Finding Home

by LittleSweetCheeks

Summary

Aaron Hotchner thought he had the perfect life. Until it all started to fall apart.

Spencer Reid thought he was in way over his head with his new job. Until he found a way to be strong.

As Hotch's life crumbles under his feet, Reid is there to help him put it back together. Along the way, the two men find what it is they've been looking for all along... Home.

Notes

**NEW** First Chapter has new art gifted to me by the wonderful Rivermoon1970.

This work will be updated on a weekly basis as my schedule allows. I will attempt to keep to the same day each week, but do not make any promises.

A lot of wonderful people have helped me write this and as soon as I figure out how to tag them here, I will update and include them. Rivermoon1970 & Dazeventura6

See the end of the work for more notes.
Spencer Reid was certain this had all been a very bad idea and he was going to somehow die.

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The lecture had ended and Spencer had waited until everyone had made their way up the stairs and out of the lecture hall to avoid being trampled. He took his time tucking away his books and binders, making sure his pencils were secured so the lead wouldn’t break. No one ever paid him any notice in class, which was a nice change of pace from high school. He knew his preferred clothes and his young age brought on the stares, but at least now he was the age of most of the undergrads so he didn’t stand out like he used to back when he was a young teen. Prepuberty at college had been a nightmare.

“This is who I was telling you about, thought you might be interested in him.” His teacher’s voice was nearing his back as he was trying to get away. “Spencer?”

Spencer turned and adjusted his large glasses, pushing them back up his nose, “Yes?” He drew back slightly from the two men towering over him. Spencer didn’t like men, or most women for that matter, looming into his personal space.

“This is Agent Gideon with the FBI; I’ve told him about you and he’d like to have a few minutes of your time to discuss an offer.” The professor tried to give the young man, barely more than a boy, a calming smile.

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The team was gathered in the round table room with Gideon sitting in the back by the door. Reid watched as the new liaison was explaining their case; men being hung in Alabama. He wasn’t sure why he was sitting in on the briefing; for the entire six months of his BAU career, he’d stayed in the bullpen at his desk working silently on files. It had suited him well. Most of the team simply ignored him, occasionally discussing him like he wasn’t even there, and never tried to include him in anything. He enjoyed coming to work at a job where he felt like he was being useful and where for the most part he wasn’t harassed or bullied by his supposed peers. Sure, other agents would hint at doing things in the cafeteria or the quad, but since he’d graduated the academy, they’d
pretty much been empty threats.

As the briefing ended, “I can’t go on this one.” Gideon stated casually. Reid hesitated, feeling the tension in the room increase.

“Why not?” Hotch frowned hard at him. Reid had looked over to hear his reply and then turned back to hear the answer, the conversation had the feel of a tennis match.

Hotch sighed heavily, he still wasn’t sure what possessed the older man to bring Reid onto the team without discussing it first. He wondered if it had to do with Gideon’s feelings of failure as a father to his own son. Hotch had watched the young man sit in the bullpen every day, arriving before every other agent down on the floor and then sitting huddled over his desk, rarely getting up, until almost every agent had gone home. When Hotch’d heard that the agent joining the team had three PhD’s, he’d expected a bit of a holier-than-thou attitude, but the boy was about as submissive and apologetic as a person could get. He would all but apologize for even existing, and Hotch wasn’t sure that given a reason, the boy wouldn’t do that as well. Even when Hotch had overheard a snide comment in the quad a month in aimed at the genius, Agent Reid had simply ducked his head and apologized to the other agent before all but fleeing the area. After making sure the other agent had noticed Hotch had witnessed the exchange, the taunting seemed to die down.

The older agent shrugged, not actually answering. “Reid can go with you. He can analyze the files as they come in. He’ll work fine, just look after him and bring him back.” He got up and left.

Spencer felt himself blush at a conversation once again being carried on like he was a small child who couldn’t tell when they were being discussed. He really hated when the other agents did that, but he didn’t want to attract any extra attention to himself by complaining. Collecting the rest of his things, he set to the task of making it to the jet on time. He wasn’t about to be the reason the team was delayed on his first ever case.

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After meeting with Gideon, Spencer quietly agreed to move across the country and enroll at the Academy at Quantico. Gideon had been persuasive in his argument that his country and the FBI needed Spencer’s skills and he’d be doing a disservice to others by not applying. He’d expected that since the older man had been so insistent on him attending, that he’d be involved in helping him move and get settled and set up at the academy. Aside from moving from his mother’s house to the dorms at college, Spencer had never experienced packing up and moving anywhere. Instead he found himself loaded down with a cart full of bags containing pretty much everything he owned, alone at the airport. The few months he’d stayed on campus had been tolerable, though he had constantly been on edge, but Spencer hadn’t been prepared for the experience of searching for an apartment in the communities around base, getting utilities in his name, and everything else that came with independent living.

Training had been horrible. In the classroom, he excelled but instead of garnering respect and admiration like it had in the past, his classmates resented him and his teachers saw him as a cocky show off. Whenever he did ask a question, classmates would mock him and the one instance he corrected the professor, he’d been threatened to have removed from the program. Spencer tried hard not to stand out as much as possible to avoid being harassed all around. He spent evenings wondering why he had agreed to join the Bureau to begin with and why Agent Gideon had pushed so hard for him to come and then showed absolutely no interest so far in how he was doing.

Halfway through his physical training courses, Gideon had delivered some paperwork stating Spencer was getting exemptions and merely had to participate in the courses, but did not have to
pass. He was so relieved he could cry. Word of those exemptions though got around and the hazing got even worse. Spencer quickly started to detest the dorm style living quarters and the shared showers. He was again certain that joining the FBI had been a big mistake.

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Spencer carefully tucked his go bag into the storage space on the jet and took a seat in the very back. After a short discussion and assignments getting handed out, Hotch sat across from Spencer, “We’re sharing a room.”

Spencer felt his eyes widen, “What?” He squeaked. The man who was technically his boss hadn’t said more than ten words to him in the entire six months he’d been on the team. The vibe he got was that Hotch, as the others called him, hadn’t really wanted Spencer on the team and preferred to pretend he wasn’t even there. He’d watched the older man interact with other agents around Quantico and had seen enough to label the man as an occasional bully. It was clear that the team leader was used to having others cede to his experience and status.

Hotch nodded, “I think that it would be best. This is your first case in the field and it can be hard to process everything that will be going on. If you room with me, we will have opportunities to talk through anything you are feeling. Agent Gideon never felt the need to share with me why he brought you onto the team, but I’m sure he had a very good reason. I just have some concerns about someone your age dealing with being in the field.” He studied his youngest agent.

Feeling his breathing speed up, Reid started to panic about sharing with Hotch. He was familiar with what sorts of hazing could be done in a private room and the team leader was most certainly an alpha personality, the type Spencer learned early in life to never trust for a minute. Unsure of how to get out of it, Spencer instead just nodded in acceptance of his fate. Away cases rarely lasted more than three days, he could stay alert that long.

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The case was destined to be bad. The BAU had been called in after the fourth body had been found hanging in a tree in his own front yard. The first two cases, which had been months apart, the local police had ruled as suicides. There hadn’t been any evidence to the contrary. The third body was discovered just short of a month after number two and then number four was two weeks later. The accelerating timeline left everyone certain the UNSUB would be striking in about four days’ time.

Reid stood in the back of the group as Hotch made introductions of the team and the Chief led them to a small room to set up. The agents who were going to the M.E. and to interview next of kin dropped their gear in the corner and headed right back out to the vehicles.

Minutes later Spencer found himself surrounded by case files and background data in an empty room in the back of the station. The small room was just the right side of claustrophobic but it was secluded from the majority of the action in the main room and Spencer didn’t mind the seclusion.

JJ fluttered in and out of the office space calling the various members of the team to update their information, get additional background checks run and generally keep the process moving along. She was talking on the phone or to herself out loud every time she walked through the doorway. Spencer found her constant activity very overwhelming so he curled into himself, head practically touching the pages he was reading, in a halfhearted attempt to block her out.

At lunch JJ tried to get Spencer to talk to her. He had glanced up when she appeared with a stack of take-out boxes and a smile suggesting they take twenty minutes to relax and talk over mediocre hot food. Reid helped himself to the plates of sustenance she offered but remained silent and still
as she rambled randomly about anything and everything that came to mind. As he nibbled on his
fries, she studied him, finding it hard not to see him as a kid brother, someone she needed to look
out for. She promised herself that as the second youngest of the team, she would make sure to look
out for him in any way she could.

Late into the afternoon Spencer found a pattern. Each of the four victims so far were involved in
the community either as coaches or tutors. They were all upstanding members of the community,
well-loved and all held down solid white-collar type jobs. He quietly showed JJ what he’d
uncovered and she’s rushed away to get the team on the phone while Spencer did his best to
connect these new activities to find a link. Puzzles and patterns were what he loved the most and it
pleased him that something he enjoyed so much could help save lives.

The team returned to the station as evening rolled around, having found no additional connections
between the four dead men. It seemed they had never crossed paths at all. Finally, Hotch ordered
everyone to wrap up and they’d all go find dinner before heading back to the hotel.

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Dinner had been a jovial affair. The team had descended on a local pizzeria that was nearly
deserted at the late hour. The small group had enjoyed the space and privacy to laugh and tease
one another though Spencer did his best to avoid being noticed by anyone, least of all Morgan and
Hotch. He had seen how the two alpha males interacted with others, even when relaxed and
having fun, and it left him skittish and nervous.

At one point in the evening, Morgan had noticed the new agent shrinking into his seat and had
made eye contact with Hotch in question. His boss’s quick shake of the head told him to leave it
alone. Morgan quietly made himself a bet that the kid wouldn’t make it a year, less if he travelled
on very many more cases.

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Spencer was thankful for the tranquility of the hotel room once they got back. His roommate
hadn’t come up right away and Spencer found he could relax little and try not to think of all the
things someone could do to him in a room that size. Working in the station, even in the quiet room
he’d been in, had been much busier and noisier than he was used to. The overhead lights had given
off a hum that had grated his nerves as the day had worn on. He knew he needed to find a way to
calm down and let go of his pent-up anxiety so he tucked himself on the desk in the corner and
closed his eyes. His right hand tapped out an intricate pattern on his knee while his left hand
worried the edge of his sweater. The motions helped him to calm his mind and release some
tension.

Hotch pressed the key card into the lock and clicked open the door, spotting his roommate almost
immediately. He’d had suspicions about Reid and figured now he was getting what would
probably be as close to confirmation as he would receive on the subject. He tried to keep his
movements calm and quiet as he gathered his things for the evening. The sound of his phone
ringing snapped them both out of the quiet and Spencer froze like a small rabbit in a room with a
large wolf, not wanting to draw attention to himself. Hotch answered and began to talk to Haley.
He sat on the bed facing away from Reid and pretended he wasn’t there.

Gathering his things quietly, Spencer shut himself in the bathroom to have a shower as soon as
Hotch was settled into his conversation with his wife. He twisted his hands together as he let the
water warm up. He was sure it was going to end up like college all over again, an experience he
wasn’t eager to revisit as the memories of being held down under sprays of freezing water came
bubbling up. Spencer stripped and stepped under the hot stream, allowing it to relax the tension
out of his body. “I can do this, I can do this,” he whispered to himself. A sharp knock on the door caused him to yip in surprise and nearly slip in the wet tub, causing him to bang his elbow on the wall. “Yes?” He called out, voice wavering slightly.

“Could I get in there and take care of some things while you’re showering?” Hotch’s muffled voice filtered through.

Spencer’s eye’s widened. He’d be trapped and vulnerable. Shaking his head and muttering to himself, he tried to convince himself Hotch wasn’t like the guys from school or the Academy. “O-okay.” He answered before gingerly stepping out and unlocking the door.

After several beats to allow the younger agent to return to the safety of the shower stall, the door slipped open and then clicked back shut, trapping the heat, and Spencer, inside. Spencer watched his boss’s shadow through the heavy curtain as he stood at the sink. After a minute, he returned to showering, blocking out the movements of the other person as he finished and slipped back out of the small bathroom.

Spencer dried off and slipped on his pajamas before steeling himself to re-enter the main part of the hotel room. When he finally stepped out, his boss was relaxed on the bed with a stack of case files sitting ignored beside him, watching him move around the room. Spencer crawled into bed, rolling so his back was to Hotch.

Hotch finally broke the silence, asking “Mind if I watch TV?”

Reid rolled onto his back, “I don’t mind.”

Hotch started flipping through channels before settling on something only slightly interesting. “How was your first day in the field?”

“Um,” He pushed himself up to sit against the headboard, realizing he was going to have to talk in order to get some sleep. “Not- not too bad. I, um, I’m not used to spending as much time with JJ? She’s always very busy and- and chatty?” Spencer twisted his hands together. “Being in the field is a lot different than being at Quantico, the activity is more overwhelming?”

When the show went to commercial, Hotch rolled and pushed himself off the bed, causing Reid to flinch, he pretended not to notice. “I’m going to rinse off really quick.”

Reid nodded in acknowledgement and watched him vanish into the other room.

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When Hotch returned twenty minutes later, Reid had buried himself under the blankets, facing the wall. Hotch sighed in frustration and got into bed. He was hoping this opportunity would help Spencer start to open up to them, but so far that hadn’t happened.
Chapter 2

Hotch rolled over and turned off the alarm on his phone. After a minute to let his body start to wake up, he sat up and stretched. Glancing across to the other bed, he realized his roommate wasn’t there, “Reid?” He frowned when the only reply he got was silence. Before he could dial his phone, the door opened and the wayward genius slipped in, trying not to wake his boss, with a bag and two cups of coffee. “Where were you?” He frowned when the words came out sharper than he’d intended.

Reid startled and then had to juggle his load to avoid spilling anything. “Coffee?” He sat everything down, “I was up and I didn’t like the coffee they have downstairs so I walked across the road and then I thought you might like some too?” He shrugged holding one cup out and sipping from the other.

Hotch smiled and retrieved his cup, “Thanks.”

Spencer nodded, staring at the desk’s surface. “I’m going to…” He gestured to the bathroom. When Hotch nodded at him, Spencer ducked in to start his morning routine.

Reid was halfway through brushing his teeth when he sensed a presence behind him. He glanced up to look in the mirror just as an arm reached around him to pick up something off the small counter. Instinct kicked in before he had time to be aware of who it was and Spencer gasped, dropping his toothbrush into the sink, and threw up his arms to shield his head from what his body expected to be an attack of some sort.

Hotch stared at the huddled form bent over the counter is surprise and horror. Clearly Reid expected to be harmed and something squeezed in his chest at the sight of the much younger man curled into a protective position Hotch remembered from his own childhood. After the moment of shock wore off, Hotch backed up, attempting to look smaller and less threatening, “Reid? Come on, stand up straight and look at me.”

The soothing voice of his boss penetrated the whirlwind thoughts going through his mind and he glanced up. Spencer hadn’t expected to see concern and something else showing so openly on the older face. “I’m sorry.”

“What?” He scared the daylights out of the boy and he’s the one apologizing? “Stand up, finish what you were doing and we’ll talk. Okay? I’ll stay out there. I promise.”

Spencer nodded but didn’t move until Hotch left the bathroom.

With the bathroom door shut, Hotch paced the room. He wanted to call Gideon and ask exactly what he hadn’t been told about his new agent. Clearly the genius had been the victim of tormentors of some description enough that his reaction was a reflex. He wanted to shake his predecessor and demand to know who in their right mind would try and place someone like him on a team like theirs. Surely Morgan alone would eventually drive him to a nervous breakdown with his somewhat aggressive form of affection. Before he could decide whether or not to call, the bathroom door pulled open.

“I—I’m sorry about that. I’ll try to do better, I promise.” Before Hotch could reply, Spencer was vanishing out the door.

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By late morning the team was assembled around the conference table reviewing details. Spencer was huddled at the evidence board trying to glean any new details from what they already had while remaining as invisible as possible. Morgan noticed something on the edge of a crime scene photo and strolled over, “What is that?” He asked softly, pointing to the object in question.

Spencer recoiled and spun around pressing his back into the evidence board, overwhelmed by the close proximity of yet another alpha male in the same morning. “I dunno.” He felt his breathing increase and his chest start to burn. “Excuse me.” He darted for the door.

When Morgan tried to follow, Hotch put out a hand to stop him, “Let him go, he needs time to adjust.”

Morgan raised an eyebrow at his leader, “What was that? He looked like he thought I was gonna hurt him.”

Hotch sighed, “It seems he doesn’t like people in his personal space. I plan on talking to him if he’ll let me. And I think he might still be a little distressed after I surprised him this morning.”

“He was jumpy like that with you too?” Morgan looked out the doorway and back, “What was Gideon thinking?”

“I don’t know, but we need to be more cautious about what we say and do for a while. I need to speak to Jason. I know all of our inclination is to press the issue and get it out in the open, but I think this time we need to wait.”

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When Hotch found himself back in the lobby of the hotel that evening, he finally pulled out his phone and called Jason.

“Hotch? How’s the case going?” The older agent answered his phone.

“Slow.” He clenched his jaw, “We need to talk about Reid.”

“What about him? I’m sure he’s helping with the case, isn’t he? He’s smart, I’ve been telling you that for months. He’ll be a great asset for the team to use.”

“Jason. He’s clearly been bullied to the point that he’s antsy and jumpy around everyone. He doesn’t even like being in the same space as JJ, she’s about as harmless as they come.” Sinking into one of the free chairs near the front windows, he rubbed a hand down his face then pinched the bridge of his nose, “I think this was a bad idea Jason, were you aware he’s likely on the spectrum?”

“Sure, what’s the big deal? He’s not there to be friends with anyone just to help work the profile. We have you and Morgan for the heavy lifting. Just stick him at a desk and feed him the details and see what he spits out. Everyone needs time to adjust to having him there to give information.”

“Good god, Jason, he’s a person, not a computer! I can’t believe you knew…” He sucked in a deep breath to calm himself, “Did you know what he was like before you brought him to DC?”

“Yeah. His teacher told me all about him. Smart as a whip he said, perfect memory, speed reads, high IQ, I knew we could use him. Started college at thirteen, pushed himself through the three degrees. No one could tell me much about his family and I didn’t press, he’s an adult and it didn’t really matter.”
“That’s not what I meant!” Hotch felt his blood pressure start to creep up again.

“Hotch, I don’t know why you’re so worked up over it. Just make sure he gets there and back fine, the rest of the time he can sit in the office where you are and do his thing.”

“You know what, Jason, never mind. I’ll deal with it.”

“Whatever makes you happy. He will be fine, just give him time.”

Hotch slammed his phone shut and tossed it on the small table where it skittered across and landed on the floor. “Crap.”

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Spencer packed his things and then waited with a deep sense of dread for his roommate to appear. Hotch hadn’t joined everyone else in the ride up to the rooms, saying he had to make a call. He regretted reacting so strongly to Morgan invading his space at the precinct, but it was too late to change what had happened now. He was certain Hotch was arranging to send him home. Maybe he could still take up one of the universities on their offer on staff somewhere. He’d love to move back to the west coast to be closer to his mom, but he was settled, more or less, in Virginia now. When the door clicked open, Reid was trying to hide his trembling hands by tucking them around his thin chest.

Hotch stopped right inside the door and studied the man sitting before him properly for the first time since he’d joined the team. His hair hung down nearly to his chin, acting as a curtain for him to hide behind. His glasses kept slipping down his thin nose, which caused him to habitually push them back up, interrupting the repetitive tapping and twitching of his fingers and hands that never seemed to stop. Hotch worked his jaw side to side, unsure how to start.

“I understand. My things are packed.” Reid whispered almost inaudibly.

Brow furrowed, Hotch tilted his head, “What?”

“I can get a cab to the airport if you want.” He sighed and walked to his bags, “I can clear my desk when I get back.”

Realization dawned on him, “No. I’m not sending you home. I’m not firing you.”

“Why not?” He nearly whimpered.

Sighing, Hotch sat heavily on the foot of a bed and hesitated, deflating, before he leaned down to remove his shoes and set them aside. He tugged the knot of his tie loose before pulling it off entirely and rolling it up. Finally, he slipped off his suit jacket and draped it over the chair that was within easy reach. Having had enough time to think of his response, “You’ve done nothing wrong. Nothing to warrant any type of disciplinary action. The past two days you have done everything asked of you related to this job.”

“But I- I’m…”

“Fine. You’re fine. Gideon left some details out of the information he gave to me on you. I’ve just been on the phone with him. It was an…enlightening conversation.”

Spencer’s whole body froze.

“From here on out, we are handling everything my way.”
He paled and swallowed hard, “What’s your way?”

“We are going to talk. Every week at least for now. We can talk about the case we are on or what we’re handling in the office. We can discuss other things if you want, whatever you feel like sharing. But I want you to understand you can talk to me. Okay?”

Spencer nodded.

“And please understand, no one on this team will hurt you. I know this is all still new for you and you need time to deal with it, but we can work through anything, okay? If you need to step out and gather yourself, you just have to let me know. It’s my job to handle anything that comes up.”

“Okay.”

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Walking into his house just as the rest of the world was ready to start the day, Hotch let out a burdened sigh. Exhaustion from being on the go and ready for anything for several days straight was seeping into his bones.

Haley appeared at the bottom of the stairs, dressed to go out. “Oh! You’re home!” She bounced up to him and threw her arms around him. “Just in time too, I am heading to the store and to take care of a couple errands. You can come with me.”

Aaron felt his body sag, “Can’t I just sit this one out and get some sleep? I just need a couple hours and I’ll be good as new. We’ll go later if you want to go together.”

The corners of her lips pulled down, “I have plans later. You’ve just been sitting on a plane for how long? Come on, Aaron, you are always saying we have to grab whatever chance to be together that we get. Who knows when you’ll get called back to work. Or do you not want to spend time with me?”

His head was shaking before she even finished, “You’re right. Do I have time to change?” He looked down at the suit he’d been wearing since the day before.

She looked at her watch, “You look fine, Honey, let’s go!” She grabbed her keys and purse.

Sighing again, Hotch steeled himself and followed his wife out the door.

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The post office had taken forty minutes. Hotch knew better than to complain as he stood dutifully by his wife as she handled things. It crossed his mind to offer to start taking any mail to the office and sending it through there to avoid this particular mind-numbing task.

From the post office it was the dry cleaners and the pharmacy, ending them at the grocery store last. Standing outside the big box retailer, Aaron couldn’t help but frown a little at the prospect of walking the entire place.

Haley stopped when she realized her husband was no longer walking behind her, “Aaron?” She caught his frown, “You know what? If you’re that tired, maybe you should just sit in the car, Honey. I wouldn’t want you to have to push yourself too hard just for me.”

“I’m fine, Haley. I’ll grab the cart.” He veered left to the cart corral.
Haley was contemplating fresh fruit as Aaron looked on in silence. He wished he could have at least changed out of his nice dress shoes. His feet were killing him. He shifted from one foot to the other to try and dull the ache.

Catching the movement, Haley bagged the fruit, “Are you really going to carry on about it? You wanted to come with me you know, you could look a little less like this is torture.”

“I know I did. You’re right, I do want to spend my off time with you.”

“Well, you’re doing a good job of fooling everyone about it.” She patted his side to get him to move away from the cart so she could push and stopped, her voice went low and hard, “Are you armed?” She whispered.

He glanced around to check if they hand anyone’s attention. “I didn’t have a change to take them off.”

“I can’t believe you came out like that. Is this job making you that paranoid?”

“No. I’m sorry. I’ll remember to put them up first next time.”
Two months later Hotch stepped through the glass doors headed back to his office late one evening, surprised to still see Reid at his desk, “I thought you went home.”

Reid popped his head up and looked around at the empty, dim room and then down at his watch, “Crap, I missed the last train again.”

“Again?”

“Yeah. I got distracted. Normally Gideon would remind me, but a lot of the time by the time he reminded me it would be too late anyway. I just need to pay better attention.” He berated himself. He started collecting his things.

“So Gideon drives you home?”

“Huh? Oh, no. I walk home unless I can spot a cab. They’re sometimes hard to find around here late at night.”

Hotch had been headed up the steps by his office until he heard that, “How long does it take you to walk home?” He was hovering on the bottom step now.

Spencer shrugged, “Couple hours maybe. If it rains I just sleep here.”

Hotch glared at the closed office door next to his for a minute, “I’m headed out, I’ll drive you.”

“No, that’s okay. I’ll manage.” He gathered his things.

“Reid. I’ll drive you home.” He left no room for argument.

Spencer nodded and nervously played with the strap of his messenger bag while he waited for Hotch to pack up and lead him out to his vehicle. Once in his boss’s car, he quietly gave directions to his apartment, not really wanting anyone from work to see where he was living. He wasn’t exactly ashamed, but he knew it wasn’t the best sort of place in the best sort of area. He considered giving Hotch a different address and then walking the remainder of the way alone, but figured Hotch wouldn’t give him a chance to get away with that.

Pulling up outside the address Reid gave, Hotch looked up at the crumbling building, aghast that this was where the young agent was living. “Did you at least get a good rate?”

“Umm, eighteen hundred and I didn’t have to pay last since I’m with the Bureau.” Spencer swallowed.

“Eighteen… I can’t believe he let you get taken for that for a place like this.” He mumbled to himself.

“Who?”

“Gideon.” When he received a strange look, he added, “Jason said when he brought you out here, he was taking a special interest in you, would take care of anything you needed. When you were over at the academy I asked him how you were handling things and he always said you were coming along fine. I was under the impression that when you moved out of cadet housing, he helped you get moved as well.”
“Umm, oh. You were?” Reid was surprised at this considering he never saw Gideon during his training nor did the man ever help him move or settle in in any way.

Hotch’s slight glare said he’d caught the tone and wanted an explanation.

“Well, he talked to me in California and he dropped off my physical training exemptions with the professors, but that was about it. I had sort of thought he would have at least been at the airport to welcome me when I arrived originally, but it was okay. Getting a cab from the airport to the Academy wasn’t hard at all. And I’m capable of doing things myself.” He hoped his sounded confident in that. “Maybe he talked to my professors about my progress? He never talked to me directly.”

Hotch parked and turned off his car, “Mind if I come up?” His thoughts briefly went to his wife waiting at home.

“Sure.” Reid answered, but his tone said no.

Hotch slowly followed him as he trudged up to his apartment and inside. The condition of the inside of the crumbling building was worse that the outside, “This isn’t a good place. I’m not sure you’re even safe here.” It was a small studio apartment. The living room clearly crossed as the bedroom, dining room, and office, the couch looked like it served as a bed and the small kitchen in the corner was peeling and cracked. The cabinets and counters were an unpleasant shade of yellow. Hotch suspected that one of the doors along the far wall was the single bathroom in the place. There were books stacked everywhere along with boxes, serving as drawers, full of clothes along one wall.

“I, um, I have some soda and water or I can make coffee. I’m sorry, I don’t really drink so I don’t have anything else.” Spencer was fidgeting nervously near the tiny refrigerator.

His sense of responsibility for the younger man overrode his urge to flee the unpleasant space, “Coffee would be nice.” As Reid moved to the machine, he asked, “Tell me about yourself.”

“Um, there isn’t much to tell.”

“Any brothers or sisters?

“No. It’s just me.”

Hotch wondered if his tendencies had played into that decision. “Parents still alive?”

“I guess so?”

Hotch nodded, he had a feeling there was a story there, but as someone who didn’t relish sharing his own stories hidden behind vague answers, he didn’t press any further.

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Gideon looked up from the paperwork in his hand when Hotch stormed into his office and all but slammed the door shut. “What can I do for you?”

“I’m well and truly speechless. Do you know where Reid lives?” Hotch paced to the windows overlooking the base and then back to the desk, fists at his side.

The older man shrugged, “Never been to his place. Never had a reason to go.” He tapped the end of his pen distractedly on the pages before him.
“What about all of this interest you claimed to be taking in him? What about the times he stays late and misses his train? Do you at least know how far it is for him to walk home?”

“Why would I know that?” Gideon wrinkled his forehead and tossed one hand up in question.

Hotch felt himself flush with anger, “Because you got him, barely old enough to drink and having never been out of the protective confines of a school, to move across the country, away from everything he knew! You talked him in to coming here because you saw him as an asset to this department!” He sank into the couch, “I think the only positive thing I can say about his apartment is I didn’t see any bugs. But then again, the lights were already on when we got there, so maybe they only come out in the dark. The landlord is taking him to town on rent, which wouldn’t have happened if you’d have done what you should have. And it’s a two hour walk at night. Why haven’t you ever given him a lift?”

“He never asked.” He answered.

“Did you offer?” Hotch tossed his hands in the air.

“Why would I do that?”

Hotch surged up from his seat and loomed over the desk, glaring down at the former unit lead, hands clenched once again, before turning and storming back out. This time he made sure the door slammed behind him.

==

The team was sitting in the bullpen joking around. They’d just returned from a week out of town on a case and were celebrating their impending three-day weekend. Hotch watched as Reid, who had not travelled with the team again since the first case, sat hunched over his desk, completely oblivious to the activity in the room. After several minutes of watching the activity, Hotch descended the stairs and tapped one finger on the edge of Reid’s desk, far enough away to not startle him too much. When the younger agent looked up, he asked, “Come to my office?”

Reid nodded and started shuffling his things away. Once in Hotch’s office, he pushed the door mostly shut and sat in a chair by the desk, “Yes?”

“How are you doing?”

“I’m sorry?”

“We haven’t had a lot of opportunity to talk lately, how are things going?”

Reid toyed with the edge of his sweater, “Okay I guess. I get through my cases okay.”

Hotch studied him for a minute, “How would you feel about travelling with the team on a regular basis?”

“Umm, why?”

“I thought it might be something you would enjoy doing.”

“I’m not cleared to be a field agent. I haven’t passed my firearms qualification or hand-to-hand.”

“We can take care of all that.” He waved his hand dismissively.

Spencer didn’t respond except to briefly glance up at his boss and back down to the floor again.
Hotch took a deep breath and leaned forward, pulling out a packet of paper and passing it across, “I took the liberty of looking at some better apartments for what you’re paying now or less. I can get you out of your lease if you would like to find a better place.”

Reid nodded, taking the pages.

“If you would like Morgan or I to come along and take a look at them with you, just let us know.”

“Morgan?” Reid whimpered, glancing into the bullpen.

Hotch tried for a disarming smile, “He renovates houses. He is pretty good at inspecting properties and even better, he will give you his opinions for free.”
Chapter 4

Reid, Morgan, and Hotch found themselves on the BAU jet headed cross country. Morgan sat down in one of the big chairs across the table from their leader, “So, tell us more about this person we’re after?”

“She’s a hacker. She’s attacked several major corporation websites already, mostly places testing on animals, using harmful chemicals, that sort of thing. She is the one behind the hack on the DOJ website recently.”

“So why are we going out there? If she hasn’t hurt anyone and doesn’t show any inclination toward violence, isn’t that sort of out of our area?”

Hotch nodded, “I’m offering her a choice. She goes to jail or she moves to the East Coast and works for the FBI. She will have to cut all ties with her current life and start over fresh. DOJ wants her on our side, they say she’s highly skilled and seems highly intelligent.” He glanced across at Reid, “We’re going to find out just how intelligent she really is.”

The local field office had already picked up their hacker by the time the trio had arrived. Hotch spoke briefly with the SAIC on their end and thanked them for their help in tracking down and collecting Ms. Garcia. Her hacking abilities had kept her well hidden most of the time and it was only out of what appeared to be sheer dumb luck that their computer analysts had found her. The analysts swore as they handed over the information that it was just too easy and to keep an eye out. This woman wasn’t anything like they’d expected. She had a mouth on her and was dressed in black, but there was still an air of innocence to her as she sat in the holding cell waiting to be interrogated. She eyed up and made a pass at every male agent who walked by her cell and then laughed loudly at them when they became flustered. Morgan set about searching the personal belongings that had been found when she’d been picked up and local agents had found her home address and went to search it.

Stepping into her holding cell and striding right into her personal space, Hotch demanded, “Let’s go.” He started to haul her up by one arm doing his best to maintain an air of brusque indifference despite his curiosity of her, but stepped back when she spun on him and stood nose to nose. His free hand twitched at the gun at his hip.

“You’re a good southern boy, don’t you know the proper way to treat a lady?” She smirked at him and blew a giant bubble that almost caught on his nose. “I’ll go wherever you want, you just have to say please.” Her mannerisms said she was confident and brazen, but something about the look in her eye said it was all a show.

Taking a deep breath, he tried, “Please cooperate and walk to interrogation room. We have a lot to discuss.” He tugged on her arm again to try and propel her out and toward the interrogation room.

She ran her eyes from his head to toe and back up again before her smile turned seductive, “I’ll do anything, Hon, if you just say please. All that suit, I would love to peel it back and see what hides beneath. I bet once you’re all unbuttoned you’re a real animal.”

Hotch felt himself blush and was thankful no one was around to witness it. “Ms. Garcia, we need to talk.”
Reid was watching through the observation window when Hotch stepped back out of the interrogation room and joined he and Morgan, “She’s scared.”

“Scared?” He glanced at the woman inside, his mind running over the odd interview he’d just given. She’s seemed plenty bold and sure of herself to him. Granted, her voice had cracked a little at some of the questions, but she wasn’t pulling back into herself like some people did when they found themselves in her position.

“Of you especially, but yes, she’s scared. I can’t work out if she was scared before or after she got picked up. I think a gentler approach might get her to cooperate.” Reid blushed as he spoke, not used to giving so much. “What’s that?” He waved at the folded pink paper in his boss’s hand.

“Her resume. Sort of.” He waved it a bit, catching the scent of roses just briefly. “I think it’s scented too.” Passing the page over, he asked, “What do you suggest?”

“I’ll go in with you.” When he got raised eyebrows at that he pushed on, “She sees you as a bully and so she’s instantly on guard. She won’t see me that way.”

“How do you know she sees me as a bully?”

Reid hesitated and almost stepped back, “Because I do, did. I did.”

Hotch had feared that was the case and his heart sank slightly before pushing forward.

“Alternative?”

“Make her see you as a protector instead. If she sees you as someone who looks out for others, she might come around.”

“Okay. You go and walk her through the paperwork we need signed.” Hotch passed some paperwork to him. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

“You’re not coming in too?” He heard his voice crack.

“No. She’s not violent, you’ll be fine till I get back.”

Spencer swallowed and went into the interrogation room, thinking to himself the whole time that his boss’s last statement could probably constitute famous last words. He’d never actually been inside an interrogation room with a real suspect before, nevermind alone. “Hello, I’m Agent Spencer Reid. I just have some documents to be signed that say you’re agreeing to our terms.”

The woman looked him up and down and her face relaxed. “Are you really an FBI agent or are you just a paper pusher?”

“I’m sorry?”

Her eyes darted to the mirror on the wall and back to him, “Do you work with the bully with the stick up his butt who was just in here?”

Spencer nodded.

“You look nervous. And young.” She reached across the table and squeezed his hand, “I’m Penelope Garcia. It looks like I’m going to be on your team now.” As she pulled back, she brought the pages with her and started signing.
Reid watched her a minute then said, “Emotional, artistic, intuitive, creative.”

“Huh?” She looked up, trying and failing to make eye contact.

“You’re left handed, like Hotch actually. Left handed people tend to be those things. They also tend to have horrible penmanship.” He looked at her writing on the page, smirking.

Garcia smiled, “Does the Bossman have bad handwriting?”

Reid felt the laugh bubble up, “It’s like reading Chinese characters sometimes.”

Hotch chose that moment to join them and took in their matching innocent looks without saying a word. “We’ve been authorized to take a day to get everything you absolutely can’t part with and get it boxed up. You can’t have any contact with anyone you know here, so Agent Morgan and Agent Kiata will clear the apartment and stand outside while you take care of things. I can have two Agents from the local office here help you pack.”

She thought a minute, “Why can’t you and Agent Reid here help?” She pushed the signed pages across the table to him. “We can get to know one another,” she flashed him a Cheshire grin.

==

Every time Reid had walked past Garcia in her small apartment, she’d brushed against him. It was putting him more and more on edge as he didn’t like people in his personal space. She’d sent him into the bedroom with a box into the afternoon with the instruction to empty the bottom dresser drawer. He’d pulled it open and froze at the assortment of adult toys filling the space. When he’d blushed and backed away, Garcia had cackled and teased him with some of them until Hotch had finally taken pity on the young man and confiscated them while managing to maintain a straight face. Reid had been silently impressed with that.

By late evening the apartment had been mostly cleared of necessary personal belongings and Garcia seemed to start facing the reality of being taken in by the FBI and essentially given house arrest on the other side of the continent.

The foursome was on the jet headed back cross country. Morgan and Hotch were sitting at the front while Spencer and Penelope were at the back. Morgan leaned toward Hotch, “So she’s our new technical analyst?”

“She will be. She must take a few classes, but she’ll be working already during that time. I asked Haley to find a couple apartments to look at. Her finances have been frozen for now, so at the moment she has no money.” He settled back into his seat, flipping through the file in front of him.

“So, where is she staying tonight?”

“I’ve sorted out a hotel near base for a week at least, maybe more. It’ll be covered by the Bureau. How have things been going with Reid in the bullpen the past few weeks?” He changed the subject.

Morgan shrugged, “About what you’d expect. He’s quiet, works hard. He doesn’t seem as jumpy since you’ve taken to talking with him so I guess it’s helping.” He started to pull on his headphones and then stopped, “He’s starting to settle in I think.”

Hotch glanced at the pair at the far end of the plane, “I wonder if they’ll help each other now. I don’t see this being an easy transition for her either.”
“Maybe they will.”

==

“So,” Garcia started, “Where did you go to college?”

“CalTech, I started when I was thirteen and I spent the better part of ten years there. I got three doctorates.”

Garcia’s eyes widened to saucers, “I heard about you!” She grasped his arm excitedly, “I went there for a year, but I heard about you.”

Reid tried to pull back, “I didn’t know I was famous.”

The raised voices drew Hotch and Morgan’s attention and they both watched the pair talking.

“What do you think that was about?”

Hotch tapped a page in front of him, “I’m guessing she just realized they have a common connection. Do you think we should save him?”

Morgan chucked, “Nah, he’s fine. But work is about to get a whole lot more interesting.”
Chapter 5

It had taken Garcia all of three weeks to hate living in the hotel and shuffling back and forth to the base. She hated feeling isolated and adrift. Sure, it was better accommodations than she’d been living in but it didn’t feel stable. It felt like at any minute the rug could be yanked out from under her feet and everything would fall apart. She needed this opportunity. The life she’d been leading wasn’t one she wanted to continue on with. Even though it had meant a clean break, Penelope had been relieved to get caught and brought in by the FBI.

She pushed into her new boss’s office intent on telling him just how wrong it was to make her live in a hotel with no sign of a real place, but when she reached his desk he silently held out a sheet of paper to her. “What’s this?”

“It’s a one-bedroom condo in a decent neighborhood. The building has been totally renovated and modernized inside but still looks original outside. The holding company is starting to sell off the units. The location is good to the base and near good roads to get to the city, it will go fast.”

Garcia read over the flyer, “I don’t have enough for a down payment on this. I don’t know if they’d work with me.” Sinking into one of his office chairs, she huffed, “I am totally over the hotel but it will be month before I have enough saved up for a place like this. Maybe longer.”

“Don’t worry about that for now. Do you want to see it? My wife has a friend who is a realtor and she can get us all in quickly to peek before it’s open to the public.” He rested his arms on his desk. “She’s waiting to hear back from me.”

“Us all?”

“Reid is in need of a new place as well. I’m about to show him the same flyer and I’m hoping to bring him along, but it might take a little convincing. I thought if you also looked at a unit perhaps he would be more receptive.”

She looked down to the bullpen at her new friend, “Sure. I’ll have a look. Anything is better than living at the hotel.”

==

Garcia and Reid rode with Hotch to meet the realtor and Haley later that day. The realtor, Janet, walked them through several units with different layouts, pointing out all of the updated features as well as the original architecture that had been restored. Garcia really liked the top floor unit facing the street. It would get natural daylight the most hours of the day and she would be able to see the bustle of the street but still be above the noise. After some coaxing by herself and Haley, Reid finally relented and admitted to liking the only other unit on the same floor. It had a small utilitarian balcony, perfect for a morning cup of coffee, but not much else. Garcia gushed about being practically roommates but with more privacy since they were the only units on the top floor. “We could almost have a special lock-out on the elevator just for us!” She had giggled to him.

When the others had stepped out, Garcia took his arm, not caring about his preference for personal space, “We could be neighbors!”

“I don’t know if my landlord will let me out of my current lease.” He tapped on the moldings and turned, looking at the high ceilings, “But it would be nice to own my own place.”

“Well, how about tonight you stop by my place and we’ll watch a movie and celebrate our
potential new ownership? My room isn’t big by the room service is pretty good and fast too.”

“Sure.” He pushed a smile onto his face as she bounced at his side. Living next to Penelope Garcia was surely going to be interesting.

==

Arriving home, both Hotch and Haley climbed out of their cars and headed inside. “Thank you for arranging that, Haley.”

“You’re welcome, Honey. Anything to make your life easier.” She deposited her things and headed to the kitchen. “I’ll start dinner while you change.”

Aaron hesitated, there was something in her tone. “What’s wrong? Did I do something?”

“No, no, Honey. You didn’t do anything wrong. I was happy to play the good little housewife to the big important FBI chief in front of your subordinates.”

“Haley?” His face wrinkled in confusion.

“Aaron. Honey. You said you had to find some listings for them to look at and you knew my friend was a realtor. You’re not that dumb. So I was happy to talk to her and arrange this. I’m glad they liked it, it clearly made you happy. And I got to spend a little extra time with you instead of you being holed away at the office until after dark like you usually are.” She turned her back to him, effectively dismissing him.
Chapter 6

Garcia had moved into her new place first, eager to be free of the hotel. Reid had taken longer, the landlord where he’d been had put up a fight. It turned out he’d profited on Reid’s presence by upping rent because an FBI agent lived in the building. Apparently that was supposed to make the place safer. Hotch had gotten involved, speaking as Reid’s lawyer and finally the man relented. Gideon simply shook his head and said he didn’t understand why the boy needed to be moved. Hotch had resisted the urge to hit him, but had taken the slightly petty route instead and forgot to invite Gideon to Reid’s housewarming party once he was settled.

Once the pair got into a routine, most of the time Garcia drove them both in to work, if Reid was in town, and occasionally home as well. They shared take-out and home cooked meals and Garcia slowly decorated his place so it ‘looked like someone actually lived there’. Reid found it nice to have someone to talk to whenever he wanted, someone to share meals with and to cook for.

Garcia discovered that they had a love of sci-fi movies in common, both loved to discover errors in them.

==

A case in Massachusetts guaranteed to change everything. The UNSUB had been picking off women who fit a very specific type; petite with shoulder length brown hair. At first, he was committing these attacks from a distance using a gun with a silencer in broad daylight. By the time the team had zeroed in on who they suspected was their guy, he’d worked his way to face-to-face attacks with his bare hands and some sexual assault for good measure. Clearly there was rage he was carrying around for someone.

Reid had escorted Morgan to the library. They were searching for the ex their UNSUB was after. They hadn’t expected a showdown with the delusional man himself. Spencer had done his best to talk him into letting the poor woman go free, she’d suffer enough knowing all this was done because of her. And it seemed to work, he set her free and she took off toward Reid. Just as Spencer’s hands took hold of her arm to guide her out, a gun fired and Reid was splashed with blood and gore. Another set of shots followed, but time had already stopped for the young agent as he stared in horror at the remains of the woman’s body now dangling in his hands.

Spencer couldn’t make himself turn loose. He sank to the ground right along with the woman’s lifeless body, unable to look away. Blood oozed onto the carpet, soaking into his pant leg and sock.

Morgan watched his partner sink to the ground, eyes glazed and unfocused. He checked for a pulse of the downed UNSUB and verified the man would never be a threat again. When he looked back to Reid and saw he still wasn’t responsive, Morgan pulled out his phone. “Hey Hotch? We have a problem.”

==

Pedal to the floor, Hotch headed across town with lights and sirens on. Morgan’s call had him beyond worried. They’d kept Reid pretty well insulated from the most violent parts of their jobs; he and Morgan hadn’t gone out thinking they would find their guy at the library. Morgan had told him their youngest member seemed to be in shock after witnessing the victim shot to death practically in his arms.
Arriving at the scene, Hotch slammed the SUV into park and bailed out, pushing past the crime scene techs and paramedics crowding the area. In the back of an ambulance he found the man on his mind laying on a stretcher, still covered in blood spray and gazing off into space. Pacing in front of the open doors was Morgan, trying to get answers about why Reid had reacted that way.

“What’s the status?” Hotch demanded.

The paramedic turned and stepped back, unsure how to handle this new, obviously agitated man wearing a sidearm. “We aren’t sure. We want to take him in and have doctors look at him.”

“I’m coming with you.” He climbed into the back, handing his keys off to Morgan.

“Hotch?”

Aaron turned back to the dark skinned agent.

“I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for.” He reassured as the doors slammed shut.

==

Hotch watched as nurses took vitals, drew blood and tried to get the young man to communicate to no avail. The agent on the bed flinched and recoiled at every touch. After an hour, he asked for some washcloths and a bowl for water so he could clean his agent up, certain the feel of blood all over his body wasn’t helping Reid’s state of mind.

As Reid’s awareness returned, he realized someone was washing something from his skin. Whoever it was was taking care to be as gentle as possible. At first Spencer couldn’t think of why someone would be caring for him like that. Then the events of the day rushed back to him, the sight of the woman being shot and dying in his hands and he gagged.

Hotch was washing Reid’s arm and hand when he felt the tiniest shift in demeanor. He started to pull back, suspecting his agent was returning to the present, and watched as he started to gag. He grabbed the dish and pressed it into his hands as he gagged again before emptying his stomach. Hotch had seen people shot many times in his career with SWAT and the BAU, had even pulled the trigger himself many of those times. The first time someone died right in front of you was one of those things that stayed with you forever. He pressed the button for the nurse and asked for something to help settle Spencer’s stomach.

Reid felt a fresh cool cloth on his face and sighed. When the queasy feeling passed he opened his eyes and looked up into the concerned gaze of his boss. “I’m sorry.”

Hotch’s brow furrowed, “For what?”

“Freaking out.”

“You did absolutely nothing wrong. Everyone has a case like this that gets to them.” He sat in the chair by the bed.

“Everyone?” Spencer sounded meek.

Hotch pressed forward, ignoring the question for now, “What’s important is what we do afterward. How we handle the process of dealing with what happened.” He rested his chin on his folded hands. “You and I will need to sit down and talk this through when we get back, but you
also need to figure out what will work for you to be able to process and leave cases behind. Everyone has something they do to get past the worst part of this job.”

“They do?”

“Morgan works on houses, Gideon studies birds, others run or go to the firing range.”

“What do you do?”

“I, uh, I have Haley. She- helps me unwind.” He reached out and patted a leg, “It might take a few tries, but you will find your thing and when you do, you’ll know it’s the right fit for you.”

“Okay.”

==

It was two in the morning and Garcia could hear him pacing through the wall. Footsteps in and out of the room that adjoined hers in even patterns. Whatever he was doing it was like he was counting or keeping up with some rhythm she couldn’t hear. Finally having enough, she took the spare key and let herself into his unit. It didn’t take long to find him, still dressed in the clothes he’d worn on the jet ride home, walking the hall from his bedroom to his living room and back again. He was muttering to himself and tapping the air with busy fingers. Garcia stood at the end of his loop and waited, after two more passes he suddenly halted and looked up at her. “I can’t stop seeing it.”

She nodded and motioned for him to return to his bedroom.

He obeyed without another word, leading her to his room before sitting on the edge of his mattress. When she pressed his shoulders, he crawled backward and laid on the bed on his back.

Once his eyes were shut, he felt the bed dip and then her spooning against him. Once he relaxed, an exhale seeming to deflate him, her fingers started gently tracing over his skin, it felt electric. The quiet tracing continued and Spencer found his mind following her patterns instead of thinking of the case. Finally he was able to drift off to sleep.

==

Aaron had been antsy all evening. There was something about the state he’d found Reid in and the look of utter despair on the young man’s face the rest of the way home that he couldn’t shake. Now he was sitting up in bed in the dark.

“Aaron?” Haley rolled over. “What’s wrong? I didn’t hear your phone ring.”

“Nothing and no, no phone. No case. I’m just thinking about some things.”

She pushed up and glanced at the clock, “In the middle of the night?”

“I’m sorry, Hales. I just can’t sleep.” Swinging his legs of the edge, “Maybe a drink and a shower will help me relax.”

He got as far as the doorway before Haley replied, “Is a drink now a good idea? Your father probably started with just a drink to help him sleep too, you know.”

His breath stopped, “You’re right.” He hung his head in the dark, “I’ll just take a shower.” He turned back into the room to gather some things.
“Okay, Honey. But can you shower downstairs? You’ll keep me awake if you do it in here.”

“Sure. No problem.”
As months passed, Spencer started to notice the odd habits of his neighbor. On the nights he was home, he often heard her leave again some time after dinner and not return until nearly sunrise. She never brought anyone back with her and she never didn’t come home. If she was dating, she was keeping it out of her own home and didn’t seem to be going back to his place. On the mornings after she was out, she always seemed happier, more easy-going than the other mornings. Spencer finally decided to figure out what she was doing so one night he stayed up and listened for her to return.

It was nearly two in the morning when Spencer heard Penelope’s heels crossing the hall from the stairwell to her apartment. He carefully pulled his door open and was greeted with the sight of Garcia wearing a tiny leather dress that left next to nothing to the imagination.

She tossed him a glance over her shoulder and smirked when she saw his jaw dropped open. “Can I help you?” She purred to him.

“What? Why, what?” He gave her a confused look.

Glancing around in case someone was lurking in the shadows between their apartments, Garcia started to strut toward him in a way he’d never seen her move before, purring, “Would you like to know what I get up to at night? Are you curious?”

Spencer took a deep breath, “I hear you come in at night. I just wondered…”

She leaned forward, offering him a perfect view of her rack, “I go get spanked.” She almost-whispered into his ear. “Or do the spanking. Depends on the night.” The feral smirk was back on her face.

He swallowed, “You’re a- a, into BDSM?”

Shrugging, she relaxed into the wall beside him, “Maybe.” She huffed out a slight chuckled, “Why? Interested?”

==

Hotch stood at the window to his office and stared down into the bullpen. Most of the team was out on speaking engagements for the day which left him in the office with the two members of the team he worried the most about. He’d watched their friendship grow over the past few months in a way he was a bit envious of. Sure, Hotch had had opportunities to work with Reid at the range and in hand-to-hand, but the young agent rarely truly opened up to him and for all they interacted, he doubted Reid was really opening up to Garcia either. Garcia, for that matter, appeared open as she playfully bantered with Morgan and JJ and took Reid under her wing as a friend, but he suspected that too was a bit of a show. She was holding back.

Finally he took a deep breath and headed down to the desks below, “Reid, we have a case. I’ve called the others, they’ll meet us at the jet.”

Instantly pulling back into himself, Reid nodded silently and started gathering his bags. Startled by his response and change of demeanor, Garcia gave the back of Reid’s head a sad smile before starting her way back to her own office. She was well versed in the ways of bullies and how to avoid and appease them, not that she thought their boss was truly a bully any longer, and clearly Reid was as well. From her doorway, she watched the pair wait on the elevator. Once Reid
stepped in, Hotch glanced back at her and she gave him a pleading look before he vanished behind steel doors. She hoped her friend and neighbor would find a way to relax and accept the friendships around him.

==

Hotch was seething. As far as cases went, it had been fairly cut and dry. The case wasn’t what had him so upset.

As soon as the team had arrived in rural Nebraska, ‘isn’t all of Nebraska rural?’ he’d thought to himself, there had been problems. The problems, however, hadn’t been case related. The problems started when two detectives decided to make Reid their personal verbal punching bag. At first it had been simply dismissing the youngest agent any time he tried to speak, but that escalated to direct comments and veiled threats. After the fact, Hotch had learned that Gideon had witnessed some of the attacks directly and had done nothing to step in and intervene. His first clue to there even being a problem had instead come the moment he’d stepped back into the station and spotted his youngest agent huddled in a chair displaying several of the stress responses he’d worked hard to help him dispel. When he demanded answers, Reid was unable to be forthcoming and the rest of the team had only been aware of snippets of what had happened.

Hotch had instructed Morgan to drive Reid back to the hotel while he dragged Jason into a secluded room for a chat.

It was late in the evening when Hotch finally made it to their rooms. He’d texted ahead and had let Morgan know he was stopping by his room to collect his bags and then would be trading off with him and looking after Spencer for the evening. Morgan had started to argue, but relented when Hotch pulled the ‘I’m the boss’ card.

Morgan handed him Reid’s room key card as he excused himself for the evening. He wasn’t sure what the unit chief was going to do to sort out the situation in the room, but he was going to leave the pair to it.

Hotch was surprised to find the younger man pacing in sharp loops, head down and mumbling quickly to himself. When trying to touch him only made Reid more agitated, Hotch did his best to talk Reid into taking a shower to try and relax. He was praying it would work.

Once the bathroom door clicked shut, Hotch grabbed his go bag to start changing out of his suit. He didn’t feel comfortable leaving Reid on his own right now and needed to be close so he intended on sleeping in the other bed in the room. When the water turned on in the next room, Hotch pulled out his sweats and started to strip his suit off, hanging it in the closet as he went. He had half a mind to suspend Jason for failing to protect a member of their team. He was starting to think maybe better than suspension would be discussing with the brass about having Jason retired, forcibly if needed. He’d gotten completely undressed and was mentally fuming when the bathroom door suddenly swung open, surprising him.

Spencer’s brain was running a mantra on loop as he struggled to get himself ready to shower. Suddenly noticing he’d forgotten to bring pajamas in with him, he pulled the bathroom door upon hurriedly and was met with a completely naked Aaron Hotchner with the angriest scowl Spencer had ever seen on his face. He’d already been rattled beyond what he was able to handle from the day’s events at the station, seeing his boss naked, glaring at him, with the sound of the shower in the background pushed his already fragile state over the edge. Reid turned back to the bathroom, slamming the door and locking it before huddling on the floor crying.

Hotch rushed to the door and tried the knob. Finding it locked, he began pounding on the door,
“Reid! Spencer! Open the door and we will talk!” He started to bang on the wood again before he realized he was standing there totally naked. Hotch stepped away to rush getting dressed, all the while listening to the sobs and gasps for air coming from the other side. “Reid? Come on, open the door. Please? I need you to open up.” As he spoke, the sobs and gasping got worse.

Hotch stopped and thought about his own experience huddled in a locked bathroom while someone pounded and shouted at the door. He instantly withdrew his hand, letting it hang a moment in midair before falling to his side. His chest ached with fear and worry for the situation and the man under his responsibility. He found himself at a rare loss for what the right thing to do was. He slowly paced back to his bag and dug around a minute before finding what he was looking for. He returned to the door and spoke gently, hoping he would be heard over the cries, “Spencer, I’m going to unlock the door and come in. I need to be able to check on you.” Hotch began to pick the lock.

As soon as he felt the lock snick, he leaned into the door, nearly falling to the floor as it popped open. Catching himself on the counter, he looked down on the huddled form in the corner. “Spencer,” he started, “It’s Aaron, I need you to calm down a bit and just listen. I won’t hurt you.” Putting a hand on one skinny shoulder caused Reid to flinch and recoil to get away. Hotch settled onto the floor with him, speaking slowly and softly, “Okay. I won’t touch you. I’ll just stay right here until you can tell me what you need. I’m sorry the detectives today were harassing you. I swore to myself no one would bother you in the field and Morgan did too. We didn’t expect for someone else to just let it happen without getting involved. You shouldn’t have to deal with that.”

As he’d spoke, Spencer’s breathing had started to even out and his trembling had eased. He was quiet now, listening to the even cadence of the other man’s voice with his eyes still screwed shut.

Hotch watched and waited for a sign Reid was coming out the other end when the younger man suddenly went still and his eyes got a slightly glazed look to them. He barely had a chance to start to get up when Reid lurched sideways over the edge of the tub and was sick. Given all his body had been through over the past several hours, Hotch didn’t blame him at all.

==

Spencer groaned into his pillow and tried to bury under the blankets, wanting to simply not exist for the day instead of having to get up. He couldn’t remember what had happened the night before, but the horrible headache told him it’d been emotional. A soft shuffling sound had him peeking out from under the pillow to see who was in his room. His gaze landed on the form of his boss carefully moving around by the desk. “Hotch?”

Aaron turned, holding files in his hand, and smiled sadly, “Are you awake now?”

“What happened?”

He turned to the mini fridge in the corner and fished out a bottle of water, bringing it across to the bed before sitting on the edge of the bed opposite. “There was a situation yesterday and I think you got emotionally overwhelmed. You reacted strongly.”

Spencer started to panic, “At the station?”

Hotch picked up on the stress in his voice, “No, here. Just you and I.” His eyes dropped to his hands, “I was really worried and didn’t know how to help. Once you were calmed down and cleaned up, I helped you get in bed and I’ve sat up all night watching.”
He thought about that a moment, “Why?”

Sighing, he leaned forward and rested his head in his hands, “I was worried you might need taken to the hospital. I couldn’t bring myself to take you forcibly, it seemed unfair, but I was worried you were in such a state where you couldn’t consent and that probably meant you needed to go.”

Spencer took in the exhausted state of his boss and wondered if he didn’t also look a little sad as well, “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Reacting like that, making you worry.” Finally pushing the covers down, Spencer scooted into a sitting position and stared down at the pajamas he was wearing. “When did I change?”

“You already had your shirt off before I got into the bathroom. Once I helped you get washed off, I found your pajamas.”

Bits of the night before started coming back to him, starting with the sight of Hotch standing naked in his hotel room. To his embarrassment and horror, he found his body reacting in an entirely different manner this time. “Okay. I need to go clean up and shower properly. Will you still be here?”

“I’ll stay.”

==

Haley was in the laundry room loading the washer and dryer when Aaron came in. He stepped up behind her and pulled her close, pressing them both against the machine as it hummed along. “I need you.” He growled into her hair. “I need you, Hales.”

She turned in his arms. “You’re still in your suit, Honey. Go upstairs and let me finish this really quick and I’ll be there.”

He pressed a desperate kiss to her lips before leaving the room. In their bedroom, Aaron hung away his suit and locked away his firearms before laying back on the bed. Haley had been much more receptive to his advances lately, normally she wasn’t interested in having sex as soon as he walked in the door, still worked up from work. She’d accused him of being a pervert once, for sometimes needing to lose himself in her after a stressful case. As he thought about how good it was going to feel buried in his wife, he allowed one hand to ghost over the underside of his cock and stroke his balls. He was already hard, it would take very little to push him over the edge, but the light teasing felt good as it made his erection bump against his stomach, leaving a wet mark.

“Are you *masturbating*?” Haley’s voice was incredulous. “You really couldn’t wait for me?” She stalked to the bed.

His hands went up in submission, “I’m sorry, Hales. I was waiting, I am waiting. I just was laying here thinking of you and…” He swallowed and his voice dropped to just above a whisper, “I’m sorry.”

She huffed out a breath, “Let me get undressed.”

==

They lay on the bed side by side, both panting and coming down from their post-sex high. Aaron was riding on cloud nine. He’d swallowed back his first request of taking her on her hands and
knees but she’d agreed to his request of her being on top. She’d not said a word either to his assault on her chest with mouth and hands. A great job and a beautiful wife who loved him, he was pretty sure this was the life he’d dreamed of.
Chapter 8

“Just remember all the moves I showed you and just go for it. You’re not going to hurt me, Reid.” Hotch repositioned on the mats and clapped his hands once. “Ready? Let’s try again.”

Reid frowned but accepted that this was happening. Hotch was trying to teach him hand to hand combat. He took in Hotch’s stance and made his move, but right before he connected, he shifted his weight and landed his hit on the opposite side of Hotch’s body. The surprise impact sent the pair tumbling down. Reid didn’t waste any time rolling them so Hotch was on his stomach with Reid grinning victoriously while perched on his back.

“Good job.” Hotch tried thinly, lacking air from the weight of the thin man seated on him.

Spencer’s grin faded a little, “You were distracted. You usually catch things like that.” He slid to the floor and stared down as Hotch rolled onto his back, “Is- ah- is there something wrong?” He tried.

Hotch watched his young agent try to show his concern and felt a pang of pride at how far he was coming along. “Want to grab a bite to eat? Maybe a drink? I think we’re done here for the day. I’m not sure my pride could handle too many more rounds like that.”

“Uh- sure.” Reid pushed up from the mat and trailed behind as they headed to the locker room to get cleaned up.

==

At the bar, neither man spoke until their food arrived. Eventually Reid leaned in, “What’s going on?”

Hotch smiled brightly, “Haley’s pregnant.”

“Congratulations!” He studied his boss a second, “What’s the problem?”

With a sigh, Hotch sat down his fork, “We’ve been trying since she finished college. She’s- we’ve- lost several already. She’s really excited this time, says she thinks this time is the one, but I can’t seem to get attached yet. I don’t want her to go through that pain again. I brought up before just accepting that we may not have a family of our own that way, but it didn’t go over well.”

Reid frowned, unsure what would be the appropriate response. “I’m sorry you guys have been through that.”

“Thank you. If we can get through the next six weeks, the odds improve. But that’s still not really official. Nothing’s official until we have the baby in her arms.”

Spencer reached across and put a hand on his friend’s arm. “It will be okay. You’ll see.”

==

Two evenings later, a knock on his door had Reid curious to see who was there. He pulled the door open to find Garcia grinning madly at him.

“You wanted to know, so tonight you are coming with me!” She reached out for him.

“Where are we going?” He tried to tug his arm out of her grip.
“Out!”

He frowned at her. “I don’t feel like going to a club.”

She waved him after her as she headed to his room, “It’s not a club, well not that kind of club. You’ll be fine.” She started rummaging through his clothes, pulling out something that looked a little less work-like and a tad more age-appropriate.

==

Reid wasn’t sure what he was expecting as he followed his neighbor and friend past the bouncer and into the club. There was a bar and someone carrying a try of appetizers. The tables were all secluded alcoves separated by the high backs of the booths and heavy curtains.

“Oh, Penny!” A male voice came from a booth, “You brought your friend tonight.”

Garcia greeted the man with a hug and peck on the cheek. “I did. I’m glad we could all get together.”

The man stood from the shadows. He was taller that Spencer with black hair just the trimmed side of shaggy and bright green eyes. Reid could tell by the way the man carried himself, he was fit. Putting out a hand, the man introduced himself, “James. First names only here.”

“Ah, Spencer.” He waved, “I don’t do handshakes.”

James raised a curious brow to Garcia, but let it go. “Well, Penny, please sit then. Let’s have a quick drink and then we’ll head upstairs.”

Garcia slid into the opposite side of the booth. “Spencer will need a rundown of what will happen tonight.”

“Upstairs?” Reid asked awkwardly as he slid in beside her.

James seemed a bit startled, “You haven’t told him anything at all? Are you that sure of his reaction?”

“Pretty much.”

Spencer looked between them. “What’s going on? My reaction to what?”

She finally took pity on him, “James and I meet up here to fill each other’s emotional needs. We have an arrangement.”

“Arrangement?”

“This club,” James leaned in, “Is a kink club.” He watched the younger man process, “I met Penny when she moved here and we found we were into the same sorts of things, so we meet up.”

“It’s entirely non-sexual for us,” Garcia piped in, “Though as long as it’s consensual, it’s not forbidden, we just don’t fulfill that for each other.”

James shook his head.

Spencer turned to his friend, “So you’re, what- a sub?”

“Oh no, sweet cheeks. James is.” She giggled. “I told him about you and we’ve discussed the
possibility of me bringing you here. So, for tonight, the offer is, you can come up with us and be a spectator. No one will push you or even ask you to do anything. If you feel uncomfortable, we’ll stop and I’ll take you home, no hard feelings. You were curious and think of it as research.”

Nodding, Spencer consented, “In our line of work, this kind of knowledge would come in handy eventually.”

“So, if everyone’s on board, shall we head up to a room?”

James produced a key, “I already had one reserved.”

==

Stepping into the room, Reid took in everything in the space. Right in the middle of the room was a narrow bed that sat low to the floor. There was a bench and a chair and several cupboards that he assumed held equipment. He watched as James stripped down to boxers and moved to drape himself over a sort of reverse chair. Garcia lost her sweater and shoes and pulled up her hair. Reid decided to sit in a chair across the room and out of the way to watch.

As soon as the door clicked shut, Garcia felt herself settle into her role. She pulled several scarves out of a drawer with a flourish and started to tie James to the chair and the blindfold him. “Too tight?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Good.” She purred. She ran her fingers through his hair before tightening her grip and tugging roughly. “Who do you belong to?”

“You, ma’am.”

“Anyone else?”

“No, ma’am.”

She grinned even though he couldn’t see it. “Are you up for the flogger tonight?” She teased her fingers across his back. “Have you done things you need flogged for?”

Spencer could see the man swallow and nod. His jaw dropped a little when Garcia returned to the cabinet and pulled out what looked like a heavy stick with a dozen or more strips of wide leather. She began to brush James with it enticingly.

Garcia leaned in, “Have you followed all of your rules this week? Have you been going for your runs?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Limiting yourself to three cups of caffeine a day?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Eating three proper meals a day?”

This time James swallowed and hesitated, “I’ve tried.”

“Tried, James?” Her voice got hard.
“At work. I get so busy. I get distracted and forget lunch.”

“How many meals did you skip this week?”

“Three, ma’am.”

“Three? Well then, you know what must happen now.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Can you count to thirty?”

“Yes.” The bound man gasped.

“Uh-uh, yes what?”

“Yes, ma’am.” As he finished speaking, the first strike cracked across his back. “One.”

Reid watched as Garcia only spoke after every fifth strike, hesitating a bit extra after numbers ten and twenty. After thirty, James’ back was red and raw. He watched his friend tuck the flogger away and release the man from his bindings before leading him to the low bed to lay on his stomach.

“Tell me what you need.” She instructed.

James turned his head in her direction, still blindfolded. “To be cared for. To feel someone else take care of me for a while.”

“Shh.” She stroked his hair. “Just relax, I’ll take care of you.”

==

After James left, Garcia crossed the room and sat next to Reid. “What did you think?”

He stared at her a minute, unsure what to say. He settled for, “You want me to be a sub?”

She gave him a soft smile, “Not really. I was thinking you would like to learn about being a Dom. James is a great guy and has zero expectations. I’ve seen how hard it is for you being on the team and dealing with everything. Something like this maybe could help you deal with all of,” she waved her hands, “that.”

Reid got up and walked around the room, touching the various things that were out. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t need to decide now or next week or even next month. It’s what I do. I go to the office all day and it’s really hard for me to look at the cases we get and sometimes the other agents on our floor aren’t so nice to me.”

“Really?”

She pretended not to hear the concern in his voice, “Coming here in the evenings gives me time to decompress and deal with those feelings and emotions.”

“Can I think about it?” He picked up the flogger Penelope had used, “It’s hard for me to wrap my head around someone enjoying something like this. I spent my whole life trying to avoid being hit by anything.”
“We don’t use that often. Every other month maybe. Sometimes for him it’s simply the act of letting go and letting someone else be in charge.” She shrugged.

He chewed his lip, “And it’s never sexual?”

“We never have sex. Sometimes what happens can be…arousing, but we agreed to no sex so we just ignore it and act like mature, consenting adults.”

Reid put down the implement and turned to her. “Would you show me?”

“What? Now?”

He nodded.

Standing, she patted the chair he’d been sitting in, “Come sit. Grip the arm rests,” She moved to another drawer and pulled out several rolls of ribbon, “I’m not going to actually tie you up, but I’m going to tie each of your wrists and ankles.” She unrolled the first length and began to wrap it in a series of knots around him. “Can you keep your eyes shut?”

He nodded and then hesitated, “Do I need to undress?”

“Just your shoes.”

==

He tried to track her movements in his mind, anticipate what she would do next. At first it was simply a touch here, a pet of his hair there. Her movements were quiet and purposeful, but without a pattern.

“Stop thinking so hard. Relax.” Garcia broke the silence. “Just. Let. Go.” She did her best to distort his sense of expectation, but he refused to open his eyes and break the moment.

When he found himself eventually floating in a state of relaxed awareness, he felt her pull away.

“Do you trust me?”

“Yes.” He was surprised at his own lack of hesitation.

“I want to try something. I need to you promise not to freak out.”

“I promise.” He wondered where this confidence was coming from. The soft impact of cotton across his chest and arms nearly had his eyes popping open. At the last possible moment, he fought his instinct to flee and made his body relax. Once he was calm, he heard her ask, “Is it okay or too much?”

“Just surprised. It was okay.”

She shifted her position over him, “I want to try something. At any point if you say stop, we’re done. No questions. Just relax and let your mind go for a bit.”

“Okay.” No sooner was the word out of his mouth than he felt the impact again, slightly lower. His reply to the strike was a long exhale.

She tugged on his hair, tipping his head back. She was surprised Reid had been willing to experiment, much less stick around this long. She didn’t want to push him too far, but she wanted him to feel how it felt to be taken part. With one hand tight in his hair, she let loose a series of swats
that had to be turning the skin under his shirt pink. As they continued, she felt his body stiffen and then relax and she knew he’d finally found that place where this felt good. He’d surrendered. She carried on one last time before turning lose and stepping back. “When you’re ready, you can open your eyes slowly and get up.”

Spencer sat quietly, letting his mind slowly start working again. His body was relaxed, having lost all of the tension his often carried around with him. All of the anxiety he felt, it was gone and he just felt…content. Cracking his eyes open, he realized that at some point Garcia had lowered the lights in the room. Blinking several times, he finally glanced at his watch, surprised to see that a half hour had passed.

Garcia appeared before him and began untying the ribbons, “When you’re ready, we can head home. We’ll talk about it in a few days, okay?”

He nodded and stood to follow her out.

==

Hotch stared down at the paperwork accrued by the cases they’d recently finished. It never ceased to amaze him the lengths human beings would go to in order to torture and kill other human beings. His thoughts drifted to Reid, he figured the young man was probably rarely surprised by what people were willing to do to one another. The younger agent seemed to always anticipate the worst of every situation. A knock on his office door had Hotch looking up, “Yes, Jason.”

Gideon leaned against the frame, “I heard Morgan talking to Reid about time at the range and at the gym? Are you really putting extra time into getting him officially field ready?”

Hotch straightened in his seat, “I am.” His gaze drifted to his window and back again, “He’s coming along well.”

“Listen, I know we don’t see eye to eye on why I brought him on the team, but I think he’s settling in nicely. He just needed time.”

“No, Jason, what he needed was to have someone support him. Now he’s got that. That’s why he’s settling in, but he’s still got miles to go before he’s ready to take on the world on his own.”
In the moment, Reid had found himself trusting in Hotch completely and without hesitation. He’d been honest when he’d told him that he’d caught onto the plan quickly. All of those hours at the firing range had paid off in the end.

The flight home had been quiet. Aside from Gideon’s little pep talk, no one else had said much to Reid. When they got off the plane, Hotch had been on the phone, checking up on Haley presumably, and Garcia had already headed home, so Spencer headed for the train as it was still his preferred method of transportation most of the time.

He’d been home nearly two hours, changed for bed and was settled on the couch when a knock sounded on his door. Figuring it was Garcia wanting to check on him and talk, he called out. “It’s open!” He tipped his head back to watch her come in upside down, but instead in stepped Hotch. “Oh! I didn’t know it was you!” He scurried up and tried to brush cookie crumbs off his top.

Hotch couldn’t help but give half a grin. “I surmised. I just wanted to check on you but, are you expecting someone?”

“No! No, sometimes Garcia pops over to talk. Unless she’s gone out. It’s Tuesday, she’s probably gone out.” He saw a brow raise in question, but ignored it. “Do you want a drink? I’m not sure what I have.”

“Water’s fine.”

“Please, sit. Pardon the crumbs.” He scrambled to get a glass of ice water. When he returned.

“I’m okay, really. What we went through, it was…weird, but I’m okay. I’m going to arrange to retake my qualification in the morning, maybe I can talk them into letting me try again sooner.”

“Don’t feel you need to rush it, profilers don’t need to carry. You’re first shot always hits you the hardest. I figured you might not get much sleep tonight and didn’t want you to be sitting up alone playing it over and over.”

Reid’s brows rose. “So, what? You planned on crashing here all night? What about Haley?”

“I talked to her when the plane landed. I told her what had happened and she agreed that I should look out for you tonight.” He left out the part where she’d insisted that Hotch didn’t need to babysit his agents and had accused him of using it as an excuse to be away from her. She hadn’t been all that pleased either to learn he’d nearly been taken out by a madman with a machine gun and his only hope had been Reid who’d failed his qualification. The prospect of leaving his pregnant wife widowed had started to sink in as she’d railed on about his not caring about himself or her by extension. “I stopped home quickly and had a quick dinner with her, reloaded my bag. She’ll call if she needs me.”

“Oh.”

When the silence lingered, Hotch asked. “Did you have dinner?”

Reid shook his head.

“Anywhere good deliver around here?”

“Umm, a few places. There’s a Mexican place a few blocks up.”
“Sounds good.” He waited for his subordinate to come up with a menu before settling in to the task of picking something to eat.

Once their dinners had arrived, Reid spoke up. “You know, I knew Morgan played football, but I hadn’t really thought about what that meant before today.”

“What do you mean?”

“At the park? He tackled me. Out of nowhere. I gave him a hard time later about it.” He chuckled. “He could have just told me to duck.”

“I think,” Hotch took a sip of his drink. “He sees you as a younger brother. And an older brother’s job is to protect.”

Reid lifted one arm, rotating his shoulder jokingly. “But does he have to be so rough when he does it?”

The conversation lulled while the pair ate. After they were finished, Hotch went to his car for his go-bag and returned, sitting it behind the couch. Retaking his seat, he studied the younger man. “You feel up to talking about it?”

Reid shook his head slowly, but then spoke anyway. “When I realized Dowd had us hostage? I didn’t feel scared. Is that weird?”

“Well, that depends on why.” He slung one arm over the back of the sofa, turning sideways.

He thought a minute. “You were there? I mean, I was worried we weren’t getting out of there without something happening, but it wasn’t fear I felt. I just knew, as long as you kept talking, we were getting out of it.”

“One day it will be you talking your way out with UNSUBs, believe me. It just takes time to get there.”

==

The pair had lost track of time, chatting about the case. The sound of Reid’s front doorknob twisting open had them both looking up. Suddenly realizing the time and who would be walking through, Reid called out. “Hey, Garcia, look who’s here!”

The blonde stopped in the slightly open doorway and peered around it at the two men. “Oh, I was just checking on you. I’ll go now.” She turned and fled the apartment.

Hotch looked back to his subordinate. “I can leave if you’d rather hang out with her. I know sitting around and talking to your boss probably wasn’t what you had in mind for your night.”

“No, she… I’ll talk to her later.” Reid stood and put their dishes away. “If you’re still wanting to keep an eye on me, I’ll get you some blankets for the couch.” He headed toward his bedroom to fetch spare things. “You’re welcome to the hall bathroom and anything in it.”

==

The next morning, Spencer let himself into Garcia’s place. “Good morning.”

“I can’t believe he saw me in that dress! What must he think of me now?” She was rushing around her living room and kitchen getting ready for her day.
Shrugging, “You were in shadow. I doubt he saw much. How is James?” He leaned a hip against her counter.

“Last night wasn’t James. After that case, I needed Ray. It was a good night though. When did Hotch leave?” She passed him a mug of coffee.

“Oh, he hasn’t. He was in the shower.”

“He spent the night?” Her voice went up half an octave. “And you’ve left him at your place alone?”

“He was in the shower. I doubt he can profile much from there.”

“But he’ll get out eventually.”

“I have another forty-five seconds before the water turns off.” When she gave him an odd look he added. “I’ve roomed with him several times now.”

She stared, speechless a moment. “Okay. You’re place, your rules.”

He grinned at her concession. “I was wondering though. About meeting with James. Could you teach me?” He headed back to the hall between their places, Garcia trailing behind.

“I will give him a call.” She leaned in as he opened his own door and stepped through. “I can teach you everything you want to know. Whips, belts, ties, you name it and we’ll try it.” She giggled and left.

Reid found himself that night again sitting on his couch with a guest. This time, however, his guest was one Penelope Garcia.

“So, I’ll teach you how to be a sub. We can do things just us two or we can do stuff with James. Or both. The thing to remember is no matter who you are with, the sub is in control. If you say stop, we stop. So never feel like you are stuck in a situation you don’t want. Even if you agree to something, you can always change your mind.” She watched him nod. “Every relationship is different and every encounter can be different. It depends on everyone’s moods and such. James has a very high intensity job and spends all his time doing for others and rarely stops to do for himself. And we only meet weekly or so. So, we set up rules for him to follow during the away time and I check on him. Everyone’s rules can be different. Some people don’t use rules at all, it’s all about the play in the moment.”

“What kinds of rules do you two use?”

“He needs to start most days with a run, even a short one, to center himself. It forces him to put himself first. There’s the caffeine thing, he’s like you and drinks way too much. He used to live on it. Now I expect him to eat properly. There are more. He doesn’t act submissive with me outside the agreed upon scene, either of us can ask for a meeting or refuse one. Oh, and no sex. We didn’t want that sort of relationship.”

“I, uhh, don’t. Either.” He reddened a bit.

“Okay, no big deal.” She patted his arm. “I’m not everyone’s cup of tea. Some like ‘um skinny or brunette or whatever.”
“No, it’s not… I… am not into… women. Like that.” His blush deepened.

“Oh!” Her eyes lit with understanding. “Well, again, no big deal. See, I’m not your cup of tea, what’d I say. So it should be easy to keep to the no sex then.” She beamed at him.

“Yeah, guess so.” The last person he’d outed himself to some years ago hadn’t reacted quite as peacefully.

“Totally random aside then, why do you let Morgan try and hook you up when we go out?”

Reid shrugged.

“He’s not got a problem with gay people and he’d stop trying to find you women. I can’t promise he’d stop trying to find you anyone, but at least they’d be your type?” When he just shrugged again, she dropped it. “So, rules. I want to start with a few and then we will discuss what happens when you break them. I like to keep my rules as things that really are just helping you be a better you. If at some point later we want to add or change, we will talk about it then.”

“Okay. What rules do you have?” He pulled a pillow in front of himself protectively.

“For starters,” she reached out and tipped his chin up. “When anyone on the team talks to you, look up at them. And when you are talking to them.”

“Really? That’s going to be a rule?”

“Uh huh. Also, when you are getting overwhelmed, day or night, you find me. Don’t stay in your head. I know it’s bigger on the inside, but you shouldn’t be in there alone with the bad stuff.” She chuckled at his smirk.

“Is that it?”

Garcia laughed, “One more. Or, two more really. Eat and sleep. Reasonable hours and meals.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Why, then you’ll be punished.” She declared cheerfully. “Now, I’ll talk to James about getting together regularly, the three of us. He already said he’s totally up for it, he is big on encouraging healthy and safe play so he’s always willing to be part of the teaching process. For tonight though, is there anything you’re interested in trying?”

Reid twisted his hands together and chewed the corner of his bottom lip. “It was really nice that one night when you held me? It felt like I was wrapped up so tight and secure.”

“We can wrap if you want. I’m pretty good at that.” She glanced around his dim apartment. “First, take off your belt and anything else solid. Get comfortable.”

He lurched up to do as instructed.

“And then kneel on the floor with your hands linked behind your back. I’m going to go look for some things. Keep your eyes on the floor.”

He nodded and looked to the floor as he finished getting ready.

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Reid was bound in a jersey knit bedsheet. Garcia had managed to wrap his arms snugly and then
secure them to his body. As he lay curled on his rug, he felt secured. Grounded. He could feel his friend moving around the room quietly but he was so relaxed he hardly cared what she was doing.

When hands suddenly pressed against him, he started. “Shh, let’s unwrap you now.” Penelope rubbed his arm. “You can speak freely.”

“All,” He cleared his throat, surprised to find it dry. “Already?” He squinted up at her in the dim light.

“Already? You’ve been wrapped up almost an hour sweetie.” She worked to unwind the sheet carefully. “How do you feel?”

“I felt…grounded. It was- weird. I can’t explain it.”

“It felt good?”

“Yeah.” He sat up as he was freed.

“You can feel that every time we meet. It helps me, getting to feel that.”

“Then I’m interested in doing it again.”
Reid had met Hotch for their weekly range practice, something the older man pushed to keep up even though the younger had passed his last qualification. Afterward they had headed to a hole-in-the-wall pub to talk a bit about their week. Reid watched his superior talking to the bartender and thought about how it was so much different than when he’d started with the team two years prior. He was now used to talking to his boss one on one and even found himself seeking him out at times. And it turned out Hotch was miles better at helping him learn to do the job and guide him than Gideon had ever been. The man still simply treated him as though he was more machine than man. And Garcia, the months since she’d started teaching him had helped him in ways he’d never fathomed. A phone ringing brought Spencer out of his reverie and he blinked at his own silent phone.

Beside him, Hotch pulled his phone out of his jacket pocket. “It’s Haley.” He connected the call. “Hey.”

Spencer watched, not trying to hide his eavesdropping as his boss listened to his wife.

“I’m on my way.” He stood abruptly and put away the phone. “Haley’s water broke. I need to get home and take her to the hospital.”

“Go. I’ll get a cab.” Reid waved him on. “I’ll settle up here too, go have your baby.”

“You sure?” Hotch hesitated.

“Go! And let me know how it goes!”

==

His phone beeping in the darkness made Spencer rub his eyes and roll over. “This better be good.” He squinted at the screen and then fumbled for his glasses, pulling them on. When he opened his messages, he found a photo of a squishy bald baby that was sporting a rather familiar scowl. The next message read, He’s here. Meet Jack Hotchner.

Spencer typed back, He looks like you. Poor kid. :)

There was no reply, so eventually Spencer placed the phone back on his side table. He figured Hotch was busy bonding with his new little family. An hour went by and he got a reply he wasn’t sure how to respond to. The screen read, What if I’m no good at this?

==

Hotch stirred from his spot in the chair of the hospital room as the nurse stepped in quietly, not wanting to disturb mom and baby. In her hand she had a wrapped package attached to a collection of happy looking balloons. She smiled when she saw he was awake. “Good morning sir,” she whispered, “this was dropped at the desk for you.”

A look of confusion crossed his face. “From who?” He pushed up from his chair.

“He didn’t leave his name, sorry. He didn’t want to disturb you while you were asleep.” She released the package into his hands.

Hotch unwrapped the box and found a book on being a dad, a how-to guide. He couldn’t help but
smile.

The team spent the next two weeks buried in paperwork. Hotch had taken time off to be at home and the rest of them were gifted with time to catch up on reports. After lunch, Garcia appeared by Reid’s desk. “Wanna catch up tonight?”

Reid peered up at her and nodded. “Yes. Tonight.”

Reid followed Garcia into the room they’d reserved. She’d explained on the ride over that tonight was about learning to submit and she outlined what sorts of things were on the table for the evening and what kinds of things wouldn’t be being introduced. Once in the room, Reid stripped to his boxers, trying not to think about his neighbor and coworker who was somewhere in the room preparing things. Finding the folded towel on the floor where she’d told him it would be, Reid folded his hands behind his back, chin to his chest and eyes on the smooth concrete floor just like they’d been practicing. He knew she wouldn’t have him hold this position for more than fifteen minutes yet, she’d said they’d talk about it when she thought he was ready to go longer.

Ten minutes passed in complete silence before Garcia approached. “Tonight, I will be tying you up. I rather liked how you looked in the ribbons before and that deep purple is such a lovely color against your pale skin.” She produced a length of wide, dark ribbon and let the ends dance and tease along his skin. “You have to hold this position. No moving. Understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Her eyes lit with delight. “Oh, you are a fast learner! I should have expected as much I suppose.” When she began to tie the soft material around him, she didn’t just make functional loops. Instead, she weaved it up his arms, around his shoulders and down the other side. He relaxed into the feeling of being bound and found himself surprised he wasn’t bothered in the least by it.

Soon enough she was moving away from him and then returning with something he couldn’t see from his position. It was nearly impossible, but he managed to not flinch when feathers ran down his body. Up and down, back and front. Moments later the feathers were replaced with something that felt much different. The silicone was more sound than sting as it came down on his body in the same pattern the feathers had just followed. When he was sure his flesh was a rosy red, Garcia pulled away and left him to wait.

He found, in that silence, his brain was calm. He felt relaxed and at peace, something that was rare for him. When something hot dripped down his chest, he hissed but didn’t move.

“Is that good?” She asked, waiting for a nod. “You are a very good boy.” She rewarded before allowing the wax to drip along him elsewhere, creating a patchwork white coating on him as it cooled. “You are perfect.” She carried on on his back down his spine to the hem of his boxers.

Reid rode the not-quite-pain to a place where nothing else existed. The only thing in his world was the feel of the drips on flesh, the feel of his arms restrained. Wood scraping on the floor brought him mostly back to present.

“Lean forward.” She guided him under his shoulders rests on the smooth chair. She ran her hands through his hair, massaging his scalp. “Breathe.”

He took deep cleansing breaths while she tugged and picked the cooled wax off. Once his back
was free, she helped him up and guided him to the massage style table, helping him with a bottle of water before she instructed him to lay on his back. His arms were still bound, but not secured tight so he was able to lay with his arms clear but his hands just under his hips.

Once he was settled, Garcia wrapped a blindfold over his eyes and covered his ears with noise cancelling headphones. He was now alone inside his brain.

Giving up trying to work out what was coming next, Reid sank into the feeling of what she was doing to him.

Lighting a fresh candle, she allowed the melted wax to start pooling at the top before drizzling a trail from his collar bone to his waist. Once completed, she returned to the silicon, bringing it down over all of the areas they’d agreed upon. When she finished, she pulled out massage oils and worked from his feet up to help cool his skin.

The hot wax barely registered, nor did the strikes from the flogger she’d used. The cool oils being rubbed into his skin were what brought Reid back around to the present. He waited patiently until she removed he blindfold and headphones, blinking and squinting against the light as she did. When he nodded, she helped hoist him to his feet and back to the spot he’d started at, leaving him for several minutes before returning to remove the ribbon.

==

Despite his enjoyment of the evening spent with his neighbor, Reid was still tender as he stumbled into his apartment, dropping keys and wallet onto the table by the door as he kicked off his shoes and fell face-first onto his couch. No sooner had he settled than his phone beeped with a message. Reid groaned and ignored it a minute before finally fishing the device from his pocket.

Can I stop by?

He glanced around his apartment and decided it wasn’t too much of a mess. Sure.

Be there in two minutes. Came an instant reply.

Reid huffed a chuckle and waited just where he was. Door unlocked. Come on in.

==

He was just dozing when he heard his front door open. “In here, Hotch.” He called out. Listening to familiar footsteps enter and the door click shut, Reid cracked one eye open and started to grin but stopped. “What’s that?” He frowned.

Hotch tipped his head to one side in confusion. “What’s what?” Then followed his subordinate’s line of sight to the thing in his hand and turned it around. “It’s Jack!”

Pulling himself upright and tucking his feet under. “I didn’t know you were bringing Jack too. Kids don’t really like me, you know.”

“I… If it’s a problem, I can go. But Haley needed some rest and asked me to take him out. He sleeps better in the car. And I figured you were home and…” Hotch suddenly looked unsure. “I can go.”

“No. Stay.” He patted the couch. “How is fatherhood?”

“Exhausting. I thought I would be used to the exhaustion because of work, but it’s…different. So,
“so different.” When Jack began to fuss, Hotch lifted him out of his seat, wrapping a blanket around him. “Thanks for letting me stop by.”

“No problem. Want a drink?” Reid finally stood and turned toward the kitchen, watching as his boss leaned back on the couch and rested his head.

“Coffee?” Hotch smiled to him.

“Sure.”

When Spencer returned several minutes later with the steaming mugs, after warning Hotch from the other room of the dangers of trying to hold both a cup of coffee and a baby at the same time, he found his boss sounds asleep on his couch, infant tucked snuggly to his chest.

==

Hotch stirred at the sound of whispers. Another minute and he became aware he wasn’t at home in bed with his wife. Another minute and he realized he was on a couch. *Reid’s couch,* his brain supplied. *Reid’s couch where you must have fallen asleep with Jack,* his brain filled in. *Jack!* His eyes popped open and he pushed up as fast as he could, pulse already racing.

“Boss man! It’s okay!”

Hands pressed his shoulders, holding him in place just long enough for his brain to process the voice. “Garcia?”

She leaned over the back of the couch and placed his newborn son back in his arms. “You fell asleep and Reid was worried you would drop him, so he called me. You looked like you needed the sleep so he’s been changes and fed.” Her face lit up. “You should have seen Baby Genius here when I changed him.” She was laughing now.

Reid rolled his eyes and sighed. “Kids are just…” He pulled a face.

With a free hand Hotch tried to wipe the tiredness out of his eyes. “How long was I asleep?”

“Almost three hours.”

“I think that’s the longest I’ve slept at a time since he was born. I need to call Haley.” He started patting himself down to find his phone.

Garcia hovered near the kitchen, unsure how to be around her boss in this very relaxed setting.

Reid didn’t seem to have any problem, having spent non-working hours with his superior before. “If she’s not desperate to have you back, you’re welcome to stay until the supplies run out. You can sleep more, have a shower, eat. Garcia and I can go across the hall with Jack.”

Hotch shook his head as the call connected. “Hey Haley… I’m sorry, I dozed off…. No, I didn’t leave him unattended in public, I stopped at a friend’s house and fell asleep on the couch…. He curled around his son like he was trying to block anyone else from hearing the conversation. “Reid, I stopped by his place… He was fine, Hales…I can stay a bit longer if you wan… Let me pack up, okay? I’ll be on my way…” He sighed and hung up his phone. “I need to get going. Thanks for letting me come by and for the other offers, Reid and I’m sorry I just crashed on your couch. It wasn’t polite of me to do that.”

Once he’d left, Garcia turned to her neighbor. “Did that call seem a bit weird to you?”
“I would have thought she’d be happy to have some time to herself and really, Jack couldn’t be any safer with anyone else.”

She chewed her lip as she thought. “She didn’t sound happy.”

“I know what you mean. The first weeks of having a new baby cause all sorts of changes to brain chemistry, add to that sleep deprivation and I’m sure things are bound to be tense on occasion.”

“You’re probably right, my little genius.”
“Hey.”

Hotch looked up from his desk to see who had stepped in.

“I… May I sit?” Reid motioned nervously at the chairs.

“Sure.” Hotch watched and waited as the younger man shut the door and sat. “What’s up?”

“I was wondering how you were? You looked pretty rough today coming back from the arrest. I heard what happened out there, it must have been scary.” His face twitched as he spoke, trying to put himself in that position. “No way to call for back up, not sure if the others would come looking for you or see you in the dark.”

“I’m okay.”

“I know… But are you really?”

Taking a deep breath and letting it out. “Is this how it feels when I check in with all of you?” He tried for a smile, but stopped when the movement tugged at the bruising on his jaw.

“Like you’re suddenly unsure of yourself? Like you don’t actually know yourself at all? Yeah.”

“It was scary. He took me out without warning and suddenly I was disarmed and struggling to breathe.” When he saw Reid glancing at his throat, he sighed and loosened his tie, unbuttoning the top button to show the raw red mark hidden beneath.

Reid nodded, considering his words. Then he tossed out something entirely different. “I was in the outer room when you talked to Perotta.” He couldn’t meet Hotch’s eyes, it felt like betrayal.

“Oh.”

“If you ever, umm,” He was back to fidgeting now, “I’m always willing to listen?” He briefly made eye contact. “I know what it’s like having mixed feelings about your own childhood.”

Hotch tipped his head to the side and studied the top of the head of the man sitting across from him. Applying that statement to the young genius, perhaps he could begin to understand how he came to relate to his world the way he did. “Thank you. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Reid nodded and stood, stumbling as he hurried out of the room.

==

Quietly slipping into his house so as to not wake Jack if he was sleeping, Hotch set his briefcase down and shed his jacket and tie as he walked to the bedroom. Nudging the door open, he found Haley propped up in the bed reading. “Hey.” He whispered.

Her eyes lifted from the page and she smiled widely at him. “Hey!”

He peered around the dimly lit room. “No Jack?”

“He’s in his crib.” She saw him hesitate. “Go check. I know you want to. But if you wake him up, you’re on your own.” She couldn’t help but chuckle as he vanished from the doorway to see his
son. Long minutes later he returned and sat on the bed beside her to start undressing. “I didn’t know if you were sleeping at the office again. Is the case over?”

“Case is over, yes. And I didn’t get a chance to sleep.” Having shed his shoes and socks, he pulled his tie out of his collar and worked on the buttons of his shirt.

“Oh, Aaron! What happened to you?” Haley was up on her knees, trying to get a better look.

He pulled back, but then relented. “The unsub got drop on me.”

Hissing through her teeth in sympathy, “Your face, Aaron, it’s going to bruise you know.” As he shed his shirt the rest of the way, her fingers traced to his neck. “Do I even want to know what caused this?”

“Probably not.”

“I wish you could see what this job was doing to you. It’s going to kill you and then who’ll be here for Jack and I?”

“I have to do my job, Haley. This job. I’ll always be here for you and Jack.”

“Nearly shot and now, what? Strangled? You’re almost forty years old, Aaron. Isn’t it time to stop playing around with your life and go back to law like you worked so hard for?”

He clenched his jaw despite the pain that shot through and resumed his task.

She sat back and watched him finish stripping down before crawling up the bed to collapse beside her in just his boxers.

“I’m sorry, Hales, I’m just exhausted.” He was on the verge of sleep already but snaked his hand across her stomach as if to pull her close. “Can I snuggle you?”

Haley frowned a moment. “I was reading my book. I want to get it finished before the weekend.”

He pulled back his hand and rolled away from her, curling up. “Okay, g’night.”

Garcia trudged up the stairs to her place, fumbling on her keys as she went. As she rounded the top of the stairwell, she noticed a light coming from under her neighbor’s door. Knocking, she waited for the sound of him granting her entry before letting herself in. “Hey Boy Genius.” She looked at his face. “What’s up? Have you forgotten our rule?”

“Huh?” He was fiddling with a carton of ice cream. “No, it’s not like that. I was just thinking about a conversation Hotch and I had today. There’s a marathon starting on the history of execution and torture devices, want to watch?”

“Uh, no. No thank you.” She made a face. “What conversation did you have with Boss Man that left you looking like that?”

“Nothing.” He pulled out a second bowl and scooped her some ice cream as well. “I can’t… it was private.”

“Ohay.” She rubbed his arm. “No biggie. I wasn’t pushing, it’s just you looked like maybe you needed an outlet.”
“Thanks, but,” he shrugged. “not this time. I really can’t.”

“You and Hotch are kinda close, aren’t you?” She shoved a scoop of ice cream into her mouth. “I know I haven’t been on the team as long as the rest of you guys and I don’t really travel, but… I guess to me it just seems like he doesn’t really lean on anyone.”

“I know what you mean.” Finishing his ice cream, he placed the bowl in the sink. “And I could never figure out why, but I don’t think he really likes Gideon. He must have had someone else he went to because I can’t imagine him lasting this long in the unit without having somewhere to turn.”

“Well, somehow that doesn’t surprise me. That man is… confusing and rude and a pain in the ass.”

Spencer chuckled. “I guess so.”

“Well, if you can’t talk about it, would you like to spend some time decompressing?”

“Well, if you can’t talk about it, would you like to spend some time decompressing?”

“Do you think we could arrange some time with James? I think that would help me.”

She studied his face. “Sure, we can do that.”

==

James was on his knees in the middle of the room, torso stripped and arms crossed at the wrists in front of himself. Garcia had just finished teaching Reid how to use heavy rope, James’ personal favorite, to carefully and artfully bind arms and legs so he couldn’t shift or move. The design would leave a pattern of crisscrossed marks on him for days, a reminder of their time together, and if he lost his focus and balance, he had no way to protect himself from falling.

“Now, here.” Garcia handed him a crop. “This is a pre-approved toy, the task is to keep the strikes random both in pattern and in frequency.” She watched as Reid studied the heavily wrapped stick, waving it through the air.

“How many times?”

“That’s up to you. Go with what feels good.”

Reid walked around James twice, mentally planning his approach. On the third pass, he brought the crop down in a snap over one shoulder blade. James arched and inhaled sharply but kept silent and his eyes shut. More steps around and Reid struck again. After the fifth strike, he found his rhythm, a pattern in his own head to keep tempo to. Finally, after what felt like an hour, arm and hand aching, Spencer stopped and let the crop drop to the floor.

James’ back and shoulders were littered with dark welts on a sea in red flesh. The man had seemed to settle into the pain and partway through, had gone quiet, mouth hanging slightly open.

Garcia watched in silence as the two men silently recovered. She could see the look of relief on her friend’s face. It was as though all of his worries had fallen away. “How are you?” She pressed.

“I’m okay. I needed this.” He turned and met her eyes. “Now what?”

“Let me show you.”
Hands stuffed in his pockets, Reid strolled back to the SUV only to have his arm caught by a large, solid hand and pull him toward the tree line. “Hotch!” He tried to pull away, confused at the sudden manhandling.

“We need to talk.” Dark eyes scanned their surroundings, making sure everyone else was busy. “I called the office and we’re staying overnight and flying out first thing in the morning. I argued that Elle needed checked out and I’m making Gideon stay down here while she does the custodial.”

Reid snorted, thinking if the interaction he’d just witnessed. “That should be interesting.”

Letting the comment go, Hotch focused on his youngest agent. “I think we need to discuss what happened on that train. How exactly did you know how to reach him?”

Demeanor suddenly shifting to nervous and closed off. “I can’t say. Can we not discuss this here?”

Hotch gave a curt nod. “Since the case is over, Brass has said we have to double up. You’re rooming with me and we’ll talk there.”

==

When Hotch turned the shower off, he could hear his roommate speaking to someone in the main room. He listened to try and see who might be out there.

“I’m okay, I promise.” The sound of Reid shifting on the bed. “You don’t understand, I could empathize with him and knew he just needed someone to give credence to his hallucination. It was real to him, so it needed to be real to me. I’m going to be going to bed soon. I promise if it starts to bother me I’ll talk.” A bark of laughter at whoever Hotch was guessing was on the phone. “I don’t think not running into danger should be a rule, it’s my job. Okay, okay! Don’t die can be a rule.”

Hotch finally pulled the bathroom door open, causing Reid to look up. He waited as the younger man finished his call and put aside his phone. “I’m pretty sure Morgan wants to staple your vest to you.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“Who were you talking to?” He moved to finish readying for bed.

“Umm, no one.”

Raising his eyebrows at the obvious but unnecessary lie. “It was just a question. I didn’t know you had done any studying on dealing with the mentally ill. It’s a good skill to have in our job, being able to talk and relate to them. I’m glad you understood how to work with his delusion.”

Reid blushed a little. “It wasn’t official studying, I just… picked it up. Every delusion is different, but they have some common threads and playing into it can sometimes help pacify the person.”

Hotch studied him and saw what looked like a brief moment of pain in his eyes. He finally repeated what his subordinate had said to him what felt like ages ago. “I’m always willing to listen if you want to talk, okay?”

“No problem.”

==

The jet ride back was quiet. Elle and Gideon were still in Texas, Morgan was at the front of the small cabin with headphones on and JJ was across the aisle from him with a pile of case files in front of her. Hotch sat alone at the table in the middle of the jet, facing the rear, he couldn’t seem to settle enough to actually work on anything. From where he was sitting he could just make out Reid on the long couch at the rear. For a reason he couldn’t place, Hotch felt like he was missing something about the young man and just couldn’t put his finger on what ‘it’ was. Reid looked almost sad ever since their conversation the evening before. He swore to himself he would work it out, but for now he needed to focus on other things.

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Haley was rocking Jack in the living room when Hotch stepped into the house just before lunch. “You’re home for lunch?” She asked.

“I’m home for the day. Don’t need to go back till morning. It might have been a quick and relatively easy case compared to some, but the team all seemed really affected by it so…” He shrugged as he shed his “Hotch” gear and shifted into ‘husband and father’ mode. In his mind it felt a little like Mister Rogers walking in the door. Shedding all the outside stuff and changing into all the inside stuff.

“So, what are your plans for the rest of the day then?” Haley stood with the baby.

“Plans? I didn’t make any plans except to be here. With you.” He gave her a blinding smile as he wrapped his arms around the both of them, kissing her neck. He had nearly eighteen hours before he had to be back in ‘Hotch’ mode and he planned to spend them all with his wife and child. “I was thinking lunch and then some one on one cuddle time.”

“You were, were you?”

“Yes.” He continued the kisses to her neck and jaw.

“I just got Jack to sleep, how about you go find lunch and I’ll put him in his crib.” She eased out of his arms.

“Any preference?” He watched her go up the stairs.

“Whatever you can find in there.”

==

By the time Haley returned, Hotch had sandwiches and potato salad on plates at the table. The couple ate in relative quiet, Hotch was in constant contact with his wife as they did. Knees bumped under the table, a hand brushing here and there. Once the meal was done and the dishes cleared away, he wrapped his arms around her from behind and resumed his attack on her neck. “I miss this.” He sighed into her hair. “I miss holding you like this. Kissing you.”

She leaned back against his chest, feeling his growing arousal at her back. “How much have you missed it?”
“So much.” He gently coaxed the collar of her shirt over her shoulder to expose more pale flesh. “I just want you right here.” His other hand drifted down to the button on her shorts.

“Oh, not here, you’re not. You know the rules; this kitchen is for eating only.” She pushed him back a bit. “If you want to continue that, let’s go upstairs.”

Hotch all but shot to the stairs, pulling her with him. He couldn’t help himself and at the bottom of the steps he pressed her into the wall, grinding against her as he pressed his lips to hers. They managed to get upstairs before he again had her against the wall.

“Bed, Aaron.” She gasped when they came up for air. It was like it had been before Jack came alone. Her usually buttoned down husband unleashing all of his pent up, raw need. At the bed she sat and watched him lose his tie and button-down shirt, dropping them somewhere on the floor. His belt was next before he couldn’t wait any longer and began to strip her.

Aaron swallowed as he undressed his wife as fast as he could. Soon enough she was laying on the bed, spread naked before him. He hastily managed to unfasten the button and zipper of his slacks as he crawled up the bed to kiss her. He could see the desperation to be touched in her eyes and he wasn’t about to let Haley down.

Haley bent her knees, spreading herself wide, as Aaron settled between then and hooked his hands under her thighs and ass. She could appreciate her husband’s many skills but the one she wanted to appreciate right now involved a set of fingers and a tongue. When the sucking and biting started without any warning, Haley felt herself arch up off the bed and cry out. Strong fingers followed, pumping in and out before spreading her open to allow his tongue entrance. Her knees pulled up as her body begged for more. She felt him adjust positions and the change in angle drove her mad.

Hotch could feel desperation coiling low in his belly as he worked his fingers and mouth into his wife. His slacks, which he hadn’t shed, were causing pressing friction on his throbbing erection. Tight enough to be just the right pressure without enough actual movement for him to get any type of relief. He shifted himself lower, legs apart and chest almost to the mattress. The new position made Haley cry out and gave himself just enough to simultaneously give a bit of relief and make his body beg for more.

She held her breath, trying to stave off what was promising to be a doozy of an orgasm. She could feel Aaron rocking against the bed, ‘probably getting himself off’ she thought through the haze. She could feel his movements increasing to a frantic pace and when his fingers curled inside her as one thumb brushed over her clit, she exploded. Stars danced behind her eyelids as she gasped for breath. Her throat was raw from shouting and her lungs burned for air. She hadn’t felt that taken apart in a long time.

Rocking back on his heels, Aaron pressed the heel on one hand to the base of his cock, not wanting to shoot off in his pants like a teenage boy. He knew it wouldn’t take more than a moment’s touch to send him over the edge but he wanted to give Haley a minute to collect herself. He watched her pant as she worked to gain control over her breathing, a content smile was on her face. When her breathing eased, he scrambled to divest himself of his remaining clothes and crawled up the bed to lay beside her. Desperation was starting to work its way through his body as he wrapped himself around her, kissing her deeply.

Haley sank into the kisses, keeping her hips canted back just a bit. She reached between them and took hold of his erection, feeling it pulse with need, hot and heavy in her small hand. She traced her thumb over the head and felt the drops of precome pooling at the tip.

A cry echoed over the monitor and from down the hall and Haley pulled back, but Aaron held her
close, “He’s okay for a bit.” He thrust into her hand.

“Aaron. If he’s crying he needs something.” She pulled away again.

“I just… please, Hales, he’ll be fine for just a second.” He was still thrusting in her hand, unable to control his desperate pace despite not wanting to finish like this.

“He’s a baby. He doesn’t understand that he has to wait so daddy can have a quickie.” Mid-thrust, she turned loose and rolled off the bed, leaving the room to check on Jack.

Tears of desperation filled his eyes as he watched her leave the room. His hands flexed, one grabbed the duvet while the other hovered over his leaking cock. He stopped just short of jacking himself off, Haley would never let him hear the end of it if he did that in their bed. His mind swam with bizarre thoughts as he crawled off the bed and stumbled painfully to the en-suite bathroom. Pushing the door shut and locking in, he finally allowed his left hand to wrap around himself. Clinging desperately to the edge of the sink he set up a furious pace, moments later he was coming in thick cords in the sink and over the edge of the counter. His legs went weak and he pitched forward to stop himself from falling to the tile floor as his body continued to tremble and erupt through his strokes. Dark dots danced along the edges of his vision until his body was spent and his breathing returned to normal. Once he found his footing again, Hotch cleaned himself up as well as the counter and mirror, staring at his reflection as he went, wondering exactly what had just happened.
“You know,” Reid appeared in the galley by Hotch’s shoulder. “This was your week off, maybe you should have taken it like you were supposed to. Isn’t forty supposed to be a big birthday?”

The older man sighed and stared at his mug of coffee. “So I’ve been told. I wanted to stay back, I told Haley it would only be a couple hours and I was coming back home to the party. But then you guys go out of the country shorthanded? It’s my job to be part of this team, to lead it. And Jason was…”

Spencer nodded. “I’m no expert, but I’m not sure basing any decision on what Gideon thinks is best is a good one. I just… I know I have no experience with relationships, but I can look at you and see that something is bothering you related to leaving on this case.”

Hotch closed his eyes. “Reid. Please… please just drop it, okay?”

Reid nodded mutely and vanished out of the galley again.

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The motel was, in the kindest sense of the word, dilapidated. Each of them were able to get their own room, but if anything it left them all a bit more on edge. At Hotch’s insistence, JJ and Elle took the two middle rooms in the row with Morgan and Gideon at the furthest end and Hotch and Reid nearest the main sidewalk. He had figured if for some reason someone attempted to ambush the team, they would likely target what they perceived to be the two weakest members first. Hotch knew it wouldn’t take long for that person to discover just how wrong they were, but he wanted to play it safe anyway. And the women were kind enough to humor him about it.

Sitting on his bed, Hotch frowned out the phone in his hand. He should be calling Haley right now, but he wasn’t really sure he wanted to. She and Jessica had both made it clear they were displeased he was leaving during lunch and then that phone call on the way to the jet, he’d been mortified that the others in the SUV had heard that conversation. She’d laid into him about just abandoning them even on his week off. Her words, chosen to cut into him, had hurt, but he couldn’t really argue with her, she was right. She was always right. Finally, he dialed.

“Aaron?” Her voice still sounded hard.

“Hey Haley.”

“Are you on your way home?” He could hear the sizzle of anger still in her voice.

“No,” he sighed heavily. “We have to stay the night, probably a few nights. Things work a little differently down here and… it’s a slower pace. We’re trying to push it along but compared to what we’re used to, everything is so outdated.”

“This is your week off Aaron, you’re supposed to be here with Jack and I. This was your
birthday! You can’t even manage to be here for your own birthday, Aaron, think about that. You had to run out the door from your own birthday party. How many of Jack’s birthdays are you going to miss? How many times will you just up and walk away from him and ruin his happy day?"

“I won’t miss any, Haley. I’ll take vacation time for every birthday.” He thought about what he said right after he said it but couldn’t take back the words.

“Aaron! You took vacation time for your own birthday. A whole week! And yet, here I am with a crying baby and you’re on a case. Jessica is going to stay until you get back and help me out. You need to think long and hard about how you plan on parenting our son before you get back. I’ve told you before, you need to think about changing jobs, find something with a normal schedule! Your family should be the most important thing in the world to you.”

“It is, Haley! I do this job to keep my family safe. To make it so Jack can be at the park or mall or even in the yard and be safe.”

“This job is making you paranoid as well as absent, Aaron. You’re starting to see monsters everywhere; might I remind you that you couldn’t even manage to go to the store without being armed? We don’t need you gone to keep us safe, we need you here. With us. Look, we’ll talk when you get back, whenever that is.”

“Haley. They still owe me the rest of the week off. I’ll be able to pick up where I left off and take the remaining days. And I have more time available, I’ll plan on taking it too.”

“Don’t. Aaron, don’t try and take time off. You work. You’re happier there I think. I’ll just muddle along on my own.”

“Haley.” He was met with silence, she’d hung up on him.

==

As the case came to a close, Spencer watched his boss become more and more agitated. Whenever the team had had a chance to get back to the hotel, he’d been able to hear the muffled pleading through the wall as Hotch talked on the phone. He had a feeling those conversations had been with Haley. Once the case was wrapped up, it was too late to get flight clearance to leave that night so the team trudged back to their rooms. Elle and Morgan were making plans to go for some authentic food and some dancing and it sounded like the other two were going as well but Hotch had excused himself to his room. Reid waved his friends off, claiming exhaustion.

Spencer was propped in bed reading when the deeps sound of his boss’s rumbling voice started filtering through the wall again. Unable to help himself any longer, Reid turned his head and focused on listening intently.

The volume through the wall increased as did the sound of desperation in the voice until twenty minutes later, the room went silent. Reid slipped on his shoes and shuffled to the door, checking to be sure he had his room key. Pulling the door shut, he walked to the next door and knocked.

Distractedly, Hotch opened the door, and then left the door ajar with Reid standing in it and returned to his bed. Haley’s words were echoing around in his head.

“Want to talk?”

“No.”
Spencer nodded slowly and stepped in, shutting the door. “Can I talk?”

His jaw clenched and he glanced to his subordinate quickly before looking back at the gaudy bedspread.

“I, umm, I’m guessing those phone calls have been to Haley?” When the man on the bed didn’t respond, he nodded and slowly started to move toward the chair. “She’s not happy with you coming on this case.” He said it as a matter of fact. “Because it was your birthday?”

Hotch’s only reply was a long slow inhale and then exhale through his nose and to chew on his lip.

“I don’t know what to say to help.” He watched his friend sit in silence, “But I’m here. And I’ll stay until you want me gone. We don’t even have to talk.”

==

Jessica’s car was still in the driveway when he pulled in. Hotch wasn’t sure whether he was happy she’d stayed or upset that she would probably witness what was sure to happen. Stepping into the house, the living room was empty. “Haley?” He called out.

Jessica appeared from the kitchen. “She ran to the store, Jack’s asleep.”

He felt himself relax, unaware he’d been so tensed. “Oh, thanks.” He glanced toward the stairs.

She smiled softly at him. “Go change, Aaron. How was work?”

“Exhausting. We found the person we were after and,” he shook his head, stopping his train of thought. “Sorry. I’ll go get changed.”

Watching him trudge up the stairs, she wondered what he’d been about to say. She returned to the kitchen and worked on her computer until he reappeared, hovering in the doorway like he was unsure. When it became clear he wasn’t going to continue into the room while she was typing, Jessica looked up, “Come sit, Aaron, before you fall over. When was the last time you ate anything?”

“Umm, I can’t really remember. We don’t get too many chances for actual meals while we’re out.” His eyes tracked to the refrigerator briefly and then back to her, but he didn’t move.

She frowned slightly, “That can’t be good for any of you. Well, don’t let me be in your way. Go ahead and do whatever you need to, you won’t disrupt me.” She shooed him.

“I- are you sure?”

“Aaron.” She smiled gently, “If you make too much noise, I’ll just go sit on the couch.”

“Okay.” He stood and started making himself a meal.

Out of the corner of her eye, Jessica watched her brother-in-law work at the counter. It all the years she’d known him, he’d never been much of a talker, especially once he and Haley’d gotten really serious. Since they’d moved back to the east coast, she’d spent more time with the couple and had noticed he was more laid back when her sister was not around than when she was. She’d seen him on TV, and he now lead his team, but she couldn’t work out how he was so different at home.

The back door opened, “Aaron?” Haley stepped in with a grocery bag. “Oh, good, you’re here, I
just went to the store, could you bring in the groceries?”

Leaving his freshly assembled meal on the counter, Hotch simply nodded and head out to the car.

Jessica watched her sister unload the bag she’d brought in and join her at the table after pouring a drink. “I thought you went on a full grocery trip?”

“Oh, I did.” She sighed, “The trunk’s full. I’m wiped out.”

Hotch quietly brought in the groceries and found places to put everything. Once finished, he collected his plate and headed to the table to join his wife and sister-in-law.

“Oh, Aaron. Jessica’s working, can you not do that here? That bread causes awful crumbs.”

He apologized and went back to stand at the counter to eat.

Jessica felt herself frown. “How was Mexico, Aaron? I was thinking of going there on vacation one day. Is it safe?”

He swallowed and cleared his throat, “It was nice. The town we were in had a decent amount of tourism and stuff. We’d been called to prove there wasn’t a serial killer, bad for business ya know. There are people who think serial killers are strictly an American thing. Unfortunately for them, they were wrong, but,”

“Aaron stop.” Haley cut him off. “We don’t need to hear about that stuff, it’s horrible.” She turned to her sister. “If you listen to his stories, you’ll never want to even leave the house, much less travel. Except even home isn’t safe, is it? It’s a horrible line of work.” She got up and walked out of the room.

Jessica couldn’t put her finger on it, but something felt off about the entire conversation.
Hotch looked over the members of his team sitting in the room. Not for the first time, he felt unusually protective of the youngest members of the group. Tangling with CIA had ways of leaving permanent marks on a person. With reluctance, he informed Reid he would be going to Langley with the larger group while JJ ‘mediated’ between everyone else and Garcia.

Garcia. Now there had been a conversation that hadn’t really surprised him. One of the CIA lackeys had shown up in his office to inform him the Technical Analyst Garcia was not permitted on the premises of Langley under any circumstances unless she was needing to be taken into custody by the CIA. He didn’t even ask. Two years was plenty long enough to know better.

As the group split up to gather what they would need for the day, Hotch followed the bubbly blonde down the stairs. “Garcia? You and JJ are staying here to run point from the outside.”

She pulled a frown. “Why?”

He took a deep breath. “I feel it’s the best use of your abilities. I think you will be able to sift through data better without the unsub and whoever may be helping them possibly lurking over your shoulder. There could be times we would have to leave you on your own and an unsub who starts feeling cornered could lash out. It’s better this way.”

Garcia looked like she was going to object, but instead she turned on her heel and stomped off.

Hotch turned his attention to the one other person he was worried about, Reid. He found the young genius at his desk. “Reid. When you’re done, come up to my office a minute?”

“Yeah, sure.” He smiled and nodded. Ten minutes later, Reid entered the office. “What’s up?”

“This case is going to be full of more alpha personalities than most.” He smirked when Reid snorted. “If you run into any problems, I want to make sure you come let me know. Just because we’re there to interrogate them doesn’t mean you have to take it if someone gets mean. I need to know if that happens.”

He nodded. “Okay, Hotch, I promise to let you know.”

“Good.”

==

JJ couldn’t stop giggling. Her friend was totally oblivious. She watched Garcia furiously typing on two separate keyboards, trying to narrow down the data even further. Finally, she couldn’t take it anymore. “Pen! Didn’t you hear Hotch?”

“What?” She glanced over at her friend.

“You really didn’t hear him?”

Penelope glanced back at the now black box on her screen and then back to JJ again. “What’d I miss?”

“You hear every little comment from Morgan, no matter how innocent and instantly get all flirty, but Hotch says he loves you and nothing.” She shook her head. “Poor guy’s going to have a
complex.”

Eyes widening and mouth open, she frantically looked to the closed video feed and back to JJ. “I did that?”

“With witnesses.” She nodded.

“Oh, my poor man, how do I fix this?”

==

JJ met Hotch just as he was stepping off the elevator. “Hey, you’re back. Warning, Penelope realized her faux pas and is now feeling guilty.”

Hotch shifted his briefcase and glanced down the hall. “And what, exactly, does that mean for me?”

She shrugged. “Hope you have a sweet tooth!” Patting her arm, she headed back to her own office.

He was confused and started to follow her to get more details when the glass doors to the bullpen opened.

“Aaron.”

Hotch turned and saw his wife standing there. “What are you doing here? Did something happen?”

“No. I called and was told you would be finishing up soon and I figured you would come straight back to work instead of stopping home so I came here. To you. I brought food.” She waited as he pulled the door back open and held it for her, his conversation with JJ forgotten.

“Thanks for that, we haven’t eaten since early in the day and are all famished.” He unlocked his office and let her in, waiting as she’d stopped to collect some containers. “The others are right behind me.”

“Others?” She cocked her head. When he nodded from where he stood behind his desk, she laughed like she was dealing with a particularly slow child. “Aaron, I only brought food for you and me. Why should I have gotten food for the others? They’re all adults.”

He felt like he’d missed something. “I need to let them know to call and order themselves something then. Most deliveries are here within about a half hour, can whatever you brought wait that long?”

“Aaron.” She started to unload the bag, “You’re going to eat here with me. They’ll be okay without you.”

He nodded and sat down in compliance. Haley wanted to have a meal with him and he intended to make her happy.

==

Morgan dumped his stuff by his desk as Elle dumped hers and sank into her chair. Looking up, he said, “Well, I guess we’re on our own for dinner.”

“What?” She turned to follow his line of sight. “That’s…different.”
Garcia hurried up to them. “Where’s Hotch?”

Elle pointed to the office silently.

The blonde thanked her and hurried up the stairs, opening the door without knocking. “I’m so sorry Boss Man! JJ told me afterward what you’d said and I’m so sorry about just ignoring you but I was so focused on what I was doing and I wasn’t listening!” She blinked at the other person in the room, trying to place where she recognized the face the face. “Hi, I’m Penelope Garcia.”

Hotch cleared his throat. “Garcia, this is my wife Haley, I’m sure you remember her.”

Haley smiled at the computer tech. “What did he say that you missed?”

Garcia shrugged. “I found a file and apparently he said he loved me,” she giggled, “I guess he wanted in on Morgan’s action. Anyway, I know it wasn’t meant as anything, but I’m still sorry I didn’t give you the courtesy of a proper reply. I promise to do better next time.” She finished her statement aimed at her boss.

Hotch felt the air leave the room as his wife replied and Garcia left, pulling the door shut.

When Haley turned back around, her kind smile was gone. “You go around telling your young blonde subordinates you love them?”

“No.” He shook his head.

“You brought her out here, right? Found her through a case? When you visit Reid, she lives next door.”

“Hales.”

“Oh no, Aaron, are you sleeping with a member of your team?”

“No. I’m not.” He stood straight.

She hesitated. “You almost looked honest then. You’ve always had an eye for blondes and you work with two. How many late nights do you spend with them?”

“It’s not like that.”

“Really?” She leaned across his desk and pushed the lid of his meal shut. “You want me to believe you spend all this time away from me, surrounded by them, and you remain faithful?”

“Where’s this coming from Haley? I’ve never given you any reason to doubt me before. It’s always been you. It will always be you. You and Jack.”

“Where’s it coming from? I read somewhere that the urge to have affairs can be genetic or something or other. You saw it as a kid and so it seems normal as an adult.”

“That’s not fair.” His voice rose.

You know what?” she cut him off, “I don’t have time to deal with this and you right now.” She collected the still warm food. “Jessica has Jack and is waiting on me to get back. If you can talk honestly to me, then we can talk later. When you get home. Whenever that will be. And here I thought you would be happy that I brought you a meal we could share together.” Gathering her things, she allowed the door to slam open as she stormed out of the office.
Spencer watched from his desk as Haley stormed out. Through the window, he could see Hotch hang his head.

==

James was hanging from the ceiling in special handcuffs, balancing on the balls of his feet. Tonight he’d agreed to being blindfolded and gagged, Garcia had shown Reid the different way to do both and her preferred ways for both. Reid had settled on vibrant purple satin scarfs, the one that acted as a gag was knotted nicely.

Once James had been secured, Garcia had coaxed Reid away to peruse the assortment of toys around the room, pointing out the ones that were cleared without having to stop the scene and discuss it. They’d already had discussions about hard limits and code words and signals. Spencer had agreed that those things were important. Picking up a silicone flogger that was the same shade purple as the scarves, he declared, “This one.”

Garcia smiled widely. “I know it’s probably obvious but no genitals, no face. In the position he’s in, that probably rules out arms.”

He nodded and began.

==

Walking up to their apartment Garcia asked. “So, what do you think makes you tick the most?”

“Um, what?” Reid stopped at his door.

“One day you expect you to ask and you don’t. Other days I don’t see it coming when you do. And every once in a while you want to do that thing we do, you and I, not that it’s really even a thing.”

He thought a minute and then shrugged. “Different things I guess. Dealing with a difficult case or having a confrontation maybe. Sometimes I can’t figure out the answer to a problem and this has helped me calm my mind enough to start to see the bigger picture. There’s been a puzzle lately I’ve had a hard time working out, but I think it’s starting to come together.”

Her expression softened. “And the solution?”

“I don’t think a solution will be so easy in the finding. I think it might be one of those puzzles thought that just understanding it is important. Not so much the need to find the solution.”

“Well, you know where to find me if you need someone to help you with your big ol’ brain.”

He chuckled. “Thanks Garcia.”

“Anytime.”
Haley frowned at the light coming from the bathroom, “Aaron?”

He appeared in the doorway, blocking much of the light and leaving him in shadow, “I’m sorry to wake you. I have to fly to Jamaica. I should be back by the end of the day.”

“Jamaica?” She squinted to get him into focus, watching as he pulled his passport and some other documents out of the safe and stuffed them into a briefcase. “Isn’t that outside your jurisdiction?”

“Usually. But Morgan and Elle are in trouble, Elle has been arrested for murder.”

“What?”

“That’s what I need to find out.”

==

Walking out of the interrogation room, suit jacket slung over her shoulders, Elle smirked at the total craziness of the situation. It would figure the one time she and Morgan managed to get away, not even twenty-four hours later work had slammed them back into reality. She watched the blue-shirted back of the man who could only be described as stalking through the halls of the Montego Bay police department.

Without turning around, he spoke, “We are going to the hotel to pick up your things and then we are flying back to Virginia. We’ll sort all of this out from there.”

She glanced over her shoulder at Morgan who was just shaking his head. “I don’t suppose you took the jet down.”

At the doors, Hotch stopped and turned, sighing, “I’m sorry, no. We have to fly commercial.” He chewed his lip, looking out the glass door. “Have either of you eaten breakfast at all?”

“No. I’ve been trying to sort this out and Elle’s been here.”

“Let’s go to the hotel and then we’ll stop somewhere.”

==

Forty minutes later, Elle stepped out of her room, bag over one shoulder and borrowed jacket over the other arm. She found her way to the lobby where her boss was sitting tucked away in a corner, staring into space. “Hey.”

He twitched slightly in surprise and looked up, “Ready?”

“Yes, here.” She held out his jacket. “Thanks for that by the way. I know what you did there, but I still appreciate being able to cover up.”

His eyes sparkled, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

==

Aaron Hotchner prided himself in rarely being surprised by anything. Most people were fairly predictable, especially those closest to him. But he’d been surprised when he’d learned that one of
his agents had called a field office on the other side of the country and insisted someone be picked up and flown privately to D.C. without clearing it with him first. He’d been even more surprised when he’d found out that agent was Reid. The less surprising icing on that particular cake had been when he found out the truth of Diana Reid.

==

When the case was over, Reid stood in the doorway of the conference room and stared at his mother. It wasn’t how he’d ever wanted to tell his coworkers about her. To be honest, he had planned on never telling them at all. He watched as she twitched and muttered to herself, looking out the window into the night sky across the base.

“Reid.” A deep voice called softly.

He turned and found his boss standing to one side of the hall, back against a window and out of view of the person in the room. “Yeah?” He glanced up for a split second before he dropped his eyes back to the floor, tongue darting out to wet his lips.

“I made a call. The pilots are waiting for the two of you whenever you’re ready.” Hotch paused to watch the junior-most member of his team fidgeting in the doorway and said agent’s mother fidgeting almost identically in the room beyond. “Do you need someone to travel with you?”

“No.” Reid shook his head. “We’ll be fine.”

Hotch nodded. “As soon as you get back, call me. We’ll talk. Okay?”

“Yeah.” Reid nodded and turned away.

“Spencer?”

The younger man glanced up again.

“I’m proud of you.”

==

The pilot was kind enough to stand at the top of the stairs and watch as Reid dragged himself across the tarmac to where his car was parked. He was completely and utterly shattered. He stumbled into the driver’s seat and pulled the door shut, unsure of what he needed to do next. The sun was just coming up, on a normal day he would be headed to the office already, but he’d gotten word somewhere over Kansas that their two weeks leave time had been restarted since the case has ruined it before. Making up his mind, Reid pulled out his phone and shot a text to Hotch to let him know he’d landed and was headed home.

Reid trudged up the final flight of stairs to his apartment and halted. Leaned against the wall to the left of his door was Hotch. “Uh- hi?”

Hotch looked up from where he’d been thumbing through his phone, “Hey. Let’s talk.”

“Um- sure.” He pushed his key into the lock and let them both in, dropping his things in the corner and flicking on lights. “Did you notice if Penelope is home? She was upset the last time I had a chance to talk to her, but I wanted to check on her more.”

Turning a chair around, Hotch took a seat, “You worry about her.” He watched his subordinate putter around the kitchen. “I suppose in a way it makes sense.”
Reid turned around, “What do you mean?”

“In the big scheme of things, neither of you have other family to lean on, to worry about you.” He decided to dive in, “You’re used to being a caretaker though. You’ve been doing it a long time.”

The room was quiet for a long while as Reid considered whether to avoid this discussion or not. Eventually he collected the bottle of orange juice from the fridge and two glasses before joining Hotch at the table. “My mom was sick long before she had me. But she took her meds and she functioned. She was a professor. She wanted kids of her own, dad worried about what would happen if she got pregnant and I suppose he was right to be worried. She had to go off her meds to have me and then had to wean back on them.” He played with the lid on the juice, “Dad said she wasn’t the same after that. She started spiraling more often and couldn’t work anymore which made her depressed and that just brought on her delusions even more.” He sniffled unconsciously. “I was just starting high school when he decided he couldn’t take it anymore and left. Just up and walked out. I was ten.”

Aaron felt his chest squeeze and he itched to reach out and reassure him, but held back. “That wasn’t fair to you, but you’ve done a good job.” When Spencer looked up at him in surprise, he gave him a soft smile, “Since then you’ve gotten yourself through high school and through college. You have three Ph.D.’s and you’re the youngest ever member of the BAU. And I- I watched you with your mom. You love her and care for her and it’s clear she loves you.”

“Did you know…?” He paused to consider his words, “Did you know schizophrenia is genetic? I asked Garcia that during the case. I wake up every day fearing that I will end up right alongside my mom.” He finally decided to pour the drinks. “I hoped no one on the team would ever find out. I don’t want pity.”

“I understand that.” Hotch started to continue when the phone rang. “Excuse me.” He walked toward the back of the apartment answering the call. “Hello.”

Spencer drank his juice and went in search of something appetizing to eat. As he assembled a sandwich, he tried not to eavesdrop on the conversation happening in the other part of the space.

Hotch frowned as he listened to his wife rant. “I’m sorry, Haley, I know it was inconvenient for you and Jack to have to stay at the hotel under guard but our guy was reaching out and contacting our families.” He listened to her again, “I have to handle this and then I’ll be home. Not everything automatically goes away when a case ends, especially when this team was the target. These kinds of things linger.” He refrained from sighing. “I’ll be home as soon as I can…”
2007 Episode 2.14

He’d made his way through the Atlanta airport at a pace just short of an actual jog. His badge had gotten him past security along with the phrase ‘urgent FBI matter’ and that he was meeting a plane about to land. Of course, the plane had gotten stuck in a holding pattern over the airport and all he was left to do was watch the sun rise and wait. And pace. His glower had already sent the two women working the desk into hiding behind their monitors. He knew he was in a bad mood, but couldn’t really find it within himself to care.

He finally stopped pacing when the plane pulled up to the gate and was prepared. The desk phone ringing caught his attention and he whipped his head around to glare pointedly at the women answering it.

She glanced at him several times before pressing hold. “Sir? I was told to, uh, ask you if you needed access to the plane before they let passengers off?”

“No.” He traced his steps back to the desk and waited as she relayed the answer.

The woman observed from behind her desk as the agent stood to one side and watched, unblinking, as passengers exited the doors into the terminal. Halfway through the line, a young woman teetering on tall heels and carrying a large purse rushed right up to the man completely un-phased by the angry looking glare and unpleasant demeanor that had kept all the passengers who’d been waiting at the gate from making eye contact or from crossing his path in any way. The blonde started chattering rapidly, one hand waving wildly with her large bag bouncing back and forth while the other hand clung to the man’s arm as if for fear of being lost.

“Do you have a checked bag?” He interrupted her rapid monologue of questions with one of his own.

Garcia hesitated and blinked twice. “Yes.” Her voice started to rise again in despair. “They wouldn’t let me carry it on and now we have to wait for it!”

The women behind the desk exchanged raised-eyebrow looks. They had figured the agent prowling their space angrily had been waiting to catch some suspect but he clearly seemed to know the woman who’d emerged and headed straight for him without hesitation.

Hotch turned, allowing her to keep one hand on his arm as they pressed through the already forming crowds. Her short steps to accommodate her footwear loud even over the normal din of the airport. “We’re at the furthest point in the airport, we have quite a walk.” He glanced down at her feet.

“I came straight from the office. I was working clear up until I absolutely had to leave for my flight and then Anderson drove. Did you know what he drives like? I didn’t have time to go change anything.”

He nodded in understanding but didn’t say anything more as they worked their way to baggage claim.

==

The SUV was silent until they were off airport property. Finally Garcia had to ask. “Do we know anything more about where he could have taken Reid?”
“As of when I left, no. Cell reception is almost nonexistent out there. All we know is it looks like there was a struggle in the corn field and he was dragged away.”

“Dragged?”

Hotch nodded. “Whatever happened to him, he wasn’t able to walk out under his own power. JJ doesn’t remember hearing any additional gunfire but she was dealing with dogs who were set on killing her. I do know there wasn’t any sign of large amounts of blood loss.”

She let out a slight whimper at the thought of her friend attacked by dogs. “How is she?”

Chewing his lip a moment in thought, “She’ll be okay. Don’t push her to talk, not right now. We need to focus on getting Reid back first.”

“How long till we get there?”

“Little under an hour. Why don’t you lean back and get some rest? There won’t be any time for that once we arrive.”

She eyed him. “Have you slept since you left Quantico?”

He drew in a deep breath through his nose and let it out, feeling himself deflate a little with it.

“Then I’m fine.” She pulled out her phone and began typing.

==

Twenty minutes into the drive, Penelope huffed and dropped her phone into her bag. “No signal.” She turned and studied her boss’s profile, the worry and stress over the situation showed in his features. “We’ll get him back.”

“Huh?” He glanced over at her.

“Spencer. We’ll find him. If he’s at all awake you know his mind is running every possible option to get away and he knows we’ll come for him.” She watched him consider her words before glancing around their surroundings. “Is there a gas station or anything out this way?”

Hotch blinked at the topic change and looked around where they were. “Yeah, just up here.” A mile up the road he guided the SUV into the lot of a dingy and questionable looking gas station.

Garcia frowned at the condition of the place but then shook it off. “I’ll only be a second.”

He watched her disappear into the store, anxiety starting to rise over having another member of his team alone out of his sight. Resting his head back against the seat, he let out a deep sigh, he wasn’t looking forward to what was surely to come. Their unsub was unpredictable and deadly and Reid was at his mercy. A pair of burly, dirty men walking in the store drew Hotch’s attention from where he’d been reviewing what he knew in his head. The anxiety that was deep in his gut started to churn up into his stomach, his skin started to prickle with heat of adrenaline and the need to rush in. Steeling himself, Hotch slowly stepped out of the vehicle and stood up to his full height, walking purposefully inside.

The inside of the store was dim in contrast to the sun outside but he didn’t pull his sunglasses off right away. Instead he stood in the doorway allowing the rest of his senses to work while his vision adjusted. The room smelled of sweat and dirt and unclean bodies. To his right, he caught the faintest whiff of something his brain could only label as ‘Garcia’, he turned his head it it’s
direction as he finally pulled off his glasses. To his left, he sensed the cashier leaning bored behind the counter, curiosity not even piqued at the man in an official suit in his store. The burly men who’d caught his attention outside were nowhere in sight. The churning, acidic anxiety in his stomach was tamped down by adrenaline and the need to act despite not knowing if there was even a threat to act against.

Even steps, he started walking around the perimeter of the shop, not rushing, letting the soles of his dress shoes click harshly on the hard floor. At the second corner he found the restrooms down a short hall, both the odors of the missing men and the smell that was exquisitely his missing analyst were stronger down the hall. “Garcia?” He called out, trusting that the bathrooms were likely single occupancy and small.

The door to the women’s restroom snapped open. “Oh!” Her smile made the preparation for a fight rush out of his system. “I grabbed some food and then figured I should pop in here before we headed out, bad guys don’t seem to prioritize cleanliness and the bathroom there is probably gross.” As she chattered rapidly, she closed in on him, stopped within his personal space and looked up.

Hotch felt himself sway as the adrenaline vanished and the anxiety over what could have happened filled its place.

Concerned, Garcia’s free hand shot out and caught his arm. “Are you okay? You’re all white.”

“I’m fine.”

“Have you eaten since the bar?” She tried to think back to whether he’d had anything other than beer and grease at their get together. “You look like you’re about to pass out. Is this about Reid? Did you hear something? Has something happened?”

“No, it’s okay. I’m okay.” He cut off what one of the men opened the bathroom door and pushed past. He felt Garcia’s eyes watch him track the man and understand. Guilt and shame mixed with the anxiety and he pulled away. “Excuse me.” He pushed into the bathroom and locked the door.

Penelope hovered in the back of the store at a respectable distance until Hotch materialized. He glanced her way and nodded before crossing the small medicine display and picking up something and heading to pay. Once in the car, he opened one of the packets and took the pills with a bottle of water before tucking the other packet in his jacket pocket and starting the SUV. “Better?” She finally asked once they were moving.

“I’m okay.” He nodded.

She decided to drop the subject, filing it away for later once their nightmare was over.

Helping Reid through the woods and up to the ambulance, Hotch waved over the waiting paramedics. “He needs to go to the hospital immediately. The other person is dead.”

The pair of paramedics grabbed Spencer and laid him out on the gurney, strapping him in while placing an oxygen mask and an IV. They loaded him into the back.

“Hotch?” Reid’s voice, tiny and muffled by the mask, barely broke through the din.
Hotch hesitated just a moment, glancing back at where locals and the team were canvassing the dark, he caught JJ’s attention. “I’m riding with him. He doesn’t need to be alone now.”

She nodded and watched her boss climb up as the doors shut.

As the ambulance raced down back roads to the hospital, Aaron held tightly to Reid’s hand. “It’s okay Reid, you’re going to be okay now. We’ll take care of you.”

As he sank into blackness, Reid whispered again, “I knew you’d understand.”

==

In the hospital, Hotch was left in the hall as doctors raced Spencer into the trauma room to start looking him over. His arms were still pulled to his chest as if the muscles were permanently contracting. A tremor ran sporadically through his body, Hotch didn’t know if it was from adrenaline, head injury, or something else. He paced, waiting to be told they’d been too late, that his agent would forever suffer from his decision.

Finally a doctor stepped in the hall. “Agent?”

“Yes. I’m Agent Hotchner.”

“Agent Reid will recover physically in time. His foot has been beaten, but nothing that won’t heal.”

“Beaten?”

The doctor nodded. “He said with a pipe maybe? Or a narrow board. He won’t be able to walk for a while on it. We’ll be doing x-rays shortly to get a better idea of the extent of the damage.”

“But he walked out of where he was being held. He walked through the woods to the ambulance. He didn’t say anything.” His brows furrowed deeply.

“It’s amazing what the body can endure. He has sustained several hard blows to the head, he’ll go for some scans as well to assess for bleeding in the brain. He was unsure exactly how much time had passed since he’d been taken.” The doctor was hoping the man before him could fill in some details.

“Two days. I know he had a seizure at one point and stopped breathing due to being struck.”

Nodding, the doctor spoke. “I saw the damage done by resuscitation. How did you know about it? He told you? He doesn’t see to recall much of what happened.”

“No. Some of the time, the man who had him had a video camera on so we could watch.”

“Well, his recovery will take time and mentally, things are going to get worse before they get better. I hope he has a good support system in place because he’s going to need people who will stand by him no matter what.”

Hotch rubbed his face with one hand. “We do this job and we see the victims and their families and we know the pain they go through, but when a case is over we leave. The families have pain and recovery, sometimes for years, and we leave and we never have to deal with it. Having one of our own be the victim, this is totally out of my depth.”

“Well, just take it one day, one hour, one minute at a time. Don’t push him to talk, especially not
right now. Let him heal physically and find a solid footing. Don’t leave him alone, make sure he knows someone is always there for him. And make sure he understands you’re there because that’s where you want to be.” With that, the doctor allowed Hotch into the closed exam room.

The small room was dim, the only light coming from the small backlight behind the bed. Reid was hooked up to a variety of machines, IV in his arm, buried under the sheet. Hotch moved slowly around the room, not wanting to upset the younger man. He’d spent the past two days in fear, worried he would be bringing his agent home in a casket. When Reid cried out from the bed, Hotch cupped a shoulder, “I’m here, Spencer, you’re not alone.”

Reid shook the sheet off his face and peered up with red rimmed eyes, body trembling. “Hotch?”

“I’m here and I’m not leaving you. What do you need?”

His arms were still curled against his chest as they’d been when he’d been found in the woods. It was as though he couldn’t make them do anything else. His hair was greasy and matted with blood, leaving marks on the pillow. He swallowed several times, trying to wet his throat. “I need.”

“You need what?”

“Penny?” His voice was small and weak.

“Penny?” Hotch was confused for a split second. “Garcia?”

Reid nodded.

“Give me a little bit, I’ll find her. I’m not leaving you on your own, Reid, but I’m just going to step into the hall a bit to use my phone. I don’t think the rest of the team has arrived yet.” He waited for a nod before stepping out.

==

Hours later Reid was moved to a room on a different floor for the night. Hotch was sitting in a chair by the bed, watching Spencer cry in his sleep, when a very subdued Garcia crept into the room. He watched in silence as she deftly removed her shoes and various accessories before not hesitating to climb into the bed and wrap herself around her friend. Reid instantly settled as she held him.

The three of them rested in the silent room for the remainder of the night, Hotch alternated dozing uncomfortably and watching the other two sleep. The quiet only being broken by nurses coming in to check on their patient. Garcia remained curled around her friend as he trembled and cried softly in his sleep.

As the sun was rising on a new day, Garcia pulled herself out of Reid’s clutches and tiptoed to the bathroom, trying not to wake anyone. Returning, she stared down at her friend. He was sweaty and trembling and even in sleep he looked restless and tormented. There was a pain in her chest as she remembered what she’d watched him go through on those godawful screens. “My poor baby,” she whispered, brushing his hair off his face. When the form under her hand moaned in pain, she frowned, hand hovering over him.

Hotch’s eyes opened as if he’d been awake the whole time. “Is he in pain?” His voice betrayed how alert he appeared to be as he pushed upright in his chair and tipped his head from side to side, working out the kinks in his neck.

Looking up, she answered. “I don’t know. It almost looks like he’s...” She tugged the sheet off
Reid’s shoulder and moved his arm. “Hotch?” She looked on the verge of tears.

Standing and approaching the other side of the bed, he turned Reid’s arm and saw the track marks. “Hankel used dilaudid mixed with a psychedelic.”

“He’s been drugged?” She ran her fingers through his hair again. “No wonder he walked away from that place in his condition. He was too high to feel anything.”

Hotch’s jaw clenched as he pressed his lips together. He had one arm crossed over his chest, hand tucked under the other elbow and the other hand fisted tightly in front of his face. He’d known Hankel had been a junky and was likely still using. If he’d seen Reid suffering the same abuse, it made since he would try to help by forcibly drugging him. “Stay with him, I’m going to go talk to the doctor.” The soles of his shoes squeaked as he turned to leave.

“If he’s in withdrawal, even after just two days of use, he’s going to be miserable.”

He glanced back at her as he stepped out. “I know.”

==

As he finished talking to the doctor about his concerns, Morgan and Emily appeared in the hall. “How is he?” Morgan was glancing toward the closed door.

“It will take time. He won’t be walking out on his own. They say his foot is fractured as well as bruised. He’s going to take a while to recover from everything.”

“What can we do?” Even though she was new to the team, Emily already felt the same connection the others did to one another. “Can we call his family?”

Hotch shook his head, “There’s no family to call.”

Her face fell in sadness, “None?”

He wasn’t sure how this would be shared with Spencer’s mother, but that was a private conversation for later. “He needs us to be there for him. Where are JJ and Gideon?”

Morgan gestured over his shoulder. “JJ’s getting some coffee, she’ll be up in a minute.”

“She barely slept all night.” Emily added.

“And Gideon I think is at the hotel or the precinct.”

“Are you staying here?”

Both nodded.

“Okay. Garcia needs to be made to get some breakfast. I don’t know how much she actually slept, but if the two of you could work on getting her to eat?” He waited for them to agree. “Reid wasn’t awake yet. When he wakes up, I’ll see if he’s up for visitors.”

==

When Hotch reentered the room, a nurse was just finishing drawing blood. He waited until she left before turning to the blonde perched on the end of the bed, “Morgan and Prentiss are waiting on you outside. They have instructions to make sure you eat something.”
“I’m fine.”

“You need to eat. I’ll stay here until you get back.” When she hesitated, he added. “If something changes, I’ll call you. I promise.” After she gathered her things and slipped out, Hotch pulled his chair closer to the bed and sank back down. The burning anxious feeling was still balled in his stomach, Reid wasn’t out of the woods yet, not by a long shot. He’d meant what he’d told Gideon in that house, he wasn’t the best example of how to cope with what they saw in the normal course of their jobs but this? If Reid tried to deal with getting over this like his did, the younger agent was going to end up even worse. All Hotch could think to do was allow the others to step in and help as much as they could, maybe that would balance out his own coping mechanisms.

The room was quiet again until a nurse bustled in. “If our patient here wakes up, we want to get him in the shower and cleaned up better. He’ll feel better for it.”

“What about his foot?”

“We have a shower chair in there. I’ll have an orderly come in to help move him to a wheelchair and into the shower and back again. We’ll have to be careful of his IV’s.” She continued checking his vitals.

Reid’s eyes cracked open a slit.

“Well, hello there.” The nurse smiled at her patient. “Are you waking up for us?”

Hotch leaned in, “Reid? I’m still here.”

“How does a shower sound?” The nurse smiled at him.

“Shower?” Spencer whispered.

The process of moving Reid from bed to bathroom had been slow going. He’d blushed everywhere that was visible when the nurse started to unsnap his hospital gown and pull it away.

“I’ll be out here if you need anything, Spencer.” Hotch called out.

“I’m okay.” Was the soft reply.

Hotch stood propped in the corner of the room while someone changed the bedding and checked supplies. He could hear Spencer talking softly with the person who was helping him in the next room, unable to make out actual words but could hear the waver of his voice.

“He’ll recover.”

Hotch looked up to find the source of the statement.

The nurse was watching him from near the monitors. “I know you’re worried. I can see he has a great support system. The overnight nurse said you sat in that horrible plastic chair all night just watching him.”

“She did?” He wasn’t aware he’d been being observed as well.

She nodded. “We keep an eye on anyone who comes and goes, or comes and stays, with our patients. Their mental wellbeing is as important as their physical.” Her face softened. “You haven’t left this room since he was brought up, you sent the others away but you’re still here. You’re worried and you feel guilty about him being here. I don’t know if it’s misplaced or not, but no one
else that’s come by seemed to act like you were somehow at fault.” She rounded the bed walking toward him, stopping when he seemed unsure. “Are your friends bringing you back something to eat?”

“I’m okay.”

She frowned at him. “I better see you eat something soon or I’m going to have to take drastic measures.”

==

Garcia was tucked into the corner behind a small round table, Morgan and Prentiss to either side. “I can’t get those images out of my head. And I just had to watch, is he going to recover from this?”

“We’ll take care of him, Baby Girl. It won’t be over night, but he’ll be okay. How was he overnight?”

“Restless. I don’t think being rescued was really real to him yet.”

Emily sighed into her coffee, “I wish I could see him. I know JJ is wanting to see him for herself too.” Her phone beeped and she pulled it out.

“Who’s that?” Garcia asked.

“Hotch.”

“What’s wrong?” Anxiety was thick in her voice.

“Nothing. He says Reid’s getting a shower and they’re going to try to get him to eat a bit.”

She released a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. “Good.”

==

JJ knocked on the door frame. “How is he?”

Hotch looked up from his phone, glancing at the bathroom and back to the liaison. “Awake. He’ll be out shortly.”

She nodded in understanding.

“I’m sorry I hadn’t asked this sooner but, how are you?”

“Fine.”

He walked across the room to stand in front of her, hands hanging at his sides with his palms open and out. “JJ.” His voice was full of concern.

“I will be fine.” She amended. “You shouldn’t be worrying about me right now, Hotch. You should be focused on Spence.”

“He’s in good hands. What you went through was,” he sighed heavily. “I shouldn’t have sent the two of you out together. I- I should have gone.” His head dropped into his hands.

“If your next words are this is your fault, they’re going to need another bed in here.” She was
frowning at him when he looked up in surprise. “You couldn’t have known.” When the bathroom door opened and Reid was pushed into the room, she turned to him. “Hey you.”

Spencer looked up to see his friend, “Hey. You’re okay. I was worried about you. I heard the dogs and the shots.” He paused as they lifted him back to the bed. “Until the end, then Hankel said there were six others on the team. He had to know you were alive still. Before that I thought maybe the dogs got you and you were dead somewhere because I wanted to split up.” Tears were forming in his eyes.

“Hey.” She pulled him into a hug. “I’m okay. You worry about you right now.”

“This isn’t going to do anything for my nightmares.” He sniffled.

JJ barked out a wet laugh, “No. It’s not.”

The nurse stuck her head in after lunch had come and gone. The room only held her patient, the tall agent she’d spoken to earlier and the blonde who’d stayed overnight. She’d watched the room all day and hadn’t seen the tall one leave even once and despite her patient nibbling on a few bites and the woman leaving to eat, she hadn’t seen him eat anything yet either. Deciding that with witnesses she would get less of a fight, she stepped in and made herself known. “Good afternoon agents.” All three looked up; two gave her acknowledging smiles while one didn’t make eye contact. Clearly he’d remembered her earlier comments. She turned to him. “I still haven’t seen you eat anything at all.”

She watched as the other two turned to him, the woman spoke. “See! You need to eat! And while she’s here and all medical professionally, what do you keep taking?”

The nurse watched as her patient homed in on the last question. “Taking?”

Garcia nodded. “He bought something after he picked me up at the airport after he thought…” She shook her head. “It’s all I’ve seen him do since.”

Realizing she may have opened a can of worms the man hadn’t wanted exposed to the others, she tapped his elbow. “In the interest of protecting my patient and what’s best for him, we need to step out and talk. I can only allow people in here who won’t hamper his recovery.” She was pleased when the agent rose compliantly, if begrudgingly. At the end of the hall was a small closet-like room that doctors sometimes used to speak to families privately. There was a tiny loveseat and a pair of chairs squeezed inside. “Please sit, agent.”

“It’s Aaron.” He sat and waited.

“Convince me you aren’t going to collapse from dehydration or starvation or anything else. If you’re friends are concerned as well, then I’m even more worried. And I’m sure you know taking lots of medicine on an empty stomach can be just as dangerous.” Her brows rose, waiting.

Realizing he wasn’t getting out of it without giving something, he sighed and reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the small packets of pills. “When we’re on a case, I never eat much, I just can’t. We pretty much live off coffee for the few days of a case.” He frowned at the label a minute before handing them over.

She wasn’t really surprised at what she saw. “Heartburn? Have you seen a doctor about it?”

“No. It comes and goes.”
“With stress I imagine.” She sat next to him on the loveseat and placed a hand over his folded ones. “I’ll find something for you to eat that will help and I expect you to eat it. But please see a doctor when you get home.”

He nodded and stood, following her back to Reid’s room.

==

Two days passed before the hospital decided it was safe for Reid to fly back to Virginia. Garcia promised to keep an eye on him until he could manage to get around his place on his own despite his objections that he would be fine.

Walking through the door of his house, completely wiped out after the stress and strain of what the team’d been through, Hotch looked around for his family. “Haley?”

“Upstairs!”

He trudged up the staircase and found his wife in Jack’s room putting away laundry. “Hey.”

She tossed a glance over her shoulder, “You look like crap.”

“I know. I’ve never.” He shook his head. “I’ve never been on that side of things where it was one of my team being the victim like that. Another could have died. It will take a while for everyone to get over it. I’ve barely slept since we left, all of it sitting up in a chair of one sort or another.”

He finally crossed the room and moved to press a kiss to her lips.

At the last moment, Haley turned and his lips instead brushed her cheek. “Jack’s ready for lunch. I made him mac and cheese. Would you go feed him?”

Aaron turned to his son, doing his best to shove away exhaustion. “Sure. Are you ready to eat, Jack?” He lifted the boy out of the crib and into the air. “Ready to eat?”

==

He woke with a gasp, something hard jabbing him in the shoulder. Panting in the darkness, he tried to slow his frantically racing heart.

“Are you awake now?” Haley asked. “You were having a nightmare. You were shouting, you’re going to wake Jack.”

“I’m sorry.” He rolled to a seated position, gut churning. “I must have been dreaming about the last case.” He made himself draw in a deep breath that seemed a bit too elusive. “The unsub made Reid play Russian Roulette and—“

“Stop. I don’t need nightmares too. Maybe you should sleep down in the guest room.”

“Yeah.” He stood, wobbling a moment before staggering to the door. “I’m sorry I woke you.” He made his way into the guest room and collapsed onto the bed, gasping slightly, not bothering to pull back the covers. Unable to get rid of the burning breathless feeling, he finally propped himself against the headboard, he doubted he was getting any more sleep the rest of the night.

==

Penelope shook Reid’s shoulder. “Hey, you’re dreaming. Wake up. Come on.”

Finally the thrashing stopped and Reid’s eyes fluttered open. “Pen?”
“I’m here. We’re at home now and you’re safe. I’m here.”

“God, I was back there.”

“I figured.” She rubbed his back. “What do you need?”

“Umm. A shower? I can sit in the tub. I just need to… To feel clean.” He glanced at his bag in the corner. “Could you take my bag in there. I need to find some paperwork from the hospital.”

“No problem, Sweetie. Let me run the bath for you, okay?”

“Yeah.”

Once the door was pulled shut behind her, Reid sank down into the warm water, letting it envelope him. Coming up for air, he fumbled over the edge of the tub until he grabbed onto his messenger bag. He dug around inside until his found the vials he’d lifted off the corpse and the needles he’d palmed from the hospital. Glancing again at the door, Reid drew a small amount into the syringe and found a vein before pushing the drugs into his body. He quickly stowed the bottle and needle again before relaxing back into the tub. He could already feel the warmth flooding his body, taking the edge off. It was just enough to keep the nightmares away.

==

Haley looked up from the kitchen table when her husband came in dressed in faded jeans and a t-shirt. “Good morning. Are you going to be home today?”

“Yes. We have the next three days off and then we’re supposed to be on stand down for a bit after that. I will have to go in for a summary meeting at some point later and I need to make sure the Bureau is arranging psychological reviews for Spencer and JJ with the right person.”

She nodded absentmindedly, cutting him off. “Good. I have some plans and I was going to have the sitter come by but you can have Jack then.”

“Okay. When will you be back?” He moved to get some coffee but the pot was empty. He started making a fresh pot. “I can put off that meeting till later.”

“You do that.” She stood and patted his arm. “I’m going to finish getting ready. You boys have fun.”

==

Just before lunch, Aaron’s phone rang. “Hotchner.”

“Agent Hotchner, we would like for you to come in at three to do the summary review of this case. We would like the able members of your team to come as well. I understand that two of your members may not be able to join?”

“I believe only Agent Reid won’t be able to make it, Ma’am, but currently Analyst Garcia is assisting him in his recovery.”

“And why is that?”

“They are neighbors, Ma’am as well as Agent Reid has little in the way of outside support. The rest of the team should be able to come in.”

“But Garcia was not injured?”
“No, she wasn’t.” He jingled a toy in front of Jack. “I don’t think I can do today anyway, could we do it tomorrow?”

“I want this wrapped up. Why, exactly, can’t you do it today?” The frown carried through in her voice.

“I’m caring for my son today. My wife went out this morning.”

“I see. And you can’t call a sitter in order to do your job?”

Hotch sighed silently, “I’ll take care of it. Three you said?”

“Yes. Three.”

Disconnecting the call, he opted for a group text to let everyone else know what was up. He debated bringing Jack to the office, he was supposed to be off after all, but if Haley ever found out she would pitch a fit. He glanced at his phone a minute before dialing.

“Hotch?”

“Hey Reid, listen. The rest of the team has to go in for a meeting today including Garcia.”

“Yeah, she told me.”

“Well, Haley went out and I have Jack. It’s almost his naptime, could I drop him with you and come pick him up after? He should sleep the whole time.”

Reid glanced around his messy room, aware of what was hidden in the bedside drawer. “I don’t know, Hotch.”

“What if I bring you dinner when I come back?”

He sighed. “Okay.”

==

Spencer did his best to clean up his room and made sure the drugs and needles were hidden above his medicine cabinet where they couldn’t be reached. Even after only a few days of light use his body was begging for a hit but he couldn’t give in, he was being entrusted with the most important thing in his friend’s life. Jack.

When a knock sounded on his door, Reid limped out and opened it to reveal Hotch carrying a sleeping Jack.

“Thanks for doing this. If you haven’t heard from me in an hour, call with a crisis. Okay?” Hotch headed for the couch and put down his toddler son, tucking a blanket around him. “His bag has everything you might need, but he should sleep the whole time.”

Reid nodded, hugging himself to keep from scratching the invisible itch on his arm. “We’ll be here.”

==

Spencer froze in his spot on the floor of his living room when Jack’s eyes blinked open. Hotch had texted and said he’d be back in another ten minutes. “Hi Jack.”
The little boy didn’t move, clutching a teddy bear and his blanket. He stared at the man sitting at eye level with him.

“Daddy will be here in just a minute. I’m Spencer, I work with him.”

After a minute to ponder the stranger’s words, Jack waved slightly. Steps on the stairs out in the hall drew their attention toward the door where Hotch stepped in.

“Hey Jack!” He sat down the bag of food he was carrying and made a beeline for the couch.

“He just woke up.”

“Have you been sitting there the whole time?”

“I- I wasn’t sure if it was okay to walk away and leave him on the couch unattended. If he fell off he could break his arm or his neck. Head injuries in toddlers his age can be quite bad, their necks and bones are still soft.”

Aaron smiled warmly at him. “Thank you for watching him. I knew I could trust you.”

Reid tried hard not to feel guilty. The only reason he’d managed to keep from using while Jack was there was because he’d sat and watched the boy sleep.

==

The elevator doors opened onto the sixth floor two months later, but when Hotch attempted to step out to start his day, a hand pushed him back in followed by Garcia, “We need to talk. Not in this building.”

“Now?” He glanced at his watch. She was never here before him.

“Right now. We’re going back to your car and driving somewhere.” She smacked the button for the parking garage.

“Where?”

“I don’t care. Just not here.”

He didn’t speak again until they’d driven several miles away from the base to an area with low traffic. “What’s going on?”

When she looked over at him, there were tears in her eyes. “Can we just be Aaron and Penelope a minute? Not, ya know, Hotch and Garcia?”

He could see her distress over whatever was bothering her. “Yes. Talk to me.”

“I think Spencer’s using. I think he has been since Georgia. I know it can’t be official or he’ll lose his job but.” She choked up. “I can’t watch him do this.” Tears fell down her cheeks and sobs took over.

Following his impulse to comfort her, Hotch climbed out of the SUV and went around to her side, opening the door and pulling her into a hug. When her tears eased, he spoke. “I can’t officially know about this, but I’ll figure something out. I’d already suspected, he’s been erratic lately. Unpredictable.”

“We’ll get him through this, right?”
“We will.”
Standing in the middle of his dark, quiet house, Hotch felt defeated. He should have seen it coming, Haley had been unreachable after he left the house earlier. He’d meant what he’d said to Prentiss before, she had enough ammo to help Strauss take him down but she’d chosen self-sacrifice instead. He hadn’t been expecting that level of loyalty from her so soon.

In his pocket, his phone began to buzz. Anticipation and anxiety bubbled up as he stiffly pulled the device out and read the screen, hoping in might be Haley. “Yeah Garcia?” He sounded as beaten down as he felt.

“We have a problem. I need you to come now. Right now.” Her voice was edged with panic. “I know you probably just got home but… but I can’t do this on my own.”

“It’s fine. Just- just give me a bit to change and clean up.” He rubbed his forehead with his free hand, feeling a headache creeping in. “I’ll be there are soon as I can.”

==

Hotch dragged to the top of the stairs and glanced at both doors, unsure which way to go until Reid’s door whipped open and a frantic looking Garcia stared at him wide-eyed.

“Come on, I don’t know what else to do!”

He followed her in, dropping his jacket as he went. She led him to Reid’s room and into the bathroom where the youngest lay half sprawled on the floor, half propped against the wall and tub.

“We got home and I came over to see if he wanted dinner and I found him like this! He won’t wake up enough to move on his own. I was going to call an ambulance but- it would ruin everything!”

Hotch’s eyes were wide, hovering on the brink of action for just a split second. “I can’t be here. I can’t actually know about this. I’ll have to report it.”

“But this isn’t his fault!” She swallowed hard, kneeling back down. “His pulse is still good. I don’t think it’s an OD, he’s just high and I guess he fell. Can we- can we just give him some time?”

He shook his head. “He’ll go downhill too quickly.”

She was looking up at him now, pleading. “Help me move him.”

Making a decision, Hotch pushed into the room and scooped up Spencer, who, to his merit, did attempt to resist, taking him into the bedroom and putting him on the bed. He moved all extra bedding out of the way and rolled Reid onto his side. “Stay with him, I’ll be right back.” He watched Garcia climb on the bed before going back in the bathroom. He searched the cabinets and under the sink but found no drugs. He felt along the walls and behind the toilet for hidden spaces but came up empty. The only signs of a problem in the room where the other medicines he suspected were to treat the side effects of opiate use.

Crossing though the bedroom, Hotch returned to the main room of the apartment, his eyes falling on Reid’s satchel. The satchel the younger man always kept close. In one move he upended the bag, dumping all the contents on the floor. A vial and a needle rolled out. Staring at it a minute, Hotch made a decision. No matter what came next, Reid would be protected as best as he could protect him.
Disposing of the drug and briefly searching the rest of the room, Hotch returned to where Garcia was talking to a still out of it Reid. “How is he?”

“He’s high. Breathing is even but shallow. What do we do when he comes around? We can’t force him to get clean. Not to mention it could take days or weeks even.”

“I- I honestly don’t know.” He put out his hands in defeat. “This is so far out of my depth.”

She studied him for a brief moment. “I think he’ll come down in a couple hours. Of course at that point stuff will get a little hairy really fast.” She looked down at her friend. “It won’t be pretty.”

She looked back up and into his questioning gaze. “When you came for me? The DEA would have had a field day with who you left behind.”

==

The hours had ticked by with little activity from the prone body on the bed. Hotch had taken over sitting with him while Garcia had gone back to her own apartment briefly for some supplies. He looked down at Spencer’s relaxed face, he looked so much younger when he was asleep.

Rousing, Spencer rolled and squinted against the lights in his room, blinking his surroundings into focus. He groaned and rolled over, his back colliding with a knee. He twisted to figure out who the knee belonged to. “Hotch?”

“Are you coming down?”

Spencer swallowed to try and wet his throat. “Yeah.”

“Garcia called me, she found you on your bathroom floor.”

“She shouldn’t have done that.” He faltered as he pushed to a sitting position. “She should have just left me there.”

“And what? Wait until you actually OD?” Hotch stood, voice rising as he spoke.

“No! I- I tried to stop! I tried! I really did! I just- First I hurt so much and then the memories wouldn’t stop. Every time I blinked or slept, I was back in that shed. Then I just wanted my brain to turn off for a while.” A tear tracked down his face.

Aaron paused, mind running over Reid’s words. “Hurt?” He closed in on the bed. “You started using as soon as you got home from Georgia?” His features were sharp, focused.

Reid couldn’t help but recognize the look as one he’d seen Hotch wear in interrogation rooms when a suspect had just revealed something damning. “What?”

He enunciated, showing his teeth. “Did you start using as soon as you got home from Georgia?”

Spencer cowered reflexively, stuttering. “Y-yes?”

Hotch balled his hands into fists, tension cording through his arms and shoulders. “I left my son with you!”

Garcia chose that moment to step back in, confused as to what was happening she stared between the two men.

“No!” Reid curled as close to the headboard as he could. “I swear! I didn’t use while he was here!”

Eyes wide, he watched his boss hesitate, waiting for him to continue. “I was going to shoot up but
you called and- and- you were coming over with Jack so I got all my stuff and put it on top of the
medicine cabinet in the bathroom! The whole time you were gone I sat on the floor in the living
room and just stared at him. Over and over I kept reminding myself that I had to just watch Jack!”

Aaron found himself torn between wanting to believe Reid and knowing you should never trust an
addict. “If you’re lying-“

“I’m not! I swear on everything I own! I knew I had to be clean, Jack couldn’t get hurt.”

Feeling the worst of his anger start to dissipate, Hotch nodded. “Where are the drugs?”

“Um…”

“Reid. I already found what was in your bag, where are else are the drugs?” He watched as hazel
eyes tracked to a drawer in the dresser. “Which one?”

“Bottom left.” He scratched the inside of his arm as he watched Hotch pull it open and scoop
everything onto the floor, finding the last vial. “What are you doing?”

“Destroying it like I did the others. You get clean or I report you, do you understand?”

Garcia finally spoke up. “I’m going to help you, Boy Wonder. I know- I know it’s not going to be
fun but I’m going to stay here with you.” She moved to sit on the bed. “You won’t have to do this
alone.”

Spencer gave her a wavering smile and looked back to Hotch. “I’m sorry.”

“I know. Let’s get you through this and then we’ll talk, okay?”

==

Hotch had managed to change out of his suit and into jeans and a tee-shirt somewhere between
midnight and two A.M. Shortly after that, a sweaty and agitated Spencer had started pacing the
apartment, bumping absently into things as he moved. Garcia had attempted to ply him with water
at every pass, reminding him that he would end up dehydrated. Her attempts only agitated Reid
more causing him to shout at her. Aaron kept trying to remind himself that Garcia had told him
they’d reach the worst of things by lunchtime before starting to see some improvements. This
wouldn’t last forever. He was hovering in the doorway leading back into the bedroom when Reid
suddenly doubled over as he attempted to pass. Catching him with one arm, Hotch pulled him tight
trying to work out what new symptom seemed to be happening.

“It hurts!” Reid whined. “It hurts!” A sob bubbled up and then a gag before he heaved what little
contents had been in his stomach onto the floor. He dissolved into tears. “It hurts- Make it stop
hurting.”

Frowning at the mess, Aaron lifted the younger man up and half carried, half dragged him to the
bathroom where if he was sick again at least there was tile around the toilet. When he came back
out, Penelope was already kneeling down, cleaning supplies in her hands and tears in her eyes.

“I hate this.”

He glanced back to the bathroom where Spencer was draped over the toilet bowl and back to her.
“Me too.”

==
No one had an appetite for breakfast. Penelope pushed some cereal around a bowl and Aaron ignored a cooling cup of coffee and a melting bag of peas. During one of his attempts to help Spencer, the younger man had pulled back and punched him. Garcia had been torn between trying to break things up, throwing herself between the two men without care, and trying to assess the damage. For now, the apartment was quiet, Reid had fallen asleep again. Hotch was wearing only jeans as he stared absently at the mess he’d made on the floor the evening before, Garcia had forced his shirt off and had it soaking with some salt and his socks were somewhere in growing piles of laundry. He envied Garcia’s ability to just pop across the hall for fresh clothes when the need arose.

Garcia cleared her throat softly. “Do you need to call Haley?”

“What?”

“Haley. You haven’t called her since you got here. Do you need to go?”

“No. I- no.” Something caught his eye on the floor, he groaned slightly has he leaned over and picked up the folded sheet of paper. The handwriting was instantly familiar to him and his stomach sank. “Shit.”

“What?” Garcia leaned forward.

He folded the paper up and crossed the room to tuck it in his jacket pocket. “What can we expect next?” He gestured to the bedroom where Reid trembled as he restlessly slept.

She stood and went to the sink to dump out her bowl. “We should be heading for the worst of it. We need to make sure he keeps drinking, even if he’s throwing it up. There are other options if he can’t keep enough down.”

Dark eyebrows rose but he didn’t ask her to elaborate.

“I feel so helpless.” She had picked up a pillow and was holding it tight to her chest. “I should have said something to him, done something sooner.” She sank onto the couch and pulled up a blanket. “Thank you for being here.”

Hotch stared down at her a minute before taking the seat beside her. “I’m glad you called.”

She leaned sideways and rested her head on his shoulder, enjoying the moment of quiet in the apartment. “You can talk to me if you need to, you know that, right?”

