Of The Seas'. His foreign poly alienated many sailors, a lot of whom served for other countries as a result.

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Religions of 1639

Protestantism

Taking its name from the Protestation against papal abuse of power the century before, it had almost inevitably fractured into many different sects. It was a much simpler form of Christianity; the saying was 'no bells and smells'. Scotland and England practised different forms of
Protestantism (see below).

(Roman) Catholicism
Still strong in Wales, northern England and northern Scotland, and dominant in Ireland. In Europe the Thirty Years War had by the time this story starts dissolved into a standard land-grab fuelled by religious differences. Charles' friendship with Catholic Spain was bitterly resented.

Anglicanism
Elizabeth I of England's compromise, about 90% Protestantism but with some Catholic bits she enjoyed like stained glass, frescos and candles. Few really liked it, but no-one had been brave (or stupid) enough to tell her that. Sneakily, the deal had also enabled her to fine recusants (Catholics who were very openly Catholic) in return for her protection; non-recusants paid smaller fines and church taxes, and had to go to church from time to time. Some Protestants, annoyed that she would not let them tie their religious opponents to posts and set fire to them as her sister had done so readily, had turned to....

Puritanism
More a movement than a religion, the Puritans wanted a purer Protestantism (i.e. 'faggots and fire' for Catholics). Elizabeth had always been one step ahead of them, but they outwitted the Stuarts much more easily and by this time were a growing force in parliament. Or would be when, as now seemed inevitable, a new one was called.

Presbyterianism
The Scots' chosen form of Protestantism, in which matters were decided at a local level by church elders. The Scots had resented Charles' father imposing bishops onto them, so when Charles had first tried to pressure some nobles to give lands back to the bishops and then thrown in a Catholic-looking prayer-book on top of that, they had rioted. He had stupidly failed to withdraw it, which successfully turned the riot into a rebellion. Charles had found raising an army without parliament very difficult, which despite the face-saving 'truce' he had made meant he would need a larger and better trained army for Round Two - which in turn meant that he would have to call another parliament.

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Notes:
1) Wales being part of England was why the national flag remained the St. George's Cross, and why the Welsh cross (same design as England, but yellow on black) did not later appear on the Union Jack. Now as then the Prince of Wales is also Duke of Cornwall, and the duchy he owns there provides his revenue.
2) Sometimes zero. The most (in)famous example was Old Sarum, a decayed town north of Salisbury which returned two members despite no-one actually living there. I can guess your next question. The lucky landowner merely had to register some of his tenants as resident in the place even if they lived somewhere else, so they got the right to vote - and if they wanted to keep a roof over their heads, they voted the way they were damn well told! The system had its upsides however; one our best eighteenth century prime ministers, William Pitt the Elder, represented Old Sarum.
3) Today in the United Kingdom the monarch surrenders the Estates (in 2016 worth about £250 million or $325 million) to parliament at the start of each reign for the stupidly-named Sovereign Grant (latest valuation £40 million or $52 million), earning the government at least £200 million ($260 million) profit a year. It's like your savings generating a yearly income of £50,000 ($65,000) and the government helping itself to 80% of that, leaving you just £10,000 ($13,000). Oh, and having people moan about how you keep getting 'public money'. Not exactly a great deal, is it?
Chapter Summary

2: Business takes Castiel Milton, grandson of the Earl of Bradstock, to the town of Norton, and as a favour he delivers a message for a friend to Long Compton, a few miles on. There, in a lonely barn on a hillside, he meets a near-naked omega, Dean Winchester. Their scents mingle, and there can only be one outcome.....

Tuesday 17th September, 1639 (1)

This is the road to nowhere.

That statement is pretty much true, as our story begins about ten miles north of the university city of Oxford, and just beyond the small market town of King’s Linton (2). Here the road to Banbury, such as it is, continues straight on, whilst a side-turning to the right is marked 'Knoll's Mere' (3). Except that some local wag has scored out the name on the little wooden sign-post, and replaced it with 'Nowhere', which is indeed the local name for the three cottages, farm and mill that comprise the hamlet ahead. We shall be meeting some of the denizens of this not so great metropolis later on.

Leaving the main 'road', we go half a mile into Nowhere. The hamlet is built on the southern end of a curious little U-shaped knoll which faces the River Sewell (4) flowing past to the east, heading down through King's Linton to join the Thames near Oxford. The river often floods and fills the 'U', creating the mere that gives the place its (official) name, but now in late summer the 'mere' is little more than a large muddy puddle. The dirt track – let us not overtax the English language and call it a road – somehow manages to degenerate even further here, as it wends its way past the three cottages and the side-turning down to the mill before continuing north across the 'U'. Before running down the northern side of the knoll, it passes a solitary cottage, technically part of the village of Charlton a little further on. And here lives the hero of our story, Lord Castiel Milton. The alpha is currently standing in his garden and enjoying the peace and quiet of his little kingdom, which is fair enough. Especially as his peace and quiet is destined not to be lasting.

No-one would call Lord Milton handsome, yet as he is the grandson of the current Phineas Earl of Bradstock, who lives in the stately home across the valley that he can see from his garden right now, he is of that degree of wealth that, as one wit famously remarked, 'he could look like a horse and still attract a mate'. Castiel is thirty years of age but one day, and although he does not have much in the way of good looks he is possessed of a pair of startling blue eyes and a generous nature that makes him that rarity amongst the English nobility, a likeable character. Though to call his hair windblown would be to pass up a chance to use 'storm-tossed', or even 'complete disaster area', which is strange as on this late summer's day there is only a slight breeze blowing up the valley. Certainly not enough to account for the wreckage above the slightly creased forehead and steady gaze that looks pensively across to the Hall.

Castiel is the second son of the late (and un-lamented) Lord Charles, who had finally made his family happy earlier in the year by quitting the world, leaving behind a widow, six sons from two marriages, and a whole load of unpaid bills. Such is the state of the English nobility in 1639 that few will be expecting any of said bills to ever be paid. Lord Charles was also the eldest son of the current earl, who according to many has been delaying his own departure from the world solely
because he wanted to see the heir to his venerable title and estate go first. These observations are totally uncharitable, no matter how true they may or may not be (approximately one hundred per cent). It might also be observed at this point that Castiel's elder brother, the unpleasant Raphael Lord Hampton (5), has five sons from his marriage to the definitely even more unpleasant Lady Naomi, proof if needed that miracles can and do happen.

It is not long past noon, and Castiel still has a job to do. One of his tasks is to collect the rents due for the estate properties on this side of the river. Technically this should be the job of his grandfather's steward, a most unpleasant beta called Armstrong, but Castiel likes their tenants enough to spare them being subjected to that man any more than is necessary. They, rather like the country, have more than enough problems already.

He had missed one person on his rounds yesterday, the owner of nearby Nowhere Farm. This is a man in his late forties – probably, it is hard to tell under the beard and hat – called Robert Singer. Rumours that he was the inspiration for the word 'curmudgeon' are incorrect, though understandable. He is a man of few words, and fewer still that are repeatable. Some time in the future he will probably marry the Widow Harvelle, owner of the Roadhouse Tavern that sits on the main road just above the turning to Nowhere. Castiel has a shrewd idea that the farmer was up there when he called the day before, but he is kind enough not to mention this.

“Got your money ready”, the farmer says curtly, handing over a small purse. Castiel does not bother to check it; the other man knows the consequences if it is short, and besides, the alpha tends to trust people. Too much so, according to his brother.

“I believe you once said that you have relatives up in Warwickshire?” Castiel says.

The older man looks at him suspiciously.

“Yeah”, he says warily. “My nephews, living at a place called Long Compton. Live with their mother, Karen's sister Mary.”

“That is just beyond Norton, if my memory serves”, Castiel says with an easy smile. “I had to go to Stratford one time, and remember passing through it, not far into the county. I am up that way tomorrow. Would you like me to take them a message?”

The farmer looks surprised, but nods.

“I'll have Garth write something out this evening, and send him to the cottage with it”, he says. “What takes you there?”


The farmer nods. He knows all too well what the nobleman means.

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This is the road to Stratford, birthplace of the recently-departed William Shakespeare, so beloved of English schoolboys up and down our fair country. Again, the term 'road' is used somewhat flexibly. Come to that, so is the term 'beloved'.

From the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire border, the road descends steeply into the small village of Long Compton, a pretty enough place in its own little valley. The largest house here is owned by the Winchester family, prominent merchants who can trace their roots back to Saxon times. A solitary figure stands just outside the courtyard entrance. This is the other hero to our story, Dean Winchester, and at first appearances he looks much more the part than the alpha about to crash
into his life. Dean is twenty-five years of age, six foot tall and therefore a giant for these times (though that bastard Dame Fate had made his beta brother Sammy even taller!), has short blond hair and forest-green eyes. He is the very definition of the handsome alpha male.

There is just one small problem with that. Dean is an omega.

Make that two problems. Dean is a barren omega.

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In one sense, Dame Fate was not as unkind to Dean as she might have been. Omegas have their first heat any time between their fifteenth and seventeenth birthdays, so when Dean had almost reached sixteen and still had not had one, it had not been remarked on. And that was when his father, making an ill-timed visit to Coventry to check up on a convoy he had organized there, had caught the plague and died within days.

John Winchester had not treated his omega son well, so Dean did not miss him. What he did miss, unfortunately, was his first heat, which in the year or so that followed signally failed to turn up. A consultation with Miss Moseley, the local wise-woman (the last person to call her a witch had contracted a very prominent rash just hours later) confirmed it; Dean was barren. He could only thank his lucky stars that it was his father who had died and not his mother; the former would surely have sold Dean off as a sex slave or worse. And he had been able to help his mother run things over the past few years until his brother's coming-of-age a few months back, when Sammy had got everything and Dean nothing.

Omegas do not cry. It is just a windy day, that is all.

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Wednesday 18th September, 1639

Castiel sighs as he edges his horse carefully along this poor excuse for a road. Honestly, one would have thought that the highway linking Oxford with the towns of the Midlands would have been better maintained, But then again, England has more pressing concerns just now. Though arguably not as pressing as those of the people he has just spoken to.

Two days ago, at the end of a meeting with his reclusive grandfather, the old earl had informed Castiel that their latest acquisition, the small hamlet of Broadstone-by-Norton, would have to go. The issue, as Castiel had mentioned to Robert Singer the day before, is sheep. Rising wool prices mean that it is becoming more economic for landowners to destroy hamlets and small villages, replacing them with a shepherd's hut and some sheep, And the earl had gone on at considerable length to his second son about not warning the people of the place what was soon to befall them.

Castiel makes a point of Not Warning them. They are already packing as he departs.

He makes a mental note to check the place on his return, so he can truthfully inform his grandfather that the people are gone. It is the same story in so many other places, starting with the abandoned hamlet of Chalford directly across the road. And Castiel's journey today had taken him past or near the remains of Dornford, Berrings, and Asterleigh, all similarly wiped from the map.

The young nobleman feels the injustice of it all bitterly, but knows that he is in no position to do anything about it. And with his brother having five sons, he certainly never will be.

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No-one thinks it unusual when Dean decides to take a walk after lunch. It is not exactly a secret
that, when the mood takes him, the young omega will head up the hill overlooking the village and make for the Stones, an ancient set of standing stones on the very top of the hill. There is a small stone circle on one side of the road and a single stone on the other; legend has it that they are the soldiers and their leader who once captured a local witch in the village (Sammy had once joked that it might have been Miss Moseley; Dean sniggers at the memory of his brother having problems with his glorious hair for two weeks afterwards, which kept smelling like he had bathed in pond water). In exchange for her freedom, the witch had foretold that if the leader could climb the hill and gaze down on the village, then he would become a king of England. She had then waited until he was just about to turn his eyes on the place before zapping them all to stone. There is a message in there somewhere, Dean suspects.

As he climbs the steep hill, Dean muses on the sad state of his fair country. He counts himself amongst the king's supporters, though even he would have had to have admit that Charles Stuart had not exactly done well for himself. Inheriting the crown from his father James fourteen years back, he had spent the first four years arguing with parliament over the fact that he felt they should give him whatever he wanted, and they for some inexplicable reason did not. So ten years ago he had dissolved them and decided to rule by himself. It has not gone well. People constantly grumble about 'taxation without representation', and Dean has seen his mother and brother move from loyalty to the crown to outright opposition as a result.

Two years back, things had lurched from bad to worse. Prompted by his foolish Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud, Charles had tried to force a new prayer-book on the Scots. They had already been unhappy enough at an absentee king, and had gone into open rebellion. Earlier this year they had marched their army to the border, whilst the king had managed to cobble together a larger but ill-disciplined force to oppose them. A truce had been agreed, but everyone knew that that was just delaying the inevitable.

Dean sets himself up by the King Stone, looks down on the village and sighs. He supposes, all things considered, that his life is not so bad. He has his mother, he has Sammy, and he is well-off. He really should not be asking for more.

Lost in his thoughts, he fails to notice the dark grey clouds rolling over the hill behind him. At least until his skin starts to prickle at the sudden drop in temperature, when he looks up and realizes that he is about to get very wet. There is no way he will be able to make it back to the village (he is not risking running down that steep track), but he knows that there is a barn by the main road at half the distance which would offer shelter, so he makes for that. Though by the time he reaches it, he is already soaked to the skin, Grumbling to himself about the English summer, he begins to peel off his wet clothes.

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Castiel knows that Long Compton, where Robert Singer's nephews live, lies but a few miles north of Broadstone, and the going proves as difficult as he remembers, past the town of Norton and up and down a series of hills. Fortunately Alan, Castiel's mount, is an old war-horse built for tough terrain rather than high speed, and he plods slowly but steadily north-westwards. The young man also keeps an eye on the skies, which are definitely threatening a downpour.

He is a little way past the milepost marking the border between Oxfordshire and Warwickshire when that threat becomes a reality, the rain hurtling down with almost brutal force. Castiel had hoped to make it to the village and seek shelter with his neighbour's relations, but there is no way he is going to get all the way down that steep hill without becoming drenched. Fortunately he is at a turning in the road by which there is an old barn, and he decides to take shelter there until the storm has passed. The rain is so heavy that he does not notice the fresh footprints leading inside.
until it is too late.

And then he stops dead. There, grabbing some wet clothes in a futile attempt to cover his nakedness, is the most beautiful man he has ever seen. Slightly taller than Castiel, he is also more muscular, yet even in this damp barn that scent is unmistakable.

Omega!

Castiel snarls. The omega's eyes widen in terror.

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Notes:
1) England was still on the Julian Calendar at the time of this story, hence the calendar was about ten days behind the seasons (so although Castiel's birthday was in summer, the seasons were already in autumn). This was not solved until 1752 when the country moved to the more accurate Gregorian Calendar, Wednesday 2nd September being followed by Thursday 14th September.
2) Real-life Kidlington. A commuter town to nearby Oxford, its population (now 17,000) rose twelve-fold in the twentieth century. The parish church of St, Mary the Virgin is very impressive, as are the almshouses. The centre is more properly along the Banbury road than in the story.
3) Real-life Thrupp, population 230. The farm, featured in this story, dates from the early 1600s and is still there. The village did have a watermill, but in 1788 this was knocked down and replaced with a row of cottages. Now a popular stop on the scenic Oxford-Coventry Canal.
4) A slightly renamed River Cherwell, a tributary to the Thames. An important civil war battle, Cropredy Bridge, was fought along its upper reaches in 1644.
5) Raphael's title comes from Hampton-on-Sewell, real-life Hampton Poyle, whose 120 people live roughly opposite Thrupp.
Chapter Summary

3: Sam Winchester gets a shock, Dean Winchester gets a mate, and the dynamic duo eventually make their way back to Castiel's home in Oxfordshire. They pass several barns on the way, and Dean learns the importance of the padded saddle.

Wednesday 18th September, 1639

Sam Winchester is worried.

Some four months after attaining his majority, he is still coming to terms with their merchant carriage business. The Winchesters earn a respectable living by organizing convoys (1), basically armed goods caravans for the dangerous roads of England. Starting from very little, their reach now extends as far afield as Gloucester, Coventry and Oxford, giving them a domain about fifty miles across. His mother has run the business well since her husband's death (which neither of them makes a pretense of mourning), and Sam knows he is fortunate in his inheritance.

No Garden of Eden is perfect however, and the younger Winchester has long been concerned about his elder brother, whom he knows is in a difficult situation. Omegas are discriminated against enough as it is, and their only value is seen by many in their breeding ability, being statistically more likely than women to produce healthy alphas. That Dean cannot do that makes him.... well, in the eyes of many outside this house, worthless. Sam knows that Dean already has a depressingly low opinion of himself, reinforced by years of poor treatment at their father's hands. And now the sun is almost set, yet there is still no sign of his wayward brother, who only went out for a walk up the southern hill.

Fortunately the beta's concerns are ended by a familiar voice echoing from the entrance to the courtyard. A whine he knows all too well.

“Hah! I might have known you would be a Puritan!”

Thank the Lord, it is indeed his omega brother returning at this ungodly hour. And evidently he is not alone; he sits astride what looks like an old war-horse, in front of an alpha.....

Sam's eyebrows almost disappear into his (naturally gorgeous) hair. Dean is willingly sat with an alpha? His brother, Dean? Not only willingly, but he is virtually draped over the man! The omega who always moans to Sam about 'personal space' might as well be inside the rider's shirt!

The alpha (who is apparently a miracle-worker) is definitely of noble blood from the way he sits upright in the saddle, Sam observes. He has also been the apparent victim of a passing tornado, judging from his hair. He scowls at Dean, probably to little effect as the omega is so close to him.

“Every religion needs a benchmark”, the alpha growls, shifting around so that his own mouth is perilously near Dean's neck, “otherwise it can drift off into the hands of those who would abuse it. Or get supplanted by something worse.”

“You're not even wearing black!” Dean scoffs, somehow contriving to get even closer to the man.
Sam is fascinated. His brother's voice is scorn and derision, but his body is sending out rather a different message.

“It is a popular misconception that all Puritans wear black”, the man bites back, and Sam belatedly notices that both his arms are around his brother. Ugh! “That is something only the truly foolish believe.”

Dean huffs and leaps off his horse, then helps the other man down. He holds onto him for way too long, until Sam coughs pointedly. Even then, his brother and the alpha are virtually coupled together as they go into the house.

Dean's new cuddle-bunny (Sam has obviously not referred to him as such, since the younger Winchester is currently both alive and unharmed) turns out to be Lord Castiel Milton, grandson of the Earl of Bradstock and a near-neighbour to Uncle Bobby down by Oxford, from whom he has brought a letter. Sam's mother welcomes him, and she and Sam gaze on in wonderment as Dean and the young nobleman continue their argument through dinner. A dinner Dean practically spends in their guest's lap.

“You must spend the night here”, Mary cuts in, taking advantage of a rare pause as both men stop to draw breath. “We cannot have you riding back in the dark. Dean can share with Sam for tonight.”

“I can sleep with Cas”, Dean says calmly.

They all look at him until he realizes what he has just said. The blush is wonderful to behold for his little brother.

“My lord”, Mary says evenly, “may I inquire what your intentions are towards my son?”

“I wish him to be my mate”, the nobleman says firmly. “I apologize for the suddenness of all this, Mrs. Winchester, though it has taken me by surprise as well. And before you say it, Dean made a point of telling me when we met that he cannot bear children. He is my true mate, madam, and I will love him from now until my dying breath.”

“How old are you?” Sam asks cautiously. He knows that whilst he himself may look like an alpha, Castiel is the real thing, and would definitely worst him in a fight. Plus, he is nobility.

“Today is my thirtieth birthday”, the young lord replies.

“Really?” Dean purrs, looking up at him. “You never told me that. How's about me giving you a real birthday present.....”

“Dean!”

It must be bad, Sam thinks, that even that tone of voice from their mother fails to register with the omega draped all over the alpha. He suddenly thinks of something and peers hard at his brother's neck.

“You haven't claimed him!” he says accusingly.

The nobleman turns slowly to fix him with a look, and Sam shuffles his chair backwards. He is not exactly afraid, but.....
“I think the pair of you may be making some mistaken assumptions about me and my intentions”, he says slowly. “I met Dean when we were both sheltering from the recent rainstorm in a barn just south of here. He had taken all his clothes off, and... well, you both know the way the world is. I wanted him more than life itself, and he was prepared to have me.”

“He wouldn't even bite me before asking your permission first”, Dean sulks. “Puritanical bastard!”

“Dean!”

Sam has to hide a smile, as his mother and their guest both bark at the surprised omega, then look at each other.

“I like you”, Mary says. “An alpha prepared to wait. Well, maybe we are overdue a miracle. Dean, what do you say?”

Sam narrowly bites back a laugh. Dean is so far into the young nobleman's neck at this point that he is unaware that he is being spoken to. And when Castiel eases him away to point him at his mother, he actually whines!

“Cas!”

“Your mother was asking you something, Dean”, the alpha says firmly. Dean's eyes widen at the commanding tone and he actually moves to lower his gaze, but Castiel does not let him. “None of that.”

“Do you wish to marry Castiel?” Mary prompts.

“Hell yes!”

Sam cannot help but laugh. It is a mark of how far his brother is gone that this does not even elicit a scowl. Though Sam will make a point of checking his underwear drawer later, just in case.

+---+

Thursday 19th September

Sam is awoken abruptly by a keening noise from the kitchen that morning. Quickly pulling on his clothes he races to the source, wondering what his brother has done now. But when he arrives, he finds Dean in his alpha's lap, Castiel running a soothing hand through his future mate's short hair. Mary barrels in behind her younger son.

“I am sorry”, Castiel says apologetically. “I suggested to Dean that perhaps he would like a couple of days with the two of you to say goodbye. He, um, did not take it well.”

Dean whines again, and snuggles even closer to his alpha. Sam notices the claiming-mark on his brother's neck, and is again impressed by the alpha's self-control. He is one hundred per cent sure that Dean would have been happy with being wedded and bedded already, but apparently he will have to wait. And his brother does not like waiting.

Dean pulls back a little and looks beseechingly at his alpha.

“But you will come back?” he asks, a tremor in his voice.

“I am only going as far as Norton, where we have a place that can put me up for a couple of nights”, Castiel explains. “I will be back first thing Monday morning, ready to take you with me.”
“Promise?”

“I promise, my beautiful omega.”

Sam stares. Someone called Dean beautiful. And Dean not only did not object, he responded by actually batting his eyelashes at the alpha.

The younger Winchester will be offering up extra prayers of thanks in church this weekend.

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Friday 20th September, 1639

“Can I ask you something?” Sam asks his brother. Castiel – Sam cannot call him Cas, no matter what his brother does – called earlier that day to discuss a few things with Mary, and Dean was initially a little sulky about not taking his old horse Chevalier. But as Mary pointed out, he is due to retire soon and would probably not take well to a long journey, and besides, Castiel had promised to buy Dean a new horse once they were settled into their new home.

That was the other reason for Castiel's visit, namely to tell them that he would, at some time in the not too distant future, be moving to London. Everyone knew that the king would have to call a parliament sooner or later, and Castiel's estate includes a town that elects a member at Westminster. That had been another reason for his reticence; he had wanted Dean to fully understand everything that their future held before making him his.

Hopefully lots of sex, Dean had told his brother, smirking at the discomfort that his remark had evinced. Now he eyes him warily.

“What?” he asks.

“Do you want this, Dean?” Sam asks. “Or does just your body?”

Dean thinks on that for a little while.

“Cas is sound”, he says at last. “And.... he kind of loves me.”

“Kind of?”

Dean suddenly turns to look his brother fully in the face, and Sam takes a step back. Never has he seen such naked want in those green eyes. It is downright alarming.

“I want him more than life itself”, Dean says quietly, “Do you know how hard it is for an alpha to hold back when he finds a naked and helpless omega, Sammy? I was his for the taking, and there would have been no comeback, you know that. And I know he wanted to; I could see it in his eyes. But he loves me so much that he held back. That's real love, Sammy.”

“Oh.”

“Besides, man's a complete sap.”

Sam smiles.

“And you do not mind leaving us all behind?” he asks.

“You?” Dean huffs. “Nope! Though I will try to write if I get time off his knot!”
Sam yelps and makes his escape, before his poor ears can be traumatized any further.

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Saturday 21st September, 1639

“Cas?” Dean says as they leave Long Compton and head up the steep hill towards the border. The alpha smiles across at him.

“What is it, Dean?”

“Why Alan?” the omega asks. “I mean, he's all right, but he's hardly what most noblemen would ride.”

Castiel hesitates and his face darkens.

“You don't have to tell me....”

“No”, Castiel says abruptly. “It is not a happy tale, though the ending is satisfactory enough. Alanegra – the name means black wings – was the property of a Mr. Jameson Penny, a beta from King's Linton. That is the town not far south of where I live. He went off to fight in the Dutch Wars (2) against the Spanish, and got injured for his pains, blinded in one eye. When he came back, Alan was all he had left.”

“And you bought him?” Dean asks, surprised.

“For the price of a cottage in Charlton, a job on the estate and the right to come to my cottage and see the old boy any time he wishes”, Castiel says quietly. “Jamie is a good man; we do not look after our old soldiers well enough in this country. And here we are again.”

The seeming change of subject catches Dean off-guard, and he looks around in surprise. They have ridden some way up the hill now, and the village is spread out in the valley beneath him. And to their right is the same barn that he....

Oh.

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It turns out that Dean's list of incredibly painful experiences needs to be updated to include riding a damned horse for twenty miles after having been thoroughly fucked! And putting up with that damned sex maniac's knowing smirk the whole damned way! And that possessive growl he keeps making is not helping.

They pass two more barns on the way.

Well, to be strictly truthful they do not exactly pass them.....

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Despite the delays it is still light when they reach their destination, which turns out to indeed be a cottage (3). Dean stares in surprise.

“This is it?” he asks. “You really do live in a cottage?”

“My grandfather the earl, my brother and his family all live over there”, Castiel says, pointing across the valley to a large building rising above the village on the other side. “My brother is also
an alpha, and besides, I do not really like any of them. Now, we need to get you out of your clothes again."

Dean blinks.

“No messing about, then”, he says. Castiel grins.

“Indeed”, he says. “You should still be nice and loose after all those fuckings I gave you on the way down, so I will be able to see if I can make you scream loud enough to be heard in my brother's house, which is approximately one mile away.”

Dean will tell himself later that what came out of his mouth as he all but ran into the cottage was a manly whimper. It is not necessarily true (ahem!), but it will make him feel sort of better.

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Some little time later, a flock of birds takes of hurriedly from alongside the river as a scream reverberates down the valley.

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Notes:
1) Winchester Transport is a convoy-carrier business. For people wanting to ship large items across the country there were two options; hire a firm like them to do it at once, paying for both urgency and the armed guards needed, or take advantage of the semi-regular convoys between the larger cities, often run by firms like W.T. The roads are dangerous, especially with the political situation.
2) The Eighty Years War (1568-1648), effectively the Dutch battle for independence from Spain, one of two religious-nationalist wars in Europe at this time. It fed into the other, the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), the struggle between Protestants and Catholics over religion in the German states. Many Englishmen fought in the former, Protestants supporting the Dutch and Catholics the Spanish. England was not involved much in either, but the effect of both was to limit foreign intervention in the country's own troubles, which..... no, you'll have to read the story and find out!
3) There were cottages and cottages. Until recent times the word had meant a small two-storey house with sufficient grounds to support the family inside (which Castiel's cottage was), but greedy landowners were now taking that land, leaving the people inside dependent on them. It was not slavery, but it was not far off.
October 1639

Chapter Summary

4: Dean settles into his new life, not without some bumps along the way. He starts to believe that, even for him, good things might happen occasionally. Bobby Singer makes a graphic threat to rearrange someone's anatomy, and Castiel has way too many brothers.

Tuesday 1st October, 1639

Castiel had been expecting this. But it still hurt, seeing the man he loved in agony.

The Sunday before he had taken Dean away from Long Compton, the young nobleman had had a long talk with his future mother-in-law. One of the things that she had told him was that, for the first sixteen years of Dean's life, his father had abused him. Not physically – otherwise Mary would have done something to him that would have made no more offspring a certainty – but her husband had sadistically enjoyed emotional torturing his omega son, never passing up an opportunity to tell him how worthless he was. Even the decade since the man's passing had not been enough to undo all that damage, and Mary had warned the alpha that Dean's self-loathing would surely break through at some point.

Judging from the fact he is now curled up in a tight ball in their bed and putting out the most distressing keening noises Castiel has ever heard from any human, that moment has come sooner rather than later. Well, desperate times call for desperate measures.

“Dean!”

The omega freezes. That is his alpha's command tone, enough to cut through the despair that is telling him over and over that this wonderful man will only want him for a short time, and will soon find a prettier and younger omega he can actually breed from. For now, however, Castiel wants him. He looks up fearfully.

“Cas?”

“I want you to fuck me.”

Dean stares at the alpha in astonishment, his own woes suddenly forgotten. And Castiel is working his way underneath him, presenting his hole like an omega waiting to be..... oh hell!

This does not happen, Dean's brain tells him, despite the fact that his own cock is rapidly hardening at the sight before him. Alphas rule, betas serve, omegas lie back and take it.

“Now, Dean.”

Still the command. Castiel actually wants this. Dean scrambles to obey.

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There is of course no knot, but Castiel insists on Dean remaining inside him even after the omega
had long gone soft. He can feel his mate as a dead weight on top of him, one he can easily support, but more importantly Dean's scent is one of blissed-out happiness and contentment, as he lazily scents the alpha beneath him. There will be other crises, Castiel knows, but for now he has a very happy omega.

And yes, he did enjoy it himself just a little.

All right, a lot. So sue him!

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Thursday 3rd October, 1639

Two days later, Dean is still in shock. He will be bustling around the cottage, cleaning or preparing food – the alpha is a menace in the kitchen; honestly Dean does not know how he has managed to survive alone thus far – when it will suddenly hit him. He fucked an alpha.

Unfortunately said alpha seems almost psychic in that Dean will nearly always look up from those thoughts to see a familiar pair of blue eyes and knowing smirk. Dean hates blushing. It makes his freckles stand out even more. And sometimes Castiel will quirk an eyebrow upstairs, and... well, omegas do what they are told. Everyone knows that.

That is the other thing. Castiel actually loves him. Not just for his broken and useless body which can never bear pups, but he loves him, Dean Winchester. And yes, the man may have weird political beliefs and impossibly cold feet – does his blood just turn around at his ankles or something? - but he is Dean's and Dean is his. It all seems too good to be true.

Looking back, Dean wonders if Miss Moseley had known that the sexy alpha was about to crash into his life. He had taken her some food the week before, and she had looked at him and told him that good things did happen. Dean had assumed she had meant his narrow escape with his father dying before realizing that his omega son was also barren, but then he had met Castiel. His Cas, of the impossible hair, iron control and kindly nature.

Maybe good things do happen, after all.

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Sunday 6th October, 1639

Being with Castiel is so fulfilling – in every sense of that word – that it is two full weeks since his arrival at the cottage before Dean remembers that his uncle lives but half a mile away, and that he really should visit the old misery. Although to fair, Dean has spent a lot of that time being horizontal (and occasionally diagonal). Some of it even sleeping.

The young nobleman is a strange fish, he thinks as he walks around the mere, notably larger since the recent rains. A Puritan parliamentarian in a family of Protestant royalists, a nobleman who lives in a cottage, an alpha who is prepared to take a barren omega to mate – Castiel is a paradox on so many levels. But then, at least he is a well-hung paradox!

He glares downwards as a certain part of his anatomy perks up at that thought. Little Dean has no sense of timing, apparently!

The oddest thing about Castiel, apart from his permanently cold feet, is not so much the sex as what follows. After coupling, Castiel cares for him in a way which always brings tears to the omega's eyes. After two weeks Dean is feeling more loved than at any time in his life before, and it
is so wonderful that the happiness is almost too much for him.

Something of his emotions must be showing in his face, because his uncle greets him with his normal sour expression.

“No details!” the old man says firmly. “Or I'll cut your goolies off and sell them as ear-rings in Linton market!”

Dean grins. He has a feeling that he and his uncle are going to get along just fine.

+++ Sunday 13th October, 1639 +++

“Castiel, what on earth is that?”

His brother sudden halt in mid-diatribe over his own worries catches his fellow alpha off guard.

“What?” he asked.

“You have a bite on you! Ye gods, cover it up brother!”

Castiel sighs and wishes (too late) that he had worn something with a higher neck today. Dean had surprised Castiel for once, though the nobleman had made him pay for it afterwards (apparently it was possible to completely rotate an omega whilst knotted inside of him). And if Castiel quietly enjoys the hint of pain every time he (often) presses against the bite, well, that is between him and his bedpost.

He may have to go to the evening service as well, with all these sins to atone for!

“Some of us get lucky from time to time”, he smirks. He knows full well that Lady Naomi limits his brother's sexual encounters to the production of children alone. Raphael scowls at him, but wisely changes the subject.

“Anyway, the King is determined to raise more levies to deal with the treacherous Scots”, he says angrily. “Though not before next summer, thank the Lord. More time with our men away from the fields! Fortunately it will not be for long; he is confident he will beat them easily enough.”

Castiel refrains from arguing that point, His own reports on the Scots army, the Covenanters (1), suggest that they are far from the disorganized rabble many report (or wish to believe) them to be. The king had mishandled his northern kingdom at every opportunity over the past few years, and now it looks like the chickens are finally coming home to roost. Chickens of course made him think of Bobby Singer's farm where Dean had gone this morning, after the two of them had....

“And Naomi actually said that she can see the Queen's viewpoint”, Raphael complains.

“The Queen (2) is a difficult subject”, Castiel observes. “Her Catholicism apart, it is a fact that many believe her influence on her husband to be rather too strong. I hope your good lady wife does not voice those opinions around our grandfather.”

“King Charles is Defender of the Faith”, Raphael says proudly. “He would never even look at Catholicism!”

Castiel wonders at that, but he keeps it to himself. He would rather think of other things. Handsome, tall, blond, naked and green-eyed other things.
The two of them walk back from church in silence that afternoon.

“This is really happening”, Dean says quietly. Their feet scrunch on the frosty ground, leaving a double trail of prints behind them as they leave Charlton behind. The service had seemed normal up to the moment when the vicar had read out the banns, proclaiming that Castiel Milton and Dean Winchester were to be wed in three weeks' time, and anyone who had objections should make them now. Dean had fully expected someone to stand up and shout something there and then.

“It is”, Castiel smiles. “Although my grandfather wishes us to have the service here rather than at Compton.”

Dean's face falls. Castiel stops and takes him in his arms.

“He can have his way”, he says quietly, “but directly afterwards, you and I are travelling up to your mother's house, and she and I will arrange for your local priest to give us his blessing as well, so she, your brother and estate staff can attend.”

“And your grandfather does not mind?” Dean asks, surprised.

“I insisted on it”, Castiel says firmly. “The service will be three weeks today, and we shall have to spend that day here meeting and greeting people, worse luck. But the next day we shall travel north, and your family shall see us wed a second time.”

“And you would do that for me?” Dean smiles. “I am a lucky omega.”

Castiel chuckles.

“You forget”, he growls. “I get to celebrate my wedding twice, which means two wedding-nights. In fact, I think I had better start getting in some practice....”

Dean is already running. Castiel snarls and gives chase.

Saturday 19th October, 1639

And so Dean had now formally met the family. Which was annoying, as it meant the blue-eyed sex maniac had been right. He had indeed not been missing out on much.

Well, he had not yet met the earl, but the according to Castiel few did. The old man kept to his suite of rooms, sending for his sons as and when the mood took him. Castiel's elder brother Raphael was a snooty toff, well-matched in Dean's not so humble opinion to his starchy wife Lady Naomi. They had both looked at Dean like he was something that had crawled out of the river, and should crawl back in again.

He and his husband had come over to the Hall because the earl had wished to speak with his second son over some matter or other, and Castiel had somehow wangled an invitation for them both to dinner. And whilst the food had been good – Dean really needs to see the housekeeper over that pie! - it had not make up for the bad company. Castiel declines to stay the night, especially when it becomes clear that the invitation does not extend to Dean. They are now striding back towards the ford and away from the Hall.

“Cas?”
The young nobleman stops and turns. Dean tries not to smile; the little scruff's hair is once again a write-off.

“What did your brother mean when he referred to 'our other brothers'?”

Castiel sighs.

“My father married twice”, he says, “and not only that, but to sisters.”

Dean bites back a comment about keeping it in the family though judging from the knowing look in those blue eyes, Castiel guesses his thoughts all too accurately. Fortunately he continues without commenting on it.

“Rebecca and Sarah Newton were co-heiresses to a great estate”, he explains. “My father married Rebecca and had two alpha sons, Raphael and myself. My mother never recovered from my birth, and died a month later. Two months after that, my father married her sister, getting her half of the estate as well.”

“Oh.”

“Six months after that, she gave birth to twins, Michael and Lucifer.”

Dean could do the mathematics there, though he was distracted by the name.

“Lucifer?”

“My father liked angel names”, he said. “Two more sons followed, Balthazar and Gabriel. All four betas. Unfortunately my stepmother was – still is – a Catholic, and my grandfather went through the roof. He disinherit the lot of them. I suppose Raphael and I should have considered ourselves lucky not to have acquired any rival claimants to the estate, but... well.”

He stops, seemingly lost in thought and staring at the ground. Dean thinks he is depressed – until he looks up and catches the glint in those blue eyes,

Oh!

“The Manor Farm barn is over there”, Castiel grins. “How about returning my brother's hospitality by fucking on his side of the river for once?”

“Hell, yes!”

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Sunday 20th October, 1639

Dean says a few extra prayers in church today. And he is oh so grateful that there is a hassock in the family pews! Those bare boards hurt!

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Notes:

1) The name commonly given to the Scots rebels. After the 1637 prayer-book riots, Scots leaders set up the Covenant, a Presbyterian resistance movement against the king. Ostensibly professing loyalty to Charles, it demanded the removal of all changes brought in by him and his father. The
Covenanter were eventually defeated by Oliver Cromwell in 1650, and treated so badly after the 1660 Restoration that many emigrated to the Americas.

2) Henrietta Maria (1609-1669), sister to King Louis XIII of France. A bitterly unpopular figure due to her Catholicism and her refusal to learn English for many years, she did not help herself by refusing to attend a Protestant coronation service. This rebounded on her in exile when the English parliament refused her request for a pension because she had never been crowned! The state of Maryland, first settled in 1634, is named after her.
October-December 1639

Chapter Summary

5: The dynamic duo are wedded, and Dean is (very thoroughly) bedded. Castiel arranges for a second service in his mate's home village so his family can attend and grant their blessing, and considers advanced weaponry. Plus there is a death in the family......

Sunday 27th October, 1639

The wedding is strange. A small affair as they both wanted, it is attended by only a few locals and Castiel's brother and sister-in-law, which Dean finds mildly amusing as they clearly do not want to be present, and all but run to their carriage afterwards (honestly, a carriage; the church is within sight of the Hall!). The service is traditional in all aspects except one; typically Castiel was worried about the mad scramble for the traditional scattering of coins afterwards, so Dean arranged for envelopes of money to be given to each of the people who attended, the number depending on how many children they have. It is lucky that Charlton (1), Stalwarton (2) and Nowhere are all small places.

Castiel also sticks with tradition at the end of the service, marking Dean with a new bite and loudly declaring "Dean is mine!" in his deepest growl. Dean thinks that everyone gets the message, although he is slightly out of it with lust at the time. Though not as much as afterwards, when Castiel again insists on tradition and drives him to their cottage where Dean is very, very thoroughly mated. He is careful not to try to sit down too suddenly the rest of that day, and is even prepared to put up with the knowing smirks at the reception.

His mating-mark (as it is now) can probably be seen from Oxford! But that is all right, as Castiel has one too - somewhere no-one except Dean will ever see it!

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Monday 28th October, 1639

Honestly, Dean is going to have to throw a bucket of water over the alpha if this keeps up. And they say omegas are the needy ones? Hah!

Castiel had thrust into him so hard the day before, Dean had been half-sure that the alpha was trying to reach Mecca! And do not even start him on the reception. Thank the Lord that it was only villagers there, who knew about... well, things. Because Castiel had been all over him, growling angrily when Dean had tried to move away from him (yes Dean loved him, but nature was not so much calling as roaring!). And the alpha had actually sulked outside the room until Dean was done, then all but attached himself to him immediately afterwards.

The ride back to Charlton had been an experience, though Dean can safely say that having your alpha knot you whilst riding – amazing! Lucky that Alan was so patient, that his two riders had to stay on him form nearly an hour until the alpha's knot had gone down. And today is just as bad – or good, Dean supposes. Castiel is still fiercely possessive, and if his omega enjoys those little growls every time they pass by someone – well that is his prerogative.
He is actually almost surprised that Castiel does not growl at his mother when they finally arrive at Long Compton (they would have been there sooner, but certain blue-eyed and sex-mad alphas had to just see a lonely barn to set them off, and some poor omegas just had to lie back and take it like a man). Castiel does growl at Sammy, which is hilarious as his brother yelps and backs away in alarm.

“I am sorry”, Castiel says once they were in their room. “I cannot help it. I know none of your family are a threat, but you are my omega now Dean, and I just want to protect you. I love you so much!”

Dean kisses him gently. He secretly loves that Castiel is so possessive of him, and the constant touching (and occasional barn-fuckings) are more than welcome. And he will always cherish the fact that his husband had actually growled at his own brother yesterday when Raphael got too close.

“I love you, Cas”, he says simply. “Nothing else matters. And tomorrow we can have a blessing here, and you can be all over me again. I suppose my poor omega body will just have to take it.”

“You are right”, Castiel says seriously. “I have been overdoing it for you, Dean. I am sorry. I will refrain from any more sex until we are safely back in.... oof!”

Dean was on top of him, forest-green eyes burning into sea-blue ones.

“Don’t! You! Dare!”

Wednesday 30th October, 1639

“You are purring!”

Dean looks up from his pie, annoyed.

“What?”

“You are actually purring!” Sam accuses. “That means you are thinking of him again. Ugh!”

A message from Castiel's brother had arrived that morning, asking if the younger alpha could visit Norton to sort out a problem with an estate property there. Castiel had not been happy about it, but it had been arranged that he would spend the day sorting it out, and he and Dean would leave for Charlton on the morrow. And Dean was not the sort of person to go all needy just because his alpha was a few miles away.

The very thorough fucking Castiel had given him before leaving had seen to that. Luckily the alpha had had the foresight to start it early, allowing time for his knot to go down. Dean could still feel the burn, as well as enjoying both the pie and his little brother's evident discomfort.

“Mum's pie is good pie”, Dean says. “It gives me even more happy memories, to go with the ones of Cas and his huge.....”

“Dean!”

“Estate!”

“Stop traumatizing your brother, Dean”, his mother scolds, “or you will not get the rest of the pie
to take with you.”

She does not laugh at the beseeching look on the omega's face at that threat, but it is close.

“Pie to go!” he cheers. “Hurrah! Today could not get any better.”

“Could it not?” Castiel asks, walking into the kitchen. “Hullo Dean. Mrs. Winchester, Sam.”

He reaches round his mate and takes his spoon, scooping himself up a large piece of pie. Only slowly does he become aware of the looks he is getting,

“Dean lets you eat his pie?” Sam asks, clearly aghast.

“Dean knows I would buy him all the pies in the world if he asked”, Castiel says simply. “Of course he does.”

Mary and her younger son exchange a look, one saying quite clearly that here are two men truly in love with each other. The alpha is eating the omega's pie, whilst the omega is apparently trying to climb inside the alpha's clothes. Again.

“Truly”, Mary muttered, “tis the end of times!”

Thursday 31st October, 1639

“We really need to see about training you how to use a gun.”

Well, if anything was going to stop Dean enjoying a long ride (no, not that sort) with his alpha, that was it. He does not pull away from him – they are on the same horse for one thing – but he does tense up.

“Why do I need to?” he asks.

“Well, when we do go to London, we shall have to ride through the Chiltern Hills to get there”, Castiel explains. “That is one of the most dangerous roads in England. I shall take my gun of course, but I think it would be good if you had one as well. And for when we are in London, too.”

“Not exactly selling me on our capital city, Cas”, Dean mutters, burrowing back into the warmth of his alpha, who rumbles appreciatively.

“Only if you want to”, Castiel promises. “If guns make you uneasy, I can have someone train you in using a knife. It is safer I suppose, although the gun has better deterrent value.”

“I like that idea”, Dean says. “Yes, I suppose I could be persuaded.”

Castiel smiles.

“Though if you want to stop in that old barn over there, I could probably be persuaded a lot more easily?” Dean offers, batting his eyelashes at the alpha who is unable to suppress a laugh.

“And they say alphas are insatiable!” he rumbles, turning the horse off the main road. “Well, I suppose Alan can have a rest whilst you ride your poor, downtrodden... oof!”
Memo to self from Dean: do not underestimate the flexibility of an alpha who, against all expectations, can remove your clothes and fuck you whilst still on horseback. And then trot his horse around the stable whilst you are still tied together, the bastard!

++++

Friday 29th November, 1639

The weather matches the mood of the country, Dean thinks sourly as he cleans round the cottage's main room. At least he has a warm alpha to wrap around him every night. Quite why Castiel is so interested in … uh, holding his omega in a manly-like manner Dean has no idea, but he loves the man more than enough to let him do that, regardless of his own feelings on the matter.

(All right, he loves it. So shoot him! As long as his brother never finds out!).

Castiel has had to go down to Oxford to attend a meeting of the local gentry, as his brother had broken his leg whilst out hunting (that at least was the official reason; Mrs Barnes, the Stalwarton housekeeper, had confided in Dean that Lady Naomi had been involved, and that her husband had make the mistake of not taking no for an answer whilst she was armed with a stout stick). The local nobility are meeting to discuss the latest news from London, which was that the king now seemed more likely than ever to finally call a parliament.

“His adviser Wentworth (3) thinks that he can easily control it”, Castiel had explained before setting out that morning. “I fear he is mistaking the wild English parliament for the tame Irish one, and it will all end in tears. It all depends on what the Scots do. They have already defied the king on so many levels, they may decide to risk all by invading.”

“The English will rise to defend their country”, Dean had said stoutly.

“I wonder.”

++++

In truth, Dean is really not looking forward to going to London. He likes the cottage a lot, even if keeping it going is a full-time task. Being skilled with his hands (and he knows his husband would make a pointed remark there), he has been able to effect a number of small but necessary repairs on the place, which he likes so much better than the barn of a great house across the valley. The cottage even has its own little brook (4), flowing from the adjoining wood for barely half a mile before joining the river near the knoll. Castiel chose the place well.

The object of his thoughts blows into the cottage at that moment, quite literally as there is a blustery downpour going on outside. His hair has decided to take the opportunity to attempt the impossible and look even worse, and he is sodden from the driving rain. He looks like a bedraggled kitten, and Dean has to bite his lip not to laugh.

“Let me get your dressing-gown”, he says, “and we can get you out of those wet clothes.”

“At this time of day?” Castiel says hopefully.

“Insatiable!” Dean mutters.

++++

Thankfully, the alpha is soon sated.
Tuesday 31st December, 1639

For once, Dean wakes to a cold bed. This is most unusual; his mad alpha likes to go running of a morning, but always returns and crawls into bed naked before his omega can wake up. Indeed, said omega has developed his own way of keeping his husband in bed for as long as possible. And if that involves copious amounts of sex, well, that is just a sacrifice that this poor omega is prepared to make. On a daily basis if necessary!

Christmas with his angel had been wonderful not marred in the slightest by Castiel going over to the Hall and getting into an argument with his brother over 'his lifestyle choices'. Fortunately it had all ended with the young nobleman storming out and dragging Dean home to make it up to him.

He smiles at the memory, and walks gingerly to the bathroom.

Castiel does not return until just before lunch. From the look on his face, Dean knows at once that something had happened.

“What is it?” he asks nervously.

The young lord hesitates.

“My grandfather died last night”, he says. “My brother Raphael is the new earl.”

“Oh.”

“And we need to talk.”

Uh oh.

Notes:
1) The village just north of Castiel's cottage, real-life Shipton-on-Cherwell (population 260). Holy Cross Church, at which Castiel and Dean worshipped not to avoid Raphael (ahem!) is there but has undergone (suffered?) a complete nineteenth century rebuild. The village has a manor house dating back to around 1600; a proposal in the 1980s to build an eco-town in the old quarry just north of the village was, mercifully, thrown out. There is only a footbridge across to Hampton Gay; I added the ford. Because.
2) Real-life Hampton Gay, population 12. St. Giles' Church, part fourteenth century but mostly rebuilt in the eighteenth, is still there, as is the manor farm which dates from the early 1600s. In 1596 villagers from both Hamptons planned to march on and kill the Hampton Gay manor owner for enclosing and forcing them off their lands, but the plot was discovered and stopped. The nearby river was the scene of a locally famous railway disaster in 1874, when cold weather and poor train maintenance combined to cause one coach to be crushed and nine others to end up in the river. 34 people died and 69 were injured. It was said that because the then inhabitants of the manor house refused to help the survivors of the crash, a curse was placed on Wadham College, who owned the place. Thirteen years later the house burnt to the ground; it was never rebuilt and is now a dangerous ruin, despite being a listed building. In 2010 an application was put in to rebuild it by the existing owner, though such is the 'speed' of local government that the damn thing may fall down before they decide yea or nay!
3) Thomas Viscount Wentworth (1593-1641), shortly to be furtehr ennobled as Earl of Strafford.
One of the leading opponents of the king in his first parliaments, his defection to the royal cause in 1629 had come as a shock, and earnt him what would prove to be the fatal enmity of his former colleagues. As Lord Deputy of Ireland his brutal but effective policies actually made the island pay for itself for the first time ever, but his tactlessness led to his acquiring many enemies. His mastery of the tame Irish parliament in no way prepared him for the English one which would ultimately secure his head.

4) Since there were no sewage systems, rivers were often deadly (this was also why beer was so popular, as the brewing process killed most germs). The Sewell rose over ten miles to the north, and waste from the rivers and towns upstream would have made it undrinkable by the time it passed the cottage. This, on a related note, was why so many people drank beer, even children would drink a weak version called small beer.
January 1640

Chapter Summary

6: Castiel explains democracy (or the lack of it) to Dean, and the omega discovers to his mortification that his alpha is a lot more observant than he had given him credit for. More emerges about Castiel's family, and Dean's twenty-sixth birthday is a cause for celebration for a whole lot of people.

Wednesday 1st January, 1640

Dean privately thinks it a bit off that the new earl wants to meet with Castiel, and their grandfather not even cold. Judging from the thunderous look on his husband's face, he is not alone in that opinion.

“I hate this!” Castiel mutters, looking positively mutinous. “We have not even buried our grandfather, yet Raphael wants to talk. It is all arranged anyway.”

Dean nods as he helps the shorter man into his clothes (letting Castiel get dressed whilst upset has only happened once, and Dean does not wish for a repeat of that experience, thank you very much). He knows that his husband is stressed because this morning, the man had absent-mindedly asked if they could 'just cuddle', knowing that Dean hates that awful word. And he had sounded so unsure that Dean had forgiven him using it, allowing his husband to wrap himself around him and just growl unhappily at the world.

And yes, there was sex later. Dean is a good omega!

++++

Castiel does not return until lunch, though as he had said this was likely, his mate has made sandwiches. Dean is all too aware that the death of the old earl will mean an end to their idyllic country lifestyle, exchanging it for the hustle and bustle of the capital. London, he thinks, will be very different from Long Compton.

He insists that his husband eats and drinks on his return, then instinctively takes him to their bedroom and starts to undress him. The young lord does not resist but he does not help either, and his listlessness worries the omega. And when Dean eases them both onto the bed, Castiel wants them to be facing each other, his hand on Dean's shoulder close to the mating-mark.

“The new Earl of Strafford has had his way”, Castiel says slowly. “Writs for the new parliament are being dispatched to the counties, and it will meet in early April.”

Dean nods and kisses his alpha, eliciting a pleasured sigh.

“Raphael will want to have the election as soon as possible to get it out of the way”, Castiel says. “I think that we can expect it as early as the end of this month.”

“How many people live in this town of yours?” Dean asks.

“None (1).”
Dean raises his eyebrows in surprise.

“Then how come it has someone in parliament?” he asks. Castiel sighs.

“Forston (2), more properly Forston St. George, was created by Lord Edmund in the twelfth century as a new town”, he explains. “It never really succeeded, particularly being so close to both Wolfstown (3) and Midstone (4). But Edmund's son Henry bailed the king at the time out of a financial crisis, and his new town getting a member of parliament was his reward. When the plague hit what was left of it in the fourteenth century, the people moved away and did not come back.”

“So how do you get elected if there are no voters?” Dean asks reasonably.

“The actual constituency is called Forston and Byteby, which is my title”, Castiel says. “As well as Byteby, which is a hamlet barely any larger that Nowhere, there are two other Forstons, St. Stephen and St. Lawrence. Like Old Sarum down by Salisbury, the landowner appoints people from the estate to qualify as voters, even if none of them live there (4).”

“So how many 'forty men' (5) are there?”

“Seven. Raphael not only employs them all, but will probably be there on the day to watch them vote, though traditionally ha always lays on food for them afterwards - provided they have voted the right person in, of course! And my constituents are only one of the two things that you should be worrying about instead, Dean?”

“Oh?” he asks. “And what is the other?”

He makes the mistake of glancing up at his husband. Then down. And down.

He gulps.

+~-~-+

Soon after, a couple of wood-pigeons make a hasty take-off from the cottage garden as a scream sounds from within, lasting an impressively long time before tailing off into a pleasured moan.

+~-~-+

Saturday 4th January 1640

The weekend brings home to Dean just what he is taking on here. Castiel mentions at breakfast that they will not be going to London until around early March – the parliament will not sit until April, but he wants a little time to settle in first - and that they they need to go to King's Linton today. The nearby town is a busy little place, set along a High Street that runs between the roads from Oxford to Banbury and Bicester. It is about the same size as Norton, Dean thinks, but busier. He has been there a couple of times with Castiel before.

His husband, to his surprise, leads him to what looks at first like a private house. Only once inside does he realize that it is a shop, though what it sells is a mystery. The owner is a small, bespectacled beta, for whom the word 'unimpressive' might have been coined. Dean is more that a little surprised when his alpha bows to him.

“Mr. Rozencratz.”

The small man smiles.
“Lord Castiel”, he says. “It has come.”

He reaches under a counter and produces a small brown paper bag. Castiel does not even check the contents, and hands over several coins. They are out of the shop in under a minute. Dean burns with curiosity to know what is in the bag, but he knows his husband well enough not to ask.

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“What did you get?” Dean asks once they are home.

Castiel's sly smile is the first sign of danger, one he misses.

“Do you remember when we went into town last November?” he asks.

Dean is about to say no when a random and decidedly horrible memory chooses that particular moment to resurface, He is sure that his blush can be seen from across the valley.

“No”, he deflects. His voice is far too high.

“Now, Dean”, Castiel says reprovingly, “what did we say about lying? You wandered off to Mr. Carter's clothes store, and when I looked across you seemed fascinated by the window display.”

And now the blush could probably be seen down in Oxford. If he had had anywhere to run to, Dean would have fled. He is so taken up with his emotions that he does not even notice Castiel moving to stand right behind him, until he reaches round and placed the bag in Dean's hands.

“Cas.....”

“If you are going to say how wrong this is”, his master says firmly, “or any such nonsense, remember that we alpha and omega, two grown men, and we can do what we like with each other. Put them on.”

Dean shudders, but obediently reaches into the bag and extracts a flimsy pair of green panties. Totally without his consent, his body lets out a little moan.

“Such a good boy”, Castiel purrs. “Your body is perfect for me in so many ways, the angel kisses all over it that darken when you blush so beautifully, the bow legs that enable me to get inside you that much more easily....”

Dean does not know how he is still standing, especially as most of his blood is currently being diverted into his lower brain. He moans again.

“And tomorrow”, Castiel continues mercilessly, “we shall go to Church. All those people, and I shall sing the hymns and answer the prayer-book, knowing that you are wearing these beautiful things next to your beautiful body, knowing that afterwards we shall come back home and I shall worship your beautiful body and......”

Dean yelps as he comes violently, tears in his eyes. Castiel chuckles darkly, and leads him into the bedroom. Somehow, what is left of Dean makes it.

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Sunday 5th January, 1640

Dean had wondered that morning why Castiel had asked him to make sandwiches for later. Now he knew. Two straight hours of love-making – Lord alone knew how the panties had survived intact,
which was more than could be said for Dean's manliness – and he feels that he can barely move a single muscle in his body.

Castiel brings him over the plate and pulls up a chair. The young nobleman normally has a thing about eating in bed, but he clearly realizes that Dean is in no fit state to be moved anywhere just now.

“Who was the dark-skinned man in church?” Dean asks. To his surprise Castiel's face clouds over.

“Uriel”, he says dourly. “I have not told you about that side of the family, have I?”

“Keeping things from me?” Dean smiles.

“I do not think, given the fact you are incapable of standing up, that I can be accused of 'keeping anything from you’”, Castiel says, standing up. “But if you wish us to go another round.....”

“Down boy!” Dean says hurriedly. “Lord have mercy, you are insatiable!”

“Yes. And?”

Dean would pout at this point, but he is not sure he has the energy.

“Uriel?” he prompts. “Odd name.”

Castiel nods.

“My late father had two younger brothers, Arthur and Zachariah”, he says. “Poor Arthur was simple-minded, and his brothers took advantage of that fact. Do you know anything about the Duke of Buckingham?”

“King James' favourite”, Dean says, in between devouring a sandwich. Panty sex is tiring; he aches everywhere, but is is a good ache. “A stupid word when they mean lover.”

“I agree”, Castiel says. “Well, before the duke there was a man called Robert Carr. When he fell from power, naturally every family in the land was pushing forward attractive male relatives for the king's attentions. Poor Arthur was his.... lover for about three months, until he was supplanted by the duke. I do not think my uncle ever really got over it; he died just short of his twentieth birthday.”

“I bet his brothers got something out of it”, Dean says sourly.

“They did”, Castiel admits. “A pair of houses in London, on the edge of Whitehall Palace. We shall be living in one of them.”

“Oh.”

“Uncle Zachariah married a dark-skinned woman called Eloise”, Castiel explains. “She was Rufus' sister; they came here from Portugal, though I think they must have come from somewhere else first. “She died not long after Uriel was born; I do not think the climate here agreed with her. My uncle owns large parts of King's Linton, and is not well-liked in the town.”

“King or parliament?” Dean asks.

“Whichever gives him the most money”, Castiel says plainly. “Feeling better now?”

Before he can stop himself, his treacherous mouth utters a yes the split second before he catches
the look in the young lord's eyes. He really should have sent up another prayer in church.

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Friday 24th January, 1639

Dean knows that snow is generally a bad thing, but he is still excited that it has snowed on his twenty-sixth birthday.

“You are such a child!” Castiel says reprovingly. Dean kisses him.

“Did he say yes?” he asks eagerly.

“He said a reluctant yes”, Castiel smiles. “I am sure my brother finds the whole thing incomprehensible. But I think that such altruism on your part deserves its own reward.”

“Oh, I don't want anything special”, Dean says.

His alpha just looks at him until he gets it. He knows that those green eyes growing darker means – yes, Dean knows just what is about to happen.

Fortunately he is quite right.

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Sunday 26th January, 1639

There is a full attendance at church that weekend, which is just as well. Once the vicar has finished what seems to Dean like a longer than usual sermon, Castiel steps up to the pulpit.

“Good people of Charlton”, he intones, “you will know that my mate, in whom I am so fortunate, had a birthday this week. I will not burden you with how we ourselves marked that auspicious occasion” - he gives Dean a pointed look here which makes the omega blush fiercely and causes some barely suppressed sniggers from some pews - “but in lieu of an expensive gift from me he asked instead for something for the people who had welcomed him here. Upon leaving today each household head will be given a token, which may be exchanged for a large bag of flour at the mill down in Nowhere.”

There is an immediate burst of applause, and Dean is congratulated by everyone and their dog before he and Castiel finally leave. He is glad that he can alleviate some of their sufferings in what looks like it will be a very bad winter.

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Notes:
1) Constituencies like this blurred the line between pocket boroughs (all the voters employed by one person) and rotten boroughs (no voters living in the town for some reason). The latter were similarly owned, the 'voters' living elsewhere but being registered to vote in the town. Both these types of seat were not disenfranchised until the Great Reform Act of 1832.
2) Byteby and the Forston villages have no real-life counterparts, though failed towns like Forston St. George were quite common. I envisioned Forston being a couple of miles south of Middleton Stoney on the old Roman road called Akeman Street, and Byteby a mile to the west of that.
3) Real-life Bletchingdon, population 910. A small and rather attractive village about a mile north-east of Hampton Gay, on a minor road used by some to avoid the city of Oxford (with good reason; it is one of the most car-hostile places in England). The medieval manor house here was successfully besieged by parliament in 1645; the current one is a replacement.
4) Real-life Middleton Stoney, population 330. Except the the places I added, all the settlements in this area were listed in the Domesday Book, the 1086 assessment of all England. Middleton lies about five miles north-east of Hampton Gay, and is part of the same Church of England benefice.

5) At this time, the vote was generally restricted to people who owned property valued at more than forty shillings (£2), roughly a large town or country house.
Chapter Summary

7: Castiel gets unanimously elected to parliament by (all seven of) Forston & Byteby's voters. Dean learns about the family curse - more of which anon - and discovers that his mate is pretty much insatiable when it comes to sex, even right in the middle of a busy town centre.

Thursday 30th January, 1640

“And I hereby declare that Lord Castiel Milton is duly elected as the member of parliament for Forston and Byteby.”

There is a smattering of applause which, Dean guesses, is more in appreciation that the whole charade is over. The seven men had cast their votes watched (1) by a clearly impatient Earl of Bradstock, and now they and their families were eager to pile into the free buffet that had been laid on for them for voting the 'right' way. Although as Castiel was the only candidate....

“Grub's up!” the returning officer calls, making impressive speed for so large a man. Dean looks longingly at the besieged food tables, then at his mate.

“Do not worry”, Castiel whispers to him. “I had Pamela set aside some plates for my favourite omega. And yes, she did bake you a special celebration pie.”

Dean will deny to his dying day that what comes out of his mouth at that moment is a whimper. It is just a cough that came out wrong. And if a certain alpha gives him that knowing look, he will not be getting laid tonight.

Huh, who is he kidding?

Castiel pulls him close, and Dean goes willingly. Well, at least he will now be able to say that he has been fucked by a politician. Hopefully to Samantha next time he sees him, the big girl.

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Sunday 9th February, 1640

Dean has had a cough these past few days, and really does not feel like dragging himself to church. Unfortunately Castiel has to go, as he is due to read the lesson today. He is not a happy alpha. Which means that he drives Dean round the bend fussing and worrying over him until the omega literally has to shoo him from the cottage.

A little later, Dean is outside working on replacing a post in their fence – it might be Sunday, but the local wildlife does not observe the day of rest, apparently – when he spots a familiar figure approaching up the track from Nowhere, carrying a basket. It is Pamela – Mrs. Barnes – the Hall housekeeper.

“One of the idiot servants managed to pull down a whole bag on top of themselves”, she smiles, “so we are low on flour. I said that I would walk down to the mill and fetch some.”
Dean is surprised, and she notices.

“And I thought I would stop off and see my favourite omega”, she smiles. “How are you enjoying cottage life, Dean?”

“Not for much longer”, he replies wistfully. “Next month we move to London.”

“Who knows?” she says. “Perhaps you might move into the big house some day?”

“What, with the earl having five sons already?” Dean scoffs. “What are the odds on that?”

She looks at him strangely.

“Perhaps you should ask your dear husband about gypsies”, she says cryptically. “I dare say I shall be making a pie with some of this, Dean. I shall send you a slice or two. Good day.”

She flounces off on her way. Dean stares after her, his curiosity piqued.

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“That woman”, Castiel says fervently, “is a menace!”

“It’s not like you to keep things from me”, Dean pouts.

“I do not recall keeping things from you last night when I fucked you until you could hardly speak”, Castiel says dryly.

“Cas!” the omega says warningly. “Focus!”

The alpha sighs.

Very well”, he says. “You know the fields below the Hall?”

Dean nods.

“Gypsies camp there from time to time”, his husband says. “As I’m sure you can guess, there are often tensions between them and the villagers. Back in 1332 a village boy went missing, and naturally the villagers assumed he’d been taken. They attacked the caravans and set fire to them.”

“Go on”, Dean says.

“The lord at the time, Martin, saw what was happening and sent his servants to split them up”, he continues. “He himself went into a burning caravan and got a gypsy boy out – the missing one, it turned out, had wandered down to Hampton to see a girl! Anyway, the gypsy king was delighted, and promised in return that the direct male line of the Bradstocks would never die out.”

Dean winces.

“These stories always have a 'but' in them”, he remarks. He squeaks as the alpha pinches his arse.

“Your butt is lovely!” he smirks, “but it's already mine.”

“Cas!”

The alpha grins, but complies.

“The 'but' was that, up till then, no two lords had ever had the same name”, he says. “There had
been a Mark and a Marcus, but that was it. The Gypsy Warning was that the line would last as long as that rule held. If any lord of the manor tried to break it, there would be.... problems.”

“Ah”, Dean says. “And your brother's eldest son is Mark, isn't he?”

He nods.

“Mark, Edward, Kenelm, Edmund, Harold”, he says. “All the names of previous lords. And you know how superstitious country folk are, Dean. I am only glad that they are all healthy boys.”

He does not say it, but Dean knows that infant mortality, even amongst the rich, is far too high these days. Perhaps Pamela is right. There is a possibility, albeit a small one, that Castiel might one day become the new earl. He cannot say that the prospect fills him with any good feelings. He wonders....

“No”, the alpha says.

“Huh?”

“I simply cannot envisage you wearing a countess' tiara!”

Dean huffs indignantly.

++++

Monday 17th February, 1640

Castiel knows, from bitter experience, that he has to be constantly on the alert when it comes to his mate. The problem, as with much of Dean's life, is the damage done by his father's treatment of the omega, something the alpha suspects may never be fully reversed. But even in the short time they have known each other (quite a decent proportion of which has used the Biblical sense of that word), Castiel has become proficient in speaking Dean.

Which is why he arrives home that day and, even before he can scent it, knows that his omega is distressed. Since Dean has their meal ready he does not immediately say anything, but instead takes his mate to bed and makes love to him (yes, Castiel makes love; he is not the sort of alpha who thinks that there is some sort of prize for getting knotted in record time and then just waiting for things to go down). And as he had suspected, the love-making had reduced Dean to a quivering wreck even more than usual, screaming for his alpha's knot which Castiel was only too happy to give him. Not just because he wanted to – oh, he so wanted to – but because once they are knotted together, he and Dean can Talk.

“So what happened today, love?” Castiel asks gently.

He feels the omega tense around him, which makes his exhausted body try valiantly to come again. Dean hates 'mushy moments' as he calls them, but he is going nowhere for the next hour. And the put-upon sigh he emits makes Castiel glad that, at this precise moment, Dean cannot see his smile.

“No”, the omega says defensively. "And stop with the smiling!"

“I do not think that you are telling me the truth”, Castiel says, pressing his knot hard onto the omega's prostate, and earning himself a shriek in the process. “Try again.”

Dean mutters something that his alpha does not quite catch.
“Getting bats?” he asks, puzzled. Dean groans.

“That damned steward Armstrong came down whilst I was talking to Pam today, and said that I was getting fat”, he sniffs. “He said that if I ate too much pie, then you would stop finding me attractive.”

Castiel makes a mental note to do something very nasty to his brother's steward next time they met.

“Dean”, he says slowly, “there is less chance of me finding you unattractive than you not squealing like a girl in the next thirty seconds.”

“I do not squeal like a..... yipes!”

Castiel keeps pressing down for some time, then gently nuzzles the back of his mate's neck. He grins darkly.

“Though I do think that you should give up pie.”

“What?” Dean tries to sit up, which is a mistake for both of them. Dean whines and Castiel grunts his displeasure.

“I was going to add, 'for Lent'”, the alpha grumbles. “It starts on Wednesday. I will donate a sum of money to church come Easter, and you can celebrate by having a whole pie to yourself to make up for all your terrible deprivation.”

“Really?” Dean asks.

“Really”, Castiel grins, reaching his hand slowly round. “In the meantime, let us prove that worm of a beta wrong by helping you work off any extra pie pounds you have acquired recently.”

“And how are you going to....”

Somewhat belatedly, the omega gets it. That he will, soon, be getting it.

“Oh fuck me!” he moans.

“Exactly!”

Friday 21st February, 1640

Dean knows his husband too well. Even though his alpha had said nothing since returning from a trip to King's Linton, something was up (no, apart from that; Castiel always wore tight trousers).

“Problems?” the omega asks.

“Nothing that cannot be resolved with my dick in your butt”, Castiel says with a smirk, starting to undress.

“Insatiable!” Dean mutters, but quickly undresses as well. The last time he had been too slow, his husband had got over-eager and torn the clothes from his mate's body. It had been hot, but costly.

Castiel strokes himself to full hardness in seconds, and signals to his mate to get on the couch. Dean is barely seated before the shorter man is pushing his legs back and easing inside him with a satisfied grunt, eliciting a noise from Dean that the omega will deny till his dying day. His eyes roll
back in his head as Castiel roars his ownership of the man impaled on his dick, coming violently inside of him. Dean swiftly follows him, panting hard at the suddenness of their coupling as his arse adjusts around the huge knot inside of him.

“So”, he manages eventually, “I guess you ran into your uncle, huh?”

His response is a swift twist of both nipples that elicits another unmanly noise.

“No-one likes a sassy omega, Dean”, Castiel grins. “Except me, of course. Yes, I called in on my dear uncle.”

“And he annoyed you”, Dean says, “so you thought you would come home and work out your frustration on some poor, defenceless omega.”

Castiel looked down at his mate's spend-covered and flushed chest.

“Evidently your body seems quite happy that I chose that particular course of action”, he quips, kissing some of his beloved mate's freckles.

His mate would usually come back with a pithy retort, Castiel knows, so the alpha chooses that moment to shift his position such that his dick presses even harder onto Dean's prostate. The omega lets out a(nother) noise that is positively inhuman. His husband feels quite proud at that.

“No, definitely no objection”, Castiel grins. “Anyway, we shall be going there tomorrow.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“We need to buy you a horse and some new clothes”, Castiel says. “There is a decent tailor there, and Rufus the blacksmith will know where to find me the best mount with four legs. I missed him today.”

“I would have thought four legs was kind of necessary”, Dean quips.

Castiel smirks.

“I was differentiating”, he says. “My best two-legged mount is right here!”

He rolls his knot, and Dean's few remaining brain functions hoist a white flag.

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Saturday 22nd February, 1640

The blacksmith's forge is next to the stables, and Dean is surprised to see that the smith himself is an elderly black man, who looks as if smiling is a curse that only befalls other less fortunate people. He greets Castiel politely enough though, and they exchange some words before the man returns to his servant.

“Rufus says that there is a horse fair in the fields between the town and Oxford, come the third Saturday in March”, Castiel says. “That would be the eighteenth. I had planned on being in London sooner, but assuming we can find you something there, we could leave on the Sunday. Now, over to the tailor's.”

Dean scurries after him across the bridge to the shop of Carter and Sons, in whose window he had seen the lace panties. Castiel stops and looks back at him, and it is clear that he is enjoying the same memory. They enter the shop, where the elderly beta is waiting to receive them.
“Dean needs some new outfits for our forthcoming trip to London”, Castiel says. “Something befitting an earl's brother's mate; we do not want him parading around Whitehall like some peacock!”

He smiles as he says it, otherwise his mate would have had something to say about that remark later. The tailor snaps his fingers and a younger beta appears as if by magic, placing a chair for Castiel to sit on. The young nobleman nods curtly to him before sitting.

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Dean has to admit; he is surprised. He had expected Castiel to insist on the sort of plain, serviceable clothes he himself prefers, but when the omega shyly expresses a liking for some expensive and soft leather-like cloth, the nobleman agrees immediately. Though when Dean suggests adding a jaunty hat with a large red feather in it, there is a disapproving growl.

The hat is out, apparently. Pity.

They arrange for Dean to come back in three weeks' time for a final fitting so there will be time for any adjustments. Dean is a little surprised, however, when Castiel pays before leaving.

“Mr. Carter is a good man”, Castiel says, having spotted his mate's reaction, “and I have every faith that he will make you look even more gorgeous, difficult though that is. And there is the added advantage that he knows to make your clothes easy to remove.”

Dean blushes and looked away.

“You cannot always know what I am thinking”, he objects.

Castiel looks hard at him. Dean's stomach drops. Surely not in the middle of the High Street.....

“The stables next to Rufus' smithy should be quiet at this time of day”, he growls. “It is just over there, Dean. You might want to start.....”

His mate is already running.

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Notes:
1) The threat of retribution for voting the 'wrong' way was a real one. Secret ballots were not introduced in England until the 1872 Ballot Act, following the extension of the franchise some five years prior.
Chapter Summary

8: Dean learns even more about his husband's extended (and protracted) family, and the dynamic duo set off for London, where the omega finds that their new home is a) right next door to a bakery, and b) has a very large and comfortable bed, which Castiel wants to christen right away!

Thursday 2nd April, 1640

His husband continues to be full of surprises, Dean thinks as they lie together that morning. He knows that they should be up and on their way – it will take two days to make the trek to London, and they will be stopping at the home of a friend of the family in Little Marlow – but it is so good to lie there with a warm alpha wrapped around him, even if he does have icicle-feet! And that idiot idea of his, running for no reason, will never catch on.

Dean had been dreading the horse-fair, fearing that Castiel would purchase some omega ride for him. Instead he had bought a young black mare called Impaler which would surely have been far more suitable for himself, especially given that she put Alan, Castiel's old warhorse, to shame. But Dean had loved her from the moment he had seen her, and Castiel had paid up without demur.

He had thanked his husband later. Very thoroughly. That Castiel wears the hickeys he inflicts him with such pride gives Dean more than one tearful moment, though. He loves his wonderful alpha so much!

Dean is washing his hands at the kitchen sink when there is a knock at the door.

Seeing that, Castiel goes and opens it, revealing a tall, muscular blond beta standing there. Dean immediately feels afraid for some reason, and dries his hands quickly.

“He's mine, Luke!” Castiel says very firmly. “Hands off!”

The beta grins brightly. Dean is reminded for some reason of a hungry wolf. He is not exactly afraid, but he is glad that his husband is so close.

“'I know better to touch what's yours, Castiel', 'Luke' says in a deep voice. ‘Though if you ever feel inclined to loan him out.....’”

The change in his husband's scent from protective to furious catches even Dean by surprise, a scent that states quite clearly that someone may be cleaning blood off the floor some time soon. The alpha follows it up with an angry snarl, and the beta takes a step back.

“Sorry”, their visitor says hastily, visibly cowed. Dean notes that he instinctively offers his neck in submission.

“Hmph!” Castiel snorts. “Dean, are we ready?”

Dean nods, not taking his eyes off the visitor. He is younger than his husband though taller and broader, his hair cut unfashionably short like Dean's own. His alpha has assured him that most of their clothes would follow them, although because they will have to wait for the next caravan from
Oxford to London, it may be a few days before they catch up with them. But they have plenty in the London house.

Not, Castiel had added, that Dean would need many clothes for their first few days anyway. Bad alpha!

His husband pointedly takes his gun out and checks it before placing it in his holster, and shaking the visitor’s hand. Dean scurries out of the door past them both, to where their horses await.

+~+~+

“Who was that?” Dean asks as they ride through Nowhere. Castiel had sent Dean down the day before to say his goodbyes to his uncle, as Bobby is out in the fields somewhere and absolutely definitely not up at the Roadhouse with the Widow Harvelle.

“My brother Lucifer”, Castiel says grimly. “Half-brother to be exact.”

Dean remembers the story of Castiel’s late father’s two marriages.

“It must be annoying to him that he will never inherit the estate”, he observes.

“I do not think that Luke cares for worldly things much”, Castiel says. “He and his elder twin brother Michael have a special sort of love-hate relationship.”

“How special?” Dean asks.

“Without the love part!” Castiel smiles as they leave the hamlet behind and turn onto the main road. “Luke is also the only one of his family to become Protestant, not I think because he expects to succeed – I know for a fact that my grandfather made the exclusion legally watertight – but on principle. And like me, he prefers a stubbled omega to a woman.”

Dean instinctively rubs a hand over his chin before he can stop himself, then pouts at his husband’s knowing look. He is glad that there is no-one else around, just the two of them on a lonely road, a farm in the distance to the west, an old barn not far from the road nearby.....

An old barn.

Dean suspects he is about to be even gladder that his husband purchased a padded saddle for him. In which thought he is quite correct.

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A rapid and most pleasurable coupling in the barn does not delay them for long, although Dean refuses to make up time by riding whilst still knotted. Even the thought of the one time they tried that brings tears to his eyes, and of course a corresponding smirk to Castiel’s, which earns the alpha a well-deserved pout.

It is late in the afternoon that they reach the town of Wycombe, just under halfway to London and the turning for their night’s stay at Little Marlow. As they are riding out of the town a group of three swarthy men look at them a little too long, but the sight of Castiel’s gun makes them quickly move away. Dean waits until they are past before smiling.

“We are off to London Town!” he sings off-key as they leave Wycombe and its possibly dangerous residents behind themselves.
“Technically we are not”, Castiel says. “The house is part of Whitehall Palace (1), and therefore in the City of Westminster. It is small, but I would be surprised if we do not get offers for it as soon as we move in.”

“Why would we?” Dean asks.

“Its position”, Castiel explains. “Right next to the royal palace, and therefore access to the king. Plus of course since it is still palace land, those living there get free food every day from the royal kitchens.”

“That is something”, Dean says appreciatively. “What about the servants?”

Castiel grins.

“The good news is that the house comes with two loyal servants”, he says, “which is all it needs.”

“How loyal?” Dean asks.

“‘My half-cousins, Gadreel and Ezekiel.”

“Half-cousins?” Dean exclaims, “How many half-relatives have you got, Cas?”

The alpha chuckles.

“That was the thing I was going to tell you before you unfairly distracted me with that sexy body of yours”, he smiles, ignoring the omega's pout of protest. “Esther, my great-aunt, had an affair with a Catholic man back in 1601. It was the same time as the Essex Plot (2), when tensions in the country were high enough as it was, let alone the fact that the man was implicated – probably unfairly – and later executed. She was sent off to have the baby in secret, and died having twins. Gadreel and Ezekiel are therefore a few years older than me, and I would trust both of them with my life.”

“Are we at the Thames yet?” Dean asks. He knows that they are due to reach the great river, which he has never seen in his life, long before they reach London.

“The town up ahead is Great Marlow”, Castiel says, “but we can cut across on this farm-track and avoid it, and then it is barely a mile to my friend's house. ‘That barn over there looks abandoned, would you not say?’”

Dean follows his line of sight, and has to agree that the place does look empty. Then he looks back, and catches the glint in his husband's impossibly blue eyes.....

Damnation, he should have asked for an even more comfortable saddle!

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Friday 3rd April, 1640

Their overnight accommodation had been Spartan but clean, and they had been furnished with a good quality breakfast (bacon and more bacon). They had then continued south to reach the Great West Road, which despite the name was little better than the Oxford road. But at least it had taken them all the way through Staines, Brentford and Hounslow before they had reached the pretty village of Kensington barely a mile from the city. Dean's eyes widened at the size of some of the houses around him.
“Nottingham House (3),” Castiel explains as Dean stares at one particularly huge property. “I am afraid our own residence will be considerably more humble.”

“Provided it has a warm alpha in the bed, even if he has icicle-feet, I do not care.”

“I do not have icicle-feet!” Castiel objects.

Dean just looks at him.

“Shut up!” But the young nobleman is smiling.

+~+~+

They pass a large public park to their left which seems to go on forever. Castiel explains that this is Hyde Park (4), a former hunting park which the king recently opened to the public. Dean observes that that is one thing the king has got right, to which Castiel acidly replies “one!”

Dean is still mulling over his reply when they reach a fork in the road. There is another large house nearby, which proclaims itself to be 'Goring House' (5).

“The left road goes up to the walls of the City of London itself”, Castiel says, “whilst our way to the right goes to the City of Westminster, and our new home.

Dean has already decided that London, however Castiel defines it, is far too big. The traffic on the road has grown to more people that he has ever seen in his life, and they just keep on coming. He can already see the huge palace which abuts onto the River Thames on the other side (less pleasantly, he can smell the river even at this distance!), and almost falls behind as he keeps looking around at all the sights. The buildings are just awesome.

“That is the last abbey left in England, Westminster”, Castiel says, pointing to a huge church to their left. “It was so powerful that even Henry the Eighth did not dare to take it on. Over there towards the river you can see the Houses of Parliament (6), what used to be Westminster Palace. And across the road, stretching a long way up towards the City, is its modern replacement, Whitehall.”

“Why did the king cross the road?” Dean sniggers.

“The old Westminster Palace was partly destroyed by a fire at the start of the last century”, Castiel explains. “And King Henry the Eighth wanted parliament's support in obtaining his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, so gave them part of what was left. An unwise move, really.”

“Why?” Dean demands. The middle of a busy thoroughfare is probably not the best place for an argument, but a Winchester never backs backs away from a fight. Especially when it is with a smirking alpha.

“Before that, parliament met wherever the king was”, Castiel says. “After, they had their own home. That meant they had a stronger identity.”

“Yes”, Dean grins. “All sorts of people could get in then!”

“No system of government is perfect”, Castiel admits. “But the moment a king tries to debar people who have points of view he finds unacceptable, it is a slippery slope.”

Dean opens his mouth to argue that point, but finds that he cannot. He shuts it again, annoyed. The smirk has somehow become even more annoying.
“Never mind”, Castiel says consolingly. “Let us get to the house, then I can fuck you senseless in our bed!”

Dean flushed bright red. How on earth can he say things like that when there are so many people around?

Oh yes. He's an alpha. And a quick look down confirms that he is a very horny alpha. It looks like Dean is in for a rough evening.

Hopefully!

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Whitehall Place is also full of people, and Dean sticks close to his husband. Fortunately their destination is only a little way up it on the left-hand side. It is a two-storey small town-house, and Dean licks his lips at the sight of the oddly-named Moondor Bakery next door, which seems to be doing a roaring trade. Maybe later.

The two servants, Gadreel and Ezekiel, stand waiting for them at the door. Dean blinks. Identical twins. They both bow.

“Gadreel, Ezekiel”, Castiel says, and Lord have mercy, his voice has somehow gotten even deeper. “Monseigneur Winchester and I have urgent need of the bedroom. We will ring when we want you.”

“The master bedroom is on the first floor, the only door that is open”, one of the twins says.

“Thank you, Ezekiel”, Castiel smiles. “Dean, upstairs! Now!”

Dean wonders briefly how on earth Castiel is able to tell the two men apart. Then he hears an impatient snarl barely two steps behind him, and he bolts for it.

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Notes:

1) Whitehall Palace lay between Whitehall Place (the modern road, now just Whitehall) and the River Thames. It was in the City of Westminster, about a mile upstream from London and literally across the road from the Houses of Parliament. It became the principal royal palace when Henry VIII took the opportunity of the overthrow of Cardinal Wolsey in 1530 to seize his town property, then called York Place, across the road from his own London pad that had recently been damaged by fire. Whitehall Palace was itself almost totally destroyed in a 1698 fire. Castiel's house would have been roughly where Downing Street, built some four decades after this story is set, lies today.

2) The Essex Plot, 1601, an attempt by Robert Earl of Essex to overthrow Queen Elizabeth. A miserable failure, as her hyper-efficient spy network was fully aware of the scheme long before it broke. His son of the same name was a major player in the English Civil War.

3) The principal royal residence for over a century after Whitehall was destroyed. In the then separate village of Kensington, it was renamed Kensington Palace.

4) Hyde Park, comprising about 7% of the area covered by London's Royal Parks. The adjoining but legally separate Kensington Gardens add a further 5%, the combined total being slightly less than Central Park in New York.

5) The earliest recorded house on the site of what would eventually be Buckingham Palace. King James I had sold the freehold but retained a mulberry garden on the site, and the disruption caused by the civil wars meant that the owner Lord Goring never secured those lands. The house was burnt down in 1674 and replaced by Arlington House, which was subsequently re-modelled as Buckingham House. It was purchased by King George III in 1761, though it did not become the
main royal residence until Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837.
6) Destroyed in a fire in 1834. The modern Gothic-style replacement was built on the same site.
April-May 1640

Chapter Summary

9: Dean is shocked when his husband uses a Bad Word and resorts to open theft, whilst the political situation deteriorates to the point where the king dissolves his new parliament after only a few weeks. Oh, and the people are revolting!

Tuesday 14th April, 1640

Dean has changed his mind. He loves living in the city.

All right, ten days in the house and he is aching in parts he had not even known he possessed. Castiel had been insatiable in their first days in the place! He had expressed a desire to 'christen' every room, and not only that, but to do it as batsman and bowler! Dean had not thought that there was this much sex in the world!

Ezekiel (or possibly Gadreel) grins at him as he limps into the dining-room. Dean squints at the neckerchief which, after much persuasion (involving at least two blow-jobs that had had the alpha yelling louder than Dean had ever thought possible) Castiel had persuaded his half-cousins to wear. Red.

“Dean”, he smirks. “Good morning. Is the master up yet?”

“What do you think, Gad?” Dean says sourly. “Thank the Lord for an afternoon opening of parliament.”

“Zeke has laid out all his clothes for this great day”, Gadreel says. “The master will probably wish you to remain here.”

“Why?” Dean asks mulishly. He has no wish to go and listen to all those windbags pontificating right, left and centre, but he sees no reason to stay in all day.

“Tensions are high in the city”, Gadreel observes, to Dean's joy producing a plate piled high with bacon. “He will want Zeke and I to accompany him on his walk to and from the chamber, just in case. That means that there will be no-one left in the house.”

“I could always go next door to Charlie”, Dean grins. The flame-haired bakery owner had presented them with a pie on their moving in, which had immediately made her a Good Person in Dean's eyes (though the double orgasm that Dean had inflicted on his husband had caused her to smirk far too knowingly). Castiel had told her that she could not buy her way into the omega's affections as easily as that, but Dean had slipped over later and corrected her on that point. He could definitely be bought for the right pie... price.

“The master says that you are not allowed too many pastries from next door”, Gadreel grins. “He mentioned something about a diet?”

Dean's hand moves instinctively to the small roll of stomach that he had never quite been able to shake off.
“Next thing he'll be cutting back my bacon!” he mutters mutinously.

He jumps as a bare arm reaches around him and snaffles two pieces of the delicious-looking bacon. Castiel nibbles at his mate's neck before eating them.

“Do not give me ideas, Dean!” he growls, reaching for another rasher.

And now the bastard is stealing his bacon! Dean hates living in the city!

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“The king sent his Lord Chancellor to make his opening speech”, Castiel says dryly that evening. “He could hardly have done worse. It was all, 'if you give us all the money we want, we might possibly deign to consider reflecting on your unreasonable demands at some time in the very distant future, perhaps, if the mood takes us'. For some reason that did not go down very well, and I have a horrible suspicion that the king will not be capable of working out why.”

“He has to have money to fight the Scots”, Dean says reasonably. Castiel shakes his head.

“He wants money for an army”, he says. “And armies can be used to fight all sorts of enemies, Dean. Not just the ones wearing kilts.”

“The king would never use armed force against his own people”, Dean says hotly.

“Yet he asks for an army against the Scots who are, if my memory recalls, his own people?”

Rats!

“That is different”, Dean says defensively. “They are rebels!”

“And we in parliament are not?” Castiel points out. “It is but a short step from Whitehall across the road to Westminster, and the king may decide that a move against us may be in his best interests. Remember, those opposing him are few in number if loud in voice. Remove the leaders who organize those against you, and it is more than likely that most of the rest will fall into line.”

Dean wonders at that – would a King of England really ever move against his own people? He really would like the answer to that question to be negative, but unfortunately he has more than a few doubts.

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Wednesday 15th April, 1640

“I... very... much... fear... for... the... Earl... of... Strafford!”

It is surprising that Dean is able to partake in this conversation at all, especially as Castiel separates each of his words by thrusting his cock ever deeper into his panting mate. Dean groans in pleasure especially as he feels the alpha's knot swelling inside of him, and it is some time before he can formulate a reply.

“How?” he gasps, his voice far too high.

“His was too closely identified with the king”, Castiel says, pushing his mate's legs back even more and eliciting a pleased growl as he pushes his knot against Dean's prostate. “I think that Pym felt he can best keep his supporters together by targeting him. The earl is far from popular.”
He comes with a grunt, before all but collapsing to lie with his head on the taller man's chest. Dean plays idly with the impossible hair.

“Who is this 'Pym'?” he asks.

“John Pym, the member for Tavistock in Devonshire”, Castiel says. “Though from his accent, he is from over the border in Somersetshire. One of the king's leading opponents, now that many from his earlier parliaments have died off during his Personal Rule.”

“It is so unfair on the earl”, Dean protests. “He was behind getting the king to have parliament in the first place.”

“The king did not exactly have much choice”, Castiel says. The he yelps as Dean used his walls to squeeze his knot. “Dean!”

The taller man grins.

“Just making sure my master knows his plaaaaaaaaace!”

The last word disappears into a yelp as Castiel rolls his knot through an impossible turn, and Dean just tosses his head back and whines. He then yelps indignantly when he feels Castiel nibbling at his nipples. The bastard knows how sensitive they are, damnation!

“Surely the earl can just go back to Ireland?” he asks, once he has recovered the power of speech.

Castiel does that impossible thing when he rotates the omega's larger body on his knot until he is spooning Dean in a.... manly embrace. The omega will deny to his dying day the noises that that elicits from him.

“The trouble is”, Castiel says as he lightly kisses his mate's heaving chest (and Dean can somehow hear the smirk), “that the earl has enemies on his own side as well. He has greatly enriched himself in Ireland, though to be fair he has also actually made the place pay for once. But he has trodden on far too many toes so to do. Once the king realizes that my fellow members are not going to cough up the money, he will in all probability ignore the man's advice and dissolve us. Then there will be trouble.”

His mate fears that he may well be right.

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Tuesday 28th April, 1640

Dean stares hard at the pie before him.

“What is this going to cost me?” he asks suspiciously.

Charlie Bradbury, owner of the Moondor Bakery and the source of way more information than is good for her, smirks at him.

“I want to use that open space outside the bakery for a few extra tables now that spring is here”, she says. “And I want to start serving coffee (1) as well.”

“That vile drink?” Dean asks. “Who on earth is going to want that?”

“Maureen, who works at the tavern up the road, said that they were closing down at the end of the month”, she says with a frown. “All these Puritans in the local area do not like to be seen drinking,
so I thought offering them something other than beer but also safe would be a good idea.”

Ah. Dean knows the unspoken truth there, namely that Maureen is married to a Catholic, and tensions in the area are high enough as it is. He knows that there had been anti-Catholic riots in London only a short while back.

“Is she all right?” he asks. He likes Maureen who keeps a good house and, unlike rather too many in this town, will not serve drunks.

“She and Malcolm are moving to his parents' house, down in Cornwall”, Charlie says. “To change the use of the place it turns out I need not only the permission of the palace – and that can be bought for the right price – but my landlord’s permission as well. Can you ask that sex-crazed husband of yours for me?”

“He is not sex-crazed”, Dean says smartly. “I make sure he gets all the sex he needs, thank you very much!”

“Ugh! Just for that I am taking back my pie”

Dean bats his eyelashes hopefully at her, giving the baker his most piteous look. It does make her collapse into a fit of laughter, so perhaps it achieves the desired effect (keeping Dean and pie together), if not in quite the way he had planned. Meh, he’ll take it.

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Castiel remains expressionless as Dean relays Charlie’s request to him that evening.

“She is a good neighbor”, Castiel says with a smile. “I have no objection. By the way, where is it?”

“Where is what?” Dean asks, confused.

“The pie that she bribed you with?”

Damnation!

+++

Tuesday 5th May, 1640

“I spoke to Charlie last night.”

Dean stops playing with his master’s impossible hair and looks up at him. The morning is dark and overcast, and even though their bedroom faces out onto the street, there is little light in the room. Charlie overhears many conversations in the bakery, and will always relay the more interesting ones to her lordly neighbour.

“And?” the omega prompts.

“The king called a meeting of his council for first thing this morning”, Castiel says gravely. “Dissolution by the end of the day.”

The omega hesitates.

“Will we be returning to the cottage?” he asks.

“I think not”, Castiel says. “We may ride back there for the next election, but that will only be for a
few days. We could arrange for your brother to come down whilst we are there, if you wished and if he has the time.”

“So the king is going to end this parliament?” Dean asks.

“For now”, Castiel says grimly, “but it will avail him nothing. With no money he will have to call another one soon enough, and after these past few weeks, I can guarantee that that one will be even more hostile!”

+++~+++

The nobleman leaves early for the House of Commons, more worried than he had let on to his beautiful pie-eating mate. The political situation is getting worse every day, and he does not see any way out of the current mess.

King Charles' fourth parliament, much as Castiel had expected, had proven not just difficult but openly hostile. Led by the erstwhile Pym, it had opened inquiries into a number of royal abuses, and an ill-judged attempt by the king (or possibly Strafford) to exploit an argument between the Commons and the Lords had only served to draw the two houses closer together. When Castiel had heard rumours being put about that Pym was in contact with the Scots – rumours that were in all probability quite true, but which were certainly started by the king's agents – he had known that Charles would act, and soon.

Only a few hours later, he was striding back to the house, no longer a Member of the English Parliament. The king had indeed dissolved it, and had immediately set about trying to raise even more barely legal taxes and an army to fight the Scots. He would fail at both and there would be another parliament soon enough, even more hostile to the king. It was all rather reminiscent of King John, who had broken the monarchical system such that the country had got Magna Carta. Now his descendant was doing the same, what would happen this time?

It was all very unsettling. But at least he had his mate to go home to, and to.... hold in a warm embrace. Because the one thing that Dean Milton never did was get involved in cuddling. Absolutely not.

So Castiel would go home and not cuddle his omega. For hours.

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Wednesday 6th May, 1640

Dean's plans for a lazy morning in are effectively scotched when – blue neckerchief – Ezekiel bursts through the bedroom door. That in itself is a surprise; both servants know full well to knock before entering, if only for their own peace of mind. At least the alpha and omega are not tied together this time.

“There had better be a good reason for this”, Castiel grumbles. He does not do mornings.

“Master, it's a riot!”

The both wake up completely at that, although Dean remembers that Castiel had said there might be trouble when they had gone to bed the evening before. Within hours of the dissolution of parliament the king had had three members of each chamber arrested, and had followed this up by massively increasing his demands for financial help from London.

It appears that the City did not receive his request particularly well.
“What’s happening, Zeke?” Dean asks, pulling the sheet over their nakedness. The servant belatedly notices that, and blushes horribly.

“The apprentices in the City are rioting, and marching on Archbishop Laud's Palace (2),” he says, pointedly staring very hard at the floor. (both servants know that Castiel does not like them looking at the omega when Dean is naked). That means that they should be safe here in Whitehall, Dean thinks, for reasons of both distance and the palace guard. But it was still a bad sign.

Ezekiel bows and all but flees the room.

“I cannot believe that the king could be so stupid!” Castiel fulminates as he gets out of bed, uncaring as to his nakedness. “Arresting people who disagree with him and upsetting the City, then demanding money from them the same day! Is he trying to lose the place?”

“You said that the Lord Mayor is his man?” Dean points out, enjoying the morning show. “Surely that counts for something?”

“You do not understand how determined the City is when it comes to its privileges”, Castiel says angrily. “Privileges that the king has trampled over once too often. He will regret this, Dean. I very much fear that he will come to regret this.”

He stops and looks down, seemingly only now aware of his nakedness. And his morning wood. Then he shrugs.

“Waste not, want not”, he smirks, getting back into bed and crawling up his mate.

Dean shudders in happy anticipation.

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Notes:
1) Officially, England's first coffee-house opened in Oxford in 1650. But we all know Charlie is always one step ahead of the game.
2) Lambeth Palace, the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the English Church. It lies about half a mile upstream from Westminster on the opposite (south) bank of the Thames. The palace's occupant at the time, William Laud, was bitterly unpopular; his attempts at religions reform had ignited the problems with the Scots. Note also that there was only the one bridge in London at this time, London Bridge about a mile downstream. The bridge roadway was about 12 foot across and it had about two hundred buildings perched on it, as well as a drawbridge in its middle to allow ships through. The last buildings were removed around around 1760, and the bridge itself demolished when its replacement (now in Lake Havasu City, Arizona) was finished in 1831.
10: It's back to the country for Castiel and Dean, with its annoying noble brothers, lack of pie shops next door, and empty barns. A new preacher angers the alpha, and he makes his protest in a unique way that nearly brings an end to his poor omega. Yes, it's panty-time!

Tuesday 2nd June, 1640

Dean feels decidedly grumpy as he makes his way downstairs. He hates waking up without a warm alpha (even one with icicle-feet) wrapped around him. And it so rarely happens, especially as Castiel and mornings go together like pie and hot sauce.

To his surprise, Gadreel is busy packing. The omega stares in confusion; he had thought that they were to have another week here at least.

“Ah, Dean”, Castiel says, coming out of the dining-room. “We are leaving. In half an hour, as soon as Ezekiel brings our horses round.”


“There was a case of the plague in Stepney (1) three days ago”, Castiel says, looking worried”, just the other side of the City. Nothing in it as yet, but I do not wish to risk staying here, especially if it is just waiting on developments. There is a convoy leaving for Worcester today, and we shall take it all the way to Oxford.”

That made sense, Dean thinks. A lone cart out on the road by itself, especially with the king summoning armed men from counties across the country, was just asking for trouble. He notes that Castiel has his gun out ready, and shudders.

“Bring your knife”, Castiel says unnecessarily. “These are troubled times.”

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Troubled times they are indeed, as Castiel knows from the reports that reach him regularly from friends across the country. His brother the earl has always scoffed at the younger lord's obsession with gathering information, but given what had happened with the arrest of three of his fellow Members of Parliament recently, Castiel is determined to keep one step ahead of any danger. He knows that he is regarded as a moderate in the House, and the king's supporters had already tried to win him over during the short parliament. He had been polite, but he had not been impressed with their arguments.

He looks fondly after Dean, who is heading next door to say goodbye to Charlie, presumably in the hope there might be a spare pie for him to bring back (there is; Castiel had arranged it the evening before as soon as he had received the plague report). In an increasingly dangerous world, the alpha fears not just for himself; now he has his wonderful Dean, whom he loves more than life itself. Castiel has already secretly made arrangements with Robert Singer that if anything happens to him,
Dean will be spirited away to his mother's house immediately. He does not trust his own family to do anything, more is the pity.

The convoy has already left Kensington when they arrive, but they catch it up in less than a mile. It is moving at barely walking pace so Castiel knows that it will take three full days to get to Oxford, from where it is an easy ride to his cottage. He has already sent his half-brother a note apprising him on his return, offering the beta the chance to move into one of the estate properties in the village if he does not wish to return home. He notes that the roads are, despite the better weather, considerably less busy than on their arrival a few months back.

“I am worried about the levies”, Castiel says as they passed through the town of Brentford. “There have been reports coming in from across the country that they are out of control.”

“The king's own army?” Dean asks, surprised.

“It is barely an army at the moment”, Castiel says ruefully. “The king was exceptionally foolish to try to win over the King of Spain to his side after dismissing parliament. It has raised fears of Catholicism again, which has made a bad situation worse. And the local noblemen upon whom he is relying to provide troops for him are the same ones he has spent the last decade annoying with his Personal Rule.”

Dean knows that his husband is right on that point. The previous year had brought a humiliation for the king when a Spanish fleet carrying supplies to fight the Dutch rebels had been chased by the Dutch into English territorial waters. After initially respecting that fact, the Dutch had eventually grown tired and attacked the Spanish, sinking many ships. The king’s ‘friends’ had then foolishly attempted to try the commander of the English ships that had stood by (as he had been ordered), and only a fierce reaction by the City had made them back down.

“The soldiers are not joining up?” Dean asks.

“Only to riot against leaders they suspect of Catholicism, or to attack enclosures (2)”, Castiel says. “That is why I would not risk the two of us alone on the road just now. The countryside is very violent at the moment, and doubtless the king is wondering why so few men are reaching his base in the north. Unfortunately I doubt that he has anyone around who is brave enough to tell him the reason, though when he goes to lead his 'army', he will soon find out!”

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Friday 5th June, 1640

Dean had been surprised that, when they had reached Oxford late the previous evening, Castiel had not insisted on pressing on to their cottage. There had still been a good two hours of light left, but the alpha had insisted on securing accommodation in the city instead, even for his cousins. Now he finds himself looking forward to being back home again.

His alpha, it seems, has other plans. When they reach the turning for Nowhere, Castiel directs his cousins to take the cart along the longer but better path round through Charlton, whilst he and Dean would ride through the hamlet. Dean wonders at that – surely even Castiel cannot be that quick, unless he has told the twins to stop at the Roadhouse for a long pint - until the two of them rein in by his uncle's farm.

“I thought you would like to spend some time with your uncle”, Castiel explains. “I have to ride on to the Hall and speak to Raphael about finding a place for Gadreel and Ezekiel, and of course to fill him in on everything that has happened. Will you be all right to walk back?”
Dean huffs.

“I am sure I can manage half a mile, even as an omega”, he grins. “And thanks, Cas.”

His alpha reaches over and kisses him, before riding off across the knoll.

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Sunday 21st June, 1639

Dean knows that Castiel and his brother do not get on, sharing a desire to protect the estate and little else. But from the angry yelling that is coming from behind the closed study door, he knows that his alpha is really angry. That and the fact that Countess Naomi is staring at him with that pitying look again (either that, or she is undergoing a painful bowel movement). He is about to challenge her on it when the door flies open, and Castiel strides out.

“We are leaving!” he growls. “Sister, farewell!”

Dean scurries to keep up with him as he heads for the front door. He knows full well why his alpha is so angry, today of all days. Charlton's vicar had retired during their time in London and the new man, a beta called Simeon Gilson, is something of a firebrand, as much moved to forgiveness as a cat facing a trapped mouse. His sermons since they had returned have been long and tiresome, but this morning he had basically encouraged his congregation to attack anyone they even suspected of being a Catholic. Castiel had roared his displeasure at him (Dean had not sniggered at the vicar making a run for it, and if he had, well, no-one could prove it as he was in the family box), and the alpha had then strode out of the church, so irate that he had not even bothered to see if his omega was with him.

(If the same alpha had run back in having a near panic attack and whining about his abandoning his omega, well, Dean was too nice to comment on it. Provided he got a pie in the next seven days, that is).

“How dare he!” Castiel seethes. “Tensions are high enough in this country without that idiot adding fuel to the fire. And he knows full well that there are two families of Catholics in Charlton. If anything happens to them, he will be out of a job!”

Dean is nervous – of course he is not afraid of his alpha; Castiel just feels things very deeply - but he leans in and gently licks his husband's neck before tentatively rubbing himself up against his lithe body. They are fully clothed so the actual scenting is minimal, but as he had guessed the action soothes the alpha, who begins to calm down. They are clearly visible from the Hall just behind them, but Dean does not care.

“We do not have to go again”, he says quietly. He knows Castiel has been on edge lately, waiting for the inevitable recall of parliament and worried at the state of the country as well as the people he cares for on the estate. And the idiotic alpha had got caught out in a summer storm two days back, and returned from his morning run totally soaked. They had spent a very pleasurable morning just lying in bed and waiting for the storm to pass. Dean smiles at the memory. Mostly just lying in bed.....

“You are thinking about sex, are you not?”

Damn mind-reading alpha. Dean just bats his eyelashes at him hopefully.

“The Manor Farm Barn is just over there”, he says cheekily. “And it is Sunday, so we will not be disturbed.”
“Incorrigible!” Castiel grunts, but he smiles as he says it. “Start running, omega!”

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Sunday 4th July, 1639

It is not that Castiel says or does anything out of the ordinary, but somehow Dean just knows he is up to something. The alpha had made a trip to King’s Linton on his own earlier in the week – he nearly always asks Dean if he would like to go as well – and had been ever so slightly off ever since. The omega wonders if he had another argument with his unpleasant relatives there, but somehow he thinks not. At least their new vicar – the Reverend Gilson having decided that a one-way trip to his relatives in Northumberland is in order – is much more laid-back, and Castiel had nodded approvingly at his sermon that morning.

“Nice and short”, Dean had muttered when they were out of earshot. The alpha smiles.

“Food for the soul”, he says. “It is nice to be able to just live like this, away from troubles and strife.”

Dean still cannot put his finger on what is ever so slightly off about his husband. At least, not until they reach the cottage and his husband bends over to take his boots off. Dean nearly has a fit.

“Cas?” he says, trying to stop his voice from squeaking.

“Yes, Dean?”

“Are you wearing..... panties?”

The alpha promptly drops his trousers, and steps out of them. The looks he gives the omega somehow conveys both a promise and a threat.

“Yes, Dean!”

One day, his alpha is going to kill him through sex, Dean thinks as he tries to stop his heart racing. Hopefully not today, though!

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Notes:
1) Then a small village near the docks, about three miles east of the City.
2) Enclosures. One of those things that should have worked well in theory, but failed due to human greed. It was normal for fields around villages to be split into dozens of strips, each owned by a different person. The idea of the Enclosure Acts, which had started in the previous century, was to group all these together and make them more efficient. However, as the local squire who wanted these lands also tended to get appointed to decide who got what – yeah, he got most of it. Many also took the opportunity to enclose the local common for their own use as well, though at times of unrest like this, the enclosure fences were an early target.
August-October 1641

Chapter Summary

11: England gets entered by the Scots, and Dean gets... look, I'm not doing all the work here, dammit! The king has to call another parliament, which means that Castiel once more gets elected (unanimously), and goes looking for something. And the alpha is worried by the actions of his unpleasant uncle Zachariah.

Saturday 22nd August, 1640

Castiel is frowning at the breakfast table. And after the extra-special blow-job Dean had so generously furnished to wake him up that morning. This does not bode well.

“Problems?” the omega asks.

“For your king, certainly”, Castiel says grimly. “Two days ago the Scots army crossed the border.”

“Yes, but you said that Berwick (1) was well protected”, Dean says, not looking smug at all. Well, not much. “The king got that right.”

Castiel looks at him, and Dean begins to have a bad feeling.

“They have not attacked Berwick”, Castiel says. “They crossed the Tweed at Coldstream, fifteen miles up river, and are marching on Newcastle (2). The source of London's coal, and a city which is totally unprepared for them.”

Oh fuck!

“Surely the northern counties will rise to throw them out?” Dean suggests hopefully. Castiel shakes his head.

“The king's army, such as it is, has only reached York”, he says. “That is about twice as far from Newcastle as Coldstream, plus the Scots army is led by professionals fresh back from fighting on the Continent. No, they will be on the Tyne in a week, and the city is doomed. And then they will at the very least demand money from the king to buy them off, which will mean that another parliament becomes a certainty.”

“Will you be standing again?” Dean asks nervously.

“I shall”, Castiel says. “It will be back to London for us, beloved. So let us make the most of our time here.”

“You do not want breakfast first?” Dean asked, surprised.

“Sex first!” the alpha growls. “Food later!”

Dean flees. And he does not complain later when he finds that the reason he is not caught on the stairs is that his wonderful husband stopped to grab him a plateful of bacon.
Well, he does not complain much.

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Monday 31st August, 1640

“Well, if the king did not realize it before”, Castiel sighs heavily, “he surely knows he is dealing with more than a 'Scots rabble' now.”

They are knotted together after an energetic bout of love-making, the alpha spooned around the omega. The week before, they had been shopping in King's Linton when Dean had spotted the flimsiest pair of lace panties he had ever seen, virtually transparent. He had mentioned them to his alpha who had not said anything – except that today Castiel had returned from his travels with a present. Dean would not have been surprised if his snooty in-laws across the valley had heard the possessive roar from his alpha when the omega had put the garment on. It said something for Castiel's self-control that they had survived a most enthusiastic coupling, from which the omega was still descending.

“What?” he asks blearily. He was sure that his alpha's knot got even bigger when he was especially excited. Certain it was that Dean was not leaving their bed any time soon.

“The Scots have taken Newcastle”, Castiel says, nibbling the back of his neck. “They threw back what little defences were offered against them four days ago and crossed the Tyne at a place called Newburn, cutting the city off. The local commander did not even bother trying to defend the place; he sen his artillery and cavalry off to join the king, who is falling back on York. It is a complete and humiliating defeat.”

“So there will be another parliament for sure, now?” Dean asks.

“There will be another parliament for sure”, Castiel says firmly. “The writs for it will be moved in days at most. The Scots will hold Newcastle hostage, but will probably ensure that London, which opposes the king almost as much as they do if for different reasons, gets its coal.”

That was another thing, Dean thinks bitterly. The king's actions after the dissolution of the first parliament that year had offended the capital city greatly, and they had retaliated by refusing to elect his candidate as the new Lord Mayor soon after. It all looked very bad.

“Do you think that Pym and his friends are in league with the Scots?” Dean wonders.

“Most probably”, Castiel says. “By the way, I spoke with Mr. Carter.”

“Huh?”

“When I bought the panties”, Castiel says, and Dean can hear the smile in his voice. “He mentioned that they also do a complete omega lingerie range. There is even a catalogue!”

Dean's eyes widen. Some day this alpha is going to be the death of him! Still, what a way to go!

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Monday 28th September, 1640

Dean is sure that the free buffet laid on for the voters of Forston and Byteby would in no way have influenced their decision at the ballot box today. He was also sure that the Moon is made of green cheese.
Hah!

“Yes, Pam sent one of the girls over with a selection for you when we get back to the cottage”, Castiel grins. “And she said that she did not forget to include a pie!”

“You are so good to your humble little omega mate”, Dean purrs, batting his eyelashes at the alpha. He notices that Castiel is looking around the room for some reason. “Are you meeting someone?”

“No”, Castiel says, sounding puzzled. “I was just looking for a humble little omega mate. I have never had one of those before!”

Dean pouts. Now that was just mean!

“I have to spend some time talking with my electorate”, Castiel chuckles (Dean notes at this point that his brother the earl has already hastened away in his carriage, clearly not wishing to spend a moment longer than necessary with the great unwashed). “But I have some good news for you.”

“Oh?” Dean says. “More pie?”

Castiel chuckles.

“No”, he says. “Mr. Carter sent up that package that was supposed to come on my birthday. The see-through lingerie set, and the catalogue.”

Dean suddenly finds it difficult to breathe. And when Castiel saunters off to talk to the local people, he just stands there, trying to regain his shattered composure.

Damn teasing alpha!”

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Tuesday 29th September

Dean spends today in bed, making what are some very manly exclamations of satisfaction (shut up!). Use of complete lingerie sets is now restricted to only certain times of the year, to avoid the poor omega getting worn out!

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Thursday 1st October

“I am disappointed in your king.”

Dean finishes his delicious pie before letting the alpha lead him to their bed. Ever since Castiel had realized he had concerns about his weight – though Dean had also noticed that the estate steward had acquired a pronounced limp soon after making those remarks to him – he had insisted on ‘working off’ all that pie. The omega suspected it was just another excuse for sex, but he had not quite got round to calling the alpha out on that. Some day soon. Next month. Or next year. Ish.

“I know”, Dean says, eyeing the lithe body before him with pleasure. “But at least he has agreed to the new parliament.”

“With the Scots in control of the northern counties, he did not have much choice”, Castiel says wryly. “No, I was referring to the the fact that he seems prepared to abandon the Earl of Strafford in order to save his own skin.”
Dean tenses and pulls back.

“You cannot think that the king himself is in danger?” he asks, horrified.

“I very much fear he may be”, Castiel says, “though I am certain that he has not yet thought through that far.”

“But why?”

“Consider the facts”, Castiel says, neatly folding his clothes. “Parliament, led by Pym, will demand concessions, probably starting with poor Strafford's head, and possibly that idiot Archbishop Laud's as well. But then what? They will know that if the king ever gets into the ascendancy again – and I am sure he is buying as many votes as he can afford across the country – then soon after it would be their heads on the block. How can they legally stop him from coming after them one day, except to destroy him?”

“That is revolution!” Dean shudders.

“I know”, Castiel says grimly. “I hope and pray that it will not come to that, but I increasingly fear that it will. And in any revolution, many people get hurt. Now, I wish to fuck my omega.”

How on earth does he say things like that? Dean wonders.

Ten minutes later, he is beyond wondering.

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Thursday 8th October, 1640

It was raining. Again.

Dean stares out at the leaden skies. The heavens had opened last Friday, and apparently there was an inexhaustible supply of the wet stuff because it had kept on coming. Thankfully it had been a fairly dry summer so the river levels had started low, but now it was threatening to burst its banks and flood both Stalwarton and Charlton. The mere in the knoll had never looked larger.

Thankfully Castiel chooses that moment to return from his trip over to the Hall.

“How’s it going?” Dean asks. The alpha hesitates.

“Uncle Zachariah has been to see Raphael”, he says thoughtfully. “He has a plan to deepen the river and strengthen the banks, to make it less likely to flood.”

“What does he hope to get out of it?” Dean asks at once.

“That is a totally cynical remark”, Castiel says primly, hanging up his wet long-coat and reaching for a towel.

“Yes. So what does he hope to get out of it?”

The alpha glares at him, and the omega bats his eyelashes at him seductively. Castiel snorts with laughter.

“I do not really know”, he says, recovering himself. “I mean he owns the marshes to the north of the town which are always the first place to flood, so perhaps he hopes to build on them. But then he also owns land along the Bicester road as well, which is higher up and would be much more
suitable. I do not like it.”

“Let me help you take your mind off of things”, Dean offers. Castiel fixes him with a look.

“And just how would you plan to do that?” he asks.

Dean simply begins to unbutton his shirt, eliciting a happy growl from his alpha. He wonders how Castiel will react to his latest underwear purchase.....

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The two cows grazing down by the rushing river do not even look up at the scream that echoes across the valley. It is not as if they have not heard it before, though perhaps not usually this loud. And for this long.

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Notes:
1) Berwick-on-Tweed, which had finally become English for the seventh and last time one hundred and sixty years earlier. An important port and fortress at the time, it was (and still is) the northernmost point of England, and barely two miles from the Scots border that wraps around its northern flank. The county of Berwickshire is actually in Scotland.
2) Newcastle-upon-Tyne, established at the end of the eleventh century to defend the river of that name and the important coalfields nearby. It lies at the southern end of the county of Northumberland, which stretches over sixty miles to Berwick along the North Sea coast, and was long coveted by Scotland (it is the only English county mostly north of Hadrian's Wall). The Scots would hold it and the next county south, Durham, as 'hostages' during negotiations.
Chapter Summary

12: The new parliament assembles, whilst a miracle occurs – Dean refuses pie! The omega uncovers some skulduggery in the docks and is suitably rewarded, whilst the people set fire to the Archbishop of Canterbury (as you do).

Friday 16th October, 1640

Dean looks hard at the man loading up the cart before speaking. No neckerchief. Damnation!

“Glad to be heading back to London, Gad?”

The servant nods. Castiel had secured him and his brother a cottage in Charlton as promised, and they had been working at a Hall busy with a rush of recent visitors, as the Oxfordshire nobility did their impressions of headless chickens and ran around making each other panic. It had resulted in Castiel having to spend much longer than he liked in his brother's company (an amount he preferred to keep as near to zero as possible), and arriving back at the cottage exceptionally stressed every time. It was lucky he had such an obliging omega who was so willing to help him take his mind off of it every time.


“Place is a wreck with all the comings and goings”, the servant mutters. “Good to be getting away from it and Her Majesty!”

Dean grins. He knows that the countess is pretty much universally disliked by all her servants.

“By the way”, the man says, “I'm Zeke!”

Damnation!

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Dean had been hoping for a pleasant ride to London with his mate (and possibly the occasional stop in a barn en route!), but Castiel is still concerned over the state of the countryside. The king is trying to raise more troops, mostly because what had meant to constitute his own army keeps deserting and heading back to their home counties. Castiel fears that even an armed alpha out on the roads might be overcome by a large enough group of men, and besides, he is not prepared to risk his omega in any way. Hence he has arranged for them all to travel in a convoy which is leaving Oxford tomorrow, and will be in London four days later.

“We are going via Newbury and the Great West Road”, Castiel had explained. “A longer but safer route, especially as that road will be busier.”

And more uncomfortable, Dean had thought. He would end up with a sore butt by the time they reached London...

And now the alpha was smirking at him! Damn mind-reading husband!
Saturday 17th October, 1640

Dean wakes to an empty bed, which is annoying. But at least he is in a castle for the first time in his life! The owner of this place – Donnington, Dean remembers – is a distant cousin of the family, at least enough for Castiel to claim kinship and a free night's board for him and his mate. The building is much smaller than Dean had expected, but at least the room is warm. Although a warm alpha body, even one with icicle-feet, would make it even better.

There is a jug of water ready for him, so Dean washes and makes his way downstairs to where he vaguely remembers the entrance hall to be. A beta servant points him in the direction of the dining-room, which is probably unnecessary because the smell of bacon would have drawn the omega there anyway. Though he is more than a little alarmed to see his mate sat there wearing a shirt with a blood-stain on it.

“Cas?” he asks, horrified.

The alpha looks down and tuts at himself, before pulling his waistcoat around him to hide the stain. “Some local ruffians broke into the camp last night and attacked some of the carts”, he says. “One of them stabbed Gadreel as he defended our things.”

“Is he all right?” Dean asks anxiously.

“Fine”, Castiel says, “except that the idiot who bandaged him up made a mess of it. I had to redo it for him, which is how I got blooded myself.”

Dean shudders. Even knowing that the blood on his mate's shirt was not his own.... ugh! Castiel smiles encouragingly.

“I am fine”, he says, “though I will be talking to the convoy organizers about their lack of preparation for such things. Meanwhile, there is bacon!”

Dean is about to say that not even bacon can take his mind off a blooded mate, but...... well, it looks so nice and crispy, so perhaps it might for just a short while.

And his annoying mind-reading husband can stop with the smirking right now!

+++

Wednesday 20th October, 1640

Castiel had insisted on securing lodgings in Kensington the night before so that his cousins could go ahead and check that the house was all right and the area around it plague-free. Privately the alpha is more than a little worried about taking Dean back to a city which is prone to outbreaks of the dreaded disease, although he has plans to move Dean back to a colleague's house in Kensington if there is another outbreak. Though he knows his omega will protest about that.

He smiles as he looks at the door through which Dean had just passed. His omega had not even unpacked before 'going next door to sat hello to Charlie' (translation: on the scrounge for pie). He need not have bothered; Castiel had made sure that his cousins had ordered one from their neighbour the day before. Just because he loves his omega so much.

His omega! Lord, but he is so lucky to have Dean. Sometimes when he looks at that beautiful man
his heart just overflows and he has to look away, a tear in his eye. He knows that Dean is still secretly worried that he can never bear children and that Castiel might abandon him some day because of that; the alpha knows that sort of thing does happen, to society's shame. He himself would as soon abandon his right arm!

His omega comes back at that moment, clearly having had the news that the pie was in their kitchen, and looking supremely happy. Castiel resolves there and then that he will move heaven and earth to keep that look on his mate's face, despite the troubles that he knows lie not far ahead.

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Sunday 31st October, 1640

All Hallow's Eve. There had been one scare already when they had been to church earlier that day and heard a report about a plague-infested ship arriving from the Levant, but it had thankfully proven to be false.

“There were so many people around today”, Dean observes. “I thought we only had a few hundred members of parliament?”

“We will when things are finally sorted”, Castiel explains, sighing happily as Dean positions his slightly larger frame on top of him, pressing him into the mattress. He loves it when the omega lines their bodies up like this, pressing him into the mattress all over. “Oh but that is so good!”

Dean snickered.

“Want me to fuck you, little alpha?” he growls.

