

Red Letter Day

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Summary

Castiel, Angel of the Lord, fount of knowledge, can give you the exact date and time down to the millisecond, and if you tell him that it doesn't match what your clock says, he'll tell you your clock is wrong. Cas knows the when and where of every major occurrence in human history since there were any humans for there to be history about, and quizzing him about it is one of Dean's favorite games to play, sometimes to show him off and sometimes just for his own amusement.

Notes

yes i do know there was a whole episode where they celebrated every manner of holiday but when has canon ever stopped me

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

For a hunter, each day is the same as every other.

Ghosts and ghouls and vamps don't give a fuck what day of the year it is, so Dean doesn't get to care about it, either. There's a job that needs doing, so he does it.

But before you become a hunter, when you're just a hunter's kid, you're acutely, painfully aware of the days that are different, of each and every holiday and birthday and anniversary you aren't celebrating.

Some of them were easier than others. For a long time, birthdays were the hardest, that day that should have been his alone turned sour by the expectations that could never be met: piles of presents that were an unnecessary expense they couldn't afford, parties that required friends he'd never made. Halloween, on the other hand, wasn't so bad—Dean had found it almost hilarious in its absurd parody of their lives.

Christmas was another story. At least on his birthday, no one else was celebrating, either. But he knew what the other kids were up to during winter break, had seen enough made-for-TV movies that he understood the broad strokes. He realized, later, how exaggerated those movies were, but they didn't feel like it to him back then, not when each new school year meant another endurance test, a week of sitting in awkward silence as his classmates talked animatedly with their friends about the presents they got, the family they visited, the food they ate. Not when he spent days dodging questions the few times they were thrown his way, when they had stuck around in one place long enough to be there both before and after the holiday, long enough for the other kids to be curious.

They weren't trying to antagonize him on purpose, Dean can see that now—after all, it's not like you can tell, just by looking at someone, that they had a fucked up childhood where the only time days were special it was for all the wrong reasons. But back then, it had stung.

During one particularly memorable holiday season, where he'd spent Christmas day welcoming John back from a hunt by bandaging up the nasty gash that ran along the length of his forearm, Dean had ushered in the new school year by landing himself in the principal's office. He'd told a couple kids that Santa wasn't real, that he was just a pleasant lie their parents told them because they were too afraid to tell them the truth. Their plan to punish him backfired after half a dozen calls to his dad went unanswered and, with a sigh, they handed him a detention slip and sent him back to class.

As an adult, Christmas is easier. Christmas gives you warnings, makes it impossible for it to sneak up on you. The weather changes, gaudy decorations pop up in storefronts, strings of lights appear on every street, half the radio stations become insufferable. Dean always knows Christmas is coming, and when a hunt falls around that time, his FBI cover makes for an easy lie. People will accept his quips about crime never taking a break, and if they're cool enough, he'll subject them to his terrible Bison impersonation, his cheeky grin as he says, *For you, it was Christmas. But for me, it was Tuesday.* There's a comfort in that, in pretending that this is something he chose instead of something that was forced on him.

Other holidays, though, can get annoying. Thanksgiving is trickier, the warning signs blending in with all the generic fall decorations that start popping up the second the leaves start to turn. Fall has a way of making Dean's days blur together until one time he tries showing up at a witness' house and gets an annoyed *Don't you know what day it is?* as they stare him down from the doorway. The guess-which-holiday pop quiz catches him off guard, makes him feel like an embarrassed little kid again, leaves him stammering, not knowing how to respond.

It's easier to just pretend special days don't exist at all, to treat every day exactly the same as any other. Every holiday, every event, everything significant that happened to Dean in the life he has and everything that could have been important to him if he'd lived a different one—it's better just to let it all slip by unacknowledged.

Besides, if you don't make any day especially good, none of them have to be especially bad, either. You don't have to spend a week of your life every year counting down to the anniversary of the day your mom died and your house burned down and everything changed. You don't have to acknowledge that it was the worst day of your life, but for millions of other people, it was just a Wednesday. You don't have to think about it at all.

Castiel, Angel of the Lord, fount of knowledge, can give you the exact date and time down to the millisecond, and if you tell him that it doesn't match what your clock says, he'll tell you your clock is wrong. Cas knows the when and where of every major occurrence in human history since there were any humans for there to be history about, and quizzing him about it is one of Dean's favorite games to play, sometimes to show him off and sometimes just for his own amusement.

Really, he'll say, after he's introduced Cas to some other hunters, *ask him anything*.