“I remember.”

“Something was wrong when I called you last night. And now you don’t need to go.”

“Please.” He forced his hands to spread open, palms down, on his legs. “Let’s worry about Reid today. Okay?”

“Sure.”

==

An hour later, some of the supplies Garcia had brought in before started to make sense. During one trip to the bathroom, she had yanked the sheets off the bed and covered the mattress is plastic before pulling the sheets back down, making sure to get comforters and heavy blankets that would be hard to wash out of the way. Bottles of sports drinks were stacked by the nightstand and by the
bathroom sink. Shakes had taken over Reid’s body, his teeth chattering painfully. All pretense of managing the situation went out the window when his lanky body completely let go of everything as he lay in the middle of the bed.

Wrinkling his nose and taking a deep breath, Aaron pulled his friend up, trying his best to avoid all of the mess, and hauled him into the shower. Reid wasn’t able to support himself so Hotch ended up in the tub as well, peeling soiled clothes off and depositing them in the floor of the tub for the water to rinse out. Through the open door he could see Garcia collecting the sheets, turning a slight shade of green, and stuffing them in a garbage bag before putting on fresh.

Spencer was limp and slippery in his arms. By the time he had him clean, Hotch was soaked through. Seeing the bedroom was empty, he held Reid upright under one arm while he worked his jeans open and off with the other hand. His soaked dark blue boxers were just going to have to be enough for the moment. He guided Reid back to the bed and laid him down, watching him sleep. A small gasp had his eyes lifting from the form on the bed.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t realize you were out here.” She started to back out.

“Could you?” He fought the urge to cover himself, they were both adults. “Would you know if he has sweats or something I could borrow?”

“Umm, yeah. He has something with a drawstring.” She headed into the closet and appeared moments later with thin gray sweats. “They might work.”

He nodded and thanked her, disappearing back into the bathroom.

Penelope fanned herself. There was no denying her boss was good looking, but seeing the man in just boxers, and wet ones at that, was almost too much. She pulled herself together just as he stepped back out, wet fabric in his hands and those thin sweats tied low around his hips. Reid was thinner than Hotch so the sweats hid more on him, they were hiding nothing from Garcia’s eyes now. She was going to have very kinky dreams for the foreseeable future after this was over.

==

Dinner was sitting ignored on the counter when Reid stumbled out of his room under a mix of his own power and gravity pulling him forward in an attempt to pull him down. Hotch was sprawled out on his back on the sofa, eyes closed and one arm thrown up over his head while Garcia was curled in the chair knitting. When he’d woken up, Reid had been confused as to why he was naked and his room was a mess. Snippets of the past day were starting to come back to him a piece at a time. “Uhh, hi?”

Two faces were instantly turned his way.

“What time is it?”

Garcia glanced over at the wall. “After seven.”

“At night?”

She nodded.

“Why are you both here?” He was leaning now against the doorjamb.

“I- I found you in the bathroom and couldn’t get you up. I called Hotch to help me. You haven’t had anything more since whatever you took last night, I don’t know if you remember that.” She
tucked her creation into the bag of yarn. “I’m sorry but- you were on the floor and I couldn’t move you.”

His eyes tracked to the man still reclined on the couch, eyes now watching him closely. His voice was rough, barely more than a whisper. “Am I fired?”

Hotch could feel Garcia’s eyes burning into the side of his face. “No.” He saw Reid visibly relax. “But.”

Spencer chewed his lip. “But?”

“There is absolutely no room here for relapse. You find a meeting starting today, go every day if you have to. I will be asking for random drug tests and if they come up positive, it will be on your formal record and you will be fired. Am I clear?”

His shaggy head bobbed up and down. “Crystal.”

Hotch rolled to a seated position, stretching his back and shoulders. “Now, can you eat something?”

“I, um, I’m not sure.”

“Start with fluids then. There are sports drinks and Garcia can give you some ideas to get something solid in you. I’m going to start cleaning up your room and bathroom and open some windows, air the place out.” He stood and brushed past Reid as he went into the bedroom.

Spencer padded across to the chair and sat on the corner by his neighbor.

“How do you feel?”

“Strange. Is, um, is Hotch wearing my sweats?”

She smiled. “Yes.”

“Uh, why?”

“Well, he lost his socks when you got sick and some splattered on them, his shirt when you bloodied his nose and the jeans when he dragged you into the shower to wash you up after you made a big mess on the bed. I just threw those sheets away by the way, you’ll have to buy new ones.”

“I- okay.” They both looked up when Hotch passed through with another armload of laundry.

When he returned, he sighed. “Garcia, I hate to ask this but… Would it be possible for me to go sleep across the hall for a couple hours? It’s not safe for me to drive home like this.”

She saw the exhaustion starting to take over. “Sure, it’s unlocked. Same layout as here.”

He nodded, collecting his things, and excused himself. Across the hall was like walking into a much larger version of the blonde’s office. In his present state, it was a bit overwhelming to his senses. Dropping his shoes and jacket in the living room, he padded into the bedroom and sank face-first onto the bed, asleep before he even found the pillows.
Every single day since his boss had left his apartment, Reid had dutifully texted him after each meeting that the movie was over. He made sure Hotch knew he appreciated the chance to get back on his feet without ending his career. He knew the decision to protect him instead of report him had to have weighed heavily on Hotch’s mind, it went against everything Reid knew his boss stood for. It made him wonder, if Elle had agreed to help, if she’s been willing to overcome what she’d been through, would Hotch have fought for her too?

A month after the night he detoxed, Garcia knocked at his door dressed in one of her going-out outfits. “Come on Boy Wonder, you’ve been working hard to do better, we need to celebrate a little. James has been asking about you for ages. He wants to see you’re okay.” She watched him uncurl from his spot on the couch, happy to see him looking healthy again. She hated to think of that night when she’d had to call Hotch and they stayed as Reid dealt with the drugs leaving his body. She’d never touched drugs, but she knew more than a few other hackers and gamers who did. She had witnessed more than one overdose and the chaos that accompanied it. If push had come to shove, she probably could have muddled through caring for Spencer, but it had been nice having someone there to do the heavy lifting. The intensity in which Hotch had focused on caring for their youngest member had surprised her for some reason, a small part of her had expected he would be a bit more hands-off.

Reid nodded and went to change into the loose-fitting clothing he’d come to prefer for their play. The entire few months he’d been using, Reid had never sought out Garcia or James for an evening. It didn’t feel right to be with them without them being aware of his using. Stepping into the club felt like stepping back into a part of himself that he’d left behind. He found himself giddy with anticipation.

James already had a room upstairs and was waiting for them. Beside where he knelt on the floor though was a second roll of ribbon. Reid’s brows rose and he looked to Garcia in question. “I wanted you to guide me again through this.”

She glanced from James up to her friend. “You’re ready to switch to being a Dom?”

He pulled himself up straight. “Yes, ma’am.”

A grin split her face. “Okay then. Let’s do it.”

==

Spencer pulled the ribbons tight on Penelope’s command. His long fingers making quick work of the intricate patterns as she taught them to him. James was kneeling still on the floor as Spencer worked. He was gasping for air, feeling like a fish out of water. Garcia and her magical knots had bound James from shoulder to knee, wide bands of fabric overly snug around his chest. Small breaths didn’t change anything, but one large exhale had caused some to slip, binding him tighter. It was like wearing a Chinese torture devise around his chest.

When Spencer finished and stepped back, she leaned in and ran her fingers through James’ hair. “Where are you at, my love?”

“Good, ma’am.” His eyes lifted but did not meet hers. “Feeling so good.”

She pressed her lips to his temple in a dry kiss. “Good boy. I’m going to let him pick what we start
with tonight. This is his show.” She stood up straight and turned to her friend. “Go over to the
drawer there and pick out something that interests you tonight.”

Spencer followed her gesture to the cupboard and pulled open the drawer in the middle. He ran his
hand over the assembly of toys and other things laid out, considering the reactions each one
caused. He wasn’t in the mood for causing pain right now, James never expressed a preference
either way that he knew of. Finally deciding to start with the shiny steel wheel tucked on the far
left, he collected it and slid the drawer closed. Returning to the pair, he brandished his tool. “I’m
starting with this.” He stated confidently.

Garcia grinned. “Good choice. Make sure all of the ribbon is smooth, it will still feel wonderful
even through it. Don’t push too hard, remember, it’s not about pain.”

He nodded and took a deep breath, settling himself. James liked the element of surprise so Spencer
steading him with one hand to his shoulder and rolled the small spiked wheel down the left side of
his spine starting at the base of his neck and ending at the small of his back. James arched under
his hands, sucking in a breath as Spencer rolled the wheel down. Straightening back up, Reid
paused and repeated the same on the other side of his back. The reaction in James made him feel…
powerful. The idea that he made a man like James arch and bend on his knees.

Switching hands, Spencer trailed the wheel along the inside edge of James’ left arm from armpit to
elbow. Not pausing he reached down and instead of repeating the motion on the opposite arm, he
tracked it over the right shoulder first swiftly over the top and then slowly around the blade.

Penelope stood back and watched intently. Normally she hated giving up control but this, watching
Spencer take charge, she could feel his taking the role and making it his own. She walked around
the pair who both seemed oblivious now of her presence, studying how Spencer was handling
James. She could see the older man tremble, a sign he was finding the headspace he sought.
Placing a hand on Reid’s arm, she quietly caught his attention and directed his attention to James’
state.

“Try something else now.” She directed him back to the cabinet. “Now that he’s found his space,
trying something a little harder. He really does like the flogger, but since he’s bound so nicely you
could try the crop. Only some of them will leave lovely marks around the ribbon.”

Nodding, Spencer tucked the wheel away and turned to where the crops were hung. Running his
fingers over them, he selected one that had colors that matched the ribbon. It was a bit smaller than
the others. With a flick of his wrist, he practiced cracking it in the air. Something inside of him
hummed with anticipation.

She didn’t want to interfere, her friend seemed to be remembering everything she’d taught him. She
had to prompted him before he started with the crop to give James some water and to stop and
check how he was doing, but other than that, Reid seemed at home in his position. Once Reid had
decided he was done, she helped him untie James and steady him as he stumbled to the table.

Pulling out some massage oils, the pair jointly began to tend to the welts and red marks left by the
ribbon. All signs of their evening would be gone by morning, but the drive home and then going to
bed, James would feel the dull throbbing and remember.

She helped Spencer bring James down, massaging and tugging at his scalp in a way the other man
loved before rubbing his shoulders and back and ending with his calves. “Always make sure you
rub away any ache. It’s no fun if someone ends up with a cramp or hurt.”

Spencer nodded and completed the ritual he was getting familiar with.
On the car ride home, Garcia looked over at Spencer. “You’ve been watching Hotch a lot lately.”

“Something’s wrong. He doesn’t talk to anyone but… something’s bothering him. He’s way more tense.”

“Yeah, I noticed. He’s not one to snap at me, that was always Gideon’s gig, but he stopped short of ripping into me the other day.”

“I just don’t know how to approach him about it.”

She glanced his way at a stoplight. “He seems, I dunno, different around you. Does he have someone he opens up to?”

He shrugged “Haley I guess.”

“I think whatever this is, it has to do with her.” When he gave her a questioning look, she continued. “He didn’t hesitate to come to your place and never once did he try to call her and you know what he used to be like about that. And once things started calming down he wasn’t racing out the door. Hell, he spent the whole next night asleep at my place.” She guided her car forward. “He’s been leaving the office at like ten or eleven at night. And he always is in right at six.”

“How do you know?”

She chewed her lip. “I checked. I have access to the bullpen cameras and looked at when he was leaving. The other weekend he did that both Saturday and Sunday too. He worked twelve days straight, sixteen hour days.”

Reid frowned. “That’s not healthy. He’ll run himself into the ground.”

“Or get hurt.” Garcia parked and turned to him. “He won’t talk to me. I’ve offered and offered but… I can feed him but he won’t talk.” She pushed his shoulder with her fist. “He’ll talk to you I think.”

“I don’t know.”

“Just try.”

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It was late. He’d given in to Garcia’s pestering and despite the late hour had texted Hotch and asked if he would come over. The man had replied that he could be over in about twenty minutes which told Spencer that Garcia’s hunch had been correct, he had to still be at the office. He rummaged through his cabinets and found the makings of toasted sandwiches and macaroni and cheese, the boxed kind but with some doctoring it would taste good enough. He opted for tea over coffee and set to work getting everything ready. The mac and cheese was just coming out of the pan when Hotch knocked on the door. “Come in!”

Hotch let himself in and made his way to the small bar that separated the kitchen from the living room. “What’s all this?” He watched Reid assemble thick sandwiches and dollop cheesy pasta beside them before passing one across.

“Dinner. Eat. I have hot tea, didn’t feel like coffee.” He turned and collected mugs and brought them around, taking a stool himself.
Aaron watched him start to eat and then dug into his own food. It smelled good and tasted even better. He hadn’t had a proper meal in days. Soon enough he felt the slight ache of an overly full stomach after far too many days of not bothering to eat more than the absolute minimum.

When both men finished their meals, Reid topped up their tea and moved to the couch, silently expecting Hotch to follow him. “Hotch.” He started softly. “I know something’s wrong. I—” He chewed his lip in thought. “Whatever’s eating you, you can talk to me.”

Thoughts of his last conversation with his wife swirled in his head. It had taken a week after she’d packed up Jack and walked out before he’d actually talked to her again. Her sister had called him just once to let him know that Haley and Jack were at her place so, in her words, he wouldn’t file a kidnapping report and have them hunted down. The next call had been Haley asking if he’d completed his transfer to White Collar and a litany of snide comments when he’d told her that in the end, he was staying with the BAU. It tore him up inside that Jack, at the ripe old age of two, was getting put in the middle of all of it, but Hotch was trying to do his best for every party involved.

It did sound nice to have someone he could lean on, turn to. He hadn’t wanted to admit to anyone that he was a failure at home, but it was becoming apparent that it was affecting his performance at work. Maybe that was a sign he really did need to move on. Maybe Haley actually was right. Maybe he did need a change. He hated coming home to a big, empty house. He hated the way he rattled around in it without Haley and Jack, his family, there to make it warm and inviting. Passing Jack’s room hurt. He missed his son, wanted him back but Haley had been firm that he wouldn’t get to see the young boy until some sort of resolution was found.

Spencer watched emotions flit over Hotch’s face as he sat quietly. It was clear something was on his mind. Something heavy, a burden he was determined to carry on his own. “Hotch?”

His head snapped up, he’d forgotten he was sitting in Reid’s living room, the young man sitting across from him. Studying him. “I’m fine.”

Eyebrows rose. That was like a mantra lately. “I didn’t ask, but okay.” He tried to figure out what to say next without setting his friend off. “Where’s Haley tonight? Is she waiting for you to get home?”

Hotch chewed the corner of his lip. “She’s at her sister’s. With Jack.”

So, she had left, Garcia had shared her suspicions that this mood had something to do with Haley. “Is that why you’ve been staying late at work?”

“The house is so quiet when they’re away.”

He wasn’t sure how hard to press. “When are they due back?”

Hotch sighed heavily. That was the real crux of it, he didn’t think she was coming back. He couldn’t do for her what she was asking and it seemed they were in a permanent stalemate. “I don’t know.” He felt exhaustion starting to press in on him. He was tired, worn out from pushing himself so hard. Placing his now empty mug on the table he sat back, letting his head fall back onto the back of the couch. “I wish I knew.”

Reid watched as Hotch relaxed, the lines of stress and worry fading only slightly. When it was apparent the man had drifted off, he found a blanket and draped it over him before going to his room to sleep. There would be more opportunities in the future to dig further into what was eating the older man.
Hotch woke with a start. Squinting in the darkness, he tried to figure out where he was and why. He was sitting on a couch, still in work clothes, that much he could tell. There was a blanket draped over him, soft and warm. Pushing the blanket aside, he looked around trying to recognize the shadows in the room. He stood and started to silently walk the room, recognition coming slowly. He was at Spencer’s place. He’d fallen asleep talking. He’d admitted to the younger man that Haley and Jack were gone and he wasn’t sure if or when they were coming back. In reality, he was almost certain they were gone for good, his life broken forever. Finding himself hovering in the bedroom doorway, he watched Reid sleep sprawled out on the bed. In the darkness, he admitted to himself that what he missed most about Haley being gone was simple companionship, the knowing someone else was simply physically there. Filing his next actions under ‘really stupidly bad idea’, Hotch stripped down to his tee-shirt and boxers, neatly folding everything on the dresser and tucking both firearms under the pile, he didn’t know the code to Reid’s safe and figured it would be too complicated and convoluted to guess, he carefully slid into the unoccupied side of the bed and drifted back to sleep.

Spencer had one arm thrown carelessly over his head in his sleep. The feel of soft movement, like puffs of air, tickling his arm brought him into awareness before his alarm was set to go off. As he blinked in the early morning light, he realized he could still feel the soft tickling and moved his arm to look and found himself looking into the sleeping face of his boss.

Lying rigid, Spencer tried to work out how their positions came to be. He could tell he was still fully dressed, not that there would have been any reason for that to have changed, he was laying on half the bed flat on his back, one arm up, one arm across his stomach. From what he could make out without glasses, he could see Hotch had a shirt on and was curled on his side into an impossibly small ball facing Reid, as close as humanly possible without actually touching. It almost looked like he’d wanted to… cuddle? But had been unsure if it would have been allowed.

Spencer felt something in his chest squeeze as his mind instantly went to the thought of a small child curled close to a parent, wanting affection but not sure if it would be permitted. He couldn’t help but wonder what had been going on that no one knew about for a man almost in his forties to sleep curled that way. In the few years he’d worked at the Bureau, he’d been witness to a few exchanges between his boss and his wife. Hotch would always shut down and concede to her desires if it looked like someone was watching or overhearing them. Except he knew Hotch hadn’t conceded with the transfer. A transfer he knew Haley had been pushing for. The whole team knew. Even if the older man had shared in small bits and pieces, the overall story had been that Haley had ben ecstatic he got suspended and was being pushed out.

Then Hotch had flown out to meet the team for that case. It was after that case that he’d spent the night so invested in helping Spencer get better. Spencer put two and two together, that must have been when Haley left and took Jack. The one time she didn’t get her way, she took the one thing in the world most precious to Hotch and left. He stared down at his sleeping friend, had Haley always been like that? He started to review everything he knew of their relationship when the body beside him made a soft noise and shifted. He sounded almost... sad.

Aaron knew never to just latch onto Haley, she’d hated the way he would cling to her like she was an anchor in turbulent waters. The warmth radiating from her this morning though wasn’t enough, he needed that physical contact. Not bothering to open his eyes, he whispered. “Please, Hales? Just for a bit?”
Reid’s brows shot up, clearly his friend wasn’t awake yet and was dreaming he was lying beside his wife. Spencer wasn’t an expert in marriages by any means, but the way the question had been asked didn’t sound very romantic. It was more reminiscent of a child begging for comfort. Deciding he could always play it off as sleepy and freaked out if things went bad, he silently moved his arm out in invitation as Hotch snuggled up next to him, head tucked on his shoulder and arm wrapped around his waist.

Ten minutes passed and Hotch retreated back across the bed, waking as he rolled. He became aware the ceiling and walls around him were all wrong. This wasn’t their bedroom at home. Looking to the side he found Reid studying him closely. He’d just been cuddling Spencer. He felt himself flush in embarrassment and retreated even further.

“It’s okay, no big deal.” Spencer put out a hand. “You seemed to need it and… it was nice. Comfortable actually. You can come back if you want, it doesn’t have to be weird.”

Hotch shook his head, answering without really thinking, still groggy from sleep. “She said ten minutes was enough. I don’t need to be clingy and act like, ah, it’s enough.” He suddenly became very interested in the pattern on the comforter. “I’m fine.”

Figuring there was a lot to analyze in those couple sentences, Reid filed it away for later. “Want some breakfast?”

Surprised Reid was offering, Hotch nodded.

“Well, if you want to shower here, you’re welcome to. I know you need to run home and change, but you can do that while I fix breakfast. Save you some time.” Spencer rolled out of bed and found his glasses before padding to the bathroom.

In the kitchen, Reid waited to hear the shower kick on before starting toast and a pan of eggs. It wouldn’t be much, but it would hold them over. He was caught up thinking about Hotch and what he’d said about Haley. He was starting to wonder exactly how healthy that relationship had been, maybe it was for the best that it was failing. He’d done enough research, reading studies and cases, to know that sometimes people coming out of those types of relationships could struggle. They got used to being controlled that they came to depend on it.

Hotch stared at himself in the foggy mirror. He hadn’t meant to tell Reid about Haley’s rule, it had slipped out accidentally. He’d have to make sure he didn’t slip and share any other rules she’d had or Reid might tell the others and then the whole team would realize he wasn’t fit to be their leader. They would realize he would fail at work just as surely as he failed at home. Dressing in yesterday’s suit, Hotch walked silently into the kitchen to find Reid sitting at the table eating toast and eggs, a cup of coffee in front of himself. Hotch sat across from him quietly.

Spencer looked up, hesitating mid-bite. When he became aware Hotch wasn’t going to just help himself, he spoke up. “There’s toast and eggs up there. I left a plate out and a mug for coffee.”

Nodding, Hotch moved to the stove and dropped a slice of toast on an empty plate, he didn’t see any butter out so he left it dry, and one egg out of the pan before returning to the table.

Reid’s brows rose. Hotch carried roughly fifty more pounds of mass around than he did, he would have expected the man to eat at least as much, if not more, than he was having. “I’m done if you want the rest. It’s all yours.”

The look on Hotch’s face in response to that comment, the amazement that seemed to fill his dark gaze, made Spencer want to hunt Haley down and make her disappear forever.
David Rossi had enjoyed the small banter with Strauss. He had remembered the woman could be a fierce but worthy opponent when her focus was well placed. It was the kind of battle of wills he just didn’t get from an editor or publisher. It had amused him slightly that he could still get under her skin after all these years. He knew her buttons and exactly how and when to press them. And she still knew very little of his. Pity. A good row now and then was good for the heart.

When his eyes landed on his old friend, now unit chief, he couldn’t help the smile that twitched across his face. The collection of agents who’d stopped talking in the bullpen to watch him was new, he’d have to get used to having fans at work now. But Hotch was still Hotch, looking older now that his youthful, puppy looks of a decade before, but still the same solid man. And clearly at odds with Strauss, the woman never liked those who appeared ambitious. The animosity was thick in the air between them, he’d have to look into that more later.

The blonde who’d appeared in Hotch’s office had been a nice change from when he’d last been a member of the unit. Granted his friend had put out a clear message that she was off limits, always the chivalrous type, but window shopping never did anyone any harm and it sounded like he was getting an honest to goodness window to shop from.

By the time they’d returned from Texas, Rossi was starting to get a better picture of this team he’d be working with for the foreseeable future. Morgan and Prentiss were attached at the hip in some ways, synced seamlessly even when working separate tasks. Both were bright and quick-witted, he’d have to watch his back with the two of them. JJ wasn’t nearly as sweet and gentle as she first appeared. Aaron had warned him to not overstep on her turf again which he didn’t take too much to heart, but when she snubbed him later by only bringing lunch back for the others and not him, he realized that maybe JJ wasn’t the one Aaron had been trying to protect. And speaking of protecting. It seemed everyone subconsciously tried to protect the youngest, genius Reid. The boy, well past young enough to be his son, was amazing but… vulnerable. Twice he caught Hotch cut him off mid-sentence with a touch to the arm or a soft word. He would definitely require more consideration before Dave could come to a decision about him but his first instinct was to also protect, following Aaron’s lead.

And the tech girl who’d barged into their meeting and instantly had been upset by the photos. It was odd that someone who worked within the BAU full time and had for years would respond that way to what was a fairly run of the mill case for their department. She was cheerful over the phone and had promised she could get him whatever he needed. Time would tell how accurate that was.

On the flight back, he’d found Hotch sequestered in the corner of the jet away from the others and had asked him about her.

“So… Garcia? Is that her name?”

Hotch looked up from his pile of paperwork. “The analyst? Yeah, Penelope Garcia.”

“What’s her story?” He settled back into his seat, adjusting his jacket as he got comfortable.

“She’s… hard to explain with words.” Hotch grinned. Dave’s original observation that she was ‘different’ was really the best way to sum her up. “She grows on you.”

“It might be misplaced of me, but she doesn’t seem the type to work for the FBI.”

Realizing he wasn’t going to get more work done while Dave wanted to chat, he closed the file and rested forward on his elbows. “There was a case. A hacker got into the DOJ website and I was
assigned to look into it. Then I was sent out to make the arrest. I gave her the choice of jail or a job.”

*It took a moment for the words to sink in. “You arrested her? I bet that was… different.”*

*He echoed his original statement about the blonde. “You have no idea.”*

Dave watched the way his friend’s eyes sparkled slightly while thinking of the analyst. There’d been a time when he’d watch Aaron’s eyes shine twice that bright when Haley was mentioned but, now that he thought about it, Haley hadn’t been mentioned once. He’d never seen the younger man step out to call his wife either. He was still wearing his wedding band and the Aaron Hotchner he knew never would even look at another woman while married and still would never risk impropriety with a coworker of any sort even if he weren’t. *Something had changed with his friend, he just wasn’t sure what.*

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Thumbs tucked into his pockets, Rossi strolled down the hall until he found the office he was looking for. The door was open so he stepped in. “Hello?” Everything was begging for him to look that way at once. Fairy lights twinkled along the wall behind the collection of monitors. Pictures adorned every available space. There was a small desk piled with all assortment of stuffed, fluffy, and feathery things. A cup of what he suspected to be pens topped with feathers and bobbly bits was next to the phone. This office was so far from Bureau bland, he almost wanted to step back out and check it wasn’t a portal to somewhere else.

“Oh! Hi!” Came from behind him. He turned to see Garcia teetering in. Her outfit just as bright and… not boring, as before. “Welcome, welcome. What can I do for you?”

He sat in a chair when she gestured to it. “We didn’t really meet properly before.” He started.

“Oh! I’m Penelope Garcia, but you know that because you’re Agent Rossi, creator of the BAU and,” she reached for a file. “You knew Boss man before, was he always so serious? Anything you ever need, just call and I’ll set you up. I can program your phone if you want, I do everyone else’s.”

Rossi couldn’t help the surprise that crossed his face. She was unlike anyone he’d ever worked with. “I just might take you up on sorting out my phone.”

She sank into her chair and spun, grabbing a tin he hadn’t noticed before, pulling off the lid and holding it out. “Peanut butter chocolate chip cookies. If those aren’t your speed I have lollipops. If you tell me your favorite sweets, I’ll make them.” The look on her face was one of anticipation.

“That’s okay.”

“Oh, no! I can’t make everyone else goodies and not you! Come on, tell me what you like.” She waved her hands in a ‘gimmie’ motion.

He relented. “Oatmeal raisin.”

He hadn’t thought it was possible for her to light up more than she already was, but she did. “I have everything at home for those!”

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Finding his way into his bedroom, Hotch wondered, if Dave had noticed in a day or so that Haley
had left him, how many others on his team had worked it out. Was he now a walking billboard for ‘this is what a failure looks like’? He changed into something to sleep in and stumbled back downstairs to his small bar tucked in the corner of the dining room and found a tumbler and the scotch. Pouring a generous amount, he took it back upstairs to his room. There weren’t many rooms in this big house he used anymore. The kitchen only for the coffee pot, the dining room only for the bar, his office mostly and the bedroom when he made it that far before falling asleep.

Just before Dave had shown up, he had another frustrating phone call with Haley. She still was keeping Jack at arm’s length saying it was for the best right now until things got ironed out. And by ironed out, she meant she was still waiting for him to transfer. She wasn’t going to be happy when she learned Dave was back, something about the older man had always grated her nerves though she played the polite wife and hostess when he’d come around. Hotch suspected she hated that it had been Dave that had talked him into being a profiler. The one who told him he’d be good at it.

And that was something else that had struck him when Dave had walked in his office. With Haley gone and not speaking to him for a week at a time, no one else in his daily life called him Aaron. It was only Hotch. Like some part of him, the Aaron part, was dying now that no one was there to use it. Dave had known him before he had gained the moniker and still alternated between his given name and the nickname.

Settling into bed, he stared into the middle distance and sipped at his drink.
No one ever got good phone calls after ten o’clock at night. Even in their line of work. There came a certain point when you just knew for certain that whatever was at the other end of that ringing phone was going to be bad. When the phone on the corner of his desk started ringing at ten minutes past ten o’clock, Hotch’s entire body went rigid. After the third ring cut through his silent office, he lifted the receiver. “Agent Hotchner.”

“Hello, this is Nurse Stella Morrow at George Washington University Hospital, I’m trying to reach an Aaron Hotchner?”

“Speaking.” His heart sank.

“We had a Penelope Garcia brought in by ambulance in critical condition earlier this evening. Once we were able to identify her, we found you were listed as her emergency contact.”

“Yes.” His mind was racing. The nurse’s words meant Garcia wasn’t communicating for herself. “What happened?”

“She was brought in with a gunshot wound to the abdomen. She’s in surgery now. I think you need to come down as quickly as possible.”

“Thank you, I’ll be there.” He hung up and stood on shaking legs. Of all the team, this was the one person this wasn’t supposed to happen to. He rushed out of his office, collecting JJ on the way. The younger woman was always able to stay calm under pressure and he was hoping to be able to rely on her even temperament now. As he drove, he told her to call the others and get them to meet at the hospital. Everyone needed to rally now, even if they were worn out from the case.

Entering through the ER, Hotch spotted a pair of paramedics heading out and intercepted their path to see if they had brought Garcia in.

JJ headed straight for the desk. “Hello, I’m trying to find out about Penelope Garcia? We got a call to come to the hospital, that she was rushed into surgery after being shot.”

The nurse typed into the computer and looked up. “Surgery is on the fifth floor. The elevator is around the corner, go up and when you get off the desk is to your right. They can give you more information and point out the waiting room there.”

JJ thanked her and turned around looking for her boss. “Hotch!” When he turned to her, she waved him over. “Fifth floor.”

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Rossi watched his friend pace in the hall. Garcia was out of recovery and in a room, the rest of the team was with her now but Hotch was pacing the hall, upset. “Aaron. What’s up?”

Dark eyes tracked the quiet hall before landing on his friend. “The one person on this team who… She’s not a field agent, she isn’t armed. She isn’t trained to look at things like we do but… But she’s the one who gets shot outside her own home?” A hand came up to his face. “It’s almost too random.” He was angry. More than angry, he was some indescribable feeling of fear, anger, and relief that Garcia was going to survive.

“I’m sure Reid could give you statistics on the odds.” He watched his friend think. “What’s eating
you?”

“If someone like her can get—” His voice cracked. “If we can’t keep her, one of our own, safe, how can we keep anyone safe? I’m the reason she’s out here working, she’s my responsibility.”

Dave rocked back on his heels, studying his friend. He could see a subtle tremble run through him under his suit, an untrained eye would have missed it. “You better not try to say this is your fault. The others are looking after her, why don’t we go take a look at the scene?”

“Sure. Umm, we should grab Reid. He could answer a few things about the building.” He glanced back at the room.

“Reid?”

“They live across from one another in the building, have the whole top floor just the two of them. He had gone to a… movie… and wasn’t home or he would have heard the shots. He’s going to be blaming himself for that.”

With a smirk, Dave sighed and muttered, “Wonder where he learned that.”

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Once they got to the apartment building, Dave hung back, watching the other two. They unconsciously leaned in toward each other as they walked and spoke. It was… odd. A sort of familiarity Dave rarely saw Aaron share with anyone. Even though the conversation wasn’t private and they kept including him, they still tipped their heads together as if sharing private information. It was an odd contrast to the almost agitated man he’d been encountering around the office lately and the nearly distraught one from the hospital.

He knew whenever he’d brought up Haley in the month he’d been back, Aaron had tensed and shut down. It was a do-not-touch subject. Experience had taught him that if Aaron Hotchner wanted you to back off, you better damn well back off or when push came to shove you were likely to get a shove. A memorable one.

Back when he was Aaron’s senior agent he’d stumbled onto the landmine that had been the younger man’s family, namely his father. He’d done what he’d always done best and pushed for answers. The weekend had ended with Aaron doing his best to out drink the older man, probably in the hope of shutting him up, and when that didn’t work, taking a well-timed swing. Rossi remembered fondly the feeling of hitting the floor hard and looking up at the utterly glorious sight of Aaron changing into ‘Hotch’ for the first time. He’d stood rigid, towering over Dave, arms at his side, brows low and fierce across his eyes. What would become his trademark glare settled into place. If he hadn’t been certain Aaron wouldn’t take another swing at him, it would have been a terrifying position to be in. In the end, he’d pushed Aaron far enough to get the truth to break through, but Dave had learned something that weekend as well, Aaron Hotchner was not a man you went toe to toe with half-cocked.

Shaking himself back into the present, he knew something was eating at Aaron, and had been since he’d gotten back. The man was spoiling for a fight it seemed. Tension bled off of him constantly and no amount of prodding seemed to find the root of the problem. When his temper started to flare, Garcia seemed to vanish from the room or screen and Reid seemed to shrink back. Like they knew that when he blew it was going to be huge and affect them all. No one would be safe. It was interesting that of everyone on the team, those two in particular seemed the most in tune with when his bad moods would pop up. Rossi wasn’t sure whether it was better to let his friend stew and talk when he was ready or to utilize the old tactic of pushing all of his buttons until he triggered a sort
of controlled explosion. Like dropping dynamite on snow drifts to prevent more dangerous
avalanches.

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A week after being shot, Garcia was sitting in her living room alone. The cop who’d tried to kill
her was dead at the hands of her friend. Her job had been reinstated finally, though Hotch had
promised that they would be having a deep discussion about boundaries before she actually
returned. What she really wanted tonight wasn’t in any condition for. She’d had to cancel a
meeting that she really would have rather kept. When her front door opened, she looked up to see
Spencer standing there eagerly looking down at her.

“Want to go out?” He was nearly bouncing on his toes.

“I’m not up for anything, sweetie.”

“I know. I talked to James. If you wanted, you could just watch me. Sit at the side and just enjoy
not being trapped in your apartment for a while.”

“Sure. That’s sounds good.”

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Garcia was sitting propped in the large high-backed chair provided in the room. Spencer had made
sure she had enough pillows and things plumped around her to not risk straining a single stitch or
mending muscle in her body.

James stood barefooted, waiting. Spencer slowly unbuttoned and removed his shirt, slipping it off
his arms before he untied the top of the pants and let them slip down to pool around James’ feet.

“Step out.” He directed, helping the other man balance as he followed orders. “I want to use
clamps tonight. Are you in a good place for that?”

James exhaled in anticipation. “Yes, Sir.”

Spencer pulled up a pair of alligator clamps connected by a chain and then a similar clip with a ring
hanging from it. “How about this?”

James turned his head and stared at the clamp, his body starting to betray how he felt.

Reid grinned. “I see that’s a yes, but we can’t have you enjoying it too much now.” He sauntered
over and played with James’ nipples, rubbing and tweaking them until they stood out nicely.
Squeezing the clamps open and closed a couple times, he used both hands to attach them both
simultaneously.

James flushed as he felt his dick twitch. He breathed through the sudden pain.

Returning to the drawer, Spencer picked through an assortment of small metal devices before
finding one that looked appealing. Turning, he presented something that resembled a hollow metal
snake baring its fangs for attack. “Is this okay?”

Taking deep breaths to calm himself, James studied the cock cage and nodded, waiting for Spencer
to slip it on his half hard length and snap it behind his balls. He was surprised when he felt the
clamp pinch the base of his scrotum, it wasn’t painful in the traditional sense. Not like his nipples,
but he knew by the clamp Spencer had chosen that weights were probably comping later.
“I’m not in the mood for whips or crops tonight.” Spencer paced in solid, even steps around the other man. “I will state some ideas and you may answer yes or no. Aside from that, you are to remain silent.”

James nodded.

“Wax and oils?”

“Yes.”

Spencer thought. “Scratching?”

“Yes.”

Weights?”

“Yes.”

“Paddle?”

“Y-yes.”

Reid’s brow rose. “We’ll make that a no.” He guided James to the spot he wanted him in. He started with adding weights to the rings James wore.

He forgot all about Garcia watching from the side as he got into what he was doing. He’d worked his way through dripping wax and then warm oils before instructing him to present his arms, wrists together. Using the skills learned after hours of practice at his place, Reid deftly bound James’ wrists together in a way that was snug but wouldn’t leave marks. Once he was sure he was secure, Spencer pulled the hook in the ceiling down a bit and raised James’ hands to it. The man was able to just touch the floor with his heels a fraction off the ground. Stretched, but not too far. Enough to keep him focused on balance and not his surroundings as he held onto the chain to help balance himself.

Using something similar to a comb, Spencer dragged it over James’ body. The purpose wasn’t to crate pain but to light up his skin with feeling, leaving red lines all over his front and back. Watching the man under his hands succumb to the sensations was the most powerful he’d ever felt.

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Trudging up their stairs afterward, Garcia stopped short at the top causing Spencer to bump into her and nearly tumble backward. Sitting against Reid’s door, eyes closed, was Hotch. Spencer recovered first and stepped around his friend, pulling out keys as he went. He unlocked his door and pushed it open before turning and watching Penelope do the same before waving good night and closing herself inside. Once they were alone, Reid looked down. “Hotch.”

The older man looked up from his spot on the floor, a look of sadness present. “You weren’t home. Movie?”

“Um, no. Do you want to come in?”

Hotch nodded and slowly pushed himself up. When they were face to face, Spencer caught a whiff of scotch on his breath. Lifting up the go bag that Reid hadn’t noticed before, Hotch trudged into the apartment and sat on the couch, stretching his legs out under the coffee table.
Spencer frowned at the back of Aaron’s head before kicking off his shoes and wandering to his bedroom to find pajamas and take out his contacts. He had no idea why Hotch would be showing up on his doorstep, ever since Rossi had returned to the unit, the pair had seemed to spend time together off hours. Once he was settled in for the night, he wandered back to the couch and sat down.

When the silence got to be too heavy, Aaron spoke. “I’m sorry if I interrupted your night.”

“You didn’t.” He tipped his head, studying the other man. “We went out to, uh, out. But she was pretty tired, I was just going to read a bit. Maybe work on a paper I’ve have laying around.”

After a moment, Hotch chuckled slightly. “A bit?”

He felt a blush creep up his neck and he ducked his head. “I bought six new books last weekend and haven’t had a chance to look at them.” Eventually he pressed. “Why, ah, why did you stop by tonight? Not that I mind, but I just thought you would prefer to hang around Rossi now that he’s back.”

Aaron’s voice resumed its hint of sadness. “The walls felt like they were closing in. Dave asks questions that I don’t want to answer. I realized I couldn’t just sit at home and drink it better.” He brought his gaze up to meet his friend’s. “I took a cab. I didn’t drive.” He wanted to be sure Spencer knew he didn’t risk other people with his bad choices.

The apartment lingered in silence, both men thinking about their respective ghosts. Spencer studied the older man out of the corner of his eye. He hadn’t seen too terribly much of him out of the office since Rossi had come back, the two had history and he figured Rossi was the type Hotch would turn to about things. A movement of Hotch’s hand drew his attention fully, the man had swiped a hand over his cheek. Not caring about boundaries, Reid stood and moved to the couch, pulling him close. “Hey. I’m here. You’re not alone.”

Feeling long thin arms surround his shoulders, a hand holding his head to a slim shoulder, Hotch let himself give in to the despair for a bit. As tears fell, his mind ran rampant over the events that had led him to this point. He felt out of control, which left a hard pain in the middle of his stomach. Haley had left him in a tailspin, no matter what he tried, he seemed to not be able to regain his footing. His feelings toward her and what she’d done flooded his system and despair suddenly jumped the track to rage at having let himself be manipulated for so long. He, of all people, should have known better.

Spencer felt the body in his arms tense and Hotch suddenly went silent. It felt like he was suddenly embracing some apex animal. One that didn’t want to be embraced. Pulling back quickly, Spencer launched off the couch to get out of the way.

Suddenly free of the arms that had been holding him, Aaron was up and pacing the room, talking to himself softly but angrily. He knew Haley was having an affair, had been for months. He knew she wouldn’t accept him back as he was. But wasn’t he the same man he’d always been? Driven, desperate to do his job to protect others? What had changed? The job wasn’t anything new and his commitment to it wasn’t either. His mind tracked back to their interactions over the years. Her dismissal of his needs and desires, the way she always put him second in everything. In the end that even extended to the bedroom. He shook himself out of his train of thought, he didn’t want to admit how she’d been manipulating him for so many years. Him, a person trained to notice human behavior. He crossed the room to the kitchen and pulled open the cabinet over Reid’s microwave where the liquor had been hidden as part of the younger man’s recovery. He’d kept it there if anyone else wanted a drink, alcohol had never been Spencer’s vice of choice. Grabbing a mug off the counter, he twisted a lid off and filled the mug.
Spencer watched his boss swallow the scotch and add more to the cup, a ball of worry and fear mixed in his gut.
He hadn’t expected Dave to stay away after the display at the office. Leave it to Haley to drag an intensely private moment out into the very public forum of his workplace. He didn’t recall the drive home, not his home for much longer, as he dumped his briefcase and the envelope on the floor inside the door and headed for his bar, shedding jacket and shoes as he went, leaving a trail of items in his wake. It felt like an ultimate betrayal. More than the affair he still hadn’t mentioned, didn’t plan to mention. More than keeping Jack from him. She intentionally did something with the sole purpose of causing him pain. It was like getting proof of his suspicions of the real Haley he hadn’t been seeing.

The second glass vanished as fast as the first, but when he went to pour a third he found the bottle empty. Swearing, he dug around for another bottle of whiskey, cheaper quality than the first but at this point he didn’t care. Tonight, he planned on getting completely smashed. Screw Haley. Screw her attorneys, he wouldn’t be surprised if she was getting a discount by using ‘off the books’ methods. Sober he would have smacked himself for such thoughts, but tonight wasn’t a night for being kind. Or fair. She’d claimed she had to get the best attorney money could afford. His money. Because he was an attorney, still maintained his ABA credentials, and had connections.

At some point, he realized the bottle on the coffee table was looking more empty than full and there was a pounding sound that wouldn’t stop. He was listing to one side on the couch, glass teetering on his leg, gripped in slippery fingers.

The pounding stopped, Hotch was thankful until three images of Dave Rossi swam in front of his face. He couldn’t decide if one was real or not or even which one but to be safe he tried to straighten and look composed. No need to let Dave see him in such a state if the man was really there.

“Totally shit faced I see.” The three voices said in unison.

Real Rossi then.

The voice had continued talking while Aaron assessed how convincing of an act he was giving. Judging by the deep frown, not a good one. He tried to stand, to use his height over the older man to get him to go away but he’d forgotten about the drink in his hand and as he moved, it spilled across his lap as the glass tumbled to the rug.

Shaking his head, Dave decided to start with the most pressing issues first, disarming a drunk. A potentially belligerent drunk. He was banking on the half bottle of cheap whiskey having done its job to slow his friend’s reaction time to something a bit more predictable and a whole lot less coordinated. Pushing Aaron back into the couch, Dave unsnapped the holster and slid the gun out, noting the surprise on Aaron’s face at the sight of it. Kneeling, he ignored his knees popping as he yanked up both pant legs in search of the backup gun he knew his friend wore. It said something of the man’s state of mind that he was this wasted without bothering to tuck his gear into the safe first.

Dave had come here to talk it out with his friend. He hadn’t expected the man to be completely plastered when he’d arrived. “What’s been going on with you? This isn’t the Aaron I used to know. I need you to talk to me.”

“Talk, no talk, no more talking. Everyone wants to talk but Haley. Haley doesn’t want me to talk. She wants me to be a good boy and do as I’m told.” He tugged at his tie, grabbing the wrong end
and pulling it tighter until Dave intervened. “She never wanted to know about my day. Sleep in the
guest room if I had a bad night. Might wake her, might wake Jack. I just wanted to be with her and
she pushed me away whenever it didn’t suit her.” He forgot about his audience. “I never thought I
would be so desperate, have to beg and promise just to get laid when I was married.”

Dave’s brows shot up. “Aaron. Aaron! I need to know about you and Haley. Talk to me here.” He
pushed his friend back into the couch.

“I couldn’t be tired. If I came home she expected me to go out. I couldn’t be upset about my day,
not bring it home. No nightmares.” A sob escaped, the emotion made his stomach roll.

“Aaron?” Rossi wasn’t surprised Haley hadn’t wanted to hear about their job. It was gory and
gruel and could lead to people being paranoid. “But you guys were good. Right? Everything
else was good?”

“I thought so.” He grew quiet and stared up at his friend. “Dave?”

“Yes?”

“I’m sleepy.” His voice sounded…small.

Dave’s eyes shot to the bottle on the table. “Can you stay here for just a second? Don’t try to
move, I’ll help you get to a bed.” He waited for a confused nod before collecting the firearms and
heading for the safe. The passcode had been Haley’s birthday for as long as he’d known Aaron. In
the dining room, he spied the bar where an empty bottle still stood along with the paper seal off the
bottle in the living room. There was no telling just how deep Hotch was swimming right now.

When he returned to the living room, he found that Aaron was passed out completely, tie hanging
limply around his shoulders, pants still wet from his spill. His conversation would have to wait
until morning.

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While his friend slept, Dave wandered the house, looking at every room like a profiler. He’d
retraced his steps back to the dining room, simple and tastefully decorated. It rang more classic
New England than Southern roots, Dave had a feeling that was Haley’s influence.

He wasn’t surprised the kitchen was Haley’s domain. Aaron had never been known for culinary
skills. Unlike Dave, who was raised in a culture that surrounded food and the man’s ability to cook
for the woman he loved, Aaron’s southern roots had encouraged marrying a woman who would
keep him fed. Traditions ran deep in each of them.

After a quick pass to check on his friend, Dave headed up the stairs and found Jack’s room.
Pushing the door open and stepping in he was surrounded but what would be best described as a
shrine to all things superhero. Even the ceiling fan had characters on the blades. Dave couldn’t
help but feel a bit of sadness that Aaron was going through this and being separated from his son.
As he passed the bed, he noticed the covers weren’t quite smooth. He started to tug them straight
until he realized the wrinkles were from someone coming in and sitting on an otherwise
undisturbed comforter.

Stepping out of the room after deciding not to smooth the covers, Dave found that the next room
was the master suite. It felt…nice. Maybe a bit feminine, but every wife he’d ever had always did
that to their bedrooms. He looked around for signs of Aaron in the space but failed to find anything
beyond the small firearm safe hidden in the bedside drawer. There were photos of Jack, family
photos of what he figured were Haley’s family, but no sign of Aaron. The attached bathroom wasn’t much better, Dave found all the other man’s toiletries stored in a bottom drawer in the vanity while there were still things of Haley’s dotting every surface.

When the annoyance of what it looked like, that Aaron had been shoved aside and labelled not important in his own home, started to get to him, Dave left the master suite and found the office. It was a narrow room just past the stairs. For as small as the room was though, this space screamed Aaron Hotchner. Law and criminology books lined the shelves, files were stacked on the desk, and the laptop open in the middle he would bet was securely passworded. The furniture was dark and heavy, the room was peppered with handmade drawings done in paint and crayon as well as photos, both framed and unframed. He ran his fingers over book titles, smirking when he found his own tomes crammed between psychology texts. Aaron’s life priorities were evident in this room. Family, work, friends as evidenced by the collage of team related photos.

Another pass to check on Hotch and Dave stumbled on the downstairs guest bedroom. The room looked…odd. Following his gut, Dave opened the closet and found a neat row of familiar suits, shirts and shoes. His heart clenched for his friend. Dave had experience with being relegated to the guest room, or the couch as the case often was for him, when your wife had determined you weren’t worthy of sleeping in the marital bed.

Returning to the living room to sit watch, Dave knew they were going to have to have a serious talk when Hotch woke up.

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Hotch groaned. He hurt everywhere. His head was pounding against his skull, his whole body felt like he’d been in a boxing match, he was pretty certain he could feel every hair follicle on his entire body. And every single one hurt. Trying to find a more comfortable position to slowly die in, he rolled over. The sudden, but extremely brief, feeling of freefalling followed by the hard collision with the floor snapped him to lucidity.

The deep chuckle from somewhere beyond his limited line of sight let him know his fall had a witness. He promised himself he would deal with whoever it was later. Much later. Right now he had to figure out what the hell happened. After several tries he managed to get onto his hands and knees and then heave himself back onto the sofa. Once on his back, the daylight streaming through the windows assaulted him like hot knives to his brain. When he felt someone take his hand and press something into it, he risked cracking one eyelid open.

“Take them, you’ll feel better eventually.” A rough voice ordered.

Hotch popped the pills in his mouth and winced as he dry swallowed them. “Thanks.”

“Sit up. You need water. And you smell of whiskey. Exactly how much did you pour in yourself last night?”

Braving the harsh light again, Aaron squinted his eyes open. “I don’t remember.” Deciding it was now or never, his friend wasn’t about to let him lie around and mope anyway, he slowly pushed himself into a seated position. “I slept in my clothes?”

“You passed out fully dressed, yes. And by that I mean that when I found you the only things you’d taken off were your jacket and shoes. The passing out was after spilling a glass of drink on yourself. Do you remember me showing up last night?”

He tried hard to think back. “No.”
Dave frowned and stroked his goatee. If his friend didn’t remember him arriving, then he surely didn’t remember what was said. “I’m going to get you some food to help mop up the booze still sloshing around inside you. You go shower and change. I’m assuming you shower up in the master bathroom still?”

Aaron gave him a puzzled look.

“All your work clothes are down here.” He smirked at his friend’s aborted glare. “You passed out and left me here to wander your house all night while I kept an eye on you. Of course I had a look around the place. Nice house. Looks…happy.”

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Showered, changed, and fed more or less to Dave’s satisfaction, Hotch found himself crammed into the passenger seat of Dave’s impossibly small, expensive and somewhat pretentious sportscar. At first, they went driving in the countryside, a grin plastered on Rossi’s face as he let the car get a bit of use while Aaron did his best not to turn a bit green in the curves. Eventually though, he brought it back into town and guided it to an apartment complex.

“Why are we here?” Aaron ignored the tall building before them, focused on his friend.

“You need a new place to live. While I was waiting for you I took the liberty of making a few appointments. This one though, this one I like the sound of. We’re not too far from the house, a tiny bit closer to the base, and it is a two bedroom so you’ll have space for Jack to call his own.” When his friend still just stared at him, he added. “He’ll have a fresh room to coat in superheroes.”

Hotch remained in the car while Rossi climbed out and headed inside, assured that the younger man would follow. He thought of his son, little Jack. Jack deserved a place to spend time with his dad whenever he could. A place that was welcoming and just as much a home as the house he would return to with his mother. Finally unbuckling his seatbelt and doing a decent impression of an uncoordinated spider as he leveraged himself out, he followed Dave inside.

The apartment, a large two bedroom two bathroom unit with a bonus space he could use as an office was on the ground floor. It had been recently renovated and simply decorated. He wouldn’t need much and it was…nice. Soon enough Rossi had requested the woman who had let them in give them some time to look the place over a bit more and think on it and then the two were alone.

Shutting the door, Dave crossed back to the couch and sat down. “Come sit Aaron.”

Deciding resisting was futile, Aaron joined him on the couch.

“Last night after I turned up you mentioned some things. Haley didn’t like hearing about work?”

Staring at his folded hands, Hotch sighed. “No. At first it was just the cases themselves but after a while she didn’t want to hear about any of it. She didn’t want to know about the nightmares or how I felt about things.”

“She used sex to control you.” It was a statement, not a question.

Suddenly agitated as more of his private life being exposed, Aaron was up off the couch and heading for the nearest other room, the smaller second bedroom. He tried to think hard about when he apparently told Dave the night before but it was all a blank.

Slowly standing, Rossi followed his friend as far as the doorway. “You said something about having to beg to get laid. You said some other things too that have me maybe more than a bit
worried about you right now.” Seeing he wasn’t going to get a response, he tried a different angle. “I’ve been where you are three times. Carolyn was the worst, I truly loved her but…there were things that came between us. The job was one of them. Hayden and Krystall were… I wouldn’t say mistakes, not Hayden anyway, but my feelings for them were different than Carolyn. I wasn’t in it for the long haul.”

“And?” Aaron didn’t turn around.

“And.” He drawled. “I understand bringing home the divorce papers and trying to drink them away. But I also know that there was something a bit different about you and Haley since I’ve been back than before. Talk to me, Aaron.”

“I think…” Hotch went quiet as he gathered his thoughts and worked out what he wanted to say. “I think Haley was manipulating me into getting everything her way. I think… I think I’ve been blind to how she’s treated me for so long that I just got used to it and stopped resisting.”

“Care to elaborate on that?”

Lump in his throat, Aaron glanced over his shoulder with pained tears in his eyes.

Understanding, Rossi nodded. He knew he would have to tread carefully. “It started small? Playing on guilt to get you to do things?” He waited for a nod before continuing. “Then it turned into more?”

Aaron sat on the bed and leaned forward, elbows on his knees, hands folded and head down. He was a picture of defeated as he tried to deny the urge to find someplace else to hide. “She’d accuse me of being paranoid so often I think it came true. I started getting paranoid about being paranoid. If that isn’t just fucked up.” He drew a ragged breath. “When I had nightmares, it was like I was purposefully doing it to hurt her. She was upset I woke her or that I could wake Jack.”

“You have many nightmares?”

“Enough. More than she liked. She didn’t like me clinging to her. It…” His voice broke. “I just needed to feel someone there with me to remind myself I was home, to keep me grounded, but…” He shook his head. Sucking in another breath, he pushed on. “Looking back now, I realize… I realize…”

“Shh.” Dave finally entered the bedroom and rested his hands on Aaron’s shoulders, rubbing. “I get it. Just let it be a part of your past now.”
He stood, silent and staring as the prisoner was escorted away, leaving him alone with a rigid and seething boss. Clearly while he had been securely in “flight” mode during the events in the interview room, his boss had taken firm root in “fight” and now the agitated tension was rolling off him in waves. It was causing Spencer to start showing his own anxieties, the ones he used to display all the time being surrounded by bullies. Something he hadn’t experienced in years now. The two stood for several minutes just absorbing the silence between them until a guard walking past the open doorway snapped them back into the present.

Reid sorted and collected the files scattered across the table, righting pieces of furniture and straightening as he went. Out of the corner of his eye he watched as Hotch slowly redressed and gathered his things before moving to stand by the door and wait for Reid to finish. Silently they walked out of the prison and loaded into the SUV.

After ten minutes, Hotch gripped the wheel tight and cracked several knuckles. “I’m sorry.”

Tucking the file he was looking over away, Spencer turned and studied his friend’s profile. “Do you want to talk about it?” The only answer he got was the silence filling the vehicle as it barreled toward their hotel, being very generous with the speed limit.

Conditions hadn’t improved by the time they pulled into the hotel lot an hour later. Spencer was starting to fear the steering wheel might crack under the force being applied by Hotch’s grip. He had also taken note of the tense throbbing of muscles in the man’s jaw and the veins in his head and neck. He could just see Hotch twitching his way to a major health crisis. He pulled his own go bag out of the back seat and all but bolted out of the SUV while Hotch frowned at his phone as he remained sitting in the driver’s seat.

Leaning against the counter, Reid smiled at the woman on the other side. “Hello, I’m Agent Reid, we had rooms booked under a government rate.” He produced his ID.

She typed the name into the system and looked up. “We had a situation with one floor of our hotel and it has restricted room availability. Will a suite be sufficient?”

“A suite?”

“Yes, sir. It is made up of two rooms. A normal hotel room with a king-sized bed and then a small sitting room separated by a door. The couch folds out into a queen-sized bed. It has a small kitchenette and then the bathroom.”

Spencer chewed his lip a moment. “That should be fine.” He waited for her to print the paperwork and hand over the pair of keys. He raised a hand. “Also? Would I be able to order room service from here and just have it sent up when it’s ready?” When she nodded, he placed an order and smiled in thanks and catching her flinch in surprise at something just beyond his shoulder. Reid turned to see Hotch stalking toward them, phone in a death grip in one hand. “Got our keys Hotch.” He watched his boss turn on his heel and head for the elevators.

The woman watched Hotch stalk away. “Your boss?”

Reid smirked. “Yeah.”
“I feel sorry for you.” She took the room service sheet from him once he filled it out. “Is he always like that?”

“Hotch is like an aged scotch.”

One manicured eyebrow rose. “Can I tell him you said that?”

He barked out a laugh. “Please don’t! No, I mean, he’s an acquired taste. Takes some getting used to.”

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The ride to their room was silent. Reid barely made it into the room before Hotch was rushing past, dropping bag and briefcase by the couch and pounding buttons on his phone.

Hotch sought out the second room and shoved the door shut just as the line connected. “Haley!”

“I’m not talking about it anymore, Aaron. I don’t understand why you’re refusing to sign them, what do you think fighting this is going to gain you?”

“Can’t we please talk about it? You’re asking me to give up everything!”

“No, Aaron. I was asking you to give up this obsession with your job, to put me first. Now I’m just asking you to not fight me and let me have what I want.”

“You’re wanting everything! The house, the car, Jack…”

“It only makes sense that whoever has Jack has the house and that car was bought for me because of Jack. I’ll need it when I go to work.”

He was pacing the room in small sharp lines, anger from the day mixed with frustration over his inability to hold his personal life together. His gut churned as he felt his entire world start to slip out of his grasp. “Haley…” His body felt committed to letting go of something, one way or the other. He swallowed convulsively, sucking in a breath to try and stave off the overwhelming feeling of dread.

“I can’t come in last anymore. Sign the papers and we can do this civilly or we can go to court and it’ll work out much worse for you. Think about how a judge will look at it when you’re either having to reschedule court all the time or not showing up at all. Jack will be unavailable for visits until this is over one way or the other.” She bit out the last sentence and then disconnected the line.

Hurt and angry, Hotch gripped his phone hard for several beats before flinging it at the far wall, watching it shatter and hit the ground. “Shit!” He stared hard at the pile of busted technology until it, and everything around it, went out of focus and his ears began to ring.

In the next room, Spencer did his best to relax and settle in, having collected the room service cart when it arrived, but it was hard when he could hear Hotch edgily pacing through the door, his voice rising at odd intervals. Finally, when he heard something smash against the wall, Reid had had enough and was up and through the door. “Hotch!” He rocked back on his heels when the larger man rounded to face him, eyes burning and fists tight, his entire body tense and spoiling for confrontation.

For both men, it felt like the entire world hesitated and stopped for just a split second as the pair stared one another down. Like the universe was waiting to see what would happen next.
‘In for a penny, in for a pound’ Spencer thought to himself before crossing the room and putting himself right in Aaron’s personal space. “You really going to do it? I can see it in your eyes, you want to hit something. Someone. You have to get whatever you’ve been carrying around all day out of your system.” With every sentence, he took a step closer, causing Hotch to take a step back. They moved across the room like that, one step at a time until Hotch was literally cornered. Back to the wall, the corner of the room. Nowhere left to go. “I’m here and while I’m no Morgan, I’m a more fair fight than the average person on the street. You were begging Hardwick to throw a punch, you were intentionally antagonizing him. You went in there so worked up, so spoiling for a fight…” He cut off when Hotch’s hands, still fisted, pulled up.

Aaron’s eyes were wild, searching for something, unable to work out what the right answer was. “I need.” He gasped. It felt like he was drowning. Spencer’s words were garbled by the intense ringing in his ears. He couldn’t work out the little details in the room, it felt as though he were looking through a lens that had gone out of focus. His fists started to shake, he lifted his chin to keep his face above the water his brain told him must be overtaking him. “I need.”

Spencer was still crowded against him, watching him transform. “What do you need? Talk to me, Aaron.” With his right hand he reached out and gripped Hotch’s left bicep, setting off a powerful reaction. Faster than even Spencer’s brain could process, Hotch’s hand come up and twisted, knocking his hand loose and grabbing him, spinning him around so they were back to chest. Reid found himself pinned between the wall and a man he may have just goaded right over the brink.

With no back up nearby to intervene. Feeling Hotch’s muscles tensing around his neck, one arm still twisted to his back, Spencer pushed off with his free hand enough to unbalance them, toppling both to the floor.

In Hotch’s current state, Spencer had a feeling the outcome of the fight had to go in his favor, he had to figure out a way to get the upper hand. Experience told him Hotch had the benefit of both strength and stamina working for him. He only stayed on top for a split second before he was being ground face down into faded carpet. “Hotch!” He gasped weakly.

There was nothing but ringing now, his brain was too busy trying to protect him from drowning, forcing him to gulp air, to invest too many resources for things like vision. Hotch did his best to keep ahold of the wrist in his hand, he couldn’t let whoever it was get away. The sudden awareness that there was an odd tingling starting up in his face distracted him from his task for just a moment long enough for the person to scramble forward, knocking him to the floor.

Rolling on the floor, Spencer took off around the bed, it gave him a split second to asses Aaron’s state. What he saw worried him, the man was pale, lips white now. He suspected one way or the other the fight would be out of his friend soon enough, he just hoped to avoid any major injury between now and then. “Get it out of your system, Hotch. Is this what you need? Do you need to get the fight out?” When the other man lunged, Reid ducked over the bed and almost made it. Suddenly Spencer found himself being dragged backward, face down across the king-sized bed with a very angry Hotch hovering over him. A very small amount of fear for his own personal safety crept in. Ignoring his fear, Spencer asked. “Now what?” When no response came, he slowly rolled onto his back.

Hotch was on all fours over Spencer, eyes squeezed shut, breaths coming quickly. He had to keep fighting, but…he was losing. He reached out again, using his body weight to apply pressure to the throat of the person below him but it wasn’t enough, he couldn’t get his fingers to respond. His body was failing him too.

Spencer gasped in small bursts., matching Hotch’s desperate pants. Even without the added squeezing, Aaron was doing a good job of restricting his air flow. Reid watched as the man over
him started to crumble in on himself. When it seemed he couldn’t hold himself up anymore, Spencer pushed him to the side onto the mattress and sat up, rubbing his sore throat. This didn’t feel over, it felt more like a small release of the worst of the pent-up anger that had been building in his friend.

Looking down at the other man, Spencer could see he was still trembling, gasping, a fine sweat breaking out across all visible skin, which wasn’t much given Hotch was still fully in his suit. Reaching out again, he gently ran fingers down the side of Hotch’s face to get his attention.

Opening his eyes, Hotch blearily stared up at Reid and suddenly became aware of what he’d just been doing. He’d attacked a subordinate, someone who had trusted him. He’d sworn to himself to never cause anyone who looked up to him to fear him. He was falling apart in more ways than he realized, the thought that he could have seriously hurt Reid felt like a punch in his already twisting and rolling gut.

A sudden awareness of the fingers on his face made Aaron pulled back, horrified at what had happened. He had to get away, get out. No one could see him like this. Unsure which way to go first, he bolted for the closest door which happened to be the bathroom and closed himself in. The drowning feeling was still making his lungs burn. He gasped for air, desperate not to be overtaken by whatever was drawing him down.

Pausing a moment, Spencer tipped his head back and stared at the closed door. He could see the remains of the phone on the floor nearby. Through the door, he could hear sounds of distress. It seemed today would be the day whatever had been eating at his friend would come out. Rolling to his feet, Spencer took Aaron’s pale skin, beading with sweat and decided on a point of action. Figuring most of the fight was gone Spencer wrapped one arm around Aaron’s chest and pressed the other hand to his friend’s forehead. “Come on. Calm down, you’re okay. Nothing here is going to hurt you. You’re panicking, you need to calm your breathing before you make yourself sick.” He stayed pressed against Hotch’s back, waiting to see if he would calm on his own. When it didn’t seem like he would, Spencer pressed forward, turning on the tap on the sink and dropping the plug. “Trust me, Hotch. Trust me.” He held him tightly and dunked his face into the water for a second or two before pulling him back up. Assessing his state, he did it twice more before helping him stand upright to have a look at him.

Aaron was leaned over the sink, eyes wrenched shut, hyperventilating. Unsure where to start, Spencer took Aaron’s pale skin, beading with sweat and decided on a point of action. Figuring most of the fight was gone Spencer wrapped one arm around Aaron’s chest and pressed the other hand to his friend’s forehead. “Come on. Calm down, you’re okay. Nothing here is going to hurt you. You’re panicking, you need to calm your breathing before you make yourself sick.” He stayed pressed against Hotch’s back, waiting to see if he would calm on his own. When it didn’t seem like he would, Spencer pressed forward, turning on the tap on the sink and dropping the plug. “Trust me, Hotch. Trust me.” He held him tightly and dunked his face into the water for a second or two before pulling him back up. Assessing his state, he did it twice more before helping him stand upright to have a look at him.

Aaron kept his eyes shut, not ready to face the reality of the situation. He could feel that his hair was drenched in front and water streamed down his neck, soaking his shirt, jacket, and tie. He suddenly was aware he was still wearing his full suit. His breath felt more even but his head still felt fuzzy, like it was being deprived of oxygen. His face still had that tingly feeling. He couldn’t work out which way was up.

“Where are you at right now?”

“I’m fine.”

“I wish there was a way to erase that word from your vocabulary.” Spencer’s voice was slightly sharp.

The statement made Aaron open his eyes. “I’m better.”

Spencer nodded. “Step in the shower, the water will help you calm down. Relax.” He put his hands
on Aaron’s wet jacket collar. “May I?”

Aaron looked at him, surprised. But he nodded silently and allowed the younger man to slip his suit jacket off his arms.

Focused on the task at hand, Spencer’s long fingers moved to Aaron’s tie, loosening it and slipping it from his shirt collar. Taking his silence as permission, Spencer moved to the shirt buttons, gently slipping them through their holes all the way down to Aaron’s belt. Pausing, he moved to the cuffs before stepping back and letting Aaron pull the shirt free and drop it on the floor. “Where are you at?”

The question sounded odd, but Hotch didn’t question him. “I’m getting there.” He whispered.

Not getting any resistance, Spencer continued and knelt to finish undressing him. It was like an evening with James, quiet surrounded them both. When Hotch was completely naked, Spencer stepped back and let the other man adjust the water to the temperature he liked. He watched as his friend stepped under the spray still looking unsure and maybe a little disconnected from his surroundings before letting himself out and pulling the door shut.

Aaron let his mind drift as steaming water ran over his body. A small part of him felt better that he had before, a very small part. He tried to figure out where his life had gotten so far off the rails that he was attacking Reid, of all people, in their hotel room. And when had the younger man changed so much that being attacked in a hotel room no longer sent him cowering for cover, but instead meeting him move for move. He concentrated on slowing his breathing by pressed both palms against the cool tiles and resting his forehead between them. The water pounded on his back and neck until he felt more like himself.

Spencer was sitting on the bed waiting when Hotch emerged from the bathroom fifteen minutes later wrapped only in a towel. “How are you now?”

“I’m-” He cut himself off. “I’m going to be okay I think. I’m sorry for that.” He gestured at Spencer.

“It’s okay.”

“No. No, it’s not. I shouldn’t have done that. I don’t know what came over me.” He looked like he still wanted to fold in on himself.

One of Reid’s brows rose slowly but he didn’t comment. Instead he stood and crossed the room to a wingback chair, pulling it away from the small desk. “Sit down.” He ordered. He was surprised when, after another minute of hesitation, his boss complied. He was slightly unsure what to do next, he hadn’t really thought out what he was doing, a rare event for him, he had simply acted on what he’d learned.

Eventually he came around to stand in front of the chair, gathering his thoughts. “You always hold everything together and lately everything has been unravelling. Falling apart. And the more it unravels the tighter you squeeze but all it does is make everything fall apart faster and faster and you’re the one who ends up getting strangled. Choked up in the need to hold everything in check. For just a little while you need to give up that control to someone you can trust to not abuse it.”

Letting the words sink in, Aaron lifted his face to look up at the younger man and choked out. “What do you propose?”

“Do you trust me? I mean, I know we all trust each other on the job. We couldn’t do what we do if
we didn’t, but do you trust me here and now. Can you trust me for a bit and not ask any questions? I will explain what you need to know, but…”

Hotch continued staring up at his agent. For some reason, he felt the urge to cry out yes, he trusted him and would always trust him. Instead he swallowed and forced out an even. “Yes.”

“Umm. Dinner came up before. Let me take control for a while. I promise it will help.”

Not finding any major risks, he could always simply tell Reid he’d had enough, he agreed. “Okay.”

“Okay? Really?”

Hotch nodded.

“I have some rules.” Spencer took a deep breath, bracing himself for rejection. “Tonight, you need to take care of you. Mind, body, and spirit. No thoughts of anything except right here, right now.”

He stepped closer and applied gentle pressure to both shoulders. “Start by just sitting up straight and closing your eyes. I will get dinner laid out, are you hungry?”

Thinking a moment, Aaron looked up again. “I am actually.”

Spencer nodded. “Sit for now and I’ll go take care of it. When you’re ready, get dressed and come out to the other room. Bring a tie with you.”

“When I’m ready?”

Spencer smiled at him softly. “You’ll know. Just take your time, relax. At the risk of sounded cheesy, see if you can find something calm to focus on.”

“Okay.” He thought a second. “A tie?”

“I’ll explain when you’re out.” Spencer allowed his eyes to wander for a brief moment, instantly memorizing the look of his boss wearing just a towel, before leaving, pulling the door shut behind him.

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Five minutes later, Hotch was stepping up to the table wearing lounge pants and a gray T-shirt, barefoot. He had a dark red tie draped over one hand.

“Sit over there.” Reid pointed to the seat with its back to the room. The seat opposite the one Hotch would habitually take.

Not sure in this weird alternate reality if he was allowed to balk at the instruction, or if he even wanted to, Hotch moved to sit where he was instructed.

Spencer leaned in and lifted the tie from Hotch’s hand. He drew on what he’d learned. “I’m going to blindfold you while we eat. I want you to simply concentrate on the act of eating. No need to try and carry a conversation or follow any normal social rules. Simply take your time and eat. I’ve already moved your water out of the way so you won’t bump it, if you would like a drink you may ask, but otherwise don’t try to talk.”

Hotch stumbled as he processed that instruction, thankful Reid was aware enough to re-steady him. Soon enough he was taking careful bites of pasta primavera and salad. The meal was lighter than he would have ordered for himself but perfect for his turmoiled stomach. The silence allowed
him to focus on the task as hand. When he asked for a drink, he was a bit surprised when Reid
guided the glass to his hand for him to manage on his own. Once the meal was complete, Hotch
waited to find out what Reid had up his sleeve next.

“We’re going to just sit for a bit and digest. The quiet will be good for us both after the day we’ve
had. Just relax and in a few minutes we’ll move away from the table.”

At first the silence wasn’t a big deal. After what felt like thirty minutes, it started to press in on
him. He tried to count and then recite facts and figures he knew. He spent some time with his
head rested back in the chair and some time with his toes tapping out a pattern on the carpet. He
wasn’t used to this much prolonged inactivity. He finally let his mind wander back to the events of
the day. He’d been spoiling for a fight long before they’d arrived at the prison that morning.
Conversations between he and Haley that morning had also dissolved into her shouting at him for
refusing to accept the inevitable. He hadn’t been all that surprised really when he’d learned Haley
had called JJ to get to him. Haley knew he never ignored a call from one of his team and the calls
from JJ at all hours, not to mention time spent at the office sequestered together going over cases,
had been a favorite accusation to throw at him.

He thought back to the first time he’d introduced the pair at a team dinner, back when a good part
of the team wasn’t single. Haley had taken one look at the young blonde, heard how she would be
working directly with Hotch, and had instantly taken a dislike to her. When their marriage started
to crumble around them, Haley had decided he was having an affair. That sudden turn of
accusations coincided with what Hotch suspected was the start of Haley’s own affair, not that he
would ever bring up his suspicions to her. Short of catching Haley in bed with another man there
was no way Hotch ever would say anything against her. He’d put her through enough.

Spencer was reclined on the sofa now. He watched Hotch fidget and fuss in his seat. When it
finally became clear that he wouldn’t be able to take much more, he spoke. “It’s time for bed; I’m
going to help you get ready.”

“The blindfold isn’t coming off?” He could hear fabric rustling as Spencer got up and approached
him.

“Would you like to take it off? There isn’t anything saying you have to leave it on. I just thought
giving up a little control would help you find some way to find- I don’t know- your footing-
again.”

The room was pressed back into silence. Hotch considered for a minute whether he wanted to
remain vulnerable with his subordinate or if he wanted to return to being in charge. “Leave it on.”
He answered softly.

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Sunlight coming through the window made Hotch squint in his sleep and bury his face into the
covers. Awareness was slow in coming. His first coherent thought was that he hadn’t slept that
soundly in months. The next was the realization that he was no longer blindfolded. Rolling onto
his back in the king size bed, he blinked up at the plain white ceiling a minute. Somehow the
previous evening of letting go just that little bit had allowed him to relax enough to sleep.

Motion at the bottom of his peripheral vision made him turn his head. He silently watched Reid
slip through the room and into the bathroom, doing his best not to wake him. When he slipped
back out, Hotch made himself known. “Good morning.”

Spencer froze a moment. “Good morning?” He twisted his pajamas in his hands. “How are you?”
Pushing himself up on his elbows, he thought a moment. “Good.”

Nodding, he edged toward the door. “That’s good. I’ll let you get ready.” The confident man from before seemed to be gone as he scurried back into the other room, pulling the door closed behind him.

Hotch took a deep cleansing breath and slid to the edge of the bed, putting his feet on the carpeted floor. He understood theoretically why the simple exercise they had done the evening before had calmed him like it had, he’d just never expected it to work for him. He thought he would have been able to out think the process.

As he went through his morning routine, he tried to find that anger he was full of the day before, but couldn’t seem to find it. The sadness was there, the rawness of everything that he’d been going through, but the anger was gone. It’d felt nice to allow someone else to be in control for a few hours.

Stepping into the other sleep space he found Reid on the couch, feet on the coffee table, coffee in one hand and a book in the other. “I grabbed both of us coffee from downstairs. They only have bagels and questionable bananas so I figured if you wanted we could hit up a diner or something before we get on the road.”

It seemed whatever that had been the night before had gone away and they were back in their normal roles. It made Aaron’s head spin a tiny bit as he realized Spencer wasn’t going to keep pushing boundaries, there didn’t appear to be any hint of a play for power. Hotch nodded in agreement, taking the offered steaming cup and sipping at it. Wincing at the heat, he glanced at the clock. “Are you wanting to go ahead and leave now or?”

“I can leave whenever you want.” He studied his boss directly a minute. “You know… You can talk to me any time. Some of the others talk to me. I guess they figure I don’t have anyone else really to betray their trust to except my mom maybe.”

Hotch felt his brows raise slightly, knew Reid wouldn’t miss the surprise, no matter how miniscule. Deciding to push forward while they were still in the hotel room, he sat across the table from Reid, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. “How did you know that would help?” When he saw the red creep up the younger man’s neck he added. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. I’m just surprised you helped me like that. Where did you learn that?”

“Some time ago I was introduced to a way to relieve stress.” He chewed his lip a minute, unsure how revealing this would change how Hotch saw him. “At work, I’m not the alpha male, not the one busting down doors or intimidating people. All my life growing up I was the weakest, the youngest. Sure, I was the smartest, but it didn’t really mean anything outside of the classroom. Pe-A person who understood what that was like introduced me to a way to switch it up and get all that built-up emotion out of my system. She helped me learn to work through letting cases go. She said I needed to find my thing. I’m just surprised you helped me like that. Where did you learn that?”

“Have you ever considered…” Reid let the question trail off until he caught the questioning look watching him. “I was going to ask if you’ve ever considered a Dom/sub relationship? I know a lot of what we see tends to be the extreme, non-consensual end, but that’s not really what it’s about. It’s not how it was intended to be.”
“I know that. I’m already called a bully, I don’t think something like that would change things. It would be more of the same just in a different setting.”

“No, I meant.” He sat his cup on the table. “I meant as a sub.” He studied his boss. “Think about it. That’s essentially what you were last night. I have one person who acts as a sub for me when I need it and one person who has been a Domme and she has been teaching me. Both are strictly platonic.”

“I’d never thought about it before.” He studied the lid of his cup and decided to change the topic for now. “We should get going, it’s a long drive back.”

Accepting the change of subject for what it blatantly was, he answered, “Yeah.”

==

The short ride to the diner was in silence, neither was willing to break it until fresh mugs of coffee landed on the table between them. Aaron twisted his paper napkin in his hands. “Looking back.” He drew in a deep breath. “Looking back, I realize that maybe what Haley and I had stopped being healthy along the way.”

Spencer’s eyes widened. “Maybe?” Dark brown eyes snapped to meet his. “I’m sorry. I’ve had the benefit of being on the outside the whole time and it’s a different view from the one you’ve had.”

“She’s been seeing someone for…” He shrugged. “Months at least, probably more. I’ve tried to think back to when things changed, it was before Jack.”

Reid studied his friend across the table. He looked tired, worn. Even with a full night’s sleep he looked like he needed more. “Can I say some things?”

Aaron wanted to say no. “Sure.”

He hesitated, straightening his silverware and moving his mug to the side. “From the outside it… Haley was abusive. Maybe not physically, but definitely emotionally.” He watched Aron’s face. “And maybe verbally?” He could see tears start to form in his friend’s eyes. “I don’t know for how long but… You mentioned once she had rules for something. What other rules were there?”

Aaron could feel a lump forming in his throat. “I just wanted to make her happy. I was always willing to do about anything to make her happy. I would come home from a case and wanted to make her happy from the moment I hit the door.”

Spencer tipped his head to one side, studying. Finally, he softly asked. “Was she as committed to doing things while you were home that made you happy?”

“I- I don’t know.”
Dave hovered in the office doorway studying his longtime friend. A month ago he was worried Aaron was on the verge of truly lashing out inappropriately, but aside from a succession of very minor incidents, as far as he was aware no such eruption ever occurred. Unless it occurred away from work. But the man was very rarely away from work these days.

Something changed recently. Garcia was still jumpy and on edge at the slightest hint of a mood swing from the boss she held in such high regard, but Reid…wasn’t. He wasn’t avoiding him, so he doubted whatever happened involved the younger agent, he was just going about his normal work. It was almost odd in its lack of oddity.

And Hotch was different in recent weeks. More…even. Sure, the tiredness he was sure his friend felt often was more visible, but the mood swings and off-ness were gone. He wasn’t as easily angered, but he almost seemed not as easily made happy either.

Finally deciding he wasn’t going to get any answers holding up the door jamb, he strolled inside. “Hey.”

Hotch looked up at him, his forehead wrinkling in confusion as he glanced out into the bullpen. “What time is it?”

“Ah, a little after six, still early enough to be acceptable, but everyone’s gone home. Are you about done?” Rossi settled into one of the guest chairs, crossing his ankles and folding his hands.

Aaron sat back in his seat, tossing his pen on the desk. “Not really. I saw you watching me, what is it?”

“I’ve been worried about you lately. For a while I thought we might have an incident on our hands, you’ve been abrupt on the verge of unprofessional on a couple cases. You even have the young ones jittery.”

He closed his eyes and leaned his head back, not saying anything.

“I’m guessing your foul mood had something to do with Haley leaving and filing for divorce? I get it, Aaron, remember?”

Cracking his eyes open, he knew he couldn’t outright lie to Dave. “I was upset, angry, frustrated. I’m sorry if it affected the team. I tried really hard to hold it all together, but…”

“I was waiting for Volcano Hotch, was calculating potential fallout in every moment. But suddenly you’re calmer. And as far as I’m aware that eruption never happened, not at work anyway.” An unsettling thought crossed his mind suddenly. “Did something happen not at work? With Jack or Haley?”

“I would never hurt them!” Hotch sat up straight, hands on the wood surface before him.

Dave opened his mouth to respond but stopped before answering. “It’s interesting that you automatically jumped to defending the thought that you might hurt them.”

“Don’t profile me.” Hotch snapped.

Raising his hands to calm his friend, he pressed on. “Something happened then to make you aware
of how you have been feeling and how it’s been making you behave.” When the only reply was a continued glare, he sighed. “You’ve almost swung the other way recently. Nothing bothers you at all, but I’ve noticed nothing makes you blindingly happy like I know you are capable of.”

“I have everything under control, Dave.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“Is that all? I would like to get this file done before I leave.”

Rossi nodded and stood. “I’m always here, Aaron. No matter what.”

==

Aaron poured another mug of coffee as he waited for the team to arrive back at the office. He’d just walked through the door at home when an urgent case came in in Texas and he was back out the door again. As soon as he’d arrived home, he’d taken medicine prescribed by the psychiatrist he’d started seeing after the incident with Reid. The incident had scared him into awareness of how his mental state could, and would, start affecting others. So he sucked up his pride and sought help. And when the doctor encouraged him to accept a prescription for anxiety and another for sleeplessness, to help things become more manageable, he’d sucked that up too.

But now he was back at the office with the drug in his system and things were a bit fuzzier than he’d liked. The coffee was helping in short bursts to clear his head, he just had to get through the meeting and then he wouldn’t have to think for a few hours.

The flight to Texas ended up being a mixture of insomnia from his brain running so fast over what-ifs, and maybe some from the drugs, to nausea every time the jet hit turbulence. He was never so thankful to arrive at the other end.

==

He stared at the board without really focusing on it. Out of the corner of his eye he could make out Reid agitatedly twitching at the desk. Something was eating at the younger man, something beside the case. He just couldn’t work out what that was. His brain still felt as foggy as his vision tried to be. Since landing he’d switched from coffee to water, hoping it would help on several levels.

Deciding on a necessary course of action, Aaron turned around to the others in the room. “I think we need to head to the hotel for two hours. Eat, clean up, nap if you can. We’ve been looking at this all night, we all need to step away and come back.” He waited until several agents nodded before gathering his things and heading out.

In his own hotel room, Aaron stretched out across the bed. His head felt clearer now, but his stomach felt worse. He’d always had a sensitive stomach, stress had given him an ulcer more than once in his life. He’d gotten used to carrying something to help settle it, but a mixture of sleepless nights, bad coffee, and his new medicine felt like it was all eating away at the lining of his stomach faster than ever before. He tried not to think about the swirling, aching feeling rolling inside him, but trying not to think about it just made him think about it more. He tried laying perfectly still, hoping not moving at all would calm the storm brewing in his gut. Eventually it became urgently and painfully obvious that wasn’t going to work and Aaron found himself knelt in the small bathroom thankful he didn’t have a roommate to witness his falling apart.

After what felt like an eternity, he stumbled back into the main room in search of his toothbrush. He could feel a headache creeping on and hoped that everything else with the case would go
smoothly.

==

The case finally over and Owen securely in jail, Spencer stormed into his hotel room and slammed the door before tossing himself bodily onto the bed with a petulant huff. This whole case no one seemed to get it, if ever a case made him feel out of control, this topped the list. Angry without a place to vent, he rolled onto his back and glared at the ceiling until his phone rang. Not checking the ID, he snapped. “Yes?” There was a pause and for a brief second he wondered if he’d just snapped at Hotch for what would likely be his last time and then wondered if he really cared.

“Oh-ho-ho, I have been hearing exactly how you’ve been doing but that does not mean you can snap at me Boy Wonder.”

Reid deflated. “I’m sorry, Garcia. I’m just… at every turn it was like people were making excuses for allowing the things that caused Owen to end up lashing out like he did. I know how he felt, how he feels.”

“And you thought no one else on the team understood that?”

“I…”

“Look, we’ll talk when you get back, okay. After, you know, Bossman rips you a few new ones.”

He pushed up on the bed. “A few? You’ve spoken to him?”

Garcia grinned even though she knew he couldn’t see. “I may have gotten a call recently and I may or may not have gotten you a stay of execution until he’s had a full night’s sleep. He sounded a bit distracted, in another person I would have called it loopy, but he said he’d had a headache all day and didn’t get any sleep. Now, this call is meant to give you a head’s up and remind you that no matter how you felt, you, my dear, fucked up. Big time.” Her tone softened as she shifted to the more personal. “I know you got called out of that new meeting, I’m sorry for that. Were you able to tell if that place will help?”

“I, um, I think so? I met someone, I think they’ll be my sponsor. They loaned me their one year coin until I earn mine and at first I didn’t get it but, but I think I’m starting to.”

“Well, you need your sleep too so you can look appropriately chagrined on the jet tomorrow. Go sleep now Genius One. We’ll talk more when you’re home.”

“Good night, Pen.”

“Night.”

==

Stepping onto the plane, Hotch found his preferred seat and waited for everyone else to arrive. He’d come early so he could work on getting paperwork finished and it wasn’t like he’d actually been able to sleep in his room. There was no way he could take the sleeping pills his doctor had also prescribed while on a case or travelling with the team. Soon enough the others all piled in and Dave joined him at the small table, away from the others.

“Are you going to have a talk with Reid?”

“I have to. I don’t have a choice. What he did was reckless and dangerous. He has to know I won’t
accept him acting out like that again.”

“But?”

Aaron sighed deeply. “But I have to make sure not to overstep. I can’t say anymore.”

“Well, good luck. He puts on a show, but he likes you, go a little easy. Remember what you used to feel like when you stood up to me.”

“I never acted out like he did.”

Dave stood to join the poker game. “Are you sure about that?”

Frowning as his friend walked away, Hotch looked around for his youngest agent. They still hadn’t talked about anything not work related since that night in the hotel. Surprisingly, Reid didn’t seem on edge about it. Folding his things away, Hotch swallowed down the burning feeling in his chest and moved to where Spencer sat.

==

Garcia waited until Spencer fumbled his way into his apartment after his meeting before going over and letting herself in. “Howdy neighbor.”

He waved silently and poured a second glass of orange juice before following her to the couch. “Before we get to the conversation I’m sure is coming, can we talk about something else first?”

“Sure.”

“How long… How long were you active in the kink stuff before you invited someone new into it? Someone who’d never considered it before I mean.”

She thought a minute. “I’m not sure. A while I guess. Why? Are you wanting to invite someone in?”

He frowned at his drink. “I think I already did.”

Penelope’s eyes lit up. “Really? Who was it? Tell me about them! What’d you say? What’d he say?”

“Uhh…” He trailed off, unsure what to say without betraying anything he shouldn’t. “He was having a panic attack and I was there and somehow slipping into my role, the role I take as a Dom, helped me help him. The next morning I sort of asked him if he’d ever considered it.” He shrugged.

“Wait, the next morning? You spent the night with him?” Her grin made his cheeks hurt.

“But you’ve slept with him a different time?”

“Not in the way you’re thinking, no.” He shook his head. “He, umm, he came over one night and ended up crawling into my bed with me. It wasn’t, you know, sexual or anything, he just wanted to…cuddle I guess?”

She studied him closely “Hmm. I will have to pick that apart later. So, you asked him, what did he say?”
“That he’d never thought about it before. He hasn’t said anything since and it’s been…a while.”

“But he didn’t say no outright, right?”

“No, he didn’t.”

She reached around him in a one-armed hug. “Well, that has to mean he’s at least considering it.”

“You think so?”

“I do.”

==

Stepping into his apartment once again after his last aborted attempt at coming home, Hotch tucked his bags in the corner by the washer and headed for his bedroom to change into more comfortable clothes. Once done, he tipped a sleeping pill into his palm and washed it down with some water from the bathroom sink. He knew he should eat, but he wasn’t really hungry, he could wait until he’d had a decent sleep. He had just pulled back the blankets, feeling darkness creeping in, when someone knocked at his door. Grumbling, he went to investigate.

Dave waited for the apartment door to open. “How are you?”

“Dave. We just saw each other less than an hour ago.” He held tight to the door handle to balance himself against the pull of the pill he’d taken. “It’s late, can this wait till morning?” The door swung open a half inch, throwing off his balance and causing him to sway and have to step back to catch myself.

Rossi rushed forward, unsure what was going on but not wanting to see his friend hurt. “What’s wrong?” He was sharper this time, really looking at the younger man. “Are you sick?” He felt concern begin to bubble up and he pushed the door shut and helped Aaron stumble to the couch.

“I’m okay. I jus’ need sleep.” He slurred. “It’s okay, Dave.”

“You’re not okay, have you been drinking?” Dave looked around for signs of a glass, but found none. And Hotch couldn’t have been home all that long. “I need an answer, what’s going on?”

Aaron grinned up at the blurry haze that was his friend. “I’ll be okay, I just need to float away, I’ll be back in a while, back with a smile.” His suddenly bleary eyes slid shut as he continued to grin.

Dear lord, now he’s rhyming, Dave thought to himself. Somehow that tiny proof Aaron’s brain was still ticking away in there made him feel a very tiny bit better. He leaned over the taller man who was now sprawled over the couch. “Hey, don’t fall asleep on me yet. What’s going on? Are you on something?”

“Something, everything.” He went quiet, Dave assumed he’d fallen asleep. Five minutes ticked by, every second marked by the tick of the clock on the wall, and the Aaron rolled over and groaned, one hand rubbing at his stomach.

“Aaron?”

Hotch blinked his eyes open. “Dave?” His voice sounded raw. “When did you get here?”

Both eyebrows shot up to his hairline. “You let me in maybe ten minutes ago. You don’t remember?”
“No.” Hotch pulled a face brought on by pain. “Excuse me.” He did his best to get up from the couch and try to walk himself to his bedroom. After knocking into the table, Dave hurried to his side to help him.

“Where are we going here, Aaron?”

“I’m okay. I can do it.” He tried to push his friend away.

“I doubt that so talk to me.”

“I just, umm, the bathroom. I’m okay.”

“Yeah. It shows.” He helped Aaron to the bathroom and then backed out, pulling the door almost closed as he moved back to the living room to give the man some privacy.

Hotch stared at his bathroom a minute, trying to remember why he was there, then another pain shot through his stomach, forcing a groan out and him searching for relief.

A half hour went by before Dave heard Aaron emerge from the bathroom. When the man never reappeared in the living room, he went looking. He found Aaron asleep in bed, a sheen of sweat on his forehead but no other signs of the distress from before. He was worried about him; he’d never seen Hotch look so out of it before without significant amounts of alcohol being involved. Deciding that being nosey was worth the risk, he stepped into the master bathroom and looked around. A small orange bottle caught his eye so he picked it up. Suddenly things were a little clearer.

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Dave woke to the sound of someone moving around just out of view. Lifting up on one elbow, he peered over the back of the couch he had been asleep on and watched his friend fumble with things on the desk, clearly trying to find something. After a minute Hotch sat at the desk chair and took two tries to turn on the desk lamp and another three to pick up a pen. It was about as amusing as it was worrying. Exactly what was he trying to write? Dave got up and crossed the open space. Case files. Of course, what else. Somewhere between drunk and sleepwalking and the man was trying to work. Taking note that he didn’t seem aware someone was standing beside him, Rossi tugged the file away and replaced it with blank paper. He watched, amused, as Hotch hunched over and began to fill the sheets with his even, though somewhat illegible, tight script. Leaving him to it, Dave decided it would be a great story in the morning and went back to his temporary bed.

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Spencer rolled onto his back and stared at his ceiling. Sleep was elusive when his mind was busy; it had always been a curse for him. He couldn’t get parts of the last case out of his head. Mainly, the parts where he’d interacted with Hotch. The way the man gripped his arm to rein him in, the reassuring pat to the shoulder that ended with that slight squeeze the let him know he was there for him. He’d never really paid attention to their interactions before; they just always had been a part of how the status quo was. But Hotch had always been kinder, gentler in a way he wasn’t with others.

The night in the hotel had played over in his mind for a week before he convinced himself he was just reading too much into it. There had been times with James that their play had gotten him aroused. Reid had found the power and absolute trust James showed him very arousing at times. Especially when it came to the caretaking part of their time together. Arousal had been a subject the pair had agreed to simply ignore. But that night in the hotel, Reid had been surprised to find watching his superior eating blindfolded, sitting completely trusting in him, arousing. He’d been
thankful in the bathroom that Hotch had been too distraught to notice him starting to get hard in his slacks and thankful again that he had managed to will it away before he stepped out, but at the table had been an entirely different animal. He had had to adjust himself to hide the bulge and after the older man had retired for the night, had recited every book he could remember to get it to go away.

Tonight, alone in his room, was a different story. Thinking of Aaron, damp from his shower and only wrapped in a towel, he felt his dick start to twitch. Not seeing the harm in a little indulgence, he shimmied his sleep shorts down and let his knees fall open. He thought of Hotch kneeling in the playroom, naked and bound. His fingers teased his length as he imagined using a variety of toys on him. He wondered if Aaron would have the control to keep his body calm or if he would need to use a cock cage or maybe even a ring to keep him from coming just from the stimulation. His hand sped up as his mind’s eye provided images of Hotch arched with the pleasure/pain as his thick dick jutted out at attention, untouched. He bucked against his own hand as he imagined being able to get the older man off without ever touching him and then he came all over his own hand and his imagined Hotch doing the same across the playroom floor.

Rolling to a seated position, Spencer had a single thought. He was so screwed.

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Hotch winced as he sat up, his neck and head killing him. He was confused, how had he ended up sleeping at his desk all night? He stiffly pushed himself up and stumbled toward his bedroom to shower and get dressed, mentally cursing the drugs his doctor prescribed.

Dave rolled over as he woke up, taking a minute to reorient himself to his surroundings. He’d spent the night on Aaron’s couch, keeping an eye on his friend. Curious, he stood and wandered to the desk, keeping an eye out for Aaron as he went. On the desk in Aaron’s tight script was a full page of writing. Much of it was incoherent rambling, but one line about a quarter of the way down stood out. The name Spencer caught his eye first. It thanked Spencer for holding him and taking care of him. That was it, no elaborating. It was sort of an odd statement for Aaron to make and it was clear Dave was missing the context. Deciding to look into it more later, Dave folded the paper neatly and tucked it into his pocket just as Aaron appeared from his bedroom.

Halfway up the short hallway, Hotch looked up. “Dave? What are you doing here?” He looked around, confused about what happened the night before.

“You don’t remember me showing up?”

“Oh, no. I’m sorry.” He crossed to the kitchen to start coffee. “I don’t remember anything.”

“I got here after you maybe took some sleeping pills? You were a bit out of it so I stayed. I was worried. As far as ending up asleep at your desk, now.” He grinned. “You woke up and decided to work on files from the office. I managed to keep you from writing in the actual files and left you to scribble on plain paper, you must have dozed off again.” He watched Hotch make the coffee and sit across from where he stood at the counter. “How long have you been on them?”

“Huh?”

Dave gave him an incredulous look.

“A few weeks, not that I can take them very often. I won’t take them with Jack around, or on a case obviously. I do generally feel more rested after a night of taking one though.”
“Well, it’s good they’re helping. I worry about you.”
James exhaled and let his head fall back. He was lying on the low bed this time as Spencer knelt beside him with a small ceramic cup in his hand. When his Master had inquired about cupping, James had smiled. It was something he was familiar with though people rarely wanted to take part in such a thing. But he’d worked out over their collective times together that his Master was a scientist, always curious, and he knew he could trust him.

Spencer carefully pressed the last hot cup onto James’ back and stood up. He’d opted to stay away from the toys today that would leave marks, he wanted the bruising from the cups to be the only blemishes on the other man’s body. He had instead played with feathers and soft silks, teasing the skin alive.

He couldn’t help comparing the body of the man in front of him with the body that had been popping up in his dreams recently. The fact that the two men were roughly the same height and of similar build didn’t help his urge to imagine it was Aaron he was doing these things to. Two months had gone by since that night and Spencer was beginning to think the lack of response was an answer in itself. He was embarrassed to have admitted to Hotch, his boss, that he was a Dom. It felt weird, wrong, like he was doing something bad. The older man hadn’t treated him any differently though, so maybe he didn’t share Spencer’s feelings on the subject.

==

Aaron got one look at the photos the DA was showing them and knew what the case was about. He didn’t need to hear any more. As the woman spoke, he couldn’t help but hearing the voice in his head that was shouting Not all abuse is visible! The DA had looked for witnesses, but Aaron understood that an abuser always made sure there were no witnesses and sometimes the victim did too.

A glance to Dave and they silently agreed to stick around in Boston and have a look into the case. He just couldn’t shake the feeling that this wasn’t going to have the ending the DA wanted.

==

Rossi listened closely to what Garcia told them, how an adult woman and mother of two had absolutely no records whatsoever. And the DA’s office hadn’t found that…suspect? It was a screaming red flag to him that something was amiss. Even the most submissive of women these days still expected a small amount of autonomy, independence. This woman couldn’t even go for a coffee on her own, what with no job, no transportation, no income. On paper, it was apparent she was a prisoner to her husband. It gave him an uncomfortable feeling, that a man would treat a woman in such a way. If the man hadn’t already been the recipient of a point blank twelve-gauge shotgun blast, Dave had a feeling he would have been sharing a few private words with the man about how a woman should be treated. And this wasn’t it.

==

Dave had always been impressed with how Hotch interacted with others in the course of their job. It was one of the first things that had caught his attention about the young agent. He had watched still-green Hotch intimidate and goad unsub until they would talk, always seeming to know just which button to press, which nerve would set off a torrent of damning responses. And then the man, for all his size, could curl down small and appear so non-threatening, so compassionate. Women, children, in their darkest hours would be willing to turn to him, open up and relive the
worst part of their lives and feel safe.

Aaron Hotchner was always good at reading people. It had made him a star as a junior agent. Dave had wondered early on just where that skill had come from, it’s why he’d pressed for answers years ago. It was also why he didn’t question when instead of soft compassion for the two teens who just lost their parents permanently, in one form or another, he took a harder edge. Something must have tipped him off that even Dave hadn’t caught. Dave, wise enough to read his friend, adjusted accordingly.

Hotch watched the siblings’ body language closely. They were upset, angry even, and that was understandable. One of their parents had just murdered the other. But he would have expected they would want to cling to their mother, even defend her despite what she did. It would have been normal. What wasn’t normal was their willingness to speak so poorly of their own mother, even at a time like this. He knew if his own mother had done something like that to his father, no matter his feelings for her about allowing the torment, the abuse, he would have fought to protect her from outsiders. It would have been instinctual. As the teens spoke, it became more and more clear just how pervasive the abuse had been, the children had taken on their father’s views.

He wondered how much Jack heard. How much he would remember of how Haley spoke to him. Would she still speak of him, to him, the same way now that they were divorced? Would he grow up thinking his father didn’t love him, didn’t care? A hand landing on his shoulder brought him back to the present and he looked up. They were alone now and Dave had a look of concern on his face. “Sorry, was just thinking.”

“Are you sure you want to keep pressing this?”

“I’m fine.” Hotch stood and made sure he had everything. “I just… I’m fine.”

Holding the door, Dave waited for Aaron to exit first. “I’m right here. You just have to talk.”

==

They were pouring over the file, trying to catch something that looked like dinner. Dave had a feeling he’d nearly stepped in it by insinuating, accidentally, that Aaron hadn’t tried, for Jack, to make the marriage work. He was thankful his friend was easily forgiving of things like that. Maybe too much so sometimes. He had a feeling this serious moment was about to lead to something profound, if he could keep his foot out of his mouth a little longer. “Everyone has their breaking point, Aaron.” He watched the man across from him nod, eyes downcast. “Haley found hers with your job. Maybe you found yours somewhere too?”

Aaron was staring at the photo of the now shattered family. “I wonder if people look at our photos and see the happy we were going for or the secrets we were trying to hide.”

“Secrets who was trying to hide?”

He chewed his lip. “Me I guess. The secret of what I failure I was at being a husband and a father. I tried. So, so hard I tried, but no matter what I did, I…” He trailed off, staring again at the picture. “I envy her.” He chuckled coldly. “How twisted is that?”

Dave sat up straight, focused now. “What do you mean, you envy her?”

“Her husband put her through hell for years, taught her own children to hate her and to treat her the same way. He was probably sexually abusing her too, if they were even being intimate at all anymore. She finally got up the nerve to find a permanent resolution to the awful situation she was
living in. I get it. I envy her ability to pull that trigger.” He said it softly, almost to himself.

Dave’s eyes had narrowed as his friend spoke. “Aaron? Aaron!” Finally, dark brown eyes met his. “I think you need to start talking.” Whatever serious conversation he felt looming moments ago was gone, replaced with a small amount a panic and a whole gut-full of worry.

“Huh?” He looked confused for a moment. “Oh. It’s nothing.”

“You can’t drop a statement like that in my lap and not start talking. You’re envious of a woman who shot her abusive husband? That means you wish you could have done the same. Or wish you could do it still.” He was a moment from pulling age over official rank and hauling Hotch somewhere for intervention that Dave couldn’t, wouldn’t try to, manage on his own.

“I don’t. Why would I want to take Jack’s mother from him? She’s the one who’s practically raised him while I’ve always been gone or been too busy. I listened to those kids talk about their mother, how much of a failure their father convinced them she was. How they believed she was. I don’t want Jack to think of me as a failure too.”

“You really believe that.” Dave was frozen in place. The words rolled out so effortlessly that it was clear they looped through his mind regularly. He seemed to truly believe them.

“What?”

“That you’re not as important to him as she is. I need you to be very honest with me about your relationship with Haley. Starting now. What happened? How long had it been going on?”

“I don’t know when it started, Dave. Suddenly there was a day where if I wasn’t willing to go out with her as soon as I hit the door, if I was tired or something, then I didn’t want to spend time with her and that meant I didn’t love her anymore. I don’t know if the change was slow, but suddenly I either wasn’t committed enough or I was paranoid or being disruptive. And the punishment was to be sent to the guest room or ignored for days or…” He shrugged. “Breaking any of the rules was met with retribution and somewhere along the line the rules increased and the reactions if I broke them did too.

“Rules?”

“She hated me wearing my guns. Or going to the range. Or cleaning them. If I did, I was paranoid. If I came home from work and forgot to take them off as soon as I got in, I was paranoid. If I wasn’t paranoid, I was trying to avoid her. And that meant I was having an affair, usually with a team member. If I was late home, she accused me of being out with a woman. If I wasn’t in the mood for sex when she was, it had to be because of an affair. She hated that I would take JJ’s calls without hesitation but at work wouldn’t necessarily take hers.

A few times she brought me a meal at work and I wasn’t allowed to eat with the team, we had to sit alone in my office. She would complain about me going out with the team.”

“Is that all?”

Hotch shook his head. “At home it alternated between I was too needy, or her personal favorite was I was like the pervs we chase.”

“In what way?”

He blushed red now. “She only allowed sex in the bedroom. On the bed. Anything else was an example of me being perverted. It seemed to get better for a while and then it got even worse.”
“When did it get better?” Dave tapped his pen on the table.

“Before Jack…” He thought about it for the first time. “When she was trying to get pregnant with Jack.”

“When she was trying? But you both wanted kids.”

“Yeah. I just wasn’t aware we were trying.”

“That’s…” He wanted to say it was wrong, manipulative. The lack of consent, never mind that Hotch would have given it, said something of the woman’s mindset. Deciding that finishing that thought would only make it look like he hated the woman, Dave went on. “And it got worse? How could it have gotten worse?”

“A few times we got going and, umm,” The conversation had turned awkward for him, “she finished and then went to tend to Jack and left me…alone.”

“But she came back.” Surely, he thought to himself.

“No. She said Jack didn’t understand that he’d have to wait while I had a quickie.” His blush crept higher.

“So, what? She got to get off having sex and you had to resort to masturbation a few times?” These things didn’t bother Dave like they did Aaron, especially when it was a personal discussion. He caught the slight shake of Aaron’s head. “No? What, was that a rule too?” The head nodded.

Throat dry, Dave swallowed. “Aaron… Why didn’t you say something?”

“What was I supposed to say? That my wife was being abusive and manipulative and probably gaslighting me? Would you have believed me that that could have been happening to me?”

“Yes.” He saw Hotch’s surprise. “No one is immune to being treated badly. It probably started small and maybe even innocent until she realized your guilt at not being the perfect husband would play in her favor.” He thought a minute. “Perhaps her filing for divorce was for the best then.”

“How?” The conversation was leaving him feeling raw and more than a little exposed.

“I doubt we’re hitting on every part of what she’s done. If this is the part you’re willing to admit to, Aaron, then you needed out.”

“I loved her! I still love her. The absolute crazy thing is…” He rubbed his face with his hands. “If she would ask to give us a second chance? I’d do it in a heartbeat. I have been head over heels for her since I was seventeen years old. I have spent twenty years wanting to do almost anything to make her happy no matter what, even if I somehow lost something in the process. Sometimes even if that something was my dignity or my friends.” He raised his head enough to study Rossi from beneath his brows.

“There was a time with each of my wives when I felt the same way. I think with Carolyn it lasted a lot longer. There were certain aspects where it even lasted after our divorce.” He chewed his lip a minute, debating his words. “I need you to promise me something.”

“What?”

“I need you to promise me that if that thought ever creeps into your head.” He leaned over the table and tapped a crime scene photo. “This one, or anything like it, you call me. Or come to my house.
Kick the door in if you must. If something has pushed you into a situation where you are upset and feel trapped, I want to hear it. Can you promise me that?”

“Dave…”

“No! You promise now. Or I’ll have to report that I feel you’re unfit to act as chief right now.” He knew it was playing dirty and he didn’t want to give Strauss any ammo, but something had to be said on the matter.

After several moments of silence, Hotch frowned. “Okay. I promise.”

“Good. Now. When are we talking to the wife?”

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The interview felt like it was going to be cut and dry to Dave, right up until she cut herself off about saying she deserved being abused. Then a small fizzle of something dawned on him. She knew murder was wrong, knew she shouldn’t have done it, but deep in her psyche she had been brainwashed, convinced of what her husband believed. Even in denying being abused, she was a perfect example of the abuse that left no physical marks. It took all of the effort he had not to turn and stare at Hotch seated beside him. When she began to talk about why she didn’t go to events, to support her children, he couldn’t resist anymore and exchanged a look with Aaron. He hoped his eyes conveyed an understanding he didn’t quite have in their earlier conversation

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As they collected their things to leave Boston and fly home, Dave didn’t talk much. This case, and the conversations that took place, have given him a new perspective on his friend. The flight, commercial and uncomfortable, had been crowded and short, no place for a heart to heart conversation. This wasn’t a time to try and corner Aaron and push him to talk. In an airplane full of strangers Dave knew he would just shut down completely.

Back on base, Hotch had vanished almost as soon as the SUV had stopped, returning to his office without a word to anyone. Dave wanted to follow, wanted to talk to him. Instead he watched through the office window as Aaron sat hunched over his desk, head in his hand as he seemed to stare at paperwork in front of him. He had a feeling the hurt would take a long time to go away. In the meantime, he had someone else he needed to catch up with. One Spencer Reid.

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Spencer pulled his apartment door open. “Uhh, Rossi. Hi?”

“Can we talk a minute?”

“Umm, sure?” He backed up to let the older man in. “What’s up?” Reid moved to the couch as Rossi took the chair.

“I am going to show you something and then I want an explanation.” He waited for Reid to nod before pulling out a folded sheet of paper, unfolding it, and passing it over.

Spencer frowned. “This is, Hotch wrote this.”

“Yes.”

Spencer scanned the tight, rambling words, freezing on the line he just knew Rossi was asking
about. “Where’d you get this?”

“Hotch was… not aware he was writing, he doesn’t remember it, and as the rest of it is rambling, I figured there has to be a grain of truth in that somehow.”

“Why didn’t you ask him?”

Rossi let one brow rise. “Because he wouldn’t answer.”

“And you think you can pressure me into answering?”

“More than he would anyway. So, start talking.”

“I don’t want to betray anything.” He shook his head.

“Listen. It’s off the record, okay? Nothing leaves this room. If either of us learn something new, we keep it to ourselves, all right?”

“Okay.” He took a deep breath. “Some time ago… there were things that happened and he ended up crawling in my bed one night. In his sleep, he must have thought I was Haley.” When he saw Rossi’s other brow join the first he blushed. “Not like that! He, umm, he begged essentially, to cuddle. Asked to be held. But not like I would have expected of a married couple. And then he pulled away. He said something about a rule, that he understood. I didn’t ask any questions. We didn’t talk about it.”

“That’s it?”

Reid shifted in his seat. “No.”

“No?”

“After that prison interview? He had a panic attack and then umm…” He wasn’t sure how much to share.

“Then what?”

“He attacked me. Not… I provoked him. I could see he, I guess, needed it. He was agitated and panicking and I provoked him and we fought. He was choking me and suddenly he realized what he was doing and freaked out. I helped him calm down, find a way to center himself I guess.”

Dave wasn’t sure where to start. “He choked you?” He tried to imagine the man he knew with hands wrapped around the throat of the man before him.

“He didn’t have a lot of strength, he’d been hyperventilating and between that and the fight and chase, by the time we got to the bed and he pinned me most of the force was from him leaning down and not so much from actually squeezing.”

“I can’t believe you’re justifying his actions.” He shook his head. He was willing to defend his friend from a lot, but this?

“He was in distress. It was a calculated risk. And it seemed to have the desired effect. Later I presented him alternatives. I’ve spent four years watching how Haley treats him and…” He shook his head again.

“Yeah, well. I’m starting to get a better picture now.”
Chapter Notes

For the past year and a half I have been remodeling a house. I am finally done and it is getting listed for sale, so to celebrate, I give you an extra chapter this week!

He was almost out the door. Well, if almost meant he was about at the point where he might as well sleep on the tiny loveseat in his office instead of making the drive home. His phone ringing made him sigh heavily, no rest tonight it seemed. “Hotchner.”

“Hello, Aaron, it’s Kate. How are you doing?”

He felt himself smile at the sound of her soft voice. He and Kate had been friends professionally for many years. “I’m well, and you?”

“Good. It’s seems I could use your help with this situation in New York. It’s gone serial now and we’ve come up with little.”

“I’ll need to brief my team.” He glanced at his watch. “They’ll all be back in in a few hours, can I just brief them then?”

“That’ll be fine. I’ll send you the latest details straight away so you can go over them before presenting to your team.” He heard her sigh. “So tell me, Aaron, how are things around the BAU?”

His smile widened. “Good. Always busy, you know. We’re all looking forward to annual leave.”

“Do you have plans for yours?”

“No. Not yet. I could use some suggestions if you have them though.”

“Of course, I have a few. We’ll talk about it later though; my assistant is waving for my attention. See you in the morning Aaron.” She hung up.

“Bye.” He replied to the dead air.

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As soon as he stepped off the elevator, Aaron spotted her across the open plan office. The bright smile she gave when their eyes met warmed something inside him. It was good to see her in person, and not for the reasons he could hear the others whispering about behind him. Kate had always been special, even when they’d first met in England. They had fallen into an easy working relationship that lacked any weird sexual tension or awkward pauses. He could talk with her with the same ease he’d had with Haley.

Following her into her office, he fell into a comfortable role of following her lead. He studied the paperwork over her shoulder, hanging on every word she spoke. When she turned her body to face his and asked about Morgan, he was thrown for a second. Somehow he’d forgotten his team standing beyond the glass.
Spencer watched the body language of his friend through the window. Hotch was holding himself differently and it unsettled him a bit. Sure, the others were joking about the similarities between Kate and Haley, but it seemed more than that. The older man was walking behind her where he usually walked beside others in a manner akin to a puppy on the heels of its master. He didn’t believe for a minute that Hotch had ever had an affair with the British blonde, but that didn’t mean there couldn’t be feelings for her. As the rest of the team split off onto different tasks, Spencer stayed rooted to the spot, watching.

Mid-afternoon arrived before anyone thought to go look for something to eat. Half the team was still out in the field so Spencer collected a couple bags of burgers and headed for the office where Hotch and Kate had been shut away. He was hoping to talk to his friend a bit as Aaron had been separated from the team most of the day.

Hotch looked up and smiled as Reid arrived with bags that smelled delicious. He turned to Kate. “Are you going to eat too?”

“Yes.” She looked at the younger man. “Is there enough there for us all?”

“I, umm, I didn’t know what you liked, so… I can go out and get you something?”

Aaron moved to the door. “I’ll run get it.” He patted his pocket for his wallet. “Give me ten minutes.”

When it was just the two of them in the room, Kate turned to Reid. “Aaron is such a lovely man and one hell of an agent. Haley must be very proud of him.”

Reid tried to school his surprise. He assumed Hotch had shared that detail with Kate, to let her know he was newly single, but apparently not. “I don’t know. He’s a great boss though and an even better friend.” He started laying out the containers of food. “He said you two knew each other before?”

“Oh, we go back years. He was in England working alongside Scotland Yard for a bit and we met there. He was there about six weeks and we had a grand old time.” She settled into a chair on the opposite side of the table from where Spencer was still standing. “Usually when Americans come over they must be all macho and run right over everyone else, damn the consequences. They have a reputation for being loud and rude and quite often pigs toward women. Aaron was refreshingly different.” She got a far-away look on her face as she thought back. “He would hold doors open, carry or fetch things, and he really listened when I spoke. A lot of men still don’t take me as seriously in this job because I’m a woman. Being over here I’ve discovered that maybe that is all just the upbringing of the South?”

Reid blinked at the question and nodded. “So, you spent a lot of time together then?”

She laughed. “Yes, but as friends. Every third thing he spoke about away from work was Haley. And he must have burned through minutes calling her international constantly. But he was always up for every suggestion I made about getting out and relaxing.” They both looked up when Hotch returned.

“I got the kind you like.” Aaron smiled, sitting beside Kate and unloading her bag, laying the box and condiments out.

Kate smiled good naturedly at his attentiveness. Though they rarely saw one another in person, it
was always lovely to have a man around who went to such lengths to pay attention and care for her like he did, without any expectation of repayment.

Spencer watched as Aaron set up the to-go containers before Kate quickly, eyes on what he was doing. From the sound of what the blonde had said, there was never any undercurrent of sexual tension, they were just friends, but he could see the parts of Hotch that were submitting to her seemingly without thought. He’d even heard Morgan earlier upset that Hotch was choosing Kate over the team.

Hotch ate happily, glancing sideways every few bites to be sure Kate was enjoying her meal. He liked Kate as a friend. Despite Kate’s ballsy approach to handling her department, she was about as honest as they came, all while somehow remaining kind. She wasn’t innocent by any means, not in the way he thought of, say, Garcia, but had a well-seasoned goodness to her. He knew he could trust her to lead them in the right direction on this case, even if Derek didn’t seem to agree with it.

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Hotch parked the SUV and climbed out. He was exhausted. Mind-numbingly, wearily, exhausted. He had one goal, to find somewhere to sleep, right now he decided he wasn’t all that picky where that might be. Reid drawing JJ’s attention to someone in the lobby drew his as well and he was only slightly surprised to see Detective LaMontagne walking toward them. Aaron had overheard JJ talking to the man about picking him up from the airport when he’d approached her office, clearly, they’d had plans. And following them to New York had been a hit or miss gamble that the Detective understood. Sometimes cases were a lot of hurry up and wait, especially for JJ as media liaison.

He was surprised at what the Detective caused to be revealed. He could see it in JJ’s eyes that she’d been holding the secret back for some time. That she didn’t feel she could come to him, share this wonderful news with him, it hurt a little. He understood he was her boss, but he’d thought they were closer than that. He’d thought she could trust him. It turned out it was just another person who didn’t agree. Pushing his personal feelings aside, he shook the Detective’s hand, congratulated them both and smiled before doing his best to what could only be described as flee the lobby. He should have known JJ would see through him.

When he turned back to face her, his chest ached. She was so happy. Unsure, but happy. Aaron remembered that feeling when Haley had told him Jack was on the way. And Will, he was willing to follow her up here on a case out of worry. He remembered that sort of devotion only vaguely. This job could and would tear up relationships in a heartbeat. He was proof of that. Riding up to his room he promised himself he would make sure JJ and Will had a fighting chance.

Finally making it to his room, Hotch shed layers, hanging things away until he was naked. He needed a shower, who knows when the next one would come. Stopping first to order room service, he ducked into the bathroom to wash the sweat of the day away.

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Garcia walked up the hall, mentally counting doors as she moved. Emily had called her about JJ and Will, gushing about blonde babies with New Orleans accents. She had then gossiped about Morgan butting heads with Kate, apparently Rossi was trying to sort him out tonight. As for Emily, she and Reid had found some movie to watch in Russian. That left Garcia stumbling into the hotel hours later than the others; tired, hungry, and in need of some company. Her options at this hour were limited, but she had a hunch. Knocking on a door, her fingers tapped out a rhythm on her thigh as she waited for the door to open. When it finally swung open, she smiled tiredly. “Were you still up?”
Hotch took Garcia in from head to toe, the tiredness seeped out of her, and he stepped back. “Come in.”

She headed straight for a chair and sat down, unbuckling her shoes and kicking them off. “I’m sorry it’s so late. I just- I just couldn’t go back to my room alone tonight. Everyone else is tied up.”

“It’s okay. I get it.” He unwrapped two glasses and added some ice and then water, handing one to her as he sat down. “How is the set-up you have here?”

She looked up, a simple response on her lips until she saw the slight twinkle to his eye. “Nothing like I’m used to! How can everywhere else in the country run on systems so old?”

He chuckled. “I think it’s more likely how are you keeping us running on a system so advanced.” When she blushed, he added. “That other analyst was in awe of your system, did you know that? He said it was unheard of in government systems outside of like Switzerland.” He took a sip of his drink. “I know I don’t really understand the stuff you put on requisition forms, but maybe I should take a stronger interest.”

“Oh, no, Sir! No need to do that!” She watched his brows rise in disbelief. “I promise!”

==

Morning arrived much too early for all of them. This case wasn’t going to go away easily. Everyone was on edge and checking on one another.

The shouts of an officer down had sent Hotch racing out of the Federal Building, Kate on his heels. As he sped through the streets, Garcia’s voice provided him details through his phone balanced in the console. At times like this he relied on her to provide them all with the information they needed without asking. The members of his team were his responsibility and even though he knew Emily was okay, he knew she would still be carrying the weight of having shot the shooter.

Arriving on the scene, he took a cursory glance in Emily’s direction, JJ and Morgan were talking to her and he trusted them to do their job now as he headed to join Reid and Dave, Kate on his heels. The news wasn’t good. What started as a serial killer picking off commuters had morphed into a domestic terrorism plot by mid-afternoon.

The last thing he recalled was everyone preparing for a major event in the city. Everything after that was a blank.

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She felt like she was going to be sick. This couldn’t be happening. The city was under siege, her babies were spread out god knows where and she was trapped in this tiny room without any way to find them. Suddenly the joy of shared workspace turned to the horror of someone witnessing her falling apart. She was with the FBI after all, she should be able to hold it together better than this! If it were her own teammates, it wouldn’t have been so bad, she knew they wouldn’t judge. But this…This was her worst nightmare coming to life.

Scanning through cameras, trying to find the location of the blast while she tried to reach her team, tears fell from her eyes. They had to be okay! It was a relief to get that call from Rossi, if only to know that he had Reid were safe at the office. Morgan and Emily made her feel a tiny bit better until their lines went dead. It left her to just worry about JJ and Hotch.

And then the officer found the blast. And they saw Kate and Hotch get blown away.
Rossi watched the youngest on their team combing through the data on the boards as fast as he could. Which, for Reid, was saying something. He could see Reid was distressed. Aside from Garcia, who was safe in a bunker, they didn’t have a clue yet where anyone else was. He wasn’t sure how to help so stayed out of the kid’s way. Dave turned around when Emily and then JJ rushed up to them to share what they knew. Five down, two to go. Emily accounted for Morgan’s safety and then Garcia popped up on their laptop.

Dave felt his chest tighten. It had been Hotch and Kate’s SUV. And there were injuries. He knew this wasn’t a time to panic, but he was fighting against that urge. Turning back around to give himself a moment, he caught Spencer’s gaze. The younger man was also clearly on the edge of panic. Stepping forward, away from the three women rapidly exchanging details as only women could, he tugged Spencer’s arm. “Come here a sec.” Dave pulled him around the boards for a modicum of privacy. “I get it, we’re all freaking out right now. But I need your head in the game. What can I do to help you focus?”

Spencer scanned the open room, hands fidgeting. “I think- I think I just need to hear Hotch is okay. I’m worried about Kate too, obviously, but I need to know my friends, my family, are okay.”

“Morgan is with him, he’ll be honest as to how Hotch is doing.” JJ’s shout that Hotch wanted them all at the hospital drew their attention. Dave patted Reid’s shoulder. “See, he’s well enough to be barking orders at us.”

Spencer gave him a weak grin of thanks and they all gathered their things.

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Hotch panted heavily as he watched blood gush down the bomber’s chest. The case was over, everyone was safe, and the adrenaline was wearing off. His head was killing him, making it hard to focus. “Let’s go back upstairs.” He turned to limp away, knowing the others would follow close behind. At the stairs, a hand came up and helped steady him. Aaron glanced over his shoulder and saw Spencer at his side. “Thanks.”

“Always.” He whispered in reply. “Never doubt that.”

The tears that pricked the back of his eyes he would swear were because of the pain, and later the truth of Kate’s fate. It had been a long and emotional night. Spencer speaking to Dave drew his attention.

“I’ll go with him back to the ER to get looked over properly, can you track down Morgan and touch base with Garcia? She will be frantic until she hears from us.”

“I’ll call her.” Emily spoke up. “I’ll sort she and JJ out and pick them up if I need to. We can meet back at the hotel?”

Spencer nodded. “Sounds good.”

Dave felt himself smile. “I’ll go figure out where Morgan ended up and collect him. See if I can’t figure out what the hell he was thinking driving away in a mobile bomb. I’ll walk you out, Em.” He followed her toward their SUVs.

Hotch continued up into the hospital, back toward the ER in silence, Reid at his side, holding his arm the whole way. Once back in the ER, Reid took over and insisted Aaron be checked over more thoroughly than he figured his boss had allowed before. He could feel Spencer hovering in the
corner as he changed back into a gown and a nurse settled him back into bed. His body was thankful to by lying down again.

When pain killers finally helped his body relax, he cracked one eye open and saw Reid watching him. “Thank you.”

Spencer startled out of his thoughts. “No problem. For what?”

“For always being here.” He pressed a hand to his head. “My head is killing me.”

“I can turn down the lights, will that help?” Spencer stepped toward the switch.

“I think so, yeah.”

==

The jet was silent on the short flight home. Two of their members, the two who had suffered injuries, were not with them. Garcia and JJ were curled together, one blonde head tucked under the other’s chin, with Emily bundled across from them. The case had rattled each of them for different reasons.

Emily had watched her partner get shot and even though she’d just met the detective, she’d liked him. He was a good man. His family didn’t deserve a thing like that.

Garcia had been the safest of the team, but at the same time had been the one watching, disconnected, as they ran into danger. A position she frequently let the others know she hated. She had nightmares about someone not coming home and this case was just going to make them worse with the very real possibilities that Hotch or Morgan would have been blown up.

For JJ the case has been a horrible rollercoaster ride of ups and downs. Will had been arriving to discuss the baby before she’d had to rush off for the case. Having the truth come out the way it did, in a way she was just glad it was out in the open now, though the look on her boss’s face had been painful to see. She knew a conversation would be coming later. Likely much later as he was going to be out of the field for a while.

Rossi slumped into a seat alone at the front with a glass of scotch in his hand. This case had been bad at every turn. Aaron had told him privately about his connection with Kate before they left, but he’d been genuinely surprised that she was such a perfect doppelganger for Haley. Now that he was informed about his friend’s marriage in the years before it imploded, it was easy to see Hotch slipping into that submissive role with the Brit. And even when Morgan had called him on it, Aaron hadn’t seen it.

Dave had tried to speak to Aaron about maybe easing up on his time spent tucked away in Kate’s office apart from the rest of the team, but to no avail. Now he felt a tiny bit guilty about that. Aaron had lost a good friend, he was sure he was blaming himself for it. They’d already asked around; her body was being sent back to England for burial so Aaron wouldn’t be able to attend the service. Given Aaron’s recent history with handling loss, Dave mentally started to make arrangements to spend some extra time at the younger man’s place. Maybe he could convince Haley to give up Jack for a few extra days. He chuckled to himself despite his mood, he was probably the worst person to reach out to Haley, she had a pretty significant dislike of him.

Spencer sat alone at the back of the jet in what was frequently Hotch’s seat after a long case. He stared out the window past the clouds at the blue sky beyond. From up here everything looked normal. Like a madman hadn’t just spent the last few days attempting to blow up a major city. Like
he hadn’t watched video footage of a good friend being thrown the width of a city street.

It had hurt watching Hotch with Kate. He could see she was his type, almost disturbingly so, and it was painfully obvious he wasn’t it. He watched Hotch follow her around the office and, apart from when Emily and her partner had been fired upon and returned fire, in the field as well. Not that he would ever say it aloud, but Hotch had even fought against a Secret Service Bypass Order to get her seen and had unwittingly delivered the bomb to its intended drop point. Spencer wondered how he’d never noticed the other man’s tendencies toward being submissive before. But now that he was aware, he recognized them easily.

Given how his boss and Morgan had been at one another’s throats the entire case, he was more than a little curious about what was happening in the SUV somewhere below them.

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Morgan stepped toward the SUV carrying both bags, the uneven footsteps of his boss softly sounding behind him. If the man was going to be in a bad mood the whole drive back, this was going to be a miserable ride.

Hotch winced as he climbed into the passenger seat. Today he was feeling the effects of being thrown by the blast.

“Did you get anything for the pain?”

He rolled his head to the side and looked at where Derek was standing in the open driver’s side doorway. “I’m fine.”

“Man, we all saw the footage.”

Hotch swallowed. “It makes me groggy. If the pain gets too bad, I promise I’ll take it.”

Derek nodded. “Okay.” He climbed into the vehicle and started it before easing into traffic.

The drive out of the city had been made in silence. Hotch was used to being in control of whatever vehicle he was in, he had planned on bullying whatever agent was going to travel with him into letting him drive, but that wasn’t going to fly with Derek. Instead he watched the concrete buildings zip by until they gave way to the openness of the interstate home.

One he was settled into a reasonable cruising speed, they weren’t in a rush for once and he had no intentions of making this a stressful drive, Morgan fiddled with the radio until he found something he knew they both could agree on and set it to a low enough volume. Letting the first few miles go by, he finally coughed slightly and began to speak. “Look man, I’m sorry about Kate. I know you tried so hard to save her.” He lapsed into silence.

Aaron heard the sincerity in his voice. “Yeah.”

“Rossi said they’re flying her back to England?” He caught a nod out of the corner of his eye. “I’m sorry. You probably wanted to go to the funeral.”

“Yeah, well… There’s a lot of things I’ve wanted that I couldn’t have.” He rested his head against the window and closed his eyes. It had been hard to separate Kate and Haley in his mind out on that street. Kneeling over her, he kept having flashes of kneeling over Haley’s lifeless body. The image caused tears to prick his eyes and burn as he willed them not to fall. Even after everything she had put him through, the thought of losing her petrified him. He couldn’t imagine a world without Haley in it. He was still struggling with the idea of his life without her in it on a regular basis. Dave
had forced him to open up about the abuse, and to admit that it had, in fact, been abuse.

The first hour was travelled in silence. At a glance he could see his boss had his head leaned back against the seat, eyes closed.

His ear began to ring and he hissed at the sudden sharp pain that came along with it. The doctor had warned him it was to be expected for several weeks. A warm hand on his arm made him open his eyes.

“You okay?”

Hotch nodded.

Derek shook his head with a disbelieving smirk.

Reluctantly admitting his discomfort, Hotch asked. “Stop somewhere?”

“There’s an exit in a mile.” He glanced over. “You okay?”

“I’m getting stiff sitting here. Need to walk around.”

Nodding, he guided the SUV off the exit and followed his gut to a strip mall that sat just off the highway. “This do?”

Aaron nodded and slowly eased out. “I just need to walk around for a bit.” He felt old. The limp that was barely noticeable before now was nearly toppling him. He was thankful when the other man appeared with a shopping cart he could lean on as they headed into the air-conditioned store.

“So, you and Kate?”

“There was never a me and Kate. I was married. It was simple professional admiration.”

“You seemed real keen to follow after her, man. I just… When I was angry before… I was outta line. With both of you. I didn’t apologize to you like I did her.”

“I get it, Morgan. I do.” They were wandering the aisles aimlessly. “There was always something about Kate that just felt comfortable. It was never… I heard JJ and Emily and what they said when we arrived.”

“They were outta line too.” He studied the battered profile of his boss. “How are you holding up now that Haley’s gone?”

He stopped then and stood up straight. “I try not to think about it too much. It still hurts that I failed her, I’m trying to not fail Jack. That didn’t work so well for Kate, failed her in the end. Haley would have hated me for the rest of her natural life if I’d have died in that explosion. Made her raise Jack without a father. Or more without him than he already is.”

“Hey. I grew up without a father, believe me, I would have done anything to have a dad like you.”

“One that’s barely around? Can’t even promise to be there for special things?” He raised an eyebrow at the other man.

“Hell yeah. Jack knows you love him. Anyone who’s within a hundred feet of you when you’re with him or on the phone with him, or even just talking about him knows you love him. None of us doubt that, so don’t you doubt it either.”
Morgan intentionally stopped an hour later for lunch so Hotch didn’t stiffen up again. The older man had been more willing to carry on a casual conversation after their first stop.

Just off the highway was an assortment of chain restaurants. “Let’s grab a bite.”

When they arrived, Aaron followed Morgan into the eatery and let him take charge of getting a table. It was nice, after everything he’d been through the past few days, to let someone else make the decisions for a little while. A thought that struck him and left him stunned.

Letting someone take over, to know his needs and fill them, sounded wonderful. Just the idea of it had his body relaxing. The remainder of the trip back to Quantico was filled with alternating restless sleep and quiet contemplation for the first time of Reid’s offer. Several times on the drive, Morgan had tried to start a conversation anew, but Hotch was too busy seriously considering the offer from that morning in the hotel to be able to keep up with a conversation for very long.

After lunch, Aaron alternated dozing lightly and thinking about the last six or so months of his life. When he’d known Kate originally, she’d reminded him of Haley on a subconscious level. So he’d carried himself around her like he always did his wife, willing to please. Now looking back, he could see the past few days from a different perspective. He seemed to miss that role he had with Haley, someone else ordering him around, directing his time for a while. He wondered if Reid’s offer from months ago was because the man had seen that need in him. Even in the midst of a panic attack and frustrated anger, he had needed someone else to step in and guide him through. But what did that make him? He was a leader, the one who ordered others around. He put his head against the windows and shut his eyes, he wasn’t sure what to think about anything anymore.

As they neared Quantico, Derek shook him awake. “Where am I dropping you?”

“Hmm?”

“We’re almost back to the Academy, where am I dropping you?”

Aaron glanced around. “Uh, could you take me past Reid’s place?”

Morgan was surprised, but he did it without question. Pulling up in front of the building, he watched his boss stiffly crawl out of the SUV and fetch his go-bag from the back.

Staring up at the building he’d visited several times before, Aaron steeled himself for what he was going to ask the younger man about.

Aaron frowned at the stairs he normally took before stepping into the small elevator.

Spencer was surprised to find Hotch at his door. “Shouldn’t you be at home? Resting?”

“Probably.” He studied the floor. “I just- I was thinking.” He felt himself blush. “You mentioned, before, about being a, uh, a sub?”

Reid nodded.

“I think… I think after some things that have happened recently? Maybe.”

“We should talk first.” Spencer put a hand gently on his upper arm. “Come sit down, put your bag
down.” He guided him to the couch. “You and Haley.” He chewed his lip. “She was very controlling, yes?”

Aaron nodded.

“And maybe you weren’t aware of it?” Dark brown eyes rose to meet his.

“Looking back. I asked Dave if he would have believed me if I’d told him Haley was abusive. Not physically but… mentally, emotionally. He said yes.”

“I wanted so many times to ask. I saw her, heard some of the phone calls. I’m sorry, Hotch.”

Aaron’s eyes darted around the room. “What you did that night, it helped.”

“And you want to know if it would help again.” He waited for a nod. “There’s a lot to talk about before we get there. I only went forward with it because you were so upset I was worried you might hurt yourself somehow. There are rules, boundaries, things we agree on beforehand so neither of us gets freaked out.”

“Okay.”

“The first thing is, you’re in charge.”

“What? But I don’t know how…”

Spencer cut him off. “As the sub, you’re always in charge. No is no, stop is stop, these are not disputable. Ever. Yes isn’t permanent, you can always change your mind. If I think you’re forcing yourself to do something and you look distressed, I will stop everything until I think you’ll be honest.”

“Are.” He swallowed his suddenly dry throat. “Is sex part of it?”

“I’ve never had sex with the Domme who taught me nor the sub I occasionally see. Some people do,” he shrugged, “but we didn’t want that as a factor.”

“Oh.” He felt himself blush. “I’ve never been with a man. I don’t think, um. What, umm, what do you do to your, ah, sub?”

Spencer smiled. “Tie him up, spank him, sometimes it crops or paddles or we use hot wax, feathers, there’s so much to use. He has hard no’s which are things he will never agree to do and then everything else we discuss before each meeting.” He watched Aaron nod in understanding. “Also… There are rules.”

“Rules?”

“For me it was what and how I ate, mostly pertaining to coffee, and making eye contact when I spoke with the team. Also, I wasn’t allowed to be in my head, I needed to talk it out.”

“Oh.” He tried to think back to when he noticed those sorts of changes in the other man. There had been a slow progression of increased confidence, but Hotch hadn’t given it much thought. “What rules would you want to give me?”

Spencer tipped his head to one side, thinking. “First, no spending the night at work.” When Hotch gave him a surprised look, he rolled his eyes. “You do remember who my neighbor is, right? And you can’t stay past seven more than once a week. You’re in by seven every day, twelve hours is
enough work for anyone.”

Aaron chewed his lip. “Is that all?”

“Limit of two alcoholic drinks a night, I’ll help you get to sleep if you can’t, just call me. And only one more for now.”

“What’s that?”

“Eat.”

Hotch frowned. “Eat?”

“Three meals a day. Don’t try to convince me that you do, there’s a whole team of profilers fully aware of your tendency to skip meals. Precisely how many did you eat in New York?”

He avoided answering the pointed question. “Sometimes it’s hard for me to eat. Especially with the stress of cases.”

He nodded. “We’re aware of that too. We’ll find something that helps, things that aren’t going to upset your stomach, but… you have to eat.”

“And if I break these rules?”

“We can discuss punishments later. I want you comfortable with things first. Right now, it’s not quite dinner time and I’m sure you could use some rest. Why don’t you change into something more comfortable and go lie down on the bed?”

His eyes cut to his bag. “I don’t really have anything except pajamas.”

“Just needs to be comfortable.”

Aaron stood and gingerly limped into Spencer’s bedroom, not bothering to turn on the light or push the door completely closed.

Spencer puttered around his kitchen looking for something to make the two of them for dinner. He assembled something that would masquerade as a proper meal before peeking into the bedroom to check on Aaron. The older man was sound asleep in the middle of the bed on his stomach wearing only sleep shorts. Long toned legs stretched out almost to the end while both arms were bent with hands tucked under the pillow. Spencer could see the assortment of small bruises and cuts from the explosion. Deciding on a plan, he crossed the room and found a bottle he was looking for before sitting next to the sleeping body and carefully running his fingers through his hair. The dark locks were as soft as Spencer had imagined and the only response he got was a slightly deeper inhale and exhale. Assuming Aaron was well and truly asleep, he curled his fingers and applied a slight massage pressure to his scalp which got an almost purring response. Popping open the bottle, he warmed the thick oil between his hands and turned to kneel on the bed so he could begin massaging at Aaron’s shoulders and work down. Quietly and steadily he worked, gentling muscles until they worked loose and relaxed, finding his own trance-like state as he worked.

Aaron woke slowly. He felt more relaxed than he had in a long time. As he returned to awareness he felt hands massaging his lower back, long thin fingers that clearly knew what they were doing. He groaned with pleasure and felt the hands pull away.

“Sorry.”
“It’s okay.” He turned his head to peer up at Spencer with one eye.

“You looked like you needed it.”

“I did.” Aaron shifted a bit to roll over. “Thank you.” He looked around the dim bedroom. “What would you do to me?”

He tipped his head to one side again, trying to catch up to the change of topic. “I would start with things that helped you focus on relaxing. Blindfolds, noise cancelling headphones, maybe make you kneel for a set amount of time.”

“That’s it?”

He nodded. “For now. If you can’t relax, the rest of it wouldn’t be enjoyable. I usually met James as a club, we could go there.”

“No.” He cut Spencer off. “I- I’m not comfortable with that.”

The younger man nodded. “I’ll get some toys and things to have here then.”

Hotch was surprised that it was just that simple. He’d said no and Spencer had accepted it without a fight. No being ignored, no being told he didn’t really know what he wanted, just simple acceptance.

“I’ll start with cotton floggers, feathers, some other small things that stimulate nerves. I really like these cotton bindings, they are versatile and hold up well to multiple washings. What would you think to a wooden paddle?”

“I, um, I don’t know.”

Spencer shrugged. “I can get one and we can decide later. I think if we find the right way to do it, you might like it.” He looked around his room. “Oh, I won’t ever use anything that will leave marks you can’t cover for work.” Spotting something, he climbed off the bed. “If you are ever curious about something, just let me know. I know you’ll go home and start researching on line.”

He turned to make eye contact. “Be careful though because a lot of what’s out there is just bad.”

Aaron pushed up on his elbows and watched him dig around in the closet before stepping out producing a long heavy strip of blue fabric.

“When I was learning, this is what I got tied up with. If you are wanting to see what it’s all about tonight, we could start with this.”

Hotch stood and crossed the room, taking the blue fabric in his hands. “What would we do?”

“I would have you kneel and bind your hands. Eyes closed.”

Considering for a minute, Aaron nodded.

==

After dinner, Aaron found himself kneeling on a folded towel in Spencer’s apartment. Spencer had tied both ends of the binding around his wrists and left the middle hang free. With his eyes closed, in this position he’d been instructed to hold, he felt bound, but if panic were to set in he had full range of motion. At first it was embarrassing. He was knelt, still in just his cotton shorts, in Reid’s living room. Exposed, vulnerable. Certain he was beet red all over from his blush. As time passed
he realized that he could hear the quiet slip of pages turning. Spencer was reading a book. He envisioned that voice that he listened to all day reading a story. He wondered if it was the kind of soothing voice that would make a child want to curl up and listen. He let his mind wander to scenes of Reid reciting a story wrapped in his arms. Or maybe with his arms around Aaron. Then his mind wandered a little further and imagined Spencer reading a book with his arms wrapped around a little boy like Jack. Tucked into the couch maybe with a blanket surrounding them. He got lost in that until soft hands on his shoulders brought him back.

“You looked so happy.” Spencer whispered. “What were you thinking about?”

“Uhh…” He blushed again. “Nothing.”
Dave strolled into Hotch’s office. “Did they get there okay?”

“Yeah, landed early this morning, Emily called and checked in. They were on their way to meet up with the contact in town and drive out. I’m expecting them to have to spend at least one, maybe two nights in Colorado.”

Nodding, he sat down. “Good. How are you?”

“Fine.” He finally glanced up at his friend. “Why do you ask?”

“Umm, you do remember what went down a few weeks ago, right? How are you healing?”

Hotch chewed his lip and sat back. “I’m better. The ringing is mostly gone and the pain isn’t as bad.”

“And your hearing?”

“That it could take time. I’m at risk of it being permanent or even getting worse if I’m not careful.”

“Then I guess you better be careful.” He stood and moved to the door, glancing out. “I’m guessing we’re staying home unless it’s something major until they get back?”

“That’s the plan.”

“Who’s replacing JJ?” He changed the subject.

Hotch looked up again from the paperwork he’d restarted, looking out in the bullpen to see what his friend was looking at. JJ was navigating slowly around the desks, passing out paperwork around her large and still growing belly. “I haven’t talked to HR yet about it.”

“Maybe it’s time.”

He nodded and watched his friend head back to his own office. Twenty minutes later a shout from the bullpen had him in motion. At first, he just saw JJ and Derek standing together and then the pair directed him to the TV. Reid and Prentiss had been taken hostage, his heart started racing.

==

Collecting his things to leave, he’d been tense. He checked and rechecked that he had everything he would need to get the members of his team back safely. Checking the weather, he grabbed his go bag and quickly changed into something a bit more suitable to where they were headed. Arriving on the tarmac he saw that the rest of the team had done the same. The flight had him jittery. It wasn’t going fast enough. In the weeks since he’d started spending time with Reid, he’d come to depend on the younger man. They had only made arrangements a handful of times, but Hotch felt so much better in the days after. By their third meeting, Spencer had acquired more bindings as well as a cotton flogger and a paddle. Aaron had been fascinated by the flogger and more than a little curious. Spencer had made him kneel as he’d done before except with his hands
folded in front and had started with a single strike. It had stung, but not in the way Aaron had expected. Seconds later he’d felt the warmth of blood moving, it wouldn’t bruise, but he was sure it must have made him a little red. When Spencer had asked permission to do it again, Aaron had willingly agreed.

Now he felt anxiety welling up, making his gut ache in a way it hadn’t in some time. He had to get to Reid. And Prentiss, he reminded himself. He had to get them both out safe. Once they landed, Hotch made a beeline for the driver’s seat and waited for the others to pile in before rushing off to the compound. Over and over in his head he thought about the conversation he’d had with his friend the night before. He’d asked Spencer about trying something else in their play. He’d done some research on his own. Spencer had been right that there was some absolutely horrifying stuff on the internet. But he used his better judgement and found a few sites that sounded much more legit and learned about a few different toys and took the list to the younger man, presenting it to him nervously.

Spencer had read the list slowly, nodding and making notes beside a few things before agreeing to do some shopping. After their short discussion, Aaron had stretched out across Spencer’s coffee table, knees on the floor on one end and wrists bound and tied over the other, and Spencer had used the cotton flogger on him until his whole body hummed.

It wasn’t humming now.

Aaron climbed out of the already dust coated SUV and swiftly took in the organized chaos in the tents. Turning, he let Dave know he wanted him, the expert in hostage negotiation, to lead them through this. To get Prentiss and Reid, and as many others as possible, out safely. And then Dave said something that made him pause. He pointed out that he, the agent in charge, was emotionally compromised and something in the way he said it told him Dave knew something. There was more to his words that just being the distressed lead agent trying to rescue two of his own.

Shouting coming from beyond the hot tent reminded him that now was not the time to get into it. Instead he turned and found himself nose to nose with the state’s attorney, the man who had lied and put his agents at risk. Someone he could blame. And he let the man have it. He was furious this man risked the lives of his people for a political maneuver. Turning back around, Hotch pretended not to see the smirk JJ was hiding behind her hand. Instead he stepped quickly into the surveillance trailer and found a cooler of bottled water. Grabbing one he took it back outside and hurriedly tracked down the petite blonde, pressing the bottle into her hand. He might not be able to help Reid or Prentiss right now, but he could look after JJ.

==

Dave watched Hotch out of the corner of his eye while he helped the hostage negotiators set up equipment. He was worried, it was clear their leader and youngest agent were close, had some sort of connection. Neither were prone to providing personal information of any kind so he was having to make assumptive leaps based on the tiny bits he could get. From the moment news of this situation had come to light, Hotch had looked more than just his usual concerned and driven, the man had looked distressed.

Once everything was set up to his liking, he pulled a pair of headphones over his ears and tried to get something usable from the parabolic mics while he waited for a phone. He needed to start with whether Prentiss and Reid were even in a position to make moves he needed to anticipate. For Hotch’s sake he prayed they both were.

Hotch stood watching the various members of his team working. Dave was leading the negotiators while Morgan helped SWAT get organized and ready for the word to go. JJ had vanished to handle
the media and keep up to date with Garcia. For what felt like the first time ever, he had no immediate purpose. It was an odd feeling. His team was so efficient that in this instance, he’d become the odd man out. It provided him an unwelcome minute to think about what was happening. Spencer, his friend and the man he’d started to depend on, was trapped inside a compound. Possibly hurt. Maybe dead. His stomach cramped with anxiety, he shouldn’t have sent them here.

It was supposed to be a routine interview. Before getting on the plane, Reid had called him just to see how he was doing and to remind him to sleep and eat while they were away. He’d been able to hear the smile in the younger man’s voice and he had chuckled when Aaron had called him bossy. Now he was wondering if those would be the last words he would ever hear from Spencer. Determined to escape that train of thought, Hotch made a beeline for where Dave was standing, he had to find a way to contribute.

==

Dave sent up a prayer of thanks when he finally made contact with those inside the compound up until he asked about the child services workers. When Cyrus said one was dead, Dave cut his eyes to Aaron and saw him trying to hide the pain. Desperate to figure out who they’d lost, he asked for a name and found out it wasn’t Prentiss or Reid. Relief that they were at least alive was mixed with the sadness that the other woman was still dead. Cyrus didn’t sound particularly unhinged but then he knew still waters tended to run very deep. He would have to simply show the man that he wasn’t the enemy, that he sympathized with what they were trying to do.

==

He wouldn’t ever admit it, be it was nerve-wracking walking up to the door as exposed as he was. Doing his best to look not at all nosey, Dave glanced around the space that appeared to be a sanctuary of sorts, not hesitating on Reid and Prentiss in the corner. He couldn’t act like he knew them. It was a relief though to see with his own eyes that they were fine. He couldn’t wait to share the news with Hotch.

Back in the mobile command center, he instantly shared that their friends were okay. The news didn’t seem to ease the pained expression on Hotch’s face like he’d hoped it would. Dave was starting to worry as to what exactly was running through Aaron’s mind.

Hotch had watched intently as Rossi had driven to the compound and back. He had tried to read his features from the tiny, grainy screen but wasn’t surprised when he couldn’t read him. Dave had a decent poker face. He resisted the urge to run out to the truck as Dave pulled up, he could wait for the older man to come in and share what he’d learned. Hearing Reid and Prentiss were okay loosened the knot in his gut, but that only started a wave of acid to roll and burn instead. He swallowed down nausea and tried to focus on what the bugs were picking up. He had to find a way to help so he grabbed a headset to listen in but what he heard made his heart stop.

They had taken poison. Cyrus told everyone they’d drank poison. Had he made Reid and Prentiss drink it as well? He was going to be ill. He had to get in there, get to them, save who he could. His head was buzzing now, he could barely hear Rossi insisting that this couldn’t be happening. That Cyrus wasn’t really leading a mass suicide. He ordered the men to get ready to storm the compound just as Cyrus’ voice came through again. No poison. It was just a test.

Aaron leaned forward in his seat, it was getting to be too much. He needed fresh air.

Dave watched Hotch lurch out of his seat and rush out of the trailer. This entire situation was wearing on all of them, but it was clearly starting to take a physical toll on their leader. Wanting to
check on how he was holding up, Dave passed JJ on her way in and followed as Aaron stumbled past where the vehicles and tents were set up and into the tree line beyond. He hovered at a respectable distance until his friend emerged, a sickly sort of pallor to his skin. When Aaron leaned back against a tree instead of starting straight back to the command center, Dave strolled over.

“You okay?”

Aaron swallowed down the sour taste left in his mouth. “Yeah. Sorry.”

“Hey. Nothing to apologize for. You haven’t looked well since before we arrived. Is it this case or something else?”

Hotch looked up from where he was leaning and met Dave’s eyes. “This case I think.” When his stomach rolled again, he let his eyes slide shut and brought up one hand to try and soothe it.

“Do you have anything to take?”

“Hmm?”

“To settle your stomach.”

“I’ll be okay.”

“That may be true, but right now you’re not. So, I’ll ask again, do you have anything to take or should I go ask around?”

“I might have something.” Aaron squeezed his eyes shut and then blinked them open. “I thought that was it. They were dead. I thought we just listened to Reid and Prentiss die in there.”

Dave nodded. “Morgan is talking to the former group leader now. JJ had Garcia looking into Cyrus’ background, she’ll be calling soon. Why don’t you take a minute and then re-group. This is a beautiful area, why don’t you take a walk for a few minutes, clear your head. I’ll call you if we have something new.”

“Dave…”

Rossi raised a hand to squash any objections. “You’ll thank me later.”

Aaron returned from his walk just in time for all hell to break loose.

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After the agonizing experience of having to listen to Emily be beaten, hearing Spencer’s voice calmly speaking was a balm to his frazzled mind. He hung on every word, waiting for some sort of code or subtle sign of what was going on.

He hung on every word Reid said through the afternoon until the signal came. It was time to go in.

Aaron glanced up as Dave neared him in the darkness. He’d been standing in the suddenly quiet darkness just staring down at the compound. Thinking, “I know I can’t go in there.” It hurt it admit it. That he was limited in what he could do.

“I’m going.”

“If something happens to Prentiss or Reid, I dunno…” He trailed off, dropping his head. He didn’t want to think about all the ways this could still go spectacularly wrong.
“You’re not alone.” He glanced at his friend, understanding the pain he felt.

He vested up and watched silently as everyone put on tactical armor and loaded into vehicles. Anything could happen and it would be completely out of his hands.

==

Hotch was just driving up to the compound when the building exploded. Through the darkness and billowing smoke, he couldn’t see a single familiar FBI vest. Had four of his team members just died in the blast? Was this going to be like the Boston Bombing case all over again? He jumped out of the truck and hurried forward as a familiar shape stumbled into view. Emily. She looked in rough shape, but she was walking, talking. Searching the crowd and debris for the others. Several yards after her, Hotch could hear Rossi’s voice guiding victims to safety. Two down, two to go.

He had just reached Emily’s side to ask after the others when Reid and Morgan appeared on the steps in front of the fire. They were both walking. They were okay. He exhaled a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding and had to get away from the scene. The awareness of what could have just happened, what almost did just happen, it was too big a thing to process all at once. Sharing a look with Rossi, he turned and walked away. He’d trusted his team the last day and a half to get everyone through this, he had to trust them now to support one another in the aftermath. Aaron felt Dave fall into stride beside him, neither man spoke as they found Aaron’s abandoned truck and drove back up to the command post that was still oddly silent.

Climbing out, Dave watched his friend start toward the trailer and then stop, one hand resting on the side of the portable, the other on his hip, head down. For now, he planned to give Aaron a chance to process, to work through what had happened. But eventually, he’d get him to talk.

==

Dawn was just starting to appear along the horizon the next time Hotch looked up from what he was doing. Scanning the area, he counted off each member of his team, all were busy helping sort this whole mess out. Even Prentiss and Reid were split off to help sort through people and information. The pair had been at the compound almost forty-eight hours now, up slightly longer. He didn’t expect either had more than nodded off while being held hostage. As for the rest of the team, except for JJ, who Hotch had forced to lie down several times, they had all been up nearly as long. He knew they weren’t working at their best anymore. Glancing around again, he found their media liaison deep in discussion with two other people and stood and walked to her. When she looked up and smiled he instructed her to find them all a place to sleep, they could leave either after dinner or the next morning.

JJ nodded and walked to a quieter area to make some calls.

Thinking of what needed to be done next, Hotch returned to his laptop and called Garcia. She was just hiding a yawn when the link connected.

“What can I do for you, Bossman?”

He gave her a weary smile. “Go home, Garcia. Take the day.”

“But, I’m good. I can help finish everything up.” She didn’t want to let her team, her friends, down.

“JJ’s looking for us a place to crash. We’re leaving as soon as she does. If HRT needs information, they’ll just have to use their own analysts.”

“But…”
“Garcia. Go home.” He gave a half-hearted attempt at a hard look.

She wilted in the screen. “Okay. I’ll finish what I’m doing and go. I’ll be out within the hour.”

“Thank you.” He watched the screen go dark.

“You managed to get permission for us to stay in Colorado for another day?”

Hotch turned to find Rossi leaned against a post at the edge of the tent. “No. I made the executive decision that we needed to do so before travelling home.” He caught the look of surprise on his friend’s face. “We nearly lost two members of our team, one of which was beaten in that time. None of us have slept in two days, while I sent JJ away several times I have a suspicion she simply hid from view and didn’t actually rest.” The smirk now on Dave’s face told him he was most likely correct. “I know we could go sit on the jet and probably all sleep and then go home to our separate houses and do whatever everyone does, but I think instead of rushing around we just need to stop for a few hours and regain our footing.”

Dave nodded. “Lovely speech, is that what you’ll tell Strauss when you put in for reimbursement for the hotel? Because you know she’ll refuse it.”

“If Strauss can’t understand this…” He glanced around out of protective instinct. “She can go to hell.”

Dave couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled out at that.

==

Emily and Spencer had rooms at a reasonably decent hotel near where they’d met Lund originally so JJ arranged for the rest of them rooms at the same place.

Spencer dumped his bag just inside the door to his room and shed his clothes as he headed straight for a shower. He just needed to feel clean. As he was finishing up putting on clean clothes, someone knocked on his door. “Rossi?”

“Hey Kid, how are you doing?”

He stepped back and let the older man in. “I’m okay. They didn’t really do anything to me and Cyrus liked me enough that the others couldn’t mess with me.”

“Good. Glad to hear it.” He sat on the end of the bed. “We need to talk about something else.”

Reid cocked his head in curiosity.

“Aaron.”

“Hotch?”

Dave nodded. “This case affected him, not knowing if you were alive or okay. I don’t know what it is you two have together, but it’s become obvious to me recently that he considers you a dear friend, he leans on you. So, as his oldest friend, I’m coming to you.” He paused to consider his next words. “I’m worried about him. Even when we arrived it was clear to me he was emotionally compromised. And I told him so. He was so stressed out this whole case, so worked up, that when he thought you had just been killed with that wine he made himself sick.”

Spencer’s brain started working faster. “He was sick?”
“At least once. He can be elusive when he wants to be so...” Dave shrugged. “And then just before the raid I found him off by himself just staring down the hill. Between you and me, he was on the verge of tears at the thought of either of you dying. He won’t admit it ever but I’ve known him so long I can just see it in his face.”

“Okay.” Spencer wasn’t sure why Rossi was telling him all this.

“I think you need to go talk to him. Today. Before we leave Colorado.”

And suddenly this little visit made sense, Rossi clearly suspected something. “Are you sure it’s a good idea?”

“Yeah, Kid. I do.”

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Aaron couldn’t shake the feeling of near-loss. He’d spent the past two days in fear that he would be pulling Spencer’s lifeless body out of that compound. Just the thought made his stomach and throat burn again. Dumping his go-bag in the bathroom, he undressed quickly and stood in the bathroom. He could have lost Spencer, just when they’d started to find something good between them. He’d been feeling better before this mess. He wasn’t sure if what they were doing would be called a healthy coping mechanism, but it helped. He was just about to start shaving two days worth of stubble away when a soft knock tapped on his door. “One minute!” He called out, grabbing the robe from the closet before looking through the peephole. He was surprised to see Spencer standing in the hall dressed in what he suspected were his pajamas. Pulling open the door, he smiled. “Hi.”

Spencer raked his eyes up and down the barely tide robe Aaron was wearing. “Can I come in?”

Aaron nodded and let him in. “I’m glad you’re okay.” He stood in the middle of the room, unsure.

“I am. Are you?”

“Am I what?”

“Okay. I heard... I heard some things.”

Hotch sighed. “I saw the news and realized I’d sent you into danger.” He took a shallow breath, remembering. “It took forever to get out here and start getting information. I just wanted to go in and get you out.” His shallow breaths came a bit quicker. “Dave kept stopping me from sending in SWAT. Then Cyrus said one of you were dead, my whole world stopped.” The burning feeling was worse now, he brought his arms around himself. “Even once we knew you were alive, we didn’t know what had been done to you. And then Cyrus started talking about poison. I thought he might have made you drink it too.” His eyes were squeezed shut now, trying to block out the memory. He could have listened to Spencer be murdered. He never would have gotten the chance to speak to him again. Bile filled the back of his throat.

Spencer watched Aaron fold in on himself, clearly distressed by the memory, and then bolted for the bathroom. Following him, he rubbed his back, working to calm his friend down. “I didn’t drink anything. He didn’t make us drink anything. Shh, I’m okay, Aaron. We’re all okay.” Clearly Rossi hadn’t been exaggerating what he’d said about Hotch being upset. Spencer flinched with each retch until it subsided to gags and dry heaves. “Come on, sit back and relax. Let your body calm down. Deep breaths.”

Hotch let Spencer guide him back against the wall. His gut ached from the tension he’d been
carrying for days now and the pain of having been ill. Again. He could feel his skin was flushed and sweaty as he gasped for breath. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“This.”

“Hey.” Spencer gently wiped Aaron’s face with a cloth he’d dampened with cool water. “This was a horrible situation.” He couldn’t help but let his eyes track down to where the robe had come untied completely and had fallen open. “Do you think you can get up now?” He asked gently.

“Yeah.” He blinked up at Spencer, gaze open and vulnerable.

“I can help you into the shower if you want.” He pulled Aaron up and helped him steady himself.

“I was- I need to shave first.” When his hand came up to gesture to his grooming kit, he saw it shaking. Making a fist to hide the obvious tremble, he asked. “Maybe you could help?”

Spencer nodded and waited for him to set everything up. “I’ll help with whatever you need, Aaron.”

==

Spencer had quietly helped Aaron shave and shower before drying him enough to go sit on the bed. The routines and habits he’d spent years honing caring for his mother made each step come naturally and easily. Once Aaron was seated and looking up and him, Spencer stood, still fully dressed, in his personal space. “What do you need?”

Aaron’s breath caught. “Will you… will you hold me?”

Swallowing, Spencer nodded, crawling across the bed to lay back. Once he was settled, Aaron crawled up next to him and tucked his head under the younger man’s chin, arms and legs holding him tight. Carding his fingers through Aaron’s hair, he told him. “Sleep. You can stay right here till you wake up. I’m not going anywhere.” He felt Aaron nod and continued stroking his hair until he felt his breath even out in sleep.

Letting his mind wander, Spencer thought back to the discussions he’d had with Rossi. There hadn’t been any outright questions about the nature of their relationship, but the fact that the senior agent had come straight to him to comfort Hotch had said a lot. The man could be an ass sometimes when he wanted to get his point across, but he was a perceptive ass. At some point either he or Aaron would have to come clean with him about what had started between them. He wondered if Hotch would want to do that or if he’d rather just stop getting together. Pondering the possibilities, he drifted off to sleep.

==

Hotch woke to the room bathed in half-light. Evening must have been starting to creep in; they had slept the day away. Studying the angle of the room he realized he must have rolled over at some point in his sleep, he was now facing the exterior wall and the window. He was surprised he hadn’t had any nightmares during his sleep. He felt marginally well rested. Arms tightened around his body, one hand on his chest, and he had to think a second. He’d fallen asleep cuddling Spencer. If felt nice to be held. The body nestled against his back shifted again and he felt the younger man’s erection against his lower back. Understanding the mechanics of NPT in the average, healthy male, didn’t help banish the flushed feeling over actually feeling it pressed against him. Figuring it did no harm to fanaticize about the situation while the other man slept, he let his eyes drift shut and
imagined they weren’t just in bed as a friend comforting another or even a Dom caring for a sub, as he’d read about, but as a loving partner embracing his other half.

He had let his imagination run away with him until he felt Spencer’s breathing change as he started to wake up. When he surfaced enough, the body pressed to Aaron’s back pulled away with a mumbled, “sorry,” leaving him feeling chilly and alone. Ignoring the sadness that came with the feeling of loss of contact, Aaron rolled over and watched Spencer sit up on the bed, rubbing his eyes and trying to control his hair. He looked positively innocent. And beautiful. He swallowed hard as Reid stood, erection still tenting his sleep pants, and stumbled into the bathroom, seemingly clueless as to the show he had put on.

When the bathroom door closed, Hotch laid flat on his back and ran his hands down his chest and stomach until they reached the thick hair surrounding his own dick. Taking the soft flesh in hand he closed his eyes and tried to think about the fantasies he’d just been having mixed with the sight of Spencer moments ago. He tried to force himself to relax as he heard the shower come on, tried to imagine Spencer under the spray doing the same thing. Finally giving up with a groan of utter frustration, he lifted the sheet to start down at his limp and response-less body and cursed the doctor who’d insisted medicine would help him.

When Spencer stepped out it a billow of steam twenty minutes later, he put the smell of semen and sex that seemed to linger after him down to wishful thinking.

==

Spencer used the restroom and then stared at himself in the mirror. He really should have brought his brush with him when he came down, there was no way to tame his hair otherwise. Taking in how he looked, he wondered if Hotch would mind if he had a shower. Deciding it was easier to beg forgiveness, he turned on the water and stripped down, letting one hand linger over his bobbing arousal as he did. There had been something wonderful about waking up with his arms wrapped around Hotch. The man had been soft and warm in his arms, something he’s never really experienced before and he’d been sad to let go until they’d both moved slightly and Spencer had become well aware of his erection rubbing against Aaron’s back. The sensation had been wonderful, he’d only just been able to hold back the urge to thrust forward. He hadn’t wanted to upset the older man any more than he already was and they’d already discussed that whatever this was between them would stay platonic. He didn’t want to overwhelm him with his own urges to the contrary. Stepping under the spray, Spencer bit back a groan as his hand slid up and down his dick, setting an instantly furious pace. He needed release to come as quickly as possible. He pictured the two of them wrapped together on the bed again, this time both naked, Aaron open and waiting. He was teetering on the sharp edge of completion and then he imagined sinking into Aaron on his hands and knees, taking him until he begged, until they both came together. Biting his lip to remain silent, Reid let his head fall forward as he watched his seed begin to pulse out of his dick. He brought up his other hand and caught as much as he could in his palm, some of it dribbling over and down his arm. The pulsing and twitching of his cock subsided and he let his eyes drift shut, picturing Aaron licking his hands and dick clean. The thought stirred his cock to twitch and pulse again with aftershocks.

When his body had calmed down, Spencer finished washing and redressed before returning to the room. He prayed the smell of sex and semen didn’t linger in the hot air that billowed out after him.
His fingertips curled over the top of the door frame as he gasped through gritted teeth. “Four.” He knew there wouldn’t be a predictable pattern or rhythm to the strikes, just that the paddle would meet the flesh of his ass again.

He deserved this. With each blow he mentally listed his recent failings; the list just seemed to grow.

“Five.” The smack brought him out of his head again. He readjusted his grip on the wood, his arms were tiring already from the position, but he wasn’t going to disobey. Unable to see Spencer’s movements due to the blindfold, he listened intently. It seemed one of the younger man’s many skills included stealth movement. “Six.” He gasped, that blow had followed the previous one much sooner.

He thought about the couple out west, the ones who nearly died because he didn’t pick up on the unsub being an unsub. His focus had been elsewhere. “Seven.” He hissed with that one, his skin stung now. He knew he would be sore after this. Unable to comfortably sit for a day at least. Penance for not seeing through the distracted rambling of a murderer. Dave and Spencer had both tried to talk to him on the ride out in the SUV. But he knew, “Eight!” Knew that he’d failed. There was no excuse for that.

The team had been picking up his slack for months now. It was obvious to him that they were aware of his failings as well. Even JJ had been stepping up it felt like, even in her currently limited position.

“Nine.” He wanted to ask Spencer to stop, but he held back. He trusted him to know what it was enough. “Ten.” He was breathing hard now, unable to feel his arms while his ass sang with remembered pain.

“Carefully lower your arms.” Spencer softly instructed, helping steady him. “I’m going to go grab a robe, don’t try to move.”

Disoriented from the blood rush, Aaron complied, patiently waiting until Spencer slipped a light silk robe over him, tying it in the front. The cool fabric was wonderful on his warmed skin.

“I’m going to help you lay on the bed. Do you need anything?”

He knew he was required to be honest. “Water.” A straw bumped his lips a moment later. He drank greedily, like a desperate man in a desert. When the bottle was empty, the straw was replaced with a soft finger coated in lip balm to soothe his dry lips. Spencer guided him down onto the bed to lay on his stomach.

“Just rest. I’ll be back to rub cream over you.” Spencer slipped out of the room and pulled the door shut. In the kitchen, he refilled the water bottle and collected things to make them both a light lunch. He had both plates almost finished when someone tapped on his door. Moving to unlock and open it, he was met with his neighbor. “Hey, Garcia. What’s up?”

Breezing into his apartment, she smiled. “I was wondering if you were up for a movie night? I found this awesome B flick that you’re just going to love!” She spun around to face him and spotted the two plates on the counter. “Do you have company?”

“Umm, kind of?”
“Kind of?” Her eyes landed on the paddle propped by the bedroom door. “Ohh, is that sub you won’t tell me about here? Can I meet him?”

“No!” He stopped her in her tracks. “Not, not right now. We just finished, he’s resting.”

Giving in, she nodded. “So how was the paddle? Did you like it?”

“I- I’m not sure. He seems to though.” Reid shrugged. He guided her to the door and almost had her out into the hall when her eyes paused on something over his shoulder and widened. Uncertain of what she’d seen, he slowly turned and followed her gaze. Right to a familiar fleece pull-over draped carefully over the back of a chair. “Garcia, please…”

“Oh my sweet sweet lord I know that sweater!” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “You have Hotch in there? He’s been your sub all this time?”

Putting his hands up to nudge her into the hall, he softly insisted. “We’ll talk about it later, okay? Right now just please? Go?”

Seeing the pleading in his eyes, she nodded and backed up. “We’ll talk later Boy Wonder.”

He thanked her and pushed the door shut, letting out a deep breath. Now he had to tell Hotch that Garcia knew. He was not looking forward to that conversation.

==

Aaron was balanced on the edge of sleep when the bedroom door opened again. He was boneless as Spencer eased off his robe and began applying cool cream to his hot flesh.

“I need to um, I need to let you know something. I know I don’t usually talk while I’m doing this, but you’re relaxed and probably feeling really good so I hope that will help.”

Wishing he could see Spencer, but not willing to ask to remove the blindfold, instead he answered. “What is it?”

“The Domme who taught me all this, introduced me to the club and stuff? It’s Garcia.”

Aaron rolled that information over in his mind. Spencer had referred to the person who had taught him before, always with an affection that made him a little jealous, but he’d never expected it to be the bubbly blonde. He wasn’t sure why. Curious as to what brought about this revelation, he asked. “Why are you telling me this?”

“She stopped by a minute ago and saw the lunch I made. She asked if my sub was here, I’d mentioned not seeing James anymore to her. As she was leaving… she saw your sweater.” The room was so quite Spencer swore he could hear his heart beating. “She knows.”