“Careful”, Castiel says mildly, “or I might turn on you and show you just how 'little' I am most definitely not!”

“Not much of a deterrent, Cas”, the omega mutters, rubbing their bodies together and eliciting another happy growl. “What do you mean, sorted?”

“Fuck me and I'll tell you!”

Dean sighs in a put-upon way.

“Honestly, the things I do for England!”

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Dean nibbles at the back of his mate's neck. The sexy bastard seems to have dropped off after all their fun.

“Sorted?” he prompts.

“You really want to talk politics whilst lying on top of me?” Castiel complains. “Impossible omega!”

Dean chuckles. His husband sighs.

“Normally at the start of each parliament, there are a few results where the losing candidate cries foul”, the alpha explains. “Often correctly, but proving it is not easy. Especially this time.”

“Why this time?” Dean asks.
“Because the king has been working hard to get his own friends in”, Castiel says, “Pym and his allies will need every vote they can get. That means a lot more arguments over who won what seat.”

He eases out from under his omega and pulls him into a hug. Dean sighs.

“I wonder how long this parliament will last?” he wonders.

“Who knows?” his husband says. “But the king cannot dismiss it whilst the Scots are in charge of the north and he has to pay them hundreds of pounds a day for the privilege. And remember, he tried to dismiss the Scots' own parliament, and they just ignored him. I do not know how far Pym will go, but I really fear that it may be very far indeed – if he can take the Commons with him.”

If, Dean thought, as he subsided into a... a manly embrace.

He just knew that someone was smirking, damn him!

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Tuesday 3rd November, 1640

If there is one thing that Castiel Milton knows above all else, it is that a full Dean is a happy Dean. And a Dean full of pie – well, his mate might not be up for sexy times this evening, but seeing him lying on the couch rubbing his stomach and moaning in remembered pleasure – what more could an alpha need?

Well, all right, there is that. But he is not getting that tonight and (incredibly for an alpha) he actually does not mind. Seeing his omega so happy makes him feel so... well, if he went and told said mate, he would doubtless end up being called a complete sap.

“Tell me how your day went”, Dean mumbles.

“I'm sorry, was that 'please give me another slice of pie?'” Castiel teases. His mate shoots him a dirty look.

“You fed me too much”, he whines. “I'm full!”

“I spent the day enduring the rigours of the English parliamentary system”, Castiel points out. “I am hardly likely to want to come home and then risk life and limb by standing between a Dean and his pie!”

The omega pouts. It is so adorable, and when he follows it up by batting his eyelashes, Castiel has to turn away to school his features. He is almost glad the answer is serious enough to enable him to keep a straight face.

“It could scarcely have gone worse for the king”, he says gravely. “If the days that follow are as bad, then he has some tough times ahead.”

“What happened?” Dean asks. He rolls over onto his side and winces, then scowls at his husband's barely suppressed smile.

“Well, his speech about how everyone should immediately give him loads of money in return for vague promises about possible reform went down like a leaden warship”, Castiel says. “And he has chosen William Lenthall as the Speaker (1), a safe choice he doubtless thinks, but I know him and the man is a lawyer first and last. Plus, Pym has now secured more than half the members of the
Committee of Privileges, which will only make his position even stronger once things settle down.”

“That is the one that decides dodgy elections”, Dean remembers.

“All against whoever the king’s candidate is, guaranteed”, Castiel nods.

“What about you, Cas?” Dean asks. “What is your position?”

“Thrusting long and hard into my omega whilst he…..”

“Cas!”

The alpha thinks for a while.

“It is difficult”, he said. “I do not like to speak ill of my fellow members, but may of them are fools. Pym is one of the few who seems to have thought through to what might happen at the end of all this, as I have. I shall support him for now, and see how far he actually does go.”

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Thursday 5th November, 1640

“I wonder why there are two guys on the bonfire (2) outside”, Dean muses as he looks out across the wide street at the huge bonfire and the palace opposite. Gadreel comes up and stands beside him.

“Laud and Strafford”, he says simply. “They will fix the masks and other stuff on at the last minute.”

“And right in front of the king’s palace”, Dean mutters, shaking his head. “I wonder the guards do not come over and do something.”

“They are probably in sympathy with the general view of those two”, Gadreel says with a shrug. “Both are about as popular as a plague-ship!”

Dean sighs and goes back to Castiel’s accounts. The alpha had insisted on his knowing all the family's dealings, which is unusual if not unknown for an omega, and Dean suspects it is partly to stop him getting bored at home all day. Often times he helps Charlie out when she needs extra staff, something his husband is happy for him to do because, Dean suspects, he is as scared of the fiery redhead as is the omega. Plus she pays him in pies!

Another sigh. Back to the boring old accounts for now.

About an hour later, Dean is frowning over the seemingly straight forward figures before him. Something is definitely not right here. He thinks for several moments, then calls for Gadreel.

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Castiel looks at the figures before him as if they are a foreign language. Which to him they probably are.

“Is there an explanation in English?” he asks hopefully. Dean sets two sheets of paper down on the table.

“Here”, he says. “This company you own half of, Leviathan Shipping. They sold an old flute called
'Speedwell' last March, and bought a new ship called 'Prophet' two months later.”


Dean places a third sheet over the other two.

“I asked Gad to go to the shipping office to make some inquiries for me”, he says. “The company sold the old ship to the Lakeside Shipyard in the East End, and purchased the new one from a shipwright called Edgar Gaines & Sons in the same area.”

“Go on.”

“The 'Speedwell' was sold on the fourth of March”, Dean says, grinning. “I noticed that the 'Prophet' had virtually the same dimensions which seemed odd; ships are never standard. Gad checked for me, and on St. George's Day, two days before they purchased the new ship, the shipyard sold a 'used' ship to Gaines, ostensibly for use as parts. I would wager that if you check, you will find that the 'Speedwell' and the 'Prophet' are one and the same ship, and that these rogues pocketed the difference themselves.”

“If they did, I will ruin them!” Castiel growls. “My clever, perfect omega. Now, what would you like as your reward?”

Oh, is that a loaded question. Dean tries to think fast.

“The pie from Charlie's aside”, Castiel grins. “You are getting that anyway.”

Lord, but he loves his alpha!

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That night, he really loves his alpha! And the wounded little moans of happiness that come from the panty-clad scruff as the omega rides him to a third orgasm – Dean really wishes there was some way of recording those, so he could enjoy them again and again. Some day, maybe.

+++ Notes:
1) Speaker of the House (of Commons). Up till this time the Speaker, chosen from amongst the available members, was very much the king's man, his eyes and ears in the Chamber. He was in effect the judge of the chamber, deciding who got to speak in debates and applying the many rules. The previous century some holders of the post had been beheaded for displeasing the Tudors, so it was not exactly a sought-after honour. Today the post is held by the occupant for as long as they want, and it is customary for the larger parties other than the one they come from to not put candidates up against them in elections. The three most recent have been Betty Boothroyd (brilliant), Michael Martin (crooked and forced to resign) and the current holder John Bercow (a complete tool).
2) Bonfire or Guy Fawkes' Night, the marking of the failed 1605 plot (i.e. 35 years before these events, hence in living memory) by the Catesby brothers and a group of fellow Catholics including gunpowder expert Guido Fawkes to blow up King James I and the Houses of Parliament at the State Opening in that year. Unless, as is quite likely, they were set up by James' chief minister, the wily Robert Cecil in an attempt to discredit the Catholics and make James draw back from giving them concessions. It is less celebrated in England these days, having been largely supplanted by Halloween.
Chapter Summary

13: Monopoly gets explained, and Castiel has to entertain an unpleasant guest to dinner, which means his omega has to keep out of sight. The political situation continues to deteriorate, the archbishop gets arrested, and Dean is disappointed to find he will probably not be able to walk on water.

Wednesday 11th November, 1640

Castiel rarely smiles when he comes back from parliament, Dean has noted, but today he looks even graver than usual.

“Something happened?” Dean asks. His husband nods.

“Strafford!”

The omega sighs. He knows that the earl is a member of the House of Lords, handy for when Pym and his enemies choose to make their move against him, a move that has long been in the offing. The Commons has been busy this past week with all the disputed election results – over forty, Castiel had told him, when it was usually just three or four – and everyone had been waiting for the master of the House to make his move. Now, it seems, he has.

Dean opens his arms to his alpha, who goes into them with a heavy sigh. The omega knows how truly stressed he is when Castiel actually starts to scent him, something no alpha ever does (well, ever admits to doing).

“There will be a trial”, he mumbles into his mate's neck. “The earl, it seems, is prepared to wager his own life to defend his king. I only wish that our monarch was better deserving of such loyalty; he allows many at his court who would be all too happy to see Strafford fall.”

“I thought that you would be discussing.... what was it today?” Dean asks. “Patients?”

“Patents”, Castiel corrects, eliciting a groan as he removes Dean's shirt and licks down his chest. The omega shudders. “Another royal abuse of power that is detested by both those on the receiving end and those who miss out on the chance to be the ones doing the abuse.”

Castiel works his way back up and licks over the claiming-bite. Dean moans pleasurably.

“I am never going to learn all about politics if you keep doing that!” he protests feebly.

The alpha stops his ministrations and pulls back to look him in the eye. Dean knows that look. It is going to be a long, hard evening. With any luck.

They enjoyed a long, almost lazy coupling before Castiel eases in behind his mate, still knotted inside him. Lord, he loves having Dean both around his cock and in his arms at one and the same time, his glorious scent mingling with the alpha's.
“Patents?” the omega prompts.

“Yes, I wish you would show some”, Castiel agrees sleepily.

“Show some what?” Dean asks, puzzled.

“Patience!”

The response is a sharp squeeze on his knot, which makes his eyes water. He wraps his arms around his mate even tighter and tweaks his nipples in retaliation, earning himself a squeal of protest.

“Bossy omega!” he scolds. “Very well. Queen Elizabeth started the idea with monopolies, granting people the right to be the exclusive suppliers of some good or service in return for a payment to her. It made her a lot of money but parliament hated it, and right at the end of her reign – after she had had all the money, in other words – she outlawed them.”

“I see”, Dean says, not seeing.

“Our current king has got round that by renaming them as patents”, Castiel growls. “His officials claim that it is only right that, if someone makes a new invention, then they should be the only ones to gain from it for a while.”

“That sounds fair”, Dean says.

“Some of the new inventions were bricks and soap”, Castiel points out, “made or supplied in a slightly different way than before. And it has of course leaked out that Catholics have been much more likely to be granted patents than Protestants. The scheme has made the king very unpopular. We were going to debate them today, but the earl turned up unexpectedly in the Lords, and Pym moved against him just minutes later. His own colleagues placed him under arrest, such is the mood just now.”

“They must really hate him”, Dean says bitterly.

“They fear him”, Castiel says. “Remember, he is probably the only man who can control Ireland, which means he may be able to raise an Irish army against the king’s enemies - in Edinburgh or in London! And I would wager that no-one on either side of the coming battle has yet worked out that the Irish might take full advantage of his absence, and mount their own rebellion. The king cannot afford to lose the second of his three kingdoms.”

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Monday 30th November, 1640

“The King’s secretary has gone.”

Dean looks up in surprise; his husband has been thoughtful since his return home half an hour since, and the omega had known that he would tell him all when he was ready.

Hopefully nakedness would be involved somewhere along the line.

“Who he?” he asks.

“Francis Windebanke, or Old Windy as he is known to most”, Castiel says. “The honourable member for Oxford University (1). One of Pym’s men laid charges against him yesterday, and he
went home claiming illness. He has spirited himself across to France, and I doubt we will be seeing him again.”

“What did he do?” Dean asks.

“It is more what he did not do”, Castiel says. “He was responsible for mulcting (2) Catholic recusants of fines, and the figures are damming. Not so much the money he kept for himself – everyone does that – but that he fined so few and pardoned so many of them. It is very damaging for the king.”

“I am sure the king is a good Protestant”, Dean argues.

“You may be right”, Castiel concedes, “but what matters is not so much what he is, but what people actually perceive him to be. And things like this – Old Windy must have had his master's tacit approval at least for such behaviour, because he would not risk it otherwise – do him a lot of harm. It is certain that he helped secure his escape, and... no Dean, it does not look good.”

+++

Friday 4th December, 1640

“And so it begins”, Castiel says heavily.

They are sat on the long couch, Dean's favourite piece of furniture (well, after their four-poster bed!). It is big enough for them to lie side by side, the alpha's feet by Dean's head and vice versa, and spend an hour or so just reading of an evening. The omega had wondered sometimes if this was a sort of 'old married couple' thing to do, but the one time he had mentioned his concerns to Charlie she had simply pointed out that if they both enjoyed it, what was the harm? And Dean does enjoy it. It is soothing and wonderfully domestic.

He still hopes for sex later, though.

“What begins?” he asks, putting down his book.

“I saw the first signs of unease in the House today”, Castiel says. “Pym has demanded of the king the right to question his councillors over what they discuss with him in private.”

“That is wrong, surely?” Dean frowns. “Private conversations are private.”

“Pym is calculating that the king cannot win”, Castiel explains. “If he says no, everyone will think that he has something to hide. If he says yes, then not only may they find something interesting in the case against Strafford, but even if they do not, the damage will be done. We already know that Charles does not like receiving bad or unpleasant news. Which royal councillors will want to give the king advice to move against his enemies, knowing that such a conversation may lead to their own head ending up on the block?”

Dean shudders.

“I hope it never comes to that”, he says.

“So do I”, Castiel says. “This was the first time that I found some members of the House coming up to me and wondering if this was perhaps going too far. The question is – and it is one to which only John Pym knows the answer – how far is he prepared to go?”

+++
Friday 18th December, 1640

“It looks like the painting was right”, Ezekiel says at lunch that day. Dean looks at him in confusion.

“What painting?” he asks. He is feeling a little grumpy because his husband had had to leave early for the House as he was on some committee or other, which had meant waking to an alpha-less bed. Something Dean definitely did not enjoy.

“It was all round the city last month that a painting in Archbishop Laud's study fell down for no reason”, Gadreel explains, serving as he spoke. “Well, they came to arrest him this morning, and he is to be taken to the Tower.”

“Not before time”, his twin says, coming in from the bakery with – the saints be praised! - a pie. Dean’s eyes light up.

“For this evening”, Ezekiel says sternly. “The master is entertaining.”

Dean is surprised. Castiel usually tells him if they are having guests.

“You are not going to like it”, Gadreel says, looking at his twin. “It is Lord Watts.”

Oh.

+++

Dean could now see why his husband had been wary about telling him. Robert Lord Watts is the member for Marylebone, sixty years of age and one of the most extreme Puritans in parliament. He opines often that alphas like him should decide everything, and was even rumoured to have sought to ban betas from parliament. Fortunately that had been too extreme even for his Puritan friends, and the proposal had, as Castiel had wryly put it, ‘been deposited in the circular filing-cabinet’.

The alpha comes back early that evening, and is all apologies.

“I am so sorry, Dean”, he says. “Unfortunately I have to entertain some people to dinner here occasionally, even those I would rather have thrown into the Thames.”

“He would probably pollute it even more”, Dean says acidly. “I'd help?”

Castiel shoots him a reproving look, then chuckles as Dean bats his eyelashes at him. The tall muscular man playing the coy omega is always a sight that quickens his heart. Amongst other parts....

“He knows that I have an omega mate”, Castiel says glumly, “and he will doubtless expect you to not be at dinner with us. I do not suppose.....”

Dean sighs in a put-upon manner.

“Alright!” he grumbles. “Anyway, I arranged with Charlie to go round and her he do a thorough clean-through of the bakery this evening, purely out of the goodness of my heart.”

“And not because she promised you pie?” Castiel grins.

Dean opens his mouth to deny that, but then realizes he cannot. He has to settle for a pout.

“Do not worry”, Castiel smiles. “Besides, all the time I am listening to that bore drone on, I shall be
wearing the green panties that you love, ready for you to come back later.”

Hell, how is Dean supposed to enjoy an evening in the bakery now he has that image in his head? Bad alpha!

+~+~+

Friday 25th December, 1640

Castiel had promised Dean an extra Christmas present that year, in return for his being so understanding over the unpleasant Lord Watts' visit. Dean had wondered if it might be a new pair of panties; the green ones had not survived the alpha's highly energetic love-making the evening after the old buffer had left. Come to that, Dean had barely survived it himself!

It is not. Dean wakes that morning to find for once that his alpha is not wrapped around him, but lying on his back next to him. And there is a green ribbon tied round a most impressive morning erection.

“This is your reward”, Castiel grins at him. “Today you can have me any way you like!”

Dean whimpers, and nearly comes right there and then!

+~+~+

Sunday 27th December, 1640

Dean does not go to church today. Not that he does not want to (and after that Christmas, he probably needs to!), but he has a mild headache and cannot cope with being talked at for hours on end.

They are alone in the house, as Castiel has given the twins a second day off to go to the fair behind held at the top of Whitehall. Gadreel and Ezekiel would normally have just had Boxing Day off, but when they had asked for today instead, Castiel had given them both days provided there was food for their absences.

“Do you think that there will be a fair on the river (3)?” Dean asks hopefully. Since coming to London he had learnt that the river sometimes froze so hard in winter that huge fairs could be held on it. Castiel shook his head.

“It does not seem likely at present”, he says. “Besides, I am told that the last one was six years back, and that there is usually at least a decade between each one, sometimes much longer.”

“A pity”, Dean sighs. “I would love to walk on water.”

“Technically you would be walking on ice”, Castiel points out.

“You're no fun!” Dean pouts.

He suddenly catches the alpha's eyes. He knows that look very well.

“Oh come on!” he whines. “Your beautiful mate is so tired.”

“Hmm, perhaps getting what you want is not good for you”, Castiel muses, ignoring the squawk of protest from nearby. “I think that come New Year, I should help you cut back on a few things. Starting with pie.”
Dean shoots him a look that is positively murderous!

Notes:
1) The two great universities, Oxford and Cambridge, returned their own members of parliament separate from those of the nearby towns. These seats were not abolished until 1950; as the franchise was being extended in the nineteenth century it was at one time considered allowing university students more than one vote each. When one looks at some such institutions today......
2) Collecting fines from people who were recusants, i.e. openly of a non-State religion. Queen Elizabeth had instituted a system of fines for all Catholics, more if they insisted on publicly following their religion (though she also protected them as well, which was a damned sight better than the 'tie you to a post and set fire to you to save your soul' approach her sister and predecessor Mary I had favoured). Some of this money was supposed to go to the poor, but of course the person in charge of it took their cut first. Government salaries were so low that this was accepted behaviour, provided it did not go too far.
3) A combination of the Little Ice Age, the lack of bridges and the fact that the embankments had not been built yet (hence the wider river flowed more slowly) meant that the Thames often froze over at this time, sometimes hard enough for frost fairs to be held on it. The last such was in 1814.
Chapter Summary

14: Charlie marks Dean's birthday with a pie, which for once he is less than pleased to receive. The omega discovers that yes, his alpha can be cruel when the urge arises, although a small part of him (all right, a large part) rather likes it. King Charles' position steadily worsens, though it is not as terminal as the Earl of Strafford's.

Friday 1st January, 1641

Castiel looks down on the sleeping omega and smiles. He is tempted to wipe the tears from his mate's beautiful face, but he resists. Dean has earnt his sleep.

Castiel's choice of the activities for the start of the new year had of course involved copious amounts of sex – he is an alpha, after all – but mostly it involved his making love to Dean, worshipping the omega's body until the taller man had been reduced to a quivering wreck, drowning in his husband's adoration and weeping uncontrollably with happiness. Castiel knows that his beautiful mate has a low opinion of himself, brought on by his late and un-lamented father's ill-treatment, and that it will take many years before his own love can make Dean understand his true worth.

Dean snuggles into his pillow, and mutters something about pie. Castiel smiles. His wonderful, perfect mate. He is one lucky alpha!

Friday 15th January, 1641

“So how is the talking-shop?” Dean asks as his alpha comes home that evening. Castiel sighs and ruffles his mate's hair before dropping tiredly into the chair opposite.

“Parliament is indeed from a word meaning place for talking”, he says. “‘Tis a pity that some of its honourable members have yet to learn the art of shutting up!”

Dean chuckles.

“There was a lot of gossip about Princess Mary marrying the Dutch prince (1)”, Castiel says. “Doubtless the king thinks it will buy him a lot of support, a link with the other Protestant power in the area. Unfortunately things are too far gone for that.”

“Why?” Dean asks, surprised.

“They fear that the king hopes for aid from the Dutch against them”, Castiel explains. “I myself think that will not happen; the Dutch are still engaged in beating back the Spanish, and with the French helping them and the mess in Germany, the king will get no help from the Continent.”

“And Strafford?”

“He has not even been formally charged as yet”, Castiel frowns. “I wonder if Pym is up to...
something else, and using him as cover. The man is sharp enough.”

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Sunday 24th January, 1641

It is Dean's twenty-seventh birthday. And the good news is that Charlie has provided with with a huge pie.

The bad news is that, sculpted large into the pastry top, is '30-3'. Cow!

“It is not that bad”, Castiel says reassuringly. “I am already in my fourth decade, and I look forward to you joining me there soon.”

Dean pouts even more.

“Do we have to go to church today?” he whines. He looks hopefully up at his alpha, but the look in those blue eyes tells him he is going to lose this particular battle.

“I am afraid we do”, Castiel says with a smile. “They do not grant exceptions for sex-starved omegas who are nearly thirty..... oof!”

Dean pounces on top of him. He knows instinctively that the alpha could throw him off without breaking a sweat, but he also knows that Castiel loves to be fake dominated like this, letting his omega have his way with him. Some of Dean's greatest experiences have been fucking himself on the alpha's huge cock whilst his husband lies prone beneath him, until his omega literally pulls a knot out of him.

“We could go to the evening service”, he smirks suggestively, batting his eyelashes for good measure. “That would give us the whole day up here. And you do have a present for me?”

“Bedside table”, Castiel grunts.

Dean grins and opens the drawer. Then he freezes.

“Cas”, he says warily. “What on earth is that?”

'That' is a seven-inch long rubber thing shaped, incredibly, like Castiel's dick. And it even has Castiel's name carved along one side of it. Dean gulps.

“Is not technology wonderful?” Castiel grins. “The dildo. Perhaps when you are used to it, you could even wear it to church?”

Dean swallows. His alpha would surely not be that mean?

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Monday 25th January, 1641

The thing turned out to have attachable straps, so Dean had been wrong. Apparently his alpha could be that mean. Seldom had he prayed so fervently!

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Sunday 31st January, 1641
As the Fates would have it, it is Castiel's turn to read the lesson in church today (and at least this time his omega is sitting comfortably!). At least Dean is at the front when it all happens, in the small 'nobs' box, so he has a good view. His husband has barely reached the lectern when the church door flies open and Gadreel stumbles in. This in itself is surprising enough; Ezekiel accompanied them today, and is at the back with the other servants. What is so important that his twin felt obliged to interrupt a church service?

The blond beta stumbles to the front of the church and hands a piece of paper to his master, who reads it and frowns. Then he nods and bids the servant leave, walking slowly back to the lectern to give him time so to do. Once he is there he hesitates. Dean begins to get a bad feeling.

“Ladies and Gentlemen”, Castiel says sonorously, “before I begin today's lesson, news has reached me of a political development which I feel it is incumbent upon me to share with you. Today the Earl of Strafford has been charged with high treason (2), and is to be taken to the Tower.”

Dean blinks hard as there is a commotion all around him. Well fuck!

+~+~+

Sunday 14th February, 1641

For once, Dean is not really enjoying his meal. The reason, a scant few feet beneath him, is the river.

Castiel had said that he was taking Dean out to dinner for Valentine's Day, somewhere special. He had neglected to add, 'and terrifying'. They had been driven into London and then onto the great bridge, although that greatness was marred by the buildings at the northern end being little more than burnt-out shells.

“A fire came through eight years ago”, Castiel says. “At least I am not taking you all the way into Southwark.”

“What is there?” Dean asks curiously.

“A lot of theatres (3) where they used to put on plays too bawdy for delicate omega eyes and ears”, Castiel grins, “but the south end of the bridge is where they put the heads of the executed on display.”

“Ugh!”

Dean knows that there is a drawbridge in the middle of the bridge to allow tall ships through, but their destination is just this side of it. The restaurant itself is all right (there is even pie on the menu!), but the place overhangs the river by a ridiculous amount, so that the omega's fear of heights kicks in with a vengeance. But his alpha is doing this for him, so he will just keep quiet and.....

“You do not like it.”

It was an observation, not a question. Castiel smiles.

“I am sure we can find somewhere else”, he says, beckoning a waiter over. “And yes, we shall take the pie.”

Best. Husband. Ever!
Tuesday 16th February, 1641

“So any news from the big house?” Dean asks over dinner that evening. Unfortunately he misses his alpha's sly smile.

“Not that you are going to like”, Castiel said in a sombre tone. “They are considering a new tax on sales of bread and all pastry products.”

Dean catches his breath.

“Not including pie?” he asks warily.

“Well, pie is pastry, so yes”, Castiel says.

He manages to keep a straight face for an impressive seventeen seconds before his omega's pouting is too much, and he guffaws into his dinner. Dean scowls at him.

“That was mean!” he hisses. “Bad alpha!”

“Sorry, beloved”, Castiel smiles. “Actually we did do something important today.”

“What?” Dean asks, still scowling. The fact that his alpha is looking at him like he is the cutest thing in existence is not helping matters.

“The House passed the Triennial Act”, Castiel says. “That means that there has to be a parliament every three years at the most, whether the king wants to or not. Should he fail to summon one, the Lords can meet and do it without him.”

“And the king has agreed to this?” Dean asks, surprised.

“He does not have much choice at the moment”, Castiel says. “It is a smart move by Pym; everyone likes the prospect of power. Though now I come to think of it, a tax on pastry might actually be a good idea.....”

Dean throws a bread roll at him.

++++

Wednesday 10th March, 1641

Dean is fully supportive of his husband using the red-headed baker next door as a source of information. Especially as every time she comes round, she brings pie. Castiel chuckles as his mate slavers over her latest offering, and turns to her.

“To what do we owe the pleasure, Charlie?” he asks politely. True, Charlie is his tenant or at least a tenant of the estate, but Castiel had always held that manners cost nothing. He has never understood the pleasure that his snooty brother gets from talking down to his workers.

“I overheard a rumour twice this week”, she said, sitting down. “The first time was from someone pretty damn unreliable so I did not bother with it, but today I heard it from someone in a position to know.”

“Go on”, Castiel frowns.
“All those tales about the king trying to butter up army leaders so they will support him at some future time”, she says. “I heard today that there is now definite proof out there. Unfortunately all I know is that some leading lord wrote an ill-advised letter, and it is about to come out. I wish that I had more for you.”

“That is quite good as it is”, Castiel says. “Not for the king, of course. It will damage him and by implication Strafford, as well as swinging any waverers back behind Pym.”

“He has waverers already?” Charlie asks. Castiel nods.

“There is a natural tendency to drift back to the status quo and support the king”, he says. “If Charles Stuart had more sense he would just let well alone and take advantage of that. This latest development suggests that he does not. And by the by, no more pies for Dean.”

“Cas!”

“I am putting him on a diet”, Castiel grins, ignoring the horrified looks he is being shot from across the room. “I think a maximum of one pie per fortnight. Maybe per month.”

“Cas!”

“You are so cruel to your poor little helpless omega!” Charlie says reprovingly.

“If you find me one, let me know where.”

“Huh?”

“I would quite like to experience a poor little helpless omega”, Castiel grins. “I have Dean, who is so demanding, especially when we....”

“And that's my cue to leave!” Charlie almost shouts, making impressive speed towards the door.

“Bye!”

Dean stares after her, then turns to glare evilly at his mate. Who grins.

“As if I would ever come between Dean and pie!” he chuckles. “I actually value my life!”

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Notes:
1) William, son and heir to the current Dutch ruler Frederick Henry. The boy was fifteen when he married Mary Stuart, nine. He became the Dutch ruler in 1647 only to die of smallpox three years later; their son William of Orange (later William III of England, Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands) was born a few days later.
2) Treason against the monarch, as distinct from petty treason, which was against a legal superior such as a master by his servant or a husband by his wife. The latter ceased to be a separate offence from murder in 1828, after which the 'high' was dropped from the former.
3) The City of London lies on the north bank of the Thames, so the area to the south had its own laws, and functioned rather like Las Vegas to California, providing sin just across the border (and in this case, within waking distance!). Shakespeare's Globe was amongst the theatres there, but was closed by the Puritans the following year as too bawdy, and pulled down to make room for housing a couple of years after that. The modern Globe, opened in 1997, is a couple of hundred yards away from its predecessor's site; a special law had to be passed to allow its thatched roof construction as such coverings were outlawed after the Great Fire of London in 1666.
Chapter Summary

15: Guilty until proven innocent suddenly becomes guilty enough, as John Pym changes the rules of the game. One of Charlie's customers learns that she has a metal spoon and is not afraid to use it, whilst Dean comes to the unhappy realization that for too many people, survival comes before principle. And Castiel considers some new furniture.

Friday 12th March, 1641

“Are you allowed to have that?”

Castiel looks up to see his mate staring at the newspaper he is holding. It is a reasonable question; in normal times the licensing of the supply of news is strictly (if not always effectively) enforced. But then these are far from normal times.

“In this case, yes”, he says. “This was handed out in the House today. It will not surprise you to know that our flame-haired neighbour was right again. Henry Baron Alnwick (1) has tried to flee the country after a letter detailing the king's efforts to win over certain army leaders emerged with his name on it.”

“Tried to flee?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“It seems the people of Sussex were apprised of his actions and prevented him, at least for now”, Castiel says. “He has gone into hiding, or made a successful attempt to leave; we do not know. But the letter he wrote to his brother the earl is damning, especially as the king has always denied any attempts to win over the army leaders. Now we know that he was lying all along.”

“The army does fight in the king's name”, Dean says, though he thinks as he says it that even that sounds weak.

“You know as well as I do that it is all about perception”, Castiel says. “Although with things as they are at the moment, I cannot see him able to bring even part of the army away from the border. I have not told you yet, but the army itself is mutinous right now.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“The king diverted money meant to pay them to the Scots”, Castiel says. “It is bad enough being kept in the cold north over winter, and not being paid on top of things – well, I thought beforehand that the Scots could just roll them over if they really wanted to and push even further south. With things the way they are, I am now quite sure of it.”

+++++

Thursday 25th March, 1641

“Bishop Williams (2) is a slippery fish”, Castiel says as they lay in bed that evening, still knotted together after an enthusiastic coupling. Dean loves that his mate, who is all alpha, is so considerate
like this; even when he comes home after a hard day with tedious people, he is always careful and gentle with his omega.

Well, unless Dean tells (or begs) him not to be! This evening Dean had known the minute he was through the door that Castiel had needed to let off steam. Besides, the omega liked it rough on occasion, even if the omega might find sitting down tomorrow... difficult.

“I thought he was on your side”, he said sleepily. John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, had until recently been held in the Tower by order of his master the unpopular Laud, who had been greatly frustrated that he was legally unable to deprive him of his bishopric. The bishop had been let out to public acclaim, and it was now the primate who was experiencing the joys of life in London's castle, whilst the man he had jailed had reclaimed his place in the House of Lords.

“He is on his own side”, Castiel says primly. “He made a speech today saying that as the Strafford case could result in the death penalty being applied, it should not be a matter for the bishops. It is very clever; Pym will sacrifice his desire for removing the mostly royalist mitres from the upper house – at least for now – in return for such a pledge.”

“And it makes the poor earl's position even worse”, Dean says sadly. “He is not having much luck in his case.”

“Nevertheless, I still do not think that Pym has enough to make his case stick”, Castiel says. “The earl is a wily opponent, and I think him capable of fending off the charges against him. And since he stands or falls on the power of the Law, Pym cannot do anything about that. I wonder what he will do instead?”

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Wednesday 31st March, 1641

The customers at the Moondor Bakery are amongst some of the very highest in society, positions that they had achieved partly by knowing when to see and when to not see certain things. And to a man, they all know that when some passing alpha decides to make a pass at the tall, handsome omega serving at the counter, it will only end one way. At least the rushes on the floor will soak up any blood.

There is a pained yelp from the counter, followed swiftly by the sound of a punch and a pained moan. Apparently this particular alpha had thought that messing with Charlie Bradbury or her staff to be an advisable course of action. As everyone pointedly not seeing this could have told him, it is most definitely not.

Charlie comes back in and gratefully takes the drink Dean has ready for her. The bruised alpha stumbles to the door and makes his first wise decision of the day by fleeing the scene.

“Honestly, some alphas just think with their knots!” the baker grumbles. “’What's a nice omega like you doing in a place like this?’ Ugh!”

Dean chuckles.

“He was full of himself”, he agrees. “I'm fine. Do you need to go out and take five minutes to calm down?”

“No”, she sighs. “Thankfully not all alphas are like that. Though few are the other extreme, like that dreamy husband of yours.”
She grins at the omega's instinctive growl, which is swiftly followed by a blush.

“So possessive!” she teases. “Do not worry, Dean. Castiel is all yours.”

“I know”, Dean says, embarrassed at his instinctive reaction. “Lord, but I shall be glad when today is over!”

“So shall I”, she agrees. “If I hear one more person opining about that damn trial, I shall give them a free coffee right over their head!”

“How is it going?” Dean asks. “Cas seems to think that the earl is doing rather well.”

She hesitates.

“Yes”, she says slowly. Dean picks up on it at once.

“But?” he prompts.

“I suspect that his enemies have rather more than they have showed thus far”, she says. “They will certainly need it. A man is guilty until proven innocent in this country, and from what I hear they are nowhere near nailing him. And I do not think they would have risked starting this process unless they were sure they had him.”

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Saturday 10th April, 1641

Dean knows that neither of the twins likes Castiel's gun, but with the rising tensions in the capital, their master has now insisted on them being trained to use similar weapons whilst he is away at the House of Commons.

“Things are getting very serious, Dean”, he says when he comes back from a rare Saturday sitting. “Pym had his first major setback today. He wanted to introduce some new piece of evidence, but the Lords would only allow it if the earl was given the same right. When he tried to withdraw the changes, there was nearly a riot.”

“Do you think the earl can be saved?” Dean asks hopefully. Castiel shakes his head.

“Pym responded by revealing his back-up plan”, he says. “This afternoon he introduced a Bill of Attainder into the Commons.”

Dean frowned.

“I thought that was what he was doing anyway?” he asks.

“Pym's original plan was impeachment”, Castiel explains. “That is basically like a normal trial, innocent until proven guilty. Attainder rests merely on the balance of proof; if enough members in both Houses think that Strafford had indeed planned to use his Irish army against them – an army, I might add, that the king still refuses to disband – then they will find him guilty. And that is one reason why I want Gadreel and Ezekiel to be trained to use guns.”

“I don't follow”, Dean complained.

“If the Commons passes the attainder as I think they will”, Castiel says, “then it will go to the Lords. They would be likely to reject it, given their current mood. The London mob is restless as it is; such a prospect would enrage them still further. It only takes one hothead to split away and try
their luck at some house near the chamber like ours... no, I will not take the risk. I value you too much.”

Dean blushes.

“You are so beautiful when you blush”, Castiel smiles, making his mate redden even more. “Your freckles stand out like the angel kisses they truly are.”

“Sap!” Dean muttered.

“And you look so gorgeous that I want to take you right here on the dining-room table.”

Dean looks up hopefully. Castiel sighs in regret.

“But we would need to buy a stronger table first”, he says sadly. “Especially with an omega who eats so much pie.....”

“Hey!”

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Sunday 25th April, 1641

Though he would never have admitted it, Dean knows that the events of recent weeks have proven his husband right in training their servants to use what are now the three guns that he owns. The mob in the streets outside is a daily occurrence, and he has stopped going for walks in the nearby park. Even with one of the twins and a gun, Dean does not want to risk it. If he told the alpha he had been right though, Castiel would be insufferable. Worse, he would exhibit that sort of smug silence that drives his omega around the bend!

Castiel always takes one of the twins with him when he goes to the Commons these days, and he has insisted that Dean should never be alone in the house. When he gets home today, the events he recounts suggest that this precaution is all too wise.

“The Spanish ambassador's house was attacked today”, the alpha says morosely over dinner.

“I would not have thought that you would see that as depressing”, Dean observes.

His mate sighs heavily.

“It is not just that”, he says. “The king is making one last attempt to win Pym round and save Strafford. You know how the rumour mill works. Some think that there may well be a deal.”

“But that is good, surely?” Dean says. Castiel shakes his head.

“Sorry though I am to say it, this king cannot be trusted”, he says. “He wants everything and will give nothing in return. A condition of the deal would be that he disbands his army in Ireland, and I do not think he will do that. I very much fear that Strafford is doomed.”

“But the King promised to save him”, Dean points out.

“You have not yet seen the power of the London mob”, Castiel says. “These crowds we are getting now are but a shadow of what is to come, and the king dare not stand against such a power marching past the very doors of his palace. No, we are entering dark times. I do not like it at all.”

Dean leaves his food and goes round to his alpha, draping himself over him and lightly scenting
him. Castiel sighs contentedly.

“Now you see how bad it is?” he says with a smile.

“What?”

Castiel points to the abandoned dish.

“You actually left pie to come to me!” he grins.

Dean bats at him. Sexy bastard!

“Finish your pie first, Dean”, Castiel grins. “Sex later.”

Best. Husband. Ever!

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Notes:

1) Henry Percy (c.1612-1659), younger brother of Algernon, Earl of Northumberland. It is probable that he wrote the letter as the 'price' of his being allowed to eventually escape. He returned and assisted the king, but fell from favour and died the year before the Restoration.

2) John Williams (1582-1650). The personal enmity of both Strafford and Laud made him popular with parliament and in 1642 he was appointed as Archbishop of York, but he fled the fighting in the area for his native North Wales soon after. Notably he was succeeded in the northern city by a Puritan with the wonderful name of Accepted Frewen!
April-June 1641

Chapter Summary

16: There are camels and elephants, and Dean is left alone in a room with pie. Charlie is not surprised by the result, although she is by her landlord's decisions as to her rent. The Earl of Strafford is executed, but there are signs that the king's opponents are beginning to lose support.

Wednesday 28th April, 1641

Castiel looks at their neighbour in surprise.

“Of course I would not be charging rent at a time like this, Charlie”, he says, scratching his unruly mess of hair. “The estate can hardly ask you for money when you are not making any.”

The redhead looks relieved, and the alpha can understand why. With the London mob outside every day now, all the shops are boarded and shut up, rather than risk themselves being attacked.

“By the way, where is Dean?” Castiel asks. “Ezekiel said he had gone round to see you.”

“He did”, she smiles. “I left him cleaning up the kitchen for me.”

He looks at her incredulously.

“You left Dean and pie in the same room?” he asks. “Er, why?”

“He promised me that he would not eat the small pie I left cooling”, she says. He looks hard at her.

“And?” he prompts. She grins mischievously.

“I may have added some spicy peppers to it”, she chuckles. “Just as an experiment.”

“Charlie.....”

Castiel's reproof is lost in a strangled yelp that comes through the connecting door, followed swiftly by a fast-moving blur that shoots into the kitchen and begs a drink of water from Gadreel. The baker smiles.

“Evidently he cannot keep his word”, she says.

“Evidently!” Castiel agrees. The sort of language coming from the kitchen is decidedly unfitting for an omega, he thinks with a smile. He may have to 'talk' with his omega about that later.

Dean is still pouting later that day, once his mouth has ceased to be on fire. Damn evil bakers! Castiel kindly does not comment on his minor lapse over dinner but he does smirk, which is almost as bad.

They have almost finished when Gadreel brings in a note, which the alpha reads. And frowns.
“Bad news?” Dean asks. The alpha nods.

“The king has made an attempt to secure the Tower, to save Strafford”, he says. “He sent a large group of men there with a warrant to take over the place, at the same time as the earl tried to bribe his way out. The Tower guards refused them entry. The earl is a dead man walking now.”

“But surely the Lords have to vote on it as well?” Dean points out. “And the king to sign the warrant?”

“The lords will be intimidated by the mobs that Pym has brought out onto the streets”, Castiel says sadly. “And this – this offering Pym a deal with one hand and trying to go behind his back with the other – it will make even more people think that the king cannot be trusted. I wish he would play a straight game, and then people might trust him, but at the moment... well, things do not look good.”

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Wednesday 5th May, 1641

“It is so damn unfair!” Dean grumbles.

Castiel gently levers the omega on top of him, and holds him there.

“It is”, he said, “but the earl knew that this might be the price of his convictions when he embarked on this battle. He has gambled and lost.”

Dean snuggled closer into his alpha's broad chest. The newspaper – more a leaflet, really – had reached them an hour ago. Trapped in the Tower, the Earl of Strafford had written to the king releasing him from his promise to spare his life. The vote on his attainder would be held soon, and the result was a foregone conclusion.

“It is all rather like the Cousins' Wars (1)”, Castiel said quietly. “That all started with one battle and a few casualties, but many of them were noblemen and their kin wanted revenge, which led to more bloodshed, which.... well, the inevitable, really.”

“You think that there will be more trouble?” Dean asks.

“I do not see how there cannot be”, Castiel says. “The king will never forgive Pym for making him sign that warrant. Pym has to keep both the Scottish Covenanters and his fellow Puritans onside, and each wants different things. If the king simply sits by and does nothing, that dichotomy would slowly bring more people back to his side. The question is, is he wise enough to wait?”

The answer, Dean thinks ruefully, is almost certainly not.

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Wednesday 12th May, 1641

The atmosphere in Whitehall is strange, Dean thinks as he looks out of their door that day. For the first time in weeks the mobs have gone, and the whole city seems to be holding its breath, knowing that an English nobleman is being parted from his head in the Tower. The whole street is eerily quiet, as people seem to be mulling over what happens next.

It is the same in the bakery, when Dean goes in to help Charlie. Now the shop is open again it is as busy as before despite the crowds; the redhead's pastries having a strong following in the area. Yet even here the atmosphere is muted, people whispering to each other as if they are afraid of being
overheard. Which with the current tensions they might well be.

“It's disgusting that the whole thing is a public spectacle”, Charlie grumbles as she sets out a new tray of pastries. “The trial was bad enough.”

“Did you go?” Dean asks. She shakes her head.

“I asked old Martin, over there, what it was like”, she grimaces. “He said it was disgusting. People treating the public gallery like it was a day out, taking food with them and even relieving themselves there and then! Ugh!”

“People are disgusting”, Dean agrees, keeping his voice low. “But perhaps human nature always will be. Those mobs frightened me.”

“At least you had a strong alpha to protect you”, she points out.

“Cas would protect you as well if needed”, Dean says with confidence. “He is a good mate. And he has such a huge......”

“Dean Milton, you finish that sentence and I am stopping all pie for a year!”

“Estate?”

She swats him.

+++++

Monday 24th May, 1641

“Something surprising happened in the House today”, Castiel says at dinner that evening. It had been unseasonably cold the past few days, so Dean feels he is quite entitled to drape himself all around his alpha whilst they eat. Said alpha does not seem to have many objections to this approach.

“What?” he asks, as Castiel feeds him a piece of bacon.

“The Lords threw out the Root and Branch Bill (2)”, Castiel says. “It is Pym's first major setback. I am sure that when he got the king to agree to self-perpetuating parliaments at the same time as signing his friend's life away, he thought he had complete victory. But many in the Upper House were angry at the use of the mob to pressure them into the vote, and today they made that disapproval manifest.”

“Will he try again?” Dean asks. “He has to surely, if only for the Scots?”

“He will have to wait awhile first”, Castiel says. “And every day makes more and more people think that maybe they have gone far enough in reining in the monarch's powers. As I have said, if the king could be trusted there might still be a way out of this labyrinth. But I doubt he can be. And that, Dean.... that makes me worry mightily.”

+++++

Tuesday 8th June, 1641

Dean had come to a decision. He had been wrong. High summer, and the river could smell worse.

“You get used to it”, Charlie says unsympathetically when he calls round to help out that day.
“And after all the furore lately, I would have thought a smelly river would be the least of your problems.”

That was true, Dean thought as he washed up for the flame-haired baker. The execution of the Earl of Strafford the previous month had reduced tensions in the city, but now there was an air of unease, as people waited to see what would happen next.

The omega groaned as she dumped another set of plates beside him.

“There is pie later”, she promises. “And with what is going on in the Commons today, you will need your strength to deal with an unhappy alpha later on.”

“I do not need strength to deal with Cas”, Dean says haughtily.

“Then you do not want any....”

He gives her a dirty look, and she chuckles as she goes back to the bakery.

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There is something sinfully wonderful about reducing his Puritanical alpha to the point where he works out his frustrations by walking around their bedroom whilst supporting the omega on his engorged knot, Dean thinks happily. And he doubts that many political discussions up and down the country go like this. More’s the pity!

Castiel eases him back slightly, and attains a whole new and even more delicious angle. Dean moans in pleasure.

“Pym revealed new details of the king's dealings with army leaders today”, the alpha says conversationally.

Dean is too busy trying to remember his own name, but what his husband says eventually registers.

He pulls himself back upright, making his alpha growl in appreciation.

“The king has a right to talk to the leaders of his own army”, the omega says. “They fight in his name, after all.”

“It is all about appearances”, Castiel says. “The king is trying to win back the trust of the more moderate members...... Lord, Dean, right there!”

The omega manages to roll himself around the alpha's knot, eliciting a sound that is some distance from manly. The alpha responds by playing dirty, pulling the omega into a deep kiss. Dean moans.

“I cannot believe that you want to talk politics at a time like this”, Castiel says.

“Politics makes you even hornier”, Dean grins. “And that makes me very happy!”

Castiel lowers him onto the bed before rolling him around his knot and slipping in behind him. Dean's eyes are watering, but he is smiling.

“Dirty omega!” Castiel mutters.

“As if you are complaining!” Dean points out.

++++
Wednesday 16th June, 1641

“It is a measure of how far things have gone”, Castiel says gravely, “that a letter about elephants and dromedaries can spark a political crisis these days.”

His mate stares at him in confusion and, it might be said, annoyance. Charlie has closed the bakery for a few days so she can visit her sick friend out in Twickenham, which means that Dean is without pie. Unfortunately the redhead’s sudden departure meant that she did not have time to bake enough pies to see him through the terrible hiatus. And now his husband is talking gibberish!

“What on earth is a dromedary?” he asks reasonably.

“A camel with one hump”, Castiel explains. “The king wrote Montrose (3) a letter referring to these two animals in a seemingly nonsensical way, so naturally everyone assumes that it is code for some evil plot.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” Dean mutters crossly. He still misses his pie.

“The Graham is a popular figure north of the Border”, Castiel says, “and there have been rumours of his being disaffected with the current Covenanter leadership. People have every right to fear the worst, especially with the king visiting Scotland later this year. If by some miracle he can swing the Scots onto his side, parliament may yet find itself outgunned.”

“So what are they saying?” Dean scoffs. “The constitution is lumbering around like a panicked elephant, and everyone has the hump?”

He stops. Castiel is staring at him.

“You are even more gorgeous when you are angry!” he grins.

“Shut up!”

The alpha puts on a hurt expression.

“Speaking to your poor alpha like that”, he says mournfully. “And after I stopped on the way home and got you pie.”

“I love you!”

Castiel grins.

“I know”, he says. “But you love pie almost as much, and my perfect mate deserves the best. If you ring the bell, Gadreel should have it heated up by now.”

Definitely. Best. Husband. Ever!

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Notes:
1) The Cousins' Wars, better known by their later-acquired name The Wars of the Roses (1455-1487), a battle for the throne between rival branches of the Plantagenet dynasty. The similarity to the English Civil War was that neither side really won; the direct-line Lancasters died out, and the Yorkists were eventually defeated by a cadet branch of the Lancasters called the Tudors.
2) The removal of bishops in the Church, started by a petition from thousands of Londoners the year before. Parliament initially wanted to only remove the bishops from the House of Lords (1642), but in 1646 the bishops were gone, and would not come back until the Restoration in 1660.
3) James Graham, Earl and later Marquess of Montrose (1612-1650). Handsome and well-educated, his middle of the road approach – he disliked both bishops and the Presbyterian ministers – left him stranded between the king and parliament. He was betrayed after being defeated at the battle of Carbisdale and cruelly put to death. Upon the Restoration Charles II granted him a state funeral at Holyrood in Edinburgh and his titles and lands were restored to his son, and the line survives to this day in the form of the eighth duke, Alexander (born 1935).
Chapter Summary

17: Dean loses a bet, but he is not the sort of omega who resorts to batting his eyelashes at his alpha just so he can have pie (all right, he is). The two of them return to the cottage for the summer recess and the omega does some chores wearing just panties, with the inevitable result. Oh, and Dean gets fucked by a baronet.

Friday 9th July, 1641

“I wonder if Pym is going too far”, Castiel says worriedly as they relax on the couch after another hot week. “I did expect the king to have to yield his power to appoint judges, but he did it without even a fight.”

“Maybe he is going to fight on some other issue”, Dean suggests, relaxing back into his alpha. It had been a hard week with several late-night sittings, but the Commons had closed early today, and even better, Charlie had provided pie. The omega's life was pretty good just now.

“Maybe he is already scheming elsewhere”, the alpha says. “The Queen has said today that she is considering going abroad for her health.”

“That sounds reasonable”, Dean says affably. “She has never been healthy. Several of her children have died young.”

The alpha smiles and looks fondly at him. Dean scowls.

“What?” he says. “Am I missing something?”

“Only my knot in your arse!”

“Cas!”

The alpha chuckles.

“If the Queen goes abroad”, Castiel explains, “She will try to find some reason to take the Crown Jewels with her. Once there, she can raise an army using them as security. As one of my fellow members said today, does the king really think that we are so naïve as to not see that?”

“But what if she needs to go?” Dean presses.

“Then she can go”, Castiel says simply. “Without the jewels. I would wager, however, that once she realizes that those are the terms, she will decide she does not need to go after all.”

“You are so cynical, alpha”, Dean groused.

“Bet you a pie!” Castiel smiles.

“You're on!”

+---++
Monday 19th July, 1641

“Mmm, this pie is delicious, Dean.”

The omega grumbles under his breath. His alpha is enjoying this far too much for his liking.

“I did say that the Queen might effect a Lazarine recovery once she realized that she could not take
the jewels with her”, Castiel smiles. “And lo, she does not need to go after all. This pie is so tasty;
Charlie really has surpassed herself!”

Dean tries a beseeching look at his alpha.

“How? For Dean?”

“You lost the bet fair and square”, Castiel smiles. “If you had won, would you have shared your
pie with me, Dean?”

“Of course I would!”

The alpha smiles and says nothing. There is a notable pause.

“Probably”, Dean mutters. Damn conscience!

“All right”, Castiel smiles benevolently. “I cannot bear to see you without....”

He stops. Dean, with a spoon he must have been secreting somewhere on his person, is already
devouring the remains of Castiel's slice. The alpha smiles at his mate; it is worth not collecting his
winnings to see his mate so happy, somehow managing to let out little whimpers of happiness in
between filling his beautiful face.

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Tuesday 3rd August, 1641

Dean knows that the letter that came this morning was not good news, and even though his alpha
barely had time to read it before rushing off to the House, the frown on his face was ominous.
Normally Castiel does not mind Dean reading his mail – indeed, he prefers it, as the omega can
then tell him what it is about without having to read it himself. And when he does read it, Dean
can see why his husband is so cross.

“I cannot believe it!” the alpha fumes that evening. “I mean, I know it is waiving a debt that we
may never recover rather than giving up cold hard cash, but even so, my brother is a fool!”

Dean knows that when his husband smells as distressed as he currently is, he needs putting right.
Fortunately there is no pie tonight, so he does not feel guilty about abandoning his dessert and
moving round to stand behind and start scenting his alpha. Castiel leans back into the embrace and
sighs.

“You are so good for me”, he mutters.

“I have to be”, Dean teases lightly. “Especially now I have to get knotted every night by a baronet
(1) rather than a plain old lord.”

Castiel chuckles despite his mood.

“Who are you calling old?” he smiles, then sighs. “The king owed my grandfather and the estate
over three hundred pounds from a debt incurred to his father, Earl Nebuchadnezzar, and my stupid brother has waived it all just so he can claim to have nicer titles for both his heir and his brother.”

Dean thinks privately that this is in reality the unpleasant Raphael having a dig at his brother, securing him a title that can be passed onto a son because he knows he and Castiel can never have any. But he knows voicing that thought would probably upset his alpha.

“At least he got a good rate”, he says instead. “I asked her, and Charlie says that even the reduced rate that the king is selling off baronetcies at is three hundred and fifty minimum. And you know what the king is like; you might never have got the money at all.”

“But if the king falls, we might lose the title”, Castiel points out.

Dean tenses.

“You do not think the king would actually fall?” he asks, worried. “You mean lose his crown?”

“Honestly, beloved. I do not know what to think”, Castiel says. “Except that I love it when you scent me like that.”

Dean duly obliges, and earns himself a happy grunt.

“Kings are the natural way of things”, Castiel says after some time. “But the system relies on the king having all the power and being smart enough not to use it. That was why Elizabeth was so successful; everyone knew she would use her power as a last resort, but they also believed she would deal fairly with them, and would do everything she could not to abuse her position. Her Stuart cousin has created a situation where most people feel he cannot be trusted. I do not see how we go forward from here, or where for that matter as to where we are going.”

“Maybe some sex would take your mind off of it?” Dean suggests.

“I would need a lot of sex for that”, Castiel says firmly, a happy smile creasing his features. “But that is an interesting theory, that most definitely needs to be tested. Starting now!”

+++

Friday 13th August, 1641

Gadreel and Ezekiel are busy packing. Today is the last day of parliament before the summer recess, and on Monday they will join a convoy headed for Oxford. Dean had pouted at not being able to travel alone with his alpha, but Castiel had reassured him that there would probably be quite a few lonely barns near wherever the convoy stops for the night.

“Pym had a surprise for us today”, Castiel says, hurrying in out of the summer storm that had just broken outside and made his hair – well, not much worse than normal, really. “He is planning a Remonstrance.”

Dean pouts.

“You only use long words to try to confuse me!” he complains. “Well, I know that one. It means a complaint.”

“Smart as well as sexy”, Castiel grins. “I hit the bull's-eye with you! Yes, he thinks to pull his supporters together by making a list of all the royal abuses of power the king had undertaken. It will be a long list.”
“Does he need to pull his supporters together?” Dean asks, surprised.

“The king has bought many new friends with all those baronetcies he has sold of late”, Castiel says. “And as I said some time back, there is a natural tendency of people to drift back to the status quo, which he could take advantage of if he was patient or wise enough. Which, fortunately for Pym, he is abjectly not.”

“I wonder how he will get on with the Scots?” Dean muses. The king had left London to attend to his northern kingdom, and Charlie had agreed with his husband that he might try to win the Scots to his side.

“I doubt he will wish to hurry back to London”, Castiel says. “It has definitely been a bad year for him thus far. Even his absence would allow tempers to cool a little. Though I shall not miss the place much.”

“I will”, Dean says.

“You will miss Charlie's pies”, Castiel says astutely. “Do not worry too much. She is baking some especially for our journey. I take care of my omega.”

Dean batted his eyelashes at him.

“Take care of me now?” he simpers. Castiel growls.

“Upstairs!” he orders.

He is talking to his omega's fleeing back. He grins, and gives chase. Ezekiel and Gadreel tut at each other, but he lets it slide. He has more important matters to attend to.

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Sunday 5th September, 1641

It is nice to be back at the cottage, Dean thinks, as he flits around the room making desultory attempts at dusting. He grins at the almost-constant low growling coming from the omega, as Castiel eyes his panty-clad behind with evident pleasure. It is a good thing they are going to evening service, as the omega suspects he will have quite a few sins to atone for. With any luck.

“Are you going to tell me the latest news you had this morning?” Dean asks, wiggling his arse even more. Unfortunately he takes his eyes off of his alpha, so is more than a little surprised when he is bodily grasped and pulled on top of what quickly becomes evident is one highly aroused alpha. Castiel moans at the relieving pressure, and Dean takes full advantage by pulling out Castiel's almost fully erect cock – thankfully the alpha prefers loose trousers around the cottage, for reasons of convenience – and lowers himself down on top of it in one swift move.

“Ye Gods!” Castiel gasps.

“No”, Dean grins. “Just your omega.”

It makes him incredibly happy (and possibly the tiniest but smug) that he can reduce Castiel in this way. The alpha is all focus and power most of the time, but when inside Dean he becomes a wild animal, barely able to control himself. He thrusts even deeper into his omega and his knot swells rapidly, then he comes with a mighty roar. Dean lets him recover (and waits for his own brain to
get back into gear) before continuing.

“The letter?” he prompts.

“You must be the only omega in the land who wants to talk politics whilst knotted”, Castiel grumbles. “Fine. The Scots have apparently refused the king’s request for their army to be used for his poor, beleaguered cousin (2). Apparently they were advised that the rulers of Europe would not take seriously a king whose subjects were rebelling against him, yet at the same time was hiring out armies right, left and centre.”

“I would have thought Charles Louis would have been a popular cause”, Dean says, “even amongst the Presbyterian Scots”

“It is the same old story”, Castiel sighs. “They do not trust the king not to use the army against his enemies this side of the Channel, north or south of the Border. He is apparently trying to win people over up there, but it will be hard going. The Scots bear grudges like no other.”

With the way the king had treated them, that was understandable, Dean thinks ruefully. He did not say it out loud, because his alpha would have won another argument and given him that smug look the omega hated.

And now Castiel was looking smug anyway. Damnation! Dean squeezes his walls, and the alpha responds by thrusting even harder into him.

Yes, a whole lot of sins to atone for. Praise the Lord!

+++ Notes:

1) A knight whose title can be inherited with the title often being sold by a monarch for hard cash, the going rate being about £53,000 ($70,000) at 2016 prices. In ascending order the titles were; knight, baronet, baron, viscount, earl, marquis and duke.

2) Charles Louis, the Elector Palatine (1617-1680). His late father Frederick had married the king's aunt Elizabeth, and had ruled over a small area in western Germany (the Rhine Palatinate) before unwisely trying to take the vacant Bohemian crown, and losing all his lands as a result. Through his mother the Elector therefore had some claim to the English throne, and as he was then childless so did his brothers Rupert and Maurice, who both fought for the king in the wars. The 1648 treaty that ended the religious wars in Europe restored about half the Elector's homeland to him, but his actions had alienated him from his English cousin, who refused to see him before the tragic events of the following year.
Chapter Summary

18: Castiel is worried by the strange actions of his unpleasant uncle Zachariah, but still finds time to sort out a ventilation problem for Linda Tarrant. Dean visits a lovely house in a village near to London, and promptly hates it. And there is the inevitable revolt in Ireland, but overall things are beginning to look better for the beleaguered king.

Thursday 9th September, 1641

Castiel is in a bad mood. And Dean knows why.

“Hopefully you will not have to meet with him again for some time”, the omega says soothingly. “It was all settled, was it not?”

The alpha had had to go over to the Hall to sort out a problem with Nowhere Farm, more specifically the land just south of it owned by his uncle Zachariah. Castiel hated dealing with that oily excuse for a human being, but unfortunately his brother the earl was on holiday in the North, and sorting out a boundary dispute between the various family lands had fallen to him.

“I do not like it”, Castiel growls. “I cannot see why my uncle would go to all the trouble of draining those lands just to put sheep on them.”

“Sheep make money”, Dean points out.

“Yes, but cutting all those culverts to drain the marshes would have been very expensive”, Castiel says, “let alone the cost of maintaining them. And my uncle is all about money. He would sell his own son if he thought he could get a good enough price for him.”

“Who would buy him?” Dean chuckles. “Besides, I think that Uriel is just as likely to try to sell his father. Which reminds me; Ellen told me that ‘The Big ’U’ as he calls himself is courting some omega from the north of the county.”

“Far enough away so the poor man does not know his true character”, Castiel says wryly. “Perhaps my uncle thinks he can get them married without ever meeting beforehand, so it is all done and dusted before the victim can back out.”

“That's exactly what Ellen said”, Dean grins.

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Sunday 19th September, 1641

Dean wakes up this morning feeling gloriously sore. It is lucky that his alpha's birthday – thirty-two this year – happened to fall during the parliamentary recess, so they could celebrate it at home. In this case, barely leaving their bedroom; the omega had got enough food in beforehand so they could just mark the day together.
Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest, but his husband's birthday had also been marked by a major storm sweeping up the valley, and this morning Linda Tarrant – who lives in one of Nowhere's three cottages with her son Kevin – had called at the cottage. Apparently half her roof had been blown off, and she had been hoping that Castiel could arrange for repairs to be done some time, preferably before winter set in. Of course his wonderful alpha had acted at once, setting the two Tarrants up with a room at the Roadhouse courtesy of the estate before going and telling his brother than they would be paying for their stay until said roof was repaired. Castiel had duly returned from Stalwarton with three workers and supplies.

Yes, Dean loves his alpha. Even if the bastard does sometimes leave him unable to sit down without wincing!

+++ + + +

Thursday 30th September, 1641

“I have more news about our monarch's travails in Scotland”, Castiel said as they cuddled together on the couch that evening.

“You mean travels?” Dean asks. The alpha shakes his head.

“No, travails”, he says. “Hamilton (1) went north with the king to try to broker a deal with the Scots, or at least keep them neutral. It seems that his efforts were not appreciated in some quarters. Some minor lord publicly insulted him; the whole thing has been patched up, but the Scots are now eyeing the king very warily.”

“Do you think he has betrayed the king?” Dean asks, snuggling closer into his alpha's arms. It is a nice warm September evening, and he has had pie for dessert. Life is pretty good just now.

“I think that James Hamilton is the sort of person who puts self before everything”, Castiel says dryly. “Whether you can classify that as betrayal is another matter. But I do not doubt that he would do it if he thought that it served his interests. Which reminds me, I received notification of the new parliament sitting today. It starts on the twentieth.”

Dean sighs.

“So, back to London”, he says reluctantly. Castiel smiles.

“I know you like it here”, he says, “but needs must. And perhaps I can persuade you of the benefits of moving?”

Dean is about to deny that point when the alpha shifts beneath him, and he suddenly realizes that his alpha is really, really aroused.....

+++ + + +

Wednesday 13th October, 1641

They are due to leave for London tomorrow – Castiel thinks the roads are safer now, so he is prepared for the two of them to ride with Gadreel and Ezekiel taking their cart of belongings. Though Dean does not fail to notice that both the servants now have new flintlock guns.

The omega is happily musing about being back next to the bakery when Castiel comes in, looking grave.
“That”, Dean says, “is not a happy look.”

The alpha nods.

“More bad news from the North”, he says. “A plot has emerged amongst some army members loyal to the king. It seems that they wanted to seize Hamilton and Argyll and make them ‘see sense’. I doubt the king was directly behind it, but....”

He stops. Dean sighs.

“But everyone will think he is because of his past form for such dealings”, he sighs. He really wishes that his monarch were either more straight-dealing or at least a lot more careful over his plottings. “I am going to go out on a limb here and suggest that the reaction has not been good?”

“As you say, form”, Castiel agrees. “Once again our king does himself no favours through his double-dealings. And this will damage him in England too; those who were drifting back towards him will think twice.”

“What does everyone want him to do?” Dean asks reasonably. “Does the House of Commons think that it should run the country instead of him?”

“It is an idea”, Castiel says thoughtfully. “It is elected by the people – well, the rich men at least, but it is a start – and at least answerable in some way for its actions. The king answers to no-one, and clearly thinks that he is above even the law. I wonder if that is what Pym is aiming at in the end. Indeed, I sometimes wonder if he knows what he is aiming at himself.”

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Saturday 16th October, 1641

In all fairness the large house is very nice, its own gardens running down to the relatively clean river, the rooms large and spacious, and set apart from other houses in the street.

Dean hates it.

“I do not want to have to stay here whilst you go on ahead”, he grumbles. “The plague is always in London. If everyone leaves every time someone dies of it, the place would be permanently empty!”

“True, the plague is often in the eastern suburbs beyond the City”, Castiel agrees, not stopping the unhappy omega from scenting him all over. “But just now it is in the City itself, and I am not prepared to risk the love of my life until I have established just how serious it is. Gadreel and Ezekiel have gone ahead to the house, but if it is as bad as some reports suggest, then we shall remain here until the danger has passed.”

They are in a small house close to the river in Kensington, a couple of miles from their own house. Dean only found out this morning that Castiel had been receiving daily reports on the plague in the City before they had left Oxfordshire, and the last one had caused him to call in here on a family friend who is more than willing to put them up for a few days. The house is much bigger than theirs, but Dean is silently terrified that his alpha will insist on going to the House of Commons this week despite the dangers.

“I am sure that many members will be ‘late back’”, Castiel says, reading his mate's mind in that annoying way he has, “but these are important times, Dean. Every vote matters, especially with the king's supporters working hard to peel away the opposition. I wonder even if Pym will get his
Remonstrance through the Commons.”

“It will be a huge setback if he fails”, Dean says.

“Perhaps not fatal, but it would definitely wound him”, Castiel agrees. “What a mess things are in this country just now. How can things possibly get any worse?”

Monday 25th October, 1641

It takes three days for Dame Fate to answer that question, and another two for the news to reach London. Castiel returns to the house that evening looking grim.

“It never ceases to amaze me how bad news travels so fast on our terrible roads”, he glowers. “The Irish (3) are revolting.”

“How true!” Gadreel mutters, setting the table. Castiel shoots him a look, and the servant shuts up.

“I have been fearing this would happen”, the alpha tells Dean, “ever since Strafford's execution. No-one, it seems, gave a thought to the fact that dispersing a highly-trained and mostly Catholic army into a resentful Catholic country would give potential rebels just what they needed; leadership and arms. Now the country is in uproar, and we just know how the king will react.”

“He will need an army to crush the rebels”, Dean says. “But parliament will not give him one because they will fear... oh.”

“Yes, oh”, Castiel says grimly. “And there is worse news on top of it all, at least for the king. One of the Irish leaders is claiming to be acting in his name, and even has a charter which, he says, bears the king’s signature.”

“Surely no-one can believe that?” Dean asks hotly.

Castiel looks hard at his mate, and the omega gets it. As with the Scots, people will believe it because of the way the king has behaved of late.

Friday 5th November, 1641

“I wonder”, Castiel muses as he toys with his dinner, “if this is how the Roman Empire ended. Not with a bang but a whimper.”

Dean looks at him on confusion. He knows that his alpha has been getting increasingly worried over developments in the Commons of late.

“Has something else happened?” he asks cautiously. The alpha sighs.

“Pym chose today of all days – Guy Fawkes’ Night - to set out terms for an army to fight the Irish”, he says heavily. “He demanded that the king remove, and I quote, 'all evil counsellors from his person'.”

Dean is aghast. The king’s choice of who sits around him is sacrosanct.

“The House is irrevocably split now”, Castiel says morosely. “Edward Hyde (4), a good sound man, spoke out strongly against the move, and he was the first of many. Victory is within the
king's grasp if he will wait just a while for that split to deepen even further.”

“What about you?” Dean asks nervously. “Will you still support Pym?”

The alpha sighs, but nods.

“I am sorry, Dean”, he says glumly, “but I can see no other end of this than the king being reduced to a much lesser role in the constitution. The whole system of monarchy depends on the monarch being trustworthy, having the power to do a whole range of things but knowing when not to do them. As I once said, that was why Elizabeth was so good; she would make mistakes from time to time, but she knew when to apologize and back down. So at the end of the day, people trusted her to do right by them. Our current king just makes everything worse.”

“Our current king will not accept such a move”, Dean says firmly.

“And that”, Castiel says flatly, “means war. That was why I was thinking of the Romans, especially today. The people will burn their guys and party merrily enough, but we both know that a storm is coming. The greatest empire the world has ever seen ignored the warning signs, and look what happened to them. Will we be the same?”

+++~++

Notes:
1) James Hamilton, Marquis and later Duke of Hamilton (1609-1649), a prominent Scots politician and landowner. Highly skilled at self-preservation, he was the king's man in appearance at this time but secretly working for his enemies the Covenanters. He had a tentative claim to the Scots throne after Charles and his children, which may have inspired his actions. He was captured after the battle of Preston in 1648 and beheaded the following year.

2) Archibald Campbell, Earl and later Marquis of Argyll (1607-1661), similar in stature to Hamilton but solidly pro-Covenanter. Ruined by the Commonwealth takeover of Scotland at the start of the fifties, he struggled to survive until the Restoration, when a moment of madness led to him going to London and presenting himself to the king whose father he had opposed. He was beheaded soon after.

3) The situation on the island of Ireland was complicated. In the north (Ulster) there were large numbers of Scots settlers, many with ties across the narrow North Channel; the Scottish kingdom had been founded by a tribe from Ulster, nearly a thousand years before. English Protestants were settled mostly around Dublin and the east coast, in the area called the Pale. The rebellion this year was initially aimed at extracting concessions from the dominant Anglo-Scots settlers who had all the rights whilst the native Irish Catholics had few or none, but it quickly devolved into an all-out ethnic conflict, with all the horrors that entailed.

4) Edward Hyde (1609-1674), lawyer and member for Saltash in Cornwall. The Remonstrance caused him and many others to move away from Pym and the hard-line Puritans. A moderate, Hyde was distrusted by other royalists and lost favour with the king. He was ennobled as Earl of Clarendon on the Restoration in 1660 and his daughter Anne married James II, two months before the birth of her first son. Two of their daughters, Mary and Anne, both ruled England, Scotland and Ireland; Anne would be the first Queen of Great Britain.
Chapter Summary

19: Tensions rise as the king and his opponents manoeuvre for position, and Castiel increasingly fears the worst. The alpha does a kindness for his baker neighbour, and Dean has to agree to test new pie recipes for her. Oh, the terrible trials of being a modern omega!

Friday 19th November, 1641

Castiel is late home tonight, and his mate knows why. They eat in a heavy silence, and once they are done Dean leads his alpha quietly to their bedchamber, setting him face down on the bed before easing in to lie squarely on top of him. Castiel loves it when Dean covers him like this, his alpha frame easily able to support the larger omega body above him, as is evidenced by the happy sighs half-smothered by the pillow.

“How is it all going?” Dean asks eventually. Castiel turns his head for a kiss.

“Not well”, he says. “This afternoon we received news that Henry Gurney has been elected Lord Mayor of London.”

“Who he?” Dean asks.

“The king's man”, Castiel says. “Londoners are not happy at Puritans preaching at them all day long, and the king was able to get his man across the line. It has only stiffened the resolve of his supporters to defeat the Remonstrance. They may even manage it, or at least delay it enough for the king to make it back from Scotland.”

“When is he due back?” Dean asks.

“The twenty-fifth, a month before Christmas”, Castiel says. “The journey will take him a whole week. He should have started back sooner; word is that he gave his enemies north of the Border everything they wanted anyway. His being here might be the crucial difference, if his allies can delay things long enough.”

“Pym will not let that happen!” Dean snorts.

“Pym's control is slipping”, Castiel says with a sigh. “All his achievements thus far may come to naught very soon, if he is not careful. I love you, Dean.”

“Love you too, alpha.”

Castiel growls contentedly and, to his omega's surprise, falls asleep with his omega still on top of him. Dean nuzzles into him, sighing happily.

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Tuesday 23rd November, 1641
Dean is anxious. The twins have been pressing him to go to bed, but Castiel is still not back from the House, and it is past midnight now. What can be keeping him so long?

Fortunately his concerns are ended by the sound of a key in the door. Moments later a tired and crumpled alpha is yawning his way into the house.

“Lord, but I need my bed!” Castiel groans. “And my omega.”

Dean hurries over to him and quickly scents him, smiling at the evident relaxation that causes in his mate before leading him upstairs to their bed. He helps Castiel out of his clothes and into bed before quickly undressing and joining him. He would like to know what has happened, but although he is back with his husband in under a minute Castiel is already asleep, though Dean does get a contented grumble as he snuggles into him.

+~+~+

Surprisingly in view of his late night, Castiel is up early for once the following day. Dean wakes to an empty bed, which is annoying, but then Castiel comes in with a plateful of bacon, which is not so annoying.

All right, damn pleasant! Dean reaches for the bacon, and Castiel smiles.

“Do you not want to hear everything that happened yesterday?” he asks.

“Bacon!” Dean whines, batting his eyelashes for good measure. Castiel smiles but brings the plate over, and they share it in companionable silence. Once they are done, the alpha sighs.

“Pym got his Remonstrance”, he says, “but barely. One hundred and fifty-nine votes for, and one hundred and forty-eight against, a majority of just eleven. The king was so close; one of Pym's supporters remarked that he would have upped and emigrated to the Americas if they had lost.”

“No-one likes a bad loser”, Dean remarks. “Who was it?”

“Oliver Cromwell, representing Cambridge”, Castiel says. “Quite a character, really. I have to say that I think I may have underestimated Pym.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“I am beginning to think that a split is exactly what he wants”, Castiel says. “Think about it. About half the members support him, and half do not. He can tinker around the edges, maybe try to create new constituencies in friendly areas like Elizabeth did – the number of members from the West Country is formidable (1) - but if he can cause a major breach with the opposition, then they might quit and form a rival parliament.”

“But then the king would have won”, Dean points out. Castiel shakes his head.

“You are not seeing the mathematics of the situation”, he says. “With his enemies gone, Pym would have complete control of those left behind. No, I think he is plotting to cause just such a breach. But how will he achieve it?”

It crossed Dean's mind to say that his monarch would not be so stupid as to fall for that, just before it also crossed his mind that yes, he probably would. He pouts, and hopes his alpha did not notice.

Castiel does. But because he is a good alpha, he says nothing. He just smirks, which was almost as bad.
Dean bites viciously at a piece of bacon. At least it loves him!

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Wednesday 1st December, 1641

“I have to admit”, Castiel says, “that for once your king has made a wise move.”

“He is your king too”, Dean points out, shifting so his mate's knot moved inside him and made his eyes momentarily water. “Oh Lord!”

“No, just your husband”, Castiel grins, helping Dean move round so that the alpha was.... holding him in the way he really, really liked that in no way shape or form resembled cu.... the word-that-must-not-be-spoken..

“You were thinking of that word again!” Dean says accusingly. Castiel nuzzled into the back of his neck.

“I have no idea as to which word you mean”, he says lightly. “Anyway, the king has replaced the soldiers guarding the Houses of Parliament with the Westminster Trained Bands (2). A clever move.”

“How so?” Dean asks, relaxing back into his alpha's embrace.

“Because the new soldiers are loyal to him, yet he can claim he is doing it to 'protect' parliament”, Castiel says. “He has basically secured a whole set of spies in the enemy camp, just like they have spies in his.”

“You are spying on the king?” Dean asks, shocked.

“I am not personally”, Castiel says, “but I would wager a guinea on Pym having several people in place. This is the first really smart thing that King Charles has done. If he keeps this up, he may yet emerge triumphant. Now, let us just lie here and relax.”

“You say that word and I am prising myself off of your knot somehow!”

Castiel sniggers, and rolls his knot again. Dean moans in pleasure.

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Tuesday 14th December, 1641

Dean is working at the estate accounts when Charlie storms in. She is very clearly not happy.

“If this goes on I am going to shut up shop and move to the country!” she grumbles. “I had a group of those apprentices in just now, demanding that everyone in the shop sign their damn petition or else!”

Dean is aware that things have been difficult for his neighbour of late. The king's move to appoint new guards to parliament two weeks back has had the unfortunate consequence of squeezing the malcontents onto the streets, and they had found a new demand that they wanted met, or at least rediscovered an old one.

“They want the bishops removed, I suppose”, he says.

“I do not mind them asking people to sign their petition”, she storms, “but I had to get out my gun
today when they threatened a customer. And one of them promised to come back later, though I think he was all mouth and no trousers. Typical alpha!”

With less than perfect timing, her last words are uttered as the alpha of the house comes in through the door. He stares in surprise.

“Did I do something wrong?” he asks.

“Not you, just some unruly customers”, Charlie says. “I had better go and open up again, now they have had time to move on and annoy someone else. Goodbye!”

She bustles out. Castiel slumps exhaustedly into a chair.

“You look wrecked!” Dean says sympathetically. “Bad day?”

“Very”, Castiel says heavily. “The king came to the House today and addressed the Lords. No mention of the Remonstrance, which he seems to be ignoring for now. No, he wanted to know why there was no money for an army to put down the Irish.”

“A fair question”, Dean says warily.

“I am so tired of all of them”, Castiel sighs. “There is no reconciling the two sides, and they argue over the silliest things, like children. I found two of them going at it hammer and tongs over whether the king’s failure to settle the Carolina Province (3) was because he was trying to buy the friendship of the Spanish through his inaction. Honestly!”

“I am surprised that they are not going all out to win you to one side or the other”, Dean says.

“I think my mind is made up now”, Castiel says. “Though I very much feel it is somewhat the lesser of two evils, I will support Pym. If it comes to war, that is.”

“And will it come to war?” Dean asks nervously.

“I think that, one way or the other, we shall soon know”, his husband answers.

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Monday 20th December, 1641

“Well, you can score another success for your king”, Castiel says when he comes home that evening. “He has secured the Tower of London. A pity he was unable to do it in time to save Strafford though.”

“How?” Dean asks.

“He sent one of his men, a Colonel Thomas Lunsford, off to take charge this morning”, Castiel says. “It is one of the few areas where he still has power, and he has used it well. Pym is furious, but there is nothing that he can do about it.”

“That makes two successes this month”, Dean says. “And that Remonstrance was only narrowly passed. He may soon be able to control parliament after all.”

“I still have a feeling that Pym has something up his sleeve”, Castiel says. “There were rumours going around today that he might initiate a move against the queen herself, because she is so unpopular. That would definitely cause the king to react.”
“What could he do?” Dean asks.

“Her open preference for Catholic advisers and envoys is foolish”, Castiel says. “She is a much easier target than her husband. Yes, I can see why Pym would be tempted. But he is playing a dangerous game. Oh, and apparently I am a Roundhead.”

“What?” Dean is confused.

“That is what they are calling us Puritans now, presumably because they think us too bull-headed”, Castiel says. “It is better than what the call the king’s supporters; caballeros or cavaliers. For those Spanish horsemen who ride roughshod over their enemies.”

“Name-calling”, Dean sighs. “It has come to this.”

+~+~+

Thursday 30th December, 1641

It is a cold and blustery winter’s day, and Castiel blows into the house at speed, startling his mate who is helping their baker neighbour out. This may or may not involve tasting large quantities of pie (it does). The alpha smiles at the scene before him, but not for long.

“There has been another development”, he says gravely. “Twelve bishops have been arrested and taken to the Tower of London, and the rest are trapped in the Lords by the mob. It looks like their petition has succeeded.”

“I would have thought that the other lords would not be happy with that”, Charlie observes. “Dean, what do you think about number three?”

Dean forks off a piece of pie and eats it, then pulls a face. The baker sighs.

“Needs more sugar?” she asks.

“Definitely!” he says. “Ugh! So, is she right, Cas?”

“The Lords is as divided as the Commons when it comes to the king”, Castiel says, “though this removal of so many of the king’s supporters will do his cause some harm. Oh, and Charlie, what is this I hear about you buying more coal?”

She looks at him in surprise.

“Um, baker, Castiel?” she says. “Bake things. Need fire?”

Castiel smiles.

“Yes, but the heat from your chimney warms half our house, including our bedroom”, he says. “And I know that the price of coal has gone through the roof since the Scots damaged the Northumbrian mines whilst they were in possession. Plus you keep my omega in pie, even if he is about to go on a post-Christmas diet.....”

“Cas!”

“So I told the merchant that I will be paying for your coal in future”, Castiel says. “After all, you provide a service on part of the Bradstock estate, even if we are in a major city. I take it there is no problem with that?”
She looks shocked, but quickly recovers.

“Thank you, Castiel”, she smiles.

“If only all our problems were so easily resolved”, Castiel sighs. “Still, we must just struggle on and hope for a resolution to our difficulties.”

It was odd that he should have said that....

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Notes:
1) In this area Cornwall, the most south-westerly county in England and base for the royal duchy of that name still held by the English monarch's heir today, was vastly over-represented for its population, primarily due to monarchs (particularly Elizabeth I) setting up new seats in areas loyal to the Crown. At the Great Reform Act in 1832 it went from 42 down to 15 seats. Devonshire dropped from 31 to 24, and Somersetshire from 20 to 15 (all figures net). At the 2015 election the figures were Cornwall 6 seats, Devonshire 12 and Somersetshire 9 in a larger House of Commons.
2) There was no standing army at the time, troops being raised as and when needed. The best options on offer were the Trained Bands (locally raised part-timers of some ability who would usually only fight for their own city or county) and the militia (a semi-skilled and poorly-armed equivalent). The City of London had far and away the biggest and best Bands; Westminster, although by this time physically joined to its more famous neighbour down-river, had its own much smaller force.
3) Named for the king (Latin Carolus = Charles), it covered the modern Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. It was a failure, and settlers spilling over from Virginia settled the area's first town, Edenton, in 1658. The southern part was settled a few years, the settlers moving subsequently to Charleston (named for the king's son and eventual successor). Differences between these two led to the split between what later became North and South Carolina.
Chapter Summary

20: The king makes a sudden move against his opponents, and Castiel is a witness to history as it all goes horribly, horribly wrong. A man with a first name some forty-six letters long brings startling news, and Dean doesn't go to church.

Saturday 1st January, 1642

“I am not going to the Commons today.”

Dean grins. He and Castiel had welcomed in the New Year in their own special way – the blue panties had not survived it! - and now the alpha was lying in a nearly catatonic state, pouting at the ceiling.

“Your omega sexed you out?” he teases. “Poor old alpha. Being past thirty must make you feel.... oof!”

He is suddenly pinned to the bed, looking up at an alpha with a mightily impressive erection. And a look in his blue eyes that suggests even more good things for a certain omega.

“What I meant”, Castiel growls, “is that Pym wants us to meet in Committee at Guildhall (1), in the City. His way of controlling things, I believe. And the good news is that I do not have to attend until mid-morning, which leaves me plenty of time to deal with any sassy omega mates in the vicinity.”

“Oh noes”, Dean moans, throwing his hands back in mock despair. “Help. Save me.”

Castiel chuckles.

“If that was a cry for help, it was pathetic”, he grunts. “But I suppose I had better give you something to be saved from, regardless.”

He starts to lick a path down the omega's chest, and Dean shudders in anticipation. What a wonderful way to start the year!

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“Pym was wise to call a sitting today”, Castiel says. “Many of the king's supporters went home for Christmas, and as they are mostly in the north and west, a number have not yet made it back.”

“That is sneaky and underhand”, Dean complains.

“Yes”, Castiel agrees. “I believe that it is called politics?”

Dean pouts.

“You are so gorgeous when you pout!”

“Shut up!”
Sunday 2nd January, 1642

It is fortunate, Dean often thinks, that their situation means he has a reason to get out of attending church most times. Not that he has anything against the Church of England – he rather likes it – but Castiel attends a Puritan church with some of his friends from parliament, and from his description of what goes on there, Dean places it right alongside such delights as having a tooth pulled.

Omegas would of course normally be expected to attend with their mates, and then sit in the box (usually uncomfortable bare boards) especially reserved for them and the wives. However, the Puritans in parliament are a close-knit bunch of people at the best of times, and there is a strong fear, Castiel had told him, that one or other of the mates might gossip about any private conversations that happen there. Better for them all to stay at home, then.

Dean does not agree with much in the Puritan rule-book, but this idea has his whole-hearted support. Especially as it would of course be unthinkable for him to attend church on his own, or even with one or other of the twins. No, he will just have to remain home and plan for ways to deal with his alpha husband when he gets home tired and cranky from his religious endeavours. Dean has such a hard life.

Or soon will have, with any luck!

Castiel arrives back a little earlier than expected, which is nice. He looks even more windblown than usual, which is impressive considering that it is a calm day outside.

“I picked up some interesting news”, he says. “The king offered Pym the post of Chancellor (2), but he refused it.”

“He could surely not have accepted it?” Dean asks.

“I suppose it was more symbolic than anything else”, Castiel says. “An olive-branch to show how reasonable the king is being, prepared to reach out to his enemies. He has chosen John Colepeper instead, the member for Kent and something of a moderate. Of course the result of the offer was to cause even more speculation about what the king plans next.”

“Wait, hopefully”, Dean says. “If he has enough sense.”

“If”, Castiel echoes, and his mate can hear the disbelief in his voice.

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Monday 3rd January, 1642

Dean's hopes are set to last for a little under twenty-four hours. His husband charges into the room the following evening in a complete state.

“What was the man thinking?” he storms. Dean looks up in surprise.

“Has something happened?” he asks.

“Yes and no.”

Dean looks at his husband in confusion. Castiel sighs and all but collapses onto the couch.

“This morning Sir Edward Herbert, the attorney general, rose in the Lords and accused Pym,
Hampden (3) and three other members of high treason”, Castiel says angrily. “I do not know exactly what the king had planned, but clearly someone missed their cue because nothing happened. A list of charges was issued this afternoon, and the whole place is in turmoil.”

“You were right after all, then”, Dean says wryly. “He is striking at the leaders of the opposition against him, and at a time when that opposition is divided. A clever move.”

“Except that unlike with Strafford, no arrests have been made”, Castiel points out. “Maybe not so clever after all. Now the five are forewarned of his intentions, they can protect themselves to some degree. I do not understand why the king failed to seize them immediately the charges were laid out, as he could have done.”

“Are they still at the House?” Dean asks.

“I would presume that they have been smuggled away through one of the many side-entrances”, Castiel says, relaxing a little. “The place is a rabbit-warren. But the king must make a move to seize them soon, surely? He can hardly march into the chamber and take them whilst we are sitting?”

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Tuesday 4th January, 1642

A ghost town.

That is what Dean thinks when he chances to look out into the normally busy Whitehall Place running past the house. Usually the place is filled with people either selling their wares or hurrying somewhere or other, but today it is virtually deserted. A lone palace guard stands across the road in the steady January drizzle, looking decidedly bedraggled.

Dean watches on.

Suddenly there is a flash of colour up the street. The next moment, a group of royal guards emerges from one of the main palace entrances and turns to march down towards the Houses of Parliament. Only then does Dean note that he is not the only one watching the spectacle; several doors in nearby houses on his side of the street are opened as people gawp in awe. Thanks to the newspapers which proliferate in the city even more than the dreaded rats, everyone knows pretty much what had happened the day before, and by implication what a group of soldiers marching on parliament means.

Big trouble.

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“By your leave, sir?”

Castiel snaps to attention. John Pym is addressing Speaker Lenthall, which in itself is not unusual. But all four of the other accused members are sat around him, away from their usual seats. Now that is interesting.

The Speaker nods his assent, and the five members slip out. Castiel feels his gaze fall on the sceptre that lies squarely on its table before the chair on which the Speaker sits. The symbol of the king’s authority in the House. The alpha has a really bad feeling that he knows what is about to happen, and wishes fervently that he will turn out to be incorrect.
He is not. Barely half an hour later there is a commotion in the hall outside the chamber, followed swiftly by the doors being thrown open – and the king himself strides in, to gasps from many of the assembled members. Castiel notes that one royalist member is very pointedly holding the door open so that his colleagues can see outside to where the king’s soldiers are priming their weapons, some even pointing their guns into the room.

The alpha swallows hard. This is bad. Very bad.

The king doffs his hat, nodding to some of his supporters as he makes his way across the chamber. His gaze falls on where the space normally occupied by Pym is very empty. Castiel is sure that his face falls slightly.

“Mr. Speaker”, he intones, “I must for a time make bold with your chair.”

So very, very bad. Castiel is so shocked that he misses the king’s next few words, presumably explaining why he has come and then inquiring generally as to the whereabouts of the five accused members. But when he asks the same question of the Speaker, the reply snaps Castiel back to reality. William Lenthall is first and foremost the king's man, after all.

“Sir”, the Speaker says bowing, “I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to tell but as this House commands.”

The king notably pales, but quickly recovers himself.

“Tis no matter”, he scoffs. “My eyes are as good as any other's.” He scans the benches again, presumably hoping that the five might be hiding under them or something, then sighs unhappily. “Though I see all my birds have flown.”

Turning on his heel he marches from the chamber, and the door closes behind him. Castiel is not the only member staring after him in absolute shock.

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“He has ruined everything”, Castiel tells Dean later. “Bringing armed men into the chamber – it will swing all the waverers back behind Pym again, for a long, long time.”

“And the five got away?” Dean asks.

“Taken by river to somewhere in the City, for sure”, Castiel says. “And after this breach of privilege, they will not give them up, royalist Lord Mayor or no royalist Lord Mayor. The king has made a fatal blunder, Dean. He has lost London.”

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Wednesday 5th January, 1642

It is another cold, drizzly January day, and Castiel really does not want to go to the chamber today. Especially when he had a snuggly omega wrapped around him. But needs must.

Apparently his mate thinks needs mustn't, because Dean whines petulantly when Castiel tries to extract himself that morning. The alpha chuckles.

“It's not as if you even get paid for all this hassle”, Dean grumbles, scenting his alpha all over.

“These are turbulent times, beloved”, Castiel smiles, kissing his mate before reluctantly extricating
himself from the octopus grasp. “It behoves every man to do his duty. Besides, I have to go and see what foolish and unwise act our noble monarch will attempt today. I would not be surprised if he has Speaker Lenthall thrown in the Tower for so brazenly defying him yesterday.”

“Maybe this was his plan all along?” Dean suggests hopefully. “After all, Pym cannot control Westminster from London, can he?”

The alpha shakes his head.

“I am sure that Pym planned for this, and is communicating with his allies regularly”, he says. “If the king has the slightest degree of sense, then he will apologize for yesterday's actions. But I would sooner expect to see elephants – and dromedaries, for that matter - floating down the Thames!”

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“Well, if the king did not grasp the mood of London before, he knows it now”, Castiel says heavily that evening. “He actually dared to ride into the City and demand that Mayor Gurney hand over the five members.”

“That was very brave of him”, Dean says.

“And very foolish”, Castiel says. “His best option by far would have been a swift apology and letting tempers cool for a few weeks, if not longer. Instead he has once again upset the City, which is now totally against him. As I said, he has lost London. The question is, how much of the rest of the country will back him?”

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Monday 10th January, 1642

Dean loves his husband. Provided he is kept clear of the kitchen. Castiel and cooking do not go well together.

This is why, after dark, they have the front door open with the alpha standing guard, to try to waft the smell of burnt whatever-Cas-had-just-incinerated out of the house. Fortunately the street outside is quiet and empty, at least until Dean sees a dark figure hurrying across the road. He feels rather than sees his husband stiffen defensively before he recognizes the newcomer, and relaxes. Jet is one of the palace guards who works opposite, and often comes to the bakery to collect food for his fellow men. He is a Puritan like Castiel, although perhaps less lucky in that having been born on Christmas Day, his parents had named him 'Jesus-Wast-Born-On-This-Day-To-Savest-Thou-So-Be-Thankful' Jones. Hence, Jet. Fortunately he is a beta and so no real threat, though Dean still hears a barely suppressed growl from his protective alpha. He smiles to himself.

“I wanted to catch you tonight”, Jet says urgently. “The king has gone!”

“Gone?” Dean echoes, shocked. “Where?”

“He did not say”, the soldier says, “but rumour is he made for Hampton Court (4). After events in the City today, we were all hardly surprised.”

He bows and hurries back across the road to his post. Dean knows what he means; the London docks had risen in support of parliament today, and at one time had looked set to march on Whitehall itself. The king had clearly weighed the odds and decided to make a run for it.

Notes:
1) Guildhall is London's city hall and was old even then, having been completed two centuries before. Situated in the north-east part of the old City, it is used today for certain official functions by the City of London Corporation, their main offices being nearby.
2) The official title is Chancellor of the Exchequer, today the post controlling (or not) government income and expenditure. The post was a more important position at this time because there was no 'prime minister' as such, so it was effectively head of the king's government.
3) John Hampden (1599-1643), member of parliament for Wendover. He had become a national figure when, in 1637, he had fought a legal case against the hated Ship-Money tax. Charles won what turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory; his efforts in rigging the court system against Hampden meant that the royal reputation suffered considerable damage, and the tax proved difficult if not impossible to collect afterwards.
4) A royal palace on the Thames, about twelve miles south-west of London. Seized by Henry VIII from his advisor Cardinal Wolsey the century before and only rarely used since, it is redolent of the late Medieval Period and well worth a visit. Although the fabled maze is a bit of a let-down.
Chapter Summary

21: The country slides inexorably towards war, and Castiel makes an amazing suggestion to his stunned omega. Dean celebrates birthday number twenty-eight, which his husband marks with twenty-eight pies and Dean marks with a stomach-ache from trying to eat them all on the same day. The alpha helps out Charlie again, and he and Dean have to share body-heat to combat the terrible winter weather. Poor omega!

Tuesday 11th January, 1642

“Pym came back in triumph today”, Castiel tells his mate as they lie together that evening, both panting after their make-out session. “He and the other four members were rowed in from the City to thunderous applause. London is his now.”

“It is all very wrong”, Dean frowns. “They must surely come to an agreement sooner or later?”

“How can they?” Castiel asks, pulling his mate into an embrace and nibbling his neck. Dean sighs happily. “The king has tested the system of monarchy to destruction, and this is the result. And Pym has wasted no time, he has already sent to Hull and Portsmouth to try to secure those key ports.”

“I know the Navy is at Portsmouth”, Dean says, “but what is at Hull? It is in the north somewhere, is it not?”

“Oh, not here in Westminster”, Castiel says. “That city's harbour, in effect. It is the main armoury for the North, and critical to anyone raising an army there. From what I know, the men in charge of these cities could go either way. I am sure that if the king has not done so, he will soon be sending to them himself.”

“I know the Navy is at Portsmouth”, Dean says, “but what is at Hull? It is in the north somewhere, is it not?”

On the east coast not far from York”, Castiel says. “The king has tested the system of monarchy to destruction, and this is the result. And Pym has wasted no time, he has already sent to Hull and Portsmouth to try to secure those key ports.”

“Still in the king's hands, for what good it is to him”, Castiel says. “I understand that some local vendors are already refusing to supply food and drink to the garrison, and they cannot get anything in through the docks with the sailors against them. No, the best thing for the king would be to try to use it as leverage to gain concessions elsewhere, or at least avoid making further concessions on his part. Though I rather fear that it is too late for that.”

Monday 17th January, 1642

“Well, we have had our first action of the conflict”, Castiel says as he comes in from what sounds like an apocalyptic rainstorm that evening. “Mercifully with no loss of life.”

“What has happened?” Dean asks, alarmed. “Are you all right?”

“Oh, not here in Westminster”, Castiel says. “The town of Kingston, Surrey, just a couple of miles from where the king is hiding out at Hampton Court. A group of royalists tried to seize the town
armoury, and local parliamentarians swept them out of town and secured it for themselves. Not only that, but they have even posted a guard on the Portsmouth road at Farnham, to prevent any move in that direction."

“Fighting so near to the king”, Dean shudders. “It is horrible.”

“It will get much worse before it gets better”, Castiel says. “The king has many failings, otherwise we would not be in this awful mess, but lack of bravery is not one of them. We may see him leading his own troops in battle before long.”

He belatedly sees what effect his news is having on his mate, and feels a rush of guilt. He opens his arms and, despite the fact that the alpha is dripping all over the tiled floor, Dean rushes into them and instinctively starts scenting him. Castiel lets him. His mate needs this.

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Friday 21st January, 1642

“I do somewhat admire the king’s supporters in all this”, Castiel says as they sit at dinner. “He has put them in an impossible situation, but they fight on for him. And at least my own side is also conducting itself in a civilized manner just now, though I wonder if it will last.”

Dean pouts. He has a mean alpha!

“I told Charlie not to provide pie for dinner this evening because it is your birthday next week, Dean.”

“Huh?” The omega is confused.

“I have a little surprise planned for your birthday”, Castiel grins. “It involves pie, and I thought that if you have too much of it leading up to it, you might go off it.”

Dean stares at him incredulously.

“Go off of pie?” he asks, aghast. “Go off.... of pie?”

Castiel narrowly bites back an undignified guffaw. Dean looks like Castiel had just suggested he swim the length of the Thames for fun. He hurries on.

“The king’s cousin, the Duke of Richmond (1), moved in the Lords today that both Houses adjourn for six months ‘to cool off’”, he says. “A clever ruse, at it would allow the king to gather his strength whilst his enemies cannot. It was the extent to which he was voted down that surprised me, though. By a clear hundred majority. The king has no hope of regaining control of things with figures like that.”

Dean was still musing about the strange idea of him going off pie. Castiel hid another smile. His omega was so damn cute at times, though he would doubtless pout if told such. Then again, he was even cuter when he pouted!

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Monday 24th January, 1642

Dean whines piteously.

“I warned you”, Castiel says unsympathetically. “I said that you should save some for later in the
week. But you tried to eat them all at once, and this is the consequence.”

“Puritan wiseacre!” Dean sniffs mournfully. “Oh my aching stomach!”

Castiel's present (apart from the obvious!) had been one small pie for each of Dean's twenty-eight years, each a different flavour. He had expected his mate to consume maybe a dozen today and have the rest later in the week, but Dean had managed an impressive twenty-one before his body had made its displeasure manifest. Now he was lying on the couch groaning, clutching at his overly full stomach.

“You fed me too much!” he whines.

“Yes, I definitely forced you to eat those last nine pies!” Castiel says unsympathetically. “I take it that this means you feel unable to fulfill your obligations as my mate?”

He gets a reply that involves a gesture quite unbecoming of an omega. He smiles, and reaches for the covered glass that, with commendable foresight, he has ready.

“It is fortunate for you that both Charlie and I foresaw your gluttony, and she gave me this”, he says, handing the glass of cloudy liquid to the omega. “It will help your stomach settle, although judging by the size of it.....”

Dean tries to swat at him, but the movement makes him groan again.

“Besides”, Castiel says, “this has been a very costly birthday. And not just for the pies themselves.”

“Huh?”

“Charlie and I both knew you would over-indulge”, the alpha grins. “Unfortunately I thought you would stop at eighteen and she went for twenty-two. You have cost me a week's rent, omega, and I shall be taking it out on you at some time in the future when you can actually move!”

Dean groans again. He gets no sympathy!

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Monday 7th February, 1642

It is strange, Dean thinks, that even though the building across the road looks exactly the same as it always has, something is different. Whitehall is a palace without its king, and the lack of the monarch makes a difference.

“It certainly makes a difference to me”, Charlie grumbles when Dean is helping her out that afternoon. “All those people spent money here, whilst Puritans like that sex-crazed husband of yours are much more careful with their cash.”

“Cas is not sex-crazed”, Dean says defensively. “Well, not often enough, in my opin.....”

“Ugh!” she exclaims. “Well, if business does not pick up I am going to have to consider.....”

She is interrupted by what for Dean is a most welcome sight, his husband coming into the bakery. Unusually he has four of his fellow members with him. Dean recognizes only one of them; appropriately it is the member for Woodstock (2), a genial beta called Robert Pye. The omega walks over to his mate, careful to keep his eyes lowered.

“What brings you here, master?” he asks courteously. He catches the twitch of the lips, which
means the alpha is refraining from laughing at his unusual subservience. Castiel checks to make sure that Charlie is busy serving his friends before he answers.

“You mentioned that Charlie's takings were down lately”, he says. “So I thought I would start introducing more of my colleagues to her wonderful place.”

Dean smiles at his thoughtfulness.

“Good alpha!” he purrs. “Tonight we shall have to see about you having a reward for that.”

“Can I get an advance on it now?” Castiel asks hopefully.

“Bad alpha!” Dean scolds, but he smiles as he says it. “Has there been any more news today?”

“The king told parliament that he is sending Princess Mary to be with her Dutch fiancé”, Castiel says. “Her mother is going with her.”

“Translation, the queen is fleeing the country”, Dean says sombrely. “Perhaps it is for the best. She is not well liked.”

“It is much of her own doing”, Castiel sighs. “She has done nothing to win the English people over ever since she first came her over a decade ago, and now she is reaping what she has sown. I had better rejoin my friends, before they think that I am totally whipped.”

Dean opens his mouth to make the obvious comment, but decides not to. Though judging from the smirk on the alpha's face, he knows exactly what his mate had been about to say. The omega returns to his work, smiling.

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Monday 14th February, 1642

“I wonder what sort of reception the king is getting as he makes for Dover”, Castiel muses that evening. “The south of the country is where he is weakest, though he may hope for support in one or two areas. That could make all the difference.”

“Why?” Dean asks. “Surely just one town would be of no use?”

“You have seen the great walls around London”, Castiel points out. “A fortified town, even with the wonders of gunpowder, can withstand months of attack whilst besieging it is horrendously expensive, in men and equipment. I myself think it will come down to who controls the Royal Navy. It can be used to keep a port in enemy territory supplied indefinitely.”

“War is horrible!” Dean mutters.

“Indeed it is”, Castiel sighs. “The king conceded the exclusion of the bishops from the Lords today – for what that was worth, as they are a spent force anyway – but he refuses to sign the Militia Bill as yet. And whilst he has even nominal control of the armed forces, parliament cannot be safe. It is much his own fault; if he could but be trusted, then we could all deal. But he has shown time and again that he cannot.”

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Sunday 27th February, 1642

Dean is grateful that his husband is so considerate that, having been called into the Commons for
an urgent meeting after church that morning, he thought to send a message to him that he would be
delayed. Though the omega still worries, all the way until his alpha is striding in out of the gusty
winter weather. Dean immediately rushes over to hug him.

“Ugh, you're like an iceberg!” he complains, pulling the alpha's long-coat around them both.
Castiel smiles and walks them over to the fire, which Gadreel comes in and pokes into action
before leaving to fetch food and drink.

“It is so cold out (3)”, Castiel says. “I would not be surprised if the Thames freezes over after all.”

They embrace each other until Gadreel returns with hot drinks, then part long enough to eat and
drink. Dean is not a great fan of either coffee or tea, but at times like this he could be converted.

“The service was interrupted this morning by news”, Castiel explains once they are refreshed and
lying on the couch, the omega in the alpha's embrace. “The king sent word from Greenwich (4).
He has formally refused to sign the Militia Bill, as expected. Now he and Pym will be sending to
each county lieutenant to raise men for their side. We shall soon see just how much support the
king has in the country.”

“Will not the country mostly support him?” Dean wonders.

“The men he is trusting so to do are the very same ones who have been repeatedly vexed by his
high taxes and arbitrary rule this past decade”, Castiel says sombrely. “It may be that some of those
chickens chose now to come home to roost.”

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Notes:
1) James Stewart, Duke of Lennox and Richmond (1612-1655). A third cousin of the king (Stewart
was the old spelling of the family name) and one of his major supporters during the civil war. is
title descended to his son Esme on his death; the current duke Charles Gordon-Lennox (also Duke
of Richmond and Duke of Gordon) is a descendant of James' brother Charles.
2) A small town a few miles west of Stalwarton Hall, with a population of just over 3,000 (2016).
Site of a royal palace that had been little used since Elizabeth I had been imprisoned there in her
youth (this had not made her overly fond of the place for some strange reason!). Today a World
Heritage Site for Blenheim Palace, its eventual replacement and home to the Churchill family of
Winston fame. Possibly equally well-known for the 1969 concert held near the New York town
named after it.
3) Winters in the early 1640s were unusually cold and wet, even compared to the norm. This
rendered many roads impassable, which was why major fighting was restricted to the summer
months.
4) Greenwich Palace, also called the Palace of Placentia. Built in 1443, it was the principal royal
residence outside the capital, and lay about five miles downstream from London on the south
(Kentish) side of the river. It fared badly during the civil war and was mostly demolished. Partly
rebuilt in the 1660s by Charles II, it was not actually used again as a palace, but his establishment
there of the Royal Observatory was why the prime meridian was eventually sited through
Greenwich.
Chapter Summary

22: The slow shuffle to open warfare continues, as king and parliament jockey for position. Dean effects some improvements to the bakery and takes payment in pie (no surprise there!), while his husband worries about the city of Hull. And a seal gets stolen away.

Saturday 5th March, 1642

“Why York?” Dean asks as they lie tied together that evening.

“Three reasons”, Castiel says. “First, the king's strength is in the North, Wales and the west, the more Catholic areas of the country. Second, he is not far from Scotland, which he doubtless hopes for aid from. In vain, I suspect. And third, he is but a short ride from Hull and its huge armoury. I would wager Governor Hotham is a nervous man just now, unless of course he has already decided to side with the king.”

“But surely the king would see that getting support from Catholics would alienate most of the county?” Dean objects.

“He has little choice”, Castiel says. “Today, parliament made the Militia Bill law without his even signing it. If the king does not make some sort of move on Hull before the month is out, then I'm a Dutchman (1)!”

“Surely the nobles will back him, though?”

“I suppose, but that is the problem “, Castiel says. “People like my brother have huge estates, but the actual income generated is relatively small. The only way to get a large sum is to sell off part of the estate, and then you have lost the income from that forever. The merchants who support parliament on the other hand have a steady cash flow – provided they can keep trading. That is one reason why I said that the position of the Navy is so important.”

“Have you spoken with Ralfie lately?”

Castiel squeezes his omega's thigh, eliciting a yelp.

“You know how he hates being called that”, he said reprovingly.

“And?”

“Sassy omega! ’Raphael' will support the king, at least to some extent. But even the most fervent supporters of both sides will be keeping a weather eye on how things develop. I myself think that the king might well win a quick victory by marching on London, which is another reason why Hull is so important.”

“Huh?”

“The king would need a whole lot of extra troops if he fails to secure it”, Castiel explains. “A
number to besiege the port, and prevent them from riding the surrounding country, and then a whole lot more to march south. Anyway, enough politics for tonight. I need a nice, warm bed with a sweet, kind, loving omega in it.

Dean smiles. That is so sweet!

“But I suppose you'll have to do!”

“Hey! Bad alpha!”

Castiel sniggers, then does that thing with his tongue that is highly effective in silencing his sassy omega, if not reducing him to a happy, whimpering pile of goo. As usual, it works.

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Saturday 12th March, 1642

Castiel's 'advertising' of the bakery at work had worked well – possibly a little too well, Dean thinks with a smile as he applies a plane to the door he is working on. Charlie now had so much business that she was expanding, although bearing in mind how boxed in their houses were, this basically consisted of turning the store-room behind the eating area into extra seating. It had been the alpha's idea to make these into two small private rooms for people who did not wish to be overheard, which is why Dean is working on a replacement door for the new area. And yes, he is being paid in pie, but he would have done it anyway out of the goodness of his heart.

Probably. It is not as if Dean lives for pie alone.

(Somewhere, a blue-eyed alpha is sniggering).

Charlie comes in from the front area. Disappointingly she does not have pie with her.

“Honestly, I thought these Puritans were supposed to be so good and pure”, she complains. “That is the third time I've been groped by one this year!”

“I thought I heard a yelp”, Dean says. “Beta?”

“Yes”, she says, “and unfortunately for him, I had the large metal tray with me at the time.”

“Oh. Do you need me to bang out the dent?”

“I already did”, she grins. “Using his head!”

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One of the many things that Dean loves about his husband is that he is so caring. Not just for Dean himself – though he knows not all alphas care for their wives and mates as they should – but for anyone associated with them.

They are lying together on the couch reading when Castiel mentions that he is increasingly worried about the reports from Ireland.

“Though I doubt much can be achieved until king and parliament have sorted out their differences”, he says sadly, “and that will take some time.”

“There will definitely be war, then?” Dean asks nervously.
“There will be”, Castiel agrees. “I meant to ask you; would you be willing to write a letter to your uncle for me?”

“Of course”, Dean says. “But why?”

“I recalled today that that Garth, who lives in one of the cottages, is half-Irish”, Castiel explains. “Not so that anyone who knows him would suspect, but the name may become an issue. A Fitzgerald is currently the Earl of Kildare, I believe.”

“Hard to think of Garth as nobility”, Dean says. “He is just so.... so Garth!”

Castiel chuckles.

“Nevertheless, though I doubt he has any great travel plans, it might be wise for him to remain in Nowhere for the foreseeable future”, he says. “Tell your uncle that I will help him any way I can. Both of them are good men.”

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Monday 28th March, 1642

Dean stares incredulously at the newspaper – well, paper – in front of him.

“I cannot believe the king is that stupid!” he growls angrily. Castiel looks up from where he is reading another paper.

“What is it?” he asks.

“This article says that the king is considering crossing to Ireland”, Dean says, shaking his head in disbelief. “Never mind the danger; people will only say that he plans to use the rebel Catholics to cross back into England and restore the Old Faith. It is madness!”

“But hardly unexpected”, Castiel says, laying aside his own paper and crossing to where his omega sits. He wraps his arms around his mate, and smiles as he feels him calm down a little.

“Why unexpected?” Dean asks, leaning back into the embrace.

“He was rebuffed by the Scots”, Castiel points out. “And the English settlers in Ireland are Protestants, so generally not supporters of his. If he can somehow persuade the Irish to leave the Scots in Ulster alone, then it is a possibility that they may back him. With force, even.”

“That would swing much of England against him, surely?” Dean says.

“Yes, but as I once said his main hope lies in a swift victory rather than a long, drawn-out campaign”, Castiel explains. “An Irish army brought across to Chester, say, could descend on London before much of a force could be raised to stop it, if he was quick enough. And if London falls, he has pretty much won.”

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Saturday 23rd April, 1642

Sometimes Dean wonders if someone has secretly invented some new technology that enables news to be transmitted across the country in a flash. Events two hundred miles away yesterday evening are somehow already being discussed in London less than twenty-four hours later.
“It may be a saw that bad news travels fastest”, Castiel says at dinner that day, “but it is true. I myself am surprised, but it is a bad setback for King Charles.”

The previous day the king, who had eventually decided that going to Ireland would make a bad situation even worse, had instead tried to secure Hull. He had been clever, the London papers said, but not clever enough, first sending his young son James Duke of York to visit Sir John Hotham, and then dispatching a second and much larger party to join him. The intent had clearly been to seize the port city and its armoury, but for whatever reason it had failed, and the young prince had had to be escorted back to York in the dark. There was also speculation that the governor had been prepared to open the city to the king, but for some reason had not.

“Why are you surprised?” Dean asks. “We still do not know what went wrong?”

“Hotham was appointed, or I should say re-appointed to the governorship earlier this year”, Castiel says. “The king sacked him as governor three years back because he protested against Ship-Money; he is the member for Beverley, not far from Hull. I did not think much of him I am sorry to say, and even though we ordered him to secure the city earlier this year and he did so, I expected him to side with the king when push came to shove. That he has not is a welcome development.”

“At least the king did not go to Ireland, after all”, Dean says. “That would just have made his situation even worse.”

He would soon have cause to remember those words.

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Tuesday 10th May, 1642

Another of the oh so many things Dean truly loves about his husband is that he always remains in control, which when one considers the average Stuart alpha is about as common as hen's teeth. Some days Castiel will come in from the House looking totally frazzled, and will quietly ask Dean if the omega would not mind his husband being a little rough with him that night. The answer is always yes; Dean knows that even in the wildest throes of passion Castiel would stop at once if asked, as the omega had only once ever had to do (they had just broken the bed and the alpha was too far gone to notice; Charlie had fallen about laughing when he told her the next day).

Dean is feeling well and truly fucked that night, wondering if it would be a good idea to ask why his husband had come home so tense. Fortunately the alpha works them round until he is on top, still knotted inside his mate, and then speaks.

“Edward Lyttleton has gone”, he says.

“Who?”

“The Lord Keeper of the Great Seal”, Castiel rumbles, making himself comfortable and rendering his omega speechless in the process. “One of the many men out for themselves, regardless of the rights and wrongs of the issues at hand. I disagree with the king’s most fervent supporters, but I respect them for holding to their beliefs. Men like Lyttleton, I just despise!”

Dean sighs contentedly as their bodies aligned, alpha and omega perfectly together. His husband nibbled the back of his neck, and he smiled.

“No loss, then”, he says.

“Unfortunately it is”, Castiel says. “He has taken the Seal with him. The king can now claim some
legal force behind any laws he issues in York, as they have the Great Seal (2) affixed to them. His own seal, the privy one, people would overlook, but the Great Seal has standing.”

“Cannot parliament just make one for themselves?” Dean asks.

“Doubtless they will”, Castiel says, “but in the meantime it gives him an advantage. Now, up for another go?”

“Cas!”

The alpha chuckles darkly.

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Wednesday 11th May, 1642

“Well, the king’s advantage did not last long”, Castiel remarks at breakfast that morning. “The Confederate Irish have declared for him.”

“Who?” Dean asks, confused.

“The Catholics in charge of much of the island now”, Castiel explains. “Apparently yesterday there was a conference of bishops at Kilkenny, and they have persuaded the leaders of the rebellion to swear loyalty to the king. Possibly they think he may come over and be just their king, ridding the island of the English and Scots settlers.”

“He would not do that!” Dean says hotly.

“I doubt he would”, Castiel sighs, “but as I have said many times, it is not what he does or does not do that matters. What counts is that many in England will think that he might do just that, and he will lose even more support. He should have rebuffed their offer the minute it was made.”

“I thought you said an Irish army was a good idea?” Dean asks.

“I should have made clear that I meant an army raised from the English settlers”, Castiel says. “A Catholic Irish army entering the country – the king is a fool to have even considered such a prospect.”

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Friday 27th May, 1642

Castiel comes through the door looking shocked. Dean is immediately worried.

“What has happened now?” he asks. The alpha hesitates.

“Pym made his answer to the king getting the Great Seal today”, he says flatly. “He said that King Charles was, and I quote, ‘making war on parliament’, and that no laws in this land were legal unless that had been passed by both the Commons and the Lords. Legal niceties aside, we are now at war.”

Dean swallows hard. This is bad.

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Notes:
1) An expression that gathered popularity during this particular century as the Dutch moved to
become England's main trading rivals, it was a way of expressing complete disagreement with some premise or other. The English dislike of their near neighbours led to several other negative expressions, such as 'Dutch courage', 'double Dutch' and 'going Dutch'.

2) The Great Seal symbolizes the monarch's approval of important state documents, not necessarily laws. In the past each monarch also had a privy (private) seal. The former is for documents that are of national importance, whilst the latter was used for personally important documents.
June-July 1642

Chapter Summary

23: The war seems to be taking an age to actually get started, and the king suffers a setback when he loses most of the Navy. Castiel makes few objections as Dean uses the time to seduce him, and his precautions about a certain person back home prove to have been justified. Dean worries that his mother and brother are living just a few miles from what is now the front line between royalist Oxfordshire and parliamentarian Warwickshire.

Wednesday 1st June, 1642

“It is strange”, Charlie says as she brings another tray full of pastries in from the kitchen, “that we seem to be at war without actually having gone to war.”

Dean looks at her in confusion.

“Huh?”

“Well, it's not like the Cousins' Wars, is it?” she asks. “That all started on a set day at a set time when one side demanded the king remove advisers they did not like, the king refused, and there was a battle. This time the country just seems to be... I don't know, almost sleepwalking into war.”

“You have to remember that those wars were nearly two centuries back”, Castiel points out, smiling as he holds a hot coffee. He has only recently discovered that there are many different types of the drink, and some of those made by Charlie are delicious. “We are not like our Continental brethren who have wars on a regular basis. I suspect that many people here simply do not know the full horrors of modern warfare.”

“But you do?” she asks. He shakes his head.

“I can however see that with these more reliable guns appearing, the number of casualties is going to be far greater”, he says. “And those are just physical casualties. The damage done between and within families and communities will take years to repair. But I can tell you that we are another step along that sad road.”

She puts the tray behind the counter and comes round to sit opposite him and next to Dean.

“Spill!” she demands. He smiles.

“Parliament has finalized the list of demands for a peace that will give the king money and an army to use in Ireland”, he says. “They are quite unacceptable, of course, and he will reject them sooner or later. At the moment however both sides are struggling to raise armies in each of the counties. Oxford, I note, has declared for the king.”

“Did you not say you expected that?” Dean asks.

“There is a strong pro-parliament feeling in the city”, Castiel says, “but the colleges (1) and chief landowners are for the king. It is a useful city to have, what with the university being so rich.
“Doubtless my brother will view the development with mixed feelings, though.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Because everywhere the king goes, he expects his loyal subjects to pay for his war effort”, Castiel says. “And my dear brother, as my gorgeous husband so rightly states, is tighter than a duck’s backside!”

Dean blushes as the other two both laugh.

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Monday 20th June, 1642

Castiel sighs as he collapses onto the couch. Dean immediately reaches over and starts to scent him, eliciting a happy rumble from the alpha.

“So tired”, Castiel yawns. “But at least we got the king’s answer to the Nineteen Propositions back today. Incredibly he declines to become a puppet monarch and yield all his power to parliament. It is so surprising!”

His flat tone makes the omega chuckle, and he begins to work his husband out of his clothes. Over the back of the couch he sees Gadreel hesitate in the door to the kitchen, then grin and turn back. Castiel must be truly exhausted, because he does not even register the servant’s brief appearance, although Dean knows he must have smelt it.

“As you expected”, Dean says, easing the alpha out of his fine shirt before wrapping his arms around him. The omega feels his husband shiver - odd as it is almost summer and the city is hot - and frowns.

“You need to take care of yourself, alpha”, he scolds lightly.

“You seem to be doing a good job of that”, Castiel mutters, smiling as he realizes just where Dean’s hand is heading. “Oh!”

The alpha shudders again, but this time is is pure passion, as Dean jerks him off in short order. Castiel comes with a strangled moan, and collapses onto his back. Dean cleans him off with the cloth that he keeps ready.

“You planned this”, Castiel mutters accusingly. “Seducing your poor alpha.”

“You have any objections to that plan?” Dean grins.

“None. Did you open that letter from Raphael as I asked?”

“Yes”, Dean says. “He says that the land he has ‘purchased’ is in Connaught, around a place called Westport. I checked on the map, and it is about as far west on the island as you can go without getting wet.”

“Deep in rebel-held territory, in other words”, Castiel observes. “This idea of rewarding those who fund the war with the estates of the dispossessed Irish will only make the latter fight even more fiercely. And things are not helped by the fact that the French and Spanish are vying with each other to provide help to the rebels.”

“They want a free Catholic state to threaten England from behind”, Dean reasons. “And that state
to be beholden to one rather than the other.”

“Indeed”, Castiel yawns. “Now, how about helping a tired old alpha to his bed?”

Dean grins. Castiel is only a few years older than him, but when he mentions the age difference, it usually means that the evening is only going in one direction.

Fortunately, his assessment proves, as ever, to be quite accurate.

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Saturday 2nd July, 1642

The atmosphere in the bakery is tense, and everyone looks up expectantly as Charlie returns from the street.

“Not to worry”, she says cheerfully. “The bells are being rung in celebration, not for an attack. The Navy has declared for parliament!”

There is a mixture of relief and cheer at the news. Dean stares down at his pie and feels a little saddened. Charlie slides in opposite him.

“This is bad news for the king”, she says in a low tone. “A few ships may have gotten away or just have been lucky enough to be elsewhere, but the main fleet off the Downs has welcomed the Earl of Warwick (2) and accepted him as their leader.”

“Hardly surprising”, Castiel says, sliding in beside his mate. “The king spent most of his Personal Rule preventing them from helping our friends abroad, even if he did build several new ships. And the humiliation of the Dutch beating the Spanish in our own waters whilst we stood by and did nothing – well, sailors have long memories.”

“It is ironic”, Charlie muses. “All that fuss over Ship-Money, yet those taxes – well, those that were collected – ended up going to to his enemies.”

“The feeling in parliament is that this allows us to remain on the defensive”, Castiel says, “now that the Navy is guaranteeing our trade income. The king will need a quick victory, so it will be in his interests to attack sooner rather than later. Though I hear even some in the North are only lukewarm to his appeals for help.”

“You think he will attack London?” Dean asks.

“I think he will raise an army, or armies in the North, Wales and the West Country, where he is strongest”, Castiel says. “His main problem is persuading the trained men of the counties and cities to leave their homes and fight elsewhere. It will take a brilliant commander to achieve that.”