Um, they'll say. *I don't know. Sherman's March to the Sea?*

November fifteen to December twenty-one, eighteen sixty-four, Cas will say, not even bothering to look up from the game he's playing on his phone as the other person Googles it to fact check him.

All right, they'll say. *I'm impressed*.

Cas pretends to be annoyed by it, will roll his eyes or sigh sometimes when Dean asks. But he always answers, anyway, and there's this way the corner of his mouth twitches that says he's trying not to smile—that's how Dean knows he's secretly pleased about it, that he enjoys humoring Dean, that he enjoys Dean's enjoyment of it.

Which is to say that Cas knows all the holidays, too, Dean is sure he does. Dean could ask Cas to tell him when it's Christmas or Ramadan or Yom Kippur and he's sure Cas could tell him. Cas could warn Dean about Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July and New Year's Eve, but he doesn't. He doesn't bring them up at all.

Dean asked him about it, one year, in a roundabout way. Made some bad joke about how you'd think Cas would be more into Christmas, being an angel and all.

It isn't even Jesus' actual birthday, Cas told him. And anyway, regardless of their origin, all of the major holidays celebrated in the United States are at this point little more than capitalist—what?

What?

You're smiling.

Dean had simply shrugged. He still doesn't know if Cas actually believes that or if he'd just said it for Dean's sake—after all, if there's one thing Cas knows better than every major date that has ever occurred, it's him—but either way, he loves him for it.

—

Cas is acting weird and Dean doesn't know why.

There's a normal level of weird that Dean is used to—Cas' lengthy stares, his incredibly dry sense of humor, his terrible earnestness that occasionally leaves Dean feeling raw and tender—and then there's whatever this is.

“You okay there, bud?” Dean asks, as Cas aims yet another furtive glance his way.

Cas startles a little, looks down and away, like he's embarrassed to have been caught. “I'm fine, thank you.”

Dean may not know what time it is without looking at his phone, and it might even take him a second to pinpoint the day of the week, but he knows Cas pretty damn well by this point and can tell when he's lying nine times out of ten. “Okay,” he says, “well, are you gonna tell me why you're being so weird?”

Cas stares resolutely down at the book lying on the table in front of him. “I'm not being weird.”

“You are,” Dean says, he's sure of it. He ticks the evidence off on his fingers. “You actually got out of bed before me this morning. You haven't had a single cup of coffee. You're honestly kind of starting to drive me nuts with the way you keep bouncing your leg under the table. And you've been giving me these looks all day, like...I dunno. Like you're waiting for me to say or do something and I don't know what it is.”

“I...” Cas starts, shifting uncomfortably in his seat, not meeting Dean's eyes. Dean waits patiently for him to continue, but it seems that's all the rebuttal he could muster.

“Hey,” Dean says, scooting closer to him, “I'm not trying to catch you out or anything. I just wanna know what's going on.”

Cas' gaze flicks up to meet Dean's for only a moment before he's back to staring at the table. He toys with the edge of the book, flipping the corner of the pages like he's shuffling a deck

of cards, and says, “Do you know what day it is?”

Dean’s thoughts grind to a sudden halt, stalling completely before they lurch back into movement and kick into overdrive. He immediately gets the sense that he’s forgotten something major—if he can just figure out what it is, maybe he can salvage this. Heart racing, he runs through his memories, pulls up what little knowledge of important dates he’s retained over the years. What holidays are even around this time? Isn’t Memorial Day in September? Or is that Labor Day? For some reason, he always gets the two confused. But why would either of those even matter to Cas? There’s something he’s missing, he just can’t figure out what, and he can tell by the look on Cas’ face, the slight frown, the gentle disappointment, that it’s something that really matters, that he shouldn’t play it off as a joke.

“No,” Dean admits, and adds, lamely, “sorry.”

Cas must have seen the panic playing across Dean’s face, because something in his expression immediately shutters. He nods once and says, his voice carefully neutral, “That’s okay. It’s not important.”

“Yes it is,” Dean says. “Whatever it is, it’s important to you. I can tell.”

Cas raises one shoulder in a noncommittal shrug.

Dean would be lying if he said that part of him didn’t want to just accept the out Cas is giving him, to let the rest of the day slide by in awkward silence and pretend to have forgotten the whole thing in the morning. But he spent a long time indulging the same bad habits and watching it get him nowhere. Nowadays, the part of him that’s not really interested in continuing to go in circles is louder.

“Cas,” he says, “what day is it?”

“Today,” Cas says, “thirteen years ago, is, um. The day we met.”