He ran that information around in his mind. Garcia knew. But she should understand the importance of discretion about a thing like this. But she knew what they were doing. Might be doing. Could be doing. Thin hands resumed massaging cool cream into his skin, the feeling making his mind drift back into the bliss of being cared for, tended to. He knew that soon enough Spencer would untie the blindfold and they would go eat in the next room. Spencer encouraged him to remain as relaxed and free from ingrained limits as he could manage. That included remaining naked in the apartment as long as he could stand. The younger man had pegged easily that he used his suits and things as armor to protect himself from the world. In here, Spencer would protect him. He was beginning to get used to wandering around nude.
Standing up, Spencer helped Aaron to rise, collecting a towel for the man to sit on, he led them into the kitchen to eat. His lips twitched in a smile when the older man sat at the table and then hissed loudly. Staring down at the beautiful naked body on his bed, ass red and swollen from the paddle, had started to stir something inside him. Watching that same ass walking into his kitchen, bending at the waist to reach across the table and pull one plate to where Aaron always sat. Watching as balls and dick were suddenly on display as the man turned and sat in his chair. Spencer headed for the bathroom, claiming a need to wash his hands. In truth, he needed time to calm his body. He didn’t want Aaron to see his growing arousal.

==

He’d been watching Spencer since they had arrived at the office that morning. The younger man looked… tired. Garcia hadn’t said anything beyond her usual good morning as he’d come up the hall, he hoped that meant she was going to keep quiet about what she knew. It left Aaron time to worry more about his friend.

He knew Spencer rarely made it back to Vegas to see his mom, he planned on suggesting that he take the time while they were here to do that. Gathering most of the team on the jet, they dug into the little information they had about the latest abducted boy. The clock was ticking. When Spencer mumbled something from the far end of the couch, he looked up, the younger man was asleep. It wasn’t unheard of for any of them to doze off on the jet, sometimes naps were the only sleep any of them got while cases were going on. And the smooth rumble of the plane tended to lull them all to sleep. Deciding not to make a big deal of it, Hotch continued with the review until Spencer cried out again. Exchanging eye contact and a nod with Emily, Aaron waited for her to wake him up. He would have to talk to Spencer later about what was wrong. Right now, they had a boy to find.

==

Aaron stood next to the mother at the funeral. He stared at the horribly small coffin. He tried to imagine the horror of being the parent watching their own child being lowered into the ground. He pictured he and Haley losing Jack, as horrible as it was to think about. No matter their relationship, he would stand by her no matter what. Scanning the crowd, his team scattered throughout, he tried to imagine knowing the person who kidnapped, killed, your child coming to what you mourn. A man who would harm a child and then relish the despair of the family deserved prison. Deserved worse than prison.

He caught Emily glancing at Dave and paused. Waited. Then Dave glanced to him. Following, Aaron saw the man videotaping the service. Videotaping the worst day of these parents’ lives. What was threatening to become a future reality for the couple next to him. A quick nod had Dave and Emily in motion. He prayed to a god he rarely believed in that this man was their guy. That the nightmare for this family could be over soon.

==

The nightmare wasn’t over. Aaron watched as the couple turned away from one another, laying blame everywhere they could, and he didn’t mind. The mother blamed him for not catching the right person at the funeral. He wanted to tell her, he blamed himself too. Then Spencer did what he always managed to do. He went from quietly processing everything to rallying and sharing his thoughts. He made sense, to a point. Everything about the behavior of their unsub screamed that despite the age of the boy who had been abducted, screamed that it was a woman. And as often happened between what he considered to be the two best brains on their team, where one hit a wall the other picked up and ran with it. And as the team often did, they followed them.

He just didn’t expect Spencer to show up at the unsub’s house looking even worse than when he’d
left them.

Seeing Reid though carrying that little boy out of the house, it made Aaron’s heart swell unexpectedly. He could just picture Spencer with Jack, whispering in his ear as they walked, heads tucked together. Squelching the thought before it got too carried away, he approached them. “Is he okay?”

“I think so. He’s hungry though, do you think we can find him something to eat and drink?”

Nodding, Aaron guided the pair back into the house to find something a five-year-old boy would like. Searching the cupboards, he found a package of chocolate chip cookies. “How do these look?” He held them up and Michael nodded, making Spencer grin. “Let’s get something to sit them on.” He fetched a paper towel and deposited a stack of cookies on top. The boy now distracted, he looked up at Spencer. “Are you okay?”

“I… We’ll talk later.”

Hotch nodded, taking a seat to watch the boy eat.

When Emily let them know JJ and the parents had arrived, Spencer watched his friend walk the child outside. Hotch was a good dad and it showed. Even with caring for this little boy who wasn’t his own, it was obvious he was meant to be a father.

==

Walking away from Reid, Morgan slapped Hotch on the back. “So, you gonna come join us?”

He smiled at the other man. “You want your boss hanging around while you’re in Vegas?”

“But you won’t be our boss tonight. Come on. What else you gonna do? Sit in your room? Pretty Boy is stayin’ with his mom, JJ’ll be asleep. Come hit the slots.”

“I don’t gamble. Not in casinos anyway.”

“Huh.” Morgan shook his head.

“What?” Hotch felt himself grin.

“You’d be hell to play against. We can catch a show then, I’m sure Rossi knows a place. Just us guys.”

Stopping, he glanced past the younger man’s shoulder and then back to him. “What about Emily?”

“Well, okay. The guys and Emily. What a night, sounds like fun. Come on, what do you say?” He flashed his blinding smile.

“Okay. We’ll figure it out at the hotel.” He led them to the SUV.

“I can’t believe we had to stay off the strip.”

“What was I supposed to do? Make Reid sleep in the car? He’s banned from practically every place with a casino attached.”

Morgan laughed heartily as he climbed in.

==
“It’s a bad idea, Emily.” Rossi warned, shaking his head.

“Come on, Rossi! My parents were politicians. I’ve been drinking since I was big enough to sneak the bottles, I have lots of practice and wild years on my side. And some of those countries I’ve lived in have stronger stuff than all this!” She waved her hand over the table covered in glasses.

Dave was kicked back with a cigar and a single glass of high end scotch, determined to remain a spectator. “I think you underestimate Aaron’s abilities to hold his liquor.”

Morgan was off, busy paying for the next rounds while Aaron sat in the booth looking totally relaxed and at home.

“He’ll either beg off to go back to his room or surrender, you watch.” She held up the last full drink and turned to Hotch. “Ready?”

“Sure, why not.” His smile was coming easily now. They were working their way through the display behind the bar, Emily had challenged that she could carry on longer than he could. With Derek and Dave grinning at his side, he could hardly turn down the challenge. Tossing back whatever was in the glass, he coughed, it had a serious kick to it. But he’d finished.

Emily smacked the table, bringing a laugh out of Morgan as he returned. “Still not ready to give up, Princess?”

“Never!”

“Well I hate to tell ya, but my money’s on this man here. And I’d be willing to bet that at the end of this silliness, he’d still have a steadier hand on a target.”

“You will never know.” Hotch assured.

“Hey!” Emily was indignant. Or, as indignant as she could be when suddenly there was more than one of her close friend grinning at her. “You can’t know that!”

“I wouldn’t take that bet, Emily. Stick to losing the one you’re on.” Dave was enjoying the amusement right at their table. The woman singing on stage forgotten. “When do we call it a draw and go to bed?”

Aaron looked at his watch. “Well, our departure time is eight A.M. so… how much sleep do you need?”

“We can sleep when we’re dead.” Morgan laughed.

Emily leaned across the table, knocking several glasses over, and grabbed Hotch’s tie. “Your tie is moving. These damned dots, they’re moving! How are they doing that?”

Morgan tried to push her back into her seat. “They’re not movin’, you’re floatin’.”

The song changed and Emily lit up, still holding Hotch’s tie. “I love this song!” Pulling him, she beamed. “Come dance with me!” She dragged him out of the booth by his tie.

With the pair was on the dance floor, Derek turned to Rossi. “What do you think they’ll look like in the morning?”

Dave grinned. “Aaron will be just fine.”

==
JJ stepped into the cool air of the jet, Emily stumbling in behind her, and spotted Hotch reclined halfway down. “How do you not look like hell?”

“What?”

She gestured to the other woman. “I heard you guys tried to out drink one another. Guess she lost.” Emily groaned. “Rossi warned me.” She headed for the couch and sprawled out. “I didn’t listen.”

Chuckling at her friend, JJ faced Hotch. “Rossi said he told you he and Morgan are sticking around to support Reid.”

“Yeah, he called me. Morgan told me about the nightmares Reid’s been having, he’s worried about him.”

“You didn’t want to stay too?”

He studied her, wondered if she knew. JJ was perceptive, but the question seemed innocent enough. “They’ll handle it.”

After letting the pilots know they were ready, JJ settled into the seats across from him, putting her feet up.

With little else to distract him at the moment, he watched the mother-to-be lovingly stroke her belly. “You excited?”

She was startled by his question. “Yeah. I am. Any advice?”

He thought a minute. “Don’t feel like you have to rush back to us.” He swallowed and chewed his lip. “I’ll, we’ll, miss you. But take all the time you feel you need. It goes fast. And people really aren’t kidding when they say sleep when the baby does.”

JJ chuckled, looking down as she felt her baby kicking in her belly. “Will and I… We’ve talked about how we’re going to do this. I don’t want to leave the BAU and he loves being a cop. He just keeps telling me we’ll work it out a day at a time.” She stared into the middle distance a minute and then to Hotch. “What if, when the time comes, I can’t come back?”

Hotch reached out and placed a hand on her arm reassuringly. “Then we’ll talk about it. Right now, just focus on this.” He was surprised when she took his hand with her opposite one and tugged it down against her swollen belly.

“I let Spence feel him kick. He’d never felt a baby kicking.”

Enjoying the feel of the strong kicks under his palm, he asked. “How’d that go?”

“It creeped him out.” She laughed. “The look on his face was…priceless. Em told me he was staring a while back and she asked him if he was considering having baby geniuses on day.”

He thought back to the sight of Reid with young Michael. “Yeah?”

JJ nodded. “She didn’t say if he answered. Can you imagine though, a bunch of miniature Spencer’s running all over the place?”

The mental picture brought a smile to his face.

Letting go of his hand so he could sit back, she sighed. “He’d make an awesome dad.”
“Yeah. He would.”

==

Coming down the steps from his office, Aaron could hear the three women talking by Emily’s desk. He caught Emily’s comment and despite being almost certain as to what she meant, he had to ask. “Donor for what?” The three guilty and slightly embarrassed looks he got in return confirmed that they had been discussing what he thought. Well, women got discussed like pieces of meat often enough, not that he agreed with that, but he could suck it up and let it go. And he was glad Emily looked better than she had when they left Vegas, the hangover having worn off. Leaving them to continue talking, he excused himself and went in search of Garcia.

Penelope spun around in her chair when her office door opened. “Hey!” She waved him in. “I am running all the information you already gave me, we should have something to work with in just a minute.”

Pushing the door shut behind him, Hotch thanked her and took a seat. “So there’s nothing we can do just yet?”

“No.” Her curls bounced as she shook her head.

“Then… Could we talk?” He leaned forward, elbows on his knees and hands folded. Tilting his head, he looked up at her. “For a minute? Just you and I?”

“Sure.” She dropped her pen and turned so he had her full attention. “What’s up?”

“Spencer… Spencer said you dropped by his apartment the other day. Right before we left for Vegas.”

“I did.”

He took a deep breath and held it a moment, chewing the corner of his lip. “We’re not… We haven’t been meeting very long. And I’m not…” Hotch caught himself. He’d started to say he wasn’t gay, but these thoughts he’d been having about Spencer… Was it just a thing or was it real? “I don’t know what I am. But it helps.”

“What happens it between the two of you. As long as it’s consensual and you both are happy with the arrangement, it’s not my business.” She rolled her seat forward and wrapped his large hands in her smaller ones. “I’m happy for both of you. I’m sorry if me finding out makes you uncomfortable. I saw your pull-over in his living room and knew. Have you been to the club with him yet?”

“Uh, no. I wasn’t really comfortable going out somewhere.”

“Well, think about it.” Her computer beeped. “Looks like our search is done.”

==

Disconnecting the call in Garcia’s office with Morgan, Hotch rang Dave directly to check on Spencer. He would have thought hearing his dad cared at least enough to keep tabs on him would have counted for something. Apparently, he was wrong. Hotch listened as Dave recounted their entire day so far with the younger man, right up until he admitted Spencer had wandered off and neither Morgan nor Rossi knew where he’d gone.

The only thing Hotch could offer was to check the nearest small time gambling area. And to watch
for hookers. Something in Spencer seemed to attract the women like flies. Perhaps it was his innocent appearance.

Later, Dave would tell him that not only did he find their young genius in the company of a woman of the night, but that Reid had left her with over two thousand dollars in winnings on a machine.

Knowing Spencer as long as he had, it didn’t really surprise him.

==

He was pouring a fresh cup of coffee when Penelope appeared in the bullpen sharing that JJ was in labor. A surge of adrenaline pressed him into motion, darting off to collect a car while the others helped JJ get out of the building. It was exactly the same and yet completely different from when he rushed to drive Haley to the hospital to have Jack. He navigated his way off the base and to the hospital while Emily and Garcia held JJ’s hands in the back and Will was called.

At the ER entrance, JJ nodded in understanding as Garcia hopped out and headed inside to let the desk know what was up. Reminding herself it would all be over soon, she started to scoot out of the back seat, smiling at Hotch when he opened the door and offered his arm. “Thanks.” She just missed his reply as she stopped as another contraction rippled through her, clinging tightly to his jacket sleeve until it was over. “Sorry.”

He shook his head. “It’s okay, really. Let’s get you inside. How about Emily walks you in and I’ll park and catch up?” He put one arm around her to make sure she was steady as her feet hit the pavement.

JJ turned and looked up at her friend who looked slightly panicked, giggling when the brunette replied. “I’ll park the car. You’ve done the supportive thing before.”

Hotch tossed her the keys and let JJ lean into him as they walked inside. “Will’s on his way?”

“His partner was going to drop him back at his car, he has a change of clothes in the trunk. He should be here within the hour.”

“Well, we’re all here until you deliver. If you need anything, just say so.”

She smiled up at him again as they stepped inside. A nurse met them just inside the door and had JJ sit in a wheelchair, pushing her straight up to labor and delivery. Garcia and Emily were trotting alongside trying to talk to her until the nurse stopped them at the door and said they had to wait. In the now quiet room, the nurse helped her get changed into a gown.

“Is that your husband in the hall? The handsome one in the suit?”

“Oh, no, that’s Hotch. My boss. My husband will be here soon, he was at work.”

The nurse nodded. “Do we know what we’re having?”

“A boy.”

The kind woman smiled. “Boys are the best if I do say so myself. I have four of them.” She was strapping the monitor in place when another contraction hit. “You’ll be okay till your husband arrives?”

“I guess so. It’ll be about an hour, well, less than that now. He doesn’t want to miss it.”
“You want one of your friends in here with you?”

JJ thought hard. “Could you see if Aaron would come in here? Tell him it’s okay if he doesn’t feel comfortable.”

The nurse nodded and slipped out of the room. Walking up to the man in the suit, she spoke. “Are you Aaron?”

“Yes.”

“She’s asking for you.”

Hotch entered JJ’s room and shut the door. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah.” She tried to hide the wince of pain. “Would you… would you stay until Will gets here?”

He was surprised at the request. “Are you sure? I’m sure either of the others would love to?”

Her head was already shaking. “Pen is no good with people hurting and Emily… she puts on a brave face but I think it makes her nervous.” She smirked. “Nothing bothers you and you’ve been through this before.”

Taking a seat, he agreed.

After the next contraction during which Aaron had reached out and held her hand through, she had to ask. “You ever consider more kids?”

“I did. Maybe if I find someone else who will put up with me, maybe. I think it’s the most awesome thing a woman can ever do. Create life, bring it into the world. When Haley had Jack… I was speechless. For hours she was in labor and then in the wee hours of the morning there was this moment. Suddenly the whole room was silent. Waiting. And then he cried. This tiny sound and then he was there on her chest, in her arms. I was so afraid to touch him.” He was lost in a memory now, staring unfocused. “It felt like if I touched him, all I’ve seen, all I’ve done, it would taint him, this perfect being. The nurse pushed me to cut the cord and they bundled him up and put him in my arms. He was so tiny. But it made me feel so small, like I suddenly wasn’t big enough to protect him from the world.” Shaking himself back to the present, he met her eyes and saw the tears there. “Sorry.”

“No. That was wonderful.”

Lapsing back into silence, he stayed by her bed until Will arrived. Shaking the father-to-be’s hand, he congratulated him and went to the waiting room.

Garcia shared that the case was over, the three men would be flying home. She wasn’t sure if it was resolved for Reid, but the Riley murder case was now closed along with another one. They would just have to wait and see.

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Will stepped out into the hall and found the members of the BAU in the waiting room. “Well, he’s here.” He beamed. He exchanged hugs with the ladies and shook Hotch’s hand again. “She wants you all to come and see him. She also asked if someone can call Reid and make sure he stops by when he lands.”

“I’ll do it!” Garcia already had her phone out. “I’ll be right there!”
Emily and Hotch followed Will up the hall.

“I’m really thankful y’all got her here safe and stayed. We’re both lucky to have friends like you.” Pushing the door open, he headed straight for JJ. “Garcia’s callin’ Reid. She’ll be in in a minute.”

“Thanks.” She gave him a kiss before turning to the other two. “Want to hold him?”

Emily shook her head and turned to Hotch, teasing. “Come on, you now you want to.” She nudged his shoulder with her own.

Grinning, he acquiesced. “I’d love to hold him.” He stepped close and took Henry into his arms. “I can’t believe Jack was ever this small.” He stared down at the tiny infant, a small voice in his head wondered what Spencer would look like holding him. Garcia bursting in broke his thoughts.

JJ laughed and pulled her friend close. “Pen? We want you to be Henry’s god mother.”

“Oh! Me? I get to be his fairy godmother? Really!” She excitedly peered over Hotch’s shoulder at the newborn. “I’m going to spoil you so much! Godparents get baby holding rights!”

Hotch passed the excited analyst the baby and asked. “Who is the god father?”

JJ exchanged a look with Will. “We’re going to ask Spence.”

“He’ll be thrilled.”

“I hope so.”

==

Returning with a spare cup of coffee, Hotch peered into JJ’s hospital room and his breath caught. Spencer was standing by the bed with Henry in his arms as he spoke to him, a wide grin on his face. His heart thumped with excitement at the sight. He wondered what the younger man’s answer to Prentiss was about being a father. He saw JJ notice him hovering and stepped in, holding up the second cup when Reid looked up as well. “I thought you might want coffee.”

Spencer smiled “Thanks.” He looked down at the baby again. “JJ wants me to be Henry’s god father, can you believe that?”

“I can.” Hotch smiled when Reid looked up in happy surprise. “You look good holding him. Like a natural.”

“Really? I feel like I’m about to drop him or squish him. Or he’ll look up and me and start screaming like every other kid ever.” He laughed nervously.

“Not Jack.” Hotch replied distractedly.

“Yeah. Not Jack.” The baby started to fuss and Spencer quickly passed him back to JJ.

“If you’re ready to go home, I’ll drive you.”

“Sure. That’s be good.” He nodded. “We could grab dinner?”

“Yeah.”

==
Spencer leaned against the kitchen counter and watched Aaron clean up the dishes from dinner. “I’m sorry about the Riley case. I didn’t mean to drag everyone into it.”

“You needed to sort it out and we were more than capable to help.” Hotch shrugged.

“Well, I appreciate having the latitude to look into it and it helped having Rossi and Morgan stay.”

Glancing at the apartment door a moment, Aaron cleared his throat. “I spoke to Garcia when I got back. Before I took JJ to the hospital. So, she knows about our… relationship doesn’t seem like quite the right word.” Staring at the glass in his hand a minute, he finally looked at Spencer. “We haven’t really talked about this thing we’re doing. I mean… We’ve discussed boundaries and that sort of thing but… Is what we’re doing okay? Garcia, she said as long as we were both happy and consenting, she was happy for us. Is it that simple?”

Pushing off the counter, Spencer slowly crossed the room. His brows and mouth twitched as he thought. “I think it is. Okay and that simple I mean. You said once that everyone has to find their thing that helps them get past the horrors of our job. Penelope… She helped me find a way to feel in control, to feel stronger. I spent my whole life being weaker, smaller, younger and she showed me how to take those feelings and use them. You…” He trailed off.

“I what?” Aaron’s brows pulled together in curiosity.

“At work you’re in control, calling the shots. Anyone who challenges you is knocked down; anyone who defies you is punished. I saw you in that courtroom in Roanoke, when you took on that lawyer. He questioned the validity of our jobs and you didn’t even flinch, you put him in his place. You do it without even breaking stride. But somewhere you have to let go and let someone else handle things and I think… I think that for as unhealthy as maybe things were with Haley, she still filled a need there. For you to have someone else take over for a while. But that? That wasn’t healthy.” Spencer drew in a deep breath. “How often did she ask if you were okay? Did she make sure you were okay? When was the last time she just held you when you were upset?”

Aaron tried to think. He learned very young that boys didn’t cry and he wasn’t willing to subject Haley to the things he knew so he never raised his voice to shout at her. It was easier when he was upset to just stay quiet so he didn’t say the wrong things. A hand on his cheek startled him.

“As long as you want this, I’m here. When you stay stop, we’ll stop. I won’t push you into anything.”

He wanted to scream at him to please push him, pressure him! He wanted to know what it felt like to press their lips together. He wanted to know if he tasted like sweet coffee, if his hands were soft or rough from handling his gun. Staring into Spencer’s eyes he reminded himself, the younger man had only been interested in a platonic friendship. He didn’t want to scare him off by making any unwanted advances. Nodding, he licked his lips. “I want this.”

Back ing out of Aaron’s personal space, Reid looked around the room. “I ordered some stuff. It came in the mail while we were away if you’re interested in playing.”

“What’d you get?”

A mischievous smile spread across his face. “You’ll have to wait and see.” He quickly did a mental inventory of what had arrived and came up with a plan. “Go lie on the bed in just your boxers.” His voice had become authoritative.

Hotch’s eyes instantly went to the floor, voice silent. He nodded and hurried into the bedroom,
stripping as he went.
Strolling back into his room, mugs of coffee in hand, Spencer stared at the man asleep in his bed. Aaron was staying over at least once a week now; their relationship was still some weird form of platonic. He set the mugs on the nightstand and crawled back up the bed, adjusting the pillows so he could lean against the headboard.

Whatever this was, Spencer was happy to be able to fill this emotional need for the older man. Staring down at the sleeping face, he tried to bury his attraction to him. Aaron clearly wasn’t interested, even during play or in the early hours when they were wrapped together, his body betrayed no attraction. It made Spencer all the more embarrassed when his own body showed some interest. Aaron either hadn’t noticed or was being polite enough to pretend not to.

His eyes trailed across Aaron’s broad chest and shoulders and then down to where the hair thinned into a narrow line over his abs, like an arrow straight to his cock. Yanking his eyes up and away, Spencer reminded himself thinking like that was wrong. It wasn’t part of the deal. Instead he tried to remember where each of the red dots were from the night before. They’d explored wax play for the first time, Aaron had seemed to love it. The sounds he’d made, the moment his head had lolled back, eyes rolling shut. Spencer let the memory play through his mind like a movie. When the wax had trickled down his chest and abs, cooling just before it dribbled too far, Hotch had exhaled a moan that had left Spencer breathless. It was deep and guttural and so erotic that Spencer had had to step away. With a sound like that, Spencer had expected the older man to show some sort of twitch at the very least. Spencer had definitely twitched from it. He was still sporting half-hardness in his pants when they finished and he slowly peeled the dry wax away.

The memory reawakened his body, his eyes darted sharply to the sleeping face beside him before he readjusted himself. His hand around his cock felt good though, he wondered if he had time to sneak into the shower before Hotch woke up. He considered trying to just will his erection away, but the tug of his hand up hard flesh as he went to pull back made him have to bite back a groan. Mind over problem wasn’t going to cut it this morning. Sitting back on the edge of the bed, back to the remaining occupant, he allowed himself a split second for his eyes to slide shut as his hand fondled his dick. Feeling the sheets shift as Aaron moved, Spencer darted up and into the bathroom before he was caught quite literally red handed.

Aaron blinked awake, rubbing his face into the pillows and smelling Spencer’s scent lingering there as he did. He loved the smell of Spencer and waking up like this, in his bed, it felt right. He knew it was wrong to take advantage of the younger man’s good nature, but Spencer inviting him to stay the night, even just as a friend, could be enough if it was all he could get. Spotting the mugs of coffee, Aaron sat up and took the darker one. He couldn’t fathom how Spencer drank his so sweet. Sitting naked in the other man’s bedroom, he listened to the shower running. He wished he was brave enough to march in there and join him, to insist they should try a real relationship, but he knew the boundaries and didn’t want Reid to push him away because he didn’t respect them.

Instead he stood and crossed to the bathroom door, knocking before slipping in. “Mind if I use the restroom?”

Through the frosted glass, Spencer couldn’t make out the details of Aaron’s body, he hoped Aaron couldn’t make out the details of his either or this would get very awkward. “It’s okay.” He was frozen in place, one hand desperately wrapped around his cock, tension painfully hovering in his balls and right at the base of his dick where the fingers of his other hand were keeping his orgasm at bay. He was teetering on the edge. One wrong moment and he’d be coming uncontrollably over
his small shower with the man of his fantasies a foot away on the other side of the glass. *With his own dick in his hand* his brain offered helplessly.

The moment the toilet flushed and the door clicked shut, Spencer turned loose, his hand fisting his cock painfully. With a gasp, come coated the glass in thick strands right where Spencer had watched Aaron’s form on the other side just seconds before.

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If ever he was tempted to agree with Garcia’s assessment of a case being “icky”, this was definitely the one. He would have been happy to never have known that people could live for hours or longer with their guts hanging out. How Spencer knew these things and was able to walk around as a mostly functioning member of society was beyond him.

The flight to Atlanta wasn’t long, freshly in for the day the team was well rested and focused on finding the killer. Even Spencer was in usual form, finding tangents in the most amazing places and though he enjoyed listening to the younger man talk immensely, Hotch had cut him off for the sake of time. He promised himself that he would ask him about it later.

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Spencer was just getting coffee when Hotch stormed back into the office, Morgan and Todd following behind at a slower pace. He spun, watching their boss blow by and then turned back to the pair. “What happened? He looks pissed. Like… Pissed.”

Morgan exchanged a look with Jordan and stepped close, keeping his voice low. “Jordan lied to the family to get the mother to open up.”

“Lied?”

Jordan sighed. “I told her my older sister died in a car accident. I based it on an educated guess and she was willing to open up once she thought I could relate.”

“And did she?”

“Open up?”

“No. Die?” Spencer shook his head.

“I’m an only child.”

He nodded in understanding. “And because he’s read your file, he knew.”

She glanced at Morgan. “And Morgan let me know just how big of a mistake that was in Hotch’s eyes.” She glanced to where their boss was scowling at the evidence board. “If this makes him unbearable the rest of the day, I’m sorry.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” Spencer resumed his search for coffee and now a bite to eat. When he returned with coffee and food, everyone was gathered around newspapers, trying to see where the hookers had been advertising. He didn’t see Jordan anywhere. Setting a cup and bag by Hotch, he leaned in. “For you. Eat.”

Aaron looked up in surprise. “What?”

“Food, coffee. Eat. Morgan told me what Jordan did, I understand why you’re upset, but right now
you need to put it aside so you can focus. And, I know you focus better when you’ve eaten. So eat.”

==

Listening to Viper preach to his class made Hotch’s skin crawl. How did women even fall for this stuff? He was training future unsubs. Unbelievable. Emily’s observation of the man made him have to hide a smirk. She wasn’t wrong, he was clearly all of those things and probably a few more. He glanced over a Morgan, who looked ready to take the man down a peg or three already. Perhaps these two weren’t the right choices for coming on this interview. Both could toe the line of professionalism when pushed.

Speaking to Viper face to face went about as well as Aaron expected. Viper zeroed in on Emily as a worthy opponent and the two men were left to almost fade into the background until Viper threw a few barbs Morgan’s way.

Apparently Hotch wasn’t much of a perceived threat. He’d have to think that over later.

Emily’s eagerness to keep Viper on their radar made him smirk. Their suspect clearly wasn’t aware of what nest he’d just kicked.

==

Heading back into the office, Hotch recounted for Garcia the interview with Viper, chuckling at her reaction to the amount of balls, or stupidity, the man had for putting Emily on the spot like that. He had to agree, Emily was a seriously formidable opponent when provoked. And Viper had definitely pushed her buttons.

“Sir? Does this stuff actually work? Or real, breathing girls?”

He was surprised by her question. He didn’t exactly have a reputation like Morgan or Dave of dating lots of women. Aside from Haley, his experience was seriously limited. “Why are you asking me?”

“I abhor the whole ‘chicks dig jerks’ thing.”

He chuckled. That didn’t really surprise him. Garcia had a good heart, was a good person. But she was strong and tougher than she gave herself credit for. “Well, fortunately Garcia, you’re one of the exceptions.”

“Well.” He heard her giggle. “Be still my be-speckled heart, so are you, Sir!”

As he hung up, he realized he could feel himself becoming less tense. The annoyance from earlier seemed to be fading. He thought he might be actually smiling when he looked up and saw Dave walking his way.

==

Emily’s request startled him. It probably didn’t help that he had been standing uncomfortably in the women’s locker room when she’d asked. The look on her face had told him she expected him to agree and it made him wonder if all of the women around him thought he was a pushover.

The fact that he’d went along with her idea probably meant they were right.

Standing shoulder to shoulder with Dave while the younger members of the team were at the clubs,
discussing the profile, it helped center him. He and Dave were good at this, bouncing the profile back and forth, stepping into it and trying it on. Any other problems seemed to fall away as they put their heads together and shared ideas. They used to do it all the time before Dave had retired, and he’d enjoyed it. Dave was good at pushing boundaries, dissecting motives and triggers.

It helped him keep him mind off Spencer out at a club with Morgan.

With everyone out, Dave was standing well within his personal space, chest to shoulder. Whatever he was about to say wasn’t going to be case related. “How are things with you and the Kid?” And there it was.

“What do you mean?” He glanced over his shoulder and just caught an eyebrow raising. Dave had him nearly pinned to the board now, crowding him in. It was an interrogation tactic he’d seen the older man use before, presence to make up for the height difference. Now he understood why it worked. “We’re just friends. We agreed to it. But, yes… I spend time at his place. It’s… been helping.”

“How much time?”

“I, umm, I spend the night once a week. We hang out another night or two depending.”

“You spend the night at his place? I didn’t think he had a guest room.”

Hotch blushed.

“Oh really.”

Turning in the tight space, Aaron tried his best not to sound defensive. Dave could be like a hound on a scent. “He’s been helping me figure out how to let my guard down. It’s not…”


“Dave!” He hissed between his teeth. “Yes, we share a bed and yes I sleep…” He stopped.

“You sleep what?”

Hotch sighed. “Part of helping me… I admitted I use my suit, my clothes, as a defense against the world. So, he encouraged me to be naked. Sleep naked.” When he finally looked up at his friend, he saw the biggest grin across the man’s face. “It’s not about sex!” He whisper-shouted. “He’s not interested, he’s just doing it as a friend. He’s never gotten…” He burned red again.

Dave clicked his tongue against his teeth. “And if he were?”

“I can’t think about that. It hurts too much.”

“So, you care for him.”

Bowing his head, Hotch conceded. “Yes. I do.”

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Dave and Hotch both looked up as Morgan and Reid were the first pair to return. Morgan had his arm slung around Reid’s neck and was teasing him.

“What’s going on?” Hotch was smiling at their joy.
“Pretty Boy here managed to impress a lady. She even asked for his number and I’m pretty sure she wasn’t meanin’ for the case.” He nudged his friend until the younger man shoved him. “And she was a good lookin’ thing too.”

Dave bit his lip and threw a look toward his friend to gauge him. He looked stunned. “Well, while you boys were out flirting, did you actually do your job?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Morgan nodded. “All the flyers went out. It’s just an added perk that Pretty Boy got to get some flirting on. I believe he can do it, just gotta get him to.”

Reid glanced at Hotch, he looked odd, almost hurt. “Is everything with the case okay? Have you heard from Emily and Jordan?”

“Yes.” Hotch spoke up “Emily thinks the unsub knew Vanessa personally.”

==

Looking up and seeing Spencer with the woman he knew was the one Morgan had been talking about in his arms. It was too much. He could see clearly that his feelings toward the other man weren’t returned. Here was someone, a woman his own age, who had showed an interest in Spencer and he was already openly caring for her, helping her to safety and to the ambulance. Spencer had agreed to their arrangement probably out of pity, at best out of friendship. If that’s all he was going to get of the young genius, he would cling to it until Spencer wanted to have a more fulfilling relationship with someone else. He made a promise to himself that when the time came, he wouldn’t let Spencer see how heartbroken he was. He would be happy for him. Finding that someone special was a big deal, he couldn’t deny his friend that kind of happiness, even if it wasn’t with him.
The smell of death, of decomposing bodies, it was a smell he never forgot. Stepping into that kitchen, Hotch just knew. A man, a father, shot his own wife, his own children. Lost somewhere in a delusion brought on by grief, he was compelled to blast a shotgun shell through each of them as they lay in bed. Each room was horrific, close range gunshots of any kind always left gory scenes, but shotguns were always a little worse. And the one girl was so small, there wasn’t a whole lot left of her where it had gone through.

He was going to have nightmares. How could a father, even in the throughs of a delusion, do such a thing? The man had watched his youngest die before him and in an attempt to protect the others, he destroyed them. Wiped them from the earth.

The flight home was quiet. Jordan was still upset, Dave had taken it upon himself to comfort her, falling into the role of something akin to a father. Under other circumstances, Hotch may have found it within himself to be worried for her. This job was hard, her job as liaison was harder in some ways. JJ never complained, but he knew cases affected her as well. Jordan had shouted at him in the street, angry over being put in that position without being told the possible outcomes.

The three that had captured the unsub were tucked together at the other end of the small plane. Having shared that moment, seeing a broken man face his reality, it made them want to linger together for a while longer.

It left Hotch sitting alone. Feeling morose, for the lack of a better word. Something somewhere inside him chuckled, thinking Reid could probably give him a whole page of better words. Haley was out of town for another two days, so there would be no stopping to see Jack once they landed. He had overheard Morgan asking Reid about Austin, it made him wonder how much longer he had before the younger man asked if they could end their arrangement. He was afraid to ask him outright, as much as Aaron was happy he found someone, it would hurt too much to see him smile as he talked about her. For now, he just pretended he didn’t know.

Seeing JJ in the conference room, as much as he played it off as upset she was there, felt nice. She looked good holding Henry. And after that case, it was nice to see everyone excited about the tiny boy. He stood back and let everyone else pass the baby around, trying to hide the small ache at being denied the ability to hold his own son whenever he wished. As each one took their turn, he could see a glimpse of them as parents one day. And when Dave started singing to him and everyone laughed, it felt right. And it must have shown, because even JJ, always perceptive, pointed out he was smiling. When the other had had their fun, and had handed the sleeping baby back to her, JJ crossed to where he was sitting tucked out of their way on the couch and placed Henry in his arms.

Her hair brushed his arm as she leaned over. “You didn’t hold him.”

“It’s no big deal. Everyone was enjoying him.” Hotch started down at the sleeping baby.

Her hand landed on his shoulder. “You’re part of everyone too, Hotch.”

He opened his mouth to speak, to reply, but he couldn’t find the right words.
Spencer watched as JJ placed her son in Hotch’s lap. He couldn’t hear their conversation from across the room, but Hotch looked down at Henry with such obvious fondness, it was hard to miss. The man, for all his demeanor at work, was very comfortable in the role of father, protector. He could see his friend remarrying and have more kids one day, giving Jack a whole brood of little brothers and sisters. And what woman wouldn’t want him? He was the definition of good looking; tall, dark, and handsome. Especially in a suit.

“Why the look?” A voice whispered over his shoulder.

“Huh?” He spun around and came face to face with Garcia. “What look?”

She glanced across the room and back to him, grinning widely. “Oh, we are so talking when we get home.”

His last thought as she walked away was, well, crap.

==

Reid hoped she would forget. He didn’t really believe she would, but he hoped. Instead, he found himself sitting on Garcia’s couch, tea and cake in front of him, waiting for the interrogation to begin.

“So.” She plopped down beside him, setting her own treats on the table. “Talk. You have feelings for Bossman.”

“Garcia.” He whined.

“I know he’s your type. And I know you two spend a lot of time together. Even when I first joined the team there was something a little different between the two of you.”

“We’re friends. He was a mentor when Gideon left me to figure it out on my own. And whether he is or is not my type is irrelevant, I’m not his. He just got divorced.”

Penelope shrugged. “That doesn’t mean anything. So, are you attracted to him?”

He sighed. “Yes.” He flinched when she squealed. “I’m attracted to him. I think I always have been a little bit. It didn’t really start being a thing until after a case when he was upset, Haley was pushing for the divorce and keeping Jack away. He was just so upset… I helped him without even really thinking about it. We didn’t talk about what happened until later. Then when we started meeting more regularly, we talked about what we wanted and we agreed that it would remain platonic. He really was worried I would want something sexual and I didn’t want him to worry about that. And everything we’ve done, and I know it hasn’t been much, but he’s never once acted like he wants more. He’s never gotten aroused. Hell, when we’ve had sleepovers, he hasn’t even been um…” He blushed, unsure how to phrase it.

Garcia smiled softly. “Never?”

“He’s not interested and that’s okay. I just keep my mouth shut and he’ll never know. I don’t want to cause problems or make him uncomfortable.”

“Is that what the look was about?”

Reid nodded. “I was watching him with Henry. He’s such a good dad. I was thinking one day a woman will come along and he should have more kids. A big family, he’d be so good at it.”
“And you’re okay with that?”

“I will enjoy what I get with him until he finds someone and wants to stop.”

She pulled him into a hug. “I think you should tell him how you feel. He could surprise you.”

Wrapping his arms around her, he shook his head. “I can’t. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, Sweetie. It just hurts me to see you look that way when you think no one is looking.”

He pulled back. “I’ll keep seeing him and I’ll just enjoy every minute of it while it lasts. I know it will hurt, but I can’t hurt him by causing a problem. No matter what, I don’t want to be a problem that stands in the way of his happiness.”
Letting himself into his hotel room, Aaron discarded his bags and went to the window. It was a wonderful view of Dallas at night, the lights from this high up actually looked nice. He hated it when people requested just he fly out for a case, like somehow his team was less trustworthy, less vital, than he was. He always wanted to tell them it just delayed the inevitable. Staring out, he thought back to the conversation he’d had with Dave that morning before he’d flown to Texas. The older man had materialized in his office as he frequently did and had asked about his weekend with Jack.

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Jack had been wonderful. Haley had dropped him off late Friday night and Hotch had gotten forty-eight undivided hours to spend with his son. The two-year-old was just starting to talk and he chattered from the moment he woke up until well past bedtime. Doing his best to follow along, Aaron had nodded and smiled the whole day.

Saturday had been a trip to the park where Jack had run gleefully through the grass, up the ladders and down the slides. On Sunday morning they had walked around the neighborhood, Jack had been mesmerized by the organ music coming from a church several blocks over so Hotch had let them linger a little longer on the sidewalk out front. After lunch Aaron had driven them to the toy store and he let Jack squeal at every bright and cheerful character, purchasing several to keep at the apartment.

==

Standing in the doorway watching her sister make breakfast, Jessica wondered how to bring up her questions to her sister.

Putting the finishing touches on her eggs, Haley shut off the stove and turned around, surprised to see Jess in the room. “Oh! Good morning. I didn’t see you there.” She smiled as she sat at the table. “So, I’m Jack free for the weekend, what should we do?”

Jess shrugged and joined her sister at the table. “I’m open to ideas. Hey, how is Aaron doing?”

Haley gave her a confused look. “I don’t know. Why?”

“Well, you saw him last night dropping off Jack, I was just curious. It’s a little weird not seeing him now and again.”

“He’s not my problem. You know, I tried so hard to get him to leave that job and find something that would have him home regularly so we could be a family but he just refused. I was so patient and he just had to rush off and be with his precious team.”

Jessica chewed her lip. “Maybe he felt more appreciated there.”

Haley’s eyes burned with agitation. “Excuse me? I appreciated him. I loved him, even when he wasn’t around to love me back. He just wasn’t here to notice.”

“Haley… Sometimes? Sometimes I saw you talk to him…” She looked everywhere in the room but at her sister. “You treated him like a servant.”

“I did not!” Haley screeched. “It’s not my fault he couldn’t seem to figure out what needed done
without being lead around by the nose. You don’t know what it was like living with him. After he was in that horrific job a few years he got so paranoid and then he wouldn’t even come home.”

“Did you ever ask him about his job?”

“What? I didn’t want to hear about those crimes. I don’t want those nightmares.”

“But a guy like Aaron, he needs somewhere to unload all of those things he takes in.”

“And you think I should have let him unload on me?” She sat back and crossed her arms, food forgotten.

“You were his wife.”

“If it was that bad, he should have made a change.” She waved a hand in the air.

“Haley. When I would come over, Aaron barely spoke at all when you were around, he never looked happy. Hell, I could barely get him to make eye contact. But if you left? He changed. It was like he relaxed and could be the Aaron he was in college. He smiled a little. He was still skittish, like he was waiting for something to happen, but I could at least get him to talk.”

“And you think that’s my fault? Look, I suspected he was having an affair, probably with one of those women on his team. You say he needed to unload everything, he was probably doing it with them. I even had to hear about how he told one of them he loved her. She told me right to my face. I caught them wrapped around each other.”

“Aaron, who won’t let anyone touch him beyond a handshake, was wrapped around a woman at work? That doesn’t sound like him. And what makes you think he was sleeping around? Because you were?” She flinched reflexively as her sister surged up to storm out of the room.

Haley saw her sister flinch and froze. “Do you really think I would hit you?”

Lowering her voice, Jessica shook her head. “Of course not.”

Sitting back down, she frowned. “Do you think I hurt Aaron?”

She took a deep breath and let it out. “I don’t think he would have put up with you ever striking him, but you’ve always been good with using the right words to drive home your opinions. And I’ve seen you get angry with him. Haley… not all abuse leaves a mark.”

Stunned, she sat quietly for several minutes before asking in a small voice. “You really think I was abusing him?”

“You know I love you, you’re my sister. But. I think you might have been slowly killing him.” When Haley jumped up again and ran out of the room, Jess followed her. “I’m sorry! Sweetie, it just always felt like something was wrong when I visited and I was worried that if I spoke up you would think he said something and maybe take it out on him later when he denied it. Aaron would have never said anything negative against you even in his life depended on it. I didn’t know what to do and then you moved out and got divorced so I figured it was the best for everyone. But you even refused for him to see Jack until he bent to your will and you know deep down he’s a wonderful father. He deserves to get every opportunity to be with Jack that he can. Yes, his job has crazy hours, but do you want your son to grow up being a pawn? To never know his dad except as the guy who writes the checks and he sees maybe twice a year when you allow it?”

“No. I want him to know Aaron.”
“Then you need to maybe take a look at your relationship with him. Figure out when things changed and see maybe what made some of those changes happen.” She watched her sister sink onto the couch. “You can talk to me about anything you know.”

Both women kept to themselves the remainder of the morning and into early afternoon. Haley was angry at her sister for even hinting that she had ever treated her ex bad. Sure, she had figured out early in her marriage that Aaron carried an immense amount of guilt around for not being able to be with her more often and sure, she may have used that guilt to her advantage. But he could have asked her to stop, he was an adult.

Couldn’t he?

She thought back to when they were in high school, Aaron never wanted to bring her home to meet his family. She knew his little brother, Sean, but he kept his mother and father at arm’s length. Her parents had loved the tall, polite young man he’d been. Always quick to offer help to them, always respectful and agreeable to their wishes. A thought struck her for the first time ever. Aaron, for all his bravado and presence on the job, had always been the total opposite at home. Almost submissive. Jess was right about the woman at work too, Aaron hadn’t been wrapped around her, he tended to avoid touch until he got so desperate for human contact that he would curl into her side like a child.

And she’d used that needy quality to manipulate him whenever the urge struck her. And he never complained once. Haley went in search of her sister and found her in the guest bedroom. Hovering in the doorway, she waited for Jessica to look up. “I abused Aaron.” Her voice caught. “He was so submissive, so willing to do whatever I forced him to and I didn’t see it. I just saw what I wanted him to be. And when he did something I didn’t like, I punished him.” Tears burned her eyes. “I didn’t just make him sleep downstairs, Jess.”

Jessica stood and moved to stand in front of her sister. “What did you do?”

“I would use sex as a reward…or punishment.”

“So, you didn’t let him have sex once in a while.” Jess didn’t think that sounded too bad. Sometimes people weren’t in the mood.

“No, Sis. I would make sure I finished and not him. On purpose.”

She was staring at her sister now; not sure she ever really knew her at all. “How could you do that to someone? Is that how you’ve been treating the guy you’ve been dating?”

“Well, no.”

“Aaron knew you were having an affair and even after everything you’ve done, he didn’t use that against you. And Haley, you have to realize he would never start having an affair just because you were. He probably accepted it because it was his fault. And you know it wasn’t. You didn’t get your way and you never once considered his position. You didn’t care. Now. Now that you are starting to realize what you’d been doing all these years, what are you going to do to make it up to him?”

“I don’t know.” Haley looked away from her sister.

“I think for a start, you need to let him have access to Jack whenever he can. Stop taking him out of town when you know Aaron will have the weekend off. He gave you sole custody and let the visitation be all undecided, but you really need to meet him halfway.”
She nodded in thought. “Jess, can I ask you something?”

“Anything.”

“Aaron’s parents, he never really took me around them. Do you think something could have happened to him as a kid?”

Jess wondered how her sister never noticed the signs before. “I do think so. And I think he was so desperate to make you happy that you just carried it on.”

“I’m a horrible person.” She chewed her lip. “Do you think he’ll ever forgive me?”

“I think he doesn’t even blame you, Hon. I think he still loves you beyond all reason because at some point you loved him. I don’t think the divorce changed that. I bet if you asked his friends, he’s not even seeing other people now that he’s single. His loyalty will always be to you. You and Jack.”

“I have to fix this.”

==

Waiting for the team to arrive the next morning, Hotch spread out paperwork over the desk and quietly began to sort through it. The lead local popped in. “How’s the quiet suiting you?”

“How’s the quiet suiting you?” Hotch smiled up at him. “Honestly? I’m used to there being as many as five or six other people crammed in a space like this, all busy, talking. The quiet is a little strange.”

“Really?”

“The rest of my team is on their way, well, the part that always travels. Once they get here things will get moving faster.” The phone on the table rang. “Excuse me, that’s them now.”

==

Something about this case was leaving him feeling slightly off kilter. The hotel was nicer than they usually got when on a case, the victims were acting in some ways more like unsubs, and the unsub was being protected by the men she was hunting as well as their lawyers. And the professional problem solver. As much as she’d irritated him, she was a woman he could deal with.

The mess only complicated by lawyers and gag orders. Not that he or his team were afraid of the latter, but the former was quite a headache they really didn’t enjoy.

“You really never notice it, do you?”

Hotch looked up from the desk he was hunched over to locate the source of the voice. “Notice what?”

Dave chuckled. “So far today I’ve counted no fewer than four women flirting openly with you and you don’t even seem to notice.”

“They weren’t flirting with me.”

“No?” Dave’s brows rose. “I was pretty sure I was going to have to turn a hose on one of them.”

“Dave.”
“Or is your attention just so focused elsewhere that you don’t bother responding to their advances. You know, it wouldn’t hurt you to loosen up a bit.”

“And do what? Act like these men and find a call girl?”

“Well, for a start you wouldn’t be acting like these men. You’re single. Or did you forget?”

“No. I didn’t forget.” Hotch glanced around the room. “I don’t think I could be with someone else.”

“I know you loved Haley, but we talked about this. Your divorce was the best thing for you. You need to realize that and then figure out what you really want.”

“What I want, I can’t have.” He mumbled.

Rossi opened and closed his mouth several times, unsure how to respond. “And if you could? Have what you want? What would that be?” He saw he’s friend’s eyes cut quickly across the open room to where a certain genius stood, arms waving excitedly as he spoke before returning to meet his own. Dave sighed and nodded. “I’m not sure what to tell you.”

==

“Hey Garcia.”

“Oh, Boy Wonder, what’s with the voice? Dallas got you down?”

“Dallas is wonderful.” He sank into the chair by the window of his room. “Apparently it is full of, umm, cougars? Though?”

She tossed her head back and laughed. “Are you having to beat them off with a stick, my love?”

“No! No. But Hotch seems totally unaware that these women are falling at his feet.”

“Aww, are you jealous?”

He blushed and didn’t answer.

“Sweetie, I really think you need to just talk to him. He’s let you in so much, I really don’t think he’d freak out over saying you have a crush.”

“I’m not telling him. So, find another way to make me feel better.” He cleared his throat. “Someone we interviewed said something today. She said that these men, when they called the escorts, they really wanted someone to unload their problems onto so they could go home and be normal. Like a therapist. She talked about the dominant men needing to be submissive.”

She snorted. “Hell of a therapist.”

“It made me think. Is what I am with Hotch really that different? We meet so he can bleed off those things and be able to carry on with his life.”

“No, Sweetie, it’s not the same. For a start, he’s not paying you. And everything between the two of you is equal, even if it doesn’t feel like it. I promise, it’s not the same.” She let the quiet linger a moment. “Or are you wanting to be his late-night bootie call?”

“Garcia!” He yelped. “I’m hanging up now!”
She was just putting tags on files when her phone rang. “Office of Magic and Mystique, how may I
wow you?”

“Umm… Is this Ms. Garcia?”

Penelope hesitated at the soft, unfamiliar voice. “This is she.”

A sigh of relief. “Oh, good. I, umm, Aaron gave me this number a while back and said if there was
ever anything and I couldn’t reach him, that you would know.” Garcia could hear her voice relax.
“This is Haley, uh, Hotchner. His ex-wife.”

“Oh! I’m sorry, ma’am, I didn’t recognize your voice. What can I do for you?” She was confused
about why the woman would be calling now.

“I know Aaron’s been away on a case, I think he said in Texas? I didn’t want to call him directly in
case he was somewhere his phone shouldn’t ring.”

“Oh, the case just wrapped up, but the after-action stuff can sometimes take hours.”

“Oh.” She considered for a minute. “Is everyone okay? Is Aaron okay?”

Penelope pulled the phone away and stared at it a second. This was quickly becoming the most
bizarre phone call ever. “No one got hurt but the woman they were chasing did take a slight
fascination to Hotch and in the end, she committed suicide. I heard she asked him to sit with her as
she died and he did, held her hand. It wasn’t as violent or adrenaline filled as they sometimes get,
but experience tells me he’ll carry it around for a while. A young woman still died in front of him.”
She didn’t understand why the woman suddenly cared now. “Were you just trying to reach him?”

“Oh, I… do you have any idea when they’re getting back?”

“They’ve all been up since before sunrise, so he and JJ will probably try to swing it so they fly
back in the morning, but sometimes he can’t get approval. He, um, he likes to try and make sure
everyone can decompress before going home. Especially when a case keeps them from normal
eating and sleeping.”

Haley wondered why she’d never asked these things before. “I was going to ask him if he’d get
time off since he’s been gone, he could have Jack. I know he just had him over the weekend, but I
didn’t know if he would want to take the extra time.”

“I can let him know you called. The day after a case generally is only finishing paperwork from the
case.”

“If you could, just let him know to call me. If they end up flying back overnight, could you let me
know?”

“Um, yeah. I can do that.”

==

Checking the ID on his phone, he answered it. “Yes, Garcia?”

“Hey, Bossman. I was just calling to let you know I just got a sort of odd call to my office.”

“Odd?” He put down what he was looking at to give her his undivided attention.
“Haley called.”

He bristled. He remembered the last time his ex had called one of his team. “I’m sorry, Garcia, if she said anything that…” He stopped when she cut him off.

“No, it wasn’t like that. She mostly just asked if I knew if you were reachable and then she asked if everyone was okay. If you were okay. I was surprised so I, I told her what happened with Megan Kane, in the end. She said she was trying to find out if you wanted Jack when you got back. If you would have a day off or something.”

He was stunned. He usually had to beg to see his son. “Thanks for letting me know, Garcia. I’ll call her when we get back to DC.”

“Are you guys flying red-eye or coming back in the morning?”

Hotch sighed heavily now. While he was no longer fighting Haley on a daily basis, he still had the likes of Strauss in his life. “We have to fly red-eye. We’re the last flight out tonight, we’ll be leaving in a few minutes.”

“Okay. I, um, Haley asked me to call her if you were flying out tonight. I didn’t want to call her without telling you. It felt wrong.”

“I appreciate that. I guess call her and tell her. I don’t know why she would care, but, if you agreed to do it.”

“I will sir.”

==

They had landed back on base in the wee hours of the morning. Still processing what had transpired during the case, Hotch collected his things and waved everyone good night before heading to his vehicle. He had told the team to not come in to work on paperwork until noon.

As he sat behind the wheel, he phone rang. “Hello?”

“Aaron.”

“Haley? Is everything okay with Jack? Why are you up at this hour?”

Her voice was softer than he could remember in a long time. “I was waiting for you to land.”

“Garcia told me you called her earlier this evening. I was finishing up a case.”

“Do you work tomorrow? Or, today I guess now.”

He was confused about where this was going. “Yes, but I don’t have to be in the office until noon. Since we’re getting back at this hour, that gives everyone about an eight hour break.”

“I’ll let you get home and sleep but I was just wondering, would you… I could bring Jack by to have brunch with you before you go. I know you’ll only get a couple hours with him, but he’d really like it.”

“I… I’d love that Haley. But you don’t have to bring him to me. I know you’re busy and you both have a routine.”

“No, Aaron. I’ll call when I’m on the way. Okay?”
“Yeah. Okay.”

==

Rossi was eating breakfast when Garcia called him the next morning. “To what do I owe this pleasure, Garcia?”

“I, um, it’s not my place but something weird happened and you’re his best friend and I thought you should have a heads up incase everything went to crap.”

“Well, I’m assuming this is about Hotch then?”

“Yes. And Haley.”

Rossi inhaled a sharp breath. “Go on.”

“She called me yesterday, when the case was over. It was weird, she was going to offer him extra time with Jack and she asked if everyone was okay on the case. It was a little twilight zone.”

“I see.” His mind began to spin. Surely, she wasn’t trying to get back with him. “I’ll ask him about it later on, but now that he’s single, it seems his heart is being lead down a different road.”

“Oh really.”

“I can’t betray confidences but he’s been spending time with someone and I think he’s developed some serious feelings for them. He doesn’t think anything will come of it, but for now…”

Her eyes popped open wide. “Wait! He has feelings for Reid?”

“What? Why would you guess Reid?”

“Because they’ve been…hanging out together. And dear lord that boy is head over heels in love with Bossman.”
Spencer laid curled in his bed, wrapped around a pillow and staring at his phone. In the past week, Hotch had been a bit more distant without any sort of explanation. Rain pounded against the window while he debated calling the other man to check on him. Garcia was stuck overnight at the office and had texted him earlier to say Hotch was still holed up in his office. It made him worry.

Over dinner the day after the last case, Aaron had shared that Haley had brought Jack by that morning. That she had wanted to set up something to work around his schedule so Hotch could spend as much time as possible with his son. It seemed odd to him that the woman who would never budge for her husband’s job the entire time they were married would now be willing once they were divorced. But he didn’t want to ruin Hotch’s excitement over more time with his son, so Reid kept quiet. Reid worried that more time with Jack also meant more time with Haley. Maybe she wanted to try again. That thought hurt just a bit.

Dialing his phone, Reid figured it couldn’t hurt to check up on him. “Hey, Hotch.”

“Let me guess, Garcia told you I was still at work?” His voice sounded warm, but tired.

Reid grinned. “Yeah. She texted me. She said she’s starting to think you moved out of your apartment and into your office to work more.”

Sitting on the couch in his office, Hotch smiled. “It’s not that bad. And I’m glad I was here because Emily came in just a few minutes ago about something. She was upset.”

“Is she okay?”

“I think she will be. In time. We’ll all go over it in the morning, I’m going to call an early meeting.”

“You should sleep between now and then. Come here and I’ll help you sleep.”

“Just sleep?”

“Unless you want to do something else, but really, sleep in important.”

“Give me a half hour? Sleep actually sounds good. Something tells me helping Emily is going to take it out of all of us.”

==

Finding Dave in his office didn’t really surprise him. “What can I do for you?” He brushed passed the older man and sat behind the desk.

“I talked to Emily. The details are in confidence, but this man she asked us to look into… She feels responsible for who he became.”

Hotch studied Dave. “And what do you think?”

“I can understand her point. They knew each other as teens, he was part of the crowd she tried to fit in with. He cared for her and gave her the time of day when others wouldn’t, but it cost him something.”

“So much he turned to drugs?”
“No, but he turned his back on a faith he felt had turned its back on him. She’s…hurting. His death, this case, it has brought up a lot of pain she buried a long time ago.”

“I got a call from DCPD, they were upset we were investigating on their turf without an invitation. We can’t be looking into this.”

“I think we really need to. Something is going on.” He worked his jaw in thought. “Whether we keep going or not, we need to keep an eye on Emily.”

“I know. I’ve had Morgan staying on her to help keep her head in the game. He plays a good devil’s advocate in situations like this.”

“Good.” Dave shifted in his chair. “Now. Do you have a minute to take a mental break from this case and talk?”

Hotch glanced around. “Sure. What’s up?”

“I was wondering about Haley.”

“Haley?”

“Yes. I heard she started wanting to give you more time with Jack.”

“She said I can have him once a week as my schedule allows. No more last minute trips, no early bedtimes. He is available when I am.”

“What, exactly, brought about this change? Is she trying to get back together?”

“I don’t think so. She hasn’t made any moves that way anyway. She wouldn’t tell me why the change. I asked.”

Dave nodded. “So does Jack get to spend time with Reid?”

“Reid?”

“I heard you spend off hours with him. Does Jack also get to spend off hours with him?”

“I’m not sure Reid would want to.”

“Have you asked? I can’t imagine Reid would turn down a trip to a museum or something. He’s been around Jack before. They like one another?”

“I guess so.” Hotch looked out his window where Reid was hovering over Prentiss. “Do you think I should let them spend time together?”

“I do. It can only help.” When Aaron raised a brow at him, Dave added. “Jack, it can only help Jack. Reid is full of so much information.”

“I’ll have to ask him.”

Rossi stood, hiding his smirk as he turned his back. “You do that. Let me know how it goes.”

==

It was snowing now. After days of unpleasant rain, the snow was almost a kind reprieve. There was always something pure and fresh about snow. He startled when a hand slapped his shoulder.
“I think you need to find her. I’ll ride with Morgan to the airport.”

“Me?”

“Talk. Listen. You willingly put your career on the line for her and she appreciates that, but maybe knowing why might help her heal.”

Hotch turned away from Rossi and stared in the direction Prentiss had vanished. “Maybe you should go. She opened up to you before. You know her reasons for being so bothered by this case.”

“I haven’t walked in her shoes. But I think you could come close.” He nudged Hotch’s shoulder. “Go.”

The cold bit at his nose and face as he trudged off in the direction his distraught agent had gone. He had said everyone was capable, deep down, of unspeakable things, and he believed that. He just couldn’t imagine a trigger so great as to push himself over the edge. He was still trying to figure it out when he rounded a corner and spotted Prentiss on the steps of a church. Cautiously approaching, he stopped shoulder to shoulder with her, listening to her sniff in the cold.

“I told Rossi I was okay.” She didn’t turn her gaze from the heavy doors.

“In my experience, that’s like putting out a billboard that you’re not.”

She snorted in a slight chuckle. “Yeah. I got that.” The silence lingered, broken only by the wet sound of passing cars. “Why’d he send you?”

“I don’t know.” He shook his head. “That’s not true.” He shoved his hands deeper into his pockets. “When I was seven, my father hit me for the first time.” He didn’t flinch when he saw her turn in surprise, mouth open. “At church I was told to pray without ceasing and god would fix bad things. So I prayed. I prayed every time he took a drink. Every time his took a swing. And it never stopped. I was being told god was bigger than anything we ever would deal with, that no one was a mistake, he protected all of his children, but at home it got worse and my mother just hid the evidence.” His shoulders sagged as he stepped forward and sat on a frozen concrete step. “For seven years I was his punching bag and god never saved me.” He couldn’t look up now, he was too committed. “So I stopped praying.”

Emily’s heart broke for him. She understood what it felt like, to have your faith betray you. “Did Rossi tell you?”

“About?”

“What I told him before?”

“No. He would never betray a confidence. But… I could profile the situation, and I know your mother…and you…and make a guess.” He finally looked up at her. “But I won’t. It’s not my place. We don’t profile each other for a reason. We need our secrets.”

She pulled the photo back out and handed it to him. “That’s me with the two of them.” She managed a small smile when Hotch smiled. “I loved them both. They didn’t deserve this.”

“No one does.” He watched her shiver. “I still think you should take that time. Finding the truth doesn’t automatically heal the pain and… it’s not good to carry pain around for a long time. You should find someone to help carry it.”

She studied him as the snow fell, coating his shoulders and hair. “Who helps you carry your pain?”
Hotch stared up at her but didn’t answer.

“You’re hurting. You’ve been hurting for a while now. Who helps carry your pain? Or do you not share it?” She licked her wind-dried lips. “When I came to the office the other night, Garcia met me in the hall with the file I asked for. When I asked if you were there, she said she thought you lived there. So, you’re there all the time. Is that how you know it’s not good to carry it around alone?”

Hotch rose and stood in front of her. “How about we walk back to the SUV and I drive you home?”

Emily nodded. “That would be nice.”

==

Pulling away from Emily’s building, Hotch was already pressing send on a call to Reid.

“Yeah, Hotch?”

“Can I come over?”

“Um, sure. I’m free.” Reid looked around his apartment and wondered what the other man would be up for tonight. “Overnight?”

“Maybe. I wanted to talk about something first.”

“Oh, okay. I’m home so, you know, whenever you get here.”

“Thanks, Spencer.” Hotch hung up and turned towards Reid’s place. He would tell him about Haley and Jack and see if he was interested in spending time with him with the little boy around. Aside from when he stopped by, it seemed Reid was always alone. Maybe Jack could help that.

At Reid’s building, Hotch parked and snatched his go bag just in case before jogging up the flights of stairs. In the apartment, he found a spot on the couch.

“Talk first?”

“Yes.” He got comfortable. “Haley called me the other day. I don’t know the reasons behind it, but she brought Jack over to have breakfast with me after the last case. She stayed as well since I had to get to work later and we talked. She decided she wants Jack to see me, be with me, whenever I’m off. Even if it’s for an hour.” He was grinning now, thinking of seeing his son more. “Isn’t that great?”

Spencer smiled, but inside he hurt. Haley had brought Jack over and stayed. She wanted to do it more often. He didn’t doubt that if she officially asked for them to try again, Hotch would jump with both feet. He’d thought they’d have more time. “That’s great. Really. I know how much you’ve missed them. Just let me know if you want to stop this and I’ll call James and start scheduling with him again.” Spencer stood and turned toward the kitchen. “I’m happy for you, Hotch.”

Aaron was stunned. “What?” He followed Reid into the next room. “I don’t want to stop this.”

“I know, but you might. Don’t feel bad when that happens, I understand.”

Now he was confused. “Why would I want to stop?”

“When you and Haley try again. I doubt she would approve of you doing this on the side.”
Realization dawned on him. “We’re not. Trying again, that is. In fact, what I wanted to ask you was how you felt spending time with Jack.”

He was stunned. “With Jack?”

Aaron nodded. “I know he can’t be around when we do…this. But I’ll have him a lot more, so I thought we could figure out ways to incorporate everything together.”

“Are you sure?”

He chewed his lip a second and nodded. “We could… We could find other ways for me to sub beyond the whips and ties. I think, I think it’s worth a try.”

Spencer thought a minute and then nodded. “Okay.”

“Really?”

“But we need to work out a few things. Like, code words. Obviously, no stays no, but a praise or discipline, we will need a different phrase that won’t draw attention.”

“Okay, that sounds reasonable.”

“We’ll keep the order of things by, like, me doing things for you. If we’re out I’ll order for you, pay, open doors, all of those traditional gentleman things.” Reid thought a second. “Think fifties housewife roles.”

“You want me to act like a housewife?”

Spencer blushed. “That’s not what I meant. I meant like deferring to my thoughts, asking permission, that sort of thing.”

Aaron nodded. “I think I understand.”

“I know we haven’t had to delve too much into actual punishment, but if we’re doing this differently, we might have to play it by ear.” He studied the older man considering his words. “We don’t have to keep doing this, you know.”

“I want to. I enjoy it.” He wanted to add that he enjoyed being alone with him, especially when he got to spend the night, but he didn’t want to ruin everything.

“Okay. Well, I know it’s late, but what do you say we go out for a bite to eat? It was a long case and I’m hungry.” He raised one brow and waited to see how Hotch responded.

Aaron studied Reid a moment before nodding. “As you wish.”

==

Given the late hour, the best they pair could find was a quiet diner tucked away across town. Following what they had agreed, Hotch had let Spencer drive them to the restaurant and then waited as the younger man had come around and opened the car door and then the door to the restaurant. It was an odd reversal of what he was so used to. He had started to look through the menu but a sharp look from Spencer had him putting it down. He would have to trust Reid to select something he would eat.

The waitress, an older woman who barely glanced at them, approached their table to get their order.
“I’ll have a strawberry milkshake and a glass of water and he’ll have a peanut butter milkshake and a glass of water as well. And if it’s okay, we’d like to order now?”

“Sure, sweetie, go ahead.”

Reid smiled up at her. “I’ll have the pork chop with the mashed potatoes and vegetables. He’ll have the chicken penne casserole with a side salad, Italian dressing on the side.”

The waitress glanced up at the two men, but didn’t ask. Instead she took their menus and walked away.

“It’s weird.”

Reid raised his brows.

“I’m used to being the one doing everything.”

“But isn’t that the point of this?”

“Yes. It is.”

“Now, I was thinking.” Spencer leaned forward on the table. “As praise for being good I could compliment something on your appearance. Your shirt or something.”

Hotch looked up at him a minute. “And discipline?” He saw Spencer shift in his seat a moment before there was a pinch to his thigh.

When Aaron flinched, Spencer smiled. “Or something like it. Agree?”

Aaron nodded in silence. The pair chatted quietly until their food arrived. Hotch cut his eyes to Spencer for permission before smiling up and the woman and thanking her for the food.

When they were done, Spencer led Aaron back out onto the sidewalk. “Let’s take a walk.”

“Now?” Aaron couldn’t hide his surprise.

Spencer turned and narrowed his eyes.

Instinctive from his marriage, Aaron averted his gaze and mumbled, “Whatever you want.”

Hesitating at the response, Spencer let it go for now and started to walk. Half a block down, he cleared his throat. “We’re two federal agents, armed agents. Are you worried something will happen to us out here at night?”

Aaron was silent so long, Spencer assumed he wasn’t going to answer. “I can’t remember the last time I took a walk for the simple act of walking.”

“You run.”

“I run to keep in shape for work and I am usually thinking of five hundred different things as I’m going. It’s not the same as this.”

“Maybe you need to approach running as a time to relax and almost meditate if you will.”

He thought about it for a while and then answered. “Yeah, maybe I should.”
Saturday morning found Hotch and Jack standing at Spencer’s door waiting to be let in. The trio was going to head to the mall to do some shopping and have lunch together.

Reid pulled the door open and waved them in. “There was one thing I was thinking about that we didn’t discuss before.”

“What’s that?” He set his son down and watched him toddle straight for Spencer’s books.

“Um, what we were talking about? None of that is meant to ever stop you from parenting Jack. Jack always comes first. In fact.” He smiled, only blushing slightly. “I love seeing you be a dad. You shouldn’t worry when we’re out about how silly you might look or what other people think, just enjoy him.”

Aaron was surprised at Spencer’s words. Spencer loved seeing him be a dad. It made his feel something warm in his chest. Looking over at his son, he smiled with pride at the small boy pretending to read one of the heavy books from the shelf.

Wandering through the mall, Aaron pushing Jack in the stroller, Spencer spotted something in a store window and gleefully darted off, leaving Aaron to follow. When he found the younger man inside the store, he shook his head. “Jack’s too young for that.”

Shaking his head, Spencer picked up the box. “Not for Jack. You can’t tell me you’ve never imagined yourself as a sort of James Bond.” He waved the scale model Aston Martin around. “You can put it on a shelf at home, maybe in your room. I’m getting it for you.” He laughed and almost danced to the check out, stopping just before he reached the counter to pick up a large box Hotch couldn’t make out from where he stood.

Aaron pushed his way through the store and come up alongside Spencer at the back. “And who is that for?”

“Oh!” He looked absolutely electric with excitement. “I’m going to build it and Jack can watch it go up. He’ll love it!”

Shaking his head, Hotch headed back into the main corridor to wait. Once Reid joined them, they found the indoor play area and set Jack free to run around. Watching the boy climb and slide, Hotch sat down on the bench next to Reid. “I’m so glad we came out. I’m glad you came with us.”

Reid gave him a small smile. “And how has it felt? Letting me do things, handle things? I know we haven’t had too much of it, but…”

“It was a little weird at first, but you know, I think in some ways I was used to it before just… I was being expected to do those little things as part of the role.” He chuckled. “And here I thought I was always in charge. I guess that’s only at work.” When he caught Reid lean slightly away and stare at him, he turned his head. “What?”

“You really think you’re the one in charge at work?”

“Um, aren’t I?”

Not answering verbally, Spencer just chuckled and shook his head.
Chapter Notes

I am posting this chapter before the storm hits tomorrow. We have been warned to expect up to a week without power, so it may be that long or longer before the next chapter. As soon as everything is settled and back to normal, I will return to posting regularly. At this point we are no longer anticipating a direct hit, but until it arrives, there is no way to tell.

Rossi was pecking at his computer keyboard when a small message screen popped up in the lower right-hand corner of his screen.

*The Queen requests your presence before her throne.*

A grin broke out across his face. There was no wondering who the message was from. As it disappeared as fast as it had appeared, Dave saved what he was working on and left his office. When he let himself into Garcia’s cold office, she waved him to a chair.

“Sit! Sit! Have you talked to Bossman?"

He got comfortable. “I was on the phone with him early this morning. He flew to Boston to talk to an old friend and is trying to get a flight back sometime this evening. I guess it has to do with a case he worked a few years ago, he didn’t go into details. Why? What’s up?”

“I made Reid have a movie night finally, he’d been avoiding me and he gets all weird when he’s trying to be squirrely and secretive. Anyway. Did you know that he and Hotch and Jack all spent a day together last weekend?”

He gave her a one-sided smirk. “No. I did not know that. And how did that go?”

Garcia was thrilled to have someone to gossip a little with. “Reid was over the moon about it. They just went to the mall and to lunch, which is a bit boring but for the two of them it’s a really big thing.”

“It is. Especially if Hotch hasn’t told me about it. That means he thinks it’s a big thing too.”

“Why won’t they just see what we see?”

“They’re too stubborn. And from what we’ve talked about, they’re both so busy getting out of each other’s way when it comes to being happy that they don’t seem to see what is making each of them happy.”

“Well, we’ll just have to keep nudging them in the right direction. How hard can it be?” She saw one of his brows raise. “Right. Operation thick as two bricks to commence at a later point in time.”

Rossi laughed and got up. “You keep nudging Reid. He seems to respond to your touch.” He could have sworn she blushed slightly. “I’ll jump all over Aaron, I know just how to talk to him to get him to see a little bit of reason.”
“Good.”

Reid looked up from his perch on Emily’s desk as Hotch blew by, JJ on his heels. He watched the older man vanish through the glass doors as JJ turned to speak. “What’s in Boston?” He asked her. The blonde shrugged. “I gave him a file on a single murder in Boston that happened overnight. He took one look and was off.”

“We’ve been called in on a single murder?” Morgan was surprised.

“No. That’s the thing. I asked if we should wait and he said no, they’ll be calling.”

“He’s headed for the jet?” Emily stood and shut down her system.

“He didn’t say.” JJ tossed up her hands.

“Where he goes, we follow.” Rossi, who had been listening from the catwalk above, instructed. “Any concerns, we discuss together. Got it?” He watched them all nod before finding his own go bag and leading them to the elevators.

Their roles on the job were comfortably inversed of the roles they chose in the privacy of Reid’s apartment. It didn’t stop Spencer from keeping a watchful eye on the older man as they walked the crime scene and then spoke to the officers. He’s been keeping look out for the throbbing vein that had a habit of appearing along Hotch’s temple when he got particularly stressed. So far, despite the nature of the case, it hadn’t appeared. Arriving at the field office, Reid waited for JJ to climb out of the back of the SUV before reaching across the console and catching Hotch’s arm. “Hold on.”

Aaron released the door latched and turned back to the younger agent. “Reid?”

“This case…You’ve been coming back to it for a decade. Remember that we work as a team for a reason. Let us help.”

“I will.”

“And trust that if you get sucked down, the rest of us will pull you up.” He waited until Aaron met his eyes. “We’re always right behind you.” He turned loose of his jacket sleeve.

Hotch stepped out of the SUV and nearly bumped into JJ.

“Everything okay?” She squinted up at him.

“Fine. I’m going to leave the reporters in your capable hands. Let me know what you need.”

“Oh. Sure.” She nodded and turned away.

As they walked inside, Spencer fell into step with Hotch, just behind him, letting the leader lead.

Slumping through the hotel lobby toward another sleepless night, Spencer was surprised when an arm wrapped round his shoulders.
“Come with me, Kid, we need to talk.”

He stared at Rossi as the older man led them to the elevators. “But it’s late.”

“I know. I also know you won’t be getting much sleep anyway. So, humor an old man.”

“Uh, sure.”

Rossi didn’t speak until they reached his room and stepped inside. “This case is eating at Aaron.”

“I’ve been watching him.”

“I know. I am too. I’m worried that he’s going to push himself too far. I doubt he’s been sleeping.”

“I talked to him the other day. I told him we would pull him back if we thought he needed it. I reminded him that we work as a team.”

Dave studied the younger man. He could see so clearly now, alone with Reid, just how deep his feelings were for Aaron. He wondered how his friend could miss it. Despite the clear exhaustion, he could see that Reid was steeling himself to step up and be the support it was starting to become clear Hotch would need eventually. “I’ll keep an eye on him for a while, Kid. You go sleep. If I think he needs you, I’ll give you a shout.”

Spencer studied Rossi. It seemed like the man had made some conclusions of his own about the situation. He wasn’t willing to confirm anything, especially when it was all in his own head any. “Sure. Call me.”

Rossi patted Reid on the back and saw him out of the small hotel room before dropping onto his bed. He was beat. These long days and late nights were something to be maintained by the young, not by him. He was just considering getting some sleep when his cell phone rang. Hotch. Duty was calling.

==

Late turned to early before Rossi reentered his hotel room. Deciding the younger lot had gotten enough beauty sleep, he flipped through his phone until he reached Reid’s number.

“Hmm?” Reid answered his phone still mostly asleep. He figured whatever the person on the other end was about to say would wake him up enough.

“Reid. I think you need to go talk to him.”

“To who? Who’re you?”

Shaking his head, Rossi filled in the blanks. “I went to a crime scene with Hotch.”

“A crime scene?” He sounded suddenly more awake.

“Yes.” He drew out. “Apparently Hotch got a call from the Reaper earlier tonight and when he hung up on him, the Reaper lashed out and kill a bus full of people. Aaron was personalizing it, beating himself up. I got him out of the initial funk, but he’s going to circle back around to it later. I know he will.”

“And you want me to do what?”

“Help him keep his head on his shoulders. Listen to him. Just don’t listen too hard if he tries to tell
you what I did to knock him into shape.”

Spencer frowned. “What did you do?”

“Nothing for you to worry about. Just, go see him.”

“Okay, sure. I will.”

“Good. Now, I’m going to get some sleep.”

==

As the news played on the TV, Rossi glanced back at Reid. This was about the worst scenario they could have ever dreamt of, Foyet on the loose. If Aaron had been obsessing over this case before, it was certain to eat him alive now. When the younger man met his gaze, Rossi gave him a pointed look and then indicated to where their leader seemed to already be lost in his own head. Until Foyet was found, it would take everything they all had to keep Hotch from becoming another agent who buckled under the job.

Garcia’s heart stopped. She’d spent the past week having to pour over what this man had done to dozens of victims over the last ten years and just when they’d done their job, just when they’d caught the monster that everyone had started to forget, he was back. He was free. She wasn’t sure she could feel safe with a man like that lurking in the shadows. She turned to face the rest of the team, the TV behind her and studied their faces. Shock, anger, frustration. She knew what they were feeling, it didn’t take a profiler to work it out. But Hotch, he looked…closed. Like he was shutting down already. Searching out Reid’s gaze to see if he’d noticed, see if he had a plan to fix it, she saw him caught in a silent conversation with Rossi. A moment later, both men glanced in the direction of their leader. She felt the tiniest bit better knowing they were worried too.

Spencer watched Hotch bow his head, bringing his hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose. The he caught it, the throbbing temple he’d been waiting on in Boston, now it was keeping a frantic tempo. Through everything else, Hotch had managed to keep himself in check, but this was too much. Figuring everyone was too stunned by the news to be paying much attention, Reid wove between the desks until he was at Hotch’s side. He leaned his head down to stop the others from overhearing. “Your office. Come on.” Reid caught the minute bob of Hotch’s head in understanding just before man turned and used his naturally long strides to vanish into his office. Exchanging another look over his shoulder with Rossi, Reid followed a moment later, shutting the office door behind him. “Talk.”

“I didn’t give up. For ten years I kept digging without anyone knowing. I let my ego get in the way and now he’s free… He zeroed in on Shaunessy because he was the lead on the case. Is he going to come after this team next? He already snatched Morgan’s creds.”

“Right now he’s going to be celebrating his victory and plotting. He can’t have planned for every single outcome. JJ said the Marshall Service is all over it and they’ll call if and when they need us.” He tried to step closer to Hotch but stopped when the other man curled away. “You’re distressed and trying to find the answer when there isn’t an answer to be found yet. Right now my concern is about your health. I need to know what you need right now and if you can’t tell me what that is, then I’ll have to make some decisions for you.”

“I…” His voice broke.

“Start with the basics. Nourishment, food and drink, then rest, comfort.”
Hotch shook his head and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Okay. It’s time to go home. I’ll drive.” He let a bit more authority fill his voice. “Gather your things, meet me by my desk.”

Eyes still shut, Hotch nodded and began to obey.

Spencer stepped back to his desk and collected his bags. He found Rossi watching him now from the doorway of his own office and Spencer nodded to him to let him know he had a handle on the situation. He was putting the last thing in his satchel when Hotch appeared at the corner of his desk. “Ready?”

“Yes.”

==

He’d instructed Hotch to relax and shut his eyes while he drove them back to his apartment. Five minutes from his place, he could tell the other man was still a solid line of tension. “Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold it to the count of twenty.” He listened to Hotch follow his command. “Now see how slowly you can blow it out. Really squeeze and get your lungs empty.” Once Aaron had completed it, he told him. “Now do that once more.” When Aaron was finished, he asked. “Better?”

“A bit, yeah.”

“Good.” He pointed the vehicle down an open road just past his place. The hum of the car hopefully would be enough to relax Aaron. “Don’t try to think about where we are. Open your hands against your legs. Just relax, we’ll talk when we get back.” He wandered around the outskirts of town until he figured enough time had passed. Pulling into his parking spot, he instantly spotted Garcia’s car already cooling in her spot. Turning off the engine, Reid kept his voice low. “Let’s go in. Grab your things.”

Hotch obediently climbed out of the vehicle and followed Spencer in. In the living room, he hesitated, unsure of the plan for the night.

“Tonight, I want to take care of you.”

Staring at the floor under his feet, Aaron felt a tiny thrill shoot through him and the double meaning. He knew it would never happen, but he couldn’t help but dream about a time when Spencer might say that and mean something else.

“I read something, it will help but…You have to trust me. I would like you to remain completely silent unless you need your code words. I don’t want you naked tonight, go change into an undershirt and fresh boxers to sleep in. See if you have those dark red ones here.” He watched Aaron start to obey. “And Aaron? There will be someone here with me when you get back. Will that be okay? You may answer.”

“Yes, Master.”

==

Stepping back into the living room, Aaron was slightly thrown to see Garcia standing at the kitchen table sorting through piles of what appeared to be rope. He knew he wasn’t allowed to speak, so instead he crossed to the doorway Spencer liked him to stand in. Arms stretched up, fingers tight over the top of the sill. It made his shirt ride up, but he knew not to try and adjust it.
Hotch listened as Garcia moved around the apartment, ignoring him. Not her usual jittery or bubbly self. Clearly each of them had a part to play tonight and right now his part was to be ignored.

Penelope waited for Spencer to reappear before explaining the type of rope she had laid out and the pattern. “The spider web has to be tight, he can’t be able to move at all.” She let him fondle the rope. “Tell me, when you address him, what do you use?”

Spencer smirked. “Sir.”

She was surprised. Normally that was reserved for the Dom, but when did either of these men do things the normal way.

“Every ‘Sir’ out there reminds him of this, here. Almost like a trigger that seems to help ground him. And it’s used just frequently enough to both catch him by surprise as well as not stand out to attract attention.” He made sure he didn’t look to the doorway where Aaron was standing stretched up. “Every time someone uses it, he exhales the tiniest amount, relaxes just a little bit.”

She nodded in understanding. “Where should we do this?”

“I want him standing for now, so let’s take this stuff over there.” He collected the rope and led her across the open room. “Arms down and step forward.” He waited for Aaron to follow his instruction. “Mistress is going to help me tie this and then she will leave us. You are to keep the rules in mind, head down unless ordered, eyes to the ground, no speaking. Do you understand these?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Good.” Spencer purred. Moving to join Penelope behind Aaron’s back, he followed her instructions as she taught him to loop and weave the rope tightly over his shoulders, around his arms and waist, until there was a wonderful spider web cinched over his back. Before tying his wrists, Garcia pulled out two lengths of satin and wrapped them around Aaron’s wrists under the rope until it was a thick pad.

“This will keep his wrists from bruising. It will still ache, but no marks.” When they were done, she gave the center circle and good tug, nothing moved. “Good job sweetheart. Call me if you need me.”

Spencer watched her leave before turning to Aaron. “She assured me that if you try to move, it won’t give. Stand there with your feet shoulder width apart and close your eyes. I’m going to go cook some dinner.” He watched brown eyes close before leaning in. “Be a good Sir and stand very still.”

==

Hotch started out listening to Spencer moving around the apartment, but soon enough he realized that with his arms bound across his back, his balance required more work to maintain. It was distracting in a way he hadn’t expected it to be, he wondered if Spencer was watching him working to do something so simple as stand. The apartment began to smell wonderful as food, chicken by the smell of it, sizzled in a pan. He pictured how Spencer had looked as he’d focused on tying the knots, absolutely nothing missed his attention. That laser focus, that attention to detail, was what helped them on so many cases. It was what protected him on nights like this. When he was tied, bound in the most literal sense, helpless against the world. Unable to do the simplest things for himself.
“Come to the table and sit.”

Including feed himself. He kept his eyes averted as he found his seat, a backless stool Reid had taken a liking to, and waited for the plate to be placed before him. He could feel Spencer pulling his own chair close and tucking in beside him at an angle, one long leg alongside his while the other was cocked out, brushing his hands folded at the base of his spine.

Spencer leaned over and speared a bite-sized piece of meat on the fork and brought it to Aaron’s lips. “Eat. Slowly, savor it. Breathe deeply and let me care for you.” He stared at Aaron’s profile as the man gently tongued the next bite off the utensil, opening his own mouth in some odd sort of sympathy bite. The sight was breathtaking, almost too much so. As he felt his body begin to respond to the display of submissive male practically in his lap, he shuffled his chair back just enough to keep his arousal from accidentally brushing the other man. With each bite, his dick twitched, safely hidden in black corduroy jeans, kind lighting, and Aaron’s averted gaze.

As his stomach filled, something calming settled over Hotch. He let his eyes drift shut as he chewed. He fantasized that Spencer was feeding him something more erotic than chicken and vegetables. When the next bite wasn’t like the others, but instead a heavier chocolate mousse, a moan slipped free.

Spencer froze, that sound ran straight down his spine and nearly out his prick. As it was, the inside of his boxers was becoming a damp, uncomfortable mess. He offered another bit of the dessert to Aaron, whose moan turned somehow more erotic and Spencer was up like a flash, dropping the fork and an apology as he vanished into his bedroom.

Aaron swallowed his bite and listened for where Spencer had gone. He could make out the sink running in the bathroom and then several minutes later, the younger man returned. Voice rough, he whispered. “Master?”

“Yes, Sir?”

“Is Master okay?”

Spencer was staring at the back of Aaron head, he was thankful for that as a blush rose over what he’d just done. “Yes. The meal is done. I will assist you to the bedroom to get ready for sleep. I’ll undo the ropes and you will be free to ready for bed as your routine dictates, but you still cannot talk.”

He nodded and stood, crossing to the bedroom. Out of the corner of his eye he could see that Spencer seemed to have changed clothes.
Our house survived the hurricane! We have no power and may not have it until late Sunday, but we are staying elsewhere that does have power (and A/C). We lost all the fish in our large tank when we tried to move them, but aside from some minor damages it's all good. I could go the rest of my lift without having to sit in the dark and listen to a storm like that for hours ever again.

Another case over, Aaron sat at his desk working on paperwork. He looked up when Spencer ducked his head into his office. “Heading home?”

“Uh, yeah. Just um, before you leave could you take care of something?”

“Sure. What’s up?”

Reid glanced down to the now empty bullpen and back up. “Can you go talk to Garcia? If she comes home without talking, she’ll make me listen.”

Hotch chuckled.

“Yeah, not funny. She’s mad at you, it would be nice if it was you she yelled at.”

He nodded. “I will go talk to her.” He watched Reid nod once and vanish. Garcia wanted to yell at him. Well, that was…not surprising. He had gotten a bit short with her during the case. Maybe more than a bit short. Bracing his hands on his desk, Hotch pushed up and steeled himself before heading out in search of his irritated analyst.

Arriving in her open doorway, he stopped when she threw him a dirty look. Mentally he kicked himself for being the reason that hurt, angry look was on her face. Her outfit, brighter and maybe a little more shocking that she usually wore somehow didn’t cover the dark cloud that seemed to be hovering over her.

“You guys choose this. Turning people over like rocks, looking at all their creepy crawly things underneath. And I get it, I do, it’s the only way to catch them. But..” He watched her pick up something soft and fuzzy to cling to. “I want to see the good in people. I choose to see the good in people. And getting into someone’s mind and trying to find the godawful thing that happened to them that made them do the godawful thing to somebody else has seriously impaired my ability to giggle and it makes my brain all wonky, and I don’t like it!”

She was facing him now, still just as angry, though he hoped that maybe the tirade, as calm as it was given the situation, helped her get some of what she was feeling out of her system. He didn’t want to admit that he depended on her being her to get through these cases. He depended on her to smile and tease and call them all home, back to the nest so she could check and be sure they were okay.

“Garcia.”

“Yes, Sir.” Yelling at her boss was probably not the way to go, but he had forced her to do
something that was never in the agreement for this job. When he finally stepped into the office to stand right in front of her, Garcia figured this was it, she was in real trouble now.

“I…Just wanted to thank you for your excellent work on this case.” He truly meant that. Her work was, as always, excellent. “And I understand that what you did was, for you, very difficult. But your contributions are essential to the success of this team.”

She could feel herself blush. She couldn’t remember ever hearing him give a compliment so openly. “Thank you, Sir.”

“I know you see the good in people, Penelope. Always.” Even in himself, he added mentally as he started to walk away before hesitating to add. “I would never want you to change that.” He could feel his voice want to crack so instead he turned and hurried out of her office. It felt like, somehow, he’d exposed some part of himself to her by admitting what he did. Ever since things had started to take a turn with Haley, it didn’t feel like there was much good left in him. And now that he spent every free moment trying to locate Foyet, even if the team didn’t know he was still working the case, Hotch felt like his not being good was seeping into work and now he wasn’t as good at his job.

Starting his car a short time later, he wondered if Reid had anything planned for the weekend. They hadn’t made plans, but their last evening had been cut short and he was finding that he missed the physical contact he got to enjoy when he was curled into the younger man’s side.

==

A month later, Hotch found himself in Oregon watching the Detective watching Reid process the new information and mesh it with the team’s existing profile. As much as he enjoyed watching the younger man directly as his mind worked at a speed far beyond the rest of them, he also enjoyed the looks of amazement and disbelief of those who didn’t have Spencer in their lives on a daily basis.

Reid was always animated, always on the move in some way, but never so much as when he was thinking through the endless possibilities that came with their job to find the most likely one. As he thought, his fingers twitched and lips moved ever so slightly, tongue darting out to wet them randomly. The breeze pushing through the trees made his curls dance around his head, he was a sight.

Realizing Reid had spoken to him and was now starting to smirk, Aaron shook himself and made eye contact. “We need to tell the others.”

“Sure.” As Hotch passed by to return to the SUV, Spencer let his shoulder bump Hotch’s. He wasn’t sure where the older man had gone in his mind just then, but he promised himself to find out later.

==

An officer appeared in the doorway of the small room. “There’s been an accident.”

Spencer lurched out of his seat. “What happened?”

“Your guy, Agent Hotchner? He used the SUV to stop Coakley. I had a call from one of the other officers, that’s all I know. Well, Coakley drove off the cliff, but…” He trailed off as Reid turned away.

Going for the source of the best information, Reid dialed Rossi. “He did what?”
Dave sighed. “Hotch tried to stop Coakley. By crashing the SUV into his truck.”

“What? Is he okay?” He tried to calm the frantic sound to his voice but failed.

“He’s talking, but we’re keeping him pinned down until the ambulance gets there. He’s angry about it, so that’s probably a good sign.”

Reid frowned, mind racing with potential injuries. “He needs to go to the hospital. Hotch needs an MRI, x-rays of his neck and probably shoulder. And they need to check for bleeding across his abdomen from the seatbelt.”

“Kid, I promise to have them look Hotch over head to toe. Once I know more, I’ll call you, okay?”

“Yeah. Okay. Thanks.”

==

Hotch was working on clearing his double vision when his friend leaned back into the open hole where the window had once been, lowering his voice.

“Spencer knows. I’m not sure how, but he just called.”

He squeezed his eyes shut, partly against the sudden nausea he hoped was only being brought on by his still swimming vision, and partly at Dave’s news. “Shit.”

“Yeah, well. He’s worried and currently alone. So, we are going to load you into the ambulance when it gets here and you aren’t going to fight the doctors. Got it?”

“Yeah. Got it.”

==

Not that he would admit it, but Aaron was happy to see the paramedics turn up on the scene. He wasn’t quite as happy when, after a word with Dave, they pulled a stretcher out of the back and rolled it to the SUV.

“Sir, Can you tell me your name?” A blonde EMT spoke to him.

“Aaron Hotchner.” He kept his eyes closed.

“Can you list for me where it hurts?”

“Um.” He tried to assess himself. “My head and…stomach, chest. Knee a bit.”

The blonde man nodded and reached for something the other EMT was passing him. “I’m going to put this collar on you to keep your neck steady. Don’t try to move on your own, okay? Just let us take care of everything.”

Hotch cracked one eye open. “Thanks.” He tried to stay calm as the pair worked around him. He felt the seatbelt release and his vest get unstrapped as the neck brace was strapped into place. Hands were taking his pulse, checking his lungs and other vitals before they moved him carefully to the stretcher and strapped him down. One of the medics called Dave over and handed him his gun and then he felt what he assumed were Dave’s hands as his back-up was freed from him as well.

As he was rolled to the ambulance, Hotch got a look at the damage to the SUV where it was buried.
in the trees. It had been a long time since he’d wrecked a vehicle so extensively.

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The ambulance ride to the hospital had been hell. Aaron had never been good at riding backward and mixed with the scrambling his brain had already taken, his nausea took a turn twice on the ride in. At the hospital, he got a full work up, x-rays and everything. He knew he couldn’t get out of it without help from the team and mysteriously they were nowhere to be found. Odd, given their generally overprotective nature.

After several hours, he received an official diagnosis and discharge papers. A concussion he needed to keep an eye on, whiplash and bruises from where the seatbelt had tightened across his gun, pressing it into his hip, and where his knee had smacked the steering column.

Dave appeared in the doorway of his exam room just as Aaron finished getting changed. He saw the older man say something. “What?” Dave’s brows rose. Aaron waved at his ears. “I’m sorry, they’re still ringing.”

Dave frowned. Just what Aaron needed, more hearing injuries. He stepped closer. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah.” He watched as Dave picked up the paperwork and read over it. He wasn’t really in any condition to fight him. “From the top? A killer headache, blurry vision, my ears won’t stop ringing, can’t move my neck much, the dizziness seems to come and go at least, there are some bruises but only superficial ones.” He stopped and tried to walk toward the door, stumbling as he did.

“Balance is off as well I see.” He put his hands up in submission when Hotch attempted to glare at him. “I care, so sue me.” He took Aaron’s arm with one hand and led him out into the sunlight, watching him squint against the brightness. Once they were on the road, Rossi cleared his throat. “Reid seems a bit agitated, he’ll want to be sure you’re okay.”

“I’m fine.”

“Concussion, whiplash, bruised. Did they have to pull any of that glass out of you?”

“No.”

“Well, that’s something I guess.” He let the silence linger for a couple miles. “What were you thinking?”

“Huh?” Aaron wasn’t feeling up for a conversation right now.

“You drove into his truck. What were you thinking? You could have been hurt worse, you could have been killed.”

“He had to be stopped before he killed anyone else.”

“And it had to risk your life to get that done?” When no answer came, he sighed. “It amazes me, you know, always has.”

“What’s that?”

“The lack of self-preservation you seem to have.” He glanced over and met his friend’s eye. “An officer who was in the building told Spencer about the accident, he called me in a panic. If I didn’t know better, the way he sounded?”
“Dave, don’t.” Aaron ground out. He didn’t want to discuss it.

“You and him...you dance around one another. Both of you gravitate closer together than either of you do with anyone else on the team. There was a time when I was the only one allowed into your personal space but Reid? You don’t even seem to notice.”

“Dave.” His head hurt. He really wasn’t in the mood.

Rossi plowed on, thankful for the captive audience. “And he lets no one in at all. Except you.” He let another mile tick by. “He likes you.”

“As his boss, as his mentor.” Aaron chewed his lip. “Maybe as a friend.”

“I’m about certain it’s more than that. I talked to him.”

Despite his injuries and headache, Aaron turned quickly to stare at his friend’s profile. “He said something to you?”

Rossi grinned. “I have never shared anything we have talked about with another person, even when I truly felt it would have helped you to do so. So why would I share with you a conversation I had with someone else?” He guided the SUV into the lot in front of the station and cut the engine.

“Time to face the others.”

==

He saw Morgan, JJ and Emily first, standing halfway across the room talking together. They all looked up when he came in, Rossi at his back, but none spoke or moved forward. Instead he heard a shout that made him wince, ears still ringing. He turned in search of the source of the voice.

“What were you thinking! Don’t you know there were over thirty-seven thousand vehicle related deaths last year? Over half of those were front end collisions! You could have severed your spinal cord!” His voice rose as he began to panic over the thoughts trampling through his mind. “You could be dead! Why didn’t you find another way? Do you think your injuries were worth it?” He took another deep breath to continue, but was cut off when Rossi grabbed the back of his collar and with a yank, dragged him out the doors of the station.

JJ and Morgan exchanged a confused look and shrugged, unsure what set Reid off in such a passionately angry manner.

Emily watched the pair vanish out of sight and strode up to their boss. “What was that about?”

“I, umm...” He wasn’t sure what to say.

Emily looked right at him. “How are you?”

“I’ll be okay. Banged around, but nothing permeant.”

“Good.”

==

Rossi dragged the much younger man a block and a half, ignoring his wheezing and complaining until he found a picnic table in a small park. “Sit.” He ordered, waiting for Reid to comply. “Now, talk.” He remained standing.

“What?” Reid squeaked.
“That.” He pointed back in the way they’d come. “Was not how a coworker reacts when another gets hurt, even if they’ve done something stupid. That wasn’t even how a good friend reacts. That was more how a…” He trailed off, suspicions coming to mind. “Just how close are the two of you these days?”

Reid couldn’t help the blush that crept up his neck. “We’re just friends. He’s not… It’s not like that.”

Bracing both hands on the table between them, Rossi pressed. “Then what’s it like?”

“I…can’t. I can’t say anything without talking to him first, but… I can tell you about me?”

“Go one.” Dave instructed slowly.

“I, um, I’m a Dom.” He stared up into Rossi’s eyes until things began to click into place. “Surely you can understand that I can’t say anything beyond that.”

Rossi sighed and sank onto the bench. “Yeah, Kid. I do.” He watched Reid shift uncomfortably for a minute. “Can I ask how long you’ve been doing it?”

“Umm, in general? About four years.”

“And… a little less general?”

“Just over one.” Reid licked his lips. “I can’t say anything else. I really shouldn’t have said that.”

“I know. But thank you for giving me that. I am assuming it is a mutually beneficial arrangement?” He smirked when Reid narrowed his eyes. “Will you do me one favor?”

“Maybe.”

“If anything ever… changes… Will you come to me?”

“Yeah. I can do that.”

Dave stood up and waited for Spencer to follow suit. “You’ve got to keep it reined in though, another reaction like that and the others will start getting curious.”

“Reined in?”

“Your feelings for him. Unless you want everyone to know.”

==

Standing in his bedroom, Aaron debated trying to do some paperwork before going to sleep. The headache had eased up, but he hurt everywhere.

Sinking onto the bed and starting to strip, he pondered Dave’s words in the car. It wasn’t the first time his friend had brought up the attraction he had for Spencer, and Dave seemed pretty sure Spencer had feelings for him. But that didn’t make sense. As much time as they spent together, Spencer had never shown any sign of being attracted to him. Had never given him any hint of other feelings. Dave was a sap when it came down to it though, the man saw romance around every corner. Aaron wondered if that was the writer in him. Always looking for a good storyline.

Finally naked, Aaron scooted back until his head found the pillows, not bothering with finding pajamas to wear over his bruised body. Now that things seemed to be settled with Haley, Aaron had
asked his doctor about weaning off the medicine he’d been taking. The doctor had agreed to a step-down process to wean him off slowly to avoid any panic attacks. The one up side to his new, lower dose, was he didn’t feel quite so numb all over anymore. It still took a while, but with enough images of Spencer circling through his mind, Aaron managed to get his cock to half mast.

He gritted his teeth and stroked until the skin of his member began to ache from the dry friction. Searching through his side table, he found nothing useful. A testament to just how long it’d been for him. Doing his best to not lose the ground he’d gained, Aaron stumbled into the bathroom and grabbed a shampoo bottle, flipping on the water to mix it a bit before gripping his dick with his now soapy hand. He wanted to cry. He couldn’t remember ever feeling this desperate to orgasm and so frustrated and the amount of time it was taking. He kept stroking, as hard and as fast as he could manage, until tears sprang to his eyes and then rolled free. It wasn’t fair. He was hurt and sore and angry at the events that made it happen. It felt like the good things in his life were so rare anymore, he just wanted one good thing that would last. When he was about ready to just give up, a thought crossed his mind. It was something he had come across when he’d been researching toys.

Once he realized he was really going to try it, Hotch hesitated before grabbing the towels hanging up, the bottle of shampoo, and returning to the bed. No need to get hurt while trying to jack off and having to explain it. Laying on his side, one knee propped up, Aaron resumed the stroking on his cock while those two fingers, now damp from the soap, pressed firmly against his hole. Blowing out a breath, his pushed his fingers in to the second knuckle, gasping through the unexpected pressure/pain of what he’d done. Pressing a bit further, he moaned deeply as he brushed against what he was looking for. If it helped him find his release, he was up for anything at this point.

After several strokes, he found a good rhythm with both hands and slowly his cock finished hardening and twitched in anticipation. He thought of the last evening he’d spent around at Spencer’s place. Jack had been with them, asleep in a play pen in the living room while the two men were asleep in the bedroom, curled together. He imagined that tall, thin body not just holding him close, but thrusting into him, fucking him.

He whimpered and then whined a bit as a vaguely familiar feeling curled at the base of his spine. Hotch cleared his mind and just imagined Spencer over him, protectively draped over his back, fucking into him until the two men became one. If he was keeping score, what came next would have gone down as his most pathetic orgasm in memory, the mess barely warranting the face cloth he’d brought much less the large towel. But his mind, once the hormones released, his mind found that place he’d missed. That place of complete bliss. All while imagining himself being fucked by another man. As he moved to clean up, Aaron swore to himself he’d ponder more on that new development another day.
He was wrapped around a long, thin body when his phone rang in the early morning darkness. Fumbling for it, he pressed what he hoped was the accept button. “Hotchner.”

“Hey, Hotch, I just had a case sent to me, it really can’t wait till we get in.”

He cleared his throat. “Office or straight to the jet?”

“Office, it’s local. I’ll call everyone back here, how soon will you get here?”

“Um, tell everyone to be there in an hour. Thanks, JJ.”

“No problem. I’ll text you the details so you can get familiar with what’s happening.” She hung up.

Dropping the phone onto the mattress, he rolled back over and rewrapped himself around the body that was dead to the world. They would have to wake up properly in a few minutes, no need to rush around now.

Ten minutes later another phone vibrated to life. Its owner muttered something under his breath and pulled it to his ear. “Yeah?”

“Spence, it’s me.”

“Somebody better be dead… JJ? Crap, sorry, guess somebody is.”

JJ ignored his sleepy ramblings. “I’ve already spoken to Hotch, he wants everyone in within the half hour. We’re meeting in the conference room, no need to worry about a go-bag.”

“Hmm. How bad?”

She sighed. “Twelve so far. That many again hanging on by a thread.”

“Good god, why do people do this.”

“I don’t know, Spence. But it’s going to be a bad one, it looks like it could have been a targeted attack.”

“Kay, I’m up. On my way.” He hung up the phone but didn’t move.

“I thought you said you were up?” A deep voice rumbled from under the covers.

“I thought you said meet in an hour.” He whined back.

Hotch chuckled. “JJ knows you too well.” He crawled out from under the sheets. “Come on, let’s go. There’s a world to save.”

==

It had been an accident. He’d stopped Morgan from being contaminated alongside him, but he could read the panicked look on his friend’s face as he pulled out his phone. Reid listened to Morgan explain to Hotch what was going on and then hang up.
“He’s on his way, Pretty Boy. He sounded really upset. Is there anything I can do while he and the docs and hazmat are on their way?”

“No.” Spencer looked around. “I’ll start looking around in here though.”

“Wait. Shouldn’t you just sit and wait for help?”

He gave his friend an exasperated look. “Why? I’m already in here. I know what sort of things to look for. Might as well be useful in the meantime.”

Morgan sighed heavily. “And I just watch?”

“I guess. You’ll need to be around and ready when Hotch gets here. He’s got thirty minutes to stew and freak out before he gets here, so…”

Derek nodded and headed back toward their SUV. “I’ll be back, Kid.”

==

Hotch was pretty sure his world was collapsing. To watch Spencer die like the other victims had, he wasn’t sure he could survive that. And he really didn’t want to have to be the one to fly to Vegas and explain how the Bureau couldn’t keep him alive.

Pulling sharply into the driveway, he spotted Morgan as soon as the vehicle was in park. “Morgan, how’s Reid?”

“There’s white powder in the room and the air was blasting.” He led his boss to the small lab behind the house, trying hard not to noticed the pained look on his face. “I should’ve been right there with him.”

“Morgan, there’s no time for second guessing, is he showing any symptoms?”

“He says he’s fine, but I’m not sure.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Hotch stared at the small building. “He could be almost dead and would deny there was anything wrong.”

“Wonder where he learned that.” Morgan bounced back, thankful when he boss didn’t seem to hear him.

Pulling out his phone when it began to ring, Aaron saw the familiar number. “Reid.”

“Hotch. I really messed up this time.”

“Reid, we need to get you out and to the hospital.”

“No, I’m staying right here.”

“No, you’re not, Reid.” Morgan raised his voice to be heard.

“I’m already exposed, it’s not going to do me any good to stop working the case.”

Aaron felt his chest squeeze when Spencer vanished from view. “Reid.”

“Look, I’m sorry. Okay? But I might as well be useful while I’m in here.”
“I know you are. We can sort this out later when you’re out of there.” Hotch ground his teeth. There were too many people around for him to let himself get emotional over the idea of watching Reid die slowly and painfully. Without disconnecting the call, he found a quiet corner away from the activity. “Spencer.”

“Aaron…this is a case right now. I’m trying to find the cure, I’m sure he made it, it has to be around here somewhere.” Sounds of things being moved came across the line.

“Stop! Just…stop a minute!” He sucked in a ragged breath, on the verge of uncharacteristic tears. “Please…”

“I can’t.” Spencer’s voice as soft now, small. “If I stop then what is happening sinks in and I won’t be able to function.”

“And what do I do when it does happen and I’m left alone!” The line was far too silent. “Reid?”

“I’ve got to go.” He hung up the phone.

==

The relief of hearing that Reid was out of the small home lab, scrubbed clean, and on his way to the hospital was erased with the news that aphasia had set in. Already. In the other patients, it had only set in shortly before their deaths. The doctor had reassured him that testing the inhaler was their top priority and if it was confirmed to be the cure, Spencer would be the first to receive it. Until then the younger man was agitated and in pain, still refusing heavy medication that would surely relieve the worst of it.

The concerning part had been when she wasn’t sure that even if it was the cure, whether the aphasia could or would be reversed. The idea of Spencer Reid changed forever, unable to speak and share his infinite knowledge, made him want to just give up altogether. Hotch sat at his desk staring blankly at the paperwork in front of him. He couldn’t let this be the end for the man he’d come to depend on so much. Even in their relationship was forever changed, he swore he’d always take care of Spencer. A shuffling in the doorway had him looking up.

Dave had been watching his friend sit at his desk unmoving. Deciding to make his presence known, he shuffled his leather shoes against the carpet and watched as Aaron’s head snapped up. “We’re sort of between steps right now… Let’s talk.” Rossi closed the door and took one of the chairs by the desk. “How’s Reid?”

“At the hospital.” Hotch frowned at his desktop. “Aphasia has set in. He’s angry, scared, in pain. Even if this doesn’t kill him, he could be trapped without language.” He heaved a sigh and slumped back in his chair, letting his head fall back as well. “If he gets too bad, I’ll have to step in as his medical proxy and make tough decisions like…”

Dave waited several beats before prompting. “Like?”

“Like allowing them to give him narcotic pain medicine to let him be comfortable if…if…”

Rossi took pity and cut him off. “It won’t come to that.” He wondered why Reid wasn’t already on the good medicine if he was suffering like he had to be. “This seems to be bothering you more than it is the others.”

Aaron cracked his eyes open and narrowly studied his long-time friend. “What if this is it?”

“What if what’s it?”
“What if the Spencer I knew never comes back? What if…”

Dave felt his brows rise. “What if you missed your chance?”

Aaron pressed his lips together, gathering his thoughts. “I think…I think I’ve been denying how much he has come to mean to me.”

“You think? Aaron. You turn to him when you used to turn to me. You spend nights at his place doing what? Watching movies?”

Hotch reddened. “No.”

The older man’s voice went soft. “Like I said before. Talk to me.”

“He helps me feel settled. It’s not…we’re not in a relationship, but…when I stay we do share a bed. Just. Not in the biblical sense.”

“Oh. Whatever it is, it seems to help you both.” He cut off when Aaron’s phone rang.

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Hotch sank into the chair by the bed. The sun had already gone down by the time he’d relieved Morgan of his spot. Spencer was still unconscious, the doctor was unsure what sort of timeline to expect for his recovery, but he would recover. Leaning forward, he brushed his fingertips against the still hand on the sheet, nervous at first to make contact. Bowing his head, Hotch took the hand and held it tight. “You have to get better.” He whispered as tears pricked his eyes. “I need you to…” His voice cracked. “I need you.”

Time dragged on, lights on the floor dimmed to allow other patients to sleep. Aaron clung to the hand like a lifeline, keeping Spencer from fading away. Several times the younger man twitched or mumbled but he never woke.

===

Sunlight was flooding through the windows when something brushed his cheek, making him twitch and move his head. Feeling rough cotton against his skin, Aaron opened his eyes to figure out where he was. He’d fallen asleep in Spencer’s hospital room, head and arms resting on the bed by the younger man’s side, hands still wrapped together. It wasn’t the most comfortable position to sleep in, but he’d managed to get some rest. Sitting up, Aaron stretched and looked around, into partially opened eyes. “Hey.” He smiled wide.

“How’s Spencer?”

“Home?”

Aaron smiled again. “You’ll need a few days maybe to be back to your usual self, but yeah, you get
to go home.”
“I’m sorry, Hotch.”
“I know.”

Spencer squeezed the hand still wrapped up in his. “You okay?”

He couldn’t bring himself, now that he was faced with Spencer awake, to admit what he’d discussed with Dave. “I’m fine. Tired is all.”

==

Dave looked around at the other patrons in the restaurant as he followed the maître d’ to the table. He’d chosen this one not only for the ambiance, but the ability to have a deep conversation without too many other people getting nosey. When Penelope joined him, he smiled and nodded to the server to bring the bottle of wine he’d selected.

“So, what’s this about?” She couldn’t help taking in the high-end establishment.

“Hotch and Reid.”

“Huh? What do you know?”

“I know in the past month both of them have acknowledged their feelings out loud for the other but still refuse to talk to each other. Short of locking them up together, I have no idea how to get them to see reason.” He studied her. “What do you know that I don’t?”

She pursed her lips together. “Well, what do you know?”

“I know they’re close. Close enough that they occasionally share a bed.”

Her eyes widened. “Really?”

“You didn’t know?”

“Not that, no. Go on!”

“Reid shared with me that he takes part in dominant and submissive play. I believe the hint was that somehow involves Aaron.” He studied her for tells. “What else?”

“Their…friendship? They already had a connection when I joined the team. It was different then but…they were closer than I expected.” She took a sip from her glass. “What if we arranged for the two of them to go to dinner somewhere nice together?”

“And how, exactly, would we achieve that?”

Garcia thought a minute. “Bossman will meet up with you, yeah?”

He nodded slowly. “Usually reluctantly, but yes.”

“And I can get Boy Genius to come out with me anywhere pretty much. We can just drag them both out and then bail.”

“What will keep them from just getting up and leaving instead of spending time together?”
Her eyes glittered with mischief. “We’ll be the ones who drive.”
The scotch was an old habit, one he rarely indulged in anymore. In the door, depositing things as he went, fill a glass, and take a sip. The apartment was always too quiet, too still, but a faint whisper of sound made the hairs on his neck stand up. Paranoia was a familiar friend but this felt different. Someone was in his private space.

Staring into the barrel of a forty-five, Aaron decided that if this was how he was going to go out, he wasn’t going to give Foyet anything he wanted. He made sure his voice was even, held his head high. And then Foyet pulled the trigger.

Hotch hadn’t considered just how loud the crack of the shot would sound as it reverberated in the small apartment. Despite his intentions to fight back, the pain was crippling, disorienting. Grinding his teeth to try and distract himself, he fought back.

Somehow, he was laying on his back on the floor. Arms tangled in his jacket, Hotch blinked to clear his head and find the man in his home. It didn’t take long, Foyet was kneeling over him, a blade glinting in the lamplight. And he was talking, though Hotch couldn’t make it out over the buzz in his head.

The knife sliding into his gut felt like fire. Sliding out wasn’t much better. Twice more it happened before the man stopped. Aaron was gasping for breath. He watched Foyet display his own scars and then caught his words about their profile being wrong, that they would never again think stabbing was substitution for the sex act.

He tried to fight him off when Foyet undid the belt in his slacks and then worked the slacks themselves open. This was a serious deviation from the MO they knew. This was meant to be personal and violent. He was going to take from Hotch in a way he’d never taken from any of his other victims. Hotch tried to resist and was rewarded with another butt of the gun to the side of his head. When he was rolled onto his stomach, he gasped with the pain of laying on his gaping wounds. He was losing blood faster now that he was face down. He tried to get his hands under him to push up, but his body was already decreasing circulation to what it perceived as non-vital functions. Giving up on his arms, Aaron tried to kick out, to move to keep his clothes from being pulled down. Slacks and boxers bunched around his calves, unable to push further due to his shoes. Shirt and jacket pushed up, this was as much a violation of his persona, the man he presented as an agent, as a violation of the man himself.

The tip of the knife pressed into soft flesh above one hip. “Don’t even think about it.” When Aaron struggled again, Foyet pressed the blade in. “Now, see what you made me do?” He pulled it out and laid it on Hotch’s back. “I’m going to make sure you think of me every time someone uses a knife for the rest of your life.”
The pain was unlike anything he’d ever known before. He tried to relax to lessen the pain, but they were dry and he could feel his skin giving against the painful intrusion. The need to escape the extreme violation of what was being done propelled him to try and crawl away from where Foyet was forcing his way in. It felt like he was being split in two. “Stop!” He begged. “Please stop!”

“I’m not done yet. This could take a while.” Even under the machismo, his voice sounded pinched. Frustrated.

“The profile was right. Sure, you can get it up,” he gasped as he felt tender skin give further, “but it’s no good if you can’t finish.” He couldn’t bite back the scream when Foyet drove into him harder several times before pulling suddenly out. In an instant Hotch was looking at his ceiling again, blinking the disorientation away when the blade slid into his previously unmarked side and stayed in place. A groan of pleasure came a millisecond before something warm and wet splattered over his exposed body.

Hotch welcomed the darkness as it enveloped him.

==

He hurt. Everywhere. Something was beeping nearby that he couldn’t identify. There was a soft whooshing and sudden noise of a busy place before another whoosh and silence again. Heels across a hard floor, five steps and then a shuffle. He was laying on something soft, covered. He cracked his eyes open and confirmed he was in a bed. A hospital bed.

“You’re awake.”

He rolled his head to the side to locate the voice. Prentiss. And she looked worried, scared even. “What happened?”

“Foyet stabbed you. In your apartment.” She watched him process that. “Do you remember anything?”

He tried hard. “No.”

She nodded carefully. “From what I can gather, he was in your place when you got home. There were no signs of forced entry. He brought you to the hospital and left you here.”

Hotch tried to recall what had happened. “How did you…”

“We got called to a case. When you didn’t show up eventually, I went to your place to find you. Spencer wanted to come but we were on a clock and he’s just faster at going over files.” Her eyes ran over him. “He stabbed you in the same places he stabbed himself. Probably…” She cut off when he gasped.

His eyes were squeezed shut against the memory. Foyet has said their scars would match. He would always carry the memory of this case, for the rest of his life. And then he had taunted him. The memory of what came next flooded his mind.

Emily jumped up when alarms started going off. “What’s happening?” She asked the nurses who rushed in. “What’s wrong? He was just talking!”

“Ma’am, please wait outside.” One nurse pushed her into the hallway.

==
As Aaron relaxed with the drugs the nurse pushed into his IV, he heard her speak. “It’s just you and I now. I have some questions we need to sort out, okay?”

He gave a slight nod. “Okay.”

“The other agent seemed to know who did this. Do you agree with her assessment?”

“Yes.” He pushed through gritted teeth.

She paused long enough for her patient to finally open his eyes and look at her. “Now, normally this next part goes right in the official record, but I’m going to ask first. During surgery as they were cleaning you up, the doctors found semen in your wounds.” She watched him flinch at the memory. “As well as significant anal bruising and tearing. You have several stitches both internal and external. We had to take pictures before we could treat you, right now the forensic nurse has them in a John Doe file. Do you want to make it an official rape kit and file charges?”

He knew he should, but it wouldn’t really make much difference at this point, Foyet was a serial killer who’s known crimes would put him away for life. “No.”

The nurse frowned but understood. “We will keep those records in a Doe file and you’ll get a confidential patient number. We still drew blood to check for any diseases and you should have more tests in the future.”

“I think I’ll be okay. He doesn’t have a history of any illness. We have his medical records.”

Her brows rose in surprise. “I’m still going to jot it in as routine since we don’t know where the knife came from or went to. Who’s to say he didn’t use it on some else.”

“Okay.”

“Now, before the other agent forces her way back in. Don’t try to sit up for now, you are being held together on all sides right now by thread and prayer. I heard her talking to someone else about a team?” She waited for a nod. “They can come check on you, but I will be watching closely and will throw them out if I think it’s too much. All the men in my family are or were cops, a room full of people with guns doesn’t bother me one bit.” She finished what she was doing and started to leave.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Rest now.”

==

Drifting hazily into awareness, he could hear voices talking softly around him. It took a minute longer than he felt it should to work out who is speaking, but eventually he discerned JJ and Morgan further away on one side of his bed and Rossi and Emily closer on the other. Blinking, Aaron let his head roll to his left as Dave and Emily came into focus. The pair stopped talking and looked his way. “Wh…” He cleared his dry throat. “Where’s Reid?” He caught Prentiss exchange a look with the other two, now quiet as well, and then Dave. “What?”

Dave watched the younger team members silently communicate amongst themselves, unwilling to be the first to speak. Deciding he was the best person for the job, they knew Hotch would be upset about the news, they just didn’t know quite why, he motioned with his head for them to leave the room.
When the trio vanished and the door pushed shut, Aaron turned to Dave again. “Dave, where’s Reid?”

“He’s in the hospital in McLean. He sorted through piles of charts and paperwork to figure out who was targeting a man and his son and solved it. Not that that really surprises any of us, but then when the unsub showed up at the man’s house with a gun, Reid jumped in front of him and took the bullet without a second thought.”

Reid had been shot. He’d been shot and Hotch couldn’t go to him. “Is he okay? Why’s everyone here with me then?”

Dave finally took a seat on the edge of the bed, patting his hand on an unbandaged part of Aaron’s arm. “He’ll be fine. Eventually. He took a bullet to the knee in sort of a bad way, so he could be on limited duty for months at best. I set JJ and Garcia on getting information and between them I got a good picture of how he is. And the whole team isn’t here. I sent another agent to drive Penelope to McLean to sit with him. She’ll keep him company, and us updated, and I’ve asked her to press the hospital to get him transferred here once he’s able.”

Aaron was thankful his team knew to take care of everyone even when their attention had to be split. “Thank you.”

“Did you think we wouldn’t take care of everything? Sometimes it’s band together to overcome, sometimes it’s divide and conquer. Emily and Garcia spent all day looking for you, for whatever reason, Prentiss couldn’t shake that something was wrong. If she hadn’t, we wouldn’t have found you yet.” Dave looked over the thick bandages covering his friend. “At some point we need to take your official statement.”

“I can’t remember much.” He didn’t want to remember any more than he already did.

“That’s understandable. But we still need to do it.” He studied Aaron’s guarded face. He suspected more happened overnight than anyone would ever be able to find out. “Will you want me to do it, or one of the others?”

Hotch thought. He would have asked for Spencer, knowing the young man would naturally pen his statement in such a way as to protect him, but that wouldn’t be an option in this. “Yeah, you.”

“Okay. Let me know when you’re ready.” Dave stood. “I’ll let you get some more rest, we’ll be back later. By then I’ll have more information on Spencer, okay?”

Aaron nodded. “Okay. Thanks.”

==

Spencer tried to roll onto his side to get more comfortable but discovered he was stuck, pinned in place by something heavy. Dragging his eyes open, he looked down to find what was trapping him and was met with the sight of a large device akin to a cage attached to his leg.

He was in the hospital. He’d been shot and was in the hospital. He’d had surgery on his knee. It looked…bad. He’d been shot after… He thought a minute, mind still sluggish from anesthesia. Emily had called about Hotch being in the hospital. He’d been attacked. Panicking, Spencer tried to push upright.

“Hey! No, lay down!” A voice insisted a moment before hands pushed him down. Garcia.

“You’re here.”
“Rossi had someone bring me. Everyone else went to Hotch.”

“How is he?” He needed to know.

“Alive. Recovering. Haley and Jack left with the Marshall Service already. Rossi had me work out a deal, once you are stable, you’ll be getting a ride to the same hospital so we all can take turns.”

Reid thought over her words. “Foyet threatened Haley and Jack?”

She nodded sadly. “I haven’t seen Hotch yet, but I was told he stabbed him the same way he’d stabbed himself. He’s covered in stitches, will be covered in scars.”

“Oh.” He wondered what he needed to be able to do to get transferred. “I need to talk to him.”

“I know, Sweetie, but we have to wait until we can get you transferred. My last text from JJ was that he was asleep anyway. They have him on a pain pump thing.”

Just then a doctor walked in. “Agent Reid, good to see you awake, I’m Doctor Jones, I did the reconstruction on your knee. You will heal with close to full function again under one condition.”

He waited for his patient to nod. “You have to follow all medical instructions to the letter. I’ve dealt with my share of agents in my time and I know how you lot can be.” He smiled. “I have written here that you need to be transferred to another hospital, I just need to have a look at the surgical site and then transport will come get you.” He pulled back the blanket over Spencer’s leg. “Do you have someone who will be staying with you.”

Garcia spoke up. “Me. At the very least, we already live across the hall from each other and work together, so he’ll have me.”

“Good.” Doctor Jones nodded. “Because you’re going to need to be waited on hand and foot for about six weeks.”

Since Penelope had been dropped off at the hospital to stay with Spencer, she rode in the transport van for the hour drive to Saint Sebastian Hospital. The transport team had shared that Spencer had a room on the post-surgical floor, the same floor as Hotch but a separate wing. It was better than being an hour away.

She followed the gurney into the hospital and up to his room before leaving Reid to talk with the doctors. While he was settling in, she found her way to Hotch’s room, Rossi was inside reading a book. “How is he?” She whispered.

Rossi looked up, surprised to see the bubbly blonde so soon. “Resting for now.” He stood and escorted her back into the hall so as to not disturb Aaron. “He’s been having nightmares. Reid made it here then?”

“Yeah. He’s in room three seventy-eight which is down the blue wing hallway.” She glanced in through the window.

“Hey.” He pulled her attention back to him. “He’ll be okay. They’ll both be okay. Eventually. We just have to make sure to show them they’re not alone.”

She nodded, willing tears to stay back. “Spencer, he… the other doctor said he needed six weeks of care before he could really be mobile. He’s going to need months of therapy, maybe a second surgery. I told the doctor I would look after him since we live across from one another.”
Dave sighed. “I have no idea how long Hotch’s recovery will be. At the moment he has so many stitches he can’t even lift a glass to take a drink. There’s no way he could go home alone. Not to mention he has no home to go to.”

The pair quietly watched their battered leader sleep for several minutes before Garcia spoke again. “Really we need them to be recovering together in one place.”

Rossi chewed his lip. “It would make it easier for all of us to pitch in.”

Her face lit up. “Hotch can stay with Reid!”

“He only has a one bedroom place, you know that.”

“I know, but for now we could put a second bed in the living room, Spencer has space along one wall, a single would fit. Then my sofa pulls out now, so we can take up the whole space. I could hook up an intercom or something so if they need me or whoever is around, they can call for us.”

He thought about her idea and couldn’t find any immediate problems with it except for one. “How do we get them to agree?”

“Well.” She let a mischievous grin slip out. “They can’t get discharged unless someone will be there to help.”

“Blackmail. Nice.”

==

He groaned at the pain radiating through the lower part of his gut. His bladder was spasming, telling him he badly needed to pee despite the catheter, he tried slow deep breaths to relax the muscles. Getting his body to relax alerted him to a new and urgent reason for the pain. Pressing the call button, he asked for a nurse to come help him.

A nurse and an orderly turned up, pulling the door shut and closing the blinds so they had complete privacy. “Mister Hotchner, you can’t get up and we advise you don’t do anything to tense your abdominal muscles. I’m sorry but you’ll have to use this for now.” She produced a metal bedpan.

He pulled a face, this whole situation was just getting worse and worse.

“Now, please keep in mind you are mostly stitches.” She pressed on, aware that there probably wasn’t time for a long drawn out discussion if he’d been pressed into calling her in. “No pushing, no straining. Let gravity and nature do its thing. I promise it will work, the more you focus on it and stress, the slower things will move. Once you’re done I’ll go ahead and look over your catheter and everything and get it out of the way for now.”

Hotch frowned and glared at them as they adjusted his covers and gown and rolled him to the side so the pan could be placed before rolling him back and pulling the sheet up. He watched the nurse and orderly quietly step away to give him privacy while making sure no one else would come in. Closing his eyes, he worked on relaxing his whole body and letting everything happen.

What felt like hours later, Aaron called the nurse back over and she and the orderly set about cleaning him up and checking him over. It had been the most humiliating experience so far since he’d woken up. Never before had he been unable to do something so simple as use the restroom properly. He was still trying to wipe the memory of what he’d had to do from his mind when Rossi and Garcia showed up in his room asking how he was.
Dave took a seat by the bed. “I’ve talked to Reid’s doctor. They are watching him for another twenty-four hours for infection, after that he can go home with full supervision. He isn’t allowed any weight-bearing at all for a bit. Pretty much he must sit and be cared for. He will see a doctor in another week or so for a check-up.” He watched Aaron process the news. “And then there’s you.”

Aaron looked up. “Me?”

“Your doctor wants you here a few more days, to make sure everything is healing well and then, if I can assure him you won’t be alone at all for a while, you can be released as well.”

“I don’t… I’m not sure I could hire a home nurse for long.”

Garcia stepped up to the bed. “We have a better idea?” She smiled at him. “Your place is still… not useable. So, what if we got another bed and you and Reid become roomies? Then the whole team only has one location to go to.”

“I don’t know. I haven’t had a chance to talk to Spencer about anything yet. How is he doing?”

Penelope frowned. “He’s in pain. He won’t take anything narcotic even though I could tell he was a little tempted. The pain will slow his recovery.” She glanced at Dave and then back to Hotch. “I think being together while you heal would help you both.”

Dave watched his friend mull it over. Maybe this would finally get the pair to talk and admit their feelings to one another. Maybe. He could hope.

==

The next time Hotch woke up, Garcia was the only one in his room.

“How do you feel?” She asked him.

“Okay, considering I guess.”

“Good.” She smiled softly at him. “How was… How were Haley and Jack?”

His breath caught in his throat. “I never wanted this job to affect them. Haley insisted I see Jack before they left.”

“I heard.”

“It was… I never wanted him to see me hurt. What will he think if the last memory he has of me for the rest of his life is in this bed?” He looked up to her.

Garcia reached out and took his hand. “I’ll make sure that doesn’t happen. If he isn’t back soon, I’ll figure out something.”

“You can’t.”

“Hey. We’ll get this sorted out. I promise. Okay?” She waited for him to nod and then took a breath. “Well, good, because I have a bone to pick with you.”

He couldn’t help the feeling of amusement that she would corner him while he couldn’t physically move. “About?”

“Calling me out to horrible, scary houses to profile computers and hard drives of bad people. This is the second time you’ve done that and this time was worse because I watched the man we were
looking into get shot and die right in front of me.”

A genuine smile crossed his face. “Penelope? I am sorry.”

“Good. Now get some more sleep.”

==

Spencer was surprised to find Rossi in his room reading when he woke up. “How’s Hotch?”

“Why is it the first thing both of you ask when you surface is how the other is?”

“He’s been asking about me?”

“Yes. And as soon as the doctor clears you to be out of bed, I’ll personally take you to see him. Right now, though, I want to know how you are?”

“Okay. Leg hurts.”

Dave nodded. “Were you aware you need someone to look after you for a while?”

“Yeah.” He sighed. “Garcia told the other doctor she would do it.”

“Well, it turns out that Aaron also needs someone to care for him for a bit.”

“Oh?”

Dave nodded again. “We were thinking it would be easier if the two of you recovered in the same space.”

“O-okay?”

“The alternative is you don’t get to go home.” He smirked.

“Blackmail? Really?”

“Of course. How else can we get you to do what we want?”

==

He barely recognized his apartment as he crutched in, one of Rossi’s hands guiding him carefully around the now open space. “Who did all this?” His furniture was pushed against the walls, out of the path to the bedroom and kitchen. A bed was on the other side of a folded back divider tucked into the far corner of the open living space.

“Morgan and I think one of two of his men.”

“Oh.” He sank onto the couch and let Rossi lift his well-wrapped leg onto the cushions. “Is the bedroom rearranged too?”

“Probably. JJ and Penelope did the grocery shopping so there are easy to make things on hand. And I believe Garcia wired up a camera system so she can keep an eye on you from her place.”

“Great.” He frowned.

“Now.” Dave sat down in a chair. “Aaron is supposed to be discharged tomorrow. I went to his place and got a bunch of his clothes and toiletries. I was going to put it out here in the main
bathroom so you guys aren’t crawling over one another. Once you’re both here, someone will be on hand around the clock until you two get cleared for more activity.” He shook his finger at Reid. “No trying to do things you shouldn’t or I’ll haul you back myself. My heart doesn’t need the stress. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“Do you want to stay out here a while or go into the bedroom?”

Spencer looked around. “I’ll stay here. Would you, um, would you grab me a few books to read?” Rossi stood back up. “Anything in particular?”

“Surprise me.”

Emily was standing in the doorway of the hospital room with her arms crossed determinedly, flanked on either side by JJ and Penelope, also with their arms crossed.

Looking up from where he was sitting on the edge of the bed, trying not to wince from the pain, Hotch asked. “How come Dave or Morgan aren’t here to help?”

All three ladies grinned, but only JJ spoke. “Because we all agreed you’re more likely to just give in to us, especially all together. We brought you something loose and comfortable to wear out, Morgan and Rossi are with Reid at his apartment and will come down when we get there to help you up. So, we only have to get you dressed and into the wheelchair.” She saw him shoot a glower at the chair in the room. “And then into the van.”

“Van?” He couldn’t remember anyone on his team owning a van.

“I borrowed my neighbor’s minivan. I was talking to her and she said it would be easier for you to get in and out of.”

“Oh.”

“Now.” Emily stepped forward into the room. “You need to get dressed.” She raised her eyebrows in silent question.

Hotch looked between the three women a moment. “Emily, could you, uh…”

She nodded and the other two turned to leave saying they would track down his discharge paperwork. Once the door was shut and blinds closed, Emily brought his bag to the bed and opened it. “Least personal first?” She waited for him to nod before untying the gown from his shoulders and letting it pool in his lap. “Let me do it, okay?” Emily waited for another nod before gently tugging the t-shirt over his head and then working each arm through their holes.

“You’re good at this.”

“Well, I’ve seen my share of injuries and picked up a few things.” She helped him smooth the shirt flat to his waist. “So, this is how we do the next part. I’m going to get your boxers up past your knees and then help you stand and you can do the rest. Then we’ll work on the sweatpants.”

One his pants were on, he watched her tug socks and shoes on his feet just before someone knocked on the door. “Come in.”
JJ peeked her head around. “Everything’s ready.”

==

Hotch stared out from what he was told would be his bed for the next couple weeks at least. The divider gave him some privacy without making him feel too claustrophobic. The trip from the hospital to the apartment hadn’t been as bad as he’d expected. Emily had kept reminding him to not try and do things himself, to let them do it and she was right, it hurt less doing it her way. He wasn’t actually ready to admit that though.
Day 1

The first day they were both out of the hospital, most of the team was in and out of the apartment the entire day. Spencer watched from his place on the couch as Garcia organized her famous lists. Lists for meals, for who would watch them when, lists of medicines and times ad lists he wasn’t even sure anyone but his eccentric neighbor understood.

Hotch had been escorted in just in time for lunch and while the older man had said he wasn’t very hungry, Spencer was ravenous. Enjoying the spread of sandwiches and sides that had been whipped up for everyone, he listened to the conversation around them quietly.

Several hours later, everyone filtered out, leaving the two men on their own for a while after looking over them one last time. After several minutes of quiet, Hotch’s voice came from the far side of the room. “How are you?”

“Good. Sore. You.”

“I’m fine.” It was quiet a while longer before he spoke again. “Dave told me about the case, about you getting shot. It was either brave or reckless.”

“Probably both.” Spencer huffed. “Did he tell you I might have to have another surgery?”

“Yeah. But if you follow doctor’s orders you might be okay. Right?”

“Maybe.” Spencer didn’t add anything else for some time. “Penelope told me about…I’m sorry this happened to you. Maybe if you’d have come here or if I’d come home with you this…”

Hotch cut him off. “He would have gotten me eventually, Spencer. He wanted to make sure I remembered him forever.”

“He taunted you?”

“Yeah. He took his time stabbing me. Moving me around.”

“And you’ll be okay?”

“Eventually.”

==

Day 4

Spencer heard another groan of pain from where the two older men were in the main bathroom and steeled himself before pulling upright on his crutches and hobbling to see what was going on. He had agreed to not be up and about much just yet without an able-bodied person around in case he fell, but technically Dave was here so he figured that counted. Peering into the bathroom, he got his first good look at the damage Foyet has caused. Aaron was seated on the toilet lid, shirt and all bandages off as Rossi helped care for the wounds. His slight gasp alerted the men to his presence.

Dave looked over his shoulder and spotted Reid. “Why are you up?”

“I was worried.” He couldn’t tear his eyes way. “And you’re here, so technically I’m not breaking
any deals I made.”

Shaking his head, Dave went back to his task. “Well, if you are both insisting on being up, I will cook up something to eat.” He placed new bandages and helped Aaron put his shirt back on. “Up you get.” He helped him ease up and then held his arm as he walked into the living room.

“I feel old.” Aaron grumbled. “Can’t do anything for myself. Can barely walk.”

Spencer had arrived at the couch first but waited for Hotch to pick a seat before settling down as close as he dared. “Can you lean over?”

“What?”

Reid raised his arm and motioned for Aaron to tuck his head in close, once he did, Spencer got comfortable and let his eyes drift shut.

Dave worked quietly in the kitchen until his feast was ready. Excited to show off his skills, he swept back to the living room to present it only to be presented with the sight of the two injured men tucked together asleep.

He really hoped that the time it took for them to heal would be enough to get them both to see the light.

==

Day 7

They were both more or less mobile now, though Garcia and other members of the team popped in throughout the day. Neither of them would be running anywhere any time soon, but it felt better than being waited on like invalids.

Hotch hovered in the bedroom doorway, Spencer was sprawled out on his bed watching TV dressed in a worn t-shirt and a pair of lounge shorts, long limbs tossed in every direction. “Spencer?”

Reid turned at the sound of his name and spotted his friend in the doorway. “Hey. Wanna come watch? It’s about the Tower of London.”

Aaron glanced at the screen. “Sure.” He slowly crossed the room and eased down onto the mattress on Spencer’s uninjured side. “It was getting lonely out there. I think I’ve gotten used to everyone coming and going.”

“Yeah, me too.” He waited for Aaron to get settled before adjusting to hold him close. “You can come in here whenever you want. I know we can’t do anything else, but we can lay like this together.”

Hotch nodded silently against Spencer’s soft shoulder.

==

Garcia let herself into the apartment to check on the two injured agents and was met with a large, empty room. “Hello?” She looked around a bit. “Bossman? Boy Genius?” Surely they couldn’t have gotten far.

Making her way through, she paused at the entrance to the bedroom. The missing men were sound
asleep on the bed, wrapped in each other’s arms. She really wanted to snap a picture, but she knew neither of them would appreciate it.

==

Aaron woke up slowly, without feeling panicked, for the first time since he was attacked the week before. It took him a minute to remember he was in Spencer’s room, in his bed with the younger man wrapped around him protectively. It was a good feeling after constantly waking from his newest nightmares with a gasp and his body tense and in pain. Doing his best to not irritate his wounds, Aaron rolled to his side and snuggled closer to the other man, letting his arm fall around Spencer’s hips.

A bump against the underside of his arm as Spencer shifted slightly in his sleep made Aaron raise his head to peer down. Barely hidden in Spencer’s lounge shorts, the head of the younger man’s arousal was a millimeter from his arm. Pausing to consider for only a second, Aaron let his arm slip ever so slightly lower until he bumped it again, causing the sleeping man to whisper out a hummed sort of moan. Even through the heavy cotton, he could tell the younger man was long and thin and some part of him felt suddenly desperate to see more. The thought made him pause and then pull back but as he did, the palm of his hand brushed Reid’s member and it felt electric. Hotch froze in place.

As he hesitated, Spencer thrust along his palm in his sleep, unaware of what he was doing. Closing his eyes and praying his could just claim it was an unconscious action done in his sleep, Aaron let his hand wrap loosely around the fabric covered length, allowing Spencer to continue thrusting into his fist. The only sound in the room for long minutes was short, panting breaths and the shift of the mattress. Just when it seemed Spencer was getting close, Aaron felt him tense and hold his breath. His dream had been wonderful. He’d had Aaron naked on his bed, spread out on his stomach as he’d used oils to massage the older man until he was loose and pliant. He poured lubricant along the crevice that cut between the globes of Aaron’s ass, making sure there was plenty before stroking some onto his length and lining up. Ever so slightly he started pushing in, gauging his pace by the moans coming from the body beneath him. When he was finally fully seated inside Aaron’s ass, he began long slow thrusts meant to drive them both crazy. The feeling was glorious, just like he knew it would be. He was about to finish when the flesh around his member squeezed slightly, more like a hand. That thought was enough to shake him loose from his dream.

Emerging from sleep, he was instantly aware there was, in fact, something wrapped around his aching member. He tensed. He was right on the edge, ready to explode. Cracking his eyes open he could make out the top of Aaron’s head, facing down, and could just see that the other man’s eyes were slightly open. Watching what was happening. The sight of Hotch watching him fuck up into his hand, still clothed sent a shiver through his body. The shiver turned into an uncontrollable tremble and his eyes rolled back as he choked on a gasp and his body exploded.

Aaron felt Spencer tremble, then the dick in his hand swelled as the material was soaked in warm fluid. He was mesmerized at the sight. He couldn’t believe it had just happened. Then it dawned on him. He’d just jacked the other man off in his sleep, though he wasn’t sure he was asleep anymore, without talking about it first. What he’d done was wrong. Very wrong. He moved to pull his hand away but was caught, another hand wrapped around his.

“Hold on.” Spencer moaned, tightening their combined grip a moment as he thrust twice more and came again, this time pulling away. “God that felt so good.” Catching his breath, he let his head roll to the side and looked right into Aaron’s wide, panicked eyes. “What’s wrong?”

His hand was tacky, even with the fabric protecting it. “I shouldn’t have… I’m so sorry. I don’t
know what I was thinking.” He tried to slowly adjust so he could get off the bed, but Reid caught his uninjured shoulder.

“Wait.”

“Spence…” His voice broke. He couldn’t handle hearing his rejection on top of everything else he’d been through recently. It would be too much. “I get it.”

“No. I don’t think you do.” Spencer waited for his to stop resisting and at least relax back onto the bed. “My dream… I was dreaming. I was…” He pursed his lips together a moment and diverted his gaze, might as well be honest. “I was dreaming of you.” When there was no horrified reply, he looked up.

“Me?”

“I was having sex with you. I’m at… I’m attracted to you. I think maybe I always have been.” He waited for Aaron to meet his gaze. “I know you probably don’t feel the same, I never wanted to make you uncomfortable with something like this.” He gestured down to the cooling damp. “I’ve always known I was gay, I just don’t broadcast it. Garcia knows from when we talked a few years ago.” The sound of the front door opening made them both turn to look. Rossi’s voice filtered through announcing his presence. Spencer looked down at himself. “I need to go clean up.” He slowly edged off the bed and grabbed his crutches and clean shorts before vanishing into the bathroom.

A minute later, Rossi was leaning in the bedroom doorway looking down at what he could only describe as a somewhat shell-shocked Aaron while water ran in the bathroom beyond. Deciding to just catch him while it looked like he was still off his game, Dave asked. “Why does it smell like sex in here?”

Without thinking, Aaron replied to him. “It wasn’t sex.”

“Then what was it?”

He looked up at his long-time friend confused. “What?”

“What was it then?” When he got no reply. “Come on Aaron, you don’t think another man would recognize the smell of something like that and not know what it was?” He started to smile even wider until he saw the whites of the younger man’s eyes get bigger and his breathing get shorter and faster. Moving to the bed, he dropped the teasing for concern. “Hey, hey! Calm down, tell me what’s wrong. Did something happen? Did…” He glanced to the door, surely not. “Did Reid do something?”

“No.”

“Okay, you need to calm down. This isn’t helping you heal. Talk to me. You know you can tell me absolutely anything, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So, talk.” Dave listened as Aaron recounted what had transpired over the last few hours and when the story concluded, he nodded. “And how do you feel about him?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t?”
“I… I haven’t allowed myself to think about it. I was married. I have a kid! I don’t think I’m…” He trailed off.

“You *don’t think* you are? It sounds like you need to give yourself some time to figure things out. Life, love, it isn’t either or, black or white. There’s nothing wrong with enjoying the gray.”

“But what about…”

“What about what?”

“If Strauss ever got wind of something going on.”

“Then we don’t let her. If you ever feel like you need a second opinion, ask me. I’ll keep your head on your shoulders.” The water turned off and Dave moved to leave the room. “Unless, of course, what you really need is to have it knocked off.”

Hotch couldn’t help the small smile as his friend left. He only got a minute to think before Spencer reappeared. “Hey.”

“Hi.” Reid edged onto the bed again.

“I have no idea what I want. Before this, you, I’ve never once considered being with a man in any way.” He chewed his lip. “But I have had dreams about you too so maybe… Maybe I would like to keep an open mind and see what happens.”

==

Day 10

Aaron was doing his best to shower properly unassisted. His scars were still sore and he’d managed to keep anyone from discovering the full extent of the damage, but the hot water felt wonderful rolling down his body. Morgan had stopped by earlier that morning and handed him the new keys to his place along with the details for his security system. He’d been so thankful he’d been almost moved to tears. He finally had a home to go back to, not that he had a family there. The apartment was going to be empty after ten days with Spencer who was rarely quiet or still.

Drying off carefully, he pulled open the bathroom door to head toward the bed they’d been sharing for the past three days but stopped. Sitting on the foot of the bed was Spencer, taking in the sight of Aaron standing naked in the room.

After a moment, Spencer shook himself. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to stare.” He swallowed down the feeling of arousal as he stood to leave the room.

Aaron watched him start to leave. “Wait. Please.” He waited until the younger many slowly turned back, growing arousal poorly hidden in his worn sweats. “You really… You really are attracted to me.”

Spencer nodded.

“I know we can’t… Could you…?” He blushed red. He was curious but couldn’t find the words to ask for what he wanted.

Stepping closer, Reid prompted him. “I need words.”

“Show me.” Something felt very right about the situation. Maybe it was the tone Spencer had used,
the one that he always was willing to submit to. “Please.”

“Go lay down, get comfortable.” He watched the older man do as he said before he collected another towel and thumped to the bed. “You want me to show you how attracted I am to you?”

Looking up, Aaron forced out. “Please.”

Balancing one crutch under his arm, Spencer dropped a towel on the edge of the bed before he set the other crutch aside. He couldn’t believe he was about to let Hotch watch him do this. The incident a few days ago, the older man hadn’t actually seen anything. This was way more personal, more intimate. Pushing down his sweats, he’d forgone boxers that morning, they caught on the heave brace on his leg as his arousal sprung free. He stood still a moment watching Aaron study him carefully. The older man was laying on the side of the bed, close enough that when he reached out, he could touch if he wanted to. “It’s okay.” He told him softly, like he was speaking to a scared child. When calloused fingers brushed soft flesh, Spencer exhaled to try and maintain control. Struggling to hold back, Spence used his right hand to start stroking himself, slow and gentle at first but all too soon it was rough and fast. All he could think about was that Aaron was watching. Wanted to watch. Wanted to be right there with him for however far they eventually decided to take this. When those rough fingers ghosted along the spot where his balls were slapping his inner thigh, Spencer came without warning, whining at the sensation of the unexpected orgasm.

Aaron watched as come landed on the towel, the sight of it streaking out of the other man was overwhelming. He suspected if he still wasn’t pretty well medicated, he would be hard from the sight, maybe he would have even come himself from watching. He couldn’t wait until he was healed.

==

**Day 24**

“Hey. Why so crabby?” Garcia smacked Spencer’s shoulder.

He frowned. “I know we’ve both had therapy and stuff and I’ve been allowed back at the office now, but I haven’t actually talked to Hotch in two weeks. I’m just worried about him.”

“Well, Rossi says he’s fine. Has been stopping in morning and night. I doubt he’s avoiding you.” She smiled at him.

“If you say so. I just wondered if he was regretting some of the things we talked about while he was at my place is all.”

“Well, give him time. If they were that big of things that he needs to think, you know him, pushing won’t help.”

“I know. I just wish that if he was worried about something or wanted to take it back, he would just talk to me. It won’t hurt my feelings.”

“It won’t?”

“Well, I’m a big boy, I’ll get over it. I’m not going to demand he follow through just because he said he was considering…um..what we were talking about.”

Penelope stopped and stared at him. “Wait. What, exactly, is this all about?”
“Nothing.”

“Oh, no, the ship that answer is on sailed, Honey.”

“I admitted I had feelings for him.” He covered his ears when she squealed loudly, suddenly bouncing around and laughing as well.

“I knew it!” She clapped excitedly. “How did he find out?” She watched him blush a very deep red. “Oh, what did you do that you are going that color?”

“I am not giving you details!”

“But there are details? Like, real, honest to goodness, details?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll take it!” She pulled him into a crushing hug.

==

“What did the orange juice do to you?” Dave watched his friend glaring at the glass.

“It’s not the juice. It’s the reason for the juice.”

He tried to work it out and gave up. “What?”

“I feel ninety years old.”

“Because of the juice?”

“Because of the medicine.”

“Okay, Aaron, take pity on me here.”

“Have you ever had an…encounter…where you couldn’t…reciprocate?”

Realization dawned on the older man. “Oh.”

“Yeah. Oh.”

“Well, it’s not forever.”

“I really wish it wasn’t right now either. I haven’t brought myself to call him since I came back home. I don’t want to know yet if maybe he decided I am too old to bother with. Until I talk to him, it’s not over before it starts.”

“You’re an idiot, you know that?”

“Excuse me?”

“You, my dearest and best friend, are an idiot. Talk to the boy! Don’t just assume you know what he’s thinking.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Huffing as he walked into the net room, Rossi tossed back. “It’s you two making me gray. You know that?”
“He yelled at me.”

Spencer pulled his phone away and glanced at the screen. “What?”

“He yelled at me. For not having the information fast enough.”

He could hear the hurt in her voice now. “He’s a little…off. We’re all keeping an eye on him.”

“Well, it hurt. He’s never yelled at me. Never. That was Gideon’s gig.”

Reid knew she was sensitive to the moods of the rest of the team, especially if any of them were short with her. “It wasn’t your fault, Garcia, and later I’m sure he’ll apologize. Right now though, it’s his first case back, he probably is having some PTSD and I think maybe he’s trying to re-find his footing.”

Garcia nodded. “You’re probably right. Have you talked to him?”

“No. There hasn’t been time.”

“Well, maybe that will help everyone too.” She sighed. “Keep an eye on him, okay?”

“I will.”

“I mean it. He gets in his head and doesn’t take my calls and I start to panic.”

“Garcia? I promise. We’re all looking after him.”

“Okay. I’ll call when I have more information.”

“Thanks.”

==

Emily turned to Rossi as they slowly walked toward the SUV. “I’m worried.” She glanced ahead to their swiftly retreating leader’s back.

“Yeah. Me too. Just stay close and prepare for anything.”

“That’s it?”

“You have a better idea?” Rossi scanned to see who might overhear their conversation before dropping his voice. “We can’t question him here, you know that. In the SUV, in a private room, hell, it the middle of an empty field. But not here where the locals can see it. One of us sticks close, stays alert. We think he’s truly a risk, we all do what we have to. I’ll deal with any consequences later.”

“You sure?”

No, he thought to himself. “Yeah. I’m sure.”

==

Glancing down the street to where she could just make him out, Emily sent a pained expression
Rossi’s way. It shouldn’t have gotten this far.

Dave nodded when he met Emily’s gaze. He would be having a very long talk with Aaron after this to assess his mental state. But for now, they had to get him out before he got himself shot.

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Watching the SUV carrying Darren Call drive away, Aaron felt more than saw two bodies approach him on either side, moving in so close they were almost crowding him. He remained silent, refused to acknowledge either of them.

Once he realized Hotch wasn’t going to start talking, Rossi cleared his throat. “We need to talk, Aaron.” When the younger man didn’t respond, he tacked on. “Now.”

When Aaron turned to meet Dave’s hard gaze, Emily watched the battle of wills in profile. She wasn’t sure why she was included in this, but Rossi had pulled her along without a word. She frowned when Hotch turned suddenly and sharply and knocked into her, sending her stumbling back a step as he pushed past. “Hey!”

“Aaron!” Dave barked. He wasn’t giving it up, not this time.

“I’m fine, Dave.”

Everyone else was occupied and a reasonable distance away, so he dove right in. “I don’t think you are.” Dave had to stop short to keep from crashing into Hotch when the team lead turned back on his heel and faced him, glare stony and chin raised. To the unpracticed, it was a terrifying look. Aaron’s dark eyes burning down from beneath his heavy brows along the long line of his nose. But Dave wasn’t unpracticed and it was far from the first time he’d been on the receiving end. “Give it up.”

“You seem to forget, I’m your boss. I can have you out for insubordination.”

“And you seem to forget that I can make one phone call and have you not only out for mental health reasons, but in somewhere else for the same.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t I? Do you have any idea what that just looked like from the outside?”

Emily felt like she was watching a tennis match. She volleyed back and forth reading facial expressions and body language. When she saw Hotch’s hand curl into a fist and Dave’s determined look, she threw herself between them. “In the SUV, both of you. Now!” She poked them both until they turned to do as instructed. When Hotch pulled out the keys as if to drive, she plucked them from his hand. “Not on our life. Not in the frame of mind you’ve been in.” She opened the back door for him. “Get in.”

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Morgan, JJ, and Reid looked up from where they’d been talking quietly in the middle of the jet when Emily appeared through the doorway. She met each of their eyes silently, giving them a brief shake of her head telling them not to ask. Behind her was Hotch who, in contrast, did not meet anyone’s gaze as he headed straight for the back of the cabin, lips pressed into a thin line. Stopping in the doorway and watching Hotch go was Rossi, who was still keeping an appraising eye on the other man.
Settling back in his seat silently, Reid figured it was going to be a very uncomfortable flight home.

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Taking the metro with his leg braced up was a pain, but Spencer didn’t want to wait for Garcia and have to face answering her hundreds of questions. Letting his satchel swing behind him, he thumped his way into the building and found Hotch’s door. He knocked and waited for the other man to answer.

“Reid? What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to see how you were. Without the others around. We haven’t talked in weeks and then today…I was worried. I thought maybe it would help to talk to someone you know isn’t going to judge you.”

Hotch kept the door in hand, leaving Reid still in the hall. “Dave and Emily both talked to me already.”

Reid nodded slightly. “But did you talk to them?”

Leaving the door open as an invitation, Aaron turned into the apartment and went back to what he was doing. He could have just slammed the door in Spencer’s face, but knowing the younger man he would probably just sit in the hall all night. He didn’t need the neighbors talking any more than they already were. “I’m okay, Reid.”

“I doubt that.” Spencer thumped to the couch and dropped his bag, and then himself, down. “But you’ll get there.” He watched the older man finish pouring himself a drink before hesitating with it halfway to his mouth, eyes locked on the wall. “Aaron?” The man didn’t move. “What’s wrong?” Grabbing one crutch, he hurried to his friend’s side. Reaching out with his one free hand, he touched Hotch’s arm, feeling his flinch beneath his hand. “Hey.”

“I’m okay.” Hotch mumbled, backing away.

“What just happened?” Taking firmer hold, he did his best to pull the other man to the couch and sit him down. “Come here.”

Aaron settled into Spencer’s arms. “What if I end up just as haunted as Call?”

“You won’t. You have us around you.”

“Dave asked…”

Spencer waited for him to continue for several long minutes, listening to the clock on the wall softly ticking the seconds away. When it became apparent that Aaron wasn’t going to speak more, he decided to start. “We’re all worried. And to be fair, we would be worried about any of us but you keep yourself so much more closed off.” He carded fingers through short locks. “I found out after the fact from Morgan that you left your vest and gun and walked straight into the line of fire of a man in a psychotic break who was looking for revenge toward his father who was a serial molester and killer on his own.” He took a breath. “I don’t know what Rossi called it, but I know what I would have.”

Aaron turned to look at Reid. “What?”

“Suicidal.”
Dark eyes dropped back toward the floor.

“What did he say?”

“He threatened to pull me from the field and have me forcibly admitted if I didn’t straighten up.”

“Do you believe him?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you need? Right now. How can I help you?”

Aaron thought a minute. He wasn’t sure what he should really ask for, wasn’t sure it was a decision that should be left up to him. “I… I don’t….”

“Hey.” Spencer tugged his chin until Aaron was facing him. “Just tell me. If I don’t think you’re in a good place for it, we’ll talk about it. Okay?”

He studied the worried hazel eyes looking back at him. “Okay.” Swallowing, he looked away, thankful Spencer allowed it. “I feel so out of control. It’s like I was driving and hit a patch of oil… or ice… and the car is sliding and spinning so fast everything is a blur. No matter how hard I turn the wheel or slam on the pedals, it doesn’t make a difference.” He looked back up to Spencer. “I need it to stop.”

“Okay.” Spencer glanced around the small living room and then down to the still fully suited man in his arms. “Go get ready for bed, whatever you’ll be comfortable to sleep in. Have you had dinner?”

“Uh, not really, no.”

He nudged Aaron up and away. “I’ll find something.”

==

Aaron quietly moved around his room, hanging his suit away, dropping shirts and socks in the hamper. Changed into sleep pants he considered the shirt for a minute before setting it aside. Spencer was one of an extremely short list of people who’d actually seen the damage done to his body and he’d only seen them the once when they were still fresh and crossed with stitches. As much as he longed for the protection of hiding, he didn’t want to ever hide from Spencer. Dropping the shirt back on the dresser, he padded to the bathroom to brush his teeth before crawling onto bed, propping upright at the top. He tried not to think about Spencer somewhere else in his apartment, probably discovering he had nothing edible in the kitchen.

Eventually the bedroom door eased open and Reid appeared carefully balancing a plate with what looked like sandwiches on it. “I am letting you know, I took pictures of the inside of your fridge and pantry and sent them to Garcia. You’re on your own with that one.” He smiled teasingly. “It’s not fancy, but it’s food.” Reid look at where Hotch was sitting against the headboard shirtless, he hadn’t seen the other man’s chest and abdomen in nearly a month, the scars looked like they were healing well. Passing off the plates, he awkwardly crawled up the bed to sit beside him.

When the sandwiches had been reduced to assorted crumbs, Spencer patted the bed. “Scoot down on your back. Do you have some lotion?”

Partway into moving down, Aaron hesitated. “Yeah. Umm, in the drawer on that side.”
Spencer dug around and found a small bottle, rolling back so he was sitting turned the other way, facing the headboard now. “Close your eyes. Trust me, okay?”

Aaron let his eyes drift shut until he felt a hand, cool with lotion, touch him just below the solar plexus. With a sharp gasp, his eyes snapped open and his arms flung out defensively.

Anticipating the reaction, Spencer attempted to topple backward out of strike range until the other man calmed down a bit but was too close for those long limbs. With a yelp he rolled to the floor, managing to catch himself with his hands and his good knee.

Concern edging out panic, Aaron leaned over the edge of the bed. “Are you okay?”

“Fine.”

“Do you need help?”

“No! Just, give me a minute. I’m okay. I promise.” Eventually Spencer pushed himself back onto the bed. “Okay, this time eyes open and you’ll know what’s coming. Okay?”

“Yeah.” Aaron laid back and waited for Spencer to start over. When thin hands landed on his torso again, he only flinched a little, prepared to be touched this time. Having someone else see his scars was one thing, having them touch them was another entirely. Spencer didn’t linger anywhere in particular though, he massaged every muscle equally whether there was a raised line running through it or not.

“Where are you at?”

“I’m…okay.” He exhaled slowly. “I think it helps. You touching me. No one…”

Spencer studied his face. “No one what?” He asked softly.

“No one really touches me now that Jack’s gone. Not even Dave really. And never like…”

“Like?”

“Like they care about me.”

“I have an idea of what your father was like but…was your mother particularly affectionate?” He watched as Aaron’s gaze took on a distant look as he thought back.

“She would always hold my hand in public. Or when I was bigger would rest her hand on my shoulder.”

“But did she ever pull you onto your lap to snuggle or let you climb into bed with her. Give you hugs.”

“I can’t ever recall that. It must have happened though, surely.”

Spencer gave a small nod. “And Haley?”

“When we were young, we were together all the time. Why?”

“Have you ever heard of being touch-starved?”

“No.”
“People need touch, to be touched. To have the physical intimacy of skin contact with someone else. If you didn’t have that growing up, you would shy away from it now. And if the only touch you really did get was something that should have been negative, you accept it as what you need.”

“I don’t understand.” Hotch stared up at the younger man.

“Humans are social animals. We spend our early years in our mother’s arms or in the arms of extended family. We don’t touch almost at all here and it’s so normal that someone like Garcia is considered the odd one.”

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Aaron grunted as he worked to sit up the following morning. They had talked into the early hours before both fell asleep on the bed. Spencer has explained that he needed to learn to associate those closest to him with positive touch. To associate positive things with being touched. After some prodding, Aaron had agreed to submit to Spencer’s plan. Carefully rolling off the bed, Aaron padded into the bathroom and shut the door. He quickly took his morning medication, tucking the bottles back away, before gingerly stepping into the shower. As the water tracked down his body, Hotch traced each of his scars with his fingers, wondering if he could ever get used to someone else touching him or seeing him as he now was.
The time between when he returned to work after being attacked and when he would later refer to as \textit{The Day} was a time that Aaron would always try to forget. It had been one kick after another while he tried his best to stay afloat.

Watching Jack play through the grainy video of a dash cam, locked in the darkness of Garcia’s office on the little boy’s fourth birthday had been one of the most painful things he’s felt in a long time. Garcia had promised she was zoomed in as close as she could get, but his son was still too far away. Two months since he’d last held the little boy and he wondered how many more holidays and birthdays he would only get to see through the lens of a camera hidden somewhere. He wasn’t allowed to take the video with him in case Foyet somehow hacked into his computer or phone and was able to identify the background. Garcia had promised to save it in a secure file, her definition of secure, not the Bureau’s, and he could come view it whenever he wanted.

The second pain had come when he realized his team was trying to protect him from anything that might remind him of what he was missing. JJ used to happily talk with him about Henry, but now she almost tried to hide him away. Hotch could understand the impulse, not wanting to flaunt what she still had in front of him, but hiding it didn’t feel any better either.

And they were circling him, a pack protecting a wounded member of their own. He heard it in JJ’s tone after Strauss had left his office. Strauss, the poisonous snake who had been watching and waiting all this time, waiting to take him out, had found her opportunity to strike. Superiors had been easy to convince, and why wouldn’t they, his own team was secretly questioning him. One way or the other he was out. The only thing to do was control the fall and how far the damage would reach.

Maybe he could have approached Morgan a little differently. Challenging the younger man as he did, pushing him so far, wasn’t one of his better thought out plans, but a case could easily be made that he wasn’t thinking straight at the time. Sitting with him though reviewing case files, had felt right.

Handing the team over gave him more time to focus on Foyet. Obsessing, the others called it, not that he asked. It seemed they were a little less afraid to talk about him within earshot now that he wasn’t the one in charge. And some of the line blurred as well. The one that had separated him from the others a bit during down time. The camaraderie seemed to suddenly include him in a way it hadn’t before. And the touches, he noticed them now since Reid’s talk, seemed more common. He wondered if the women of the team had always touched him that much and he’d just never noticed. A brush of his shoulder as they walked past on the jet, walking just close enough that an elbow or arm might bump on occasion, and then the more overt moments that came with a reassuring smile that helped calm him.

Everyone touched Reid, but he knew that already. Hugs, pats on the back, everyone seemed to have something, but now that he was injured and, as Garcia had put it, couldn’t flee, it was more. Despite her issues, he knew from Spencer that Diana had always been a loving and affectionate mother. Even with his general aversion to being touched, those Spencer considered family were the exception. The Spencer of five years ago seemed to be but a memory now that he was fully settled into the group. Aaron wondered how he hadn’t seemed to notice the change and felt a little sad that he’d missed it. It made him wonder how different Jack would be when he got him back.
If he ever got him back.

Foyet had proven he could wait forever.

The only thing that helped Aaron handle those months was Spencer. Spencer had agreed to resume their previous arrangement with a few minor limitations. For now, no hard impact play. Nothing he felt would do Aaron more harm than good. Ribbons and silk, though, were in and Aaron found himself more and more frequently tied in one position or another in Reid’s apartment.

One change since their talk during recovery was that Spencer no longer hid his excitement as seeing Hotch submitting before him. They didn’t talk about it or do anything to solve it, but he didn’t hide it.

Spencer had resumed their dinners, meeting in casual out of the way places that wouldn’t attract any additional attention as anything more than two friends being together, but in those evenings, Aaron didn’t have to speak or think. Spencer took care of everything. He ordered everything from wine to dinner to dessert while Aaron remained quiet and polite. It felt right.

Evenings spent in meant Aaron walked around totally naked. Every evening Spencer would touch his chest, his stomach, his arms. Replacing the bad thoughts about his injuries and resulting scars with good thoughts of gentle touches and affection. When Spencer would walk around, obviously hard in his pants, Aaron longed to reach out and touch him again, but didn’t know how to put that into words.

They played with the silk ties before truly tying him up to make sure there wasn’t a trigger for him now. It was after Aaron’s first case no longer as unit chief when he found himself tied to Spencer’s large bed on his back and naked. Spencer had been using the soft flogger from their early days, the one that didn’t quite hurt, despite his begging for more. He understood the younger man’s reluctance, but he really did feel ready to move forward. He just had to convince Reid.

Spencer did his best to not let the twinges of pain from his own knee injury show, but Aaron saw how he still favored it in his movements. The soft worn sweatpants he was wearing tonight, slung low on his hips, did absolutely nothing to hide his arousal and he moved from the soft flogger to feathers to Aaron’s current favorite, a spiked wheel. When Spencer leaned across the bed to pick up the lotion, a moment of boldness filled him and Aaron leaned his head up enough to brush against the bulge on Reid’s pants. The moan of pleasure from the brief contact was still a surprise.

Spencer found that seeing Aaron in various stages of undress in his apartment was a serious turn-on. Having him naked and tied in his bed was even worse. He’d spent the entire evening reciting the periodic table plus each element’s primary uses just to keep distracted enough not to embarrass himself. When Hotch nuzzled his dick, the touch sent a ball of heat straight to the base of his spine. He had never asked for more of anything of a sexual nature because he wasn’t sure that’s what Aaron wanted. It seemed that now the older man wanted. Hovering over him, Spencer looked down. “God, I could fuck that mouth right now.”

Aaron smirked up at him. “Promise?”

Spencer was pretty sure he was done right then. That look was too much. “We’ve never talked about making this a sexual arrangement. I’m not sure now is the right time to make a decision like that.”

“I’ve seen you come twice now.” His eyes were pleading. He needed something, even if he was unlikely to find his own release.
“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t. I trust you. I submit to you.”

Spencer wanted to insist on no, but Aaron was an adult. A sober adult. Technically he shouldn’t be so far gone as to be unable to make a consenting decision. “You’ve never given head before.”

“No.”

“I won’t last long are you sure?”

Hotch nodded. “Yes.”

Leaning down until their lips were almost touching, Reid glanced from his eyes to his lips. “Then I just need to know if you want me to pull out or fill you up.”

He really wanted to say fill him up, but having never given a blow job in his life, Hotch had no idea what to expect. “Pull out.”

Spencer nodded and backed up, stripping his pants off, letting his erection spring free before he adjusted to straddle Hotch, left leg out so he wouldn’t put pressure on his knee and one hand gripping the headboard. “Snap your fingers and I stop, okay?”

“Yes.”

Arching his back, Spencer angled his cock down till the head brushed pink lips. When the mouth opened and he sank in, Spencer couldn’t hold back the moan. It felt wonderful. Moving slowly, he held the base of his dick to keep from coming as he started to carefully fuck that wonderful mouth, not wanting to choke him.

Aaron let his eyes drift shut. He wasn’t sure what he’d expected, but the feel of Spencer in his mouth, leaking onto his tongue as he went, was beyond anything he could have imagined. Saliva ran down his throat as well as his cheeks, but he didn’t care how he looked at the moment. Something small curled in his belly, he already knew he wanted to try this again. Opening his eyes, he looked up to watch as Spencer, the man he trusted to care for him, flew closer to the edge, face twisting in ecstasy. Desperation was clear as Spencer moved his hand from staving off the orgasm to frantically stroking his cock as he continued to fuck shallowly into Aaron’s mouth, it was the hottest thing Hotch had ever seen. Dribbles of precome leaked into his mouth moments before Reid jerked back, keening as he started to come, still stroking as his orgasm carried on.

Watching and feeling Spencer coming over him, hands tied so he was helpless, Aaron felt himself tremble as his eyes rolled back and his balls seemed to draw up, wanting release but somehow not finding any. His legs pulled against the ties at the bottom of the bed, he so badly needed his body to cooperate and harden so he could pass that plateau of need and find release.

Easing up, Spencer stood carefully balanced by the bed and took in the sight as he found his pants, using them to clean himself enough to walk to the bathroom. Fluids ran down Aaron’s throat and shoulder, some even along his jaw. They’d have to talk about this more once they were cleaned up. He reached up to untie the other man. “Let me clean you up. Don’t move yet.” He used one crutch to hobble away.