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Saturday 16th July, 1642

“We stay.”

Dean is surprised.

“I would have thought that they would want you to go back to Oxfordshire and help out there”, he says.
“Pym knows my situation is difficult”, Castiel says, “what with my brother being a royalist and having most of the estate. Yes, the House is pretty much empty now; the king’s supporters have by and large fled to join him, and many of us in counties which could still go either way sent out to be of more use there. Pym has full control now, and we all wait to see what the king will do next.”

“The king is still before Hull (3), I suppose?” Dean asks. His husband nods.

“Nearly a week now”, he says. “Pym is worried about Governor Hotham, with good reason I suspect, although the man has stood firm thus far. And the king suffered a setback yesterday when his men tried to secure Manchester. One man was shot when Lord Strange (4) rode into town, ostensibly for a banquet. Tensions are high everywhere.”

“Lancashire”, Dean muses. “Any troops from Ireland would have to come through either there or Chester (5).”

“I doubt he can will any help from the Irish rebels, no matter how much he needs it”, Castiel says. “The last reports put them in control of nearly three-quarters of the country now, but the English and Scots settlers are dug in in the remaining territories, and they have everything to lose. No, Ireland is out of the picture until England is sorted.”

“And then?” Dean asks.

“I doubt that the Irish see it that way”, Castiel says grimly, “but their only hope is if the king wins this war. He might well be prepared to abandon at least the English settlers over there, with his pro-Catholic sympathies. If he loses.... well, there will be a terrible reckoning some day.”

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Tuesday 19th July, 1642

Dean stares morosely down at the pie that his husband has just brought in.

“How bad is it?” he asks.

“For the king, very”, Castiel admits, not surprised that his beautiful mate has once again seen right through him. “He has summoned Sir Jacob Astley to help lead his armies.”

Dean stares at him in confusion.

“He was the governor of Plymouth”, Castiel explains, “which we all knew could go either way. But he had not even reached the king before the town declared for us. It is a terrible blow to Charles Stuart.”

“Why?” Dean asks. “Did not Portsmouth declare for the king yesterday?”

“Portsmouth is useless without the Navy”, Castiel says. “Indeed, even with the improved defences that that rogue of a governor has used our money to build, it cannot hold out when besieged by land and sea. Plymouth is another matter entirely. Cornwall, beyond it, is solidly royalist, and the king might have hoped to raise an army there to march east and join his main force. But like Hull, they cannot throw all their weight forward whilst leaving a hostile fort in their rear. And the Navy can resupply Plymouth, which makes a full siege almost impossible.”

“Almost?” Dean asks.

“Never underestimate human treachery”, Castiel says sonorously. “The strongest walls can be
undermined by the people behind them more easily than those before them. I suspect that we may so nearly have lost Hull that way. And talking of the Navy, we got supplies into the city again yesterday. The king is trying to besiege it in both Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, but his few ships cannot stop our many.”

Friday 29th July, 1642

Receiving a letter is an unusual event in any but the richest households, so when Dean receives two just minutes after Castiel had left for the house, he is surprised. Per his husband's instructions – Dean blushes when he remembers the conversation about this, them both standing naked as the alpha told him 'you can see that I have no secrets from you, beloved' – he opens them both.

The first, another surprise, is from the Widow Harvelle at the Roadhouse Inn. Dean knows that his uncle can barely write, but Bobby usually gets Garth to write for him. Ellen confirms Castiel's concerns from some months back that the goofy-looking beta might end up being targeted because of his Irish name, and says that she has given him a job at her place for the time being. Dean smiles at that; all the locals know that the woman is terrifying when challenged, and that she always aims her first blow low and hard, as more than one of them had told him. Otherwise there is little news except that the river is unusually low even for summer, and that the mere has almost disappeared.

The second letter is of greater import, and Dean is not sure what to make of the news it contains. He tells Castiel about it as soon as he returns home.

"Raphael writes that the town of Stratford has declared for parliament”, he says. “Most of Warwickshire, too.”

Castiel looks at him shrewdly.

“Do you need to go home and see your mother and brother?” he asks. He knows what this latest development means, namely that the county border a few miles south of Dean's old home has suddenly become frontier territory (6). Dean shakes his head.

“I worry what this will do to the business, though”, he says. “Gloucester and Warwickshire on one side, and Oxfordshire and Worcester on the other. In war, both sides will be looking to grab what they can.”

“You should write your mother at once”, Castiel says firmly. “Remember that they are my family too, now. If the worst comes to the worst, I can find them a home on the estate.”

Dean smiles at his alpha.

“And that is why I love you”, he says. “Because you have a great big heart.”

“Really?” Castiel grins. “And I thought it was because some other part of me was great and big!”

Dean's eyes widen, and he starts to back away towards their bedroom. It might only be mid-afternoon and the country might be heading to war, but that look only means one thing.....

Fortunately, he is right. Again!

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Notes:
1) The two most famous English universities are both sets of semi-independent colleges rather than
a 'normal' university. The teaching of students was recorded in Oxford at the end of the eleventh century and friction between 'town and gown' existed even then. A particularly bad showdown in 1209 led to some students decamping 80 miles north-east to the Fens to form Cambridge University, which is similarly structured.

2) The accurately named Robert Rich (1587-1658). His daughter Anne married another prominent parliamentarian, Edward Earl of Manchester. On Rich's death he was succeeded by the third Robert Rich in succession (the family seemed singularly unimaginative when it came to naming their children). This earl's only son – you'll never guess his.... oh you did – married Oliver Cromwell's daughter Frances but died soon after.

3) Formally (but rarely) Kingston-upon-Hull, renamed by King Edward I in 1299.

4) James Stanley (1607-1651), who would become Earl of Derby on his father's death later that same year. A descendant of Henry VII and a second cousin once removed to King Charles, though he wisely never pushed his claim to the throne. A heavy-handed soldier of the worst typ, he was involved in the Bolton Massacre of 1644, and fittingly met his end in that same town when he was beheaded after being captured fleeing the disaster at Worcester seven years later.

5) A key port in the county of Cheshire in the north-west, close to the border with Royalist Wales. It was connected to the Irish Sea over five miles away by the River Dee; rivers were generally wider and less embanked in these times, allowing ships to penetrate further inland. Charles' hopes for support from Ireland depended, naturally enough, on their having somewhere to land, so both Cheshire and adjoining Lancashire were important.

6) Border country was the worst sort of area to be in, as both sides would try to extract (steal) what they needed from the local populace. Fortunately for Sam and Mary Winchester, a certain alpha has foreseen that possibility.....
August-September 1642

Chapter Summary

24: The bakery ceases to exist (sort of). There are some small skirmishes across the country as king and parliament raise their main armies, and Castiel marks his thirty-third birthday in London, increasingly worried not just about the war but the conduct of both sides. And Dean is not allowed three for one, much to his displeasure.

Monday 1st August, 1642

“Some of these stories that are coming in from the country are horrible!” Dean says as he cleans up in the bakery – well, the restaurant now that Moondor Bakery has become Moondor Restaurant, officially at last. “These people are going to have to live with each other after all this is over. How are they going to manage that?”

“Because the victors will have all the spoils and the losers will have sour grapes”, Charlie smiles. “Gosh, it was a close-run thing today. Thank the Lord you were in, and I could go out and make more pastries.”

“Why was it so busy?” Dean asks. “It is not a special day or something, is it?”

“No-one told you?” she asks, surprised. He points to himself.

“Uh, omega?” he quips. “Definitely not worth wasting gossip on. And the people we get in here are edgy enough without me trying to overhear all their conversations. All I could make out was that someone has been sent to the Tower.”

“Mayor Gurney”, she says. “Frankly I am amazed he lasted this long, especially with so much of his own city against him. Though it was really dumb of him to try to publish the king’s Commission of Array, especially in a city where the number of people likely to join up would fit in a cupboard.”

“I thought the war would be, I don't know, more dramatic?” Dean says, cleaning off one of the tables. “But it seems to be all running around and not actually doing nothing.”

“Oh, there will be some action soon enough”, his friend says. “There has to be. Your alpha is quite right when he says that a long war would favour his side, so the king has to strike sooner rather than later. I would guess the first battle will be somewhere in the Midlands, what with that area so finely balanced between the two sides. It is good that your mother and brother do not live on a major road.”

Dean nods. Castiel had made that same point the night before, and again offered to either take Dean home for a few days or send him with an escort. But he had felt that he could do little if he did go, and besides, Castiel is now in constant touch by letter with his mother. Dean just wishes that his family lived somewhere that was definitely for one side or the other, not so close to a border between the two.

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Thursday 4th August, 1642

It does not exactly help Dean's piece of mind that, three days after this conversation, the first major skirmish of the war takes place along exactly the sort of frontier that is less than five miles from his mother's house.

“First blood to the king”, Castiel says grimly, “though his commanders have made ill use of it.”

“What has happened?” Dean asks anxiously.

“There has been fighting (1) in Somersetshire”, Castiel says, grim-faced. “A place called Marshall's Elm; just a few hundred troops on each side. The county is divided, and Stawell (2) won a victory for the king when he confronted a large group of our recruits and drove them off.”

“But what was the ill use?” Dean asks.

“Stawell refused to let the victims, all local men, receive Christian burial”, Castiel says bitterly. “In God's name, have we sunk so low already, and the real fighting not yet started? What horrors lie ahead if this sort of thing is allowed to happen?”

“It will not win the king much support in the area”, Dean says. His husband nods.

“Nevertheless, it is an important victory”, he says, “First blood, in every sense. And Pym will feel it particularly deeply, being a Somersetshire man himself. It is not a good start.”

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Monday 22nd August, 1642

“Any time now”, Castiel mutters, as he holds his omega in his arms.

The news of the past few weeks had been mixed. The setback at Marshall's Elm had been negated by Somersetshire largely turning Parliamentarian, and the Royalists being forced to retreat south into Dorsetshire. But then news had reached London about the king leaving York and heading to Nottingham, where today he would raise the Royal Standard. This would be a formal declaration of a war that was already underway, and accompanying this story had come wild rumours about the size of the king's army.

“Which is apparently as great as that his predecessor had at Towton (3)”, Castiel says wryly. “Though Pym is wise to speed up preparations for an army to go and meet him.”

“I would have thought that you would want to fight somewhere near London”, Dean says, nestling back into his alpha. “And your feet are cold again. What do you do; put them in an ice-bucket at the House?”

Castiel tweaks his mate's nipple, eliciting an unmanly yelp and (although he cannot see it) a pout he instinctively knows is there.

“Stop pouting, o love of my life”, the alpha smiles. “No, if the king has an army in the field and we do not, then it will naturally draw more people to him. With the country so divided, the number of people who prefer to back winners could be pivotal.”

“The king's supporters are all principled men, I am sure”, Dean insists.

“There are principled men on both sides”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Whether we can keep the
conflict itself civilized may, I fear, prove to be another matter.”

That was true, Dean thinks sadly. There were already many tales, some doubtless exaggerated but others equally doubtless true, of horrors perpetrated by those who were using the war to settle old scores with adherents to the other cause. That was human nature, he supposed.

He snuggles closer into his alpha and sighs happily. At least he has his alpha. Then he lets out a pained yelp.

Still an alpha with icicle-feet, damnation!

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Wednesday 7th September, 1642

Dean knows his alpha well. So the fact that Castiel is unusually silent when he returns home from the House that day does not bode well.

“Has the Earl of Essex (4) left the capital?” the omega asks. The huge army being gathered on the outskirts of the city is common enough knowledge, but he had thought it was not yet fully formed. His husband shakes his head.

“No”, he says gravely. “Portsmouth has fallen to us.”

Dean looks at him in surprise. The siege of the country's chief naval base had been the talk of London of late and its eventual capture had been seen as a foregone conclusion, especially after the Navy itself had largely declared for parliament.

“You seem to see it as bad news”, he observes. “Why? Has something else happened?”

“Sort of”, Castiel admits, smiling ruefully. “The news reached the Commons an hour ago, and most of the king's remaining supporters there – precious few – have left to join him. Not that he did not have it before, but Pym has complete control now. The argument of battle, as they say, must decide all.”

“We both knew that it would come to this”, Dean points out, crossing to his alpha who holds out his arms to receive him. The omega gently scents his husband.

“Yes”, Castiel mutters into his shoulder, “but that does not make it any the more pleasant. I so wish it had turned out differently, yet looking back I cannot see how it could have been otherwise, except by us surrendering completely to and trusting a king whose word cannot be relied upon. Well, the army is due to march out on Friday. Soon after that, we shall all know the Lord's will.”

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Sunday 18th September, 1642

They are sat on the couch together when the side-door opens very slightly. They both look up, puzzled. The twins would either knock or, in an emergency, come right in.

“Is it safe?”

Charlie's voice comes through the crack. Dean grins.

“We are decent”, Castiel says, smiling as the red-head came into the house. “Though if you had come half an hour earlier....”
"Don't be mean, Cas!" Dean says reprovingly, nestling back into his alpha. They had not long finished marking Castiel's thirty-third birthday, which thankfully this year had fallen on a Sunday. Being fucked whilst doing a handstand had been an interesting experience, but Dean still felt a tad dizzy.

"You two are so gross!" she says with a smile. "I have just come back from church – you know, the place people go to confess their sins." She looks pointedly at them both.

"Have we committed any sins lately?" Castiel asks Dean. The omega pretends to think about it, then sighs.

"I can't tease Charlie about that", he grumbles. "Else she'll cut me off as regards pie."

The baker grins.

"What, not even the time you had me bent double?" Castiel asks. Their visitor glares at him.

"You are one mean alpha!" she scolds. "But I heard some news at church and, despite you giving me an image I definitely did not need, I am going to share it with you. The king has abandoned Oxford and is retreating west before Essex's army."

"That does surprise me", Castiel frowns. "If he is to gain any presence in the Midlands then he must hold Oxford, let alone the fact that it interferes with links between here and Bristol. But I suppose he is headed back to the Welsh March, hoping to pull in more support there."

"A retreating army", Dean says worriedly. "Their morale will be low. Unless of course it is a ruse to try to slip past the earl."

"Unlikely", Castiel says. "Even if he could, I doubt he has the strength to take London, and to do so with an enemy army closing in behind him would be folly. No, he will offer battle somewhere, at a time and place that he hopes will give him the advantage."

Neither of the say it but both their thoughts run to Dean's mother's and brother, home in Long Compton. The omega can but hope.

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Saturday 24th September, 1642

Dean's fears for his parents' house had been made worse by a letter from his brother, which had told him that the king had come close to the village but had chosen instead to retreat by the more direct road through Norton and towards the Severn. A narrow escape; armies these days tended to take first and ask never when it came to the places that were unfortunate enough to suffer their baleful presence.

There is no sitting today, so Castiel takes his mate into the City itself. This time they go to a small restaurant not far from the Strand, overlooking the Thames. Dean likes it a lot more than the one on London Bridge, but he notices immediately how depressed everyone seems. Castiel has a few quick words with the owner before returning to join him, glaring at an alpha who had been looking rather too intently in Dean's direction. The omega grins as the man shrinks back into his seat.

"Has something happened?" Dean asks.

"Another victory for your king", Castiel says. "Not the major battle, but Prince Rupert's (5) cavalry have routed a much larger force of ours at a place called Powick Bridge, near Worcester. Like
Marshall's Elm a small affair, but the effect on morale will be disproportionately great. Even though the king's forces have moved off towards Shrewsbury, he has scored another point. It worries me.”

“Why, if it such a small battle?” Dean asks.

“Because once again, their cavalry has proven so much better than ours”, Castiel frowns. “And cavalry is a major part of any army. Unless Essex is a far better general than I think he is, then he may end up being defeated, giving the king an open road to London.”

“But you still think he will not be able to take London?” Dean asks.

“I doubt it”, Castiel says. “And even if he does, holding a hostile city may be another matter entirely. Still, let us bestir ourselves to more important matters, Dean.”

“More important than the war?”

“They have three flavours of pie here”, Castiel grins. “And yes, you can have two to take with you, but you can only have one for dessert here.”

The omega opens his mouth.

“You may not have three slices of pie instead of a main course, so don't even ask.”

Dean pouts. Mean alpha!

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Notes:
1) The most common soldier's weapon was the pike, a twelve-foot long pole with a spike on the end, with which they would try to push the enemy back. Pikemen wore protective breastplates as well. Cannons were still primitive, although early mortars could be effective when used properly. Handguns for common soldiers were less common than pikes (though more common by the end of the war), had a range of about 300 yards/metres, and often justified the old joke as to which end was the more dangerous! Cavalrymen had their own pistols which took a long time to reload, so they would take turns to discharge at the enemy before riding to the back of their formation.
2) John Stawell (1600-1662), the member of parliament for Taunton, though he was debarred after declaring for the king. Captured after the loss of Exeter in 1646 he spent the next fourteen years imprisoned, losing his estates and nearly his head before regaining everything at the Restoration two years before his death.
3) Part of the Cousins' Wars (the Wars of the Roses), and fought in Yorkshire in 1461. The rival Lancastrian and Yorkist kings, Henry VI and Edward IV, had armies of around 40,000 each, and total casualties were around 28,000 after the Lancastrians broke and fled. As a comparison, that was more than one per cent of England's population at the time; during the six years of World War Two total British dead was slightly under one per cent of the then population.
4) Robert Earl of Essex (1591-1646). Son and heir of the earl of the same name who led the 1601 rebellion against Elizabeth I and got beheaded as a result. An important parliamentarian general during the war, Essex later became a leader of the Presbyterian faction in the House. His death after a stroke was a heavy blow to them.
5) Rupert of the Rhine (1619-1682). His relative youth, military successes and closeness to the throne (he was the king's cousin and the fourth male in line of succession) led many Royalists – especially Queen Henrietta - to loathe him, and despite his abilities he was dismissed by the king in 1646. After the Restoration he moved into science and colonial matters, helping found the Royal Society and establish Rupert's Land (the Hudson Bay watershed) in North America.
October-December 1642

Chapter Summary

25: The first major battle of the war takes place, although Dean is more concerned that it happens at Edge Hill, barely a dozen miles from his mother's and brother's house. The king lunges for London, but ends up turning at Turnham. And there is a dose of lex talionis.

Saturday 1st October, 1642

His alpha has a certain look about him when he comes home that evening. Unfortunately it is not the one that suggests that Dean is about to be ploughed senseless, worse luck.

“So the king has suffered a setback”, the omega says as soon as Castiel finishes kissing him. The alpha chuckles, and pulls him onto a hug.

“I am going to have to learn to disguise my emotions better”, he says. “Yes. His forces have broken off the siege of Manchester, after just one week.”

“I thought they needed the town”, Dean says. He knows that the king has recently moved to nearby Chester, but that whilst Cheshire has solidly supported him, Lancashire further north was tending to support parliament. The capture of Manchester, close by the Pennine Hills dividing it from Yorkshire, would have given the king a strong bridgehead in the north-western county, as well as allowing him to link up with Royalists further north in Westmorland and Cumberland.

“It was the same old story”, Castiel says. “The men of Cheshire refused to leave their own county, even though Manchester is but five miles across the border. Local militias are incredibly insular, as the king has just found out to his cost.”

“He must march on London soon, surely?” Dean says. “We are only a couple of months out from winter.”

“He must”, Castiel agrees. “I only hope Essex knows what he is doing. Worcester seems a poor choice from which to keep an eye on the king. I do not think Charles would risk an attack on London with an enemy army at hand, but he could sweep down Watling Street and be in London before the earl could reach him if he were so minded. Well, we shall soon see.”

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Sunday 23rd October, 1642

Everyone in the city had known that there was to be a battle, ever since the king had eluded Essex and blocked the earl's road back to the capital. And the first news of that battle was now reaching London, to the general confusion of all.

“It is a draw”, Castiel says glumly, “though in some ways the king has come off the better. He seized the high ground on Edge Hill, south of Warwick; his cavalry was victorious, but our foot held its own.”
My own county, Dean thinks glumly. Of course his sharp-eyed mate spots it.

“At least a dozen miles from your mother’s house”, he says reassuringly, “and the king has since moved east to Banbury, which will surely fall to him. I expect that he will then go to Oxford and down the Thames towards us. He will probably take the road past our cottage – and the Roadhouse - so he will not go anywhere near your mother's house.”

The omega shudders at the thought of those thousands of hostile troops approaching the city. It has been quieter around Westminster these past few weeks; those people who had the option were shifting themselves to the relative safety of the country. Of course even if Castiel could do that – and Dean knew that the estate had a holding somewhere on the Essex coast – he would not abandon his cause. And his omega would not even ask him so to do.

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Tuesday 1st November, 1642

One of the worst things about living during a time of war, Dean has discovered very quickly, is that whilst bad news travels fast, it also gets turned and twisted such that those on the receiving end cannot be sure just what has really happened. Though judging from the hopeful new light in his alpha’s blue eyes, Dean doubts that it is anything good for the king.

“The king has reoccupied Oxford”, Castiel says, and Prince Rupert has been repulsed a second time. He was beaten off at Windsor, and now he has been frustrated at Aylesbury. His cavalry are a force on the battlefield, but they are not made for sieges or patient warfare of the sort that may be needed ere long.”

“Two minor successes”, Dean observes. “But I suppose, like Powick, they are important as the first victories for your side.”

Castiel smiles.

“London evidently does not believe Essex’s claims of a great triumph, if the barricades in the street are anything to go by”, he observes. “You are of course right, my pretty omega.”

His pretty omega scowls at him. Castiel chuckles.

“I did wonder if the king might chance all and make a dash on the capital, after the battle”, he says. “As I have said more than once, he needs a quick victory whereas we do not. However, by diverting to Oxford he has given Essex time to slip round and beat him here. Pym has agreed to send envoys to the king – talks about talks, he says – but it will all come to naught.”

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Saturday 12th November, 1642

The 'talks about talks' had indeed come to naught, to the surprise of neither alpha or omega, although there had been ‘a temporary cessation of hostilities’.

“Some cessation!” Castiel snarls as he storms into the house that evening. “If the king wanted to show just how little he can be trusted, then he is doing very well!”

Dean comes up behind his alpha and gently starts scenting him. Despite his anger, Castiel lets himself relax into the feeling of safety and security this always brings him. He is surely the luckiest alpha in Christendom!
“The earl did march out with the troops towards the king yesterday”, Dean says carefully. He does not wish to make Castiel any angrier than he already is. “Perhaps they thought that that meant the truce was over?”

“In that case the king's own movements towards London would count the same”, Castiel says. “Though if anything good is to come out of this sorry development, we shall soon know.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Because amongst the men they captured at Brentford (1) was John Lilburne, or Freeborn John as they call him”, Castiel says. “Someone who is a radical even amongst my fellow Puritans, but whose heart is in the right place. The way the king treats him will be a benchmark for the behaviour of both sides in this conflict. Let us pray that the king sets that benchmark high, or at least higher than his own actions thus far have suggested.”

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Sunday 13th November, 1642

Dean values his life. So even though he knows that the future of England is being decided less than seven miles away to the west, he does not suggest to his alpha that they could go and watch it happen, as he knows some people in the street have done. He does however let the alpha hold him close all day, whilst they sit at home and wait for developments.

It is six o'clock before Charlie comes in, unusually silent. They both look at her.

“There was no battle”, she says simply. “Just a short cannon contest before the king turned and retreated back to Oxford, probably for the winter.”

Castiel nods.

“I thought Brentford was a mistake”, he says, “and so it proved.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“The king would have faced Essex and the Trained Bands”, Castiel reasons, “but so close to the capital he may still have fancied his chances. However, the sacking of Brentford angered many people here who might have supported him or at least remained neutral. I did think the king might still chance things, bearing in mind that a part of those against him were ill-armed and untrained Londoners, but I presume he thought the disparity in the forces too great regardless.”

Charlie nodded.

“There were large numbers of common folks there, armed with whatever they had to hand”, she says. “Even some women. It was hard to judge, but from what other people told me I think all those extra people made it nearly two to one against the king.”

“He will come again”, Dean says determinedly. “He has to.”

“Well, it is winter soon”, Castiel says, “when no army can find what it needs to survive, let alone endure our excuse for a road network. Though I am still worried about this Lilburne matter. The king, or his friends, are making all sorts of unpleasant threats about trying and executing him, and Pym will only respond in kind of those threats are carried through. This war is bringing out the worst of humanity as it is; we do not need things to descend any further.”
Tuesday 13th December, 1642

“You are lucky, you know.”

Dean looks across at Charlie in surprise. He is neither eating nor in possession of pie, so what does she mean?

“I meant that your alpha does not mind that you take the other side in this contention”, she says. “Alphas treat their mates bad enough as it is, and I shudder to think how some of the cavemen in these parts would take it if their nearest and dearest voiced a contrary opinion to the one they know is right. Castiel just does not care.”

“I think he would rather that I did take his side”, Dean says, “but I see your point. He told me last week about the king taking Marlborough, and was prepared to explain its importance to me even though that showed how much of a setback it was for him. But he says he likes an omega that speaks his mind.”

“That's nice.”

“Especially considering some of the things we get up to when he does that thing with his....”

“Dean Milton, you finish that sentence and I shall withhold all pies for a whole year!”

The omega shuts up. Fast. But he is still smiling when his husband comes into the bakery a few moments later, although judging from the gleam in his eye the news he brings will not be good for Dean, or at least the king.

“Marlborough is avenged!” Castiel smiles. “Waller (2) has swept the royalists out of the place, and then gone on to secure Salisbury and Winchester as well. There will be no advance south from Oxford.”

“But the king still has Chichester, which declared for him”, Charlie points out.

“Waller is advancing on that too”, Castiel says. But the news from the North is less promising. Yorkshire is mostly for the king, and Lancashire could still go either way, despite the setback at Manchester. The important thing up there is that the Navy helps us hold Hull. Even if the king can raise a large army there, it cannot throw its full force south with a hostile fort behind its back. The same goes for the West Country, where Plymouth serves the same end. As long as we hold those two ports, we are fairly safe.”

“I begin to wonder if those idiots who keep leaving for the Americas are right to go after all”, Charlie says. Castiel chuckles.

“There was someone giving out pamphlets outside the House on all the 'exciting opportunities available Over There’”, he intones, unfolding a piece of paper. “Yes, you can go and live in either Bermuda, Newfoundland, Sagadahok (3), New Somersetshire (4), New Hampshire, Cape Ann (5), Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut, Maryland (6), New Albion (7), Saybrook (8), Rhode Island and Providence, New Haven (9), Gardiner's Island (10), Virginia, Carolina, the Barbadoes, St. Christopher's (11), Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua or Barbuda.”

They both stared at him in astonishment.

“I thought we only had a few thousand people over there”, Dean says. “How on earth did they
make so many small states?”

“It is a huge area, and anyone with religious or other differences can very easily go somewhere else and start their own country”, Castiel shrugs. “Any chance of a coffee, Charlie?”

“Coming right up!” the baker smiles.

“Any chance of....”


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Saturday 17th December 1642

“Say what you like about Pym”, Castiel says as he relaxes that evening, “and even his friend sometimes do, but the man is a genius at times. He has sent the king a letter stating that from henceforth we in parliament shall be very firmly applying the law of lex talionis.”

“Something to do with lions and claws?” Dean asks, confused. Castiel smiles, and pulls his mate into a loving embrace.

“It translates loosely as 'an eye for an eye’”, he explains. “It is because of the threats made against John Lilburne. Pym is basically telling the king to do what he likes – except that whatever he does to Lilburne will be meted out to any Royalist captives we either have or may get. It these amoral times, appealing to a cold hard sense of self-preservation is a smart move.”

Dean tenses.

“You are not saying you would ever do such things to the king himself one day?” he asks, shocked.

“Not unless he does them to Lilburne first”, Castiel says. “And that will be at the back of the minds of even his most hard-line advisers, in that anything they suggest may quite possibly be done to them at some future date if the war goes against them.”

“If”, Dean says.

There is the slightest of pauses.

“If”, Castiel says, his voice heavy with more than a hint of 'when'.

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Notes:
1) A Thames-side town on the Bristol road and less than ten miles from London. Prince Rupert’s attack on the town was legally justifiable, but not seen as such in the nearby city.
2) Sir William Waller (1599-1668), member of parliament for Andover in Hampshire. His victories at this time were important because parliament relied on the rich south-eastern counties of Sussex, Surrey, Kent and Essex as a major revenue source. Subsequent setbacks and lack of support embittered him against parliament, and as a Presbyterian he was in and out of prison for much of the forties and fifties. He returned to parliament upon the Restoration in 1660, but soon retired from public life.
3) Northern Maine.
4) Southern Maine. It was soon to be subsumed by the Massachusetts Bay colony, but would later regain its independence.
5) A town north of Boston, renamed by Charles I for his late mother Anne of Denmark. It was
originally called Cape Tragabigzanda, after the Turkish mistress of one of the co-founders!

6) Named for Queen Henrietta Maria. A predominantly Catholic settlement, which was something else for people to dislike the king over.

7) An area around New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. It had been chartered that same year, and had failed by 1649. The area was later partly settled by the Dutch expanding from New Amsterdam (New York), and finally ceded to England in 1674.

8) A town at the mouth of the Connecticut River. It was sold to Connecticut in 1644.

9) Then a separate colony, it merged with Connecticut in 1665.

10) A small island named for its founder Lion Gardiner, situated off the north-east coast of Long Island. It was the first English settlement in what later became the state of New York, and joined that state when it was formed out of the captured New Netherlands in 1664.

11) Still its formal name, but more commonly called St. Kitts.
Chapter Summary

26: Castiel's information network delivers an unpleasant piece of news and he celebrates another birthday (panties are involved; you had to even ask?), but a moment of carelessness leads to a rare argument with his omega. The king does well in the war, and parliament is reduced to spinning their own nickname.

Sunday 1st January 1643

Sometimes, Dean thinks that he and Castiel know each other almost too well. In particular, either of them keeping something from the other is difficult if not impossible. For example, even though his alpha seems fine on the surface, Dean knows instinctively that something is wrong. His fears are only increased when Castiel asks him if he can make love slowly to him that evening; the omega knows that his husband loves this, but usually only asks if he has come home more stressed than usual.

Dean waits until they are knotted together, his husband behind and wrapped around him before asking. He feels the alpha tense up at once.

“You do not have to tell me if you do not want to”, Dean says. “Or if it some sort of secret.”

He knows that Pym places an increasing value on his alpha's intelligence network, and the reports Castiel gets from around the country. The alpha is silent for a little while longer before replying.

“A couple of vague reports from the king's court at Oxford”, he says. “Nothing I would care to tell Pym about before – if – I can get it substantiated. But if it is true, then we may have a major problem.”

“Oh?”

Castiel sighs unhappily.

“Pym believes that if he defeats the king decisively on the battlefield, then he will have to accept our terms”, he says. “But the reports – merely what two courtiers claim to have overheard – suggest otherwise. He has told some friends that he will either win this war or die trying.”

“What does that mean?” Dean asks, confused.

“Consider”, Castiel says. “Suppose Pym gets his victory and the king's armies are crushed. He is totally defeated. What if he still refuses to accept it, and merely carries on trying to work round parliament? Pym would have no choice but to remove him.”

“Force him to abdicate, you mean?”

Castiel's silence is ominous, and Dean belatedly gets his meaning.

“Oh. That.”
“Yes”, Castiel says. “‘That’ indeed!”

Friday 20th January, 1643

The conversation with his husband at the start of the year seems to stay with Dean all that month, as if somehow spelling out a possible outcome has made it that much more real. The omega hopes – how he hopes! - that his gorgeous husband is wrong, but a small but persistent voice inside him tells him that he is likely not, especially give the king's character and actions thus far. And the war itself seems to be going nowhere, though doubtless part of that is due to it being winter, when smart omegas wrap themselves in a nice, warm alpha.

Even if said alpha does have icicle-feet! Honestly, does he detour via the North Pole on his way home?

“This defeat at Braddock Down worries me”, Castiel says that morning as he reads through the letter that has just come. “Cornwall may be over two hundred miles away, but I think it may be important.”

“What?” Dean asks.

“I think that I can see the king's strategy now”, Castiel says. “Remember yesterday that I said us taking Bradford is important?”

“You said you would explain why, and then forgot”, Dean points out.

“I seem to recall being distracted by a naked and horny omega”, Castiel smirks. “But if you wish to bring that up....”

“Politics first”, Dean insists. “Sex later.”

“Mean omega!”

Dean glares at him. Castiel chuckles.

“All right”, he says. “The king is based in the middle of England, at Oxford, and most of his support is in the North, Wales and West Country. If he can raise armies in those places and bring them to join his own power at his capital, he may be strong enough to attack and hold London. That is why us taking Bradford the other day is important; like Hull, it is another Yorkshire town that means the king’s northern force cannot march south until it has been retaken.”

“And this other place – Braddock?” Dean asks.

“We tried to secure Cornwall, but our army was defeated there”, Castiel says. “The Duchy of Cornwall, along with the earldom of Chester, goes to the reigning monarch's eldest son as Prince of Wales, so the Cornish are very royalist. I do not think I can see them willingly leaving their native lands to march all the way to Oxford, but all we have down there of any import is Plymouth just this side of the border, and the geography does not make resupplying it by sea that easy. No, we shall have to keep an eye on developments there.”

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Tuesday 24th January 1643
It would be unfair to say that Dean Milton always feels more than a scintilla of pride when he reduces his alpha to a catatonic state through sex.

All right, it might be unfair, but it would also be wholly accurate. Dean smirks at the wrecked look on his husband’s face as the dark-haired man stares at the ceiling and moans quietly.

“Still feeling smug about your lot taking Leeds?” Dean inquires.

“You broke me!” Castiel whines. “You sexed me too much. I shall have to get Gadreel to write Pym a letter saying that my omega broke me!”

“It was my birthday”, Dean points out. “And you did say that I could have anything I liked.”

“Yes, well, those panties will in future only be worn on your birthday”, Castiel mutters, finishing up with another small moan. “I do not think my poor shattered body could stand this more than once a year.”

“I could dig them out on your birthday as well”, Dean suggests, still clearly enjoying his alpha’s exhaustion a little too much. “And for Christmas. And New Year. And All Souls’ Day. And.....”

“Stop!”

Dean chuckles, and gently runs his hand down the alpha's broad chest, enjoying the shudder as he nears Castiel's now limp cock. The alpha whines weakly, but seems incapable of escaping as his eyes flutter closed.

“You are lucky that you have such a good omega, who is letting you off”, Dean says, sliding in behind his husband. “Though tomorrow.....”

He stops as a gentle snore echoes from the exhausted alpha. Dean chuckles and snuggles in close beside his mate, thinking that perhaps his life is not that bad after all.

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Thursday 2nd February, 1643

“There has been a setback”, Castiel tells Dean that evening. “Prince Rupert has taken Cirencester.”

Dean is surprised at this. His geography is poor outside his home area in the Midlands, but he knows this town because his father on one occasion had to visit it over problems with a wool shipment that the family business had shipped to Gloucester, but which had been short when checked at Cirencester, the next town south. Fortunately John Winchester had had the records, signed by both merchants and the Gloucester town clerk, to show that the firm could not have been to blame.

“That is only a small place, I know”, he says. “Is it important?”

“Not so much for itself but for what it may portend”, his husband says. “The king may be sniffing round Gloucester, which would be a great prize for him. He already holds Worcester to the north and has regained Marlborough to the east, let alone the fact that Rupert can now easily interfere in communications between Gloucester and Bristol. It is a small gain, but with potential for much more.”

“You look tired”, Dean says sympathetically. “How about an early night?”
He is silently overjoyed at the positively feral look that that comment elicits.

“I am frustrated, annoyed, and very, very horny!” Castiel growls, his voice cropping at least an octave as he speaks. “Start running, omega!”

Dean is already gone.

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Saturday 11th February, 1643

Dean has been spending the afternoon helping out Charlie, who is taking advantage of parliament having another meeting in the City to close the restaurant for a day at relatively little loss so she can have a thorough clean through. Although Dean does not like cleaning, he does like pie, and Charlie had promised him seven of them in return for helping her make the place spotless.

A whole pie week!

The omega arrives home and is surprised to find his husband there already. Then again, the length of parliamentary sittings lately often fluctuates, despite Pym being in complete control. Castiel frequently complains that said control encourages some honourable members to talk for far too long, which nearly leads Dean to say something he (or at least his arse) would regret. If only briefly.

Castiel is poring over a map of England which is crudely drawn but, from what little Dean knows, fairly accurate.

“We have received bad news today”, he says. “The Earl of Newcastle (1) is seemingly so sure of himself in Yorkshire that he has reached down to Newark (2) to encourage the Royalists there.”

He points to a town on the eastern side of the map, some distance south of York.

“Is that important?” Dean asks. “Your tone suggests it is.”

“The Eastern Association, our men in East Anglia, are some of our strongest supporters”, Castiel explains. “But if Newcastle secures Yorkshire, then he may come south far enough to threaten them. It is a distant threat but one we cannot ignore, and we would have to divert precious resources to help them out.”

“Is that not where that politician you like comes from?” Dean asks. “What is his name – Cromwell?”

“Admire rather than like”, Castiel says. “Like Pym, a man of vision, if rather more extreme in some of his views. Like any group we Puritans have different strengths of belief, and his is amongst the strongest. I have wondered as to what sort of military leader he will make, as it is his eastern lands that are now coming under threat. Well, if the king's forces press south from Newark, we may soon find out.”

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Sunday 19th February, 1643

One of the many things that Dean loves about Castiel is that he is so far from the stereotypical alpha. The way he cares for his omega, even going so far as he can to treat him like an equal (this is the seventeenth century, after all). Dean knows that Castiel truly loves him, and would always do
his best for his mate.

Which is why seeing the alpha angry with him is so upsetting. In fact, Castiel is seething. He paces up and down their room – Dean only slowly realizes that his husband took them there so the omega scent could help him cool down a little – clearly wanting to shout at his mate on one hand and not wanting to frighten him on the other.

“How could you, Dean?” Castiel almost snarls. “You know what gossip is like in a place like this! What if someone had seen you?”

Dean's eyes flicker to the cause of his alpha's anger, a small badly-printed newspaper he had bought from a vendor hawking them almost right outside their house that day. 'Mercurius Aulicus', literally 'the prince’s messenger', a newspaper concerning all the events of the ongoing war (3). A royalist newspaper.

“If anyone found this in our house, it would be terrible for you!” Castiel growls. “Thankfully this sort of thing is so new that the law has not caught up with it yet, but your life could still be in danger if anyone found out.”

He does not say it, but Dean realizes (belatedly) that having such a thing in the house could also endanger his husband. It would almost certainly finish his career as a member of parliament. A half-strangled whimper escapes his throat, and the alpha's eyes widen before he opens his arms. Dean immediately runs into them, almost knocking his husband over.

“I am only angry because you endangered yourself, Dean”, Castiel says, sounding miserable. “If anything happened to you, I could not.....”

He tails off, and arches his neck to allow his omega to scent him better. Dean immediately obliges, and they stand together, both still shaking slightly.

“I should burn the thing”, the omega says at last.

“Was there anything good in it?” Castiel mutters. Dean stifles a snigger.

“It was a little bit funny”, Dean admits, “especially poking fun at all the attempts to have 'Roundheads' be redone as 'Soundheads'. Some people on your side need to be kept away from the quill.”

“I can but agree there”, Castiel says. “I am sorry for over-reacting. Let me make it up to you.”

Dean opens his mouth to say something.

“Apart from the forgiveness pie I am going to ask Charlie to make.”

“In that case”, the omega grins, “I shall just have to settle for some good old-fashioned sex!”

And he did.

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Friday 24th February, 1643

Castiel frowns as he reads the scroll he has just brought home. His mate looks at him anxiously.

“Bad news?” he asks cautiously. Their relationship had been shaken by his buying that damn newspaper, though the alpha has seemed more unhappy with his own reaction that his mate's
foolhardiness. Dean hopes they are past it now.

“The Queen had landed with the arms she secured abroad, and successfully reached York”, Castiel says.

“So the king has more weapons”, Dean muses.

“It is not that”, Castiel says. “She landed at a place called Bridlington, a little way up the coast from Hull. Governor Hotham went to effect an exchange of prisoners with her, so he knew that she was there, yet he made no move to stop her even though she was crossing within miles of his city. I am worried.”

“You think he may turn his coat (4) after all?” Dean asks.

“Treachery and betrayal are all part of this dreadful war”, Castiel says sadly. “It is human nature.”

Dean crosses the room and gently wraps his arms around his alpha, who seems to relax into them.

“Sex?” his husband says hopefully.

“Cas!” Dean protests. “It is three in the afternoon!”

His husband quirks an eyebrow at him.

“And?”

Dean sighs in a put-upon way and steps back.

“My life is so hard!” he whines.

Castiel grins. “No”, he says tugging at his shirt, “but it is about to be!”

Dean is already running.

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Notes:
1) William Earl of Newcastle (1592-1676). The king's chief supporter in Yorkshire and the north-east and one of the richest men in the country, his efforts got him elevated to Marquess that same year, but he fled England after the defeat at Marston Moor the year after. Returning upon the Restoration (1660), he was further elevated to a duke in 1665.

2) A key town and castle in the north Midlands, astride the long and important River Trent and on the London to York/Scotland road). It was an important Royalist possession, linking the king's capital territory around Oxford with his supporters in Yorkshire, as well as providing a base for any advance towards the capital. It was attacked or besieged unsuccessfully three times before being ordered by the king to surrender during the fourth siege in 1646, when the war was all but lost for Charles.

3) This was in some ways the first war fought partly through the new medium of the press, the first newspaper having arrived in England from the Netherlands as recently as 1620. The punishment for buying or having a newspaper from 'the other side' was usually jail, and attempts at censorship (nearly always unsuccessful) continued until 1695.

4) Turncoat, a phrase from when people would change allegiances, sometimes in the middle of a battle. Each side would have a distinguishing mark, so turning one's 'coat' (actually a sort of tabard) inside out showed the new allegiance, and prevented one's new allies from shooting you. Money back guarantee if it didn't work!
Chapter Summary

27: Dean is annoyed that Castiel kept some news from him, though sex helps. Not that the omega is always so easily distracted (ahem!). The war continues to go well for the king, and to help Castiel with his worries his omega endures (enjoys) some very pleasant rough sex with him. Not that his alpha is so ...... um..... is that the time?

Sunday 26th February, 1643

It was all his husband's fault, really, insisting that the omega open his correspondence as he did. So the sealed letter that had arrived that day was opened as with any other letter. What had not been as with any other letter had been that it had contained a letter for him, Dean Milton. He had read both, and his initial reaction had been anger.

“When were you going to tell me about the loss of Stratford?” Dean demands before his husband has even gotten his boots off.

It crosses his mind briefly that an omega speaking like that to his alpha in most households would all too often be the prelude to a beating - or worse - and he blushes deeply. Of course his mind-reading husband sees his thoughts, and holds open his arms to the omega who hurries into them. Castiel pets him for some little time before answering, and Dean most definitely does not purr with happy reassurance, whatever anyone says.

He will be having Words with Gadreel about that smirk later.

“The Royalists took Stratford last week”, Castiel explains. “My steward at Norton told me that the king had set up a small garrison there, so I arranged for the estate properties to supply them in return for an understanding that they would not raid your brother's village a few miles away. I also wrote to your mother and asked if she wished to be moved under guard to either Oxford or Warwick, but she declined. I would guess that you have received the same news I had a few hours ago, that we have the town back?”

Dean nodded, still more than a little annoyed at not having been told.

“Your brother specifically requested me not to worry you over the matter”, Castiel says, “and I was moved to accept his request, especially as I knew we would soon have the place back. But I did send one of my own men on the estate up to Shipston just in case, so he could go and warn your parents if the king's men did try to move south and join up with the Oxfordshire Royalists. Your family was never in any danger.”

“This should have told me, Cas”, Dean pouts. The alpha chuckles.

“You are even more adorable when you pout”, he smiles. “Let me make it up to you by letting you ride me until.....”

He stops. Dean is already racing for the bedroom, putting out the sort of noises that would mortify him if he had any pride left where his alpha was concerned.
Luckily for him, he does not.

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Wednesday 1st March, 1643

“More peace talks”, Castiel sighs. “And they will get nowhere.”

Dean is surprised that his alpha is still so down today. Yesterday he was unhappy because the royalists in Newark had fended off a parliamentarian attack, and today he seems even more down.

“Surely you did not expect otherwise?” he asks. Castiel nods, but still looks glum.

“It is the use of this word ‘delinquent’ that worries me”, the alpha says. “We shall all have to live together once this war is ended, yet we seem to have forgotten the lessons of the Cousins’ Wars, when lack of magnanimity in victory led to over three decades of war. There are already some - on both sides - who say that with ‘proper planning’, we can match the terrible German wars that have lasted nearly that long.”

Dean shudders at that prospect.

“I thought the king was called a malignant, not a delinquent”, he said.

“They are much the same thing, except that the former title is reserved for the worst of the enemy”, Castiel explains. “Ere long Pym will move against all those who support the king, and seize their lands as delinquents. So far he has only targeted the malignants.”

“Is the estate in danger?” Dean asks. Castiel smiles.

“Raphael holds all the estates in lands the king owns, and I all the ones in lands we own”, he says. “For now, at least. I am known not to agree with my brother – an accurate impression, I must say – and also as a good friend of Pym. He wanted me to sit on the Committee of Safety, the one in charge of directing the war, but I declined as they already number fifteen and it is unwieldy enough as it is. And I do not trust some of its members.”

“On your own side?” Dean asks.

“There is a lot of truth to that old saw about having to get behind someone before you can stab them in the back”, Castiel says. “I have twice apprised Pym about approaches from certain members who wanted me to supply information only to them. I hate disloyalty, though I am at least lucky in one aspect.”

“What is that?”

“I have the most loyal, wonderful omega as a mate who lets me come home and fuck him repeatedly into the mattress, until he is begging for.....”

Dean is already out the door.

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Tuesday 14th March, 1643

Dean’s body shudders under the delicious assault, as his alpha thrusts into him for..... well, he lost count somewhere after passing into double digits. He had been upstairs reading on their bed when he had heard his husband return, and the appearance of the alpha in the doorway wearing his
dressing-gown meant only one thing.

His husband wanted angry sex.

It is at times like this that Dean thanks the Lord for having Castiel as a husband. Any other omega would have just had to lie back and accept their alpha doing what they wanted to him, but Dean knows that if he did refuse him, the alpha would accept it. Apart from the time they broke the bed, he had only ever had to do so on one other occasion, and that had been last month when he had sprained his ankle. It had been a terrible experience – not for the pain in his leg but for the scent of unhappy and remorseful alpha filling the house.

The sex that had had to make up for it once his leg had gotten better, though – yes, that brings back happier memories. They had nearly broken the bed again!

Dean's cock twitches feebly as his alpha rotates him on his knot until he is spooning the omega, and nuzzling the back of his neck whilst still growling possessively. Dean would like to ask as to what brought on this passionate display, but for the moment he is content to revel in the scent of sated alpha, and even though he himself had not been that tired half an hour since, he finds himself falling asleep.

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It is some hours later when Dean wakes to the sound of Castiel sliding back into bed with him. This time his wonderful alpha pulls Dean around to spoon him, sighing happily.

“What brought this on?” Dean whispers. There is no need to be quiet; the servants know full well that unless Cas rings to summon them, the dressing-gown means keep well clear except for emergencies. “I thought that you would still be upset over Scarborough?”

The small Yorkshire port had defected to the king last week, strengthening his grip on the county as well as providing a useful safe haven for his few ships and - potentially - a landing-place for foreign aid, unlikely though that seemed. Castiel pulls the omega even closer and Dean wraps his arms around his husband, earning himself an appreciative growl.

“We have won an important battle”, he says. “A place called Middlewich, in Cheshire. The king controls Chester itself, but the Irish cannot send any troops to help him through it providing we hold the county around it. It is an important link between Wales and the north-west, and we have it now.”

“I thought you said that the king was stronger in the North?” Dean says.

“Yorkshire and the north-east are fairly secure for him”, Castiel says, “except for the towns of the West Riding (1). But Lancashire across the Pennines is another matter. His man there, Lord Strange, is alienating many by his harsh approach. And I mean harsh even by the standards of these times.”

The omega winces.

+~+~+

Monday 20th March, 1643

“Damnation!”

Castiel thumps the table, making the bowl in the middle - and his mate sat next to him – jump.
“I am guessing the king has won a battle?” Dean asks cautiously.

Castiel takes a deep breath, then slides round to sit next to his mate and pulls him into a tender embrace. Dean sighs happily.

“Sorry for upsetting you”, Castiel apologizes. “But yes. After we took Lichfield, I had hoped our forces could secure Staffordshire, which would have given us a major advantage in the north Midlands. But it seems that our armies have been beaten back at a place called Hopton near Stafford, and have retreated. Though it seems we killed the enemy leader, the Earl of Northampton (2). Poor Spencer.”

“You knew him?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“A good man and true to his cause, even if it was not mine”, he says thoughtfully. “He came to the Hall a few years back on a business matter, when Raphael was away and our grandfather laid up with an illness, so I had to entertain him. At least he leaves a son.”

“You rarely mention your brother”, Dean observes. The alpha smiles.

“I am not blessed with the close relationship you enjoy with Sam”, he says, “though in my case the earldom and our both being alphas complicates matters. The current situation we have holds for now; I only hope Raphael does not do anything foolish if the war moves against the king. Especially bearing in mind how close Stalwarton is to Oxford.”

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Saturday 25th March, 1643

Castiel has the strangest timing, Dean sometimes thinks. He is buried inside his omega, the two of them firmly knotted together whilst the omega wraps his long legs around the alpha. Castiel sighs happily.

“I love your bowed legs”, he says. “And they are quite topical, given the news today.”

Dean wonders just how his deformity (he never calls it that because it upsets his alpha, but secretly that is how he regards his lower half) relates to current affairs. Fortunately his strange husband explains.

“We have won the latest battle”, he says, “and it is an important one. In Gloucestershire – yes, I know how close that county comes to your family’s house, but this is the far end from that – we have destroyed a royalist army at Highnam in the Forest of Dean. It means that Gloucester itself is safe for now, otherwise I would have been pressuring your family to move even more.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Gloucester is the key place we hold in the county (3)”, Castiel explains, "especially with its bridge over the River Severn. If the king can take it, he would be able to turn his attentions towards Warwickshire, which would not be good. As I told you yesterday, both your mother and brother are unwilling to move, but if Gloucester falls, they may have to.”

Dean winces.

“Cas”, he grumbles, “you know the rule. No mentioning my family during sex. It puts me right off!”
The alpha grins.

“Then in that case”, he smirks as he pulls the omega even closer, “I shall have to put you on again.”

And he proceeds so to do.

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Friday 31st March, 1643

Castiel winces at the sight of the cherry pie. Dean raises an eyebrow at him.

“What?” he asks.

“Just not the best choice given the news today”, the alpha says glumly. “History has repeated itself, and this time to our discomfiture.”

Dean tries not to look hopeful, but judging from the wary look he gets from his alpha, he fails by some distance.

“There is a little river in Yorkshire called the Cock Beck”, Castiel explains. “In the seventh century King Penda of Mercia was caught retreating across it, and it was said that the river ran red with the blood of the slain. In the Cousins' Wars two centuries back there was a battle fought next to it at Towton and the same thing was said again; indeed at that time it was also reported that the river was so blocked that the bodies of the drowned formed a bridge for their colleagues to escape across.”

Dean looks hard at his mate,

“Ugh, but you are not putting me off my pie!” he says firmly. Castiel grins.

“And now Tom Fairfax (4) has been caught retreating from Tadcaster and the river is red once more, this time with the blood of our own men”, the alpha says unhappily.

“Is he not the one they call Black Tom”, because of his dark and handsome looks?” Dean asks.

The silence registers only slowly, and he belatedly realizes that he just called another alpha handsome in the presence of his alpha husband. Fuck!

“If Newcastle can secure the towns of the West Riding, Yorkshire is almost all lost”, Castiel says, eyeing his mate warily. “Except for Hull, and I still have fears over Hotham.”

“You still think he may defect to the king?” Dean asks.

“I am sure he has considered it more than once”, Castiel says. If he does, then Newcastle's army will be free to move into Lincolnshire and either secure the north Midlands or worse, fall on East Anglia. Which reminds me.”

He stops. Dean looks art him expectantly.

“Reminds you of what?” he asks. The look he gets in return is feral.

“If my omega is thinking how handsome another alpha is, maybe it is time I fell on him and drove my point home!”

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They do not even make it to the bedroom. Castiel makes his point very thoroughly. All the way up the stairs!

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Notes:
1) Yorkshire, a county about the size of Connecticut, is divided into three areas or ridings (originally 'thirdings'). The West Riding contains many of the towns that would later become part of the Industrial Revolution, and were important even then. The North Riding, including Scarborough, was more rural, as was the East Riding, which includes Hull. The three ridings meet at the county town of York, then the third largest city in the country, which ran its own affairs.

2) Spencer Compton, Earl of Northampton (1601-1643). After the battle the parliamentarian commander, Sir John Gell, attempted to exchange Compton's body for the guns he had lost, an outrage which was long remembered. Compton's son Henry became Bishop of London, an important figure in the Bloodless Revolution of 1688, and his son James' son, another Spencer, was briefly prime minister of Great Britain and was also Earl of Wilmington, from which title three towns in the United States are named.

3) Though geographically part of Gloucestershire, the port of Bristol had its own governance. Gloucester was a pivotal block to the king, particularly in this and the following year when part of his strong support in both the West Country and the Welsh March was tied down keeping the city in check.

4) Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671), son and heir to Ferdinando Lord Cameron, parliament's chief supporter in Yorkshire and the north-east. Dogged and determined rather than brilliant, he supported Cromwell up to Pride's Purge, but refused to sit in judgement on the king in 1648 and faded from the political scene, though in 1659 he was important in assisting George Monck's march on London which led to the Restoration.
April 1643

Chapter Summary

28: Castiel has a rare alpha moment and chases a fellow alpha down Whitehall when the man makes the mistake of advising him how to manage his omega properly. The war continues to go largely in the king's favour, and there is an argument over children. The long hours are stressful to Castiel, though at least he has the joys of coming in from work to a panty-clad omega!

Tuesday 4th April, 1643

Castiel is again frowning over his map. Dean sighs.

"Something bad has happened, has it not?" he asks, gently embracing his alpha and lightly scenting him. He is rewarded by a pleasured growl and the smaller man melting into his arms. It is a while before his husband replies.

"Prince Rupert defeated one of our armies just south of the town of Birmingham (1) yesterday", he says, "and proceeded to burn the town."

"A war crime", Dean says.

It takes him very little time to realize that there must be something more. He looks at his alpha, who nods.

"I only received the news this morning", Castiel says. "Prince Rupert travelled there via Norton and Shipston. He must have passed right by your mother's house some time Friday. Fortunately he was presumably under orders from the king to attack Birmingham and nothing else. Charles Stuart is a vengeful man at the best of times, and he has said before that he will not tolerate that small place standing out against him as it has done."

Dean is worried, but he knows from his mother's last letter that she is resolved to stand firm in Compton for as long as possible. He sighs.

"It is a race now", Castiel says. "Rupert is advancing on Lichfield, whilst down here Essex is moving towards Reading."

"The war seems to be going nowhere", Dean says carefully.

"If Rupert takes Lichfield – and I think he well may – then that leaves only Burton and Nottingham between the king's capital lands and Newark", Castiel says. "Both Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire are as yet uncertain in their commitment to either side, but we know from history that the undecided prefer to back winners. If he can reach all the way across England, it would cut us off from our few Northern holdings. That would be a disaster."

"But you said that the earl is moving on Reading?" Dean asks.

"Far too slowly, mainly because so many of my colleagues keep dragging their heels over providing money for his army", Castiel says. "The taxation system of this realm was never
designed to fully fund a large armed force for such a long period of time, especially with so much of the country in enemy hands. Our best hope is that even if Lichfield falls, the king may be prevented from taking advantage of it by having to rush to save Reading. Should Essex secure that town, then Oxford itself would be in some danger, and that the king cannot ignore.”

Dean slips his hand inside Castiel’s trousers and begins to fondle his husband’s already erect cock. The alpha growls.

“You do know you cannot always distract me with sex, you know?” he rumbles.

“I know”, Dean teases. “But I will settle for only being able to do it ninety-nine point nine nine per cent of the time, alpha!”

And with that he suddenly steps up his movements, eliciting an almost unearthly sound from his alpha who shudders and moans before coming violently. Dean grins in triumph.

“Bad omega!” Castiel pants, though he is smiling as he says it. “I shall have to punish you for that!”

Dean bats his eyelashes at him.

“Promise?”

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Wednesday 12th April, 1643

Strictly speaking – and Dean would never, ever voice this particular thought out loud – Castiel is not much to look at. He seems at first glance very much atypical for an alpha, and only the scent and the muscular build – the former partly obscured by his cleanliness – give him away. He also comes over as far too mild-mannered for an alpha, something which more than one of his sub-gender has learnt the hard way was not the case.

Such as the man Castiel is now chasing down Whitehall Place, roaring his fury as his mate watches on and tries not to smirk.

“You are smirking”, Charlie observes. “But with good reason, so I shall let it pass.”

Dean had been helping out in the restaurant when the alpha currently fleeing for his life from his husband had overheard him discussing the latest news in the war with Charlie. He had made several suggestions as to how Dean’s husband should keep him In His Place, and had repeated them to one of his fellow diners. Who, unfortunately for the now fleeing alpha, had happened to be the honourable member for Forston and Byteby - in other words the husband of the omega in question and also the man now chasing him from the area whilst yelling what he will do when he catches him. In some detail.

Castiel finally stops – Dean knows that he could have easily outpaced the other alpha had he wanted to – and lets out a final defiant snarl before walking more sedately back to his mate and his neighbour. He has that slightly ashamed look that Dean does not like, which means that he is unhappy at letting his alpha side show through. Well, his poor little omega mate will just have to let him work any residual anger out on his poor little body. At the first opportunity.

After Dean has finished his pie, that is. Priorities here!

“At the moment I do not care how the war goes”, Castiel growls, “if it means knotheads like that
think they have free rein to spout their garbage about omegas!"

Dean pulls him into a hug – bystanders be damned! - and scents him gently, smiling as he feels the alpha relax a little. Castiel smiles even more when Charlie brings him out a coffee, which he swallows half of in one gulp.

“Ancaster is a setback”, the omega says quietly, “especially as it blocks any plans your side had of entering Lincolnshire for the time being.”

Castiel looks at his mate, and Dean knows instinctively what he is thinking. The alpha is torn, worrying over his mate having to work with such people, yet wanting Dean to have as much of a life as a seventeenth-century omega can have. Almost any other alpha would have put their foot down by now, if they had even allowed their mate to work in the first place. Dean is so lucky.

He sees that Charlie has moved away, and scents his alpha some more. Thankfully the usual gawkers have moved on too.

“How about going upstairs and me wearing the panties?” he suggests, smiling at the sudden increase in his husband's breathing. “Or you wearing them?”

Castiel lets out an almost inhuman growl, and Dean scents him one last time before slipping away (though he takes the pie). He has a husband to seduce. Because he is such a dutiful omega!

He can hear Charlie sniggering for some reason. Cow!

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Friday 14th April, 1643

It has not been a good week, and Castiel once again arrives home looking stressed and unhappy. This time Dean gets Gadreel to run him a hot bath, which his husband loves, especially when his mate washes him down. Castiel will tell him what has gone wrong eventually, but for now he needs to relax a little.

They are wrapped around each other in bed some time later when the alpha finally opens up.

“We lost another battle”, he says. “A place called Ripple Field, not far from Gloucester. And Sir Ralph Hopton, one of the king's best commanders, has somehow persuaded the Cornish militia to leave their county and fight in Devonshire. He is working towards besieging Plymouth, which we must hold at all costs.”

“It is a port”, Dean says. “Do I recall you saying that the navy can only partly resupply it?”

“The entrance to the port is very narrow”, Castiel says, “and if the king's forces can secure the headlands to the south, they could make the passage of supply ships very interesting. But yes; had the town been inland, it would surely have been lost by now. We have other garrisons in Devonshire, but Plymouth is the largest, the key to the West Country. It must not fall!”

“Yet something else has upset you”, Dean urges. “What is it?”

Castiel sighs.

“I had an argument with Pym today”, he says. “Our first serious disagreement. It is over the Court of Wards.”
“I thought only the king did that?” Dean says.

“Pym set one up for those wards who are unlucky enough to inherit in our lands as well”, Castiel says. “Tobias Lord Midstone, who is a family friend, died at Camp Hill, the battle for Birmingham. His son had predeceased him, so there was only a grandson, Orlando, to inherit. He is nine years old.”

Dean knows that that means. The system is supposed to be that the Crown administers the lands for the young boy until he comes of age, then hands them over. What actually happens is that the rights to administer the lands are sold to some greedy relative (after the Crown has taken a cut, of course), and the relative then often enriches themselves so that the poor boy has little of his inheritance left when he finally comes of age.

“I argued that since his grandfather fought for us, the least we could do was to allow to the grandson to inherit all his rightful lands”, Castiel says. “Unfortunately we also had another request for funds from Essex today, saying his army may not be able to finish off the siege of Reading unless he gets them. Bearing in mind the fact that I do not get paid to be a member of parliament, I got angry.”

Dean is surprised. His husband rarely gets riled, yet this is twice in one day.

“Pym acceded to my request eventually, but several other members were voicing 'concerns'”, Castiel says glumly. “I shall have to watch my step over the coming weeks.”

His omega pulls him into a tighter embrace and the alpha goes willingly, sighing his contentment.

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Saturday 22nd April, 1643

“You look conflicted today”, Dean observes as his husband sits at a table covered with scrolls. Castiel sighs.

“We received lots of news today”, Castiel says. “Some good, some bad. The bad news is that Prince Rupert has taken Lichfield, though that was very much expected. Its defences were minimal.”

“And your good news?” Dean asks.

“Two lots”, Castiel says with a weary smile. “The king's efforts to relieve Reading have been frustrated. And Lord Strange has been defeated in Lancashire and is withdrawing from the county. The king allowed his jealousy to get the better of him there.”

“Why jealousy?”

“Because Strange is descended from the Tudors, in other words from a rival lineage to the Stuarts”, Castiel says. “Both the king and his father had relatively weak claims to the throne when the great Elizabeth died, and the Stuarts have always been wary of the many people with better claims. It is his loss; Strange is an idle fellow, but had the king given him more support, he could have swept the north-west and given his master full control of the area. Now we hold most of Lancashire and Cheshire, which means the king must maintain forces on the northern side of his Oxford lands that he could better use elsewhere.”

“So the good news outweighs the bad?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.
“Yes”, he says thoughtfully. “Perhaps I should be celebrating after all.”

He shoots a feral look at Dean, but the omega is already running for the bedroom.

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Wednesday 26th April, 1643

“It is strange”, Dean observes, “how people react in ways you do not expect. The destruction of Birmingham has definitely made people angry, despite it being such a small town.”

“What can be done to small towns can also be done to great cities”, Castiel says, pulling the omega's head onto his chest and ruffling his short hair, earning himself a grumbled protest. “Threats of action are one thing, but seeing it for real is something else. All London knows now that if the king wins, he may take his revenge on the place. That sort of thing makes people fight even harder for the cause.”

There is the sound of celebrations outside, but the alpha and omega are snug in their bed, having turned in early for the evening. Though not before Castiel had celebrated parliament's latest victories with a new pair of panties for his mate and some very athletic sex that had led to both of them needing to lie down for some time afterwards.

“It was unlucky for the king that Hopton's private letters fell into our hands”, Castiel admits. “We all suspected that it was the plan that he advance from the west and join up with the Oxford army, but having it in writing makes people feel the danger that much more.”

“And makes them more willing to pay taxes?” Dean says pointedly. Castiel chuckles. “And makes them more willing to pay taxes”, he says. “This victory at Sourton will force Hopton back into Cornwall for the time being, but I doubt it will be for long. He is too good a soldier for that. But as long as we hold Plymouth, he cannot bring his full force to the king. Little wonder that people are celebrating.”

“And even a Cavalier omega should help his Roundhead husband celebrate”, Dean says slyly.

“How do you mean....?” Castiel begins, before he realizes that Dean is sliding down his chest. “Oh fuck!”

“Later”, Dean promises, as he takes his husband's cock into his mouth.

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A few moments later, Gadreel and Ezekiel look at each other across the table as a mighty roar echoes through the house. They both grin, then continue with the polishing.

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Friday 28th April, 1843

Castiel almost bounces into the house that evening, cheerful after another good day. News had reached parliament earlier that Essex had finally taken Reading, and even if his army was too tired (and unpaid) to push any further, holding the Berkshire town would mean that the king would have to divert more precious resources to defend Oxford's southern flank from a potential push along the Thames. Yes, today had been a good day.
He comes into their study to find his mate at the table with lots of paperwork on it. Nothing unusual in that – except all Dean is leaning over said table wearing his newly-acquired green panties, which frame his perfect arse... well, perfectly. Castiel cannot stop himself from snarling.

Dean wiggles his arse, and grins when in the mirror he sees the alpha almost fall over his feet as he races across the room to pull the panties down and bury himself inside his omega. It is a little painful – Dean only had the time he caught sight of his husband approaching a minute before to finger himself open – but oh so good! He clenches his walls around his husband's cock, eliciting another snarl, and Castiel thrusts even deeper into him as he takes him forcibly.

Thankfully the bedroom is across the corridor from the study, so Castiel is able to walk Dean there on his knot – the omega can remember the one time Castiel tried to walk him up the stairs whilst knotted, which had resulted in the omega passing out after coming for the fifth time – and they tumble into bed with Castiel still almost fully clothed. The alpha apparently does not care; he pulls his omega close to him and promptly passes out.

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Notes:
1) Birmingham, a small but growing town; nearby Coventry and Warwick were then larger and much more important. Its sacking was normal by Continental standards of the time but unknown in England, and the public reaction was vitriolic. Later in the war, when the parliamentarians were in the ascendency in the area, captured royalist troops were sent to Coventry where they were jeered at by the locals, hence the term 'being sent to Coventry'. Today (2016) Coventry has a population just over 325,000, whilst Birmingham is in excess of one million, making it the second-largest city in England. Both are best avoided.
2) Sir Ralph Hopton (1596-1652), member of parliament for Wells in Somersetshire. One of the king's more skillful leaders, he won several important victories that year, but was narrowly defeated at Cheriton in 1644. His surrender of the king's last western army in 1646, though inevitable given the forces against him, seems to have alienated him from his own side, and he died in exile, mourned more as an able opponent by parliament that his 'friends'. 
29: An old queen gets the chop. Dean has his own definition of 'small' when it comes to pie slices, and something unexpected turns up in a lady's skirts (no, this is not that sort of story!). The war continues to run in the king's favour, and the threat to London grows ever stronger. Up in Nowhere, Kevin Tarrant learns a painful lesson.

Tuesday 2nd May, 1643

Castiel is angry when he returns home.

"Of all the stupid things!" he grumbles. "The war is in the balance, the North and West Country both in peril, and what do my honourable colleagues do about it? Start pulling down medieval monuments!"

Dean looks at him in surprise.

"What has happened?" he asks.

Castiel takes a deep breath before continuing.

"They voted today to take down Queen Eleanor's Cross (1) in Charing", he says. "Of all the complete wastes of time and resources, they are focussing their efforts on a pile of stone."

"I rather like that cross", Dean says dreamily. He likes the idea that a king of England would so love his wife that he would go to the expense of building twelve separate memorials to her. "What have they got against it?"

"It is royalty, so it must go", Castiel grumbles. "Future generations are going to think us idiots, I tell you!"

"Queen Eleanor must have been a wonderful woman, to inspire such devotion", Dean smiles. "Would you ever build me a cross like that, Cas?"

His alpha does not immediately answer. Dean turns to him in surprise, then pales at the look on his face.

"If you died, I.... I do not think I could carry on", Castiel says in a broken voice. "I.... Dean...."

Too late the omega realizes that he has made his alpha unhappy, and rushes over to scent him, Castiel opening his arms as he approaches. The keening wail that his husband lets out as he sets to work is heart-rending, and Dean spends some minutes just calming his alpha down until he can take him upstairs. He knows that when he is really upset, Castiel likes to just be held and gently scented, so he does just that.

There is definitely a whole lot of manly embracing later than evening, but in no way, shape or form could this ever be said to resemble cuddling. Because Dean Milton does not cuddle, so there!
Sunday 14th May, 1643

Their evening meal is just finished when Charlie calls round.

“Glad to see I am not catching you two at it again!” she says cheerfully.

They both blush. A few weeks ago Castiel had come home feeling particularly amorous, and knotted Dean there and then in the front hall. Unfortunately their baker neighbour had called round whilst they were still tied together, and had left (fled) with a face to match her hair. She smiles.

“I bring news”, she says, “or at least gossip. You may have heard it already, but better twice informed than not at all.”

“Thank you, Charlie”, Castiel says politely, whilst his mate stares mournfully at his empty dish in the presumed hope that the pie he just ate will be magically replaced. “What is it?”

“I overheard some people talking today”, she says. “It seems that the king has hopes of a Royalist rising in London.”

“I thought London was all for parliament?” Dean says. He looks hopefully at his alpha, ignoring a certain soon to be ex-friend's snigger as he bats his eyelashes.

“Yes, you may go and ask Ezekiel for a small – and I mean small, Dean! - second slice of pie.”

“Woohoo!”

The omega almost falls over his feet as he races off to the kitchen. They both smile fondly after him.

“He is right”, the alpha says, “but the king does have some supporters here. Thank you for letting me know this, Charlie. I presume that the Tower will be one of their targets, so we should alert Sir John Conyers at to any danger there. Do you know anything more?”

“No”, she says, “though from what I know of the war, I would expect the king to try to get his Commission of Array (2) read out again so as to bring his supporters together. But with so many people coming in and out every day even in these times, you cannot search every one of them.”

“But we can keep an eye on the most interesting”, Castiel smiles, watching as his grinning mate returns with a steaming plate. “I said a small piece, Dean!”

“This is small!” Dean protested. “I wanted twice as much!”

The politician and the baker exchanged looks, and they both chuckle quietly. Fortunately Dean is too busy inhaling his extra pie to notice.

Wednesday 17th May, 1643

“The news is nearly all bad”, Castiel says glumly that evening as he and Dean lie tied together. He is grateful that he has such a wonderful mate that can take his mind away from his troubles; Dean had taken one look at him when he had come in and then led him upstairs, before forcibly impaling himself on his alpha.
Hmm, perhaps the alpha should come home looking depressed more often? He kisses along his mate's freckled back, eliciting a happy sigh from the omega.

“At least we have taken Stafford”, he says, "so the threat of the North being cut off is reduced for now. But our eastern armies just melted away after a defeat at Grantham a few days ago, and I am increasingly glad for Cromwell's men in the Eastern Association. Even if he is a little unorthodox in his ways.”

“How so?” Dean asks, nestling back into him.

“He believes that any man can make a good soldier, even a leader of men, whether he be of low or high birth.”

Dean frowns.

“But you believe that too”, he points out. “Do you not?”

“Yes, but they all think that I am strange anyway”, Castiel chuckles, “besides which I am not nor shall I ever be an army leader. And now this defeat of our western field army in the west at Stratton is disastrous. All our men there are defending the towns we hold, especially Plymouth, and there is nothing to stop Hopton from sending at least some men to join up with the king. It may not be many, but the effect on morale – on both sides – will be significant.”

“You think that the king may still win?” Dean asks.

“I think it increasingly comes down to Hull and Plymouth”, Castiel says. “If the king can take one or both of those cities, he will be able to throw considerable force against us. Yes, he can still win – but he has to take those cities. And soon.”

+~+~+

Tuesday 23rd May, 1643

Everyone knows that Puritans do not swear, at least in public. So when Castiel utters an oath whilst reading the letter that came this afternoon – Dean would have opened it but he had been helping Charlie out with a rush order for a marriage, the original caterer having backed out because the bride's sister is Catholic, of all things – the omega knows that something is wrong.

“Another setback?” he asks.

“Not in the war as such”, Castiel says, frowning. “That young idiot Kevin has gotten himself injured.”

Dean has to think for a moment before he realizes.

“Kevin Tarrant, from Nowhere?” he asks. “What has he done?”

“Joined the king's army at Oxford for adventure”, Castiel says. “And probably some new clothes, like so many these days. Unfortunately he was injured when a matchlock exploded near him. Fortunately your uncle writes to say it is not too serious. There is a letter from Bobby for you as well.”

Dean smiles.

“The king is a brave man”, he says sententiously. “Talking on parliament is bad enough, but
upsetting Linda Tarrant – well, that is one battle he is certain to lose!”

“And Bobby says that Garth has moved into the Roadhouse full-time now”, Castiel continues. “That means that we have an empty cottage. I must write and tell Raphael and see if he has someone he wishes to put into it.”

“Is Garth all right?” Dean asks.

“Yes”, Castiel says. “One local idiot did make a remark about his Irish name, but apparently Jo sat down across from him and started talking about her knife collection. He got the message.”

“And they say us country folk are slow!” Dean chuckles. “Will we go back to the cottage this summer?”

“That may be problematic”, Castiel says. “We should have to obtain passes from the king, otherwise his men at whichever outpost we access the area by may prove, well, difficult. Things are so tight across the country that we cannot afford to take our eye off of things. Plus of course, Pym will worry that some of those who go home may use the chance to defect to the king. Particularly in the Lords, which is more for a settlement that the Commons. But I would like to have some time in my real home with my favourite omega.”

Dean smiles.

“And a whole week of non-stop fucking him would do me the world of good”, Castiel says amiably.

Dean glares at him. Though he has to admit, the prospect is not entirely without appeal. Provided, of course, there is also pie!

++++++

Wednesday 31st May, 1643

“Well, I have an answer to your question”, Castiel says at dinner that evening. “And sooner that I expected.”

“What question?” Dean asks.

“As to whether we would get a break this summer”, Castiel says. “There has been a development over the king’s plot to incite a rising in London. His Commission of Array has been discovered – smuggled into the capital in a lady’s skirts, would you believe? - and the plot is finished. One of the chief plotters was arrested this morning, and he has given a list of all the others involved to save his own neck.”

“Your Pym must be a happy man”, Dean observes.

“So happy that he has consented that the alpha who provided him with one of the earliest warnings as to what was afoot can go home for two weeks this summer”, Castiel grins. “I only have to write to Raphael so he can obtain a pass for me; as he is one of the king’s richest supporters there should be no trouble obtaining one. And I must reward Charlie for her part in this. I think a month’s free rent would be fitting.”

The omega smiles.

“Or maybe I could tell her I shall pay for all your pies in future? It is time you started to cut back.”
Dean stares at him in horror.

“Cut back on pie?” he asks, as if his husband were suddenly speaking some strange language he no longer understands. “On pie?”

Castiel pulls him into an embrace, and toys with the very slight bulge around his omega’s belly. Dean whines in protest.

“There is just a little bit extra there”, the alpha teases. “We should work at removing it before it becomes a lot extra.”

“How about we just work it off through lots of athletic sex?” Dean asks hopefully. “Would not my dear alpha prefer that?”

Castiel seems to be considering these options and his mate watches anxiously – until the dear alpha suddenly collapses into a fit of laughter, and Dean belatedly realizes that he has been had. He pouts.

“That was mean!” he protests. “Bad alpha!”

“You bad alpha would not say no to the athletic sex anyway?” Castiel grins, waggling his eyebrows at his mate.

Dean folds his arms and pouts, until Castiel comes and wraps his arms around him.

“All right”, he smiles, “there is a pie for you in the kitchen.”

“Yes!”

“Which you can have after we.....”

Dean is already in the kitchen. Castiel smiles, but does not follow. His mate deserves his pie.

"Cas!"

His miniature pie, which Charlie baked per his instructions to be half an inch across!

+~+~+

Monday 5th June, 1643

“I see that the king’s double dealings have finished what little support he had in parliament”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Just as well given the news today.”

“What news?” Dean asks.

“With our having no western army, some of Hopton's Cornishmen have joined up with Prince Maurice – Rupert's younger brother – at Chard in Somersetshire”, Castiel says. “The fear is that they will try to push into Hampshire, which is largely for us, as a prelude to encircling London from the south.”

“Would they have the strength for that?” Dean asks dubiously.

“Hampshire and Dorsetshire are divided”, Castiel says. “Both counties are rural and poor, and as I have said before, people like to back a side that appears to be winning. Success breeds its own momentum, as does failure. And we are struggling to find enough money to support the Earl of
Essex so his army can move from Reading and threaten Oxford. That would at least force any advance away to defend the king's capital.”

“So that means we cannot leave any time soon”, Dean says resignedly.

“Not until battle is joined, one way or another”, Castiel says, kissing him gently. “I am sorry, Dean. But I will get you home.”

Dean smiles at him.

“So we can have all that lovely sex!”

“Hmph! There'd better be pie as well! And a full-sized one this time, alpha!”

Castiel sniggers.

+~+~+
Notes:
1) The last of one of twelve memorial crosses, erected by Edward I to mark the 1290 passage of his late wife Eleanor of Aquitaine's body from the country to its burial place in London. Three survive today; the one in the story lay in the village of Charing, between London and Westminster and now marked by the south-east corner of Trafalgar Square. This cross was indeed destroyed, but a replacement one was erected in 1865 outside nearby Charing Cross railway station. Ironically the site of the old cross was later used for a statue of Charles I, and now marks the exact spot from which the distances between London and all other towns are measured.
2) An ancient device for summoning the militia of a county or city. It had not been used for centuries and was somewhat questionable; its powers had lapsed under Elizabeth but had never actually been repealed.
Chapter Summary

30: Castiel grows frustrated as the war continues to go badly for his side; a parliamentary thrust towards Oxford is repulsed, whilst the king's forces grow ever stronger. Disaster is only narrowly averted at Hull, and death strikes the Milton family......

Tuesday 6th June, 1643

“I sometimes think”, Castiel says as they lie together after an athletic coupling – Dean will definitely need some new panties - “that the king has the advantage that on his side he makes all the decisions, whilst we have to decide everything by committee. But then he goes and does something stupid like this, and I realize that it is both a curse and a blessing.”

“What has he done now?” Dean asks, then yelps as Castiel shifts around him, the alpha's knot making him shiver in delight.

“We have received proof of his dealings with the Confederate Irish”, Castiel says. “A most unwise move on his part. Even if the odds of his obtaining any help whilst they are still trying to secure the whole island are remote because we hold much of the coast facing, it will enrage the Scots, who are supporting their own settlers a short distance across the straits in Ulster. It may even make them consider intervening in the war with their own forces.”

“That would be disastrous”, Dean agrees, remembering a shade too late to add, “for the king.” He knows by his husband's smirk that he spotted the oversight, but fortunately the alpha says nothing. “But what would they have to gain by it?”

“I think they believe, or wish to believe – it is much the same thing – that their Presbyterianism can be foisted on England”, Castiel says. “Certain it is that the dear old Church of England needs reform one way or another, though I doubt many if any would go that far. But again, it is a question of belief. If they believe they can achieve it, they may send an army south. And that would be a disaster.... for the king.”

Dean pouts at the teasing, knowing the alpha behind him cannot see his face.

“And stop pouting, Dean!”

Damnation!

++++

Wednesday 7th June, 1643

“We lost two more members of the Lords today”, Castiel says with a sigh. “This Irish business is making the king's final few friends give up.”

“I thought you would have been pleased about that”, Dean observes.
“Like many things, it is a mixed blessing”, the alpha says, smiling as Ezekiel brings a tray with two plates in. Sure enough, Dean pouts when he realizes that there is no pie for dessert today.

“Charlie gave you pie when you went round earlier”, the alpha smiles.

“She told you!” Dean sulks. “Cow!”

“No, I just assumed”, Castiel grins. “Dean Winchester, good omega, will work for pie.”

Dean sighs, and picks disinterestedly at the fruit on offer.

“Too much power can be a bad thing, even when your friends have it”, Castiel says, reaching for something on the omega's plate and earning himself a slapped wrist for his pains. “I thought you did not like non-pie desserts?”

“Still mine”, Dean grumbles. “Do you not trust your friends?”

“People will abuse power”, Castiel says, “whether it comes from religion, politics or wherever. Pym is setting up an official censor to prevent hostile literature, which will fail completely. We all know that the best way to make someone want to read something is to tell them that they must not read it.”

Dean smiles at that.

“Like telling your omega that he cannot have pie”, Castiel grins.

Dean scowls at him.

“At least the proof of the king’s Irish dealings has enables us to extract more money from the City”, Castiel chuckles. “Not as much as Essex asks for – it is fortunate he is known for his honesty, otherwise people would think he is pocketing it for himself – but hopefully enough to push him towards Oxford and prevent this western menace from getting any closer to London.”

“Can we have pie tomorrow?” Dean asks, batting his eyelashes at his husband. “Pretty please?”

Castiel laughs.

“You are so cute when you do that”, he smiles, knowing how Dean hates that word. “Actually I thought we might have pie for breakfast, for a change. You will need something with lots of sugar to give you energy.”

“Why?”

“To help you recover from the prolonged fucking your husband gave you the night before.”

Dean gulps.

+~+~+

Monday 19th June, 1643

“This is a disaster!” Castiel fumes. “And so close!”

“I guess your earl has been defeated?” Dean says carefully. He is reminded once again that most alphas would not even consider tolerating their omega having a different party to their own, but then his wonderful Cas is nothing like most alphas. Especially when he does that thing with his
He only slowly becomes aware that Castiel is looking at him, and blushes.

“You were thinking about sex, were you not?” the alpha says.

The blush deepens. Dean tries deflection.

“What has happened?” he asks. Castiel gives him a look that says quite clearly he knows what his mate is about, but fortunately he lets it pass.

“Essex had advanced to Thame, a town barely fifteen miles from Oxford”, he says. “He had news that Prince Rupert was after a convoy of ours carrying soldiers' pay, and when the prince attacked some of his outposts he gave chase. But he has been badly defeated at a place called Chalgrove – and there is worse, much worse. Hampden is gravely wounded, and not expected to last.”

“That is a pity”, Dean says. “I have read some of his speeches, and he always comes over as a very good man. A moderate, too.”

“Sound”, Castiel says. “Not brilliant or intelligent as such, but a good man, especially when it comes to managing the unwieldy beast that is parliament. He will be sorely missed; the weight will fall wholly on poor Pym now. I hope he can bear it.”

+++

Sunday 25th June, 1643

Dean is spending a lazy Sunday afternoon in bed with his mate, they having fulfilled their moral duties and attended church that morning. Castiel usually prefers the evening service now the days are longer, as it enables him to spend longer in bed making love to his mate. Dean does not exactly have many objections to this.

They are lying together when there is a knock at the door. They both look up, surprised; neither Gadreel nor Ezekiel enter the room at times like these unless summoned or if there is an emergency. Dean can feel his alpha tense, and Castiel pulls the blanket up over them both.

“Enter!” he growls.

Ezekiel comes in and very obviously keeps his distance, remaining in the doorway and staring hard at the floor. Even so, Dean can hear the instinct-driven defensive growl of his husband. He snuggles closer to Castiel, and the growling eases off.

“What is it, Ezekiel?” Castiel asks impatiently. News of late had generally been bad for parliament, topped off by Hampden dying of his wounds yesterday.

“The king's men have raided Wycombe, sir”, the servant says, looking fit to bolt at any minute. Dean knows that unlike most alphas Castiel would never hurt his servants, but no beta is going to approach an alpha and his mate in bed together and not feel nervous (as in terrified). “There is panic in the city, with the enemy less than forty miles away.”

Castiel mutters unhappily.

“Thank you, Ezekiel”, he says heavily. “You may go.”

The servant almost falls over his feet as he tries to back quickly through the door, which shuts very
firmly behind him. The alpha sighs.

“This is very bad”, he says. “Essex has allowed himself to be outmanoeuvred again, and many in parliament will be calling for his head. Either that, or to reduce his role.”

“It does seem strange, the forces of parliament being led by an earl”, Dean says.

“Men respect nobility”, Castiel says. “But there are other nobles just as ambitious. Manchester (1), for example, is one of those who is favoured by the moderates who come out of the woodwork every time there is a setback like this. He is a decent man, but we cannot weaken Essex when he is all that stands between us and the king’s armies.”

“I love you”, Dean says. Castiel looks at him in surprise. The omega blushes.

“And you know I love you”, Castiel says. “Let us bury ourselves away from the world's troubles for a time, shall we?”

Dean signals his agreement by snuggling in even closer, letting his alpha cu.... hold him in a manly-like manner. Yes, that is what he is doing.

How on earth can someone snigger silently?

+++++

Friday 30th June, 1643

Castiel returns to the house in a good mood.

“By the Grace of God, we came close to a second disaster yesterday”, he says, looking relieved. “You remember that I expressed doubts as to Hotham up in Hull, especially after he let the Queen pass right under his nose?”

“Yes?” Dean says. “Has he rebelled?”

“His son was arrested, and he himself captured trying to escape”, Castiel says grimly. “We have details of their plans to defect to the king, and follow that traitor Cholmeley up in Scarborough. All those weapons and the only major port we have in the area, so nearly lost. We have been very fortunate.”

“Surely though Newcastle will still try to besiege the city?” Dean asks.

“Yes, but the sea-access to it is far wider than at Bristol or Plymouth”, Castiel says. “I am fairly confident that its walls and our ships can beat off anything the earl can throw at the town.”

“Only fairly confident?” Dean teases.

“Well, about as confident as I am that you will be screaming loudly as I rotate you on my knot in about five minutes' time!”

Dean flees for the bedroom, barely making it. And his husband is swiftly (and very loudly) proven all too right!

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Saturday 1st July, 1643
Castiel sighs as he slumps onto the couch in the main room. Dean looks at him anxiously, then joins him and gently starts to scent him.

“Bad day?” the omega asks.

“Mostly”, Castiel says, arching his neck back to give his mate better access. “The only good news is that Raphael wrote to me – at the House for some reason rather than here – and enclosed the warrant that will allow us to travel to the cottage, at least this year.”

He hesitates.

“What?” Dean asks, worried.

“Two of my nephews have died”, he says softly. “The countess was visiting her own family up in Northamptonshire with them, and they both caught scarlet fever (2) and died. Edward and Kenelm.”

He does not say it, but Dean knows that they are both thinking about the family curse. Surely not.....

“In the Commons, most of my fellow members are still happy over us averting disaster at Hull”, Castiel says heavily. “Which is just as well, as the news elsewhere is grim.”

“Go on.”

“It looks like the West Riding is lost”, Castiel says glumly. “Fairfax has been defeated at a place called Adwalton, and has abandoned the area in favour of throwing himself into Hull, of which he has been appointed the new governor. And Rupert has shifted to Buckingham, threatening our links with the Midlands. I thought that Pym was going to tell me he could not spare me after all, but I think he sees it as a chance to gain possible new information from inside the enemy camp.”

“We are not going to Oxford?” Dean asks, alarmed.

“We are most definitely not”, Castiel says firmly. “However, I shall have to visit and talk with Raphael, if only to pass on our condolences.”

Dean gently nuzzles his husband's neck. Castiel sighs.

“You cannot always use sex to distract me, you know”, he says with a small smile.”

“I could always order some new panties?” Dean suggests.

“Perhaps we may go via King's Linton and get you some”, Castiel concedes. “That arse of yours is mighty fine, but even finer when clad in those gorgeous colours.”

Dean shudders, and nuzzles his husband even closer. Castiel growls his approval and lies back, pulling the omega on top of him. They lie there in the evening light, happy and contented.

“We shall go tomorrow”, Castiel decides. “Two days there, then two or three weeks resting and relaxing. It will do us the world of good.”

Unfortunately the alpha's best-laid plans were destined to not turn out quite as he hoped....

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Notes:
1) Edward Montagu, Earl of Manchester (1602-1671). A moderate, he clashed repeatedly with
Cromwell, who was about to become his subordinate as leader of the Eastern Association. The earl's preference for a peaceful settlement later marginalized him into semi-retirement. He married five times, his second to Anne Rich, daughter of fellow parliamentarian Robert Earl of Warwick. 2) A bacterial infection, responsible for large numbers of children's deaths until antibiotics were discovered in the twentieth century. Those aged five to ten were most vulnerable.
Chapter Summary

31: A jobsworth beta soldier makes the mistake of getting too near Dean, and the omega has to be saved by his alpha (well, he does not, but that way he gets to 'reward' Castiel later). The return to the cottage is a pleasant one, but shocking news about his brother Sam comes to light during a visit to his mother in Long Compton. The king’s run of successes continues, and he takes the important western city of Bristol.

Monday 3rd July, 1643

There are few things in the world that truly terrify Dean Milton. Unfortunately today brings one of them.

They had stopped the previous evening at the home of Castiel's family friend at Little Marlow, and that morning had passed in silence the ruins of West Wycombe, victim of Prince Rupert's recent raid. This morning they had been stopped by some nervous looking soldiers at Stokenchurch, the furthest parliamentary outpost along the Oxford road, and had only had to go a few more miles to reach its Royalist equivalent at Postcombe.

Where, regrettably, there is now a sharply-dressed soldier with a death wish, if the way he is leering at Dean is anything to go by. The omega knows the sort; a beefy beta who wants to act all alpha in the hope people will think he is one. And that includes getting far too close to Dean whilst pretending to peruse Castiel's documents.

Dean does not even see his husband dismount, but suddenly Castiel is standing in the narrow gap between him and the soldier and.... oh fuck, his eyes are glowing red. There is going to be violence.

Fortunately one of the soldier's fellow officers, an alpha showing rather more sense (not difficult), hurries up and pulls the beta back. He seems reluctant to accede to the suggestion until Castiel definitely snarls at him.

"Madden!" his companion hisses. "The eyes!"

The soldier finally backs up enough to see the alpha's eyes, and the reaction is almost comical. He yelps, drops the papers and flees back into the house he had emerged from when they arrived, slamming and bolting the door behind him. His companion picks up the papers and carefully hands them to Castiel, who nods his thanks, though he looks almost longingly after the vanished soldier.

"Cas", Dean whispers. "We need to get on."

Castiel growls his dissatisfaction. The second soldier backs away carefully, making sure to keep his hands visible as he does so. The other two soldiers who had been watching have long since made themselves scarce. The alpha growls again, and pulls his horse round to between Dean and the soldiers' house before mounting. Dean reaches across and pats him on the shoulder, and the alpha smiles at him.

"My hero!" Dean simpers.
Castiel looks at him as if he is not sure whether his mate is teasing him or not, but then nods and rides on, though not (Dean notes) without taking care to keep his horse between Dean and the house until it has long vanished behind them, still growling softly. The omega smiles. He has a wonderful alpha protecting him like this, and his day is definitely looking up.

That is the precise moment he sees the old barn ahead.....

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Tuesday 4th July, 1643

Dean is careful when he moves about today.

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Thursday 6th July, 1643

It is clothes shopping day, which means a trip down to King's Linton. Monday evening and Tuesday had been spent mostly horizontal, as Castiel had felt that they had to rechristen every room in the cottage now they were home. Dean feels so loved (and sore!), though they are not doing the full-circle turn on the knot thing thing again. Or at least only on birthdays and very special occasions!

“I am surprised that Raphael has not put someone into Garth's cottage”, Castiel says as they pass through Nowhere and ride past the three small buildings. Kevin Tarrant is gardening and waves to them; Dean notes that his mother is keeping a sharp eye on him from the door of the house.

“Perhaps he has no-one who needs housing?” Dean suggests. Castiel snorts.

“There is always someone in need of a roof over their heads”, he says, “and many families in Stalwarton would love the chance to move their offspring out. Or Raphael could rent it to an outsider. It is unlike him to pass up an opportunity to make money.”

“He is a charming fellow”, Dean grins. “Hard to believe that you share the same blood.”

Castiel winces.

“Do not remind me of that!” he grumbles.

+++++

There is nothing in the little clothes shop that particularly appeals to Dean, although Castiel does order a new pair of trousers for himself. Dean looks longingly at the barn near the smithy, then blushes when his alpha catches him so doing.

“Happy memories”, he mutters defensively. Fortunately Castiel does not tease him, and they walk over to greet the blacksmith.

“There's news”, Rufus mutters quietly. “A major showdown in the west. The king's men were moving on Bristol, and defeated Waller at a place called Lansdown, not far from Bath.”

Castiel sighs.

“But not all bad”, Rufus continues. “That was yesterday. This morning – shows you how fast bad news travels – Lord Hopton was severely injured when a powder wagon exploded. His men have started back towards Oxford.”
“The importance of a good leader”, Castiel says. “He is not of my party, but Sir Ralph is one of the best men the king has, apart from his princely cousins. One cannot wish such a man ill.”

“They are brave enough, but they do themselves no favours with their prancing about”, Rufus says sourly. “And that brother of theirs virtually offering himself as a king instead of our own – some are whispering that Rupert himself would not object to being king.”

“King Rupert the First?” Dean muses. “That sounds unlikely.”

“It does not matter whether we think it unlikely, but the king”, Castiel says. “If he starts to fear his cousin because of it, it will cause dissension which can only benefit us. Thank you, Rufus.”

A small bag of coins changes hand – Dean notes that it is one of the ones that Castiel had at the cottage; obviously he does not want to risk the blacksmith being caught with the enemy's coin – and they leave for home.

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Wednesday 12th July, 1643

Dean had been fortunate enough to obtain a new set of panties during a trip to the town of Woodstock the day before. There had also been more news about the war, and it had not been good for his husband. Even injured, Hopton had been able to inspire his troops to defeat those of parliament whilst the latter had been trying to corner him in the Wiltshire town of The Devizes [1].

Dean is more concerned, however, with the arrival of a letter which must have gone to their London house before either Gadreel or Ezekiel had redirected it here. It came from Sam, and although it was of course addressed to Castiel – no-one wrote letters to omegas – Dean had opened it without a thought.

“You seem troubled”, Castiel says, coming in with a basket of firewood. He had been over to see his own brother that morning, and had been working out his frustrations with an axe for the past two hours. Dean frowns.

“Sammy asks if we can meet up to discuss something”, he says. “But he does not say what. It must be important.”

“We should go and see him”, Castiel says. “It would be easier. The pass Raphael obtained for me will let us cross the border; I assume that the king has guards on the road near Norton, and your brother mentioned that there is a small outpost of ours in the village now. Not enough to defend it, but someone to ride to Shipston or Stratford for reinforcements if the king tries for Warwickshire.”

“What is so bad that he cannot put it into a letter?” Dean wonders.

“In war, it is unwise to put anything on paper that can be misinterpreted”, Castiel says. “Deliberately or otherwise. The last time he wrote, your brother assured both of us that he and your mother were well, and had it been illness, he would have mentioned it.”

Dean nods, but he still worries. Castiel pulls him into a hug, and they stand in front of the now warming fire, holding each other and (as his uncle would doubtless say) 'smiling like idiots'!

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Thursday 13th July, 1643
This is to be an important day in Dean's life. For more than one reason.

Fortunately the soldiers manning the junction of the road to Norton and Worcester are not the same sort of knotheads as those back at Postcombe and they pass through easily, soon riding down the hill towards Dean's old home. The omega most definitely does not glance at the barn where he first met the love of his life.

"Maybe later", Castiel growls.

All right, maybe he did give it just a quick glance!

They ride into the courtyard, and Dean greets his mother and brother. Castiel is his usual charming and courteous self, telling Mary that she has not aged one bit and earning himself a delighted laugh. Then they adjourn to the kitchen, where to Dean's surprise there is a strange young blond omega who can be barely a teenager. He looks underfed, and is clearly wary of both of them. He is also vaguely familiar, which is odd as Dean is sure he has never seen him before.

There are two chairs close together for Dean and Castiel, and the omega notes with interest that his mother and brother sit either side of the stranger. Definitely not a servant, so who is he?

"There is no easy way to break this to you, son", Mary says calmly, "so I shall have to be blunt. You remember how your father caught the plague on a visit to Coventry?"

Dean nods. Castiel gently takes his hand, though he looks as confused as his mate. Mary makes a visible effort before continuing.

"Whilst in the town, John had an affair with a local woman, one Katherine Milligan", she says, her voice trembling slightly. "He died in April. Adam here was born the following December."

"His mother managed to scrape a living for them both", Sam continued, "but she died recently. She had a brother, who wished to force Adam into marriage. He ran rather than face that; he knew where his father came from, and made it here a few weeks ago."

"A half-brother", Castiel says softly. He looks at Dean, clearly waiting for some reaction from the omega, but Dean is still stunned.

"What do you want?" he blurts out.

"Dean!" his mother snaps. Castiel's grip on his hand tightens momentarily, but relaxes almost at once.

"I didn't mean it like that", Dean says defensively. "You're my brother – well, half-brother – but why are you here?"

"I have nowhere else to go", Adam says simply.

It suddenly strikes Dean that this could so easily be him; indeed, as an omega it would be much more likely he could be the one sat there fearing for his future. He manages a smile.

"Welcome to the family", he says.

+++++

The shocks of the day are not yet over, it turns out, though Dean is still reeling from the sudden enlargement of his family. He is rarely more grateful for Castiel, whom he knows would back him
whatever he decides in this matter. He knows that, in a way most people would call typically omega, he is all but draped over his husband, but he does not care. And the warning look and unsubtle growl that said husband shot his brother when he looked set to make a comment on it (and just possibly Sam's abject look of terror in response) were more than a little enjoyable.

Dean is also man enough to admit that another omega, even one who is family and under-age, is something he instinctively feels as a threat. Despite this, he is beginning to feel back together again when a servant rushes in and whispers something to Sam, who pales.

“What, here?” he says, clearly alarmed.

The servant nods and leaves. Sam hurries outside, first into the courtyard then to the archway leading out onto the main road through the village. They are only just in time.

A procession of some thirty horses is riding through the village, and moving at a fair pace. This in itself would be unusual enough, but it is one of the riders, almost hidden by the four riding point around him, who draws all their attentions. A short man, his clothes are notably finer than everyone else's, and he has a look of contentment about him. The group ride on, and in minutes all that remains of them is the dust they have raised in the Warwickshire afternoon.

They all know that they have just seen the King of England.

“He must be going to meet the Queen and the arms she has brought from abroad”, Castiel says sombrelly. “I knew that there was a rumour that he might so do, but since they were supposed to meet on the battlefield of Edge Hill that started this sorry war, I rather assumed he would head up the Banbury road past Nowhere.”

“And our cottage”, Dean says quietly.

“Both are hidden from the main road, so there should be no danger”, Castiel says, though he does not look happy. “We had best adjourn for supper. London has many attractions, Mary, but none I have found yet to rival your wonderful cooking.”

Dean smiles at his mother's blush. His husband is such a charmer.

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Friday 15th July, 1643

Castiel opts to remain an extra day in the village, and he and Dean take a walk up to the Stones.

“It is good for you to have time with your now extended family”, he tells Dean as they walk along the ridge above the village, “but I also want to avoid the King and Queen. They cannot bring their guns down this poor road, even in summer, so will have to take the one past Nowhere. I did not want to leave precipitately and run the risk of meeting His Majesty a second time.”

“He would not have you arrested?” Dean asks.

“Not whilst Raphael funds part of his army”, Castiel smiles. “This year, as I feared, will be one of holding on for us. I expect the Scots to join on our side ere long – the king was foolish to entertain an Irish alliance, as it has driven them to support us – but we could still be beaten in the interim. I fear we may lose Bristol and Exeter, but if we hold Hull and Plymouth we should weather the storm.”

“I quite like Adam”, Dean says. “He is going to stay here until he reaches eighteen, then we will
have to find him something or other.”

“I will help if you wish it”, Castiel offers. Dean smiles.

“And you offered without me asking”, he smiles. “That is why I love you.”

Castiel looks behind him, and Dean turns. They are back at the main road into the village, where there is a familiar old barn....

Oh.

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Wednesday 27th July, 1643

“It is as I feared”, Castiel says. “We must return to London tomorrow. Bristol has fallen.”

“You did say you expected it”, Dean says.

“Yes”, Castiel admits, “but it is still a heavy blow. The king now has a major western capital, some captured ships, mastery of the lower Severn – the only small ray of light is that Rupert's men took heavy casualties. We can but hope it delays his move on Gloucester, which will surely come next.”

“And that we do not run into any more soldiers who throw their weight around”, Dean says.

“Though at least I have my brave alpha to protect me.”

“You so do”, Castiel smiles. “And I accept payment for my services in sex, which I am sure you do not mind. I have already written to Gadreel and Ezekiel to prepare the house for our return.”

Dean nods. Castiel grins.

“And to tell them to make sure Charlie bakes some extra pies.”

“Yes!”

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Notes:

1) Battle of Roundway Down. Slightly outnumbered, Hopton was able to perfectly time a sortie from the unfortified town to coincide with an attack from a relief force. Six hundred parliamentarians were killed and around a thousand captured, in total about a third of the entire army.
August-September 1643

Chapter Summary

32: The war turns on Gloucester, as the king attempts to secure control of the important Severn Valley. Castiel and Dean return to London and watch as the Earl of Essex rides to its rescue, taking him uncomfortably near Dean's mother's house. The siege is lifted, but.....

Wednesday 2nd August, 1644

The two of them are back in London, and Castiel seems more depressed than ever. Yesterday (and everyone knew this despite the censor laws) the king had entered Bristol in triumph, and now all eyes were turning to Gloucester, the last town held for parliament in the western county.

“Even the east is threatened now”, Castiel says darkly as he returns home that evening. “Cromwell did manage a small victory at Gainsborough, but has been forced to retreat because Newcastle has him totally outnumbered. If they secure Lincolnshire, then they could also push across towards the west Midlands and cut us off from the North completely. It is all very bad.”

“How is the Commons taking it?” Dean asks.

“Pym has reformed the Council of Safety and made it smaller”, his husband says. “It is now the Council of War, a war we may be about to lose. Newcastle could send the bulk of his force down to join Manchester, or he might go back and besiege Hull. I hope the latter; I feel confident in Fairfax and our Navy being able to hold him off there.”

“And Gloucester?” Dean asks.

“We shall have to send Essex to relieve it”, Castiel says. “More expense, and people object more to paying for a war that they feel they are losing. At least the talks with the Scots seem to be bearing fruit, from what I hear.”

“You think they can be brought in to support you?” Dean asks dubiously. “In the false hope that England will also become Presbyterian?”

“There are so many shades of Protestantism now that I doubt they expect a full conversion”, Castiel says. “But the countries moving together on a religious level can only be a good thing. It is only since the Union of the Crowns that England is able to look to expand in the Americas, which is just as well given how many of our enemies are doing the same.”

“And our enemies are not beset by civil war”, Dean points out. Castiel shakes his head.

“Portugal (1) and the Netherlands (2) are both trying to assert their independence from Spain, France is meddling in the wars in Germany (3) in the hope of territorial gains, whilst Denmark (4) and Sweden are only minor players. We could do great things across the ocean, if only we could end this terrible conflict.”

“Have you ever thought of going there?” Dean wonders. Castiel shakes his head and smiles.
\textbf{Monday 7th August, 1643}

The bad news had continued to trickle in through the weekend. After the fall of Bristol, royalist armies had swept into Dorsetshire and taken Dorchester and the twin ports of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, leaving parliament with only Poole on the eastern fringe of the county.

“Though that we can supply that place by sea”, Castiel says with a sigh. “And we lost three more members of the Upper House today, after their hare-brained scheme for peace was thrown out by the Commons. The remaining Lords are sulking now, and Pym is stressed out trying to soothe all their ruffled feathers. Thank heaven for Gloucester.”

Dean frowns.

“I thought you said that it was under siege”, he says.

“It is”, Castiel says, “or soon will be – the king is marching on it any day, we hear - but it seems to have roused London from its current depression. That is one of our few advantages, in that our Trained Bands are prepared to fight away from the city in times of extreme peril. And these are such times. Some reports put the armies the king is massing in excess of fifty thousand.”

“An exaggeration, surely?” Dean says. Castiel nods.

“True”, he says, “and many of them will be local men drawn from forts in the county, who will return to their home towns once an enemy army approaches. But if Gloucester falls, the king will control everything in that area, and be able to bring in even more men from Wales. We must save it, at whatever cost!”

\textbf{Thursday 24th August, 1643}

“Thank heaven for those cannon!” Castiel mutters as he reads his latest letters.

“What cannon?” Dean asks, confused.

“The king decided that the siege of Gloucester was proceeding too slowly, so he asked Prince Rupert to bring over a huge cannon from abroad”, Castiel explains with a smile. “Not only has the delay enabled Essex to ready his army – they should finally be off come Saturday, thank the Lord! - but when they did finally get the thing into position they pointed it straight at the cathedral. It seems that the Good Lord was not impressed with such impiety, and the thing exploded on its first firing.”

“Modern technology”, Dean mutters. “Like guns, you just do not know which end is the more dangerous.”

“In this case, it proved to be both”, Castiel smiles. “And apparently the king still trusts the Duke of Hamilton, despite the fact that the man is the original self-serving nobleman par excellence.”

“So many are”, Dean sighs. Castiel shoots him a sharp look, and the omega feigns innocence. The
alpha huffs.

“Montrose, a moderate man, tried to tell him that Hamilton cannot be trusted”, Castiel says, “but the king ignored him. Very foolish, as the Scots will surely be over the Border around the end of the year. And that will change the situation in the North completely, provided of course we still hold Hull. I am surprised that Newcastle has not besieged it already.”

“He soon will, I suppose”, Dean sighs. “Does Essex have enough men to fight the king at Gloucester?”

“I think so”, Castiel says. “I did wonder if the king might consider a direct attack on London instead, but he is a cautious man, and Gloucester is a prize worth having. Well, we shall soon see.”

Friday 1st September, 1643

Dean stares out into the evening gloom, as the rain pelts down onto the street outside.

“More rain”, he grumbles. “This is supposed to be summer, damnation!”

“We at least have cause to thank the Lord for it”, Castiel smiles. He looks tired, the omega notes, but he smiles as the alpha crosses the room and envelops him in an embrace. He leans back and sighs happily.

“Why?” he asks quietly.

“Essex must be barely halfway to Gloucester, and the king’s men had been trying to dig tunnels to undermine the walls”, Castiel explains. “But the latest report we have is that all this rain has flooded them and made them useless. Rather hard to place mines (5) in a lake!”

“So far the Lord seems to be supporting Gloucester”, Dean concedes. “But you said that the news from elsewhere is less good?”

Castiel nods, and kisses the back of his mate's neck.

“Prince Maurice is besieging Exeter, which will fall any day now”, he says. “Though that is good in a way; those troops could otherwise have been at Gloucester. We lost Bideford, our last outpost in north Devonshire, yesterday, and Newcastle has taken the town of Beverley, capital of the East Riding, which means that he will be besieging Hull tomorrow or Sunday. The Scots cannot come soon enough.”

“It seems a bit off, inviting an enemy in like this”, Dean mutters. There is no particular need for them to be quiet, but the unusual silence of the city beyond the walls of the house seems to demand it tonight.

“My enemy's enemy is my friend”, Castiel quotes. “No-one is sure who first said that, but it is true. At least until the war is over, when history suggests that the new 'friends' tend to fall out very quickly. But we shall cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Tuesday 5th September, 1643

Dean scowls at his husband. Though bearing in mind the fact that they are currently tied together
and that Castiel has as usual spooned round behind him and is holding him very firmly in place, it is pretty much pointless. Still, point to make here.

“You waited to tell me this until I was not in a position to complain”, he complains.

“You like this position”, Castiel reminds him, and shifts slightly. His knot does things to the omega's insides that renders talking impossible for the next sixty seconds, at least until Dean's eyes have stopped watering. The omega retaliates by clenching around the invading knot, but all that achieves is to make his husband mutter, “oh Lord above, do that again!”, which is not exactly the desired effect. Damnation!

“Sammy was not in any danger?” Dean asks, still annoyed. His husband had just told him that Prince Rupert's forces had tried unsuccessfully to force a split between Essex's main army and the London Trained Bands, which had fallen behind somewhat. And he had done it at Norton, less than five miles from Dean's mother's house.

“One of his servants was in Norton at the time, and went back to tell him”, Castiel says, gently rubbing his hands over his trapped mate and earning a sulky not-purr. Dean is never more cute that when he is like this, and part of Castiel wants to tease him even more to see that glorious huff-pout combination. Fortunately – perhaps unfortunately – he loves his wonderful mate too much for that.

Well, perhaps later.

“Essex was moving east to west, in from Brackley”, Castiel explains, smiling to himself as he feels his mate melt into his embrace. “I am surprised; I expected him to go through Stratford instead and come towards Gloucester from the north to try to surprise the king. He must be at the city by now. I wish we had some way of knowing sooner what is happening.”

“Will there be a battle?” Dean asks.

“Yes, but not necessarily around the city”, Castiel says. “It depends what sort of state the king's army is in. He may fear being squeezed between Essex and the city and being attacked on both sides, as happened to us at The Devizes. Or he may choose to hold his ground. I wonder.”

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Wednesday 6th September, 1643

Castiel sweeps into the house at speed. Dean looks up in surprise.

“No battle yet”, the alpha tells his mate. “But the king has withdrawn from Gloucester.”

“Then the siege is over?” Dean asks.

“For now”, Castiel says. “The king has drawn off some place, we know not where.”

Dean stares at him.

“So?” he prompts.

“I begin to fear that we have been out-thought”, Castiel says grimly. “Gloucester may have been merely a side-show. If the king can engage and defeat Essex's army, including our own Trained Bands, then there is little or nothing to stop him making another advance on London. This time... yes, I think that after such a victory he might take the city.”
Dean is silent. Whilst he supports the king, he cannot but feel that a victory for the king would mark the beginning of a long period of revenge on his part. Charles Stuart, he has long realized, does not do forgiveness.

“At least we could go home to the cottage”, he offers. “There has to be peace eventually, surely?”

“Our past civil wars have only ended when one side was either totally defeated or had nothing to fight on for”, Castiel points out. “King Stephen gave up after his son and heir died, King John died during the war he helped create, his son Henry III defeated his rival Simon de Montfort and had his body torn limb from limb, and the Cousins’ Wars ended when the White Rose was totally crushed, its few surviving scions being hunted down for decades afterwards. And now we have a war that involves the very way the country is governed, let alone who governs it. There is some talk of ‘properly raising’ the king’s youngest son Henry as a constitutional monarch, though the boy is but three years of age. I do not see how we can ever have Charles Stuart as king again. Would you trust him, Dean?”

The omega wants to say yes, he really does. But slowly, reluctantly, he shakes his head.

“Essex will enter Gloucester in triumph, if he has not already”, Castiel says, “then he will return to London. Somewhere, the king and Rupert will be waiting for him. This is the most important battle of the war yet, Dean. This could be it.”

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Notes:
1) The Portuguese Restoration War, 1640-1668. The two Iberian crowns had been united back in 1580 but relations across the peninsula had continued to be poor, and the Portuguese were now fighting for their independence. The English Restoration in 1660 proved important in that Charles II married a Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza, helping force an exhausted Spain to peace talks.

2) Castiel was a little way off here. The Dutch, despite fighting for their lives, found time to not only settle the Hudson Valley in the Americas (the New Netherlands) but to also conquer New Sweden (the lower Delaware Valley).

3) ‘Germany’ was not united at this time, but the word was commonly used to refer to the confederation of states that was the Holy Roman Empire. Originally stretching from the Baltic down to the edge of Rome, it had by this time contracted to (roughly) modern Germany, western Poland, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia and western Czechia.

4) Charles’ mother had been a Danish princess, making that country’s current king, Christian IV, Charles’ uncle. Unfortunately, despite an offer to surrender the Orkney Islands back to him, Christian was like his Swedish neighbours still tied up in the Thirty Years War in Germany.

5) One of several available explosives available was the petard (charmingly from the French for ‘breaking wind!’). Its unreliability led to the phrase ‘hoist by your own petard’, i.e. caught when it exploded prematurely.
Chapter Summary

33: Dean takes a slow but memorable journey down the stairs to mark Castiel's birthday, and there is talk about men wearing dresses. The king's run of successes come to an end at Newbury, where an indecisive encounter forces him to retreat to Oxford. A second parliamentarian victory in Lincolnshire removes the threat to the Eastern Association's lands, much to Castiel's relief.

Saturday 16th September, 1643

“We are struggling to raise the money to pay for the Scots army”, Castiel sighs that evening. “Government was never designed to pay for an army full-time, let alone two of the things. But at least the king is helping us.”

“How?” Dean asks, surprised.

“He is signing a formal Cessation with the Confederate Irish, and effectively abandoning his English and Scottish subjects in the island”, Castiel says. “And with Scotland and Ireland so close – I believe the channel between them is barely ten miles across – the Irish may traverse it and threaten Argyllshire. The king is forcing his northern subjects to side against him, and ignoring people like Montrose who counsel against such folly.”

“But he would then be able to bring Irish troops across to help him”, Dean points out. Castiel nods.

“We shall have problems in the north-west in the coming months”, he admits, “and I dare say that some troops will reach the West Country, either directly or via Wales. Whilst he holds Basing House at the top end of Hampshire, a drive to encircle London to the south is always a threat. But at least our ships managed to resupply Plymouth yesterday, despite the siege. Just as well, considering we have lost everything else down there.”

“And Essex?” Dean asks.

“I do not doubt that he would prefer to reach London again without giving battle”, Castiel says, “but I think it unlikely. There are reports that he is moving north on Worcester, up the Severn Valley, but I presume it is only a feint. No, a battle is still coming, and it will be a big one. I hope that he is up to the challenge.”

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Monday 18th September, 1643

Dean wakes from a glorious dream in which his mate is beset by an attack of super-horniness and is pounding him into the mattress like he is trying to find Mecca. It is glorious – though it comes a poor second to his wits finally realizing that it is not a dream, a realization brought forward by the feeling of a familiar knot swelling inside of him. Then Castiel comes with a possessive roar, before falling untidily across his back, panting hard.

“Poor old guy”, Dean teases. “It must be hard being thirty-four. Only six years till you're forty,
The response is a sudden resumption of the thrusting, and the alpha coming a second time. Then Castiel flips them both over before sliding down the bed, and rotating Dean on his knot so the omega faces him. The omega gasps for words.

“That stopped your sass quite effectively”, Castiel grins, “and now I think I am ready for breakfast.”

“The bell is behind you, Cas”, Dean points out, quite proud that he is able to manage a whole sentence even if his eyes are still watering. The alpha grins darkly.

“I am sure Gadreel and Ezekiel can prepare something for us quickly enough”, he grins. “We shall go downstairs.”

Dean looks down his husband’s muscled chest to where they are firmly knotted together, and will be for the best part of the next hour.

“Uh, how?” he snarks, though he knows full well how.

Castiel stands up – typical alpha show-off, Dean thinks – and then begins to walk to the door, still carrying the mate tied to him. The omega squeaks in terror.

“Not the stairs!”

“The stairs!” Castiel grins evilly.

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Ninety minutes and one shared breakfast later, Castiel’s knot has finally gone down and he has slipped out of his shattered mate. Though Dean remains sat facing him on his lap, as any movement makes his insides reiterate their protest at their descent of the stairs earlier. On every damn stair Castiel had stopped and changed his position inside his mate slightly, and before Dean could adjust, the sneaky alpha had descended the next step, using his mate’s weight to force his omega body down even further onto his dick. It had been indescribably agonizing.

And hot. Don’t forget hot!

“Not bad for a thirty-four-year-old”, Castiel grins. “And I am not needed in parliament today, so we can stay home all day. I am really looking forward to this evening.”

Dean begins to have a bad feeling, and not just there.

“Why?” he asks warily.

“Because then I shall then knot you a second time, just before we take the stairs up to bed”, Castiel grins.

Dean’s innards start work on a letter of complaint whilst (incredibly) his cock twitches in anticipation. The omega glares down at it. Traitor!

+N+N+

Tuesday 19th September, 1643

Dean does not remember much of this day.....
Thursday 21st September, 1643

Castiel comes in quietly this evening. Dean watches him anxiously. Everyone knows that the battle that Essex had been trying to avoid would have started yesterday, but as the king's men were between him and London, no news of it had got through. By the look on the alpha's face, today it had.

“Like Edge Hill, Newbury is a draw that is not a draw”, Castiel says darkly. “But this time it is the king who has retreated. Essex writes that after leaving a garrison in Donnington Castle, where we stopped that time, he has taken his men to Oxford. The earl's path to London is open.”

“You do not seem cheered by the news”, Dean observes.

“At least two thousand men dead”, Castiel frowns, “all of them with families. I did not expect a victory for our side, but this uncertainty is dispiriting. Many men will leave for winter and will not come back, nor do I blame them. The Scots cannot come soon enough.”

“What if the Irish come first?” Dean asks.

“I believe that they will be fewer in number and far less organized”, Castiel says, shrugging his shoulders. “And bringing in the Irish will alienate many who have so far been neutral, or at least failed to firmly support one or the other side in this contention. The king was foolish to lose the Scots the way he did, and all for a prayer-book and an insufficiently quick enough apology.”

“Kings do not usually apologize”, Dean observes.

“Except when it may mean saving their crowns, in which case they should do so at once”, Castiel says firmly. “Elizabeth knew when she had gone too far, and always backed down gracefully. Even if the king was crossing his fingers and toes at the time, he should have back-tracked after the prayer-book fiasco. He has lost the Scots for no good reason, and it may cost him the war.”

“You do not think much of the Irish as fighters, then?” Dean asks.

“It is more the situations in Scotland and Ireland than any lack of quality on their part”, Castiel says. “The Scots have only a few Royalists in remote areas, and can afford to send a huge army here safely. The Confederate Irish have still to deal with the Scots settlers in Ulster backed by Edinburgh as well as the English in their coastal fortresses resupplied by the navy, and can only send at best a few thousand men. And because of our control of the seas, getting them across to England will be problematic.”

“But at least parliament still has its army”, Dean says. “And you still hold Plymouth, Gloucester and Hull (1).”

“Two of which are besieged, and only the navy can prevent being lost”, Castiel says. “We are hard pressed, but holding our own. Quite appropriate, really.”

“Huh?”

“Because in a few moments I intend to hard press my omega, and end up holding my own!”

Dean glares at him.

“That was terrible!” he complains.
But when Castiel quirks an eyebrow at him, he still races for the stairs.

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Tuesday 3rd October, 1643

It had only been last week that the Trained Bands had marched through the city, proclaiming their 'victory' at Newbury. Castiel has, unusually, received three letters on the same day, and as he is not needed in the Commons today he is sitting on the couch reading them, a contented and not-purring omega on his lap. His mate is never happier than on days like this, when an early morning knotting is following by some time cu.... holding each other.

Just to be on the safe side though, Castiel has taken the precaution of popping next door to order a pie from Charlie whilst Dean had been having a bath. It is one of the alpha's regrets that their tin bath is not large enough for two, and so far he has been unable to find anywhere that makes such an item, which knowing the sexual proclivities of some in the city surprises him. Perhaps he might send a letter to Rufus and ask him to make one for the cottage?

The alpha opens the second letter.

“The king has taken Reading”, he says calmly. “But that is no loss. With his army so battered after Newbury, Essex did the right thing in withdrawing the garrison there, even if it will make some in the House run around like headless chickens.”

“Does it not leave London exposed?” Dean asks, nestling even further into his alpha, and uttering a sound that is definitely not a purr, whatever anyone says.

“The king's army suffered similar if not worse losses, and he has further weakened it by garrisoning Donnington to provide a link to his outpost at Basing”, Castiel says. “He has not the strength, let alone the fact that his men's morale must be low.”

He opens the third letter, and Dean feels him visibly relax.

“Good news”, he says. “The town of Manchester has beaten off another siege. That is the one theatre of war where the Irish might enable the king to make progress, if he can get enough of them in through Chester. But the Scots will soon come south and extinguish that particular danger.”

“Is it true that the Scots wear dresses?” Dean asks.

“They are called kilts, and apparently are copied from the Romans”, Castiel says. “I dare say they would not be too impressed if you called them dresses!”

Dean is silent. The alpha smiles.