“Oh,” Dean says, thoughts once again racing. The implications hit him all at once, take his breath away.

The thing is, Cas has never been one for holding to human traditions. He’s thoroughly unimpressed with holidays, never having grown up celebrating them or resenting not celebrating them. As for birthdays, he doesn’t even have one, was created before human’s measurement of time existed, before years or months or hours were tracked and assigned significance.

So it kind of floors Dean that Cas—Castiel, literal celestial being who has lived for millennia, has seen civilizations rise and fall, has experienced more unprecedented, once-in-existence events than Dean can even imagine—is being weird and cagey because the one thing that he’s deemed worthy, the one date he’s ever expressed an interest in memorializing, is the day he pulled Dean Winchester’s sorry ass out of hell.

Dean swallows hard, mouth dry. It feels wholly insufficient as he says, “You want to celebrate our anniversary.”

“I’m sorry,” Cas says, pushing his chair back from the table and standing, preparing himself to beat a hasty retreat from this conversation, “for bringing it up. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. I know you hate how people assign meaning to certain dates, and I—”

And, yeah, usually Dean *does* hate it, can’t manage to shake the bitterness he still feels over all the empty spaces in his childhood. But this feels different, somehow. Maybe it’s that it’s something so unique to them—he’s pretty sure Cas hasn’t pulled anyone else out of hell and fallen in love with them and just hasn’t told him about it. Or maybe it’s just the fact that Cas, despite being an angel, has very human feelings—intensely human feelings, actually—and has decided that this is one of the things that matters to him.

“No, hey,” Dean says, reaching for Cas, grabbing his hand and holding it. “That’s not it. You just surprised me, that’s all. It’s okay.”

Cas stops in his tracks, looks down at Dean, finally meets his eyes. He’s still frowning, some mix of apprehension and tentative hope playing across his features. “Really?”

Dean considers it—genuinely tries to work out how he’s feeling and finds that it’s true. “Yeah,” he says. “It is.” He smiles at Cas, runs his thumb across his knuckles. “Of course we can celebrate.”

Cas’ entire demeanor changes, everything about it growing lighter and brighter as he returns Dean’s smile. “Yeah?”

Something in Dean unclenches in turn. “Yeah,” he says, pushing himself to standing, pressing a reassuring kiss to the corner of Cas’ mouth. “What did you have in mind?”

—

With a few notable exceptions, Dean doesn’t remember specific dates. But that doesn’t mean that he doesn’t remember other things, that there isn’t anything he holds close to his heart.

For instance: He remembers in visceral detail every single time he’s watched Cas die, sometimes still gets caught off guard by the sense memories, the smells that will remind him of that beach or that building or that reservoir. He remembers the exact weight of Cas’ waterlogged trench coat as he pulled it from the water, held it in his hands, let it drip on his shoes, shoved it into the trunk of his car. He remembers what it felt like every time Cas came back after Dean thought he was gone forever, the shape of him in Dean’s arms.

He remembers what it was like to hear Cas tell him he loved for the first time, the overwhelming mix of dread and elation that had frozen him in place, the look on Cas’ face as the empty swallowed him whole. Remembers just as well how it had felt to get Cas back—the relief, the disbelief that he could be so lucky yet again. Remembers when he told Cas he loved him back, the way it had felt like his whole body was alight.

Dean could describe, if asked, the exact feel of Cas’ stubble the first time they kissed, or the curve of his shoulder the first time Dean slipped him out of his shirt. He could talk at length about the first time they met, the way something intense and electric had crackled in the air between them in that barn and for years afterwards. Before that, things get fuzzy, though he’s

managed to hold onto bits and pieces—Cas’ radiance in the darkness, the burning, cleansing cold that flowed through him as Cas knit him back together.

What’s between them now is softer, the sharp edges sanded down by time and familiarity, rough patches smoothed over by apologies, gaps filled in with forgiveness. There are a thousand little things that Dean can still hardly believe have become mundane—falling asleep next to Cas at night, waking up next to him in the morning. The feel of Cas’ hands in his hair, Cas’ lips at his neck, Cas’ voice in his ear, whispering endearments.

He can’t always assign these things a place on a calendar, but that doesn’t mean he takes any of them for granted. Some things are worth remembering the hundredth time just as much as the first, like how even with all the years between them, the hurt and betrayal and reconciliation, the misunderstandings and halting explanations, Cas will still look at Dean with light in his eyes, a hand on his shoulder, seeing all of him and loving him anyway.

If that’s not worth celebrating, Dean doesn’t know what is.

End Notes

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