Alone, Aaron ran a hand down his chest to his own member. Closing his eyes he wrapped his hand around the limp flesh and imagined the view of Spencer coming. The look on his face. Stroking himself while he was soft was almost impossible, but his body was begging for something. Anything. Remembering that whine right as Reid spilled himself finally made his dick give half a
twitch and he was coming despite not getting properly hard. What he would have previously considered an embarrassing performance before the attack, was now blessed release as the small amount of come ran down his leg. Opening his eyes again, he met Reid’s gaze. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Doing that here.”

“Hey.” Spencer started to wash him up. “It’s fine. So, I got to watch this time. This only goes as far or as fast as you want.”

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Sitting at the table eating, Spencer watched Hotch closely. “What’s bothering you?”

“Nothing. Why?”

Reid gave him a knowing look. “I can see something is on your mind.”

“The Brass asking me to step down.”

“You mean, Strauss trying to push you out now that she has something she thinks she can use against you.”

Hotch shrugged. “Either way, it feels like this is the first step toward the end.”

“I know it feels like you’re losing everything, but maybe taking a step back isn’t such a bad thing. Not being in charge will give you more free time which means more time to go over those files we’re all supposed to pretend you don’t have at home.” He caught the guilty look that passed over Hotch’s face. “I get it and I’m not judging, but we all know and maybe if you let us all help it would go better.”

“It’s personal.”

“We all feel it’s personal. He attacked one of us, threatened the family of one of us. He might as well have done it to all of us.”

“Dave told me to not get so involved in the chase that my life passes me by. When this is over, I owe it to Jack and Haley to be the absolute best at what they need from me. I won’t get back together with her but my priorities will change. No more missed birthdays or holidays. Fewer late nights. I just want them back.”

“I know you do. We’ll get them back, I promise.”

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Dave found Garcia in the hall headed back to her office. “And what have you been up to?”

She grinned brightly at him. “Morgan has his own office now. I just surprised him with it.”

“You have any plans for the evening?”

“None. What’s up?”

He followed her into her office and let the door swing shut. “What’s your take on how things are between Hotch and Reid?”
She sank into her chair. “Hotch has been around to his place a few times. I think they’re finally exploring their feelings now. I was about to lock them in a room together and throw away the key though.”

“I hope Aaron’s leaning on him then, because lately I can barely get a word out of him. I asked him what will happen when we catch Foyet.”

“What do you mean, what will happen?”

He shrugged one shoulder. “Morgan is a good leader. He may settle in and then find it hard to step back again. This very well could be Strauss’s final move. She has now bumped him out as unit chief, for now he’s no longer a threat.”

“But Morgan says he doesn’t want to stay in charge. And how long do you think Morgan and Strauss will last butting heads?” She pulled a face. “I don’t think it would last anyway.”

Racing out of the prison, Emily’s first thought was that this was bad. Very, very bad. Her second though, on the heels of the first, was that he shouldn’t be allowed to drive, but the very, very bad still topped the list.

Arnold had very pointedly commented that the fathers were always so willing to give up and die once the children were dead. Not parents. Fathers. It made her wonder precisely what Foyet had said he was planning, whatever it was that had felt like a threat to Jack. And if she felt it, Hotch had to be burning with it.

Jumping into the driver’s seat, she didn’t wait for him to buckle before putting the SUV into gear and taking off. They needed a plan and to get a plan, they needed the team. The final round had started. Hell was just over the horizon somewhere and they, all of them, as a team, would bring it down upon The Reaper so swift and hard that he wished he’d stayed in prison.

Judging by the look on Hotch’s face during the tensely silent drive and the rest of team as she told them what had happened, Emily was certain that this time, Foyet would not be going to prison.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sure you’ve guessed, hell is just around the corner.
Spencer passed JJ carrying Jack down the stairs. The boy looked shaken but ultimately unharmed. “How is he?”

JJ glanced up, covering the boy’s face so he wouldn’t see the destruction and carnage in the house. “I’m taking him out to the ambulance, but I don’t think Foyet found him.” She glanced back up the stairs. “He was hiding in a bench in the office. Hotch is in the master bedroom with…” She didn’t finish.

Reid nodded and carried on his slow climb to the top of the stairs. Morgan and Rossi were blocking his view into the room. “Hey.” He whispered to get their attention. When both men turned around, Spencer got his first view of Aaron with Haley and the sight crushed his heart. They stood, protecting the distraught man from the rest of the world as he openly wept over the dead woman in his arms. All three men knew that all too soon they would have to let someone in to take the body, but for now they stood as sentries.

Aaron could feel himself wearing out, tears subsiding. There were voices somewhere beside him and then hands on and under his arms.

“Help me get him; Morgan will take care of everything else.” A voice, Dave’s, whispered.

As he was pulled to standing, he saw Morgan on the other side of Haley’s lifeless body. He let them guide him away.

“Come on, Aaron. It’s time.” A hand guided him toward the door. “Derek will stay with her.” There may have been more said, but it was covered by a buzz in his head. “Let’s just take one step at a time.” Somehow, they made it to the bottom of the stairs without incident, but Aaron didn’t remember actually walking down. His mind replayed over and over the fall he’d taken down the same stairs earlier. Maybe he fell again, but he didn’t hurt any more. Maybe someone carried him. Arms were holding him tight as he felt them drift out the door and into the sunlight. The brightness was too much, it burned his eyes. Trying to pull away from the light, he could feel the ground rushing up, someone shouted near his ear but he couldn’t make it out. Soft grass was welcoming him before a pair of thin, strong arms wrapped him up in a tight hug. His eyes cracked open once, he was pressed against something hard and dark covering whoever was holding him. Trusting that wherever he was, he was safe, Aaron let himself sink into the waiting blackness.

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JJ looked up from the back of the ambulance as Rossi walked over. “Everything okay?”

“I don’t think things will be okay for a very long time.”

“I know. I meant…” She spotted the two men on the grass, Emily now the one standing guard a
respectable distance away. “How is he?”

“In shock. Spencer is trying to help him. We need to find out what we need to do to get to leave as soon as possible.”

“Where do we take them?” She glanced down at the boy in her arms. “There are notifications to make, he is going to need looked after. Do you really think Hotch is in any condition to jump right into that now?”

He took a deep breath and sighed. “No. I don’t. His apartment doesn’t have a spare room either.”

He chewed his lip and thought a minute. “You focus on Jack. What do we need to be able to leave with him. What will he need for the next twenty-four hours. Emily can head back inside to help Morgan settle up the scene and I’ll get Reid to help me get Hotch looked at and out of here. We can go back to my place for tonight.”

JJ nodded. “I’ll need keys to…” She glanced across the lawn again. “You know what, I’ll figure it out. I will keep my phone on me, if you need us, just call.”

He patted her shoulder. “I’ll see you in a bit.” He strolled back to the trio in the yard, stopping by Emily. “Stay here and help Morgan finish up. JJ is going to make sure Jack is handled, he and I are going to take Aaron back to my place. You guys join as soon as you can, okay?”

“Sure.” She studied him. “We can get Garcia on the way.”

==

Somewhere beyond the darkness there was a gentle swaying and vibration. He could feel the same arms still wrapped tightly around him, protecting him. He knew that he had a job to do, but right now the darkness felt so good after hurting for so long. Nothing hurt here.

More voices and then he was wet, standing under the spray of a shower. Blinking, he watched detachedly as Reid bathed him, washing all evidence of what he’d done away. Washing the last of Haley that would ever touch his skin away. He wanted to shout at him to stop, to let him keep Haley on him just a little longer, but he didn’t seem to be in control of his mouth or anything else anymore. When he swayed, another set of hands steadied him. There were two people in the bathroom but he couldn’t work out who the second person was.

He was dressed in clothes that weren’t familiar and tucked into a bed he didn’t know. He wondered if this was what madness was like. Maybe he’d lost his mind totally somewhere along the way and his memories were just an illusion. He didn’t hear the sounds he would expect a four-year-old boy to make, maybe Jack had really died too. Maybe he had never existed at all. If either were the case, he would happily live in the madness that allowed him to have the joy of a son to love.

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“I’m worried.” Dave started to reach for the scotch and thought better of it as he spoke to Reid.

“He’s almost catatonic.” Reid agreed. “It might help him once Jack gets here but Jack might get upset seeing his dad like that.” They both looked up when the front door opened and the little boy in question appeared.

“He fits in Henry’s car seat thankfully.” JJ sat down several bags. “I went to the store and bought a few days worth of clothes. He says he wears big boy underwear at night as well as during the day but with everything going on, regression wouldn’t be unexpected. He also helped me pick out a few toys and books for Uncle Dave’s house.” She kissed him on the head. “Garcia is bringing
dinner plus I gave her a list of little boy approved food and snacks. Right now though, he would like to see his Daddy.”

Rossi smiled at the little boy. “Daddy is asleep, but he should wake up soon.”

Jack finally spoke. “Is the bad man gonna take Daddy far away too?”

Dave felt his chest squeeze. “No, Jack. Daddy made the bad man go away forever. But sometimes it takes a lot of work so afterward he’s sleepy. He’s just sleepy right now. Okay?”

“Okay.”

He woke in a cold sweat, fear coursing through his veins. Foyet wasn’t dead, he was still hunting Haley and Jack. The room he was in was dark now. He couldn’t remember ever seeing anyone come or go and he couldn’t hear anyone now. Unsure whether he was allowed to leave, or if it was safe, he rolled over and clung to the bedding. What was the dream? Was Foyet really dead, along with Haley? Or were they all alive and waiting on him? Confused and anxious, he fell into another fitful sleep.

Waking from another nightmare, Aaron lurched out of bed, his stomach rolling dangerously. He’d been beating what he’d thought was Foyet with his bare hands only to look down and discover he was covered in the gory remains of his son. He’d become so much worse than his own father, he’d killed his own child, his own innocent boy, with his bare hands. Gagging painfully, he tripped into the bathroom and hugged the toilet, not even trying to fight the anguish and pain that came with every convulsive heave.

Aaron found himself sitting at a table in different clothes. Sunlight was filtering in through curtains. His plate was filled with what looked like toast and eggs. He wasn’t hungry.

Looking up, he watched Garcia, though nothing like the woman in his memories, cleaning up the kitchen. This Garcia had her hair pulled back in a plain ponytail, she wore simple jeans and a plain blue t-shirt. No glitter, no sparkles, no feathers.

Noticing him watching, she gave him a gentle smile. “I would feel better if you would take just one bite. Please?” Her voice was soft, even. Unlike her voice in his dreams.

He lifted the fork, it felt odd in his hand, and speared a piece of cut up egg, someone had cut his food up for him, and lifted it to his mouth. He unenthusiastically chewed it and swallowed before looking back to the blonde for approval.

“‘What’s up, Mama.” Derek softly crossed the kitchen and pulled Garcia into a hug.

“How do we fix this?”

He sighed. “We can’t. Not this time. All we can do is be here for them, whatever they need. But it’s gonna take time.”
“I hate not knowing what to do.” She looked up at him. “What will happen with work?”

“Hotch is on paid leave pending an investigation, which I’m sure Strauss will have her fingers in. He’s going to put Jack first from now on though, so be prepared if he doesn’t come back.”

“We have to help him, no matter what he decides. We’re his family.”

“I know. And we’ll be sure he knows. But right now he’s still processing.”

Someone was coaxing him to sit up on the bed. Unsure what might happen if he didn’t comply, Aaron sat up. The voice and hands nudged him up and walked him toward the kitchen again. How much time had passed? It seemed like he had just eaten the bite of egg.

In the hall, Derek questioned Rossi’s direction. “Why Reid? Why couldn’t someone else try to talk to him?”

Dave pulled his eyes away from the dim room, gesturing for the younger man to follow him away. “Who has better real-world experience in handling someone who is in a fragile mental state? I think in the short term, he’s the best person to help Aaron.” The pair looked up when Spencer limped out of the bedroom, cane in one hand and Aaron leaning against the other.

Spencer smiled softly as they passed.

“Garcia is in there.” Dave patted Aaron’s shoulder as they passed, his eyes meeting Morgan’s behind their back. When they were out of earshot, he continued. “Aaron trusts him and Spencer has a natural inclination to be compassionate and caring.”

What looked like a grilled cheese sandwich was on a plate in front of him, cut into triangles now. Looking around the kitchen, someone else was at the counter this time, not Garcia. Garcia was at the table with him, but not with him. She was helping someone else. Aaron stared a minute until the little boy looked up. Jack. Jack was here, he was alive. It made him wonder which parts of his dreams were real then. Was Haley alive as well? He looked back to the counter as the other person turned. Spencer. Spencer looked like he expected him to but something seemed…off.

“Miss Penny?” Jack glanced at his unusually silent and still father before facing the woman.

Garcia’s face plainly showed her surprise at the small boy speaking. “Yes, sweetie?”

He didn’t speak much above a whisper. “Do you know how to make cookies?”

She traced a finger down his cheek. “I sure do. What sort of cookies would you like?”

“Can you make chocolate chip ones?”

“I can. I’m not sure if I have everything here right now though.” She glanced up to see if Rossi, who was watching them from the doorway knew, he shrugged. “Have you ever had peanut butter chocolate chip?”

Jack shook his head.
“How about I look around and see what I might need and then go get it. Would you like to help me bake cookies?”

He stared up at her with wide eyes. “I can help you?”

She pulled a mock frown. “I don’t know. It’s a job for a big kid, you have to be at least four to help make cookies.”

Jack lit up. “I am four!”

“You are?” She acted surprised. “Then I guess you’re old enough. While I find the ingredients, could you make me some pictures?”

Temporarily forgetting his sadness, he nodded vigorously. “I need crayons.”

“I think Miss JJ has some in the living room, Sweetie.”

The adults watched Jack scurry off in search of crayons as the room descended into silence. Hotch was still staring down at his sandwich, unaware of what had gone on in the room around him.

==

Concerned, Dave ducked into his study and dialed a phone number from memory. An old friend of his still practiced medicine. Outlining what had transpired, Dave got the doctor to agree to stop by the next day and assess Aaron in person. They would get him through this no matter what it took.

==

The second night JJ and Garcia had talked up sleeping in the king-sized guest bed on the second floor with Jack, adding a fun child friendly blanket and an abundance of stuffed toys before popping a cartoon on the flat screen TV hanging on the wall. Making a night of it, the pair had ‘snuck’ snacks up and joined him until he fell asleep.

Morgan and Emily had gone home late in the afternoon with the agreement that they would return the following morning so the two women could head home next. Notifications to Haley’s family had been rough. Jessica had been heartbroken but had at least shown concern for her ex-brother-in-law, asking after Aaron’s health and safety. She wanted to help him arrange the funeral once Haley’s body was released for burial. Haley’s parents, however, had been a different animal. They had been irate that they hadn’t had access to their daughter or grandson for the past four months, that this was how their daughter had died. They had promised to fight for custody of Jack, swearing Aaron was not fit to be a father just like he hadn’t been fit to be a husband.

Everyone was thankful that Aaron hadn’t been subjected to their rage directly and only hoped they could smooth things out before he had to face them.

==

Morgan hung up his phone as Rossi trudged into his kitchen. It was day three of having his home opened up to the team and while he loved them all very much, the overwhelming feeling of sadness was beginning to get to him. “What’s up?”

Derek sighed. “That was Strauss. They’ve started the investigation already. She wants formal interviews with each of us within the week.” He tossed his phone onto the counter. “Even Hotch. It’s like she doesn’t even care. The man just lost the woman he has loved his entire adult life and then some, he nearly lost his son too. She reminded me that I’m still in charge of the unit and a
failure to comply would reflect on my leadership skills.”

“Then we comply. We’ll get at least a day’s notice, usually more. We knew this was going to happen, we just have to be honest and let the system do its job.”

He glanced back toward the guest room. “How is he?”

“Spencer is still in there with him. As far as I know he still hasn’t said anything. I have a doctor coming by to see him.” He chewed his lip. “I’m not sure how much Jack understands, he’s been asking questions and I don’t know how Aaron would want us to answer them.”

“I think we just have to do our best and hope he understands.”

“Yeah. Jack needs his dad right now, but… We can’t let Aaron just bury this for the sake of Jack.”

==

Aaron felt completely wrung out. He watched Jack color in a large book laying on the floor until someone shook him, trying to prod him on to the next task. It had felt like he was floating ever since he’d left the house. It was all a very bad dream and eventually he would wake up and Jack would still have his mother.

No matter how it had ended, he had loved Haley for over two decades. His entire adult life. He had loved her and now she was gone. Forced away by a brutal death that he’d had a hand in causing. He’d as good as killed her himself. Guilt began to settle in the empty void inside of him.

==

Blinking his eyes open, he was sitting at a table, half a ham sandwich on a plate in front of him. He wasn’t hungry. Hadn’t been hungry in a long time. Days? Weeks? He didn’t think he would ever be hungry again. The house was nearly quiet now, he could make out a single voice somewhere deep in another room speaking softly, but couldn’t make out the words. He couldn’t be bothered to try either.

==

Another blink and he was lying in bed, in pajamas now. It was dark out again. Was this his fourth night in this house or had it been longer? There was a body beside him in the bed. Turning, he realized Jack had crawled into his bed at some point.

==

Dan Franklin stepped out of the bedroom with a heavy sigh and a nod to his friend. “Can we go somewhere to talk?”

“Sure.” Dave gestured for him to follow into the study where he shut the door. “What do you think?”

“PTSD easily. Shock, depression. If he were officially my patient, I would strongly recommend inpatient care right now. Is that an option?”

“He’s now the only living parent to his four-year-old son who just listened to his mother get shot to death.”

“So, no then.” Dan pulled out a pad of paper. “How is the boy?”
“Jack.”

“Jack.” Dan nodded. “How is he coping?”

“It’s hard to tell. He’s talking, for the most part acting like a little boy used to having his life uprooted. He asks about his mother and if the bad guy is going to get his dad too. We’ve been doing what we can.”

“Good. Children can be so resilient.” He pulled off a page and handed it to Dave. “This should help him get through the next few days. I think the funeral should be done by then. See if you can get him moving around, even if he doesn’t seem to notice. And if you feel he’s not coming out of it, please bring him in. His son won’t benefit from him being in this state for any length of time. I don’t have to tell you that normalcy and routine will help him move on.”

“I know.” Dave thanked him and took the paper. “I’ll run get this taken care of.”

==

Aaron stared straight ahead, barely listening as Jess and Spencer spoke around him, the latter’s hand around his arm. They were at the funeral home, picking out a casket and planning the service. He could see Jess constantly glancing at him with worry in her eyes. He didn’t feel the overwhelming grief and pain anymore. Now he felt…nothing. The nothingness allowed him to blankly sit beside Haley’s sister dressed in a plain white shirt and dark blue tie he didn’t remember owning and listen as the man representing the funeral home droned on about their options. He blinked when Jess looked to him expectantly, apparently, he needed to answer a question he hadn’t heard.

Finally, Spencer leaned in close. “We can plan on you speaking for now, Aaron. If you don’t feel up to it on the day, we can have a back-up plan. How does that sound?”

It was like he was a small child. Aaron nodded in agreement.

Leaving the funeral home, he was walked to the car each of them holding one arm. Suddenly stopping, he waited until they looked at him curiously. His voice was rough and raw from not being used. “I want to go home.”

Spencer chewed his lip. “Let’s go back to Rossi’s first, okay? Then we will discuss it.”

==

Spencer, Jack, and Aaron stayed at Aaron’s apartment the night before the committee interviews. Despite the depressed feeling that hung in the air, Jack seemed better being in a place he was at least a little familiar with. After tucking the boy in, Spencer thumped into Aaron’s bedroom where the older man was sitting on the edge of the bed. “Hey.”

Slowly Hotch looked up. “Will you stay?”

“I was planning on it. At least until after the funeral. I’ll drive you to the office tomorrow and back. Jack can come too. We are all here for the both of you, you’re not alone. You will never have to be alone again unless you want to.”

“Thanks.”

==
He was the last to face Strauss. Each member of the team, *his team* they kept reminding him, no matter what the Bureau said, had sat down already and answered questions and told the story as they knew it. Hashed out their own reports they’d written at some point while he had been sunk into himself. He hadn’t written a report, not that he remembered anyway. And no one else before Strauss had asked him in an official capacity what had happened between he and Foyet.

She would make her decision, he didn’t have it in him to fight her anymore.

He recounted what happened in his own words without any emotion. And then waited while she read off the autopsy report into record. Haley’s death would have been quick and relatively painless. Her suffering had all been done in the weeks and years even leading up to that day. His job had robbed from her her own life, figuratively for so long and then literally in the end. He’d meant it when he’d said she hadn’t deserved any of this.

The walk back to the BAU had taken much longer than he’d expected. The building was quiet. Passing his office as he went toward the conference room where the team, along with Jack, were waiting, he wondered if it would be his office ever again. Could he come back and do the job that killed her?

==

Spencer stood close as Hotch clung to Jack. “It’s over.” He whispered.

“We don’t need to be here.” Dave added. “Let’s go eat. Jack? How does pizza sound?”

Over his daddy’s shoulder, Jack gave him a thumbs up.

Extending comforting pats on the back to both father and son and they filed out, the team all headed quietly to the elevators leaving Hotch and Reid to bring up the rear.

Once they were alone, Spencer wrapped his arms around the pair. “I’ll be here with you until you want me to go away. Whatever you need, just ask okay?”

“Okay.”

“Now. Let’s go get that pizza.”
Waking before dawn, Spencer eased out of bed, doing his best not to wake Hotch, and went to the bathroom. Today was going to be hard on all of them, he wanted to be prepared should the older man need to lean on him in any way. Leaving the bedroom in darkness, he headed to start coffee and something easy but filling for breakfast. Looking through the cupboards the rest of the team had helped stock, he found everything he would need for French toast and started the process.

As the first batch was done, Jack peered at him around the wall.

“Good morning.” Reid greeted softly. “Are you hungry?”

Jack nodded.

“I made French toast. Would you like some?” When Jack nodded again, he continued. “Go use the bathroom and wash your hands, okay? Daddy needs to sleep a little more. We can eat together though.” He was starting to get used to this feeling of domesticity, though still very quiet and often clingy for his dad, Jack was warming up to the genius.

==

Spencer sat on the bed and watched as Aaron put on his suit. The house had been quiet all morning, even Jack playing with some trains in his room seemed quieter. When Aaron turned around, tie tied, Spencer nodded. “It’s perfect.” He glanced at the remaining suit hanging up. “I’ll go get Jack for you.”

“Thanks.”

He helped dress the little boy in his small suit. Watched as Aaron solemnly tied his little tie around his neck.

“You look very nice Jack.” Aaron placed a kiss on his forehead. “Mommy would be very happy.”

“Are we going to say bye to Mommy now?”

“Yeah, Jack. We’re going to go say bye to Mommy now.”

==

Jess spotted her brother-in-law and nephew as soon as they came into the funeral home escorted by the young man she remembered was Doctor Reid. “Aaron.” She pulled him into a hug which he hesitantly returned. “How are you holding up?”

“I’m okay. How are you?”

“Getting there. The director said we should sit in the front for the service. I know Dad won’t like it, but Haley would have wanted it.” She looked past his shoulder to the young man standing quietly behind him. “Do you want Doctor Reid to sit with us as well? Jack might like having someone there for him.”

Spencer waited for Aaron to nod. “It’s Spencer, please. I don’t want to infringe on this family time if it will be a problem.”

“It’s not a problem.” She smiled at him. “I saved the next row on that side for your team, at least
some of them. I didn’t know how many were coming.”

“What you’ve done is fine.” Aaron reassured her. “Thank you so much.” Holding Jack’s hand, he walked to the front of the room, leaving the other two standing together.

Once she figured he was out of earshot, Jessica turned to Spencer. “How is he really doing?”

“Better than he was when we met a few days ago. The investigation is over and he’s been cleared of any wrongdoing by the Bureau.”

“Good. No matter what my parents say, I really can’t see how anyone could say this was all his fault.” She watched Aaron speak softly with Jack. “And how is Jack?”

“Kids are resilient. He’s confused at times still and sad, but he’s back in familiar territory and has a routine now. Hotch has several more weeks of bereavement time off and I think it will give them both plenty of time to heal.”

“I’ve wanted to stop by and check on them.”

Spencer pulled out his phone. “What’s your number? I’ll text you and then you’ll have mine. I think it would do them both good to have you stop by whenever you want.”

==

The entire team had been thankful that Haley’s family had chosen to simply snub Hotch instead of causing a scene. As everyone left the cemetery, Spencer took advantage of the moment of privacy and put his arm around Aaron. “What do you need?”

“I’m just...” His eyes slid shut. “I just need a minute of quiet, alone.” Spencer started to move away. “Wait. Maybe...Can you stay? I was just overwhelmed with the crowd.”

“Sure.” He looked around. “There’s a bench over here. Come sit.” He led Aaron to the side, out of view of those gathered on the road. “Come here.” Spencer opened his arms and waited for Hotch to tuck his nose against his neck. “I’m here. All you have to do is ask.”

“Thank you.” He soaked in the feeling of arms around him. “I still can’t believe this is happening.”

Several minutes of silence later, the pair stood and found their way to the limos waiting at the bottom of the hill.

==

Standing in the reception line, Jessica watched Aaron as he glanced again toward the table where his team was talking amongst themselves. When there was a break in the line, she leaned into his shoulder. “Your team, they’re more than just colleagues, aren’t they?”

“The job doesn’t allow us much time for outside relationships. The things Haley and I had issues about, we weren’t the first. Divorce is common...affairs.” He drew in a breath. “It’s easier sometimes to just spend time with one another instead of having to constantly explain to an outsider our job. We know why we might be having a bad day.”

She nodded in understanding. “I’m sorry. For everything I know Haley did. I’m glad you have a group like them to support you.” They watched Dave walk their way.

==
Jess watched from the other side of the room as the team pulled out phones, frowning. It didn’t take an agent to understand what was going on, she’d seen the same look on Aaron enough times when she would visit Haley. Even now, with one of their own mourning, duty called.

When the team had filed out, giving their condolences again as they left, she watched her brother-in-law staring out into the darkness. It had to be hard for him, watching the rest of his team get up and walk away while he was in pain. Giving him some time, finally Jessica collected a small plate of food, she knew Aaron hadn’t eaten all day and wasn’t likely to, and quietly slipped outside to join him.

When she got to his side, Aaron sighed. “They had a case.”

“They told me.”

“It’s not the first they’ve had to do without me and… and I think it won’t be the last.”

She reached out and took his arm. “That’s not a decision to be made right now. Here. You need to eat something.”

“Thank you but… I don’t think I could eat.”

“But you should. I picked all bland stuff.” She smiled at the look of surprise on his face. “You’ve always had a sensitive stomach and in times I knew you were under additional stress or anxiety, I know it got worse.” Her head tipped to the side. “Please?”

He picked up a small finger sandwich. “Okay.”

==

Spencer had heard about the conversation in the cemetery through Rossi. After the case that had dragged the team away from the funeral, the older man had gone in search of his long-time friend to check on him in person. Dave hadn’t said much except to be patient and give Hotch time.

But two weeks later, Reid was standing outside Hotch’s apartment door trying to listen for sounds of life within. Garcia had pulled him aside as they were leaving work and shared something that was concerning her. She’d been keeping track of the GPS on Hotch’s phone and for several days the phone hadn’t moved at all. Not even to the parking lot of the complex. So either he had been leaving his phone at home, which would have been out of character, or the man hadn’t left his apartment in days. It was unusual behavior, even for the newly single father.

When no answer came, Reid pulled the spare key he’d been given out of his pocket and slid it into the lock. Turning the knob, Reid pushed the door open and peeked into the apartment, it was completely dark. The curtains were pulled closed and no lights were on. “Hotch?” He called out. “Aaron? It’s me, Spencer.” Entering and shutting the door, Reid looked around the main living space. There were blankets tumbling off the couch and papers scattered everywhere. Walking toward the bedroom in the back, Reid had to step over several photo albums that were on the floor. The bedroom was just as dark as the front of the apartment, Reid thought he could make out a shape on the bed. “Hotch?”

The shape on the bed moaned painfully.

Fumbling for the switch, Reid flipped on the light, having to blink momentarily against the sudden brightness. Aaron was curled in the middle of the bed, breath coming in short bursts.

Hotch had attempted to throw his hand up to block out the light, but he lacked the coordination to
do little more than flail in the general direction of the source of the light. “Haley?” He whined.

“No, Hotch, It’s Spencer.” Settling next to Aaron, Spencer tried to work out what was wrong. Feeling the dampness to the sheets and the clothes he was wearing, Spencer frowned. “What’s wrong? Are you sick?”

“I just want it to stop.” Hotch whispered.

Looking around the now lit room, Reid spotted a familiar orange bottle on the corner of the dresser. Fetching it, he read the label. Checking the dosage and fill date on the bottle, he quickly counted the pills. The bottle didn’t seem to be short any medicine. Spencer sighed in relief at a worry he didn’t realize he’d had. Thinking back to the living room though, Reid had seen a rather impressive assortment of liquor bottles around the room. “Hotch?” He pushed his friend onto his back to try and rouse him a bit, “Have you been drinking? Hey, you’ve been taking these pills, have you been drinking too?”

Hotch blinked his eyes open and then stared through Reid.

“Hotch!” He patted his face. “Aaron! Where’s Jack?”

“Jack?”

“Your son? Where’s Jack? Is he here?”

After a moment where he seemed to be thinking, Hotch responded, his voice slurred. “I dunno. I dunno.” He started to panic. “I dunno!”

“Oh, okay! Hey, I’m going to look around. I need you to promise me you won’t get off the bed. Okay?” He didn’t get a response. “Aaron? You have to promise me.”

“Promise.” He mumbled, eyes slipping shut.

Reid swore to himself, certain the man wasn’t even aware of what he just promised, but unwilling to spend any more time on it when he needed to look around. Leaving the bedroom, Spencer moved from room to room looking for the small boy. Jacks’ room was clean, the bed made and several toys lined up on it. It was a stark contrast to the rest of the place. Nosing around the room, Reid couldn’t find the boy’s little blue go-bag or his favorite toy. He was hoping that meant Jack was staying with someone. He didn’t want to think bad thoughts, but their line of work tended to make those bad thoughts be the first ones. Making his way to the kitchen, Reid pulled out his phone and dialed Jessica. A quick call to her located Jack and then Reid turned his focus back to his friend.

He took his time clearing the kitchen and living room of mess, there were glasses scattered about on every surface. Food went straight in the garbage as plates went in the sink to wait. His head shot up at the sound of a heavy thud and he shot to the bedroom as fast as he could manage with his cane.

Curl on the floor by the bed was Aaron.

“Hey, I thought I said to stay in bed.”

“Spencer?” He looked up, confused. “What’re you doing here?”

“I stopped by to check on you. Why did you try to get up?” Reid knelt down and worked to heft the larger man up to sit on the bed ignoring the scream from his knee.
“I…It’s late. I need something out of the bathroom.”

Pressing down on Aaron’s shoulders, Spencer held him in place. “It’s not that late yet, I’ll go get it. What is it?”

“In the medicine cabinet.” Aaron blinked hazily. “Two medicine bottles.”

“Wait here.” Spencer ducked into the bathroom and found the bottles, these less full than the first, and read the labels. On the verge of panicking now, he hurried back to snatch the first, comparing the doctor’s names on all three. “Have you been taking all of these?”

“What?” He was staring into space now, not at Spencer.

“Did this doctor know you were taking these other drugs? Aaron?”

A tear tracked down his cheek. “I failed Haley. I got her killed. Dave was worried, made me see a doctor.”

“And the doctor gave you these?” He shook the newer bottle. “Last week?”

“Maybe. I think.” Aaron tipped over onto the pillows. “I don’t know.”

“Rossi doesn’t know about the other medicine, does he? He would have told the doctor otherwise. You can’t take anymore. This is… this is bad.” Spencer tried to rouse Aaron again. “Hey. Do you take them every day?”

“No.” Hotch mumbled. “I’m supposed to take them before bed but sometimes I forget. So I get up and take them when I remember.” His eyes slid shut again.

Tucking the bottles into his pockets, Spencer stood up. “I might be overreacting, but I’m not taking a chance. We’re going to the hospital.” He leveraged the larger man until he was sitting upright on the edge of the bed. “You either help me help you or I call for an ambulance.”

“No ambulance.” He said into Reid’s waist.

“I can’t carry you, you’re going to have to help me.”

==

It had taken a fight to convince the doctors in the ER that it hadn’t been some sort of suicide attempt, but instead a simple case of prescription confusion. A doctor had agreed to not put Hotch under a seventy-two-hour watch, but still had him moved upstairs for observation as the drugs wore off. Spencer sat in a chair by the bed and waited quietly until Aaron returned to him.

Sunlight woke Aaron the next morning, his head felt like someone had taken a hammer to it. Opening his eyes he realized he wasn’t at home in his own bed, but in a hospital and started to panic. Behind him he could hear beeping increase as his heart rate rose. Squeezing his eyes shut he tried to block out the images of Haley and the funeral. This didn’t feel real, but then that didn’t feel real either. Hands on him tried to get him to calm and relax, but his mind was racing with questions and memories.

“Aaron, Aaron! It’s okay! I’m here, open your eyes!”

Trusting the voice, he snapped his eyes open and stared into soft brown ones.

“Now breathe. You have to breathe. You’re okay. Everything’s okay.”
Nurses were filling the room to check on him now as he was gasping for breath. It felt like the room was closing in, getting too hot. It was sweltering and he needed space. Dark spots started to dance on the edges of his vision and an odd feeling came over his face and fingers, like the blood flow had been cut off. Now refusing to blink at all, his eyes pleaded for rescue from what felt like certain death. There was movement to his side, someone, or multiple someone’s, had spoken but he couldn’t make it out over the buzz filling the room. Suddenly it was as if every sense dimmed and then slowly faded out, darkness enveloped him.

Spencer watched as Aaron went limp in his hands. “What happened?”

The doctor had come in just after the nurses. “It was an anxiety attack. I got his records and it seemed he’s been on some pretty powerful drugs for well over a year now and started taking even more within the last few weeks. The levels in his system are much higher than they should be, I would guess somehow he lost track of time and took a dose thinking he hadn’t yet.”

“So, what? You’re weaning them out of his system?”

“Yes. Then we’ll assess his mental state and reintroduce medicine, probably something different, based on that assessment.”

==

The next time Aaron woke up, he was much calmer. Looking around the room he could see Spencer asleep with his arms folded on the edge of the bed. Rolling to his side, he tapped the younger man.

Spencer woke up and smiled. “Hey.”

“Hey. What happened? How’d I end up here?”

Sitting up, the younger man stretched. “You overdosed on your medicines and they interacted. I brought you in a little over twenty-four hours ago.” He studied Hotch a moment. “I went to your place because Garcia’s been tracking your phone and she was worried. You couldn’t tell me where Jack was.” He saw the look of panic and raised his hand. “He’s with Aunt Jessica, he’s okay.”

Aaron chewed his lip. “What happens now?”

“I need to tell the nurse you’re awake. The doctor wants to make a plan to get all of the medicine out of your system, which could actually take a while, and then see what you need to be on.” He got up to fetch a nurse.

He nodded. This wasn’t going to be over quickly. “Spencer?” He waited until the younger man turned. “Thank you.”

“Always, Aaron. Always.”

==

The morning of his release from the hospital Aaron was settled into Reid’s car for a lift home.

As he started the drive, Spencer asked. “What traditions do you have for Christmas?”

“Christmas?” Hotch’s brows drew together in confusion.

He nodded. “It’s less than two weeks away. Have you bought Jack’s presets yet?”
His mind was spinning. He had no idea about traditions or decorations or anything. Haley always did all of that. He hadn’t even bothered to buy a tree for his place and he really hadn’t had time to find presents. “No.”

“No?” Spencer asked in surprise. “Do you usually get a live tree or do you have a fake one?”

“Haley liked live trees. I don’t have any decorations or anything.” He shook his head. “How do I recreate everything Haley used to do? She made a big meal and cookies and decorations everywhere. And she wrapped every single present.”

Reaching across the space, Spencer squeezez Aaron’s hand. “You don’t have to recreate it, make all new ones. You and Jack. And I know this is hard, but you’re not alone in any of it. Just remember that.”

Aaron nodded and thought back to the previous Christmas. Even though he and Haley were divorced, she’d invited him over early to open presents and have breakfast together. It had been cozy, just the three of them. He and Haley had sat in chairs opposite one another and small talk was a bit stiff, but they’d managed to be civil and together as a family so Jack had a great Christmas morning.

Now this year the small boy had no mother and a clueless father who forgot to buy presents.

==

Several hours after getting home, Jack had arrived, thrilled to be back with his Daddy, followed by Morgan and his pick-up truck.

The muscled man knelt down to get a hug from the blonde boy. “Hey little man! How would you like to go chop down a Christmas tree?”

Jack bounced in place. “Really?”

Derek gave him a blinding smile. “Sure! We’ll even take your dad with us. How does that sound?”

“Yay!” He was dancing around the room now.

“Go get your snow stuff then, do you know where it is?” Morgan asked.

“Yep!” Jack darted down the hall.

Derek turned to Hotch finally. “He’s going to love this.”

“A tree, Morgan? You didn’t have to do this.”

“I know Hotch, but it’ll be fun. This place gives out hot cocoa and cookies too. You got good boots?”

Aaron nodded and turned to the coat closet to dig them out. “Did Spencer put you up to this?”

“He may have mentioned you didn’t have a tree yet and he may have also mentioned you always had a live tree.” Morgan shrugged. “I was just kickin’ back with Clooney anyway and figured why not.” He caught Jack as the boy rocketed toward him. “Are we all ready?”

==

It turned out Morgan had a gift for tree selecting. The specimen they finally agreed on was equally
full from every angle but not so full that it would fill Hotch’s small living room, and left room for the stand and a tree topper. Trudging back to the truck after a warm cup of cocoa and a cookie, Hotch was frowning to himself.

Morgan glanced back at him. “What’s up?”

“I, um, this was very nice of you, but…” He blushed in embarrassment. “I don’t have any decorations for it.”

Patting his shoulder, Derek smiled gently. “That’s okay.”

==

Aaron was speechless. Jack was screeching through the apartment, coat trailing behind him as he tried to take in everything at once. “How?” Every inch of what he could see was covered in something twinkling or sparkly. There seemed to be a running theme of fuzzy looking reindeer and chubby, cheerful snowmen in every single display. On his coffee table sat several boxes of what appeared to be decorations meant for a tree. And it looked to be enough to cover the tree they had just picked. He was stunned.

Catching Jack, Morgan wrestled him out of his winter gear. “We have to set the tree up tonight buddy and let it rest, then tomorrow the lights and decorations can go on.”

“Rest? The tree needs to rest?”

“Yep. It can sleep while you sleep and tomorrow you can decorate it.”

“Okay!” Jack scrambled down and darted toward his room.

“How?” Aaron asked again once it was just the two men.

“I’m not allowed to say and the person who swore me to secrecy is a lot scarier than you are.” Morgan chuckled as he bid his boss goodbye.

==

Christmas Eve had moved slowly. Jessica had kindly collected Jack for a few hours in the afternoon so Hotch could finish wrapping presents without fear of discovery. A cheerful drink had kept him company as he’d worked.

Once Jack had listened to *T’was The Night Before Christmas* and had been tucked into bed, Hotch turned out all of the lights in the living room except for the ones on the tree, tucked the dozen presents underneath and poured himself a healthy attempt to forget how this year compared to last.

He’d been in a morose mood all day, Christmas had been Haley’s holiday. The one she loved to plan and shop and decorate for. Jack would never remember the excitement in his mother’s eyes at the holiday approached. He took another swallow of his drink, emptying the glass, and felt a tear run down his cheek. His selfishness had stolen that precious joy from his son.

Somewhere near the bottom of his second glass, there was a very gentle tap on the door before a key slowly slid into the lock. Aaron didn’t have the urge nor the speed to respond to whoever was coming in. He was surprised however when it turned out to be Spencer. “What are you doing here this late?”

Spencer stepped close, assessing him. “I brought some stuff. You have to be sober when Jack
wakes up you know.”

“I’ll be okay. This is only my second glass since he’s gone to bed.” He stared at it a moment. “I think.”

“And before he went to bed?”

“Umm…”

“Go to bed, Aaron. Take a glass of water with you. Tomorrow won’t be as bad as you think.”

Trusting the younger man, Aaron nodded and rinsed his glass before going to his room. If Spencer said it wouldn’t be as bad as he thought, he had no reason to doubt him.

==

He could feel Spencer beneath him, warm and soft as he thrust his leaking cock against him. A moan came from somewhere he couldn’t place. The friction was wonderful and frustrating all at once and he shifted to pick up the pace so he could finally find his release. He couldn’t remember how they’d gotten here together, but he was so happy it had finally happened that he was practically bursting with it. Imagining what Spencer must look like in the darkness, Aaron arched his back as his balls drew up and he came, pulsing out his desperation in a hot mess.

A screech reached his ears a split second before a forty-pound weight landed on top of his back, crushing him down into… The bed? Aaron opened his eyes and blinked. He was in his bed. Alone, save for Jack sitting on his back babbling about Santa having been and presents. Spencer had been a dream. The frottage had been a dream. Shifting, he could feel the sticky wet slick in his pants, soaking through into the sheets. The orgasm had not been a dream. “Jack? Jack. Get off Daddy.”

“Okay.” The boy slid to one side, expectantly.

Holding the sheet up over his mess, Hotch rolled to his side. “How about you go count all of your presents, I’ll be out in a minute, okay?”

“Yay!” Jack bolted from the room.

Tossing the covers back, Aaron stared down at himself. Well, there were definitely worse ways to start a morning.

==

He was sitting in Spencer’s apartment for the first time in what felt like ages. It had been a month since Spencer had found him, six weeks since he’d laid his ex-wife to rest. He was due to return to work the following morning, released to full duty. Spencer had invited him over for a few hours to play.

In the time he’d had off, Aaron had sorted through Haley’s things, putting into his storage unit anything he thought Jack might like to have one day. Spencer had helped him a few times, he’d been surprised to find the older man had a storage unit instead of simply having his things in the apartment. He’d been even more delighted when they’d pulled open a few of the boxes and Spencer found records, many of which were duplicated by CD’s at the apartment, and tons of evidence of Aaron’s ‘inner geek’. Reid had coaxed him into bringing some of the stuff out and using it to decorate the apartment.

Following their old rules, Aaron had stripped naked as soon as the apartment door shut. Nothing
else had happened between the two men beyond cuddling and light petting. Part of that had been due to Spencer’s concerns for Aaron’s mental and physical health and the rest because Jack was now at the apartment full time. Aaron was already thrumming with anticipation. Spencer had told him that everything could be on the table tonight if he wanted. And he wanted.

Taking in Aaron standing in his living room totally naked, Spencer dropped a folded towel onto the floor. “Kneel.” He watched Aaron scramble into place and smiled. “Close your eyes, hands at your sides. Count to ten out loud, no other words except your safe words. Understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

Lifting the bundle of leather falls, Spencer stood to one side and swung them down firmly across Aaron’s back.

“One.” He started with a gasp.

==

He hissed at the burn from the last strike. He suspected his back was now a crisscross of red stripes. A voice near his ear asked. “Talk to me. What do you need?” His mind whirled as he tried to decide.

“Could we…” He trailed off. He missed being touched by someone other than Jack. He loved the little boy with every fiber of his being, but he needed something else.

“You have to say the words.” Reid backed away.

“I would really like the pinwheel.” He wanted so badly to open his eyes and look up. Instead he settled for listening to Spencer moving around and returning. The pinpoint pressure of the spikes on the wheel was perfect. As the wheel ran across his body he exhaled, relaxing and letting the sensations wash over him. In between passes of the wheel, Reid stroked and rubbed his body with fingers from his other hand. His mind drifted into nothing as he let Spencer take over.

Spencer watched Aaron relax and smiled. There was no telling what would happen once they got to work the next day, but for now, it was good to see him relax. He kept his pattern varied, sometimes alternating front then back with his touches, other times his would do several on one side.

Once he felt they’d done enough, Spencer quietly helped Aaron up and to the bed to finish up. He wanted to make sure he got some soothing cream onto his back before they fell asleep. He could see how relaxed the older man was tonight, he was glad for that. With the drugs now completely out of his system, he worried about Aaron getting anxious and not being able to overcome it. He would be watching Aaron very closely over the coming days.

==

Finishing up with the cream on his back, Spencer nudged his hip. “Roll and I’ll do your front too.” Aaron rolled onto his back and looked up.

“It’s a part of you.” Spencer reached out and traced the longest scar down the middle of his chest. “But it isn’t who you are. They tell a part of your story.” When Aaron nodded, he squeezed out more cream from the bottle and started over Hotch’s chest, applying pressure as he went. When he pressed into one particularly knotted muscle, Aaron groaned beneath his hands. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m good.”
“Want me to keep going?”

He let his eyes drift shut. “Yes.”

Spencer brought up information he’d reviewed once about massage in his mind and continued on down Hotch’s body, listening to the delightful sounds he was making. When his leg started to ache, he backed off the bed carefully and looked down. “Aaron.”

Aaron blinked up at him and returned his soft smile before lifting his head to look at whatever was catching Spencer’s attention. He hadn’t even felt himself getting hard during the rubdown but his arousal, that he has secretly feared would never make an appearance again, was standing upright, curling toward his stomach. “Oh.”

“May I?”

He looked back up to see one of Spencer’s hands moving forward toward his groin. “You want to… touch me?”

“Would you like that?”

“Yes.” The s turned into a hiss and then a deep rumbling moan as those long slender fingers wrapped carefully around his cock. “I’m so…” He gasped. His orgasm was already pulling tightly at his balls. He hadn’t had the urge nor ability for so very long it was like being a teenager again. “I can’t last.”

“Then don’t.” Spencer added a twist at the top of his stroke and semen was like a fountain from within his curled palm.

Panting, Aaron let his head roll to the side as he opened his eyes to look at Spencer. “That was…”

He smiled. “Beautiful.” He pushed off the bed to stand up. “We haven’t talked about crossing that line still. I know you need to get back to Jack tonight, but we do need to talk before we do anything else.”

Aaron’s eyes were now level with Spencer’s tented pants. “But what about you?”

Spencer blushed. “I’ll be okay, just… Just give me a minute. I’ll help you clean up.” He backed away from the bed and headed for the bathroom. He washed his hands and wetted a washcloth while reminding himself they had to talk about things before any more touching happened. What they did after recovery had been a bit of an anomaly and they hadn’t spoken of it since but if anything that fell in the realm of sex was going to come up again, they needed to be on the same page. Returning to the bedroom, he leaned over to begin cleaning Aaron up. When a large hand was suddenly cradling his cock, he clenched his jaw and did his best not to thrust against it. “Aaron.”

“We’ll talk, I promise.” He whispered, voice thick. “But I just…Please?”

Both hands braced on the bed and head down, he nodded. “Okay.”

The hand pulled away and pushed against the elastic waistband of his pants until they slid down his thighs. “Before… When I felt and saw you, you were so perfect. You fit so perfectly in my hand.” He began to fist Spencer’s straining dick. “It made me wonder if it would be just like all my dreams.” Aaron was so focused on his hand that he didn’t see Spencer’s eyes snap up to his face. “I’ve been dreaming about you for so long. Dreamed about so much.”
The surprise of Aaron’s words pushed Spencer over the edge and he watched himself come over the large dark hand.

==

Still momentarily naked, Aaron was sitting in the living room waiting on Spencer to bring him a fresh glass of water.

“So, I guess we need to talk then.” Spencer sat beside him on the couch. “I didn’t think you wanted a sexual encounter.”

“I don’t. Well, I’m not sure. I don’t think I’m ready for anything….penetrating, but what we did in there?” Aaron stared at his hands. “I don’t have any experience but… I might be willing to try other things.”

“So, during a normal scene if you get aroused, is it okay to acknowledge it?”

“Yes.”

Spencer nodded. “Can I ask a question?”

Hotch nodded.

“The medicine you were on. Did it have side effects?” He couldn’t help his eyes drifting down to Hotch’s lap and back up to his face.

The older man nodded.

Spencer shook his head. “I wish I’d known. All this time I just figured you weren’t interest so I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“I don’t know when the interest started. At first I knew I would never have any attraction to you. But then that changed.”

Spencer finally reached out and took Aaron’s face in his hands. “May I try something?”

Aaron nodded and watched as the younger man slowly leaned in and pressed their lips together.
Hotch’s first case back in the field had gone in the books as a win, but only by a hair. Still on restricted duty until he finished his series of sessions with the Bureau psychologist, he led from the desk and Morgan and Rossi led the others from the front. It was nice, however, to get the extra time with Spencer, who was still sidelined as well. Following JJ out the door, Dave had turned around and given Hotch a knowing grin as they left the two men on their own in the station.

After hearing the little boy begging for his daddy to help him, Spencer wasn’t surprised when at the next opportunity, Aaron was leaning just a little closer. Glancing around the room to see who might notice, Spencer slid one hand across to Hotch’s wrist under the table and out of sight, feeling the light flutter of a heartbeat under his fingers. He could see the rattled look in the older man’s eyes and understood. It was much too similar, much too soon. “You should call him.” Reid leaned over to say softly.

“But we’re trying to put this together.” Aaron shook his head.

“You’re starting to panic, I can see it. Take two minutes, step outside, and call. Even if you only get a hello out of him, you will feel better.”

“I know he’s with Jessica and he’s okay.”

Spencer frowned at him until Aaron resigned himself to doing what the younger man told him to.

==

Weeks later, Dave leaned against Aaron’s door until the younger man looked up.

“Dave?”

Taking it as the invitation he knew he wouldn’t actually get, Rossi strolled in and took a seat. “I’m surprised you’re still here.”

“Jessica took Jack to the beach and they won’t be back until after bedtime. I figure I can plow through as much as possible for another forty-five minutes and still have time to get home and comfortable before they walk through the door.” He watched his friend a second. “What’s up?”

“Reid seems to have healed well.”

“Yeah, he was worried they would still want to do another surgery, but his knee seems okay.”

“He looked good back in the field. When do we get you back to full duty?”

“I have my last session on Friday.” He inhaled through his teeth, chewing his bottom lip slightly.

“Good. It feels too odd leaving you behind.” He watched Aaron watching him a minute. “I sometimes forget Reid’s background, but today it came in handy.”

“I heard.”

“How often does he go visit his mom?”

“I honestly don’t know.”
“Maybe after this one he should take the time. You should talk to him.” Dave smirked.

Hotch tapped his pen on the desk. “As his boss or as…"

“As far as I’m aware there isn’t a choice other than boss. Friend maybe. Is there another choice I need to be made aware of?”

“No.” Aaron closed his eyes. He’d answered too fast, rookie mistake. Opening his eyes again to look at Dave, he could see the older man grinning. “I’m busy.”

Rossi put up his hands. “I’ll just get out of your way then.”

==

Finally cleared for full duty again, Hotch was sitting in the jet listening to JJ talk about how someone with a plan for suicide acts. It sounded like she was coming from a place of experience. Studying her after she finished speaking, he got his confirmation when her gaze met his. When a case got personal, it could get hard to keep everything in check. He knew that from experience.

The pain he saw on JJ’s face during the case and on the way home, the pain she dredged up in telling him it got better, it left Hotch in a place he tried hard to forget. The raw emotions of Haley’s death came to the surface. He excused himself once during the flight to step into the tiny bathroom to have time and privacy to wait the tears out and then clean up. It was like a pressure release valve, letting off just a tiny bit of the pain he could feel burning its way through his chest until he got home and could let it all out. When he stepped out of the small bathroom, the galley curtain had been drawn closed and Spencer was leaning one hip against the counter.

“Come.” Reid whispered, curling a finger at him. When Hotch got close enough, he opened his arms and allowed the older man to curl into him, wrapping him in a hug. “Do you want me to come to you?”

Aaron shook his head. “We’ll be early, I can come to you.” He took a ragged breath and stepped back. “Thank you.”

“No problem.” He backed away so Hotch could pass.

Squeezing through, Aaron allowed his hand to briefly steady them both against Spencer’s stomach, his pinky landing on his belt buckle.

==

He was on his knees, naked and blindfolded. When he came through the door, Spencer had mentioned clamps but didn’t elaborate. Now Hotch was bound with what felt like silk rope, arms pulled back just enough that his chest was pushed out. The younger man had discussed finding ways that Aaron could learn to associate touch to the areas around the scars as positive again instead of negative. Something started to buzz to his right and it set him on edge. He knew he could halt whatever was about to happen with just one word, but he also knew Reid wouldn’t push his boundaries. He trusted him. And he was curious. Suddenly whatever was buzzing touched the sensitive part of his arm just below his armpit. It was vibrating. And somehow it felt…good.

The object slipped along his chest, down to just below his navel, the vibrations rippled down his muscles and he could feel the base of his cock react. Up his chest, over the scars, it teased each of his nipples before dipping down, down, and then pulled away. He could feel Spencer move and the object was on his back, low, just above where his wrists were knotted together. Skipping over his hands, it ran a ring around the outside of each cheek of his ass, stopping just before it reached
center each time. To the front again, it bumped and teased his stomach and sides, every time it dipped low near his pelvic bone, Aaron felt his cock twitch.

With the object still vibrating in the space between navel and now interested dick, suddenly something grasped his nipple and held on. He gasped at the not quite pain of it. A moment later another was placed on the other side. Letting his head fall back, he panted, his body felt alive in the most unusual way. He couldn’t find a single thing for his mind to fret about, everything was about right here, right now. A third clamp of some kind, the same as the other two, suddenly took hold of the delicate flesh below his balls. The feeling was intense, but not quite what he would call pain. Exhaling slowly, he counted to ten in his mind.

“Where are you right now?” The vibrator had pulled away just enough so it was more like a peripheral sensation on the ends of the hairs covering his body.

“Good.” He swallowed. “Green. So green.”

Spencer smiled down at the man before him. Bound and blindfolded, there was a thin sheen of sweat over Aaron’s body now, but he was relaxed. His arms weren’t tense against the bindings, there were no subtle signs of distress to make him worry the man might be lying to please him. He teased again with the object in his hand, a little lower to watch the heavy dick twitch and thicken a little more.

He moved slowly, he wanted Aaron to have enough time to use his safe-word if he needed it. Using one foot to smooth out the towel he’d placed on the floor, Spencer carefully slid the vibrator along the underside of Aaron’s cock. He smiled when the other man moaned loudly. “What do you need?” He pulled it away.

Aaron swallowed and panted. He wanted Spencer to jack him off. To help him let go of that lump that formed in his chest over the course of the case. He didn’t know how to ask. The sudden lack of buzzing as the object was clicked off brought him back to the present. Spencer must have seen confusion on his face.

“I can’t do anything unless you can ask.”

There was a sudden ache as the clamps on his nipples were opened and removed, allowing blood flow to return. He was desperate for Spencer to touch him again. He opened his mouth, but his voice was silent. A mental picture came to him of Spencer gripping him like he’d done what felt like ages ago, just the touch had sent him shooting over the edge. All he needed was a touch. His arms and hands were still tied behind his back. He needed Spencer to touch him.

“I can’t help you unless you talk, Sir.” As he spoke, Spencer squeezed and released the third clamp, intentionally letting it drag along the dick, heavy and dripping with desperation already, as he pulled back.

The words and the simple brush against him were enough, Aaron saw stars dance against the blindfold as he keened, back arching. Without any other touch, he came across the floor and whatever else was in front of him. His vision supplied the picture of Spencer knelt before him and his dick twitched again, pulsing still as his legs tried to give out and his ass landed hard back onto his feet. He could feel the fluids shooting down his thighs, dripping along to puddle between his knees. Hands on his shoulders steadied him so he wouldn’t hurt himself.

Spencer waited Aaron out. Eventually his body sagged, having found relief and release, even with the blindfold on he looked fairly disconnected from the present. He watched as Aaron’s cock finally began to soften, spent. When he couldn’t get a response by calling his name, Spencer
steadied him with one hand while he caught the edge of the thick throw off the couch. Folding it in half, he carefully lowered the larger man to the soft surface.

Carefully he loosened and removed the bindings, checking for any marks. Aaron hadn’t fought them, even subconsciously, which meant there was only minor redness that would go away. He moved up and slipped off the blindfold. Spencer could see his eyes were cracked open slightly but unfocused. Checking the area for any immediate dangers, the younger man quickly moved to the bathroom to get some damp clothes.

He hadn’t expected such a strong reaction to their play or he would have made sure to have been more prepared. Grabbing a pillow off his bed and an additional blanket, Spencer cleaned Aaron up and balled up the towels before covering him.

==

Aaron groaned as he tried to roll over, his mouth was dry and cottony. Something wrapped around him from behind prevented his movement so he settled for just opening his eyes. He was on the floor. Naked and with a blanket over his hips, he was on a floor. From the looks of the furniture and bookcases, he was on Spencer’s floor.

“Shh. Don’t move.”

He tried to lick his lips. “Why are we down here?”

“You don’t remember?”

“No.”

Spencer sat up, allowing Aaron to roll onto his back. “We were, uh, playing. Don’t move or try to sit up yet, I’m going to go get you some orange juice.” He stood and put out his hands in a stay-there motion before walking away.

While he waited, Aaron assessed himself. He felt…hungover. But he knew they hadn’t been drinking. He obeyed Spencer’s instruction and stayed laying on the floor under the younger man returned.

“I’m going to help you sit up and lean against the couch. You need to sip the juice slowly until it’s all gone, okay?”

Aaron nodded. “Okay.” He took the tall glass and started to sip. When the glass was half empty, he spoke again. “What happened?”

“I think you went into what’s called subspace and then had a subdrop. I’ve read about it, but I’ve never actually seen it. If that’s the case you might feel hungover or depressed until you even out.” He watched Aaron finish the juice. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Pushing you that far.”

Aaron’s brows bunched together. “How could you have known it would happen?”

“I didn’t, but.”

“Then you’re not to blame.” He handed over the empty glass. “Now what?”
“Now I put you in a bath, I have some stuff that may help you, and you start on glasses of water. It will help with the hungover feeling just like if it were a real hangover.” Spencer stood and put his hands out to help Aaron up. “Whatever you feel or you need, you have to tell me. It’s very important.”

Aaron pulled to his feet and swayed a moment before Spencer caught him. “I’ll try.”

“No, Aaron. There’s no try. I don’t want you to end up worse because you didn’t want to trouble me. This is part of my job as your Dom, I need to know.” He gripped the older man’s biceps hard.

“Okay.” Hotch nodded. “I’ll tell you.”

==

Spencer was perched on the edge of the tub in just a pair of boxers, fingers gently dancing down Aaron’s arm where it jutted out above the waterline. The room smelled of lavender and peppermint, Spencer had left Aaron by the couch just long enough to beg some oils off Garcia, asking her to hold questions until later, before guiding the man into the tub that was now filled with steaming bubbles. Adjusting how he was sitting, Spencer carefully traced his fingers up until he could start massaging Aaron’s scalp. He smiled when he started to purr at the water’s surface.

“Hey.” He whispered. “Don’t slide down too far.”

The gentle massage slowly transformed into firm but gentle strokes across Aaron’s face, helping to erase years of worry and stress lines. When Spencer could feel the water start to cool and he caught Aaron start to shiver, he pulled the plug and unfolded a fluffy blue bath sheet. “Be careful standing up, don’t want you to slip.”

Aaron nodded quietly as he stood and tried to take the towel. When Spencer didn’t hand it over, he looked up into the younger man’s eyes. He was taken by the look of caring he saw there.

Instead of handing over the towel, he offered his hand to help Aaron step out onto the rug and then proceeded to dry him off slowly and carefully before finally bundling the damp towel around Aaron’s waist. “Let’s go lay down. When is Jessica expecting you back?”

Letting Spencer lead him to the bed, he thought a minute. “Not until late. She understood that I needed a little extra time tonight.” He crawled up the bed, leaving the towel at the end, and curled up on his side.

Spencer peeled off his now damp boxers and crawled up beside him, allowing Aaron to curl into his arms before pulling him close. “Rest.”

==

The next time Spencer woke, he could feel Aaron trembling in the darkness and something damp on his arm. He didn’t ask any questions, just pulled him closer and ran fingers through his hair.
The jet was quiet, the others had drifts to their various spots to decompress leaving Dave and Hotch sitting oddly side by side at the four-seater table. They were used to being in one another’s space so the closeness didn’t faze either of them. Glancing around to verify that everyone was, in fact, distracted in one form or another, Dave cleared his throat.

Hotch quirked an eyebrow at him.

“Florida was hot.”

“Yes.”

“It didn’t seem to bother you like the rest of us.”

“What?”

He tugged at the arm of Aaron’s jacket.

“Oh. I didn’t even think about it.”

“And the rest of us were peeling off as many layers as we could afford to lose, you didn’t think about it?”

Hotch shook his head.

“Reid wasn’t fazed in that warehouse with those journals.”

“Nothing usually fazes him while he’s reading.”

“That thin cotton shirt, damp and sticking to his body.” Dave carried on like Hotch hadn’t spoken. “Hair curling with the humidity and sweat.” He smirked as he saw Aaron shift out of the corner of his eye. “Leaned forward, concentrating so hard.”

“What are you trying to do here, Dave?” He smacked the file in his hand onto the tabletop.

His smirk had turned into an all-out grin. “Nothing. Why? Is something….happening?”

Aaron shifted again. He’d been fully aware of Spencer, sweaty and hair curling, through the entire case. He’d tried as hard as he could to not notice, but notice he had. Closing his eyes, he tried to purge the memory from his mind before he had a problem besides his endlessly nosey best friend. “Would it be worth my effort to tell you to go away?”

“No. It wouldn’t.”

He sighed and put his head back against the headrest, closing his eyes.

Waiting for his friend to calm down and start to inevitably forgive him, Dave changed the topic. “You seemed worried, talking to JJ. What’s going on in your head?”

Opening his eyes again, he stared at his friend for a minute. “She asked about the baby’s odds coming from two parents who were killers. At least….” He hesitated and drew in a breath. “He’s not going to be raised by those people, he’ll likely be raised by a good family who has never experienced nor committed anything close to that.”
Dave studied Aaron, “And you worry about Jack. What you do in the line of duty is nothing close to what they did.”

“I’m not talking about that and you know it. I’m talking about… I’m talking about killing someone out of anger, out of revenge, someone who had surrendered.”

“He wasn’t serious, you had to know that. He couldn’t be trusted.”

“How can I raise Jack right, carrying around that I’ve done that.”

“For a start, stop carrying it around.” Dave looked down the length of the plane and stared at where Reid was sitting, when the younger man looked up, he gave him a hard stare and then gestured toward Aaron with his thumb. Spencer nodded before going back to his game. Dave knew he would take care of things later.

==

Jack watched from his booster seat at the table as his daddy filled a bag and found their shoes. “Where we going, Daddy?”

Aaron smiled at his son. “We’re going to go to the park and to eat lunch at a restaurant with Spencer.”

“I like him.” Jack went back to nibbling his waffles into ships.

Rubbing his son’s head, Aaron replied. “Me too, Buddy.”

==

At the park, Spencer had laid out a large blanket in the shade where they had good visuals of the entire play area and settled down to watch Jack run around.

Stretching out, Hotch moved, with Spencer’s prodding, until he was lying flat with his head in Reid’s lap. He looked up at where Spencer was propped against the tree. “This is nice.”

Spencer smiled. “I brought a couple books but I thought maybe I could read you one I have memorized. Then we can both keep an eye on him.”

“You don’t.” He cut off when he saw the look in the other man’s eye that told him to not fight it. “That sounds good.”

Recalling the opening lines, Spencer started running his fingers through the short, dark locks, massaging his scalp.

Aaron stared up into the leaves rustling in the breeze above them as Spencer’s voice mixed with the sounds of children playing nearby and made his eyes drift shut as he dozed off. His last thought was that this was perfect.

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Spencer stopped reciting when the relaxed body on his lap suddenly tensed and drew in a sharp breath. He let his fingers carry on combing through Hotch’s hair. “Shh.”

“Jack.” Hotch tried to sit up but was stopped. He’d fallen asleep when he was supposed to be watching his son!
“He’s fine.” There was amusement in his voice. “He’s right there playing. He hasn’t been out of my sight once.” When Aaron relaxed, he let him up.

“Okay.” He rubbed his face. “How long was I out?”

“Maybe thirty minutes. Jack came over and I told him you were just having a nap and asked if he wanted one too. He pulled a face and took off again.”

Hotch chuckled. “I can’t believe I was able to relax enough to fall asleep.” He sat up with Spencer’s help and stretched.

“That’s the point of an outing like this. You sit back and relax and I do all of the planning, the worrying, everything. You get to be with Jack without having to do anything else.”

He looked over his shoulder. “It’s nice, doing this. It feels…right.”

Spencer rubbed his back, enjoying the feel of the soft sweater under his hand. “If you’re ready, let’s go eat.”

==

Jack had excitedly held Reid’s hand as they walked from the car into the restaurant, Spencer holding the door open and speaking to the hostess. It was a family place, but still nicer than the usual fast food joints Hotch would hit up with his son on occasion. He’d worried about how Jack would stay still, but with Spencer around, the little boy was constantly mesmerized.

Spencer ordered food and drinks for all of them, smiling confidently when the server acted a bit surprised. He watched father caring for son throughout the meal and then quietly paid before Aaron had a chance to protest. He wanted to care for him in a way he figured he hadn’t been cared for in a long time.

They returned to the Hotchner apartment just as Jack was nodding off. Spencer followed them down the hall and watched as Aaron tucked his son carefully into bed. When he returned to the door, Spencer whispered to him. “He played hard today.”

Aaron nodded. “He had fun.”

Taking his hand, Spencer tugged him into the hall, easing the door shut behind them. “Let him sleep.” He pulled Aaron close and wrapped his arms around him. “What do you need?”

“Touched.” He swallowed in surprise at how quickly the word came out.

Pulling back and raising one hand to carefully ghost down the older man’s face, Spencer asked. “In what sense?”

Hotch chewed his lip, staring at the collar of Spencer’s shirt before finally meeting his eyes. He lifted his hand and covered Spencer’s. “Like this. Just this.”

“All right. Let’s go lay down.”

==

Reid watched the rest of his teammates leave the conference room before turning his chair and looking up at Hotch. “I’ll go grab some dinner if we have time?”

He glanced up, distracted. “Um, yeah. Get whatever, I’m not all that hungry.” He turned and left
the room, head in a file.

Reid frowned at his retreating back. It took prodding on the best of days to get the older man to eat, once a case had come in? It was nearly impossible.

==

Climbing up the steps, Spencer found he was the last one on the jet. He deposited an armload of boxes on the table and sank into a chair. Lifting the two bags off the top, he dropped one in Hotch’s lap. “Dinner. Eat.”

Aaron met his gaze and started to object, saying he wasn’t hungry, but stopped when he saw the look of determination in his eyes. Instead he nodded. “Thanks.”

“And. I grabbed an assortment of goodies for breakfast or at least, much later. I figured it was better that whatever we normally have on board.” He grinned at the round of thank you’s that were raised.

Carefully starting on the food he’d been brought, Aaron looked around the cabin. “Well, we have an eight-hour flight. Everyone should find a comfortable spot and get as much sleep as they can. I know it’s not great, but it’s nothing we haven’t done before.”

Digging through bags, Emily, JJ, and Penelope took turns changing into sweats to be more comfortable and then claimed the back end of the cabin together. A short time later, Rossi and then Morgan followed course and found their own places to sleep.

As the cabin got quiet, Reid leaned sideways against Aaron. “How is your food?”

He looked down at the meal, he’d managed about a quarter of it. “Good. I don’t think I can eat any more though.”

“Okay. Did you bring something to sleep in or were you planning to sleep in your suit?” He watched Aaron’s face a minute. “You weren’t planning on sleeping.” He sighed. “You have to sleep.” Spencer closed the file on the table and pulled it into a stack with some others. “I think we’ve already lost all of the good spots, but we can figure something out.”

Giving in, Aaron rose and found his own bag in the stack by the galley and ducked behind the curtain and into the bathroom. Several minutes later he returned to find Spencer had assembled something resembling two pallets on the floor at the far end of the aisle. Taking his place on one, he watched as Spencer ducked away to change as well.

==

A buzzing near his head woke him. It took a minute for him to remember he was asleep on the floor of the jet. The buzzing turned out to be from the alarm Spencer’s phone between them. Sitting up, he could see the others, all still asleep, spread out around the cramped space.

“I thought you’d want to wake up before everyone else.” Spencer whispered.

“Thanks.” Aaron rubbed a hand over his face. “I didn’t even think to set an alarm.” He stood and stumbled down the aisle, collecting his things as he went.

==

When the owner of the Inn told them there were only four rooms, Spencer started to panic. When
Morgan automatically refused to room with him and then got claimed by Garcia, he worried some more. Someone was getting to room alone and judging by the grin on Rossi’s face, he had a hunch who it would be.

“I’m going to plead age and take a room by myself. Good night. I will see you all in the morning.” Dave shot Spencer and then Aaron a grin before turning to head up the stairs.

In their room, Spencer watched Aaron strip. “It’s not so bad, right?”

“Sharing? No. It’s not so bad.” He stood just in his boxers and stared at the two beds. “We either sleep separate or at least make both beds look slept in so whoever cleans doesn’t also gossip.”

“Do you… Do you want to share a bed?” They’d never done anything during a case, it had been an unsaid agreement.

Suddenly Aaron looked nervous. “It’s okay if you don’t.” He trailed off.

Standing and crossing the small room to stand right in front of him, Spencer framed Aaron’s face with his hands. “You have to tell me what you want. What do you need?”

He swallowed hard. “To… To share.”

“Okay. Then we’ll share.” He pulled him back toward the bed. “Let me get changed.”

“Kay.” Aaron crawled up the bed and snuggled under the covers.

Joining him, Spencer pulled him close. “Talk to me.”

“There’s something about this case… I can’t figure out what we’re missing.”

“We’ll figure it out in the morning.” He pressed a kiss to Aaron’s crown. “Right now, just let it all go.”

The calm of their night was broken later by familiar sounding desperate cries coming from outside. The pair scrambled up and into the first clothes they could find, bursting out into the frigid air just as the rest of the team reached the front door. A quick scan of the group as they bolted around the building told Hotch that Garcia was out there somewhere. Alone and unarmed.

Once the chaos had died down, Aaron had excused himself back to their room, Morgan and JJ had promised to keep the case running for the next few hours. With one eye open, he watched Spencer enter and shut the door before stripping his jacket and shirt. He watched Spencer turned toward the bed, shoving his slacks down as he approached. “No boxers?”

“What? Oh. No, no boxers. Wasn’t in the mood.”

“Have you done that before?” Hotch propped up on one elbow, interest overriding exhaustion.

Spencer crawled up the bed. “Sometimes. Boxers leave lines with those new dress pants I got a few weeks ago, so it looks nicer if I go without when I wear them.”

Eyes wide, he thought of Spencer around the office in those pants. Bending over the desks helping Morgan or Prentiss. Now every time he saw them, he would know there was nothing underneath.

Reid felt something brush against his hip and glanced down, it seemed Aaron was enjoying the mental image with this new information. Gripping his hip, he pulled Aaron closer. “Are you ready to go back to sleep?”
“Huh?”

He teased the underside of the cock jutting between them. “What do you need?”

“Would…” He blushed. He was curious about something, but he didn’t know how to ask. Would Spencer tell him no?

“I need your words.”

“Would you… I’ve never had a…umm.” His blushed deepened. “I’ve never had a blowjob.” Lips pressed against his, stopping his train of thought that was already headed toward panic. A tongue traced his lip and he opened his mouth, letting Spencer lead as the kiss deepened.

After a minute, Spencer pulled back. “Lay back.” He watched Aaron do as he was told. “I told you, all you have to do is tell me what you need. Can you be quiet?”

Aaron nodded, eyes dark with need.

Spencer wrapped his long fingers around Aaron’s cock, his thumb massaging the vein underneath. Down and then up over the head, using the precome at the top to wet his palm before sliding back down again. He watched the man beneath him shift around, trying to get more. “Shh. I’ll take care of you. I’ll always take care of you.” Dipping down, as his fist slid to the base, his mouth sank down over the head, drawing him in until he bumped the back of his throat. Keeping alert to the sounds Aaron was making, Spencer licked and pumped in a steady rhythm until the movement of Aaron’s hips became almost desperate. Pulling off, Spencer looked up. “No touching. Don’t come until I tap your hip here.” He pressed into Aaron’s hip. “No matter what. You can talk, beg, but remember who’s on the other side of these walls.”

Aaron nodded again. “Yes, Master.” His eyes rolled back when Spencer sank back down. He was focused now on holding off his orgasm and not making a noise. Both of which became more difficult once Spencer started taking him even deeper down his throat, the feel of hot muscles clenching the head of his cock was indescribable. His hands fistied the sheets, desperate to touch something. He lifted his hips to start thrusting against the wet heat but a firm hand held him still. He was so close, closer than he’d ever been without just tumbling over the edge. Spencer swallowed his down again and his ears started to buzz, he needed to come, needed that release. “Please.” He tried to thrust again but was still held down. “Please let me come.” The rhythm around his dick changed, fist moving harder and Spencer’s mouth worked the head, shallow sucking and then deep into his throat. He did his best to bite back the groan that rumbled up into his throat, he couldn’t even tell now if he was getting too loud.

Just when dots began to dance in the edges of his vision he felt it, two fingers pressed firmly against his hip as Spencer swallowed him down further than he’d done before. Aaron’s back arched up off the bed as his cock throbbed, forcing his seed out harder than he’d ever experienced before.

Back up as the pulsing down his throat subsided, Spencer continue pumping his hand until he felt a slight tremble run through the body beneath him and Aaron began to whimper. Pulling up and off the bed completely, he looked down on Aaron from above, the older man looked thoroughly debauched. Stepping into the bathroom to find something to clean them both up with, Spencer wrapped his hand around his own cock bouncing desperately in front of him. Checking the Aaron was dozing now on the bed, Spencer pumped twice and leaned over the edge of the sink, letting his come mix with the running water as it rushed down the drain.

Returning to the bed armed with damp cloths and a dry towel, Spencer carefully wiped down the dozing man to clear up any sweat or anything else that may have accidentally been smeared
around. Confident he was cleaned enough to continue sleeping comfortably, Spencer tossed the
towel and clothes in the direction of the bathroom and pulled Aaron into his arms to sleep.

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Unsub in custody and the kid Rossi had shot was recovering, Aaron looked over the group of
agents eager to get back home. “There are some concerns about the jet being able to take off
tonight by the time we land at the airport. We’ve been told we can either fly to the airport and risk
spending the night there or stay here one more night and take off in the morning.”

Penelope looked about ready to cry. “I just want to go home.”

JJ pulled her friend close. “If we’re going to be stuck though, I’d rather be stuck here at the Inn
than in what isn’t much more than a hangar.”

“But…”

“Come on, Baby Girl, at least here we have beds and other creature comforts, trust me, getting
stuck in a tiny airport is no fun.” Morgan squeezed her shoulder.

Garcia nodded and looked around the group.

One by one the rest of the team agreed it was best to sit tight and travel early the next morning.
They all wanted to get home, but safety had to come first.

After making the appropriate calls in his room, Aaron headed back downstairs on his way outside
where he could hear the rest of the team talking at a picnic table. He was almost to the door when a
sound made him look back. Alone on one of the couches wrapped in a thick blanket sat Garcia. He
moved around the furniture. “I thought you would be outside with the others.”

She gave him a weak smile. “I didn’t really feel like being around everyone. Didn’t want to bring
the mood down. I’m okay though.”

Taking a seat beside her, he leaned forward resting his elbows in his knees. “I know that what you
saw the other night… I wish I could go back and keep you from seeing it. Is there something that
would help?”

She shrugged noncommittally. She figured once they got home she would call up someone and
have a night out, until then the funk of the horrible case would just linger.

“Do you normally go… out… after a case this hard?”

The question surprised her, she lifted her eyes to meet his and saw nothing but worry. “Yeah.”

He nodded. Sometimes cases just sucked and everyone had their ways of getting past them. “Well,
let me know if there’s anything I can do to help.” He stood, squeezing her arm before he moved
away.

“H-Hotch?”

He looked back, head tilted in question, watching her chew her lip.

“Maybe if I had someone to… talk to like, like Spencer?”

Hotch nodded. “I’ll mention it to him.”
All through dinner, Hotch watched the youngest two members of the team together. Reid was practically in Garcia’s lap as she touched and petted and cared for him. The blonde would whisper in his ear, making him blush and something deep down inside was making Aaron feel a tiny bit jealous. Shoving the feeling down, he tried to return to the conversation he’d been having with Dave only to find his friend watching him watching them.

Dave had stopped talking once he realized Aaron wasn’t listening anyway. Looking down the table he watched Garcia tease and then feed Reid a bite of brownie. The pair were in their own little world. Turning back to his friend, he waited for an explanation that didn’t come. Finally deciding he would have to dig for answers, he sat his glass down. “Let’s go upstairs and talk. My room.” He nudged the younger man up and aimed him in the direction of the stairs. Turning back Dave crossed to the opposite end of the table, leaning down to whisper to Reid that Hotch would be with him for a while. When the young genius nodded, Dave followed Aaron up the stairs.

Once in his room, Rossi faced Hotch. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing.”

“Aaron. I think it’s time for some better answers.” He pointed at the chair, making his friend sit. “You and Reid.”

“Are friends.”

“And?”

Hotch sighed, his voice went soft. “I’m…a sub. His…his sub.”

Dave was both surprised and not at the same time. “Platonic?”

“What?” Aaron’s head snapped up.

“You really think I made it past fifty years old without trying a little of everything?” He smirked. “So?”

“It…was. Still is sort of.”

“Since…Sometime after that interview you never wanted to talk about? So, like eighteen months.”

“At first it wasn’t anything. Then after… when Morgan drove me back from New York I had him drop me off at Reid’s apartment.”

Dave nodded slowly. He wasn’t surprised it would have taken something big for Hotch to make a decision. “So, when did it become sort of platonic?”

Hotch blushed. “When we were both recovering at his place. I fell asleep in his bed and when I woke up he was…” He cut himself off. “I accidentally…” That wasn’t going to go any better. Instead he just stopped talking.

Fishing, Dave pretended to fill in the blanks knowing how Aaron would talk just to set him straight. “So, you woke up, saw him sleep and accidentally got your rocks off looking at him. I’m impressed given how doped up you were.”

Hotch didn’t disappoint. “No! He was hard and I couldn’t help it, I had to feel and the next thing I
know I’d made him…” He cut off again, the grin on his friend’s face cluing him in to how he’d just been played. Sighing deeply and blushing even deeper he decided, this was Dave. He could trust him. “He was still in his pajamas. I was touching him and he…came. The next time he was naked. And you’re right, I’d been so doped up as you put it that nothing was happening.”

Rossi chewed his lip a minute. “And since then?”

“Now that all of the drugs I was taking are out of my system, things seem to be working as they should. We have gone back to playing when we can get the chance around Jack.”

“And by working as they should you mean…?”

Aaron frowned at his friend. “I have gotten my rocks off with Spencer, yes. Happy?”

“As long as I don’t ever have to listen, yes. But how is that still platonic?”

“There’s no actual sex.”

“Aaron. It doesn’t have to be penetration to be sexual.” He watched Hotch process. “So, if it’s a sexual arrangement now, is it exclusive? Because I just can’t see you in a non-exclusive arrangement.”

“I think it is.”

“Then what was that downstairs?”

“He learned to…” He suddenly wondered if that was crossing a line.

“Oh really.”

“Dave.”

“Fine. You’re an adult. If you are happy, I am happy.”

“I wasn’t really looking for permission, Dave.” Hotch stood up to go.

Rossi stood as well. “But now that I’ve said I approve, you won’t worry so much about what you’re doing. You know it’s true.” He grinned when Hotch shot him a dirty look as he left.

Heading to the next door, Aaron let himself into the room and stopped. Spooned on the other bed were Garcia and Reid. Garcia’s hand was running through his hair as she held onto him like a large teddy bear. For his part, Spencer looked content and possibly even asleep. Quietly crossing the room, Aaron shut himself into the bathroom. It was silly to be jealous, they weren’t doing anything. And he was the one who sent Spencer to her in the first place. Quickly taking a shower, he dried off and looked around, suddenly aware he hadn’t grabbed his bag on the way in. Resigned to it, he wrapped the towel snugly around his waist and stepped into the room.

Two pairs of eyes were watching him from the bed. Spencer raised one arm in invitation. “Come here.” When Hotch hesitated, Spencer’s voice got firmer. “Come here, Aaron.” Finally, Hotch took his place with his back against the younger man’s shirt covered chest. “What do you need?”

“You.”

“I’m here. Always.”
Hotch stared at the object in Spencer’s hand slack-jawed. Over the past weeks, their time spent together both in play and out had started to include more, as Spencer had termed it, outercourse. Aaron sometimes felt like a teenager again, both in his experience compared to the other man as well as his longevity. He had a feeling the object laying in Spencer’s palm had more to do with the latter. “What’s that?” He looked up from his place on the floor to Spencer’s face.

Reid’s empty hand caressed Aaron’s cheek. “It keeps you from touching yourself or becoming aroused.” He lifted Aaron’s hand and placed the clear silicone in it. “I searched for one that could be discrete.”

“Discrete?”

“I was hoping you would wear it out to dinner tonight. I called Jessica, she agreed to come look after Jack so we could go out.”

Aaron swallowed. “How do I… How do I put it on?”

“Are you sure? You know all you have to do is say no.”

“I know. I think I’d like to try it.” He stared up as Spencer took it back.

“Stand. I’ll put it on you.”

Aaron obeyed. He watched, hands fisted at his sides, while Spencer unbuttoned his pants, pulling them down just enough to pull his cock free. He coated it slightly with some lube and slipped it on, the anchoring strap wrapping around his balls. Spencer tucked Aaron back into his boxers and pulled his pants up, rebuttoning them.

“Now, go find that dark blue shirt, the one that we bought to go with that paisley tie. No jacket tonight.”

Hotch nodded and crossed to the closet while Spencer vanished into the bathroom. He finished dressing, aware of the silicone around his cock when he sat to pull on his socks and shoes.

Spencer stepped out of the bathroom in a maroon shirt and dark gray vest, the collar of the shirt open and casual. And he had on those slacks. The ones Aaron knew there would be nothing under.

His dick twitched but was unable to do anything more.

“Let’s go sit, Jessica should be here any minute.”

==

After dinner they walked for a while, enjoying the evening. Eventually Spencer looked over. “How are you doing?”

“I’m good. Okay. It’s oddly reassuring, like some part of you is physically with me. Some part of me can’t help but think that other people can tell.”

“I want you to do something.” He stopped walking and turned to face Aaron. “I want you to wear it for a week. Day and night, it’s made to be worn long term. You can go to the restroom and everything safely with it on.”
“Even at work?”

Spencer nodded.

“I… I can do that.”

“One week. I can’t touch you, you can’t touch you.”

==

Aaron dressed for work carefully. He was hyper aware of the toy wrapped around his cock and balls. He found the softest pair of boxers he had and black pants. Deciding he needed the extra confidence to get through the day, Aaron pulled out a blue shirt he’d bought the week before when Spencer was with them and the coordinating striped tie. Shrugging his suit jacket into place, he stood back and looked in the mirror, as Spencer had promised, there was no way to tell what was under his layers of clothes.

Stepping out into the hall, he mentally counted off the start of day one.

==

Hotch had found it slightly difficult on the drive to drop Jack off at his first day of preschool. There had been lots of extra walking, bending, and hugging that went along with the process as well as one occasion of Hotch sitting into a tiny preschool chair, knees almost to his chest, with Jack in his lap. With every change of position, he could feel the toy around him, feel when it brushed his leg or as it rubbed inside his boxers. It wasn’t heavy, it was just there.

Once he finally made it to the office, no cases came in so Aaron spent his entire day at his desk going over paperwork, which wasn’t as simple as it sounded. It had taken him a while to work out that the least distracting position to sit in was right on the edge of his chair with his knees apart, letting himself dangle, for lack of a better word.

When Spencer had arrived and glanced up his way wearing a purple shirt and tie and one of his fitted waistcoats, Aaron felt himself shift with interest. It was going to be a long day.

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Finally stepping into his apartment later that night, Aaron greeted Jessica before making a beeline for the refrigerator. “How was Jack?”

“Good. As always. Loved his first day of school, I’m sure he’ll tell you all about it tomorrow. Talked about Doctor Spencer a lot.” She smiled when Aaron’s head popped back up from behind the fridge door. “That surprises you?”

“I hadn’t realized we were around him that much that Jack would be talking about him.”

“Either you’re there or he’s here, it’s hardly a surprise.” She sat and the counter. “And he’s a delight, Jack thinks he’s the best because he, and I quote, knows everything about everything.”

He chuckled. “That he does.”

“Are you looking for something to eat?”

“Yeah. I was buried in paperwork and meetings all day, haven’t eaten since breakfast.”

“Coffee doesn’t count as food, Aaron.”
He sighed. “Then I haven’t eaten since dinner.”

She shook her head at him. “Really, you need to take better care of yourself. Spencer may be able to pull off the model-thin look, but you would just look sickly. Go change, I’ll whip you up something.”

He shut the door. “Thank you, Jess, really.”

“Don’t thank me yet. There’s a fifty-fifty chance you’re getting a peanut butter sandwich.” She laughed.

Shutting himself in his bedroom, Aaron quickly stripped naked and headed for the shower. Standing in front of the mirror, he stared at the small piece of clear silicone he was still wearing. As the day had worn on, he’d gotten used to the feel of it holding him in. He’d even figured out how to use the restroom without embarrassing himself with it. He’d started to head to the urinals as usual until he remembered the device, he’d been thankful the restroom was empty as he had quickly turned around and headed for a stall.

Aaron ran a hand down his front until he brushed the coarse hair around his bound cock, through the device he couldn’t feel his fingers as he touched it curiously. Stepping under the spray of water, the memory of the night before when they’d returned to the apartment made his dick twitch. Spencer had walked him clear to his bedroom where he’d mouthed teasingly at the silicone before ordering Aaron to his knees.

Hotch had never given someone else a proper blowjob before, but it didn’t stop his desire to try as Spencer had tugged out his own cock, growing hard at the sight of him on his knees still fully dressed. He’d been ordered to fold his hands behind his back and lean forward. Aaron had given it everything he had, licking and sucking, trying to remember what Spencer had done to him. Unable to hold off any longer, Spencer had started to masturbate at a furious pace while the head remained in Aaron’s mouth. At the last moment, when salty drops of precome were already coating Aaron’s tongue, Spencer had pulled back and shot semen, hot and thick, down the front of Aaron’s shirt. That alone had left Hotch desperate to be touched. When Spencer was apologetic about coming on him without discussing it first, that just made him needier. Even when taking from him, Spencer was considerate of his wants and desires and remorseful if it seemed he could have crossed a line. ==

Six days. It had been six days since Aaron have felt any sort of contact on his cock. He fidgeted in his seat. By day three he’d started noticing leaking, he’d been surprised to discover that but luckily he’d been at home alone with Jack when it’d started. More frequent bathroom breaks gave him opportunity to clean up throughout the day. For three days he’d suffered the constant dripping. He was worried because now the team was about to leave on a case. Three hours in the jet with a team of profilers. ==

Prentiss, Morgan, and Reid were at the far end of the jet playing poker while Dave had sat across from him in the back for the ride home. The case had ended up being a quick one, they’d been in Texas for roughly eighteen hours before heading back to the jet to come home. As the early morning sunlight filtered through the windows, Aaron hunched over a stack of files making notes. He tried to breathe evenly, it was day seven now, Spencer had said he was to wear it for seven days, today was the last day. Thinking of Spencer, he could feel the dampness forming right at the tip of his dick again. Checking his watch, he wondered if he’d be able to hold off until they landed, the jet bathroom wasn’t exactly made for moving around much. He wasn’t prepared for the jet to
hit turbulence, nor was he prepared for the vibration of the plane seat against his cock.

Aaron curled over the table pressing his face into the files as he blew out a breath between his teeth the avoid making a sound. There was no throbbing, no euphoric feeling, just a gushing release of fluids. The plane continued to jerk about around him as realization of what he’d just done crashed down.

A hand on landed on his shoulder a moment before he heard Dave in his ear. “Aaron. Are you okay?” He felt Dave pull away and talk to someone else, there was someone else there as well. Dave leaned back in. “Do you feel ill?”

“Yeah.” Well, it wasn’t a lie anyway. “I think I need to…” He trailed off as Dave’s hand pulled away. Another hand landed on his shoulder.

“Aaron.” Spencer. “Let me help you up. Let’s go.”

Hotch hesitated, glancing up in the bouncing jet to locate everyone else. It looked like either Reid or Rossi had made sure everyone else stayed at the far end where the older man was gripping his own seat. “Okay.” He stood carefully, hoping no one could see what happened.

Spencer guided him past the curtain and into the tiny bathroom. “Just take a minute and breathe.” He ran a hand along Aaron’s forehead. “Are you okay? You never usually have problems with turbulence.”

“It wasn’t… It wasn’t just the turbulence.” The plane jostled again and he squeezed his eyes shut. There was no way to get to their bags down in the cargo hold. “I…” He blushed red as his voice dropped to a whisper. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry?” Spencer had confusion written all over his face.

Aaron’s voice got even softer, making Spencer have to lean in close to hear him. “I’m sorry… Master.” He brought one hand up to just brush the damp fabric of his pants.

Confusion turned to surprise as he worked out what Aaron meant. Squeezing into the tiny bathroom, he pulled the door shut and locked it before reached down and feeling the wet material. “Is this what happened out there?”

Tears of shame leaked out of his tightly closed eyes as he nodded. He was struggling in the moment to separate his role with Spencer outside of work with his role on the job. Right now he fully felt like a sub who’d failed to do what he’d been told and he ached with the knowledge that he’d disappointed him. He was just thankful that Spencer had brought him to this private place.

“It’s okay.” He was leaning right into Aaron’s ear to whisper as he stroked his hair, shoulders, and arms. He needed to calm him down, comfort him before he got too distressed. It was out of character for Aaron to break down while in ‘Hotch mode’, he needed to figure out what brought it on. “I’ll take care of you. It’s okay.” Once the silent tears stopped, Spencer coaxed his eyes open. “Stay in here, okay? I’ll go tell the others you aren’t well. Once we land, I’ll help you get sorted out.”

Aaron nodded in reply and shifted over for Spencer to get out.

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Having convinced the others that he had everything under control, Spencer collected their go bags and headed back inside the jet. He spoke to the pilots for a few minutes, shared that someone
hadn’t been feeling well and they just needed some time. The two men had happily given the agents space and time to do whatever they needed. Once he was sure they were alone and the door closed, Spencer headed back through the galley. Pulling the door open, he squatted down in front of Aaron. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think this could happen. I brought your bag up so you could change.”

“Thank you.”

“Was there any warning at all?”

Hotch bit his lip.

“You know the rules, I need you to talk to me.”

“At first it was odd but fine, I liked it. I do like it. But I didn’t realize just how much I’m used to feeling touch there and having nothing, it started putting me on edge. Everything has been making me aroused and leaking. I’ve had to change my routine to avoid damp spots.” He blushed at being so forward. “I thought I could hold off till we landed and then we hit that turbulence and I just came. It wasn’t like it normally was thought, there was none of the normal rush or pulsing, just… just come.”

“How do you feel now? Will you make the drive home in the car?” Spencer helped him up and batted his hands away as he started undoing his belt and undressing him. Taking care of cleaning him up like a child. “I had something planned for later but it can wait if you need to stop now. You say the word and we end this here and now.”

“I want to wait.” He lifted one foot and then the other until he was standing in the jet, practically in the galley, in nothing but socks, shirt, tie, and jacket. The awareness sent a shiver through his body. Spencer ran his finger over the tip of the toy, collecting a drip of precome on his finger as he went, before bringing it to his own mouth and sucking on it, moaning at the taste. He watched Hotch tremble again. “Tell me what you need.”

Mesmerized by the finger moving in and out of Spencer’s mouth, Aaron spoke without the filter of fear. “To suck you until you come in my mouth.”

The finger pulled out with a pop. “Kneel.”

Aaron dropped to his knees before remembering they were still on the jet. He opened his mouth to reconsider, but didn’t speak. Moments later, the head of a cock was brushing his cheek. He gripped the long member with one hand, leaving the other at his side, while he licked around and over before sucking it in. He wasn’t as good at it as Spencer was, but he gave it his all, slurping and sucking while his hand pumped.

Spencer watched as Aaron gave this task the same focus and dedication he did anything else. He was turned on by the risk involved in what they were doing, that Aaron had been the one to suggest it. When the older man tried to deep throat him, he got that tiny moment of warm heat around the head of his dick before Aaron had to pull back and it was just enough to having him coming, filling Aaron’s mouth as he’d asked. When he pulled out, some dribbled down Aaron’s chin. Spencer wiped it with his thumb and offered the digit to Aaron to suck clean. Pulling Aaron to his feet, Spencer could see some dripping freely now from Aaron’s bound cock. “Let’s get you home.” He found a pair of jeans in the go bag on the counter and helped Hotch into them without boxers, zipping him up before removing his tie and undoing the top button. “There, you look okay.”
The car ride to Spencer’s apartment was torture. His jeans were tight and damp from where he’d been leaking since before they’d left the jet. He tried breathing through the vibrations of the tires running along the pavement, the bumps in the road. His hands were pressed palms flat into his thighs.

Spencer’s voice floated across the small space. “What do you need?”

“To come, god, to come.” It was the only thought in his mind now, blessed release. Visions of how he was willing to come danced in his mind, each one more desperate, more needy than the last. He felt himself shudder before there was another gush, like a pressure valve releasing, it wasn’t an orgasm by any means but it took the edge off. Aware he’d made a mess again, he choked out. “I’m sorry, Master.”

Spencer reached out at a light and traced his finger along the now soaked seam in the jeans. “Shh. We’ll be there soon.” He pulled his hand back and took Aaron’s in his own. “Just lay back, I’ll take care of you.”

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Spencer carried both bags as he led Aaron up to his apartment. He just caught Garcia peeking out of her door but a quick shake of his head had her ducking silently back inside. Without speaking, Spencer guided Aaron to the doorway to the bedroom and stopped him. “Take everything off your top half as well as shoes and socks. Leave the jeans alone. Then put your hands over the top of the frame.”

“Yes, Master.” Aaron rushed to do as he was told.

Once he’d complied, Spencer started to peel the jeans away. “You aren’t going to come again until I tell you to, do you understand?”

“Yes, Master.” The jeans were bunched around his ankles.

“You’re so on edge already, we’re going to keep it easy. I don’t want to overwhelm you.” He picked up the leather flogger, they couldn’t go as long with it, but he didn’t think Hotch would be lasting much longer now anyway. “You’ll count to ten. Five for each time you came without permission. If you are good, then after that I will let you come. Now, before we begin, I will unbind you.” He carefully removed the toy, doing his best to still not touch. “Open your eyes and stay with me, Sir.”

“Yes, Master.” The first strike crossed his back. “One, Master!”

==

His dick was hanging heavy, jutting out from between his thighs. His balls were pulled up, balanced on the edge of oblivion or denial. A sheen of sweat covered his body as he trembled, hands still holding the frame. “Please, Master, please touch me. Please let me come.” A tear ran from the corner of his eye. “Oh god, please let me come. Please touch me, Master.” He was babbling now, he knew that. He didn’t care.

“Shh.” Spencer was close enough that Aaron could feel his breath. “Shh. Soon, my love, soon. Take a deep breath in and out. That’s it, and again. Now, you still aren’t allowed to come just yet.” He wrapped his hand around Aaron’s heavy cock. He loved the feel of it, loved that he was the only one who could touch it, stroke it. He pulled to the tip and pushed back down, drawing a moan from the older man. He did it once more before pulling his hand right to the head and making short
tugs around it. “Come for me.” The dick on his palm twitched and swelled before emptying across his hand and wrist. Thick cords rushed out as Aaron keened long and low, one breathy sound until his orgasm was over.

Wrapping his free arm around Aaron’s waist in case he lost his balance, Spencer waited until he looked up and then lifted his hand. “Lick me clean. Taste yourself.”

Aaron eagerly began to lick at the offered hand like it was water in the desert. Feeling Spencer stroking his hair the entire time.

==

Jack threw himself at Spencer as he came in the door. “Daddy say we goin’ to the museum! You come wif us?”

Spencer laughed and pulled the child into a hug. “Yes, I’m coming with you. Are we going to see dinosaurs today?” He put up his hands and roared like a dinosaur.

“Yes!” Jack screeched, excited.

Reid looked up as Hotch came into the room dressed in a short sleeve shirt and dark jeans. “Hi.”

Aaron smiled and stepped close to him. “Hi.” He reached out and took Spencer’s fingers in his, feeling bold. “I’m glad you came.”

Surprised at the contact, he smiled. “Me too.” He turned to the little boy. “Are you guys about ready to go?”

“Are we Daddy?” Jack looked up.

“Almost.” Aaron laughed. “Just have to grab the backpack.” He squeezed Spencer’s fingers before pulling away.

Spencer tried to work out what was going on. They hadn’t had time to be together in the nearly two weeks since their encounter on and off the jet. Part of that had been simply being busy, but the few times he’d tried to engage Aaron into play, the older man had had a reason why he couldn’t. He wondered what was going on.

==

At the museum, Jack tried to run ahead but kept getting called back. Once the boy settled into staying within a safe range, Aaron let his steps veer right just a hair until their shoulders and knuckles were brushing.

“Aaron?”

He looped his pinky around Spencer’s. “I’ve been thinking. You always tell me to tell you what I need, what I want.”

“Yes. It’s important for you to tell me so I can care for you. I have to know your needs to be able to provide for them.” They walked in silence past several exhibits, pinkies still hooked together. “So, what were you thinking about?”

“This.” He lifted their joined hands a bit. “We never discussed whether we were exclusive or what we are. It seems like it’s gone past play and it’s…more. Maybe I’ve wrong.”
“You’re right, we’ve never discussed it. What do you want?”

“I’m not sure what I want. I honestly still can’t imagine being in a relationship with a man. But I also can’t believe I enjoy being a sub, so…” He shrugged. “That night you were comforting Garcia? I was so jealous. Even when I could see what was and wasn’t going on, I was jealous.”

“I’ve never slept with her, not that way.”

“I know.”

Spencer stopped, tossing a glance to where Jack was standing. “Even if we don’t come to a decision, I will never go do something without discussing it with you first. Even as your Dom, this arrangement, no matter how it’s dressed up, has to be based on freely given consent.” He glanced toward Jack again, the boy was still leaning on a rail staring up at the exhibit. “We spend a lot of time together outside of work. Does this help you?”

“Help me?”

“I come by because after what…after what happened, having me there seemed to help ground you. Do I still help?”

“Yes. It helps.” He ducked his head, eyes to the floor as they moved a little closer together. “I’m not sure I could go back to everything before.”

Spencer opened his mouth to reply, glancing again to the railing and froze. “Jack.”

“What?” Aaron’s head popped up, eyes wide with alarm at the way Spencer had said his son’s name.

“Where’s Jack?” Spencer broke away from Aaron and was off like a shot calling for Jack, heading forward in the direction they had been moving. Maybe the four-year-old simply hadn’t noticed they weren’t following him. “Jack!” He tried to think of what himself at four would have been attracted to and stopped, making a three-sixty turn of the wide space.

To Aaron, it felt like his world stopped. Jack was gone. Missing. Fear was keeping him frozen, rooted in his spot as Spencer’s shouts started to echo over the normal noise of the museum.

Pushing aside the fear of what he knew, had seen happen after a child went missing, he turned in the opposite direction to search.

As he ran through the hall, Spencer could tell he was attracting attention. Stopping by a display, he hopped up on the dividing rails to get a better view as security approached.

“Sir, you have to get down.” The heavy-set men waved him down.

“Jack, he’s four. He has blonde hair and a blue shirt on with a green dinosaur and he’s wearing size ten and a half blue sneakers with the Captain America logo on them. He’s thirty-eight inches tall and forty pounds and I can’t find him!”

The guards exchanged a look. “And Jack is your son?”

“No, he’s my friend’s son. Aaron…” He spun around, suddenly realizing he didn’t see Aaron either. “Shit.” He stepped close to the guards. “I work for the FBI, the BAU, you’ve heard of us?” The two men nodded. “My friend does as well, we have seen what can happen in a situation like this and he’s in here somewhere now looking for his son. Someone has to find Jack. I know he’s probably just wandered off but…” Spencer thought to himself, Aaron’s probably armed. “Where
seems to attract the most little kids?"

“Hands down the ocean room. The kids love the tanks. But it’s three halls over.”

“Which way?” When the man pointed, Spencer took off at a run, ignoring the shouts of the guards. Skidding to a stop at the entrance to the hall, he scanned the room. Standing pressed right up to the glass was Jack. Totally unaware he was even lost. “Jack!”

Jack turned around and smiled wide. “Spencer! Look at the sharks!”

Sinking to his knees next to him, Spencer pulled him into his arms. “Jack. You can’t just wander off like that, I was so worried.” He subtly looked the boy over for injuries. “You have to stay with us.” The sound of rushing footsteps behind him made Spencer look up. “He’s okay. He’s here and he’s okay.”

One guard leaned down. “Are you Jack?” He smiled when the boy nodded. “And who is this?”

“Doctor Spencer.”

“And how do you know Doctor Spencer?”

“He works at the same job as Daddy. I told Daddy I like him and Daddy says he does too.”

Spencer smiled for a moment before remembering. “Aaron. Shit, I don’t know where he went. Come on Jack, we have to find Daddy.” He scooped Jack up in his arms and took off at a more socially acceptable pace.

Having cleared the interior of the building, Aaron was outside by the time the pair found him. He whirled around when he heard Spencer shouting his name and saw Jack in his arms. The pair ran toward him as he attempted to move their way. As Jack was placed in his arms, Aaron sank to the ground with him. “I thought he was gone. I thought I’d lost him too.” He pulled his son close and felt Spencer hug them both.

“He’s okay. He went to look at the sharks, but he’s okay.” Reid rocked them all for several minutes. “Do you want to go see the rest of the museum?”

“I’m not sure I can, I… I don’t feel well.” Aaron drew in a breath. “Can we go home?”

“Yes. Let’s go home.”

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Spencer reached across the console and took Aaron’s trembling hand. “It’s okay now.”

“I know.” He was trembling visibly. “I don’t know what’s wrong.”

“All of that adrenaline has to bleed off somehow. Just close your eyes and let me know if you need something.”

“Okay.” Aaron leaned his head back and let his eyes drift shut. He’d been terrified when he couldn’t find Jack. When they arrived at the apartment, Aaron followed Spencer in and headed for his own room while Spencer made the boy a snack. Spencer was keeping his son occupied while he quietly fell apart. He managed to lay on the bed for a short while before the overwhelming fear started causing waves in his stomach. Breathing deeply through his nose, he tried to will the sick feeling away. The threat was over, Jack was okay, it wasn’t helping. Jerking up off the bed, Aaron
dashed for the bathroom as his stomach cramped and bile rose in the throat.

Watching Jack color, Spencer heard something from down the hall. “I’ll be right back, Jack. I’m going to go check on your dad, okay?”

“Okay.”

“You stay right here for me and finish that picture.” He quietly moved down the hall and into the master bedroom, sounds drew him to the bathroom. “Aaron?”

“I’m okay.” Aaron managed to get out between heaves. “I’m okay.”

Spencer wet a cloth and knelt beside the older man. “Come here. Just relax, let me clean you up.”

Giving in, Aaron leaned into his arms and let himself sag.
Garcia had taken him by surprise. He recognized her passion to want to help fill the hole left by JJ, but he also was very aware that she had a very useful, but very specific skill set. Her plea to come help, and her willingness to conform to the Bureau dress code that he allowed her to so openly disregard, made him agree to give it a try. He just hoped that she would be able to stay strong enough. JJ had had an iron will and a backbone of steel, not that it looked like it normally, that he really didn’t believe Garcia possessed.

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As Spencer spoke, he felt like a fraud. Like a liar. Their profiles had always been that men who stabbed were impotent, that it was a substitution for the act of sex. But Aaron wanted to shout that it wasn’t always true. He knew it wasn’t always true. They had thought the same thing about Foyet and had been wrong. Very wrong.

Spencer caught the pained look on Aaron’s face across the jet and wanted to ask what was wrong but didn’t want to draw attention to him. Something was definitely causing him distress though. He promised himself he would asked later.

==

Hotch found himself able to stay distracted from the look Spencer had given him on the jet by keeping busy and keeping an eye are Garcia. As hard as she was trying, and succeeding, she always saw the good in people and sometimes that could leave her open to being taken advantage of.

He’d been supremely impressed with how she’d made sure that everything was ready the moment they walked through the door and her way with the family members, that was one aspect of the job he knew she would excel. When Dave had pointed out her efficiency, he had to agree, it looked as if he’d been worried for nothing.

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Arguing with the reporter, Penelope could feel the exact moment Hotch stepped outside. She couldn’t explain it, but when he jumped in to get the reporter to prove he would hold the story, she hadn’t been surprised by his presence.

JJ had never really told her how she dealt with the press. There were the odd stories about the more bizarre situations, but they’d never talked about the day to day. She was realizing now that maybe Hotch had been right, she wasn’t trained enough to do this job. She’d managed to screw up something so simple.

==

Her list of faults just kept getting longer. In her bunker, she rocked at multitasking, but here, in a busy station with phones ringing and people coming and going, she could barely blink and breathe at the same time.

And freaking out on Hotch, well, that probably was just the icing on the cake of her day. She wondered if she’d manage to skate by on an informal warning and avoid something showing up in her permanent record.
He sat staring at the paperwork on his desk. There had been some rough spots, growing pains he supposed, but overall Garcia had done a wonderful job trying to take on JJ’s work with her own. Closing the files and stacking them to the side, he went in search of her to make sure she wasn’t taking anything too hard.

==

Leaving the office, Hotch thought about the conversation he’d just had with his tech analyst. She’d always been able to make him smile, no matter how bad a situation seemed in the moment. And he really didn’t want her to ever change.

He managed to place a call to Jessica asking her to keep Jack overnight and then head home to gather fresh clothes before heading to the Spencer’s apartment.

Spencer pulled the door open and watched Aaron stiffly get off the elevator. “Hey.”

“Hi.” Aaron stopped in the doorway.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine.” He didn’t quite meet Spencer’s eyes.

“We could just eat and watch a movie tonight.”

“No. I need…” His voice caught in his throat before going soft, eyes looking to his shoes. He chewed his lip, worried about the rejection. He needed this. He needed to know he was okay, not broken. They’d never discussed going any further, but he needed to know. “I want sex.” After several beats of silence, he tacked on. “Please?”

Spencer was stunned by the request. He’d honestly never expected Aaron to ask and he hadn’t planned on ever pushing. “Come in, we’ll talk.” He tugged on Aaron’s arm, leading him to the couch. He took the go bag and set it by the bedroom door before moving back to stand in front of the other man. “You’ve never received before.”

Aaron swallowed. “No.” Yes. Wasn’t given much of a choice, his mind added unhelpfully.

“Okay.” He thought a minute, trying to decide if he had what they would need. “Go in the bedroom and get undressed, lay on your stomach in the middle of the bed. I’ll be there in a minute.” He watched Aaron nod and do as he’d said in silence. Taking advantage of the moment alone, Spencer tried to work out what he felt he was missing. Aaron had been off for a couple days; quiet, withdrawn. They hadn’t been able to spend time together in over a week, he wondered if the time apart had something to do with it.

Finally heading to his bedroom, Spencer stared down at the expanse of bare flesh spread in the center of his bed. There was no denying that Aaron Hotchner was a beautiful man. Fishing a new bottle of lube out of the drawer and tossing it on the bed, Spencer collected some towels to join it before stripping himself and crawling up, walking on his knees, to Aaron’s side. “Are you sure this is what you want?”

“Yes.”

“You can change your mind any time, okay, just say the word and I’ll stop.”

“I won’t.”
“Aaron.” He admonished.

“Yes, I know, I can change my mind any time.” He buried his face in between the pillows to try and block out what Spencer was going to do. He wasn’t sure he would enjoy this and didn’t want Spencer to read his expressions and call it off.

“Okay.” Spencer popped the lid of the bottle open and filled his hand.

Aaron let himself relax as Spencer started massaging his shoulders and back. Slender fingers kneaded the knots in his muscles making him let out a sigh with each one. Slowly he could feel Spencer working down until he reached his hips and ass. More slick liquid was poured out, this time straight into the crevice between his cheeks.

Spencer held Aaron’s cheeks apart and guided the lube down, letting it pool right where he wanted it. He knew from experience that when it came to sex, there was no such thing as too much lube. Slicking himself up with several firm strokes to make sure he was hard, Spencer wiped his hands on one of the towels before straddling Aaron’s thighs. “Ready?”

“Y-yeah.” Aaron swallowed against the pillows. He could feel Spencer’s length resting against him. Visions of the last time he was in this position tried to creep in but he squeezed his eyes shut to try and push them away. This wasn’t the same. This was Spencer who would never hurt him. Blunt pressure against his opening made him gasp. Even with the lube it was more painful than he thought it would be. He tensed but didn’t say a word, if he spoke then Spencer would stop and he’d never have proof that he wasn’t broken.

The head of Spencer’s cock pushed through the ring of muscles and Aaron let out a low whine. He tried to shift around to get away from the pain and feeling of being too full but the movement made Spencer sink in even further. As Spencer tried to ask him if he was okay, if he was liking it, his voice changed. Aaron’s breath caught when he realized the voice was familiar, it was from his nightmares. He pulled his hands up and placed his palms flat on the surface he was laying on. He could feel Foyet dragging in and out of him, picking up speed, hands tight on his hips. He couldn’t let him win this time. He had to fight back, had to protect his family. Kill him before he killed them. Pushing up and back as fast and as hard as he could with a roar, Hotch dislodged the hard member that had been buried inside him as the man it was attached to fell backward with a shout.

He wouldn’t get stabbed this time, he knew how this would play out. He’d had this dream enough times, but he’d always been just as paralyzed as before. This time he was free to fight back, to attack. Launching down on the form on the floor, he yanked the man’s arm back and reveled in the cry and the sickening pop. He would should the horrid man no mercy. “You will not win! I won’t let you kill them!” He hauled the thinner man up and flipped him, slamming him down on the floor. The man was trying to talk, trying to get in his head, no doubt. But it wouldn’t work.

Spencer had been taken by surprise when Hotch had launched backward, sending him falling to the floor. Shock had quickly turned to fight or flight as the larger man landed practically on him, grabbing his arm and snapping it around so hard and fast a sharp, painful pop from his shoulder made his scream. Aaron’s words made no sense and he tried to talk to him, to figure out what was going on. As he did his best to stay small, limp arm pulled close to his body, he knew he was in no condition to take on Aaron in hand to hand while injured, he tried to slink away. Out of reach. He crept toward the bathroom hoping the fixtures would protect him from the swinging fists and the shouts of rage. Spencer listened to Aaron’s accusations and something clicked. Wherever the older man thought he was, Spencer was almost certain he knew exactly who Aaron thought he was fighting. And if he was right, there was every chance Aaron could kill him.

Glancing around his bathroom moments before Aaron followed him in, Spencer saw what he
hoped could be his one chance to get the other man to snap back to the present, if he failed, he’d be trapped with no way to try and get away. Yanking the shower head down and flipping the water to cold, the moment Aaron closed in to land another punch, Spencer turned the blast straight at his face, making him gasp and splutter against the wet assault.

Aaron could feel the water hitting his eyelids, bubbling up his nose the wrong way, blocking his ability to breathe. He tried to put up his hands to stop the spray but it wouldn’t stop. For a dream, he was getting very wet. The only way to try and get away from the water was to back up, to retreat. Taking quick steps backward, Aaron tripped on something and fell backward hard on his ass. Dripping wet, he blinked and looked up. He wasn’t in his apartment. Panting hard, he blinked again as awareness came back to him. He wasn’t in his own apartment, he was in Spencer’s bedroom. And if he was in Spencer’s bedroom, it wasn’t Foyet who had attacked him and he’d fought off. It was Spencer. The water shutting off made him freeze. “Spencer?”

Sodden and cradling his arm, Spencer appeared in the doorway. “Are you back?”

“Yes. I’m…” He took in the younger man, bruises already blossoming. He remembered the move he’d done to his arm and tears fill his eyes. “I hurt you.” His voice was rough and filled with pain. “You need to go to the hospital.” His stomach cramped violently, forcing him to wrap his arms around himself.

“I’ll be okay, Aaron. I’m worried about you.”

“Oh god.” He gasped. He’d hurt Spencer. He’d had every intention of killing him. Acid rolled in his stomach as the air seemed to leave the room. One arm came up across his chest as intense pain hit him. Squeezing his eyes shut, he tried gasping in breaths as he curled in on himself on the floor.

Spencer watch Aaron begin to fall apart and hurried to his side. “Aaron, come on. Breathe.”

“It hurts.” His voice was tight, breathless.

“Roll onto your back. Come on, slow breaths, you’re panicking.” Spencer prodded him into compliance. “Look at me.” He watched Aaron’s eyes crack open.

“I’m fine.” He was staring just over Spencer’s shoulder, ashamed. “I’m…sorry. Give me a minute to get my things and I’ll drive you to the hospital then…” He took a gasping breath. “You won’t have to worry about me hurting you ever again. I’ll go. I just…” He was thinking out loud to himself now. “I need to talk to Jessica, maybe I can talk her into keeping Jack.” His fingers dug into his sides as his stomach rolled again. “I can’t hurt Jack.” The gag that followed the thought of Jack getting hurt at his hands made his whole body hurt.

“Aaron.” He waited for dark brown eyes to finally look up. “I don’t want you to leave. And you won’t hurt Jack. Calm down before you make yourself sick.” He could see tears welling up in Aaron’s eyes. He carded fingers through drenched hair. “Why didn’t you tell me what Foyet did to you?”

“I… I never told anyone. I asked the hospital if it could stay off the record. I didn’t want you to ever know.”

“Why would you ask for this?” He waved at the bed. “Why would you do this to yourself?”

“I wanted to prove to myself he didn’t break another part of me.” The tears finally sprang free and rolled down his cheeks. Curling in on himself on the floor, the sobs came unbidden.

Ignoring the drenched bathroom and the drenched body, Spencer wrapped his good arm around the
other man. He knew he needed to get his shoulder reset sooner rather than later, but Aaron was in distress. “He didn’t break you. I promise, he didn’t break you.”

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“You can do this, Aaron, trust me.” Aaron was fully dressed now, Spencer had managed sleep pants. He was trying to talk the older man into helping him reset his shoulder at the apartment, but Aaron was refusing.

“Please let me drive you to the hospital. Please?” Aaron was horrified at what he’d done and wanted Spencer seen by a professional. “Who knows what kind of damage I could have caused, you’re covered in bruises. You need a full work-up.”

Seeing the anxiety in Aaron’s face, he finally conceded. “Fine. Drive me. I need a jacket though, I can’t go out like this.”

==

Aaron had refused to come back to the exam room with him, so Spencer had spent the last several hours all alone. Texts to the other man went mostly ignored except to confirm he was still out in the waiting room. A new man entered the small room and introduced himself as a social worker and Spencer sighed. Annoyed, he started in. “Have you ever worked with people with PTSD?”

Surprised at the question, the social worker hesitated. “Yes, quite a bit.”

“The man who did this suffered two significant traumatic losses within the past two years. The first of which he was nearly killed, the second in which the same man successfully killed his wife. Now, tonight he had a flashback and thought I was that man. Yes, it sucked, and yes, I hurt like hell, but I don’t want him to know that. But this was not a domestic situation.”

“But, Mister Reid.” The social worker tried.

“It’s Doctor Reid and in case they didn’t share it with you, I work for the FBI. Surprisingly, this isn’t even in the top ten of bad days at work.” He watched the man try and come up with a reply before he simply got up and left. Once alone again, he looked at the bruises he could see around the special sling he was now sporting. Hurt like hell didn’t even begin to cover it.

Finally able to go and find Hotch in the waiting room, Spencer worked on zipping his jacket around his bare chest. “I’m ready.” He looked down at where Aaron was sitting.

“Okay. I’ll drop you at your place. Do you need any prescriptions picked up?”

“No.” He shook the bag in his good hand. “I’ve got everything here.”

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Aaron remained silent on the drive back to Spencer’s building and on the ride up. Once Spencer was inside, he turned at the door. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Don’t leave, Aaron.”

“I- I won’t.” He nodded and pulled the door shut. Steeling himself with a deep breath, Aaron knocked on the door across the hall. A minute later, the door opened.

“Hotch?” Penelope gave him a surprised look. “What are you doing here?”
“Um, Spencer and I just got back from…” His voice caught in his throat. The closing-in feeling started again. “From the hospital. I was wondering if you could keep an eye on him.”

“Sure.” She stepped into the hall, pulling her door closed. “What happened? Is he sick?”

“No.” He led her back to the other door and took the knob, his head falling in shame. “I tried to kill him.”

==

Penelope was trying to wrap her head around what neither man was saying. Her neighbor and friend was hurt, she could see that much. Something had happened between them that led to the injuries, but neither was talking.

Every time Aaron glanced in the direction of the bedroom, he paled with the memory of what he’d done.

Having made everyone herbal tea, Penelope settled on the couch and placed her hand on Hotch’s leg. “Start talking. From the beginning.”

“I.”

Spencer sucked in a breath when Aaron froze again. “Is this because of the comment I made on the jet?” He stared over the blonde’s head. “I know it bothered you.”

“Yeah.”

“What comment?” She diverted her attention to her neighbor.

“As we were discussing the unsub I… I mentioned that the ones who use a knife are usually impotent, it’s a substitution for sex. For, umm, rape.”

She let it start to sink in.

“I knew something was upsetting him, he looked…upset. In pain. But I didn’t have a chance to check on him and then when we got back he asked for…”

“For?”

Aaron cleared his throat. If there was anyone they should be able to be honest with, it was Penelope. “Sex. I wanted to prove to myself that Foyet didn’t break me, so I asked for sex.”

“But did he know about…?” She was facing Hotch now.

“No.” He frowned, trying to remember what happened. “It started okay. But then I had a flashback and attacked him. I would have killed him if he hadn’t managed to spray me with the shower head.”

Penelope turned back to Spencer. “Injuries?”

“Dislocated shoulder.”

“You should see him, he’s covered in bruises. Bruises I gave him.” He waved at Spencer who was still wearing his jacket, his voice lowered. “I would have killed him tonight.” He pushed up from the couch, abandoning his tea on the table as he began to pace. “It’s not safe to be around me, I should go. I’ll let Dave know to expect the formal paperwork, he’ll take care of things.”
“What?” Two voices asked in unison.

He wasn’t paying attention to them now. “I can’t do this anymore.” Hands squeezed his arms tightly and his head snapped up, looking into a pair of bright blue eyes. “You shouldn’t have to be around me, I should go.”

Her hands gripped him tighter. “I can’t let you leave, not right now. You’re upset and I’m worried about what could happen if you go anywhere like this.”

“Huh?”

Her small hands slipped down to wrap around his. “You’re shaking, you shouldn’t be driving. You drove him to the hospital like this?”

“It didn’t start until I was waiting for him.” He stared down at his trembling hands. “It was a lot worse but since I…” His voice cracked. “Since I was sick, it’s better.” He finished with a whisper.

“You were sick?” His own pain forgotten, Spencer’s face was a mask of concern.

Ignoring Reid, Penelope started to lead Hotch into main bathroom. “I know just what will help you calm down.” She turned on the bath, shooting Spencer a look over her shoulder. “Close your eyes and take slow breaths.”

Hotch nodded and complied. The room began to fill with the smell of lavender and then hands were on him, undressing him. He was so used to Spencer undressing him, preparing him for a bath, that it didn’t even register until he was naked that this wasn’t Spencer caring for him. Following the hands guiding him, Aaron stepped into the bath and sank down into the bubbles.

“Just relax, I’ll be back.” She waited for his hum acknowledging her before she pulled the door almost shut and went in search of Reid. She found him trying to change the sheets on his bed and straighten up the disarray. “Want some help?”

He stopped and faced her. “Sure.”


“I need for him to be okay. I need…I don’t know.” He sank down onto the bed. “Why didn’t he tell me?”

“Sweetie, he was scared and with everything that had already happened, everyone was already seeing him as a victim, it would have made it worse. Not saying something gave him a little control back.”

“Yeah. You’re probably right.” He rolled over the events of the night in his mind for a while. “He can’t go home.”

“I caught that too. I’ll try and get him relaxed.” She stood, collecting the pile of sheets to drop by the washer on her way. “What helps him?”

“Um. Massage. Rubbing or scratching his scalp. Tugging his hair a little. Massaging his face or hands helps.”

Penelope nodded and left.
Aaron sat on the dusky blue sofa and waited. It was his third time seeing Doctor Sue Tipton, a counselor Garcia had recommended.

The first visit hadn’t gone well, he knew that. He hadn’t been able to relax despite being dressed casually in chinos and a sweater. He knew he needed to talk things out, get it out of his system, but he hadn’t been able to open up and had kept to simple one or two word answers to her questions. The second visit was only marginally better. She’d asked about Jack, his work, and his hobbies. He’d felt himself loosening up.

The day before, she’d called him and asked him to come in whatever he normally wore to work. So now he was sitting and waiting for her to appear wearing his full suit and tie, side arm, everything. He stood when Doctor Tipton entered, nodding his head in greeting.

“Hello, Aaron. I want to change things up a bit.” She stopped to assess him, smiling at him. Garcia had been right, dressed up the unit chief looked every inch the Fed he was. She waved to the desk.

“I want you to sit there. Take a minute to get comfortable, adjust anything you want. I’m going to sort my notes and then we’ll talk.” She took a seat in one of the chairs in front of the desk and did her best to be distracted.

Confused, Aaron walked around the desk and looked at it for the first time since he’d walked in. The surface was cleared of anything he shouldn’t see and what was left was assorted stationary, the phone, a calendar, and the blotter. Taking a seat in the chair, he looked around a minute before rearranging everything and sitting back. He couldn’t help the slight smile when she asked if he was ready.

“I didn’t break any confidentiality, but since our last visit, I spoke to Penelope, asked her about you. She’s known you a long time now.”

“Yeah, about five years.” He let his fingers tap on the desk as he spoke.

“And you consider her a friend.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yeah.” He answered anyway. “She’s….unique.”

Doctor Tipton smiled. “That she is. And she’s always spoken very highly of you.”

That surprised him. “She has?”

The doctor nodded. “I asked her where she thought you felt most comfortable. Where it was the easiest, as far as she could tell, for you to open up. She said behind your desk, that your suit and your desk were your shield.” She watched him process that. “I think she hit it right on the head, don’t you?”

He did feel more calm, relaxed, behind the desk. “I think she did.”

“So, tell me about your team.”

“My team?” He was surprised, these sessions were supposed to be about him and his issues.

She nodded. “You’re the unit leader, the most senior member of the team, right?”
“Sort of.”

She gave him a curious look. “Sort of?”

“Dave, he started the BAU and then retired. He was my supervisory agent originally, pulled me back to Virginia. He came back but as a subordinate. I still see him as the senior agent though. Sort of.”

“As an equal at least.”

“Yes. He’s been my best friend for a long time. I can talk to him about pretty much anything. Work, my marriage, family, anything.”

“But you didn’t tell him the full story about the attack.”

Hotch shook his head.

“Did you think he would judge you?”

“Not at all.”

“Then why not tell him. Surely he would keep your confidences.”

“Unless he felt it was in my best interests to do otherwise, yes. He’s as trustworthy as they come.”

Sue watched him a moment. “Okay. So Dave is your equal. Who else is on your team?”

Hotch chewed his lip. “Derek. Morgan. He became unit chief not long after my attack.”

“And now?”

“He’s stepped down. He still helps with the paperwork and some of the other duties so I can see Jack more.”

“So also an equal.”

He thought about it. He did view Morgan as his equal more now. “I guess so.”

“Tell me something about him.”

Aaron drew in a breath while he thought. “He’s loyal. Even when he’s questioning my call, he’s loyal.”

“Okay. Who’s next?” She waited as he closed his eyes a moment to think.

Opening his eyes, he answered. “Emily.”

“What’s Emily like?”

“Determined.” He blurted out quickly before drawing himself back in. “I wasn’t happy with how she was put on the team, my fears were valid, but it wasn’t fair to her. It didn’t stop her from being good at her job though nor letting me see how I’d misjudged her. And then there’s JJ.” He carried on. “she’s not a profiler technically, she’s a media specialist.”

“I think I’ve seen her on TV.”

“Probably. She’s exceptional at her job. She keeps us all in line.”
“Is that it?”

“No.” He smiled.

The doctor waited.

“Spencer. He’s… about as unique as Garcia.”

“He’s a techie too?”

“Oh, no. Not at all.” Hotch shook his head. “But he’s a genius.”

The name clicked in her head as the other man Penelope had told her about. “He’s special to you.”

“Very.”

==

Walking back to his car, Aaron reflected on the past hour. He’d finally opened up about all of his interactions with Foyet and then a little bit about Haley. Doctor Tipton didn’t push and when he changed the subject, she let him. When their time was up, she’d told him he needed to talk openly with Spencer about his wants and fears. And he needed to trust other people’s assessment of his state of mind when he was unsure. He had a good support system, he needed to let them support him.

Finally making it back to his apartment, he walked in on Spencer and Jack hovering over the kitchen sink. Spencer had his arm wrapped snuggly around the small boy’s waist as they both peered down. A fizzling sound was followed by a sudden pop and Jack squealed with surprise and delight as a fountain of bubbles gushed up into view between them. “What are you two doing?” He couldn’t help the amusement in his voice as the pair spun around. “Science?”

Spencer blushed. “Chemistry. Jack had some questions so we did an experiment.” He stood the boy on the floor so he could run to his dad. “Hands-on is the best way to remember anything.”

“Did you have fun?” Aaron looked down at his son.

“It went whoosh!” Jack threw his hands in the air with excitement.

“Can you go play in your room just a minute?”

“Okay Daddy.” He took off down the hall.

Aaron approached Spencer and wrapped his arms around him. “Hi.”

“Hi. How was therapy?”

“Good.” He thought a moment. “Really, it was good this time. I think I’ve made some headway. She… She said I need to talk to you, be more open. And… She said I need to trust you when I’m not sure about my own state of mind. If you trust me on something, then I need to trust that you are seeing things clearer than I am.”

Spencer pulled back a bit. “You really did have a good session then.” He watched a smile break out across Aaron’s face and then pressed a kiss to his lips. “I am always here to listen and you can always trust me to look out for you. And Jack.”

“I know.” He released the other man. “And thank you by the way for staying here like you have
been. You didn’t have to do that after what happened.”

“I couldn’t let you give Jack up over something like that, Aaron.”

“I hurt you!” He could feel himself getting worked up again, never mind that they’d had this conversation what felt like a thousand times.

“And you apologized. And Aaron, I forgave you before you even knew what you’d done.” He rubbed Aaron’s arms. “I am in no way afraid of you and I do not worry about Jack being left with you. This will get better. I promise.”

Aaron nodded in acceptance.

==

Spencer had left for the night and for the first time in nearly a month, Aaron found himself alone with his son. Despite the younger man’s reassurances, he was nervous.

“Come on Jack, bedtime.” He tried to cover the butterflies feeling in his stomach with a giant smile plastered on his face. Taking Jack’s hand, he led the small boy to his bedroom. “Which PJ’s do you want tonight?”

“Captain America.”

“Yeah?” Aaron pulled them out. “You like Captain America?”

Jack nodded. “Spencer says he thinks you’re Captain America in disguise. Is he right?”

“Well, I can’t answer that, can I? It would ruin the disguise.”

Jack giggled. “I guess so.”

“Now, up in bed.” He helped his son into the bed. “Hugs and kisses?”

“Twice Daddy!”

“Twice? Why twice?”

“Then you can give them to Spencer later. I give him hugs and kisses twice so he has some for you too.”

“You do?”

The boy nodded. “Why did Spencer leave tonight?”

“He went back to his own home.”

“Oh. I thought he liked living with us.”

“I-” Aaron didn’t know what to say.

==

Knocking drew Hotch’s attention away from the Jack-approved dinner he was making and to the door. He was greeted with an overflowing box of material and happy looking pumpkins held tightly in familiar looking, seasonally bedecked hands. “Uh, Garcia?”
“I brought stuff!” She cheered from somewhere buried in the pile. “I need to sit down the stuff!” She tottered in on purple heels, depositing the box on his couch.

“What’s all this?” Hotch lifted out a paper pumpkin. “And…why?”

“Costumes!” She held several out with a flourish. “Choices for our little super agent and decorations as well as stuff to make cookies.”

“Halloween has cookies?”

She made a face at him. “He’s four, of course Halloween has cookies.” Penelope looked around. “Where is he?”

“Playing in his room.” Aaron called for Jack to come out.

Jack rushed to Garcia and wrapped her legs in a hug. “Did you bring me things?”

Garcia laughed over Hotch’s admonishment of the question. “Yes, I did. I brought some costumes for you to pick one for trick or treat. Tell me, do you like superheroes?”

“I love superheroes!”

“I’m glad.” She pulled several costumes out. “I think I got your size in every one they had. We can try them on and see which is the most fun!” She laughed again at his excited dancing.

Aaron shook his head. “You didn’t have to do all this.”

She met his eyes. “I wanted to, it makes me happy. Go rescue whatever you’re burning in the kitchen and let us have our fun.”

Head snapping around at the reminder of food on the stove, Hotch returned to the kitchen, listening to the pair have a mini fashion show.

==

At breakfast the next morning, Jack was still was bouncing excitedly in his seat, talking about his Spiderman costume. Looking up between bites of peanut butter toast, he asked his dad. “Can we go show Spencer my costume? Please? Do you think he’ll like it?”

“I think he’ll love it. And how about you finish eating and we’ll go over there and show him. Huh?”

“Okay!” Jack dove back into his meal.

And hour later, the pair was standing in front of Spencer’s door, waiting for it to be answered. When no answer came, he pulled out his phone and dialed figuring the younger man had gone out somewhere on foot. His eyes snapped to the door when he could hear his ringtone echoing from inside. Hotch knelt down, tucking his phone away. “Jack? Let’s go see if Miss Penelope is next door, okay?”

The blonde boy nodded and followed his dad across the hall.

Once Jack was quietly handed over, Aaron used his spare key to let himself in. The apartment was completely plunged into darkness which seemed a feat given it was approaching lunchtime. He didn’t know Spencer’s apartment could even get totally black and it was also unusual because he knew Reid hated the dark. “Spencer?” He didn’t get a response as he quietly crept through the
room. Pausing to listen, he wished he’d worn at least his ankle holster. Something felt…off.

Reaching the bedroom doorway, Aaron eased it open, flinching when it reached the point about a third of the way where it squeaked loudly in the silence. A groan followed the squeak and Hotch reached out and flipped on the light.

In the middle of the bed, huddled in a ball, was Spencer. “Turn it off.” A raspy whisper demanded.

Without questioning, Hotch flipped the light back off. “Are you okay?”

“Headache. I’m okay.”

Aaron felt his brows rise in surprise. “Just a headache?”

“Mmm.”

He crossed to sit at the edge of the bed. “Tell me how to help. How long have you been like this?”

“Been building a few days. This started late last night.”

Aaron sighed and stood, heading for the bathroom where he fumbled around for towels and a heating pad. Plugging in the pad to warm, he headed back to the kitchen and filled a bowl with ice. Loading one towel he’d made damp with some of the ice, he pressed it to the side Reid was clutching painfully. “I left Jack across the hall. Don’t move, I’ll be right back.”

==

Reid felt hands on him. Massaging his shoulder, neck, scalp. Hands rubbed his face, alternated laying dry heat and damp cold on him. Hands brought him water as well as sips of bitter coffee which made him pull a face. Occasionally a body, small and warm, was curled against his chest like a giant teddy bear. He never remembered it moving, so maybe it was.

Once instead of water being pressed to his lips it was some sort of thin broth. Voices that sounded very far away pierced his head and he tried to shrink away from them. He’d been fighting the oncoming migraine for days but it had finally caught him. Making his face twitch in pain and his body heave and gag. Another time he surfaced and the sheets felt different somehow. A little cooler and smelled of dryer sheets.

==

Spencer’s head felt…not like it was about to ooze out his ears anymore. He blinked and squinted in the dark. Beside his glasses he could make out a glass of water he didn’t remember pouring and reached for it. Thirst quenched, he pressed his glasses to his face and stumbled up and out of bed.

He was surprised to find Aaron and Jack at his table eating dinner. “Hey.” He watched both turn to face him. “What are you guys doing here?” His own voice still made his head ache.

“We came by to show you Jack’s costume and found you on the bed in pain. How are you now?”

“Alive? I think? What time is it?”

“Six thirty.”

“P.M.?”

Aaron nodded. “Sunday night. We got here a little before noon yesterday.”
“Oh.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I think…maybe.”

“Sit. I’ll make you something easy.”

==

Jack had managed to get himself invited to sleep over on Garcia’s couch, so Aaron was lying beside Spencer on the bed. “Is your head feeling better?”

“Getting there.”

“Good. I’m glad.” He carded his fingers through Spencer’s damp hair. “I was wondering…”

When the silence drew out, Spencer stroked Aaron’s cheek with one finger. “Wondering what?”

“Do you think there’s a way for me to learn to be okay with sex again?” He brought his eyes up to meet Reid’s.

“If you really want to, one day we can look into it. But Aaron, we don’t ever have to do that if you don’t want to. It’s not necessary.”

“But I… I think I want to.”

“Tell me… Tell me what really happened.” He watched Aaron swallow hard and leaned in, lips near his ear. “Talk to me.” He whispered.

“When he made himself known, we fought. The shot was so loud it made my bad ear just throb in pain. I remember it in bits and pieces. My jacket was tight around my arms and I couldn’t fight back, he was stabbing me. Slowly, it hurt so much. And he was talking, going on about how we’d gotten the profile wrong and he was going to prove it. He rolled me over onto my open wounds and it hurt so much.” He squeezed his eyes shut a minute and then continued. “He only undressed me enough to be able to rape me. Him leaning down on me made the wounds bleed more and then the pain.” He gasped.

“Aaron, it’s okay. Stop.” He stroked his arm.

“No.” He sucked in a breath. “I taunted him, even then. We were right, he couldn’t just have sex, he needed the violence. Finally, he rolled me back over and being able to stare at my open wounds, stare at what he’d done to me, then he was able to finish.” He made a gagging sound. “He was partway standing and… I had to watch. He did it over me. Then he finished stabbing me while I was covered in…” The tears sprung free, the anguish he’d held in over what had been done to him finally out in the open, released to the world.

“Shh. I’m here now.” Spencer pulled Aaron into his arms and held him. “We’ll get past this. Together.”
Garcia was sitting in his office waiting; Hotch had texted her and reminded her that they needed to talk. Spencer had texted her shortly after and let her know that Hotch had been upset since the news about the chief’s son. She wasn’t exactly sure what to expect when he finally came through the door.

Pushing through the glass doors, Hotch glanced up toward his office. He could just see Penelope’s red hair through his half-opened blinds. He honestly didn’t want to talk to her about what ever thing got them the tablets, but he didn’t want to be blindsided later should it become his problem. Trudging up the steps, he quietly entered and shut the door. “Penelope.”

Her eyes were wide as she faced him. “Sir?”

He moved to his seat, dropping his things beside his desk as he went. “Funding for tablets?”

“It really is all pretty much on the up and up, Sir. I made all of our files digital like I said and it seemed silly to still be printing when the goal is to be paperless.”

“Get to the part where it’s ‘pretty much’ on the up and up.”

Garcia nodded. “I did a proposal for the funds request and figured I would take it to Strauss to surprise you but she, um, she doesn’t really like me. I tried, I really did. I think her desire to keep us from having new toys outweighed the possible cost savings.”

Aaron watched her chew her lip. “So, if Strauss said no…”

“I, um, may have gotten her to sign off by other means?”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Garcia?”

“I filled out a vacation request which she signed off on happily and then she was almost to her car in the parking garage and I chased her down and told her I messed up the dates and could she resign it.”

Hotch could see exactly what was coming next. “And?”

“And… The second sheet wasn’t a vacation request.” She had the good sense to look sheepish and ashamed.

He let his head fall back against his chair and shut his eyes. On the one hand, what the analyst had done was wrong and deceptive; on the other hand, if Strauss hadn’t expected something like that from the eccentric hacker, well, she had it coming. At least now he knew. “Why didn’t you just ask me to sign it?”

“I wanted them to be a surprise and…”

“And?”

“I figured you would have said no. Our budget is tiny as it is and this way it didn’t come from our budget.”

“Okay.” He sighed.
“Okay?”

“If anyone asks, I sent you to get that signature. Consider this your warning, no more spending without my signature. Got it?”

“Yes, Sir.”

He saw that she looked appropriately remorseful and sighed. “You can go. Don’t do it again.”

“I won’t, Sir. I promise.” She rose and moved to the door. “Will you be by Spencer’s this weekend?”

“Yeah. I will.”

“I’ll be around, just knock and Jack and I can have some serious fun.”

“Thanks, Penelope.”

==

Aaron let himself and Jack into Spencer’s apartment Friday evening and stopped short. Where books had filled all the book shelves ceiling to floor before, now in once case the bottom two shelves were clear and instead held bins and baskets in bright cheerful colors that stood out in the otherwise plain room. On the shelf directly above those, heavy chapter books were replaced with colorful, thin children’s books. On the floor was a small rug decorated with trains.

“Hey.” Spencer appeared from his bedroom and smiled at the pair. “You’re here, good. Dinner should be here in about five minutes.” When he realized Aaron wasn’t moving from the doorway, he stopped. “What’s wrong?”

“You did this just for Jack?” He gestured to the shelf.

“Oh, that. Yeah.” He shrugged. “He spends a lot of time here with you and I thought it would be easier than dragging stuff back and forth. And that’s not all, come look over here.” He waved Aaron in and to the far corner where Aaron had once slept during his recovery. Now the space was blocked off by new bookcases that seemed to contain the heavy books missing from the other shelves and inside the small area was a low children’s bed covered in a blanket that matched the rug. “He can leave some stuff here in these couple drawers if you want and now he doesn’t have to sleep on the couch.” He watched Aaron stare in surprise as Jack climbed onto the bed. Spencer leaned in close to the older man. “I wasn’t thinking I would ever need to plan for a child being here when I agreed to this place.”

“I can’t believe you did all this.”

“Is it too much?”

“No.” Aaron pulled him close and pressed a kiss to his lips. “It’s perfect. Even when I don’t know it, you’re taking care of me.” He looked down at his son. “What do you think, Jack? Do you like it?”

“This really for me?”

“Yeah, buddy. Spencer did all this just for you.” He chuckled when the boy launched himself at Reid for a hug.
“Thank you!”

“You’re very welcome. Why don’t you go see what’s in those bins while I talk to your Daddy?”

“Okay.” Jack went to poke through the bins.

Spencer stood up straight and pulled Aaron close. “I want both of you to feel safe here, happy here. That’s important.” He pressed a kiss to his lips. “Would you be willing to wear the cage this weekend? I have a couple other things I would like as well if you’re up for it. I’ve taken Jack being here into account.”

“Yes. Whatever you wish.” He knew he could trust Spencer to think ahead and keep Jack in mind.

He leaned in close, knowing the bookcase blocked them from the young boy’s view. One finger trailed along Aaron’s fly and he talked. “On my bathroom counter are several things, go put them on and then come back out.”

Aaron nodded and headed straight for the bathroom without a backward look and locked the door. On the counter was the cage he’d worn previously as well as satiny looking black fabric, some soap he didn’t recognize as well as lube and a soft rubber…thing. He frowned and racked his brain a moment until it came to him and then he blushed. Collecting the soap and lube, Aaron stripped down and stepped into the shower. He was curious to see where this night was headed.

==

Spencer looked up from where he was settled Jack in at the table with dinner to see Aaron step out of his bedroom dressed in the snug jeans and soft sweater he’d laid out. “Everything?” He watched the hint of blush deepen to almost crimson.

“Yeah.” Aaron nervously ran a hand across his neck. “Everything.”

“Come eat, Aaron.” He pulled out a chair and waited for the other man to sit before helping him scoot in. “You look lovely.” He purred in his ear.

Between everything he was wearing and Spencer’s words, Aaron felt the warm pooling of arousal start in his belly. “Thank you.”

Reid nodded and turned his focus to his dinner and Jack.

After the meal was done, Spencer asked Aaron to clear up while he and Jack explored which toys the boy wanted to sleep with. He watched him move out of the corner of his eye as he did as he was told. Once Jack was tucked in and asleep, Spencer moved to the couch and waited for Aaron to join him. Several minutes later, Aaron was tucked into his side. Spencer reached down and undid Aaron’s jeans, exposing the black underwear. “Do you like them?”

“They’re more comfortable than I expected.” He shifted to allow his legs to spread as far as the tight pants would let him. “I’m still not sure about the plug though.”

“Did you struggle putting it in?”

“No.” He shook his head. “How long will I wear it?”

“Not long the first time.” Spencer glanced at the clock. “Actually, let’s go into the bedroom.” He stood and pulled Aaron up, guiding him to the bed. “Go ahead and pull your sweater off and lay on your back, leave the jeans for now.” Spencer headed to get towels and damp cloths.
Aaron waited for Spencer to return with his eyes closed. They were planning to spend the entire weekend together, the three of them, and he had no idea what Spencer had in mind but he knew now that he wouldn’t be coming any time soon. When Spencer returned, he lifted his hips when prompted and let him drag his jeans down, slowly, to his ankles and then pulled his feet in so his knees stuck straight up in the air.

Around the narrow band that made up the back of the underwear as it ran up the crack of Aaron’s ass, Spencer teased with his fingers a moment before giving the plug a bit of a tug to see how firmly it was seated. Bumping it made Aaron gasp and tried to grind down against nothing. Spencer popped open the lube and added some fresh around the rubber plug to help it start to work loose. “Relax. Bear down.” He pressed against Aaron’s perineum and felt him do as he was told. “That’s it. Keep doing that.” Spencer tugged gently until the ring of muscles gave way and the plug slowly slipped out. He wrapped it in a towel so it could be washed and used one of the cloths to wash Aaron’s hole. He wanted to be sure there hadn’t been any accidental damage done.

Aaron relaxed at the sudden feeling of emptiness. “What was that?”

“What? The plug?”

“No.” He cracked his eyes open. “When you touched it, it was like fireworks.”

Spencer gave him a soft smile. “Ah. Prostate.”

“Wow.”

He chuckled. “In time, maybe we’ll get there.” He helped Aaron pull the jeans back up. “Tonight though, we’re going to stay soft. I don’t want Jack to accidentally walk in on something he shouldn’t.” He produced an assortment of things intended to tease. “Feathers, wax, wheel, we’ll keep it simple for tonight.”

Aaron woke alone. He’d slept in just the cage but Spencer had left pajamas out for him just in case. He stretched and listened to the sounds of the apartment. Through the closed door he could hear Jack talking and he smiled. He had no idea what Spencer had planned for today, but they were all going to be together. Finally crawling out of bed, Hotch slipped into the pajama pants, leaving his top half uncovered and headed for the bathroom.

Spencer sat at the table and listened as Jack told him a story about something that had happened at school that week. He wasn’t entirely sure what the boy was saying, but it sounded like it involved another boy and going head first down a slide. “So, you like school, Jack?”

“Yeah. We get to hear stories and do science stuff. Only, the teacher’s science stuff isn’t as fun or as messy as your science stuff.”

Reid chuckled. “Well, not all science is messy, but we can still do the messy stuff if you are very good at school for your teacher.”

“Really?”

“Sure. Why not.” He was surprised when Jack crawled into his lap for a hug. “What do you think about checking out the park today? Does that sound fun?”

“Uh huh.”
Aaron had enjoyed spending the day relaxing with Spencer and Jack. There had been a chill in the air, but it stayed mild enough that they were able to spend several hours outside before coming in to eat a late lunch. When Jack took a nap, Spencer had dragged Aaron into the bedroom and locked the door before ordering the older man to his knees with his hands folded behind his back.

The entire time he’d been giving Spencer a blow job, he was extremely aware of his own cock, caged but otherwise hanging free, in his khakis. He knew Spencer was comfortable going without underwear, but he’d never tried it before. A day off, playing at the park, had definitely been a good time to try it for the first time. The salty taste of precome brought Aaron back to the moment and he pressed in closer as he heard Spencer’s breath hitch a moment before he was pouring himself out. He wanted so badly to follow him over as well, be he knew he would have to wait.

Spencer pulled him to his feet. “How long will Jack sleep?”

“Maybe another hour.” He felt himself twitch as long thin fingers dipped below the waistband of his pants.

“God, I love the feel of your skin. And knowing you’re not wearing anything under these, it’s so hot.”

“We could try.”

“No.” Spencer cut him off. To soften the sharpness of his abrupt answer, he stroked Aaron’s face with his other hand. “In time. Not now.”

“Please?” He gave him his best pleading look.

“You have a long way to go yet.”

“Yes, Master.” He gave up. For now.

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Sunday had been spent much like Saturday except instead of the trio playing in the park, they had wandered a museum and stopped for pizza. Upon returning to the apartment, Garcia had whisked through declaring that she absolutely had to borrow young Jack for precisely two hours and they would call when they were on their way back.

It was that ‘surprise’ opportunity that had made it possible for Aaron to be stretched out over the back of Spencer’s couch, counting strikes from a recently acquired paddle. The burn was amazing, he could feel his cock dripping down his bare leg and this time he was not at all embarrassed by it. The frequency and location of each strike changed so he couldn’t anticipate it. The next swat caused him to grunt as suddenly he could feel his arousal reaching that critical point. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Reid pulling back for another swing. “Stop.”

Spencer pulled back, the paddle only connecting with air. “Stop?”

“I can’t.” He panted. “I’m gonna come.”

The wooden paddle clattered to the ground as Spencer stepped up behind him and lifted him up so Aaron was leaning back against his chest. “Let’s get you taken care of.” He pressed a kiss into Hotch’s neck. “Let me help you to the bed.”
As he led Aaron to the bedroom, he collected a fresh bottle of water and passed it over. “Drink.”

Hotch nodded and polished off half in one go. “Thank you.” He leaned on Spencer as they walked.

On the bed, Spencer had him brace himself so he could apply cream to red flesh to help cool it. The massaging had Aaron whimpering even as he relaxed. “Shh. What do you need?”

“To come. Please let me come.” He squeezed his eyes shut and felt tears of desperation push out. “I don’t want to do it caged, it doesn’t feel good.” He felt something like a sob well up in his chest.

“Okay.” Spencer’s voice was soft. “Roll over. We’ll try something.”

Aaron complied and allowed himself to be adjusted and propped up on pillows and towels.

“Don’t close your eyes. Even the slightest hint that you’re not comfortable and we stop, got it?”

“Yes.” It turned into a hiss as the cage was pulled away and his cock sprang free. He watched as Spencer nestled his hips between his thighs, holding on to his knees. Aaron could feel the other man’s dick, coated now with lube, sliding between his cheeks.

“Is this okay?”

“Yes. So good.”

Reid set a hard pace, fucking Aaron’s crack. As he got close, he wrapped one hand around the cock bouncing between them and began short, hard strokes. Aaron arches under his hands, desperate to find completion. Waiting until he was about to come, Spencer leaned forward. “Come for me, Aaron.” The sight of Aaron’s back bowing, shoving his dick up in the air in his fist, the thick cords of come that coated them both, it was enough to cause Reid’s hips to stutter and he pulled back just enough before coating the ass beneath him with his own spunk.

“Oh…oh…shit.” Aaron panted. He was out of breath and he’d seemed to have lost all ability to speak. “Damn.” His body was still humming when a finger pressed against the tender flesh behind his balls and then down, pushing come with it as it barely pushed past the ring of muscles. The single digit slipped in and out twice before Spencer pulled away.

“We both need showers before Garcia gets back with Jack.”
He was learning to love the ropes. The patterns of knots and weaving the Spencer would do were beautiful, he knew that because he’d asked him to take photos. They’d gotten off work early for once and Jessica had asked about taking Jack on a trip so there was no reason for Aaron to stay at his own apartment. Within minutes of walking into Spencer’s place, he’d been naked except for the cage he was coming to love and the plug that he was permitted to wear for short times. Spencer still expressed some concerns about any anal play until Aaron had gotten enough therapy under his belt, but Aaron wasn’t above begging.

Tonight, though, he couldn’t beg.

Hotch was lying on the bed, his ankles were being kept apart but what had looked like a belt, but with loops in it and he was gagged with a soft bit of fabric, reducing his communication to a series of finger snaps. He knew Spencer would keep track of time to make sure he got water to drink, the man was nothing if not precise about appropriate hydration. The bedroom was dark, sensory deprivation his mind provided. Fighting back the instinct to panic, Aaron instead forced himself to relax and just be.

Spencer stood in the doorway and watched as the stress and tension finally left Hotch’s body. It was what he’d been waiting for. He needed him relaxed and open before they moved on to what he had planned next. Quietly slipping into the room, he crawled up the bed, licking a path along Aaron’s body as he went. Reid knew he would never grow tired of having this body, this man, beneath him.

Licking around the cage, Spencer smiled at the moan he got in response. Aaron had taken to wearing it more and more, and as he had, the length of time he could go without having difficulties was increasing. Spencer made sure to help him out by not keeping him too long between orgasms. It seemed that the older man’s stress levels at work could be greatly influenced by the amount of time Reid spent caring for him away from work.

Removing the gag and offering a straw into a bottle of water, Spencer stroked Hotch hair. “You’re so good, so patient. I want to try something tonight but you have to stay with me, okay?”

“Kay.”

Reaching down, he eased out the plug and dropped it onto the towels by the bed and poured out more lube. “How are you doing?”

“Green. It feels so good.” He let himself sink into the feeling of Spencer rubbing lube into his hole. Something new pressed at his entrance and Aaron forced his muscled to relax and bear down to allow entrance. Whatever it was was thicker than the plug, caused a slight about of burn as it stretched its way into him and then settled.

“How are you doing?” Spencer whispered.

“Um, green. But really close to yellow.”

“But not yellow?”

Aaron shook his head. “What is that?”

“A vibrator. I’m going to turn it on.” He got a nod and flipped a switched.
It was as if his entire body was electrified. He wanted to grind down and pull away at the same time. He could feel hands on his hips, holding him in place as he rutted and tried to find some sort of stimulation. Dragging his ass against the bed in starts and stops gave him the feeling of being slightly fucked but it wasn’t enough. “Please! Please oh please oh please!” He needed to be touched somewhere, somehow. His entire body was humming and he couldn’t feel any touching anywhere.

“Not yet.” Spencer’s fingers landed gently on Aaron’s nipples and then on his throat. Around and around he touched, just a touch and then away again. He switched the vibrator off and carefully drew it out. “You look so wonderful, spread out like this. I don’t think you even know what you do to me.” He knelt over his sub and started to make out with him. “One day I will fuck you senseless. Fuck you until you can’t help but scream out my name.” He began to rub his own hard dick along Aaron’s stomach, gasping and moaning at the feel of skin against skin. Seeing this man spread out like this, the absolute trust Aaron put in him, it made his cock throb and swell. “I could just come right here, all over you. Would you like that?”

“Yes.”

“You want me to come on your chest? Coat you with my essence? Mark you as mine?”

“Yes.” The feel of Spencer’s cock bumping and brushing his stomach, balls dragging along his confined cock, it was driving him crazy. “Please. I want to be yours. Please mark me as yours.” His eyes widened as his Master rocked back onto his heels, up higher now than he was before and began to stroke his cock. A moment later, his Master was coming all over him, painting him with fluids. He did his best to find some sort of stimulation to find his release, he was so close. He just needed a tiny…bit… Hands stilled his hips and a cry burst out.

“Stay. Don’t move.”

How could he move? He was bound everywhere. He just needed to finish. Fingers tracing patterns over him made him focus. Spencer was painting in the come across his body. It was almost hot enough to make him explode right there. When his Dom’s other hand tugged away his cage and gave his swollen dick a few short strokes, explode is exactly what he did as it felt like his entire being was being shot out of his cock.

“There.” He finished whatever he’d been doing in the mess and then offered his finger tips to Aaron to lick clean as the older man panted as he came down. “Let’s get you some water and then I’m going let you rest here a few minutes before I take care of you.” Spencer helped Aaron drink until he wanted to stop and then carefully leaned him back down before untying his legs so they could stretch. Tapping Aaron’s shoulder, he got him to roll to his side to remove the rope. The marks would go away before morning.

Collecting the used toys, Spencer moved to the bathroom and washed them before washing himself. Cleaned up, he heard his phone ring from the kitchen. Peaking at Aaron as he went to answer it, he saw the man was almost sound asleep.

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Staring in the bathroom mirror, Aaron made a snap decision. A case had interrupted what was their normal aftercare routine and Spencer had helped him stagger into the bathroom before he had reassured him that he was okay to handle it on his own this once. He wasn’t going to tell the other man what he had decided to do.

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He’d handed Dave the keys without making eye contact, he felt off kilter and being behind the wheel when it wasn’t really necessary would just be adding one more thing to his split focus. He still hadn’t told Spencer what he’d done the night before and approaching twenty-four hours later, he also hadn’t found a chance to undo his decision. Now he was strapped into a bullet proof vest on top of everything else, quite literally.

“What’s wrong?”

“What?” He looked over at Dave.

“You keep fidgeting. That’s not you. Come on, Aaron, what’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry.” He was apologizing before he even really thought about it. “I’ll stop.” But then almost instantly he needed to tug on the vest again to try and ease the itching. “Shit.”

“Aaron.” Dave reached one hand over and stilled Hotch’s hand where it was messing with the vest. “It’s just you and I now. No one can hear us. What’s bothering you?”

Hotch sighed heavily and dropped his hands to his lap. “After work yesterday I went straight to Reid’s place to spend the night, Jess has Jack for a few days. We were, umm…”

“Playing?” When Aaron gave him a look, he shrugged. “I’ve played. Go on.”

Aaron blushed. “He is always so frank when talking about things but I still can barely say the words. He makes me ask using actual words and it’s so hard.”

“I can guess if you’d like.”

“No. That’s okay. He likes to come on me.” He choked around the words a moment. “When I’m tied up. I- I like it too.”

“Not hearing the part yet where I’m appalled.” He smirked when his friend shot him a dirty look.

“Normally we have a routine afterward. Cleaning up, drinking, eating, lotion or whatever I might need. But the case came in as we were about to clean up and I told him I could handle it myself.”

Dave nodded but remained silent lest Aaron realize he was actually talking to a real person and promptly clam back up.

“Staring in the mirror at where he’d rubbed it around on me, it was already drying and I decided… I decided to leave it. To stay marked by him even though I would be the only one who knew.”

Mentally he added that the sudden decision to go commando under his suit for the first time ever was messing with his mind a little as well.

Rossi chewed the inside of his cheek. His friend had changed from the man he’d known many years ago and he wasn’t sure that was a bad thing. Out from under what he now knew had been a very bad relationship and with a young man that clearly seemed to be good for him, his friend seemed generally happier, more balanced maybe.

Dave’s attention was drawn to other things as they found their unsub trying to suffocate Penny. Leaving their conversation behind, he bid his friend good luck as he rode to the hospital with the woman. Heading back to their vehicles, he pulled Spencer aside. “We need just a second to talk.”

Reid glanced over his shoulder to see that Emily had walked away. “What’s up?”
“The moment this is over, you need to pull Aaron aside somewhere private. Okay?”

“What? Why?”

“He said something to me, nothing’s wrong, just get him to talk to you.”

“Yeah, sure. I’ll talk to him.”

“Good.”

==

The case was over. A phone call told Spencer that Aaron was ready to get a lift from the hospital so he commandeered one of the SUVs and went to get him. On the ride back to the base, he cleared his throat. “Rossi pulled me aside after you left with the victim.”

“Oh.” Aaron frowned. He had hoped to either tell Spencer himself or, even better, not at all. “Sorry I didn’t talk to you first.”

“About what?”

“Huh?” He was surprised, didn’t Dave tell him? “Didn’t Dave tell you?”

“No. He just said that you talked to him and for me to pull you aside and get you to talk to me.” He reached across the center divider and rested his hand on Aaron’s thigh.

“Oh.” He repeated. “Last night when you left me to clean up I- I didn’t.”

“Didn’t?” Spencer was confused.

“I wanted to feel you marking me so I didn’t wash up. Dave found out only because he noticed when I started feeling itchy. It had been a great idea in the moment but by the time I had to vest up, not so much.” With that out in the open, he figured maybe hearing the rest would ease any negative feelings his Master had for him at the moment. “I also didn’t put on any underwear.” He rushed to get it out.

“Oh.” Now it was Spencer’s turn to be down to single syllables. “Wow, I can’t believe how arousing the idea of that is.”

“Really?” He gave him a hopeful look.

“Really.” Reid dragged his hand up until he was cupping Aaron inside his cage through dark slacks. “Very, very arousing. Almost enough to want to make you come for me right here, right now.”

“Now?” It came out more like a squeak. The mere thought of Spencer telling him he could come had his blood pressure climbing and his balls ready to tighten.

“Not now. But soon. I promise.”

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He’d known the moment he said it that he’d have a whole lot of groveling to do. One did not simply upset Penelope Garcia and move on from the experience, no matter what position they felt they had in life. She’d asked him to keep his knowledge of the play a secret, a simple request and he’d blew it.
The clerk in the store watched him browsing the displays at the far end. She was clearly watching him, though she feigned disinterest well, allowing him to get relaxed in the store before pouncing. He figured he wasn’t like most men who came in here and probably stood out. Finally, she approached, “May I help you Sir?”

Hotch looked around at the displays of things he couldn’t begin to recognize. “I need a gift.”

The clerk looked surprised. “A gift?”

“I need something that says I’m sorry and this definitely looks like the right sort of place to say that to her.” He was surrounded by all sorts of computer and tech equipment.

“Is there anything she needs?”

“I doubt it. Is there something that is the latest and greatest must have?”

She nodded and went to the far end of the shop and returned with a box, handing it to him.

“What is it?”

The clerk laughed. “You really are in over your head, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I am.”

She showed him what everything in the box did and the rang up the sale, impressed when he almost completely hid his surprise at the cost. She figured that someone must be very lucky to have a guy like him.

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Garcia was getting ready for bed. It’s been a long day and a horrible case. She was mad and trying to decide exactly what punishment to dole out to her boss. She was in fuzzy pajama pants and a tank top, hair in braids when someone knocked softly on her door. She stared a moment, wishing for x-ray vision to see who was interruption her evil contemplations. Huffing, she crossed the small space and pulled the door open to find said boss standing in the hall. “Sir!”

Hotch glanced up at her, taking her in. “I’m sorry for stopping by like this.” He glanced at the door, “You didn’t check the peephole before opening the door.” He frowned a moment before switching gears. “I’m sorry for today, Penelope.”

She stepped back and let him in. “I asked you to not say anything and I can’t believe you said it and it hurt. Do you have any idea how much it hurt to have you of all people betray me like that?” As she spoke, her voice got higher.

He held out the bag in his hand and met her eye, “I know. I never wanted to do that to you.”

Garcia hesitated, taking the bag slowly. She recognized the logo of the store where she bought a lot of her computer stuff as she pulled out the box and opened it. “Oh wow! I didn’t even know this was officially on the market yet!”

“The clerk said it was just in.”

“This is… Wow. But this is too much.”

“No. I overstepped the line. I’m sorry.”
Penelope sighed. “At least come to the show tomorrow night?”

“I… I would love to.”

==

Spencer had spent most of the play not staring at the stage, though his friend and neighbor was an amazing actress, but staring down at Aaron sitting in the row below him in dark, tight jeans. The outfit was exactly what he’d told him to wear and he couldn’t wait to find out if that extended to being sans boxers as well.

As they were about to leave, Hotch has excused himself to the restroom and Spencer had followed. Down the narrow hall there was a single occupancy men’s room and Reid crowded in behind him, locking the door. “I have to know.”

“Know what?” Hotch was surprised to have hands and lips all over him.

“If you’re really naked under those jeans.”

“Are you wanting to see for yourself?”

“God yes.” Before he finished speaking, Spencer had the jeans open and gasped at the sight of flesh and hair. “God that’s so hot.”

Aaron pressed their lips together. “I’m glad you think so, but I really did come down here for a reason and sex in a public place wasn’t it.”

“Oh.” Spencer blushed. “I’ll just….” He pointed and then left.

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Spencer waved off rides home, telling Morgan and Emily he would get a lift from Penelope. Dave gave him a knowing grin and a shake of his head before bidding everyone good night. Turning to go back in, he stopped when Aaron walked out. “Ready?”

“Yes. Let’s go.”

“Keys?” Spencer held out his hand.

Sighing, Aaron handed them over without much fight. He was getting used to Spencer driving his car. It was over an hour in late evening traffic back to Spencer’s place and he suspected the ride wouldn’t be made I silence.

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They were barely halfway to the apartment and Hotch was ready to demand Reid pull the car over. Fingers had started tracing around his thigh and the front of his jeans three blocks from the theater. Once they were past the city lights and traffic cameras, he’d been instructed to put his hands on the arm rests and not move them and then the snap and zipper had come undone, exposing his contained cock to the night air coming in through the open windows. He wondered if the windows being down was to keep him still. They weren’t on the high traffic roads now, Spencer had turned off and onto quieter back streets. The drive would take longer, but there would be a smaller audience to his undoing.

The fingers teased inside his jeans as far as they could reach. “Lift up and pull your jeans down to
right here. No further.” Spencer pressed a spot on Aaron’s leg. Once Hotch complied, he had better access to everything he wanted. “I love feeling your balls, so big and heavy. Every time I touch them, I try to memorize the weight and feel of them.” He let his thumb slip under and press the sensitive skin behind them. When Aaron sucked in a breath, he smiled. “I love getting to watch you fall apart.” At a deserted stop sign, he turned his face toward Aaron’s. “You’re going to come, in this car, with the windows down, before we get to my place. In my bag is lube and a few other things, I want to listen to you pleasure yourself. When I think you’re ready, I’ll tell you you can come, but not until I say so. Got it?”

It was like his brain was already short circuiting. He was going to have to jack off here, practically in the open. He was somewhere between extremely turned on at the idea and turned off. “Yes, Master.”

Spencer drew his hand back and continued to drive. “You may remove the cage now.”

Aaron’s hands were trembling as he pulled it off and sat in in one of the cup holders. There was something erotic about seeing something so intimate laying out like that. One hand started stroking his cock while the other opened Spencer’s bag to see what he’d brought. The lube was right on top, next to something clear and long, thick, it felt almost flesh-like in his hand. He stared at it, unsure. “Use that.” Spencer ordered and when he got a questioning look, he added. “You fuck it. It’s a masturbation sleeve. Remember though, you don’t come till I say so.”

Hotch’s breath sped up as he poured some lube in it and slipped it into place with a deep exhaling moan. It was tight, so tight. It brought back memories of when he’d first started having sex, tight wet heat. Closing his eyes, he let his mind make up a scene of being ridden in a car. Hands were on his shoulders, around his neck and his dick ached to slam up into that warmth. He’d always known she was soft and warm but he’d never imagined that she’d be soft and warm like this, riding him. He could feel her legs pinning his thighs together, she always rode him so perfectly.

Spencer watched Aaron fucking up into the sleeve. A look of bliss had settled on his face that he’d never seen before. The older man looked happy in a way that made him look years younger. He didn’t speak as he drove, letting Aaron enjoy whatever vision he was creating. When they reached the point where they had to cut through a small wooded area where Spencer knew they would be out of earshot of houses, Spencer finally spoke in a whisper. “Come for me.”

Aaron heard the words somewhere deep in his mind. They didn’t sound like quite the right voice, but permission was permission and he sped up just a second before his hips stuttered and he came, groaning out her name desperately.

Spencer froze as he watched Aaron’s cock erupted through his orgasm. Never in a million years would he have expected Aaron to call Haley’s name, even while masturbating.

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Awareness returned and Aaron discovered he was in the passenger seat of his car with a blanket tossed over him. The car was parked in what had become ‘his spot’ outside Spencer’s apartment building. He tried to remember how he’d ended up dozed off… He shifted around and felt his jeans partway off… with his pants down. Then he remembered, Spencer had told him to jack off during the drive back. After being denied orgasm several days earlier, it had felt wonderful. That new toy had felt just like… Aaron paled. “Well, fuck.” He wasn’t one normally for swearing, but he also wasn’t normally the person who shouted out someone else’s name during anything remotely connected to sex.
He needed to find Spencer though as he started to open the door. But first, he needed to put his pants back on.
Spencer looked up through his open doorway as he heard heavy footsteps running up the stairs. Aaron was only slightly out of breath as he burst through the doorway and shut the door behind him.

“Spencer, shit, I’m so sorry. I swear, it was an accident.” He panted to try and catch his breath. “I would never… I don’t… I swear I don’t miss her, not like that. I haven’t fantasized about having sex with her since long before we even separated.” He stopped abruptly and thought hard. “I haven’t fantasized about her since just after I met you.” His voice had changed to awe as he spoke. He hadn’t even been aware until just then.

“Aaron.” Spencer approached him, broke his introspection by taking his hands. “I’m not upset. I was surprised, yes, but I’m not mad. I know you were married before, I don’t think it would be healthy for either of us to try and pretend you weren’t. You were with her twenty years, she’s Jack’s mother. Those things will never change.” He pressed a kiss to Hotch’s cheek. “We’re coming up on the first anniversary.”

Aaron swallowed, voice going soft. “I know.”

“If you weren’t already planning on it, I think you and Jack should take the day, be together. She’ll never be not important.” Silence filled the apartment for several long minutes before Spencer finally tugged Aaron to the couch. “You loved Haley, that never changed. Even with everything that happened, I know that. Don’t even feel like you can’t talk about her around me, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Okay.” He whispered. “Do you still want to stay the night?”

Hotch nodded.

“Come to bed.”