“I wonder how I would look as a Roman soldier?” Castiel muses. “Standing there wearing the armour and the pteruges....”

“The what?” Dean asks.

“That was their version of your 'skirt’”, Castiel says. “Lots of leather strips, some of which were decorated with marks from victorious campaigns. I could be the brave warrior returning from battle, and you could be my willing mate, ready to do anything to welcome me home.”

Dean looks up at him through his eyelashes.
“Anything?” he says tremulously.

“Anything you want”, Castiel promises. “Perhaps on your next birthday....”

“But that's four months away!” Dean objects.

“Something to look forward to, then.”

Dean pouts. Again.

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Saturday 7th October, 1643

There is more news from the front lines. It is not good.

“Some of the king's soldiers have secured Newport Paynel (2)”, Castiel says, “a town just south of Northampton. That is bad. If they can keep it, it will threaten our links with the Midlands and East Anglia. But there is worse.”

“What?” Dean asks.

“Prince Maurice, Rupert's brother, has taken Dartmouth (3)”, Castiel says glumly. “Not that the place itself is worth much except as the last town we held outside Plymouth, but there happened to be a large number of ships in the harbour at the time. It will greatly add to the king's own navy; not enough to openly challenge ours, but certainly to threaten the trade routes we rely on for our income.”

“You look stressed”, Dean says.

“Pym looks worse”, Castiel says. “The strain of holding everything together, now that Hampden is gone, is telling on him. Some of my colleagues are wondering if he is ill. And Essex is sulking because he has been told he has to take his men all the way up Watling Street to Newport. Plus he feels that he did not get the credit he deserved for his magnificent 'victory' at Newbury.”

“He did in all probability save London from attack”, Dean says fairly.

“He did”, Castiel admits, “but he and Waller do not get on. The earl is also annoyed that Waller's last battle was the defeat outside The Devizes, or Roundway Down as they are calling it now, yet 'William the Conqueror' remains as popular as ever in London. Children, both of them!”

His mate smiles.

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Thursday 12th October, 1643

Dean is working in the restaurant when Gadreel comes in with what looks like a number of letters. The omega is about to tell him to take them back and he will open them later when he realizes that they are all addressed to him, and in Castiel's writing. Even stranger, each has a number on it. He opens the first of them:

'Proof that our leaders can co-operate when needed; yesterday Fairfax, Manchester and Cromwell have won a great victory at a place called Winceby that should secure Lincolnshire for us. Newcastle's men are fleeing back to Yorkshire.'
Dean smiles, and opens the second letter:

'Even better, Newcastle has broken off his siege of Hull. Yes!'

Dean smiles again. He opens the third letter:

'When the clock strikes six, one very horny alpha will be arriving at a certain house in Whitehall. It would greatly please him if a certain omega is upstairs, ready and naked except for the red panties he will find in the left bedside table. Said alpha will be very, very horny!'

Dean flushes bright red. He looks up to see Charlie watching him, and blushes some more.

“Do not even say it”, she warns, “or I shall cut off you supply of pie!”

Dean grins, and puts his letters away before getting on with his work. With a definite smile on his face.

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Notes:
1) On the Restoration in 1660, Charles II wrought vengeance on two of these defiant towns. Gloucester had its walls removed, whilst Plymouth was fitted with a new huge fort half of whose guns pointed pointedly at the city they were supposed to be defending. Only Hull, thanks to its connections with Thomas Fairfax, was spared any repercussions.
2) Now Newport Pagnell, a town just north of Watling Street which is the main road between London and Chester. Its position about halfway between Oxford and Newark made it strategically important.
3) A small town in Devonshire, over 200 miles south-west of London. Its deep water port made it important in this time of smaller ships, but it later lost out to larger ports like Portsmouth. Today it is about as car-friendly as Oxford (i.e. not).
Chapter Summary

34: Castiel is Displeased (capital letter not optional) with the twins after they come home drunk and burst in on him and Dean whilst.... well yes, that. The king takes some bad advice from his wife and his nephew makes a dash to cut off London from the north, whilst parliament mourns the loss of its chief organizer. Castiel explains the difference between Independents and Presbyterians, and Dean is not impressed over pie.

Sunday 15th October, 1643

“Rupert has tried to get into Northampton”, Castiel says as they sit at supper that evening. Dean looks up in surprise.

“Huh?” he says. Castiel chuckles.

“I should know better to talk politics when there is pie”, he smiles. “You remember that the queen brought all those arms to the king in Oxford?”

“And we all saw him in Long Compton”, Dean says thoughtfully. “Yes?”

“Well, my sources say that she is not pleased to find that her husband thinks so highly of Prince Rupert”, Castiel says. “I do not think the prince has any ambitions for the crown himself, but the queen knows as well as everyone that his elder brother does, and she feels threatened for her children.”

“So?” Dean says.

“I think she is behind the king’s lack of interest in supporting Rupert’s plans to push towards the east”, Castiel says. “She fears any success might make him even more popular. Spiteful and petty, but very her.”

He takes the knife and cuts a large slice of pie, smiling as his mate’s eyes light up. He places the plate to the side for himself, then makes to cut a much smaller slice for Dean.”

“Cas! Pie!”

His omega is looking at him like he is the beastliest alpha every to be beastly to some poor helpless omega. Castiel struggles not to laugh, and fails, earning himself a major pout – until he passes the large slice to Dean, who whimpers happily as he accepts it. Gadreel places a small jug of custard next to the omega, who thanks him before almost drowning the slice in it.

“No custard for me?” Castiel says mournfully.

Dean looks at him, and blushes. The alpha chuckles.

“All right”, Castiel sighs. “I suppose you deserve it all. Though I shall want lots of sex later to make up for my generosity.”
“Like that deters me!” Dean snarks, before diving into his dessert.

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Saturday 28th October, 1643

“I do not like this persecution of the primate”, Castiel says that evening. Dean looks across at him.

“They are still going after Archbishop Laud?” he asks.

“They are”, Castiel says glumly. “Pym thinks it will give us something to unite around, which given how unpopular he is – well, I can see his point. Oh, and I was right about the queen and Prince Rupert.”

“How?”

“The king failed to support his nephew’s thrust at Newport Paynel, and they have had to withdraw”, Castiel says. “Rupert was furious, and has tried to make good the loss by taking nearby Towcester, right astride the road to Chester. The queen, so I hear, is not happy with his successes.”

“She is not helping her husband, then?” Dean says.

“She calls herself ‘the She-Generalissima’”, Castiel chuckles. “A high opinion and one shared by very few people, let alone justified by any facts. But she is a cipher in all this. As I have said, whether the king wins or loses is immaterial now. Whatever the final settlement, he can no longer be trusted. The question is, what shall we get instead?”

And what is to become of the king, Dean wonders.

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Monday 6th November, 1643

Castiel is Displeased. Gadreel and Ezekiel stand before him, both staring so hard at the floor that Dean wonders if they are trying to will it to open up and swallow them. It might be better than the look currently on their master’s face.

“I am not happy with the pair of you”, Castiel growls. “Stumbling in here drunk after the bonfire, singing loudly enough to wake poor Charlie, then falling into our room when Dean and I were... occupied.”

Dean blushes. The twins had been lucky that Castiel had still been knotted inside him at the time; the roar of a disturbed alpha had done wonders to sober them both up in record time, if a little belatedly. His alpha had been torn between pursuing the interlopers and caring for the omega he was still knotted to, and who may or may not have uttered a plaintive cry – no, it was not a girly shriek – when he had moved. Castiel draws a deep breath.

“You know that I do not mind if you have reasonable consumption of beer when you go out of an evening”, he says, clearly making an effort to contain himself. Dean reaches across and places a hand on his husband’s arm, earning him a smile in return. “But if you bring your inebriation home – in particular, if you enter our room in such a state – then I cannot be held responsible for what may happen. You were fortunate that we were... ahem, tied up.”

Dean tries not to snigger, but fails. Castiel shoots him an exasperated look, and mutters something that sounds suspiciously like ‘girly shriek’. The omega glares at him.
“Let us make sure this never happens again”, Castiel says firmly. “Shoo!”

The twins almost fight each other to get out of the door first. Dean smiles.

“You were surprisingly hard on them”, he observes.

“It has been a hard few days”, Castiel says, “and those two idiots disturbing us in mid-fuck was not appreciated. I am increasingly worried about Pym, who looked dreadful yesterday. And I have learnt that the king has managed to get some Irishmen landed in Somersetshire, and has instructed them to again attempt a circle around London to the south. Waller has been sent to take control of the area, which I suppose will at least keep him and Essex from each other's throats.”

“And now you have drunken servants as well”, Dean says. “Perhaps they really should be punished.”

Castiel looks at him shrewdly.

“No, you are not forcing them to make you extra pie, Dean.”

Damn mind-reading alpha!

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Tuesday 14th November, 1643

The omega is surprised. Tuesday afternoon is one of the quieter times of the week, but the restaurant is bustling. Then his husband hurries in, looking worried.

“I thought it might be busy today”, Castiel says, “especially given the news.”

“What news?” Dean asks. His husband frowns.

“The Trained Bands have mutinied”, he says darkly, “and refused to continue the siege of Basing. They have left poor Waller and have marched back to the city. Hopton and his Irish have a clear path to the south-east if they want it.”

“What about Essex?” Charlie asks, passing him a coffee. He smiles and thanks her; Dean still marvels that his husband can drink the hot beverage without burning his mouth.

“He is still up in the Midlands, keeping a watch on whether Prince Rupert can fortify Towcester”, Castiel says. “At least the news is better there; I understand that the prince rushed back to Oxford to try to persuade his uncle to send more troops, but the king 'claimed' he had none to spare just now. That is stretching the truth a little; his failure at Gloucester means he still has to watch his western front, but I dare say he could find the men if he really wanted to.”

“Or if the queen did not want him to?” Dean asks. Castiel smiles.

“Her petty jealousy could cost the king dear”, he says, “especially after our great victory at Winceby. Lincolnshire will soon be ours again, and controlling Towcester would threaten our links with the area. The king is unwise to let his fears over his nephew's loyalty – which I do not doubt for one moment; he is a fine soldier and a good man – get in the way of that. This is good coffee.”

“I shall make you another cup”, Charlie smiles. “You and coffee are getting as bad as Dean and pie.”

“No-one”, Castiel says solemnly, “can be that bad!”
His omega pouts at him.

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Friday 8th December, 1643

“Pym is dead.”

Dean is not surprised at the news. Parliament's great leader had been visibly fading for the past few months according to Castiel, the stress and strains of the war slowly grinding him down.

“So who will lead the Commons now?” he asks.

“I wonder if we need a leader”, Castiel muses. “Monarchy may literally mean one ruler, but parliament decides things by vote. Vox populi (1).”

“The voice of the people”, Dean says. “Well, the rich, male, non-omega landowning people.”

Castiel gently swats at him.

“We have already come a long way since a ruler was able to choose who sat in parliament with little if any regard to whom was represented therein”, he says. “The system is far from perfect, but we are getting there. Change takes time. We do not want to emulate some countries and have a revolution.”

It was a nice thought.

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Saturday 16th December, 1643

Dean smiles as their bedroom door opens, and a tray with a letter on it is placed onto the nearby table before the door is very firmly shut. The twins have been on their best behaviour since the Guy Fawkes' Night debacle, and are visibly reluctant to enter their bedroom even when summoned. Fortunately Castiel is still sleeping – the alpha growls when the omega moves away, but for once does not pull him back, enabling Dean to fetch the letter for him.

Castiel sits up, looking squinty and generally displeased at the world. He is so adorable first thing in the morning. Dean kisses him.

“I am sure mornings are the devil's doing”, the alpha mutters, opening the letter whilst Dean nestles against him. The omega thinks quietly that so many alphas would never allow their mates to be with them when doing anything remotely official, but then his Cas is unique.

His cock twitches, reminding him of just how unique after last night's gymnastics. Unique and so damn flexible!

“News?” he asks, smiling at the memory.

“Good news”, Castiel smiles. “Hopton has quitted Petersfield. I was seriously worried when he sent men to take Arundel down in Sussex last week – it is close to due south of here - but after his defeat at Alton he has chosen to abandon his push around London. And we shall soon have Arundel back.”

Dean nods.
“Cas”, he says, “what's an Independent? I, uh, read the term somewhere.”

“In a certain royalist newspaper usually published in Oxford, mayhap?” the alpha grins.

His omega's full body flush is wonderful to behold. Castiel takes pity on him.

“They are similar to, but not the same as the Scots Presbyterians”, he says. “The Scots believe in governing their churches by a council of elders, each church having its own prayer-book; that was why the king's imposition of a national one so upset them. The Independents believe that the congregations rather than the elders should be in charge, though both are against bishops on principle.”

“I suppose by congregations you mean rich alphas and betas”, Dean says. “Just a different set of people in charge, it seems to me. No change, really.”

“The religious wars in Europe, Bloody Mary's burnings.... the smallest things in religion can have the gravest consequences”, Castiel says sadly. “The Independents are quite strong in the Commons, and Cromwell is one of their leaders. I rather think we shall hear more of him, especially now that Pym is gone to meet his Maker.”

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Tuesday 26th December, 1643

Dean sighs happily as he lies on the couch. Castiel stares fondly across as his mate, who is smiling as he snoozes. It has, by and large, been a good Christmas.

Well, apart from the arrival of the Scottish delegates to Westminster, who had been less concerned with telling parliament about when their promised army was ever going to cross the damn Tweed, and more concerned with expressing outrage at the way the English still celebrated Christmas (2)! A view that Castiel knew some of his Puritan friends shared, though they generally kept quiet about it as they did not like being (accurately) called killjoys.

As it was the festive season, Dean had been allowed to finish off the pie he had consumed half of yesterday for dinner, which was why he was now sleeping it off and looking so pleased with himself. Castiel loved his mate more than life itself, and it made him very happy to see Dean so content.

The alpha had received news that morning that he had not yet shared with his omega, not because he had sought to keep it from him but because he had wanted Dean to enjoy his pie without any distractions. Parliament had had a narrow escape; a plot to turn over Aylesbury, halfway to Oxford on the Chilterns road, had been discovered just days before it had been due to be put into effect, and the danger averted. But in a few days’ time the Scots’ army would be across the Border, and then hopefully the North would soon be secure. Surely the end of the war was in sight?

His omega belches in his sleep and mutters something about hunting in a bunker, before he rolls over and finds a new position. Lord, but he is so cute!

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Notes:

1) A phrase apparently first used by the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin of York (735-804). He actually used it negatively, advocating against those who proclaimed 'vox populi vox deli’ (the voice of the people is the voice of God).

2) The war against Christmas continued all the way through the forties and fifties, with only
limited success. Puritans never quite grasped why confiscating Christmas dinners and mince pies was so unappreciated by the general public!
Chapter Summary

35: Charlie again resorts to a metal spoon to get her point across to a rather slow beta. The Scots finally invade in support of parliament but make painfully slow progress southwards, though at least Castiel is pleased that Sweden has attacked Denmark (and Norway). And climate change (or as some deniers persist in calling it, bad weather) wrecks the king's position in the north-west.

Wednesday 3rd January, 1644

Dean just knows that he is going to loathe the man the minute he walks into the restaurant, looking around him as if he cannot believe that he has to be here. One of those unctuous little betas who someone has very unwisely given a position of power, and who then see it as their life task to make everyone around them as miserable as possible whilst they carry it out. The little man struts – actually struts, dammit – up to the counter and stares at Charlie.

“Owner!” he snaps imperiously.

Dean is only slowly aware that everyone in the place – and he knows at least two of them are members of parliament – is watching the encounter with interest, if not a degree of trepidation. Charlie's eyes narrow dangerously, and she surreptitiously grabs a large metal spoon from behind the counter. Oh Lord, there is going to be violence.

“I am the owner, sir”, she replies, making the title sound like a sneer. “Did you require anything - apart of course from a sudden and immediate infusion of good manners?”

Someone snorts in laughter. The man reddens.

“You own this place?” he asks incredulously. Charlie emerges from behind the counter, and for the first time he sees the spoon. He shifts his position noticeably.

“Yes”, she says coldly. “Is there a problem?”

“You are aware that parliament has ordained fasting on Wednesday?” the man says, though his voice is definitely nervous. “You, madam, are breaking the law.”

She smiles tartly.

“If you had bothered to check your facts”, she says, “you would have noted that the owner of this site, Lord Castiel Milton, has registered it as a provider of clean water and refreshments for later consumption”, she says acidly. “Therefore we have the right to serve certain food on Wednesday, and to make sure everyone gets their drinks.” She pauses. “And their just desserts!”

She takes a sudden step towards him, and the man yelps and makes a run for it. Dean sniggers, and goes off to see how the latest bunch of pastries is doing.

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Wednesday 17th January, 1644

“You seem happy today”, Dean observes that evening. “Good news from the North?”

“Yes and no.”

The omega stares at him in annoyance.

“Cas!” It is not a whine, no matter how much it sounds like one. The alpha chuckles.

“Not the way you are thinking”, he says. “The Scots are making irritatingly slow progress, and the snows – this winter is even worse than last year’s – do not help. No, the really good news comes from Sweden.”

“Sweden?” The omega is confused.

“Yes. They have attacked King Christian IV of Denmark [1] – the king’s uncle – just as he was looking to try to support his nephew with some ships”, Castiel says. “It could have been very important, especially with Hull still in some danger. The Earl of Newcastle is still master of Yorkshire and the north-east, at least until the Scots fully enter the fray.”

Dean sighs. Castiel grins.

“We may not be fully observing the fast, but the least we can do is to give up desserts”, he smiles. “Though I hear from Oxford that some of the king’s soldiers are hoping that this will be like the ongoing wars in Germany, and last for over twenty-five years.”

Dean stares at him in horror. Twenty-five years without pie every Wednesday. He would be.... older.

“I know what birthday someone has coming up next week”, Castiel teases. “We are going to have no-one in this house still in their twenties, and everyone aged at least....”

“Cas!”

His bastard of a husband sniggers.

Friday 19th January, 1644

“You have not mentioned how things are going without Pym”, Dean says that evening.

“At the moment, they are trying to agree on a new Committee to manage the war”, Castiel says, “one that includes the Scots. Apart from Cromwell, who is away with his ‘low-born men’ as they are most politely called, the lead seems to be being taken by Vane (2) and St. John (3). I trust the latter; he defended Hampden in the Ship-Money case. His wife is distantly related to Cromwell.”

“But you do not trust Vane”, Dean guesses. “I think you have mentioned him before?”

“It was he who secured poor Strafford's death, by leaking information about documents his father had been holding”, Castiel says, frowning. “Some suspect collusion between them; they made up after only a few months, but I doubt that. I also wonder why the boy returned from the New World a few years back; religious differences, I suppose. And some more news from the Midlands; Rupert has slighted Towcester.”
“He has done what?” Dean asks, confused.

“Deliberately ruined the defences so they cannot be used by us, before withdrawing”, Castiel explains. “Once again the king has listened to the queen and failed to support a thrust across our front that could have caused us serious damage. She is doing wonders for our cause. Oh, and I found something else out today."

Dean hesitates. There is a dangerous twinkle in his husband's eyes which he knows all too well.

“What?” he says warily.

“Well, apparently Royalists in London still follow the traditional fasting on Friday”, Castiel grins. “So as you support the king, perhaps....”

“I just looooooove parliament!”

The alpha smirks.

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Wednesday 24th January, 1644

It is just Dean's luck that, the moment parliament decides to move the fasting day to Wednesday, his birthday has to go and fall on that same day of the week. He had tried to persuade his husband that he could make up for his beloved omega's disappointment by giving him pie on the Tuesday and Thursday either side of it, but the alpha hadn't fallen for it. Damnation!

And this birthday was... the one after his twenty-ninth. Yes, his twenty-tenth. That sounded right.

Shut up.

He had been helping Charlie out in the restaurant that afternoon, and was more than a little annoyed that Castiel had come in to see him and insisted on collecting one of the hugest pies that Dean had ever seen Charlie make. And his cruel husband would be making him wait hours until midnight, when Dean would be sneaking out of their bed and heading for the kitchen, propriety be damned!

Castiel places the warm pie on the dining-table, then reaches for a letter. Dean looks at him in confusion.

“I obtained permission from the local priest to do our 'fasting' this week on a Thursday instead”, he smiles. “I did not want you going without pie on your birthday.”

Dean feels himself tearing up.

“Especially when you are now the great age of....”

“Cas! Bad alpha!”

“And you remember that idea about me wearing a Roman pteruges?”

Dean actually feels light-headed as all his blood heads for his lower brain.

“Yes?” he says, in what is definitely not a high-pitched squeal.

Castiel wiggles his eyebrows at him. Oh fuck!
Saturday 27th January, 1644

Castiel does not like to look smug, except on special occasions. And today is one such occasion.

The flow of generally poor news – a few more Lords had gone to the king's own parliament in Oxford, which now boasted about a third of the Commons' usual full strength, and the Scots were still snowbound somewhere in the North – had been interrupted by some excellent and unexpected news from elsewhere.

“I had some fears that the advent of the Irish would enable Lord Byron (4) to sweep the board in Cheshire”, Castiel says. “At the end of last year he had forced our men into the town of Nantwich, and Fairfax was being summoned all the way from Hull to relieve them. At least we have the Scots to thank for that; Newcastle has had to abandon the siege to go and face them. Byron's men massacred a group of civilians at a place called Barthomley last Christmas, smoking them out of the local church and then killing them in cold blood.”

“You never told me about that”, Dean frowns. This is the first day he has been able to sit down without wincing after his 'Roman' experience on his birthday. It seems leather, impossibly, makes his horned husband even hornier.

“I try to spare you some of the worst horrors of this war”, Castiel says. “Evidently the Good Lord was less than pleased with his actions; Byron had his men either side of the Weaver to besiege Nantwich, then just as Fairfax's men came up there was a thaw and the river flooded, breaking the bridge between the two halves of his army. Fairfax has crushed one half, and the other has fled to Chester. Another potential danger has been averted.”

“Now you just need the Scots to get a move on”, Dean says. Castiel nods.

“Hopefully the same thaw will help them, and make the roads easier to pass”, he says. “And I doubt Newcastle will be able to resist trying to save the town that shares his name. Well, when they do finally get into Yorkshire we shall finally see just how and if they can fight after all. Would you like a cushion?”

“Yes, I... damnation!”

The alpha's smirk can probably be seen from Southwark.

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Wednesday 14th February, 1644

Dean likes working on the counter in the restaurant. Not just because of the protection of something solid between him and any alpha or beta who might prove 'difficult' – the vast majority of the bakery's clientele know better than to upset Charlie – but because he enjoys seeing people happy with their purchases.

Today, however, something is a little unusual. Not just because it is technically a fasting day, which means that more people than normal are taking their orders away 'to eat tomorrow' (hmm), but that Charlie is behaving strangely.

“What is up?” Dean asks, when for the third time he notices her slip something extra into the bag he is making up for the customer. In each case it is a smaller bag, already sealed. She grins and waits for the current customer to leave.
“It's Valentine's Day”, she explains, “so I thought it would be nice to reward those of my alpha and beta customers treat their omegas properly. So I am slipping in two extra biscuits for each of them, one with each symbol and each iced with a love-knot.”

Dean does not drool. Even if he does happen to wipe his mouth at that exact moment.

“Did you.... you know?”

“What?” she asks with faux innocence. He glares at her.

“Cas treats me right”, Dean says, not pouting.

“That is why you are having pie tomorrow”, she grins. “Despite how awful your alpha is to me.”

“Why?” Dean asks anxiously. “What did he do?”

“Told me how he plans to make sure you, and I quote, 'work it off afterwards”, she scowls. “A mental image I so did not need!”

She waits for several moments before snapping her fingers in front of the daydreaming omega.

“Dean!”

“Huh?”

“You're as bad as each other!” she sighs. “Romeo and Julian, honestly!”

Dean grins, and looks at her hopefully.

“Yes”, she sighs. “Your biscuits I took through to Ezekiel earlier. I knew if I gave you them here, you'd eat them both.”

“I would not!”

She just looks at him. Damnation, she knows him too well!

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Thursday 29th February, 1644

“I cannot believe how slows the Scots are going”, Castiel fumes. “They have only reached Corbridge, near Hexham. Not even out of Northumberland, and making little impression down the Tyne towards Newcastle. Hopeless!”

“But there is no danger in the North, surely?” Dean says.

“Lady Derby (5) is defying us from her house at Lathom, in Lancashire”, Castiel says ruefully. “She is tying up valuable troops who could otherwise cross the Pennines and retake the West Riding. Though I must say how amusing it is to watch my fellow members fulminate at being outfought by a woman!”

“Almost as bad as an omega”, Dean says nonchalantly. His husband looks sharply at him, but says nothing.

“St. John did ask me if I would wish to be on the new Committee of Both Kingdoms”, Castiel says instead. “It is our new body to bring in the Lords, Commons and Scots to better organize the war.
Each committee we have gets smaller; if this goes on we shall end up with just one person and have to call them the monarch!”

“Why did you not wish to be on it?” Dean asks.

“There are deep divisions between those who, ostensibly, are on our side”, Castiel explains. “Divisions on our own side are in a way more dangerous that what divides us from the king; one only has to look at how the different branches of the Protestant faith tear at each other even more than they do at the Catholics. No, I am best being thought of as neutral, at least until we see what way the wind blows. I am just that mad Puritan who trades in information and who everyone thinks is a little weird.”

Dean says nothing.

“That”, Castiel says archly, “was an opening for a loyal omega mate to step in and say, 'but my beloved, in no way can that describe someone as wonderful as you'.”

“Would saying that get me pie?” Dean asks hopefully.

Castiel looks round for something to throw at him.

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Notes:
1) The Torstenson War (1643-1645). A brief engagement but a significant one; Sweden was able to take advantage of the Danes having been weakened in the Thirty Years’ War, and made territorial gains that, though small in area, consolidated their control of the Baltic Sea and made them the strongest power in that part of Europe for the next half-century.
2) Sir Henry Vane (1613-1662), member of parliament for Hull. Known as Harry to distinguish himself from his father of the same name. His role in the execution of Strafford in leaking documents of his father's was significant if not critical, and he eventually paid for his treachery with his own life when he was beheaded not long after the Restoration in 1660.
3) Oliver St. John (1598-1673), member of parliament for Totnes in Devonshire. He took no part in the king's trial and execution, and he thus avoided vengeance at the Restoration and was allowed to retire from public life.
4) John, Baron Byron (1599-1652). He was also on the losing side at Marston Moor later in the year, and fled into exile soon after. His brother and successor Richard was an ancestor of the famous poet George.
5) Charlotte, Countess of Derby (1599-1664). Her husband got the chop later in the war but she lived long enough to see the Restoration and the return of all the family's ancestral lands to her son Earl Charles. Her descendant Earl Edward was prime minister of the United Kingdom three times (1852, 1858-9 and 1866-8). Quite a gal!
March-April 1644

Chapter Summary

36: Castiel returns from a difficult church service feeling decidedly unholy, to the great joy of Dean if not of Dean's butt. A danger to the south country is narrowly averted, and the king's hopes for a Highland rising to stop the Scots invasion in its tracks come to naught. Dean has a minor family problem to mull over, and almost misses Castiel talking about hunting poodles.

Sunday 10th March, 1644

Castiel is not happy. He has just returned from church, normally a tolerable enough experience except that the normal preacher had been off sick. Worse, he had not even had Dean with him; the omega was down with a serious stomach bug that was so bad, he had even refused pie!

“You do not know how lucky you were to miss that experience”, the alpha says sourly. “Lord, I thought that the man would never shut up! I am offering up extra prayers that Father Bestwood recovers by next week, otherwise I may have to fake a crisis meeting somewhere.”

“You had a letter come”, Dean says, “just moments after you left. I opened it. It says your side has taken a place called Tenby. Where is that?”

“Pembrokeshire”, Castiel says sitting next to his omega and checking his temperature, “the most south-western part of Wales. That is important, especially as we took Milford the other week. Doubly so with the Irish Confederates fifty miles across the seas in Waterford. A base for us in that neck of the woods would make it very difficult for them to cross over.”

“So it is all going your way?” Dean asks. He is better this afternoon, but still does not feel much like eating, damnation.

“Not all”, Castiel says. “I am worried that word has gotten through to call Prince Rupert to the aid of Newark. The Eastern Association needs that town before it can press north and into the southern West Riding. But overall yes, things are going better. Apart from priests who talk too much.”

“At least you are well rested with all that sitting down”, Dean smiles. Castiel shoots him a feral look, and the smile fades.

“I passed much of the time thinking decidedly unholy thoughts about what I would be doing to my mate when I got home”, Castiel says darkly, beginning to remove his shirt. “I had plenty of time to draw up a really, really long list.....”

Glancing down, Dean can see that the list is not the only thing that is really, really long. He grins, and feels even better.

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Saturday 16th March, 1644

Everyone knows that omegas have no power in modern society. Though as Dean once more
reduces his alpha to a quivering wreck (with his more than happy consent), he sometimes thinks that being the third sub-gender is not all bad.

Castiel had come home earlier with a smile on his face after the news from Scotland, which had threatened ill for a few days, had turned good again. Five days back the bold Montrose had crossed the border and seized the town of Dumfries, whilst obviously co-ordinated risings in Stirling and Aberdeen had threatened a pincer movement on Edinburgh. But the Covenant government had (to Castiel's relief and, admittedly, surprise) coped well; the northern rebels had been crushed, and Montrose had retreated back to England rather than face the superior force sent against him.

Yes, Castiel had been pleased with that. Though not as pleased as he is now, judging from the sounds that Dean is wringing out of him as the alpha lies panting and sweating on their bed. His blue eyes gaze unfocused at Dean, who saunters over to the clothes drawer and pulls out the package he had had delivered a few weeks back. And saving for just such a time as this.

Judging from the way the alpha's eyes darken, he guesses that his husband is more than a little happy at his choice of underwear. Black lace panties with slots at the side just large enough for an alpha's hands. Dean saunters over to the bed, and without ado begins to work Castiel's already hard and leaking cock even harder. The alpha whines in protest.

“I wonder if I can get you to pop a knot without even being inside of me?” Dean muses, knowing how his words are driving his husband insane. Castiel could throw him down and have his way with him in a trice, yet the alpha is exhibiting remarkable self-control. “I have read somewhere that it is possible.”

“Less reading books like that”, Castiel grunts. “And a waste of a good knot if it isn't being buried inside of you!”

Dean can actually see the base of his husband's cock beginning to swell, and decides to get this show on the road before it is indeed too late. Fortunately he has already prepped himself before letting Castiel into the room – not that the alpha would ever hurt him, but the one time he had forgot, his husband had actually cried at having to wait whilst prepping his omega. He pushes down easily onto the huge cock, only just in time judging from the growing resistance towards the base. He can feel the alpha expanding inside of him, and words are beyond both of them.

And then Castiel comes.

One day, Dean thinks (once he has the power to think), his husband is going to quite literally blast him over his knot and off of him with the force of his ejaculation. But for now there is only the glorious ache, and the wonderful scent of a fully-sated alpha who pulls him down to rest on top of him and growls a rumbled defiance at anyone who would come between him and his mate. And if Castiel is happy, then Dean is happy.

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Friday 22nd March, 1643

“Bad news”, Castiel sighs. “As I feared, the indomitable Rupert has relieved Newark and is threatening our position in Lincolnshire. If the king had a few more generals like him, we would be in severe trouble.”

“Plus your friends the Scots seem to be coming on very slowly”, Dean says.

“That is mostly bad luck on our side, and good luck on theirs”, Castiel says. “They stopped to pull
their army together at Morpeth, north of the city, and bad weather enabled Newcastle to reach and fortify his namesake town (1). He has pulled back to Durham now, and the town he has left behind will be able to hold out for some time. At least we are doing better elsewhere.”

“Where?” Dean asks.

“Well, with Newcastle having taken most of his troops north, we have pushed our way back into the West Riding”, Castiel says. “Bradford is ours, or what is left of it after it has changed hands yet again. And the garrison in Hull is raiding throughout the East Riding. It helps also that the Scots have taken Sunderland (2), just south of Newcastle, as the harbour means they can secure the Yorkshire coast and free our ships for use elsewhere. It was for us before this, but with no walls it was of little use.”

“But?” Dean prompts.

The alpha looks at him in confusion.

“You are worried about something else”, Dean says.

“You know me too well”, Castiel grumbles. “Yes. Despite getting Arundel back, I am afraid that Hopton's army may use the better weather to sweep towards our iron foundries in Sussex (3). The North is all but lost to the king, I suspect, or will be before the end of this year. His best hope lies in victory in the south, before the Scots can come to our aid. Things are coming to a conclusion – but as of yet we cannot be sure as to which conclusion.”

Friday 29th March, 1643

Dean is worried. His husband is late home, and although he has (of course) sent a message that he is being delayed at the Commons and can Gadreel come down to walk him home, Dean does not like it. The city streets are dangerous, even for an alpha like his wonderful husband. He sends Ezekiel as well.

It is long dark by the time his alpha returns, looking tired but happy. He kisses his omega long and hard in the doorway, their two servants making a point of disappearing very quickly to serve supper.

“I am sorry to be so late out, beloved”, Castiel says, “but important news came in just as we were about to end the sitting. There has been a major battle.”

Dean knows (or at least can guess) from the light in his husband's eyes that this will not be good news for the king, but he waits patiently. The alpha smiles at him.

“As I expected, Hopton tried to push across the South Downs towards Sussex”, he says. “Waller blocked him at a place called Cheriton, about eight miles east of Winchester. It was a close-run thing, but Hopton was forced to retreat back to Basing. The south is saved – again.”

“The god of battles does not appear to be Royalist lately”, Dean muses. “Surely the king would do better to mass all his strength and make one full assault on London? If as seems likely he will lose anyway, why not take a chance?”

“But he believes that, one way or another, he is destined to win”, Castiel says. “You forget that we are entering uncharted waters here. After his last troops are crushed, then what? He cannot be trusted with any power, and unless this idea of raising poor young Prince Henry as a good monarch
bears fruit, who else is there? Not forgetting that once he is beaten, we will still have the Irish to reckon with. And the Scots.”

“Your allies?” Dean asks, confused.

“There is nothing like victory for making allies fall out”, Castiel says. “Many Scots still expect England to become Presbyterian in return for their help, but so far that help has not proven decisive. Well, I suspect that by the end of this year things will be a whole lot clearer.”

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Saturday 13th April, 1644

Castiel's latest letter is one of the longest Dean has ever seen. He knows that an omega opening his alpha's mail is unusual (in the sense aliens dropping down from the Moon would be unusual), but he carefully reads through the whole thing, making notes. Castiel will read it himself later, but he likes to come home and lie with his omega on the couch, letting his mate tell him about his letters and his day in general. Dean thinks it a little odd that each of them finds the other's voice sexy (which Castiel's is, especially when it drops at least an octave before 'developments'), but finds their own voice boring.

He expects his mate home by around six, and Castiel duly enters the house just after the clock strikes. Dean blinks at him.

“What happened to you?” he asks. His husband is covered in coal dust. Castiel scowls.

“Halfway back, a horse carrying a cart of coal sacks bolted right next to us”, he grumbles. “Gadreel went one way, and I the other. He chose right.”

He begins to pull off all his clothes, quite unashamedly. Dean watches fascinated, then suddenly remembers that the curtains are not yet drawn, and rushes to attend to them. Castiel sniggers.

“I still want to hear how your day went”, Castiel says, and Dean turns to find him already fully undressed and sitting on the couch, stroking a very impressive erection. “Have a..... seat.”

Dean shucks out of his clothes almost as fast as his husband, and is soon lowering himself onto his husband sighing happily. There is almost a sort of lazy contentment in their coupling, Castiel knotting him slowly then pulling him round as they they both lie on the couch. He hears the kitchen door open before being very firmly shut; the twins have correctly apprised that supper does not need to be served just yet.

“Any news?” the alpha yawns.

“Yes, from the North”, Dean says, wincing as his husband adjusts his position and does things to the omega's insides that make his eyes water. “Your side has won a battle at a place called Selby, and Newcastle has decided to retreat to defend the country's third city.”

“A wise move on his part”, Castiel says. “Selby is in the southern part of the West Riding, about sixty miles above Newark, and if we hold that town it means that he cannot expect much help from the south. He has clearly decided to invest all his efforts, or at least his infantry, in defending York. Its walls are formidable enough, I have heard.”

“Do you think that the king will send Prince Rupert again?” Castiel asks.

“I hope not, but I fear he may”, his husband says. “However, he will find York a very different
kettle of fish from Newark. Indeed, with the loss of Selby he may not even be able to get to the place. But we should not underestimate him.”

“I have heard that he has a dog that rides into battle with him”, Dean says.

“A rare white hunting poodle, called Boye (4)”, Castiel says. “I suspect he is too much of a gentleman to inflict battle conditions on the poor animal, but caring for something small, defenceless and cute is an endearing characteristic, especially for an alpha.”

Approximately seventeen seconds pass before Dean realizes.

“Hey!” he yelps indignantly.

Castiel sniggers, and Dean pouts. But at least the apology sex is awesome!

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Tuesday 23rd April, 1644

“And on this day the Scots, having taken four months to travel a hundred and fifty miles, should finally begin investing York. Newcastle will have sent his cavalry to where they can be used elsewhere, probably across the Pennines to try to make it through Lancashire. There is no escape south or north.”

“I feel sorry for all the innocent people trapped inside the city”, Dean says sadly. “This horrible war hurts too many such people.”

Castiel toys gently with his mate's short hair.

“Sam said something in his last letter that upset you, did he not?” he asks gently.

Dean blushes, but nods. Again, it is odd that Castiel lets him read his own private mail but never tries to read letters addressed to his omega, as he knows so many alphas would.

“What was it?” Castiel asks. “Anything I can help you with?”

“Adam wants to join your army”, Dean grouses. “The boy is not yet fourteen, damnation!”

Castiel pulls him into a hug, and holds him for some time before answering.

“Sadly, there are soldiers that age and younger on both sides”, he says heavily. “Why not propose the following to him? Say that I will buy him a commission in a regiment suitable for him, but not until his sixteenth birthday.”

Dean smiles.

“And by that time – what, nearly three years away? - you think it may all be over?”

“One way or another, I rather think it will be”, Castiel says. “Indeed, this business over York may hasten the conclusion, unless Prince Rupert can work another miracle.”

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Notes:
1) Despite the name, Newcastle-upon-Tyne started life as a rebuild of an earlier town called Monkchester whose inhabitants made the mistake of rebelling against the Normans at the end of the eleventh century. Their town was flattened, only for the Normans to realize that a castle on the
Tyne river crossing was actually necessary with the Scots only forty miles north, hence their 'new' castle. Today the entire population of the rest of the county of Northumberland (of which Newcastle is still technically a part) is only slightly greater than the city. As a comparison, the county is about 20% larger than the state of Rhode Island but with less than one-third the population.

2) Some say that the rivalry (as in utter unabiding hatred, eternal loathing and absolute wholesale detestation) between Newcastle and Sunderland, cities about fifteen miles apart, dates from this time. Ships from Sunderland, a small port whose traders had to pay Newcastle's tolls even if they did not use that port, blockaded their rivals at this time, severely disrupting the coal trade. Today both cities' urban areas are about the size of Newark NJ, around a quarter of a million people each. At the time this story is set, the city of York had a population of over 12,000, Newcastle one of around 7,000 and the three villages that constituted Sunderland - Sunderland itself, Bishopwearmouth and Monkwearmouth - around 1,500.

3) The Sussex iron industry was in decline at this point, losing out to works based on the larger rivers in the North. However, that area's split between the two sides meant that the Sussex foundries enjoyed a brief Indian summer of importance due to their position (mostly) safely behind parliamentary lines.

4) Thought by some to be invulnerable to bullets as he could catch them in his teeth. This theory got rather decisively disproved when he was shot after the Battle of Marston Moor later in the year; he had escaped his ties and unfortunately gone looking for his master in the middle of the Royalist retreat, ending up feeling really ruff (sorry!).
May-June 1644

Chapter Summary

37: The changing situation allows Dean and Castiel to return to the cottage, little knowing that it will be the last time they will ever have this pleasure. Their arrival coincides with another death in the family, making Dean increasingly anxious. The king appears to be in trouble, but a fateful mistake by his enemies enables him to turn the tables on them.

Tuesday 7th May, 1644

Castiel stares incredulously at the letter before him.

“News from Lincoln?” Dean asks. The omega knows that his husband is increasingly confident about the situation in the North, despite the threat that Prince Rupert might once more step in and save the king’s bacon.

He wonders if there is any leftover bacon in the kitchen.

“Taken, and Manchester's men are advancing to join Fairfax and the Scots outside York”, Castiel says. “No, this is amazing! How would you feel about a sudden trip home?”

“Huh?”

“The king has decided to pull in his Reading garrison in order to aid Prince Maurice's (1) siege of Lyme (2)”, Castiel says. “Utter foolishness, now we have the men to take advantage of such a lapse! Essex and Waller will be nibbling around Oxford before the month is out, or I'm a Dutchman!”

“How does that mean we go home?” Dean asks.

“Well, if the king abandons Oxford, as he will probably be forced to do, it will mean we can go to the cottage without needing to worry about borders”, Castiel says, still clearly astonished at developments. “Though I may still write to Raphael and see if he can obtain a pass for the next few months, just in case.”

“You think the king will lose his capital?” Dean asks, surprised.

“Oxford's walls are fairly strong”, Castiel says. “But if Waller and Essex can bring their combined strength against it, I would not rate its chances. The king falling back to Worcester would certainly help us no end, in going to and from our home. It would also mean your mother's house is less at risk.”

“I miss the cottage”, Dean sighs. “I know that this house is bigger and we have lots more to do here, but the cottage is so... us.”

“But no Charlie next door”, Castiel points out. “So no pie on demand.”

“We can still get pie”, Dean says. “I wonder if Charlie would like to move to the country one day?”
The bakery in King's Linton isn't very good....."

Castiel laughs and ruffles his mate's hair, earning himself an indignant huff. It is an idea, though.

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Sunday 26th May, 1644

Dean sighs as he reads his husband's latest letter. Said husband is currently lying exhausted on their bed after a very thorough morning love-making session that had left him screaming just how much he loves his omega. No wonder Charlie had complained that she had had to move her bed to the far side of her house!

(Dean did not strut around the house after she had said that. He did not. Much.)


“It must be hard being a Puritan, with all those restrictions on pleasures”, Dean teases. Then he yelps as his husband moves much quicker than he had expected, and pulls him down beside him.

“I do not think you should tease your poor alpha about things that are hard”, Castiel mutters. “I am going to have to wear the loose trousers to the House today. Again.”

“Poor, downtrodden alpha!”


“Your beloved brother – don't look like that! - says that the king has also pulled out of Abingdon”, Dean says. That is less than ten miles south of Oxford. Essex has established an advance post at a place called Headington, which is almost within sight of the city. I would wager the people there are anxious.

“Living there, they have good reason”, Castiel says gravely. “I spoke with St. John the other day, and provided I write to him about any developments, he has no problem with our going to the cottage for a month or so. We should also fit in a visit to your mother's house whilst we are there.”

“I expect the king rode through Norton on his way to Worcester”, Dean says, shuddering at the thought. The still formidable power of the king only a few miles from those he loved. Well, some of those he loved.

“At least we have not had the horrors we hear about in Ireland perpetrated here as yet”, Castiel sighs. “Though I sure that some of those tales were exaggerated, there is usually a kernel of truth in them. I can but hope these terrible wars conclude before we go down that particular highway to Hell.”

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Tuesday 28th May, 1644

They had not ridden through Oxford, skirting it on its north-eastern side and reaching the road to Nowhere and the cottage. There had been no sign of any of the king's men this time; they had seen one party of Essex's men who had stopped them and checked to see who they were, but they had been courteous enough.

Castiel's half-brother Lucifer had done a good job of maintaining the cottage in their absence, and
they returned to find food and a fire ready for them. He had withdrawn (reluctantly, Dean suspected) to his mother's house until they finished their stay. The only jarring note was that the earl had sent a letter that Castiel was to attend on him at the first opportunity, at which the alpha groaned.

“If you go over now”, Dean points out, “you can get it over and done with. And as it is almost dark, he will not want to keep you for long, surely?”

“You do not know my brother”, Castiel grouses. “The man is inordinately fond of the sound of his own voice, something I can only assume the Good Lord arranged because no-one else on the planet would be. But I suppose you are right. I shall go and do my duty.”

“And when you come back, you can do me!” Dean says brightly. The alpha glares at him.

“That is mean!” he grumbles. “Now my mind will be elsewhere all the time my brother may be telling me important things.”

Dean just grins.

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Castiel returns looking ashen-faced. Dean is immediately concerned.

“Has something happened?” he asks.

Castiel nods.

“Raphael's nurse took the boys down for a picnic by the river in Hampton yesterday”, he says dully. “Somehow Edmund slipped away from her when she was not paying attention, and the next thing she knew he had fallen into the river. He had drowned before she could get someone to help get him out.”

The omega pales. Three of the earl's sons dead, and only two remaining between Castiel and the earldom he has so often stated that he never wants. This is not good.

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Wednesday 29th May, 1644

It catches Dean totally off guard. One moment Castiel is reading his letters and the omega is tending the fire, the next he jumps as the alpha snarls angrily.

“Cas?” he says, dropping his firewood onto the hearth and hurrying over to him. “What is wrong?”

Even as he approaches the scent of distressed alpha is palpable. Dean knows that only omegas are supposed to be able to convey emotions through their scents, but he has always been able to read his alpha in the same way. They seem to share a sort of profound bond that allows it.

“We knew Prince Rupert was on his way to try to save York”, Castiel says angrily. “It seems he chose to swing through Lancashire and gather strength there. A good choice; they could benefit from a second ingress for the Irish now that Chester may be coming under threat.”

“But?” Dean prompts. Castiel glares darkly into thin air.

“There has been a massacre of local people at Bolton”, he says. “It may have been a result of miscommunication; the report says the prince attacked as soon as he came upon the town, but he
seems to have done nothing to stop his men committing all manner of foul acts. Stupid, especially for such a fine soldier as he is. Very, very stupid.”

“But your side will read reports of it”, Dean says slowly, “and feel that they can then behave in exactly the same way.”

“Which too many of our men would, given the chance”, Castiel sighs. “Whatever one thinks about him – and even I have my doubts – this is where I admire Cromwell. His men know full well that if they even looked like committing such acts, he would be onto them at once, and Hell would be pleasant in comparison. But most of our army – well.”

“It is sad that people are so poor that joining the army is the only way they can get clothes and money”, Dean says. “There must be a better way to run a country.”

“I dare say”, Castiel says dryly, “that once this war is over, we may well find out if that is true!”

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Wednesday 5th June, 1644

It had been arranged – as much as anything could be arranged in these troubled times – that Dean and Castiel would visit the omega's family today and spend a couple of nights in the village before returning to the cottage. Hence Dean is spending the day with his mother, whilst his husband and brother ride into Norton on estate business. When Castiel returns, Dean knows immediately that something is wrong. He rushes over and instinctively starts to scent his husband, heedless of his family watching on.

“Thank you”, Castiel sighs. “This is bad.”

“What is it?” Mary asks.

“It happened in the town some hours before we got there”, Castiel says heavily. “Waller and Essex met – and you know that there is no love lost between them – and incredibly they have split up.”

“They are not going after the king?” Mary asks. Castiel shakes his head.

“Essex wished to head south to relieve Lyme”, he says. “He fears that Prince Maurice may break into the town, especially because it has no walls. And presumably he thinks Waller is capable of dealing with the king.”

“But you think he is not?” Sam asks.

“I know that the king will be greatly encouraged that he only has to face one army rather than two”, Castiel says. “This is an act of great folly by the pair of them. May the Lord prevent it from costing us too dear.”

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Saturday 15th June, 1644

“I thought you would be happy”, Dean says as they lie tied together that morning. Dean is enjoying being back at the cottage, with nothing to do but just enjoy living day to day away from the hustle and bustle of London.

His husband having ordered a delivery of pies from the bakery in Woodstock may, just possibly, be
a small factor in that happiness. Very small.

“I am pleased that Maurice has been driven off into Devonshire, and that Lyme is safe”, Castiel says. “Though the loss of Liverpool (3) worries me. It is much more accessible than Chester, and will enable the king to bring in more Irish troops, plus it is partly protected by the Isle of Man. And to cap it all there is Rupert. He must be on his way to York right now.”

“Will he have enough men to relieve the city?” Dean wonders. “You did say that there are three armies ranged against him.”

“It is Prince Rupert”, Castiel sighs. “He may support the other side in this contention, but I would not deny that he can be a genius on the battlefield; I am sure it was not his daft idea for the king to abandon Oxford once he was in the North. He has saved the king before; but this time it will be more difficult. His task is one of two things that I know to be very hard.”

Dean has an omega moment, and falls for it.

“What is the other?” he asks, realizing a fraction of a second too late that....

Castiel thrusts deeper in, and Dean's higher senses shut down as he lets out a wail of pleasure. Two pigeons pecking around the cottage garden fly off in a hurry.

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Sunday 30th June, 1644

Castiel groans in annoyance. Dean looks across the room in alarm.

“What has happened?” he asks.

“The worst, just as I feared”, the alpha almost snarls. “I knew Essex and Waller splitting up was a mistake. The king was defeated William the Conqueror just north of Banbury at a place called Cropredy, and will be back in Oxford soon enough. And worse, Waller's army has all but fallen apart.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“The usual reason”, Castiel says with a sigh. “A mixture of barely willing men only in it for the free food and clothes, and locals forced to campaign outside their home county. The reports are that most of his men are slipping away, and he is trying to bring what little remains back to defend London.”

“Do you think the king will attack the capital this time?” Dean asks.

“That depends on his nephew”, Castiel says. “If Rupert can work a miracle around York – and I am sure Fairfax, Manchester and the Scots are all scouring the countryside trying to find him – then he may feel emboldened so to do. He would be wise to do so anyway; the North will be lost to him sooner or later, and only a victory in the south can save him. Or perhaps....”

“Or perhaps what?”

“He may try to hunt down Essex”, Castiel frowns. “Well, as long as the earl has the sense to bring his army back east, we should be safe enough.”

He was to remember those words rather sooner than he would have liked.
Notes:
1) Maurice of the Rhine Palatinate (1620-1652), Prince Rupert's younger brother and only twenty-three at the time. The lifting of the siege damaged his reputation, even though it and subsequent events proved beneficial to the Royalists. Maurice ended up serving with the royalist fleet in exile, and went down near the Virgin Islands when his flagship 'HMS Defiance' was caught in a hurricane.

2) Lyme Regis, a small but strategically important port 150 miles south-west of London. It lies at the centre of the long sweep of Lyme Bay, and was then the westernmost place held for parliament on the south coast apart from Plymouth 75 miles further on. Dorsetshire, Lyme's county, was mostly Royalist, but Lyme served a similar function to its sister city to the west, holding up disproportionately large numbers of troops who could otherwise have been used elsewhere.

3) Then a small port with a population of about 750. Today (2016) is it around 475,000 (c.f. Atlanta), with 2.2 million in the greater metro area.
Chapter Summary

38: Forty thousand men fight at the Battle of Marston Moor, one of the most decisive battles of the war, which goes narrowly to parliament - but the king then pursues the Earl of Essex's army into the west and traps them there, much to Castiel's alarm. The alpha also endures a rare rut - Dean endures it rather more! - and there is talk of invoking the Rhineland Cowboy Option.

Friday 5th July, 1644

For once the news from the war front is slow getting through, and Dean can see that it is driving his husband mad. The last certain news had been that, somehow, Prince Rupert had dodged all three armies lying in wait for him and made it to York, had gone out to give battle – and then nothing.

Until now. The day after they reach Westminster, Castiel comes in from a busy Whitehall looking grave, and Dean stares at him anxiously.

“We have won”, the alpha says quietly. “But it was a damn close run thing!”

“What happened?” Dean asks.

“Rupert came out and offered battle at a place called Long Marston, west of the city”, Castiel says. “It seems that he had a disagreement with one of the other commanders, who held his men back. That may have proven decisive, as Fairfax’s report – we got it two hours ago – says that we held a slight advantage in numbers (1). The prince's cavalry won on one flank and Cromwell's on the other, but our man was able to press home his advantage whilst Rupert could not rein his men in. The king's northern army is finished.”

“You do not seem overly happy at that”, Dean observes.

“As I once said, victory brings almost as many problems as defeat”, Castiel says. “But at least the North is secure. There will be a few isolated strongholds that will hold for the king as long as they can – Scarborough and Lathom, for example – but only victory in the south can save the king now. And despite the disaster at Cropredy, we can send Essex to march on Oxford again now that Lyme is safe.”

“Are you not afraid that the king will defeat him as he defeated Waller?” Dean asks.

“Essex's army is stronger”, Castiel says. “No, barring any mistakes this war is all but won.”

Again, he would soon have cause to rue those words.

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Wednesday 17th July, 1644

Despite it being a Wednesday, the atmosphere in the restaurant is one of celebration. Parliament
has ruled that, to mark the fall of York, people could celebrate today and fast tomorrow instead. Dean suspects that that is also aimed at the few remaining Royalists in the capital who still fast on Friday, making them go two consecutive days without food.

“You are not celebrating?” Dean asks his husband. Castiel has received good news, he has coffee and he has his mate. He should be very happy.

“I am worried about Essex”, Castiel says, frowning. “The Committee sent him to return and defend London, but he has gone haring off to the West Country, presumably looking to catch the Queen. Rumour is that her husband is sending her out of the country for her own safety.”

“Hardly a vote of confidence”, Charlie says, putting a plate with a bun next to the alpha. Castiel smiles in thanks. “Though I dare say many in his court would be glad to see the back of her.”

“Prince Rupert especially, once he makes it back to Oxford”, Castiel agrees. “She has never liked him. But Essex also writes that he thinks the West will support him now that things look lost for the king elsewhere. I fear he has been deceived.”

“Poor Newcastle has also fled the country, after Marston Moor”, Dean says. “That will further dispirit those few in the North who may have considered fighting on. What do you think your armies up there will do once they have taken York?”

“I expect them to move south on Newark”, Castiel says. “It is the king's furthest outpost in the north Midlands, vulnerable on every flank. Once it has fallen, they will doubtless move across country towards Oxford. It is surely only a matter of time, though given how long it has taken them to get this far, maybe some considerable time.”

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Saturday 27th July 1644

With a shyness that is so not like the average alpha, Castiel comes home that evening and asks for a massage. Dean loves kneading oil into his husband's broad back, knowing that the alpha could throw him off with ease but would never do so. And the happy little moans that he always elicits make him very happy.

And hard.

“You can fuck me later”, Castiel mutters sleepily, not exactly helping Dean's problem. The omega chuckles.

“Did you get bad news today?” he asks. He knows that his alpha often asks for his mate to get on top of him when things in general get on top of him. Castiel sighs.

“Essex's dash to the west is looking stupider by the day”, he says morosely. “The king has given chase, and is already at Exeter. Essex should go to Plymouth and relieve the siege there, then stay and give battle if he must.”

“But you think that he will not?” Dean asks.

“He has been duped into thinking Cornwall will change sides at this late stage”, Castiel says scornfully. “Fool! Though if the Committee spent more time agreeing on one set of orders and not fighting amongst itself, even Essex might get the message.”

“Trouble?”
“You remember telling me that Tacitus once said the credit of success is claimed by all, whilst disaster is attributed to no-one?” Castiel asks. “The Scots are sulking because all the papers make Cromwell the hero of Marston, and Manchester is angry because he is technically Cromwell's superior officer.”

“Jealousy.” Dean presses down on a particular spot, and the alpha beneath him lets out an inhuman sound.

“Oh Lord!

“No, just your mate”, Dean grins. “But you may call me Lord if you wish.”

Castiel just grunts as his omega moves to start prepping him. He is one lucky alpha!

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Saturday 17th August, 1644

Dean knows that his husband is dedicated to his job as a member of parliament, which is why he is surprised when the alpha returns home in the middle of the day. Parliamentary sittings are fairly regular, and Castiel always tells him if there is going to be a change. As it happens Dean is upstairs in their bedroom when he sees his husband walking down the street – faster than usual, he notes – so he closes his book and goes down to meet him. He is on the stairs when the alpha enters the house, and it takes barely two seconds before the scent reaches him, making him freeze in his descent.

Rut!

Castiel snarls. Dean turns and runs.

Sometimes he wonders if his mate really is the angel he is named for, because Castiel almost beats him to the bedroom, despite having over twice the distance to cover. Dean is two steps into the room before he is being pressed against the wall, his husband nibbling his neck and moaning as if in pain.

“Cas?”

The usually sea-blue eyes are dark with passion, and Dean feels a moment of fear. Then he sees that Castiel's eyes are watering, and he realizes just how much control the alpha is exerting to stop him tearing the omega's clothes from his body and taking him right now. He smiles and gently plays with his husband's hair, something he knows helps to relax him.

“Let me save you the cost of a new outfit by getting my clothes off undamaged”, he says gently, “then you can go to town.”

Castiel's breathing somehow increases still further and he nods frantically, before suddenly realizing that it would be better if he too was naked. Dean would laugh at the fumbling alpha before him, but he knows he is going to need all his energy over the next few days.

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Friday 23rd August, 1644

Dean lies on the couch – face-down, of course – and grunts. He doubts that he has ever been quite so sore in his entire existence, and his husband's smirk from across the room is not helping matters.
“Hullo, you sex-mad duo!” Charlie smiles, bouncing into the room. “I brought pie, but I suppose Dean is unable to sit up and have any.”

“Plate me some up and get me a spoon”, Dean grousers. “I worked damn hard the past few days!”

“I know”, Charlie grins. “I heard. So did my customers. And most of Whitehall!”

“Alpha ruts are few and potent”, Castiel says sonorously (Dean seriously considers hitting him). “I can only assume that all the stress lately triggered one in me. Fortunately I had Dean. Several dozen times.”

“Not helping”, Dean mutters into his pillow.

“Well, I am afraid that I am going to add to your stress even more”, Charlie says ruefully. “Have you heard the latest from the front?”

“Only that that idiot Essex is still heading west, with the king close behind”, Castiel says. “And parliament is cheered because of the victory at Ormskirk (3), which secures the north-west. Why? Have you heard something?

“The king has defeated your man near Lostwithiel in Cornwall”, she says, “and he has fallen back to Fowey. They are just names to me, though.”

“I wish they were just names to me”, Castiel groans. “This is disastrous, especially as the men we sent to help him were beaten back at Bridgwater. Fowey is one of the places that the Navy will not be able to get in and save him.”

“Why?” Dean asks into his pillow.

“High cliffs nearby, on which the king will mount his artillery and prevent our ships getting too close”, Castiel says morosely. “Essex is a fool to have let this happen, especially after Waller is in disgrace after the disaster at Cropredy. We really need a proper army with proper leaders.”

“The old guard will not like that”, Charlie says, handing Dean a steaming piece of pie and earning herself a happy whine in return.

“The old guard have had their chance”, Castiel says. “Cromwell may be a bit extreme in some things, but it really is time the likes of him were given their opportunity, despite what his supposed superiors like Manchester say. Now, I have to go into work and explain why I have been away for so long.”

The omega whines. Charlie laughs at him, and he makes a rude gesture to her.

“Do not do that Dean”, Castiel says in mock reproof, “or I will ‘forget' to stop off and purchase your special aftercare ointment on my way in.”

Dean pouts. But at least he has pie!

He whines again as he sees the little brown jug. Custard too! He loves Charlie!

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Monday 26th August, 1644

Dean stares in surprise at the procession passing up Whitehall. It seems centred around one particularly well-dressed man who looks a little like the king, though it is evidently not him.
Gadreel comes into the room behind the omega.

“That is the king's cousin, the Elector Palatine”, the servant says. “Not that such a title is worth much when you have no lands to go with it.”

“Why is he here?” he asks.

“Because he hopes to become king.”

Dean jumps at his husband's earthy growl. Honestly, the man moves like the angel he is named for at times! Dean did not even hear him come in. The alpha comes up and stands behind the omega, pulling him into an embrace.

“Charles Louis out there knows that there can never be any trust between king and country in London”, Castiel explains. “He knows parliament is looking for an alternative, so he is offering himself up. He made offers to come here, and parliament decided to let him.”

“Why?” Dean asks. “Are they considering offering him the crown?”

“Hardly”, Castiel smiles, “but think of the trouble it will cause the king. The prince out there is unmarried. If he becomes king and then does not have any children, who is next in line?”

“His brother Rupert”, Dean says, his eyes widening. “Ah.”

“Yes”, Castiel says, “that is exactly what the king will think. That his top general is angling for his own brother to become king of England, so that one day there may perhaps be a King Rupert. Even if the man out there becomes king and does have children, Rupert and Maurice would be set for life. It is a clever way of sowing trouble in the enemy camp.”

“But parliament has no intention of making him Charles the Second?” Dean asks.

“I very much doubt it”, Castiel says. “The trouble is, in these Pym-less days, I am not sure that even parliament knows what parliament plans as an end-game.”

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Notes:
1) 22,500 parliamentarians versus 17,500 Royalists, of whom around a quarter were killed and a further 1,500 captured. Accounts of the battle vary, and it seems both Cromwell and Manchester had what one might term 'wobbly moments'. The official parliamentarian estimate of their losses – 300 – is probably some way short of the real figure. The tragedy (for the Royalists) is that Rupert only gave battle so quickly because Charles had ordered him to, yet the king's victory three days earlier at Cropredy Bridge meant he no longer needed to. The king seems to have failed to try to let his nephew know this somewhat important fact.
2) Tacitus (56-117), Roman senator and historian. A quote often wrongly attributed to President John F. Kennedy. Dean is an exceptionally well-read omega!
3) The follow-up to Marston Moor, when the Royalist cavalry that had escaped from York was soundly defeated in Lancashire. It left the North virtually all parliamentarian except for a few small and isolated Royalist outposts.
September-December 1644

Chapter Summary

39: Although the North is now all but secure, things look bad in both the south-west and in Scotland. Having destroyed parliament's second southern army under Essex, the king marches on London, but is stopped at a second battle fought at Newbury and decides to retreat on Oxford. Castiel considers panem et circenses over a clerical execution.

Tuesday 3rd September, 1644

Dean knows that Castiel is nervous. Not just for news from the front – the ongoing disaster in Cornwall concerns him greatly – but because of the bed. Which is why Dean is keeping to his promise and spending the day in the bakery, whilst a group of beta workmen assemble their new bed.

(In case the reader is wondering, the old bed was somewhat damaged by the rut. They had both though that it had come through unscathed – unlike a sizeable part of Dean's wardrobe – but some particularly energetic riding by Dean two nights back had caused the whole thing to collapse, though fortunately the posts had held the canopy from falling on them. They had both promptly fallen about laughing, though when he realized he would have to have men in the same house as his mate, Castiel had soon stopped. This is the third time this has happened; the alpha will be getting a bad name amongst furniture-makers (and lots of envious looks from other alphas when he 'accidentally' slips it into the conversation).

Castiel had been reluctant to go to the Commons that morning despite Dean's promise, and the omega had had to promise him a very thorough blow-job in the evening to persuade him. It was only when the alpha had departed that Dean was left with the distinct feeling that he might have been had. Ah well, swings and roundabouts.

The alpha arrives back early that evening, and Dean knows even before the scent hits him that the news is not good.

"It is worse than I feared", his husband says morosely. "Montrose has slipped into Scotland and joined that Irish raiding party, and then somehow defeated the Covenanters at a place called Tibbermore (1) near Perth."

"Surely Scotland cannot be in danger from just one raiding party?" Dean says.

"The Scots dithering around York will be reluctant to push on until their homeland is one hundred per cent secure", Castiel says. "And the news from the West is almost as bad. Most of Essex's army has surrendered to the king in Cornwall. The 'great general' himself escaped by boat; I am not sure whether that is a good or a bad thing."

"Most?"

"He managed to somehow get the cavalry away to Plymouth", Castiel says. "A few thousand left of one of our major armies, not counting whatever disarmed rabble the king lets through to us. I
shall say it again; we cannot keep losing battles because of people like Essex. Something must be done!"

“That is easy to say”, Dean says. “Can the Commons do anything, though? Without upsetting the Lords, of whom both Essex and Manchester are members?”

“We shall see”, Castiel says grimly. “In the meantime, we have to get an army between us and the king. It is still summer in England, and I would bet a large part of the estate that he will make some move on London before the year is out. With the North lost to him, he would be a fool not to.”

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Wednesday 18th September, 1644

It had been another tiring day, not helped by the obligatory midweek fasting (though Castiel had noted that the number of honourable members who excused themselves for suspiciously long 'bathroom breaks' was notably higher on such days). And Charlie stays open for longer on Wednesdays now, reporting a sharp increase in the number of people buying food 'for tomorrow'. Hmm.

The alpha can not but feel that Cromwell's allies are plotting something, though as yet he has no idea what. But he suspects that it will be aimed at forcing the unreliable Essex out of his post, as well as the indifferent Manchester, whilst allowing the Independent to somehow remain. And to cap it all Castiel himself has turned thirty-five today. At least the morning blow-job – his omega had the best ways of waking him up! - had left him happy, if perilously close to being late in as he had not been able to find his loose trousers.

The news since the start of the month has been mixed. The Scots are still encamped outside a defiant Newcastle, whilst the battered remnants of Essex's defeated army are slowly traipsing into Portsmouth, lowering morale as they arrive. The king had tentatively probed at Plymouth but seemingly decided that it was too strong for him, and was now marching towards Exeter (and presumably London). On the plus side, recent victories at Oswestry and Montgomery in the Welsh March have cut the direct links between the king's Oxford pocket and the port of Chester. And the fall of York means that Manchester's Eastern Association army can be released to come to London's aid which, given the mess Essex has made in the south-west, is just as well.

The news from Scotland, on the other hand, continues depressing. Montrose had evaded the armies sent after him and sacked Aberdeen before drawing off into the endless hills of the Far North. And the Scots are increasingly resentful, both of the failure of the English to enforce Presbyterianism – Cromwell is a leading light against that, too – and what they see (with some justification) as their efforts at Marston Moor not being recognized.

Castiel sighs as he opens the door, and walks into an empty house, though he can hear one of the servants in the kitchen. There is a folded note on the small table in the hall, which he opens and reads:

'Saw you coming', it reads. 'I am upstairs, horny and, by now, fully prepped. And wearing a new pair of panties. Happy birthday from your humble little omega'.

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Moments later, Gadreel and Ezekiel grin at each other as they hear the sound of their master almost falling over his own feet as he races up the stairs, making a keening sound that can only be described as over-eager and then some. A short time later someone yells 'Hallelujah!'. It is not clear
who, and neither of the twins feels the least bit inclined to investigate.

Friday 27th September, 1644

Castiel walks slowly into the main room, his face expressionless. Dean looks at him anxiously.

“The king has lost”, the alpha says. “In terms of numbers and casualties it was a claimable draw, but this was his last chance to move on London. It will all be over within a twelvemonth.”

“How did it happen?” Dean asks. Castiel sighs.

“We may well have won, or at least have caused him much more damage had our men been better led”, the alpha says heavily. “They met the king at Newbury again, would you believe it? Despite our having about twice as many men and managing to encircle him, he got away to Oxford. And neither Essex nor Manchester could be bothered to give chase! I have said it before and I say it again now; we need an end to such so-called leadership.”

“The king still holds Donnington and Basing, then”, Dean says. Castiel nods.

“But not for too much longer, I would wager”, he says firmly. “The temper of the Commons has been steadily worsening at such results, and I think they are about ready to actually do something. We need an end to this war, even if no-one seems to have thought through to what happens thereafter.”

“What would you like to see?” Dean asks.

“The king cannot be trusted”, Castiel says, “and many are of the opinion that his two eldest sons are too ingrained with his own ideas. I can see the attractions of the raising young Prince Henry – ‘Henry IX’ - to be a new type of monarch, one with reduced powers. Certain it is that we cannot trust his father.”

“And perhaps make parliament fairer”, Dean suggests. “Possibly even votes for omegas one day?”

“Remember that poor Simon de Montfort was destroyed because of opposition to even a small shift towards fairer voting”, Castiel warns. “But when the time is right and there is enough support, maybe. Possibly even votes for women one day. I can imagine Charlie making a good politician - if not a terrifying one!”

Ezekiel comes in and whispers something to Castiel, who says something quietly before he leaves.

“Something up?” Dean asks.

“We are facing reduced supplies of coal, because the Scots have taken to using their new acquisition of Newcastle to blackmail us into paying them the money we owe”, Castiel says. “We should never have fallen into debt in the first place, in my opinion. We shall have to make do with firewood for some time, as Charlie obviously needs coal for her ovens.”

“That's so considerate”, Dean says. His alpha smiles.

“It's self-preservation”, he says. “No ovens means no pie.”

Dean stares at him in abject horror. No.... pie?

“I will always find pie for you, Dean”, Castiel reassures him. “No matter how far I have to go to
The omega looks adoringly at him.

Thursday 31st October

“I was fearful that this might happen”, Castiel says with a sigh. “The Commons is to finally push for a Bill of Attainder against poor old Archbishop Laud. I know he is partly responsible for this whole mess, what with that dratted prayer-book he tried to force on the Scots, but this is merely to distract the City from not having enough coal for the coming winter. Panem et circenses.”

“What?”

“Bread and circuses, as Juvenal (2) so rightly said”, Castiel smiles. “In other words, give the people food and entertainment – even if that entertainment is watching someone get beheaded – and they will be happy.”

“Attainder”, Dean muses. “Is that not what they did against Strafford?”

Castiel nods.

“It is basically an admission that the accused cannot be found guilty by an English jury, so parliament uses a legal device to convict him ‘on the balance of probability’”, he sneers. “I know such things were arguably necessary in the past when the king had greater powers, but using them now seems wrong. Especially with the war so nearly over.”

“Nearly?”

“Our reports are that the king has amassed an army of some fifteen thousand around Oxford”, Castiel says. “But we can put more than that against him, let alone the Trained Bands, and bring the Scots in now Newcastle is secure. He has his pocket of land, but he has not the strength to break out of it, whilst we shall soon have the power to break in. Not this year – winter will save him for now – but next summer, I hope we shall see this whole dastardly business laid to rest.”

Saturday 16th November, 1644

“I cannot believe that the Earl of Manchester actually said that!” Dean says, shaking his head. “I mean, I know many are thinking it, but when people think you are questionable in your commitment to the war, the one thing you do not give them is give them verbal proof.”

“Talking of which, I love your alpha”, Charlie says. “He is the only thing keeping me going, letting me have his coal allowance. I am going to have to put a limit to people coming into the place, as I think quite a few only come for the fire.”

“He is mine!” Dean says defensively, sticking his tongue out at the redhead and earning himself a chuckle. “Hands off!”

“So what exactly did Manchester say?” she asks. “You know how it is in the papers; they always seem to get it wrong.”

“Cas heard it from someone who was in the Lords (3) when he said it”, Dean says. “If we beat the
King ninety and nine times yet he is king still, and so will his posterity be after him; but if the King beat us once, we shall be all hanged, and our posterity be made slaves. He smiles as his friend laughs at the pompous voice he uses. “I suppose that he is right but it sounds very defeatist, and will make those who distrust him – he is more inclined to a settlement than many - feel vindicated.”

“I thought that they were trying for peace?” Charlie says. Dean sighs.

“There are negotiations”, he says, “but Cas says that the king will not budge. He will feel confident having survived Newbury against the odds, and secured his two southern outposts at Donnington and Basing. No, he will not give ground until he is defeated and has no armies left. Then....”

“No-one knows”, Dean shrugs. “And few apart from my alpha – whom you are not having, my lady, so hands off! - seem to have thought it through.”

“How nice to have a dreamy alpha like that!” she beams. “Those eyes, that hair, those muscles....”

“One muscle in particular!” Dean grins. The look on his friend’s face as she gets it is priceless. “Euw!”

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Thursday 19th December, 1644

“It is truly said that one should never let a crisis go to waste (4)”, Castiel muses that evening. “Because today I saw someone make good use of the latest twists and turns of this conflict.”

“I thought everything was closing down for winter?” Dean says.

“So did the Scots”, Castiel says, “until Montrose descended on the Campbell capital at Inveraray and sacked the place. That he and his Irishmen can strike at the heartlands of possibly the greatest Clan in Scotland – well, it will make many Scots in the North look over their shoulder and wonder if they should not be returning home to defend their native lands, rather than fighting for us.”

“They would not pull back, surely?”

“Unpaid, unloved, and with allies who do not keep their word”, Castiel says. “It is not beyond the realms of possibility. But Cromwell and his allies have made good use of the bad news to push through their version of reform of the army.”

“You said it was needed”, Dean says. “What have they done?”

“The Commons has passed something called the Self-Denying Ordinance”, Castiel says. “Basically it means that no member of either our house or the Lords can be an army leader. It would force Essex and Manchester to resign.”

“But Cromwell is a member as well”, Dean points out. Castiel chuckles.

“We are dealing with lawyers and lawmakers here”, he says airily. “I am one hundred per cent sure that some loophole will be found to enable our most able commander to keep his post, even if neither the Scots – who detest him – or the Lords – who detest him more - realize it. The danger is that it will cause a breach between the two houses when the Lords reject that move.”
“So it will fail?” Dean asks.

“Lawyers and lawmakers”, Castiel repeats. “One way or another, it will become law, and Cromwell will remain in his position. I would bet the pie I brought home on it.”

It takes Dean a few seconds to realize just what his alpha said, and his eyes light up. Castiel laughs.

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Notes:
1) Now Tippermuir. The startling effectiveness of Montrose's guerrilla tactics prompts questions as to why they were not used by either side south of the border.
2) Roman poet of the late first and early second centuries A.D. Provider of this and two other famous Latin sayings; ‘mens sana in corpore sano’ (a healthy mind in a healthy body) and ‘quis custodiet ipsos custodes?’ (who guards the guards?).
3) One of many errors in the thematically great 1970 film 'Cromwell' placed Manchester in the House of Commons. It is one of the few films worth watching despite this, from an age when errors were more due to making something watchable that getting a political message across.
4) A phrase later made famous by Winston Churchill. Amply demonstrated by Labour spin-doctor Jo Moore who arranged the 'cover' of three thousand people being murdered on 9/11 to slip out a whole load of bad news. She got caught, fake-apologized and had seemed to get away with it, but six months later was caught doing the same thing again over Princess Margaret's death and forced to resign. To its shame (though it did not seem to have much to start with), Tony Blair's Labour government then forced out the man who had exposed her foul deeds.
Chapter Summary

40: Denial is not just a river in Egypt, as some people find out the hard way. The king steadily loses ground but peace talks get nowhere, so the war rumbles on. Dean celebrates a birthday that he considers to be his 'twenty-eleventh' and if either a blue-eyed alpha or a red-headed baker snigger, there'll be trouble!

Friday 3rd January, 1645

Dean looks up in surprise as his alpha drops a book into his lap.

“Present?” he says dubiously. “My birthday is not for another three weeks.”

“Oh believe me, you will be... getting something for your birthday”, Castiel says darkly.

Dean shudders. Damn sexy alpha!

“But this is not it.”

Dean looks down at the book and reads the title.


Castiel chuckles.

“What you have there is basically an attempt to buy some credit with our Scots allies”, he says. “A Presbyterian replacement for the Book of Common Prayer. I suspect most people will dislike or ignore it, but at least it shows that we are doing something.”

“I dare say the Hothams would not accuse you of doing nothing”, Dean says dryly. “I take it from the fact the streets are so quiet in this neck of the woods that they were executed today?”

“The son yesterday, the father today”, Castiel sighs. “They did try to claim that they had just been trying to buy time by pretending to negotiate with the king, but unfortunately for them we obtained their correspondence after the fall of York. It proves that they were indeed traitors, and now they have paid the ultimate price.”

“And next week so will poor Archbishop Laud”, Dean says ruefully. “Just like Thomas à Becket.”

(1)

“The analogy is not without accuracy”, Castiel says. “Both men who got carried away with their post, and thought they knew best. I personally would have been in favour of allowing him an honourable retirement abroad, but Vane and St. John want blood to keep the House united, so blood they must have.”
“It is horrible”, Dean mutters.

“It is war”, Castiel agrees. “Let us hope and pray that it is all over soon.”

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Monday 13th January, 1645

“I really do not like Harry Vane”, Castiel says a few nights later. They are lying together, Castiel's knot just having gone down so he can pull out of his mate (the omega had complained that Castiel often chooses these times to talk about feelings in the knowledge that he cannot get away, but his husband had just sniggered at that).

“Why not?” Dean asks. “Is it because of his dealings about Strafford?”

“Not just that”, Castiel says. “The Lords rejected the Self-Denying Ordinance today, and he responded by reminding them that their complaints about Cromwell could not be pursued because he is a member of the Commons, and it would be breaching privilege.”

“How does that help?” Dean asks, confused. Castiel grins.

“The Lords will think that it might be worth sacrificing Essex and Manchester if Cromwell resigns as a member of parliament to continue his post”, he says. “Then they could bring an action against him. It is all another of Vane's ruses of course; some way will be found to exempt his friend from the general rule and he will remain untouchable, if not stronger than before.”

“So why do you not like Vane?” Dean asks.

“Like too many, he does not think things through”, Castiel says. “The army has been placed nominally under the control of Fairfax, who is one of the few unaffected by the Ordinance, but Cromwell is the rising power. He wants a professional army, nationally controlled and better-trained so that it can finish off the king.”

“And that is a bad thing?”

“The Ancient Britons thought it a good idea to have a fighting force that could defend them”, Castiel points out. “That fighting force, made up of Angles and Saxons, took over the whole country eventually.”

Oh.

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Friday 24th January, 1645

One of the definite downsides of the lack of coal was that Dean had to sleep in a set of night-clothes, as did his mate. Though on the upside, Castiel was incredibly clingy for an alpha, and it was almost unknown for his mate to wake up without finding himself being very firmly held in place by the octo-Cas. Not that he minded that.

On this particular morning, Dean wakes and has a few seconds of blissful semi-consciousness before it hits him. Today he is thir... twenty-eleven. But at least there will (probably) be pie.

Unusually, Castiel is a little way away from him in the bed so Dean snuggles closer, pulling the
alpha into the sort of embrace he is usually on the receiving end. The omega will later put it down to his general morning torpor that it takes him some time to realize the obvious.

“Um, Cas?”

“Yes, Dean?”

“Are you wearing... panties?”

“Yes, Dean.”

“Holy fuck!”

“I wish you would.”

“Huh?”

“Mount and wholly fuck me, Dean.”

This time, it is Dean who produces the almost inhuman sound as he scrambles into action. He is probably not going to make it to... twenty-twelve, but who cares?

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“There are to be peace talks”, Castiel says later that afternoon. “At the town of Uxbridge, in Middlesex.”

Dean blinks as he tries to gather his scattered wits. Castiel is sat – on a thick cushion, which makes his omega smugly proud - across from him, reading his letters. It is the sort of domestic scene no doubt repeated up and down the country.

Except that the alpha is still wearing those damn panties underneath his trousers, and the omega knows it! Dean whimpers, and Castiel smirks.

“A town halfway between here and Reading”, he says. “One would hope the king might be more reasonable given his failure to take Abingdon back earlier this month, but I suppose miracles take a little longer.”

He fondles himself, and Dean thinks, longer. He does not drool. Much.

“The Lords look set to pass the Ordinance now”, Castiel says lightly, easing his impressive cock out of his panties and smiling at panting mate. “Proof that it is possible to fool some of the people some of the time. And Charlie says she will bring your pie over.... oof!”

The alpha's eyed widen as the omega literally flies across the room and takes his cock into his mouth, fondling his husband's balls. Castiel moans loudly and physically shakes, and Dean sets to work. It takes him barely a minute before he pulls off with a pop, his grip of the alpha's balls preventing him from coming. He knows Castiel could break free in an instant, but his alpha loves him so much he is prepared to tolerate this sort of torture from his omega.

“Come!” Dean says quietly.

The force of the explosion sends a spurt of white shooting right over Dean's head to start with, and Castiel moans again as he paints the floor with his spend. Dean grins in triumph, even if his clothes too are splattered.
“Happy birthday to me”, the omega smirks. “Now, let us see how Little Cas feels about Round Two.”

He gently begins working the alpha's cock back to hardness, secretly enjoying the whine of protest that that elicits.

He still expects birthday pie later, though!

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Tuesday 4th February, 1645

It is snowing. Again.

For the past few weeks Dean has been exercising his carpentry skills in helping Charlie re-arrange things in the restaurant. During the last cold spell they had had way too many people who slipped into the place just for the fire and did not actually buy anything. For a small place like hers such people are expensive, so Charlie has decided to move the counter to right next to the door so she or Dean can see everyone who comes in and challenge those who only want free warmth. Not that Charlie is mean; Dean knows that Father Ranulph calls round often to collect unsold pastries for the poor, because Castiel sometimes lets him borrow one or both of the twins to help him carry the load.

This particular cold spell however has been lasting from the day after Dean's birthday, and the omega is fed up with it. The lack of coals from Newcastle – the Scots are still only allowing a few ships through – means that firewood has become more expensive, and Castiel restricts the use of their limited supply to evenings and mornings. Dean also notes (because he is observant) that unlike so many masters, Castiel makes sure that the twins have supplies for their own fire. He is a good alpha like that.

“More bad news from Scotland, according to Table Four”, Charlie says as she bustles around the back of the counter. The only drawback of it being here is that she has to cross the shop from the entrance to the kitchen, though all her customers know (a few slower ones the hard way) not to try anything on with her when she is moving between them. “They say that Montrose has won another victory out in the wilds, near some place called Inverlochy.”

“Castiel says he is more of an irritant than anything else”, Dean says dismissively. Another advantage of the re-sited counter is that it is further away from the nearest table, so they can talk in some privacy. “The main problem is that he knows those lands so well, and can move faster than the troops sent after him. If he ever tries to come into the Lowlands, then he will be in trouble.”

“Still, it will only harden the king's attitude”, Charlie says, sorting out the display pastries. “He will think he can fight on if the Scots army is withdrawn from the field to deal with him.”

“More fool him”, Dean says. “I wish things had turned out differently, but I have to agree with Cas. The war is lost for him.”

“But is the war won for parliament?” Charlie asks. “The Scots, the Independents, the Anglicans – your sexy husband is right. There is nothing like victory for causing an argument.”

Dean nods, and only slowly realizes.

“Hey!” he barks. “Stop calling Cas sexy. That's my alpha you're talking about there!”

Charlie sniggers, and heads out to the kitchen again.
Saturday 15th February, 1645

Castiel sighs with relief at his latest letter.

“We have managed to resupply Melcombe”, he says. “What a relief!”

“That is in Dorsetshire, you once said?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“The twin port across from Weymouth, which the Royalists took last week”, he said. “But as long as we hold Melcombe, it is useless to them. I had feared the worst as we were totally outgunned, but it seems our men there held on somehow.”

“So cause for celebration?” Dean asks. Castiel bites back a smirk.

“Indeed”, he says. “I think that we should attend a church service and offer up extra prayers for our victory.”

He knows from the omega's face that that was not what he had been hoping for. Dean hesitates.

“Or”, he says far too casually, “we could have a nice meal. We do not even have to go out anywhere; I am sure that Charlie could supply us with something if we asked.”

“A good idea”, Castiel smiles. “I spoke to her earlier as it happens, and she told me it had been a very busy day for her. She had even sold out of pie.”

This time it is almost too much. Dean looks like his world is about to end.

“Sold out of pie?” he says, sniffing piteously.

Castiel breaks into laughter, unable to control himself any more.

“Except for the one she always keeps by for a certain alpha whose mate is obsessed with the things”, he grins. His mate pouts.

“I am not obsessed!” he protests.

“Then you do not want the pie?”

The omega struggles with this one, and Castiel looks on amusedly until Dean realizes that he has been had and pouts even more.

“I hate you!”

“Then I had better not share what is now my pie.”

“I love you Cas!”

The batting of the eyelashes is too much. Castiel just has to laugh. His omega is so predictable at times!

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Thursday 27th February, 1645
“I wonder if the king is already regretting not doing more in the peace talks”, Dean muses that evening. The Uxbridge talks had ended in predictable failure last weekend, and the week had seen a run of bad news for the king. Not only had he failed to secure Melcombe, but the relieving parliamentarian ships had also enabled the local forces to retake Weymouth. And then two days ago he had lost Shrewsbury, an important Marcher town whose loss further limited the help he could expect from either Wales or Ireland as it all but cut off the Oxford base from Chester.

“Those Irish troops have been a snare for the king”, Castiel says sadly. “He would have done far better to have steered clear of them; the few thousand he did get from the island were not worth the resultant loss of support in England, let alone the alienation of the Scots. Parliament has repeated the order that no mercy be shown to any Irish captives.”

“Did not one of your commanders get into trouble over that?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“Sir John Meldrum, who is currently besieging Scarborough Castle”, he says, “one of the king’s last northern outposts. Yes, last year he ignored the new rule when he retook Liverpool and let the Irish captives leave. If he were not such a good soldier there may well have been repercussions for that, but he had just won at Ormskirk. There is nothing like success for making people ‘overlook’ minor lapses of judgement.”

“So now what?” Dean asks.

“Once the weather improves, we shall see if this much-vaunted New Model Army (3) fights on the battlefield as well as it fights on paper”, Castiel says wryly. “It is only a matter of time, but my opinion is that they will end this war sooner rather than later.”

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Notes:
1) Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 to 1170. Appointed by his friend King Henry II to reform the church, Thomas immediately ‘went native’ and refused all the king’s demands until Henry finally had enough and forced him into exile. It looked like things might be sorted out, but Becket returned to England and excommunicated several of his political opponents, prompting the king in France to remark ‘will no-one rid me of this turbulent priest?’ Four of his knights took him rather too literally, slipped away and murdered the cleric inside Canterbury Cathedral.
2) Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, twin ports either side of a bay some 140 miles south-west of London. Each returned two members to parliament until the 1832 Great Reform Act. Melcombe was traditionally regarded as the port through which the Black Death had reached England back in 1348.
3) So-called because it had certain innovations, particularly that it was nationally rather than locally based (i.e. soldiers would not go home once they were finished with a battle) and that its men were full-time professionals and far better-trained than the part-time militia. Derisively termed ‘the New Noddle’ by its critics, it was one of those ideas that seemed quite good at the time....
March-May 1645

Chapter Summary

41: The king's hopes centre on Scotland, where Montrose is notching up victory after victory against the Covenanters. Castiel frets over another division of parliament's forces, so much that he 'forgets' something rather important, whilst Dean worries for his family back in Warwickshire. Two members of parliament come second in disputes with the fairer sex, and a certain alpha has difficulty counting properly.

Wednesday 5th March, 1645

Castiel looks unusually grave – even by his standards – when he comes home that evening. Dean looks inquiringly at his husband.

"Is it Prince Rupert?" Dean asks. The London papers have been full the past few days of rumours as to where the irrepressible prince will turn up next.

"He is for Bristol", Castiel says, "though much good it will do him. I presume he is going with the young Prince of Wales to set up this new court the king has arranged. Charles Stuart seems to think that if he pretends everything is normal, then as he is king, so it must be!"

"You are so cute when you get annoyed!" Dean teases. The alpha blushes fiercely.

"I am worried about all these reports we are getting about clubmen”, he says.

“What?"

"Armed local people who are fed up with both sides”, Castiel explains. “The creation of the New Model Army comes in the nick of time; once people see that we at least are not destroying their day-to-day lives (1), I suspect they will not prove to be that important. But I am concerned about the attack on Oxford.”

"You do want an end to this war?" Dean asks, surprised. He still supports the king, but he is a realist, and he can only see the war ending one way. Castiel looks at him.

"Cromwell likes to try to entrap his enemies”, he points out. “If he chooses to sweep round Oxford on its eastern flank, name the royalist-supporting earl with a house less than ten miles north of the city.”

Dean eyes widen. “Oh”, he says softly.

"Exactly”, Castiel says. “I think that we should make plans.....”

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Thursday 13th March, 1645

Dean is cleaning the kitchen when he realizes that Charlie is talking to someone in the shop. That is odd, he thinks, as they have not long closed. He carries on for some time until his work is again
interrupted, this time by a pained yelp that is definitely male, followed by running and then the sound of the door being very firmly locked. Moments later the redhead joins him.

“Your husband demands a high price for some coal and keeping you in pies”, she grumbles. “Some of his so-called friends are a menace to society. That one I just left has more hands than any alpha should have!”

“Which man?” Dean asks.

“Harry Vane.”

He looks at her in surprise.

“Sir Grope-A-Lot told me that he had been hearing interesting rumours that all sorts of things went on in my little place, and that for the price of a kiss he'd overlook them”, she scowls. “I decided that his price was a little too high.”

“Not the metal spoon?” Dean asks tremulously.

“The toasting-fork!” she grins. “I doubt he will be enjoying any fun and games with Lady Vane tonight, or at least not until the swelling has gone down!”

The omega smiles.

“Have you ever thought of marriage, Charlie?” he asks. She shakes her head.

“Never found anyone worthy of my sheer awesomeness”, she smirks, making the omega roll his eyes. “Besides, my father left me well enough provided for, before he disappeared off to Lord alone knows where. But I am worrying about what will happen once this is all over. If the Puritans get a real grip on this place, I may be forced to close.”

“You know Cas would want you to come to Oxfordshire with us if that happened”, Dean says. She smiles.

“I know”, she says softly. “And yes.”

“Huh?”

“I did bake you a pie today.”

“I cannot be bought with pie every time”, he says loftily.

She just looks at him.

“What flavour?” he asks.

In terms of smugness, her look is right off the scale. Still, Dean will graciously condescend to overlook it for the right pie.

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Saturday 6th April, 1645

“And this”, Castiel says grimly, “is why one should never believe what one reads in the papers!”

“Are you saying that this victory at Dundee was a defeat?” Dean asks.
“As good as”, his husband says. “Montrose raids the town, is nearly caught by the troops sent after him, then doubles back and outruns them. As long as he remains an irritant up there, the king will believe that he still has hope.”

“But he does not.”

“He does not”, Castiel agrees. “Fairfax is addressing the New Model Army today. It says how confident we are that Cromwell is taking only part of them against Oxford whilst we consider what to do with the rest of them. Taunton would be my choice, between Bristol and Exeter, though some of the northern members are anxious that the king still has a few garrisons up there.”

“Did you not say that your man in Taunton – Robert Black - is a relative of yours?”

“Blake (2), and not as such”, Castiel says. “His brother Richard lives in Adlestrop, not far from Norton. I met this Robert once, and thought him a good man. He did wonders holding out in another defenceless place, Lyme, and had worked another miracle in Taunton. Like Plymouth, he ties up a large number of troops that the king can ill afford.”

“But the king still has an army.”

“Yes”, Castiel says, “and I differ with many – including Cromwell, I might add – who think they are demoralized and dispirited. I still think that if we can force an engagement on at least equal terms, then our men will beat theirs, but unfortunately we need to not just defeat but destroy them. Only when the king has no forces left can we move on – to whatever comes next.”

“Which is?”, Dean prompts.

“Only the Good Lord knows that”, Castiel says. “And I doubt that he has told even Cromwell!”

Thursday 25th April 1645

Castiel smiles at his latest letter.

“Well, my dear brother should be writing to me in a few days’ time”, he says wryly. “And he will probably be in a complete panic.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Because Cromwell took Wolfstown House yesterday, not two miles from the Hall”, Castiel grins. “Thanks to Charlie and her ineffable knowledge bank – I would never have thought Harry Vane went in for that sort of thing to look at him - our great leader had been told not to take the other royalist mansion in the area, but I am sure Raphael must have been sweating when the news reached him.”

“Did you not tell him that you had spared him from all that?” Dean asks.

Castiel looks confused for a moment, then slaps his head.

“Oops!” he grins. “Memory like a sieve!”

Dean stares at him reprovingly.

“Bad alpha!” he scolds. “You really are terrible.”
Castiel grins slyly at him, then carefully pulls down the top of his trousers. Dean sees the briefest flash of blue silk before they are pulled up again. His breathing suddenly accelerates, as his husband stands and saunters towards the stairs. Castiel hesitates at the door.

“Well?” he says cheekily? “Going to punish your 'bad alpha’?”

Dean somewhat disgraces himself by falling over his own feet, but at least it means that his alpha is almost naked by the time he stumbles into their bedroom. Just him, his teasing husband and those seductive panties.

Which barely survive the evening.

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Tuesday 6th May, 1645

“It worries me that, with all the advantages we have now, we could still lose this war”, Castiel says over dinner that evening. “Or at worst prolong it, and cost so many more innocent civilians their lives.”

“Bearing in mind all that has happened in Germany (3), the innocent civilians could have fared much worse thus far”, Dean agrees. “Is there any more news of the king.”

The hesitation is slight, but he knows his husband too well to miss it.


“He has ordered a general muster of his forces away from the city”, he says. “At Stow.”

Dean's eyes widen in alarm.

“The Stow that is less than ten miles from my mother's house?” he almost yells.

“Calm down”, Castiel says coolly. “From there he will do one of three things. He might move back south and attack Cromwell's army before they can join up – our Puritanical Easterner is still smarting from his reverse at Faringdon (4), so he would have to move fast for that. He could head north to try to save Chester, but that would mean effectively abandoning Oxford. Or he could fall on some other major town and hope to draw Fairfax from his capital. If he has any understanding of human nature he will go for option three, as Fairfax is known to loathe sieges as both expensive and boring.”

Dean still looks anxious.

“For option one he would have to double back to reach Compton”, Castiel says. “That would make no sense. The other options both take him north, up the old Roman road towards Warwick. The third option has the advantage of allowing him to edge towards Newark, another place he has to hold. And talking of things to be held.....”

The alpha promptly stands up and drops his trousers. He is not wearing any underwear. Dean gasps as his husband starts to palm his growing erection.

“Twenty”, Castiel growls. “Nineteen, eighteen, seventeen.....”

Dean is already at the door.

“Sixteeneightzero!”
Hey! Cheater!

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Tuesday 13th May, 1645

“Montrose has won another victory”, Castiel sighs that morning. “Four days ago. It is impressive that we heard so soon; it was in Nairnshire, about a hundred and fifty miles north of Edinburgh. Though a minor triumph, it will only harden the king's determination to continue.”

“Why can the Scots not bring him to battle?” Dean frowns.

“Because they do not think him a serious threat, and before the battle they split the forces against him”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Worse, the man they sent to fight him was that traitor John Urry (5), who had turned his coat twice already in this war. I would not be the least surprised if he does so a third or even a fourth time.”

Dean looks at him shrewdly.

“There is something else”, he says slowly. “What is it?”

“We may not be able to go home this summer”, Castiel says sadly. “The situation with the siege at Oxford makes it dangerous, especially if the king's forces tried to break out. And you know that I value you too highly to risk your life, even if we would both like to spend time at the cottage.”

“I would”, Dean says sadly.

“And to re-christen every room by me fucking you in it until your screams can be heard by my brother across the valley”, Castiel says airily.

Dean swallows. For all that his husband is a Puritan, he can be a sex-crazed demon at times.

Fortunately!

“The news from elsewhere is not so good”, Castiel says, as his mate's breathing slowly returns to normal. “Our armies besieging Chester withdrew because they heard that Prince Rupert might be approaching, such is the man's reputation. And our Pembrokeshire forces were defeated at a place called Newcastle Emlyn, and have been forced to withdraw to our chief forts in the county. That in particular will free up more men for the king, if they can get to him across the Severn.”

He stops, and looks sharply at Dean.

“You are thinking about re-christening the rooms at the cottage, are you not?” he demands.

Dean blushes, but nods. Castiel smirks.

“Well, we can always re-christen the bedroom here”, he says. “I am sure the christening from last night has worn off by now.”

“Yes!” Dean yelps, and races for the door.

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Notes:
1) Castiel's somewhat questionable (as in illegal) arrangement with the Royalist garrison at Norton was more than necessary. Soldiers of both sides often took what they needed (or wanted) from locals at gunpoint, and by this time the dislike of war in general had hardened into a loathing of
both king and parliament, and hence locals armed with clubs and other weapons attacking either side.

2) Robert Blake (1598-1657), rightly termed 'Father of the Royal Navy' for the dominance of the waves he subsequently established for England that it rarely yielded for the next few centuries. Like most parliamentarians, he was written out of history books after the Restoration (the vengeful Charles II had his body disinterred from Westminster Abbey and dumped in an anonymous grave), so is little known. He successfully defended two key unwalled towns, defeated Prince Rupert's fleet in Portugal, supplied and kept going Cromwell's invasion of Scotland, recaptured the rebellious pro-Royalist colonies in the Americas, and defeated the Dutch, Barbary pirates and Spanish before, appropriately, he died of battle wounds whilst at sea. Four Royal Navy ships later bore his name, the first of which was a 74-gun ship launched in 1808.

3) At least eight million casualties, and many towns and cities never recovered. Exact figures are of course unavailable, but it is estimated that the male population of the German states was at least halved, more in some cities (Magdeburg was reduced during a 1630-31 siege from 30,000 to just 5,000 inhabitants).

4) A small town about ten miles south-west of Oxford, important in that it commanded one of the few bridges over the Thames at nearby Radcot. A curiosity not just because it was a rare defeat for Cromwell, but that the local defence force that defeated him was, according to the surviving records, at least half made up of 'posemen' – in other words, women given a rifle and acting as snipers.

5) Changed sides three times during the wars, and ended up being captured in Montrose's ill-starred 1650 invasion of Scotland. He was executed in Edinburgh soon after. Not much of a loss.
42: The last major battle of the First Civil War is fought at Naseby, and the king's main army comes a distant and rather dead second. Fairfax moves off to deal with the king's western army, but Montrose keeps the royalist flame flickering North of the Border. Castiel frets over the problems of victory and a publishing error, whilst his mate is just happy to have a warm alpha and warm pie (maybe or maybe not in that order).

Sunday 1st June, 1645

“The race is on.”

Dean looks up in surprise.

“What race?” he asks.

“The king has by-passed Warwick and gone for Leicester”, Castiel says gravely. “He had little choice, if Fairfax's reports as to Oxford's poor defences are to be believed. He will believe, correctly, that since Fairfax is a man of action, he will prefer to seek a direct battle. The only danger is that he will be able to strike at either Cromwell or Fairfax before they can join up; once they have, they will more than outnumber him.”

“He was outnumbered at Newbury”, Dean points out, “and still survived.”

“Survival is no longer enough, with the war going so much against him”, Castiel says. “And I rate both Fairfax and Cromwell as too wily to be caught out like Essex and Waller were last year. I also understand that the unreliable Goring (1) has failed to supply the troops the king asked of him from the West Country. This may be the big battle we have all been waiting for.”

“If it all goes to plan”, Dean says.

“It will”, Castiel says firmly.

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Friday 13th June, 1645

Dean is worried. His husband had warned that he would most likely be late home, and Gadreel had been dispatched to meet him in the Commons as he waited for news from the Midlands. The hour of crisis was fast approaching, and Castiel was needed.

Finally – thankfully – his alpha comes in. Dean may or may not have started scenting him in the doorway in his anxiety, Gadreel making himself diplomatically scarce. Castiel just stands there and lets Dean work on him.

“There may be a battle tomorrow”, he says at last. “The king moved south after Leicester – I suppose he was indeed hoping to get at either Fairfax or Cromwell before they could unite – but he
only reached Daventry before our men found him, and he is now heading east, presumably towards
Newark. The decision now is as to whether he runs, or turns to fight.”

“Surely the king will not offer battle when he is at such a disadvantage?” Dean says.

“He may be outnumbered by nearly two to one” (2), Castiel says, “but he, along with many around
him, despises the sort of common soldier that makes up the New Model. And as you said the other
week, he survived similar odds at Newbury. It would make far more sense for him to make a stand
at Newark, where he could pull in the garrison there and at least get closer to an even fight, but he
so rarely does the sensible thing. He still may, but my opinion is that he will offer battle. St. John is
very pleased with me, as well.”

“Why?”

“Because one of my sources in the west confirmed Fairfax's report that Goring is not helping his
master”, Castiel says. “Unreliable as ever, that man. I know he has problems with other nobles
down there, but this really is the king’s last chance to save anything from this war, and Gorgeous
George would just rather enjoy taking the waters at Bath and dreaming of imaginary armies from
Ireland that will save the king at the death. Which, unless they have wings and can fly across the
Irish Sea, they will not.”

“So, tomorrow?” Dean says.

good or ill – will be decided.”

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Saturday 14th June, 1645

The city is silent. Everyone out there knows, Dean thinks, knows that just short of the longest day
of the year, things are coming to a head. Despite the sheer awfulness of the road network, he is
fairly sure that one way or another, news will reach London by nightfall.

It is getting dark when Castiel finally returns, slipping his boots off and collapsing onto the couch
with a heavy sigh. He opens his arms and Dean moves silently into them, lightly scenting his
husband as he sits there.

“It is all over”, the alpha says quietly. “They met at Naseby, near Northampton. The king’s army is
destroyed, and the remnants are being pursued back to Leicester, which we will have back soon
enough. Then Fairfax can head west and finish off Goring, and we shall have peace.”

And then what?” Dean asks nervously. He knows that his husband has been growing increasingly
anxious as to what the future holds once the fighting is done.”

“Too many of my colleagues believe that with no armies, the king will have to yield to whatever
they ask of him”, Castiel says, frowning. “They misread the man. Charles Stuart will not
compromise, because he does not understand the meaning of the word. There are divisions enough
between the factions against him, and he will strive in some way to turn us against each other. His
family has not survived on the perilous Scots throne (3) for two and a half centuries without
learning a trick or two.”

“Will he? Manage it, I mean.”

“Quite possibly”, Castiel admits, ruffling his mate's short hair and earning himself a grunt of
protest. He smiles weakly. “The Scots still have not dealt with Montrose, and the Independents are feeling increasingly confident in parliament, given their strength in the New Model Army. There are divisions enough, if he can exacerbate them.”

“But this is your moment of triumph”, Dean points out. “You have beaten him.”

“It does not feel like triumph”, Castiel sighs. “Too many good men have died already in this war, and it is not done yet. And whilst the king holds Oxford, we cannot go home. I miss the cottage.”

Dean eases himself upright, and pulls the alpha slowly up with him. He leads his husband gently upstairs, then undresses them both before getting into bed and pulling Castiel around him. The alpha sighs, but this time he sounds a little happier as he locks into position around the omega, even putting out a possessive growl as he snuggles close. Dean smiles and falls asleep in his husband's arms.

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Thursday 19th June, 1645

Castiel fairly storms into the house, visibly upset. Dean looks up in surprise.

“I cannot believe they could be so stupid!” the alpha almost yells.

“Leicest?” Dean asks.

“Oh, we have that back all right”, Castiel grumbles. “No, it is this damn letter that Cromwell sent after the battle. He put in a line about how good it was that his men were fighting for 'liberty of conscience'. I thought Harry Vane was going to have a fit when he read it.”

“But it was only a private letter”, Dean points out.

The silence is ominous.

“You know that we managed to capture all the king's private letters at Naseby?” Castiel says grimly. “Well, in the rush to publish them, the idiot who sent Cromwell's letter off to the publishers forgot to strike out that incendiary phrase, and now all London knows. I feared that this would happen.”

“I thought you were all in favour of giving people more say”, Dean says. Castiel rounds on him.

“You do not see the danger here, Dean”, the alpha says urgently. “We have effectively removed a king from power, we have an army many of whose members believe in free thinking – remember what happened last century with the Reformation? How many people will end up getting burnt at the stake or beheaded this time because they either go too far or not far enough, according to whoever is in charge.”

“And who is in charge?”

“Vane and St. John for now, but even they have their differences”, Castiel says grimly. “St. John is closer to Cromwell, whilst I think Vane would prefer a negotiated settlement with the king, which will never happen. As I have said on more than one occasion, Charles Stuart can never be allowed the sort of power which, we all know full well, he would turn against those who defeated him. But what we aim for instead – I do not know.”

+++
Monday 30th June, 1645

“Well, even if the Scots cannot bring Montrose to battle, at least we have shut the door on his returning to England”, Castiel says that evening. “Carlisle is back in our hands, and the Border is closed to him. The king still holds Pontefract and Scarborough, but surely not for long.”

“All good news, then?” Dean says.

“Not quite all”, Castiel admits. “The young Prince of Wales is proving quite charming in the West Country; he persuaded a group of clubmen to defeat Massey (4) at Sturminster Newton (5) in Dorsetshire. But the king’s days are still numbered. Fairfax will crush Goring, then I think he will be sent north against Chester. After that the king will possess just a few isolated garrisons, of little use to him.”

“And Oxford?”

“I think with the effort needed to take it, Fairfax will have to wait until next year”, Castiel says. “A pity, as once he moves against it the king will, I suppose, have to flee. Though where to I do not know. I only hope he does not make things even worse by trying to go to Ireland. Things there are going to be bad enough over there as it is.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Because once parliament has defeated the king, it will be able to bring all its forces to bear against the Confederates”, Castiel says. “Remember that awful deal at the start of the war, rewarding those idiots who provided funds – and yes, I count my dear brother amongst them – with the lands of the natives? We have more or less held our own for the past seven years, so once we throw our full weight against them victory is assured. Though with the Scots pushing in from the north, there will doubtless be more quarrels as a result.”

“You always think the worst of human nature”, Dean says with a smile.

“That is because human nature usually proves me right”, his husband replies tartly. “But in fairness, that is like saying all alphas are sex-starved obsessives who are never happier than when their omega is dangling off the end of their knot, screaming for more.”

Dean opens his mouth to make a sarcastic comment about that, but then he catches the look on his husband's face. He gulps.

He does not make it to the bedroom. But then, he does not care!

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Saturday 5th July, 1645

Dean grunts his approval. There are few things nicer than being in a warm bed with a warm alpha who is still knotted inside him. But when the warm alpha has made sure that a slice of pie with custard is waiting for him on the bedside table – well, Dean officially has the best husband in the world. Ever!

“No pie for me?” Castiel grumbles, nuzzling the back of his mate's neck.

“You do not like it as much as I do”, Dean says. He thinks silently that so many alphas in Castiel's position would never allow their mate to have a dessert that only they liked, but then no-one is quite like Castiel.
The alpha shifts his position slightly, and Dean's eyes water. And no alpha is presumably as big as Castiel, whose knot is damn impressive!

“No news the last few days, then?” Dean says once he has his breath back. He does not usually initiate talks about politics when they are tied together, but he feels warm and comfortable, and he knows his husband enjoys keeping him informed. Again, something hardly any other alpha would even think of doing.

“Montrose won another victory”, Castiel sighs, “at a place called Alford. He is edging closer to the Lowlands, and still they have not brought him to heel. It is pitiful, really. But on the plus side, Goring has abandoned the siege of Taunton and retreated behind the River Parrett. History repeating itself again.”

“Huh?”

“A thousand years or so ago, the Anglo-Saxons had the same problem”, Castiel explains. “The Ancient Britons of the west were defending the river in strength, and the area was also a lot more heavily forested than it is today, so it was easier to defend. But I expect Fairfax to finish the job easily enough. He has swept through Dorsetshire, such that the king only holds Corfe and Sherborne now, and Goring has not the strength to hold him off for long. And once he is defeated, the king will have no armies left.”

“But you still believe that he will refuse to deal?”

“I do”, Castiel says sadly. “We are, as I have said, entering uncharted waters over the constitution. The king has lost this war – but we have not yet won it.”

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Notes:

1) George Goring (1585-1663) royalist soldier and charming incompetent. Earl of Norwich from 1644, he was the sort of adviser the king would have done much better without. He lost more often than not, finally at Colchester in 1648 when his refusal to surrender a hopeless cause nearly cost him his life. He and two other leaders were sentenced to death; petitions for mercy were heard by parliament, and his alone was accepted on Speaker Lenthall's casting vote. He went into exile with the future Charles II, returning to England at the Restoration and dying soon after.

2) 13,500 parliamentarians to 7,400 Royalists. The parliamentarian advantage was greatest in infantry, over 2 to 1; they recorded 400 either killed or wounded, whilst 1,000 Royalists were killed and around 5,000 captured. Typically the southern part of the battlefield is now bisected by a charming major east-west dual-carriageway!

3) Five Stuart kings called James preceded Mary Queen of Scots, and they were stabbed to death in a drain (James I), blown up by one of their own cannons (James II), murdered by an English spy (James III), died in the battle of Flodden, a major defeat against the English (James IV) and died of a fever after suffering a major defeat against the English at Solway Moss (James V). It did not exactly seem to be a lucky name. James VI (I of England), Charles' father, managed to die of old age, but his grandson James VII (II of England).... well......

4) Edward Massey (1619-1674), who successfully defended Gloucester. A Presbyterian, he changed sides for the Third Civil War and after the failed battle of Worcester persuaded Charles' son, the future Charles II, to abandon him, as the wounded soldier was slowing him down. Massey was sent to the Tower but managed to escape to join the king-in-exile, and became a member of parliament again on the Restoration in 1660.

5) Gloucester is over eighty miles from Sturminster Newton. That the parliamentarians could operate at such a range shows the weakness of Charles' position.
July-September 1645

Chapter Summary

43: Castiel celebrates his thirty-sixth birthday, and Dean makes it one to remember. The king's western army is destroyed and he loses the key port of Bristol. His cabinet ends up being opened, and worst of all, his last hope, Montrose, finally suffers defeat in Scotland and melts back into the hills. Only the threat of winter can delay the inevitable. And Dean becomes a priest – sort of.

Friday 11th July, 1645

“No wonder they call it the wings of victory”, Castiel says. “News of defeat seems to take days to reach us, but success always travels faster.”

“Goring?” Dean says inquiringly. Castiel nods.

“Fairfax has crushed him at Langport, and his army is all but destroyed”, he says. “Poor Prince Rupert in Bristol will be next. The king's West Country heartland is being steadily eroded.”

“You are such a weirdo”, Dean complains. “Who on earth uses the word 'eroded' in normal talk these days?”

He is suddenly aware that his husband is a lot closer to him that he had thought.

“As in, the alpha fucked his omega for hours on end”, he purrs seductively, “determined to test the theory that by rubbing against it long enough, he could see if his cock eroded the omega's prostate.”

“You cannot win every argument through sex!” Dean pouts.

Castiel just looks at him.

“Well, not every argument, Dean says, slipping his hand inside his husband's trousers and earning himself a contented growl before setting about proving just how right the alpha is. Still, not every argument, though.

Just this one.

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Thursday 24th July, 1645

“A free press”, Castiel grumbles. “Not something we are supposed to have, but in a city this size, it seems inevitable. I think that the censor has just given up.”

“I thought you would be pleased with the press”, Dean says. “This book – 'The King's Cabinet Opened' – is hilarious.”

“His secret correspondence has certainly damaged his chances of recruiting in Wales, from what I
“hear”, Castiel says dryly. “No, some backstreets publisher has put out the whole of Cromwell's letter written to us post-Langport, in which he uses that damn 'liberty of conscience' phrase again.”

“Does that worry you?” Dean asks. Castiel sits down heavily.

“I started this war as a Puritan”, he says slowly. “I wanted nothing more than a better-run Church of England, the proper and fair application of the law, and a system of government that keeps itself to itself and does not stick its nose where it does not belong. Now the Church is in turmoil, the law is applied by committee, and no-one has a clue who runs the government. It is an unholy mess!”

Dean comes over and gently scents him, running his fingers through the alpha’s long hair.

“You need a haircut”, he teases, “or there will be another unholy mess on your head.”

He smiles as the alpha gently moans and leans into his touch. He leads him gently the couch and sits them both down. Castiel sighs happily.

“At least Fairfax has taken Bridgwater”, he says. “Though he does not want to move on Bristol immediately, it seems. Always cautious, he is sending some of his troops to take nearby Bath and himself dealing with Sherborne, the last royalist outpost of import in Dorsetshire.”

“And then Bristol?”

“And then Bristol”, Castiel confirms. “I feel sorry for Prince Rupert, I do. He deserves a better master, and he has been given a task at which he is sure to fail. His enemies at court (1) – the same idiots who forced the king to engage us at Naseby rather than making a dash for Newark – will be rubbing their hands with glee. Well, their joy will be short-lived.”

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Sunday 3rd August, 1645

Castiel yawns lazily as he stretches himself on the bed. It is a glorious summer’s day outside, the strong sunlight pushing through the curtains, but he just wants to lie there along in a warm room with his warm omega. Dean snuggles into his side, and the alpha smiles. Life is good.

Then he realizes where Dean's hand is going, and that the omega's tongue is in close pursuit. He moans in anticipation, and lets his mate take care of him. Life is very, very good.

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Dean is not surprised when Castiel returns from the bathroom to the bed and pulls him in close. He had barely had time to answer the knock at the door and find a plate of food outside. Evidently it is one of those days.

“Lazy alpha, wanting to spend a whole day in bed”, he chides gently. Then the lazy alpha rubs a rough hand against his cock, and Dean moans out loud.

“Lazy omega does not exactly seem to be objecting”, Castiel says dryly. “Everything is going well enough, there are no battles pending, and the constitutional confusion out there can damn well wait. I want sex with my omega, and I want it all day. Long!”

Dean shudders in anticipation. He knows that Castiel is worried about whatever constitutional settlement emerges once the fighting is done, but this past week has been one of steady successes, and he has been pleased to see his husband become more relaxed as a result. The king had lost his
Yorkshire outposts at Pontefract and Scarborough last week, Fairfax's men had taken Bath and were now threatening Bristol, and the parliamentarians in Pembrokeshire had won a victory that was enabling them to push east and threaten to cut the king off from the south Wales coast. He thinks things may be coming to a conclusion.....

Then he feels Castiel's clever fingers working him open, and he thinks no more.

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Sunday 17th August, 1645

Castiel grunts unhappily as he walks into the front room. Even the day of rest is not sacred, he thinks bitterly, as he had been called in by St. John to discuss the latest news from Scotland. The latest bad news from Scotland.

Somehow, despite having access to far more troops that the rebel marquis, the Covenanter government had been consistent only in the number of times Montrose had run rings around them. And now they had lost not only decisively – despite outnumbering the rebels by at least two to one – but had contrived to suffer defeat on the brink of the Lowlands. Montrose either was or soon would be in Glasgow, and even Edinburgh itself might be vulnerable. Damnation!

Castiel has also had a frustrating day as a result, not helped by reports of the king having moved across towards Newark again. Yorkshire has only just been fully secured for parliament, and there was the distinct fear that the king might be able to slip through it and join with Montrose, then re-invoke England in triumph. At least the news from the west continued good; Sherborne had fallen after a stubborn resistance, and Fairfax was finally ready to move on Bristol, which would soon be back in parliament's hands. That and the improving situation in Wales meant that the king had all but lost his southern outlet to the Irish Sea, and with Chester coming under increasing pressure, he might soon be effectively landlocked.

Not, Castiel knew, that the outcome of the war was in doubt, at least the fighting part of it. But history was, he well knew, littered with people who had contrived to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, and they might have to work hard to prevent the king from sowing divisions amongst his conquerors that might start the whole sorry business up again, and cost even more innocent lives.

The alpha suddenly baulks when he sees the unmistakable figure of a priest at the top of the stairs. He suppresses a groan before he realizes that he knows this particular cleric. Dean grins.

"Son", he says in a deep voice, “let me absolve you of your sins.”

"Then I'd better commit some sins for you to absolve me of”, Castiel growls, starting slowly up the stairs. Dean grins and backs away to the bedroom. The alpha makes one final prayer – Lord, thank you for my perfect omega – before he charges after his mate.

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Sunday 7th September, 1645

“I should thank God”, Dean says fervently.

“I know”, Castiel says, smiling. “Thank you Lord for my perfect alpha with the huge dick, amen’.”

“You're a huge dick!” Dean complains, pushing half-heartedly at him. “No, I meant the church being closed today with the priest ill. Though he did send a note advising the faithful to attend another church today instead.”
“I am not feeling that faithful”, Castiel mutters. “And I loathe that new Presbyterian prayer-book he uses, though bearing in mind how close he is to Westminster, I suppose he has little choice.”

Dean sighs. It had been a rare bad week with the war almost won. Castiel had had to work longer hours than normal when the king had moved into Huntingdonshire and won a small victory at Stilton (2), and the late summer storms reflected the general mood of depression, not helped when the king had swept first back into Oxford and then on to relieve Hereford, from which the Scots had timidly withdrawn on his approach.

“At least we are besieging Bristol now”, Castiel sighs, rolling onto his front and pulling his omega on top of him. Dean is, unusually for an omega, slightly taller than his alpha, and Castiel loves it when Dean lets him treat him like a blanket, snuggling all over the alpha’s muscular back. Sometimes it ends in Dean fucking him from behind and sometimes it doesn’t. They do not need sex all the time to let each other know how strong their love is.

“And Montrose?” Dean asks. “Surely he has not the strength to secure Scotland, let alone invade England?”

Castiel pulls him closer, and Dean's eyes widen. The alpha must have prepped himself when he went to the bathroom just now. Dean slides in without resistance, and the alpha lets out a satisfied grunt.


“Sir, yes sir!”

He yelps as Castiel's walls squeeze his cock for his cheekiness, but snuggles closer to his alpha anyway. Damn sex maniac!

+++ Friday 18th September, 1645

“In centuries to come”, Castiel says, “people will still think wars are won on the battlefield. Yet two of our greatest triumphs this past week have been won through diplomacy, or as some would call it, skulduggery.”

“Sneaky alpha!” Dean says reprovingly. “If you have been too bad, maybe you should not get your present!”

The fact that he is wearing nothing except a pair of semi-transparent black panties and that Castiel has the strength to have his way with him if he so wishes, Dean knows, means nothing. His alpha's self-control is absolute, and if his mate says no, then Castiel will hold back. Though the fact that he is sweating with the effort is..... interesting.

He really should have put on the matching negligée.

“Tell me how bad you have been, alpha”, Dean purrs. “Then I will decide if you should have your... present.”

Castiel whines, but answers.

“We gave the Elector Palatine, Rupert's brother, a grant of some £8,000 (3)”, Castiel says, “just as his brother was being beaten at Bristol. The king has sacked Rupert from all his posts because he no longer trusts him.”
Dean tuts disapprovingly. “And?” he prompts.

“We may have encouraged some of the Scots lords to pretend to have switched to Montrose, then desert him as soon as he was stranded in the Borders”, Castiel admits, blushing prettily. “He has been crushed at Philiphaugh near Selkirk, though he has escaped.”

“Naughty, naughty”, Dean says. “Perhaps I should change back to my normal clothes and make you wait for your present. For a week, perhaps?”

Castiel lets out an inhuman sound and physically shakes, but does not make a move on Dean. The omega silently thinks how wonderful his husband is at times like this, though he does not need telling. Yet.

“Well, I suppose it is your birthday”, Dean muses, standing up and walking round to his husband, who looks at him much as a starving dog would look at a steak. “Care to unwrap your present?”

Castiel just nods frantically, then gently places his hands on either side of the panties before lowering them to the floor. The keening noise he makes is sheer desperation, and Dean grins. It is going to be a long, hard night.

With any luck!

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Notes:
1) Castiel was most likely referring to the unreliable George Digby (1612-1677), later Earl of Bristol, who had been the chief moron behind the disastrous plan to seize the Five Members three years back. George has been described as having a 'slight instability of character', which is like describing a tsunami as 'a slight instability of water'.
2) Original home of a famous blue cheese, a pleasant village on the Great North Road. The cheese was later made in several nearby counties, and the European Union actually declared it illegal for Stilton cheese to be made in... Stilton!
3) Worth about £125,000 ($160,000) in 2016 terms, even on the lowest measure. Although free from the poisonous influence of the queen, Charles was both paranoid and jealous of his more able nephew. For parliament it was worth the money to drive a wedge between the two royals.
Chapter Summary

44: Castiel has to choose between going to church and sex with his omega. It is not hard (well, actually 'it' is, but... you know). A death in the family is more than a little suspicious, making Dean increasingly fear the worst. There is improper use of brooms, and with victory so close the coalition against the king shows increasing signs of strain. And Christmas is 'marked' with an appropriate degree of gravity.

Friday 26th September, 1645

Castiel is not getting old. He does have nearly full four years before he reaches his fortieth birthday. And he does not need reminding of the fact his mate is still only thirty-one. Though after last night, he doubts that said mate will be teasing him by leaving a walking-stick out in the bedroom. Especially after the use Cas put it to alongside his tongue, that had the omega making noises that were in themselves enough to make the alpha come.

It had been a very satisfactory morning. And a certain omega would be a damn sight more careful about being so sassy in the future!

The news from the country has continued to be good. The king had made a dash for Chester and reached it three days back, only to see his forces crushed (1) outside the city the very next day. He had melted back into Wales; there was speculation whether he would abandon Oxford for Worcester – which itself was in some danger since the capture of Berkeley Castle (2) had solidified the parliamentarian grip on nearby Gloucestershire – or make another sally across to Newark in order to try to boost his fortunes there. But the Scots sent back to crush Montrose at Philiphaugh were coming south again, Fairfax would spend the autumn mopping up the few garrisons still loyal to the king in the west, and next year they would finish off Oxford and the last remnants of Charles' 'kingdom'.

Castiel is still worried, though. Now that victory is within their grasp, the various factions – Scots, Independents, Presbyterians, Anglicans – are fighting to secure who gets what in the eventual settlement. Already there are rumours that the king, perhaps having belatedly realized that his 'Irish army' is and always has been an illusion, is sending out feelers to the various sides to try to break their alliance.

The alpha wonders, as he sits at his desk and considers matters in general, just how ready the country might be for the strange ideas emerging from some of the Independents. In truth he quite likes the idea of votes for everyone and freedom of conscience – but he thinks that with the state of modern society, the country is probably not ready for such a daring social experiment. And one only has to look at the mess in Germany, where the religious wars have blurred with the neighbouring troubles in the Netherlands, to see what happens when there is no firm religious direction. Though at least those wars proved instrumental in preventing the king from receiving any significant foreign aid; Castiel knows full well that both France and Spain would have dearly loved to have a grateful Charles Stuart on the throne. And that both are funding the quasi-independent Confederate Irish state to make sure it likes them the most.

“Beloved?”
Castiel turns, and sees his sleepy omega yawning at the door, wearing only his night-shirt. He instinctively thinks that he really should tell Dean to put some clothes on, but then it is Sunday, and he does not need to be anywhere except for church later, so....”

Dean's eyes widen as his husband's scent changes.

“Upstairs?” he grins.

Castiel's reply is a guttural snarl, but his omega is already gone. The alpha gives happy pursuit; his religious devotions and the affairs of England can both wait for a while.

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Thursday 2nd October, 1645

“Are you thinking that he did it?”

Castiel frowns.

“I do not like Uriel”, he says slowly, “but I would not like to think him capable of such a thing.”

“But?” Dean prompts gently. Castiel hesitates.

“But indeed”, he says. “This story of his that a group of soldiers just rode by and shot at him and poor Harry for fun.... something about it does not ring true. Unfortunately such is the chaos around that area that proving any deliberate action on his part will not be easy.”

Dean is silent, but he knows that they are both thinking the same thing. Of Earl Raphael's five children only the eldest, eleven-year-old Mark, is still alive. All that stands between Castiel and the earldom he does not want.

And, Dean thinks with a shudder, Castiel is all that stands between the earldom and Zachariah - and later Uriel.

Suddenly he is not quite so keen to go back to the cottage.

+~+~+

Thursday 16th October, 1645

The two of them have wandered up Whitehall Place to Charing. Dean looks sadly at the doomed Eleanor Cross, standing tall in the autumn fog.

“I do not see why a monument to a queen gone nearly four centuries past constitutes a threat to public order”, Dean mutters. He knows better than to talk out loud; never mind that such opinions could get him into trouble, an omega speaking his mind is bad enough in the eyes of some people. An alpha standing some distance away looks curiously at the pair of them, and Castiel growls warningly at him. And loudly. The alpha affects disdain, but moves quickly on.

“Possessive alpha”, Dean grins. “I like it.”

“I am increasingly of the opinion that I too do not like the city much”, Castiel says. “If the king loses Oxford and there is a settlement of some sort or another, then we may be able to go back to the cottage.”

And your potentially murderous uncle and cousin, Dean thinks. Joy.
“You would not wish to remain a member of parliament?” he asks.

“I only became one to serve and protect the estate”, Castiel points out. “Now that that danger is passing, I may be no longer needed. It would be nice to live back in the country, just the two of us and our own little cottage, living quietly together. I am tired of politics.”

Dean smiles.

“And I quite like the idea of us fucking like bunnies every night.”

Dean looks pointedly at him. His husband smiles innocently.

“The king continues to lose ground”, Castiel says. “We took Chepstow last week, which means that both Hereford and Worcester are now in danger. That would cut the king off from his Welsh recruiting grounds. We finally have Basing House (3), which means we can move north and threaten Donnington now. And his attempt to re-establish himself in the North was frustrated at Sherburn, where we destroyed the cavalry that escaped from Chester.”

“Montrose?” Dean asks.

“Has melted back into the Highlands”, Castiel shrugs. “But he will find it harder to raise an army now that everyone knows that the king is all but beaten in England. The danger up there is past. The danger here....”

“Here?”

“As I said, we have not won the war yet”, Castiel says. “The king has no armies, but he is still the king, and his family has a reputation for surviving against the odds. I do not underestimate him, unlike some of my colleagues. Next year he will have few men and fewer lands, but after that? Who knows?”

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Thursday 5th November, 1645

The 'guy' on the bonfire was wearing a dress.

“A kilt”, Castiel says, materializing next to the omega as if by magic and making him jump violently. “Evidently the news is out, then.”

“What news?” Dean asks.

“Stories have been going round all day that the king put out an offer to the Scots to try to win them to his side”, Castiel says, “and that said offer was not immediately refused. The Scots are denying it, of course, but rumour is painting them as the villains in all this.”

“Why would they side with him at this point?” Dean asks. “Surely he is a spent force?”

“They are angry – and anxious – about the strength of the Independents in the New Model Army”, Castiel explains. “There may also be the very slightest touch of jealousy, in that the New Model Army seems to have been a great deal more successful that they themselves have been. And the enforcement of the new Presbyterian prayer-book has been patchy, let alone the fact that they do not like it that parliament has retained overall control of religion. Presbyterianism is all about no
“central control, after all.”

“So they think that the king may help them enforce it - in return for what?” Dean asks.

“An unwritten threat to renew the war on their part, this time with them backing the king”, Castiel says. “They think that because many wish for peace – and Lord, the country yearns for it – that parliament will push back against the Independents. I rather think that they are wrong.”

“But there are not that many Independents, surely?”

“It is not quantity but quality”, Castiel says. “I would not say that they control the army, but they are strong in it, possibly a majority of the common soldiers. And the army is all about iron discipline, which is how they won at Naseby and Langport after their predecessor's many failures. Cromwell is an Independent, and I rather think he will do better in the long run than Fairfax, who is more soldier than politician. I rather fear that we will soon find that proven.”

“Why?”

“Because parliament is as ever short of money”, Castiel says, “and some damnably foolish members think that they should disband part of the New Model Army without paying them first”, Castiel says, frowning. “They forget that these are professional soldiers, not part-time men from the fields. I have spoken against such foolishness, but I am but one voice. Well, what will be will be.”

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Thursday 18th December, 1645

Charlie stands next to Dean, resting her broom on the floor.

“Would you say this was a gun, Dean?” she asks. The omega looks at her in confusion.

“Uh, no?” he ventures. “Not unless it is very cleverly disguised.”

“Well, some people did”, she says, “and the king has lost Hereford as a result. And that cuts him off from the sea, or will when Chester finally falls.”

“What do you mean?”

“It seems that the besiegers at Hereford came up with a clever ruse”, she explains. “They sent a group of soldiers into the town disguised as labourers, then they struck at key defensive points just as an attack came in from the outside. The king cannot go to Worcester now; it is far too exposed with both Shrewsbury and Hereford in enemy hands. He will have to skulk at Oxford and pray that the Irish somehow fly him an army in.”

“Why did they let a bunch of strangers into the place anyway?” Dean grumbles. “Fools!”

“I suppose they must be having the same weather we are”, she says, looking at the large ice-clad window. A heavy frost had hit the capital nine days ago, and the temperatures had stayed below zero ever since. “At least your husband will be pleased that Prince Rupert is finally dismissed.”

“The king was stupid not to take him back”, Dean says resignedly. “His so-called 'friends' have a lot to answer for, though I suppose they have already feathered their own nest and made themselves a safe bolt-hole for when the end comes.”
“Which cannot be long”, she says, balefully eyeing someone at the door who looks like they might be trying to slip over to the fire without buying anything. The alpha scowls but moves away. “I am taking some food over to the guards at the palace. Are you all right here whilst I am gone?”

“Let me ask one of the twins to step in, then you can go”, Dean says. A lot of people would find it amusing that an omega regards a woman as being able to protect him, but none of those people have been on the receiving end of an angry Charlie. She kisses him briefly.

“I have another pie for you tonight”, she promises.

He grins. Life is not too bad.

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Thursday 25th December, 1645

It is totally unsurprising when there is a loud knock at the door, and Castiel is summoned to answer it. He returns with a beta soldier who looks far too officious for Dean's liking.

“Sorry, sir”, the soldier says most definitely not looking it, “but we received a report of someone celebrating Christmas Day. You know that that is not allowed.”

Castiel just looks at him. The soldier shuffles perceptibly backwards.

“As I am sure you are aware”, Castiel says slowly, “the ban does not extend to birthday celebrations. The lady sat over there is Mistress Hannah Newton (4), widow to a cousin of mine, and the boy with her is her son Isaac, who is three today. We are thus marking this monumental occasion. Because I know one must observe the rules and regulations in this day and age, I have the boy's birth certificate to hand. Would you care to see it?”

He does not wait for an answer but hands an official-looking document over to the soldier, who looks at it for some time before nodding.

“Thank you, sir”, he says. “Sorry, but we cannot be too careful.”

“Indeed”, Castiel says coolly. “I am glad to see that. Good day.”

The tone of dismissal is clear. The soldier reddens, and makes a quick exit. Castiel stares after him for some little time before crossing to his mate.

“How lucky that the boy's birthday is today”, Dean grins. “Is it really?”

“It is”, Castiel says, “and his mother was delighted that I was able to put her up in a friend's house during her visit to London. And that we can celebrate the.... birthday.”

Dean chuckles.

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Notes:
1) Battle of Rowton Heath. Chester, the king's last port, held out for an impressive five months after it before surrendering.
2) Berkeley ('bark-lee' rather than 'burkalee') is about forty-five miles south of Worcester, but its capture meant that Charles had no remaining holdings in Gloucestershire, and the parliamentarians could advance unhindered to Charles 'alternate capital'.
3) Basing House, which in its time was almost as large as Hampton Court, was taken in one of the
most confusing battles ever. Armies used symbols and battle-cries to distinguish friend from foe, but by an amazing coincidence both sides at the final siege used the same ones. The chaos enabled the Roundheads to finally take the place. Like many families the Paulets regained their lands upon the Restoration but did not rebuild on the foundations of Basing, whose earthworks are impressive even today.

4) Hannah and her sons were real; the boy was named for her late husband, and young Isaac would grow up to famously prove that the apple did sometimes fall far from the tree. A matter of some gravity (sorry).
Chapter Summary

45: A birthday trip to the fair turns out to be one to remember for both Dean and Castiel, as they get glimpses of a.... well, different future. The king's few remaining forces are picked off one by one, leaving him with only isolated castles of little use; his 'kingdom' around Oxford is now landlocked, with only winter postponing the inevitable. And both Castiel and Dean study 'hard'.

Friday 16th January, 1646

The terrible weather has continued into the new year, but at least this winter they have coal. Castiel arrives home shivering at the cold, and shrugs off his thick long-coat. He sighs happily as his omega's warmer body is wrapped around his own, the fire roaring into life before them.

"You are late again tonight", Dean whispers. "Is anything wrong?"

"Plenty", his husband says grimly. "We have received the papers of the Earl of Glamorgan (1), who has had to flee Ireland recently. All those rumours of the king trying to negotiate a peace with the Confederates so they could provide him an army at last were too true."

Dean frowns.

"But you suspected they were true anyway", he objects.

"Yes", Castiel says, "but we did not then know the extent of it. The Confederates have promised an army in excess of ten thousand if the king recognizes them as an independent Catholic state. Which he may well do, as he has no other options open to him."

"He still has a few places holding out for him", Dean says.

"The brave Hopton is trying to gather a new army in the West Country", Castiel admits, "but it is a lost cause. He only has north Devonshire and Cornwall left, and once he has gathered his own troops Fairfax will be off after him. Then he will invade Cornwall and see if he can perhaps capture the Prince of Wales. From what I hear, the boy is most regrettably a chip off his father's block."

"Was not your army at Naseby nearly fifteen thousand?" Dean asks. "Surely they are too numerous and well-trained to be defeated by some Irish warriors?"

"It is the unending of the war that has so angered people", Castiel says wearily. When he sees his mate's confused look, he continues. "Many in parliament were hoping for an end to the fighting this year, so the country can begin to recover. And there are rumours that the French are seeking to bring their involvement in the German Wars to an end, which would enable them to start interfering in matters here. Remember that although a young child (2) sits on the French throne, it is still his aunt who had been driven from the country she married into to become queen, even if King Louis' mother is unlikely to help her sister-in-law."

"And any way, thousands of Irishmen tramping across England would do a lot of damage", Dean
reasons, “even if – when they were eventually defeated.”

“They would be”, Castiel says, “though my own opinion is that this Irish army is as imaginary as
the one the king has been expecting to ride to his rescue for the past three years. The reaction to the
letters is also worrying. I know that some of the more extreme Independents support the deposition
of the king, but this sort of thing will make more moderate members inclined to back them.”

“You did once say you did not see a way for him to continue”, Dean says, “given that he cannot be
trusted.”

“Yes”, Castiel says, “but I still hope for him to abdicate in favour of someone more suitable. Such
an action will only cause even more bad blood, and there is more than enough of that to go around
as it is!”

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Saturday 24th January, 1646

There is a winter fair being held at Charing, and Dean wants to go. He knows it is a tribute to how
much Castiel loves him that he says yes. Not because he would deprive Dean of such pleasures –
he knows his alpha is always so happy to see him happy – but because Castiel's sensitive alpha
nose finds the confusion of scents in such a place irritating. Yet he still does not hesitate before
saying yes. Dean loves him so much.

The iron-hard frost that had set in at the start of December still shows no sign of abating, and
Castiel insists that his mate wraps up well before they go, as well as adding a temporary claiming-
mark on his jaw to replace the one covered up by a thick scarf. Again, Dean knows that some
alphas either would not care if their mate had to go bare-necked, or even worse, would do nothing
so they could have a reason to start a fight. The mark will mean any alpha foolish enough to get too
near will deserve everything Castiel does to them.

Everything goes well until they reach a bright red-and-white striped tent proclaiming 'Madame
Zaza, Gypsy Fortune-Teller'. Dean hardly has to bat his eyelashes at his alpha before Castiel grins
and leads him inside.

Madame Zaza reminds Dean vaguely of Miss Moseley, with her dark skin and knowing eyes.
Castiel moves for his wallet, but she raises her hand to stop him.

“What I have to tell you, my lord, is not something you should have to pay to hear”, she says, her
voice vaguely musical in its tone. “This will be a dark year for you, and you will have no choice
but to see someone close to you put to death.”

Castiel pales and pulls his omega closer. She smiles.

“Not, I should add, that close”, she says, looking pointedly at Dean. “Though come to that.....”

She looks hard at the omega. He tries not to flinch.

“There is more turbulence ahead in your own life, omega”, she says. “But when you come to the
dun cow, remember, sometimes things really are exactly what they seem, no matter how unlikely
you may think that to be.”

She stops, and Dean thinks that she has done before she says one more thing.

“Remember too”, she says, looking back at Castiel, “what has gone can also be regained. The
blood that destroys can also rebuild; nowhere and no matter how. Now go!”

Castiel bows to her, and ushers his mate out. They are both shocked, and stand there for some time before, by mutual agreement, they start for the house.

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Wednesday 4th February, 1646

For the first time there has not been a frost the night before, although it will doubtless be some time before the ground outside has thawed. Not that Dean cares much; he always wakes up with a warm alpha wrapped around him, even if Castiel does have icicle-feet.

“Do you stand in an ice-bath or something?” the omega grumbles, as his husband kisses him gently in the dim morning light. The bastard's response is to run his cold feet up between Dean's legs, making his mate yelp in protest. Castiel chuckles at his scowl, then sits up to read the letter that, presumably, he must have been given when he went to the bathroom.

“More news?” Dean says. Castiel nods.

“Chester has finally fallen”, he says sombrely. “The king's lands around Oxford now have no outlet to the sea. Even if those damn Irish do come, they will have to fight their way through to get to him.

“But you think they will not?”

“The latest reports suggest that, even if they do, it will not be the ten thousand promised”, Castiel says. “Or threatened. No, either way they are too late. Before long the king will have nowhere left to run to, and then – well, he will have to deal with the reality of defeat. Though too many at the Commons still think he will concede everything sooner or later.”

“But he will not.”

“No”, Castiel says. “For all his failings, he is a skilled operator. He is not done yet.”

“Are there still some calling for his deposition?” Dean asks.

“Not so many of late”, Castiel says, “but that is because, as I said, they believe that he will have to agree to their demands once he is finally beaten. When they realize that he will not, their tone may change. And also, when the king is finished, Cromwell will return to being a member of parliament, and will become a focus for opposition, the de facto leader of the Independents. I admire the man's drive and support him to some extent, but he still worries me.”

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Tuesday 17th February, 1646

“It is like watching the tortured struggles of a fly caught in a web”, Castiel says as they sit on the couch that evening. They have just come in from a walk in the snow-covered streets of Westminster, and Dean thinks that there are few things nicer than snuggling up with a warm alpha and a warm fire at one and the same time. He sighs contentedly.

“The king is still making an effort, then?” he says. Castiel nods.

“He has been trying to raise new armies in Wales and the West Country”, he says. “Hopton did his
best, and took Torrington in an attempt to draw Fairfax away from besieging Exeter. He succeeded rather too well; our leader crushed him and destroyed his fledgling force, and is chasing what little remains of it into Cornwall. Hopton will have no choice but to surrender, and I think that fortunately he is man enough to do it. Fairfax will offer decent terms if he can secure the west.”

“So it is nearly all over down there?”

“Some of my colleagues are grumbling about the amount of time Fairfax is taking”, Castiel says, “but he is cautious rather than brilliant, and at this stage in the war that is what we need. I doubt any mistake he makes now could change things, but it could cost many hundreds of men their lives unnecessarily, and that is something we do not want. No, slow and steady wins the race for us. Fairfax will deal honourably with Hopton, secure the west, then he will advance on Oxford.”

“So you have won the war”, Dean says.

“Yes”, Castiel says. “Now it remains to be seen whether we can win the peace.”

He pulls the omega into an embrace, and Dean goes happily.

+++ Saturday 28th February, 1645 +++

Dean stares for a moment at the map on the study wall. It shows England and Wales, with all the counties gaudily decked out in different colours, and the alpha has been using it to chart the war's progress. The omega remembers a few years back, when the black metal pins covered over half the map, stretching from the West Country up through Wales and the Midlands across to Yorkshire. Now there are just a few isolated pins in place, mostly concentrated around Oxford.

He yelps in surprise as his sneaky mate embraces him from behind. He must have been deep in thought not to have noticed that scent, which tells Dean that his mate is aroused even if the hard cock pressing into his arse did not. The omega sighs as Castiel reaches forward and takes an isolated pin out from the bottom centre part of the map.

“Corfe fell yesterday”, Castiel says. “Dame Mary (3) defied us to the last, but was betrayed by one of her own men. The king's last possession in Dorsetshire, and soon the whole West Country will be lost to him. It is almost over.”

Dean rubs back against his husband, eliciting a playful growl.

“Winning wars must be so... hard”, the omega teases. His eyes widen as Castiel reaches down inside his trousers and finds his entrance, before the clever fingers start to work him open. “Cas!”

“What?” the alpha says innocently. “This is my study. Here is where I do all my.... hard work.”

Somehow Dean manages to fumble his own belt loose, and his husband is easily able to push down his trousers. The alpha scent is also working its magic, working Dean loose much faster than usual, and before long Castiel is slipping inside of him, thrusting almost lazily and, the bastard, deliberately making sure he misses his target.

“Cas!” Dean whines. The alpha chuckles, then wraps his hand around Dean's own cock, which has somehow gotten hard without the omega noticing. His whine gets appreciably higher in pitch, and then suddenly he feels Castiel's knot forming. Which means he cannot help but.....

Dean goes off like a rocket.
“You are a sex maniac!” Dean protests later, after Castiel finally slips out of him.

The alpha grins, and gently rubs Dean's now hyper-sensitive cock, eliciting a yelp.

“One part of you seems to have no objection to that!” he teases.

“Yes, well, that part is worn out now”, Dean says pointedly. “I do not think I could get it up in the next twenty-four hours if your promised me pie.”

He suddenly realizes that, moving in that silent way of his, Castiel has got round in front of him and is kneeling before his omega, eyeing his exhausted cock hungrily. Oh fuck.....

Outside in the corridor Ezekiel turns sharply on his heels and returns rapidly to the kitchen, smiling slightly as he goes. Supper, it seems, will have to wait.

Notes:
1) Edward Earl of Glamorgan (1603-1667), who became Marquess of Worcester on his father's death later in the year. A Catholic, the secret treaty he concluded with the Irish Confederates was pretty much a sell-out, and he was forced to flee to join the Prince of Wales in exile. Oddly he returned to England in secret in 1653, and even more oddly was treated leniently by Cromwell when discovered not long after. He moved into the field of inventing, and one of his proposed devices (sadly never built) was a prototype steam engine.

2) Louis XIV (1638-1715), only five when his father Louis XIII died and he became king. The boy's mother Anne of Austria acted as regent, and was more concerned with getting France out of the messy German Wars and problems with the Spanish border to worry much about her English sister-in-law. France advanced greatly under Louis' rule once he came of age such that he became known as 'the Sun King', but he met his match on the battlefield in the form of Charles I's grandson William of Orange, King of England, Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands from 1689.

3) Mary Bankes (1598-1661), whose husband John had died two years back, and was defending the castle with her fifteen-year-old son Ralph. Like with many castles Corfe was slighted on the orders of parliament; when the family regained their estates on the Restoration in 1660, the new Sir Ralph decided not to rebuild it, and instead built nearby Kingston Lacy House. It is impressive and the castle ruins it supplanted even more so; they were the inspiration for some of Enid Blyton's Famous Five novels (so reviled by 'progressives'), and they also featured in the wonderful 1971 film 'Bedknobs And Broomsticks'. 
March-April 1646

Chapter Summary

46: Stow-on-the-Wold, the last battle of the First Civil War, sees the army that the king had summoned to him at Oxford wiped out before it can reach him. The end of the war seems nigh, but a surprise visitor at the London house brings dreadful news from Oxfordshire. The hamlet of Nowhere, along with their old cottage, has been laid waste - by orders of their new owners.....

Sunday 15th March, 1646

Castiel frowns as he looks at his latest letter.

“Bad news?” Dean asks. “Surely there cannot be any at this stage?”

“Oh, the news from the front line goes well enough”, Castiel says, still frowning. “Sir Ralph Hopton surrendered to Fairfax on honourable terms yesterday, and is to disband the king’s remaining western forces. We may even capture the Prince of Wales if we move quick, unless he gets away to the Channel Islands or abroad somewhere.”

“Then what is it?” Dean asks.

“A letter from Lucifer, at the cottage”, Castiel says. “Strange, as he hardly ever writes. Yet he says that both he and Bobby – on separate occasions – have seen Uriel walking around Nowhere.”

“Zachariah does own the land south of the place”, Dean points out. Castiel snorts disdainfully.

“Uriel would not know one end of a sheep from the other!” he says disdainfully. “And I do not understand his brazenness in this. I know that soldier who gave evidence that he was behind the shooting later retracted his evidence, but I find it odd that the poor man was suddenly shipped off to Ireland when his regiment was not. Raphael wrote me a most unpleasant letter about how he used his influence with the king to prevent the matter coming to trial, so I would have expected my cousin to have kept a low profile. This is not like him.”

“Perhaps he and that noxious father of his are hoping to get some more lands in the area?” Dean offers. “Your brother has had to pay a fine to parliament for backing the king, has he not?”

Castiel nods.

“Only a small one, because I have been here”, he says. “Not so that he would have to sell any lands; indeed, in his last letter he said that the estate was doing well. I do not like it.”

“Maybe Uriel just needed some exercise?” Dean suggests.

“He does, but I doubt he would take any voluntarily”, Castiel says. “It is a mystery, and I do not like mysteries.”

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Sunday 22nd March, 1646

“So that is it”, Castiel says heavily that evening. “The king's last faint hope, the army he had scraped together in Wales, has been destroyed at Stow (1).”

Dean raises his eyebrows and opens his mouth to say something, but Castiel beats him to it.

“I had already apprised Sam and your mother as to the army's movements”, he says, “but once they reached Worcester it became obvious that Astley was trying for Oxford. Unfortunately for him we had three armies moving in on all sides, and they were waiting for them at Stow. The king's last field army; he has a few castles still holding out for him, but it is all over now.”

“You do not exactly seem happy”, Dean observes.

“I fear for the future”, Castiel says, “especially with Cromwell returning to the Commons. If he is now as inspirational in the chamber as he is on the battlefield, the Independents will become bolder in their demands, and that may cause exactly the rift that the king seeks. And then there is that ambassador that the French sent over to him recently. He left Oxford ostensibly for the West Country, but I am sure that he did not go there.”

“So?”

“Is the king using him to treat with the Scots or the Irish?” Castiel muses. “Charles Stuart is not finished yet, politically at least. There are many – probably still a majority – who would like to see him continue but reined in, and it may take some time for their to realize that he will never accept that. And when that happens, for happen it surely will, those people may side with the extremists. We are entering troubled times, even if at least people are no longer dying on the battlefield. Ah well, let us hope and pray that England gets some time to lick her wounds before whatever comes next.”

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Tuesday 31st March, 1645

“I rather think that the Irish have missed their chance”, Castiel says over supper. Dean looks at him inquiringly.

“How so?” he asks. It had been an unusually warm early spring evening, and the alpha is wearing just a light shirt through which Dean can see his rippling muscles. The omega allows himself some pleased thoughts as to his husband using those muscles on him later that evening.

The pleasure is curtailed somewhat when he looks up to catch that azure, knowing gaze, and realizes that the smirk means his alpha knows exactly what he is thinking.

“Soon”, Castiel growls, not helping Dean's 'issues' below the table. “I meant that the Confederates do not seem interested in concluding a deal with the Anglo-Irish lords, for some reason. Such arrogance is foolish.”

“Because many in parliament will want to turn to Ireland now the war is won here”, Dean reasons, “and the New Model Army will cut through the Irish just like the Normans did.”

“It is the organization of one's enemies that people fear”, Castiel says. “Beforehand, there was just the Pale around Dublin and the wild lands beyond, sometimes subdued and sometimes not. Having what amounts to a formal Irish state beyond the borders – England is only just getting used to the luxury of not having to watch our backs with the Scots. A hostile Catholic enemy behind us with
France and Spain still powerful would not be tolerated.”

“So the war will go on, just over there”, Dean says sadly. Castiel nods.

“And much worse than over here”, he says ruefully. “There have been incidents here where religion made a bad situation worse, but thankfully they have been isolated ones. There, it will be a constant factor. The Irish should have treated and settled for what they had, then done as the Scots did with the Romans all those centuries ago and avoided pitched battles. A mistake they will soon pay for. Dearly.”

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Tuesday 14th April, 1646

“Exeter has surrendered”, Castiel says simply. “The West is ours.”

“Some day one of these victories is actually going to make you smile”, Dean teases.

“We had the Prince of Wales trapped in the Scilly Isles (2)”, Castiel frowns. “But our fleet was scattered by a storm, and he used the respite to make good his escape. Possession of his person would have strengthened our hand with the king, and it is an unexpected blow. Still, Fairfax is moving on Oxford now, so the king will soon have to find somewhere else to run to. He has no ports left, but he might still try to flee from some small harbour.”

“Abroad?” Dean asks.

“He has too many options”, Castiel sighs, “and we cannot watch all of them. A dash to the south-west and across to France, Wales or the north-west for Ireland, or the east for the Netherlands. And we could do without Cromwell's supporters referring to the king as 'that man of blood'. It takes two to make a war, they seem to forget.”

“Where do you think he will go?” Dean asks.

“My guess is Newark, his last real possession beyond his capital base”, Castiel says. “It is not far from the coast, so he might make a dash for it if things went wrong. The Scots and our own forces are besieging it, and he might think to create disunity between us that way. Still, things are finally coming to an end.”

“Yes”, Dean says. “But as they say, every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.”

Castiel looks hard at him.

“Seneca” (3), Dean says defensively. “I do read, you know.”

Castiel says nothing.

“All right, Charlie had it up on the wall as part of a buy one, get the second pastry half-price deal”, Dean says crossly.

“So you went and asked for a second piece of pie, then?” Castiel asks innocently.

Dean scowls. He hates it when his alpha is right!

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Thursday 23rd April, 1646

“I am sure that Cromwell chose today deliberately”, Castiel says as he sits down to supper that evening, eyeing the roast beef with some pleasure. “St. George's Day, when the saviour of England returns to his adoring fans in the Commons.”

“Fan is short for fanatic”, Dean snarks. “And some of them are.”

“It seems to be human nature to go after some things too much”, Castiel says. “The Commons is grateful for all he has done, of course, but the ideas he has about liberty of conscience – I am sure he knows just how much they hate that phrase! - make many people uncomfortable.”

“You included?”

“Not so much for their content as their effect.” When Dean looks at him in confusion, he explains. “Even the great Cromwell does not seem to think things through at times. If the country embraces the sort of liberties he demands, then it would be like a stagecoach where everyone wants to drive at once. Sad though I am to say it, the human condition needs laws and people strong enough to enforce them, otherwise the strong will turn on the weak, and the weak will turn on each other.”

“You do not have a high opinion of us mud-monkeys.”

“It must be the angel in me”, Castiel says with a smile. “I wish I was wrong, but my experience of people tells me to hope for the best and prepare for the worst. It is also something my brother and I do not see eye to eye over. He thinks only of milking every last ounce of work out of the people he is lord over, whilst I think that the happier they are, the more they will work of their own free will. He then tells me such ideas are nonsense, and it is a good thing that I will never be Earl of Bradstock.”

“I cannot imagine you as a real earl”, Dean grins. “Castiel Earl Bradstock, Viscount of Scruffy Hair, Baron of Icicle-Feet...”

Castiel throws a bread roll at him.

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Friday 24th April, 1646

Castiel is only half-listening to some member from the West Country droning on about something or other when one of the Commons servants comes in and whispers something. He stands and bows to Speaker Lenthall, who nods his permission for him to go, then follows the servant out into the outer chamber. Gadreel is there, looking anxious.

“What has happened?” Castiel demands.

“You have a visitor at the house, sir”, Gadreel says. “Your half-brother, Mr. Lucifer.”

Castiel's eyes open wide. Why on earth is Lucifer here in London, and not up at the cottage? Something major must have occurred for him to venture such a journey, but what?

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The alpha's first thought is that his half-brother looks truly terrible. Lucifer never looks quite as bad as Castiel knows he himself does in the morning – he had always thought Dean had been teasing until that time he had scared himself by seeing his reflection in the mirror, much to his
bastard of a mate's amusement – but he himself has never looked (quite) this bad.

“Have you heard from your brother lately?” Lucifer asks, sipping the coffee that Charlie had provided. Even his voice is off, Castiel thinks. He shakes his head.

“Not for a few weeks”, he says. “I presume he is monitoring Oxford, waiting for the king to make a run for it. Luke, why are you here?”

His half-brother runs a hand through his thatch of hair, and mutters something unintelligible. Then he looks up.

“All gone”, he says dully. “Nowhere, the cottage – gone.”

Dean and Castiel stare at him in confusion. He pauses before continuing.

“Raphael sold the place to Uncle Zachariah, and threw in the cottage whilst he was at it”, he says flatly. “They must have been watching and waiting for me. I had to go to Woodstock for the day, and when I got back – they'd fired the place, wrecked the garden and taken away half the stones already. It's all gone.”

“And Nowhere?” Dean asks, fearing for his uncle.

“Everyone got out all right”, Lucifer says, his voice devoid of all emotion. “I spent the night at the Roadhouse, and they had all gone there; Farmer Singer, Garth, Ash and the Tarrants. Thank the Lord that the thugs that did it wanted beer to take with them, and the Widow Harvelle found out and warned everybody. But their houses are just shells now; the bastards did not even give them time to take out their belongings before setting fire to the lot. All except the farmhouse; 'dear' Uncle Zachariah wants to keep that for his 'expanded' farm.”

“I shall expand him soon!” Castiel growls. “And that bastard of a brother of mine for letting him do that. What was Raphael thinking?”

“The king made a sudden demand for more money, and he sold the place to our uncle”, Lucifer says coldly. “And he has destroyed it. The end of Nowhere.”

Dean thinks, but does not say, that that is strange. Castiel had told him only the other week that the estate was doing particularly well of late.

“Not whilst I live and breathe”, Castiel says angrily. “Does either of them know you are here?”

“I am sure Uncle Zachariah does”, Lucifer says. “One of his men was checking out the Roadhouse last night. The Widow Harvelle gave me one of the place's best horses, otherwise I could not have made it here so fast. I set out whilst it was still dark.”

“I am needed up there”, Castiel says, still evidently seething. “Lord, how can things get any worse?”

He was to remember that particular phrasing. Quite soon.

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Notes:
1) The Royalists were commanded by Sir Jacob Astley (1579-1652), fittingly as he had been at Edgehill, the first major battle of the war. He left us with two great quotes of the war; at Edgehill: “O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not forget me”, and four years later the prophetic “Well, boys, you have done your work, now you may go and play - if you
do not fall out among yourselves”. He gave his parole at Stow, and despite the king's request refused to take part in the Second Civil War as a result. After a brief imprisonment he was allowed to retire.

2) An archipelago of several small islands about thirty miles off the south-west tip of England, of which it is the southernmost part. Used as a Royalist privateering base, they were finally taken for parliament in 1651.

3) Seneca The Younger (4 BC – 65 AD), Roman philosopher and playwright. Unfairly implicated in a plot to kill Nero (those were pretty common occurrences), the emperor ordered him to commit suicide, so he lay in a bath and cut his veins until he bled to death. Eighteen other men were also ordered to end it; they really all should have prevaricated as Nero took his own life during a revolt just three years later.
Chapter Summary

47: Death strikes in the Sewell Valley. More than once....

Monday 27th April, 1646

It had been a trying weekend. Castiel had wanted to set out for Oxfordshire first thing Saturday morning but a messenger had come round just as they had been getting ready to leave, summoning him to an urgent meeting about a (probably false) rumour concerning the king's plans. A lot of blather over nothing, the alpha had scoffed, but it had prevented his leaving that day, although at least he was able to see Lucifer off to his mother's house. Then in the small hours of Sunday morning some local ruffian had broken into the restaurant, and Dean had been reluctant to leave Charlie immediately after such a thing. Not that she was that upset – she had broken one of the man's legs, and he had been begging for mercy by the time Castiel had arrived on the scene – but the thief had damaged the front door, and Dean wanted to not leave London without knowing that his friend was safe.

All right, maybe it was good to be out in the spring sunshine repairing the door whilst Castiel stood guard, glowering at any man who came too near and putting out a near-constant growl. And the repairs took a surprisingly long time, which was terribly unfortunate as it meant they missed church. How very sad.

They had finally left that morning, after some very rough morning sex. Dean knew that his alpha truly cared for him and that he only had to give the word to make him ease off, but he quite liked the possessive displays that Castiel came out with some times. Although perhaps letting him do one just before a long day in the saddle had not been his wisest move ever. His husband smiles at his evident discomfort.

"Another long 'ride'”, he teases. “At least we are not doing it all at once.”

Dean knows that the alpha is anxious to get home to face his brother and uncle, and that he would have preferred to do the journey in one day. It would have been possible at a push, but he does not like to submit his omega to such a long journey. Given the fireworks currently going off in someone's nether regions, that someone is more than grateful for this.

"It is still a long journey to... where did you say we are going?"

“About two-thirds of the way there; I would rather have at least some of tomorrow to assess the situation before I bite anyone's head off.”

"Oh please be gentle with them”, Dean mutters, with somewhere less than zero sincerity. Castiel chuckles.

"I shall endeavour so to do”, he says, perfectly matching his omega in the (utter lack of) sincerity stakes.

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Their stopping-place for the night is a small manor-house in the village where the owner, a mild-mannered beta called Frederick Spurling, is a distant cousin of Castiel's. Dean knows the minute they arrive that something big has happened; the village is alive with gossip, and unusually busy for this time of a Monday evening.

“You timed your arrival well enough”, their host says with a grin. “Did anyone tell you the news on your way in?”

“News?” Dean asks.

“The king has fled Oxford!” the beta says. “Rumour is that he is going to try to slip round Fairfax and make for London, then try to appeal to the people over the heads of parliament.”

“Good luck with that!” Castiel scoffs. “My colleagues will be having all the roads into the capital closely monitored, should he be foolish enough to make such an attempt. I would have advised a flight abroad, if he could make the coast and find a ship (1).”

“Or he might make for the Scots”, Dean says. “That would cause the divisions that are his only hope now.”

Their host is clearly surprised to hear an omega talking politics, though he covers it well enough. Castiel grins.

“My sweet little omega mate is quite the political commentator”, he teases. “Indeed, were it possible I should be resigning my seat to him.”

Dean pouts at the teasing.

“Your sweet little omega mate may not be putting out tonight!” he sulks. Castiel grins.

“I did send ahead to ask our host to make pie?”

Dean whimpers unashamedly, and goes over to scent his husband in gratitude. He has such a wonderful alpha!

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Tuesday 28th April, 1646

It is a dark day today, heavy grey clouds casting a dark shadow over the country in a way that reflects Castiel's mood. They do not of course try to enter Oxford, skirting past it on its eastern flank. There are parliamentary soldiers in a few places but no full siege as yet, and Dean is glad when they reach King's Linton safely, though he dreads going to see Nowhere. And the remains of their old home.

He is grateful that his alpha happens to be looking the other way when the omega wipes a tear from his eye.

The town, though – well, one does not need to be an expert to realize that something is very wrong. And Dean suspects that neither the flattening of a nearby hamlet nor the flight of a king would not make the place look almost deserted in the middle of the day like this.

The smithy, it turns out, is open, though they do not exactly seem overwhelmed with business. Rufus Turner looks even more sour than usual, which probably goes to show that miracles do happen. He nods at Castiel.
“You heard the news?” he asks shortly.

“The end of Nowhere”, Castiel says. To Dean's surprise, the smith shakes his head.

“I meant the Hall”, he says. “Your uncle, the new earl.”

What?

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“Yesterday, it was”, the smith says, looking angry. “It's been chaos these past few weeks, as the city prepares for the siege they all know is coming. Seizing all and every thing they can from the lands around and about. And your uncle took advantage, the bastard!”

Neither of them bothers to try to correct him.

“When your brother signed Nowhere over to him, your uncle tricked him”, Rufus says. “One of the documents signed was a will, disinheriting you and passing everything onto Zachariah. Then he had his men ambush your brother and his family on their way back from Woodstock yesterday. All three of them shot, even the child.”

Dean swallows hard. His husband has gone white with anger.

“And my uncle?” he says coldly.

“Has claimed to be the new earl, and is in the Hall now with that bastard son of his”, Rufus says sourly. “God rot his soul in Hell!”

“Indeed”, Castiel says darkly. “Let us make sure that the process of that happening is expedited forthwith.”

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Castiel does not know what comes after a murderous rage, but he is at it and still moving. Only the fact that he knows venting his full emotions would probably terrify his omega mate restrains him, as he and Dean ride north out of the town. They purposely do not look at the little sign that points down a by-road to a place that no longer exists.

He is glad to reach the Roadhouse, and to find the inhabitants of the former hamlet safely ensconced therein. He presses a bag of coin onto Ellen Harvelle – she resists, but he knows that it cannot be easy feeding all those extra mouths – before turning to his mate.

“I am going to the Hall”, he says to his mate, his tone flat. “I wish you to stay here.”

It is most certainly one of the few times that he has ever given his mate a direct order, and he knows before he says it that Dean will not obey.

“I am coming with you”, the omega says firmly. “I took you as my husband through all and every travails, and this is one such. Do not try to stop me.”

Castiel looks at that steady green glare, and knows it is pointless. Silently he looks down to his bag, then extracts the box with the knife inside it. He hands it to Dean who hesitates only briefly before opening it and extracting the weapon.

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They ride north and turn through an eerily silent Charlton rather than cutting through to the remains of the cottage, then cross the river at the ford and ride up the gentle slope towards the Hall. Dean notes that the Bradstock flag, which normally flies outside the front of the building, is palpably absent. To get to the Hall they have to pass the church, and the omega hesitates.

“Time for a quick prayer?” he offers. He is not as religious as many, but he fears that his husband may need all the help he can get soon enough.

“I will wait outside”, Castiel says darkly. “My thoughts are not fit for this holy place.”

The omega shudders, but kisses his mate before entering. It is pleasantly cool inside the little church, and Dean looks around in some pleasure at his surroundings. The family pew at the front is shielded by a drawn curtain, but otherwise the place is open, with plain yet honest furnishings.

He is about to slide into a pew when there is a sudden movement from the front of the church. A man steps out from the family pew, pulling back the curtain as he does so. Dean's faint hopes that he might have disturbed the local priest are crushed when the other catches sight of him, and looks first confused and then angry.

Zachariah Milton.

“Well, well!” the beta sneers. “The pretty little omega back at his local church, to pray. Too late for that nice little home of yours. Seen it yet, omega?”

Dean mentally calculates the distances between his relative, himself and the church door. He might make it or he might not. Zachariah leers at him and takes a step forwards.

“My son has disowned me!” he says angrily. “Says he is going to go off to the Americas to start a new life there, and after all I did for him. So that means I need a new mate, to secure my bloodline. Better to keep it in the family, I always say.”

He takes another couple of steps towards Dean who backs away in fear. Then the beta suddenly leaps forward and the omega flees, taking advantage of the small table at the end of the aisle which he overturns as he races for the door. The scent of arousal behind him is nauseous, but if only he can make it to.....

There is a sudden flash at the edge of his vision, and he blinks before being able to focus on the now open church door. His husband is standing there, his gun still smoking, and Dean hears two things behind him; a surprised whimper and a pointed cough. He spins round and sees his attacker lying there bleeding (and looking more than a little surprised), and the priest at the far end of the church, having come out of his office at the noise.

“Father”, Castiel says gravely, “I think it would be in all our interests if you were to help me get this man away from this holy ground, which he has already desecrated with his foul presence. Then....”

“I will provide a full statement for you”, the priest says firmly. He knows as well as Dean that anyone trying to take another alpha's bonded omega forfeits all protection of the law, and that in these lawless times a trial would be unlikely anyway. But Dean still feels nauseous as his husband and the priest manhandle the bleeding beta outside, before the priest returns to write his statement and clean up the blood.

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Wednesday 29th April, 1646
Irritatingly (for Dean) Zachariah does not die; seemingly Satan is not quite ready for the competition. The doctor says that he could recover, whilst the carriage sent for him also brings the county officials, who given the circumstances in the area are more than happy to clear the whole thing up in record time. Zachariah admits to the murder of Raphael and his family, and asks only to be beheaded in his home town rather than being hung, drawn and quartered. Castiel (reluctantly) grants him that last request, and he is taken away. The omega knows that he will never see him again, and that at least makes him glad.

Dean also knows that his alpha has been shaken by all this, no more so than when he returns from seeing the bodies of his slain relatives. Castiel returns from this unusually silent, and goes straight into Dean's arms when he walks through the door. The omega holds him for as long as he wants, gently scenting him and feeling his husband's heartbeat returning to normal.

The funerals – all three of them – will be tomorrow. And it is only when they go to bed that night that it suddenly hits him. Castiel is the new Earl of Bradstock, and Dean is the barren omega who cannot ensure his bloodline follows him. Why would any alpha put up with that when....

“Because I love you, you idiot!” Castiel snipes, pulling him closer and inserting one of his icicle-feet next to Dean's, making the omega yelp. The omega winces at the harsh catch in his husband's voice. “Now stop thinking and just cuddle your alpha, damnation!”

So Dean does. He lies there with his alpha in his arms, knowing that nothing will ever be quite the same for either of them again.

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Notes:
1) Oxford to Southwell (where Charles surrendered to the Scots) is about one hundred and twenty miles, but he took a most circuitous route to get there. He started by going forty-five miles towards London as far as the town of Hillingdon, some twenty miles from the capital. He was presumably weighing the possibilities of trying to slip into the city, and must have decided against it as he then turned north and went over a hundred miles to the town of Downham Market, about seventy miles south-east of his destination (i.e. his journey was at least twice as long as necessary). From Downham he sought what reassurances the Scots were prepared to offer, though his closeness to the coast – the port of King's Lynn was twenty miles away - and distance from Newark suggest flight abroad was still being considered as an option, before completing his fateful journey. He would never again be a free man.
Chapter Summary

48: The shock of recent events is added to by the emergence of a new family member. Castiel's murderous Uncle Zachariah is beheaded for his crimes, and the alpha feels that he has to be there to witness it. He reveals his plans for Nowhere (which involve rebuilding), Bobby reveals his plans for Ellen (which involve marriage), Ash reveals his plans for Jo (which involve moving in together) and Ellen reveals her plans for Ash (which involve a spade and a grave).

Friday 1st May, 1646

Dean is not the sort of omega who can get through a crisis only to collapse and cry like a girl (and yes, he knows his mother would clip his ear for that comparison). No, he is not that sort of omega. And even if he was, Castiel is the sort of alpha who would not only never tell, but who would hold him afterwards and spend hours whispering sweet words of reassurance that leave his mate crying with gratitude.

All right, there was sex too! Dean has needs, damnation!

After spending some hours in bed not crying, the omega sits up and wipes his eyes (an allergic reaction to different sheets) before snuggling back down into his alpha's embrace. Castiel kisses him like he is the most valuable and precious thing on earth.

“To me, you are”, the alpha whispers.

“Stop doing the mind-reading thing”, Dean grumbles, staring groggily around the room. They are in one of the spare bedrooms at the Hall because... well, because. Even so the room is nicely furnished, and the omega would not mind spending more time in here. And there is the prospect of having to christen every single one of the rooms in this barn of a place....

He becomes aware that his alpha is looking at him, and there is a definite smirk beneath those blue eyes.

“Shut up!” Dean snipes. Castiel just laughs, and his mate pouts. Honestly, his alpha has a one-track mind.

Fortunately!

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The flag outside has just been set at half-mast when a visitor is announced. Both Dean and Castiel are surprised to find it is Rufus Turner, whom Dean would have wagered never to have left King's Linton since his arrival in England. He has with a him a young blond teenage omega, who is clearly very nervous from the way he tries to hide behind the surly blacksmith.

“Sorry I am to dump this on you now, sir”, Rufus says respectfully, “but I talked with Mary-Beth and she thought it best.”
The alpha looks surprised before a look of recognition crosses his face.

“The landlady at the Red Lion”, he says. “Who is this, Rufus?”

The smith gently pushes the boy forward. He reminds Dean vaguely of Adam, and Dean feels an immediate bond with a fellow omega. Poor chap.

“This is Samandriel – well, we all call him Alfie”, Rufus says. “Uriel's by-blow.”

Dean does a quick mental calculation. The boy cannot be more than twenty, more probably late teens, so he must be the result of an affair that Uriel – whose flight to the Americas suddenly seems a lot more explicable – had before he came of age. Castiel had always said that the unpleasant beta was too awful for anyone to marry, but some woman or omega must have said yes to him at some stage. Unless...

Rufus catches his eye, and nods ever so slightly. Dean feels nauseous.

“Margaret, one of the girls at the tavern”, Rufus says. “She died not long after he was born, and Zachariah gave Mary-Beth some money for the boy. But she's struggling as it is, and we thought.....

“You were quite right to bring this to my attention now”, Castiel says with a smile. “Thank you, Rufus, I am most grateful. Son, do you prefer to be called Samandriel or Alfred?”

“Alfie, s...sir”, the boy stutters, not looking up.

Dean walks forward and wraps an arm around the other omega, clearly surprising him.

“You're scaring him, Cas”, Dean says reprovingly.

“Not intentionally”, Castiel says a little defensively. “I cannot help being an alpha.”

“Yes, but you're being too alpha”, Dean says. “Do not worry, Alfie, Take it from a fellow omega. Cas is sound.”

The boy looks at him warily, but nods.

“Tell Mary-Beth – she is Mrs. Benson after her remarriage, is she not? - that I shall find time tomorrow to discuss all matters appertaining with her”, Castiel says smoothly. “And be not afraid, Alfie. Blood is blood, and you are family. I will stand by you. That is a promise.”

He moves forward, and Alfie instinctively bares his neck. Dean bites back a sudden feeling of jealousy, but all Castiel does is rest his hand over the boy's neck for a moment before withdrawing it. Dean knows that he has now claimed the omega in front of witnesses, and Alfie's future is secured.

“Alpha sum, et sanguis te peto” (1), Castiel says firmly.

+++++

“I need to turn in early”, Castiel yawns later that evening. “The funerals are tomorrow, and it will be very tiring. Lots of people expressing their condolences, many of whom I would normally move to another county to avoid.”

Dean is not still sulking that his alpha touched another omega. He just nods, not even looking at his husband. Which is why he is more than a little surprised when a naked and evidently very
aroused alpha joins him on the bed. Castiel lies down, and stares at him.

“What?” Dean says, trying not to blush. Castiel is the one naked here, with an erection pointing very hard at the ceiling.

“I thought you might want to scent me again before we turned in”, Castiel says with a slight smile. “I saw your reaction earlier. Green-eyed jealousy.”

“Not jealous”, Dean pouts.

“Then perhaps I had better just turn in”, Castiel sighs. He barely has time to move before the omega is on him.

“You dare!” Dean growls.

Castiel just smirks, the bastard.

+++

Saturday 2nd May, 1646

Castiel had been right; the funerals had been a nightmare. Dean had felt his alpha shaking beside him, especially when poor Mark's smaller coffin was brought in after his parents'. And there had been a potentially dangerous moment when one of the local bigwigs had asked Castiel why the thing had not been moved to a bigger church (2), and complained that the estate workers were taking up too many of the seats. Dean had had to lay a restraining hand on his husband, who had managed to reply coolly that the man could always wait outside if he so wished.

“Fairfax's men are in King's Linton”, Castiel says quietly as they stand together after the service, saying their farewells to the many who had turned up. “The king did well to get out in time. I wonder where he went?”

He is interrupted by a burly alpha, whom Dean hopes fervently will not be invited back to the buffet afterwards. Castiel catches the look on his face and smiles, waiting for the man to move away.

“I told everyone that there would be a proper memorial service for my brother once things were settled at Oxford”, he says. “I just have to step across and talk with Mrs. Benson about Alfie first.”

“All right.”

“And Ellen is setting up a buffet over at the Roadhouse for the estate workers”, Castiel says. “I do not suppose you will wish to attend, so I will quite understand if you....”

Dean is giving him a murderous look.

“I may have asked her to bake a pie?” Castiel grins.

Dean would have snarked that he cannot be bought so easily, but the look on his husband's face told him that, quite rightly, such a claim would be laughed at. Damnation!

+++

“I am glad you are all here”, Castiel says some time later. “As the entire population of Nowhere, I wished to talk to you about recent... developments.”
Uncle Bobby, Garth, Ash and the Tarrants are all gathered at the Roadhouse, whilst Ellen tidies up after the buffet. Each of the estate workers had some food to take away with them (Dean had snarked that that was probably the first and last time they had gotten anything out of Raphael, and Castiel had been unable to disagree), so all was now quiet.

“I have something to tell you first”, Castiel says. “Two things, in fact. First, the holdings of Uriel were sold off shortly prior to the day of the killings. From what my uncle's servants tell me, my cousin was unaware of this until after the shooting when his father gave him the money, whereon he fled to a new life in the Americas. My uncle's estate I shall be managing it on behalf of Uriel's omega son.”

Dean thinks, quietly, that such a move must have been planned for some time. The shooting was premeditated after all. He is even more glad that Castiel has checked to make sure that Uriel has left the country.

“Would that be the boy at the Red Lion?” Linda Tarrant asks. Castiel nods.

“He was christened Samandriel, but goes by the name of Alfie”, he says. “An omega with an inheritance faces a dangerous world, and although I shall be taking Nowhere back into the estate, it is still a sizeable sum that he will one day come into. I shall pay into his estate to take the lands between Nowhere and the town, and administer them as part of the farm. Mr. Singer, I hope you might be persuaded to stay on.”

Dean is keenly aware that the landlady behind them has stopped her cleaning. His uncle blushes.

“Uh, I might be moving here kind of permanently”, he says, looking hard at the floor as if seeking inspiration. “Ellen and me.... you know.”

“Congratulations!” Castiel smiles. “I hope that you will allow your nephew and myself to give you a suitable wedding-present. To the rest of you, I can of course only apologize for my uncle's barbaric actions, and offer you the opportunity to have your homes rebuilt, plus compensation for what you have suffered. Dean, my own angel, reminds me that you may not wish to go back to the place after such an experience, and if you wish to settle somewhere else instead, he and I will do all in our power to facilitate it.”

“That is very generous of you”, Mrs. Tarrant says. “Kevin and I would like to go back, though.”

“Me too”, Ash says. “Jo says she might move in with me soon.”

“Jo says what?” Ellen thunders from across the room. Ash turns deathly pale.

“I'm for going back”, Garth says, as Ash moves quickly round to hide behind Castiel. Ellen is definitely looking at her potential son-in-law in a way that does not bode well.

“Then, if it is all right with you Ellen, I shall pay you for all these fine people to stay here until their homes are habitable”, Castiel says.

“Fine!” Ellen says, still staring hard at Ash. The beta whimpers.

“Provided you promise not to murder Ash in the meantime”, Castiel adds with a smile. Dean chuckles.

“Does that preclude bodily harm?” the landlady glowers.

+++
Sunday 3rd May, 1646

The first Sunday in Stalwarton with a new earl, Dean thinks, looking at the empty space beside him. Who is currently off in town watching his uncle get beheaded. Funny old world.

He is standing outside the church, silently thankful that so many of the estate people are unwilling to talk to him as an omega. Not that they look down on him – everyone knows both how Castiel values him, and what the alpha would do to anyone who upset him – but socially it is a grey area, and with the country the way it is, people tend to avoid grey areas.

From the churchyard he can see across the valley, the knoll of Nowhere clearly visible in the distance. As is the charred remains of a burned building at the northern end of said knoll, a building that Dean has not had the heart to go anywhere near as yet. He and Castiel were truly happy there, and the bastard meeting his deserved end down in King's Linton today destroyed those memories out of pure spite.

Two riders emerges from the trees at the end of Charlton village, and Dean immediately recognizes his husband and one of the twins, before they splash across the ford and ride up to him. Castiel's face is grave.

“It is all over”, he says sombrely. “I wish I could have avoided it, but I felt I had a duty to be there. He admitted everything, and claimed that he shot Raphael when the man insulted his breeding. Naomi threatened to go to the authorities, so he set his men on all of them. He said that he did not actually plan to have them killed; matters just got out of control.”

“The land sales rather suggest he planned it”, Dean points out.

“I am just glad that it is all over”, Castiel sighs. “Now they are both in a place where the judgement is final and irrevocable.”

Dean just looks at him.

“What?” Castiel asks, confused.

“How did I end up with someone who uses the word 'irrevocable' in a conversation?” Dean wonders. Castiel grins.

“Because I am alpha and I have a huge big....”

“Cas!” Dean yelps. “We're right outside the church!”

“Estate?” Castiel finishes, looking confused at his mate's outburst. “Honestly Dean, your mind is always in the gutter!”

Dean just pouts.

+++Notes:
1) Latin, 'I am alpha and I claim you as blood'.
2) The funeral service would have been held in King's Linton church. This in real life is St. Mary the Virgin at Kidlington, dating from at least 1220 and on a site that was in use at least two centuries before. It is an impressive size, though presumably the speaker thought that even more people could have attended had it been held in Oxford.
May 1646 (II)

Chapter Summary

49: Castiel plans for the succession now that he is Earl of Bradstock, and he and Dean revisit the barn where they first met. What happens next is both predictable and highly enjoyable for them both, though riding (a horse) afterwards is uncomfortable for the omega, even with a padded saddle. They will have to return to London soon, though at least Dean knows that there will be a pie there waiting for him.

Friday 8th May, 1646

Castiel has five letters today. Dean is surprised.

“The rest of the ones for Uriel, and inquiries about the king”, Castiel explains, coming up behind his omega and pulling him into an embrace. Yesterday he had received further conformation that his cousin had left Bristol on a ship bound for the Rhode Island colony. Dean sighs happily as Castiel opens each of the letters in turn. His silence after the third of them is ominous, though.

“What is it?” Dean asks.

“We have underestimated the king again”, Castiel says quietly. “It was Newark. Not only that, but he has surrendered himself to the Scots, who are taking their prize back to the homeland.”

Dean winces.

“Your friends in the Commons will have a fit”, he says.

“Indeed”, Castiel says. “Our army besieging Newark, just a few miles from the Scots, had no idea, even when the garrison surrendered. It turned out that that had been done at the king’s command, shortly after he reached the Scots at Southwell a few miles away. They must be in Yorkshire by now.”

“He is trying to divide you, just as you said”, Dean says. Castiel nods.

“And this is exactly the sort of thing that might work”, Castiel says. “Now the Scots will want him to push forward moves to make England Presbyterian, which the Independents, and particularly Cromwell's men in the army, will fight all the way.”

“Will the king go along with that?”

“I doubt it very much”, Castiel says, “even though it would be his best hope. No, we can but ask the Scots to hand him over – they will, quite rightly, demand all the back-pay we owe them, the raising of which will be painful – but it will have to be done.”

Castiel opens and reads the fourth letter, which is quite an achievement given how far his face is into Dean's neck. The omega sighs in pleasure.

“Oh.”
“What is it?” he asks. Castiel, very inconsiderately, takes some time nibbling a hickey into his mate's neck before answering. Dean makes a noise that he will deny till his dying day.

“My omega cousin Sachiel (1)”, the alpha says. “Like me, he is a great-grandson of Earl Nebuchadnezzar. He is my closest male relative - well, legitimate relative, now we have Alfie - with my half-brothers debarred from inheriting.”

“Might they not contest that, now they are so close?” Dean wonders. He gets on well with Lucifer Milton, but dislikes the other three of Castiel's siblings. Michael looks at him creepily, Balthazar is a flake (Castiel will not allow him to use the more accurate single-syllable term that starts with an 's' and rhymes with 'glut') whilst Gabriel has a weird sense of humour which, fortunately, he is now inflicting on the people of the New World. Dean pities them.

“I am advised that the legal bar against them is watertight”, Castiel says. “I am sure they have sought similar advice, otherwise there would have been a challenge by now, even when Raphael was alive. I am also sure that if there had been any chance of success in such a claim, then my late brother would have preferred to buy them off rather than lose part of the estate in legal fees, and I am sure that they know that I would not be so inclined.”

“Where does this Sachiel live?” Dean asks.

“Norton, coincidentally”, Castiel says. “His father Barachiel (2) died when he was ten years old, and he became my grandfather's ward when his own grandfather Caspar died back in 1638. He lives with his mother, Anna. I know that my grandfather and later Raphael paid them a very small allowance out of the estate, so it would be a courtesy to visit them both anyway. And we could drop in on your family whilst we are up there.”

“And in the barn where we first met?” Dean teases. Castiel gives him a feral look.

“I do not need farm buildings for that, Dean Milton!”

The scent of arousal is almost overwhelming, and Dean makes a run for it. However, he does get caught when he 'accidentally' trips over.

Right onto the bed, as luck would have it.

+~+~+

Monday 11th May, 1646

It takes Dean very little time to realize that what awoke him at this ungodly hour was the scent of unhappy alpha. He pulls himself up slowly to find Castiel sat upright in their bed, staring blankly out into space.

“Huh?” he manages.

“I'm an earl”, the alpha says slowly, as if he cannot quite believe it. “An actual earl. A peer of the realm.”

Dean blinks, confusedly.

“And?” he says. It is dark and he is tired, but now he is worried as to why his husband is so unhappy.

“I can't do this, Dean”, Castiel says softly. “I never expected it. I...”
Dean gently pulls him down into a hug, and the alpha lets himself be pulled. The omega sighs.

“I never expected”, Dean says, “that when I took shelter from a cloudburst in a barn some seven years ago, I would find the love of my life. Someone who loves me despite my broken and useless body....”

“Dean!”

“Someone so good, so true, so gentle in his ways that he treats all people, even his mate, right”, Dean finishes. “You are perfect for this, Cas. If anyone can be a good earl, it is you.”

The alpha sighs, and Dean smiles as he feels his scent change from unhappy and worried to..... whoa, that was quick.

“Insatiable alpha!” he grumbles, shifting over. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

Castiel chuckles.

++++

Saturday 16th May, 1646

“My mother and stepmother both came from here”, Castiel says, looking with interest at the smallholding on the edge of town. “My mother chose my name partly because there had been a Castiel here before. Funny, really.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Because he moved here from London some six centuries past and married the alpha who came with him”, Castiel grins. “Some rapscallion by the name of Dean [3].”

His mate looks at him uncertainly.

“Are you teasing me?” he asks. Castiel shakes his head.

“We can see the records later”, he says. “Sadly, such is the law of the land that the property became my father's when they married, and mine once he died. I folded it into the estate – we have other properties in the town, as I have told you – and visited it just once, seven years ago.”

It takes Dean a little time to process that information., His eyes widen, and Castiel nods.

“You have no idea how much I wanted to claim you that time we met in the barn”, he growls. “It took every ounce of restraint I had not to knot you then and there, and leaving you behind at your mother's house physically hurt me. I stopped in the barn on the way home and jerked off, imagining that I had you.”

“So romantic”, Dean says dryly. Castiel shoots him a look.

“It will be when I knot you in the barn, and we go and meet your family immediately after”, he grins.

Dean pales. He would not... would he?

++++

Sachiel Milton, it turns out, lives just a few doors down from the smallholding. He is a pleasant
enough young man, not much more than twenty years of age, although Dean does find it a little bit disconcerting that he resembles his husband somewhat. Not as handsome, of course.

“He really is an omega, Cas!” Dean hisses once they are alone. His husband smiles.

“When he debarred my then future half-brothers from inheriting, my grandfather named Sachel's father as next in line”, he explains. “Barachiel was engaged to Mrs. Milton – Anna, Sachel's mother – at the time, and she comes from a family known to produce more omegas than average, so my grandfather specifically named her husband's offspring as his heirs, regardless of their gender or sub-gender.”

“And now an omega is heir to a great estate”, Dean muses. “Might not the next eligible alpha challenge his title?”

“The next such is his uncle Jegudiel”, Castiel says, “and he has always made it clear that he supports his nephew's title. He himself is a priest somewhere up in north Worcestershire, Oldbury I believe.”

“Would not Sachel be in some danger up here, though?” Dean asks. He knows that with omegas, even some of the greatest families will accept a policy of take first and ask later, thinking that acceptance will be preferable to any public scandal. Something which it too often is.

“Yes”, Castiel says heavily. “That is why I suggested to them both that they may wish to move down to be near us, so that we can keep an eye on them. You know as well as I do what could befall him here, especially now that he is so potentially wealthy. I would make sure everyone around him knows he has my protection, and that is easier to establish when he is near us.”

Dean shudders. He notices the estate's steward standing outside the window, and stares at him. There is something vaguely familiar about the man, though he cannot quite put his finger on it.

Anna Milton returns with her son, and smiles at them both. It turns out that whilst she would have preferred to remain in the town, she quite sees that her son's (and her own) circumstances have changed, and that it would be beneficial for them to be where everyone in the area knows that the boy is off limits unless approached in the correct way. A nobleman defending his heir has as much leeway with the law as an alpha defending his omega.

Not too far into the future, Dean will discover just how true that is.

+++

Dean trembles as he balances on the stacked bales of hay, his alpha thrusting ever harder into him. They are already knotted together, and if Dean's higher brain functions were still functioning, he would doubtless worry about what his mother and brother will say when he rolls into the family house looking well and truly fucked. Fortunately said functions packed up and left some time ago.

Castiel changes his angle once more, and Dean's cock twitches feebly as it attempts to come for Lord alone know what number of times. The omega moans in pleasure.

“We may have to go back to London, soon”, Castiel says, seemingly striving to push in even deeper. “The Scots have taken the king all the way to Newcastle, and my colleagues in the House are probably having kittens.”

Dean looks at him incredulously. “Politics now?” he snarks.

Any further backchat is prevented by Castiel coming yet again whilst leaning back, which makes
his knot do things to Dean's insides that probably breach some biblical law or other. The omega whines, even more so when his husband traces a cold finger down his chest.

“I wonder how your family would react if I rode in with you on my knot”, he says idly.

Dean stares at him in horror. He wouldn't dare!

+++++

Mercifully, he does not dare. But the bastard does wait until they are in the courtyard with his mother and brother standing there before whispering in his mate's ear that he will be making full use of the barn on the way back as well. Dean is sure that his blush can be seen from Stratford!

+++++

Wednesday 20th May, 1646

It had hit Dean once more as to what had happened when they had returned from Long Compton on Monday – they had arranged to send servants to escort Sachiel and his mother down once they are packed – and instead of turning right in Charlton village for the cottage, they had ridden on and over the ford to Stalwarton. Dean had looked at the Hall and remembered.

Oh yes. This was his home now.

“We should be able to have a proper summer break this year, once the siege of Oxford is done”, Castiel promises as they dismount and their horses are taken away. “Then you can start on making the place into a real home.”

“Anything I want?” Dean asks eagerly. Castiel chuckles.

“I will need to see the plans first”, he says, “so bright pink walls are out.” Dean winces visibly, and the alpha chuckles. “Plus we shall need to get any structural changes you want checked to see if they are safe. But yes, I want this to be a home for you, Dean.”

The omega's happiness suddenly dims. It hits him once more that this should be a home not just for him and his husband, but for the family he cannot have. He bows his head, and of course Castiel notices.

“We have a perfectly good heir in Sachiel”, he says, “and we need to concentrate on training him up to run the estate. I love you, Dean, and not having to share you with a bunch of mewling little Deans and little Castiels is an added bonus. Though I shall miss being able to traumatize them with tales of all the sex we have had. Especially that time I fucked you in the boat-house.”

Dean frowns. They are looking over the ornamental lake at the back of the house, which has a tiny island in the middle accessible only by a boat from the little wooden boat-house on the nearby bank.

“I do not remember that”, he says.

Castiel pulls out his diary and checks it.

“Oh no”, he says, “I am getting ahead of myself. That is scheduled for today!”

He shoots his mate a feral look, but Dean is already off and running.

+++++
Thursday 21st May, 1646

So today they are going back to London. Dean stands outside the Hall and watches the preparations for their departure, as the spring sun lurches sluggishly into a clear blue sky. He gazes across the valley, and notes that something seems to be happening around where the cottage was. He squints, trying to see more clearly.

“I thought it would make a good home for Sachiel and his mother”, Castiel says, making him jump as he appears behind him. “A little small, but once he has a suitable mate then his mother can remain there whilst he moves somewhere larger.”

“We were very happy there”, Dean says wistfully. For all the glamour of being an earl's mate – and he is happy for the estate workers, who now have an infinitely better boss – he misses the simpler times they had had before the country set about tearing itself apart.

“The past is another country”, Castiel says sombrely, “one we can look at but never visit. England is changing, and we must play our part in that. But I shall look forward to coming back here, and making this place into a home for my gorgeous, pie-loving mate.”

Dean smiles, then looks hopefully at him. Castiel grins.

“Yes, I did remember to send ahead to Charlie and ask her to have pie ready for your return.”

Best. Husband. Ever!

+~+~+
Notes:
1) Named for the other angel of Thursday. Born in 1622. He and Castiel were second cousins.
2) Named for the angel of lightning. He was the son of Casper Milton (1570-1638), who in turn had been Earl Nebuchadnezzar's second son and therefore Earl Phineas' brother. Old Casper had nearly met a bad end when found in bed with another alpha's omega, but the family had been able to use its influence to commute his punishment to a one-way trip to the Americas.
3) Documented in my story, 1016 And All That (free advertising!).
Chapter Summary

50: Dean's life is just one long round of being fucked by his alpha, poor thing. It is so hard (in both senses), but at least he knows how to let his alpha take care of him. In the political arena negotiations begin with the Scots for the return of the king, whilst Castiel worries about the Irish, a new housekeeper and salad.

Monday 8th June, 1646

“I don't like it”, Dean grouses. “I mean, I see that it's pretty much inevitable and all that, but I still don't like it.”

“You cannot change people, Dean”, Charlie says knowledgeably. “They will be what they will be. And knowing you're the regular lay of one of the great noblemen....”

“Hey!”

“They think that you are worth getting in with”, she grins, “since getting in with you is akin to getting in with the big man himself.”

Dean smiles. Castiel had been particularly rough last night – the evening service had gone on far longer than usual, and the alpha had hustled him home with what could only be called over-eagerness, before knotting him right in front of the fire – and yes, his man was big. Charlie raps him with the spoon.

“Stop thinking about that”, she grumbles. “It's gross!”

“I was.... k-not”, Dean teases. She flicks a towel at him, and he dodges out of the way with a laugh.

++++

One of the many great things about Castiel, at least as far as Dean is concerned, is that after a night of intense fucking – the alpha had had to carry the sexed-out omega to their bedroom last night, Dean had been so shattered – is that the day after such an event, his husband always feels that he has to make up for it by being even more caring and attentive than usual. And if that means pie, kisses and long sessions of manly holding him close, well, Dean is after all an omega, and in this day and age omegas have to just put up with such things.

Shut up.

“The Commons is not a happy place just now”, Castiel mutters into his mate's neck as he nibbles at the mating-mark there. Dean tips back his head to give him better access, earning himself a satisfied growl.

“Wh.... why?” the omega asks. Lord but that feels good!

“We found out today all about the secret talks the king has been having with the Scots”, Castiel says. “It had been going on for rather longer than either we suspected or they told us, which puts
them in a weaker position. But they will still want paying off handsomely before they hand him over, and that means even more taxes. And of course we have Cromwell and his Independents, who are furious that the king has now all but accepted the idea of a fully Presbyterian England.

“The price of the Scots helping you win the war, I suppose”, Dean says.

“I myself think that their intervention was decisive”, Castiel says, “especially coming when it did. But many see only Cromwell's triumph at Naseby, and resent our northern cousins for holding the king over us. I do not think that the king will be able to divide us as yet, but we may split amongst ourselves over the religious question. And their recent defeat in Ulster (1) means that they need us as much as we need them.”

“Will you have to pay towards the Scots' settlement?” Dean asks.

“Yes”, Castiel says, “but we are fortunate there. For all his failings my late brother was excellent at scrimping and saving, and it turns out that he amassed quite a small fortune in his time in charge. I shall be able to make a donation to the fund to get the king back, and with no damage to the estate. Life is really quite good, all things considered.”

“It is”, Dean agrees.

“So now I am going to fuck you again.”

Oh. It seems the caring alpha part is over. Dean will just have to smile, lie back and take it like an omega. His life is so hard!

+++

Saturday 11th July, 1646

“I would like to think”, Castiel says heavily, “that my colleagues in the House are not as stupid as they sometimes make out. But they do make things hard.”


He rubs his hand up the front of his husband's trousers, and raises his eyebrows in surprise.

“Already there”, Castiel growls. “Just being near you is enough, omega!”

Dean can see (and feel) that it is going to be a rough night. Good.

“What have they done to upset you now?” he teases. The look on the alpha's face says that he knows quite well what Dean is about, but he answers the question.

“They have fined and jailed poor John Lilburne, and thrown him into the Tower”, Castiel says. “Again. He spent much of last year there because he criticized lazy commanders who sat on their backsides in the House whilst the common soldier fought and died for their beliefs.”

He looks pointedly at Dean, who stays quiet. Too quiet.

“Sassy omega!” Castiel scolds.

“Hey! I said nothing!”

“But you thought it very loudly”, Castiel reproves. “He was right, if unwise to voice what many other people are thinking. Though few go as far as he does in advocating a government fully
“answerable to the people.”

“I thought that was what you wanted”, Dean points out. Castiel sighs.

“It is not so much what I want, but what we can realistically get”, he says. “If I introduced the idea of votes for women into the House, say, you can just imagine the reaction. We have to aim for what is achievable, and move another step towards our eventual goal. I drew before the comparison with poor Simon de Montfort, who was destroyed because his baronial allies decided that letting the common plebs have even a small say in running things was unthinkable.”

Dean has to agree with that. Damnation!

“Then there are the Irish”, Castiel says. “Reports say that the English settlers’ position over there is slowly worsening, and parliament will wish to send the Army in to remedy that. Plus that now the Scots are no longer needed, they can throw their army across the North Channel and repair the damage after their defeat in Ulster. But our own soldiers have still not been fully paid as yet, and I doubt they would go willingly.”

“Would they refuse a direct order?” Dean asks doubtfully. “That would be mutiny.”

“An order from parliament does not carry the same moral authority as one from the king”, Castiel says, “no matter how unfair that may be. We are lucky that Cromwell is a member of parliament; he is the lynch-pin that is holding it all together right now. Let us hope he knows what he is about. As I do.”

And he proceeds to prove to his omega that he knows exactly what he is about. Very thoroughly!

+---++

Friday 24th July, 1646

“Worcester has surrendered”, Castiel says with a smile that evening, “less than a month after Oxford. The king only has a few isolated castles still holding out for him, and they will soon be ours. It is nearly over, thank the Lord.”

Dean looks at him in surprise. They had had an intense love-making session before the omega had allowed the alpha out of their bed that morning, leaving Castiel looking even more ruffled than normal as he had rushed to pull on his clothes. Dean had not noticed what he had thrown on, mainly because he was lying back and enjoying the post-coital glow of being well and truly fucked. He had barely made it down to lunch, though his alpha did not need to know that. It would make him too big-headed.

“Enjoy lunch?” Castiel grins, and Dean knows immediately that one of the twins must have tattled on him, the bastard. He pouts, but still stares at his husband's shirt.

“That is new”, he says. “And of good quality. You do not normally wear something so.... fancy.”

In truth there is nothing that showy about the shirt, except that it is evidently of the sort of quality that a Puritan like Castiel does not normally stretch to. The alpha shrugs.

“It's for the injured soldiers”, he says. Dean looks confused.

“Huh?”

“The Worshipful Company of Haberdashers is currently headed up by someone who has a brother
in the army”, Castiel explains, “and the man got badly injured. “They both came up with the idea. The Company will provide a good shirt to any member who donates to the capital's fund for injured soldiers.”

“We must have quite a few of them back in Oxfordshire”, Dean muses.

“We must”, Castiel says, “and as the new earl I shall be doing everything in my power to help them. Regardless of which side they fought on.”

“My hero!” Dean grins. “And there was me thinking you were becoming less of a Puritan these days.”

Castiel thinks about that for a moment.

“I must say that I am disappointed with the way the movement has gone in recent years”, he admits. “And the Americas do not help, encouraging those who dissent to emigrate rather than stay and argue their cases.”

“I would have thought that you would not be sorry to see them go?”

“The trouble is not so much those that go as those that stay”, Castiel says. “At the moment the extremists – and I include Cromwell amongst that number – appear to be in the ascendancy, whilst many moderates are taking ship and chancing a perilous crossing of the seas rather than staying to fight. Though from what little we hear from over there, things are just as contentious between people in the New World as they are in the Old.”

“Did you inquire as to if there is to be a summer break?” Dean prompts. Castiel smiles.

“Now that Worcester is secure, we can go home a week Monday”, he says. “You had better start thinking about redecorating ideas.”

Dean smiles.

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Saturday 1st August, 1646

It is unusual for Castiel to have to attend a sitting on a Saturday, and more than a little annoying as Dean wants to start packing. The omega has to stay home and content himself with a pie from Charlie, who is sitting opposite him and smirking at the fact that, rather embarrassingly, he is drooling.

It is good pie, damnation!

Castiel bustles in at speed, surprising them both. He was not expected back until the early evening.

“We had to have a short debate”, he says, “but it was one of those when the outcome was inevitable. The king had sent a request that he be allowed to come to the capital for talks.”

Charlie makes a scoffing noise. Castiel smiles at her.

“Indeed”, he says. “That is what everyone there said. A reply has been drafted to the effect that parliament does not wish the king to come to the city until a settlement has been reached.”

“Yet you do not wish the Scots to have him?” Dean points out.
“I suppose he will end up under what is effectively house-arrest in some country house somewhere, just like his ill-starred grandmother (2)”, Castiel says. “And we all know what happened to her. Charlie, the restaurant is closed.”

She blinks, confused at the sudden question.

“It does not pay me to open Saturdays any more”, she says. “Business is down quite a bit lately, now that your reduced Commons runs with so few members.”

“I have noticed”, Castiel says. “Which is why I have a proposal you may wish to consider.”

“Go on”, she says warily.

“The Hall housekeeper, Mrs. Barnes, wishes to leave and go to the New World”, the alpha says. “Given her precognitive abilities, I presume that she has seen some happy future for her good self over there. So I will soon need a new housekeeper, someone skilled enough to manage a whole host of servants as well as a large building. Would you be interested?”

“I think I would”, she smiles. “Nothing against your colleagues, but some of them would like to shut me down, you know.”

“No offence taken”, Castiel says amiably. “Mrs. Barnes will not be leaving until next summer, so we have plenty of time to arrange things. You will be very busy though, and I doubt there will be time for such fripperies as baking extra pies.”

“Cas!” Dean exclaims in horror. “Bad alpha!”

“Sorry beloved”, Castiel grins. “As if I would come between a Dean and his pie. I value my life!”

Dean pouts. He is not putting out for the whole rest of the day after that!

Well, unless there is pie!

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Tuesday 4th August, 1646

Again, the change does not strike Dean until they ride through the village of Wheatley, and the fork off to the right rather than continue on the road to Oxford. The day is warm and pleasant, with a cooling breeze offsetting the strong August sun, and the omega actually feels really happy with life. Especially if Charlie is going to be their new housekeeper soon.

“You do know that I really shall be limiting the number of pies she gives you?” Castiel teases, showing that annoying ability of his to read the omega's mind. Though when Dean had last challenged him on that, he had (damn reasonably) pointed out that guessing his mate was thinking about pie was a safe bet. Bastard!

“I can struggle through on only three a day”, Dean says with a long-suffering sigh. “Provided I can have extra on weekends.”

“Which you would then save for the week”, Castiel smirks, earning himself a glare. “I might talk to Charlie about a salad diet for you.”

The quivering lip and look of utter betrayal that gets is too much, and Castiel laughs out loud, startling the villagers outside the tavern they are just passing. Dean scowls.
“Bad alpha!” he hisses. “I want extra pie for that!”

Notes:
1) The battle of Benburb, fought near the city of Armagh. It was to be the only time a Confederate army won a major field battle but it proved a double-edged victory; the Irish felt emboldened enough not to do any deal with the Royalists as they had planned, which eventually rebounded on them – heavily - when Cromwell arrived a few years later.
2) Mary Queen of Scots (1542-1587). Dumped off the Scots throne for her involvement in the death of her husband (immediately marrying the man's murderer was not, perhaps, her smartest move), she had been imprisoned but escaped, only to suffer defeat at Langside (1568). Despite the fact that she had spent the past ten years denying her cousin Elizabeth's right to the throne she then decided to go to England; for some strange reason her cousin was not best pleased to see her (yeah, mystery!), and Mary ended up under house-arrest for the next nineteen years, until her involvement in one plot too many against her unwilling hostess led to her getting the chop. Her son James VI was in line to become king of England on Elizabeth's death, so he did nothing to save her.
Chapter Summary

51: Castiel celebrates his birthday in a way that brings tears to his omega's eyes (no, apart from that!). Dean discovers that the stairway at the Hall may not lead to Heaven but it is damnably long, especially when you are riding an alpha's knotted cock (which is also damnably long!). Castiel has a bad experience at a funeral and ends up saying something he regrets, plus there is haggling over expenses.

Wednesday 12th August, 1646

It has taken some time, but Dean has finally forced himself to go back to the old cottage, which is now almost completely rebuilt. Sachiel Milton and his mother will be moving in there next week and he feels every so slightly envious of them, despite his living in the big house across the river. Though that too has started to feel more of a home, especially after a major and very expensive shopping trip to Oxford at the end of last week, their first purchases now having been delivered.

Castiel and he have ridden over to see the progress both here and a little further down in Nowhere, where the cottages are being rebuilt. Not just the three old ones, but three new ones on the knoll alongside them, which Castiel has had built for three local King's Linton men he knows of, all of whom were injured in the war.

At least, Dean had expected the two of them to continue to the destroyed hamlet, but instead Castiel cuts through the wood to the Roadhouse, outside of which a tall muscular alpha is waiting. Dean recognizes him as Jameson Penny, the former owner of Castiel's last horse Alanegra, who had died two years back. Castiel nods to him, and leads the way inside.

There are four men drinking at a table in the corner, and at first they are unaware of the newcomers. But when they catch sight of them, the reaction is definite; three freeze and the fourth rises hastily to his feet.

“Waties”, Castiel says sharply, “I am to assume there is a reason why you and half the men I assigned to Nowhere are drinking during working hours.”

The man opens his mouth to try to defend himself, but Dean can see that he has nothing. Castiel's face darkens.

“It is bad enough that you drink on duty”, the alpha growls, “but that you leave the three men who have served our country to do the work whilst you and your friends stand idly by – no, that I will not allow. You are relieved of your position, and Mr. Penny here will take over as of now. Furthermore” - he takes a step towards the beta, who whimper in terror - “if you or these three reprobates – and it goes without saying that none of you are getting paid this week - take one more step out of line, I shall banish you from the estate. I trust I make myself clear? Good. Now get to work!”

He rounds off with a warning growl, and the four men almost fall over each other in their eagerness to be out of the place. Castiel waits till they have gone before turning to his friend.
“Tell their wives that they may come to you for half their pay this week”, he says. “I would not want to make their families suffer overly much for their stupidity, though if they persist, they will find that I am a man of my word.”

“Very good, sir”, his friend says, and goes after the four reprobates. Castiel throws some coins on the table to cover the unfinished drinks, and leads his mate out into the warm summer sunshine.

Friday 28th August, 1646

“Flint Castle has fallen”, Castiel says as they run through a list of things for the journey tomorrow. “That makes three this month, after Pendennis and Raglan. The king's position grows weaker by the day, yet still he temporizes.”

“That is what monarchs do”, Dean says, watching as the distant sun finally disappears over the horizon. “And only you would say 'temporize'. You are such a Puritan!”

He suddenly realizes that the alpha is a lot closer than he had thought.

“I do not recall having been very.... puritanical last night, omega!” he growls.

Damnation, it was so unfair that just a few words from the sex god could have Dean feeling like the stereotypical omega, wanting to lie back and just take his husband's knot. And Castiel is now rutting against him, his erection very obvious despite the layers between them. Dean moans.

“We are at the front window”, he complains. “The one that opens out onto the main drive. Cas!”

“They had better hope that we do not have any unexpected visitors!” the alpha growls, and Dean can feel his trousers and pants being lowered, followed by Castiel manhandling him back and up onto.... holy fuck!

Dean's eyes widen, and he makes the sort of noise usually only associated with mating walruses. His tone gets even higher as his husband jerks him, frustratingly not hard enough to make him come but enough, it turns out, to distract him from the initial pain of intrusion, as he is lowered onto his husband's erect cock. And then Castiel is suddenly thrusting into him hard, and Dean has to make an effort not to be pushed bodily through the window, even if it only means that he gets impaled even further. It is agonizingly wonderful.

It is only when Castiel's knot begins to swell that Dean comes, moaning as he does so. And then he moans some more when Castiel comes inside him, growling his satisfaction and biting over the mating-mark. Dean arches his neck instinctively to allow his husband better access, and only slowly do his various brain functions return. He stares blankly ahead of him.

“And how are we going to explain that?” he asks, pointing to his spend all over the huge window. Castiel grins.

“They will just think that I am a sex-starved alpha who needs so much sex with his mate that he is overcome at inopportune moments”, he grins. “Still, bedtime!”

Dean's eyes widen in panic. Fuck, he had nearly passed out the time Castiel had tried to take Dean up the stairs at the London house whilst knotted inside of him. And the grand stairway in the front hall is at least twice as big.

He whimpers as Castiel manoeuvres him towards the door, and to his amazement his cock starts
getting hard again. He glares at it. Traitor!

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Saturday 29th August, 1646

Dean does not sit down until early evening, and only then, with two cushions.

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Saturday 12th September, 1646

“It is going to be a bad winter”, Charlie says mournfully as she drops a set of books onto Castiel’s writing-desk. The redhead is in the village to spend some time learning her future role as housekeeper. The alpha looks up at her in surprise.

“Why?” he asks.

“Because of the harvest failure”, she says. “The whole country, apparently. I suppose we should thank the Lord that it did not happen during the war, or at least the main part of it, but it still hits people hard.”

“That reminds me”, Castiel says, “we shall need an extra allowance of food for six of the villagers. They are taking it in turns to guard the granaries.”

“Hardly worth it, considering they're probably empty”, she points out.

Dean sniggers, and she looks at him in surprise.

“You really don't know your alpha”, he smiles. “Cas ordered in extra grain from abroad two months ago when the problem started, and it was shipped up the Thames last week.”

“I look after my people”, Castiel says loftily, “and not just because I know my omega will reward me with lots of....”

“Castiel Milton!” she yelps. “Earl or no earl, you dare finish that sentence!”

Both men snigger unashamedly.

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Friday 18th September, 1646

Castiel had been worried all week, after the Earl of Essex had died on Monday. Dean also suspected, though he did not say it, that his alpha missed being on the estate now that they had had to return to the capital.

“He may have taken a back seat”, Castiel had said, “but he was nominally the leader of the Army, and a moderate. Now he is gone there is just Fairfax and Cromwell. Essex will be granted a state funeral next month, and at least arranging that will help keep people from each other's throats. Hopefully!”

Yes, Dean’s alpha had been stressed all week. But today – today was someone’s thirty-seventh birthday. Which meant ordering a secret something from Charlie, and some new panties from that discreet shop off Whitehall that, hopefully, would make for a long hard weekend. It would be worth not being able to walk properly for a few days to both see that satisfied smile and even more,
to be surrounded by the distinct scent of happy alpha.

Dean watches for his husband's return for over an hour from an upstairs window, and is relieve when he finally sees him and Ezekiel making their way home from the House. He rushes into the bedroom and strips off in record time, donning the new panties. They are green – his sappy alpha likes that colour best, saying that it brings out the forests in the omega's eyes – with fancy white bows. Dean suspects the latter will not do well in what is to come (him, with any luck).

It seems like an eternity before Castiel finally starts up the stairs, and even from the bedroom Dean can scent his arousal. Then he hesitates outside the door for another age, and the omega wonders what on earth he is doing – until he opens the door and steps inside, stark naked.

And carrying a pie. Dean's eyes widen.

“Charlie spoke to me”, Castiel explains, carefully placing the huge dessert on a table, “and said you had asked for a cake. I changed the order, because I wanted something that you would love as well.”

Dean can feel himself tearing up at that half-truth. Castiel is all right with pie; it is his mate who truly loves it. And Castiel wanted Dean to have pie when it should have been the alpha's choice of food. It is almost too much.

Castiel steps outside the room briefly, and re-enters carrying two dishes and spoons. He smiles at his mate.

“The one thing that makes me truly happy”, he says, “is knowing that my omega is truly happy. Pie for my Pie. Let me feed you, Dean, and let us just lie here and enjoy a lovely evening together.”

Dean does not whine with happiness. No matter what it sounds like.

“And after the pie has gone down”, Castiel says, his voice suddenly deepening, “I think I will want to explore.... my present.”

He gives Dean such a look that the omega feels light-headed, all his blood heading to only one part of his body. This time, it is definitely a whine.

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Thursday 22nd October, 1646

The Earl of Essex's funeral had not gone well. At least for Dean. Castiel is furious.

“He deserved it!” he growls. “And the law would be on my side, damnation!”

Dean says nothing. The alpha glares at him.

“That”, he says crisply, “is a judgemental silence.”

“I do not think Lord Roberts quite deserved you nearly strangling him”, Dean says carefully. The gaunt alpha lord had stopped at the omega enclosure on the way out of the Abbey and been foolish enough to lay a hand on Dean. And to do so whilst Castiel had been coming down the aisle behind him. Three people had been knocked over and the omega had had to reason with his husband to stop strangling his assailant, who had been turning an interesting shade of purple.

“His sort are only after one thing!” Castiel says darkly. “And they do not care if it belongs to
someone else.”

Dean’s breath catches. Castiel looks uncertainly at him, then his eyes widen.

“Oh no!” he says, shocked. “Beloved, most precious. I did not mean that!”

“But it is true”, Den says sadly. “In the eyes of the law, I am your property. We both know it.”

If he were in the mood, Dean would laugh at the almost comical distress on his husband’s face. Castiel has never treated him like he knows too many alphas do treat their omegas, but being reminded of his true status in society is painful for the younger man. His alpha pulls him into an embrace.

“I love you”, he says firmly, “and that includes defending you from knotheads like Lord Roberts. I do not care what the law says, Dean. I love you so much that, if you turned round and told me you did not love me any more, I would let you go. It would kill me, but I would do it if you wanted it.”

The strain on his face is terrible. Dean kisses him.

“Then it is lucky that I will never be wanting that, is it not?” he says lightly. “Come, beloved. Let us just hold each other for a while, away from knotheads who know no better.”

Castiel whimpers lightly as he pulls Dean even closer, and they just stand there in the gathering gloom.

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Saturday 28th November, 1646

“Negotiations with the Scots are not going well”, Castiel sighs that evening. “The Commons passed a resolution today asserting their right to the king’s person. Almost as if they own him in some way.”

“I thought you were happier with the way things were going?” Dean asks.

“Well, they have not made any more stupid decisions lately”, Castiel concedes. “Last month they agreed to keep the New Model Army under arms for another six months, though the fact that they have still not dealt with the back pay worries me somewhat. Especially with the situation in Ireland; I cannot see the Army allowing itself to be hurled into that without things being settled money-wise first. And I do worry a little that the king still holds Conway (1) and Harlech Castles on the Welsh coast, though we are besieging them both. If this long-promised Irish force ever does materialize – and I still rate it as less than likely – then it would be near one of these places.”

“Do you think you will reach agreement with the Scots?” Dean asks.

“I think that it just a matter of time and money”, Castiel says. “We offered a hundred thousand, they wanted half a million (2). They have the king, so we will have to settle nearer their figure, painful though it will be to raise. But we will have the king back. And then....”

“And then?” Dean prompts.

“Who knows?” Castiel says gloomily. “We can only hope the king does not do anything stupid, but given his past form, that is the original forlorn hope (3).”

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Friday 25th December, 1646

“The Covenanters have handed the king over, at long last”, Castiel observes.

There is a whine from the couch. The alpha smiles.

“And I dare say we will have some foolish Puritan official going to someone's house and accusing them of celebrating Christmas.”

Another whine, followed by an un-omega-like belch. Castiel only narrowly suppresses a laugh.

“But perhaps celebrating Christmas by allowing you to eat as much pie as you wanted was a bad idea?"

There is a rude gesture that quite accurately imparts his omega's disagreement on that matter, although the movement makes Dean whine again, and clutch his stomach in agony. Castiel heads for the door before he laughs.

He does not make it. And he can almost hear the resultant pout!

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Notes:
1) Now Conwy. Both these castles were built for Edward I after his conquest of Wales in the late thirteenth century, and were formidable fortresses.
2) Respectively around £1.5 million and £7.5 million ($2 million and $10 million) in today's terms at the lowest 2016 comparison, probably a lot more.
3) Curiously nothing to do with hopes being forlorn, it comes from a Dutch expression meaning 'lost troop', a group of soldiers chosen to participate in something for which the casualty rate would be high. This might be part of a battlefield manoeuvre or a special forces mission.
Chapter Summary

52: Dean's twenty-thirteenth birthday is a time for considering if there is such a thing as too much pie (nah!). Castiel does as his omega tells him, but frets over the growing power of the army and the even faster growing stupidity of his colleagues in parliament. The alpha also takes up knitting, which has some 'warming' consequences for his omega in the bedroom....

Sunday 24th January 1647

Another birthday, Dean thinks resignedly as he wakes that morning, though at least he has the compensation of a warm alpha wrapped around him. And now that Castiel has taken up knitting, said alpha is wearing bedsocks, which despite being garish in colour at least mean an end to icicle-feet making the omega yelp when they are put against him unaware. It is worth his husband looking like he got caught in a paint factory explosion for that.

(Dean may or may not be wearing similar items of apparel created by his weird husband but that is quite beside the point. And his socks most definitely do not have fluffy bunnies on them).

The bed has slightly less than its usual warmth, which means that his alpha must have slipped out and only recently returned. Dean assumes the obvious, until he catches sight of a plate on the bedside table, on which is a small (too small) pie. He looks at it in surprise.

“Hullo, Dean”, Castiel growls. “If you do not want the pie, then I can always....”

Dean is already stuffing the thing into his mouth. It is delicious, although he is grateful for the small glass of water that is covered and next to it, as his throat is dry from sleep.

“A good start to the day”, he concedes. “Thank you, beloved.”

“Best wait for all the others”, Castiel grins.

“Huh?”

“Today is your thirty-third birthday”, Castiel says, “so that is the first of your thirty-three pies for today. And we do not even have to go to church; I made a donation to the church roof fund so that we might be excused, and I could devote myself to you fully today.”

Dean blushes. For pie he will over look the use of the word 'thirty'.

“That's so sweet!” he says. “Nice alpha!”

“And in between each pie, I will be finding a new way to fuck you.”

Dean's eyes widen. Oh. It is going to be that sort of day.....

+++++
Fifteen hours later, a thoroughly exhausted if sated omega is tumbling into bed, wondering if just perhaps, there might be such a thing as too much pie. Or too much sex; he had not known just how inventive his gorgeous mate could be. Dean did not think that he would want either pie or sex for at least another week now.

Then Castiel clambers into bed beside him, and the omega thinks, well....

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Thursday 18th February, 1647

“I cannot believe that my colleagues would be so stupid!” Castiel fumes that evening. “We are threatened that we might even lose Dublin, the king is doing everything he can to break us apart – and they want to go and reduce the Army now? What is wrong with them?”

“Why would they do such a thing?” Dean asks.

“The Presbyterian members feel threatened”, Castiel says, calming down a little. Even though we now have the king – he is being held at Holmby (1) in Northamptonshire – the rumblings coming out of the Army are ominous.”

“Rumblings?”

“The ideas of Lilburne – being imprisoned does not stop his literary output, somehow – are spreading”, Castiel says. “The papers call them the Levellers, after the country rioters who flatten buildings; they claim that they want to flatten society and reduce everyone to the same level.”

“And the soldiers like these ideas?”

“When the idiots who should be paying them try to get rid of them with a promise of 'we might pay you sometime in the future if we get round to it', then it is not surprising”, Castiel snarks. “And to think we started this war because we did not believe similar promises of jam tomorrow from a king! Yes, we need to send troops to Ireland, but we need to deal fairly with our fighting men first. Too many of my colleagues think we can do government 'on the cheap', so that they themselves do not have to pay any more taxes. It does not work that way, and if they continue to upset the Army, there will surely be trouble.”

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Monday 22nd March, 1647

“I feared as much”, Castiel sighs as they lie together that evening. “I have tried to warn my colleagues about how unhappy the Army is, but they will not listen. One or two of them are even muttering about making a move against Cromwell, which I fear would be the last straw.”

“Has something happened?” Dean asks. He feels happy and sated just now, knowing that his alpha is so fulfilled having worked his frustrations out through sex (the omega may or may not have enjoyed getting fully filled just a bit, too).

“Some soldiers are refusing to serve in Ireland until certain issues are resolved”, Castiel says. “Mainly back-pay. It is not an open mutiny yet, but unless my colleagues start dealing with a few of their grievances, it may turn into one. I do not think they understand the real situation here.”

“Which is?”
Castiel pulls him into an embrace and kisses him before answering.

“Parliament created the New Model Army to win the war”, he says. “Consider it. A fully-trained, well-paid fighting force, that could match up against any of those famed German regiments (2) but is much larger. I do not think it has occurred to more than a handful of my colleagues that one day soon, that power might be turned against them.”

“A mutiny!” Dean exclaimed.

“Yes”, Castiel said gravely. "We may have won the war – and with Harlech falling last week, the king has nowhere left – but I fear that we may somehow contrive to lose the peace.”

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Thursday 1st April, 1647

Sometimes modern technology amazes Dean. One of the illicit papers which someone left behind in the bakery actually has news of what is happening in the Commons today, something doubly illegal as no-one is allowed to report what goes on in the House (3), never mind the fact that the paper itself has evaded the censor.

“Funny name”, Dean says to Charlie as they clean up with the door locked. The restaurant is, as she feared, still not doing well, so the redhead will definitely be coming to Stalwarton as the new housekeeper this summer, Mrs. Barnes having secured her passage to the Americas. “Licotho.”

She looks at the article and giggles.

“Silly omega!” she says reprovingly. “That’s short for Lieutenant Colonel Thomas. Pride, by name and nature; he is one of the Army leaders. What has he done?”

“Been summoned to answer a charge of soliciting signatures for an illegal petition”, Dean says, reading the article. “Cas is worried about this sort of thing. He thinks that the Army may actually mutiny.”

“The gossip here tends to agree with him”, she says. “I shall have to run that down to the censor, just to show what a loyal parliamentarian I am for turning in such tat.”

“He will know that you have read it”, Dean smiles.

“There would be hell to pay if he or his like found it here first!” she points out. “Would you be all right to finish the washing-up whilst I go?”

“Provided you lock up behind you”, he grins. “I can look after the place.”

“I'll also be locking up the pies before I go!” she says with a smile.

Dean scowls. Damnation, she knows him too well!

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Friday 23rd April, 1647

“I have found a buyer for the restaurant”, Castiel says over dinner that evening. “He wishes to develop it into a town house, like ours. I did have another offer from someone who wishes to make it into apartments, but I do not think we wish to have that next door, even though it was more money.”
Dean hesitates.

“What is it?” Castiel asks.

“Do you still actually need to be a member of parliament?” Dean asks. “I mean, the war is over, and the estate is safe now, surely?”

“I rather fear that the war is not over, even if the fighting is done for now”, Castiel says. “My colleagues are still dragging their feet over Army pay – one or two of them even wanted to arrest that unpleasant lieutenant-colonel we had at the bar at the start of the month – and the king is doubtless still seeking to divide us one way or another. Perhaps once we have reached some constitutional settlement that looks like working, then yes, I would like to resign my seat and retire to the countryside. But we do not need flats next door, even for a short while.”

“Retire”, Dean giggles. “That makes you sound so old.”

Castiel puts his fork down, and looks hard at his omega, whose eyes widen. He knows that look.

“Bearing in mind that I would then be spending the rest of my days fucking my mate into a sex coma, I do not think it would be that relaxing”, he growls. “In fact, I think that I should start by getting in some practice soon!”

Dean looks at him pleadingly. Castiel grins.

“After dessert”, he says as Gadreel enters. “I see that it is pie tonight. Again!”

“Yes!”

Friday 30th April, 1647

“At last!” Castiel grunts, as he thrusts lazily into his mate. They have been knotted together for some time, but he loves letting his mate rest for a time before surprising him with a sudden movement. The grunt that he elicits is somewhere between pained and pleasured, and Dean glares at him.

“Working out your frustrations on a poor, defenceless little omega”, he pouts, knowing that it is pointless as the strange alpha finds his pouting ‘adorable’, the weirdo. “I do not know why I put up with it.”

“Because you love being impaled on my cock, that is why”, Castiel grins. “In fact, I feel really good right now. Though I could do with a drink.”

“Ring the bell and call one of the twins, then.”

“Or I could walk downstairs with you on my cock?” Castiel suggests with a grin. As he knew he would, Dean responds immediately by clenching his walls, which presumably he thinks his alpha will not like. Wrong.

“You are not walking me down those stairs on your knot again”, Dean says firmly. “The last time you tried it, I had days of Gad and Zeke smirking and saying they could not get the stains off the floor. And I could not get up until three the next day.”

“I do recall that I myself had no trouble getting ‘up’ after that”, Castiel teases. “And things are
going well down at the House. It looks like my colleagues are finally going to get around to dealing with the thorny issue of back-pay, which will make the Army happy.”

Dean looks at him incredulously.

“What?” Castiel asks.

“I thought you had had a bad day”, Dean scowls, “and wanted to work out your frustrations on me.”

“No”, Castiel grins. “I just wanted lots of hot, horny sex with my perfect mate.”

Dean blushes.

“Downstairs?” Castiel asks hopefully.

“Just ring the damn bell!” Dean growls.

The alpha laughs, but obeys his omega. He knows his place!

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Notes:
1) Now Holdenby. A palatial building owned by the Crown, it was later sold to a Parliamentarian soldier who knocked down everything but the small servant's quarters, which survives today. And even that is impressive!
2) Because German states were so small, their fighting men had to be of the highest quality to defend their homelands. This persisted through to the following century, when Great Britain was in a personal union with the German state of Hanover and hired many more for its wars, including in the American War of Independence.
3) For a supposed bastion of democracy, the Commons regarded people knowing who said what as being quite unthinkable. This continued through to 1771 when the then-mayor Brass Crosby (people had great names in those days!) refused to take any action against a printer accused of printing the proceedings. The Commons took Crosby to court, but the judges promptly threw the case out, hence the phrase 'bold as Brass'. Efforts to stop publications continued through to 1810, when radical William Cobbett was fined and jailed for two years for doing it. Upon release in 1812 he sold the 'rights' to his records to his publisher, Thomas Curson Hansard, who had also done three months for his part in the 'crime'. But as the government moved (grudgingly) towards fairer votes for people, Hansard became accepted as the official publisher, which is why today UK parliamentary records are still called 'Hansard'.
May-June 1647

Chapter Summary

53: Castiel has to make the difficult decision as to whether to warn Cromwell about a planned move against him, and reluctantly decides so to do. The Reformadoes are on the loose, whilst Dean becomes an early limey and discovers that when it comes to Recreation, his alpha can be a complete bastard of the first order. And yes, Dean does get to go to the ball!

Monday 3rd May, 1647

Charlie comes round that evening.

“I heard another rumour in the shop today”, she says, “and thought you should be made aware of it.”

“Go on”, Castiel says.

“Trent, a regular who works in the local Trained Bands, told me that he was sounded out about a new set of leaders for the group”, she says. “Presbyterian leaders. I think some of your colleagues are planning something.”

“Fools!” Castiel growls. “They have won this war, yet they seem determined to lose the peace.”

“Why would they do that?” Dean asks.

“They think the Bands will defend them from the Army if the latter mutinies”, Castiel says. “They are so wrong. Not only would the Army be far stronger, but the Leveller movement is quite strong in some of the Bands as well, from what I hear. If they even move towards trying to take control of them, the Army will rightly see it as a threat. It may incite the very reaction they want to avoid.”

“Do they want to avoid it?” Charlie asks. “Maybe they think that it will be Turnham Green all over again, and that London will rise to defend itself.”

“London is split this time”, Castiel says, “and they are very wrong. I only hope they do not find out the hard way!”

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Tuesday 25th May, 1647

“I said that we should not underestimate the king”, Castiel says, looking exasperated. “He has suggested that he might agree to some of the Newcastle Propositions, and it has caused my colleagues to think they have him – and do something dumb as a result.”

“What?” Dean asks. “And more Propositions?”

“A constitutional settlement to end the war”, Castiel says, “which we drew up last year. The sticking-point, or at least the one upon which he is prevaricating for now, is as to which of his
supporters will be punished for their actions in the war. He wants it to be as few as possible, but of course the larger the list, the more money parliament gets. But now they think that he is almost ready to submit, they have gone and voted to reduce the Army.”

“What?” Dean exclaims. “That is stupid!”

“Foolish indeed”, Castiel says. “And one of them actually approached me with a plan to seize Cromwell before he can go and join them. I am in two minds about it.”

“Why?”

“Because on one hand I think he might moderate some of the Army's demands, or at least better control them”, Castiel says worriedly. “At the moment it is like a wild beast steadily getting out of control. It needs to be carefully directed, not provoked. But on the other hand, I can see the plotters' logic. There is no-one quite of his calibre, and there is a strong chance that any revolt may fail without him. It is all very difficult.”

“And if he later finds out that you knew and did not tell him....” Dean reasons. Castiel nods.

“Exactly”, he says. “It is made more difficult that he is off with a cold at the moment, presumably a recurrence of whatever laid him low earlier in the year.”

“What about Charlie?” Dean suggests.

Castiel looks at him in confusion.

“She could send Cromwell a pie”, Dean says, “and suggest a meeting at the same time. Something vague, that does not mention your name but says he can bring a guard if he needs it. He would be on his guard anyway.”

“I knew you were not just a pretty face”, Castiel grins. “And a pretty body. And a pretty....”

Dean yelps as he realizes too late just where his husband's hand – his husband's very cold hand, damnation! - is heading.

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Monday 17th May, 1647

Dean is laid up in bed - not in the fun way, worse luck - with a severe cold. Truly severe; they had had pie for dessert yesterday evening and he had not been able to even taste it.

“This is the devil's work”, he grumbles as he sits up and drinks the water that Gadreel has brought him (Castiel had insisted that Dean drink plenty during the day, and the omega knows that the beta twins would tattle on his if he did not). It tastes odd. “What's this?”

“Lime juice, sir”, Gadreel says. “You remember? You suggested that the sailors on the company ship would be healthier if they drank it every day.”

Dean does remember that, having read a book from a few years back where the writer had said that sailors who drank lime or orange juice never got the dreaded scurvy (1). It had seemed an odd idea but he had asked around and read some more, and there had seemed to be something to the idea. The fact that the ship had just returned from a trip down to Portugal and not had a single case of the disease looked promising.
“It’s sharp”, he says, “but all right.”

“Mistress Bradbury is seeing if she can make them into a pie in some way”, Gadreel grins. “Of course the master told her you would be unavailable to do taste testing for.....”

He stops. Dean is looking murderously at him.

“Bye!”

The beta runs for it, chuckling as he goes, and Dean does not even have anything to hand to throw at him. Damn cold!

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Thursday 3rd June, 1647

Castiel had returned home late on Tuesday, and Dean knew exactly where he had been and with whom. The alpha had slunk quietly into bed, and the omega had just held him. He had known instinctively that that was what his husband had needed at that moment. Now they are lying there after another exhausting day, going over the day's events.

“What will Cromwell do?” Dean asks.

He is quietly proud that his husband does not even hesitate before telling him, though he knows that not to do so would never have crossed Castiel's mind.

“The Presbyterians in the House are moving slowly to impeach him”, Castiel says, “so he will flee tomorrow. Then, or soon after, my colleagues will discover just how much trouble they are in.”

“A lot?”

“When I told him what I knew, Cromwell told me his plans”, Castiel says. Dean notes that he does not even bother to ask the omega not to say anything; he knows his mate never would anyway. “He has sent someone to seize the king at Holmby, and take him to where the Army regiments are gathering, near the town of Newmarket (2) in Suffolk. He should have him by now.”

“I wonder what the king thinks about that”, Dean muses. He knows, because it is Charles Stuart, that the king is doubtless already plotting ways to turn this latest development to his advantage, but he cannot help feeling that they are fast heading into even more dangerous times.

“He is on his travels again”, Castiel says. “My colleagues will have kittens soon enough, first with Cromwell eluding them and then the king. Well, time will tell.”

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Monday 7th June, 1647

This is London (well, Westminster), so there are few things that can surprise Dean Milton. Having his husband return in the middle of the day, running into the shop looking like the hounds of Hell are chasing him – yes, that is on the list. Castiel looks around frantically, then steps over to where Charlie and Dean are standing behind the counter and speaks quickly to the redhead. She pales - impressive for someone of her skin tone, Dean thinks abstractly - then reaches down and picks up a large metal triangle which she bangs several times with her metal spoon. This, unsurprisingly, gets everyone's attention.
“All right, listen up men!” she barks. “There's a large group of angry soldiers – Reformadoes (3) mostly – rioting up at Charing, and it looks like they may be headed this way. You all need to get out of here now.”

Castiel also steps forward.

“Anyone who has a home towards the City, I suggest you head for the river and seek a boat across to the south bank, where you can go round via the bridge”, he says. “Or continue on down to Pimlico, where you should be safe. I believe that they are marching on the Commons, so they will not go that far.”

There is a scramble for the door, though Dean observes that the departure is rushed but orderly as the men hustle out between Charlie and his husband. Once they are gone, Castiel and Dean pull in the tables from the outside, then barricade the door. Charlie tries to argue that she should stay, but Castiel insists that she come with them into the house. This makes sense, she agrees reluctantly, if only because the bakery does not open out onto Whitehall Place. The house has a door on the corner which Castiel moves to secure, sending the others upstairs.

Dean watches from his window as the soldiers - hundreds of them – move slowly and angrily down the road towards the Commons. This is all they need; just when parliament has managed to turn the New Model Army against it, it upsets the old army as well. He tenses as the bulk of the men near the house, but it seems that – for now, at least – looting is not their number one priority.

Phew!

Friday 11th June, 1647

“Cromwell is politically astute”, Castiel observes that morning. “Just as his colleagues are congratulating themselves on buying off the Reformadoes, he lets them know that he is inching closer. He has shifted the Army over to Royston, barely forty miles north of here.”

“And the implication of cutting London off from the rest of the country by moving around it”, Dean says. “I bet that is helping to concentrate minds in the House.”

Castiel chuckles.

“You would think so”, he says, “but I am afraid that far too many of them still do not get it. They pushed through a law abolishing Holy Days today. Instead we are to have, and I quote, 'Days of Recreation'.

His mate stares at him.

“What the hell are those?” he demands.

“Presumably days when every alpha has to fuck his omega for as much of the day as his physical stamina will allow”, Castiel says dryly. “I must start getting into training.”

Dean is ninety-nine per cent sure that his husband is having him on here, but that one per cent precludes an awful lot of soreness. Then the alpha chuckles, and the one per cent becomes zero. Dean growls in disapproval.

“Bad alpha!”
“I will be, when you wear the green panties tonight”, Castiel grins.

“We are going to a ball at Lord Fenshaw's remember?” Dean points out.

His alpha just looks at him, and grins. Slowly, Dean gets it.

Oh fuck!

+-++++
Notes:
1) A disease caused by a deficiency of the essential Vitamin C, to which sailors were particularly susceptible. The Navy was dreadfully slow to catch on to this, and fruit juice rations for all sailors were not introduced until 1795. It was the use of limes from the West Indies that prompted Americans to call the British limeys.
2) A more successful new town than Castiel's own Forston St. George, it lies about 65 miles north-north-east of London. Founded around 1200, James I had established it as a royal resort in 1609, and it was there that Charles had refused a deputation five years before in a last attempt to avert war after his failed attempt to seize the Five Members. Under Charles’ son and eventual successor it became a major horse-racing centre, something it retains to this day. It is home to two of the five annual Classics – the 1,000 Guineas and the 2,000 Guineas – and the Queen is a regular visitor to her own horses stabled here. Population as of 2016 is a little over 20,000.
3) Men who were forced out of the old army when the New Model Army was formed, mostly because they were unsuitable. They would have stayed on half or even full pay and retained any officer status, but would not of course have been paid their back-pay yet. The riot started about four hundred yards north of the restaurant between the cities of London and Westminster, roughly where Trafalgar Square is today.
Chapter Summary

54: The Reformadoes cause more trouble in London, and Charlie closes the shop for the last time to take up a new job making pies for Dean (and being housekeeper at Stalwarton Hall when she has the time). The Army advances slowly on London, and Dean spends a lot of time looking at brown cows, a fact which, to his utter mortification, his husband learns of.

Saturday 12th June, 1647

Lord but Dean is so sore! He had been edgy enough when they had set out the evening before – he hates formal dinners – but his bastard of a husband had teased him constantly throughout the meal, growling possessively every time someone else stepped too near, and whispering suggestions as to what he had planned for later. Dean did not need an erection when fine dining, thank you very much! And once back at the house - well!

His wonderful sex maniac of a husband is kind enough to bring him breakfast (and dinner) in bed, and even let Dean lie on top of him whilst he eats. Which is necessary as Dean is not going to risk his arse resting on any sort of surface any time soon. It has been through more than enough!

“Cromwell is moving his men to St. Albans, further round to the west and only twenty-five miles away”, Castiel says as the omega crunches happily on some crispy bacon. “And parliament tried to order up the Trained Bands today, but only the Westminster one turned up. I think that some of my colleagues may have belatedly realized the gravity of the situation. Too late, alas!”

“What will happen now?” Dean wonders. Then he yelps as Castiel rests a cold hand on his still sore arse. Bastard!

“Hopefully parliament will deal fairly with the Army as regards pay”, the alpha grins, and kisses his mate's pout before continuing. “But I dare say some of my colleagues – particular the Presbyterian ones who have landed us in this mess – are considering their futures. Which will include a long stay in the country if they have any sense.”

“The Army would force them out of parliament?” Dean asks.

“Definitely”, Castiel says. “Though I disagree with their extremism, the Levellers are right about where the country needs to aim for, even if I think we will be far longer getting there than they would wish. But the Army can force change at the end of a gun, a gun provided to them by us. What we have here is, at least in part, a military takeover.”

“And the king?”

“Who knows?” Castiel says, “but I am sure he is going to try to exploit this somehow. The only saving grace is that Cromwell, for all his stridency, is moved to keep him in some capacity, but I do not know how long that will last. I would say that all the king has to do is avoid anything stupid, but....”
“But he is Charles Stuart”, Dean finishes.

“Exactly. Any chance of me having some of that?”

"Cas!"

The alpha just laughs, but lets his omega have the remaining bacon. Because bacon makes Dean happy.

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Wednesday 16th June, 1647

“Eleven.”

“What?” Dean asks.

“The Army wants the removal of eleven members, all Presbyterians”, Castiel says. “It could have been a lot more, but they are going only for the hard core of those against them. The unspoken threat being that a larger purge could follow if they are provoked.”

“And yesterday?”

“Sullen silence when their spokesman read out the Representation, listing all their demands”, Castiel says. “But there was a definite reaction when he go to the bit where the Army claims to speak for the people of this country. That is supposed to be parliament's job.”

“If they have provoked their own army to march on them, then it kind of suggests they are not doing it that well”, Dean observes.

“Cruel, but correct”, Castiel says. “Well, if Cromwell goes to form he will continue to circle the capital to apply more pressure. I think he will go to Uxbridge next.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“It is where we had the negotiations to try to end the war a couple of years back”, Castiel says. “The king had lost the North and failed to take advantage of his victory over Essex in Cornwall back then, but he should still have treated whilst he could. Plus Cromwell will think to remind the capital of Forty-Two, and the invaders coming in from the west.”

“The invaders were pushed back then”, Dean points out.

“Yes”, Castiel says, “except that then the city was defended by the old army, the Trained Bands and the citizens themselves. This time we only have some very reluctant Trained Bands, so the situation is very different. I wonder just how far we are going to have to go to sort this mess out?”

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Saturday 26th June, 1647

“This situation grows more confused by the day”, Castiel says as he comes through the door, looking tired and hot. It had been one of the hottest days of the year, and he does not like the formal attire he has to wear to the House at the best of times. Which these are not.

Dean smiles and comes over to him, beginning to ease him out of his clothes. Castiel sighs in gratitude.
“What happened today?” Dean asks, pulling off one of his husband's boots.

“The Eleven – the members the Army wanted out – have gone”, Castiel says. “Bad timing on their part, and ours. Yesterday the House passed a resolution to stand by them, but with Cromwell now less than twenty miles away they panicked, and have told us they will not be returning. A shame, really.”

Dean pulls off his husband's other boot.

“You were right about Uxbridge”, he concedes, standing up. “So what next, o far-seeing one?”

Castiel grins.

“I see a bed”, he says, shrugging off his fine shirt, “and on that bed, a naked and horny omega begging for mercy and screaming his husband's name as he is ploughed into the week after next....”

That is incorrect as he currently does not see an omega. Dean has fled.

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Saturday 3rd July, 1647

“We are leaving. Monday.”

Dean is surprised. He had known that they were to go to Stalwarton this summer, but he had expected more warning.

“Has something happened?” he asks uncertainly. “I thought you would be all happy with the Army drawing off to Reading.”

Castiel grins.

“Cromwell is something of a genius at times like this”, he says. “He knows that there is a substantial peace party in the capital, even if a lot of them want the king back as part of it.”

“So?” Dean prompts.

“So, he is thinking that either they will make a move, or parliament will feel less threatened and do something stupid that will give him reason to go in hard against them”, Castiel says. “Besides, Mrs. Barnes is due to set to leave for Bristol in a month's time. It would be beneficial if she can give Charlie as much training as possible before she goes.”

“Provided she does not teach her how to know what's coming”, Dean says firmly. “I abhor all that supernatural rubbish!”

“It does need to be taken with a pinch of salt”, Castiel agrees. “Although that fortune-teller was right in the sense that last year was a dark one for me, losing so many of my family. And she warned you as well, which has led to you wandering around the estate farms asking people about all the brown cows.”

Dean scowls. Tattle-tale farmworkers! His husband chuckles.

“I think that Cromwell has his men”, Castiel says, “and that there may well be trouble. You had better go and tell Charlie that this is the shop's last day. I have already warned her that we would be leaving at short notice, and soon.”
The omega hesitates and looks pleadingly at his husband, who lets out a long-suffering sigh.

“Except for tomorrow, when doubtless she will be baking someone one last pie”, the alpha smiles.

Best. Husband. Ever!

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Tuesday 6th July, 1647

There had been another incident with some Reformadoes lurking around the back of Westminster yesterday and who had looked as if they were considering trying to stop the wagon, but with three men each armed with a gun, they had wisely thought better of it. The journey to their stopping-point in Aston Cantlow had been uneventful and it had only been today, as they had turned again in Wheatley, that something had occurred to Dean.

“Will we ever be going back to London?” he asks.

“Not for a while”, Castiel says. “If things turn out as I expect then there will be high drama around Westminster, and I would rather watch it from a safe distance. I have rented the house down there to a fellow member for the next three months, so we shall stay away at least that long.”

“But you will still be a member of parliament?”

“For now”, Castiel says. “The earldom does not entitle me to sit in the Lords, so technically there is no bar against me continuing. However, I would rather watch events from a distance for now, with those I love beside me.”

Dean blushes. Damn sappy alpha! Castiel smiles at him.

“Hey, Romeo and Julian!” comes a familiar cry from inside the cart just ahead of them both.

“Some of us want to get to our destination today, you know!”

They both grin at Charlie's outburst – she is right, as they have fallen a few paces behind the cart whilst they were just staring at each other from atop their horses – and they press on.

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Wednesday 28th July, 1647

“Well, that did not take long”, Castiel sighs as he comes into the main room. “I have just returned from King's Linton – signing off the final documents over the sale of my late and un-lamented uncle's uselessly large house, thank the Lord – and Oxford is abuzz.”

“Why?” Dean asks, accepting a kiss from his husband. Castiel slides gracefully onto the couch next to him and pulls Dean into a willing embrace.