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Spencer tried to be available for Aaron and Jack both during the days surrounding the anniversary of Haley’s death. Aaron had said Jack had started having nightmares and had been keeping him away. Spencer wondered if maybe that wasn’t the entire truth of the situation. He made sure to send at least one message each day letting the other man know that he was available, day or night, if they needed anything. Even if it was groceries.

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Curious about how his friend was doing, Dave stopped by the night after he knew father and son had visited the cemetery. His friend had said they were fine over the phone, but he wanted to see for himself.

Jack had been about how he’d expected; the boy had spent much of the day watching videos Aaron had of Haley and cuddling under a blanket. The grief was still fresh for him, he’d been at an age where his mother had still been his whole world and to be ripped away so suddenly.

Aaron though had been a different matter. The man was distracted and quiet, more so than normal. Filling two glasses from the small bar, Dave nudged him to the couch after bedtime and took a seat
on the heavy coffee table in front of it so he was facing his friend, knee to knee.

“What’s up?”

“I’m fine.”

“No, you’re not. And that didn’t answer that question anyway.” Dave swallowed a mouthful of his drink. “You’re thinking awfully hard about something.”

Aaron drew in a breath to speak but then held it.

Dave pressed on. “Come on, talk to me. Or do I need to drag Spencer over here?”

Aaron averted his eyes.

“So, this is to do with him. He’s not been acting any differently lately, so what’s going on?”

“I screwed up.”

Head tipped to the side in curiosity, he asked. “How so?”

A blush crept up his neck and tinged his cheeks slightly pink. “I called out the wrong name.”

“You called out the…oh.” Dave had done that once. “I guess I hadn’t thought about you two being…intimate. I didn’t know you guys had gotten that far.”

“We haven’t really. Not…” The room was starting to feel hot as he flushed further.

“Out with it, Aaron. Just close your eyes and talk.”

Galvanizing himself, Aaron squeezed his eyes shut and pretended the room was empty. “We mostly stick to blowjobs, stuff he calls outer course, masturbation. He likes to push my comfort zone in little ways so on the way back from the play he drove the long way home through the countryside with the windows down and had me jack off.” He sucked in a deep breath to try and refill his lungs. It was out, what he wanted to talk about, the weight of it seemed less now and his eyes opened back up. “He had bought this…sleeve I guess it’s called and the car was dark and it just felt so…”

“Good?” Dave asked, smirking at the dirty look he received.

“Somehow I visualized Haley and when I came, I called out her name.” He let his head fall into his hands. “He said it’s no big deal but I can’t shake this feeling that I really screwed up something.”

Setting his glass on the table beside him, he took Hotch’s and did the same. Some conversations required taking a few liberties. Dave leaned in and gripped both of Aaron’s wrists firmly, not so hard it hurt but enough that he couldn’t just shake him off. “I need you to listen to me. Spencer has never made it a habit to lie to you as far as I’m aware. Right?”

Aaron nodded.

“If he’s not showing any signs of being bothered by this, not pulling away from you or anything, then you need to listen to him. It was one time and in your defense, it wasn’t actually during sex. She was the only woman you had sex with for two decades.” Hotch whispered something he didn’t catch. “What’s that?”

“At all.” He cleared his throat. “I dated one other girl before her, but we never had sex and then
when we broke up for a semester in college, there were a few kisses but never…” He shook his head.

Dave’s brows rose in surprise. He knew for a fact that Haley hadn’t been able to come close to saying the same. “What I’m saying is, I’m not surprised and I bet he isn’t either. Cut yourself a little slack on this one. And if he starts acting weird, come talk to me and we’ll figure it out together.” He waited in silence to see if he’d gotten through to his friend.

“Yeah.” Aaron finally looked back up at him. “Okay.”

“Good.”

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When Aaron returned from a few days off, he called Spencer up to his office looking nervous. Once Spencer was sitting down, he cleared his throat. “I wanted to ask you about…” He paused and decided to start from the beginning. “Jack and I are going away over Christmas and New Year. I have rented a small cabin in the mountains and we’re going to pack up the car and just be away during that time. I’ll work Friday and then Saturday morning really early we’re leaving.”

“Oh.” Spencer had sort of thought they would be spending the holidays together. He wasn’t going to let on that he was disappointed, father and son didn’t get enough time together as it was, if this was what Hotch wanted, then he should have it.

“I was hoping you would be willing to come with us. Maybe like a… like a family vacation I guess.” Hotch was a little nervous given how he’d messed things up recently, but he’d rented the three-bedroom cabin with the hope that Spencer would say yes.

Spencer was surprised. “Oh, okay.” He hadn’t expected that. “I- I guess that sounds good.” A smile slipped on his face. “I’ll have to ask my boss for the time of first though. He may not give it to me, he’s a real hard-ass sometimes.” His smile widened further when Aaron barked out a laugh in reply.

==

Spencer got his first glimpse of the cabin as the trees opened up around it. Aaron had kept all details of their trip a secret, just telling him to pack for snow and don’t forget the presents. “It’s a bit…rustic.”

Aaron smiled softly. “It has power, running water, satellite TV, not to mention two fireplaces and all of this privacy.”

He gave him an unsure look but didn’t argue. He wasn’t a big fan of camping, but it was nice to see Aaron so happy.

Once the car was unloaded, Aaron left Spencer to get settled in while he followed his son out into the snow. Spencer debated for only a minute about just sharing with Aaron, but he didn’t want to assume. Aaron had rented a three-bedroom place instead of just two, maybe he didn’t want to confuse Jack over their relationship. Collecting bags, he hauled them to the third room and dumped them on the bed. The cabin had already been decorated with a tree and lights, non-perishable food had been ordered and delivered that afternoon. Once his things were put away, he headed back to the main room and watched the other two playing in the snow. Aaron looked so happy romping around tossing snow balls at the boy and intentionally throwing wide so he almost always missed his target.
Aaron glanced up at the window and saw Reid watching and waved. He knew the younger man wasn’t a giant fan of the snow, so he figured he’d give him time to settle in before they took the noise and excitement back to him. He would be the first to admit that being thrust into Jack twenty-four seven could be a bit overwhelming.

Jack had finally worn himself out running around inside and out and after a warm dinner, had been tucked snugly into bed. Arron returned to the living room and snuggled into Spencer’s side in the couch in front of the fire.

“I’m glad you came.”

“I’m glad I came too.”

“I saw you put your things in the third room.”

“I didn’t want to assume.”

Aaron nuzzled into his cheek. “I picked this cabin for the same reason. You’re welcome to sleep in my room though.”

Spencer pressed a kiss into his hair. “I’d love that.” He watched the fire crackle. “It’s so peaceful here. This is nice.” When the fire died down, they made sure it was out and quietly snuck away to bed.

The bedroom was warm enough that an extra blanket was enough to not require them to wear heavy pajamas. Tucked underneath, Aaron let his hands run down Spencer’s body, memorizing every inch. If he got nothing else this holiday, having Spencer in his bed for a week with no interruptions would be enough. Lazily he pressed kisses under Reid’s jaw, nipping and kissing along his ear and down to his collar bone. He felt every sigh, every breath Spencer made and he slipped under the covers and carefully carried on his attention along his ribs and breastbone, down to his navel and then kept going. He’d never taken it upon himself to initiate so much, but between the snow and cozy fire, Aaron was feeling bolder than usual.

Spencer was surprised by the gentle assault on his body. They had never discussed roles outside of play, up to now Spencer had simply always taken the lead in everything. He was eager to see what Aaron intended to do. Lips wrapped around his cock brought his attention back to the present and he drew in a deep breath. It was slow, hesitant, and gentle but it was amazing. Spencer relaxed his entire body into the mattress and let the sensations of Aaron petting and touching him take over. When he finally came it was like the soft roll of waves on the beach. Easing in a little more with each wave until the beach was overtaken by the water.

Aaron felt as Spencer came down from his orgasm, his body relaxing beneath him. Leaning back on his knees, he looked down at the younger genius spread on the mattress almost asleep. As his own eyes started to drift shut, he let one hand ghost up the underside of his own dick once. He could probably get himself off but he wasn’t desperate for it. Instead he rearranged his legs until he was tucked against Spencer’s side, head on his shoulder.

The morning of Christmas Eve, Spencer woke up extremely cold and all alone in the bed. Shivering, he dragged the blanket off the bed and kept it around him as he went in search for thick socks and the other occupants of the cabin.
Jack was bundled up on the floor in front of the fire, bowl of oatmeal in his lap. The fluffy blanket that was around him made him look like some sort of blonde snowman. Shivering over the stovetop, Aaron was dancing from foot to foot while trying to cook something on the gas stove.

“Why’s it so cold?” Spencer made his presence known.

“Oh! Good morning. I was sort of hoping you would stay in bed and keep it warm!” Aaron quickly crossed the room and pecked a kiss to his cheek before darting back to the stove. “Power went out sometime overnight. We have the fireplaces and the stove thankfully is gas. I left a message already with the company, hopefully I’ll hear back soon.”

“I wonder why it went out.” Spencer sat on the couch and drew his legs up, bundling the blanket around his body.

Aaron gestured to the window with a spatula. “Probably the feet of snow we got last night. Thick fluffy stuff, can’t even see the SUV.”

“Really?” Spencer strained to see out the window from his seat but didn’t make a move to get up. “So, we’re stuck inside?”

“For a while. Here.”

Spencer smiled at the stack of blueberry pancakes that appeared in his lap. “Thank you, you’re the best.” He gave Aaron a giant smile.

“I’m glad you think so.”

==

Aaron had popped out to the SUV to try and charge his phone for a little while, when he returned the two blanket snowmen that he’d left in the living room had become a single, two-headed, giggling snowman that didn’t take any notice of him. He listened as Spencer was telling his son an elaborate story about snowmen and the north pole. He crept into the kitchen to avoid disturbing them when he heard Jack’s happy voice turn serious.

“Spencer? Is Santa real?”

There was a pause and Aaron could picture the thoughtful look on the genius’s face. “What makes you ask that?”

“Donny in my class, he said Santa wasn’t real because his big brother told him so. He told me mommy and daddy were just lying to me and it made me cry.”

“He made you cry? When was this?” Aaron could hear the protectiveness creep into his voice.

“At school. The teacher took him away and told him I don’t have a mommy anymore and he had to say sorry to me. But the story we read said Santa comes down the chimney and where we live doesn’t have one and where you live doesn’t have one.”

“We have one here.”

“Yeah.” The boy was quiet. “Spencer?”

“Hmm?”

“Can you tell me about Santa?”
“Sure, Jack. But… Why me?” Aaron leaned in to hear the answer.

“Cause you know everything and sometimes Daddy tells me pretend answers because I think the real answers make him sad.”

His chest clenched. He hadn’t noticed that his son was aware when he skimmed over the truth. It hurt to think he son already didn’t trust him to be honest.

==

As the chilly afternoon wore on, Spencer noticed that Aaron seemed a bit withdrawn. His smiles were forced and he seemed to vanish into the next room whenever he and Jack were distracted. At first he thought maybe the single father was finishing up Christmas presents, but as far as he knew, everything was safely stored in the back of the SUV. Spencer finally cornered Aaron in the bedroom once he’d read Jack to sleep on the couch. “Hey, talk to me.”

Aaron glanced up and then away.

“I hate invoking the rules, but I will if I think it’s what’s best for you.”

“I heard you earlier today, before lunch. Jack knows I lie to him.”

Spencer tugged him to the bed and sat him down. “You don’t lie to him. You make necessary and age appropriate adjustments to the answers you give him, but you don’t lie.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“No.”

Aaron sighed and leaned forward, resting his cheek on Spencer’s stomach. “Thank you for coming. Even with the power out, this has been nice.”

Carding his fingers through Aaron’s short hair, Spencer soothed him. “How about we lay down too? I don’t have much real-world experience, but I’m under the impression we’ll be up quite late tonight and then very early tomorrow.” When the man in his arms nodded, he encouraged him to back up and lay in the middle of the bed. When hands started to roam over his body, Spencer stilled them. “Shh, sleep now.”

==

Presents were stacked under the tree; the room was dark except for the twinkling of the multi-colored lights thanks to the restored power and the fire that had nearly burned itself out. As Aaron lay curled in Spencer’s arms on the rug in front of the fire, the only sound in the room was the ticking of the kitchen clock. Turning his head, Aaron pressed a wet kiss against the firm spot of Spencer’s adam’s apple. “Please make love to me.”

The request surprised him. Aaron had asked before, had even begged at times, but he’d always said no, he didn’t think the older man was ready. Spencer knew it had always been about Aaron proving he wasn’t damaged, but this… There was something else burning in his eyes as he asked. “Okay. Let’s go to bed.” He started to push up.

“No. Here. Please?”

Finding himself unable to say no, Spencer nodded. “I’ll be right back.” He stood up and went to the bedroom. He returned with a towel and a new bottle of lube. “The heat hasn’t quite taken the chill
away, so only take off your pants.” As Aaron shifted to do so, Spencer laid out the towel over the rug to protect it. “Lay on your back.” He whispered.

A small part of Aaron hadn’t expected Spencer to agree, he’d expected him to refuse like every time before. He was nervous but didn’t want it to show. When hands started to fondle his cock and balls, he sucked in a breath before forcing his body to relax. He let his eyes slide shut as those hands pulled away for just a moment before returning, coated in warm slick lube. They massaged his perineum and then down to coat his hole. As pressure was applied to his entrance, he exhaled and pulled his knees up and apart. This was it. Now was not the time to allow fear or panic to take over. Opening his eyes back up, Aaron watched as Spencer nestled in close, lifting Aaron’s hips onto his legs, before he slicked his own length up with a very generous amount of lube. He watched in awe as that long, slender cock was lined up and then the pressure started and he forced himself to relax.

It was slow and there were moments of burning as muscles stretched, but he wanted this so bad. Aaron hooked his heels around Spencer’s back and pulled him closer until he was fully seated inside his ass.

“Are you okay?” Spencer watched the man spread out before him for any signs of distress.

“I’m good, wonderful.” He stared up into his eyes to show he was serious. “Please take me.”

Pitching forward to get just the right angle so he didn’t hurt Aaron before they both finished, Spencer began to stroke in and out.

As the embers died down to nothing and the room dimmed to just the lights of the tree, Aaron broke the silence. “I’m so close.”

Spencer took his cock in hand and stroked it as he chased his own orgasm. The first flutterings of Aaron’s walls sent him tumbling over the edge with the other man following right behind. Panting into the silence, Spencer carefully tipped sideways, not yet pulling out, curling around Aaron as they both came down from their highs. They would need to wash up soon, but right now, curled together like this, Spencer was pretty sure this was as close to heaven as someone could get.

==

Aaron woke up contented. He felt a peace about him that he hadn’t felt in a very long time. Years maybe. The bed was empty but there was a note on the pillow beside him.

*Merry Christmas! Jack crept in very early but I stopped him before he jumped onto the bed. We are going to go on a little adventure and will be back shortly so he gives you time to wake up. You may be a little sore, so go slow today. I’ll take care of you. Spencer*

Hotch read over the note twice more. Something about the way Spencer cared for Jack, how he cared *about* him, it made his heart swell. He wasn’t sure, but he had a feeling he could come to love the younger genius if he wasn’t careful.

Climbing out of bed, he got almost upright before the ache hit him. He’d never given much thought to how sore he would be after his first real time. After ‘the incident’ he’d been sore everywhere and had assumed it had just been due to the brutality of the attack. Limping to the bathroom, he decided that it was totally worth it.

==

Spencer returned to the cabin with Jack in tow, smiling when he saw Aaron standing by the coffee
“Merry Christmas!”

Jack flung himself, still snowy and wet, at his dad. “Daddy! Santa Came!”

“I know!” Aaron bent down to start unbundling his son. “I thought maybe he took you back to the north pole with him and I was going to have to unwrap all these presents myself!”

“No! Can I unwrap some now?” He was bouncing up and down.

“One. Then you have to wait for the grown-ups to come sit on the couch.”

“But you take forever!” Jack groaned out the words, already frustrated. “Hurry up!”

Laughing, Aaron watched his son run off before being pulled up and into a kiss. “Hi.” He whispered.

Spencer wrapped his arms around him. “How are you this morning?”

“Good. I just feel…happy. That doesn’t feel like the right word somehow. I just want to snuggle in close and be together.”

==

For the past hour or so, each time Jack had squealed with delight, Aaron had seen Spencer wince out of the corner of his eye. Now the younger man had squirreled away somewhere out of the main room where all the noise was. After a minute of searching, Aaron found him in the third bedroom in the dark. “Spencer?” He got silence as a reply. Carefully moving to the bed, he looked down at the man curled tightly into familiar position. He brushed hair back and got a whimper.

“Migraine?”

“Yeah. Sorry.”

“It’s okay. Came on very sudden.” He sat on the bed.

“Started just before dinner last night.”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

“We had things to do and I was okay.”

“How can I help?” Aaron looked around the room for some idea of what to do.

“Just…I’m okay. Go be with Jack. Don’t let him worry.”

Pressing a kiss against his temple, Aaron stood back up. “Okay, I’ll give you an hour and then I’ll be back. Just call out if you need me for anything.”

Spencer nodded into the darkness.

After Jack was tucked into bed later that evening, Aaron eased into the bed behind Spencer, tugging him close. “How are you feeling?”

Spencer hummed and leaned into the touch. “A little less like my head is in a vice.”

“I don’t think it’s normal to have had two of these in the span you’ve had them.” He gently combed back Spencer’s hair with his fingers.
“Three.”

“What?”

“This is the third. There was one while you took time off to be with Jack.” Warm tears burned his
eyes and he couldn’t stop them from slipping down his temple. “It hurts.”

“I know. Just relax and let me do the worrying for tonight. You’ll feel better in the morning, you’ll
see.”
This was the second doctor he was seeing about the migraines. Three had become five and then eight and then he felt like he was going days with blinding pain that was getting difficult to hide. He did his best when he was with Aaron and Jack to disguise it, but the look of worry that seemed to take a permanent place on the older man’s face when he looked his way told him he was failing.

Hallucinations. He really didn’t need those on top of everything else. That the doctors were suggesting the pain was caused by his own mind made him shudder. He didn’t want to end up like his mother, as much as he loved her. Spencer knew that no matter what personal toll it took on him, if something like that happened, Aaron would not just walk away from him.

A handful of aspirin and he was stumbling into the conference room, disappointed to discover that not only did the others notice his lateness, they clearly also noticed something was wrong. He tried to brush them off and focus on the case, but he could feel their eyes on him throughout the briefing.

==

Aaron watched him across the table. Squinting against the bright lights, rocking in his chair. He suspected Reid was rocking to try and ease the pain he would lie about having. The flight to Miami would be busy, their unsub was accelerating rapidly, but he’d hoped to get a chance to talk to him. As the team split up, Spencer managed to slip out before he’d noticed. Aaron frowned at the empty chair.

On the plane, Hotch watched his lover curl up in the darkest corner, blinds pulled down. His entire body screamed to be left alone. Chewing his lip, he started to move down to talk to him but was sidetracked by the others discussing the case.

==

Following Morgan upstairs and into the bedroom, Hotch’s worry was reaching critical mass. He’d known something was wrong and he should have done something, pulled him from the case, forcing him to see a doctor. But he hadn’t. He’d simply sat back and left him alone. Now he was standing in an unoccupied bedroom staring at a discarded flack vest. He was relieved when Morgan recognized the house in the photo and they had a goal for getting Reid back. Again.

As they ran across the street, Aaron decided that he just might help Morgan with that threat to glue their youngest member to a desk somewhere.

Even in the dim space he could see Spencer wincing against the light. Having enough he finally had to ask. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah, Oh, I pretended to have a headache.” He couldn’t meet Aaron’s eyes.

“Pretended.” He couldn’t’ believe Reid was expecting him to buy that after his erratic behavior the past couple days.

“Yeah, pretended.” He edged past both Hotch and Rossi and headed outside.

==

As they were leaving the office, Aaron managed to finally catch Spencer and guided him to his car.
“I’ll drive you home.”

“I’m okay, really.”

“It’s dark out and you have those on.” He gestured to the sunglasses. “You’re having another migraine. Or is it still?”

“Huh?”

“How long have you had it?”

“Umm… maybe four days?”

Aaron sighed and put the car into gear. He couldn’t’ believe Spencer had been insistent on suffering in silence about this.

They made it to Hotch’s apartment in silence. Aaron half helped, half dragged Spencer to the bedroom before returning to greet Jack and Jessica.

“Is he okay?” Jess asked.

“He has a migraine. He says he’s fine, but I’m worried.” Aaron chewed on the corner of his lip. “He’s admitted to having it for the past four days.”

“That was before you guys left.” She gasped.

“I know. He’s been…erratic. I’m not really sure what to do for him.”

“If you need to be focused in him, I’ll take Jack back to my place tonight.”

“Jessica, I can’t ask that of you. We’ll be okay.”

“No. He’s in pain, let me take Jack and you call me if you need anything.” She insisted.

Sighing, Aaron nodded. “Okay.”

==

He’d managed to make the bedroom pitch black. He’d covered the blinds and curtains with another blanket to totally block out even the slightest amount of light. He’d removed anything that made any kind of noise all of the way down to the ticking of watches. Now Aaron was sitting on the bed, silently stroking Spencer’s scalp to try and relax him. Neither had said a word in hours.

Spencer willed his body to remain very still. In the darkness, he could feel what he thought was Aaron asleep at his back. His head felt like it was being split in two. On the jet to and from the case, the pain had left him feeling airsick from the normal motion, but on the ground, it had gone away. Now, it the total darkness where he could get no cues of movement, the sick feeling was back again. He wanted to scream for someone to stop the boat and let him off. Hands pressed flat into the covers, Spencer tried to open his eyes but slammed them back shut. One side of his head throbbed as if his brain was going to pulse out of his skull. The mental image of that did nothing for his stomach. Flinging one hand out, he connected with the fabric of a shirt and swatted until the body inside it shifted.

“Spencer?” A voice asked from the darkness.

“M gonna be sick.” He breathed in through his nose to try and quell the feeling. “Help me. I’m
gonna be sick.” Strong arms were pulling him upright like he was a small child or a rag doll and Spencer felt himself being almost carried into the next room. The jostling movement didn’t help at all and he clamped one hand over his mouth to try and stop the inevitable. The feel of carpet still under his feet told him it was all in vain as the last meal he’d managed to choke down came back up. Tears sprung to his eyes. He couldn’t believe that had just happened. “M so sorry.” Aaron silently gave him a minute before carefully leaning over and flipping on the light.

“Shh, let’s get you cleaned up.” Avoiding the mess, Aaron led him to the bathroom. “Stay here. I’ll clean up.”

It felt like hours before Aaron returned. With the lights on, the older man was a series of odd halos of light, doubled and then doubled again, watery and making choppy movements. He saw Hotch’s mouth move to ask him something but he couldn’t work out what it was. Aaron stared at him a minute before frowning and leaving again. He just wanted it all to stop. He wished Aaron had just taken him to his own place so he could be miserable alone.

Aaron was certain Garcia only agreed to break the rules of her own code of morals when it came to the privacy of the team because she too was worried about her neighbor and friend. Putting aside his own concerns on that front, he tucked the contact details into his pocket and returned to the bathroom to scoop Spencer up. “Come on, I’m taking you to the hospital.”

“Hmm?”

“I’m driving you to the hospital.” He looped one arm around his shoulders. “Just lean on me and keep your eyes closed if you need to, I’ll guide you.”

==

The room was bright. Too bright. And white. There was a horrible humming sound that overwhelmed everything. He could hear himself breathing, the sound was raspy and dry like he’d been crying hard for a long time. He had no idea where he was. Squeezing his eyes shut to block out some of the light, Spencer tried to work out what had happened. Where he was. The last thing he could recall was being on a case. Had he been abducted again? Drugged? If that was the case, Morgan was going to be so pissed.

Simply thinking made the pain worse. He needed to not think. Was that even possible? He tried to try at any rate.

Somewhere over his face suddenly floated the image of Hotch. If he’d been taken again, Hotch was going to be pissed too. Pissed and scared. He hoped he was found alive, then maybe someone could help with the pain and the buzzing. “I’m so sorry, Hotch.” A lump caught in Spencer’s throat. Maybe if he told his imagination, maybe it could pass the message on. “I’m so sorry I never told you.” He could almost hear Aaron’s voice asking him questions, wanting to know what he was talking about. “I should have told you I loved you, but now… Now you’ll never know.” A warm feeling washed over him and he slipped into blackness.

Aaron stared down as Spencer went limp in the bed, the medicine the doctor had ordered kicking in. He’d said he loved him. Spencer had clearly thought he’d been talking to a hallucination of some sort, a hallucination of him, but he’d said he loved him. Settling into a chair by the bed, Aaron wondered about those words. He’d thought them, but he’d not said them. Once Spencer was better, he promised himself, he’d make sure he knew.

==
Spencer woke up slowly, blinking at his surroundings. He was in a hospital room, by the looks of it, maybe an emergency exam room. Sitting up, he spotted Aaron curled tightly into a hard plastic chair and he wondered what time it was. “Hotch?”

Aaron twitched and slowly woke, unfolding as he tried to work out the kinks and painful knots. He saw Spencer wide awake and smiled. “How do you feel?”

“I’m…okay. I feel almost a little hung over, which is odd, but.” He shrugged. “What happened?”

“You’d had a migraine for days you said. I brought you home and took care of you. When you got sick and started acting altered, I asked Garcia to dig for your medical details and brought you to the hospital.”

“Oh.” He wondered what else Garcia found. “How long have we been here?”

Hotch checked his watch. “Just over six hours.” He finally stood and moved to the bed, sitting on the edge so he could reach out and brush hair out of Spencer’s face. “I was worried. You’ve been babbling, I think maybe you were hallucinating for a while before the medicine kicked in.”

“Hallucinating?” He tried to recall what had happened.

“You were apologizing. Something about staying put from now on. I don’t know if you thought you had been taken again or what. And maybe you were talking to your mom.” He swallowed against the lie. He knew that Spencer had been talking to his brain’s version of him, but he didn’t know the rest of the context. “I think you were telling her you loved her.”

It all came back to him now. “It wasn’t my mom.”

“What?”

He blushed. “I wasn’t saying it to her. I was saying it to you. That I loved you.”

“Oh.” Aaron looked away. “I know you were suffering.”

“Aaron.” He cut him off and waited for him to look up. “I love you. Pain or no pain, I love you.”

Aaron didn’t know what to say. He’d never imagined that anyone else, especially Spencer, would ever say that to him. He was a mess, had been a mess for years. His mind whirled with all of the ways he could supremely screw this up. Hands cupping his cheeks made him blink and look up into hazel eyes.

“Aaron?” Spencer gave him a soft smile.

“I love you too.” He gasped out the words, like saying them took all of the breath he had. The room started to swim and everything took on a soft, fuzzy aspect.

Spencer sifted and held tight around his shoulders, grounding him with a heavy touch. “Hey, deep breaths. Slow, deep breaths.” He continued until he felt Aaron calm down. “I’m no expert, but I don’t think telling someone you love them should cause a panic attack.” He tried to smile at his slight joke.

“Oh god.” He buried his face in his hands. “I mess everything up. I can’t even do this right.” Done berating himself, he changed gears and lunged forward, catching Spencer’s mouth with his own, tumbling them both back against the pillows. If he couldn’t say it without screwing it up, he could show him instead. When a tongue traced along his lip, he opened and allowed Spencer in. He
didn’t want to think about a world without Spencer as a major part of it. He wanted Spencer with him forever. Adjusting his legs so he was lying flat over the other man, Aaron let one hand trace down his side while the other supported his weight.

The sound of someone clearing their throat made both men pull back and then jump apart when they realized a nurse was in the doorway.

“Just so you know, my patient here is still hooked up to a monitor that we can see at the desk and this door has a window. If you feel up to business like that, I guess it’s time to write your discharge paperwork and get you out of here Mister Reid.” She managed to hide the smirk until she was out of the room.

Falling back into Spencer’s arms, Aaron was blushing red. “I can’t believe that just happened.”

“Well, at least she stopped us before we went further. Come on, let’s go home and go further.” Reid pressed a kiss to Aaron’s lips and worked on getting redressed.
Spencer looked up from the table where he and Jack were working when Aaron stepped into his apartment. “Hey, you’re back! How was the meeting?”

Aaron sighed and dropped his bag by the couch. “Strauss was…Strauss. What are you guys doing?”

“Learning binary.” Spencer held up the strings of beads that matched sheets of papers with colored in squares.

“Isn’t that a bit advanced?” He kissed the top of Jack’s head, the boy too engrossed to greet his father. He wondered how much a five-year-old could understand of such an advanced subject.

“But really. It’s essentially a foreign language and he’s the perfect age for learning a new language. And anyway, I was sort of banking on his having about the same intelligence as you.” Spencer shrugged.

“As me?” He took another seat at the table.

Spencer blushed. “Apparently when Pen was updating some information in records, she had to do some updating in your general file as well and there were some test scores there. You had listed your Mensa status in the application process for the Academy.”

Aaron was stunned. He’d taken that test under advisement of one of his law professors but aside from going through the steps to gain admission, he’d never really looked into if such status would ever help him. He always figured it would make people assume he was some sort of genius that he really wasn’t.

“She only told me because she was a little jealous.” He’d put his beads down now and was watching Hotch for some sort of signal of what was going through his mind. “It took half a pint of ice cream to figure out you beat her out by a few points.”

“I’d forgotten all about that.” He watched his son busily add black and white beads to a string. “What are you making there, Jack?”

“My name. See?” He held it up. “These beads make J and these make the A. Spence says this is how Miss Garcia’s computers talk to each other and stuff but he knows all of the letters in his head.” Amazement laced his voice.

“Is it fun?”

“Yeah. I want to do something bigger. Maybe I could make you one, Daddy?”

“You want to make me one?”

“Uh huh. It’s easy, I can teach you.” Jack handed over a length of string as Spencer gave Aaron a raised eyebrow as if to say, see.

Aaron couldn’t help but just stare back, enjoying the happiness.

==

Looking over the information as Garcia presented it to him, Hotch couldn’t help but see Jack in the
boy in the picture. He could see why the local police were asking for their help. The BAU was known for being able to interview people in unusual cases and while the locals probably could handle the majority of the case on their own, speaking with someone like Sammy took a special skill set that many simply didn’t have.

==

Walking into the house and seeing the bloodstains, Hotch wondered if the day would ever come where he didn’t automatically have that moment of dread as he walked in. Keeping his focus on Morgan, he tried to block out the comparisons, as superficial as they were, that his brain was trying to make. He let Derek lead the process of looking over the house. A task the younger man had come to excel at since they’d unofficially started to split the workload.

Watching Morgan talk with the deputy, he wondered if maybe they shouldn’t sit down sometime and outline something a bit more concrete. Morgan definitely should be getting some sort of acknowledgement for the extra work he was doing. His own office just wasn’t enough.

Dave watched Reid approach Sammy, watched how his body relaxed to appear even less threatening. Standing behind their youngest team member, he listened as Spencer spoke gently, curling into himself to appear smaller as he did. It was something he knew Aaron had always done when needing to talk to people who might see him as threatening. Victims, scared family, or witnesses, often women or children, the same position of shoulders curled in, elbows drawn together in his lap.

==

Hotch stared through the window into the room where Sammy was sitting. He’d slipped into the room just long enough to show Sammy the wooden train he’d found in the boy’s bedroom. That the boy hadn’t shown any signs of distress at his presence he counted as a win. Placing the train on the cushion, he’d returned to join Morgan in the adjoining room. Dave and Reid weren’t back from the school yet so he and Morgan were waiting, looking over the pictures and paperwork they had. Something in the way the boy held his crayons as he drew, the twitches and rocking as he waited for something familiar, it made his chest ache as he imagined it was Jack.

“If they’re alive still, his parents must be worried sick about what’s happened to him.” Morgan stopped just behind Hotch’s shoulder.

“Could you blame them? He’s trapped inside himself, he can’t do the same things as other boys his age, can’t communicate.” Hotch worked his jaw side to side. “He needs us to find them.”

Morgan nodded and then turned as the rest of the team arrived. “Anything?” He stepped forward and to the side slightly, blocking his friend from view as he saw a hand come up to surreptitiously wipe at his eyes before Hotch turned around.

==

Dave sat and quietly watched Sammy draw. He’d always wanted children but it’d never been in the cards for him. When the officer that had been watching the room had needed to go, he’d jumped at the chance to look after him. Without intruding on Sammy’s space, he’d brought over a bottle of water and a snack, hoping that if Sammy was hungry, he would eat.

He’d caught Hotch watching through the window several times, drawn in either out of concern for the boy’s fragile state or out of curiosity, or perhaps both. He knew Aaron had a paternal side more than a mile wide and a child in distress would worry him into madness.
The next time Aaron appeared in the doorway in silence, Dave stood and walked to him.

“How is he?”

“Calm now. He alternated between coloring those shapes and pushing the train back and forth.”

“What happens…” His breath caught. “What if we’re too late?”

Dave turned fully to his friend and looked him over. “It’s not like you to ask that.”

“I…”

“Hey.” Dave gripped Aaron’s arm. “It’ll be fine. Sammy will be okay. Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

Hotch nodded. “Okay.” He started to walk away.

“And, Aaron?” He waited for Hotch to turn back around. “Were the matching jackets planned or an accident?”

He frowned at his friend and turned back around, walking away while ignoring Dave’s chuckling.

==

Dave ambled to the back of the plane, checking that everyone else was asleep as he went. There was one person still awake in the very last seat. Sitting down across from where Aaron was staring out the window, head resting against the frame, he studied his friend. “Interesting case.”

“Yeah.”

“We managed to get one parent back home to Sammy.”

“I know.”

“What’s eating you?”

“I can’t imagine if Jack never looked at me, never hugged me or talked to me. Is it wrong that I’m thankful he can do that? That he isn’t like Sammy?” Aaron met Dave’s eyes.

“No. I don’t think so.” He watched his friend turn back toward the night sky. “I was surprised Reid was so good with him. Something in him just connected, like he sensed a kindred spirit. You should have seen him at the house on the piano. Reid said he’d never played before, that it was all math really but to see him watch Sammy play through the bit of music a few times and then copy it. Makes you wonder.”

“Wonder what?” He asked absently.

“Haven’t you ever wondered? About Spencer?”

Aaron’s eyes slid away from the window, hesitating a split second on Dave before seeking out Spencer in the darkness. “I used to. Never asked.” He thought back to the Spencer that had started in the unit, the one that twitched and stuttered around everyone. The one that had been afraid of his own shadow. Somewhere along the way that Spencer had left and had been replaced with a man that was more sure of himself, who could speak in front of groups and manage witnesses and unsub in equal measure.
“Never needed to?”

“Hmm?” He looked back to his friend. Dave never knew the Spencer he first knew. “You should have known him before. He’d already changed a lot before you came back and now… Now he’s…” He chewed his lip.

Dave leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “I know he was very young and I know Jason, as good as he was as a profiler, his people skills were always a little, ehh.” He wiggled his open hand in the air. “I would be willing to bet he found Reid in some library somewhere and dragged him back here kicking and crying and expected him to spit out information with a snap of the fingers.”

Aaron couldn’t help the smirk. “Close. It was a university if I recall, though I suppose it still could have been the library. And, yeah, I think he saw him as a living computer.”

“That’s who Jason was.” Dave watched his friend nod. “But that’s not who you were. Or are now. You see people as people. Unique, valuable. He grew on you.”

“Somewhere along the way I stopped being able to imagine a world without him. His habits and impulses were never a factor.” He let his head fall back. “I think I’m all in, Dave.”

“I think you’ve been all in a lot longer than you know.”

He chewed his bottom lip again, thinking.

==

Pressing a kiss to Jack’s head in the dark, Aaron stayed knelt by the bed and just watched him sleep. He felt like he missed so much of his son’s life because of his job and every day he wondered if it was fair to Jack. But he was thankful that Jack could hug and kiss him, tell him how much he loved him. He tried to imagine a world where Jack couldn’t so those things, he wondered if his job would make that Jack not accept him as part of his life at all. There would have been no returning to the unit after Haley died, even with Jessica’s help and the help of the team. He would have had to take retirement. Haley probably would have resented him and his job even more, maybe even severed his rights all together.

Feeling tears prick his eyes, Aaron pushed himself up and climbed onto the small bed behind his son, snuggling him as he fell asleep.

==

They’d been home two days, Spencer was sitting on Hotch’s floor with Jack at his hip, showing him the keyboard he’d purchased. At the table, Aaron quietly watched them playing and giggling as large thin hands covered tiny ones, showing him how to listen to the notes as they were played. He hadn’t been able to shake the funk he’d gotten himself in during the last case and was withdrawn so his mood didn’t affect the pair.

Seeming to sense Hotch watching, Spencer turned and looked up at him before whispering in Jack’s ear, sending the boy running happily to his room. Returning his focus to the older man, Spencer pushed up onto his knees and knee-walked the short distance across the room until he was nestled between Aaron’s legs. Reaching up, he framed Aaron’s face with his hands and spoke softly. “Talk to me Aaron.”

“I can’t…I don’t…I’m not sure what it is.”
Spencer gave him a gentle smile. “Don’t worry about knowing what’s wrong. Just talk.”

Aaron nodded. “I keep seeing Jack like Sammy. Dave asked me if I’d ever…”

“Ever what?”

“He talked about watching you with Sammy and said it’s made him wonder.”

“About me?” Spencer was surprised. He’d never tried to hide anything about himself and no one had ever asked him.

He nodded again. “He asked if I’d ever wondered about you.”

Spencer cocked his head to the side and waited, he knew Aaron would talk when he was ready.

“I was sure Jason was an idiot. All I could see were your…quirks.”

“Stims.”

“Hmm?”

“The quirks, they’re called stims. Self-stimulating behaviors.”

“Oh.” Aaron let his eyes drop to their now joined hands.

“I would have understood if you’d asked. I also understand why you didn’t. You saw me like you see everyone on the team. Unique, an individual. And you protected the parts you thought needed protecting.”

He blushed a bit. He’d never known that Spencer knew about that. “I see you every day with Jack and I see you with Henry. Then I saw you with Sammy and…” He glanced up. “Did you ever want children of your own?”

“No.” He was confident in that. He’d never wanted to create offspring that could inherit the seemingly endless array of issues his genetics seemed to possess. “Or. Not my own genetically. I’ve dreamed of adopting a child…or two. Maybe a child a bit older who’d been told they were out of chances. Then you walked into my life with a new born baby in a carrier and fell asleep on my couch.” The corners of his mouth lifted slightly at the memory. “And you kept coming back. And a tiny part of me dreamed, pretended that in some alternate universe, some version of him was mine as well.”

Overwhelmed, Aaron shook off the hands holding his and pulled Spencer’s face in and kissed him. He couldn’t hold back the insistence as he fought to taste and feel as much of the other man as he could. Something brushing his cheek made him pull back, confused. He felt it again and reached up to wipe it away only to discover they were tears. His own tears. “I…” His breath caught for a moment as his heart seemed to swell. “I love you. So much.”

“I love you too. You and Jack.”
Garcia pointing out the error in the spreadsheet printout, pointing out that there was a name removed, it raised a red flag. Spencer, being who he always was, of course he would remember something he’d overheard one of them say. He should have known that everything Reid heard them say, he’d be able to recall perfectly.

Finding the ringing phone in the desk drawer, his own face smiling up from the screen as he waited on a call that would never connect, made his stomach plummet. Instead of turning to him when she realized she was being hunted by a ghost from her past, Emily had run. Fled. To protect all of them. One part of him wanted to be angry, furious with her for not letting them help but the other part, the part who’d had his own ghost hunting him and his family, understood.

Having pushed the team into action gathering and profiling the most recent information, he took a few minutes and shut himself into his office. Sitting behind his desk, he felt his body tremble. Nerves, fear, he wasn’t sure. Squeezing his eyes shut, Hotch breathed in through his nose and held it, trying to find some sort of calm and make it wash over him. When his mind started to feel fuzzy and his lungs burned, he exhaled in a rush, curling one arm around his chest. He hadn’t felt like this is ages. Years maybe. Knowing Emily was out there, alone, returning to her spy ways that they didn’t know, couldn’t predict, it made him feel sick.

Fumbling for his own phone from his jacket pocket, he pressed a speed dial number he hadn’t used in a long time.

The call connected with a gentle. “Hotch? How are you?”

He could feel his throat closing up, she needed to understand how bad this was. “Something’s happened. Emily’s on the run, chasing down an UNSUB on her own and he’s hunting her. I…” He choked on the words. “I need your help.”

“I’m on my way.” JJ disconnected the line and stared at her phone a moment. Something had sounded off about Hotch, more than usual. She hadn’t talked to him in ages, keeping closer contact with others on the team. Gathering her things, she pressed another button on her phone and waited for the call to connect.

==

Spencer was turning circles in the conference room, sorting and resorting as he read over the data. A person standing in his periphery made his head turn, his body following it around comically. “Something happen?” He took in Rossi’s worried look.

“You know I wouldn’t mention something here if it wasn’t necessary.” Dave watched as the younger man was already tossing aside everything in his hands and bolting out the door that led around the catwalk before he could continue. He didn’t follow, Spencer would handle whatever was happening. Instead he picked up the pages he’d tossed down and did his best to channel his own inner Reid.

==

Spencer tried the knob only to find it locked. The blinds were drawn so he couldn’t see the person inside. Knocking on the door, he tried. “Hotch? It’s me, Reid.” Tilting his head toward the door, he could hear someone moving somewhere on the other side. Scanning the bullpen, he couldn’t see
anyone close enough to overhear him. “Please, Aaron.”

“I just need a few minutes.” The voice was rough, pinched, but sounded like it was just the other side of the heavy wood.

“I know. But I think you need to let me in and I think you know it too.” When the lock clicked, Spencer carefully turned the handle and let himself in, relocking it behind him. Aaron was pacing along the windows that overlooked the base, hair askew and eyes unfocused. Spencer didn’t try to step into his path. “I know she should have come to us, but she’s smart and she knows we’ll come after her. She knows all of his moves better than anyone else and if he’s hunting her, he’s going to be too busy trying to figure out where she’d go underground to also try to come after all of us. As much as we all hate it, her going rouge might actually help us.”

Hotch finally stopped and face him, shadowed from the light coming in through the windows behind him. “You asked me one time if I ever felt like a case was just going to end badly."

“I remember.” Spencer nodded. How could he forget.

“This is the one.” The trembling, overwhelmed feeling suddenly took over his whole body and he had to sit. Hotch tried to walk to the couch, but his legs wouldn’t cooperate so instead he sank to the floor and found himself wrapped in long arms. “I don’t know what’s…” His voice broke.

“I think you’re having an anxiety attack. Just relax, focus on calming your breathing down. I’m right here with you.”

==

“Sir!”

Hotch slowed his trek up the hall to wait for Garcia to rush to catch up.

“I left messages on every one of the numbers I’ve ever had in the system for Emily. If she’s gets one of the numbers, at least she knows we’re tracking her to help.” Her eyes were teary.

Giving her a sad smile, Hotch squeezed her shoulder. “Thank you. If there’s one person who could reach out right now and really make her feel that we’re with her, it’s you, Garcia.” Dropping his hand, he changed topics. “I’m headed to the airstrip now, are you ready?”

“Yes. I have everything I need.”

“Good, come on. I’ll drive.”

==

Watching Aaron head down the hall, away from the rest of them, to talk to Easter, Spencer couldn’t help but feel a little sorry for the Brit. There was no way the man knew what was coming.

==

He’d listened to Morgan’s shouts echoing over their coms and through the building. The sense of dread that had filled him ever since they’d turned around to discover Emily gone was pulsing through his system with every heartbeat, every thundering step as he ran to their side. The man they were after was gone, the numbers of his supporters significantly decreased, but at a cost. A price. He slipped on loose dirt on the warehouse floor as he stopped in the doorway. Morgan was attempting to give Prentiss CPR around the large wooden stake jutting out of her stomach. Her face
was lax, arms and legs limp on the floor in a way she’d never allowed herself before, even asleep. He knew before Morgan’s tear streaked face turned up to him that she was gone.

When Derek bolted from the room, angry and on the hunt for revenge, Aaron didn’t stop him. A small part of him hoped the man succeeded in his goal. Someone needed to pay for cutting a member of their group down.

==

Emily was alive. Just. Watching the team fall apart had been utter hell. He’d finally excused himself, knowing the others would figure he wanted a moment alone to gather himself, and wound through the hospital halls until he found the right room. An officer posted at the door frowned at him in silence until he produced his badge. Stepping in and closing the door, Hotch stared at the bed in dismay. He’d failed. Emily Prentiss was laying under a white blanket, tube down her throat and IV’s in her arm. The doctor said she would recover in time, so long as no infection set in. For now, she was sedated and unaware of the choices that had been made for her. If this plan failed, she was going to be so pissed. When it felt like the room was starting to shrink, he stepped forward and took the one hand that was on top of the covers, “I’m sorry Emily. I promise I’ll fix this.”

==

When Hotch finally tumbled through the door, it was well past dinner time. Again. He’d been caught up in the plan since JJ had announced Emily’s death the night before and had had little time to eat or even sit down. He wasn’t even sure if he was where he was supposed to be for the evening.

“You’re here.” A voice wavered from a doorway.

He looked up at the man wrapped in a heavy blanket and leaning against the wall. “Am I supposed to be?”

Reid shrugged. “We didn’t have plans either way. I’m not really up for anything.”

“I’m- That’s not why I’m here. I haven’t been home since… and I just- I just needed to be near you.” He was suddenly worried he’d be turned away. “Is it okay?”

“If you’re here? Yeah. Sit,” he waved his hand, “I’ll make tea.”

Aaron sank into a chair at the table and stared blankly into the half-light. His decision had taken on a life of its own once he and JJ had started making calls. The State Department had agreed to the cover and had agreed to sending Emily out of the country once she was able to travel. Then they had put their foot down on something that had broken Aaron in two. He was told that under no circumstances whatsoever could he tell anyone that Emily was alive. A mug gently being placed in front of him made him blink and mumble in thanks but he didn’t pick it up.

Spencer hurt. He’d never really imagined one of their team dying in the line of duty. Sure, it was a very real possibility every time they walked out the door, but he’d never actually imagined it. Even when he himself had been abducted and held, some part of him, a very tiny part, believed he would live despite the odds. It’s what they did. Survived. JJ walking out and telling them that Emily didn’t make it through surgery had crushed him. He’d barely registered Aaron withdrawing, walking away from where the rest of the team was turning to one another.

At some point though he’d realized the other man had vanished, no one knew where he’d gone. And now, hours later, he was sitting in his kitchen looking lost and alone. Reaching across the
table, Spencer nudged the mug. “Drink, Aaron.”

Hotch nodded but didn’t move to pick up the cup.

Sighing, Spencer stood again, dragging his blanket with him. “Make sure you lock up.” When he didn’t get a response, he just nodded and went to his room, shutting the door behind him.

The silence of the room stretched out until a finger to the mug told Aaron his tea had gone cold. Blinking he looked around and realized that Spencer had go to sleep at some point so he quietly stood and let himself out, making sure the door was locked.

It seemed to take an excessive amount of time, he’d made two wrong turns on the way, but Aaron managed to get himself home in one piece. Dumping his things on the table, he dug through the cabinet until he found the scotch that was kept out of Jack’s reach and poured a glass, bringing the bottle with him back to the couch. He had no idea what time it was now, but it didn’t really matter. The team had tomorrow off. And the next day. He was tasked with planning Emily’s funeral. A funeral he didn’t want to plan. A funeral that was even more his fault than the last one.

==

Dave carefully walked down the aisle of the church, his shoes echoing in the empty space. He watched his long-time friend Jimmy at the front, tending to whatever a priest tended to at this early hour. The shadows together with his black clerical shirt and pants gave him a rather unsettling effect of a disembodied head floating at the far end of the room.

“Davie!” Jimmy put down what he was doing and walked up the aisle, meeting Rossi almost halfway. “To what do I owe a visit at this hour by you?”

Dave gestured to a pew, silently asking if they could sit and waited for the priest to settle beside him. “Do you remember a few years ago when I came to you about a member of my team and exorcisms?”

Jimmy thought over their conversations, Dave came to him often about his closest friends. “I do. Has something else happened?”

He opened his mouth to speak but his voice caught a moment. To say it out loud, especially to a priest, would make it real in a way that it wasn’t yet. “She died today. Or… yesterday now. The sun will rise today on a world without Emily Prentiss in it for the first time.”

Settling a hand on his friend’s shoulder, Jimmy was silent. Part of his job involved comforting the dying and the grieving after a loss. The frequency with which he found himself sitting in this sort of position did not make the task easier but it had honed within him some skills that helped. “Was she at least among family, among friends?”

Dave shook his head. “She knew we were there somewhere. Morgan, Derek, he got to her before she faded away and she spoke to him so she knew he was there, but the rest of us got to her too late.”

“But she knew Morgan?” He paused for confirmation on the name. “Wasn’t alone?”

“I believe she did.”

“Well, I know it seems the wrong sort of time, but I’ll ask. What is happening with her funeral? Is her family handling it?”
“I don’t know. I think she only has her mother now.”

“Find out and if anyone needs my services, don’t hesitate to call.” He waited for a nod. “Is that all?”

“I think for now.” He watched his friend rise. “Mind if I just sit a while?”

“Take all the time you need.”

“Thanks.”

==

Jessica let she and Jack into the apartment and smiled as her nephew squealed at the sight of his
dad on the couch, running in and flinging his small body right onto the man. She caught the brief
moment of startled surprise, Aaron must have been asleep, before he groaned and shoved his son
aside, staggering to the kitchen in time to retch in the sink. Jack looked to her with wide eyes
asking if his daddy was sick. Approaching the boy, Jessica finally saw the empty bottle and glass.
“I’ll find out, Jack, how about you take your things to your room? Huh? I’ll check on Daddy.”

Jack nodded, glancing toward his dad before dragging his backpack to his bedroom.

Clearing up the bottle and glass, Jess entered the kitchen just as Aaron sagged against the counter,
turned, and slid down until his was sitting on the floor. She could see tears in his eyes. “I thought
you’d essentially given up alcohol ages ago. After the problem after the funeral.”

His chin trembled. “I did. I have maybe a sip or two if I’m with Dave, but that’s it.”

She was torn between angry he was drunk and in no condition to have Jack left with him and
worried about what was eating him up so badly that he’d gotten into that condition. Kneeling down
beside him, she brushed his damp hair away from his forehead. “What’s going on, Aaron?”

He gasped in a breath. “Emily.” He shook his head. “Emily died.”

Jess felt her eyes widen. “Emily on your team?”

Aaron nodded mutely.

“One of the people you chase?” Her heart clenched when he nodded again. “Did you get him?”

“No.”

She knew their job was dangerous and stressful, she had always been able to see the weight of it as
it ate into him, but actual on the job deaths seemed fairly rare. Plenty of injuries and some burn-
out, but rarely a death. “I- I have to get to work. Are you working today?”

He shook his head again. “We have the rest of the week off. I have to plan her funeral though.”

Making the decision to push past his walls, she scooted across the small distance and wrapped her
ex-brother-in-law in her arms, pulling him to her chest as he began to cry openly. After several
minutes, as the sobbing stopped and he sagged into her, she realized he’d passed out again.
Thumbing through her phone she tried to reach Spencer, the young man always knew just how to
reason with Aaron, but he didn’t answer. Not hesitating, she tried another number. Another person
always willing to help.

==
Jimmy looked up when he heard Dave’s cell phone beep in the silence. Standing, he watched his friend lift the small device to his ear and speak softly to whoever it was who’d called him. Suddenly his friend jumped up, swearing under his breath but loud enough in for the priest to shake his head, before darting out the door. He would make sure to say an extra prayer for Davie and his team over the coming days.

==

Carefully letting himself into the apartment, Rossi wasn’t sure what he’d find. Everything looked organized and in order until he got to the kitchen where Jess was still sitting with Aaron slumped over her. “And he’d been drinking?” He asked her even though he’d already had the answer.

“I figured he was just hung over when we got here but then this happened.” When the older agent hefted the dead weight out of her arms, she couldn’t help the sigh of relief. Aaron didn’t look like much compared to some men, but he was deceptively heavy when unconscious.

Bending at the knees, Rossi pulled his friend up over his shoulder and stood, both knees cracking, half carrying, half dragging him to the master bedroom. “Jack in his room?”

“Yeah.” She watched from the doorway.

“I’ll look after them. You get to work and have a good day, try not to worry about him too much. If he doesn’t start showing signs of waking up soon enough, I’ll handle it.” He sank down on the edge of the bed with a heavy sigh. “It’s not the first time I’ve had to handle a drunk Aaron.”

“He- he told me Emily died.”

“Yeah.”

“He said you guys haven’t caught the person who did it.”

“No.” He looked down at his friend and then up at Jessica. “But we will, just like we’ve always done.”

She nodded and started to turn away before stopping again. “But at what cost?”

==

He had to bring his hands up to his head just to double check that someone wasn’t actually driving a spike through it. Groaning, he rolled to the side to get up only have hands push him back. He grunted but obeyed.

“Here’s a glass of water and some aspirin, there will be another glass of water as soon as you’re done with it. Please tell me if you start to feel sick again.” A voice, deeper than he expected, told him.

“What time is it?”

“Almost eleven.”

“A.M.?” He forced one eye open to look at the disheveled form of his best friend. “Jess was supposed to bring Jack home before she went to work.”

Dave nodded slowly. “She did. You don’t remember her being here?” He watched Aaron hesitantly shake his head. “You were passed out drunk on the couch. She said Jack darted in and
jumped on you and made you sick, probably just as well considering how much you’d drank in a pretty short amount of time. She called me when you passed out again, pinning her down that time and she couldn’t move you. She called Spencer first but he didn’t answer.”

Aaron let everything sink in. Jess must be so angry with him, he needed to make it right. “Oh.”

“Oh?” Dave moved closer to the bed. “Is that all you have to say?”

He thought a minute and then nodded. “I’m sorry, Dave. I-I can’t.”

Dave couldn’t find it in himself to be angry with Aaron. Supremely irritated, sure. But not angry. “You can’t?”

Aaron’s eyes were swimming with guilt as he looked up. “I’m sorry.”

He sighed. “I talked to my friend, Father Davison, he said he’d do Emily’s service.” He paused when he saw Aaron flinch, it made his brows rise. “I wasn’t sure who was handling it.”

“I am. Thanks.”
Spencer hurt. Emily had been a dear friend and losing her the way they had had ripped his heart out and shredded it to pieces. In the days directly following her death, he’d understood Aaron pulling away, but instead of leaning on each other to mourn, Spencer’d found himself having to look elsewhere. Rossi had called him when he’d had to help the other man sober up, but they hadn’t talked long.

At her funeral, he’d led Rossi and Hotch on one side, carrying Emily to her final resting place. Morgan had been across from him, JJ, Seaver, and Garcia following behind. They wouldn’t abandon their teammate and friend, not even in death.

It took a week before Aaron showed up again at his door, this time promising to stay sober but explaining that he needed some time. They’d talked for a while before Hotch had left to pick up Jack. That was a week ago.

Today he watched Aaron carefully walk through the bullpen to his office, slower than he used to move. Not as steady. He paused to stare at the vacant desk next to Spencer’s before shutting himself into his office.

Aaron sagged against his desk and stared blankly across the room. Exhaustion was already creeping in, making him feel heavy and everything around him a bit disconnected. He hadn’t really thought about eating when he and JJ had been sorting everything out with the State Department and when they’d finished, he’d headed straight to Spencer’s and then home. He hadn’t felt like eating since. Over the past two weeks he’d slowly given up on most food. Nothing tasted like it used to and what he could choke down made him ill. Not wanting to worry Jack, Hotch had taken to eating two bites of dry toast while his son happily munched on cereal in the mornings and then either claimed he’d eaten very late at the office or just pushed food around his plate as Jack exuberantly told him about his day.

Superiors had told him he couldn’t tell anyone about their decision, he had to lie to his team, his friends. He desperately wanted to tell them that Emily was alive and safe, they just had to catch Doyle and she could come back.

Blinking at his empty office, Aaron wondered if he could manage some food today, but the burning feeling in his stomach seared to life and he knew eating would be a bad idea.

Spencer watched the clock tick around. He was worried about Aaron but wanted to wait until lunch, then he could go in armed with food and try to get the man to talk.

When the minute hand was close enough, Reid went to pick up some food, burgers and fries that he knew the other man loved along with a large milkshake. It was the perfect recipe for getting Hotch to open up. Inviting himself into the older man’s office, he sat down, placing the food on the desk. “I thought we could talk.”

“Talk?” Aaron wanted so badly to talk.

“Over food.” Spencer nodded. “I got your favorites.”

“Thanks, but I’m not really hungry.” Aaron frowned at the containers. The smell was making his stomach roll.
“Just a few bites, you need to eat something.” Spencer encouraged. “Please? For me?”

Sighing, Aaron knew he couldn’t deny the look that was on the younger man’s face. Opening the Styrofoam container, he stared at the giant burger and fries dripping in grease. “Maybe just a bit.”

“Okay. Just a bit.” He dove into his own meal.

The food tasted like sawdust as he chewed. Aaron did his best not to make a face as he forced several bites down his throat. It instantly sat heavy in his stomach, feeling as though the weight of it was pushing the constantly storming acid higher. Switching to fries, he wondered if those would be gentler. He dipped several into the sauce Spencer had remembered to request and shoved them into his mouth. His body was desperate for food suddenly, having been denied for most of two weeks and he ignored his stomach’s displeasure and gave in to the greasy flavors of the food and the rich taste of the milkshake. He needed this and he was thankful Spencer had brought it.

Watching Aaron switch from reluctantly picking at his food to suddenly devouring it had Spencer frozen in his seat, brows somewhere near his hairline and jaw dropped. He’d never seen Aaron eat like that before. “Aaron?”

Hotch didn’t answer, he was too busy inhaling the rest of the sandwich. Just as he brought the last bite to his mouth, his gut twisted. There was simply too much food after so long with so little. His body was overwhelmed by the intrusion. Covering his mouth with his hand, he belched, stomach acid burning his throat. “Oh god.” He was up like a bolt, doing his best to make it to the men’s room before his embarrassed himself.

Confused and worried, Spencer dumped his own containers on the desk and followed, making it into the bathroom just in time to hear Aaron being sick. Frowning, he flipped the lock on the door. Everyone else could go use the other bathroom on the other end of the building. “Aaron?”

“I’m fine.”

Spencer shook his head. “No, you’re not.” He wet some paper towels and squeezed into the stall, wiping down Aaron’s face. “What’s going on? I’ve been worried about you.”

“I was given an assignment.” Hotch turned so he could look up at Reid. “A case of sorts but I’m not allowed to talk about it. I can’t tell any of you what’s going on. I hate it.”

“It has to stay confidential?”

He nodded. “I didn’t want it to but I was committed before I found out.”

Spencer frowned and then backed up. “Come on, can you stand?”

“I think so.” Aaron let him help pull him up. He gripped his abdomen as he straightened.

“Hey, what’s wrong?”

“It hurts, right here. It burns all the time and I can’t…” He gasped in a breath. “I can’t figure out of eating makes it better or worse.”

“Have you seen a doctor?” Concern covered his face.

“No, not yet.” Aaron shook his head. “I’ll be okay. It’ll go away eventually.” He leaned over a sink and splashed water over his face, using some to wash out his mouth.
“Come over.” Spencer asked softly.

“Tonight?”

“Yeah. I haven’t seen you in two weeks. Come over, even if you bring Jack with you. I think it will do us both some good.”

Aaron nodded.

==

Jack was dancing with excitement in the hall outside the door. “Come on Daddy! Let’s go to Spencer!”

He was dragging, carrying both of their bags that felt like they were filled with bricks. “I’m right here, Jack. Go ahead and knock, but nicely.” He watched his son knock eagerly and then bounce as he waited.

Spencer opened the door and caught the young boy as he darted forward. “Hey, Jack! How are you?”

“Good!”

“Tell me, do you like chicken nuggets?”

Jack squirmed happily. “Yes!”

Turning into the apartment, Reid deposited Jack on a bar stool where he could see into the kitchen. “I’m so glad to hear that! I have these chicken nuggets I made and I was hoping I could find someone to test them and tell me if they’re awesome or not. Would you do that?”

“I’ll eat them!” Jack waited for the plate to be sat down and dug in.

Looking up from Jack, Spencer located Aaron where he’d dropped their bags inside the door and sank onto the couch. Ruffling Jack’s hair, Reid move to the other room. “Hey.”

Hotch looked up and gave him a weak smile. “Sorry, I still don’t feel great. Thank you for making dinner.”

Spencer looked over him, concerned. “It’s no problem. The coating is homemade, breadcrumbs mixed with carrot.”

Aaron chuckled at how much of a parent-move hiding vegetables was but didn’t say anything. “I hate to ask, but would you mind if I just had a shower and went to bed?”

He didn’t agree with missing another meal, especially since Hotch hadn’t kept the last one down, but he shook his head instead. “Go ahead. We’re good out here.”

Hefting himself up, Hotch carefully walked through the master bedroom and into the bathroom, using furniture to balance himself as he went. Closing the bathroom door, he shed his clothes and stared into the mirror. His scars were still more noticeable than not across his body, he didn’t let too many people see them. He’d avoided so far letting Jack see all of them at once. Stepping under the hot spray of water, he swayed before catching himself on the wall. Over the past few days, he’d started to feel a bit weaker than previous, his workouts weren’t as long or as intense and keeping up with Jack was becoming a chore.
As he scrubbed himself clean, Aaron wondered just how long he’d have to keep his secret. Would he ever be able to tell? Keeping something like this from Spencer, from the team, he wondered if it would kill him.

==

After making sure Jack was sound asleep in his little bed, Spencer slipped into the bedroom and stripped down. Aaron was already sound asleep in the middle of the bed on his stomach. Crawling up beside him, he wrapped his arms around and pulled him close, frowning when he was certain he could feel more bone than in the past. Deciding that was a problem for another day, Spencer drifted to sleep.

Aaron startled awake in the darkness, gasping for breath. His throat down to his gut burned. Untangling from Reid’s grip, he rolled over and pushed up to sit against the headboard. He desperately needed something to take his mind off the pain he was feeling. He watched as Spencer rolled onto his back, sheet falling away from his body as he did and Aaron got an idea. He would have to work quickly, before Spencer realized something was wrong.

Crawling down the bed, Aaron settled across Spencer’s calves and started ghosting kisses across the younger man’s stomach and hips. He let his breath tease the long thin cock until it twitched to life. He could do this, he thought, he could wake Spencer up like this. Grasping the cock with one hand, Aaron wrapped his lips around the head and sucked his cheeks in. In his sleep, Spencer arched and moaned which just encouraged Hotch to continue. He’d been away from his master for two weeks and he was feeling that separation now. Licking and sucking, he stroked the long length from end to end, enjoying how it twitched and responded to him. When Spencer started to whine, Aaron increased the speed of his hand and pulled back, waiting and watching as the cock in his hand swelled and then erupted. The sight made his own dick, neglected for the past two weeks, twitch and ache. Stripping off his pants as fast as he could, letting them fall somewhere off the bed, Aaron wrapped one large hand around his own dick and stroked. Tipping his head back, he started to lose himself in the feel if it, of that release getting closer and closer.

“Stop.” A voice spoke in the darkness.

He whimpered but complied immediately, letting his hand fall to his side, leaving his aching cock jutting up from his lap. There was movement in the bed and then Spencer was close.

“Is this what you need? You need to come?”

“Yes. I need to come.” He was ready to cry.

“Don’t come until I say you can, do you understand?”

“I understand.”

Spencer fumbled in the darkness for something in the nightstand and then made his way back to Aaron. “Breathe.” He wrapped one hand, warm and slick with the lube, around Aaron’s cock. “Just relax and close your eyes.”

Aaron nodded in the dark and relaxed as the had started stroking him, adding a twist as it came to the end. The feeling of arousal was overtaking him, washing over him with each stroke until Spencer gave the word and his orgasm broke through with a surprise. As he came, his whole body relaxed even more, sinking into the bed and into the darkness of unconsciousness.

==
Spencer pulled the ball cap down further over his eyes to try and block out the morning sunlight. Jack was playing his second soccer game of the day and he had come along to cheer him on. Looking around at the other parents, he frowned, almost all of them were more interested in their phones or tablets than on the kids running around. Almost all of them. Aaron was running back and forth, cheering the kids on, wearing tight jeans and a very well fitted polo shirt. It had kept Spencer’s attention the entire morning.

As the game paused for a drink break, Spencer watched one mother, a woman who’d been sharing, quite loudly, about her trials as a divorced mother of two approach Aaron and curl her hand around his bicep. He could see him tense at the contact from where he was sitting, but the woman didn’t seem to notice. As she spoke, Aaron’s eyes searched Spencer out, looking for that connection to keep him grounded.

A squeal drew Spencer’s attention away just in time for Jack to run and jump into his lap.

“Did you see me Spencer? Did you see me? Was I good?”

“You looked great out there! Are you having fun?” He gave the boy his widest smile.

“Yes! I’m so happy you showed Daddy the flyer for soccer!” Jack threw his arms around Spencer’s neck.

Over Jack’s shoulder, he watched the woman frown as she watched Jack cuddle into his lap. She asked Aaron a question and, judging by the love-struck smile that crossed the older man’s face, it had to do with him. As soon as the woman turned loose, Aaron headed right for them, kneeling down beside the chair. “What did she want?”

Aaron blushed. “I think she was trying to flirt with me. She asked me about taking the kids out for pizza after the game.”

“And I guess she didn’t want me included in that?” He asked, amused.

Aaron chuckled. “No. But we can still go for pizza afterward. How does that sound?”

“Yes!” Jack jumped off Spencer’s lap and danced around happily before darting back to his teammates.

Lap now empty, Spencer reached out and carded his fingers through Hotch’s hair. “You’re a good dad, out here cheering everyone on.”

Letting his eyes slip closed as the slight massage to his scalp, Aaron rumbled a soft reply. “You’re pretty good too, sitting here with me. Not getting jealous when the moms try to flirt with me.”

“I don’t get jealous because I can read your body language from a mile away.”

Opening his eyes and standing up, Hotch winced when his knees popped. “I was asked to start coaching Jack’s team.”

His brows rose. “And which spare hours are you supposed to do that in?”

“I have no idea. It does sound fun though.”

Spencer nodded. “It would make you happy I think.” To himself he added, and it’s been a while since you’ve really looked happy.
“I’ll think about it then.”
Spencer sat cross-legged on his bed, naked, and watched Aaron getting dressed from his shower. The older man’s moods had seemed to even out a bit in the couple weeks since he and Jack had practically moved into his place. He knew he still wasn’t eating and his stomach was bothering him, but Aaron seemed more even. He should be getting ready too, otherwise they would be late for work, but right now he was enjoying one of his few pleasures as Hotch performed almost a reverse strip-tease as he put on his suit.

Pulling black pants out of Spencer’s closet, Aaron crossed the room to sit to put them on. He was getting used to the unsteadiness that seemed to have taken root in his body, the weakness where there hadn’t been any before. Standing to button his pants, Aaron frowned. He knew he hadn’t worn this pair in a while, but they were much too big now, without his belt there was a chance they would fall down. “I’ve lost weight I think.”

“I know. You don’t eat anymore, I’ve been worried about you.” He climbed to his knees and crawled across the bed. “I wish you could tell me what is causing all of this. Are you still having panic attacks?”

“Not as much. It helps when you’re close.”

“Good.” He wrapped his arms around the other man. “I worry. I hate it that we can’t talk about this.” He pressed a kiss to Aaron’s shoulder. “I worry that you’re not eating. I worry that your health seems to be deteriorating. What if you took some time off? Spent some time just you and Jack?”

“I think I’d go crazy. And the team was already working without JJ and now we’re short Emily and no matter what Strauss thinks, Seaver just can’t fill all that hole. I know the added workload is dragging Garcia down, Dave mentioned it to me a couple days ago. She’s not bounced back from Emily either.” He pulled back so he could see Spencer’s face. “I’ll be okay, I promise. But… What if I asked Jessica to keep Jack overnight tonight? We haven’t had a night just you and I in over a month. It’s been all very parental.”

“Parental?”

“You know. Sneaking around while the kids are asleep or watching a movie. Quick kisses or teases as we pass each other. I’m not complaining, I do enjoy that, but I miss… I miss the other part.”

“I do too. Okay. Talk to Jess.”

==

Listening to Derek talk about how upset he was, how angry, it ate away at the hollow spot that seemed to have taken up permanent residence in his chest. If the was how angry Morgan was now, exactly how was he going to react the day he learned the truth. This requirement to keep his team in the dark was only going to tear them apart in the end. Once they learned he’d kept up this lie for however long it persisted, none of them would ever trust him again.

He’d never been so thankful for a case to come up in his life. Another grief assessment like Morgan’s would just be too much. He just wished the case wasn’t in Florida. Nothing good ever happened in Florida.

==
Making the decision to check in with Garcia before the team left, Hotch called her to his office and asked her to have a seat. He explained what the meeting was about and watching the tears instantly start to fill her eyes.

Morgan’s anger and Spencer’s hurt he could handle. Even Dave’s odd passivity that he would have to delve further into later, he could handle. But to see Penelope almost in tears and refusing to talk about missing Prentiss, Hotch wasn’t sure he could handle that. Those tears were his fault. His deceit caused them to what had to be the sweetest, gentlest person he’d ever met. And what was worse was that he knew that when she did find out about what he’d done, she would forgive him. Probably without hesitation because he’d done it to protect Emily.

Hotch felt a bit like a monster.

==

“Why do we have to do this here?” Spencer frowned at the chairs in the small room.

“Because if I don’t talk to everyone and give my report to Strauss by the end of today, she’ll call in someone from the outside to do it. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want her doing that.” Hotch felt himself getting a bit defensive.

“But you and I talk about this anyway.”

“I know.” Aaron tried to calm Reid and stay in charge. “This part is for the record, nothing we talk about away from this meeting will go in the report.”

“Okay.” He chewed his lip and then began to talk.

Aaron listened as Spencer talked about missing Emily, he hadn’t realized they were quite as close as it seemed they had been. When he talked about if they couldn’t keep each other safe, why were they even doing this job, Hotch couldn’t help but feel more guilt pile on. He knew if he could feel the guilt, it was only a matter of time before someone else saw it.

==

Aaron watched Dave pour them drinks and sit down. There were days that he really hated his best friend, he was able to be relaxed and appear carefree in a way he never could manage.

“So, how do you think everyone is doing?” Dave settled into his chair.

“No one wants to talk about it, but it’s all anyone is thinking about. Everyone seems to be pretty much exactly as they are displaying.” Hotch took a sip of his own drink.

“Well, when you work around profilers, there’s really no sense in trying to hide it.”

“No. There’s not.”

Dave watched his friend sink into himself. “The others lean on one another, but you. Who are you leaning on?”

“Me?”

He nodded slowly. “You’ve been through a lot. In little less than eighteen months you’ve stood beside two different graves of women you cared for, felt responsible for. You carried you son behind one and you carried the other. A thing like that, it marks you.”
“I’m fine.”

He knew that as his friend’s code for ‘not fine’ but let it go for the moment. “How are things with Reid?”

A smile ghosted across his face. “Good I guess. Jack likes being at his place so we go there a lot.”

“How much is a lot exactly?” He smirked when he caught the blush up Aaron’s neck even in the dimness of the lamplight.

“He made up a space as sort of Jack’s room. It wouldn’t do forever, but right now Jack thinks it’s cool. We’re there more than we’re home lately.”

“Well, that’s good?”

“Good?”

“I know Reid won’t let you internalize too much. You’re private. Sometimes too private when you should be letting others in, but he’ll take good care of you.”

“You know, this assessment wasn’t supposed to be about me.” Aaron tried to redirect.

“I’m okay.” Dave took another swallow of his scotch. “I’m more committed to this team than I ever was any of my wives. Maybe that’s the problem.” He thought a minute. “It’s been a hard year, hopefully the next will be better.”

“Yes.”

==

Staring at Aaron, naked and stretched out with his fingers looped over the top of the doorframe, Spencer couldn’t help but see just how thin he’d gotten. What was once all trim muscle and masculine curves were now skin stretched over bone and sharp angles. It made him nervous to carry on with the evening, but they’d already gotten settled. Pouring out a small amount of lube into his hand, Spencer wiped it inside the cage, something they’d stopped using for a while, before slipping it into place. Aaron had begged to have everything on the table tonight and Spencer had relented. Agreeing to have everything on the table didn’t mean he had to use it.

Pouring out more lube, Spencer coated an anal plug, a nice sized one that could just brush Aaron’s prostate in the right circumstances, and pressed the tip to his entrance. “Relax.” With his other hand, he felt muscles untense and he pressed the plug in, carefully seating it where it belonged. He wanted tonight to be about total surrender for Aaron, wanted him to give himself over completely so he pulled out cotton fabric and folded the first piece into a heavy blindfold before tying it around Aaron’s head. The second piece of cotton got knotted several times like Penelope had taught him until he had a good sized, absorbent gag. Tapping Aaron’s jaw, he instructed him. “Open.” He pulled it snug and tied it. Crossing to the dresser, he picked up the noise cancelling headphones. He wanted Aaron to be totally removed from everything tonight.

His dark world grew silent as the weight of the headphones settled on his head. Aaron was isolated in a way he couldn’t remember ever being before. He’d begged Spencer to have everything on the table tonight, now he had to relax and wait patiently for it to begin.

Spencer had moved away. He couldn’t feel him in the air near his exposed skin, but he knew he had to be nearby. Spencer would never totally leave him like this. He couldn’t tell how long he’d been just standing, his body was beginning to tremble though. The thought of Spencer watching him
was arousing.

Suddenly, the end of a crop bit into his back and he moaned against the gag. He tensed and waited, but another strike didn’t come. He left himself relax just a small amount and then another bite seared across his skin, this time near his shoulder blade. Hotch had a love/hate relationship with the crop. It stung like hell, but the way it made him feel afterward, it was pure bliss.

The third strike wasn’t from the crop and it wasn’t one strike. It was an endless series of strikes with no discernable pattern to his front and back as well as his ass and legs and they stung. Leather flogger, his mind supplied. He would be marked for the evening.

As soon as the flogger stopped, there was another bite from the crop and it burned. Before his body could process the pain, something soft was brushing over his skin, teasing and dancing over the small hairs setting his nerves alight with ghosted sensation. It brushed over his entire body, from his face to his feet, bringing all of the feeling to the surface before vanishing and leaving him in his silence again.

Hands. Hands were guiding his arms down to his sides, holding him steady as they led him to the bed. He was surprised when instead of being laid out on the soft surface, he was helped to kneel at the side and stretch his shoulders, head, and arms forward over the covers.

The first drips of hot wax made his cock start to leak. The drips grew bigger until some of them ran along the planes of his back, dripping toward his ass. Once his back felt well coated, the hands and the candle vanished, leaving him trembling against the bed, time slipping in and out of his mind like a fluid, changeable thing.

Hands under his arms finally helped him stand and then crawl onto the bed, laying carefully on his stomach. Gentle, fingers began to peel the dried wax away, letting the cool air again touch his skin. Once he was clean, he could feel Spencer shift around before he started rubbing cream onto the spots where the crop had made contact with his skin and then lotion over the whole expanse of flesh. Back cared for, Aaron let the younger man roll him over, lifting his head to remove the gag and offer him sips of water until he shook his head to signal he was finished. Aaron expected the gag to be replaced and was sad when it wasn’t.

Spencer then massaged lotion into Aaron’s chest all of the way down to his hips, taking care to avoid his genitals. Once he was sure that all of the spots that had been abused were properly cared for, he turned Aaron once again and removed the plug, using a damp cloth to carefully set it aside and make sure it hadn’t caused any irritation. Seeing none, Spencer uncapped the lube and filled his hand, coating Aaron’s hole, one finger dipping past the relaxed muscles a small amount, before slicking himself up.

They’d been working on this since Christmas, his taking Aaron either on his back or stomach. Aaron had asked for it more often that he’d given in, not wanting to push him too far if he wasn’t really ready. But tonight was about pushing everything away and just being the two of them, for tonight no one else in the world mattered. Lining himself up, Spencer pressed himself in slowly until he was fully seating inside his partner. As he started moving in and out, he made sure to keep an eye on Aaron’s face and body language, he never wanted to push him to the point of distress. When he finally came, it was slow and gentle, there was no urgency to it. Pulling away, he slicked up the plug again and pressed it back in before carefully moving around the prone body to remove the headphones and blindfold. Even without having managed his own orgasm, Aaron looked completely relaxed and almost like he was asleep. He wanted to get him cleaned up and drinking more water, but for now he would let him sleep.

==
His stomach rumbling woke Aaron up. It took him a moment to remember he was in Spencer’s bedroom, in the dark. He didn’t remember the blindfold and headphones being removed, but he could just make out shapes in the dimness and the clock in the room was ticking loudly. Hunger pushed him into action as he rolled and tried to stand up by the bed, swaying badly at the rush of lightheadedness that came over him. Hands were suddenly on him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Just hungry.” He tried to reassure Reid to go back to sleep.

“I’ll cook. Sit.” Instead of nodding back off, the lanky man climbed out of bed, still naked, and headed for the kitchen. “I would have made you eat before, by you looked so relaxed and lately you’ve looked so tense. I’m sorry.” His voice floated back as he walked away.

“It’s oaky.” Aaron called in reply, deciding to listen and sit back against the headboard and wait.

When Spencer returned with a tray holding fruit, water, and buttered toast, he spoke again. “It’s not okay. I should have woken you up. It was my job. Eat now and then I’ll draw you a bath and clean you up.”

Hotch took a bite of pineapple. “If that’s what you want.”

“It’s what I want.”
“You shot at me!”

“What was I supposed to do? Wait till he shot everyone else first?”

“You could have waited until I noticed you and moved. I can’t believe you shot at me.”

Spencer couldn’t help but grin as the pair of voices ascended the jet stairs.

“I didn’t shoot at you. If I’d shot at you then Strauss’s problems would be solved now.”

There was a pause in both voices and footsteps. “I can’t believe you said that.”

“What? It’s true. You were a giant blue target in front of a formerly cream-colored wall.”

Aaron finally appeared in the opening of the jet shaking his head. “I should write you up, you know.”

“Probably. But you won’t.”

“And why won’t I?”

Dave grinned. “You love me too much.”

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Three weeks passed as they did a dance of domesticity. If there was no case, Jack and Aaron come to Spencer’s place and if they had to go away, Jack and Jessica would use her place. Aaron stopped by his own place to check mail and rotate clothes during the week and to occasionally just spend time as he and Jack on the weekends.

He’d go so far as to say things were going well if Strauss would just stop disrupting their work. They’d been at one another’s throats for so many years that this new feeling of worry and concern, it fell odd. There’d been a time not all that long ago when Hotch would have been glad to see her go, to see her struggling and needing help, but now that it was happening, it didn’t feel nice at all.

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Spencer watched as Morgan, Seaver, and Hotch entered the station, two of them soaking wet and looking a tad chilled in the air conditioning. “Are you okay?” He asked none of them in particular.

“We’re fine, Kid.” Morgan patted his shoulder. “Hotch here shot our guy in the lake.”

“In the lake?”

“And boy am I glad he did too, we barely saved the girl as it was.”

Hotch couldn’t hold in the involuntary shiver that ran through him as he passed under an air vent. “We’ll just get changed and we can leave.”

Spencer nodded. “Sure.” He turned on his heel, watching how the material of Aaron’s now-clear white shirt and his pants clung to every inch of him. Fingers snapping at the end of his nose made him jump back. “Hey!”
“Find something else to look at, Kid.” Rossi whispered as he smirked. “So. Aaron told me that he was asked to coach Jack’s soccer team.”

“Yeah. I told him he should do it.”

“But he hasn’t said either way yet?”

“No. Not yet.”

“Well. Why don’t you go ask him?” Dave gestured to the bathroom where Hotch had just vanished and then grinned.

Understanding, Spencer nodded and followed after Aaron, letting himself into the bathroom and locking the door behind. He was just in time to see Aaron peel off the wet shirt and tie and drop them both with a soppy plop into the sink.

“Yes?” One brow rose humorously.

“You, wet, like that. It’s so hot.”

Aaron was surprised at the hunger in Reid’s eyes. “Now?”

“If I ordered you to your knees, would you?”

His hands worked his damp belt loose before undoing the button and zipper. “Yes.”

“Kneel.” Spencer’s voice was harder.

Aaron was on his knees before he even made the conscious decision to do so, hands folding behind his back.

“I want to fuck your mouth. No words, no hands. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

Undoing his own pants, Spencer pulled his hardening cock free and gave it several strokes before closing in on the mouth he was so desperate for. Threading his hands through wet hair, he guided Aaron’s face until his dick was brushing his nose. “Take it in. Suck me in.”

Aaron complied and licked and sucked as far down as he could manage. He felt when Spencer’s desperation took over and instead of him sucking, now Reid was fucking his mouth hard and fast. It didn’t take long before Spencer was coming, exploding down his throat as he carried on fucking his mouth.

When Spencer was done, he sagged back, pulling out of Hotch’s mouth and helping him to stand. Helping him balance with one hand, he tugged at Aaron’s wet slacks and boxers until they fell around his ankles. Between them, the older man’s cock bounced freely. “Do you need this to be dealt with now or can it wait until we get home?” He gentle palmed the cock, knowing the gentle touch would drive Aaron crazy.

“I…umm.” Aaron tried to concentrate. If he could will it at least mostly away, he could wait. Wanted to wait. “I want to wait.”

“But?”

“I’m not sure I can get it to relax enough. I think sucking you off pushed me too close to the edge.”
He could hear himself panting. He didn’t want to sound too desperate in case Spencer said no and left, but if the younger man did, he’d probably end up jacking off just to be able to leave the bathroom.

Spencer stepped behind Aaron, his now soft dick nestled in his ass. Sliding his hands around visible hip bones, he held one hip still while the other gripped the hot cock. “I’ll help you then.”

In the mirror, Aaron watched as Spencer’s hand jacked him off, his head rolled back and rested on his shoulder as his body felt like all of its energy was racing to leave him via his dick. “I’m gonna come. I need to come.”

Spencer breathed into his ear. “Not yet. Wait.” He turned loose of Aaron’s hip and cupped the head of his cock. “Now. Come now.” He watched over Hotch’s shoulder as his hand was filled with the man’s release.

Aaron had never watched himself orgasm. Not really. He was mesmerized now though by the sight of his own body, totally relaxed as his dick pulsed out his release. He groaned.

“Good boy. That’s my good boy.”

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Dave was surprised to see a shape he recognized curled into a camp chair on the edge of the field early Saturday morning. Walking up to Hotch, he just had to ask. “How’d you manage that?”

“How’d you manage that?” Hotch looked up from his seat on a cooler.

He thumbed over his shoulder. “Him. He hates mornings. I know.”

A grin spread across his face. “I…”

“You know what.” Dave put up a hand and cut him off. “Forget I asked. You have that grin again.”

“Again?”

“Like you did the whole way home from our last case. No normal man who’d just ruined two guns, his wallet, and his phone looks like you did unless he’d gotten lucky.”

His grin faded. “You could tell?”

“I think astronauts could tell, Aaron.” He pulled up another cooler and looked inside before taking a seat. He had pulled out a snack. “What are these?”

“Fruit and yogurt cups. Homemade.”

“By?”

“You didn’t want to talk about him.” Aaron did his best to be petulant.

Dave’s brows rose. “Reid made snacks?”

“Reid always makes the snacks. Healthy ones with good vitamins and stuff. The other parents usually bring chips or snack cakes or something. Though he doesn’t tell the kids that’s why, he tells them he’s secretly testing recipes to give them super powers and they have to eat it all and report back next week if it worked or not.”
Dave didn’t know where to start with that so he jumped on the most obvious. “Other parents?”

“What?”

“You just implied that Spencer was a parent.” He watched as Aaron thought a moment.

“Oh.”

He chuckled. “So, when will the rest of the kids be here?”

Aaron checked his watch. “Just a couple more minutes.”

“Good. This will be fun.” Dave clapped his hands together.
Penelope’d been concerned about Hotch earlier in the day when he’d been evasive about staying with the team and she’d approached him to try and talk but of course, the case got in the way. But there was something in his eyes that just looked…sad. Pained. It just made her worry even more.

She’d tried to stay focused on the case but every time she spoke to him, she couldn’t help but reach out and have some physical contact, even if it was only for a second. Now she was walking into his building with a grocery bag over her arm and determination in her stride. It might be late, but she wasn’t going to let him turn her away tonight.

Knocking firmly on his door, Garcia waited, listening to the shuffle of footsteps before the door pulled open.

“Garcia?” Hotch looked surprised and a bit confused. He’d expected Dave to turn up at his door, even Spencer, but not the bubbly blonde.

She held up the bag. “I’ve come to talk. And listen.” She waited for him to invite her in, but when he didn’t she asked. “May I come in?”

“Uh, sure.” Hotch stepped back and let her in, watching her find her way into the kitchen and his cabinets while he shut and locked the door. “What’d you bring?”

“Ice cream!” She pulled out a carton and then everything else she’d bought as well. “Plus all the toppings to make a superb sundae.”

Her smile made him smile just a bit. “I haven’t had an ice cream sundae in forever.”

Garcia scooped vanilla ice cream into bowls and passed him one. “Ice cream makes every bad day a little better.” She watched as he layered it with chocolate sauce, rainbow sprinkles, and cherries. It was an open secret that their unit chief had a serious sweet tooth though he rarely indulged it. Once they both were happy with their creations, Penelope rounded the counter, taking Hotch’s arm and leading him to the couch to sit. “Now. Talk. I’ve been worried about you all day. Actually, I’ve been worried about you longer than that.”

“You have?” That surprised him a bit, normally when Garcia was worried about someone, she all but smothered them. “I’m sorry.”

She tilted her head. “For what?”

“Making you worry.”

Rubbing his arm, she kept contact with him as she ate with her other hand. “Never be sorry for that. How are things with Spencer?”

“Good.” He took a bite and swallowed it. “He’s worried too if that helps.”

“It doesn’t. Tell me what’s going on.”

“After Prentiss…I ended up part of something that was much bigger than just me. Decision makers way above my paygrade made some very final decisions and one of those was that no one else could know about the case.”
“That’s what’s been causing you to look like this?” Her voice was full of concern.

“Looking like what?” He stared down at where she was leaning into his shoulder.

Penelope turned and assessed him. “You haven’t looked okay in months and it’s been getting worse. And now you’re talking about leaving the team?”

He pushed his dessert around the bowl. “It’s been a long couple years and a small part of me just wants things to be easier and right now they’re just getting harder and besides Spencer I’ve felt so alone lately. I know that as the boss, it can be awkward to have me around when the team goes out and I want you guys to be able to relax so I hang back. Sometimes I wish I hadn’t taken the position.” He frowned. “If I’d let it pass me by then maybe Haley and I would still be married. She’d still be alive. Maybe Emily would still be here. Maybe…” He trailed off. There was a long silence as his mind ran over all of the possibilities of how things could have turned out different. He hadn’t realized he’d started crying until he sniffled and then the bowl was being pulled from his hands.

“Come here.” Garcia pushed up onto her knees so she could turn sideways and then pulled Hotch into her arms. “You’re never alone.”

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Waking up, he was stiff and sore from sleeping on his couch. He really needed to get a better couch. Maybe one more suited to a man over six feet tall sleeping on it. But who really planned on sleeping on the couch anyway?

The feel of an arm wrapped around his waist from behind and hair against his neck had him scrambling to remember what had happened the night before. Had Spencer come over and stayed the night? He twisted around to check and found himself looking at the dozing face of Spencer. The sight of him clinging close on the same couch made Hotch twitch to life. At some point, Reid had come to lay with him. Rolling in the other man’s arms, Aaron noticed they were similarly dressed in sleep pants and a tee-shirt. A hand snaked between them as Aaron pulled himself free and stroked. He’d have to stop before long and see what Spencer wanted to do, but right now he just needed to take the edge off. He let his eyes slide shut as he imagined it was Spencer’s hands on him until suddenly that’s exactly what was happening.

Spencer woke to the sight of Aaron pleasuring himself while in his arms. It was a beautiful sight, but Spencer wanted more. Brushing Hotch’s hands aside, he took hold of the warm cock and began to stroke as his own sprang to life. The couch was much too narrow and he was having a hard time moving around so Spencer tapped Aaron’s hip. “Up a second, take of your pants.” While he watched the older man comply, he shimmied out of his own, letting them ball up at the end of the couch. “Come straddle me.” He lifted his knees a bit so Aaron had a secure place to sit. “Come here.”

Aaron tipped his hips forward until Spencer grabbed both of their cocks and brought them together, hands stroking both as one. It was erotic as hell to watch, balancing with one arm on the back of the sofa as he looked down at hands and cocks. “I love you.”

Spencer looked up into Aaron’s eyes. “I love you too.” He moved his other hand to bring both of their balls together, letting them rub against each other as they ground their hips together. “Are you close?”

“Yes.”
“If I asked you to stop, could you?”

“Anything for you. Just tell me and I’ll stop. I’ll wait.” He wouldn’t hesitate to do what Spencer told him.

“Don’t come.”

Aaron whimpered in answer as he felt Spencer’s cock swell and then come as it pulsed below his. He was teetering on the edge of able to stop and too far gone, but the stroking stopped and left them both panting into the quiet room.

“That’s so hot.” A voice said from the far end of the room, making both men look up. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to intrude, but you two are just so beautiful together.” Garcia let her eyes wander over them, over the mess on Spencer’s stomach and the still rock-hard cock jutting up between them.

Spencer ignored the stunned surprise on Aaron’s face as he addressed the blonde. “Could you get the thing out of the front pocket of my bag?”

Penelope nodded and dug through his bag, producing a soft black ring. “This?”

“Yes.” Reid slipped it around Aaron’s hard prick, one loop tucked tight behind his balls while the other held to the base of his cock. “It won’t be for long.” He stroked along Aaron’s dick once he was done. Garcia looking up brought both of their attention to her.

“Hey, sweetie.” She smiled brightly past the couch into the next room.

Hotch turned and saw Jack standing in the hallway. He was thankful his son could only see him from the chest up.

Penelope was already around the couch. “Daddy is just stretching, let’s go brush our teeth and stuff while he finishes up. Okay?”

Jack was too far away for the father to hear his response. He looked down when the man beneath him chuckled.

“I forgot about Jack.”

Aaron slid off of Spencer and stood up, pants around his ankles and cock standing proudly on display. Pulling up his pants, he shook his head. “I did too.”

“Is there someone in the building who could watch Jack for an hour?” Spencer gathered himself and followed as Aaron carefully walked to his bedroom.

“Miss Kenzy next door would.”

“Which way?”

“One-fifty-two.”

Spencer nodded and ducked out, still in his pajamas. Five minutes later the apartment door opened and closed as Spencer and Jack left.

Aaron stayed standing in his bedroom in his pajamas, unsure what to do. He decided to not do anything and wait for his partner to come back. Movement out of the corner of his eyes made him look up. “Garcia.”
She shook her head. “Penelope right now. Spencer told me what he wanted to do. Has he told you?”

“No.”

Her eyes raked over him. “He wants us to both dominate you.” She tilted her head sideways and watched him lick his lips and swallow. “Would you like that? To be dominated by both of us?”

“I… I’ve never thought about it.” But he was thinking about it now. The apartment door opened and closed again before Spencer finally appeared carrying another duffle bag over his shoulder.

“You told him?” He inquired.

“I did. You brought supplies?”

“I did.” He handed the bag over to her. “And is this okay, Aaron?”

He’d made a decision. “Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Masters.” He dropped to his knees and lowered his eyes to the floor to show he was willing to start.

==

Penelope had let Spencer lead the show. She made sure her jaw didn’t drop too far when the younger man stripped Aaron’s shirt off of him and then tugged his pants down to his knees. For a man his age, he had an impressive body, even if he didn’t seem to be feeding it properly as of late. Spencer had also stripped off his own shirt but left his pants on before he’d started with the pinwheel across Aaron’s chest and back. As far down as his thighs and ass. He was pressing in just enough to cause Aaron to give a little shiver without causing any pain. From the pinwheel, Spencer pulled out the vibrator he rarely used and turned it on knowing the vibration it gave off as it danced over Aaron’s skin made the man a bit crazy.

Penelope gasped where she had been seated, watching the show, when the vibrator came out. It turned her on more than she’d expected seeing how Hotch responded to it and it teased down his abs and against his cock. She froze when two sets of dark eyes focused on her.

Spencer leaned down and whispered into Aaron’s ear, having a private conversation made up of whispers and nods before Spencer stood straight and smiled widely at Penelope. He beckoned her out of the room into the hall, leaving Aaron trembling in the bedroom.

“Yes?”

“I have a proposition and I wanted a chance to discuss it before we went any further.” He shifted from foot to foot nervously. “I’m not into women, you know, but Aaron…is. I know he loves to watch me masturbate knowing he can’t come until I say he’s allowed and when he finally does, it’s often just with words, no touch whatsoever and all of that stress, that anxiety he carries around, it just leaves him. I was wondering if you would put on a show for him.”

“Are you serious?” She tried to assemble a coherent reply. “That’s my boss.”

“That you’ve seen naked more than once, you’ve helped care for him, right now he’s not your boss. Hell, Pen, less than an hour ago you watched us frot on the couch. I think if there was a line before,
it’s gotten awfully fuzzy.”

She looked back into the room where Hotch was still staring straight ahead at the bed. “And he’s okay with this?”

“Trust me.” He pressed the now-quiet vibrator into her hand. “Make it your own show. Show him just how you dominate and control without touching him.”

“Can I touch you?”

“Yes.”

She took a deep breath and let it out, settling herself into her persona. “Let’s do this.”

==

Aaron figured if he was about to die, this wasn’t a bad way to go really. At least if he were dead he wouldn’t have to hear Dave’s commentary on his demise. Sexed to death. Dave would never forget that one. He’d probably track him down in the afterlife just to give him a hard time about it.

He’d wondered just how Spencer was going to pull off pulling Garcia into their little scene, but he shouldn’t have doubted the younger man’s skills at negotiation. Currently he was still kneeling on his bedroom floor, naked to his knees where his pants were still bunched, hands fisted at his sides. He’d watched Penelope strip Spencer the rest of the way naked before laying him out over the end of the bed, ass facing Aaron, and spanking him with the paddle from the bag he’d brought in. Aaron was familiar with that paddle and it’s stinging qualities, watching it redden the ass before him made his neglected dick twitch.

When she’d pulled Spencer back upright, Aaron had seen that the younger man was now hard and leaking. He licked his lips reflexively, imagining rushing forward and sucking his off. Instead he’d watched as she turned him around and stood him next to Aaron, cock bobbing at the older man’s eye level.

“You two be good.” She smiled as she began to strip he shirt, bra, and then skirt. She’d foregone underwear that morning figuring she was heading straight home, now it ended up just one less item she had to remove. Crawling up the bed, she collected the vibrator and propped herself up, knees falling open. She could see Aaron’s attention was split between her and Spencer. Wasting no time, she flipped the vibrator on and impaled herself with it. If she was to put on a show, she wanted it to be a hot and fast one.

Aaron watched the woman on his bed. There was a woman on his bed pleasuring herself and he couldn’t move a muscle. Not because Spencer had told him to stay put, and that was a little of it, but because he’d never imagined another woman would ever want to be anywhere near his bed. His mind was split between wanting to watch what was, in essence, live porn and wanting to beg Spencer to slide in behind him and fuck him. Maybe while they watched. That idea made his dick jump and drip. “Please.” It slipped out before he realized it.

Spencer leaned down and pressed a kiss to his lips “What do you need?”

Aaron stared into his eyes, hoping to communicate just how much he needed this. “Please fuck me.”

“Here?”

Aaron nodded. “I need to feel you inside me.” He wasn’t watching Penelope now, though her
sounds he couldn’t block out. “I need you.”

“Okay.” Spencer moved to his bag and collected a bottle of lube, pouring out enough to make sure both his cock and Aaron’s ass were well coated. Lining up, he wrapped one arm around the other man. “Ready?” When he gasped out a yes, Spencer pressed in until his head sank through the ring of muscles and slowly carried on until they were firmly anchored together. He paused to give Hotch a moment to adjust before he started stroking in and out, picking up speed.

He was back to watching the show on the bed, his bed, as Spencer fucked him. It took him a minute to realize that Spencer must have been watching too because his strokes fell into time with the toy vanishing in and out of wet folds. It was like he was watching himself get fucked. When Penelope began to cry out as her orgasm rolled over her, his whole body started trembling anew.

“What do you need?” The words were rough in his ear. “Tell me what you need.”

“To feel you come. For you to fill me up.” He could hear he was begging now. Spencer’s soft grunts in his ear warned him just before the younger man came, pulsing into his ass.

“Look at her.” Spencer whispered, pausing for Aaron to obey. Penelope had scooted to the end of the bed, wet center still open to them, the toy slowly sliding out into her hand. “Show her what an obedient boy you are.” His voice was impossibly softer, keeping their moment intimate despite the third person in the room. “I can feel you trembling, you need to come so desperately. Would you like to come now?”

Aaron nodded. “Yes.”

“Then come for me.” He thrust his hips against Aaron’s ass even as his softened dick was slipping out. “Come for me, Sir.”

His head landed back onto Spencer’s shoulder as his eyes nearly closed. He could just make out Penelope, watching still, as his back bowed, forcing his dick further out on front of himself before he felt it swell and pulse. As his body sagged, he couldn’t find it within himself to be embarrassed.

Spencer was sitting at the table reading and rereading the papers in his hands. He didn’t understand. “I don’t understand.” He looked up at Hotch questioningly. It had been almost a week since their adventure in the older man’s bedroom.

Hotch drew in a deep breath and stared at the tabletop instead of at Spencer. “This thing that I can’t talk about has been bothering me and I just need to take some time away. I don’t think staying here right now is good for me.”

Spencer looked over his lover. He knew the other man was still struggling to eat and was still often ill. He suspected the stress and anxiety from whatever this secret was was probably causing other problems as well. He’d lost weight and looked older, sicker, gaunt even. The stress was making him struggle to sleep and he was having nightmares regularly. “When do you leave?”

“In a week.”

“Do you have to go to a war zone? Can’t you just take a sabbatical and go on vacation?”

“I’ll be okay. I wasn’t going to leave at all, but when Dave told me JJ is coming back, that she’s taking the profiler training, I knew this was what I needed to do.”
“But what about me?”

“I need you in order to do this.” Feeling less nervous, Aaron took a seat.

“What do you mean?”

“In order to spend the summer away, I need to know Jack is in good hands. Jessica is willing to continue on like she has been but with the promotion she just got, she can’t take him in for months at a time.”

“You want me to take him?” He was surprised.

Aaron tried to look confident so that Spencer would feel confident. “Yes.”

“But, Aaron, I don’t know anything about taking care of him.”

“Really? When we spend the night at your place, he wakes you up in the mornings for breakfast and he asks you to read him stories and you make him food that’s not only good for him, but that he eats without turning his nose up at.” He reached across the table and gripped Spencer’s hands. “You parent him as much as I do. You have for a very long time. I trust you with him. Implicitly.”

Spencer thought about it for a split second. “Okay.” He answered softly.

Hotch gave him a small nod. “He’ll still have daycare five day a week and Jess will be around for anything else. Plus, you will have Garcia I’m sure and Dave.”

“Okay.” He replied again. “Do I come stay here or should he stay at my place?”

“I think the two of you will figure out which is better between yourselves.” He gave him a smile. “I’ll be able to focus knowing he’s with you.”

==

It was the night before the night before Aaron had to get on a plane and fly halfway around the globe. His last night at home would be spent just with Jack but tonight the boy was with his aunt and his father was stretched out across Spencer’s bed. Spencer didn’t want the older man to arrive on a military base with bruises or other injuries from their activities so tonight he was just pampering him. He started with a deep massage, front and back, not once touching Aaron’s cock when it showed interest at the touch. Not even when Aaron gave him some seriously dangerous puppy dog eyes.

After the massage, Spencer left him to rest while he moved to the bathroom and drew a warm bubble bath, adding relaxing oils and turning on soft music. Returning to the bedroom, Reid coaxed Aaron up and guided him to the bath. “Sit, relax. I have to run to the kitchen a minute, I’ll be right back.” He helped him in.

While he was alone, Aaron pondered the apartment and the bathroom. So much had happened here over the past six years. He’d come to comfort Spencer and then he came here to receive comfort. He’d brought Jack here when he was seeking shelter from the turmoil of his failing marriage, and then came alone to seek shelter from the turmoil within himself. He’d laughed here, cried here, lashed out and had panic attacks here. He’d freaked out and attacked Spencer here and then found endless compassion and understanding here. Tears were starting to fill his eyes as Spencer returned with a tray in his hands.

Alarmed at the sight of the tears, Spencer hurried to set down the tray and find his way to the tub.
“What’s wrong?”

The melancholy feeling bubbled up as Aaron turned his face up to him, tears breaking free. “I love you so much. I can’t even explain it.”

“Oh!” Spencer opened his arms as Hotch’s wet ones circled his waist, holding him tight. “I love you too.” He ran his fingers through Aaron’s hair. “What brought this on?”

“I was just thinking about what this apartment has seen of us over six years. No matter what was happening in my life, no matter what brought me to your door, I’ve only ever been met with your seemingly endless understanding.”

“You needed it. And you were always worth the time I invested.”

“Even when I hurt you?”

“Especially then.”

The quiet tears gave way to a sob. “And if I ever hurt you again?”

“It will always be worth it, Love. Always.” He just held him as the sobs continued, finally dying out as the water turned cold.

“I’m going to miss you.” Aaron whispered as Spencer helped him out of the bath and into a towel and then pajamas.

Collecting the previously forgotten food, Spencer settled Aaron into bed and placed the tray before him. “Shh, eat now. There will be time to miss me once you’re gone.”
Week 1, Day 1

Jack held onto Spencer’s hand as they made their way out of the airport. The pair had been lucky enough to be able to escort Aaron to his gate to see him off, the goodbye had made them all a little teary. As they found Spencer’s car, Jack looked up at him. “Daddy said we will be able to talk to him on the computer?”

He popped the locks and helped him into his carseat. “Yep. It will take about a week I think for him to get there and then get settled in. There will be a lot of meetings and things for a few days but once those are done they’ll tell him when he can call us. And then I’ll make sure that whatever we’re doing, we’re able to take his calls, okay?”

“Okay.”

Closing the back door, Spencer moved to the driver’s seat and pulled out of the garage and then the airport. “We have the whole day off today since we took your Dad to the airport, what do you want to do?”

Jack thought a minute. “Can we go to the zoo?”

“Sure.”

==

It seemed to be hitting Jack at bedtime that Daddy was away. The pair had talked and they had decided to give staying at Spencer’s place a trial run for a few days and see how they liked it. Jack had slept there often enough and knew where everything was. He’d picked at his dinner, had his bath, with Spencer’s help, and was sitting on his bed with a teddy bear in his arms. “I don’t want to sleep.”

“Why not, Jack? You have school tomorrow, you’ll need your energy.” Spencer sat on the small bed.

“I don’t want to go to school. Can we drive back to the airport and bring Daddy back?” He gave the man a hopeful look.

Reid drew him into his arms. “No, we can’t. I’m sorry. You know what I always liked as a kid when I was sad?”

“What?”

“I used to climb into my parents’ bed and hear a story.” He tipped the boy’s face up. “Would you like to come in and listen to a story?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Grab whatever stuffed animals and blankets you want to bring and go in. I’ll find a good book and we can read a little every night. How does that sound?”

“Good.” Jack hopped down and began to gather his dearest creatures.

By the time Spencer found a book and got into his room, half of his bed was taken over by a
stuffed zoo. “Is this everybody?”

“Is it too much?” He frowned, imitating his father almost perfectly.

“No. Why?”

“Daddy always says it’s too much.”

“Well, see. It’s a good thing he’s not here then, isn’t it?” He smiled when the boy smiled at that. “He’s not here to get in their way. Now they can all stretch out and get comfortable.” He climbed into the bed. “I loved this book as a kid. We’ll read a chapter every night and then we can pick another one, then before you know it, it will be time to go pick him up.” They adjusted pillows until both were comfortable. “Ready?”

“Yeah.”

==

Week 1, Day 2

“Come on Jack, we don’t want to be late on my first day dropping you off.” Reid called across the apartment, a lunchbox and small backpack in his hand. His tie was around his neck, untied, messenger bag over his shoulder.

“I’m ready!” Jack appeared fully dressed but shoes untied.

“Please don’t run, you’ll trip and we’ll end up in the ER instead of at school and work.” He ushered him out the door and into the elevator, crossing his fingers that traffic was cooperative.

==

Morgan looked up when Reid rushed in. “Rough morning?”

“No, no, we’re all good. He got there on time.” He glanced at his watch. “I am on time. We’re all good.” He dumped his bag and started to tie his tie.

Morgan chuckled. “No one expects you to have it all under control on the first day you know. Take a breath.” He watched his friend do just that. “How’d yesterday go?”

“Good. The drive to the airport was okay and we got to walk Hotch all the way to the gate. After we left, Jack asked to go to the zoo. I figured it would help take his mind off his dad leaving, you know?”

Derek nodded.

“At bedtime though he got a little upset so he, and all his stuffed animals, came and slept in my bed. We read a chapter of a book and he fell asleep.”

Kicking back with his hands behind his head, Morgan smiled. “Sounds like you handled it though. Why, exactly, did Hotch ask you to take Jack?”

“Umm.” He wondered when that question would come up.

“Jessica got a promotion that requires more hours and young Jack already knows Reid here.” A deep voice answered, making both men turn and look up at Rossi. “Aaron and I discussed it at length. He asked me first, but what little boy wants to hang out with an old man like me for an
entire summer? My house isn’t meant for kids and I don’t know what would be fun. But Reid here is really just a big kid.” He sauntered down the stairs. “I bet the magic and science lessons alone will keep Jack busy the whole summer.” He stopped by their desks and smiled.

In that moment, giving him the out he needed to avoid questions leading to an outing of another kind, Spencer could almost kiss Dave. He was starting to understand Aaron’s love/hate relationship with his best friend. The man could be grating and annoying when he tried, but then he did things like that, or like helping two coworkers cover a relationship, and it was hard to be mad.

==

Week 1, Day 6

“Dad!”

Spencer winced. “You don’t have to shout, Jack. He can hear you just fine.”

The boy was bouncing in front of the computer monitor. “I can see you! Can you see me?”

Hotch laughed. “Yeah, I can see you. How was your week with Spencer?” His heart swelled watching the two men he loved so much through the small laptop screen.

“Good. I slept in Spencer’s bed with all my animals and he said it was okay because you weren’t here to take up their space.”

“Did he now?” He chuckled.

“And! He reads me a chapter of a book every night and it’s good and he said we can read more books when we’re done!” The sadness from the first few days had, at least temporarily, given way to the excitement of what felt a bit like a sleepover.

“Are you letting Spencer get his work done? Or are you disturbing him all the time?” He didn’t want his lover to start to resent him or his son from this.

Jack paused in his dancing and looked at Reid a minute and then back to the screen. “He doesn’t bring home work like you do. He sometimes brings home a little, but he reads way faster than you. Have you ever watched him read?” There was amazement in his voice.

“Yes, I have.”

“He’s so fast! It’s so cool! What can’t you read fast like that?” He tilted his head to the side.

Hotch laughed out loud at that. “Is he cooler than me now?”

“I don’t know.” Jack frowned.

“Hey, Jack?” Spencer jumped in. “Can you go brush your teeth while I talk to your Dad a minute?”

“Okay. Bye Daddy.”

“Bye, Buddy.” He waited till Spencer turned back around. “How are things really?”

“Good. He has moments of being a little sad, but so far nothing big. How are you?”

“I’m okay. It’s hot, dry, dusty. I wasn’t aware just how much I disliked those three things, but it is what it is. I’ll be very busy, but I think I can agree to a call every two to three days at a minimum
with an attempt to call every night.” He studied Spencer as best he could. “How are you?”

“I’m fine. Why?”

Aaron smiled at him. It hadn’t even been a week and he missed him. “I know Jack full-time can be a bit overwhelming. You agreed to this arrangement pretty quick, and you have no idea how much I appreciate it, but I know kids aren’t your thing really.”

“It’s different with Jack.” Reid reached out a brushed his thumb across the face on the screen. “I don’t think Jack is going to be the hard part of this summer.” He looked up as Jack raced back into the room.

“All done! Is Daddy still here?”

“Yes, he is. Come say good night to him so we can get you into bed. We both have busy days tomorrow.”

==

Week 3, Day 3

He stared in horror as the usually mellow and happy little boy pitched onto the floor of the store and began to scream. They hadn’t heard from Hotch in two days, prearranged as he’d told them he had to travel and would be out of touch, but Jack’s mood had slowly soured until it had reached this point.

He’d spent the entire shopping trip asking for sugary snacks, something Spencer knew Aaron tried to limit. When Reid kept saying no, the boy started to make a scene. When Spencer attempted to correct that behavior, that’s when this performance had started.

Now Jack was laying in the aisle kicking and screaming that Spencer wasn’t his dad. It was making Spencer nervous that someone would think he was trying to kidnap the boy.

Eye contact with a man down the aisle, three older kids following behind, pressed Reid into action to at least get him up of the floor. “Come on, Jack. Don’t do this. Get up.”

“Give him a minute. Just walk to the end of the aisle and keep him from having an audience.”

Spencer looked up to see the man was now standing right beside him. “I don’t know.”

The man chuckled. “Trust me. I’ve been through it three times.” He waved generally at the kids. “They all do this eventually. He just needs a minute.”

Reid frowned but stood and walked with the man to the end of the aisle.

“I’m Brandon.” He held out his hand.

“Spencer.” He took it and shook.

“First public tantrum?”

Reid nodded.

“I would say it gets easier, but that would be a lie. The saying you’re not their parent, that hurts the most.”
“Well. I’m not really. His Dad is overseas for the summer.”

Brandon nodded in understanding. “Military?”

He figured a small half-lie wouldn’t hurt. “He’s with the military, yeah. He’s been gone three weeks so far.”

“If this your first time stepping up into the full-time dad role?”

“Yeah.” He looked up when Jack went silent. The young boy was now just lying on the floor watching him.

“See. Now that he has realized that it didn’t get him what he wants, he should be easier to get to cooperate.”

“Thanks.” He walked back to Jack and looked down. “Done crying now?”

“Yeah.” Jack sniffled.

“Is this how we act in public?”

“No.”

“Come on, get up. We are done shopping anyway.” He helped the boy up and led him to the cart.

“Here.” Brandon handed Reid a card as he got close. “If you want, we could get the kids together at the park or something. Maybe when your partner gets back, we could talk he and my wife into something together. She works way too much and always needs to take a break.”

Spencer was surprised at how easily it seemed Brandon accepted the notion that he was part of a gay couple. “Um, yeah. Sure. That sounds great.”

==

Sitting at the table for dinner, Spencer was looking down at Jack sternly. “I know you wanted those snacks today, but we both know your dad doesn’t like you having a lot of sweets and that isn’t changing just because he isn’t here. I’m not happy about how you acted today.”

Jack’s lip trembled. “Am I in trouble?”

“Do you think you should be?”

He nodded.

“And what do you think your punishment should be?”

Jack looked around the room as he thought. “No dessert.”

“I think that’s appropriate.” Reid nodded.

“What does appropriate mean?”

“It means I think it’s a good punishment for what you did. It’s not too mean and it’s not too nice. It fits just right.”

“Oh.”
“So, if you’re done eating, maybe you should go wash up for bed.”

“Okay.”

==

Week 4, Day 2

“Are you in your room?” Spencer looked at the background on the screen.

“Umm, yeah.” Aaron blushed. “I asked about being able to make a private call and they let me bring it for an hour or so. I have to take it back though.”

Spencer’s eyes narrowed. “But you knew Jack was staying with Jessica tonight so they could leave early in the morning.” He watched the blush rise further.

“Yeah.”

“Exactly what were you planning here, Agent Hotchner?”

“Umm.” He chuckled through his embarrassment. “I was hoping maybe you would talk.”

“Talk?”

“Are you really going to make me say it?”

“Yes, yes I am.” Spencer grinned. “Tell you what, I’ll go move to the bedroom while you find the words to tell me what you need.” He let his voice change at the last five words, knowing it would ease Aaron’s nerves and get the older man to relax. A glance at the screen as he walked confirmed just that.

In his tiny room, Aaron let the words wash over him as his eyes shut. He hadn’t realized just how dependent he’d become on Spencer’s presence to keep him calm and balanced. Their near-nightly talks mostly included or revolved around Jack and it wasn’t the same as private time like this. He heard a question come through the computer.

“Is your door locked?”

Aaron double checked and nodded.

“Sit the laptop on the end of the bed and get undressed.” Spencer waited for the device to be put down and then stripped himself and climbed onto his own bed. When Aaron reappeared to recline against his pillows, Spencer could see he was already starting to get hard. “I have missed being able to touch you, hold you.” He took in the sight of Aaron’s thin body for the first time in a month. It didn’t appear that he was eating any better there than he had been at home, that and the tan were making him look older. “I know you’ve been dreaming of me. Show me what you dream.”

Aaron let his mind wander to the dream he’d had just last night. He’d just gotten home from this assignment and Spencer had greeted him at the door, but it wasn’t the door of either of their places, it was a house, light and open. Spencer had stopped him just inside and reached around to lock the door behind him before silently stripping him naked. He ran his hands over his chest, tugging at his nipples as he went, imagining it was Reid’s hands on his body. He’d wanted to speak but somehow knew it wasn’t allowed. Dream Spencer had pressed kisses to his hips and thighs before licking and slightly sucking at his head just a moment, just enough to drive him wild, before pulling away and
standing up.

Spencer watched as Aaron wet his hand and stroked his cock before pulling away. He own hands were around his dick and balls, massaging and rubbing them. A moment later, he watched Aaron press three of his own fingers into his mouth and give them what had to be the best blowjob Spencer had ever watched. He wondered what he was fantasizing about. When he saw Aaron’s hips begin to thrust into the air, he finally spoke again. “Stop. Don’t come, Aaron.”

Hotch froze, pulling the fingers from his mouth.

“One finger, you can tease your cock with one finger.” He watched the older man do as he was told. “Spread your knees nicely so I can see you fuck yourself like I fuck you.”

The idea of what he was about to do via skype made Aaron groan as he fingers slipped in and he set a hard pace. He was so desperate for his release. “I need to come.” He panted.

“Not yet, not until I say so. I want you to watch me come first. Look at me, let me see your beautiful eyes.”

He stared past his throbbing cock and into the camera, watching as Spencer jerked himself off, come finally coating his stomach. His dick was twitching, begging. “Spence?” His voice was high, desperate.

Spencer smiled at his finally. “Come for me.” He watched as Aaron’s back arched as his orgasm rocked through his body. Since he hadn’t been stroking himself when it happened, come coated not only his torso, but went onto the bed as well. “I love you so much.”

Hotch’s whole body was relaxing now. He could hear Spencer speaking but it sounded far away and distorted. Spent, he wanted to fall asleep and not worry about cleaning up his mess. This was always the time when the younger man cared for him. Except Spencer wasn’t there with him. He’d run halfway around the world because of a secret and now he just felt alone. The feel of a tear running down his temple took him by surprise, he hadn’t realized he’d started crying. Wiping it away with his mostly clean hand, Aaron sniffled which only opened a torrent of emotions.

“Aaron? What’s wrong?” Spencer tried to get his attention.

Remembering he still had an audience, Aaron sat up and reached for a towel he’d brought to his room. “I’m sorry.” He said to the screen. “I need to go now.”

“Wait! Aaron! What’s wrong?” Spencer tried again, his heart breaking when the connection ended.

==

Week 9, Day 4

Wandering the aisles of the store trying to find something different to make for dinner, Spencer stopped at a cardboard display set out in the middle of the main walkway. Walking around it, he mentally looked over a map of the area and made his best guess before selecting a page. “Hey, Jack?”

“Yeah?” The boy looked up from a display of fruit snacks he was staring at hopefully.

“You start kindergarten this year, don’t you?”

“I dunno.” He shrugged.
“You’re five. And if you’re five by September, you should start kindergarten.” He was looking over the page, a list of school supplies.

“If you say so. Why?”

“If you’re starting school, you’ll need school supplies. I wonder if your Dad was just going to enroll you in your normal school or send you somewhere else. I’ll have to ask him tonight.” He folded the page and tucked it into his pocket.

==

When the call connected that night, Spencer had a list of things ready that he wanted to ask about.

“Hey.” He smiled at Aaron. “How are you?”

“Good. How are you guys?”

“Fine. We went to the store today and I saw something that made me wonder. Have you enrolled Jack in a school for kindergarten yet?”

Aaron paused. “I think I was supposed to in June after school got out. I totally forgot.” A glance at the date in the corner of the screen told him why Spencer was asking. “I’ll only just be getting back before school starts.”

“I hadn’t thought about it until we were at the store and there was a display of school supply lists. Which school were you going to send him to? I think you’re zoned for Edison Elementary.”

“Yeah, we are. I wasn’t planning on sending him to a fancy private school. I don’t know what they need to get him registered.”

Spencer smiled. “I’ll call them and find out and then Jack and I can go school shopping.” He looked up with the boy darted into the room. “Ready to talk to your dad?”

“Yes!”

==

Leaning against the front counter at Edison Elementary two days later, Spencer handed over the completed paperwork to the secretary. “And that’s all you need?”

“For now.” She nodded. “Mister Hotchner can come in and pick up the rest and sign it himself before school starts.” She looked down at Jack. “Would you like to see the classrooms? You’ll find out a few days before school starts which teacher you will have.”

“Okay.” The boy clung to Spencer’s hand as they followed her down the hall.

==

“But I want this one!” Jack stuck out his lip in a pout. The store was more crowded today and he knew that Spencer disliked crowds. “I don’t want that one.”

“But it has superheroes. See?”

“I don’t care. Superheroes aren’t real. This one is black like daddy’s and he’s a real superhero.”

Sighing, Reid gave in. “Fine. If that’s the one you want, you can have that one.”
Jack bounced around excitedly. “Thanks Spencer!”

“Don’t drop it. Now, let’s go figure out what folders and stuff you want.” He herded Jack into the next aisle.
Her phone beeped from the conference room. “What do you need?” She rushed.

“Garcia.” A voice she was surprised to hear spoke. “I need a list of everyone you can find who is an enemy of Doyle.”

“I-I, yes. Right away, Sir.” She smiled even as the line disconnected. Hotch was back.

==

Heading for the round table room, Penelope knew the rest of the team was down in interrogation so she was likely the first to see their wayward boss in person. Entering the room, seeing him dressed so relaxed and casual and with that beard. Well, it was easy to see what Spencer saw. She greeted him warmly and got right down to business, the look in his eyes told her that right now was night the time for friendly banter. They had a murderer to nail to the wall.

==

Dave chuckled at his friend as they stood outside the interrogation room. “And Spencer?”

“What about him?” Aaron looked up from his phone.

“Does he… approve?” He smirked.

Aaron blushed. “He expressed being very eager to see it in person.”

Rossi barked out a laugh at that. “That sounds…fun.”

His phone beeped again. “I need to take this. Excuse me.” Aaron slipped back out of the room, pulling the door shut behind him.

==

The halls were empty. Hotch could not remember a time when he’d ever walked around their floor and it’s been so deserted. He turned another corner but instead of Reid, he found JJ and let her know what needed to happen. “Oh, JJ?”

“Yeah?”

“Have you seen Reid around?”

“Umm, he’s in the round table room with Garcia.”

There would be no time to talk to him before the announcement. “Okay, thanks.”

==

As Emily followed JJ and Garcia to Garcia’s office, Hotch glanced around the three men still in the room with him. Dave looked… not surprised, while Morgan just looked angry and Spencer looked… something else. “Reid, I need to see you in my office a minute.” He turned on his heel and left the room.

Rossi and Morgan watch their youngest agent follow their leader out. Morgan turned to Dave.
“That’s it? What? Reid gets a full explanation?”

“Leave them alone. Hotch hasn’t seen Jack yet, apparently the boy is on a trip with him aunt. They’re probably just catching up on him.” Through the window, Dave watched as Hotch’s blinds flicked shut. He had no doubt they were catching up, it just wasn’t about Jack.

==

Spencer found himself immediately pressed against the wall behind the office door the moment it was shut and locked. Calloused hands were running over his body, tugging at his sweater as a mouth latched needily to his neck. Coarse hair tickled him and he couldn’t help but laugh and pull away slightly from the sensation. Reid grabbed the sides of Aaron’s soft shirt and pull him close, feeling his erection straining in his pants. “Slow down, Aaron.” He tried to calm him down before they both made a mess they didn’t have time to clean up.

“I missed being able to touch you, to feel you. I hate that we have to deal with this case.” One of Aaron’s hands found its way to the front of Spencer’s slacks and stroked his covered length. “Please let me touch you.” Desperation from their time apart crept into his voice. “Please?”

Spencer lowered his voice. “On your knees. Pull yourself out, you can stroke, but don’t come.”

Aaron nodded and sank to the ground, eagerly staring up at the other man. When a slim cock brushed his lips, he opened up and took it in eagerly. He wanted to do much more, but this would have to do for now. He relaxed his jaw as Reid took his head and didn’t hold back, fucking into his mouth fast and hard before grunting and tipping Aaron’s head back so they could look into each other’s eyes as he came down Aaron’s throat. Feeling the tension build in himself, Aaron pinched the base of his own dick and pulled back once Reid loosened his grip. The first words he spoke from the floor were that he needed to come.

Spencer helped Aaron up and guided him to a chair before kneeling to the floor and wrapping his own lips around Hotch’s cock and sucking. He knew the older man wouldn’t last long at all so he swallowed him down, allowed Aaron to feel the wet heat of his throat.

He let his head fall back, it was going to be too much, too fast. Giving in, he came long and hard until he was spent and exhausted. He barely felt Spencer putting him and his clothes back to rights.

“Come on, you can’t sleep right now. We have to go find Declan.”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

==

Dave sat in one of the chairs in front of the desk, placing two tumblers on the surface. “So, what has you thinking so hard?”

Hotch nodded in thanks and took one glass. “While I was away? It was mentioned to me, I have to find a school for Jack. It’s something Haley would have taken care of, but now I need to do it. The preschool was already handled.”

“This is the first thing you have to do on your own.”

Hotch nodded.

“Well, do you have any idea where you want to look?”
Sighing, he sat back in his seat, “When we’d bought the house, Haley’d picked it because of the schools. I didn’t think about that when I got the apartment.”

“You could always move.”

“Maybe. I told Spencer that the local school was fine but on the flight home I pulled up information for Mann Day School. It has high security and a number of kids whose parents work for the Bureau go there. Tuition is a bit steep, but I think they may be a bit more understanding of this job.”

“So, when do you go for a visit?”

“I haven’t heard back yet, probably sometime next week. It’s cutting it close to the start of the year, but I’m hoping they understand I’ve been overseas.”

==

The way Aaron had been pressed firmly against Spencer’s back as he tried to unlock the door, making contact almost completely from shoulder to heel, caused them to both pitch forward as soon as the entry was open. On the floor, Aaron had rolled to his back, pulling Spencer with him until he was seated across the older man. “I love you.”

Spencer grinned and leaned in for a kiss, letting their erections grind together through their clothes. “I love you too. Tell me what you need.”

His mind whirled with where to start. “I want to feel you inside me.” Aaron’s hands went to his own pants, undoing them and pushing them down the little bit that he could manage with Spencer sitting across his thighs. His desperate cock managed to spring free before he reached up and attempted to do the same to Spencer. “I’ve missed you touching me, tying me up, spanking me, but I’ve missed feeling filled with you.”

A sound made Spencer look up and then lean forward and shove the door closed with a slam just as the top of Penelope’s head came into view.

“Oops.” Hotch chuckled.

“Yeah. Oops. Now, where were we?”

Aaron thrust up. “I was trying to talk you into fucking me.”

Spencer paused. “I have one question.”

“Just one?” He cocked one brow.

Nodding, he continued. “Was Emily the secret making you so sick?”

Aaron nodded. “I was afraid lying to you would drive you away. I went and begged to be able to tell you several times and they always said no. I didn’t want you angry.”

“I am angry.”

“Oh.” His face fell.

“Just not at you. At the people who gave the orders, like we couldn’t be trusted to protect her? Maybe at JJ some.”
“JJ?”

He nodded. “After you left I went to her place with Jack and cried. Emily was dead, you had left, sometimes I felt alone.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I was hurting and I could see that you were hurting but JJ? She carried on like every day this happened and it just made me feel worse.” Spencer shook his head to clear his thoughts then leaned forward to kiss Aaron again. “I love the beard.”

“Jack hates it you know.”

“Good thing he’s not back for two more days.” He ground their members together. “I want to play, but I want this too. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I have a secret.”

“What’s that?” Spencer rested on Aaron’s chest and stared down, watching the blush that always appeared when topics around sex or play came up.

“I stole something.”

“What’d you steal?” He was curious now.

“The last night we were together before I left? I was up before you and your bag was open so I, uhh, I took one of the plugs.” His blush deepened. “I took it with me.”

Brows vanished behind his hair. “You did? I thought I lost that somewhere. Wait. So we can..”

Aaron wiggled a bit from underneath him. “I’m ready. It was in my bag so before we left I snuck away and put it in.”

“You have it in now?” Spencer was floored. Aaron had prepped himself so they could get right to it. Well, that explained as they were leaving the building. And the open need that had been rolling off of him in the car. And the assault coming up the stairs. “Get naked. I’ll grab more lube.” Spencer pushed up and took off to his room, losing his own clothes in the process.

When he returned, Aaron was naked facing away from him. He could see the black plug now nestled between his cheeks. Rushing forward, he poured entirely too much lube into his hand, dumping the bottle and a towel on the floor before pushing Aaron into the door hard. “Keep your hands on the door. Don’t come until I say.”

“Yes, Master.”

The sound of his words made Spencer’s dick jump. He coated it until it glistened and then rubbed a little around the plug to help ease it out, tossing it onto the towel before he coated Aaron’s hole with the rest of the lube. Gripping masculine hips, Spencer lined up and sank in, making them both moan. Aaron felt so good wrapped around his cock. He set a brutal pace, desperate to reach his climax quickly, they would have time for slow and gentle later.

“Please can I come?” Aaron begged. He felt weak, like his legs were going to give out any minute. A hand wrapping around his dick made him cry out.

“Come for me.” Spencer whispered into his ear. “Show me how happy you are to be home.” He
continued pumping and stroking in tandem. “Let go, Sir.”

“Yes, Master.” Aaron’s back bowed as he came into Spencer’s hand, he could feel the other man’s cock pulsing within him as he too came, filling him up. When he felt the dick start to pull away, he made another request. “May I please wear the plug again?”

“Now?”

“I want to feel you still inside of me. I’ve missed it.”

“I’ll have to wash it first. For now, clench and hold it in. Show me you are still so obedient.” He carefully turned Aaron around, making sure he was leaning against the door before moving to wash himself and their things up.

==

Four days later, Jack clung to his dad’s hand as they walked the halls of Mann Day School. The headmistress, Miss Jacoby, had given them a tour of the school and let him peek into a kindergarten class for a little bit before they started back toward the office discussing adult stuff.

“Everything on the application you filled out Mister Hotchner looked great so if we meet your expectations, we are excited for Jack to be joining us whenever you’re ready.” Miss Jacoby smiled down at the boy.

“I think it will do fine.” Hotch pulled out his wallet. “What is the total I owe?”

Opening the folder on the desk, Miss Jacoby made a sound of surprise. “Actually, sir, it’s already paid up. In fact, an anonymous donor covered Jack’s tuition and books for the year plus a general donation to the school to be earmarked for a specific department.”

Hotch looked confused, “Who would have done that?”

“I’m sorry sir, the note with the donation said to not tell you who made it or where else the money was to be used. All I can say is Jack is covered for the year.”

Standing, he was speechless, “I… Well, thank you.” He extended his hand, “I suspect I could make a guess or two who would have been responsible. We look forward to Jack starting school, don’t we Jack?” He stared down to his son who beamed up and him and nodded. Dave had been the only one who’d known about him looking at the school.

==

“You didn’t have to do that.”

Rossi looked up from his desk, confusion written in his features, “Do what?”

“Pay Mann Day School.” Hotch was leaning against the door frame of the older man’s office the following day.

Dave’s brows furrowed further, “I didn’t.”

“What?” He studied his friend, who appeared to be telling the truth. “Someone paid for a year of Jack’s tuition plus a donation to the school. It had to be you, who else do I know that has that sort of money?”

“I…” He thought a minute, “I have no idea. But it wasn’t me. Not that I wouldn’t do that, but I
wouldn’t do it on the sly, I’d either force you to take a check or failing that, I’d make Garcia wire you the money.” He watched his friend think about that, “Anyway, I’m assuming that means you’re going with Mann Day?”

That brought a smile to Hotch’s face, “It was great and Jack loved it. Kindergarten is its own little world, but then in first grade kids move around based on performance. So a student who needs extra help can have more time in areas they need while moving on in other areas. They can have more time on one subject than another.”

“So it’s like Montessori.”

“Sort of.”

“Well, I’m sure he’s going to do great. And look at you, you’ve now successfully jumped the first big hurdle of single parenthood, he’s enrolled in school. We’re all getting stand down the first week, right?”

Hotch couldn’t help but to laugh.

==

The reality ended up that the team was away on a case as Jack’s first day of kindergarten approached.

“Hey, Rossi.” JJ checked over her shoulder as she scurried to catch up with him. “I’ve talked with the others and they agreed too.”

He lifted his chin in acknowledgement. “I am about to talk to the Chief, wanna join me?”

“Sure, the faster we get this into action, the better.” She fell into step beside him.

“Garcia at the ready?” He raised his hand and knocked on the frame of the Chief’s door.

“As always.”

“Come in.” the Chief called out. “How may I help you agents?”

“I was hoping we could have a moment of your time, privately?” Rossi smiled.

“Is something wrong?” Chief Saunders, a greying man in his sixties, asked.

“No, it’ll all make sense in a minute.” He pushed the door shut and followed JJ to the empty chairs.

“Less than a year ago,” JJ started. “Agent Hotchner lost his ex-wife and was left to raise his son on his own. It’s something we’ve all helped and supported him with.”

Saunders nodded. “It must be hard.”

“Well, on Monday his son, Jack, is starting school, kindergarten. The way this case is going, if Agent Hotchner stays, he’ll miss the first day.” Rossi crossed one leg over the other. “We are going to take measures to prevent that from happening, but it will mean losing two agents for the remainder of the case. We can work two agents down, we do it from time to time, I just don’t want you to think you’re getting shorted.”

He smiled. “I understand the situation and that things happen, he needs to be with his son now.”
JJ stood and extended his hand. “We are hoping to negotiate Agent Hotchner and I to the airport tonight without too much issue.”

Rossi spoke up. “Reid should go.”

“What?” She turned to him.

“Spencer thinks he’ll be able to negotiate Hotch onto the plane and home with less of a fight. He says he knows you can bully him into it, but he seems to think his way will be better.”

Saunders’ brows rose. “You bully him? I would have expected it the other way around.”

Her only reply was a smile as she continued. “I’ll get the plan into motion.”

==

Spencer hurried around the corner and found where Hotch was negotiating with a vending machine for the release of a candy bar, it appeared the machine was winning. “Rossi had a lead and he said you and I should rush to follow up before we miss our window.” He put a sense of urgency into his line.

Hotch frowned at the machine and his lost snack. “What lead?”

Spencer looked confused. “He didn’t tell you? He said he’d tell you. Oh well, there’s no time now to sort that out, come on, I’m driving.” He tugged the sleeve of Hotch’s suit jacket to hint the man should follow him.

Hotch complied without question.

==

Twenty-five minutes into the drive, Hotch suddenly looked up from the file and squinted into the near darkness. “Where are we?”

“The airport.” Reid answered like it was obvious as he guided the SUV through a private entrance and alongside the air field.

“Um, why?”

He ignored the question until he parked next to a small private jet. “We’re headed back to DC. Tonight. On that plane.” Before Hotch could argue, he got out and shut the door.

Hotch stared out the window a minute before finally exiting and hurrying to catch up. “Why?”

On the second step, Spencer stopped and turned around, causing his partner to stop quickly to avoid crashing into him. “Because Monday morning is Jack’s first day of school, he only gets one of those. This team can live without you for the thirty-six or so hours it will take for you to go home and be Dad and come back.”

“The whole team was in on this?”

“Yes. Rossi talked to Saunders and Garcia found the plane and pilot. Morgan’s stepped up to lead and the only thing remaining is for you to board without a fight.”

He considered what his team had done for him, “Fine. Let’s go.”
JJ stared through the doorway at the rest of the team, her eyes meeting those of her boss. It hurt, hearing Spencer explode his anger and then admit he’d considered using again. His drug use had never been something openly discussed, though it was assumed most of them knew. Everyone but Rossi anyway. She tried to blink back the tears as Hotch headed her direction, shutting the glass doors behind him so at least their conversation would be private.

“Are you okay?” Concern filled his voice and was written across his thin face.

She stared at the pattern on his tie, unwilling to return his gaze now. “Yeah. I’m fine.”

“JJ.” It came out slightly exasperated. “You two have been close for years.”

“He’s my best friend.” She cut in.

“I know. I’ll talk to him. It was my choice to fake Emily’s death.”

“Why isn’t he mad at you?”

“I-I don’t know.” Hotch chewed the corner of his lip. “I told him that there was something I couldn’t share. I didn’t know he’d been coming to your place. Why didn’t you tell me?”

JJ swiped tears away. “And say what? That Spence, the guy who openly detests change and has abandonment issues, isn’t coping well with a close friend dying? If he wasn’t willing to share with you, him finding out I betrayed his trust would have just alienated him from me and then where would he have turned? To drugs?”

He winced at the mention. “I don’t know.”

“I’m fine, Hotch. It hurts, but I’ll figure out how to work it out with him.”

Hotch finally nodded. “Okay. But if you think things aren’t improving, let me know.”

“Sure.”

==

An hour later, the SUV was quiet until Dave finally asked from the passenger seat. “What did Reid mean by that?”

Hotch glanced at him. “Mean by what?”

“When he asked JJ about what she would have done if he’d started dilaudid again.”

“Oh.”

Rossi waited in silence before pressing. “Oh? Come on, Aaron, you have to give me more than that.”

Aaron sighed. “Dave. Before you came back there was a case, Reid was abducted.”

He nodded slowly. “You told me about that.”
“There is something that isn’t in the files. There aren’t any records of it at all.”

The older man started putting two and two together. “Something was covered up?”

“One of the personalities of the unsub drugged him several times over the two days.” Aaron wondered just how much he would have to give before they reached their destination. “We realized that the next day.”

“We?”

It was Aaron’s turn to nod. “Garcia and I stayed with him afterward at the hospital. She discovered the track marks and showed me.”

“Okay. But that doesn’t match up to the blow-up I saw back there.”

“It became apparent in the months the followed that he was addicted, was still using. Garcia came to me a few months later when his behavior away from work as well as on cases got so erratic, she was worried.”

“He was working while addicted? And you knew?” Dave was floored. Clearly his friend had had feelings for the younger man long before they got together. “How long?”

“Eight months or so.”

“How’d you keep his medical records out of the Bureau’s hands?”

Hotch knew what he was asking. “He didn’t detox at a hospital.”

Rossi was speechless now. “That’s one hell of a drug to detox from.”

“I know.” He thought back to those days.

“And you didn’t know he was considering using again?”

“No.” He exhaled heavily. “I wouldn’t have left if I did.”

==

Standing at the counter in Dave’s house after the case was over, wine glass in hand, Aaron stared at Spencer’s ass.

“How many of those have you had?” A voice giggled near his head.

He turned and looked at Garcia who was propped against the center island beside him. “I-I’m not sure. There was one while I was waiting my turn and then one while I was cooking and one… I sort of lost count after that.” He smiled at her, the warmth of his buzz washing over him.

“That just means you need more.” She sloshed red wine into his glass, leaving a puddle on the counter and drawing a cry about wasted wine from Rossi in the next room where he’d just turned on music. “I want to dance.”

“Here?” His voice cracked, which made her laugh.

She leaned close so the others wouldn’t hear her. “Yes, Sir, here.”

Aaron swallowed. He knew she knew full well what that did to him sober, playing that now was
just mean. “Okay.” He gasped out as he followed her to the living room.

Spencer was staring at them, slack jawed, pressed against the opposite side of the counter. He loved to see Aaron submissive and obedient. Seeing him trail after his neighbor almost like a puppy was a serious turn on. A voice approaching helped to kill the twitch in his pants.

“Man, Garcia can get anyone to loosen up, can’t she?” Emily was watching the pair dance.

“Yeah.”

“Hey, I’m glad you made it.”

“Yeah.” He stared into his own glass. “Would have sucked to miss that.” He gestured to where Aaron was now totally focused on the woman in his arms. To any outsider it looked like he was just humoring a friend, but Spencer could see him waiting for permission at every turn.

“It looks fun. Come dance with me.” She tugged the wine glass away from him and sat it down.

“Okay. Sure.”

==

Dave watched from the doorway as the party wound down. JJ had been the first to excuse herself to get home to her son. He envied her a little over having that waiting at the end of the day.

Garcia had finally removed herself from Hotch, passing him to Emily, before pulling Morgan up and talking him into escorting her home. It was always an easy sell with him, Dave knew that despite their ‘just friends’ status, the man would move heaven and earth for their analyst.

Gesturing to her from a distance with a fresh bottle of wine, Rossi watched Emily settle Aaron onto the couch near where Reid appeared to be drifting off before she tiptoed closer to him. “Want to take this one into the den?”

“Will they be okay?” She looked over her shoulder.

“They’ll be fine.” He shrugged. “Sleep will do them both good.”

Prentiss waited until Rossi sat on the low loveseat before curling beside him. “Hotch looks almost sick lately.”

“I know. The thing with you, it ate at him.”

“Oh god. I joked with Reid that hiding gave me an ulcer, but…” She glanced out of the room. “I hope he’s okay.”

“He’ll be fine. Enough about them, c’mere.” He lifted one arm and pulled her close. “How are you holding up?”

“I think I’m doing okay.” She smiled up at him.

“And you’ll tell me if you’re not?” His face dipped close to hers.

“Yes. I promise.”

“Good.”
Emily held her breath as dry lips brushed across her own. “What is this?” She whispered, the words getting swallowed up in the darkness.

“It’s an old man who understands that he didn’t take the opportunity when he should have and thanks god he gets a second chance.” He brushed her hair back behind her ear. “Is that okay?”

“I’m just tipsy enough to say it’s perfect.” Emily watched him take both of their glasses and place them on the table before leaning forward, laying her back and covering her body with his own.

“Even if it’s just for a little while?”

“Yes.”

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The sudden silence made Reid look up and around the dim living room. The only other person with him was Aaron who was possibly only half awake. “Aaron?”

“Hmm?” He rolled his head to the side.

“Did everyone else leave?”

“Think so.” He slurred, then frowned at the slurring. He looked back up to Spencer and smiled. “Garcia caught me watching you. That’s why she wanted to dance.”

“I enjoyed the show.”

One brow cocked, alcohol relaxing him more than normal. “Enjoyed how much?”

Spencer blushed. “How sober are you?”

“Enough to consent. Why?”

He glanced around the room. “Come kneel.” He ordered and then watched as the older man tumbled as he rushed to comply, kneeling between his now spread knees. “Take me out and suck me off.” He watched the muscles of Aaron’s arms moving under the edges of his polo shirt as he followed orders. Spencer loved that Aaron wore an undershirt, fitted and black from what he could make out.

Aaron leaned forward and nuzzled the cock begging for his attention before licking a stripe up the underside. His own prick was straining desperately in his pants but he didn’t reach down to adjust or free himself. He knew Spencer never forgot about him so he could wait. Gripping Spencer’s dick, he stroked as he sucked in the entire head, keeping suction as he slipped down as far as he could manage before pulling up again. He knew his master loved the tease and he didn’t want to disappoint him.

Even nearing drunk, Spencer could see the focus Aaron was giving the task at hand. It mere minutes he was rocketing toward an end he wasn’t ready to happen yet. “Up, up.” He softly instructed, cupping Aaron’s cheek. “That’s enough for now. Come up here and let me kiss you.” He helped him comply, straddling his lap, jeans straining. Nudging under Aaron’s arms, he guided him up until he was standing on his knees, Spencer leaned forward and licked and sucked at the spot where he knew the head of Aaron’s cock to be, where he would be most sensitive. He touched and teased, his hands came around and squeezed his ass, fingers pressing along the seam of his pants right where Spencer knew his hole was until Aaron was softly whimpering and trembling. Smelling the arousal as a damp spot started to form on the heavy denim, Spencer moved to
unfasted the conspicuously tented pants.

A noise that sounded a bit like someone calling out from the next room made them both freeze.

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Emily felt alive in a way she hadn’t in months. Her slacks were open and pushed down just enough to expose dark curls to the air while limiting her ability to move. As lips and tongue worked her mouth, neck, and exposed part of her chest, thick fingers had cupped her core, two managing to push inside her while the thumb circled her clit. She was practically ridding that hand, trying to get more friction, more to fill her up. Biting her lip, she did her best to stay silent as her orgasm rushed up. “God, Dave. I’m going to come. Don’t stop.”

“Never, Sweetheart. Never.” He picked up the pace, watching as she finally let go, calling his name before biting her lip to stay quiet. When the clenching around his fingers stopped and he could feel her relax, he slowly eased his hand out, smiling caringly when she whimpered at the loss. Not breaking eye contact, Dave used his clean hand to hold the back of the small sofa and push up onto his knees before freeing himself from his jeans, using the hand coated in her fluids to stroke himself to full hardness. Even in the half-light he could see her eyes dilate at the sight. He knew he wasn’t a young man anymore, things like this tended to take time now, but he was determined to see this through.

A movement in his peripheral vision made him look up and to the right to where he saw his best friend scowling at him as he carried on stroking his cock. Dave knew the other man couldn’t see anything of Emily from there, she was still fully dressed except for her shoes, her pants had ridden back up just enough when he’d pulled his hand out. The black hair, though, spread across the cushions left no room for guessing who he was with. Ignoring the younger man, Dave turned back to Emily, only just catching Aaron turn to leave and the telltale tenting of his own arousal.

==

Spencer looked up as Aaron hurried back in. “What was that?”

“Nothing. We can use the guest room upstairs, end of the hall on the right.” He tugged Spencer up. “Come on.”

“Okay.” He couldn’t wait to get behind a closed and locked door.

==

Emily saw Dave look up a second time. “What?” She twisted to peer back toward the door. “What is it?”

“Aaron.”

“What!” She pushed up. “He saw us?”

“It’s okay. He’s gone now.” He could feel the moment slipping away but he wasn’t ready. Clinging desperately to the hope that they could get back on track, he sped up his strokes. “We can just finish.”

“I’m sorry, Dave. I didn’t think! What’s he going to think of me now? I have to go!” When he relented and sat back on the opposite arm, she scrambled up and reassembled her wardrobe. “I’m so sorry!”
“It’s okay, Emily. It’s not the first time he’s managed to be a cockblock in my life. I just figured at our ages, we’d had the last.” He gave up on his aching cock, letting it curl to his stomach on its own. He looked up at her. “Will you be okay getting home?”

Emily nodded. “Thanks for dinner. And…” She waved at the loveseat. “Maybe we could try again without my boss in the next room?”

He gave her a soft smile. “Sure.”

She stepped forward and pressed a kiss to his cheek. “Hell, if we manage single rooms, feel free to knock.”

His brows rose. Emily the rule breaker, he should have known. “Sounds good.”

“I’ll let myself out.” She backed away, eyes running over him. “I really am sorry.”

He deflated. “Yeah. Me too.” As he watched her leave, he mentally swore dismemberment and death on his best friend.

==

Once the bedroom door was locked, Spencer slowly undressed as he watched Aaron eagerly strip as fast as he could. He didn’t know what had the older man all wound up, but if sex was the plan, Spencer was all in.

“Do you have lube?” Aaron was standing completely naked, his dick bobbing out in front of himself.

“No.” Spencer glanced around.

“I’ll check the bathroom.” Aaron turned to the small en suite bathroom and dug through the cabinets. Finding a new bottle, he headed back, tossing it to Spencer. “I want to come with you buried inside me.”

Nothing close to their normal supplies was in sight around the room, so Spencer figured he would be left with his hands to tease the other man. “Climb on the bed.” He was surprised when, instead of doing as he was told, Aaron tipped his head down and folded his hands behind his back in submission. “What do you need?”

“If it pleases you I would like to be fucked somewhere other than the bed.”

He waited a beat before asking. “Do you have a place in mind?”

Aaron scanned the room, his eyes landing on a dresser against the wall he knew was shared with Dave’s bedroom. “Over there?”

Spencer crossed the room and checked out the wood furniture. It seemed heavy enough and sturdy enough to hold them. Deciding it would hold up, he went in search of some towels and spread them out before moving back to where Aaron was still standing submissively. “Okay. We’ll get there. I promise.” He opened the lube and coated one finger before gliding it down his crack, sinking it in all of the way. He loved the way Aaron whined at the intrusion and whimpered for more. “Right now, I’m going to just work you up. No touching.”

Aaron nodded.
“I need words, where are you right now?”

“I’m good. So good.” His eyes rolled shut.

Spencer stroked twice more before pulling out, wiping his hand on the towel over his shoulder. He worked his way around the body, sucking and nipping as he went, making Aaron whine again and again. “Go lean over the dresser, ass out, spread yourself apart.”

Aaron rushed to follow orders, his cheek pressed into the wall as his hands gripped his ass cheeks, holding them apart. He could hear the click of the cap before the blunt head of Spencer’s cock pressed against his opening. When Spencer finally breached his muscles roughly, pushing in in one slick movement, Aaron cried out before hearing a door slam in the next room.

Seeing Aaron spread out so needily made Spencer unable to hold back any longer. Ignoring the sounds of their cries and the furniture banging against the wall, he fucked into that glorious ass as hard and as fast as he could. He was ready to rush them to the end when the body beneath his began to tremble and the voice spoke up.

“Stop.”

It wasn’t loud or desperate, but it was clear and Spencer stepped back, even as his hips tried to keep pumping, like they hadn’t gotten the message until a second later. “What’s wrong?” He was instantly concerned.

Aaron felt bad for stopping, but he really wanted to be face to face this time if Spencer agreed. He dropped his head, averting his eyes. “Can we…”

“What do you need, Aaron? You have to tell me.”

He swallowed. “Can we be face to face?”

Spencer smiled. “It’s not the most comfortable, especially on a wooden dresser.”

Aaron nodded in understanding.

“But if that’s what you want then yes, we can do that.” He smiled at the look of childish surprise on Aaron’s face, like he had expected to be told no. “Hop up there.”

Aaron rushed to get settled, watching as Spencer added more lube and tucked in close. He wrapped his arms and legs around him as Spencer resumed his frantic pace, this time hitting his prostate with every thrust. He threw his head back, not caring when it hit the wall, and let himself go, moaning and crying out with every thrust until he could feel his orgasm building. “I need to come, Master. Please let me come.” He started to shake with the effort of holding it off.

“Not yet. Just hold on.” Spencer picked up the pace to approach his finish.

“I can’t!” He cried out. He could feel precome leaking down his cock, making him that much more desperate. “Please!” His hips started to try and thrust into the air even as his ass was still being ridden.

“Almost. I promise, My Love, Almost.” Spencer felt his dick swell and begin to pulse, filling his lover up as the trembling in his arms grew worse. “Just hold on.” He gripped Aaron’s cock in his hand but didn’t stroke, pulling his own still-twitching dick out, ignoring the mess that trailed after and slammed to his knees. Aaron was crying with desperation now, barely holding on to his orgasm. Without further words, Spencer wrapped his lips around Aaron’s prick and sucked, pulling
him in as far as he could manage.

Once the wet heat had enveloped his dick, Aaron thrust desperately before pressing his legs into the towel covered wood and his hips up, filling Spencer’s throat with hot come, each throbbing pulse also pulsing his ass, making Spencer’s come leak out. Just when he thought he was spent, long fingers pressed hard into his weeping opening and fucked against his prostate until he came again, weaker this time but no less desperate. He knew they’d both been loud, himself especially, but he didn’t care. He was right on the line of drunk and had been more than a little horny all night. As Spencer pulled up and away, covered in both of their fluids, Aaron laughed, making his body quiver and leak even more.

Spencer cocked his head and smiled. “What’s so funny?”

Aaron blinked up at him to clear his vision. “Garcia said I looked like I was ready to fuck you right there in the kitchen and everyone else be damned.”

“Did she now?”

He nodded. “I think she seemed to think grinding against me would kill the half erection I had.”

“I doubt that.” He helped Aaron to his feet carefully and used a spare towel to wipe him down enough to save on floor clean up later. “She was probably getting you revved up on purpose.”

“You think?” The room was starting to get fuzzy for him now. “I need to lie down.”

“No, you need to rinse off first. No sleeping yet.” Spencer tugged him toward the bathroom even as his blinks got longer. “I promise it will be quick.”

“So this sex brought to me by the letter G?”

Spencer chuckled. “Something like that.” He looked up, Aaron wasn’t even bothering to open his eyes now, trusting Spencer to not let him get hurt.

His voice got rough and a bit slurred, this time with sleep. “She knows I live you. Love you. Live to love you.” He sagged against the wall of the shower stall.

“I love you too.”

“Please make up with JJ. She didn’t mean to hurt you. She was following orders.”

Spencer frowned. “I’ll try.”

Aaron blinked his eyes open, focusing clearly into Spencer’s gaze for a split second before his eyes went out of focus again and slipped shut. “I only ever want to be yours. Forever, only you touch me.”

“Okay.”

“I thought about it while I was gone.” He was drifting off, he could tell, but he wasn’t ready yet. “I want you to put the chastity cage back on me and I want to wear it forever.” He sagged, causing Spencer to reach out to keep him from slipping to the floor and failing. “Please? Please let me be yours? Only yours.” His face was upturned from where he was seated against the wall.

“Okay.”

“Aaron, come on. If you fall asleep here I can’t move you.” He tried to rouse the large man.

“Please?” His voice sounded desperate.
“Yes. Yes, you can be mine. Okay? Now get up and come to bed.” He tugged Aaron up and guided him to the bed, drying him quickly before letting him fall naked into the blankets.
The following Monday morning, Spencer looked up from where he had been waiting on a bench outside Jack’s school as Aaron emerged. “How was it?”

“You know, as a kid? I imagined these conferences were so parents and teachers could talk about how bad you were and discuss how they were going to be horrible to you.” He chuckled as he pulled the driver’s side door open. “I never would have believed it was so boring and mundane.”

Reid climbed in the other side. “I can’t imagine what my parents had to sit through, I was always miles ahead of my classmates.” He looked up in surprise when Hotch passed him a manila folder. “What’s this?”

“Samples of how he’s doing in school, results of his start of year placement test.” He could feel the smile in his cheeks. He was proud of his son and couldn’t wait for Spencer to be as well.

Spencer read over the page quickly. “Wow! I knew his reading seemed above what it should be, but I didn’t really have anything else to compare him to.”

“She said the reading every night helps a great deal. And the other scores, did you see those?”

“I did. If he keeps this up, you really should think about having him tested. Even if you don’t though, I can spend extra time with him and encourage him to pursue his interests. We can make projects and reports on whatever topic he wants. You learn more and retain more if it’s something you’re interested in.”

Aaron looked over at Spencer at the next light, happiness filling his heart.

“What?”

“I love you and I love how much you love Jack.”

Spencer blushed.

==

Dave stood just inside the doorway of Aaron’s office, arms crossed and face settled into a glower that would probably make his protégé proud. When he realized Aaron was content to ignore him, he gave up his pose and moved to a chair. “Care to explain to me why that was necessary?”

“Why what was necessary?”

“You know what. That little show you tried to put through my bedroom wall after the dinner.”

Aaron finally dropped his pen. “Will you at least shut the door?”

Considering a second, Dave nodded. “Sure.” He stood and shut the door. “Are you really upset about me being with Emily?”

“I thought I made the boundaries within this team clear.” Aaron looked up at him from under heavy brows.

“You warned me off JJ, I just figured you had your eye on her.”
“I wasn’t keeping her for myself, you must have misread it.”

“No. You pissed all over that particular plant.”

He pulled a face. “Dave!”

Rossi waved his disgust off. “We’re adults and I’d like to point out you’re in a relationship, a secret one, with a member of your own team.”

Aaron deflated and slumped back in his chair. “Couldn’t you have taken it to the bedroom?”

“We dumped you and sleeping beauty on the couch and moved to the next room, we hadn’t planned on it going any further.”

“I could have lived without walking in on you with your dick in your hand.”

Dave let his brows rise, his friend wasn’t usually so descriptive. “Well, if it makes you feel better, you also saw the end of my evening as well.”

“What?”

“Emily found out you’d walked up and freaked out and bolted. Then I try to go to my room to take care of business the old-fashioned way but there’s a pair of people trying to slam themselves through my bedroom wall. It was a long night.”

“Sorry.”

“Are you really?”

Aaron tried his hardest to look embarrassed but a grin slipped out.

Shaking his head, Dave stood. “I won’t forget this.”

“I have no doubt, Dave.” He returned to his paperwork as his friend left. Half an hour later, someone else had slunk into his office, sitting anxiously, the door already shut. “Yes?”

“I’m really sorry, Hotch.”

“For what?” He looked up at the brunette woman.

“The thing at Rossi’s. We’d had a lot to drink and I was so lonely while I was away and…” Emily trailed off.

“I’m not upset. I was surprised.” He finally dropped his pen, again, and sat back. “Got an eyeful of Dave I could have lived without. But not upset. This job sucks. It makes it hard for any of us to have normal relationships and the past year has been even harder than normal. The night was about relaxing and letting loose, bonding again as a group. Until such time it affects what happens during work time, I do not care nor do I want to know.”

She cocked her head at him. “How are you doing?”

“Huh?” The change of topic threw him for a moment.

“I told Rossi… Since I’ve been back you’ve looked… unwell.”

“I’m okay.”
“Uh huh.” She nodded sarcastically. “I’ve heard that before. Come on, Hotch. I remember when you were fresh out of the Academy working for my mother, you never showed it but stress never sat well with you. You internalize too much, make yourself sick. So, I’ll ask again. How are you doing?”

Hotch chewed his lip before drawing a breath. “I’m doing better. It was hard keeping it secret, especially from the team.”

“You worried yourself sick.”

He nodded. “I thought joining that taskforce would help. The distance.”

“Did it?”

“No. It was just a fresh group of people, strangers who were too unfamiliar with me to speak up, giving me worried looks and whispering about me.”

“Have you talked to anyone? Really talked?”

He stared at his hands. Even since she’d been back he hadn’t really talked to Spencer. He knew the younger man was upset, felt he was valid in his feelings and so he hadn’t brought it up in case Spencer thought he was trying to take away from his pain. “No.”

“Well, I’m always available to listen. Okay?”

“Yeah.”

She stood and then smirked. “Just… Maybe knock first.”

Aaron rolled his eyes and shook his head. They were a good match, Dave and Emily and he really hoped they managed to find a little happiness. As long as it was behind closed doors from now on.

==

A week later, halfway through their next case, Hotch turned to Morgan as Reid stormed away. “I’m going to go on the record and advise you to throw in the towel.”

Morgan scoffed. “Why? And give in to Reid? Not a chance, man.”

“I just think you’re in over your head and are seriously underestimating your opponent.”

He waved Hotch off. “I’m good.”

“Okay. But I don’t want to hear about it later when it ends badly for you.”

“You won’t.”

Hotch nodded and walked away in the direction Reid had gone. Maybe if he couldn’t talk sense into one man, he could talk some kindness into the other.

==

The back of the building that housed the Boise Police Department was covered in old trees and dense sections of brush. At some point it probably held some aesthetic appeal but now it just looked like whoever was responsible have given up on trying to tame it. Slowing enough to glance around and be sure they were alone, Hotch grabbed Reid’s wrist and pulled him through a small
gap in the bushes with a yelp.

“Why are we back here?” Spencer hissed. “There could be snakes, or bugs.” He tried to turn to look around.

Aaron stopped his movements by pressing him into the cool bricks with his entire body. “I need you to put this thing with Morgan on hold until the case is over.” He tucked his nose into the curve of his throat, hands gripping the sides of his gray sweater tightly.

“Why?” Spencer could feel the shiver that ran through the other man’s body as he wrapped his arms around him, one had threading through his hair. He pressed a kiss to his hair.

“This.” Aaron ground himself into Spencer’s hip. “Seeing you all worked up and aggressive toward him like that...” He cut off, getting lost in the grinding.

He pulled Hotch’s face up and drew him into a kiss, allowing tongues and teeth to tangle together for a minute before pulling away. “Okay, I won’t retaliate until the case is over.” The hand that was around his waist slipped down until he was squeezing the older man’s ass. “We don’t have time right now.”

“I know.” Aaron pulled back, adjusting himself in his slacks, momentarily relishing the feel of his hand rubbing against his arousal. “I just need a second to calm down, I’ll be back in in a minute.”

“Okay.” Spencer pressed another kiss to his lips before navigating his way out of the brush.

==

Once the case was over and the team had made their way home, Aaron checked on Jack in the living room before he wandered into the kitchen where Spencer had insisted on cleaning up after dinner. Ducking his head, he hovered just out of the way until the younger man looked up and smiled.

“What do you need?” The question was soft and gentle, not at all like the dominating voice he used during play, but the words had the same relaxing effect on Aaron.

He sighed a little and glanced up, a blush creeping up his neck. “I-umm, the other night at Dave’s I think I mentioned…” His voice faded out. He was surprised when warm hands cradled his face.

Spencer moved closer. “Shh. Take a breath.”

Aaron took a breath he didn’t realize he needed. “I meant it. That I want to be only yours. Forever. When I was away I thought about it every day. I thought about how it would affect my life, and Jack’s. I did all this research about how Doms and subs show their commitment to each other and there was a lot that I’m not sure I would like. Not all the time. But…” He sucked in a ragged breath the slow himself down. “I’ve spent time with the cage on before and now I know what to expect and if you’ll have me…” He slowly lifted his eyes towards Spencer’s face.

“This is what you want?” Spencer’s voice was barely a whisper.

He nodded.

“Okay.” He pressed a kiss to Aaron’s forehead. “I need to do more research. If you’re going to wear it full time, I want to be sure it’s one that’s safe for long term wear. I won’t have you getting hurt or sick because you’re wearing the wrong one.” Glancing toward where Jack was playing to check on the boy, Reid pulled Hotch flush to him. “Remember, you will always have me, my
love.”

Aaron tucked his face into Spencer’s neck. He loved it when they were at home and he could be as tactile as he needed to be. Spencer never denied him touch whenever or for however long he needed it. Tangling his hands into the soft shirt, he clung to Spencer for what felt like ages, just quietly hold on.

Finally, Spencer spoke. “Why don’t you get Jack put to bed? I was going to head home after saying good night, but if you need me to stay?”

Aaron pulled back and blinked. “I’m okay. You head home.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I will probably just go to sleep as soon as I tuck him in.”

Nodding, Spencer pressed his lips to Aaron’s in a simple kiss before pulling away.

==

Aaron brushed Jack’s hair back from his face as they put the candle away. Staying beside his son’s bed, he spoke again. “Hey, Buddy, I want to talk to you about something. About Spencer.”

“Spencer?”

“Uh huh. You like him being with us, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too. And he did a really good job looking after you while I was away, right?”

“Yeah.” The boy nodded.

“I…” Aaron wasn’t sure how to explain it to a little kid. “I really like Spencer. I like that he comes here and does things with us.”

“And helps me with my homework.” Jack offered.

“Yeah, he helps you with your homework. And I like it when we go to his place.”

“And when we spend the night?”

Hotch smiled. “Especially when we spend the night.”

“Do you like it when he has a sleep over in your bed?” Jack asked. “Sometimes I can hear you talking and stuff, is it fun to have sleep overs?”

He blushed, wondering what his son might have overheard. “I do. And Spencer really likes spending time with you and me. So, I asked him if he wanted to do those things all of the time.”

“What will you hug him more?”

“What?”

“After dinner I saw you hugging him, but it didn’t look like when Aunt Penny hugs people. It looked…different.” Jack thought a second. “And then he kissed you on your lips. I saw that on TV
and Aunt Jessie said only grown-ups who are married and love each other kiss on the lips. Are you guys getting married?”

Hotch didn’t know where to start. “We haven’t talked about it.”

“I like Spencer. I don’t mind if he comes and hugs you and kisses you, you need somebody to hug and kiss you. Aunt Penny said hugs and kisses are important. She was talking to Uncle Dave while I was watching a movie and she said you didn’t get enough hugs and she said you were starving cause nobody hugged you and it doesn’t make sense because you can’t eat hugs like you can eat mac and cheese. Can you?” He looked up at his dad in question.

“No, Buddy, you can’t.” He tried to think back to when Dave or Garcia would have been watching Jack and figured it must have been over the summer. He would have to have a talk with them. “I love getting hugs and kisses from you though, they’re the best.”

“And from Spencer?”

“Yeah, I like getting them from Spencer too.”
The team had managed almost two straight weeks of being in the office. Hotch loved that each day either himself or Spencer had been able to pick Jack up after school and spend the entire afternoon together. The first weekend, Spencer had come to their place and stayed, helping with chores and meals. It was domestic in a way Aaron missed living essentially alone.

After a discussion with Jessica, she had agreed to pick Jack up the following Saturday evening in exchange for dinner out, the four of them, and would bring him back Sunday night. Sitting in the restaurant, Aaron happily let Spencer take over his normal role. He knew that if he wanted to convince the younger man that he wanted this commitment, then he shouldn’t want to hide the more subtle parts of their arrangement. He’d felt the blush on his neck when the waiter had looked to Aaron asking what he wanted to eat and Aaron had turned to Spencer, waiting for him to answer. He saw the question in Jessica’s eyes, but she never voiced it.

As they ate, Aaron had carefully shifted his leg closer to where Reid’s was beside him in the booth until they were just touching. When a warm hand settled on his inner thigh under the table, it helped ground him. This, this family, Jack and Jess along with Spencer, this was what he wanted. As the fingers began to trace patterns on his leg, it felt like he was being lit on fire. He was thankful for the evening lighting in the restaurant as well as his black jeans, both of which helped to hide his cock twitching to life.

Meal over, Aaron excused himself to the bathroom. As he stood, he caught Spencer glancing down his body before meeting his eyes, causing him to blush again. He tried to keep his steps relaxed and even, praying his jeans and untucked shirt helped to hide the situation he was in.

Shutting himself into a stall, he undid his pants and pulled his hard dick out. There was instant relief of being free from the confines and he was thankful the stall had proper doors. Taking a deep breath to calm himself, he slowly stroked up and back down his length. He was at the point where he needed to decide, hide his hard-on up under his belt and be uncomfortable or try and silently jack off and risk getting busted. His phone pinging in his pocket gave him his answer.

Don’t come.

Hotch stroked himself one more time before rearranging and washing his hands.

==

Jessica had driven Jack to her place straight from the restaurant so the pair were alone for the car ride home. “You didn’t finish, did you?” Spencer turned to him.

“No.” Aaron shook his head. He could feel the urge to preen at the positive gaze he was receiving for having followed orders. “I’m all yours.”

Turning off the highway near his apartment, Spencer guided the car down the road. “I want to see it.”

The old Aaron would have balked at the instruction to pull himself out while riding down the road, but instead he quickly unbuckled his belt and pants, displaying his dick to Spencer.

“You can stroke yourself, just teasing though.”

He nodded and began, shifting in his seat as the sensations started to overwhelm him. “Please may
I stop?"

"Not yet, but you can slow down."

Large hands loosened their grip both on his leaking cock and the handle on the door. "Do you still have that sleeve?"

Spencer’s brows went up, they hadn’t used that in ages. "Yes, I do. Did you like that?"

"Yes."

"And you would like to use it again?"

"Yes.” He hissed this time.

The building was coming into view in the darkness, streetlamps spotted the darkness along the mostly deserted road. “We’re going to play for a while when we get inside and you won’t be allowed to come.” He smiled as Aaron whimpered. “If you want to come and take the edge off before we start, then you may come in your own hand and lick it clean. It’s up to you.”

Hotch hesitated, the building was getting close, there were only about a block away. As they slowed, anyone who happened to be at a window on an upper floor might be able to see into the vehicle. It was a risk. But if Spencer was telling him it could be a while, he knew the other man was serious. Throwing any worries out of his mind, he cupped the head of his cock with his hand and pumped hard and fast, staying focused on the approaching building. Just one more light and then they would be pulling into the lot. Anyone could walk by them then. Groaning and crying out, Aaron dug his heels into the floor and came, filling his hand until he was done pulsing. He was out of time to think about it any further, there was only one option, he lifted his come-filled hand to his lips and began licking away the evidence before anyone had time to spot them, his cock still held in the other hand. A sound from the other side of the car made him glance up and meet Reid’s eyes as he felt a dribble of the fluid make a bid for freedom down his wrist.

“Ready?” Spencer gestured to the building.

“Yeah, just let me.” He tucked himself in and made sure he was decent before following Spencer inside and up the stairs. Once they passed the second floor landing, hands were suddenly working the buttons on his shirt open, making the process of walking up harder and a bit more dangerous. He tried to speak but was shushed as the shirt was suddenly freed from his body and he was pushed against the wall halfway to the next level.

“I can’t wait to devour you. A part of me just wants to take you right here.” Spencer ground into Aaron’s hip. “Would you let me? Have you right here?”

“Yes.” He swallowed, lowering his eyes to the thinner man’s collar bone. “Anything for you, Master.” He cried out when teeth sank into his exposed shoulder. “Please take me. I’m only yours.”

Spencer backed away, not bothering to rearranged where his dick was tenting his pants. “Give me your belt.”