“About sixty Independent members of the Commons have fled to the place (1)”, Castiel says. “On Monday a group of 'peace' campaigners invaded the Commons and forced them to pass a resolution asking for the king to return – it always amazes me that people who campaign for peace can be so violent when the need suits – and they got their way. Now the Presbyterians are in control of what is left, for what little good it will do them.”

“Do you think that Cromwell will now march on London?” Dean asks.

“I am certain of it”, Castiel says, “and like Caesar at the Rubicon (2), there will be no going back.
Any pretence that parliament is in control of the situation will be blown out of the water by such a move. Those foolish people will be causing the very thing that they were seeking to avoid. Still, history is full of such idiots.”

Dean snuggles closer to him, and the alpha growls contentedly.

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Notes:
1) Not just the nearest large city to the west, but also until a couple of years back the king's capital. A provocative choice.

2) The laws of the Roman Empire forbade anyone from bringing legions into the Imperial province uninvited. Hence when in 49 BC Julius Caesar crossed the river Rubicon and did just that, he was saying that he would tilt for complete power or die in the attempt. He succeeded - but unfortunately he ended up getting so powerful that five years later, twenty-three of his 'friends' stabbed him to death on the Senate floor - though they 'kindly' named a month after him. How sweet!
Chapter Summary

55: In the political arena things are rendered Null And Void, whilst unusually it is the men with the guns who start praying. Castiel decides it is time to resign his seat in parliament in order to concentrate on running the estate, and encounters some objections to his unusual choice of steward. Dean reacts badly to his alpha's frankly bizarre idea that a certain omega cannot be bought off with pie (weird!) and, fatefully, hesitates at just the wrong time.

Sunday 1st August, 1647

“You were right”, Dean says over supper that evening. “Though it still seems bizarre that we can find out what happened in a city eighty miles away within twenty-four hours.”

“Bad news travels fast”, Castiel says, “or at least, bad for some. Fairfax is an average general, but he has done well this time. Having the Army at Colnbrook, twenty miles west of the capital, might seem like he is holding back, but sending detachments to secure both Deptford and Tilbury, down the Thames – he is basically telling members at Westminster that he has them surrounded.”

Dean looks curiously at his husband.

“Is there something else?” he asks.

“Joss – Mr. Baum – has said he wishes to retire”, the alpha frowns. “I had hoped he could be persuaded to carry on for a few more years – he is a steward after all – but he wishes to marry a widow up in Wolfstown and go and spend his twilight years with her. He will be hard to replace.”

“He was definitely an improvement on Armstrong”, Dean agrees. “Do you have anyone in mind?”

Castiel hesitates, which is quite unlike him.

“Yes”, he says slowly, “but it is a little unconventional....”

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Saturday 14th August, 1647

Dean really hates official functions, but he knows it is one of the few downsides of being an earl's mate (if Castiel calls him a countess again, he is not putting out for a whole... day! (1)). And there are many upsides – his sex-god of a husband finds many aspects of the job frustrating, which means his poor omega has to let him work out all those frustrations on his helpless body – so Dean cannot complain.

Though he may consider buying more of that ointment that helps at times. His husband had been very 'frustrated' all last night. And this morning!

Dean winces as Mr. Jason Tucker approaches. The man is brother to a high-ranking officer in the Army and has used that connection to buy Woodfleets, a large house about ten miles away to the
north-west and just off the road to Dean's mother's house. The omega had met the alpha once before, and had swiftly decided he was most unpleasant. And if he starts to leer anywhere near Dean, he will soon regret it.

“Good day, Monseigneur Milton”, the man smirks. “Tell me, who is the piece in the blue dress?”

Caveman, Dean thinks acidly. He follows the man's gaze to the lady in question, then smiles to himself. This could be interesting.

“That”, he says, “is Mistress Dorothy Baum. Our new steward.”

The alpha stares at him in shock.

“You have a woman running the estate?” he says, far too loudly. Dean knows without even seeing it that the sound has alerted his mate, because he can sense Castiel's alarm, followed by a sharpening of his scent. Fortunately Dean is confident that any blood will wash off the hardwood floor. Well, it did last time.

“Why not a lady?” Castiel says crisply, approaching and wrapping a protective arm around the omega. “We have a female housekeeper, so why not a female steward as well?”

“Stewarding is a man's work”, Mr. Tucker sneers. “Everyone knows that.”

“And does everyone also know that my new steward has already come up with ideas to raise income from the estate by nearly five per cent, and that in her first week?” the alpha smiles.

Their guest splutters.

“The men on the estate would never take orders from a woman!” he snaps.

“Well, they have a choice”, Castiel says smoothly. “They can take orders from my steward, or they can leave and try their luck elsewhere. I do not employ slaves, 'sir'!”

The last word is said with a definite sneer, and followed with a warning growl. Their unpleasant guest actually looks like he is thinking of challenging Castiel further on this but (despite Dean's hopes that it might end in violence), he backs off and makes his way to the door, muttering angrily to himself.

“Caveman!” Dean mutters. He stares after the retreating figure for some time before he realizes that Castiel is looking quizzically at him. “What?”

“Just imagining you and I in cavemen outfits”, he grins. “The alpha hunter dragging his poor omega back to the cave so he can have his way with him.”

Judging from the dilated pupils and the sweat appearing on his alpha's face, Dean is possibly a little too close to re-consummating their relationship right in front of everyone. That would be something for the society pages.

“Maybe later!” the omega promises, and slips away quickly. Though not before hearing an anticipatory rumble from behind him. It looks like it will be a(nother) rough night.

Well, he can but hope!

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Sunday 22nd August, 1647
Dean is not sulking. He is not, damnation!

“Stop sulking”, Castiel grins. “Just because you did not see it sooner.”

Dean does some more not sulking whilst his husband reads his letter.

“As I expected”, the alpha says. “Parliament, no doubt at the wrong end of a gun, has passed a Null And Void Ordinance. All laws passed whilst the sixty Independents were forced out are cancelled, and they are not only back but in complete charge. The Presbyterian party (2) is broken. And with the relief of Dublin earlier this month, perhaps now we can all draw breath and set about reaching some sort of settlement.”

Dean is silent.

“Charlie did apologize, Dean”, Castiel says reasonably, though the added smirk only annoys the omega further. “And you got the wrong end of the stick about her and Dorothy always arguing. All that passion had to go somewhere.”

“Yes, but to walk in on them kissing!” Dean grumbles. “Why did she not tell me?”

Castiel reaches across the table and lifts the heavy silver cover off one of the huge plates. Dean's eyes widen. There, before him, is one of the largest pies he has ever seen.

“I believe that this might be her way of offering an apology”, Castiel says. “But I quite understand that you are too upset to be bought off so easily. I will have it sent back...”

The angry hiss from his omega is too much, and Castiel has to put the cover down before his laughter makes him drop it. Dean scowls at him, then looks hard at the pie and most definitely drools. His husband grins. His mate is so dammably cute like this!

Though as Castiel values his body parts in their current arrangement, he wisely keeps this thought to himself as he cuts Dean a very generous slice, and enjoys the happy anticipatory whimpers from his wonderful mate.

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Sunday 29th August, 1647

“What did the preacher mean, about praying for guidance for those who watch over us?” Dean asks, as they walk back from church that morning. He knows that this in itself is unusual; most noblemen would insist on riding to their local church, even if (as is often the case) they can see the building from their own windows.

“The Army has moved to Putney”, Castiel explains, “strategically midway between parliament and the king now down in Hampton Court. Everyone knows – even if no-one wishes to say it – that they run the country for now. But what form of government they wish to impose on us, well, that is for them to decide. It is very English, I think.”

“What?”

“A civil war between king and parliament, which both sides end up losing”, Castiel points out. “The Army, the Scots, the king and parliament. None trusts the other, but the Army has all the guns. They will soon be thinking of what to do with all that power, hence the prayer for the Lord to guide them well in that decision.”
“Right.”

“We all need guidance at times”, Castiel says. “Like as to appropriate items to wear to church. Panties are, of course, not really appropriate.”

“I am not wearing panties today”, Dean points out.

Castiel just grins at him. It takes his mate almost a full minute to work it out, and the alpha knows the exact moment he does so as his mate's eyes widen perceptibly.

Dean has such a good alpha! Even if he is apparently trying to kill him!

+++++

Saturday 18th September, 1647

“I have decided to resign as a member of parliament.”

Dean stares at his husband in confusion; Castiel is still a little blurry after one of the most thorough fuckings the omegas has ever been on the receiving end of. The alpha likes to be a little rougher on his birthdays, and Dean suggesting each and every year that this is only to prove he can still do it only makes things worse (which is why Dean suggests it each and every year), hence the omega is still trying to come back down to Earth. It would help if his alpha did not enjoy all that post-coital teasing with his knot that renders Dean speechless for so long afterwards.

“Huh?” the omega manages, quite proud that he got a whole word out. Then Castiel shifts his position again, and Dean's cock positively aches as it tries to come with nothing left in the tank. The omega lets out a noise that would make more sense coming from a seal.

“I think that parliament and the Army are soon going to have a major confrontation”, Castiel explains, and it is blatantly unfair that the alpha still knotted inside of him can manage whole sentences at a time like this. Dean would squeeze his walls on the trapped cock if he had the energy, but his brain is temporarily out of commission just now.

“Oh.”

“I know that Cromwell expelled that major (3) for saying that the Army should be the sole power in the land”, Castiel says amiably, working his cock around and eliciting a whine from his omega that tails off into a pleasured moan, “but I cannot see them holding off for ever. And then there is the king. If the reports I am getting are accurate, then he is trying to prise the Scots away from us, which will only anger the Army more. They may decide to do without a king altogether if he pushes things too far.”

“Too far.” Wow, two words. Perhaps he can manage a whole sentence some time soon.

Then Castiel effortlessly stands up and pulls the omega into him, and the changing angles make Dean swoon like a lady in those terrible stories that his Uncle Bobby does not buy from that 'discreet' shop in Woodstock. Dean flushes all over.

“So”, Castiel grins. “only two years till I hit the big four-zero. Still think your alpha has it, Dean?”

This is where Dean makes a very small, infinitesimally tiny mistake that certain body parts are going to spend the rest of the weekend regretting. He hesitates.

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As they so rightly say, he who hesitates is lost. Or to be more exact in Dean's case, fucked into unconsciousness for several hours after which he wakes to find his alpha had brought him pie. And if a certain omega sobs out his thankfulness for such a husband, then a certain alpha will, Dean knows, never ever tell.

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Notes:
1) Minus two hours for each pie provided in the interim, of course!
2) There were no political parties as such at the time, just factional special interest groups. However, by the end of the century supporters and opponents of the Stuart dynasty had begun to crystallize into the Tory and Whig parties respectively – both, fittingly enough, named after words for thieves!
3) Major Francis White. He recanted that opinion when he realized that he had gone too far, and continued as a prominent soldier under the Commonwealth. He died when his ship sank off Flanders in 1657.
October-December 1647

Chapter Summary

56: Everyone knows that Charles Stuart is trying to inveigle the Scots into the war on his side, and tensions rise as the New Model Army starts to annoy people. The king briefly escapes from custody only to end up trapped on an island. Castiel says no, Charlie is embarrassed over an incident in the wine-cellar, and a letter bringing good news from his brother makes Dean come over all emotional.

Wednesday 13th October, 1647

“No.”

Dean and Charlie both look at Castiel in surprise. Dean had warned the housekeeper about approaching his husband today – Castiel had just received the news that the king was refusing to negotiate with the Army, which given the ominous noises coming out of Scotland, had annoyed the alpha. But Dean had at least expected him to give her a fair hearing.

“No?” she asks, clearly surprised.

“No”, Castiel repeats. “Dorothy is to retain her house as steward, and you are to retain your rooms here.”

It is an open secret on the estate that there is, well, something between the housekeeper and the steward, though few know just how close they are. Then again, this is the seventeenth century, and for that sort of thing to become known to the wider public might, Dean concedes, not be good. Especially with the Army so powerful just now.

“You would stop me seeing her?” Charlie asks incredulously. “Castiel, I thought you were better than that.”

She takes a step back as he looks sharply at her. Dean knows his husband would never even think of violence, but Castiel is an alpha and the omega can scent his annoyance. Dean hurries over and starts to gently scent him.

“I would only ask”, Castiel says, arching his neck to give his mate better access, “that the two of you practice a greater degree of caution. We live in a country area, and it would only take one disgruntled servant to go to the authorities and invite a whole cart-load of trouble. We have only just gotten over the travails caused by the vile Mr. Hopkins (1), remember?”

That is true, Dean thinks bitterly. The country's 'Witchfinder General' as he had styled himself had caused terror wherever he went with his torture and interrogation techniques, and single women everywhere had breathed a sigh of relief when he had died a couple of months ago. And Castiel is right; country areas do tend to panic over the smallest things.

“We are discreet”, Charlie says defensively.

“Wine-cellar”, Castiel mutters. Dean does not know what he means by that, but judging from the way Charlie's face moves so swiftly to match her hair in colour, he can guess.
“Charlie!” the omega mutters into his husband's neck.

“You can talk”, she snipes. “The two of you – honestly Castiel, one day I am going to come into dinner and find Dean knotted on your lap.”

Dean starts to count. He reaches five before it happens.

“You bloody dare!” she snaps.

Castiel sniggers.

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Friday 5th November, 1647

“I think that I shall have to go to Putney and meet with Cromwell”, Castiel says as they stand before the blazing fire. Around them, their estate workers are tucking into the free food (Castiel is a very popular lord of the manor on days like this), and they are enjoying the warmth of the annual burning of the guy.

“Though the Army seems to be finishing what old Guido started”, Dean observes. “Is there more news?”

“Nothing concrete as yet, but I do have definite indications that the Scots commissioners who are seeing the king are acting as conduits for his negotiations with them”, Castiel says. “Our Northern brethren are very angry that England seems to be edging away from Presbyterianism, especially after all they did for the war effort. I really fear that the king may succeed in winning them over and restarting the war.”

“So the Scots would invade again, but this time in his name?”

“Yes”, Castiel says. “I wish that I had more evidence, but Cromwell must have many other sources, and one will strike gold. The king is too careless when it comes to this sort of thing, and when they discover just how untrustworthy he really is, there will be ructions.”

“Surely they know that already?” Dean says.

“Yes, but many still hope that he can somehow still be worked into a permanent settlement”, Castiel explains, “which means that they want to be able to trust him. I fear that, very soon, they will come to see just how impossible this is. I only hope that the king is allowed to go into an honourable exile.”

“And if not?”

Castiel draws a finger across his neck. Dean shudders.

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Monday 15th November, 1647

Castiel had been due back on Saturday, but instead a letter had arrived stating that he was safe but that events were such that he would be delayed. Dean had spent the intervening forty-eight hours worrying about those 'events', and he may have gone a little overboard in his welcome home when Castiel did finally stagger in to the Hall.

Two hours later, they are lying together exhausted but happy, Castiel having just been able to slip
out of his omega and ask for a cuddle. Dean normally objects to that word, but he is so glad to have his husband back – a husband whose scent now radiates a level of happiness that is off the scale – that he does not care. His manliness comes a distant second to making his gorgeous alpha happy.

“Something did happen whilst I was there”, Castiel tells him, “and not something I wanted to put into a letter that might be intercepted. Let me start from the beginning.”

He manages to pull the omega even closer, and Dean sighs happily.

“The army had debated many things in the weeks before I got there”, he begins. “The Levellers are stronger in its ranks than I had thought. Many of them support what they call manhood suffrage, that is the vote for all 'real men' except beggars and servants.”

“But not omegas”, Dean guesses.

“But not omegas”, Castiel agrees. “As I said, some changes take longer. However, the very day I arrived all was chaos, as the king had escaped.”

“What?”

“Indeed”, Castiel says. “That was Thursday. All through Friday there was pandemonium, but then late on Saturday we had news. He had gone to Hampshire and crossed to the Isle of Wight, presumably in the hope that the governor of the island, one Robert Hammond (2), might support him or at least facilitate his escape to the Continent. Instead the man wrote to us the same day, and he has probably already received instructions to place the king under house-arrest.”

“So the great escape failed”, Dean says. Castiel nods.

“He must have known that we were having all the ports watched”, he says, “and also that Hammond had had a falling-out with the Army some time back. Presumably he wagered that he might be won over to his side. Unfortunately for him, he lost that throw of the dice.”

Dean sighs, and nestles back into his alpha's warm body. Then he yelps.

“Get your socks on!” he grumbles. “Damn icicle-feet!”

His husband sniggers, but does as he is told. He knows his place!

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Thursday 18th November, 1647

Castiel knows something is wrong the moment he steps into the Hall that evening. The scent of distressed omega permeates the place, and he positively sprints into the sitting-room to find his mate. Fortunately Dean is there, looking up in surprise at his noisy entrance. The alpha can tell at once that Dean has been, if not crying, then damn close to it.

“What is wrong?” Castiel asks anxiously. Dean reddens.

“You remember mentioning that man Blake, and his distant connection with you at Norton?” he says, not looking at the alpha. Castiel feels his anxiety levels rising even further.

“Yes?” he says warily.

“Well, it seems that the connection is about to get a bit closer”, Dean says. “I had a letter from Sammy today. He is dating the man's niece, a girl called Sarah. And it's serious, he says.”
Castiel looks at him uncertainly for a moment. Why would Dean be unhappy about his brother having... oh.

The alpha growls, more at himself for being so slow than anything else, and runs to sit with his mate, pulling him into an embrace.

“This is the children thing again, is it not?” he mutters.

Dean blushes, but nods.

“Dean, we have Sachiel, and I have you”, Castiel says simply. “Do you know how few alphas ever find the love of their life, their one true mate with whom they share the most profound of bonds? Statistics say it is under one tenth of one per cent!”

Dean manages a strangled chuckle.

“Trust me to get the alpha who quotes figures at a time like this!” he mutters, his eyes glassy with tears.

“Bedroom”, Castiel says firmly. “I am going to ask Charlie for a special pie to mark the occasion, then I am going to massage all the tiredness and unhappiness out of your gorgeous body.”

“That might take a while”, Dean says.

“And then I am going to make love to you slowly and passionately, until you finally understand that you are the reason I live for, and that you and I are one forever.”

Dean manages a small laugh as he stands up.

“Sappy alpha!” he mutters, as the tears start to fall. Castiel wipes them away and smiles at him.

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Thursday 2nd December, 1647

“Oh.”

Such a small sound, but the ominous look on his alpha's face made it rather more. Dean stares at him anxiously.

“What is it?” he asks.

“Well, if the escape did not do it, this will”, Castiel says grimly. “It is a message from Putney. Cromwell has received proof of the king's perfidy, by his own royal hand.”

“How?”

“A letter that he wrote to the queen has been intercepted”, Castiel says, “and it contains a definite mention of his intent to try to persuade the Scots to invade in order to free him. That is crossing so many lines, it is hard to know where to start. The country will not forgive 'that man of blood' as Cromwell calls him for trying to restart a war that did so much damage, especially one he has little chance of winning.”

“Did not the Scots make the difference at Marston Moor?” Dean asks.

“They did”, Castiel concedes, “but things are very different now. We have the New Model Army, a
group of trained professionals who know exactly what they are about and are highly disciplined.
The Scots made a difference three years ago because they were entering as a third and well-trained
force into a battle finely poised between the king and parliament, and that proved decisive. Here,
the best they can hope for is a few pro-royalist riots in as many areas as possible, so as to stretch
the Army and prevent them from throwing their full force northwards. That is unlikely.”

“You make it sound like the king is doomed”, Dean says.

Slowly does he become aware of the ominous silence that is only eventually broken by his alpha.

“I rather fear”, Castiel says, “that on a personal level, he very much is.”

Monday 27th December, 1647

“I did not go so far as to suggest that Cromwell's men were stupid”, Castiel says defensively. “I did
however point out that whilst cracking down on Christmas celebrations was itself arguable, doing it
in the county nearest the exiled Prince of Wales is inadvisable.”

“And so the peasants revolt in Kent”, Dean sighs. “I do not think soldiers going round and
confiscating Christmas dinners is arguable in any way.”

“Thankfully our local garrison has stopped such nonsense”, Castiel agrees.

“Only after one of their servants blabbed last year about how they were eating all the confiscated
food themselves”, Dean points out.

“Not wanting it to go to waste?” Castiel offers. Dean just looks at him.

“Then give it to the poor and needy”, he says. “I bet that thought never crossed their minds.

“I sent them a goose anyway”, Castiel says. “To mark the new year, I said. If the rumours I am
hearing about the king finally having done a deal with the Scots are true, they will soon be busy
enough.”

Notes:
1) Matthew Hopkins (1620-1647), a charlatan who used his charm and people's superstitions to
'find' witches. In the last three years he had had at least three hundred women killed (this was more
than would be put to death in the rest of the four centuries between 1400 and 1800) until he died,
most probably of tuberculosis. Torture was illegal in England, but he used methods such as sleep
deprivation that were as bad as. His writings continued his evil legacy after his death, and were
used in the Salem Witch Trials at the end of the century.
2) Robert Hammond (1621-1654), a clever but occasionally erratic soldier. He had assisted in the
victories at Basing, Naseby and Torrington, but had also killed a fellow officer in a duel (the
'falling-out'). He had just been appointed as custodian to the island, which lies off the south coast
of England about a hundred miles south-west of London. He died of a fever shortly after arriving in
Ireland in 1654.
57: Dean wonders if his alpha only does nice things for him to get sex, and Castiel wonders if his omega has finally seen through him. The alpha hides an actor from the full force of the law, and the king nearly succeeds in a second escape attempt. A minor dispute over pay at a Welsh castle will eventually see someone drawing the short straw, and there is an Engagement.

Tuesday 11th January, 1648

It has been a bad winter thus far (1). Indeed, Dean has never spent a full one in the valley before, though Compton when he was younger had been bad enough; a heavy enough snowfall there would usually cut the hill road, leaving open only the road north to Shipston. Here however the single track that connects through to the Oxford-Banbury road would be undetectable was it not for the fact that one of the Manor Farm barns (yes, that barn!) marks its edge. Otherwise only the track to and from the House remains clear.

“We need extra firewood”, Castiel tells Dorothy that morning, “so I have purchased the right to collect four cartloads of fallen wood from Wolfstown Copse. Lord Marston's title to the place is questionable but he is also a friend of Cromwell, and I do not wish to cause trouble when none is needed. Can you have twelve men out there sometime this week?”

“I can by Thursday, sir”, his steward says crisply. “I thought that the House was well stocked as regards fuel?”

Dean chuckles as she belatedly realizes her mistake and blushes fiercely. Only the housekeeper would know about that, not the estate steward. Fortunately Castiel takes pity on her.

“This is for all the estate workers, yourself included”, he says. “If my mathematical calculations are correct and your men stack the wood high enough, then there will be enough for at least two large baskets for each estate property once it is all divided up, not forgetting the people in Charlton and Nowhere. I am only glad that the workers there finished their work before the heavens opened.”

Dean is pleased at that, too. The enlarged and restored hamlet is back and flourishing, and all the retired soldiers who have cottages there work on the estate in some capacity or other, one of them as one of Dorothy's two deputies (Castiel's old friend Mr. Penny is the other). Dean had wondered if the men would be prepared to take orders from a woman, but having once seen what the steward was like when she got angry, he now knew why. She was a fire-demon!

Dorothy leaves to sort out the extra wood, and Dean smiles.

“You are such a good alpha, doing things for your workers like that”, he says. Castiel smiles at him.

“Does that mean that I get a reward?” he asks, sounding so eager that the omega almost laughs.
“I might think you only do things like that for sex”, Dean says. His alpha looks at him in confusion.

“And your point?” he asks.

Dean shakes his head, and in so doing misses the alpha moving swiftly across the floor towards him. Then he realizes how close Castiel has gotten to him, and he whimpers.....

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Tuesday 18th January, 1648

“And so we come to this”, Castiel says resignedly, “a complete sham.”

“What is a sham?” Dean asks. They are at dinner after another long, cold day. The snow shows no sign of abating.

“Two weeks ago, the Commons passed a resolution breaking off negotiations with the king”, Castiel says. “Which is fair enough, except the Lords refused to allow it. So the Army sent in troops, ostensibly to deal with some rioting on London, but the Lords got the message loud and clear. Yesterday those few that remained – all pro-Army by some amazing coincidence – passed the resolution. Now we wait.”

“For what?”

“For better weather to bring the Scots in to try and fail to save the king”, Castiel says dourly. “Unless he somehow grows wings and escapes his island prison, he is doomed.”

“At least things are better here”, Dean says consolingly. The estate workers had been surprised and cheered at the extra wood supplies, though on reflection the omega sees it as a doubly smart move on the alpha's part – many of them might go to the Copse anyway as the nearest edge lies barely a mile from the village, and one of them being captured pilfering would be embarrassing for his husband. This way, everyone wins.

“Yes”, Castiel smiles. “I have some good food, a good fire and a bad omega.”

“Cas!”

“Who fortunately I can turn into a good omega by keeping him fed with pie.”

Dean smiles at that.

“Cas.”

“And fucking him senseless every night!”

“Cas!”

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Monday 14th February, 1648

Castiel is going to keep his temper. He is not going to kill the odious little jobsworth pontificating in his own front room. He is not going to bury the man's body out on the island in the ornamental lake. Obviously not.
The ground is too hard just now. But a thaw is forecast.....

“Captain Lane!” he barks, silencing the man's nasal diatribe which was slowly but steadily eroding his will to live. “I have told you twice now that no such man has been seen in this area. Is there some part of that phrase you do not understand, or do I have to write to my friend Mr. Cromwell about people who have been promoted beyond their abilities?”

The beta sniffs at him. Castiel grabs the arms of his chair harder.

“Everyone claims to know our leader”, the beta almost sneers.

“And does everyone know that he insisted on putting his name at the top of this edict stating that all actors in unlicensed theatres should be flogged?” Castiel asks dryly. “Or that, most unusually, he signed it with his official stamp rather than his usual signature?”

He can see that that particular arrow strikes home. He and Cromwell exchange periodic letters, and the general's last one had included what had then been the forthcoming crackdown on theatres and plays, many of which poke fun at the Establishment. Castiel had told Dean he thought it a waste of time, as like the ban on newspapers it would only make people strive even harder to obtain what was denied them. The general had also mentioned that he had had to use his stamp on official documents due to a sprained wrist.

“I shall have to report in”, the beta sniffs. “Good day, sir.”

He shuffles away. Castiel allows himself an angry growl once the man is gone, which evolves into a happy one as his mate pokes his head round the door.

“Has he gone?” Dean asks.

“Yes”, Castiel says, “but we will have to find Mr. Meadows a place on one of outlying properties, in case that waste of space comes sniffing round here again. Perhaps up in Norton. Lord, the country on the brink of another war and parliament is pitching a fit about people laughing at them! With the mess they have been making of things lately, most of the country should be laughing at them!”

Dean chuckles. His alpha is so cute when he gets cross. And if he wants to work out some of that annoyance on his omega later, even better!

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Wednesday 22nd March, 1648

It does not feel like spring, Castiel thinks as he returns to the Hall that evening. But at least he has a warm omega to snuggle up with tonight, even if it is one who complains every time Castiel refers to it as cuddling. One day Dean might work out that he only does that to earn the utterly adorable pout which, sure as night follows day, always appears as a result.

Hopefully not too soon. A pouting Dean is just so damn cute!

Castiel enters the house to find said omega looking thoughtful. He is immediately alarmed.

“Not bad news when all is said and done”, Dean reassures him, “but you need to know about it. Two days ago the king made an attempt to escape from the Isle of Wight. Everything was planned, except that he forgot to work out if he could fit between the bars in his cell window. Apparently he could not, as the guards found him there the next day, stuck fast.”
Castiel suppresses a smile. The escape news is alarming, but the outcome is a little comical. The grin on his mate's face tells him that he feels much the same.

“The king stuck fast”, Dean says. “It suits his position, really.”

“If he had any sense of self-preservation, then he would long ago have offered to abdicate”, Castiel says. “But Cromwell, who distrusts him completely now, says that he seems quite fatalistic. He is prepared to do whatever it takes to try to put things back the way they were, which is impossible. I am not sure that England can ever be the same again.”

“An English republic?” Dean asks dubiously.

“A possibility”, Castiel says. “Well, once the Scots try and fail to save the king they so recently were fighting against, I believe we may well find out.”

Saturday 25th March, 1648

“Do you recall talking about Pembrokeshire?” Castiel asks that morning. Dean scrunches his forehead as he thinks.

“That is the bit of south-west Wales close to Ireland, is it not?” he asks. “The port of Tenby.”

“It is”, Castiel says. “It played an important role in the war, because our having it tied down troops the king really needed elsewhere, as well as providing us a natural naval base facing Ireland. Well, it seems history is repeating itself.”

“How?”

“I have been watching developments there”, Castiel says. “I did warn Cromwell about it, because the castle garrison at nearby Pembroke is angry over not getting their back pay, and does not trust parliament to pay them later. Wisely, I have to say given their past record. Now Colonel Poyer (2) has refused to hand over to his appointed successor until the pay is forthcoming, and has gone into open revolt.”

“Well, it is only one castle”, Dean says dismissively.

“And he has declared for the king.”

“Oh.”

“The timing is inauspicious”, Castiel says, “as next Wednesday marks the anniversary of Charles' accession to the throne. If his supporters are going to try something, that would be an excellent time to do so, a natural co-ordination point and one I am sure that Cromwell is preparing for.”

“And the Scots?”

“I hear that there is some opposition to the Engagers – those are the people who have signed the Engagement, the agreement to support the king – but not enough to stop them”, Castiel says. “But they will face a very different situation to four years ago, and the eventual outcome will not be pretty. I can only hope not too many people die before this second civil war – and what is civil about it, I wonder? – is brought to an end.”

And the king soon after, Dean thinks. He knows, from the look on his husband's face, that he is
thinking much the same.


Tuesday 11th April, 1648

There is definitely an air of something about to happen, Dean thinks as Castiel gets into bed and snuggles up behind him. The weather had turned unusually warm for spring about a week ago, which given the terrible winter had been a relief. The omega eases back slightly, eliciting a happy rumble.

“There has been more pro-royalist rioting in London”, Castiel says, wrapping an arm around his omega, “and the situation in southern Wales is rather too precarious. It seems ironic that another argument over back-pay has caused trouble just like the first one.”

“But nothing the Army cannot handle”, Dean says sleepily.

“True”, Castiel says, nuzzling closer.

There is a pause, as Dean feels.... something. His eyes widen.

“Cas?”

“Yes, Dean?”

“Are you wearing..... them?”

“Yes, Dean.”

Trembling, Dean pushes himself upright and the blankets behind him, then settles between his husband’s legs. His naked husband. Naked, except for the lacy blue panties he is sporting. The ones with the detachable flap. Dean whimpers.

“Come on in!” Castiel smirks.

His omega does not need a second invitation.

Notes:
1) This time was later defined as the Maunder Minimum (1645-1715), when decreased sunspot activity led to a sharp drop in temperatures that made the Little Ice Age even worse. Sadly for Dean he missed his frost fair in London; the Thames froze over the following year.
2) One of the unluckier casualties of the war, he joined with two other men in the revolt against parliament. When it was eventually crushed, Cromwell ordained that the three should draw straws so that the Lord could decide as to which one of them went to his death. John Poyer drew the short straw...
Chapter Summary

58: Dean behaves himself with as much decorum as one might expect at his brother's wedding to Sarah Blake (i.e. nil), but if his alpha will insist on wearing panties at family events – well, that is what outbuildings are for, is it not? He only wishes there was some way to preserve his brother's epic bitchface! There are more rumblings of discontent at army rule, parliament manages to lose a chunk of the Navy, and a young man dresses up as a woman and heads down to the docks.

Saturday 22nd April, 1648

“You do not seem overly worried”, Dean says. Castiel shrugs his shoulders.

“The Prince of Wales is already overseas”, he says, “and as I said before, neither he nor the Duke of York (1) have fallen very far from the tree. I doubt that we could have considered either of them as an alternative, more's the pity. The young prince's escape is annoying – if not a little embarrassing – but nothing more.”

“You seem very calm, considering that you are expecting another war”, Dean says.

“I am angry over the unnecessary loss of life”, Castiel says, his voice suddenly acquiring a definite growl. “Hundreds of good men taken away from their families or severely injured, all because the king will not accept the inevitable. This new war will cost him what little he has left, up to and including his own life.”

“You do not think that he will be allowed to just go into exile, then?” Dean asks anxiously. “After all, if they do anything to him, surely the Prince of Wales will just claim the throne. It would be pointless.”

“In his last letter, Cromwell referred to the king again as 'that man of blood’”, Castiel says gravely. “It is a matter of justice. The king will subject his country to a second, unnecessary and unwinnable war, and he will not be forgiven. What comes next I do not know, but Charles Stuart will play no part in it. His day is done.”

Dean shudders.

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Monday 1st May, 1648

“I sometimes think that the Army is going flat out to turn people away from Puritanism”, Castiel grumbles as he blows in along with a cold wind, before a servant shuts the door behind him.

“Thank you, Blenkinsopp. At least the journey back from town was quick enough. If horses came with attachable sails, I could have been back even quicker!”

Dean chuckles.

“How is King's Linton?” he asks.
“Rufus is as grumpy as ever”, Castiel grins, “so no change there. He re-shod Impaler (2) for you, and made a pointed remark about your choice of name that I chose not to hear. Mind you, the townsfolk are just as miserable. The authorities posted guards around the maypole today, just to stop people celebrating May Day. If this is Army rule, it will not be popular.”

“They have guns”, Dean points out. “I do not think they care about 'being popular'.”

Perhaps some of them will be sent north soon”, Castiel says. On seeing his mate's confused look, he continues, “Rufus told me that royalist insurgents have taken both Berwick and Carlisle.”

“So?” Dean says.

“The Scots will come into England down either the east coast or the west coast”, Castiel explains. “The east coast is easier, shorter, and goes through Yorkshire, which in the war was more Royalist than Lancashire. Plus it is the way they came in four years back, and Berwick is closer to Edinburgh than Carlisle.”

“So why on earth would they go west?” Dean asks.

“If they can get a large enough Royalist insurgency going in Cheshire and Wales, then it may be tempting”, Castiel says. “Cumberland and Westmorland, the first two counties they would come through that way, are also generally Royalist, although sparsely populated. There are also rumblings in several other counties, and whilst many of them will probably come to naught we will still need to send troops to deal with them. Thank the Lord that the Confederate Irish are even more divided than usual (3) and cannot throw their armies across the seas, otherwise we would be in trouble.”

“But you are sure that you can crush the Scots?”

“Provided we do not get too caught up elsewhere, fairly easily”, Castiel says. “I am a little concerned that the force being sent against Poyer is relatively small, but it should be enough.”

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Monday 8th May, 1648

Dean is not going to cry. He is not. He is just allergic to all these damned flowers!

Castiel hands him a handkerchief, and he accepts it gratefully.

“I thought it was supposed to be the groom who gets all nervous and excited”, the alpha teases. “Not his best man!”

“Shut up!” Dean snipes, looking over to where his brother and his newly-acquired sister-in-law are laughing with one of the guests. He likes Sarah Blake – now Sarah Winchester – a sassy, short brunette who very clearly has his brother wrapped around her little finger. And her lack of height makes the moose look even goofier, which is a nice bonus.

The only downside of the day – and Dean is sure his husband knows he is worrying about this – is that it means that some day soon, there is going to be a new generation of Winchesters running round and wanting to play with their Uncle Dean when he visits. Not that any offspring of his own would have been Winchesters, but seeing his brother happily married brings home to Dean that of his mother's two sons, only one can provide her with grandchildren. It is a sad thought.

Castiel slides closer to him.
“Want to go out to the stables and fuck?” he whispers.

Well, that certainly succeeds in distracting the omega from his darker thoughts. He stares reprovingly at his husband.

“At my brother's wedding, Cas?” he says. “Really?”

“I'm wearing panties!”

++++

When they stumble in later, it is so patently obvious what they have been doing that to pretend otherwise is pointless. Mary chuckles, Adam blushes, Sarah finds it hilarious, and Sam pulls out the rarely-used Bitchface Number One to express his absolute displeasure. Dean just sniggers; his future nephews and nieces are going to have to learn very quickly that Uncle Dean and his husband are quite incorrigible!

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Tuesday 16th May, 1648

“I am actually beginning to worry about London”, Castiel admits as they sit down to supper that evening. “Yesterday was supposed to be a thanksgiving day for the great victory at St. Fagan's last week, which saved south Wales – but the people of London have shunned it. I hope Cromwell has enough troops to deal with the city if needed.”

“What about the Trained Bands?” Dean asks.

“They respect Skippon (4), thankfully”, Castiel says. “I am sure he can persuade them not to oppose the Army, as they know he has always striven to avoid bloodshed where possible. One of the better men to come out of the war, when so many good ones have not.”

Dean eyes his husband lasciviously. It has been raining all day, and Castiel had been soaked when he had returned home, stripping out of his wet clothes and into a thick blue dressing-gown that he loved. And the omega knew, he was wearing nothing beneath that dressing-gown.

“I feel so objectified”, Castiel complains with mock annoyance. “You only want me for my body.”

“That's my line!” Dean pouts. They both laugh.

“Eat up”, Castiel says, “then we shall let the Lord continue to promote the ark-building industry whilst we go upstairs and cu.....”

He stops, grinning at the dark look Dean shoots him.

“Come together like alpha and omega?” he finishes with a knowing grin.

“Smart arse!” Dean mutters.

Castiel's blue eyes glisten dangerously and a fraction of a second too late, Dean realizes his mistake.

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By the end of the evening, his arse too has realized his mistake. His smarting arse!
Saturday 27th May, 1648

“Kent is the traditional focus for revolt”, Castiel says unconcernedly. “Essex too; the Peasants’ Revolt came from both counties either side of the Thames. And with Cromwell so far away in Wales, they naturally think that this is too good a chance to pass up.”

“I am surprised the Army is keeping the king on the Isle of Wight”, Dean muses. “A strong enough raiding party from abroad could seize him and carry him off.”

“The Spanish have only just made their peace with the Dutch”, Castiel says, “and the French judge – rightly – that the king is a spent force. Even the fact that he is married to a French princess will not make them risk upsetting England when they are just getting over their own war, even if it is one they have been fighting second-hand. The war effort has greatly weakened their country.”

“So it is not serious, then?”

“No.”

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Sunday 28th May, 1648

“It is serious now.”

Dean looks at his husband in surprise.

“What has changed?” he asks.

“Twelve ships from the Navy have declared for the king off the Kent coast”, Castiel says grimly. “Thankfully Fairfax himself has been roused to go into Kent and deal with the rebel risings there. They are falling back before him, according to the letter Cromwell sent me.”

“That is a heavy blow”, Dean frowns. “A substantial part of the Navy gone, and the country dependent on trade. What use do you think the king will make of them?”

“If they had a strong commander, he might make a rescue attempt on the king”, Castiel says fretfully. “All those sailors could probably make a bid to secure him, if they move quickly enough. Though I am sure that the same message sent to me was dispatched even faster to the island. They had already tightened security there after the escape attempt.”

“Or?”

“The Prince of Wales could try his luck”, Castiel says, “though he too would have to move fast. I am confident that Fairfax will snuff out the troubles in Kent in no time; indeed, I am more than a little surprised that their neighbours across the Thames in Essex have not already flared up in sympathy. What was your other letter?”

“Eh?”

“You had two letters this morning”, Dean points out. “Are you going to tell me, or do I have to have sex with you until I force it out of you?”

He suddenly finds himself pinned to be bed beneath a very aroused alpha. He grins.
“Do not worry, Dean”, Castiel says darkly. “I think you will find that you do not have to 'force' anything out of me!”

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The sex is so good that Dean does actually forget about the second letter. Though he will remember it soon enough.

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Notes:
1) James Duke of York, the king's second son, then fifteen. He had been held in St. James' Palace in London but, with the contrivance of some friends, escaped disguised as a woman. He was later the disastrous King James II and VII (1685-1688), who so upset the country that.... but that's another story.
2) Dean's new horse, a jet-black stallion purchased at the end of the year before. Castiel had suggested naming the beast after himself 'because I am sure that he too will give you a good ride'), but Dean had wanted the same name as his first horse, now happily retired in the stables.
3) At a time when a parliamentary invasion looked more than likely, the Irish Confederates somehow found time for a brief civil war of their own between those who wanted to compromise with the English and Scottish settlers and those who did not. The latter won, but it weakened the nascent country at the worst possible time.
4) Philip Skippon (c.1600-1660), a highly able parliamentarian general. In an era of variable quality leaders, his fairness was respected by all soldiers, even those not under his direct command. Illness marred his final years and he died shortly before the Restoration.
Chapter Summary

59: The slow-motion Royalist uprising judders along, and still the Scots do not come as the Army picks off the rebels a few at a time. The king makes a third escape attempt, but that too ends in failure. Dean grows increasingly worried as he fears that his alpha is keeping something from him – and he finds out just what because of coniunx et heredem.

Monday 29th May, 1648

Unusually, Castiel had returned from his rounds just after dinner, looking windblown and generally put out. Dean knew that look; it meant that his alpha wanted hot, hard sex and he wanted it like ten minutes ago. Oh, the things that a poor omega has to put up with these days!

He is still floating down from being fucked into a semi-coma when he realizes that his mad husband is talking politics again. He focuses, or at least tries to; his brain is still on Cloud Nine, whilst his cock, the incorrigible bastard, is hoping for a repeat performance. No alpha should be that flexible!

“Wha.....?” Dean mutters. Castiel grins.

“Obviously I still have it, if I can fuck you so hard you end up not being able to pay attention to me when I talk”, he smiles. “I was talking about the king in his island prison.”

“The king?” Dean asks. His husband nods.

“There has been a further escape attempt”, Castiel says. “A better-managed one this time, but two of the guards he tried to bribe talked, and we were ready. I wonder if it is more than coincidence that it happened just as the latest troubles broke out in Kent.”

“Will they move him?” Dean asks.

“I am not sure”, Castiel says. “With fewer ships the island is vulnerable, but Carisbrooke is right in the centre of it and well-defended. And I am amazed that the Scots have not invaded.”

“Why have they not come yet?” Dean wonders.

“There is some division because the king has refused to sign the Covenant”, Castiel says. “Because of that, the Scots Kirk has opposed the necessary recruitment, and generally proven obstructive. Though the weather so far this year has not exactly been conducive to campaigning.”

“Still, you think they will still come?”

“Once they have enough men, they will”, Castiel says confidently. “It would pay them to ship their army down to either Cheshire or Yorkshire, both more Royalist areas, especially now the Navy is so much weakened. But I think that they will do the traditional thing and march. The question is, will they come via the east coast or the west? If our generals guess wrong, they could slip past them and cause a great deal of harm before they can be beaten.”
“You are still sure that they will be beaten.”

“Very sure”, Castiel says firmly. “I would stake my pie on it!”

Dean glares at him.

“House”, Castiel corrects, with a look on his face that is several miles from innocent. “I meant house. Not pie.”

Dean still glares at him. Bastard!

+~+~+

Thursday 1st June, 1648

When he takes a long look at it, Dean Milton supposes that yes, his life is really rather good right now. He is the mate of a nobleman who is evidently crazy about him – Castiel had come in the evening before to find a servant cleaning up a mess from the floor, and had growled at the poor man because he was too near the omega (though to be fair, the alpha had then gone and apologized to him afterwards, something unheard of in modern society).

Yes, Dean is very happy. Which is why he keeps a sharp eye out for anything that might threaten that happiness. And an awkward conversation with Charlie the day before has left him on edge, as the redhead seemed to know that his husband was up to something but not telling him about it. Which is almost unknown. Dean does not like it.

Castiel seems happier this evening, though as Dean soon discovers, that is because of the news from the south-east.

“Fairfax has crushed the Kentishmen at Maidstone”, he says cheerfully, “and is advancing to retake Dover. The loss of those ships is irritating, but I am sure that we can get round it.”

Dean just nods. It concerns him also that Castiel must know that something is off with his mate, yet most unusually he has not raised the matter. It is unlike the alpha, to avoid subjecting his poor omega to a discussion about 'feelings' when given the chance.

“Are you all right, Dean?” the alpha asks. “Has Charlie been denying you pie again?”

“She knows better”, Dean snarks. “No, I am fine.”

Castiel looks at him a little uncertainly, but does not push it.

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Friday 2nd June, 1648

Dean gets a brief distraction from his concerns when he reads the latest newspaper from Oxford.

“It's damnably unfair”, Castiel complains as he collapses onto the couch, his face flushed with being out in the strong wind. “By all means fine people for swearing if you must, but to fine the rich more is just wrong.”

“Says a member of the rich”, Dean mutters.

“Even the common folk will have to pay if this law ever comes to pass (1)”, Castiel grumbles. “And three shillings for a mild swear word! Not only that, it rises steadily through the ranks so that
someone in my position would have pay a guinea (2) for exactly the same words.”

“Yes, but you can afford to pay more”, Dean argues.

“It might mean less money for pie”, Castiel points out with a smile.

Dean stares at him in horror.

“It sounds an absolutely horrible idea!” he says firmly.

“The whole concept is unsound”, Castiel agrees, suppressing a smile at his omega's sudden change of tune, “and will only make those who try to implement it look foolish. If this is the best that parliament can come up with, then army rule may not be so bad after all!”

+++++

Friday 9th June, 1648

The more Dean thinks about it, the more he is convinced that whatever Castiel is about, it has something to do with his cousin in their old cottage. Dean may be a tad envious at Sachiel Milton living in his old home – yes, he knows it is ridiculous given the spaciousness of the Hall, let alone that Castiel is letting him redesign most of the rooms any way he wishes – but something in Dean yearns for the simpler life he so briefly had before London.

Castiel had been cheery again yesterday, with the news that Fairfax had secured Dover and its castle, though his joy had been marred slightly by the loss of Pontefract.

“One of the largest castles in Yorkshire”, Castiel had said exasperatedly, “and it will tie down more of our troops. Plus some of the defeated Kentish rebels managed to cross the Thames into Essex – though I suppose we should be grateful that they did not get into London – and now the east has risen in support of the king. So Fairfax is to be held up there now, whilst Cromwell batters away at Pembroke. The danger is that the Scots may be able to come down the middle between them.”

Dean had nodded distractedly. His husband had said that he was going over to Woodstock that day, but he had been gone for far longer than such a short trip would necessitate. And he had been disinterested in discussing what he had been about, which was also unlike him.

Dean was an increasingly nervous omega.

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Saturday 1st July, 1648

The storm finally breaks that morning. In both senses; the weather has been hot and unpleasantly humid these past few weeks, and today there is a deluge going on outside. But for once Dean pays it no heed, as his attention is fully on the sight before him.

Coniunx et heredem (3). That is the Latin inscription writ large on a sheet of paper, which Castiel has had set up on a pole in the corner of the room so that everyone can see it. Not that there are many people here, but for things like this – what is known unofficially as a ‘nest and next' court – there rarely are. Castiel sits on his favourite dining chair, looking positively regal, whilst Dean sits on a smaller chair to his right. Sachiel Milton sits to the alpha's other side, and even despite the angry scent rolling off of his alpha, Dean can scent his fellow omega's fear. He smiles edgily at him, and earns a weak effort in return.
For all that England is built on laws – the recent war was, Dean supposes, fought for them – there are certain situations where different rules apply. One such is here, where someone has clearly done something very bad involving Castiel's heir – his 'next' – as Dean knows such courts only deal with two things; an alpha's mate or one of his three immediate heirs. Anyone inflicting harm on any of these forfeits the usual trial by jury and is subject totally to the whims of the alpha affected.

The door opens and three men enter, two of Castiel's men supporting a manacled and clearly terrified beta, whom they throw down before the alpha's chair before standing back. The beta looks up fearfully; Dean does not immediately recognize him, yet he does seem vaguely familiar from somewhere. He notices that across from his husband, Sachiel Milton flinches visibly.

“Metatron!” Castiel growls.

Now Dean remembers. This is the steward he saw that time they went to see Sachiel in Norton, Metatron Armstrong, son of the old steward who was in charge of the whole estate under Castiel's brother Raphael. A nasty piece of work, he recalls; the father had been banished from the estate when Dorothy had found that he had been stealing from it, his son having already moved to run the few holdings in Norton. Some months ago, he now remembers, Dorothy had asked for the son's removal as well, as it appeared that that particular apple had not fallen very far from its tree. Evidently the younger Armstrong had tried to gain revenge in some way. Dean looks across at Sachiel, who now looks terrified.

Castiel turns to his mate and nods silently. Dean takes this as acceptance, and moves round to sit next to Castiel's cousin and heir. He can feel the omega relax a little, though he knows this is more because of the sheltering power of the nearby and clearly very angry alpha. This is one of those thankfully rare times when Castiel is all alpha.

“I will not sully this room by going into the details of what you did to my heir and cousin”, Castiel says grimly. “It is fortunate for you that he was in a pre-heat rather than a regular heat during the attack, and unfortunate for you that he managed to rip off part of your clothing, by which you were subsequently identified. I shall remind you that the standard punishment for what you have done is a slow and painful death. Slow, painful and utterly merited.”

The beta whines, but nods. He does not speak. Castiel turns to his cousin.

“Sasha”, he says gently (Dean does not feel the slightest hint of jealousy, honest), “what would you like me to do with him?”

Now that, Dean thinks, is unheard of in any court. Omegas are not even allowed to be jurors, let alone decide sentence. There is a whine of protest from the cowering beta, but Castiel silences it with a glare and a low snarl. Sachiel hesitates, then whispers something to his cousin, who smiles and returns to his chair.

“A fitting punishment”, he says. “Metatron, it is fortunate for you that I am going to allow you a chance to redeem your soul of its recent foul actions. I shall write to my friend Cromwell, and tell him that I have someone who wishes to volunteer for his army. You will be escorted to Pembrokeshire and spend the summer serving your country. If, come the end of the year, God has seen fit to let you stay alive, then he will let you go free. I would advise a rapid and one-way trip to the Americas for your 'health'.

That seems lenient to Dean. But he should have known better.

“However”, Castiel suddenly snarls, “if you try to run away or avoid your place in the front line, then I am instructing Cromwell to tell your luckless commanding officer to shoot you. Without
warning.”

Apparently not that lenient, after all. Dean watches as the cowering beta is dragged out, before turning to his alpha.

“That was what you were keeping from me, was it not?” he asks.

“I asked him to”, Sachiel says before his cousin can reply. “I am sorry, Dean, but after what happened I wanted nobody to know. I only told Castiel because....”

“Because he is the alpha”, Dean finishes resignedly. “Yes. I get it.”

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Notes:
1) It did. The Blasphemy Act of 1650.
2) Respectively about £2.50 and £16 in 2016 terms ($3.25 and $21) respectively). A guinea was (and still is) twenty-one shillings, or £1.05 ($1.35), and is still used today for the sale of racehorses.
3) Literally ‘wife and heirs’.
June-September 1648

Chapter Summary

60: The aftermath of the Metatron affair affects Dean badly, until he suddenly snaps at his alpha and... well, safe to say there are definitely Consequences, one of which is Dean having to use That Word again. The Scots invade in support of the king but their armies are destroyed by Cromwell, who proceeds to crush the flickering embers of the Royalist uprising. And Castiel brings home something quite unexpected.

Wednesday 12th July, 1648

The business with Metatron had affected Dean more than he would have expected. And the most annoying thing is the fact that he knows his alpha did nothing wrong. Indeed, in respecting his cousin's request not to spread news of the attack any further, he had showed far more consideration that most alphas in his situation would have done. Dean has no right to feel annoyed.

He does, though. And in the days that have followed, Castiel has contrived to make it worse by being so damn considerate, not forcing himself on Dean or allowing himself any of the rough sex he so often wanted and which he always asked permission for first (the answer is yes every time, but Dean values being asked).

The omega sticks it for eight long days before he snaps.

They are sitting together in the sunroom, whose large west-facing windows make it pleasant on days like today. The sun has almost set and Dean is comfortably full; there was even pie for dessert. He is also silently seething that his mate is still maintaining a discreet distance between them on the couch.

“The Scots crossed the border near Carlisle four days ago”, Castiel says conversationally. “Fortunately the situation in Yorkshire has improved, so I expect that they will stick to the west coast route.”

“Right.”

“And Cromwell has taken Pembroke, at last”, the alpha continues, “though it seems not without losing a certain additional recruit I sent him in the process.”

“Good.”

“So with Fairfax tied up in Essex, he will have to go and deal with....”

“Cas!”

The alpha looks up in surprise.

“What?” he asks, seemingly confused. Dean draws a deep breath.

“I cannot take any more of this!” Dean storms. “I want hot, hard sex with my alpha, and I want it right now!”
“All right.”

Dean looks at him in surprise. Castiel stands up and starts undressing, moving with his usual swift efficiency.

“Um, bedroom?” Dean says tentatively. Then he sees the red eyes, and he swallows.

“My omega wants sex”, Castiel says matter-of-factly. “Here and now. I am more than happy to oblige.”

He drops his underpants to reveal an impressive erection, and shoots his mate a feral look. Dean shudders.

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The servants know better to enter any room from which those sort of noises are coming out.

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Sunday 23rd July, 1648

“The Prince of Wales has attempted a landing in East Anglia”, Castiel says as he gets into bed that evening.

Dean mutters something incoherent, then grunts in protest as his alpha pulls him closer.

“Cas! Not again!”

“But you said that you wanted sex”, Castiel says simply, and Dean just knows he is smirking behind his back. “I am merely striving to fulfill the wishes of my omega.”

“If you fulfill me one more time, I will not be able to sit down for the rest of damn summer!” Dean whines. It turns out that any suppression of Castiel's occasional demands for angry sex has the side-effect that, once he is given free rein, he takes it and then some. Dean is so damn sore!

And so damn happy!

“I thought that you like things a little rough”, Castiel teases.

“There's a difference between 'a little rough' and 'fucked into 1649'!” Dean snarks. “Cannot you just.... you know.”

“What?” Castiel grins. He knows what his mate wants, just as he knows it will annoy Dean greatly to be forced to say it. The omega mutters something into his pillow.

“I am sorry, I did not hear that”, Castiel grins, striving hard to keep a straight face. The omega's whine of complaint does not help.

“Fine!” Dean grumbles. “I want to..... cuddle. There, I said it!”

Castiel grins again, but pulls the sulky omega into his arms, and some gentle touches soon ease out his mate's tensions and lead to him snuggling up against his husband. Who does not smirk.

“And stop the damn smirking!”

Castiel sniggers.
Tuesday 6th August, 1648

One change that Castiel has wrought as earl has been to sell of many estate properties in distant counties as more trouble than they are worth, with the exception of the London businesses which are quite profitable.

“Wensleydale is supposedly a very beautiful area”, he says as he reads a letter that morning, “but I am glad that it is our estate manager and not me there just now.”

“Why?” Dean asks with a yawn. He had woken to some slow and easy morning sex with his husband which, bizarrely, had left him feeling more tired that many of their more energetic activities. Not that he would say no to going back to bed and trying it again.

“The Scots have tried to force a passage of the Pennine Hills into Yorkshire after all”, the alpha says. “I rather thought they might, but Cromwell’s deputy (1) has fought them off. The news I am receiving says that the response to the Scots’ calls for help from English Royalists thus far have been, and I quote, ‘disappointing’.”

“Yorkshire is more Royalist, is it not?” Dean yawns. Castiel grins.

“I am going to have to do this sort of wake-up more often, if it leaves you this quiet”, he smiles, earning himself a pout from the omega. “Yes, it would definitely be to their advantage to get into that county. But they have failed, and Cromwell is already headed towards it as fast as he can drive his poor tired men. Though not as tired as my poor omega.”

“Hey! I worked hard this morning!”

“I know”, Castiel smirks. “I always know just how wrecked you are when you inadvertently use the e-word!”

Dean pouts.

Tuesday 27th August, 1648

“It is all over”, Castiel says. “All the naysayers who said Cromwell should have stuck to the west coast and hit the Scots head-on have been proven wrong. He joined up with his men in Yorkshire as planned, crossed the Pennines and hit the Scots near Preston over the weekend before last. He has spent the time since driving the remnants ever further south until they laid down their arms and surrendered. Doubtless many will soon be improving their tans in the West Indies, if not Venice.”

“Why Venice?” Dean asks.

“Cromwell writes that around nine thousand men were taken”, the alpha says. “I doubt even the labour-hungry Barbadoes (2) can take that many at one time. The danger is past.”

“Not for the king”, Dean says. “He will be held to account for this.”

“Cromwell is done with him”, Castiel says heavily. “The best that Charles Stuart can hope for is an honourable exile, and one of his sons continuing as a new and greatly weakened monarch. The worst.....”
Friday 1st September, 1648

“Colchester has fallen”, Castiel says as he read his letter at the breakfast table. “It lasted over two months, which is quite impressive. The king still has a few other places holding out in his name, but the war is over. Again.”

“Cas”, Dean says as he reads the same letter (he is sat on the alpha's lap but they are not tied together, not after The Unfortunate Cherry Pie Incident which made Charlie scream like a banshee and threaten to resign), “what is a whiggamore (3)?”

“Generally it is Scots people opposed to their leaders having dealings with the king”, the alpha explains. “The leaders signed a deal with the king to enforce Presbyterianism on England once he was restored to power, but the whiggamores – the term originally referred to cattle-drovers who came into Edinburgh to sell their herds – do not think the deal is acceptable, either because it does not go far enough or they do not trust the king.”

“That makes sense”, Dean says with a sigh. Much as he wishes things back to the way they were with a trusty and reliable king on the throne, he has long resigned himself to the knowledge that Charles Stuart is not that man. “What will the king do now?”

“There is little he can do”, Castiel says. “His only hope is that parliament will wish to deal with him, but I am sure the Army will soon stop that. Which brings me to my news. I have formally informed Speaker Lenthall that I wish to resign from parliament.”

Dean is surprised. He knew that such an event was coming, but so soon? Castiel smiles at him.

“Cromwell has asked me to support the candidacy of a Lieutenant Torrin”, Castiel smiles, “a friend of his who is part of the Oxford garrison. The man sounds all right, and I will invite him here before endorsing his candidacy.”

“Only seven men have the vote, Cas”, Dean points out. “It is a sure thing.”

He is suddenly aware that his seat is moving. He looks at the alpha, who grins at him.

“I do not need to be anywhere for another hour or so”, Castiel growls. “Shall we grab a bowl of food and head for our room?”

“Hell, yes!”

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Tuesday 4th September, 1648

Dean knows something is wrong the moment his alpha enters the room. He sniffs the air uncertainly. His alpha looks.... shocked.

“Dean”, Castiel says urgently, “I need you to listen.”

Oh God, what has happened?

“I had to go to Eynsham on business”, the alpha says, sitting down heavily, and Dean notices that, unusually, he is keeping some distance between them. “To the house of one Captain Birkin, a place
he appropriated from poor old Lord Radcot.”

Dean looks at him nervously.

“The man is supposed to be a Puritan”, Castiel sneers, “and he has a wife, yet when I stepped into the place I found he had purchased an omega 'as a spare' as he so brazenly put it. And the boy – he can barely have been sixteen years of age!”

Dean shudders in sympathy, though he knows such things are not as uncommon as they should be. Doing it so openly when married, and with someone so young....

He belatedly puts two and two together, and his eyes widen in shock. Castiel sees that he has gotten it and nods.

“I purchased him”, he says flatly. “I, uh, may have led Captain Birkin to believe that he was for my personal use. I am sorry, Dean.”

The omega understands now, and loves his alpha even more for this. Castiel has acted not only bravely and honourably, but he is upset lest bringing another omega into the house unsettles his mate. He walks over to the alpha and starts to scent him, feeling him relax at once.

“Better take me to him then”, he says after a while.

“Love you so much”, Castiel sniffs. “So adorable. So sweet. So Dean!”

“Sap!” Dean grumbles, though he is secretly pleased.

+~+~+
Notes:
1) John Lambert. We will be seeing a lot more of him later.....
2) Then England's richest colony, probably generating more money that all the other American colonies put together. The origin of the name is possibly the original bearded inhabitants of the island (hence 'the' Barbadoes); the nearby English colony of Barbuda derived its name from the same source. As a major sugar-producer the island was always in need of more slaves; in fact unbeknownst to the English government it had then just been taken by the Royalist fleet, and parliament would not regain control until late in 1651.
3) Eventually this term was shortened to Whigs and came to refer to all those opposed to the Stuarts, whilst Tories (from an Irish word for thieves) was used for those who supported them. During the eighteenth century these evolved into what we would consider modern political parties. The nineteenth century saw the two Whig groupings either side of the Atlantic meet very different fates; the American one self-destructed over slavery and was replaced by the Republicans, whilst the British one merged with pro-free trade Tories to form the Liberal Party, but factional infighting (mostly over the question of Ireland) led to them being replaced by the rival socialist Labour Party during the first half of the twentieth century.
Chapter Summary

61: There are more whiggamores. Castiel stands aside and lets someone else take care of Forston and Byteby's electorate (still all seven of them). Charlie proves a master (mistress?) forger, Dean shuns a mission impossible and Castiel quotes Latin - again. Parliament undergoes a purge and the king's double-dealings finally catch up with him, leading towards the ultimate pain in the neck.....

Monday 18th September, 1648

There is a polite knock at the door. Dean turns his head – even that movement hurts – and stares at it, but no-one enters.

“Cas!” he whines. “Door!”

“Yes, o master!” Castiel teases, slipping out from under the covers and padding across the room. Dean's eyes widen.

“Cas!”

The alpha looks down at his naked form, then shrugs and comes back for his dressing-gown. Just as well, Dean thinks acidly; they do not want to have Charlie having to talk another maid out of resigning after having seen something she should not. Something that is for Dean's eyes only (alright, he had bowled out of bed equally naked and growled at the poor girl, to a certain bastard alpha's amusement, but he had apologized later).

His husband opens the door and looks out, then goes outside and re-appears almost immediately bearing a tray of food. Dean makes a promise to himself to push for a raise for a housekeeper who supplies him with pie at times like this.

Except his cruel bastard of an alpha places the tray on the far side of the bed, then picks up the steaming plate of pie and pours custard all over it. Dean shoots him a pout that should have made a certain alpha tremble with shame, but it seemingly has no effect, worse luck. Castiel just looks at him.

“Would you like a bite?” he teases. “I know that, despite the fact it is my birthday...”

“Thirty-nine”, Dean mutters.

“.... I did do most of the work”, Castiel finishes.

“Cas!” the omega definitely does not whine. “Dean needs pie. Give Dean pie!”

He bats his eyelashes at the alpha, and this is more effective – not for the reason Dean would like if truth be told, but because it always makes the alpha chuckle at him. Castiel eventually stops laughing, and forks off a piece of pie, which he gently trails into Dean's mouth.

“Ow”, Dean mutters. “Hot.”
“Needy omega”, Castiel sighs in mock exasperation. “I love you so much.”

Dean just smiles at him.

“Love you too, alpha”, he not-purrs. “More pie?”

Castiel just laughs. His mate is so damn adorable!

Wednesday 20th September, 1648

“I did not know that forgery was one of your many talents”, Castiel observes as he finishes looking through the papers that his housekeeper has just given him. “These are magnificent!”

She blushes.

“Yes, well, that new omega you 'purchased' is great at cooking”, she says, “so we need to keep him. And as his 'owner' you have the right to do whatever you want to him. If anyone asks now, these show that you sold him off an Irish lord, whose ship went down on the crossing. I found the sinking in the papers last week.”

Castiel nods. He knows that there is a bill currently going through parliament which would require all omegas to be registered, and whilst it looks unlikely to become law, he does not want to take chances.

“So Master Nicholas Elia becomes Master Benjamin Braeden”, he smiles. “I have not yet had any luck tracking down his mother who I understand might be the only surviving family member, his father having died of the plague.”

“You will”, she says confidently.

Thursday 12th October, 1648

“. ....And I hereby declare that Geoffrey Augustus Torrin is duly elected as the member of parliament for Forston and Byteby.”

Castiel smiles, although he knows the outcome was never in any real doubt. Though he hopes his electorate – all seven of them – would not believe that he would pursue a vendetta against them like his brother may well have done, he is pleased for the young lieutenant, who is a good alpha. He will need to be; unless the earl is very much mistaken, parliament will be quite interesting in the next few months.

The buffet is still provided, though. Although Castiel suspects a few of the electorate – probably all of them – are annoyed that it is also open to non-voters.

“Thus endeth my political career”, Castiel says, dabbing his eyes with his handkerchief (1) in what is very obviously false emotion. “Oh woes!”

“Ham”, Dean mutters.

“What?” Castiel says suddenly. Dean blushes.

“Uh, I hope there is some ham”, he says, silently congratulating himself on a good save. Though
by the way his alpha's eyes are narrowing, not that good a one. Dean may be in for it later.

He hopes.

“The king still refuses to budge on the matter of the bishops”, Castiel sighs, seemingly content to overlook Dean's snide remark. “Ridiculous, considering they have next to no power any way, but he still seems to think that he can stop changes merely by saying 'it cannot be so'.”

“Some foreign rulers have power like that”, Dean says.

“Yes”, Castiel says, “but the key word in that sentence is 'foreign'. England will always be different, usually in the vanguard of liberty. And since the king cannot expect any more help from the Scots now that his supporters are all but done there, I had hoped that he might belatedly see sense. It seems that I hoped for too much.”

Dean nods, looking across to where a man is cooking meat on a fire and handing cooked pieces out. He licks his lips.

“Red and glowing”, Castiel grins. “Better than 'ham'. More like the arse of an omega when he gets fucked hard by his alpha, eh?”

Ah. It seems that his husband did notice his quip earlier. Dean is in for a rough night.

Score!

+~+~+

Thursday 29th November, 1648

“Salus populi suprema lex esto (2).”

Dean blinks in surprise. The alpha currently knotted very firmly inside of him, and holding him tightly to his chest, seems to be acting a little strange. Even for him.

“You what?” he mutters into the alpha's ear. He would try to do something with the mess of unruly dark hair next to him, but he knows some missions to be impossible.

“The safety of the people is the supreme law”, Castiel says. “The key phrase in the Remonstrance that the Army has just presented to parliament, as to why they will not go forward with any negotiations with the king. Very foolishly, the members have declined to debate it as yet. It is fortunate for them that Fairfax is still in at least nominal control of the army, as I am sure that Cromwell must be livid.”

“You think that parliament may try to negotiate with the king, despite the Army?” Dean asks.

“I rather fear that they would be foolish enough to think that they can try”, Castiel says grimly. “And that if they do, they will find out the hard way just how wrong they are!”

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Thursday 6th December, 1648

The news reaches them late that evening, presumably so swift because the Oxford garrison is partly funded by Castiel. He reads the message and scowls, but still hands a coin to the messenger.

“Thank you”, he says grimly. “There is no reply.”
The man bows and leaves. Dean watches his alpha anxiously.

“Well?” he asks.

“Not well”, Castiel says. “Parliament has behaved as foolishly as I feared it might. Yesterday they voted to continue talks with the king, by a clear majority. The Army's response was fast. Colonel Pride – not a man I am overly fond of - came early to the Commons today, and arrested any member who he suspected of not being sympathetic to the Army cause. Some forty-five have been held, which means many others must have been warned beforehand and effected a diplomatic absence. About eighty are left, in what its opponents are already calling a rump parliament.”

“But why?” Dean asks. “Surely they would have reversed the vote with just a little pressure?”

Castiel shakes his head.

“This is very bad”, he says. “Cromwell wrote to me at the end of last month, and he seemed at the end of his tether. Unless the king agrees to concessions in the next few days, he will accede to the pressure he is under and put the king on trial.”

Dean gasps.

“How can we try a king of England?” he demands. “He is the law!”

“Cromwell believes – and I rather fear that Charles Stuart is about to prove him right for Lord alone knows what number of times we are at now – that there can be no peace with this king”, Castiel says slowly. “The king will be tried for treason against the English people. And the punishment for that is....”

He trails off, but he does not need to finish the sentence. Dean knows full well what the punishment for any noble person convicted of that crime is.

Beheading.

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Saturday 29th December, 1648

It had been a good Christmas, even if it had not been Christmas.

Under the regime of whoever was in charge of this country, celebrating Christmas was of course banned. However, it had long been a tradition at the Hall to give out small financial gifts to each staff member to mark the end of the old year and the start of the new one, for their faithful service in the past twelve months. And if Castiel had extended that to all the local estate workers, well, that was his right.

Yes, the moneys did go round the week before Christmas. It just made sure that everyone got covered, that was all. And because it was estate money that helped finance the garrison down in King's Linton (and the soldiers of that garrison also got an unseasonal thank-you that in no way, shape or form had any connection with marking someone's birth over sixteen hundred years ago), well, that was just coincidence.

Dean loves his mate at times like this. Which is why he is alarmed when Castiel reads the letter that arrives that morning, and his face falls.

“Bad news?” he ventures.
Castiel nods.

“The king has, as I expected, dug his heels in”, he said sorrowfully. “Cromwell's patience has finally snapped; indeed, I am amazed it lasted this long. Charles Stuart will be tried for treason against the state early next year. And I rather fear that the verdict is a foregone conclusion.”

“He will be put to death”, Dean says heavily. Again Castiel nods.

“Beheading, the so-called nobleman's death (3)”, he says darkly. “It is the only solution, much as I hate it. The wars in Europe are coming to an end, and if he were allowed to go abroad, he would become a figurehead for whichever of our enemies wanted to invade in his name. And that would divide the country and set us back to even worse than when we had a so-called civil war!”

“It is wrong!” Dean says angrily. (4)

“It is”, Castiel says, “though he brings much of the blame on himself by his actions. I would prefer a permanent confinement here, even with the risk of escape – we held his grandmother for nineteen years fairly easily – but Cromwell will not take that risk. The king must die.”

Dean stares down blankly at the food before him. Suddenly he does not feel at all hungry.

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Notes:
1) Something that appeared around the start of the previous century. Kerchiefs were used as headgear (the word comes from the French for head-covering), so the smaller version that fitted in the hand became the handkerchief.

2) A quote from Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Roman orator and philosopher. A valiant defender of the old Roman republic, he was eventually captured by the troops of Mark Anthony, who had his severed hands and head displayed in the Roman Forum. Remember, this was 'an advanced civilization'. Hmm.

3) Not as of right. For serious offences noblemen could still be hung or even hung, drawn and quartered, though parliament had by this time gotten into the habit of allowing pleas for a less barbaric sentence, which it sometimes granted.

4) Like many Royalists Dean was torn between supporting the institution of monarchy and the undeniable fact that the current king was a jerk. However he understood that the king had pretty much betrayed his country and had to go, one way or another.
Wednesday 2nd January, 1649

“This is really going to happen”, Dean says flatly.

Castiel nods. He and Dean are lying on the couch, holding each other. Although they both know that this is the way things have been heading, it still seems shocking that the king is to face a trial. This is England, after all.

“Parliament – what is left of it – has passed an ordinance for a special trial of the king”, Castiel says. “There can be no doubt as to the verdict, given that his enemies will be in full control of the proceedings. There are still some who wish for his son Henry to replace him – the boy is eight now, and both his elder brothers are far too much their father's sons – but I do not think it will happen. Though what we will get instead, the Lord alone knows.”

“They have not thought that through yet”, Dean says softly.

“We are all on new ground now”, Castiel says. “In the past, we have got rid of incompetent monarchs by replacing them with someone else, usually the next in line or at least someone of royal blood. But this time – I really fear that parliament will try to run the country without a king. The Commonwealth, Cromwell calls it.”

“The what?”

“Commonwealth, or the common good (1)”, Castiel says. “Government for the good of the common people. I think they will discover that it is harder than it looks.”

He smiles slightly, and waits for few moments. Sure enough, he feels his mate's hand probing beneath his belt.

“Yes, omega”, he growls. “That, too, is harder than it looks!”

Dean grins, and begins to jerk him off. Castiel really should complain – anyone could walk in – but he is the alpha of the house, and if he wants to let his omega have his way with his cock, then he is damn well going to have that pleasure.

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He has that pleasure.

He will have to give the servants an extra bonus this year. Meh, it is worth it!
Friday 5th January, 1649

“This is what I feared would happen”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Cromwell writes to me that he hopes I might consider taking up a position in the House of Lords, on the same day that his parliament says it can ignore the Upper Chamber in its efforts to block the trial. The Commons – what is left of it – claims to be the supreme authority now that the king has lost all power.”

Dean does not immediately answer, staring at the white world beyond the window. The heavy snowfalls seem to reflect the mood of the country, an England locked in an interminable winter. On the plus side, it stops Castiel going round the estate all day; the alpha is a very hands-on landowner, and his workers know he is wont to turn up anywhere without warning. At least it keeps them on their toes.

The snow is also a blessing in its confining nature, as Dean knows his husband needs him close at times like this. When the alpha is particularly sad or stressed he likes nothing more than having his omega near, preferably touching him in some way. Sometimes Dean will jerk his husband off, but mostly they will just sit there skin to skin, happy in each other’s company. It is wonderfully domestic, and Dean would not change it for the world.

“When does the trial start?” the omega asks eventually. Castiel kisses him.

“Not for a couple of weeks”, he says, “though I doubt that it will last long once they get underway. That is why Cromwell would like me in London, even if he knows that I will have nothing to do with any sentence. Presumably he thinks my being there would imply my tacit approval.”

“You do not approve?” Dean asks, surprised.

“I agree that we can never go back to the way things were”, Castiel says, ruffling the omega's short hair and earning himself a mild snort of displeasure, “but I still think monarchy is the best form of government for this country. Just not the absolute monarchy that France has and that Charles Stuart appeared to be aiming for. It is a pity that the Leveller movement seems to be on the wane, for I would quite like to see votes for all. Even omegas, I suppose.”

Dean glares at him. Castiel chuckles, standing up.

“Perhaps even sassy omegas who render their husbands speechless with their astounding beauty.”

Dean blushes. Then he realizes that Castiel is loosening his belt.

“And good hand skills”, Castiel grins.

He drops his trousers. Dean nods eagerly (he does not pant in eagerness, but there may be a little drool), and sets to work to prove his husband right.

He does. The servants' bonus just got a little larger (and it was not the only thing!).

Wednesday 24th January, 1649

“Three days of nothing”, Castiel says dryly over supper that evening. “Three days of ‘I do not recognize this court's authority’. The king is playing this well.”
“But he will still be found guilty?” Dean asks. It is his birthday, but he does not feel like celebrating it this year.

“And beheaded”, Castiel says. “The pressure on those sitting in judgement (2) must be terrible. They called over one hundred and thirty Commissioners to hear the case, but about half have not turned up. The newspapers – those that have eluded the censor – praise his attitude, but they too know it was over before it began.”

“What happens now?”

“The court will hear witnesses – witnesses that the king will not be allowed to cross-examine, which is in my opinion unfair – and then pronounce sentence”, Castiel says. “Perhaps this week, perhaps the start of the next. I doubt there will be much delay before the sentence is carried out. They will wish to make a public thing of it.”

Dean shudders. In his time in London he had come to understand that it was a violent city, but he had always avoided public executions and pillories. Even though he is no longer there, it still seems too close.

Castiel pulls him into an embrace, and he goes willingly.

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Tuesday 30th January, 1649

The snow is back with a vengeance. It lies heavy on the ground, erasing the road through the village and settling on the ice-covered lake, bright against the leaden grey skies. Dean stares out forlornly onto the scene before him, and sighs. Eighty miles away, just a couple of hundred yards up from their old house, Charles Stuart is being beheaded (3). Everyone is going about their business today in an unnatural silence, in the knowledge that, perhaps irrevocably, England is changing.

Castiel stirs in the bed behind him, and Dean realizes how cold he is, standing next to the huge window. He closes the curtains and almost runs to get back into the warm shelter of his alpha's body. He is safe there, whatever the world can throw at him.

A murder of crows takes off from the field near the river, and circle over the village before flying off down the valley towards King's Linton. The village they leave behind is silent beneath the grey January skies, and more than a little fearful.

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Wednesday 7th February, 1649

In all the heavy atmosphere that surrounded the trial, Dean had almost forgotten that England was, technically, still at war. He is reminded of it when his husband receives two letters today, which he naturally opens for him. Now that the snow has partly melted, his alpha has been anxious to be out on his rounds again, checking into each and every part of his great estate. He had left unconscionably early, though when the omega had whined in protest at that, he had returned and given Dean such an intense blow-job that the servants must have heard the screams from their quarters. Fortunately they know by now not to come and investigate.

Dean shifts happily at the memory, silently grateful for loose clothing. He is so lucky with his alpha!
Said alpha chooses that moment to return to the house, clearly frozen to the marrow judging from his red face and the fact that he is wrapped in several layers of clothes. Dean takes him to the fireplace and helps him remove them, scenting Castiel's naked body before helping him into his dressing-gown. His husband slumps onto the couch, pulling a willing Dean down on top of him.

“I am so happy to be indoors”, the alpha sighs. “It is not just the cold, but there is a strong northerly as well. I am freezing!”

Dean eases out of his grasp and laughs at the pout that this earns, until his husband realizes that he is fitting the heavy woollen socks that Castiel himself knits. The alpha growls his approval as his mate settles back, rubbing himself gently on his mate's muscled body.

“Any letters today?” Castiel yawns.

“Cromwell wrote to you again”, Dean says. “You know he would have a fit if he knew that your omega opens your mail?”

“I do not care”, Castiel says shortly. “You are the love of my life, Dean. And I want to share so much more with you than just my correspondence.”

The omega blushes at his husband's smirk – despite being frozen, the man is already hard! - and hurries on.

“He says that the Scots have proclaimed the Prince of Wales as King Charles the Second”, Dean says, “but only if he takes the Covenant to enforce Presbyterianism which, Cromwell thinks, he will fight tooth and nail to avoid. And Prince Rupert has taken his fleet to southern Ireland.”

“At least we got five of the ships back”, Castiel mutters. “Does Cromwell say whether he himself is being dispatched to Scotland or Ireland first?”

“Ireland.”

“That is the trickier situation”, Castiel says. “We are at war with the Scots, but neither of us can spare enough troops for a full invasion of the other as yet, we because of the Irish and they because they are still divided over the king – or new king - now. We may end up fighting a proxy war in Ireland, which will not be pretty.”

“Religion, I suppose”, Dean says sadly.

“The Confederates should have taken their chance”, Castiel says, “and united against or done a deal with the English and/or the Scots settlers. But they have always been divided between realists, who want to let the settlers stay in reduced lands, and extremists, who want them all gone. I rather fear that they will find that division fatal to their cause, once Cromwell gets there.”

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Monday 19th March, 1649

“Parliament – well, the Commons – formally abolished the Lords today”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Two days after they ended the monarchy and declared a Commonwealth.”

“Good” Dean mutters sleepily. It has snowed heavily the past few days, and he and his alpha are wrapped in a huge blanket together, nestling against the huge window that opens out onto a white world. It is cold near the glass, but Dean has a hot alpha to keep him warm. He sighs contentedly.
“Comfortable down there?” Castiel grins.”

He is interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Come in, Dorothy”, the alpha calls out.

The steward enters. Dean is surprised that she is holding a small basket of coal and.... vegetables? His eyes widen.

“Yes”, Castiel chuckles. “Best winter clothes on, then you and I are going out to make a snowman. And Dean?”

“Yes, Cas?”

“Not an anatomically correct one this time, thank you. I had a devil of a time explaining your effort last year to poor old Lord Eaton. In the end I just blamed local children, and he said whoever did that deserved a good spanking!”

Dean blushed. Yes, he remembered that particular snowman, and those particular consequences! And by the happy look on his alpha's face, Castiel remembers them too!

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Notes:
1) The Commonwealth was basically a military republic with better PR, stating that everything was done in the name of the people (unless the people chose wrong, in which case, sod 'em!).
2) The Indemnity And Oblivion Act of 1660 would name 104 people as regicides, directly or indirectly involved in the late king's execution. 24 had died of whom three (Cromwell and two others) were disinterred, 'tried' and beheaded, their heads then being placed on spikes over London Bridge. In the end ten of the remaining 80 were captured and executed, whilst a further nineteen suffered life imprisonment or transportation. The remainder were either able to use their influence at court to obtain a pardon or fled abroad, although three of the latter were extradited and put to death. A later similar act in Scotland added four more executions, most famously the slippery Argyll.
3) The execution of King Charles I took place outside the Banqueting House, built in 1622 as an extension to Whitehall Palace. Despite the name it was more of a reception suite for visiting dignitaries than for dining. Ironically when the palace was destroyed by fire in 1698 it was the only building to survive, and is still there today.
March-August 1649

Chapter Summary

63: A trip to Woodstock brings stories of ladies of leisure, lions and lustful kings, whilst Stalwarton receives more than one important visitor, to a certain omega's annoyance - well, some of the time. Castiel has to deal with another irritating local official and Dean is not a pastry whore, except for those rare times when he is.

Wednesday 21st March, 1649

Dean hates days like this. Having to come to meetings with pompous nobodies who think they are somebodies. And as an omega, he should not really be here anyway. But Castiel had suggested that, if Dean did not wish to come with him, he might talk to Charlie about cutting back on the number of pies the omega got through. The bastard!

“I quite agree”, Castiel says dryly.

King's Linton's mayor, a gaunt beta in his forties – Mr. Hoffman, Dean recalls - looks across the table at them both in surprise.

“You do, my lord?”

“Yes”, Castiel says. “For a town associated with my noble family to have that number of beggars, even given the state of the economy, it is not really acceptable.”

The mayor smiles.

“So you are in favour of our moves to have them thrown out?” he asks.

Dean knows that look. His alpha is up to something.

“I have talked with my friend Mr. Cromwell about revoking the town's charter”, Castiel says airily. “Of course it was originally a royal charter, but now that the monarchy has been officially abolished, he assures me that there is no problem. Having no market will reduce the size of the town considerably, and the beggars will soon move on elsewhere.”

He beams at the mayor with false sincerity. The man gulps.

“Or”, Castiel says sharply, “we could have a discussion with the burghers of the town about setting up some almshouses for these men and women. Though if you would rather....”

“No!” the mayor almost yelps, before recovering himself. “Almshouses. Great idea. I shall go and talk to them. At once!”

He almost falls over his feet as he scurries from the room. Dean grins at his alpha.

“Always caring for others”, he says. “You deserve a reward, Cas.”

“In the mayor's office?” the alpha asks hopefully.
Dean bats at him. He is tempted, though.

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It turns out that Dean is not very good at resisting temptation. Though the look of horror on the mayor's face when he returns is priceless!

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Monday 23rd April, 1649

King's Linton is of course the nearest place of any size, and there is the much larger Oxford not much further south, but Dean likes to shop in Woodstock occasionally. They have several small but interesting shops that the other towns do not.

Yes, one of them does sell a wide range of sexy omega undergarments, but that is a total coincidence.

Shut up!

They are riding out of Woodstock when Dean notices a large, rather forlorn looking building set a little way back from the road.

“The old royal palace”, Castiel explains. “It has been there for the best part of five hundred years, but it is no longer needed of course.”


“King Henry I kept lions and camels there in the early twelfth century”, the alpha says. “And his grandson Henry II did rather better, keeping one of his many mistresses in apartments nearby. In those days it was thought quite acceptable for even a mated alpha to have many mistresses, or even a harem of omegas.”

Dean stares at him suspiciously.

“Though I do not know how he had the energy”, Castiel says innocently. “I mean, I only have one omega and he alone tires me out!”

His omega pouts.

“I love it when you pout”, Castiel teases. “It's the second-most sexy look on you that I will see today.”

“Second?” Dean asks, puzzled.

The look he gets in return is almost feral.

“The first is when you change into the contents of that bag you are holding!” the alpha growls. “It is a fair ride home Dean, and once we get there you are going to get more than a fair ride!”

Dean shudders.

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Friday 18th May, 1649
“So”, Dean says with a sigh, “that was the great Oliver Cromwell.”

Of course the omega had not been there when the man effectively in charge of the country had called – ‘Army leader dies of heart-attack after seeing omega getting above his station' was not a headline Dean wished to read in a newspaper – but he had been in the small bay window directly above the front door, and had seen him come and go.

“You remember me telling you yesterday about the mutiny of some regiments at Banbury, north of here?” Castiel says. “Some of them tried to march to the rest of the army at Salisbury in an attempt to persuade them to join in the revolt. Cromwell intercepted them at Burford, not far from here, and had three of the leaders shot. They are all back in line now, especially as he has sworn that not one of his men will go to Ireland without first getting all their back-pay.”

“And he is in a position to make sure that happens”, Dean says. “What did you think of him now he is ruler in all but name? Has he changed?”

“He is very like his letters”, Castiel says. “Frighteningly focussed. I disagree with him over some matters political, but I do not doubt that he has a vision for this country. Whether or not he can achieve it is another matter entirely.”

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Friday 1st June, 1649

Lord, but it is hot again! After a bitter winter, all the country's heat seemed to be arriving in one go, and Dean wakes up sweating. Not for the usual 'athletic' reason, worse luck.

He eases gently out of the huge bed so as not to wake his husband, and crosses to pull back the curtain and open a window, remembering only just in time to don a dressing-gown (Charlie had been crossing the courtyard last time and had threatened to stop making him pies if she ever saw that much of him again!). There is no breeze, so he opens all three other windows for what good it does before returning to the bed.

Castiel grunts as Dean slides back in, and inelegantly clambers on top of his mate, squinting at him from beneath his impossible hair and looking generally displeased at being awoken.

“You wanted to get up early and go out to look at that place the other side of Wolfstown”, Dean reminds him.

“I am up”, Castiel grumbles. “It's too bright.”

“Grump monster!” Dean teases.

“Love you so much, Dean”, the alpha whispers as he manoeuvres his mate into position. “Love you always. All the way!”

He thrusts effortlessly in, his knot forming almost at once as he lets out a keening noise. Dean thinks that he never looks more beautiful than at times like this, a raw alpha staking his claim on his omega. He is so lucky.

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Saturday 30th June, 1649

All things told Castiel is loving, considerate, and in all the best ways fairly untypical of the modern
alpha. Which makes encounters like the one approaching all the more difficult.

The omega stares suspiciously at the pie.

“Who else is coming to dinner?” he demands. “You always try to distract me with extra pie when it's someone bad.”

“I am sorry”, Castiel says insincerely. “I was wrong to presume that. I shall have it sent straight back and tell Charlie that....”

It takes every ounce of effort not to laugh as Dean whines piteously, grabs his wrist and stared pleadingly at him, like he is the most unloved and underfed omega in the whole wide world. Which is so not the case on just about every count.

“Cas! Pie! For Dean?”

The pouty quivering lip and batted eyelashes nearly makes the alpha smile, but he just nods and replaces the pie, cutting his mate a large slice that has him whimpering in happiness. Especially when he sees the jar of custard that comes with his favourite dessert. Castiel lets him finish the whole slice, and the omega lets out a belch of happiness, not even stopping to glare at Castiel for the snigger that escapes him.

“So who is it?” he asks, with the sort of longing look that suggests a second helping might just possibly be acceptable (as in the ocean might just possibly be wet).

“Cromwell has asked me to talk to a Mr. Thomas Scot (1), his chief spymaster”, Castiel says, “and to give him the benefit of my advice. I know a little of him. He is a sound alpha, but very traditional. I think if he came here and saw you anything less than barefoot and collared, he would have a fit.”

Dean stared at his alpha in horror.

“I was therefore going to suggest”, Castiel went on, “that you keep to our room during his visit. With supplies of pie.”

“I am not some sort of pastry whore”, Dean says loftily.

His alpha just looks at him.

“Shut up!”

Castiel sniggers again, the bastard, but cuts him another slice. Dean most definitely does not purr in gratitude, whatever it sounds like!

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Sunday 1st July, 1649

The alpha glares at his mate in annoyance. Dean smirks, and pulls the fake beard around his chin.

“Am omega's place is in the home, my lord”, he says in a squeaky voice. Despite himself, Castiel smiles.

“Most of the people in charge of this country would think it strange that I treat my omega as anything more than a bed-warmer”, he says teasingly. “At least the man kept his visit short.”
They had just said goodbye (a permanent one, Dean hoped) to Mr. Scot, and Dean had kept well out of sight during his visit, though he had spied on them through the bay window. And apart from one rather unfortunate remark on their visitor's behalf, the encounter had generally passed off well.

“I do not think he is going to say anything about barren mates in future”, Dean snarks as Castiel returns to their bedroom. “He will always remember the time a member of the nobility growled at him over a dutiful omega.”

“A dutiful, obedient and well-behaved omega”, Dean points out.

The silence is palpable.

“Shut up!” Dean grumbles. The alpha grins.

“And I love you for playing a role so unfitted to your personality”, Castiel says. “Move over.”

Dean still pouts, but shifts over in the bed. Castiel shrugs off all his clothes, pulls on his bedsocks and gets in beside him. And lies on his front. Dean's eyes widen.

“Come on in”, Castiel grunts into the pillow. “You deserve some reward.”

Hell yes!

Friday 17th August, 1649

“Cromwell has made it safely to Ireland”, Castiel says. “I fear for what may happen next.” (2)

“Why?” Dean asks.

“All those tales of Irish barbarity against settlers have made many Englishmen want revenge”, the alpha says. “Two things give me hope; he is a firm believer in the rules of war, and he has an iron grip on his men, who know they will face his wrath if they stick so much as a nose out of line.”

“Then what is the problem?”

“If any of the people or places he comes across try to double-cross him”, Castiel says grimly, “or do anything remotely questionable, he will unleash his men and let them have free rein. He believes in making examples where necessary, on the grounds that it will spare more lives later.”


“If you were defending somewhere, and the only place between you and the enemy got totally destroyed, would you not think twice before resisting or trying anything questionable?” the alpha asks. “I am sure that many of the tales coming out of that sorry place are false, but there must be some truth behind some of them; there is seldom smoke without at least some fire. I just pray that they will not push their luck with someone like Cromwell, or they may not live to regret it.”

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Notes:
1) Thomas Scot (c.1605-1660), member of parliament at this time for Aylesbury. One of the regicides, he fled to Brussels on the Restoration, but was captured and extradited, and subsequently hung, drawn and quartered.
2) The Cromwellian Conquest is hotly debated among historians today, with both sides knowing
absolutely that they are in the right and the other side are liars (in other words, a standard historical debate). It is known that around 50,000 prisoners (then about 4% of the island's population) were transported as indentured labourers, but total casualty estimates vary from between fifteen and over fifty per cent, things being made worse by an untimely outbreak of the bubonic plague. Many Catholics who survived were dispossessed by the subsequent settlement of more Protestants, particularly from the Army.
Chapter Summary

64: The Irish pay the first installment of a heavy price for their dealings with the late king, and Dean finds that all these straight-laced visitors coming to the Hall do lead to certain compensations (of the horizontal variety). The dynamic duo also mark ten years since the meeting in the barn, and have a quiet evening in with no sex - yeah right! Dean falls out of love with an item of clothing and ends an evening in tears.

Saturday 15th September, 1649

“It seems that they pushed their luck.”

Dean blinks over his pie. Unusually a letter had come whilst they were at supper, and Castiel was reading it whilst his omega was finishing his slice of pie.

All right, it was a second helping. And?

“Who pushed their luck?” Dean asks, looking mournfully at the once more empty plate.

“The Irish”, Castiel says. “The news from there is that Cromwell has massacred the town of Drogheda, after they refused to surrender to him.”

“That is just wrong”, Dean says firmly.

“The conventions of war are quite clear”, Castiel says, “and from what he writes, Cromwell followed them. The town was offered a chance to surrender, and it declined. Once they did that, they were totally at the mercy of the besieging commander (1). He says he used lots to kill one in ten of the defenders – not the first time he has done that – and the rest are to be shipped off to the Barbadoes. Many civilians were killed, and he does not appear to have moved to rein his men in.”

“Brutal”, Dean shudders.

“But sadly effective”, Castiel says. “The Irish have abandoned Dundalk and Trim as a result, sparing any deaths there I suppose. I do not approve of his tactics, but I can see the logic behind them. Though I rather doubt that the Irish do.”

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Tuesday 18th September, 1649

Dean moans in a mixture of pleasure and pain, as his husband comes inside him for.. well, he lost count sometime after it reached double figures. An alpha's stamina is supposed to decrease with age (he has never mentioned this to Castiel, of course), but if anything his alpha seems to be getting even hornier. If he had any brainpower left, he would tell himself how lucky that makes him. Instead he can only utter a feeble whine as Castiel once more rotates him on his engorged cock and moves in behind him.

“Not bad for a forty-year-old”, Castiel says proudly, wrapping his arms around his mate, who sighs
and relaxes into his grip. “Hopefully I should have gone down enough for us to make it down to supper, or to at least have something sent up without unduly frightening the maids.”

“You are getting hornier as you get older”, Dean mutters. He hears a snicker in response.

“You say that like it is a bad thing?”

“Not when you reduce me to a ball of sheer happiness”, Dean sighs. “Thank you, Cas. For rocking my world. Again.”

“Ten years since we met in that barn”, Castiel reminds him. “A lot has changed since then, and not all for the better – but you are still mine, Dean, and I love you even more now than back then, when you were just a sassy omega who draped himself all over me in front of his family.”

Dean blushes fiercely. Trust his sappy alpha to remember that embarrassing detail.

“I was yours the moment we saw each other”, he says simply. “Yours and only yours, Cas. My perfect angel.”

His perfect angel shifts slightly, and his knot does things to Dean's insides that momentarily make his eyes water. But then he is pulled into a warm embrace, and Castiel growls possessively into the back of his neck, a cool finger tracing the mating-mark that means that Dean will always be his.

He yelps in shock. But preferably his with bedsocks. Damn icicle-feet!

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Monday 15th October, 1649

“It has happened again”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Wexford this time.”

“Bad?” Dean asks.

“Very. The town is in ruins, with over a thousand killed at least. And all because of a misunderstanding.”

“What?”

The town defenders tried to play for time, thinking they would have aid sent to them”, Castiel says. “But then the castle surrendered without telling them, and in the general chaos and confusion – well, it was a bloodbath.”

“One that your 'friend' did not stop”, Dean says grimly.

“Indeed”, Castiel says ruefully. “He has made an error of judgement here, though like us all, he will answer to it in the next world. It has secured him most of the island's England-facing coast, but he will probably soon be thinking of moving into winter quarters. I dare say he will find that very difficult, as the Irish will doubtless make small-scale raids on his forces (2).”

“You surely cannot approve of his behaviour?” Dean asks, surprised.

“I cannot condone his failure to stop it, and I do not expect he will punish his men much”, Castiel says, frowning. “But the townsfolk were offered the opportunity to surrender, and like Drogheda, they declined. It is bad that events transpired as they did, but war is an inexact science, and they knew at least some of the risks (3). I am more worried about Scotland just now.”
“Why?”

“Because I hear that they may be finally nearing an accord with their new king”, Castiel says, “which means that if he can get there and raise an army, we may have a third outbreak of war in England. And that is all we need!”

+~+~+

Monday 22nd October, 1649

“Portugal (4)”, Castiel mutters as he reads his latest letter.

“What?”

The alpha looks up, and smiles. There is something warming about seeing his mate with a mouth full of pie, and blushing because it is Castiel's dessert that he is devouring. The alpha had been distracted from the food by the letter's late arrival, and by the time he had come back to the table Dean had finished his own pie and was looking like the most underfed and unloved omega in the whole world as he stared piteously at Castiel's piece, his lower lip quivering. The alpha had not even hesitated to hand it over. He had not laughed at his mate's behaviour, but it had been close.

“Portugal”, he repeats. “And I am going to have to start asking Charlie to send up three plates of dessert in future, so that I can actually have some.”

Dean blushes fiercely, but does not stop eating.

“What about Portugal?” he asks through a mouthful of pie. At least that is what Castiel thinks he says. He does not even try to reprimand him for talking with his mouth full; no-one with any sense comes between Dean and Pie.

“Prince Rupert's fleet has been forced to sale for there”, Castiel says. “He was operating out of Kinsale, but now that Wexford has fallen it means that the port is vulnerable, even if we cannot fully use Wexford Harbour.”

“And we know why that is”, Dean snarks.

“Sadly I was right about Cromwell not disciplining his men”, Castiel frowns. “I have to say that I am disappointed in that. But again it has certainly had an effect; New Ross surrendered in just a couple of days, and Cork has declared for parliament. The Confederate state is shrinking daily.”

“I wish we could just let the Scots and Irish – and the Welsh for that matter – do their own thing”, Dean sighs.

“Maybe one day”, Castiel concedes. “Perhaps when religion is less the killing-ground that it seems to have become in the past century, and people are more reasonable all round. Or when Hell freezes over.”

Dean sighs, but (reluctantly) he has to agree.

+~+~+

Monday 5th November, 1649

Dean loves Guy Fawkes' Night, and the annual bonfire on the estate. Although Castiel is the alpha and has to see and be seen on this important occasion, he makes sure he always has Dean by his
side, and that everyone on the estate acknowledges his omega's position.

Today however Dean is feeling a little down, although he says nothing to his alpha, whom he knows is very busy. So it is a surprise when they finally reach the haven of their room, and Castiel pulls him in close.

“All right”, he says quietly. “You have been off all day. What is wrong?”

Dean sniffs.

“You will think it silly”, he says.

“Not unless you actually tell me what 'it' is”, Castiel points out. “Tell me.”

Dean hesitates.

“I was going to wear the same top I wore on this day last year”, he says, his voice unnaturally loud in the cold, silent room. “But when I tried it on this morning it was tight, so I wore something else.”

Castiel holds him tight but eases back, staring hard into his mate's green eyes.

“You are worried about your appearance”, he says, understanding. “I see.”

Dean stares at the floor, embarrassed. Castiel comes round to his front and starts to unbutton his shirt.

“I know I have been busy with expanding the estate these past few months”, he says quietly, “and I am sorry that I have not thought to do this more often, or you may have avoided such bad thoughts. Tonight, once more, I am going to worship your body, Dean Milton. I am going to undress you slowly and enjoy every minute, then I am going to take you apart piece by delicious piece and enjoy that too. And then we shall adjourn to the bed and I shall make love to you, the man I love more than life itself.

Dean cannot help himself and bursts into tears. Castiel holds him gently until he stops, then wipes his mate's gorgeous face and carries on with his adoration.

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Tuesday 6th November, 1649

A certain omega spends the whole day with a smile on his face. Even if he does sit down very, very carefully!

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Wednesday 5th December, 1649

Dean always hates it when they have the sort of visitor that means that he has to stay upstairs and out of sight like the good little omega house-mate. The only consolation is that Castiel knows how much he hates it, and always indulges him in some hot, passionate sex soon afterwards. Once, rather embarrassingly, before their guest had been out of the drive; the man had returned for his stick and the servants had had to cover for their master.

Come to think of it, maybe Dean does not hate these sort of visits that much.
He and Castiel are lying together, the omega collapsed untidily on top of his alpha after having ridden him to an impressive triple orgasm. Neither of them are young any more, and they need some little recovery time (though the covered glasses of fruit water Castiel insists on having within reach are pushing it, Dean thinks, even if he always drinks his).

“Lieutenant Torrin is serving the people of the area well”, Castiel says, “and thank you for keeping out of the way during his visit.”

Dean grins.

“I think you thanked me three times already, Cas”, he grins. “Unless you want to make it four?”

To his horror, the alpha seems to be seriously considering it.

“Maybe later”, he says, much to the omega's relief. “He wanted to tell me that they are excluding all members who have not sat since Colonel Pride's purge at the end of last year.”

“They will hardly have anyone left, soon”, Dean scoffs.

“Surprisingly they have about two hundred”, Castiel says. “A lot have come back, although of course any against the Army are still excluded. I miss the hard thrust of parliamentary debate, but now I have something better.”

“What is that?” Dean asks sleepily. Then he yelps as Castiel pushes his knot in even deeper.

“Hard thrusting into my omega!” Castiel grins.

Oh fuck!

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Tuesday 25th December, 1649

This is of course Puritan England, so there is absolutely no celebration of Christmas in any way, shape or form. There is, however, a large party at the Roadhouse to mark the recent birth of Ash and Jo's first child, Elizabeth, and Ellen and Bobby becoming.... a word starting with the seventh letter of the alphabet that would bring grievous bodily harm on anyone who uttered it. Little Lizzy may have been born in October, but these things take time to arrange.

Dean's belated celebration present to Castiel is a drawing-set that the alpha had seen in King's Linton and liked. The alpha's present to his omega, given the night before, is a two-piece lace negligee, which Dean considers a bit of a cheat as he will certainly get as much (if not more) joy out of himself. But he supposes that he can grin and bear it.

The negligee is almost transparent, so he ends up baring quite a lot!

Fortunately their friends all know them well enough not to inquire about such gifts, and they all exchange smaller gifts for each other before sitting down to a cooked goose.

“I mean to ask”, Castiel says to Linda Tarrant, “how is Kevin doing? We rarely see him these days.”

“He is working as a builder on a site in Oxford”, she says. “He stays there six days a week and only comes home Sundays.”

That explains his absence, Dean thinks, and the food bag set aside by Ellen.
“‘I would not have thought he would have chosen that’”, Castiel says.

“He wanted to get into Oxford”, Mrs. Tarrant says, “but you know how expensive it is. And he hardly qualifies for a scholarship.”

“Why not?” Castiel asks.

“Because scholarships go to who you know, not what you know”, Dean puts in. Mrs. Tarrant nods in agreement.

“Then perhaps Kevin should resubmit his application”, Castiel says. “After all he knows a local landowner of some import.”

Dean smiles at that.

“And the landowner's pie-mad omega mate.”

“Hey! Bad alpha!”

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Notes:
1) Dating back to the Ancient Greeks, there were certain unwritten laws of siege warfare. A besieger had to first formally summons the target city (i.e. offer it the chance to surrender). If it declined, then all bets were off once the first shot was fired by the attackers, or when the siege weapons touched the city walls.
2) Guerrilla warfare, though that term (from the Spanish for 'little war') did come into usage until the Peninsula War of 1807-1814 where the Spanish used it to great effect against the occupying French forces.
3) For the past eight years, newspapers in England had been full of tales of Catholic atrocities against Protestants in the island, many either exaggerated or downright untrue. But as a certain alpha said on more than one occasion, some were horribly accurate.
4) Then in a relatively quiet period of its eventually successful war for independence from Spain, as well as trying to defend its overseas empire from the growing power of the Dutch Republic. Portugal's King John IV continued the policy of friendship between the crowns but was too weak to oppose the parliamentarian navy when it arrived under Blake, and Prince Rupert was forced to leave. John's daughter Catherine would make an unhappy and unsuccessful marriage to the future King Charles II.
Chapter Summary

65: Dean's pie habits clue Castiel into events in the family, and the alpha surprises his half-brother Lucifer when he gives him his blessing for his marriage. The Confederacy all but collapses, but the danger from Scotland grows stronger. The Rump Parliament comes up with a novel punishment for adulterers, and there is a leather harness.....

Thursday 24th January 1650

It is just possible that a very small if not infinitesimally tiny fraction of the 'interesting' situation that Dean Milton currently finds himself in is, if one truly stretches the definition of the term 'culpability', ever so very slightly his fault.

All right, perhaps a little bit his fault.

Oh hell, when on earth is he going to learn to keep his big, fat mouth shut? Especially when it comes to giving his sex maniac of a husband ideas to 'spice up' their sex life (the last time Cas had found a spice concoction that had proven to Dean that yes, being knotted by your alpha could get even more intense, at least when his cock was coated in a paste of whatever the hell that stuff was. The omega had not been able to walk properly for nearly a week (and yes, he had ordered more of the stuff in, but that was quite beside the point thank you very much!).

And this latest torture was, if anything, even worse. Stopping at the Manor Farm the other week, Dean had eyed the polished harness around the huge shire horse and suggested that his husband would like to have one of those on his omega, so he could ride him even more easily. He had known the minute the words were out of his mouth that he was going to regret them, especially the way the alpha's eyes had darkened and a subtle growl had escaped from him before he had regained control of himself.

Dean only hoped that Castiel had not got Rufus to make the harness he was wearing, as he would never be able to look the blacksmith in the face again!

The thing is a series of leather straps, the result of which is to bind Dean's chest tightly and make his nipples permanently hard, an effect only made worse by the soft shirt he is half-wearing. And the bottom strap ends in a strap with notches that is currently fitted snugly around his cock, keeping that hard too. This is torture!

And he had actually agreed to it!

Castiel comes up behind him, and Dean tries not to feel annoyed by the smirk that can probably be seen from down in Oxford. He fails.

"I must say, I do like your choice of birthday present", Castiel grins. "Though this seems to be as much for me as it is for thee. Yes, leather most definitely suits my perfect omega."

He runs his hand over, the front of Dean's trousers, and the omega nearly comes there and then. Then he reaches inside the open shirt and tweaks one of Dean's nipples.
“Cas!”

“And you are going to be wearing this all day”, Castiel says, reluctantly withdrawing his hand. “Although this does give me an idea for my own birthday, come September.”

No doubt about it, the alpha was definitely trying to kill him.... wait. His birthday?

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Thursday 14th February, 1650

After the ill-fitting top incident, Dean had taken to going on long walks every day, for at least an hour. It was one of these trips to King's Linton that led to him learning something unexpected about someone in the family, namely Samandriel Milton, which is why the young omega is visiting the Hall today. He looks terrified, though this is very much the norm for him. With him is Lucifer Milton, who works in the small school in the town. The older man looks scarcely any less uneasy than the boy – young man – next to him, and Dean knows full well as to why that is.

“You wished to ask me something, Alfie?” Castiel says amiably. Though Dean notices that his eyes are sharp; he has picked up the unease radiating from the two, even though he does not yet know the reason why.

“I'm pregnant!” Samandriel burst out with.

Yes, that. Castiel, to Dean's surprise, does not bat an eyelid. He looks between the two men before him, and nods slowly.

“Is there to be a wedding?” he asks dryly.

“Yes”, Lucifer Milton says, staring at the floor in the apparent hope that it will open and swallow him whole. Samandriel may not be heir to much of an estate, but defiling an omega relative of an alpha noble, even when said noble is your half-brother – well, safe to say that Castiel could make his relative's life 'interesting'. And short.

The alpha smiles.

“Congratulations, then.”

There is the sort of awkward silence that one usually gets when people have just had all their preconceptions blown clean out of the water, and are struggling to work out just what happened.

“You... do not mind?” Lucifer says, and he moves into the small omega, pulling him close. “You know what people will say, the age difference and all.”

“I know what people will think”, Castiel says, “though few will be stupid enough to come out and say it to your faces. If they do, kindly direct them to me, and I shall 'explain' things to them.”

Damn alpha even does the air-quotes, Dean thinks with a smile. Then he notices that the damn alpha is looking pointedly at him.

“I knew something was wrong when Dean came back from seeing you, and he had not stopped to try to cadge a pie off of Mary-Beth”, Castiel grins. “That is akin to the sun deciding not to come up of a morning. I wish you both well, and I hope to be allowed to formally grant my blessing at your wedding.”
That, Dean knows, is one hell of a big deal. Even if (God forbid!) something were to happen to his Cas, the promise of protection from the chief alpha of a household is binding on all his successors. Lucifer and Alfie will be set for life.

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Friday 29th March, 1650

“Cromwell has taken Kilkenny”, Castiel says as he reads his latest letter. “The capital of the Confederacy. It will be mopping up from here on in, which is just as well really.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“It looks like the Scots are going to try to bring Prince Charles over, even though he has not yet agreed to sign their Covenant”, Castiel says. “We are fortunate that they are so divided at this time; hopefully Cromwell will be able to finish up in Ireland and get back here before they can raise an invading army.”

“You think that they are going to try to invade again?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“The only question is whether or not Cromwell lets them”, he says.

“What? Let them?”

“There was precious little support in England for the king in his fiasco that ended in Preston, two years back”, Castiel says. “There will be even less for his son this time, now the Army is getting a grip everywhere. A few local uprisings, perhaps a castle or two declaring for the king, but that will be it. Cromwell has two choices. He can fight them in Scotland, where they will be on home ground, or let them wander halfway across England growing weaker all the time, then strike and destroy them. I think he will favour the latter course of action; it is one of his better qualities that he does not waste the lives of his men.”

“So he may not even invade Scotland, then?”

“Oh, he has to invade”, Castiel says. “They still have their regular army (1), which is quite formidable, but is not equipped to cross the whole of England and put a king into London. They will need a new, bigger army for that, and there are already divisions over who should and should not be allowed into it. For one thing, the king is still pinning his hopes on Montrose to invade from the north and defeat the Covenanter.”

“Will he?”

“I would wager that there is more chance of you giving up pie!”

“Hey! Bad alpha!”

Dean pouts, and his husband chuckles.

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Friday 3rd May, 1650

“I wonder if he knew?” Castiel muses.

It is raining again. Dean half expects to see boats floating by outside; a whole month of rain has caused the river to swell up to way beyond its normal size, and several of Uncle Bobby's fields are
underwater. At least Stalwarton, set some way back from the river, is still safe, though Castiel has said that he will have to consider moves to defend the church if the rain continues.

“You wonder if who knew what?” Dean asks. He himself has been feeling a little unsettled of late for no particular reason, but he worries when he sees his normally self-contained alpha looking unsure. It is not like him.

“Montrose was betrayed four days back”, Castiel says, “and the very next day the king caved to the demands of the Scots, who have been hammering away at him for over a month. I do not see how the news can have got from the Far North of Scotland all the way to the Netherlands in barely twenty-four hours, but it is an odd coincidence.”

“He has agreed to impose Presbyterianism on the three kingdoms, then?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“In the unlikely – as in impossible – event that he is able to defeat the Army that destroyed his father, he has so promised”, he says. “I feel sorry for the Marquis, betrayed by someone he trusted (2). He was a good man.”

“Yet he fought for the other side”, Dean points out.

“A man must often times battle his own conscience, and go where it leads him”, Castiel says. “He was against the king to start with, and that change of coat was held against him by some. Yet he gained a series of stunning victories that so nearly won Scotland back for the king, when England was being lost. I do not think he could have changed the course of the war, but I admire his abilities as a warrior.”

“I could imagine you as a warrior”, Dean grins. “Castiellus, the great Roman fighter, with his mighty sword, fighting for what is right.”

The alpha grins.

“Then let us go upstairs”, he says, “and I shall put my 'mighty sword' to good use by sticking it.....”

Dean is already gone.

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Friday 24th May, 1650

“They hanged poor Montrose”, Castiel says sorrowfully, “and put his head on a spike. Barbaric!”

“They do that on the London bridge”, Dean says.

“Welcome to our capital”, Castiel intones, “and here is what we will do to you if you do not behave. Oh, and there is a new act against adultery.”

“Somehow I did not think your Puritan friends would approve of that”, Dean smiles.

“I am not sure that they are my friends any more”, Castiel sighs. “The Puritan name is being tarnished with stupid laws like this. The punishment for adultery is now death.”

“What?” Dean sits up, shocked.

“Oh, I doubt that any jury would convict on such a charge (3)”, Castiel says. “But they also set a three-month jail sentence for 'fornication'. I mean, we have few enough jails as it is, but depending on how they define it, that could lead to most of the population being inside.”
Dean grins.

“How about a little fornication so you end up inside of me?” he asks. Castiel looks at him.

“That was just bad!” he protests. Dean stares back.

“But worth testing!” the alpha grins, rising to his feet.

His omega is already running for it.

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Notes:
1) Like England, Scotland had no standing army at the time, but would have been able to raise a purely defensive force with some ease. But raising an army to mount a risky invasion of some other country was always infinitely harder.
2) Neil MacLeod of Ardvreck Castle. He later denied his and his wife Christine's role in this, though they seem to have kept the £20,000 (at least £300,000/$400,000 in 2016 terms) that they got as a reward. Fate caught up with them, though. Upon the Restoration in 1660 Charles II seems to have initially missed them in his otherwise efficient settling of old scores – but this oversight was corrected in 1672 by MacLeod being declared an outlaw, and later that same year the castle was destroyed in a raid that ended his family's control over the area. His own fate is unknown.
3) Castiel was right. Juries flatly refused to convict given such a punishment, and no-one ever suffered it. Like all laws passed at this time it was rendered void by the Restoration in 1660.
Chapter Summary

June-December 1650

66: The self-proclaimed King Charles II negotiates with the Scots for their support, but Cromwell outmanoeuvres him and defeats the Auld Enemy at Dunbar. There is yet another war crime, whilst the Clampdown On Christmas gets even more heavy-handed. And Castiel makes his forty-first birthday one to remember - for his omega.

Thursday 27th June, 1650

Castiel shakes his head as he reads his letter.

“Coffee?” Dean ventures.

“You know that does not go well when I am already tense”, Castiel says. “Things are hard enough as it is.”

He catches the smile on his omega's face, and sighs.

“Must you make everything about sex?” he asks, trying to suppress his own smile. From the smug look on his mate's face, his efforts are not wholly successful.

“Yes”, Dean says shortly. “Your point?”

Castiel smiles, and turns back to his letter.

“Fairfax has finally gone”, he says. “I think he went with the Army as far as he could, probably a little further, but he did refuse to sign the king's death-warrant (1). And he is nearly forty, which is old (2) for someone who has been fighting for as long as he has.”

“Yes, I suppose forty is getting on a bit”, Dean says airily. Castiel looks around for something to throw at him, and scowls when there is nothing to hand.

“I shall take great pleasure later in proving very thoroughly that forty is not that old”, he says, enjoying the shudder that his statement elicits from the omega. “The news is not unexpected. He took no direct part in the Irish campaign, and the Scots were probably the last straw.”

“Yet Cromwell is older, is he not?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“Fifty-one”, he says. “He will go north alone, now that the new king has signed the Covenant. Hopefully the general will be able to deal with the Scots before they become too strong, and better on their lands that ours. Though as I said, he may let the king into England if the latter is deluded enough to think people will support him.”

“The monarchy is still popular”, Dean says defensively. “And even you keep calling him the king, not the prince.”

Because by right he is or will be King of Scots (3), Castiel says. “I do not doubt that people support the monarchy in principle, but with a Puritan Army in charge who will punish any rebels as
fiercely as they did those in Ireland.... well, it will make people think twice. I only hope that the king is not captured.”

“Why?” Dean asks.

“Because I think that one day soon, England may turn back to the system of monarchy”, Castiel says, rising to his feet, “and whilst I have some reservations about the man, I have more about his brother James. Still, we shall cross that bridge when we come to it. In the meantime, let us, as parliament might say, fornicate. Now what was that about forty being old, pray?”

Dean grins, and races to the bedroom.

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Thursday 25th July, 1650

“I am worried about Prince Rupert.”

Dean quirks an eyebrow in surprise. They are in his husband's study, where Cas has the large map on which he followed the progress of the first two civil wars; Dean remembers the first one as the little black pins that marked the king’s domains first swelled and then slowly contracted to nothing. And over by the window is the comfortable leather couch, where there have been a number of non-military manoeuvres in the past.....

Castiel coughs pointedly, very obviously enjoying the blush on the omega's face. And elsewhere.

“I shall deal with you later!” he promises with a knowing grin, before moving a small red marker a little way along the map. “Meanwhile, Cromwell has just entered Scotland.”

“He must love to fight”, Dean observes. “He is barely back from Ireland.”

“He has on more than one occasion toyed with emigration to the Americas”, Castiel says. “I remember him saying he would sell up and leave England if we lost the vote on the Grand Remonstrance, and Pym squeaked by with eleven votes to spare. The decisions of but six people may well have changed our country’s history.”

“Will there be a battle?”

“Not if the Scots can avoid it”, Castiel says. Seeing his mate's surprise, he continues. “They probably have more men, but they are not even the semi-organized army that died in the mud at Preston. Poorly-trained and only lightly armed, they will hide behind their fortresses and try to starve the invaders into going home. That is why those ships we have sent to deal with Prince Rupert in Portugal (4) are so badly needed back; we will have to supply Cromwell by sea, and that will not be easy. Seventy miles of precious little between Berwick and Edinburgh, and the only port of any size between them is Dunbar, just over halfway.”

Dean looks at the map in detail, and locates the town his husband has just mentioned. He feels Castiel move in behind him, and smiles at the line of warmth from the alpha's body. Then he feels something else.....

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Scotland is not the only thing about to get invaded.

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Thursday 12th September, 1650

Dean is puzzled. His alpha should be happy over the great victory won by his friend, but he seems strangely depressed.

“Has there been a problem after the battle?” he asks. Cromwell had crushed the Scots the previous week, capturing around half of the forces ranged against him despite being outnumbered.

“Cromwell has taken Edinburgh, though the castle holds out against him”, Castiel says distractedly. “No, it is the news from Durham.”

“Durham?” Dean knows it is a city about seventy miles north of York, and so must be one hundred and thirty miles from Edinburgh. His mother has talked about visiting the great cathedral there some day; Castiel has said that he would help arrange things if needed.

“I feared something like this might happen when I heard that there were so many captives after Dunbar”, the alpha says. “Cromwell would not be able to spare that many men to take such a large number of troops south, so the only way would be to shackle them all and force-march them as quickly as possible so the guards could return north.”

Dean looks at him in confusion.

“So?” he prompts. Castiel looks at him, a haunted expression in his eyes.

“Cromwell estimated that he captured at least six thousand of the enemy, possibly more”, he says hollowly. “The report I just received from Durham says that only three thousand arrived there.”

“The others escaped?”

Castiel just looks at him, and belatedly the omega gets it. He shudders in horror.

“Ugh!”

“And still more will die there (5), not counting the ones who do not survive the journey out to the plantations”, Castiel says quietly. “I hate this war! It is barbaric!”

Dean sighs and pulls his alpha closer, gently scenting him. Castiel goes willingly into his arms, but he remains tense for some time.

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Wednesday 18th September, 1650

Castiel has been unhappy ever since the news from the north, and Dean wakes wondering how his alpha will want to get through today. His own birthday earlier in the year had been memorable, especially with that leather harness, but he wonders if his husband is really up for sexy times. He moves his hand carefully round.

Apparently his husband is 'up'. He moves in closer, and nuzzles into the alpha's neck. Or at least he tries, but something is in the way. In his still half-asleep state, it takes him some little time to realize what it is, and rather longer to realize what it means.

“Cas?” he whispers quietly.

“Yes, Dean?”
“Um, you're wearing a collar.”

One of the things Dean loves most about his alpha is that he has never even suggested that his mate wear one of those heavy omega collars, permanently showing their subservience. Indeed, the one time a neighbour remarked as to why Dean was not wearing one Castiel had gotten very angry, and Dean had had to calm him down afterwards.

And now Castiel was wearing one. That could only mean one thing.

“For my birthday this year”, Castiel growls, “I want you to have your way with me any way you want. I want to be owned by my omega physically in every way possible, just as you own my heart. I have arranged for food to be left outside, and they will ring the bell when it is delivered. That apart, I am all yours.”

Dean whimpers. How he does not come there and then is, frankly, a miracle. He gently eases the alpha onto his back, and smiles lovingly at him.

“You sap!” he chides. “I love you, Cas. Let me show you how much.”

And he does.

++++

Friday 8th November, 1650

“I am not sure that I can support parliament any more.”

Dean is not surprised by the announcement, even though it does come when the two are tied together after a particularly enthusiastic bout of love-making. The omega knows that when his husband has a hard day then he is in for a rough night, and he always welcomes it, especially the unspoken power that one word from him would stop said husband in his tracks.

The omega had wondered if the execution of the king at the start of last year might be the tipping-point for the doubts he had watched slowly growing in his husband’s mind, but it seems instead that the endless grind of the war has finally gotten to him.

“I just wish for a stable settlement”, Castiel sighs. “King, republic, army rule; just let the people be.”

“Has something happened?” Dean asks.

“Cromwell asks if I would consider going to the Netherlands.”

“What?”

Dean makes the mistake of trying to sit up, then yelps as his movements not only make his alpha come again, but make his knot do things to the omega's insides that are amazing. And eye-watering.

“Dutch is one of the languages I can speak”, Castiel explains. “William II has died, and his wife, the late king's daughter Mary, has given birth to a son just after. The country is divided, and parliament wishes it to stay that way as the late ruler was a supporter of Charles II. I am tired of it all, Dean. I just want peace and quiet. Is that too much to ask?”