Aaron didn’t hesitate to pull the leather free and hand it over. He was prodded to carry on walking up the remaining steps while Reid worked on twisting the belt around into circles. Two steps from the top he was stopped again, this time by Spencer pulling his arms behind his back and using the belt as bindings, cuffing his wrists in place. Coming up behind him, standing a step lower, Spencer stroked Aaron’s chest down to his hips before beginning to loosen his pants. Another step up and they just had to make it across the small hall the two apartments shared.
Spencer continued loosening his clothes until they stopped at the door. Aaron was standing topless, arms bound and pants hanging open, only held up where they caught on his muscled thighs, boxers being pulled down as gravity worked. Seeing this man, the man who was offering to be his forever, on display like this, in semi-public, it made him ache inside his own pants.

Aaron kept still as he felt his Master stop at the door and assess him. He made sure his head was down and body as relaxed as he could manage. He didn’t twitch when a sound came from behind him and Spencer looked away. Penelope. She must have seen them pull up and had popped her head out and was now asking Spencer about dinner. The pair talked as if he wasn’t there and in a strange way, it was relieving. He didn’t have to be worried about acting a certain way or being stressed over his general awkwardness, he was meant to just blend in.

“You can’t manage to keep him dressed, can you?” Garcia giggled.

Reid laughed. “I try, but naked is just so much better.” He ran his eyes over his sub’s body.

“Have a fun night planned?”

“Oh, it’s already started. He was so worked up in the restaurant I actually had to remind him to not touch but then on the drive home I remembered I had a lot of play planned and told him he could touch if he thought he couldn’t hold out till later tonight.”

“Catch?” She was leaning against her door frame now, ignoring Hotch’s back.

“Had to catch it and lap it up himself.”

She smiled slowly. “And did he come?”

Spencer nodded. “Like a rocket, hot as always.” He stroked Aaron’s face.

“Well, I’ll let you get him inside and naked then. I’m headed out to the club soon, so don’t worry about me. You just enjoy your Hotch Rocket.” She chuckled.

He smirked. “Hotch Rocket, very appropriate.” Opening the door, he tugged Aaron inside and finished getting him naked. “Lean over the back of the couch. If you’re in agreement, I want to use the nice flogger.”

“Whatever you wish, Master.” Aaron headed straight for the couch, slipping his hands down around his thighs so his back and ass were exposed. “I just want you to take me away.”

Spencer moved to his bedroom to find what he needed and to make sure it was clean before stripping to just his boxers and returning. Without further announcement, he began working over his skin with the flogger, watching as it flamed red and then raised as he carried on.

When he saw Aaron’s arousal began to poke at the back of the couch, Spencer stopped and sat the toy aside, fetching water for them both before checking his skin for any breaks. Satisfied that there were none, he put the water aside and pulled out a set of clamps. Helping Aaron to lean up enough, he placed one clamp on each of his nipples before spreading his legs wider and adding the remaining pair, slightly different in size, to the bottom of his sack and the underside of his cock. He glanced at the clock and mentally began to start counting out how long they could stay in place.

Aaron breathed through the almost-pain of the clamps and watched as his Master pulled something else out of the bag. The best he could describe it was that it looked like a witch’s hand on a handle. When it gently scratched down his back, his entire body shivered and he groaned. The gentle passes slowly became heavier, harder, until he was hissing and twisting as the metal hand
scratched its way down his body, leaving read lines sizzling out on his skin in its wake.

He wasn’t prepared when the scratching stopped and the clamps were removed. Blood rushed to the areas that had been pinned, causing a full-body ache to sweep over him and make him cry out.

The water he was offered wet his dry mouth, he hadn’t realized he’d been breathing with his mouth open, but it didn’t help ease the pain. He tried to shift a bit on the back of the couch but only managed to move where the hard top support ran across his gut, making him groan in discomfort.

Spencer caught the pained sound and stopped. “Aaron? Where are you at?” He petted his hair.

“Green. I’m green.”

Looking him over a moment, Spencer couldn’t see any signs of distress so he nodded and stood him up. “I want you to go lay on the bed, on your stomach.” He helped him walk on unsteady legs into the next room. “Is there anything you need? Do you need to stop for a break?”

“No, Master. Please do as you wish to me.” He lay with his eyes closed and listened as his lover moved around the room before climbing onto the bed. Warm hands were on his ass, spreading him wide before swiping lube along his crack. In the next moment a plug, one a tiny bit bigger than they used before, was pressing into his hole, making him lift up on his knees slightly in begging. He felt full. The tip of it not quite brushed his prostate as he settled back down. More lube was poured over him, this time over his back as Spencer began to massage away any soreness from the impact marks on the muscles underneath.

When his back was done, Aaron allowed himself to be rolled over and Spencer started on his front. Working his chest and shoulders down to his hips. He tried to tense up when Spencer went to massage his stomach but it didn’t help the building pressure he was feeling.

Spencer pulled away and grabbed an extra pillow to tuck under Aaron’s hips, lifting them up. He pulled out the plug and slicked himself up. “Ready?”

“Yes.” Aaron watched as Spencer lined up and plunged in to the base, hitting his prostate immediately. He moaned and keened as Spencer worked a fast pace in and out of his ass, hitting the perfect spot with every thrust. He began to babble incoherently, tossing his head side to side. He wanted to touch Spencer, himself, anything. He just wanted to touch. “Please.” He begged. “Please please please.”

“Please what, my love?”

“Please touch me. Please let me come.”

“Soon.” Spencer leaned forward and crushed their mouths together in a heated kiss. “Soon, my love. I’m so close and you’re so beautiful. So perfect for me. Begging to be cared for.”

The curled position he was in made the multiple glasses of tea he’d had at the restaurant hours before mixed with the water Spencer had been plying him with start to feel like gallons. The pressure made a tear slip from him eyes but he didn’t speak up. He wanted to feel Spencer come inside him, wanted to be filled up. “Please.” He was desperate for release.

Spencer grunted as his orgasm started to wash over him. “Come for me, my love. Come for me.”

Tears leaked out of his eyes even faster as he pumped into Spencer’s hand and came hard, coating them both in his fluids.
Spencer pushed up as he came down from his high, staring down at where Aaron’s face was crumpling into a mix of pain and something else. Still buried inside him, he asked. “What’s wrong? Aaron? What do you need?”

“It hurts.” He whispered softly. “God, it hurts.”

Pulling out and climbing away, he tried to assess his partner. “What hurts? What’s wrong? Can you sit up?”

“Help me?” He could hear how weak his voice sounded, how needy. “I need…” He was embarrassed and hurting now. The two warring inside him. It finally came out as a whisper. “I need to use the bathroom.”

“Okay.” Spencer exhaled. “Let me undo your arms.”

“No.” Aaron swallowed dryly. “It can’t wait. I don’t want to have…” He cut off as he leaned forward, groaning through the pain of a spasm, doing his level best not to cause a mess. He heard Spencer swear under his breath before hauling him up off the bed and practically dragging him to the bathroom. Detouring away from the toilet, the sound of the spray turning on in the shower made Aaron feel the pressure start to overwhelm his system just a tiny bit as he was pushed under the warm water and the door shut. It was all the permission he needed as his body gave up the fight.

Spencer waited until he heard Aaron’s tense breathing even out before he stepped in behind him and began to work the sodden belt loose. “Why didn’t you say something?”

“I didn’t want to stop.” He tried to shake some feeling back into his now free arms.

“You could have hurt yourself.”

Aaron nodded. “I’m sorry.” He bowed his head. “I’m sorry I almost caused a mess.”

“Hey. That’s not my biggest worry here. I’m worried about your health. Now. Let’s get cleaned up and sleep a little. This is only the beginning.”

==

Aaron spent the following morning blindfolded. Spencer had fed him breakfast before leaving him standing in a doorway while he puttered around the apartment. Sometime close to what he guessed was lunch, he was led back to bed and spread out in a relaxed pose. During the week they had discussed what they each would like to try and what they still weren’t willing to consider, it had opened up a few new options that were on the table during play.

The sight of the specialized glass jars relaxed him and warned him all at once as to what was planned next. The intense pressure as the first cup was sealed onto his skin, pulling flush and muscle up as Spencer worked through the movements, made him groan. As his body began to relax, Aaron felt the tension leave and he sank into the mattress.

Once it was over and Spencer’s had rubbed him down, Aaron rolled over and smiled up at the other man. “I love you.”

Spencer crawled up his body and pressed a soft kiss to his lips. “I thought about your request.”

“Yeah?”
“Yes. I’m going to make love to you, you’re free to come whenever your body needs to. After we get cleaned up, I’ll cage you.” He traced Aaron’s features with his fingers. “You’ll be just mine. Is that what you need?”

“Yes.” His eyes slid shut. “I want to be yours.”

“You’ll be mine. Forever, my love.”

==

A week later, Aaron walked through the grass quietly, stepping respectfully around headstones and ducking under low branches. The person he was here for he could just make out over the next roll of the hill, quietly sitting on a blanket. He would be here soon enough for an anniversary of his own and he remembered the day when his best friend found him sitting at a grave, unloading his heart to a plot of dirt.

Just because Dave didn’t look up when he got close didn’t mean he didn’t know he was no longer alone. He just wasn’t ready to speak. Aaron watched him a moment before speaking. “You smuggled alcohol into a cemetery?”

Dave smirked sadly. “It’s her favorite year.”

Aaron settled onto the blanket beside his friend. If Dave wanted to be left alone, he’d make his wishes known. “You still love her.” It wasn’t a question.

“You still love Haley.” Dave glanced in the general direction of her grave.

“Yes.” Aaron played with a blade of grass. “It doesn’t mean I don’t love Spencer.”

“I know. Just like it doesn’t mean I didn’t love my other two wives.”

“Or Emily?” Aaron pressed.

“I don’t think either of us would call that love. Lust maybe.”

Aaron noted the lack of sparkle in his friend’s eyes at the mention of the brunette. “I sometimes forget you had a son.”

“James was…eagerly anticipated. The first born of an only son in an Italian Catholic family. He would have been two and a half years older than Reid.”

“Stephen’s age.”

Dave nodded. “Everything was perfect, Caroline glowed practically from the moment we knew. A month before her due date she woke me up saying she needed me to take her to the hospital. I’d just gotten back from a case, a week in Florida.” He caught Aaron pulling a face. “Yeah, that state’s never been good. But I drove her and the doctor were optimistic everything would be fine. Then they kept losing his heartbeat and you could feel the tension in the room as they rushed the delivery.” He sucked in a ragged breath. “He never cried, never drew a breath. They told us it was a boy and we got to hold him for a minute.” He cut off.

“I’m sorry.” Hotch whispered.

Dave nodded. “At first we clung to each other but then we both blamed ourselves. From there we were angry at the other for blaming themselves and it sort of spiraled. We tried counselling but in
the end.” He shrugged. “I still loved her though. We didn’t stay in touch nearly enough.”

==

Two weeks had passed since the day at the cemetery. Aaron was buried under the covers, wrapped up in Spencer’s long limbs when his phone rang. Reaching out in the dark, he fumbled it and then grunted a greeting. Morgan’s voice over the line woke him fully. “I’m on my way.”.

He disentangled himself and headed to the bathroom to work on looking as awake as he could. He would meet Morgan and what sounded like a very distraught Garcia at the office as soon as they could get there. A small part of him was thankful that the younger man had gotten that particular late-night call and not himself.

==

Seeing Penelope in person was nothing like he’d expected. She looked lost, sad. Subdued in a way that was totally out of character for her. He turned to Morgan. “Let’s get this together and then call in the team.”

Garcia looked up in surprise. “That’s it? You’re just looking into it?”

He nodded. “I made some calls. It’s ours to look into until we have evidence, then we have to bring the locals in.”

She made a face. “The guy who showed up couldn’t believe I was FBI. Can you believe that?”

His brows rose as he fought to keep a smile off his face. “Completely.” He turned and left before he had to acknowledge her dropped jaw.

==

Aaron had worried about Garcia all through the search to find her friend, but he’d had little time to try and talk to her before another case was dropped in their laps directly from Strauss.

Seeing both Aaron and Erin sitting in the conference room when he walked in made Dave pause. Mentally he thought ‘this isn’t good’ while out loud he went with the much less suspicious good morning.

When she announced she was coming as well, Dave had a bad feeling about the whole case.

==

Dave looked over Aaron as he stood at the board. There was something unsettled about his friend that he couldn’t put his finger on. Worried that it could end up affecting the case, Dave crossed the room and slapped a hand on his shoulder. “Let’s take a walk.”

“What?” Aaron glanced over.

“I need some air. Let’s observe a little.”

Putting down the pen he’d been playing with, Hotch glanced to where the others were working. “Okay, sure.”

They walked along one edge of the open campus until they were out of earshot before Dave asked. “What has you rattled?”
“What?” Hotch asked again.

Dave cocked a brow at him. “You came back from that last interview and looked like something was eating at you.”

“I think something is going on here that isn’t being talked about.”

“Like?”

“Like abuse. Like a reason a teenage boy would feel compelled to take his own life.”

“It would have to be severe for that. As far as I’m aware there haven’t been reports of old injuries or anything.” Dave carried on walking again.

“I don’t think it would have had to have been severe. But if it were sanctioned, if other adults knew and did nothing, he would feel powerless. When you know what’s happening to you is wrong and you go to another adult and they tell you to man up, or to stay quiet, to a kid there’s really nowhere else to turn.” He had started to follow Dave and then stopped again, making his friend turn back.

Dave assessed Hotch for a long minute. “Aaron?”

“I’m not sure I’m the most impartial right now.”

“You can trust your team. If we think you need pulled back, we will do it.”

“I know.”

==

Spencer found a reason to end up seated at Aaron’s side on the flight back, mumbling something about his case write up. Once the rest of the team was at one end playing a round of pretzel poker and Strauss at the other flipping through her phone, he tipped his head and lowered his voice.

“How are you?”

Hotch raised a single brow.

“Rossi may have mentioned there were things about this case bothering you.” He added on. “He didn’t say what they were.”

He nodded. “We’ll talk, I promise. I have something I need to take care of before I head home though.”

“You want me to wait?”

“Um, no. Head on out. Meet at mine?”

“I’ll see you there.” Under the table Spencer brushed his knuckles against Aaron’s.

==

When he came through the door, Aaron found Spencer curled on the couch with Jack. “Hey, guys. What are you watching?”

Jack blinked tiredly at his dad. “Lion King. Spencer was telling me about the animals.”

He knelt by the couch. “Were you waiting for me?”
“Yeah. He said you would be home soon.” He put up his arms to be carried to bed. “Will Spencer be here when I wake up?”

“I dunno. Maybe.” He glanced back at the genius and saw him nod. “Would you like him to be?”

“Yeah.” Jack yawned.

“Then I think I can make that happen.” He tucked his son in and kissed him good night before rejoining Spencer. “I’m so glad to be home.”

“Everything okay?”

Aaron nodded. “There will be some changes and there are some things I can’t talk about but yeah, I think everything will be okay.”

He pulled him in close. “What do you need?”

“I think just to be held tonight. Is it bad that I miss being able to touch you when we’re on cases?”

Reid chuckled. “No. I don’t think so.” He rubbed his arm and then let his hand drop to brush across his slacks. “How is this doing?”

“I think I’m adjusting. Having sex as often as we have been, I haven’t had any problems really with dripping. I’m not sure what I can do if that comes up.”

Spencer raised a brow. “Wear a pad?”

“Really?” He asked incredulously.


“Hmm.” The pair were quiet for a while. “Oh, you warned me about chaffing when I worked out but I think my pants are tight enough that it’s not been a problem.”

“That’s good.” He finally settled his hand in Aaron’s lap, undoing the button under his belt and then the zip, easing out Aaron’s caged cock and tracing his finger over it. “I sometimes can’t believe that you would want to do this, that you really see a forever with us.”

“I would do anything for you.” Aaron shifted down, tucking his face into Spencer’s neck, his favorite place to hide from the world.

“Me too.” Spencer wrapped his arms around him.
The nice thing about running as early as he did was that the roads and paths didn’t start getting particularly crowded until he was almost done. The same could be said for swimming his laps. The pool at the Y tended to be quiet and almost desolate, the one old man lazily doing laps at the far end mentally spurred him to swim harder, faster. Aaron smirked, he’d have to make sure Dave never heard that thought. But he hoped that adding swimming to his workout rotation would help him stay healthy and in shape longer. It was always after a hard case, when he was exhausted, that looking into the mirror he was well aware that he was getting old. There was currently an entire decade between his age and the age of the man he was dating.

There were days when he watched Spencer. Watched the way he ate whatever he wanted, his diet was worse that Jack’s. Aaron watched as he curled up in tight spaces, rolled on the floor, climbed trees, there was never a moment when his body had just had enough. Sure, he still favored his knee and always would, but he’d never once seen Spencer reaching for aspirin because his back hurt from sitting too long. Sometimes Spencer made him feel old. And young too.

The younger man prodded him into doing what Jack wanted frequently, no matter how silly a forty-year-old man might look playing superheroes in the park, or how much mess letting Jack cook or build a fort might make. With Spencer around, Aaron was learning he could just focus solely on Jack and the other man would happily worry about the rest of the world.

It was Spencer who had seen the flyer for the triathlon and brought it home. Aaron had seen it as well, but hadn’t given it much thought. Reid had pressed though, pointing out that he used to bike all of the time and with the running he was doing already, he believed Aaron could do it. It felt good having someone in his corner, telling him he could do it. That he was good enough. There hadn’t been many of those people in his corner in his life.

Turning the last corner toward the parking lot, Aaron picked up the pace. Maybe if he shaved a few seconds off his time and traffic was favorable, he would have just enough time to show Spencer his appreciation. The thought made his heart race just a tiny bit more. A voice behind him caught his attention and he turned around, surprised to see a woman jogging up behind him. Women rarely openly approached him, especially to try and flirt. He wasn’t any good at it. It was just another thing he loved about Spencer.

Realizing the woman as still talking and he wasn’t paying attention, Aaron tried to join in the conversation. Her comment on seeing him in his suit, that she couldn’t imagine him as anything but an FBI agent, he left him speechless.

==

Letting himself back into his apartment, Aaron smiled at Spencer helping Jack get his things together for school. He watched the younger man’s eyes slide down and back up his body, Spencer loved him in his workout gear, before he stepped close enough for a kiss.

Pecking Aaron on the lips, Spencer curled his nose. “Just in time for a shower.”

Aaron chuckled. “Is Jack ready?”

“Yeah. Just finishing his toast.”

“Care to join me?” He tugged his fingers.
“In the bathroom yes, under the water, no.” It was his turn to chuckle at the pleading look in the older man’s eyes. “Go. Shower.” He followed him into their room. “What has that look in your eye?”

“I was thinking of you on my run.” He shed his clothes quickly as the water warmed up. “I had this plan of coming back here and showing you just how much I loved having you here.”

“You did, did you?” Spencer was watching his shadow now through the door.

Under the spray, Aaron changed subjects for a moment. “Do I really only look like I could be an agent in my suit?”

“What brought on that question?”

“No reason really. Is it true though?”

“Aaron. You look like an FBI agent totally naked or dripping wet. In your suit, the full ‘Hotch’ get-up, yes, the only thing in the world you could be is an agent.”

“Oh.” He ducked his face back under the spray. “I had a plan.” He switched back again as he washed and rinsed quickly before stepping out, dripping wet, falling straight to his knees on the rug and tugging at Spencer’s pants. “I want to show you.”

Reid gripped the edges of the counter. The bathroom door was open, the bedroom door was open. Jack could come looking for them at any moment, which just turned him on even more. “Fast.”

Aaron stared up at him, eyes wide and submissive. “Yes.” He finally undid the genius’s pants and pulled out the hardening prick, wrapping one hand around it, guiding it to his mouth. He knew he wouldn’t be getting anything in return, at least not before work. He would probably be carrying that hum, that slight ache, all day long until Spencer was able to take him. Sucking needily, Aaron ran his tongue along the underside, taking as deep as he could manage. He could feel Spencer’s hips try to thrust forward as the younger man tried to hold back. Wanting to be taken, to be used, Aaron fumbled until he found one thin hand gipped on the counter and peeled it away, placing it on the back of his head.

He could feel when Spencer understood what he wanted and relaxed his jaw and throat as he fucked quickly into his mouth, coming almost silently so as to not draw attention from the boy in the next room. When he felt Spencer was done, Aaron sat back on his ass on the floor a moment before standing up, wincing and groaning as he body protested. Yep, he was getting old.

Spencer ran his hands down the still damp body. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” He reached for a towel to finish drying off.

Looking down, Reid reached out and caught some of the fluid dripping from the end of the cage. “Will you be okay today?”

“Yes.” He watched as his love brought that now damp finger to his mouth and sucked. God, if Spencer did that again the answer might change to no. “I promise to let you know if I’m not.”

“Good.” Spencer pulled him in for a kiss, tasting himself as well as Aaron in it.

==

They were halfway to the base when Hotch remembered. “Oh. A woman talked to me at the end of
my run this morning.” He fished out the card and showed him. “I guess she’s seen me around running and swimming at the Y. She asked about training together.”

“Training?” Spencer was curious.

“Biking Saturday, if we don’t have a case.”

“She was flirting with you.” He stated.

“I got that feeling, yeah.” Aaron blushed.

“Training is better with a partner, yes?”

“Yes.”

“So, are you wanting to meet with her?”

Aaron glanced at him, suspicious. “I’m not interested in her. I’m committed to you.”

Spencer felt the overwhelming urge to reanimate Haley just for the pleasure of killing her himself. “You two are both training for races, yes?”

“Yes. Hers is in February.”

“I have friends that I share common interests with outside of just you, it’s totally normal. The two of you share a common interest, one I have zero urge to also share. By all means, if you think having a training partner will help you stay focused, then call her and meet up.”

Aaron frowned. A small part of him was screaming this was a trap, it was always a trap. “I don’t really need a training partner.” He kept his focus on the road ahead and didn’t say anything more the rest of the ride.

==

As the pair walked up to the building, they ran into Rossi. Spencer stopped to take a call, waving the pair inside. Dave looked over his friend. “What’s with that look?”

“What look?”

“Like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Aaron frowned. “A woman came up to me today at the end of my run, she said she’s noticed me there and swimming and…she gave me her card so we can meet up to bike together.”

His face twitched as his ran through several emotions. His friend was never good at being flirted with. “And?”

“And I told Spencer about it.”

He frowned now himself. The younger agent didn’t come across as the jealous type, that had been Haley’s gig. He could name the look on Hotch’s face now though, apprehensive. “What did he say?”

“That I’m allowed to have friends I share interests with, he has them. He asked if training was better with a partner and then said I should call her.” He was certain now this was a test. He kept his eyes to the ground. “I’m not going to call her.”
“What’s her name?”

“Beth.” Aaron sighed. “She wanted to meet up for a bike ride.”

“When?”

“Saturday.” The doors of the elevator opened and he stepped out, his friend on his heels. “Why?”

“I think you should call her.”

Hotch didn’t say anything more until they were both through the bullpen and in his office. “Why?”

“Because Reid is right, you need friends beyond these walls. And a friend you can train with, it’s something you have in common.”

“He pointed out she was flirting with me.”

Dave shrugged. “Don’t lead her on. If it seems she’s looking for more then tell her you’re in a relationship. It’s okay, Aaron.”

“Is it?”

The older man sighed. “I have cases to look over. Be good.”

==

Before Aaron could talk to either Spencer or Dave further, the team was called to Philadelphia to look into a case of people being beaten to death.

After they had tracked down the unsub and had followed him to the hospital, Spencer followed Aaron down the hall but not into the exam room. It was quickly apparent that what his friend was saying wasn’t how a normal interview with an unsub went. Hotch was showing him a compassion he usually saved for victims. And Spencer figured that in a way, this man was a victim as well. A victim who was going to watch his only child, his little boy, die. Lose his own battle with an unsub they couldn’t see. Even as the man insisted his son was a fighter, that he would be okay, Reid heard the desperate need in Hotch’s voice that this dad understand.

In what felt like an instant, he was watching his lover gingerly push the wheelchair upstairs and into the hospital room of the son of their unsub. This wasn’t part of their job description, holding the hand of family as their loved one passed away, especially when that death had nothing to do with their case. But Spencer knew Aaron. Knew he wouldn’t just walk away.

Leaning against the wall in the hallway, Reid watched as the other staff seemed to know what was happening. Right now, a little boy was losing his fight. They all seemed affected by it, even out here. He wondered how someone could do such a job, but then he knew there were lots of people who wondered that about his job. Violence, depravity, death. Sometimes for what felt like days, weeks, months on end. It was a calling, plain and simple.

He stood up straight when Aaron finally emerged, eyes red and watery. Reid could see the sadness vibrating through him and glanced around until his spotted an empty room across from them. “Come on.” He whispered, tugging Hotch’s wrist for a split second. Once inside, he pushed the door shut and pulled Aaron close, feeling the older man tuck his face into his neck. “I’m right here.” He whispered as Aaron let go and sobbed silently into his shoulder.

==
On the jet back, Aaron ignored the curious looks he got as he took a seat beside Spencer on the couch. After the emotional end to their case, he needed the reassurance he knew he could only get from the man he’d come to love. When exhaustion started to overtake him, Hotch allowed himself to slump to the side, eventually resting his head against Reid’s shoulder as he drifted off.

==

Finally, in his own office once again, Aaron pulled out his phone and the card he’d been given. Both Spencer and Dave said this would be good for him and while instinct told him to be wary of Spencer’s encouragement for now, Dave wasn’t one to steer him wrong.

“Hello?” A perky voice answered.

“Hello, this is Aaron. We met in the park Tuesday morning?”

“Oh! Aaron, hi!” She giggled. “I wasn’t sure if you would call or not.”

“Well, I am.” He felt himself blush and was glad she couldn’t see it. “I had to go out of town, but I’m back and I’ll have the weekend off if you still want to do that bike ride?”

“Of course!” Hotch could hear activity in the background. “You want to meet in the same lot? Say, nine A.M.?”

“That sounds good.”

“Great! I’ll see you tomorrow!”

“Yeah, you too.” He smiled as she hung up. Movement in his doorway made him look up. “Dave.”

“So. Is the doomsday bike ride happening?”

Aaron let out a sigh. “Yes it is. Tomorrow morning nine o’clock. But… I don’t know.” He was embarrassed to admit he was looking forward to it. He wasn’t looking to replace Spence in his life but he was looking forward to just being around someone who wasn’t also a part of this world he had to work in. Maybe that’s what Spencer had been talking about in the car.

“You need to be out, Aaron, around other people. Even with all of us, you still stay pretty isolated. You can’t keep avoiding making those natural human connections.”

“I’m not avoiding anything, I’m just not sure.” He glanced out into the empty bullpen.

“Not sure about what? Going on a bike ride? Aaron, I know this is hard for you, but Spencer is a good man, he won’t pull the same tricks Haley did. You’re no good to anyone when you’re miserable because you are so closed off from the rest of the world.”

“I’m not miserable.” He defended. And he wasn’t. Was he?

“Ehh, maybe slightly uptight.”

Aaron smirked at his friend. “Okay. I’ll give you slightly uptight.”

Dave smiled now, it seemed he was getting through. “You deserve to be happy, Aaron. This job, the satisfaction of a success will only get you so far. You need other things, other people who you can enjoy being with, doing non-work things with.”

“I know.”
“Have a good time. I mean that.” Dave nodded and turned to leave.

“Thanks, Dave.” He watched his friend stop halfway through the doorway. “For everything.”

“I’ll always be in your corner.”

==

Spencer sat at the table with Jack as Aaron came out dressed for his ride. “Nice.”

Aaron rolled his eyes. “I shouldn’t be more than a couple hours. I’m not sure how good of a rider she is.” He frowned. “I’m not sure how great of a rider I am anymore. It’s been a while.” He pressed a kiss to the other’s lips. “Are you sure about this?”

Spencer smiled up, letting his hand trail where the young boy couldn’t see. “Yes. And when you get back, I may have a few ideas that will help take your mind off things.”

His brows rose and his pulse started to race. “Really?”

“Mm-hmm.” He let one finger slide along the compression shorts, tracing the bulge right in front. “So, hurry back.”

==

Aaron saw Beth’s SUV as he pulled into the lot and smiled. He had a feeling she would keep him on his toes. Climbing out he greeted her as they both set about getting their gear unloaded.

He was surprised to learn she was recovering from a loss of her own, a parent, but no less painful. Catching up to her finally, he spoke, trying not to sound like he was out of breath. “The chase huh?”

Beth grinned. “Are you usually the chaser or the one being chased?” She cheeked.

“Umm.” He wasn’t sure how to answer that. “I’m not sure.”

“How is a guy like you not sure?”

“A guy like me?”

She slowed her pace to something more sustainable. “Tall, dark, and handsome, and from what I’ve been able to gather polite.” She caught him blushing. “I would think you beat women off with sticks all of the time.”

He barked out a laugh at that. “No. But I have a couple friends who are that type. I took me months to find the nerve to speak to my wife when we first met.”

Beth was surprised, he didn’t have a tan line from a ring. “You’re married?”

“Not… Not anymore. We divorced about four years ago and she passed away two years ago.” He sometimes forgot it had been that long. Maybe that’s what Dave had been talking about in his office. “We met in high school.”

“Wow.” Beth wondered how to get the conversation back on to something a little less depressing. “So, when you mentioned home then the other day?”

He smiled now. “My son. My…” He swallowed. “My partner is with him while I work out.”
“Oh.” She pedaled in silence for a bit. “How long have the two of you been together.”

Hotch was surprised she was still carrying on the conversation after his admission. He didn’t have a whole lot of practice telling people but he knew it wasn’t always received well. “We’ve known each other about seven years? We started seeing each other just after my wife passed away. He was there as support and…” He trailed off.

“The feelings grew?”

“Yeah.” He followed her into the park. “And you?”

“Perpetually single. I’m not usually as bold with guys, but I’d been watching you and you didn’t look all that threatening.”

“Ouch!” He held a hand to his chest in mock injury. “That hurts. All of the reputation I’ve built up and you go and blow it down.”

“So, what can you tell me about what you do?”

He thought a minute. “You were right.”

Beth lit up, pleased. “Okay. That doesn’t narrow down much though.”

“I would have thought the first thing you did was do an internet search of me once you had my name.”

“Should I have?” Her brows rose.

“You would have gotten a pretty good picture of what I do.” He glanced over. “I thought all women did that.”

“Did what?”

“Check guys out before meeting them.”

“What sort of women do you hang out with?”

“Umm…” He wasn’t sure how to describe them. “Interesting ones.”

“I’ll say.”

They made it to the coffee cart and stopped. Hotch insisted on paying for both and they walked to a bench, propping their bikes at the end. “Can I be honest a minute?”

“Sure!” She turned to him.

“I was surprised telling you I’m with a man didn’t scare you off.”

She shrugged. “Takes the pressure off a bit. Tell me about him. Does he work in the same field?”

Aaron nodded. “Yes. We work together actually.”

“So, I’m guessing you have to keep things quiet.”

“In general, yes, within our group, probably not. We haven’t really discussed going public with it.”

“So, no one knows?”
“No, there are two that know. My best friend and his neighbor, both of them work with us. They have helped cover for us in the past and a small part of me thinks they conspired to get us to date.”

She chuckled. “Sounds like good friends.”

“They are.” He sipped his coffee. “But to answer your question, he’s different.”

She watched his eyes sparkle as he thought of what to say.

“He’s a certified genius.”

“Really?”

Aaron nodded. “He convinced me to meet up and ride today.”

“Well, then tell him thank you for me.”

“I will.”

Standing to throw her cup away, she asked. “Ready to head back?”

==

Having made his way home after the bike ride, Aaron kicked off his shoes and looked around.

“Spencer?”

“Back here!” A voice called from the master bedroom.

“Where’s Jack?” Aaron followed the voice.

“How was the ride?” Spencer asked when Hotch came into the room.

“Good. Beth’s nice, we had a lot to talk about.”

“That’s good.” He got up from where he was sorting paperwork into binders on the floor. “Shower and wash up, we have a little time.”

“Where’s Jack?” He tried again.

“Oh! Dave had passes to some arcade with laser tag.” He shrugged and started peeling the damp shirt off Aaron’s body. “They’ll be back later. What did you guys talk about?”

It took him a second to catch up. “You, actually.”

“Me?”

“A little. It didn’t send her screaming for the hills anyway.”

He giggled. “You thought it would?”

“Maybe a bit.” He nodded. “I had a question though. Something she said.”

“What’s that?”

“Our relationship being secret. Do you want to tell the rest of the team?”

“It doesn’t bother me, Aaron. We’ve all kept relationship stuff a secret before. If we don’t want to
share, that’s our choice together. Do you want to tell them?”

“Not yet. Maybe later, but it still feels so...new.”

“It’s not new anymore.”

“I know.”

“If you decide you want to let them in on it, just say the word. I’ll be ready.”

“Okay.” Hotch nodded. “Now, are you planning on joining me in the shower?”

“Yes, I am. Is that okay with you?”

“Very okay.” He giggled, pressing a kiss to Spencer’s lips.
He had been loving these morning meetings with Beth to run or bike. She was great to talk to about normal things that sometimes he and Spencer didn’t discuss. If they had time, they had coffee together before they went their separate ways. Aaron laughed at her antics to try and win their final race.

Beth giggled. “Training is easier with a partner.”

“I’ve been meaning to remind you to thank me for that.”

“Our lunches are okay too.”

Aaron had to agree. They’d only met a couple times, days when Spencer had been caught up in something else and they lucked into being in town. “So, I was reading that you shouldn’t train the week before the race, so this might be it.” He didn’t want it to be awkward. He genuinely liked being around her as a friend and he’d talked enough about Spencer that she couldn’t possibly forget he existed.

“What are we going to do about that?”

“Well, I think we should do something.” He wondered where this boldness was coming from.

“I do too. And for once I think it should include your partner.” She bit her lip waiting to see what he thought.

“Really?”

Beth nodded. “I had an idea. It’s totally crazy and out there but… I like spending time with you.”

“I like hanging out with you too.”

“So? Maybe we could all do lunch.”

Hotch nodded. “I’ll talk to him. He always comments that I spend too much time isolated from everyone else, that I should branch out.”

“Sounds like a good guy.”

“He is.”

==

He ended up running later than usual with no time to discuss meeting Beth with Spencer. Instead he’d rushed Jack to school and then made a beeline for work, hoping no one noticed. When Dave stepped into the elevator, Aaron inwardly groaned. Dave had a vibe around him this morning and he knew he was up to no good.

“You work out this morning?”

He sighed. “Yes.”

“And how was the, uh, workout?”
“It’s called training and I’m not sure where you’re headed with this. In case you forgot, I’m happily with someone.”

Dave shrugged. “You’ve been happier. Not sure if it’s the training or the expansion of the company you keep. Not willing to risk it.”

“You are horrible.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard that before. What does Spencer say?”

Seeing the opportunity to get his own back, Aaron smirked. “Well, last night he was telling me how much he approved of the muscle I’ve built up as he rode me from behind.”

Dave did a wonderful impression of a fish out of water.

Aaron broke into a full-blown grin. Checkmate.

==

Hotch and Prentiss arrived just in time to see JJ being looked over by the paramedics, with Reid doing his best to hover as close as possible. His first thought, seeing her bruised and bloody, was that he wasn’t looking forward to seeing the other guy. Hotch had only paired himself with the petite blonde a few times before deciding that there was a lot of power packed into that slim form. A glance down told him she was wearing the heeled boots she preferred. “Any roundhouse kicks?”

“Not this time.”

“How are you?”

“I’ll be okay. I swear, Hotch. He got in a couple good swings, but he started out with a gun and a knife. I knew he wasn’t expecting me to be able to take him on.”

He nodded. “Make sure you get a full work-up or from now on I’ll send Reid with you to the hospital.”

She rolled her eyes at him, but it had the intended effect. “Fine.”

He nodded as he watched the paramedic resume looking her over.

==

Derek knocked on the office door and waited for his boss to look up. “Hey. I thought I was the one supposed to be burning the midnight oil.” They’d kept to the agreement of splitting the paperwork so Hotch could be home with Jack.

“With Strauss away, brass has me doing extra work.”

“Not the best way to spend Valentine’s Day though, is it?”

Aaron sat up straight. There was no way Morgan knew about he and Reid, but at the same time, the younger man probably figured he’d be with Beth. Most of the team seemed to think she and he were now an item and he hadn’t exactly stood up and told them otherwise.

Morgan chuckled. “I forgot too. Some of the singles were going to go find a bar and grab a drink if you want to come along. Unless you have someplace else you could be.”
Aaron looked up at him now, unsure if it was an innocent question or probing for answers. He was getting paranoid. “Uh, I think I’ll pass, but thank you.” He started stacking up the paperwork.

Derek watched his boss packing up, suddenly planning to leave. “What about the paperwork?”

He tried for innocent. “Well, Strauss comes back next week. I don’t want her to be bored.”

Morgan chuckled. It was hard to believe there had ever been a time he thought the older man didn’t have a sense of humor “Good night, Hotch.”

He was standing now, packing his case in a rush. “Night Morgan.” He wondered where he could get reservations for at such late notice. He’d have to make some calls.

==

Spencer picked up his phone, answering abruptly. “Yeah, Hotch?”

“What?” He was in his car, driving across town.

“I’m sorry, I’m trying to get groceries into my apartment. What’s up?”

“It’s Valentine’s Day.”

“Oh.”

“It’s Valentine’s Day and I didn’t plan anything. Did you?”

“No.”

“Shouldn’t we?”

“If you want.”

Aaron sighed. “Spencer.”

Reid sank into a chair, abandoning the bags. “We don’t have to go out to celebrate you know. It’s just a day. We can do something tomorrow night, it won’t be as busy and then you can plan.”

“Oh.” He frowned. “I have to get Jack from Jessica’s.”

“Stop by here then. My place is closer than yours from there and it’s getting close to his bedtime.”

“You’re right.” Aaron turned toward his ex-sister-in-law’s place. “I haven’t had a chance to talk to you about my run with Beth.”

“Okay, talk.”

“Now?”

“Aaron.”

“Okay, fine. She wants to meet you.” The other end was quiet. “Spencer?”

“Really?”

“Yes.”
“Oh. Okay, set it up.”

“Really?” He echoed Spencer’s question.

Reid chuckled. “Yes. Now, go pick up our son and get back here, I’ll put together dinner.” He hung up and started toward his kitchen before freezing, suddenly realizing what he’d said aloud.

Aaron nearly drove off the road as the line disconnected. Spencer had referred to Jack as ‘our son’, not ‘your son’ as he’d always said in the past. He was still stunned when he rang Jess’s bell and waited for her to come to the door.

Jess smiled as she pulled her door open, but then her smile faded slightly. “Aaron?” She pulled him inside. “What’s wrong?”

“He called him our son.”

Her brows knit together, confused. “What?”

“Spencer. I was just on the phone with him and as we hung up, he told me to go get our son and he’d start dinner.” He wasn’t really focused on anything in front of him, staring in the middle space. “He’s never done that before.”

Her heart melted a little. She liked Spencer, had since before her sister had passed away. “He loves him, Aaron.”

“I know.” He finally looked at her. “I just didn’t realize he felt that way.”

She handed over Jack’s backpack as the boy tugged on his shoes. “Go home and talk to him. And if you need me, just call. Okay?”

“Yeah, sure.”

==

Spencer returned from tucking Jack into the bed he was quickly outgrowing to find his partner on his hands and knees in the middle of the bed, towels and lube spread out already. From this angle, he could see between his legs to where his bound cock was leaking. “Aaron?” He pushed the door shut and locked it.

“Please.” He begged. “I need to feel you fill me.”

His brows rose. Aaron had seemed a bit needier than normal since he arrived with his son and he’d humored him. Spencer had been happy to provide those extra touches and kisses every time Aaron had nestled up to him. He walked up to the bed and stroked down the other man’s spine, feeling him tremble. Stripping his shirt, Spencer gentle reached under Aaron and removed the cage. He wanted him to be free tonight to find his release as he needed to. “Shh, my love. I’m here. I’ll take care of you, my love.” He finished undressing and crawled onto the bed. “I will take you, but I don’t want to do it this way tonight.”

Aaron shuddered as hands rubbed along his body.

“Lay on your side, my love.” He helped him down and into a comfortable position, fetching and then spreading lube along them both. “Relax. Let me in, my love. Shh, relax.”

Aaron took a deep breath and let it out, relaxing as much as possible as the blunt head of Spencer’s
cock pressed into his opening. He continued focusing on relaxing as the younger man pushed in and in until they were seated together.

“What do you need?” Spencer whispered into his ear.

“Please move. Please make love to me.” Aaron pushed his hips back.

Spencer began to move, stroking in and out in a slow, gentle rhythm. “I love you so much. I love you and Jack. You two are my family.” He began to stroke Aaron’s dick matching his own thrusts. “I see him as my own son. Our son.” He felt and heard Aaron groan in his embrace. “You are my love and I will care for you forever.”

“I need to come.” Aaron rumbled.

Feeling himself getting close, Spencer encouraged him. “Whenever you are ready, my love, come for me. Show me you love me. Then I will show you how much I love our little family.” He felt the first quiverings of Aaron’s passage around his cock. “Show me how happy you are the we have our son.” He felt the dick in his hand swell as Aaron buried his face into the pillow as he cried out his orgasm. Spencer watched as Aaron fell apart before him, the most beautiful thing he’d ever see. Propelled forward, Spencer pumped his hips hard and came while a groan, filling him up with his hot seed.

Once they’d both stopped panting, Aaron detached and rolled over, devouring Spencer’s mouth with his own. “I love that you see him as our son. I love that you accept us as your family.”

==

The following weekend, Spencer noticed the way Aaron’s face lit up as they approached the small deli and knew Beth was already there. Looking around, he spotted a woman dressed casually, hair pulled back into a ponytail, bouncing eagerly on her toes and she stared straight at Hotch. He felt Aaron take his hand and the nervous gentle squeezes the older man kept giving it.

Once they were close enough, Beth spoke. “Hey Aaron, glad you could make it. And you must be Spencer, he’s told me so much about you.” She waved at him, surprising Spencer, Aaron must have really told her about him.

“Shall we go get a seat?” Aaron ushered them all inside.

==

Meals mostly done, Beth leaned forward and faced Spencer. “So, I had an idea I wanted to toss out there.”

“What’s that?”

“I have loved hanging out with Aaron and he mentioned that for a variety of reasons, your relationship stays more secret than not. My idea was that on the rare occasion that he, or I, need a plus one for something, we could use each other. From what he’s said about the rest of the team, if they thought he was dating, they’d worry less.”

Spencer had to agree with the last bit, much of the team’s worry came from what they believed was Hotch isolating himself. “You would really be okay with that?”

A smile spread across her face. “Sure. The museum has these events and I’m supposed to bring a date and I’m never anywhere to actually meet a person to date. He comes to the occasional
museum event, I can come to anything that might come up for you guys and we can train together or not.”

He glanced at Aaron, raising a brown in question. It didn’t sound like a bad plan and she seemed truly willing.

Aaron thought it over a minute and rubbed his face with his hands. “Am I now the stereotypical sitcom gay friend?” He smirked when the other two laughed.

==

Monday morning started with a phone call from the assistant director before he even made it to his car, wanting to know if Hotch would be sitting in on the meeting to review some upcoming policy changes. The man had all but blatantly stated that he thought Hotch should take advantage of his temporary rise in status to rub elbows and make stronger connections should a permanent position become available.

To Aaron, it sounded like a horrible idea but he was smart enough to know not to actually say that out loud. At least not while the line was connected. Once he was sure the call had ended though, Hotch grumbled into the empty vehicle that he really didn’t want a different position. As crazy as it sounded, he liked running his team.

Checking his watch, he did drop his things in his office though and head up three floors to sit in on a meeting that slowly degraded from reviewing actual policy changes, one of which happened to have to do with how relationships within the Bureau, specifically within same teams, were handled. He hoped that as he voiced his opinion that each case should be assessed individually, a blanket rule would never work, but they should take into account that many agents devoted their entire lives to the job and it left them little time to socialize out in the real world, that he didn’t look too guilty. The meeting ended as a discussion about who the most promising up-and-coming agents were. The stars who shined the brightest and drew the most attention.

When the assistant director asked as to which agents everyone was interested in, Aaron realized all eyes turned to him to answer first.

“Um, I’ve been so busy, I haven’t really taken notice. Our team is full right now, but I know I have a stack of qualified agents willing to transfer if an opening happens. I haven’t been actively watching them though.”

Another man, ten years his senior, that Hotch couldn’t recall the name replied. “But if you’re not watching them, how will you know the best moment to reach out?”

“I’m sorry?” He was confused.

“You know, when they seem to be having a run of bad days, showing signs of burn-out in the department they’re in? That’s the best time to sway them to somewhere new. They’re about one bit of bad news from finding the bottom of a bottle and you dangle that carrot out there.”

Aaron’s brow furrowed. “I’ve never done that. I simply approach them when I have something to offer, either they’re interested or they’re not.” When the rest of the room chuckled, he couldn’t help but feel like they were laughing at him.

A woman at the end, who dressed much like Strauss always did, spoke. “Of course he doesn’t hunt for agents, he has them flinging themselves at him. Look at that team he has, they’re all more loyal to him than they probably are their jobs.” She turned to the man beside her and carried on only
marginally softer. “Who knows what he’s offering for that kind of loyalty, it’s just not normal.”

Clenching his jaw to prevent himself from making a scene, Hotch didn’t say another word for the remainder meeting.

Monday night the rest of the team left for southern Pennsylvania for a case, leaving Hotch behind.

==

Tuesday Aaron did his best to stay hidden in his office. His team wasn’t back and he offered to help by phone but so far no one had called needing him. Garcia had promised to let him know if she needed anything, but he hadn’t seen her leave her office the entire day. He almost thought he’d made it through the day without being dragged into something when two other agents, equals to Strauss, knocked on his door and invited themselves in. Hotch knew their reputation. Agent Dickson was a bully and had at least a handful of complaints swept under various rugs made by much younger women working for the Bureau. His sidekick, Agent Santos, wasn’t much better. He was younger, fresher, hadn’t had the same amount of time to rack up the indiscretions. Aaron knew that even in all of Rossi’s younger days, he’d never had a complaint from a woman. He may have been a womanizer, but he’d always been a gentleman.

“So, Hotch.” Agent Dickson smirked from one of the chairs in the office, the way he said the nickname made it sound…offensive. Mean. “Since you’re one of us now, I thought I would invite you to our favorite little pastime.”

Just the way he said it made Hotch’s skin crawl. “And what’s that?”

“Well, the new trainees all hit the mats for hand to hand classes in the afternoons after the classroom stuff is over. Lots of lovely ladies down there, hot bodies getting all sweaty. And since you’re single…” The smirk turned into a suggestive grin.

“If I recall, you are not single.”

“Well, no, but what my wife doesn’t know won’t hurt me.” He shrugged.

“So, what do you say?” Santos jumped in. “Come try it once, see what you think.”

Hotch looked across his mostly empty desk and then out into the bullpen, desperately wishing for some crisis to come up. When none appeared, he frowned. “Okay.” Grabbing his phone as he stood, he shot a text to Garcia letting her know where he would be and who with as well as if she needed anything at all, to let him know.

“Who you texting?” Dickson tried to look.

Tucking his phone away, Hotch frowned again. “My analyst. The rest of my team is on a case.”

“That Garcia chick, the one who dresses strange?”

“Sure.” He wasn’t about to get into it, if the man wanted to think her strange, so be it.

“Man, what I wouldn’t do to get a ride on that.” He made a few suggestive gestures with his hands. “I woulda thought she’d be an easy catch, but no one seems to have gotten a chance.”

Anger started to burn inside him. “Why would you think that?”

Santos laughed. “You’re kidding, right?” He saw Hotch shake his head. “You know, fat girls, low
self-esteem.”

==

The conversation didn’t improve by the time they reached the training rooms. Hotch did his best to ignore the inappropriate play-by-plays from the pair as a woman who reminded him of JJ when she was new took to the mats and quickly levelled her opponent. After how they’d been talking about everyone else, it was the last straw. Turning quickly, Aaron had Dickson against the concrete wall, feet dangling inches above the ground as he growled warnings for the man to stop.

The entire class froze at the sight of two suited agents suddenly locked together, appearing about to fight themselves. Santos was trying and failing to pull Hotch away, yelling threats of his own, but Hotch wouldn’t give in. His hand squeezed, making Dickson gasp for breath as he turned red.

The buzzing in Hotch’s ears lessened as a cacophony of sounds and voices rushed back in. His initial anger was easing, he was still pissed at the smaller man, but he wasn’t willing to risk suspension for fighting in front of the new recruits. Another sound, out of place in a room of sneakers and padded mats reached him a moment before small hands wrapped around his still-tensed bicep.

“Put him down.” A voice calmly instructed.

Obeying, Aaron turned loose, letting the man drop to the floor, gasping for air.

“Come on.” The hands tugged him away and he followed obediently until Santos opened his mouth again.

“No wonder no one else gets a shot riding the crazy train, he’s already on board. Wonder if that’s how he keeps them all running to him.”

Like a shot, Aaron was back across the room, grabbing the younger man by the shoulders just as hands grabbed him again.

“He’s not worth it and I can do so much worse anyway.”

Conceding Garcia’s point, the former hacker was likely to leave longer lasting and much less traceable revenge than he ever could, he turned on his heel and stormed out, not waiting for her to catch up. As he walked, he couldn’t help but think that he had, in fact, crossed that line with Penelope. And Spencer. Out of the six people who worked directly under him, he’d managed to cross that line with two. A third of them.

If anyone ever found out, he could have ruined their careers. Anger left his system, leaving guilt over the kind of man, the kind of leader, he’d apparently become. The kind that takes advantage of other people.

He couldn’t see how he was much different than the other two agents. Sure, they were lewd and inappropriate in public, but his sins were so much worse.

==

Garcia found him back at his desk, the door shut to his office and blinds drawn. “Why did you go down there with them?”

He didn’t look up at her, how could he? His actions put a stain on her career that could one day cause her a problem. Someone would eventually find out. “I’m supposed to be playing nice with
the other people holding similar positions.”

“Okay. But Dick and Dick Junior?” She was waiting for him to look up at her.

He looked up at her finally. “I didn’t think it would be that bad.”

“They’re always bad.”

“Huh?”

She sat down. “I know what they say about me and it’s okay. The people who are important know better. He’s just upset because he can’t do a Rossi and bag whatever chick he wants.”

“It’s wrong.”

“Yeah. But it’s life.” She shrugged, frowning at his hunched demeanor. “What’s wrong? Talk to me.”

“They were right, they just didn’t know it.” He chewed his lip.

“What about what?” She knew she hadn’t heard everything, but knowing the pair, they probably weren’t.

He blushed. “They implied, more than once, that I sleep with my team. And they’re right. And I wasn’t even aware I had become this man who was okay ruining careers.”

Garcia thought a minute. “As far as I know, the only member of this team, past or present, you’ve slept with in the biblical sense is Spencer.”

“What about you?” He mumbled.

She had to lean forward to hear him. “What about me?”

Guilt filled his face as he glanced at her before turning his chair away.

Not willing to give up on him, she stood and moved around the desk, kneeling in front of his legs. “Hey. What about me?”

Suddenly realizing how their positions could be misconstrued to an outsider, Hotch quickly stood and backed away, sending his chair into the wall. “What we did could ruin your career, I can’t do that to you. It was wrong. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Penelope.”

Garcia was chasing him across the room now, trying to get him to calm down. “Nothing happened. Nothing anyone would care about anyway. I don’t care what you call it as long as you stop trying to convince yourself it was sex.” Finally catching him, thankful the blinds were shut, she held his face so he was looking right at her. “You didn’t take advantage of me. You are not like those two agents so stop beating yourself up about this. If anyone had less choice about what we did than anyone else involved, it would have been you. Spencer and I? We enjoyed it. At no point did any of us think our jobs would be harmed if we said no or improved if we said yes.” She watched him sag in on himself, defeat taking place of some of the guilt. “Okay?”

“Yeah.” He muttered, sinking onto his couch.

She stood. “Now, stay away from those two, that’s an order.” When he replied with a curt ‘yes, ma’am’, she smiled and left.
The team wasn’t back Wednesday either. Hotch took Garcia’s advice and steered clear, instead he hid the entire day in his office with the blinds closed, not speaking to anyone in person except for the bubbly blonde.

The four phone calls and dozen emails regarding meetings later in the week still got to him. He was supposed to assess the budgets of three units before the meetings and cut them significantly. He was then given a list of ways to do that.

He couldn’t do that.

Hey, when you have a minute and are alone, we need to talk.

Spencer frowned at the message from his neighbor.

In my room now. Morgan isn’t back yet. What’s up?

H had an encounter with Dick and Dick.

Elaborate?

They somehow talked him into going do the training rooms to gawk at new recruits. There was a tussle because D&D are pigs and H is a knight

Okay?

They hit a chord though. They joked that the whole team sleeps with him, that’s why we’re all so close. He took it to heart. I found him beating himself up, believing he’s ruined both our careers

Whose?

Yours and mine

He hasn’t slept with you

Yeah. Had that conversation. He was determined to become a guilt-ridden mess over it.

He hasn’t slept with you

I don’t understand his brain! That’s your job. I’m just warning you, he might still be a mess when you get back.

Gee, thanks. I leave him with you for a few days and you give him back broken.

::Snort::

The team came back Thursday. Hotch was never so glad to see them, but seeing them was all he managed as the director and assistant director both spent the afternoon in his office wanting to know his plans for moving up the ladder, possibly taking over for Strauss if, for some reason, she didn’t return.
There was talk of creating a path to becoming director himself one day. To making the move to D.C. proper and running everything. Just the thought of doing that made his already upset stomach hurt more. He listened as the pair tried to plan out his life and future career, referring to him as a perfect choice, a born leader, a man of change.

Never once did they ask him if he wanted those things.

==

Friday came.

Four meetings. He’d had four meetings related to his temporary position as section chief and as much as he hated to admit it, he couldn’t wait for Strauss to come back. It was almost six o’clock and he was finally sitting down at his desk for the second time that day. Hotch had arrived that morning at seven and had just enough time to touch base with his team and drop his things before rushing upstairs for two back to back meetings that took him to until twelve-thirty. With a quick text to Spencer, he managed a mad dash across the quad for half a sandwich and a quick wave at Spencer before heading back for the other two meetings that finally finished just after five-thirty.

He really couldn’t wait until Strauss came back. He hated the politics she loved so much and every one of those meetings had involved political games of chess. Each attendee trying to suss out the weaknesses of the other. It had been years, nearly a decade, since he’d been so talked down to, made to feel so lacking in control over his own tiny corner of the Bureau. He hated it.

Letting his head fall back against his chair, he wondered how things had gone with Spencer and Jessica. Before the last meeting, he shot them both a message asking them to discuss with one another about Jack and if he could spend the night at his aunt’s house. After the day he’d had, he just didn’t think he had it within him to give his best to his son. If she couldn’t, he knew Spencer would happily fill in wherever he was lacking, but he hoped that maybe he would be able to have a sleep-over and all would be well in the morning.

Turning his phone back on, he saw he had a message from Spencer.

*Dropped Jack with Jess, come straight here from the office.*

Aaron frowned. For some reason, the voice he heard in his head as he read the words were more demanding, controlling, than usual.

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Spencer knew it had been a long day for Aaron. The fact that their unit chief hated playing politics wasn’t a secret to any of them. He had dinner finished and the paddle sitting on the table as soon as Hotch came through the door. He moved to press a kiss to his lips but at the last second, Aaron turned his head and Spencer ended up kissing his cheek. He pulled back, confused, but didn’t comment. “I’ll take your things.” He tugged the briefcase out of Aaron’s hand and started plucking his phone, guns, and wallet off him.

Aaron felt himself being stripped and it just upped the anxious energy inside him. He’d been out of control all day and now he was going to be out of control all evening as well. Without being told, he stripped naked and moved to the doorway. He’d seen the paddle and knew what the plan was for tonight, but when he moved to hook his fingers over the door frame, he realized he couldn’t. He needed to take back control of his life and there was no way tonight that he was going to let Spencer go through with their routine. He silently watched the younger man move around the room, tucking his things away. He wondered if there would be a fight, if Spencer would want to
dominate him and force him into submission in a way he’d never had to before.

He imagined lashing out like he’d wanted to in the meetings, screaming and causing a scene until everyone cowered away from him. He felt his jaw clench, the muscles flexing in his face. One fist was tight as his side while the other hand moved to fondle his balls.

Spencer turned around and froze. Rocking back on his heels, his eyes were wide as he took in the rigid lines and the anger rolling off Aaron in waves. The older man wasn’t starting at the floor submissively, he was staring straight into him, almost through him, unblinking. He took a step forward and watched as he seemed to coil, ready to spring.

Standing tall, Spencer raised his chin, he wouldn’t allow Aaron to behave this way. Running through his options in his mind, he decided that if what he really wanted was a confrontation, Spencer wouldn’t give it to him. “I’m going across the hall, make yourself comfortable.” He turned quickly before Aaron could speak and left, slamming the door behind him as he did.

==

Aaron seethed at the back of the door for what felt like hours until the complete silence of the apartment started to press in. Spencer had walked away from him. He’d practically stared him down, challenged him, and he’d just walked away. The anger and adrenaline started to fade, leaving him trembling. He did his best to stay upright, pressing his body into the submissive stance that was expected of him but he could only hold it for a moment. Sagging, he didn’t try to hold back the tears over being rejected by his master, by the man he loved. Finally sinking to his knees, naked, on the hard floor, Aaron began to cry.

==

Spencer listened through the door he was leaning against. He’d fully intended to go to Garcia’s once he’d left, but he couldn’t bring himself to completely leave Aaron alone. He could feel deep inside him that the older man needed him, maybe more so tonight that normal, but he knew that he couldn’t allow the display of behavior that he’d gotten. Resting his head against the cold surface, he made out a gasp for breath and then the thump of something, or likely someone falling to the floor. The sound of sobbing had him up and through the door in an instant.

==

Aaron felt arms around him, pulling him close, cradling him like a baby. Soft hair was brushing his face as words of comfort were whispered into his ear. When he was able to catch his breath, Aaron whispered. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“Shh. Just relax, we’ll talk soon enough.”

Hands carded through his hair, calming and comforting him until finally he gave in and passed out.

When he came to later, Aaron was lying on the bed on his side, he had no idea how he’d gotten there.

Having sensed the change in breathing, Spencer spoke. “I want to get you in the bath. Do you think you can walk?”

He tried to speak, but his voice caught, so instead he nodded.

“I need words, Aaron.”
“Yes.”

Spencer climbed off the bed carefully and helped the other man up, leading him to the bathroom in silence as he started to run a bath, adding scented bubbles and oils. He knew they would have to talk, but first he wanted to take care of him. When the water was ready, he helped Aaron in. “Sit back and close your eyes. Let me take care of you.” He gently traced his fingers over Aaron’s face.

==

Aaron was sitting at the table wrapped only in a very fluffy bathrobe, a plate of pork chops and mashed potatoes in front of him.

“Want to tell me what that was about?”

He looked up at his master and swallowed. “I’m sorry.”

Spencer shook his head. “That doesn’t answer my question, Aaron. What was going on in your head? You were trying to dominate me.”

Aaron nodded. “I spent almost twelve hours having to play political chess and being reminded I had no control and I just got more and more upset. Then I got here and you instantly were ordering me, dominating me and all I could think about was fighting back. Showing you who was stronger.”

“Why didn’t you just say stop?”

“I didn’t want you to stop. I wanted to…” He drew in a breath and let it out. “I wanted a fight.”

Spencer thought a minute. “I wish you had talked to me. Just because we’ve always done things a certain way doesn’t mean we always have to. I want to help you, take care of you, and I know that sometimes that might mean letting you call the shots.”

He was confused. “What?”

Leaning forward, he cupped one of Aaron’s cheeks with his hand. “What if you were in charge here? Normally you are the one in charge at work, everyone follows what you say so you come here to me and I take over. Today, though, you were so far from in charge, in control, there and you needed some of that control back. What if you were in control? Is there anything you ever wished to try on me?”

Aaron’s entire body flamed red as he blushed.

“So, there is something then.” He softened as he studied the face of the man he loved. “Tell me what you need, my love.”

“I- I wondered what it would be like for you to ride me.” His eyes traced down Spencer’s chest to avoid making eye contact.

“Is that it?”

He shook his head. “No.”

“Then what?” His voice was just above a whisper.

Hotch swallowed. “I imagined coming in, surprising you as I shove you against the wall like I did that day in the hotel, twisting your arm behind your back, making you gasp. I would crowd in behind you, grinding against your ass, showing you how excited you make me, because you do…"
Sometimes I just watch you working and I can’t believe you’re mine.”

“Aaron.” Spencer cut of his rambling and then smirked to himself.

Hotch shook his head to get back on track. “With my free hand I unzipped your pants and pulled you out, stroking you the rest of the way hard before pushing your pants down just enough.” He sucked in a breath, dinner forgotten, he felt himself trying to get hard and shifted in the chair, not caring that the robe slipped open as he did, his mind was drifting away with his fantasy now. “I pull myself out and slick us both up before sinking in and taking you right there against the wall.”

Spencer had watched as Aaron had explained his fantasy, how his body relaxed and his breathing changed. He wondered how long he’d had this fantasy. “Have you ever topped before?”

Aaron was quite again as he shook his head.

“He’s done eating?”

“Yes.” He watched as Spencer cleared the table and then left the room. He felt the overwhelming sadness start to set in again as he watching the younger man walk away. Again. He was startled out of his despondent thoughts when a hand carded through his hair and something was placed on the table.

“Scoot your chair over a bit.” He helped him move over, reaching down and petting one finger along the cage Hotch wore before straddling his knees, now totally naked. “If you would like, we can try it.”

“Really?”

“Here, pour this on your fingers.” He helped Aaron coat his hand with lube. “With your middle finger, press inside me. You won’t hurt me.”

Aaron cautiously did as he was told, letting his slick fingers press along Spencer’s perineum until just his middle finger found the tight pucker. Applying pressure, he sank in to the knuckle, hearing the man in him lap moan lowly. He pulled back and did it again.

“Add another.” Spencer directed. It had been a very long time since someone else was doing this to him and Aaron’s fingers were wider than his own.

He knew the moment he brushed Reid’s prostate, the response in his arms was electric, sending a pulse of need straight between his own legs. Burrowing against his shoulder, he gasped. “I need more.”

He helped him pull his fingers way, wiping them on the edge of the robe before carefully freeing his cock from its confines, watching it spring to full mast, already dripping with precome. He helped Aaron slick his dick up liberally before lining it up and carefully sinking down, impaling himself with a moan that was mirrored by the older man.

Aaron couldn’t believe the tightness, the slick heat, of Spencer’s passage. He held slim hips in place until the feeling that he would come any second passed. He knew that it would be quick, but he didn’t want to shoot off the moment he was inside for the first time. With a gasp, he asked Spencer to start moving, to start riding him, and he was relieved when he obliged. He had to look and see, had to watch his cock sliding in and out of the other man whose own prick bounced desperately between them. The sight made his balls draw up. “God, I’m so close. I’m going to come, I don’t think I can stop it.”
“Just hold for one second.” Spencer peeled one of the large hands off his side and wrapped it around his dick, encouraging it to jack him off quickly. “I promise if you hold on, it will be worth it.”

Aaron bit his lip and squeezed his eyes shut, everything in him totally focused on the single act of not coming yet. He felt tears of desperation leak from the corners of his eyes. He felt the walls wrapping his erection start to tremble, massaging him wonderfully as he choked out a sob, and then it happened. Spencer pitched forward, groaning loudly as he slammed down into Aaron’s lap, telling him to come now. The release was amazing. All of Aaron’s focus was in the small point where his body was unloading his seed into Spencer, he was so focused that he almost missed Spencer coating him with his own.

Spencer watched as Aaron came, watched how the need turned to relieved bliss as he filled him up. He kept riding him until the pulsing stopped. Panting, he pressed kisses to his lover’s face, neck, and lips. “You are so good. You did so good. I’m so proud of you.” He tipped Aaron’s face up and pulled him into a sensual kiss.

As they made out, Aaron felt himself softening until finally he separated from Spencer, fluids trailing after. Pulling away, he blushed. “I made a mess.”

“That’s okay.” Spencer pushed back and stood up. “I’ll go get something to wash you up, sit tight.” He traced his fingers along the side of his cheek before walking away to clean up.

Aaron watched his lover, boyfriend? he wondered, walk out of the room and then looked down at where his chest and lap were covered in fluids. He should have just talked to Spencer, why had he doubted that the younger man wouldn’t help him, take care of him. Spencer told him all the time how much he loved him and wanted to help. Another tear broke free, Aaron put being more emotional than normal down to exhaustion. He just needed some sleep.

==

Aaron rolled over in bed and looked around. Without looking at the clock he knew it was past his normal time to wake up, he could hear the voices of his family, Spencer as well as Jack, in the next room which meant Jess had already dropped the boy off. He didn’t really want to get out of bed though and wondered if he couldn’t just stay holed away in here all day.

Staring around the room, he couldn’t shake the ache that had cropped up when Spencer had walked out of the apartment the night before. It was like he decided he wasn’t worth it to him anymore. The thought that that could happen permanently one day cut into him deeply, without warning those emotions bubbled up and out as silent sobs into his pillow. He curled into himself, knees pulled to his chest, and let out everything he usually held back.

Spencer looked up from the table who a noise came from the bedroom.

Jack looked up at Spencer. “Is Daddy okay?”

“Let’s get you set up with these coloring books and I’ll go have a look, okay?”

“Okay.”

Once the crayons were in proper reach, Spencer let himself into the bedroom and looked down at where the other man was curled into an impossibly tight ball. “Aaron?” He didn’t get a response. “Aaron, what’s wrong? What do you need?” He placed his hands on the broad back and felt him tense. “Talk to me.”
“I don’t know.” He tried to control his breathing but failed, breaths coming out ragged. “I just keep feeling so… emotional. It just keeps overwhelming me and I just need to curl up and cry.”
Beth frowned. “So, you could be out of town and miss your race?”

Hotch nodded. “There’s a very good chance.”

“What if you don’t make it back in time?”

“I’ll just have to do another race.”

“But you trained for this one.”

“I know, I’ll just have to do the next one. Maybe I’ll do yours.”

She laughed. “But you’ve worked so hard.”

He couldn’t help but smile. “I know, all for nothing.”

“Yeah, too bad nothing good came of it.” She caught him glancing at his watch. “You have to go already?”

“No, it’s just… Spencer is dropping Jack at school and said he’d have him call on the way so I could say bye and they haven’t called yet. It’s almost time for him to be there.”

She shrugged. “Maybe they were in a hurry and forgot?”

He shook his head. “Spencer never forgets anything. Ever. He plays dumb well when he knows it serves him or the situation, but.. never.”

Beth sipped her tea. “Yeah, I got that.” She set her mug down and changed the subject. “Well, assuming you do make it back, I’d love to be there, you know.”

“Seeing me collapse at the finish line?” He cut in with a smirk.

“I really want to see that, to have that moment, I really do. No, I know Jack’s going to be there, so…”

“And my team.”

“Yeah.”

“But it’s fine. I’d love for you to meet all of them. Though, depending on their moods, you might be safer with Jack and his game of two thousand questions.”

“I thought the game was twenty questions.”
“Well, Spencer is teaching him to be an overachiever.”

She laughed. “Well, I’m in, for whatever I end up with.”

“Good.” His phone rang in his pocket and he pulled it out. “It’s them, I’m going to step outside.”

“Sure. I’ll be here. Waiting.” She watched him leave and wondered to herself how come she never managed to find such a great guy when they were single, and interested in heterosexual relationships.

==

Aaron finished sending a message to Beth letting her know he would be able to race after all. He looked up when Dave spoke. “So, what time tomorrow do I need to pick up Jack?”

“I, um, have to leave by five AM.”

Rossi pulled a face. “Okay. Well, I’ll tell you what, you put on the coffee and I’ll be there.” It had been decided too many questions might be asked of Reid brought Jack to the race.

Aaron chuckled at his friend. “Thanks.”

“So, you nervous? It’s not too late to back out.”

“No, I’m ready. Maybe.” Talking from behind him made him glance over his shoulder just in time to hear Spencer offer to watch Henry while the women went out for dancing and drinks. Considering what Hotch knew of the trio’s abilities to party, he couldn’t wait to hear how that would end.

==

He couldn’t help it. Seeing his entire team plus Jack at the finish line made him smile and gave him that last boost of energy he needed. As he ran past, he could make out their voices in the crowd, cheering.

He hadn’t seen or heard from Beth that morning, but having his family around him, ribbing him about doing well, it was enough. He worked on drinking his water as the rest of them discussed the pros and cons of going out for breakfast, it seemed everyone wanted to celebrate finishing with him. And judging by the looks of it, maybe working on sobering up. He’d pushed Beth out of his mind when he heard a voice behind him.

“Hotchner!”

He looked up and smiled, glancing at Spencer who nodded. “Beth! Hey, Jack, come here, there’s someone I want you to meet.”

Dave stepped up behind their youngest member. “You guys could tell everyone, then you wouldn’t have to hide behind pretend relationships.”

Spencer glanced around. “I know. Neither of us are ready to give up our positions though.” He was watching the trio that was just out of earshot.

“You’ve met her.”

“Yeah. She’s great actually.” He turned back around as Hotch rejoined the group, Beth following him.
“Everyone, this is Beth. Beth, this is my team, my family. We’re headed for breakfast if you want to come?”

“Sure? Where you going?”

“Something greasy!” JJ moaned.

“Yes, diner food.” Garcia added.

“Somewhere dark.” Emily finished.

Beth glanced up at Aaron.

“They were out drinking until dawn. They’ll be fine once fed.”

“You sound like you speak from experience.” She chuckled.

He rolled his eyes “You have no idea.”

==

Beth ended up riding with Aaron and Spencer while Jack rode with Uncle Dave again since his booster seat was still in his car. From the back seat she watched as the pair held hands as Aaron drove to a diner she guessed the team all knew, she hadn’t heard anyone actually mention a place by name. “So, are you sure everyone else will be okay with me tagging along?”

“Yes, we love it would new people join us.” Spencer chuckled.

Beth’s brows rose. “Really?”

“You’ll be fine until the girls sober up some more.” Aaron filled in. “Then they’ll be asking you anything and everything. Just… be careful what you say because if they aren’t already running a full search from the car, they will be soon.”

“A full search? On me?”

“Yeah. They do that anytime someone on the team tries to date someone else.”

“But, we’re not dating.” She was surprised.

“They don’t know that.”

==

Aaron smiled as he watched everyone eating and talking. He suspected Spencer was talking louder than normal just to annoy JJ and the other two for being out all night, but at the same time he kept helping Jack manage his meal and kept him distracted from the grown-up conversation happening at the table. When he saw Morgan tell the young boy to do earmuffs before saying something inappropriate, his brows rose. “What have you been doing to my son?”

Morgan laughed. “Sometimes they need a talking to that a young’un shouldn’t hear.”

Aaron looked down into Jack’s smiling face. “Do they make you do that much?”

Jack shook his head. “No. Only when Aunt JJ and Auntie Em are acting kinda silly.”
Hotch saw all three blush. “Exactly how often are you guys drunk around him?” He was absolutely surprised by this.

“Never drunk.” Garcia insisted. “But sometimes a teeny bit hungover.” She held up her fingers a tiny space apart.

“I need new sitters.” He grumbled.

Beth had loved watching the dynamic of the team Aaron and Spencer worked with. She wondered how a group of profilers were unaware that the pair were a couple. Even as they had separate conversations they were constantly brushing against each other, but neither adjusted to avoid the casual contact. She finally saw a possible opportunity when two of the women, JJ and Emily, excused themselves to the restroom, leaving her with Garcia, whom Aaron had told her knew of their relationship. “I can’t help but wonder.” Her eyes cut to the pair. “How no one seems to notice.”

Garcia nodded and leaned close, dropping her voice. “I think it’s only because they were like that for years before there was even a them. So, to us, it’s normal.”

“Oh.” That would make sense. “But really, no one suspects anything?”

“Nope. I really can’t wait till the day it’s out and everyone realizes how blind they were. It will be an awesome day.” She grinned. “A happy day because everyone just wants them both happy.”

“You think so?”

“That everyone wants them happy?”

“No, that everyone will be happy there’s a them.”

Penelope nodded. “I foresee a party when it comes out and I know it will happen because I’m awesome and just know things like that.”
JJ rushed into the room with keycards. “We have to double up, but I doubt we’ll be sleeping much anyway. Here are cards, we can drop our stuff and sleep if we have time.” She passed them out, each member of the team not giving it much thought as they took theirs and headed for the elevators to quickly drop their things.

Hotch was surprised when it was Rossi walking in behind him and not Reid, but then, JJ didn’t know about their relationship.

“Sorry to disappoint you.” Dave snickered.

“Yeah, well, I doubt we’ll get much sleep anyway before this case is over.”

“I was getting that feeling too.”

==

They’d split up. The house was so big and they needed to cover as much ground as possible, so it was the only logical decision. He’d sent Emily upstairs to check out the girl in the window, figuring her to be their missing victim until he entered the basement and found a woman on the floor. Hotch disliked basements, too many places to hide and an inability to check them all at once. No matter which way he turned first, looking the wrong way meant possibly giving the unsub the opportunity to take him out.

Something hard and heavy to his shin told him his luck had run out as he fell the last two steps, flashlight and gun sliding out of his grip. Giving up on them for a moment, he turned back to his attacker, determined to stand his ground, that same hard object whipped across his face, bringing tears to his eye as pain lanced through his cheek.

Trying again, this time Aaron stayed low and managed to get inside James’ swing of whatever was in his hand, slamming him into a wall. Hotch tried to squeeze his eyes shut to clear his vision, but it didn’t help. Being headbutted in the face didn’t help either.

Royally pissed now, Hotch slammed the younger man into another wall, drawing back and drawing on the anger he always kept tamped down, he landed a left hook that momentarily stunned the man. Taking the chance, Aaron scrambled for his gun, but was grabbed from behind and the pair grappled to gain the upper hand again. Turning to try slamming him against the wall again, Aaron realized a moment too late that his orientation in the room had gotten messed up and instead of a wall, James ended up flung down the well.

Supporting himself on the wide ledge, Aaron tried to catch his breath as he stared down at the limp body below. Their unsub was dead. Trying to stand upright, Hotch winced in pain at the various points that hurt. He just wanted to sit down, but he needed to get out of the basement and find the rest of his team. Dave and Spencer were waiting to hear from them. Grabbing his things from the
floor, he limped up the stairs, wonder just how bad his injuries were.

==

Aaron was seated on the back of an ambulance, phone to his ear and his right pantleg pulled up as the paramedic assessed the damage, when the phone finally connected.

“Hotch? How’d it go?” Reid asked.

“James is dead, the victim is dead, his sister will live.”

Spencer heard the tone in Hotch’s voice. “And?”

“I took a fire poker to the shin and then the face, plus a skull to the face.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah, you could say that.”

“Are you okay? Are you going to the hospital?”

“My facial injuries have been declared not in need of further medical attention and I’m waiting on the verdict on my leg.”

“You’re being looked at?” He couldn’t help the surprise in his voice.

Aaron shook his head. “Yes, as we speak.”

“Hand them the phone.”

He handed the phone to the man looking him over. “Agent Reid wishes to speak to you.”

“Hello?”

“Hi.” Spencer cleared his throat. “I want to hear directly from you that he doesn’t need to go to the hospital.”

“He’ll be bruised, sore, but he’s fine.”

“Okay, thank you.”

The paramedic handed the phone back.

“Thanks.” Hotch said to the man.

==

The decision was made, it was too late to drive to the municipal airport and get out that evening, so the team was spending the night.

Having sought out the relaxing properties of a steaming shower, Aaron stepped out and assessed the bruising on his face in the mirror. He didn’t give the bathroom door being ajar any thought, he was used to sharing with Spencer, as he pulled the towel away and dried his hair.

Dave strolled over, menu in hand. “I am thinking of ordering in Chinese, you want some?”

Aaron turned, letting the hand holding the towel rest on the counter. “Sure. I’ll take some broccoli
Rossi snorted and started to turn away until something caught his eye. Curious, he turned back and stared directly at his friend’s junk. “You’re wearing a…”

Hotch looked down and blushed bright red, using the towel to cover himself. “Yes. I am.”

Brows rising, Dave nodded. “You couldn’t just exchange rings like other people?”

“I wanted to do this.” He tried to sound convincing.

Dave put up his hands. “I’m not judging.” He sat at the desk. “How long, if I may ask?”

“After I got back from being overseas.”

He nodded. “You’re good for each other, I’m not going to deny that. But considering some of the conversations we’ve had in the past, surely you can see why I would be a little worried about whatever relationship you’re in. I need to know you’re okay, Aaron.”

“Fine. But I’m not talking about it while I’m naked. Hold on.” He shut the bathroom, listening to his friend order dinner while he dressed for bed. Stepping out, he sighed. “For me this whole thing started with a prison interview.”

“When you attacked Reid.”

Aaron’s brows drew together. “How’d you know that?”

“Reid told me. That’s about all he told me though, so go on.”

“I was angry at Haley, I was angry at myself. I goaded the prisoner into a fight and then Spencer stopped it.”

“How?” Surely the Spencer of years ago wouldn’t have put himself between two men bent on fighting, probably to the death.

Aaron snorted. “How? How does Reid do anything? He talked. He talked for like twenty minutes, barely taking a breath. And saved my ass.” He bit his lip. “But I was still angry.”

“Okay.”

“We got to the hotel and he literally forced me into a corner, backed me there, taunted me until I finally gave in and lashed out and then he kept going, kept pushing. I had a panic attack, or anxiety attack I guess, and he just kept going until I couldn’t go anymore.”

Dave watched his friend sag. “And then what?”

“And then he calmed me down… took care of me.”

“ Took care of you?”

He nodded. “Blindfolded me, stayed quiet, made me eat and then sleep. Took over everything and let me just give in for a while.”

“He got you to submit to him.” Dave was familiar to scenes and play, having dabbled in his youth. “And how did you feel afterward?”
“Calmer, happier than I had in ages.” Hotch closed his eyes and let his head fall back. “We didn’t really talk about it until after I was nearly blown up and even then, it was just about me being able to let go. Let someone else be in charge.”

“But that changed?”

“Yeah.”

“When?”

Aaron blushed. “After I was stabbed and he was shot.”

Dave was surprised at the honesty. “When we had the two of you bunking together?”

Hotch nodded. “Wasn’t that the plan?”

Rossi smirked and shrugged. “Maybe. So, the two of you started doing the dirty…”

“No.” He cut in.

“No?”

“No, not right away. I- I couldn’t… I wasn’t ready.” He felt himself tremble at the memory of why he wasn’t ready.

Seeing the movement, Dave knew not to let it go. “Aaron?”

“You remember when Reid wore a sling for a bit about a year after Haley died?”

“Yes, he was vague about what had happened.”

“He got… His shoulder had to be reset after it got dislocated.” Hotch focused now on the pattern in the commercial carpeting. He was determined to talk to his friend for once about things he usually carried inside.

“He never said that. What happened?”

“I freaked out and I guess… Had a flashback? In my mind, I was fighting someone else and hurt him.”

“Okay. Any idea what brought it on?”

Hotch flamed redder than he had earlier. “I asked to try sex, actual sex, and when he took me I flashed back to when…” The fear of sharing tightened his chest, making it hard to breathe. He stood and began to pace the room, gasping for air, trying to keep the small space in focus. It wasn’t the violent lashing out from before, but he was still having a panic attack and he couldn’t figure out how to stop it.

“Aaron!” Dave grabbed hold of him and held him still. “Talk and it will get better. Come on. What’s eating you this bad?”

He screwed his eyes shut. “I flashed back to when Foyet raped me.” The words made him bend forward and then gag, acid churned in his belly.

“Shh.” Dave pulled him close, holding him like he would a distressed child. “Slow breaths.” He could feel the tension thrumming his friend’s body. “Come here.” He started to tug him toward the
bathroom in case he made himself ill.

“No, I’m okay. Just give me a second.”

“Then lay down. Don’t talk.” Rossi nudged him onto a bed and flicked off the closest light. “Don’t worry about talking.” He sat beside him on the bed and rubbed his back soothingly.

Aaron didn’t move or speak until after dinner had been delivered. “I hate being so weak like this.”

“You, my friend, are many things, but weak is not one of them.”

“I can’t even talk to my best friend without having a panic attack and almost making myself sick.”

“Do you have them with Spencer?”

“No.” His voice was soft.

“Why?”

“He always takes care of me. He reminds me that I’m capable of being who I am all day and I deserve to be able to let go and be loved, be cared for.” Hotch was startled when someone knocked on the door and then surprised when Dave opened it to reveal Spencer.

“He needs you.” Dave shut the door behind the younger man who said nothing in reply.

Spencer simply shed his shoes and crawled onto the bed, wrapping himself around Aaron, pulling him close.

Dave tucked into his food, silently watching as Aaron tucked his face into Spencer’s throat and clung to him.
Chapter Notes

#2 of 2 chapters posted for Thanksgiving Day

Checking the mirror, he smoothed his gray pants with one hand, checking for wrinkles. The pants were a shade lighter than he normally wore and thin enough that boxers would leave lines if he were wearing any. And he knew Aaron would know that.

Adjusting the sleeves of his fitted lilac shirt as he buttoned the cuffs, he smoothed the collar and adjusted his tie, it was striped on the diagonal, before pulling on the waistcoat that completed the look.

Heading back into the bathroom, Spencer worked his fingers through his hair, styling it just the way he knew Hotch loved before pulling on his cleanest shoes and stopping in the kitchen to get his travel mug before shutting his door behind him.

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Reid made sure he didn’t look up at the upper offices as he strode into the bullpen, late by his own standards but still plenty on time. When Emily greeted him, loud enough to draw attention from anyone curious, he smiled and sat on the corner of her desk a moment, placing his mug next to him. After their morning round of catching up, Spencer moved to his own seat, he could see in his peripheral vision Hotch watching him. He still didn’t look up.

Waiting a believable amount of time, he played suddenly remembering his mug and stood, stretching across the divider to collect it. He smiled when something crashed upstairs.

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Aaron had noticed the suit as soon as Reid had entered the bullpen and his jaw had dropped. Seeing him, he knew for a fact the younger man was commando under those pants. The thought thrilled him.

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The team gathered in the conference room and went over cases that needed attention for the week. Spencer kept up a cheerful banter with both JJ and Morgan, pretending to not notice Hotch’s discomfort at all. Once the meeting broke up and everyone was headed back to their desks, he bumped his pen onto the floor. Knowing Aaron was directly behind him with a clear view, Spencer bent at the waist to collect the fallen pen.

Aaron watched Spencer bend over and felt his dick try to twitch in its confines. If Spencer was going to play that game all day, he was going to be a complete mess by the time the day was over.

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“So I had that white ribbed sweater on, you know, the one you were with me when I bought it?” JJ gestured to Emily with her fork.
“Oh, yeah! I love that sweater.”

“I was wearing that and my black suit jacket and that silk scarf, the navy and pink one. And I’m sitting in the meeting with all these other people, mostly men, and the room is so warm! Eventually everyone starts shedding extra layers and I’m sitting there horrified because it hits me. I can’t take my jacket off. I wasn’t planning on needing too.” JJ tossed her hands up in the air.

“Ohh, winter wear rules?” Emily frowned in commiseration.

“Yes! I know it’s not quite still winter outside, but it still has enough of a chill.” JJ took another bite of her lunch. She was sitting on the couch along with Emily, styrofoam containers on their laps and files stacked around them. Garcia had taken over the desk with two laptops and her own lunch, bright yellow platform heels perched on the edge of the desk.

“You know, that is so unfair.” The bubbly blonde added in. “Once winter hits, those of you in the itty bitty committee get to just tuck your bras away like your bikinis until warmer weather while the rest of us have to not only still strap um up, we have to figure out how to keep them warm. You have no idea how lucky you have it.” Her eyes flicked to something in her peripheral vision and she yanked her feet to the ground, dropping her fork into the tray. “Oh my lord how long have you been there? You can’t just sneak up like that!” Her voice rose to a screech.

JJ and Emily turned to look and who she was speaking to, both covering their mouths to try and stifle laughter.

Hotch raised his hands in surrender. “I apologize for barging in, I’ll go.” He turned on his heel and starting to walk away, smirking slightly when he heard the sounds of JJ and Emily guffawing once he thought he was out of earshot. Hotch strolled back to the bullpen, headed to his office but in his doorway he hesitated and instead changed course for the next office.

Entering, he sank onto Rossi’s loveseat and leaned his head back, covering his face with his hands and crossing his ankles.

After several beats of studying his friend, Dave asked. “Problem, Aaron?”

“We spend too much time together.”

After another beat to see if there would be more elaboration. “Who, exactly, does this we include?”

Hotch let his hands fall to his lap. “This team.”

“And do you have any suggestions on how to rectify that?”

“No.” It almost sounded like a whine.

Dave relaxed back into his chair. “What brought this on?”

“I went to JJ’s office for… I don’t even remember what for. She has Prentiss and Garcia in there, they’re all working on cases and talking.”

“That’s a dangerous den to enter.” Dave’s face twitched into his trademark smirk for a split second.

“I didn’t know!” Hotch all but howled. “Garcia was ranting to the other two and it included, and I’m quoting here, itty bitty titty committee. There was more but…” He shrugged and shook his head.
Dave tossed his head back and laughed. “Yeah, it has been my experience that women that men would describe as...blessed don’t always see the situation the same way. I would imagine Garcia’s no different especially with the lovely JJ and Emily around.”

Hotch’s face scrunched up as he thought. “Are you sure? She’s so confident and dresses so…”

“Ah.” Dave’s smile took the air of someone who had much wisdom. “A woman always knows to use her best assets and wiles when handling men. Just because she knows it works to keep us all in line doesn’t mean she’s happy about it.”

Garcia resorted to throwing French fries at her friends. “It’s not funny! I’m so mortified! Will you stop laughing at me?”

Emily raised her hand. “I’m sorry, Garcia! It would be you who gets caught saying something like that. And hey, at least it was Hotch and not someone else.” She shrugged. “He’s not going to make a big deal about it.”

“Don’t you remember the last harassment seminar we had to sit through? That just totally defined their definition of workplace harassment! I can’t get written again!”

JJ chuckled. “Do you have any idea how much Hotch hates those things? There is no way on earth he would bring another one of those on himself. He’s not about to report you. And it’s you, he’ll forgive pretty much anything.”

Penelope sat upright and faced her friend. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

JJ and Emily exchanged a look. “P, he has the world’s biggest soft spot for you. Sure, he has a soft spot for Spence, but it doesn’t hold a candle to you.”

“That’s not true.” She wondered just how much they had noticed, but asking would just cause more questions.

“Okay.” JJ picked her file back up. “Okay.”

Despite the slight disruptions of the day, Aaron hadn’t had much time to forget Spencer parading around the office dressed as he was. It seemed that at every turn, he could see the younger man bending or stretching, showing off his body in some of the most sensual ways possible while at work.

By late afternoon, Reid had produced a large sucker and spent the better part of an hour practically making love to it. Aaron hadn’t been able to look away. Behind his desk, he’d let one hand drop out of view and apply what pressure he could to his cock, he needed something.

When, after the sucker, Reid had fetched himself a lukewarm cup of coffee and then had forgotten a stir stick, Aaron felt his breathing grow heavier as he used his finger to stir it and then slipped it in his mouth, sucking it in and out for far longer than necessary. Feeling the leaking he’d grown accustomed to increase, he was up like a shot, shoving past Dave who was just stepping into his office, already taking in both men and putting two and two together, before he almost ran to the nearest restroom, thankful to see it empty before shutting himself in a stall. If he was going to lose control, at least he could do it without much of an audience.
Eyes squeezed shut, he replayed Spencer working that lollipop and then his finger, there was little else to do but to wad up toilet paper and let the feelings wash over himself. He tried to will away the curling ball of need, he knew it wouldn’t be satisfying anyway, he tried to think of anything but that finger sliding in and out, in and out. With a rumbling hum and a slight whimper of sadness at the lack of pleasure that came with it, he came without any hint of the orgasm that would have made him feel better.

It was going to be a long rest of the afternoon.

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Dave had been watching the same show out his own office window and had hear the soft sounds of someone almost in pain through his wall. He knew the younger man was torturing the older intentionally, he just wasn’t sure why. Getting up, he headed to the other office only to be bulldozed by Aaron making a beeline for the hall.

Shrugging, he headed down the stairs himself, stopping by the genius’s desk. “Hey.”

“Yeah?” Spencer smiled up at him.

“I think you broke him.”

His smile grew. “I promise he’ll be all better tomorrow.”

Dave huffed a chuckle and walked away.

==

Aaron was jittery the whole way home. Stopping off to pick up Jack from school, making small talk with the teachers and other parents, had been torture. He’d been hyper aware of his cock and its desire to be hard and find release, preferably buried or wrapped in something with a one-eighty-seven IQ. The thought had him shifting on his feet as he listened to a mother talk about wanting to plan a playdate soon, he just hoped she couldn’t read on him where his thoughts were drifting. Herding Jack into the car, he hurried to get the car moving, heading to their own apartment to collect bags before rushing to Spencer’s place. He hoped the whole way that Garcia would already be home by the time they arrived.

Spencer looked up when his door opened, surprised to see Jack, but not at all surprised to see Aaron. “Hey. You’re here.”

Hotch was starting to feel caged in a whole new way. “Is Garcia, um.” He swallowed. “Is she home yet?”

“I’m sorry, no, she got a call as I was leaving about needing to help another team with something.”

The whine that slipped out was involuntary.

Spencer stepped forward, shutting the door as he pulled Aaron flush to him. “It’s okay. Parents do this all the time, right?” He felt Aaron nod against his shoulder. “It’s no big deal. We’ll work it out.”

Aaron gripped the sides of Spencer’s vest, pulling the slimmer body to his. He was practically vibrating now with anticipation. “I need you.” He whispered.

“I know. Tell you what, I’ll get Jack dinner, you go shower and change.”
“Okay.” He pulled back.

Spencer let Aaron go and turned to Jack. “And what would you like for dinner buddy?”

Jack grinned. “Pizza?”

“Pizza? I don’t know. Have you been good enough for pizza?”

“Yes!” The boy bounced around, taking no notice of his father disappearing into the bedroom. “Pizza with ham and pineapple!”

Moving to the freezer, Spencer pulled it open. “You mean like this one?” He pulled a pizza out.

“Yay! I love that kind!”

“I know you do, that’s why I bought it. And if you eat, I have a very special secret surprise for dessert.” He brought his finger up to his lips to signal it was a secret.

“Okay!” Jack darted off to play while dinner cooked.

After the pizzas went into the oven, Spencer headed to the bathroom and found Aaron standing in the shower, one hand pressed against his inner thigh while the other was stroking his chest and stomach. “Need some help?”

Aaron opened his eyes, a shiver running through him. “Yes. But… But I can wait.”

Stripping quickly, Spencer ducked into the shower stall and under the spray, wetting himself. “That may be true, but it doesn’t mean you should.” He soaped up the sponge and began to lather Aaron up. “Rossi stopped by my desk this afternoon and said he thought I broke you.”

Aaron could feel the heat creeping up his neck. “Yeah. That suit you were wearing, it was a bit… overwhelming.”

Spencer pressed a kiss to his collar bone. “Well, we’re home now, you don’t have to be overwhelmed anymore.” He hung up the sponge and pulled out the sprayer, rinsing them both. When he was done, he danced his fingers down until he was stroking Aaron’s caged cock.

Aaron brushed his hands away. “Please, not yet.”

One brow curled. “Are you sure? It could be a while before Jack is asleep.”

He could feel emotions well up that not only was Spencer caring for him, but he factored in Jack and his needs as well. It made him almost consider giving in already. “Yes, I’m sure. I’ve been imagining how this would go all day and…” His eyes closed as Spencer massaged his balls, moaning out his next words. “I can’t wait till he’s asleep.” He chuckled. “I can wait, I’m okay. But I can’t wait. Does that even make sense?”

Spencer huffed a laugh. “Yeah, it does.” Stepping out of the shower, he looked around. “Would you wear a plug until he goes to bed?”

Aaron’s eyes dropped at the question. “Yes.” He waited for the other man to return with the plug and lube. Bracing himself on the wall, palms flat, he focused on relaxing as Spencer spread lube around and then eased the plug in. He blew out between his teeth as he felt it settle into place.

Spencer pressed a kiss to Aaron’s shoulder. “Let’s go eat.”
Aaron had spent all of dinner aroused and distracted. After his shower, he’d slipped on a pair of worn jeans, skipping the boxers, and a soft shirt. The normally soft fabric seemed to itch and irritate. He was looking forward to taking everything off as soon as his son was sound asleep.

After dinner, to give Aaron a bit of a break, Spencer had exuberantly looked over everything Jack had brought home from school, asking if he could hang the art as well as the A+ writing assignment on his fridge. Aaron couldn’t believe how happy Spencer was to get to pepper his fridge with the boy’s work.

He watched his partner take over bath time and then the final story before tucking Jack into his little bed with a kiss to his forehead. After giving a kiss of his own, Hotch vanished into the bedroom while Spencer headed for the kitchen to clean up the rest of their dishes.

Spencer stepped into the bedroom and was instantly shoved into the wall. The dark room was plunged further into darkness when the door was pushed shut, the lock snicking quietly. “Aaron.” He whispered.

The voice spoke roughly into his ear as hands began to roughly wander over his body. “You showed up in that suit today knowing full well it would turn me on. Don’t think I didn’t know that every stretch, every bend you did was completely on purpose.” He ground his hips against the younger man’s ass. “And then that stunt with the lollipop, sucking and licking it like it was a cock. And your finger, you knew exactly what you were doing.”

Spencer’s own dick had sprung to life, hard and tenting his pants, head bumping the wall.

Aaron reached around and undid his pants, shoving them down so Spencer’s cock sprang free before grasping it with one hand. “I could just imagine you licking, sucking, me like that and then suddenly I was on the verge of messing myself right in my office.” He tugged twice on the cock in his hand. “Would you have liked that? For me to come in my office from watching you through the window?”

He gasped. “Yes.”

Hotch’s face slipped into a predatory grin, nipping at Spencer’s neck and shoulder. “I had to run to the bathroom and come into a wad of toilet paper like some teenaged boy. And you know how unsatisfying I find coming while caged, no orgasm to make it feel good.”

“Yes.” The hand around his dick was going just enough too slow that he wasn’t getting off. He tried thrusting his hips, but large fingers biting into his hip halted the action.

“You had me so out of control. Now, I think I should take some of it back.” Aaron released Spencer but kept him blocked against the wall as he unbuttoned and zipped his own jeans, pulling them past his thighs. Gripping the cock cage that he never removed himself, Aaron sucked in a breath. He wasn’t going to ask permission this time. He was in charge right now. Pulling it off, he moaned loudly, gripping it as it sprang to full hardness. He fished the lube out of his pocket and poured maybe a bit too much into his palm before dropping the bottle to the floor. Aaron slicked himself up before spreading the rest in Spencer’s ass.

Spencer relaxed as the blunt head of Aaron’s thick cock pressed against his hole. He could feel the slight uncertainty in the other man as the pressure increased until his muscles finally gave and the head slipped in.
Aaron sank all the way in, gasping in deep breaths as he tried to calm his body. This was only the second time he’d taken Spencer and the sensation was sending him into overload. Bracing one hand on the wall and the other on Spencer’s hip, he pulled back and slammed in again, reveling in the moans and keens it drew out of the other man. Speeding up, he pistoned into his ass, chasing the overwhelming desire to fuck him as long as he could. His mind played back the visions of Spencer stretched and bent as he’d done that day, finishing with the performances with his finger and the lollipop. Gripping the hip even tighter, Aaron buried himself deep inside Spencer and came, dots dancing on the edges of his vision.

Spencer trembled as he felt Aaron’s come filling him, the thick dick twitching and pulsing in his passage. The authority Aaron had used, pinning him to the wall, taking charge, it was a serious turn on for him. As he felt Aaron sag against him, spent, his hips rutted in the air looking for his release. Hotch must have understood the movement because a moment later, Spencer felt the softening cock slip out of him before he was spun around, Aaron sinking to his knees and taking his cock in his mouth. It took him a minute of no movement to realize that the older man was waiting for him to fuck his mouth.

Gripping the back of his head, short locks threading through his fingers, Spencer fucked into him in short bursts before sinking in as far as he dared and coming down his throat. As he sagged against the wall, he could feel Aaron shifting at his feet.

Aaron sat back on his heels, one heel pressing in the plug until it stimulated his prostate. The electric feeling shot through him and felt so good, so he repeated it again. And then again. Until he was rocking on his heel, pleasuring himself with the plug. It had been what felt like forever since he’d been able to pleasure himself, long enough that he knew that even with the diminished results, he would still get the relief in just a moment. Not bothering to hide what he was doing, if Spencer wanted him to stop, he would say to stop, Aaron let his head fall back, a breathy gasp slipping out as he rocked harder, faster.

Spencer quietly stared down, watching Aaron get himself off while still holding, clinging, to Spencer’s thighs. He didn’t intrude, didn’t interrupt, just watched until Aaron moaned his name and came again across his lap and the floor. It was a beautiful sight.

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Washed, dried, and the door open again if Jack needed them, Aaron was wrapped in Spencer’s arms. “What are we?”

Spencer thought a minute. “What would you like us to be?”

“Dave implied that me wearing the cock cage was akin to exchanging rings. Getting married. Or, I guess, engaged at least.”

“He did?”

“Well. He asked why we couldn’t just exchange rings like normal people when he saw it.”

His brows shot up. “He saw it?”

Aaron nodded. “So, what are we?”

“This relationship is important to me. You and Jack are important to me. I see us as a family, you and I and our son. Boyfriends sounds a bit juvenile. Partners maybe?”

Aaron thought on it a minute. “Do you ever think about us getting married? Or being married?” He
was hopeful.

Spencer’s voice was soft. “No.”

His heart sank. “Oh. Okay.”

When the silence stretched on for too long, Spencer spoke again. “Was that it?”

Aaron tried to swallow back the sadness he felt welling up. “Yeah. That was it.” He kept still until long after he knew Spencer had drifted off. In the quiet and darkness, tears filled his eyes, slipping down his temple as he silently cried. He’d hoped that Spencer saw the same future he did. He hadn’t considered how he would feel if he was wrong.

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Jack tiptoed into Spencer’s room just as sunlight was filtering through the curtains. He was used to seeing his dad wrapped in the other man’s arms as they slept. But this morning they weren’t asleep.

A sound had disturbed him and, curious, he’d crawled out of bed, this week’s favorite toy under his arm, to investigate. In Spencer’s bed were the two grown-ups, both of them were naked and the sheets were all rumpled at the end. Jack chewed his lip. His daddy was making a noise, eyes closed, as Spencer sat between his legs moving around. He wasn’t sure if he should let them know he was awake, they were both whispering. Maybe it was a secret he wasn’t supposed to hear.

Jack’s eyes were like saucers as he watched Spencer fall forward, his hands landing on either side of his daddy’s shoulders like they were wrestling, but they weren’t. It was like they were stuck together and were trying to get unstuck. Jack wondered if that was why wearing jammies was so important, so you didn’t stick to other people in your sleep.

Both men crying out and moaning shook him out of his curious thoughts and he realized they’d stopped wiggling now. He figured it was okay now to talk to them. “What’cha doing?”

Jack was pretty sure he’d never heard his daddy or his Spencer scream like the girls in his class before.
It was late when Dave pulled into his long driveway and made his way up to the house. A familiar black SUV parked on the right side of his drive made him sigh heavily as he hit the button to raise the door. He should have known he wouldn’t get to have this night to himself.

By the time he hauled himself out of his parked car, Aaron was hovering at the end, waiting. A paper bag in one hand. “You didn’t have to come here. I’m fine you know.”

Hotch shrugged one shoulder. “I got the others to agree not to come or bother you if I came in their place.”

He worked his jaw a moment. “Garcia?”

“Promised to stay home. Is probably baking up a storm though, so be prepared for that.”

“Great.” Dave grumbled, then waved for him to follow, hitting the button on the wall to lower the door once he knew his friend was clear. “What’s in the bag?”

“A birthday present.” Aaron followed him up the short steps and into the kitchen, setting the bag down with a soft thump. “We did well today I think.” He settled into a barstool.

“Yeah.” Dave sighed again. “We did.”

“I field calls regularly for us to guest lecture either individually or a couple at a time from several of the colleges. I always turn them down stating we’re simply too unpredictable in our schedules, but… Maybe we should change that.”

Rossi was surprised this was what his friend wanted to talk about. “Just… Don’t send Reid alone.”

Aaron laughed. “I know. But he actually does lecture every semester for a professor in all her classes. All alone, none of us to escort him.”

“Really.”

“Uh huh.” He nudged the bag across the counter. “Gonna open your present?”

Dave pulled the bag the remainder of the distance and pulled out the box inside, whistling when he read the label. “You shouldn’t have.”

“I figured if you’re going to drown your misery in a bottle tonight, it might as well be the good stuff.”

“This will do then.” He headed off in search of appropriate glasses. “No Spencer tonight?”

Aaron blushed slightly, unused to discussing his relationship with anyone. “When we got home, he offered to stay the night with Jack while I came here. They were making plans that involved something that, and I quote here, ‘shouldn’t make too much mess’. I didn’t ask.”

Returning, Dave chuckled. “It’s good they get along.”

“Yes.”

“And you and he are good now?”
“I think so.” He frowned, remembering the conversation they’d had before. He wasn’t about to tell Dave about that, not tonight anyway. “We had discussed moving, his lease was coming up, but we spend so much time together with work and Jack and everything that having separate places to occasionally retreat too is nice. He is considering moving to a two bedroom place though.”

“Why’s that?”

“So Jack can have his own room.”

“Oh.”

Aaron studied his friend for several minutes as they sipped their drinks. “How are you doing?”

Dave shrugged silently before collecting the glass and bottle and moving to the couch. “You mean, how am I doing since a serial killer hijacked my birthday?”

“Yeah.” He watched as Dave filled his glass again.

“Birthdays sort of lose their importance as an adult anyway I suppose. Even more when you don’t have any family around to remember it.”

“You have the team.”

“I do.” He tossed back the drink like it was a shot, closing his eyes as it slipped down. “Why can’t I just let it go? We have so many of the names, I’ll never get them all. I could just never go back, no one would ever know.”

“You would.” Aaron sipped from his own glass and he watched his friend refill his again. “You care. You’ve always cared. It’s why you came back, you couldn’t handle not having those answers.”

“Maybe I need to learn to not give a damn.” He sipped at his third glass at a more acceptable pace. “I hated it, going down there. And he was so smug and…” He turned and made eye contact. “He sang at me. I can’t get it out of my head. I think I’ll hear it forever. So now not only has he ruined my own birthday, he’s ruined every party I might need to go to in the future!”

“You could start by letting someone else do the work, make the notifications.”

“No!”

“Dave…”

“No! I have to see this through. These people have to know that their tragedy wasn’t shuffled off onto some lackey, that the lead agent cared enough to do the leg work.”

“Can someone at least go with you?”

“No.”

“Dave…”

“What?” He reached for the bottle again. “A babysitter won’t help.”

“That’s not what I meant. You were distracted before we even started this morning, it was already bothering you. You don’t have to bottle it up. We’re all here to shoulder each other’s pain. You went and saw him, but Morgan could oversee verifying the location of the body and Garcia is a pro
at finding families. JJ or Emily could go with you to talk to them.”

Dave grunted his objection.

“Just think about it.”

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The evening wore on quietly, the only sounds were the soft tick of the large grandfather clock in the study, occasionally gonging the hour, and the sound of glasses being placed on the tables. Every once in a while, Dave would splash more into his, the bottle getting lighter with each pour.

Aaron sat sentry, watching as his long-time friend started to slump to the side, face twitching as emotions ran rampant along with the alcohol. Once the bottle was closer to empty than full, Hotch collected the glasses and bottle, depositing them by the sink for later cleaning and returned to where his friend was starting to doze. Sighing and accepting his role in this evening, Aron knelt on the floor and began to work the laced of Dave’s shoes, thinking back to more than one occasion when he’d woke in the morning to discover Dave had extended the same care to him. Sitting the shoes aside once he was done, Aaron put his own beside them before hauling Dave up, pulling one arm over his shoulder to try and hold his weight.

“Maybe cut back on the treats.” Hotch grunted, slowly walking the older man upstairs to the master bedroom. Depositing him on the bed, Aaron sighed and began to tug on Dave’s belt, removing it followed by his watch and rings. Making the decision that his friend could sleep the rest of the way dressed, Aaron walked around the bed and climbed up onto the other side, intending to sit watch over him for the night.

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Dave groaned against the sunlight piercing his eyelids, doing his best to roll away from the assault but finding himself pinned. Turning his head, he squinted one eye open to work out what was going on. Ignoring the pain, he lifted his head to see that Aaron was sprawled out beside him fully dressed. His movements triggered something in the younger man because before Dave could process, a leg was sliding over his and hips were being thrust against his.

Hangover or not, it was time to get up.

Extricating himself from the other man’s grip, Dave staggered to the bathroom to wash up and find something, anything, to make the pounding, throbbing in his brain go away. A sound from the bedroom had him investigating, brows shooting up. There was no mistaking exactly what his friend was dreaming about.

Leaning over the bed, Dave ignored the pain and spoke sharply into Hotch’s ear. “If you do that here, you’re buying me a new bed!”

Jolting awake, Aaron took a moment to reorient himself. “Shit.” He stilled his hips, blinking over his shoulder at his friend. “Sorry.”

“Well, I was awake already. Just.” He headed back to the bathroom to brush his teeth, leaving his friend to sort himself out.

Aaron rolled over and stared down at the damp spot on the front of his pants. He really hoped Spencer would be free when he got home.

Dave watched as Aaron got up and went to the bathroom he’d just left, a little nosey and just
hungover enough to lose the filter on his curiosity. “With the show you were putting on, I’d have expected to see you giving a full salute there.” He called through the closed door.

Aaron rolled his eyes, ignoring the comment until he was out, finding his friend in the kitchen again, making coffee. “Not that it’s any of your business, but I wear the, uh.” He faltered a moment, losing some of his gusto.

“The cock cage?” Dave offered.

“Yeah, that. I wear it all the time. Only Spencer takes it off. It’s…” He bit his lip.

“I get it. And you were asleep and probably forgot you weren’t at home.”

“Yeah.”

Dave nodded, moving to the fridge to find breakfast. “Tell Spencer I say he’s a lucky, lucky man.”

Aaron huffed. “I will.”

Holding up a carton, he asked. “Eggs?”

“Sure, why not.”

Getting everything started, he glanced over his shoulder. “Thanks for coming by last night. I guess it was a bit better than drinking alone.”

“No problem. I think you’ve mopped me up enough times, time to return the favor.”

“Ain’t that the truth.”

“Do you remember much of our conversation?”

“Not really, no.”

“I mentioned letting us help you with this, don’t feel you have to do all of it alone. You have the whole team more than willing, you just have to say the word.”

Dave took his time replying, finishing the eggs and plating them in the silence. “I’ll think about it.”

“Okay.”

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Aaron entered Spencer’s apartment and stopped. The entire living room looking like something out of some otherworldly planet. Bizarre trees and animals were drawn and taped to every upright surface. Cardboard boxes had been converted into a collection of small caves and what could be huts. “Hello?”

With a roar, a furry purple monster launched out from behind the couch and charged him, swiping and bouncing as it made contact with his legs. When the little monster looked up at him, Hotch saw that the purple fur wasn’t the end of it, Jack’s face was very carefully drawn and decorated with purple and black paint, and glittery stickers.

“Are you having fun?” He couldn’t help smiling at his son.

The boy nodded before roaring and running away. There was noise from the bedroom where Jack
had disappeared so Aaron crossed the open space to investigate. There was another set of box huts in the bedroom as well. Curled inside one was another furry monster, this one blue. “Spencer?”

The blue monster popped up in surprise. “Hotch!”

Aaron chuckled. “Hotch?”

“I mean, Aaron. I didn’t hear you come in!” He unfolded and climbed out of the box. How’s Rossi?”

“He’ll survive. What happened around here?”

“Jack had the idea and we went out and found the boxes and stayed up decorating. Pen stopped by after dinner and saw everything and came back with the furry outfits and paint.”

Aaron smirked. The outfit Spencer was wearing was skin tight, the fake fur hiding very little. Leaning forward, he nuzzled the younger man’s neck. “You look good in it.”

Spencer pushed him back, checking for Jack before replying. “We’re not having furry sex. Forget it.”

“That’s not what I was thinking.” But he was thinking about it now.

“No. Aaron. Absolutely no.”

A feral grin broke across his face. “Are you sure?”

Realization hit him and Spencer shrieked, taking off out of the bedroom with Aaron hot on his heels. Rushing through the living room, he rounded the far end of the couch and headed for the kitchen. Jack realized his Dad was chasing the younger man and started jumping up and down, cheering them both on. In the kitchen, Spencer looked cornered. Aaron was across the breakfast bar from him, watching his every move as he tried to get back into the main part of the apartment. He faked left and waited until his pursuer was closing in before making an impressive leap up onto the counter, launching over the stools onto the floor. Aaron’s whooping laugh at the surprise move pushed Spencer to scramble and almost-vault over the couch as well. The apartment was too small to keep their chase up long.

Jack darted around the room, distracting Spencer for a split second. When the young genius looked up, Aaron was closing in on him, already having made it around the couch. A moment later, Aaron lunged forward, tackling Spencer to the ground as Jack danced around them.

Grinding himself into the younger man, Aaron leaned forward and nipped at Spencer’s ear. “How fast can you take this off?”

“What?”

“Can you get out of it on your own?” He tugged at the blue bodysuit Spencer had on.

“Y-Yes.” He could feel himself responding as Aaron kept rubbing their hips together. “Aaron.” He was breathless now for an entirely different reason.

Aaron’s eyes fell shut as he groaned deep in his throat. “Feel me.” He whispered. “Feel what you do to me.”

Spencer slipped one hand down and stroked the front of his partner’s slacks, feeling the damp spot
in the fabric. “Oh.”

Turning his head, Aaron tried to spy his son. “Jack?”

A voice came from the small area that was converted into the boy’s bedroom. “Yeah, Dad?”

“You want to go see Miss Penny today?”

“Are you and Spencer going to snuggle?”

Aaron’s skin flamed red. “Yes.” He pushed up from the floor. “Let’s grab your bag and see if she’s home. Yeah?”

“Yeah! We can make cupcakes!” Jack grabbed his bag off the floor and darted to the door.

Following behind, Aaron escorted his son out into the hall, glancing back to Spencer. “Don’t move.”

==

Changed, Jack watched Penelope gather ingredients to make cupcakes. “Daddy wanted me to come over here so his and my Spence can cuddle.”

Penelope gave him a sweet smile. “I know, Sweetie. They both love you, but sometimes grown-ups need a little bit of time by themselves.”

Jack nodded. “Daddy came home and chased Spencer all over until he caught him and then they were laying on the floor and Daddy was smooshing him down.” Jack started playing with the spatulas that were out. “But they still had all their clothes on this time.”

“This time?”

Jack nodded. “I saw them before but they were in Spencer’s bed and it was hot I guess cause they took off their jammies and were sweaty. Spence was sitting on the bed and talking to Daddy. I think they got stuck together cause they were both making noises.”

Penelope blushed. “You saw that?”

Jack looked up and nodded again.

“Do they know you saw that?” She really hoped she wouldn’t have to break it to the men.

“Yes. Then Spencer got funny and left to get fancy doughnuts for breakfast and Daddy and I had a talk about not coming into bedrooms anymore if the door is shut.”

“That’s good.” She breathed a small sigh of relief.

==

Ten minutes later, he was back, locking the door behind him and looking at where his lover was now lying in the middle of the floor naked. Yanking his shirt off and starting on his pants, Aaron stumbled across the room and fell to the floor, straddling his hips. “I love you so much.”

Pushing up, Spencer rolled them until he was on top, sliding backward until he could lick and suck at Aaron’s caged cock and his balls. He held his thigh with one hand while the other snaked its way up until he was pressing on the small bit of skin, stroking just behind his balls, making Aaron
Once Aaron was panting, Spencer leaned up. “What do you need?”

“Oh, god. I need you. I want to feel you in me, want to suck your wonderful cock. I want everything, so much.”

Pressing two fingers against Aaron’s tight hole, not quite breeching him, Spencer teased him a moment before pulling back and standing up. “On your knees.” He didn’t wait to see if the other man complied before disappearing into the bedroom.

==

A tremble ran through Aaron’s body. He was blindfolded and bound, arms crossed over his chest. Something firm pressed against his lips and he opened his mouth, letting a gag made from a knotted binding in.

“Remember, two snaps and I stop.” Spencer spoke into Aaron’s ear. “Either hand. Do you understand?”

He nodded yes.

“Good.” He purred. Spencer circled him slowly before picking up the flogger, letting the tips tease Aaron’s shoulder before he drew back and brought it down across his back, smiling at the groan he got in return. Pulling back, he repeated the movement until Aaron’s skin was a pattern of pinks and reds.

Sitting aside the flogger, Spencer picked up the furry collar of the costume he’d had on when Hotch had come home, folding it over before gently stroking Aaron up and down, front and back with it.

Aaron had imagined when Spencer looked like whipping him, the focused concentration as he watched the strips connect with flesh, always looking out for potential injury. Spencer’s focus had always been a major turn-on for him. The whipping stopped and he could sense the younger man moving about the space before something started to tickle his flesh, raising goosepimples as it moved. It took Aaron a minute to figure out what was teasing him, lighting his skin up like it was on fire, and then it hit him. The costume Reid had been wearing when he’d come home, it’d had a plush furry collar around the neck. The idea of Spencer stroking him with that fur made him groan and his legs began to tremble. His arousal had ramped up, but he wouldn’t be permitted to come until Spencer let him. He could feel his cock leaking precome down his leg and wondered if Spencer had noticed too.

==

Spencer watched Aaron, who was trembling all over now. He’d alternated the fur and something harder for over an hour already, each time he switched, the older man seemed to sink further into himself, even as his caged cock continued to drip along his legs. He could tell that Aaron was in a trance of sorts now, he could probably do anything to him and he wouldn’t respond. Spencer took that as a sign to start wrapping their play up, he didn’t want to carry on if Aaron’s ability to consent was jeopardized.

Steadying the man on his knees with one hand, Spencer tugged the gag loose and tossed it aside, stroking Aaron’s jaw and mouth with his thumb as his mouth hung open. Carefully, he pulled the ends of the bow tied at Aaron’s wrists, where they were crossed over his chest, looking for any
signs of irritation as he unwound the wide fabric and let it drop away.

Aaron swayed but stayed upright as his arms dropped to his sides, a tingling feeling starting in his fingertips. To his right he could smell his master, a slight sway in that direction and he felt the younger man’s erection against his cheek, he nuzzled against it until his master pulled away with a hiss. He swallowed to wet his mouth and throat. “Please.” He whispered.

“Shh, no talking. Not yet.”

He was aware of long fingers brushing along his cock, removing the cage as his dick sprang eagerly to life, achingly hard. The fingers moved up, catching him under his arms and lifting him to his feet, his legs trembled as they held him up. He was held tight as he was guided into the bedroom and sat on the bed, knees spread wide. A moment later, a warm mouth wrapped around his painfully hard member, a thumb at its base keeping him from exploding right then and there. The mouth suckled and dragged up and down his cock, driving him mad, until the thumb moved away and he blanked out as he came harder than he could ever remember coming before.

As Aaron passed out, Spencer pulled up quickly, catching him and easing him onto the bed, rolling him over. He watched the older man closely as he languidly stroked his own cock. The taste of his partner filled his mouth still, making him groan with need. He’d planned on rolling Aaron over and fucking him into the bed, but that was before the other man had dropped off.

Aaron returned to consciousness to the smell of Spencer’s arousal nearby and whimpered.

“You’re back?”

“Yes.” He tried to lean closer, following the smell.

“I was going to screw you into the mattress, would you like that?”

He whimpered again. “No.”

Spencer smiled, carding his fingers through short hair. “What do you need?”

Aaron sucked in a breath. “I want to suck you, I want you to fuck my mouth until I can’t breathe.” He tried to slide a little closer, only stopping when a hand landed on his shoulder.

“I’ll let you suck me. Come here, my love.” Spencer settled back against the pillows, helping Aaron to crawl between his legs, burying his face against Spencer’s dick and balls.

Taking a deep breath, Aaron dove in, licking and sucking like his life depended on it, doing his best to draw all of those little sounds out of Spencer that he loved. When he felt Spencer’s cock harden even more, he swallowed it down as far as he could take it, relaxing his throat as his master came hard, filling him up.

==

The blindfold was gone as he lay in the warm bathtub, surrounded by bubbles. Spencer had stepped out to clean up the living room, leaving him alone to think. He tried his best to be all-in still, but in the quiet moments, his mind still wandered back to the conversation from weeks ago. The one where Spencer had shared that he didn’t think of them getting married and having a shared life together. Even when he’d brought up the subject in other ways, Spencer had opted to renew his lease instead of move in with he and Jack. Granted, he’d expressed a willingness to find a bigger apartment so Jack had his own room, but it wasn’t the same as living together properly.
He sucked in a shuddered breath, hoping the slight noise he made didn’t alert Spencer to his distress. His dreams were always full of the three of them as a family, of finally sharing with everyone just what they meant to one another, finding out that wouldn’t happen hurt. It was crushing, but he didn’t want to lose Spencer entirely.

“Are you okay?”

The voice startled him, making him slosh water over the edge as his flinched. “Huh? Yeah, I’m okay.” He tried to give his partner a smile.

Ignoring the puddle, Spencer sat on the edge of the tub. “You can always talk to me you know.” He traced his fingers along Aaron’s jaw.

“Yeah, I know.”

After a moment, he spoke again. “Okay. Well, I want to fish you out of there and rub cream over your back before Jack is ready to get back, then I want to feed you. How does stir fry sound?”

“Good.” His voice was soft.

“Okay.” Spencer leaned down and pressed a kiss to his lips before pulling the plug.
“So, you and Beth are taking Jack on a bike ride today, right?”

Aaron smiled into his phone. “We’ll try.”

“Try?”

“Jack decided he and I needed to sleep under the table in our fort last night.” He chuckled when Spencer hissed.

“Aren’t you getting a little old for that?”

“Last night I would have said no, but now? I might have to agree with you on that. You and Garcia are headed to the Sci-Fi thing?”

“Thing? Thing!? I will drag you to one of these things one day, costume and everything.” He chuckled when his partner did. “But yes, we’re about to leave. I’ll let you know how it goes.”

“I’m sure you will.”

==

Spencer had scrambled to change and meet Garcia back downstairs when the call had come in. He hadn’t expected Aaron to be on scene when they arrived in a well-worn polo shirt and dark jeans. Very well fitted dark jeans. He allowed himself a split second to run his eyes along the older man’s exposed arms and down to his firm ass before Garcia elbowed him in the side and then rolled her eyes.

The ogling would have to wait.

==

The divide and conquer plan had seemed perfect. Spencer and another analyst, along with Emily were working with minimal distraction at the office while the others were on scene processing information as it happened. They had worked that way before, it was an efficient division of power. Until he’d noticed that the gas lines ran right under the building. Then it was the worst idea in the history of ever. Over half his team was about to be blown to bits and he was on base, safely tucked way and unable to help.

==

It was going from bad to worse. Aaron’d watched, and winced, as Morgan and JJ were thrown clear by the blast, glass and chunks of brick raining down on them. He left it up to Garcia to take roll of the team while he moved on to instructing as many people as possible on how to proceed. None of his team needed their hands held by him, so Aaron kept pushing forward until Garcia caught him and said she hadn’t seen Emily. He could feel his blood pressure ramping up as concern set in. Emily had been taking the side door with some members of SWAT.

There was no way he was getting home in time for that bike ride now.

Dave finally caught up with his friend after all but chasing him up and down the street. He’d been the negotiator and negotiations were now over, so now his first concern was the trail of blood he
could see down the side of his friend’s face.

Aaron looked up as another SUV pulled to a hurried stop, he allowed himself a moment of relief in seeing Spencer in person before turning back to the task at hand.

==

Bent over her laptop screen, Garcia saw the other analyst, Kevin, flinch visibly when Hotch came into the trailer and talk to them. Once he’d left, she grinned. “Why are you so jumpy around him?”

“What?”

She pointed with her pen. “Hotch. You practically come out of your skin when he so much as looks at you.”

“Oh. Well… He terrifies me. The guy is like, always in a bad mood. It seems like whenever he says something that he’s about to yell at me and I’ve seen him yell at people before.”

She smiled. “Aww. He’s a giant teddy bear. Really. Nothing to be afraid of.”

Kevin frowned, looking her over. “For you maybe. I don’t think he likes me though.”

==

Dave stared down at the woman on the ground and couldn’t help but flinch. “Kicked her?” He stared up at JJ.

“Yeah.” She was breathing hard, Henry in her arms.

One side of his mouth twitched up in a smirk. “Remind me never to piss you off.”

JJ couldn’t help but chuckle at him.

==

Dave drove quietly to the hospital, watching JJ and her son curled together. It was the closest thing he figured he would ever have to his own child and grandchild, outside of maybe Aaron and Jack. And he fully intended on being the best he could be at it.

He followed them into the ER and to where Will was waiting to go to x-ray, taking Henry’s hand as JJ went in. He stared down at the young boy and sent a prayer of thanks up that he would get to go home tonight with both parents, his world not horribly rocked as Jack’s had been.

==

Spencer looked up as Aaron spoke on the phone and then asked them all about going to Rossi’s for a celebration. He caught the twinkle in the older man’s eye and knew there was more to the story than he’d shared.

Once the floor was empty, Spencer crept up to Aaron’s office. “Beth still with Jack?”

“Yeah.” Aaron smiled at him. “And if it’s okay with you, I thought about asking Beth to come along. I think the others would expect her to either be there or for me to have a really good explanation why she isn’t.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” Spencer shrugged. “Garcia doesn’t want to go back to the convention, so I’m
free to do whatever now.”

Aaron leaned in as close as he dared. “Come over?”

“Sure.”

==

Beth watched the others dancing over Aaron’s shoulder. “He looks good in a tux?” She spoke softly.

“Hmm?” He hadn’t been paying attention, just enjoying the moment.

“Spencer. He looks good in a tux.”

Aaron glanced around, landing his eyes on his partner. “Yeah.”

She started to speak again when someone tapped her shoulder.

“May I cut in?” Penelope asked.

“Sure.” Beth backed away, handing one of Aaron’s hands to the blonde.

Penelope smiled as Aaron pulled her close, closer than Morgan had even done. “You look happy tonight.”

“After yesterday, this is nice.” He tried to look down at her, but they were too close, he could feel her hair on his cheek. Her tall heels made them almost the same height.

His breath in her ear made her blush. “Everyone assumes it’s because you have Beth.”

“That’s okay.”

“She gets alone with Spence pretty well.”

He glanced to where his fake girlfriend was dancing with his real boyfriend. “They have similar interests in a few things.”

“You’re a better dancer than I expected.” She giggled and then bit back a shriek as he dipped her back before twirling her around. “Damn.” She murmured.

Aaron blushed, surprised at his own boldness. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” She spotted Spencer stepping away from Beth now and leaned up on her tiptoes, pressing a kiss to Aaron’s cheek before whispering in his ear. “You’re wonderful.”

He was speechless as he watched her turn away, into the arms of Emily and JJ as the trio danced together in a way women who were close friends could. Excluding everyone else from their tight circle. He glanced over and met Spencer’s eyes, hoping his gaze conveyed the love he was feeling for the younger man in this moment.

==

Much later as the party was dying down, Dave wandered to where his friend was standing in the grass right where the light from the tent ended. “You okay?”
Aaron startled. “Yeah.”

He sighed. “How’s the ear?”

“Fine.”

“I called to you twice before you heard me, you know.”

It was Aaron’s turn to sigh. “I have an appointment in a week.”

Dave nodded. “Emily’s leaving.”

“Yeah. I got that too.”

“I don’t think we ever really got her back, did we?”

“No. I don’t think so.”

“What has you standing out here in the dark alone when there is a great party, good food and drinks, and a whole group of people who love you just up the hill?”

“Are you sure?”

“Am I sure of what?”

Aaron frowned and scuffed his toe against the dirt. “That they love me. Jack loves me, of course, and he will until he finds out certain things were my fault. And Beth is infatuated with me, but she knows it doesn’t go both ways…”

“And Spencer?”

“I used to think so.”

Dave was worried now. “But now?”

“I asked him if he’d ever thought about us getting married, being a proper family.” Aaron lifted his almost empty glass to his lips and finished his drink.

“And?” Dave took a step closer.

“He said no.”

“No? No, what? No, he’d never thought about it or no, he wasn’t interested in such things?”

Hotch shrugged. “I didn’t press further.”

He snorted. “Don’t you think you should get some clarification?”

“No. It would hurt too much.” Aaron unconsciously wrapped his free arm around his middle. He saw the look in his friend’s eye. “Leave it alone, Dave. I would rather stay like we are forever than have to hear that he doesn’t see us the same way I do.”

“Well, you’re wrong. Trust me on that. Very wrong. That young man up there loves you more than anything. You and your son.” He gestured up the hill with his drink. “Look at him. Jack is almost asleep in his lap. Jack didn’t even going searching for you when he got tired, just went to Reid. And Reid didn’t look around for you before pulling him up and getting him comfortable. He cares
for him like he were his own.”

“I know.” He felt his throat tighten. “I know Dave. That doesn’t mean he feels that way about me.”

Dave huffed. “You’re an idiot. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know I have a couple rooms if you want to stay, you or Reid. Henry is spending the night here, JJ’s mom already got a room up the road. Beth can stay too if she’d like or you or I could drive her home.”

“Thank, Dave.”

“No problem.”

==

Jack was asleep in his lap, not that Spencer minded. Everyone else was happy to leave him alone, not wanting to disturb the child. He watched Rossi and Beth talk, eyes glancing to where Hotch had secluded himself at the base of the hill. When they split, the older man headed his way.

“Hey.” Dave’s voice was rough with exhaustion.

“Hey.” Spence watched him sit.

“Beth said she’s getting a cab home, didn’t want to keep Aaron out any longer than needed. I have a room for Jack upstairs with Henry if you want to take him up?”

“Sure.” Spencer stood and carried the boy, following Dave into the otherwise empty house.

“I have a room for you and Aaron too.”

“Oh, thanks.”

They remained quiet until Jack was tucked in. In the hall, Dave turned to him. “You need to talk to Aaron, really talk to him. Push, and don’t give in. Got it?”

“Um, got it.”

==

Spencer watched from the bed as Aaron hung up his clothes in the closet and crawled into bed.

“I’m beat.” Hotch stretched out on his stomach. “But it was good. It was nice to have something to celebrate.”

“Yeah.” Spencer shifted around until he was straddling Aaron’s hips and began to massage his back. “It’s nice to have a reason to be happy.” They both were quiet for a while. “It was a nice wedding.”

“Yeah.”

“I haven’t been to many, I wonder who will be next.”

Tears sprang to his eyes. “I don’t know.” His voice wavered.

Worried, Spencer slipped to the mattress. “Aaron?” He caught a tear with his thumb. “Talk to me.”

“I’m okay.”
“Aaron, come on. What’s going on?”

He held himself in check, feeling tears pooling in his eyes, blurring his vision. He couldn’t bring himself to speak, so instead he just shook his head.

Spencer sighed and slid down. “Please talk to me.” He waited until he finally drifted to sleep before crawling out of bed and sneaking downstairs. He found Dave in the kitchen and sat down at the island. “What’s going on?”

“With what?” Dave turned to face him.

“Aaron.”

“I will remind you of a conversation, but I can’t go into more detail, okay?”

“Sure.” He nodded.

“Some time recently, he asked you if you’d ever thought about the pair of you getting married?”

“I’d never thought about it before, I’d assumed until he asked that it would be something he wouldn’t want as a gay couple.” He thought a minute. “That was the wrong answer, wasn’t it?”

Dave mimed zipping his lips.

“Crap.”

“Talk. You both need to learn to talk.”

==

Aaron woke the following morning to an empty bed. Stretching, he glanced around and noticed Spencer’s pants and undershirt were missing.

Making his way downstairs, he found both men entertaining the two boys at the kitchen table. “Morning.”

Spencer looked up and smiled widely. “Morning.” He bounced up and pressed a kiss to his lips. “Rossi said he’ll watch Jack today along with Henry. We can go do something.”

“I have to meet with Emily at some point, what do you have in mind?”

Spencer’s eyes sparkled. “Just a walk. I brought our go-bags up from the cars.”

==

After breakfast, Aaron walked along the trail, holding Spencer’s hand. “So, what’s all this about?”

“I just needed to have you to myself for a bit after last night.”

“Last night?”

He nodded. “JJ’s wedding.” He didn’t elaborate.

“It was a nice wedding.”

“What was your wedding with Haley like?”
Aaron was surprised at the question. “Fancy. Formal. We had the church, the big dress, the bigger cake, the half dozen bridesmaids and groomsmen.”

Spencer wasn’t surprised. “If you got to do it again, which would you prefer?”

He answered automatically. “JJ’s.”

“Me too.” He led Aaron to where the path crossed a small creek and stopped, staring down at the water. “I can’t imagine having a big, fancy wedding in a church but what Rossi did, that was nice.”

Aaron wasn’t sure what was going on, so he stayed quiet.

“A month ago, you asked me if I ever thought about us getting married, and I’d never really thought about it. Before last night I couldn’t picture the two of us standing there in tuxes with Jack, exchanging rings. I could picture us married, but not getting married. I don’t know if that makes sense.”

Aaron was staring out into the trees now, Spencer’s words running, whirling, through his head. Dave had been right, not that Aaron would admit to that, he’d read too much into the previous conversation with too little information.

Spencer gripped Aaron’s arm. “Aaron?”

Startled out of his internal dialog, he turned to face him, framing the younger man’s face with his hands before pulling him in for a desperate kiss. Relief flowed through him as he nipped Reid’s lips, teeth scraping together as he pushed his tongue in. He wanted to stay like that forever, locked, kissing, but they needed air.

Spencer pulled back for just a moment, gasping for breath before allowing Aaron to pull them back together. Hands in hair, they stumbled sideways until they landed on their knees in a patch of grass a short distance from the water. Aaron nudged them sideways, applying just enough pressure until Spencer got the message and eased down, allowing the older man to cover him. Hands moved from hair to buckles and buttons until they had both twisted and tugged free, bare from waist down, growing erections rubbing, dry skin catching.

Aaron pulled back from kissing, taking note of Spencer’s swollen lips, just long enough to wetly lick his hand before starting to make out with him again. His wet hand took hold of the younger man’s dick, jerking desperately until he came suddenly with a shout.

Sitting back on his knees, Aaron stared down at his lover, mouth open and panting. He groaned as he pulled off the toy he wore, placing it aside on his jeans as he gripped his freed cock, pumping twice before having to pinch the base to hold himself off. Once he had his orgasm under control, Aaron traced his fingers through the mess on Spencer’s stomach and reached down, hand hovering near his ass. “May I?”

Suddenly aware of what Hotch had planned, Spencer groaned. “Yes.”

He pushed two fingers in just enough to lubricate his hole before scooping up more and slicking up his own length. Lining up, he sank in, pausing so they both could adjust.

“Move.” Spencer gasped out, finding relief as the dick in his ass began to move. “God, you feel so good.”

Wanting to change the angle, Aaron lifted one leg until Reid got the hint and wrapped his legs around his waist. It wasn’t long before Aaron felt that coiled feeling pooling low in his belly. “I’m
gonna come. I love you so much, so much I’m gonna come. I need to come.”

“Fill me up, baby, come for me.” Spencer held onto his shoulders as the man over him began to tremble before stilling, eyes shut but face open as he cried out with his release. He could feel the hot, pulling deep inside him and then the moment when Aaron’s body relaxed, spent, before collapsing down onto him, cock still in his ass.

==

They cleaned up the best they could in the creek, chilly water causing a shiver to run through them as they hurried to get clean and redress. Spencer watched Aaron, curious. “Not that I’m complaining at all, but what brought that on?”

“Huh?” Aaron looked up at him, hair standing up in different directions.

Spencer gave him a knowing grin. “That.” He waved at the grass. “What was all that about?”

“I thought you didn’t see our relationship like I did. You said you never thought about getting married.”

“Oh, Aaron. I’m so sorry, why didn’t you say something before? That was like a month ago.”

Aaron shrugged. “I was happy to accept what you were willing to give. If you didn’t want to give more, that was okay.”

Spencer frowned. “You need to talk more. If I give an answer you’re not expecting, say something. Okay?” He stepped forward and stroked his cheek. “Anything, anytime. You talk to me, okay?”

Aaron’s eyes darted away. “Okay.”
Spencer moped around his apartment for three days before Dave turned up and dragged him out to play caddy for a round of golf. Neither man spoke the entire time on the course, Spencer silently kept score as well as track of stray balls. Rossi thought to himself that the younger man was pretty good to have around for a game or two, though he didn’t say it out loud.

The apartment was quiet, Garcia and Morgan had left for England at the same time as Emily, travelling officially to help with the London Olympics, unofficially to help their friend settle in. The bullpen was quiet as well with both of them gone. JJ was around, but with the team down three members, she was taking shorter days and spending much needed time with her son.

Spencer had appreciated Rossi pulling him out of his head and into some sunlight, the fresh air did him good, which was probably the older man’s goal to begin with. Once they were leaving the private golf club, he turned in his seat. “Any word on who’s replacing Emily?”

Dave worked his jaw to the side. “Hotch is doing interviews next week. He didn’t tell you that?”

“I hadn’t thought to ask him yet. I know someone who was wanting to apply.”

“Really?” He was only slightly surprised. “Any good?”

“I think she would be great.”

“Well, let’s make sure she gets a sit down then.”

“Yeah.” He sank back into his seat.

Dave reached over and patted his arm. “I know he’s been working extra with the others gone, how are you holding up?”

“Hmm?”

“He said something about you having a migraine the other day. I thought you weren’t getting those anymore.”

“Oh, um. Yeah, I still get them. I try not to let Aaron know about them.” He ran a hand through his hair. “My last doctor suggested posting my scans on this message board to get other opinions from medical professionals. I found a geneticist who is willing to find a reason behind them beyond just telling me it’s all in my head.”

Dave eyed him at the next light. “They did that?”

“Yeah. Like I don’t know what crazy looks like.” He huffed.

“You are many things, Doctor Reid, but trust me, crazy is not one of them.”

==

Hotch stood as Agent Blake entered his office. “Take a seat.” He motioned to the chairs in front of his desk before sitting again, smoothing his tie as he did. “Your file is impressive, I can see you’ve worked very hard to prove yourself in the Bureau.”

She smiled at him. “It’s been work, but I’ve always wanted to get a shot at a spot in the BAU,
when Doctor Reid told me there was an opening, I jumped at the opportunity.”

Aaron nodded. “He mentioned that a colleague was interested, but refused to give me a name specifically so it couldn’t look like I was swayed. Though, I did know he guest lectured for you, so it wasn’t a big leap. Having your expertise in linguistics would be great, it’s an area we don’t officially have covered right now.”

“Well, if you’re willing to take a chance on me, I’m willing to do what it takes to prove myself.”

He smiled finally. “It’ll be good to have you.” Movement in the bullpen caught his eye and he turned. “Looks like Reid is back from archives.”

Alex smiled. “Can I give him good news?”

“Yes.” He watched her rise and leave the office, hurrying down the steps, surprising Spencer and wrapping him in a hug. Spencer lit up and began talking animatedly to her about something he couldn’t hear. Aaron was surprised at how happy he looked to see her.

==

Spencer turned and smiled as Hotch came through the bullpen. “Hey, I think Alex is really settling in.” It had been almost two weeks since she’d joined the team. “She asked me about going out and celebrating since we’re off this weekend.”

Aaron stopped by his desk. “Oh, okay. Well, have a good time. Let me know if we’re still on for the museum tomorrow.”

His brow furrowed. “Of course we are. We won’t be out late, are you and Jack still staying at mine tonight?”

“Yeah.” He tried to hide the surprise. “We can just let ourselves in?”

Reid nodded. “There’s food in the fridge, make yourselves at home.”

==

Aaron looked up from where he was sprawled out on the couch when Reid came into the apartment. “Hey, you’re home already.”

“Yeah, it was just a quick bite. What’re you watching?” He tried to figure out what was happening on the screen.

“Um, something about tropical fish…. I have no idea.” He chuckled.

“It would probably help if you had the volume up.” Spencer slid onto the couch.

“Yeah. Didn’t want the noise though.” Aaron sighed. “I forgot my laptop at work, tried to use yours but the password is changed.”

“Oh!” Spencer moved to the table to pick it up. “Sorry, you should have called. Here.” He typed in the passcode and handed it over. “I thought maybe it was time to change.”

“I probably need to change mine too.” Aaron agreed, opening their email server, paying little attention to the fact it opened into Spencer’s first before logging out. His mind picked up that there were a significant number of messages from the same doctor, but he didn’t pay them any mind. “I’ll be just a minute. Jack and I made steak fajitas, there are some left staying warm in the oven if
you want them. I wasn’t sure if tonight was just drinks or dinner too.”

Spencer headed for the bedroom to change. “Appetizers mostly. I could eat.”

==

Alex had stayed in the Marshall’s office as the rest of the team rotated through. When she and Reid were the only ones left, she took a seat beside him. “So. Hotch is an interesting boss.”

Spencer shrugged and turned to face her. “What makes you say that?”

“Well. Most people in his position lead from behind. Stay in the office, let the rest of the team do the grunt work. But in Seattle and now here, he’s out there leading the charge.”

“He’d never ask us to do something he wouldn’t do himself.”

“I’ve noticed.” She tipped her head to the side. “And Morgan, he is the second in command?”

He nodded now. “He temporarily was the lead for a while, but when things went back to normal, the two of them agreed to split the job. It’s unofficial technically, but Morgan steps up when Hotch has to be somewhere else.” He turned as the rest of the rest of the team returned. “Anything?”

Alex watched as Spencer’s face lit up just a bit when his eyes met their boss’s, the older man’s eyes crinkling in response. “Huh.” She said softly to herself. If she didn’t know better, she’d wonder if there wasn’t something between them.
“She stopped by his soccer practice?” Spencer passed a mug of coffee across the table in the break room.

“Yeah.” Aaron sat down. “She was hoping we could get together for dinner tonight, that was just before Garcia messaged me about the case.”

“Something wrong?” Spencer joined him at the table.

“No. She got a job offer in New York.”

“Oh, wow. Did she say where? There are a lot of good museums there.”

“No, she didn’t. I’m guessing that was what dinner was supposed to be about.”

==

The jet was quiet, everyone plugged in in some way, blocking everyone else out. Spencer worked his way to the back and sat next to Aaron.

Tucking a file away, Aaron let his head fall back. “What’s up?”

“Does everyone assume I’m on the spectrum?”

It took him a moment to remember the cause behind the question. “For Blake it’s more fresh that for the rest of us.” Straightening in his seat, Hotch adjusted his jacket. “You were then and are now a valuable and vital part of this team. You are you. Not you, except for these odd bits of you, except for when you do this or that. Just you. We’ve talked about this before.”

“I know.” Spencer hugged himself. “My mother never had me tested. She didn’t trust them to test me properly.”

“It might have been good to have the information when you were younger, but it could have held you back as an adult.”

“You think so?”

“I do.”

Unsure how to respond, Spencer just thanked him before moving to the couch.

==

He was on his third glass of wine already as Aaron sat in Beth’s townhouse. He’d called Spencer from the car to let him know that lunch at the diner was going to run long, the younger man declined to join them however. Their discussion about her new job carried on, her telling him all about the wonders of museum work. He loved how her face lit up, the wine making her cheeks pink. He was relaxed, settled into the plush sofa while Beth knelt beside him, almost leaning into his side.

She told a joke and he turned to face her, a laugh bubbling out. Their faces were so close he could smell the fruitiness of the wine on her breath. He watched her eyes dip to his parted lips just before she leaned down, holding his jaw with her free hand while she pressed her lips to his.
His own free hand came up, holding her cheek in similar fashion. Her lips were soft and supple against his, he could feel her breathing in time with himself. He stayed locked, kissing her back until her tongue pressed for entrance. Awareness slammed down on his and he pushed her back, surprise filling both their faces.

“Wow.” She panted for breath. “I’m so sorry.” Her voice was a whisper.

“I- I can’t. I have to go.” He nearly spilled what was left of his wine as he hurried to flee out the door. He didn’t care if he had to walk the whole way home, he just needed to put as much distance between himself and Beth as he could. He didn’t look up until his phone rang. “Hello?”

“Aaron, I’m so sorry. I don’t know what came over me.”

“I can’t talk. I need to get home.”

“Will you please come back? I’ll call you a cab.”

“No. I can’t Beth. I need to go.”

==

Spencer was surprised when Aaron showed up suddenly at his apartment. “What’s wrong?”

Aaron barely had the door shut before he hit his knees, body trembling. “I deserve whatever you want to give me.”

“What?” Spencer tried to get him to stand to no avail. “What’s going on?”

“Please.” His voice was faint but desperate.

“Not until you tell me what happened. I can’t help you otherwise.”

Aaron’s eyes went to the floor. “Beth kissed me.”

“Okay.”

“I kissed her back.”

Spencer frowned. “Why?”

“Three glasses of wine. That’s no excuse, but… She kissed me and for a moment it felt good but then it all came back and I pushed her away and ran out of her house.”

“You ran away?”

“I had to get out. I didn’t want to be there.”

“So you came here.”

He nodded.

“You kissed Beth.”

“I’m so sorry.” A sob finally broke free.

Spencer knelt down and placed his hands on Aaron’s shoulders. “Does she know where you went?”
“No.”

“Okay. We’ll talk, but first I think you need to at least text her that you’re safe. So she’s not worried about you wandering around upset.” He waited until Aaron’s eyes lifted. “Okay?”

“Okay.”

==

Aaron was growing suspicious. Everything between he and Spencer seemed as normal as ever, but recently the younger man had started to mysteriously need time to do things on Sundays. Always at roughly the same time. And then there was the passworded laptop, which he still hadn’t been told the new code to even though Reid let him use it whenever he needed. Though his health seemed better since summer, Spencer had started to have moments where he was more jumpy, like he was keeping a secret.

Aaron wondered if this was going to be Haley all over again, but like with Haley, he had no intention of asking. If it happened, it happened.

Maybe he wasn’t deserving of a long-term commitment.

==

Alex sat in the SUV and waited, watching Reid through the windshield. Despite the difference in their ages, she’d never quiet felt so much like his mother as she did right now. There was a woman. Woman that Reid didn’t want the rest of the team to know about. It made her wonder about those small moments she’d seen between the team’s youngest and their leader. Maybe she really was just imagining that.

When he climbed back into the SUV finally, she didn’t automatically start the engine.

“Are we going to go?”

“Why don’t you want anyone to know about her?”

“I didn’t tell them about the migraines and I don’t want them to know about her because they just want to treat me like a baby. I just wanted something for myself that didn’t involve the entire team, you know?”

“I get that.”

“Do you?” He snapped. “Because you seemed pretty determined to be just as up in my business as they get and I thought you would be different.”

Chewing her lip, she started the vehicle and put it into drive. “I’m sorry.”

==

Aaron couldn’t help but eavesdrop on their conversation. He could hear Morgan pressing Reid for information on wherever the younger man had vanished off to, he was curious as well. The light teasing about Spencer having found someone to talk to made Hotch blush around his collar. The incorrect gender assumption didn’t even bother him at first, until he started to put more of Morgan’s words together. His second in command had noticed Spencer making secret phone calls and acting unusually, so it wasn’t just him noticing it.
When Reid asked who’d told him, Aaron’s stomach dropped. There was a secret, and by the sounds of it, Garcia knew about the secret too. And even she thought he was acting odd.

Hotch wondered if he could get the blonde to open up to him.

==

Letting himself into her office, Hotch pulled out a chair and waited for Garcia to finish what she was doing.

“What can I do for you?”

He chewed his lip. “Is something going on with Spencer?”

“What?”

“I overheard Morgan on the jet and… Is something going on?”

“I don’t know. He called me from the crime scene asking about a payphone, which is odd seeing as he called me from his cell phone, which I pointed out to him.”

“But you have access to his call logs.”

She hesitated a second. “Yes. I do.”

“And if I requested them, I would have access to them.”

“Also correct.” She felt a sense of dread washing over her. “But why would that matter?”

“He’s started coming up with reasons he can’t do things on Sundays. Changed the password on his laptop, and now these calls.”

She gasped. “He wouldn’t! No, no, no, he wouldn’t do anything to mess with what you have, it can’t be that.”

“What am I supposed to think?” He sagged in his chair.

“Anything but that, sir.”

“This is all my fault.”

“How?”
Garcia couldn’t help but smirk when they both rushed in late but through separate doors. She wondered what had kept them both from getting to work on time thing morning.

Aaron was surprised to see Reid rushing in later than himself. The younger man had left the apartment before him that morning while he rushed Jack to school. Even with a stop for breakfast, Spencer should have beat him into work.

==

Dave did his best not to look at Aaron nor Spencer while Garcia talked over the phone about the S&M equipment search. He could hear in her voice that she wanted to say so much more and mentally promised himself to call her back later and prod her into talking. As Morgan walked up to them, he risked a glance at the pair, noting their diverted eyes and matching blushes, and shook his head.

==

Walking out of the puppet theater, Aaron glanced at Dave. “I hate puppets.”

“Yeah, well, after today, so do I.” He patted his friend on the back.

“And all those props.”

“They creeped me out to begin with.” He chuckled. “Reid’s been awful quiet this trip.”

“I know. He’s been a bit distant lately.” He looked around as they made their way to the SUV. “I’m not sure what’s going on.”

“Want me to talk to him?” Dave offered.

“Not yet. I’m going to try and get him to open up. I think he’s been talking to Blake though.”

“That’s something I guess. He’s not bottling it up.”

“I guess.”

==

The invitation to Dave’s, not made by Dave himself he noted, was a nice one, but he planned on dragging Spencer to bed and spending the weekend finding out what was up with him. Beth was still an easy excuse to get out of team gatherings, maybe even a better one now that she was in New York and couldn’t just join them.

When JJ announced Spencer had a girlfriend, he was speechless. He looked at the blonde, shock taking over his face. All this time Spencer had been talking to a woman? How had he missed that? Clearly the rest of the team seemed to know, well most of the team. Dave and Penelope didn’t seem to be speaking up. “He has a date?”

JJ chuckled. “It was bound to happen eventually.”

“He’s been happier lately.” Morgan tossed in.
Looking around the elevator car, Aaron’s eyes met Dave’s, who was frowning. “I- I didn’t know he was seeing anyone.”

“This is the first time they’ll be meeting in person.” Alex supplied. “It’s been all email and phone calls before now.”

He thought about the changed password on the laptop, the emails he’d noticed and not payed attention to, the disappearing on the weekends. “Oh.”

“Maybe it’s not a date then.” Dave tried.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” JJ turned around.

Rossi shrugged. “Who knows. No good speculating without all the facts.”

==

When his cell phone danced across the side table later that night, Aaron ignored it. It fell quiet only to ring again a minute later. Sipping his scotch, he was in no mood to hear from Spencer, to hear about either his date or his excuse for where he was. He had ignored Haley’s indiscretions, but Spencer knew full well how they’d left him feeling. As far as he was concerned, Spencer Reid could go to hell.

His phone lit up again, buzzing until it fell to the floor. Once it went quiet, Aaron picked it up and turned it off. It would be easier to drink in silence anyway.

==

Spencer frowned when the call went straight to voicemail. Hanging up, he tried Rossi instead.

“Reid?” The older man’s voice asked as he answered the phone.

“Hey. Hotch isn’t answering his phone.”

The background noise stopped as he moved into the next room and shut the door. “Are you surprised?”

“I guess so.”

“Spencer, for a genius, you’re being pretty dumb right now. You went on a date tonight and now you wonder why your boyfriend or whatever you call each other isn’t taking your calls?”

“On a date?”

“That was the word in the elevator car. JJ said you had a girlfriend. That’s what she told Aaron. Everyone else backed her up.”

“Shit.”

“Yes. Well, everyone else but the two of you is here for the night. Aaron claimed he was headed to New York to see Beth.”

“Oh no. He probably made plans, Jack is at a friend’s for the weekend.”

“Screwed that one up, didn’t you?”
“Yeah. I’ll go by his place.”

“Take it from me? Give him tonight and then try to talk to him tomorrow. If you need me, just give me a call. But not too early. Garcia and JJ have been in my wine cellar, it’s not going to be an early morning.”

“Okay, I’ll go tomorrow then. Thanks Rossi.”

“Any time, Kid. Any time.”

==

Spencer had called back, leaving a voicemail on the off chance that Aaron would pick it up, then he texted him as well for the same reason. He couldn’t sleep, worried about what he’d done and if he could fix it. When he had contacted Maeve originally it had been purely for medical purposes to get his migraines under control, but their professional emails had turned into more personal phone calls. Sitting in his dim apartment, he could see what he’d done.

Sure, he and Maeve had never seen one another, but over time he’d turned to her to share his feelings, his innermost thoughts. The things he used to share with Aaron. It may have not been physical, but it had still been an affair. There was no doubt Aaron thought that as well. Sighing, he stood and shuffled to the kitchen, digging around in the cabinets until he found the bottle of scotch and poured a glass. Wandering his apartment, he stood in the small opening and looked at Jack’s rumpled bed. There was a superhero blanket half on the floor, a blue dinosaur across the pillow. He wondered if his slip up would mean he’d lost the closest thing to a son he’d ever have. Would Aaron still let Jack spend time with him? Could they work out some sort of agreement to share him? With a sigh, he moved to tidy the small makeshift room. Jack deserved more than a bookcase divider wall in the living room anyway.

==

Aaron tried to stare at the empty bottle on the table hard enough to bring it back into single vision. He wasn’t sure how long he’d been drinking since he’d turned his phone off, but nothing was in focus now. Deciding to head to bed, he rolled off the couch and tried several times before managing to stumble upright and bump into the walls as he headed for his bed. He was thankful the Jack was away for the entire weekend, he could mourn the loss of their relationship and then suffer through the following hangover in peace.

He hadn’t faulted Haley for her affairs, he’d not been there and it was too much to expect her to understand the job he did. But Spencer knew the job, knew the stress and the pain. And he still managed to have an affair. Aaron couldn’t overlook it this time. It had happened right under his nose; the secret phone calls, the emails, the stopping sharing his thoughts with him. He’d been so blind.

Stopping in the bathroom, Aaron stripped out of his now-wrinkled clothes and stared at his blurry reflection in the mirror. What was it that made people do this to him, he couldn’t help but wonder. They promised themselves to him and then seemed to easily break that promise. He stared at his cock in its cage in the mirror, debating a minute. The cage was essentially his engagement ring from Spencer, it declared, albeit privately, that they were only for one another. After Haley left, he’d had a hard time breaking the habit of wearing his wedding ring. Even after her death, his hand had still reached for the band tucked in the box on his dresser.

Sucking in a breath, Aaron gripped the cage and eased it off, placing it on the edge of the counter. Like the ring on his hand had done, it felt odd taking it off and putting it aside. He felt more bare,
more naked somehow. Washing up, he washed the cage and dried it and debated. His chest squeezed at the thought of doing anything other than keeping it safe so he took it back to the bedroom and tucked it into the same wooden box where his wedding ring lay.

Flopping across the bed, he wondered what would happen now. Would Spencer want to transfer out? Would they have to learn to work together as only colleagues again? He knew Jack would want to see the younger man, would Spencer want to spend time with his son? As he sank into sleep, he wondered just how his life had gotten this far off track again.

==

Spencer waited until noon before knocking on Aaron’s door. He had seen the older man’s car in the lot and he doubted he’d be out on a run in the middle of the day. Pressing his ear to the door, he called, but couldn’t hear a phone ringing inside.

Taking a chance, he spoke through the heavy wood. “Aaron, it’s me. Look. I’m sorry. This isn’t what I intended to have happen, okay? I reached out to a group of doctors on a medical board about my migraines. None of the doctors I’d seen could do anything about them. One doctor messaged me back and looked at my scans. It was only meant to be a doctor patient thing,” He sighed. “I wish I could explain this to you face to face.”

Aaron’s chin trembled at the despair in his lover’s voice, but he stayed silent.

“She made a few suggestions, vitamins and other things to take and they’ve been helping. But part of it also was she acted almost as my therapist. Last night would have been the first time I’d ever seen her in person, but we didn’t meet in the end.” Spencer started to pull away. “I’m sorry, Aaron.”

Aaron listened as footsteps faded down the hall, once he couldn’t hear them again, a sob escaped. He clung to a pillow and let it all out. The pain, the betrayal, the heartbreak. Aaron knew some of it was from being miserably hungover, but it felt good in a way. Once he ran out of tears, he stumbled to the liquor cabinet and started the process all over again.

==

Dave had just managed to get his house back to himself when the doorbell ringing broke the silence. Muttering expletives in two languages under his breath, he stopped to the door and yanked it open. “What!”

Spencer stared at him with red-rimmed eyes. “I tried.”

He huffed. “Come in.” He headed back to his kitchen, leaving the genius to shut the door and follow. “You tried what exactly?”

“I just came from Aaron’s place. He didn’t even come to the door.” He sank into a chair. “I really wish I could have talked to him directly. I tried to tell him it started out just as a doctor patient thing and I said I was sorry.”

Rossi poured them both some juice and joined him at the table. “Explain it to me. Tell me everything, start to finish.”

He sipped from his glass for a minute as he gathered his thoughts. “About seven months ago I had put a request about my migraines and my scan results on this message board online to see if a doctor would have any ideas how to help me when the in-person doctors I’d seen had failed. One replied. A geneticist. We talked back and forth about my symptoms and she made some
suggestions and they’ve really helped. Our emails turned into phone calls, but she is in hiding from a stalker so she asked that I call from a payphone so the stalker couldn’t track me.”

“She’s hiding from a stalker? Did you tell her what we do?”

“I did. She didn’t want us involved.”

“Okay. So, what? How did you get to this point where Aaron is so in the dark about everything?”

Spencer slid down in his seat. “I didn’t want him worrying about the migraines more than he already was. I didn’t want him to get all freaked out because I was freaking out, you know? I changed the password on my laptop at home so he wouldn’t stumble on the emails and misread them and jump to some wrong conclusion without me being able to explain first.”

Dave sighed. “Well, that backfired, now didn’t it?”

“Yeah.” He took another sip. “She didn’t want anyone to know about her stalker, so when I started calling her, I came up with reasons I couldn’t spend time with Aaron. He would have pushed to help her. I didn’t want him worried about her or me.” He thought a minute. “I never even thought about what we were doing could be seen as anything different until she said she loved me.”

Rossi sucked in a breath. “Do us all a favor? Leave that bit out when you finally talk to Aaron.”

“I- okay.”

“You said you never thought about it before, how it would look to an outsider? You see it now though, right?” He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “You two may have never set eyes on one another, but at least as far as I’m concerned, you’ve been having an affair. And that’s how Aaron is going to see it too.”

“I know.” He looked up at the older man. “How do I fix this?”

“It’ll take time. Aaron’s probably dug himself a hole somewhere to drown his sorrows and you need to let him do that. You hurt him and now you owe him the time and space. Write him a letter, be honest. Let him know you want to apologize whenever he’s willing to hear it and then accept whatever decision he makes. I take it you don’t want to split up?”

“No. I love him.”

“Ask him what you need to do so he will forgive you. This is going to take time though, remember that.”

“Yeah.” Spencer stood. “Could you do me a favor though?”

“What’s that?”

“Could you go check on him?”

Dave stood and patted his shoulder. “Sure, no problem.”

==

Aaron blearily stared out from inside his nest of pillows and blankets at the fuzzy form of Dave standing beside the bed, his only acknowledgement of the man was a grunt.

“Maybe we should both make a pact to stop making the other of us do the scrape, wring, and rinse
routine.”

Aaron tried to glare, but it hurt too much.

“I’ve talked to Spencer.”

He did his best to clear his dry throat. “He stopped by before sometime. Not sure how long ago.”

“He’s sorry.”

“He said that.”

“There’s no excuse for his behavior, what he did was wrong.”

“Yeah.”

“He’s sorry and he still loves you and he’s hoping eventually you’ll take him back.”

“Why should I?” Aaron snapped, a hint of venom in his words now.

“Have you ever known Spencer to be attracted to a woman?” He waited for an answer that didn’t come. “Spencer is gay, Aaron. You know this. It doesn’t stop women from falling for him, hitting on him, but he doesn’t return the feelings.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because reading people is my job. Just like it’s yours. I’ve spent the last five years watching women from all walks of life throw themselves at him. At the very least, he looks innocent and safe.” He crossed the room and collected the empty glass and bottle. “I’ve told him to give you time to be angry, sad, whatever else you’re feeling. He owes you that. But he’s desperate to talk to you face to face and explain himself. I think you should hear him out.”

“Go away, Dave.” Aaron buried himself under the covers again.

“I’m not going anywhere. Not while you need a friend.”
I was feeling generous tonight.

“Daddy?” Jack crawled up into the chair next to where his dad was working.

“Yes, Jack?”

“Where’s ‘Pencer?”

He wondered when that would come up, they hadn’t seen one another outside of work in over a week. “He’s been busy. Why?”

“Is he coming back?”

That was the real question everyone was waiting for an answer on. “I’m not sure. Did you need him for something?”

The boy shook his head. “You’re sad when he’s not here.”

“I am?”

“Yeah. I want him to come back so you’re happy again.”

He pulled his son into a hug. “I’ll see what I can do, okay bud?”

“Okay.”

When Spencer finally called him in the middle of a Sunday afternoon, he didn’t expect the younger man to be frantic to the point of rambling, desperately asking Aaron to help him. Already gesturing for Jack to get his shoes on, Aaron managed to interrupt Spencer long enough to tell him to meet him at the office. It would be easier to calm him down and work it out face to face.

Hanging up with Spencer, he quickly dialed Jess to see if he could drop Jack off, citing a possible work emergency. He wouldn’t know till he got there. She was already on his end of town and agreed to just pick Jack up.

Once he was parked in the garage, Aaron rushed through the building, glad it was essentially empty on a weekend afternoon. He could see Spencer pacing tight circles in his office and rushed up the stairs. “I got here as quickly as I could.” Seeing how upset the other man was, his voice softened. “What’s wrong?”

Spencer froze, turning to face him. He swallowed and then spoke. “I need to tell you something.”

Aaron’s heart sank. Covering his reaction, he turned and shut the door to his office before shedding his jacket and dragging a chair over to the small couch and table. “Talk to me.”
Spencer sat on the sofa and began to explain when and how he’d come to know Maeve Donovan, their letters, emails, everything. He didn’t hold anything back. It was tearing him up inside, but he needed Aaron’s help now more than ever and, he supposed, at least he was getting his opportunity to lay himself bare. To get the truth out in the open.

Aaron watched as Spencer spoke, watched the broken, pained features move. He’d missed him. He’d gotten to see the work side of him, the Reid side, but he’d missed the Spencer side. The side that was playful and vulnerable. “I’m going to call the others in, we’ll need their help.”

Spencer nodded. “I know.”

He stood and retrieved his phone from where he’d tossed it on the desk, typing out a message to everyone before dropping it again. Sitting back on the edge of the chair, Aaron leaned in, taking his hands. “Why didn’t you just tell me?”

He blinked back tears. “I didn’t want you to worry. About me or her.” He sniffled. “I screwed up.”

He took a chance and brushed a lock of hair out of Spencer’s face. “We’ll get past it. You really think the migraines are gone now?”

“I do.” He nodded.

He smiled slightly. “That’s good.”

The first shot almost stopped his heart. Hotch was taking stairs two at a time, Morgan hot on his heels, doing his best to get to Spencer. All Aaron could think was that he’d let him go up unprotected. The second shot just as they reached the right floor almost paralyzed him. He skidded into the room to the sound of Spencer shouting at them to stay back, holding one arm tight with his other hand.

Well, at least he was up and moving, that was something.

Aaron thought maybe Reid would really manage to save the day until Diane held the gun to her own head, smashed against Maeve’s, and pulled the trigger. In that split second, they all knew it was over. Everyone was stunned as the pair of bodies, now suddenly limp, folded to the ground. The final shot seemed to drown out all other noise.

Spencer falling to his knees brought time back to normal speed.

Aaron exchanged a look with Dave before tucking his gun away, useless now, and moving forward. Spencer needed looked over, cared for, to be away from the corpses cooling on the concrete floor. “Hey.” He whispered. “Come on.” Not getting a response, he slipped both hands under Reid’s arms and hauled him to his feet. “Let’s get you out of here.” Getting no response, he wrapped one arm around the smaller man’s waist and guided him out of the room and quietly down the stairs. Out in the darkness, Aaron found EMTs waiting and led Reid to them. “Check his arm, I think he was shot.”

“Sure.” The medic gestured where he wanted the patient placed before starting to work.

“He may be going into shock as well.” He turned when the door to the building banged shut and saw Dave walking toward him. He met him halfway. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah. I just didn’t think it needed four of us to watch the ME bag the bodies. We know what
happened, there won’t be any charges or court case.” He looked over Aaron’s shoulder. “How is he?”

“Quiet. Upset.”

“And how are you?”

Aaron let out a deep breath. “Reeling. He called and when I saw his name on my screen, I was ready to work things out. Talk. But it was about this.”

“So, you two haven’t actually talked yet then.”

“No. Well… He came clean about everything and… As angry as I was at him, I understand how it happened before he realized what was going on. It still hurts.”

“And it should. And he should feel bad about having hurt you. Just because it wasn’t on purpose doesn’t mean he didn’t cause you pain.”

“I know.”

Dave gave his shoulder a squeeze. “Go take care of him. You said he talked, so now it’s your turn. Be honest with him.”

He nodded. “Okay.” He looked over at where Spencer was frowning at his arm and then back to Dave. “You have everything here?”

“Yes. Go.”

He went back to the ambulance. “How is it?”

The EMT looked up. “No major damage, just some stitches. He has someone to take him home?”

“Yeah, I’m taking care of it.”

“Keep an eye on him.” He turned to Reid. “Let your arm rest. Don’t be macho and try to do stuff for yourself at least for a couple days.”

Spencer nodded. “Thanks.” He glanced at Hotch a moment as the EMT walked away. “You don’t have to do that, Garcia will stay with me.”

Aaron rolled his eyes and helped him up, ignoring the sniffling for now. “Come on.”

==

Helping him into his apartment, Aaron let Spencer head for the couch under his own power while he locked up. “What can I get for you?”

“Hm?” Spencer didn’t look up.

“What do you need?” His breath caught. “I- I’ll get you some water and something for the pain. Your arm has to be killing you.” He waited for a reply that didn’t come before moving to do just that.

Returning, he sat on the coffee table and handed the items over. “I’m sorry.”

Spencer met his eyes now. “For what?”
“That she died. That she died right when you were saving her, that she died in front of you like that. I’m sorry Diane shot you. I’m sorry I didn’t let you explain yourself before all of this. That it took this for me to listen.”

“S’okay. I understand.”

“No.” Aaron lurched forward and grabbed the hand of the uninjured arm. “It hurt so much when I thought you were having an affair. That after everything, you couldn’t be honest with me, that you would do the same thing Haley did. JJ said you had a girlfriend, that you were going on a date and I didn’t even think to call or text you. I just assumed she had all the facts and believed her.”

“Maeve thought it was a date.” Spencer whispered.

“I know.” He felt tears prick his eyes. “I should have talked to you, listened to you, first.”

“And now?”

“It hurt that you didn’t trust me. It hurt that you snuck around and hid it instead of just sharing the parts you wanted. I don’t want this to be the thing that breaks us.”

“Me neither.” His voice was small.

“Then let’s not let it.”

Spencer thought a minute. “How?”

“First, we get you fed and into bed. We’ll work out the details later.”

==

The night had been interrupted by nightmares, waking both of them several times. Exhausted, Aaron shuffled into the kitchen late the following morning to start the coffee maker. He looked around the small apartment, taking it in fresh after their short separation. He wanted this, them, to work. Even having been through what they had in past weeks, he could see them eventually getting past it.

He wanted to get past it.

But his heart was saying he couldn’t just trust Spencer like he had before. They’d have to work on it. Collecting the coffee when it finished, Aaron crept back into the bedroom and placed the mugs to the side before crawling up the bed, pressing a kiss to his fabric covered hip and he moved.

Spencer rolled onto his back, humming with approval as Aaron’s nose bumped his hip and then against his bare belly. “Good morning.” He croaked.

“I brought coffee.”

His hum turned into a moan. “Perfect.” He thrust up lazily when a cheek came close to the tip of his dick.

Aaron pushed up and stared at Spencer splayed out before him, naked to the waist. “How’s your arm?”

“Hurts.” He finally opened his eyes. “Hurts when I do anything.”

“I’ll get you some more medicine then.” Aaron made to climb back off the bed.
“Wait.” Spencer caught his with his good arm. “I’m okay for a bit, come let me hold you.”

Aaron frowned, thinking. “I don’t know.”

“Please? I can’t do too much, but I can be right here and I can listen.” He moved his arm and waited until Aaron gave in, curling into his side, head on his shoulder. “There. I know it doesn’t fix things, but… I missed this.”

“I missed this too.” Aaron was staring along the plains of Spencer’s stomach, down to where his sleep pants were still tented with his morning arousal. He let one hand rub over the smooth flesh, up and down until the side of his hand brushed the head of the cock. He felt suddenly unsure. Like they hadn’t been together for all these years, like it was his first time again. Chewing his lip, he pushed up on his elbow and swallowed, eyes darting from his pants up to Spencer’s eyes. “I- I’m sorry. I don’t think I can.”

Spencer tipped his head sideways. “Can what?”

Aaron lifted his hand and gently brushed the younger man’s erection. “This.”

“Oh.” He gave him a small smile. “I wasn’t expecting anything to happen right now.”

“I- I have something to show you.”

Spencer could see the older man was growing unsure, uncomfortable. “Okay.”

Nodding to himself, he pushed off the bed and turned to face his, thumbs hesitating on the hem of his boxers.

“It’s okay, Aaron. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. Ever.”

Drawing a deep breath, Aaron shoved his boxers to his knees in one move, exposing himself, and his uncaged dick, to his partner.

“Oh.” It was Spencer’s turn to feel the ache in his chest. He stared at the flaccid member a moment before looking up into dark brown eyes. “When…?”

“When I heard about your date. I was…” He gasped in a breath. “I was drunk, and hurt, and angry. I didn’t want to repeat wearing the sign of my commitment to someone who wasn’t committed back.”

It hurt to hear, but he couldn’t blame him. “I understand.”

Knees hitting the floor in an instant, Aaron gripped Spencer’s hands, leaning in close. Desperate. “Do you? Do you understand how much it hurt me to take it off? I wore Haley’s ring long after she stopped being faithful to me. Long after the papers were signed. I had to force myself to stop wearing it after the funeral.”

“I know.” He whispered.

“I couldn’t be that person again. Holding on to a relationship that was already over.” Tears were filling his eyes. “It hurts. Staring at the damned box and seeing proof of failing love twice.”

Tears pricked Spencer’s eyes now. “It’s in the box?” He remembered the decorative wooden box on Aaron’s dresser. He’d been with him when they’d found it.

“Yeah.”
Rolling closer, Spencer pulled Aaron’s face in until they were nose to nose. “I’m going to do everything in my power to fix this so it can come back out. Okay?”

“Okay.”
Aaron made sure Jack was secured in the cab before sliding in beside him and pulling his phone to his ear.

“You made it?” Spencer asked as a greeting.

“Yes.” Aaron chuckled. “We’ve just got a cab.” He watched his son watch the buildings go by.

“Are you still joining us tomorrow night?”

“If I stay up late tonight, I should be able to catch a train late tomorrow afternoon. Any idea what’s on the itinerary yet?”

“No, not yet.” Aaron smiled. The pair had been working to build back what had crumbled in the wake of Maeve and her death. So far they’d managed to get to a point where Aaron was comfortable holding hands again as well as cuddling some, but neither had made the push yet to try any further intimacy. “I need to let Beth know we’re on our way over. I promised her I’d give her a heads up.”

“Go do that then. I’ll try and finish this up and be able to join you.”

“Good.” They both hung up and Hotch sent a text to Beth quickly.

==

Beth watched from the kitchen as Aaron tucked his son into bed on the pull-out sofa. He gave the boy a kiss on his head and the stood, crossing to join her. He caught her smile and smiled back.

“What?”

She sighed. “I was just thinking that maybe in another life somewhere you might have been here for another reason than just my plus one to this event.” She turned, collecting two glasses of tea and headed for the bedroom, ending the conversation before it began. “So, is Spencer going to make it up here?”

“He’s going to try.” He sat carefully on the foot of the bed, suddenly nervous.

“Well, if not, we can get my neighbor to watch Jack during the gala. I don’t expect we will be out all that late anyway, just rub a few elbows and the like.”

“Whatever you need, that was the deal, right?”

She hesitated in flitting about the room. “That was before I got drunk and made an ass of myself, Aaron. I honestly expected you to tell me to go to hell when I called.”

He was surprised. “You did? Then why call at all?”

“Because there wasn’t anyone else to call? Because, worst case, it gives you a weekend in New York City with Jack. I know how important time with him is to you.” She moved in closer. “I’m sure after my performance that day that Spencer had some choice words when I called.”

“No. He was okay.”

“Really? But, you told him, right?”
“Yeah, I told him.”

“Wow.” She tried to keep her jaw from dropping. “He’s a hell of a man, Aaron.”

“I know.” He quietly began to change once she ducked into the bathroom. Once they were both under the covers, each on their own respective sides, Aaron stared up at the ceiling in the dark. It was weird laying beside someone who wasn’t Spencer and he was sure he didn’t like it. It was almost a relief when his phone rang.

==

Spencer picked up his phone. “I swear I’m doing my best, Aaron. I’m almost done for tonight and then I should be good to go.”

“That’s not why I’m calling, Spence.” His voice sounded as tired as he felt. “There’s… Something happened, I need you and the rest of the team in New York. Tonight. Garcia will be arranging the jet, everyone needs to just meet there.”

“What’s wrong?” He was already shoving files aside. “Did something happen?”

“Sean called me.”

“So, you are…. where?”

“The police station, I’ll text you the address. Could you do me a favor and stop by my apartment for a couple things on your way? I didn’t exactly pack for work.”

“Sure, send me a list.”

==

Spencer entered the station with one primary goal in mind, find and assess Aaron. Dave spotted him first and signaled to Reid with a jut of his chin to go on ahead. Stepping into the glass-walled room, Spencer nudged the door shut. “Hey.”

Aaron looked up at him with relief. “You made it.”

“I brought the stuff you asked for. Where’s Jack?”

“Beth agreed to keep him for now. She’ll call when he wakes up in the morning.”

“And Sean?”

Aaron shrugged. “For now, he’s just a witness, but I have a feeling it won’t stay that way.”

==

Standing just inside the lobby of Beth’s complex after the case was over, Spencer watched as Aaron helped his brother into the back of the cruiser. He knew this situation was crushing the older man, but there wasn’t really anything anyone could do about it. Sean had to pay for his decisions. When Aaron re-entered the building, Spencer opened his arms. “Come here.”
Aaron allowed himself to be wrapped up. “Why does it hurt so much?”

“Because he’s your brother. Above anything else, he’s your closest relative besides Jack and you’re sending him away.” He waited until he felt a nod against his neck. “Let’s go upstairs, I heard Jack had a busy day today.”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

Beth looked up from her spot on the floor by Jack when the door opened. The two men looked exhausted, Aaron was leaning into Spencer for support. “Hey you guys. I put fresh sheets on the bed, it’s all yours.”

Aaron blinked slowly at her, like he hadn’t quite heard what she’d said and stayed quiet. Spencer glanced down at Jack. “How was your day, buddy?”

“Good.” He smiled up at his Spencer. “Is Daddy sleepy?”

“A little bit. Can you finish getting ready for bed for me?”

“Yeah.” Jack got up and headed for his travel bag.

Beth followed the men into the bedroom, watching as Spencer settled Aaron on the edge of the mattress with a soft word in his ear. It was very sweet and private. “Have you guys slept at all?”

Spencer turned to her and thought a moment. “I hadn’t gone to bed yet Saturday morning when Aaron called, I’d been finishing up some other work. None of us slept last night, we had too much going on with the case.”

“You haven’t slept then the past two nights?”

He shook his head. “When we get a case it’s either all work straight through or we sleep in shifts. We all usually crash and burn the day after.”

“That’s…horrible.” Her eyes drifted back to Aaron and her voice lowered. “I’ve never seen him like that.”

Aaron was sitting, sagged down with his hands loose in his lap. His head was tipped forward, eyes half open and gazing toward the floor. He looked almost asleep sitting up.

Spencer cupped the older man’s cheek and looked up. “Can you let Jack know I’ll be out in a minute to tuck him in and give kisses?”

She took it for the dismissal it was and nodded. “Sure.”

==

They’d managed three solid hours of sleep when a cell phone ringing broke the silence of the apartment. Climbing and stretching across the bed, Spencer checked the screen before answering it. “Hello?”

“Reid? Where’s Aaron?” Dave sounded frantic.

“Asleep. Hold on.” Spencer poked his shoulder until Aaron grunted. “It’s Rossi, something’s wrong.”

Suddenly more alert, Aaron grabbed the phone and rolled to a seated position. “Dave? What’s
Beth watched in silence as the pair of men rushed around, doing their best not to disturb Jack, and wondered how someone could live such a life like they did. Barely a handful of hours of sleep and they were rushing out the door again, no wonder Aaron took every opportunity to be with Jack. When both men hesitated to ask her if she was okay watching Jack a third night in a row, she waved them out the door, telling them to call as soon as they knew what was happening.

What, it turned out, was happening was an unsub had abducted Erin out of her hotel room and was taunting them. They couldn’t work out whom, but the person had known Erin well enough to know forcing her to empty the mini bar was a great way to make her compliant. It was a matter of luck that the man hadn’t thought through the noise of the city while talking to Hotch on the phone, a passing siren tipping him off to her location.

Holding Erin in his arms, Aaron tried to keep her calm. She was rambling, not making much sense but she knew she was dying. And maybe that was the worst part of it all, to be dying and be aware of it. He alternated staring down at her and looking around for his team. Passersby didn’t seem to take any notice of the woman dying on the bench. Later he would wonder how those people would feel if they knew. But it was the main war within them all about their jobs, the people on the outside often never knew. Never knew the quiet man next door was a monster, never knew the family who suddenly moved had been victimized, maybe lost a child or a spouse. They often didn’t know when a house they saw every day was full of corpses decaying or, somehow worse, bodies still breathing but wishing they were dead.

He’d seen so much, but there was always something new. Pulling her close, Aaron tucked Erin’s face into his neck, blocking others from witnessing such a private thing as death. He thought back to the first time he’d been introduced to her as his new boss. There’d been whispers about her being the ‘dragon lady’ and from the word go there had been animosity between them. Dave had gotten along with her and wanted to spit nails in turns, his drive to undermine her and press her buttons, Aaron was pretty sure the older man had done it out of fun.

Sometime after Emily had been resurrected and he’d caught them on the couch, Aaron had sensed a shift in the air between his boss and his best friend. He’d been equal parts horrified at the prospect and happy that maybe they would mellow one another a bit.

He could feel her life leaving her. Could feel as she sagged with her final, gentle gust of breath against his throat and it closed up, chocking him on tears held back. Hurried footsteps made him look up the street and into Dave’s eyes and he tried to silently communicate that they were too late. She was gone. He watched tears from in his friend’s eyes, his jaw trembling and clenching. This wasn’t how their job was supposed to go. Erin wasn’t one of them, despite being one hell of a shot, she didn’t regularly carry a gun, didn’t go in the field. This wasn’t supposed to touch her. Like it wasn’t supposed to have touched Garcia. Haley. He swallowed the lump down and blinked. “Is the ambulance on its way?” He whispered.

Dave went to his knees before them, tucking blonde hair behind one ear. “Yeah.” They all waited in silence, circling their fallen teammate, protecting her from curious eyes until they came to take her body away.

Aaron found Spencer back at Beth’s playing with Jack. “Hey, you ready to go home, Buddy?” He brushed his son’s hair back.
Jack looked up and then stood, wrapping his arms around his dad. “Spencer said somebody died.”

“Yeah. Do you remember Miss Erin from Daddy’s work?”

The boy nodded. “Did a bad guy get her like Mommy? And like Aunt Emmy?”

Aaron’s breath caught.

“Will a bad guy get you and Spencer too?”

Tears were welling up in his eyes when Spencer pulled Jack into his lap and began to speak. “Miss Erin was sick. She got better for a while, but it was a very special kind of sick that doesn’t always stay better. A bad guy tried to get her, but her kind of sick came back first.” He pressed a kiss to the head of the boy he considered almost his own. “It’s not a kind of sick you can catch though, okay?”

Jack nodded again. “Was she alone like Mommy?”

Spencer tried to smile. “No, your daddy stayed with her so she wasn’t alone. He gave her hugs so she wasn’t scared.”

“That’s good. Daddy’s hugs make me not scared.”

He looked over the blonde head at his partner. “Me too.”

==

The wake at Rossi’s had been nice, a great way to remember a fallen teammate. It was weird considering Strauss a teammate, but even though they hadn’t liked her most of the time, that’s what she was.

Aaron was sitting on his own bed thinking over a meeting he’d had between leaving New York and the closing of the case and following funeral. He wasn’t entirely sure about saying yes, but it had tempting possibilities. Namely, if the temporary change became permanent, he’d no longer be directly above Spencer at work.

“Aaron?”

Hotch looked up to where Spencer was hovering in the en suite bathroom doorway. “Yeah.”

“I’ve been thinking, since all of this happened.” His eyes dropped away a moment and then slowly came back up as he chewed the corner of his lip. “I miss us. The old us. Could we… Could we try something? I know we’re not back at the point where you’re comfortable to do what we were doing but…maybe this could help?”

“What’s that?”

Spencer leaned back into the bathroom and picked something up, holding it out where Aaron could see. He faced Aaron straight on, wanting to stay as open as possible and eyeing what had to be about three days of stubble on the older man’s face. “Could I…” His voice broke from nerves.

One brow curved up. “You want to…shave me?”

He blushed. “I’ve been reading and there were some articles that said it would help with building trust, or in our case maybe rebuilding trust. Your trust in me. And shaving someone, it’s pretty private, intimate.” Maybe even a little erotic, he added to himself.
Aaron considered it a minute. “Where?”

Spencer was momentarily stunned. “In the bathroom, we’d need a chair and maybe a couple more towels.”

Deciding he wasn’t going to over think anything tonight, Aaron stood and went into the dining room for a chair and brought it back. He stripped to his boxers and sat down and waited.

Reid was stunned silent for a moment before shaking himself into action. He shook open a large towel and wrapped around Aaron’s shoulders before getting the brush and razor out and ready to be prepped.

Aaron closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. He gave in to the feeling of magical hands massaging his face, rubbing lotion of some kind into his skin. In his mind, Aaron could see those long fingers as they worked along his cheeks and neck. Enjoying the feeling, he let his head fall back against the top of the chair.

The hands vanished and were replaced almost instantly with a hot towel, warming and wetting his skin. Shaving for him had always been a simple means of looking well groomed, he never put a lot of thought into the actual steps or sensations. Not that he’d ever had a shave like this before.

He hadn’t taken notice of the sounds of the soap being prepared or tools being moved until the towel was pulled from his skin and the lather began to be spread. At first it was a dabbing, rolling motion and then Spencer changed to strokes, working to make the lather thicker. There was a slight shuffling as Spencer moved around him. He could sense the younger man leaning over him and then the blade was against his cheekbone, almost at his temple. The blade slid down an inch at a time. Aaron could feel the care Spencer took near his ear, making sure the line of hair there was straight no doubt. He could feel Spencer pulling the skin tight and working along his jaw slowly, nearing his mouth.

It was oddly intimate.

Spencer stepped back, exhaling slowly as he studied Aaron’s clean right cheek and jaw. He was overwhelmed with the amount of trust the older man was showing in this and leaned forward, brushing a gentle kiss to the newly exposed cheek before cleaning his blade and turning Aaron’s face to do the other side.

He worked the left side of Aaron’s face like he had the right and finished it as well with a kiss. Moving again, he steadied himself before staring on the man’s throat.

Aaron felt the knife blade at his chin and had to fight back a flinch on the first pass. He could feel Spencer’s breath on his now exposed flesh as the younger man leaned in close. He imagined he could feel his hair brushing his cheek. When his throat was done, Spencer worked the blade quickly around his mouth and Aaron held his breath. At the completion of each area, Spencer had kissed it. Would he kiss his mouth? He felt his whole body begin to come alive with the prospect.

He was disappointed when instead of a kiss, a warm towel cleaned the remaining foam from his skin before being replaced with a cold towel. The cold towel on his face failed to act as a deterrent to any other part of his body and he could feel his boxers getting tighter.

Spencer pulled the cold towel away and stepped back to check his work. He was pleased with how it had turned out. Dropping the towel in the sink, he closed the space between them and pressed a chaste kiss to Aaron’s lips. He was surprised by the older man’s reflexes and with a yelp, Spencer found himself pulled into Aaron’s lap, a desperate kiss on his lips and a hard cock against his leg.
Finally pulling up for air, he squeaked out. “Aaron?”

Hotch responded with a thrust up of his hips. His voice was rough and deep. “I need you to keep touching me.”

Nodding, Spencer pushed the towel from his shoulders and began to kiss his way down, starting behind his ear. Sliding down, Spencer knelt on the hard tile and mouthed Aaron’s cock through the thin cotton, eliciting a moan from his partner. He could tell Aaron was desperate for the contact and knew this would be quick, not to mention they never knew when Jack might wake up. Lining up the opening on the boxers, Spencer pulled the thick cock free, massaging his balls through the fabric. Leaning in, he licked and mouthed the twitching dick before wrapping his lips around and sucking it down.

Aaron’s eyes rolled back. They’d not touched each other in a sexual way in way too long. The mouth working his cock was amazing and he was desperate. All too soon, he was tugging on Spencer’s hair. “I’m going to come, I need to come.” He couldn’t decide if he wanted to come this way or not but the desire pooling low in his belly, making his dick start to swell, told him the time for deciding such details was closing rapidly. “Oh god, I’m coming!” He cried out as his hips bucked and he began to pulse into Spencer’s mouth.

Spencer swallowed all he was given and then carefully stood, ignoring his own arousal for the time being. Instead he leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Aaron’s mouth. “I love you. I’ll always love you, Aaron Hotchner. No matter what stupid things I might do, I love you.”
Spencer chuckled as Garcia complained about being back at work already. It would be nice, but with Hotch doing not only his own job, but now Strauss’s as well on top of raising Jack, really none of them had a whole lot of room to complain.

It had been an adjustment, handling Aaron’s increased responsibilities, but Spencer had happily taken on picking Jack up every afternoon they were home so Aaron could keep up with his paperwork. He and the young boy would work together on homework and then make dinner, Jack was loving learning to cook.

==

Case over for good this time, Spencer boarded the plane last, a giant grin on his face. He looked to every team member except Alex, meeting the gaze of each before clearing his throat. “I am going to start with I told you so and then the four of you.” He pointed from Hotch and Rossi across to Morgan and JJ. “Are going to apologize for laughing at me and then all of you are going to make it up to me.”

Alex looked around, confused. “What for?” The four being called to the carpet so to speak looked equally confused.

“Precisely five years ago today on the jet headed to Lower Canaan, Ohio.” He cut off when JJ spoke.

“Oh my god!” Her hand came up to cover her mouth.

“Uh huh.” Spencer carried on. “I sat here and suggested the idea that with the new victims having the same DNA on them, we could be dealing with an evil twin/eviler twin situation and the lot of you laughed at me.”

Morgan’s head fell back against his seat. “Man.”

His look turned smug. “You all laughed and now, while that’s not what happened then, that’s precisely what happened here. By completely ignoring the possibility, however remote, we missed clues that should have told us we were missing something.” He finally took a seat. “You’re all welcome to take some time to think about how you will make up for having mocked me and let me know.”

He turned to face the window, avoiding eye contact.

==

Morgan was the first to sink down into the seat beside Reid on the jet, slapping his shoulder as he got comfortable. “Listen man, I’m sorry. You’re right, we laughed at the idea of twins as subs, it just sounded so unlikely.” He chuckled.

Spencer’s lips curved up at the corners. “It is exceptionally unlikely, but that doesn’t make it impossible.”

“I get that.” Morgan was quiet a minute. “You did good today. With the father? I’m not all that comfortable in situations dealing with people like that, no matter how much I try. I get nervous I guess. You handle people like him so well.”
“I spent a long time learning to get information out of my mom when she wasn’t always coherent. It’s been a little nice to know that skill can help to serve another purpose.” Both men looked up when Hotch sat down across from them.

“Almost ten years ago, I mentioned after a case that I hadn’t been aware he’d studied how to handle mentally ill people we encounter.” Aaron adjusted his jacket to get comfortable. “All he gave me was that it hadn’t been official studying, he just.” He added air quotes. “Picked it up.” He put his hands back down. “Along the way.”

Morgan grinned and shook his head. “Well, it was good. You were definitely the best man for the job today. A few times.” He patted his friend’s shoulder again and stood, heading for a seat to nap in.

Spencer looked across to Hotch. “I didn’t know you remembered that. I was barely a part of the team then.”

“You were a very important part of this team then. I’m sorry if you couldn’t feel that.” He held the younger man’s gaze until Spencer finally blinked away. If they hadn’t been sitting in the middle of the jet, he would have admitted right then that he’d loved him then as well. Even when he barely knew him.

==

JJ had caught up with Reid on the walk back to their cars and had given him a hug and a peck on the cheek as an apology. They had had a short conversation before he’d seen her to her car before climbing into his own.

Making his way to his own apartment, Spencer wasn’t surprised to see Aaron’s car in his spot. He trudged up the stairs and smiled at the older man who was standing at his kitchen counter only in boxers and a t-shirt. “I thought maybe you went straight to get Jack.” He dropped his bags in the corner and approached, wrapping his arms around Aaron’s waist when Hotch opened his own arms.

“I called Jessica, but Jack was almost asleep and she said he could stay.” He let the hug linger. “I am sorry about not believing you on that case.”

Spencer turned his chin up, grinning. “I was kidding about owing me, it was nice to be able to say I told you so though.” He pressed a kiss to Aaron’s cheek and stepped back. “What are you making in here?”

Aaron grinned and turned to pick up two bowls. “Sundaes.”

He laughed and headed for the couch, tucking Aaron into his side before taking his own bowl and starting to eat. It was one of those times he was glad his partner was left handed while he was right. They could cuddle and eat at the same time. As his bowl was nearly emptied, Spencer noticed a drop of melted ice cream hanging from the bottom of his spoon, with a slight twitch, he jostled it loose and watched it fall, landing on Aaron’s exposed thigh.

Surprised at the sudden touch of cold on his warm skin, Aaron inhaled sharply. Looking to his partner, he was speechless at the look of need in Spencer’s eyes. “Spence…” He whispered.

Ignoring the empty bowls, Spencer lunged forward, straddling Aaron’s lap and crushing their mouths together. He could taste the chocolate and caramel sauces that Aaron had poured over his bowl of vanilla. Opening his mouth, he licked the seam of his lips until Aaron allowed him
entrance. He fucked the other man’s mouth while he rocked his now throbbing dick, still trapped in his dress pants, against Aaron’s inside his boxers. He carried on until he moaned deeply and Aaron gently pushed him back.

Out of breath, Aaron blinked at him. “Are we doing this?”

Spencer licked his lips, panting for breath. “Do you want to do this?”

He went quiet, thinking. “I don’t know.” He finally answered softly. He could feel his cock twitching in disagreement as he let Spencer slip off his lap and sit on the table across from him. “I’m sorry.”

“No. Aaron. It’s okay.” He took his hands. “I- I shouldn’t have just done that. Look, I sorry Aaron. We haven’t talked about where we stand since before. I shouldn’t be pressuring you into anything you aren’t willing to do.”

Hotch felt tears burn the backs of his eyes. “I want to be willing. I do trust you, Spencer.”

“I know.” He scooted forward again, this time wrapping his arms around Aaron’s shoulders. “Let’s go to bed.”

==

“You’re going to do what?” Spencer was looking at Aaron like he’d grown a second head. It had been a week since their evening together.

“I signed up for a class.” He blushed now, it sounded a little silly saying it out loud. “I haven’t been spending at much time in the gym at work and this class is at a time I can be sure I can make.” He began to smile at the sight of Spencer’s smile. “What?”

“What brought this on? You’ve gone months before without training or working out.” He watched his partner duck his head. When he mumbled something, Spencer leaned forward on his toes. “What was that?”

Aaron brought his head up but didn’t meet Reid’s eyes. “I realized the other day that you’re barely over thirty and I’m headed toward forty-five.”

Spencer’s brows rose, their ages had never been an issue before. “What made you think of that?”

The slight pink on Aaron’s cheeks darkened and spread, reaching out to the tips of his ears and down his neck. “It sounds silly, you’ll laugh.”

“Try me.” He prodded.

“I, um, I found gray hair. I was looking in the mirror and there were some around my temple and in my beard and…” His voice faltered. “I just looked so old.” He finally met Spencer’s gaze.

Spencer framed Aaron’s face with his hands. “And? We’re all getting older, so what. It’s how it’s supposed to work.” He pressed a chaste kiss to his lips. “Go to the class, you’ll probably enjoy it, knowing you. And you’ll have the added perk of getting out and meeting other people which is something you don’t do nearly enough of.”

Mischief glinted in Aaron’s eyes. “You trying to get rid of me now?”

Brows rose. “Yes, so your son and I can eat an abysmal dinner for once and stay up too late. Real
hard-core partiers we are.”

He chuckled, relaxing and tucking himself close to the younger man, nose into his throat. “Our son.” He could feel himself choke up as he said it. “Our son.”

==

Spencer had listened to Aaron explain how snipers could stay awake and focused for great lengths of time through the Bluetooth on the SUV. He’d watched Hotch at the firing range on more than a few occasions and while the older agent primarily stuck with practicing with his normal side arms, Aaron would occasionally check out other weapons as well.

He didn’t doubt Hotch had managed to commandeer such a weapon now.

==

Aaron bolted up the stairs as fast as he could, rifle in hand. With every step, he worked to control his breathing. Slow his heart rate. He ripped the earpiece out of his ear, he’d need zero distractions to pull off what he was about to try.

He burst into the small apartment just as the woman let herself out onto the balcony, leaving the door open wide. Running across the room, he sank to his knee and lifted the rifle, eyes already focused on the point where he suspected their shooter would be waiting. As the scope came up to his eye, he saw him. The shooter was already lined up, finger on the trigger. Without hesitation, Aaron pulled his own.

Dropping his rifle at the sight of Morgan in the window where the sniper had just been, Hotch lunged to his feet and rushed to the woman’s side as she began to collapse from the shock of what had happened. It had been a win, but barely.

==

JJ was talking when Hotch entered the jet without her noticing. “You should have seen him, Spence. I mean, I knew that he was an expert shot and everything, but to see him across in the next building and to see the shot he made, it was just…wow.”

Hotch ducked his head to hide the slight blush creeping up his neck and hurried to his preferred seat in the back.

There was some amusement in Reid’s voice as he answered. “Oh, I’ve seen him shoot before, it is impressive. But he usually dresses pretty casually at the range, I bet he’s even more impressive to watch with the full great hair and tie.” Copying their analyst’s earlier words.

Aaron let his head thump down onto the table in front of him at Spencer’s words as well as the mirth he could hear in them.

“Aw, come on Hotch.” JJ could see him now. “You know she doesn’t mean anything by it.”

“I’m gonna fire her.” He told the tabletop.

Rossi sat across from his friend. “Just make sure she gets her computer tech stuff and she’ll play nice.”

Morgan joined in, laughing. “You did look pretty awesome over there though. Why’d you leave SWAT?”
Alex looked up. “Wait, you were in SWAT?”

Morgan answered for him, not that Aaron was rushing to speak for himself. “Back in the day, he sure was.”

Hotch finally sat up and was met with Blake’s impressed look and the rest of his team’s amused ones. “You know what? You’re all fired. Everyone but Blake.”

Everyone on the jet laughed.

==

Days later, Aaron personally followed the paper trail until the form that Garcia had CC’d him on was verified to be in the proper hands for approval. He then printed a hard copy of the verification and walked it down to the office on the second floor and applied his best intimidating look before stalking in and firmly, not quite slamming, it onto the desk of the other person who’s signature the form needed.

The young man behind the desk shrank back and swallowed visibly. “M-may I h-help y-you?”

“I’m Agent Hotchner, Unit Chief for the BAU. This requisition has been filed so that our technical analyst can update her server. People’s lives depend on her to be able to do her job as quickly as she possibly can. Would you like to be the reason a victim dies because we can’t access information fast enough?”

The man’s already fair skin went white. “N-no. S-sir. No sir.”

Hotch tapped on the form with his index finger. “Sign.”

The man nodded vigorously and scribbled his signature to the bottom of the paperwork.

With a grin that showed a bit too much teeth, resembling something closer to a snarl than a smirk, Hotch snatched up the paperwork and left the office, pulling the door shut behind him with a hard yank.

Heading directly back to the sixth floor, he bypassed the bullpen and headed for Garcia’s lair, knocking on her door.

“Come in Mortal!” She called out.

With a much softer smile, he entered and presented her the signed paperwork expectantly.

Garcia read over what she was handed quickly and lit up. “You got it approved already?” Her voice rose with her excitement.

He nodded shyly.

Jumping up from her seat, she wrapped him in a big hug. “You’re the best, the absolute best!” She pressed a bright pink kiss to his cheek. “I promise to behave on the next case we have.”

His brows rose in question.

“Okay, I promise to try to behave.”

He grinned. “You’re fine, I promise. Have a good weekend Penelope.”
“You too, Sir.”

Days later he was pulling his damp workout stuff off, Aaron groaned at the dull pain in his abdomen. He’d finally made it to his first class. Deciding he’d just done too much during the class, he grabbed his toiletry bag and towel and headed for the showers, the hot water would do him good.

He let the hot spray beat down on his, dulling the ache that sharpened again each time he stretched the area. Standing still didn’t hurt, but twisting and stretching in just about any direction did.

The drive home had been filled with sharp pains that had made beads of sweat appear along his hairline. Forcing himself to breathe evenly, Aaron carefully let himself into his apartment and smiled at Jessica and Jack. “Hey, guys.”

Jessica’s smile fell as she moved closer to him. “Hey, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” He leaned forward to drop his bag, a groan slipping out as he stood back up. Her hand was on his shoulder. “No, Aaron, I’m not sure you are. What’s wrong?”

“I just over stretched at the gym is all. I’ll be fine, Jess. I promise.”

She was watching him closely. “If you’re sure.”

“I promise, by Monday I’ll be right as rain.”
Spencer stopped in Aaron’s office doorway on his way out. “Will you be late?”

Hotch looked up. “No, I told Jessica I shouldn’t be much longer.”

Chewing his lip, he debated. “Are you sure you feel okay?”

“Fine.” He tried to give him a reassuring smile. “We still on for tomorrow?” He shifted in his seat, partly to try and find an easier position to breathe in and partly because he wasn’t quite used to wearing the cage again. His plan was to show Spencer as a surprise. He was ready to move forward.

“Yeah, we’re still on. Get some sleep, Aaron.”

“I will, I promise.” He forced a smile through the constant pain.

==

The floor was quiet once everyone had gone home. Finding it difficult to focus sitting up at his desk, Aaron grabbed his files and headed to the couch. Maybe a change of scenery would help.

The curled position made it hard to breathe, so he turned and laid back, stretching his long legs out as best he could on the loveseat.

==

Gasping awake, Hotch hadn’t even realized he’d fallen asleep. Glancing around the room, he tried to shake himself awake. Jessica was waiting for him to pick Jack up, he grabbed his phone to call her and let her know he really was on his way.

==

Waiting on the rest of the team, Aaron paced in his office and out on the platform. He felt…off. He tried to focus on taking slow, deep breaths. The pain was a dull throb in his gut and chest. He tried to sit back at his desk, but sitting made his struggle to breathe worse. For a fleeting moment, he considered calling Spencer and telling him he wasn’t well, Spencer would probably drag him to a doctor. He wondered if that wasn’t such a bad idea.

==

Entering the round table room, Hotch opted to stand behind his chair instead of sitting in it. He could manage, and hopefully hide, his struggle to breathe if he was standing. He didn’t want to alarm the rest of the team and distract everyone from the case and the missing girl. He could get them ready and then maybe send them on ahead, he could see a doctor before following them later.

As they discussed the case, Aaron felt the room begin to spin. He tried to clench his fist but his hand struggled to obey. Stumbling in the direction he hoped was toward a chair to grab onto, he gasped for air. His vision swam and dark spots crept in. As his vision dimmed he was aware that he was sinking to the conference room floor.

The entire team jumped out of their seats as their leader fell to the floor, unconscious. Everyone was speaking at once, calling his name, trying to get a response.
Looking up from his spot trying to find Aaron’s pulse, Dave pointed at Garcia. “In my top drawer there is a bottle of aspirin, bring the whole thing.” He watched her practically fly out of the room, tears already in her eyes.

“You think it might be a heart attack?” Morgan was on Hotch’s other side, trying to check the man’s breathing. “I’m not sure he’s breathing.” He stared up at Rossi, worry filling his face.

“I don’t know, can’t hurt to try. I’m barely getting a pulse.”

“Ambulance is on its way.” JJ knelt down by Hotch’s head. “Shouldn’t be too long.”

“Good.”

“Got it!” Penelope ran back in, pressing the bottle into Spencer’s outstretched hands. “I-I don’t know how much…”

“I’ve got it.” Spencer poured out the pills and scooped up two before pulling Aaron’s chin down and pressing the pills under his tongue. “If it is a heart attack, this will help until he gets to the hospital.”

“I can’t get his pulse.” Dave’s voice rose.

“Check the other arm.” Spencer lifted the other wrist, removing Hotch’s watch to search for some sign of activity. “I can’t find it here either.” He looked at Morgan. “Can you maintain chest compressions?”

“Yeah, man.” Morgan got to his knees, straddling Hotch’s chest, and started. “I can’t believe this. Shot at, stabbed, everything else, this can’t be the way you go, man.”

Alex was watching through the windows. “They’re just getting off the elevator!” She ran out to direct the EMT’s to the conference room.

Spencer looked up at Dave. “You go with him.” His voice was soft enough that no one else could hear.

“You sure?”

Reid nodded.

“Okay. Morgan, you get everyone on the jet and into the air. You’re in charge here.” Rossi ordered.

Derek backed off when the paramedics took over. “Let us know when you know.”

They all stood back and watched as Hotch was moved to the stretcher and hooked up to an assortment of machines.

“It’s weak, but we have a pulse, let’s get the O2 going and get him moving.” The first paramedic spoke. Looking at the group gathered, he asked. “Is someone riding along.”

“I am.” Dave stepped forward and then followed them as they rushed to the elevators.

“He just collapsed?” They asked during the ride down.

“He was short of breath and gripped his chest and that was it.” Dave still couldn’t believe it had happened to Aaron of all people.
“Sounds like it could be a heart attack.”

“His dad died at forty-seven of one. We gave him two aspirin under his tongue already.”

“Good. That helps.”

==

Dave tried to stay out of the way during the ride to the hospital, willing Aaron to come around and be royally pissed at all the fuss. Aside from a moment where his eyes cracked open slightly, he didn’t come around though. Dave wasn’t even sure that Hotch was aware during those moments his eyes cracked, moments later he stopped breathing entirely and alarms started going off.

==

Rushing into the ER, the team started sharing information to the nurses who were taking over. “Forty-three-year-old male, sudden onset chest pain and difficulty breathing before losing consciousness. Has not regained since, stopped breathing en route, pulse weak. Family history of heart attack, also patient uses air travel on an almost weekly basis, sometimes more, aspirin given sublingually.”

Dave stood outside the room and watched as a sheet was tossed mostly over Hotch’s body by one nurse while another took a pair of sheers and began to cut away all of his clothes. Dave frowned and made a mental note to replace them for him. Another nurse pulled Rossi away and handed him some paperwork.

“Anything you can give us will help, we can try and look up the rest. Do you know if he has a proxy?”

“I, um, I’m not sure who it is anymore.” He looked over the paperwork. “Someone else will be here shortly, she has access to all of his records and will be able to answer that and all of this.”

“Okay, just let me know when she arrives.”

“Sure.” He looked up as the activity in the room increased. “What’s happening?”

She looked over her shoulder a moment. “His oxygen is low, he’s not breathing well enough to provide what his blood needs and it’s dropping his blood pressure. They’re waiting on the ECG and labs, as soon as we get his kidney function results back we can know if he can go to CT without a problem or not.”

“Oh.” It was all going right by him, but it sounded bad. “You think it’s a heart attack?”

“We are trying to rule out that or an embolism. He could have a clot somewhere.” She hurried away.

He watched them hook IV’s into Aaron’s arms, bags hanging on the bed as it was moved, rushed out and down the hall.

“Where is he?”

Dave turned to see Garcia hurrying his way. “I think they just took him for a CT scan. It looks like a heart attack or a clot, they’re not sure.” He pulled her to the side of the hall where there were some chairs, taking her bag and handing her the clipboard. “Can you fill this out?”
“Yeah, no problem.”

“Do you know who his proxy is?”

She nodded. “Reid. And- and me.”

Dave was a little surprised by that. “Really?”

“We had this long talk a long time ago, he didn’t want Haley burdened with something out in the field, so he always had Gideon as a second so he would have access if she needed help and then after he left… He asked Spencer, that was before you came back. But when they divorced, actually I think it was before that, when she moved out? He took her off and later, he added me. Because, you know.” She waved at the paperwork and her now open laptop. “I have access to everything.”

“Can I leave you with him then?”

“Oh! No, please don’t! He might have faith in me to be able to access his information, but I’m not sure I have faith in me to make any calls if I have to.”

A doctor approached the pair as Hotch, still unconscious, was rolled back into the room. “Do we know who is proxy or next of kin?”

Garcia stood. “I am. I’m his proxy. Penelope Garcia. What’s happening?”

“We’ve done several tests and it looks like there’s internal bleeding, though we don’t know from where yet. I saw in his records that he sustained significant trauma from being stabbed at some point?”

“Yeah, um, about four years ago? You think this is related to that?” She glanced into the room. “Will he be okay?”

“We believe the heart and breathing difficulty are from the increased pressure the bleeding is causing and not from a heart attack or clot. We’re not ruling it out, we’re keeping an eye out on both fronts, but we have to stop the bleeding first.”

Dave rubbed her shoulder. “I have a flight to catch, you got this?”

She turned to him. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, I’ve got this. I’ll take care of him.” She picked up her bags and turned back to the doctor. “Can I see him? When is surgery happening?”

He guided her to the room. “We’re waiting on the next available O.R. and then he’s going up. Right now, he’s being monitored and prepped for surgery, nurses will be in and out to do that, but you are welcome to sit right up here on this side and wait.” He gestured to a chair a nurse nudged closer.

“Thank you.” She sat and took Hotch’s hand, squeezing it. “You probably can’t hear me, but just in case… I’m right here and I’m not going away until someone makes me.”

==

Nurse Jody led another nurse, Dean, into the exam room, nodding to the young woman beside the bed as she readied the kit they would use to insert the catheter. Motioning to Dean, she waited for him to lift the side of the sheet as she moved the gown of their otherwise naked patient. Jody was much too professional to let her reaction show on her face, but she did glance to the face of her patient, eyebrow arching up slightly, and then to the woman at his side before looking back down
at the item in her way. If the woman was just a friend, she may not know about this man’s private habits and Jody wasn’t about to risk her license to mention it. With a deep breath, she carefully pulled the chastity cage off, tucking it into a tan envelope usually used for jewelry and other valuables, before completing her task. Once the gown and sheet was replaced and the bag properly hung, she made eye contact with Dean and smirked. You never knew what would end up in the ER.

“Excuse me?”

Jody was surprised by how soft and sweet the woman’s voice was. “Yes?”

“What was that?”

The nurse smiled. “We had to put in a catheter, he’ll be in surgery most of the rest of the day.” She chuckled when the woman pulled a face. “You are worried about him.”

Garcia stared down at her friend. “Yes. He’s strong, not just… He has a strong spirit. He’s a fighter, you know? But he’s been through so much. I just can’t help but wonder what will eventually make his body say it’s had enough.”

“We’ll take good care of him. I’ll be back in a bit to take him upstairs, I’ll show you the surgical waiting room then.”

“Thanks.”

==

Aaron looked around the car he was riding in. If he didn’t know any better, he would say it was the antique that Dave had been restoring. It was a beauty. He didn’t recognize the streets or buildings as they drove and the person driving didn’t speak to him. The car finally stopped out front of an older theater, the kind that showed older films. Curious, he stepped out onto the sidewalk and was amazed to be suddenly in a tux instead of a hospital gown.

Why had he been in a hospital gown? He couldn’t remember.

Looking around at the deserted street and sidewalk, Aaron pressed forward into the lobby and looked around. Everything was pristine. Clean. Popcorn was in the machine, candy in the display case, but there weren’t any employees around to serve them. Wandering through the halls, he found a single theater with the doors propped open, lights up, and music playing. Close to the front, in the center, he could see someone sitting. Waiting maybe.

He walked down the aisle until he was at the right row and was speechless. “Haley.”

==

Pacing the waiting room anxiously, Garcia checked her watch. It had been six hours since the team had watched their leader collapse to the floor mid-sentence and five since she’d last laid eyes on him. The surgeon had come out and reassured her that he would take very good care of Hotch, and she believed him. He was the same surgeon who had saved her when she’d been shot.

It felt like a good omen.

But they had no idea how long surgery would take. Until they got in there, there was just no way to tell.
She let five more minutes pass before she went to the nurses’ station to ask for an update.

“I’ll go check.” The nurse gave her a sad smile and went around the corner. She’d been watching the brightly dressed woman all day, despite her obvious worry, the blonde had only been asking for updates on the hour, she’d been more than willing to get them. Walking into the room beside the surgical suite, her heart dropped. There was a flurry of activity inside and alarms were going off. She had no idea how to tell the woman waiting what she was seeing. Waiting for the activity to die down, the nurse pressed the button and asked for an update.

Returning to the blonde, she gave her a sad smile. “It’s touch and go.”

“Oh god!” Garcia covered her mouth with her hands.

“He’s coded twice in the last hour, but they’ve brought him back both times. Right now they’re working on making sure they got everywhere that was bleeding and then they’ll be closing him up. The doctor should be out soon to talk to you, okay?”

“Yeah. Okay. I’ll just… I’ll just be over here.”

==

All Penelope could think was that he’d coded. He’d died. Twice! She chewed on her thumbnail as she waited for the doctor to come out to her.

“Miss Garcia?” The surgeon stepped into the waiting room an hour later.

“How is he?”

“Stable. He tried to get away from us twice, but we got him back. We’ll have to watch for clots for a while, we’ll be running some more tests over the next few hours and days.”

“When can I see him?”

He sighed. “He’s on his way to recovery now. If he looks like he’s waking up, I’ll have them come get you. After recovery though, he’ll be getting moved to our post-surgical ICU, you’ll be able to be with him there.”

She really wanted to see him, but didn’t want to question the man who’d just saved Hotch’s life. “Thank you. Really, I don’t know what any of us would have done if he didn’t make it.”

== 8pm

Eleven. Eleven hours since the last time she’d seen his brown eyes open. The four hours he’d spent in recovery had been some of the worst in her life or so she thought. But now he’d been rolled into his private room and hooked back up to a myriad of machines and he still wasn’t awake.

Garcia wasn’t good at being patient. Didn’t he know that? Deciding that getting frustrated wasn’t going to help anyone, she focused on the case and helping her teammates get home. At every opportunity, she glanced up at his face to reassure herself he was in fact still there.

==

Aaron could feel tears on his cheeks. “I’ve missed you so much.”

“Aw, Aaron, I’ve missed you too.” She beamed at him. “Oh look! The movie is starting!”
He glanced at the screen and then back at her, he wasn’t interested in whatever the movie was.

“Oh! I’d never realized he was so good with him!”

Her exclamation made him look up. On the screen was Spencer sitting on the couch in his own apartment, infant Jack was in his lap. “He wanted to be his best for Jack.”

The scene changed and it was Jack toddling now around the same apartment, giggling as Spencer’s long gangly body crawled after him. Neither of them spoke as the scene played out and then changed again.

The next did not have Jack in it. It was of Aaron and Spencer sound asleep, spooned together.

He felt himself blush. “I- It’s not what it looks like. We weren’t… I never cheated on you.”

She put a hand on his cheek. “I know, Honey. But he loved you and you love him. He was helping you when I no longer could.”

He leaned into her touch. “I didn’t want to fall in love with him.”

==Midnight

The nurse stepped in to check on her patient and stopped to smile. His guest, the woman who’d been here with him all day, was sound asleep with her head resting on her arms on the bed by his side. She hated to do it, but she needed to be able to check the bag that was hanging on the side of the bed, so she carefully woke the woman up.

“Hm?” Garcia blinked. “Oh, hello.”

“I’m sorry to wake you, I just need to get under here and check something.”

“Sure, no problem.” She moved her chair back. “How is he doing?”

The nurse looked over the machines. “He looks okay. I’ll have to check his incisions and things at my next check.”

“Why… Why hasn’t he woke up yet?”

She thought a minute. “It’s hard to say. Some patients take longer to wake up than others. Sometimes they’re more sensitive to the drugs. It could be that his body is just worn out and is taking advantage of the rest. He was barely breathing when he came in, his body has been through a lot in the past day. Give him until morning rounds, if he still isn’t awake then, the surgeon will run more tests. Okay?”

“Yeah, okay.” She smiled sadly at the nurse. “I just want to know he’s okay.”

“You two are close?”

Garcia nodded. “We work together, but yeah. He’s… he’s a dad. Did you know that?”

The nurse shook her head.

“He’s a good dad. But he’s a single dad, his wife, ex-wife, she died. He has to be okay because I can’t tell his little boy that he’s not.” A tear dropped down her cheek.

==
Hotch had been uncomfortable sitting beside Haley as she watched highlights of his and Spencer’s relationship as it had developed, but she just kept smiling. Scenes had come up though that Aaron swore he’d never been aware of before. The way Spencer’s eyes followed him around a room, the look of worry on the younger man’s face when he couldn’t speak up. The way Garcia, and then Dave, would create instances where they would end up together.

He’d never noticed it before.

The screen changed again and Haley gasped. “Oh, Aaron!” Her hand covered her mouth.

He looked away from her and watched as Dave and Spencer half carried/half dragged him, covered in blood, out of his former home and then held him as he collapsed in the yard.

“I wish that had never happened to you.” She whispered.

His jaw dropped. “To me? I got you killed. I would do anything to change it. If staying here meant you could go back, I’d do it in a heartbeat.”

“Oh, Sweetie, I know you would. But it doesn’t work that way. And look at what you would have missed if you had died that day instead of me.” She gestured to the screen again.

==9am

She stood in the hall outside the room where the scan was being done. The surgeon had been kind enough to allow her permission to walk with the bed down there and back again, so she was understanding when they said she had to wait outside. The little clock in her head was telling her it had been twenty-four hours since this nightmare had begun and she still didn’t have any answers.

The surgeon stepped out and led her to a chair. “He’s in a coma. I can’t see anything on any of the tests that show a problem, he’ll likely come out when he’s ready.”

“How?”

“Sometimes we don’t know. There aren’t any signs of damage from lack of oxygen, though it is something we worry about, and I don’t see any clots. He’s breathing on his own now which is a good sign, sometimes after a ventilator a patient struggles with remembering to breathe until they wake up. I know you stayed the night, have you had anything to eat yet?”

“Not really.”

“Go eat. Leave your number with the nurse and if anything happens, she’ll call you. I’ll check back in after rounds and see how he’s doing.”

“Sure.”

==

He’d been unaware that the team had rallied around him in the days after her death, that Spencer had stayed right by his side at every step. The scenes changed a little faster now, some without sound, but he knew precisely what they were.

He watched Spencer burst into his apartment and frantically look for Jack before caring for him. He saw the wincing as Spencer bore too much of his weight on his recovering knee as he got him to the hospital.
It moved forward to the day at the museum not long after. He watched himself standing helpless, lost, as Spencer stepped up and found Jack.

Spencer getting Jack ready for school.

Helping him with homework.

Helping him write his own letters to Haley when he had a rough day.

Aaron’s breathing turned shallow as tears pricked his eyes. “He loves us.”

“Yes, he does.” Haley didn’t sound surprised. “He loves you and Jack.”

He glanced at where he and Spencer’s lips were now locked together on the screen. Jack had been in the bath when Aaron had gotten home, Spencer had been perched on the toilet lid playing with him and was splattered with water and bubbles. He’d looked up and saw the burning desire in Aaron’s eyes and stepped out of the bathroom. The moment they were out of view of Jack, Aaron had shoved him roughly against the wall and kissed him senseless. “He sees us as a family. We’re a family.”

“Oh, sweetie, it’s okay. Really. You’re happy, Jack’s happy.”

“I still miss you.”

“I know, but you need to focus on Spencer now. He’s alive and he’s there for you.”

“He’s been wonderful. To me and Jack.”

The screen flickered and Aaron instantly knew what it was from. He watched himself burst, breathless and disheveled, through Spencer’s door and hit his knees. At the time, his eyes had been on the floor but now he was looking at Spencer’s face. There was no anger or recrimination in his eyes. He looked almost…sad. But loving. Understanding. The younger man really hadn’t been upset about what he’d done. “I called out your name.”

She smirked. “I know.” She watched him blush. “And Spencer understood.” She took his hand. “Even in the bad times, he loves you more than anything. You just have to stop hiding and talk to him. He’s not going to walk away.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I know what’s in his heart.”

==3pm

Garcia put her laptop aside with a huff and stared at the sleeping man in the bed. “You know, I’m going to file a request for a raise due to extended pain and suffering.” She frowned. “This can’t be it for you. For you and Spencer. Jack. Oh, god! Please don’t make me tell Jack you’re gone too! That little boy doesn’t need any more heartache.” She looked around the room. “We need happy.” She sat up straight. “That’s it. You’re going to wake up and get better and you and Jack-o and Spencer and I will head to the beach or something and we will have a good time. Jack and I can do fun things while the two of you do things I don’t want to see.” She chuckled. “Okay. Maybe I kinda want to see. But don’t tell Spencer that! That boy can blush red enough to make a tomato look dull.”

==
Aaron looked around their surroundings, they were back on the sidewalk again. He looked down, sure enough, he was back in a hospital gown. “I don’t want to leave you.”

“You have to go, who will care for Jack if you stay?”

“I.” He wanted to say Spencer would care for him, but why would he just assume he would take him in?

Haley wrapped him in a hug and placed a kiss on his cheek. “Talk to him, Aaron. Spencer is better with words, you know that.” She started to walk away but stopped halfway across the street. “And smile more, let everyone else see it. You look good smiling.”

He nodded dumbly and watched her vanish.

==6 pm

Penelope did her best to work on adding data to the files on her laptop. She needed to work to stay distracted. Glancing up again from her paperwork, she was surprised to see Hotch’s eyes open. She tried to remain calm as he worked to get his bearings. “Hi, Sir. Welcome back.”

Hotch tried to work out where he was, he slowly took in the room. Hospital. Carefully he tracked his eyes in the direction the voice had come from and found Penelope quietly sitting and watching him. It had to have been bad for her to be so still.

“Do you feel okay? Do you need anything?”

“What happened?” He could see she wanted to reach out but was holding herself back.

“Oh, you collapsed. And they performed emergency surgery because you were bleeding internally. The doctor said it was something to do with the stabbing. But you’re fine now. There were some complications with the operation but you’re… You’re okay.” A smile started to cross her face. “You’re like, as healthy as a puma. A bedridden puma! But my point is, you’re going to be fine.”

He let her talk herself out, finding comfort in her bubbly personality shining through. “Where’s Jack?”

“He’s at home, with Jessica. Should I send for him?”

“Please.” She seemed to light up even more at being given something to do. “And could you get me my phone?”

She handed it over, having been holding on to it the entire time.

“Thank you.” He tried to think who he should contact first.

Garcia stood. “I’m going to go call Jessica and let her know you’re okay.”

He was both surprised and not when she suddenly leaned in and wrapped his shoulders in a hug, pressing a kiss to his temple. He gasped in pain which sent her scrambling back, full of apologies, which made him feel guilty. “It’s okay.” He watched her start to leave.

“I’m really happy you’re back, you had us worried sick.”

“Garcia?”

She nodded.
“Thank you for staying.”

Tears pricked her eyes. “Wild horses, Sir, just… wild horses.” She hurried to make her calls before he saw her cry.

==

Hotch waited in the silence for Garcia to return. Her things were still piled on the chair and table, a file open though he couldn’t see its contents. Spencer hadn’t answered his phone, it had gone straight to voicemail signaling the younger man had turned it off. He guessed that the case was still going on.

The door opened and Aaron looked up with a small smile which instantly fell when he saw it was a nurse, not the blonde, entering. “Nice to see you’re awake now Mister Hotchner, the doctor will be in shortly to look you over. You’ve been through a lot in the past day and a half, so you need to take it easy and let your body heal. You’ve had your insides rearranged a few times, so expect some discomfort beyond just your incisions okay?”

He nodded. “Yeah.”

“Okay. I need to take a look at your stitches.” She glanced around the room. “Where did your Miss Garcia get to?”

Aaron was slightly surprised the nurse knew her name. “Uh, she went to make some calls.”

“She’s absolutely lovely.” She smiled at him. “She’s been by your side or waiting nearby since you were brought up from the ER yesterday.”

“Really?” Garcia had been there the whole time?

“Uh-huh. She had one whole section of our waiting room taken up. Cell phones, laptop, tablet, paperwork. It was like she just uprooted and dropped where we told her she could sit. But being busy didn’t stop her at all from worrying about you.” The nurse carefully moved the gown out of the way and adjusted the sheet to give him privacy before removing his bandages in order to apply new ones.

A gasp from the doorway made both nurse and patient turn. Garcia had a hand over her mouth and fresh tears filling her eyes.

Aaron felt himself choke up at the sight of her upset. “It’s okay Garcia. I’m okay now.”

She nodded as her lip trembled. “I-um. I got ahold of Jessica. She had Jack in the bath and asked when visiting hours were.”

“Thank you.” They both fell silent until the nurse finished looking him over and left. He glanced around the room. “Do you have the rest of my things?”

She nodded and pulled out a small bag. “Rossi has your guns and holsters. But this is your other stuff like shoes, belt, wallet, ID. Oh, I think Spence has your watch, they took it off when they couldn’t find your…” Her voice broke. “Your pulse.”

“Penelope?”

“Hmm?” She didn’t look up.
“Talk to me.”

She shook her head before drawing a shaky breath. “I was so scared. You were talking and I was looking right at you and you hadn’t looked well when we all came in, but I didn’t want to say anything and Rossi and Reid suddenly looked all wrong and you stopped talking and tried to leave I guess and then you just…stopped.” She sucked in a fresh breath. “I was frozen. Rossi gave me a purpose and that helped but they were saying you weren’t breathing and they could barely get your pulse and I know I’m not a doctor but to me if you aren’t breathing and you don’t have a pulse you’re…” She cut off a moment. “I thought you were dying.”

“I’m sorry.”

She couldn’t believe he was apologizing. “For what?” Her voice rose. “There is nothing here for you to be sorry for.” Her voice cracked again as she paced.

Aaron hated being trapped in the bed, but there was zero chance of him getting up in his condition. “Penelope. Please come here.” He carefully raised one hand to get her to come closer. “Please?”

Garcia hesitated before relenting and approaching the bed.

He raised the arm that was free of wires and tubes. “Come here. I can’t chase you, I need you to cooperate this time.”

“You want me to…”

He nodded.

Swallowing, she sat on the bed and carefully tucked herself along his side, settling her head on his shoulder. It was an odd position to be in, but as his arm wrapped around her shoulders, she couldn’t help the onslaught of tears that started.

Aaron held her close until she cried herself out and fell asleep.

==

The room was dark when Penelope woke again. There was a new nurse moving around the room, quietly checking vitals. The woman noticed Garcia’s open eyes. “I’m sorry if I woke you.” She whispered.

Shaking her head, she tried to extricate herself from Hotch’s arms, but when she moved, his arms tightened around her. “It’s okay. I hadn’t meant to fall asleep.”

“He looks a lot better now.” She gestured to the sleeping patient. “I helped with getting him prepped for surgery.” She glanced around the room. “I put the special things we removed into a brown paper envelope, is it with his things?”

Garcia thought a second. “Yes, there was an envelope.”

The nurse nodded. “Good. I know he won’t be able to wear it until he gets discharged, but I didn’t want anything to get lost.”

Unsure what she was talking about, Penelope thanked her and watched her leave. Tired won out over curiosity and she fell back to sleep again.

==
Spencer strolled down the corridor while Garcia was waiting on Jack and Jessica to come out of Hotch’s room. He chuckled when she flung a hug around his neck. “How are you, Garcia?”

“Better. I’m all cried out now and I feel better.”

“All cried out?”

She nodded and turned slightly pink. “I got worked up and upset and he…” She ducked her head. “He made me lay beside him so he could comfort me. I fell asleep on his shoulder.”

“Oh.” He rocked back on his heels. “But you’re doing okay?”

She nodded. “He looks good. The doctor is optimistic.” They looked up when Jack burst through the door and hugged Spencer.

“Hey, Buddy. How’s your dad?”

“Okay. He says he’s getting better but it will take a while.”

“It will. But we’re going to help him get better, right?”

Jack nodded.

“You be good for Aunt Jessica, I’ll stop by and see you later, okay?”

“Okay.”

The pair watched as aunt and nephew left.

“Ready?” Garcia asked.

Spencer nodded.

==

Having given the pair some privacy, Penelope had left for a while. Spencer sat on the edge of the bed and held Aaron’s hands. “Any idea what happened?”

Aaron shook his head and then stopped. “I might have caused this from the workout. I’d been having pain and other problems since.”

“Oh, Aaron.” He leaned forward and pressed a gentle kiss to his lips. “I wish you would have just talked to me.”

Hearing the words, he remembered. “I saw Haley.”

“What?” He was startled away from his previous train of thought.

“While I was out, I saw Haley. I talked to her.”

“You did?” He wasn’t sure what to make of his partner seeing his dead ex-wife.

“There was a movie. It was about us. You and me. And Jack. She showed me that you’ve always loved us. Cared for us. She said I needed to start talking to you, that you needed words.”

“She did?” He couldn’t imagine real life Haley ever saying such a thing.
Aaron nodded. “She told me to be happy. That you make me happy.” He gripped Spencer’s hand. “I had invited you over for dinner to tell you I was ready to move on. Forward. I had it all planned out. I didn’t want to lose us.”

“Didn’t?”

“Don’t. I don’t want to lose us. I’m sorry I pushed you away without talking to you first. I had decided that what I want is to be yours, wholly and completely. I’d even…” His voice trailed off.

“What? Aaron?”

He paled. “I’d even put the cock cage back on. I was wearing it at the office.”

Spencer’s eyes couldn’t help but glance to Aaron’s sheet covered lap. “It’s not there?”

Hotch shook his head. “They must’ve had to take it off.”

Garcia walked in on her neighbor searching the clear plastic bag holding his shoes and things. “What’d you lose?”

Both men froze, staring at her wide eyed.

Her brows shot to her hairline. “Okay. One of you talk and it better be to explain why you both look like that.”

“When he collapsed, he was wearing, umm…” Spencer blushed as he dropped silent.

“If they removed it, it has to be here somewhere, right?” Aaron asked.

She looked between them. “Okay. I need more to go on that it clearly being something embarrassing here.”

The men exchanged a look but stayed silent.

“I could guess, you know.”

Hotch mumbled something from the bed, skin flushing bright red.

She leaned in close. “Huh?”

“A chastity cage.”

Holding back her surprise, she calmly straightened and located the smaller paper envelope. “I was told that there were things in here. I have not looked.”

Taking the envelope, Aaron slowly tipped it over and watched as the missing item landed on the blanket pulled over him. He let out a sigh of relief.

Garcia kept her jaw from dropping in surprise. “How, um, how long have you…”

Both men looked up at her.

“You know what, never mind. I’m going to go find us some lunch. I’ll be back in a bit.”
Spencer watched from the bedroom doorway as Aaron carefully pulled on his suit jacket. “Nervous?”

It had been six weeks since he’d stepped foot inside the BAU, his incisions had healed nicely and he was officially back to work as of today. He huffed out a breath. “Maybe a little.” He looked himself over in the mirror, biting the corner of his lip as he brushed invisible lint away. “I left on a stretcher and barely alive after collapsing during a meeting.” He turned to finally present himself to Spencer. “I’m nervous about being embarrassed. That must have been a major scene.”

Reid shrugged. “Old news.” He stepped closer and worked on straightening Aaron’s tie. “There have been no fewer than two new headlining pieces of gossip since then.”

Aaron’s brows pulled together. “Only two?”

“Well, your dramatic exit was top news for a little longer than normal and then there were some small ripples about whether you were coming back or not.”

“The team thought I might not come back?”

He rolled his eyes. “Noo.” He drew out. “The team never once questioned it. The rest of the gossip mill, however, does not have the same ingrained faith in you that we do.”

“So what gossip got me bumped from front page news?”

“You remember Janice on the fourth floor?”

He thought a moment. ‘Chief Daniels’ assistant?’ He got a nod from his partner. “I never understood why he got an assistant and I got…” He trailed off when Spencer smirked. “A bunch of wonderful agents.” He ended.

“Well. You know he would take her with him when he did recruitment seminars at universities?”

“I think I heard that.”

“Turns out she’s now pregnant.”

Aaron’s jaw dropped.

“And Missus Daniels got wind of the whole thing when Janice had the doctor’s office send a copy of her medical results to his home address.”

“Wow.” Aaron could never wrap his head around how men willingly got themselves into that kind of trouble. “And the other news?”

“It seems Anderson has a thing for tequila and leggy redheads.” He chuckled.

“But how would that be gossip?”

“Neither Anderson, nor the redhead have offices, they both work in bullpens. They were working late one night and borrowed a coworker’s tequila and that nice long table down in conference room B.”
“Oh no.”

“They didn’t lock the door and were woke up the next morning by the AD and an assembly of other top suits who were there for a meeting. They were naked, passed out on the table.”

Aaron thought about the numerous meetings he’d attended in that room and pulled a face.

“I heard the cleaners have sanitized it half a dozen times already but when the sun comes in the windows at about three o’clock, if you’re sitting in the right chair you can see a butt print that looks suspiciously the right size to be Anderson’s.”

Aaron couldn’t help laughing. “And you keep asking to have sex at work.”

“Ah, but you have an office. With a door that locks.”

“We’re still not having sex at work.”

Spencer smirked. “We’ll see.” He turned and left the room.

“Spencer? I’m serious.” Aaron followed after him. “We’re not having sex at work.”

==

Taking a seat in the conference room, Hotch kept throwing suspicious looks down to where Reid was working in the bullpen. When Garcia rushed in, arms full of paperwork, she caught his look. “What’d he do?”

Nervously, Aaron glanced around to make sure they were alone. “He has an idea he won’t let go of.”

She took the seat directly next to him and opened the top file, making a show of being deep in discussion about a case should anyone look up. “And which idea would that be?”

He narrowed his eyes at her but didn’t answer.

“Fine. Don’t tell me. You know I could be helpful.” She shrugged. “You look better than you did a few weeks ago, how are you?”

“I’m good. Ready to be back.”

“And how are…things?” She gestured with her pen toward Spencer.

He blushed bright red.

“Hey. Remember what I said when I first found out? As long as you are both happy and safe, I’m all happy for you. There is no need to be ashamed or embarrassed about anything the two of you do. Not with me.”

He sighed as she stood to call the others up. “We haven’t gotten around to things since I’ve been cleared.”

==

A week later, Spencer was finishing Garcia help set up for the party when she leaned in close. “He’s coming, right?”
“He said he would be here.”

She looked around nervously. “I’ve never had everyone here all at once. I mean, there were a lot of the team here at a time back when you guys got hurt, but it still wasn’t everyone.”

“It’ll be fine.”

==

After the rest of the team had left at the end of the night, only Spencer and Aaron remained, basking in the alcohol and candlelight in Garcia’s living room. The music was still playing quietly in the background.

Spencer had no idea where their hostess had vanished to, he couldn’t hear her moving around anywhere. Rolling to his side, he reached up and cupped Aaron’s face, turning him so he could kiss him deeply.

Aaron sank into Spencer’s soft lips, allowing him to lead as the kiss deepened and the younger man’s tongue began to slowly fuck his mouth. He moaned and shifted, his confined cock twitched with interest. His hands carefully tangled into Spencer’s hair and shirt, slowly untucking it from his slacks.

Feeling his shirt pull free, Spencer echoed Aaron’s moan and turned to rest on his hip, thrusting his growing erection into Aaron’s thigh. They’d been unable to do anything for so long, he knew he wouldn’t last long tonight. Moving his own hands, he slowly pulled Aaron’s shirt up and over his head, exposing warn flesh that he ducked down and kissed. Finding one nipple and then the other, he nipped and sucked until Hotch was gasped and whining desperately.

“Please.” Aaron whispered.

“Tell me what you need.” He sat back up, pulling loose the belt and button on Aaron’s jeans. Letting the slow vibration of the zipper against the cage tease him. He groaned when he discovered there were no boxers underneath. “So hot.”

“I want…”

“Talk to me.”

“I want to come inside you.”

He pressed their lips together and then pulled back just enough to speak. “Would you like me to ride you in your lap?”

“Yes.” Aaron hissed.

Standing, Spencer quickly lost his shoes, trousers, and boxers before tugging Aaron’s jeans down just enough that he could pull the older man’s cock and balls free. “I love your balls.” He whispered into his ear. “So heavy. So ready.” Tugging the cage away, he watched Aaron’s dripping cock spring to life. “Fold your hands together behind your head. No touching.”

Aaron whimpered again but did as he was told. He trembled as slim fingers stroked him, using his own precome to slick him up. Those same fingers help him steady as his master slowly slid his glorious hole down his desperate prick. The tight heat was almost too much and he cried out as he tried to hold back. “I’m so close!” He fist ed his hands to try and hold back his orgasm.
“You feel so good inside me.” Spencer began to fuck himself up and down the cock. “I love feeling you inside me.” He watched Aaron’s features as desperation built inside him. “I’ve missed fucking you. Being fucked by you.”

Aaron’s entire focus now was on the single task of not coming until he has given permission. He could feel himself leaking desperately and knew that all too soon he would either need to come or be painfully unable to.

Spencer held himself off, he didn’t want their night to end with just one round. “Come for me, my love.”

He gasped for breath as his vision whited out.

==

There were hands on him, petting him, rubbing him. He was laying down on something soft, still in his jeans, though they were still pushed low enough that his cock was at risk of slipping back out of its limited confines.

He groaned and one set of hands stilled before a kiss was placed to his lips.

“You were so good, my love.” A familiar voice whispered. “May I fuck you? Fill you up the way you filled me?”

It took three tried for Aaron to find his voice. “Yes, Master.” He felt hands tugging his pants down and rolling him onto his stomach. Slick fingers pressed into his hole quickly, slicking him up before a similarly slicked up cock pressed at his entrance and slowly pushed in. He keened and lifted his hips, presenting his ass as the cock was swallowed into it.

“God, you feel so good.”

He let himself remain pliant, eyes closed as Spencer fucked him noisily. His still free cock twitched to life from the stimulation and friction of whatever he was laying on. As the pace increased and Spencer began to cry out, nearing his release, a rumbling moan worked its way out of Aaron as he came into the fabric beneath him. He could feel Spencer pulsing inside him as they both stilled.

When the cock was pulled away, he was rolled onto his side and a needy kiss was pressed to his lips. Hands pulled his jeans off and away and he was helped to roll to his side so he could get up. Standing, his eyes cracked open just enough to avoid tripping as he was led toward the bathroom. He could feel as Spencer’s spunk ran down his thighs.

A voice declaring the sight of him as so unbelievably hot clued him in that Garcia had been watching.

==

A month after the party, the team had been gathered quietly in the conference room, all hoping that if they appeared to be deep into a pressing case, the young woman in the bullpen trying to gather agents for the sexual harassment seminar would leave them alone. They knew their plan had failed when she stepped into the room.

“Agents? I do believe we’re just waiting on you now.”

Grumbling, the team began to file out one by one. They hated these things, but given the way some members of their team tended to talk to one another, it wasn’t really a surprise that they got called
in to attend them regularly.

Hotch gathered his files and turned to the woman. “I’m sorry, I can’t be there.”

She frowned at the man. This was her first time in the building, so she didn’t know any of the agents. “Why not?”

“I.” He glanced toward Dave and Morgan. “I have an important meeting with my lawyer.” He edged toward the door around her.

“Your lawyer?”

He glanced back toward his best friend again. “My divorce lawyer.” And he rushed out of the room, the sound of Rossi coughing and choking on his coffee following him as he went.

Following Rossi down the stairs, Morgan whispered. “He sure came up with that fast.”

“Yeah, it was my lie and he knew it.” He groused. “I used to use it to get out of these things when they were my fault.” He shot the younger man a dirty look. “I shouldn’t have to suffer through them when they’re yours.”

Morgan chuckled and shook his head, slapping Rossi’s shoulder.

==

Sitting in the seminar, Garcia wanted to sink into the floor, it felt like everyone was staring at her as the leader spoke. She was beyond relieved when her phone went off with an urgent message.

Rushing out to the elevators, she found Hotch waiting on her. “Did you know that meeting was all about me and Morgan?” She hissed at him.

He shrugged. “I could have guessed.” He handed her his phone. “Take a look at this.”

She read over the post on the screen. “Is this real? Is this happening?”

“Yes.” He led her onto the elevator. “And we’re headed to the Attorney General’s office to explain it.”

“Uhh, when you say we, you mean the whole team?”

He met her eyes, they had known this could always be a possibility. “I mean you and me.”

“Oh.” She was speechless, hurrying into the elevator car after him to head down to the garage.

As the doors opened into the parking structure, he could hear her breathing speeding up. Stopping and turning to her, he placed both hands on her shoulders. “Breathe, Garcia. Take slow, deep breaths.” He waited for her to obey. “Everything will be fine.”

“I- I have to talk in front of the Attorney General? I can’t do that. I can’t go in there and admit who I am, what I’ve done. That’s not me now, that was over a decade ago.”

“I know.” He squeezed her shoulders. “And you’re not going to be the one explaining things, I am.”

“But, Sir.” She started.
“Garcia, it’s going to be okay.”

She stared into his dark brown eyes and stilled. “Yeah, it’ll be fine. That was a long time ago.”

“And… You know I wouldn’t let them do anything to you. You are going first as a member of my team who has vital information.” He waited until she looked less frantic. “Okay?”

“Yeah. Yeah, let’s do this”

==

The conversation with the AG had gone better than Garcia had expected. True to his word, Hotch had done all of the talking while she had stood at his side, mostly in silence.

Hotch watched Garcia fidgeting with something in the galley and stood and walked down the aisle of the jet. He didn’t speak until he’d stepped in beside her and pulled the curtain closed.

“Penelope.” He started, softly.

She whirled around, back to the counter and stared up at him. “I’m scared.” She whispered so the others wouldn’t overhear. “I never wanted the rest of them to know about me, about my past.”

He sighed. “Morgan and Reid know.”

“Yeah, well, that’s already too many. I didn’t like that person I was back then.”

“I know.”

“I made it so you could find me as a way out.”

“I know, Penelope.”

“What if I said I can’t do this?” She shook her head, tears in her eyes.

Hotch swallowed and considered her a moment. “How about this. If I feel this is getting too overwhelming for you, if I think this is doing you more harm than it’s worth, I’ll pull you out of it. Okay?” He waited for her to nod. “Like anyone else, I don’t want to see you hurt by a case. But I need you on this one, more than any other. Can you trust me to be the one to decide that?”

Garcia considered it a minute. She trusted him, possibly more than anyone else. “Yeah. I can do that.”

“Good.” He gave her arm a squeeze and was surprised when she leaned across the small space and rested her forehead against his shoulder. Giving in for a moment, he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and let his cheek rest on her head.

==

Watching the lines of code rush across her screen, explaining some of what was happening to Morgan as numbers flashed by, Garcia gasped when the code’s signature appeared on the screen. It told her so much about who was behind the hack. Leaving Morgan confused at the desk, she rushed through the building until she found Hotch walking down a hall. Rushing her steps so she could catch up to his long stride, she called out. “Hotch!”

He turned around, hand on whatever door he’d been about to open. “Garcia. What’s wrong?”

“I know who’s behind this. I found the code with the signature.”
“And?”

“Happy fun meow meow.”

“But that’s…”

“Yeah. But there’s only one person brazen enough to use it and they know full well that using it would get them what they really want.”

“You.”

She nodded. “I really don’t want to do this anymore.”

“Go gather the others, I’ll be there in a minute and we’ll explain this to them. All of it.”

“But… You’re not coming right now?” She asked, trailing off when one of his brows rose in question. Her eyes trailed to where his fingers were now tapping on the fake wood door of the men’s room and he blushed bright red. “I’ll go get everyone together.” She turned and hurried away.

==

Once everyone was gathered in the conference room, she began to explain how hackers and code worked as well as what a signature was and why. It felt like every member of the team was watching her. And she hated it. To solve this case, she was going to have to open up about her past and tell these people who had become her friends, her family, just what she used to be. As she spoke, she looked at the faces of her teammates and wondered if she had lost all of their respect now. The fact that they were all drawn into this case was because she was on the team.

Once the meeting was over, she did her best to bolt from the room and find a quiet place to be for a while. She prayed that Hotch wouldn’t try to follow her.

==

The team watched Garcia flee the room and Hotch held up his hand. “Give her some space. Don’t everyone go rushing to try and comfort her all at once, you’ll only overwhelm her and she’s taking this a bit hard right now.”

Morgan shook his head. “Shouldn’t we be letting her know this doesn’t change anything?”

“Eventually, yes. Just… Give her a little space. I have a feeling this is going to get worse before it gets better and if it does, she will need friends to turn to then.” He stood and collected his things, sensing Dave trailing after him as he walked outside.

“This guy Shane, ex-boyfriend?” Rossi sked when they were both clear of the doors.

“Yes.” Aaron nodded.

“Abusive?”

“No. Not that I’ve ever been aware of anyway.”

“What has her so shook up then?” He shoved his hands in his pockets.

“Maybe seeing him after ten years? I really don’t know.” He dropped his files onto the hood of the SUV. “I told her to let me make the call on if and when to pull her out.”
“Are you impartial enough to do that?” He asked.

“No.” Aaron reluctantly admitted.

Aaron stood in the hall and watched through the window, listening as Garcia told Morgan about Shane, about her relationship with him. He tried to remember the Penelope Garcia from when they met. Nervous, despite her bravado. Meek at times when she thought no one was looking. He remembered the first time he saw her with her hair blonde and the thick make-up washed away, she’d looked so young.

When she appeared in the hallway on her way to change, he spoke up. “Garcia?”

“Sir?” She turned to him.

“You’ll be just fine. None of us will let anything happen.”

She gave him a soft smile. “I know, Sir.”

Back from the meeting with Shane, Morgan left Garcia with her laptop and tracked down their leader in a side office. “Hey.”

Hotch looked up from his paperwork. “How’d it go?”

“She got him to agree to discuss it. But. He seriously hit on some nerves with her.” He sat on the edge of another desk. “He knew about the Baby Girl thing, played on her insecurities. Claimed she used to be the strongest woman he knew and she infantilized herself. He accused her of walking in, getting caught on purpose to get away from him.”

Hotch’s brows pulled together. “And how’d she handle it?”

“She denied she and I were sleeping together, which had been his first thought, but she pretty much admitted to getting herself caught. Said she wanted a different life.”

Aaron sighed and tapped his pen on the table. “Stay with her? Keep an eye on her and if there’s anything I need to be aware of, let me know?”

“Sure, man.”

“Thanks.” He watched Derek start to leave. “Morgan?”

“Yeah?”

He glanced around. “Make sure she knows she’s still strong.”

“I will.”

Aaron watched her on the flight back to Virginia. Garcia looked much better, joking with Morgan and JJ and teasing Reid. He was happy she was able to easily move past the parts of the case that upset her. He worked on pouring he and Dave a drink when someone stepped into the galley beside him and drew the curtain closed.
“Thank you.”

He looked up at the bubbly blonde. “For what?”

“For just being there? This case sucked.”

“I know. Why don’t you go relax, we can talk about things later. Okay?”

“Yeah.” She opened the curtain and headed back to the poker game.

Aaron sat across from Rossi and handed him his drink.

“All is well now?” Dave asked.

“I think it will be,”

“They’re going to make her retake the seminar, you know. Since she walked out.”

“Yeah, well, I can’t do a whole lot about that.”

Dave chuckled. “If you asked her to stop, she would.”

“I’m not going to do that.”

He shook his head. “Works for me.”
Aaron stared at the expensive looking envelope lying in the center of his desk. He suspected that if he tracked down a ruler and measured, he’d find it was perfectly dead center. Carefully picking it up, he could feel the grain of the cream paper, heavier than a normal letter. He carefully slid his finger under the flap, releasing it, and pulled out a heavy card embossed in silver script.

It was an invitation, from Spencer no doubt, for the weekend of Valentine’s Day. There were instructions telling him to leave work early on Friday and head home to change, he would know what to wear when he got there. It said not to worry about Jack, arrangements had been made for him and to not worry about packing anything, everything he needed would be there already. A car would pick him up and take him to the arranged point.

Hotch sank down into his chair and wondered just what the younger man had planned.

==

Three evenings later, Aaron stood in his bedroom naked and stared at the clothing bag hanging from his closet door that hadn’t been there that morning. His breathing sped up slightly as he slowly pulled the zipper and revealed what was inside, a note taped to it said he was to only wear what was provided.

The first thing he pulled out was a pair of very expensive looking trouser socks, complete with garters. Nervously, he pulled them on, taking care to make sure they were clipped properly, and stood, catching sight of himself in the mirror. The view made him blush.

The pants were black and once he pulled them on, fitted. There hadn’t been any underwear in the bag and now he figured that was intentional. The length was perfect, better than his normal work suits even. He looked around for a belt, but found suspenders instead. Sitting them aside, he reached in for a shirt.

The black dress shirt was soft in his hands and even softer as he pulled it on. Through the delicate material, he could feel as his own fingers brushed down his chest, smoothing wrinkles. It was like wearing a second skin. Carefully tucking the shirt in, Aaron attached the suspenders and added the black tie, made of silk that felt very expensive. A black, fitted vest and suit jacket completed the look.

Staring at himself a moment in the mirror, Aaron couldn’t believe how the suit made him look. The fitted cut made him look taller and leaner and, somehow, more imposing. He found his best dress shoes and wiped them down before pulling them on. Biting his lip for a minute at the mirror, he decided to style his hair so that loose locks fell across his forehead like Spencer liked. Checking his watch, he gathered his phone and wallet, set the alarm and walked to the front of the building.

Parked at the curb was a Bentley with a driver waiting to open the door for him.

==

It was possibly the most exclusive restaurant in all of DC. Aaron stared up at the building as he was let out of the car. Lights along the walkway shone red, dimming the area, giving it a more intimate feel. Taking a slow breath, Hotch straightened and began to walk toward the door, ignoring the eyes he could feel following him. The way Spencer had dressed him was to intentionally put him on display. Just before he reached the door, Spencer appeared on the walk with a large, deep red
“You look wonderful.” Spencer’s eyes ran over Aaron.

Aaron took in the younger man’s own suit, nearly identical save for the deep red tie that perfectly matched the rose. “You do too.” He smiled shyly. When Reid leaned in and brushed a kiss to his check, he felt himself blush.

“Our reservation is ready.” Spencer took his hand and pulled him inside, leading him to a wall of booths with high backs, limiting who could see them. “I already placed our order, it should be out shortly.” He shared once they were settled and the wine poured.

“I’ve never been here before.” Aaron admitted. “I’ve heard good things though.”

“I wanted to do something special for you.” He reached across the table and took his hand, rubbing his knuckles with his thumb. “I have the whole weekend planned.”

“The whole weekend?” He was surprised.

Spencer nodded and then glanced up as the food arrived. “Eat up, you’ll need it.”

Aaron found himself excited to discover what was next.

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After dinner, Aaron was surprised when Spencer took his hand and started walking them up the street. They strolled slowly for several blocks until Spencer stopped in front of a hotel and stared expectantly at Aaron.

“What’s this?”

Spencer smiled. “We have a suite here for the weekend. Just you and I.”

Aaron turned and stared up. “You got us a room here?”

Moving in close, he pressed a kiss just below Aaron’s ear. “Yes. Are you ready to see what it looks like?”

==

The suite was large with windows that looked out over the city, sparkling in the darkness. There was a balcony off the main room that had a small kitchen and plenty of plush furniture. Aaron could just make out that there were bags in the closet, but he didn’t ask what was in them. The bathroom had a jacuzzi to fit two and a shower to match.

“Wow.” Aaron looked out over the city.

Spencer came up behind him, having shed his own jacket already, and wrapped his arms around him from behind. “It doesn’t come close to the beauty in this room. I knew when I bought that suit, it was perfect for you, I just didn’t anticipate you would look so hot in it.” He let his hands trail over Aaron’s body and along his thighs. “It almost makes me forget what I had planned for tonight.”

Aaron turned in his arms. “And what is that?”

Lazily thrusting his tented pants against Aaron’s thigh, he hummed. “I’m going to spread you out
on my bed and slowly unwrap you until you are begging to come. I’m going to take my time taking you apart.” He danced his fingers across Aaron’s ass. “Would you like that?”

Aaron let his head fall back, eyes closed. “Yes.”

Stepping back, Reid left the older man standing with his back to the window and moved to a chair, carefully removing each piece of his own suit until he was naked except for his opened dress shirt. He turned and stared at Aaron a moment, stroking his own cock as he did. “Take your jacket off.” He ordered and then watched with a low moan as Aaron complied. “Vest and shoes too.” He added.

Testing his boundaries, Aaron pivoted on his heels when he bent over to untie his laces, presenting Spencer with a view of his ass. He smirked when he heard another moan. “That was very naughty, Aaron.” Spencer chastised. “I think that stunt deserves a punishment.”

Standing upright, Aaron’s breathing sped up in anticipation. He waited until Spencer gestured for him to approach before he crossed the room and placed his hands where he was instructed on the back of the low couch.

“It’s a good thing I brought a nice assortment of equipment with me then.” Spencer moved to the closet and then came back with a wooden paddle. “No speaking unless you need to safeword. But first.” He reached along Aaron’s stomach and slipped down until he found the button of his slacks. Undoing it, he pressed the zipper down until Aaron’s caged cock hung free beneath him. “I promise you will get to come tonight and every night. You just have to be patient.” With that, he brought the paddle down for the first strike against Aaron’s ass. Aaron cried out in surprise and pain at the contact and then again when the paddle struck again. Spencer stopped when Aaron’s cries turned to trembling whimpers and he could see the long drips of precum leaking out of his dick. Putting the paddle aside, Spencer took his shoulders. “Stand for me.”

Aaron stood straight, body trembling and eyes nearly closed.

“Where are you?”

“Green.” Aaron whispered.

With nimble fingers, Spencer unbuttoned Aaron’s shirt, trying to ignore the whimpers as his fingers teased the man’s chest. Leaving the suspenders in place, he untucked the shirt and let it hang from his shoulders. With one hand, he wiped the fluid leaking from Aaron’s cock and coated his fingers before bringing it to his own lips and sucking it off, watching Aaron watch him. “You taste so good.”

A shiver ran through Aaron’s body at the words. “Please.” He begged softly.

“In time.” Taking his hand, Spencer led him to the bedroom and finally set his pants free, pushing them to the ground along with his socks and garters before removing both of their shirts.

Standing naked together, Spencer began to nip and suck his way down Aaron’s body until he was on his knees. “Sit, lean back.” He helped the older man sit back on the edge of the chair he’d positioned him in front of. Pushing Aaron’s knees wide, Spencer began to lick and kiss and nip his way along strong thighs before taking each of Aaron’s balls in his mouth and sucking on them. Opening the tube of lube he’d stashed under the chair earlier in the day, Spencer slicked up two fingers of one hand and adjusted so he could press them both into the ass hanging off the edge of the seat.
Aaron hissed and bucked at the intrusion, whining with need as he started being fucked by those fingers. He did his best to keep his legs apart as his body desperately tried to ride the fingers harder and faster. He could feel Spencer’s face nuzzling his hip, breath teasing his aching cock. He knew that mouth was right there and yet it was so far away.

“I love the way you smell.” Spencer shared. “So masculine and hot. To me it’s the best smell in the world.” With his other hand, Spencer set Aaron’s cock free and watched as it filled and swelled, desperate for release. “I love the way you taste too.” He carefully licked along the hot flesh, taking care not to over stimulate and make him come. “I’m going to milk you and make you come so hard.”

“Yes!” Aaron begged. “Yes please!”

He mouthed the head of his cock, sucking only slightly before pulling off and watching as hips thrust into the air. “I have loved you for so long.” He wrapped his hand around Aaron’s dick, but only stroked slowly. “I love that you trust me like this. Look at you. Fucking yourself on my fingers and trying to jack yourself off in my hand. So desperate to come and yet so trusting in me to let me decide when.”

His begging turned into whines and whimpers as a sheen of sweat broke out across his flesh.

Spencer glanced at the clock on the wall and stood as much as he could without releasing either hand. When the hands all lined up perfectly, he whispered. “Come for me, my love.” And he pressed a searing kiss to Aaron’s lips as he erupted like a fountain between them. He let Aaron continue fucking into his hands until he finally stilled, spent, and then pulled away. “Happy Valentine’s Day, my love.” He smiled as Aaron’s eye fluttered open. “It’s midnight.” He gave a small smile when Aaron’s only reply was a small huff. “I want to fuck you before we go to sleep, but first I need to get you into the bath. Stay right here, I’ll go draw it and come back for you.”

Aaron nodded but stayed silent as Spencer moved into the next room. He couldn’t believe he’d managed to ever get so lucky as to find someone like Spencer who loved him, cared for him, understood him. When the younger man reappeared, he could only muster a rather fucked-out looking smile.

==

Settled into the lavish tub filled with lavender scented water and overflowing with bubbles, Aaron relaxed and watched as Spencer adjusted the jets so that they were barely on and climbed in to join him. “I love you.” It slipped out almost on its own. Once he was over the surprise of having said it, Aaron smiled. “I love you.”

Sitting at the opposite end of the tub, Spencer lifted one of Aaron’s feet and poured some lotion into his hand before he started massaging. He remained silent as Aaron was slowly reduced the soft moans and whines each time he hit a tender spot. Alternating one side and then the other, he worked up his calves and then his thighs, taking pleasure in providing Aaron with so much bliss.

Once he’d massaged his arms and legs, Spencer turned off the jets and drained the tub, carefully pulling Aaron out and patting him dry. Leading him to the bed, he laid him on his back first, massaging his chest, stomach, and sides, before rolling him over, hips still on the towel, and working on his back.

Finally finishing, Spencer traded the lotion for lube and massaged it between the globes of his ass before coating his own cock and lining himself up. Straddling Aaron’s thighs, he sank in and began to fuck his relaxed body. Enjoying the sounds Aaron’s was making beneath him as he slammed in,
Spencer leaned forward and pressed kisses to his shoulders and back. “Come whenever you need to.” He picked up the pace.

He felt as Aaron’s muscles began to tremble moments before the man beneath him cried out and came, dragging his own orgasm free as he cried out as well.

Panting, Spencer pulled out and slipped off the bed, finding a damp cloth to clean them both up before pressing a new plug, slightly longer and thicker than the previous one, into Aaron’s ass and slipping the cage back into place. Once they woke up, they could play again.

==

Aaron had enjoyed the huge cooked breakfast Spencer had ordered for them. Belly full of eggs and bacon, he was instructed to make himself comfortable, naked, on the couch. Two chapters into his book, Aaron learned just what made the new plug unique when a slight movement by Spencer’s hand set his world alight. Arching up off the couch, Aaron cried out in surprise before settling back down as the low buzz just barely stimulated his prostate. Unsure how to respond, he turned to Spencer and gave him an asking look.

Spencer smiled and crossing the room, petting him. “Shh. I want you to be able to handle at least level three without being too distressed and then we’ll play. This is only one. I’ll give you a bit and then raise it.”

Aaron nodded. “Yes, Master.” The smile he received made pride swell in his chest.

==

Aaron found that level three made him break out in a fine sweat and made it impossible to finish the chapter. Panting, he tried to shift on the couch to ease the stimulation but no position seemed to calm his nerves. As suddenly as the vibrating had started, it stopped. Before he had a chance to process the sudden loss, Spencer was there, hand under his chin offering him a glass of cool water. Finishing the glass, the hands moved away but returned almost immediately with a cool cloth, wiping sweat from his skin. He looked up as Spencer tugged him to his feet.

“I want you to go clean up. Take the plug out and wash it up too.” Spencer gently kissed his lips. “I need to step out for a bit, but when I get back we’re going to play. We’ll need a stack of towels, the lube and our ties from last night.” He brushed hair out of Aaron’s eyes. “Can you gather that?”

Aaron nodded.

“Go on. I left some bottles of water in there on the counter, make sure to drink.” He gave him another kiss before finishing getting dressed and leaving the hotel room.

Carefully, Aaron made his way into the bathroom and placed one foot on the lid of the toilet, wincing as he removed the plug before washing it and himself. He worked at sipping through a bottle of water as he took care of business and gathered what Spencer had instructed plus a few things he found around the suite. Folding two towels together, he made a kneeling pad and checked the clock. It had been forty-five minutes since Spencer had left, surely he would be back soon. Glancing at the items he’d laid out, Aaron decided to go ahead and kneel, chin to his chest and hands folded behind his back, and wait.

==

Spencer stepped into the suite and stopped. In the middle of the main room knelt Aaron waiting on him. Beside him on the floor were the supplies he’d instructed the older man to gather as well as
the whip he’d had in the bag in the closet. Closing the door and locking it, Spencer put down the things he’d brought back and moved to stand in front of Aaron, picking up the whip. “Are you wanting me to use this?”

“Yes, Master.” He didn’t look up.

“May I tie your wrists?”

“Yes, Master.” He repeated.

Putting the whip back down, Spencer grabbed the black tie and knotted it around his wrists and hands. “May I gag you?”

“Yes, Master.”

Spencer knotted his own tie and carefully put it in Aaron’s mouth, making sure it wasn’t so tight that his jaw would ache or it would leave marks. Finished, he collected the whip and stroked Aaron hair once before he began to mark the older man’s back with it.

Aaron was very vocal, crying out at first and then working himself down to lower keens as his mind finally let go and let him float away. He knew that no matter what happened, Spencer would take care of him. He trusted the younger man implicitly. He didn’t notice when his trembling body finally sagged back and his head fell forward. He was still trembling when Spencer put the whip aside and tipped his chin up, pulling the gag loose. His eyes were only cracked open, he stared blearily up unseeing as his Master stroked his face, speaking to him. Voice falling on unhearing ears. He wanted to say to him that he trusted him with his entire being, but he couldn’t get his mouth to form the words.

His hands were freed and he was laying on his stomach on the soft carpet. Aaron allowed himself to float away in his mind, the peace only interrupted when hands started massaging cool oils into his back. He knew Spencer would be wanting to press him with more water and probably to talk, but it felt so good to know he was taking care of him.

==

Spencer kept an eye on Aaron as he assembled what he’d planned for lunch, waiting for the older man to work his way back up. When he started to see signs of movement, he sat beside him and began to stroke his hair and face. When brown eyes fluttered open, he smiled. “Hey. Where’d you go?”

Drawing in a deep breath, Aaron rolled carefully to his back and stared up. “All I could think was how I trust you with my everything. I knew I could let go because you are here.” His voice was rough, raw from yelling against the gag.

Reid nodded. “Okay. How about let’s not do that again though? It means more than you could ever know that you trust me that much, but you finding subspace takes years off my life I think.” He chuckled, trying to lighten the mood. “As you can guess, I have water for you. And lunch. I was hoping to sit out on the balcony and cuddle after we eat.”

Aaron pushed upright. “That sounds lovely.”

==

The balcony was surrounded by a solid wall just tall enough that the pair could walk out naked without putting on a show. The afternoon air was brisk, but not so cold that they couldn’t get away
with a blanket off the bed and some shared body heat.

Aaron sat in one chair while Spencer brought out some cut up fruit and a fondue pot of chocolate. Straddling Hotch’s lap, he picked up a piece of fruit and dipped it before feeding it to the older man who moaned with pleasure at the taste. Swallowing, Aaron smiled up at him. “I ate lunch, but I’m still famished.”

“Lots of sex will do that to you.” He offered up another piece of fruit.

Shifting to spread his legs slightly, Aaron leaned back and enjoyed the hum of need that pulsed through his body. He didn’t try to hide the way his hips wanted to thrust up against where Spencer’s balls were laying against him. Even as he was being fed, he was hyper aware of every point in which they were touching. Fingers started touching him, teasing his skin and making him squirm even more. He knew the moment Spencer started to harden as well, leaking against his stomach.

Pressing a kiss to Aaron’s lips, Spencer could taste the fruit and chocolate on his tongue. “Before we leave, I want to fuck you and be fucked by you out on this balcony.” He smirked when Aaron moaned at the thought. “I see you would enjoy that as well. Maybe tonight then, under the stars.” Stroking himself a moment, Spencer stood and tugged Aaron to his feet. “First I want to go play with that plug some more, see how many times I can make you come on your knees. Are you up for more play?”

Taking a chance at taking charge, Aaron pulled Spencer’s face close and kissed him roughly.

==

His knees were spread wide on the towel pad, another towel between them to keep them spread the correct distance apart. His cock was still bound and leaking, the anal plug was reseated in his ass, he’d been told it was turned up to three. Hands folded behind his head, Aaron exhaled as the wheel he loved tracked over his front and back in unpredictable patterns before switching to gentle tracking along his inner thighs. He felt his body shake as the leaking increased. Moments later the cage was tugged away and his desperate dick sprung to life, curling up toward his stomach as the wheel was replaced with the vibrator Spencer liked to tease him with. It teased around his balls before just brushing the head of his cock. He shouted as he came hard, the stimulation from but toys almost too much.

He loved being teased over the edge, but he loved to have Spencer buried inside him even more. Daring to speak, he tipped his head back. “Please fuck me.”

“Soon.” Spencer made sure he drank enough water before guiding his hands down to his sides. “On all fours, would you like that?”

Aaron answered by dropping onto his hands, relaxing as more lube was added to his ass as the toy was removed. He was sensitive now and starting to get sore, but he knew he could handle being fucked first.

Getting into position behind Aaron, Reid encouraged him to walk his hands forward some until he was in something like a push-up position. His own knees in between the older man’s, he lined up and sank in, setting a hard pace from the start. He wrapped one hand around Aaron’s cock and began to stroke, feeling as it twitched to life. “You will come again, my love. When I tell you, you will come for me.” He panted as the ball of arousal that he’d been carrying around low in his belly all day swelled and threatened to burst through. “Are you ready for me, my love? Are you ready for me to fill you until you’re full?”
“Yes! Please fill me!”

“Then come for me.” He ordered, feeling Aaron go instantly rigid beneath him, coating the towel and carpet with his seed, the sight making Spencer come as well, filling Aaron up. Slipping out quickly, he watched the ass before him still quivering, come oozing out. With his free hand, he caught some of it with his fingers and pressed them into Aaron’s ass, mesmerized by how hot and slick and open Aaron was. “I could spend my whole life fucking you.”

Arms giving in to the trembling, Aaron collapsed to the floor as Spencer played with his ass. He wished he could see the younger man’s face right then, but wasn’t ready to break the moment.

==

The evening had been filled with Spencer pressing Aaron into eating what had to have been the biggest steak and baked potato he’d ever seen for dinner. The meat had been cooked to perfection, practically melting like butter in his mouth. Once they’d gotten up from the floor, Spencer had settled him into the tub again, washing him and making sure he was okay. The entire evening had made Aaron feel like a king. Spencer had anticipated his every want and need before he was even aware of it and had cared for him down to the smallest detail.

Belly full, they had retired to the bed and had gently cuddled and petted one another. Arousing slightly without trying to get off. Their lips were red and swollen from making out time and again, necks and shoulders littered with marks from kisses and bites. It was hard to tell who enjoyed the hours just silently touching one another more.

Once darkness had settled fully over the city, Spencer tugged Aaron up from the plush bedding. “Let’s go outside.” He whispered. “We’re going to take turns. I want you inside me and then me inside you tonight.” Pulling their bodies together, he kissed him. “I want you to push me against the wall out there and fuck me. You have such beautiful muscles; I want you to hold me there so I’m at your mercy.”

Aaron nodded, pulling away and taking the lead on heading through the sliding door. Once the door closed, he turned and lifted Spencer, pressing his back against the cool concrete. Finding his mouth, he used his tongue to fuck it while he took the bottle of lube from the younger man’s hand and poured some out.

He lifted one of his legs and pressed two fingers in just as Spencer had done to him before quickly pulling away and slicking up his cock. Catching Spencer behind both knees, he folded them up to his slim chest before lowering that tight ass onto his throbbing prick. Thrusting up quickly, he held him folded against the wall until he was grunting out his release. Anticipation of what was about to happen kept him from going completely soft as he pulled out and dropped Spencer’s feet back to the floor.

Once his feet were on the floor again, Spencer pressed against Aaron’s shoulders until he was turned and leaning over the rail of the balcony. “Watch the world out there. See them going about their lives while I fuck you senseless up here? Make them hear you, hear what I do to you.” He sank into the other man and began to move. “I want to hear you. You don’t have to wait for permission.”

At first he was slightly self-conscious about being loud, but soon enough his already sensitive nerves were sending him into overload and he was calling out, begging to whoever was listening only his body finally released again as Spencer came inside him.

He didn’t remember later being led back to bed.
Aaron spent all of Sunday in bed. He woke to Spencer bringing in another lavish breakfast and enjoyed as the younger man fed him bites of toast between his bites of eggs and sausage. After breakfast he’d been allowed up to take care of things in the bathroom before he was pointed back to bed where his muscles were soothed with a warm oil massage.

Lunch was much the same as breakfast though the meal was lighter. A spring salad with vinaigrette dressing alongside pasta and tomatoes in a light sauce. He fed himself while Spencer sat cross legged at his feet eating and watching him at the same time.

Once the dishes had been returned to the other room, Aaron finally asked. “Is there a plan for today?”

“Not really. I wanted to take care of you for a while.”

“You could.” He blushed. “You could join me and we could take care of each other.”

One brow rose before Spencer nodded and crawled into the bed beside him. Together they repeated their stroking and kissing from the night before, this time also stroking one another’s dicks as they moved together. As the afternoon ticked on, Aaron slid down the bed, pushing the sheets away as he finally took Spencer’s cock in his mouth. He sucked the member down, opening his throat when the tip bumped the back, until hands tugged him up and away.

“Roll onto your back.” Spencer whispered.

“But…” He tried to protest.

“Shh, you will, I promise.” He waited until the older man obeyed before turning himself around, supported on elbows and knees and he lined his own mouth up with Aaron’s prick. Swallowing him down, he moaned when Aaron did the same. Together, they worked each other with their mouths until they couldn’t hold back any longer.

Spencer came first, curling his spine as he unloaded his seed down Aaron’s throat. Picking up the pace with his mouth, he swallowed the cock down as far as he could, letting the muscles of his throat massage Aaron’s release out of him.

Both spent, they fell asleep wrapped together.

==

While they waited for dinner to be brought up, Spencer tugged Aaron into the large shower for the first time, slipping the cage into place as the water warmed. “I wanted to take you in here just once.” He pressed his lips to the back of his neck. “Hands against the wall, we’ll have to be quick before dinner gets here.”

Aaron gasped as Spencer’s prick pressed into his ass, no longer needing stretched. He shook and keened but was unable to come as Spencer finished. He knew he would never be left unfulfilled, so Spencer must be planning to play again after they ate. When the water shut off and their normal play plug was pulled out, he held up a hand. “No.”

Spencer stilled. “Okay.” He put it away and fetched their towels, drying them both off.

He was always taken a bit aback that with Spencer it was that simple. He said no and there was no arguing, no questions. “I know you wanted to keep your come inside me but…” He felt his flesh
heat up. “I’d really like to feel you. In me. On me.”

Understanding what his partner was wanting, he nodded before passing him one of the provided robes to wear.

==

Wanting to enjoy their final evening before having to head back to the real world and work the next morning, Spencer and Aaron took their time making love, Aaron on his back with Spencer hovering over him. The cage and all other distractions and restrictions out of the way, they tried their best to make their coupling last all night.

The following morning, Aaron finished getting ready in the room while Spencer ran all of their bags down to his car. They would ride in to work together and then Spencer would drop him off at the end of the day.

Aaron was surprised when Spencer returned and looked at him with burning need in his eyes. They were both already in their suits for work, but it didn’t stop Spencer from stripping them from hip to mid thigh and taking Aaron quickly against the wall by the door one last time before they left. The burning desire that had been in those hazel eyes as he’d kissed him and fucked him simultaneously left Aaron speechless clear up until he was sitting at his desk in his office.

==

Dave strolled up the steps to head to his office, coffee in one hand and briefcase in the other. He started to pass Hotch’s office but hesitated at the sight of his friend just staring into space. Backing up, he knocked on the door frame. When his friend looked up, he asked. “You okay?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah, great. I’m great.” He shifted in his chair.

“You were staring into space.”

A hint of red showed along his collar. “A bit tired maybe, but I’m okay.”

“Good weekend?”

The tinge deepened. “Yes.” He adjusted again.

“Do anything special?” Dave was curious now about the blushing and the fidgeting.

“Uh. Spencer reserved a suite in the city.”

“Ah, I see. So tell me…”

Aaron’s distant gaze suddenly shifted and narrowed on his friend.

Dave couldn’t help but smirk as he asked. “Can you walk?”
Aaron looked around the kitchen and living room, tying his tie as he searched. “Has Jack come out yet?”

Spencer looked over at the table and then up at the father. “I haven’t seen him yet.”

Frustrated, Aaron headed back down the hall, knocking on his son’s door before going in, shocked to see the boy still sprawled out asleep in bed. Pulling the covers back, he tried to rouse him. “Hey, Jack! Come on! You’re going to be late for school! Didn’t your alarm go off?” He started pulling out his uniform. “Up, up, up!”

Groaning, Jack pulled his head out from under his pillow and glared at his father. “Leave me alone! Can’t I just sleep?”

Frowning at his son’s raised voice. “There’s no need to shout and no, you have to go to school. If you aren’t getting enough sleep, maybe you need to go to bed earlier.”

Rolling out of bed and landing on his feet, Jack narrowed his eyes. “Why can’t you just leave me alone? All you do is bug me about stuff!” He snapped, storming to the bathroom and slamming the door.

Alone in the room, Aaron stared from the closed door down to the bed where just the night before he’d tucked in his sweet, loving son.

“What was all that about?” Spencer appeared in the doorway, drying his hands on a kitchen towel.

“I have no idea.” Aaron’s eyes were wide as he tried to figure out where pod-Jack had come from.

==

Spencer had placed Jack’s normal breakfast of toast and cereal out for him, then watched in shocked silence as the still angry boy devoured all of it and started rummaging through the cabinets until he finally made himself two peanut butter sandwiches, starting on one as he made the second. When Jack pushed past him to leave the room, Spencer finally spoke. “Hey! You say excuse me, don’t just shove through!”

Jack rolled his eyes. “Whatever!”

One hand shot out and grabbed his arm. “No, not whatever! We have rules in this house and respect for one another is one of them!”

“You’re not my dad and this isn’t your house!” Jack cut, smirking when Spencer yanked his hand back as if he’d been burned.

Neither adult said much of anything again until Jack had been dropped off at the school. Alone together in the car, Aaron finally cleared his throat. “What the hell was all that?”

==

Putting the incidents of the morning behind him, Aaron dove into the files stacked on his desk and didn’t come up for air until his cell phone pinged to remind him it was time to pick up Jack. Pulling up to the school, he waited nervously for his turn at the front of the building, surprised to see his
son happily playing with other boys he didn’t recognize. They were smiling and joking around.

When Jack climbed into the car, it was with a cheerful. “Hi Dad! How was work?” Followed up closely with. “Can we have meatball subs for dinner?”

“Sure.” Happy that whatever mood that had plagued his son at breakfast was now gone, he didn’t press to ask any questions.

“When will dinner be? Can we stop for a snack on the way home?”

“Uh, well, we’ll have to stop at the store to buy stuff for subs, but I guess you can get something from the place next door while I grab what we need.”

“Yes!” The boy danced in his seat all of the way to the parking lot, holding his hand out for money before dashing into the small restaurant without so much as a backward thank you.

Shaking his head, Aaron hurried down the aisles, managing to meet Jack at the registers at the front. He watched his son inhale a cheeseburger in just a few bites. “Wow, you were hungry, didn’t you eat lunch?”

“Yeah, but it was little.” He handed back the change, a little over a dollar.

“Where’s the rest of it?”

“Rest of what?”

“My change?”

“Oh.” He glanced at the mostly empty bag in his hand. “Umm…”

Aaron’s brows crept up. “How much food did you get?”

Jack shrugged but didn’t answer. “Are we ready to go home now?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

==

It was late and Aaron was sitting at his home desk working on performance reviews when Jack crept in and tried to squeeze onto the heavy leather office chair behind his left arm. The boy was quiet, but hard to ignore and Aaron finally gave in, putting down his pen and sitting back, pulling Jack fully onto his lap. Jack hadn’t taken up space on his lap in a long time, his son was getting older and those moments seemed to be mostly in the past. “What’s up? You should be in bed.”

“Just wanted to snuggle you.” He leaned to the side, tucking himself into the crook of his dad’s arm. His lip popped out in a pout.

“I’m always happy to snuggle you.” He gave him a squeeze.

“Is Spencer mad at me?”

“I don’t think so. Why would he be mad at you?”

Jack shrugged. “He’s not here tonight.”

“He had a few things to take care of and I’m doing some reviews so it just worked out that he went
to his place. You couldn’t do anything to make him go away, Jack. He loves you.”

Tears filled his eyes as his voice shifted to sounding younger and smaller. “Mommy loved me too and she went away. Was she mad at me?” He sniffled.

“Hey, I’ve told you, Mommy loved you very much and she didn’t just go away, a bad guy hurt her while she was trying to protect you.” He pulled his son close. “We’ve talked about this before, Jack.”

“I know. I just kept thinking about Mommy today at school and then Spencer wasn’t here tonight for dinner and it was lonely and it made me even more sad.”

Aaron checked his watch. “Well, Spencer should be done soon with his thing, maybe we can call and talk to him?” He felt the boy nod against his chest. “Okay.” He pressed a kiss to blonde hair.

==

Days passed and the pair put Jack’s outbursts behind them, everyone was entitled to an off day now and again.

One morning several weeks later, a quiet and almost sullen looking Jack was seated at the breakfast table.

Spencer blushed when Aaron crowded in close behind him, using his own body to shield his son from where his hands were wandering. “He’ll see.” Spencer almost silently admonished.

Aaron nipped at his neck, feeling his cock start to strain against its confines. “What if I drop him off and call us in for a half day?”

Rolling his eyes, he guided Aaron’s hand to grip his own hardening cock, thrusting slowly into the larger palm as he took a drink of his coffee. Moaning when the older man applied slight pressure. “Okay, call. Just this once though.” They’d made love the night before, but with Jack at school, they’d be able to play a little.

Aaron pulled away and went in search of his phone while Spencer stayed pressed to the counter to hide his obvious arousal.

Jack had watched both men getting ready for work from his spot at the table. When his dad had vanished from the room, he worked up the nerve to ask Spencer. “How come you two aren’t married?”

Spencer coughed and choked on his drink. Recovering, he took a seat across from Jack. “We’ve talked about it a little. Why?”

Jack shrugged. “You’re always here or we are always at your place. If you got married, maybe we could live all in one place.” He sighed. “You’ve been together forever.”

He glanced up in the direction his partner had gone. “Not forever, but maybe as far back as you can remember.” He tipped his head to the side and gave Jack a questioning look. “Your dad didn’t want there to be a whole bunch of changes in your life.”

“Changes? I think I’m almost the only kid in my class who has both parents still together.”

“But…” Spencer bit his lip. “I’m not your parent.”
Jack raised his gaze to the genius, giving him a hard look that rivaled his father’s.

Cutting his son off before he could start, Aaron stepped into the room and raised his hand. “Tell you what, we all need to get going so we’re not late, but how about we make a plan to all sit down and get everything out in the open. Okay? We’ll all be honest and you can ask all of your questions without having to worry about getting to school and work. Does that sound okay?”

The boy thought a minute before nodding. “Yeah, that sounds okay.”

Aaron returned from the school run to find Spencer quietly sitting on the couch. It was clear by the look on his face that sex wasn’t on his mind. “Spence?”

“A few weeks ago he yelled at me that I wasn’t his dad and this wasn’t my house. Today he refers to me as one of his parents.”

With a sigh, he took a seat beside him. “Yeah, he’s been all over the place lately. Angry then happy, clingy and sad then laughing and playing. I’ve seen him after school lately with a different group of boys.”

“You think it could be to do with that?”

“I have no idea. Jess hasn’t said anything about his behavior with her so I don’t know if it’s just around me he’s acting this way or what.”

“Oh.” He stared at the wall across the room, thinking. “I’m sorry if I killed the mood.”

Hotch took his hand. “Not your fault. Sometimes being a parent sucks.”

Spencer huffed a chuckle.

“Well, we don’t have to be at work till after lunch. We can just hang out or we can go back to the bedroom and see if we can relocate that mood.”

Reid finally turned to look at him. “I suppose, as parents, we really owe it to all of parent-kind to seize the moment and do something.”

The team had arrived in Mississippi in the early hours of the following morning and had hit the ground running. No one was willing to stop to rest with a girl’s life on the line.

Aaron shook his head as he drove out to the abduction site to keep himself focused. Dave caught the movement from the passenger seat. “You okay?”

“Yeah, fine. Was a long day already even before this.”

Aaron quietly watched the girl’s mother pace and scream her fears and frustrations out. Time was of the essence, but he needed her help to get things moving along and to do that, she needed time to vent. When it looked like she was calming down, he finally spoke, keeping his voice soft and even to help her calm even further. “I need your help.”

“Anything!”
“I need you to tell me about Gabby.” He listened as she lovingly told him all about Gabby and then asked her if her daughter would go with strangers. When she realized they were suspicious of her ex, she instantly handed over the numbers she had to reach him in an emergency. He hurriedly relayed them to Garcia.

==

Morning broke just in time for a team to drag charred remains out of a creek. Their suspect was indeed guilty, just not of taking the missing girl.

Aaron watched their only suspect through the mirrored glass and considered his options on getting the man to talk. His burns looked bad, and painful. His nose curled slightly at the memory of the burned flesh smell from earlier. He’d talked to more than one victim in a burn ward in his career, it was a smell he would never get used to.

By the time he was in the room with Ian, Hotch was angry. How could someone do something to a little girl? With the father alive there was always a chance the girl was alive, but with the father dead…

==

The day and the case seemed to tick by endlessly as rush by like a torrent. Too many people were involved, too many keeping their own secrets. At the point that he had been up over twenty-seven hours, Aaron stepped outside the station for a moment of fresh air. Minutes later, Spencer was standing next to him.

“I know I’m not really a parent, but I can’t understand the impulse to harm a child.” Reid shoved his hands in his pockets.

“Yeah, well, if everyone felt that way, which they should, we’d be about out of a job.”

“If the aunt is involved, I have a really bad feeling about Gabby’s outcome.”

He nodded. “Me too.”

Spencer leaned to the side slightly, letting their shoulders bump. “I’m a bit upset right now that this is rural Mississippi and we won’t be here long enough for a hotel.”

Aaron finally looked his way and gave him a confused look.

Spencer smiled slightly. “You look like you could use a hug.”

==

Deciding on a course of action with the aunt, Hotch waited for Rossi to start before he came in to play the hard ass and press her buttons. When Dave had suggested he was the best agent for the job, he’d frowned at his friend. Most of the team was good at knowing how to push buttons, Dave frequently did it for sport, but he agreed that the aunt saw him as the highest-ranking agent and would react more strongly to him.

The right hook had honestly surprised him.

==

Spencer’s head shot up when Rossi was suddenly dragging Hotch through the station toward the
bathroom. Concerned, he dropped his paperwork and marker and followed after. “What happened?”

Dave glanced back as he ushered the taller man through the door. “She sluged him good.”

“What?” Once the bathroom door clicked shut, he was rushing forward to check the damage.

“I’m fine!” Aaron insisted. “I’m fine, no damage!” He tried to wave them off as he worked to clear his head. “She caught me by surprise is all.”

Spencer lifted Aaron’s chin. “Your jaw is bleeding and there’s a mark under your eye, but I don’t think anything is broken.”

He hissed when his cheekbone was prodded. “Just give me some tissues and stop making a fuss. I’m fine. The point was to see if she would react to being challenged.” He could feel the ache starting already, but he wasn’t going to give Spencer that just yet.

“But did your face have to be involved?” He hadn’t realized he was standing between Aaron’s legs where he was almost perched now on the counter, pressed together from hip to chest, until strong arms wrapped around his back.

“I didn’t plan on it, Spence, I’m sorry.” He gave his partner a small pout before tucking his head and nipping at his neck, making his squeak. “I promise to be more careful.” He whispered before starting to brush their lips together.

“That’s it, you’re just fine! I’m opening this door now!” Dave spoke up, reminding them he was still standing there. He smirked as both agents jumped apart with innocent looks on their faces. “Yeah, yeah. Wash up, we have a girl to find.”

==

Jack was disappointed when it was Aunt Jessica, not his dad or Spencer, out front of the school to pick him up at the end of the day. Sagging into her car, he huffed.

“Hey, Kiddo! How was your day?”

He grunted in answer. “Why aren’t they back yet?” He frowned.

“They should be back soon.” She answered, glancing at him. “What’s up?”

“Dad said we could all sit down and talk but now they’re gone again. Why do they have to both be gone all the time?”

Jess considered her words for several blocks before speaking. “Their job is important. Not many people are as good at it as their team is. But while they’re gone, they both wish they could be here with you and they worry about you and you know they’re always so happy to get back to you.”

“I asked yesterday morning why they weren’t married.” When his aunt didn’t answer, he carried on. “They’ve been together forever, it’s like they’re already married but just not living together. I like our place and I like Spencer’s place, but on the nights we aren’t together, we always miss the person who isn’t there.”

“What did your dad say?”

He shrugged. “Nothing.
Neither of them spoke until they got to the apartment. Letting them in, Jess watched her nephew take off to his room and sighed. She’d have to call Aaron later and let him know what was going on, she only hoped their case would be finished soon.

==

The jet was quiet on the flight home. They’d been running for two days straight and mixed with the emotions of the case, everyone was beat.

Dave strolled down the aisle, checking on everyone as he made his way to the galley where Hotch was making tea. “Everyone’s asleep.”

Hotch nodded.

“You know, I never really saw it until today.”

“Saw what?” He pitched his voice low to match his friend’s whisper.

Dave arched a brow at his. “You two.”

“I’m sorry.”

He raised a hand. “No, that’s not what I was getting at. Listen, we’ll talk, properly talk, later, but… I know I bust your chops about it most of the time, but it suits you.” He patted his friend’s shoulder.

Aaron blushed. “Thanks.”

==

After a quick phone call from Jess, Aaron and Spencer had agreed that despite their exhaustion, talking to Jack needed to be their first priority.

With Aaron on the sofa, Jack next to him, and Spencer curled into the chair across from them, they had already eaten dinner and were ready to talk.

“Okay, Jack, we’re all here together, what questions do you have?”

The boy chewed his lip. “When did you two meet each other? Some of my friends talk about their parents meeting new people, but I don’t remember a before Spencer.”

Aaron took a deep breath. “Spencer started working on the team a couple years before you were born.”

“You were still with Mom?”

Hotch nodded.

“Is that why Mom had boyfriends?” His voice sounded so innocent when he asked it.

“Where’d you hear that?” Aaron’s tone went slightly sharp.

He shrugged. “Aunt Jess. She was talking to someone on the phone one time and she was angry. She told the person to remember Mom wasn’t a saint and said she had boyfriends.”

“No, Jack, that wasn’t why. He was just a member of the team at first, then just a friend. We were
really good friends…”

“Best friends?” The boy cut in.

“Yeah, Jack, until your mom died. You don’t remember a before Spencer because even before there was a Spencer and I, he was still there as my friend.”

“Oh.” He glanced at the man tucked quietly in the chair. “Joel’s mom’s new boyfriend doesn’t really like kids and always makes her make Joel spend the night with his grandma. But… You like me.”

Spencer nodded. “I do.”

“Do you have any more questions, Jack?” Aaron placed a hand on his son’s shoulder.

Jack ducked his head. “I dunno.”

“We said we’d answer everything, is there anything else going on that maybe you have questions about?”

The boy shrugged.

“I saw you had some new friends at school.” Aaron tried. “Are they in your class?”

“No. They’re in fifth grade. They’re big kids.”

“Are they nice to you?” He wondered if maybe his son was being bullied.

“I guess so. They like to talk to me because I’m cool they said. They tell me about what they talk about in their class.”

“Like what?”

He shrugged again, a blush tinting his ears. “Nothing.”

“Jack?”

With a huff, the small blonde was on his feet, tossing his arms into the air. “Can’t you just leave it alone! They said a teacher took all the girls into another classroom and then talked about how their junk was going to change and look different and they talked about what some of their insides did and stuff.” He was pacing now, reminding both stunned adults of his father. “One of the boys had got online at home and looked it up to see if they were lying and found some movies about how it all worked. They were all talking about it and I asked them and they brought his tablet to school and after lunch we snuck to the bathroom one day and they showed me it.”

Aaron’s jaw was hanging open as he searched for the right words. “They showed you… videos? Of grown-ups…?” He looked to Spencer for some help.

Jack pushed on. “The videos were all of girls and boys doing stuff to each other. Some of their boobs were huge.” He paused, his eyes unfocusing as he thought back to what he’d been mesmerized by. “But I just had more questions and I was afraid to ask them.”

Steeling himself, Aaron took a deep breath. “What questions, Jack?”

He finally turned back to his dad. “How do boys have sex with each other?”
Hotch peered out from under a pillow as Spencer stumbled around in the dark trying to get dressed. “What’s wrong?” His voice was gravelly from sleep.

“Nothing. Garcia and I planned on working out this morning, I’ll be back soon. Go back to sleep.”

“Work out?” He was confused. They were the two members of the team, after only maybe Dave, least likely to ever work out.

“Yeah. I promised to do it with her.”

Aaron huffed. “So?”

“If I’m not ready, she’ll use her key to get in and you know she isn’t at all bothered by seeing us naked and potentially wrapped together. Do you really want to start your week with Garcia checking you out naked?”

“No.”

Leaning over the bed, he pecked a kiss to his lips. “Sleep. I promise to bring back coffee and a much better start to your morning.”

Aaron hummed in approval of that plan and burrowed back under the sheets.

==

Penelope and Spencer slowly made their way back into their building, huffing and holding their sides. He tried one last time. “Are you sure we can’t get Morgan to help us? Or maybe Aaron even? He’s good at running. He does it for fun.”

She pulled a face. “How can anyone enjoy doing that for fun. And no, he can’t know we can’t do this. We have to be able to pass!”

“I’ve never had to do this before.” He panted.

“Yeah, me neither. But we got our letters and we will do this! We won’t let our team down.”

“No. No letting down. Crap, I forgot coffee.” He leaned against his door. “I promised Aaron coffee and a better start to his morning.” He let his head thud against the wood. “I don’t think I have it in me for sex.”

She snickered and watched him open the door.

Spencer stepped into his own apartment and watched Aaron rushing around, fully dressed, gathering his things. “What?”

“We have a case.” He glanced to Jack’s area. “Ca you ride in separate? I need to get to the office, Jessica is on her way to get Jack.”

“Yeah, sure. I need a shower and stuff first.”

Carefully kissing him, Aaron hurried for the door. “I’ll see you there.”
“See you.”

==

Case over and everyone back in the office, Morgan knocked on Hotch’s door.

“Come in.” He looked up at his second in command. “What’s up?”

Derek held a sheet of paper. “Have either Garcia or Reid said anything to you about having to take the physical fitness test?”

“No. I’ve always handled their exemptions, but honestly I’ve been so busy I hadn’t noticed that I haven’t seen them yet this year.”

He handed over the sheet of paper. “They’re on my roster for tomorrow’s testing.”

Aaron sank back in his seat and shook his head. “Before the case, Reid said something about working out with Garcia.”

“So, what? They’re seriously going to try and take it?”

“Sounds like it.”

Morgan smirked. “Well, this oughta be fun.”

==

Spencer stumbled through his door and collapsed onto the floor just inside. A snicker told him Hotch was there to witness his pain. Without moving to look up, he spoke mostly to the floor. “If Morgan is missing or found dead, I know nothing.” He felt the vibrations as someone walked across the floor until a pair of black dress socks were stopped near his nose. Twisting, he caught the smile on Hotch’s face. “You knew!”

“Yes. Morgan stopped by my office last night when he got the sheet of tests for today.” He crouched down. “Why didn’t either of you just say something?”

“We didn’t want to sound whiny.”

With a sigh, he replied. “Spencer… I’ve been signing waivers for both of you for ten years.”

“You have?”

“I lost track of the dates and hadn’t realized I hadn’t done it yet. I’m sorry.”

“You’re sorry? You’re sorry?” He made a pained sound. “Prove it.”

In a fluid movement, Aaron stood again and scooped Spencer up off the floor, kicking the front door shut before carrying him to the bedroom and depositing him on the bed. Making a stay-there gesture with his hands, he started to roll up his sleeves as he headed for the bathroom.

Spencer blocked out the sound of running water until Aaron was back and stripping him naked. The older man scooped him up again and carefully placed him into the warm bathwater. “Ahh. This is wonderful.”

Hotch perched on the edge of the tub. “You’ve always taken care of me, it’s only fair I return the favor.” He carefully scooped up water with his hand and poured it over Spencer’s shoulders. “Just
relax a bit, the warm will help ease your muscles.”

After ten minutes of silence, Spencer looked up. “Where’s Jack?”

“Oh.” Aaron smiled. “Jess asked if she could take him with her out of town for the weekend. She was headed to Boston for a meeting and since it is over the weekend, her boss allowed the people going to take families. One of the wives of a coworker agreed to watch him while she was out to the meeting.”

“So, no Jack all weekend?”

“Nope.” He yelped when Spencer’s hand darted out of the water and snagged his tie, yanking him, fully dressed, into the soapy water. Before he could demand an explanation, lips were pressed against his, a tongue demanding entrance.

Spencer held onto Aaron’s tie until the older man gave in and returned the kiss. Their hands explored each other’s bodies until Aaron tried to adjust to rest on his knees, sloshing more water onto the floor. With a laugh they both peered out at the mess. “Let’s go to bed.”

Aaron climbed out first, dropping his wet clothes into a pile on the floor, he’d deal with them later. Barely having a chance to towel off, he moved when Spencer started to push him back into the bedroom, falling to a seated position on the bed.

“Stay there.” He moved to grab the bottle of lube and something else out of the drawer before returning and pulling Aaron’s cock free from its confines and slicking it up. On himself, he slipped a cock ring before crawling onto Aaron’s lap and lining himself up. “I want you to fuck me as hard as you can. Once you think you’ve come as many times as you can tonight, I’m going to fuck you till you scream and make you come one more time.” He sank down quickly, taking all of Aaron in at once. Nipping his ear, he ordered. “Fuck me.”

Aaron grabbed Spencer’s hips and began to bury himself deep into the younger man’s body over and over again. To try and prolong things, whenever he felt himself getting close, he’d change the rhythm, keeping his orgasm at bay.

Spencer was the one trembling and begging in his arms and he kept it up until his body couldn’t stay upright anymore. In a smooth move, Aaron rolled them over so he was on top. Energy renewed by the change in position, he dropped down and bit into Spencer’s chest as he finally came, muscles quivering with the force of it.

Brushing the younger man’s hair out of his eyes, he murmured. “I love you so much. You’re so beautiful.”

They both worked on catching their breath, Aaron still on top of Spencer, until his softened cock finally slipped free of his passage. Rolling to the side, he stared down at Spencer’s still hard dick and stroked it. “You have the most beautiful dick.”

Spencer’s jaw dropped slightly at Aaron’s words, the older man wasn’t known for being comfortable with such open language. “Suck me.” He watched as he obeyed, sucking and playing with his balls as well. Exhausted, Spencer finally pulled him back up the bed. “I love you.” He pressed a kiss to his lips.

“I love you, I love your brain and your body and I love who you are.” Aaron pulled away, smiling at him. “I love that you love Jack and I.”

“How could I not?”
By the time Aaron was getting Spencer’s promised end to the evening, he’d already been slowly screwed on the bed and thoroughly fucked up against the refrigerator, Spencer somehow managing to hold one of Aaron’s legs up to give him access. Plus the constant teasing in between. He was totally beat. There was no way his body could orgasm again before morning, but he’d shivered when Spencer had finally removed the cock ring and had folded his knees up to his chest. They were on the floor in the living room, a place Spencer seemed to secretly enjoy, as Reid started driving into him with abandon. He was sensitive all over now, but it was clear that this time would end with Spencer finishing as well.

It made need curl in Spencer’s belly when Aaron cried out so openly, calling his name and begging like he was. “I’m gonna come.” He cried out, joining Aaron’s cries. “Oh, god, I’m gonna come!” Speeding up, he began to swiftly jack off the dick swinging desperately into the air, watching the milky white fluid burst out, coating Aaron’s chest as his own muscles tightened. “Oh, my love! I’m coming!” His hips stuttered, trying desperately to get deeper. “Oh, Aaron!” He cried one final time before turning loose of the man’s legs and tipping forward.

Grabbing Spencer’s face, Aaron pulled him up for a desperate kiss, not caring that he pulled his still half hard cock out, along with a trail of fluids. Panting, he pulled him back, staring into his eyes. “If I asked…” He panted. “If I asked, would you marry me?”

Spencer’s eyes widened to saucers. “Are you really asking? Like this, after sex? Are you asking me that?”

“No! I’m asking that, if I were to ask, eventually, would you?” His voice was thin now with an edge of panic.

Spencer sat back on his heels and thought a moment. “I guess you’ll have to wait and find out.”

==

Several weeks went by, Hotch had started to get used to dealing with pod-Jack on the days he made his appearance, choosing to wait out the phase instead of addressing it. Until his cell phone rang during a briefing.

Looking at the screen, he frowned. “It’s Jack’s school, excuse me.” He headed for the privacy of his office. “Hotchner.”

“Mister Hotchner? This is Maime Ross from your son’s school.”

“Yes, Miss Ross, what can I do for you?”

“We’ve had an incident, it’s not an emergency, but we do need you to come pick Jack up.”

He made it around his desk. “It’ll take me about forty minutes to get there from work. My I ask what happened?”

“Jack was in a fight with another boy. There were a number of witnesses giving conflicting reports and neither boy is willing to talk about what the problem was.”

“I’m on my way.”

“Thank you, sir.”
He disconnected the call and dropped the phone on the desk. When he looked up, both Spencer and Dave were in his doorway. Sinking into his chair, he wilted back. “Jack got in a fight.”

==

In the main office of the school, Hotch was surprised when instead of being just given his son, he was asked to walk down the hall and talk to Miss Ross in person. Outside of her open office, he found his son. “Hey, Jack.”

The blonde looked up at him with tears in his eyes. “I’m sorry, daddy.”

“It’s going to be okay. I just need to go in here a minute and then we can go home and talk about it?” He worked to keep his feelings locked down. Knocking first, he entered the office and closed the door, taking a seat where the petite woman gestured. She reminded him of JJ, sweet face and almost innocent look in her eyes. Like JJ, he doubted that was true. “Miss Ross?”

“Mister Hotchner, I’m glad you could take the time away from work to meet with me. I’ve heard you have a job that keeps you very busy.”

“Sometimes.” He wondered if this was going to be a judgement of his abilities as a single parent. “I have a great team I work with though, taking a day for my son isn’t hard.” He took a fortifying breath. “In fact, they constantly push me to do so.”

“Well, that’s good to hear. I’m sure as of late you’ve probably noticed some changes in Jack’s moods and things?”

“I… wasn’t aware he was acting out at school as well.”

“He’s been fine. He’s at that age where we almost expect a certain level of testing of boundaries and mood swings to start happening in the boys.”

He stared at her, confused, until her brow furrowed.

“Mister Hotchner, you are aware it’s perfectly normal for boys to start the process of puberty at Jack’s age? He’s far from the only one.”

“Puberty?”

She gave him a soft smile. “Mood swings, testing of boundaries, fighting, increased appetite even, and of course exploration.”

He thought about pod-Jack and other things he’d noticed. “I thought it was a phase.”

“Well, it is, kind of. One that will last the next ten years, give or take.”

“Puberty.” He repeated.

“It’s okay, I promise. You’ll both survive this.” She watched him process. “I know what’s in Jack’s file but, is there anyone currently in your life of a personal nature?”

His eyes dropped to her desktop.

“Mister Hotchner, I’m a licensed therapist, as such, anything said to me when the door is closed is private and protected with very little exception.”

He nodded. “I have a partner, we’ve been together since just after my ex-wife passed away.”
She smiled at him. “I know this is awkward, but perhaps the two of you could talk to Jack a bit, help him to understand how these changes will affect him?”

“Yeah. Uh, apparently some older boys were passing on their health class lessons already. They reinforced it with videos.”

Miss Ross sighed. “I’m sorry. We try to keep that from happening, but every once in a while, we miss it.”

“He had a few questions that he came to us with.”

“That’s good. He’s open to talking with you.”

He nodded. “Can I take Jack home now?”

“Yes, just sign him out at the desk. He has a three-day suspension.”

He stood. “Thank you.”

==

Father and son rode the whole way home in silence. Once they were in their apartment, Aaron turned to Jack. “Is there anything you want to talk to me about?”

Jack shrugged. “Are you mad at me?”

“Disappointed maybe.” He watched his body language. “Is there anything maybe you would like to talk to someone else about?”

He shrugged again.

Sitting on the couch, Aaron waved the boy over. “Come here, Jack. I know that sometimes it’s hard to talk to me about stuff, personal stuff. And you know you can talk to Aunt Jessica about anything too. But maybe there are things that you would rather talk to someone that isn’t Dad or Aunt Jess about?”

Another shrug.

“Spencer will answer anything about anything. Or… we could find someone else for you to talk to.”

Jack chewed his lip. “You think Spence will talk to me about the stuff Miss Ross was talking to me about?”

“Yes, buddy, I think he will.”

“Will you ask him?”

“Sure.”

==

“You told him I’d do what!” Spencer shrieked as the pair were closed in their bedroom later that night after Jack had gone to bed.

“Shh!” Aaron tried to calm him, failing to hide the smile on his face. “I was totally blindsided
when the school counsellor brought it up, but it makes sense?”

“Yeah. I was about his age I think.”

“So, will you talk with him?”

“How involved do you want me to get?”

“Just answer honestly, whatever he asks about.”

Spencer pouted as he finished getting undressed. “Fine.”

It took almost a month, but Spencer managed to work up the nerve and get enough days off in a row to make plans with just Jack. They started their weekend with an old favorite, pizza and skeeball. On the way home, Jack turned to Spencer. “Do you like boys and girls or just boys?”

Taking a deep breath, he decided to just jump in without thinking too hard about it. “Just boys.”

“Oh.” He stared out the window at the passing lights. “Have you ever kissed a girl?”

“No.”

“But Dad used to kiss Mom and now he kisses you.”

“Yeah.”

“And Penny and Henry’s mom kiss boys.”

He had a few hunches about Garcia, but didn’t say anything. “That’s right.”

Jack was quiet for a minute. “And Derek and Uncle Dave like kissing girls?”


“How will I know which I like?”

He guided his car into his parking place. “Well, when you’re old enough, you’ll try it a few times. But you’ll need to wait a while, I’m not sure your dad could handle the school calling because you were kissing someone.”

The boy was quiet until they made it into the apartment. “Do grown-ups really do that stuff I saw on Billy’s phone?”

Aaron had told him to be honest, so Spencer answered simply. “Yes, sometimes.”

“Oh.” He headed off to get changed for bed. When he returned, his mind was hanging on a new train of thought. “Spence?”

“Yeah?”

“How come sometimes I get really mad at everybody? The teachers at school tell me it’s normal, but I don’t know why.”

“Well, it’s really hard to explain, but your body is starting to make the hormones and things that will make you change from being a boy to being a man, the things that will make your voice get
deeper like your dad’s and make your muscles get bigger. They also can make you feel really angry over little things that maybe you wouldn’t normally get angry about.”

“Oh.” Jack took a seat on the couch, wrapping a blanket around himself. “You think I’ll sound like Dad one day?”

Spencer tried to imagine Jack in his twenties, or in his early thirties like Aaron had been when they’d first met. “I do.”

“Will I be as tall as him?”

“I should think so, but remember that genes come from both parents and your grandfather, your mom’s dad, is a lot shorter.”

The conversation lagged until Spencer and Jack both retired to bed for the night. The following morning, Reid was surprised to find Jack already in the kitchen assembling breakfast when he got up and shuffled in. “Good morning.”


“Can it wait till I’ve had some coffee?” He smirked when Jack’s answer was a grin. “You can always ask me any question, Jack. Never feel like you can’t.”

“Are there videos like the boys at school showed me but of two boys?”

Spencer was thankful he hadn’t finished making his coffee yet. “Yes, but you’re too young to be looking at stuff like that, Jack. I understand that you’re curious and it looks really interesting, but trust me, hold off a few years, okay?”

“Okay.” Jack headed for the table with his food.

“Anything else this morning?”

“Maybe.” He shrugged. “Is it normal for my…stuff…to get hard all the time?”

“Yes. All healthy males experience them, as you get older you’ll learn to control it.”

“Is that why sometimes you or Dad stay standing at the kitchen counter after you’ve been kissing? Does it happen when you kiss too?”

It was Spencer’s turn to blush. “Yes.” He tried to change the subject. “Are we headed to the park for some soccer practice today?”

Jack nodded and finished his breakfast before going to change.
“Shh.” He was practically giggling. “You’ll wake him up!” His voice was barely a whisper.

“I’ve really been meaning to look for a bigger place.” He whispered back.

“But you like this place.”

“Mmm, god. The place is okay, so long as you’re in it, doing this.”

A snort. “That was beyond cheesy.”

“Ohh, don’tstopdon’tstopdon’tstop.” He buried his face in the pillow to drown out his cry as he came into the towel under him. He resurfaced to a cock still working him while teeth nipped roughly at his shoulders. “God, what you do with that thing is probably a sin.”

A deep chuckle. “And the truth of your love for me comes out.”

“It came alright.” The dick vanished from his ass as the warm body pulled away. He rolled over indignantly. “Hey.”

“A man can only suffer through so many bad jokes during one round of sex.” He tossed aside the condom they’d used to aid in clean-up and crawled back up the bed. “Now it’s my turn before I explode, ring or no ring.”

On the dresser, a phone started to ring in the darkness.

“Just had to say the word ring, didn’t you?” Spencer couldn’t help but smile as he watched Aaron crawl off the bed and connect the call, cock still curled desperately out in front.

Aaron hung up and stared at Spencer, tracking his gaze down to his member. “We may have a case, we need to get to the office early.”

“Let’s shower first, then wake Jack. Will we have time to get him to school?”

“Yeah, that’ll be fine.”

==

Aaron did his best to not recheck if anyone would be able to tell he was wearing his cock ring still under his suit pants. Where his cage had always kept him tucked in close, this made him look a bit like he was permanently half hard. Or maybe it had been the sight of Spencer tucking his cage into his pocket, wrapping it in a handkerchief, that had him half hard.

He just knew that if Spencer kept touching him when he least expected it, he was eventually going to explode.

==

His meeting with Cruz had been brief, the team would be flying to Texas within the next few hours, they just had some paperwork to sort out first. The first text he’d gotten from Spencer just before the meeting had been short.

I bet I can make you hard sitting at your desk.
Aaron didn’t respond, but he did blush. He wanted to swear that the younger man couldn’t, but without his usual hardware on, he could already feel himself twitch just from that sentence.

After Cruz was out of the bullpen, his phone dinged again.

*Tease yourself.*

One word would end whatever game this was before it started, but Aaron found himself dropping one hand into his lap and teasing himself through his pants. He wasn’t sure how long he was supposed to do that for, but he was getting hard, harder than he’d ever wished to be while seated in his office.

*When your beautiful cock is hard, pull it out and stroke it.*

He nearly choked on air. Spencer wanted him to jack off behind his desk? He risked a glance out his window, but Spencer and the others were all busy working, heads down at their desks. While his blinds were open, his door was shut so he had a tiny amount of privacy. The rush of realizing he was, in fact, going to obey, made him even harder. Not bothering with his belt, he scooted forward on the chair and dropped his zipper, pulling himself out through the slit in his pants and boxers. He nearly moaned out loud at the feel of his hand around his swollen dick. He’d been in a constant state of horny all morning and the possible promise of finally getting to come was wonderful.

*You may tease yourself to the edge, but don’t come. I’ll be up shortly.*

Aaron tried to keep up the appearance of working while one hand worked himself until Spencer ducked into his office and closed the door behind him. He watched as his partner gave a sly look to the others working on the floor below before rushing to duck under his desk. “Oh god.” The realization of what Spencer fully intended to do shot through him.

Spencer batted his hand away. “You work, whatever happens, you can’t let on what’s going on.”

He was panting now. “Jesus, you’re going to kill me.” He started to say more, but Spencer’s glorious lips wrapped around his dick and he forgot what words were. Picking up his pen, Aaron tried to ignore the sucking and wet heat happening in his lap as he finished up the reports. He was almost done, in more way than one, when someone knocked on his door.

Clearing his throat, Aaron called out. “Come in.”

Garcia hurried into Hotch’s office, several files in her hand. “I’ve already started running those searches for you.” She passed him part of the files. “I’ll get started on the rest of your list and hopefully have answers by the time you land.”

“Thank.” He cleared his throat again. “Thank you, Garcia.”

Hesitating, she looked him over, from the tiny beads of sweat just at his hairline to his pupils that seemed slightly bigger. “Are you okay?”

“Fine.” He answered too fast as Spencer swallowed his cock down, he could feel the tight muscles around his head. “Just fine, I promise.” He tried to meet her eyes so she would believe him.

Worried but knowing better that to push, she nodded. “Okay.”

He watched her start to back away. She was watching him entirely too closely and moving way too slow compared to the speed at which he was hurtling toward his end. There was no way he could
come without giving up what was going on. Not with someone standing right in the same room. Throat dry, he spoke again. “Please shut the door on your way out, Penelope.”

She nodded, finally turning and hurrying out, pulling the door shut behind her. Stepping toward the stairs, a soft moan caught her attention and she glanced back through the office window, but Hotch appeared to be focused back on the paperwork before him, head down. With a shrug, she decided she was imagining things and carried on.

===

Hotch listened to the gunfight through the coms. Blake and Spencer had arrived on scene as the first wave of back up assisting the locals in apprehending their suspect. He heard the machinegun fire, heard someone, Morgan maybe, shout Reid’s name. Through the garbled chatter, he could tell his second and JJ had arrived on scene just as everything turned south.

Open coms helped them work together as a team, they’d always used them. It also helped keep anyone off-site, more often than not Garcia, to stay abreast in real time of their location and activity. This time, however, it meant Hotch was listening to Morgan grunt from probably taking shots to his vest. Listening to Blake beg for Reid to wake up, hearing her beg for a medic.

Spencer had been shot. And he wasn’t there.

===

He was on a three-way call with Cruz and Blake trying to assess the situation. Tightly, he glanced at Dave before asking. “What about Reid?” They both started heading for their vehicle.

“Not good.” Alex replied. “They’re taking him to the hospital.”

“Okay, we’ll meet you there.”

===

Morgan watched as his friend’s eyes fluttered and he mumbled something.

“The sun is like a teakettle…”

“Reid! Come on, what? You gotta stay with me man!”

“Woulda…yes…al…” His eyes rolled back as alarms started to sound.

===

Alex was antsy, waiting for something, anything, to happen. Seeing JJ helped her feel a bit more settled. Holding onto Reid as he bled out had torn at a part of her she’d tried to bury a long time ago. She listened as JJ commented on how many books Reid would have already read by now and then shared that he wanted kids. She tried to imagine Spencer as a dad, all of his gentleness and knowledge being poured into a child, wide-eyed with innocent wonder. He’d be great at it.

Before the conversation could drag on any longer, Garcia, followed by Cruz, hurried in, having found their own way to Texas by private plane, asking about Spencer’s condition. Alex was upset that she didn’t have more to share, but she was happy that it seemed like the team was slowly assembling to support one another. All that was missing now were the three other men of the group and she had a feeling they were in Morgan’s room.
A nurse approached them. “You all can see Agent Morgan now.”

Blake looked to the others. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to stay here.”

Everyone nodded as they started to leave, JJ speaking up. “The second you hear anything, you call me.”

“Yeah.”

Garcia turned back to her. “Hey. I’ll be right back.”

==

He was upset he couldn’t check on Spencer right away, nothing had come out of surgery yet, so Aaron gave Dave a worried look before they ducked into Morgan’s room to check on him. The younger man looked pissed, which was generally a good sign. Looking pissed meant he felt well enough to be pissed off. Clenching his jaw, Aaron tried not to think of the alternative somewhere else in the hospital.

Dave listened to Morgan’s theory about how the shooting started. They had already suspected the preacher was being set up, taking the fall for someone else, but the evidence seemed to prove it.

==

Aaron hated when a case moved forward so fast the various members of the team couldn’t privately regroup and shared what they’d learned before moving on. He picked up, though, the tone when Rossi started questioning the officer about where McGregor was, what the woman had been driving when she was caught. There was something about it, he was…fishing. When their eyes met, Aaron instantly knew that Dave knew it was all a lie.

He got his confirmation as soon as the officer walked away. There was something going on and it involved the police department, either in part or entirely and his team was dropped right in the middle of it. Making them targets too. Taking a deep breath, Hotch started to work out the best way to minimize the fall-out of what was going to eventually happen.

And spilt now between two locations, how would he keep everyone safe.

==

“He’ll be okay, he has to be.” Garcia spoke from near the window.

“Yeah.” Alex looked up. “He’ll be okay.”

A groan caught their attention and Penelope couldn’t help but gasp.

Spencer blinked as he woke up, eyes landing on his teammates. “What happened?”

Blake moved to sit on his bed. “You were shot, in the neck. Do you remember? We’re in Texas.”

“Yeah. I think so.” He looked around and landed on Garcia. “Where’s everyone?”

She nodded, understanding his silent question. “They were here before, they’ll be back. The case is still going on. Morgan took a few to the chest and one to the arm but no one else was hurt. I’m duty bound to call Hotch as soon as you were awake to let him know.” She pulled out her phone. “We can do that now and then I’ll find you something to eat.”
He tried to nod, wincing as his stitches pulled. “Okay.”

She dialed and waited for the call to connect.

“Garcia?” He was anxious. “How is he?”

“Fine, Bossman. He’s just woke up, that’s why I’m calling.”

Aaron felt the vice around his chest ease. “Good. That’s good. Tell him I’ll be by later. You keep tabs on him until I can stop in.”

“Sure thing, Sir.” She chirped.

==

As he walked through the halls of the hospital as fast as was socially appropriate, Hotch came to the conclusion that this case had aged him at least a decade. Two members of his team had been shot, another two had been ambushed in the dark, nearly writing off a government SUV in the process. He hated when the SUVs got damaged, always so much paperwork involved. Then the two youngest members managed to fend off two separate attacks on their lives while one was recovering from a near-death injury.

Yep, ten years, easy.

Now he just needed to get to Spencer. Morgan had assured him the younger man was okay, Garcia was understandably freaking out, but together they were coping somewhat.

Skidding into the room, he stopped and tried to even his breath. The pair were curled together on the bed, Morgan standing watch in the doorway. “Hey.”

Derek turned around. “She shot him, did a good job too, he’ll live to stand trial though.”

Hotch nodded. “Thanks.”

“You okay man?”

“Yeah, I just. I’m ready to go home.”

“Me too.”

“Could you give us a few minutes?”

Derek nodded. “Sure.” He stepped around him and left.

Hotch closed the door and all the blinds before rushing across the room and pulling Spencer close, kissing him soundly. He didn’t care that Garcia was still curled behind him in the bed. “God, I hated that I couldn’t be here with you!”

“Pen didn’t do a half bad job taking care of me.”

He glanced into the woman’s blue eyes. “I know. I still wanted to be here though.”

Spencer held them together, cheek to cheek, until he felt wetness on his face. He pulled back and saw the tears. “Shh, I’m okay. I’m right here and I’m okay. We’re all okay.”

“I can’t lose you too.” His voice was rough.
“You won’t. Now, I know that ideally we should stay the night in Texas before loading me back on a plane, but can we please take a redeye home? I need as much distance as I can from this place.”

“Yes.” He pulled Spencer into a tight hug, not caring when he felt Garcia joining them.

==

Everyone had changed before boarding the jet back home, wanting to be comfortable as they tried to sleep. Aaron had kept busy assessing the ones who had been injured first, watching as Garcia, as shaken as she still was by what she’d done, tucked Reid in on the couch, and Morgan brushing off JJ and Dave’s questions about his arm. It wasn’t until he got the text that he took note of Alex, curled up in the far corner of the cabin.

He knew her leaving would hurt Spencer, he just hoped his partner understood that it was what she needed to do.

==

Spencer carefully followed Alex out of his elevator and into his apartment. The morning before the case felt so far away now, but he and Aaron and Jack had been in a hurry to leave so the normally only slightly messy space was a collection of small disasters made by all three of them. He’d seen the look of apprehension in Hotch’s eyes when Alex had insisted on driving him home, but the older man had nodded the tiniest bit before turning away. Garcia wouldn’t be home for hours yet, still caught up in her first ever experience into the red tape and paperwork of discharging a weapon, Aaron with her every step of the way.

Steeling himself, he led her through the door and waited.

Alex took in the main room, noting the books and things that definitely didn’t seem to be Spencer’s. She didn’t say a word until her eyes landed on the small room within the room that housed a twin bed covered in superheroes and had drawings taped to the wall of superheroes wearing capes and carrying guns. One with black hair and a dark suit with a red tie and the other with long curly hair and a purple top. Turning on her heel, she focused on Reid, who looked more nervous and worried now that he had looked in pain in the car. “What’s this?”

“Umm…” He blushed.

“You’re in a relationship.”

He nodded.

She glanced back at the picture and squinted. “You’re in a relationship with Hotch.”

When she turned back to him, he nodded. “Alex, you can’t say anything to anyone.”

“It’s okay.” She raised a hand to calm him. “Your secret’s safe. But… How long have you been together? This looks like his son lives here.”

“A few years. And he doesn’t live here, he just has his own space for when they stay.”

“A few… years? And no one knows?”

“Well, Garcia knows. She lives across the hall. And Rossi, he knows too. But no one else can know.”
“Why not?”

He shrugged. “We didn’t want problems with Strauss and we didn’t want to mess up the team and now we are just used to not telling anyone. I think they’d be mad at being lied to.”

Sighing, she took a seat. “Well, I gave Hotch my notice on the way back. So, I won’t be around to tell your secret.”

“Oh.” Tears pricked at his eyes. “You’re leaving?”

She nodded. “I’m going to join my husband in teaching full time.”

“That’s- that’s good.” He hovered between the couch and the kitchen. “Would you like a drink?”

“No, that’s okay. I’m supposed to be looking after you anyway.” She stood and passed him. “I could make you dinner?”

He turned and followed her. “You don’t have to do that. I’ll be okay.”

Rolling her eyes, Alex pulled the fridge open and barked a laugh. “Well, if I didn’t already know, this would have confirmed it.” She reached in and pulled out a pack of butterscotch pudding cups. “I only know one person who has a serious addiction to these.”

Spencer smiled. “That’s like two days worth.” He joked.

Her jaw dropped. “Really.”

Nodding, he watched her continue her search. “It took a while for me to come to terms with that one. I mean, I knew he had a sweet tooth, but still.”

She came out again with some bacon. “I see stuff to make BLTs.”

“Sure.”
Spencer had been out of work for two weeks and out of the field for two beyond that. The team had been called away on two cases in that time that required at least two nights spent away each and then the day before Spencer was allowed back on full duty and his doctor had permitted him to fly, siting unnecessary temptation as the reason he was keeping the genius grounded, the team had been called to Oregon for nearly a week.

A week where every night, Spencer had been calling Aaron and teasing him into a frenzy with phone sex that left him in a needy, damp mess.

Tonight was no different.

“Are you back in your room yet?”

“Yes.” Aaron settled on the bed, it was where Spencer had wanted him every other night so far.

“Alone still?”

“Yes.”

“Strip naked and then go find your go-bag, there’s a second toiletry bag tucked in the secret side compartment.”

Taking a deep breath, he stood and did as he’d been ordered. “I have the case.”

“Take it into the bathroom and open it. I’m assuming it’s a standard hotel room, low counter and a long mirror?”

“Yes. It’s about average.”

“Good.” He almost purred.

Aaron pulled out a black device that fit in his hand. “What’s this?”

“A prostate stimulator.”

He gaped. “You want me to…?”

“Get the lube too. I want you to watch you fuck yourself in the mirror while I tell you in great detail what I imagine we’re doing. Then, when you finally get home, I’m going to recreate it.”

“May I come, Master?”

“You must remain caged. The faster you finish the case and get home, the faster you get your release.”

“Oh god.” He turned his phone to speaker and placed it on the counter before looking over the stimulator and then at himself in the mirror. “Okay.”

“Slick it, and yourself, up. Figure out the best place so you can see everything.” He moaned. “I’m going to slick myself up and get ready to take you.”

Aaron rushed to do everything. “Ready.”
Spencer gripped his own cock and began to stroke close to the head. “Tease your entrance with it, you can push in a little but not all the way.” He listened as Aaron gasped. “I love the sounds you make just as I start to fill you up. That moment when my head just starts to push through.” He teased his own head now. “Push in, Aaron, slowly push in and feel as I fill you up.”

Aaron did as he was told, feeling as every bump pushed in. “You always fill me up.”

“I love watching you as I do. Do you see what I see? You give me all your trust, all your love.” He moaned. “God, you always feel so good, hot and tight. I love it when you’re spread out under me and I can watch your face.” He shuddered as he tipped just a bit too close, easing up on his speed.

“Yes.”

“At the base, there is a button, turn it on, my love.”

Aaron found it and pressed it on, arching when his entire body came alight from it. “Oh, Spencer! Oh, I need you.” His hips were working on their own now, trying to fuck himself down onto the device more. He needed more. “I need more.” He tried to stroke his own dick, but the cage was in the way. “Please, I need more.”

“Are you leaking yet? Can you see your own mess dripping everywhere?”

“Yes!”

“Tell me, my love, is it dripping down your legs? Running down, making you look so desperate and needy?”

Aaron forced his eyes to focus, Spencer was right, his precome was started to run down his legs, the sight only made him leak more. “I’m so needy. I’m always needy for you, just you.”

“I know.” He moaned, louder this time. “Just the thought of you leaking is making so hot, I’m going to explode just imagining the mess you’re making. Would you like me to come?”

“Please come, please let me come, please.” He was babbling now.

Spencer sped up his fist, jacking himself off hard. With a gasp, he watched himself erupt. “God, I’m coming Aaron! I’m coming just for you! All over you, inside and out, I’m coming, my love.”

Aaron trembled, his body was so close, so on edge that whimper began to slip out. His legs were trembling. He watched himself in the mirror as his entire body reached that plateau but was denied finishing. His pupils were blown wide, making his eyes look almost completely black, his body trembled, a sweat coating his skin. Hearing Spencer’s soft instruction, he shakily turned off the stimulator and eased it out, leaving him feeling empty. His cock was still leaking, desperate to come. The whole week had been building, it had taken longer each day for him to shake off the effects of the calls. He wondered if he would even be able to shake it this time. This case really needed to be over.

==

The case broke three hours later.

By sunrise, the team was on the plane headed back cross-country.

Walking into his own apartment, Hotch found Jack and Spencer sprawled out assembling a puzzle on the coffee table. He shifted from foot to foot as he watched them laugh and joke about what
they were doing, Spencer shot him a smoldering look that had him instantly damp again. “I’m going to go put my things away and change.”

“Okay, dad!” Jack called out.

Spencer watched Aaron disappear. “Hey Jack? I’m going to go talk to your dad for a bit, can you finish this?”

“Yeah.”

He nodded and stood, shutting and locking the bedroom door once he got there, losing his clothes as he walked. By the time he reached the bathroom doorway, he was naked, stroking his dick to hardness. “Hands on the counter.”

Aaron looked up at the mirror, the sight that greeted him made his body tremble. He could see a spot begin to form on the front of his gray slacks. “Spencer.”

“I’m going to fuck you, right here. And you’re going to watch. I want you to see what I see in your eyes.” He reached around from behind and began to work his belt and pants. “You’re already so wet, so desperate for me. Tell me, did you come after our talk?”

“N-no. I was so desperate that I’ve spent all day worried I would just explode.”

Spencer slicked up and pushed Aaron’s pants down enough for him to gain entrance. “I can only imagine. You in front of other people when your body betrays you. Knowing it was my fault.” He thrust in over half way in a single stroke. “I would have been sad to have missed it.” He bottomed out. “Look in the mirror. Look at how I’m seated in you, making love to you. Look at how beautiful you are, being impaled on my dick, begging me to fill you up.” His had trailed down to the cage and leaking cock. “What would it take to make you come without an orgasm? To give me just a small amount of your seed?”

“I’m so close, so close.”

He thrust twice, feeling as Aaron trembled in his arms before a gush of come filled his hand. “Look at you. You’re so needy, begging me to set you free so you can come.” With the same hand, he pulled the cage away and began to slowly stroke Aaron’s prick. “I’m going to hold you here, against my chest. You dressed and me naked, buried just like this. We’re going to watch as you come.”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes.” Aaron leaned back, resting his head on his shoulder as Spencer turned loose of his dick and grabbed his hips, pounding into his with lightning speed. When he felt his orgasm begin to crest, he keened, he was waiting for permission.

“Are your eyes open?”

“Yes!” He cried out.

“Come for me, my love!” Together they watched as Aaron exploded, coating the counter and mirror in the spray of his seed. When it seemed like he was done, Spencer picked up his pace, pulling back until he was right on the brink before stroking himself to completion, only his head inside his partner. When he pulled back, a trail of come dripped out of Aaron’s ass. “You’re so beautiful.”

==
Spencer rode up in the elevator playing over in his head his weekend with Jack and Aaron. They’d headed to the beach and did very little at all except play in the surf and lounge on the sand. It had been wonderful to see Aaron so happy and relaxed, to hear him every time he tossed his head back in laughter. It wasn’t a weekend full of sex and crazy passion, but it was one of closeness and intimacy. There had been no rules, no phones, no bedtimes for forty-eight hours and all of them had loved it. Aaron had suggested they return for their annual leave and any long weekends and just be a family. Jack had taken the time to start campaigning for a dog.

He looked at the woman riding alongside him. “Karaoke at the Benjamin.”

She turned and looked up at him. “What?”

“You were singing karaoke at the Benjamin the night it closed.”

She laughed and went out about the music that had, sadly, died that night.

Used to working with JJ and Emily in their more traditional heels and Garcia in her platforms, he couldn’t help but mentally note just how short she seemed by comparison. Pulled the door to the bullpen open, he pointed her toward Hotch’s office. Hopefully this agent would stick, they’d be running out of prospects eventually.

==

Kate entered the office when Agent Hotchner called out and took a seat in front of the desk. He was writing, left handed, she mentally noted, his head was down, focused. Taking the opportunity, she looked around the room. The dark, heavy furniture was filled with books, mostly law and psychology. There was a family photo that included a blonde woman and a small boy. Further evidence of Agent Hotchner being a father was in the framed drawings proudly displayed over and between his own awards and things. A photo of him with the same boy, much older now, maybe even twice the age, sans woman gave a possible answer about the lack of wedding ring.

Filing it away for later, Kate started to mentally count off the piles of files taking over the desk. The piles looked about even, fifteen or twenty a piece and five different stacks between the decks and credenza were…

“The, uh, piles of files usually aren’t this high. Our section chief is overseas and we’re down an agent.” He finally really looked up at her, feeling guilty for the mess.

“I heard that SSA Blake transferred to Boston.”

He gave her a nod. “She decided to teach full time.”

“That’s…noble. Good for her. I am not ready for that.” Her heart nearly melted when he gave her a dimpled grin. How did women work with him? She wondered to herself.

“No, I’m not either.” He looked over her file. “You have an impressive success rating and your supervisor speaks very highly of you.” He kept his eyes on the paperwork. “I think you’ll be a valuable asset to the team.” He finally looked back up, there was surprise written across her face.

“Really? That’s it? I’ve only been two minutes. There’s no song or dance? I mean, I had a whole thing prepared. I don’t know if you know this, but there is a band outside your door.”

Hotch smiled, he liked her energy, he could see her fitting in well. “You have eight years with the Bureau and your undercover work convinced me that you’d fit right in. Any questions?”
She started to ask something when the door opened. Kate turned and looked up at a woman who definitely stood out, especially in this office.

“I know, I’m interrupting.” Garcia looked at the new agent as Hotch spoke.

“Garcia, this is Agent Kate Callahan, she’ll be joining the team...”

She spoke over Hotch’s words. “Hello, hey, I know you!” She looked back at her boss. “He’s at it again in Bakersfield.”

Aaron watched the brief interaction between the team’s hardest to win over and the newest member. They were going to be just fine.

==

Finishing the briefing, Kate hurried after the analyst as she headed to her own office. “Hey! Garcia, is it?”

She turned, walking backward. “Penelope Garcia. Penelope, Pen, P, Garcia is good too. Hi.”

Kate was impressed by her ability to walk the way she was. “Any tips you could give me to make this go smoothly?”

Garcia waved her in, letting the door shut behind them. “You’re wanting the two-minute low-down on all your new teammates?”

She shrugged. “Sure.”

“I’ll give you the abbreviated version.” She took a chair, nudging another out so Kate would follow suit. “Hotch has a nine-year-old son, Jack, he’s a single dad and we all do everything in our power to make sure he is home nights and weekends. If you don’t already know the backstory, it’s not my place to share, just he’s a single parent and we never discuss spouses, ex-spouses, anything.” She watched Kate nod. “Rossi started the unit, he’s great, laid back, you can talk to him about anything. Well, that makes it sound like you can’t talk to Hotch about anything and you can, I just meant...” She waved her hands. “Morgan is Hotch’s second, they sort of split the chief stuff.”

“So Hotch can get home to his son?”

“Yeah. JJ looks sweet, but she is a crack shot and a serious fighter. Baby genius Reid knows everything about everything but he can not do what I do here, so he is only like one half of the genius and I’m the other half.” She stopped for a breath.

“Okay.” Kate nodded. “Well, I have a plane to catch.”

“Good luck!”

==

Dave could have smirked at the assignments Hotch gave out on the jet, teaming him up with the new girl to suss out his own opinions of her. He’d seen how quickly Garcia had warmed up and remembered how stand-offish she’d been with him for so long. He hadn’t missed that Reid seemed to be excited about her too.

==

Passing in the hall of the station, Spencer caught Aaron’s arm. “Just a heads up, Kate and Garcia
“Wow.” She glanced at the other two who were shocked by his frankness.
“That was just one unsub.”

“But, wait, killed? How?”

“Oh, he brought me back to life. I guess torture is no fun if the torture-ee is dead.”

“I just…Wow. So, do you have more scars than him?” She pointed her thumb at Morgan.

“Ah, no. I’m pretty sure he’s seen as the bigger threat, so unsubs usually only go after me if they’re into mental games. I do have a reputation of getting into situations I’d be better off not in more often, but I’m not really viewed by strangers as a threat.”

“So…” She studied him. “Morgan said he *almost* holds the record.”

“Oh…” Reid trailed off, swallowing before speaking again, fully aware everyone was listening to the conversation. “He probably has the record for most total injuries and most individual scars. Yeah, I’d say he does.”

“Okay.” She could tell they were all being evasive all of the sudden. In a matter of moments, she’d gone from being included back to being the outsider. “But not total stitches?” She watched the trio exchange a look before JJ leaned in.

“No. Not total stitches.”
Aaron was in the park with Jack when his phone rang.

“Aww, do you have to work?” The boy whined.

He glanced at his screen. “No, it’s Spencer.”

“Oh! Can he come play with us?” He entire demeanor did a one-eighth.

“I’ll ask, give me a minute.” He kicked the soccer ball to his son before walking to a quieter area.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“Garcia’s over here and... I think I’m in over my head.”

He could hear the worry and stress in his voice. “What’s wrong?”

“She hasn’t been sleeping since the shooting. She has nightmares, she’s jumpy at loud sounds, she’s barely been eating. She’s hyper-vigilant and anxious and you know what this all adds up to.”

He was trying to keep his voice even so as to not attract Garcia’s attention from where she was huddled on the couch.

Aaron frowned. “PTSD.”

“I asked, she’s been suffering from symptoms for a while apparently. She needs help, Aaron.”

“She had sessions with the Bureau shrink.”

“Well, does that help any of the rest of us? When we go, we say whatever to get cleared again.”

“I’m with Jack at the park right now.” He looked over to his son who was bouncing the ball on his knees. “Jess is out of town, I’ll have to bring him with me.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

“Okay, I’m on my way. Bye.” He hung up and returned to his son. “Hey, Bud. Aunt Penny isn’t feeling well, would you mind if we headed over there for a while?”

Jack let the ball bounce in the grass. “I’m going too?”

“Yeah, I think she’d love to see you. She’s at Spencer’s apartment right now waiting on us.”

“Sure!”

==

Father and son quietly entered what was almost their second home, Jack heading for his small “room” while his dad headed for the couch to see what was going on. “Hey.” He spoke softly once he reached the end of the couch.

Garcia’s head shot up. “Oh my god! He called you?” She turned to Reid. “You called him?” Fresh tears started in her eyes. “I’m so sorry.”

At a loss as to what to do, Spencer stood and nudged Aaron onto the couch. “I’ll take Jack and...
something.” He darted in the direction he’d seen the boy go and quickly collected him so they could leave.

Once the apartment was quiet, Aaron relaxed back into the cushions and watched Garcia cry. “Why didn’t you say anything to me before now?”

“I.” She hiccoughed. “I didn’t want you to worry. Or think I was crazy.”

He put his arm along the back of the couch and waited for her to relent and settle closer. “I remember having this same conversation with Spencer. In this apartment, if my memory serves me correctly. I came to him the night he shot someone for the first time and I stayed with him. I told him about my first time shooting someone.” He chewed the corner of his lip. “I’ve been so caught up in other things both at work and in my personal life that I guess I forgot when it came to you.”

“Did you have nightmares after you shot someone for the first time?”

Aaron nodded slowly. “I would be more worried about the person who didn’t.” He gathered his thoughts a moment before reciting for her the story he’d told Spencer years before. “To be honest, Penelope? Doing this job, there isn’t a week that goes by where either he or I don’t wake up in the middle of the night and can’t get back to sleep. Every week.”

“Oh.” She thought on that a minute. “That’s horrible.”

“Before Spencer… Before him, Haley could never relate to why I was having nightmares, why I would wake up shouting or crying. And I was always reluctant to try and tell her because I didn’t want the bad of this job to destroy the good in her. I don’t have to tell Spencer anything.” He tipped his head and studied her a minute. “You’ve done this job a long time and yet you’ve always been able to keep that good in you.”

“Yeah.” She reached for a tissue and dabbed at her eyes. “If this is how it’s going to be all the time now, I’m not sure I can keep doing this job. This is just horrible.”

“Let’s not rush into anything just yet.”

==

Several days later, Garcia was sitting in Hotch’s office. She’d learned the date of Baylor’s execution and it just didn’t sit well with her that he was going to die. She just hoped her boss understood why she had to do this.

When he said she should go, it left her momentarily speechless. “You don’t think I’m certifiable and you’re not mad at me?”

“No.” He’d already planned to talk to her about taking some time off. “I’ll have Kevin Lynch cover, you have a lot of vacation time.” Judging by the numbers, he was going to have to get her in soon anyway to take some of that banked time.

“Thank you. Thank you!” She started to get up. “You are a…terrific boss. A terrific boss, just terrific. Thank you.” She made it to the door before stopping to turn around one last time. “And, go easy on Kevin. Please?”

He gave her a confused look. “Why’s that?”

“He is utterly and completely terrified of you.”
He gave her a nod and watched her disappear before grinning to himself. “Good.”

Morgan stared at his phone as sighed.

“What’s wrong?”

He turned and looked up at where his boss had just entered the room. “Garcia. She’s left another message.”

“From Texas?”

Derek nodded. “You really told her she should go there?”

“Yes. I did.”

Tossing the phone on the table, he made a frustrated noise. “I don’t get it. Reid said it’s just PTSD, but going and seeing him? He tried to kill the two of them.”

Shutting the door, Hotch took a seat across from the other agent. “She has to deal with this her way. There’s no rule on how we each reach the other side. She told me she came to you about the nightmares and such.”

“Yeah. I tried to help her through it, but…” He shook his head. “I don’t know what to say anymore.”

“It’s not about talking, it’s about listening.”

Spencer waited until he heard Morgan leave in the early hours of the morning before he crossed the hall and let himself into her apartment. He found her sitting on her own couch. “You okay?”

Garcia looked up at him. “I think I will be eventually.”

“Want me to stay?”

“Would you?”

“Of course.”

A month later, Aaron was standing in his own living room staring at Jack. “You don’t want to be Spiderman now?”

“No, Brice is going as Spiderman and we can’t go as the same thing!”

“Okay. So, what do you want to be now?”

“Darth Vader.”

“Jack, you realize Halloween is practically here. I’m not sure I can find a costume now.”

“But please, Dad!”
“I’ll try.”

“Yes!”

“No promises though.” He shouted after his son as the boy danced away.

==

Having dropped Jack off at school early, Aaron headed straight for Spencer’s place and let himself in, finding his partner half-dressed in the kitchen and gave him a kiss. “You’re naked.”

“Only half naked. Did I know you were coming by?”

“No.” He pressed a kiss to the back of the younger man’s neck and let his hands run over bare flesh. “Jack had a project happening at school and needed to be dropped off early.”

“The diorama thing?”

Aaron chuckled. “Yes, the diorama thing.” He sucked a sensitive spot on Spencer’s throat, making him moan. “So, I thought I’d come over here and see if we couldn’t manage to be late for work this morning.”

“And how, exactly, were you planning to do that?”

Deft hands undid black slacks. “I’ve been thinking about pushing you up onto the counter and sucking you off before fucking you senseless.” He felt Spencer’s dick harden in his hand at the words.

“Oh, did you now?”

In answer, Aaron spun Spencer around and pushed his ass up onto the counter, letting the edge start the process of shoving his pants down. Once that glorious cock sprang free, Aaron sank to his knees and began to suck in earnest, lavishing in the younger man’s needy cries and babbling words. Keeping mind of the time, he used one hand to pump Spencer’s dick until finally the younger man arched back, his head hitting a cabinet door with a crack, before he came down Aaron’s throat, begging and calling out Aaron’s name as he did.