Dean pulls him gently down to lie on top of him, and ruffles the permanently untidy hair, which
now contains one or two strands of grey amidst the black. He can understand his husband's feelings. Peace for the country would be wonderful, although the current rulers seem a right bunch of killjoys.

His alpha growls, and is soon exerting his usual octopus hold on his omega as he sleeps.

+++++

Monday 29th December, 1650

“I cannot believe that the Council of State cannot find better things to do with its time!” Castiel grumbles. “Do they really want the Army to march into every home on Christmas Day each year and confiscate any seasonal fare? It is ridiculous!”

“It does seem an odd way to pursue godliness”, Dean admits. “I am sure the Oxford garrison refused the food you offered them for Chr.... for the coming winter.”

“Oddly enough, they did not”, Castiel grins. “Though I took pains to make sure that there was nothing there that could be misinterpreted as seasonal. Bearing in mind that their own supplies and pay are sometimes a little erratic, they were grateful.”

“Grateful enough not to come round here?” Dean asks.

“Probably.”

Dean looks uncertainly at his alpha. Something seems slightly off.

“Are you all right?” he asks. “Not entering another rut, are you?”

“Alphas over forty do not usually have them”, Castiel sighs. “Though I do feel a bit off. It will pass, I am sure. Probably all the food I ate.”

With the sort of timing Dean can only marvel at, he and Castiel had become uncles when on the twenty-third Sarah had given birth to a healthy baby girl, to be christened Hope Deanna Winchester. The message had reached them late on Christmas Eve, and provided the perfect cover for a celebratory dinner for everyone in the house that did not involve any seasonal additions whatsoever.

(All right, there had been some mistletoe, but only in the bedroom later).

“This oppressive weather is not helping my mood either”, Castiel sighs. “I wish it would just have a major snow and get it over with. I am sure I will be better in a week or so. Especially when someone has a birthday coming up that I am really looking forward to... celebrating.”

Dean gulps.

+++++

Notes:
1) Although not a regicide, Thomas Fairfax was originally among those set to be targeted for retribution in the Restoration (1660). However, he had assisted in General Monck's takeover at the start of that year, so he was let off. Charles also spared Fairfax's home city of Hull from the vengeance he inflicted on Gloucester and Plymouth, the other cities to defy his late father.
2) The mean life expectancy around this time was thirty-five, but this figure was skewed by the many who died young. Those who reached adulthood could expect to reach around fifty-five to sixty, and living into one's seventies (especially the rich, with their better diets) was not
uncommon. 'Fighting age' was generally defined as between fifteen (though armies often took boys younger) and forty, so Fairfax's retirement was the norm.

3) Castiel was right in this; the Scots parliament was in no way obliged to accept the abolition of the monarchy in the country they had shared a king with. Oliver Cromwell, for some reason, saw things rather differently.

4) The threat was not so much mainland Portugal but their Atlantic island holding, the Azores. About 1,200 miles south-east of Newfoundland and 850 miles west of mainland Portugal, they were the perfect Royalist base to interfere with England's transatlantic shipping.

5) A redevelopment at Durham University in 2013 uncovered about thirty bodies in an area three foot (one metre) square, and estimated that there were at least 1,700 bodies on the site as a whole.
Chapter Summary

67: After the winter snows prolong their visit to his mother in Long Compton, the omega has a rough time of things as his alpha experiences the appropriately-named superfucero (1), which turns out to be a Latin word that Dean actually likes. Parliament continues to come up with daft Puritanical ideas, Castiel is clingier than usual, and Dean does not like a pastry product (proof the miracles do happen!). Plans for a trip to Long Compton have to be postponed when Castiel breaks an ankle - and no, not that way!

Wednesday 8th January, 1651

Dean had accepted his mother's invitation for the two of them to spend the New Year at her house, and they had duly ridden up on New Year's Eve. They had only planned to spend a week there, but on Monday the heavens had opened and blanketed the county with several feet of snow. Dean always finds it rather funny that Castiel feels the snow more than he does, even if he knows that biologically omega bodies tend to run warmer.

Dean is in truth more than a little concerned about his alpha, who has been slightly off in some way for over a month now. He knows Castiel is monitoring developments in Scotland where they have finally crowned King Charles II, but his alpha seems distracted for some other reason. And then there is his own increased possessiveness. They have both always been a bit bad in this area, but lately Dean finds himself getting more anxious when his alpha is not around, and feeling intensely relieved when he returns, scenting him more than usual. Not that Castiel ever objects, bless the man.

The omega decides to visit Miss Moseley whilst he is here, and ask her advice. Castiel does have a doctor in King's Linton, but the omega thinks that the wise-woman will know more about this sort of thing. She frowns as she listens to what he has to say, then asks a strange question.

“Have you scented your husband much lately?”

“Yes”, Dean says. “I do it all the time. Perhaps a bit more than usual the last few months.”

“Did his scent seem strange in any way? Different from usual?”

She was right, though Dean had put it down to the new soap Castiel had gotten at Christmas. Unlike far too many people today his alpha has high standards of personal hygiene, which is a little tiresome when his honey soap blurs his normal scent, but (he supposes) better than the alternative.

“Focussed”, Dean says. “I cannot describe it in any other way. It is intense, like he is waiting for something.”

“And you”, she says. “How have you been, Dean?”

“I am running a bit of a temperature”, he admits, “but it is just a cold.”

She nods knowingly.
“Some time in the next week is my guess”, she says. “A superfucero.”

“A what?” Dean asks, confused.

“From the Latin for overdrive”, she says. “Alphas without children sometimes experience it after their fortieth birthday. Castiel will want sex around the clock, preferably the rough kind. Let your staff know, remove anything remotely breakable from your bedroom, and prepare for up to two weeks of not going out much.”

Dean pales, but thanks her. He takes the long way round to try to get some colour back in his cheeks. He does not see the way the wise-woman looks after him, nor that she marks a day considerably later in the year on her calendar.

+++

Saturday 11th January, 1651

Their ride back home had been pleasurable enough – stopping for the traditional sex in the barn where they first met, as well as in several others – but the omega has been feeling increasingly nervous the past few days. He knows he is lucky that, although his husband has noticed this, he is too nice to press him on it.

He suspects there will be more than enough pressing later. And the look on Charlie's face when he had told her.... priceless. He will have to ask her later what she means by T.M.I.

His thoughts are disrupted by the sound of running outside. He just has time to scoot up and present himself before his husband bursts through the door, panting like the hounds of Hell are chasing him. He is tearing ineffectually at his own clothes, and looks at Dean like he wants to ravish him. Repeatedly.

The omega takes a deep breath. Here goes....

+++

Friday 24th January, 1651

There is some irony, Dean thinks with what is left of his brain, that Castiel's superfucero seems to be tailing off on his birthday. Indeed, this morning had found the alpha in tears, begging forgiveness for what he had done to his exhausted mate. Dean had had to work had to reassure him that, whilst he might not be walking (or for that matter attempting any complicated facial expressions) for the next week or so, he had really enjoyed all the sex. Even the upside-down bits.

(All right, he had gotten a bit testy that time when his alpha had wanted to knot him during dinner, but damnation, there had been pie on the table!)

Castiel is now asleep next to him, letting out the occasional small sigh of contentment. The superfucero has left him as tired as Dean, who is only awake because some stupid alpha forgot to put his bed-socks back on, and Dean had been woken by an icicle-foot again. Said alpha looks so cute, naked except for the multi-coloured footwear now safely back on him, and Dean finds it hard that this is the man who has been pinning him up, down and at all angles over the past few days.

The omega yawns, and snuggles in closer to his alpha, reaching round and gently running his hand down the muscled chest to....

Again?
Oh well, Dean thinks. Happy birthday to you!

+++++

Friday 21st February, 1651

There is of course the possibility that Miss Moseley had been wrong in some way. Then there is also the possibility that the earth is flat, and both Magellan and Drake both fibbed when they claimed to have sailed right round the globe (2).

The Long Compton wise-woman had said that after the superfucero things should return to normal (Dean is beginning to wonder about that 'should'). But he and Castiel are both... well, different. The alpha has always been prone to hold him in a manly-like manner in a way that is a million miles from anything that rhymes with huddling, but since the superfucero he has become much more prone to do so. Not that Dean has any objections – he loves it if truth be told – but he has noted that his husband no longer likes leaving him to go off on his estate duties for any length of time, and that he really enjoys Dean welcoming him home every evening.

Yes, Dean enjoys that too, but being knotted right there in an open doorway in the bleak mid-winter is bloody damn cold!

An incident earlier today had also given the omega more than a little cause for concern. They had gone down to King's Linton to do some shopping, and stopped in the smithy to talk to Rufus. One of his apprentices had been bringing a horse over to be shod when he had lost control over it, and the animal had veered near to Dean. He had dodged out of the way easily enough, but Castiel – well, he had reacted very badly, pinning the terrified young man against the wall and looking set to strangle him until Dean quickly talked him out of his rage. The alpha had apologized to everyone afterwards, but the incident had left the omega worried. His Cas always had been possessive, but he did not usually lose it like that. Something was wrong.

+++++

Monday 7th March, 1651

Dean screams.

He had been drinking in bed when he had heard a noise outside, and had spilt some of his water onto his chest. When the cool liquid caught his nipple the pain was excruciating. Fortunately he is distracted only seconds later by a nearly naked alpha racing back into the room from the bathroom, looking frantic.

“What happened?” Castiel demands. “Are you in pain?”

“Just some water”, Dean grumbles, wiping his chest clear and wincing at the unexpected pain. His nipples have always been a bit sensitive, but never to this extent. He wrinkles his nose as the alpha clambers back into bed and pulls him into an embrace. “And are you using another new soap?”

Castiel looks puzzled.

“No”, he says. “Still the same honey one I always use. Did I use too much?”

Dean normally likes that soap, but today he just wants the scent of his alpha. Honestly, what is wrong with him lately? He yawns.

“Just feeling tired today”, he grumbles.
“Do you want me to stay home?” his alpha asks.

Yes. But despite his alpha's increased protectiveness of late, Dean knows that Castiel also frets over his estate if he is away from it for too long.

“Just hurry back”, he says.

He can scent his alpha's concern, and snuggles into his embrace. Perhaps he has a fever of some sort. It will pass.

+++

Saturday 29th March, 1651

Another difference since the superfucero is the sudden (and unwelcome) absence of rough sex, which even after two solid weeks of it Dean misses quite a lot. He could of course request it, but somehow when his alpha is back in one of his cu.... holding moods, which he is most days now, the omega knows that his alpha does not want rough sex just now. And on top of it all, this week Dean seems to have contracted yet another fever, his body feeling unnaturally hot all the time. This winter has sucked! Still, at least he is in better shape than Cromwell, who has finally been beaten by disease rather than any human force.

“Though it has allowed those he leaves in charge to come up with more daft ideas!” Castiel grumbles. “Honestly! Selling off or demolishing the cathedrals? The people who come up with these ideas should be placed in the pillory!”

The alpha is a little grumpy as he sprained his ankle dismounting from his horse yesterday. He thinks – correctly, Dean believes – that if he is not there to keep an eye on people, they will slacken off. And despite his recent case of advanced clinginess he does not like being confined to the house all the time. Dean opens his first letter for him and reads it.

“Something up?” Castiel asks. “Apart from me, of course.”

Dean shoots him a withering look. At least that hasn't changed.

“There have been a number of arrests across the country”, he says, reading as he speaks. “They found someone who was key to a whole set of planned Royalist uprisings, and the man has sung like a bird to save his own neck.”

“They must have known something was afoot, with Charles II crowned”, Castiel says dryly. “I would say his chances of success just moved from next to nil, to nil.”

Dean opens his second letter, then frowns.

“Bad news?” Castiel asks.

“Mother has had a fall”, Dean says. “Sam writes to say it is nothing serious, but he wonders if we could pay a visit some time soon.”

Castiel looks torn, and Dean can sympathize. On one hand he wants his omega to be happy, and taking him to see his family would definitely achieve that. But on the other his possessive streak is
still in overdrive, and he would not want Dean to go without him.

“A long ride for you is out of the question just now”, Dean says quickly, because he knows his wonderful alpha would suggest just that. “Why do I not write back they we will be there in a week or so, once you have recovered?”

“That would be good”, Castiel smiles. He opens his arms and Dean moves over to sit with him, gently scenting him.

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Later that day Dean goes to the kitchen to see Charlie and definitely not to check up to see if she is making pie (she is not, worse luck). Instead she is rolling out some pastry, a large bowl of dried fruit and nuts next to her. Dean sniffs balefully at it.

“Smells disgusting!” he says. “That's not your usual bun recipe.”

Is it his imagination, or is there the slightest pause before her answer?

“I soaked them in flavoured water as an experiment”, she says with a smile. “Did I overdo it?”

“Definitely”, he says. “Oh well, no pie here. See you later.”

He does not see the anxious look that follows him from the room.

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Notes:
1) Latin 'super fecero' = over drive. Of course the English, to whom subtlety was a thing unknown, would have made it into a rude word.
2) Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) was head of an expedition that did the first circumnavigation in stages, though he died before it was completed, his deputy Juan Elcano bringing the fleet home. English adventurer Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596) set sail in 1577 and became the first commander to lead an expedition all the way round when he returned three years later, a feat which stunned many coming as it did from such a small and inconsequential island nation.
April-May 1651

Chapter Summary

68: Having exaggerated an illness to avoid seeing another Milton omega and their new child, Dean finally discovers the truth behind the prophecy concerning the Dun Cow. His initial reaction is naturally one of unbridled joy (once he has prevented his alpha from growling at his brother), augmented when he and Castiel enjoy a long ride. Several, in fact. But he also soon makes the unpleasant discovery that what goes down soon comes up.

Thursday 15th April, 1651

Castiel is annoyed, and Dean knows it is only partly due to the letters he received that morning. The alpha had been called out of bed in the small hours of the morning to deal with a fire at an estate property in Kirtsford (1), and an alpha deprived of his sleep was grumpier than usual. Dean could relate to that; he himself seems to be sleeping longer of late. Probably that damn bug he had.

The fire has been the last in a line of little annoyances that have delayed the omega's much-desired trip to see his mother, although his brother's last letter had said that all was well and she was recovering nicely. Last week Castiel had been 'invited' to see Cromwell in London, so of course he had had to go. Then he had just got back when his cousin Samandriel had had his first child – an alpha called Luke – nearly a month early, so he had felt compelled to stay for the christening yesterday in order to publicly grant his blessing on the couple's first-born.

Dean had not attended. Not that he had not been invited – everyone knew how his husband felt about that sort of thing – but seeing another mate with a healthy child made him feel – all right, envious, so he had somewhat exaggerated yet another bout of flu-like symptoms. And stupid though it was, the fact that Castiel would be granting his blessing to the sort of son Dean could never have – it made the omega feel very unhappy. Not that he told his alpha that.

He should have known that Castiel could read him like a book. He had returned from the christening, immediately asked Dean what was wrong, and then suggested a prolonged bout of rough sex to remedy matters. The omega would have quipped that he could not so easily be coaxed out of his funk, but it turned out that actually he could. They had not fallen asleep until nearly midnight, only for the news of the fire to drag a disgruntled alpha from his bed two hours later.

“Bad news from Scotland”, Castiel yawns at breakfast. It is breakfast in bed, as the alpha has stated he intends to make up for lost sleep so he will be refreshed for his journey on the morrow. “Our forces have abandoned both Hamilton and Dumfries, and withdrawn behind the Border.”

“The king is stronger than you expected?” Dean asks. Castiel shakes his head.

“Cromwell is unwell again”, he sighs, “and the war effort is disorganized without his leadership. Parliament is dithering over finishing off the Irish rebels, and I do not trust Lambert. I am sure that he has his eye on being Cromwell’s successor one day. At least the king has not assembled his army in Scotland yet.”

“You think that he will soon invade?” Dean asks.
“I am as sure of it as the fact that I will soon invade you!” Castiel replies.

Dean looks piteously at him.

“All right, after pie”, Castiel sighs resignedly. “I know my place.”

“Hey!”

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Friday 16th April, 1651

There is still snow on the ground as they make the twenty mile journey to Long Compton earlier that day (via a certain barn, of course). Dean had hoped that the journey would give him the chance to consult with Miss Moseley, but unfortunately they had arrived in the village that evening to learn that she was away visiting her sister in Gloucester, and would not be back until the next day.

“You do not have to come with me, you know”, Castiel says as they lie together that evening. One of the estate workers had died at the start of the month and left a few personal effects to his sister who lived beyond Stratford, in a place called Wootton Wawen. The alpha had said he wanted to take the items himself and make sure the woman was doing all right.

“I enjoy the ride”, Dean says. “Just like the ride I enjoyed earlier!”

Castiel smiles. That is another odd thing that Dean has noted in the past few months; the alpha seems much more prone to have his omega fuck him than before. Not that they never switched and his husband would have let him do whatever he wanted if he asked for it, but.....

“Are you all right?” the alpha asks anxiously.

“Fine”, Dean says. “Just feeling a bit off for some reason. I will go and see if Miss Moseley is back when we return tomorrow.”

As things turn out, he will not.

++++

Saturday 17th April, 1651

His mate had been particularly happy to be given a copy of Thomas Hobbes’ new book Leviathan, which had only come out in London two days ago. Castiel too looks forward to reading the book once Dean has finished with it, if he does not spoil it by telling him everything first. Castiel had already said that if he does, then the alpha will stop wearing the bedsocks and subject the omega to his icicle-feet again!

They have ridden through Stratford and are making good progress towards Wootton when Castiel realizes that his mate is falling behind. He turns to ask why, and is immediately concerned. Dean is hugging himself fiercely, and he looks frozen.

“C-c-c-cold”, he blurs out.

Castiel frowns. It is a fairly warm day for April, and his mate had been saying that he had been feeling warmer than usual of late. Omega body temperatures do tend to run warmer on average than those of alphas and betas, but this sort of sudden drop which only happens when.....

The alpha's eyes widen as it finally clicks into place. Longer sleeps, increased sensitivity, more
scenting, a wayward sense of smell - it is impossible, yet the only explanation.

He rides slowly back to the omega, not wishing to spook him. If he is right – and he so hopes he is - then that will happen soon enough. They are just coming up on a small tavern, and he leads the two horses up to the rail outside before helping Dean off. He scents Dean but concentrates on his omega's scent more than usual. And there, besides his wonderful mate's normal scent, is another one.

“What is wrong, beloved?” he says softly. “You do not look well.”

There are two betas drinking outside but he ignores them, and they shoot him a quick look before scurrying inside. Castiel knows full well why; Dean must be truly out of it not to have detected the sharp fear in his husband's scent. Just as he thought he would, Dean instinctively clutches his stomach.

“Cas?” Dean says piteously. He stares down at his body in betrayal. “Oh Cas!”

It is such a tiny sound, but the alpha is on him at once, wrapping his arms around him and kissing him protectively. Sometimes, it seems, the impossible can happen.

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It is only as Dean is riding away, still with tears in his eyes, that he notices the pub sign. The Dun Cow (2)......

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“I can't believe it!” Sam says incredulously. “You said you were barren!”

“I thought I was!” Dean says defensively, moving quickly between his brother and his husband as the latter snarls defensively. “Down, Cas. This is Sammy. He's not going to hurt me.”

His brother backs quickly away, despite that. Dean knows that his husband would never hurt his brother – well, he is fairly sure, but then none of them expected to end up in the situation of an alpha defending his pregnant mate. He runs a hand over his still flat stomach, and wonders idly how long he will remain like that, before he balloons up. Perhaps Castiel will stop finding him attractive and....

He is cut short in his concerns by a pained whine, and the next moment he has an unhappy alpha frantically trying to scent him. He cannot help but smile; his husband is an untypical alpha in all the best ways, but biology has reduced him to a feral possessiveness. He is grateful when his mother comes in, with Miss Moseley in tow.

“So it looks like your alpha managed to fuck you into bearing children”, the wise-woman says bluntly. His mother sniggers behind her all three men blush bright red. “Do you wish to know the gender and sub-gender?”

Dean looks uncertainly at his husband. In his current 'reduced' state, he wonders if Castiel will resort to the old 'alphas must beget alphas' attitude of so many of his sub-gender. His husband smiles.

“That is up to my mate”, he says. “He is bearing our offspring. Dean?”

The omega blinks, but nods. The wise-woman places a hand over his stomach and Dean feels his alpha tense up, but the hand is soon removed.
“Alpha”, she smiles.

Dean relaxes. He knows Castiel will be quietly pleased, even if he does not show it.

“Both of them.”

What?

+-+++-

Monday 24th May, 1651

“You really have him whipped, you know.”

Dean grins up at Charlie. He is barely showing, but the past month has been... well, instructive. Castiel had cried for days when the news had been confirmed, and had been a wreck once they had got back home. Dean may have lied when he told his alpha that Miss Moseley had said sex was all right if not a benefit to the omega's body for the next few weeks at least, enabling them to stop off at their favourite barn. And a few others.

Yes, the journey had taken two days.

“I do not know what you mean”, he says loftily. “Where's my pie?”

“You cannot eat nothing but pie”, she points out, producing a steaming bowl and placing it in front of the omega.

“I can try!”

“And stop marking up your husband”, Charlie goes on. “That hickey he's walking around the estate with can probably be seen from Oxford!”

Dean snickers.

“I had to give him that”, he points out, folding away the letter he was reading. “He won't leave the house unless he has some memento of me. Besides, you should see where I put the other one!”

“Ugh! Bad omega!”

“One of Cas' friends writes that the Navy has finally taken the Scilly Isles”, Dean says, holding out his hand for the pie. “I suppose that is good news.”

“The old king's execution made a lot of people switch back to the monarchy, or at least the new king”, Charlie says, handing him the dish and smiling at his happy whimper. “I kind of suspect your husband may be amongst them.”

“Cas is sound”, Dean says. “Besides, he'll soon have a couple of other things to worry about.”

++-++++

“That really is interesting news about the Scilly Isles”, Castiel says when he comes home later. “A definite bonus to have them for the Commonwealth, as the base there was interfering somewhat with Channel trade.”

Dean moans into the bowl. Charlie's pie had been delicious going down, but less so on the way back up.
“Maybe it is a sign”, Castiel suggests. “Maybe one or even both of the twins do not like pie, and are letting you know.”

The omega stares at him in horror.

“Not like pie?” he gasps. “Not. Like. Pie?”

He looks so forlorn that Castiel's heart nearly breaks at the sight. He sighs and runs his hand over the omega's hot forehead.

“So beautiful”, he praises. “So clever. My perfect omega.”

“Sap!” Dean mutters, though he is smiling as he says it.

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Notes:
1) Real-life Kirtlington, population 1,000 (2016). The next village upriver from Stalwarton (just under two miles), it is an ancient settlement near the crossing of a Roman road and Ancient British track. It was once the most important place in the area; King Edward the Martyr once held a parliament there in 977, and it had remained a royal manor until 1604.
2) A real place that I often passed journeying to and from the Midlands, a few miles north of the tourist trap that is Stratford-on-Avon. The opening of the M40 motorway in 1991 meant the road past it became only a minor country one, and the pub closed a few years ago. Ironically a few months after Dean and Castiel visited, the defeated Charles II would pass this very spot.
June-September 1651

Chapter Summary

69: Dean does not behave like a typical omega during his pregnancy – except that he does, and he wagers an ultimately successful battle to force his future offspring to like pie! The omega frets briefly as the king's invasion looks as if it might menace his mother's house, but Charles II's hopes end in ruination at Worcester. However, his defeat spells trouble for both the alpha and his pregnant omega, and reduces Castiel to tears.

Tuesday 1st June, 1651

Dean hates being pregnant! He is constantly hungry, yet unable to keep much down because the twins keep rejecting it. They do not even like pie, but they will. Damnation, they will!

“The Scots parliament is meeting at Perth”, Castiel says airily, “now that they are forced back from the Antonine Wall (1). I suppose that at least it is close to Scone, where Scots kings were traditionally crowned, but it looks like a retreat primarily because it is one.”

He places a covered dish next to the omega and uncovers it. Dean scowls when he sees the contents.

“Charlie says that this might be one food you can keep down”, he says.

“Dry biscuits?” Dean pouts. He reaches to try one and bites into it. “Ugh!”

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Unfortunately Charlie, as usual, turns out to be right. The horrid-tasting crackers are the only thing he can keep down for any length of time, and worse, when he tries putting jam or cream on them, up they come again. Dean hates being pregnant!

+++++

Wednesday 21st July, 1651

“Cromwell's men have won another major victory in Scotland”, Castiel says, eyeing his mate as he waddles over to his couch and all but tumbles onto it. Dean is three months out now, and the alpha is even more possessive than normal around him, though he knows Dean gets antsy if he goes too far. And then gets upset if he can scent the alpha's distress. It is all very difficult.

“Where?” the omega mutters.

“A place called Inverkeithing”, Castiel says as he reads his letter. “The Scots were holding Stirling, but Lambert cut across the Forth to the Fife Peninsula and outflanked them. The king is beaten.”

Dean eases himself upright and scowls at the world in general. Castiel utters up a silent prayer that at least Dean can keep pie down now; the morning sickness had passed for most foods but pie had been continually rejected by the omega's body until about a week ago, when presumably his future
children had finally taken their omega daddy's determination on board. They were getting pie until they damn well liked it!

“And the king?” he asks.

“Charles II will doubtless use the opportunity to slip into England, hoping to raise people in his support here”, Castiel says. “It is probably his only option, and doubly tempting now that Cromwell is north of the Forth, but it will be his undoing. Cromwell is having all the Royalists watched, he has secured all the armouries, and he will soon be in a position to give chase. The king is doomed.”


“I am concerned for my beautiful omega, of course”, Castiel says with a smile. “The bearer of our children. The perfect, pie-loving....”

“Pudgy”, Dean put in, staring at his bump.

“Pregnancy sex.”

“What?” Dean looks up in surprise to find his alpha stripping off.

“I want you now”, Castiel growls. “Mine!”

The omega rolls his eyes. Honestly, his alpha has a one-track mind, and if he honestly thinks that Dean can be so easily distracted...

Then he is damn well right!

+++

Sunday 3rd August, 1651

Dean knows that it is stereotypical for pregnant omegas to become bratty, short-tempered and irritable. He of course would never indulge in such behaviour. Though if his alpha continues to prattle on about developments in the war – sans pie on the table – then there is going to be Pouting.

“The city of Perth has surrendered straight away”, the alpha observes, reading his latest letter. “That is good. Presumably they wished to avoid a repeat of Drogheda or Wexford.”

“Understandable”, Dean mutters, shifting his position and slotting his feet – now at least a size bigger – into the new slippers that Castiel had bought him. Charlie had warned the alpha about the swollen feet bit of a pregnancy and Dean had thanked her for the foresight; this summer is damp and drizzly, and his feet need the warmth. Now if only there was pie....

“And two Scottish lords have abandoned the king because they did not approve his taking the army to invade England.”

“Also understandable”, Dean says. “Any chance of pie?”

“Surely you do not want that again?” Castiel grins.

“I wasted precious months getting the kids to accept it”, Dean grumbles. “I need to make up for lost time.”

His alpha just looks at him.
“Shut up!”

Castiel sniggers, but rings for Charlie to send up the pie he asked her to bake that morning.

Friday 8th August, 1651

Two and a half months until the twins are born, and Dean can barely move. Yesterday Charlie had joking suggested installing a pulley system to winch him up and down to the bedroom, but that had triggered an emotional outburst from the omega that had made Castiel come running – impressive, as he had been nearly a mile away at the Manor Farm at the time – and Charlie had apologized with a whole week of pies.

Although his horrible and cruel husband subsequently refused to let him try to draw another remark out of the housekeeper, though, no matter how much Dean batted his eyelashes and pouted!

“The king has indeed crossed into England”, Castiel says distractedly at supper that evening. “Thankfully Cromwell is off his sick-bed, and just in time to finish off the Scots, though Monck (2) has done a good job in his absence. The city of Stirling has surrendered to him, but the castle continues to hold out.”

“But the king has slipped round them”, Dean says. Castiel nods.

“I wish he might be King of England one day”, he says, “though I fear that the way things are, it will not be any day soon. I tire of this rule by an army and barely half a parliament, when we do not know what stupidity they are going to dream up next. As if ancient crosses, old cathedrals, theatre-houses, Christmas puddings and people dancing round maypoles constitute a threat to public morality!”

“I fear that Sam and my mother are involved in his coming”, Dean says. “I hope not too deeply, for their own safety. I wish I could go and see them.”

His husband does not say it, but the size he is now means that the omega is going nowhere any time soon. Dean stares at his bloated stomach wondering if Miss Moseley had underestimated, and he really had triplets in there. It would just be his luck.

“I could arrange for one or both of them to come here?” Castiel offers. Dean smiles but shakes his head.

“Sam is needed to run the estate”, he says, “and my mother is probably needed to run Sam, and help with Hope. But it would be nice if they all came down soon after the birth. I doubt I will feel like travelling, let alone being away from the future Earl of Bradstock and his brother.”

The fact his alpha whines in happiness at that makes Dean smile.

Monday 25th August, 1651

“Good news”, Castiel smiles. “It seems that the king had abandoned any ideas of a march on London – one that might have brought him past either us or your mother’s house – and is making for the Severn Valley, the edge of his father’s old territory. Worcester, most likely.”

Dean is only partly reassured. Worcester is about forty miles from his mother’s house, but the main
road from there to London goes through Norton, only a few miles away, as well as passing through Woodstock near here.

“He will not get past Cromwell?” he asks.

“The general came south through Yorkshire”, Castiel says, “and used his cavalry to harass the king's men on their west coast route. If Charles II hoped for an English rising, he must have realized by now that it will not happen. Presumably that is why he is making for his father's old stamping-ground. The last I heard was that Cromwell was at Warwick – that was yesterday – so he is only forty miles from his quarry.”

Dean nods, relieved. That puts Cromwell in between the king and his mother's house, as well as the king and London.

“You still believe that the king is bound to fail?” he asks.

“I am afraid that I do”, Castiel says ruefully.

“Yet you do not wish him ill?”

The alpha hesitates.

“He is still technically my enemy”, he says carefully, “but I wish him safe for three reasons. First, because army rule – or misrule – has convinced me that I cannot see any future for an England without a king. And second, because as I have said before, the reports I am getting as to his younger brother are not encouraging. Neither are great men, but Charles Stuart is the lesser of the two evils.”

“A ringing endorsement”, Dean says dryly, shifting his position and wincing as he gets a kick from one of his offspring for his pains. “And the third reason?”

“Because as you said, I rather suspect that your brother is involved in his coming”, Castiel says heavily, “and for the protection of my mate's brother I would go far indeed.”

+++

Friday 29th August, 1651

“Cromwell's men have taken Upton”, Castiel says as he reads his letter.

Dean just grunts. He had had a minor panic attack this morning when he had been unable to get into even his looser pregnancy clothes, and Castiel had taken him back to bed and spent an hour making love him him until the omega was just a happy pile of goo. Maybe there was something to be said for this pregnancy thing after all.

His load shifts inside of him, and he winces. Maybe not.

“Where is that?” he asks.

“The next crossing of the Severn south of Worcester”, Castiel explains. “The king is being surrounded. If he is not careful, he may well end up getting captured.”

“And they would behead another king?” Dean wonders.

“The mood of parliament at the moment is such that yes, I believe they would”, Castiel answers. “Remember, they have made a law that anyone helping the king can be court-martialed rather than
tried in a normal court of law. That is why I worry for your brother. His letter yesterday suggests he is even more deeply implicated than I feared.”

++++

Thursday 4th September, 1651

If proof were ever needed that bad news travelled fast, Dean thinks bitterly, he has it now. Less than twenty-four hours after the king’s army had been cut to ribbons at Worcester – admittedly not that far away (3) – the news had reached Stalwarton. The invasion had failed, and Charles Stuart was on the run with what would doubtless soon be a large price on his head.

A month and a half to go before the birth, which seemed aeons away to the omega. Honestly, how was he going to get through to it whilst he could barely move? His life sucked!

This time, the bad news waits seven minutes before arriving. Dean can tell at once that Castiel knows something, and that he is weighing up how to tell his heavily pregnant mate. He sighs, and tries to find a more comfortable (or less uncomfortable) position on the couch.

“How bad is it?” he sighs.

Unusually Castiel checks that the doors are locked before coming back to him. He sits down and regards his mate gravely.

“Your brother is indeed heavily involved in the plan to get the king out of the country”, he says. “So much that he has asked for my help.”

Dean’s initial reaction is positive, until he puts two and two together. He swallows hard.

“You might miss the birth”, he says sorrowfully.

“I would miss you”, Castiel says, tears in his eyes. “My perfect, pie-eating omega, whom I love more than life itself. Sam needs the sort of help that only someone in my position can give, but if you need me here, my first priority is and always will be you. You know that.”

He looks set to cry, and he is setting Dean off as well. The omega sighs, and nods.

“I shall take some of the servants with me”, Castiel says, “and send them back with your mother. Your brother says that he has a reliable steward who can assist him in running the estate, and Sarah's sister Margaret will come in from Norton to help with Hope. Our king needs us, but you will always come first, beloved.”

Dean smiles weakly.

++++

Notes:
1) The second and much less famous Roman wall across Britain, just north of the Edinburgh-Glasgow line and taking in much good farming land in what would later be southern Scotland. It was shorter than and would have been easier to hold than Hadrian's Wall further south, but the Romans held it for only a few decades before abandoning it.
2) George Monck (1608-1670). One of the most complex characters of the conflicts, he was initially a Royalist captured after the disaster at Nantwich (1644). He changed sides and fought alongside Cromwell at Dunbar (1650), subsequently being appointed in charge of Scotland. His
key role in the Restoration in 1660 led to his being created Duke of Albemarle.
3) About fifty-five miles.
September 1651

Chapter Summary

70: Castiel and Sam plot to draw attention away from the overly tall king, who has already had his initial escape route blocked. Further frustration awaits at Bristol, and Castiel and his brother-in-law have more than one narrow escape themselves. Bad embroidery and sappy letters allow a certain alpha and his omega to show just how much they love each other. Hankies at the ready.

Saturday 6th September, 1650

The parting is terrible. There are tears, desperate hugs and the scent of distress is so palpable but it hurts. Finally however Castiel manages to pull himself together and leaves, though the desperate look he gives his mate as he rides away nearly makes Dean run after him.

Well, attempt to waddle after him. Dean will not be running anywhere any time soon.

The situation is made worse by the fact that Castiel cannot risk communicating with Dean in case their letters are intercepted. The earl is still secure in his friendship with Cromwell but Dean knows that they are now playing a dangerous game, one that could cost them their lives. He misses his alpha, and the man is not even out of sight yet. Not even pie can cheer him up.

Well, not much. Though as Charlie has been kind enough to bake him one, the least he can do for her is to eat it.

How can he hear her smirking down in the kitchen, damnation?

+++++

Castiel does not cry as he rides past the barn where he met his omega twelve years ago. The ride up has been lonely and depressing, not helped by an overcast sky which seems set to rain any minute. He can see the village and even make out his brother-in-law’s house in the valley below. He stops for a moment, taking in the view.

The alpha has no doubt as to the danger of the situation into which he is riding, nor for that matter the irony of the situation. He is risking everything for a man who, just a few years ago, he was in opposition to. But a combination of the execution of Charles I, the needless slaughter after Dunbar, and the fact that he is increasingly of the opinion that the current parliament cannot run a bath let alone a country, has led him to this.

It is not of course himself who he fears for, but for his beloved Dean. Unbeknownst to his omega, he had a few months struck a private deal with Thomas Fairfax, still an important figure despite his ‘retirement’. If anything happens to the earl, then the former army leader will speak out to protect his mate. Castiel does not care about himself or his lands; Dean – and their future sons – is all that matters.

He wipes away a tear. He misses his omega so badly!

+++++
Sam Winchester greets him as he rides in. The normally carefree beta looks exhausted, but manages a weary smile.

“The king is with the Giffards at Boscobel (1), up in Shropshire”, he says heavily. “They tried to get him into Wales yesterday, but failed. At least there are plenty of other fleeing men to hide amongst after the disaster at Worcester.” (2)

“What will they do now?” Castiel asks.

“They are going to move him to the Whitgreaves at Moseley”, Sam says. “They have a pass for a party to travel to Abbot's Leigh, near Bristol, and we hope they will be able to get a ship to France from there.”

“So where do you fit in?” Castiel says. “And me, for that matter?”

“The king will spend a night at Long Marston, not far from here”, Sam explains. “He will be in disguise, of course, but the one thing he cannot change is his absurd height (3), which people will be on the lookout for. So I am going to act as a decoy, and draw attention to myself where I can to protect him.”

“But you do not have papers to travel”, Castiel points out. “I suppose that that is where I come in?”

“You are known as the one nobleman that Cromwell trusts”, Sam says. “I do not wish to get arrested – we both know what soldiers are like – but if I am, you can vouch for me, as your brother-in-law. You are taking me to visit a property or business you are interested in; his soldiers all know what Cromwell is like when they upset the wrong people. It will be drawing straws to see which of them ends up in the pillory!”

“Or the Barbadoes!” Castiel agrees.

+++++

Wednesday 10th September, 1651

“So what do you think of the king?” Sam asks.

Castiel hesitates. They are spending the night at Long Marston as promised, where his bed is plain but serviceable. It just lacks a certain something. A certain sassy, pie-eating green-eyed something. Fortunately Sam is kind enough not to press his question, as Castiel blinks back his emotions. There may or may not be a doleful sniff.

“He seems.... insubstantial”, he says eventually. Seeing his brother-in-law's puzzled face he goes on, “I do not meant physically, of course. I meant in terms of character. I think he will bend far more easily that his late father ever did, but I also think that he will always remain true to his inner convictions. That is no bad thing in any man, especially a king. At least he seems better than his brother.”

“Have you met James Stuart?” Sam asked.

“I have not”, Castiel says, “but as his elder brother is as yet unmarried I made it my interest to find out what I could about him. He has courage – his escape from custody shows that – but he seems far more rigid in his beliefs than the king. I am minded of Henry Stuart, James I's son, who was a promising future king until he died before he could marry and produce any heirs.”
“As a result of which we got Charles I and a civil war”, Sam sighs. “Ah well, such is the tide of history, which we are attempting to keep flowing in a certain direction. We shall make for Tewkesbury tomorrow and see if we can cause some sightings of a well-dressed tall stranger trying to cross the lower Severn into Wales. That is one route that they will expect him to try, so we must not disappoint. The king is for Cirencester, and then straight onto a ship come Friday if he is lucky.”

“He has not been lucky in war”, Castiel says. “I wonder if he might be lucky in peace?”

“We will work down the Severn via Gloucester, and hopefully get to Bristol to find him gone”, Sam says. “There are also slow goods ships that cross to Ireland from some of the smaller ports along our way. Again, where they would expect him to go.”

“We hope”, Castiel says, silently missing his omega.

+++ Saturday 13th September, 1651 +++

His wonderful mother has arranged for the servants to set up a comfortable bed in the study. Now not only does Dean not have to attempt the stairs every evening – he was fearing he might have to be carried up by the servants, the way he has kept expanding – but here he is surrounded by his husband's scent in his private room. The omega chuckles at the thought that this study is probably unique in its owner's omega being allowed into it at all!

To his surprise, there is a letter for him at the breakfast table (which is now also in the study). He looks at his mother curiously.

“Your 'sappy alpha' as you call him left me instructions to pass on one letter every day to you, until he comes back”, she smiles. “He wrote them all when he reached us at Compton. He knew he would not be able to write to you given the circumstances, but he wanted you to know just how much he loves you.”

Dean does not cry as he takes the letter and reads it, although all the dust in the room means that he has to wipe his eyes more than usual. It is only a few lines, but it is so Castiel, pledging his undying love for his omega in impossibly long words before ending with a suggestion as to what they might try after the birth. Dean blushes fiercely; he is sure that such a thing is physically impossible.

Well, fairly sure. Better to make that one hundred per cent, though!

“I am not going to ask!” his mother says with a smile.

+++ The news is not good. Castiel and Sam have been stopped twice on their way here, but they arrive at Abbot’s Leigh to find the king still there. Apparently no ships are leaving for France in the next month, and guards are thoroughly searching the few that are allowed to go. It is determined to try for the south coast, and to that end the king will be taken to the house of another trusted friend in the village of Trent, Dorsetshire.

“We will work our way down the Somersersetshire coast as far as Watchet”, Sam says, poring over a map. “He goes south-east, we go south-west. Watchet has boats across to Wales and Ireland as do other ports along that coast, so it will be well guarded. And then we should try for Exeter and Exmouth, to imply a dash for Brittany. After that we can rejoin the king and see how things stand; they will try for one of the Dorsetshire ports.”
“The newspaper in town reports that a reward of one thousand pounds (4) is being offered for the king's capture”, Castiel says heavily. “And he has been seen in Norfolk, Surrey, Lancashire and Yorkshire.”

“All in the wrong direction”, Sam says with some satisfaction. “Let us sleep. We have another long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

Yes, Castiel thinks sadly. Another Dean-less day.

+~+~+

Monday 15th September, 1651

Castiel barrels into the inn, where Sam is finishing his drink.

“Soldiers!” he growls.

Sam abandons his beer and races for the back exit, swiftly followed by the alpha. They hear a shout from behind them, but presumably it is not the soldiers entering the place as there is no immediate pursuit. Dodging along a dirty back-alley, they emerge not far from the docks.

“I thought offering a large sum for a crossing to Wales in a dirty goods boat would do the trick”, Sam chuckles in between his gasps. “That rat of a captain must have run straight to his soldier friends.”

“We need to get out of town immediately”, Castiel says firmly. “There is a road south through the hills and the soldiers will not follow at once, as they will have to sort out a guard for the harbour.”

They move carefully out of the small town to the isolated barn where they had earlier secreted their horses, then ride slowly southwards, keeping a careful eye out behind them.

“Dean is due in between twenty-six and forty days' time”, Castiel says absently. “I hope he is all right.”

“You really love my brother”, Sam observes with a smile.

“I cannot imagine my life without him”, Castiel says simply. “Everything I do, everything I have, is for him and him alone. I have not told him such, but this pregnancy frightens me, Sam. You know as well as I do that twins are dangerous, especially for an omega.”

“He will get through it”, Sam says confidently. “You will give him nothing but the best, and you will have two fine sons to carry on your bloodline.”

“That reminds me, I must put in place something for Sasha”, Castiel says. “It is unfair to have dragged him all the way to the estate only to get nothing. I shall ask my omega. He always tells me what to do.”

They both laugh.

+~+~+

Wednesday 17th September, 1651

They have stopped at a small wayside inn in a small town called Cullompton, some fifteen miles north of Exeter, and are enjoying the late summer sunshine outside.
“This ale is good”, Sam says.

“Do not react, but we are being watched”, Castiel says quietly.

“Where?”

“The woman gardening in the cottage across the road”, Castiel says. “She has been weeding that particular patch for some ten minutes now. And that man leaving the house now came down and spoke with her a moment back.”

The man in question, unquestionably a beta, walks down the road to one of the more substantial houses in the main road, and knocks at the door. He turns to look across the road at them before the door opens, and then slips inside.

“Go?” Sam asks.

“Yes!”

+++++

Thursday 18th September, 1651

Castiel and Sam sit astride their horses in the little copse, as the party of soldiers thunders past down the road towards Plymouth.

“I caught at least two people racing each other to the garrison when you called me ‘your maj....’”, Sam grins. “They will be scouring every place in the district for hours!”

The alpha smiles, and leads the way back around the town. If the Army thinks that the king is making for Cornwall, then not only will they be sending troops to the area from elsewhere, they will also be stepping up shipping patrols around the peninsula rather than further east. All well and good.

“What was in the box?” Sam asks suddenly.

Castiel pulls up and takes out the small box that he had opened that morning, and hands it wordlessly to his brother-in-law. Sam opens it and takes out a badly-embroidered... something about nine inches square, with a wobbly letter 'C' on it. He opens his mouth to comment on how hideous it is, then stops to think.

“Yes”, Castiel smiles. “Dean's birthday present to me. He gave it to me before I left. I tried to teach him knitting once and he was hopeless, but he must have persisted. I would wager that this took him many, many hours. And you are right. It is hideous, but it was made with love.”

“He loves you enough to stick at something he is hopeless at”, Sam says, understanding at last.

“Yes”, Castiel smiles. “That is why you are looking at the luckiest alpha in the kingdom!”

His brother-in-law looks away and 'misses' the alpha's tears.

+++++

Notes:
1) At both Boscobel and Moseley, the king hid in an oak tree to evade his pursuers. Many pubs in England are still called The Royal Oak. Boscobel is about fifty miles north and Moseley thirty miles north-east of Worcester.
2) Charles did try the obvious escape across the River Severn to get through Wales and hence a ship to France, but at Madeley he was chased away by an irate mill-owner. The man chasing him was actually hiding other refugees from Worcester, and feared that the newcomer might betray him!

3) Charles was about six foot two, against the average height for the times of around five foot five – so nine inches taller (though fortunately his moose of a distraction was a clear eleven). The irony was that Charles’ father at five foot one - we cannot be sure as paintings naturally made him look taller - was one of our shortest kings ever.

4) Even at the most conservative estimate, over £15,000 ($21,000) in 2016 terms, worth immeasurably more to the mostly poor people for whom such a sum was unimaginable wealth.
Chapter Summary

71: Horseshoes prove almost fatally unlucky for the king, but he is rescued by an unexpected arrival at a pub, and sees people celebrating his capture. Castiel and Sam continue to draw attention away from their charge, who ends his wanderings with a dirty Surprise. The alpha immediately rushes home in time for the birth, only... well, let's just say that things do not go quite according to plan. But at least Dean knows his Shakespeare!

Monday 29th September, 1651

It has not been a good week. For anyone. Though the scene before them all is... amusing.

Last Monday they had taken the king to Charmouth (1), where a local fisherman had promised to take him over to France. Except the idiot had gone and told his wife who, panicking over their being found out, had locked him in his room. But worse had followed. They had shifted some eight miles east to Bridport where someone (2) must have recognized the king, because barely had they made the last-minute decision to head back to Trent when a party of soldiers had charged by on the main road east, within clear sight of them. Fortunately they had been just inside a small copse and had not been spotted.

Their troubles were not over, though. That night the king had stayed in a pub in the small village of Broadwindsor only for a group of soldiers to descend unexpectedly on the place, and demand rooms. Fortunately the Lord giveth heart-attacks and then the Lord taketh away cause of same; one of the women with the soldiers had gone into labour and, horrified at the expense of their having to look after the child, the soldiers had been told to leave. Which, thankfully, they had done.

And now the villagers of Trent seemed to have gone mad, celebrating for no apparent reason.

“What is happening?” the king asks. Sam blushes, and Castiel can understand why.

“They received a report of your capture, sir”, he says crisply. “It seems that they are quite happy at this 'news'."

Fortunately the king takes the celebrations of his capture well enough and they all go back inside, leaving the villagers to their unjustified celebrations.

++++

Monday 6th October, 1651

“The king is set for Heale, near Salisbury”, Sam says as they prepare their horses. “I thought it would be best for us to strike off at right-angles again, south-east towards Poole and then along the Hampshire coast as if we were trying to get across to the Isle of Wight.”

“Not a happy place for the king's late father”, Castiel observes. “Would the king go there?”

“He went hard by Lyme, which defied his father during the war”, Sam points out. “I believe he has
hopes that he may be able to arrange an escape from one of the small Sussex ports further along the coast, so we shall move on and meet him at Hambledon in Hampshire on the twelfth.”

Castiel is silent at that. Less than three weeks before his mate's due period starts. He sniffs mournfully.

“If we can get the king away that same week, you will still be home in time”, Sam says confidently.

The alpha wishes that he shared that confidence.

+++

Monday 13th October, 1651

They are all sat at a small wayside inn in the village of Upper Beeding in Sussex, just a few miles from the coast. The rain beats heavily outside, and Castiel thinks to himself that they can almost smell the sea air. The innkeeper bustles in from outside.

“Blowing a gale out there”, he says conversationally. “You gentlemen travelling through?”

“Yes”, Castiel says shortly. The innkeeper smiles knowingly.

“You know, it's just turned midday”, he says. “Every day at this time, regular as clockwork, the soldiers manning the gate to the coast road go to the local tavern there for lunch. And they don't even leave anyone on duty. Sloppy, I call it.”

He gives the king a knowing look, and bustles away.

“I think a breath of sea-air right now would do us the world of good”, Castiel says, quickly downing his drink. “Shall we depart?”

He is less than surprised when the innkeeper presses some sandwiches into his possession as he pays.

+++

Tuesday 14th October, 1651

There are many interesting and scenic places along the south coast, Castiel is sure. The small run-down fishing-port of Brighthelmstone (3) is most definitely not one of them. But at least it is by the sea.

And they are so close. Although the owner of the George Inn where they are staying had, in one of those twists of Fate which seemed to beset the king, recognized him. The man was a retired royal servant and fortunately a loyal one, as he had fallen on his knees before his former master.

“That and those soldiers who galloped by us at Bramber”, Sam whispers. “What a day!”

Eleven to go, Castiel thinks silently. He knows that if he asked he would be excused to go to his mate, but he wishes to see the king safely off, or as safely as he can be with a captain who demanded an extra two hundred pounds (4) danger money at the last minute.

“His ship is a coal-barge called the 'Surprise' (5)”, Sam says. “Not really a king's vessel, but then it should not draw suspicion as a result. It is due to sail in the small hours of Thursday morning.”
Nine days, Castiel thinks. Pray to the Lord that nothing goes wrong, here or with the man I love. I am coming, Dean!

+++++

Thursday 16th October, 1651

The barge seems to take an age to edge slowly out to sea in the dim morning light, though Castiel knows this is just the captain taking precautions. Any ship sailing directly away from the coast towards France would attract attention, so the captain is being sensible. But it is an eternity before the black dot disappears over the horizon without anything else coming along to challenge it. Castiel draws a deep breath.

“Home?” Sam says.

“As if you have to ask!” Castiel says fervently.

They ride swiftly along the coast road, heading west towards Chichester as the sun rises behind them. The mighty cathedral's steeple looms over the town, a welcoming sight as it dominates the skyline for miles around. The road (such as it is) that they are on is an old Roman one, and continues on to the small port of Portchester now overshadowed by its replacement, the great naval base of Portsmouth next door, after which Castiel pushes across country to Winchester. There is clearly no way that they are going to reach Stalwarton before dark, but Sam is not the least but surprised when Castiel shows no inclination to slow down, though he does stop in the old West Saxon capital to purchase some sandwiches.

The going is harder as they push north from the city, and the countryside emptier. A few isolated villages are all they see before they pass the battlefield town of Newbury, nestling in the Kennett Valley, before more hills and vales slow them down again. Sam does not suggest that they stop for supper, but he does take advantage of a rest break in town to buy some pastries from a tavern in East Ilsley. It is getting dark now, and they are not even near Oxford yet.

They pass through Abingdon, slumbering again after its role as a frontier town in the wars, and are soon riding down towards the university city, quiet on this cold autumn evening. It is dark now so the gates are closed, and they have to ride around rather than through it. King's Linton is in its turn left behind as they head up towards the turnings for Nowhere and Charlton. The woods along the roadside seem dark and unfriendly to Sam, and he finds himself riding closer to the alpha. Castiel is silent, but Sam can sense the tension in him.

They turn through Charlton and splash across the moonlit river, the Hall now visible on its slight hill ahead of them. Sam hears the alpha's breath catch, and feels for him. Then they are riding to the gatehouse, where a stunned servant lets them in. The ride up to the door is in silence, yet by the time they are there the door is open and the servants are coming out to greet them, led by Charlie.

“Plenty of time”, she grins. “He has missed you, Castiel. He is in the study.”

The alpha lets out an inhuman wail and almost falls over his feet as he runs through the door. Somehow he instinctively makes his way to the study, and inside it he finds a large bed, on which lies a very large omega. Dean looks at him, tears in his eyes. Castiel cries, but stumbles over to him and falls on his knees, kissing every part of his omega that he can, promising never to ever leave him again.

Finally, he is home. Dean is his home.
Saturday 25th October, 1651

Unfortunately, the best-laid plans do not always come to pass. But smart people always have a contingency plan.

“Alpha down!” Charlie yells, and two of the stronger servants are there to catch Castiel as he faints. She had suspected that the sight of all that blood and his mate in labour might be too much for the alpha, and it seems that she was right. As instructed, the men move Castiel to lie next to where Dean is squatting on the bed, moaning in pain. Charlie moves his hand across, and without even looking the omega grabs hold of his husband's hand.

She smiles, but says nothing. Dean is going to need all the help he can get, especially as his useless beta brother managed to knock himself out by trying to run for help and clattering straight into the door-frame. She hopes that the boys she is about to deliver will be better coördinated.

Castiel is not sure which one of them has cried the most, but seeing his beautiful mate with their first-born in his arms is an experience he will never forget. And Charlie passing him the boy's twin... well, it is worth making a complete fool of himself, a thousand times over.

“What shall we call them?” Dean asks.

“You did all the work”, Castiel says. “I just made an arse of myself, in a way I am sure is all around the estate by now.”

It does not help that Dean opens his mouth to deny that, then seems to realize he cannot. Castiel shoots him a look.

“Today is the anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt (6)”, the omega says. “Shakespeare said it was fought on the feast-day of Saint Crispin.”

“Saints Crispin and Crispinian”, Castiel says. “Are you thinking those names for our sons?”

Dean nods shyly. Castiel smiles.

“So be it”, he smiles. “Earl Crispin.”

“Not for many a year yet, son”, Dean says, smiling as he looks down at the small fair-headed bundle in his arms. “Not for many a year.”

Thursday 25th December, 1651

It had been an exhausting and monumental year, Dean thinks as he lies in bed on Christmas morning. Not of course that they are allowed to celebrate Christmas in this day and age. There may be some present-giving that got hold over from their respective birthdays, there may be a roast goose downstairs, and Charlie may even be cooking that special Christmas pudding which is one of the few things that can match pie, but the day is nothing special.

Well, except for the blow-job his alpha just did on him that has left him wrecked before the day even starts. What a way to wake up!
“Love you so much”, Castiel whispers. Their room is isolated from everyone else in the house, but whispering in the cold morning air seems the natural thing to do. “My omega. My wonderful, perfect mate.”

“Sap”, Dean mutters.

“You have done so well, my love”, Castiel praises. “Birthing our two sons, keeping me happy, downing all that pie....”

“Hey!”

He is louder than he had planned, and sure enough a cry echoes from the adjoining room. Castiel chuckles and gets up.

“I'll go and see to them”, he promises.

“Cas!”

“What?” the alpha asks.

“Uh, dressing-gown?” Dean suggests. “Charlie said she never wanted to see that much of you again after last time, remember?”

“Yes, o master”, Castiel teases, pulling on his gown.

Dean throws a pillow at him. The alpha yelps and pouts indignantly, but does as he is told before hurrying to see to their son.

+~+~+
Notes:
1) A small fishing village just over 150 miles south-west of London, and only a couple of miles east of Lyme Regis along the huge sweeping expanse of Lyme Bay.
2) Bridport, a small town which despite the name is now a mile inland. A horse in the royal party had cast a shoe here, and the observant blacksmith noted that the beast had been re-shod in different counties, including Worcestershire. He told a friend who immediately went to inform the local priest – but the latter was at what proved a very thorough prayer session so could not be disturbed, and the friend had to come back later. The priest's name was Bartholomew Wesley, great-grandfather of John, and because of his devotions the king avoided capture by about ten minutes. Bart would have been really annoyed had he known about his role in changing history, because he was a solid Puritan.
3) Now the city of Brighton. Think San Francisco with (even) less class.
4) About £3,000 ($4,000) at 2016 prices, at least.
5) Purchased by Charles II upon his restoration and refitted for use as a royal yacht, 'HMY Royal Escape'.
6) Fought in 1415. A vastly outnumbered English force used their superior longbows to destroy the French army, and opened the way to Henry V's near-conquest of France during the (First) Hundred Years' War.
Chapter Summary

72: Dean gets a birthday to remember (yes, a barn is involved!) and later gets fucked into Oblivion. Stained glass nearly proves fatal for one of Cromwell’s men, and Castiel resorts to subterfuge to make sure his omega gets some much-needed rest. The troublesome American colonists are brought to heel, and a prank goes horribly wrong for a certain family member, who has to head off into the sunset as a result.

Saturday 24th January, 1652

Dean is suspicious.

“I can't leave the boys”, he says firmly. “Come on, Charlie.”

“Dorothy and I will look after them for a bit”, she says. “Just go with Gad.”

Dean pouts, but complies. His cousin had brought a message from Castiel saying he was still out on the estate, and would Dean come to meet him? Very odd, considering how cold it was outside.

“Do you know what this is about?” Dean asks the beta as he pulls on his coat. Gadreel shakes his head.

“But I can guess!” he grins. “It's not far, master.”

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Even more oddly, Gadreel takes him only as far as the Manor Farm Barn, before opening the door and ushering Dean through. He does not follow.

“Holy fuck!”

Castiel – his Cas – is naked and prepped, lying with his legs raised on a bale of hay. Dean whimpers.

“Happy birthday, beloved”, Castiel whispers. “Well? Going to keep me waiting?”

“Not a fucking chance!” Dean growls as he races to strip off.

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There is even a picnic for dinner. Dean so loves his alpha!

“Charlie and Dorothy have all the maids, as well as Ezekiel and Gadreel, to help them with the boys”, Castiel says calmly. Somehow the scruffy bastard is even more sexy when he is wearing just the waistcoat, damnation! “I know how stressed you have been lately especially when Crispin caught that cold, so I thought some relief would be welcome.”

“Very welcome”, Dean sighs, definitely not crying. It is just dusty in the old building. “Lord, what did I do to deserve you?”
“Well, back in Thirty-Nine there was this barn with a naked omega in it....”

“And a puritanical alpha who refused to fuck him, no matter how hard he begged and grovelled”. Dean finishes.

“Some things are worth waiting for”, Castiel smiles. “And you are the best thing that ever happened to me, Dean Milton. Happy twenty-eighth birthday!”

Dean smiles.

+++

Tuesday 24th February, 1652

Dean is depressed, and it is not just three solid weeks of heavy grey cloud and cold winds. Miss Moseley had warned him that, whilst he would be able to have more children some day, he should expect his first heat after the twins to be delayed, possibly by up to a year. A year having to do with just normal sex from his alpha. His life is so hard!

Castiel thrusts into him once more, and yes, very hard! Dean's eyes roll back in his head as his alpha tries to wring yet another orgasm out of his omega's broken yet blissed-out body. Not going to happen, Dean thinks, as he feels the knot swell once more. And then Castiel comes, and in a way that is far too stereotypical for so manly an omega, Dean promptly faints.

He comes to some time later, to find Castiel has already slipped out of him and, glory be, gotten him pie. In another extremely rare display of stereotypical omega behaviour, Dean sheds the odd tear. Or four.

“Parliament has passed an Act of Oblivion and Pardon”, Castiel tells him, holding him in what is definitely a manly embrace. “They had hoped to win over some Royalists by pardoning most treasonable acts done before Worcester.”

“But?” Dean prompts. “I know there is a catch, so I will ask.”

“A most gorgeous arse from where I am sitting”, Castiel grins, mis-hearing him quite blatantly. “However, it has only succeeded in annoying both sides; the parliamentarians because they feel it is too lenient, and the Royalists because so many of them are on the exemptions list.”

“Not very successful, then”, Dean observes.

“Yes”, Castiel agrees, producing another spoon and looking hungrily at the pie dish. At least until his omega whines like he is the most underfed and unloved mate in the whole universe – hah! - and the alpha sighs and places it to one side.

“Passed over for pie”, he mutters. “It has come to this. Woe is me!”

Dean is too busy with the pie to answer.

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Sunday 14th March, 1652

Captain Martin Delamere eyes the door carefully. He is sure – well, fairly sure he can make it and yell for help before he gets attacked, but he would rather not test that theory. The waves of anger rolling off the alpha before him are tangible.
“Lieutenant Lane did raise a valid point about the glass in the church windows, sir”, he says carefully, more than a little glad that there is a solid table between him and the alpha. He knows as well as everyone that this particular nobleman is a good friend of the great Cromwell, who has been known before to take an unhealthy ‘interest’ in those who rock the boat without good reason. As in the permanent relocation of any boat-rocker to somewhere they will get a much better tan.

“He also came too near my omega”, Castiel growls. “I am sure the bruises will fade. Let us hope the apparently long overdue lesson in keeping away from an alpha's bonded mate will not.”

“And the glass?” the captain ventures. There is another growl, and he takes a subtle step back towards the door.

“I shall consider it”, Castiel says through gritted teeth. “Good day, sir.”

The captain does not run, but leaves the room at what can only be described as a smart pace. The door is all but slammed shut behind him.

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“That oily alpha, getting too near my beloved”, Castiel grumbles as they ride back to the Hall. “He was only after one thing.”

“My hero!” Dean beams. “You made sure that he knew his advances were unwelcome!”

“I am sorry that you had to come with me”, Castiel says, “but I felt it would be for the best. And I am less likely to do anything that will need cleaning up when I have the love of my life with me.”

“Sap”, Dean mutters, blushing.

“Let us go home and see if Charlie has got any grey hairs yet”, Castiel smiles. “The terrible twosome are probably running rings around her as we speak!”

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Tuesday 4th May, 1652

“The Navy is continuing to bring the rebellious colonies in the Americas to heel”, Castiel observes as he checks through his letters that day.

There is no reply, and he looks over to where, sure enough, Dean has dozed off on the sofa. His mate is so adorably cute at times like this, although Castiel's fondness for certain of his own appendages ensure that he rarely if ever voices that thought. And Dean sometimes has the strangest dreams; last night he had kept muttering about seals. And, even more bizarrely, lilies!

Normally the twins would be within sight if not earshot, but Castiel has insisted that they get some fresh air whilst they can. It has snowed heavily in each of the first four months of the year, so the opportunities for getting out have been few and far between. He himself needs to keep on top of the estate, otherwise people will start to slip. Only last month, with Dorothy's help, he had turned up for an unexpected revisit at a farm and found his tenant letting out the attached cottages and keeping the profits, the man's own tenants having been sent away during his first visit. The tenant had been instantly dismissed; not something the alpha had really wanted to do, but he knew that sometimes one had to make an example.

No, the real reason for the twins 'getting some fresh air' is to let his omega get some rest. Castiel knows – and yes, unlike so many alphas he has actually read a book about pregnancy in omegas –
that for the first six months after birth Dean will retain a strong emotional bond with his babies. Not that he will not always love them of course, but this is one area where rich women have the advantage, being able to more readily let their servants take the strain whereas omegas feel horribly guilty in the same circumstances.

Castiel also knows (because some of the servants have not yet learnt to gossip in quiet voices around their master) that they are secretly amazed if not confounded that he takes his share of the workload where Crispin and Crispinian are concerned. For an alpha to be worried about their son and heir is natural enough, but Castiel had decided long before the birth that he would not let the whole weight of caring fall on his beloved omega.

His beloved omega belches, and mutters something about wings. Castiel smiles, and lets him rest.

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Wednesday 26th May, 1652

Castiel is holding court again (1). Dean is not and never has been scared of his alpha, but at times like this.....

All right, he is scared. Because Castiel has every right to be absolutely, bloody furious. Dean feels up to the bruise on his head and shudders.

Gadreel and Ezekiel enter, dragging a reluctant beta between them before depositing him on the floor in front of Castiel's chair. Someone Dean knew only vaguely before the events of the day before, but now knows only too well. Gabriel Milton, Castiel's half-brother, and perpetrator of practical jokes, one of the latest of which had involved the daughter of the governor of the Rhode Island Colony, a pot of glue and a privy, and had resulted in his being 'invited' to return to England. Or else.

Gabriel had visited the house when Castiel had been out on his rounds the day before and, not knowing this and thinking the alpha would come from elsewhere in the house to greet him, had decided to hide behind the door and surprise him. Unfortunately he had instead surprised Dean – right into a dresser against on which he had caught his head and fainted.

The omega can still see the scars of Castiel's reaction on his half-brother. The alpha had been Upset.

"It is customary", Castiel says in his gravelled tone, "to allow someone from the family a fellow member to speak in their defence. However, Michael has told me that he has no interest in the matter, I have no idea where Balthazar is, and Lucifer's exact words were, and I quote, 'he had it coming'.”

Gabriel whines piteously. Dean would feel sorry for him, but there have been too many tales of the wastrel playing his tricks on estate workers, who then have to clean up any mess. The omega's well of sympathy has long run dry.

“For injuring a pregnant omega, the punishment is a complete loss of all lands and titles, and permanent exile”, Castiel says flatly. “However, because Dean – bless him – has asked me, I am prepared to somewhat ameliorate that sentence.”

Dean can see the look of hope that that remark engenders. He winces at what is to come. Castiel had wanted to tear his half-brother limb from limb for what he had done, and Dean had suggested... well, a slightly less awful alternative.
“You will be aware, Gabriel”, Castiel says, “that the late Earl Raphael purchased the rights to some lands in Connaught, in the far west of Ireland. A foolish move, I always thought, but now that the reconquest of the island is all but complete, the lands fall to us.”

“You want me to go and manage them?” Gabriel asks hopefully.

Nope, Dean thinks. Though he gives his husband bonus points for the slow, cruel smile that sinks his half-brother's hopes.

“I have already appointed a Catholic steward for them”, Castiel smiles, “and he will do that. There is however one smallholding that is currently unoccupied. A few chickens and goats maybe, but it is either that..... or I could have you castrated!”

“Ireland!” Gabriel squeaks in an impressively high voice. “I'll take Ireland!”

“I rather thought you would”, Castiel smiles. “Kindly remove yourself from this country within the week, or I shall have to consider my unwarranted generosity.”

Gadreel opens the door, and their unwanted guest almost falls out of it.

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Notes:
1) The 'coniunx et heredem' court again. Had Dean been pregnant at the time, Castiel could justifiably have had his half-brother killed. The alpha had offered the Irish stewardship to Lucifer and Samandriel, but they had declined.
Chapter Summary

73: Cromwell struggles to find a constitutional settlement that works, and parliament proves about as helpful as a straw teapot. Sachiel Milton's new mate makes a poor initial impression at Stalwarton, and Dean has to try pie without touching the filling, as his next child proves horribly pie-phobic. He is also warned about using a certain word in his mother's presence. Kevin Tarrant gets into college, and Castiel has to see Cromwell about prizes.

Wednesday 30th June, 1652

Ye Gods, how did people survive with children? Dean felt like throwing his hands up in despair as Crispin (who had a deeper bellow than his twin) went off just moments after he had been settled.

“I’ll get it”, Castiel calls from the doorway, hurrying over to where his elder son was making his displeasure felt.

“He can't need feeding”, Dean grumbles, but he stays put. His husband had recently had to put his foot down and insist that the omega could not be with them around the clock. A necessary move as the little mites seemed to have perfected totally different sleep patterns, so one was always yelling for something or other. Dean did not like it, but he knew that his husband was right and that he did need help, especially with two. The fact that Castiel had caught him sleeping on the floor that one time meant he just had to go along with whatever his alpha wanted.

There had also been a rather unfortunate incident involving Sachiel, who now was suddenly no longer heir to a huge estate. Castiel had set him up with his own lands up in Kirtsford to which he had moved, but during a visit to the Hall Sachiel's husband, a beta called Andrew Gallagher, had growled at Dean for getting too near his pregnant mate, and Castiel had immediately attacked him. Though the scrap had been brief and the alpha had apologized for it immediately afterwards, it had brought home to Dean just how possessive his husband was. Sachiel had been safely delivered of an alpha two months later and Castiel and Dean had both attended the christening so the alpha could bestow his blessing on the child.

(Dean had secretly entertained secret hopes that when Sachiel had moved away, his cottage might be available, especially since the omega's mother had married a Hampton man and moved out the year before, but Castiel had rented it to Jameson Penny's son Jack who had moved into the cottage along with his father, to Dean's unspoken envy).

“He is dry, so I think he just wants attention”, Castiel says, rocking his son and heir gently. “Lord but I am tired. I swear the roads grow ever worse.”

“I blame the government”, Dean snickers. His husband shoots him a look, but changes the subject.

“It is formal, then”, he says glumly. “We are at war with the Dutch. Though it is hardly surprising after the Navigation Act (1) last year. Just what we need; a war with the only other major Protestant power in Europe!”
He stops and looks up. Dean looks perilously close to tears.

“What is it, beloved?” he asks anxiously.

“Just seeing you with your son, Cas”, Dean sniffs. “I mean, our son.”

Castiel smiles.

“Yes”, he says happily. “Definitely our son, beloved.”

“Sap!” Dean mutters, but he smiles as he says it.

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Saturday 3rd July, 1652

“Pembroke”, Castiel says with a sigh, collapsing heavily into a chair. “At last!”

“The town?” Dean asks, confused. His alpha shakes his head.

“The college”, he says. “I have been trying to get young Kevin Tarrant accepted at one of them, and the snobbery – honestly, it made me retch!”

Dean smiles, and goes across to join his alpha, nestling into Castiel's muscled body. It earns him an appreciative grunt.

“How much did you have to pay them?” the omega asks quietly.

“Enough for a permanent scholarship, on condition that he becomes the first beneficiary and I and my successors get to choose who benefits thereafter”, he says. “The boy is exceptionally smart, and will make a good teacher some day.”

“You are so good to your people”, Dean smiles. “I think you deserve a reward.”

“Charlie is about to serve lunch”, Castiel points out.

“I know”, Dean says. “But after lunch.... I have a new purchase from that shop in Woodstock that I think you will like.”

Castiel growls appreciatively. He wonders idly if any of his other estate workers would benefit from a scholarship.....

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Sunday 5th September, 1652

“It is embarrassing”, Castiel admits, “but I am glad he has gotten away.”

“Who?” Dean asks, scouring the table for any signs of pie.

“Edward Massey”, Castiel says. He smiles at the omega's confusion. “The man whose defiance in Gloucester was pivotal in the first war against the king's father, but who later changed sides and was captured after Worcester. He has contrived to escape from the Tower of London by climbing up a chimney, and is surely in France by now.”

“It is all bad news”, Dean sighs. “Is that why we are at war with France now?”
“To tell the truth, I do not see why we are at war with them at all”, Castiel says exasperatedly. “I know that Cromwell was annoyed that the French refused to recognize the Commonwealth as the rightful government of England, but this seems a total over....”

He stops mid-sentence. Dean looks up from his book in surprise.

“Cas?” he says.

Then he sees the red eyes.....

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Saturday 18th September, 1652

Castiel growls as he ploughs even harder into his mate, and Dean's eyes roll back in pleasure. This rut has been one long round of sex, sex and more sex, and Dean could not be happier (and sorer!) about it. The omega moans in ecstasy, and can even forgive the smirk on his loving husband's face. Hell, he has earnt it, rocking Dean's world like this.

Castiel changes his angle, and Dean moans. Lord, is his alpha somehow getting even larger as he grows older? The alpha runs a gentle hand over the omega's chest and tweaks his nipples, and Dean lets out an almost inhuman sound of happiness.

“Horny alpha”, Dean manages, quiet proud that he managed two whole words. And with more than a single syllable each. Then Castiel changes his angle again and Dean's eyes water as, for the umpteenth time, his cock tries to come on empty.

“Sassy omega!” Castiel grins. “Gonna breed you up good. Love you, Dean.”

Dean knows that the breeding claim is more than likely. Some months back he and Castiel had taken little Crispin and Crispinian to spend time with their doting grandmother (who had said that if Dean used the G-word in her presence, she might just start remembering some of her elder son's less respectable childhood antics), and they had taken the opportunity to call in and see Miss Moseley. She confirmed their usual doctor's diagnosis; Dean was now a regular omega and could have children any time he wanted. And Dean wanted, badly.

“Ouaieee!” he whines as his clever husband finds yet another angle of attack that makes the omega's eyes roll back in his head.

“Love you”, Castiel says quietly. “My Dean. My perfect mate. You are all mine!”

Dean manages one last strangled moan before he passes out.

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Thursday 19th November, 1652

Castiel works hard to run his estate, and that includes seeing off some dangers before they have a chance to arise. He is grateful to Captain Torrin, the man now representing his old seat in the Commons, for helping him avert a situation that, if not life-threatening, could have involved heavy legal costs.

In order to fund the money-hungry war effort parliament has been working towards the Confiscation Bill, which had passed into law yesterday. It seizes the lands and property of some six hundred lesser Royalists which, whilst it does little to further peace and harmony in the still divided
country, at least brings in lots of money. But thanks to an error by some idiot of a parliamentary draftsman, the name of the old Earl of Broad Stoke had been written as Bradstock, so Castiel's name was effectively on the list. Fortunately the Captain had spotted it and alerted him last week, and today Castiel had received a most pleasant and apologetic letter from Cromwell about the error, promising him that it would immediately be corrected, and that the clerk responsible would be 'spoken to'. Castiel has little doubt on both counts.

There is a pained moan from the bathroom next door, and the alpha smiles. That, it seems, is another area he has been successful in. This is the second morning that Dean has bolted from the bed to empty his stomach contents in the privy. Poor omega.

Castiel gives himself a mental pat on the back for both successes, and waits for his pie-mad lover to return.

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Friday 3rd December, 1652

"I feared as much", Castiel says. "I did warn about the danger of spreading our resources too thinly, and now this."

Dean looks at him piteously. It would normally be unheard of for Castiel to have pie and his omega none, but at the moment Dean's body (or at least the new life very obviously growing inside it) has decided pie is unacceptable. Although if a certain alpha says 'waste not, want not' one more time, then that certain alpha is not getting laid tonight.

Probably.

"What happened?" Dean asks disinterestedly.

"Our Navy has been defeated by the Dutch off Dungeness in Kent", Castiel says. "Apparently a lot of the merchant vessels impressed (2) for the battle refused to fight. Disappointing."

Dean just stares wistfully at the pie. Castiel smiles.

"Maybe you could just try the pastry on its own?" he suggests.

The omega nods in agreement.

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No.

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Monday 20th December, 1652

Castiel had been 'invited' to London, though as the invitation had been from Cromwell, it was (Dean knew) more of a command. Fortunately it was only for one night; Castiel would normally have taken two days each way for the trip when riding alone (or at least with just an armed guard), but with Dean now three months in he did not wish to be away from him any longer than necessary.

"They underestimate Cromwell at times", Castiel tells his mate as they lie together that evening. The alpha had returned long after dark but had insisted on only a quick bath before getting into bed and pulling his mate into him, arching his neck so Dean could re-scent him. "He may have an
unfortunate sense of humour – though I have never seen it myself – but he was fully understanding of my need to return to my omega.”

“Why did he need you there in the first place?” Dean asks sleepily, rubbing himself over every part of his alpha that he can reach. “Is that not what letters are for?”

“He had received this proposal for better conditions for our sailors”, Castiel says. “Better care of the wounded, a fairer apportionment of prize money (3), and just better pay. His problem in London is that people are generally so terrified of him that they become sycophants, saying what they think he wants to hear. He sent me the proposals some time back, and I went to tell him what I thought.”

“I hope you said yes”, Dean said, yawning.

“I made one or two suggestions as to how they might go further”, Castiel says, “but yes, I gave them my full.....”

He stops. A gentle snore echoes up from his chest. He smiles, and eases them both under the covers.

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Saturday 25th December, 1652

Dean's future child gives him the best Christmas present ever – they let their carrier keep pie down! The day is marred only by a visit from the local soldiers led by the obnoxious Lieutenant Lane; Castiel coldly shows them the plain meal in the main room where there is not a sight of any seasonal fare or even the merest sprig of mistletoe. He also growls at the lieutenant throughout the visit, which is cut short once they have established that there are absolutely no Christmas festivities going on here. Dean does not laugh when the lieutenant realizes that the two betas he brought in with him have 'gone outside for some air', and promptly sprints from the Hall.

He does not laugh that much.

All right, he does. Though it is a bit off that they have to keep a servant up on the roof with an eyeglass on days like this just because some local Puritan commander is a complete killjoy.

Fifteen minutes later Ezekiel comes in from his watch and confirms that he has seen the soldiers passing through Charlton and on their way back to King's Linton. Everyone heaves a sigh of relief and moves into the main dining-room where the full Christmas spread is being laid out by Charlie and Dorothy.

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Notes:
1) This Act was aimed at limiting naval trade to/via/from England to English ships, and struck hard at a United Provinces which was only slowly recovering from the eighty-year war of independence from Spain. The war that resulted lasted two years and achieved little, and was the first of three with the Dutch that century.
2) Impressing (hiring or seizing merchant vessels for battle) was standard practice, even after states grew large and powerful enough to afford proper warships. The latter were expensive, the recent success of the Dutch and their small boats against the might of the Spanish Navy, the largest in the world at the time, showed there was a place for smaller vessels. However, poor performances like at Dungeness meant that that place was soon usurped by the frigate, a cheaper warship fast enough to outrun larger vessels but strong enough to defeat smaller ones.
3) Basic pay was poor, and prize money was a clever system of performance-related pay. As England came to rely more and more on its Navy, it was essential that it performed well. A general division rule was one-quarter of the total value to the captain, one-eighth to his admiral, three-eighths to various officers and one-quarter among the crew. That latter may not sound much, but the 1762 capture of the Spanish ship 'Hermione' by the British frigate 'HMS Active' earned its crew the equivalent of about twenty-five years' worth of their normal salary!
Chapter Summary

74: Dean's next child decides that it likes custard rather than pie, then changes its mind with minimal notice. Still, what goes down.... The omega counsels his alpha to think before he writes, whilst Castiel tells Charlie he knows about her little secret. And Dean tentatively names his next child.

Friday 7th January, 1653

If he thinks back (with what little is left of his brain), Dean can remember worrying that his being pregnant would make him less attractive to his alpha husband.

Hah!

Castiel had managed to order his mate a book on pregnancy for omegas, and Dean had been interested to read that the middle third of the pregnancy was known as 'the hump'. And remembering his husband's reaction during the first pregnancy, he now knows why. Far from finding him unattractive, Cas had somehow triggered a second rut close on the heels of the most recent one. Dean now has a permanent cushion on his favourite dining-room chair, and even so he is careful when he very slowly sits down. For the alpha has really taken on board the passage from the book that extra sex makes for a happy omega and happy future children, and he sees it as his duty to see that Dean is kept as happy as possible, even returning from his estate work in the middle of the day for some extra sex. Dean is kept in an almost constant state of post-sex euphoria.

Not that he is complaining. Though he is glad that the servant's quarters are some distance away!

At least things are calm now, after Castiel for once woke early and asked for some hard, heavy morning sex, after which he fell straight back to sleep again, a look on his face that was far too smug for a certain omega's liking. Still, Dean can at least feel proud that he has reduced his alpha to such a state of exhaustion that he is no longer.....

Oh. Apparently his alpha is not that exhausted.

Castiel sniggers.

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Monday 24th January, 1653

Dean’s twenty-nineteenth birthday present is some silk panties, a book he had wanted, and the chance to let his alpha hold him in a manly embrace for much of the day. And to recover!

+++ ++

Monday 31st January, 1653

The morning sickness has arrived earlier this time, for which a certain omega is less than grateful. Especially when he returns to the bedroom feeling like death warmed over to find a certain alpha
looking far too pleased with himself.

“If the Good Lord had any sense of fairness, he would have arranged it so that we had to take turns to bear our children”, Dean grouses as he slips back into bed. “And stop looking so damn happy!”

“It seems that at forty-eight, I still have it”, Castiel grins. “And now so have you, my beautiful pie-mad omega. The love of my life. The man of my dreams. The.....”

“Oh put a sock in it and just..... hold me”, Dean grumbles.

His alpha duly obliges, but it is a very loose hold that he exerts on his mate. Dean snuggles back into him, but the grip remains almost non-existent.

“Can't you just.... hold me closer?” Dean snarks.

“I am holding you”, Castiel says equably. “Is something wrong?”

Dean counts to ten before he says something that he, or at least his butt, would surely regret.

“Embrace me”, he says at last. “Grasp me. Hug me. Cradle me.”

“That last request sounded just like.....”

“Depends if you want your dick cut off or not”, Dean snaps.

Castiel sniggers, but pulls his mate into a proper.... embrace. Yes, that is what it is. And absolutely nothing else.

“And stop thinking of that damn word!” Dean grumbles.

“What word..... oof!”

Advantages of being this close; being able to hit your husband somewhere that will stop him saying such dangerous words. Now if only there was a way to stop that scent that is approximately one hundred and ten per cent pure smug.

+++

Monday 14th February, 1653

“Are you writing to Cromwell?” Dean asks casually as he relaxes on the sofa. He instinctively feels he is only carrying one child this time, despite his huge size, though he is sure he is more tired than when he had the twins.

“Yes”, Castiel says, frowning. “I cannot let this foul deed of Heselrige's (1) pass without commenting on it.”

His omega is silent. Too silent. Castiel looks over to him.

“You think that I should not?” he asks, surprised.

“I think”, Dean says, choosing his words carefully, “that you should perhaps take a time before writing. If you write something and send it off in haste, you may regret it later when it is in Cromwell's hands.”

“It is still wrong, though”, Castiel grumbles. “Using his knowledge of parliamentary procedure to
“Maybe just the one”, Dean grins. “He is a large fellow, the old Lobster.”

Castiel smiles at him.

++++

Tuesday 15th February, 1653

“The Navy is continuing to bring the rebellious colonies in the Americas to heel”, Castiel says as he reads his newspaper. It is not something he would normally do at the dinner table, but then his mate is currently somewhat occupied. With his sixth plate of custard.

“This kid hates pie, but he wants custard”, Dean grumbles as he pours out a seventh helping from the huge jug Charlie has just set in front of him. “He has no taste.”

“It could be a girl”, Castiel points out.

“Girls are not usually so demanding”, Charlie says with a smile. “Besides, we did that old watch over the belly trick the other week, and that said it was a boy.”

“By the way”, Castiel says innocently, “how is that young peasant girl that you and Dorothy took in the other week?”

The housekeeper looks sharply at Dean, but he is too intent on his custard to even notice. Castiel chuckles.

“I think you both sometimes forget that this is a country area”, he points out. “Few things travel faster than gossip, with the possible exception of bad news.”

“Her name is Alex – Alexandra – and she is doing all right”, Charlie says, clearly with some reluctance. “Her family over in Midstone died of the plague, and she had no-one left. Dorothy found her all alone when she went to collect the rent, and brought her back.”

“All right.”

She looks at him in surprise.

“You are not upset?” she asks cautiously.

“You both do your jobs very well, and earn your wages”, he says with a smile. “What you do with your money and behind your own doors is your own business, provided it does not impinge on your work here. I presume that this Alex is the new maid who was hiding in the cupboard when I went into the gallery the other day?”

The housekeeper nods.

“Well, set her up with a proper uniform and tell her that I do not bite”, Castiel says. “As I said, she is your responsibility, and I need not know the details. I am sure that you do not need to know what happens when Dean and I....”

“Castiel Earl of Bradstock, you bloody dare finish that sentence!”

The alpha smiles innocently. His mate helps himself to more custard.
Later that day, Dean's future offspring decides it does not like custard after all, and makes its change of mind felt with little or no warning.

Thursday 3rd March, 1653

“I really do not like this war with the Dutch”, Castiel says, pretending to read his letter whilst keeping a sharp eye on his omega. Dean had fallen off the couch the day before, and the alpha had snapped at him for being careless. The omega had snapped right back at his husband for being over-protective and Castiel, to his eternal mortification, had locked himself in his study and actually cried. Dean had to have been really out of it to have forgotten the terrible scent of unhappy alpha, and had had to spend some time coaxing his husband back to his usual self.

The omega sighs and tries to get comfortable. He is a little over three months from giving birth, and seemingly even bigger than when he had the twins, though the doctor has assured him he is only carrying one child this time. And he is even more tetchy, though he tries not to be.

“What has happened?” he asks.

“And inconclusive battle fought off the Isle of Portland”, Castiel says. “We are too evenly matched when it comes to our navies, and I do not feel that the two leading Protestant powers in Europe should fight each other when we have so many Catholic enemies. At least the French are too busy fighting amongst themselves and against the Spanish to cause much trouble.”

“I am so tired”, Dean complains. “I do not think I could even get up for pie.”

“Oh”, Castiel says with a smile. “Shall I get Charlie to give the one she is making to the staff, then?”

“You bloody dare!”

The alpha chuckles.

Thursday 21st April, 1653

Castiel sighs as he reads his latest letter.

“I feared as much”, he says heavily. “Cromwell had finally had enough, and dissolved the Rump Parliament. They brought it on themselves, really.”

He watches carefully as his mate waddles inelegantly to the couch, and tumbles onto it. His breath does not catch, nor does he only narrowly prevent himself from leaping to the omega’s aid, though there might be a slight flinch. Dean is testy enough as it is lately.

“I think I may have triplets after all”, the omega grouses. “And I’ve just been to the bathroom, but damned if I do not want to go again!”

Castiel suppresses a smile.

“I saw that!”
“Cromwell simply told them their business was done and locked them all out (2)”, Castiel says, choosing deflection as his best strategy. Dean has been a lot more irritable during this pregnancy, and he still has nearly two months to go. Their bedroom is now permanently downstairs, as the omega cannot get halfway up the long staircase before he needs the bathroom again. Castiel is silently thankful that he took the plumber's advice and had the new-style flush privies fitted on both floors.

“So now he is king in all but name”, Dean says grumpily. “And yet you still support him?”

“For now, I think he is the best thing for our country”, Castiel says carefully. “When he dies, perhaps then we can consider returning to a monarchy under the man I helped escape the country two years ago. I am sure that Cromwell suspects my involvement in that, but the man does not like being told what to think, and luckily several of his advisers have a habit of trying to tarnish my name with him.”

“But you will be all right when he goes?” Dean asks anxiously.

“We will be all right”, Castiel says firmly. “You, me, the twins and little Sandalphon (3) – if it is a boy - in there.”

Dean chuckles. His brother is going to be so chuffed that..... oh.

“Tinkles time again!” he grumbles, pulling himself up and waddling towards the bathroom. “Damn children!”

Castiel does not smile. At least not until his mate has left the room.

“I saw that one, too!”

+++++
Notes:
1) Sir Arthur Heselrige (1601-1661). One of the leading parliamentarian soldiers during the civil wars, his men were known as Lobsters because of their heavy armour. His talking out of a bill aimed at providing at least some support to the poor in society alienated him from Cromwell, and he spent the next seven years trying to secure an English republic. He was one of those sentenced to death on the Restoration in 1660, but died in the Tower before sentence could be carried out.
2) A bit less dramatic than the 1970 film Cromwell, which had the general storming into the Commons and throwing the royal sceptre on the floor. In fact that along with the other Crown Jewels had been sold off to raise money soon after Charles I's execution.
3) Named for an archangel thought by some to be the human formerly known as Enoch. One of the tallest angels, apparently.
Chapter Summary

75: Charlie has a spicy solution to getting Dean through his second birth, during which Castiel does not faint. The alpha puts on an impromptu art exhibition for his omega, and gets himself even further into Cromwell's good books with some helpful advice. A man of the cloth gets thrown through a glass window because he patted the wrong omega, and there is a man called Praise-God (you should see what he called his son!).

Saturday 11th June, 1653

Dean has to hand it to Charlie; that spice-soaked towel she had draped over him when this torture had begun – yes, the one he had laughed at before the next contraction had kicked in and made him say something that no omega should ever say, let alone to a woman – seems to work. He has been half out of it throughout the birth, still able to push but dulled from at least some of the pain. And the blubbering alpha, crying buckets as he holds Dean's hand and telling him what a wonderful omega he is and how much he loves him – well, not really helping, much, but at least he hasn't fainted this time.

Yet.

Oddly, he feels a lot emptier than he did after the twins were born, as he is helped-carried out of the birthing area and across to their bedroom, where he can be surrounded by the reassuring scent of his alpha. Yes, there are tears, blubbering and a near-breakdown, but Castiel makes it and lies down beside him as Charlie hands Dean the new baby.

"The biggest beta I have ever seen", she exclaims. "Eight pounds or thereabouts, though I wager he'll be a tall one as well."

Dean grins weakly, and places the baby (who, yes, is kind of big, but still damnably cute) on his chest. The new Sandalphon Milton seems to take an eternity to think about things, but finally latches on and begins to suckle.

"At least it is only one this time", Castiel grins. He looks worse than Dean, bearing in mind all he did was stand there and blubber.

"At least someone did not faint this time!" Dean teases. The alpha pouts mournfully, which makes his mate laugh, then runs a hand gently over the baby's fair hair and sighs contentedly. The omega looks up at his husband, tears in his eyes.

"What is it, beloved?" Castiel asks gently.

"I do not think I have ever been this happy!" Dean says. "Lord, look at you, turning me into as big a sap as you are!"

Castiel sniggers, and they both look down happily as their new son enjoys his first meal.

+++++
Tuesday 16th August, 1653

“Lansdown on sea.”

Dean looks up in confusion.

“What?” he splutters through a mouthful of pie. Castiel refrains from commenting. The last time he had said how adorable his mate was, Dean had huffed for a whole day, and demanded lots of sex to make up for it. Later (too late) he had remarked that perhaps it might have been better for Castiel to get them both to the bedroom first, rather than do it in the study. By the large window.

The alpha smiles at the happy memory.

“We have engaged the Dutch off Texel, one of the Frisian Islands (1),” he says. “We drove them back, but our ships had to abandon the blockade we had maintained since our great victory off North Foreland two months ago.”

“So not a victory, then?” Dean asks.

“That was why I drew the comparison to Lansdown”, Castiel says. “The battle was two weeks ago and seemed a draw, but we have since learnt that the great Dutch commander, Tromp, subsequently died of his wounds. Cromwell will be delighted, as the Dutch leaders will now accept a peace that precludes them from helping the exiled king.”

“Foreign support has not done the Stuarts much good so far”, Dean says.

“Remember that the king’s sister, the Princess Royal (2), is the mother of the infant Prince William, who may well rule the Netherlands one day”, Castiel points out. “If they can ever get their act together that is; merchant republics seem to spend too much time worrying about finances and not enough about defending their own borders.”

“Finances brought down our king”, Dean says.

“Just like I am about to bring down your trousers!” Castiel grins.

Damn horny alpha!

+++

Saturday 7th October, 1653

“Cromwell is pleased with me”, Castiel smiles as he and Dean take their places at the breakfast table. Sandalphon has proved to be as much as a handful as his elder brothers put together, but for once he is fed and sleeping, even if both his parents look like they have been dragged through Purgatory.

“Why is that?” Dean asks, puzzled. “I thought you said there was a mutiny down at Chatham (3). Surely that would make him angry?”

“It was what did not happen that has put him in a good mood”, Castiel explains. “Yes, three ships mutinied, but they wanted to take twelve others with them. Only the better terms and conditions that Cromwell gave the Navy last year – on my advice – helped to prevent that.”

“Is he going to let us off paying taxes?” Dean asks hopefully. The alpha chuckles.

“He does not work like that”, he says. “But if in the future I need a favour from him for anything, I
am sure it will be granted much more readily now. And in the current climate, that is all to the good.”

“What do you mean?” Dean asks.

“There are some in parliament who resent my friendship with the great general”, Castiel says equably. “Mostly it is jealousy, because they want influence for themselves. But one or two of them I am keeping a close eye on, in case they try anything. I always make copies of any letter I send him, and keep one here in case the one I send is intercepted or tampered with in some way.”

“We cannot even trust the government's own postal service”, Dean mutters crossly. “What is the world coming to?”

“I know”, Castiel sighs. “Still, at least we still have pie for afters today.”

“Yes!”

Wednesday 30th November, 1653

Dean stares in confusion at the scene before him. His alpha chuckles.

“They are all merely on loan”, he says, gesturing to the six paintings each on its own stand in the gallery. “I just wanted to know what you think of them.”

“Are you buying them?” Dean asks. He knows that paintings can be a good investment, and that one of the many changes Castiel had had made to the house when he took over was to re-site the gallery to a drier and better ventilated room. Although way too many of Castiel's ancestors still look constipated, in Dean's humble opinion.

“Not as such”, Castiel smiles. “But I thought it would be nice to have some portraits done of Crispin as the next earl, next summer when the light is better and he is close to three. These are each from some of the best artists in London; I invited each of them to send a picture saying we would pick one.”

Dean feels warm at the chosen pronoun. We. Not I.

“You do know it is going to be impossible to get him to stay still long enough to be painted”, he points out with a smile. “The boy is a bundle of energy.”

“I suppose I shall have to bribe him with pie”, Castiel says off-handedly. “That seems to work well enough round here.”

Dean shoots him a sharp look, not believing the innocent expression for a moment.

“And in a few years' time, we can have one done of the whole family”, Castiel continues. “Although perhaps by then we might need a bigger canvas.”

Dean blushes. Insatiable alpha! It is a pleasant thought, though.

Sunday 5th November, 1653

Castiel's estate covers a wide area, and it has several churches on its lands. Though the alpha is not
overly religious he sees it as his duty to provide some sort of spiritual leadership to his people, so he attends one service at Stalwarton's village church every Sunday and, on alternate Sundays, he visits at least one of the other churches on his estate. Dean goes with him to Stalwarton but not to the other churches except for Charlton, where he actually quite likes the friendly vicar Reverend Forrester.

Which is why he is more than a little annoyed that, on this particular visit to the church across the river, the old cleric is not there. He has been replaced 'by order of parliament' with some black-frocked alpha Puritan called Reverend Miller. And the man is a Pain! Dean is not surprised that the pews are half-empty; he himself is rapidly losing the will to live, and he is sure that some of the parishioners are not so much looking in their prayer-books to find the texts the idiot keeps throwing out but more to find something to distract them from the sheer tedium of a man who is endlessly fond of his sleep-inducing monotone. That makes a total of one person on the whole planet!

Finally the ordeal is over, and they get to leave. Unfortunately the cleric is waiting for them outside the door, and immediately launches into a bitter complaint about how the locals are refusing to pay their tithes (4). Little wonder, Dean thinks, though when the tiresome cleric begins banging on how about this is all Castiel's fault as lord of the manor, the omega can see the tell-tale twitch in the alpha's neck that signifies annoyance.

“And this is your pretty omega?” the cleric says condescendingly. “How sweet! Do you rent him out at all?”

And he reaches out to actually pat Dean on the head.

To be honest, Dean had never really liked the large glass window next to the door, where in times gone past the old entrance had been before the church had been expanded. The window had been plain and boring – and now it is smashed to pieces, plain and boring, with a shocked cleric lying amidst the shards.

“Lay one dirty hand on 'my pretty omega'”, Castiel growls, “and you will be meeting with the Lord our God rather sooner than you may have planned for, sire! And if you are not out of this establishment by sunset this evening, I shall not be responsible for my actions! Good day!”

He turns on his heels, grabs Dean and heads off towards their carriage. The omega does not smile, not even when the locals start to applaud.

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Sunday 12th November, 1653

It is so good to have Reverend Forrester back again. And Castiel is paying for a nice new window as well.

+~+~+

Friday 16th December, 1653

“Yes and no."

Dean stares confusedly at his husband.

“Come again?” he prompts.

“Yes, the Commonwealth as such is finished”, Castiel explains. “Cromwell's decision to accept the
title of Lord Protector means we now have a Protectorate, although he is calling it 'a Protectorate of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland'.

“I bet the Scots and the Irish do not wish to be so protected”, Dean snarks.


“Did he really expect his 'selected parliament' to do any better than an elected one?” Dean asks scornfully. “No wonder they called it the Barebones Parliament!”

“Actually the name comes from one Praise-God Barebone (5), a Baptist merchant”, Castiel explains. “But you are right; it was an experiment that failed. What next, I wonder?”

Dean notices the change in his husband's scent, and grins. He has a very good idea of exactly what comes next. Him, with any luck!

In which he is soon very happy to be proven quite correct.

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Notes:
1) A chain of small islands stretching from the Netherlands past Germany to Denmark's west coast. Texel, the largest island, is just over sixty square miles in area (roughly the size of the District of Columbia).
2) A title created for Charles I's daughter on the urging of his wife, who was jealous of the French equivalent Madame Royale. Initiated in 1642, it reminded many of Henrietta Maria's Catholic links, which was unhelpful at the time. Like Henrietta Maria, really.
3) A Kentish port about thirty miles east of London, then also a naval dockyard and possessed of a fair-sized natural harbour. A useful place for ships defending the capital.
4) A historical church tax, as the name suggests usually one-tenth of the value of someone's wealth, and generally paid in kind.
5) A typical Puritan name. His poor son got called Nicholas If-Jesus-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-Thee-Thou-Hadst-Been-Damned Barebone, and for some reason preferred to be called just Nick! Praisegod was one of those to face justice on the Restoration in 1660, but parliament accepted a plea for mercy from his wife on the grounds that he was sick and not expected to live long. She may have stretched the truth somewhat, as he lived until 1679!
Chapter Summary

76: Castiel makes a Daring move, and gets reduced to a happy pile of goo by his panty-clad omega. The exiled king's latest schemes unravel in Scotland, and young Crispin proves to have unfortunately good hearing. Cromwell is the subject of more than one plot against his life, whilst there are carrots that are definitely not purple. And Dean is suspicious of Castiel's latest literary gift.

Tuesday 24th January, 1654

Dean's thirty-tenth (shut up!) birthday. And his husband is a complete bastard of the first order, who after changing the family flag for one containing a certain number in the ten-times table just over thirty-nine is definitely not getting laid tonight.

Make that probably.

Dean is celebrating this particular birthday in three ways. First, all the estate workers are receiving extra allowances of firewood to help them through the severe winter. Second, the people of Daring (1), a village a few miles east of Wolfstown that Castiel had added to the estate at the end of the previous year, are having their villeinage (2) revoked, as well as various long overdue repairs down to their properties. And third.....

Oh come on! How often does an omega get to reduce his alpha to a snivelling pile of nerves in this day and age? And that look Castiel always gives him afterwards, as if Dean has hung the moon for him – well, the old Dean Winchester would have surely considered himself unworthy of even a mate, let alone such adoration.

The new one just feels damn smug!

Ah. Castiel's breathing is returning to normal, Dean notes. He does not smirk (much) as the alpha turns to look at him, then lets out a shocked gasp as he sees the new panties his mate has just slipped on. The blue eyes somehow darken even more.

“Killing me!” the alpha gasps as the omega manoeuvres into position.

Dean just grins as he lowers himself and his husband slides effortlessly home, growling his alpha satisfaction. Life is good right now.

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Thursday 23rd February, 1654

Castiel shakes his head in disbelief as he reads his latest letter.

“Bad news?”

“Not as such.”
“Huh?”

“You remember the other week, when I said I was a little concerned that we had not secured Scotland?”

“Impossible to secure, looking at the map”, Dean said. “A lot of hills and valleys and very few people.”

“Well, it seems the king's so-called supporters have pretty much done it for us.”

“Huh?”

Castiel looks at him adoringly. Dean knows that look; a certain alpha is about to say something annoying.

“If you say anything starting with a 'C' that rhymes with mute, I am not putting out any time soon”, the omega snarks.

“And my hopes for a fun evening in go right down the... chute!” Castiel grins. The pout is predictable, and just as adorable.

“Scotland”, Dean grouses. He is not... that word, nor will he ever be. Even his mother knows not to use it, though like his husband she has developed an annoying habit of Not Saying it very loudly.

“The king sent over one of his major-generals to lead the clans in their Highland uprising”, Castiel says. “The Earl of Glencairn (3), who had done so much to get the whole thing going, was prepared to step aside, but then his replacement chose his own man George Munro (4) as his second-in-command. And to put the cherry on the cake....”

Dean glares at him.

“Sorry”, Castiel says un-apologetically. “To put the cherry on the... pie, Munro and the earl then insulted each other and fought a duel. They both survived, but the reports are that their army, such as it is, is already falling apart.”

“With friends like that”, Dean sighs.

“Yes”, Castiel agrees. “It is probably all for the best, given their limited chances of achieving anything. Whilst Cromwell lives – and many wish him long life, if only to delay what might come after – the king has no hope.”

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Tuesday 14th March, 1654

Dean yawns as he slowly wakes up, and experiences a moment of panic before he remembers. Charlie and Dorothy are looking after Crispinian and Sandalphon, whilst his eldest son is playing with his cousin Andros and some coloured blocks on the floor. Andros’ papa Sachiel is keeping a watch on them both from across the room.

“Sorry for nodding off like that”, Dean says ruefully. Castiel had been particularly rough last night (Dean had asked for it), and enjoyable as it had been, the omega feels shattered today.

“It's all right”, Castiel's cousin smiles. He and his partner Andrew have done well of late, the latter unexpectedly inheriting a share of the family estate when his father had died in a fall from a horse,
and have moved into Bell Place in Hampton village. Dean is pleased at this, since his fellow omega now looks like missing out on inheriting Stalwarton. Though judging from his current size, he is 'coping'. “The boys are no trouble.”

“Though young Andros looks like he will be as tall as his father”, Dean observes.

“Daddy says I may get a horse of my own soon”, Andros says carefully. The boy has a slight speech impediment, but provided he speaks slowly the words come out all right.

“A pony”, Sachiel corrects. “That is the word for a small horsey.”

“My daddy and papa do that”, Crispin says. They all look at him, confused.

“Do what?” Sachiel asks.

“Play horsey. I heard Papa ask daddy if he wanted to do it the other day, and daddy used a bad word before he said yes.”

Sachiel seems to be suddenly taken with a coughing fit. Dean just wants to die!

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Thursday 14th April, 1654

“You cannot force people to do something against their will”, Castiel says as they sit at breakfast that morning. “The plan will fail.”

“Cromwell rarely fails”, Dean says, scraping round the last remnants of his pie, which disappeared far too quickly for his liking. And he cannot even scrounge some off his husband, who had boring fruit and vegetables instead. “I doubt that he will listen to the Scots.”

“Forcing them into a union against their wishes will not end well”, Castiel says. “They will simply bide their time. They know Cromwell cannot last forever, and sooner or later one of his successors will let them loose again.”

Dean stares curiously at the thing his husband is eating.

“What is that?” he asks.

“A carrot, Dean.”

“But carrots are purple! (5) Everyone knows that!”

“This is a new variety, grown by the Dutch”, Castiel explains. “Their ruling family is the House of Orange, so they developed an orange carrot.”

“Disgusting!” Dean says firmly. “It will never catch on.”

One of the maids brings in a covered tray and sets it on the table next to the alpha. Castiel lifts the cover, and Dean's eyes immediately light up.

“Pie!”

“Yes, I decided to have some after all”, Castiel says. “I felt quite hungry, so....”

He stops. Dean's lower lip is trembling, and he looks set to break into tears at any moment. Castiel
sighs.

“I know when I am beaten”, he smiles. “It's all.....”

Dean has already grabbed the dish and is devouring its contents, in between emitting small whimpers of joy. The alpha suppresses a smile. His omega is happy, and that is all that matters.

“Yours”, he finishes.

His 'reward' is a satisfied belch and an adoring look. Definitely worth it.

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Saturday 14th May, 1654

“They came so close to killing Cromwell!” Dean marvels as he reads the newspaper from Oxford.

“Did they?”

The omega picks up on it at once. He knows his alpha well enough that anything out of the ordinary in his voice trips an alarm in the omega's mind.

“What do you know?” he demands. “Don't make me force it out of you?”

“And how would you do that?” Castiel grins. “With sex? Or withholding sex?”

It crosses Dean's mind that that second option is only available to him and a very small, if not infinitesimally tiny number of omegas across England. In far too many relationships the alpha would simply take what he wanted when he wanted, regardless of his mate's wishes on the subject. Judging from the dark cloud that crosses his husband's face, the same thought has occurred to him too.

“It is John Gerard” (6), Castiel says quietly. “He has been arrested.”

Dean sighs.

“I am only surprised they waited this long”, he says.

“Arrested shortly after his return from France”, Castiel says significantly. “The French government, which is currently housing the king and his family, is implicated in the plot to assassinate Cromwell.”

Dean thinks silently that the parliamentarian spymasters had Gerard pegged a long time back, and were just giving him enough rope to... no, that is not a good analogy, even if it will soon be all too accurate.

“At least one of the London newspapers is saying that the whole thing is a set-up by Cromwell to make his government more popular”, Castiel says with a sigh. “I made quite clear to the king when we parted three years back that, whilst I would do what I could to make him king again some day, I would never resort to murder. Furthermore, I would work actively to prevent the killing of anyone on any side of the contention. Seemingly he did not listen.”

“Kings rarely do”, Dean says with a sigh.

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It's barbaric!” Dean says hotly.

“Yes”, Castiel sighs, “but self-inflicted. This John Southworth used his position as a tender of the sick to try to covert people who were weak and vulnerable. Let alone what it will do to them in the next world – it was wrong. And he must have known someone would tell on him sooner or later.”

“Still I mean, hung, drawn and quartered”, Dean says with a shudder. “A horrible punishment, that belongs to another age.”

“Mankind will always have a brutal element in its make-up”, Castiel says. “I do not like bull-baiting, cockfights or the barbaric boxing matches that so often end in death or severe injury, but I see their existence in society as a way of releasing our baser instincts.”

Dean nods. Castiel hands him a book.

“What is this?” the omega asks.

“Cinnus, sive Adversaria miscellanea, in quibus Sacrae Scripturae primo, deinde aliorum scriptorum, locis aliquam multis lux redditur. (7)”

Dean just stares at him. Castiel chuckles.

“It is a rewriting of the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor between 161 and 180”, he says. He opens the book and reads from it. “Put an end once for all to this discussion of what a good man should be, and be one.”

Dean looks at him sharply.


“You did ask for something ancient to read”, Castiel says innocently. “I thought that this fitted the bill perfectly.”

“Hmph!”

Notes:

1) Real-life Weston-on-the-Green, 2016 population about 300, it lies about two miles east of the Hall and a mile north of the busy A34 that links the Midlands to the south. There were plans to build a huge eco-town that would have subsumed the village in this case, but they were fought off.

2) A villein was pretty much a slave in all but name, a worker tied to the estate or to the landowner of their property. The term derived from the Roman villa where such workers had to register annually in Roman times, and later became derogatory, hence the modern word ‘villain’.

3) William Earl of Glencairn (1610-1664). He quit the army that he had raised two weeks later, was arrested by Monck the following year, but managed to survive to just beyond the Restoration.

4) George Munro (1602-1693). He had rather too much form for this sort of behaviour, so his selection was a poor move on just about every level. The forces he continued to lead achieved nothing and fell apart before the following winter. He however did well upon the Restoration, even briefly running the English army between 1674 and 1677.

5) Carrots were indeed purple when introduced by the Romans to Britain about two thousand years ago, and the orange variety was one of several developed much later, alongside red and yellow varieties. The myth of carrots giving good night vision was propagated by the Royal Air Force during World War Two, to hide advances in radar and plane technology.
6) Gerard's Conspiracy. Three minor Royalists were arrested for the plot; Summerset Fox, most unusually, pleaded guilty to treason and was transported to Barbados. Peter Vowell and John Gerard were sentenced to death. It was widely thought of as a set-up, but that has never been proven. 7) 'Cinnus, or Adversaria miscellanea, the Sacred Scriptures, in which the first, and then others, and for a few places where the light is returned.' The work of the last of the Five Good Emperors, he was (in)famously followed by Commodus of 'Gladiator' infamy, who renamed Rome and all twelve months after himself, and eventually (192) got strangled in his bath by his wrestling partner. As you do.
July-December 1654

Chapter Summary

77: The weather is not the only thing that is hot, as a summer rut works its wonders and means Dean gets to spend autumn throwing up again. Cromwell's new parliament proves completely useless, and Castiel realizes to his alarm that someone is after his beloved omega, and is prepared to destroy the alpha to get him. The earl is forced to resort to a side of the city of dreaming spires that does not merit inclusion in any tourist literature, although Charlie (luckily) has a little green book.

Monday 10th July, 1654

“Do you think it was a set-up?” Dean asks.

To his surprise, his husband does not answer. He does not even set down his book. The omega is confused.

“At least you told Cromwell, so he cannot doubt your loyalty”, Dean says.

A slight nod is all he gets over the top of the book. The omega feels annoyed.

“Did you also write to the king, and advise him against being associated with it?” he asks. The newspapers are rife with speculation that the recent Gerard's Conspiracy was nothing more than a Protectorate set-up. Castiel just nods.

“Cas!” Dean whines. “Pay attention!”

The alpha lowers his book, and too late, Dean sees that his eyes are red. And that is the same moment the scent hits him. Rut!

The omega makes it to the bedroom, albeit with inches to spare. His clothes do not make it to the next hour.

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Monday 18th September, 1654

Castiel had had all sorts of plans for celebrating his forty-fifth birthday. This had not been amongst them – but he could not have been happier at the sound of his beloved omega staggering out of the bathroom having thrown up for the fourth time in two days.

His beloved omega moans and makes an indicative if not somewhat obscene gesture, indicating his feelings most accurately. The alpha chuckles.

“A fourth child”, he smiles. “Perhaps an omega or a girl this time. Or another alpha or beta. I do not care, provided they are healthy. And that they do not each too much pie!”

“Please do not mention food!” Dean whines. “I shall never be able to eat another pie as long as I live! None of my children like pie!”
It is true, Castiel thinks, that the few days of morning sickness thus far have been considerably worse for this one than for either of his first two pregnancies. Morning, afternoon and night, Dean has been unable to keep anything down for any length of time, even his beloved pie.

They are interrupted as the twins, now almost three, tumble noisily into the room. Neither of the young alphas has yet mastered the art of entering a room quietly, or for that matter doing anything quietly. Behind them comes Charlie, looking exhausted. She hands a letter to Castiel and a cold damp towel to Dean, who whines in gratitude. The alpha opens and reads his letter.

“Just as I thought”, he says resignedly. “Now the war with the Dutch is won, Cromwell’s Protectorate Parliament (1) is about as useless as his last one. Though it is a lot fairer; my old constituency was one of many to be abolished.”

“Fairer seats are long overdue”, Charlie says. “Seven people elected who some alpha toff of a nobleman tells them to elect is just plain wrong.”

“Some alpha toff of a nobleman could always start inquiring as to why certain outspoken bossy housekeepers hand out the food they buy with his money to the local poor, when they think said alpha toff is not looking”, Castiel says dryly. She blushes.

“Point”, she mutters. “I had better be getting these two their next meal; they are always wanting food.”

“Food!” Dean moans, his eyes widening as he makes a hurried exit for the privy. From what they hear through the open door, he does not make it.

“I’ll send a maid”, Charlie sighs.

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Monday 2nd October, 1654

There is one upside to his mate spending so much of his day throwing up, Castiel thinks wryly to himself as he rides over to Woodstock. And that is Dean being spared any worries about what the Earl of Bradstock has recently found out.

Castiel has long known that many in both the army and parliament resent his friendship with Cromwell, and that some of those are not above seeking to end it. But recent developments have led him to suspect that at least one of those who dislike him has a rather more personal motive, and it involves a threat to his beloved Dean.

Castiel is, at heart, a simple alpha. Threats to his mate get removed. One way or another.

Fortunately money is a great incentive for people to change what passes for their loyalty, which is why he has a small bag of coin on him today. And his gun. And a spare dagger. He has no doubt that the low-life he is about to meet would make the world a considerably better place by leaving it, but he is resigned to the fact that, sometimes, one has to let the smaller fry escape so one can net the big fish.

Sometimes. If they deserve it.

He reins in outside a small cottage on the edge of town, but does not dismount. His hand is on his gun. A small rat-faced beta comes out of the cottage and leers at him.

“Mr. Azazel Jones?” Castiel says coolly.
“The very same”, the beta says flatly. “Your Grace. Will you come inside?”

“No”, Castiel says firmly. “We do not trust each other, and our little business can be conducted out here in the open. What do you know?”

“Money?” the beta says.

“Information”, Castiel replies. “I have never welshed on a debt, and I have no intention of sullying that reputation with you, sir. Proceed.”

The beta scowls, but does so.

“His name is Alistair Campbell”, he says. “At least that's what he calls himself; he has an East London accent, not a Scots one. He runs the Presidential Club in College Lane, Oxford.”

“Go on”, Castiel says coolly.

“It's little more than a whorehouse”, the beta says scornfully, “but several of the town councillors and a couple of the local guard are his clients, so it stays open. He was visiting Linton last December and saw your omega.”

Castiel growls angrily. The beta takes a step back in alarm.

“Look alpha, him, not me”, he says hurriedly. “He came back and said he would have your omega one day, and set about finding out who you were. He's very close, but I know he sent someone down to London last month for some reason, and they haven't come back as far as I know.”

Castiel nods, consideringly.

“I see”, he says darkly. “So be it. You shall have your money, Mr. Jones, and I strongly recommend an immediate trip to the Americas for... your health. Kindly bear in mind that your old master is not the only person it would be unwise to cross. Good day.”

He throws the bag of coin to the beta, who catches it and scurries back into the cottage. Castiel rides on.

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Tuesday 3rd October, 1654

Castiel is totally unsurprised when he receives a visitor at the Hall this morning. The fact that it is a lady would doubtless surprise many if they knew of the reason for her visit, but thankfully Dean is having what he calls a 'bed-in', which is basically regular supplies of food and equally regular visits to the privy.

“Madam”, the alpha says courteously, nodding to his visitor, who is almost certainly the most dangerous woman in Oxfordshire. She curtsies, then places a familiar bag of coin on Castiel's desk. He sighs heavily.

“You must have known that he would run back to his master and try for more money”, she says pointedly, “otherwise you would never have had me follow him in the first place.”

Mistress Theresa McKeon is one of the foremost assassins in the country. Castiel got her name through Charlie's little green book, and very pointedly did not ask how his housekeeper had come by it. Nobility is sometimes knowing when not to ask.
“I considered it highly probable”, he admitted. He extracts a second purse from the desk and hands it over to the woman who, he notes, pockets it without counting it first.

“No-one double deals with me, my lord”, she smiles. “At least, not more than once. May I be allowed a question?”

“Of course”, Castiel says.

“Do you wish any action taken against Mr. Campbell?”

“Secondarily, perhaps”, Castiel says. Seeing her confusion he continues, “I would prefer to deal with that excuse for a human being myself, bearing in mind the personal nature of his offence. But I do not underestimate so wily an opponent. In the event of anything happening to me, I have set aside a sum of money for you which will be yours if he follows me into the hereafter within a week. It is triple your usual rate.”

That does get a reaction.

“You clearly want him gone”, she says. “I can understand. Is it acceptable for me to call on Mistress Bradbury before leaving?”

“Most certainly”, Castiel smiles. “And thank you for your time.”

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Later that day Castiel speaks to his housekeeper himself, to ask if she has a different kind of contact for a set of tasks that are... well, questionable. He is not surprised when she supplies him with three names without even opening her book. Possibly a little concerned, but not really surprised.

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Sunday 5th November, 1654

Dean is sure that the next time they need to fill the ornamental lake round behind the house, they should just wait till he gets pregnant again. Honestly, he has never been to the privy so much in his entire life! This child was obviously going to be a champion marksman, judging from the way that they seemed to unerringly target Dean's bladder on a regular basis.

“Lime juice?” Castiel offers. The omega scowls at him, unsure as to whether his husband is teasing him.

“Like I need it!” he grumbles. The child's timing sucked; Dean had been caught short in the middle of some very pleasurable manly embracing the night before, quite ruining the mood. And the fact that he knew his alpha wanted to laugh but was reining it in because he was so considerate – somehow that made it worse.

“I won't be able to see the guy burn tonight”, Dean pouts. The bonfire is traditionally held in the field between the village and the river, but at the moment that seems a million miles away for an omega virtually chained to the privy.

He misses his alpha's knowing grin.

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Later, Castiel surprises Dean by suggesting they use their upstairs bedroom for a change. He fusses
over the omega like a mother hen all the way up the stairs; Dean pouts and pretended he doesn't enjoy it all the way. Once in their room Castiel opens the huge balcony door. Dean shivers as the November air rushes in.

“Cas!” he doesn't whine.

The alpha chuckles and beckons him over. Dean pulls his thick dressing-gown tighter and joins his husband on the balcony – and freezes in shock. There, on the normally pristine back lawn, his alpha has had the estate workers set up the annual bonfire. The alpha steps forward.

“My mate and I are ready”, he calls to the men below. “Let's send this guy up in flames!”

There is an answering cheer, and within moments the flames are such that even at his distance, Dean can feel them. This is so nice. This is so absolutely....

“Privy!” he mutters, rushing back inside. “Damn children!”

He just knows his alpha is holding in the snigger until he is out of the room.

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Saturday 29th December, 1654

Castiel considers his options (2). He really does not want to stoop to murder – Mr. Azazel Jones had his chance to do the right thing and chose the wrong option, so that was different – but he sees little choice. At least he has been able to find Mr. Campbell's representative in London, who had obtained a minor government post and was trying to work through to gain access to the Lord Protector. An incriminating letter from a secret Royalist who was threatening to become a nuisance to Castiel found in his quarters after an anonymous tip-off had landed both men squarely in the manure-pile, and they were both currently enjoying some of the Tower's less salubrious accommodation.

At least his beloved Dean, currently fast asleep in their bed and muttering some nonsense about reapers – oddly the omega can never remember any of these ramblings when Castiel asks him on waking – does not know of the danger posed by the vile piece of human excrement that lives only a dozen or so miles away. And the alpha will make every effort to see it stays that way. His omega is far too precious to ever know about such things.

He sighs heavily and eases himself down before wrapping himself protectively around his omega, who makes a noise that is definitely not a purr. At least if a certain alpha knows what is good for him! Castiel can feel the new life growing inside his mate, and he prays that 1655 will bring both a happy event and the removal of the threat to all three of them.

One way or another.

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Notes:
1) The 'success' of the First Protectorate Parliament can be judged by the number of the eighty-four bills they had to consider that actually made it to law. Nought.
2) Castiel could of course have challenged Alistair to a duel, but he knew the man would almost certainly cheat in an attempt to win.
Chapter Summary

78: Dean has a button, and Charlie is horrified when her inquiry into clothing purchases makes her wish that she had not asked. With Mistress McKeon's help Castiel removes the worldly threat of one Alistair Campbell by removing Alistair Campbell from this world, mercifully without his omega knowing the whole truth - though Dean is a little surprised at what Castiel brings home that evening. The king's latest plan to seize power nearly ends up in quarters, and Dean has two Cas'es to cope with.

Wednesday 24th January, 1655

Dean knows that Castiel is stressed just now, what with the severe winter, his mate's pregnancy and a tenant he had thought trustworthy being caught stealing from his winter food stores. So as his loving and dutiful omega, Dean has little choice but to use even his bloated body to please and calm his husband as much as he can, whatever he himself feels about it.

All right, he feels damn happy (and occasionally damn sore), but still. Dean is a good omega. He still finds it odd, if truth be told, that his pregnancy seems to actually increase the alpha's libido even more. Oh the tales he will be able to tell his children when they are older, and the joy he will get as they run screaming from the room in horror at their parents doing...

He hears his alpha entering the dressing-room, and a shudder run through him. A delicious and anticipatory one.

“Were you right?” he calls out, cursing his way too high voice.

“Yes”, Castiel says from his room. “Cromwell dissolved the parliament - again. I think their trying to stay on got to him just like when the old Rump tried it.”

Dean grins as his husband enters their bedroom, wearing his familiar long coat. Castiel had mentioned bringing him something for his mate's thirty-eleventh birthday, but he is empty-handed.

Then the omega's eyes drop, and he notices something rather odd. Castiel is wearing the long coat, but apparently no trousers.....

That is the moment when the coat swings open, and Dean whimpers. Wh... wh.... white lace!

Well, if the sex does kill him then at least he will go with a smile on his face!

+~+~+

Thursday 25th January, 1655

“I am going into Oxford”, Castiel says as he comes into the breakfast room. “Does the house need anything?”

“We are fine”, Charlie says. “I thought you went only last week?”

“But I saw them washing your coat this morning and.....”

She stops and pales.

“Oh God, you two!” she says in mock disgust. “Honestly, have you no shame?”

“No, but I have a souvenir coat-button”, Dean grins.

She flounces out, and they both laugh.

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Thursday 1st February, 1655

Castiel's problem is a simple one, yet his life is on the line if he gets it wrong. Over the past few months some well-directed letters and careful planting of evidence by Charlie's 'friends' (and the alpha is really starting to wonder about that bakery in London) has pretty much devastated Mr. Alistair Campbell's business, exposing all the top people who use it to the full force of the modern media. He has also, after some thought, set himself up so that his target has an opportunity to strike at him. It is fortunate that Mistress McKeon has taken on Charlie's and Dorothy's charge Alex as a potential successor, as the young girl is able to take covert messages between the Hall and the assassin's house in one of the nicer parts of Oxford. Though today Castiel receives a visit from the lady herself.

“I am here about the chapel dedication”, she says.

“For the new school”, Castiel nods. Next month he is due to attend the consecration of a small chapel on the site, which if not complete at least looks like a school now. It had been planned to be a quiet affair, but it will now be a small civic event with speeches and all the other things Castiel would normally eschew. Because that will offer his enemy the perfect chance to strike at him.

“Yes”, she says gravely. “Your moves against him have definitely been noted. I do not think he can be sure that you are behind his sudden run of misfortune, but he is not one to dally on such matters. He means to kill you.”

“A gun or a bomb?” Castiel asks calmly. “Cowards like him will use a distance weapon rather than risk their own scrawny necks.”

“Both. He plans to set a small bomb off nearby, then shoot you in the ensuing confusion. He has rented a small house overlooking the stage where the ceremony will take place.”

“Good”, Castiel says with a smile. “And much as I would quite like for you to have the pleasure of dispatching him quickly and efficiently to join the Devil in Hell, I wish to be there myself when he realizes his end has come. Just to make sure, of course.”

“That will be more risky”, she points out.

“Not if I plan sufficiently”, he says confidently. “But I shall need the help of one or two other people you may know whose talents, shall we say, may not quite be on the right side of the law.”

“Name them”, she says.

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Monday 5th March, 1655

“I wish I could come”, Dean says regretfully. “But.... you know.”

Castiel knows. Dean is about ready to pop, and had it not been for certain other events that are scheduled for today, he would be more than happy to have his omega along. Fortunately Dean is going nowhere except to the privy with increased regularity. And no, the omega is not allowed to name their new child 'Tinklia' or 'Priviel'!

“A lot of pompous people making boring speeches”, the alpha says with a shrug. “I am only doing it for the publicity. Yes, I can see why you would do want to put yourself through that. If the baby comes whilst I am down there, send Ezekiel or Gadreel to fetch me back. I do not care if it is in the middle of my speech, I will come right away.”

“Sappy alpha!” Dean teases. “Kiss me before you go.”

“Willingly”, Castiel smiles.

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He will have to pay Mistress McKeon a huge bonus, Castiel thinks as he stands behind a screen waiting for his prey to arrive. She may have gone a little overboard with the preparation – a large 'A' in what he fervently hopes is red paint on the floor and a single chair at the point of the letter – but it is certainly dramatic. And from the soft creaking of the stairs, his target is approaching.

The door opens and Mr. Alistair Campbell enters in silence. He is much as Mistress McKeon has described him; a scrawny blond beta whose quality clothes hang on his gaunt frame. He stares curiously at the chair, then makes his way over to the slightly open window. From there, Castiel knows, he will have a perfect shot over to the stage opposite. He smiles slightly as the man staggers slightly before reaching the window, which he opens a little wider.

“Greetings, Mr. Campbell.”

Castiel steps out from behind the screen. The beta's reaction is immediate; he pulls out his flintlock and fires at a distance of barely five feet.

Nothing happens. Castiel smiles cruelly.

“Several things”, he says. “Firstly, on your way here you ran into two of the smartest pickpockets in fair Oxfordshire. One replaced your regular gun with a similar one that is unloaded, and the other.... yes, you have just realized that the dagger you keep in your inside pocket was also substituted. Though if you wish to threaten me with a blunted letter-opener, please do.”

“Smart-arse nob!” Alistair snarls. “What the fuck are you doing up here? And where's that pretty omega of yours?”

Castiel smiles evilly.

“He is safe back at the Hall”, he smiles. “And I am merely waiting for you to die.”

The beta looks at him uncertainly, then staggers sideways. He looks at the alpha in confusion.

“What?”

“I might also add that your morning beer – other drinks are far more healthy, by the way – was
laced with a heavy dose of slow-acting poison”, Castiel says, looking disinterestedly at his watch. “The servant involved was allowed his life on condition he quit the country, and unlike the late and un-lamented Mr. Azazel Jones he was wise enough to do. As you imbibed the poison some hours ago... ah, I see it is working.”

The beta lurches away from the window, and all but falls onto the chair on the huge 'A'.

“You tried to take my mate”, Castiel says simply. “You ruined the lives of countless omegas by reducing them to sex slaves – by the way, my men are removing them from your house as we speak, and I will be finding places on my estate for each and every one of them – and you tried to kill me. Now kindly hurry up and die, please. I have a ceremony to attend.”

The beta whines what is presumably an attempted obscenity, but slumps further against the chair. Castiel smiles cruelly, and checks his watch.

Alistair Campbell is no longer breathing by the time he leaves the room. He knows that he can rely on Mistress McKeon to dispose of the body.

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“Other people get gifts from their husbands”, Dean snarks that evening. “But not little old me. Oh no.”

“Old, yes”, Charlie mutters. “Hardly little.”

He bats at her but misses.

“My alpha comes back from a day out with twelve omegas!”

“I did not bring any of them into the Hall itself (1)”, Castiel says with a smile. “And since they were rescued from what was essentially a whorehouse, they have nowhere else to go. You know how I am with helpless omegas. Putty in their hands!”

Dean scowls at him.

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Monday 12th March, 1655

This time it is too much, and Dean passes out as soon as the birth is over (he still trails Castiel by several minutes though; the alpha is already unconscious on the floor, the useless lummocks). But there is no rest for the omega-daddy, and Dean is soon roused by his new son being held to his chest as the baby, showing more speed than any of his elder siblings, begins to suckle like his life depended on it.

“Another alpha”, Castiel smiles as he sips the gin Charlie brought him. “And dark hair. That is unusual.”

“He only needs a long-coat, and he’ll be a mini-Castiel”, Charlie says, as her staff work to clear up the mess. Normally Dean would be helped away form the birthing-area but for now he feels too weak to move – baby number four took ages to get with the programme and understand that the real world awaited - though the reassuring scent of his husband (who thankfully has come round after being as useful as ever) is very welcome.

“Cassiel”, the earl muses. “An alternative spelling for my own name, though some scholars say the
two were different angels. If he is to be cursed with my looks, then perhaps he should have my name as well.”

There is a pointed silence in the room.

“That”, Castiel says acidly, “is where a mate who wants to keep having pie and a housekeeper who wants to keep her job would say, ’nay, sire, the estate is truly blest to have such a handsome and caring alpha in charge of it.”


“And I need to go and sort out clothing and bedding for this little mite”, Charlie smiles.

Castiel does a mock sulk, but Charlie and Dean can see he is not really annoyed. He rolls his eyes at them both.

“Cassiel”, Dean mutters. “My son.”

Friday 16th March, 1655

“I warned him”, Castiel sighs. “I did say that, with the Army in such firm control of the country, there would be little appetite for any Royalist uprisings. And I have been proven right.”

“The king?” Dean asks, yawning. Apparently Mini-Milton Mark IV (as Charlie calls Cassiel) has yet to learn that babies need sleep, and unfortunately for Dean his omega nature means that he is completely at his offspring's beck and call for the first few weeks of his life, growing fearful if there is any distance between them. Even if it does mean that he himself falls asleep at the daftest times, and his alpha has to lay him out and cover him with a blanket. From what little he has pieced together, Dean suspects that Castiel is taking the boy to the back of the house for a couple of hours each time, so his poor tired omega-daddy can get some much-needed rest. Castiel is also just possibly behind the notes Dean finds when he wakes that tell him ringing the bell will summon a piece of pie.

There may or may not be a tear of gratitude at times like this, but if so it is a manly tear. His alpha is so good!

“The king”, Castiel confirms. “I think he is more realistic than his father, and just wanted to ’test the waters' with these uprisings. Most of them melted away before they got started; only the one in Salisbury got anywhere, and they were crushed when they tried to recruit in Devonshire, in what was once the most royalist of areas. And the price of the king being sure is more executions and people being transported to the Barbadoes again.”

“Hanging, drawing and quartering?” Dean asks, looking pale.

“I am writing to Cromwell asking him to commute the sentences to just hanging, or possibly beheading for the gentlemen (2)”, Castiel says. “I fear he may wish to make an example of at least the leaders, though.”

“Barbaric!” Dean mutters.

“People are”, Castiel says. “Science may be shuffling forwards and we may have stopped burning people at the stake, but humanity still has a long way to go before it can claim to be truly civilized. Indeed, I wonder if it ever will be?”
He stops, noting that his mate has a faraway look on his face. He smiles.

“A few more days to recover”, he promises, “and then I think my omega will be up for some truly uncivilized behaviour from his brute of an alpha.”

“Promise?” Dean asks eagerly.

Castiel laughs.

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Notes:
1) Castiel arranged for them all to be put up at the Roadhouse. Five were subsequently re-united with their families or mates, whilst the remaining seven (including two whose mates had actually sold them to Alistair for money) were all found positions on the estate. One of these will feature in a minor role later in this story.
2) Penruddock's Uprising; the battle mentioned was fought near South Molton in Devonshire. Cromwell, in a rare act of mercy, did 'reduce' the sentences of the ten ringleaders to two beheadings and eight hangings. Around seventy common folks who had joined the rebel army got transported to the Barbadoes, including apparently one man aged seventy-six!
April-November 1655

Chapter Summary

79: There is kale. The Holy Father in Rome has problems with what is and is not by the sea, whilst Castiel remembers what happens when the Romans tried to be smart and divvy up the country. The alpha gets a surprise when he visits a fellow nobleman's house, causing him to fear for his mate's reaction, and Dean considers German politics.

Saturday 28th April, 1655

“Say what you like about Cromwell”, Castiel says, “but he has certainly improved England's reputation in Europe. I would wager the Pope regrets his rudeness to him now.”

“Why?” Dean asks, letting Cassiel suckle at his breast. His husband shoots the baby an envious look, and the omega chuckles.

“The milk bar will still be open later, alpha”, he says with a smile. “The pope?”

“The Pope has been encouraging the Duke of Savoy to persecute the Waldensians, a group of Swiss Protestants”, Castiel says, licking his lips. “When Cromwell objected, the Pope told him that the power of the English Navy could never reach the mountains of central Europe.”

“True”, Dean agrees.

“So Cromwell said yes, but they could sail into the Mediterranean and flatten the coastal towns of the Papal States (1)”, Castiel smiles. “The Pope took the hint, and the duke has been told to lay off. We may still need to get the French to put more pressure on him, but it is good that England is leader of the Protestant cause.”

“We could still be Protestant under a King Charles II”, Dean points out.

“I rather fear our potential monarch's Protestantism is as shallow as his late father's”, Castiel says with a sigh. “Ah well, what will be will be. I am but one mighty cock in a little omega.”

Dean glares at him.

“I mean one little cog in a mighty wheel”, Castiel corrects. “Oopsie!”

Dean still glares at him.

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Monday 4th June, 1655

“So Cromwell did not listen to you?” Dean says.

Castiel sighs. It has been a generally stressful day out on the estate with lots of small problems that needed sorting out by him in person, and he had come home exhausted. Fortunately a hot bath and a prolonged manly holding session (both with his favourite omega) have helped make things better.
“I did not expect him to over this”, he says. “He is quite set on this plan for major-generals, or governors as he calls them, to run the regions.”

“Why is it so bad?” Dean asks.

“The Romans tried the same thing in their day”, Castiel points out. “They started out with one rebellious province, so split it first into two and later into four (2), thinking it would make it harder for someone to become emperor from a smaller base. It just resulted in four times as many efforts. It will only take one such person to realize they have lots of men at their command, and wait for Cromwell to die before making their move.”

“Does he not see that?”

“He thinks it a risk worth taking to keep the local militias under control, especially with parliament persistently trying to reduce the size of the Army because of the cost”, Castiel says with a sigh, pulling his omega even closer. “Ah well, let us just lie here and cu.....”

Dean shoots him a warning look.

“Quietly enjoy the evening?”

“Hmph!”

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Thursday 9th August, 1655

“George Monck.”

“Who?” Dean asks lazily. His brother and sister-in-law are down for a holiday, although somehow Castiel inveigled them into looking after all the children whilst the earl and his mate have been to check out a property the former was thinking of acquiring not far south of Oxford. They had spent the night there, though Dean had not gotten much sleep. And it had not helped that, just as they were riding away from the place, Castiel had suddenly ‘remembered’ that there was a lonely barn along the road into the place. Not for the first time (and hopefully not for the last) Dean utters up a silent prayer of thanks to the creator of the padded saddle.

“Monck is Cromwell's main man in Scotland”, Castiel says. “I advised the king not to, but he insisted on writing to him to see if he could be won round. He was a Royalist once.”

“And?”

“Monck forwarded the letter straight to London.”

“So?” It is a warm summer's day, and they are in no particular rush to get home. Sammy can enjoy playing lord of the manor and running after all the children for a while longer.

“I do think that Monck may still be persuaded, one day”, Castiel muses. “Though Cromwell's going ahead with the division of the country into regions and the appointment of major-generals for each one, well, it suggests his grip on things is as firm as ever. At least he went for a large rather than a small number of regions.”

Dean nods. Castiel chuckles.

“You were thinking of your alpha getting a firm grip on you, were you not?” he teases.
“You could not know that”, Dean insists.

“No”, Castiel says, “but in view of the fact that you have not noticed what is coming up ahead, I thought it more than likely.”

Dean frowns and looks ahead along the road, to where an old barn sits in the middle of a field..... oh.

He feels that he is about to achieve the impossible, and be even more grateful for that padded saddle.

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He is. And when he walks into the Hall with a broad smile on his face, a brand-new hickey and a definite limp, his brother's scandalized look is just an added bonus!

+++++

Tuesday 18th September, 1655

Dean had planned to celebrate his alpha's forty-sixth birthday in much the same way as he had marked so many of its predecessors – horizontally – but all his plans are put on hold when he hears the front door slamming, followed quickly by said alpha storming into the room.

“I do not believe it!” his husband almost shouts.

Dean quirks an eyebrow at him. Castiel never looks tidy – that, Dean has long decided, is impossible – but now he looks even more ruffled than usual.

“What is wrong?” he asks. “You said you went to see the Earl of Wychwood.”

“Yes, for my pains”, Castiel grumbles. “And I am barely in the house when a strange omega comes up to take my coat.”

“So?” Dean asks, confused. An omega footman is a bit unusual, but surely that does not account for his husband's perturbation.

“And goes and starts scenting me!”

Dean's eyes widen.

“What?” he yells.

“I know”, Castiel says, looking disgusted. “Apparently His Grace knew I was married but, and I quote, ‘well Milton, a second omega is good for when the first one wears out, what?’ I really despair of the English nobility and their caveman attitudes!”

Dean sighs. His husband is right; too many people have exactly those attitudes.

“I am going upstairs for a very thorough bath, to get that foul creature's scent off of me”, Castiel says firmly. “Then I want to see you in our bedroom in half an hour and have you scent me thoroughly. There is only one omega I belong to, and whose scent I am willing to wear.”

He strides from the room at speed. Dean feels a pricking at the back of his eyes, but he does not cry.
At least, not until he gets to their room and finds that his alpha is wearing a new purchase from the 'special shop' in Woodstock. Then he does allow himself one whimper, but it is a manly one.

Oh yes it is!

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Monday 22nd October, 1655

“I think our modern media are becoming desperate”, Dean says as he peruses the latest newspaper from Oxford. “The most exciting thing in this is that we have apparently appointed a new ambassador to Brandenburg (3). Whoop de do!”

“Do not mock the Brandenburgers”, Castiel says with a smile. “I know there are lots of small German duchies, but they are one of the more important ones, even if their lands are so scattered.”

“The maps of the place look like some mapmaker was on the beer”, Dean says. “And calling themselves kings? Really?”

“One of their holdings is a country called Prussia (4), hundreds of miles to the east”, Castiel explains. “Because of its strategic position on the Baltic is it a kingdom; a small one to be sure, but the rulers of it can call themselves kings as of right.”

“Nice work if you can get it”, Dean mutters. “I bet the poor peasants get screwed either way!”

“I do not know about that”, Castiel says. He stands up and starts to undress. “Let us see how it feels when 'some poor peasant' gets screwed by their overlord, shall we not?”

Dean grins, and goes to lock the study door before complying.

+++

Sunday 5th November, 1655

Dean folds his arms and stares at his alpha, who gives him the sort of innocent look that is several miles beyond belief.

“It could still be an aphrodisiac”, he says with a smirk. Dean's scowl intensifies.

“You said, and I quote, that the effects of this new vegetable were unpredictable”, he says crossly.

“Unpredictable' does include 'dick”’, Castiel grins.

Despite his annoyance, Dean cannot suppress a smile at that. And his sex-mad alpha notices, of course.

“This 'kale' (5) has no effects on an alpha's sex drive at all”, Dean says. “I checked in two of Charlie's cook books. You just wanted hot, hard sex, and used that tasteless green gunk as an excuse!”

“You're even more sexy when you're angry”, Castiel grins. Dean blushes.

“So you're thinking dirty thoughts”

“Really?” he says, before he realizes. “Hey! Stop trying to sweet talk your way out of trouble.”

“You are of course right”, Castiel agrees, standing up and starting to take off his shirt. Dean does not drool, and he tries to remain indignant, but it is hard – hah! - when he sees so much beautiful,
touchable skin. But he is not the sort of omega to be so easily won over.

Moments later, Ezekiel does a sudden about-turn in the doorway, but he can still hear the screams when he shuts the door quietly behind him and starts a very fast walk back to the kitchens. Which quickly becomes a run.

Apparently Dean is that sort of omega after all.

Monday 20th November 1655

“This cannot be right”, Dean frowns. “I did not know the Netherlands and Sweden were at war, let alone that the Swedes have been conquered.”

Castiel looks at him in confusion and takes the paper from him, reading it. He sighs.

“That cat of Charlie's has been chewing the paper again”, he says. “It should read that the New Netherlands have conquered New Sweden (6).”

“Eh?”

“You know we have two sets of colonies on the American mainland”, Castiel explains. “They are divided by the Dutch and Swedish colonies. So this is not good news, as it means the colonial Dutch will be stronger.”

“Huh”, Dean says. “Any other news?”

“Another plot to assassinate Cromwell”, Castiel sighs. “More men to be hung, drawn and quartered. When will they learn?”

“No time soon, it seems”, Dean sighs. “Who is it this time?”

“An Irishman named Richard Talbot (7)”, Castiel says. “I really wish the king would just step back from these plots and wait. Even the great Cromwell cannot last forever, and much as I have concerns about what may follow, I do hope it will end with the return of the king.”

“And we can then totally disgrace ourselves by making out during his coronation”, Dean grins. Castiel scowls at him.

“Some of us are above such things”, he says loftily. (8)

Notes:
1) The temporal lands of the head of the Catholic church, occupying part of what is now central-northern Italy and with coastlines either side of the peninsula. The capital, Rome, is about twenty miles inland, but a determined effort by the English Navy could have decimated the towns of the coastal plain, let alone damaging trade.
2) More recent research suggests there was a fifth marcher province around the modern Anglo-Scots border.
3) A small Protestant German duchy based around Berlin, whose outlying territories were indeed over seven hundred miles from each other. It would eventually unite to form modern Germany, then twice attempt to conquer Europe and succeed in exterminating several million of its
population.
4) A tiny but strategically important territory based around Konigsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia), Brandenberg's eastern outpost. The name most probably derives from 'pruce', literally the land of the spruce trees, whilst the similar-sounding Russia derives from 'rus' meaning red (rosy).
5) Kale was indeed introduced to England during the seventeenth century, as were strawberries and celery. And Castiel could do things with a celery stick that..... well, that's another story!
6) Founded in 1638, a small colonial territory around the lower Delaware valley. It was less than half the size of the New Netherlands, which at the time was the Hudson Valley as far north as Fort Orange (Albany).
7) Richard Talbot (1630-1691), later Earl of Tyrconnel. Known as Lying Dick. He escaped captivity and later became infamous for his implementation of James II's pro-Catholic policies in Ireland between 1685 and 1688 such that he earnt a sort of immortality in being mentioned in the famous folk ballad of the time, Lilliburlero. He fled after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, but died shortly after his return the following year.
8) Um.....
Chapter Summary

80: Dean gets to be both batsman and bowler on a very happy birthday, even if a couple of months later finds him head down in the privy again. And the nausea this time is even worse! An army captain finds that clipping can be costly, and Castiel really does not like the exiled king's brother. There is a quote from the Book of Daniel, a new and rather unique school, and plans for an invasion (of England, not Dean - this time).

Saturday 26th January, 1656

Somewhere in the past week, Dean thinks hazily, he had a birthday. Yes, he was.... he was.... thirty-something. Thirty-twelve. Yes, that was it. And if a certain alpha says anything when he mentions that number, there will be no putting out for... well, at least a few hours!

Dean had been planning to do something for his birthday, but all those plans had gone out of the window when, twelve days ago, Castiel had arrived home panting and wide-eyed. One sniff told Dean that this rut was a major one, and that he and his husband would be out of commission for some time. He had been proven right; Castiel had fucked him every which way and loose up to and through the omega's birthday, which had been marked only by the food being left outside their door – no-one in the house was brave enough to enter their room – including pie all day. The alpha had promised to make it up to him later, in between thrusts. Well, Dean thinks he did. His memory is kind of hazy from the fourteenth onwards.

Yet another of the many great things about Castiel is that he is so damn considerate. Dean can go to the bathroom – mercifully they chose the room two doors down from it and at the end of a separate connecting corridor, so there is no danger of bumping into any of the servants, who avoid this part of the house except when summoned by bell, fairly sprinting away once they have made their deliveries – and whilst he is there, he knows his alpha will immediately change the sheets and air the room a little, so he can come back to a comfortable bed and a warm husband, who is lying on the clean sheets when he returns.

Naked, prepped and face down on the bed. Dean grins.

“A belated happy birthday to me!” the omega mutters, shucking off his dressing-gown.

Ten minutes later he is asleep on top of his alpha. Meh, there are worse fates.

+++

Friday 22nd February, 1656

“Cromwell has been given a force of some hundred and sixty men for his personal protection”, Dean says, reading from the newspaper. “How good it must be to be so loved.”

“Sassy omega!” Castiel says reprovingly. “A wise precaution, if not a very effective one.”

“Why not?” Dean asks.
“Because a determined assassin will usually get through in the end”, Castiel says with a sigh. “The only way to stop such people is to make it clear to the people behind them that what goes around comes around.”

“Huh?”

“Make it clear that if the exiled king tries to assassinate Cromwell, then Cromwell is perfectly entitled to send people to try to kill the exiled king”, Castiel says. “The only problem with that is, once Charles Stuart is removed, that leaves his brother James.”

“Whom you do not like”, Dean says.

“I think myself a reasonable judge of character”, Castiel says. “The man I hope may become king one day is not much of a man, but he will do. His brother... he is very much in their father's mould, and not to be trusted. Remember, much of the Civil Wars were because no-one could trust the late king's word.”

“And you think a James the Second might repeat that?” Dean asks.

“I rather fear he might”, Castiel says heavily. “Still, at least he is a Protestant.”

+++ Wednesday 12th March, 1656 +++

There is good news and bad news when Castiel wakes this morning. The bad news is that his bed is minus one gorgeous omega. The good news is the vomiting sound coming from the adjoining bathroom.

Apparently the alpha has still got it!

Dean returns to their bed some little time later, looking very pale and with a pout the size of Oxford. Castiel smiles at him and opens his arms, pulling his mate into a warm....

“You dare say it!” Dean hisses.

“Yes, o master!” Castiel says, not smiling.

+++ Sunday 16th March, 1656 +++

Charlie is unusually cheerful this morning, Dean thinks sourly. He is sat in his alpha's study, as even the sight of the normally delicious bacon which both he and his husband love makes him retch. The housekeeper bustles into the room with a glass of fruit juice for him.

“Why are you so happy?” he says crossly. He loves having children, but the process of actually having them – not so much.

“That horrible Captain Greene has gone”, she says cheerily. “And good riddance!”

Dean is surprised. Last November the soldier in question had been appointed as commander to the Oxford garrison, of which the small King’s Linton contingent was an outlying part, and had immediately made it his duty to enforce all the Puritan rules to the limit. Christmas had been stamped down on hard (though the lookouts Castiel had wisely posted on the Hall roof had seen the soldiers coming in plenty of time), and for some reason men had been moved around between
garrisons, so that the town was now 'policed' by strangers. That had not gone down well.

“How did we get rid of the old groucher?” he asks. “Did someone pay him off?”

“More like he tried to pay himself off”, she says. “He was caught clipping (1).”

“Clipping what?”

“Coins”, she says. “He was clipping bits off coins, then telling his men to go and spend them as the original value, and to get out their guns if the recipients proved ‘difficult'. Unfortunately for him someone tattled to Cromwell. Someone, I suspect, who is currently changing his second son's clothes again not too far from this spot.”

“Again?” Dean asks. “Honestly, that boy is a dirt magnet! What was it this time?”

“Master Crispinian decided to see if he could wear a tomato (2)”, she says with a sigh. “Apparently he could not... oh, sorry.”

Dean has gone pale at the mention of solid food. Fortunately the waste basket is close to hand.

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Tuesday 18th March, 1656

“Daniel”, Castiel says, as if that explains everything. Dean would swat at him, but any sudden movement makes him feel nauseous, and worse, his bastard of a husband who got him like this – again! - knows that fact. He has to settle for a pout.

“Explain”, he demands.

“I meant the Book of Daniel”, Castiel says. “You asked me why these particular nonconformists are called Fifth Monarchists. The Book of Daniel predicts that the end of humanity will occur in 1666, because it contains the Devil's number apparently, and this will usher in a fifth monarchy under Christ. The Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians and Romans were the first four monarchies.”

“Are they dangerous?” Dean asks.

“Well, they mostly died several centuries ago”, Castiel says blithely. This earns him a frankly adorable pout, and he laughs. “You mean the Fifth Monarchists. They are quite numerous in the capital, I hear, but Cromwell usually has a handle on such things. (3) I find the idea quite interesting on one level though.”

“What is that?” Dean asks.

“A fifth coming”, Castiel grins. “I wonder if I can come inside you five times in a row?”

Dean scowls. Damn horny alpha. It is an idea, though....

++~++

Wednesday 19th March, 1656

Apparently heavy sex reduces nausea. And yes, there was a fifth coming!

++~++
Monday 7th April, 1656

“Does King's Linton really need a second school?” Dean asks, sitting down carefully. His nausea has gotten a little better, but he has learnt – the hard way – that sudden movements make it return with a vengeance.

“I want this particular school to be one with a difference”, Castiel says, eyeing his mate with caution.

“Such as?” Dean asks.

“I intend to admit only omegas.”

Dean's eyes open wide. Grammar schools, ostensibly for the poor but in reality for those who can afford them, are becoming more common, but only for alphas and betas. Admitting omegas to one is almost as revolutionary as admitting girls.

“As I said once, change takes time”, Castiel says with a smile, clearly reading his thoughts. “Much as I would like to admit the fairer sex and all, I do not think England is ready for such a thing as yet. But Cromwell's overtures to the Jews in Amsterdam and certain other things that I have seen make me think that now is the time for such a venture. As the only such establishment to admit omegas, I think it would do well.”

“Some of your old colleagues in parliament will have a fit!” Dean grins.

“I suppose”, Castiel shrugs. “Yes, admitting a gender who are known for being moody, temperamental, bossy…..”

He is not looking at his mate, but he can still feel the glare from across the room. He chuckles, then smiles.

“I just want more people to have an omega as smart and wonderful as mine”, he grins.

“Good save”, Dean mutters.

+~+~+

Thursday 29th May, 1656

“I know that the king wishes to regain his throne”, Castiel says plaintively, “but must he start signing deals with our enemies so to do? Especially with Philip of Spain (4) making mutterings about an invasion of England.”

“Perhaps they think little of the Commonwealth as a fighting force?” Dean suggests, easing himself gently down into a chair. “They did manage to attack the wrong island!”

Thankfully he seems to be swelling up rather less this time, and even better, the morning-sickness tapered off by the end of March, which was a relief. Charlie says that means he is having a girl this time because they cause less fuss, which he would quite like, even if he does not see her logic.

“That is a popular myth”, Castiel says loftily. “Cromwell gave the expedition leaders the freedom to choose their targets, though I will admit that the failure to capture Hispaniola (5) was a setback, but they are moving onto Santiago (6), which would have been a better target to begin with. A major base in the western Caribbean would cause the Spanish all sorts of problems, especially with their treasure fleets.”
“But foreign leaders will still think that the much-vaunted Army cannot fight overseas”, Dean says.

“Then let us hope that they are not so foolish as to attempt an invasion”, Castiel says dryly. “Not only for the damage it would do to our poor country, which is only now recovering from three consecutive wars, but because all armies fight best when defending their homelands. Fortunately I think that the Spanish have more than enough on their plate as it is, and that Cromwell will direct his efforts to make sure things stay that way.”

++~+++
Notes:
1) A practice outlawed by Elizabeth, but which the feckless Stuarts had allowed to resurface. A bag of coins, face value say a shilling (twelve pennies) each, would get bits chipped off the edges of each of them, but the coins would still passed off as worth their original value, and the clippings melted together to make new coins. William III (1689-1702) finally put an end to the practice by milling coins, giving them a rutted edge that made any tampering easily detectable.
2) A fruit first seen in England the previous century, and still rare. Many thought it was poisonous if consumed in large amounts, and some considered it an aphrodisiac (a certain omega would make a scoffing remark at this point about a certain alpha not needing any such 'encouragement').
3) In fact the Fifth Monarchists would make failed takeover attempts of parliament in both 1657 and 1659, and again shortly after the Restoration in 1661.
4) Although Philip IV still ruled over the Spanish Netherlands (roughly modern Belgium and Luxembourg) with its harbours ideally suited for an invasion of England, such a thing would have been unlikely. At a time when the flow of gold from the American mines was declining, he was severely stretched with the war with the French, Portugal's fight for independence, and internal troubles with, as ever, the Catalonians.
5) The second-largest island in the Caribbean, just east of Cuba and now split between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.
6) Subsequently renamed Jamaica. The decision to allow pirates to operate out of Port Royal later caused the English considerable problems, until most of the town was destroyed in an earthquake in 1692.
Chapter Summary

81: Dean has a difficult encounter with a family member which ends in someone taking a one-way trip to the Americas. The omega gives birth to a daughter this time, who gets named after two of his favourite females, whilst Castiel gets involved in the assassination business – twice. There is a departure from the Hall, and the sort of awkward Christmas dinner that nightmares are made of.

Wednesday 1st July, 1656

Dean feels like a whale, and he is still at least three months out from giving birth. But the situation he and Castiel have on their hands is a delicate one, and the omega knows that he has to help sort it.

Castiel's relations with his half-brothers have over the years been – well, varied. He has always gotten on well with Lucifer, especially after the latter's union with Samandriel who is pregnant yet again (a certain alpha had made a quite crude remark about Magic Milton Dicks which, whilst possibly accurate, had been uncalled for, and Dean had demanded a whole lot of manly embracing to make up for it). Gabriel of course is away in Ireland, and not the least bit missed by either of them. Which leaves Michael, who is currently standing before Dean having just delivered a letter.

“No Castiel?” Michael asks, clearly surprised that he has to see a mere omega. Dean shakes his head.

“He is around”, he says dismissively. “I wanted to talk to you about your plans to take your wife and family to the Americas.”

Michael frowns.

“We have no such plans”, he says, sounding suspicious.

“Cas has been doing an audit of your part of the estate in Midstone”, Dean says, and he notes how the beta pales at his remarks. “It seems that there is a notable shortfall between the moneys collected from the people and the moneys handed over to Dorothy. Of course Cas is very busy right now, but I think in a couple of months' time he might start a full-scale investigation into that 'shortfall'.”

He looks pointedly at his brother-in-law.

“You can't make us go”, Michael says, but he looks pale.

“Then there is the not inconsiderable matter of a fake letter you sent to Cromwell recently”, Dean continues. “One which claimed to come from Cas, and said that he would openly back the next Royalist uprising.”

Michael glares at him, but is silent.

“There is a ship leaving from Bristol on the fourth of July”, Dean says. “The 'Independence'.
Decent quality accommodation across the Atlantic is not easy to obtain, but Cas has said he can get you all berths on it.”

Michael utters a small growl and takes a step towards him. An answering snarl echoes through the open door to the next room, and the beta freezes, his eyes wide with terror.

“I did say Cas was around”, Dean says airily. “You can inform Dorothy of your decision. Cas will not start his investigations until.... oh, I think around the fourth of July?”

His brother-in-law scowls at him, but sweeps from the room in silence. Castiel comes through the door and kisses his omega.

“Thank you”, he says. “Had I spoken to him myself, the servants would have ensured that it was all round the estate by nightfall.”

“Probably sooner”, Dean agrees. “Do I get a reward?”

Charlie appears through the other door, and saints be praised, she is bearing pie. Dean does not let out a whimper, although judging from the smirk that a certain alpha is wearing at this point in the proceedings, it is just possible that he makes a noise that might sound like one. Especially given the innocent look that said alpha gives in response to Dean's glare.

+++++

Thursday 20th August, 1656

There is, Dean has decided, something worse than being heavily pregnant. And that is being heavily pregnant and hot. Charlie had suggested fitting wheels beneath his chair so he could scoot between the table for his incessant drinks of water or lime juice, and his privy for incessant... yes. He had pouted, but he had had to admit that she had a point.

“Definitely a girl this time”, she says knowledgeably. “I guess you and Castiel have already named her?”

“It feels different from my other pregnancies”, Dean admits, staring morosely at the half-empty pie-dish. “No, we haven't talked about names this time, though he did say a future son might be named Diniel, after the angel of childbirth.”

“And you”, she says. He nods.

“I like it", he says. “Though I feel somehow that it isn't an alpha name. Well, we shall soon see.”

Castiel enters at that moment, and they both stare at him. He is bare-chested, and Dean does not drool. Much.

“It is too hot for a top inside”, Castiel says with a heavy sigh. “Here I can just be a regular alpha, enjoying the peace and quiet of my home sweet home.”

It is almost predictable that that peace and quiet is instantly interrupted by a loud squeal from somewhere nearby. Charlie groans.

“That will be Sandy again”, she says. “Ever since you gave him that box of toy soldiers, he plays with nothing else. And he gets very cross with his brothers if they try to take them from him.”

“Quite right”, Castiel agrees, kissing Dean. “I know how mad some people get when they have
what is important to them taken away.”

It takes Dean a few seconds to realize the implication behind that remark, and he pouts. Especially when some bastard of an alpha reaches towards his precious pie. There may or may not be an angry hiss around this point.

Judging from the smirk on the face of a certain alpha, there probably is. But at least he backs away from the pie.

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Saturday 20th September, 1656

Apart from a whole lot of manly embracing with his omega, Castiel had made no special plans for his recent birthday. Which had been just as well, because events had led him to have to rush down to London four days ago, and only now is he on his way home to his gorgeous mate, whom he has missed terribly in his absence. Dean had been getting increasingly anxious during his pregnancy, mainly because he has swollen up much less than before, although Charlie keeps telling him this only means it’s a girl ‘because they are better organized and need less space’. His husband would infinitely rather be home tending to his omega's concerns, but instead he has had to spend a few days in what is decidedly a cheerless capital city.

It is the estate's old property in Whitehall, his and Dean's old home, that is the reason for Castiel's precipitate dash to the capital. Last weekend he had received a message from his friend with whom he is now staying and who manages his Whitehall house for him, that a new tenant was causing him some concern. A Mr. John Fish had only wanted the room for a week, which in itself was suspicious enough, but then Castiel's friend had been told by a neighbour that the man kept a gun in the house, and was striving to conceal that fact. The alpha had remembered with a start that the east side of the property faced out onto the route used by Cromwell for trips between Whitehall Palace, where he sometimes stayed, and either the nearby Abbey or Houses of Parliament, so had rushed down to warn him (2).

The alpha spares himself a wry smile at his actions. For someone who now hopes one day to see a king back on the throne of England one day, he is doing everything he can to keep a king-killer in power. But, he reckons, Oliver Cromwell is as good as it gets for now. When he dies, which cannot be that far into the future, well.....

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Thursday 16th October, 1656

The baby is tiny. Incredibly tiny, and it takes every ounce of Castiel's alpha nature not to break down and cry at the sight of his omega holding the little mite and looking down in silent stupefaction at the new life in his beloved omega's arms. A baby daughter.

Sod it, he cries anyway.

“She is fine”, Charlie says, her face almost as red as her hair. Considering how small the child is, coaxing it out of its parent had been a nightmare, with Dean screaming and swearing all the way through, often breaking off to tell his alpha what he would do to him if he ever made him go through this again, up to and including the forcible severing of certain appendages. Castiel is sure that his hand will return to its normal shape after so long in his mate's death-grip, though for now he is just glad everyone is all right. He looks at his omega, who nods slightly.
“She looks like her name”, the alpha says quietly. The baby has Dean's eyes and hair colour, and is currently eyeing Castiel warily.

“Yes, you didn't tell me after all”, Charlie says. “Still not decided?”

“Oh, we decided”, Castiel grins. “Welcome to Mary Charlotte Milton.”

Charlie reddens, then smiles at the omega.

“She's going to have the most awesome honorary aunt ever!” she declares.

“Godmother”, Castiel corrects. The housekeeper blushes even more.

+++

Thursday 6th November, 1656

“I honestly think that if you starved that child, she would still produce more poop”, Charlie grumbles as she brings a newly-changed (for the third time that morning) Mary Charlotte in to see her parents. Dean smiles and takes her, letting her suckle gently.

“Soon she will be old enough to start her on proper food”, he says. “Pie first, of course.”

“As if she has a choice”, Castiel mutters under his breath. Dean shoots him a look, but settles for a pout. He carefully rises to his feet and takes his daughter away to her room.

“I meant to ask”, Charlie says once the omega has gone. “Alex wants to move down to Oxford so she can train with Tessa. She was only a part-time maid here, so is that all right?”

“Always good to have an assassin in the family”, Castiel says cheerily.

“And the English nobility wonders why people think them weird!” she smiles, shaking her head.

+++

Thursday 25th December, 1656

“Do we have any recusants, Cas?”

The alpha yawns and stretches. They have just enjoyed a long, languid morning in bed together, during which Dean had fucked his alpha to orgasm. Twice. He feels quietly proud of himself. Meh, maybe not that quietly. Especially when his alpha's voice is clearly as wrecked as the rest of him.

“Only the Tallboys in Kirtsford”, the alpha mutters. “Fortunately they are emigrating to the Americas next spring. Connecticut, I think.”

“That is lucky”, Dean says. He knows that his alpha has always treated Catholics on the estate a whole lot better than most of his ilk, but the new law cracking down on recusants will make that more difficult. “Did you pay for their trip?”

“Certainly not.”

Dean just looks at him. Castiel breaks.
“I may have paid them slightly above the price for their property”, he admits.

“Legally you could have paid them nothing”, Dean points out.

“Yes”, Castiel agrees, “but then I would have to come home and justify my actions to my perfect omega mate. And that would be hard.”

He directs Dean's hand a little lower and oh yes, that too is hard. Well, there is no hurry to get up yet.

Third time's a charm!

++~++

“Are you and papa all right?” Crispin asks over dinner. Castiel frowns.

“Yes”, he says. “Why would we not be?”

“I looked in your room this morning”, the young alpha says, “and you were fighting in bed.”

There is the sort of stony silence at the table normally only achieved when someone loudly breaks wind. Lucifer Milton tries to turn a chortle into a cough, his mate Samandriel looks away and Dean turns bright red.

“Of course they weren't fighting”, his twin says scornfully.

Castiel risks a quick glance to the Heavens. God take him now!

“Daddy and Papa never fight”, Crispinian says roundly. “They were prob'ly just playing horsey again.”

Castiel prays for the New Year. Or a lighting strike.

++~++

Notes:
1) The plotters, led by an anti-Cromwell Puritan called Miles Sindercombe, subsequently tried to shoot Cromwell on his way to Hampton Court, and then blow up Whitehall Palace with him inside it. Sindercombe was arrested and sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered, but his sister managed to slip him poison during her last visit to him in the Tower, and he was found dead on the morning of his planned execution on February 13th the following year.
Chapter Summary

82: Dean learns the hard way about angles and rotations, and Gadreel learns to not pursue certain lines of inquiry. The omega has a bad vexillological experience, as well as an alarming technological one. Someone is thrown out of the Hall for spying, and Cromwell has to weigh up whether or not he wants to become King Oliver the First. Mary Charlotte Milton has no sense of timing, and Dean gets messy with chocolate.

Thursday 1st January, 1657

“Do you know”, Castiel says conversationally, “that it is possible to rotate an omega on an alpha's knot a full three hundred and sixty degrees?”

“I know!” Dean yelps, as his insides start work on a(ther) letter of complaint. “Believe me, I bloody know!”

“Oh yes, we did that one to welcome in the New Year”, Castiel says. “That was when we were discussing Bremen.”

His alpha is such a horny bastard, with the emphasis on the bastard. All right, and on the horny as well. Castiel knows full well that Dean finds it hard (hah!) to retain information given during sex.

“Oh yes”, Castiel says calmly. “Cromwell wants a treaty with Sweden, where Charles X is afraid we might join the Dutch with whom he is at war. He demanded the port of Bremen as security; the king offered Oldenburg (1) instead, but that was not good enough. And you know what they say.”

“What?” Dean grunts incoherently.

“When you have tried it one way, you should try it another”, Castiel grins.

Dean moans in a mixture of anticipation and horror as the alpha manhandles him into yet another new position. This is his life!

++++

“Can you arrange for Dean's breakfast to be sent up to him, Gadreel?” Castiel says a short while later. “He will not be down today.”

“Of course master”, his cousin grins. “Is Master Dean all right?”

“Just a little sore”, Castiel grins back. “We were investigating the theory that what goes around, come around.”

His cousin pulls a face, and scurries off with the food before his master goes into 'details'.

Saturday 24th January, 1657

Dean is thirty-thirteen years old today, and definitely not anywhere near a certain milestone in his life that no-one is going to remind him of if they do not want to get hurt. Or pouted at. Though Charlie had been as sneaky as usual; having promised not to mention the number that was five times ten, she had baked him a pie with the letters 'XLIII' on the top, the 'L being far larger than the other letters. When Dean had asked his husband, Castiel had explained that in the Roman numerals system, 'L' stood for fifty and the whole thing for.... thirty-thirteen. The alpha had not smirked, and Dean had watched very carefully to make sure he stayed that way.

He just knew that his husband was smirking inside, though. Damnation!

“That is one 'L' of a pie”, Castiel grins. “May I please have a slice?”

Dean eyes him suspiciously, but cuts his alpha a very small slice and passes it over. The alpha eats it, a knowing look on his face.

“Shut up”, Dean grumbles.

“I never said anything”, Castiel says, looking hurt.

“You have loud thoughts”, Dean grouses.

“I bought a new negligé”, Castiel says conversationally. “I thought we might use tonight to christen it.”

“I don't know if it will fit”, Dean says sadly. His figure has never quite got back to where it had been before his first pregnancy, and whilst he loves his children to death, he misses his muscled (well, fairly muscled) body. Castiel grins.

“Who said that I bought it for you?” he says, standing up. “Coming?”

“I think I soon will be!” Dean says, abandoning his pie and hurrying after his sex-crazed (and he wouldn't have it any other way) husband.

But because his husband loves him so much, he insists that Dean goes back and takes it to Charlie to be stored for later. And because she is such a good friend, she says nothing about his very obvious over-eagerness.

He just knows that she is smirking inside as well, though. Damnation, he cannot trust anyone round here!

++++

Tuesday 24th February 1657

“I am sure”, Castiel says heavily, “that in generations to come, ours will be knows as the time that used long words to cover up what they were really up to.”

“Such as?” Dean yawns. He feels exhausted. He spent much of last week down with the flu, to the consternation of his alpha who just ran around clucking uselessly. At least Charlie provided pie!

“Parliament has put forward the Humble Petition and Remonstrance” (2), Castiel says. “Basically they are offering Cromwell the kingship. He has toyed with the idea before, but never seriously.”
“Many of his supporters would have a fit”, Dean says. “Three civil wars to get rid of a king, then he becomes one anyway. They will not stand for it.”

“I doubt he will accept”, Castiel says wryly. “As you say, the opposition from his friends will be a major factor. There is always someone around ready to tell those in charge what they should be doing.”

Dean is about to agree when he gets it, and shoots a suspicious look at his alpha, who is looking far too innocent. But Dean knows an inner smirk when he doesn't see one!

+++

Thursday 12th March, 1657

Dean stares suspiciously at the strange contraption on the desk. It is an agglomeration of wheels, levers and cogs, and he half expects it to leap down onto the rug and make for the door.

“What is it?” he ask suspiciously.

“A computing device (3)”, Castiel says. “Ash asked me to try it out. You set the cogs to one number, then set each of these levers to a digit of the number you wish to multiply by, and the cogs turn to show the correct answer.”

“Why?” Dean wonders. “Why not just work it out on paper?”

“Speed of operation, I suppose”, his husband says. “I have a sum I worked out earlier, so I thought I would try it.”

He leans over the machine and sets the cogs, then toys with the levers. Dean maintains a careful distance – which is just as well, as the instant the alpha steps back, something creaks ominously from inside the machine, then a small cog shoots out at high speed and surprises one of the house cats, which shrieks in alarm and flees the room.

“I do not think the world is ready for this much technology”, Castiel observes, Dean can but agree. That sort of thing will never catch on.

+++

Monday 30th March, 1657

“Well, we are finally allied with the French”, Castiel says. “The king is fortunate that his sister married into the Dutch royal family, and he has a refuge with her.”

“It is odd”, Dean muses.

“What, beloved?”

Dean nestles into his alpha's arms, and sighs happily.

“From the newspapers, it seems that parliament, which is supposed to be the voice of the people, pretty much ignores the law and jails anyone who crosses it”, he says. “Whilst Cromwell, for all his failings, actually lets people contradict him and argue against him.”

“Parliament is the voice of just parliament”, Castiel says. “It is a poor shadow of what it once was, let alone what it should be. But talking of making decisions, I had to make one earlier today that
you may not initially approve of.”

He can feel the omega tense up.

“Initially?” Dean says warily.

“Yes”, Castiel says. “You remember the omega from Dublin who I took onto the estate last month?”


“I had to fire him. I have sent him back to Ireland.”

Dean looks at him curiously.

“Why?”

“I found out he was a spy for parliament”, Castiel explains, quietly pleased that Dean is taking the news so calmly. “They employed an intermediary in London, so I do not now who, but he had been threatened that his family would suffer if he did not co-operate. I sent him back to them.”

“You did what was for the best”, Dean sighs.

“You took that better than I expected”, Castiel smiles. “I thought you might demand lots of rough sex to make up for my actions.”

He starts counting, but only makes it to three before....

“Damnation!”

Castiel chuckles. But because he is a kind and generous alpha, he lets Dean have the rough sex anyway.

+++++

Monday 4th May, 1657

“This is going to be an expensive trip for me, is it not?” Castiel grins.

His mate feigns an innocent look.

“I have no idea what you mean”, he says loftily.

“That would have a lot more credibility if you did not still have a brown stain on your upper lip”, Castiel says with a smile. “And if you had not drooled when I suggested making this a regular trip out.”

His omega frowns and tries to lick off the incriminating mark. They are returning from Oxford, where Dean was perhaps just a little pleased at finding a place that sold the new chocolate drinks (4). He may have moaned his pleasure in a way that had made the alpha's eyes darken, promising all sorts of fun and games later.

All right, he'd done it deliberately. So sue him. He knows a win-win situation when he sees one.

“I see your Cromwell looks like he will decline the chance of becoming King Oliver the First”, Dean says conversationally. The look on his husband's face states quite clearly that he knows what
the omega is about, but he rides on regardless. The city is behind them now, and the few houses
that mark the western edges of King’s Linton are not yet in sight.

“He is right so to do”, Castiel says. “Whatever one may think of the man, he at least tries to do
what is best for the country. I wonder what will happen when he is gone?”

“Did you not say his son Richard would probably succeed him?” Dean asks. “You know, eldest
surviving son (5) succeeding. Like a king?”

Castiel bats half-heartedly at him.

“I think young Dickon is a pale shadow of his father”, he says. “But that is for another day. You
know Dean, that chocolate smear is annoying me. How about my helping you remove it?”

The omega is about to say how unnecessary that is when he realizes that they have stopped outside
a lonely barn.

“Oh come on!” Dean says cheekily. “We did that one on our way back from Ilsley!”

“True”, Castiel says, dismounting. “Or I could knot you and then ride back with you all the way
to.....”

Dean is already off his horse and racing inside. The last time Castiel had ridden whilst knotted
inside his omega, his mate had been unable to sit down for a whole day!

+++++

Saturday 9th May, 1657

“I hate this weather”, Dean grumbles. “April showers are meant to be showers, not the constant
rain we have had since All Fools’ Day.”

“Yes, being confined to the bedroom is very hard”, Castiel agrees. He groans as the omega gently
palms his erect cock through his trousers.

“I think that is hard, too”, Dean grins.

Unfortunately Mary Charlotte, showing her godmother’s terrible sense of timing, chooses that
moment to make her presence felt in the next room. Castiel chuckles and leaves to attend to her.
Dean whines.

“Later!” Castiel promises over his shoulder.

He keeps his promise, although their daughter interrupts that too. Then again, holding his daughter
whilst his perfect husband holds him – Dean sometimes wonders if he could actually burst with
happiness.

+++++

Notes:
1) Both important small port cities on the German North Sea coast. The irony of the situation was
that, albeit briefly, kings of Great Britain later ended up ruling over both territories anyway, whilst
they were also rulers of the adjoining state of Hanover.
2) Later restyled ‘The Humble Petition And Advice’, presumably because the first title sounded too
aggressive. It also called for the (re-)establishment of a national church and a second chamber in
parliament – in other words, things pretty much as they had been back in 1642.
3) Well ahead of its time; the first computer design that worked was designed by Charles Babbage in 1833. He never actually built it, but in 1991 some scientists put one together using his plans and it worked perfectly.

4) Because of difficulties in achieving a consistency that made them practical, the first chocolate bar, made by Fry's, did not appear until 1847. It was plain chocolate; milk did not follow until 1875.

5) His third son, born 1624. Robert (1621-1639) had died whilst away at school, whilst Oliver (1622-1644) contracted typhoid fever whilst serving as a parliamentary officer in Newport Pagnell. Cromwell's male line died out, but from his daughter Frances' second marriage a line descended to Miss Katharine Worsley (b. 1933), who in 1961 married Queen Elizabeth II's cousin Edward Duke of Kent (b. 1935); as of 2016 he was 35th in line of succession to the British throne.
June-December 1657

Chapter Summary

83: Castiel is able to rid himself of one local pest, but finds himself being questioned by his son over battle tactics, and how to celebrate a good victory. The alpha has another rut with the inevitable consequences, and this time round Dean hopes for an omega all of his own. He says nothing to his husband, but of course Castiel knows. And a prank by Sam Winchester on his big brother goes horribly and painfully wrong.

Wednesday 17th June, 1657

“Tell me again, daddy.”

Dean smiles at his son's persistence. Castiel has already gone through the battle several times, but Sandalphon's fascination with all things military is seemingly unquenchable.

“Our navy defeated and destroyed the Spanish treasure fleet at Santa Cruz”, Castiel says patiently, “which is a port in the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa. I showed you Africa on the map earlier, remember?”

“Why are they called that?” Sandalphon asks. “Are there canaries there?”

(Dean had wondered about that one himself).

“The islands' name comes from the wild dogs that once lived there centuries ago”, Castiel explains. “'Canis' is the Latin for dog; you remember that house we saw in King's Linton one time which had 'cave canem' on the gate? That means 'beware of the dog'.”

“Can dogs read Latin?” their son asks, clearly puzzled.

“I do not think it matters if the dog can read, more the people who might get bitten if they trespass”, Castiel says with a smile. “The only bad thing about the recent battle was that the treasure had already been landed, but the good thing is that we have destroyed much of the Spanish Navy. They will find it very difficult to supply their armies in Flanders now.”

“Why are they fighting there?” Sandalphon asks.

“Spain used to own all the low-lying land on the north-west edge of Europe”, Castiel says. “They were called the Netherlands because nether means low; we have a village some way north of here called Nether Worton, which I showed you on the map once. When the northern part became independent as the United Provinces, or Holland as some people mistakenly call them, Spain kept hold of the southern part.”

“And today we are celebrating shooting all their ships!” Sandalphon exclaims. “Daddy, are you and papa celebrating as well?”

Castiel shoots Dean a meaningful look. Dean gulps.

“We will be later”, the alpha says darkly.
Dean gulps again.

+++++

Tuesday 6th July, 1657

“Do you remember Lieutenant Lane?”

Dean frowns at the name before he remembers.

“The one who tried to grope me over the stained glass thing?” he asks. “And came round for the Christmas dinner that wasn't?”

“Yes”, Castiel says. “Well, it seems he is one of those who does not learn lessons very well. He recently used some soldiers to take over the house of the Filmores, the Catholic family who live over in Charlton.”

“That is because of this new law requiring everyone to swear an oath against the Pope, is it not?” Dean asks. “I did not think they were recusants.”

“They are not”, Castiel says. “Unfortunately for the lieutenant the family had recently sold the property to me, and despite the fact they told him that he threw them out and set about selling it for his own gain. I have let Cromwell know that I was Not Best Pleased.”

Dean can hear the capitals. He grins.

“And his response?” he asks.

“He recommends a holiday for the lieutenant.”

“Huh?”

“On a plantation in the Barbadoes”, Castiel grins. “For the next thirty years. He can work on his tan!”

+++++

Tuesday 13th July, 1657

“Who is this John Lambert?” Dean asks. “The name is familiar from somewhere.”

Castiel tuts at him.

“And to think you once complained that I only talk politics when we are knotted”, he reprimands, eliciting a whine from the omega as he shifts his position. He rolls over until the omega is above him, held on his knot. His mate is so beautiful when he has that look of combined agony and ecstasy on his face.

“Cromwell was complaining about him in his latest letter”, Dean gasps, once he can speak again. “You mentioned him once before, I think, but I cannot recall over what.”

“He stopped the Scots getting into Yorkshire during the second war, and outflanked them to win at Inverkeithing in the third”, Castiel says. “He was one of the army leaders who went to Cromwell and begged him not to accept the kingship, which was fair enough, I suppose. But they have fallen out over this oath of allegiance, which Lambert refuses to swear because he thinks it is too kingly. He will have to resign his commission.”
“And your interest in him?” Dean asks, toying with his alpha’s muscled chest. He wants to tweak Castiel’s nipples, but the last time he had done that the surprised alpha had bucked and rendered the omega speechless for a whole minute. Then again, he might do it anyway.

“I think he is one to watch”, Castiel says carefully. “Ambitious, and not in a good way. Let us hope we have Cromwell for a while yet, as I think there will be a right military mess when he does....”

He stops mid-sentence, which Dean thinks a bit odd. That is, until he suddenly sees the tell-tale red eyes.

Oh come on! Now?

Then he feels the knot inside him swelling even further, and moans in pleasure. Apparently now it is.

+++++

Tuesday 31st August, 1657

Charlie looks at him in surprise.

“Oh”, she says dully. Castiel narrows his eyes at her.

“Oh?”

“Well, when you said you had fallen from your horse and broken your leg, I assumed... you know, you were using a metaphor.”

The alpha just looks confused. Dean sighs.

“She thinks I broke you during sex”, he says bluntly.

“Dean!” the housekeeper yelps.

“Well, did you not?” he challenges.

She scowls at him, but pretty much answers his question by flouncing out of the room. He chuckles.

“I do not know why people always assume that of me”, Castiel says plaintively. “They really think I do nothing else all day but make sure my omega is screaming on the end of my knot.”

“Cas!” This time it is the omega who yelps. The alpha sniggers.

“I heard some news in King’s Linton”, he says. “As I thought from his letters, Cromwell has finally tired of the French using our soldiers to capture towns for them, and us getting nothing out of it. He has insisted they move on Dunkirk (1) or he may pull out altogether.”

He crosses over to his desk.

“Not that you know anything about pulling out”, Dean mutters mulishly.

He had thought to be unheard, but the look he gets when Castiel turns around..... yes, his alpha’s hearing is really, really good.

+++++
Wednesday 9th September, 1657

Dean is torn.

On one hand, his mouth is currently on fire from whatever the hell was in that piece of pie he just bit into, and he is desperate for water to put the flames out.

On the other hand, there is the small matter that, seconds after Sam had chortled about teaching Dean a lesson of not being so greedy, his little brother had found himself pinned to the wall by one very angry alpha who seemed intent on strangling the living daylights out of his pregnant mate. Well, that was one way to let the family know the good news.

Water first, Dean decides. He ignores Sam's terrified whining, and his mother and sister-in-law's pleading with his husband that it had just been a badly-timed joke, before taking a deep breath.

“Cas?” he says in his most pleading voice.

The effect is immediate. Sam hangs stupidly in mid-air before slumping to the floor, the alpha formerly holding him having somehow vaulted the table to be with his mate. Dean gently scents his husband, and the way that glorious body just sags under his ministrations is wonderful. And Dean definitely does not send his gasping brother a smug look across the table.

Oh come on! Of course he does!

++++

Friday 18th September, 1657

One of the things about life, Dean has come to realize, is that the best-laid plans do not always come to fruition. And the untimely (though not unwelcome) arrival of a second rut close on the heels of the first, this one coming a week after their trip to see his old home – well, it is not just the plans that ended up well laid.

Castiel is forty-eight today, and Dean knows that alphas are supposed to drop off in both ruts and potency after their fortieth birthdays. His alpha, it seems, is the exception that proves the rule. Come to that, for an omega to still be dropping children in his early forties is in itself a rarity, and after all his pregnancy experiences so far, it would be more than understandable if Dean had just decided that five children were more than enough to secure the family bloodline.

But he likes the sex!

The bed begins to shake as Castiel works his way through to another orgasm, his cock still knotted tightly inside the omega. That is another thing; the alpha's knots seems to be lasting even longer during ruts than before, and Dean has grown used to sleeping with that monster still inside of him. Castiel has a way of gripping the omega tight which, whilst a bit possessive, at least ensures that he does not move much in the night, which in turn is good as any movements whilst knotted make Dean yelp in a voice that is far too high for such a manly man. He can put up with the.... uh, manly embracing if it helps him avoid that.

Dean utters up a silent prayer that at least the morning sickness this time has been relatively mild in the past two weeks. He has not said as much to his husband, but Dean wants another child for a particular reason. He would really like to have an omega to raise by himself, especially now his brother Sammy has one, his latest arrival called Peter. Of course Dean loves all his children, and will love this one no matter what it turns out to be.
There might, however, be a little bonus love if it is an omega.

++++

Friday 23rd October 1657

“I am surprised”, Castiel admits. “Not that the Spanish counter-attacked; that could have been foreseen. But that both the king and his brother were in that attack – that is foolishness in the extreme.

“I suppose part of being a king is doing what you want”, Dean says.

“And we know how well that worked for their father!” Castiel retorts. “Lord, if the king had died and we had been left with his brother – ugh!”

“It is all so complicated”, Dean sighs. “I thought to be signing up to be the mate of a country squire, where the only danger was my beloved alpha going out for the occasional ride.”

“You are quite right”, Castiel says.

Dean looks at him in confusion, as the alpha efficiently starts to strip.

“Huh?”

“I do fancy the occasional ride”, Castiel grins. “Like now!”

++++

When Dean limps down to the kitchen on a pie quest later, Charlie just shakes her head at him. Though he is a bit disconcerted to catch her and Dorothy exchanging money after they had thought him gone. Honestly, one just cannot get the staff these days!

++++

Friday 18th December, 1657

It is because Castiel is a good mate that he says nothing. He knows what his omega wants from this pregnancy, and he knows that the far milder than usual morning sickness (especially when comparing to the hurling before) is a good sign. It is a traditional and at least moderately reliable predictor of an omega issue.

For himself Castiel does not care what sub-gender his children are, provided they are healthy. He finds it frankly irritating when other alphas congratulate him on having three alphas (2), as if other sub-genders were less important in some way. But he knows that Dean really wants an omega all for himself, and he hopes – how he hopes – that their prayers will not go unanswered.

The country is in a state of high tension just now, with rumours that the Royalists are aiming to take advantage of so many troops being out of the country and mount an invasion. Castiel is fairly sure such a move will fail but he is still anxious, not so much for the outcome as for the stress it causes his perfect, pie-eating mate. Who for the first time is able to east pie into a pregnancy.

(Oddly, the pregnancy books do not comment on what that means, though Castiel heard one maid snark to another that she would not have been surprised if this time round, Dean actually birthed a pie instead of a child. He had gently admonished her (gently because he privately agreed), but at least she had had the sense not to say it anywhere near his mate).
No, Christmas will soon be here – another Christmas that the government does not allow people to celebrate in any traditional way – and it will be a Christmas meal whilst Castiel's twin cousins take turns to stand guard on the roof with spy-glasses to watch for soldiers (3). Such is the state of the country just now.

Dean returns to the room looking a little pale, but happy. He slides silently back into bed with his alpha, and does not even object to being held in the proper, manly-like manner.

“And stop with the damn smirking!” he groused.

“Yes, master!”

+++-+
Notes:
1) Then the nearest major Spanish port to the English coast, and a privateering base for both Spanish and Royalist pirates.
2) Except when he found they were referring to him in noble circles as 'The Potent Potentate'. There may have been some quiet preening over that.
3) It might seem unfair that it was always Gadreel and Ezekiel on the roof every winter, but they had copious amounts of food and drink with them, and a whole extra week off every summer, with money.
January-April 1658

Chapter Summary

84: Castiel has to make a trip to London as the threats of both invasion and rebellion loom large, but he is able to return home in time to make Dean's birthday 'memorable' for both him and his visiting moose of a brother. Dean discovers the hard way that the old wives' tale about omegas being slow to come into the world is painfully true, but pie comes to the rescue. And there is a snowball fight – sort of.

Thursday 10th January, 1658

A winter journey on England's excuse for a road network is no joke, and Castiel is shivering as he rides past the gatehouse, the end of his one hundred and sixty mile round trip in sight. Cromwell had asked him to come to London to view the gathered intelligence surrounding reports of a Spanish invasion and/or any associated Royalist uprising. Castiel had spent a long cold day examining all the reports, and at the end had told the great general that whilst the country was mostly prepared, there were three places that were of concern, and he would expect the invasion to target one of those. The most obvious danger point was the long coast of East Anglia, but the Navy would hopefully stop any move there.

Though he wishes for an eventual return of the exiled king, Castiel is still worried about Cromwell, who he thinks does not look well. The stresses and strains of trying to hold a disparate and ungrateful country together have told on the man, and he looks even older than his fifty-eight years. Castiel is not that far behind him, which is another depressing thought, but on the upside he has his omega's birthday fast approaching.

And Castiel has made Plans.....

++++

Thursday 24th January, 1658

It is Dean's birthday again; he is sure the damn things comes round quicker each year as he gets... very slightly less young. And this one is even closer to... no, he is not going to think about it. He still has six whole years in hand, damnation. That's... uh, a whole lot of days.

The trouble is, everyone has been so considerate that the omega frankly wants to slap the lot of them. No-one mentions his age, not even indirectly. Everyone is kindness itself. Even his children, who it seems have been trained by their alpha-daddy not to say anything untoward. No, this birthday is going to pass off uneventfully.

So Castiel's little 'surprise' comes completely out of the blue. Or more exactly, out of the shoe.

++++

Sam and Sarah had come down, the younger Winchester somewhat wary after his prank during Dean's last trip north. Dean may have exaggerated the after-effects just a smidgeon (1), and definitely not to land his brother in any further trouble if he could. But it still comes as a surprise
when the four of them are sat around the table and Dean is about to say something to his husband when he sees Gadreel and Ezekiel come in. His eyes widen in astonishment. Oh no. His husband wouldn't be that cruel... would he?

Sam looks up as the twins draw up either side of his chair – and promptly jumps into the air with a shriek, knocking Ezekiel over as he bolts for the door yelping in fright. Sarah joins Castiel and the twins in falling about laughing, and Dean shakes his head reprovingly at his husband.

“Honestly, Cas”, he smiles. “Clowns?”

“He upset my omega”, Castiel chuckles. “I was just making sure that he understood the full strength of my disapproval at such actions.”

“I think he got it”, Sarah laughs. “Oh how I wish we had some way of recording his face just then!”

Dean laughs with her. His big little brother will not be pranking him again any time soon, if ever!

+++

Tuesday 5th February, 1658

“Poor Cromwell”, Castiel sighs. “Another parliament proving about as successful as his earlier efforts.”

“Closed down again?” Dean asks tiredly. He is not showing much even at seven months, but after his daughter's safe birth he is less worried this time. Particularly as this latest child seems intent on sucking food out of him as soon as he eats it. At least they like pie, which is the most important thing!

“Yes, he wanted to accept part of the Petition and have a second chamber to examine the laws of the Commons, rather like the old House of Lords”, Castiel explains. “The Commons objected, so he dismissed them. Kings of old had less power than he does.”

“So what now?” Dean asks.

“Who knows?” Castiel says glumly. “All we can do is lie back and take it.”

Dean shoots him a suspicious look, but Castiel feigns an innocence that his omega does not believe for a minute.

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Thursday 28th February, 1658

“I do not understand why the papers are so thrilled that two foreign countries have made peace”, Dean grouses as he waddles (there is no other word for it) over to the sofa. “Neither is our enemy and both are Protestant, so what?”

“Ships.”

Dean looks at his alpha in confusion whilst he adjusts himself on the sofa. Another thing that makes him think that he will get his much-desired omega is that he is less bloated than usual, even if he still feels like a whale. But then Castiel looks at him like he is the stars and the moon, and he does that thing with his tongue that......
“Ships?” Dean says, dragging his reluctant mind out of the gutter. The twinkle in his alpha's blue eyes (and the slight tongue roll) suggests he is enjoying much the same thoughts, but mercifully he answers the question.

“The bulk of our naval materials come from the Baltic Sea”, he explains. “Rope, tar, sails, pitch – our Navy could not function without such essentials, as much as the wood we can grow in the royal forests. It is also one of the few things that some of the northern American colonies can supply, but it is still in our interests to keep the Baltic trade going as strongly as possible. Not to mention the kudos Cromwell gets from negotiating such a peace.” (2)

“I want pie again”, Dean says, looking a little brighter. “Or at least Diniel in here wants pie.”

“Excuses!” Castiel coughs into his hand, but rings the bell anyway.

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Friday 5th April, 1658

“Do you know”, Castiel intones, “that the last sign of an impending omega son is a prolonged birth?”

“I'll prolong you if you let your dick get anywhere near me in future” Dean groans as he arches his back and presents yet again. “For Heaven's sake son, get the hell out of me!”

He had gone into labour in the small hours of yesterday morning, and everything had proceeded just fine all the way up to lunch. Then dinner. Then supper. Then through the night. Except that one person had most definitely not yet come to the party. Charlie had assured him that the baby was not stuck or badly presented or anything, it just seemed disinterested in joining the world out there, no matter how hard his omega-daddy strained to make him.

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Another hour has passed. Dean has begged, pleaded, yelled at and even promised his future son pie if he will but come out, but still nothing. Charlie is sure that there is an omega in there somewhere, because she thinks the child is male (‘a girl would be much better organized’) and if it were an alpha or beta, it would be larger and Dean would be able to push more easily. As it is Dean has already run out of curses to throw at the alpha who got him like this, but give him time – and he seems to have plenty of that just now – and he will come up with plenty more.

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It is at the end of the next hour that the long-awaited event finally happens, and only then thanks to a fortunate coincidence. Dean, who has barely eaten all day, asks for a small slice of pie with cream, and Charlie sends one of the maids to fetch it. When the girl comes back and hands it to her, Dean sniffs at it and smiles – and that is the precise moment that one Master Diniel Milton must also sense pie in the vicinity, for he rushes out of his beleaguered omega-daddy in barely a minute. And sure enough he is an omega, one who is soon suckling at his papa's breast whilst his father looks on and tries to wipe away his tears.

Dean still has the pie, though.

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Monday 8th April, 1658
“Not Oxford?” Dean asks sleepily. He still feels half-dazed, the events of the past three days having left him feeling drained.

“No”, Castiel says quietly reading his letter. “They are starting up regular stagecoach services to Exeter, Chester and York, each about two hundred miles from the capital. They estimate the journey will be done in around four days to each town (3).”

Dean stares mournfully at the little cot across the room. Trust him to get the omega who wants to sleep when Dean wants to hold him.

“They need their sleep at that age”, Castiel says with a soft smile. “Especially little omegas, who are going to grow up and boss some poor, hapless alpha around, making him do whatever he wants.....”

“Don’t sass our son”, Dean mutters, still listening out for any signs of wakefulness.

“Beautiful Diniel”, Castiel says. “Just like his omega-daddy. I wonder if he will still like pie when he grows up?”

“Of course he will like pie!” Dean snorts indignantly. “He’s my son. Besides, he was the only one who didn't make me throw up pie whilst I was having him, and he came out to pie. He has to like pie!”

Castiel sniggers at his mate's crossness, earning himself an adorable pout for so doing, then goes to poke the fire. It has started snowing again, and this time it is coming down as if it means business.

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Monday 29th April, 1658

Dean skulks behind his semi-protective bush, watching the unmistakable figure of his husband in that awful long-coat of his move around behind the tree that is currently affording him some shelter. It has snowed solidly for the past week, and having built the obligatory snowmen (and snow-children) with his family, he is now engaged in The Snowball Fight To The Death. Cas will have to make a run for it soon, and Dean will get him.

Sure enough, the tousle-haired figure looks out from his tree and moves tentatively across towards the house. Dean grins and picks up a heavy snowball, preparing to let his husband have it.

Splat!

It takes the omega a moment to realize that the impact sound is not from the distant figure but himself, the snow from a snowball now dripping down his neck. He spins round and turns right into a second snowball, which splats into his face. He swipes at it, and his vision returns to see Castiel standing triumphantly before him.

“What the....?”

“Got Ezekiel to wear the coat”, Castiel grins, hefting an even larger snowball. “Yield?”

“Hell no!” Dean yells, and runs for the house, narrowly avoiding getting hit twice more from behind. He almost makes it to the steps before Crispin and Crispinian pop up next to them, both with....

(Thankfully he thinks his next two words rather than says them).
“Alpha-daddy wins!” Crispin grins, dropping his snowball. “Come on, papa. Let's get you into the warmth.”

It is a bitterly cold day, Dean thinks as he trudges into the merciful warmth of the main room. That is why his eyes are watering, with all that cold wind. Yes, that is it. And if Cas wants to get him warm by holding him close, well, Dean is but an omega and will just have to put up with it.

Shut up.

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Notes:
1) A large smidgeon. Emperor-sized.
2) The peace lasted only a few months, but the Swedes kept most of their gains and were well on the way to replacing Denmark as the chief power in Scandinavia. They would retain leadership of the area until the rise of Russia in the following century.
3) This would have yielded an average speed of barely more than walking pace, but remember the dreadful state of the roads, which were the 'responsibility' (in the loosest sense of the word) of the parishes unlucky enough to host them. Oh, and no suspension on the coaches, either!
May-December 1658

Chapter Summary

85: Dean institutes a ban on sex with his alpha, which he then has to amend just a little. A letter from the Front upsets Castiel greatly, and not just because he will have to pass on the bad news. A certain Cromwell dies, which makes Castiel fear the worst. To add to his woes Crispinian falls gravely ill – but the cavalry are riding to the rescue! Oh, and Cromwell dies, which puts Castiel in a difficult position as regards Cromwell.

Monday 20th May, 1658

“In the vernacular of the modern media”, Castiel says wryly, “it is an offer that cannot be refused.” (1)

“I would have thought old Cromwell had other things on his mind”, Dean says. “Arresting all those royalist plotters a few days ago, and now asking the merchants of England if they would like to send supplies to the English armies around Dunkirk. For free.”

“Or alternatively, would they like their local major-general to come round and start scaring off all their customers?” Castiel says wryly. “Such a generous offer!”

“It is only the merchants?” Dean asks.

“Yes”, Castiel says, “but I am sending one of our three London ships over with supplies anyway. Cromwell or no Cromwell, it pays to keep on the good side of the people with weapons. Besides, I am including a note that it is in celebration of my latest son, and the joys of having a willing mate who always.....”

Dean is looking at him with interest.

“Always what?” he says testily.

“Uh, always is ready to help me make important decisions?” Castiel says hopefully.

“Someone's not getting laid tonight”, Dean mutters.

“I have new panties.”

Dean considers that for a moment.

“Someone's not getting laid until after dinner”, he amends. "And there'd bloody well better be pie!”

Friday 14th June, 1658

Dean is puzzled. He knows the news is good – the English and their French allies have defeated the Spanish at Dunkirk – yet his husband is strangely if not worryingly silent over at his writing-
“Is there a problem with this victory?” the omega asks tentatively.

Castiel sighs.

“It eliminates a major privateering base for the Royalists and the Spanish”, he says, “so that is all to the good. And we gain Dunkirk, though it is pretty much indefensible when we are next at odds with the French.”

Dean looks at him curiously. Castiel's scent is definitely off in some way, but he cannot read just how or why.

“Yet you seem down”, he ventures. “Is something wrong?”

“Tom Penny's commanding officer wrote”, Castiel says, sniffing mournfully. “He was one of the men killed at Mardyck. He only married last year and..... and....”

Dean is unprepared for the horrible keening noise his alpha lets out, and he hurries over to him and starts scenting him at once. Castiel continues to whimper, but slowly he seems to calm down.

“I love you so much, Dean”, he says between sobs. “I just.... you and the children.... I love you all.”

“Shush little alpha”. Dean says comfortingly. “Come on, let's go to our bedroom.”

“It's only three o'clock”, the alpha points out.

“And?”

The look of love that the alpha shoots him is almost too much, and Dean takes him by the hand to lead him up the stairs, gently scenting him as they go.

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Wednesday 10th July, 1658

One of the things Castiel finds frustrating about politics is that his powers are limited. He is master in his own domain – he feels a sense of pride that the likes of the recently widowed Olivia Penny he is able to provide a safety-net should she need it – but that is all. In a way he can understand how Cromwell ended up as king in all but name, as he too would like to be in a position to be able to do more good. But as it is, he has to be content with small victories here and there.

Three of the men who were involved in the latest Royalist uprising planned in London have just been hung, drawn and quartered in the City. Castiel would not wish this particular punishment on his worst enemy (well maybe, if Alastair Campbell was still alive), although he was able to use his little influence to help secure last-minute reprieves for three others sentenced to be similarly dispatched. There must be a better way to secure justice and protect the people, without doing anything so..... well, so barbaric.

Diniel's difficult birth coupled with the news about poor Thomas Penny has left Castiel feeling the sort of emotional vulnerability that, he knows, no alpha should ever feel. Thankfully his beloved Dean is both safe and happy now, never more so than when he is nursing his very own omega. Dean loves his new son so much that Castiel rarely gets a look-in, though he is more than content to see his mate happy. And to know that their family is growing and safe.
Well, safe for now. Castiel still has most of the contacts from his intelligence network from when he was in the Commons, and he knows that many important people are circling, ready to make their move when Cromwell does pass on. The future is uncertain, but for now he has his mate and their children, and all is right with the world.

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Saturday 10th August, 1658

“Oh.”

Dean looks across the breakfast table at him. For once he does not have a tiny omega attached to him; Diniel is sleeping in his cot a short distance away. Castiel knows better than to separate the two by any distance.

“Oh?” Dean asks nervously.

“Elizabeth Claypole has died.”

Dean frowns.

“Should I know that name?” he asks.

“Born Elizabeth Cromwell”, Castiel says heavily, “and the general's favourite daughter. This will hit him hard.”

He is soon to be proven right.

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Friday 10th September, 1658

Castiel sighs heavily.

“I am going to London”, he says. “But only for the funeral. And I may speak with the new Lord Protector, though only in a private capacity.”

Dean stops nursing Diniel, who makes his feelings at the interruption loud and clear. The omega lets his son suckle again, but stares at his husband.

“Is that wise?” he ventures. “What if there are.... consequences?”

“I do not think he will be able to hold things together”, Castiel says. “It means another time of uncertainty for England, but I have hopes. I have already exchanged letters with Monck, and he agrees with me. Dickon is but a shadow of his father, and he will fail. And then.....”

“A restoration?” Dean asks, sorting his youngest son's hair which he seems to have inherited from his alpha-daddy. It is a complete mess, and he only combed it out this morning.

“Possibly.”

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All last week, England had been racked by the worst storms in living memory. Castiel had been unable to go round the estate, and by the time the winds had abated he had received news from London. The wiseacres had said that the devil was coming for his own – the so-called Year of the
Devil, 1666, was only eight years away now – and sure enough when the storms had blown through the great Oliver Cromwell was no more, dead on the anniversary of his great victories at Dunbar and Worcester. His son Richard had been appointed in his stead, and had immediately written asking if the earl could come to London.

“If I see him formally”, Castiel says, “it expresses my backing for a continuation of the regime. I do not know what the future holds, but England cannot go on like this, no king, no parliament and a Puritanical Army in charge of everything. Dickon must fall, and then..... well, who knows what we shall get instead? Possibly Lambert, possibly... someone else.”

He looks across to his beloved mate and their youngest son, and smiles. The alpha feels that they are close to reaching a new and better England, but he well remembers the story of Orpheus, who blew everything at the last. He has written again to Thomas Fairfax recently, securing that important figure's support should anything befall the alpha. In the meantime he will protect Dean and their children right as much as is in his power, whatever storms still lie in their paths.

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Saturday 18th September, 1658

Castiel is forty-nine today, but there are no celebrations. Crispinian, just turned seven years old, has come down with a severe fever, and the alpha was less than pleased when his doctor had seemed to think all was lost. He knows that Dean, one of the least religious of omegas, has been spending more time in the local church lately, and he is frankly very worried.

“You have a visitor, sir”, Fforbes says mournfully, which is his normal tone. Castiel spares a moment to utter a prayer of thankfulness for a good butler; the last one had had to be sacked because he drank too much, but Fforbes is teetotal.

“Someone you damn well should be at home to, alpha.”

The voice is vaguely familiar, and Castiel looks past his butler to see the figure who has just entered. She is a black woman of some age, and one he knows well.

“Miss Moseley?” he asks, confused.

“Would've been here sooner if this country had better roads”, she grumbles. “Well? I haven't got all week. Show me to the boy.”

Castiel, a well-trained alpha, hurries to obey.

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Saturday 25th September, 1658

“I wanted to tell you something anyway”, Miss Moseley says as she prepares to leave. The whole family is there to see her off, including a still pale but definitely recovering Crispinian. “You'll see me before then, but I might as well tell you now.”

“Not something dangerous?” Dean asks anxiously.

“Not if your husband plays it right”, she says. “Next year he will receive an invitation to go and talk with someone important. He'll know it when it comes. He should parley for a meeting on
neutral ground."

“May I ask why?” Castiel asks courteously.

“You always were the one with manners”, she smiles. He beams, before she adds, “and a good choice in agricultural outbuildings!”

Castiel blushes fiercely. She barks a laugh.

“Do not visit the man's house”, she says, “His – and your - enemies have planted a spy in his household, and you would be in danger if you are known to have been there. Take care, my lord.”

“I so will”, Castiel says. “Thank you for everything Miss Moseley, and Godspeed!”

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Wednesday 24th November, 1658

Castiel had been quite prepared to ride home the evening before, but his mate had insisted he wait until the next day.

“Even with an armed guard”, he had said, “I do not want you riding overnight on dangerous roads, when a good night's sleep will mean you can do the same journey safely but twelve hours later.”

It made good sense, Castiel supposed, as he had come to the capital only in his capacity as a private citizen. Had he made his presence known, he would certainly have been inveigled into playing some major role in the procession, which he would have hated. He had respected Cromwell as a friend and an opponent – he was sure the general must have realized his leanings at some point, especially given that there had been no note asking him to support Dickon, but the general had never said anything – and he owed him a farewell. And a little more.

Castiel had risen early that morning and gone to the new Lord Protector's lodgings. As he had expected, he had been asked if he would participate in a new government. He had declined, but had affirmed that his friendship with the great general would extend to his family who might call on him in a personal capacity if needed (3). He then left for his lodgings, and immediately set off on the long journey home. It was uneventful, except for a small group of ruffians just before Wycombe who discovered the hard way that some travellers carried more than one gun each.

And now, after a long and cold journey he is back with omega, who gently scented him all the way to the fire whilst sending the servants to run him a hot bath. Castiel supposes that, if he were a dutiful alpha, he would put in a couple of hours of estate work this evening. But the rain is still falling, his bed is warm and his omega is warmer. Pulling Dean into a manly embrace he falls asleep, uncaring of the world outside.

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Wednesday 8th December, 1658

“Of course I understand”, Castiel says smoothly, whilst wondering if he could stick a dagger in his unwelcome guest and make it look like an accident. As he is one of the circuit judges, the odds are not that good.

Justice William Straw sniffs disdainfully

“This humane crap is all very well”, he says, “but there is a time and a place for it. The man is as
guilty as sin, and he deserves to face the full penalty that the law demands.”

Therein lies the problem, Castiel thinks. Last week a highwayman called Philip Clare had been captured and now faced the trial of being hung, drawn and quartered as a deterrent to others. As an ex-Royalist he was technically a gentleman so could normally have asked for beheading instead, but the law was vague on the status of such people. And some judges liked to make examples of the men before them.

The earl is surprised when they are interrupted by a knock at the door, and of all people his housekeeper enters. The judge looks her up and down with great disdain, but before he can say anything she speaks.

“You know, you look awfully like someone I saw at a certain, ahem, 'guest house' in Oxford recently”, she says cheerfully. “Though it was a shady place, so it cannot have been you.”

The judge is turning an interesting shade of purple. Castielseizes the chance.

“That is interesting", he says innocently. “Perhaps with Mr. Clare out of the way I could make some inquiries.....”

“As you said, my lord”, the judge bursts in, speaking very quickly, “we must not overlook the rights of any gentleman, no matter which side of the contention they mistakenly choose. Dear me, is that the time? I must be gone. Goodbye!”

He leaves the room rapidly, only hesitatingly to glare at Charlie who obligingly hands him his coat, hat and stick. He snatches them from her and disappears. Castiel chuckles.

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Notes:
1) A phrase rendered (in)famous from its use in The Godfather book (1969) and film (1972). It had been used before of course, but not with the tone of underlying menace.
2) In 1662 shortly after the Restoration, Charles II sold the port back to the French for £320,000 (about £5 million or $6.5 million in 2016 terms). It was arguably a wise move, but his pro-French policies alienated many at the time.
3) It was needed. After the Restoration Richard Cromwell was forced to flee abroad, and Castiel sent him money during his time there. He returned to England in 1680 and lived quietly there for the rest of his life. Ironically he held the title of the longest-lived ruler of the country until Elizabeth II passed him in 2011.
86: Neither alpha nor omega ever purrs, let that be understood right now. Queen Dick tells parliament where he intends to shove their job, and Castiel tells Dean where he intends to shove... why yes, it is that sort of story. Dean ends up with a bun in the oven again, and this time the morning sickness and nausea disobligningly start earlier than usual. Oh joy! The Rump is back, and there is a palace for sale.

Monday 24th January, 1659

Dean is thirty-fifteen today. And showing what is for once excellent timing, his husband's latest rut ended yesterday. After two weeks. Two long, hard weeks. The omega sometimes wonders if Castiel has found some sort of medication that enables him to jump-start his ruts to make so many of his omega's birthdays memorable – if sore – but he thinks that such a thing is unlikely (1). The alpha grumbles as he shifts his knot inside his omega, and Dean's eyes water until the bastard finds a comfortable position, holding him in an... embrace. A manly embrace. Yes, that is it. He had made the mistake of calling his husband 'old man' yesterday, and the alpha had responded with a fucking that had nearly succeeded in forcing Dean off his knot (this had actually happened one time and the omega was determined it would never occur again; not because of the pain – which had been bad enough – but because the scent of an alpha distressed because he had hurt his mate was a thousand times more painful to Dean).

“Breed me up good, little alpha”, Dean mutters, his eyes watering as he nestles back into the warm body behind him. He smiles as two strong arms enfold him and pull him in. “Yours, Cas. Forever and always.”

The alpha keens as his knot somehow manages to swell even more, and Dean passes out.

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Saturday 29th January, 1659

Castiel bangs his fist down onto the desk in annoyance, making both the pen-holder and his mate jump.

“Mwah?” Dean says sleepily. The alpha cannot understand why his mate is so out of it; it is not as if twenty minutes back Castiel had been trying to suck Dean's brains out through his dick.....

Oh yes. He had been. Ah well.

“The new Protectorate Parliament has met for the first time”, Castiel growls. “And of all the stupid things, they managed to fall out on selecting a cleric to conduct the prayer services in the House. Never mind running the country; this lot could not even run a bath!”

Dean yawns, then stands and crosses to where his alpha is sat in his huge padded chair. The omega drapes himself all over his husband, gently scenting him. Castiel does not purr.
“You cannot do that every time to take my mind off of my problems”, he snorts, though he is already arching his neck to give Dean better access. And still not purring.

“We'll see about that”, Dean mutters.

Despite himself, Castiel smiles.

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Monday 21st February, 1659

“Bound to be an alpha”, Charlie says with far too much cheerfulness when speaking to someone who is throwing up their most recent meal. “They do say that early morning sickness means a really big baby.”

Dean manages, through creative use of his functioning hand, to convey what he thinks of both her opinion and life in general. He throws in a piteous whine for good measure.

“I'm going to get fat again!” he moans.

“As if that stops your ramrod of a husband!” the housekeeper snorts. “He seems to find you even more hump-worthy when you're pregnant. Why do you think the maids have that wheeled trolley parked just outside your door?”

“Huh?”

“So they can push your meals inside without seeing too much of their lord and master”, she grins. “The Earl of Bradstock has no problems with being naked around far too many people!”

“That's not true”, Dean protests.

She just looks at him.

“Not totally true”, he hedges. “Besides, he really likes to do it wearing panties, especially the white....”

He is alone, the sound of a slamming door and running feet making him smile. That will teach the girl to be cheerful around the pregnant omega.

Unfortunately the smile does not last, but at least he has the waste-basket to hand.

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Tuesday 22nd February, 1659

Dean is sorting through the estate cash box when he finds it, and stares at it in confusion. The fact that he will have to wait for his alpha's return from his estate work is the second most annoying thing to happen to him that day.

The first, incidentally, is the pie Dean had for lunch. And then lost. In record time, damnation!

“It is a drawn note”, Castiel explains as he sits down on the couch that evening, running his fingers through the omega's hair and earning himself something that sounds suspiciously like a purr (Dean of course does not purr, just like he never cuddles). “Also called a cheque. Instead of Mr. Berringe giving me a sheaf of cash he signs over the note, and it is worth the same as fifty pounds cash.”
“Sounds a bit risky, all that money on a single piece of paper”, Dean sniffs. “It'll never catch on.”

“He and I have been having dealings about the spare grain I bought”, Castiel says, “especially after the dreadful weather all last year. It seems that I am one of the few noblemen in this country capable of planning ahead for his thing called winter, which as we know is totally unpredictable every year. So how has my perfect omega been today?”

“Mostly face down in the privy”, Charlie says, coming up to them both. “Or the waste-paper basket. Dinner is almost ready; it's roast pork with gravy and potatoes.....”

Dean is already running for the bathroom. Unfortunately the noise from the corridor suggests that he has not made it.

“Betsy's on clean-up duty today, poor girl”, Charlie sighs. “I'll send her up.”

+~+~+

Monday 14th March, 1659

“Snipe, snipe, snipe”, Castiel grumbles. “This parliament never misses an opportunity to complain, even as it bumbles along doing very little.”

“I thought you were happy at the new Upper House?” Dean asks. He is resting with Castiel's shirt from yesterday, the scent of his alpha apparently one of the few things that can stop his nausea. He is starving, but refuses to think about any particular food because... well, because he knows full well what will happen if he does.

“They are always complaining about the powers of the Lord Protector”, Castiel says. “If they are not careful, they may get exactly what they wish for. He may decide that the battle is not worth fighting, and tell them exactly where to shove it.”

“They need telling”, Dean agrees.

“Whereas I, as an alpha, know exactly where to shove it”, Castiel grins. “As your current state clearly shows.”

“Mean alpha”, Dean grumbles. “Once I can stand up, I want lots of sex to make up for that.”

“Oh how awful”, Castiel says flatly. “Woe, woe and thrice woe.”

Dean throws a cushion at him. Even that movement makes him feel nauseous, and....

Castiel sighs, and rings for the maid.

+~+~+

Monday 25th April, 1659

Dean is at least grateful that the morning sickness and nausea that arrived early have also departed early. He is less grateful that he is already swelling up. He wonders if it might be triplets this time.

“Who on earth is Queen Dick?” he yawns.

Castiel raises an eyebrow at his omega, who is reading a letter the alpha has just received from London.
“One of the unflattering names used for the Lord Protector”, he says. “He is also called Tumbledown Dick.”

“Looks like he's tumbled down all right”, Dean says. “Your Kensington friend writes that he has agreed to dissolve the parliament selected mostly by his late father and recall the Rump. He also says that the Royalists are rejoicing.”

“More fool them”, Castiel says shortly. “Remember that it was the Rump members who voted for the trial of the king. I only hope that poor Dickon is dealt with fairly and allowed to leave the country. He is hardly the same sort of threat to the army that the king is.”

“So what now?” Dean asks.

“It really comes down to just two men”, Castiel says. “Lambert and Monck. Lambert, though he has never said as much, wishes to be the new Protector (2) and continue army rule. I am sure Monck is secretly pro-Charles, but he is very cautious, and some way out of things up in Scotland.”

Wednesday 11th May, 1659

“The Rump is back.”

Dean can hear the surprise in his husband's voice.

“Did you not say they were going to be recalled?” he asks.

“Yes”, Castiel says cautiously, “but I was not sure it would actually happen. Though the Army have been careful to exclude anyone banned at the Purge back in 'Forty-Nine. Who knows what we will get now poor Dickon has gone?”

“The doctor came round today”, Dean says. He feels the alpha immediately tense up. “Do not worry; I was never alone with him.”

He can see that his alpha is a little ashamed at his instinctive reaction. Castiel had been due to be there for the appointment, but a fire at a cottage in Hampton had led to his being called out. Dean holds out his hand to his alpha, who immediately rushes over and starts to scent him.

“Silly alpha!” Dean chides gently. “I had Dorothy with me at all times, and besides, you know we both trust Doctor Christian.”

“I know”, Castiel sighs. “I am sorry.”

“One cannot fight nature”, Dean agrees. “He says that he cannot be sure for another month, but he thinks that I am only carrying one baby. A baby what he did not say; I am considering a whale.”

“You will birth me another perfect child, whatever they may be”, Castiel smiles. “I have faith in you.”

“Just not in our paid doctor”, Dean points out. “Even though he is a beta, and would know what you would do if he tried anything.”

“He would not dare!” Castiel growls.

“As he is married with six children of his own, I doubt that he has either the time or the energy”, Dean says wryly.
Monday 20th June, 1659

“There is going to be trouble”, Castiel sighs.

“Over Whitehall?” Dean asks surprised. “I would not have expected them to find a buyer.”

“With even the possibility of a Restoration making any sale risky, that is no surprise”, Castiel says flatly. “No, it is Lambert again. He is unhappy that his Army is suborned to parliament. And worse, the members have alienated Monck by appointing new officers to his army without even consulting him.”

Dean smiles.

“In short, they are behaving like a king who thinks he can do just what he likes because of his position?” he ventures.

Castiel glares at him. Dean fakes an injured look.

“Pretty much”, Castiel sighs. “They do not seem to understand that the reality is they are only in power because there is no-one else. If they go too far, it will be a repeat of them being locked out again – and then what?”

Monday 25th July, 1659

“They arrested more of the Royalist conspirators today”, Castiel says with a heavy sigh. “This is bad.”

“You actually thought the uprising might succeed?” Dean asks, surprised. His husband shakes his head.

“No”, he says. “What I mean is that only the uprising was keeping parliament and the Army from each others’ throats. Now that that danger seems to be passing, battle will be joined again with a vengeance.”

“Except”, Dean says tartly, “only one side has any weapons!”

He looks curiously at the alpha. Castiel has that ‘I am considering telling you something which you may not like’ look about him. They have had pie for dessert, so it cannot be anything that bad.

“What is it?” he asks.

“Lieutenant Mallow called in”, Castiel says. “He says he had to take some men to break up a small Royalist meeting up in Norton yesterday. Only a few dozen, but...your brother was amongst them.”

“He has not been arrested?” Dean asks anxiously.

“Just cautioned”, Castiel reassures him. “Fortunately the Lieutenant recognized his connection to me, and advised him to go home. But you may wish to write him and counsel a degree more caution. There is no need for Sam to endanger both himself and his young family with a possible end to our troubles so close.”

“So close”, Dean echoes.
Notes:
1) Dean is quite correct. Otherwise his husband would be using it all the time!
2) It was thought possible that Lambert might succeed Oliver Cromwell when he died, but the former's opposition to the Humble Petition And Advice had led to a breach between the two that was both personal and professional. Lambert's support of Richard Cromwell had always been lukewarm, and subsequent events.... you'll see.
Chapter Summary

87: Dean is horrified by an enforced diet change, but is then successfully delivered of yet another baby. The omega definitely does not wait for hours by the window for his alpha to return, because that would make him a complete sap. John Lambert makes his bid for power but Castiel has already outmanoeuvred him, heeding Mistress Moseley's warning and travelling to a small village in Nottinghamshire for a 'chance encounter' with the great Fairfax.

Saturday 20th August, 1659

Castiel shakes his head in sorrow as he reads his latest letter.

“I warned him”, he says sadly. “But either the king did not listen, or his instructions did not reach the rebels in time.”

“There has been a battle?” Dean asks.

“Lambert has crushed an uprising in the king's name at a place called Winnington Bridge (1) near Chester”, Castiel says. “Doubly unfortunate; not just for the loss of life but because it will enhance the man's reputation. Yes, I think I may have to take a short trip.”

Dean looks at him in alarm. He is two months away from birthing what feels like a whale, and his alpha is off somewhere?

“Only for a couple of days at the most”, Castiel says fervently. “It is nearly a hundred miles of poor road, but I can do it in a day each way at a push, and meet Fairfax on the intervening evening. As if I would wish to be away from my omega when he is so close to creating another new life for us both.”

“Do you have to go?” Dean asks in a small voice.

“For England, I shall have to go”, Castiel says. “And I shall miss you every minute we are apart, my beautiful pie-eating omega. My perfect, wonderful, magnificent mate. My Dean!”

Dean blushes.

“Sappy alpha!” he mutters, though he is secretly pleased.

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Wednesday 24th August, 1659

“I do not like the man”, Castiel says, “but I have to admit that John Lambert is smart. He has split the thousand pounds (2) he was awarded for his success at Chester amongst his men. In the coming conflict with parliament, that will buy a lot of loyalty.”

“Loyalty that can be bought is not real loyalty”, Dean says testily. His future offspring has been
restive all day, and no sooner has the omega sat down to rest than his load has shifted, casing him all sorts of pain down below. And not the good sort he gets from his alpha, either.

“Problems with the baby?” Castiel asks, concerned.

“He won't keep still”, Dean complains. “Charlie says all that pie is giving him too much energy, but what does she know? Besides, the baby wants pie so the baby gets pie!”

Castiel refrains from pointing out that all their children have gotten pie whether they liked it or not, sometimes repeatedly until they did damn well like it!

“Does the baby want pie now?” he asks. Dean thinks about it for a moment, then goes pale. Castiel is immediately worried.

“Dean?”

“No!” His omega looks distraught.

“What is it? What is wrong?”

His mate turns a piteous face on him.

“The baby wants carrots!” he says mournfully. “Rabbit food!”

“I'll go and get some straight away”, Castiel promises, jumping to his feet and hurrying from the room. Yes, he is a good alpha who does things like that for his omega. And it is totally not because he was set to fall about laughing at Dean's mournful face.

All right, he does laugh in the kitchen. But so does Charlie when he tells her his mate's request, and at least Castiel has straightened his face before his return.

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Sunday 18th September, 1659

Dean is a manly man, not some wimpy omega who cries every time their alpha wanders more than a few feet away from him. So he is not seated at the huge window in the library because it is the room which offers the best view of the track through to Charlton and the main road north, waiting anxiously for his alpha to return. He just likes the sun.

All right, he likes the rain too. And the heavy cloud. Shut up!

Most of the children are at dinner, but Dean is not hungry. Only Crispin is there, the seven-year-old (‘seven and three-quarters, papa!’), working hard at his writings for his father's return. Charlie appears at the door and the boy slopes over to her, reluctantly heading off to join his siblings at the dinner table. Dean smiles; he knows the boy wants to show his alpha-daddy just how much his writing is progressing lately.

The omega is so rapt in himself that he fails to hear the door open a second time – but then he detects a delicious and familiar scent, and looks up in surprise. His husband is there, grinning at him. Dean lets out a whine and moves to get up, but he is eight months pregnant so Castiel has plenty of time to forestall him, moving swiftly across the room to claim his kiss.

“Didn't see you coming”, Dean says once he can draw breath.

“So you were looking out for me?” the alpha grins.
Dean realizes his mistake and pouts. Castiel chuckles.

“I came back via the Great North Road, and so through Wolfstown rather than Charlton”, he says. “I promised to be back for my birthday, and I have kept my word.”

Dean leans into his husband’s touch and sighs happily. Then he looks at him with a knowing smirk.

“So”, he grins, “how is the small and definitely not worth a long trip in this weather estate of Langar-cum-Barnstone?”

“Nottinghamshire is very nice at this time of year”, Castiel says. “And as I told you, I went to meet with Thomas Fairfax, who like me has been in covert communication with Monck. Despite the latest failed Royalist uprisings, we are hopeful.”

“Missouri was right that one of you going to the other’s house would draw much attention”, Dean admits, “even without a spy there. The two of you happening to meet at an estate in the middle of nowhere halfway between your houses that, by an amazing coincidence, you were both bidding for…. well, I am sure someone would believe it.”

“The roads may be terrible”, Castiel says, “but I could guarantee that had I gone to Hull, the London papers would be full of ‘The Fairfax-Bradstock Plot To Bring Down The Government Of Our Realm’. No, we have laid our plans. Which is good in another way too.”

“What?”

Castiel grins.

“You get to extract them from me through cuddling with your poor, tired fifty-year-old alpha!” Castiel says.

Dean smiles before he realizes.

“C-word! Bad alpha!”

His husband sniggers.

Friday 14th October, 1659

“As I feared”, Castiel says heavily. “The Rump has tried to dismiss Lambert, and he has responded by dismissing them…. ow!”

Dean cannot believe it. He is straining to push out what must be the largest baby in all creation, and his stupid alpha husband is talking about politics now? He lets out a snarl that tapers off as there is a sudden easing of pressure…. praise the Lord and hallelujah!

“I really do not like Lambert”, Castiel says calmly, as if his omega mate were not squeezing the life out of his hand whilst delivering the Lord alone knows what number child – Dean lost the ability to count some time back. “I rather fear he may try for power himself.”

Some day, Dean thinks acidly as he feels a horrible and yet blissful emptiness inside, he is going to traumatize this child with stories of what his alpha-daddy was doing during his birth, and what his omega-daddy did to his alpha-daddy as a punishment afterwards. His child....

“An alpha”, Charlie announces. “And a really big one; must be ten pounds or thereabouts.”
“A veritable Herakles”, Castiel chuckles.

Dean eventually manages to get his breath back, as Charlie helps the servants with the cleaning up. Soon the omega is moved away to the comfort of his bed, where he can suckle his latest addition to the family.

“He looks like a Herakles”, he says. “A strong face.”

He holds the baby to his chest, and it latches on immediately. Dean's eyes widen.

“Strong suction like the original, too (3)!” he gasps. “Herakles it is!”

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Friday 4th November, 1659

“Lambert has left London”, Castiel says quietly. “He had little choice; Monck's statement that he would uphold the rights of parliament are an act of open defiance. He thinks that if he can engage him or at least have talks with him from behind the wall of an army, then he can remove the danger.”

“Why not let him come to London?” Dean wonders. “Four hundred miles of bad road will not exactly do much for the Scots major-general.”

“I think Lambert has finally realized that London is all for the king”, Castiel says. “He thinks the men he leaves behind can handle it, and he can destroy his chief rival. Then he will become the new Lord Protector.”

“Well he succeed, so you think?” Dean asks, cuddling a suckling Herakles to him. The baby lets go just long enough to belch – something he needs little assistance over, they have both learnt - then latches on again almost immediately.

“If Monck is as efficient as our new son, I doubt it”, Castiel smiles. “That was one of the other reasons I wanted to talk with Fairfax. The plan is for Monck to hold his ground, and let Lambert get as far as say Newcastle. Once he is there, Fairfax will lead a rising of his own Yorkshiremen to cut his retreat off. Boxed in, his army will feel they cannot win, and should disintegrate.”

“And if it does not?” Dean asks.

“Then Towton (4) may have competition for the title of bloodiest battle in the kingdom”, Castiel says sombrelly.

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Monday 26th December, 1659

Much as Dean loves the people who worked on the estate, Boxing Day is tiring. It is expected that the omega will present the traditional gifts to servants and staff, and even with Castiel sharing the load, it had taken a long time. Now at last there is just the two of them, lying together in their bed. Castiel gently massages his mate's backside, earning himself a contented not-purr.

“Quite appropriate really”, the alpha mutters.

“What is?” Dean asks sleepily.

“The Navy has declared for parliament, so the Rump has reassembled at Westminster in spite of
Lambert and the army”, Castiel says. “His supporters have the power to crush them easily, but they are afraid to act.”

“But they have all the guns”, Dean points out.

“It is the tide of history”, Castiel says. “Lambert's supporters have realized that if he does lose in the North, then the retribution wrought upon they themselves will be fierce. So they are staying their hand to see how things turn out.”

“Cowards”, Dean mutters.

“Self-preservation”, Castiel says. “The future of this country hangs in the balance just now, and this festive season should decide all.”

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Saturday 31st December, 1659

Dean watches his husband anxiously. Castiel frowns as he reads the letter, then smiles.

“It is over”, he says. “At least the danger of a major battle; Fairfax writes that he has secured York, and that Lambert's army is falling apart. Monck will cross the Tweed any day now, and will be in London in little over a month, I reckon. Barring some other disaster, we shall have our king back early next year.”

“But you will still have to go to London?” Dean asks anxiously. Castiel had returned from Oxford the day before having spoken to the area commander there.

“I will, but only to secure what is all but won”, he says. “I talked with General Lee and explained the political situation, and whilst he himself is inclined against parliament, he sees that his side has lost this war. Ten of the country's top noblemen are riding to the capital to support the Restoration, and I am the nearest of them. If I did not turn up, it might encourage Lambert's friends to continue the fight, which would only cost more innocent lives. But I will soon be home again. (5)’’

“I suppose”, Dean sighs.

Castiel pulls him into an embrace as they stand by the huge window, looking out onto a cold winter scene outside. A steady drizzle is soaking the already sodden fields and is threatening to turn to sleet, but he and Cas have each other, and.....

Oh come on! Now?

“Insatiable alpha!” Dean smirks, nestling back into a very impressive erection.

“I do not know”, Castiel says darkly. “Why do you not try sating me, omega? Unless you want to go outside and find a nice empty barn?”

“In this weather?” Dean laughs. “Not a bloody chance!”

His alpha sweeps him effortlessly off his feet and carries him out of the room, to their own bed where they can be alpha and omega together. Cas and Dean, as it always should be.

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Notes:
1) The uprising had been scheduled to break out in several Royalist areas across the country but the
government's efficient spy network easily discovered the bulk of the plot, and only the city of Chester was briefly held by the rebels.

2) About £15,000 ($20,000) in 2016 terms. Despite being split among so many, it was probably a lot to soldiers whose pay was intermittent.

3) In Greek myth, Zeus tricked Hera into suckling Herakles so her milk would make him immortal. He sucked so hard that she pulled him away, the resulting jet of milk becoming the Milky Way (hence the name). It also earned him her enmity for life which eventually sent him mad and made him kill his family, but you can't have it all.

4) The battle of Towton, fought during a snowstorm on March 29th, 1461 between the forces of Lancaster and York during the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487). A combination of bad luck and poor judgement led to the losing Lancastrians being slaughtered; it is thought that around thirty thousand men lost their lives that terrible day.

5) Cas would be away for over a month until Monck arrived and he could be sure of the Restoration. But the welcome-home sex when he got back – well, it was time to order a new bed anyway!
May 1660

Chapter Summary

88: The Restoration. England is a monarchy once more; the Puritan killjoys who banned such frivolities as Christmas and maypole-dancing have sloped off into history, and there is a new and proper parliament. Everything is perfect for the soon to be crowned King Charles II – well, everything except for two of his noblemen who cannot keep their hands off of each other, and for whom decorum is an alien concept.

Tuesday 29th May, 1660

For Charles Stuart, second of that name and now king of England, Scotland and Ireland in deed as well as name, this is a day of triumph. The day he enters a London where, eleven years earlier, his father had been beheaded. Now the monarchy is restored and everything is back to normal. (1)

To his right stands the recently-ennobled Lord Compton, ridiculously tall and with his hair constantly falling into his eyes. His pretty lady wife stands a little way back, and the king knows that the two almost identical boys dressed in similar finery before him are in fact his nephews, Crispin and Crispinian, the eldest sons of two people who should be here and palpably are not.

One of the drawbacks of royalty is not being able to roll one's eyes at times like this, especially when all around you are doing just that. Then from the far end of the great hall comes the predictable sound of bickering. The king allows himself a quiet tut.

"Waiting to get your hair in order is totally pointless!" comes one voice. "Twenty-one years and I've not seen it happen yet! One might as well wait for Judgement Day!"

"And whose fault is my hair?" comes a deeper voice. "If you will bend over like that in those trousers....."

The voice tails off, and the king can see Lord Compton flush bright red and bow his head in mortification, whilst his wife has a sudden coughing fit. The two boys before them glance at each other with the sort of long-suffering look that only those with the most embarrassing parents in the world can effect. And then coming round the far corner are the dual causes of that embarrassment, two men both of whom it is fair to say look more than a little dishevelled. They are not holding a huge sign saying that they have just been making out, but they might as well be.

The first man, unusually, is an omega. That might be unusual except that everyone who is anyone knows that, whilst omegas generally remain several steps behind their alpha, this is the exception that proves the rule. Dean Milton is tall, broad-shouldered - and pregnant.

Behind him comes his alpha, whose hair does indeed look as if he has been outside during a tornado. He has the appearance of someone who has been thoroughly debauched, and is very glad of that fact. Castiel Earl of Bradstock, who after the king is the man of the moment. The king notices (but prudently does not comment on) the subtle growling from the earl that one would expect from any alpha in his position, which is accompanied with the sort of sly smile from the omega that is several degrees beyond smug.
Charles knows that the earl, along with Fairfax and Monck, are the three people he most owes for his crown. When Lambert's already stuttering army had been caught between the first two, the earl had taken a grave risk by coming to a London filled with Lambert's supporters and publicly proclaiming his loyalty to the Stuart, and also listing ten other nobles who were joining him to support the Restoration. Fortunately Lambert's friends had quickly thrown in the towel, and the would-be third Lord Protector was now safely locked up in the Tower (2). Monck had reached London in little more than a month, and after some careful and discreet negotiations the Stuart had been invited to resume the kingship. Maybe with reduced powers, but there was time.

The earl and his mate pause in front of the king and the alpha immediately moves to support the omega, who smiles in gratitude. The king silently prays for them to avoid a repeat of the Dover Incident, when had been making out as he approached. And they had not even been embarrassed about it, stopping only when he had coughed. Three times!

“Your Majesty”, the both say, bowing. An omega should of course curtsey, but then this is the Earl of Bradstock's omega.

“Gentlemen”, the king says. “I see that you are both well.” He glances down. “How goes the pregnancy?”

“Another pup”, the omega sighs. “Someone cannot keep it in their trousers, despite being past fifty.”

“You like it when I....”

The omega slaps him. Few people around him are surprised, the king included, though he is sure that he hears Lord Compton behind him muttering something about adoption.

“Let us proceed”, the king smiles. “London awaits, and I do not wish to keep my subjects waiting.”

He steps down from the platform and leads the way out, but not before he catches the earl still fussing over his mate, who blushes at his care but smiles. Two very lucky men, he thinks. And the omega, even pregnant, is quite attractive. But then he knows that if even he made a move on that particular omega, the earl would tear him limb from limb, crown or no crown. No, there are women and omegas enough out there for him.

He goes out into the morning sunshine followed by the omega and the still-growling alpha. Castiel Earl of Bradstock and his inimitable mate Dean, the Lord of Nowhere.

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Notes:
1) All laws passed since 1642 were rendered void by the new parliament (the Indemnity And Oblivion Act). Note that it was 1642, not 1640; parliament kept all the concessions they had wrung from Charles I in the two years before war had actually broken out.
2) Lambert briefly escaped and tried to rally the army against the Restoration, but he was soon captured. He would spend the remaining twenty-four years of his life in captivity on islands, first Guernsey off the coast of France and later Drake's Island off Plymouth.
Epilogue (1660-1683)

Chapter Summary

89: A timeline of what happened next..... sort of

1660: Dean gives birth to a daughter, Jane. Parliament moves against those it deems guilty of being responsible for the king's death; Oliver Cromwell is sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered; he probably doesn't mind much, being dead.

1661: Coronation of Charles II. The event is only slightly marred by two noblemen openly making out during the service (guess who!), and not even stopping when the Archbishop of Canterbury coughs very loudly. Twice!

1662: Charles marries the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza, but there will be no Prince of Wales. The king will treat her very badly, openly parading his many mistresses at court; despite her Catholicism the English grow to like her, especially that she takes no interest in politics. Dean gives birth to a fifth alpha son on April 23rd, hence he is called St. George. The birth is difficult, and the omega is advised not to have any more children. There is some (a lot of) pouting. That winter Castiel is seriously injured in a fall from his horse, and Dean is mistakenly informed that his husband may die. The relief he feels when he discovers the truth leads to....

1663: On August 20th Dean gives birth to his and Castiel's tenth and most definitely last child, an omega called Demetrius (Misha to his family). This birth is even more difficult, and Castiel promises no more sex during heats. Dean gets a week of pie to compensate (he had wanted two). The king ennobles his oldest illegitimate son (1) James as Duke of Monmouth.

1664: Dean is forty-ten. Castiel is wisely silent.

1665: Plague in London is killing a thousand people a day at its height; the king and parliament flee to Oxford for safety. A second war starts with the Dutch. In the Americas, New Haven is merged into Connecticut.

1666: Great Fire of London. Nearly all of the square mile, including Old St. Paul's Cathedral and around 13,000 buildings, is burnt to the ground, but only six deaths are recorded (the real figure was probably higher, but not much). The city authorities will subsequently decide that building wooden and thatched properties with coal-burning fires close by each other might not be a good idea.

1667: The war with the Dutch ends in defeat, and England feels humiliated. The king will use this as a reason to start cosying up to his cousin Louis XIV of France, whose Catholicism and absolute authority he admires and wishes to follow. Significantly the peace treaty keeps the New Netherlands (roughly New York, New Jersey and Delaware) for England, uniting the southern and northern mainland English colonies for the first time. Isaac Newton discovers calculus, to the joy of schoolboys everywhere.

1668: The king's brother and heir James Duke of York converts to Catholicism. He is so busy managing his new lands across the seas from his renamed capital of New York that he 'forgets' to tell anyone.
1669: Diarist Samuel Pepys makes his last diary entry after nine years of documenting Restoration England and all its peculiarities. He cites poor eyesight.

1670: Death of Mary Winchester, aged eighty-three. A bad year is made worse for Dean when his brother announces that he had been waiting for this before emigrating to the Carolina Province in the Americas. The king signs a formal treaty with Louis (Treaty of Dover), but secretly agrees to accept large dollops of cash in return for trying to make England Catholic again. In the Americas, the first settlements are established in what will be Georgia.

1671: Anne Duchess of York dies, her eight pregnancies having produced two surviving children, Mary and Anne. Colonel Thomas Blood is caught leaving the Tower of London with the Crown Jewels in his coat (presumably the souvenir shop was shut). Condemned to death, he is rather oddly later pardoned and exiled by the king.

1672: Dean and Castiel's oldest son Crispin married Letitia Stephens, heiress to a rich Devonshire merchant. Louis declares war on William of Orange (2), new ruler of the Netherlands, and Charles tries to pile in with England, only for parliament to snap the purse strings shut. The king's attempt to get rid of harsh anti-Catholic laws through a Declaration of Indulgence does not win him any friends.

1673: Parliament, suspicious of the Duke of York, forces him to declare his Catholic sympathies with the Test Act, which makes Catholics resign any posts they hold if they will not openly renounce their faith. James remarries the Catholic princess Mary of Modena (in Italy); he was forty and she was fifteen! Crispin's twin Crispinian marries Ion, an omega who came through the new omega school in King's Linton. Despite their misgivings, Castiel and Dean arrange for their son Sandalphon to obtain a commission in the Austrian army.

1674: Letitia Milton wins the race for the first grandson by birthing an alpha called Daniel one day before Ion gives birth to an alpha called Ivan (Dean scoops the house pool on this). Disaster threatens when, later that year, Castiel suffers a minor stroke. He recovers fully, but the doctor recommends a long period of rest and relaxation. To Dean's utter joy, his husband effectively 'resigns' leadership of the estate to Crispin, and the dynamic duo move into their old cottage across the Sewell. Castiel does not get that much rest – or relaxation – but he has a happy omega, so that is all that matters. The war with the Dutch ends inconclusively, but the Dutch finally abandon any aspirations to regain their North American lands; also across the pond the Province of New Jersey is divided into East and West Jersey.

1675: Aiming to destroy parliament's unity against him, Charles abandons his immediate Catholic ambitions and begins to woo the Tories, preferring them over the Whigs. He portrays himself as seeing the error of his ways and now being the defender of Anglicanism. Don't laugh; they were dumb enough to fall for it!

1676: Daniel, Castiel's and Dean's elder omega son, marries Percy Sidney, illegitimate son of the politician Henry (great-great-nephew of Queen Elizabeth's favourite Robert Dudley, and himself later Earl of Romney). Crispin strikes a fellow nobleman when the man says that his brother married a bastard; there is talk of a duel, but fortunately it comes to naught.

1677: Charles forces his brother to allow his fifteen-year-old daughter Mary to marry her first cousin, the twenty-seven-year-old William of Orange (yes, the fellow he was at war with three years back). There is a minor panic in November when, unusually, one of Duchess Mary's births is successful, but the boy (3) dies barely a month later.

1678: The start of the Popish Plot, so-called because it was allegedly backed by the Pope. It claims that papal agents were to assassinate the king and replace him with his Catholic brother, who
would then authorize the slaughter of thousands of Protestants in the confusion. There is the all too predictable mass hysteria and several people are put to death as being agents of the Holy Father, and it is two years before the whole thing is exposed as a hoax, dreamed up by a couple of madmen. Herakles Milton finds his hopes of taking over from Rufus one day dented when a handsome new alpha becomes the curmudgeon's apprentice. This time it is Castiel who wins the pool when the two come and ask for his blessing, even if they cannot be married in law. Baptist preacher and general pain in the Establishment John Bunyan publishes a book called 'The Pilgrim's Progress'.

1679: The king's attempt to crack down on Presbyterianism in Scotland causes a revolt, which his son Monmouth crushes. The young man's popularity alarms his father who realizes belatedly that the young Protestant is angling to succeed him, and he publicly refutes rumours spread by his son that he and Monmouth's mother were secretly married (they almost certainly were not). Castiel's and Dean's son St. George marries Harvey, omega son of Jo and Ash at the Roadhouse. The king's second parliament is dissolved after eighteen years; his third passes the famous Habeus Corpus Act, establishing their right to 'seize the body' of anyone imprisoned by royal command (i.e. to prevent arbitrary use of that power by the king), but when they move to consider excluding James Duke of York from the succession, the king dissolves them too.

1680: The American colonies are growing fast, having more than doubled in population to over 150,000 people (though that is still barely 3% that of England) in the past two decades. The Virginia colony with some 53,000 people constitutes over a third of that total, and Massachusetts (40,000) over a quarter; the largest cities are Boston (4,500), New York (3,000) and Newport RI (2,500). An American called Beauregard Washington-Lowell (!) returns to England to encourage even more settlers, and catches the eye of Castiel's and Dean's younger daughter Jane. The two are soon married, and they emigrate the following year. The king's fourth parliament assembles in London and again heads straight for exclusion, but the king gets the Lords to block it. For now.

1681: Castiel breaks his leg in March (not that way, though he finds it amusing how many of his family think he did). Unfortunately this means he cannot take up the king's invitation to attend the new parliament to be held in Oxford. Rinse and repeat; when the exclusion of the Duke of York looks likely, the king dissolves them, and will rule without them for the rest of his reign. Crispin attends in his father's place, but the earl learns that the king (quite probably encouraged by his brother) considers this a slight. The king also makes one of the largest grants to an individual ever, the recipient being his friend William Penn. The grant is in lieu of a £16,000 (4) debt the Crown owes William's father of the same name, and Charles insists that the territory of New Wales be renamed for him, it becoming Pennsylvania.

1682: Halley's Comet is seen from England (5), a sure sign of trouble to come. Sandalphon returns from his latest commission with a minor injury, and decides to spend a year away from fighting. He tells his parents he will not marry and subject some girl or omega to the life he leads.

1683: There is a second plot against the king, into which the Earl of Bradstock will find himself drawn, resulting in..... well, you had better read A Pocketful Of Rye, a short two-chapter 'timestamp' to what are now The Tales of Nowhere.

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Notes
1) The king had fourteen acknowledged bastards, and certainly many more unacknowledged. Another of his sons, Charles Duke of Richmond, was an ancestor to both wives of current heir to the British throne Charles Prince of Wales (born 1948), namely Diana Princess of Wales and Camilla Duchess of Cornwall, and thus William Duke of Cambridge (Charles and Diana's son) and William's son George are descendants of Charles II.
2) Born a week after his father's death in 1650, William had in 1672 become Stadtholder ('state-holder', a sort of president-general) of the United Provinces. He had married his first cousin to break the Anglo-French alliance, and was widely seen as the Protestant champion of a Europe increasingly afraid of the expansionist tendencies of Louis XIV of France.

3) Charles Duke of Cambridge. Had he lived, the rule of primogeniture - males inherit before females – would have threatened a continuation of the Catholic line. This rule no longer applies in today's royal family, although the next three generations all start with males (potentially Charles III, William V and George VII).

4) At least £250,000 ($325,000) in 2016 terms, at least. Penn purchased three coastal counties from James Duke of York as the colony of Delaware so his lands could have better sea access, but Pennsylvania rapidly became so big that the smaller colony got shut out of the decision-making process, and decided (1704) to go its own way.

5) Astronomer Edmond Halley (1656-1742) witnessed this event, and realized it was the same damn lump of rock which kept appearing every 76 years or thereabouts. Unfortunately he did not live to see the thing come back yet again exactly when he had predicted. It's next due in 2061.

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