Swallowing quickly, Aaron hurried back to his feet, shoving his pants down just enough with one hand while he tried to open the small lube bottle with the other. Pulling off his cage and slicking up his prick, Aaron pressed two fingers worth of lube into Spencer’s hole quickly before pushing in. He didn’t care that they were both grunting loudly, Spencer’s head banging the wood door as his own pants finally finished their fall to his ankles. “God, you are so tight. So hot. I just want to fuck you forever.” He wanted to keep going as long as he could, but they both eventually needed to get to work. “I’m always so close with you. I can never last.”

Spencer ran his hands over Aaron’s cheeks and hair. “I’m so full. Fill me up. Fill me up, Aaron and make me remember you all day.” He moaned when Aaron’s hand wrapped around his cock. “I love you. I love you.”

Pumping his hand in time with his dick, Aaron chased his orgasm over the edge. “Spencer! Oh, god, Spencer, I’m coming!” He moaned and deep, rumbling moan before dropping his voice. “Can you feel me? I’ve filled you up.” His hand kept moving until the walls trembled around his dick and the one in his hand exploded.

“Yes! I’ll feel you all day.” Spencer panted through until they both recovered enough for speech. “I
don’t know what brought that on, but I’m not complaining one bit.” He winced as Aaron pulled away and helped him carefully stand back on his feet. “I have to go change now.”

Aaron smirked. “Shame.” He stared at Spencer’s ass as he headed for the bedroom. “I brought a spare suit just in case.”

“So, you planned on an ambush then.”

“Yes. I just needed to be buried inside you.”

==

“Hey, Garcia?” Hotch stepped into her office.

“Yes.” She didn’t even glance back at him. “I’m typing and listening, talk.”

“I’ve been looking everywhere and Jack now wants to be Darth Vader and I can’t find a costume. Would you have any ideas?”

She turned around finally. “I can make some calls.” She nodded. “Give me till the end of the day.”

“Sure, thanks.”

By the end of the day, Penelope was bringing in a piece of paper to Hotch’s office. “This is a friend of mine, she was able to track down a costume to borrow for Halloween. Give her till tomorrow to get it here and then you can go pick it up at her shop.”

“Shop?”

“She has a little place on the edge of the city. She’ll get you everything you need.”

==

Aaron had met all kinds of people from all walks of life in his line of work and Penelope was, well… Penelope, so the eclectic nature of her friends really should never come as a surprise, but Madame Bovier had taken him by surprise.

Standing in the rain, he’d done his best to convince the woman inside that he was, in fact, a friend of Penelope Garcia. He couldn’t really argue that he probably looked a bit different than all her other friends. Dripping in the psychic’s, of course Garcia knew a psychic, front room, he couldn’t help but blush at the flirting tone she used before disappearing into the back to get the costume.

Having a look around, he smiled softly at the assortment of decorations and things that filled the room. It all definitely aided in the ambiance of the space, that air of mystery. He turned when she came back with the costume.

“Penelope called just in time.”

“I’ve been looking for one for weeks, where did you find it?”

She smiled knowingly at him. “I suppose Miss Garcia didn’t tell you, Madame Bovier never reveals her secrets.”

He felt the blush rise up again. “No, she didn’t mention that. I’m sorry.” He was starting to feel flustered under her gaze.
She laughed then, waving her hand at him. “Child, I’m playin’. My cousin runs a prop house in Hollywood, he Fedex’d it.”

“Well, you and your cousin are going to make one boy’s Halloween very special. How much do I owe you?” He worked on pulling out his wallet from his soaked jacket.

“You know what? It’s on the house. Any friend of Penelope is a friend of Madame Bovier.”

“No, I insist.” He was already indebted to Garcia for all of this, he couldn’t be indebted to someone else as well.

“No, I insist. Any man who will come out in this mess for his son? Deserves a break.” Her eyes ran over him. “The world could use more good fathers.”

Aaron relented. “Thank you. Shall I return it Monday?”

She shook his hand, holding onto it beyond what was socially acceptable. “And when you come back, you should let me read your palm. Now that I’ll charge you for.”

Stunned silent a moment, Aaron stared at her and then his own hand before pulling it back. “Thank you. And hap-py Halloween.” He collected the box Jack’s costume was in and headed back into the rain. The door clicked shut behind him just before he heard her make comments that apparently meant she’d approved of him. He was really going to have to talk to Garcia about warning him about her various friends.

==

Leaving the conference room, Hotch slowed his walk until he saw Garcia heading out as well.

“Garcia?”

“Yes, sir?”

“When you have a moment, my office please?”

“Oh, sure.” She glanced at the others, wondering what it was about. Hurrying her steps, she entered her boss’s office and shut the door. “Something wrong?”

“No.” He glanced out the windows at the storm when lightning flashed again. “I picked up Jack’s costume, he loves it. Thank you.”

“Ah.” She giggled. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” He frowned at the next roll of thunder. “I’m hoping to wrap this case up and not miss trick or treat.”

“Jack’ll understand if you have to miss.”
He sighed. “I know. But how many more years of trick or treat do I have with him? In a couple years he won’t want me tagging along to keep an eye out.” He played with his pen. “He’s growing up, and I’m missing it.”

==

His phone told him it was November now as the team rode home on the jet, the sun just rising. They’d saved the last boy and Aaron hadn’t been able to help noting how he wasn’t much bigger than Jack as he pulled him, unconscious, out of that hole.

Everyone but maybe Morgan was asleep already, it had been a long couple days for them all. Hotch had stared at Spencer stretched out asleep and couldn’t help but think to himself that four parents missed trick or treat last night. They had all given up an evening of joy with their own children to go rescue another. They all needed a day to be with their families, he decided, as he stared out at the sunrise.

Later, when he had finally managed to stumble through the door, trying to stay quiet so as to not wake anyone yet, Aaron dropped his bags at the desk and made a beeline for Jack’s room. Jack’s room was empty, the bed still made and a moment of panic started to rise in his chest. He turned and found Jessica at the end of the hall.

“How’d it go?” She asked him.

“Good, it went, good. Where’s Jack? He’s not in his room.”

She gave him a reassuring smile. “You didn’t see him on the couch? He tried waiting up for you but he fell asleep. I just left him there, he wanted to make sure you saw him in his costume.” She watched her brother-in-law smile wide as his eyes landed on his son asleep on the couch. “He had a lot of fun.” She spoke again after Aaron had brushed a kiss across Jack’s head. “Are you okay?”

When Aaron stood, he turned to face her, seeing the way she was studying him. “Yeah, I’m good.”

“Did someone get hurt?”

“No. It was kids, boys.” He glanced back down to his son. “It was just a hard case.”

Jess went back to where she’d been working on making herself a mug of coffee and found a second cup, pouring Aaron some as well. “Tell me about it.”

“What?” He froze, halfway to sitting on one of the stools. “No, Jess. It’s not something you want to hear about.”

“Come on, Aaron. I can see it’s eating at you and sure, Spencer knows and can probably get you out of your funk, but sometimes you just need to retell it in your own words.”

He arched one brow. “Are you my shrink now?”

“No. But I am a friend.”

Giving in, he tried to reach for his cup of coffee.

“Talk first.”

“It wasn’t nearly as bad as some cases we get. It just happened that the boys were close to his age is all.”
Accepting that that was all she would get, Jessica pushed the steaming cup over. “Do you have plans for the weekend?”

“Not that I know of.”

==

Monday evening, Aaron was walking up the same steps again, box in hand, to return Jack’s costume. He wasn’t as late and the open sign was still lit up, so he let himself in. “Hello?” He called out. “I came to return the costume.”

There was a gust of perfume in the air just before Madame Bovier billowed into the room. “My, my, you sure have. And how did your son like it?”

“He loved it.” Hotch smiled.

“Good.” She took the box and set it aside, reaching for his hand before he could react. “And now you’ll let me read your palm?”

“I-” He tried to pull back, but her grip was tight. He started to panic but remembered, this was one of Garcia’s friends, surely he was safe here. “I don’t know.”

She tugged. “Come on in the back. You’ll be just fine.”

He was relieved when she dropped his hand but still followed behind as she led them into a small room. He took a seat and waited as she looked over his hands.

“You have such big hands and they do tell a story.” She looked him over. “I can see you’ve had heartbreak in your life, more than any man should. Enough to make a lesser man insane with grief perhaps?” She wasn’t expecting an answer. “But there is also true love here. A lifelong companion, raising children and growing old together.”

“Growing old together?”

She nodded. “I don’t see any more heartbreak here for you. But you must take care of yourself and this true love. Good health is important.”

“Okay.” He was still skeptical of everything she was saying. This was a friend of Penelope’s, she probably had heard his whole life story.

She gave him another grin. “Miss Garcia said you wouldn’t believe. That’s okay.” She hadn’t turned loose yet. “She also tried to warn me about just how good looking you were, but I didn’t believe her.” Her eyes raked over him. “From what I can see, she didn’t exaggerate about a single thing at all now did she?”

Hotch felt himself flame red. He opened his mouth to speak, but came up with nothing.

She finally pulled away. “Shh, I’m just teasing. You’re lovely, a proper gentleman, just like she said. Though it is a little hard to picture Penelope in all her color and personality with someone who looks so comfortable in such a nice suit and tie.” She stood and he followed suit, letting her lead back into the front room. “But I guess I shouldn’t be surprised really, she does seem to have a type.”

“A type?”
Finally picking up on his confusion, she stopped and turned to face him. “She never told you where we met, did she?”

“No. I’m afraid she hasn’t.”

“Well.” Her demeanor changed slightly, became more reserved. “That’s her tale to tell. I’m glad your son liked the costume.”

“Thanks again for getting it for him.” He nodded to her before heading back out into the darkness.
“I think I have a stalker again.” Dave stated without greeting.

“What!?” Hotch’s voice rose in surprise at the statement dumped in his doorway, his pen hitting the desk as he started to stand. “A stalker?”

Rossi shrugged. “I’ve seen her following me a few times and she actually had a folder in her car today with my name on it. I dunno.” He starting walking again, taking a seat in a chair. “Private investigator maybe? Something.”

“Do you think she’s dangerous?”

“I didn’t think the last one was dangerous.”

Aaron nodded. “I’m not sure she was either. Crazy and obsessed, sure, but not sure about dangerous.” He studied his friend. “What do you want to do?”

“Right this minute? Nothing. There was something about her I can’t put my finger on.”

“Going to have Garcia look into it?”

Rossi nodded. “Of course. I don’t need something coming at me outta left field and blindsiding me.”

“Well, let me know if you need anything.”

“Yeah.”

==

Spencer leaned back in his chair, pushing up on his toes until the front wheels were just off the floor as he tried to watch the interview happening in the conference room. Rossi and Kate were at one crime scene and JJ and Morgan were at another, so he was left to compile information as everyone called in. Sometimes it was a job that left him a bit bored.

When Hotch opened the door and led the woman out, Reid let the chair fall back to the floor and stood, taking the moment of privacy to let his eyes wander as his partner waited for the elevator to arrive to take the woman out. When the older man returned, he hopped to his feet and was speaking even as they were still coming together.

Discussion complete, Aaron started to head for Garcia’s office but stopped a moment, glancing around before turning back. “If you tip that chair and fall, I’m laughing.”

Spencer’s jaw dropped. “I didn’t think you saw that.”

“I see everything, Reid.”

==

After the team had tossed around theories and lines of inquiry to chase, Hotch headed to his own office to look over the file in peace. A light knock on his doorframe caught his attention. “Yes?” He called without looking up.
“Have a couple minutes for a slight break?”

He looked up at Reid standing in his doorway, something tucked behind his back. With a heavy sigh, he gave him a small smile. “Sure.”

Reid’s face lit up as he moved to sit in a chair, pulling the items from behind his back and setting one on the desk, one of Aaron’s favorite puddings and a spoon, while he worked his own vanilla one open. “I heard Rossi has a wannabe writer fan.”

“Yeah.” Aaron chuckled. “After last time, he’s absolutely over the moon about it.” His tone dripped with sarcasm.

“Is it bad that I find it a little funny?”

“Yes.” A voice grumbled from behind Reid’s back. Rossi entered and slumped into the remaining empty chair. “It’s not funny. I’ve had stalkers and crazy people and I hate it. It’s bad enough I have a collection of ex-wives who like to keep tabs on me so they can be sure the checks keep on coming.”

“But they only know about you because you had to go write all those books and do those lecture series. Write half a dozen books on serial killers and then travel to talk to people about them, you’re bound to attract some crazies.” Reid grinned.

Dave frowned at him. “You’re no help.”

==

Later, when Dave left the bullpen, Aaron did his best not to listen to his friend’s raised voice in the hallway. He frowned as he listened to his arguing with a woman, the woman he’d said was stalking him by the sounds of it, and he winced when the woman declared she was his daughter. He shot a glance to Reid, making eye contact and getting a small nod before he started around the desks to come to his friend’s aid.

Standing just around the corner, Aaron listened as the woman tried to plead her case. He knew very little about Dave’s wives or the marriages, but he recognized the name Hayden as one of them. Giving them some privacy, he turned away to get everything ready to collect their suspect.

==

Their woman having been removed from the scene and JJ talking with the daughter, filling that supportive role she had always been so good at, Hotch looked around in the darkness, eyes landing on Dave on the phone. He did his best to not eavesdrop too much on the conversation as he approached and waited. He hoped the older man would talk to him, clue him in as to what was happening, but didn’t want to push if he didn’t have to.

The moment Dave pulled the phone away, Aaron pounced. “What’s going on?” Now his friend was going in search of this woman?

“I need a car.” Dave was shoving his phone in his pocket and pulling out keys already. It wasn’t normal protocol, but he needed to get to the airport before the flight left.

Confused, Aaron answered. “Okay. Is everything alright?” He was worried as he watched Dave hurry down to the SUV’s without answering his question. Watching the SUV pull away, he silently promised to find out exactly what was going on with him.
When his phone beeped as he was just getting ready to leave the office, Aaron pulled it out and looked at the screen.

_Dave:_ **On a flight to San Francisco, will call when we land. SUV is in the motor pool drop off.**

Aaron sighed and tapped out a reply. _I’ll be waiting._ Tucking his phone away, he finished collecting his things and drove home. Jack was already in bed, so Aaron said his goodbyes to Jess and locked up, checking his watch before deciding on a shower while he waited for a phone call. In the early hours of the morning, his phone finally buzzed on the bed beside him.

“Dave?”

“Hey, Aaron. Look, I’m sorry about before. Garcia said she’d already checked out of the hotel and I had some questions still.”

“And that required you to fly to the other coast?”

“Yeah. After our divorce, Hayden had a baby, a little girl. She never told me. Her name’s Joy, Aaron, and she had to get home because she has a son, he’s two, who is sick. I- I couldn’t just let this go and never know.”

Aaron pinched the bridge of his nose. He knew how much it bothered the older man, deep down, to have missed the opportunity to ever be a parent. It had seemed it wasn’t meant to be in the cards for him so he could understand the need to want to jump on this opportunity now that it was here. “Will you be talking to Hayden?”

“I’ll have to call her eventually. Joy said she has a spare room so I don’t have to get a hotel. I’ll catch a late flight back Sunday night so I don’t miss work.”

“It’s not a problem, Dave.”

“I know. I just… I know I’ll need to work to keep me grounded while I process this. We’re on our way to Joy’s house now, I’ll text you the address so you have it.”

“Okay.” Aaron sighed. “Dave?”

“Yeah?”

“Take care of yourself. This is a big thing, don’t try to deal with it all at once.”

“I know. Thanks, Aaron. Get some sleep.”

“You too.” He hung up and tossed the phone aside. He tried to imagine how he would react if a child turned up that he’d fathered and didn’t know about. At his age and with his limited number of partners, the child would still be a child though, not an adult with a child of her own, but still… His eyes closed as he tried to imagine a child who looked similar to Jack, but not quite like him. When the abstract idea of said unknown mystery child changed from looking mostly like his son to being more slight, with wavy hair almost to his shoulders, pushing a pair of glasses up his nose as he studied something while crouched in the dirt, Aaron felt himself smile before shaking himself back to reality.

Shifting on the bed to get comfortable, he finally let himself drift off to sleep. His dreams that night were filled with Jack and the boy from his imagination.
Aaron held Spencer’s hips as the younger man carefully rode him. He was flat on his back in the middle of Spencer’s bed, knees up to give him some support. Spencer was pitched forward over him, hands gripping Aaron’s shoulders, staring down through a curtain of hair, his dick bouncing between them.

Reid’s pace picked up. “Oh, Aaron! I love the feel of you inside me! Fuck me!” He moaned when strong arms lifted his ass just a bit before Aaron began to do just that. “You make me so hot, I could come just from you fucking me.”

A deep moan rumbled in Aaron’s chest as he felt his balls draw up. “I’m so close. I’m going to come.”

“Come for me.”

“Oh, god, I’m going to come.” He pistoned even harder. “Oh, oh, I’m coming, Spencer, I’m coming.” His body curled as he cried out.

Watching as Aaron fell apart beneath him, Spencer’s breathing started to come in short pants. “Shit, Aaron, you’re so hot. Oh, I can feel you! I’m so full!” When one of Aaron’s large hands moved from his hip to his desperate dick, Spencer’s hips twitched once before he was coming as well across his lover’s chest. “God, I love you so much, Aaron.”

Aaron couldn’t help the chuckle. “I love you too.” When they started to get their breathing under control, Aaron shifted, carefully easing his softening cock out of Spencer’s hole. “I’ll help you to the shower.” Careful to keep the sheets as clean as possible, Aaron rolled off the bed and pulled Spencer into the bathroom. Pushing the younger man ahead of him, he couldn’t help but watch his come leaking down slim legs from between Spencer’s perfect ass cheeks. He waited until Spencer had started the water and stepped into the stall before Aaron made the decision to be bold.

He pushed the slimmer man again the tile wall with a yelp of surprise before hitting his knees and pulling those cheeks apart. Pushing himself into action before he could overthink it, Aaron began to lap up the mess he’d made starting at Spencer’s thighs and working back until he was cleaning up what was leaking straight from the tight hole. When Spencer’s mewls turned unto moans, Aaron pushed further, using two fingers to sink in, using the remaining come as lubricant as he finger fucked the younger man, making sure to curl them just right to hit his prostate with every thrust.

Aaron nudged Spencer’s feet further apart until he could nose at his perineum and reach up and stroke his cock. Finding a satisfying rhythm of hands and face, Aaron carried on until Spencer was a quivering, babbling mess above him. When he could tell his partner was pushed as far as he could handle, Aaron scissored his fingers open and pushed his tongue between them. The increased feeling pushed Spencer over, making him explode, coming all over the tile wall.

Once his breathing had returned to normal, Spencer turned around and faced a now smiling Aaron. “What was that about?”

“I couldn’t resist.” He leaned in, pulling Spencer into a deep kiss before backing up so they could both get clean. As they stepped out of the shower, Aaron heard his phone ringing in the next room and headed out to answer it, rubbing a towel over his hair as he walked.

Spencer continued getting ready for bed until Aaron returned, a look of shock on his face. “Who
“Locals… Locals in Roanoke County responded to shots fired and found one person dead. When trying to figure out who their victim might be, they found my contact information. I need to go meet them and try to ID the body.” He didn’t give Spencer any other details, didn’t tell him the familiar address the LEO had given him. It was too soon. He needed to be certain before he told Spencer Gideon was dead.

“Oh, Okay. Do you want me to come with you?” Spencer looked over Aaron’s features and could tell he was holding something back.

“No, um, can you stay with Jack? If I do need you, I’ll call Jessica and ask her to come pick him up.” He was staring into the middle distance now.

“Yeah, sure. Whatever you need.” Spencer moved to the side and watched as Aaron went through the motions of putting on his suit and tying his tie, tucking all of his gear where it belonged before pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek and leaving the apartment. Spencer felt his chest squeeze with worry about what was really going on.

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Halfway to the cabin he hadn’t been to in over a decade, Aaron pressed send on his phone and waited for it to connect.

“Case?” Rossi answered.

“No. I don’t think so anyway. I got a call from Roanoke PD, they found my contact information at the scene of a single homicide and asked me to come try to ID the victim.” He sighed. “The address they gave me is Gideon’s cabin, Dave.”

A heavy sigh came down the line. “Reid with you?”

“He was when I got the call, I was at his place. I couldn’t tell him until I knew, if it’s true it’s going to crush him.”

“What do you need from me?”

“Could you… Could you meet me out there? And, call the others? Let them know not to contact Spencer just yet, I’ll handle letting him know.”

“Yeah, sure. I can do all that.” Dave started to dig out fresh clothes suited to the weather. “I’ll call you when I’m out of town, keep me informed.”

“Yeah.” He disconnected the call and tossed the phone into the passenger seat. “Damn you, Jason Gideon.”

==

It was an hour before Hotch was pulling up the gravel drive to the once familiar cabin. Several patrol cars were parked near the front as he put his own into park and climbed out.

“Agent Hotchner?” A man came out of the cabin and down the steps.

Taking a galvanizing breath, he stretched out a hand. “Yes, I came as soon as I could.”

“You knew the owner of the cabin?”
“Jason Gideon, yes, we worked together in the FBI.” He cautiously followed the officer inside where a body was laying under a tarp. He was in no hurry to see the carnage that was once his friend and teammate. “I haven’t been up here in years, haven’t talked to him in almost a decade.” He sighed. “I’m honestly surprised he still even had my information.”

The officer gestured to the covered body. “Do you want too…?”

“Uh, can we wait? A friend of ours, another agent, he should be here in about fifteen minutes. He and I can do it at the same time.”

“Sure.” He nodded. “The crime scene techs are almost done so…”

“I’ll wait outside.”

==

Dave and Aaron knelt down as the officer pulled back the tarp and showed them what was left of their former coworker.

“Damn you, Jason.” Hotch met Rossi’s eye. “I have to call Spencer.”

==

When Reid turned on his heel and took off back out into the darkness, Morgan started to follow him but Hotch put up his hand. “No, I’ll go.” Passing the others, he reached the door just as Spencer vanished down a dark trail. “Reid! Wait!” When the younger man didn’t slow, Hotch started to jog to catch up. “Spencer!” The cabin was out of view in the darkness when Aaron was finally close enough to reach out and grab his arm. “Spencer!”

Spinning on the spot, Spencer raised both hands and shoved Aaron back as hard as she could. “You knew!” When Aaron stayed standing, he shoved again and again, pushing him back up the path a step at a time. “You knew and you didn’t tell me! You stood in my apartment and as good as lied to me!”

“You knew!” Another shove, another step and he tripped over a loose root, falling back on his ass. “Yes! Okay? Yes, I wanted to be sure before I told you! I’m sorry!” Spencer was standing over him now and he raised one hand to ward off whatever might come next now that he was down. “If it wasn’t him, I didn’t want to upset you unnecessarily.”

Spencer started to deflate.

“Look, just because they found my information here didn’t mean it was Gideon inside and the body… The way he was shot? They needed me to come see him in person. I’m so sorry, Spencer, I was trying to protect you.” Tears started to prick his eyes. “Please understand, I had to be sure first.”

He looked back up the trail. “He was… Can I see him?”

“I really don’t think you should.” The ground was cold, nearly frozen solid already and he didn’t
have a proper coat on. The cold was seeping through his suit, but Aaron didn’t dare try to stand yet. “I know that how he went about bringing you here wasn’t the best, but that didn’t make him not important to you. I know he was important to you. And I know you have a hard time with someone just leaving. I remember the letter, Spencer.”

“You know about the letter?” Spencer stilled.

“Yes, I read it. When Garcia and I stayed with you while you detoxed, the letter… I found it and read it.” He didn’t know if the younger man would see it as another invasion, another betrayal.

“You read the letter?” He could barely make out Hotch’s nod in the moonlight. “You never said anything.”

“It was private, personal. I know your dad left you with nothing more than a letter and then Gideon did and… I swore to myself then that no matter what, I would never do that to you. We were far from ever becoming an us, we were barely friends then, but I knew I had to do better than they did.”

“You…” He was speechless. “I…”

The silence of the night stretched out between them.

When he started to shiver, Aaron finally broke the silence. “Can I get up now?”

“What?”

“It’s… It’s cold and I don’t have a coat. Can I get up?”

“Oh. Yeah.” He offered him a hand and helped pull him up. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” He brushed himself off and started to trudge back. When Spencer took advantage of the cover of darkness to take his hand as they walked, Aaron gave it a gentle squeeze.

==

Another lead, another odd turn in the process of retracing Gideon’s last steps as Hotch and Rossi drove to the next site. “How is he?” Dave asked from behind the wheel.

Aaron drew in a deep breath and let it out. “Angry.”

He waited to see if his friend would elaborate. “At?”

Hotch slumped in his seat. “Me, for not being honest about the call. Gideon for being a spineless bastard who took off and left nothing but a letter, recreating his dad leaving him. Probably his dad for having done it in the first place and leaving him particularly vulnerable. Himself for being hurt by it all.”

“So, everyone?”

“Just about.” The silence stretched out between them. “Can’t say I blame him either.”

“Yeah. You haven’t said what went down in the woods earlier.”

His mind went back to the woods. “I know.” But he didn’t add any more, he knew Dave wouldn’t press any further.
It hurt to see Spencer hurting, but Aaron gave him the space he clearly wanted and tried not to take it personally when the younger agent seemed to turn to Morgan with his pain. Maybe he was just too close to everything to see clearly.

The woods around the cabin were calm, quiet. Like all of nature knew that a good man had died there and was in mourning. Aaron filled his lungs with the crisp air and just took it in until Dave slowly climbed the steps to join him. “I remember the first time I came out here.”

Dave raised one dark brow but didn’t speak.

“We’d had a bad case and in the hotel afterward and then on the jet home I’d had nightmares.” He knew Dave would remember the one, remember the row of boys they’d found. “Instead of heading straight home... Gideon found me stalking the aisles of a liquor store with plans to get completely smashed somewhere on my own. He paid for all of it, loaded me into his truck and brought me out here. The only words he said to me, after taking my phone, wallet, and guns was that I was safe.” He replayed the scenes he could remember in his mind. “I drank and came outside and screamed until my voice was gone. The next day he took me back to my car and never said a word about it.”

Nodding, Dave smiled sadly. “I have a confession.”

It was Aaron’s turn to arch a brow.

“I did to him with you what he did to you with Spencer.” When he saw the confusion in his friend’s face, he elaborated. “When we met in Seattle, I knew you were perfect for the unit. Pretty green still and maybe in need of a few proper meals, and only a little cocky.” He smirked. “But you were a natural at reading people. Situations. The difference was that I saw the job through until you could stand on your own two feet.”

Aaron frowned, watching the rest of the team slowly coming back from the walk they’d taken as a group, everyone bundled up tightly. “When he turned up with Spencer, I was so angry at him.”

“Yeah, well, no one could ever accuse Jason of being great at interpersonal communication.”

He chuckled. “No, they couldn’t.”

Dave watched as Spencer’s eyes glanced their way before he huddled into where JJ was pulling him close to her side. “We’re all better off for him having done it though.”

“Yeah.” He didn’t speak again until Dave was about to walk away. “Spencer said Gideon made us, he and I, possible. I’d never thought about it that way.”

A lump formed in his throat. “Take him home, Aaron. Take care of him.” He waited for the younger man to nod before he joined the others.

Aaron had followed Spencer’s old car all of the way back to his apartment. Parking and climbing out, he opened Spencer’s door and helped him out as well. “Let me take care of you.” He whispered in his ear, chests pressed together. When he felt a nod against his collar bone, he took the younger man’s hand and led him upstairs.

Locked away in their own world finally, Aaron pulled him into a hug. “It’s okay now, I’m right
here.” He felt the first trembles right before sobs overtook the slim body. “Shh. Tell me what…” His voice caught at the role reversal. “Tell me what you need.” His voice was soft, rough with his own emotions.

Brushing his lips against Aaron’s gently, he murmured. “Take me to bed, my Love. Make love to me.”

Silently, Aaron led him to the bedroom and carefully stripped them both naked before laying Spencer out carefully on the bed. He was nervous, his taking Spencer was rare anyway but this… He could see the heartbreak simmering just below the surface, could feel similar sadness welling up in his own chest. He prepped everything and then carefully line himself up, slowly pressing his cock into Spencer’s opening. When he was, finally, fully seated inside his lover, Aaron saw tears beginning to pool in his eyes and his breath hitched. Spencer tugged on his shoulders until Aaron finally obeyed and sank down till they were chest to chest, his thrusts slow and careful. The room was quiet as they moved together and Aaron wasn’t sure if this would end in either of them reaching orgasm or not, but that didn’t matter tonight. They both needed to release their emotions.

Beneath him, Spencer began to tremble, his dick twitched as he came without fanfare between them a moment before the dam broke. His walls were still trembling, still massaging Aaron’s swollen cock as the first sob burst free and he began to cry in earnest, tucked in the safe embrace of his lover’s arms.

Aaron carried on with his movements as he pressed a kiss to the curve of his throat. Long legs wrapped around his thighs as his own sadness began to take over, making him shake. Something between a growl and a moan welled up in his chest, rattling around in his ribs, as he came and with it, his own emotions set free. Relaxing and pulled Spencer close, they remained locked together, sharing in the grief of a lost friend.
The team had just gotten back from a case that afternoon and Hotch had sent them all straight home from the jet. It was too late in the day to start anything fresh and they all needed a night’s sleep. He was surprised when someone knocked on his office door later. Looking up, he saw Kate smiling nervously from the doorway. “Come in. Let me just finish this line.” His eyes quickly darted out the window to verify that none of the rest of the team had followed him back into the office.

One he finished his thought, Aaron closed the file and moved it and his pen to the side. He had been watching Kate nervously play with her nails in the edge of his vision, now giving her his full attention, he folded his own hands on the desk, watching her still hers in mirror action. He made sure his posture and features were relaxed, open, as he waited for her to speak. When she didn’t just jump right in, he finally prompted her. “What’s up?”

She blushed and ducked her head. “I’m being so stupid.” She looked up, meeting his gaze. “I really like this job, what we do. I’m not quite ready yet to give it up.”

He turned his head slightly, waiting for her to go on.

Taking a deep breath, she decided to just be out with it. “I’m pregnant.” The moment the words were out, she felt herself smile. It felt like a weight was lifted off. “I’m due in the summer.”

Hotch smiled back. “So, you’ve known for a while.”

“Yeah. I didn’t want to jinx it before.” She cleared her throat.

“How did Chris take the news?”

Kate was surprised by the question. “Good. Great actually. He’s thrilled, he’s hoping for a boy this time.”

He chuckled. “And Meg? Is she happy about it?”

“Eh. She’s spent her whole life as the only child and she’s at that age anyway where everything is a difficult phase I think.”

“Yeah, Jack’s getting to those now too. Though I couldn’t imagine how I would manage if he were a girl. Things have definitely been easier as a single dad having a son.”

It was her turn to chuckle. “So, I guess I’m on restricted duty now then?”

Hotch nodded. “Yes. When JJ was pregnant with Henry, she was only our media liaison, so she wasn’t in danger generally. But as a field agent, we can’t be having you running headlong into gunfire or anything now. You’ll have to discuss with your doctor about the amount of flying we do, I’m sure at some point he or she will want you grounded. We can leave that as an ongoing discussion in the coming months.”

She couldn’t help the urge to brush a hand over her belly. “Okay.”

“Every person and every pregnancy is different, so it’s hard to just have a list of how every single situation will be handled. I’ll do my best to adjust assignments based on this information, but if you are uncomfortable with something, just come talk to me. We can discuss it.”
“Sure.” She had been worried for nothing, she thought to herself. “Thanks. Honestly, I was a little worried that something like this would get me bumped from the team.”

“You’re a good agent. I’m not going to let you go that easy.” He rose to his feet when she did and started to see her out. “Talk to JJ, I’m sure she’ll have a world of advice on just about everything.”

“I will. Thanks.”

He caught her elbow and gave it a gentle squeeze. “And Kate?”

“Yeah?” She turned back to face him.

“Congratulations.” He gave her another, rare, wide smile.

==

He was almost ready for work the next morning when his phone rang. He glanced at the screen before answering it. “Hey, Jessica.”

“Aaron, I’m sorry to do this, but something has come up and I won’t be able to get Jack today.”

He stopped loading his briefcase and gave her his full attention. “Is everything okay?”

“I- Yeah, I think so. I’m going to have to call into work so I can take care of some things, but it’s okay. I know you really need me to be able to get Jack, but I just… can’t.”

“It’s okay, Jessica, really. Is there something I can help you with? We haven’t had any calls about pending cases, I can take a part day if you need me to.”

“No, Aaron, it’s okay. I promise. I’ve got it under control.”

He wasn’t sure he believed her. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure, Aaron.”

“If you change your mind though, you’ll call me? Anything at all, just say the word.”

“Yes, Aaron. You’re too sweet, you know that? Everything you have going on and you still make time to want to help me with my problems.”

“Well, you’re family.”

“And I’m thankful every day that we are, but I’ve got it under control. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Yeah.” He ended the call and tucked the phone back into his jacket pocket and finished getting ready to leave.

==

When the rest of the team had disappeared for lunch, Aaron pressed the speed dial on his phone to call Jessica. When she answered, he greeted her with a quick. “Hey Jess, it’s me.”

She sounded weary, even under the forced humor. “Checking up on me?”

“Yes. I was worried. I know how you tend to downplay your own needs, so the fact that you admitted you needed help with something, even something so mundane, makes me worry.”
“Pot, kettle.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, well, maybe that’s how I recognize the signs so well.”

“And I wasn’t admitting to needing help, I was admitting I couldn’t be your help.”

“When it comes to Jack, that’s splitting hairs I think. He’s as important to you as he is to me, so if you have something that is actually making you admit you can’t be with him, well, to me that sounds like a pretty big cry for some help.”

Jess sighed. “Some days I hate that you read people for a living.”

“I’m sorry.” Came his automatic reply. “Actually, no, I’m not.”

“Oh, you’re not?” True amusement was in her voice now.

“No. I know you’re holding back.”

“It’s just something I have to handle, Aaron. I swear. If that changes though, I’ll let you know.”

“Okay, fine. I surrender for now. I am picking up Jack from school today, I moved everything around on my calendar. If you need more time, just call me. I’ll figure it out.”

“Thanks Aaron. I promise you don’t have to worry about me. Bye.”

“Bye.” He replied, disconnecting the call. “Not worry about her.” He said out loud to himself with a snort. “Like that’s gonna happen.”
Aaron let his sister-in-law into the apartment with a quick smile in greeting. “Jess, I really appreciate you doing this last minute. I thought when I agreed to chaperone the field trip that I’d be able to take the day off.”

She gave him a slight shrug. “No worries, I’m looking forward to it actually. The Air and Space Museum is always fun.”

He paused in what he was doing and looked her over. “With twenty-four fourth graders?” He tipped his head to the side when she didn’t respond. “You okay?”

His intense gaze startled her. “Yeah, I’m good. A little tired, maybe.”

He wasn’t convinced. “Okay.” He grabbed his bags and kissed the top of Jack’s head. “I left you some cash in the kitchen in case you guys want to get some pizza tonight.”

Jess swallowed. “Okay.”

Aaron hesitated at the door. “Just call me if anything comes up, okay?”

“Mm-hmm.” She kept a smile plastered on her face until the door shut behind him.

==

Hotch was in Garcia’s office watching the screens flip through information as she worked when his phone rang. “Excuse me.” He stepped back to the door of her office, unsure what Jess wanted. “Hi, Jessica. What’s up?”

“I just got a phone call that my dad broke into the place where his old store used to be. The new owners called the cops who came and picked him up. I guess he forgot he didn’t have the store anymore and broke in to try and open for the day.”

“When did this happen?” His brows furrowed as he listened to her.

“About two hours ago, I just got the call. I spoke to the teacher and they can let me have time to go and get him but there aren’t extra chaperones…”

“No, no, you stay at the museum with Jack. I’ll handle it.”

“Are you sure.”

“Yes.” He ended the call and looked up into Garcia’s studying gaze.

“Is everything alright, Sir?”

He gave her a short nod. “I have to go, I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Looking him over, she nodded, the worried tone in his voice making her worried as well.

==

He finished talking with the officer, relieved to hear the new owners weren’t going to be pursuing Roy for the breaking and entering. The window was an easy enough fix, he made a mental note to
call and arrange to pay for a new window and to not let Jessica know about the cost. She had enough on her plate.

When Roy appeared through the door, Aaron steeled himself. “Roy, I brought you a coat in case you want it.”

His former father-in-law levelled a sneer at him. “Shut up!”

The drive back to Aaron’s apartment was filled with tense silence until Roy finally snapped at him. “Why the hell aren’t you just taking me home? To my home?”

He drew an even breath. “I told Jess we’d meet her at my place, she can pick you up when she drops Jack off.”

“Why’s she gotta do that?”

Hotch sighed. “We didn’t have much time to talk, she’s chaperoning Jack’s field trip.”

He snorted. “She’s off parenting her nephew as usual and you’re sitting back, denying your responsibilities.”

Aaron’s only response was to grip the steering wheel tighter.

==

He’d settled the older man into Jack’s room to rest and headed to his office when his phone rang. “Hey, Jess.”

“I’m so sorry, Aaron.” She started. “How is he?”

“He’s resting.” He didn’t want her to know about the angry outbursts. “Jessica, when was the diagnosis?”

“Last week.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. It explained her behavior recently. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“He’s my father, Aaron, he’s my responsibility. Not yours. I was going to talk to you about it tonight though. I even left an assisted living brochure on your desk.”

His heart ached that she thought she needed to carry this burden alone. “Okay.” He replied softly. “Well, he’s fine and we’ll both see you tonight when you get back from the museum, okay?”

“Thank, Aaron. Really.”

“Bye.” Putting his phone aside, Aaron began to lay out the various files for the case so he could keep abreast of what was going on.

“This is ridiculous!” Roy snapped, slowly appearing in the doorway. “Coming all the way up here. I’m not even dressed!”

Aaron was determined to not let Roy get a rise out of him. “Jessica said she’ll bring you some clothes when she and Jack come home.”

“I’ve got all kinds of clothes at my house! What are you doing?”
“I’ve got an active case that I need to stay on top of.”

Roy’s frown deepened. “Don’t you have an office for that?”

“Yes, but... I can stay in touch with them over the phone and computer just fine. They can work without me holding their hands.”

“I don’t need no damn babysitter!”

“I’m not babysitting you, Roy. I was supposed to have today off anyway. The rest of the team is more than happy to have my help as I work from home.”

“They don’t want you ‘round neither, huh?” His eyes narrowed. “You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

He shook his head. “No. I’m not.”

“The hell you aren’t.” He grunted. “You’re hurt because I never forgave you and this is payback.”

It hurt to hear that the older man still hated him for what happened. “Roy, this has nothing to do with the past.”

“The hell it doesn’t! That’s all we got, you and me, it’s everything to do with who we are.”

Garcia finished making notes and spoke into the phone again. “Is everything okay, Sir? You seemed a little...off earlier when you left and I know it’s a pretty short list of things that would have you walking away in the middle of a case.”

Aaron chewed his lip. “Everything is fine, Garcia. I- I’ll explain more later, but right now I just have to work from home.”

“Is Jack okay?”

“Jack is fine.” He smiled at her question. “I appreciate your concern, but really, I promise, everything is okay.”

“If you say so. But I’ll be checking in again later.”

He had to laugh at that. “I wouldn’t expect anything less, Penelope. Let me know what answers you find”

“Will do!”

Putting his phone aside, Aaron glanced up at Roy frowning at him, having overheard at least some of the conversation.

“Yeah?” Spencer answered his phone.

“Can you talk?” Aaron worked on pulling out bread and lunchmeat.

Reid glanced around the bullpen and found it deserted. “Sure, what’s up?”
Hotch sighed. “I just need a minute to talk. I had mentioned to you before that something was off with Jessica?”

“Yeah, is she okay?”

“She’s… I had to go pick Roy up from the police station because he broke into his old store.” He listened to Spencer breathe for a beat. “Apparently they got the official diagnosis of Alzheimer’s last week so who knows how long he’s been symptomatic and she didn’t tell me.” Finding a knife, he started spreading mayonnaise on bread absently.

“Where is he now?”

“Here. With me.” He sighed again. “I feel a tad blindsided but that’s not really the worst part of it all.”

“He’s still mad at you.”

“Yeah.”

“I can come over, it wouldn’t take me long to get there. I’ll bring you some files if you want and just be a general barrier. We can take turns being battered.”

“I can’t ask that of you.”

“You didn’t, I offered.” Spencer began to shove his own paperwork into a pile. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

“Thanks, Spencer.”

“No problem.”

Finishing adding lettuce and cheese, Hotch placed the top slice of bread in place and cut the sandwiches in half. “I made you a sandwich, Roy.” He called down the hall. “If you’re hungry.”

The older man eventually appeared from his office, a colorful brochure in his hand. “This! This is what you and Jessica have been doing behind my back?”

Aaron sent up a prayer for patience. “You went through my desk?”

“Well, I’m an old man with Alzheimer’s. I’m not responsible for my actions.”

“I didn’t even know about the situation until today.”

Roy read the page. “Happy Hoofers Club? That’s where they take you to a mall and let you walk around! Big deal, huh? Bingo tournaments. Movie nights with popcorn.”

“What’s wrong with movie nights?”

“It’s a damn nursing home, that’s what’s wrong with it! I can go to the movies and eat popcorn myself! I’ve been to these places before, they take you there to shrivel up and die.”

“Roy. The doctors have said you’re going to need more help.”

“Doctors!” He huffed with disgust. “Psh. I could write a book on what doctors don’t know! I’m fine!”
Aaron opened his mouth to speak but his front door opening cut him off.

“Aaron?” A voice called out.

“Who the hell is that?” Roy demanded.

“A colleague.” He tried to get back on the previous conversation, ignoring Spencer for the time being. “Roy. You broke into your old store this morning and you told the police that you were opening up for business.”

“I got a little mixed up! You’re not allowed to get mixed up?”

“They could have taken you to jail!” His voice started to rise with frustration.

“This!” He waved the brochure in the younger man’s face. “This is jail! I make a mistake? A change of clothes fixes it! You? You make a mistake? And I lose my daughter!” Roy stormed off, leaving the two agents alone.

When the silence started to overwhelm the room, Spencer finally dropped the files in his hand on the counter and took off his satchel. “Hey, it’s okay.”

Aaron finally looked up, tears in his eyes. “How? How it is okay?” His voice was strained now.

Spencer pulled him close, letting Aaron tuck his nose into his neck.

“H’s right.” He whispered.

“H’s angry.”

“What the hell is this!”

The men pulled apart and turned toward the angry voice.

“Who the hell is this? You said he was a colleague. What the hell sort of colleague is he?”

Aaron opened his mouth to speak, but Spencer squeezing his hand silenced him. The younger agent stepped forward offering his other hand. “We’ve never formally met, sir. I’m Doctor Spencer Reid.” He kept his hand out until it was clear the old man wasn’t going to shake it.

Roy responded with a grunt. “What the hell kind of doctor are you to work with the likes of him?”

“I have Ph.D.’s, three of them. In math, chemistry, and engineering.”

“Is that all?” He snarked.

“I also have a bachelor’s degree in sociology and philosophy and a master’s in psychology.”

Aaron took a small amount of enjoyment from the stunned look on Roy’s face.

Roy’s eyes moved between the two men and then to where their fingers were linked. “Son of a bitch.” He turned and stormed off.

“Shit.” Aaron swore under his breath once they were alone.

“Aaron, it’s okay. So what, he knows now.” He pressed a quick kiss to his lips before pulling back. “Let me show you what we’ve uncovered so far with the case.” He started to open files across
Aaron’s desk. Glancing up, he realized the older man was still standing in the kitchen. “Aaron?” Dark brown eyes met his. “You are allowed to stand up for yourself. This is your home, your life. You don’t owe anyone an explanation.”

==

When Roy hadn’t reappeared several hours later, Spencer slipped toward Jack’s room to check on him before Aaron realized what he was up to. He found Roy watching the TV in the boy’s room.

“What the hell do you want?” Roy snarled when he finally caught sight of Spencer.

“To see how you are doing, if you need anything.”

“That hair and those looks, no surprise you’re a fairy.”

Spencer shrugged. “That may be so, but they’re just words. I’m comfortable with who I am, what I am. You haven’t answered my question though about if you need anything. I saw you hadn’t eaten the sandwich in the kitchen, I can fetch it for you along with some tea.”

“I don’t drink none of that sweet crap.”

“Me neither. I have a jug of proper iced tea in the fridge if you’d like.”

Roy eyed him a minute. “I am hungry.”

Nodding, he vanished and retrieved the sandwich and drink, returning quickly and placing it on the desk. “I know it might not seem like it, but I understand what Jessica’s going through a little bit.”

“What?”

“It’s not the same, but as a child my mother wasn’t…well. I cared for her the best I could with the skills and resources I had but there came a time when the best thing for everyone was that she move into a facility where professionals with experience were making decisions.”

“You put her in a nursing home?”

“Of sorts. I cried about it for months. I didn’t want to hurt her, but I did. She was angry at me for a long time.”

Roy silently started working on his meal. “I still don’t want to go into no damned home.”

“I understand that. And I understand why you feel the way you do about Aaron, but I think you need to hear Jessica out.”

He stared at Spencer a moment. He would have expected a friend of Aaron’s to automatically side with him. “I thought you were screwin’ him.”

“What?”

“I saw the two of you all wrapped together and then holdin’ hands. Shouldn’t you be telling me how horrible I’m being to him?”

“I said I understand why you feel like you do, not that I agree with it. I also never said I agreed with how you treat him. I spent years watching Haley tear him down until he was a broken man and it’s taken me years to repair that damage, so I’ll be damned if I stand by and let someone new tear him down again.”
“You know he knows you’re in here.”

“Yes. He wouldn’t be the great profiler he is if he hadn’t worked out just where I’d vanished to by now.” Spencer stood and started to leave. “I am supposed to be working a case right now though.”

“Yeah, go do your job.”

Both agents looked up from where they were bent over the desk when the front door opened and Jack burst in.

“Dad! Spencer!” He ran to give them both hugs.

“Spencer! What a surprise!” Jess trailed after her nephew. “What are you doing here?”

He shrugged. “I thought it might help Aaron to have someone in person to bounce theories off of.”

“I thought I heard my favorite grandson!” Roy emerged from the bedroom.

“Look what I got, Grandpa!” Jack showed off his loot.

“That’s the greatest fighter plane that was ever built!”

“Want to play my new video game?”

“You wanna get beat?”

“You’re going down!” Jack laughed.

“You’re dreaming boy!”

Jessica turned to Aaron. “How’s he been?”

“Well, about what you’d expect. He went through my desk and found the brochure.” He saw the sadness in her face. “There’s no way he can stay at home, is there?”

“Not without around-the-clock help and he’s on a fixed income, there’s no way I can afford that.”

“I’d offer to have him here, but…”

“He’d never do that.”

“I know.”

She choked back tears. “I’m out of options, Aaron.” The tears welled up in her eyes. “My place is way too small. His sister was going to take him, but three days ago she fell and broke her hip. And that place needs an answer by tomorrow, otherwise they’re gonna give the spot to someone else.”

A tear tracked down her cheek. “I’m an awful person.”

Aaron rubbed her arms. “No, you’re not.”

“It’s gonna kill him.” She whispered.

Heart breaking for her, Aaron pulled her into a hug. “Well, he’s a proud man and nobody wants to give up their independence.” He gave her another squeeze before turning loose.
“My whole life, he was the rock.”

“Yeah. Spencer and I have to go back to work, but stay for dinner? We’ll both talk to him tonight. Okay?”

“Thank you, Aaron. I don’t want to do this alone.”

“You’re not alone.”

==

Once the two men had left, Roy nudged his grandson. “I need to talk to your Aunt Jessica a minute.”

“Okay.” The boy collected his things and headed for his room.

Studying his daughter closely, he finally asked. “You knew, didn’t you?”

“Knew what, Dad?”

“About Aaron and that doctor. I caught them holding hands and stuff.”

Jessica swallowed and turned to face him fully. “Yeah, Dad, I know about Spencer.”

“How long they been together?”

She shrugged. “They weren’t a couple when I met him just before Haley’s funeral. They were close, but the whole team is.” She wrapped her arms around herself defensively. “Spencer’s good for Aaron, Dad. I really think Aaron was in a dark place for a long time and he pulled him back. And, he understands the job and knows how important Jack is.”

“You think that’s why he and Haley didn’t work out? He was a fairy all this time?”

“Dad!”

“What?”

“You can’t say things like that!”

Roy shrugged. “Didn’t seem to bother the doctor when I said it to him.”

Her jaw dropped. “You called Spencer a fairy? Did Aaron hear you?”

“No. You didn’t answer my question though. Do you?”

“No, Dad, I don’t think their marriage fell apart because Aaron was gay. Aaron would have tried to move heaven and earth for Haley, hell, I think he might have murdered someone to avenge her death. But Haley wasn’t innocent.”

He grunted at her. “What could my daughter have done to create those problems?”

“A lot, Dad. More than you could ever know.” She turned to walk away. “Aaron said to order pizza for dinner, let me know what toppings you want.”

==

On the car ride back to Quantico, Spencer spoke up. “What are Jessica’s other options?”
“I have no idea.”

“Is money the biggest problem?”

Aaron sighed. “Jess makes good money, but taking on her dad full time with the extra help he’d eventually need plus the move to a two-bedroom unit, she’d been stretched, I think, beyond her means. I’ve offered before to help her out, she does so much with Jack, but she knows I’ve been putting aside what I can to get him set up for college.”

“You know, my mom’s care isn’t all that much. Her disability and pension cover quite a bit and ever since Rossi had a talk with my dad that time in Vegas, he’s been contributing as well.”

Aaron chuckled.

“What I’m saying is, I put money aside every month with nowhere to spend it. Sure, I set stuff aside for Jack and Henry, but my rent is pretty reasonable and my outgoings are minimal. Do you think she’d let me help out?”

“Are you sure?”

Spencer lifted one shoulder up and down. “Why not? Jess is pretty important to me too and she’s always supported us. And I can always head down to Atlantic City and pick up some extra if things get tight.”

“You say that as casually as someone would say they were stopping by the bank.”

“Yeah, well, as long as I don’t get caught again, it’s about that easy.”

He chuckled again and then stopped, looking at Spencer. “Wait. Again?”

==

Spencer had ridden back to the apartment with Aaron and had joined them for pizza. He knew it wasn’t his place to be involved in what was to come, but he wanted to be on hand as support for afterward.

“Dad, can we build my plane tonight?” Jack asked.

“Sure, but the adults need a little time first.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll come help you get set up.” Spencer rose and followed him to his bedroom.

Roy looked between the two remaining adults. “Here we go. The talk.”

“Dad…” Jess admonished.

“It’s a good facility, Roy. It’s only three hours away.”

“Actually, Aaron, I’ve been thinking.” Aaron had shared with her Spencer’s earlier offer over the phone. “Dad, do you remember when I told you that I got that promotion at my job last month?”

“Mm-Hmm.”

“That I’d be supervising a new software unit?”
“Yeah.”

“Well, I was going to use the extra money to move into an apartment closer to town, but if I stay in the same complex, I can get a two bedroom place. I want you to live with me.”

“Oh, that’s… that is very sweet of you. But no.”

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t want to be a burden.”

“You wouldn’t be! You’re really handy around the house, and I could use the help.”

“Mm.” Roy nodded and glanced at Aaron. “You’re awfully quiet.”

“Well, it’s up to you. I will say that Jack would like having you close.”

“No Happy Hoofers.” Jessica added. “No bingo tournaments. But we can still have popcorn and movies.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?” She was surprised it had been that easy.

“Okay.”

She pressed a kiss to his cheek and stood. “I am going to go get our things. When we get home, we can start planning what your room’s gonna look like.”

“Great.” He watched his daughter walk away.

Aaron stayed quiet until he realized Roy was watching him. “It’s a good solution.”

“Oh, I’m sure you think it’s a great solution. Sure. Given the fact that you conceived the idea.”

“Roy, I didn’t.”

“My brain may be checking out, but I’m not an idiot. Jessica told me a while ago that her promotion was in title only. And the song and dance the two of you have been doing for my benefit, you’re giving her the extra money, aren’t you?”

“I’m not. I swear.” He shook his head. “But Spencer is.”

Roy was stunned. “Spencer? Why?”

“Because he wants to. Because he has very few financial obligations in this world and he puts a high price on the value of family.”

“But I’m not his family!”

“No, you’re not. But you are Jack’s family. You and Jessica are his closest links to Haley, Spencer wants to make sure Jack keeps those links as long as possible.”

“But… why?”

“That’s the man Spencer is. And I’m well aware of your views on same sex relationships, Roy. But maybe… if you took the time to get to know him.” Jack appearing from his bedroom cut Aaron off
as the boy said goodbye to his grandpa. “Go get set up. I’ll be there in a minute, okay?” He waited for Jack to move to the living room.

Roy let out a heavy sigh. “He’s all I got left of Haley. I see her in his eyes, in the small things he does.”

“I see it too.”

“You and me? We’re not good, you know. I’ll never forgive you for what happened.”

Aaron felt himself choke up. “I wish you didn’t feel that way.”

“Oh! Don’t be so understanding! For one, take the low road and tell me to take a hike!”

“I think about what Haley would want for this family.”

“Well, I do, too! She’d want to be alive still, and she’d want to be Jack’s mom again.”

He drew in a ragged breath, wondering briefly where Spencer had vanished to. “She wouldn’t want us holding onto the anger or pointing fingers at each other.”

“Well, I’m pointing anyway! You’ll be rid of me soon enough. Doctor’s told me there will come a day when I won’t know who she is anymore.” He got contemplative until Jessica appeared to usher him out.

Once the door had closed, Spencer stepped out of the hallway and watched silently as Aaron stared at a photo, he could see tears in his eyes. Approaching him, he wrapped his arms gently around his shoulders and chest from behind. “I’m here.”

“Will you stay tonight?”

“Of course. Are you okay?”

“I- No, I’m not. This, today, it’s opened a lot of old wounds.”

“I know.”

Aaron swallowed. “He blames me. He said my mistakes got her killed.”

“I was there, Aaron. You did everything you could to protect her. To save her. Let’s help Jack build his plane.”

“I’m- I’m not really up for it.”

“I know. He just wants his dad to be with him. I’ll help too.” He backed up and tugged Aaron to his feet. “You’ll feel better afterward, I promise.”
“Aaron!” The voice sounded far away. “Aaron! I need you to look at me!”

He felt his brow furrow. Were they talking to him? There was noise, others shouting and then hands. So many hands. He wondered if the person who had been shouting had found him. Did he want that man to find him? Was he safe now or still in danger?

Curling forward, he realized he was leaning against someone and the events of the evening started to rush back to him. He’d tried to save a woman on his own. Lewis had sprayed him with something and was going to kill the team. He needed to save the team! Fumbling, he wrapped his hand sluggishly around an unfamiliar gun and pulled it free, pointing it straight ahead. He would not let Lewis kill his team.

Spencer’s head snapped up when Dave shouted and started wrestling with Hotch at the back of the ambulance. Running to help, he saw that Rossi was trying to wrestle his gun back from the other man. “What happened?”

“Damnit Aaron! Turn loose!” Dave grunted when he caught an elbow to the side. He tried peeling back Aaron’s fingers from the trigger. “He’s gonna shoot someone!”

Morgan joined them, jumping into the ambulance and hooking both arms over Hotch’s, restraining him. “Hey! It’s Morgan, man! It’s you’re team! Calm down, we got you, man! You’re okay!”

“Got it!” Dave pulled the gun free and stumbled back, watching the others continue to struggle with him. Aaron was disturbingly silent for someone putting up such a fight. He turned to one of the medics. “Sedate him.”

“Sir, we don’t know what he was given.”

“He’s gonna hurt himself!”

The medic frowned but located something to calm the struggling man. When Hotch sagged in Morgan’s arms, everyone stepped back.

“What the hell was that?” Morgan didn’t turn loose. “Did he say something?”

“No.” Dave shook his head. “I was trying to get his attention, get him to look at me. I couldn’t get a response.” He glanced at Spencer and back to his best friend.

“What the hell happened in there?” Derek asked.

“I.” Dave had no answers.

Spencer finally spoke up. “Let’s get him taken to the hospital.” He turned to the uniformed men. “Do you have a way to restrain him?”

“We can use the belts, they’ll keep him from getting hurt anyway. That’s all we got.”

He nodded. “Okay. Let’s get him inside. Morgan, can you help lift him?”

“Sure.” He started to shift positions to lift Hotch up. “Who’s gonna ride with him? If he wakes up on the way, he could flip out.”
Reid took a deep breath. “I’ll go. I know more about the details the doctors will want. The rest of you can follow behind and meet us there?” Hesitating before climbing in, Spencer passed his own gun to Rossi.

“Are you sure, kid?”

“Yes.”

==

Aaron woke with a start and blinked at the plain white walls. There was something itching his nose and he tried to lift one hand to move whatever it was away, but his arm caught. He tugged again and looked down. He was restrained. Strapped to a bed. Pulling his feet up, he confirmed, he was held down by his wrists and ankles. He yanked again, ignoring the incessant beeping behind his head as he struggled.

A minute later two nurses and a doctor burst into the room, the doctor speaking directly to him. “Agent Hotchner, I need you to calm down and relax. Once you are calm, we can get the restraints off of you. Can you stop struggling please?” The doctor watched his patient who remained silent but stilled as requested. “Good. Now, I know you’ve been through a lot recently but you’re safe now. I was told to tell you that Spencer would be back shortly, he had to leave for a bit, but he wanted me to be sure to tell you if you woke up that he’s okay and he’s on his way.”

Aaron gritted his teeth, the muscles in his jaw flexing, and stared at the doctor, but didn’t speak. Instead he tried to work out what had happened to him. He remembered being in a fight, the pain of being smashed across the face. He squeezed his eyes shut and opened them again, watching the doctor assess his vitals as the nurses finally set him free.

“You’ve had a lot of drugs in your system, so please don’t try to get up just yet.” He waited to see if he would get a reply before escorting the nurses out. Rounding the corner, he spotted Reid striding up the hall. “Ah, Agent Reid. Agent Hotchner has just woken up. I’ve just been in to see him and remove the restraints.”

“Good. Did he say anything?”

“No. He practically stared right through me. But when I asked him to stop fighting so we could remove the restraints, he stilled pretty quickly. Do you have any idea yet what he was sprayed with?”

“No, not yet. Did you give him my message?”

“I did. You’re welcome to go see him, but please, keep the door open while you’re in there?”

“Sure.” Spencer headed into Aaron’s room. “Hey, I’m here.” He watched Aaron’s eyes scan the room before landing on him. “I’m going to start going over what happened and if you could, fill in the holes?”

After a beat, Aaron nodded.

“Two nights ago, you drove on your own to pick up a woman who we believed was about to be attacked by Peter Lewis. Do you remember driving out to Doctor Regan’s estate?”

He thought a minute. He did remember doing what Spencer said so he nodded.

“But Peter Lewis was already there. He had made Regan stab herself to death, her body was on the
floor near where you were. After that, what we know so far is a little less clear. We can tell from the pattern of destruction in the room and bullet holes that the two of you fought and he sprayed you. You were soaked and there was a broken water pitcher on the floor, we’re assuming that you tried to remove or dilute the drugs.” He watched Aaron staring. “Can you remember what else happened?”

Aaron opened his mouth but didn’t speak right away. Did he remember what else had happened? He tried to put what he remembered into a logical order. When he finally spoke, his voice was barely above a whisper. “I- It doesn’t make any sense.”

“That’s okay.” He was still standing across the room. “Rossi and I came in and you fired behind you. I pursued Lewis and Dave said you begged him to take your gun from you, do you remember that?”

“Yes.”

“When I came back, he’d gotten you into a chair. You seemed dazed but lucid. We talked, and Morgan joined us.”

“Lewis gave himself up.”

“Yes. You were confused by that.”

“It made no sense.” His voice strengthened. “His end game…”

“I agree. Dave escorted you over to be looked at. I’m honestly still a little confused as to what happened next.”

Aaron’s eyes ran around the room again. “How long ago was that?”

“It’s been just over thirty hours.”

“The other victims killed their families.”

“Most of them.”

“She was still alive when I got there, Lewis was with her. Her voice was calm and then she showed me the knife and then just stabbed herself.”

Spencer nodded, but stayed quiet.

“I remember kneeling over her, trying to save her, but she was already dead.”

“Her injury would have been instantly fatal.”

“He- he sprayed me, I think. Or he hit me first, I can’t remember. I lost my gun and then he sprayed me… Again maybe? I…” He thought hard, his head aching with the effort. “There was water on the desk. I think he hit me again and I couldn’t move.” He finally met Spencer’s eyes. “He talked about mister scratch and then gave himself away. He mentioned the sage, but the only way he would have known that is if he’d been there.”

“He didn’t mean to reveal that about himself.”

“No. Then… He wanted to see what my biggest fear was. I saw all of you come in the door, all of you get shot. He didn’t know me, he hadn’t had time to plan an attack on me.”
Spencer wanted to speak, but he knew Aaron needed to tell his story his own way.

“I laughed at him.”

“How’d he take that?”

“He pointed my gun at my face. If he was going to kill me, I wasn’t going to give him the benefit of seeing me scared.” That part was so clear now. He could hear his own laughter in his head, see the perfect circle of the barrel of his gun. Smell the gunpowder. “There were lights in the windows. The dream he’d shown me felt so real and I couldn’t figure out if it was another dream until there was a knife in my hand.”

“Where’d the knife come from?”

“I don’t know. I was going to surprise him and kill him when he came in the door but something was off. The knife was in my right hand.” He stared down at his hands. “I asked for my gun and it appeared on the floor beside me.”

“Where was Lewis?”

“About to come through the door. No. That’s wrong. I was supposed to shoot at the door, but I knew the team was going to be coming too, you all knew where I was headed. Something told me it was all wrong.”

“We appreciate you following your gut.”

“But… Then I was okay. How’d I end up here?”

Quietly, Spencer pulled his phone out of his pocket and turned off the recorder before crossing the room to finally join Aaron on the bed. “Dave asked you to tell him what happened and you closed your eyes and got really still. He tried calling your name several times and you slumped over, he thought you’d passed out until you grabbed his gun and aimed it at the rest of us. It took he and I and Morgan to get it away from you and hold you down.” He took his hands, rubbing his thumb on the slight pink mark on his wrist. “The decision was made that for your safety, you needed sedated.”

“Am I on a psych hold?”

“No.” He caught Aaron arching one brow. “You are only here to sleep off the drugs. You were pretty combative and we didn’t want you to hurt yourself in your sleep. I recorded what you just told me as your official report.”

“I can go home?”

“I think the doctor wants to look you over first. We still aren’t sure what he was using to drug his victims. Your doctor was watching your vitals, your heart rate was fast for a while.”

Aaron turned his hand over and held Spencer’s. “I want to go home.”

“I’ll go talk to him.”

==

Spencer had nudged Aaron to bed after Jessica had left with Jack. The pair had stopped by to have breakfast with them before giving them some time. Spencer puttered around his apartment while
his partner slept.

With a gasp, Aaron woke from a nightmare, thrashing against the sheets as he tried to get up.

“Aaron!” Spencer rushed in and crawled up on the bed. “Aaron, I’m right here.”

Panting, he pulled Spencer to his chest to ground himself. “It was just a nightmare.” He said to himself.

“Yes. A nightmare. Do you want to tell me about it?”

“I don’t remember much.”

“Okay.”

“Thank you.” He inhaled the smell of his aftershave. “Would you lay down with me?”

“Sure. Let me just get undressed a bit.”

==

Two weeks later, Aaron was sitting in his office once again, looking over files. His first days after the Scratch case had been rough, nightmares had plagued him every time he’d shut his eyes. They’d figured out soon after that the dreams stayed away if he was curled around Spencer as he slept. After almost a week, Aaron had made some calls to the therapist he’d seen previously and the same day had met with her, and then every day after that until he was able to go back to work.

The team had just come back from a case and weren’t due it until lunch, so he was taking advantage of the quiet to get back into the swing of things. Someone knocking on his door frame made him look up. “Hey.” He smiled at Kate and stood. “Come in, sit. Please.” He waited until she made her way to a chair and got comfortable before he sat back down. He spotted the white envelope in her hand but didn’t comment. “How are you doing?”

She seemed momentarily surprised by his question and rubbed her swollen belly. “Good. I’m good. Ready to be done, but good.”

He smiled. “Exciting and scary all at once.”

“Yeah.” She looked down at the letter in her hand, hesitantly placing it on his desk. “When we got Meg, I took a year off to be with her, it helped us bond. I’ll always have those memories of that time, it goes by so fast.”

Hotch nodded.

“I want to do it with this little one as well. I’ve loved being with the team, but I just…”

“I understand.” He picked up the letter and placed it to the side. “When you’re ready to come back, you’re always welcome on the team if we have an opening.”

“Thank you. Really.” He slowly stood, smiling when he stood as well, rounding the desk to stand next to her.

“If you ever need anything, just call.” He was sad to see her go, but was happy she was going to get to spend time with her growing family. He hugged her and then stepped back. “I mean that.”

“I will, I promise.”
The work day moved along quietly until Hotch knew everyone but JJ had gone home. Glancing out the window, he watched as one of her hands vanished into the top drawer of her desk and then slowly pulled something he couldn’t see out and moved it to her mouth. Curious as to why she was still at her desk after everyone else had called it a day, he rose and moved to his own doorway. “JJ?”

Her head popped up and she turned, looking at him guiltily. “Yeah?”

“I would have thought you’d have left already.”

“Yeah.” She shook her hair out of her face. “I was just stalling really.”

“Stalling?”

JJ sighed. “Are you busy?”

“Not at all, come on up.” He turned back into his office and waited, curious when she took a seat on the couch. Turning a chair around, he sat across from her. “What’s up?”

“I just… could you not be Hotch for just a second?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Could… I…” She took a deep breath, a smile crossing her face despite her nerves. “I’m pregnant.”

Aaron felt himself smile. “Congratulations.”

She exhaled. “I don’t know why I got myself so worked up about telling you. Maybe it was because I know Kate just turned in her resignation so she could take a year of maternity leave.” She chuckled.

“No, this is great. I’m happy for you guys, really, I am.”

“Thanks.” She stood up, a weight lifted off her shoulders. “Well, I need to get home to Henry and Will. See you on Monday, Hotch.”

“See you Monday.” He watched her leave before gathering his things to head to Spencer’s apartment. When he arrived, Penelope was standing in his kitchen, laughing.

“Hey!” She giggled. “I was starting to think we were going to have to go back and forcibly haul you out.” She stopped teasing Spencer and picked up a fresh cupcake and handed it to him. “I talked to Jessica, she’s going to be here just in time to join us all for dinner tonight.”

“Good.” He took a bite of the spongy cake. “So, Penelope.”

“Yes?” She took a bite of her own treat.

“You’re not pregnant as well, are you?”

Jessica led Jack into the apartment and was greeted with the sight of Spencer smacking his neighbor’s back while the usually cheerful blonde was coughing and pelting her former brother in law with what looked like pieces of cake.
“How late are you planning on staying?”

Aaron sighed into the phone. “I have to get these reports finished and upstairs before morning or it will be a constant barrage of phone calls and emails until I do.”

“Well, if you hadn’t been so easily distracted lately…” He could hear the smile in Spencer’s voice.

“If you weren’t so damned intent on distracting me.”

“I can’t resist. Well, Jack’s homework is done, he aced his science test so I told him he could stay up an extra hour tonight. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Whatever you decide, Spence, it’s fine.”

There was a slight pause. “Is it weird that it still feels weird that you just let me parent him?”

“You’ve been a parent figure in his life pretty much since he was born.”

“Yeah, well.”

Aaron missed whatever he said next, distracted by the sound and sight of Morgan all but carrying a very upset Garcia through the bullpen. “I’ve got to go, I’ll call you later.” He hung up without waiting for a reply and rushed to meet the pair at the bottom of the stairs. “What’s going on?”

“She was in my office, sittin’ in the dark.” Morgan relinquished half of the support to Hotch, who helped steady stumbling steps as he led them up to his couch. Morgan started to pace, one hand rubbing over his head. “She said she was scared. You had her review everything on the Dirty Dozen case and she did.” He stopped and turned to face his boss. “She’s the Dirty Dozen. She’s the next target.”

“But what about the firewalls? We have filters on our computers.” He glanced between the two of them.

Morgan shrugged. “I don’t understand a lot of it, but someone has been watching her and she said there was a way they could get in and trace her.”

Hotch wanted to reach out and wrap an arm around Garcia’s shoulders but he stopped himself. “It’ll be fine. We’ll find them and it will be fine.”

“She mentioned Montolo at the prison, if he can be eliminated there, then they can get to anyone anywhere.”

He was more concerned that throughout the entire conversation, Garcia hadn’t uttered a word. “Garcia?” When she didn’t respond, he tipped her chin up to face him. “Nothing is going to happen. I’ll make some calls and start a plan of action.”

“What are you thinking?” Morgan asked.

“I don’t know yet.” He drew in a deep breath. “For right now I’d feel better if she wasn’t alone.” He turned back to her. “You have some choices for tonight. You can stay with Morgan or I or one of us can stay with you.”
Garcia hiccuped a breath and looked up at Morgan. “What do you think?”

“I’m more than happy to have your back, Baby Girl. I was just packin’ up to leave.”

She nodded. “Would you stay at my place?”

“Sure.” He pulled her to her feet. “Let’s go get your stuff.”

Hotch watched the glass doors shut behind them before finding his phone on his desk and calling Spencer back.

“What happened?”

“I can’t get into it right now.” He sighed, sagging into his chair. “Morgan is going to be staying with Garcia tonight. Could you and Jack…” He trailed off.

“Yeah, sure. I’ll grab a bag real quick. Have they left the office yet?”

“No, not yet.”

“Okay, I have a bit then.” He listened to the older man breathing for a minute. “Aaron?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll see you at home.”

“Yeah, see you.”

==

Spencer was propped up in Aaron’s bed reading when Aaron finally arrived. “Hey.”

“Hi.”

“You look rough.” He watched Aaron go through the motions of shedding his clothes and getting ready for bed. “What’s going on?”

“Garcia may be in danger.”

“What?”

He sat on the edge of the bed and turned sideways, pulling one leg up onto the covers. “The Dirty Dozen?”

“Yes.”

“She is the Dirty Dozen. The hitmen may be after her.”

“Oh, god. What do we do?”

“I’ve made some calls. I’m waiting for some calls back so I’ll have to leave my phone on, but I gave them sufficient evidence that supports her being in protective custody.” His face fell. “They are pushing for WitSec and to move her probably out of state.”

“No. Aaron, that can’t be our only option.”

“I’m too tired to come up with anything better.” He crawled up the bed and adjusted to lay next to
Spencer. “It’s not a good option, but it might be all we have.”

==

Hotch tried his best to be a calming presence for Garcia as he outlined for her that she needed to be in protective custody. With Spencer out of town, he worked to keep his focus all on what needed to be done to keep her safe.

“For how long?”

“Until we can produce a viable lead.” He tried to give her a reassuring smile. “You’ll be here and an agent will be assigned to you until further notice.”

“This is horrible.”

“I know. WitSec wanted you moved to another state. I convinced them that you would be safer here. With all of us.”

“Thank you for that. I, um, okay, I need to go home and get my things.” She started to gather her things.

“Garcia.” His voice only rose a tiny bit, but it was enough to still her. “This starts now, you can’t leave the building.”

“What…? But I have…”

“Make a list and I’ll send someone to pick up whatever you need.” He passed her his pan and some paper.

“Okay.” She began to write. “Wait. Who’s getting this stuff?”

“I was going to send Anderson.”

She frowned, scribbling out and writing things as she muttered to herself. Finally, she handed him the paper.

“Garcia?”

“Hmm?” She looked up at him with fresh tears in her eyes.

“What’s bothering you the most?”

“What if this isn’t enough?”

“Enough?”

“To keep me safe? Rossi was attacked once here… We’ve had unsub in other times. I like to think of this place as our own Minis Tirith, but in reality…it’s not.”

“I know.”

==

Morgan and JJ had taken to spending extra time over the following days with their friend while Aaron made sure her apartment stayed locked and secured.
When a case came up that had Hotch working separately from the team, when his case ended, he headed down the hall to check on Garcia. His phone rang as he walked to the part of the building she was in. “Hey, Dave.”

“Hey. We’re on our way back now.”

“Good to hear.”

“How’s Garcia doing?”

He stepped through the doorway to her room. “She's disappointed she can't go home, but she's doing ok.”

“I'll bring her a new garden troll to cheer her up when I get back.” Rossi chuckled.

“That's a good idea.” Dave ended the call and Hotch looked up. “Am I right? You doing all right?”

She looked around the small, cluttered room. “Well, uh, I don't really have a choice, do I?”

“No.” He shook his head, tucking his phone away.

“Well, then, yes, I am hunky dory.” She started to move stuff randomly around the space without a sense of purpose. “I am. I'm, um I'm gonna put some satin sheets on that, I'm gonna put a splash of color over there. I'm gonna put some tassels on that thing.” She choked on a sob until it finally broke free. “I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.” She hated crying in front of the others, especially him.

“I know. It's all right. But it's not gonna be forever.”

She sniffed and wiped away the tears on her cheeks. “Okay. Hey, I'm gonna make myself a vegetarian omelet for dinner. Do you want one?”

He thought a moment. He knew some company would do her some good. “Well, uh Jack's already in bed, so… You have jalapenos?”

“Uh, Uh, I'm sorry. Um, do I have ja-- I want you to know, I have had a love affair with all things hot and spicy since I was like twelve!” She started to pull the things they would need out of the small fridge and pass them across.

Aaron couldn’t help but smile at her antics as she began to chatter on about her love of spicy food as he shed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves, taking a seat to begin helping. He looked up, still smiling, when she gasped excitedly.

“Do you think it would be weird for Jack to come by here?”

He shrugged. “Why?”

“Your birthday just passed and we didn’t have time to do anything. I can’t…” She looked around. “I can’t bake anything, but we could still have a party.”

“I can see about it.” He focused his attention back on cutting. “I had forgotten all about it with everything going on. Well, Spencer had something planned, but then we got a case and he had to leave town.”

“How?”

“I guess it just isn’t that important to me. Never really has been.” He finally looked up when he
realized she’d stopped assembling the food. “What?”

“Nothing, I- nothing.” She shook her head.

“Penelope.”

She pointed her spatula at him. “Don’t. You say my name like that and you know I’ll talk.”

Putting the knife down, he waited.

“I got the impression that maybe the birthday memories you have weren’t as… nice to remember as mine.” Refusing to look at him, she tipped veggies into the pan.

Neither of them spoke again until they were both seated on the small sofa. “I don’t really talk about it.”

“Don’t feel like you have to explain to me!”

“Garcia.” He cut her off. “It’s okay.” He took a bite of his dinner. “And you’re right, my memories probably aren’t like yours. But that’s okay, it was a long time ago now and I have so many better ones to make up for it.”

She rubbed his back. “I’m glad. That you have the better ones., not that… you know.” She shoved a bite of her own food into her mouth so she would stop talking. Feeling bad for having mentioned it, she stayed quiet until they were both finished. “Thanks for staying. It gets a little lonely and I’m starting to go a bit crazy being trapped indoors.”

“I’m sorry it has to be this way.” He looked around. “If you want… I don’t have to leave yet. We could watch a movie or something.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I’m sure.”

Garcia pushed the door shut and locked it before drawing the blinds. She asked him to help move things around so they would be able to comfortably watch a movie from the couch and then smiled when he kicked his shoes off before situating his heels on the makeshift coffee table.

Starting the movie, she sat beside him stiffly while the opening credits rolled until he finally raised his arm along the back of the couch and tugged her against him. Blushing in the dim light, she shifted closer to get comfortable, her head falling against the curve of his shoulder.

==

Aaron stretched, wincing when the muscles in his back spasmed from having slept in a bad position. Biting back a groan, he used his free hand to try and rub away the pain in his neck. He realized he was still in his work shirt and tie about the time he also realized his other hand, and arm, were not free. Stopping the attempt to pull himself upright, Aaron blinked at the glowing black screen and then looked around the room, finally landing his eyes on where Garcia was asleep beside him. Staying still, he studied her while she slept. She looked sad and he wondered how much all of this was really bothering her. When she shifted, he managed to free his arm and work to make the pins and needles go away.

“We fell asleep.” Garcia whispered.
“Yeah.” He looked around for his shoes. “I’m not sure what time it is.”

“Uhh.” She stretched and pulled her phone off the table. “Late. After three.”

“Oh.” He slowly redressed. “I must have been extra tired, I don’t normally fall asleep on the couch that long.”

“Me neither.” She played with the edge of a pillow while he made to leave. “See you tomorrow, well, this morning I guess.”

At the door, he turned back to her. “Get some sleep, Penelope.”

“I will.”
“How’s it going?” Aaron was happy to hear from Spencer.

“It’s…good. It’s good. I’ve spent a lot of time with my mom. I miss you.”

“I miss you too, but I’m sure your mom is happy to have you around for a while.”

“Yeah, I think she is.”

“How has she been? Has she had good days? I know that was your big worry, that she’d be having bad days while you were out there.”

“It’s been hit or miss sometimes but we’ve managed some good time every day.”

“That’s good. I wish Jack and I could meet you out there, but with this case with Garcia still open I just really feel I needed to stay close.”

“Yeah, she needs you more than I do right now. How is that case going?”

“We have some possible leads. I’m hoping to have more things ironed out by the time you get back. Am I still picking you up at the airport?”

“Yes, I’ll text you the details again so you don’t have to search for them and I’ll let you know about any delays.”

“Okay. I’ll see you at the airport then.”

==

A week later, Hotch was waiting for Spencer by the baggage carousel. The younger man lit up when he saw him. “Hey! I thought you’d just wait outside till I called.”

“I thought about it. But we haven’t had too many chances to talk and I couldn’t wait to see you.” He instigated a brief hug. “Jack’s thrilled you’re back too.”

“It’s always good to see my mom, but it’s good to come home too. Especially to you and Jack.” He forced a smile at his partner. “What’s the plan for dinner?”

“According to Jack, homemade pizza.” He smiled. “Jessica was helping him when I left.” When he spotted Spencer’s luggage, he grabbed it before the younger man could, giving him a mischievous grin as he did. “You’ve been travelling and I know that stresses you out, just let me do this.”

“Fine.” Spencer allowed it as he followed his partner to the car. “You have the weekend off?”

“I do. I’ll take you home in the morning, but tonight I want you to stay over.”

==

Jack had been excited for everyone to try the pizzas he’d made and everyone had loved them. Once Jessica had gone home and Jack had finished his school work, the two men were finally able to have some alone time. The whole evening had been filled with the quick touches and gentle squeezes that they’d missed over the last three weeks. The moment the door to Jack’s bedroom had closed, Aaron had caught Spencer by his belt and pulled him chest to chest, pressing a lazy kiss to
his lips, not caring the Jess was somewhere in the living room getting ready to leave.

They’d both blushed when she’d cleared her throat and then said goodbye, letting herself out.

Once the door clicked shut, Aaron nipped at the spot he’d been kissing at his throat. “Take me to bed. Please.”

“Anything for you.” Spencer tugged him to the bedroom, making sure the door was shut and locked before carefully stripping Aaron and then himself naked. He nudged him back until he sat on the bed, and then again until he fell backward, feet still on the floor. Taking his time, he used his fingers and mouth to map out every inch of Aaron’s skin. The hair that covered most of his body, the faint silvery lines that were now barely visible as they crisscrossed his body. Marks from bullet wounds, from more mundane injuries. On his knees, Spencer worked along Aaron’s thighs, committing to memory the spot on the outside of his leg where he’d taken a bad fall while bike riding and had sustained road rash. Spencer smiled sadly, remembering the day. He’d gotten a phone call asking to pick him up and to bring towels. The wound had looked much worse that it ended up being.

Lifting one of Aaron’s feet, Spencer pressed lightly to the bottom, making Aaron arch up and hiss. He mirrored the action on the other foot before working his way up and pushing his knees further apart, exposing everything to Spencer.

He had to hold Aaron’s hips still when he took his balls into his mouth, sucking on them as the older man let out a needy whine. He loved to lavish his partner with attention, affection. It made everything in the world seem right. When the cock in front of him started to leak, he let go of the balls and licked up what he could, taking what Aaron was giving him.

Pushing to his feet, Spencer slowly crawled up his body, kissing and nipping as he went until he was seated, hovering, straddling Aaron’s chest. He whispered, not wanting to break the intimate feeling of the room. “I want to fuck your mouth.”

Aaron’s dark brown eyes opened, staring straight up at Spencer. “Yes.” He let his mouth fall open and waited until the dick he knew so well brushed along his lips, leaving traces of fluids before it sank into his mouth. When his lover set a fast pace, taking from him what he was offering up, he couldn’t resist grabbing Spencer’s ass, holding it tight, feeling the muscles flexing. Letting his hands wander, he could feel the back of the younger man’s balls, the soft skin behind them, the pucker of his ass. He let his fingers tease at the hole, stroking the skin until the tip of a finger accidentally slipped inside. He heard Spencer make a noise at the intrusion and so he did it again, dipping a little further. Over and over until Spencer was fucking himself back on a single finger while fucking Aaron’s mouth. Aaron’s knees drew up, heels catching on the edge of the mattress as Spencer began to cry out with every stroke. He was just starting to go dizzy from the restricted oxygen when he felt the tremble sweep through his lover’s body followed by him coming down his throat. Shuddering, Aaron felt himself come, fluid shooting down his balls and along his ass. When Spencer pulled away, Aaron was still trembling, still incredibly aroused, like any touch was going to set him off again.

Spencer cupped Aaron’s cheek as he started to climb off the bed. “Look at you, My Love, looked so utterly debauched. I just want to memorize every inch of you over and over again, would you like that?”

“Yes.” He gasped.

“Would you like me to play with you?”
“Yes.”

He backed away completely, teasing two fingers along the top of Aaron’s thigh as he moved around the room. He found one of Aaron’s ties, a deep red one that he knew would look so nice against flushed skin. Returning to the bed, he saw but ignored the fluids collecting around Aaron’s ass, instead he crawled up and tied his wrists over his head. “You can’t touch anything. Do you understand?”

“I understand.” He could feel his balls still drawn up. His partial coming had taken the edge off, but still left him close. It wasn’t until something soft started brushing his hot flesh that he realized he’d closed his eyes. Opening them, he watched as Spencer brushed what looked like the fluffy end of a boa along his body, teasing his cock as he moved around. His heels were still pushing into the bed, legs shaking.

Leaving the feathers on Aaron’s hip, Spencer nuzzled Aaron’s cock, smelling the potent scent of arousal and lapping at the fresh offering. He finally pulled the cage away. He had no doubt Aaron hadn’t removed it in at least a month, hadn’t had an intentional orgasm in that long, so he didn’t want to draw out the torment tonight. The moment the cage was off, he watched in awe as Aaron’s thick dick filled, arching desperately toward his stomach. Spencer picked up the feathers again and trailed them under his member, teasing. “Come for me, Aaron. Show me how you fall apart so beautifully.”

When his back arched, if felt to Aaron like he’d been possessed by some other being. When his cock began to pulse, his eyes rolled back. He felt his ass lift off the bed. The new angle had his come pulsing up his own chest further that he could ever remember it going, making a mess as he thrashed around. Black spots danced across his vision as he began to wonder somewhere in the back of his mind if it would ever end.

When Aaron woke later, he was washed up and curled around Spencer who was sound asleep.

==

Hotch wasn’t surprised when the ultimate plan to catch one of their elusive unsubs came from Reid. He wasn’t a major fan of the plan, but it was about as sound and as solid as they came. Reid would go undercover and draw her out, allowing them to take her in.

The night of the ‘date’, Aaron had taken one look at Spencer all dressed up and ready to go and had had to bite back his first response to drag him off somewhere and tear the suit off. It had already been suggested, by Rossi of all people, probably anticipating a problem, that Hotch stay back with Garcia, so he wasn’t going to get any opportunities to manhandle his partner somewhere private until the sting was over.

He paced her office like a caged animal until it had driven her mad and she’d shoved a stress ball into his hands and snapped at him to sit down. He’d spent fifteen minutes quietly amusing himself with how the little person’s eyes bugged out every time he gave it a squeeze, absently wondering as he did where such a thing had been when he’d been dealing with Strauss all those years.

Garcia calling him over and handing him an earpiece so they could both listen and communicate with Spencer brought his out of his musings. Nothing after that went as planned. Listening to Spencer talk to their unsub about his mother, Aaron recognized the sounds of truth in his voice. The sounds of a man admitting to his own internal pain, fears, aware that everyone was listening as he unburdened his soul.

“When I looked at her medical chart, it…it didn't make any sense. The medication that they gave
her should have been helping, but I couldn't figure out what was making her so angry. So, I, uh, I
got to see her. The moment I walked in her room, I saw it. For three seconds she didn't know who
I was.” Spencer sighed, wishing this wasn’t how Aaron found out. “I, um, I had her tested that
morning, and I found out that night That she had early onset of dementia. Most likely Alzheimer's.”

“Did you test yourself? No, you didn't. You were too scared.” Kat leaned in, studying him.

Garcia turned to look at Aaron. “Did you know?”

He shook his head, stunned that in the weeks since Spencer had been home, he’d said nothing.
“No.” He felt Garcia reach up and pat his hand where it was on the desk.

“I thought I dodged a bullet when I turned thirty and didn't have a schizophrenic break like her, but,
uh, this is somehow bigger and scarier because I can actually see it happening. All the memories
that we used to share are just dying. I can't stop it. I can't help her. All I can do is find people that I
can help.” He wondered if Aaron would understand. Understand that helping him was doing as
much for himself as it was the older man. That he feared a day he would look up and it would be
Aaron’s turn to see that three seconds before he realized who the love of his life was.

As they watched the rest of the case come together, Aaron worried about Spencer’s state of mind.
He could see the younger man pushing, ad libbing at the speed of his mind to get her out of the
building without a scene. Once she was secured, he gave Garcia’s shoulder a squeeze. “You ready
to go home?” He asked her, not at all surprised when relief overwhelmed her to the point she began
to sob. Putting Spencer and the others out of his mind, he removed both of their earpieces and
pulled a second chair close. Taking a seat, he pulled Penelope until she was wrapped in his arms.
He held tight, grounding her and rubbing her back until she cried herself out.

Garcia pulled back finally, wiping her face with her hands. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

She looked up at him, sniffling and laughing at the same time, rubbing at his shirt. “I got you all
wet.”

“It’s fine, Penelope. Whatever you need, I’m here. You’ve gone through something traumatic and
stressful, you’re going to have more moments like this one.”

“More?”

He nodded. “And if you need anything, anything at all, you call me.” He studied her closely.
“Okay?”

She nodded. “Okay.” Her voice was a whisper.

“You are important, don’t feel like you're going to be a burden.”

“Okay.”

Deciding that was all he was going to get out of her for now, he stood. “I have to go start sorting
out the paperwork to wrap up this case. I’m giving you some time off, a week for now and then
we’ll discuss from there.” When she only nodded, he sighed. “We’ll get through this, Penelope. I
promise.”

==
Aaron waited until late into the night for Spencer but he never came home. Worried that their wires had gotten crossed, he swung past his own place, but the younger man wasn’t there either. Thinking, he remembered that he and Morgan had been discussing spending time together after work, so Aaron pointed his car in the direction of where Derek and Savannah lived. A motion in a park a block away had him slowing and checking it out. In the moonlight, he recognized Spencer’s lean form sitting in a swing.

Parking, Aaron slowly walked across the grass, sitting in the empty swing beside him, not saying a word.

“I’m too young to find out for certain.” Reid finally spoke.

“Okay.”

“I could one day forget who you are. Who Jack is.”

“If that happened, we’d deal with it.”

“I could still one day experience a break and end up schizophrenic.”

“I know.”

“Then why are you with me? I could ruin all of our lives.” His voice rose.

“There is no way you could do that.” Aaron remained calm.

“I could end up like the endless dozens of unmedicated schizophrenics we’ve seen in our careers and you don’t think that would ruin your life? Jack’s life as he watched me unravel?”

“No.”

“How?!”

“I don’t think your mother has ruined your life. I think she has given all she could and maybe then some to turn you into the man you are. The man who helped me, saved me, with no expectation to get anything back.” He dug his heels into the soft ground and began to swing slowly. “If you had a break, I would make sure your wishes were respected, but I wouldn’t just walk away. If you forgot who I was, I would remind you every day. I love you. More than that, I am in love with you. That doesn’t change because one of us gets sick.”

“You would really promise me the whole ‘in sickness and in health’ spiel knowing what that sickness could include?”

“Yes. And there’s nothing to say it would be you. It could be me. Or Jack even. We have no way of knowing, but what I do know is we shouldn’t be inviting problems in where they don’t already exist.” He stopped the swing and reached out for Spencer’s hand. “If it happens, it happens.”

Spencer chewed his lip. “Okay.”

He let the silence linger for a bit before asking. “Weren’t you supposed to be headed to Morgan’s?”

“Yeah.” He grinned. “Garcia was there though and had already hit the jaeger and was wanting to strip down. I decided not to stay.”

“Ah. Yeah, well. Can’t blame you there.”
Hotch wouldn’t have been surprised if Morgan had taken a swing at him when he’d told him he was off the case. He’d steeled himself for it, knew he wouldn’t strike back. The younger man was hurting, his wife and child were in surgery and they had no answers. Morgan bringing up the Reaper case had been a low blow, but he understood. He had been far too involved for his own good in that case.

He also knew that there was no way the rest of the team would truly follow his order to keep Morgan out of the loop. He was banking on their attempts at being sneaky, their attempts to covertly talk to Derek and assess how it was doing in order to get additional information out of him.

Aaron listened as Derek had talked about understanding how Chaz Montolo feels, the waver in his voice at the thought of losing his own child and possibly the woman he loved and his heart clenched. The terms were different now, but Aaron wanted to just take Morgan by the shoulders and tell him over and over ‘I get it! It’s okay to be angry and upset and a mess and I get it.’ He held back though. He and Morgan had never been known for overt forms of connection of any kind; maybe they were always both too afraid of setting off hidden triggers somewhere.

==

Spencer watched as everything seemed to fall apart and fall into place at almost the same time. He tried to be supportive to Morgan, to Garcia who always had trouble when cases hit close to home, to Hotch who didn’t seem surprised when JJ had looped their friend in and repeatedly showed concern, empathy, for everyone’s feelings. It was a case that was just too much, too close for all of them.

He’d quietly followed Aaron down the hall when he went to talk to Derek, listened to them talk and the anger in the younger man’s voice. He just hoped that when it was all over, everyone would be able to move past the words and actions done and go back to being able to work together.

==

“Morgan never calls me Aaron, why would he start now?”

JJ turned. “What else did he say?”

“That of all people, I should understand.”

“He’s talking about Foyet.”

“Yes, but he mentioned that earlier, why would he bring it up again?”

“He wanted you to relate to his rage and back off?” Dave offered, worried about what sort of other things this line of thought would dredge up later.

“Is there any other relevance to Foyet?” Tara asked.

“He attached me in my home, maybe Morgan unconsciously let that slip.”

“Yeah, but his house isn’t red.” Garcia tried to think.
“But he’s renovated a lot of houses!” Reid added in. “What if it’s one of those?”

Garcia began to type on her laptop. “Wow, he has been busy. He started renovating in 2001 right after nine-eleven.”

“I remember him saying he didn’t know what to do with his frustration.” JJ joined. “He thought tearing down walls would be a good start.”

“He wanted to restore them so he could control something.” Reid shared a split-second glance with Aaron. When Garcia found the photo of the house, Spencer watched as Aaron all but flew out of the building to the SUV. He worried about just how this could end.

From the back seat, flying down the road, Spencer felt his heart all but stop at the rapport of the gun through the vehicles speakers for the second time in his life.

The second time some of them listened to a loved one die.

The second time Garcia was alone with her grief.

==

Back in the hall, this time waiting on news of Savannah and Derek’s baby, Spencer watched as Aaron hovered in the background. They weren’t free to talk here, but he could still make out the tremble in the older man’s hands, the way he tugged at the edges of his jacket. Fidgeting. Trying hard not to pace and draw attention to himself. Pulling his own phone out, Spencer quickly typed a message out before dropping in back into his pocket.

Aaron felt his phone vibrate and pulled it out, reading the words on the screen. *Deep breath. We can see the baby and then leave.* He nodded once at no one in particular and then looked up just as Morgan announced the big news.

==

After some subtle prodding from Spencer and Dave, Aaron found himself the first one to be taken to meet Morgan’s son. Washing up and donning gloves, he stared into the incubator at the tiny boy, a part of him afraid to touch a baby so small. “You know, Jack was never this small.”

“Yeah, well, the doc says this incubator is going to be home for the next couple weeks.”

Aaron looked up at his teammate. “It’ll fly by.” Jack as an infant was now only a faint memory and he’d missed so much of those early days because of work.

“Hotch? I get it.” Derek felt himself smile. “I finally get what you guys have been talking about all these years. I never knew that six pounds one ounce could knock me out.”

Hotch just nodded, his voice catching on a lump forming in his throat. Instead, he changed the subject. “Check out the grip.” He held gentle to the baby’s hand.

“I know, right?”

“He’s strong.”

“Alright, so it’s not just me.”

He watched his friend grin brightly and smiled as well. He didn’t want Derek to miss what he had. “Promise me you’ll take some time?”
“About that. Hotch, after these last few months, I can’t let this job risk taking me permanently away from my family. They need me, now more than ever. I’m gonna take the time, paternity leave, and discuss it with Savannah, but I’m thinking about turning in my badge for good. I think it’s time.”

“I understand.”

==

At home later that night, Spencer waited until Aaron came to him to talk.

“There were moments when it felt like history was repeating itself.” Aaron spoke softly, now dressed in a soft t-shirt and boxers. “He brought up…before…and I couldn’t shove it back out of my mind.”

“I know.”

“He didn’t kill him.”

“No.”

“He’s a better man than I am.”

“No, he’s not. The situations were different.”

“I killed an unarmed man with my bare hands.” He insisted, the tears filling his eyes tracking down his cheeks.

“You stopped a man hellbent on murdering your son alongside his mother.”

“I don’t know if I’ll be able to sleep.”

“I’ll be right here beside you every step of the way.”

“I know.” Aaron finally crawled into bed. “I’m not sure I could have survived the past seven years without you.”

“You would have made it, because you are strong and determined and you love Jack. Without me, you would have found a way to do what you needed to.”

“I might have left the BAU.”

“Maybe. Or you would have found a way to stay.” He began to work his fingertips over the older man’s scalp. “Did you see how tiny Morgan’s baby was?”

“Yeah. It’s hard to believe a person can start out that little. It’s hard to believe any of us were ever that small.”

“Would you…”

When he didn’t continue, Aaron nudged his leg. “Would I what?”

“In some alternate universe, I guess…. Do you think you would have had more kids?”

He let out a gust of breath. “I don’t know. If I’d stayed with Haley? I don’t think so.”
“No?”

He shook his head. “After all we went through… all she…no. Jack was enough for us.”

Spencer didn’t reply as he continued playing with Aaron’s hair.

“In an alternate world where I met someone else? Maybe. I don’t know. I wouldn’t want Jack to feel like I was replacing him.”

“That makes sense.”

Aaron tipped his face up and pulled Spencer close. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

==

Weeks later, Aaron watched from his office window as Morgan climbed the stairs to the conference room one last time, as he spoke to Spencer. He could tell by their body language that this was difficult for them both. Spencer struggled with goodbyes, always had. And even though this goodbye meant that Derek was going to get to spend more time with his own son, he knew Spencer was struggling with it.

In the time since Morgan had officially announced he wasn’t coming back, Aaron had tried to keep Spencer from wallowing too much in the sadness of losing a coworker and friend, but he also knew that he had to let him process in his own way. He just hoped the talk he was watching helped with that process.

==

Deciding they needed a weekend away, Aaron had arranged for them to take a weekend and get a cabin in the woods. They both needed to regain their footing after everything that had been thrown at them recently. Once Spencer had agreed, Aaron had secretly made the arrangements and on a Friday afternoon had whisked Spencer away to the woods.

The cabin turned out to be made up of one large room with something better described as a partition blocking the sightline from the bedroom area into the main area, and then a rather hedonistic bathroom with a large tub with jets and a large shower. They were totally isolated; the next nearest cabin was over the ridge almost a mile away. It suited Aaron just fine. The pair had dropped their bags in the bedroom, shedding everything they wouldn’t need until Sunday night, when Aaron caught Spencer by the loops of his slacks and pulled him close, chest to chest, letting one hand wander between his legs and the other held the back of his head. He pulled him in until they were caught in a passionate kiss.

Breaking apart to breathe, Aaron started a nipping assault on Spencer’s throat and neck. His teeth grazed the end of day growth of hair, his ear lobe, tender skin that made the younger man moan. “I think we’re alone now.” Aaron whispered into the soft flesh beneath Spencer’s ear.

“If you start quoting cheesy lyrics at me, this is going to be shut down a lot sooner than you want it to.”

He snorted and then pushed Spencer back two steps. “Run.”

“What?” Spencer hesitated, frozen by the predatory look in Aaron’s eyes.
“Run. Put up a fight.” An odd, almost frightening sort of smile crossed his face. “Let’s see who comes out on top.”

He realized Aaron was serious and with a shriek, Spencer took off for the still open front door of the small cabin, trying to listen for footsteps following him. Down the steps, he darted into the woods. Spencer didn’t hesitate to look back, it would cost him too much. He knew Aaron was chasing him.

Turning left, Spencer left the established trail and cut through a stand of trees, jumping over fallen limbs he never would have believed he could clear. Catching a hand around a thin trunk, he changed course and went right, now parallel to where the trail should be, heading away still from the empty cabin. The only advantage was it was harder for Aaron to pursue him silently, the ground off the path was covered in leaves that crunched and slipped together.

At a creek, Spencer splashed through it noisily, leaving tracks for several paces before turning left again into a patch of grass that hid his prints, jumping back over the narrow waterway and then following along its bank as far as he could. Pausing, he ducked under some thick brush and stayed still, listening and watching for any sign of Aaron.

Then he spotted him.

Across the creek, moving slowly and using all of his well-honed skills, Aaron was looking for any sign of the younger man. Spencer waited until he’d passed by before edging out of the brush and slowly began to stalk his lover through the woods. When Aaron turned to creep along the edge of a small open field, Spencer quietly scrambled up a pair of thick evergreens and watched him move. He worried he’d been caught when, at one point, Aaron froze, turning slowly on his heel and stared along the tree line where Spencer was hidden, but then a deer jumped out below him, scaring off some birds and a rabbit and Aaron returned to the direction he was heading.

Moving from tree to bush, Spencer trailed along behind Aaron until they had slowly looped back to within sight of the cabin. His blood was pumping, his flight or fight response was trying to kick into gear as his arousal grew. He had the upper hand, he would be the one besting Hotch this time. Watching how Aaron was moving, Spencer finally planted both feet firmly against the thick branch he was perched on and pushed off, launching himself, with a silence he was proud of, into the air toward Aaron’s back. Once airborne, Spencer realized that Aaron hadn’t been unaware of his presence. By the time he landed on the older man, Aaron had turned to face him, hands out to slow his fall as he then rolled them along the ground.

He was stunned into inaction that Aaron had anticipated his moves and it took him a moment to recover. When he did, Aaron was already kneeling over him, working their pants open. With a thrust up of his hips, Spencer made him topple back, he rolled and took off again, this time slowed by his now sagging pants. He had made it as far as the steps into the cabin with a heavy weight landed on his own back, shoving him roughly into the stairs as he pants were yanked down. He tried to fight again but Aaron let out a growl and bit into the curve of his ass, drawing out a moan. Before he could process, slick fingers were swiping lube messily along his ass and then Aaron’s thick cock was pressing in. He gasped at the intrusion and tried to push back. He was held down as Aaron set a furious pace, slamming into him over and over until they were both crying out desperately. With an almost animal sounding groan, Aaron came hard, filling his ass as he continued to pound away.

Still hard, Aaron remained seated in Spencer’s ass as he held him tightly and rolled them so they were seated on the stairs, Spencer spread as wide as he could manage with his clothes still tangled around his body. He grasped Spencer’s cock that was pointed straight up to the clouds and began to
jack him off hard and fast. “I want to hear you. I want to hear you scream.” He bit at his neck as he kept the punishing pace.

Spencer began to cry out with abandon, shouting and calling to the heavens as the rush of impending orgasm began to flood his system.

“Watch.” Aaron growled. “Watch yourself.”

Spencer tipped his chin down, starting at the swollen, purple tip of his cock as it vanished in and out of Aaron’s hand. His cries turned desperate as he felt the pull of his balls. A moment later, he was coming straight up into the air, come spraying wildly with the rough strokes of the dark hand working him. He continued to cry out, the feeling almost overwhelming as his orgasm continued to roll through him until Aaron’s hand finally stopped.

Totally limp, spent, Spencer squirmed as he felt Aaron’s now flaccid member break free, pulling part of his own load out as well. He panted for what felt like an hour, waiting for his heart rate and breathing to return to normal.

“We had sex outside.” Spencer finally said.

Aaron’s answer was a growl and another nip of his neck.

“You planned on having sex outside.”

“Yes. I plan on having lots of sex while we’re here. I hope more of it is outside.”

Spencer chuckled and then frowned as he felt how the tightening of his stomach muscles pushed more come out of his ass. “I’m a mess.”

“You’re beautiful.”

“I’m sticky.”

Aaron chuckled, letting his hands begin to play in the various messes he’d instigated. “I’m okay with that.”

“That may be, but I’m going to take a shower.”

Aaron growled again, Spencer felt his dick twitch against his ass.

“Alone! I’m showering alone!”

“Then I guess you better run.”
Spencer hadn’t been to the club in years, not since he and Aaron had become Dom and sub and then partners. He knew Garcia still went on occasion. When Aaron came to him after a particularly stressful case, a case where the locals had hated their interference and Hotch’s job had boiled down to mostly chasing bureaucratic red tape while the rest of the team chased the unsub, and inquired about the club, well, Spencer agreed to find out more. When he’d gone in the beginning, either Penelope or the man they were meeting had arranged the room for the evening, he’d never done it himself. So, he went to the person who he knew could help him and asked Penelope about arranging a room.

While they waited for the approval process to be completed, Spencer prodded Aaron into a conversation about his fantasies, about what he would and wouldn’t like now. Play had slowly phased out as their relationship had grown; sure, they still played on occasion, but it was different. Once they were in the clear with the club, Aaron asked Jessica for one overnight watching Jack and their night was arranged. The younger man kept quiet on what he had planned and the knowledge that there was a surprise, an intense one of Reid’s past was any indication, had Hotch jittery and easily distracted the entire week. By the time Friday had rolled around, he’d had to resort to special pads to keep his constant leaking from staining his clothes. Spencer hadn’t touched him since he’d brought it up and now everything the slimmer man did was arousing him. Rushing home as soon as he could leave work without raising suspicions, Aaron made sure the front door was locked and then his bedroom door for good measure before stripping his suit off and tossing it into a heap on the chair. He normally took better care of his suits, but tonight he wasn’t going to have to worry about anything.

He looked himself over in the mirror. The gray at his temples and the more noticeable lines on his face. He kept himself clean shaved but knew if he grew out his stubble, that would be all gray now too, no longer dark like his hair. He sighed as his eyes slowly tracked down, tipping his head up and pushing his jaw forward to stretch the skin along his chin and neck. He was still reasonably well muscled, but things were starting to look different, softer in a way. The scars that crisscrossed his torso were now faint white lines, time and some attention having lightened and softened them over the years. He stared at his dick and balls; his dick pulled up tight and caged, he could barely remember what it looked like hanging flaccid while his balls hung behind it. Now they were fully in view and the idea of being naked no longer scared him.

He didn’t turn around to check the marks on his back. The really old ones he used to check on, to make sure they weren’t visible. They weren’t now, it had been too many years, not to mention they had been covered over time and again by Spencer, if only for a night. He wondered what this night would bring.

Looking around the room, he found the bag Spencer had told him he’d dropped by and collected it, dropping the contents on the bed, there wasn’t very much there. In fact, there was only one item in the bag, a pair of black boxer briefs but they were very fitted, stretchy, and not all there. Sitting, Aaron carefully pulled them on and then up, working out what was supposed to hang out where. They were comfortable, he felt almost naked in them, there was an opening in the front that allowed just his cock to hang out, his balls pressed provocatively inside the leg either side. He felt the smoothness on the fabric along his ass and realized there was an opening in the back too, he would be able to be fucked without taking them off. He wondered at the scenario Spencer had planned where he wouldn’t be able to undress.
Aaron looked over the note that had been in the bag with the lingerie, it was a list of what to wear for the night, a specific suit that Aaron only saved for special, non-work, occasions. The pants were very fitted, showing off his ass and thighs and anything else depending on how he moved, and the jacket was cut very trim. He found the thin, fitted, white shirt mentioned in the note and pulled it on with no undershirt, forgoing a tie. Finishing getting dressed, all Aaron had left to do was wait.

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Aaron let Spencer lead him into the club by the hand. He tried to take in everything at once, the private booths, the bar, the very averagely dressed men and women serving, the small smattering of people spread throughout wearing little more than chains and leather.

Spencer caught Aaron staring at a sub being fed at a table and leaned in close. “Would you like to do that? Come out here and be fed, be able to be my sub without a risk of being judged? Let everyone stare at you?” Dark brown eyes slowly turned and met his, the pupils blown wide.

“I think yes.”

He stroked Aaron’s cheek. “I hadn’t planned it, but we can do that. Let’s go to our room and put our things away and then we can come back down.”

His tongue darted out, wetting his lips. “Okay.” He obediently followed Spencer through the restaurant and into an elevator that took them to a floor above that looked like a basic, run of the mill, hotel. Except, the rooms themselves were nothing like one. There was a double bed in one corner and a place for them to store their things as well as a doorway to what he assumed was the bathroom, but the rest of the room was filled with cabinets and hooks in odd places and mats on the floor.

“We’ll look around in here when we come back. Let’s get you changed and then we can go eat.”

“Changed?” Aaron glanced down at what he was wearing and back up again to where something had materialized in Spencer’s hand. “What’s that?”

“A collar. I was hoping you would be willing to wear it for tonight. Some of the…things, I have for later attach to it.” He waited patiently for Aaron to answer, when he got a yes, he carefully put it on him before dropping his hands to push the older man’s jacket off. He then worked his pants open and then off and unbuttoned the tight, thin shirt down to the bottom two. “Kneel.” He ordered, watching as Aaron instantly hit his knees. Spencer stroked his hair. “You will not speak while downstairs, that is a rule. You will keep your eyes down, I know you’re curious, but you will be there just to be seen. Are you still okay with this?”

“Yes.”

“Stand up and slip on these sandals, I am bringing cuffs and if you don’t keep your hands at your sides at all times, I will have to cuff you.”

“Yes, Master.”

==

Stepping back into the restaurant, Aaron’s first instinct was to cover himself but he kept his hands at his sides. He followed dutifully as Spencer led him to a booth that was semi-private, which helped to calm him. A voice out of a pair that were drawing nearer caught his attention and when Spencer stood to greet them, Aaron forced himself to continue staring at the table.
“I thought you would be just enjoying the evening upstairs, I didn’t expect you to be down here or I wouldn’t have come.”

“It’s okay, we’ve just sat down, would you two like to join us?” Spencer asked.

“Are you sure? We wouldn’t want to intrude.”

“I can see why you liked James so much.” The unknown voice spoke, eliciting a choking sound from Spencer. “You found yourself a beautiful one though, congrats.”

“Thanks.” Spencer waved the pair to sit in the empty side of the booth and a moment later, Aaron found himself between Spencer and Penelope.

“So.” The blonde began. “Was the room how you’d requested?”

“It seemed to be. We only dropped our clothes and things there.”

“Speaking of things, I see you went for the black ones. You were right, they do look better than the red ones would have.”

Aaron felt himself blush, realizing she was taking an appraising look at his lower body.

Spencer began a lively discussion with the man, whom he apparently knew, about a paper that had recently been published, all the while leaning close to Aaron but otherwise ignoring him. After their food arrived, Spencer began to feed him while the others ate, being sure none of the bites were too big for him to manage.

“So, what do you use?” The other man asked.

“We mostly do impact play, wax, we keep it pretty basic. Plugs and vibrators, that sort of thing.”

“Violet wand?”

“No. I’m not okay with that kind of play. I’ve done a lot of reading and while, when used properly, it can be very safe and enjoyable, I think that given my job it might freak me out a bit too much.”

Aaron listened to his words. The other man must not know who he was, despite knowing the other two, since Spencer hadn’t said ‘our job’.

“Shame, I bet he arches wonderfully.”

Fingers on the inside of his thigh, teasing the edge of one bulge that was a testicle, made Aaron jump.

“He does, but I don’t need electricity to make it happen.”

“No, Baby Genius, you two make enough electricity on your own.”

The fingers began to draw patterns in earnest, Aaron focused on keeping his breathing even, letting his knees fall open to welcome the petting. A hand swatted the one drawing on his skin, brushing against where he hung out as it pulled back. Garcia leaned across him to whisper at Spencer. “Naughty, you’ll make a mess of him.”

“And?” Spencer shot back.

“I’m aware of what a tease you like to be. If recent days have been any indication, you’ve been
winding him up for ages.”

“Six weeks.”

“Six, what?” There was shock in her voice.

“Since the night he asked about coming here. I wanted him to be desperate when we got here.”

“Well, that explains why he looks ready to take you right here.” She patted Aaron’s other leg, right at the base of the shorts, a hair’s breath away from his other testicle and felt when a tremble ran through his body. “You need to get him upstairs before he short circuits.”

Spencer waved down their server and asked for the bill to be added to their room number before he stood and helped Aaron slide out.

Aaron glanced up quickly as he turned away and made eye contact with Garcia, who winked at him before her eyes dropped back to his package. He felt himself blush all over as he was escorted back upstairs.

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In the room, Aaron quickly learned the purpose of the mats and hooks. Spencer had stripped him to just the lingerie and had ordered him to kneel on a mat. He’d maneuvered him around and then a hook had been clipped to the back of his collar followed by cuffs on his biceps and wrists. Each cuff was then hooked to the chain hanging down his back. He tried shifting, the way the clips were made meant he couldn’t undo them himself. Spence adjusted his feet and then attached cuffs to his ankles and Aaron felt the chain lift slightly as his ankles were hooked to it. He wouldn’t be able to stand, the mats would keep him safe if he fell over, but he was helpless, defenseless.

“You’re thinking too hard.” Spencer stroked his shoulders. “You’re safewords?”

“Coffee to stop completely, butterscotch to pause, and Bond if it’s overwhelming me mentally.”

“Good. And if you say stop or no, I’m going to respect that as well. Aside from the chains and cuffs, there won’t be anything here tonight we haven’t played with before, but we may play with them a bit differently.”

“Yes, Master.”

Spence walked out of view, watching Aaron to make sure he didn’t try to peek, and stripped naked. He planned on seeing how many times he could make the other man come in one session. “You looked ready to be fucked downstairs, even Penny said so. I could see it in her eyes, how she was itching to touch you. I could see it on the faces of other Doms, they wanted to see what I had. Maybe I should have stroked you properly under the table, seen if you could forget you were in a restaurant as I toyed with your cock, your balls. Would you have liked that?”

Aaron’s body shivered. “Yes.”

“Show me how desperate you were downstairs.” He still hadn’t come into view. “Close your eyes and imagine my hand around your cock, stroking you. Maybe I ducked under the table to suck on you, tease your slit. All the while, Penny and her friend sitting beside you, eating their meal, talking casually like they didn’t even notice. When your knees fell open earlier, I could see how desperately you wanted something to happen. Maybe you wanted me to shove my fingers into your hole and fuck you,” He watched the body before him tremble harder. “Would you have cried out when you came? Would you have cared if Penny and her friend had watched? You, fucking your
needy prick into the air, head tapping out a desperate march against the bottom of the table while your hips tried to grind down onto my fingers, wanting more but not finding relief? Would your head fall back as you gasped? By now surely, they would be totally focused on watching you, everyone would be.”

Aaron’s head fell back as his mind played out what was being described. He hadn’t realized he’d wanted just that until right in this moment. His hips started trying to fuck up into that hand, desperate to find the tightness his cock was begging for. He imagined his head rolling to the side as he watched as the pair beside him had watched back, eyes wide and mouths open, as he came spectacularly right there in the booth beside them.

Spencer watched as Aaron arched, trying to find more stimulation before finally exploding down his own legs. Offering a steadying hand, Spencer made sure Aaron wasn’t going to topple over before finally stepping into view, his own cock hard and dark. He knelt down and removed the cage finally, setting Aaron’s own cock free, watching as the flesh darkened and hardened from the rush of blood pumping to it. “You are so beautiful.” He allowed Aaron to watch him teasing himself as he fetched the man a bottle of water, standing close as he helped him drink from it, his cock a mere inch from his cheek. Putting the empty bottle away, Spencer collected a damp cloth from the bathroom and wiped Aaron’s chest and back down, checking the cuffs as well. “Would you like to lay down for a moment?”

“No.”

“Are you sure? It could be a while before I let you come again.”

“I’m sure.”

Spencer began to line up the impact toys in the order he planned on using them, alternating those with a hard, biting touch with the ones that weren’t as hard. Aaron had a pretty high tolerance for impact play if it was done in the right sequence, if body and mind were given proper moments of reprieve.

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Aaron’s legs were shaking now. He’d survived rounds of a crop, paddle, flogger, crop again before it was a feather boa, a belt, back to a different type of flogger, and then now a whip that while it wasn’t actually making contact, was snapping so close to his skin, his hairs could feel the shock of it. He had no idea where Spencer had learned to expertly handle a whip, but he was impressed. He was also terribly close to another orgasm. Judging by the two bottles of water the younger man had pushed on him and the large amount of precome pooling before him, Aaron figured it had been going on for hours. Spencer started with one toy and then stopped, not speaking at all as the intervals of each toy and between each toy changed constantly. He could feel his cock swelling impossibly and wondered if it was visibly swelling as well or if it was his own imagination.

“Butterscotch!” He cried out. He wasn’t ready to come yet, not if Spencer didn’t want him to, but he was about to have no choice.

“Talk to me.” Spencer’s voice was firm but kind.

“I’m so close, too close, I’m gonna come. I’m so close I can’t hold it back. I don’t want to come until you’re in me.” He felt desperate tears prick his eyes.

“Shh.” Spencer dropped the whip and fetched some water for him. “Here, drink.” Once enough water was gone, he put it aside and took Aaron’s dick, feeling how hot and heavy it was. “I can feel
how close you are, I can feel how you’re just pulsing with desperation. I love how you look when you’re this close, this on edge. You’re so focused on holding back but at the same time you’re letting yourself go. Letting yourself feel.” He turned loose of the prick without stroking it and moved away, rolling a full-length mirror into place before kneeling behind Aaron, knees are either side of his feet. “I love it, watching you watch yourself fall apart.” He teased his fingers through the hole in the back of the lingerie and against Aaron’s hole. “You arch so beautifully, he was right earlier. It’s a sight worthy of becoming a famous painting.” He began to stroke along Aaron’s ass, mimicking how his cock would move. “Man, undone. Everyone would travel from around the world to see you at your moment of breaking.”

Aaron’s breaths turned shallow. He stared at his dick and then into the hazel eyes peering just over his shoulder.

“They call it la petite mort, the little death, that moment when you orgasm and your entire system seems to stop for that split second.” He pulled his fingers back and pushed his cock through the hole in the fabric, thrusting against Aaron’s ass. “Do you believe that you die for a moment when you orgasm? A little death and your entire body focuses on the act of erupting out of your dick?”

“Yes, yesyes.” Aaron babbled. “I need you. I need you!” Aaron arched, fucking the air as he felt the wetness from Spencer’s precome start to coat his ass. He began to cry out, unable to control it, keening loudly as he finally gave in and came hard. He felt Spencer pull out of the fabric, his hot dick shoving its way between his pressed together thighs as he fucked the tight space quickly, adding with a desperate groan to the mess on the mat.

Aaron sagged, trusting Spencer to catch him and care for him as he gave in to the exhaustion.

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Spencer had carefully steered Aaron onto the floor and removed all of the cuffs, leaving the collar. He had eased him to the side so he could wash the soiled part of the mat with cleaning supplies before he began to sponge bathe Aaron. Satisfied that his skin was clean and free of any of their fluids, Spencer began his process of tending to the array of marks left by their play, making sure none had done any damage and all got the affection they deserved.

Once he was done with his routine, he set up a collection of sports drinks and a tray of food to replenish them close by before dragging a blanket from the bed, covering them both as Spencer pulled Aaron close.

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Aaron woke slowly, taking in the room as he worked toward consciousness. Standing carefully, he staggered to the bathroom to relieve himself before returning to find Spencer looking up at him.

“Eat now. You need the fuel. We’ll play some more afterward.”

Aaron nodded silently and began to eat.

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Aaron drew in a breath as the cock slipped down his throat. It turned out that dessert was scheduled to be the younger man’s dick as he gave him a blowjob. He was given permission to jack himself as he did, the one rule was he had to come at the same time Spencer did, not a moment before. So for so long that he’d lost track of time, Aaron had been giving the best head of his life while continuously edging himself and backing off. He was against covered in his own precome, slobber
from the mess he was making dripping onto his chest. He sucked Spencer down again and again, taking him as deep as he could handle without gagging, until he felt the heavy cock twitch against his tongue. The movement excited him, it meant Spencer was close, but it didn’t mean much, he’d twitched before but had somehow mentally worked himself away from the edge. The fluid dripping on his tongue changed consistency as well as the sounds coming from above him and Aaron knew this was it. Jacking his hand harder, he desperately raced toward his own finish line as his mouth was flooded with Spencer’s seed. A thumb against his throat prevented him from swallowing.

“Not yet.” Spencer whispered. He watched as Aaron hung in limbo, cock still in his mouth, come leaking out the sides while it pooled around their knees and feet. “Now, swallow.”

Aaron reflexively did what he was told, looking up expectantly for praise.

“Very good. You are so very good for me.” He pulled out, petting his hair. “I see you looking like this and I want to fuck you so hard.”

“Fuck me. Please.”

“You want me to take you?”

“Please? Mark me. Make me yours.” Aaron was looking up at him, eyes wide. “I want a reminder I’m yours forever.”

Spencer helped him up and to the bed, silently taking the time to clean them both up and fill them with snacks and water. An hour of silence went by before Spencer rolled Aaron onto his stomach. “On your knees.”

Aaron obeyed immediately.

“You may make as much noise as you want. I want to hear you.” He poured lube along his crack, pressing it into his hole before he climbed on the bed and slicked himself up. Lining up, Spencer sank in completely in one motion, feeling as Aaron tightened against the intrusion, crying out, before relaxing to welcome him. Gripping his hips tight, he set a furious pace, fucking his lover as hard as he could, pushed to go faster and faster by the shouts and cries he made. He fucked him through Aaron’s first orgasm, hitting his prostate over and over until his keens turned to whimpers of overstimulation. Shifting positions, Spencer carried on, allowing Aaron a moment to recover before he pushed him flat to the bed, not caring about the mess, as he picked up speed and fuck him, both of them getting louder and louder until they were both hoarse and covered in sweat. Their slick bodies slipped together as they each found their final climaxes. Pulling out, Spencer leaned down and bit into Aaron’s ass, leaving a bruising mark that would linger for days before pulling the older man up and to the shower.

“What time is it?” Aaron sagged against the wall.

“About five A.M. We’ll have to leave soon to go get Jack.”

His head thumped against the tiles. “Wow.”

“We can get a couple hours more sleep and then have breakfast first.”

“Good, I’m starving.” He yawned. “And exhausted.”

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Walking up to Jessica’s front door to collect his son, Aaron tried not to look like he was sore. When
Jessica opened the door for him, she watched as he carefully walked in. “Does Spencer look this bad?”

“Huh?” He turned to her.

“Pardon my wording, but you’re walking like someone shoved a pole up your ass.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose and blushed.

She patted his chest, chuckling. “You look happy, positively glowing.”

“Thanks.”

“I’ll get Jack, tell Spencer I said hi?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“And he has you down to one syllable words now! Wow.” She walked away, leaving him to his embarrassment.

==

Aaron hurried through his apartment, trying to gather everything he needed before JJ and Henry arrived. Spencer had gone to the Academy early to give a guest lecture and JJ had called just as he was getting up to share that her car was out of commission and could Will drop she and Henry off to catch a ride in. “Jack!”

“Coming, Dad!” The boy’s voice trailed down the hall as the doorbell rang.

“You getting all packed up?” He asked his son as he headed to answer the door. “We’re running a bit late this morning.” He told his friend as he let them in.

“That’s okay. Look, I’m just really thankful you were willing to drive us.”

“No problem. Let me get my stuff.” He left her to watch the boys bent over trading cards while he went to get his guns out of the safe. His gun was barely tucked into its holster when all hell break loose.

In the SWAT SUV, his mind played over the look on both boys’ faces when JJ quietly reminded him that a stand-off with SWAT probably didn’t need an audience. He’d announced himself, but it didn’t matter as he heard Jack ask what was going on. He tried to reassure him, watched as JJ held him close to comfort him. When his hit his knees, it felt wrong, was wrong. He shoved aside the memories of countless times he’d went to his knees, willingly, for Spencer. When the cuffs were zipped tight around his wrists, he remembered the last time soft cuffs or ties were tied there instead. He didn’t understand what was happening, but he did know that this was probably the worst thing ever for Jack to see.

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JJ waited for Will to pull up, helping the boys into the back before climbing in.

“You were serious on the phone?” Will asked, not clarifying.

“As a heart attack.” She got in and waited for him to start to drive. “I have to call the others, we have to figure this out.” She chewed her lip.
“Hey, don’t worry, I told my boss I needed to have the day, that it was an emergency. I’ll stay back with the boys.”

“Thank you.”

==

He’d never given much thought to just how uncomfortable it was to ride in a vehicle while cuffed. He couldn’t find a comfortable position that didn’t either hurt his back or make his arms numb. The agents in the car with him kept trying to talk to him, but he remained silent, eyes forward. That was another thing, he couldn’t remember the last time he rode in the back seat of a car.

He managed to maintain his silence until the transfer from the SWAT vehicle to a DOJ one, when he saw Dave. It helped to know the others were already looking into what was going on, and if Dave knew, that meant Spencer knew and Spencer wouldn’t let anything ever happen to Jack. Jack was his only concern now, it was why he only asked Dave to let his son know he was okay. He could take anything as long as Jack was safe.

==

Being hauled into the D.C. FBI building and into an interrogation room, Aaron wondered exactly what that would accomplish. He’d spent a good part of the last twenty years of his life in interrogation rooms. Granted, he wasn’t usually the one cuffed to the table, but it wasn’t a room that was intimidating to him. His irritation level went up when Agent Richie walked in though, the man had a reputation and it wasn’t a particularly good one. “I need to let my son know that I’m alright.”

“He’s with Agent Jareau.”

“I want my phone call.”

“You didn’t even ask why you’re here.” He went about setting out files.

“It doesn’t matter. It’s either a mistake or I’m being framed.”

Richie opened a laptop and pressed some buttons. “This came in today at seven twenty-four A.M.” He hit play and a recording started that Aaron knew was his voice, but it sounded off, not natural.

Aaron listened closely. “I didn’t make that call.”

“It was traced back to your cellphone.”

“I didn’t make that call.”

“The voice recognition software says it’s you.”

Hotch watched as Richie started opening the files on the table, methodically laying them out. He waited, silent, for the little show of ‘how much evidence’ to be over.

“There’s more.”

“Whoever’s doing this, they want me here instead of investigating. There has to be a bigger plan because they want my team distracted.”

“You have a storage unit in Weston, Virginia?”
“My wife and I had one, it’s been cleared out for years.”

“Why did you rent a van last week?”

“I didn’t.” He did his best not to pull at the cuffs.

“Have you ever purchased nitromethane, diesel fuel, blasting caps, or ball bearings?”

He knew what that added up to. Surely the Bureau didn’t think he would use something like that.

“No!”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes!” He went silent as Richie laid out printouts of receipts as well as both sides of his license.

“My door was kicked in two and a half hours ago, how long have you had this?”

“We’ve been watching you. For weeks.” He took a seat.

“What caused me to be put under surveillance?”

“A confidential source.”

“Tell me now or I will invoke.”

“You know who needs lawyers? Guilty people.”

“Smart people. So lay out your entire case to me right now or every attorney I know will drop everything and come help me.”

Richie chuckled, he was a little surprised Hotch didn’t just say he would represent himself. He knew the agent was still an active member of the bar. But the man had made a career of getting to know attorneys both as a prosecutor and as an agent. When he took the stand, it tended to be memorable. The entire BAU were frequently called in as witnesses, but Hotch had a certain presence that swayed juries. “We got a tip, from a source. And it was, very convincing.”

“Antonio Slade?”

“No, not Slade.” He pressed play on the laptop and turned it around so Hotch could watch the interview.

“You’ve gotta be kidding.” He did his best to stay composed as Lewis talked about what he’d done to him. Finally having enough, he made the recording stop. “Why would you believe anything he says?”

“We didn’t. But, it got us digging, into you.”

“What about me?”

“Was your wife killed because of your responsibilities to this job? Yes. Did you question your commitment to the BAU after her murder? Yes.”

“And how does that connect to this?”

“Because it was then that you started dismissing procedure.”

“I did not.”
“You faked Agent Prentiss’ death. You rubber-stamped the unjustified shooting, by Agent Rossi, of the man who killed Jason Gideon, giving him a pass for the same crime you expelled Agent Greenaway for ten years ago.”

“Each of those instances was a judgement call. And it’s a waste of our time for me to justify each one. But I can.”

“Good. Because this last one? It’s one you have no defense for. He subjected you to a very powerful drug. One that, in other victims, led to very powerful psychotic breaks. Now, why wouldn’t you include that in your Bureau psychological evaluation?” When he didn’t get an immediate answer, he leaned in. “Agent?” Hotch kept perfectly still, he wasn’t even entirely sure the man was actively breathing. “Agent?” When dark eyes met him, it was in the full force of what he’d heard referred to as the ‘Hotch glare’. It was as if the man was staring straight through him, or into his soul perhaps. And it was unnerving.

After what felt like an unnaturally long amount of time, Hotch slowly blinked. “His goal was to induce my worst nightmare, to bring it to the surface to exploit it. What he failed to realize was I’ve already lived through that day. I listened as my wife was shot and murdered. I fought and eventually took out the man who’d already tried to murder me. All the while not knowing where my son was or if I would be finding his body somewhere. I knelt over my wife’s dead body in the bedroom we’d shared for years, in the house we’d made into a home. My team is as close as family, but as part of this job, I have to accept that death is a possibility. The only thing in the whole world that would be a bigger nightmare than what I went through then would be my son dying. Nothing else compares.”

“He says you laughed when they were shot.”

“And they all sustained the same injury. The most recent serious injury someone on the team has received. Of course that injury and my team came to the surface first, we’d been working the case and Jack had been out of my mind for close to twenty-four hours. And that injury was about the worse anyone has sustained as far back as I can remember.” He clenched his jaw. “The reason I didn’t mention the drugging was I knew how it would be received. That someone at the DOJ would misinterpret and someone else would use it to their advantage.”

“That’s one profile. Here’s another.” Richie flipped open a new folder. “The most common trait is an unyielding belief that he is always right, often reinforced by a traumatic loss. The suspect will purposefully separate himself from coworkers and quietly keep score, cataloging every slight against him. He will then use those slights to justify his own self-interest. One final trigger, like a violent confrontation or a drug-induced episode, will push him over the edge. Sound familiar?”

“Of course. That’s my profile on workplace shooters.”

“And now it fits you.”

“No, it doesn’t. ‘Today will change everything’. What did you think, that I was going to blow up my team? Turn my son into an orphan? And then, and this is the part I argue against in the profile, I would call nine-one-one and tell you what I was about to do?”

“I want to believe you. But I can’t.”

“Fine. You’re first error is the assumption that I believe I am always right. I rely on my team to close a case, they each bring a unique perspective and my job is to simply assign them to the tasks that best suit them. And before you think that I can even come close to believing I am always right, perhaps you should take some time to work with my team. Agent Rossi founded the BAU, he was
my supervising agent. He has zero problem pointing out my mistakes. You mentioned Prentiss, her favorite game used to be showing me how I was wrong. Agent Morgan? I’m sure his name came up in your search? He was the best second because he questioned everything. Every call I made, he made me validate it’s necessity. And let’s not forget the likes of Reid and Garcia. A certified genius and a top-notch hacker. There has never been a member of my team who would allow me to believe I was always right.”

“Fine. But that’s just one part of the profile.”

“But it’s a pretty big one.” He leaned forward. “Next on the list was separating myself from those coworkers. Two members of my team have keys to my house, Agents Reid and Rossi. My son has frequent playdates with Agent Jareau’s oldest son and he spends so much time at Agent Reid’s doing educational stuff that he has a bed there. It is a rare day when I don’t see at least one member of my team outside of work hours.”

“So you do wish to try and isolate yourself from them.”

“What? No! But at this point, we spend so much time together, we could all move into Rossi’s mansion and would probably see less of one another.”

“We’ll see.” Richie stood and took his files, leaving Hotch alone in the room to watch the hours tick by.

==

He was on the verge of fidgeting now. It had been hours since the last time Richie had been into the room, he assumed someone was in the observation room on the other side of the window, she he made sure to remain still, eyes on the table. Glancing carefully at his watch, he saw it was well past lunch, his stomach growled.

Aaron tried to remind himself, his team would be doing their best to prove him innocent. And he knew that they would all take care of Jack, he tried to not let the panicked-father part of his mind take over, he needed to stay focused on the task at hand.

When the shadows started to get longer across the floor, Richie finally returned. “Who’s Eric Rowden?”

*Should have guessed that one,* thought to himself. “He’s behind this.”

“Maybe he’s your partner.”

“If that were true, you’d have evidence.”

“I do. The storage locker in your name, the supplies.”

“You’re grasping! And I’ll tell you why. You need me here as cover for missing a major terrorist incident.”

“It’s a prison break.”

“Not to Rowden. His dream has always been to set off a bomb in a major metropolitan area. Not for any political or ideological reason; he just wants to watch a city burn. And you’re letting it happen!”

“Now you’re grasping.”
“Am I? Ask yourself one question: am I more helpful here, mentally preparing a report to the subcommittee that’s gonna haul you in, or out there catching Rowden?”

Richie sighed. He knew he had nothing and he knew Hotch knew full well he had nothing. It was infuriating to try and deal with a man who always seemed to gain the upper hand. “I’ll see what I can do.”

==

There had been no word, no contact with Hotch since Dave had seen him that morning, Spencer was starting to seriously worry. They had no idea if IA would even believe their evidence or not. Or if it would be written off as the team just trying to get him free.

Hearing Aaron’s voice from where he had ducked for cover in the prison cell warning of the flashbang, Spencer felt a bit more confident in the outcome of the day. Seeing Aaron stepping through the smoke, the hero that arrived at just the right moment, he made sure he would smile later about how he’d looked.

Later came with the sound of a magazine being systematically unloaded as a helicopter took off. With an earth-shaking boom as the helicopter and its load exploded just above their heads, instantly heating the air.

Spencer’s eyes snapped from the airborne blaze, through the darkness, to where he could just see Aaron beyond the front column of the SUV, the muzzle of his gun still pointed up. The smell of burning metal, bodies, and explosives filled that air and they all quietly watched.

Deciding they’d had enough, Dave herded them one by one back to the SUVs. They needed to get back to the office, to see the boys that would bring a smile to everyone’s face, but especially Aaron’s. He hoped. He wasn’t sure he’d ever known Jack to go an entire day without really talking.

Driving them back to Quantico, Aaron realized that somehow their vehicle only held himself, Dave, and Spencer. He wondered if that was by design. “It’s good to see you.”

“You too.” Spencer leaned forward and squeezing his arm. “Jack is at the office with Will and the boys. How are you?”

“I’m… better now. They let me go, but I’m not sure it’s all going away.”

“What do you mean?” Dave insisted. “They know the bombing had nothing to do with you.”

“There was more to it than that.” He pinched the bridge of his nose before letting his head fall back. “So much more. They’d been investigating me for some time now.”

“For what?”

Aaron shook his head. “Tomorrow?”

“Yeah. Sure. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

==

Aaron led JJ up to his office to collect the boys, it’d been a long day for everyone. “Hey.” He said to Jack as he entered the room, getting no response. “Hey.” He tried again, glancing back to where JJ was waking a sleeping Henry.
“Hey.” Jack didn’t look up.

“Whatcha doin’?”

“Drawing.”

“Can I take a look?” It hurt when Jack not only replied no, but turned the page over and put it away.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m okay. How about you?”

Finally, Jack looked up at him. “I’m fine.”

It hurt him, seeing his son hurting like he was. Aaron worried about the part he played in bringing that kind of pain into the boy’s life. “Ready to go?”

“Sure.”

==

Since Aaron’s car was still at home, Spencer had driven father and son, both silent, to his place, deciding for them that right now neither needed to be at the scene of where their life had been so disrupted. Escorting them in, he watched as they went their separate ways, each to their own rooms. He reminded himself to later bring up to Aaron the idea again of moving to a bigger place, maybe together.

Spencer ordered take-out for dinner and went in search of his partner, finding him sitting on the edge of the bed, clothes already changed. “What did you mean?”

“Hmm?”

“You told Dave that there was more, that you had been under investigation.”

Aaron sighed. “It was so many things. Judgement calls I made. Allowing Dave to get off on shooting Mallick, faking Prentiss’ death, other things. They claimed I fit the profile, the one I wrote, of a workplace shooter.”

“Other things?” Spencer wondered if Aaron’s protection of him so many years ago was about to tank the older man’s career.

Seeming to read his mind, Aaron reached out. “Not that. They mentioned Elle. They brought up some other instances they said prove I’d started to disregard procedure when it suited me. He had me cuffed to a table. He kept leaving and coming back, he left for a few hours at one point.”

“To what? Make you sweat?”

“I think he wanted to knock me down a peg or two.”

Spencer took his hand. “Tell me, what can I do to help you tonight? I know you want to talk to Jack, I could take his bed and the two of you could be in here?”

“No.” He shook his head. “I mean, that’s sweet of you, but I think we just need some normal.” He looked up when the doorbell rang.
“Dinner. I ordered from the place around the corner.” He left to answer it while Aaron went to find Jack.

Once everyone had eaten and Jack was in bed, Aaron crawled into Spencer’s bed and curled around him. “They kicked in my door, invaded my home. Destroyed my son’s sense of security.”

Spencer ran his fingers through Aaron’s hair. “I know.”

“I had guns aimed at me, was forced to my knees and restrained and all I could think, was in all the years you had me on my knees, bound, I never once felt helpless, out of control. But then? I felt so…weak.”

“I’m sorry, love.”

“I hate that they might have taken that from us.”

Spencer turned, letting Aaron’s face tuck against his bare chest. “We’ll deal with it later. Right now, you just need to worry about sleep and Jack. Don’t worry about sex or play or anything.” He felt Aaron’s breath hitch. “What is it?”

“But what if I want sex?”

“Then, at that point, we’ll talk about it. About what it is you want.”

“I really want to pin you down, feel you fighting me, take you and make you cry out, beg me to stop. I want to feel powerful again.” Aaron stopped, held his breath, waiting to see what Spencer said. When he never got a reply, Aaron quickly clambered to his knees, shoving Spencer onto his stomach as he did, holding him down with one large hand pressing hard into his back. He shoved his pants down, kicking them away as he removed his cage and started to work Spencer’s pants off. Leaning in, he bit into his shoulder, making him yelp. “You’re going to need a safeword.” He growled.

“Elements!” He gasped, feeling Aaron press his body down, grinding against him.

“Good. I’m not stopping unless you say that.” Giving him another nip, Aaron crawled up and fished the lube out of the drawer. Messily, he squirted more than enough along Spencer’s ass and then on his cock, tossing the bottle aside. He used his free hand to spread the slick around. “Bite down on the pillow, we don’t want to wake Jack.” He didn’t wait for a response, he pressed the head of his dick against Spencer’s hole and then leaned in, sinking in completely, making Spencer cry out buried in the pillows. Aaron adjusted his hold, gripping one him hard while resting his weight on the younger man’s other shoulder. He pounded in hard, pulling back until his head was almost out before slamming back in. He blocked out the muffled sounds the other man was making.

Spencer did his best to remember Jack was in the next room, crying out from the rough handling. He listened as Aaron began to talk, rambling about how he wasn’t the man they said he was. He listened through the pain of the larger man’s weight pressing down on him, the burn of being fucked so roughly. He listened, crying out until his throat was raw, until he felt drops and heard the waver in his voice. And then he broke, crying out in the way Aaron had said he’d needed. He gave Aaron the power, begging into the pillow, for what, he wasn’t entirely sure. He was determined to wait his lover out, had no intention of safewording.

Aaron felt the dam break, picking up speed as the pain and anger and pent up emotions of the day moved to the forefront and manifested as hot, angry tears. His arms gave out, dropping his chest to
Spencer’s back. He continued rutting until he felt heat pooling at the base of his spine, looking for an anchor, Aaron moved the hand that had been on Spencer’s shoulder to the back of his neck, holding tight as he finally came, filling Spencer with his seed.

Spencer winced at the dual ache of the hands gripping his hip and his neck. He had a feeling he’d have a few bruises in the morning. He heard Aaron’s breath catch and knew he was close. He carried on begging, crying out until he felt him finish, Spencer was still hard, having only been rubbing against the sheets for friction. When Aaron stilled, he waited and then felt the wet again, realizing it was Aaron crying. Ignoring his own dick, Spencer managed to shift enough to get Aaron to roll to the side. He wrapped him in his arms. “Shh. It’s going to be okay.”

“I really thought for a bit that that would be the last image Jack would have of me.” He pulled Spencer close, his voice was clearer now. “I hadn’t seen you before it happened and I didn’t know when they would let you see me. The rules… If they’d decided to hold me…”

“You really don’t think we would have found a way?” He asked, incredulously. “Have you forgot who you work with?”

“No. I haven’t.” He pressed a kiss to Spencer’s lips. “Thank you for that, by the way. I know it doesn’t solve anything, but I will probably be able to sleep now.” He kissed him again.

Spencer moaned into his lips, thrusting his hips against Aaron’s thigh.

“You’re still hard.” Aaron gasped.

“S’okay. Keep kissing me.” He wrapped his arms around Aaron head, feeling as Aaron copied the motion by wrapping his strong arms around his torso. Lips together, they resumed kissing, tongues occasionally diving in, rubbing together as they carried on. When their lips were both swollen and they were breathing hard, Spencer pressed against his hip again, moaning into his mouth as his came.

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They were the first ones to Dave’s house the following night, Jack taking off into the back yard to Hayden’s delight, with Spencer trailing behind.

Patting his best friend’s shoulder, Dave steered him into the kitchen. “How’re you holding up?”

Aaron exhaled as he thought. “I will be okay. Eventually. Spencer and I talked last night, I’m not quite as angry now.”

“I understand you being angry. They invaded your home.”

“I was being investigated for misconduct. Every decision I’ve made, especially every decision since the day Haley died, is being scrutinized. Has been scrutinized already.”

“What decisions? How could they find anything to peg on you that could be misconduct?”

He levelled a look at Dave. “Mallick?”

“Is that all?”

“No. There was more. And I’m sure if I rock the boat too much, they’ll dig even further and there are some rocks that, if they are turned over… we could all get taken out in the flood.”
“Then I guess we all lay low and keep that from happening,” Dave nodded. “But you know we wouldn’t let you stand and take it alone, right?”

“That’s what worries me the most.”
Aaron kept one hand gently on Jack’s shoulder as they walked through the grocery store. An entire summer had passed since their home had been invaded and both he and his son struggled to spend much time there at all, preferring now to stay with Spencer. It had become a habit that Jack was always within reach when out and about, Aaron was reluctant to let his son wander too far. Spencer had tried several times to suggest that Aaron was being a bit overprotective, but the older man shut him down every time he brought it up.

The team had taken several out of state cases over the summer, a few of which Aaron had decided to stay behind. Spencer knew he’d been called in for at least two additional meetings since his time being interrogated, but he didn’t know any details about what had been discussed.

Just after school started, Aaron had found a moment to talk to Spencer over dinner while Jack was with his aunt. “I was thinking… Jack and I should go back to staying at our place now. He’s back in school and it takes longer to get there from here. Plus, his friends are around there. Your apartment was never meant to have three people living here and… I know everything you did for Jack here was wonderful and perfect when he was little, but he’s practically a teenager now. You know?”

Spencer was stunned. “I understand. And you’re place couldn’t really hold all of us either. What if we looked for a new place?”

“I…yeah. Sure, we could do that.” When his smile did quite reach his eyes, Spencer studied him.

“We don’t have to, Aaron.”

“I want to. We can look at some places.”

He nodded and finished his meal. Later in bed, Spencer attempted to pull Aaron close, but the other man shifted away.

==

Plans to view new apartments kept getting put off, a case here, a meeting there and time ticked by where the pair began to see less and less of one another outside of work. Spencer had brought his concerns to Rossi, who had told him to be patient, that Aaron would come to him eventually.

When Aaron took time off under the guise of some special assignment without telling Spencer anything about it, Spencer started to wonder exactly what was going on. Calls to his cell phone went straight to voicemail, text messages weren’t returned, his willingness to wait was reaching its end.

He gave it a little longer before going to Aaron’s apartment to find some answers.

Letting himself into the apartment that was like a second home to him, Spencer looked around and frowned. It had been nearly a month, three weeks to be exact, since he’s last seen or spoken to Aaron or Jack. At first glance, the place looked normal, like maybe the occupants had just gone away for the weekend. The place was still filled with furniture, but everything important, everything that wasn’t generic, was gone.

No photos of any of them, no favorite books, no clothes.
Quickly, he dialed Jessica to see if she had any idea what was going on and learned she hadn’t seen her nephew or his father in weeks either. They disconnected their call only to have her call Spencer again a short time later to report that Jack had been withdrawn from school.

Spencer was worried about what it all meant. His worry had led to this, using his spare key to get into the Hotchner’s apartment to get answers in the first place, but now he was left with more questions.

He went to the safe hidden in the dining room and tapped out the code. The light flickered red instead of green. Thinking a minute, Reid tried the factory preset code and the lock popped open, revealing an empty interior. He spent the next hour searching every room, looking for anything left behind, any clue as to where they’d gone, but he only found the same thing in each. Everything personal, irreplaceable, was gone. It was if father and son had simply vanished into thin air.

Pulling out his phone, Spencer dialed Rossi. “I can’t find Hotch.” He led with. “I’m at his place and it’s like he never existed, everything personal is just gone and Jack was withdrawn from school.”

Spencer could hear his friend clear his throat. “Kid, there’s a box and an envelope, a big manila one, that got delivered earlier to my house. It’s addressed to you with no return details.”

Mind racing, Spencer ran a hand through his hair. “I don’t understand.”

“Come here, Kid. I think I’m starting to get an idea. I’ll make some calls while I wait on you.”

Rossi just hung up his third call as Reid stepped into his house. “Hey.” He tried to give the younger man a reassuring smile. “I found out some things. Apparently, they will be announced in the morning, but I think you need to be told before everyone else.” He motioned Reid to the couch, the box and envelope he’d mentioned before were on the table nearby. “Were you aware Aaron had spotted Peter Lewis watching Jack?”

“What?” Reid’s eyes widened. “When?”

“Apparently there were reports that he’d been seen at games, at the school. There’s been an investigation going on for weeks. What I was told was that Aaron and Jack got moved temporarily into a safe house during that investigation.”

“So they’re in a safe house?”

“They were.” Rossi braced himself.

Were?”

He drew a deep breath. “I was told they were moved into Witness Protection. There was a discussion about how to best protect Jack and the only parent he had left. Witness Protection failed him last time, but now Aaron is with him twenty-four seven. And since there wasn’t a concern like last time about one parent being separated, they can move them anywhere they feel is best. Even internationally if they need to. I’m not sure whether Hotch would be the perfect WitSec person or the worst.”

Reid let out a slight snort. “Worst.” His lips trembled as he processed what he’d heard. “He swore
he’d never leave me. Never just up and vanish.”

Dave squeezed his shoulder. “I know, Spencer. And he meant that. I was told there was more, but
they didn’t elaborate.”

“I knew he was hypervigilant. Almost paranoid. Jack couldn’t be out of his sight, or mine if it came
to it. I had brought it up a few times but he brushed me off.”

“I know. Now, how about we see what’s in these.” He picked up the envelope and passed it over.

After a minute, Spencer broke the end open and pulled out a stack of papers, flipping through them
at his normal speed. On the last page, he stopped and looked up. “There’s a marriage license here.”

“What?” Rossi reached across and took the paper. “This says the two of you got married a week
ago. How?”

“It’s…it’s by a proxy. It says I signed by proxy.”

Dave didn’t understand. “On a marriage license?”

Spencer felt his throat closing up. “A few states allow it. That’s…that’s my signature on the proxy
page.”

His jaw dropped in shock and perhaps a little horror at what his friend had done. “He married you
before he vanished.”

Reid nodded, tears in his eyes. They’d discussed over the years getting married, but up until
recently, same sex marriage was a difficult and not legally accepted practice. “He’s signed
everything over to me as well. Everything.”

“Everything as in?”

Reid started to pass the rest of the pages across as he spoke. “Paperwork on his apartment, title to
both cars, his…” His voice cracked. “Life insurance on both he and Jack. This says I’m the sole
beneficiary. Full medical proxies for them and…” He simply handed the last page to Dave.

Dave read over the document. “This gives you joint custody of Jack.”

He chewed his lip for several minutes before eyeing the box. “I’m not sure I want to know what’s
in there now.”

“Do you want me to open it?”

Reid nodded.

Dave pulled out a pen knife and opened the box. He pulled out stacks of photos and other
mementos. There were pictures Jack had drawn and things about the team.

Spencer watched as items were pulled out. “He didn’t take anything with him that could link him to
any of us.”

“It doesn’t look like it.”

“He vanished into thin air.” He stood, letting the paperwork from his lap spread over the floor as
he paced. “He promised me! He promised he’d never just leave me with nothing more than a note!
And then he has the guts to do this?” He grabbed the marriage license again, waving it. “I don’t get
the decency of a proper proposal? I didn’t get to agree and at least go to the courthouse with him? This is worse than just leaving with a note! I can’t believe he would do this! I-” He hesitated in his pacing. “I hate him, so, so much.”

“Come on, Spencer, you don’t mean that. You two have been together for years. You love one another.”

“I loved him with every inch of my being, but I don’t think he felt the same. If he did, he wouldn’t have been able to do this to me.”

“He might have thought it was the only way. The Marshall’s…”

“Fuck the Marshall’s!” Spencer shouted, cutting him off. “Fuck the Marshall’s and you know what? Fuck Aaron too. I gave him all of me for over a decade but apparently, I was disposable. I could have helped keep Jack safe if he’d just told me. I could have helped if I’d known. But I guess he didn’t feel he could trust me.” He dropped the page onto the coffee table. “Maybe he never really trusted me.”

“Spencer.” He stood.

“No. Don’t Rossi. Just…don’t. Maybe it’s good the rest of the team never knew about us. They won’t try to be angry at him on my behalf.” He grabbed his bag and headed for the door. “I don’t care what you do with the paperwork, Dave. I don’t want it.” With that, he let himself out, letting the door slam behind him.
Merry Christmas Everyone! We are bringing this story to the end. The only thing left is the epilogue and that will be posted after Christmas. For those of you that have stuck it out, thank you for reading! This story has been a labor of love for over a year. As I wrote and re-wrote (and re-wrote) it, it has made me laugh and made my cry and made me blush a little perhaps from time to time and I hope you've felt a whole range of feelings as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Dave announced to the team that Hotch was gone and that he’d also resigned from the FBI, Spencer couldn’t hold back any longer, his anger and sadness and frustration all rushed to the surface as the tears came unbidden and he broke down. Garcia was the first to rush to his side; she pulled him into her arms and held him until he was through. He hadn’t wanted to show any additional emotion to the announcement, but hearing Rossi spell the situation out, hearing it officially announced that his partner, now husband, wasn’t coming back, it had been more than he’d expected.

As Reid finally calmed, he felt other hands on him. JJ and Tara were rubbing his shoulders; Rossi had a hand on his back, as did Emily. Finally he sat up and wiped his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“We get it, Spence, we all are devastated by losing him like this.” JJ squeezed his arm.

“It’s not that. Not just that.” He looked up at his circle of friends, hoping that his revelation wasn’t about to make things worse. He had no idea how they would react. Garcia had known about them since before they’d been a ‘them’ and Dave had worked it out along the way, but as far as he knew this was about to surprise everyone else. “We were in a relationship.”

The room was quiet till Emily asked. “Since when?”

“Umm…” He twisted his hands together. “After Haley left? There was an interview we did at a jail together, a death row interview.”

JJ’s jaw dropped. “That was like eight years ago.”

“Eight years nine months and seventeen days ago. Four hundred and fifty-nine weeks. Three thousand two hundred and thirteen days.”

“I can’t believe we didn’t know.”

“We, umm.” He blushed. “We didn’t start, sleeping together until after Haley died. I’d been going to spend time with them, Hotch was struggling. At Christmas we…”

Emily looked around the room and back to him. “You didn’t know about any of this? About him resigning and going away?”

Spencer shook his head. “Not until last night. And I didn’t know then that he’d resigned. It turns out he also figured out a way to do a marriage license by proxy.”
“A what?” Shock filled her voice.

“It turns out I’m now legally Spencer Reid-Hotchner.” Tears started again.

She shook her hair out of her eyes. “I’m so sorry, Reid. If there’s anything you need. If you need to talk or to get together, you just call, okay?”

He gave her a sad smile. “Okay.”

“You know what, why don’t we all just get through this review as best as we can and then we’ll take a few minutes. A lot has been shared here and I know we all need a little time to process and talk it out.” Emily waited for everyone to sink into their seats before beginning.

==

The team didn’t manage to get a break in their day until the workday was nearly over. The group insisted on inviting themselves to Spencer’s apartment despite his objections, each one offering to bring something to eat or drink. Reluctantly, Spencer headed straight home with Penelope following him to tidy up anything that might be lying around. When he stopped and stared at the neatly made bed in the corner, the shelves of books and things that Jack had been looking at the last time he was there, he frowned. He knew if he pulled open the drawers, there would be clothes inside, just waiting for their wearer to return. A hand touching him made him turn.

“I know, Sweetie. This hurts so much it feels like it’s killing you. It’s okay to feel that way, just remember you have friends who want you to come to them when it gets to be too much. Okay?”

“Yeah. Okay.”

“Come here.” She tugged him close until she could wrap him in a hug. “I’m right across the hall, you are always welcome to come over. I mean that. If you need movies and popcorn or to ride in a car all night or just have someone talk at you while you don’t say anything, you come over. And I know, addiction is a lifelong battle, I don’t want to have to watch you go through getting clean again. So, if you are getting close to that line, you drag me to a meeting with you, I’ll drive you any time, day or night.”

He nodded as someone knocked on the door.

“I guess that’s the others. It’s going to be okay, having them here. Nothing is a secret anymore. And they expect you to be upset, don’t hold back.”

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The evening had been spent eating, drinking, and sharing stories funny, heartwarming, and sad, about Hotch. Spencer didn’t want to think about how it was similar to how they’d mourned Strauss’ death, Emily’s, Gideon’s. It felt a bit like a wake for a man who was still alive. Somewhere.

Everyone had curiously glanced at Jack’s space but said nothing about it. JJ and Emily had been only slightly annoyed to discover Penelope, and Rossi, had managed to keep the mens’ relationship a secret for so long. Spencer admitted to Blake having found out, admitted to some of the struggles they’d had balancing work and home, but that he loved Jack like he was his own.

“Spencer?” JJ finally spoke up again. “Is there anything I could do for you? That would help you right now?”
He chewed his lip. “Maybe… In the left side of the closet are some of Aaron’s clothes and shoes? And the three drawers in the left side of the dresser? I’m not…I’m not sure I can handle dealing with them right now. It just, it hurts too much.”

She stood. “I’ll take care of it.” She patted his hand. “Mind if I use your bathroom first?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

After her detour to the restroom, JJ walked to the open closet and instantly spotted the familiar suits and things belonging to their boss. Taking a deep breath, she pulled them out, laying them across the bed. She wondered if they would ever see their teammate and friend again or if this was it. Crossing the room to the dresser, she stared at it a moment, trying to remember in Spencer had said the right or left drawers. Shrugging, she guessed right and pulled the top one open first. Her jaw dropped.

==

“Spence?”

Everyone turned at the questioning in JJ’s voice and went silent at the sight of what she was holding.

“Is this…?” In one hand she had a pair of floggers, in the other, blindfolds and cushioned cuffs. “I…” His eyes went wide, turning to silently beg at Penelope. “I…” He started to blush.

“Only say what you are comfortable saying, Hon.” Garcia tried to calm him.

He held her gaze, blocking everyone else out. “I have taken part in a dominant and submissive relationship.”

“When?” JJ asked.

“For nearly twelve years.”

“Before you and Hotch…” Tara asked.

“I learned before him. Then…” He drew in a ragged breath and let it out. “It was how we began.” JJ looked down at the stuff in her hands. “So, what? He was your…master?”

“No.” His voice didn’t waver then.

Emily studied him. “I… How could I have missed it? All that time…”

“Missed what?” JJ asked her.

Spencer didn’t break his gaze with Garcia as he silently begged her to help him out.

“Spencer was his.” The bubbly blonde finally filled in.

“The way he leaned on you.” Emily carried on. “He turned to you when cases got bad. I always just figured it was because the two of you were so naturally reluctant to share your emotions, that you gravitated to one another.”

“That was some of it.” He confirmed.
“Alright, guys.” Dave finally stepped in. “Enough grilling Reid. We’re here to eat, drink, and enjoy one another’s company. JJ? If you wouldn’t mind putting the toys away?”

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned for the epilogue!
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Two and an Half Years Later.

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Spencer was just finishing loading a travel bag when Garcia entered his apartment.

She pressed a note card into his hand. “When you get to Tampa.”

“Tampa?”

She plowed ahead. “There is this awesome little diner right on the beach. On Sunday mornings they do a brunch and you can sit and watch the ocean. I’ve heard the view is just more than words.” She beamed at him. “It’s really something you can’t miss, so you have to promise me you will go to this diner for Sunday brunch. Okay?”

He found himself nodding. “I’m not entirely sure where I’m headed, but if I get down there, I promise to go.”

“No!” He saw her brows pinch together and the desperation in her eyes. “You have to go there first.”

Spencer swallowed and looked at her neat scrawl on the card. He’d left the Bureau and was taking time to figure out what he wanted to do with the rest of his life.

A week and a half later, Spencer found himself sitting on the deck of the diner Garcia had directed him to. The food had been delicious and the staff polite. He sat with his feet in the sand and a coffee cooling in his hand as he watched the water and the people strolling by.

Out of the corner of his eye, Spencer noted two males, one a teen, walking up to the deck and turned to offer a simple good morning. When his eyes met the older man’s, he froze. It was like being back two and a half years ago, the last time he saw those eyes. “You.” He breathed.

The older man was frozen in place, the sound of his own pulse rushing in his ears, drowning out even the sound of the waves. The teen rushed forward, flinging himself at Spencer. “Spencer!”

Wrapping his arms around him, squeezing him in a grounding hug to convince himself they were real, Spencer felt tears prickle his eyes. “Hey, Jack.” He could feel a lump forming in his throat.

The boy, skin tanned from the sun, looked up at him. “You’re really here?”

“Yeah, I’m really here.”

“Do you have to go back?”

“No. I don’t have to go anywhere ever again if you guys don’t want me to.”

“Good.”
The house was small and sat a short walk off the beach. When neither man had been able to find the words to speak to one another at the restaurant, Jack had dragged them both home. The rooms of Aaron’s house were light and airy, the furniture simple and tasteful. It took another hour of them staring dumbly at each other before Jack finally was called away by some friends wanting to skateboard somewhere, leaving the two men alone in the silent house.

Aaron’s voice was soft when he finally spoke. “How did you find us?” His eyes didn’t meet the younger man’s. His heart was still racing at seeing Spencer again. He’d resigned himself after the first few months that being together again just wasn’t in the cards. He and Jack had gone on their weekly stroll along the beach that morning, he’d never expected that at the end of it, he’d find the one person he longed for for so long.

He’d been studying the changes in Aaron the entire walk to the house. His hair was longer now, falling in his eyes and covering his ears and it was going more salt and pepper instead of the rich brown it had been. He wasn’t clean-shaven, but his beard, gray more than anything, helped to hide the extra wrinkles and signs of aging on his face. His stride was less even than he remembered, slower and less determined. He wondered if that was caused by living a much more laid back life or something else. “As I was packing up, Penelope handed me a slip of paper and told me I absolutely had to go have Sunday Brunch there.”

He nodded slightly. “I figured once the coast was clear she’d track us down, but I didn’t hear anything.”

“Aaron.” He tried to get him to look up. “I meant what I said to Jack, I don’t have anywhere else to be. I gave the Bureau sixteen years of my life and I just didn’t have any more to give.” He let the silence linger for a while. “The day Dave told everyone you were gone… The team was told the truth.”

“Truth?”

“About us. Even about the paperwork you had sent to Dave’s. They…it came out within the team about our play. JJ was trying to help out and… found the drawers. I told them they missed that we’d been together nearly nine years. For the past two and a half I’ve mourned the loss of my family… I did my part finding the men we needed to find and then I handed Emily my badge and gun and walked away.” He was speaking at little more than a whisper, but in the quiet room it felt like he was shouting. “They got my entire adulthood, I was nearly destroyed time and again for them… I lost the love of my life for them. I’ll be forty soon… I didn’t want to start another decade the way I started the last one, cutting away at myself for a job that would never change. I have no plans, no agenda, nothing, but whatever happens will be on my terms.”

“The love of your life?”

Spencer nodded and finally Aaron’s eyes met his. He smiled gently at him.

“I… I have something I want to show you. I thought I’d never see you again. I thought maybe after enough time passed that you might move on. Maybe create a new family. Maybe you would go back to Penelope for a while. But… But my commitment to you? It never faded.” A tear tracked down his cheek.

“How could I create a new family? We’re married, remember?” He felt his voice harden, the old anger trying to bubble back up.
“You could have gotten it annulled.” Aaron’s voice dropped to a whisper again. “I would have understood. What I did.” His voice caught. “What I did was unforgiveable.”

“Dave… Dave held onto the paperwork when I refused to accept it. I was so angry.” He knew his voice was rising. “The one thing!” He cut himself off. When he started again, it was at a normal volume. “The one thing you knew… You didn’t even leave me a letter. You didn’t do me the decency to tell me what was happening. Here I was, planning our life, finding us a place to live together, dreaming of getting Jack a dog or… a fish. Something. Making it a home. Our home. And you were planning your escape.”

“It’s not what I wanted. They wouldn’t let me contact you.”

“Did you tell them?”

Aaron met his eyes again. “Yes. But since…since we weren’t married, you couldn’t be informed. You weren’t family. I realized then that if something happened, if the worst…” Tears filled his eyes. “You wouldn’t ever know. They left us in a safehouse the first day while they were working things out and… I needed your signature, as a lawyer, I knew there were places that allowed by proxy signatures on marriage certificates. I needed to know that if I died while in hiding, someone would tell you.”

Spencer didn’t know what to say to that. Instead, he changed the topic. “What did you want to show me?” He watched in silence as Aaron’s hands nervously, slowly, undid his pants, pushing them and the boxers beneath down to his knees. He could tell it wasn’t the exact same one, but it was the same style, and it made Spencer feel like all the air had left the room. “You still wear the cage?”

“Always. Well, I do clean it regularly, but I’ve learned to be careful when I do. I dream at night of you finding us. I had tried to never stop believing it would be over, but as time went on… And I wanted you to see that I was still committed, that I hadn’t forgotten you if I ever got to see you again.”

Spencer swallowed to moisten his suddenly dry throat. “I- I never… I dreamt of that too.”

Finally closing the space between them, Aaron took Spencer’s hands and guided them to his hips. “Can we make our dreams come true?” Lifting his own hands, he framed Spencer’s face and pulled him close, drawing him into a deep kiss.

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The had made it to the master bedroom, lips swollen and breaths heavy. Spencer was astounded to find that Aaron still kept, and used, a few basic toys and had lube on hand. Despite his adamance that he hadn’t pleasured himself in their entire separation, he had still used the anal plug just often enough to stay stretched.

Spencer prepped him, pushing lube in, checking to see just how relaxed the older man was. Slicking himself up liberally, he stared down at Aaron on his back from his position over him before lining up and slowly filling him. Once he was fully seated and the trembling in the older man’s body had almost stopped, he reached down and gently removed the cage, tossing it aside. “You don’t have to wait for me to tell you.” He began to make love to the man he’d thought only a day before that he might not see ever again.

Aaron sank into the feeling of Spencer making love to him. He’d feared that despite his desires, he would be alone for the remainder of his life. Just he and Jack. It wasn’t a life he wanted. This, here
with Spencer, was the life he wanted. He relaxed completely until he felt the increasing wave of his arousal start to build. He didn’t want to come yet, didn’t want this to be over. His body was desperate, it had been denied for far too long. He keened and threw his head back, crying out as he tried to hold it off just a moment longer.

Pumping in and out of him, Spencer watched his lover begin to thrash desperately on the bed, calling out as he did. He noted new additions to the older man’s body as he was stretched out, cataloguing their existence for later. Increasing his speed, he watched as Aaron gave in, sinking into the mattress and then coming across their chests as his body found his release. He tumbled after him a moment later.

Falling to one side, Spencer realized that the trembling was Aaron sobbing so he pulled him close, not caring about their joined mess. “Shh. Shh, I’m here now.”

He gasped. “I thought I would never have you again.” He cried until he finally passed out.

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Sitting at the kitchen table hours later, Spencer watched Aaron prepare some dinner wearing only some cotton shorts. The changes he’d noticed before on full display.

“When did you get those?” When Hotch looked up, confused, he tapped his own ear.

“Oh. About a year ago. My hearing had been getting worse and the doctor said it was time.”

“And the scar on your chest?” He stood and crossed the room. “I know all of your scars, have them memorized. But this one is new.” His fingers softly traced along it as he frowned. “This is from getting a pacemaker.”

Aaron nodded. “I started having problems about three months after I left. Apparently, I’d been having symptoms of a heart problem slowly creeping up and didn’t know. The job, especially at the end, was killing me.”

“I wish I could have been there for you.”

He held his hand. “Me too. Recovery was rough. There were some problems as I was trying to heal. But I’m okay now.”

“I’m glad.” He brushed his lips across Aaron’s. “And I’ll be here for you if anything else ever happens.”

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They were back on the beach to see the sun set later that evening when Aaron turned to Spencer. “So, tell me about the team.”

“Derek and Savannah have twin girls now as well as Hank.” He grinned at Aaron’s surprise. “He stays home full time, working on houses and such. I want to say he told us… two months? After you left. They’re just turned two now.”

“I knew he’d be a good dad.”

“He is.” Spencer chuckled. “Anna and Sofie.” He thought a minute. “Dave is working out the year as a desk agent, he stopped being a field agent after his heart attack. I think he just wanted to not abandon me. I’m supposed to call him when I know I’ll be in one place for a few days.”
“Call him in the morning?”

“Yeah. Do you want me to tell him I found you?”

“I dunno yet.”

He nodded. “JJ and Will moved the boys to New Orleans.” He ticked off his fingers. “Emily is married to a guy who already had two kids, teens. So she has a stepson who is fourteen and a stepdaughter who is nineteen with an infant girl of her own.” He smirked. “She refuses to let the baby call her grandma.”

Hotch chuckled. “And Garcia? How is she?”

“Tired. She thinks she let opportunity pass her by. She now oversees all of the technical analysts at Quantico, so she doesn’t work for the BAU anymore. But she and Emily still spend time together. She worried about me for a long while after you left, she was hurting too but she didn’t want me to see it.”

“I was just her boss.” He brushed it off.

“You were so much more than that, Aaron. You were a vital part of her family. Anyway, I think as the team broke off, it became more apparent she was the only one standing alone. Rossi has his daughter and her family, everyone else has families now and in a way, I still had you. And Mom for a while but even though she’s still alive, she doesn’t know me at all now. It hurts too much to see her.”

“So, she is alone still?”

Spencer chewed his lip. “Was. She’s still single and decided she’ll always be single, but now she has almost an entirely nine to five job and great pay with her new position.”

Aaron wondered what Spencer was suddenly concerned about saying. “What is it?”

Deciding, Spencer pulled out his wallet, removing something from it and hesitating, staring at it, before he hand it over.

Aaron stared down at the picture of Penelope with a tiny baby, wisps of blonde hair and wrapped in a blue blanket.

“She used a donor. He’s four months old.”

Aaron was still staring at the photo. The face was all Penelope, but the eyes were familiar in a different way. “You were the donor.” He looked up.

Spencer nodded shyly. “His name is Grayson Aaron Garcia.”

Tears filled his eyes. “You made his middle name Aaron?”

“Well, she did, but she did ask me if it was okay.” He leaned against Aaron’s shoulder. “Even though it was done by artificial insemination and officially as a donor and everything, she insisted on listing me as the father. She said that way if anything ever happened to her, there would be no argument over where he belonged.”

“You’re a father?”

“Only technically.” He stared at the picture as well. “He is pretty amazing though.”
Aaron gripped his hand. “You’re amazing, Spencer. You’ve amazed me from the first day I met you. I was so lost but then… I found you.” He stared out at the water. “Wherever you were, I knew I was home.”

Chapter End Notes

Fin.

I hope you have enjoyed this and I hope you take a peak at any future (or past) stories I've done and enjoy them as well.

End Notes

Comments and likes are always appreciated. I will attempt to reply as my schedule allows.

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